

# Fashion in Fiction Conference Abstracts

26-27 May 2007

University of Technology Sydney





**Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building**  
in collaboration with  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Fashion in Fiction International Conference**  
University of Technology, Sydney Australia

**26-27 May, 2007**

**Convenors**  
Professor Peter McNeil  
Dr Catherine Cole  
Dr Vicki Karaminas

**Bernal**

**Kathryn Hardy Bernal (Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand)**

### ***Kamikaze Girls and Loli-Goths***

#### **Abstract:**

*Kamikaze Girls* (dir. Tetsuya Nakashima, 2004) is a film that both extracts and informs the Japanese fashion subculture of the Elegant Gothic Lolita (EGL, *gosuloli* or Loli-Goth). Based on a light novel by Novala Takemoto (2002) and spawning Yukio Kanesada's *manga* version in 2005, it is an example of *shojo* (teenage girls') fiction. Released in Japan as *Shimotsuma Monogatari*, or *Shimotsuma Story*, *Kamikaze Girls* tells of the two unlikely companions, Momoko Ryugasaki (Kyoko Fukada), a "Sweet" Lolita obsessed with the designer label *Baby the Stars Shine Bright*, and Ichigo ("Ichiko") Shirayuri (Anna Tsuchiya), a *yanki*, or biker-punk, member of a rough all-girl *bōsōzoku* (motorcycle gang). The narrative operates on a somewhat allegorical level and is certainly of a comical nature, weaving the girls' histories throughout a fantastic multi-media world of anime, music video, and live-action sequences. On the surface, this colourful foray appeals as light entertainment yet on another level represents more topical cultural issues.

*Kamikaze Girls* interfaces with the realm of the EGL (Elegant Gothic Lolita) and the notion of "cute gothic". It has been said that Japan's obsession with all things cute, or the *kawaii* phenomenon, represents an "infantile mentality" (Yuri Kageyama, 2006) and a reluctance to "grow up" (Osaka Shoin, 2006). It has also been related in general to post-war Japan's perpetuating uncertainties about the future (Rika Kayama 2004). In terms of the Lolita, says Kayama, the dressing as frilly babies symbolises still a deeper anxiety, instigated in the 1990s by economic instability and the wish to hang onto childhood security. This is perhaps one reason why the cult translates, for a minority of male followers, to that of the Elegant Gothic Aristocrat (EGA). For Japanese girls, though, this fear of adulthood is more pertinent in the face of the harsher realities of womanhood. This is interesting in terms of the sexual connotations of the Lolita in the West and the sexual ambiguities of the EGL. The focus of this paper, therefore, will be how *Kamikaze Girls* reflects more complex attitudes related to sexuality, gender and Japanese society via competing images of the "cute" and the gothic.

*Kathryn Hardy Bernal is currently Lecturer in Contextual and Theoretical Studies for the Graphic and Fashion Design Departments of the School of Art & Design at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand. Her background is in Art and Design History and Theory with an emphasis on the Victorian Period. Research areas are Gothic Revivalism, Aestheticism, Japonisme and Pre-Raphaelitism. Her current focus is on cross-cultural engagements between Western Medievalism, the Neo-Gothic and contemporary Japanese subcultures.*