



The last issue of *The Japan Society Review* in 2021 presents six reviews of books which focus on different aspects of Japan, from its history to anthropology and textile design. The first review covers *Toward Creation of a New World History*, the English translation of an academic monograph originally written in Japanese by Professor Haneda Masashi. This publication reflects on the discipline of World History from a Japanese perspective considering issues of methodology, transnationality, and Western centrism.

From the field of anthropology, this issue includes a review of *An Affair with a Village* by Professor Joy Hendry. As our reviewer Alice French points out, this book is “a heart-warming, funny, informative and highly personal love letter to Kurotsuchi, the small village in Fukuoka Prefecture, Kyushu that Hendry first visited in 1975 to undertake a year of fieldwork during her time as a PhD student at Oxford University”.

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Japanese literature is represented in this issue by the reviews of two books, *Japan Stories* by Jayne Joso and *Murakami T: The T-Shirts I Love* by Murakami Haruki. Joso's volume is a collection of short fiction, some of them illustrated, revolving around characters' feelings and emotions, and combining realism with supernatural tones. Murakami's book is the author's personal homage to his favourite t-shirts including a selection of images of his collection with short essays that have been translated into English for the first time.

The December issue ends with reviews of a chef's monograph, telling of the inspiration, traditions, and recipes behind the restaurant *monk* on the Philosopher's Path in Kyoto, and a volume exploring the craft work of NUNO, one of Japan's most innovative and respected textile design studios.

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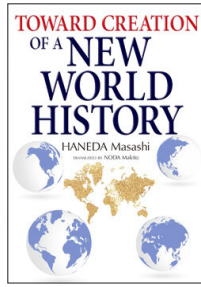
Image: textile detail from *NUNO: Visionary Japanese Textiles*.

Toward Creation of a New World History

by Haneda Masashi
translated by Noda Makito

Japan Publishing Industry
Foundation for Culture (JPIC) (2018)
ISBN-13: 978-4866580234

Review by Francesco Cioffo



To paraphrase Benjamin Disraeli, World History is a career. As we witness the rise in many departments around the world of MA and PhD programs, specialised conferences, funded chairs, and research institutions on transnational and global topics, it is safe to say that World History has become one of the most popular fields of research. Nevertheless, the dominance of national history in academic departments is still far from being challenged. It took about a decade for World History to reach such heights. When Professor Haneda Masashi first wrote *Seikaishi he* (the original Japanese title of the book) in 2011, he probably did not expect that the subject would have become so ubiquitous so rapidly. In the past decade Haneda has been at forefront of the institutionalisation of World History as one of the main subjects in the Global History Collaborative, one of the many emerging international research consortia, which includes Harvard, the University of Tokyo, Humboldt, and Free universities in Berlin and the EHEES in Paris.[1] In terms of scholarship as well, the so-called transnational turn has sparked a wave of major works about world, global and transnational history.[2] Overall, it seems that all kinds of historical fields and methodological school are coming to terms with the non-national dimension of their research.[3]

In this short book, which I would look at almost as a manifesto for Japanese World History, Professor Haneda argues that today's World History as taught in Japan is simply not *realistic* anymore. He exposes three World History main issues in Japan, although arguably these problems are shared to many other countries too. First, World History as taught in Japan is one for the Japanese people, that is, it reflects the country's own bias (p.63). Secondly, Japanese World History puts too much emphasis upon the differences between people, countries, and civilisations (p.75). Thus, encouraging the alienation of the non-Japanese other. Lastly, World History in Japan is too Euro-centric (p.81). The final issue, he points out, is shared with the rest of the world, since it is something imbedded within the very fabric of the modern historical profession. How

does he propose to surpass these issues? He proposes that an ideal World History as such: 1) it does not stress differences and it does not encourage othering; 2) it is not centred upon any specific region or country; 3) it fosters a sense of belonging as citizens of the earth [what he termed "earth-centrism", p. 95]; 4) it makes people realise that interconnectedness among people is the true state of nature of humanity.

The main part of the text draws upon a meticulous analysis of primary and secondary sources. Haneda looks at the World History textbooks used in Japanese classes, such as the *Shosetsu sekaishi B* (Detailed account of World History B), as well as other major publications on the topic and the history curriculum guidelines devised by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT).

The book is divided into three main thematic sections discussing, first, the World History of today, second, the structural issues of World History as discipline, and, lastly, the new World History proposed by Haneda. In Chapter 1, he traces the development of contemporary World History from the 1940s onwards. Chapter 2 identifies the main problematics and it shows why the current type of World History is not enough. Chapter 3 introduces the two main responses to the issues discussed in the previous chapter, which have attempted to 1) depart from Eurocentrism and 2) to highlight commonalities and correlations. In the final chapter Haneda proposes his views on the new World History.

The only concern that I have about this otherwise clever book might be better expressed using the very words of the author: "when the future direction of the world is considered in earnest, it becomes obvious that a world history of the global community is an enterprise that must be accomplished at any cost" (p. 188). The risk of such propositions is to turn Haneda's new World History into a teleology of the global community. Exchanging the idea of a global sense of community for either progress or the nation as the final goal of the long march of history. Methodologically, once again we are reposed with the same issue of presupposing the existence of an historical phenomenon rather than critically question it.

Having said that, Professor Haneda's book is a very important addition to de-westernise World History as a subject, which so far is still too heavily western-centric despite all its good intentions. Haneda also adds a critical environmental element to his vision of World History. I am not sure whether there will ever be a day in which the people of the world will ever be able to

develop a common identity as “*chikyu no jumin*” (p.10), or citizen of the earth, but reading Haneda’s thought-provoking arguments I would really hope so. His vision of World History might not be perfect, but it surely is a good way to start discussing these difficult topics.

Notes

[1] For another major conglomerate of research institutions see Global History Online, <https://en.globalhistoryonline.org>.

[2] Haneda recommends the works of Conrad, Sebastian (2017), *What is Global History?*, Princeton

University Press, and Hunt, Lynn (2015), *Writing History in the Global Era*, W. W. Norton & Company.

[3] Ghobrial, John-Paul A (2019), ‘Introduction: Seeing the World like a Microhistorian’, *Past & Present*, vol. 242, issue supplement 14, November 2019, pp. 1–22. §

An Affair with a Village

by Joy Hendry

Extremis Publishing (2021)
ISBN-13: 978-1999696269

Review by Alice French



With more than four decades of research and at least eight books dedicated to Japan and its culture already under her belt, one would have been forgiven for thinking that legendary anthropologist Joy Hendry had run out of things to write on the subject. However, her latest offering, *An Affair with a Village*, proves such assumptions to be far from the truth.

This book is a heart-warming, funny, informative and highly personal love letter to Kurotsuchi, the small village in Fukuoka Prefecture, Kyushu that Hendry first visited in 1975 to undertake a year of fieldwork during her time as a PhD student at Oxford University. In *An Affair with a Village*, Hendry documents her 45-year-long relationship with Kurotsuchi as if it were her lover: from the initial nerves and awkwardness to the heady honeymoon period, to the painful goodbyes and subsequently joyful reunions. Her personal experiences are interspersed with cultural, social, and religious background, giving a unique insight into Japanese marriage, funeral and birth rituals, along with some of the lesser-known and fascinating traditions of rural Japan, including the lengthy rituals attached to housebuilding and rice-harvesting. The wonderful colour photographs that accompany Hendry’s anecdotes are a charming bonus; by the end of the book, the reader will feel as though they know Kurotsuchi almost as intimately as Hendry does.

One of the main draws of this book is the unadulterated honesty with which it is written. Although Hendry’s affection for Kurotsuchi is clear --

she has returned to the village multiple times since completing her fieldwork, taking her own children with her, and has also hosted several friends from the village during their visits to the UK over the years -- she does not hold back when recounting her less enjoyable experiences there. Having to deal with initial resistance from some households when gathering data for a family tree chart project, being deliberately excluded from some of the villagers’ events, even experiencing a rather terrifying breaking-and-entering incident – Hendry’s time in Kurotsuchi was far from uneventful.

However, as is the case in any romantic relationship, the lows came with a multitude of highs: laughter, gifts, and lifelong friendships, just to name a few. Hendry’s close, enduring relationship with the Kumagai family, her neighbours during the initial year of fieldwork, is a particular highlight. The ebbs and flows of Hendry’s affair with Kurotsuchi are what makes the work so engaging, and her willingness to admit when things did not go to plan makes it a brilliant read for budding anthropologists in any country.

For any Japanologists who have read Hendry’s other, iconic, works, such as *Marriage in Changing Japan* (1981) and *Wrapping Culture* (1993), *An Affair with a Village* will be a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the extensive work that went into her research. As Hendry explains in Chapters 7 and 8, much of her understanding of Japanese family traditions and domestic life was developed during sleepovers at the houses of numerous Kurotsuchi residents, and her famous insights into Japanese gift-giving culture were greatly inspired by the gifts that she gave and received during her time in the village. A re-reading of Hendry’s other books after finishing *An Affair with a Village* will no doubt make any student of Japanese society appreciate her findings in a new light.

Above all, however, *An Affair with a Village* is a rare and detailed look at a Japanese village that few will likely have the opportunity to visit. Located in the remote countryside of southern Kyushu, the Kurotsuchi that Hendry fell in love with represents what little remains of traditional, family-oriented rural Japan in

the modern age. Hendry's colourful descriptions and humorous personal accounts paint a vivid picture of what is clearly a beautiful part of the world and, if nothing else, the book provides some well-needed escapism at a time when many of us are craving a getaway. §

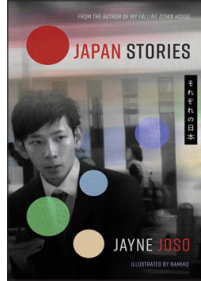
Japan Stories

by Jayne Joso

Seren (2021)

ISBN-13: 978-1781725894

Review by Eleonora Faina



Japan Stories is a collection of short fictions by Jayne Joso, some of which gracefully illustrated by Japanese Manga artist NAMIKO. All these stories revolve around the main characters' loneliness taking many shapes and forms, often accompanied by trauma, emotional detachment, shame, and contempt towards "normal" people. Those who manage to function and connect in the society are mostly mocked, but also envied. That is because all main characters are outcasts to some degree, few of them (Oona, Chizuru, Bowie) shaped after Joso's real acquaintances.

Far from being a light-hearted read, *Japan Stories'* succinct format is quite perfect to engage with these stories effectively; the latest section of the book called 'The Miniatures' presents even shorter, haiku-like features. It must have been a long time coming for Joso's latest work to come to life; despite claiming she never intended to write with a theme in mind she still birthed a peculiar cohesive piece of modern literature in one go.

Her influence as a writer and her fascination with Japan is strongly connected to Angela Carter's work, specifically *Fireworks*, a selection of short stories Carter wrote whilst she was living in Tokyo. Carter's poetic activity combined to a deep appreciation for haiku and the work of Lydia Davis highly influenced Joso's choice of short format for this publication, exercising brevity as a form of control over her imaginary world.

Interestingly, in her past work Joso's approach to Japanese culture has been somehow reverential by wanting to translate it to the Western public as accurately as possible. *My Falling Down House* - another Seren-published book taking place in Japan and winner of The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation Award- was written on those bases. This publication though, follows a different approach. This time Joso is

allowing herself to be "mischievous" in telling darker and more complex stories, distancing herself from her past naturalistic work. Freer to stretch her imaginary legs and to take more room for exploration she proceeds to tell us tales of solitude within the modern Japanese society by engaging with new sharper formats and Carterian gothic surrealist elements. The emphasis is put on the characters' internal world rather than their external realities, blurring the line between reality and fantasy and how much the tales we tell ourselves influence and shape the world surrounding us.

Love and the ideas surrounding love are recurring themes throughout the second-half of the book, yet still accompanied by a high degree of loneliness. Shoen's story it is one of the longest and possibly the first "real" love-story we encounter. It is a misunderstanding tragedy of idealisation between him and Grace, clashing on cultural grounds and expectations towards what is the meaning of their relationship. Shoen would be happier with a 'shallower, less unsettling' love and regards his time with Grace as if it was from a movie, as 'fiction' before his real life starts. This time solitude embraces two people falling in love.

The stories of Mr Yoneyama and Mr Takahashi explore broken families from different perspectives, cleverly mirroring the solitude of modern men. The first is an unwilling stranger to his wife and children; for some unknown reason he is unable to manifest or communicate his needs despite his yearning for connection with his loved ones. Those conflictual feelings are portrayed as raw and heart-rendering to the reader. On the other hand, Mr Takahashi is highly detached from reality as he perceives himself as a good husband and father mainly because he represents the household breadwinner. Yet, he is oblivious of what his wife and kids are up to these days and not particularly interested in finding out while he engages in extramarital affairs. The turning point in Mr Takahashi introspective journey is the encounter with his new American colleague, who he starts spending more and more time with, showcasing an "oddly" close

relationship with his family and unshakable marital values. The comparison highlights to both the readers and to the main character how lonely Mr Takahashi truly is in his life, the shallowness of his character and the weightlessness of his relationships and status.

Joso's writing style is perfect to describe these themes, her sentences often repeating, mimicking the natural train of thoughts of an obsessive mind. Her ability to shapeshift into a diverse deck of characters with different communication abilities and traumas is remarkable. The language is predominantly descriptive, and some stories are quite cryptic and need several reads to come to life and solve the puzzle Joso puts in front of you. All stories present degrees of realism but from time to time they can take a magical tangent, sprinkling elements of the extraordinary in an ordinary and, at times, alienating Japanese life.

Misaki's story perfectly encapsulates this by describing a young woman's sense of self-sufficiency, purposely alienating others her entire life, escaping societal pressure and social conventions. Her nihilist nature despises the 'act of being human' and regards socialising as a farse. She embarks on an apparently random quest of building a tower – representing both a mean of isolation and connection – by herself in the neighbourhood she lives in, whilst the pandemic dictates social distancing. Surprised and amused by her neighbours' acts of kindness alongside morbid curiosity for her strange pursuit, the story suddenly assumes supernatural tones.

Joso's use and characterisation of physical spaces here transcends its mere structural form. Describing herself as a solitary child who put lots of effort in curating what inhabited her room and her surroundings, her deliberate approach to structural descriptions in *Japan Stories* instantly assumes a deeper meaning. This tendency manifests in her depictions of Japanese houses, living organisms

subject to transformation by taking different shapes using *shoji* (sliding doors)- possibly translating as a metaphor of human behaviour. Chizuru's story is representative of this, her house a reflection of her internal world, regulated by unbreakable rules. The central room does not match the traditional style of the entire house and is completely covered in cellophane, to protect (or to separate) what is most precious to this landlady character.

Arguably, not only the Japanese society but also Western ones are experiencing a collective generational solitude due to a widespread sense of instability (job-related, market-related, and consequentially life-related). In Japan this has been historically present and – to a point – inherited in a low birth rate society where long-working hours, sense of duty and status are the pillars of one's self-identity. As we also seem to live in a culture nudging us to cast aside negative emotions – or avoiding their exploration and meaning as much as possible – this further pushes individuals to be not only disconnected to others, but mostly to themselves.

This solitude is familiar and transcends cultures, and here that is where the true power of this book lies. Open to interpretation, it could be read as a critique to the Japanese society, an analysis of similes in Western and Eastern social matrixes and its elements of alienation, but also as a love letter to a country where Joso spent several years of her life, honouring with every description its architecture and rituals.

This book could be easily read in one go, but I refrain you to do so. Some stories are quite heart-breaking, a few might require a re-read to be decrypted and others may event haunt your mind, demanding time to be fully digested. Overall, representing a good first approach to Joso's work, *Japan Stories* allows the reader to savour her distinctive style in small, deliciously bitter bites. §

Murakami T: The T-Shirts I Love

by Murakami Haruki
translated by Philip Gabriel

Harvill Secker (2021)
ISBN-13: 978-1787303195

Review by Laurence Green



perhaps it is just plain old desire, born out through all the power and force of modern day consumerism.

And so, to the latest Murakami Haruki book. But wait... it's not a novel, or even one of his always-popular short story collections. No, *Murakami T: The T-Shirts I Love* is something else entirely, an ode to that most humble item of clothing, as the author takes us through a selection of some of the favourites from his own personal wardrobe. The volume's handsome dust jacket tells us that the T-shirts photographed and discussed here are in many ways just an extension

to some of Murakami's other obsessions, including his well-documented passion for running (which he famously wrote about in *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*) and, of course, his collection of 10,000 vinyl records. And yet, as Murakami explains in the book's opening essay, he isn't especially interested in collecting things, they just seem to accumulate. Like a kind of antithesis to KonMari and her decluttering regime, Murakami sees objects pile up, gathering around him, even if they don't serve any obvious purpose. He is, he claims, resigned to it.

Portions of this book originally appeared in the ultra-hip Japanese men's fashion magazine *Popeye* between August 2018 and January 2020. Fitting, given Murakami himself was a reader of *Popeye* back when it launched in the 1970s, and he would regularly purchase the magazine for customers to leaf through as they frequented the jazz bar he was running at the time. The 1970s were also when Murakami recalls illustrated T-shirts first starting to appear in Japan, with a particular predilection at the time for those bearing the branding of American Ivy League universities. We discover that most of Murakami's T-shirts come from the thrift store Goodwill in Hawaii, and that after the publication of the original articles in *Popeye* magazine, the prices rose - coincidence, or not?

Often, the T-shirts are merely a springboard to talk about something else entirely. There is an amazing chapter where Murakami expounds several paragraphs on the virtues of picking up a cheese hamburger (onions, tomatoes, lettuce, pickles, plus a side of French fries and coleslaw) in the USA and enjoying it alongside a Coors Light. This is the kind of writing that Murakami's fans lap up with voracious appetite; a pulpy, fast-food love affair with the minutiae of life's little pleasures. For Murakami, it is a means of 'imbibing the atmosphere', a symbolic arrival in 'America' far more meaningful than the plane actually touching down on the tarmac. He then follows this up with an equally wonderful piece singing the joys of good whisky. Many of Murakami's novels have attracted fan-made playlists compiling the many records he mentions in them - perhaps this book could do with something similar in the form of tasting notes?

As always, it's Murakami's mixture of casual friendliness paired with a kind of sagely wisdom that charms in the extreme. His eye for the bizarre, or just downright random. Did you know, for example, that 'If you wear a T-shirt with an animal design, the

chances are very good that a girl or woman will tell you, "Whoa - that's so cute!" - In Murakami's novels, chance encounters and happenstance like this are the stuff that a whole novel's worth of action springs forth from, but even here, these bitesize essays give off the buzz of the everyday banal turned life-affirming wonder. Philip Gabriel - serving on translation duties here hot on the heels of his work on Murakami's recent short stories collection *First Person Singular* as well as a number of earlier works - does sound business again in capturing this easy breeziness in all its glory.

The Murakami textual "style" - as rendered in English - is now so especially identifiable and memorable that there's often an unavoidable air of commercialism to it now. But perhaps that is, in a way, what this book is an extension of. Given the subject matter, and the fact it stems from writing first featured in a fashion magazine, this somehow fits it even more than usual; Murakami as "brand", through and through. The book's copyright page is a bizarre hotchpotch of iconographic intellectual property and trademarks - the Shelby Cobra, Astro Boy, Iron Man, even the rock group R.E.M. These are the heroes of the 20th and 21st century, the means by which we mark modernity. The book's front cover revels in perhaps the most ubiquitous of all brands: Coca-Cola. The back cover? 'Keep Calm And Read Murakami'. Of course.

Is Murakami's passion for T-shirts really so strange, nowadays - in an era where running trainers ('sneakers', even) are seen as quasi art objects commanding eye-boggling price tags? As perhaps the icon of world literature that best commands the pulse of global pop-cultural stardom, Murakami's fiction has always felt like more than simply "writing", it is a product, a kind of "packaged" entity in its own right. While for some, Murakami's tendency over the past decade or so toward a kind of more populist prose skews away from the ersatz literary noise he displayed in his early work, it has clearly done his career no harm. Now more famous and beloved than ever, every paragraph from his pen seems to add to his gravitas.

This pint-sized hard-back volume is a strange object, no doubt about it. Difficult to categorise, it is nonetheless an immensely enjoyable read, in a way only Murakami can be. Not only the perfect stocking filler for the Murakami fan in your life, but another fascinating piece in the enigma-like puzzle of a global superstar. §

monk: Light and Shadow on the Philosopher's Path

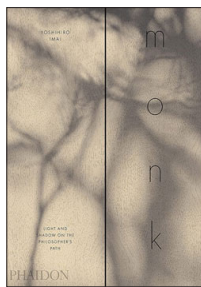
by Imai Yoshihiro

translated by Naomi Reis and Emmy Reis

Phaidon Press (2021)

ISBN-13: 978-1838662547

Review by Riyoko Shibe



monk: Light and shadow on the Philosopher's Path is a chef monograph, where, through food writing – a blend of personal essays and photographs revolving around food and nature, concluding with a number of recipes – Imai Yoshihiro tells the story of his fourteen-seated wood-fire pizza restaurant.

Imai started working at a pizzeria while studying sociology at university and spent his holidays interning at different restaurants. It was in this period that he fell in love with the process of making pizza dough, and in 2015, he opened his own restaurant, *monk*, on the Philosopher's Path in Kyoto.

Echoing the inspiration behind the restaurant, the book is divided by seasons with images to match. Opening with spring, photos of bright blue skies, foraged foods and farms alternate with bright plates of spring vegetables and fruits; colourful pizzas are interspersed with photographs of blooming cherry blossoms. Summer, Autumn and Winter follow.

Each element of *monk* is given space and prominence, from a single ingredient to the

architecture and design of the building itself, to the joys of hospitality. In 'The Yayoi Stone Ax', Imai writes about the tools he uses to cook, while in 'Vessels', he ponders the dishes used to serve food. In another chapter, 'The Mushroom Whisperer', by writing a homage to Sasaki Yu, a mushroom forager who sources the mushrooms used in the restaurant, he uncovers meaning and joy behind the ingredient used at *monk*.

Bringing each element of the restaurant alive, Imai makes all aspects of *monk* familiar and relatable to his audience: not only philosophy, history and tradition, but also practical elements like the troubles brought by Covid – both financial and emotional – and staffing issues, rent and sustainability. In the essay 'Life and Work' he explores his own perspective on work/life balance simply by tracing his day from waking up and eating breakfast with his children, shopping for vegetables, ordering fish, and daily yoga. Seamlessly, the day folds into food preparation, service at the restaurant, closing up, and the walk home.

The book closes with 75 recipes – each rather simple if tweaked to swap out the stated local Kyoto ingredients for alternatives, and to fit a standard oven over a wood-fired one. These recipes serve as a fitting conclusion, making real the themes explored throughout the book. [S](#)

NUNO: Visionary Japanese Textiles

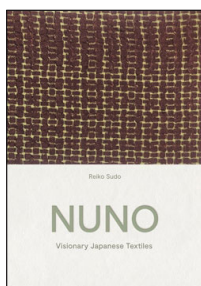
by Sudo Reiko

edited by Naomi Pollock

Thames and Hudson (2021)

ISBN-13: 978-0500022689

Review by David Tonge



In the late 1990's I was working at a design company in the Axis building in Roppongi, Tokyo. The Axis building is known as a place to see design and craft related exhibitions as well being the headquarters of *Axis* magazine, a global design journal. It is also the home of several stores. One of these, located in the basement, is called NUNO, simply meaning "cloth" in Japanese.

While I didn't know its significance at the time, I would browse their bolts of unique fabrics, buying small samples for reference and the occasional

finished piece, such as the scarf I happened to be wearing in the first Autumn chill a few days ago.

Leafing through the impressive *NUNO: Visionary Japanese Textiles* by Suda Reiko, I was delighted to be reacquainted with their work. This luxurious large format book, bound in NUNO fabric, is encyclopaedic in both content and weight and is a fitting celebration of their work.

So why is NUNO and in particular Suda Reiko important to the world of textiles?

NUNO was founded in the 1980's by Arai Junichi. Born into a textile manufacturing family based in Gunma Prefecture, Arai was not cut out for business so instead used his knowledge as a textile consultant. After collaborating with the big fashion names including Miyake Issey and Yamamoto Yoji in the 1970's and 1980's, he was on the map.

Invited to open a store in the then newly developed and aforementioned Axis building he

created a treasure trove of textiles for his customers to experience, and called it NUNO using the kanji character for “cloth” (布) still in use today. Shortly after, Arai was joined by Suda Reiko who like Arai came from a family steeped in traditional Japanese textiles.

Where Arai and his experimental approach left off, Suda continued to develop the output and introduce the name of NUNO to a global audience. With a dizzying list of accolades, she and her team advise companies such as MUJI on the use of recycled fabrics, collaborate with architects and art institutions on global exhibits as well as working with artisans and educating students of textile design, all the while continuing to create unique fabrics and products for public consumption through their stores in Tokyo and beyond.

When thinking of Japanese textiles, we might conjure up an image of dimly lit ateliers with artisans practising the labour-intensive processes required to create fabrics for making kimonos, the indigo dyed fabrics found in everyday household items or the globally coveted Okayama selvedge denim created for jeans. In contrast, but aligned with, Suda’s work stretches, smashes and subverts the strengths and weaknesses of a fabric to find unique applications and aesthetics beyond what we may think of as Japanese. It’s a no holds barred approach and while its (annoyingly) common for people to use the word “disrupter” these days, NUNO truly deserve this mantle within the textile industry.

This context is made simple in the insightful introduction by renowned Japanese architecture and design author Naomi Pollock, who deftly highlights the achievements and charts NUNO’s journey explaining how and why they are so revered and influential in the world of textiles. A fact re-affirmed, if you were fortunate enough to visit, in the recent Japan House London exhibit *Making NUNO*.

But it was when I read the chapter titles that I fell in love with this book. Each of the eight chapters use onomatopoeic descriptors according to the feeling evoked when touching a fabric – Fuwa Fuwa, Shiwa Shiwa, Kiwa Kiwa, Zawa Zawa and so on. No doubt we have all struggled to describe the troubling texture of velvet for example? Even if we don’t speak Japanese, onomatopoeia provides a unique and thought-provoking solution to this problem and a great way to guide you through their work.

Each of these chapters feature an essay by a luminary of the arts world, including author Murakami Haruki, architect Ito Toyo and musician Arto Lindsay. Perhaps more interesting for me, as a designer, are the ‘Portraits of a Textile’ at the end of each chapter, describing the process and inspiration used to create each fabric, including details from NUNO’s sketch books and photos of team members in the act of creation.

If forced to pick out a favourite it would be Zawa Zawa (p. 258) which is interpreted as ‘The rumble of the unknown,’ as something unnervingly unidentifiable. Surely a fitting way to describe NUNO itself. It starts with four poems about noise by the American musician Arto Lindsay, a long-term collaborator of Sakamoto Ryuichi. Lindsay writes and sings in a surreal haiku-like style. For example in ‘Almost Aphoristic’ (p. 262) he writes:

Noise of hair on skin
Unconscious Noise
Applying Lipstick

... something unnervingly unidentifiable.

But it is the sheer breadth of creative processes and dynamic visual nature of the fabrics that are so compelling. A few to mention are Tataki – a patchwork of prints punched together, Big Ring – a stretchy cotton crepe (the material of my scarf), Computer Chip – a woven and beautifully detailed geometric graphic of a computer chip, Scrapyard Iron Plates – a rust infused printed fabric, and we must not forget Heat-moulded Velvet – where the effect is crinkly, crumbly, and earthy. A velvet I might get to like! While photos cannot do the fabrics justice, these are all beautifully illustrated with full page colour images befitting of a Thames and Hudson art monograph.

If your interest in Japan is in the purely traditional, then this book might not be for you. But if, like me, your interest in Japan is in its ingenuity, creativity and commercial instinct combined with its traditional craft culture, then I can whole heartedly recommend this book for your Christmas list. And when we can travel again, please do visit the NUNO store in Roppongi and experience the emotions that Suda Reiko’s creativity and fabric inspire. §