

“Beyond the ‘Feminisation’ of Culture and Masculinity: The Crisis of Masculinity and Possibilities of the ‘Feminine’ in Contemporary Japanese Youth Culture”

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Introduction

In this paper, I intend to explore the significance of the emerging trend of male beauty by primarily observing and analysing the expressions, strategies and intentions of those young men aesthetically representing themselves. From varied points of view, the emergence of a class of aesthetically conscious young men is often described as the “feminisation of masculinity,” in which the phenomenon is viewed as a logical outcome of the greater trend of the “feminisation of culture” in the “postmodern” cultural condition where human bodies are transformed into visible representational surfaces. In this perspective, the emergence of beauty conscious young male is seen as reflections of the intense commercialisation of culture, which has brought about a cultural orientation that ascribes greater significance to the adaptation of feminine aesthetics and strategies. I follow this line of argument up to a point, since this theoretical scope allows me to link important issues, such as femininity, beauty, and the gendered representation of the self, in a broader context of capitalist culture that relentlessly reconfigures masculine bodies. However, I also need to employ another perspective that sufficiently conveys a sense of agency in the young men’s lively practices of exploring and expressing new masculine ideals. While the perspective of “feminisation of masculinity” tends to reduce young Japanese men into passive, commodified bodies, I want to view their use of feminine aesthetics and strategies also as assertions of non-conventional masculine identities made possible by standing in the position of “the feminine.” Here, I am using the word “feminine” to designate an imaginative, indeterminate space both inside and outside of phallogentric discourse, where young men and women can explore imagined selves and genders different from the socially ascribed ones. In shifting my perspective this way, I view what is described by some as the “feminisation of masculinity” as counter-hegemonic practices that challenge conventional masculine values and ideals upheld by the phallogentric hegemonic discourse. I argue that this challenge to the phallogentric economy is opening up a space for the subjective feminine gaze to rise, to which young men are now responding with efforts to redefine masculinity. In this sense, the increasing presence of gender ambiguous identities is, at least in the case of contemporary Japan, conducive to a feminist goal of transgressing patriarchy.

Although I devote substantial space to describing and analysing the cultural significance of the “feminisation of masculinity,” my primary objective is to problematise the discursive contexts in which the phenomenon is placed and discussed. By not conforming to the socially ascribed gender role nor to conventional notions of masculinity, those young men disturb the stability of the clear gender division between the masculine and the feminine assumed in phallogentric discourse, and thereby become subjected to a moral charge from those who feel threatened by the erosion of the authority of the patriarchal economy. In this sense, the coinage of the phrase “feminisation of masculinity” itself is implicated with such a fear and anxiety about the gender boundary-crossing and the consequent loss of power of those who are included in the privileged half. What is articulated in terms of “feminisation of masculinity” is, therefore, an attempt to manage and contain a crisis on the part of the phallogentric masculine subject, which came to be increasingly challenged by shifting gender power relations, assertions of new gender ideals, and intrusions of other destabilizing factors to the patriarchal economy. In the following discussion, I problematise this inclination in the patriarchal discourse which makes us think in a phallogentric language that reinforces the assumed gender boundary, and seek a different way of

describing the phenomenon in the way it deserves. I pay particular attention to the political implications of the crisis-ridden phallogocentric discourse, which strongly reacts against the intrusion of what is different, and is compelled to reassert the transparency and coherence of its masculine order by excluding “the feminine.” Unlike what is thought by the hegemonic perspective, however, the presence of “the feminine” – i.e., an indeterminate, open space for imagination – is precisely what can diffuse the obsessive and ultimately self-destructive inclinations of the patriarchal subject in crisis. I conclude that the cultural hegemony of contemporary Japan would be much better off, if it wishes to sustain itself, by incorporating assertions of non-hegemonic gender and other identities, rather than presenting a reactionary call for a transparent and coherent national identity.

The “Cult of Male Beauty” / The “Feminisation of Masculinity”?

The emergence of fashionable maleness is not entirely new, and one can trace the roots of this widespread male aesthetic awareness in a greater historical frame of reference as being in contiguity with older cultural traditions such as the culture of homosexual boys in early Edo *wakashu kabuki*. However, I locate the current vogue for male beauty not along this highly specialized artistic tradition but within a popular, modern, and capitalist cultural phenomenon that exposes masculine bodies to full-scale commercialisation where powerful inscriptional forces of media-constituted aesthetics are constantly at work. In contemporary Japan, the young Japanese male is increasingly targeted by the growing fashion and image industries, and exposed to the flood of commercial flirtations disseminated from various forms of media, such as men’s fashion and idol magazines, and numerous TV programs, wherein images of physically appealing young males are ubiquitous. One finds aggressive advocacy in male fashion magazines of the day, such as *Men's Non-no*, *Fine Boys* and *BiDan*, which encourage young men to improve and maintain their physique with numerous photographs of how best to obtain the targeted facial and body images, in the same way women’s fashion magazines do. Indeed, the pages of contemporary male fashion magazines are filled with information on more than mere updates on trendy clothing items, hairstyles, and fashion techniques, but also on facial care, aesthetic salons and body-building studios, often stepping into sensitive territories, like the removal of body hairs and surgical alternation of facial and body parts, accompanied by unhesitatingly detailed explanations of medical experts.¹ In this discourse of male beauty, fashion magazines, beauty industries, and the pop-culture media collaborate together in cultivating a highly sensitised aesthetic consciousness in the minds of young men, tacitly imploring them to submit to “the cult of male beauty.”

It was the development of an image/information oriented mode of capitalist economy of the 1990s that made the imaginative exploration of alternate selves, including the aesthetically sophisticated self-representation by young men, a highly desired economic practice. In addition to the commodification of female bodies advanced in previous decades, masculinity came to be a new cite of capital’s colonization in the 1990s’ Japan, where youth popular culture became a favourite target of profit extractions. The Japanese pop music scene of the 1990s, for example, was a nurturing ground which saw the mushrooming of such a new race of men. The pop idols typically displayed delicate and beautiful “feminine” faces with smooth skin, often accompanied by flimsy eyebrows, eye make-up and coloured lips, as well as an androgynous body shape and somewhat “foreign” images as if they came straight out of a girls’ fantasy comic book.² These new type of young musicians are somewhat pejoratively called the “*bijuaru-kei*”—a sub-category of musicians who are “visually-oriented,” and by implication, not musically serious, although there is no reason to assume that the quality of music produced is negatively co-related to the attention given to appearance. Clearly, their intent is not to “look like women”; instead, these young male musicians skilfully combined their feminine appearance with new and attractive images of young adult men, such as independence, gentleness and sensitivity, although

admittedly overridden by narcissistic self-awareness of their beauty. In other words, they are pioneers of new identities for young adult males who no longer comfort themselves by simply following hegemonic masculine ideals, but actively seek and employ aesthetic styles and characteristics conventionally associated with women for their own purposes. Such an adaptation of feminine aesthetics was initially displayed among pop musicians, but then spread much broader to ordinary young males, leading to what some call the “feminisation of masculinity.”³

For the sake of argument, it is possible to defend the proposition that what critics of mass culture describe in terms of the “feminisation of culture,” or the qualitative change in culture as a result of commercialisation, results in the “feminisation of masculinity,” the rise of a class of men who actively employ feminine aesthetic codes and strategies.⁴ The former phrase came to be used to mean the change in cultural orientation under “postmodernism,” which has been eroding the elite, modernist and patriarchal cultural hegemony (high culture) with its commercially driven, casual and inauthentic, artistically inferior and mass produced form of art. In this change, so it is argued, the “feminisation of culture” advanced, with the conventional cultural values such as substance, meaning and depth, were challenged by popular culture’s “guerrilla tactics”, which playfully and ironically incorporate commercially generated symbols and images to elaborate on stylistic representations and forms.⁵ Referring to these qualitative changes, Margaret Gullette argues that masculinity in the culture of the industrialized world, has come to be represented as a sign, “a signifier of desire, pleasure, and difference,” similar to the ways in which femininity has long been subjugated to stylised representation of the self by means of the aesthetic techniques of parody and masquerade.⁶ She claims that “the emergence of male cosmetics and perfumes, the normalization of the ‘male makeover,’ and men’s performance of more ‘expressive’ corporeal styles,” are markers of changing gender positions in society, such that “men now experience the traditional cultural traps of femininity... by becoming the subjects of an objectifying gaze.”⁷ Along the same vein, Rita Felski has argued that a feminised state of culture manifests a change in the cultural orientation of society in which “the dominant motifs...[would be] no longer those of self-discipline, control and deferred gratification, but rather of hedonism, abundance and instant pleasure.”⁸ In such a feminised culture, she argues, “[c]apitalism is increasingly portrayed as the good mother rather than the repressive father, the munificent breast rather than the phallus,” where everyone is equally “feminised” under the omnipresent and all-encompassing gaze of the mother Capital.⁹ If one follows these lines of thinking, it can be argued that the “feminisation of culture” may indeed entail a “feminisation of masculinity,” in the cultural context where the intensification of commercial and technological effects has diffused the hegemonic phallic gaze, allowing more pluralistic ideas and practices to assert different views.

Although the idea that the “feminisation of culture” leads to the “feminisation of masculinity” is an interesting proposition, one should be cautious of giving too much credit to such an overtly gendered explanation of cultural phenomena. By juxtaposing opposite genders, the phrase makes the popular trend of redefining masculinity sound like something that should not be happening, is unnatural and possibly dangerous, implying the degeneration of the superior gender into the inferior one. Although the changing cultural context under maturing capitalism has substantially contributed to the emergence of young Japanese males’ active employment of feminine aesthetics and strategies, this alone is insufficient in explaining the phenomenon. It is therefore important to pay attention to the actors’ intentions, strategic practices, and the messages they try to send to their generation and society at large, as well as the dynamics these practices generate in the hegemonic operations of phallogocentric discourse. For one thing, those who attempt to create new masculine identities are not passive objects of structural/material changes in society, but agents who are involved in the generation of new cultural currents. Any practice that claims non-hegemonic gender identities disturbs cultural norms and poses a challenge to the patriarchal economy, as that would point to the fact that the existing order is not natural but open to contestations. Another issue at stake is that the search of young men for alternative masculine images is in part pressed ahead by the demand of women of the same generation, who are

themselves seeking female identities more suited to themselves. While being subjugated to the hidden gaze of culture industries and the chain of commercial pleasure-signs they create, young men and women also add their share of input to the picture. Indeed, the Japan of the 1990s witnessed a surge of generational claims rejecting conventional gender identities, and instead expressed their preferred values and ideals in such ways to transform the conventional order of pallocentric discourse. In this sense, contemporary Japanese youth culture is a battle zone where established and emergent values collide against each other, each claiming a higher authority and legitimacy.

Searches for Alternate Gender Ideals

The decline of corporate masculine culture in post-bubble Japan provided young men and women with renewed opportunities to explore and assert new gender identities outside those conforming to the hegemonic ideal. On the other hand, since such expressions destabilize the conventionally assumed gender roles and ideals in the phallogocentric discourse, claims for different gender identities were inevitably merged with generational struggles. Indeed, the younger generations of the 1990s are often described by the older generation as the *shin-jinrui* – literally, new human species – with a moral condemnation addressed to those who no longer share the same values with “the rest of society.” Strong resistances to these new attitudes on the part of the guardians of hegemonic discourse seem to have created a setting in which both genders found each other as natural allies, rather than competitors, in their attempts to create new gender identities. Indeed, men and women of younger generations increasingly came to reject the previous masculine ideal of the salaryman type, which typically designates de-eroticised corporate culture, as exemplified in the anti-aesthetic characteristic of *oyaji* – unattractive middle aged men. In her study of the intense beauty work among contemporary young Japanese men, Laura Miller argues that “[f]or many young Japanese women, patriarchal values, or at the very least a dowdy conservatism, go hand in hand with the cloned salaryman body style,” and therefore, the appreciation of an opposite aesthetics, “the ephebe style,” is inseparably linked to “a rejection of male dominance and an assertion of an independent sexuality.”¹⁰ More generally, both genders of younger Japanese ascribe greater appreciations for a better quality of life, such as having hobbies and leisure time in which one’s self-cultivation and the representation of a unique personality are pursued.¹¹ It has been reported that contemporary Japanese males and females under 20 years of age are inclined to “see their partners more as individuals than as men or women,” and women’s expectations with respect to their male partners are increasingly diverging away from the hegemonic canons of the “Japanese male proper.”¹² Also reported is a major shift in women’s criteria for ideal men, which used to be described as the three “Hs” – high salary, high educational credentials and high physical status – which is now settling into the three “Cs” – comfortable, communicative and cooperative – as well as shift in the gravity of gender power relations which is now more favourable to women.¹³ At this juncture, it appears that many young Japanese men began to seek new and different images of masculine ideals that are more reflective of women’s desire for erotically charged men.

The merger between these two motives in effeminate male appearances among young men – i.e., the response to women’s desire and the generational struggle against the older gender values – can be identified in the popular appeal of the *bijuaru-kei* musicians. A popular rock group called Glay, for example, consistently pursues in their songs a theme of the complicated and involved frustration of living in a materially rich and spiritually impoverished world, and the related anxiety of attaining a maturity in which they are bound to lose the purity and innocence of youth.¹⁴ One well-informed music commentator has remarked that the songs written by Hyde, the vocalist and songwriter of another popular *bijuaru-kei* rock group, L’Arc-en-Ciel, are something akin to “a scream rejecting the maturation into adulthood.”¹⁵ Presumably, their fans are likely hearing their own inarticulate voices in the groups’ songs, sharing similar feelings of pressures,

anxieties and frustrations, perhaps stronger in the adolescent male than in the female, to enter an adult world where dishonesty, “dirty” power games and hierarchical order prevails.¹⁶ Noteworthy here is that the physical beauty of feminine appearance serves as an effective and indispensable currency to advance young men’s generational challenge to configure new masculine ideals. The power of beauty, generally speaking, rests upon the symbolic slide from youthful beauty to the purity of mind, perhaps because “a libidinal investment in the ideal male body was historically furnished with an alibi based on a set of equivalences: spiritual and moral beauty = physical beauty = idealized masculinity.”¹⁷ By strategically taking the aesthetically pleasing and gender ambiguous masculine position, these young musicians seem to achieve a number of goals simultaneously: an appealing assertion of the generational challenge to reject corporate culture and salaryman masculinity; a political instrument to attract young women whose criteria of selection is increasingly inclined to physical beauty and feminine aesthetic styles; an ideological relief from being fixed into expected positions and responsibilities in society; an imaginative outlet for an exploratory desire in experimenting with non-conventional identities; and perhaps, a narcissistic satisfaction with aesthetically and erotically representing themselves.

There have been extensive discussions in past feminist literature concerning the view that gender is not a biological category which unproblematically expresses one’s biologically given sex, but it is a performance, a conscious acting out, or masquerading, of one’s socially ascribed gender role to conform or to advance their goals. From this perspective, those who strategically gender themselves in the given hegemonic codes with targeted results are often seen as “feminine,” in the very meaning of the word to designate those who perform, locate themselves both inside and outside patriarchal narratives, and constantly negotiate their positions by disrupting the assumed gender boundaries.¹⁸ Referring to this subject position of being simultaneously inside and outside, Sue Thornman claims that a “female person” holds a “double-subjectivity”; while “she represents herself to herself,” she also performs a role of another subject who “consciously creates, manipulates, and compensates for the figurability of an imaginary subject that projects cohesiveness as its founding assumption through a fictional body.”¹⁹ It seems that the gender ambiguity displayed on the bodies of those aesthetically conscious young men represent a similar strategy of double-subjectivity, as a vehicle for exploring and cultivating non-conventional masculine identities. The surface bodies of those young men in this sense are performative sites where their counter-hegemonic generational challenges are displayed in aesthetically appealing looks. In order to clearly mark a different masculine identity from the conventionally recognized ones, a simple modification to existing masculine ideals would not serve the same purpose, for doing so would instantly transpose them into the terrain of patriarchal lexicon, not allowing them enough distance from the corporate masculine narrative to freely explore and clearly communicate new masculine identities. By holding an ambiguous gender position, they relocate their practice to the de-gendered space of “the feminine,” a space for alternate identity constructions and performance where one can strategically negotiate with hegemonic codes. In other words, the purpose of young men adapting feminine aesthetics and strategies is not to hold the position of women, but to distance themselves from the corporate masculine ideals and expectations imposed upon them.

Beyond the Crisis of Masculinity

Since the stability and order of the patriarchal economy depends on the maintenance of clear gender boundaries and transparency, those defenders of hegemonic masculinity find the emergence of young males who openly embrace and adapt feminine aesthetics and strategies threatening. In the patriarchal view, therefore, the “feminisation of masculinity” is narrated, along the line of the mass culture debate, as a crisis – that the “feminine aspects” began contaminating the foundational ground of cultural hegemony with impurity, opacity and disorder, that is most symbolically manifested in the erosion of conventionally defined masculinity. Viewed from

another perspective, however, the assertion of alternative gender identities is a creative cultural practice, specifically when conventional gender values and ideals become incapable of representing complicated gender awareness of contemporary young men. Seen from this point of view, as I have proposed, “the feminine” designates those who take a critical distance from the socially constructed and idealized notions of gender, and those who consciously and strategically perform their gendered identities. In some ways, the challenge from the younger generations of men would be even more destabilizing to hegemonic masculinity than challenges from women, since the voluntary abandoning of the “superior gender identity” by young men inevitably puts into question the biological ground of the assumed superiority. That is to say, the feminine appearance in some young men contradicts the transparency of biological sex and its superiority assumed in the phallogentric economy, and thus unsettles the stability of the hegemonic order and the patriarchal masculine self. Moreover, by calling those fellow young men “feminine,” the patriarchal discourse complicates and further weakens itself, leading to the secondary crisis added to the original; that is, the anxiety generated in the hegemonic subject internalises fracture in masculinity itself, as well as shifts the ground of contestation and struggle from gender to generation.

What is discussed as the crisis of masculinity in the phallogentric perspective, then, is an identity crisis of the hegemonic subject, i.e., adult middle-class men, who are reacting to the increasing heterogeneity and opacity in the information-oriented and globalized cultural terrain. Perhaps, those who strongly react against unconventional gender practices have their own good reason to be fearful of the dissidents, for their gender identities are immediately dependent upon the undisrupted operation of phallogentric discourse. This dependency, moreover, could be more than just psychological, but may also involve total personal well-being, for the gender identification *via* the symbolic penetrates the formation of sexuality and thus personhood. On the effect of language upon a stable sense of sexuality, Judith Butler argues:

The capacity of language to fix such [sexual] positions, that is, to enact its symbolic effects, depends upon the permanence and fixity of the symbolic domain itself, the domain of signifiability or intelligibility. If, for Lacan, the [N]ame [of the Father] secures the bodily ego in time, renders it identical through time, and this ‘conferring’ power of the name is derived from the conferring power of the symbolic more generally, then it follows that a crisis in the symbolic will entail a crisis in this identity-conferring function of the name, and in the stabilizing of bodily contours according to sex allegedly performed by the symbolic. *The crisis in the symbolic, understood as a crisis over what constitutes the limits of intelligibility, will register as a crisis in the name and in the morphological stability that the name is said to confer.*²⁰

The last sentence summarizes the crux of what supports and defends the phallogentric discourse: the “name” becomes embodied by repetition, by means of the identity-conferring mechanism involved in the formation of the sexed body. Moreover, since the phallogentric economy simultaneously constitutes a national hegemonic economy, a crisis of the “patriarchal name” caused by the disturbances in the symbolic economy also registers as a crisis of nation. The criticisms of “effeminate” young men and unfeminine young women by those who endorse conventional gender ideals typically articulates the challenge of younger generation in terms of the loss of traditional Japanese virtues, the weakening of national (assumed masculine) spirit, or even the decay of the national moral fabric.²¹ Due to this gender-national linkage in the hegemonic subject, the assertion of alternative gender identities – a “feminine” strategy in the position of “double-subjectivity” – is likely to meet moral condemnation in national voices that see gender blurring as un-Japanese. What this extra-rational symbolic slide reveals is the multiple affiliations in the identity of the phallogentric subject – i.e., masculinity, generation,

class, and nationality – that together affirm the authority of the Name of the Father, which nevertheless seeks to unify them to constitute a coherent sense of the body=gender.²² Another thing revealed is the inherent crisis in patriarchal masculinity, but not in the way it understands itself (i.e., “feminisation”). This crisis is rooted in its ontological instability which manifests itself in the form of obsessive attempts to deny and control what is threatening to itself, or “the feminine” as indeterminacy that cannot be grasped by the hegemonic gaze.²³ Seen from the perspective at the margin of hegemony, then, what the patriarchal perspective understands as causes of instability, “the feminine,” is the very source of relief for the patriarchal elite national subject, in the sense that the former mitigates the latter’s obsessive pursuit for identity – i.e., an inclination that tries to equate itself with ideally constructed gender/national images. By virtue of being excluded, “the feminine” functions as a constitutive ‘outside’ of the phallogocentric symbolic economy that assures an open space for imagination and alternate possibilities, without which the hegemonic economy would ultimately destroy itself.

Conclusion

By looking at the ways young Japanese men and women strategically employ gender ambiguity to destabilize dichotomist notions of gender at the hegemonic horizon – which I called “the feminine” – I found the possibilities for alleviating an obsessive drive in the patriarchal subject for transparency. Such a narcissistic and claustrophobic drive for self-identity, or desire for the identity-conferring function of the Name, would ultimately suffocate and destroy the patriarchal subject itself, by virtue of eliminating all indeterminacy and openness as the constitutive foundation for itself. Seen from this point of view, the practice of gender ambiguous identities can have a neutralizing effect, and therefore, be rather conducive to the healthy regeneration of social hegemony. Moreover, the development of horizontal linkages among counter-hegemonic identity practices in the terrain of youth popular culture – those that cut across gender, generational and nationality boundaries – seems to suggest that contemporary Japanese cultural hegemony has to come up with some creative and convincing responses to better accommodate younger generations’ demands. I tend to see the assertion of wide-ranging alternative identities as beyond a generational challenge directed at those who reside on the side of the established cultural norms and ideals, but they together constitute a transformative cultural movement calling for fundamental changes.

Such a counter-hegemonic cultural movement naturally involves a challenge to Japanese national hegemony and thus to the national subject/identity. Indeed, in conjunction with their inventions of different gender identities, the Japanese youth of today also challenge the culturally and ethnically assumed sense of self – i.e., “Japaneseness” – and actively incorporate images of foreign origins to better designate their sense of themselves. As in the case of gender, this phenomenon of the incorporation of the “foreign” has little to do with imitation, intending to copy already established aesthetic styles from outside Japan. Rather, through imagistic and aural exploration, Japanese youths attempt to create alternative ideal types by selectively employing a quota of foreign images and combining them into the native content to obtain “effective” (different but familiar enough) outcomes. The hybrid image produced by this method of pastiche assemblage has more to do with the de-nationalization of Japanese youth culture than internationalisation as such. Similarly to those who choose gender ambiguity as a site for formulating new identities, this de-nationalization, or de-Japanisation is made possible by distancing themselves from the notion of biologically and culturally determined selves as a condition to freely explore values, ideals, representational styles, and identities that may go beyond the nationally circumscribed imagination. As expressed in clothing and other image-making means, one can see creative explorations in the aesthetic style of young men’s and women’s self-representations that attempt a number of simultaneous boundary-crossings, seemingly aiming at gender-less, age-less and nation-less identities. I would like to see in those

explorations of alternate identities among young Japanese men and women the possibilities for engendering both subversive and reproductive effects to the crisis-ridden phallogocentric economy.

Critics may worry that the highly malleable, flexible and ungrounded expressions in contemporary youth identities are manifestations of the subject in crisis, in the highly technologically mediated and image constituted society. Although I share similar concerns on highly abstract and de-centred subjectivity, which fall largely outside the scope of this paper, I must emphasize that neither reactionary drives for transparency and unity in the symbolic economy nor calls for masculine and national identity would serve as a solution to the problem. I would like to find a solution in an enhanced awareness and complication in the understanding of gender and national identity, which is not singular, uniform, fixed or transparent, but instead in always self-reflexive, self-undoing practice which is open to the possibilities of being other than itself. Such an open notion of gendered self would be conducive to building a society with greater understanding, sympathy, creativity, exploratory spirit, and an opening up of imagination.

Endnotes

¹ Especially noted is the popularity of body hair removal (on chest, legs and underarms) among young men who developed an acute consciousness of women's strong distaste for hairy men. On the increasing demand from young Japanese men for hair removal at aesthetic salons, see Laura Miller's "Male beauty work in Japan" in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salaryman doxa*, edited by James Robertson and Nobue Suzuki (2003). Miller shows how the young men's concerns are motivated by the aversion for bodily hair among young Japanese women.

² The music they played mostly falls into categories either of American rock and roll or European rock/punk styles, the former emulating cheerful, healthy and active West Coast American images while the latter is inclined to display sophisticated, sensitive and introverted images broadly associated with "European" Romantic artistic codes. One can see these effeminate male features in the booming publication of music and idol magazines, such as *PopBeat*, *Band Hotline*, *Junon* and *Potato* among others, which centre on visually attractive male idols. Some archetypal images of androgynous male beauty can be found at the internet homepages of idols such as Gackt and T.M.Revolution, which addresses are <http://www.dears.ne.jp/> and <http://www.tm-revolution.com> respectively.

³ In Japanese discourse, the phrase "feminisation of masculinity" can be used in two quite different cultural meanings; one to designate the gentrification of men, especially the tendency to show greater understanding and sympathy for feminist causes, and the other, the adaptation of feminine aesthetic styles to display sensitivity, gentleness, and sophistication. However, I am here using the term, as discussed in the following paragraph, in the sense Western feminists including Rite Felski and Margaret Gullette use the term, to designate a universal cultural trend under growing capitalist commercialisation.

⁴ To be sure, the phrase "feminisation of culture" was initially used to designate changes in the gender composition of labour due to the greater participation of women in the workplace, as the maturing capitalist economy increasingly favoured the part-time, non-unionised, and service oriented jobs that made women more visible in public space. A concise genealogy of the term feminisation is found in Lisa Adkins, "Cultural Feminization: 'Money, Sex and Power' For Women," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*, 26: 3 (2001), pp. 2-5.

⁵ One of the "classical texts" that analysed the features of postmodern art as a manifestation of a stage of capitalist development is Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). In Jameson's view, "postmodernism" is the commercial logic of late capitalism where the entire sphere of culture falls under the immediate gaze of capital, and materiality, historicity, dialectical relations and temporality are all evaporated.

⁶ Adkins, "Cultural Feminization," p. 4.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Laura Miller, "Male beauty work in Japan" in *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salaryman doxa*, edited by James Robertson and Nobue Suzuki (2003), p. 44.

¹¹ Miller, “Male beauty work in Japan,” p. 38.

¹² The comment was made by Hiraki Niko, cited in *SPA!*, May 9, 2001, p. 52.

¹³ Miller, *ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁴ Masubuchi Toshiyuki, “Bijuaru-kei ni atte bijuaru-jei ni arazu,” *Bessatsu Takarajima*, 418 (2000). For more information, see Glay’s official web-cite: <http://www.glay.co.jp>.

¹⁵ Masubuchi, “Bijuaru-kei ni atte bijuaru-kei ni arazu,” *ibid.* One can find visual images of L’Arc-en-Ciel and listen to their songs in a number of internet cites on them.

¹⁶ Interesting here is that both Glay and L’Arc-en-Ciel have been, at least initially, categorized as *bijuaru-kei* bands, that is, groups whose popularity is dependent on their good looks, but they gradually reduced the visual component of their appeal (e.g., literally reduced the amount of cosmetics they wore). This brings us back to the significance of beauty in contemporary Japanese youth culture, and the necessity of representing oneself in visually appealing images in order to get one’s message across. The simple dissemination of a political message has, perhaps, lost its efficacy long ago, even more so in a televisually oriented contemporary youth culture where visual appeal is far more important to becoming known and getting heard than other forms of creative endeavour like writing, which carries far less influential power.

¹⁷ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Male Trouble,” *Constructing Masculinity*, edited by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (1995), p. 75.

¹⁸ Sue Thornman, *Feminist Theory and Cultural Studies: Stories of Unsettled Relations*, p. 144.

¹⁹ *ibid.* Here, Thornman is citing from Hilary Radner’s reading of an article from *Vogue* in which Radner finds ambiguous implications in the act of masquerade, which represents “an *active subordination*.” Thornman summarizes this ambiguity arising from the position of women who are “both inside and outside the system of consumerism, complicit with it but in constant negotiation.” (*ibid.*)

²⁰ Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning” p. 461 (*italics in original*).

²¹ Along this line of thought, conservative critic Hayashi Michiyoshi criticized “feminised men” as eroding the notions of motherhood (published in Chuo Koron, October 2000). As I noted above, the phrase “feminized men” in Japanese is used to designate both those who pursue feminine-type fashion style and appearance and those who endorse feminist causes. This dual meaning assigned to the phrase reveals the operation of the pallocentric gaze, which uncritically links and equates the symbolism of femininity, feminine aesthetic styles, feminism as a movement, and the lived women. In this slide of meaning, resentment to any one of them is automatically and simultaneously transposed to all others, and this constitutes a ground for morally and emotionally aspired condemnations against “feminised men” and feminists in the name of idealised motherhood.

²² Referring to this aspiration of the bodily ego to obtain a sense of “wholeness” and “unity,” Dana Nelson attributes the source of this aspiration to cultural education rather than internal desires in infantile bodies as Lacan discussed. She argues: “Lacan suggested that it is ‘organic disturbances and discord’ which prompts the child to seek out the form of the ‘whole body-image.’ However, it seems to me that the reverse is actually true: it is the cultural premium placed on the notion of a coherent bodily ego which results in such a dystopic apprehension of corporeal multiplicity” (Nelson, *National Manhood*, 1998, p. 27).

²³ The patriarchal gaze, however, may be understood as a lack (or refusal) of ability to engage in self-criticism and the authorisation and justification of its absolute status by the rejection of being in the position of the “looked upon.” Dana Nelson, citing Lee Edelman, characterizes this scopophilic exercise of the masculine subject as follows: “If the fantasy of masculinity ... is the fantasy of non-self-conscious

selfhood endowed with absolute control of a gaze whose directionality is irreversible, the enacted – or “self-conscious” – ‘manhood,’ ... is itself a performance *for the gaze of the Other* ... [I]t is destined therefore to be always the paradoxical display of a masculinity that defines itself through its capacity to put *others* on display while resisting the bodily captation involved in being out on display itself” (ibid, pp. 81-2).

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