



Yohji Yamamoto, Ready-to-Wear, Runway Collection, Men Spring / Summer 2000. © firstVIEW 2021

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**I will show you my life.  
Even if you don't want  
to see it.**

Between July 14 and August 18, 2018, I presented an exhibition at Veronica Project Space in Seattle, Washington, entitled:

YOHJI YAMAMOTO POUR HOMME  
PRINTEMPS-ETE 2000 DIMANCHE  
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The exhibition *re-presented* the staging elements of Yohji Yamamoto's S/S 2000 menswear runway show from July 4, 1999, in Paris, France. This 2018 iteration sought to provide an exhaustive amount of resources related to the 1999 presentation available to anyone who walked into the project space's door. Beyond the lecture that ended the exhibition's run, the space itself didn't provide textual resources as to why this work was being re-presented. This allowed room for the audience to draw their own conclusions about what was significant about this collection of garments and its initial presentation, and what merited this reiteration. Additionally, it served as a research room. Viewers of the show were invited to try on the garments and walk the runway. Pattern-making supplies were provided to encourage utilizing the runway as a drafting table to make knock-off patterns of the collection's garments to take home and make their own.

The presentation is worth explaining, particularly as the original full-length video complete with genuine audio was taken down from YouTube sometime around 2015. The show runs for nearly 23 minutes and presents 41 looks by 19 different models. The presentation featured a solid yellow curtain that the models walk through to reach a matching yellow platform. The platform is 9 paces long and is narrow enough that when models pass each other, they have to maneuver their bodies so as to avoid collision. The presentation was not a constant stream



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of looks, but was instead presented in 16 waves, where anywhere from 1 to 6 models are present on the platform at a given time. Models step up to the platform, reach the end in no particular hurry, stand, and then pivot 45 degrees to the left and right, presumably to allow photographers on all sides a chance to take a picture. The models rearrange themselves so each has time at the front of the platform. Occasionally, once all have cycled through, there is a lull, where the models talk to each other as to what to do next. Their pace is unhurried. At one point, one of the models even shrugs, perhaps a bit baffled at the procedure.

The garments worn are woven of cotton, linen, rayon, polyester, wool, nylon, and ramie fabrics, sometimes blended. The palette is largely neutral, with only one stand-out color being a bright red, used sparingly as detail. Overdyed and plaid-printed textiles are used on pants and reversible jackets. Some garments—button-up shirts, t-shirts, jackets, and coats—have printing on them in four different languages: Russian, German, Dutch, and Korean, all comprising quotes by Yamamoto himself. Thick, seat belt nylon is used as applique on jacket and blazer collars, the backs of coat arms, down the centers of blazers, and backsides of trousers, as well as on the sides of trousers, as if mimicking military braiding.

Suiting, which is shown throughout the runway, appears in wool crepe fabrics but also in cotton twills and stiff overdyed cotton/linen blends, allowing a variety of draping styles. Pants are cut with massive crotches, which, in their cotton/linen and cotton twill variants, hold their bizarre, sculptural shape and feature prominently throughout the runway. Despite the generous crotch cuts, adorned with abnormally long zippers or conspicuous button closures, garments in this collection often run true to size, if not erring on the slim side.

Suit jackets and pants feature extra buttons accompanied with wool button-tabs to hold up rolled sleeves and to connect—however delicately—jacket to pants. A set of suits on display have copious, discreetly placed hidden zippered or buttoned pockets. One suit in this style has 28 distinct pockets, 18 for the jacket and 10 for the accompanying pants. These are exhibited on the runway during one passage, where two models step out wearing these suits with many of the hidden pockets stuffed. On opposite ends of the runway platform, they dig around in their respective pockets to pull out a bra and a folded newspaper to audience applause.

Footwear consists of leather thongs and strapped sandals, creepers, and laced boots. A handful of belts with large silver buckles were produced. Non-runway pieces include cotton/linen bucket hats and cotton knit sweaters.

The soundtrack consists of an almost entirely acapella selection of songs. The show begins with “There Must Be an Angel (Playing With My Heart),” originally a pop single by the Eurythmics featuring Stevie Wonder on the harmonica, covered by Japanese group Fantastic Plastic Machine. It’s immediately followed up by a Deep House



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cover of The Jones Girls’ R&B funk classic “Nights Over Egypt” performed by the British group Incognito. Following this is about 5 minutes of silence, where the models keep coming out, the only sound being that of the cameras going off with the occasional yell or whistle from the photographers to the models to turn so they can get their shot. At nearly 11 minutes, Tracy Chapman’s “Behind the Wall,” a somber song with no instrumentation about domestic abuse and the inefficacy of apathetic police, plays in full. There’s about a minute and a half more of silence that precedes the isolated opening vocal melody of Fantastic Plastic Machine’s Eurythmics cover, succeeded by a 5-second string and piano sample from Incognito’s Jones Girls’ cover, ending in what sounds like the sound of a CD skipping. A minute later we hear the same sounds again, but with the string/piano sample merging with the vocal sample, followed by what sounds like a record getting cut short. Another silent minute goes by, and then the first continuous example of instrumentation comes in with Tracy Chapman’s guitar beginning her song, “Baby Can I Hold You.”

This song marks the finale of the runway show. As the song is coming in, 6 nearly identically dressed models step up onto the platform. They are wearing black leather thongs or strapped sandals, black woolen trousers, variations on a bib attached to a larger button-up in white and grey pinstripe with their sleeves rolled, and a variety of subtly decorated black and grey ties. As the chorus kicks in, the models, one-by-one, with their hands in their pockets and a severe insouciance, head to the front of the stage, do their pivots, and walk off behind the curtain. The last model, however, removes one hand from his pocket, and as he walks off the stage, throws out a peace sign with his hand on the small of his back.

As the song reaches its crescendo, Yamamoto himself gives a quick jog and step up to get on the edge of the platform, gives a small bow of thanks and turns around to run behind the curtain to applause and whistles.

It’s not clear what sort of literature and context was provided to the guests of this runway show to help assess what they were witnessing. We know the title of the show, in a mixture of katakana, hiragana, and kanji, in Japanese, is アシアの不良, or phonetically in roman script, “Asia no furyo.” The word *furyo* can quite directly be translated to mean “corrupt,” or “defective,” when referencing the quality of a given non-human object. But if used to refer to an individual, it takes on a more specific meaning, being that of a “hooligan,” “hoodlum,” or “rascal,” albeit with an aesthetic nuance of beauty or romanticism—perhaps best summed up by the word, “outlaw.” The hiragana の, or “no,” particle connects as an adjective would to a noun, *furyo* to アシア, katakana for “Asia,” giving us a polysemic reading of the show title: “Corrupted Asia” or “The Asian Outlaw.”

The outlaw in question refers to a few interconnected groups and sub-cultural fixtures or tropes of delinquency in Japan, directly referenced by Yamamoto in the collection—namely, the ruffian



Photo by Katsumi Watanabe, from his book *Gangs of Kabukicho* (2009).

yankees wearing *gakuran*, the *bosozoku* biker gangs, and members of the *yakuza*. These groups have different operational styles and scales but are made up of different distinct age groups starting at pre-teen and reaching to adulthood. They all participate in anti-social and illicit activities, exemplifying such traits as ultramasculinity, bravado, defiance, and violent behavior. *Bosozoku* and *yankee* activity generally include violence; drug use; truancy; illegal driving; and gang rape. The *yakuza* additionally include drug, arms, and human trafficking; racketeering; realty and banking schemes; gambling; prostitution; strikebreaking; blackmail; control of labor recruiting; entertainment; and street peddling.

These three sub-cultural groups, in their very material and deleterious activities, exhibit a certain wry theatricality in their costuming and social presence that plays to Yamamoto's interest in dandyism. On the Yohji Yamamoto Pour Homme website, one can find the mission statement for the menswear line that reads: "For the designer, men should be free-spirited and detached from social standards, carrying a mysterious air. The Yohji Yamamoto man is a dandy, but also comical in a unique way." This element of comedy isn't the type of flamboyant, campy wit as found in the also-dandy garments of Jean Paul Gaultier. It is most likely more that of black comedy, a type of humor and posturing that, by its own nature, is self-deprecating and destitute, yet hopelessly and passionately romantic.<sup>1</sup>

Yohji writes: Men's fashion can all ultimately be traced back to the dandy look perfected on London's Savile Row. That is where a true gentleman's appearance was decided, emerging from their common-sense aesthetic. The authority of that aesthetic is buttressed by the hegemony of Europe, and we simply must acknowledge that fact when we discuss men's fashion. The question we need to ask is, "How do we break loose of those conventions?" Or perhaps we should think of it as a matter of subverting those conventions from within.<sup>2</sup>

The dandy's primary interest and occupation is wearing clothing and maintaining an audience. Dandies, who follow chronologically after the gender-neutral macaronis of the 18th century, carry on the same traditions—but with a distinctly more masculine flair—of intellectual esotericism and visual excess and splendor. This esotericism and splendor, initially achieved by appearing as what one might think of as a Platonic, if not hyperbolic, ideal of a British gentleman, became more subtle and exacting as the mid-19th century menswear fashions became more muted. As fashion historian Aileen Ribeiro notes, their focus turned to "[t]he quality of the fine woolen cloth, the slope of a pocket flap or coat revers, exactly the right colour for the gloves, the correct amount of



Photo by Katsumi Watanabe, from his book *Gangs of Kabukicho* (2009).

1 In other words, a cynic. To quote Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*, "Psychologically, present-day cynics can be understood as borderline melancholics, who can keep their symptoms of depression under control and can remain more or less able to work... [this] new, integrated cynicism even has the understandable feeling about itself of being a victim and making sacrifices. Behind the capable, collaborative, hard façade, it covers up a massive offensive unhappiness and the need to cry."

2 Yohji Yamamoto, *My Dear Bomb*, Ludion, 2009, page 108.

3 Aileen Ribeiro, "On Englishness in dress" in *The Englishness of English Dress*, Edited by Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox, Berg Publishers, 2002.

shine on boots and shoes, and so on."<sup>3</sup> Using this archetypal framework of the refined, mid-19th century dandy, and Yamamoto's call to subverting traditional menswear conventions, we can point to his inclusion of various, global production techniques and points of reference present as a way of expanding the dandy beyond just Savile Row tailoring and into a wider sartorial and semiological world.<sup>4</sup>

But let's wind it back to the subcultures engaged in S/S 2000. *Yankee* is a malleable term indicating both a lifestyle and costume that can be applied to a range of age groups, but which we see often beginning as youth, usually junior-high or high-school-aged. *Yankees* are a diffuse and common, yet not organized group that operates throughout all of Japan, usually occupying different neighborhoods within cities of all sizes. The popular television show, *Ikebukuro West Gate Park*— incidentally released the same year as Yamamoto's collection, although it marks an evolution from Yamamoto's nostalgic view of a more dated *yankee* style—was based on the first of several short stories by author Ira Ishida describing people participating in these scenes. The show depicts a dramatized contemporary view of the activities of local Tokyo delinquents in rival gangs based in Ikebukuro, engaging with hip-hop culture, gang warfare, prostitution, drug abuse, rape, and murder.

*Yankees*, often unorganized and with no goal, commonly exhibit in their gatherings a shared sense of boredom.<sup>5</sup> They like to loiter and spend time at American imported fast food restaurants like KFC, McDonald's, and Mr. Donut. The rest of their time has them focusing on personal acts of flamboyant deviance, otherwise known as *tsuppari*. Generally, *tsuppari* strives to cultivate an obtrusive, intimidating, and conspicuous appearance, imitating the older *yakuza* in both dress and actions: smoking at home or school, being truant or frequently coming late to school, wearing modified school uniforms, dying their hair, having perms, staying up late, sleeping over at friends' houses, inhaling paint thinner or glue, joining street driving, and using meth.

If they are young, it is common that *yankees* rework their school uniforms, initially designed after 19th-century Prussian military *Waffenrock*, to appear more threatening or intimidating.

As Ikuya Sato writes: The most common school uniforms in Japan include, for male students, a black jacket with a stand-up collar, and black trousers; the females generally wear a dark blue midy blouse and a skirt. The Japanese term for school uniform is usually *gakuseifuku* or *seifuku*. A modified school uniform is called a *gakuran*, from *gaku* for student and *ran*, a vernacular term used by racketeers, and meaning "cloth." For boys the jacket of *gakuran* has longer hems... School regulations usually require white shirts under the uniform, but *Yankees*

4 For example, Yamamoto's S/S 1987 menswear show particularly focuses on mid-20th century Americana and old-world European tailoring conventions. In S/S 1992, blazers feature Central and South American weaving techniques with traditional embroidery motifs. A/W 1994 clearly references circus and clown clothing with comically long collars and drop-crotch trousers with too-low pockets. A/W 1995 touches on the Rokumeikan era, the meeting point in the late-19th century where Western culture is adopted quite gauchely in Tokyo to impress foreign diplomats and dignitaries; models sport true-to-size and oversized cowboy hats paired with Western-wear styled suiting. A year later, S/S 1996, entitled *Flowers and Boys*, uses inkjet-printed textiles with motifs traditional to Chinese watercolor paintings. Images on garments feature lotus flowers, chrysanthemums, peonies, and the mythical phoenix. The aforementioned A/W 1999 collection is based on traditional Roma clothing and is worn and modeled by a live Roma band. And this is just to mention menswear shows up until 2000. The list goes on, and on.

5 Ikuya Sato, *Kamikaze Biker: Parody and Anomy in Affluent Japan*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

wear colored shirts or T-shirts. Baggy pants with high waists may be combined with the modified uniform. Yankee boys may wear belts of bright colors, sometimes of snake skin or imitations of it...It is widely assumed that Yankees adopting more radical styles (such as shorter perms and uniforms with longer hems) tend to commit more serious or risky delinquent acts than those who take up less extreme styles.<sup>6</sup>

While the more colorful and graphic examples of this description don't necessarily make it into Yamamoto's runway show, the silhouettes of the extended coats, known as *yoran* in their longest form; high-waisted baggy trousers, known as *bontan* and *dokan*, or "clay pipe," in reference to the long and wide silhouette of the pant; and more traditional *gakuseifuku* clearly do.

The *bosozoku*, meanwhile, present an image of a motorcycle or automobile-clad "action-seeker" that goes beyond the loitering antics of the *yankee*, and in some sense presents a heroic alternative to this lifestyle. This group's beginnings can be traced to the mid-1950s when unassociated motorcycle and automobile fanatics begin to refer to themselves as *otokichi*, or sound freaks. As the numbers of these enthusiasts rose, the media began to assume them a collective mass and dubbed them the *kaminarizoku*, or thunder tribe, in reference to the loudness of their modified exhaust pipes. Most of the people making up this media-christened group were from wealthy families or the children of auto mechanics, as motorcycles were still prohibitively expensive for ordinary youth at the time. As the 1960s rolls in, Japan's availability of motorized vehicles expands, and are introduced within gang organizations. The gangs at this time are referred to as "thrill-zoku," "circuit-zoku," and "Mach-zoku." It isn't until the late 1960s to early 1970s that there is a moral panic surrounding these groups. In 1972, an event takes place called the *Toyama Jiken*, or Toyama Incident, where over 3,000 spectators join in on a destructive riot started by one of the organizations, which results in over 1,100 people being arrested. Since then, these wheeled groups of outlaws are referred to as *bosozoku*, the out of control tribe.

In the 1980s, *bosozoku* reached a zenith in terms of visibility and popularity, which, in turn, diluted it. As Sato notes, the steady spread of *bosozoku* motifs on commercial merchandise and paraphernalia made this deviant style accessible to youngers, transforming it from an aberrant and stigmatized lifestyle into a fashionable, pop-cultural look.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas the earlier *kaminarizoku* got their initial start and appearance from emulating American-biker films—like the 1955 James Dean classic, *Rebel Without a Cause*—the 1980s *bosozoku* adopt a very different image. These newer-generation groups often wear standard *yankee gakuran* like *yoran* coats and *botan* or *dokan* trousers in



Photo by Katsumi Watanabe, from his book *Gangs of Kabukicho* (2009).



Champ Road, (*bosozoku* magazine), 1996. Scanned by Christian

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

bright and conspicuous colors, rather than in subdued colorways. Catalogues included in the *bosozoku* lifestyle magazine *Champ Road* (which ran for 29 years until its last issue published in November 2016) feature a rainbow assortment of brightly colored cotton/polyester options for people to choose from. Also commonly found in these ads are *nikka*<sup>8</sup>, tapered knickerbocker-style pants first adopted by the Japanese as military uniform in World War II. The pant found popularity with *tobishoku*<sup>9</sup>, construction workers primarily working on scaffolding, a common occupation for dropout *yankees* and *bosozoku*. As time has gone on, the *nikka* worn by these workers, alongside gang members, have gotten longer and baggier to swallow the taper of the pant completely. For dramatic effect, *bosozoku* adopted the word *tokkofuku*, a term for kamikaze fighter clothing, to describe these unrelated workwear-inspired outfits.

All of these garments were subject to heavy embroidery that would often feature graphics, the group name along with aliases of members, and threatening or perplexing slogans associated with the gang. Riders would wear surgical masks to avoid police identification, occasionally headbands with the Japanese imperial war flag, and a sash around the waist. The groups use several incongruous sources in their symbolic patchwork to instill fear and confusion in their audiences. They feature on their garments and vehicles the emblematic motifs of ultranationalist right-wing organizations and employ the use of obscure and elaborate traditional Chinese characters to resemble perverse incantations or scriptures. The dress and visual presentation of these groups also recall the images of the armed forces, *yakuza*, and men's college cheering groups.

Sato points out that this heavy sampling of disparate signifiers hollows out the chance for any critical depth and seriousness in the groups' appearance, allowing it to become the stuff of parody.

He says: The *bosozoku* style is a collage of such fragments that are easily understood. For example, one does not need detailed knowledge of nationalist thought to make an impression; one need merely wear an army uniform and a headband with the rising sun. Thus the *bosozoku* style was not only imitated literally but also became an object of various forms of parody and caricature such as feline *bosozoku* and bicycle *bosozoku*. In other words, the *bosozoku* style, which is itself a parody, lends itself to further comic twists.<sup>10</sup>

Yamamoto's runway show directly references the coat-length workwear chore jackets found in the pages of late 1990s *Champ Road*. The seatbelt-thick nylon details on the jackets and trousers in the collection can be considered a material nod to *bosozoku* vehicle culture. The garments printed with Cyrillic, Hangul, German, and Dutch all



Champ Road, (*bosozoku* magazine), 1996. Scanned by Christian

<sup>8</sup> An abbreviation of the Japanese spelling of the English word renders "knickerbocker" into *nikka-bokka* and finally, *nikka*.

<sup>9</sup> Commonly shortened and referred to as *tobi* by *yankees*.

<sup>10</sup> Ikuya Sato, *Kamikaze Biker: Parody and Anomy in Affluent Japan*, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

seemingly refer to the embroidery found on these gang garments. And over half the models strike the same intimidating poses found in the pages of Sato's ethnographic study and the crew profiles of *Champ Road*.

While many *bosozoku* leave their road warrior days after their graduation at the age of 20, others choose to delve deeper into a more violent, pervasive, and visually conservative organization, the *yakuza*. The *yakuza* as it's known today is not introduced until the 18th century with two particular groups of racketeers. The first are known as *bakuto*, otherwise known as traditional gamblers, and the other are *tekiya*, who are otherwise known as street-peddlers. As these groups develop in their activities, leaders naturally form and take on a parental role for younger members who are adopted into the group once pledging loyalty. This sort of parent/child relationship comes to influence the structure of political parties, social movements, the military, business, and industry, as well as the criminal underworld.<sup>11</sup> The social structuring of these groups is not unlike that of other global mafias and organized crime syndicates, like those found throughout Italy and the Americas. And ironically, following World War II, the groups do not look much different either.

Prior to the war, *yakuza* are almost entirely indistinguishable from ultranationalist, preservationist, and fascist groups who attempt to stop the flow of foreigners coming into the nation with hopes of expanding the Japanese empire. As a sign of their interest in preserving culture and tradition, *yakuza* traditionally wear *kimono*, usually in subdued neutral colors.<sup>12</sup> However, following national reconstruction and the now rapid importation of American and European media and products in the 1950s, the influx of Western-originated tailored garments and their widespread adoption is in full effect. The *yakuza*, now participating and benefitting economically from the importation of these Westernized products—some being distributed along the black market—are also looking at the West, interested in the novelty of the images of American Mafioso they see across media, particularly in cinema.

However, the films they show interest in are more parodic of Western organized crime than representative of anything found in real life. For example, the 1955 film adaptation of the musical *Guys and Dolls*, seems to be the stylistic point of reference. *Yakuza* take to dressing in dark suits with dark shirts and white ties. Pants have flamboyant pleats. Members take their suits to tailors to have them insert hidden, "payout pockets." Sunglasses are worn by *yakuza* at an incredibly common rate by the 1960s, and crew cuts are the dominant haircut for decades. Additionally, members of the *yakuza* walk with a swagger to distinguish themselves from ordinary citizens.<sup>13</sup>

It's important to point out that Yamamoto, born during the war in 1943, grows up in the Tokyo neighborhood of Kabuki-cho, where a great deal of underground, illegal activity by these groups takes place. In interviews, he speaks of witnessing fights outside his home, with *yakuza* beating up store owners or those who challenge their territory. What's more, is that the same year this collection is released, Yamamoto



Illustrations from Ikuya Sato's *Kamikaze Biker: Parody and Anomy in Affluent Japan*, July 1991. Published by University of Chicago Press.

11 David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro, *Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld*, 25th Anniversary Edition, University of California Press, 2012.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

also provides full costuming for Takeshi Kitano's film *Brother*, which follows the lives of *yakuza* members that move from Tokyo to Los Angeles as a way of avoiding certain death and to expand their terrain.<sup>14</sup> In the film, the costuming appears more subdued from what is seen on the runway, perhaps in an attempt to represent the real-world appearance and dress of the *yakuza*, as opposed to Yamamoto's highly stylized, although equally theatrical, product that through artistic license heavily references the subcultural group.

As a result, the actors playing *yakuza* members wear what is worn following national reconstruction. The majority of characters sport unbuttoned open- or nehru-collared shirts while wearing wool suits in a similar palette to what is seen in Yamamoto's show; mostly black, beige, and brown, although some wear checkered and more showy colors such as blue. The jackets have a variety of pointed lapels and are for the most part single-breasted, although double-breasted suits do occasionally appear. Ties sport simple geometric shapes, usually subtle diamond patterns against neutral colors, which is seen on the runway as well. This sartorial grouping, meant to visually represent a national institutionalization of criminal activity, carries a dramatic heft. However, at this point around the millennium, time has caught up with these tailored decisions, here, memorialized in film. Perhaps, in comparison, the true-to-life versions feel a bit quiet from their fresher and romantic runway counterparts, although they nevertheless remain siblings.

So, a designer born, living, and working in Japan, presents a collection of European-style tailored clothing directly referencing a variety of ultra-masculine and violent subcultural groups found in Japan, whose costumes have in part been inspired by imported American cinema—in some cases depicting American-based, European-immigrated organized crime groups—during American post-war occupation, all on American Independence Day, in Paris, France, to be manufactured in Japan and sold to Japanese, American, and European audiences, not as the real thing, but as saleable fashion product. Additionally, printed on a selection of garments in the collection are five quotes from the designer, in four languages, that hail from four countries that Japan has had significant international relations with during the Russo-Japanese War, World War II, the Japanese forced occupation of Korea, or the Dejima trading post of Nagasaki. Meanwhile, half of the soundtrack the models walk to, are American and British songs in origin, but presented here as covers by British and Japanese groups, respectively. The other half are Tracy Chapman songs; the first bears sonic witness to brutal domestic violence by the hand of a man, and the second about a former lover unable to meaningfully communicate their thoughts and feelings, deludedly thinking that saying the right words alone would allow them once again to possess the love of their ex-partner. What exactly is going on here?

Garments and runway shows are an ineffective tool for conveying specific complex meanings, instead creating a cloud of indirect references in the form of visuals, sound, and body language. Art-



Scan of 1996 issue of *Champ Road*.

14 Kitano has had a long history with the *yakuza*. He states in an interview with Alex Simon from 2001, on his American promotional tour for *Brother*, that his father was a housepainter and alleged *yakuza*, although he isn't entirely certain. Growing up, he said that his neighbors were laborers or *yakuza* members who treated the children kindly. And states that children at this time either idealized becoming baseball players or members of the *yakuza* themselves. Additionally, Kitano was in a dangerous motorbike accident in 1994, that left him hospitalized for a month, needing partial facial reconstructive surgery. Later on, the actor described the crash as an "unconscious suicide attempt," because of his business and entertainment dealings with *yakuza* groups.

ist Michael Asher makes this critical remark about reference in the work of artists: "Using reference in the work of art leaves the viewer to endlessly associate what the work is about. It thereby gives the viewer an illusion that they have experienced something profound. In this respect, it is a decoy so the viewer will do the artist's labor for them."<sup>15</sup>

One reading that feels relevant, whether intended or not, is about the journey of bodies and media as they move through the contexts of time and nation-states. Let me take a shot: The Mafia moves from Italy to America through migration. American cinema produces films about these Mafioso immigrants. America occupies Japan following the war, these films come with the G.I. These images, arriving again through migration, find their way into the minds of their fresh audience, thus creating a new generation of images modeled after the likenesses presented in the films. The filmic source material, itself a reinterpretation, continues to move into the past, as the image is multiplied in this new region again and again in new permutations. The filmic source material is overlooked in the present day regarding the interpretation of these images that are often taken at face value. A clothing collection by a historically-minded designer presents these garments for a global audience to be redistributed again in Japan, and back to the Americas and Europe as a designer good. And the models walk to songs that are foreign covers of their originals which are each over a decade old.

Not to mention that this collection is presented as the millennium nears, a time when the dot com bubble is burgeoning, the popularity of the Canon ELPH series of cameras allows for the mass creation of digital images, and the world's media apparatus rapidly speeds up to create a contextless and hollow computerized reality. In some ways, a collection so heavily based on *reference*—or with the complexity of this reading, *reference upon reference*—seems prescient. This collection is about migration.

The word *violent* is often used when talking about the effects of removing an image or work from its original context. A History of Violence: Yamamoto violently presents a collection of garments representing actual violent sub-cultural Japanese groups that violently take their images from other actually violent sub-cultural groups from America and Europe whose images are brought over violently when Japan loses in a violent world war. Fantastic Plastic Machine and Incognito violently cover the Eurythmics and The Jones Girls. Tracy Chapman sings about having to hear violence through the wall. I think about violence and how it has been wielded in history, as a brutal tool for ideological expansion and assimilation. America brandishes this tool upon Japan following the war, Japan brandishes this tool against Korea, Russia, and alongside Germany. *Bosozoku*, *yankees*, and *yakuza*, with their mocking dandy sneers, brandish their physical, mortal, sexual, and economic violence to expand their turf and resources. A History of Violence: This collection is about violence. Somehow graphic t-shirts are present to emphasize that to us.



Scan from *My Dear Bomb* by Yohji Yamamoto (2009).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Asher, *Public Knowledge: Selected Writings* by Michael Asher, Edited by Kirsi Pelotmäki, The MIT Press, 2019, page 34.

Something happens too when the models step up onto the platform. Physically, they're corralled, their motion is limited to the stage as opposed to a wide-open floorplan. When they get to the end of the runway, they turn to the cameras as if being photographed in a police lineup to provide their profile from both sides. The platform also acts as theatrical staging, where these men are removed from any real-world context and thus, neutered. This allows one to think again of Yohji's dandy framework. But while tempting as it is to claim that this is a black humor collection lampooning Japanese biker gangs, Japanese schoolboy ruffians, and Japanese mafia, the designer clearly states, in his late-1980s film with Wim Wenders (albeit a decade before this collection), that his design process always puts first considerations of the European body. In thinking about this, as well as Yamamoto's pushback against his nationality as defining of his design practice, one can only reference a handful of collections and garments that seem to employ traditional Japanese tailoring or costume.<sup>16</sup>

S/S 2000 is as much as it is *not* a collection about Japanese clothing, and if anything, can impart a curious anti-nationalist sensibility. By his cunning use of dandyism, Yamamoto, is of course referencing these "Japanese-" prefixed groups, but simultaneously refers to the whole of the history of their garments stretching back continents and centuries. The groups are primarily ultranationalist, conservative, and have fascist tendencies that wish to return Japan to a Meiji-era-like nation-state, with a heavenly-designated reigning emperor and a vacuum of foreign influence. But the belief that Japan was a Galapagos-like nation was never true: in places like the Dejima trading post operating in Nagasaki, locals traded with the Portuguese at first, and later, the Chinese and Dutch for over 200 years. The writing of the title of the show itself even seems to be about this acknowledged collision of cultures. アシアの不良, incidentally uses three different common alphabets: *katakana*, primarily used for loaned words from other languages; *hiragana*, specifically for Japanese words; and *kanji*, an ideogrammatic language adopted from Chinese, and over time simplified by the Japanese. And the polysemic reading of the title that lets both translations of "The Asian Outlaw," and "Corrupted Asia," to be valid interpretations, allows a reader to place emphasis on this anti-nationalist notion where one would have to be deluded to think Japan ever had a moment of cultural purity.

So what's left? A final Tracy Chapman tune and a peace sign? Chalk it up to an attempted apology and a surrender.

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<sup>16</sup> These being menswear season A/W 1995-1996, womenswear season A/W 1994-1995, and his inclusion of hakama style pants in his S/S 2012 menswear collection.