1. Introduction

One of the most vexing issues when writing about cultural globalization is the relationship between the global and the local. To which extent can we say that globalization is truly global? When is the local truly local? For example, I remember seeing a TV interview with a Japanese soccer player who was at that moment in Germany preparing for the World Cup. Asked what aspect of Japan he missed the most, he said the food in Germany was OK, but he missed Japanese food like kimchi. He quickly corrected himself, saying that anyway he missed the food available in Japan – but as he had just proved, the border between Japanese things and things that simply happen to be in Japan is a fuzzy one. While the distinction between local and global is fuzzy with kimchi, we’re at least dealing with a satisfyingly concrete object. When it comes to intangible commodities such as entertainment products, the issue becomes even more complex.

Studies of this kind of cultural globalization have overwhelmingly focused on the flow of cultural products from Hollywood to the rest of the world. However, as Pokemon and the global success of the Indian film industry have shown, a more realistic view of cultural globalization is as a process where cultural commodities are produced in many centers at once and exported to many more.¹

Hollywood dominates this system, but that dominion isn’t total.
For example, in my home country of South Africa, American influence is very strong, but so are British and Indian influences. In addition, TV schedules are boosted with anime, martial arts films from China and cable TV from the Netherlands. Post-apartheid South Africa’s closer links with the rest of Africa has also opened the door to movies imported on videotape from Nigeria and dance music from the Congo, while South Africa is also beaming its own cultural influence throughout the continent via satellite TV. Even the powerful American influence needs to be divided into mainstream Hollywood influence and the specifically African-American content favored by South African audiences.

In addition, one has to remember that this situation is not unique to South Africa, but is true in varying degrees and in various mixes across the non-Western world. But how do local audiences make sense of this mix of influences? How do they understand works coming from countries with which they have neither a cultural overlap nor an historical relationship? Anime is not propelled into the consciousness of the audience with the same kind of budgetary zeal as Hollywood films. One therefore has to ask how much of the “Japanese-ness” of anime is communicated when it shows up in dubbed form as part of a mix of children’s programming in a different country.

In this article I want to use the Japanese anime comedy Kureyon Shin-chan to argue that in the process of being globalized, different aspects of a single work become emphasized in order to support the audience’s understanding. While local nation-state culture supports the narrative understanding of a home audience, film-makers can’t assume that a foreign audience possesses the same level of knowledge. This doesn’t mean that the audience has no knowledge about the country, rather that the filmmakers don’t have access to that knowledge in the same way as they have with a
home audience. Countries like Japan or France inspire powerful fantasies outside of their borders, fantasies that certainly facilitate their films and TV to circulate internationally. These fantasies constitute a powerful set of ideas of how “Japan” or “France” lives in the international mind’s eye. Yet these ideas can’t necessarily be counted on to provide a substantive base for decoding narrative to the extent that their knowledge of Japanese or French life provides for a Japanese or French audience. I would like to argue that whatever knowledge an audience has about a foreign culture is crucially supported by their own experiences under everyday capitalism. However, because capitalism is itself such a contested concept, I need to be a little clearer about the basis from which I’m working.

2. Capitalism and Narrative Decoding

In this article I argue that the relationship of capitalism to local culture is part of a process Henry Louis Gates Jr. has called Coca-Culturalism, proposed in contrast to earlier views of globalization as a simple process of Coca-Colonization. Gate defines Coca-Culturalism as: “a mode of market penetration that in part alters local environments and in part conforms to them, in a process of mutual adaptation.” On one level, countries have little choice but to conform to global capitalist practice – frequently to the detriment of their own citizens. However, capitalism doesn’t simply impose itself from on high, it also insinuates itself into everyday life by merging with local culture. One therefore finds hybridized capitalisms that vary from state to state and from region to region. In my opinion, this is a point of overlap between the rich and the poor countries of the world – while the content of the capitalist transactions that structure everyday existence differ wildly, the fact that the everyday depends on and is shaped by capitalism remains the same. While every hybrid looks different,
the fact of hybridization remains.
So while on a macro-level a country might find itself on the other side of an economic ravine from such producers of mass culture as the United States or Japan, on the everyday level of capitalism most frequently depicted in films or TV programs, there is a stronger sense of what Michel de Certeau has called the practice of the everyday.\(^4\) De Certeau made the famous distinction between the top-down strategies deployed by those at the centre of power and the tactics from below deployed by the powerless to survive. These tactics of ‘making do’ or subverting the original intent of a strategy for one’s own purposes can be read into the relationship audiences both in and outside of the centers of cultural production have with cultural products. De Certeau points out that the state of being marginalized from producing culture is pervasive. Only a small minority of audience members actually produce cultural products of their own:

Marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive; this cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized, remains the only one possible for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself.\(^5\)

Everyday practices such as reading, cooking and watching are therefore tactical in the sense that they involve a making-do with what one has access to. Lacking anime series specifically created for them, foreign audiences take what they can use from the anime series they can get. However, while on the one hand the actual economic distance between a Japanese viewer of *Kureyon Shin-chan* and an Indonesian viewing the same program is probably sizable, their respective relationships with mass-produced culture and commodities within their own societies are similar, because they both make use of tactics and making-do
to survive. So while the specific tactics involved certainly differ, a shared subject position vis-à-vis commodities, money, saving and other aspects of everyday capitalism can be said to support narrative decoding. In this context I want to argue that the lived experience of capitalism as it structures everyday life becomes a crucial tool for audiences to use the imported culture they have access to. I think anime is particularly valuable in this case because it is both globally popular and avoids the complex debates around the Americanization of other cultures.

For all of these reasons *Kureyon Shin-chan* has proved a very interesting case. Achieving significant popularity across East Asia and showing up on TV schedules in Europe and the US, the series can be seen as a dramatization of these everyday tactics for survival and pleasure. Yet it’s also very specifically Japanese. Many jokes require knowledge of Japanese culture and the series is loaded with untranslatable puns. So while it is very hard to faithfully replicate the humor outside of a Japanese context, the series has still become an international hit. I want to argue that the act of appropriating *Shin-chan* for Korean or Chinese or Indonesian or Dutch use is crucially supported by the reality of a shared capitalist everyday uniting those disparate societies.

But how to go about teasing out these shared experiences? Using *Kureyon Shin-chan*, I want to argue that three fundamental aspects of capitalist subjectivity also aid narrative comprehension. Because they shape everyday capitalist experiences in crucial ways, their deployment in a narrative universe helps audiences to both understand the narrative and to emotionally invest in it. For the needs of this essay I want to depend on a slightly rough definition of everyday capitalism as a system where an individual is interpellated as a subject within an economically controlled scheme of overlapping discursive categories relating to gender,
race, employment status and so on. These categories are crucially infused with one’s financial status and both constrain and produce certain kinds of agency. At the same time, I argue that the capitalist system is underlain by currents of desire, connecting the subject to what Terry Eagleton has called “an immense desiring machine, an enormous circuit of messages and exchanges in which pluralistic idioms proliferate and random objects, bodies and surfaces come to glow with libidinal intensity.”

I want to focus on these three aspects – agency, money/commodities and desire – in order to move closer to identifying narrative aspects of *Kureyon Shin-chan* that have aided its globalization. My thesis is that these axes ease the global circulation of films and TV shows by facilitating narrative intelligibility and audience pleasure. They make it easier for us to understand what’s happening on the screen and they also add to the intensity of our reaction. However, I have to make clear that I don’t think capitalism is the only factor facilitating this cross-cultural comprehension. We don’t need capitalism to laugh at Shin-chan’s dancing naked ass. The human body is clearly hugely powerful in its power to communicate narrative and elicit audience pleasure across cultures. I don’t discuss factors such as the body in this paper due to space constraints, but I feel that a more detailed discussion of Shin-chan’s appeal has to these non-capitalist factors into account.


Based on the manga of Yoshito Usui, *Kureyon Shin-chan* revolves around the daily lives of five-year old Nohara Shinnosuke (Shin-chan) and his family: his father Hiroshi, a middle-manager; his mother Misae, a stay-at-home mother; his baby sister Himawari. Rather than following the American sitcom tradition of single, episode-length scripts, every episode is
divided into several short vignettes. These sometimes continue into longer stories, but are more often self-contained. Unlike such anime precursors as *Sazae-san* and *Chibi Maruko-chan*, the epicenter of the comedy is not the extended family but the nuclear family. They live in Kasukabe, Saitama prefecture – a dormitory city from where workers such as Hiroshi commute to Tokyo by train. This is also where Shin-chan attends Futaba kindergarten. The kindergarten is the second main narrative arena – his friends are important characters, as are the kindergarten teachers. The third main narrative arena is comprised by the shops and department stores of the neighborhood. The suburban triangle of home-school-shop is central, with Shin-chan causing havoc in all three.

As the title implies, Shin-chan is the main character, appearing in almost all the mini-episodes, even when they centre on other characters. His role as instigator of mischief could be compared to that of Bart Simpson. However, as a character Shin-chan is much younger and less knowing. Whereas both Bart and Lisa Simpson and the *South Park* characters generate comedy through displaying greater insight than the adults, Shin-chan’s comedy comes from misinterpreting and misusing the codes of behavior that structure the lives of the adults around him. Whereas the *Simpsons* and *South Park* children generate comedy from their heightened insight, Shin-chan’s comedy comes from his lack of insight. This is coupled with his pure eccentricity – more than once he is referred to as “wake ga wakaranai ko” – a kid one just can’t make sense of. So for example his friends see him lying by the side of the road and ask what he’s up to, only to be told he’s busy with ‘shitai gokko’ – playing corpse.

Shin-chan’s tendency to misunderstand etiquette and his eccentricity come together in his use of language. Much comedy is generated from him misusing or mixing up words or sayings, as
well as from the misuse of the formal set expressions that structure many interactions in Japan. For example, Shin-chan frequently angers his mother when, presented with a lavish evening meal, he shouts ‘Kaa-chan, futomomo!’ (Mom has fat thighs) instead of ‘Kaa-chan, futoppara!’ (Mom is generous [literally ‘fat stomach’]).

Faced with such cultural specificity, it would seem that *Kureyon Shin-chan* isn’t a natural candidate for export. Yet, the series has been shown in various cut, censored and dubbed formats in many countries. Pirated copies of *Kureyon Shin-chan* proved so popular that he was rated the most popular cartoon character among people in their twenties in China even before the manga or anime was officially launched there.

While the different versions of *Kureyon Shin-chan* obviously differ significantly from the Japanese original, they can only differ so much before requiring new animation. In the remainder of this essay, I would like to point out some aspects of the series that are translatable and that support its transnational circulation. In other words, I want to show how a shared capitalist everyday helps foreign audiences to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps and to invest emotionally when viewing foreign works.

4. *Shin-chan* and Capitalism

On the most basic level, *Kureyon Shin-chan* differs from many other anime series in its frank depiction of money. The Nohara family is always bargain-shopping, scrimping and saving, hiding money from each other, using the housekeeping money to splurge and so on. Money is depicted, as is the condition of not being able to afford something. This is given more power through setting up an intra-series commodity system in the form of *Akushon Kamen* (Action Mask) – an *Ultraman*-esque TV character whom Shin-chan adores and whose spin-off toys he covets. The link
between a TV program and its spin-off products marketed to kids is satirized in the series while being perpetuated in real life through the popularity of *Kureyon Shin-chan* character goods.\(^9\) The toy economy isn’t the only commodity relationship in the series. In a highly gendered view of consumption, Misae frequently lingers in front of shop windows staring at dresses while Hiroshi tends to keep his bonus a secret in order to buy expensive golf clubs which he needs for the golf weekends with his boss. The series makes a point of investing each family member with his/her own version of commodity lust. It is a running gag that the baby Himawari is the most aggressively acquisitive of the whole Nohara family. She has a fascination with shiny objects and tends to grab at any jewelry she sees. In one episode an off-screen narrator comments (as Himawari is rifling through her mother’s drawer) that she has an eye for value, as we see her tossing away fake stones and grabbing the one real stone (Misae’s diamond engagement ring), the price of which flashes on the screen, as well as the fact that Misae was planning to pawn the ring in case she and Hiroshi ever get divorced. Another running joke is that Himawari collects the fliers from jewelry stores.

The desire for commodities exists in close proximity to and washes over into actual sexual desire. Himawari doesn’t just fixate on jewelry catalogues; she also turns pink and happy when she sees a beautiful man. She hides a huge stash of pictures of actors and boy band members in various places in the house and in one gag Shin-chan suggests that his father might be better able to calm her down if he wore a mask of a handsome boy band member, implying that this mask is a tool often used in the house. Similar to commodities, desire is visited on each of the family members. Both Hiroshi and Misae have erotic fantasies about other people. Shin-chan is a slave to desire – particularly for women in their late
teens and early twenties. In an often repeated gag his parents lose him in a crowd, only to find him trying to chat up a young woman, even though he is only as high as her knee. However, commodities are never far away. In one episode Misae and Shin-chan are simultaneously seduced by new product displays in a shop window – Misae wants a designer dress, while Shin-chan is transfixed by an *Akushon Kamen* power belt. Staring at the expensive commodities, they have similar fantasies – they each see themselves wearing the dress/belt, surrounded by a fawning crowd of bikini-clad women (for Shin-chan) and tuxedo-clad men (for Misae).

In this fantasy, the commodity becomes the gateway not only to the desired other, but also allows access to the position of the adored. One can therefore argue that the commodity doesn’t only activate desire, but it also activates agency, or rather allows one to enter a different (and enhanced) agency position. This is a repeated theme in the series – not only the pure desire for an object or a person, but the moment of being transformed by a commodity into someone of a higher order. The storylines frequently generate these hopes only to dash them as a punchline.

The series doesn’t only detail the joys of shopping, but also what Arjun Appadurai has called the discipline and drudgery of consumption. Misae frequently complains about having to constantly shop for groceries, which as she immediately adds, is the bane of the housewife. So while shopping opens the door to enhanced agency, it also locks the characters into their current (sometimes claustrophobic) agency positions. In fact, agency positions tend to be highly fixed in the Shin-chan universe. For example, there are several instances where adults gaze at Shin-chan acting up, or being coddled by beautiful women and
murmur: “Kodomo, ii naa…” (It’s nice to be a child/I wish I were a child). The rigid distinction between people who get to be childish and irrational and those who don’t is much sharper here than in say *The Simpsons*, where the father Homer is more closely related to Shin-chan than to Hiroshi. The rigid delineation of agency positions in the series also extends to gender. In one episode, the family inherits relatives’ old laptop computer. Misae decides to teach herself computer skills, but she’s soon defeated by the manual and can’t even find the power switch. When Hiroshi comes home, her demeanor is uncharacteristically submissive, asking him to be her teacher. However, he soon turns it into a power game, asking for massages and beer in return for lessons. When the lesson finally gets underway, it turns out that she really can’t figure it out, despite Shin-chan and even Himawari managing to follow Hiroshi’s instructions. In order to salvage her pride she lashes out, reminding Hiroshi that all of these second-hand computer problems came about only because he can’t afford a new one. There’s no escaping these gender nightmares. In a later episode she is looking for a part-time job as a clerk, a plan she abandons when Shin-chan points out she might have to use a computer. Part of the comedy comes from the characters trying to escape from their subject positions, only to end right where they started.

While the agency positions of the other characters remain fixed, Shin-chan’s freedom gives him narrative power. He is the rare subject who can control his own agency and for that reason he becomes a powerful centre to the series. In contrast, the other characters find themselves continuously pushed back into their set roles – frequently by Shin-chan himself. For example, there are several episodes where both Shin-chan’s parents and his teachers use stealth tactics to try to escape from the children. In the case of the kindergarten teachers, it becomes a running joke that it is
almost impossible for them to go on a date without Shin-chan (and frequently his friends) showing up. The resultant crashing from one level of agency (that of prospective lover) to another (child-minder) generates much of the comedy, heightened by the contrasting of internal dialogue with outward good manners. This distinction between one’s personal wishes and one’s social role-playing can be read as the traditional Japanese division between honne and tatemae, but I would argue it is also powerful in capitalism itself, where one’s agency depends on maintaining a front of professionalism.¹¹ In this case one finds the series simultaneously appealing to the cultural knowledge of a Japanese audience and the global audience’s experiences under capitalism.

In this respect the character of Shin-chan takes on a powerful double role. Not only is he the least able to restrain himself, speaking out of turn and following his own desires without embarrassment, he also takes on the role of all-seeing eye, seeing right through other characters’ defenses. There are frequent scenes where Shin-chan sidles up to someone and repeats exactly what they were thinking in voiceover seconds before. He takes on the double role of being simultaneously the voice of society, saying out loud what everyone is thinking, while also being completely impervious to criticism himself. He polices society’s norms while living out his own disruptive desires. The combination makes him a potent source of audience identification and pleasure. Shin-chan presents a powerful fantasy of having society’s codes at one’s fingertips without being subject to them oneself. To identify with Shin-chan is to have everybody be legible while remaining comfortably opaque oneself. This is partly the effect of Shin-chan occupying a position of low agency — that of kindergartner — which absolves him of culpability. However, the narrative allows Shin-chan breaks his kindergarten friends don’t get. This becomes especially clear during a sequence of episodes that breaks with the
usual narration and presents Shin-chan as himself, but also a salaryman. When 5-year old Shin-chan takes over his father’s job, he only gains in agency (for example he gets to go on business trips) without having to work overtime or kowtow to the boss the way Hiroshi has to. The Shin-chan-as-salaryman vignettes are particularly revealing in terms of this play on agency because while Salaryman Shin-chan is just a five-year old in a suit – falling asleep on the client’s lap and jumping up and down on the couch – the other characters remain real professionals. Much of the comedy comes from their mortification at their colleague’s behavior.

This creative undermining of agency roles is almost exclusively open to Shin-chan alone. Shin-chan frequently takes on the role of cutting the other characters down to size – a role which while sometimes speaking the truth to power, is more often socially conservative. As soon as Misae feels confident in her new dress, Shin-chan is there to point out again that she has small breasts, a big behind and wrinkles for miles. Hiroshi hardly ever gets through a flirtation without Shin-chan mentioning that his dad has stinky feet and 32 years left on his mortgage. Shin-chan acting as the voice of society means that the other characters are repeatedly re-interpellated into their narrow subject positions (which the series reveals are not always happy – both his parents and his teachers make clear that they don’t always like Shin-chan or the other children very much). This almost sadistic dynamic is interrupted by the conks on the head Misae dispenses.

I would argue that the most fundamental comedic rhythm in the series occurs between Shin-chan and Misae. There is a repeated pattern of Shin-chan’s behavior spiraling further and further out of control, culminating in a bump (or two or three) on the head delivered by Misae. Her frequent eruptions are just as fundamental to the comedic power of the series as Shin-chan’s
malapropisms. So while the series makes a certain attempt to divide subjectivity down gender lines (Shin-chan and Hiroshi’s reactions to beautiful women are frequently exactly the same for example, while Misae and Himawari become captivated by the same window displays) Misae and Shin-chan are more fundamentally linked as two people who tend to lose their cool in public. The big difference between them is not how they act (him acting up and her clunking him on the head) but in the fact that she is embarrassed by her own public outbursts while he isn’t. This lack of insight into how he fits into society adds the power that makes Shin-chan’s character central to the series. Shin-chan’s ability to turn society’s strictures on others while escaping the full experience (or even knowledge) of how they might be turned on him is an extremely powerful subject position within capitalist popular culture. One could argue that in different ways American superheroes, Snoopy and Pippi Longstocking tap into similar desires.

The reality of Shin-chan simultaneously occupying our world and his own is visually emphasized in that when Shin-chan plays his different games (“namakemono gokko”, “unchi gokko”, “kanshi kamera gokko” – playing sloth, playing turd, playing security camera) he frequently appears in full costume. It is never made clear where these costumes come from, and he is the only one that manages these wardrobe changes. These nuigurumi sūtsu (full body costumes in the shape of a plush animal with a hole allowing the person inside’s face to be seen) that only Shin-chan gets to wear can be read as a commodity manifestation of his special agency status. This is one side of a parallel commodity-agency axis running through the series.

While on the one hand agency is frequently connected to commodities, the flipside of this connection is that a character’s loss of agency is frequently accompanied by the destruction of a
valued commodity. When viewing many episodes of *Kureyon Shin-chan* one after the other, one is struck by how often a character’s boasting about a new acquisition during the first act of the story leads to the loss of that object in the third. The regularity of this cycle almost takes on the ritualistic nature of boom and bust or destruction clearing the deck for more production that is inherent to capitalism itself.\(^{13}\) For example, at the beginning of one episode we see Matsuzaka-sensei (one of Futaba kindergarten’s teachers) applying her new designer perfume.\(^{14}\) She’ll have to eat just bean sprouts for the whole month to make ends meet, she says, but the expense was worth it. At school her boasting about the new fragrance is interrupted by Shin-chan, who asks why she stinks so much. Soon all the children are complaining about the smell. At the same time, the head of the kindergarten dislodges a wasp nest from the eaves and soon the children are fleeing enraged wasps. He volunteers to go outside and spray them with insecticide. Shin-chan confuses the insecticide with Matsuzaka-sensei’s perfume and she watches in horror as the head teacher sprays her expensive perfume at the relentless swarm of wasps.

The cutting down to size of a boastful character is echoed by the destruction of the commodity that occasioned the boasting in the first place. In order to understand this process *as comedy*, the audience has to draw on a tangled skein of experiences related to expensive commodities, desire, loss and envy. As I’ve argued in the course of this paper, this act of interpretation is crucially related to everyday life under capitalism and for that reason it contains communicative power unrelated to the culture of the nation state. At the same time, the repeated rhythm of boasting and deflatory destruction itself echoes the mass-produced commodities that are destroyed. Destruction enables production, but at a price.
I want to argue that the mix of sadistic and masochistic pleasures an audience takes in watching a character being put in his/her place is echoed by a certain pleasure taken in the destruction of commodities themselves. In a commodity-focused system such as contemporary capitalism, where so much energy is expended on working and saving in order to afford commodities, then buying them and caring for them, the pleasures of destroying commodities take on a particular power. Whether inside Japan or not, we are all in a very similar relationship with commodities, and seeing them destroyed is a melancholic pleasure inherent to capitalist experience itself.

5. Conclusion

I realize that statements such as “we are all in a very similar relationship with commodities” might strike the reader as quite sweeping and I am not attempting to use capitalism to discredit or avoid the analyses of actual audiences’ reception of actual works. Rather I see this essay as an attempt to suggest a template that might support such analyses. The global institutionalization of capitalism on an everyday level among other things presents us with a matrix against which to gauge what a concept such as ‘the everyday’ might mean in different environments. My instinct is that the making explicit of capitalism’s contribution to the cross-cultural intelligibility of fiction could facilitate such comparisons. It seems to me that this is a crucial step towards making clear what resistance against capitalism might constitute in different contexts.

In this essay I have argued that for a global audience the cultural work of decoding imported narrative is crucially supported by everyday experiences under commodity capitalism. In the case of *Kureyon Shin-chan*, where a series finds international acceptance
despite its cultural specificity, one has to investigate what role the increasing hybridization of nation-state culture with global capitalism plays in supporting audience pleasure. In this respect the character of Shin-chan – the loudmouth who says whatever comes into his head – speaks to us, no matter what his language is. Shin-chan is frequently dubbed into other languages and in the process some of his Japanese identity is lost. Yet, many of the comedic situations in the series remain intact despite travels across borders. Shin-chan therefore offers a fascinating chance to look at the hybridization between local and global capitalist culture that fuels cultural globalization.

Notes
2 In this paper I’m concentrating on the third and fourth series of *Kureyon Shin-chan* as they have been released on home video by Bandai. I have chosen these series because they follow after the birth of Shin-chan’s baby sister Himawari. Her emergence as a fourth family member significantly changed and enriched the series and I decided to make this my starting point. I have also decided to use the Japanese version of the title (*Kureyon* not *Crayon*) because I’m most consistently dealing with the original Japanese series rather than any specific overseas version.
4 Michel De Certeau, 1984, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.
5 ibid. p.xvii.
6 My concept of agency is drawn from the work of Louis Althusser. In addition, I have applied Judith Butler’s Foucault-inspired concept of agency being simultaneously produced and constrained by the law to the way our agency is produced and constrained by our position in the economic order. This economic agency in turn produces and is produced by a myriad of discursive agency positions including class, race, gender, nationality, age and so on.
For a more detailed discussion of my use of agency, desire and money/commodities as analytical categories, see my Exporting Stories: Global Capitalism, Narrative Design and Anime.

7 Terry Eagleton, 1986, Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism, p.142.

8 Shin-chan’s fight with the pirates didn’t end there. After the launch of the manga and the dubbed anime series, it was revealed that a Chinese company had already registered Shin-chan’s character design and his Chinese name as their property. Futabasha, the holder of the original Japanese copyright, had their original Shin-chan merchandise removed from the shelves and found themselves being accused of pirating the pirates. As far as I understand, the case is still going through litigation. A detailed rundown of the unfolding scandal is available at http://hotwired.goo.ne.jp/original/hamano/050531/index.html.

9 This relationship of a series to its own merchandise is even more explicitly addressed in The Simpsons where in one episode Bart becomes a flash-in-the-pan celebrity and his face appears on merchandise. The Simpson family ends up with a large box of unwanted keyrings, figurines and so on – the design of which was based on actual Simpsons merchandise. (The Simpsons, Series 5 DVD commentary).


11 Honne refers to one’s own, individual attitude while tatemae is the attitude one should display to the outside world and is influenced by discourses of duty and etiquette.

12 In some cultures this comedic oscillation between provocation and crackdown might be seen as almost approaching domestic violence. I have to come to Misae’s defense though – she really is provoked past breaking point.


14 The box sports a modified Chanel logo.
Bibliography


