Introduction

Eija Niskanen
University of Helsinki

During September 2008 Finnish Society for Cinema Studies, SETS, together with International Institute for Popular culture, IIPC, arranged the Imaginary Japan conference. The idea for the conference grew from the recent interest in Japanese popular culture amongst young Finnish people, as well as worldwide. The Finnish otaku phenomenon is a slightly later phenomenon than the U.S. or French manga and anime fandom circle that, for example in U.S. grew up on the university campuses during 1990s. Finnish consumers of Japanese popular culture grew up seeing Moomin anime, which, though based on Finnish original novels, became a true children and family hit in Finland through the creation of the 1990-91 Japanese anime series. Another country, where this series took foot, seems to be South Africa, from where our conference presenter Cobus van Staden arrived. His paper studies the discourse, through which the Moomin anime was dubbed and proportioned for the culturally, historically and linguistically divergent South African audiences.

Our conference aimed at studying the fan experience not only through academic papers but by having a discussion panel with three young Finns, who have grown up with Japanese popular culture and themselves become promoters of Japan-related fan events. Professor Annamari Konttinen from University of Turku, whose scholarly work has centered, amongst others, on Japanese culture fandom, lead the discussion, and here reports on the young people's experiences, based on her email exchange with them.

One of the keynote speakers was Professor Machiko Kusahara from Waseda University. Her research moves within the interdisciplinary topics of media, design, art, technology and science, covering a field ranging from pre-cinema magic lantern shows to latest media and video art. Her article delves into the ways in which Japanese artists connect technological and scientific concepts in their art, and how the Japanese art can be understood from this technological aspect. Cindy Lisica's article Generation Superflat: Fashion Fusions and Disappearing Divisions in the 21st Century studies Japanese contemporary art from another angle: her article takes Takashi Murakami's work as a focal point, discussing, how contemporary mix of art, commerce and theory connect in his artistic endeavors and in his artistic/theoretical concept of superflat. Lisica claims that Murakami as an artist highlights the flattening out of borders between high and low art, avant-garde art and commerce, and East and West.

Sorensen ponders the reasons for the success of Japanese anime in the world market. His approach is a cognitive one: certain exaggeration of the facial features causes us to feel strongly for the animated characters. Sorensen also points out to the fact, how in anime, as Thomas Lamarre has noted, instead of drawing movement, moving drawings is the practice (Lamarre, 2002). My own paper discusses the relationship of background, character, and movement in Hayao Miyazaki's two theatrical animations.

Part II delves into the global flow of Japanese and Western imagery, and their mutual influences from each other. Global flows and their local practices are seen as a postmodern phenomenon, but these flows began well before our enter into the postmodern. Alex Zahlten's paper discusses the notion of imagined nation in connection to Japan, this time through anime and film festivals both as a concept and as cultural events. In his discussion Zahlten enlarges the notion of anime beyond that of a certain technique of producing moving images, and treats anime as particular form of discourse. The author sees The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi as an example on how the narratives of anime themselves are already built around fragmented spaciality, perfectly suiting the postmodern concepts of fragmented, multiple worlds and the concept of flow in contemporary culture. Contrary

to anime culture, film festivals were built around the concept of modernity. How then do these two get connected in contemporary film festival scene, is Zahlten's central question.

Kelly Hansen's article "Japanese Horror: The Last Hold-Out in the Globalization of Japanese Pop Culture" studies the phenomenon of Hollywood remaking J-horror. Contrary to anime and manga, which are consumed in their original (though translated and dubbed or subbed, sometimes even re-edited forms), J-horror, recent Japanese horror film genre, has found its Western audience, not as direct import but as Hollywood remakes. Hansen claims that this is due to the difference in the concept of horror and horrific in West and Japan. Japanese female ghost figure yûrei stems from the history of Japanese horror, and in its Western re-incarnation the ghost girl's presence has to be rationalized, whereas for the Japanese audience the knowledge of their culture's horror conventions provides a satisfactory explanation for ghostly Sadako's appearance.

Frans Mäyrä, a Finnish game researcher, writes here about the inter-cultural dialected of influences between the West and Japan. For example science-fiction novelist William Gibson was heavily influenced by Japanese, seemingly 21st century city image, when writing his 1980s novel Neuromancer. Similarly, Hollywood was infatuated with postmodern Japan in the mise-en-scene of Blade Runner. Both them influenced Japanese, who then created works like Ghost in the Shell. To add to Mäyrä's article, this kind of back and forth influence is not limited to postmodern works: already Akira Kurosawa got influenced by John Ford's westerns, put these influences in Seven Samurai and Yojimbo, which further influenced the spagetti westerns of Sergio Leone and sci-fi films by George Lucas.

Part three centers on young women's experinces of both consuming Japanese popular culture, and as working within it. Riikka Matala's paper "Coffee Girls and Reflections on Lived Cultures" discusses the Akiba (youth slang for Akihabara, the former electronic shopping town area of Tokyo, which is now rapidly turning into a playground for enthusiasts of anime, manga, games and other content industry entertainment. Here, her focus is the maid café workers. Matala claims that this seemingly subservient job offers young Japanese women a chance to escape the traditional role of women, offering them a role of resistance. Therefore maid café workers can be studied from the feminist, or perhaps more appropriately, from the post-feminist angle. Tuuli Bollmann continues from this, centering on the female gender-specific audience appeal towards yayoi, shonen-ai and BL sub-genres of anime. Both these papers reveal how Japan and its popular culture complicate the analysis of female agency as both consumers, targets and practitioners of popular culture.

Bibliography

Lamarre, Thomas (2002) 'From animation to anime: drawing movements and moving drawings.' Japan Forum 14(2) 329-367, 2002.