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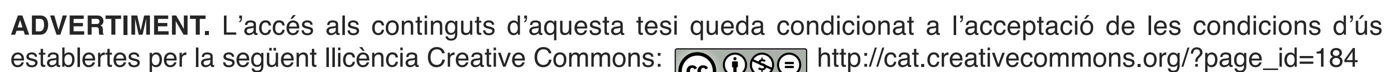

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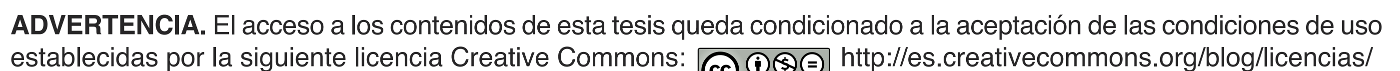

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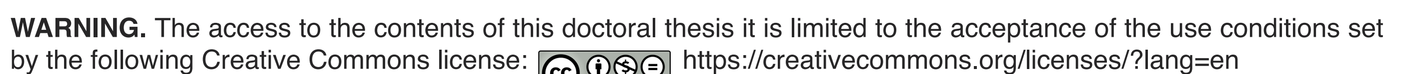

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Creating Chilean Identities to the Rhythm of Japanese Rock:

A Study of Santiago de Chile's Visual Kei Fandom as Subculture

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Abstract

During the first decade of the new millennium, Chilean television, magazines, and newspapers turned their attention to groups of young people and their fashion styles, music tastes, and tendency to use public spaces as gathering spots. The ones of the capital, Santiago de Chile, were of the most interest due to their size and were categorized as urban tribes. Among them, one stood out due to its members' outrageous hairstyles, dark makeup and clothing, androgyny, and the language of the music to which they listened: visuals, the name given to Chilean fans of the Japanese music genre visual kei. Visual kei had reached Chilean audiences as a section of Japanese popular culture influx spearheaded by anime yet had evolved into its own niche scene that stood separate from both other music genre-based groups and from other associations formed around Japanese media.

This research works with the notion that Santiago de Chile's visuals constitute a subculture that follows patterns that had been set by a long tradition of Chilean youth cultures. In this development, visual kei serves as, on the one hand, an agglutinating factor and, on the other, as an element of the articulation of identities in relationship with Chilean society at large. These issues are explored through the application of the concept of "subculture" as developed by the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and subsequent theorists. Supported by ethnographic research, it finds that Santiago's visuals work as a subculture in terms of shared experiences, spaces, and the shifting boundaries that have developed throughout its history.

Keywords: Chilean youth, Japanese popular music, subcultures, visual kei

Dedication

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my father Juan, my mother Verónica, and my sister Catalina. I owe this work and much more to their constant love and to their support of my unconventional ideas, to which they have always been able to add a dash of realism.

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I am indebted to everyone from the visual kei scene of Santiago who participated in this research. While omitting names, I wish to thank all of you for opening your hearts, and sometimes homes, to me and making this possible, and especially the organizers of parties who were extremely kind to allow me into their activities and friend groups.

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Introduction

In March 2008, Japanese visual *kei*[1] (*vijuaru kei*, "visual style" or "visual lineage") artist Miyavi announced his long-awaited first world tour for the promotion of his album *This Iz the Japanese Kabuki Rock*. Apart from Japan dates, this tour included three cities in the United States, eight European ones, three Asian ones, and two in South America, among them, Santiago de Chile. The May 21 concert tickets sold out within two days and quickly caught the interest of the media and even of government initiatives such as the Library of Congress' Asia Pacific program ("'Idol' japonés realizará concierto en Chile," 2008).[2]

As a preamble to the concert, Miyavi sent a video message to his fans. Said video was projected in the large screen on Paseo Ahumada, in downtown Santiago, on May 2, in front of a large group of visual kei fans who had initially gathered to commemorate the obituary of X Japan´s Hideto "Hide" Matsumoto, who had died ten years before. The videos shown for the occasion contained forty minutes of Japanese music content, broadcasted in the country's capital for an audience comprised mostly of Spanish-speakers, creating an apparent juxtaposition of mediatic images.

A review of the concert's media coverage finds mentions of devoted fans and a "visual kei urban tribe" in Chile (Asia Pacífico | Observatorio Parlamentario, 2008; Heufemann, 2008). Such assertions could be read merely as mediatic hyperbole, yet the existence of an urban tribe that centered around Japanese visual kei, while enigmatic and certainly niche, was not unfamiliar to

[1] Recurrent foreign words will only be italicized in their first iteration. Japanese script has been written following Hepburn romanization.

[2] This work uses the American Psychological Association's (APA) citation format according to its seventh edition (American Psychological Association, 2020). Block citations are single-spaced, and the text has been justified for ease of reading.

Chilean audiences. Visual kei, a music genre produced in Japan, had steadily been gaining followers in the country since the previous decade, mainly among those who belonged to alternative music scenes and had previous consumption of Japanese popular media such as anime[3] and film. Visuals,[4] as they were sometimes called, were one among a myriad of youth groups that were visible in the urban landscape and were being evaluated in terms of their possible deviation from societal standards.

The decision to focus this research on this topic came from two sources. On the one hand, the subject came up in the form of side comments when working with the experiences of Japanese and Japanese descendants in Chile in 2013. During the fieldwork, conversations touched upon the image of Japan that they believed Chileans held and it became necessary to look into the situating of Japan as an imagined space and into the factors that contributed to its production, among them, visual kei. On the other hand, my personal relationship to visual kei and to the visuals during my adolescence and currently as an adult and as a researcher is somewhat convoluted and cannot be described with a simple insider/outsider dichotomy. I came into contact with visual kei as a music genre and its aesthetics in 2002, at 14 years of age, as an extension of my interest in Japanese animation. I spent the next couple of years avidly downloading visual kei mp3s and acquiring black clothing of all kinds. However, I did not partake in the visual subculture, mainly because it was not defined at such at the time in my city, Viña del Mar. My friend group was comprised of anime and videogame enthusiasts, some of whom were also visual kei fans, but this element was not used as an identity. By the time of highest media visibility of the subculture in the second half of the 2000s, my undergraduate studies took most of my time and, although I remained an devoted

[3] Throughout this text, “anime” will only be used to refer to Japanese animation.
[4] This noun was generally used in English in Chile, thus making the singular “visual” and the plural “visuals.”

listener of the visual kei artists I was familiar with, I no longer looked for new music or attempted to contact fellow fans. This distance was eventually solidified when I moved away from the country and to the United States in the year 2009. It would not be until 2013 that I decided to look more keenly into visual kei in both Japan and in Chile, and I rekindled my interest in Chilean fandoms and subcultures.

One of the elements which makes this particular music genre noteworthy is how it was at the forefront of Japanese popular culture in Chile, despite working as a niche subculture in relationship to the Japanese music industry. Moreover, this topic goes further than fan studies as strictly the study of leisure preferences and moves into the intersections of fan studies with subcultural ones. Many followers of visual kei in Chile self-identified (and were identified by the media) as "visuals" themselves, showing how a foreign music genre could be articulated with their (always shifting) identities as Chileans and creating a quandary that survives until this day: can you only like visual kei or can you become visual kei through embodiment of certain elements? And, perhaps the most striking question for outsiders, why would someone in Chile wish to embody this genre?

Theoretically-speaking, the present research follows on the tradition set by the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its later developments. It utilizes the frame of analysis created around the concept of "subculture" to approach the object of study and privileges said term over other options such as "scene" or "tribe." While these are used either in their vernacular acceptations or when quoting from primary or secondary sources, the research presented here places the visuals as a subculture in terms of their interpersonal connections, the locations they frequented, their shared interests, and their boundaries in relationship to other groups.

Most scholarship on the topic, particularly the one developed during the height of the trend in Chile and the years right after, struggled with the same lack of information on the Japanese genre of visual kei that made Chilean fans create a unique subculture. Therefore, much of the length of the publications was dedicated to attempting to explain what visual kei was and what exactly it is that Chilean visuals did, rather than delve into the discourse that these same participants created around the subculture.

The passage of time and the access to both Japanese and English-language sources provide a contextualized perspective for the analysis of the subculture in its historical and current dimensions. This is also the reason for the language of this text: it seeks to place Santiago's visual kei scene and the visuals within the international field of the reception of Japanese popular culture worldwide, one which has often centered around the phenomenon in Europe and the United States due to linguistic limitations.

The present research builds on the tenet that Santiago's visual subculture is not a localized version of Japanese visual kei. Instead, it is a subculture inscribed within the frame of a long tradition of Chilean youth movements and characterized by clustering around a Japanese cultural product that is visual kei. However, the patterns it follows respond more to local circumstances than to the observation and adaptation of the Japanese scene. This is not to say that visual kei as a Japanese product in itself is irrelevant to subcultural formation. The dedication to visual kei as music genre and as personal subcultural style is shaped by the participants' position within Chilean society and by their relationship with Japan as a sign that has been present in the group's lives since childhood.

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

First, it seeks to understand visual kei fandom in Chile in general, and the visuals in particular, through the framework of subculture. The working hypothesis was that the bond created through these interactions and the identifications and boundaries of the scene, particularly in reaction to media coverage, are those that characterize a subcultural formation. Subcultural studies provide an analytical framework useful for the understanding of the group's inner workings but also of its relationship with its parent culture while incorporating issues of gender and socioeconomic status.

Second, it endeavors to set its findings within the study of the international expansion of Japan's soft power through popular culture, which has come to be known as the Cool Japan strategy.[5] Part of the research focuses on identifying the history of Chilean consumption of Japanese media and the construction of an image of Japan. The latter is shaped by both this media and by an orientalist conception that seeks, consciously or not, to place this imagined Japan as a point of contrast to their lived experiences as Chileans.

This subject called for a multidisciplinary approach. The original design of the fieldwork anticipated conducting semi-structured group interviews, but the dissimilitude between those who had shown initial interest in participating and those who signed up for interviews soon showed that the plan needed to be changed. At the early stage of the project, the participant observation aspect was going to be minimal and function as a platform for networking with potential interview participants. As the ethnography was carried out, participant observation acquired a protagonist role.

[5] In 2012, Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry explained the popularity of Japanese content and advocated that a "strategic expansion overseas can turn popularity into added value, making them into revenue sources" (2012, p. 5).

The original interviews and their objectives were eventually split into two different modalities. On the one hand, an online questionnaire was created to collect demographical data on the composition of the fandom. It also included some general questions on their experience with visual kei that had been planned for the semi-structured interviews. On the other, in-depth unstructured interviews were conducted directly with informants, two in group settings and the rest individually or with no more than two people, totaling twenty-two interviewees. Some of those present in group interviews were willing to also meet for a more in-detail, personal one, while others were only willing to talk about their experiences in a group setting. Both the interviews and the online questionnaire were conducted in Spanish and their answers have been translated into English.[6]

Due to the location of visual kei-themed events and of the potential informants, the research eventually focused only on the Santiago Metropolitan Region. Out of a total of 75 respondents of the online questionnaire, 51 stated that they lived within the area, and their answers were used towards the research.[7]

For most of the history of the subculture, dancing to visual kei music has been the main form of group interaction. By a stroke of luck, the period during which I performed the fieldwork (parts of 2018 and of 2019) happened to be unusually active in terms of visual kei-themed events. I had the opportunity of attending a total of twelve dance parties in the capital. The dance party scene is dominated by party brands, which refer to the organizers (either individual or groups), who operate under a pseudonym or brand name. Although there used to be many more organizers,

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[6] Following APA guidelines, most of the texts in other languages without official translations have been paraphrased with the exception of interviews and questionnaire responses, which were translated into English and quoted directly.

[7] See Appendix: Table 1 for the details on the location of all respondents by region.

Kuchizuke, Paradoxical, and Shinigami Kagura were the three party brands dedicated to visual kei that were still active during my research.

In addition to this, I partook in the 2018 Chilean Harajuku Fashion Walk, an annual event inspired by Tokyo's own monthly ones. The Chilean Harajuku Fashion Walk gathers Japanese fashion enthusiasts who show their style as they walk in downtown Santiago after gathering around the Eurocentro shopping center, which has been a critical subcultural landmark. This culminated in a pop-up market at the Casa de los Diez cultural foundation, with various stands offering Japanese-inspired clothing and independent magazines and books, among other items.

This ethnography was complemented with the analysis of primary sources such as television features and newspaper and magazine articles. This allowed me to corroborate some of the accounts of facts by the informants. Nevertheless, the focus of the research is ethnographic and derives its argumentation from the lived experiences of the participants and the discourses built around and through these very same narratives.

Dedicating a research to visual kei and to the visuals in Chile seeks to highlight the capacity of young people in Chile to engage with foreign cultural products and to articulate this interest within their identities. The focus on subcultural theory endeavors to understand these instances through the creative dynamism that makes collectives such as Santiago's visual kei scene work as self-generated and self-managed spaces that run parallel to governmental initiatives targeting them.

This work also pursued to observe the effects of media coverage on the inner workings of the community and on the processes of identity of its members. While it is not my intention to provide value judgements in terms of veridic or distorted portrayals, the way that these social

phenomena are depicted can create discourses that overshadows their creative potential in favor of more sensationalized accounts.

This particular ethnographic study posed a challenge in terms of the distance to the object of study, or lack thereof. As someone who holds a personal attachment to the visual kei genre and has grown to form close ties with the visual subculture in Chile through this very same ethnography, this project required a constant revision of how my bias could affect the interactions with informants and the analysis of the ethnography conducted with them.

Nevertheless, I was able to approach the object of this research from a privileged standpoint. On the one hand, I was already somewhat knowledgeable of the visual kei genre and could recognize major artists and songs. Moreover, as a Chilean, communication with the informants went ahead without major linguistic misunderstandings and national historical events and conventions were common knowledge.

On the other hand, I was an outsider. Not only did I not come from the capital and had not participated in Santiago's scene, but I had also lived abroad for most of my adult life. Being aware of the unevenness created by the researcher-informant relationship, efforts were made to avoid both a position of eminence over the informants and any possible patronization. For the most part, this was achieved, and informants were willing and enthusiastic to share their knowledge of the music and of the history of their community with me.

Finally, given the aforementioned geographical restrictions to contacting informants, it is essential to characterize this research as focused on the capital and acknowledge that there may have been equally significant scenes in other areas that were not part of the scope of the project.

Chapter 1, titled “Approaching Visual Kei Through Cultural Studies” contains the literature review and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The literature ranges from studies of youth subcultures, specifically those of the CCCS, through publications on Japanese popular culture, to youth groups in Chile, with the main focus on, on the one hand, coverage of visual kei, and, on the other, coverage of the Chilean subcultures of the 2000s, among them the visuals.

Chapter 2, “Overview of Visual Kei as a Music Genre,” is an outline of visual kei as a Japanese music genre in its historical, cultural, and industry dimensions. It builds upon the latest research on the topic, which includes sources in English and in Japanese, and explores the strategies through which visual kei has been exported, including its connection to the anime industry, which will be essential to understanding the penetration of the genre among Chilean audiences.

Chapter 3, “Setting the Scene,” details the history of the visual subculture of Santiago de Chile. The first part sets it within the history of Chilean youth organizations and of music-centered subcultures, while the second reconstructs the history of visual kei fandom in Chile and of the visual subculture through a process of oral history compilation. Informants’ accounts were used to rebuild a sequential account of the scene from its beginnings in the early 2000s to the present. Such statements were also contrasted with printed media and with each other the create a basic chronological framework and identify the way in which informants referred to their collective history.

Chapter 4, titled “The Creation of a Local Subculture,” centers on the appropriation and incorporation of the visual kei music genre by Chilean fans in Santiago. The first section focuses on the creation of an imaginary Japan through the consumption of media and the situating of this creation within orientalist discourses on Asia and on Japan. The second section details the elements

that inscribe visual kei in Santiago in the tradition of Chilean subcultures, mainly through its forms of socialization and expression.

Chapter 5, “The Subcultural Body as a Space of Expression and Resistance,” focuses on the use of subcultural style as a form of expression through bodily displays. It also addresses the topic of androgyny and of cross-dressing within Santiago’s scene and of gendered practices in the community. In the later part of the chapter, these issues are linked to the evaluation of authenticity within the subculture and to its evolution since its inception in the early 2000s.

Chapter 6, “Visibility and Belonging,” looks at Santiago’s visual kei fans as a subculture, the one that during some years came to be known as the “visuals” by the media. It focuses on the sense of belonging, group boundaries, use of public spaces, and of media coverage as elements that shape subcultural affiliation as much as individual identities.

Chapter 1: Approaching visual kei through cultural studies

While the research on visual kei in Chile has not been necessarily scarce in relation to the size of its fanbase, it appears disconnected from broader global trends, a shortfall that arises from both the time in which these works were written and the language barriers faced by their authors. At the time visual kei and the visual subculture came under Chilean mediatic and academic scrutiny, the literature was mostly available in Japanese and, moreover, the media's insistence in labeling these youth groups as "tribes" rather than using any other terminology reduced the theoretical framework to the one surrounding this term.

The following section intends to breach this gap by looking at the literature of both visual kei and Japanese popular culture as a global phenomenon and the study of groups created around music genres, particularly the work of subcultural theorists, as a way to establish an analytical tool that can further analyze the visual kei phenomenon in Santiago.

1.1 Literature review

1.1.1 Cultural, subcultural, and music scenes studies

Works covering music genres and the subcultures which develop around them (and, simultaneously, fuel them) borrow much of their theoretical and historiographical foundations from twentieth-century cultural studies. It was also this line of research that would set the components of the field up to this day: the focus on deviancy as materialized in the initial works of the University of Chicago’s Department of Sociology on criminology and gang affiliation and that of subcultural style as a form of ritualistic resistance. On the latter, subcultures, as they are

recognized today, were systematically studied by the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) of the University of Birmingham, usually mentioned only as the “Birmingham School.” The work of scholars such as John Clarke and the CCCS’s second director, Stuart Hall, are pillars of subsequent scholarship on youth groups which, even as it might revise and sometimes openly critique the CCCS’s theories, builds upon the basis set by them.

The field of global music-based youth subcultures owes some of its pioneer publications on topics such as reggae followers, mods, and punks in Britain to the CCCS. Its theorists, Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts, laid out the school’s approach in the introduction to the collective work *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (1975/2003). The CCCS worked from Marxist and non-Marxist structuralist theory and combined it with other paradigms such as the semiotics of Lévi-Strauss and the reflections of Althusser on ideology, among other topics, to approach youth cultures and to complexify their view on structure and human praxis, emphasizing an analysis through articulation rather than homology (Hall, 1980). Its approach to culture and subcultures in terms of cultural, and therefore material, hegemony and subordination applies this model of ethnographic work to various groups, seeing their expressions as articulations of opposition and resistance to the parent culture (Clarke et al., 1975/2003, p. 15).

Dick Hebdige, a graduate of the CCCS, published another of the cornerstones of subcultural studies, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* in 1979. Although its theory has been contested later, his work remains one of the most-read books on subcultures; it combines the works of Hall and others from the CCCS with further theoretical elaborations applied to a myriad of case studies on youth groups in postwar Britain. Using semiotic analysis, including those developed by Barthes in *Mythologies* (1972, as cited by Hebdige, p. 9), Hebdige states that “it is perhaps appropriate that the punks, who have made such large claims for illiteracy, who have pushed

profanity to such startling extremes, should be used to test some of the methods for 'reading' signs evolved in the centuries-old debate on the sanctity of culture" (p. 19). This way of communicating meaning, he argues, was in direct opposition to that of other subcultures such as Britain's Teddy Boys. Hebdige's work gave academic validation to punks' use of stylistic spectacle to voice frustration and aggression by ascertaining the adequacy of the use of stylistic elements as signs.

Punk, in its various shapes, has resonated internationally and given rise to local adaptations, including in Japan and Chile, which makes its method of stylistic subversion a global resource. Style-wise, punk and its subcultural inheritor, goth, in combination with hard-rock imagery, are commonly found in visual kei style.

The British goth scene has thoroughly been studied by Paul Hodkinson, who has explored its different dimensions through interviews, polls, and direct participation in it. Hodkinson's (2011) work on aging within the goth subculture and the adaptations that its participants perform in order to still identify with it is relevant to what is being found in many scenes from the 2000s, including Chilean visual kei. In particular, he describes goth as being a subculture because of their strong identification with the style, identification that, in many cases, surpasses geographical distances (Hodkinson, 2002). Hodkinson is one among many scholars that look at goth through a subcultural lens and identify various themes that have been swept along from glam and, therefore, become latent also in visual kei. Among them, androgyny and its ambivalence between resistance to societal expectations on gender presentation and a "cult of hyper-femininity" and the use of religious and anti-religious imagery as part of stylistic choices (Powell, 2007) are very much evident in visual kei performers and fans alike.

Visual kei can be analyzed as a music genre, following the history of its development, the industry, and the lyrical and visual symbolism employed by performers. In this aspect, there is a

parallelism with the development of glam rock in the West, as this style contains two traits that are transversal to visual kei: utilization of theatrical stage personas and androgyny. Philip Auslander (2006) identifies three identities in glam rock performers: the real person, the performance persona, and the character of the song/text (p. 4). While he believes these exist for all music acts, he cites glam rock performers as extending their onstage personas into public appearances, as was the case with Alice Cooper and David Bowie. Of the latter, he analyzes his use of the bisexual Ziggy Stardust in his negotiation of sexuality on and off stage, stating that it "was both a figure who mediated between sexualities and a third term that triangulated the relationship between Bowie and the characters in his songs" (p. 120).

This is a theme that is also addressed by Chapman and Johnson in their introduction to the book *Global Glam and Popular Music: Style and Spectacle from the 1970s to the 2000s* (2016), which contains chapters on various music acts, including a chapter on visual kei. The editors mention the difficulty of defining glam as a music genre with "the usual tools-of-trade employed by pop musicologists" (p. 2). This issue with definition places glam in a similar conundrum as visual kei's. When talking about glam outside of its original geographical limitations, these authors state that "global glam exists in the intersection of British glam and other styles (punk, metal, disco, goth, etc.), and its proponents create spectacle and style in popular-music performance, fandom, and fashion" (p.3). This work, with the various essays contained in its chapters, provides a comprehensible description of glam's influence in the global music scene and of how its original characteristics have extended to more current versions of the style.

Theo Cateforis's book on new wave music, titled *Are We Not New Wave*? (2011), also has contributed to the studies of genres which were initially seen as not as academic-worthy as others, as he believes that new wave was regarded as a "mild cousin to punk" (p. 11). He also argues that

the fact that new wave encompassed many seemingly different styles has impaired both research on the topic and a proper appreciation by the media (p. 10). It can be argued that in this regard its position as a subject of study is similar to that of visual kei, for academics and listeners alike tend to have problems defining it and deciding which bands (and in which era of their careers) deserve the label.

Although visual kei developed more directly from hard rock than from glam (Inoue, 2003a), the latter's influence at a global level by the time of visual kei's debut permeated the performances of pop to hard rock musicians. The developments in performance studies that applied their tools to the analysis of glam and other forms of popular music are relevant to the study of visual kei as a genre.

1.1.2 Visual kei in Japan

English-language coverage of visual kei in non-academic media has tried to explain the style's origins and characteristics to the Western audience. For example, the book *Tokyo Rock Catwalk. Visual Kei Bands Big in Japan* (2008) is comprised of photos of bands and fans, together with short interviews, but does not go into detailed analysis, focusing instead on demystifying and explaining the style to the Western audience. Also, with the intention of introducing and explaining the genre to its overseas audience, in 2012 MTV81 aired a multi-segment special titled Visual Kei 101, which included an interview with the band The Gazette ("Spotlight. 'Visual Kei 101: The Gazette'," 2012). Similarly, Pfeifle presented a series of articles on the topic on the website JaME (dedicated to Japanese popular music), which later was published as an undergraduate work in the peer-reviewed journal *The GMU Review* under the title "Exposing the Underground: The Japanese Subculture of Visual Kei" (2011d). This is perhaps one of the most comprehensive studies on the style as a whole: it focuses not only on its musical, stage, and economic factors, but also includes

the results of a poll, conducted on the same website, with over 6,000 responses to various questions relating to visual kei fandom, alongside interviews with industry insiders. All these publications have the goal of working as introductory works to a genre that is relatively unknown for foreign audiences and Pfeifle's works in particular attempts to clear up what the author perceives as misconceptions held by Western fans.

Visual kei does have a presence within the field of Japanese popular culture studies. X Japan, to whom the initial popularity of visual kei is attributed, is usually mentioned within larger works on Japanese popular music in the chapters dedicated to more recent music artists, such as those of Condry (2011, p. 242) and of Bourdaughs (2012, p. 225). However, it has been of interest to scholars focusing on fandom and on gender. Because of the relative niche-status of the topic, most articles spend a considerable segment of any publication on the explanation of the style and its origins to the reader. It is nevertheless possible to identify main topics of interest within this scholarship: fan behavior, visual kei subculture and its points of contention with mainstream Japanese culture, and the negotiation of gender norms as expressed in band members' and fans' appearances.

The origins of visual kei have been attributed to the intersection of hard rock, glam, and Japan's own traditional art forms such as kabuki theater (Reesman, n.d.). This is particularly poignant in one of the style's most prominent features: the band members' androgyny and, sometimes, outright crossdressing. Takako Inoue has written about this aspect, arguing that this use of femininity by male performers actually reproduces the gender dichotomy already existing in the international rock industry. Inoue describes rock bands as an "alternative male homo-social community for realizing male aesthetics" (2003a, p. 199). The author explains her decision to use the term "visual rock" by stating that "visual kei" has come to include the influence of the genre

on masculine aesthetics in general and the chapter only deals with the music scene. This is consistent with the time of publication when visual kei was still limited to mostly rock-inclined artists, and thus the term “visual rock” could encompass most of the music scene. According to this, her analysis is applicable only to the music scene side of visual kei, which she specifies as “visual rock,” yet, despite this nomenclature, the scope of the analysis coincides with and contributes to the studies of visual kei music and the scene surrounding it.

In the same year, Inoue participated as one of the editors and authors of the Japanese-language publication *Vijuaru Kei No Jidai: Rokku, Keshō, Jendā* [The Age of Visual Kei: Rock, Makeup, Gender], alongside Takuo Morikawa, Naoko Murota, and Kyōko Koizumi, (2003). This work remains the only book focused solely on visual kei until this day.

The first chapter, “Vijuaru Kei to Jenda” [Visual Kei and Gender], authored by Inoue (2003c), is an overview of the history of visual kei and its gendered practices within the field of rock music as a worldwide phenomenon.

The following chapter, “Vijuaru Rokku No Keifu” [A Genealogy of Visual Rock], written by Morikawa, traces the development of visual kei within the Japanese and global music scenes. It clarifies the areas of influences of existing music genres in visual kei; like Inoue, Morikawa finds that musically visual kei is more closely tied to hard rock and heavy metal than to glam rock, including also audience behavior (such as heavy metal fans’ headbanging) and highlights the connection to punk rock from a thematic-standpoint of rebellion (Morikawa, 2003, p. 60-70) Moreover, the author divides visual kei bands by chronological and thematic order by establishing those belonging to the first, second, third, and, lastly, “new generation” visual kei artists (Inoue et al., 2003, p. 276-277).

Inoue is also the author of Chapter 3, "Kakuchō Sareta Otoko No Bigaku–X Wo Megutte" [Expanded Men Aesthetics–On X]. The chapter follows the theoretical work laid down in the first one and analyzes the visual kei band, exemplified by X, as a form of homosocial community that incorporates feminine symbols to expand masculine aesthetics (2003b, p. 120). This and the first chapter are extended versions of what the author discussed in the English-language book chapter that had been published earlier in the year (Inoue, 2003a).

Chapter 4 is written by Murota and titled "Shōjo Tachi No Ibasho Sagashi–Vijuaru Rokku to Shōjo Manga" [Girls' Search for a Place to Belong—Visual Rock and Shōjo Manga]. It focuses on the connection between girls' manga and visual kei/rock. This link, according to the author, is older than the existence of visual rock itself; the subject of *dōjinshi* (parody comics) with a homosexual theme authored by women had focused on "makeup rock" artists such as the members of the band Japan and David Bowie. This, together with the aesthetics of visual rock musicians that resembles that of the men in *shōjo* manga (girl's manga), made them accessible subjects for the creation of *dōjinshi* on visual kei members themselves and also the creation of manga centered around fictional rock bands by fans of the Japanese rock scenes, such as the case of Kaoru Tada's manga *Ai Shite Knight*.

The fifth and last chapter, "Isei Wo Yosou Shōjo Tachi-Vijuaru Rokku Bando No Kosupure Fan" [Girls who Dress as the Opposite Gender-The Fans of Visual Kei Cosplay], was written by Koizumi and follows the history of fans cosplaying as visual kei musicians and also the way that this expression of fandom has changed through the years. She makes a distinction between the participants of the first visual kei cosplay boom of the early 1990s and those of the second boom of the second half of the decade. The former is characterized as having started their cosplay activities as a direct result of being fans of the band (this band being in most cases X Japan);

however, the latter would become interested in the bands subsequent to their cosplay practices. According to Koizumi, for the cosplayers of this second boom the band members are seen as “characters” that function as cosplay material (2003, p. 224).

Yasunori Kashiwagi’s article “Poppu Karuchā Toshite no Vijuaru Kei no Rekishi” [The History of Visual Kei as Pop Culture] (2011) was published eight years after Morikawa’s (2003) book chapter. Much like its predecessor, the text undertakes to present the history of visual kei. Unlike the majority of authors and visual kei followers, Kashiwagi does not attribute the creation of visual kei to X Japan. Instead, he sets across the many developments in the global and Japanese music industries that influenced the incorporation by various artists of the elements that would make up the visual kei genre (Kashiwagi, 2011, p. 89). To this he adds the importance of the media, namely rock music magazines, that would solidify the genre as such. Due to the time of its publication, the article covers many years of development past what Morikawa wrote about and Kashiwagi uses the term “neo visual kei” to refer to the tendencies that dominated the scene since the mid-2000s (p. 95).

A book chapter written by Lim titled “Crime of Visual Shock: Japanese Rock Subculture” (2004) observes the production and consumption of visual kei in Japan through the lens of subcultural studies. Lim argues that the industry and communities formed around the style can be labeled as a subculture, as it “is both a reaction and incorporation of certain social norms in contemporary Japanese society” and “an avenue of simultaneous reflection and expression of those norms and values” (p. 225). While the author sets this subcultural dimension in its opposition and differentiation from both Japanese society at large and from the rest of the Japanese music industry, he also emphasizes the conformity within itself (p. 241). In this, Lim identifies certain practices such as fan behaviors during live shows and the consumption of said fan base, which consists

mostly of Japanese "teenage schoolgirls" (p. 235-236). Unlike Inoue, Lim sees crossdressing among performers and fans as an expression visual kei's alternative culture status, part of what he describes as "a nonconformist playground where 'identity' (both personal and group) can be expressed without coercion of existing societal norms" (2004, p. 240).

Yumiko Iida, in "Beyond the 'Feminization of Masculinity': Transforming Patriarchy with the 'Feminine' in Contemporary Japanese Youth Culture" (2005), touches precisely upon the interaction of mainstream Japanese masculine ideals and those of visual kei in a study of the emergence of new masculinities among Japanese men. Iida argues that the use of feminine aesthetics and strategies by men serves to resist and oppose the expectations and ideals of hegemonic masculinity (p. 57). The author identifies this development as a response to both women's ideal of masculinity and the "generational struggle with older gender values" (p. 62). In this view, visual kei's utilization of feminine aesthetics in the development of masculine ideals would go past simple commodification and instead signify a stance against cultural gender norms.

Oliver Seibt focused a book chapter on the aspects of fantasy and desire in visual kei's female fanbase through observation and interviews of followers of the band D, titled "Asagi's Voice: Learning How to Desire with Japanese Visual-Kei" (2013). Using the Lacanian concepts of "desire" and "voice," he analyzes the discourse of one of D's Western female fans and the behavior of various attendees to their live events in Japan. Seibt believes that visual kei creates a fantasy that serves as a training space for the need to desire, having this desire focus on the visual kei musicians or, in the case of the interviewed fan, the voice of the vocalist. Any sexual aspect of this desire is from the beginning unfulfillable; the same world that allows for its emergence curbs it by a series of rules of the *bangya* (an abbreviation of *bando gyaru*, or band girl, used to refer to women followers of visual kei) world that prevents close personal relationships between musicians

and *bangya*. Seibt proceeds to identify visual kei as "a cultural arena for desiring as an ineluctable imperative of human existence, a social space that molds desire as an end in itself" (p. 261-262).

Henry Johnson and Akitsugu Kawamoto wrote a book chapter titled "'Visual-kei': Glamour in Japanese Pop Music," in which they argue that it is precisely the visual aspect of the genre, understood as aesthetics, that provides an avenue of analysis of the style. In the history of the genre and case examples they provide, the authors identify two themes that define it, namely divergence and androgyny. The former refers to both the difference in production of the underground and mainstream scenes and to the musical style divergence within the genre. As for the presence of androgyny, they find it to be present throughout visual kei's history, even if it was toned down during what they call its "golden years," and suggest that this change might have been part of a strategy to appeal to a larger mainstream audience. In fact, both of these elements, they argue, fluctuated and subsided during the height of visual kei's popularity within mainstream pop music, after which its return to the underground scene made the divergence in music styles and in androgyny rise once more.

Ken McLeod's article "Visual Kei: Hybridity and Gender in Japanese Popular Culture" (2013) suggests the concept of "hybridity," as developed in postcolonial studies, as an analytical tool useful to understand visual kei. He argues that visual kei as a genre can be seen as creating a third space by the dislocation of time, place, and gender. The cultural hybridization allows for the overcoming of dichotomies such as East/West, male/female, and artist/audience. As for the latter, McLeod establishes that identification with and desire for the artists are essential to young women's involvement in the visual kei scene as fans. He believes that "their participation should be understood as means for sexual empowerment as they are able to, often aggressively, project themselves both with and as the male characters on stage" (McLeod, 2013. p.314). From this

premise, he goes on to describe how the hybrid space created by visual kei provides fans with "a means of constructing social integration and freedom" (2013, p. 315).

Mira Malick responded to McLeod's proposition in "Elusively Ubiquitous: Issues with the Application of Hybridity in Visual Kei" (2018). In her argument, Malick stresses that hybridity, if misused as an analytical term, presupposes, on the one hand, the existence of originally pure forms of the elements now present in the hybrid and, on the other, the lack of borders of the object of study. What is proposed in the chapter is the further problematization of visual kei, rather than an overarching, simplifying tag of "hybrid." The author believes that this can be overcome by the understanding of visual kei in its sociohistorical settings and studying its developments as responses to trends and pressures of the Japanese music and cultural industries at specific points in time.

Wolfgang Welsch's concept of "transculturality" is proposed as an analytical tool for the study of visual kei by Klaudia Adamowicz (2014b). An understanding of all cultures as combinations of elements that arise from transcultural networks rather than from fixed national identities (Welsch, as cited by Adamowicz, 2014b, p. 13) would allow observers to work with the apparently dissimilar elements that appear in visual kei aesthetic motifs as a coherent whole, instead of focusing on the alleged national origins of each of them.

Although not following directly from McLeod's research and his observations of bangya's empowerment through visual kei, Adrienne Renee Johnson's "From Shōjo to *Bangya*(*ru*): Women and Visual Kei" (2019) also addresses visual kei's female fandom practices. She situates the genre within a "distinctly Japanese, woman-oriented media context," with aesthetics that explicitly draw from *shōjo* manga tradition (p. 309-310). She highlights the power of *bangya* to determine bands' and events' course of actions as the genre's primary consumers, which is coupled with the safety

found in the fanbase's subculture to create an instance through which, "intentionally or not, they are challenging heteronormative ideals by refusing to base their lives around positions as wives or mothers, and could be seen as embracing the liminal, non-(re)productive position of the shōjo" (p. 313).

Johnson has also explored the queering potentiality of visual kei for performers, whom, she argues, employ the "layering of (usually) male gender identity with typically feminine-coded items, language, and expressions" (Johnson, 2020, p. 120), which destabilizes the naturalized binary of the genders. Moreover, the rejection of labels allows these performers' lives, or at least the construction of their persona available for the audience's consumption, to exist outside of established Japanese LGBTQI+ narratives (p. 123). Johnson's research offers a different perspective on issues of gender within the scene past the binary that Inoue points at. While this does not necessarily negate Inoue's (2003) conclusions, it employs other theoretical approaches to grasp the gender negotiations within the scene at large.

Chen (2019) has looked at the internationalization strategies of visual kei performers through a marketing lens. The author coins the term of "Ouroboros strategy" to designate the "circular pattern of internationalised cultural products, which originate in a non-Western culture, flow out into the world (e.g. 'the West'), and returns to its country of origin" (p. 1216). Unlike traditional, linear internationalization strategies that seek to expand the market by acquiring fans abroad, through the Ouroboros strategy, the artists' cultural capital is increased by this association with the West, which later translates into growth within the domestic Japanese market (p. 1230). These developments showcase the breadth of reach of visual kei but also in the way that the visual kei industry views foreign audiences.

If we see the culture developed around visual kei as an alternative to mainstream Japan (if not directly as "subculture"), other studies on alternative communities and music scenes are also relevant to its analysis. Like their British counterparts, goths in Japan have also been subjects of inquiries. John M. Skutlin (2016) identifies them with the spectacularity of other subcultures but explicitly states that his interviewees sought to differentiate themselves from other "purely fashion-based subcultures" through musical preferences and subcultural knowledge (p. 37). Like other researchers of goth, he finds that the subculture presents a mechanism to channel and outwardly express emotions usually seen as negative, even if this is not possible in the day-to-day lives of the participants (p. 39).

Another subculture that tends to overlap with visual kei both in Japan and in Chile is the one created around *lolita* fashion.[8] There are several connections between this subculture and visual kei, starting with the fact that one of its central figures, Mana, is also a prominent visual kei musician and producer and that lolita, much like visual kei, borrows and repurposes European themes such as fairytales and Victorian fashion. Lolita communities employ subtle tools to differentiate from mainstream culture, which go from aesthetic choices to linguistic ones (Gagné, 2008), and this overlapping played an important part in the reception of both subcultures among the Chilean public.

The research on visual kei presented in this section has been divided across two main lines: one that studies visual kei focusing on the musical genre´s production, be it through the imagery used by performers or through the industry, and a second one that explores the genre through the interaction of music and audiences. In the case of Santiago's scene, the second variant of study

[8] Lolita fashion style's common elements are enumerated by Liu Carriger (2019) as "lace and ruffle-decked blouses under jumpers, aprons, or high-waisted belled and crinolined knee-length skirts; more skin covered than bare; headwear including bonnets, miniature hats, or massive bows over ringlets and long tresses" (p. 122). Terms such as "lolita" or foreign ones that show repeatedly throughout the text will only be italicized in their first iteration.

serves as a model for researching the way music is used by audiences to process their own personal and local circumstances and create subcultural forms.

1.1.3 Japanese popular culture abroad

The studies on visual kei fandom outside of Japan borrow from those on other forms of Japanese popular culture abroad. Moreover, we need to take into consideration the sets of circumstances that differentiate its Chilean localization. Anime, one of Japan's biggest popular culture exports, has been thoroughly studied in English-language scholarship and, as will be further explained, anime seems to be a common gateway into the world of Japanese popular culture among the informants in this study.

In "The world of anime fandom in America" (2006), Susan Napier studied the interaction and community-building of transnational fans through the Miyazaki Mailing List, which she believes illustrates the international anime fandom in a larger scale as well. Napier, a renowned scholar on Japanese media and particularly anime, also published *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (2008), which touches upon the creation of Japan as an imaginary *topos* by fans of its media.

Lawrence Eng (2012) has highlighted the role of the Internet as a network platform for anime and manga fans to develop their communities, even as there are also large events available for in-person interaction. He uses the example of the United States' fandoms and their practices to show the hybridity of their interaction and information sources, as his informants would both share anime-watching with peers and resort to websites for information and interaction (p. 166). Mizuki Ito, in the introduction to *Otaku Unbound* (2012), also brings up that, although their media might seem similar, differences in sociohistorical circumstances influence the content and format of the

media that is consumed by otaku in the United States versus Japan, making the former more prone to follow fandom trends on digitized and animated mediums (p. xx).

Núria Venâncio Monteiro (2011) has conducted research on gender as sexuality in the anime, visual kei, and lolita following in Portugal, alluding to a lack of scholarship on the topic in her country (p. 3). Through qualitative research within these groups, she concludes that these mediums allow for the subversion of traditional gender and sexual orientation norms, which she attributes to the country's Christian background. However, she encounters gender-differentiated approaches to the topic of androgyny in performers and anime characters; women appear more open to it and even welcome it, while male informants only accept it as either a source of comedic relief or when it is perceived as clearly justified within a plot or as artistic performance (p. 15-16). Instead of a clearly positive or even neutral stance, male informants tolerated androgyny and insinuations of homoeroticism among visual kei musicians only as a comedic device, not as a legitimate sexual orientation or gender identity. Although Venâncio Monteiro does not delve on the further implications of this, it can be inferred that it reveals more about the constraints of their own ideals of masculinity than about the sexual orientation of performers.

Followers of Japanese popular culture have also become a topic of research in South America in works that focus on anime fandom. Santiago Ricciardelli-Dusseldorp’s article on Argentinian otaku and gamer groups brings up the difficulties of studying this phenomenon following only the participants’ self-affiliation to any group, given that such they tend to be associated with obsessive behaviors, choosing instead to classify them by group and individual behavioral patterns (Ricciardelli-Dusseldorp, 2017). He finds that his informants’ adherence to these identifications is much more fluid and less confrontational than initially thought, stating that

he considers that identifying as otaku or gamer is more of a discursive strategy, and there is not a significant polarity between those identifications (p. 46).

Tania Lucía Cobos (2010) has rejected the understanding of globalization as a one-way process, taking it instead as a multidirectional exchange with actors other than the United States or the traditional West. In "Animación Japonesa y Globalización. La Latinización y la Subcultura Otaku en América Latina" [Japanese Animation and Globalization: Otaku Culture in Latin America], the author identifies three elements to the "Latinization" of anime: dubbing and levels of localization, video alteration (usually for censorship reasons), and the substitution or trimming of anime theme songs (p. 16-19). As for Latin American otaku themselves, who have received anime and produced a hybridization of Japanese popular culture, she finds that, among other characteristics, they seem to take a more critical position in regard to the hegemonic consumer discourse (2010, p. 26). Still, Roberto García Núñez y Dassaev García Huerta (2014), in their review of the literature on otaku in Latin America, have concluded that, as of the year of their publication, the "serious" studies on the topic were still scarce, but are being conducted from various academic disciplines (p. 1). Like the groups observed by Napier in the United States, the majority of the informants, regardless of country, tend to have no issue with, and even prefer, socializing with fellow fans, making their experience, again, dissimilar to that of Japanese anime fans as described by Eng (2012).

1.1.4 Visual kei and subcultures in Chile

Chile is no stranger to subcultural studies, of which visual kei is but a small segment of a broader set of so-called urban tribes that comprise the landscape of youth social groups in the country, particularly in the city of Santiago. Participation extends well beyond their members'

adult years, and they continue to identify with the groups, although news reports and magazine articles tend to focus on adolescents when covering them.

There have been publications on the topic both by insiders, with more of an anecdotal component, and by academics from major Chilean universities. Of the former, Christian Mancilla's *Manto Negro. Historia y Anécdotas de la Escena Gótica e Industrial Chilena* [Black Shroud: History and Anecdotes of the Chilean Goth and Industrial Scene] (2014) works at both a descriptive level by explaining the origins of the goth movement and its development in Chile, and at an anecdotal one, with many insider stories that were either experienced by the author himself or were conveyed to him by his close acquaintances. Like Hodkinson in his own research, he considers himself to be an insider—he has participated in the activities he describes and identifies with the scene. He does not, however, go into theoretical or analytical detail, as Mancilla's objective seems not to be to go into interpretative territory but to portray as closely as possible a subculture that has been a large part of his life.

It is important to also note that the Instituto Nacional de la Juventud (INJUV, "National Youth Institute") has commissioned and published studies on young people's behaviors, among them one on Internet usage and meanings (Soto Valenzuela., Espejo Silva, & Matute Willemsen, 2002) and the Instituto's very own national poll Encuesta Nacional de la Juventud ("National Youth Poll") (currently on its eighth iteration), which serves as a valuable source of information for several studies. The site also hosts external publications on youth behavior, such as those of Christian Matus Madrid, who has published several works on the consumption and use of spaces by Chilean youth groups. One of them focuses on the space of the Blondie dance club in Santiago de Chile (Matus Madrid, 2009). This brief study on the nightclub's environments is particularly relevant, for it is a space that has played a pivotal role in the development of the visual kei scene

of Santiago. Moreover, Blondie has been associated with various subcultures, among them goths, new wave, and British pop followers. Matus Madrid follows Michel Maffesoli's (1972/1996) concept of "tribes" when analyzing his observations. He does not extrapolate what transpires inside the space of the nightclub to other areas of the subjects' lives but instead studies Blondie as both a physical and symbolic space. Matus Madrid works with the Lacanian opposition between the concepts of pleasure and *jouissance* (translated to Spanish as "goce"), identifying the former with fixated desire and the latter with the ephemeral realm that characterizes Blondie gatherings and the various expressions of the self in them (p. 113). Although the author does not write about visual kei, partially due to the year of publication of the study, his application of the concept of the feast (translated in the original Spanish text as "fiesta," which incidentally can also be translated simply as "party") to these gatherings and the importance he attributes to the Other's gaze and the act of dancing will also be applied in the present study.

Although the "tribalization" of Chilean youth is often seen as a phenomenon of the 1990s and 2000s with roots in underground organizational practices of the military dictatorship era (Salazar & Pinto, 2002, p. 266), anthropologist Yanko González places the provenance of Chilean youth cultures and their tribality as early as the second half of the 1950s with the young men who followed Hollywood actors' fashion styles (particularly the wearing of the black leather jacket) and had an interest in motorcycles, who were called *coléricos* by the media. González uses Stanly Cohen's (1972/2011) model of moral panics to follow the reaction of media and society to this perceived threat to the young Chilean republic and its role in the creation of another subculture, that of the *carlotos*. Although the author recognizes the stylistic similitude between these groups and the subcultures described by the CCCS, he argues that *coléricos* and *carlotos* do not fall within either the canonical and specific acceptation of subculture nor does they remain within the concept

of counterculture. He explains this differentiation in the bourgeois origin of these two groups and their lack of a political project and instead considers them as “generational connections, which is defined as “people who share the same socio-historical environment and the same ‘community of historical life,’ who can create a connection if they are of the same age or in the same ‘generational position’” (Mannheim, 1990, as cited by González, 2012, p. 393). The groups described by González show forms of socialization that are relevant to Chile’s youth cultures throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including the visuals, who incorporate their interest in a Japanese music genre into this tradition.

Sociologist Doris Cooper Mayr’s book *Ideología y Tribus Urbanas* [Ideology and Urban Tribes] (2007) sets to establish the context in which Chilean subcultures emerge and develop, emphasizing the topic of globalization and of structural dominance before approaching national subcultures through several ethnographic studies: on goths, punks, rap/hip-hop, and Rastafarian. Moreover, although the title of the book refers to these groups as “urban tribes,” the rest of the text uses the concept of “subculture” to analyze them. The book dedicates a large section to situate Chilean subcultures within the phenomenon of globalization. Cooper Mayr, however, is careful to highlight the dissimilar access to global communications and to capital, which impacts the way in which subcultures relate to the dominant culture and internalize its values. The author goes on to provide a harsh yet insightful analysis of the Chilean class system, which includes the incorporation of the variable of differentiated socialization among the lower and upper classes, and thus differentiated access to all forms of capital, and incorporates it to the identity processes. The author also works with her knowledge of theory on subcultures, crime, and deviation, including children and youth as marginalized social categories and citing the way that they experience their own sets of societal issues, particularly that of violence. This influences the book’s

view on culture as a whole, adding the nuances of class, sex-gender, race, and ethnicity that are absent from more traditional definitions.

Most of the publications on visual kei in Chile have been the result of undergraduate work and published either as theses or as books. While these efforts were supported and guided by mentors, those who have taken the initiative to study the phenomenon have been people who were either going through their undergraduate studies during the 2000s or people who took part in this or other subcultures and later focused their research on it. Some other established members of Chilean academia specializing in youth formations, in contrast, were divided on whether these new formations qualified as proper “tribes” in regard to their alleged lack of ideology (Cooper Mayr in Contardo, 2007) or as to whether they have enough autonomy from the rest of society (Larraín, 2009).

One of the most comprehensive works on the Chilean youth scenes of the 2000s is Andrea Campo Cea’s *Ciertos Ruidos: Nuevas Tribus Urbanas Chilenas* [Certain Noises: New Chilean Urban Tribes] (2009). Prompted by what was seen by the author as the media’s sensationalist coverage, her research was performed during the height of the urban tribes' media phenomenon, which is generally also seen as the height of participation in them (A. Ocampo Cea, personal communication, July 19, 2018). Ocampo Cea’s analysis draws on her own background in literature and philosophy, with a theoretical framework heavily based on semiotics and on the Chilean background of abandonment (social, parental) set forward by Montecinos (2007, as cited by Ocampo Cea, 2009, p. 23) From it, Ocampo Cea identifies the notion of syncretism—religious, racial, and cultural—as the defining element of Chilean culture. The idea of impurity stemming from this miscegenation, she argues, is also present in the way that Chileans and other Latin Americans appropriate foreign subcultures or create their own, and she works with this hypothesis

when searching for the root of subcultural identities among Chile´s youth. Ocampo Cea's work reflects the early stages of the visual kei scene in Chile and, specifically, it reflects the reaction of outsiders. The book is as much analysis as it is an attempt to understand and categorize these groups even as the author gives an alternative reading to that of the media she cites, which focused on deviancy. She nonetheless does focus on the rebellious nature of tribal association yet specifies that this rebellion is not manifested in the establishment-sanctioned forms.

The author works to vindicate (or at least re-signify) the image of these groups, which oscillated in the media between scandal and derision. A testament to this is the inclusion in the work of various glossary sections that explain the meaning of esoteric terms to outsiders; in the case of visual kei, that of Japanese words that circulated freely among the Chilean followers and of subculture-specific terminology. She attributes high levels of participation in youth groups to the context of mediatized images, exclusion from political processes, and a generational divide that renders these new manifestations unintelligible to professional and non-professional observers alike (Ocampo Cea, 2009, p. 13). Visual kei and otaku groups take only some chapters among other collectives, but they are highlighted as some of the most visible ones. On the former, Ocampo Cea makes the essential distinction between the Japanese style and what became what she calls a "tribe" of Chilean fans. In it, the author does away with comparisons between the Chilean scene and the original Japanese style and highlights the legitimacy of local forms of subcultures instead of taking them as lesser forms of a foreign original (2009, p. 221). Although Ocampo Cea performed fieldwork, joining many of these groups to obtain access to practices that were initially foreign to her, most of the analytical portion of her work consists of a considerable review of Chilean media coverage of the phenomenon, particularly in magazines aimed at adults. Thus, her book is as much an explanation of these groups as it is a critique of the sensationalist and

uninformed image of them that society at large is seen as having. One of its most notable accomplishments is its acknowledgment of the importance and academic value of these cultural expressions, which at the time were dismissed because of the age of the subculture's participants.

Although when it came to Asia the focus of publications has traditionally been on trade and cultural understanding to facilitate it (see, for example, Claudia Labarca's *Ni Hao Mr. Pérez, Buenos Días Mr. Li* [2015]), together with the above-cited works, there has been a relatively recent (compared to global trends) attention to the adaptation of Asian popular culture by Chilean audiences. Visual kei in Chile is then but one fraction of both the field of youth cultural studies and of the expansion of Japanese popular culture in the country, usually approached through anime, which tangentially touches the topic of visual kei audiences.

Luis Perillán's work "Otakus en Chile" [Otaku in Chile] (2009) approaches anime fans as part of a phenomenon, individually and collectively. One of the critical points that Perillán develops is his envisioning of youth not as a transitional period but as "in essence, a rejection of adulthood, an attempt at being a non-child and non-adult" (p. 56). This conceptualization can broaden the field of research on youth cultures (and/or subcultures) and overcome the constrictions mentioned by other authors. He does, however, find relevant differences between younger anime fans and those he calls "veterans," both in discourse and in socialization, as the former use their peer networks to reaffirm their identity more than the latter, who had begun consuming anime individually (p. 86).

Francisca Collao Kehr and Mónica Rivera Oyanadel's 2015 undergraduate journalism thesis describes and compares the fan bases of Japanese and Korean popular cultures. They find processes of identification with cultures other than the national, but find this to be more a syncretism than identification with a foreign culture per se (p. 8). The authors do find a strong

impact of the consumption of Asian popular music on the development of the identities of their subjects, even if they do not observe as much of a conflict between the interviewees and the rest of society prompting the identification (2015, p. 213).

Anya Bergman's ethnography of visuals in Viña del Mar is an interesting exception to the tendency to focus the studies of tribes and subcultural groups on the city of Santiago. The article, titled "Un Juego de Identidad y Percepción: Un Estudio de Caso de 'Visuales,' una Tribu Urbana en Viña del Mar, Chile" [A Game of Identity and Perception: A Case Study of the 'Visuals,' an Urban Tribe in Viña del Mar, Chile] (2009) is comprised of an analysis of her observations of the group and of her attendance of an anime and Japanese popular culture event, and of interviews with insiders and with youth culture specialists. Although dance parties are mentioned as part of the group's spaces, the author's description of the stores they frequent and of the FanViña anime event illustrates the intertwining of various interests and seemingly heterogeneous groups under the umbrella of Japanese popular culture fandom.

Jacqueline Herrera has published two books dealing with the reception of Japanese popular culture in Chile. The book *Otaku: Cuatro Décadas de Cultura Popular Japonesa en Chile* [Otaku: Four Decades of Japanese Popular Culture in Chile] (2017) follows both the historical development of the otaku community and the impact that it has had on its participants. It dedicates a whole chapter to visual kei, as this group has become one of the most visible ones among the ones of Japanese music followers. Although much of it is spent in explanations of what is visual kei and its origins, Herrera does provide her view of the phenomenon both in Japan and in Chile, characterizing it as the usage of fashion elements as signifiers, as the physical representation of contradiction, and a rejection of adulthood from what she calls an extended adolescence (p. 43). The following year, Herrera published *Kawaii: Blondas, Caramelos y Sesos* [Kawaii: Ruffles,

Candy, and Brains] (2018), in which she develops on the Japanese concept of *kawaii* and how it is being used in Chile. Although it does not target visual kei specifically, it touches upon scenes that intersect and sometimes merge with it, such as the lolita fashion community.

In an upcoming book chapter, Stephano Labarca (who was a member of the scene during his teenage years) studies the embodiment of visual kei identity and discourse by men within the Chilean visual kei scene between 1999 and 2012. He approaches gender expression by considering it intimately related to the body, not merely a performative act but one that requires a body to be materialized. Coming from a musicology background, Labarca focuses on the creation of visual kei-themed and visual kei cover bands in Chile and interviews their former members. He concludes that members of the scene used visual kei and the myths created around it, such as its alleged linear relationship to Japanese tradition, to experiment with new forms of visibility without entering into a direct confrontation with Chile's hegemonic masculinity (Labarca, 2020, seventh paragraph)

In all these works, authors have refrained from analyzing Chilean phenomena as misrepresentations or misunderstandings of originally Japanese cultural forms, valuing them instead as independent objects of study. This is an essential distinction that allows for a scholarship to develop on the topic without the interference of prejudices on the authenticity of cultural expressions, or at least with a minimal degree of such biases. This is not to say that the origins of said trends in Japan are of no importance; it should not, however, be the bar with which local fan bases are appreciated. On the other hand, this standard is employed by some of the participants themselves when talking about the scene, as shall be seen further on.

1.2 Conceptual considerations

1.2.1 Music genres and identity

Since its emergence in Japan and throughout the development of scholarship on the topic, visual kei has posed a conundrum to the industry, fans, and researchers alike. The main quandary that they face is on the definition, and thus delimitations, of visual kei; can it be defined as a music genre? And, if the answer is positive, what are the common elements that separate it from other genres and create an approachable object of study?

X Japan's Yoshiki has explained that "Visual Kei is not only a music genre, it's more like a spirit, a movement" (Neredude, 2017). Similarly, Penicillin's vocalist Hakuei expressed that "it's not really a genre in the same vein as rock or pop" in the sense that various generations of musicians can be found within the same scene (NBT, 2019). However, I believe these clarifications reduce the application of music genre categories to musical composition, refusing to group together as a genre musical sounds that might not have a unified, easily identifiable sound. What would be lacking in this approach is the acknowledgment that even the musical genres that we take today as established (rock, pop, jazz, etc.; and their subdivisions) are in constant flux. Therefore, they are not pure forms but systems of categorization and orientations.

Working from the development of genre theory of film studies, Negus (1999) goes on to expand the definition of a music genre from the compositional aspects to a broader sense of "a dynamic social practice created across analytic distinctions such as production/ consumption and culture/politics" (p. 132). Much like Hodkinson (2002) in his study of goth, Negus argues for breaching of the artificial divide between the audience and industry and between what is perceived as the indie scene and major labels. In this view, genre works not only as a classifying system for industries in their production and advertising strategies but also as a regulatory system of the

expectations of the audience. It is in this regard that visual kei can be approached as a music genre despite the lack of unity in its musical (rhythmical, melodic, even lyrical) patterns.

For all purposes, visual kei works as a genre, from the industry's structure, through its promotional targets, to the expectations held by the fans. This last aspect is the crux at which genre intersects with subcultural studies; the way in which individuals claim affinity with a particular music genre to both reflect their identity and to have a part in the formation of said identity.

It can be argued that a music genre is hardly enough of a cohesive element through which people can articulate a permanent identity, much less for a group to coalesce around. One of the main topics of contention in these debates is that of identity and/or identification in relation to music. Conceptualization is problematized by the fluidity of identification itself. With a strong connection to psychoanalytic studies, identity has time and again been challenged both in its definition and its usefulness to describe the individual and collective experiences of globalization, but authors agree that its fluidity is key to the postmodern construction of identity. The search for and statements on identity are seen as a result of the post-war globalizing world, attributing them to the dismantling of traditional society and the imposed identities given by religion and nationality with it.

Frosh and Barraitser (2009) also emphasize that the current scenario that individuals face promotes the search for identity when they affirm that “under conditions of social instability there is little for identity to cohere around; the social nexus that has traditionally given it fixed points is itself too slippery and inconsistent” (p. 167). Moreover, Bauman (2009) suggests that, given the contradictions created by the individualization of the globalizing world, the field might benefit instead from the use of the term “identification,” which he describes as “a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are

engaged” (p. 129). This idea is also present in other assessments of identity studies, such as Volgsten’s (2014), who, drawing on Judith Butler’s work, states that “we don’t *have* identities, we *do* identities” (p. 119). This assertion suggests that identity, on the one hand, needs to be seen as a process rather than an attainable state and, on the other, as construed in actions, and places emphasis on the active nature of identity, which can open up more music-based social groups to subcultural analysis.

1.2.2 Subcultures, (urban) tribes, and scenes

As for the groups created around these music genres, the concept of subculture has been criticized, expanded, and alternatives have been proposed to make up for its limitations. Although not the first to focus on youth culture, the CCCS's working of subculture has become the basis of this theoretical approach. In Hall's words, the CCCS rose from "the debate about the nature of social and cultural change in postwar Britain," as "an attempt to address the manifest break-up of traditional culture, especially traditional class cultures” (Hall, 1990, p. 12). Hall himself viewed subcultures as an attempt by working-class youth to resolve cultural contradictions, although he described those solutions as only "imaginary" (Hall & Jefferson, 1976, p. 48). In order to identify the object of study, the first chapter of *Resistance Through Rituals. Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* asserts that “sub-cultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their ‘parent’ culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture” (Hall et al., 2003, p. 13-14). While this might seem like an overly restrictive definition, the same text clarifies that subcultures can have varying degrees of cohesiveness, being "loosely or tightly bounded" (Hall et al., 2003, p. 14), which allows for the inclusion of other subcultures that are not approached in the book.

The CCCS, as represented by Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts, understood culture as the "level at which groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give *expressive forms* to their social and material life-experience" (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2003, p. 3). With this as a starting point and using a Marxist approach, the same group's understanding of subculture is of "subsets–smaller, more localised and differentiated structures, within one of other of the larger cultural networks" (2003, p. 6). The nuances of subcultures are studied within the framework of class struggle and are situated within their overarching working-class background, which they do not completely leave.

Looking at several subcultures that rose from post-war Britain (among them, mods, punks, and the reggae movement), Hebdige (1979) finds resistance in subcultural style through subversion of symbols. On his vision of culture, he states that "all aspects of culture possess a semiotic value, and the most taken-for-granted phenomena can function as signs: as elements in communication systems governed by semantic rules and codes which are not themselves directly apprehended in experience" (p. 13). From this view, the author insists on the necessity to explore these rules and codes that are naturalized and which, he argues, are routinely broken by subcultures through style. Hebdige's work has become one of the most widely cited in subcultural studies and its influence can still be seen today despite there still not being consensus on the "subculture" concept.

Thornton's study of club cultures in Britain reworked many of the CCCS's concepts and combined them with Bourdieuan social theory. To Bourdieu's (1986) three forms of capital (economic, cultural, and social), Thornton (1995) adds the concept of subcultural capital to refer to the one that, when embodied, "confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder," meaning those within the subculture (p. 27). Subcultural capital is an essential tool for understanding the internal hierarchies of subcultural groups and its complex relationship to class

and gender factors. How these subsets of society structure their internal hierarchies around the accrual of forms of capital that can both be different from the parent culture's or reproduce its patterns connects subcultural studies to a larger, structural vision.

Following up on Thornton's development, in the book *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (2002) Hodkinson reworked the concept of subculture to difference it from looser, more dispersed associations. For this, he developed four elements that, in varying degrees, must be present in a social group to qualify as a subculture. First, he argues, there ought to have "a set of shared tastes and values which is distinctive from those of other groups and reasonably consistent" (p. 30). Second, subcultures have a sense of identity derived from "a perception that they are involved in a distinct cultural grouping" and "feelings of distinction from those regarded as outsiders" (p. 30-31). Third, their commitment to the subculture is reflected in "a tendency for concentrated and continuous practical involvement among participants" (p. 31). And, lastly, the group must have "a relatively high level of autonomy" (p. 32) in reference to, among other things, the organization of subculture-specific events.

Ross Haenfler (n.d.) stresses the nonexistence of an agreed-upon definition of subculture, but he nevertheless enumerates its characteristics. He states that subcultures are "diffuse networks" lacking formal leadership and that they have a membership that is fluid; have "shared distinct meanings" that manifest in shared objects, practices, and values that differ from the main culture; and possess a "shared identity," for which collective self-identification is essential. Like the CCCS, the author also emphasizes the importance of resistance and marginalization in subcultures. When talking about the former, Haenfler draws on J. Patrick Williams's (2007, as cited by Haenfler, n.d., Resistance section) work to present the three-dimensionality of resistance, manifested through it being active/passive, micro/macro, and overt/covert. For the later, he brings up the possible

existence of two instances of marginalization: one that the individual was suffering due to their characteristics and another one that is the direct result of the subcultural affiliation. To this, he adds that subculturalists "can ‘choose' their marginalization as opposed to being structurally marginalized" (Marginalization section). Finally, he states that subcultures each possess "stratification, values, and specialized vocabulary" (Stratification, Values, and Specialized Vocabulary section). The hierarchical system within subcultures, although usually informal, bases itself on subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995). Similarly, Hodkinson (2006) hinges the category of subculture on the existence of what he calls “group substance” (p. 634). This notion is comprised of standards that would help differentiate subcultures from other forms of associations and includes “shared identity, commitment, distinctiveness and a degree of autonomy with respect to spaces and networks” (p. 634).

Despite authors such as Hodkinson, Haenfler, and Thornton reworking the concept of subculture to ameliorate some of its possible deficiencies, subculture’s traditional structuralist view is still criticized for being too rigid to properly apprehend the reality of youth cultures. The two concepts that are most widely cited as an alternative are those of “music scenes” and “neo-tribes.” Michael Maffesoli in *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society* (1972/1996) describes what he sees as a new form of socialization that is replacing those based solely on class membership or nationality. He characterizes tribes as having fluid memberships, as being apolitical in their collectiveness, “and whose sole *raison d'etre* is a preoccupation with the collective present” (p.75). Maffesoli’s focus on neo-tribalism is not a response to subcultural theory as much as it is a response to modernity’s focus on individualism as the defining element of our times. In contrast, the author offers a frame through which to look at new social formations that both escape traditional class analysis and have a sense of belonging too loose for previous

studies on subculture. In the foreword to the 1996 English edition of Maffesoli’s book, however, Rob Shields reminds readers that tribes do not only refer to groups such as punks and mods and include those created around hobbies, environmentalism, and sports (Shields, 1996, p. xi); Maffesoli himself explains that the requirement for the coalescence of a tribe is “a shared sensibility or emotion,” which would make his framework applicable to a variety of social groups, even those with permeable borders and limited identification (p. 28).

Bennett (1999) also elaborated on the concept of tribe and its merits as a replacement for subculture. He argues that the subculture model cannot account for the nebulous belonging and commitment to groups in modern-day society: “the group is no longer a central focus for the individual but rather one of a series of foci or ‘sites’ within which the individual can live out a selected, temporal role or identity before relocating to an alternative site and assuming a different identity” (p. 605).

Maffesoli’s (1972/1996) tribes are, at least professedly, at the foundations of the theory of consumer tribes in the field of marketing as well. In the 2007 book *Consumer Tribes* (to which Maffesoli himself contributed a chapter), editors Cova, Kozinet, and Shankar advance a view of the associations among consumers, explaining that,

> We belong to many little tribes and not one tribe. From this perspective the consumption of cultural resources circulated through markets (brands, leisure experiences, and so on) are not the sine qua non of contemporary life, rather, they facilitate what are meaningful social relationships.” (p. 5)

O’Reilly (2012), however, argues against there being a direct theoretical line joining Maffesoli’s theories and the later adaptation of his tribal terminology in marketing. In particular, the author finds that the main connection between them has to do with the importance attributed to people’s sociability as opposed to an individualist focus, but he cites the introduction to *Consumer Tribes* when stating the connection and influence to be only partial (p. 344).

At the heart of these discussions is the issue of informants (or consumers)'s agency. Even Cova, Kozinets, and Shankas talk about preferring what they call "a bottom-up postmodern sociology" over a "top-down modernist sociology" approach which, although they do not clarify it, could be associated with more traditional studies like those guided by subcultural theory (2007, p. 5). This reflects the trend within academic circles of seeing early subcultural theory as too rigid and superimposing of a structural analysis over reality.

"Scene" has been presented as an alternative to "subculture" when dealing with groups composed around musical styles. Bennett explains "scene" as a descriptive concept used to designate "the clusters of musicians, promoters and fans, etc., who grow up around particular genres of music" (2004, p. 1). They have expanded on the concept to include the constant merging of local and translocal elements in today's interconnected world; for this, they proposed three types of scenes which, nevertheless, are in constant exchange with one another. What they denominate as local scenes are those that most closely resemble the traditional scene concept, being the ones "clustered around a specific geographic focus" (2004, p. 6). Translocal scenes, on the other hand, are formed in the interaction of various local ones "through the exchange of recordings, bands, fans, and fanzines" (2004, p.8). Finally, the author incorporates the later development of virtual scenes, which can be superposed to local ones as another instance of interactions and also connect distant scenes whose members would geographically not have been able to mingle otherwise (2004, p. 10).

Defenses of subcultural theory have argued that the proposed alternative terminology did not solve the issues raised by subculture's critics. In Blackman's (2005) response to subculture's critics, the author argues that doing away with subcultural theory without an equally strong framework is detrimental to the field: he finds the representation of the CCCS's work by

postmodern scholars inaccurate on its alleged rigidity and also dismissive of the impact of socioeconomic structure on subcultural participants. On Bennett's arguments, Blackman states that "postmodern theories of subculture do not address or critique the relations of dominance and subordination exercised through social and cultural structures of society" (Blackman, 2005, p. 12).

In response to Bennett, Hesmondhalgh argues that “popular music should not be conceived as the privileged domain of young people” (2002, p. 22), offering also that “we might have a richer understanding of the politics and aesthetics of music if we were to consider its emotional and social significance, not just for youth subcultures, or for young people as a whole, but for everyone. This means considering a range of experiences, from the transgressive to the banal, without prioritizing the search for the rebellious” (2002, p. 37). In this line of reasoning, Paul Hodkinson, in his work on aging within goth subculture, questions the assumption that people lose their affiliation to these groups as they age and explores the way they adapt while retaining their identification (Hodkinson, 2011). However, Hesmondhalgh ultimately makes a case for the separation of youth studies and studies of music collectives, for which the framework of both “subculture” and “tribe” would have to be abandoned. The concept of “genre,” as developed by Negus, among others, would be a preferable “starting point” to the analysis of the articulation between these groups and music (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p. 32).

Ultimately, these debates on how to approach both youth cultures and the relationship between music and its audiences have aided in developing more robust concepts around these topics and, while there is not a definitive solution that can comprehend the complexity of these interactions, multi-disciplinary approaches have produced interesting studies. I do not believe that the visual kei phenomenon in Chile could be properly explained without taking into account current and historical socioeconomic factors, but I do not see subculture and neo-tribalism as

mutually exclusive; instead, I will argue that Santiago's visual kei scene has neo-tribalistic behaviors that can effectively be analyzed through the lens of subculture. Thus, subculture is a fitting framework to this research since it is best suited to account for the structural contexts, which, I will argue, definitely impacted how and when the visual kei scene of Santiago was formed. While the emphasis on identification and expression through consumer practices is seen in those I interviewed, there are also unspoken socioeconomic pressures that affect internal hierarchies.

For the purposes of this research, “scene” is used as the translation of the word "ambiente," which is the one that informants used to describe themselves and activities related to visual kei. There exists another translation for the word “scene” into Spanish, which is “escena,” yet this only appeared in texts and was never mentioned by the informants. I have concluded that “scene” is an appropriate word for both “escena” and “ambiente” because the latter is defined by the Real Academia Española as a group or social circle in which someone develops or lives (Real Academia Española, 2019). It also defines “escena” as a scene or circle where an activity develops (“Escena,” 2019)**.** Meanwhile, the *Cambridge Dictionary*’s (2020) definition of “scene” is “a particular area of activity and all the people or things connected with it”. Following Bennett and Peterson´s arguments of the existence of multiple types of scenes, it is also true that these often overlap. While the present study deals with the local visual kei scene of Santiago de Chile, I found many of the members to be active at the virtual and translocal levels. Considering all of the above, “scene” will be used in the vernacular sense of “ambiente” and not as a replacement for subculture.

As for “tribe,” both colloquial and scholarly Spanish have merged it with its stage (the city) to create the concept of “urban tribes.” In turn, this concept has been exported to use by media and by the wider public. It is not clear how those outside of academic circles became familiarized with Maffessoli’s (1972/1996) conceptual framework for the term, if at all, yet it was used universally

by the press and the public. In the case of Ocampo Cea's (2009) work, it is coherent that the author covered these groups using this term as it was their visibility through media that prompted the research, but what is not present in these usages is a clear differentiation of "tribe" in regard to "subculture," or mentions of the latter at all. Although their level of understanding of the implications of such terms in academic settings is unclear, their responses do suggest a rejection of the idea of a Chilean visual kei subculture or of the use by the media of "urban tribe" to describe them.

The plasticity of postmodern identity is seen as crucial to understanding the level of ascription, or lack thereof, to the scene by the informants. It does not presuppose that visual kei plays a central or even permanent role in the identity-building process of its followers. However, it inquires about the forms of identification that these fans have with the style's various elements and amongst each other. As for the notion of hegemonic culture, the goal is not to state what constitutes Chilean mainstream culture, but to identify which characteristics visual kei fans attribute to it. In this regard, Chilean visual kei fandom will be seen as a subculture, but one that features many of the characteristics of Maffesoli's (1972/1996) tribes, especially their fluidity and the ability of an individual to adhere to more than one group or identification at any given time.

Chapter 2: Overview of visual kei as a music genre

Visual kei formed in Japan approximately two decades before its following in Chile caught the attention of the media. A local development of both hard rock and glam aesthetics, visual kei functions as a music genre and holds its own place in the Japanese music industry. It is distributed through specialized labels, played at specialized live houses, and the relationship between artists and their fanbase follows genre-specific, localized patterns. Although removed from some of these dynamics, Santiago's visual subculture formed around a genre with characteristic elements that made it a versatile product to be consumed by a Chilean audience and to be used to articulate particular ways of interaction with larger cultural patterns.

2.1 Visual kei in Japan

2.1.1 Situating visual kei

As Malick (2018) has pointed out, looking at visual kei from a perspective of hybridity without further complexity could imply that the forms that are hybridized in the final product are, in themselves, pure at some stage. In a similar vein, Adamowicz (2014b) argues for the use of transculturality to understand all cultures and their products. From this point of view, Japanese culture cannot be approached as a monolithic whole to which foreign elements are incorporated to create visual kei aesthetics; Japanese culture would be transcultural in its inception.

Some of the misconceptions about visual kei, but also some of its aura of exoticism, rely on this difficulty of situating its clear origins. However, it might be the identification of “origin” with a clear-cut birth of a genre that is detrimental to a more profound understanding of visual kei’s interplay with both Japanese and global music industries’ flows.

Regardless of the various definitions used, the commonality among authors is that visual kei does not equate to a particular musical structure or lyrical content. The common factor uniting these artists is, essentially, the way they present themselves in appearance and performance and the production and fan circuits that they move in. Among Japanese members of the movement, the definitions appear to remain intentionally broad as well. Yoshiki of X Japan has stated that "visual kei is not really a style, it's more of a freedom in describing yourself," (Urbandale Grimes, 2010) while Yo, the bassist of Matenrou Opera, has said that "visual kei was and always be [*sic*] about looking for new ways of expression" (Japan Vibe, 2017). On the other hand, Kamijo, former vocalist of Lareine and Versailles, clarified this idea that visual kei is not exactly a genre by saying that it "is not a genre of music, it's a genre of scene" (2016). His then-bandmate, the late Jasmine You, echoed his opinion, adding that "it's a lifestyle and also a place where I can express myself as an artist" (2016). Seiichi Hoshiko, the founder of the cross-media company under which the magazine *Shoxx* is published, JVK Inc. (formerly called Starchild), has also stated that "first of all, I feel that it is an original Japanese music genre. . . . I know there are many meanings and points to all this, but I define 'Visual-kei' as the music itself along with all the visual aspects of it" (NBT, 2018).

It is not clear how much of these performers' and Hoshiko's responses are conditioned by the way the questions were constructed or by the fact that the cited interviews were done by foreign media, which could have put them in a position more demanding of a particular type of definition. However, being that there is no need for them to create a formal definition in this context, it is understandable that band members would rather mention the significance of visual kei than delimit the scope of the term.

In the academic field, authors have ventured definitions to describe the variety of musical acts that fall within the spectrum of visual kei. It is perhaps in the broader meaning of "genre" offered by Negus (1999) that it can be identified as such. McLeod (2013) defines visual kei as "a genre marked by an emphasis on elaborate visual display often involving cross-dressing of male band members" (2013, p. 309). Along the same line, Inoue explains that "the most important aspect of visual rock is the musicians' visual image, specifically, the bodily representations constructed primarily by makeup and costumes" (p. 194). On his part, Seibt (2013) furthers that the term was used to "designate a new form of Japanese rock music that was heavily influenced by Western hard rock and glam metal bands" (p. 250).

These definitions, despite their minor differences, point to the same object: a genre and movement among Japanese musicians that encompasses music, aesthetics, and fan practices. It is characterized by theatricality in the artists' images that is heightened through makeup and clothing, high emotionality in the music and its rendition, and close ties to their fanbase. This definition, though broad, would allow for a common thread through the history of visual kei and encompasses the very dissimilar artists that are part of it.

2.1.2 Elements of visual kei: genre and scene

As the aforementioned explanations show, visual kei tends to be defined in relation to the characteristics of the artists that are part of the movement, whether these characteristics were present prior to them entering the visual kei scene or they were adopted later as a marketing strategy. Based on the bands that are usually accepted within the genre, the common elements are the genre expectation that the artists are male; the use of makeup and elaborate costuming; androgyny and, at times, cross-dressing; the creation of artistic personas that stand separate from

the private life of the artist including the use of pseudonyms; and the distribution of music through visual kei-specialized record labels and live houses.

From their inception, the bands used to be called *okeshōkei* ("makeup style"), a designation that was eventually replaced by "visual kei" or "visual rock." Although this trend might have been an extension of Western artists' use of makeup, the fact that it was noteworthy enough to be continually referenced would show that it was a rarity, at least in the extent of its ostentatiousness, and a defining element of visual kei. When asked about the aspects of the style that caught his attention, former guitarist of Baiser, Hiderō replied that he had been interested in the makeup worn by Western musicians and their followers, stating that their "followers [of artists like David Bowie, David Sylvian, Pete Burns] were accepted [by society] without problems. Then I wanted to be as well" ("A Piece that Will Not be Forgotten: Interview with Hiderou (Ex Baiser)," 2016).

From a gender perspective, the opinion on whether this subverts societal norms is divided. On the one hand, Inoue (2013) makes a strong argument favoring the notion that the visual rock industry, in fact, perpetuates gendered divisions despite the gender-bending performed by the artists. On the other, authors like McLeod have highlighted the potential for disruption of gender norms in these displays through the concept of hybridity, going as far as to state that "the most pronounced aspect of visual kei is the elaborate gender-crossing cosplay of band members," whose inspiration he identifies in "Goth, Punk and Glam Rock as well as by Japanese manga, anime and computer games" (2013, p. 309). Another element that adds to the "more casual, playful queerness" highlighted by Johnson (2020, p. 126) is the public homoerotic play among bandmembers, such as sharing kisses on stage, all of which is performed to the delight of screaming fans. However, the general understanding is that the artists are heterosexual, or at least they publicly remain in an

ambiguous space in regard to their sexual orientation and availability to the fans, with very few exceptions.

If gender-crossing appearances and the use of makeup are essential elements of the genre, the status of female musicians within the industry tends to be liminal. Although having female members does not automatically exclude a band from visual kei status, there is a glaring lack of female performers in the genre (Seibt, 2013, p. 225; Johnson, 2019, p. 317).[9] If androgyny is one of its cornerstones, this androgyny is still dependent on its embodiment by a male performer that can be a socially acceptable orientation (if not object) of female desire in an industry that is reliant on women's spending.

The interplay of these various genre elements is clearer when looking at artists that, at first glance, could be identified as visual kei, yet remain outside of the genre. For example, Yōsei Teikoku is not categorized as a visual kei band despite its heavy emphasis on theatricality and narrative cohesion throughout their career (with their female vocalist Yui going by the title y*ōsei teikoku kuni shūshin dokusaikan* ("Lifelong Dictator of the Fairy Kingdom"). On the one hand, the fact that this is a female-fronted band does not automatically mean that they are not visual kei, but, when added to other factors, it seems to matter. Yōsei Teikoku also does not share their music through the usual visual kei avenues; their performances are not in visual kei-oriented live houses and their music is not released by a visual kei label (the band is currently signed under Lantis, which focuses on anime music) (Lantis, n.d.). The fact that they remain outside of the visual kei industry's distribution circles in this case, is enough to exclude a band from the nomenclature.

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[9] Exist Trace and Danger Gang are examples of all-female visual kei bands that have been recognized as belonging to the movement, and both present stereotypically visual kei appearances. The solo project of Lucifer Luscious Violenoué was also recognized as such, though her status seems to be determined more by association to other visual kei artists, as her style was more experimental and harder to pinpoint.

The relationship of visual kei bands with the styles from which they draw inspiration is complex. While the artists might embody elements of any given genre (be it metal or gothic rock) both in appearance and in sound, their connection to the visual kei industry tends to erase their claim to authenticity and exclude them from acceptance into other genres. Skutlin (2016), for example, describes visual kei as “a form of mainstream Japanese glam rock with some Goth trappings” (p. 42) and indeed links its popularity to the decline of goth clubs in Tokyo. Debates on identity and authenticity are common within and between subcultures. In this regard, visual kei is usually seen as a commercialized style that appropriates gothic imagery, yet it is not clear whether these opinions were shared by both the researcher and his informants. This is an issue also addressed by Lim:

> The lyrical content of visual kei is interesting given that it approaches dark and nihilistic themes despite the young age of its audience. . . . Themes of suicide, despair, and existential angst are not uncommon, although whether this is, in themselves, a true expression of the artists’ opinions or merely a form of exaggerated performance they employ is still a matter of speculation.” (Lim, 2004, p. 232)

Although the theatricality and reproduction of visual kei imagery and lyricism might inspire skepticism about how authentic these expressions are, looking into the interviews with some band members it is unclear that what they express and embody is in any way a façade masking a purely monetary interest. For example, the mental health of the former vocalist of the band Mejibray, Tsuzuku, was the subject of fan speculation. If his own words are to be believed, the expressions in their songs, for which he was the lyricist, do reflect the personal struggle of its writer, who has admitted to suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder and suicidal ideations (Yamamoto, 2016). Whichever colorful and appealing way these feelings are marketed, there are no clear reasons to believe that the artists and fans alike do not experience and relate to the feelings of emptiness and despair that are evoked with the music and lyrics, even if their avenue of expression and sociality differs greatly from those of other subcultures.

2.1.3 History of visual kei in Japan

All claims to originality and authenticity aside, the fact remains that there was a movement among Japanese musicians during the 1980s that focused on extravagant appearances and dramatic *mise en scène* and, although the history of visual kei is far from a cohesive, homogenous stream, it would not be correct to equate it to the evolution of a few individual bands. Widespread opinion among fans, as evidenced in online articles on visual kei, is that the genre originated with X Japan (which went by the name X until 1992). This might be due to, first, the very real level of popularity and the importance of the band to the Japanese music industry as a whole, and, second, to their motto "Psychedelic Violence Crime of Visual Shock," which appeared on the cover of their major debut album *Blue Blood* in 1989. Without minimizing the importance of the band to the movement, the overemphasis on them as the founders of the genre does not account for its organic evolution within global music trends.

Visual kei was not born in a vacuum, and it is hard, if not impossible, to establish the exact line separating what would later be called visual kei and rock bands influenced by glam and hard rock. Kashiwagi, in his detailed history of the movement, argues that, while the "visual" part of the genre's name might have originated with X Japan, it fell within the breadth of terms that were being used to describe rock music acts at the time alongside "shock" and "violence" (2011, p. 92). The term "visual kei," according to the author, would not appear until much later, when the visual kei magazine *SHOXX* used it to refer to the band Luna Sea in 1996 and, later, to give a name to a genre that had existed since the previous decade. By then, most of the bands that are commonly associated with visual kei had been on the music scene for several years. Moreover, another of the classic visual kei bands, Buck-Tick, had been formed merely one year after X Japan, which furthers

the thesis that the latter was born out of, and developed within, a scene in which many bands shared these visual elements rather than invented them.

In this respect, Hoshiko's words are very clarifying**.** When asked about the coinage of the term, he explains that he had borrowed the "visual shock" portion of X Japan's motto for his magazine's own motto, "VISUAL & HARD SHOCK MAGAZINE," and, in an attempt to also find an alternative to describe the band and similar artists without the banal connotation of "makeup style," he suggested "visual shock style," which would later be shortened to "visual kei" ("visual style") and, eventually, to "*v-kei"* (NBT, 2018). While the influence of X Japan and of the guitarist Hide on Hoshiko bears out, this does not stray away from Kashiwagi's contention that the terms used to describe such bands at the time were those of *violence*, *shock*, and *visual*, with an emphasis on the first two.

Inoue (2003a) also makes it a point to situate visual kei in the history of the development of Japanese music in a way that showcases its articulation to larger trends rather than over-individualize it. Inoue argues that the use of makeup was not restricted to visual kei or even to rock music; the author explains that Japanese artists in the new wave and techno-pop genres were already using makeup in the 1970s, though she asserts that she finds that visual rock bands were far more connected to the international heavy metal scene than to the glam and new wave ones. While I agree that, musically and visually, bands such as X Japan, D'erlanger, and Color might credit heavy metal musicians for their inspirations and musically stay within metal subgenres, I also believe that the influences of glam in the Western music industry go far beyond the confines of the category of glam rock, contributing to the development of alternative masculinities in the public sphere, thus indirectly having an influence in the music and musicians' images that were later consumed by Japanese visual kei musicians.

Kashiwagi proceeds to trace a history of the visual kei movement and its artists in chronological order, giving an overall view of each decade. After locating the precursors of the genre and identifying the 1980s as its origin as an independent style, he goes on to point out that the 1990s would mark both its highest point and its decline (2011, p. 94). By the beginning of the decade, the popularity of the bands born in the previous one was well underway, and other bands that would become part of the visual kei classics started releasing their music. In particular, bands such as L'Arc-en-Ciel (which is no longer associated to visual kei but was considered part of it at the beginning of its career), Malice Mizer, Glay, and Laputa were at the forefront of this popularity, but there were countless other bands forming, disbanding, then having members move onto new projects within the scene. It was also a period in which many of the most iconic bands were either formed or released their most popular albums: Buck-Tick released *Aku no Hana* in 1991, X Japan released *Jealousy* in 1991, Malice Mizer released *Merveilles* in 1998, Glay's *Pure Soul* was also released in 1998, and La'cryma Christi released their album *Lhasa* in the same year.

However, by the second half of the decade the popularity of the genre was declining. X Japan's disbandment in 1997 and Hide's death the following year would mark both what seemed like the failure of visual kei bands to move on to international markets (after X Japan had not moved forward with their international debut) and the end of an era despite the many accomplishments of the bands. During this critical period, Kashiwagi attributes visual kei's survival to the capacity of certain bands to push through the darker years between the end of the 1990s and the mid-2000s. This would force visual kei back to its underground roots as the bands associated with the genre were looked down upon by mainstream media. In this regard, Hiderō has shared his experience with the negative, inferior image that visual kei held, explaining that, during the 1990s, "visual kei was treated as a comedy or display socially speaking. There was a

recognition that too much makeup or dressed bands are lower than the orthodox rock band that needs no makeup" ("A Piece that Will Not be Forgotten: Interview with Hiderou [Ex Baiser]," 2016). Jimi Aoma, an American who has been part of the visual kei industry, told Pfeifle of what his bandmates had experienced in respect to the image of visual kei for older generations: "all of my former band mates have stories of seeing X or LUNA SEA on TV and hearing their parents tell them 'please don't grow up to be like that" (Pfeifle, 2011b). The negative image of visual kei thus spread both to mainstream audiences and to the music industry itself, where visual kei's gaudiness was seen as proof of lower technical quality.

Kashiwagi (2011) believes that, if the turning point from visual kei into "neo visual kei" could be found, it would be within the development of Dir en Grey, one of the most popular visual kei bands and one that remains active until this day (p. 94). He identifies the release of their 2002 EP *Six Ugly* as the embodiment of this change; the author explains that the six tracks of the EP hold no musical resemblance neither to Dir en Grey's previous releases nor to the sound that was common in visual kei at the time. With this change in musical direction that *Six Ugly* epitomized and the subsequent release of their full-length album *Vulgar* the following year, Dir en Grey would showcase the change from *visual kei* to what Kashiwagi calls "neo visual kei" and authors such as Seibt (2013) identify as a second wave of the genre, led by The Gazette, Alice Nine, and Sadie, among others (Kashiwagi, 2011, p. 94-95).

This was also the time of the introduction of artists that Kashiwagi calls *gikō bando* ("technical bands"): music acts in which everything, from the musical skills of their members to their looks and display on stage, is perfectly polished to awe their audiences through musical and visual overwhelmingness, a trend that would include bands such as D, Versailles Philharmonic

Quintet, and Matenrou Opera [10]. This revitalization of visual kei in the first decade of the new millennium would prompt the return of bands that were either officially disbanded or on hiatus, including X Japan themselves, Kuroyume, and Luna Sea. Kashiwagi attributes this growth and the reunion of important bands at least partially to the influence of overseas fans (Kashiwagi, 2011, p. 95-96)**.** This is supported by Yoshiki's own words. When being asked about his reaction to X Japan's international success, the artist explained that, although they had not been able to go ahead with their international career before they disbanded, when they got back together they found out their music had spread worldwide through the fans who had continued supporting them, which allowed them to make a successful comeback (Thisalienlovesmusic, 2019).

2.1.4 The visual kei industry

While it is inaccurate to name X Japan as the sole founders of visual kei, they have, among other actors, been essential to the growth and promotion of the movement. In particular, Yoshiki founded Extasy Records in 1986, which debuted by releasing X Japan's single "Orgasm" in April of the same year. A couple of months later, they would release metal band Poison Arts's *Mystery Temptation* EP and, in 1988, X Japan's first studio album, *Vanishing Vision*. Yoshiki's initiative would provide Japanese visual kei and rock musicians with a space dedicated specifically to their genre, where they were not forced to make as many concessions and modifications as they otherwise would have had to in order to be accepted into a major label. Extasy Records would go on to release music by some of the biggest names in the visual kei scene, including Zi:Kill, Glay, Luna Sea, and Gille de Rais.

[10] This is the official romanization of the band's name.

Together with X Japan, the band Color has also had a lasting impact not only on visual kei music, but on the industry itself. Although Color is labeled as punk rock, they are also believed to have been important to the birth of the movement. Their vocalist, Dynamite Tommy, founded the label Free-Will also in 1986. Since then, they have had several important visual kei artists signed under them: The Gazette, By-Sexual, Kagrra, Miyavi, and Dir en Grey, among others. Moreover, they have continued co-managing some of their bands even as they have signed contracts with major labels such as Sony.

Despite these efforts and some bands being able to release albums through mainstream labels' subdivisions, Japanese visual kei subculture remains an underground (understood as a minority in relation to the larger Japanese music industry) set of practices and exchanges. Pfeifle (2012) differences the concepts of "indie," "major," and "mainstream." The author states that, for the Japanese visual kei scene, the difference between the two first is determined by the signing of a band onto a large record company; however, a band going from an "indie band" onto a "major band" does not equal the band "going mainstream" (p. 80). In the Japanese music industry, mainstream could be defined by sales numbers, concert attendance, and the cross-advertising of bands through magazines, advertisements, and radio and television shows. Under these criteria, most visual kei bands, including those signed under major labels, would not qualify as having mainstream success. While some bands such as X Japan may be able to fill a stadium in their concerts, indie bands constantly have trouble selling enough tickets to break even. They are subjected to the *noruma* ("sales quota") system, in which there is a set amount of tickets that must be sold, and only after reaching said number does the band pocket a percentage of the ensuing sales.[11] Furthermore, there are several other costs involved in the production of visual kei acts:

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[11] It must be noted that this and similar practices are not exclusive to Japan.

costumes, makeup, promotion in specialized magazines, among others (Pfeifle, 2011d). All of this makes for precarious conditions and bands that often face financial struggles.

In 2010, the website Tokyo Damage Report published an interview with an alleged executive of the visual kei industry using the pseudonym Satoh-san. In it, he described a variety of damaging trade practices: the lack of creative freedom and the level of control that record executives hold over the musicians, lyrics, and music being written by ghost-writers instead of bandmembers themselves, money laundering, and various ways in which labels make fans spend money (Schultz, 2010, Financial Shennanegans [*sic*] section). Although its veracity is not agreed-upon, some of the issues described by the interviewee coincide with the ones pointed out by musicians themselves, varying mostly in the degree of severity of the industry's practices. Out of all the information given in this article, one of the most useful is the clarification of the structure of the visual kei industry as of the 2000s. The image that is presented is of one of a close-knit scene dominated by Extasy Records at a national level, after which other labels work more as a territory division strategy than as direct competition among themselves. Furthermore, it clarifies the position of these companies and their producers as being in control of most of the bands' and their members' activities, music, and image, which extends into their personal lives. In a sense, this is not much different than the way that Japanese popular music industries, in general, have worked since the 1970s, as exemplified by pop idols and the control exerted on them by their producers and what Condry terms "an industrial approach to production and marketing" (Condry, 2011a, p. 242). In the case of visual kei, this production and marketing are done within a relatively small scene, so that oftentimes labels, recording studios, specialized magazines, and clothing brands are owned by the same company, which results in the whole production sequence possibly being

controlled by one entity at any given time (Schultz, 2010, Tip Two: Control of Every Step of the Process section).

The heterogeneous aesthetics that can fall within the genre, paired with the also varied music, has created substyles within visual kei. However, these are not fixed; it is common for them to be used as descriptors of an artist at a given time or even of the aura of a music video, rather than as a categorizing system within the industry. *Kote kei* (from the onomatopoeic word *kotekote* meaning “over the top” and referencing makeup) within the Japanese scene is usually used retroactively to refer to classic visual kei bands from the 1980s and 1990s, but also to newer bands that use the word to describe themselves. Visually, they make reference to dark makeup, colored and flashy hairstyles, and gaudy clothing, but Japanese sites are not unified in this classification; for example, one site cites bands such as La'veil MizeriA and Phantasmagoria (“Kote kei no zen VKei bando ichiran,” n.d.), while another includes early Dir en Grey within it,” n.d.) . On the opposing end of *kote kei* is *oshare* or *osare kei* (“stylish/smart style”) refers to artists from the 2000s that have more casual, colorful images; some of the artists cited to illustrate the substyle are Baroque and An Cafe (“Osare kei,” n.d.). Although these are two of the most commonly cited styles in Japanese sites, others mentioned with some degree of consistency are *sofuto vi* (soft visual kei, or bands with only some visual kei elements but more mainstream looks and sound), *chikashitsu kei* or *angura kei* (“underground/basement kei,” referring to the bands that participated in the 1994 Tokyo Chikashitsu music event), and *wafū kei* (with clothing and themes evoking a traditional Japanese aura, such as by wearing *yukata*). Nevertheless, there is no consensus on these styles, and in many cases bands will go through different ones during their career or even from one promotional video to another, as is the case with Dir en Grey.

2.1.5 The Japanese visual kei fanbase

It goes without saying that any entertainment industry is reliant on the spending of fans; however, visual kei creates a connection between artist and fan that elicits a sense of direct responsibility from the fan in support of the artist in a manner reminiscent of what Galbraith and Karlin (2012) have identified as "affective intimacy" for the case of Japan's pop idols (p. 9). In addition, the small scale of the scene and the recurrent costs that bandmembers must undergo increases the drive of fans to invest in the future of their favorite artists through the purchase of different editions of singles, c*heki* (instant polaroid pictures of the band members), and a variety of smaller concert memorabilia**.**

As of the beginning of the 2000s, Inoue identifies four types of fans of visual kei: the ordinary fan, who may or may not belong to a fan club and is interested in easily-accessible fan activities such as buying music and concert-attendance; the fan that sees a musician as a sort of lover figure; the "wannabe" who emulates the idol; and the otaku[12], an obsessive fan who strives to know all about the musician. The author goes on to identify within the third category two forms of fan cultures that are characteristic of the *visual kei* scene: cosplay and *bando yarō* ("let's-play-the-band") (2003, p. 208). The former is usually practiced by female fans who dress like the visual kei musicians they follow, especially smaller bands that have highly theatrical images such as Malice Mizer. The latter, however, refers to amateur cover bands which used to emulate Western bands until X Japan's popularity gave rise to visual kei let's-play-the-band groups (2003, p. 201). The phenomenon of visual kei cosplay was also observed by Seibt (2012) in his attendance of D's concerts when fans would cosplay the vocalist's, Asagi's, image. Despite their similarities and the

[12] In this case, the word "otaku" is being used in its Japanese acceptation of a person who is (somewhat obsessively) devoted to a hobby and has a strong personal connection to it, not necessarily to anime or manga.

fact that both would belong in the "wannabe" category, Inoue highlights two levels of gendered differentiation in these fan practices. On the one hand, she notes that those participating in each of the practices are majority female and male, respectively, a custom that is reflected in the magazines that cater to both activities. On the other hand, the choices in bands to emulate differ greatly between them, with let's-play-the-band participants choosing major bands whose members might have an androgynous image but not fully incorporate feminine aesthetics, and female fans focusing on more underground artists whose femininity and cross-dressing are more prevalent (Inoue, 2003a). This supports the author's idea that, far from subverting gender, visual kei goes on to re-emphasize gender differences that reverberate through its industry and fandom.

Although visual kei offers this space where, as Iida (2005) suggests, alternative models of masculinity can be experimented with, this expansion on the gender expression of masculinity does not in itself result in breaking heteronormativity. However, the way in which the genre's aesthetics allow for these non-hegemonic masculinities to flourish (albeit nearly always embodied by men), does also provide a space in which female fans might explore ways of socialization. Johnson (2019), while acknowledging and incorporating Inoue's critique of how far can visual kei aesthetics truly take the gender-bending, looks at the current power that visual kei female fans, or *bangya*, wield within the scene. Unlike the metal scene in Japan and abroad, visual kei's target audience is women, who make up the majority of the consumers and of the event attendees. Johnson believes that these fans "can appreciate Visual Kei as a gendered safety zone, where restrictive heteronormative ideals can be ignored, at least temporarily. . . . They are actively pursuing lifestyles that conflict with hegemonic femininity" (p. 313). Moreover, in the capitalist enterprise where female desire, as Seibt (2013) identifies, moves the industry, "*bangya* subculture

may indeed be a paradise for older shōjo, where their desires are catered to and their surroundings are comfortable" (Johnson, 2019, p. 314).

Bangya can actually embody all the types of fans that Inoue identifies, sometimes simultaneously. Though the level of commitment varies, as a collective the *bangya* could be seen as obsessive, possessive fans by onlookers. Alleged former visual kei executive Satoh-san talked about how some of them behaved aggressively to the point of becoming a risk for the musicians or each other (Schultz, 2010, Fans section), something that an anonymous fan going by the pseudonym Sonnya described for an online article on visual kei (Strusiewicz, 2016). More significantly, Satoh-san shared how fans were willing to spend large sums of money on the fantasy that these musicians created for them, and how the industry had capitalized on this willingness to obtain the maximum profit.

There is also the delicate topic of *mitsu*, a much-hushed practice of *bangya* paying bandmembers for their attention, from anywhere between simple private messages to sexual relationships (Strusiewicz, 2016, 4: Some Visual Kei Bands are Also Prostitutes section). This practice tends to only be addressed by anonymous sources, yet it is commonly seen by fans as real, though not ubiquitous to the whole scene. All these ways in which bandmembers and fans interact within the Japanese scene make their power dynamics much more complex than what could be expected despite them remaining within the gender binary.

2.2 The expansion and promotion of visual kei in the foreign market

2.2.1 Visual kei as a cultural export

It is interesting to note that, while foreign trends have been readily taken in by recent visual kei artists, the 2000s revival also marked a strong notion of visual kei as essentially Japanese. The organization of the first edition of the V-Rock Festival in 2009 responded to the increasing awareness of the popularity of visual kei abroad. The festival itself and the way it was advertised revealed how visual kei had come to be regarded as a Japanese cultural product. In an article on Oricon Biz Online, the event's organizer, Koji Sugimoto, expressed his view of the concert as a showcase of Japanese bands, in opposition to concerts that introduced foreign artists to the Japanese audience. One of the article's headings expressly refers to visual kei as "uniquely Japanese culture" as part of an initiative to capitalize on the growing popularity of the genre abroad, which, he explains, might be related to anime's popularity (Vijuaru kei ātisuto ga kaigai de daininki no riyū," 2009, third paragraph header).

Visual kei's international popularity has played a role in Japan's soft power policies that have been capitalized by animation and the industries associated with it. The idea of Cool Japan, or of Japan's "Gross National Cool," had been in use by lay audiences and scholars alike years before it was adopted as an official strategy by the Japanese government to encourage tourism and trade, for example, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 2004 Blue Book directives (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2004, p. 217). According to Matsui (2014)**,** the trigger for this shift came not from within the country but from the publication of McGray's article "Japan's Gross National Cool" (McGray, 2002). The design of this policy responds directly to foreign perceptions of Japan, and it embodied the effort from authorities to encase and control the discourses produced by and about the country.

As it usually happens when authorities appropriate underground cultures, Cool Japan projected a fractured image of Japan's youth's reality and, in particular, of its female participants.

While, as it has been argued, the production and distribution powers within the visual kei industry do reproduce the patriarchal organization of Japanese business practices and cultural industries as a whole, it remains true that most of their Japanese consumers are female. Miller (2011b) argues that Cool Japan had a focus on activities that were both followed by and led by male audiences while using the images of women as a strategy, such as that of Ami Onuki and Yumi Yoshimura from the J-pop (Japanese pop) band Puffy. Although she concedes that the introduction of Japanese girl studies to fields that had traditionally been male-dominated (as was the case of Japanese studies) and had focused on Western objects of study (in the case of the studies on girlhood) has been an enriching development, she believes the strategy embodied by Cool Japan remained male-dominated and catered to men's fantasies of Japan (p. 102-106).

It is then understandable that, at least in its beginning, officially-supported images of Japan did not include visual kei, even though it was something in which audiences abroad had shown interest–visual kei, especially since the 2000s, has most commonly been associated with female audiences. By the year 2009, however, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had named as Kawaii Taishi ("Ambassadors of Cute") three females that would represent three aspects of Japanese popular culture: Harajuku street fashion, represented by Yu Kimura; lolita fashion, represented by Misako Aoki; and the figure of the schoolgirl, represented by Shizuka Fujioka. Miller (2011a) sees this initiative as a strategic move to further governmental and corporate gains rather than focus on the subcultures themselves, or even understand them. She goes on to argue that the branding of Japan through Cool Japan, despite the inclusion of these female images, remains masculinity-oriented:

> I do not believe that the Japanese state is "branding" Japan as female or feminized by promoting the Ambassadors of Cute and other cute products, because a dark-suited male chaperone is always there in the picture. The MOFA is, rather, promoting fantasy-capital in which women and girls might be consumed as the objects of desire. (Miller, 2011a, p. 23)

In this manner, Cool Japan's origins, and perhaps even essence, remains removed from the youth cultures that it reportedly represents. In fact, I would argue that its Western-centric approach also results in (further) unexpected responses in different cultural settings, as would be the Chilean case. While the Japanese government may not have directly exploited visual kei (despite its tenuous links to gothic lolita fashion) as part of Cool Japan, the initiative is based on the same concept of Japan that served as a platform for the popularity of visual kei bands: one that identifies Japan with the popular culture images it produces.

In this regard, Kashiwagi senses a disconnection between the reality of visual kei in Japan and its portrayal by foreign media, particularly in Germany (2011, p. 96). To exemplify this, he uses the German Wikipedia entry for "visual kei" to gain insight into how German fans perceive the genre. He goes on to find many assertions, particularly those characterizing visual kei as the most popular form of Japanese music abroad, surprising for those familiar with the scope of the scene within Japan.

Kashiwagi's conclusions are echoed by Pfeifle (2011), who states that the status of visual kei bands in Japan in relation to those of other genres might be grossly misunderstood by foreign fans. She quotes a survey she performed in which she asked members of the JaME website's community whether they believed visual kei was mainstream; only 43% of respondents believed that it was not mainstream neither in Japan nor abroad, while the rest split their answers between it being mainstream worldwide or mainstream in Japan only, with only a small fraction answering that it was mainstream overseas only, although it is not clear what the concept of "mainstream" versus "underground" meant for each of the people responding, as Pfeifle herself notes. The results of the observations conducted for this research also point to a gap between the popularity of visual kei in relation to other forms of Japanese culture among foreign fans, but this is also reflected in

the perception of Japanese popular culture as a whole, which has been drastically shaped by consumption of Japanese media and overemphasizes specific popular culture products.

Assessing the popularity of visual kei abroad is not an easy task. On the one hand, record sales are not quantified in the same manner that they are in the Oricon chart for Japanese domestic sales. On the other, the possibility of gauging it by analyzing the venues where visual kei artists have played would be misleading, as the actual number of tickets sold remain unpublished, with the exception of when they are sold out and the number of attendees can be inferred from the capacity of the venue.

Although the presence of visual kei in Western stages is fairly recent, this is not true of Japanese music as a whole. In 1989 the Japanese pop-punk band Shōnen Knife played their first concert in the United States and would go on to tour with Nirvana in 1991 (Shonen Knife, 2007). However, visual kei, being a niche style, did not gain enough popularity outside of Japan for bands to tour overseas until the end of the decade, which would coincide with the expansion of the Internet and the access to this music through unofficial channels.

Chen (2019) explains that internationalization supposes a risk for visual kei bands, who have a stable following in Japan and can rely on them for revenue rather than seek out new markets. The author found that, although some bands internationalize early in their careers (with 48.3% of the sample doing so within four years of their founding), many do so only after maturity and being well-established within the Japanese market (p. 1226-1228). Two bands that he cites as having started their internalization early, Vamps and Versailles, have lead singers who belong to older bands (L'Arc~en~Ciel and Lareine, respectively), which suggests a certain level of popularity abroad from before the inception of their new project.

In 2005 Dir en Grey was able to sell out their first two European concerts; in Berlin's Columbiahalle, which has a capacity of up to 3,500 people; and in Paris's Olympia, with a self-reported audience of 2,500 people.[13] This was accomplished without the use of major printed advertisements and the main avenue was online promotion among fans. The following year they sold out New York's Club Avalon, with a capacity of 1,500 people, and proceeded to tour alongside Western rock bands. Even if Dir en Grey's numbers might be on the higher side, they do showcase that there is an important following for these types of bands outside of Japan itself.

X Japan, too, could be taken as an exceptional case, being one of the most successful Japanese bands of all time (Aaron, 2014). The release in 2016 of the documentary *We Are X* by American director Stephen Kijak and its subsequent critical acclaim marked another landmark for visual kei abroad. Although X Japan was already known overseas, after the documentary was shown at international film festivals and its soundtrack reached nine countries' music charts (Childers, 2017), the band was chosen to play on two dates of the Coachella 2018 festival, performances for which they were joined by non-Japanese artists such as Marilyn Manson (Kim, 2018). Yoshiki has been actively focused on the international expansion of both his band and the style as a whole, using his presence in Los Angeles as the platform to various collaborative ties that have supported the band when they reunited.

While Pfeifle's data, collected through the JaME sites' schedule of Japanese musicians playing worldwide, shows that visual kei acts are still largely overshadowed by other Japanese concerts, the mere fact that visual kei bands are being brought abroad is significant given their scarce promotion, no matter how niche their fanbase may be (Pfeifle, 2011). Visual kei bands, understandably, started their ventures abroad in Asia rather than other continents, which offered

[13] The website for Okami Records reports this number as 2,600, while Dir en Grey's site reads 2,500.

much higher risks. In 1999 Luna Sea played their first overseas concert in China and, on April 9, 2002, Dir en Grey would play their first concert overseas, also in China. October 30, 2004, would mark the start of D'espairs Ray concerts abroad, this time starting in Berlin, Germany, which would advance to a full-blown international European and American tour in 2006, and 2005 was the first iteration of the short-lived JRock Connection convention in Santa Clara, California.

One interesting phenomenon is the creation of visual kei or visual kei-inspired, non-Japanese bands. While some of them have started as and remain cover bands of Japanese musicians, others have created music of their own and proceeded to enter the mainstream music market while portraying visual kei elements, though these are at times hard to differentiate from glam rock aesthetics. Among them, perhaps the most successful one has been the German band Tokio Hotel, though the true extent of their visual kei influence is still debated. Together with Cinema Bizarre, they have been cited as a prime example of Japanese rock music and aesthetics being emulated abroad. Other examples, though not as commercially successful, would be the Russians Akado, the Mongolian Visual Moon, the Germans Kogure (whose lyrics are in Japanese), Americans Aftermalice, and Sweden's Seremedy. Seremedy's guitarist, Yohio, remains one of the very few Western musicians to have crossed into the Japanese market and into the local visual kei scene, where he has been featured in visual kei magazines *Arena 37* and *Fool's Mate*. The Swedish band Bataar, on the other hand, went as far as to have their music featured in the soundtrack of the *Tekken 7* videogame**.**

The words of Kyuho, of the South Korean visual kei and metal band Madman's Esprit, are illustrative of how visual kei can resonate with non-Japanese musicians. When asked about the style, he responded that "visual kei for me is more like a scene and culture rather than a musical genre. It gives me the freedom to express what I want musically, also aesthetically" (Wolff, 2018).

Kyuho, like his Japanese counterparts, rejects the categorization of visual kei as a genre, yet the characterization of it as a scene and culture would place it within the definition set by Negus (1999). In the same interview and others, he has also explained that the band and its style has had much broader acceptance abroad, particularly in Germany, than it has within the Korean market, which mirrors the minority status of visual kei in the Japanese market, though it is even more niche and marginal in the Korean music industry. Kyuho also has been vocal about his mental health and discontent with the South Korean government and society as a whole, reflecting the feelings of alienation, depression, and rebellion that permeate visual kei lyrics (Madmans Esprit, 2018).

The group VisualUnite, based in Japan, works on the promotion of non-Japanese visual kei musical acts and organized the World Visual Unite Festival in 2015. Some of the bands promoted through their twitter account are the Swedish Kerbera, the Brazilian Allumia, and MaleRose from Thailand (Visual Unite, n.d.). Although the 2000s had many more visual kei-inspired foreign bands that have since then disbanded, the fact that there are entities, however small, focused on this endeavor shows that visual kei has a utility abroad as a marketing category, at least within a specialized circle.

2.2.2 The anime connection

Authors such as McLeod (2013) and Johnson (2019) have linked visual kei to anime and manga fandom and practices like cosplay, particularly shōjo manga's *bishōnen* ("beautiful young male") characters, yet it is not a given that visual kei fans are all also fans of anime and/or manga. This connection, however, is more apparent when it comes to Western fans, who, usually, have gained access to Japanese popular culture with an initial interest in anime. This does not mean that they identify both as visual kei fans and as otaku, but anime is, even to Japanese authorities, a sort of gateway into an interest in Japan as a whole (Murai, 2016).

Moreover, anime series have used visual kei songs as the opening or ending theme for their shows. Although the number of visual kei artists featured in anime pales in comparison with other genres, these occasions may be the first encounter that many Westerners had with visual kei, such as the popular anime *Death Note*'s opening song "The World," performed by the visual kei band Nightmare. This strategy, however, can result in the creation of an undesired link between visual kei bands and anime that might preclude them from entering other scenes such as the hard rock one abroad (Pfeifle, 2012, p. 83).

The first visual kei band to play in the United States did so in an anime convention; DuelJewel performed in 2002 at A-Kon, an anime convention held in Dallas, Texas. L'Arc-en-Ciel also had their American debut at the 2004 Otakon, though since then they have held independent shows in the U.S. and in Europe. Most notably, they sold out their 2012 Madison Square Garden performance as part of the tour that celebrated their twentieth anniversary.

This phenomenon of local fan bases organizing and pressing for the visit of the bands they followed is echoed in other countries. As Sanz Martínez (2016) describes, Spain's followers of visual kei have also been instrumental in bringing visual kei bands to play in the country, a trend that reached its peak in 2008 and 2009 (p. 42). In 2006, Blood played at the Saló del Manga de Barcelona, and in 2007 Calmando Qual performed at the Japan Rock Festival in Barcelona and then in Madrid. As in other countries, the fanbase has joined in the production of music themselves, with Spanish visual kei bands as opening acts and in independent shows, including Pink Jisatsu, Gothic Dolls, and Violent Pachinko. Similarly, Venâncio Monteiro (2011) reports the existence of a committed fanbase in Portugal, where they experienced their first visual kei concert in 2007, after years of organization of visual kei-inspired parties and meetups. All of this is evidence that, even outside of Japan, visual kei goes well past the mere following of a Japanese musical style and

its bands; it delves into the production of local, albeit foreign-influenced, music and local niche economies needed for the exchange of merchandise and the organization of live events.

While Pfeifle has asserted that anime has only helped the dissemination of visual kei abroad to a minimal extent, this was based on the responses to a survey which showed that only 23% of respondents had learned of visual kei through anime and videogames (2012, p. 83). While this is an important piece of quantitative data, this project's research has shown that the role of anime in the exposure to visual kei tends to be downplayed by foreign fans, either purposely to disentangle with the negative connotations of anime fandom, or because they do not see anime as the sole reason they have come to follow visual kei. Nevertheless, the local or trans-local (mostly virtual) circles in which they move, and which facilitated their exposure to the genre tend to derive from an initial interest in Japanese popular culture that was sparked by anime or manga.

Chapter 3: Setting the scene

By the time visual kei reached Santiago's audiences, Chile had a long history of youth cultures from which visuals would eventually inherit most of their traits. The response from the adult world—be it their parents, the media, and the government itself—has remained relatively constant in its oscillation between consternation and banalization of young people's efforts in the public arena. Most of Santiago's visuals come from a generation of Chileans that were exposed to Japanese media, particularly anime, throughout their childhoods. The history of the reception of visual kei in Chile is intrinsically tied to that of anime fandom, whose own history is necessary to understand the formation of the visual subculture.

3.1 Youth cultures in Chile

Despite the changes in academic circles in regard to the approach to subcultures, the environment that would eventually receive visual kei fans in Chile was one that still regarded youth and its associations through the prism of deviancy, which has a long history of permeating media representations of youth since the mid-twentieth century. Gamboa and Pincheira (2009) have remarked upon the lack of a concept of youth in Chilean publications prior to the 1960s, meaning that those who were not adults were not acknowledged as a social and political actor. At first, this was because it did not fit the discourse on national development set by the nascent republic and, later, because they were not singled out from within the worker's movements as a specific age section.

Like it happened in other countries such as Britain and the United States, music genres and the groups of, usually young, people developed around them have been a source of (or scapegoat

for) what Cohen (1972/2011) has called "moral panics," in which "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (p. 1).

Examples of this in Chile can be found as early as the 1950s, which saw the rise of what might be the first youth subculture of the country. In 1959, Carlos "Carloto" Boassi Valdebenito was arrested (and later convicted) for having aided in the suicide of his girlfriend ("Noticiero judicial: Fallos históricos–El crimen del Carloto," 2016). It was the coverage by the media that would show the way that it serves to both reproduce and produce subcultures; much of it was centered around the defendant's fashion and lifestyle. He was identified as belonging to a group of young men who sported James Dean and Marlon Brandon-like looks, usually consisting of a black leather jacket and blue jeans, listened to rock and roll music, and focused much of their time in motorcycle racing and partying, a group that was called *coléricos* ("cholerics"). After the focus of the media on the case and the publicization of the defendant's name, a later, hardened version of the subculture would adopt the very nickname of Boassi Valdebenito and call themselves "*carlotos*," effectively differencing themselves from the rest of society and appropriating a term that had been used with negative connotations in the past.

González (2012) points out that this Chilean youth culture differed significantly from its British counterparts and could not be regarded as a subculture. According to the author, the *coléricos* and *carlotos*, unlike the groups studied by the CCCS, had participants who majorly came from the bourgeois and middle classes of Chile rather than the working, subordinate class. The slow industrial growth of the country had made many subcultural symbolic goods inaccessible to the majority of the population until later in the decade. Eventually, the emergence of such a "generational connection" was made possible by the formation of a cultural industry directed

specifically at the age segment of "youth," and the increasing access to this industry to larger segments of the population (2012, p. 393)

González also discusses the creation of spaces that became youth-specific, such as the cinema's matinée session, which would bring American and European youth cultural products to a larger audience, *malones* (community-organized parties), and the opening of trendy dance clubs in the city. All these influences, although not all subcultural, would lead to a formal section of the population recognized as "youth," with its own symbolic world, cultural industry, and even forms of dressing that were not shared by those belonging to the adult world.

This tendency would start in the 1950s but would further materialize in the 1960s and beyond. Although at times problematic for the established political parties, the emergence of the category of youth also drove (and simultaneously fed on) the creation of specialized youth units for the younger militants of the parties (Benítez, González, & Senn, 2016, p. 194). However, this channeling of youth to make it work within social order did not always render the expected results; during the 1960s and 1970s, hippies, in particular, held a precarious position in regard to the established political actors, as their style was shunned by both the right-wing (later by the military junta) and by sectors of the left for representing a conflict with the hegemonic image of masculinity for both sides. Mularski (2016) proposes that "Chilean hippies identified deeply and centrally with foreign hippie movements and their counterculture, while decisively rejecting political engagement with either the Chilean right or the Chilean left" (p. 81). This would situate them among a translocal subculture, though this very opposition to established political parties would eventually separate them from the United States's version of the movement, which went on to blur with the American left's anti-war politics centered in the Vietnam War (2016, p. 83).

Lamadrid Álvarez and Baeza Reyes (2017), in their study of music rankings in Chile during the 1960s, found that music could not be seen as a unidirectional, constant influence coming from the American cultural industry into the country; during the period studied, the influx of American music was constantly re-signified and also competed closely for popularity with national artists. A graph depicting the percentages of the countries of origin of music in the charts during the decades, in fact, showed that the majority, at 39%, were of Chilean origin, with only 21% coming from the United States, 9% from the United Kingdom, and the rest divided among various countries including France and Italy (p. 86), but they indicate that, just as with languages, these numbers varied depending on the years and trends.

The later development of other music-related subcultures during the period of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990) also occurred within this constant struggle between the reception of the foreign seen as counterculture and as a shallow localization of consumerist trends. Benitez et al. (2016) suggest that these styles and their variants, from their inception, rose as both a cry of protest and liberation and as a foreign and commercial trend; Chilean new waves and *punkis* were the direct inheritors of this contradiction (p. 196).

The military government established in 1973 the Secretaría Nacional de la Juventud ("National Youth Office"), an institution that aimed to demobilize and restructure the growing "pluralization of youth identities" (González, 2015) to conform to government ideology and discourse. In 1991, with the return to democracy, the Office was replaced by the Instituto Nacional de la Juventud ("National Youth Institute"), which, although removed from the explicit ideological aims of its predecessor, kept young people as a social subject that required specific analysis and policies. The creation of such an institution during the very first months after the September coup d'état speaks to the importance attributed to the control of youth forces as a form of political

strategy; this period can be seen as one of the deliberate dismantling of spaces of socialization and of identity-formation for youth.

In her study of Chilean subcultures, Cooper Mayr (2007) identifies the insertion of Chile in a global capitalist economy at the center of the conflicts that drive young people towards methods of articulation through subcultural association. Despite the return of the country to institutional democracy in 1990, the author's interviews with members of various subcultures showed a general dissatisfaction with the pressures inflicted on people by the economic system and its inequalities. The work also identifies these inequalities with the unequal access to the communication technologies that are usually cited as the benefits of globalization, particularly to the Internet.

The government, through its agency Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, commissioned a report about the usage of the Internet among young Chileans. As of 2001, Chile showed the highest percentage of Internet users in relation to its population among Latin American countries, at 20.0 % (Soto Valenzuela., Espejo Silva, & Matute Willemsen, 2002, p. 30). The highest level of coverage was found among those aged between 12 and 18 years of age, without significant differences among the sexes, yet presenting important dissimilitudes among social classes as reflected by those within the public school system with Internet access, at 9.5%, and those with it in the private school system, at 45.2% (p. 35).

This concurs with what was presented by Millaleo and Cadenas (2015) in the discussion on the state of intellectual property laws in Chile; the country, as of 2015, appears as a nation with high institutional development concerning the laws governing intellectual property, but with high levels of social inequality which drive the infringement of said laws in different areas, including the piracy of entertainment media (2015, p. 133).

One item that authorities focused on was the alleged lack of youth participation in politics, and polls do show low participation in formal political activism. In a government report that analyzed social trends among young people from 1994, the year of the first National Youth Survey conducted by the National Youth Institute, and 2003, it was indicated that the percentage of people between 18 and 29 years of age registered to vote had decreased from 57.8% to 27.2% (INJUV-Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2004, p. 80). Moreover, it characterized the participation of young people in political parties as "marginal" (p. 82). The registration in the electoral system remained low, reaching 20.8% in 2010 (INJUV-Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2010, p. 156), until the entering into effect of Law 20.568, which implemented the automatic registration of all eligible voters but made voting itself voluntary.[14]

However, it was the year 2006 during which school-age youth were the protagonists of the "Penguin Revolution" (a name that referenced the mandatory uniform worn by public school students), a country-wide student movement that attempted to tackle the inequalities of the educational system by, among other measures, demanding the repeal of the Organic Constitutional Law of Education, the normative law for education in the country, implemented by Chile's military government in 1990. Although the final gains of the movement are debatable (Bellei, Contreras, & Valenzuela, 2010), it showed that this generation was far from a passive observer of political situations. Again, in 2011, the country was swept by student-led protests that strived for further education reforms after the derogation of the Organic Constitutional Law of Education in 2009. The years in between these two major waves of protests also featured political movements in which young people, students, in particular, were at the forefront.

[14] The previous system made voting, once registered, mandatory in all subsequent elections, which could account for the postponement of registration.

Salazar and Pinto (2002) identify the apparent lethargy among youth during the 1990s as a deepening of what they call Chilean youth's third period of silence (p. 244). Within this pattern, this period served as one of revitalization and cemented the role of young people as cultural innovators. The authors note that the decade demonstrated this segment of the population's instinct to generate their own spaces of participation and their capacity to periodically gather on the basis of a common, incidental frame of context (p. 262-263).

The capacity of Chilean subcultures to come together on initially loose bonds and carve a space for themselves without the major intervention of established institutions is, in part, an inherited characteristic of a national tradition of youth cultures, but it is also the organizational capacity of generations of youth political participation.

Informants of the present research agreed that the visual subculture was not formed around a particular political standpoint, yet individuals within it had views on the political situation of the country and would even participate in protests, though not utilizing visual kei as their primary identity.

The new millennium marked a new onset of subcultures, yet these had been brewing from the previous decade. The media played a key role in two ways: by increasing accessibility to global trends through information technologies and by magnifying their visibility through press coverage.

It is uncertain whether visuals would have been received as much coverage had it not been because it was only one among many youth groups that were being categorized as urban tribes. The development of new subcultures did not mean the extinction of the previous ones. While some such as the *coléricos* and *carlotos* were long-gone as distinct social groups, punks (or their Chilean version, *punkis*), goths, brit-poppers, Rastafarians, and hip-hoppers were and remain active. The

significant difference between periods of perceived high subcultural activity and those of low one is the manner in which these groups merge into the larger category of the "alternative scene."

While informants have admitted that it is now rare to see people on the streets of Santiago dressed in subcultural styles as flamboyantly as before, the eventual disappearance of media interest in the subculture is not clearly explained simply by this. The attention given to subcultures in the first place was hardly justified. According to the Fifth National Youth Survey, conducted between November 2006 and January 2007, only 6.9% of the respondents answered affirmatively to the question of whether they "cultivate a style (such as hip hop, etc.)" (INJUV-Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2007, p. 212). For the subsequent survey, conducted in 2010, the question had been modified slightly to reflect the language used in the media and academia. The percentage of participants that answered affirmatively to taking part in an "urban group or tribe" was of 6.4%, which showed no significant change (INJUV-Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2010, p. 128), raising the question of whether this percentage justified the overexposure of subcultures in the media, and even the final words of the report stress that it was only a minority of young people who participated in "tribes" (INJUV-Instituto Nacional de la Juventud, 2010, p. 323). Likewise, it is not possible to assess the degree of youth identification with a subculture during the following years because the question was entirely removed in the 2012 version of the study.

Some of the subcultures were local adaptations of global trends, as was the case of the emo, yet some existed only in Chile. Among them, perhaps the most visible was that of the *pokemones*; a Chilean youth subculture that formed towards the end of the 2000s and which blended emo aesthetics, reggaeton music, and the name "*pokemones*," either as a reference to their unaccountable numbers or to the colorfulness of their hairstyles, which were somewhat reminiscent of anime characters'. It was this group, more than others, that attracted the press'

attention and outcry. Pokemones were unashamedly sexual yet reports on them were rather exaggerated. It is not clear whether the misinformation about their practices was international or a misunderstanding on the part of the journalists. In particular, a piece published by *Newsweek*, which focuses on the sexual aspect of their socialization, made it seem like public sex and orgies were a defining practice of this teenage subculture. Not only pokemones' subcultural jargon was misrepresented, but it conflated them with a separate 2007 event in which a video of a public sex act between several male high schoolers and their female classmate was leaked. The author called this, and public sexual encounters in general, a common practice among pokemones (Steinberg, 2008).

The media also insisted on the creation of another alleged subculture: that of *peloláis*. The word is a combination of "*pelo*" ("hair") and "*láis*," a made-up word that sounds somewhat similar to "*liso*" ("straight") and works as a jokingly anglicized pronunciation. The term was applied almost exclusively to young women who belong to the wealthier families and wore long, light-colored, straight hair. Cooper Mayr, in an interview, expressed her opinion that they were not an urban tribe because they didn't have an ideology and were just snobbishly wealthy (*cuica*) girls with a specific appearance (Contardo, 2007, p. E4). On the one hand, it would be incorrect to say that peloláis do not possess an ideology; there is simply that of Chilean hegemonic culture and blurs into their socioeconomic background. As Hebdige (1979), building on Marx, explains, "ideology by definition thrives beneath consciousness. It is here, at the level of 'normal common sense' that ideological frames of reference are most firmly sedimented and most effective, because it is here that their ideological nature is most effectively concealed" (p. 15). *Peloláis* girls' ideology concurred with that of the ruling class, thus masking it as natural and inexistent. On the other hand, and because of this very same ideology, it is true that *peloláis* cannot be approached as a subculture

inasmuch they are instrumental to the reproduction of the existing social and economic order rather than a disruption. Their patterns of behavior and of consumption did not set them apart from others in their social strata, nor did they signify a break from their parents' generation.[15]

Their incorporation into the urban tribe discourse reveals the media trend of highlighting these groups. Some television shows also insisted on the analogy of this group to other subcultures and would attempt to bring them to a confrontation with one another. For example, the Mega television program *Cara & Sello* did features that confronted the lifestyles of peloláis and visuals; after having aired one that did the same with *peloláis* and *pokemones* (pokemonespelolais, 2009), but the results were more akin to a forced mingling that had the peloláis group represent the hegemonic, normalized culture of the upper classes (Rodríguez-Peña G., 2009).

More than actually dangerous or antisocial behavior from young people themselves, the increased interest in these groups might have been due to the increased visibility of subcultures, the apparent disconnection between generations due to the rapid advancement of technology, or, just as significant, the lack of a frame of reference on how to treat these new forms of socialization. Although the visual kei scene of Santiago was already underway since the 1990s, its composition as a subculture was the result of this specific historical setting that, fueled by media interest, pushed disperse youth groups to set boundaries and definitions that finally articulated them as subsets of the parent culture.

[15] It is possible that this focus on *peloláis* as a subculture momentarily destabilized this notion of the naturality of their norms, yet their relative return to obscurity and the fact that they do not even figure as an urban tribe in nostalgia features on television indicate that they have been assimilated into upper class culture as a whole.

3.2 A brief history of the development of visual kei in Chile

While visual kei started developing in Japan in the first half of the 1980s, it did not reach Chilean audiences until more than a decade later. Rather than this delay, what is noteworthy is the fact that that the genre found footing in a country that was distant from Japan both geographically and linguistically. However, the way it was embraced by certain segments of the population can be explained by a long tradition of Japanese media presence in Chile that paved the way for further cultural elements to be accepted without much resistance.

Visual kei made its entrance into the Chilean entertainment world in close association with the decades-long broadcasting of anime on public television and, later, cable channels that specialized in this type of program (cartoons and/or Asia-originated content). One channel, in particular, is recognized as the initiator of this trend; UCV TV (later renamed TV+), a network initiative of the Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, which was officially put on the air in 1959, only one day after the first television transmission in Chile. Its show *Pipiripao* (original run: 1984-2003) was a children's show that featured various animations, both from the United States and from Japan. The latter included *Candy Candy*, *Hana no Ko RunRun*, and *Groizer X*, and, while some theme songs were modified in their entirety, many were only dubbed, retaining the original music. This trend in regard to music continued into the 1990s, but some channels would start broadcasting anime with their original opening and ending themes in Japanese, particularly *The Vision of Escaflowne* (1996, broadcasted in Chile in 2000 by TVN) and *Rurōni Kenshin -Meiji Kenkaku Romantan-* (1996-1998, broadcasting in Chile began in 1999). The latter featured songs by the formerly-visual kei band L'Arc~en~Ciel (f. 1991), which are still played in Chilean visual kei parties until this day.

Two Spanish publications can be credited for introducing Chilean anime fans to visual kei: *Minami* and *Dokan*, published by Ares Multimedia in 1997 and 1998, respectively.[16] Four of the interviewees mentioned that the CDs that would come with the magazines would contain music by visual kei bands, including L'Arc~en~Ciel. The tracks contained in the CDs became one of the sources for the acquisition of new music in mp3 format or sometimes even full music videos at a time when only a small percentage of the population had access to the internet. The informants told about having accessed Japanese rock music aside from the openings and endings through these magazines. It is also noteworthy that these magazines would circulate among friends and acquaintances, as a precedent for larger networks that would develop for music-sharing in the late 2000s both online (through forums and peer-to-peer file-sharing programs such as Emule, Kazaa, and Soulseek)[17] or in person.

The majority of the study's participants came into contact with visual kei during the late 1990s and early 2000s. One of them explained that he had directly heard about the genre from corresponding with followers of goth and deathrock in the United States, who were the ones to introduce him to the Japanese genre. However, all of the other participants expressed having found visual kei at least partially through other forms of Japanese media. Among them, an interest in Japanese film (particularly Akira Kurosawa) was mentioned as a source of interest in Japanese culture and a pathway to the discovery of visual kei, but to a much lesser extent than anime.

This is not due to an intrinsic link between anime and visual kei music, although parallels with some manga/anime genres (namely, *shōjo*) have been made (Johnson, 2019); anime was simply the most readily-available form of Japanese popular culture to the generation and the most likely first instance of contact with it. Moreover, not all anime fans would move on to become

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[16] *Minami* had been in publication as a fanzine since 1992.
[17] Emule was released in 2002, Kazaa in 2001, and Soulseek in 1999.

visual kei fans, instead favoring other forms of Japanese music such as pop, or simply not having an interest in Japanese music at all.

This was evidenced by the formation of a separate subculture of otaku, whose behaviors and appearance differed from those of visuals. Z.A. (male, 24) talked about the initial years of the scene and how there were divisions in style within the general one of followers of Japanese popular culture:

> Usually, [visuals] would start off as otaku and then move to visual [kei], yet they would keep watching anime. For example, I was never an otaku. I mean, of course I watched shows because that is what you do when you are involved in the Japanese [popular culture] world, but that was never my thing. For example, I had a friend who would wear so many pins it was like armor.

When asked whether what he meant by otaku style was the wearing of pins, he explained, "yes, he would wear pins on his bag, on his shoes, on his clothes, pins of anime that I think nobody else had watched (laughter)."

While some visual kei bands have contributed with music to anime series, anime fandom and visual kei fandom in Japan usually function as separate scenes whose members might overlap. Despite this separation in its country of origin, the above quotes show that the earlier years of the Chilean visual subculture had several scenes related to Japanese popular culture tied together.

Ocampo Cea (2009) describes the stereotypical Chilean otaku as wearing many pins, having a lock of hair over their forehead, imitating their favorite characters, wear headbands of animal ears, think out loud, become hysterical, use too many hand gestures, yell too much, and enjoy Japanese and Chinese food (p. 246). Past this image, she emphasizes their tendency to accumulate knowledge but also to share it among people with the same interests. The author believes that (Chilean) otaku culture is the source of all other urban tribes with Japanese tendencies,

but the time at which the book was written is also reflected in the fact that she will place gothic lolitas within visuals (p. 255).

The identification of otaku at a subcultural level with the wearing of pins is also reflected in Perillán's (2009) study. Among his informants, pins are cited as an easy element of identification among anime fans (p. 41-42). These characteristics of the Chilean otaku style beyond the mere interest in Japanese animation and manga appear in the younger group of the author's study, which also coincides with that of the teenagers that served as informants of Ocampo Cea's (2009) work. By the second half of the 2000s, "otaku" was not synonym with being an anime fan, but instead served as a primary subcultural identification that was at odds with that of "visual," despite the interest in anime not necessarily coming into conflict with the interest in visual kei.

Despite the tendency of Chilean scenes to be largely dependent on the developments in the Santiago Metropolitan Region, it was in the city of Valparaíso that the first anime events of the country were hosted by the fansub group Illion in 1994, followed by karaoke competitions and cosplay events that quickly spread to the capital. In Santiago, the events that would introduce attendees to both new anime and new music tended to be the same; either anime screenings (one of the few ways to access new material at the time) or anime conventions. Out of them, the events held at the Planetarium in Universidad de Santiago de Chile (USACH) are remembered by informants as some of their first exposures to the music videos of the tracks that some were already listening to, and the music parties that sometimes took place during these same events were precursors of later exclusively-visual kei parties. The importance of these events to the visual kei scene was acknowledged by those participants that had attended them.

B.N. (32, male) remembers that a whole weekend could be spent in these activities: "there were a lot of events at the Planetarium, weekend events which lasted two, three, or more days."

N.S. (male, 33) started attending the Planetarium events when he was seventeen and spoke of his initial response to the style and the scene surrounding it: "when I went to my first Planetarium party, it was kind of shocking for me to see men dressed as women and wearing makeup. I mean, not shocking, but like 'oh, what is going on with them?' And, later, I also did it."

It is unclear when the very first exclusively visual kei-themed party was held, mostly because of the number of parties held at private properties during the first years of the scene (and, sometimes, in abandoned houses). The longest-standing dance party brand of Santiago has been active since 2000: Kuchizuke (the Japanese word for "kiss"). It was named after the website focused on goth music, El Beso (Spanish for "kiss"), run by the same VJ[18] of Kuchizuke. This works as a small wink to the common elements to both genres, stylistically and in the way that various scenes have intermingled in Chile.

Dance parties became a common instance of gathering by visual kei fans. In 2002, the first of the Blade Zeta parties was produced. Although originally it did not have a set name, it started being called that because of the pseudonym used by its creator. Much like this one, there are accounts of several other parties without set names or which no longer exist. Among them, those by the production company Noix (currently focusing mostly on bringing K-pop [Korean pop] bands to Latin America) at the Teatro Novedades together with the featuring of visual kei music at the parties in the Teatro Carrera from 2003 until its closure in 2006 have become a staple not only of the visual kei scene but of the alternative scene of Santiago in general (Muñoz, 2008).

Visual kei events also sometimes featured tribute/cover and visual kei-influenced bands, among them Batsu69, Black Amber, Bloody Ann, Break the Silence, MannequiN, The Fault, The Nameless, and Undesire, out of which only the last two remain active. According to the interviews

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[18] Those in charge of music at parties call themselves "VJs" instead of "DJs," because the music comes accompanied by the projection of the song's music video.

with some of these bands' members conducted by Labarca (2020), these were created by young men with little to no experience in music and with no knowledge of the Japanese language. The lyrics, when not available on the Internet, were phonetically transcribed and sung, and the arrangements for songs were also made by bandmembers themselves after listening to the music (fifteenth paragraph).

The decline of interest in these bands was attributed by informants to the eventual arrival of Japanese artists to Chile. Y.F. (female, 32), who was one of the few women to participate in a band, explained that "before when we used to have bands, we would play the music of these guys who were never going to come. Then they came. What can you do after that? It's like the whole thing got redefined."

Together with dance parties, local visual kei or visual kei-inspired bands were instrumental to the popularization of certain Japanese artists and songs over others and bandmembers, like the party VJs, had the ability to shape the tastes of Santiago's audiences and, eventually, define which artists looked at Chile as a possible concert location.

One additional modality of dance parties were daytime ones. Some of them allowed attendance by underage people and were instrumental in people from Santiago's more distant areas partaking in group scene activities rather than remain as individual fans. This was not restricted to visual kei but a general trend among youth subcultures; in an effort to expand the events' attendance, daytime parties were produced not only for the visual kei scene but for others as well. Daytime parties without the usual restriction of attendance allowed only to those of 18 years of age or older did create a somewhat unexpected new problem. As organizers and attendees of Kuchizuke's daytime parties, which were first held in 2005, remarked, the mixing between minors and adults in the parties opened the door for older men to attend with the apparent intention of

grooming minors. The way to attempt to overcome this problem was to charge different entrance fees, with a higher one for those over 18. Although did this not fully make the problem go away, it was reported that it discouraged some of these men from attending.

Together with these dance parties, other forms of socialization were mentioned, among them, the creation of unofficial fan clubs and their meetups. These fan clubs were formed around specific artists (such as The Gazette) or as an amalgamation of various artists that were perceived as sharing characteristics, such as belonging to the "new wave" of visual kei, which can be more or less associated with Kashiwagi's "neo visual kei" (2011, p. 94).

By the time that the field research was conducted, many of these fan clubs had either dissolved or had resorted to function only online, mostly as Facebook groups or Facebook pages. Some of this shift can be attributed to the growing responsibilities in the professional and family aspect of the lives of organizers, but also, from what was gathered through the interviews, much of their struggle was the result of personal disagreements. This, coupled with the lack of incentive to create further groups as a previous one splintered, has resulted in the diminished size of this avenue of fan participation. However, even for some interested in keeping the scene active, the lack of participation in these groups is discouraging. H.B (female, 25) talked about her involvement in Facebook groups formed around visual kei with the intention of revitalizing the scene and the meetups organized by them:

> There were a lot of people who liked smaller bands, so we got all of those people together and [Facebook group] was born. It was a Facebook and Instagram page where we got all of the fan clubs together and we would do meetups at least once a month.

However, the dwindling attendance has taken its toll on her, and she explains: "now we are really dead. I make efforts and all but the organization of events… I won't do it anymore. I don't have so much time and I don't feel like it anymore."

This disenchantment with people's unwillingness to attend fan-club events was shared by D.V. (female, 24), who also had the experience of attending anime events with stands dedicated to the fan clubs she belonged to, but she explained that "the truth is that it did not raise people's interest. They would come over, ask about it, and then you would never see their faces again." It is important to note that D.V., by her own admission, only came into the scene towards 2016, many years after its peak, and, in hindsight, those were attempts "at reviving a dead scene."

During the interviews, band-specific fan clubs were only mentioned in passing, in a way that could imply they were not as important to the formation of the scene as other forms of organizations, but their ubiquitous presence actually suggests that this was related to, on the one hand, a lack of access to fan club participants for interviews, and, on the other, to the inherently low-profile of their members as the purpose of the organizations is to highlight specific artists rather than to create a brand for themselves.

The aforementioned instances were formal gatherings, but visual kei fans were noticeable because during the 2000s they also congregated in visible public spaces right in the heart of Santiago, often during the day. These have not remained static, nor have they been used by the same people. Moreover, their gathering places mingled with those of other groups, attesting to the blurry lines and plasticity of the scene.

Some of the longest-participating informants interviewed mentioned that, apart from the Planetarium events, arcade game centers served as a gathering point where people with interest in visual kei would eventually meet each other and newcomers would be introduced to the style. In particular, dance games such as the Japanese Dance Dance Revolution (originally released in 1998) and the Korean Pump it Up (originally released in 1999) were central attractions of those spaces. Although the music style of both of them lean more towards pop, electronica, and hip hop,

some of those who played them were also interested in visual kei and would start dressing in visual kei style.

While the Raprán arcade (which closed down in 2011) (Hayama, 2012) was mentioned, it seems like it was the Entretenimientos Diana arcade on Ahumada Streetthat served as the main spot for dance games and for visual kei followers who were also gamers to spend time and socialize aside from themed parties.

The Diana arcade, officially named “Entretenimientos Diana,” was founded in 1934 as a multi-entertainment space that held various forms of games such as a carousel, a Ferris wheel, table football and, later on, pinball machines. From the year 1984, the facilities were located at 170 Ahumada Street, which is the location mostly cited by the informants of this project when referring to the arcade. In 2006, said location was closed allegedly due to the high criminality of the area; although a new location on 839 Merced Street, but with less than half of the machines that were available in its previous location (“Historia,” n.d.).[19] Although some of the informants frequented the new site as well, the one that was identified as part of the subcultural landscape was the one on Ahumada Street:

> I used to go to the Diana [arcade] in Ahumada [Street]. . . . In 2000, DDR [Dance Dance Revolution] arrived and it had Korean and Japanese songs. Then I noticed that some friends looked kind of goth and found out they were visuals, but there were very few of them, and they also played. As of 2002, there were like five visuals who would get together there and many more of us became visuals on that year. (X.M. male, 32)

Z.A. (male, 24) joined the scene only one or two years later and stated that “the Diana [arcade] was a basement, now it has been turned into a Falabella [store]. That is where they would

[19] In the 1960s a part of the owning family split off and founded Juegos Diana, which is located at San Diego 438. Despite the similar names, they have different ownerships.

get together to go party; they would come looking for a party to attend. I started going to the Diana [arcade] when I was 14, around 2003 or 2004."

By this time, the Diana arcade was already known for being frequented by visual kei fans. B.N. (32, male) told of what a regular weekend night was like:

> They would go play DDR, then they would change and wash away the sweat; at 9 PM there were like 30 guys doing their makeup in the Diana [arcade]'s restrooms. [A former visual kei fan] would come in with a giant backpack that had everything, even high heels, and would get dressed. And later he would again dress like a normal person.

Personal accounts indicate that visual kei was becoming a defined fashion style among some of the attendees of the Diana arcades located on Ahumada Street as early as 2001, but the eventual closure of the location made the association between dance games and visual kei eventually diminish.

Alongside these, the Eurocentro shopping center and surrounding areas were another of the notorious gathering spots. A building containing various independent stores, the Eurocentro catered to followers of non-mainstream trends, be it goth fashion, rock music, or Japanese popular culture. In particular, the space in front of Eurocentro on Paseo Ahumada was recognized by insiders and outsiders alike as a point of socialization. Nicknamed "Imán" (Spanish for "magnet," either a reference to it attracting many people or specifically to the metal piercings worn by the participants), this spot would become one of the most contested spaces of the scene, as its location in a public area and in a very central spot made their presence and appearance hard to ignore to the rest of society and exposed them to public scrutiny. Towards the second half of the 2000s, the Eurocentro started becoming replaced by Santa Lucía Hill as a meeting spot for visual kei fans, though many experienced both because they would go to the hill after spending some hours at the Eurocentro first.

There is an impression that these spots were divided by subcultures, as the account of Z.A. (male, 24) shows: “Visuals would get together at the Diana [arcade]; at the Imán on Nueva York Street, there would be the Brit Pop [fans], the alternatives; and the Eurocentro it was full goth.” However, it was also clear from their accounts that these places were simultaneously being used by various subcultures at any given time and that the boundaries between them were blurry.

Salazar and Pinto (2002) underline the importance of the concept of “*carrete*” to understand Chilean youth’s socialization.[20] While its Chilean usage could be simply translated as “party,” the authors difference it from the regular party, or “*fiesta*,” by explaining that the *carrete* culture is a form of youth regrouping “from below” and of sociability “among peers” which is open and has functions of important intersubjective adjustment to form or reform identity (p.264). According to their analysis, the *carrete* lacks the formal organization of the party and includes various forms of association and activities that use the form of the party as an instrument of the process of society’s tribalization, which they see as the creation of new forms of citizenship (p. 265).

It is possible to include these moments of socialization in public spaces as part of the *carrete* culture rather than an entirely separate instance. They are quoted not only as precursors to parties but as spaces where people could exchange visual kei materials. X.M. (male, 32) reminisced that “back then not everyone had internet, you had to go to an internet cafe to download songs. The other common thing would be to exchange materials such as CDs, although it was also common for some people not to share with others.”

Another reported way of connecting with other visual kei fans was through online forums, of which the largest were AnimePortal and Anime Ippai, both of which had sections dedicated to

[20] The formal definition of “*carrete*” is “reel or “bobbin.”

music and where people would discuss visual kei.[21] [22] Finally, many of the informants mentioned having found visual kei through school friends and acquaintances and, while usually, they would remain a minority among their peers, it allowed them to form groups with similar interests, and it would sometimes be these same classmates that would introduce them to the scene that was gathering in downtown Santiago.

The growth of the scene was finally recognized by the Japanese industry and such recognition solidified through concerts. The solo artist Miyavi, who had been the guitarist of visual kei band Due Le Quartz, played in the Telethon Theatre on May 21, 2008. The production company for the event was Noix, an entity involved in the development of visual kei events for years. The tickets sold out within the first day, and Miyavi played in front of 1700 people in an unprecedented event that caught the attention of media outlets because of the devoted reaction of fans (Donoso Espejo, 2013, p. 130).

For a scene that could have only dreamed of getting to actually see their favorite artists live, what followed Miyavi's first Chilean performance was an almost overwhelming amount of concerts. The same year, Noix was responsible for the Chilean portion of Japanese alternative-rock band Monoral's Latin American tour, becoming the first Japanese artist to perform outside of Santiago, in Valparaíso on November 17, 2008, followed by the city of Concepción two days later and finally Santiago's Caupolicán Theatre on the 20th. However, despite attendance improvement in later shows, the Valparaíso one was notorious because only approximately 30 people turned up,

[21] It was also mentioned that most of the fanclub members were women, but this could not be corroborated with data since they had already dissolved, and more members were among those willing to be interviewed.
[22] Both sites are currently inactive. According to Wayback Machine, Ippai.cl was active between 2007 and 2009. Animeportal.cl was active intermittently between 2000 and 2019, but the site currently is an empty Worpress website.

starting a trend of insecurity on whether the number of people expressing interest in a concert would match the attendance, a concern that lasts until the present day.

The major visual kei concerts that followed Miyavi’s were that of T Earth (with X Japan’s vocalist Toshi) on October 11, 2008; LM.C on January 29, 2009 (and again in 2012); Dir en Grey on November 6, 2009 (with a second visit in 2011); Versailles -Philharmonic Quintet- on June 6, 2010 (again in 2011 and 2017); Vamps (a project of L'Arc-en-Ciel’s vocalist Hyde) on November 6, 2010 (with a subsequent visit to the country in 2015); X Japan on September 9, 2011; and Gazette on September 29, 2013 (and, again, in 2019).

However, as Noix’s owner Gonzalo “Hito” García has admitted, those years might have been of oversaturation of the market due to the same fans' and companies' zeal in bringing artists to the country and the lack of proper assessment tools for projected attendance to concerts, which ended with losses as the expected ticket sales could not be reached on every occasion (Donoso Espejo, 2013, p. 132).

The growth of the scene, the parties, and the passion of the fans finally made it possible for Japanese artists to consider Chile within their tour destinations. However, paradoxically, what would become the highest point of popularity of visual kei in Chile was also the one that would determine its rapid decline.

According to the informants of this study and those of Donoso’ Espejos (2013), the year in which the scene would start dissolving coincides with the aftermath of the visits from the first visual kei artists to the country. What had kept the scene active had been the constant efforts to access visual kei music from Japan. However, when Japanese artists started visiting the country, the need for and interest in such instances as cover/tribute concerts dwindled. Similarly, the

increasing access of the population to the internet made it unnecessary in most cases to share music files in person with others.

Informants cited the years after 2008 as a steady decline in which the smaller, more underground parties stopped. This is not to say that the whole scene became inactive; Kuchizuke still held events, albeit less often, mostly as part of the multi-dance floor large parties of the Blondie night club. Daytime parties also did not fade away completely until some years later, and the last Kuchizuke one was held in 2013.

While the change in accessibility to materials is credited in part for the shrinking of the scene, safety considerations were also a factor. The rise of Neo Nazi youth groups that targeted alternative subcultures was a concern of many event attendees. This situation escalated until the 2012 murder of homosexual teenager Daniel Zamudio by four people with alleged ties to Neo Nazi ideology, an event that emerged from years of threats and violence (J.R.G., 2012). It is interesting to note as well that one of the perpetrators had been a part of the visual kei scene and was well-known to some informants of this study, yet this apparent shift in ideology was explained as just one example of the constant rotation of people in and out of scenes at the time.

The scene and the subculture are far from over despite them not being as visible as before. In 2014, Kuchizuke debuted its podcast, *Kuchitril*,[23] which has since been airing almost weekly. While never reaching the rate of the years immediately following Miyavi's first concert, Chile remains an important destination for visual kei artists when touring in the American continent. The years 2018 and 2019, for example, had concerts by Gazette, Jupiter, Kaya/Schwarz Stein, Miyavi, and Versailles, among others. The year 2016 was also the addition of a new visual kei party brand to Santiago's nightlife, Shinigami Kagura, which lasted until late 2019. Born around the same

[23] "Kuchitril" is a play on the Spanish word *cuchitril*, meaning a "shack" or a "hole-in-the-wall."

period, Paradoxical Party has been active from 2017 to the present, while Moshi Moshi Club regularly features a visual kei dance floor together with one dedicated to J-pop and K-pop.

Chapter 4: The creation of a local subculture

> I arrive directly to the dance party and much earlier than the group I usually come with. While I wait for them, I am trying to stay away from the dance floor, sitting in one of the very few chairs left from the regular layout of the venue's bar, lest someone tries to strike up a conversation with me in the noisy environment, as has happened before. I see a group of about four men in their late twenties walk from the dance floor and pass me; they are laughing as one of them is having trouble fixing his long, bleached, straightened hair. The more he pulls at it, the more matted it becomes, and it is not until one of his friends decides to help him that they manage to untangle the hair. It is a striking show of camaraderie and, apart from myself, nobody seems to notice the exchange. In Santiago's visual parties, seeing men helping each other do their hair and makeup in public view is far from uncommon. (fieldnotes, September 1, 2018)

Santiago's visuals recognize visual kei as intrinsically Japanese, not only because of the language of most of the songs but also because, despite the use of universal themes, visual kei retains an unmistakable Japaneseness that fans connect to their preconceptions of Japan, which in turn are the result of the Western image of Asia and of their reception of a particular concept of Japan through its popular media. At the same time, visual subculture is not a recreation of Japan's scene, nor is it a fully new creation either; Santiago's visual subculture is born out of a tradition of alternative subcultures in Chile as described in the previous chapter. Their praxis is as important as the product they consume, which turns them from passive receivers of messages to creators of meaning through their actions, both individual and collective.

4.1. Visual kei as a Japanese product in Chile

4.1.1 Situating "Japan" in the visuals' imagination

Miyavi's 2008 concert in Santiago's Teletón Theater marked the first occasion a visual kei artist visited the country. For over a decade, the growing scene had developed without the feasible chance of watching any of the artists perform live. Although now it is possible to interact with

many of the bands through social media, particularly Instagram (launched in 2010) and Twitter (launched in 2006, but with most visual kei artists joining after 2010),[24] during the early 2000s the Chilean fanbase was cut off from the production site and the scene surrounding it. However, it was precisely this geographical and linguistic distance from the object of interest that gave Santiago's visual kei scene the dynamics that allowed its internal bonds to surpass the interest in the genre and develop as a subculture.

Separated from Japan, and unable to effectively breach that distance with technology, the scene's initial phase (the late 1990s to mid-2000s) was one of semi-independence from the Japanese industry itself. Most early visual kei bands focused their activities within Japan at least until the mid-2000s, when artists began internationalizing in search of newer markets. This development in marketing strategies eventually fueled the genre at home as well (Chen, 2019). In the case of Chile, Japanese companies were not able to accurately gauge the level of popularity of the genre and plan market strategies accordingly because, for years, the distribution of visual kei music was done peer-to-peer only, primarily through physical media such as CDs and DVDs.[25]

This degree of independence shifted with the intersection of two developments: the increased usage of social media by visual kei artists and the increased access to the Internet of the audience living in Santiago. Record labels and artists' managers neither had direct input on the strategies used to distribute music in the Chilean market, nor did they monetize on the popularity of the genre in the country. However, fans with access to the Internet were ultimately affected by the Japanese scene's trends and fluctuations through social media and, in turn, were able to function as (sub) cultural intermediaries within Santiago's scene. However, the lack of a frame of reference

[24] While Miyavi’s official account has been active since 2009, Yoshiki only joined in 2010. Kyo’s account and the official Dir en Grey account were created in 2011.
[25] Only one informant reported having used iTunes or any other paid service as an early method of obtaining music.

on how to conduct themselves as visual kei fans or on the style itself made it a malleable identity that developed its own set of rules, references, and definitions.

The West has a long history of fascination with Japan, with different degrees of exoticization (Napier, 2008). However, this West in academic analysis is often identified with Europe and North America rather than with the Global South. As part of the latter, Chile has received an image of Japan that has been filtered through two lenses: that of representation in American and European media, and Japan's self-representation available through Japanese popular culture products, particularly anime.

Iwabuchi (1994) has pointed out that the construction of "Japaneseness" has utilized "complicit exoticism." This device is different from the West's orientalism since the latter is projected upon the Other and the former is about the self. In the case of the image of Japan held by the informants of this research's ethnography, it was fed by both–the complicit exoticism present in popular culture products and the orientalist image inherited through Western media.

Visual kei is defined in its relationship to the country where it originated, Japan. Although other subcultural styles (such as goth, hip hop, and punk) are also heavily tied to the locations where they originally developed, and the local artists are kept at a referential position, this is a particularly strong relationship in visual kei. This genre, framed as a uniquely Japanese form of entertainment, has taken root in other countries to the point that it can be claimed as an (at least partial) identity element by individuals. Yet, it always remains connected to the idea of Japan.

Referring to it as "Japanese visual kei" seems redundant since audiences at large cannot envision visual kei as anything but Japanese. Pfeifle (2012) notes that all of those in the industry do not share this idea of visual kei being only Japanese. Still, the national branding of the genre

by a Japanese executive such as Backstage Project's Keiji Sugimoto has strengthened this view at an international level (“Vijuaru kei ātisuto ga kaigai de daininki no riyū,” 2009).

This notion persists among the visual kei fandom in Santiago, where it is generally agreed that visual kei is, by nature, a Japanese style. This framing leaves foreign musicians with visual kei traits outside of the definition; musicians in the scene in Santiago are either regarded as cover bands or described as having visual kei or J-rock elements, yet never as visual kei per se. In this sense, Santiago's visual kei was described by informants as "Chilean visual kei fandom" rather than as true visual kei. However, and despite seeing visual kei as Japanese and admitting the difficulty for a band or even a person to be identified as visual kei outside of Japan, informants' accounts indicated that they felt a strong connection to the style. This connection was strong enough to routinely participate in events and invest money and time in their interest.

Adamowicz (2014a) takes Iwabuchi's concept of *mukokuseki* ("statelessness") and debates its use for the case of Harajuku subcultures. Rather than describing these styles as evoking a sense of statelessness or of not belonging to any specific culture, Adamowicz proposes the concept of *takokuseki* (using the Japanese "*ta*" as either "multiple" or "other") to denote what is born between transcultural networks (p. 38-39). This image of visual kei as a mixture of various cultural elements was prevalent among Santiago's scene, but, as Adamowicz herself observes, one culture is privileged over the others in the reading of the product, that of reading visual kei as "Japanese."

Given that the Chilean fanbase had been exposed to Japanese media and language from an early age, Japan did not seem as much of a distant country as it might have for older generations. However, the type of media that this group had consumed determined the image of Japan that they developed.

No image of a country would be unbiased or even able to encompass the entirety of one culture and, in the instance, the image of Japan reproduced among the informants had been shaped by a combination of anime, visual kei music, and stereotypes around Japanese culture held by the general Chilean population.

The conversations with informants about Japan centered around whether they had any engagement with areas of Japanese culture other than music. This engagement included any dabbling in the study of the Japanese language, visits to the country, or merely an interest in Japanese culture. Of all the informants, only one declared to have no interest in Japan as a country; he stated that his interest was restricted to music alone, and he cited what he identified as problems with Japanese culture to justify his position. He mainly focused on the country's treatment of women, but how this differed from Chile's society-wide treatment of women was not specified.

One item of the online questionnaire asked respondents, "are you interested in other aspects of Asian culture? Which ones?" While the question did not specify any Asian countries, respondents answered with explicit references to Japan, except for one answer that indicated an interest in South Korea as well. The most-mentioned aspects of "Asian culture" were "anime," with sixteen mentions; "language," with fourteen; and "cuisine," with twelve. While "culture" was only mentioned eleven times, words that can be associated with the term were present separately, such as "music," "religion," and "values."

The idea of “values” was one that was brought up by informants in various conversations. One of the responses to the questionnaire contrasted Japan and Chile: "I am impressed by their culture in general, especially traditional values, because, to be honest, those basically do not exist in this country" (#18). However, neither these values nor their alleged connection to tradition were specified. The same person mentioned an interest in Japanese street fashion, yet these trends,

especially when embodied by females, have not had an entirely positive reception among the population in Japan, especially among older generations (Kinsella, 2005). This notion of the traditional is then quite selective and only applicable to some cultural elements at any given time.

Moreover, most informants described feeling a closeness to Japan from an early age. During an interview, one of them explained hers and another person's interest in Japan as a life-long process:

> It was about the culture, the music… the thing is, the culture has influenced us since we were very little, we are a generation that grew up watching Japanese cartoons. You already knew that there was another country out there, that there were other people. You knew that China, Japan, and Korea were three different countries, so there was already an interest. (B.R., female, 35)

Another informant had chosen a field of study related to Japan and, although she had yet to visit the country, she said that it was in her plans as part of her education. She directly her interest in visual kei as the starting point of her interest in Japan. One more informant talked about what she felt was a connection to a characteristically Japanese concept, that of "honor." However, she did not specify where she had acquired the notion that honor was a core Japanese value. When asked to explain further, she explained: "For me, it is their representation of honor; they have established such a strong thing for honor, and I can relate to it, in the sense that if you say something, you must keep your word. I find it so beautiful" (O.Q., female, 35). Despite this identification of honor as a Japanese value, she would go on to admit that this is not something that all Japanese follow, something she says she has learned through personal experience in interaction with Japanese people online and in travels to Japan.

However, honor, at least in the acceptation attributed by this informant, is not an exclusively Japanese concept. In fact, Valdés and Olavarría found that "keeping one's word" was a highly esteemed value among Chilean men in Santiago during the 1990s (1998, p. 15), yet these

informants associated it with honor and with Japanese ideals rather than with Chilean ones. This strict connection between Japanese identity and the concept of honor reflects what Befu has described as the samuraization of Japanese society during the Meiji period (Befu, 1971, as cited by Iwabuchi, 1994, seventh paragraph). This process is traced further back by Hanley (1999) in terms of material improvements to the quality of life in Japan during the Tokugawa period, which made it possible for a larger segment of the population to have access to commodities that only the wealthiest section had to before, such as *tatami* rooms and baths (p. 178). This phenomenon of extension of not only the elite's material goods but also of a set of values and morals of the to the rest of society would ultimately lead to the identification of society as a whole with those values and material elements, even though their labeling as "traditional" is questionable. The repercussions of the use of samuraization as a cultural and political strategy are still active in today's image of Japan at an international level, one that comes through despite its transmission through a medium as critical of the status quo as visual kei can be at times.

In this regard, the national branding that Iwabuchi observed would be strengthened by the perception of Japan created through a somewhat rebellious genre such as visual kei. Japan's national identity is reified by the identification of it as Other by outsiders; in this case, the interviewees. This otherness is not limited to it being a distinguishable nation-state from, in this case, the Chilean nation, but also by the identification of a culture that is uniquely Japanese.

When I spoke to people who had visited Japan, the image of the country was predominantly positive, yet opinions split when it came to the question of whether they would move to Japan if given a chance. When asked about her experience during a trip, one informant explained that she "didn't want to come back [to Chile]. I was doing well; I fit in in all aspects. It was as if I had always belonged there" (Y.F., female, 32). She talked about the lack of judgment from onlookers

in Japan on her fashion style compared to people in Chile and her overall impression of the country after having visited was "order, respect. People don't say things to you on the street. You feel safe; you are not afraid of someone doing something to you."

Examples like Kinsella's (2005) account of the media reaction to the *ganguro* and *kogyaru* female street fashion styles show that the response to alternative fashion styles is far from non-judgmental. Yet, the way that members of the Santiago scene were confronted by people on the streets of their own country regularly makes the contrast starker. Although Japanese observers' opinion on this informant might not have been positive, the possibility of walking on the street without receiving direct criticism was seen as a better option than what Chile could offer.

Another informant who had traveled to Japan explained her vision of the country after having had the chance to see it in person after years of following its media:

> First of all, I feel like Japan is not a different country; it is a different planet. It is a very safe country, a very respectful culture. And, at the same time, I can say that I wouldn't live in Japan because it is an extremely male-oriented, conservative country, women have very few benefits . . . I feel like [traveling to Japan] helped me get rid of that idealized image that you hold . . . . I feel like Japan is a duality, it is something that is both old, archaic, and modern, and it knows how to coexist properly. It is harmonious. (Y.F., female, 32)

Descriptions of Japan as an essentially dichotomous, yet unified, country has been in circulation for many decades, as far back as the first chapter of Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946/2005), where, in turn, she explains that these impressions already existed among westerners who had encountered Japanese culture (p. 2-3). Moreover, this work insisted on the intrinsic difference between Japan and the West, in this case between the alleged justifications of Japan for the war versus those of the United States (p. 20). These would be among the characteristics later turned from a negative stereotype into a form of national identity through "complicit exoticism" (Iwabuchi, 1994), creating an image of a Japan full of the duality

of modern and traditional and of complete difference from the West which pervades discourses on Japan to the present day and appears in the discourse of this research's informants.

This success from a soft power standpoint is reinforced when compared to the perception of other countries. The other country from the Asian continent that was brought up during conversations was South Korea, due to the current popularity of Korean pop culture products in Chile as part of the *Hallyu* or "Korean wave" (Jorquera Mery, 2018). Despite the geographical closeness of the countries and shared cultural elements stemming from centuries of cultural flows across East Asia, Japan was identified as having a uniqueness that South Korea did not possess.

Apart from stating the differences between Chilean visual kei and K-pop scenes, when South Korea was mentioned, the informants were asked whether their feeling of closeness to Japan was similar when it came to other Asian countries. Y.F., who had had the opportunity to visit Seoul after her trip to Japan, explained:

> Seoul is so much like Santiago (laughter). We have the same economic model, so it is a lot alike, a lot of consumerism, mass culture, industrialization… that whole deal about everyone being beautiful, plastic surgeries… I feel like Seoul is like another small United States, just like Chile is.

Another informant explained how, despite also having some interest in Korean popular music, his interest had only gone further in the case of Japan, because "Japan is more complex, they have sort of managed to keep their essence. Korea hasn't; it is really Americanized, as if the girls were trying to look like Western ones, the music is really Western" (X.M. male, 32).

More than a reflection on South Korea itself, these comments attest to the image of an exceptional Japan–a Japan that has been able to hold on to its traditions, whatever they may be, and has survived the process of modernization with its alleged essence unaffected. Unlike it, other countries lacked this ability, either in their nature or due to external circumstances. In all but one

conversation, the factor highlighted was that of national characteristics and stemmed from perceived Japanese exceptionalism.

As for the presence of other Asian countries' popular culture in Chile, the topic of Chinese popular music and its low incidence was mentioned only once; in this case, informants said that they believed it was only due to a lack of exposure to it. If compared to the situation with Japan, the main difference is that other Chinese cultural products such as television dramas or movies directed explicitly at young audiences were not commonplace in Chilean television. At the same time, Japan had had a steady presence through anime.[26]

In this national branding, Japan has become decontextualized. References to Japan's actual topography or its various social groups were barely present, with only passing mentions to its LGBT population as a possible subgroup within the larger, seemingly homogeneous Japanese society.

Japan also becomes ahistorical and apolitical. The topic of Japan's role during the Second World War, its lingering repercussions on Japan's international relations, or even Japan's current political system were never brought up, except for one response to the online questionnaire that cited an interest in Japan's "military history" but did not explain further (#14). While this can be partially attributed to the age of the informants as a factor for not being as familiarized with the history of the Second World War and to Chile's late involvement in the conflict, it may also be due to the influence of popular culture products.

Iwabuchi (2010) has also remarked upon the effect of uneven transnational cultural flows on the consumers' perceptions of a nation. This same consumption may also be contributing to a degree of amnesia regarding the horrors of the war among consumers of Japanese popular culture

[26] This relative lack of Chinese popular culture presence and of a positive national image is not restricted to Chile, as expressed in George Gao's article in Foreign Policy "Why is China so… Uncool?" (Gao, 2017).

products in Chile. What is being consumed by Chilean audiences is, rather than a memory of Japan, a recollection of the past which is in itself a political act of collective identity (Guarné, Lozano-Méndez, & Martinez, 2019, p. 2). The amnesia then is not only created in the process of consumption by international audiences but is already present in the formation of these discourses in Japan. As Morisawa (2019) chronicles, even certain products that are labeled as Japanese, such as anime, are created within a complex network of production that includes non-Japanese labor, which also puts into question how "Japanese" these products are and what constructions are at play when identifying them as such (p. 178). The result here is not so much the consumption of a product by removing it from its national origins, but of the identification of said nation with its cultural products on a one-to-one basis.

Japan was, paradoxically, both intimately close and distant. The interest in its culture was a constant feature in informants' lives, yet most of them also admitted to finding it an impenetrable social structure. Not only did visual kei serve as a space of expression, but also Japan as a whole became an empty concept that could hold fans' dreams and expectations, prompting the recognition of this oneiric Japan as a haven from the very palpable reality of Chile and of their individual experiences. In this process, however, the complexities of international relations and Japan's position in the world, for example, after the Second World War in Asia, were either unknown or ignored in favor of this anachronic, apolitical entity.

4.1.2 Bridging the gap between countries

How did Santiago fans follow a style from a geographically distant place having limited access to information on it? The visual kei scene developed into a subculture that is far from a small-scale reproduction of the Japanese one. Rather than looking at the differences as distortions,

they are better understood as part of a distinct subculture that was built around the same Japanese product yet developed separately in most other aspects.

Although visual kei presented elements that were regarded as shocking and extreme at first encounter, its fans were receptive to Japanese popular culture after having been exposed to it from an early age. The anime experience was ubiquitous; there were no informants who did not mention anime, at least in passing. However, the importance that was given to it as a part of the reasons for being interested in visual kei varied from person to person. Anime was reluctantly mentioned as a gateway to visual kei, but it was also regarded as a separate interest. Very few informants stated that it was the main reason for their interest in visual kei music, and, in fact, it appeared to be detrimental to subcultural standing within the scene.

When talking about anime as a gateway into visual kei, informants sometimes confused it with it being a sole motivation for the interest in the music genre. With the separation of Santiago's visual kei and otaku scenes, informants tried to make it clear that their interest in both was not connected. Moreover, the idea of someone's interest in visual kei could be based solely on anime was commented upon as a lack of commitment and inauthenticity. Interest in the style was framed as an individual inclination or connection, rather than the response to the appeal of a scene, and was regarded as a mere result of personal interests coming together.

Santiago's scene has maintained a gender ratio that is more similar to the one of early visual kei as described by Inoue (2003) than the one later identified by Seibt (2013) in that there is almost an equal number of men and women involved. However, the justifications for this involvement are divided along gender lines. There was never a single reason given for following visual kei, but female informants would often mention an emotional connection to it that breached any linguistic barriers:

> It is more about the melody than the lyrics because I feel like a lot gets lost translating from Japanese into Spanish. . . . I feel like the melody is more important than the translation, the melody can make you feel things. This would happen a lot with MUCC [whose music] is more distressing. That communicates a lot more than going "oh, he is saying he loves me." (Y.F., female, 32)

In a similar vein, another informant remarked upon the importance of a feeling of understanding between artist and listener at an instinctual level:

> Most of the bands had pretty deep lyrics, very fulfilling, they would express what they were singing. But I also had a lot of friends that didn't care, they never found out what [the songs] said, but the artists managed to communicate the same feelings. It was the way they sang and the instruments that were expressive . . . . [The message] is what is the most fulfilling. Like when you managed to get a DVD [of a live performance] and you saw how they managed to communicate this feeling. Maybe you didn't have the lyrics, but that was enough. (C.T., female, 29)

In contrast, men mostly framed their interest as a matter of admiration for musical and/or artistic prowess. One male informant expressed perplexity at the fact that the Japanese fanbase is in its majority made out of women. It wasn't clear whether he was genuinely unaware of the target audience of the style in Japan or if what was inconceivable to him was that, some bands being hard rock, it still was not popular among Japanese men. This belief corresponds with a general trend of equating rock music with masculinity, which Leonard (2017) attributes to an arbitrary characterization of rock as a masculine (and heterosexual) field in which women fans and performers accommodate to a male sets of rules (p. 23).

Another feature of the subculture in Santiago is that it appears as a highly individualistic one, where collective efforts are seen as accessory despite the cooperative nature of the collective that gave these individuals access to the music in the first place. Visual kei provides a medium to canalize feelings of marginalization and difference that might have already been present in the individual's life. At the same time, being part of its subculture becomes a new source of marginalization from their peers, as Haenfler's model explains (n.d., Marginalization section).

Even if said feelings had surfaced together with exposure to visual kei or partially due to it, the emphasis was on the way that individuals had been personally drawn to the style.

Although avoidance of emphasis on the look of the artists was present across genders, it was women who were slightly more willing to admit that there had been a physical attraction component. Given that most of the men interviewed declared themselves heterosexual, it follows that the attractiveness of the male artists would not be a topic of discussion. There was one male informant, however, who admitted having been drawn in by one musician's looks, but because he had mistaken him for a woman due to his makeup and clothes.

> I saw [Malice Mizer's] "Gardenia," and it caught my attention because Mana was very striking. I said, "what's going on? That girl is really hot, she is beautiful." And I was told, "no, dude, that's a man." I was shocked. "How can he be a man if he doesn't look like a man?" And that was my first approach, but it was positive. It didn't put me off; it surprised me, it was something I had never seen or heard before. (Y.N., male, 25)

However, he would also go on to emphasize that his way of enjoying the style was through music and music videos. He made it clear that he made a difference between those who consumed the style in this manner and those that were focused on the partying or self-aesthetics aspects.

This process of differentiation based on the source of interest in visual kei was present in all the informants' accounts. Even most of the women also downplayed the attractiveness of the musicians as a factor, and the homosexual and bisexual male informants did not emphasize it either. The significance of desire for the artists in the Japanese fandom (as Seibt [2013] describes it) is not unknown to them; one informant did acknowledge that her involvement followed this pattern and even would regularly travel to Japan to take part in fan activities, including meet-and-greets. In her case, this was a source of pride, an element that distinguished her from other visual kei fans in Chile whose way of doing fandom did not follow Japan's patterns. However, following what

Japanese fans do was not seen as essential by other informants, even those who had also attended concerts while visiting Japan.

4.1.3 Consumption of music in a foreign language

The Japanese visual kei scene congregates around events directly organized by music producers and artists' managers, such as concerts and meet-and-greets with the artists. These types of events were unavailable to Chilean audiences for years and, even now that visual kei bands tour Latin America, they are scarce. Instead, Santiago's visual kei fans congregate within the alternative scene; a space to which the style had been associated since its reception in the country. In addition to the visual elements that made the genre shocking, visual kei was kept away from the Chilean music mainstream due to two characteristics: the fact that most of the music that was shared during the beginning of the scene was rock, and that the songs were sung in Japanese.

Chileans widely use the Spanish expression "*es como que me hablaras en chino*" ("it is as if you were speaking Chinese to me") to mean being unable to understand something either because the speaker is speaking gibberish or because the listener is unable to grasp the meaning. Chinese is used to refer to what cannot be understood, denoting both the perceived complexity of the language and its foreignness to Spanish-speakers. Chinese then stands for all languages that are deemed alien, much in the same way that "*chino*" ("Chinese person") is colloquially used to refer to any person with stereotypically Asian features, be them Asian or not. Together with the racially-charged implications of these expressions, particularly the last one that equates ethnicity with isolated physical features, they speak to the identification of Asia with the exotic, reflected in the expression "*Lejano Oriente*" ("Far East"); of China with the whole continent; and of China itself with only one language and one ethnicity.

This connection between Asia and the faraway and with alienness extended to the cultural products coming from the region. Anime was dismissively called "*monos chinos*" ("Chinese cartoons")[27] and visual kei artists were sometimes described by outsiders as "*chinos* gay" ("gay Chinese boys"). Eventually, some in the scene started using the same expression as a joke, talking about their love for their "*chinos* gay," despite knowing perfectly well that they were both Japanese and, for the most part, heterosexual. This was a way to re-appropriate a term that had been used to diminish their interests. These expressions worked both as an internal code, as a wink to the subculture, and as derision of the ignorance of outsiders, yet reproduced the exoticizing pattern of the rest of society.

Guarné (2008) explains the implications of such an expression when applied to the product of a country that has been otherized through orientalist reductions. The simian comparisons play into the image of the Orient in general and of Japan in particular as imitators of the West, as the simian representation of the non-European became a truism in the colonial visibility system (p. 6). The construction of the Orient centered around China is also a relatively new phenomenon. As March (1974) chronicles, the antithetical position of the Asian continent in relationship to Europe is a legacy of Greek and, later, medieval world concepts that survives to this day. The expression “monos chinos” when referring to Japanese animation then builds on a centuries-long tradition of orientalist thought. It also characterizes Japanese animation as both childish because cartoons were believed to be children’s products and also an inherently imitative product because they were seen as a copy of American animation.

The language of the music put visual kei out of the reach of audiences who were not accustomed to the sound of Japanese or not used to being unable to understand the lyrics of songs.

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[27] The original expression is “*monos animados*” (“animated drawings” or “cartoons”).

Although English is commonly heard on Chilean radios, its usage is much more widely accepted than that of Asian languages. Moreover, the image of the visual kei artists with their overly feminine demeanor and crossdressing, together with them not singing in the rock lingua franca (English), contributed to a rift between the visual kei fan community and that of rock fans in general. [28]

One of the characteristics of the movement that perplexed observers in Chile was the fact that the fans were, in the majority, unable to understand the lyrics of the songs they listened to immediately. The irony was not lost to the informants; why would listening and singing Japanese lyrics as non-Japanese-speakers be any different than the following of English-language music by Chileans that were not fluent in that language? The fans, in fact, were not unfamiliar with the Japanese language; they had been hearing it through anime openings for years, some of them faithfully using any tool at their disposal to keep said songs (one of the informants attested to having used a tape recorder to record the *Rurōni Kenshin* opening and closing songs from the television set).

In the online questionnaire, only two respondents explicitly said that they had experience with formal studies of the Japanese language. In the case of the informants that were interviewed, this number was of five of a total of twenty-two. Nevertheless, all the informants and party attendees observed during the duration of the research knew the lyrics to Japanese songs. While it might not have translated into formal learning of the language for various reasons, among them the lack of access to foreign language education, there is relative familiarization with Japanese. The interviewees also mentioned knowing basic words and phrases, including salutations and expressions such as "*kawaii*" ("cute") and "*sugoi*" ("amazing"). Although this might be far from

[28] This is not limited to Chile, as Kiss's Gene Simmons commented on X Japan, "if they sang in English, this could be the biggest band in the world" (Appleford, 2016, sixth paragraph).

comprehensive knowledge, the habit of listening and repeating these foreign words made Japanese an intelligible language rather than an entirely alien object.

The topic of culture and language was approached somewhat comically in a section reporting on the first Miyavi concert in Chile in 2008. In it, the journalist interviewed one concert attendee and one venue worker.

> "Miyavi is neo-visual; it has nothing to do with the poser *pokemones*. There are a lot of Japanese aesthetics going on here, like kabuki theater and those things, you know?" Sara clarified. . . . Mr. Hugo, the fries seller, couldn't understand a thing: "If this guy sings in Chinese, I don't know how kids can understand him." (Cárdenas, 2008, as cited by Ocampo Cea, 2009, p. 243)

On the one hand, this fan's words intended to clarify misunderstandings on the stylistic elements of visual kei for the interviewer, trying to differentiate its origins from other subcultures; it served, at a personal level, to showcase subcultural capital, and, at a collective one, to claim a more prestigious origin than other subcultures, one that is, in theory, rooted in an element of tradition such as kabuki theater. On the other hand, Mr. Hugo's remarks are those of someone perplexed at the interest in this foreign artist who also sings in a language that is neither Spanish nor English. Juxtaposed with the words of concert attendees, it also underscores a generational gap; those going to the concert, seen as "kids," have no issue with enjoying music sung in another language, one that they have been in contact with for years despite not having a formal education in it, while the words of the older man respond to a background in which most adults would have little to no exposure to East Asian languages.

Although it could be expected the language of the music to be regarded either as an obstacle to be hurdled or as a source of exoticization that was part of the appeal, informants' accounts revealed this to be a non-point; while the lyrics of the songs were regarded as important, they were far from an essential element of their interest in visual kei.

The interest in the lyrics tended to come much later than the initial contact with the style, as it involved online research that was not available to all participants. One fan told of how she started looking for lyrics online in an attempt to further understand her relationship with the music she was already listening to.

> There was one band that I liked a lot and started translating their lyrics, I would search for them and translate them to understand them a bit. . . I would think, "there must be a reason why this touches me so much," and so I started translating them. (J.V., female, 30)

A male informant did explicitly state that the lyrics had not been appealing to him because of a disconnection from both the topics being sung about and the approach to them.

> In my case, it was more about the music and aesthetics. I liked the lyrics, but some were so romantic and I was never really close to romanticism because of the influences I had before: Rammstein, Metallica, Slipknot; heavy stuff. Also, I didn't relate that much to the lyrics, and I was young, maybe with more life experiences… But in the beginning, no, it was the music. The parties. That was it. (P.R., male, 33)

One exception was a female informant who placed a lot of importance on the lyrics to the music she listened to and, while they were not the reason for her entering the scene, discovering what the artists were singing helped her come back to it years later and remain in it despite the lack of incentives to participate in group activities:

> I have always looked for the lyrics, it is what I like the most. My re-enchantment with Dir en Grey was because I hadn't read the lyrics before, I had only listened to their music. They were just as depressed as I was (laughter). . . . In Japan, they kind of embellish things through language a lot. There were songs that I could really relate to, they made me go "when did I write this?" (H.B., female, 25)

Both the blankness and the mood projected onto the lyrics indicated that the fans had found an alternative way of relating to the style; one that did not rely on explicit communication or the sharing of the same cultural background. All that was left was sound and image, both interpreted and internalized through the framework set by the participants' media consumption and the local setting. The appeal and disruptive potential of visual kei for a section of Chilean youth lay not in its alienness, but in the feeling of affinity created in a portion of the population by years of exposure

to Japanese media, an affinity in which others, particularly those from an older generation, could not participate.

What makes visual kei fertile soil for self-expression despite cultural differences is the way its rebellion is faced inwards. Unlike other forms of protest which highlight systemic abuse and advocate paradigm shifts (such as punk), visual kei's dissatisfaction with the status quo devolves into feelings of self-hatred, despair, and anguish, either directed at oneself or the closest ones such as a romantic interest. These feelings, whichever social root they may have, can be understood across cultures. Particularly, the nihilism and isolation that are common themes in visual kei lyrics and videos have resonated with Chilean audiences, who are also going through the isolationist experience of rapid economic growth and generational divides, as Cooper Mayr has documented (2007, first chapter, second paragraph). Rejection of adults' expectations and regulations are naturalized as part of the universal youth experience. However, the experience of aging within a subculture shows that this disavowal of models of successful adulthood might not be as tied to a particular age as determined by the historical circumstances of each subculture. In the case of those studied by Cooper Mayr and for the subjects of this research, the ubiquitous, intergenerational experience is the process of Chile's incorporation into the global market under a capitalist system, an experience that finds an outlet through collectivism rather than established political channels.

Interviews and conversations showed that visual kei is not seen as a direct oppositional product to those in the English or Spanish languages; it is regarded as just one more element of the domain of alternative music, and it is in this sense that it represents a response to the establishment. The language is not perceived as a barrier and, while the interviews revealed a general familiarity with it that was far from fluency, people interested in the lyrics of songs or on interviews with the artists were resourceful enough to find translations on the Internet or ask for help from people who

had better knowledge of Japanese. As participant observation of the subculture developed, it also became more apparent that the sense of deviance and of rebellion had been mostly assigned by people outside of the group. This is not to say that participants are or were unaware of the impact they cause on outsiders, but their reasons are framed more as an individual avenue of self-expression than as an active stance.

4.2 Visual as a Chilean subculture

4.2.1 Local forms of socialization

One of the outstanding characteristics of Santiago's visual kei scene, particularly when compared to the Japanese one, is the way that it is shaped through its participants' actions. Since the possibility of seeing the artists in live concerts or getting to meet them seemed like dreams, the formative years of the scene relied on self-produced events and informal gatherings to congregate without direct interaction with performers. More than an adaptation of Japanese forms of socialization or a mere replacement for them, what occurred was the incorporation of Japanese themes into modes of socialization already present among alternative Chilean social circles. This process differentiated visuals from both mainstream groups in their modes of socialization (dance parties within Santiago's alternative scene) and from other subcultures in the content around which they congregated (visual kei).

Family and societal circumstances forced some participants to keep their activities and even image secret from their family and acquaintances. It was a common practice during the height of the style's popularity to leave one's house in "normal" (family-approved) clothes, only to change

in the restrooms of the Entretenimientos Diana arcade before going to a dance party.[29] Aesthetic markers and preferred venues of socialization took shape under such circumstances, and this enhanced the crystallization of a distinct sphere for the style.

Also adding to this separation, all of the people I met within the subculture used a nickname to identify themselves. Although through constant contact they would be aware of some of the other participants' given names, they would still call each other by different ones. Most of the nicknames used were taken either from those of visual kei artists or common Japanese names that had become popularized through anime or manga. Therefore, it was not unusual to know more than a couple of "Mana," "Gackt," "Klaha," "Midori," and "Saku," among others. The action of naming oneself and of being recognized by such a name by others had a transformative effect; it increased the perception of visual kei events as a sphere separate from other aspects of life, where participants could explore identities with minimal judgment. The degree of separation of these spaces depended on the individual's circumstances. For example, during this research's fieldwork, one participant of the subculture explained that her pseudonym had become so widely used that even her parents had started calling her by it. Another one, during the *Kuchitril* podcast, explained that, while his visual identity represented by his pseudonym used to be more prevalent, with time he had started "just being [real name]" during his daily life and being his visual self only for visual kei-themed events (Klaha & Zukoe, 2014).

Of the different types of events that existed during the 2000s, the one form that has persisted has been that of dance parties. Although there are no longer daytime parties, the nighttime ones have been going through a sort of revival during the last couple of years, to the point that, when fieldwork was conducted, there was at least one party by a different VJ/producer every

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[29] This is another interesting parallel between the visuals and the Miyuki tribe members of Japan, who also resorted to changing outside of the home to avoid parental censure (Marx, 2015, Introduction, fifth paragraph).

weekend. Following Thorton's typology, Santiago's visual subculture would be part of the larger category of club cultures, which she describes as "taste cultures" which "generally congregate on the basis of their shared taste in music, their consumption of common media and, most importantly, their preference for people with similar tastes to themselves" (Thornton, 2003, p. 15).

Dance events have been the common space for youth culture socialization for decades. As González (2012) has chronicled, their predecessors were the *coléricos* and *carlotos*' *malones*. A word borrowed from the native Mapuche language, "*malón*" originally designated unexpected attacks conducted by the Mapuche people.[30] During the mid-twentieth century, it came to refer to parties, usually held at a private residence, in which each attendee would bring drinks and food, making it a collaborative event. This modality of events is no longer in vogue, but visual kei parties remain considerably small. Except for Kuchizuke, which works more as a VJ brand that is contracted into larger multi-themed parties, all active party brands during the fieldwork period were self-produced, with small groups of people or simply one person being in charge of venue-rental, music curation, venue decoration, equipment, publicity, and even alcohol sales unless the venue had its own bar.

Matus Madrid (2009) has remarked upon the dance style of alternative scenes within Blondie. In contrasting it with mainstream dance clubs' codes, he explains that, if the code of the mainstream youth party is dancing with a partner, in "alternative" dancing the emphasis is on distance, one dances with everyone but also with no one in particular (p. 10). While following this pattern, visual kei dancing is closer to an onstage performance than it is to other clubbing subcultures. All dances are accompanied by mouthing the lyrics of the songs and it seemed like a previous knowledge of each song was imperative to enjoy it to the fullest. It was rare that people

[30] The Real Academia Española defines it as an incursion or unexpected attack by indigenous people (2019).

didn't sing along and, when a less-known song came on, those who did not know it would take it as a cue to use the restrooms, get drinks, or simply leave to another dance room (or leave the party entirely).

Matus Madrid also tells of how dancing styles were affected by both the mood of the dancers and the songs played in a constant negotiation of proximity and boundaries. For example, he mentions that, when songs by either Morrisey or Siouxsie and the Banshees were played, some people would enthusiastically move as if they were dancing with the artist (2009, p. 107). Likewise, visual dancing was determined by the songs being played. Which songs are popular and/or recognizable is a direct result of availability and of the personal choices of the party's VJ. For example, although L'Arc-en-Ciel is not technically visual kei, it is played in all parties because it has come to be part of Santiago's visual kei canon; a list of songs that are basic knowledge to scene participants. This was also because each song has, through the years, come to have a proper way of being danced to. The prime example of this is Malice Mizer's 1998 song "Illuminati," which holds a somewhat infamous reputation within the scene and, sometimes, among outsiders who have been present when it is played or heard about it. The music video for the song features the band members engaging in various sadomasochistic acts with women, who ultimately are sacrificed violently in one way or another. The shocking video, together with the song's lyrics and the beat that is punctuated by the effect of a whip's lash, the song is danced to sensually by default, breaking the space between dancers that is common to almost all other songs. Rather than a couple's dance, "Illuminati" is usually danced to in groups where caresses and kisses are sometimes shared.

"Illuminati" is far from being the only sexually charged song by a visual kei artist, but its start is an immediate cue that the style of dance is bound to change, and people cheer to it. It is an

illustrative example of not only what occurs at visual kei parties but of how to (properly) conduct oneself in them because, while the merriment appears quite spontaneous, it is regulated by subcultural guidelines.

The necessary knowledge to conduct oneself in these events can be understood as subcultural capital which is, in this case, being embodied. Thornton (1995) gives the examples of “using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles. Both cultural and subcultural capital put a premium on the ‘second nature’ of their knowledges. Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard” (p. 27). If a visual kei event attendee broke the subculture’s code of conduct, it was seen as a transgression regardless of how well-achieved the visual look was. This subcultural capital could not be attained simply by owning music or having knowledge of visual kei as a genre; it was directly related to attendance to these events and the order of the songs could sometimes even be predicted according to the VJ and was specific to Santiago's scene.

If anyone danced to other songs with the level of sensuality of "Illuminati," they would risk being seen as overdoing it or not understanding when the appropriate time for such behavior was. Likewise, overstepping of boundaries during the dancing is also a problem. While for an outsider it might look like a free-for-all hedonistic ritual, the people dancing are usually friends and it was rare to see strangers dancing. When people who were not close to a particular inner circle attempted to join a dancing group or went too far with their touching, the displeasure of those involved was evident and it was due to more than the breaching of a personal boundary; it reflected the sense that the person had acted out of subcultural bounds. The dance moves are highly sexual, but they play out more as simulacra than a seduction that intends to progress further. The laughter and jesting during it, together with the familiarity among the subculture’s members, makes it more

ludic than sexual, yet this dimension can only be appreciated by those who have been present before.

Similarly, some songs with harder sounds and growling vocals announce a dance style close to mosh pits, in which dancers (on the occasions observed, male) will jump and push each other, but it is still possible to dance without becoming involved in them. However, like with "Illuminati," this also called for the subcultural knowledge of which instances and songs made it acceptable behavior. During three different night parties, by different organizers, the group of attendees that were part of the research and I had issues with someone who, while under the influence of alcohol, would run into us and push us. Informants made it clear that this was unacceptable behavior; this pushing might have been alright while dancing to certain songs and people who wished not to be pushed should exercise caution and not stay too close to a mosh pit, but this person's actions were showing a lack of understanding of when and how aggression was condoned.

"Illuminati" might be the most notorious of the visual kei party songs, yet it is far from being the only one. Gackt's second solo single from 1999, "Vanilla," is also a sensual song, but its meaning within the scene is quite different. If "Illuminati" is a referent for desire as a whole, "Vanilla" is one for male homoeroticism. This association could be partially due to Gackt's androgynous image during this era of his career and also to the flirting between Gackt with his guitarist in one of the live versions of the song.[31] The dancing is not as erotic as it is in "Illuminati" but the men will poke fun at it, at each other, and at themselves by modifying the lyrics of the song. In the chorus, the phrase *"aishitemo ii ka*?" (“is it okay to love you?”) is replaced with the Spanish

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[31] In the original music video, the person he chases is a woman and the male-on-male fanservice is only present in the live rendition.

one "*hazte marica"* ("become gay/queer") as a way of referencing the implications of the song and also the stereotypes surrounding the scene. While at a surface level it is a joke on the stereotypes associated with the subculture, particularly the idea that the male participants are either homosexual or bisexual, it uses sexual orientation as comedic material.

The practice of parodying the songs' lyrics is common in other instances as well. The same practice was observed regarding Baiser's song "*Furōra*." The last line of the chorus, "*hana ga saku no youni*," ("so that the flower blooms") was changed to "*a la casa y no huevís*" ("go home and don't be a pain in the ass") and sang out loud by most of the party attendees. The lyrics of the chorus of The Gazette's "Filth in the Beauty" were also changed from "closet mind" to "*conchasumadre*" ("motherfucker"), and the rest sung in its original Japanese and English form. That the most parody lyrics contain swear words that are unique to Chile (except for the ones for "Vanilla") creates a greater sense of closeness to the song as it becomes an inside joke, one that is closed off to the rest of subcultures that might share the space of a party and even to other Spanish-speaking visual kei scenes.

Another observed practice is that of changing artists' names to nicknames in Spanish. It became common to hear X Japan's Yoshiki being referred to as "*la vieja*" ("the hag/old woman") and L'Arc-en-Ciel's Hyde as "*la tía*" ("the aunt"). This was much less widespread than the changing of the lyrics (which was done by most party attendants regardless of which party it was) and the particular nicknames chosen might have been different in each group.

Rather than a lack of esteem or respect towards the artists, this practice humanizes them and brings them closer despite the distance separating the two countries. It also signaled that, even in the presence of intense investment in the genre, the informants did not want to appear to take

themselves too seriously; an excess of seriousness was also perceived as a negative trait within the subculture.

4.2.2 Visual kei subculture's potential as a space for exploration

During a conversation before attending a dance party, informants talked about whether there was a high percentage of sexual minorities in the scene. Although heterosexual men had commented saying that there were, one informant, who identifies as a gay man, explained that he did not agree because, in his experience, while there had been a lot of men who had explored their sexualities during the initial years of the scene, most of them had gone on to identify as heterosexual and have relationships with women, a statement that the rest of the informants present ultimately agreed with.

These conversations showed that, however unconsciously, homosexuality was seen as belonging to the realm of the parties as ritualized behavior sometimes associated with a specific setting, such as a song, but the expectation remained that most people would ultimately identify as heterosexual and leave those explorations behind. At the same time, those informants who identified as part of a sexual minority did not report having suffered any abuse from other people in the scene and found it to be accepting.

In the online questionnaire, which allowed respondents to remain anonymous, 34% identified as either homosexual or bisexual, which would represent a higher number than those reported for the general Chilean population of 1.8% as of 2017 (CASEN 2017, 2017). Although the sample size of the questionnaire does not allow for a proper comparison, it supports the observation that the subculture remains accepting of non-heterosexual orientations. However, even this space for relatively judgment-free exploration in terms of sexual orientation and gender expression did not fully escape the heteronormative expectations of Chilean society.

Despite the media's and the public's idea that the visual kei scene was particularly sexual and/or promiscuous, most of this happened in the context of youth exploration and is no longer a prominent feature, if it ever truly was. Informants have framed this as an environment of acceptance of diversity but also where there was a freedom to explore gender expression and sexual orientation without the need to affix any one label to oneself. When talking about both the crossdressing and same-sex relationships within the scene, one event organizer believed that it had been a passing trend but also a positive space for many. He added that,

> There used to be more guys dressed as women, but you no longer see so many "girl-boys."[32] I think they don't feel as much prejudice anymore, if they want to fool around they do so and that's it. They don't feel the need to put on a costume in order to do something. Everything starts with novelty, but those times are already in the past. (X.U., male, 40)

Interestingly, he talked about crossdressing and homosexual behavior as interconnected, but it was a combination of this fluidity in gender expression and the exploration common to most youth subcultures of the time that made the visual kei scene appealing to people looking for safer spaces. The same topic came up in a group interview, where two informants explained how, during the first years of the scene, the separation between it and other alternative ones, including LGBT spaces, was not so strict and that it was an appealing feature for outsiders to join. One of them expressed that, "there were a lot of gay boys that didn't have anything to do with the scene but felt accepted in it" (B.N., male, 32), which was agreed on by another informant by saying that "it was about belonging to something. It is more widely accepted now, but back then one channel was visual kei, where if you dressed up like a woman you would be told how cool you looked" (Y.N., male, 25). B.N. went on to add that, in his opinion, "they would come looking for acceptance. Out of thirty people, around four or five would come only looking for that in the parties and would

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[32] "Niños-niñas," a term used by the informant to refer to boys dressed as girls or with typically feminine traits.

know two or three bands," indicating that the rest of attendees would be there for other reasons, including feeling comfortable with their sexual orientation within the scene.

Some informants did mention that underground, privately produced parties featured more societally questionable behavior concerning sexual exploration, but they did not go into detail, nor was this observed during the time spent in the scene as these private parties no longer exist. These instances were talked about with nostalgia for a past that was regarded as more adventurous and authentic, but the changes to party behavior can be attributed to the aging of the subculture's participants rather than to the scene becoming more prohibitive.

Dance parties have been an essential element of youth subcultures of Chile since their earliest inceptions, dating back to the 1950s. What happens in them has also become part of the innovation brought about by succeeding generations with respect to their predecessors, marking differences such as acceptance or rejection of non-heteronormative identities or the introduction of foreign languages to those of the songs played. However, the innovations also jelled and remain a common form of socialization. Also, they occupy spaces that are dwelled by other groups and this results in blending amongst such groups.

Visual kei is born as much out of the interest in the Japanese genre as it is born out of the already-existing Chilean alternative scene, and it follows patterns more closely associated with the latter. This is not to say that there is no relationship to the country where the visual kei industry is located. In almost all the cases studied, the interest in the genre was preceded by some level of exposure to Japanese popular culture and visual kei is recognized as being a specifically Japanese product.

Chapter 5: The subcultural body as a space of expression and resistance

> The informants with whom I attended the dance party have lost interest in the music being played, so we head out for a smoke break. As we lean against the wall on the sidewalk, looking at people coming and going in their mostly black attire, we start talking about visual kei fashion. The two females, with whom I have had similar conversations previously, tell me about the reasons for their style, citing personal expression and sense of identity and dismissing other people's opinions when choosing what to wear. However, they are cut off by the third informant. He chuckles and says, "Come on, we all know that nobody dressed like this to remain unnoticed." (fieldnotes, March 23, 2019)

Subcultures catch the eye of the outsider for two reasons: the size of their gatherings and the style they embody. The latter's most visible aspect is that of their fashion as expressed through clothing, makeup, and accessories. The explanation given by visuals for their style might at times be simple, but the coding and decoding of signs that are involved in the display of subcultural style is a complex process that is sometimes intentionally obfuscated.

This style is often seen as incompatible with adult obligations, a conception that contributes to the notion that subcultures are only the domain of youth. Nevertheless, even in their adulthood visuals utilize different strategies to show that they remain active members of their community despite how much it may seem like they have moved on and joined the so-called mainstream.

5.1 Style and fashion as disruption

Style, both as fashion and as demeanor, has been regarded as one of the funding elements of subculture and one which simultaneously differentiates it from the parent culture and ties it to it. Hall (1973/2003) proposes three methods of coding and decoding television discourses, which can be applied to subcultural style as a form of communication: the one in which the decoder is

operating within the “dominant code”; a second one which gives privilege to the hegemonic code buts allows for a “negotiated code”; and a third one which, despite understanding how the hegemonic code was used for coding the message, consciously decides to use a “contrary code” for the decoding (p. 515-517).

Hebdige (1979), following Hall, argues that subcultural style works as a reflection of the tensions present between the dominant and the subordinate groups, which are, in turn, expressed through signs (p.9). Without a linear connection between the sign exhibited, a sole intention, and the reading of others of those same signs, they are susceptible to analysis at the coding and decoding level.

Santiago’s visuals narratives on style suggest that they believed they were decoding visual kei style according to Japanese hegemonic codes; however, accounts show that the access to these systems of meaning was limited. Whatever the original message encoded in visual kei’s imagery might have been, Chilean audiences had not been its target decoders. Moreover, visual kei aesthetics already borrowed from the global imagery of hard rock, glam, and punk, among others. The reading of these signs becomes further problematized when being read by outsiders to the subculture; regardless of the intention with which visuals coded certain signs in their vestiary choices, they were read by Santiago’s public through a Chilean hegemonic code and informants were aware of this fact.

A style might be “intentional communication,” but it does not secure a sole reading, and, in fact, some subcultures seek this semiotic confusion and perturbation of the naturalization of the ideology embedded in signs (Hebdige, p. 101). Such is the case of visual kei, which explicitly seeks to produce shock through spectacle, a feature that makes it particularly sensitive to an analysis of what Hebdige (1979) described as "the superficial level of appearances; that is, at the

level of signs" (p.17), because its very foundation is explicitly situated in the concept of disruption through visual shock.

The notion of shock relies on the idea of normalcy of the society in which it is performed, which would originally have been the one of Japan during the late 1980s and the 1990s. While much of its stylistic repertoire were emulations and adaptations of global rock music trends, visual kei's positioning within the Japanese music industry and society at large, coupled with the amplification and overplaying of tropes, would set visual kei aesthetics apart from similar styles worldwide.

The style's potential for shock became exacerbated when extrapolated to another country unfamiliar with the background in which said style developed. When participants of the Chilean scene wear what they identify as visual kei clothing, the media and onlookers attempt to connect it to their own cultural references, producing new meanings and ensuring that, however internally homogenized both in Japan and abroad, visual kei's clashing combination of signs will evoke a feeling of displacement.

Subcultures use objects "not simply picking them up, but actively constructing a specific selection of things and goods into a style" in ways that are at times subversive of their original meanings (Clarke et al., 1972/2003). As members of Santiago's alternative scene, which had decades of decoding through contrary readings, visuals approached visual kei with a local subcultural framework even as it was not clear whether visual kei itself was part of Japanese mainstream or of a subculture in its own country.

According to informants and observation conducted in the city of Santiago, full visual kei attire outside of visual kei-oriented events has decreased since the first decade of the 2000s, when it was common to see scene participants dressed in the style in public spaces, particularly near

specialized stores such as those inside the Eurocentro shopping center and the nearby meeting point informally called Imán.

Nevertheless, visual kei dance parties provide a space to wear specialized clothing and makeup, sometimes devoting hours to preparations. This is embodied by the Chilean expression used by informants, "*producirse*," the reflexive of the verb "*producir*" ("to produce"). In this research, the expression has been translated as "getting decked out," but the full implications get lost in translation. "*Producirse*" holds the connotation of hard labor put into attaining a certain look, which includes not only clothing but also makeup and hairstyling. It also suggests a degree of artificiality and of the human ability to manufacture an image of the self to present in public that stands in opposition to the everyday, unadorned look.

In addition to the efforts put into party attires, many of the informants admit to having kept certain visual kei markers in their everyday life, even if they have been modified in order to fit into the workforce. For example, those working in corporate environments may keep strands of dyed hair or buzzcuts hidden; the men with long hair may be required to wear it pulled back during work hours or face piercings are removed during the time at work only to be put back on once the workday is over.

Visual kei embodied by Chilean fans does partially respond to a desire to emulate the style of the artists, but it is also explained and justified by participants in various ways that connect it to their personal experiences and avoid equating it with the blind following of a trend.

Subcultural style works as it is performed and displayed; it becomes validated by receiving the sight of the Other and sometimes revels in its own unintelligibility. Sennett (1998), working from Levinas's and Ricoeur's theories, emphasizes the necessity of this Other as both gaze and accountability for the formation of the Self (p. 145). In the case of subcultures, this need for an

external observer is made explicit and the performance of the self is externalized in style. Visual kei plays with the notion that the individual is aware of the chaotic mesh of signs that he or she is wearing, yet consciously decides to override their meaning as a fashion statement.

5.2 Visual kei style displayed in Santiago

Santiago's visual kei scene is markedly less varied in its fashion style than the bands that it follows, which can be attributed to the lack of access to the clothes themselves and to possessing different references and criteria to build upon. It still manages to exhibit the eclectic tendencies of the Japanese scene, albeit at a more modest degree, by incorporating goth, punk, glam, and Harajuku style fashion.[33] One visual kei substyle that was not consistently observed while looking through past events' photographs was the one that alludes to traditional Japanese clothing, such as the modern interpretations of *yukata* (light summer kimono), the *haori* (kimono-style jacket), or even just the use of Japanese print patterns, worn by visual kei artists such as Kagrra or Kiryu. This can be attributed to the lack of access to these items of clothing, which would later need to be modified (by tearing or dying) in order to fit the visual kei image, to the lack of access to textiles that could be made into Japanese-style garments, and to the difficulty of having them tailor-made in a country that is unfamiliar with the patterns. Recent events' photographs posted on social media do show some people mixing *haori*-like jackets in their outfits, perhaps because online shopping and increased demand for Japanese popular culture has made them more available.

Although the impact of these visual elements is not as provoking as those of punk style as presented by Hebdidge, I contend that the use of motifs such as goth ones also presents a semantic

[33] "Harajuku style" is an umbrella term used for the street fashions worn by some young people in the Harajuku district of Shibuya, Tokyo, including lolita and decora.

disruption. They do not oppose the politics of respectability associated with clothing and its state (whole, clean) as torn fabrics do, but they present an anachronism and anatopism; someone in Santiago de Chile wearing Victorian-inspired black clothes is, for most observers, unexpected. The same applies to Harajuku style; even as it has become somewhat normalized in Japan through media, seeing it boldly displayed in a different country's urban setting also causes an impact on onlookers.

At first glance, the average Chilean visual kei participant's style resembles that of his or her goth fellow subculturalists and is inseparably tied to the color black. Some informants criticized this uniformity in the scene and its allegedly incorrect identification of visual kei style with black clothing. One ventured that "I think it might have been because [the performers] would dress in a suit for concerts and certain events. And, compared to making your own clothes, it was easier to buy a black suit for twenty *lucas*."[34] While acquisition power and access to clothing were limited, it would be inaccurate to attribute the use of black solely to these reasons. Although Japanese visual kei is not limited to this color, it is a predominant one. It is either worn in clothing or, in the case of more colorful substyles, it is mixed with other colors or used in makeup.

As much as it is used in mainstream fashion, black remains associated with alternative lifestyles. Black is identified with sobriety and sophistication, yet, depending on the context and the way it is worn, it is also a sign of mourning, emptiness, or the mystery of the unknown. Cooper Mayr (2007, Los Valores Góticos section) identifies the use of the color black in the goth stereotype as a symbol of death and also of mourning for society. Black served as a marker of subcultural affiliation even when other elements of the style were not present, and, although it did not indicate which subculture the wearer belonged to, it attested to the fluidity of the visual kei

[34] "*Luca*" is a Chilean colloquialism meaning a thousand Chilean pesos, making this 20,000 CLP (24.2 USD according to the May 15, 2020, exchange rate).

scene in its acceptance of participants that belonged to more than one style. Much like the Japanese visual kei artists, participants incorporate elements of dress and accessories from various styles to add on to this black canvas created by the clothing.se

Participation in the scene in Chile is not limited to those that dress in a typical visual kei style, and thus it is common in events to see people in elaborate attires as well as others who would wear dark (usually black) bottoms mixed with also dark shirts, sometimes with band logos, and even some colored ones. In every dance party attended, there was a small fraction of the attendants that sported elaborate, aristocratic-style clothing, yet the average attendant wore a more moderate look. Together with black-colored clothes, many women choose short to mid-length skirts with ruffles and lace trimmings, while men complement their look with accessories such as hats or gloves.

Dresses and skirts are sometimes reminiscent of elegant gothic lolita fashion in their length (knee-height) and their shape (bell-shape, but it is not common to see people wearing the petticoat that is required for the lolita silhouette). Although the lolita subculture exists in Chile parallel to (and sometimes intertwined with) visual kei, these influences are at least partially due to Malice Mizer's Mana's style. Some of the participants indicated that they believed that the lack of information of the early years had made people equate visual kei with lolita, which has remained a common inspiration until this day, but lolita is only one of the styles that may be worn by artists and fans. Other women would wear shorter pleated skirts, shorts with tights (sheer or nets) under them, or simply black pants. One garment that was seen on many women was the corset, both overbust and underbust, worn over the different clothing described above.

Instead of purchasing already-made clothes with the ragged styles, before online shopping became popular, the method to modify them was simply to cut or tear clothes themselves,

particularly black pants and shirts. Some informants also attested to buying sheer undershirts, which could be worn under school uniforms, and poking a hole near the end of the sleeve for the thumb to come through, creating a fingerless glove look. Clothing modifications became and remain the most common form of creativity within the scene. Despite the later emergence of official visual kei brands, most people keep working with clothes that can be purchased locally. Accessibility to clothes and materials still plays a role in the styles that are worn. Cotton, tulle, and lace are much more affordable and easier to manipulate than materials such as leather, PVC, and latex, which marked the fetish elements of visual kei style in Malice Mizer's, Dir en Grey's, and others' music videos.

It was in the makeup and hairstyles that the Japanese influence became more apparent: layered haircuts, straightened bangs that would cover one eye, and dyed propped-up hair. Makeup is also worn regardless of gender. Although it is by no means uniform, it is common to see eyeliner either in black or red, dark lipstick, shaved and painted-on eyebrows, and white foundation. More than enhance facial features, the combination of these makeup elements, and sometimes colored lenses, created an unearthly appearance that marked the theatricality and spectacularism of the whole ensemble.

On the one hand, safety pins, like in punk, are used to hold clothes together or as piercing jewelry, providing an edgy, tough appearance to the wearer. On the other, images of crosses and skulls are displayed in jewelry and prints. When asked directly about it, the informants denied that these symbols held any meaning apart from their aesthetic purpose.

> A big part of it is fashion; the goth usage of crosses, pentagrams, and the goat ['s head], but there are some people among visuals and goths that have spiritual inclinations. It is the same thing with those guys that like reggaeton and wear a rosary; it is fashion. (N.S. male, 33)

The same people, however, were quick to point out that they were not ignorant of the traditional meaning behind what they used as an adornment.

If the transgressive potential of subcultural style lies in that it "challenges the principle of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 18), using these symbols as only fashion statements, de-naturalizing their meanings and managing to make indents in the straight reproduction of the parent culture, is transgressive in and of itself. Regardless of whether this was the intention of the participants in the scene or not, the style constructed through all the stylistic practices effectively disrupted the assigned reading of their attire.

It is noteworthy that the few people who intentionally avoided wearing references to Christianity, particularly the image of the cross, were those that had been raised in a religious setting and did not accept the divorce of this symbol from its relationship to faith.

> I don't wear anything with crosses out of respect. . . . I don't find them aesthetically pleasing, perhaps because I have seen crosses my whole life, so it is kind of mundane to me. . . . It is not a problem for me if a band wears it, but it isn't for me. (M.D., female, 27)

This informant, although having stated that she is no longer a practicing Catholic, expressed the idea that it was fallacious to dissociate the cross, especially as a crucifix, from Christianity and thus wearing it as a fashion accessory was disrespectful towards the religion.

Another informant, on the contrary, stated his belief that most visual kei participants wore various symbols and styles without caring about their meaning, only focusing on their potential for shock. He illustrated his point by talking about shirts that had been painted to simulate having blood on them in the same manner that some artists did in their promotional shoots.

> You could try to find a spiritual meaning to it, but aesthetics come first; the band looks cool like this so I will do it too. We did some 'bloody shirts'-themed parties and all the guys came, and the girls were wearing dresses with blood on them. Nobody took it as something mystical. (P.R., male, 33)

In this statement, something as graphic and gory to the general population is regarded only as fashion and worn for shock value together with an inclination for grotesque aesthetics. Blood, like many other elements, can be then also separated from its role as an index indicating the existence of a real wound under bloodied clothes or of a violent aggressor quick to draw blood from victims. Blood is also part of the imagery of vampires, which has a long tradition as a horror and romantic motif in both goth and visual kei and works as a connecting element between the subcultures.

During one of the conversations with T.G. (29, male), he talked about the stylistic choices of visuals vis-à-vis those of other subcultures. When asked about whether visuals could be differenced from other groups by style alone, he explained that this had changed together with the subculture and with media coverage:

> Before, you couldn't [tell them apart], now you can. . . .Before, visuals would wear ruffled shirts and so would goths. The haircut was sideways, like Tilo Wolff's in the "Copycat" era[35], so you would look very similar to goth, deathrock, and even visual kei. . . . When television started talking more about what visual kei was people started saying "ah, so this is visual, this is goth, this is industrial, this is punk."

Visuals might have been stylistically indistinguishable from other subcultures, it moved towards a level of uniformity that is present to this day in its more toned-down version. For example, the three Kuchizuke dance parties held at Blondie which were attended as part of this research were set alongside a larger goth event called Dark Dance. The main dance floor was dedicated to EBM and industrial dance music while Kuchizuke occupied a smaller dance floor. Although visual kei borrows from goth style, among others, and this is reflected in its fans in the Santiago scene, the style of the dancers in the main dance floor and in the Kuchizuke section was markedly different. This might have been due to the theme of the party, which was leather and

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[35] Tilo Wolff is the vocalist of German/Finn gothic music duo Lacrimosa, whose single "Copycat" was released as part of the *Inferno* album in 1995.

fetishwear. Visuals who were attending Kuchizuke did not follow the dress guidelines for the main event and wore more casual clothes such as the ones described earlier in this chapter. However, just by the small details such as the way their hair was styled, with bangs and haircuts that resembled those of members of the emo subcultures, they could be differenced from goth members.

5.3 Performances of gender in the visual kei scene

The Chilean scene retains the characteristic androgyny and freedom of stylistic expression of the industry. Personal accounts and photographs taken at the height of visual kei's popularity attest to crossdressing being more prevalent in the 2000s than it is now. When asked, the way this was framed was that there was no need for it to be read as anything related to sexual orientation but only a stylistic choice. The startling cosmetics and sartorial choices opened up a semiosis that dismantled stereotypes present in Chilean society regarding clothing; if the wearing of women's garments (i.e., skirts and corsets) and makeup by men has traditionally been read as indicating homosexuality, the Chilean visual kei scene poses a challenge as men nonchalantly displace all these gender codes and break their readings by being used regardless of sexual orientation.

Butler (1992/2002) highlights the subversive potential of drag inasmuch the practice holds the power to upset the normalized construction of gender by exhibiting its artificiality. Johnson (2020) applies this analysis to the gender performance of visual kei artists. While some performers de-stabilized gender normativity through the "layering of (usually) male gender identity with typically feminine-coded items, language, and expressions" (p.120), others, the author argues, queer their lives by explicitly refusing to label their gender and their sexual orientation (p. 126). Similarly, aesthetic choices of men in Santiago's visual subculture upset the socially-sanctioned

performance of gender without most of its members declaring that their practices indicated a sexual orientation.

Nevertheless, the binary of the genders persisted; the subcultural space works as a playfield, yet it is not devoid of the structures that govern the interactions of its social actors at a larger scale. Skirts and dresses were not split from their place as markers of women's attire; many informants and practitioners referred to this as "dressing up as a woman," emphasizing that they had not redefined clothes as genderless. This carried the notion that "womanness" could be performed; the same way that in 1990s visual kei it was common for one bandmember to take the role of the woman/princess/maiden within the bands' arrangement, this "dressing up as a woman" was differenced from partially adopting an androgynous look.

What set this apart from other forms of cross-dressing was that Santiago's visual kei scene participants, at least at a discourse level, severed the connection between the practice and male homosexuality; men wearing women clothing in visual kei events in Santiago were not expected to be homosexual any more than their non-crossdressing peers. When asked about the practice, informants would point to how Japanese visual kei artists portray these looks and, allegedly, they are not interpreted by Japanese society as homosexual, claiming to be working under those standards rather than the more restrictive Chilean ones.

This pervading presence of the gender binary was also extended to the treatment of sexual orientations. While informants attested to the relative acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality in the subculture, the use of references to homosexuality in parody lyrics such as Vanilla's and by the hosts and invitees of the *Kuchitril* podcast as a source of humor perpetuate a treatment already present in society. Can one become gay, as the parodied lyrics of "Vanilla" suggest? If so, is this sexual orientation temporary and lasts only for the duration of the song, after which dancers usually

separate and go back to a more distant form of dancing? It is possible that the answer depends on each person, but visual parties remain a rather heteronormative space.

As for the possibility of women exhibiting the same degree of androgyny or donning masculine clothes, the lack of men-only wear makes the answer more ambiguous. As among men, the choices in attire among women are varied, going from corsets and dresses to plain pants and shirts. As a whole, the displays witnessed at events did not exhibit the "cult of femininity" that Brill (2008, p. 41) reports of the goth scene, and which would restrict women's style to a form of femininity that, when embodied by them, reinforced gender stereotypes whereas that same attire provided a higher degree of subcultural capital to male participants who donned them. When female informants were asked about it, some highlighted the freedom of the scene.

> I think what I liked about this trend was that it was really free; people, in general, didn't really care about looking masculine or feminine. It was a matter of style; some liked lace, looking pretty and kind of glamorous. (Y.F., female, 32)

However, in a subculture that thrives on visual shock, male cross-dressing is a source of subcultural capital, one that is restricted to one gender. Although the constraints presented to women in regard to genderbending might not be as overt as in other subcultures, the acquisition of subcultural capital is greatly diminished for female participants. It is possible that this is a factor that makes female visuals find a different source such as knowledge of bands or commitment of time to the scene to attain similar levels of subcultural capital. In comparison to the prevalence of men as VJs and dance party organizers and as bandmembers, women in the subculture tend to occupy less visible positions despite the results from the online questionnaire and observations showing that the gender ratio is close to 1:1. One position that was prevalent among female informants was as either leaders or members of fan clubs. These were essential to the support of visual kei artists that would eventually hold concerts in the country but provided less

individualized platforms for its members to become figureheads in Santiago's scene because the fan clubs' main intention was to bolster the artists.

It is more complicated to assess whether cross-dressing by females has been a common practice in the scene. Since most of what is deemed masculine clothing can be seen as unisex (such as pants or even suits) and visual kei fashion is already comparatively feminine when contrasted with Western menswear (in that it focuses on adornment rather than comfort), unless it was acknowledged as such by the person wearing it, a cross-dressing look was impossible to identify in a woman. The exception was when a female would explicitly state that she was dressed as a specific male artist, a practice that crosses into the realm of cosplay. However, this was done outside of cosplay events and would become such a characteristic style for the wearer that they would become known in the scene as someone who "dressed up as." The most cited example among informants was that of female fans who would dress as the vocalist of Dir en Grey, Kyo, who has become an emblematic and admired artist within the Chilean fan community.

The level of self-expression present in subcultural style needs to also be analyzed as the possibility of hiding what is perceived to be the real self by the conscious creation of public personas, as is the case of the following testimony:

> I feel that you dress like this kind of to avoid showing yourself. Sometimes I am less embarrassed to talk to people if I am dressed up as another character. . . I never liked dressing up as myself because I felt like it did not look good on me, it was like everyone looked cool all decked out and I was so plain. (H.B., female, 25)

The close personal identification with one particular performer, especially given that Kyo is credited for the lyrics of Dir en Grey's music, made it both an occasion of costuming and one of expression through this very same costume. Dressing up as an artist became a double act of displaying oneself and of hiding under the guise of makeup and characterization, which, in the case of this informant, facilitated interactions.

5.4 Style and subcultural authenticity

The discourse around the personal adoption of visual kei style is individualized and presents many apparent contradictions. During the interviews conducted, one of the questions asked was about when and how they had started wearing black and/or visual kei-style clothing. While some people have never dressed in the style, they are the minority; most interviewees and poll respondents stated that at some point they did dress at least in a darker fashion, which set them apart from what they considered to be the mainstream Chilean look.

The responses to the question, which sometimes did not need to be formulated and would come naturally during the conversation, pointed to the beginning of teenage years as the onset of experimenting with style as a form of expression. One informant characterized this age for him and others as one during which identities and preferences are being defined.

> I was about fourteen. I was going through that phase when you are trying to figure out what's up, where your life is going, what you want to do, where you fit in, and I didn't fit in anywhere. (P.R., male, 33)

In his and other cases, the change in style coincided with the introduction to visual kei, even if they had been exposed to other forms of what they believed to be non-mainstream music genres. T.G. (29, male) stated: "When I became conscious of what I was listening to and started plucking my eyebrows and all of that… that must have been when I was around twelve." This is echoed by most of the informants and cuts across genders. A female informant also highlighted the transformative potential of early adolescence and how, coupled with admiration of visual kei performers, it changed the way she dressed and her overall attitude:

> I think that when you are younger you look for your identity, you say, 'well, what am I going to be like in the future?' They would kind of inspire you to dress in a certain way. . . .You kind of would always wear your hair over your face, you would always dress darker." (V.C., female, 26)

In these personal narratives, visual kei style is both a discovery and a restatement of tendencies that were dormant within the individual, a style that appeals to a particular type of personality, becoming only a vehicle to showcase a pre-existing tendency. In a group setting fixated on authenticity, stating that the change was brought forward by mere exposure to a style is seen as a reprehensible motivation.

Some of the informants reported having already participated in subcultures with different degrees of involvement before they began systematically listening to visual kei and attending events. One of them explained that she was already part of the goth subculture.

> I listened to goth music but also British music.[36] I started looking for something that would represent me because I was a depressive bitch (laughter). I would write poems about wanting to kill myself and all that stuff. I started looking for things on vampires, I found goth music and it opened a whole new world. . . . With my friend from school we got involved with goth, went to the Parque Forestal,[37] and met more people. I was about thirteen or fourteen years old, but later I lost contact with them because I started studying [in college]. (B.R., female, 35)

In her account, being involved in the goth subculture meant both sharing interests that are identified with the subculture (i.e. vampirism, music taste) and spending time with other participants. Although the conversation did not go further into details of what it meant for her to be a goth, she did indicate that, having been one already, there was a precedent for her joining the visual kei scene. When asked, on a different occasion, about her clothing style, her remarks on how she was already a goth indicated that she believed it had not changed significantly.

This previous interest in non-mainstream music and fashion was mentioned by other informants: “Back then I was Britpop. I did like alternative music, but visual kei was kind of goth, kind of otaku… it was really bizarre” (X.M. male, 32).

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[36] When British music is mentioned, it usually refers to Britpop, a British alternative rock style from the 1990s.

[37] Urban park in downtown Santiago where some youth subcultures congregated.

When asked about what it was about visual kei that made him adhere to the style, he insisted on the uniqueness of it within the alternative scene:

> I always listened to all kinds of music, but style-wise what I most followed and most identified with was visual kei because it was the most extreme within the scene. I saw it and said, 'this is it; this is my thing,' because it was something completely different.

While this last sentence remarks on the difference of visual kei from other styles, this is done regarding its degree of perceived intensity and eclecticism rather than it being wholly apart from them. This is a common element in the personal narratives on the adoption of visual kei style. Even when the informants were not participants of another subculture before exposure to visual kei, their introduction to it and subsequent change in clothing style are articulated as an expression of personal truths rather than having an impressionable young mind.

The Chilean visual kei scene is far from exclusive in its acceptance of various influences or even of people who do not wear subcultural markings as part of the scene, but their relationship with the clothes revealed a semi essentialist view of authenticity in which a core identity exists throughout their lives and finds different styles that express it better than others. The discovery of visual kei style as an option in early adolescence would not stem so much from the changes that come during that life-stage as from being able to channel pre-existing interests and personality traits.

> I have always liked the goth style since I was a child, so when I found visual [kei] I fell in love. I already dressed in black as much as I could, because you have your family saying things like ‘why do you wear black if you are a girl? What about colors?’ So, I struggled with that for a long time and I would look for black clothes in normal stores. (D.V., female, 24)

D.V., during informal conversations, mentioned being interested in goth, but, unlike B.R., did not recount participating in the subculture by meeting with other goths, instead referring to an array of personal interests that included the morbid, dark, and metal music.

This previous interest in non-mainstream music and lifestyles was a common part of these personal narratives. In them, visual kei is seen as an extension, or subset, of alternative style instead of a completely separate realm. Even when they report not being part of another subculture before their introduction to visual kei, the identification with it is said to stem from an inner tendency. In a narrative that cuts across genders and ages, visual kei only comes to further an alleged pre-existing interest in darker themes and aesthetics.

> I did dress in black before, but more normal. I didn't wear makeup or skirts; that is something that came with visual kei. With the events at the Planetarium, I said, 'okay, let's wear eyeliner.' It escalated. (N.S., male, 33)

A female informant talked about her experience while growing up, indicating that she could not place the exact moment that she had started to wear black or dress in visual kei style.

> I would get decked out, but it wasn't extreme; I would just dress in black and wear makeup. It was every day, I always identified with a dark side, but I wouldn't be able to tell you whether I was a goth or what. (C.T., female, 29)

This points to a subculture that, at a personal and group level, places value on the purity of the motivations for adhesion. In this case, said purity is not defined by exclusive belonging to the visual kei scene; in fact, belonging to a coexisting subculture with a more structured or explicit set of norms and values seems preferable. As visual kei is seen as not holding a specific life philosophy, participation in one that does helps fill that gap and presents the subculturalist as one who has motivations beyond aesthetics. The one most mentioned was goth, despite this subculture not presenting a unified philosophy either.[38]

What is important is that the adherence to visual kei not be based on aesthetic aspects alone. This creates an apparent contradiction; visual kei is explained as an aesthetic movement, yet participants are expected to base their interest in it on more than this aspect.

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[38] Cooper Mayr (2007) identifies among Chilean goths a common interest in self-discovery that includes the darkest facets of the self.

During a group interview, one informant harshly criticized those that he believed were overly focused on looks in detriment of musical knowledge:

> There were very few in the scene that could both say that they were visual and that they knew a lot of bands. They would fall into this game of 'I want to be in the scene to be the prettiest and flashiest boy, and if I am not I will leave.' (Y.N., male, 34)

The criticism of this perceived shallowness was directed at male scene participants more so than their female counterparts. It can be speculated that this is related to an underlying social standard that recognizes men's interest in style and fashion as deviant, and thus something that needs addressing, favorably or otherwise. Male interest in fashion for the sake of visual pleasure or simply as a hobby is not acceptable, but when it stems from an intellectual drive it does. In contrast, women's fixation on style did not seem worth mentioning, as it was seen as the default. This followed the masculine orientation of the scene that attempted to override the overly made-up image of the performers (associated with femininity) by focusing on the accumulation of knowledge of the music (associated with masculinity). In this conception, women are seen as innately fashion-oriented, and thus their interest in other aspects of the genre are not highlighted as strongly as in the case of men.

Fashion within the subculture was regarded for the most part as a positive feature, especially in its apparent freedom of expression and acceptance of various substyles and medleys. Most of the scene participants lack access to (or lack the interest in) Japanese clothing brands, so subcultural capital is not dependent upon the ownership of such items.

However, there were other ways in which clothes and makeup could impact a member's subcultural standing. One informant brought up the effect that the scene's focus on style and physical appearance had on her as a teenager:

> There some envy based on appearance and everyone wants to stand out. It is about who looks the best, because that is kind of what visual is about: having a visual impact on others. . . . I did realize later that it had lowered my self-esteem, because it is a world where

> everyone wants to stand out and you are trying to stand out by any means possible; physically, visually. You end up saying “damn, that one over there stands out more than I do, and I am just here wasting my time.”. . . I saw a lot of people who were sad, who couldn’t go out with the level of makeup and dress they wanted, so they would decide not to attend a certain event. (J.V., female, 30)

The focus put in style is visible not only when observing the clothes themselves, but also when informants share the difficulties that they had to overcome in order to achieve their desired look. On the one hand, there was the work put into either acquiring, modifying, or making clothes from scratch; an informant described how he would go as far as to make his own hair extensions from scratch by taking apart braided cords. On the other hand, not all families were supportive of these stylistic choices, especially if the informants were underage at the time. The disapproval from the family could be avoided by changing in the route between their home and the event; this was done either at friends’ houses, at common meetup spots such as the Entretenimientos Diana arcade, or in the restrooms of the final destination. In these moments, the private act of putting on makeup and clothes became a communal one, and it was not uncommon for people to help one another. Even nowadays, you can observe both men and women helping fix each other’s hair and makeup during parties, and the meticulousness in preserving one’s appearance is not looked down upon.

Although the change to visual kei or another alternative style marks a symbolic break from parental control in the informants’ narratives, this was not always synonymous with an actual separation from them. The element of shock would commonly be first tested, intentionally or not, with those in the closest circle of the participant: family members. Chile was assessed by informants as a conservative society, making the expected reaction to all the elements of visual kei aesthetics, particularly androgyny and cross-dressing, a negative one. However, when asked about their parents’ responses to their clothing style, the responses were mixed, going from rejection to full acceptance and even participation of parents in the making of clothes.

Most of those who remain in the scene, including those that used to wear some of the most elaborate looks during the 2000s, have toned down the style in their everyday life. The most cited reason for this is workplace demands; informants reported that employers expected their employees to hide tattoos, maintain hair colors within the natural range, and to wear "work-appropriate" clothes, which left little space for the garments and accessories mentioned earlier. Some work in occupations that allow hairdressing and tattooing, but most of the informants were working in office settings.

Another explanation given was that people, as they grow up and acquire more responsibilities, naturally grow out of more extreme styles. In this regard, the question of whether visual kei style even looked good on non-teenage bodies was a contested one. This was emphasized in the case of males; some argued that the androgynous look could simply not be achieved by adult Chilean men.

When X.M. (32, male) was asked if he still dressed in women's clothes for events, he answered that he had stopped in his twenties, further explaining that his opinion was that "the whole point is looking feminine, and my facial hair grew and my back broadened." Another male informant, who advocated for the possibility of still wearing visual kei style later in life, still stated that he believed there was an adequate physical type for it.

> A lot of people say, 'Why would I get decked out if I don't have the body anymore.' And I go, man, I am sitting down all day at work but still worry about my physical appearance, I exercise and all that. I don't want to gain weight because a chubby visual looks awful (laughter). (T.G., male, 29)

These and similar comments on who had the necessary physical characteristics to perform femininity showed that femininity itself was associated with a specific body type and features, particularly slimness. It was not so much about males or females being allowed to wear feminine outfits or about age itself being a restriction, but the approval of said look depended on whether it

could embody that specific, restrictive image of the feminine. In contrast, no comments on the aptness of subcultural style for adults were made with respect to female participants.

5.5 The aging of (and aging within) Santiago's visual kei subculture

All informants agreed that visual kei fans during the 2000s had been much more overt in their attire. When talking about the lack of effort put in clothes and makeup of party-attendees in recent years, Y.F. jokingly quoted Dir en Grey's Kyo's own change of style as a catalyst for this change: "Kyo from Dir en Grey put on an Adidas jacket and screwed all of us over. It is like they took visual kei off and then everything was allowed." However, she also added that she herself had simply come to like attending parties because of the dancing, "not to have your picture taken." This statement reinforces the narrative that there is a negative connotation to participation for only aesthetic purposes; this informant deems emphasis on attire and getup as too conceited and preoccupied with external validation (the act of having a picture taken) over a purer form of adhesion that focuses on music.

These changes were not only perceived among older attendants; younger groups did not take on the gaudiness of their predecessors either and, while many did get dressed up to attend events, it was by no means ubiquitous to any age group. Moreover, certain markers of subcultural association have become accepted at a mainstream level: fantasy-colored hair; tattoos; dark, heavy makeup on women, and even some clothing items such as pleated skirts, once a garment that indicated someone's interest in Asian popular culture, are now regularly seen among young people in Santiago. P.R. (male, 33) expressed his view that "young people… kind of started becoming normal again, they don't see the appeal of weirdness. Now it is accessible to everyone, so it is hard to distinguish whether someone is something [associated with a scene or subculture] or not."

Subcultural markings are then no longer enough to differentiate members from outsiders and then cease to work as such. The same informant later in the interview also associated the shift in visuals' style to the changes of artists' looks: "After Miyavi, a lot of people showed up who wanted to be like… pretty; an earring here and there, a Miyavi-style shirt." He did not specify whether he was referring to Miyavi's visit to Chile in 2008 or to the way in which Miyavi's own style had changed throughout his career. It is true that, alongside the look of visual kei artists such as X Japan and Malice Mizer, the 2000s saw the emergence of artists whose looks leaned less towards goth and included more colors and prints, such as An Cafe and LM.C., which were imitated by their Chilean fans. However, from what was observed during dance parties, there is not a predominance of one style over the others or even discernable substyles.

It is possible that this shift responds to changes in modes of association with cultural products rather than an abandonment of subcultures per se. The information collected through the online questionnaire suggests that most visuals are between 21 and 30 years of age, so it is not necessarily an old subculture but certainly not one made up of teenagers.[39] Dance parties have long ceased to be the only space in which to listen to visual kei music, and the acquisition power that comes with employment allows fans to gather at home or inside businesses such as restaurants and bars, or simply to communicate using the Internet, thus reducing the occasions in which they display subcultural style and also the significance of the style overall as a source of distinction.

Even as the style becomes toned down and/or is relegated to special events, informants keep elements and incorporate them into their lives. From piercings that are taken out during work hours to hair color that is taken as far as regulations will allow, keeping of certain subcultural markings is presented as proof of a lifelong commitment, if not to visual kei in particular, to the

[39] See Appendix: Table 2.

nonconformity that the style had exemplified during a period of their lives. V.C. (female, 26) believes that the scene has, in fact, become more flexible:

> You used to have to be visual all the way, listen to certain bands; if not, you were not a visual. Now I feel like people are a lot more tolerant but visual is more hidden. I still feel like everyone has grown up and moved on from their visual phase, from dressing in black.

When asked about whether she had also moved on, she answered:

> I am still involved but… I never actually liked to wear makeup. I mean, I liked it, but I was too lazy to do it myself. If there is a Harajuku [Fashion Walk] I will look for an LM.C shirt or for a lolita dress, but I work so I wear whatever is most comfortable. I will wear pants and then [at work] I have to change and put on a work shirt.

However, as to whether her hair would remain dyed, she said that it would. As was explained by all informants, changes in their outward appearance did not mean that they had stopped participating in the scene or that they had stopped personally consuming visual kei music. There were comments about people who had stopped "being visual," but this was only said in regard to the few that had left the scene to join in another subculture, not for those who had stopped attending events or who had stopped dressing in a fashion reminiscent of Japanese visual kei artists but had gone on attending. The fate of these individuals used to be unknown and it is still common to hear people talk about those who have left the subculture not to ever come back, and tracking was made harder by the fact that full names were, often, unknown even to their visual acquaintances. However, social media has provided a new avenue to check in on these people and observe how much their lives might have changed.

One of the criticisms towards subcultural theory has been its focus on youth as the prime age for subcultural affiliation and articulation through music genres. However, further studies such as Hodkinson's (2011) suggest that, rather than decreasing, members' involvement in their subcultures merely changes as they balance it with the demands of adulthood and incorporate their identification into the rest of their lives. Although they might become incorporated into the

working class, the members of the subculture maintain a high degree of self-identified separation from outsiders.

Hodkison (2002) lists an extended time of commitment as an important indicator of subcultural substance when he indicated the need for a "tendency for concentrated and continuous practical involvement among participants" (p. 31). While many have taken a step back from the subculture's events, they still listen to visual kei music in their private lives and wear elements of the style, albeit modified. Informants' accounts pointed to this intangible sense of resistance to conformity that has followed them into adulthood, and B.R. illustrated it as follows.

> We all have some rebel in us, we all want to break something. That is why we keep doing things; we keep getting tattooed, we keep abruptly changing our hair color. At least when I upload a picture of myself and get told I look scary I feel accomplished!

Chapter 6: Visibility and belonging

> I stop the recorder when [name] tells me his lunch break is over. We exit the shopping mall as I accompany him back to his work. He asks me whether I will stay in Santiago and I explain that I will be going back to Viña del Mar but should be coming back on the weekend for a friend's birthday celebration. He seems curious, so I quickly clarify that it is not someone from the visual scene. I say, "she is not into visual kei, or anime, or goth, or anything like that." He laughs and replies, "oh, so she is a *normie*."[40] I am a little taken aback by the statement because he is so certain of it. I mention that my friend is a bit of a history geek, so not necessarily a *normie*, but he does not seem convinced. Even after we part, I am still thinking about this exchange. Is there a clear line that differentiates those with those interests from the so-called mainstream, and is it such an important separation for subculture insiders that it persists into their adult lives? (fieldnotes, February 6, 2019)

When talking about Santiago's visuals as a subculture, it is important to determine what its members believe in regard to who is a proper visual kei fan, who is allowed to speak for the collective, and of what the boundaries are in regard to other groups. The subculture is in a constant process of defining themselves against the rest of society, both what they perceive as the mainstream and other subcultures.

Chilean media's involvement with the visuals was not merely imposed on a pre-existing group; the subculture itself was formed through its interaction with the media. The coherence and the differentiation from other groups occurred as a direct effect of Chilean television, magazines, and newspapers demanding explanations from visual kei fans about their community.

6.1 The resignification of public spaces and moral panics

The development of Santiago's visual subculture reads as a topographical account of the city itself. From the shifting public spaces for gathering to the venues used for specialized events, subcultural groups visually defied onlookers as they moved about the city. They posed a challenge

[40] "*Normie*" is a term used to refer to people whose interest are within the mainstream and usually has negative connotations.

by merely stating their existence and their right to occupy the urban landscape. Places such as the Imán outside the Eurocentro shopping center; the Blondie night club, with its catering to a myriad of alternative scenes; and the Universidad de Santiago de Chile's Planetarium, where event organizers would project both anime and Japanese music videos, are all landmarks of the capital but took on another significance as part of historical and community narratives of Santiago's visuals.

The subculture's spectacularism was a defining factor of the media attention they received; they elicited society's curiosity when they came into public view, nonchalantly parading a look that was extravagant in relation to the average Chilean's. The combination of their stylistic defiance and the visual impact of their congregation made them a puzzle and even a possible threat that needed to be explained, tamed, and eventually incorporated into Chile's social fabric to neutralize the deviancy they symbolized.

Filardo's (2002) study of youth groups in Montevideo, Uruguay, identified the appropriation and resignification of public spaces as one of the ways that subcultures impact their surroundings (p. 9-11). One of the clearest examples is that of skaters, a subculture that uses the cityscape to gather and to practice their skating skills. Their presence is perceived as both a visual and physical disruption because they obstruct the flow of pedestrians and threaten their safety and their own when performing difficult moves in areas not designated for such activities, and constitute a challenge to urban governance in terms of city planning and regulation (Stratford, 2002, p.194).

However, less physically active subcultures also present a reformulation of urban spaces for their use. Filardo (2002) identifies two methods by which this takes place: by creating new urban areas designated for the performance of a subcultural activity or by re-signifying existing

ones (p. 11). In the case of visuals in Santiago, it was mainly the latter option that was employed. Visuals had very specific spaces where they would meet up and, while there were memorable gatherings in private residences, many of the occasions that get spoken about are those that involved meeting with friends in the center of the city and the parties attended afterward.

This is one of the features that bring attention to subcultures in the first place: they assertively display themselves in front of observers, superimposing new meanings and modes of use to sites for which consensual, naturalized ones already existed. Spaces were re-signified; the Eurocentro was not only a location where subcultural merchandise could be acquired and the Entretenimientos Diana arcade was not only for playing games. They were also spaces where friends could meet, new friendships formed, and plans for the rest of the evening were discussed. In this manner, Santiago's historical landmarks also became subcultural ones and were recognized as belonging to various groups at different points in time. Moreover, these changes also serve as milestones for the history of the movement and its internal shifts. As an informant explained when talking about the Imán, the place was understood to be a point of gathering for people with similar interests (in this case, visual kei).

> You would arrive and your friends were already there. Friday was the day to meet up; from here we would go to the Santa Lucía [Hill], get blind-drunk, and then come back [to the Imán] looking for a party to attend. Then we would all go together. (Z.A., male, 24)

As this account illustrates, there were unwritten understandings of the function of these landmarks. Coupled with behaviors such as the one described above, which could just be attributed to youth recklessness rather than subcultural affiliation, these were features that concerned onlookers.

Cohen (1972/2011) explored the connection between subcultures and moral panics through the creation of "folk devils" in relationship to British Mods and Rockers and their confrontations in seaside towns in 1964. The framework he developed in order to analyze and explain how moral

panics burgeon in relation to what is perceived as deviance has been expanded upon and modified by later scholars such as Thornton (1995). Cohen's study of the relationship between media representations and the development of moral panics has been vital in the analysis of how subcultural members come to be identified as folk devils. This process starts from an incident that prompts society to find an incarnation of collective fears and misgivings, and he notes that ”scapegoating and other types of hostility are more likely to occur in situations of maximum ambiguity” (Cohen, 1972/2011, p. 219).

In the case of Santiago's visuals, the surging of a moral panic directly affected the geographical positioning of the subculture. During the first years of the movement, the Juegos Raplán, the Entretenimientos Diana arcade, and the space outside of the Eurocentro were identified as points of encounter for the subculture. There would be a steady relocation to, first, Santa Lucía Hill, and, later, to the Parque Forestal alongside the Mapocho River. While many of these sites were being used concomitantly, their identification as visual kei spaces shifted according to how massively they were used as gathering points at any given time. For example, the Eurocentro was not a visual kei-only spot; it was used at the same time by visual kei fans, otaku, and goths, among others, because its businesses catered to many styles that fell under the "alternative" umbrella.

As far as the spaces dedicated to visual kei music (video projection and dancing), they have historically been shared with other subcultural groups or styles affiliated with the alternative side of Santiago's nightlife. The Blondie nightclub has long been associated with youth styles (Matus Madrid, 2009), and the Teatro Carrera was, until its business shift in 2006, both a nationally-recognized historical monument and a dance club that hosted different subcultures, sometimes simultaneously. All these associations with subcultural spaces have contributed to creating an image of visuals as one more subculture among the many that existed in Santiago; that the object

of their fandom was a Japanese product was only a side note in the eccentricity that all of them presented.

According to numerous accounts by informants, what prompted a significant change of location was a public reaction to a crime: the murder of Catholic priest Faustino Gazziero on July 24th, 2004. Not only did it take place at the Santiago Metropolitan Cathedral, located three blocks away from the Eurocentro, but was also perpetrated by black metal fan Rodrigo Orias Gallardo. In an episode of paranoid schizophrenia, he stabbed the priest when he was finishing mass, allegedly with Satanist ideations ("Un sacerdote asesinado en la Catedral de Santiago de Chile," 2004). All these characteristics matched preexisting fears around youth groups; from his black clothes sporting a metal bands' logo, to the ritualistic nature of the murder, he embodied concerns about subcultural association and deviance.

Informants spoke of how their presence came to be seen as a threat to businesses and public order in the area around and within the Eurocentro. These reactions from both merchants and authorities would have been similar to the ones received by various subcultural groups in Japan. For example, the 1960s Miyuki Tribe were perceived as a source of degeneration of the Ginza area simply due to their loitering and their possible effect on Japan's image for the upcoming 1964 Olympics. The concerns over their presence was framed within issues of public image rather than a particular threat, as "they were just standing around and talking. However, the police, like the shopkeepers, feared that, without intervention Ginza would soon degenerate into a 'hotbed of evil" (Marx, 2015, Introduction, seventh paragraph).

Accounts on this topic are consistent yet somewhat vague in the details. While there is consensus on the fact that the presence of subcultures was undesirable, the source of this sentiment is unclear. Due to a large portion of the Eurocentro's stores being dedicated to subcultural

merchandise, these groups would have been their consumers, so it is unlikely that shop owners inside the shopping center asked for their presence to be removed. The main issue of the security personnel of the Eurocentro seems to have been loitering in the shopping center's hallways when it did not convert into these same people making purchases. The owners of other stores outside of the shopping center might indeed have been worried that the large presence of subcultural groups, particularly on Friday afternoons, could deter their own customers, but it is not clear whether this was due to their appearance, their perceived association, or simply to a large number of people that could obstruct their storefronts. Nevertheless, this narrative of discrimination and of abuse from subculture outsiders serves as a unifying element to the subculture's history and strengthens their self-perception as social outcasts.

This alleged rejection of subcultures was based on their deviant looks, particularly the wearing of black clothing, tattoos, and piercings, rather than their behavior. Their exclusion was not only aimed at them as a group but also as individuals; some people were singled out and told not to frequent the spaces dressed in black regardless of whether they had come alone or in a group. P.R. (male, 33) said he was once denied access to the Entretenimientos Diana: "they denied me entry, to my face, because I was dressed up [in visual kei style]. I was going in and they said, 'you cannot come inside,' 'why?' 'you cannot come inside because you belong to a movement."

Informants agreed that some business owners near the Eurocentro whose business was not subculture-related had been opposed to their presence from the start, but the Cathedral incident was a catalyst for a generalized rejection of subcultures in the area. The restrictions given to their assembly, framed as loitering, would, instead of dissipating subcultural gatherings, create a forced relocation to peripheral areas. The periphery within the center of the city was found in the slopes of the Santa Lucia Hill, located less than one kilometer away from the Eurocentro. This space was

already being used as a secondary meeting point to the Imán but became more prominent after 2004.

Being pushed further out of sight heightened behavior that would have been unacceptable closer to the Eurocentro, namely alcohol consumption. This is not to say that the scene did not previously have its fair share of alcohol usage; however, by most informants' accounts, it increased significantly with these changes. The same informants said that the practices became riskier as a result of being further away from the general view. One jokingly remarked that the later move to the Parque Forestal further created a space which was "basically Sodom and Gomorrah" (Z.A., male, 24), referring in this case to sexual exploration, though it was not clear how much of this description was hyperbolic.[41] Pushing the unsightly out of visible public spaces effectively encouraged the perpetration of the presumed behaviors that provoked a public outcry.

6.2 The role of the media in subcultural formation

Once presented with this threat to public order in the form of deviant youth, society worked towards the understanding and incorporation of these groups. The very way that they were named ("urban tribes") created a series of mental images. Apart from the original references to Maffesoli (1972/1996) and to the urban/rural divide inherent to the term, the notion of a tribe alludes to the wild in opposition to civilization. It also implies a form of kinship that is external and radically different from that of traditional, acceptable capitalist hierarchies, regardless of whether the people that participated in the visual subculture believed that they had a particular socialization dynamic. Ultimately, these groups, in their alleged tribality, represented the untamed within the

[41] Most people referred to these occasions but only admitted having witnessed them, never participated. The few informants that were active in them did not describe situations that were outside of other stories of alcohol-fueled parties by young people, but they were not questioned for further details for privacy reasons.

city; an inexplicable desire of certain groups (mostly youth) to return to more primitive associations.

Thornton (1995) has studied the role that media plays in the development of subcultures; instead of seeing media as a monolithic force that negatively impacts the authenticity of a preexisting subculture, she argues that a multiplicity of forces, among them the media, are essential to their very formation. The author's tenet that media coverage has a defining effect seems to apply to the visual kei scene in Santiago; while Chilean media may not have initiated the gathering of people with interest in the style, it did work as a catalyst for the definition of the scene and also for it fracturing into subgroups and competing definitions.

The concern over visual kei was inserted within a general concern for youth that did not follow the same patterns of socialization of their parents' generation. More than visual kei, the folk devils in this media reaction came to be Santiago's (and Chile's) youth as a whole. It is not novel for societies to use their younger generations as depositories of social anxieties even though the boundaries of "youth" remain unclear; it seems to encompass everyone who has yet to join the workforce or who has done so in occupations that do not fall within the traditional spectrum. Therefore, people who have decided to sell Japanese music merchandise or still participate in the organization of events might be regarded as living an extended adolescence because their lifestyles are seen as not sustainable or fully assimilated into the Chilean economic system.

During the first decade of the new millennium, abstract worries about the direction of the country's youth found a vessel in the groups that distinctly challenged respectability politics and patterns of association by finding a space to converge (illustratively, in the heart of the city) and by displaying their common interests through their looks and mannerisms.

These groups presented an enigma; they were opaque in the sense that Cohen (1972/2011, p. viii) described. They were seen as needing analysis and, more than anything, needing to be explained and made sense of again in the Chilean social fabric. Consistent coverage of the subculture by the media started halfway through the decade of the 2000s, at least five years after the first visual kei dance parties of the capital. For example, in 2006 *La Liga*, a program aired on the channel Mega that covered various topics in short segments, explained the visual kei scene by having one of its hosts, actress Blanca Lewin, talk to a member of the scene and attend a visual kei event (BladeZeta, 2013).

However, it is *El Diario de Eva* that holds an emblematic position among the programs that covered the topic because it specifically thrived off youth subcultures. While shows like *Buenos Días a Todos* or local news might have later held individual sections that dealt with subcultures, *El Diario de Eva* was based entirely on them for an extended time and obtained content from both their youth and their subcultural affiliation. It started in the year 2003 as another mid-afternoon talk show where the host would take the role of moderator between parties but later shifted its focus to subcultures, their internal disputes, and the differences between their members and their parents.

The modification of the program's time slot in 2007 from morning to the afternoon changed their target audience from only homemakers to include teenagers coming home from school. Their in-studio audience also became teenagers; since the show was taped at 16:30 and shown at 19:00, high school students were able to attend the tapings and watch it at home ("CHV tomó cartas en el asunto. El Diario de Eva sufre coletazos de la polémica: cambia de horario y ya no va en vivo,"

2007).[42] The audience of the show was then both the parents of these teenagers and the teenagers themselves.

When looked at closely, this change was not as dramatic as it might seem; the topic of subcultures fed into the alienation of the new generation in relation to their parents. The program thrived off this sense of estrangement, but it mainly capitalized on the role of the mother as the caretaker for whom the subcultures needed to be interpreted. It brought forward a relatable figure, host Eva Gómez, who worked as an "accredited expert" (Cohen, 1972/2011, p. viii) to explain subcultures to viewers. She would do so together with co-hosts who were closer to the ages of the subjects and later included an insider to visual kei subculture, an approach that was repeated by other outlets.

The format of *El Diario de Eva* had teenagers exhibiting their subcultural styles come into the program to resolve personal conflicts.[43] Some of the cases displayed issues that were relatable to teenagers of any group, such as the case of Kai accusing his friend Kaomi of being too possessive of him (toodoprograma, 2008/2010b). However, the quarrels shown in other cases were subculture-specific; such was the case of Kyu bringing her former friend Krai to the show to accuse her of having abandoned the gothic lolita style and changing into *ero guro* through a third friend, Kyo (CHVRetro, 2008/2017). Another case shown in the program was that of Nicole, who identified herself as a gothic lolita and demanded that her friend Camilo, a self-proclaimed otaku, identify either as *ero guro* or as *oshare* instead being ambiguous in his interests (toodoprograma, 2007/2010a). All these cases, regardless of subcultural codes, reflect problems that teenagers face, namely those of friendship loyalties and personal identity, but their details were subculture specific.

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[42] The show's time slot was changed several times, but since 2009 it was taped and shown after teenagers were released from school.

[43] Second-hand accounts from informants suggest that the cases, or at least their degree of severity, might have been scripted, but there was no conclusive evidence either way.

The topic of subcultures, or "urban tribes," as they were called on television, bled into other channels and television shows during 2007 and solidified during the summer season of December 2007, through February 2008, during which morning programs usually will change their format to appeal to school-age children as well as their usual audience of homemakers through the rest of the year.

For example, the morning show *Buenos Días a Todos* would often invite teenagers on to the tapings and to the set during their summer format, but the 2007-2008 season had whole daily segments dedicated to subcultural groups. In the case of visual kei, there was one during which a visibly uncomfortable host dresses in visual kei attire with the help of a visual kei insider. In his journey to becoming a "real visual," he then goes to a gaming arcade to learn how to play EZ2Dancer (TVN, 2008c). Although there was an overlap between visual kei-followers and dance game-enthusiasts, informants of this research and commentators of the video both expressed their disapproval of this characterization. Moreover, the host, Herber Espinoza, was explicitly identified on television as belonging to the *pokemon* subculture,[44] which makes his dress-up as a visual kei insider a mere costume. This segment works as an introduction to another one filmed in the program's set, a contest to choose the "best visual." Another of the program's hosts dresses up during it, even taking a Japanese nickname, and then the contest's participants are interviewed, made to show their looks, and eventually dance to Gackt's "Vanilla" (TVN, 2008b; TVN, 2008a).

Similarly, the showbusiness-centered program *SQP* (*Sálvese Quien Pueda*) covered the topic during the beginning of the 2008 school year. In a segment, the presenter dresses in an allegedly subcultural fashion as a costume, clearly with humorous intentions. He goes on to talk to people waiting in line to enter the taping *of El Diario de Eva*. In these interactions, he asks these

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[44] See Section 3.1.

teenagers, “what are you?”; a demand for an answer that would define the interviewed party in subcultural and stylistic terms. He also asks, “what would you say I am?” and breaks into laughter when the interviewee answers that he looks “like an emo [boy].” This interaction shows his disbelief and the absurdity of the idea that he himself could belong to a subculture. Later in the segment, he interviews Eva Gómez herself, who gives her own explanation of visuals and immediately separates them in *oshare* and *ero guro*, which she describes as the colorful and dark versions of visuals, respectively.

All these representations insisted on forcing young people to identify with one style and make efforts to create a taxonomy that can organize the chaos of signs that these groups represented. Moreover, it reinforced the idea of subcultural style as costume and denoted that clothes worn by the mainstream are natural and devoid of ideology, while these youth styles are an anomaly.

All these instances, but especially *El Diario de Eva*, hold a contentious position in the collective memory of the community. On the one hand, when informants were asked to give their opinion on it and its possible impact on the scene, they were dismissive. Most of them wanted to express that the show had not had any influence on them dabbling into visual kei, but, on the other hand, they themselves would later come back to the topic and give more ample criticism of it. Part of it was aimed at the alleged misinformation of the people who had spoken about the style on *El Diario de Eva* and other programs. One of them commented, “when visual [kei] arrived, people started to come up with a bunch of stupid things to get attention, like saying that it was some sort of cult to womanhood” (T.G., male, 29). His and others’ comments on the ignorance of self-proclaimed spokespersons for the whole scene revealed deep-seated disapproval of what information was presented to outsiders and the way in which it was introduced.

> A lot of very ignorant people would go [on television] to talk nonsense, but nothing about the real scene. J-music became accessible but not in a positive way; you would see more

> people, but they were not fans; they were people who would get decked out but didn't even know the names of the bands. (P.R., male, 33)

These descriptions of true and fake visuals might be exaggerated for impact's sake. It is unclear whether the people mentioned indeed had very little information on visual kei or just not enough to fit the standard of the speaker. It is interesting to note that some of the informants expressing this criticism were, in turn, criticized by others as for their credentials to be able to speak on these topics.

This quest for definitions has been quite literal among visuals, partially due to the lack of information in Spanish during the early 2000s. The inner hierarchy does not rely so much on who is closest to the Japanese source as much as it focuses on being able to explain what visual kei is, even if this information is not gained directly from Japan. After the media, and therefore outsiders, staked a claim to define the scene and its participants, the clustering process accelerated. When faced with the self-proclaimed authorities on youth behavior who would take upon themselves to explain their actions and motivations to media personalities, visuals were prompted to reckon with their own identities, issues of definitions of visual kei, and appropriate visual behavior. The subculture was rapidly put in the spotlight after years of relative anonymity, which made participants, both individually and collectively, negotiate definitions that seem to have been more fluid before this phenomenon. In this manner, media coverage both solidified the scene and fractured it.

Together with being in the media's eye, more information on Japan's visual kei substyles prompted their rise within Santiago's scene as well and fans started to identify their own style as that of the bands they followed. For example, a newspaper article published in January 2007, distinguishes between substyles such as *kote kote* or *kote kei* (described by the author of the article as dark and androgynous), *oshare* (characterized as being cheerful, colorful, and wearing a lot of

accessories), and *ero guro* (described as having erotic, grotesque, and sadomasochist elements) (Franco Ramos, 2007).

In Japan, the first two labels are used to classify artists or the general theme that a particular album or music video evokes, but they are neither strict nor are they applied to the fans. [45] In comparison, the connection between the term *ero guro* and visuals is more complicated. *Ero guro nansense*, shorthand for "erotic grotesque nonsense," is a Japanese phrasing born in the interwar period to describe the mass culture of the era. Silverberg (2006) relates the erotic in the phrase to "an energized, colorful vitality," the grotesque to a "culture resulting from such deprivation as that endured by the homeless and by beggars," and the nonsensical to the alleged absurdity of the pastimes of the era which she nonetheless finds to be coherent (p. xvi). The implications of "erotic grotesque nonsense" reached all spheres of Japanese life and of its cultural productions, yet it has been notable in its influence the literature of the era and, later, in those authors who have taken inspiration from it, such as writer Ranpo Edogawa (1894-1965) and manga author Suehiro Maruo (b. 1956).

In the case of Santiago's *ero guro* visuals, the phrase was devoid of its social and historical context but lived on through the aesthetics of some artists, such as Dir en Grey during their *Macabre* era, whose style and themes were associated to the ideas of "erotic" and "grotesque" by visuals. It is possible that, in this context, the grotesque was associated to the concept of "gore," as reflected by the use of blood as a motif in visuals' style. However, apart from this element, descriptions and photographs and video of the *ero guro* visuals suggest that their style was characterized primarily by their black clothes and dark makeup, which resembled that of the artists that fall within the *kote kei* umbrella.

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[45] See Section 2.1.4.

In the case of Santiago's subculture, these two categories came to reference the subculture's members' styles rather than only that of the bands they followed, so that people would describe themselves as *ero guro* or as *oshare*, which worked as opposite sides of the stylistic spectrum.

However, informants during the research period did not focus on these divisions, nor did they recall any tensions between these alleged factions, and whatever significance such categories may have had in the past is not present today. The informants' memories of the time do not indicate that the categories were strict nor that there was significant opposition between the visual subculture at large and other youth groups. In fact, some recalled that it was commonplace in the earlier years for visuals to party with different groups, even occasionally with individuals as seemingly dissimilar as Neo Nazi-identifying youth whose ideology, informants explain, was also not solidified. Differentiation from other youth groups and internal subdivisions appear to have risen, or at least intensified, in response to the demand by outsiders that individuals further specify their style.

The fieldwork observations and interactions indicate that the terms *oshare* and *ero guro* are no longer used by the subculture at large to describe individuals. Informants mentioned these categories when referring to the past of the scene and, when asked whether there had been confrontations between them, T.G. (29, male) said that there might have been some joking around, but nothing that translated into physical fights or into actual divisions within the scene. P.R. (male, 33), when talking about the *oshare* subgroup, explained that they listened to "An Cafe and those kinds of bands, but if they play Malice Mizer they will still dance to it. Visuals are shameless and you think: 'you are supposed to be *oshare* but you are dancing to 'Illuminati'?" What he illustrated with this example held true in the events attended; although there was variety in style, neither did

this influence the dance choices of participants nor were the styles distributed in clear groups, which coincides with the feeling of informants that these subgroups were not as important as they had been made out to be in the media.

Working from Barthes's reflections on Otherness in *Mythologies*, Hebdige (1979) distinguishes two processes through which the threat of this Other, embodied in subcultures, can be neutralized by society. On the one hand, the subculture can be reduced to spectacle resistant to analysis, "transformed into meaningless exotica" (p. 97). When, during a segment of the news, the channel Chilevisión covered the so-called visual kei *ero guro* subculture, the emphasis was placed in the fact that these were men who dressed like "girls" with "girls' mannerisms" and even had doubt placed on their sexual orientation; although those interviewed stated that they were heterosexual, the opening words of the presenter were that these people "allege that they are heterosexual" (RoqueSanteiroCL, c. 2010). This also follows Cohen's (1972/2011) observations of the hierarchical nature of definitions provided by the media; the author states that "in such situations the media adjudicate between competing definitions of the situation, and as these definitions are made in a hierarchical context–agents of social control are more likely to be believed than deviants–it is clear which definition will win out in an ambiguous and shifting situation" (p. 44). However much their sexual orientation was stated by the interviewees and their styled explained as a tribute to women's beauty, the incredulity planted by the presenters both reflected the one possibly felt by their audience and produced it.

On the other hand, "the Other can be trivialized, naturalized, domesticated. Here, the difference is simply denied ('Otherness is reduced to sameness')" (Hebdige, 1979, p. 97). This is closer to the effect obtained by *El Diario de Eva*, which sought to explain the phenomenon in terms of the mundane; by showcasing these teenagers in situations that were comprehensible and

relatable to the general population, such as quarrels with friends, love triangles, or even the occasional disagreement with parents over house rules, they were shown not to be different from any other teenager in the country. Moreover, the combination of both strategies reduced Santiago's visual subculture to a source of mockery. Too familiar to induce fear, yet too deviant to be fully incorporated into society's model of acceptability, they were simply categorized a derisible anomaly.

6.3 Subcultural curators and intermediaries

In his analysis of cultural intermediaries in nerd subculture, Woo (2012) likens the role of subcultural gatekeepers to that of curators in their function of carefully selecting materials to which the subculture's participants will have access. In the case of the visual kei scene in Santiago, this role and associated tasks fell upon the organizers and VJs of dance parties. By selecting (curating) the artists and songs that get played during parties, they directly affect the consumption practices of the attendees. Given the limited access to materials and to information during the subculture's early years, their impact was aggrandized; not only did the curation affect those that were present at the parties–for many, the only space where they could get introduced to new artists–, but also anyone around them that belonged to their network of shared music content. These networks were the earliest means of music distribution of the scene and, while new avenues of access to the materials have debilitated their economic importance, many of the networks remain active in the form of friend groups.

Most of the events in Santiago started from these networks; groups of friends who decided to share their musical interests and establish spaces where others could partake in their enjoyment

and in the manner of enjoyment that they deemed correct. One former event organizer acknowledged their role as curators when he expressed his opinion that:

> Unfortunately, current fans are so lazy that all they do is complain online. If you want your bands to be more popular and have classics such as Malice Mizer, Dir en Grey, and L'Arc~en~Ciel, make your own parties. That was how Malice Mizer, Dir en Grey, and L'Arc~en~Ciel became so famous; because we liked them, we threw parties and made others like them. (P.R., male, 33)

When another VJ was asked about what made certain songs into classics, including a lesser-known band whose single everyone at a party had sung along, he stated that it had been “the people that played them [in events]. . . . You can create a classic in one night” (N.S., male, 33).

This power has also made event organizers the target of disapproval from scene participants; their motivations and musical choices would come into question in most of the conducted interviews. In particular, older party brands, in particular Kuchizuke, were criticized for an alleged lack of musical diversity in their repertoire, which reflected on the general public of Santiago also restricting their knowledge and interest in visual kei to a handful of “old school” bands in detriment of any new acts or even older but more obscure ones.

One case of a subcultural curator going on to become also a subcultural intermediary was that of Blade Zeta, organizer of the Blade Zeta Parties during the earlier years of the scene. Perhaps due to his relatively respected position within the subculture, informants had no particular criticism about his participation in *El Diario de Eva* despite their low opinion of the show itself, but most of those who had spoken to the media were deemed as too ignorant to talk about visual kei or for the visual subculture.

6.4 Gatekeeping through knowledge

It is Santiago's visuals' tendency to hold narrow interests or even restrict the definition of visual kei that often gets cited as one of the most significant reasons for the subculture's decline. Informants believed that the Chilean scene had become stagnant, too focused on a handful of bands that, in most cases, were no longer active. Their refusal to support new artists or even older ones in new endeavors was blamed for the incapacity to keep up with the Japanese scene.

A form of gatekeeping behavior that was encountered during the research was that exhibited by those claiming greater access to knowledge and thus better understanding. These subjects also argued on which were the adequate ways to perform visual kei fandom.

> I define visual kei as it is defined in Japan, not here. Even if people don't like it, the visual kei scene is exactly the same as the idol one, but with metal. . . . What happens is that you go and tell people here 'hey, your metalheads are actually idols,' and… [informant pauses to think] There is a lot of people that either don't know it or don't want to see it. (M.D., female, 27)

This would, however, be the only example of someone judging the propriety of subcultural practices based on its similarity to Japanese ones or lack thereof.

Since the scene has been built around a Japanese cultural product, it could be expected that the closeness of an individual to the country of its origin would be a determining factor in the subcultural status of said person, yet it was far from the case. Interestingly, issues of authority on definitions did not hinge on the closeness of their authors to Japanese fandoms, their possible trips to the country, or the knowledge of the language. Subcultural status, and the subcultural capital upon which it is built, does not depend on the place of origin of the musical style itself. This characteristic evidences the degree of autonomy of the Chilean visual kei scene in regard to the Japanese one.

Although very rarely explicitly given, the authority to provide definitions and work as a cultural intermediary depended mainly on the length of participation in the visual kei scene and their familiarity with a diverse musical repertoire. When talking about the latter, the emphasis was placed on the person's ability to delve further into the style, either broadening their knowledge on a particular band to encompass less popular songs and albums, or to include bands that were less known but were believed to be musically and conceptually superior to their more mainstream counterparts.

Malice Mizer and Dir en Grey were two bands that, due to their popularity and relatively long trajectory, were used as examples of proper subcultural adherence. The way they were talked about illustrated the fixation within the scene on specific albums, vocalists, or eras of visual kei bands. For example, the common belief was that Malice Mizer's most popular era was the one in which Gackt participated as the vocalist; in this case, the projection of videos from the bands' earlier albums, those in which the vocalist was Tetsu, symbolized a statement by party organizers on their knowledge of the style and on the public that the event intended to attract. Similarly, the era of Dir en Grey's career that the listener prefers is also tied to his or her subcultural capital. It was commonplace in the answers to the online questionnaire's question on favorite exponents of visual kei to specify to which era or albums of this band the informant was referring.

Demonstrating adherence to older visual kei is, however, a double-edged sword, as placing too much interest in their earlier albums can be seen also as lack of effort (meaning that the person did not look further into the band than the most popular songs that get played at parties) or as a snobbish display of trying-too-hard. The latter is tied to that thin line which separates the authentic subculturalist from the poseur within these groups; it seems to be preferable to recognize the best

era of a band in its earliest years, yet this needs to be accompanied by knowledge of the rest of the bands' career and, hopefully, extensive listening to their other albums as well.

As for the breadth of bands that were appreciated as an acceptable sample of visual kei knowledge, older, even more obscure bands are preferable to neo visual kei artists, a fact that a minority of the informants also criticized and blamed for the stagnation of the scene since 2008. This alleged stagnation would be concerning both music interests, which have not caught up to the Japanese scene, and the numerical contraction of Santiago's scene. It was not clear whether this came from the fanbase's music demands or was promoted by the relative homogeneity of the dance parties' despite their organizers' intentions of diversifying it.

When polled on their favorite visual kei artists, with the possibility of naming up to five, the first two positions were held by Malice Mizer and Dir en Grey, with any other bands falling below the 20-mentions mark.[46] Although knowledge of lesser-known bands was brought up as a source of pride in interviews, these anonymous answers showed that, in general, the bands that were more popular were still the older classics, even in detriment of newer projects of those bands' former members, such as Malice Mizer's guitarist Mana's Moi dix Mois.

Gatekeeping is, in this manner, a rather ubiquitous practice, but, more than a standardized behavior, it signals a variety of acts and discourses that individuals employ to function within a society in a constant process of assimilation and differentiation. Although gatekeeping as a term has taken on a negative connotation for its exclusionary nature, the practices and discourses associated with it are critical to the formation of subcultural identities inasmuch as they pivot on distinctions and similarities to the parent culture and to other subcultures.

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[46] See Appendix: Table 3.

6.5 Cohesion and boundaries

Without implying that visual kei is in direct opposition to what participants identified as the Chilean mainstream—a claim that was denied when asked about directly—, the differences between those who belonged to the visual subculture and those that did not emerged very quickly in the informants' discourse. There was a deeply held, yet somewhat vague, notion of what Chilean culture and Santiago's visual subculture are, definitions which in turn hinge on their discrepancies from each other.

What arises from the interviews and questionnaire answers is the similitudes in how members of the subculture characterize the Other, being, in this case, the country's dominant ideologies in opposition to their own. In these representations, informants shift again from pointing out the issues and heterogeneity of their own community to highlight what, as a group and individuals, set them apart from other members of Chilean society.

Two main oppositional categories appear in the informants' account: that of the traditional, conservative Chilean and that of alternative subcultures' participants, who also present a specific response to the first category. As for the first group, one questionnaire respondent defined Chile as "a country of stereotypes" (#45). This was in response specifically to the question of how she believed society had perceived the visual kei scene. She pointed to society's tendency to make stereotypes out of groups, which was evident in its treatment of anyone who displayed behaviors that deviated from the norm. Similarly, another informant pointed at the ignorance pervading most of Chilean society, which "happened and still happens in a lot of places. The country evolves, but this still happens. Chileans have a lot of growing to do, in terms of culture, vision, and tolerance" (R.D., male, 38). As for what the stereotypes formed about them might have been, informants and questionnaire respondents alike pointed to the assumed link between their clothing styles and

satanic tendencies, reflecting an image of Chilean society as both profoundly religious and fixated on the constant threat of disruptive belief systems. One respondent answered that, as for what he believed was the image that visual kei style caused in others, it was “people being ludicrous as always and saying that anyone who wears black and listens to rock music is a Satanist” (#8). Another respondent also believed that a connection between subcultural styles and satanic tendencies was held by a segment of the Chilean public, “I think that they believe we are lazy or something, or that we are Satanists. Those are the kinds of things I have heard about us” (#11).

The other group that gets referenced as a point of contrast is a section of the lower socioeconomic class of Chile, pejoratively condensed in the word *flaite*. Informants used the term as both a noun (referring to people of lower socioeconomic status with what they believe to be undesirable behaviors) and as an adjective (to denote the attributes that would mark someone of that category). In the last decade, the concept of *flaite* has evolved to signify not only the socioeconomic origin of the subject, but the style (including clothing, manner of speaking, and practices) that might be characteristic of such social strata but has been adopted by other groups as well. One informant, who by his own account was raised in a vulnerable neighborhood, differenced himself from said groups, not so much in his educational or economic status, but in his subcultural belonging.

> My reality could have been a lot more boring or harsher; I could have been a rapper, a drug-dealer, or just your typical metalhead. Visual opened the world to me, it allowed me to know about a wide variety of things that perhaps I would have never been interested in otherwise. (X.M. male, 32)

When talking about people who used to belong to the scene but had not been heard of for years, some informants also casually referred to someone whose style had changed.

> He would come [into the Entretenimientos Diana arcade] with a giant backpack carrying high heels, everything. He would get decked out and then dress back as a normal person. He is still around, but he is a *flaite* now. Many of them are something entirely different now. (Y.N., male, 34)

Another informant added that this person "was always a *flaite* in the sense of where he lived, which was a high-risk area. I imagine he also arrived [to visual kei] through anime" (B.N., male, 32), referencing the fact that anime was available on public television.

This was far from an isolated instance. In these cases, the comment on someone becoming a *flaite* expressed not so much that said person's manners or customs had become less educated or revealing of their socioeconomic background, but that they had adopted the clothing and musical style that goes with these groups, all of which were, in theory, opposed to their own. At a style level, Pérez A. and Roca V. (Pérez A. & Roca V, 2009) explain that "*flaite*" is used to refer to young people who wear expensive brand-name tennis shoes and baggy clothing who also listen to reggaeton and c*umbia villera* (p. 101).

The references to dressing "as a normal person" framed the speakers as "abnormal," a device that worked as a tool of self-exoticization. In this manner, the visual differences him or herself from the default group identities of the country: the "normal" people, characterized as conformists, uniformed, and hiding their feelings for the sake of the system; and the subcultures formed around the circumstances of socioeconomic disadvantage in Chile as a method of survival. Although the informants referred to *flaites* as a scene much like their own, the classist implications of the term were not lost.[47] This second group from which they differenced themselves was presented as the natural projection of someone who had not been able to overcome his or her circumstances.

The appearance of visual kei on national television, and thus in the national debate centered around youth, only heightened the concern about definitions which exists within any community. It also significantly impacted the way that outsiders perceived the subculture. Informants pointed

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[47] For the possible etymological origins of the term, see Rojas (2015).

out that they had experienced a critical shift in mainstream engagement with visual kei and other subcultures. From being an opaque category of people who dressed somewhat differently, subcultures became a topic to be dissected, categorized, and ultimately opened for scrutiny and, thus, ridicule. One commented that "the problems started in 2006 or 2007. The bullying, getting called 'otaku.' Before you were just a weirdo, they didn't understand it" (B.N., male, 32). Following on this assertion, another informant added that "*El Diario de Eva* mocked it. Before, it was people from the scene that would see [visual kei], but with *El Diario de Eva* your mom would see it, and perhaps that is when bullying became more transversal" (Y.N., male, 34), referring to bullying from classmates at school.

Their conclusions correspond with the different experiences that informants narrated regarding their families' and their school environment's reactions. Cases of families' rejection of their styles appeared in all age groups, yet the concerns of the parents and the abuse by peers were further remarked upon by those who had joined the subculture during the second half of the 2000s. The worries before seemed to have centered around a general fear of teenagers being out late at night or whether their dark clothing reflected any non-Christian tendencies, but later extended to gender ambiguity, sexual orientation, and promiscuity.

Many reported that the period of most freedom had been at the beginning of their interest before their parents recognized what exactly it was that their children were into. This coincides with the reports of younger participants, who came into the scene a time in which visual kei was already known as a subculture to the general public. It was then that mocking became specific, making references to the foreignness of the music and the feminine and androgynous looks. These accounts illustrate Thornton's (1995) theory that youth subcultures might not so much oppose the misunderstanding of media coverage as how it shared tightly guarded subcultural knowledge

without a proper context and in a rhythm too rapid to be controlled. The risk of overexposure then includes the media's inadequate engagement with subcultural elements, which is feared more than the engagement itself.

When asked about whether either now or in the past there has been a common mindset or sense of unity among those in the scene, the answers are dissimilar. There is a specific resistance to identify these characteristics as they might be associated with the way the media had represented them as an urban tribe, despite the media coverage having disappeared almost entirely in the last decade.

Informants brought up differences within the scene and even asserted that there was little in common between the people who attend visual kei events or have attended them in the past. Despite this internal heterogeneity, contrasts with the rest of society and feelings of alienation have contributed to the formation of a feeling of community. A cohesive element is a struggle with mental health conditions and the angst of adolescence and, most importantly, the method of dealing with them through music and stylistic expression. One informant summed up her impression of the scene as a whole, particularly during the 2000s, when she had been the most active in it, by stating that, "in the world of J-rock I felt as if we were all abandoned children. We were social pariahs, we had been bullied… so, I don't know. We liked things that were different" (Y.F., female, 32).

In this scenario, visual kei and subcultural affiliation appear as both a source of social ostracism and as a coping mechanism to a preexisting shunning. The way that individuals embraced this Otherness in themselves and chose to associate with people with similar interests and express them through their style was a source of further alienation because it marked them as different.

This sentiment is echoed by another informant who, in retrospect, stated that, back at the height of the scene's popularity, a community bonded and it has survived to this day.

> I think we were always too embarrassed [to call ourselves a tribe] because the people who would go on television were all idiots and would say a bunch of nonsense. . . . I refused to say that I belonged to the "visual tribe," because I found that being grouped with the guys who would go on television was horrible. Yet I would make the long trip to the Eurocentro every Friday, and it would take me around an hour to greet people because I knew everyone. (T.G., male, 29)

More than a rejection of being pigeonholed into a group, the dismissal was directed at media representations. When talking about these mediatic instances, the informants referenced people that would lay claim to visual subcultural affiliation and to the very same term of "urban tribe" with all the associations it conveyed. When answering whether there had been such a thing as a visual kei "urban tribe" as the media had reported, one questionnaire respondent reported:

> No, I always hated that term. There is no such thing as tribes, only people, "social groups" that like certain things. It is not like we went out hunting or fighting other groups; these are just things you like. (#45)

This explanation again highlights, and ridicules, the connotation of the word "tribe" as used by outsiders.

Chilean visual kei experiences many of the conflicts of other subcultures and follows a similar pattern of a dialectic relationship with the media. The discourse(s) on the scene hints at a purist approach that resembles that of early subculturalists of the CCCS as expressed in works such as *Resistance Through Rituals*, which establishes the existence of an original/pure form of the subculture which precedes or exists parallel to media coverage (Hall & Jefferson, 1972/2003). As Thornton (1995) has pointed out, subcultures are indivisible from media, be it mainstream or produced from within the culture. This insider versus outsider divide is also continuously negotiated. If the boundaries of visual kei as a style in Japanese music are already somewhat ambiguous, the way that its Chilean fans relate to the style and how they define it is even more

contested. Media served as a catalyst for the subculture's self-definition, which, in turn, simultaneously solidified them as a group and splintered it through the toughened gatekeeping practices that sought to establish its boundaries. Despite the informants' vision of a scene that stands autonomous of its depictions, their own narratives reflect how representations by all types of media had always been interwoven into the subculture, making it an unavoidable element of its history, even if it is only brought up to signal its lack of influence or the inaccuracy of its representations.

Conclusion

This project's fieldwork was completed by late March 2019, which closed the main body of the research. Custom would dictate for the time frame to be acknowledged but not necessarily devote some words to developments that could not be explored further. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to close the present investigation without recognizing major events that have impacted Santiago's visuals and the country as a whole.

The wave of Chilean protests began on October 18, 2019, sparked by the rise in Santiago’s subway fare and overall socioeconomic inequality. The demonstrations disturbed the capital’s social life and shifted the topics of conversation to national events. During the initial weeks, the parties of the alternative scene were cancelled and the social media accounts of many participants of the visual subculture were dedicated to raising awareness of the situation.

On December 21, the Chilean newspaper *La Tercera* published an article detailing the contents of a report analyzing the social media trends during the days following the beginning of the protests (Ayala C., 2019). Said report was delivered to the Office of the General Prosecutor as part of documents allegedly supporting the possible intervention of foreign influences in the anti-government protests. When analyzing the accounts that tweeted in support of the protests, the report identified the youth as the largest group and listed many of the characteristics of their social media accounts, including the fact that a large number of them were fans of K-pop. The relevance of this particular point and any real causation link between K-pop fandom and anti-government sentiments were disparaged by those belonging to the Japanese and Korean popular culture scenes. Not to mention the stream of jokes and memes on the matter that were observed in the social media accounts of informants and of visual kei events, the acknowledgement of an Asian popular culture

element alongside such a major national occurrence reminded people of its past ubiquity in the media.

Unlike what occurred with the subcultures of the 2000s, this did not devolve into a moral panic; the mentions of fandom of Asian popular music were lost within the much larger national crisis and were not used as a catalyzer of the social anxieties that were already being explored through other mediums such as the protests themselves and their coverage. Although it followed a different pattern, this rekindled interest in young people's consumption of Asian popular culture products highlighted the ubiquity of these forms of entertainment among an important section of the Chilean population and brought it into the national spotlight.

The music genre of visual kei, around which the Chilean visual subculture was born, was a complex popular culture product with its own industry and set of practices in its country of origin, Japan. All the elements that surrounded the music, including its production, the circuit within which it was promoted, and the customary interactions between artists and their followers, were lost in the geographic and linguistic distance between the two countries. In the present day, this distance between Asian cultural products and their Chilean consumers can potentially be breached by accessing online information both in English and in Spanish or by purchasing the music directly from labels, yet these tools were not readily available to fans of visual kei in the early 2000s.

What was received in Chile was not necessarily a distorted version of visual kei but one that had been partially dislodged from its cultural and historical context within Japanese society in general and within the Japanese music industry in particular. For those without access to academic texts on Japan, most of these questions were resolved through the knowledge provided by the available media, specifically anime, and by ideas on Japan and on Asia that were commonplace among the general population.

Visual kei, conceptualized as a Japanese product, was assimilated into a preexisting tradition of youth subcultures encompassed within the so-called alternative scene. This involved the use of certain spaces such as the Eurocentro shopping center and the Blondie nightclub, which were already frequented by other groups. Perhaps the most significant way in which Santiago's visual kei fans have created a subculture that is distinct from the Japanese visual kei scene is the incorporation of dance parties as the major instance of social interaction; they provided a space for sharing a common interest but also for the acquisition of new music.

The customs that were developed in both these dance parties and in the informal meetings in different spots of the city were the ones that would eventually solidify into a subculture with its own history and modes of interaction. Their subcultural style, the specific artists they listened to, and the overall feeling of rejection of alleged Chilean values such as homogeneity and the (socially-sanctioned) path to successful adulthood were all elements that came about as much from the genre itself as they did from the local circumstances within which it was received.

The question remains as to whether the current configuration of the scene warrants the designation of subculture. Following Hodkinson's (2002) parameters, the basic elements of subcultural substance are still present in visuals to this day.

First, the necessary "set of shared tastes and values" (Hodkinson, 2002, p. 30) has remained relatively consistent throughout the years, not only in the fixation on visual kei as a genre but also in the artists and songs that are highlighted in events. This consistency has at points been interpreted by participants as stagnation because it impeded the introduction of new artists into the subculture's music canon and kept it in a time lag from Japanese developments. As for shared values, these have also persisted in time: the emphasis on self-expression and the rejection of

conformity, although vague, was prevalent among informants, even those who held occupations that were purportedly at odds with subcultural affiliation.

Subcultural substance also depends on “the extent to which participants hold a perception that they are involved in a distinct cultural grouping and share feelings of identity with one another” (Hodkinson, 2002, p.30-31). This element is perhaps the most complex one when addressing visuals. Because of an underlying resistance to classification stemming from the way the media had forced the “urban tribe” label and its implications upon them, most informants were reticent to mention concepts of identity-formation. In spite of this, the perception of belonging to a distinct group was evidenced through their shared discourse. This is one of the aspects most deeply impacted by the coverage from mainstream media. Although informants did not align with the way the subculture was presented to audiences, this very same experience made them solidify a feeling of opposition to the rest of society, epitomized by the approach of television shows like *El Diario de Eva* and *Cara & Sello*, and it drove them to close ranks to face the perceived threat to their authenticity. Visuals are not simply a group of people that enjoy the same music genre privately and gather as prompted by the industry when artists visit the country. Instead, and despite the growing availability of visual kei materials online, visuals continue to congregate periodically, sometimes as often as once a week.

This also ties into the fact that “subcultures are liable to account for a considerable proportion of free time, friendship patterns, shopping routes, collections of commodities, going-out habits and even internet use” (Hodkinson, 2002, p. 31). Participant observation and interviews showed that the networks of friendships between visuals have stood the test of time and that they still dedicate much of their free time to the subculture, even as said time has been shortened due to professional obligations.

The last element of subcultural substance is a certain degree of autonomy from the large culture within which the group is embedded (Hodkinson, 2002, p. 32). All party brands mentioned in this research were started by people who already had a high level of involvement in the subculture themselves, rather than by larger organizations than had taken an interest in the subculture. Likewise, the networks that developed for the sharing of visual kei music were also comprised of the visuals themselves and the stores at spaces like the Eurocentro were either subculture-specific or catered to a larger network of alternative groups.

Informants' accounts indicate that the subculture goes through periods of high activity characterized by an increase in the number of party brands that become active and also in the number of people who attend them. These periods are followed by lower activity ones during which people withdraw from public gatherings and keep listening to the music in the comfort of their own homes, either on their own or accompanied only by their closest friends from the scene.

The latest low point of activity was not prompted by the cyclical nature of the subculture. Instead, a rather active cycle was cut short by the spread of COVID-19 in the country. The public health crisis and the measures used to combat the spread of the virus, particularly the use of government-imposed curfews, seemed like an extension of what the country had been going through since October of the previous year (Heiss, 2020, p. 1); both were severe interferences of the routine of the capital within which the visual subculture operates. This brought about the cancellation or rescheduling of all programmed events, including visual kei band Dimlim's concert in Santiago and all dance parties (Gatoroko [GatoRoco], 2020). The *Kuchitril* podcast aired its last episode on April 25, 2020, before going on an indefinite hiatus until its hosts could safely gather in a house to do its live streaming, thus temporarily eliminating the only medium that addressed

the scene as a whole and provided a constant account of either the buoyancy or the lying low of the scene (KUCHIZUKE.NET, 2020).

Despite these obstacles, visuals have found ways to maintain a degree of activity as social distance regulations and warnings remain in place. Both the visual kei party brand Paradoxical and the J-Pop and K-Pop-centered brand Moshi Moshi Club have taken advantage of streaming platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitch to keep the scene active. On the one hand, Paradoxical has streamed dance party playlists and full concert videos during usual late-night party times on Fridays. On the other, Moshi Moshi Club has also joined in the music streaming initiative while also debuting a podcast that features Japanese and Korean music topics together with interviews with members of different sections of Santiago's Japanese popular culture scene, including visual kei (Moshi Moshi Club, 2020; Paradoxical J-Music Party, 2020).

Although visuals might have been deprived of their primary form of socialization by local and global circumstances and this could have meant the end of their association as a whole, the strong ties of individuals to visual kei music and to a shared sense of difference from the rest of Chilean society work as binding elements when the instances for in-person meetings are not present. At the same time, these elements of identification with a shared history were brought about by the sharing in modes of socialization and spaces. This scenario suggests that these bonds will not be entirely forfeited in favor of online interactions. It is precisely this convergence of visual kei and an audience exceptionally receptive to its appeal in a city which had a long tradition of fostering alternative subcultures that produced the visual subculture as a significant Chilean phenomenon.

The end of the current research project almost coincided with what I believe to be a new stage for Chilean public life and, along with it, visual subculture. The "social outburst," as the

wave of protests and citizen demands from October 18th onwards came to be called, did reposition the spotlight from their group activities to individual's engagement with national politics, yet the visuals reconvened as soon as it was safe to do so. It would be the COVID-19 crisis that discontinued the dance parties, which have been a central element of cohesion for the community, in an unprecedented way. It will be interesting to further look into this new stage of the history of visual subculture and the adaptive mechanisms of the collective to preserve a unity that, as the visuals' responses to previous changes have revealed, is more than the sum of each individual's love for a music genre.

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II Visual kei

II.1. Popular culture, music, and visual kei in Japan

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III Popular music, otaku and visual kei outside of Japan

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Appendix

Table 1: Location of online questionnaire respondents by administrative region:

Region	**Number of respondents**
Santiago Metropolitan Region	51
Valparaíso Region	7
Antofagasta Region	4
Libertador General Bernardo O'Higgins Region	3
Los Lagos Region	2
Tarapacá Region	2
Maule Region	1
Biobío Region	1
Araucanía Region	1

(Living abroad: 2; Northern area of Chile [no city or region specified]: 1)

Table 2: Age range of respondents from the Santiago Metropolitan Region

Age range	**Number of respondents**
15-20	4
21-25	19
26-30	19
31-35	8
36-40	1

Table 3: Most popular visual kei artists in Santiago.

(This information is based on the online questionnaire question "Name five of your favorite visual kei artists" and includes those with five mentions or more)

Artists	**Number of mentions**
Dir en Grey	26
Malice Mizer[48]	24
X Japan[49]	10
Lynch	9
L'Arc-en-Ciel	8
Buck-Tick	7
Deathgaze	7
Luna Sea	7
Versailles	7
The Gazette	6
Alice Nine	5
An Cafe	5
Kagrra	5

[48] Two mentions of Malice Mizer and Moi dis Moix's guitarist Mana have been included with Malice Mizer.
[49] Includes one mention of X Japan's guitarist Hide.