

VISUAL LANGUAGE OF KAWAII:  
AESTHETICIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

A Master's Thesis

By  
ILGIN SIDE SOYSAL

Department of  
Communication and Design  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University  
Ankara

June 2015



To the women and the deer

VISUAL LANGUAGE OF KAWAII:  
AESTHETICIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

ILGIN SIDE SOYSAL

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in  
THE DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION AND DESIGN  
İHSAN DOĞRAMACI BİLKENT UNIVERSITY  
ANKARA

June 2015

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Media and Design.

---

Instructor Ekin Kılıç  
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Media and Design.

---

Assist.Prof.Dr. Ahmet Gürata  
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Design.

---

Instructor Fırat Engin  
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

---

Prof.Dr. Erdal Erel  
Director

## **ABSTRACT**

### **A VISUAL LANGUAGE OF KAWAII: AESTHETICIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

Soysal, Ilgın Side

M.F.A., in Media and Design

Supervisor: Inst. Ekin Kılıç

June, 2015.

The notion of “Cute” has been studied as a global aesthetic form in consumer and popular culture. Aside from being a dominant aesthetic of mass culture, the cute also became a form of expression with increasing virtual and visual communication. Oscillating between physical world of commodity culture and virtual media culture; cute’s visual, cultural and economic meanings are expanded. The specific form of cute (and inevitably weird) culture has paved its way to the top of the world economy: *Japanese Kawaii Culture*. The proliferation of Kawaii aesthetic brought about revelations in art, fashion, and design even in the everyday life practices. Obsession with Kawaii culture opens the door to new distorted visualities that create paradoxes between mundane reality of everyday life and surreal fantasy life.

The focus of this paper is the exploration of the Japanese cute (and the weird) aesthetics impact and its conceptual methodology in the popular visual culture and

the contemporary art scene. As a visual way of distorting everyday life, glitch aesthetics are experimented and used by mostly video artists. In the complementary art work; experimental glitch and multilayered video effects are used for the artistic expression and exploration of ‘distorting everyday life’ regarding Japanese cute’s conceptual methodology; intensification, hybrid visualization and complicated imagery.

Key Words: Kawaii, Cute, Aestheticization, Everyday Life, Japanese Cute, Hybrid Aesthetics, Visual Distortion.

## ÖZET

### KAWAII'NİN GÖRSEL DİLİ: GÜNLÜK HAYATI ESTETİKLEŞTİRME

Soysal, Ilgın Side

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Tasarım

Danışman: Öğretim görevlisi Ekin Kılıç

June, 2015.

"Şirin" kavramı, tüketici ve popüler kültürün küresel bir estetik formu olarak incelenmiştir. Kitle kültürünün baskın bir estetiği olmasının dışında, "Şirin" aynı zamanda artan sanal ve görsel iletişim ile bir anlatım biçimi haline geldi. Meta kültürünün fiziksel dünyası ve sanal kültür dünyası arasında gidip gelen "Şirin", görsel, kültürel ve ekonomik anlamlarını genişletti. Şirin kültürü'nün özel bir formu (ve kaçınılmaz olarak "Tuhaf" olanı) kendisini dünya ekonomisinin üstüne taşımayı başarmıştır: *Japon Kawaii Kültür'ü*. Kawaii kültürünün getirdiği estetiğin çoğalması sanat, moda ve tasarım alanında yeniliklere yol açtı ve hatta gündelik yaşam pratiklerine kadar yansıdı. Kawaii kültürüne olan yoğun ilgi yeni çarpıtılmış görselliklere kapı aralar; bunu da gündelik hayatın sıradan gerçekliği ve fantazi hayatının gerçeküstücülüğü arasında paradox oluşturarak yaratır.

Bu çalışmanın odak noktası, Japon "Şirin" (ve "Tuhaf") estetiğinin popüler görsel kültürde ve çağdaş sanat sahnesinde görsel etkisini keşfetmek, kavramsal metodolojisini kavramaktır. 'Glitch' estetiği, genel olarak video sanatçıları tarafından

günlük yaşamı görsel olarak deforme etme yollarından biri olarak deneyimlenmiş ve kullanılmıştır. Tezi tamamlayıcı görsel işin uygulamasında deneysel 'glitch' ve çok katmanlı video efektleri; Japon "Şirin" -Kawaii- estetiğinin kavramsal metodolojisi, görsel yoğunlaşma tekniği, hibrid görselliği ve karışık imgeleri çerçevesinde, 'Günlük yaşamı deforme etme' sanatsal ifadesi ve keşfi için kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kawaii, Şirin, Estetikleştirme, Gündelik Hayat, Japon, Hibrid Estetik, Görsel deformasyon.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor Instructor Ekin Kılıç. Her patience, motivation and open-mindedness were extremely helpful to this thesis.

I am also grateful to Assist. Prof. Ersan Ocak for his valuable ideas and criticisms and Assist. Prof. Ahmet Gürata for his guidance and support.

I would like to express my gratitude to my colleagues; Esin Erdoğan, Esmâ Akyel, and Erdoğan Şekerci with whom I shared more than an office in this exhausting process.

I thank my great friends; Deniz Camus, Damla Sezgi and G.Sümeyye Topaloğlu for their support, motivation and care along the way.

I must also acknowledge the help and support of all the Bilkent staff in my dormitory and in the department who made this campus feel like a second home.

Last but not the least; I am extremely thankful and indebted to my family and relatives, especially to my mother, since without their support and love, I would not have finished this thesis.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ÖZET .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 2: JAPANESE KAWAII IN EVERYDAY LIFE: EXPLOSION OF THE “CUTE”&“WEIRD” .....	5
2.1. Brief account of the root of “Kawaii” .....	5
2.1.1 Rune Naito and the rise of Kawaii consumption .....	6
2.2. Proliferation of the Kawaii Aesthetic .....	13
2.2.1. Sebastian Masuda’s Harajuku Kawaii Fashion .....	13
2.3. Hybrid Language of the Kawaii .....	23
2.3.1. Takashi Murakami’s Superflat Art and Distorted Kawaii .....	23

CHAPTER 3: THE AESTHETICIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE .....	31
3.1. Conceptualizing the “Everyday” .....	31
3.2. The Aestheticization of Everday Life .....	34
CHAPTER 4: THE AUDIO-VISUAL PROJECT: DISTORTING EVERYDAY LIFE WITH KAWAII .....	38
4.1. Glitch Studies and the notion of visual “distortion” .....	38
4.1.1. Glitch Aesthetics and Video as a new medium .....	39
4.1.2. Rosa Menkman’s Glitch Momentum .....	41
4.2. Contemporary Art and Glitch Aesthetics .....	43
4.2.1. Rosa Menkman’s video: Collapse of Pal .....	43
4.2.2. Visual References from Contemporary art .....	45
4.3. An Audio-Visual Installation: TMD – Never Ending Story .....	49
4.3.1. Process explanation of visual design .....	49
4.3.2. Audio-Visual installation drafts, photos .....	53
4.3.3. Finalization of the Audio-Visual Installation .....	55
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION .....	59
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	62

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Fig. 1. Traditional chiyogami patterns, [photograph], Retrieved from <a href="http://pingmag.jp/2008/07/24/chiyogami/">http://pingmag.jp/2008/07/24/chiyogami/</a> .....	7
2. Fig. 2. Takehisa’s umbrella and match patterns, [illustration], Retrieved from <a href="http://pingmag.jp/2008/07/24/chiyogami/7">http://pingmag.jp/2008/07/24/chiyogami/7</a> .....	7
3. Fig. 3. Naito, Rune (1960), Covers for the magazine Junior Soleil, [illustration], Retrieved from <a href="http://syoujokan.exblog.jp/5615577/">http://syoujokan.exblog.jp/5615577/</a> .....	8
4. Fig. 4. Naito, Rune (1960), Young girls (Shoujo) [illustrations], by Yunapyon, 2012, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.kawaiikakkoisugoi.com/2012/09/06/artist-rune-naito/">http://www.kawaiikakkoisugoi.com/2012/09/06/artist-rune-naito/</a> .....	8
5. Fig. 5. 6%DOKIDOKI boutique, (2012), [photograph], In 6%DOKIDOKI “Beyond the Kawaii” Evolution & Harajuku Shop Renewal, 2013, Retrieved from <a href="http://tokyofashion.com/6dokidoki-beyond-the-kawaii-harajuku/">http://tokyofashion.com/6dokidoki-beyond-the-kawaii-harajuku/</a> .....	14
6. Fig. 6. Horie, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2013, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2869/harajukutokyoclaire6dokidokidaichulaa">http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2869/harajukutokyoclaire6dokidokidaichulaa</a> .....	15
7. Fig. 7. Junnyan, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2013, <a href="http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2297harajukutokyosuperlovers%E2%80%93wltmalkomalka6dokidoki%E2%80%93spxangelicpretty">http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2297harajukutokyosuperlovers%E2%80%93wltmalkomalka6dokidoki%E2%80%93spxangelicpretty</a> .....	15
8. Fig. 8. Hanazono, Uri, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2013, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2587/sangenjaya-tokyo-6dokidoki">http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2587/sangenjaya-tokyo-6dokidoki</a> .....	18
9. Fig. 9. Hanazono, Uri, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2012, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/1905/shibuyatokyohanazonouri">http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/1905/shibuyatokyohanazonouri</a>	18

10.	Fig. 10. Pamyu’s Music Video “Pon Pon Pon” (2011), Opening Sequence, [video still], In Warner Music Japan, Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&amp;list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&amp;list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g</a> .....	19
11.	Fig. 11. Pamyu’s music video “Pon Pon Pon”, (2011), Room sequence, [video still], In Warner Music Japan, Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&amp;list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&amp;list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g</a> .....	20
12.	Fig. 12. Pamyu’s music video “Pon Pon Pon”, (2011), Pink Face sequences, [video still], In Warner Music Japan, Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&amp;list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&amp;list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g</a> .....	21
13.	Fig. 13. Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture (2005), Exhibition Poster, [poster], Retrieved from <a href="https://kterrl.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/littleboytheartsofjapan2527sexplodingsubculture.jpg">https://kterrl.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/littleboytheartsofjapan2527sexplodingsubculture.jpg</a> .....	25
14.	Fig. 14. Yanobe, Kenji (2000), “Atom Suit Project Antenna of the Earth”, [installation], In Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture, 2005, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/littleboy/25.html">http://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/littleboy/25.html</a> .....	26
15.	Fig. 15. Iwamoto, Masakatsu -Mr-, “View of the exhibition”, [installation], In Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture, 2005, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/exhibitions/2005-04-08_japan-society-new-york-ny/press_release/0/exhibition_installation/1">http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/exhibitions/2005-04-08_japan-society-new-york-ny/press_release/0/exhibition_installation/1</a> .....	27
16.	Fig. 16. Murakami, Takashi (2007), “The Emergence of God at The Reversal of Fate”, Acrylic on canvas mounted on board (16 panels) / 300 x 2400 x 5 cm, [installation], Retrieved from <a href="https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi_Murakamiworksoevres1702312.html">https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi_Murakamiworksoevres1702312.html</a> .....	28
17.	Fig. 17. Murakami, Takashi (2007), Close up, “The Emergence of God at The Reversal of Fate”, Acrylic on canvas mounted on board (16 panels) / 300 x 2400 x 5 cm, [installation], Retrieved from <a href="https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi_Murakamiworksoevres1702312.html">https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi_Murakamiworksoevres1702312.html</a> .....	29
18.	Fig. 18. Murakami, Takashi (2014), “Tan Tan Bo–In Communication”, Acrylic, gold leaf and platinum leaf on canvas mounted on wood panel, [painting], Retrieved from <a href="http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/12/takashi-murakami-rashomon_n_6136340.html">http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/12/takashi-murakami-rashomon_n_6136340.html</a> .....	30
19.	Fig. 19. Paik, Nam June (1995), “Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S”, 49-channel closed circuit video installation, neon, steel and electronic components, approx. 15 x 40 x 4 ft., In Smithsonian American Art Museum, Retrieved from <a href="http://americanart.si.edu/education/rs/artwork/">http://americanart.si.edu/education/rs/artwork/</a> .....	40

20.	Fig. 20. Menkman, Rosa (2011), “Collapse of PAL, Angel of History”, [video still] Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuDwaQDzOZc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuDwaQDzOZc</a> .....	44
21.	Fig. 21. Rist, Pipilotti (1986), “I’m Not The Girl Who Misses Much”, [Video Still], by Atelierist, 2008, Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJgiSyCr6BY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJgiSyCr6BY</a> .....	46
22.	Fig 22. Rist, Pipilotti (2014), “Mercy Garden”, Close up Leaves, [installation], In Hauser & Wirth Somerset ‘Stay Stamina Stay’ exhibition, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist_id=25&amp;a=pipilottirist&amp;p=7">http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist_id=25&amp;a=pipilottirist&amp;p=7</a> .....	47
23.	Fig. 23. Rist, Pipilotti (2014), “Mercy Garden”, Close up Sky, [installation], In Hauser & Wirth Somerset ‘Stay Stamina Stay’ exhibition, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist_id=25&amp;a=pipilottirist&amp;p=8">http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist_id=25&amp;a=pipilottirist&amp;p=8</a> .....	48
24.	Fig. 24. Carnovsky 2011, “RGB Exhibitions” [installation], by Jeff Metal, In DreamBags – JaguarShoes, London, Retrieved from <a href="http://www.carnovsky.com/RGB_Jaguarshoes2011.htm">http://www.carnovsky.com/RGB_Jaguarshoes2011.htm</a> .....	49
25.	Fig. 25. Layer Coloring Process, “Tmd Sugar”, [video still] .....	50
26.	Fig. 26. Layer Blending and Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still] .....	51
27.	Fig. 27. Layer Blending and Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still] .....	51
28.	Fig. 28. Layer Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still] .....	52
29.	Fig. 29. Layer Blending and Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still] .....	52
30.	Fig. 30. Sketch for floor plan of the installation, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [drawing] .....	53
31.	Fig. 31. Sketch for screen placement of the installation, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [drawing] .....	54
32.	Fig. 32. Test projection of the installation, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [video still] .....	55
33.	Fig. 33. Installation View, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [photograph] .....	56
34.	Fig. 34. Installation View, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [photoaph] .....	57
35.	Fig. 35. Installation View, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [photograph] .....	57
36.	Fig. 36. Installation View, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [photograph] .....	58

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The recent cultural and media studies regarding cute aesthetic attempted to reflect upon: how cute functions between the audience and the visual media, its semiotics, and the affect it awakens, etc. These studies delve into how cute aesthetic represents cultural parameters depended upon categories such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, etc. The cute culture is an established part of traditional culture in Japanese society even before the nineteenth century. The rise of its aesthetics in everyday with the developing capitalism casts a lifestyle since modern consumption patterns demand cute commodities. However, to push forward the scope of these studies, further explorations in visual culture should be conducted. Visual culture contains areas like fashion, TV-shows, performance art, video games, music and so on. The categorizations can go even further, but the important point is that all areas are bound by the modus operandi of contemporary digital culture. All the platforms in social media help us make sense of ever changing aesthetic codes, revelations that emerge in visual areas which are also blended by each other's aesthetics.

The main theoretical question related to cute aesthetic and its role in our contemporary visual culture stemmed from how to formulate cute aesthetic and the cute itself. The notion has been tried to conceptualize as an ever expanding genre, concept, style, etc. in every kind of production-consumption-circulation pattern. It exists to be depended upon everyday modes of beingness such as madness, kindness, strictness, loneliness, etc. since it reaches itself to touch to the areas that human interaction can exist. This way of description is not to say that *cute* is everything or it encapsulates everything we get in touch with. It rather finds a way to involve itself in everything in its own unique way. That is how it is open to many recreations, manipulations, and interactions.

In this respect, among the scholars of cute studies, I mainly have chosen Sianne Ngai, Christine Yano, Manami Okazaki & Geoff Johnson's arguments due to their relevance to the cute aesthetic construction.

Especially Japanese cute aesthetic and its relations to glitch aesthetic should be considered in terms of contemporary visual cultures. These cultures consist of fluid, transitive and rapid qualities. All these qualities are changeable fundamentally due to technology they entail. Since the beginning of Modernist era, technology brought about some level of standardization to social life and thus, glitch art emerges as a way to break down the strict structures with fluidity. Whether glitch is an art or not is not in the scope of this thesis's arguments. The potential of the glitch's visual technique and the conceptual starting points will be taken as an artistic exploration platform for Japanese cute aesthetic. Similar to glitch art's pursuit of alternative ways to reflect upon social life and people's individual beings, cute aesthetic acts as more

than solely being a market product. It is influenced by the social, economic, technological and also political conditions that are constantly changing.

The focus of this thesis is the exploration of visuality of Japanese Kawaii, which is an influential element in the entertainment culture and contemporary visual culture. Kawaii is influenced by fashion, animation, music, games, etc. and likewise influenced them back. This situation necessitates definitions of Kawaii concerning the potentials it reveals in contemporary art and popular culture. What kind of potentials? Every visual medium reaches beyond the sole purpose of entertainment whether one looks at cinema, television, photography, cartoons, animations, etc. There are many different moving image types that people encounter every day from which they create contents according to different contexts. They can create them for protesting, activism, etc. in everyday reality. The reason to look at new visual codes and styles is to understand the potential aesthetic categories we can habit more and more every day. That is why contemporary culture's digitalized visuals simulate our everyday reality creating possibilities for new realities.

In chapter two, the formation and evolution of Kawaii in a constantly changing multimedia everyday context will be analyzed in terms of popular culture and contemporary art. The different formations of Kawaii will be seen through how the uses of popular culture and contemporary art can interchange styles between them and blur the boundaries. As a result of many categories, and different visualities that kawaii can turn into, one will see the hybrid and distorted aesthetic that kawaii offers which cannot be foreseen.

In chapter three, the introduction to aestheticization theory of everyday life is made through firstly constructing a conception of “everyday” itself. Later, it will be looked at how everyday life is constructed in aesthetic terms. The theory of aestheticization of everyday life will be briefly explained and then the relevant theoretical base will be related to Japanese cute aesthetic: Kawaii.

In chapter four, the relation between Japanese kawaii’s weird aesthetic and glitch art’s aesthetic of distortion will be looked at together. The art project bases the relationship not solely on visual similarity but also, and more so, on the conceptual and theoretical similarity between the two aesthetic.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **JAPANESE KAWAII IN EVERYDAY LIFE: EXPLOSION OF THE “CUTE”& “WEIRD”**

#### **2.1 Brief account of the root of “Kawaii”**

Cute is everywhere in Japan. If a person, who does not even have the slightest interest in Japanese popular culture, sees a Hello Kitty or Pikachu character on a product, then he/she can at least guess this cute image belongs to Japan. The main source of Japanese popular culture that has reached to global scales is this cute configuration called “Kawaii” which has become a cultural notion, rather than just a word in Japanese context. Kawaii has been one of the main elements of Japanese culture in the last fifty years. Especially nowadays, the introduction to Japanese cute culture is formed through the popular mediums such as Japanese comic book –manga – and Japanese cartoons –anime – to foreign audience.

Kawaii actually pervaded into Japanese way of life since everything is and can be cute from electronics to food. Japanese Kawaii culture aesthetic and its expansion can be seen in everyday life as well as in contemporary visual culture. The word

Kawaii in Japanese is written as *かわいい*(ka-wa-i-i) with hiragana<sup>1</sup> syllables and as *可愛い* with kanji<sup>2</sup> characters. Hiragana has more rounded shapes which make it look softer, and cuter. That is why mostly hiragana is preferred to write since its type suits to the meaning.

Both men and women have their childhood times before entering the society as adults, before start working. Kawaii symbolizes this dependent, but also carefree era where childlike, innocent features are protective to the self. The concept originally exists in this way; however as it became more and more a popular culture phenomenon, new categorizations and sets of meanings have emerged. Kawaii started to be commercialized within the *Shojo*<sup>3</sup> culture, which involves a certain life style products produced for young girls.

### **2.1.1 Rone Naito and the rise of Kawaii consumption**

In 1914 with Yumeji Takehisa (1884-1934) opened a shop that sells “fancy goods” for schoolgirls, all kinds of daily life commodities like toys, clothes, books etc. Being an illustrator, Takehisa was quick to catch on the trends and aesthetic in west and blend them with the east culture. For example first time ever he applied umbrella patterns onto the *chiyogami*<sup>4</sup> paper instead of traditional patterns, in a way that emphasizes the colorful and childish style. The style of patterns he has referred as Kawaii -cute-, which was a notion to be popularized yet.

---

<sup>1</sup> The modern Japanese writing system consisting of different writing systems, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese\\_writing\\_system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_writing_system):

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sh%C5%8Djo> Shoujo, a young girl or woman between 7-18.

<sup>4</sup> Chiyogami is a specific word developed to describe the graphic, repetitive designs applied to paper in the Edo period. Originally these patterns were printed by woodblock for use in paper doll and small accessory making. In the twentieth century, these patterns began to be applied using silkscreens and this continues today. [http://www.japanesepaperplace.com/wholesale/chiyo/about-chiyo-yuzen/faq\\_1-yuzen-chiyogami.htm](http://www.japanesepaperplace.com/wholesale/chiyo/about-chiyo-yuzen/faq_1-yuzen-chiyogami.htm)



Fig. 1. Traditional chiyogami patterns, [photograph], Retrieved from <http://pingmag.jp/2008/07/24/chiyogami/>



Fig. 2. Takehisa's umbrella and match patterns, [illustration], Retrieved from <http://pingmag.jp/2008/07/24/chiyogami/>

Yumeji Takehisa was also drawing rounded and bigger eyed girls as illustrations, however these were yet to be accepted as positive traits. They were rather seen as lower social status (Kincaid, 2014: para.6) since this style gives face a cute but also a pitiful look. Katsuji Matsumoto was also another famous illustrator who created the first iconic cute *Shoujo*<sup>5</sup> that is called “Kurukuru Kurumi-chan” who had a very round face and eyes.

---

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 3 for the definition.

The term Kawaii was much more visibly put into Japanese popular culture in 50's with illustrator Rune Naito. His illustrations depict modern, fashionable girl image that has certain western life style but with a little physical twist. Bigger eyes and head, thinner legs in a slim body, all these features twist the traditional depiction of a realistic body image.



Fig. 3. Naito, Rune (1960), Covers for the magazine Junior Soleil, [illustration], Retrieved from <http://syoujokan.exblog.jp/5615577/>

The drawing style is cute but in a weird sense, a visual basis on what Kawaii culture has improved itself; a certain unrealistic, imaginary, fairytale like representation that recalls a *grotesque* structure.



Fig. 4. Naito, Rune (1960), Young girls (Shoujo) [illustrations], by Yunapyon, 2012, Retrieved from <http://www.kawaiikakkoiisugoi.com/2012/09/06/artist-rune-naito/>

Daniel Harris states in his writing “Cute, Quaint, Hungry, and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism” that the cute already contains the malformation of the “grotesque” in its physical features (Harris, 2000:4). Thus, the term itself does not denote to the *attractive* because it is beautiful but rather the attraction comes from its ability to invoke feelings of *pity* and *sympathy*.

Since 1960’s onward, following the fashionable goods production, there emerged trends among school girls and even boys. Tokyo schoolgirl Fashion style has been an evolving street style. Patrick Macias and Izumi Evers traced back to 1960’s to see the development of this street fashion and they created a book titled *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno: Tokyo Teen Fashion Subculture Handbook*. Various looks evolved in its different form of aesthetics, especially the spread of colorful layered textures on textile and extended accessory usage. There are detailed explanations and illustrations of periods such as early 80’s, between 80’s and 90’s, end of 90’s, and 2000’s. The era after 90’s specifically is more the concern of this thesis since those new looks were influenced widely from constantly changing cute culture aesthetics. This kind of visual tendency is uttered as “*cute overload*” (Macias & Evers, 2007:132).

Harajuku Street is one of the touristic places where different looks of Tokyo Street Fashion can be easily spotted. *Decora* is the most colorful, visually overloaded look of Harajuku Street. *Decora* is an abbreviation of the word decoration, which qualifies for its overuse of accessory and color in a literal sense of ‘decorating one’s own body’. Along with the fashion magazine illustrations and the fancy good stores mentioned above, there have been a lot of visual culture productions that paved the

way to this sort of extravagant style of girl fashion. From print to digital platform, there have been enormous creations of manga especially around 80's. *Shojo* manga and *Shoujo* anime emerged as an appealing genre for girls just as other genres that specify categories such as age, gender etc. These are fed from developments from western culture along with what Yumeji Takehisa and Rune Naito have brought about since they were inspired from western popular culture as well. A certain cute visual culture was developing and evolving into much more multi-layered aesthetic structure.

Manifesting a certain lifestyle from clothes to food, to accessories; cute has become a preferable consumption pattern for young people. Cute has been formulated under the commodity aesthetics of global marketing as studied in the book "*Pink globalization: Hello Kitty's trek across the Pacific*". In her book, Christine R. Yano argued about what kind of dynamics make audience relate to this Japanese cute aesthetic in everyday life within the case of Hello Kitty. There are many images, products scattered all over the globe in terms of this cute-*Kawaii*- industry, and Hello Kitty is just one example; a very famous and a very cult icon of Sanrio Company's productions. Sanrio Company has many shops, cafes and franchising toy stores all around the world. The very image of Hello Kitty itself has been recreated in many different contexts, in many different form of cuteness. This process can be understood by looking at how aesthetic categories function in this process of consuming, producing, exchanging and recreating a certain phenomenon in visual culture.

In her book *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Sienna Ngai argues about our aesthetic categories under the influence of capitalism. There is a high rate of commodification, information saturation and visual abundance that transform our everyday life experience and practice. Production, consumption and circulation patterns are constructed in terms of aesthetic categories.

... the commodity aesthetic of cuteness, the discursive aesthetic of the interesting, and the performative aesthetic of zaniness help us get at some of the most important social dynamics underlying life in late capitalist society today (Ngai, 2013: para.1).

The zany, the cute and the interesting intensify postmodern culture. They dominate postmodern society's art and commodities and discourse. These aesthetic categories evoke and present conflicting feelings that postmodern subjects work, exchange, and consume; changing from “tenderness to aggression” (Ngai, 2013: para.1). The emphasis on “postmodern” comes from Ngai which is similar to arguments of postmodern subject and society as mentioned in chapter three, the theory about aestheticization of everyday life. However, as said before, the arguments or questions about postmodern or modern society are not the main concern of this thesis and will not be dealt specifically. It is just being mentioned later for the conceptual and aesthetic potential it has for the contemporary visual culture.

In Japanese modern culture, if one looks at everyday existence with Ngai's argument in mind, it involves a lot of cuteness even just in its physical forms reaching from Tokyo's colorful fashion street Harajuku to other streets. Public transportation can be cute as well with the printed characters on them. Even the most ordinary type of food served in a café or in a restaurant can be aestheticized in a cute style to make the food

aesthetically pleasing and satisfying to the eye before it feels the same in the stomach. Okazaki Manami explains it as:

That bus stop shaped like a watermelon? Kawaii. Adorable police mascots? Kawaii. Harajuku fashionistas with pink tutus and purple bangs, Hello Kitty TV sets, fish cakes that look like pandas, girls in manga with sparkly eyes, construction signs that take the form of frogs? All kawaii (Manami, 2013: para.2).

What Manami stated here corresponds well to Ngai's formulation of cute as commodity aesthetic. The categorization of these production, consumption and circulation system in terms of different aesthetics, fits well to Japanese contemporary capitalist society; but maybe with one little trick lacking.

In the case of Japanese cute, the formulation should be revised since *kawaii-cute* is more than just a consumption pattern. The trick is that it is a commodity culture on the one side and the artful potential of avant-garde and popular culture's juxtaposition on the other. The whole cute culture is extended to consume, to create, and to recreate anything cute all at the same time every day. In Everyday life there are acts of wearing cute clothes or buying cute hello kitty products, buying Anime-manga, video games. The more it extended through digital visual culture the more it became performative and discursive. Thus, there are also uploading self-created anime music videos, idol pictures, character pictures, or pictures of themselves performing a character, or even a video tutorial about how to apply a hello kitty inspired nail styling, or how to prepare a costume inspired by anime characters. Even more so, videos include how to draw or illustrate anime-manga characters, how to act like them, how to play the theme songs or sing. So with all these digitally shared media, the global audience get in touch with many content, and actively circulate and reproduce whatever media culture they are interested in

without even needing a firsthand physical experience. They can create artistic interpretations of existing cute culture by consuming, producing and circulating it. Thus, cute aesthetic itself turns into something more experimental and playful extending the boundaries of commodity aesthetics.

Viewing Japanese cute in global context means a certain visual culture that is created out of “*interference*” within the existing production and consumption systems since there is a certain blend in high art aesthetic and popular standardized aesthetic. The emerging connections between art, popular culture and everyday life aesthetics will be more extensively analyzed with the works of two influential Japanese contemporary artists: Sebastian Masuda and Takashi Murakami.

## **2.2. Proliferation of Kawaii Aesthetics**

Japanese young people are loyal to the core values of strict Japanese culture, but they are trying to establish a colorful world inspired by West. This may seem to be something like local Japanese subculture, but “*Harajuku Culture*” has extended its boundaries across the globe. *Harajuku* is a colorful lifestyle that reflects the variety of Japanese visual culture. It is a street fashion that evolved in time presenting many different dressing styles.

### **2.2.1 Sebastian Masuda’s Harajuku Kawaii Fashion**

Sebastian Masuda is one of the main representative artists of this culture. In 1995, he opened up a shop called 6% Doki Doki which started as a vintage toy shop since he

was travelling across the world and collected many second hand toys and other cute products. Masuda was selling imported goods and after few years he started to design not just clothes but also accessories and interior accessory items. His shop has been influencing Tokyo street fashion. All the colorful products that Masuda created have paved the way for more and more colorful Harajuku style.



Fig. 5. 6%DOKIDOKI boutique, (2012), [photograph], In 6%DOKIDOKI “Beyond the Kawaii” Evolution & Harajuku Shop Renewal, 2013, Retrieved from <http://tokyofashion.com/6dokitdoki-beyond-the-kawaii-harajuku/>

There are different fashion styles since the aestheticization techniques are developed. Many girls and even also many boys started to dress mixing different elements together by layering in an eclectic style. They put on the style and come to Harajuku to be seen. There are references from western style terminology as well such as Gothic, Lolita, Fairy or Goth-Lolita, or Dark Fairy look, etc. The more references are blended together; there emerged unique styles and applications. Knowing no boundaries and taking it to the limit in terms of color and accessories, one certain look emerges as an overloaded cute and also weird. This overload look is called as “*Decora*” which is a visually intense style immersed in colorful accessories, skirts, t-shirts etc. In general, the *Decora* style and other looks of Harajuku resemble costume parties where everybody can dress freely as the way they want and can turn

themselves into performative beings that most people normally would not turn into in their everyday routine. However, this is exactly the position they have: bringing the extravagant dressing style to the streets as a distraction from the everyday structure: an aestheticization process in an artistic, surreal way.



Fig. 6. Horie, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2869/harajukutokyoclares6dokidokidaichulaa>



Fig. 7. Junnyan, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2013, <http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2297harajukutosuperlovers%E2%80%93wltmalkomalka6dokidoki%E2%80%93spxangelicpretty>

*What Harajuku Girls Really Look Like* is a short documentary on *Decora* fashion. The video, uploaded in 2014, is part of Style Out There series prepared by the YouTube channel *Refinery29* that specializes in fashion, styling, beauty, DIYs, etc. with 80.492 subscribers. In the short video (7'49"), the general sense of the colorful style of the *Decora* was portrayed as *fun fashion*, *in your face fashion*, and sort of *rebellious* expression. The rebellious side is emphasized in a subtle way that makes a question mark. Is it really confronting or converging the existing strict structure of Japanese society? The answer could be a "no" when analyzed in a wider and deeper sense. *Decora* look separates itself from the masses look but forms a group of people who engage in it within the norms of society. They still act according to the rules of the society, only the outlook changes. The documentary shows a specific case: a *Decora* girl named Kenae (23) who lives with her husband, baby and other family members outside of Tokyo city center. Kenae tells the process of how she gets ready for the whole look before she goes to Tokyo for meeting her friends. Choosing clothes, little accessories and a wig makes a chaotic but still a harmonious color style. This process takes approximately two hours as she stated.

*Decora* style uses many different designer brand items; Masuda's brand is one of the main ones. Japanese Street fashion blog website called "Japanese Streets" describes Masuda's designs as:

6%DOKIDOKI designs are easily recognizable by their design and the shades of vivid yellow, pink and purple that Masuda likes to use. Combined with stars, hearts, ribbons, unicorns and ice cream cones, this results in ultra-kawaii items that have become representative for Japanese pop culture ("6%DokiDoki", 2014: para.3).

Masuda uses color as a weapon for expression. He thinks that it is an important form of communication for young people; a way of saying out loud what they think.

Instead of using bold characters on paper cardboards, putting colorful cloths and accessories on is a certain statement for opposition.

The essence of *Kawaii* culture takes its feed from infantilized point of view. Masuda's inspiration comes from everything around him that mainly uttered as childish such as from toys and related products as can be inferred from his set designs. Harajuku Street Fashion mainly showed that eclectic style in which people can dress in an extreme way by not just applying color but also toys, hairpins, badges all over themselves. The important thing is that the every kind of coloring style or accessory can be used in multiplied way or in a reversed way in creating blended styles. For instance, there is not one type of Decora, even though there are always similar patterns that resemble each other. One young person could be applying many styles separately or all in one as in the example of Hanazono Uri from Shibuya. He used *Decora* together with his dark *Shironuri*<sup>6</sup> style. He is constantly experimenting with his visual style.

---

<sup>6</sup> "Shironuri" means 'painted in white'. It is one of the old artistic traditions in Japan where the artist should paint his/her face all in white as a rule of the style.  
<http://alternative-fashion.wikia.com/wiki/Shironuri>



Fig. 8. Hanazono, Uri, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/2587/sangenjaya-tokyo-6dokitoki>



Fig. 9. Hanazono, Uri, [photograph], In Japanese Streets Photo Blog, by Kjeld Duits, 2012, Retrieved from <http://www.japanesestreets.com/photoblog/1905/shibuyatokyohanazonouri>

As Masuda's artistic stance involves provoking visual style, he has influenced popular icons as well. The most known example is Kyary Pamyu Pamyu who has transformed from harajuku street girl into harajuku kawaii pop queen of Japan. Her most famous and debut music video Pon Pon Pon which came out in 2011, reflects

Masuda's visual style. Masuda was the art director of the music video; he designed all the decorations and the setting.



Fig. 10. Pamyu's Music Video "Pon Pon Pon" (2011), Opening Sequence, [video still], In Warner Music Japan, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g>

The video uses different visual techniques from live action to 2D and 3D animation. It does not clearly describe a story of a girl although it starts with a room that Sebastian designed which is Pamyu's room overloaded with every type of cute stuff (Figure 9). The theme is *Kawaii*, but it is a deeper, more complex visual type which takes audience slowly to the weird side of it.



Fig. 11. Pamyu's music video "Pon Pon Pon", (2011), Room sequence, [video still], In Warner Music Japan, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&list=R Dz y z C 4 h F K 5 P 3 g>

In the screenshot above, Pamyu's room became more and more mixed with every kind of 2D and 3D elements of fantasy including "her" as an image and we cannot be sure whether she is a 2D or 3D reality, a part of weirdness of the whole concept. Even from the very beginning, Pamyu's image has never been so fixed on a certain reality, the audience could guess from the opening sequence that something even more visually *psychedelic* weird-cute will come.

Visually complex and hybrid language brings the element of weirdness and the colors, textures, patterns, movements, etc. everything becomes more and more absurd in those sequences. Even, there are certain repetitive motions graphics of live action or animation that work as a moving background for Pamyu's image that recall internet GIFs rather than usual animation technique. However; it is not the only thing that adds up such a narrative, there are other references to anime culture, and popular music such as dance figures, but it will not be delved into much here. The sequences

of the pink faced Pamyu, involve a certain fantasy world in which Pamyu imagines all the elements in her life in a form and style as she wants them to be.



Fig. 12. Pamyu's music video "Pon Pon Pon", (2011), Pink Face sequences, [video still], In Warner Music Japan, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzC4hFK5P3g&list=RDyzC4hFK5P3g>

The pink face sequences are called as Pamyu's mental world "nōnai sekai" -脳内世界- as the director explained in an interview (Tamukai, 2011: para.10). However, there is no clear line between Pamyu's real(!) face and pink face, meaning there is no line between her real world reality and imaginary world, since all the elements are slowly merging together as the time passes. That is why the audience can see references floating from one world to another in a blurred way, leaving an open door to all kinds of imagination.

The limitless source of aestheticizing life with bending the *Kawaii* itself reflects a motto which is making life more experimental in a playful state of mind. All the concepts, notions in life, specifically our everyday reality is not fixed but rather fluid. Sebastian Masuda sums up well what kind of weirdness that Pamyu's *Psychedelic Kawaii* has popularized by stating: "I am perpetually in a state of sensory overload, so nothing in this room seems weird to me anymore" (Mohajer-Va-Pesaran, 2014: para.1).

All these colors and accessories are bursting out and lead us to the idea of freeing oneself from one strict structure, trying to be freer in the expression. That is why the very colorful outlook is the result of Masuda's will to express as much as possible from the outside world. He recently started to open some art exhibitions where he can spread the idea of kawaii culture in a more artistic way. This is a point where popular culture of *Kawaii* and its artistic potential can meet. One of the recent exhibitions reflects the idea very well: His solo show *Colorful Rebellion – seventh nightmare* in New York City. It is an entirely colorful series of installations that invades rooms with the toys, artificial fur, and cute accessories and also wall paper prints. Masuda says that the concept of Seventh Nightmare is based upon interpreting the Seven Deadly Sins. Expressing sins in a bold way holds a statement against all the strict rules and norms that people has to conform in society. Likewise, to dress in a quirky fashion with applying all these Kawaii accessories creates the core of being Harajuku girl, a sort of questioning the way one lives, a certain interruption to the style of everyday life. Kawaii ambassador Masuda is proponent of the idea of “counter-culture”, thus the visual culture helps to create a possibility of such a space in society.

Kawaii is creating your own universe, your own world. Something that other people can't encroach upon. So with that in mind, no, color isn't necessary. Black can be kawaii. But for me the Harajuku/Kawaii movement was a counter-culture, and my weapon is color (Jarnes, 2015: para.11).

Masuda keeps travelling all around the world hoping to spread his colorful rebellion idea with the means of Kawaii Culture, both as a life style and as an artistic expression. Tokyo is a city with a specific platform for the Japanese visual cultures to develop. Every minute the color schema changes as the Harajuku girls walk along

with the blinking digital billboards and led screens. Combining the changing lights from night time to day time- with changing rush of many different outlook of people, the contemporary city is fueled with visual signifiers.

## **2.3 Hybrid Language of the Kawaii**

### **2.3.1 Takashi Murakami's Superflat art and distorted Kawaii**

Takashi Murakami is a Japanese contemporary artist who holds BFA, MFA and PhD from the Tokyo University of the Arts. He has established an art production company under the name Kaikai Kiki. It is a cooperation which not only sells Takashi's work but also promotes newly emerging artists.

His most remarkable act was the introduction of the self-coined art movement *Superflat*<sup>7</sup> in 2000, which combines different forms of Japanese art, animation and pop culture in a 2D compressed aesthetic. Murakami's take on compression refers to "*two dimensionality of Japanese graphic art and animation, as well as to the shallow emptiness of its consumer culture*" (Drohojowska-Philp, 2001: para.5).

Murakami works with different media to reach the mixed style, starting from *nihonga*<sup>8</sup> to contemporary digital graphics and animation. Trying to blend the high art and low art – in this case it is meant to bring together and clash them by using every accepted popular cultural concept defined in the market. Japanese pop culture phenomenon *Kawaii* spreads itself to everything that can be produced in the market.

---

<sup>7</sup> Superflat: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superflat>

<sup>8</sup> Nihonga, is a traditional Japanese painting style.

It moreover effects how people, especially young people, apply the *Kawaii* concept to their appearance and to their behaviors as seen in the case of Harajuku Fashion mentioned before. In its overly scattered mode, slowly one sees the weird side of it. For instance according to Murakami, *Kawaii* has sweetness that also explodes into dark, quirky and weird aesthetic of Japanese culture. Since he experienced the dark times of Japan during WWII and western occupation, he traces back to those times to for the root of dark and weird expression and relates them to today's contemporary pop culture, subculture, and art in Japan.

*Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, was one of the main exhibitions he curated in 2005 as the third and last part of the series of the project "Superflat". The whole concept included exhibitions series, music events and a same titled book. Exhibitions and events were held in the institutions of Japan Society of New York –a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization– and Public Art Fund –a non-profit organization–. The Title's first two words Little Boy refer to the name of the atomic bomb that hit Hiroshima in 1945. The rest of the title refers to the visual-cultural forms of contemporary Japanese popular culture. In this framework, the main theme was *Otaku Culture* that has evolved in Japan since 80's as a symptomatic act of disaster relief.



Fig. 13. Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture (2005), Exhibition Poster, [poster], Retrieved from <https://kterrl.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/littleboytheartsofjapan2527sexplodingsubculture.jpg>

*Otaku*<sup>9</sup> is a term eventually changed to be used in popular culture context. Being similar to term “geek”, *Otaku* means a nerd who is deeply involved in Japanese popular media contents such as Manga, Anime, Japanese video games. All the artists were also accepted as *Otaku* artists since their works more or less included this otaku culture. There were variations of painting, sculpture, animation, toys, fashion etc. in the exhibition. The images of all these different mediums reflected the human characters; animals from anime and manga which are turned into objects of commodification. They were blended with the figures of monsters from Japanese traditional history.

---

<sup>9</sup> Otaku, originally means someone's house, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otaku#Etymology>.



Fig. 14. Yanobe, Kenji (2000), “Atom Suit Project Antenna of the Earth”, [installation], In *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, 2005, Retrieved from <http://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/littleboy/25.html>

The whole series and events of this comprehensive exhibition work is something more than an art exhibition since where the art, popular culture, kitsch, or everyday life start and where they end is actually blended in a way to evoke certain sensations of postwar trauma. When considering economic and technological level of Japan, this kind of mixture between traditional art and popular culture is intelligible.



Fig. 15. Iwamoto, Masakatsu -Mr-, “View of the exhibition”, [installation], In Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture, 2005, Retrieved from [http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/exhibitions/2005-04-08\\_japan-society-new-york-ny/press\\_release/0/exhibition\\_installation/1](http://www.lehmannmaupin.com/exhibitions/2005-04-08_japan-society-new-york-ny/press_release/0/exhibition_installation/1)

The aftermath of World War II, Japanese stagnated economy had to be set to level of its western counterparts. For that reason, all the hard work and effort of citizens brought social and economic and inevitably technological determinism to their everyday life positioning “work” as the primary thing in social structure.

The way of relieving from hard work was made possible with the developed market of visual culture. Booming anime-manga industry and video games plus toy industry, all created a huge effect in overseas markets as well. Murakami and other artists saw the rapid marketization of any visual cultural element in Japan. This sort of immersion in a visually abundant everyday life was in a way *escape* from everyday reality for many people, but also it was an escape from Japan’s dark history that traumatized the whole nation as Murakami stated.

Murakami's artistic vision emphasizes the blurred lines between high art and low art as mentioned in the Little Boy exhibition where commodity, fine art, everyday object fused into each other. Therefore, not distinguishing between them determines a Japanese style as for Murakami's all the artworks reflect the idea: *Kawaii* is one of the rich popularized subcultures in which Japanese culture can be reflected on and represented through it. Murakami does not take subculture or popular culture as a separate entity from culture.

In Figure 16, Murakami pushed the boundaries of hybrid aesthetic and also hybrid contextualization. The huge canvases present Murakami's cartoonish characters with traditional, historical symbols in an abstract distorted textures which in the end intensifies the *Superflat* art and makes everything more out of context.

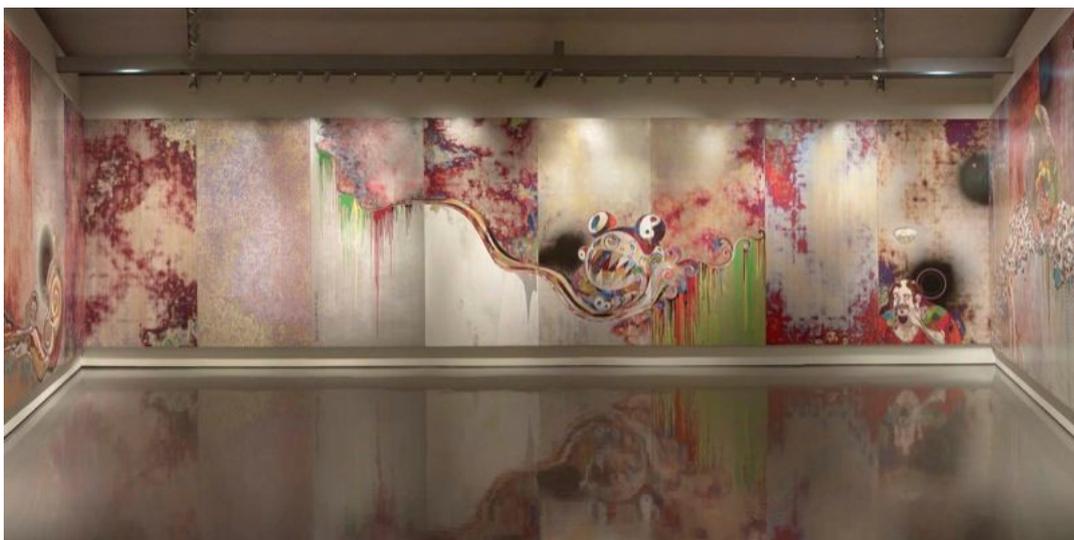


Fig. 16. Murakami, Takashi (2007), "The Emergence of God at The Reversal of Fate", Acrylic on canvas mounted on board (16 pannels) / 300 x 2400 x 5 cm, [installation], Retrieved from [https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi\\_Murakamiworksoeuvres1702312.html](https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi_Murakamiworksoeuvres1702312.html)



Fig. 17. Murakami, Takashi (2007), Close up, “The Emergence of God at The Reversal of Fate”, Acrylic on canvas mounted on board (16 pannels) / 300 x 2400 x 5 cm, [installation], Retrieved from [https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi\\_Murakamiworksoeuvres1702312.html](https://www.perrotin.com/Takashi_Murakamiworksoeuvres1702312.html)

In Murakami’s execution of Kawaii aesthetic, this time, there emerges a type of psychedelic visuality different than Kyary Pamyu’s. Even though forms and colors are similarly chaotic and textures are used as multilayered and overlaid, the conceptual framework underlying the visual identity deconstructs the thematic side of the arts as well, thus there is a certain distortion about the traditional and cultural signs that are seen in Murakami’s paintings and sculptures and print works.



Fig. 18. Murakami, Takashi (2014), “Tan Tan Bo–In Communication”, Acrylic, gold leaf and platinum leaf on canvas mounted on wood panel, [painting], Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/12/takashi-murakami-rashomon\\_n\\_6136340.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/12/takashi-murakami-rashomon_n_6136340.html)

The visual eclecticism in Murakami is seen both in his artistic style and in his personal artistic identity. Getting into popular culture a lot by not just using elements in his artwork but also making collaborations with many western popular artists caused people to call him as Japanese Andy Warhol. This inevitable reference and comparison is openly accepted by Murakami himself. That is why with Murakami’s Superflat art, Japanese every kind of visual culture aesthetic has come to position itself without the boundaries of localization but yet insisting on trying to stay as much Japanese as it can.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE AESTHETICIZATION OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

#### **3.1 Conceptualizing the “Everyday”**

In everyday life’s visual reality, people are consuming popular culture content: daily products, media news, digital images, music videos and many more things as to express oneself. There is a long history behind consumer society since the development of industrialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but not to go into detail of the origins, the focus of this paper is the developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The recent everyday activities are more subject to ever-changing aesthetic categories on what is beautiful, trendy, cool, cute, or scary, lame, average etc.

Everything can be a way to express one self’s identity. This process has been shifted to more artful and playful scene more than before since developing technology served very well for individual existence. Digital technologies bring about digital identities that are scattered all over the globe. Many people are using internet platforms as not only social media’s communication service. They create a certain identity so real to the extent that it equals itself to physical being.

That is why most people spend a lot of time on the web to express themselves and realize their potential by commenting on videos or images and also by uploading videos and images. This can be formulated as contemporary life's daily basis routine just as waking up, going out, getting on bus, eating lunch etc. Virtual existence is as much physical as the other physical acts. Even further level is the fact that most people engage in physical-real- activities and record them just for the sake of sharing these in virtual platform. Here the idea of "virtual" becomes more real than real.

Virtual reality is differing itself from the physical reality because of its technologically created sensibility. The very experience of that sort of reality is experienced in its own rights and no need for questioning it by comparing to the reality of the actuality. What is emerging aside from the physical and virtual reality is the simulated one which is hard to distinguish from the actual reality. These discussions about contemporary life's expanding realities stir up the arguments on the possibility of postmodern society. The arguments of postmodern society start from the idea of a postmodern individual. That individual is an "I" subject who is responsible from what he/she is doing to create the social identity. Every act an individual "I" does is taken as his/her free will, thus consequences are determined individually. However individual is in a strictly defined everyday reality structure where the free will actions are limited with the norms of modern life. The reality itself is entangled with digital social identities that hover around as fast as they can as if in every second something is changing around the world, or keep flowing in a river that is never flows never the same.

Fredric Jameson delves into the cultural questioning of the late capitalism which in the end link itself with the postmodern aesthetic following Baudrillard's hyperreal society where images do not just appear but simulate reality. Mike Featherstone analyses Jameson and Baudrillard along with others to reach to an inclusive conception of contemporary consumer culture. One of the essential features of the theories that formulate Postmodernism is captured in Jameson's statement:

...the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture, and the emergence of new kinds of texts infused with the forms, categories, and contents of that very culture industry so passionately denounced by all the ideologues of the modern, from Leavis and the American New Criticism all the way to Adorno and the Frankfurt School (Jameson, 1991: 54).

The very reason to put an emphasis on the effacement of postmodern society's high culture and mass culture has started from formulating the late capitalist society as a post-industrial one. It is a social formation where consumer society steps towards a media saturated society where technological developments override ideological questions in mind. It is a whole new cultural phenomenon in question since even though many element of modernism could be paralleled with postmodernism in economy, culture etc. Jameson tries to explain the distinction with positioning postmodernism in a more elaborated capitalist system where culture is also a product to be produced every day.

Another feature of the postmodern present itself with the loosening of the references in images where Baudrillard referred to the contemporary culture as "depthless" and Jameson followed his take on this subject matter as a new kind of *superficial* culture in where Andy Warhol's shoes and the images of every day products have given rise to "a simulational world which has effaced the distinction between the real and the

imaginary: a depthless aestheticized hallucination of reality” that in a way briefly summarizes Baudrillard’s nihilist take of the contemporary capitalist society (Featherstone, 2007: 54).

In the course of the mundane reality, the patterns of consumption, production and recreation are fed from aestheticization process. This means even the most ordinary; the everyday reality can be formularized in terms of artful, playful, or experimental aesthetics. These sort of aesthetics are enabled with the existing digitalized market of communication and social relations. In the course of modernization, the consumption has turned into something that commodifies everything including itself; thus the culture people are born into, is also turned into something to be consumed. The effort to move forward in this process is the point personal identities are cultural productions where individuals are constantly on the verge of passing to postmodern state of mind.

### **3.2. The Aestheticization of Everyday Life**

As Mike Featherstone described and argued about the theory of “Aestheticization of Everyday life” in his book called *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, there are three levels in the aestheticization process. 1<sup>st</sup> level starts from the idea of historical avant-garde and where all the Surrealist and Dada movements tried to “efface the boundary between art and everyday life” (Featherstone, 2007:66). He used the most iconic example such as Marcel Duschamp’s ready-made objects to challenge the hierarchy of the work of art itself and the representative institutions –museums –.

The idea was to turn art into something that can be anything and that can exist anywhere in the world. Moreover, except from its material side, the idea of art should be everywhere even for transitory moments. That is why performance artists were doing “happenings” since this form of art cannot be put into museums, they were already transitory.

2<sup>nd</sup> level also stems from the role of art; but the focus is the life itself. Mike Featherstone goes back to early times of modernization process around 19<sup>th</sup> century and talk about Baudelaire’s figure *Dandy*, the man who turns everything about himself into work of art. This everything is the way he walks, talks, dresses, etc. In this ‘turning oneself into work of art’ process, there is a dual standpoint to be noted. The *Dandy* figure is a man who is searching for different tastes, feelings in life, different from the rest of society, namely the masses (Featherstone, 2007:67).

This search for a certain life style involves commodity consumption to reflect an aesthetically pleasing life grounded on artistic and intellectual meaning against mass cultural standard living. It is ironic that even the way to be separate from mass culture takes its source from consumer culture since the *Dandy* is using everything that is defined in the market, only more expensive and unique so that it could be different than many others.

3<sup>rd</sup> level is what goes beyond the commodity consumption. Especially since the beginning of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century there is a rapid increase in consumer culture’s material production, and also in its immaterial production. Visual images are more and more spreading everywhere. They are not the actual products, but the representations of what is being produced. Every real product has its image produced, promoted, and

consumed. Now, all these images and their actual products that are produced and consumed do not differ in terms of quality, the boundary between the actual and the virtual is more and more effaced. Image can work as the mediator to create *meaning* in life; more elaborated way in aestheticization of everyday life. Featherstone gives references from famous critics of those times from Adorno, Benjamin, Lefebvre, Lukacs, and Baudrillard about what modernization project has brought to social life where lifestyle becomes new way to set an identity and the problem of overcoming consumer mass culture intervene with the aestheticization process (Featherstone, 2007:68). The whole arguments will not be discussed in detail here, only Baudrillard's arguments will be briefly mentioned because of the framework of this thesis content.

Every level of aestheticization is interrelated to each other and to the contemporary society's way of meaning production, however more emphasis will be based upon the 3<sup>rd</sup> level to be able to relate the cute aesthetics to contemporary art and popular culture productions. Baudrillard also starts with the fact that how art has become a more integrated entity rather being a separate reality. Admittedly, the concept of *high art* did not vanish completely; however partly its aura has been questioned and the idea that 'mundane reality could also be artistic' is emphasized. Moreover, images are able to make everything seems possible in a sense everything becomes hyperreal. This is a surreal standpoint that avant-garde and surrealist artists tried to reach in the first level of aestheticization. Baudrillard's statement is explains the aesthetics as an everyday reality as nothing outside of it exists:

It is reality itself today that is hyperrealist. Surrealism's secret already was that the most banal reality could become surreal, but only in certain privileged moments that are still nevertheless connected with art and

the imaginary. Today it is quotidian reality in its entirety – political, social, historical and economic – that from now on incorporates the simulating dimension of hyper-realism. We live everywhere already in an ‘aesthetic’ hallucination of reality (Baudrillard, 1983: 148).

Because the contemporary world is already in simulation mode, everything can be more and more reproduced endlessly, so the intensification of images are leading the way for our understanding of reality on a daily basis. Baudrillard and some others see this situation has caused a condition for postmodern culture. Postmodern in a sense that intensifies the social life through simulations. Images are all signs and signs are liquefied and even vaporized and thus reality is floating on the surface, cannot be traced deep down; there is no depth anymore, what was real image, the first image, the first material of something? Nobody knows, or they cannot be sure about it. Reference of something that is already a reference in itself is consumed and transmitted all around the world. That is why the simulation of something is enough to experience it, the new reality that is constructed out of lost meaning. The use of simulation is in that sense refers to a dream-like quality of everyday existence, how each time a person starts to a day, starts with unprecedented number of possibilities that can occur. Aestheticization of Everyday life is therefore taken as a process of creating an everyday visual reality that explores contemporary ways of seeing, feeling, and expressing. In that framework, the way of Japanese cute-weird aesthetics of Kawaii is one of the main elements that introduce new visualities to construct everyday life.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE AUDIO-VISUAL PROJECT: DISTORTING EVERYDAY LIFE WITH KAWAII

#### 4.1 Glitch art and the notion of visual “distortion”

When some image or video has few glitches, this situation is a visual break on the visual language of that particular image or sequence of the video. When a break is multiplied to the extent that it becomes a pattern, a visual style emerges.

Everyday life is theoretically so much fixed on the idea of a social structure that constantly restarts itself everyday morning as soon as we wake up. The intentional glitches in a medium created by using technological manipulations show the potential breaks that is engraved in a structure. Thus, in this sense artists propose to work with the glitches as a way to reach to more free expression, creation, and existence. That is why the effort to relate Japanese Kawaii to glitch art makes sense since in both aesthetics “distortion” is assumed as something experimental, playful and emancipatory. In both visual processes, the producers of the aesthetics do not know the final outcome which is not at all a concern, quite the opposite probably it becomes an element of trigger.

All these creations, experiments in visual culture refers to the fact that people either are questioning or can question the deterministic power of technology itself, and believe in shaping one's own day, life and future in a more aware state even though anything can be uncertain any moment. Artistic stance is there for the initial breakthrough. All these artistic movements like avant-garde, dada, and anything that is considered postmodern art are aware of the possible threats, disasters, and errors of the technology, modernism, anything that concerns social life. That kind of alternative vision thrived itself strikingly in the medium of the video, therefore created an area inside of the arts.

#### **4.1.1 Glitch Aesthetics and Video as a new medium**

Before going into glitch aesthetics, the beginnings of the distorted and experimental video aesthetics should be very briefly mentioned.

Korean-born artist Nam June Paik is one the pioneers in mid-1950s video art. He was a member of the artist collective *fluxus*<sup>10</sup>. Video art as an alternative stand point against cinema and television's dominant discourse, developed itself out of the understandings of experiment, deconstruction, and hybrid aesthetics. In this way, it could be thought as the beginnings of contemporary glitch videos and glitch art in general.

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fluxus>

Paik has been a global artist, and his impact on the art of video and television has been deep. Paik's works have sustained impact for the visual culture of his times in which broadcast television is redefined and video has turned into an artistic medium.

*Electronic Superhighway* (Fig.19) is an installation that Paik used TV screens with changing dimensions. What are seen in the screens are various programs that refer to American broadcasted programs. They are shown at once in a repeated pattern, like today's gif videos. All of the TV screens compose a huge one piece installation and that is the shape of the U.S. map covered in neon, like an artistic interpretation of roadside attraction signs, billboards.

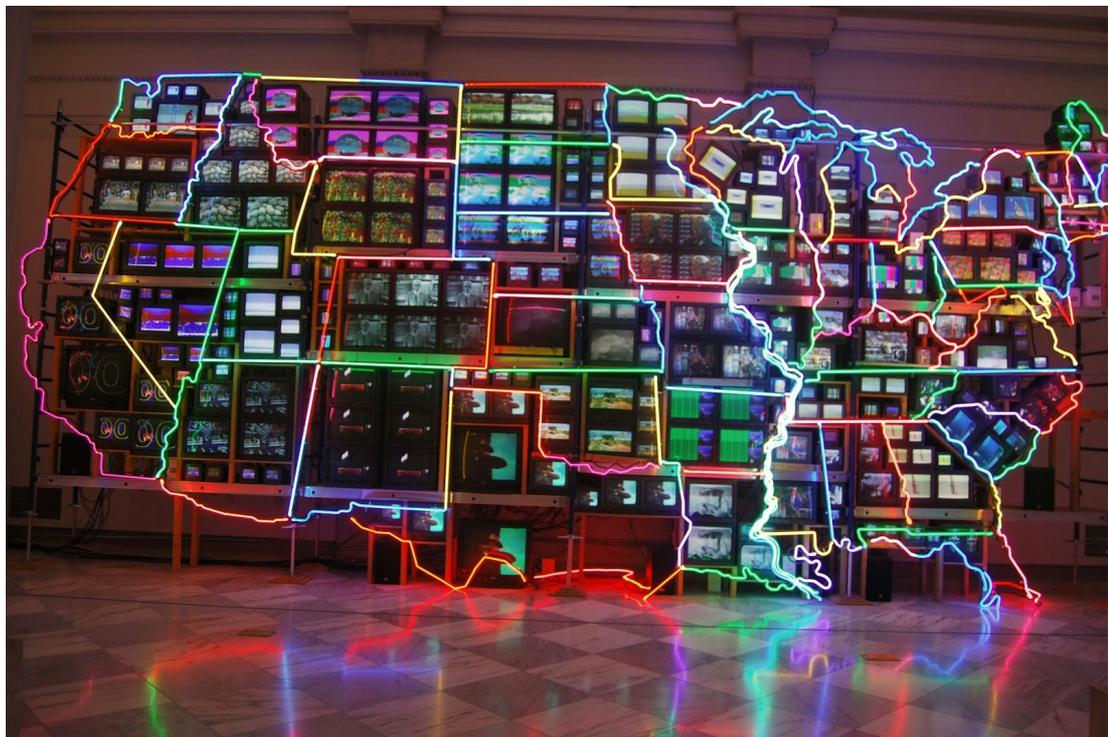


Fig. 19. Paik, Nam June (1995), "Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S", 49-channel closed circuit video installation, neon, steel and electronic components, approx. 15 x 40 x 4 ft., In Smithsonian American Art Museum, Retrieved from <http://americanart.si.edu/education/rs/artwork/>

TV screens flash with the sights and sounds of the 50 states. His slogan related to the art work's main idea was "The future is now". Similarly, many of his works make

use of multiple TV screens in various physical layouts, playing back video imagery to form collages or repeated patterns.

Paik envisioned a different concept for television that involves a new type of moving image understanding: "Electronic Super Highway" (Yalkut, 1995: para.1) that would be open and free to everyone. The multiple forms of video that Paik developed can be interpreted as an expression of an open medium able to flourish and grow through the imagination and participation of individuals from around the world. Paik, along with many artists, worked to challenge the idea of television as a medium and domain exclusively controlled by a monopoly of broadcasters.

#### **4.1.2 Glitch Studies: Rosa Menkman's Glitch Momentum**

Glitch<sup>11</sup>, in its simplest sense a technical malfunctioning in terms of electronics as its origin suggest that "*glitsh* a slip, from *glitshn* "to slip; from German *glitschen*, and related *gleiten* "to glide"". Thus it is a term used to refer to certain bugs in every kind of electronic devices. In particular, their software structure could face an unexpected malfunction and that creates glitches in the graphics of a video game or in images of a video, or in the audio data.

Distorted visuals on the surface with various forms of glitch aesthetic seems so chaotic; but if everywhere is distorted and this style is scattered all around the medium, than it becomes the norm itself, a *structured chaos* [italics mine] in itself. In the book titled *The Glitch Moment(um)*, this situation is referred as "orderly chaos"

---

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=glitch&searchmode=term](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=glitch&searchmode=term)

(Menkman, 2011:26). Glitch art is a way to aestheticize the errors and bugs of the technological system.

Each fragmentation or distorted element can become too much chaotic for the eye in the beginning. In its inherent meaning, *glitch* has connotation with the “unexpected”, “unwanted” similar to the *noise* in audio. Noise does not conform to the structure of the information that supposed to be transmitted since it leads to a “break” or “disturbance” in the transmission. If technical cause of the break is known, these noise artifacts are called by their causes such as “jaggies, checkerboarding” which are compression artifacts (Menkman, 2011:26). However, when the source of the technical mistake is not known and the noise caused by is more complicated, then this noise is referred as a kind of ‘glitch’. In that sense of falsity, glitch is similar to noise, but only differing in terms of expectancy.

Glitch, an unexpected occurrence, unintended result, or break or disruption in a system, cannot be singularly codified, which is precisely its conceptual strength and dynamical contribution to media theory. From an informational (or technological) perspective, the glitch is best considered as a break from (one of) the protocolized data flows within a technological system (Menkman, 2011: 26).

Menkman talked about experience of a glitch for the first time is related to shock due to “unintended result” or “unexpected occurrence” (as mentioned in the quotation) that occurs in the flow of the system. This is the first reaction when the situation is perceived solely in terms of technological progress. Technological deterministic discourse is dominant in perceiving glitch as failure. Menkman is more interested in these inner mistakes that change the logic of the structure very deeply. She sees hope in terms of questioning the technology itself, the dominant structures of our lives in general. That can be made possible with perspective of art as a first reaction. Thus,

she moves on to explain more about the artful potential of glitch. She talks about glitch art and why many artists prefer to experiment with the glitch aesthetic to play in between the boundaries of familiarity and unfamiliarity. She uses compressions, glitches, and noise artifacts to reach different narratives technologically and conceptually.

## **4.2 Contemporary Art and Glitch Aesthetics**

### **4.2.1 Rosa Menkman's Video: The Collapse of Pal**

Rosa Menkman has been developing her interest and ideas on glitch since 2005 especially one work called *Untitled Game*<sup>12</sup> has left a huge effect on her. The term glitch was not much developed in the art world yet; it was officially to be defined in Wikipedia around 2007 without proper grounds (Menkman, 2011:7). The more she developed her critical attitude towards digital arts, the more she entered into glitch aesthetics. In her writings “Glitch studies manifesto” and “Vernacular of file formats”, she tried to develop further arguments on glitch design related compression artifacts and even further developed a project called *Monglot*<sup>13</sup> in collaboration with Johan Larsby which explored, presented the generation of glitch software: mixing two different visual languages and also compressing the image data. This is the basis of how popular glitch styles emerge: grain, noise, pixel, lines, jitter etc.

In the audio-visual work called “*the Collapse of Pal*<sup>14</sup>”, she delves into historical and cultural context of glitch in digital world along with technological discourse. The

---

12 Untitled game (1996-2001) Modification of the Video game Quake 1 created by artist collective Jodi.

13 Johan Larsby and Rosa Menkman, monglot, 2011, <http://rosamenkman.blogspot.com/search/label/Monglot>.

14 The Collapse of PAL is a real-time performance presented at TV-TV on the 25th of May 2010, in Copenhagen, DK.

video footage lasts circa ten to eleven minutes long. First minute shows glitched titles about the name of the work and some related information and audio of broken sounds not music at all. Later, there is a distorted human face and so soon there starts the scenes of outdoor landscape with little movement, and the left up the typed sentences start to appear. There is a narrator in the video which is called the Angel of History (taken as the way it was described by Walter Benjamin) and which was referenced from *Angelus Novus*<sup>15</sup>. It tells the story of the ending of PAL in a sort of dramatic narration. The idea is that while better technologies appear and defeat PAL, such as DVB, there is always the possibility of technologic flaws and mistakes that can be left over from old technologies in so called progressed versions. The Angel tells this story basically, thus “there is more to glitch art and more at stake, than just design and aesthetics” (Menkman, 2011: 8).



Fig. 20. Menkman, Rosa (2011), “Collapse of PAL, Angel of History”, [video still] Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuDwaQDzOZc>

---

<sup>15</sup> Paul Kless's painting, 1920, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelus\\_Novus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelus_Novus)

Using and formulating every kind of new glitch can create its own flow and it can turn into a fixed style which is sort of inevitable since breaking down systems can generate new modes in technology culture. This is the potential of digital art. Moreover, the potential of glitch art, the aesthetic of distortion that breaks itself every time from the conventional way of digital communication by the reconfiguration of “error” and “accident” (Menkman, 2011: 9).

Glitch scratches the whole system, opening a little crack in the structure of the contemporary technology. Every day, technology progresses and digital culture becomes more and more rich and complicated in terms of visual aesthetics and concepts. Between the audience and the mediums there occurs a certain form of interaction as soon as the audience does certain acts to receive information from it. That is why glitch art is about leaving the usual way to create new understanding of the whole communication structure itself. It does not distort to negate the reality of the structure but to present an alternative to the existing without having to disregard all the other structures.

#### **4.2.2 Visual References for the Audio-Visual Installation**

Pipilotti Rist, born in 1962, Switzerland, is one of the contemporary multimedia artists whose works have been exhibited globally, and also some public screenings such as the work “Open My Glade<sup>16</sup>” that was shown in Times Square. Because she studied different areas of visual arts such as photography, illustration, commercial art

---

<sup>16</sup> Pipilotti Rist's public shown work, <http://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/pipilotti-rist/>

etc. she is interested in mediums themselves and textures, patterns and they all can be decontextualized. Early works of her have been exploring the medium of video itself. “I’m Not The Girl Who Misses Much” (Fig.20) is a video that Rist experiments the editing of the live action shooting of a women singing the same verse as the title name by deforming the video tape, fast forwarding both audio and the visual, etc. This is how she manipulated the medium itself and somehow expressed the potential breaks in the medium and also our own everyday life’s content which is normally look at not as distorted. She explains the interest as:

I’m interested in feedback and generation losses, like color noise and bleeds. In my experiments with video it becomes clear to me how these supposedly, faulty, opportune images are like the pictures in my own subconscious (Osborne, 2012: para.9).

Pipilotti Rist made the everyday familiar unfamiliar. By using the internal failures of the medium -technology- itself she created a different structured reality.



Fig. 21. Rist, Pipilotti (1986), “I’m Not The Girl Who Misses Much”, [Video Still], by Atelierist, 2008, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJgiSyCr6BY>



Fig 22. Rist, Pipilotti (2014), “Mercy Garden”, Close up Leaves, [installation], In Hauser & Wirth Somerset ‘Stay Stamina Stay’ exhibition, Retrieved from [http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist\\_id=25&a=pipilottirist&p=7](http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist_id=25&a=pipilottirist&p=7)

Pipilotti Rist explores a lot of different visual expressions with not just deforming video but also using projection. Covering rooms with visuals of nature, she changes the plants environment and also the environment in the room. The size of the visuals are bigger and people see zoom in and their color burst out. Surrounding the room, it becomes an unrealistic live wall paper.



Fig. 23. Rist, Pipilotti (2014), “Mercy Garden”, Close up Sky, [installation], In Hauser & Wirth Somerset ‘Stay Stamina Stay’ exhibition, Retrieved from [http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist\\_id=25&a=pipilottirist&p=8](http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/imagesclipsview/?artist_id=25&a=pipilottirist&p=8)

Carnovsky is an artist collaboration comprised of Francesco Rugi and Silvia Quintanilla, based in Milan. Carnovsky has been one of the western art influences since they experimented with light and color on a multi-layered understanding.

RGB series is an exhibitional work that consists of flat images of 2D print works, however intends to explore the “surface’s deepness” (Carnovsky, n.d: para.1). The numerous interactions are experimented with printed images and applied colors in a hybrid language of mixing the overlaid textures, lines, and colors to reach to an unconventional visual outlook every time. There are different layers that are clearly seen only when specific filter is applied, for instance below left is the original mixed images and the green image is the filtered one where audience can see jungle plants better animals need red filter to be seen.



Fig. 24. Carnovsky 2011, “RGB Exhibitions” [installation], by Jeff Metal, In DreamBags – JaguarShoes, London, Retrieved from [http://www.carnovsky.com/RGB\\_Jaguarshoes2011.htm](http://www.carnovsky.com/RGB_Jaguarshoes2011.htm)

### **4.3 An Audio-Visual Video Installation: TMD – Never Ending Story**

#### **4.3.1 Process explanation of visual design**

The following recorded video footages that will be talked about one by one are used for the base of the video art work. TMD (Tunus-Merkez-Doğu) is one of the buses that make shifts from campus to city, city to campus; its route starts from Bilkent main campus reaches to the Tunus street down town as a last stop. It has a fixed route with limited stops. It is a scheduled transportation that lasts the whole day until night time. I used a hand camera to record the journey from beginning to the very end as an everyday life ritual. There is a single shot that viewer is seeing, taken from the bus window. There is no long shot or middle shot distinction, camera records as wide as its frame enables. The fluid scenery of the city scape does not much change in color or texture. It is day time around noon, during spring time of March and yet the weather is quite gloomy with all the dark white-grey-blue colors. There happens a change in the color schemes as time passes, colors burst in intensity.



Fig. 25. Layer Coloring Process,“Tmd Sugar”, [video still].

First, the audience sees the actual video footage of the journey for 2 minutes, and then it starts to get distorted by changing colors. Throughout the journey audience sees a lot of color combinations that are constantly changing in every visual element of the video: trees, cars, buildings, sky and the clouds.

There is another video created with the same logic of everyday life journey of TMD bus. However, this time visual aesthetic of the video is intensified by overlaying video footages and changing a lot of colors and at the same playing with their blending modes many times. Chaotic yet visually appealing scenes are created using color burst and overlay technique. The road video footage is the base. The other visuals are scenes from city center video footage and there are also some other

everyday life scenes that I shot inside/outside of the campus. The images of the first scenes present the audience a mixture of road and people walking in the center. By adding these two together in such a visually distorted and intensified way, I wanted to express the weirdness and playfulness of “making cute” in my everyday ordinary life as experimental as possible.



Fig. 26. Layer Blending and Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still].

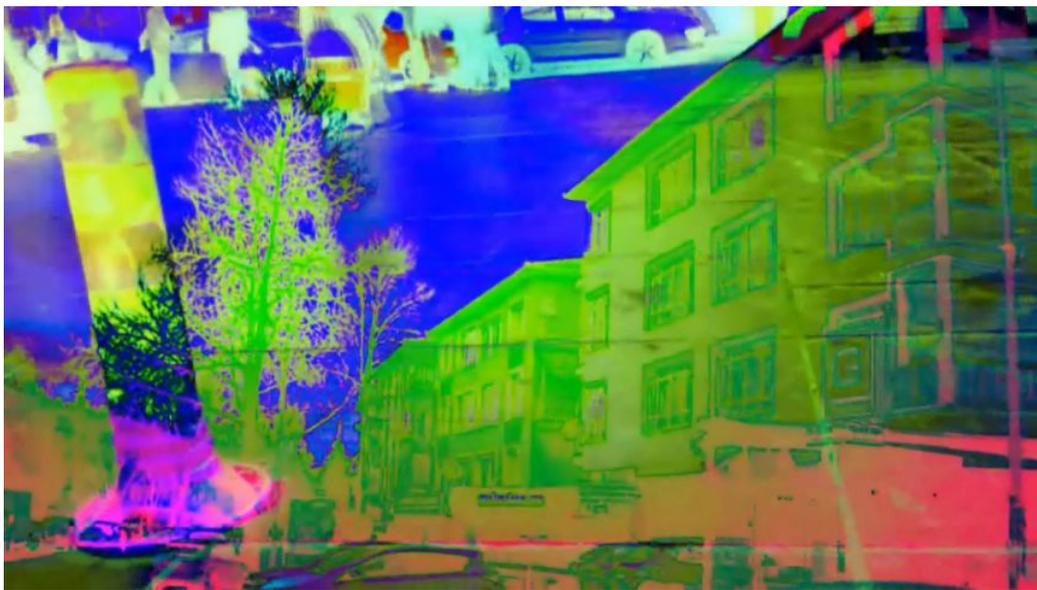


Fig. 27. Layer Blending and Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still].

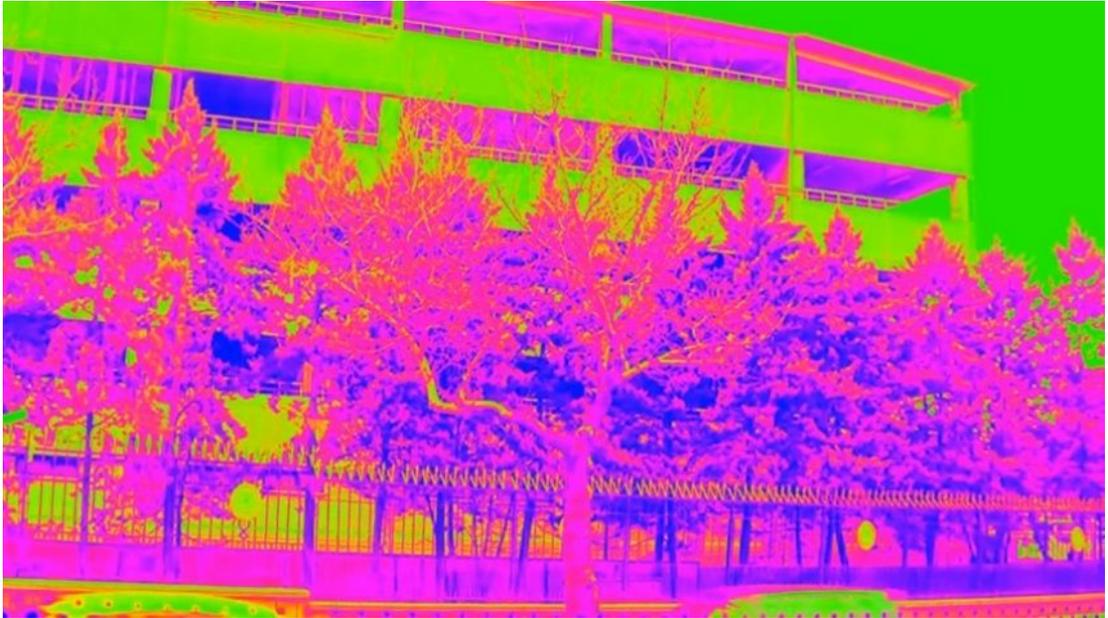


Fig. 28. Layer Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still].

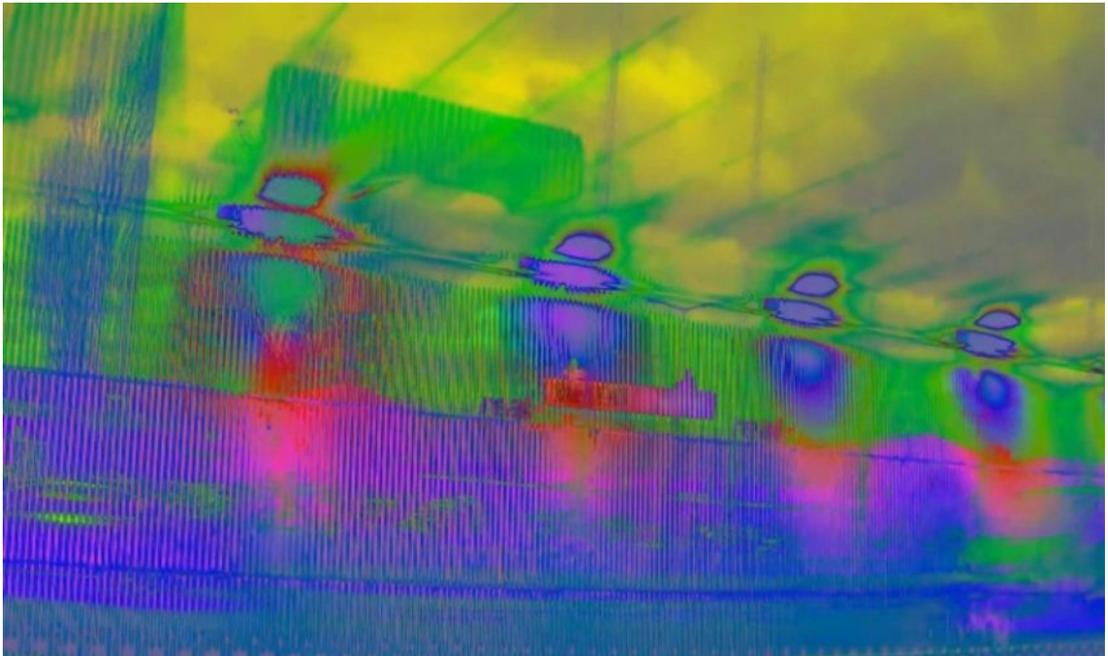


Fig. 29. Layer Blending and Coloring, “Tmd Glitch”, [video still].

### 4.3.2 Audio-Visual installation drafts, photos and sketches

The video projection test has been applied as the way it was designed in the drafts of the project. There are three interfaces which are frames for the different shootings of the bus. One is the left one, one is the front and the other is the right frame which corresponds to shootings done from left window, front window and right window respectively.

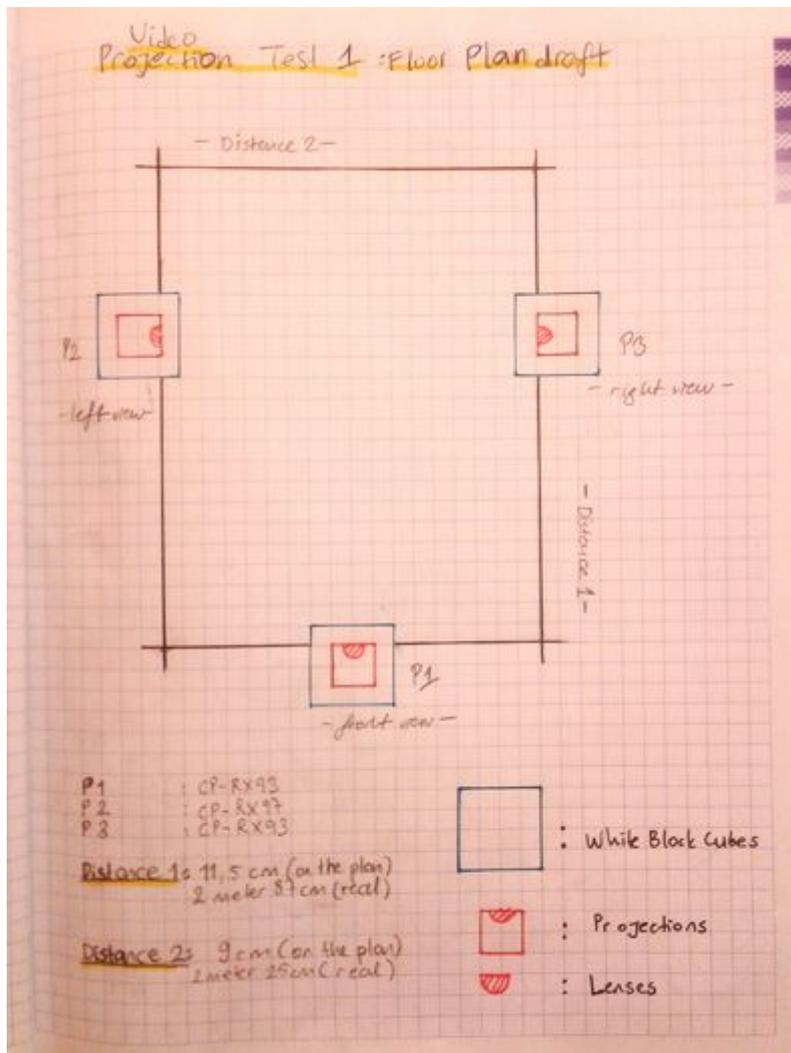


Fig. 30. Sketch for floor plan of the installation, “Tmd-Neveending Story”, [drawing].

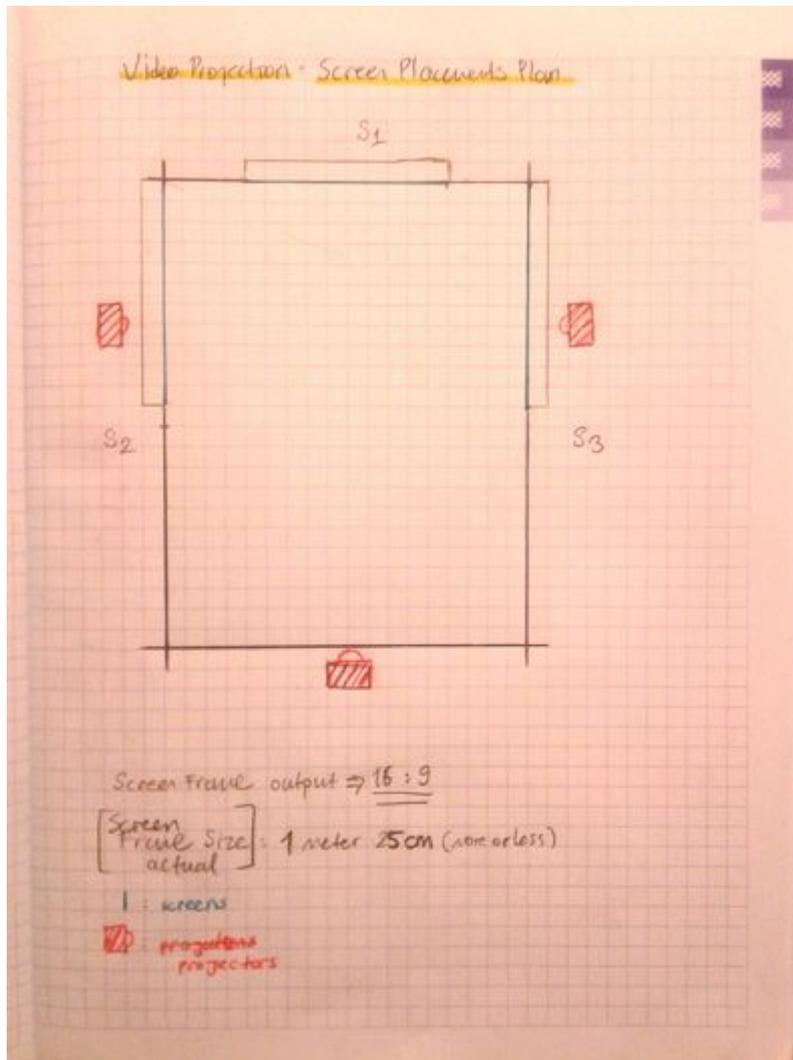


Fig. 31. Sketch for screen placement of the installation, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [drawing].



Fig. 32. Test projection of the installation, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [video still].

### **4.3.3 Finalization of the Audio-Visual Installation**

The final version of the three channel audio-video installation has been constructed with mobile panels that were 207x120 cm in size. One side of panel’s surface that would function as a screen for the videos have been covered with white fabrics, doing the same act for all three are done by me. All the three videos start at the same time and finish at the same time, then go into loop. The duration is 6’49” for all three of the videos. We see the whole journey from beginning to the end however in a slightly fast forwarded style in most of the time to make an easier viewing for the

audience and also to emphasize how temporality of one journey to another is depended upon how one feels it to be.



Fig. 33. Installation View, "Tmd-Neverending Story", [photograph].



Fig. 34. Installation View, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [photograph].



Fig. 35. Installation View, “Tmd-Neverending Story”, [photograph].



Fig. 36. Installation View, "Tmd-Neverending Story", [photograph].

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

There are no fixed realities in contemporary visual culture; anything can be anything so it means anything is replaceable and convertible in one context or many contexts. Japanese Kawaii aesthetic has been developing itself through high technical modernization of Japanese society in which there have been many changes and shifts occurred in the media that has been consumed. The Japanese comic book, Manga, has turned into a Japanese animation: Anime. The fan community of Anime and Manga created the cosplay culture in which people started wearing costumes of the anime characters and did role playing. Fans organized cosplay events, comic conventions all over the world. This act is a socialized form of consuming this visual culture since it is more productive and active. This culture of dressing up as a character revived itself in the Harajuku Street Fashion style. In Harajuku there are no boundaries, only categories and subcategories are created and they recreate themselves by deconstructing the visual aesthetics.

Kawaii culture has had many fragments and a decentered structure that caused us to further question for its newer definitions rather than just calling it “cute” as an equivalent translation in English. In her book, “*Kawaii!: Japan’s Culture of Cute*”, Okazaki Manami explains how she has been doing research about Kawaii in every possible visual area of Japan and come to one summary conclusion that:

I spoke to product designers, manga artists, fashion luminaries, event organizers, scholars and artists who deal in kawaii. One thing they made clear is that contrary to popular belief, kawaii products need to be cute, but not too cute – otherwise they won’t sell (Manami, 2013: para.4).

The expression “cute but not too cute” is to emphasize the twist Japanese Kawaii has to offer. As Kawaii aesthetics hybrid language was seen as a Japanese way of eclectic aesthetic that is open to exploration of the potentials it bares now and in the future, just as the glitch has reached to a level of distortion that is visually appealing and makes a pattern. Kawaii, is also a potentially manipulable aesthetic that, with its playfulness, opens a more experimental existence in everyday life.

Kawaii, “isn’t about perfection, here she talks about the physical features that have been related to kawaii’s soft edges, innocent outlook of cute characters that has been designed and how they do not have a proportional aesthetic; it “isn’t anything new”, by saying that she implied how kawaii aesthetic developed during modernization of Japan after WWII giving the example of Takehisa Yumeji’s kawaii designs as mentioned earlier in chapter 2; it “isn’t supposed to be sexy”, here she talks mainly about the rise of Harajuku Street fashion and how the ideal girl style has become something that applies a kawaii look which is not just innocent or sweet but can be contextual according to everyday creations; it “isn’t static”, probably the most prominent and contemporary feature that Manami talks about kawaii aesthetic there

have been many different categorization of kawaii developed day by day such as ‘ero-kawaii’ (erotic), ‘kimo-kawaii’ (creepy), ‘guro-kawaii’ (grotesque) in the production of goods, visual images and fashion styles; it “isn’t confined to Japan”, is lastly a common ground for all the artists, designers or consumers of kawaii since the consumer profile extends Japan and global contemporary events, expos of Japanese kawaii culture gather fans all around the world (Manami, 2013: para.6-10).

## SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 6%DokiDoki. 2014. Retrieved from  
<http://www.japanesestreets.com/fashion-brands/2495/6dokidoki>
- Baudrillard, J. 1983. *Simulations*, New York: Semiotext(e).
- Carnovsky. n.d. Retrieved 2015, from <http://www.carnovsky.com/RGB.htm>
- Drohojowska-Philp, H. 2001, January 18. Superflat. Retrieved from  
<http://www.artnet.com/Magazine/features/drohojowska-philp/drohojowska-philp1-18-01.asp>
- Featherstone, M. 2007. *The Aestheticization of Everyday Life*. In *Consumer culture and postmodernism* (2nd ed., pp. 64-81). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Harris, D. 2000. *Cute, quaint, hungry, and romantic: The aesthetics of consumerism* pp. 4-6). New York: Basic Books.
- Jameson, F. 1991. *Postmodernism or The cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jarnes, M. 2015, February 9. Interview: Sebastian Masuda: The King of Kawaii. Retrieved from <http://www.mtv81.com/features/interviews/sebastian-masuda-the-king-of-kawaii/2/>
- Kincaid, C. 2014, September 7. *What is Kawaii?*. Retrieved from <http://www.japanpowered.com/japan-culture/what-is-kawaii>

- Macias, P., & Evers, I. 2007. *Japanese schoolgirl inferno: Tokyo teen fashion subculture handbook*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
- Manami, O. 2013, July 23. 5 Things You Didn't Know About Kawaii. Retrieved 2015, from <http://blogs.wsj.com/scene/2013/07/23/5-things-you-didnt-know-about-kawaii/>
- Menkman, R. 2011. *The Glitch Moment(um)*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- Mohajer-Va-Pesaran. D. 2014, June 26. Kawaii champion Sebastian Masuda invites us in. Retrieved from <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/20437/1/kawaii-creator-sebastian-masuda-invites-us-in>
- Ngai, S. 2013, February 7. Zany, Cute, Interesting: Sianne Ngai on Our Aesthetic Categories - Asian American Writers' Workshop. Retrieved from <http://aaww.org/our-aesthetic-categories-zany-cute-interesting/#footnote1>
- Osborne, S. 2012. Eyeball Massage: Pipilotti Rist. Retrieved from <http://www.artnewsnviews.com/view-article.php?article=eyeball-massage-pipilotti-rist&iid=29&articleid=823>
- Refinery29. 2014, November 5. What Harajuku Girls Really Look Like | Style Out There. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbINctc3ys0&list=PLJEBmLpTgd\\_-L45yq0GSqbKV3LySGFjO&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbINctc3ys0&list=PLJEBmLpTgd_-L45yq0GSqbKV3LySGFjO&index=6)
- Tamukai, J. 2011, August 22. きゃりーぱみゅぱみゅ、原宿から世界を席卷!? 田向潤監督が明かすMV「PONPONPON」が出来るまで!!( Kyary Pamyu Pamyu, conquering the world from Harajuku!? Director Tamukai Jun reveals all of the production process of MV "PONPONPON"!! ) [Online interview]. Retrieved from <http://white-screen.jp/?p=9761>.
- Yalkut, J. 1995. *The Electronic Super Highway: Nam June Paik in the Nineties*. Retrieved May 1, 2015, from <http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=2409>
- Yano, C.R. 2013. *Pink globalization: Hello Kitty's trek across the Pacific*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.