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SELLING JAPAN IN *MAD MEN*'S POSTMODERN AMERICA: THE VISUAL TRANSLATION OF JAPANESE ICONS AND IMAGES THROUGH A LENS OF WESTERN ADVERTISING AND AESTHETICS

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ABSTRACT

To what extent do Americans continue to fetishise images of Japan in Western popular culture? Evinced by generalised twentieth-century stereotypes, as well as twenty-first-century discussions of anime, manga and cosplay, it appears that World War II archetypes of Japanese society have had lasting residual effects that are slowly diminishing. This article unpacks cultural artefacts in order to understand how American's view of Japanese culture has evolved since then. For years, reductionist cinema portrayals, along with Ruth Benedict's 1946 anthropological study of Japan—a misguided attempt to redefine Japanese customs—impacted Western perceptions of a mysterious and militarised people during the ensuing decades. Benedict, in preparing her analysis, lacked immersion in authentic Japanese culture; instead, she attempted to gain perspective by interviewing Japanese Americans who had not lived in Japan since infancy. This important distinction significantly distorted her resultant theories on cultural differences. An examination of her influence—contextualised vis-à-vis the television drama Mad Men, films like Lost in Translation, and Walter Benjamin's aesthetic aura—sets the stage for determining the extent of fetishism still present in contemporary American society. These segues provide alternate lenses for disseminating communicatively unfamiliar cultural spaces between East and West and exploring Japan through contemporary Western eyes. While negative sociocultural exchanges portrayed in popular media continue to exemplify both gratuitous cultural simplifications and post-World War II hostilities, American perspectives of Japan have improved in the ensuing decades due to globalism and increasing cognisance of regressive stereotypes. Strong American loyalties toward anime and manga further provide a positive outlook on progressive discernment and congruous cultural interests.

Keywords: Japanese icons, *Mad Men*, American cosplay, cultural representations, familio-exotic

INTRODUCTION

The American dramatic television series *Mad Men*, first airing nearly thirty years after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, focuses on the business and personal relationships of wealthy and middle-class white Americans in the 1960s at a prestigious New York advertising agency. *Mad Men* is widely acclaimed for its intelligent, unflinching dissection of American privilege, and its subtexts generate thousands of discussions across the Internet. Despite its strengths, the show rarely offers viewers the opportunity to observe ethnic diversity at play. Thus, the inclusion of several Japanese guest characters in an almost perfunctory appearance added a layer of transcultural reality to *Mad Men*'s function within representations of the racially-charged 1960s. The episode, titled "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword," which aired in 2011, was also the only one thus far in the series to depict Japanese. [1] However, the calculated international verbal sparring hints at the receptivity of America toward Japan hidden within historical cultural interpellations that increasingly challenge fetishism and transnational phobias.

A distinct shift in cultural perceptions leading into the twenty-first century reveals new American/Japanese exchanges that replace visual fetishisation of Japan with simulacra that stimulate creativity through artistic borrowings. My inquiry into the presence of Japan (spectral and otherwise) in U.S. postwar culture unpacks signposts from historical signifiers, considering events in which the East within Western consciousness has been accepted, disregarded, or denigrated in order to reinforce America's jealous guardianship of global leadership in creativity, economics and power. The representative samplings that follow—wartime propaganda, postwar trade friction, acceptance of culturally neutral or localised Japanese products, and America's interest in anime and manga—are culled from popular culture and consumer marketing. They build upon what I term the "familio-exotic," a contradictory sentiment evolving during World War II of fascination and suspicion that engenders the comfort of relative familiarity through manipulation of popular images and Walter Benjamin's aura of authenticity.

The "familio-exotic," I propose, provides a new means of situating exoticism within a postmodern global economy that no longer views Japan as completely foreign or formidable. *Mad Men* thus provides both a starting and end point to this argument, as the series itself documents a confusing era of American society that both fascinates and dismays its viewers. Drawing upon the implications of this disorientation, I focus on the complicated and often paradoxical snapshots of Japanese people and

iconography within and on the periphery of American visual idealism. Also keeping in mind cultural naivetés and stereotypes mired in a long and uneasy cultural consciousness, I utilise *Mad Men* as a springboard for gazing into a myriad of subjectively styled Japanese images disseminated in America, including the iconography of Japanese-influenced cinema, consumer products and cosplay, which pervasively permeate cultural barriers. Western preoccupation with difference and the historical maintenance of cultural distance is perhaps best summed up by one *Daily Telegraph* reporter who explains that "we look at Japanese people as curiosities" (Mayes and Rowling 1997: 130). This continual gaze materialises as a racial subset of Western culture that stereotypes Japanese as alternately and ambiguously stoic, mysterious, subservient and monolithic—a visual underground of otherness somewhere in between stark black and white racialisation.

In order to unpack the changing social and political climates since the enmity of the Second World War, it becomes necessary to closely examine the factors leading to a certain type of American visuality that historically fetishises Japanese cultures and, alternately, rejects their differences or appropriates and emulates their purported "uniqueness" as desirable yet inscrutable others.[2] The ways in which Americans respond to and interact with imported visual interpretations of Japanese popular culture—including, but not limited to anime, manga and their resultant cosplay (role-playing)— can be viewed as cumulative responses to a pattern of racially-charged interactions and cultural preconceptions toward Japan. I would like to begin with the nineteenth-century image of Impressionism artist Claude Monet's contribution to *Japonisme*,[3] his 1876 painting of a "Japanese Lady" titled *La Japonaise*. In actuality, the saucy kimono-clad woman he depicts as Japanese is his ostentatiously blonde wife. Although Monet was enthralled and influenced by Japanese art, this odd juxtaposition perhaps indicates that "Japanese art was alien, an irruption from an unknown, dreamlike culture and, as such it was to be a constant challenge to Monet's vision" (Spate and Hickey 2001: 22). This unrealistic depiction serves as a reminder of culture conflation and the "familio-exotic" that have extended into twentieth- and twenty-first-century Western visualisation.

An historical timeline that delineates historically changing images of Japanese is essential in accounting for the complicated ontology of American attitudes toward Japan and its visual progeny. I have chosen to focus on American reactions to contemporary Japanese visual representations that emerge through both creative arts and economic insecurities that reveal America's desire to capitalise upon Japan, including Hello Kitty products and the films *Rising Sun*, *Kill Bill* and *Lost in*

Translation. I introduce these in a historical sequence that investigates Japanese imagery in America beginning in the mid-twentieth century. Two examples of cinema culture during World War II establish the extremity of propaganda that doggedly influenced American attitudes for decades. These reminders of a divided past and cultural clichés still frame postwar television and cinema representations for new generations of digitalised Americans who observe, emulate and participate in Japanese aesthetics and technology.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

My methodology includes two distinct yet parallel frameworks: theoretical concepts of Western aesthetic perceptions and visual culture set within an ongoing socio-historical narrative. I shall utilise Walter Benjamin's examinations of the photographic fetishisation of art culture and the aesthetic aura believed to be located within authentic imagery. The Japanese-inspired imagery explored here provides categorical examples of Benjamin's depiction of artistic aura as "[a] strange web of space and time" (Benjamin 2008: 285). Benjamin acknowledges that the aura, or unique distance between the viewer and the image, found in traditional artwork possesses a type of cult value that retains its sacredness. Since Benjamin juxtaposes neoclassical Western aesthetics with multifaceted ethnography in his research, I employ his artistic authority here to tease out new applications of the West's take on the sacredly peculiar Japan that is selectively familiar to them through advertising and media. In conjunction, Nancy Armstrong's focus on the significance of these fetishised gazes and objectification offers a new consideration of American advertising's illustrations and reimagining of Japan through popular images and products. In situating these initial principles of visuality within a historical patchwork of popular Japanese iconography, this project interrogates America's renewed desire to engage with distinctive and influential Japanese culture.

Armstrong notes that since the nineteenth century, "popular photography reproduced what people thought they had agreed something was supposed to look like"; this observation, I argue, particularly denotes images utilised in advertising and other media culture (1999: 27). Further, the same holds true for visual interpellations of cultural unfamiliarity. Thus, when cinema and advertising produce mass-displayed images of Japanese caricatures or emblematic products, their constant exposure generates a cloning model that clings to American perceptions. We can further apply here the contemporary Baudrillardian view of simulacra as contributory to a

Japanese hyperreal [4] display through the artificiality of constructed environments that help formulate postwar perceptions of Japan. Selective Japanese imagery within cinema like *Rising Sun*, *Lost in Translation* and *Kill Bill* exemplifies the staged visuality of subjective representation and "substitut[es] signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard 2001: 1733). In essence, it becomes easier for America to view Japan in terms of an imaginary location that simultaneously subverts postwar stereotypes and creates a hyperreal interpretation of a new Japanese visage to scrutinise as it situates the popularity of Japanese art, including anime and manga, into the insularity of Western culture. Overcoming this sense of the Japanese hyperreal ultimately ushers in familiarity and acceptance of Japan as a real space.

RACIAL HAUNTINGS: THE SPECTER OF WORLD WAR II PROPAGANDA

Japanese ethnicity became a means of intense visual scrutiny as the Other within U.S. postwar hegemonic culture. Ethnic caricatures that were popular during and immediately after the war overtly relay America's fears and insecurities regarding Japanese power military and economic potential. Anti-Japanese propaganda, including posters, film shorts and brochures, remain in limited circulation among collectors, due to renewed interest in mid-twentieth-century and World War II nostalgia as evidenced by their popularity on collectable websites like eBay.com and Etsy.com. These artefacts overwhelmingly depict Japanese men as comically serious or enraged, with animalistic facial features and expressions.

The proliferation of war propaganda, exemplified by the phrase "little yellow men," emphasises an "alien as well as threatening" archetype, for it "connoted not merely people of generally shorter stature, but more broadly a race and culture inherently smaller in capability and in the accomplishments esteemed in the white Euro-American world" (Dower 2010: 50). With the extensive internments of Japanese Americans during World War II, antipathy against the "enemy" following the war was so rampant that even cartoons featured blatant racialisation. One of the most egregious offenders, *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944), depicts an animated rabbit, an ostensive metaphor of Western cleverness, prevailing over an easily befuddled Japanese soldier and a sumo wrestler. The eight-minute animated short encapsulates the era's stereotypes about the Japanese, portraying them as slow-witted, dangerous and highly malleable. This treatment of Japanese as buffoons emulated other media portrayals and

popular myths. Additionally, Japan itself appears as a remote, deserted tropical island imaginary, a veritable Garden of Eden marred by the appearance of a violent, buck-toothed, barefoot and easily manipulated soldier. Here, the country appears impossibly disconnected from "civilised" culture. After ridiculing, tricking and killing the soldier, the wise-cracking "all-American" rabbit encounters the predictably clumsy sumo wrestler and easily subdues him by masquerading as a geisha. Both stereotyped characters easily succumb to Bugs Bunny's western superiority and meet their deaths through slapstick measures.

The incongruity of the mild-mannered and shy Japanese is juxtaposed with the calculated aggressiveness of the Pearl Harbor attack to reinforce the "familio-exotic" image that many Americans prior to the war held along with "dogmatic views of 'the Oriental' as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction" (Said 1978: 8). While the vast majority of American servicemen who fought in the war are deceased and positive depictions of Japan now outnumber racist diatribes, traces of dogmatism and stereotypes toward Japanese as typical of the cartoon figures populating Bugs Bunny's world lingered for years. The animated short seemed to prove that "[t]he Japanese are different… They think differently and act differently;" and "the 'two-faced, topsy-turvy mind of the Jap' provided the rationale" for the continued production of these "warnings" to the American public (Moeller 1996: 30). Duality and difference as portrayed in the cartoon bewildered and frightened white Americans who were not sure whether the Japanese were actually as dim as Bugs' opponents or, in fact, coldly calculating and unfathomable, as suggested in other war propaganda.

An example of this incomprehensibility can be found in a wartime feature film called *Destination Tokyo* (1943). Typical of popular American cinema representations of World War II, it portrays life on a U.S. submarine and relays misinformation about Japan through casual conversations among the crew. In discussing Japanese marriages, the submarine captain claims, "The Japs don't understand the love we have for our women. They don't even have a word for it in their language." Aside from the possessiveness of referring to "our women," the actual word for love in Japanese is rarely needed in contextual discourse; thus, the men manage to relay an intentionally twisted truth that furthered agitation propaganda. [5] Nevertheless, U.S. citizens, still reeling from war, found comfort in this type of foreign intelligence from the prescribed power of the U.S. that seemed to guard hegemonic cultural security. In its attempt to portray an "authentic" image of cold Japanese relationships, the film reinforces Armstrong's theory of art reproducing previously and implicitly agreed-upon versions of culture.

These reiterations of distorted simulacra illustrate deeply ingrained attitudes of institutional racism and the ways in which Americans have both reinforced and overcome lingering fears about encroaching ethnic diversity. As Benjamin notes, "[t]he more far-reaching the crisis of the present social order, and the more rigidly its individual components are locked together in their death struggle, the more the creative… becomes a fetish" in which international tensions are reflected in art (2008: 293). The direct outcomes of social crisis and cultural struggles can be glimpsed through fetishisation of the other and commentary on the tension of such relationships through artistic references. Immediately after the war, preferences for Japanese-made goods or consumption of Japanese pop culture appeared to indicate national disloyalty and challenged the cultural superiority of America itself. Annalee Newitz astutely addresses this in a 1995 article, explaining that when admiration and interest in the authenticity of Japan was openly expressed in postwar America, it often appeared that "they [were], in a sense, being colonized by Japanese pop culture. Even if [these participants] are from Asian racial backgrounds, they are still Americans, and they are rejecting their national culture in favour of another national culture" (12). Acceptance of Japan during its postwar economic rise without attempting to redefine or "Americanise" the country's success was apt to spark resentment among those who equated such acquiescence with unpatriotic promotion of a former enemy nation. This primarily became a concern when admiration or emulation extended to Japan's more obscure cultural spaces.[6]

THE CHRYSANTHEMUM AND THE SWORD: CRIB NOTES ON A CONTINUUM OF "MAD" MEN AND MISUNDERSTANDING

The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, a "politely arrogant" 1946 book written by anthropologist Ruth Benedict, purported, at the time of its publication, to explain "authentic" Japanese culture to curious Americans (Lummis 2007). It illuminates the ways in which motifs and fads, such as *Japonisme* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, created a spectacle of Japan under the guise of admiration and presents a somewhat simplistic and stereotypical view of Japanese citizens, culture, and standards of behaviour. As a cultural dissection, Benedict's tome prompts the question, "At what point does the artistic spectacularization of the other risk becoming an abusive or reduction appropriation?" (Adinolfi 2008: 61). Although Benedict hoped to obtain culturally important accounts of Japanese life, she was ultimately unable to travel to Japan for first-hand observations. Instead, she resigned herself to

interviews with Japanese Americans, many of whom had been raised in the United States since childhood.

Benedict shrugged off this sort of inauthenticity that Benjamin derides by declaring that Japanese Americans' own "concern with differences" as well as "their conditioning… could well be used in the study of Japan" (1946: 10). In this exclusion of Japanese as viable informants of their own culture, she limits the scope of her study to subjects who either never resided in Japan or who did not recall life there and identified more strongly as American. This reifies Said's belief that assumption of inherent authority assumes that the East has "a kind of extrareal, phenomenologically reduced status that puts them out of reach of everyone except the Western expert" (Said 1978: 283). Differing from Monet's aesthetic modelling of Japan, Benedict's establishment of Western primacy reinforces cultural unfamiliarity. Her incomplete reporting predicated toward American stereotypes follows a pattern of assumptions subscribed to by the West through limited visual perceptions. Inasmuch as Benedict's theories not only translate but redefine the value of Japanese culture, they further assumes a unique Western ability to determine patterns of cultural normalcy as defined by Western standards and reinforces my delineation of a longstanding American preoccupation with difference and otherness.

Postwar sentiment adjoins the role of otherness in marketing and advertising Japan to mid-century America. *Mad Men*, in featuring early Japanese-American consumer partnerships, aptly sets the stage for a gradual shift toward cultural "borrowings" of Japanese business models and demonstrates Baudrillard's distinction of goods as "speak[ing] a language within a meaningful 'system of objects' [that] also conceal a hierarchy of social groups" (Sinclair 1987: 53). "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" conveys the atmosphere of a midcentury America that hoped to achieve multicultural inspiration while still clutching at social and cultural hierarchies. The episode deliberates on a brief yet poignant interaction between American and Japanese businessmen, set in one of the most representative landscapes of the Western world. *Mad Men* is ostensibly located in "New York City… a hub for marketing global commodities" and the single most ethnically diverse city in the U.S. (Goodlad 2012: 207). Against this backdrop, the show's advertising agency, SCDP, vies for an exciting business deal with Honda as the Japanese car manufacturer expands its advertising to America. Pete Campbell, a young junior accounts man, enthusiastically relates, "So far, I've been advised to read *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. From what I can tell, [the Japanese] have their own way of doing business." Even Pete, the most socially progressive member of the agency, describes Japanese culture as inexplicable, requiring

the use of an anthropological manual to navigate. This establishes how, after pronouncement as an inexplicable contradiction of menace and buffoonery twenty years earlier, Japan's establishment of successful international trade prompted American interest in new aspects of the Japanese "familio-exotic": their successes in business and postwar adjustments to life.

Applying Benedict's text to racialised predispositions based on postwar propaganda, one of SCDP's partners enthusiastically attempts to utilise its theories to forge a working relationship with Honda, treating the Japanese sales representatives with both cautious respect and the curious contemplation of a biological scientist. However, Roger Sterling, a partner and World War II veteran unable to put aside prejudices accumulated during the war, refuses to help facilitate a deal, even after his senior partner succinctly reminds him that "the war is over." Roger responds by reverting to criticism of the quality of Japanese goods by declaring to the Honda representatives, "We don't want any of your Jap crap." However, his insult is proven inaccurate; "[w]hereas Japan goods had once been known for their cheapness, now [in the 1960s] they were known for their quality and for their threat to American industries" (Napier 2007: 91). The scene perfectly captures postwar insecurities and contradictions of the "familio-exotic" vis-à-vis Roger's tired trope as he refuses to acknowledge postwar trade partnerships and again as the other Americans, enacting what they gleaned from Benedict's book perceive as a universally Japanese custom, present their visitors from Honda with gifts as a symbol of honour.

Online American *Mad Men* fan forums reveal the progressiveness in contemporary attitudes toward Japan and Roger's war-influenced reactions. On *Television Without Pity*, commenter "fashionista79" wrote on 22 February 2010, "I was shocked by Roger's behavior… It's understandable considering that for Roger the war was not too long ago… but the outburst made me cringe." On another site, *Basket of Kisses*, commenter "DRush76" proposes another perspective on 23 February 2010: "Here's an interesting thought. Do you think any of those Japanese businessmen felt the same as Roger about Americans?" Another commenter, "Fnarf," attempts to paint a visual of mid-century America: "The fascination with Japanese business practices, and the widening fear that they were onto something we had missed… was also a decade away. There were no sushi restaurants (aside from a couple of obscure places in L.A. and Seattle). Japanese culture was very odd and foreign." For the most part, commenters evinced dismay at mid-century American attitudes toward Japan and attempted to outline the ways in which the U.S. has evolved since that time.

**MADE IN JAPAN: THE NEW WAVE OF JAPANESE
ICONIC IMPORTS**

Due to the rapidity of this evolution, a dwindling number of older
Americans lack familiarity with anime and manga and still harbour a
tangential concern for what they view as an empire of Japanese imports sold
in America. Animosity has all but disappeared in contemporary society, in
large part because of America's participation in the economy of Japanese
art; however, postwar memories marginally influenced the perception of
Japanese imports for decades. As noted in *Mad Men*'s social commentary on
Honda's expansion into the Western market, some Americans were initially
uncomfortable with imports from a nation that only twenty years earlier had
been considered an enemy of the state. Citizens who still harboured enmity
toward Japan in postwar years found new outrage in the idea of accepting
Japanese imports, despite the U.S. government's recognition of a trade
agreement's mutual benefits. As illustrated by Roger Sterling's tirade, open
dissent to Japanese goods was isolated and voiced mainly by veterans.
However, the gasoline crisis of the 1970s inadvertently and temporarily
reignited old prejudices and exclusionary tactics.

　　　In 1973, after a highly-politicised embargo initiated by several Arab
nations opposing U.S. policy in the Middle East, America experienced an
oil shortage that lasted for a year and a half. [7] Oil prices increased
exponentially, and gasoline (petrol) was strictly rationed. As a direct result,
Japanese-built cars became enormously popular for the first time with the
U.S. public due to their affordability, fuel efficiency and quality.
Unprecedented purchases of import vehicles soon affected the American
automobile industry, based in Detroit, Michigan, with thousands of workers
no longer needed on the U.S. auto production line. Once again, some
Americans viewed Japan as the enemy despite their rehabilitated
relationship after the war years; importation became just another means of
extending the "constructed ideological fabrications aimed at consolidating,
perpetuating and extending the belief system of the United States" (Moeller
1999: 29). The hard-sell of wartime ideology remained part of the American
psyche, creating a contained belief that the nation was constantly in danger
of becoming victimised and must remain diligently on guard in order to
protect their own iconic symbols of power, which included profitability and
a peculiarly American aura of authenticity.

　　　Yet the irony caused by Japan's ability to successfully implement its
economic strategies and permeate hyper-visual American car culture was
lost on many in the West. Proponents of an unrivalled U.S. auto industry
attempted to portray Japanese automobiles as shoddily-made and visually

unappealing, hoping that Americans would refrain from buying them (Heitmann 2009: 180). This attempted abjection spread to other Japanese products such as electronics, watches and alloys. Born out of competitive fear, for "[i]ndeed, Japan in many ways is the most successful non-Western country at playing the West's own games—of colonialism, of economic development, of industrialization, and of urbanization," the propaganda had the unintended effect of generating public interest in the products' lower prices (Iles 2008: 525). Only as Americans gradually discovered that the Japanese business model not only resembled their own but also boasted world-class quality and design did they begin to reverse their decades-old reserve toward Japan and its visuality.

Even more ironically, the automobile industry debacle paved the way for increased demands that included all manner of Japanese imports, including toys and animated cartoons. Corporate advertising, such as that depicted in *Mad Men*, influenced and ultimately determined public opinion, allowing an influx of Japanese goods that proved useful, reliable and visually appealing. Despite pervasive ethnocentrism which, in the twentieth century, threatened to limit multicultural exploration, Americans devour Japanese offerings because they like what feels comfortable to them and they continuously crave new visual imagery; both aspects of this double-sided coin address their predilection for the "familio-exotic" and inevitably determine diverse aestheticism's place in American society.

HELLO, PRETTY: HELLO KITTY, VIDEO GAMES, AND THE PREVALENCE OF CONSUMER ICONOGRAPHY

In the late twentieth century, the U.S. began paying attention to the entertainment value of Japanese culture, although advertising focused on its appeal to Anglo Americans, not Japanese Americans. Indeed, despite their earning power and increasing visuality, the entire Asian American presence is represented in only eight percent of television marketing (Sheehan 122). In essence, Asians still occupy a fringe culture in America, with the intricacies of Japanese cultures reduced to ostentatious displays of quirky otherness, such as sushi bars in neighbourhood strip malls. For a time, popular products and film images reinforced this perception; in particular, Japanese goods such as costume jewellery and clothing were mainly marketed in America as cheap and geared toward young, feminine tastes. In one of a myriad of possible consumer examples, Shintaro Tsuji designed the merchandise-focused character Hello Kitty to visually appeal to young girls through a basic design intended to generate familiarity and exigent affinity.

Introduced by Japanese company Sanrio® in 1976, the cartoon kitten has no ethnicity; her very blandness promotes a sort of idealistic racial amnesia. She immediately found favour with a target fan base in the U.S. and, for nearly four decades, American girls have flocked to Sanrio® specialty retail stores for Kawaii-themed collections of stuffed animals, stickers, stationary and school supplies.

On the other hand, American acquisition of Japanese goods represents not necessarily physical ownership but, rather, an aesthetically watered-down version of exoticised consumer culture per the Baudrillardian-constructed artificiality. The determinism of cultural markers as constantly manufactured through media and consumerism, for instance, stereotypes cowboy Westerns as distinctly American, while Yakuza cinema is not and can never be. Inasmuch, then, as the shilling of Japanese products in America superficially translates into a progressive transnationalism, their role as broad representatives of Japanese culture is problematic. Childish consumer symbols like Hello Kitty suggest that "one reason for the proliferation of Japanese popular culture is that it has been rendered 'culturally odorless'" (Napier 2006: 54). Children's products, almost unfailingly inoffensive and cute, generally transcend cultural boundaries and rendered these brands visually acceptable to U.S. consumers in the twentieth century. As Hello Kitty is mute, attired in a neutral dress and hair bow, and not otherwise overtly Japanese, she was instantly deemed acceptable as an aesthetically pleasing, Americanised version of Japan. Further, she upholds the historicised notion of Japan "as a land where the [people] are 'queer and quaint'" (Revell 1997: 51). Hello Kitty's muteness, along with her aloof posture, summons historical American assumptions, fostered by writers like Benedict, regarding innate Japanese poise. While other visual and consumerist brands, such as Godzilla, cannot be extricated from their cultural marriage with Japanese pop culture, Hello Kitty uniquely succeeds in visually representing America (at least in the minds of its citizens) rather than Japan.

Thus, after the initial wave of first-generation Hello Kitty consumers grew up, Sanrio® began marketing to adult women, now selling jewellery, wine and other high-end products. This direct target of consumerism seemed to indicate that in America, a country obsessed with hypermasculinity, the infantile symbolism of Hello Kitty was both distinctively unthreatening and visually appealing. Even its product lines designed for women are categorised and dismissed as children's *kitsch*, which "performs a kind of cultural snobbery that deems the cute unsuitable for adults, unless distanced with irony or tongue-in-cheek bravado" (Yano 2013: 197). Still, jewellery and rhinestone-encrusted cell phone cases are often sold in specialty shops

geared toward children and teenagers. Despite its wide appeal to women, the brand has become anathema to those who cannot understand its appeal and thus stigmatise it as hyperfeminine. Not surprisingly, feminisation itself carries with it a degree of disdain; many men are taught from infancy to avoid interests and pursuits that might brand them as either feminised or gay. Although bridging a gap between Japanese and American fads, the feminised marketing initially appeared to underscore decades-old stereotypes—that Japan itself was a feminised nation, with Hello Kitty as its mascot. Not until the Pokémon and Tamagotchi franchises emerged as collectables in the U.S. for both frenzied boy and girl collectors in the mid-1990s did gender marketing achieve parity in Japanese-made children's products. But while Hello Kitty has enjoyed long-term demand in America, Pokémon and Tamagotchi, for the most part, faded into nostalgia after the pinnacle of their 1990s popularity. As Hello Kitty is also a brand initially marketed almost exclusively towards the aesthetic predilections of some female consumers, in earlier decades it might have symbolised World War II illusions of the East's emasculation through its defeat; yet, in contemporary culture, she is beginning to be viewed as genderless.

Digital technology ultimately bridged the dissemination of Hello Kitty's image as an aesthetically pleasing commercialised brand and the highly desirable animation and art of video games and, later, cosplay facilitated by online interactions. Japanese-produced video games in the 1980s stoked American attention through interesting new imaginaries like *Super Mario Bros.* (1986) and *The Legend of Zelda* (1987), followed by *Final Fantasy III* (1991) and *Sonic the Hedgehog* (1991) in the 1990s. The titles of these games proved important in their Western intonations, garnering initial interest because they not only looked unique but evoked familiarity. The "comfort" marketing worked; as with Hello Kitty, once Americans became devoted fans of these games and their particular aesthetic qualities, they no longer cared about their Japanese origins. This phenomenon, in turn, led to interest in other forms of Japanese anime and art. However, as "public awareness of the inflow of Japanese popular culture grew," products were subject to racialised categorisation as "'bizarre cartoon games' or 'too Japanese' and [in need of] modification" (Huang 2009: 70). Largely, these criticisms were based, once again, on the mere sound and appearance of titles; from the video games *Seven Samurai 20XX* (2004) and *Shogun: Total War* (2000)—which recall Benedict's pronouncements of Japan as a warrior culture—to *Valvrave the Liberator mecha* anime (Tsuchiya 2013)—which, in addition to its awkwardness on American tongues, sounds suspiciously political—America, so it seems, has been visually reinvaded by Japan.

Finally, with the cultural barrier between America and Japan finally breeched by young video gamers, the purchase of Japanese products and art no longer seemed so transgressive. Since pioneers like Hello Kitty, Pokémon and Super Mario Bros. blazed their paths into American society, "Japanese popular culture products of all kinds, from fashion to electronics, are now booming business in America. Japan has acquired what economist Douglas McGray refers to as 'national cool,' an ability to create cultural products that appeal to the international community" (Kasa 2005: 92). Modern American consumers, constantly searching for exciting and original innovations, proclaimed their interest in Japanese aesthetics by seeking out such visualised products and sharing their enthusiasm for them on social websites and online fan communities.

MODERN *JAPONISME*: VISUAL PARODY, PASTICHE AND DESIRE

Caricature in *Rising Sun* and *MXC*

Cinema representations in the decades since World War II still, however, present familiar caricatures of Japanese people that echo the parodies of war propaganda. The Japanese characters in *Rising Sun* (1993), for example, are variously criminal, suspicious by virtue of their ethnicity, otherwise abject, or humbly apologetic for their ethnicity. In this suspenseful action film, Japanese actors portray sinister-looking fellows who threaten America's economic power by "invent[ing] a new kind of trade—adversarial trade, trade like war, trade intended to wipe out the competition" (Crichton 393). The storyline's focus on trade wars hearkens back to the nationalistic insecurities of World War II. Additionally, Japanese speak their native language in order to further heighten the racialised Oriental mystery about them. While cinema and exclusionism previously noted in this essay have established how nationalistic patterns emerge, modern films poised on the brink of the twenty-first century bridged old prejudices and new concerns about Japanese culture through continued fetishisation of inauthentic Japanese images.

Although based on Michael Crichton's 1992 identically-titled novel, the cinema version of *Rising Sun* remains more firmly ensconced in the public memory, due to the pervasiveness of its Japanese caricatures. For our purposes of critiquing cultural aesthetics, it is significant to note the film's prominence in America's racial memory as one that is preoccupied with its Japanese characters; however, it features only whites and African

Americans on its official promotional posters and DVD packaging. Additionally, the storyline revolves around a murder-mystery in which an American's reputation is maligned when he claims to have been framed by a Japanese mobster for the murder of a prostitute. While the Japanese characters are important—mainly because they pose a consistent danger—Americans emerge as cultural heroes able to outwit and physically conquer their enemies. Miming World War II tensions, *Rising Sun* perpetuates racial propaganda to reclaim American primacy.

In the original textual narrative, Crichton also establishes the abjectness of his Japanese characters. At the novel's beginning, the aforementioned prostitute, during a discussion of her Japanese clients, is only able to hesitatingly sum them up as "strange people" (1992: 5). In the film, a less self-conscious police lieutenant regularly uses derogatory epithets utilised in the 1940s and yet his overall portrayal is that of a lovable, all-American good guy. In contrast, Japanese characters are ruthlessly irredeemable while Japanese Americans are often inexplicably featured as visual clichés of menacing foreigners. In an interview addressing the preponderance of demeaning portrayals, the film's producer, Peter Kaufman, declared that "[i]f you want to just have these sanitized [characters], no one will go see that because it's boring" (Yamamoto 1993: 1). In essence, *Rising Sun* reinforces the sensational World War II-era stereotypes that advocacy groups like the Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA) fight to eradicate due to film producers' refusals to acknowledge human interest in "ordinary" Japanese citizens.[8]

In another reductionist portrayal near the turn of the century, the hit American television show *MXC* (*Most Extreme Challenge*), airing from 2003 to 2007, ran footage of the 1980s Japanese game show *Takeshi's Castle* and redubbed the sound track in English to add commentary meant to showcase humorous Japanese people performing silly stunts. Contestants were challenged to avoid game elimination by successfully completing an obstacle course while dodging large foam objects, crossing slippery rope bridges and navigating rotating platforms. During the show's first U.S. airing, audiences were wholly unfamiliar with Japanese game shows and the seemingly bizarre competitions coupled with dub-overs that provided dry, ironically serious commentary for the onscreen antics. The undignified hijinks of the contestants under the watchful gazes of kimono-clad hosts further challenged notions of Japanese stoicism long branded into the American psyches as seen in examples from Benedict's book to films such as *Rising Sun*.

The paradox here lies within the slippery juxtaposition of the polarised caricatures. Although many Americans consider themselves multicultural, conformation to an Americanised aesthetic is often expected in many regions of the country. In depictions reminiscent of Japanese World War II internment detainees, Japanese characters are often portrayed in cinema as conspicuously out-of-place and dangerous to U.S. citizens. Thus, exposure to authentic facets of social interactions and media in Japan—as exemplified by the original *Takeshi's Castle*—were somewhat rare prior to anime and manga importations, and trends imported from Japan were long viewed as didactic vis-à-vis their obvious differences from life in America. While some Americans eagerly embrace the visual, exportable portions of Japanese culture for their innovativeness, others may find them as far removed from their Western tastes as Japan is geographically, and still others follow the Western *japonisme* practice in *Rising Sun* and *MXC* of not merely imitating but othering and fetishizing Japanese art and culture.

Subversive *Japonisme* in *Kill Bill*

A more subversively influential example of contemporary *japonisme* inspired an unprecedented interest in Japan by managing to both emphasise and cleverly critique weak and silly characterisations such as those featured in *MXC*. Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003) film gained enormous popularity in America for its *tondemo-eiga* (farcical) emulation of various film genres, including Japanese *chanbara* and thus deserves mention here. When the film's heroine, Beatrix Kiddo, enters a Tokyo nightclub wielding a samurai sword and ready to seek revenge against her half-Japanese, half-Chinese nemesis, O-Ren Ishii, she must first battle an army of bodyguards called the "Crazy 88's." As she singlehandedly conquers and kills the oncoming posse, she occasionally pauses to verbally spar with a few of her victims; at one point, she yanks one slight young man around to paddle him with the blunt side of her sword and admonishes him to "go home to [his] mother." The alacrity he shows in hurrying to the exit conjures the old caricature of the agitated, cowardly Japanese man who is ultimately always intimidated by American tenacity. However, to counter this archetype, the character of Ishii, doing battle with her samurai sword while dressed in a kimono and *geta*, depicts a steely determinism and strength that counters the old visions of the delicate, Western-sexualised geisha, as well as the isolated, uniracial Asian figurehead.

The "Familio-Exotic" in *Lost in Translation*

Contributing to Tarantino's progressive take on Japanese aesthetics, another film released in 2003, Sofia Coppela's *Lost in Translation*, manages to evoke a fascinating and nostalgic Japanese aesthetic desire within Americans who have never actually visited the country across the memory-laden Pacific, even while occasionally reinforcing worn stereotypes. The film captures an ethereal quality of the country through quintessential and extensive scenery shots in Tokyo (representing modern Japan) and Kyoto (representing the "old" Japan that provides comforting reassurance of "old" Japanese otherness). Romantic aesthetic elements reinforce a sense of homeliness for two American travellers; because of their isolation from familiar American culture, they develop a psychical connection with this country that the U.S. never managed to colonise, "a culture that, while quirkily and sensuously beautiful, is foreign and outside 'translation'" (Allison 2006: 11). This combination of the aesthetically pleasant and the unfamiliar excites the travellers' American *Japonisme* and again evokes the "familio-exotic," yet allows them to remain on the periphery of genuine participation in exoticised locales. As examiners of the exotic Other, these travellers experience the phenomena of linguistic confusion and ethnic invisibility while purposely choosing to engage in a limited selection of cultural activities that allows them to remain within the realm of the "familio-exotic," such as karaoke and visiting European-themed bars.

This "familio-exotic" reifies the Hegelian "consciousness of an 'other,' of an object in general, is itself necessarily *self-consciousness*, a reflectedness-into-self, consciousness of itself in its otherness" (quoted in Ciavatta 2009: 17–18, emphasis in original). The popularity of *Lost in Translation* marks a turning point in America's cultural perception of Japan, despite the film's romanticisation of both countries, through its emphasis of Japan's artistic aura layered upon American self-consciousness. The *Japonisme* on display in *Lost of Translation* ultimately and somewhat surprisingly celebrates Japanese culture even as it mourns the absence of Western norms; as director Coppela notes, the film is meant to be a visual "valentine to Tokyo" that reproduces her own aesthetic memories of Japan (Calhoun 2003: 100). This is evident in the luxurious, panoramic scenes set in tranquil Kyoto and in what also appears to be Tokyo's vibrant Roppongi District, two areas popular with American tourists. The distinction Coppela makes between these dual "Japans" models the continuing duality representative of the country in Americans' visual perceptions. More and more, Westerners turn to Eastern culture as a means of mental escape from

the pressures of their lives and, at times, from the ordinariness of their own culture's popular interests.

The premise of *Lost in Translation* revolves around two Americans, Bob and Charlotte, who meet as strangers in a "strange land" but, by the film's conclusion, have bonded over their mutual loneliness and displacement. Bob, an aging actor, is in Japan to appear in a vodka commercial, and Charlotte is reluctantly accompanying her husband, a photographer, as he works on a photo shoot outside of Tokyo. Both Bob and Charlotte resent their commitments to spend time in Japan and initially evince no interest in becoming acquainted with the culture or geography. Like most Americans, they lack even rudimentary knowledge of *Nihongo* (the Japanese language) and spend a majority of time in their hotel rooms. In this seminal study of transcontinental resignation-turned-acceptance, the Americans eventually come to love Japan and associate it with pleasant nostalgia of their time spent there; Charlotte additionally participates in the myth-making of Japan by embarking on a solitary trip to Kyoto to explore the Nanzenji Temple and a Heian shrine. The film thus conveys an appreciation of Japanese landscapes and urban culture, as well as the pain of displacement from familiar Western customs. Charlotte travels outside of Tokyo's confines several times, evincing a desire to visually explore the countryside by solitarily traveling on unfamiliar train routes. On arriving in Kyoto and other unnamed destinations, she respectfully observes local traditions, almost wistfully gazing at a traditionally-dressed wedding party and at written *o-mikuji* fortunes seeming to fairly blossom near the shrines and temples.

Representational problems arise when virtually the entire Japanese cast reverts into caricatures; a long-running "joke" is every Japanese character's inability to pronounce the letter "r" in the English language. Also, in a scene that reminds the West of Japan's infatuation with karaoke, a Japanese hipster energetically sings the Sex Pistols' punk rock anthem "God Save the Queen" (1977). As a subtle quid-pro-quo emulation of Western culture with his Hawaiian shirt and gelled hair, the American audience is meant to experience "familio-exotic" confusion—does he understand the irony of this denouncement of European monarchy? The deeper irony here is that as he engages with Western culture, Bob and Charlotte—and, by extension, America—struggle to adapt to Japan despite their ability to mingle with locals and to spare no expense to engage in visual orgies of imagery already familiar to American audiences: arcades, *Shinto* shrines, karaoke bars, strip clubs and sushi houses.

Bob and Charlotte's conflicted feelings toward Japan are reminiscent of what author Richard Rodriguez refers to as a "hunger of memory" in his autobiographical book title on the abjectness of ethnicity (1982). Although their pleasant associations are a primary result of meeting each other and not entirely a true appreciation of Japan, the film accurately captures the poignancy of Americans at first reluctant to engage with unfamiliar cultures and, later, embracing the aura of Japanese images. Initially, Bob consistently requests a return to the U.S. "as soon as possible"; later, he deliberately prolongs his visit to Japan. While this budding relationship with Charlotte directly influences his change of heart, he also noticeably becomes more interested in experiencing Japanese aesthetics and respectfully engaging with the natives. Modifying his original perceptions of Japan's young men and women as paradoxically preoccupied with American icons—during his photo shoot to advertise Japanese whiskey, the photographer advises him to channel both Frank Sinatra and Roger Moore—and anxious perfectionists—as portrayed by the hotel staff and his entourage, Bob eventually steps outside of his tourist role to interact with subjects irreconcilable to Armstrong's notion of photographic fiction. In essence, Bob resists the glossiness of popular visual images and begins to alternatively identify with the elderly, unglamorous and otherwise invisible individuals he encounters in Japan.

Lost in Translation can therefore be viewed as a metaphor for America's gradual reassessment of Japan, with inevitable cultural missteps along the way. As twenty-first-century transnationalism slowly replaces twentieth-century resentments, America once again imitates and borrows from Japanese culture, with Katy Perry's blundering attempt to emulate a hybridised *geisha* in some way carrying on Monet's tradition of *La Japonaise* functioning as one example of an appropriate *faux pas*. [9] Furthermore, Internet culture has technologically assimilated individuals to an unprecedented type of social insulation, interacting by choice only with others who share their ideologies. In this way, xenophobia and jingoism has had the ability to thrive, even in an inaccurately labelled "post-racial" society. But just as some social outlets court racism, others like the visually-focused film industry provide resources for the cult-like following of Japanese culture in America, despite their affinity for the hyperreal. Films such as *Lost in Translation* encourage increased curiosity about Japan, fuelling the quest for a more accurate Japan through anime, manga and films.

COSPLAY: CONNOTATIONS OF INNOVATIVE IMAGERY

In spite of their previous cultural insularity, American versions of anime and manga currently thrive in the form of performative cosplay and are beginning, in the national consciousness, to cross over from underground interests into mainstream popularity. Whereas once America's *japonisme* centred on emphasis of otherness, now it celebrates and identifies with what was once culturally abject. Borrowing from and influenced by their Japanese counterparts, these entertainments, while viewed by some older adults and other insulated subsets as inexplicably bizarre, resonate with Americans who actively seek out fresh and innovative forms of entertainment. Their inclusion in mainstream popularity reflects the duality of visual creative allure and the subjective, symbolic "uniqueness" of Japanese trends.

Inasmuch as *Mad Men* reflects mid-century American interest in global product imagery and innovation,[10] Western cosplay reinforces the visual nature of these obsessions in the twenty-first century. Because cosplay relies on masquerade, "spectators play an important role in the social settings," thus rendering subjective roleplaying "pointless if it were not for the spectators" (Winge 2006: 69). This synergy provides a twofold effect: the performativity enacted to garner peer approval and the observers' enjoyment of the visual spectacle. Interactions often occur in online environs as fans digitally post and exchange photographs and costume designs. The active interest in cosplay as an American pastime, "[t]hrough the use of repeated motifs and an applicability of historical aesthetics… demonstrates [a] nostalgic continuity" in the fascination with Japanese image cultures (Booth 2013). This reinforces the methodology with which postwar American fascination with Japan evolved into an emulative desire to capitalise upon aesthetics that differ substantially from Western imagery. Much like the Freudian notion of the uncanny, the "traditional" notion of Japan, still present in the American imaginary, represents a familiar, quaintly idyllic and motionless cinematic dreamscape. Conversely, this new ideal reveals an unfamiliar "ironic result of the enormously rapid process of change which has transformed every aspect of the Japanese lifestyle, housing, clothes, transport, working habits, leisure, [and] language" (quoted in Revell 1997: 61). The resultant tension between familiar traditions and unfamiliar, exciting innovations reinforces the American perception of Japanese "familio-exotic."

The epitome of this shift toward visual Japanese influences can best be seen in the proliferation of annual manga conventions across America that encourages participation in cosplay and the socialisation of its fans.

Although Americans have traditionally regarded cosplay as an activity relegated to the confines of childhood, similar to role-playing with dolls, anime/cartoon characters or comic book heroes, its visual appeal has assisted in transforming the national perspective toward fan culture. While *Japonisants*[11] like Monet traditionally have been subject to mockery for their infatuation with Japanese artistic "decorativeness," they are also perhaps more likely to internalise transnationalism, either because of their own ethnicity or interest in diversity (Napier 2007: 30). It stands to reason, then, that Americans already favourably familiar with Japanese cultures possess a predilection for the cultural and aesthetic distinctiveness of cosplay. American appreciation of Japanese aesthetics and interests, especially amongst youth culture, is indicative of greater acceptance within mainstream culture. Since multiculturalism in America increasingly constitutes Asian heritages, cosplay becomes an important example of visual *Japonisme* meeting transnationalism by means of twenty-first century pop culture socialisation.

Costume play based on anime and manga characters, perhaps surprisingly, originated in the U.S.; after being labelled "cosplay" by the Japanese journalist Nobuyuki Takahashi, it became popular in Japan before again crossing the Pacific to gain an even greater relevance in America. These transfers of cultural economy invoke the "familio-exotic" by virtue of this continual manipulation of familiarity. However, cosplay is at times stereotyped as a mindless adolescent pursuit in America, with Deguchi Hiroshi of the University of Tokyo recently noting that "Americans consider those things associated with cosplay—manga in particular—to be juvenile, for children" (2013). Some Americans—like those who favour cutting funds for arts programs in public schools—view these types of creative pursuits as "time wasters" and, if originating in the Eastern world, inherently "foreign." Despite Hiroshi's accurate assessment representative of a number of Americans, adults are beginning to take note of cosplay and anime art. When Napier conducted her poll on anime fandom in America, she was "intrigued" by the educational levels of the respondents: "[f]orty-five percent (25) had received a BA; 20 percent (11), an MA; and 5 percent (4), a PhD" (2006: 55). This is higher than the national overall average of college graduates in America.[12] Despite cosplay's initial appeal to young culture, Americans of various class and age groups are increasingly becoming acquainted with Japanese visuality.

In addition, cosplay participants tend to choose costumes that represent characters from American films like *Star Wars*, television series like *Star Trek, South Park* and *Game of Thrones*, and video games like *Halo*, as well as comic book heroes from Marvel and DC Comics. In

keeping with the "familio-exotic," since "the most popular characters to frequent Comic Con tend to come from the Marvel and DC worlds," appropriation of cosplay in purely American terms allows participants to experience the exoticism of Japanese culture while retaining the familiarity of their own favourite characters (Emami 2013). However, increasing numbers of participants are creatively expanding their cosplay imagery, appearing as Japanese anime and manga characters that include Tifa from *Final Fantasy* and the pink-haired Sakura Haruno from *Naruto* (Masashi 1999). Thus, while many Americans adapt the visuality of cosplay to Western aesthetics and pop culture, integration with authentic Japanese imagery is also increasing.

Indeed, part of the appeal of Japanese art is its visually transgressive nature. In paying homage to these creative forms or, viewed another way, in positioning Japan as a specter of Americans' exoticised fantasies, the U.S. reimagines and "recognize[s] itself…artistically and politically" (Adinolfi 2008: 62). Enthusiastic fans who look forward to convention gatherings each year and invest substantial amounts of time and money in these events "are transforming Japanese culture for their own uses… Whereas anime are mainstream culture in Japan, in America they are still "alternative culture"… For this reason, American fans enjoy anime partly because it allows them to feel as if they have specialised knowledge ordinary Americans do not" (Newitz 1995: 3). This type of interest differs significantly from previous anti-Japanese sentiments and allows American participants to feel they are simultaneously transcending and resisting traditional American attitudes toward the racialised "uniqueness" of Japanese imagery. This cultural tension "challenge[s] Western television and film in terms of its national origin" and also "offers different destinations and paths to the construction of selfhood" (Napier 2007: 172). In forging these connections and self-identifiers, the "exotic" becomes both the familiar and the self.

To be sure, neither rebellion nor simple visual admiration of Japanese culture adequately describes the current visual appeal of anime and manga in America. In a recap of Susan Napier's most recent research on anime studies in the West, one reviewer opines that "Japanese cultural and artistic products still excite the imagination of the West in many of the same ways they did one hundred years earlier" (Iles 2008: 529). While this is an accurate assessment regarding anime as an increasingly recognised and "genuine" art form, it oversimplifies the nature and extent of American interests. The very real admiration of millions of fans, consisting of various backgrounds, ages and social statuses, points to a breakthrough in the reductive mindset of America, established so many years ago, which saw

Japan as irrevocably "other." Anime and manga do not "excite" Americans because of their otherness, as they once did; they inspire because they are, at times, the single most relatable art forms to many citizens who feel otherwise isolated in society. For these people, Japan offers a relatable aesthetic honed through a shared sensibility for the distinctly poetic. Whereas once a label marked "Made in Japan" produced contentious debate, or a longing fantasy for an exotic otherness, now entire communities thrive on products both made in and influenced by Japan, marking a unique advertising and aesthetic triumph.

CONCLUSION: AESTHETIC SIGNIFIERS OF JAPAN AND THE "FAMILIO-EXOTIC"

Mad Men itself serves as a fitting final artistic analogy to the immense appeal of Japanese culture to Western audiences. Its relevance to this essay may be summed up by a comparison to the Japanese novel series *Vampire Hunter D*, the appeal of which was described by a fan as follows: "What I really like, beyond the enticing characters, however, was that few of them were entirely good or evil. It made them more real" (Napier 2007: 178). This quality of realism lends the *Mad Men* episode "The Chrysanthemum and the Sword" its ready association with both America and Japan. The slipperiness and complex humanity of the characters, especially the antihero Don Draper, closely resemble the West's complicated feelings toward Japan. Just as contemporary American audiences understand that *Mad Men* characters should be neither idolised nor demonised, they also deeply identify with anime and manga for its multilayered portrayals of transnational humanity.

What, then, does Benjamin's Western ideal of the aura signify when applied to cross-cultural images like anime? Does it perhaps provide a commentary on the potential for artificiality in Western attempts to visually replicate subjectively-viewed Japanese culture through simulacra? For the U.S., the aura of authentic Japan serves as a cultural signifier that calls upon an historical corpus of global relationships and subjective predilections to reify such art by working on the "familio-exotic" within Western consciousness. Thus, despite the postwar effects of exclusionary American media and marketing, technology and art must still attempt to negotiate reductionist representations of Japan in the twenty-first century. Perhaps anime and manga most relevantly underscore the value of aesthetics in long-term cultural shifts in attitudes and understanding. While simulacra in cinema may work to undermine Japanese representations in the U.S. and

create a false impression of Eastern "uniqueness," art forms like anime increasingly evoke Benjamin's idea of authenticity that focuses on an aura of distinction that is not just nationalistic but human and therefore of humanistic value.

Anime and manga ultimately symbolise a subversiveness with which postmodern America finds itself eager to identify. Because they provide aesthetic and emotional responses to fantasies of self versus otherness that are specifically and authentically Japanese, America's embrace of these genres actually generate an anti-Orientalism that counters the historical Western positioning of Japanese cultures. In this sense, the "familio-exotic" reveals a subversively positive counter-response to fetishised *Japonisme*. By stepping outside of familiar Western aesthetics to participate in the worlds of anime and manga, fans open their imaginary to alternate cultural depositories and, by extension, a wider worldview that allows for change and diversity. The rediscovery of Japan's provoking art revitalises America's own desire for creativity and innovation. It also situates America as ripe for receptivity to Japanese culture through increasingly shared aesthetics without condescension, fetishisation or jingoist competition.

NOTES

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[1] At the time of this writing, the series has one season left to air.

[2] Although many contributions to science and technology have been produced by persons of Japanese heritage in the U.S., this article focuses primarily on distribution of the arts.

[3] The Western interest in—and sometime fetishisation of—Japanese art.

[4] Hyperreal, in this context, is meant to indicate exaggeration and distortion of realism.

[5] While the film may have been trying to provide social commentary for the commonality of arranged marriages in Japan through the twentieth century, it seems to have deliberately omitted a fact that would have been easy to accurately research. The word "love" in Japanese—although rarely used, as noted—is "*ai*" in its noun form and "*ai suru*" in its verb form.

[6] Conversely, attempts to duplicate European culture were often viewed as admirable and a mark of class status.

[7] It should be noted that Japan had no part in the embargo or in the relationship between the U.S. and the Middle East.

8   MANAA is based in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.; according to their website (http://www.manaa.org/goals_ objectives.html), their primary objectives are to monitor Asian media portrayals and to advocate for Asian Pacific Americans.

9   On 24 November 2013, pop singer Katy Perry donned a costume for her performance at the American Music Awards that appeared to combine and confuse a Japanese kimono and a Chinese cheongsam.

10   This episode reflects America's global visual interest by prominently featuring a female copywriter riding a flashy red Honda motorcycle around a sound stage; an earlier episode showcased Draper's interested in the minimalist style of a German Volkswagen advertisement.

11   Europeans (and Americans) who specialise in Japanese culture, especially artists or those who collect Japanese art and artifacts.

12   According to a 12 June 2013 article in *The New York Times*, 33.5 percent of Americans hold at least a bachelor's degree (Rampell).

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