

Cool Japan: Cuties and Monsters



lecturer: Ma Ran

1. basics of Marxism:

Commodity Fetishism / alienation

2. Week 8 * Nov 21st Celebrity & Fandom

Film added to "Film List":

AKB48 No Flower Without Rain documentary
you could watch it online (refer to email)

3. Change of **Week 10 * Dec 5th**

refer to handout

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's

[Frankfurt School: Frankfurt--Geneva--New York]

collaboration produced a highly influential approach to mass culture (during WWII and afterwards)

culture industry (not Cultural Industries):

refers to a homogenizing system in which culture is turned into commodity; as an entity that both creates and caters to a mass public that can no longer see the difference between the real world and the illusory world that these popular media forms (film, magazine, radio etc.) collectively generate.

----for instance, Culture Industry generates images that are nothing more than style and propaganda for industrial capitalism, reproducing status quo and obeying the dominant social order.

"the whole world is made to pass through the filter of culture industry"

"The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises...the only choice is either to join in or to be left behind"

characterized by three specific ideas: Monopoly,
Mass Production, and Technology.

high culture/low culture dichotomy

mass entertainment (popular movies, TV, and advertising) VS high culture/
intellectual art

In our society, rules by the culture industry convey that the individual is an **illusion**.

“The individual who supported society bore its disfiguring mark; seemingly free, he was actually the product of its economic and social apparatus”.

critique of the Culture Industry

They did not generally consider how people interpret and use the media forms they encounter. Other theorists have tried to introduce ideas of resistant viewing, cultural appropriation and subjective or psychological factors to modify their theory.



Walter Benjamin

‘The Work of Art in the Age of
Mechanical Reproduction’ (1992
[1936])



mechanical reproduction’s ability to change our relationship to art by making it more accessible (which Benjamin argues also makes it less auratic) pressures a reconceptualization of the function and nature of art rather than appraisal of mass culture from the privileged perspective of high culture.



"reproduction of art works" at
Dafen Oil Painting Village,
Shenzhen, PRC



In the immediate **post-war period**, work on mass-produced culture reflected both a new set of concerns and new ways of thinking about the relationship of culture and society.

The advance of the **Cold War** greatly impacted conceptualizations of culture.

Recognition of popular culture's overt political role heightened substantially and distress over the effects of 'Americanization' abounded. The type of cultural criticism produced significantly broadened the scope of earlier debates on mass culture.

'In the 1950s and 60s, something that could be called Americanism (or multinational capital, in another formulation) was insinuating itself into France not by means of any heavy-handed ideological takeover but precisely through the quotidian:
blue jeans, car culture, cleaning products'

Kristin Ross. 1997: 22

In the USA, the late 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by fierce countercultural movements, anti-war protest, and radical political activism.

The social and political transformations of the post-war era ushered in a diversity of scholars, including more people of color and of working-class origins---Ethnic studies, feminist theory, postcolonial studies and cultural studies.

postmodernism
&
globalization

Three factors in this dynamic that most frequently structure developments in and experiences of popular culture include its status as a product of industry, an intellectual object of inquiry, and an integral component of people's lives.

Globalization & Japanese Popular Culture

Koichi Iwabuchi

Japanese exportation of audiovisual products could be featured as **culturally odorless three C's**: **consumer technologies** (such as VCRs, Karaoke, and the Walkman); **comics and cartoons** (animation); and **computer/video games**.

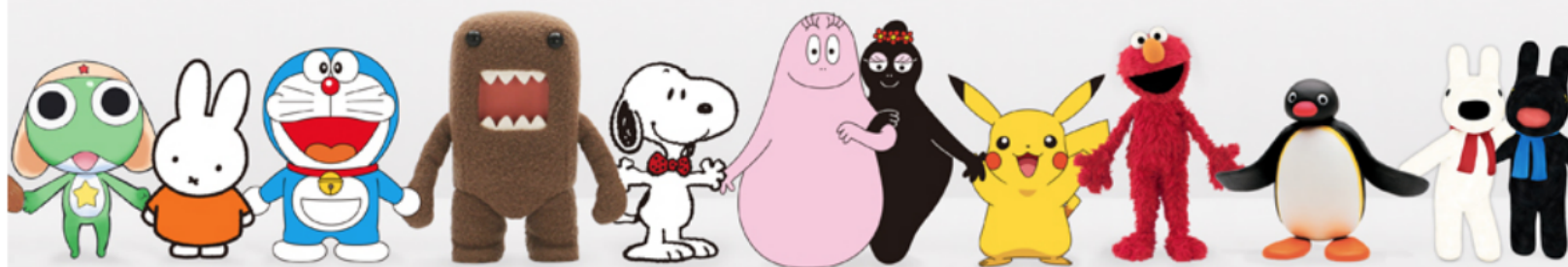
cultural odor (fragrance): "has more to do with widely disseminated symbolic images of the country of origin", just as SONY Walkman may signify "**Japaneseness**" while doesn't necessarily sell on a "**Japanese way of life**"; while it is also "closely associated with racial and bodily images of a country of origin". p27

non-Japaneseness=mukokuseki (someone of something lacking any nationality) indicating "the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context, which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features" p28

てをつなごう。

こどもたちに
えがおを

てをつなごう だいさくせん 07



the "odorless" part of Japanese popular culture raises question such as:

Japaneseness of Japanimation "can only be recognized in its being actively a mukokuseki visual culture"?

the visible cultural products featuring Japaneseness---Japanese pop music, TV dramas and fashion magazines---is consumed not as "an idea of image of Japan" ; more as materialistic commodity

there might be NO distinctive Japanese cultural influence to be found in the "Japanization" phenomenon---particularly in Asia, we need to take into account the historical entanglements between Japan and other Asian countries.

South Korea: since 1999, Japanese films, manga and TV drama have been gradually introduced.

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100名に

the rise of Japanese culture export signifies intensified global cultural flows

- 1) have decentered the power structure;
- 2) vitalized local practices of appropriation and consumption of foreign cultural products and meanings.

2) vitalized local practices of appropriation and consumption of foreign cultural products and meanings.

emergence of regional media and cultural centers such as Egypt, Brazil, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan.

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KOREAN TRAVEL MAGAZINE MOOK

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地球の歩き方

MOOK

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2大付録!

1

行きつけ満載!
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東京&大阪
BOOK

取り外しOK!
ソウル☆
韓流
MAP

2

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Japanese pop culture & intraregional cultural flows within Asia; Asian consumption of Japanese popular culture generates a positive sense of cultural immediacy



The popularity of “Japanese” mass culture (melodrama, animation, pop music, etc.) signals “commonality” and “resonance” within Asia today.

Leo Ching, "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital"

Godzilla (1954)

Toho Co. Ltd.; G featured their most expensive production up to that time

Dir. Ishiro Honda (prisoner of war in WWII)
Special Effect by Eiji Tsuburaya,

clips of Godzilla doc



ゴジラ (1954)

Background & Theme

"Japan's Nuclear Nightmare" Peter Brothers

inspired by "the Beast 1

inspired by "the Beast from 20,000 Fathoms" (1953)
& King Kong (1933);

Occupation of Japan by the US: 1945-1952

1954 Memories of Nagasaki & Hiroshima attacked:
Japanese tuna trawler "Lucky Dragon No.5"----
exposed to and contaminated by nuclear fallout
from the United States' Castle Bravo thermonuclear
device test on Bikini Atoll, on 1 March 1954.

Godzilla as "a virtual re-creation of the Japanese
military and civilian experience during the final
months of WWII", underpinned with subtle anti-
American tone



more fantasy Japanese films with monsters in the 1990s and 2000s

Joyce B Boss:

Yet the modern Japanese military can be depicted as an aggressive force in the postwar era only in fantasy films, and Godzilla himself remains beholden to a legacy in which Japan was defeated not by the countries it dominated but by the United States. The ambivalence is still negotiated through the figure of Godzilla, 50 years after his first screen appearance. p108

military and civilian experience during the final months of WWII", underpinned with subtle anti-American tone

through the figure of Godzilla, 50 years a first screen appearance. p108



Japan overshadowed by Godzilla
--reminder of the Future?



Dr. Yamane

...Godzilla is the representation of the dangers of man's tampering with atomic and nuclear power, it has more recently surfaced in such places as Three Miles Island, Chernobyl, and now in Fukushima.

"discovering there is no salvation is salvation"---
Bernardo Bertolucci



A-Bomb to A-Bomb, H-Bomb to H-Bomb

Serizawa, the science genius who would use his "Oxygen Destroyer" to kill Godzilla .

Peter H argues their final attempt reminds of Kamikaze, while Serizawa's confessions are actually closer to those by Oppenheimer's---
and could he justify the use of the potentially massive destructive weapon against Godzilla also as "necessary evil"? Is it because he realises he cannot do so that he decides to kill himself?