Japan as fashion: Contemporary reflections on being fashionable

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Abstract. This paper examines how Japanese contemporary fashion has been accepted globally, especially in the case of London. The popularity of Japanese fashion in the West started in the 19th century with kimono-style dressing gowns, but for the true design influence known as Japan-shock, we had to wait for the appearance of the avant-garde Japanese fashion designers who participated in the Paris collection in the 1970s and 1980s. A new keyword for 'fashionable Japan' today is *kawaii*, the notion of cute. This is intimately linked to street fashion and subculture and has been established and received as part of 'cool Japan' through the worldwide popularity of Japanese manga and anime. Moreover, it could be said that Japan is fashionable and the Japanese are thought of as fashionable people, but who is described as fashionable, and by whom? To reflect upon this statement, 'the Japanese are fashionable', as ideology, picking up the globally popular Japanese street fashion magazine *FRUiTS*, I would like to investigate the double meaning of fashion in the present and also what it means to be fashionable.

Introduction

From 2005 to 2006 I was a visiting researcher at London University's UCL. For many of the English I met there, the Japanese were 'fashionable people'. This trend is however not limited to the Japanese and suggests a new, modern, contemporary way of looking at Asia.

The Hollywood movie *Sayuri*, which opened parallel to the London film festival, features as the heroine a geisha played by the popular Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi,[1] at Spitalfields Market,[2] famous as a starting point for many emerging young designers and where several Korean fashion designers have opened their stalls. Furthermore, the Beijing Olympics in 2008 provided many occasions to update the image of the

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This paper was written based on my comments for the talk 'Harajuku as Fashion Contact Zone' by Philomena Keet at the Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, in 2008 and my open lecture 'Japan as Fashion: Contemporary Reflections of Being Fashionable' at the TrAIN Research Centre, University of Arts London, in 2010.

[1] *Memoirs of a Geisha* (dir. Rob Marshal, 2005). The film was nominated and won three awards at the 78th Academy Awards. It is a movie about Japan, but the main actress was not Japanese, which was also a controversial topic in the USA.

[2] This is one of the most popular markets in East London, well known as a fashion market that can give young and anonymous designers the opportunity to contribute.

Chinese—or what Chinese is—as modern, contemporary and fashionable. The exhibition 'Avantgarde China'[3] held at the National Museum of International Art in Osaka is an example of this.

The same can be said of the food culture. At present, Japanese cuisine is booming all over the world as a healthy lifestyle. But whether it is a Korean chef who creates sushi in a Japanese-style restaurant or an Indian chef who creates pan-Asian dishes at the popular Wagamama, Japan is often equivalent to a more generic Asian style. Whether Japanese, Chinese or Korean, in everyday life there is often no pressing need to make a distinction between these national identities. But when I asked a young Irish scholar of English literature whether he could distinguish between Chinese, Koreans and Japanese people, he answered that the Japanese stood out immediately because of the clothes they were wearing. In his generation, the stereotypical image of Japan as a land of geishas and samurais has been replaced by a notion of 'Cool Japan' inspired by computer games and Manga.

In this paper I would like to not so much look at whether the Japanese can be recognised by their sense of fashion, but to reflect upon the statement 'the Japanese are fashionable' as ideology. At the same time, I would like to investigate the double meaning of fashion in the present and what it means to be fashionable.

Fashion contact zone

But who is described as fashionable, and by whom? Who uses these labels and whose power of definition do they relate to? When Japanese fashion is spoken of in Western circles as 'quirky', 'innovative' and often 'mad', what is referred to is in most cases the iconic street fashion photography in such magazine as *FRUiTS* and *Tune*[4] that are available in specialist bookstores in London for example. This means that the photographers of these magazines become arbiters of taste; in other words, what counts as fashionable depends heavily on their sensibilities.

While such sensibilities are very difficult to describe and explain, it is perhaps helpful to grasp the specificities of these magazines. Both *FRUiTS* and *Tune* emerged from a magazine called *Street*.[5] *Street* is their predecessor and is published and edited by the same group of people, so an understanding of *Street* will help us to understand its other incarnations. *Street* started out as magazine dedicated to high fashion. By high fashion I refer to the collections that are shown at the biannual fashion weeks

[3] The exhibition covers Modern Chinese arts for these twenty years since the Cultural Revolution.

[4] *FRUiTS* was first published monthly in 1998 and *Tune*, in 2004.

[5] *Street* was first published in the mid 1980s (irregularly, by Aoki Shoichi: Street Henshushitsu).

in places like Paris and Milan, both as haute couture and prêt-a-porter. Images of these professional fashion events dominated the contents. Special issues documenting Tokyo street fashion and individual Japanese style would also appear. These were assembled by the publisher and photographer Aoki Shoichi. It is very important to understand the specificity of what came to be known as Japanese or Tokyo street fashion, what counts as fashionable in this context of a sensibility that emerged from taking pictures of European haute couture and prêt-a-porter. Some photographers of street fashion, for example the famous 'Mamy', started out as people who were photographed for these special street fashion editions. When she first appeared on the pages of *Street*, she was a student at a fashion college (Keet 2007).[6] She subsequently became one of the 'hunters', as those photographers roaming the streets looking for interesting people to photograph are called. So Aoki, who from his own background in European fashion thought that she was fashionable, helped her to start her career in a new magazine, thus perpetuating the sensibility of the fashionable. It is often forgotten that the eye for originality and creativity that the success of the 'hunters' is based upon in the backstreets of Harajuku is derived from the influence of the high fashion produced traditionally by the European fashion industry. Hence we need to understand *Harajuku* as a contact zone rather than a fountainhead of fashion.

Is 'photogenic' the same as 'fashionable'?

Before we move the argument further, let us dwell on the kinds of social contact that are made between those who wield cameras and those who become their objects in the area known as Harajuku. It is contact between those who see and those who are seen, between the semi-professional photographers and the tourists, and the girls who wear Lolita fashion. That they wear such ostentatious fashion to go out does not mean that their priority is to be photographed, but it nevertheless is a good opportunity to leave an impression. This means that in this context, to be fashionable means to be photogenic.

To illustrate this, let me quote from the novel *Emily*[7] by Takemoto Nobara, an author known as a charismatic gothic Lolita. In this novel, set in the streets of Harajuku, girls who wear Lolita fashion do appear, but the equation of photogenic and fashionable cannot be held up. The heroine is a girl who likes Lolita fashion and who on the way home from school kills time in front of LaForet Harajuku, a fashion building. One day, while she watches the passing crowds from her usual spot, a photographer of a magazine shows interest in her. She reluctantly has her picture taken, but with the publication of these photos, the bullying she is experiencing at school escalates. As

[6] Shitourei and Mamy are well known as 'hunters'.

[7] Most of the scenes in this novel are set at Harajuku. Takemoto frequently writes about main characters who are fond of Lolita fashion.

the photographer asks her for a name to be published with the pictures, she answers with 'Emily' because the brand she is wearing at that time is called 'Emily Temple Cute'. This name does not provide her proof of being fashionable but is subsequently used by her classmates as a derogatory nickname. The girls wearing Gothic Lolita fashion I interviewed were also reluctant to have their picture taken and emphasised that they did not simply wear this kind of fashion to be photographed in,[8] something that distinguishes them from those engaging in 'cosplay', short for costume play. For them, to change from their school uniform into their Gothic Lolita gear means to become their 'true self', it is not for them a mere costume change with the intention of being photographed. In many cases, young people in Harajuku do not like to be photographed, and the kind of friction depicted in the novel does also belong to Harajuku as a contact zone.

The home of fashion

But what do we mean when we speak of Harajuku? Harajuku does not simply refer to a geographical place in Tokyo. For fashion, Harajuku is a place of imagination, a space that acts as something like the spiritual heartland of fashion.[9] It is not simply a place to buy clothes, but also a place to exchange information and to create more than simple customer/shopkeeper relations with those working there who double as models of what it means to be fashionable. If we treat these shops as dots on a map and connect the movement of the fashionable between them, we create a map that overlaps with the territory known as Harajuku. Harajuku is like a house that allows a relaxed and agreeable experience of fashion while shopping, wearing clothes, conversing, and also eating and drinking.

In the latest issue of *FRUiTS*, you will find a page on which pictures of readers are published. Made without much ado with a digital camera or a mobile phone, the readers have submitted their own pictures. In most of these shots, it is clear that the person depicted is taking the picture him/herself. The heading of this page is 'Fashionable snaps you took yourself', and it is clear from this that the readers are invited to express their own ideas of what it means to be fashionable. Perhaps in order

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[8] I had been interviewing a Japanese girl in Gothic Lolita fashion since 2005. She seems to be very sensitive about being seen and photographed by someone, not only because she dislikes being photographed, but also because she had sad experiences of being called a 'weirdo' in the street, being pointed at, or being photographed secretly by pedophilic Kameko (amateur photographers). See Onohara 2008.

[9] It could be said that Harajuku also exists in Shibuya. Some of the shops in Shibuya have Harajuku fashion taste and actually share the same customers. Since 2000, many shops have been opened along Meiji-dori(Street); you can automatically get to Shibuya by walking along the street while visiting the shops. There is no strict boundary between Shibuya and Harajuku. See Watanabe 2005.

to publish as many pictures as possible, each snap is very small. But to be published in this place is a positive acknowledgement of one's own status within the hierarchy of fashion and the performance that underlines this. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in almost all snapshots a mirror is present. Some are taken in their own rooms; some are taken in the bathroom; most of the pictures depict part of what it is to be at home.

For those people, this is a chance to have their own ideas of what it means to be fashionable validated, even if they go to Harajuku and walk the length of Meiji-dori without being validated or acknowledged by the photographers who are present. Presently most mobile phones are equipped with a camera. This is a simple tool to create contact with the symbolic space that is Harajuku. The boundaries of Harajuku can thus be stretched endlessly. This page with snapshots was not present when the magazine was established in 1997. Harajuku as a contact zone does change and evolve ceaselessly. The technique that transforms the symbolic contact into a physical thing is the mobile phone camera.

I want to go to Japan to buy shoes!

Let us go back to London. A friend who was born and raised in London and with whom I was sharing a flat had her room decorated in Thai and Indian textiles and had perfumed the space with oriental perfumes. She went to China to study Chinese medicine and she said she was interested in Japan as a country of fashion. In short, she was a Western woman with Eastern tastes.

One day she said to me, 'Some day I want to go to Japan. Where do they sell these shoes? Please tell me!' What she pointed at was a page from *FRUiTS*. Those thick-soled boots to me as a Japanese seemed to belong to the items of punk fashion that were after all invented in England and that she, an English women, would think that they were somehow Japanese deeply puzzled me.

The magazine *Street* was the focus of my research in the 1990s (Onohara 1999),[10] but then the sister publication *FRUiTS* became a worldwide phenomenon. It became increasingly available in continental Europe and in London as well.[11] That Harajuku, rather than being a part of Tokyo, was increasingly being known as a city of fashion, I learned in London. But let us go back to the flatmate already mentioned. She also collected the American-made Blythe dolls. These were quite difficult to get hold of in

[10] Clothes are analogous to language; when you express yourself by the medium of dress, it is like writing poetry to express yourself with your own words and breaking grammar rules sometimes for a new perception of the world or creating beauty.

[11] Miura and Narumi discuss the magazine as follows: 'We can find *FRUiTS* easily at any popular bookshops in Paris' and 'Western people were attracted by Japanese fashion through the magazine *FRUiTS*'.

Britain. In spite of the fact that the doll was an American product, she wanted to go to Japan to buy it. Apparently these are called 'NeoBlythe'[12] and are manufactured under license in Japan, in special Japanese versions in order to appeal to Japanese consumers. These have countless variations in dress and there is even the possibility for the consumers to design their own clothes for the doll and have them manufactured for the market. The pricing is also lower than the American original and therefore more affordable. Indeed, for my flatmate, Blythe has become a Japanese doll and therefore fashionable.

For a European with oriental tastes, Japan is a country of and in fashion. Perhaps it is not even necessary to say 'oriental' taste. Whoever likes new fashion will like what emerges from Japan. It seems that the Japanese and the fashionable have become overlapping categories.

Not Orientalism but Japonisme

So let us investigate when the popularity of Japanese fashion started in the West and precisely what kind of clothes they were. Exports of Japanese goods began in earnest after the long period of isolation up to the 19th century in Yokohama. The occasion for this was the world exhibitions in the West that were held in Philadelphia, Vienna, Paris, etc.

Since the French city of Lyon, India and China had each already established their markets for silk, the rise of the Japanese silk trade in the West was only possible through tactical production. It was the use of the shape of the kimono to create what would come to be known as a 'tea gown' that the Japanese silk trade broke into the market for indoor wear (see Suoh 2001). This was a garment that used the cut of the kimono to create a more floating silhouette. Thin, light and yet warm, this high quality gown was meant to be worn while enjoying one's domestic space and to provide a sense of luxury and fashion. An advertisement in the *Liberty* catalogue of 1892 is of great interest here; I quote: 'Japanese silk embroidery dressing gown'. *Liberty* had this produced especially in Japan and it contained delicate, beautiful hand-made embroidery. This kind of sleeping wear provided a sufficiently dressed-up feel to be worn around the house and not only in the bedroom and was the first item of Japanese fashion that was imported to the West. Hence Japanese fashion was not initially known as public clothing, but as private 'lounge wear' and as clothes to

[12] Blythe dolls were originally produced by the company Kenner in 1972 and were designed by an American woman called Allison Katsman. The original Blythe dolls are well known as Vintage Blythe and can fetch an impressive price today. The Japanese toy company Takara (Takara-Tomy at present) got a license in 2000 to reproduce Blythe dolls called 'Neo Blythe'. Interestingly, Takara used the same body of their famous product, Rika-chan ningyo (doll), for the American Blythe doll's body at the beginning.

sleep in. The word *fashion* itself had a very different meaning then; it denoted a class-based sense of cultural accomplishment and enjoyment only available to the limited numbers of the upper classes.

As Japanese fashion that has truly influenced Western couture, we have to make special mention of Issey Miyake, who started out in Paris in the 1970s, then Rei Kawakubo, who participated in the Paris collection from the 1980s on, and Yoji Yamamoto, all of whom have produced fashion rich in individuality. At that time, Comme des Garcons (Kawakubo) and Yohji Yamamoto became brands that exemplified the traditional Japanese aesthetics of simplicity and constraint (*wabi* and *sabi*) without actually being kimonos. This influence was often referred to as the 'Japan Shock' (see Kawamura 2004) and has its offspring in the young avant-garde designers based in Antwerp. Many actors and artists became passionate fans of this new Japanese wave and helped to raise the profile of these brands remarkably.[13] Their creations were treated as objects of art and purchased by museums and exhibited side by side with Western designers. The work of Issey Miyake is very well known in England for his unique creative ideas and techniques, and he has been awarded an honorary doctorate from the Royal College of Fashion in London. We can say that this class of high fashion belongs more to the realm of art than to the realm of fashion as such. While these designers have opened flagship stores in the Aoyama and Omotesando districts of Tokyo (in close vicinity to Harajuku), their fashion remains somewhat limited to the upper echelon of taste, and while the shops are open to the public, they retain a high-class, almost intimate boutique atmosphere.

These designers have established themselves in the world of fashion as influential and lasting presences. The traditional folk garment of the Japanese is no longer representative of Japanese fashion. These modern creations are now seen as representations of Japanese culture and objects of art in their own right that have earned the respect of the Western fashion world.

From cuties to kawaii

There can be no doubt that the new keyword for fashionable Japan is *kawaii*, the cute. This notion of cute is intimately linked to the street fashion and subculture and is very popular now. This new craze for kawaii, however, has a different quality from the reception of Japanese fashion so far. The style in cute fashion that started in Japan in the 1980s is exemplified by white, pink and pastel colours, by blouses with puffy sleeves and frills, fancy dresses with ribbons, and all kinds of paraphernalia

[13] The German film director Wim Wenders documented Yohji Yamamoto in the film entitled *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (1998). He was initially motivated by Yamamoto's clothes through an actress in his film who was a great fan of the designer.

decorated with cute characters and slogans from cartoons (see Kinsella 1995). In fact, the magazine *CUTiE*—the name says it all—was established in the 1980s and bears the subtitle 'For Independent Girls'. It becomes clear from the alignment of 'cute' and 'independent' here that in the context of the 1980s this was part of the counter-culture or subcultural independent movement that emerged with the so-called band boom and the increasing number of self-producing indie bands. We can safely say that this indie style is connected to what is now known as Otaku culture. They are not content to just wear prepubescent female clothing, but they form small groups and in these underground communities they swap information and enjoy their individual taste.

The most extreme example of this highly decorated girly fashion is the contemporary trend of Lolita fashion in Japan. When I did my research in London, I also met a journalist from Eastern Europe who had made a documentary on the Japanese Gothic Lolita. He had been living in London for a long time, and when I asked him whether cuteness was also sought after in Europe, he replied, 'Cuteness is not regarded as a positive value because it is associated with immature, childish traits'. It seems that Western girls want to be adults as fast as possible and place emphasis on being sexy rather than being cute. When I showed pictures of Lolita fashion to another researcher who specialised in Indian recycling fashion, she said, 'There can be no doubt that they do this strategically to appeal to the other sex' and strongly questioned this link with what is known in Japan as the Lolita complex, the preference of men for childlike women. It seems that it is difficult for Western people to understand Lolita fashion, which partially adapts baroque Western dress, as part of the same form of Japanese cute fashion.

Through the worldwide popularity of Japanese Manga and anime, the concept of cute that has only very weak roots in the West has been established and received as part of 'cool Japan'. Dressing up in character costumes and purchasing the copious merchandise inspired by Manga characters is popular not only among children, but among adults of both sexes. Japanese high-tech exports have changed from cars and large electronic appliances to the Tamagochi and the Playstation, inexpensive game machines.[14] Further proof of this is that the Japanese word *kawaii* is increasingly used worldwide in its alphabetical spelling. This culture of kawaii has become a globalised mass culture, popular not only in the countries of the West, America and Europe, but also in the Asian nations (see Zheng 2005). Even if Japanese industrial production and its high-tech sector have been overtaken, its cultural production and sensibilities cannot easily be imitated. As a new image of Japan as the desirable and exotic Far East, the notion of kawaii has been very successful.

[14] Yomota 2006 states that Japanese *chijimi* (shrink) culture is significant in describing Japanese *kawaii*, which is closely linked with its one of the factors, smallness.

The imagination of the Other (us) through the Other[15]

Here I would like to draw attention to the second contact zone, which the anthropologist Tanaka Masakazu described in his 2007 publication. This second contact zone emerges when we think of the contemporary globalised world as infected by European influence and modernity. Any field the anthropologist may choose is no longer a first contact zone. Wherever he goes, the effects of globalisation are already palpable. He is, in short, always already in a second contact zone. This is a useful way of rethinking some of the political implications of the exercise of anthropology as such.

Applied to fashion research, we can rethink this idea through the notion of the kimono. Kimono in Japanese simply means 'thing to wear' but of course refers to the traditional dress worn in pre-modern Japan. The same phenomenon that happened with the word *kawaii* is also happening here: kimono, spelled with the letters of the alphabet, has become a fashion phenomenon in its own right (see Onohara 2007). When I wanted to talk with the aforementioned anthropologist investigating Indian recycle fashion about the kimonos that were stored and exhibited in museums as part of collections of traditional attire, what came up first in the conversation was that a young Japanese girl was making accessories such as purses from old kimonos to go with Western clothes. When the conversation about kimonos got stuck, she showed interest when I mentioned that young Japanese girls would wear miniskirts made from old *yukata*. I had the impression that rather than to talk about the traditional kimono, she was interested in the way the kimono was appropriated in modern fashion. So this notion of *kimono* is increasingly accepted as part of Cool Japan.

The focal point of Tokyo street fashion, Harajuku has become a tourist spot for visiting foreigners like Akihabara. Historically, Western culture was adopted in these places faster than in others. When we talk of Harajuku as a contact zone, we are talking about the second kind of contact zone. Different styles come into contact in this imaginary space that unfolds along Meiji-dori, a space in which a strict hierarchy of being fashionable is enacted with European haute couture at the top of the hierarchy. Harajuku is constituted by the contact of different styles, not only in a harmonising style but also often with friction and communication, as a dynamic phenomenon.

In London, for the English, Harajuku, mediated through the magazine *FRUiTS*, has become an experience and a symbol of all that is fashionable. Set between Shibuya, the centre of subculture, and Aoyama, the centre of high culture, it is a paradise for pedestrians, a breathing underground for the independent movement, a place teeming with visitors and teenagers alike, a place whose gravitational pull does

[15] The phrase is originally from Tanaka 2007.

not only extend to the homelands of Western fashion, but also to the surrounding Asian countries. When my former flatmate for example thus takes pictures of herself and her Blythe dolls in cute attire and sends these to a magazine, we can then say that she is within the frame of 'Harajuku'. And this in turn may feed back into Japan and have an influence on the real streets of Harajuku.

On being fashionable

Fashion is a holistic system in which looks and styles change according to the times but are also reborn regularly with small modifications. To be fashionable thus is different depending on the period of time and where you are; there can be no absolute notion of being fashionable. Change is the only constant and a value in itself, as each look embodies and materialises a certain moment in time.

At present, Japan is fashionable and the Japanese are thought of as fashionable people. That means this thesis itself is fashionable. To be interested in Japan, to read *FRUiTS*, to be aware of Japanese fashion, to collect small items and to combine them into a style informed by Japanese aesthetics is fashionable. It is no longer necessary to wear high fashion by Japanese designers or a traditional kimono to participate in this. Eating sushi, reading *FRUiTS*, talking about kawaii, all these actions denote that Harajuku has been globalised and has become a new contact zone, a new anchor for the system of fashion, with a dynamic interplay of harmony and friction. It seems that the ever-evolving Western fashion is deeply implicated in the politics of friction and is looking for an Archimedean point to anchor itself.

Is Japanese fashion therefore becoming something anyone can wear? Indeed it seems that everyone independent of nationality can do so. Like a character in a fantastical story of the near future, you can become Japanese by wearing Japanese style. There is no longer a need to be in Japan physically. Through the instantaneous media that connect people, Harajuku becomes part of a dynamic virtual space.

Fashion has come a long way from being simply a cover of the genitalia, a means to appeal to the other sex, a way of decorating the body. Wearing clothes is something that makes us profoundly different from animals. Furthermore, through the quick pace of change in modern fashion, the semiotic function of fashion to differentiate between gender, between ethnicity, between class and between different trades has somewhat eroded. One could maintain that fashion has become a mere game. We want to be similar to other people, but also to be different. Fashion is born where these two at first sight contradictory desires clash. There is also the contrary notion that only those who can pull off a style naturally and do not seek the attention of the cameras are truly fashionable. When too much is staked on being fashionable, then fashionable can become a parody of itself.

Transcending individuals and places, even overcoming time, as if denying that time exists, merely existing through the material one puts on one's body, this is an age of the fetish of fashion. Or maybe it is a return to the basic function of fashion of decorating the body? It is necessary to think about the intimate relationship fashion has to the individual body, not simply as a functional garment, but in terms of the remaking of the self, some through the infliction of wounds to the body. (Picture1)

Picture 1. Blablahospital: A Tokyo fashion bland designed by a Japanese girl originally started in London

Conclusion

When my fellow fashion researcher Philomena Keet interviewed the photographer Aoki Shoichi, she asked him, 'What is the meaning of fashion?' He answered, 'It seems that human beings are looking for revolutions, for violence, for erotic thrills. This is the deep meaning hidden behind Western fashion. But the young people in these magazines, they simply play with clothes'. This for me was a very interesting comment. Are these young people really just playing, or are they using their body as a medium to express something, to question something? Are the people depicted in *FRUiTS* and *Tune* merely looking for that elusive goal of being fashionable? It could be said that they exist as the modern European body, struggling through the political impact, the hidden violence, and the complexities and contradictions of the age expressed in Western fashion.

The old image that equalled Japan with the kimono as traditional value has been well received in the West. The 'Japan Shock' that Japanese high fashion created in the Western world emancipated Japan from the image of the kimono-clad woman and earned Japan's citizenship in the world of fashion. Finally the subcultural, the popular and modern notion of kawaii, the cute, has freed itself from the confines of nationality and has become a truly encompassing international value. It is not classical or traditional, not, like the earlier imagery of the Far East, mysterious or oriental, and has recently also been taken up by the European world of high fashion.

A place named Harajuku does not exist. It is in fact not the name of a place, but merely the name of a train station. The addresses around the station are in fact

'Jingumae', meaning 'In front of the shrine', referring to the Meiji-Shrine, this symbol of modernity that is the true core of this space. It is a place in which one can become the object of a photographer's lens and be transformed into a fashionable body, where one can participate and compete in the hierarchy of fashion. It is a place where foreign tourists and locals can mingle, and on New Year many people dressed in kimonos can be seen, a place where all these streets intersect. In the teeming traffic, one can see the fashion industry professionals with their branded bags and the Lolitas who wear classical Western clothes that are made in Japan; all these different persons cross their ways walking towards Omotesando.

Thus when the Japanese are spoken of as fashionable, the image of ethnic specificity has waned. This does not mean to deny one's own history and values but means that the style and the rules of Western fashion have been thoroughly digested. That again does not mean that there is in Asia the existence of a symbolic 'West', nor a 'Non-West'. What emerges cannot be grasped by these binary notions but is a truly new notion of Japan as fashion.

The worldview in which everything is referred to with the adjective kawaii, cute. Identity as play. Such a kawaii wearer no longer aims to be self-consciously fashionable, no longer who to be or where to be or when to be, but simply enjoys the performance of watching oneself in the mirror or through the lens.

Take an item from the mountain of old clothes, fallen out of 'fashion time', and create something new by customising it. Anything can be put together. If you cannot find it, put it together from something already there. Do not think about how to wear it, the adornment of the body is a goal in itself. Already we have moved closer to the original raison d'etre of clothing. The models in *FRUiTS*, the costume players, the Lolita girls, they all like to make things by hand. Originality, or customise! Fashionable Japan and European modernity are fighting or playing over my body while I dress and undress.

Contact, friction, struggle, exchange, harmony: from these experiences the experience of being fashionable is born, whether fresh or nostalgic or creating a pleasant frisson. Style is born and disseminated and finally accepted. Japan as fashion thus means new, means no one is rejected, independent of culture or ethnicity, old or new. It does not mean that all these various 'others' are transgressed, but that we should enjoy wearing them over each other, in a new style perhaps best described as 'overlapping'.

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