Performing the Branded Self:
Harajuku Fashion and South Korean Cosmetics as Tools of Neoliberal Self-Branding on Social Media

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April 2019

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Japan's unique fashion subcultures in Harajuku and South Korea's robust cosmetics industry are two cultural phenomena that have drawn contrasting international and scholarly attention in the past decade. While Harajuku fashion is associated with the commercialized death of subculture, the thriving transnational market for South Korean cosmetics is celebrated. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a more nuanced understanding of these two cultural phenomena beyond simply the "fall" of Harajuku or the "rise" of South Korean cosmetics by reading them as tools of self-branding on social media, a process which neoliberal capitalism necessitates. This thesis shows the ways that neoliberal subjects use Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics to perform and commodify their identities on platforms like YouTube and Instagram. It examines the historical conditions that gave rise to this imperative to self-brand, and it theorizes the immaterial labor of self-branding neoliberal subjects on social media, who commodify their taste and lifestyles and interact with their fans. Ultimately, using Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics to self-brand allows individuals to achieve an ideal neoliberal subjecthood. Thus, this thesis points to the simultaneous rise of neoliberal self-branding and social media platforms in Japan and Korea, examining this as both a localized and transnationally applicable phenomenon.

Abrégé

Les sous-cultures japonaises uniques à Harajuku et la robuste industrie cosmétique de la Corée du Sud sont deux phénomènes culturels ayant suscité des points de vue contrastés de la part des universitaires, durant la dernière décennie. Alors que la mode d'Harajuku est associée à un décès commercialisé de la sous-culture, le marché transnational florissant des cosmétiques sud-coréens fait l'objet de plusieurs éloges. Le but de cette thèse est de développer une compréhension plus nuancée de ces deux phénomènes culturels, au-delà du simple «déclin» d'Harajuku ou de l'«ascension» des produits cosmétiques sud-coréens, en les interprétant en tant qu'appareils pour le développement d'images de marque de soi (*self-branding*) sur les réseaux sociaux, un procédé nécessaire au capitalisme néolibéral. Cette thèse démontre les façons à travers lesquelles les sujets néolibéraux utilisent la mode d'Harajuku et les produits cosmétiques sud-coréens, afin de performer et commodifier leurs identités sur des plateformes telles que Youtube et Instagram. Elle examine les conditions historiques qui ont engendré ce désir fondamental pour le *self-branding* et conceptualise ce travail immatériel se produisant sur les réseaux sociaux, alors que ces individus commodifient leurs goûts et styles de vie et intéragissent avec leurs fans. En somme, la mode d'Harajuku et les produits cosmétiques sud-coréens permettent à ces individus de réaliser leur idéal en tant que sujets néolibéraux. Cette thèse indique donc la présence d'une hausse simultanée dans les procédés de *self-branding* au sein d'un système néolibéral et dans l'utilisation des plateformes de réseaux sociaux au Japon et en Corée. Elle examine ce phénomène en tant que phénomène local, mais souligne aussi sa validité au niveau transnational.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my wholehearted gratitude and appreciation to my wonderful advisor, Yuriko Furuhata, without whose warm encouragement and insightful feedback I would have floundered. As well, I would like to thank the rest of the East Asian Studies department faculty and staff, especially Thomas Lamarre, Michelle Cho, and Gal Gvili, as well as Jeremy Tai and Marc Steinberg, whose classes introduced me to ideas that have changed the way I view the world. I would also like to thank Miwako Uesaka, Tomoko Ikeda, Jodie Beck, and especially Yasuko Senoo for their dedication to Japanese language education and to their students' success, both in class and outside of it.

Special thanks goes to Sylvie Tran, who translated my abstract into French for me. Equally deep thanks go to Ryuta Kato, who so generously offered to help generate about 70 Chicago-style citations.

I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to my fellow graduate students in the East Asian Studies department, especially Chen Cong, Brent Lin, Meli Taylor, Hang Wu, Siqi Shi, Mathew Beauchemin, Dahye Kim, and others for creating a warm and welcoming community in which we could all share the joys and struggles of our work.

Thank you to my entire family (the Greenes, the Ahrs, and the Luborsky-Trapps) all of whom have so generously offered their unwavering support and love. Thank you to Areparipis Alexa Cárdenas Quiodettis, Taylor Lacaillade, Sho Entani, and again Sylvie Tran and Ryuta Kato for cheering me on and for being the best friends a person could ask for. Thank you also to my PGSS friends, who have found every possible opportunity for fun.

And last but not least, special thanks also go to Armin and Tanja Selbitschka for kindly supporting me in all of my endeavors, and for so generously imparting upon me their wisdom and advice.

Introduction

In early 2017, street fashion photographer Aoki Shoichi announced the cancellation of his two-decade old publication, *FRUiTS,* bemoaning that today, "there are no more cool kids left to photograph."[1] *FRUiTS* had been chronicling the evolution of "Harajuku fashion" since 1997, compiling snapshots of the multicolored, discordant, and convention-defying outfits that have become the defining feature of Tokyo's Harajuku district. Today a popular tourist attraction, shopping district, and stomping ground of young people belonging to a wide variety of fashion subcultures, the area appears to be thriving. It would be easy to dismiss Aoki's perspective as a familiar jaded and resistant reaction to change and to the area's increasingly commercial character, but in fact Aoki's statement touches on a series of longer histories, both local and transnational, that together illuminate the aptness of our current historical moment to foreground the paradigmatic shifts that have occurred in the way people engage in self-stylization through fashion and what it means to do so in the years since *FRUiTS* was first published.

Simultaneously, a similar yet opposite attitude has long been emerging regarding the South Korean cosmetic and beauty industry. At the same time Aoki Shoichi lamented the loss of Harajuku fashion, South Korean cosmetics have been gaining an increasingly sturdy foothold in the international market, notably in places like North America and Europe. In a New York Times opinion piece, Euny Hong, author of a 2014 book entitled *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation Is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture*, considers the hype with which "western" consumers have embraced South Korean cosmetics. She points to the orientalist dehistoricization of South Korean cosmetics, which are situated as both "ancient" and mysterious and yet also "ten years ahead" of Western

[1] Clarke, Ashley. "What the Closure of Fruits Magazine Means for Japanese Street Style." I. February 06, 2017. Accessed May 07, 2019. https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/ywvz3g/what-the-closure-of-fruits-magazine-means-for-japanese-street-style.

beauty practices.[2] In reality, she notes, South Korea's cosmetic industry has only formed in the past few decades, with its transnational popularity emerging in the early 2000s. At the end of the article, she reveals her skepticism toward "Korean beauty secrets," guessing that you just have to "put a lot of time, money, and energy into your skin, and you'll probably see results."[3] Yet this skepticism in the face of the South Korean beauty industry's booming international popularity raises similar questions to Aoki Shoichi's skepticism toward Harajuku's changing landscape. Like Aoki, Hong's statements gesture toward local and transnational histories that underlie an important shift in the way people consume beauty products and engage in cosmetic care. People certainly *are* putting a lot of time, money, and energy into not just their skin but also their physical appearances in general.

Wearing clothes and engaging in beauty care are everyday acts that can appear mundane, but as we know from the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Dick Hebdige, among others, clothing and cosmetics are key sites at which individuals can communicate with the world around them. A person's choice in fashion can convey social class, personal taste, and membership in communities, as stylistic elements have become associated with coherent groups and subcultures.[4] Clothing fulfills a social function, as different clothing styles are appropriate in different contexts: one would not wear the same clothes to an interview that they would wear for a night out on the town with friends. Given the wealth of information about an individual's tastes, social class, and lifestyle that clothing and cosmetics can contain, an especially interesting aspect of personal stylization that warrants closer attention is the way that individuals appropriate stylistic elements to cultivate and perform a coherent self. This consistent and repeated performance of identity through fashion and cosmetics happens in the course of everyday life, between going to work or school, going to the store, seeing friends, and other quotidian actions. Although identity is performed constantly, I have highlighted these situations as especially important points at which the individual self-stylizes because they all entail *visibility.* Apart from functioning as a mechanism to solidify the individual's sense of self, clothes can only communicate if

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[2] Hong, Euny. "I Grew Up Around Korean Beauty Products. Americans, You've Been Had." The New York Times. December 09, 2017. Accessed May 03, 2019.

[3] Ibid. 1

[4] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

someone is there to see them. For this reason, highly visual social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube have become key sites at which people self-stylize: they function as the height of visibility, as images can be circulated instantaneously and accessed from almost anywhere.

The rise of social media platforms in the past fifteen years has catalyzed the rise of a new kind of self-styling subject, an elite class of "influencers" who inhabit the highly visible milieus of the Instagram feed or the YouTube channel.[5] These influencers attract huge numbers of followers, in some cases hundreds of thousands or even millions, by posting photos and videos and interacting with their followers. These followers, who have their own accounts on social media sites, have the potential to do the very same things these elite presences do, posting their own content and in some cases attempting to achieve the same level of fame as their role models.

The activities of these social media influencers, while often done voluntarily or for leisure, also produce economic value and thus can be understood as a kind of labor. Thus, what emerges from this setup is a relatively new kind of labor, a new relationship between consumers and producers, and in fact a new kind of subject who cultivates the self and commodifies it, all articulated through the process of self-stylization: wearing clothes, doing makeup. In the work that follows, I will dissect these familiar actions against the backdrop of today's increasingly neoliberal lifeworld, attempting to parse out the mechanisms that allow style to be associated with the self, the way social media functions as a tool to commodify the stylized self, and the way neoliberalism necessitates this process. These processes all manifest in the highly stylized worlds of Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics and beauty, which both started as localized phenomena but have become transnational in distinct ways. Looking at the two of them together will not only shed new light on the reasons for their transnational popularity but will allow us to examine more closely the daily activities that we take for granted: what are we really doing when we get dressed and put on makeup in the morning? How has the increased visibility and connectivity of social media changed the way we stylize ourselves through fashion and

[5] Khamis, Susie, Lawrence Ang, and Raymond Welling. "Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the Rise of Social Media Influencers." *Celebrity Studies*8, no. 2 (2016): 191-208. 1.

cosmetics? Where do we as individuals fit into the vast web of online presences as both consumers and producers of content?

To elucidate the significance of Harajuku fashion subcultures and South Korean beauty care in answering the questions posed above, it is important to first understand their histories. To begin, Harajuku as a locality has undergone decades of change and even now continues to morph, a process upon which Aoki Shoichi has touched. During the American post-war occupation of Japan, Harajuku quickly became an area of interest: its renaming as "Washington Heights" and its development as a foreign settlement with English-language institutions (like schools, theatres, and stores) spurred the creation of a culturally hybrid downtown area whose "exoticness" attracted young creatives, many of whom opened their own clothing shops.[6] As Japan's economy, labor market, and society as a whole underwent massive restructuring and growth during this post-war period, a significant process of neoliberalization on which I will elaborate later, creative youth subcultures flourished in the area even after the American occupation had left, starting with *Harajuku-zoku* (Harajuku Tribe) in 1966.[7] This subcultural "tribe" was largely middle class and drew on sophisticated fashion trends from "Western" countries, especially the US and the UK, and enjoyed flaunting their mod fashion and their sports cars.

Other than its attractive image of foreignness, one of Harajuku's most important features that played a role in fostering its resident subcultures was its "*hokōsha tengoku,"* or "Pedestrian Paradise." Starting in the late 1970s, Harajuku's main drag, Omotesandō, was closed to vehicles on Sundays, providing the perfect space for young people to congregate, dance to their music, and wear clothes in a conspicuous way.[8] Spurred on by the continuous popularity of the small clothing shops that filled the Harajuku district, it was around this time that fashion magazines targeting Harajuku's regulars began to be published. This was the start of a long-lived print culture in Harajuku, in which fashion magazines like *non-no* and *an-an* became central forces in the crystallization of coherent subcultures by reflecting and setting trends and by directing young people to the most

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[6] Nakao, Atsumi. "The Formation and Commodification of Harajuku's Image in Japan." *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies* 34 (2015-16): 10-19, 12.

[7] Ibid., 13.

[8] Winge, Theresa. "Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita." *Mechademia*3, no. 1 (2008): 47-63. doi:10.1353/mec.0.0045, 47.

fashionable shops. Subcultural activities like dancing and congregating were initially centered around Omotesandō, but as talent agencies and shops targeting a younger demographic opened on Takeshita-dōri in the 1980s, that smaller street became an area of focus as well.[9] Following *Harajuku-zoku*, a series of influential new subcultures popped up, including *Takenoko-zoku* (who drew their inspiration from stereotypically "Arabian" aesthetics and bright colors) and *kogyaru* (who modified school uniforms by adding loose socks and shortening skirts).[10] As Harajuku's subcultures diversified and the area attracted more attention throughout the 1980s and 1990s and thus began to emerge into the "mainstream," the more innovative side of subcultural production moved behind the scenes into Ura-Harajuku.[11] This is a space physically removed from the more visible Omotesandō and Takeshita-dōri, which became increasingly commercialized.[12] Ura-Harajuku is a hub for less well-established designers to showcase and sell their creative work and to influence local fashion trends. This area was also home to a number of second-hand clothing shops.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, Harajuku had cemented its reputation for norm-defying fashion and creative innovation. Its styles are today known for their transnational and transhistorical inspirations (from the 1950s US to Baroque France) and their increasing feature of nonbinary performances of gender. The conventions of styles known today as Lolita, Decora, Fairy-kei, Shironuri, Mori-kei, Goth, and Genderless-kei rose in what Aoki Shoichi has referred to as "waves," with each innovation giving birth to new fashion subcultures.[13] But according to designers and photographers, not just Aoki Shoichi of *FRUiTS* magazine but also influential names like Masuda Sebastian of clothing brand 6%DOKIDOKI, Harajuku is not thriving like it used to. The Omotesandō "Pedestrian Paradise" was closed in 1999, taking away one of the most critical sites of subcultural

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[9] Nakao, "The Formation and Commodification of Harajuku's Image in Japan," 14.

[10] Ibid., 14.

[11] Japan, I-D. "The Editor of Fruits Magazine on the Rise and Fall of Harajuku." *Vice.* April 10, 2017. Accessed May 07, 2019, 1.

[12] Kawamura, Yuniya. "Japanese Teens as Producers of Street Fashion." *Current Sociology* 54, no. 5 (2006): 784-801. doi:10.1177/0011392106066816., 792.

[13] Japan, I-D. "The Editor of Fruits Magazine on the Rise and Fall of Harajuku." *Vice.* April 10, 2017. Accessed May 07, 2019. https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/xwdzy7/the-editor-of-fruits-magazine-on-the-rise-and-fall-of-harajuku, 1.

gathering and exchange; Aoki describes it as a "shot to the gut."[14]As well, the increasing popularity of comparatively cookie-cutter "fast fashion" from brands like UNIQLO, Forever 21, and H&M are often blamed with extinguishing the creative fire and Do-It-Yourself mentality that were so essential to Harajuku's subcultural identity.[15] Indeed, huge branches of these fast fashion brands as well as expensive luxury stores like Gucci and Prada have established themselves in Harajuku. Thirdly, the fashion magazines that used to be so central to Harajuku's subcultures are not as influential as they had been. For example, *EGG* magazine had been a central publication of the gyaru fashion subculture, but it ceased circulating physically in 2014, becoming an online-only publication in 2018.[16] And of course, although *FRUiTS* had an established reputation as one of the most essential publications in Harajuku, it too folded in 2017.[17]

Instead, social media sites have filled the hole created by these magazines' closures. In the absence of physical spaces to congregate and physical publications to reference (save for a few overarching ones like *KERA!* or *Zipper* that offer a more general view of the Harajuku fashion industry rather than catering to specific subcultures) subcultural exchange happens largely online. Today's version of Aoki Shoichi's "cool kids" now exist on Instagram as well as on the streets of Harajuku: influencers like Hida Yusuke, Sasaki Toman, RinRin Doll, Kurebayashi Haruka, Seto Ayumi, and countless others are all giants in the world of Harajuku fashion whose online personas resonate with consumers in an arguably more personal way than the figures in Aoki's street snaps. Later on, I will examine more closely the platform specificity of influencer-consumer interaction, such as the ability for both parties to converse directly on platforms like Instagram and Twitter, and the way influencers can use social media to create a sense of "authenticity" that appeals to consumers.

These paradigmatic shifts do not occur only in subcultural context. While Harajuku's case is especially reflective of the shift from print media to digital media and the

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[14] Ibid., 1.

[15] Ibid., 1.

[16] Aramajapan. "Iconic Gyaru Magazine "egg" Is Back!" ARAMA! JAPAN. February 16, 2018. Accessed May 07, 2019. https://aramajapan.com/news/fashionnews/iconic-gyaru-magazine-egg-back/85465/., 1.

[17] Clarke, Ashley. "What the Closure of Fruits Magazine Means for Japanese Street Style." I. February 06, 2017. Accessed May 07, 2019. https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/ywvz3g/what-the-closure-of-fruits-magazine-means-for-japanese-street-style., 1.

subsequent rise of social media influencers as driving forces of subcultural change, South Korean beauty provides an interesting point of comparison. The imperative to care for one's appearance through beauty products and cosmetics has permeated a large part South Korean society, even crossing normative gender lines in a way that other beauty cultures have yet to. It has also given rise to a class of wildly popular social media influencers and related communities both locally and abroad. For this reason, among others, it can be treated as a mainstream example of the same paradigms occurring in Harajuku's subcultural context; that is, the rise of influential figures and "cool kids" on social media who are making use of self-stylizing techniques. I will be comparing Harajuku fashion subcultures with South Korea's arguably mainstream beauty cultures in order to show that this increasing emphasis on social media visibility is not simply characteristic of one subculture or one local context, but is actually a useful way to read other cultural phenomena that are more mainstream and are achieving an increasingly international presence. As well as expanding on these things, in later chapters I will generate a more thorough definition of "subculture" versus "mainstream culture" in order to explain why Harajuku fashion may be considered subculture whereas South Korean cosmetics occupy a more mainstream position in their domestic context.

The more mainstream Korean beauty industry has a similarly gigantic online presence and a centralized locality. According to the Coreana Cosmetics Museum in Seoul, the popularity of skincare and makeup in Korea goes back to the Three Kingdoms period, with the first commercially circulated, mass-produced beauty product emerging much later, in the first half of the 1900s.[18] Despite the long precedence of cosmetic popularity in the region, the industry as we know it today only began to flourish after the peninsula had been liberated from Japanese control and the Korean War had ended, allowing South Korea to accumulate wealth.[19] Similarly to Japan, the latter half of the 1900s was a period during which Korea experienced significant economic and political restructuring under the leadership of Park Chung-hee. As part of his plan to build a "rich nation, strong army,"

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[18] Ah-young Chung, "Tracing History of Cosmetics," The Korea Times, January 31, 2013., accessed May 15, 2019, http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/new/culture/2013/01/135_129776.html., 1.

[19] Hong, Euny. "I Grew Up Around Korean Beauty Products. Americans, You've Been Had." The New York Times. December 09, 2017. Accessed May 03, 2019. , 1.

Park's government supported the rise of *chaebol*, powerful conglomerates involved in key industries like electronics manufacturing, and the two apparatuses worked together to strengthen the nation-state in the wake of war.[20] For this reason, since the beginning of Korea's post-war entry onto the global economic stage, there has been a strong connection between the state and key industries. This trend continues today as Korean cosmetics flourish on both the local and transnational markets and are increasingly being supported by the state as an ambassador industry for Korean culture, along with K-Pop and other popular media that together make up *Hallyu,* or the "Korean wave."[21] This state support can be traced especially to former president Kim Young-sam's 1993 initiative, *segyehwa,* a "globalization policy" in which the government began to focus their energies on "cultural industries" rather than only on the electronics manufacturing that had been the center of the post-war South Korean economy.[22] Even after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, the significance of which I will elaborate shortly, the South Korean government has continued to support the cosmetics industry and its transnational aspirations as part of *hallyu,* and much scholarship has recently been devoted to this phenomenon, such as that of Choi Jungbong, Kim Suk Young, Dal Yong Jin, and Michelle Cho.[23] I will return to this concept in chapter 1.

Growing transnational popularity aside, the cosmetics industry is domestically robust: one can buy domestically made cosmetics virtually anywhere in South Korea, especially the Myeongdong district in Seoul, which has become known as makeup central: the area's streets are lined with brick-and-mortar makeup shops selling popular brands (like Innisfree, Etude House, Missha, and dozens, if not hundreds, more.) The vast array of products and brands has also encouraged a growing online presence, flourishing especially in the form of pedagogical YouTube channels that teach viewers how to choose the most

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[20] Eun-Mee Kim and Gil-Sung Park, "The Chaebol." in *The Park Chung Hee Era: The Transformation of South Korea*, ed. Byung-Kook Kim and Vogel Ezra (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 267.

[21] JungBong Choi. "Hallyu versus Hallyu-hwa: Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign." In *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media*, ed. Sangjoon Lee and Abé Markus Norne (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 32.

[22] Suk-Young Kim., *K-pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 22.

[23] See especially the book *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media*, a collection of scholarly essays examining the configuration of hallyu compiled by Sangjoon Lee and Abé Markus Nornes.

appropriate cosmetic products and how to use them effectively. South Korean beauty regimes famously feature ten steps, in which each individual develops a regimen that best fits their skin's needs.[24] With each step fulfilling specific functions, there are ways to tailor the routine to match different skin types (oily, dry, combination) and to achieve different looks ("dewy," matte, bright, and more.) The sheer range of choice and depth of knowledge necessary to cultivate beauty routines creates the perfect environment for the emergence of knowledgeable influencers, some of whom even work as professional makeup artists offline as well as online. Between product reviews, makeup tutorials, and even general lifestyle advice, the most popular South Korean beauty YouTubers have garnered millions of followers (for example, Pony Syndrome, who boasts an astonishing 5 million subscribers.)

In short, both the Harajuku fashion subcultures and the South Korean cosmetics industry developed and rose in popularity around the same time, and the reasons for this are multilayered and related. Most essential, I attribute these developments to the permeation of neoliberal rationalities throughout both Japan and South Korea as a result of post-World War II economic changes. I argue that because of the concurrent processes of neoliberalization in these two localities, both Harajuku fashion subcultures in Japan and the South Korean cosmetics industry were able to become the significant cultural phenomena they are today. Although there are specific local configurations of neoliberalism in both areas, the basic structure is the same. Neoliberalism, as characterized by both Graham Burchell and David Harvey, most basically defines the "problem-space" of government (in other words, the issues and tasks that the state takes active measures to ameliorate and fulfill through governing) around the free market: it seeks to create a set of institutions, regulations, and laws that will allow the free market (and the resulting "artificial competitive game of entrepreneurial conduct") to operate at the highest possible

[24] Bridget March, "The Korean Skincare Routine, Explained." Cosmopolitan. May 16, 2018. https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/beauty-hair/beauty-trends/a42942/korean-skincare-routine-explained/. (accessed May 07, 2019).

efficiency.[25] This entails the creation of a state whose health is bound up with a thriving and prosperous free market economy. Within this system, because the state should not be responsible for anything beyond the creation of markets, neoliberalism is also characterized by the trend toward privatization: the individual is invested with the responsibility for important functions that used to be the concern of the state, like education and health care, which are considered key elements of a "welfare state."[26] The self-care[27] of individuals and their adherence to "appropriate conduct," which Harvey describes as "quasi-economic," simultaneously supports the state because this upholds the functioning of the free market economy. This would seem to entail that an economic rationality is extended into all aspects of life, even those that used to be entirely separate from the economic (although Burchell makes clear that this is somewhat a generalization and that in practice, there is a wide variety of possibilities for new kinds of economic action, rather than just the repetition of previous forms.)

Neoliberalism's emphasis on free markets and economic rationality influences politics, education, social contexts, and a variety of other aspects of life, but most importantly, it involves the application of that economic rationality to the individual's relationship to the self, creating certain kinds of subjects. Neoliberal subjecthood means that individuals must conduct themselves according to an economic rationality that appears to be free, necessitating what Burchell calls an "entrepreneurial relationship to the self."[28] This basically entails an individual actively cultivating the "self" (i.e. their outwardly-presenting identity, knowledge, skills, and personality) to be desirable in the labor market. However, rather than having an entrepreneurial *relationship to* the self, I argue that the tendency of market logics to permeate all aspects of life in neoliberal contexts necessitates that the individual be an entrepreneur *of* the self, the difference being

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[25] Graham Burchell, "Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self," in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (London: Routledge, 1996), 27.

[26] David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Brantford, ON: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2014), 2.

[27] I will return to the notion of self-care in chapter 2 with a discussion of Foucault's conceptualization. For now, by self-care, I mean the actions an individual takes to ensure their own ability to live "healthily" and "happily."

[28] Burchell, *Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self,* 29.

that entrepreneurs *of* the self make the self desirable not only by marketing their *labor power* as a commodity, but rather by cultivating the self into a coherent and marketable *self-brand*. This entails not only the cultivation of skills and abilities but the commodification of an individual's tastes and lifestyle, which are actively marketed in order to create what Maurizio Lazzarato calls an "ethical surplus," or a "social relation, a shared meaning, an emotional investment" in and through a given brand, which opens up possibilities for being (in this case, the occupation of "ideal" neoliberal subjecthood") and acting (the active cultivation of self brands) to consumers.[29] In this system, individuals are simultaneously producers and consumers: they must consume to produce, and their consumption is an inherently productive practice.

Social media influencers of the sort described above, especially those based in the increasingly neoliberal contexts of post-war Japan and Korea, are the quintessential embodiment of the entrepreneur of the self. Social media platforms have made it easier than ever to market the self and attain the visibility needed to create community and meaning, that is to say, an ethical surplus, around the branded-self. Self-branded subjects are constantly engaged in value-producing material and *immaterial* labor through the maintenance of their identities. This entails not only the constant performance of their identities but also the constant engagement of self-branded subjects with their followers on social media.

In contrast with material labor, which refers to concrete work affecting physical change, such as making clothes or cooking food, immaterial labor refers to "the practices that produce either the immaterial content of commodities, or the social context of production itself."[30] Replacing material labor as the dominant form, immaterial labor's primary products are "relationships and emotional responses," affects rather than physical products.[31] This labor draws on and reinforces shared systems of knowledge and is premised on the existence of the aforementioned "ethical surplus," produced through

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[29] Adam Arvidsson,"Brands: A Critical Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5, no. 2 (2005): 237.
[30] Ibid., 241.
[31] Johanna Oksala, "Affective Labor and Feminist Politics," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* 41, no. 2 (2016): 284.

communication.[32] In the case of social media influencers, this includes taking and uploading photos of themselves wearing clothes, recording, editing, and uploading videos of themselves doing makeup, and writing captions for this content. While there is certainly a material aspect to this labor, its main function is ultimately more affective than, say, embroidering a skirt or manufacturing lipstick. As Arvidsson puts it, such labor's "core functionality" is to "produce sociality" rather than to produce tangible goods (although this sociality is often formed around tangible goods.)[33] I will expand in later chapters on how self-branding subjects generate ethical surpluses and affects around their brands.

As the model of a hyper-economic, ideal neoliberal subjectivity whose entire existence has been commodified and thus able to participate in free markets, it makes sense that influencers and their self-brands are attractive to consumers. They both provide a model of ideal neoliberal subjectivity and create an ethical surplus among consumers, who can draw inspiration for the cultivation of their own self-brands. This relationship between individuals creating self-brands (especially influencers and other celebrities) and those who consume those self-brands thus becomes the central focus of this thesis, especially focusing on social media platforms as the main sites of mediation between these two groups. This thesis is hence guided by the following research questions: How do social media platforms facilitate the creation of self-brands and make them accessible in certain ways to potential consumers? How do consumers use these platforms to both consume and create self-brands for themselves? How do social media platforms mediate the interactions between influencer-celebrities and consumer-fans? I will be examining these questions to make an intervention into the fields of Japan studies and Korea studies by applying the frameworks described above to Harajuku fashion subcultures and to the South Korean cosmetic industry in order to explicate the ways social media influencers and bloggers mobilize these cultural products to construct and maintain an ideal neoliberal subjecthood.

To address these questions, I split my argument into three chapters. In my first chapter, I will provide the macro-level historical context of the rise of neoliberal systems in Japan and Korea. In the wake of significant crises in the 1990s like the collapse of the Japanese bubble economy, the Asian Financial Crisis, and the resulting IMF bailout of the

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[32] Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 2011), 10.
[33] Ibid., 10.

South Korean economy, both societies experienced significant socioeconomic restructuring that resulted in an increased flexibilization of labor, which in turn forced the precaritization of a significant portion of the work force. I then contextualize this historical background by expanding on the theoretical perspectives on neoliberalism presented in my introduction, drawing on David Harvey and Graham Burchell to outline the way that these new neoliberal governmentalities that emerged in Japan and South Korea encouraged the development of markets, thus necessitating the creation of a branded self that can survive and participate in these markets as the model of an ideal neoliberal subject.

From there, I explore the connections between neoliberalism and subculture, as this is useful for understanding the power of Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics to create communities and bolster the "soft power" of their respective national contexts. Iwabuchi Koichi, drawing on Joseph Nye's argument, explains that "soft power" refers to the exportation especially of media and pop-cultural products like music, TV shows, fashion, and more in order to increase knowledge of and the attractiveness of a given "country's cultures and values," mobilizing "traditional culture, language education, intellectual exchange and people-to-people exchange programs" as channels through which these popular media are disseminated.[34] "Soft power" is often used as a nation branding strategy that aims at transnational communities, and it is thus a useful paradigm through which to view Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty cultures as they have been coopted by their respective states (to various extents) to perform this sort of "pop culture diplomacy," as Iwabuchi puts it, and create ethical surpluses in tandem with self-brands. In examining the transnational movements of cultural phenomena that are associated with the "soft power" of Japan and Korea, the distinction between mainstream culture and subculture will come to the forefront. Subculture is usually understood as a smaller group who appropriates signs from the dominant culture and gives them new meanings, while mainstream usually refers to ideas that are hegemonic.[35]

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[34] Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pop-culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Question of 'international Cultural Exchange'." *International Journal of Cultural Policy,* 21, no.4 (2015): 420.

[35] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Winnipeg: Media Production Services Unit, Manitoba Education, 2011).

Additionally, I will draw on the theories of scholars like Dick Hebdige in order to develop a more definition of the subcultural in contrast to the mainstream, as these categories are important to understanding the transnational flows of both Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty care. As I will explain, Harajuku fashion can be considered "subcultural" in its domestic context while South Korean cosmetics can be understood as domestically mainstream. It is important to consider how their statuses are reconfigured when they move transnationally as part of their respective nation-states' nation-branding projects.

In my second chapter, I will explore the relationship between branding and marketing. To explain the theoretical mechanisms by which identity becomes associated with fashion stylization and beauty care, I draw on Judith Butler's theory of gender and performativity to think about this question. Butler argues that gender identity is composed only of repeated actions on the surface of the body, actions which appear to indicate the existence of a pre-discursive interiority, while this interiority is in fact the result of these repeated actions, gestures, and social discourse.[36] I will argue parallel to Butler that the action of wearing stylized clothes and cultivating appearance through beauty appears to reflect interiority via inscription on the surface of the body because it appears to be attributable to localized, individual specific *taste*.

Furthermore, the performance of this identity through clothing and beauty, I argue, can be understood as a Foucauldian technique of the self in that it is a way for individuals to act on their own "bodies" (in the form of bodily conduct and the physicality of self-stylization through wearing clothes and doing makeup) and "souls" (or, their entrepreneurial subjectivities and tastes) in response to the neoliberal context that surrounds them. In other words, I elaborate on the mechanisms and implications of self-stylization's designation as a technique of the self. As taste and lifestyle are two components that are particularly central to self-branding, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of taste and social capital will offer insights on the way in which they are essentially practices bound up with class, educational level, and social milieu. Bourdieu's focus on *practice* is important to the discussion of fashion because of the performative identities fashion

[36] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015).

facilitates, an essential part of which is practice and the repetition of action. Bourdieu's formulation is useful in that it allows us to see how the construction of social identity and the performance of that identity through fashion operates in a somewhat circular way.

In the second part of the chapter, I will then turn to Adam Arvidsson, whose theory of branding and media will be essential to understanding the mechanism by which individual tastes can be crystallized into brands, how brands create ethical surplus, as well as the model of brand management that requires "building intertextual, physical, and virtual spaces that pre-structure and anticipate the agency of consumers."[37] I will engage with Arvidsson's notion that brands' power lies in their ability to offer possibilities for being and action (in this case, to actively cultivate a self-brand and to more thoroughly occupy an "ideal" neoliberal subjectivity) to consumers in order to show that, in a neoliberal context saturated with "new media," brand management and self-management are essentially synonymous. In my analysis, I therefore examine theories of consumption as production, for the consumption of neoliberal self-branding subjects is inherently productive. I argue that it is a kind of immaterial labor, which produces affects and communities rather than physical goods.[38] As a complementary mechanism to branding, I will also examine marketing and brand-management strategies through which branded selves can attempt to establish this ethical surplus.

To demonstrate more clearly the way the maintenance of identity through fashion stylization allows the self to become a brand, in this chapter I will turn to an analysis of the 2004 film *Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma Monogatari)* by Nakashima Testsuya and the 2006 film *200 Pounds Beauty (Minyeoneun Goerowo)* by Kim Yong-hwa. *Kamikaze Girls* revolves around fashion subcultures in Japan (especially in Harajuku) and, apart from raising questions about labor and identity, provides especially strong examples of the way taste and lifestyle can be produced, commodified, and consumed in the context of neoliberalism in Japan in the 2000s. Kim Yong Hwa's *200 Pounds Beauty,* on the other hand, is a window into the comparable logic of Korean neoliberalism in the 2000s, which encourages a

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[37] Adam Arvidsson, "Brands: A Critical Perspective," 247.

[38] Maurizio Lazzarato and Jeremy Gilbert, *Experimental Politics: Work, Welfare, and Creativity in the Neoliberal Age* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

connection between cosmetic care and identity and necessitates constant maintenance and improvement of the appearance in order to construct a consumable "self."

My analysis of these fiction films as evidence of the way neoliberal subjects self-brand through fashion and cosmetic stylization is not meant to suggest that fiction films are an unmediated mirror of lived reality. Rather, these fiction films strengthen my argument in that they exaggerate and highlight the processes that this thesis explores. As both films were released in the early 2000s, after the neoliberalization of the South Korean and Japanese economies was well underway, I read the films as a response to the socioeconomic changes that their filmmakers experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. The exaggerated performances of identity that the main characters display make the moments of disintegration all the more jarring. As I explain later, these moments of disintegration are crucial, as they expose identities as performed constructions.

In chapter three I focus on the way that social media platforms, like Instagram and YouTube, mediate influencers' and celebrities' relationship to consumers and fans. This includes not only the importance of these platforms as tools for cultivating a self-brand, but also the platform-specific ways that these platforms mediate interactions between influencers/celebrities and consumers/fans. Instagram influencers, as a kind of self-branding performers who have more intimate connections to the fashion industry and market because of their higher cultural capital achieved through their simultaneous consumption and production, provide an excellent example of the way particular platforms allow individuals to construct and manage their self-brands, as well as to participate in what I call "entrepreneurial consumption." In this section I examine the way that the Instagram[39] and YouTube[40] accounts of highly visible influencers based in Harajuku such as Haruka Kurebayashi, as well as the Instagram[41] and YouTube[42] accounts of widely-followed

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[39] "Haruka Kurebayashi (@kurebayashiii) • Instagram Photos and Videos." Instagram. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://www.instagram.com/kurebayashiii/.

[40] くれちゃんねる(Kure-channel). "【LIVE 配信】メイク落とし&スキンケア公開." YouTube. June 08, 2018. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dP5VnV7I3ak.

[41] "PONY 포니 (@ponysmakeup) • Instagram Photos and Videos." Instagram. Accessed May 09, 2019. https://www.instagram.com/ponysmakeup/.

[42] "PONY Syndrome." YouTube. Accessed May 09, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT-_4GqC-yLY1xtTHhwY0hA.

Korean beauty bloggers such as Pony Syndrome, maintain a consistent yet always updating brand image.

Bringing in primary examples from both platforms helps me to highlight the platform specificity of social media networking sites (for example, their opportunities for user interaction and for instantaneous updating) in contrast with other print and broadcast platforms like magazines, which facilitate different interactions with consumers and operate on a much slower temporality, and with different visual conventions. I base this analysis on the platform theories of scholars like Jose van Djick[43] and Tarleton Gillespie,[44] which examine the implications of digital platforms for networking, affective work, and transnational flows. Fan studies, celebrity studies, and theories of liveness also provide productive frameworks for looking at the way in which individuals can create ethical surplus and affect through their self-brands, as scholarship on opportunities for physical, in-person interaction between fans/consumers and celebrities/influencers will elucidate the affective differences between interactions mediated through a screen or program and those that appear to be "unmediated."

Addressing these examples of self-branded subjects on social media in conversation with the fiction films I analyze in chapter two will allow me to extend my analysis of self-branding and performed identity through fashion and cosmetics to include the role of social media. Both *Kamikaze Girls* and *200 Pounds Beauty* were released in the early 2000s, a period in which social media was just beginning to emerge as a popular medium of communication. While the films are useful in that they provide exaggerated performances of identity that highlight moments in which these identities disintegrate, they do not address the social media-based marketing strategies in which self-branded subjects *must* engage to be successful in the early 2010s. My analysis of Haruka Kurebayashi and PONY Syndrome allows me to reiterate the processes of identity maintenance and subsequent self-branding that are evident in *Kamikaze Girls* and *200 Pounds Beauty,* but also to take this analysis a step further to explain the ways these performed identities and self-brands use social media to make themselves visible, consumable, and competitive.

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[43] José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[44] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'platforms'," *New Media & Society* 12, no. 3 (2010).

Finally, in my conclusion I reiterate the principle moves that I make in arguing that selves branded through fashion present models of the ideal neoliberal subject, which consumers strive to replicate in their own self-branding efforts. By highlighting the specificity of Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics as particularly apt mechanisms through which neoliberal subjects can cultivate their self-brands my thesis make sclear the way that digital media, including social media platforms, has necessitated a new relationship of the individual to the self: one that is consistent yet constantly updating,[45] striving for a sense of "authenticity," and reliant on a circular practice of consumption and production. Looking at Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics together as mechanisms of neoliberal self-branding provides more nuanced ways of understanding their domestic and transnational popularity. As a final thought, I drive home the idea that the ideal neoliberal subjecthood can never truly be achieved, and yet this unattainability makes the subject even more ideal: in constantly striving for something unreachable, to be a branded self is to be constantly engaged in practices of self maintenance, constantly participating in the cycles of consumption and production that drive market-based, capitalist societies.

In the chapters outlined above, this thesis aims to bring a comparative perspective to Harajuku fashion and Korean cosmetics and their popularity both at home and abroad. While much of the previous scholarship on these phenomena have taken sociological approaches to explain the mechanisms by which they spread and are consumed transnationally as well as their local attraction (for example, Yuniya Kawamura's work on Harajuku fashion[46] or Sharon Kinsella's take on the popularity of *kawaii* aesthetics[47]) or look at their significance through the lens of fan studies (like the insightful takes on *hallyu* by scholars such as Michelle Cho[48] and Jung Bong Choi,[49]) I focus on the way they can be

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[45] Wendy Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

[46] Yuniya Kawamura "Japanese Teens as Producers of Street Fashion." *Current Sociology* 54, no. 5 (2006).

[47] Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan." In *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Brian Moeran and Lise Skov (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016).

[48] Michelle Cho, "Pop Cosmopolitics and K-Pop Video Culture." In *Asian Video Cultures: In the Penumbra of the Global,* ed. Joshua Neves and Bhaskar Sarkar (Duke University Press, 2017), 240-265.

[49] JungBong Choi, "Hallyu versus Hallyu-hwa: Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign." In *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Meida,* ed. Sangjoon Lee and Abé Markus Nornes Hallyu 2.0 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 31-52.

mobilized as mechanisms of self-cultivation and self-branding. In so doing, this thesis aims to bring a new perspective to understanding the artistic and affective appeal of Harajuku fashion and Korean cosmetics and their importance to neoliberal consumer-subjects beyond the more practical functions (both social and capitalistic) they fulfill. Harajuku fashion and Korean cosmetics, facilitated by social media platforms that offer opportunities for visibility and interaction, provide a window into the construction of selfhood both at the level of local specificity and as a process that transcends national boundaries. As well as providing a fresh analysis of Harajuku fashion and Korean cosmetics as mechanisms of self-branding at local and transnational levels, this thesis takes a new approach to its primary sources, including the films *Kamikaze Girls* and *200 Pounds Beauty,* as well as the Instagram and YouTube accounts of relevant social media influencers. Specifically, my approach will aim to pinpoint the way these sources display examples of quintessential self-styling neoliberal subjects who mobilize both Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics to engage in immaterial labor and a constant and circular process of production and consumption. These sources show us that, even though South Korean cosmetics may be a fairly new industry, as Euny Hong notes, rather than "duping" consumers,[50] it has emerged as an important tool for neoliberal self-branding subjects to meet the demands of their competitive lifeworlds. And even though Aoki Shoichi's cool kids may not exist anymore as they did in the glossy pages of *FRUiTS* magazine or at Omotesandō's long-gone pedestrian paradise, it is impossible to ignore their vibrant presence as branded neoliberal subjects on the Instagram feed and YouTube channel.

[50] Euny Hong,"I Grew Up Around Korean Beauty Products. Americans, You've Been Had." The New York Times. December 09, 2017. Accessed May 03, 2019.

Chapter 1

The Local and the Transnational: Local Histories of Neoliberalism and Transnational Transformations of Harajuku Fashion and South Korean Cosmetics

Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics often draw media attention for their explosive transnational popularity. In the midst of what many media outlets and economists tout as the "Pacific Century," or the rise of an "Asian" regional prosperity that implies the fall of the "West" as the hegemonic global economic power, popular culture has become a key form "soft power," a tool that bolsters the spread of Asia's global influence without the coercive force of the military.[51] From anime conventions and Korean beauty expos in North America, Harajuku fashion walks in Europe, and cosplay meet-ups in the Middle East, the transnational significance of these cultural products is both physical and affective. But before delving into the precise forms that these phenomena take in both their local and transnational manifestations, it is important to understand the ways they are born of and saturated with neoliberal logics. As a paradigm that necessitates subjects to brand themselves and essentially become their style, I will examine the ways in which the rise of neoliberal logic, as the dominant paradigm that structures the life-worlds of post-war capitalist societies, is connected to the rise of subculture, especially in the post-WWII historical moment.

Mapping out subculture in relation to neoliberalism will require a clear distinction between subculture and mainstream culture, as I claim that Harajuku fashion is more subcultural, and South Korean cosmetics are more mainstream. I will use this comparative framework to analyze the transnational movements of Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty culture. This involves different degrees of co-optation by the state as national branding mechanisms and tools of soft power, manifesting in what is known as "Cool Japan" and "Hallyu." These differences in transnational movement and statuses as subculture or mainstream will prove to have implications for the ways in which neoliberal

[51] Leo Ching, "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital" *Public Culture,* 12, no.1 (2000): 244.

subjects make use of them for self-branding purposes as well as for the kinds of self-brands that result.

While one could argue that neoliberalism is a defining characteristic of the global lifeworld and that the necessitated self-branding of subjects is not a regionally or nationally specific phenomenon, there are evident differences in the neoliberal structures that emerge in different historical and politico-economic contexts, differences which have the potential to impact the specific mechanisms at work in the crystallization of self-brands. As I make my main intervention in the field of Japan and Korea studies, I would like to take a closer look at the neoliberal context that emerges from Japan's and Korea's specific political and economic histories. I will do this as much as possible without reifying or essentializing the concept of "Japan" or "Korea" as homogenous entities that refer to prescribed groups of people; in reality, while scholars have pointed to overarching trends that have emerged in the areas known as Japan and Korea, the study of these trends is not meant to claim that "Japanese people" or "Korean people" are homogenous groups who are all described perfectly through this scholarship. That said, a closer examination of overarching labor conditions will be useful in understanding what exactly is at stake in the imperative to self-brand through fashion in specifically Japanese or Korean contexts.

Neoliberalism in Japan and South Korea

As scholars Anne Allison and Yoshitaka Mori describe in their work on the dominant paradigms that structure the Japanese labor force, in the post-war years of economic recovery and restructuring, workers could more consistently expect to be employed in life-long jobs complete with benefits; this system gave a great deal of stability to laborers. However, as Mori explains in his 2009 article "J-Pop: From the Ideology of Creativity to DiY Music Culture," the collapse of the bubble economy in 1991 and the Japanese government's subsequent introduction in 1994 of deregulation measures designed to make the workforce more flexible and fluid, and therefore cheaper, created a surge of "freeters."[52] Anne Allison and Sharon Hayashi, among others, have applied the term "precariat" to this group, who have been defined in a variety of ways but are mostly understood as those who are not in school or full-time employment and therefore work part-time or short-contract

[52] Yoshitaka Mori, "J-Pop: From the Ideology of Creativity to DiY Music Culture" *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10, no. 4 (2009): 479.

jobs, often without benefits. They, along with "NEETs" (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) and "hikikomori" (those who have withdrawn from society and become shut-ins), comprise a group of precariat who have emerged from this increasingly flexible, neoliberal labor context.

As Mori helpfully describes, in the pre-bubble collapse economy of the 1980s, being a "freeter" was a way for people to "escape from the existing job status quo such as the seniority system and lifetime employment, and choose jobs and their own lifestyle more freely," for indeed, stability often comes at the price of freedom.[53] Freeters in this context often pursued "creative" careers. However, in the post-bubble economy, in which life-long employment with benefits was much harder to come by, being a freeter became more a matter of necessity: these were people who *could not* get jobs, rather than people who *chose* not to. A scarcity of government welfare as well as an increasingly flexible labor force results in the rise of the importance of individual responsibility in securing even the most basic of living standards (such as shelter and food.) While Allison points to the importance of the family unit and the corporation as the main providers of this welfare, these are highly contingent sources that are not available to everyone and whose effectiveness as institutions of support still depends on the amount of work and time the individual dedicates to them.[54] Individuals must follow a prescribed and highly normative path in order have a chance to emerge favorably in the increasingly competitive workforce as long-term jobs are replaced with flexible labor, attending school consistently, graduating from university on time, and finding employment immediately after. If individuals fail to do this, they must engage in a highly competitive market of short-term jobs.

Anne Allison paints this condition in almost alarmist terms, quoting statistics of those in Japan who are unemployed, living below the poverty line, and homeless, and emphasizing the affective dimensions of being a member of the precariat. The lack of lasting social connections for precarious workers creates a "life that no one grieves upon death and living a precariousness that no one cares to share with you in the here and now," as well as an "estrangement from ongoing human relations and recognition (not called by name at work and treated as disposable labor)"; by being outside dominant capitalist cycles

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[53] Ibid., 479.

[54] Anne Allison *Precarious Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013),10.

of consumption and production, the lives of precarious workers become saturated with the overwhelming despair of a sort of social death.[55]

What does this Japanese contextualization of neoliberal capitalism and the associated structure of labor do for our understanding of the imperative to self-brand through fashion? I argue that it becomes clearer what exactly is at stake in this process. In the Japanese labor environment, as described by Mori and Allison, it is becoming harder and harder for certain kinds of workers to access anything beyond basic necessities. This highlights the class aspect inherent in self-branding: those who can style themselves with clothes and beauty products have the financial means to invest in these things. The absence of fashion stylization often tells us just as much as fashion stylization itself does: it may indicate an individual's placement in a lower economic class or membership in the laboring precariat, working but unable to spare the expenses that gratuitous self-stylization often incurs; it could mean that the apparent lack of stylization is itself a style; or, it could convey an unwillingness to participate in the compulsory process of self-branding through stylization even at the risk of disenfranchisement, thus making a lack of style a potentially radical and subversive act.

While self-branding is a process reliant on a cycle of consuming and producing outside of which precarious laborers/freeters seem to be positioned, paradoxically, this doesn't necessarily exclude them from the possibility of self-branding. Here, we can take Amamiya Karin as a particularly apt example. Described in Allison's text and appearing in a number of public arenas (such as demonstrations, protests, and Yutaka Tsuchiya's 1999 film, *The New God,*) Amamiya is a political activist who has roots in the very same freeter culture described above. Unable to complete her education, achieve life-long employment and benefits, and thus apparently positioned on what one might call the losing side of "Japanese neoliberalism," Amamiya's emergence as a public figure/celebrity tells a different story. Allison describes Amamiya's appearance at a public performance geared toward freeters, hikikomori, and others outside of normative society (often referred to as the "lost generation"): there, she gives advice to those who are in the same situation as she

[55] Ibid., 15.

was.[56] As a celebrity who is largely identified with her background of hardship, I argue that what sets her apart is her ability to construct a stable identity as a member of the very group that is defined by instability. Now a figure also associated with Gothic Lolita fashion, she has been able to coopt instability itself into a stable identity by using fashion to perform the affective aspect of being a freeter. Amamiya makes use of traditional gothic lolita stylistic elements such as ruffles, frills, ribbons, and bows, all in black and other dark colors, which "convey a darker, moribund, and gloomy image."[57] Theresa Winge reads the Lolita subcultural style as providing a way for its members to "escape the trappings of adult life and with it the culture's dominant ideologies," pressures which freeters and hikikomori feel acutely, given their inability to align themselves with the expectations placed on adults by those dominant ideologies.[58] Amamiya, through her cooptation of gothic lolita style alongside her activism, embodies both the desire to escape to childhood and, by creating a dark, gloomy affect, successfully captures the sense of despair that instability instills in freeters and others in similar groups. Through gothic lolita, she performs on the surface of her body the darkness that comes from instability.

Amamiya has been able to brand herself, with the help of recognizable and consistent fashion stylization, as a certain kind of *creative* activist whose creative process is bound up with her identity as a freeter. As Mori explains, "capitalism… appreciates unique, different, and therefore 'creative' characters" and that in the neoliberal, post-Fordist, post-bubble economy, "creative labor is increasingly seen as the dominant and even ideal working style" in contrast with "repetitive manual labor" that can be done by interchangeable bodies.[59] This analysis speaks to the way that Amamiya has managed to position herself as an ideal neoliberal subject by associating herself with the inherently creative immaterial labor of self-branding, even if this construction of uniqueness is not the kind of full-time, life-long labor that employees of traditional companies perform. Despite the fact that Amamiya's activism is concerned with pushing back against the precarious and post-Fordist labor conditions that characterize the self-branding process, she is

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[56] Ibid., 131.
[57] Theresa Winge "Undressing and Dressing Loli: A Search for the Identity of the Japanese Lolita" *Mechademia* 3, no.1 (2008): 55.
[58] Ibid., 48.
[59] Yoshitaka Mori, "J-pop: From the Ideology of Creativity to DiY Music Culture," 481.

engaging in this process to which she is fundamentally opposed. This highlights the fact that the neoliberal imperative to self-brand has so deeply permeated lifeworlds like Amamiya's that it becomes unconscious and omnipresent: neoliberal subjects are constantly engaged in it whether intentionally or not. It *is* full-time, life-long labor, but a kind that can reside both above and below the level of consciousness.

Overall, from Allison and Mori's analyses and the example of Amamiya Karin, we can see that in the particular neoliberal context of Japan, what is at stake in striving for ideal neoliberal subjecthood is not only financial success and the ability to participate in capitalist cycles of production and consumption markets, it can a question of life or death. The inability to attain neoliberal subjecthood, like the members of the "lost generation" of freeters, hikikomori, and others, exposes these groups to death. Allison highlights the struggle that "disposable workers" face in securing the simplest necessities, leaving little time or resources for pursuing anything beyond the prolonging of life. This includes the tendency of freeters and hikikomori to be entirely isolated from social relations, meaning that membership in these categories is a kind of social death. The situation of disposable workers in the Japanese neoliberal context, in comparison to someone like Amamiya Karin who has transcended disposable worker status through her self-branding, provides a window into the way self-branding becomes both necessary and a way to move toward neoliberal ideals of productive, responsible subjecthood.

Japan, however, is not the only society to experience this renegotiation of labor environments and the resulting emergence of neoliberal subjecthood. South Korea's neoliberal structure developed at much the same time as Japan's. As they were both implicated in the Asian Financial Crisis in the 1990s, changes in the socioeconomic structures of both nation states became necessary. However, one could claim that Korea's transformation was even more dramatic than Japan's, as it underwent not only economic restructuring but also social and political reform over the course of two decades. The effects of these shifts, especially the rise in neoliberal rationality, are evident in the state's allocation of welfare, as well as in subsections of South Korea's labor force, particularly people experiencing homelessness and the young "creative class" that arose in the early 2000s.

From the 1960s to the late 1980s, South Korea was a "developmental state" run by a military dictatorship, but this changed in the pivotal year of 1987, when pro-democracy protests by a unified middle and lower class gained so much traction that South Korea ultimately shifted their political system to a liberal democracy.[60] This set the stage for the development of neoliberal logics because it meant a newfound emphasis on liberal values such as free markets and a new focus on the individual's rights and prosperity rather than those of society as a whole. The concrete impacts of such values on policy and on those upon whom policy acts accelerated with the election of Kim Dae Jung to the presidency in 1997.[61]

As Kim Dae Jung was the former leader of the democratization movement of the late 1980s, his election marked a significant political moment, as Jesook Song, Yoonkyung Lee, and Changwook Kim note in their writing about Korean neoliberalism. This is partly because he was elected in the same year that the Asian Financial Crisis occured, in which investors decided to pull out of short term and unhedged investments in South East Asia because they were scared of currency inflation that could result in losses.[62] The sudden loss of all these investments at once created an economic crash that impacted currency valuation and the viability of large corporations, which were extremely important to the South Korean economy.[63] In order to keep their collective head above water, South Korea resorted to loans from the International Monetary Fund to sustain them as their economic institutions floundered. However, in order to receive these funds, they had to sign a "Standby Agreement" stating that, in return for this financial help, they would restructure their political, social, and economic systems to foster free markets.[64] This included taking a good deal of power away from *chaebol*, or conglomerates, such as Samsung and Hyundai, who had been the primary providers of long-term, stable employment and benefits for middle class workers. Similarly to Japan in the years after the bubble collapse, this resulted

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[60] Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 8.

[61] Yoonkyung Lee, "The Sewol Disaster: Predictable Consequences of Neoliberal Deregulation." In *Challenges of Modernization and Governance in South Korea: The Sinking of the Sewol and Its Causes*, ed. Jae-Jung Suh and Mikyoung Kim. (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2017), 35.

[62] Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis,* 4.

[63] Ibid., 4.

[64] Ibid., 4.

in a significant decrease in the number of available long-term jobs and an increased flexibilization of labor.[65]

Along with this rise in short term, un-contracted, underpaid labor was an increasing privatization of public works. In order to offload the costs of governing, the federal government displaced many responsibilities onto prefectural governments and private firms. Yoonkyung Lee points to the disastrous results that all too easily arise because of this simultaneous privatization of public services and flexibilization of labor: in her article "The Sewol Disaster: Predictable Consequences of Neoliberal Deregulation," she outlines the layers of failure of rescue teams and relevant government agencies to respond efficiently to the incident. Many of the agencies who were responsible for ensuring the safety of the Sewol Ferry and for rescuing the victims once the ferry had capsized were privately owned and had either pushed the boundaries of safety to save money or stood to profit from private agreements with the government. Rather than putting the lives of the victims above all else, the Korean Coast Guard gave a corporation called Undine the "exclusive access to the Sewol" and blocked other rescue teams from approaching the scene of the incident to help the passengers.[66] As well, the crew on the Sewol Ferry and many of the rescue workers were flexible, short-contract, underpaid workers rather than long-term professionals who may have been better equipped to handle disasters.[67] Lee's account of the Sewol incident and its links to neoliberal privatization and deregulation provides a concrete example of the increasingly precarious situation for many of South Korea's workers and the increasing inability to rely on the government to provide essential services.

People experiencing homelessness are a particularly salient example of the neoliberal logics underlying the South Korean state structure. In response to the Asian Financial Crisis and IMF bailout in 1997, Kim Dae Jung implemented a system known as "productive welfarism," a method of allocating state welfare that is particularly saturated with neoliberal rationality.[68] It distinguished between "worthy" recipients of state welfare

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[65] Yoongkyung Lee, *The Sewol Disaster,* 40.
[66] Ibid., 43.
[67] Ibid., 41.
[68] Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis,* 14.

and those who would have to fend for themselves. To do so, it divided the unemployed population into three types: those who were laid off from prestigious corporations, those who were laid off and living on the street temporarily as a result of the IMF crisis, and those were living on the street long term.[69] The first group received generous benefits and opportunities to find new jobs, and the second group was provided with welfare in return for their labor in public works programs. In contrast, the third group of long-term homeless was deemed unworthy and largely did not receive government support because they were regarded as a drain on society and on the government's already strained budget.[70] The main criteria that distinguished this third group from so-called "IMF homeless" is that they did not seem to present any productive potential or any hope of "reforming" into full-fledged members of society, which, in the eyes of the South Korean government, meant becoming a male breadwinner taking care of a family (employment and normative families).[71] Along these lines, the only worthy recipients of welfare were men; even women who fell into the first or second categories did not receive government aid, as they were not considered "breadwinners" and thus not productive members of society. As Song explains, these constructed categories were not necessarily clear-cut, and they reflect increasing social anxiety about the breakdown of the family system that had previously been a central structure of society.[72]

Another group that is especially indicative of the neoliberal shifts characterizing contemporary South Korean society is youth and "creative workers," which can be considered separately but in fact have significant overlap. As Song explains in chapter 4 of her book *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, youth in the post-IMF bailout years faced challenges in getting the sorts of long-term jobs at big corporations that their parents had either aspired to or wished for their children to attain. As a result, this group of "underemployed youth" was eligible for state welfare because, despite their precarity, they were nonetheless seen as the future of the labor force

[69] Ibid., 257.
[70] Ibid., 257.
[71] Ibid., 256.
[72] Ibid., 262.

and had enormous potential to increase the productivity of the state.[73] In particular, youth who were familiar with the Internet and computers, English, international travel, and the cosmopolitan ideas that came with them (and *especially* those who mobilized these bodies of knowledge to start their own businesses) came to be known as "New Intellectuals."[74] These young people were under particular pressure to engage in "entrepreneurship of the self" and "creativity with commercial value," constantly trying to become marketable and desirable in order to not only attain stable employment but to become self-employable, and to show that they were not simply "good-for-nothings" living off of state funds.[75] Becoming self-employable (i.e. starting one's own business ventures) often means precariousness, but a kind of precariousness that is lauded rather than condemned or pitied.

As Changwook Kim describes in her article about Korean creative workers and designers, such "creatives" often occupy a political subjectivity that is distinguished hierarchically from other types of laborers. Creative work is often seen (by creative workers themselves and by the Korean state in general) as "more 'artistic,' 'creative,' or 'autonomous' than other work," while "the self-identity of 'laborer' as 'uncreative,' 'monotonous,' or even 'subservient."[76] This "artistic," "creative," and "autonomous" work implies that creative work, even starting one's own business, is inherently empowering compared to the seemingly oppressed and de-individualized labor of the masses. Kim argues, however, that this celebratory attitude toward these creative workers who willingly enter into precarious situations bolstered by a neoliberal narrative of self-development and "self-enterprise" creates a situation in which these workers "paradoxically exploit themselves."[77]

Kim's description of young people trying to enter the market to become designers is a prime example of Song's characterization of post-democratization South Korea's neoliberal environment as one in which "aggressive cultivation of the liberal self" is "a way

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[73] Ibid., 100.
[74] Ibid., 96.
[75] Ibid., 98.
[76] Changwook Kim,"The Political Subjectivization of Korean Creative Workers: Working and Living as Urban Precariat in Creative City Seoul." *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, (2017): 9.
[77] Ibid., 2.

of breaking through the difficulties in the job market."[78] Ostensibly as a result of the previously discussed celebration of creative labor, South Korea has seen a boom in the number of people graduating from design programs at universities and seeking to work in the design industry, and as a result, it has become extremely difficult to get a job with competitive pay and benefits. The most desirable of these jobs are at conglomerates. As a result, even impressive design skills are insufficient; these young creative people are encouraged to have a "mentality of self-development," create their own "self-identity as designer[s]" and to show this distinct self-identity in their design work, i.e. as something consumable.[79] This intensified individuality is supposed to be the main factor that makes one candidate more appealing than another.

It is easy to see the connections between this sort of precarious yet celebrated creative labor that proliferates in not only South Korean but also Japanese neoliberal environments and the creative self-entrepreneurship of online influencers, the protagonists of this thesis. Social media influencers, who make use of Japanese and South Korean cultural products to construct their self-brands, occupy a political subjecthood as precarious yet liberated creative workers similar to figures like Amamiya Karin and young South Korean designers. The proportion of influencers who can make a living off of their online work is fairly small; most have day jobs that fulfill their monetary needs, and the labor that goes into their self-entrepreneurship online is extra.[80] Those people engaged in unpaid, time consuming, material and immaterial creative labor often continue willingly, despite their lack of monetary compensation. This is largely because neoliberalism has engendered a shift "within which individuals accept and even celebrate the end of job security" because it signals the end of "the postwar order of 'working to find pleasure'" and the rise of an "imperative to 'find pleasure in work.'"[81] This shift is characteristic of post-

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[78] Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis,* 100.

[79] Changwook Kim, "The Political Subjectivization of Korean Creative Workers: Working and Living as Urban Precariat in Creative City Seoul," 5.

[80] Brooke Erin Duffy, (*Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 2.

[81] Min-Ha T. Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet Race, Gender, and the Work of Personal Style Blogging*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 48.

Fordism, neoliberalism's sibling, in which the flexibilization of labor also results in a blurred boundary between home and work, as well as between work and play.[82]

Although I will return in chapter 3 to the labor of social media influencers and their position in a cycle of production, consumption, and interaction, I briefly highlighted them here to make clearer the significance of neoliberalism's rise as the dominant ideology not only in "Western" nations such as the US and UK but in post-war Japan and Korea. Neoliberal capitalism creates the conditions for the emergence of the flexible, creative labor in which social media influencers and other self-branding subjects engage.

As detailed in the introduction, neoliberalism describes a condition in which the state cares first and foremost about the creation of free markets in which given parties can engage in competition with each other. As David Harvey describes, neoliberalism "liberat[es] individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within a framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade," and the state is there to uphold this framework of individual and corporate freedom through its various apparatuses of governing, such as laws, military, or the police.[83] In particular, this includes the deregulation and privatization of industry: in neoliberal logic, regulations of any kind impede market freedom. All other matters, such as the life and livelihood of a state's population, are only taken care of insofar as these provisions create and uphold the conditions for free market competition. This theoretically entails the population's equal access to equal resources, and it is up to the individual to make effective use of these resources. However, as becomes clear from the presence of precarious groups such as freeters and hikikomori (and other less locally specific groups such as migrant workers) as well as groups on the opposite end of the spectrum, in which the world's wealthiest people hold a net worth equivalent to the combined income of the world's poorest 2.3 billion people, neoliberal subjects do not have the same tools at their disposal.[84]

While class inequality and the tensions that arise from it are not new phenomena and have been perennial forces of historical change, the post-war rise of neoliberal logics renegotiated the relationships between labor and capital and thus resulted in new class

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[82] Ibid., 172.

[83] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* 2.

[84] Ibid., 34.

configurations. David Harvey even claims that "redistributive effects and increasing social inequality have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project," gesturing toward the widening gap between classes.[85] This situation did not occur immediately after the end of World War II. Rather, in the immediate post-war period many states strove for "a 'class compromise' between capital and labor" that entailed welfare provisions by an "interventionist state" and a system of "social and political constraints" on the actions of corporations; this system was called "embedded liberalism."[86] However, embedded liberalism became unviable by the 1970s because of rising unemployment and wild inflation, as well as the high costs of social programs that put financial strain on governments.[87] Neoliberal logic, with its decreased corporate regulation, was intended to revitalize capital accumulation in capitalist societies, which had become impossible given the problems embedded liberalism faced. Harvey maintains that neoliberalism has done a fairly dismal job of this, and has instead functioned to restore and sustain the power of economic elites, such as corporate leaders and entrepreneurs. [88]

From these aspects of neoliberalism, we can see how the perfect environment for the emergence of subculture is created. Increasing social inequality, where the rich got richer and poor got poorer, as well as an increasing emphasis on individual freedom, fulfillment, and happiness (not to mention the increasing responsibility that falls on the individual's shoulders to attain these things), meant that conditions were ripe for resistance. There was an increasing consciousness of the harmful and irresponsible ways in which the corporate, capitalist state operated without regard for the environment, the rights of workers, or other social issues.[89] The neoliberal maxim to make proactive use of one's resources in order to improve one's own circumstances seems to encourage neoliberal subjects to actively push back against things they feel limit their individual freedoms or are unjust. This is why, as Harvey explains, neoliberal capitalist elites sought to find a way to redirect these protests against state regulation of corporate activity rather

[85] Ibid., 16.
[86] Ibid., 11.
[87] Ibid., 12.
[88] Ibid., 19.
[89] Ibid., 42.

than against the corporate activities themselves. Crucially, they do so by relying on a "practical strategy that emphasized the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to *lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices."*[90] In other words, neoliberalism redirects the criticisms of malcontents by constructing a sense among consumers that they have full freedom and range of choice in consuming commodities and constructing a self. In doing so, consumers are encouraged to see regulations as threats to their own individual freedoms.

Theorizing Subculture

And this is precisely where subculture appears. Dick Hebdige, in his classic volume "Subculture: The Meaning of Style," locates the emergence of youth cultures as a direct indication of "the breakdown of consensus in the post-war period," as described above in the class oppositions that emerged between neoliberal elites and laborers.[91] Hebidge defines subculture first and foremost as a "space where an alternative identity could be discovered and expressed" in opposition to a hegemonic mainstream culture.[92] The principal mechanism by which these oppositional cultural groups construct their identities as specifically *in opposition to* is by appropriating signs and subverting the hegemonic meanings associated with them.[93] In other words, subcultures take a sign or symbol and redefine it in a way that challenges or subverts the commonly agreed-upon meaning. This works to create alternative identity because the dominant meanings of signs are inherently bound up with ideology: those agreed-upon meanings are created and perpetuated by a hegemonic ideology (which in this case is neoliberalism) in a way that masquerades as *nature*.[94] As a result, "the sign becomes the arena of class struggle" as groups compete for the power to define.[95] Subculture's subversiveness comes from the fact that, although dominant ideologies strive to portray their meanings as natural (and therefore irrevocable, common-sense truths) subcultures' redefinition of these meanings expose the fact that they

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[90] Ibid., 42. Emphasis mine.

[91] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. (Winnipeg: Media Production Services Unit, Manitoba Education, 2011), 17.

[92] Ibid., 88.

[93] Ibid., 18.

[94] Ibid., 18.

[95] Ibid., 17.

are not naturally occurring givens but rather are "arbitrary" and constructed, thus posing a threat to the legitimacy of the hegemonic ideology.[96]

Subcultures engage in this process of resignification especially by appropriating commodities, redefining their meanings, and using them to construct distinctive styles.[97] To provide a concrete example of the way this works, we can look to one of Harajuku's diverse fashion subcultures called *yami kawaii* (病み可愛い). Otherwise known as *menhera fashion* (or, mental health fashion) the name *yami kawaii* itself is a conjunction of the words "illness" and "cute." Although *kawaii* itself is usually translated as "cute," it is not as straightforward as simply an amalgamation of signs like pastel colors, innocent characters, sparkles, and frills. A number of scholars have examined *kawaii* as a sociological phenomenon, especially because it generates a great deal of popularity with adults although its characteristic signs (like pastel colors or frills) are associated with childhood and girlhood. Christine Reiko Yano, in her book *Pink globalization: Hello Kitty's trek across the Pacific,* locates *kawaii's* power in the way it "juxtapose[s] the child and the adult, the innocent and the sexy, the cute and the cool."[98] *Yami-kawaii* appropriates these kawaii aesthetics, like pastel colors, but fuses them with imagery commonly associated especially with mental illness, such as dripping blood, razor blades, pill capsules, syringes, surgical masks, and bandages, and makes liberal use of pastel colors.[99]

Menhera-chan, a character widely popular among members of the subculture, is the quintessential embodiment of its aesthetic: she is a small, cute girl with pink pigtails clad in a pastel sailor uniform who carries a knife and whose wrists are wrapped in white bandages (see Appendix, Figure 1). Created by pixiv artist Ezaki Bisuko and starring in her own manga, Menhera-chan has the ability to transform, magical-girl style, into a crime-fighting heroine by cutting her wrists with a box-cutter.[100] She and her accompanying imagery appear on a wide variety of items such as t-shirts, jackets, tights, stationary, pins

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[96] Ibid., 91.
[97] Ibid., 95.
[98] Christine Reiko Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific* (Durham, ND: Duke University Press, 2013), 25.
[99] "「病みかわいい」が生まれるまで　メンヘラと Kawaii 文化." メンヘラ.jp. May 07, 2018. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://menhera.jp/6038.
[100] Ibid., 1.

and buttons, and jewelry, some of which are produced by Ezaki himself, but others of which are fan-made.

The *yami kawaii* fashion subculture takes imagery that is considered disturbing or even taboo in the dominant ideology, especially considering the general stigma against mental illness in Japan, and makes it *cute*. Its juxtaposition of death, injury, and illness with cuteness, femininity, and pastel colors effectively resignifies these usually negative images as something desirable, while the norms of the dominant ideology tend to impose a taboo upon them. Even in this juxtaposition, *yami kawaii* inevitably relies upon aesthetics and associations that are socially constructed by the dominant ideology. In other words, while it is often taken for granted that images like death, injury, and illness are "dark," while constructs like "cuteness," "femininity," and symbols like sailor uniforms and pastel colors are associated with "happiness" or "goodness," these associations are themselves ideological constructs. Menhera-chan challenges these associations and thus exposes them as such: she uses images and symbols that have opposing hegemonic meanings, yet she uses them to generate positive associations, as is evident by her wide popularity. Although in the normative, dominant ideology there exists an association between femininity, cuteness and health, Menhera-chan disrupts this by positing that "femininity" and cuteness can also be associated with illness or injury, or even that death can be cute.

While *yami kawaii* is not the first fashion subculture based in Harajuku to juxtapose seemingly contradictory aesthetics (as it incorporates elements from similar, preceding styles like *yume kawaii, guro kawaii,* and fairy *kei*) it is perhaps the style that has sparked the most backlash from communities who understand its stylistic elements according to hegemonic meanings. According to an article posted on menhera.jp, a Japanese website whose self-proclaimed purpose is to create connections between people suffering from mental illness who are prone to becoming isolated, *yamai kawaii* (and especially its wrist-cutting and wrist-bandaging motifs) has received criticism for "unavoidably making fun of and offending people who cut," for "making mental health into a fashion," and for "simply being unsettling."[101] Others read *yami kawaii* as an outlet for people suffering from mental illness to express how they feel and to find community, opportunities that they would lack

[101] メンヘラ.jp. "「リスカバングル事件」から考えるメンヘラのファッション化." メンヘラ.jp. May 08, 2018. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://menhera.jp/6050. My translation.

otherwise considering the relative absence of mental health care in Japan, gesturing toward the community and lifestyle aspects of subculture.[102] Although *yami kawaii* and Menhera-chan can certainly be read as an insensitive appropriation of a serious issue that affects a large number of people, it is important to also acknowledge the subculture's empowering potential for those suffering from mental illness. Especially considering the taboo surrounding mental illness not only in Japan but in many other places as well, the *yami kawaii* community and Menhera-chan may offer the opportunity for those suffering from mental illness to express their feelings and to find a group of people who understand their struggles. As well, *yami kawaii* and Menhera-chan's resignification of these normatively taboos images offers an opportunity to change the discourse surrounding mental illness and open up its associated images to new meanings.

This sense of shock that dominant ideologies display toward *yami kawaii*'s imagery and aesthetics is not a phenomenon unique to *yami kawai.* By "dominant ideologies," I am referring to the mainstream public's associations between signs, as well as the normative expectation to adhere to these associations and the censorship of transgressions by those with the power of knowledge production. As Hebdige describes, as a result of the "moral panic" that radical redefinitions of signs may cause, those who adhere to dominant ideologies often reincorporate subcultural imagery to make it intelligible again.[103] When subculture emerges and shocks with its new significations, it garners a good deal of media attention and, as knowledge of the subculture becomes more widespread, its signs become familiar again, even in their subversive meanings.

As has been evident in subcultures like punk, goth, and even many Harajuku groups, "the original innovations which signify 'subculture' are translated into commodities and made generally available."[104] Although subculture is itself premised on meaningful and deliberate consumption of commodities, when they themselves become packaged and sterilized for mass consumption, they "become codified [and] made comprehensible," thus

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[102] Kati Chitrakorn, "Can 'Sick-Cute' Fashion Break Japan's Silence on Suicide?" The Business of Fashion. April 03, 2018. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/global-currents/how-sick-cute-fashion-is-surfacing-japans-mental-health-issues.

[103] Dick Hebidge, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* 94.

[104] Ibid., 96.

losing the subversive power they derive from resignification.[105] This is particularly evident in Gwen Stefani's much criticized appropriation of "Harajuku" and "Harajuku girls" as a concept in her music videos (like her 2007 music video "What You Waiting For?) and live shows (specifically, promotions for her 2005 song "Harajuku Girls.") The potentially subversive stylistic elements of Harajuku fashion groups were sterilized of their context and made into background for a mainstream pop star, who proceeded to produce her own Harajuku-themed commodities (from perfume to school supplies.)

While perhaps this has yet to happen with *yami kawaii,* the seeds of this commodification have been sown: the spread of the mascot-like Menhera-chan's image on clothing and goods, as well as the attempts of popular Harajuku brands like ACDC Rag to capitalize on this new trend perhaps point to *yami kawaii*'s eventual absorption into more mainstream cultures.[106] The spread of Menhera-chan's image as a commodity is in contrast to the early circulation of the character. According to the official tumblr blog for Menhera-chan, Ezaki Bisuko, created her in 2014 to express his own feelings, initially posting his art for free on Twitter.[107] Subsequently, Menhera-chan gained popularity among users, so much so that Ezaki started to produce a manga and merchandise. Although Ezaki's smaller-scale commodification of his character through merchandise, as well as fans' production of art and goods, remains subcultural, larger brands' appropriation of her image on their goods make Menhera-chan more accessible and more visible to nonmembers of the *yami kawaii* subculture. Now, even those who do not understand Menhera-chan's significance to the *yami kawaii* subculture can much more easily consume and use commodities with her image on them. This comparatively broad and de-contextualized use of commodities is an indication of the difference between subcultural consumption and other kinds of consumption.[108]

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[105] Ibid., 96.

[106] Kati Chitrakon, "Can 'Sick-Cute' Fashion Break Japan's Silence on Suicide?" The Business of Fashion, April 03, 2018. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/global-currents/how-sick-cute-fashion-is-surfacing-japans-mental-health-issues.

[107] Menhera-Chan. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://menhera-chan.tumblr.com/about.

[108] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* 103.

And this is the fate of subculture, which "must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions."[109] Even as it strives to push back against dominant ideologies, this process of subcultural appropriation of the sign, the reappropriation and commodification of that sign by the dominant ideology, and the subsequent establishment of new conventions that lead to the birth of a new generation of subcultural sign all show us that subculture is locked in a cycle. This analysis allows us to read subculture as a tool of the neoliberal capitalist state, used to foster a sense of individual freedom to construct identity and community through commodity consumption and to provide subjects with a sense of rebellious agency *in a way that doesn't meaningfully dismantle the mechanisms that allowed its creation*. As Hebdige puts it, subcultures "represent symbolic challenges to a symbolic order"—but indeed, a symbolic challenge rather than a political or economic one.[110] While I do not dismiss the power of subculture to effect tangible change by establishing new conventions, I argue that it is too structurally bound up in neoliberal capitalist logics to effectively upend them.

Much of the above discussion has revolved around Harajuku fashion, as it is subcultural both at home and transnationally, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter. In contrast, I read South Korean cosmetics and beauty culture as mainstream because it does not fit into the proceses of resignification that characterize subcultural activity. While subculture's stylistic innovations have the potential to establish new conventions, South Korea's beauty culture already *is* the convention, because it is a tool which is largely used to conform to dominant standards (at least, those of the South Korean domestic environment) rather than to appropriate dominant signs and redefine them. This is evident in South Korea's reputation as the plastic surgery capital of the world: some reports estimate that around one million procedures are done per year.[111] This staggering number points toward the pressure that many feel to conform to mainstream standards of beauty. Some of the most salient stylistic elements of mainstream Korean beauty include a high nose bridge, pale skin, wide, clear eyes, and a perfectly symmetrical, v-shaped jaw.

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[109] Ibid., 96.

[110] Ibid., 92.

[111] Keira Chan, "A New Generation of Women Are Challenging South Korea's Beauty Standards." Vice. November 07, 2018. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://www.vice.com/en_asia/article/yw9yxw/women-beauty-standard-south-korea.

Reminders of these conventions permeate the domestic urban environments: one simply has to look to the plastic surgery ads that line the streets of Seoul and to the huge numbers of pristine K-pop idols who simultaneously entertain and teach their audience the definition of beauty. Korea's widely consumed pop culture, from TV dramas to music, features celebrities who reflect all of these ideals. For example, one such ad that has appeared in Seoul features a woman who has had dramatic plastic surgery done on her face. Set against a clean, white background, the ad shows the woman's before-surgery and after-surgery pictures (see Appendix Figure 2). In her after-surgery pictures, her appearance is aligned with the standards of beauty that are mainstream in South Korea, such as a small face, sparkling eyes, and a high nose bridge. This is in stark contrast to her before-surgery image, in which shows in particular that her jaw used to be much longer and much squarer.

Nor are these beauty standards limited by gender: although articles like Vice's "A New Generation of Women are Challenging South Korea's Beauty Standards," cited above, rightly give most attention to women, on whom the pressure to conform is especially high, all genders are encouraged to attain these aforementioned ideals. For example, there are almost as wide a variety of skincare and makeup products especially branded for men as there are for women. In a video feature by the BBC, makeup artist Han Hyun-jae cites the rise in K-pop's popularity as the main factor that explains men's increasing attention to their appearances: as many male K-pop idols make use of the same makeup and skincare products that women do, an increasing number of men aspire to emulate them.[112] We might understand this shift as an example of the cycle explained above, in which signs are given new meaning in a subcultural context, are commodified, and eventually emerge into the mainstream as new conventions.

As K-pop idols show, there is value in being attractive and taking care of and commodifying one's appearance: they gain an immense amount of cultural capital[113] from their good looks. This is especially evident in the fact that many K-pop groups have a member designated as the "visual," whose job is first and foremost to look pretty, and in

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[112] Saira Asher, "Male Make-Up: Korean Men Have Started a Beauty Revolution." BBC News. February 05, 2018. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-42869170/male-make-up-korean-men-have-started-a-beauty-revolution.

[113] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 39.

the fact that partnerships between male K-pop bands and makeup brands is a common marketing strategy in the cosmetics industry (for example, k-pop boy band SHINee and the hyper-feminine brand Etude House.)[114] All of these factors point toward the way in which Korean cosmetics (and the beauty standards which they are mobilized to achieve) lean toward the mainstream rather than the subcultural.

To sum up what we have covered thus far in this chapter, Japan and Korea experienced neoliberal restructuring in the post-war period, as evidenced by the rise of creative and affective flexible labor in the place of long-term, permanent, highly-paid labor; the decrease of state-backed welfare (especially for the precarious populations) and the subsequent pressure on the individual to mobilize their own resources in order to thrive; and the subsequent widening of class inequality. These conditions paved the way for the rise of subculture as a way to redirect the protests of proletarian classes, who were becoming aware of the increasingly wide wealth gap between the rich and the poor. Subculture presented itself as a way to foster a soothing sense of autonomy and freedom from neoliberalism's demands on the individual, as individuals could create new meanings for commodities and thus push back against the dominant ideologies with which they disagreed. It is in this neoliberal context that Harajuku's subcultural fashion and South Korea's mainstream beauty care developed, and my examination of this emergence more clearly spells out the distinction between mainstream culture and subculture. Now that we have a sense of the way Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics create community in their domestic contexts, their worldwide popularity among consumers both in Asia and on other continents demands an examination of the way they move transnationally and how these transnational movements change their meanings.

Transnational Movements and Nation Branding: Cool Japan and *Hallyu*

Despite its highly localized background, Harajuku fashion has spread its influence globally, creating communities not only in other places on the Asian continent but in Europe, North America, South America, the Middle East, and Africa. While we may certainly attribute this wide reach to the increasingly interconnected global environment whose physical and digital infrastructure allows cultural products to travel more easily,

[114] MinKey91TV. "[ENG SUBBED] 111118 SHINee – Etude Hourse Sweet Play BTS." YouTube. November 18, 2011. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M223mmlmaJE.

Harajuku's popularity abroad has been bolstered significantly by the Japanese government's nation-branding campaign, "Cool Japan." Taking off in the 1990s and the early 2000s, the Japanese government sought to "capitalize on the popularity of Japanese media culture in global markets," so it poured effort and resources into promoting its pop-cultural products, such as anime, games, music, dramas, and fashion abroad.[115] The promotion of these cultural artifacts abroad was done with an eye toward increasing Japan's "soft power," an effort to "make people in other countries more receptive to Japan's positions through the dissemination of the country's cultures and values" through cultural means rather than through political influence or military power.[116]

The Japanese government aimed to develop its soft power in order to renovate the nation's sense of identity and pride in the wake of the economically devastating 1990s, but also as a tool of what is often referred to as "pop culture diplomacy."[117] Pop culture diplomacy is essentially international relations facilitated by popular culture: if a state's "culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow."[118] For example, in the wake of Japan's colonial project in the Asian region before and during World War II, the Japanese government hoped to use pop cultural products like anime or television shows to soften sentiments toward Japan and to "further the understanding and trust of Japan."[119] "Cool Japan" is an attempt to engage in this pop-culture diplomacy and spreading of soft power by presenting a unified and consumable national brand, marketed to the entire world.

This nation branding is a particularly neoliberal process, not only because of the nation-state's attempt to participate in a global free market of national brands, but also because the creative work and immaterial labor that go into the creative industries become increasingly celebrated for their contribution to the construction of the national brand. As Iwabuchi Koichi points out, the rise of nation-branding, soft power, and pop-cultural

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115 Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pop-culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Question of 'international Cultural Exchange'." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21, no. 4 (2015): 422.
116 Ibid., 420.
117 Ibid., 422.
118 Christine Reiko Yano, *Pink Globalization,* 6.
119 Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pop-culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Question of 'international Cultural Exchange'," 420.

diplomacy "displaces a differentiation between public/cultural diplomacy and creative/content industries," making it so that all creative production automatically feeds into the state's attempts to generate power.[120] As we saw in the beginning of the chapter, this reiterates the idea that creative labor is a way for the individual to inhabit a neoliberal subjecthood that directly upholds the state. In other words, not only are individuals encouraged by a neoliberal environment to engage in creative labor, nation branding and pop-cultural diplomacy binds this labor together with the state's health even more tightly.

Although nation branding and pop-cultural diplomacy have been thoroughly critiqued as idealistic, naïve, utopian, superficial, essentializing, and one-sided projection rather than true cultural exchange, the fact remains that Japan and a great deal of other nation-states have engaged in nation branding and its accompanying pop-culture diplomacy in order to compete in the market of national imagery and to increase their soft power abroad, and therefore it cannot simply be dismissed as an ineffective way to foster meaningful diplomacy. Its potential to create communities around recontextualized cultural objects is of particular interest. Harajuku fashion and its aforementioned "kawaii" aesthetics have been among the main cultural items to be appropriated as part of this nation-branding project.

The NHK, Japan's public broadcasting network, takes part in Japan's nation-branding project by producing shows about Japanese culture specifically for consumption abroad through a subsection of the network, called NHK World-Japan. Notably, they host a program called "Kawaii International" that seeks to appoint a yearly "Kawaii Leader" among members of the Harajuku fashion community abroad, especially those who are "influencer[s] on SNS."[121] The website, in its call for applications to the contest, emphasizes that "anyone can participate regardless of nationality and race which is the characteristic of 'Kawaii culture.'"[122] This emphasis on the inclusivity and lack of borders in "kawaii culture" is particularly indicative of the Japanese government's attempts to saturate their "Cool

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[120] Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pop-culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Question of 'international Cultural Exchange'," 423.
[121] NHK World-Japan. "Kawaii Leaders." NHK WORLD. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://www.nhk.or.jp/kawaii-i/leader/index.html.
[122] NHK World-Japan. "Fashion Contest." NHK World-Japan. Accessed May 08, 2019. http://www.nhk.or.jp/kawaii-i/contest/index.html.

Japan" brand with cosmopolitan appeal. As Iwabuchi Koichi notes, the Japanese state portrays "kawaii" as a "country-neutral quality," which aims to create "'a sharp break from the… old, oppressive image of the country'" that characterized prewar Japan, particularly with younger people.[123] For this reason, not only do Kawaii International and the Japanese state hold a contest to celebrate those who spread Harajuku fashion's influence internationally, they make a point to define "kawaii" itself as something inclusive of diverse national identities and races.

NHK's "Kawaii International" program is not the only group to crown "Kawaii ambassadors": in 2009, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed Harajuku fashionistas and artists Aoki Misako, Kimura Yu, and Fujioka Shizuka as icons of kawaii tasked with spreading knowledge of Japanese popular culture abroad.[124] As well, Harajuku fashion icon and musical artist Kyary Pamyu Pamyu was given a similar title in 2012, as she drew international attention for her viral music video, PonPonPon.[125] Harajuku itself as a physical locality is also coopted into this nation-branding project as a popular tourist destination, particularly Takeshita dōri. It is a packed and vibrant pedestrian shopping street with fashion boutiques, cute dessert shops, and the chance to see in person one of the fabled "Harajuku girls" or "Lolitas" that have been so instrumental in solidifying Harajuku's international reputation.

Harajuku fashion's popularity abroad cannot be attributed exclusively to the Japanese government's marketing strategies however: consumers have appropriated the pop-cultural commodities themselves to make their own subcultural communities. While these communities often inhabit online spaces like Facebook or Instagram, or even specialty websites that cater to members of the subculture, like Tokyofashion.com, there is a great deal of physical organizing as well. Harajuku fashion walks happen in many major cities, where members of the subculture meet to parade their looks in public, a tradition that seems to be a nod to Harajuku's "pedestrian paradises" of the 1990s. As well, there are

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[123] Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2007), 78.

[124] Isabel Reynolds, "Japan Picks "schoolgirl" Among Cute Ambassadors." Reuters. March 12, 2009. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-japan-ambassadors-cute-idUKTRE52B4JC20090312.

[125] Kira. "Kyary Pamyu Pamyu Crowned Harajuku Kawaii Ambassador." Tokyo Fashion News. Accessed May 13, 2019. http://tokyofashion.com/kyary-pamyu-pamyu-harajuku-kawaii-ambassador/.

"j-fashion" features at Anime conventions, including fashion shows, clothing vendors, lolitas having tea parties, and even occasionally special guests who are famous figures in the subculture. Yet this tendency of Harajuku fashion gatherings to take place at anime-related events reflects a general assumption that Harajuku fashion is part of anime fandom, such that wearing Harajuku fashion is an expression of membership in this fandom. This could be due in part to the fact that both Harajuku fashion and anime are marketed together as part of the "Cool Japan" nation-branding project, and due in part to the reporting of relatively less-knowledgeable news sources, like Reuters, which describes the fashion choices of Harajuku's ambassadors Aoki Misako and Fujioka Shizuka as "inspired by the characters in Japan's distinctive 'anime' animated films and 'manga' cartoon books."[126] While it's true that there is likely a good deal of overlap between those in the Harajuku fashion community and anime fans, this conflation of the two groups is not entirely accurate. This is one significant difference between outside attitudes toward international and Japanese domestic Harajuku fashion subcultures.

Considering the prevalence in anime fandom of cosplay, or "costume play," where anime fans dress up in costumes of their favorite characters, this tendency to associate Harajuku fashion with anime encourages those outside of the subculture to understand Harajuku fashion not as a legitimate fashion style but as a costume. Writing from the perspective of fashion law, Susan Scafaldi posits that the difference between clothing and costume is largely dependent on context: the exact same item can be considered clothing or considered a costume, depending on "a combination of the intent of the designer, seller and wearer, and the perception of the viewer."[127] Accordingly, when Harajuku fashion is exported into transnational contexts where designers, sellers, wearers, and especially viewers may have different frames of reference for understanding its stylistic elements and significance, Harajuku fashion can easily be understood as costume rather than a fashion style. As the transnational movement of Harajuku fashion changes the contexts and frames

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[126] Isabelle Reynolds, "Japan Picks "schoolgirl" Among Cute Ambassadors." Reuters. March 12, 2009. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-japan-ambassadors-cute-idUKTRE52B4JC20090312.

[127] Susan Scafaldi, "Costume or Clothing?" The New York Times. Accessed May 13, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2015/10/30/costume-or-clothing/legal-and-social-distinctions-between-costume-and-clothing-are-a-matter-of-context.

of knowledge that consumers and observers use to engage with the subculture, it creates a different sort of "ethical surplus" around styles and brands, a concept that I will address in chapter 2.

South Korean cosmetics, on the other hand, move transnationally in a very similar way to Harajuku fashion. Much as Harajuku fashion has been mobilized along with other pop-cultural products as part of the Cool Japan nation-branding project, South Korean cosmetics have been bolstered by the South Korean state as part of its nation-branding project as well. This project is often referred to as *Hallyu*, or the "Korean wave." The term was first coined to describe the spread of South Korean soft power by the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, who borrowed the term "wave," which was often used to describe Japan's expanding cultural influence.[128] Kim Suk Young, in her book *K-Pop Live*: *Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performance* describes Hallyu as "a neoliberal lifestyle, an affective mode, social relations, ethno-national pride, the statist project, and transnational cultural politics—all caught up in the dizzying pace of South Korean popular cultural development."[129] In other words, pop-cultural products like K-pop, k-dramas, Korean food, and of course Korean beauty project an attractive image of a neoliberal, South Korea-branded lifestyle or mode of being. Although there has been some debate as to what exactly constitutes Hallyu (the desire to learn the Korean language? The popularity of Samsung smartphones?) it refers especially to the *transnational* flows and popularity of South Korean culture.

Hallyu and its export of pop cultural products took off around the same time as the "Cool Japan" project, largely because of the similar economic and historical contexts in both South Korea and Japan, as I explained earlier in my discussion of neoliberalism. Kim Suk Young pinpoints democratic president Kim Young-sam's no-holds-barred emphasis on "globalization" as the logic that should structure South Korean society in the 1990s (including education, the economy, mass media, culture, and much more) as the point at which the government began to see the potential for cultural industries to generate economic prosperity.[130] Although the nation encountered financial troubles in the late

[128] Kim Suk-Young, *K-Pop Live,* 21.
[129] Ibid., 21.
[130] Ibid., 22.

1990s that set back their dreams of globalization, the middle-class, consumer youth culture that nonetheless emerged in neoliberalizing Korea contributed to the development of pop-cultural objects that are now part of Hallyu.

Choi JungBong outlines the ways that the state uses Hallyu (and the huge popularity of K-pop in particular) as a vehicle to boost the performance of *chaebol*, the corporations that are still a strong force in the Korean economy, and as a way to spread knowledge about Korean culture beyond pop-cultural products. For example, both Choi and Kim highlight the way smartphone producers like Samsung use K-pop stars to market their technology, effectively blurring the lines of Hallyu as "images and motifs of existing Hallyu are speciously concatenated with hot commodities."[131] In other words, this association of Hallyu with commodities that are not specifically pop-cultural is an effective way for the South Korean state to generate desire in the international market for South Korean products while simultaneously expanding the definition of Hallyu so that these other commodities can aid in the nation-branding project. To give another example, Korean cuisine is also marketed as part of the nation-branding project, riding on the attention South Korea has drawn from pop-cultural products brought, evident in the formation of the Korean Cuisine Globalization Committee in 2009 that aimed to teach people abroad how to cook Korean food and access it more easily.[132]

Cosmetics in particular have emerged as an important part of the South Korean nation-branding project. The commodities available in places like Myeongdong are increasingly available abroad: in Shanghai, makeup brand Innisfree has a gigantic, three-story flagship makeup/skincare store combined with a "green café," which specializes in green tea sweets and drinks[133]; The Face Shop has opened locations not only in larger cities but smaller towns like Columbia, Maryland[134]; and there are K-Beauty expos held annually

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[131] JungBong Choi, "Hallyu versus Hallyu-hwa: Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign," In *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media*, ed. Sangjoon Lee and Abé Markus Nornes (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2015): 45.

[132] Ibid., 47.

[133] SINA Corporation. "Innisfree 全球最大旗舰店正式亮相上海." 新浪时尚. Accessed May 13, 2019. http://fashion.sina.com.cn/b/nw/2015-11-26/1537/doc-ifxkxfvn9030571.shtml.

[134] "The Face Shop." Maryland's Korean Way. Accessed May 13, 2019. https://www.marylandkoreanway.com/the-face-shop.

across Canada in cities like Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal.[135] These expos function not just as opportunities for fans of South Korean cosmetics to purchase products but also as pedagogical programing to teach people how to use these products and about Korea itself.

Another indication that the state and those using South Korean cosmetics are aware of and wish to cater to their overseas audience is the increasing availability of English-language content. Although I will explore the concept of social media influencers more thoroughly in chapter three, many of the most famous of these influencers in the South Korean beauty sphere provide English subtitles for their Korean-language videos, likely because one of the largest target markets for international sales of Korean Beauty products is North America. As well, to be an influencer in this sphere is not limited to those physically in Korea or to Korean speakers: an increasing number of overseas YouTubers and Instagrammers have gained followers and influence through their knowledge of South Korean beauty. For example, one of the most popular is Morgan Stewart, a half-Korean American who runs a Youtube channel with almost 540,000 subscribers called *The Beauty Breakdown*.[136] On this channel, Stewart features makeup tutorials and tips, product reviews, shopping and travel highlights, and general lifestyle information. Notably, for the K-Beauty Expo in Montreal that took place on November 10th, 2018, the Korean Consulate of Montreal flew her in town from the U.S. to give two presentations on makeup, skincare, and beauty tourism.[137] Her special treatment by a South Korean official institution as an expert on beauty and cosmetics indicates the increasing inclusivity of South Korean beauty: one need not be entirely ethnically Korean nor a Korean citizen to aid in the spread of Hallyu.

Much as Harajuku fashion is recontextualized and conflated with anime fandom when it moves abroad, Korean beauty culture also changes when it is exported. As we explored earlier in the chapter, South Korean beauty can be considered mainstream in its

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[135] Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Montreal and Permanent Mission to ICAO. "2018 K-Beauty in Canada." News. Accessed May 13, 2019. http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/ca-montreal-en/brd/m_4455/view.do?seq=760515&fbclid=IwAR1Tu1-vmUf8eVKzleDaeWb29kii4Phx2ma0OjPhWoaascZPNHvEfftfR7s.

[136] MorgansBBD. "TheBeautyBreakdown." YouTube. Accessed May 13, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOMmsjb-VtlubcqaeyHpQVA.

[137] Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Montreal and Permanent Mission to ICAO. "2018 K-Beauty in Canada." News. Accessed May 13, 2019. http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/ca-montreal-en/brd/m_4455/view.do?seq=760515&fbclid=IwAR1Tu1-vmUf8eVKzleDaeWb29kii4Phx2ma0OjPhWoaascZPNHvEfftfR7s.

domestic context: it is a way to inscribe the neoliberal self into dominant systems of meaning rather than to resignify and subvert. However, as it moves transnationally, South Korean beauty culture transitions into something more subcultural, bringing with it stylistic elements that are recognizable and particular yet ultimately separate from mainstream aesthetics. Similarly to Harajuku fashion's association with anime fandom, upon its emergence into the North American market, South Korean beauty was associated with K-pop fandom and other Hallyu products like dramas and films, all of which might be considered subcultural from the perspective of North American mainstream culture (notable exceptions being PSY with his viral music video "Gangnam Style" and mega-stars BTS.)

However, South Korean beauty products and regimens are becoming more popular and accessible at least in North American contexts, perhaps even being resignified as mainstream. Rather than being associated with the K-pop or K-drama fandom, which is subcultural, South Korean cosmetics' appropriation by mainstream news sources, celebrities, and retail chains has allowed a larger proportion of the North American market to understand the signs and symbols it uses. For example, influential fashion news website Fashionista reports that K-beauty has started to become available in mainstream retail chains of varying target demographics, from expensive department stores like Barneys and Nordstrom to general stores like Ulta, Target, Walmart, CVS, and Sephora, as well as clothing stores like Forever 21.[138] The exposure that comes with being stocked in mainstream stores means that even consumers who aren't familiar with other parts of Hallyu or Korean culture both become aware of the existence of South Korean beauty as a global force worthy of attention and able to understand the stylistic elements that characterize South Korean beauty.

That said, even though the average consumer may have access to South Korean beauty products, the knowledge of South Korean beauty *culture*, (including the 10-step routine and the normative beauty standards that inform the development of these products) remains comparatively subcultural. The stylistic elements and signs, like a high

[138] Arabelle Sicardi,"Can We All Agree That K-Beauty Is Far More Than Just a Trend?" Fashionista. April 17, 2017. Accessed May 08, 2019. https://fashionista.com/2017/04/korean-beauty-skin-care-makeup-trend-united-states.

nose bridge, wide and sparkling eyes, or even commonly used vocabulary like "dewy" or "brightening" that are recognizable as part of South Korean beauty culture to someone in the know may be meaningless to a consumer who stumbles across a snail mask at Target. Compared to the casual consumer, those who are invested enough in South Korean beauty culture to attend the aforementioned expos and to mobilize South Korean cosmetics as a way to stylize the neoliberal self are relatively few. This is especially true outside of North America, where South Korean beauty may be less accessible due to import restrictions and to language barriers, considering the focus on English as the language of international expansion.

Looking at Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty and cosmetics together in their international movement as part of their respective states' nation-branding efforts allows us to more clearly see the way mainstream culture moving transnationally appeals to a more specific or subcultural demographic, while subcultural objects moving transnationally become, arguably, even more subcultural. Aspects of both Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty have gained visibility in mainstream North American media, but ultimately their inclusion in nation-branding projects and their creation of communities transnationally changes their contexts, dehistoricizes them, and opens them up to potentially new meanings. As we will see, Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty are mobilized not only by neoliberal subjects in their domestic contexts for purposes of self-branding: they create communities, affects, and interactions in global contexts. The transnational recontextualization of Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty impact the kinds of communities that form around these commodities and the self-brands that they help construct, because consumers of these brands may understand their stylistic elements differently based on how they fit into their local contexts.

In this chapter, we've been able to see the way neoliberal logics in Japan and South Korea encouraged the growth of creative classes and the development of subculture. We have also seen the way that nation-states enter the international market of nation-branding and attempt to generate soft power by exporting pop-cultural objects like music and film but also fashion and cosmetics. And, crucially, we've touched on some concepts that have yet to be paid proper attention, such as the term "ethical surplus," as well as the idea of self-brands. In chapter two, I will be exploring how exactly the neoliberal subject's identity

becomes bound up with the stylistic choices they make: how do they perform identity, and how can this identity be commodified? How does the self-brand create a sense of community among its consumers? In what kind of labor do neoliberal subjects engage in their cultivation of these brands? We will be able to see these concepts at work as I will turn to two films, *Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma Monogatari)* and *200 Pounds Beauty*, both of which are examples of the way Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics are mobilized by the neoliberal self to create self-brands (even if these brands are not explicitly defined as such) and show the kinds of labor that these subjects both consciously and unconsciously perform in order to inhabit their identities.

Chapter 2

The Self: Performing, Commodifying, Managing, Caring

The central figure of this thesis is the neoliberal self-branding subject, who constructs their identity through Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics, using social media as a tool. These self-branded subjects on social media are often referred to as *influencers*, and thus far I have touched upon the way that they play a role in fostering both domestic and transnational communities around Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics. To give a more specific definition, social media influencers are a type of micro-celebrity who make use of online social media platforms to foster an "authentic 'personal brand'" that other social media users can consume.[139] They are referred to as influencers largely because their success is measured according to how much influence over current trends they can generate, often bolstered by official partnerships with other companies.[140] Influencers by definition appeal to consumers using a persona that they cultivate online: they are able to associate specific stylistic elements, aesthetics, and products with their "identities" and do so, I argue, out of necessity in a world saturated by neoliberal capitalist logics. Thus, in chapter 2, I turn to theories of performance, immaterial labor, productive consumption, and brand management in order to examine the mechanisms that allow neoliberal subjects to cultivate self-brands on social media

Before spelling out exactly how an individual can cultivate a "self-brand" and how it can be made available as a product on social media, I must return to a more basic question: what is "identity," how is it constructed, and how does it become associated with the stylistic choices and individual makes about their fashion and makeup? It is important to understand this concept because neoliberal self-brands are commodifications of individuals' identities. After this process becomes clear, I can move on to explicate *brands* as a concept, the way brands create community and affect to generate popularity, and the kind of labor in which those creating self-brands must engage. I will return to the concept of labor in chapter 3 as well, when we examine the platform specificity of interaction between self-branded subjects and those who consume their brands. In the final part of this

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[139] Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ang, and Raymond Welling. "Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the Rise of Social Media Influencers." *Celebrity Studies*8, no. 2 (2016): 202.
[140] Ibid., 202.

chapter, I will examine two films in which neoliberal subjects construct self-brands via Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics, helping us to spell out the labor conditions that characterize this process.

Performing Identity: Embodied Practices

To begin, let us imagine a scene. You're out shopping for clothes with friends, and your friend suddenly calls your name for attention, holding out a garment for you to consider. "This is so you!" they tell you, holding it up so they can imagine how it would look on you. Here, we have two disparate sets of things: one, a piece of clothing with certain stylistic elements, and two, you. Your friend knows your "identity" well enough to associate it with a garment that displays a particular visual style. But what allows your friend to make this connection, and where does that "identity" come from in the first place? Judith Butler unpacks this concept in her book *Gender Trouble,* which explores "gender" as a social construct (i.e. as a category that society as a whole tends to agree upon and takes to be natural but is actually a product of discourse.)

In her argument, Butler points out that "identity" is commonly understood to be located in the "interior" of the self, where the body is understood as a permeable boundary between the interior self and the exterior world.[141] Although this concept of an interior self, or interiority, is itself constituted through social discourse, it is a key component of the coherent subject. Butler draws on the work of psychoanalytical theorist Julia Kristeva to explain where this "interiority" and "exteriority" come from: it is through abjection, wherein the subject expels some part of the interior self so that it becomes other, that the subject can constitute itself by making clear the distinction between other and not-other.[142] In other words, although the idea of an "interior self" is socially constructed, it is still a concept that is necessary, because it helps the subject distinguish between self and other, a distinction that is necessary to maintain stable subjecthood.

A person's "identity," which is said to reside within the "interior self," is taken by poststructural thought to not be an actual, self-constituted thing, but rather something constantly impacted by outside processes of construction, undoing, and reconstitution.

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[141] Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 183..
[142] Ibid., 182.

Judith Butler thus argues that identity is itself "performative." An action is "performative" when it create the impression that it is expressing an ontologically sound, actually existing interior identity on the surface of the body using signs and discourse, while actually that identity is itself composed only of those repeated actions.[143] This means that the identity is being performed on the surface of the body like an actor would perform a role in a play but that it does not have a corresponding interior "essence."[144] Butler explains this notion as it relates to gender: for example, I perform femininity, and my repeated performance creates the impression that my interior identity is "female," while really "female" is simply a category constructed through a system of signs, actions, and social discourse on the surface of the body.[145]

There are a number of parallels that may be drawn between Butler's theory that gender identity is performative and the idea that fashion or self-stylization is performative. Just as Butler asks what performance of gender creates the impression of interiority, we may also ask what creates the illusion that we are expressing our interior identities when we stylize ourselves in a certain way, whether through fashion or through cosmetics. For Butler, the repetition of *acts and gestures* of gender are the performative operations that appear to have an internal cause, and it is crucial that these acts and gestures constantly repeat in order to uphold the impression of a coherent identity.[146] Similarly, self-stylization is by definition composed of acts and gestures, constantly repeated on the surface of the body: wearing clothes, doing makeup and skincare, and other manipulations of appearance are done not once but habitually over time, creating the impression of a coherent style. Like gender, fashion and cosmetic styles can be understood as an amalgamation of signs on the surface of the body that are discursively constructed as coherent: although their elements actually have no intrinsic association or connection with each other, they are discursively unified into something coherent and recognizable. This interpretation is parallel to Michel Foucault's interpretation of "sex" as a category that discursively unifies completely

[143] Ibid., xv.
[144] Ibid., 185.
[145] Ibid., 185.
[146] Ibid., 185.

different and unrelated bodily parts and functions and then "postures within discourse as a *cause*."[147]

To give an example of the idea that self-stylization is performative, a person who wears black, incorporates chains and belts, and makes use of symbols like roses, crows, and skulls in their outfits would likely be understood to embrace the "identity" of being "goth," because these otherwise unrelated signs have been discursively constructed as a recognizable, unified style labeled "goth" that carries social meanings. Lauren Goodlad and Michael Bibby emphasize in their book *Goth: Undead Subcultures* that Goth is a symbolically rich and eclectic subcultural style, with its diverse stylistic elements undergirded by the discursively constructed social meanings such as "romantic obsessions with death, darkness, and perverse sexuality."[148] The aforementioned symbols all evoke this dark sensibility, as they are often associated with death: roses left on a grave, crows with their intimidating, dark bodies and seemingly predatory calls, and skulls recalling the image of something decayed or dangerous. Purportedly emerging from or in response to Punk, Goth met the familiar fate of many subcultures by becoming increasingly commodified, recognizable, and desirable by the mainstream culture. Popular and diverse media representations of Goth as a style and sensibility, such as Anne Rice's novel *Interview With A Vampire,* television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and brand character Emily the Strange all solidify the discursive construction that is a coherent Goth style in the minds of many North American consumers.[149]

In other words, much of the force behind the discursively constructed coherence of a style comes from media influence, which makes the style visible and accessible to the mainstream culture and creates consensus about its hegemonic meanings. This is not to say that the mass media-generated consensus about the meaning of a style is the only way to understand it, rather that it is the most *common* way to understand it because mass media has a far greater reach and visibility than individual subcultural members. Although a more in-depth discussion of the way mass media facilitates, controls, and censors public

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147 Ibid., 128.

148 Lauren M. E. Goodlad and Michael Bibby. *Goth: Undead Subculture*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1.

149 Ibid., 31.

discourse is out of the scope of this thesis, it is important to recognize its constant underlying presence and to be aware of how it plays a role in knowledge production.

Thus, a person who displays a fascination with death and darkness and wears clothing with the aforementioned symbols (like skulls) will likely be understood to be performing a Goth identity: they repeatedly wear clothes, do makeup, and consume images that are societally agreed upon as "Goth." This allows a connection to be drawn between the performance of gender as Judith Butler explains it and the performance of "identity" through clothing and cosmetic stylization. While the repetition of *acts and gestures* of gender are the performative operations that appear to have an internal cause, similarly, the action of wearing clothing and using cosmetics to alter the appearance appears to reflect interiority by inscribing this identity on the surface of the body. I argue that a localized, individual-specific *taste* positions itself as the apparent "internal cause" of fashion and cosmetic stylization.

Taste, like gender or identity, is constructed and impacted by the social context, but it presents as if it is entirely unique to the individual and in so doing thus obscures its external influences. Pierre Bourdieu has famously theorized about the mechanisms that contribute to the creation of individual taste, especially regarding the arts (including fine art, cinema, and music,) which he maintains are inextricably linked to class and the codes of meaning they contain.[150] Class, which is itself made up of a number of different factors including educational level, occupation, gender, sex, age, and others, overall serves to locate the individual in the social hierarchy and to define the peer group with which their expression of taste will principally communicate.

Bourdieu divides taste into three main categories and links each of them to differences between classes defined foremost by occupation, academic capital, and social origin: legitimate taste, associated with the upper classes with higher education; middle-brow taste, associated with the middle class; and popular taste, which is associated with the less-educated working class.[151] He explains that higher classes with higher educational and social capital are endowed with the privilege of "identifying what is worthy of being seen and the right way to see it," defining which cultural products are socially endorsed

[150] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction,* 5.
[151] Ibid., 16.

and which aren't and thus allowing other classes of taste to be defined in degrees of separation away from that legitimate culture.[152] This process is especially evident in our discussion of mainstream versus subculture: often, the legitimate culture as defined by those with cultural capital is considered mainstream.

One of the most important parts of Bourdieu's definition of social class is his emphasis on *practice*, which is the concrete manifestation of all components of class. For this he posits a formula: [(habitus)(capital)]+field=practice.[153] This basically means that an individual's habitus, or the "internalized form of class conditions" (the set of skills, values, and habits that become reflexive after a long exposure to a particular social environment) along with the individual's cultural capital (the relative value they hold based on their educational level, material possessions, and other similar attributes) operate together in a given field (like education or religion) to produce *practice*.[154] This formula is particularly important to our discussion of fashion and cosmetics because of the performative identities fashion facilitates, an essential part of which is practice and the repetition of action. Bourdieu's formulation of practice is useful in that it allows us to see how the construction of social identity and the performance of that identity through fashion and cosmetics operates in a somewhat circular way: the clothes one owns help to construct identity through contributing to one's objectified cultural capital, which in turn plays a role in determining the practices that are necessary to uphold that social identity (such as the practice of self-styling or buying a certain style of clothing) something which again contributes to the cultural capital that determined this practice).

One important feature of identities that appear to be expressed by performative actions, according to Butler, is that their constructed nature makes them susceptible to disintegration: the "arbitrary relation" between acts, "the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formation, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction."[155] This is why *practice* is so important to the construction of coherent identity: practice is by definition the repetition of action. It is the

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[152] Ibid., 28.
[153] Ibid., 101.
[154] Ibid., 101.
[155] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 192.

way action becomes habit or custom rather than a one-time occurrence. In order to keep a constructed identity from being exposed as a construct, in order to avoid the "possibility of a failure to repeat," action must become practice. As Bourdieu describes, this practice is directly informed by taste, which "transforms… classified practices, in which a class condition signifies itself (through taste), into classifying practices, that is, into a symbolic expression of class position."[156] If we take practice, the repetition of action, to be the reflection of class position signified through taste as Bourdieu asserts, we can see more clearly the way taste becomes bound up with identity. The very practices used to uphold identity and its coherence are expressions of the individual's habitus, including class. This habitus and class are also key components in the construction of an individual's taste. As a result, we can understand taste itself as a classifying practice.

To make clearer and more concrete the above processes of identity construction, performance, and unraveling through fashion stylization, we can look to director Nakashima Tetsuya's beloved film, *Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma Monogatari,* 2004*)*.[157] It tells the whimsical story of two girls living in rural Ibaraki prefecture: Momoko, a Lolita who lives with her reformed-gangster father and her childlike but capable grandmother, meets Ichiko, a girl who joined Ibaraki's all-female biker gang after being bullied at school. As their friendship develops, both Momoko and Ichiko construct and perform their identities via clothing stylization, creating the impression of an interior that is being expressed on the surface of their bodies. However, throughout the narrative their constructed identities are constantly challenged and subject to disintegration, exposing the fact that they are simply made up of the repetition of acts and gestures over time rather than prediscursive entities.

From the beginning of the film, there is a focus on clothing as a site of class difference. Momoko distinguishes herself from the other people in her small town by the physical pilgrimage she must make to buy her clothes in Daikanyama, which is far away and inconvenient. In contrast, her neighbors in rural Ibaraki buy their clothes at the local grocery store, Jusco. Momoko clearly regards them as inferior as a result, and the film emphasizes this by highlighting the townspeople and their clothes as if in an ad: the camera

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[156] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction,* 175.

[157] *Kamikaze Girls.* Directed by Tetsuya Nakashima. Tokyo: Toho Company Ltd, 2004.

zooms in on them posing with their unfashionable, cheap clothes, as Momoko looks on disapprovingly. This consciousness of class difference is not limited to her current situation, however: Momoko describes her hometown, Amagasaki, a town known for its gangs, debauchery, and bootleg merchandise, as a place where "everyone is born and dies in a tracksuit."[158] Momoko has affective associations with such style of dress as something utilitarian and unrefined, evoking the image of a dishonest lifestyle of the "losers" with less education who occupy the city. This image of an un-luxurious, and crucially *de-individualized* lifestyle is in direct opposition to her obsession with her opulent, frilly Lolita dresses.

As Anne McKnight asserts, French baroque and rococo aesthetics gained popularity in post-war Japan as a way for feminine subjects to gain freedom and autonomy and were variously understood as "'decorative' and 'playfully free,'" "'unusual, vulgar, exuberant, and beyond the norm,'" and as a site of "newness, openness, and rupture."[159] There is an "emphasis on the spectacular, a delight in sensory experiences" that directly contrasts with the utilitarian simplicity and relative cheapness of tracksuits.[160] As a result, we may read Momoko's consumption of rococo and baroque-inspired Lolita dresses as an example of what Brooke Erin Duffy calls "aspirational consumption," in which taste as a reflection of class and cultural capital creates a tendency for consumers to "emulate" the consumption patterns of those of a higher class or with more cultural capital than them.[161] Despite Momoko's origins in the "loser," tracksuit-wearing class in her hometown, she dresses and consumes commodities according to her desire to distance herself from her background and to join the luxurious French elite.

Apart from the class-consciousness reflected in Momoko's consumption of and taste for lolita fashion, *Kamikaze Girls* offers a visualization of the practice and repetition of action that are the performative operations of identity construction. For example, both of the protagonists identify their discovery of their respective fashion styles as moment of

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[158] Ibid.

[159] Anne McKnight, "Frenchness and Transformation in Japanese Subculture, 1972–2004." *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 122.

[160] Ibid., 122.

[161] Brooke Erin Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 23.

transformation or rebirth. Momoko's discovery of Lolita was the point where "the old me was slain and I was reborn," likening it to a "fatal wound" that killed her disaffected, uninspired younger self and sent her on a crusade of commodity consumption.[162] Crucially, her discovery of the baroque and rococo allowed Momoko to aestheticize everyday life, something that Bourdieu locates as the mark of the truly elite: "nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the… even rarer capacity to constitute aesthetically objects that are ordinary or even 'common'… or to apply the principles of a 'pure' aesthetic in the most everyday choices of everyday life, in cooking, dress or decoration, for example."[163] Momoko's discovery of Lolita allows her to aestheticize her lifestyle as part of her performance of identity, eating only sweets, refraining from strenuous activity or labor, decorating her personal space with lace and floral fabrics, visiting physical spaces like a fancy coffee shop called "Nobility Forest" and the Baby the Stars Shine Bright shop, and listening to Johann Strauss's music. These aspects of her performance are all aligned with the hyperfemininity that Lolita embodies and also stay true to the rococo rejection of hard work and productivity and embrace of leisure.[164]

Ichiko's performed identity is also strongly associated with her fashion stylization: the wears a long "kamikaze" coat that is emblematic of her membership in the biker gang, a social status that she appears to take as the core of her identity. Ichiko conveys this sentiment to Momoko when she entrusts this coat to her to be embroidered: "giving you my coat is putting my life in your hands," she tells her.[165] Much as Momoko's discovery marked her "death" and "rebirth," flashbacks to Ichiko's middle school years present an entirely different character in both style and demeanor: Ichiko's adaptation of biker-girl dress marks her drastic metamorphosis from dimwitted bullying victim to headstrong, gritty rule-breaker. Before joining the biker gang, her style had been much like that of the other people in rural Ibaraki prefecture: she practices piano with her unremarkable middle class family, she sports unfashionable spectacles and a conventional haircut, and she forces a smile as her classmates trip her in the hallway and dump water on her head. But in

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[162] *Kamikaze Girls.* Directed by Tetsuya Nakashima. Tokyo: Toho Company Ltd, 2004.
[163] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction,* 40.
[164] Anne McKnight, "Frenchness and Transformation in Japanese Subculture, 1972–2004," 135.
[165] *Kamikaze Girls.* Directed by Tetsuya Nakashima. Tokyo: Toho Company Ltd, 2004.

swapping her school uniform for a kamikaze suit, Ichiko also swaps her meek manner and forced smile for a tough façade. She rides motorbikes, spits and headbutts people when angry, speaks with a rough accent, and even changes her name from Ichigo to Ichiko because she thinks it sounds tougher.[166] She also wears dark makeup and sports long bangs that cover her eyes. These elements are all part of her embodied practice of identity.

However, the visualization and exaggeration of these practices simultaneously highlight the performative, discursively constructed nature of identity. Although Momoko's and Ichiko's expressions of "self" highlight the affinity between identity and fashion stylization, there are also many instances in which their identities' performative, discursively constructed nature is exposed. To recall Judith Butler's analysis, a core characteristic of performative identities is that their constructed nature makes them susceptible to disintegration, meaning that identity created through fashion needs to be constantly maintained in order to present something unified and consistent, for if they fail to repeat, this "phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" will be exposed.[167] Both Momoko and Ichiko present examples of the way in which fashion as the site of identity construction requires constant maintenance. Moments of discord or discomfort occur when Momoko and Ichiko find themselves in physical spaces or acting in ways that do not align with their performed identities. This happens when Ichiko joins Momoko in a fancy coffee shop that does not align with her gritty, rough aesthetic, and when Momoko accompanies Ichiko to a smoky pachinko parlor in Tokyo, a place more reminiscent of her family's shady past from which she tries to distance herself than of a luxurious rococo elite. Their presence in these physical spaces, taking part in activities that are incongruous with their performed identities, creates obvious discomfort, especially for Momoko. When she discovers that mice have chewed holes in her bonnet, she interprets it as punishment from the "rococo gods" for "associating with thugs" and "getting carried away with pachinko," indicating her awareness that her actions were threatening to her identity as a Lolita.[168]

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[166] Ibid.

[167] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 192.

[168] *Kamikaze Girls.* Directed by Tetsuya Nakashima. Tokyo: Toho Company Ltd, 2004.

Apart from these moments of incongruousness that expose the constructed nature of their identities from moment to moment, the most important instance of rupture occurs at the climax of the movie, when Momoko, dressed in a frilly white frock, rushes down the highway on a motorbike to rescue Ichiko from being beaten by the members of her biker gang for trying to leave. Despite the anguish she had once expressed upon finding holes in her precious bonnet, she he doesn't even notice as it flies off in the wind and disappears behind her. Further, in the midst of the fighting, Momoko's pristine white dress is splattered with blood, and she is pushed into a mud puddle.

As the carefully constructed illusion of Rococo luxury with which she identifies is sullied by violence, dirt, and blood, Momoko herself seems to go through a sort of metamorphosis. Although her character was never cozy and warm (rather exhibiting a dry bluntness in her speech and a lack of empathy or emotion in her attitude) she appears to adopt a character closer to those of the girls in the biker gang: forceful, demanding, even violent, moving from a helpless bystander to an active agent. She yells threats in Osaka dialect, abandoning her proper manner of speech, and spits on the ground like the gang members do. Footage of her swinging wildly at the gang with a baseball bat and threatening them verbally is juxtaposed against a classical soundtrack and a voiceover of Momoko describing her desire to be born in rococo-era France, seemingly a formal acknowledgement of her disrupted performance of Lolita identity. As her clothes are ruined, so she abandons any pretense of maintaining the performance, the repeated affects and actions, of her identity as a Lolita, exposing this identity's constructed nature. Her entire countenance and body posture changes, making the sullied, white Lolita dress seem as if it were there by mistake. Its power as aesthetic tool of identity construction has been completely removed. Although the film, through its straightforward portrayals of the often unrealistic or extreme ways in which Momoko attempts to construct her identity as a Lolita (for example, her refusal to eat anything other than sweets and desserts) makes clear to the viewer from early on that this identity is something she performs, it is at the climax of the movie that Momoko is completely unable to maintain the performance, fully exposing her identity's constructed nature through its disintegration.

In the aftermath of this exposure, Momoko almost immediately slips back into her performance of lolita identity, returning to her more standard speech patterns and wearing

cutesy bandages over her cuts. She is even able to layer her disrupted performance into her identity, claiming that she is the daughter of a made-up gang leader, and that her power comes precisely from the hyperfeminine Lolita dresses that she wears. Ichiko, however, is faced with the task of reconstructing her identity, as much of it was premised upon her membership in a gang of which she is no longer a part. The difficulty of this renegotiation is emphasized as Ichiko dons frilly and lacey Lolita dresses as part of her new modeling career: she refuses to perform the actions and gestures that are supposed to correspond to Lolita identity, making the dresses seem more like a costume or a tool than as a tool of identity construction.

Although real-life as performances of identity through fashion stylization are not as blatant and exaggerated as the ones portrayed in *Kamikaze Girls,* the film is a particularly apt example of the performative nature of identity precisely because of this exaggeration. The blatant and almost satirical performances act as allegories for neoliberal subjects' quotidian, subtle, and even unconscious performances of identity, therefore making it much more obvious when this performance is interrupted.

To sum up, the practice of self-stylizing according to the individual's taste helps the individual to locate the self in its social context and to maintain that position, much as Momoko and Ichiko do in *Kamikaze Girls*. The identity that the individual performs through this taste practice is thus associated directly with taste itself. This association of taste with identity is crucial to the commodification of the self, because taste is also a *value-producing practice*. In other words, taste allows the performance of identity to generate value and therefore can be understood not only as a practice but also as a form of *labor*.

Consumption as Labor: Taste Work

Min-Ha T. Pham, in her book *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet: Race, Gender, and the Work of Personal Style Blogging,* examines what she terms the "taste work" of fashion superbloggers from Asia, whose "taste practices are value-producing activities that generate a significant though highly uneven amount of cultural, social, and sometimes financial capital."[169] These fashion superbloggers are neoliberal subjects whose tastes both help them construct an identity *and* commodify this identity by generating economic value

[169] Min-Ha T. Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet Race, Gender, and the Work of Personal Style Blogging*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 5.

via practices of brand management that I will explain shortly. Pham explains that the "taste labor" of these superbloggers, especially their conspicuous consumption of brands, generates economic value by advertising on behalf of the company, increasing the visibility of the brand, and generating "interest and trust" by showing consumers how the product can be used, all often for free.[170] The specific commodities or brands that superbloggers consume are indicative of their identities as consumers themselves. Superblogger fashionista Susanna Lau asserts that, as a social media influencer, "her product is 'my eye, my point of view, a certain taste,'" rather than a physical object.[171] Here, Lau is gesturing at the fact that her taste is both value-producing labor *and* a product itself. This double functionality points toward the way in which the distinctions between consumption and production are being eroded: Lau's taste practices (specifically, consuming commodities according to her individual taste) both produces economic value for the commodity's brand and positions her individual taste as something that others can consume, that can influence their own tastes and consumption practices.

The idea of consumption as labor or production is not a new one, emerging often in fan and media studies. For example, Marc Steinberg in his book *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* describes a phenomenon called "narrative consumption," starting with a Japanese snack called Bikkuriman. Included with each snack package was an image sticker with a small description on it, a small token that does not make much sense on its own but which slowly becomes implicated in a story world with the repeated consumption of the product.[172] In this case, repeated consumption produces a coherent story, allowing consumers to become familiar with a story world's "grand narrative" through smaller narratives or even fragmented images.[173] This narrative consumption encourages consumers to produce secondary material based on the grand narrative, blurring the lines between officially produced material and fan-produced material: according to Steinberg, "the endgame of narrative consumption is ultimately the

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[170] Ibid., 5.

[171] Ibid., 7.

[172] Marc Steinberg, *Animes Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 178.

[173] Ibid., 179.

displacement of official producers in favor of consumers-as-producers."[174] According to Otsuka Eiji and Kadokawa Tsuguhiko, this leads to a condition in which "making a commodity and consuming it merge into one."[175] In fan practices of "secondary production," the distinction between production and consumption becomes blurred.[176]

Apart from the productive consumption of fans, Italian autonomist Marxist Maurizzio Lazarrato also posits a theory of consumption as production. He claims that "immaterial labor," a new kind of post-industrial labor that creates social relations around objects rather than the objects themselves, produces a new relationship between consumption and production.[177] For Lazzarato, consumption is a kind of immaterial labor, as commodities are "not destroyed in the act of consumption" but instead inform the "'ideological' and cultural environment of the consumer."[178] In other words, the rise of immaterial labor has made it so that consumption of commodities produces social relations and frames of meaning rather than simply destroying or using up the product, thus also "transform[ing] the person" who consumes.[179]

This idea that consuming commodities produces social relations and transforms the consumer is particularly important to online microcelebrities like those Pham examines. This is because the consumption-based "taste work" of Susanna Lau and other social media influencers is a variety of Lazzarato's "immaterial labor." To expand on this concept, immaterial labor is labor that creates immaterial products like aesthetics or affects, or, as Lau points out, a point of view or a taste.[180] Immaterial labor has become the privileged form of labor with the rise of post-Fordist neoliberal capitalism, replacing the manual, material labor that produces physical commodities like coffee cups, forks, or hats. Part of the reason this immaterial labor has emerged as the privileged form over material labor is that the neoliberal lifeworld is increasingly saturated with brands: public space, virtual space, and even the home are all "filled with attempts to manage and steer how we actually

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[174] Ibid., 179.
[175] Ibid., 179.
[176] Ibid., 179.
[177] Maurizio Lazzarato and Jeremy Gilbert, *Experimental Politics: Work, Welfare, and Creativity in the Neoliberal Age*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017) 137.
[178] Ibid., 137.
[179] Ibid., 137.
[180] Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*. (London: Routledge, 2011): 10.

produce truth, beauty, and utility around goods."[181] In order to steer these consumer activities, brands must first capture consumers' attention, something that is becoming increasingly difficult due to the large number and wide variety of brands attempting to do just this. In this competitive environment, simply looking and giving that attention can be understood to be value producing acts: giving attention is repositioned as a type of immaterial labor, producing "the substance of brand value" by creating common social grounds and emotional investments.[182] These social grounds and emotional investments are what Lazzarato calls "ethical surplus," the main product of immaterial labor.[183] In other words, "ethical surplus" encompasses the shared affects, emotions, and communities that emerge around brands and their goods.

Brands create desire among consumers by offering possibilities for being and action: using a commodity, a consumer "can become a particular kind of person, and form particular kinds of relations to others"; the consumer of commodities is transformed.[184] This is why an individual's taste in brand is so effective in constructing their identity and their own self-brand. By consuming a particular brand, an individual is subscribing to and endorsing the aesthetics, affects, and especially *lifestyles* that the brand creates. Arvidsson even goes so far as to claim that in the absence of more traditional forms of community, brands are what facilitate the development of not only identity but also *subjectivity* "as a *capitalist* response to the post-modern condition of insecurity and reflexivity," that is, neoliberalism.[185] In other words, neoliberalism's emphasis on the individual erodes the sense of community created by institutions like the neighborhood, and thus it creates the perfect condition for brands to fill the empty space; brands help the individual develop both a subjectivity and identity in the neoliberal lifeworld.

The individual's taste in brands is constructed in much the same way as taste in art, as brands and their goods (and the advertising that inevitably accompanies them) are arguably a form of art themselves: individuals develop a taste for certain brands depending on the social class of which they are a part, or of which they wish to be a part. As we can

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[181] Adam Arvidsson, "Brands: A Critical Perspective." *Journal of Consumer Culture*5, no. 2 (2005): 236.
[182] Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture,* 7.
[183] Ibid., 10.
[184] Ibid., 8.
[185] Ibid., 83.

see, there are two forces at work that allow individuals to construct lifestyles associated with their identities: one, the possibilities for being and action promised by brands, and two, taste itself, which lets practice be understood as a "symbolic expression of class position."[186] Brands and taste, and especially taste in brands, work together to construct a coherent lifestyle that inscribes a given individual into their social context by being a reflection of the internalized conditions of this social context.

To connect these ideas back to the previous discussion of the need for the individual's becoming an entrepreneur of the self in chapter 1, we must examine how, offering taste and lifestyle (among other things) as products, individuals' identities can become brands. Taste, as we've established, appears to compose and express an individual's identity by virtue of its masquerade as a feature of the self's interior and as a tool to inscribe and fix an individual within a particular social context. In becoming an entrepreneur of the self, individuals mobilize taste to create a market and to encourage others' participation in that market. If an individual can construct a unified taste and make it visible to others as such, then the same attention that creates "ethical surplus" around brands and goods, that is, emotional investments and especially a sense of community, can create these things around individuals as well.

Brand Management

The most important thing for any brand is to offer possibilities for being and action to their potential consumers. As Adam Arvidsson describes, brands "exploit the productivity of consumers" by anticipating the way consumers will create new meanings around and through the product, new ways of acting with the product, and new communities surrounding the brand, all of which are forms of ethical surplus.[187] This value creation through the harnessing of consumers' productive activities is what Arvidsson terms "contemporary brand management" (in contrast to older forms of brand management which operated differently).[188] No longer is a brand's value determined by

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[186] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction,* 175.

[187] Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture,* 68.

[188] Arvidsson's main distinction between contemporary and previous forms of brand management is that 20th century marketing practices, which were basically a form of management, were unidirectional: they were concerned with generating needs and desires among consumers. In contrast, contemporary brand

their products' quality or even usefulness; rather, a brand's value lies in the "whole relation between a product and its consumer," in its social and affective dimensions.[189]

Arvidsson describes a number of ways that contemporary brand management attempts to open up environments that facilitate consumer creation of meaning and potential action through a brand's products. Consumers create meaning within the limits of a certain "ambience," controlled environments that predetermine the possible meanings and actions.[190] This means that if brand management can construct the ambience within which the brand will be consumed, it can also control the meanings and actions that will be produced through consumption. Brand management wants to guide consumers' creative activities so that they *add value* to the brand and to shut down the creation of any potentially harmful or oppositional meanings.[191]

But apart from harnessing the creativity of consumers to generate value, brand management also aims to maintain the attention of consumers across a variety of media platforms. As I mentioned earlier, given the saturation of our physical and virtual surroundings with brands, all competing for attention, giving attention has itself become a value-producing action. As well, because consumers use multiple platforms to interact with and consume media, brands must be present on all of them in order to effectively capture attention.[192] One of the main ways that brands do this is by putting the product in a variety of situations, both in the consumer's physical life-world and in the media that consumers encounter, often through techniques like product placement (in movies, TV shows etc.) and "cross-promotions."[193] This means that although a brand like Starbucks may pay money for their products to be used conspicuously in a popular television show, this generates value for the brand by showing consumers the right way to use or enjoy the product.[194] This, coupled with real life events and exhibitions, allows the consumer to begin to develop

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management is mutli-directional: it pays attention to the meanings consumers create around goods, rather than dictating these meanings for them. (Arvidsson, 15).

[189] Ibid., 82.

[190] Ibid., 16.

[191] Ibid., 76.

[192] Ibid., 76.

[193] Ibid., 76.

[194] Ibid., 77.

affective attachments to brands and their products according to the guidance that the brands offer.

"Brand extensions" do something similar, expanding the reach of the brand away from their main product and offering a wider variety of branded products: even if an aspiring Lolita can't afford an entire dress from popular sweet Lolita brand Baby the Stars Shine Bright, they might be able to afford a hair accessory, cute socks, photobook, or a teddy bear. In this way, brand identity can be extended from the narrow reach afforded by one particular product (whether a coffee, a dress, or a car) to a much wider range of products which themselves offer new possibilities of use, all the while contributing to the development of ambience.[195]

Product placement and brand extension aim to create a mood, feeling, or affective relation around brands, but brand management's strategies for developing an ambience include physical techniques as well. Apart from engaging the consumer in pedagogical activities by opening stores containing theme park-like interactive opportunities, brand management also seeks to create branded communities, or social relations revolving around a brand and its products.[196] Institutions like loyalty clubs and special events allow consumers of a brand to create links with each other, directly facilitating the creation of the "ethical surplus" I described above. For example, many Lolita brands hold exclusive tea party events that consumers can attend. Popular Japanese Lolita brand Angelic Pretty held an event in 2017 to celebrate the one-year anniversary of its Paris location's opening, inviting Lolitas wearing their "favorite Angelic Pretty coordination to spend a gracious moment together."[197] The event, held in the grand Salon Pompadour at a hotel near the Louvre promised exclusive access to the brand's newest line of dresses, prizes and raffles, and the opportunity to meet special guests (including models and designers involved with the brand.)[198] This event encouraged consumers to create bonds with one another, making friends around the consumption of Angelic Pretty's products and participating in activities, all in a brand-saturated space.

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[195] Ibid., 78.

[196] Ibid., 80.

[197] Angelic Pretty Paris. "Angelic Pretty Tea Party in Paris 2017 !" Angelic Pretty Official Web Site. Accessed May 09, 2019. http://www.angelicpretty.com/en/2017paris2.htm.

[198] Ibid.

The tea party was especially effective in creating an ambience for the brand, as it was held in a location saturated with stylistic elements that figure prominently in brand's design (drawing on the French baroque aesthetics in the Tuileries Gardens and Versailles.)[199] It was thus an effective way to show consumers one prominent context in which the brand was ideally intended to be used: having fancy tea parties in opulent halls. Such live events are effective ways to guide consumers' future creative uses of the brand's product: given this demonstration, Lolitas are more likely to use the Angelic Pretty brand in similar contexts, creating a community by holding their own tea parties and other related events. These uses uphold the brand's desired identity and add value rather than challenging or modifying this identity in ways that risk damaging the brand's reputation.

Neoliberal subjects who present their unified tastes on social media platforms for potential consumption by other users engage in similar activities, attempting to direct attention and to control the surplus meanings and connections that consumers make around the tastes and lifestyles that are offered for consumption. As self-branded subjects, they engage in the same kind of brand management as brands that produce physical commodities, attempting to construct the ambiences in which their brands' products will be consumed. Considering the importance of consuming actual branded commodities to the construction of self-brands online, one of the main ways that self-brands generate cultural and sometimes economic value is by product placement and promotions, much like material brands do. As an influencer cultivates their personal brand's cultural capital, that is, influence over the tastes of others, they are sometimes able to monetize their online taste work through sponsorships. Although much of the labor that influencers and bloggers put into their self-brands is unpaid and voluntary, these sponsorships offer an opportunity to see profit from this labor.[200] Not only does it generate revenue for the brand of the promoted commodity by placing the commodity in different real life and digital situations, it does the same for the influencer's self-brand. By showing themselves consuming specific products, self-branded subjects effectively show their brands in a variety of milieus by associating their brands with certain kinds of commodities.

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[199] Ibid.

[200] Min-Ha T. Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet,* 17.

For example, South Korean beauty Youtuber PONY Syndrome published a video entitled "SUQQU X PONY Modern Chic Tangerine Look (With sub)" in which she features footage of herself visiting makeup brand SUQQU's headquarters in Japan. Walking through a clean, bright space, she learns the professional face massage and makeup techniques used by the brand, which she then teaches to her viewers. As the embodiment of her brand, this footage of her in branded environments works two ways: to promote SUQQU by showing it being used properly and by giving it a (micro)celebrity endorsement, and to promote PONY Syndrome's brand by showing how to perform or practice a PONY Syndrome-branded taste or lifestyle (see Appendix, Figure 3). SUQQU's minimalist yet elegant brand of makeup contributes to the creation of an ambience for PONY's brand, showing how consumers can most effectively be like her: by implementing these self-care techniques and using SUQQU products (and others with similar elegant and minimal aesthetics), consumers of PONY's tastes and lifestyle can mobilize these to create their own tastes and lifestyles. In this way, PONY's brand becomes more valuable as consumer creativity unfolds according to the ambience created by PONY's use of SUQQU products. Not only does PONY herself make money from this sponsorship, she also makes it clearer how consumers can use her taste and lifestyle to create their own, something which often results in consumers buying the products from brands who sponsor her.

Another effective technique of brand management in which influencers engage is that of brand expansion. As well as being a way to monetize and generate revenue from their otherwise unpaid labor, making physical commodities available along with the tastes and lifestyles of self-branded subjects enables the brand to extend its reach among consumers. Some influencers simply sell merchandise on their websites (like sweaters or phone cases with their brand name) but others achieve a high enough level of popularity to start selling their branded merchandise in larger markets. PONY Syndrome, for example, started her own cosmetic line called Pony Effect, which sells makeup products like lip color, bb cream, eyeshadow, and blending sponges.[201] PONY is, however, part of a small group of influencers who are able to make a living from their social media presences, easily translating their largely immaterial self-brands into branded physical commodities. But

[201] Huey Yun Teo, "5 Pony Effect Products That You Need to Try If You Want to Call Yourself a Korean Beauty Junkie." Daily Vanity. April 01, 2019. Accessed May 09, 2019. https://dailyvanity.sg/trends/pony-effects/

many aspiring influencers, as Brooke Erin Duffy asserts, are simply that: aspiring. They engage in self-branding practices but few are able to attain the level of monetary payoff that PONY has: in fact, only between 8% and 17% of bloggers can support themselves solely on the money they earn from blogging. [202]

As part of brand expansion, in an attempt increase their popularity, many bloggers and self-branded social media influencers turn to websites like Patreon to earn an income. Patreon, conceived as a platform to support independent artists, epitomizes neoliberal ideals of autonomous, creative work, relying on a familiar rhetoric of empowerment to promise users the ability to "create on [their] own terms," by taking care of the financial precarity that often characterizes self-branding labor.[203] Patreon, the name itself a play on the word "patron," allows influencers to build a profile on which their followers can pledge their allegiance by volunteering to pay a predetermined amount of money each month in return for special privileges. Members gain access to different levels, or "tiers" of benefits depending on the amount they pay per month. These benefits may include early access to new content, access to exclusive members-only content, discounted or free merchandise, access to community chatrooms, or even opportunities to interact directly with the influencers themselveNot only is this system useful to self-branded subjects in that it gives them the opportunity to expand their brands through new, physical commodities, it also creates *branded communities.* By concentrating all of the influencer's most devout fans/consumers and giving them a space within which to interact with each other, influencers are able to create revenue-generating communities around their brands, a form of Lazzarato's "ethical surplus." While such branded communities can form in places like the comments sections on YouTube and Instagram, the branded communities that form through membership on Patreon are more exclusive and exist within a much more tightly controlled ambience, much like the community that attends the Angelic Pretty tea party in Paris.

To reiterate the processes described above, neoliberal subjects who self-brand on social media engage in the same processes of contemporary brand management as brands

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[202] Brooke Erin Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love,* 16.

[203] Patreon. "Best Way for Artists and Creators to Get Sustainable Income and Connect With Fans." Patreon. Accessed May 09, 2019. http://www.patreon.com/.

whose primary products are physical commodities. Self-brands employ techniques like product placement, brand expansion, and the creation of branded communities in order to harness and, in some cases, generate revenue from the creative potential of consumers, who mobilize commodities to create their own frames of meaning, being, and action. As self-branded subjects engage in techniques of brand management to make their self-brands more competitive and successful in the neoliberal market, brand management becomes coextensive with self-management. We can therefore understand brand management, as well as the process of branding the self through fashion and cosmetic stylization as techniques of the self in a Foucauldian sense.

Neoliberal Techniques of the Self: Constructing is Knowing is Caring

As I established in chapter 1, one of the most salient features of neoliberalism is that the subject performs self-care in the absence of state institutions or welfare, and that this self-care functions to simultaneously uphold the health of the state. The unique set of rules and expectations that characterize neoliberalism make it so that subjects must act in a way that is consistent with these rules and expectations. This is what Foucault calls governmentality, or the "conduct of conduct."[204] As Graham Burchell explains, government, as a "way of acting to affect the way in which individuals *conduct themselves,"* is understood as the intersection between external forces that impact individuals' conduct *and* what Foucault calls "techniques of the self."[205] In other words, government is an amalgamation of both external forces that necessitate certain kind of conduct *and* the way that individuals conduct themselves. In the case of neoliberal governmentality, the rules and restrictions of neoliberal life-worlds impact the conduct of neoliberal subjects and intersect with the techniques that these individuals can use to "effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."[206] Although criteria like "happiness,

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[204] Graham Burchell, "Liberal Government and Techniques of the Self." In *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose, (London: Routledge, 1996): 19.

[205] Ibid., 19.

[206] Michel Foucault, "'Technologies of the Self.' Lectures at University of Vermont Oct. 1982," in *Technologies of the Self* (Univ. of Massachusets Press, 1988).

purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" are indeed subjective, the underlying necessity for all of them is life. In other words, in order to achieve "happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality," the individual must be able to survive in hyper-economic, hyper-competitive neoliberal contexts.

In the previous chapter I described the consequences of an inability to or refusal to adhere to neoliberal expectations, for example in the case of members of the lost generation in Japan who did not have adequate access to the full-time jobs that would afford them benefits, like healthcare, that the neoliberal state did not provide. As Anne Allison emphasizes, "freeters" and other comparatively disenfranchised populations find it more difficult to survive in Japan's neoliberal lifeworld because they are less able to successfully compete in the market economy. Neoliberal techniques of the self are thus techniques that individuals perform on themselves that allow them to be more successful neoliberal subjects, i.e. subjects who can not only meet the most basic conditions of life (like finding food and shelter) but *thrive* in neoliberal conditions. The ability to live is a prerequisite for thriving, and in order to do so, it is increasingly necessary to conduct oneself according to neoliberal governmentality and the corresponding techniques of the self that facilitate easier participation in markets. This participation provides individuals with the resources necessary to secure the conditions of life. The challenge then lies in defining what it means to thrive, or to attain the aforementioned state of happiness or perfection.

I argue that the main reason that cosmetic and fashion stylization is a neoliberal technique of the self is that it is a form of self-care. Crucially, Foucault claims "care of the self is the care of activity and not the care of soul as substance [the body]," because the self is "not the body, but the *soul,*" which might at first glance appear to contradict the assertion that fashion and cosmetic stylization is a technique of the self, or of self-care.[207] Indeed, these practices are physical and embodied, premised around the care of the physical body rather than what Foucault calls the "soul." However, I argue that because self-stylization with fashion and cosmetics is a performative process, a repetitive action and practice that allows the individual to construct and express a coherent identity, it impacts the body

[207] Ibid., 1.

while simultaneously caring for the "soul." The performative nature of self-stylization through fashion and makeup is a form of *introspection*; it is a way for the individual to solidify its subjectivity and attain what it thinks is a greater understanding of its identity. This is necessary, because "purification of the soul is impossible without self-knowledge" according to Foucault, an idea which he identifies as the "Delphic principle."[208] To achieve "purity," something for which techniques of the self strive, one must *know the self*. Foucault offers a number of ways that individuals have historically attempted to gain greater understanding of the self: he claims that the soul must look at itself in a "mirror" in order to know itself, allowing it to "discover rules that serve as a basis for behavior," or appropriate rules of conduct.[209] This sort of introspection and reflection included diverse practices that varied depending on historical period but including writing and taking notes on the self's actions, documenting in detail the "nuances of life, mood, and reading," as well as dialogue and rhetoric, and later, simple listening and learning.[210]

In today's neoliberal lifeworld, then, I argue that a dominant practice of introspection is the performance and construction of coherent identity through fashion and cosmetics. If we follow Butler's assertion that the self, or an interior identity, is a discursive construction that does not actually exist, then individuals must construct a coherent sense of self that has the illusion of being prediscursive. If neoliberal subjects perform this coherent identity through cosmetic and fashion stylization, then these very things become techniques that allow the individual to know the self and thus to care for the self. This reading is all the more appropriate because, as Foucault emphasizes, "care of the self becomes another kind of pedagogy," one that is "constant" and lifelong.[211] We thus see the importance of repetition and practice reiterated: for Foucault, self-care through knowing the self is a constant practice, as is the performance of identity. The constant and unending process of knowing the self through performed identity thus fits into the conditions necessitated by neoliberal governmentality like the last piece of a puzzle. As we established earlier, performing a coherent identity through fashion and cosmetic stylization requires

[208] Ibid., 1.
[209] Ibid.,1.
[210] Ibid., 1.
[211] Ibid., 1.

the constant and often conspicuous consumption of commodities: this is the productive nature of neoliberal consumption. This means that neoliberal subjects who perform their identities through their consumption of commodities are constantly participating in markets, something which neoliberalism encourages. This creates a condition in which the consumption of commodities is essentially a way for the individual to perform and thus know the self, leading to the "purity" of the soul. In other words, it becomes clear that stylizing the self through fashion and cosmetics is the ultimate neoliberal technique of the self because it makes it so that constant consumption and participation in markets is necessary to know the self and thus to care for the self.

This process of neoliberal self-branding and self-management is particularly evident in the Kim Yong Hwa's film *200 Pounds Beauty* released in 2006.[212] Kang Hanna, the main character, begins the film as an overweight woman with a beautiful voice, who makes her living engaging in phone sex and ghost-singing for pop star Ammy, who in reality cannot sing. Despite her beautiful voice, she is constantly mistreated for failing to conform to mainstream South Korean beauty standards, which dictate that to be attractive, one must be thin and graceful. Kang Hanna is neither of these, often shown dressed in unfashionable and ill-fitting clothes, clumsily trying to fit through-too small spaces. Although at first she appears to begrudgingly accept her social position, she begins to feel more self-conscious about her apparent unattractiveness after she develops a crush on Sang-Jun, Ammy's conventionally attractive and serious yet kind producer. After confessing to her best friend that she has feelings for Sang-Jun, her friend lays out clearly the harsh beauty standards that saturate their neoliberal lifeworld: "there are three types of women for men," she explains. "The pretty ones: they're a treasure. The average ones: we're a present. You? A reject."[213] She emphasizes to Hanna that because her appearance does not conform to South Korean beauty standards, she cannot hope to find genuine male companionship. Despairing, Hanna decides to take matters into her own hands: she disappears for a year to have drastic plastic surgery and lose weight. With her new conventionally beautiful face and slim body, Hanna is unrecognizable. She makes the most of the privileges that come with this beauty: the film shows consecutive instances of her benefiting from the kindness

[212] *200 Pounds Beauty*. Directed by Yong-hwa Kim. Seoul: REALies Pictures KM Culture, 2006.
[213] Ibid.

of strangers, in contrast to the hostile treatment she used to face. Through cosmetic stylization, her social status has changed from reject to treasure.

In order to get closer to Sang-Jun, whom she still loves, Hanna starts her own career as a singer, moving from backstage into the spotlight. In debuting as a celebrity, one of the very first things she does is to construct a public image. When a company official suggests that she have plastic surgery done to widen her eyes and raise her nose bridge, she reacts negatively, claiming that cosmetic surgery is only for people with no confidence. This instance is significant in two ways. First, although she has already had extensive plastic surgery done, the entertainment company officials still manage to find imperfections. This points to the fact that self-stylization through cosmetics is a constant practice: even though her face has already been crafted to epitomize hegemonic beauty standards, she still must engage in cosmetic stylization and self-care practices like putting on makeup to please the capitalist forces who sell her image.

Crucially, Sang-jun also supports her fervent rejection of the idea of plastic surgery, rather suggesting they use her purported lack of cosmetic stylization as her brand identity: "a natural beauty? I love it. Good for building your image" in the eyes of the public.[214] He touts this image as "innocence," "what money can't buy," all the while unaware that Hanna's beauty is the result of extensive cosmetic stylization that in fact cost not only money but time and effort. For Hanna and for the audience, whether this beauty is truly natural or not is irrelevant; *looking* like and embodying a natural beauty is the most important. She is able to construct a public persona or image, named "Jenny," that allows her identity to be commodified: her fans spend money on her CDs and pay for concert tickets.

Although Hanna is talented, she is only able to successfully mobilize that talent as part of her branded self once she has changed her appearance to fit with her lifeworld's mainstream conception of beauty. Pre-surgery, Hanna was portrayed in baggy, unfashionable clothes, her hair messy and her face absent of makeup. While Hanna perhaps engaged in self-care in other ways, it was clear that she did not utilize cosmetics and fashion stylization to perform this self-care. However, as part of her transformation, she

[214] Ibid.

begins to perform this self-care by consuming commodities and participating in the capitalist market. She spends money on an expensive surgery, begins using makeup, and wears elegant clothing: the day she is released from the hospital, for example, she buys the expensive dress and hat that she had long eyed in a shop window but which was previously too small for her. Her use of cosmetic stylization thus also opened the door for her to engage in fashion stylization, both of which together help her to construct her public image as a "natural beauty."

Hanna thus transforms from a hapless, anonymous social outcast to a self-branded celebrity whom everyone admires, and crucially, this transition allows her to embody the individualized labor that neoliberalism embraces. Although pre-transformation Hanna was able to participate in capitalist markets by generating revenue with her voice, both her phone sex job and her ghost-singing job were anonymous. She used her voice to perform both physical and affective labor, but this labor left no room for her to generate value based on her identity, and thus she was relegated to a lower position in the social hierarchy. This is opposed to someone like Ammy, who lacks talent but is able to stylize herself through fashion and cosmetics to align her appearance with dominant beauty standards and thus become a self-branded celebrity, as indicated by her generation of value through CD and concert ticket sales. This dynamic is reflective of neoliberalism's privileging of individualized, unique, creative labor, which has the potential to propel an individual above their competitors in the market in a way that anonymous labor cannot. Hanna herself is painfully aware of this: after Sang-Jun discovers that Jenny is really Hanna, she tearfully defends herself, exclaiming "I'm a product—Hanna is worthless, but Jenny is worth a fortune."[215] She is conscious of the fact that all of the self-care in which she has engaged (dieting, working out, dressing fashionably, and using cosmetics) has culminated in a commodified identity that is being presented to the public for consumption.

Once Hanna, rebranded as "Jenny," debuts as a celebrity, she also engages in a number of Adam Arvisson's brand-management strategies I described earlier in this chapter. As part of her promotion, Jenny appears in a variety of multimedia environments: shots show her image on posters in the record store windows, on TV programs, on CD

[215] Ibid.

covers, and in advertisements. Although the film was released in 2006, before social media achieved its current level of pervasiveness, her ubiquitous presence across media still points to the need to direct consumers' attention. This strategy is shown to be effective, as Ammy begins to notice her image everywhere, and Hanna's father, who lives in a nursing home, consistently sees her performances on TV even without seeking them out himself. As well, an ambience is created around Jenny's brand through live events such as concerts. At these concerts, fans form branded communities by simultaneously experiencing Jenny in person, singing her songs along with her and brandishing posters with supportive words.[216] This branded space, where Jenny's die-hard fans can interact with each other and generate revenue for her brand by purchasing concert tickets and merchandise, acts much in the same way as both the Angelic Pretty tea party described earlier and the proliferation of Patreon as a platform that similarly generates both community and revenue.

200 Pounds Beauty implicitly asks its viewers to consider how much of a person's "self" is embodied and how much of it exists in the "interior" by highlighting Hanna's often uncomfortable and high-stakes renegotiation of her performance of identity. The film guides the viewer to conclude that "appearances aren't everything" by showing the sacrifices that Hanna makes to maintain her new identity as Jenny (including her relationships with her father, best friend, and pet dog); Sang-Jun even says to her outright that she "care[s] too much about how [she] look[s]" and that she's "not half of [Hanna]," unaware that they are one and the same.[217] This implies that while Hanna has achieved relative success in the neoliberal market, she has sacrificed an important part of herself in the process. This reading would seem to challenge the idea that fashion and cosmetic stylization is a way for individuals to construct and perform an identity, as Hanna's "identity" appears to be disintegrating in front of the viewer's eyes as a result of her participation in these very processes.

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[216] Suk-Young Kim describes a few of the concert-going activities of K-Pop fans in her book, *K-Pop Live.* Some of these activities include purchasing official lightsticks and performing coordinated actions with these lightsticks, and learning fan-chants.

[217] *200 Pounds Beauty*. Directed by Yong-hwa Kim. Seoul: REALies Pictures KM Culture, 2006.

However, I argue that this impression is created because Hanna's performed identity is constantly being interrupted, dismantled, and reconstructed. If identity is performed on the surface of the body, and this body undergoes such a fundamental and thorough transformation as Hanna's did, then it follows that the individual must renegotiate their performance of identity. Although Jenny acts in ways that are contrary to Hanna's personality and engages in new practices of self-care that Hanna never did, I argue that this is less a loss of identity than a construction of a new one. Rather than demonstrating the limits of fashion and cosmetic stylization as tools of identity formation, *200 Pounds Beauty* reinforces the idea that they are powerful ways to perform and negotiate the neoliberal self. This is especially true as, once Jenny reveals to the public that she is truly Hanna and rebrands herself (releasing a new album called "Got To Be Real,") Hanna escapes the existential angst that she appeared to suffer as she tried to reconcile her contradicting performances of identity. Once she unifies her performance, cosmetic stylization and all, it is less frequently interrupted.

In this chapter, we have unpacked the mechanisms by which neoliberal subjects are able to commodify their identities, mobilizing fashion and cosmetics to stylize themselves and create self-brands. By performing identity on the surface of the body, individuals are able to inscribe themselves into classes through their taste in commodities, which they use to self-stylize. Their consumption according to this taste produces branded lifestyles, which are then offered to the public as commodities. In maintaining their branded selves and ensuring their competitiveness in markets, neoliberal subjects engage in brand-management techniques, which double as self-management techniques. I finally argued that fashion and cosmetic stylization can be understood as neoliberal techniques of the self, as they make it so that individuals must participate in capitalist markets in order to perform self-care. These processes were embodied by the main characters of *Kamikaze Girls*, Momoko and Ichiko, who were constantly engaged in the maintenance of their identities through consuming fashion commodities, and by the protagonist of *200 Pounds Beauty*, Hanna, who was able to brand herself by using cosmetics to align her appearance with mainstream beauty standards. Ultimately, these mechanisms are what allow individuals to live and thrive in neoliberal lifeworlds: as Hanna says, pleading with the

plastic surgeon to perform potentially life-threatening cosmetic surgery, "I'm not doing this to satisfy my vanity; I'm doing this so I can live a life."[218]

As was evident in our discussion of brand management, the ability of social media influencers and online microcelebrities to successfully participate in neoliberal markets depends heavily on their consumers. These consumers, who double as fans, like, comment, watch, and engage with and through the content that neoliberal self-branded subjects produce. The success of these self-brands is often measured by the quantity of fan engagements, as this number is indicative of the brand's ability to capture attention and thus to exercise influence. However, the nature of these fan interactions and engagements differs depending on the platform: self-branded subjects on Instagram may exercise different methods to generate affect among consumers than do self-branded subjects on YouTube. Thus, it is important to examine how different platforms facilitate the interactions between self-branded neoliberal subjects/celebrities and their consumer-fans. How did social media platforms emerge as the most prominent tool for the cultivation of self-brands, and how do they differ from older forms of broadcast or print media for this purpose? How do these platforms allow influencers to generate affect among their consumer-fans? How do they harness consumer-fans' productive potential to generate content for influencers and for their own self-brands? These are the questions I will be answering in chapter 3.

[218] *200 Pounds Beauty*. Directed by Yong-hwa Kim. Seoul: REALies Pictures KM Culture, 2006.

Chapter 3

Platforms as the Infrastructure of Self-Branding: Interfaces, Intimacy, and Liveness

You're attempting to do your work when your phone rings with a notification: one of your favorite YouTubers has just posted a new video. You try not to heed its siren call, to focus on your work and save the video for later. But you know it's futile when you see the title: "CONFESSIONS: GRWM CHAT ALL MY FEARS."[219] As the title indicates, beauty YouTuber Tati is exposing her deepest fears and answering audience questions, all while she puts on makeup and gets dressed. Your interest is piqued at the thought of getting to know this insider information about her. You click on it, deciding that now is the perfect time for a break; you needed more coffee anyway.

These platform-dependent marketing techniques, such as exposing details of their personal lives like Tati does in her video, as well as running giveaways for free items that are consistent with their brand identities and posting multi-part videos are all among those that neoliberal self-branded subjects on social media use to generate intimacy among their fans. That is, these techniques are forms of platform-specific brand management of the sort I described in chapter 2, which help micro-celebrities foster a sense of personal connection with their fans, keeping the fans engaged with their online self-brands. The generation of this intimacy and its role in maintaining this consumer-fan base are crucial, as the number of followers and volume of fan engagements function as a crude measurement of the brand's success, that is, its cultural capital, ability to influence, and ability to generate monetary value.[220] In chapter 1, I situated the emergence of neoliberal rationalities in Japan and South Korea and examined the relationship between subculture and mainstream culture as it relates to the transnational movement of Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty. In chapter 2, I examined the mechanisms by which "identity" can be performed and commodified, how self-brands engage in brand management to more effectively participate in neoliberal markets, and how we can understand the creation of self-brands as a

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[219] Tati. "CONFESSIONS | GRWM CHAT ALL MY FEARS." YouTube. May 14, 2018. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjTPX4TII6o. GRWM is an acronym for "get ready with me," a type of video in which self-branding subjects film and share their makeup and dressing routines, much like a tutorial.

[220] Alice E. Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy." *Public Culture*27, no. 175 (2015): 140.

neoliberal technique of the self. Thus, now that we understand why and how self-brands are constructed, it is crucial in this final chapter to examine the largely technical mechanisms that allow self-branded subjects to collect and maintain the consumer-fan bases that are indispensable to their market success. Crucially, the platforms on which self-branding subjects rely both facilitate and limit self-brands' manifestations, especially as platforms' curatorial algorithms imbue them with the power to direct attention and inform taste.

Theories of the Platform

Considering their reliance on social media, self-brands and their modes of interaction are simultaneously constrained and facilitated by the platforms on which they are constructed: as José van Dijck notes in her book *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media,* "this layer of applied platforms is anything but a neutral utility exploiting a generic resource (data)"; rather, platforms contain inherent biases as they rely on the "ideological and technological" infrastructures of Web 2.0.[221] This lack of neutrality, which often goes unnoticed by the platform's users, impacts the features of microcelebrities' self-brands in ways that are not immediately perceptible. How exactly is the constitution of self-brands guided and limited by both the obvious features and implicit biases of different platforms? How do these platforms, with their specific capabilities and restrictions, help self-branded influencer-celebrities generate a sense of intimacy among their consumer-fans using the marketing techniques mentioned above? To understand the specific ways this happens and how it relates to Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics as tools for creating self-brands, I will consider the platform-specific marketing activities of two successful influencer-celebrities, South Korean beauty guru PONY Syndrome and Harajuku fashion model Haruka Kurebayashi. I pay specific attention to their activities on YouTube and Instagram, as these two social media platforms have emerged in recent years as popular sites for the construction of self-brands.

It will also be crucial to look at the way social media platforms differ from other forms of mass media in their facilitation of influencer-celebrity and consumer-fan interaction. I argue that their temporality of liveness, their tendency to constantly update,

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[221] Jose van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media,* (New York, New York, 2013), 6.

and their enabling of direct producer-consumer interaction sets them apart from more traditional forms of mass media like film or television. To tackle this, I will first engage with theories of "the platform" to more accurately understand the relationship between neoliberal self-branding subjects and the "new media" that inevitably influences the manifestation of their self-brands. Finally, I will consider the unique capabilities of social media to facilitate intimacy and interactions amidst a changing definition of "liveness," in comparison to other forms of broadcast media.[222]

I have been using the term "platform" to refer to social media sites like Instagram and YouTube. But what exactly is a "platform?" In their introduction to a special issue of the journal *AsiaScape: Digital Asia* dedicated to "regional platforms," Marc Steinberg and Jinying Li outline the various approaches that scholars have taken to defining and theorizing the platform. Rather than presenting a unified definition, many platform scholars have divided the concept into various types depending on function. Steinberg and Li themselves propose a division into three schematic types: product-technology type platforms, content platforms, and transaction-/mediation-type platforms.[223] While product-technology type platforms refer more to physical devices and hardware (such as an iPhone), and transaction or mediation-type platforms are those which mediate between users and facilitate transactions (like Paypal), the most relevant type for our analysis is that which Steinberg and Li call content platforms.[224]

Content platforms are what are usually referred to as social media sites, "gestur[ing] at the platform as a congregation site for users and a distribution mechanism for user-produced content."[225] Such a definition implies that platforms are tools that provide users the place and means to create and distribute their own content freely, a notion that Tarleton Gillespie also acknowledges in his examination of the term. Considering its various historical uses for "computational," "architectural," "figurative," and "political" concepts, " 'platform' emerges not simply as indicating a functional shape: it suggests a progressive and egalitarian arrangement, promising to support those who stand upon

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[222] Suk-Young Kim, *K-Pop Live,* 12.
[223] Marc Steinberg and Jinying Li, "Introduction: Regional Platforms," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 4 (2017): 176.
[224] Ibid., 176.
[225] Ibid., 176.

it."[226] Platforms' rhetoric of apparently equal access and equal opportunity aligns with the logic of neoliberalism: as we established in chapter 1, neoliberalism works in theory by providing an even playing field to all subjects, leaving the individual to mobilize these supposedly equal resources to get ahead in the market. Even with this simple, preliminary definition of "platform," we can immediately see how (social media) platforms and their rhetoric of equal, democratic access have the potential to function as a catalyst for neoliberal market competition.

Yet despite the idealistic connotations of the term "platform" and its apparent egalitarian ability to empower users, Gillespie notes that many content platforms are actually attempting to find a delicate balance between maintaining this rhetoric of free discourse and neoliberal empowerment to appeal to its users while simultaneously appealing to potential business partners like professional content creators (like television networks or music labels) or advertisers.[227] This can be a fine line to tread, considering platforms like YouTube and Instagram enthusiastically own their ability to democratize content creation without restrictions on who can produce, yet they also seek to absolve themselves of liability for copyright infringement or other illegal activities that might jeopardize their relationships with the official distributors on whose partnerships they depend for revenue.[228] In other words, they seek to position themselves as neutral facilitators of community without assuming responsibility for what is produced in this community. The regulations that content platforms must institute in order to achieve this balance between users and partners, what Gillepsie refers to as platforms' "edges," effectively nullifies their claims to neutrality.[229]

As Jose van Dijck notes in her discussion of users' agency on social networking platforms, the utopian rhetoric of free and equal access "neglect[s]… the substantial role a site's interface plays in maneuvering individual users and communities."[230] Especially insofar as we understand users' consumption as productive, as established in chapter 2, the implicit biases of social networking platforms have the ability to steer taste and

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[226] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'platforms'." *New Media & Society* 12, no. 3 (2010): 350.
[227] Ibid., 353
[228] Ibid., 357
[229] Ibid., 358
[230] José van Dijck, *Culture of Connectivity,* 45.

subsequently steer the sorts of self-brands that can crystalize from this taste. Platforms promote certain content so that it is more visible to users, often appearing in a section labeled "recommended for you" or something similar. For example, YouTube uses criteria such as number of views, number of comments, and number of downloads to steer the value-producing attention of consumers, often "processed with the help of algorithms" that are "vulnerable to manipulation."[231] Thus, we may understand social media platforms' companies' desire to partner with advertisers as a conflict of interest in their creation of an allegedly equal playing field for content-creating users. A platform that is being paid by Starbucks to run its ads may direct users' attention to content that includes Starbucks (for example, a video of a YouTuber reviewing Starbucks' drinks, or a photo on Instagram of someone at Starbucks) regardless of whether the creators of that content receive monetary compensation for their inadvertent advertising. The uneven promotion of such content by platforms makes it harder for some users to generate attention for their self-brands: as Brooke Erin Duffy reminds us, it is much easier to maintain popularity than to generate it anew, as "the contributions of legions of other social media producers… who make nary a headline" are "obscured" by the algorithmically reproduced popularity of big-name influencers or brands.[232]

The promotion of certain content on social media according to what is already popular or in that which the platform has a vested financial interest thus has the ability to inform users' tastes, users who are positioned as consumers in the eyes of advertisers, "whether active creators or passive spectators."[233] As I discussed in both chapter 1 and chapter 2, taste is constructed depending on an individual's social milieu and is often aspirational, reflecting the social class of which the individual wishes to be a part. Self-brands are produced in large part by the content and the brands that their creators consume, as they contribute to the construction self-brands' primary products: marketable, coherent taste and lifestyle. Thus, because users' attention is continuously directed toward certain content at the expense of others, the promotional algorithms of social media platforms can influence the tastes that are such an essential part of self-brands. As a result,

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[231] Ibid., 45

[232] Brooke Erin Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love,* 4.

[233] José van Dijck, *Culture of Connectivity,* 47.

not only are platforms' implicit claims to neutrality and egalitarianism false, these biases have deep implications for the contents of self-brands that are constructed on a given platform.

Aside from platforms' ability to potentially manipulate the tastes of both self-branding subjects and the consumers of their brands, platforms also influence the marketing techniques that self-brands employ to generate content, distribute this content, and attract the value-producing attention of potential consumers. YouTube and Instagram in particular are popular platforms on which neoliberal subjects frequently construct self-brands, and each offering specific features and functions that individuals can mobilize to create platform-specific manifestations of their brands. For example, Instagram's interface allows self-branding subjects to construct and maintain stylistic consistency: a user can customize their profile so that all of the images and videos they post adhere to a common color scheme or aesthetic. Although thus far I have been discussing the idea of platforms as the basic infrastructure for self-brands, as I move into a more detailed analysis of YouTube's and Instagram's capabilities, I will use examples to re-center the discussion on self-brands that mobilize Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics.

YouTube: Egalitarianism and Bias

YouTube presents itself as an ideal platform for neoliberal self-branding, their tagline an imperative to "Broadcast Yourself" that explicitly asks its users to make themselves available to be consumed.[234] The platform provides features and options that allow users to do just this. Users can create their own "channels" (a term commonly used in relation to television, as is "broadcast,") in order to upload their own videos and make them publicly accessible, as well as to "favorite" or bookmark other users' videos to which they want to return. Users can also configure their own channels as they see fit, within the limits set by YouTube: for example, a user might present their uploaded videos at the top of their page or show related or featured channels on the right side. Many YouTubers also organize their content into playlists so that they can be grouped together with other videos that have similar content (such as makeup tutorials.) Users can browse YouTube and look for specific videos or channels via the search bar, but the site also provides

[234] Gillespie 353

recommendations for videos, channels, and "topics," like "cooking" or "reality TV" based on the content that users had previously consumed. As well, there is a "trending" tab where users can see what content has been garnering the most attention. This content in this "trending" tab seems to align with the biases discussed above: most of the videos immediately accessible are those by professional producers who distribute their content on YouTube (such as the Jonas Brothers, Paramount Pictures, and Taylor Swift) or self-branded microcelebrities who have been officially recognized by YouTube, evidenced by a tiny check-mark next to their usernames (like lifestyle blogger Safiya Nygaard[235], cooking channel Binging with Babish[236], or makeup guru Tati[237]).

The interface of the platform is important in guiding the way users mobilize and interact with the platform. However, another important yet less visible feature of YouTube's infrastructure, rather than its interface, that makes it especially well suited to the creation of neoliberal self-brands is that it "casts users as targeted consumers as well as content providers."[238] This means that although YouTube regards itself as a platform for content distribution and thus mainly understands its users as potential producers of this content, it also recognizes users as potential consumers and targets of advertising. As José van Djick describes, the generation of "metadata" from users actions is one way for YouTube to target its users as consumers. YouTube, as well as a number of other platforms like Google and Instagram, generate metadata from users' actions, which includes account information like name, nationality, or age, as well as IP addresses and browsing habits.[239] As van Djick emphasizes, "the user's role as a data provider is infinitely more important than his role as a content provider" because this data translates to "real value" for advertisers and other market actors, especially as it enables them to learn more about their consumer base.[240] Although this metadata doesn't contribute visibly to the individual's self-brand, this generation of value from users' every action (from posting to liking to clicking

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[235]"Safiya Nygaard." YouTube. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbAwSkqJ1W_Eg7wr3cp5BUA.

[236] Bgfilms. "Binging with Babish." YouTube. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/user/bgfilms.

[237]GlamLifeGuru. "Tati." YouTube. Accessed May 17, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/user/GlamLifeGuru .

[238] José van Dijck, "Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-generated Content." *Media, Culture & Society*31, no. 1 (2009): 48.

[239] Ibid., 47.

[240] Ibid., 49.

to sharing), makes YouTube, Instagram, and other content platforms especially well aligned with neoliberalism's imperative to constantly participate in markets. Not only do self-branded neoliberal subjects engage in value-generating market activity by constructing their tastes and lifestyles and commodifying them, they also do so at the level of platform infrastructure. Self-branding subjects on YouTube and Instagram must consume other content in the construction of their self-brands, and inevitably, they click on, share, and comment on this content in the process of consuming it. Every action of a self-branded neoliberal subject on social media is logged, tracked, and can be converted into market value for advertisers. The generation and use of metadata to increase the profits of advertisers and companies thus further solidifies this self-branding process as a form of neoliberal market participation.

As Gillespie notes, YouTube (that is, the company that runs the platform) is itself aware of the way both general users and advertisers, who use the aforementioned metadata, have interests at stake. This is one of the sources of the conflict of interest I mentioned earlier, which debunks YouTube's and other platforms' claims to equally empower all users. While Gillespie rightly emphasizes the way YouTube and other platforms "must speak in different registers to their relevant constituencies" such as advertisers, "major media producers," and the general user in order to appeal to them, I wish to highlight the similarity between the activities of these groups, especially if we consider the general user as a self-brand who is engaging in advertising and marketing in the same ways as traditional brands.[241] Although Gillespie explicitly posits these groups as separate, he nonetheless gestures at this very similarity by pointing out that YouTube makes use of "the same terminology they employ to appeal to amateur users" in order to "[sell] its service to advertisers: 'marketers have embraced the YouTube marketing platform and [sic] as an innovative and engaging vehicle for connecting with their target audiences, and they are increasing sales and exposure for their companies and brands in many different ways."[242]

Gillespie posits that content platforms have the ability to use the same language to speak to different constituencies because the term "platform" itself is so versatile, which is

[241] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Politics of 'platforms'," 354-355.
[242] Ibid., 354.

certainly correct. However, in the context of neoliberalism, which privileges creative labor and innovation, I argue that it's also because general users, as self-branding subjects, are looking for a "terrain upon which they can build brand awareness, a public campaign, a product launch," as well as a "venue in which their content can be raised up and made visible and… pushed to audiences," all things that YouTube promises to their advertisers and "major media producers."[243] YouTube, by promoting itself as a "platform of… distinctly commercial opportunity" that uses the same empowering, economic language to appeal to general users that it does to appeal to advertisers, thus contributes to the blurring of the lines between general users and commercial entities. As self-branded subjects are essentially users whose activities are focused on generating economic value, their ability to self-brand is bolstered by platforms that encourage both explicitly and implicitly economic activities of its users. Thus, I argue that YouTube's emphasis on the inherently economic character of its general users' activities makes it a particularly apt platform for the construction of self-brands.

To give a concrete example of the way the platform interfaces and infrastructures that I described above impact the manifestation of self-brands, I return to South Korean beauty blogger Pony Syndrome, whose brand management techniques I described last chapter. Pony Syndrome is a prime example of a neoliberal subject whose self-brand is constructed and maintained on YouTube, on which she has 5 million subscribers. Although she also has an even greater following of 6 million on Instagram, I consider her primarily a YouTuber because she uploads her brand's most important content to YouTube: as a makeup artist, her channel focuses on makeup tutorials that she cannot post to Instagram because Instagram only allows short videos. Pony stylizes her channel with a banner at the top of the page, featuring her face done up with her iconic pink makeup style, contrasted with a lavender background and her channel's name in white letters.[244] The right side of the top banner also features her email address and Instagram handle, reminding her followers of her presence across social media platforms, one technique of brand management that self-branded subjects use to draw attention to their brands. Under the

[243] Ibid., 355

[244] "PONY Syndrome." YouTube. Accessed May 09, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCT-_4GqC-yLY1xtTHhwY0hA.

banner is a bright red "subscribe" button that her viewers can click to follow her channel, allowing them to receive notifications whenever Pony Syndome posts new content. These features are important, for they are often the first impression viewers get of her self brand, before they watch any of her content. Simply by looking at her channel, potential viewers can get a sense of the makeup styles she creates: the jewels attached to her face, as well as her pastel pink hair, indicate that she often creates makeup looks that are feminine, fresh, and more diverse than simple, every-day makeup.

Pony Syndrome also organizes her own videos into playlists according to their content, with 81 makeup tutorials, 20 collaboration videos, 30 "get ready with me" videos, and a number of other categories.[245] While these three categories fit in neatly with the pedagogical content (teaching viewers how to do makeup or how to wear clothes) and revenue-generating content (showing viewers the brand partnerships that both bring in money and construct taste) that we have described previously, Pony Syndrome has another especially interesting category of video: "Instagram Makeup." Pony Syndrome is specifically known as a makeup artist, and she uses YouTube to upload and distribute her makeup tutorials, many of which are as long as 30 minutes. Instagram, however, only allows viewers to post short videos, averaging 30 seconds.

Pony Syndrome, however, is able to able to transcend the constraints of Instagram by effectively combining her YouTube and Instagram activities into one. She uses YouTube to teach her followers how to do makeup for Instagram, effectively cross-promoting her content, even when she cannot post her tutorials on Instagram. For example, on June 18th, 2018, Pony uploaded a photo of her face to her Instagram account @ponysmakeup, accompanied by a caption that read, in English, "I'm uploading this look tomorrow!"(see Appendix, Figure 4.)[246] This post was followed on June 19th, 2018, by a video on YouTube, entitled "Instagram Makeup-Flower that Blooms at night (With sub)," which taught her followers how to achieve the look that she had posted on her Instagram. In the beginning, she mentions "a few people [on Instagram] asked for that makeup tutorial," and this sort of acknowledgement makes clear to the viewer that Pony sees and is responsive to her

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[245] Ibid.

[246] "PONY 포니 (@ponysmakeup) • Instagram Photos and Videos." Instagram. Accessed May 09, 2019. https://www.instagram.com/ponysmakeup/.

audience feedback.[247] Despite the fact that she has more followers on Instagram than on YouTube, Pony ensures that both sections of her constituency are aware of and have easy access to her content on both platforms by making explicit connections between them.

As we can see from Pony's case, one of YouTube's advantages is that it allows users to post long videos and long video descriptions: the makeup tutorial from June 19th, as well many other makeup tutorials by Pony Syndrome, has a detailed list of the products she used in the tutorial so that her viewers can try them themselves. This emphasizes the productive nature of Pony's consumption: she makes it easy for her followers to consume the same products that she does. Users can also stylize the content of the video as they see fit: many self-branding subjects on YouTube have a short opening theme song, symbol, or catch phrase to begin their videos. Pony Syndrome's videos, for example, all start with a short animation of her brand name and the crescent moon symbol that she associates with her brand. Most commonly, a montage of Pony modeling the final makeup look follows this opening before she dives into the tutorial, during which she explains what product she is using and why. Her monologue, sometimes a voiceover but often simply her talking on camera, lets users know what she thought of each product and is usually accompanied by calming music in the background. Through their repetition, all of these stylistic elements have become recognizable and reliable, so Pony Syndrome's brand is consistent and viewers have a sense of the content they'll be getting when they click on her videos.

As is evident from my analysis above, Pony has been able to achieve a consistent brand identity and a sizeable fan base on YouTube. With each video getting multiple millions of views and thousands of comments, Pony has been able to generate enough revenue with her self-branding techniques on YouTube to support herself and to saturate her every action with economic rationality. Therefore, if Pony simply created content on her YouTube channel and ceased her self-branding activities on Instagram, she would likely still be able to maintain her brand. Concentrating her self-branding techniques on one platform would save her both time and labor, as she would not need to edit and upload

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[247] Syndrome, PONY. "Instagram Makeup-Flower That Blooms at Night (With Sub) 인스타 메이크업 - 밤에 피는 꽃." YouTube. June 19, 2018. Accessed May 09, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xguRUMGhhbc&list=PLj6FeOwWCFCqD4DsukLV9Q0MBWf74Bs_j&index=16.

photos, write captions, or record short videos for Instagram on top of the labor of video production in which she engages to maintain her YouTube channel. As I discussed above, both YouTube and Instagram encourage similar kinds of explicitly economic activity among its users, so why must self-branding subjects maintain their self-brands on both platforms? What is Instagram providing to Pony Syndrome that YouTube isn't? How do its features facilitate the construction of self-brands according to a model that differs from YouTube's broadcast-like configuration?

Instagram: Temporalities of Attention

Instagram is a social media content platform that, unlike YouTube, is primarily used in its mobile format to share photos and short videos. Users create their own accounts and use them to upload photos of their daily lives, using the cameras on their smartphones to document things like meals, vacations, pets, and especially themselves.[248] Its interface is organized into four tabs that users can toggle at the bottom of the screen. The first is the "home" tab, where users can scroll through the main "feed" of content produced by the accounts they follow, which may be people they know in real life or strangers in whose content they are interested. Recently, Instagram has also implemented a new feature called "stories," where users upload a series of ephemeral 5-second videos or photos that disappear after 24 hours, accessible in small circles at the top of the home screen. Like YouTube's recommendations and trending sections, Instagram also has an "explore" tab, which shows users recommended or popular content based on their previous browsing habits and accounts they follow. These recommendations come lumped together, but users can also browse by topic by clicking on tabs like "style," "comics," "art," or "food." In the next tab, marked with a heart, users can track the interactions their followers make with their account: Instagram notifies users with every like or comment their posts receive, as well as when they gain a new follower. Users can toggle between their own account's likes and comments and the activity of the accounts they follow, allowing them to get a sense of what content is getting attention among these accounts. And finally, the user can view their own account, organized into a grid three images wide. At the top of the tab are the user's number of posts, followers, and accounts they are following. In all, its interface is "fairly

[248] Alice E. Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," 142.

open-ended" and offers users the opportunity to "represent themselves using a range of techniques," which I will examine below.[249]

One important feature of Instagram that sets it apart from YouTube as a platform for self-branding is that it encourages a much shorter temporality of attention from its users. In other words, YouTube does not restrict the length of users' videos, meaning that consumer-fans may spend anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours watching a video (although self-branding subjects on YouTube rarely make videos this long.) In contrast, Instagram's focus on single images or very short videos, accompanied by only a few lines of text, means that viewers only spend a few seconds looking at each piece of content; as Carah and Shaul put it, "images on Instagram are live and ephemeral," as they get the most attention in the first day after being published, subsequently vanishing into the vast sea of content.[250] This extremely short temporality of attention, sometimes referred to as a "blink regime," means that self-branding subjects must "participate in an ongoing process of bodily optimization," favoring "continuous transformation of the body in pursuit of evolving limits and ideals." [251] This means that self-branding subjects on Instagram attempt to grab viewers' attention in the few seconds they have by making their bodies and faces unique and eye-catching, rather than standardized.[252] This may include embodied practices like posing, gesturing, or even losing or gaining weight. The process of optimizing the physical body to draw viewers' attention is particularly important as it impacts a good deal of the platform's content, which is composed of "selfies," or "digital self-portraits."[253] Images of the body are so important for grabbing attention largely because of the implicit link between the self and the body: the body is understood to be the physical manifestation of the self, as it is the site at which identity is performed.

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[249] Ibid., 38.

[250] Nicholas Carah and Michelle Shaul. "Brands and Instagram: Point, Tap, Swipe, Glance." *Mobile Media & Communication* 4, no. 1 (2015): 72.

[251] Nicholas Carah and Michelle Shaul , "Brands and Instagram: Point Tap Swipe Glance," 73. By "bodily optimization," Carah and Shaul are referring to the "endless loops of body work that both produce forms of calculable attention and embed the construction of the self within market processes." Users optimize their bodies to be legible and to grab attention on social media platforms.

[252] Nicholas Carah and Michelle Shaul, "Brands and Instagram: Point Tap Swipe Glance," 73.

[253] Alice E. Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," 142.

Indeed, this consistent manipulation and optimization of the body (in everyday life, in front of the camera, and on screens) in order to grab attention sounds familiar, especially in context of neoliberal subjects who are commodifying their identities. As I established in chapter 2, Judith Butler's notion of performativity involves subjects constructing identities on the surface of their bodies, something that involves constant maintenance. This bodily performance of identity is important to self-branding subjects because it informs the tastes and lifestyles that are commodified and made available for consumption. The bodily optimization necessitated by Instagram's "blink regime" and short temporality of attention thus presents itself as a platform-specific aspect of embodied performance. This means that the performance in which self-branded subjects on Instagram engage is directly impacted by the platform's configuration. As Carah and Shaul note, on Instagram, images of bodies are presented with practices of "posing, framing, cropping, filtering, swiping, liking, and commenting."[254] These editing practices allow users to perform their brands visually, as some self-branded subjects maintain visual consistency of their brands and bodies by posting photos with similar angles, similar framing, or similar color profiles. Self-branding subjects even commodify these poses as recognizable parts of their brands: Min-Ha T. Pham dedicates an entire chapter to the branded poses of fashion superbloggers, like Susie Bubble and BryanBoy, who mobilize these poses to generate value.[255] Thus "selfies" and other forms of photography of the body are like "advertisements for the self," that allow the user to manipulate and perform a platform-specific identity.

Ultimately the objective of this performative bodily optimization is to generate both attention and a sense of intimacy for self-brands, as this attention is, to reiterate, a measurement of the brand's success. Instagram's imperative to "[engage]…in endless loops of body work" in order to generate value-producing attention and a sense of intimacy ultimately "embed[s] the construction of the self in market processes."[256] In other words, Instagram necessitates its users to engage in a constantly updating performance of platform-specific self and in doing so thus makes users' activities a form of neoliberal market engagement.

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[254] Nicholas Carah and Michelle Shaul , "Brands and Instagram: Point Tap Swipe Glance," 78.
[255] Min-Ha T. Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet,* 39.
[256] Nicholas Carah and Michelle Shaul , "Brands and Instagram: Point Tap Swipe Glance," 73.

In the sections above, I have explained the way that YouTube and Instagram facilitate different kinds of contents for microcelebrities who use them to construct their self-brands. The self-brands of neoliberal subjects on social media are inevitably influenced by the implicit biases of both platform interfaces and algorithms, as seen in YouTube's "recommended for you" and "trending now" sections. As well, users' activities are inherently neoliberal: they are similar to the explicitly economic activities of advertisers, and every single action generates valuable metadata. And most crucially, the extremely short temporality of attention on social media platforms, especially Instagram, necessitates platform specific performances of identity in order to generate maximum viewer attention in a split second.

This "blink economy" on Instagram, and in general the short temporality of attention on social media platforms, warrants a closer examination, as it engenders a not only a short but *constantly updating* temporality that has deep implications for the way self-brands interact with and generate a sense of intimacy among their viewers. As I have explained, the notion of constant updating is crucial to both embodied performances of identity and to brand management. Brands must achieve a fine balance between consistency, so they are recognizable as coherent brands, but also freshness and newness, constantly introducing new products and content so that they can keep attracting consumer attention. Now, the notion of constant updating emerges at the level of platform, reinforced by the short temporality of the "blink economy."

While different platforms may have different temporalities of attention, with some (Instagram) being shorter than others (YouTube), the temporality of constant updating underlies not only (content) platforms but also a whole host of what is often referred to as "new media." "New media" usually refers to the digital communication technology that has emerged as the most dominant form of media, in contrast to analogue, broadcast, or print media that previously structured communication. Although media scholars including Thomas Lamarre[257] and Wendy Chun[258] have critiqued the idea of "new media" for the

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[257] Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesoa P., 2018), 111.

[258] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Anna Watkins Fisher, and Thomas Keenan. *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader.* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

harsh dichotomy it implicitly poses between these digital technologies and other forms of communication media, a full examination of the discourse around "new media" as a concept is out of the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of my analysis, I understand the content platforms that I have been discussing as a form of "new media."

Wendy Chun, in her book *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media,* locates Internet-based social media, or "new media," at what she calls the "bleeding edge of obsolescence."[259] She is gesturing to the fact that once content is generated, it becomes old or obsolete almost immediately, creating the need for the generation of yet more material and updates, reproducing the cycle. Before the institution of new media, the constant documentation of an individual's activities through updates on things like location may have been characterized as surveillance. However, Chun claims that "in the era of social media 'to be is to be updated.' Automatically recognized changes of status have moved from surveillance to evidence of one's ongoing existence,"[260] especially because "new media… are constantly asking/needing to be refreshed."[261] In other words, if an individual does not constantly update (in their performance of identity and in their brand management, but especially on content platforms) they almost immediately become obsolete, irrelevant, and out of date. Indeed, this need for updating on social media (as a form of new media) is immediately evident in the Instagram feed, which is configured so that users scroll vertically up and down to view content, and when they finally reach content that they have already seen, they "[bounce] back to the top of the feed" to "refresh" and see what new images have been posted since they started scrolling.[262] Each image, no matter how long it took to stage, edit, and upload, is given a maximum of a few seconds of attention before being replaced with new updates. Thus, if a user does not update their content, they will likely get buried under the vast volume of other updates and their self-brand will cease to exist.

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[259] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 1.
[260] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 73.
[261] Ibid., 2
[262] Nicholas Carah and Michelle Shaul , "Brands and Instagram: Point Tap Swipe Glance," 72.

Mediated Liveness and Intimacy: The Public Private Self

As Alice E. Marwick notes in her analysis of Instagram's constant feed, "because Instagram photos are typically taken via mobile phone, they tend toward the documentary, since mobile phones are continually present as users go about their day-to-day lives."[263] Phones with cameras, as Marwick says, are practically omnipresent in everyday life, and this constant presence makes it easy for social media users to document every moment of their lives. This hyper-accessible technological infrastructure coupled with the imperative to be constantly updating makes it easy to see why platforms like Instagram and YouTube (as well as Facebook) have introduced "live" functions to their interfaces. Users can now run livestreams on these platforms, where viewers can watch what their favorite microcelebrities and influencers are doing, ostensibly in real time. This ability to be constantly broadcasting one's activities is the epitome of constant updating: not only can self-branding subjects update by posting photos, videos, and text frequently, now they can update second-by-second. This constant updating enabled by the "live" function on social media platforms such as Instagram points to the importance of the impression of "liveness" to the self-branding process on these platforms. Liveness, which has been associated with older forms of mass media like television and radio, is essentially a way for self-branding subjects to shorten new/social media's instantaneous temporality even further and thus more effectively participate in the competition for viewers' attention.

Apart from being an important tool for keeping up with the imperative to constantly update, this "live" function is crucial to self-branding on social media because it is an important way to generate the aforementioned attention and sense of intimacy that are so important to the success of self-brands. Before explaining what exactly this sense of intimacy is and how it's created, it is important to examine the way liveness itself has changed in the age of new/social media. Liveness can refer to two things: the unmediated, physical presence of more than one person in the same space, or the unmediated experiencing or witnessing of an event. Kim Suk Young addresses both of these forms of liveness in her analysis of K-pop as a genre that blurs the lines between being live and being mediated. For Kim, "what makes an event live is either a real-time connection or a

[263] Alice E. Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," 142.

shared sense of immediacy and authenticity stemming from participants who congregate either online or offline."[264] It is crucial to note that in Kim's formulation, physical presence an event is not necessary in order to define the viewer's experience as live. Rather, the definition of liveness "becomes a question of how we live our lives as increasingly mediated subjects," in that our experiences of the world around us are now always in some way impacted by new media.[265] This means that both individuals' interpersonal interactions and their experiences of events are impacted by the presence of media, yet they can still be considered live.

Kim posits that before the rise of social media and other forms of what are also called "participatory media,"[266] it was easier to make the distinction between live and "mediatized forms" of interacting and experiencing.[267] But now, the binary distinction between live and mediated, as well as between actual live performance and the mediated distribution of that performance, has been blurred. Kim uses the example of K-Pop fandom to show what she means. At live events like concerts, fans and celebrities are physically present in the same space, yet concert attendees "'mediatize' their natural gaze" by looking at the performers projected on a screen, often because they are seated too far away from the stage to see clearly. Alternatively, they watch the celebrities' performances through the screens of their smartphones as they record the performances of their favorite songs.[268] Although fans and celebrities are in the same physical space, fans' experience of the event is still mediated through screens, much like it would be if consumed online. Despite this mediatization of experience, attendees' experience of a concert can still be considered live, as attendees achieve the aforementioned "real-time connection" and "shared sense of immediacy and authenticity" with both the celebrity and their fellow concert attendees. As well, the K-pop stars' stage performance is immediately distributed through stage screens and phone screens, making this mediatization part of the performance.

This same idea applies to influencers and microcelebrities who live-stream and live update on social media. Although self-branding subjects are not physically co-present with

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[264] Suk-Young Kim, *K-Pop Live: Fans, Idols, and Multimedia Performance,* 16.
[265] Ibid., 8.
[266] Alice E. Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," 139.
[267] Suk-Young Kim, *K-Pop Live,* 12.
[268] Ibid., 12.

their consumer-fans, and although consumer-fans experience of microcelebrities' performances is mediated through screens and platform interfaces, neither of these things prevent this consumption from being live. This is because micro-celebrities' performance of platform-specific identity and the broadcast of this performance essentially become one and the same, as do the stage performances of K-Pop stars. Livestreaming is part of the platform-specific performance of identity that I discussed earlier, and this erodes the distinction between performance and broadcast of that performance: rather, the performance *is* the broadcast.

To show the way consumers can still attain the sense of connection and immediacy that are characteristic of liveness, Kim draws on Nick Couldry's concept of "group liveness," which is a form of liveness composed of "real-time communication among mobile phone users dispersed across physical space;" as a new form of liveness, it crucially shows that "certain modes of liveness cannot even exist without digital mediation."[269] This group, or mediated, liveness is precisely the kind that is produced when self-branding subjects livestream, as it is a way for them to talk face-to-face with their consumer-fans. For example, Harajuku fashion influencer and model Haruka Kurebayashi ran a livestream on June 8th, 2018 entitled "「LIVE 配信」メイク落とし＆スキンケア公開" ("[Livestream] Makeup removal and skin care routine made public") in which her fans could watch in real-time as she took off her makeup and did her bedtime skin care routine in front of the camera (see Appendix, Figure 5). YouTube's livestream interface allows viewers to leave comments, see other fans' comments, and see how many other people are watching the livestream at a given moment. Although above I emphasized liveness in terms of the sense of immediacy that comes from the physical presence of a celebrity at a concert, I now wish to emphasize the effect that liveness has for community formation. Livestreams, though mediated, are an effective tool for creating a sense of live community among viewers, who are united by their simultaneous viewing and by their shared taste.[270] Kurebayashi sees and responds to these comments in real time: she thanks fans who compliment her makeup and answers when they ask where she got her clothes. Her response to these comments in

[269] Ibid., 12.
[270] José van Dijck, *Culture of Connectivity,* 45.

real time creates the sense that she is giving her attention in return to each of her viewers, although actually doing so is impossible.[271] The effort to return attention to each viewer, as Kurebayashi does by verbally answering her fans' written comments, is what P. David Marshall calls the "parasocial self," a form of self-presentation on social media in which microcelebrities simultaneously realize the necessity and the futility of engaging individually with their hundreds, thousands, or even millions of consumer-fans.[272]

Cultivating this parasocial self is especially important to self-branding subjects on social media because it is central to creating the sense of intimacy that will not only grab the attention of consumer-fans but also *maintain* it. Thus, having discussed the way this new type of mediated liveness can foster a sense of community among fans on social media via live feeds and real-time communication, it is important to examine the way intimacy is generated in relation to the concept of the parasocial self. Social media's ability to facilitate direct communication and connection "transform[s] the parasocial into the potentially social and increase[s] the emotional ties between celebrity and fan."[273] This is the sense of intimacy, to which I have been referring throughout the chapter, which is created by the morphing of the parasocial into at least the illusion of the social. This means that consumer-fans seek to "strip away the veneers of performance and publicity to find these true versions of celebrities."[274] In other words, rather than the highly mediated, packaged, sterilized, and seemingly perfect celebrities that so often characterized older forms of mass media (what P. David Marshall calls "representational media," like "television and film"[275]) consumer-fans seek to feel like they are friends with the microcelebrities they follow; i.e., they seek a social connection, rather than a parasocial one. Crucially, consumer-fans also rely on social media to "construct the parasocial interpersonal pathways for an apparent intensified connection."[276] Although new/social media indeed facilitate more direct communication between self-branded subjects and consumer-fans, the actual relationships

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[271] P. David Marshall, "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media," *Celebrity Studies*1, no. 1 (2010): 43.
[272] Ibid., 43.
[273] Alice E. Marwick, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," 139.
[274] Ibid., 139.
[275] P. David Marshall, "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media," 38.
[276] Ibid., 44.

between self-branding subjects and fan-consumers are no less mediated; they just appear as if they are because of the sense of personal connection generated by group liveness and the microcelebrity's performance of the parasocial self.

The most important way that self-branded subjects generate this sense of unmediated, unedited connection to their viewers is to reveal details of their personal lives. In other words, this cultivation of a sense of intimacy and interpersonal connection via social media involves the self-branding subjects blurring the lines between what is private and what is public. This is another defining feature of new media and social media, which are "driven by a profound confusion of the private and the public."[277] According to the dichotomies between public and private that existed in the pre-digital age of mass media, it was often assumed that a celebrity would have a professional or public persona, which they perform as part of their brand for public consumption, and a private persona, which encompasses the details of their everyday lives and relationships and is kept away from the eyes of consumers. However, as P. David Marshall explains in his analysis of celebrity on social media, this dichotomy between public self and private self is being eroded. Instead, he proposes three categories of self-presentation: the "public self," the "public private self," and the "transgressive intimate self."[278] The "public self" is devoid of personal information and only provides official content: for example, Harajuku icon Kyary Pamyu Pamyu has an official website, which announces new musical releases and upcoming live events (including her appearance on television, radio, and magazines) but no information about Kyary herself.[279] As well, Marshall posits that the "transgressive intimate self" is "motivated by temporary emotion" and rashly generates emotionally raw content without considering the consequences of sharing this with the public, giving the example of Elizabeth Taylor's intimate twitter posts in the aftermath of Michael Jackson's death, which "exposed her grief-stricken self."[280] The "public-private self," however, is the most relevant

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[277] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 12.

[278] Alice P. Marshall, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," 44-45.

[279] "きゃりーぱみゅぱみゅ OFFICIAL HOMEPAGE." KPP Official Site. Accessed May 18, 2019. http://kyary.asobisystem.com/.

[280] Alice P. Marshall, "Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy," 45.

to my analysis of influencers' generation of intimacy.[281] The public-private self is that which the self-branded subject constructs out of an amalgamation of their private lives and their public selves, choosing carefully what aspects of their personal lives they want to share with their audiences.

In Haruka Kurebayashi's aforementioned livestream on YouTube, Kurebayashi employs techniques to construct this public-private self and the resulting sense of intimacy with her viewers. Apart from seeing and answering their questions in real-time, Kurebayashi also uses the live stream to reveal intimate details of her life. As the title indicates, Kurebayashi is showing her viewers her nighttime skin care routine. This is a personal routine of self-care that she is making public to her fans so that they can both learn more about her and learn how to perform a lifestyle similar to hers. In other words, this sort of live skincare tutorial not only serves to foster a sense of intimacy, it also has a pedagogical purpose. It lets viewers become more familiar with Haruka Kurebayashi's self-brand and teaches them how to perform a Haruka Kurebayashi-branded lifestyle, a concept that I explained in chapter 2.

Kurebayashi's making public of her bedtime routine in her livestream is also an effective way to create a sense of intimacy among her viewers because it creates the impression that she is revealing her "true self" to the audience. Bedtime and its associated routines are often considered a private part of a celebrity's life: celebrities perform these routines in their private living spaces, usually without witnesses other than those with whom they have close personal relations, like family or friends. Thus, revealing this private bedtime routine to the public puts the viewer in the same position as the self-branding subject's close friends and family, making the connection between influencer and consumer-fan seem social rather than parasocial. As well, because it is more common to watch self-branded subjects putting *on* makeup, the act of taking *off* the makeup that is a central part of her performance of identity gives the impression that Kurebayashi is revealing a more intimate, unperformed, unmediated part of herself. This, on top of technical difficulties with lighting that would not have made it into an edited video, creates

[281] Ibid., 45.

a sense of intimacy because it implies that viewers are getting to witness Kurebayashi's unedited, unpolished self (see again Appendix, Figure 5).

In sum, self-branding subjects' construction of the "public private self" involves a mostly controlled exposure of what was previously understood as personal and private as part of their public persona. Microcelebrities' platform specific performance of identity is also a "performance of connection" to fans, as this sense of connection and intimacy is "constantly worked upon and updated in its on-line form to both maintain its currency and to acknowledge its centrality to the individual's identity, which is dependent upon its network of connections to sustain the life of the on-line persona."[282] Marshall here emphasizes that the public-private self and its generation of connectivity and intimacy is important for maintaining the performance of constantly updating platform-specific identity (which, to reiterate, is a process that instantaneous and live temporality of new media necessitates.) The importance of this connectivity and intimacy points at the crucial difference between social media as a tool of self-branding and more traditional forms of celebrity, which mostly relied on other forms of mass media and representational media.

Certainly the idea of celebrity is not a new one: individuals have been able to achieve fame and influence long before the advent of content platforms like YouTube and Instagram, and these celebrities have also engaged in techniques to generate a sense of intimacy among their fans. However, I contend that new/social media are particularly well-suited to the creation of self-brands because they not only facilitate the *live* sharing of self-branded subjects' private lives with their followers in order to create a sense of intimacy that older media, such as film and television, does not. Crucially, these social media allow self-branded subjects to cultivate intimacy in a way that obscures the constitutive role of media platforms in creating the resulting sense of intimacy. In other words, new/social media as a tool for self-branding subjects is distinguished from older forms of mass media for two reasons: its temporality of liveness and its ability to obscure the mediated nature of intimacy between self-branding subjects and their consumer-fans.

To explain what I mean by this, I return to Wendy Chun's theorization of new media. As well as the necessity of updating, Chun pinpoints another of new media's characteristics:

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[282] Ibid., 42

it is habitual. New media ask their users to develop new habits, such as the scrolling and refreshing actions on Instagram.[283] These habits are developed by repeating the same actions until they become almost unconscious: things like saving, scrolling, clicking, and the temporality of constant and live updating are not disruptive to our every-day lives; rather, they are an ordinary part of them.[284] Chun gives the example of smart phones, which "no longer amaze, but they increasingly structure and monitor the lives of their so-called owners."[285] Although we are of course aware of the new/social media we use in our everyday lives, we are not necessarily aware of the way they structure our activities, time, and physical environments.

For example, it has become commonplace for new/social media to influence where we go and what we do. Trendy restaurants, cafes, and even museums increasingly have "Instagram walls" or other eye-catching décor specifically so that customers can take aesthetically pleasing photos that are likely to generate attention on Instagram.[286] Third Wave, a smart phone application that lists cafés, lets users know which cafés have amenities like Wi-Fi and power outlets so that devices can be connected and charged; if a person plans to study in a café using a computer, they would likely stay away from those without Wi-Fi and power outlets.[287] While perhaps we are aware of the way these built environments are tailored to grab attention on Instagram or to facilitate the use of digital devices, they have become so habitual that we do not think about how they impact our actions. As Chun puts it, "our media matter most when they seem not to matter at all," when they become *infrastructure*.[288] This habituation and fading of new/social media into the background as infrastructure allow self-branded subjects to generate a sense of intimacy with their consumer-fans that seems unmediated. Even the platforms themselves adopt this language of unmediated intimacy: in a post on Instagram's official Tumblr account from 2017, the company describes its live-streaming function as "the best place to

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[283] Nicholas Carah and Michelle Shaul , "Brands and Instagram: Point Tap Swipe Glance," 72.
[284] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 3.
[285] Ibid., 1.
[286] Alyssa Bereznak, "What Happens When a Space Is Designed Specifically for Instagram Likes?" The Ringer. August 09, 2017. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.theringer.com/tech/2017/8/9/16110424/instagram-playground-social-media.
[287] "Th3rd Wave." Th3rd Wave. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.th3rdwave.coffee/.
[288] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same,* 1. Emphasis mine.

experience authentic, unfiltered moments with the people and accounts you care about the most."[289] Instagram posits their live-streaming function as "authentic and unfiltered," even though self-branded subjects and their consumer-fans are not in the same physical location and are in fact being filtered by social media platforms that function as everyday infrastructure. Social media thus distinguishes itself from representational and broadcast media as tools of self-branding in that they obscure the mediated nature of producer-consumer intimacy.

Finally, it is worth noting that the platform specific identities that influencers and microcelebrities perform on social media are not confined to these mediated spaces. Self-branded subjects often expand this performance to off-line physical spaces: as van Djick notes, "some YouTubers periodically hold public gatherings to celebrate the video-sharing community" and meet their consumer-fans face-to-face.[290] For example, there is a yearly convention in California called Vidcon in which social media influencers and fans gather for three days of panels, concerts, meet and greets, and more.[291] This provides consumer-fans the opportunity to interact with their favorite influencers without being mediated by the very platforms that facilitated the existence of these influencers in the first place. Being able to see the physical bodies of these self-branded subjects is a powerful way to generate a sense of personal connection. Apart from this, self-branding microcelebrities create other opportunities for their consumer-fans to meet them in person: for example, Haruka Kurebayashi promoted two live events during her livestream and encouraged her consumer-fans to attend the following weekend. One was a live concert in Shizuoka, and the other was a guest performance at an event for an international beauty college in Yokohama, and they provided further opportunities for consumer-fans to learn more about Kurebayashi.[292]

These opportunities for in-person interaction are not only an effective way to generate a sense of intimacy between influencers and their consumer-fans, they also show

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[289] Megan Shepherd, "Can You Rewatch Live Instagram Videos? Good News!" Bustle. May 07, 2019. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.bustle.com/p/can-you-rewatch-live-instagram-videos-heres-what-you-need-to-know-65549.

[290] José van Dijck, "Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-generated Content," 45.

[291] "Fun Stuff." VidCon US. Accessed May 12, 2019. http://vidcon.com/funstuff/.

[292] くれちゃんねる(Kure-channel). "【LIVE 配信】メイク落とし&スキンケア公開." YouTube. June 08, 2018. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dP5VnV7I3ak.

the way influencers' performance of identity, while constructed on social media platforms, is not necessarily limited to online milieus. After all, performance of identity, especially through Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics, is a fundamentally physical, embodied practice. Although self-branding subjects use social media platforms to construct and market their self-brands, this fundamentally mediated self can be exported into the world outside of the platform interface once the self-brand has been established and generates enough attention to successfully compete in neoliberal markets. Activities like meet-and-greets, talks, musical performances, and even simply walking around in public are embodied activities that allow neoliberal subjects to visibly mobilize fashion and cosmetics as part of both their online and offline performances of identity.

To clarify, in chapter 2, I established that fashion stylization and cosmetic stylization are embodied practices, and forms of immaterial labor, that allow individuals to perform an identity. Thus, self-branding subjects who mobilize fashion and cosmetics are already performing embodied practices in order to generate their online content. For example, self-branding subjects perform the bodily practices of doing makeup and getting dressed in order to create the videos and images, like makeup tutorials or fashion photos, that they then upload online. Similarly, their embodied activities with fans, like talks and meet-and-greets, can be uploaded onto social media platforms in order to create more content and aid the self-branding subject's mediated performance of platform-specific self. Thus, engaging in embodied, physical activities with fans is a way for self-branding subjects to get the maximum possible value out of the labor they are already doing to perform their identities. In other words, a self-branding subject's online and offline performances of identity support each other. Self-branded subjects' platform-specific identities can be exported into more embodied activities, which can then in turn be uploaded as updated content on social media, creating a circular and mutually supportive performance of identity that is both embodied and digital.

For example, Pony Syndrome surprised one of her biggest fans in person by posing as a shop staff in a makeup store. She then made a video of herself surprising the fan and doing the fan's makeup, which she then uploaded to her YouTube channel as content for

her other viewers to consume.[293] Although it was not a public event like a meet-and-greet, this video is footage of Pony Syndrome and a fan engaging in face-to-face, direct interaction that was then used to update Pony Syndrome's online self-brand. Other microcelebrities engage in similar activities for their public events: for example, the Try Guys, a comedy quartet from California, regularly upload their live Vidcon performances to their YouTube channel.[294]

Throughout this chapter, I have examined the importance of social media platforms in the construction of self-brands, as well as their role in mediating the interaction between self-branding subjects and their consumer-fans. Ultimately, I posit that we can read social media platforms as the infrastructure of self-brands: they are the basis upon which self-branded subjects can participate in neoliberal capitalist markets, generate and maintain attention across a wide audience, and constantly update their performances of self. In this case, I use the term "infrastructure" to refer to the basis of self-brands, rather than to refer to the basis for habitual and unconscious actions as I did previously. These platforms, as infrastructure, allow self-branded subjects to blur distinctions between live and mediated and between public and private. As we can see in Pony Syndrome's and Haruka Kurebayashi's use of YouTube and Instagram, self-branded subjects employ a number of techniques to perform platform-specific identities, generate attention for their brands, and foster a sense of intimacy with their viewers. They operate across platforms, linking their activities on Instagram, YouTube, and elsewhere; they engage in livestreams and constant updating as necessitated by the instantaneous temporality of new media; and they reveal details of their personal lives to turn the parasocial into the illusion of the social. And although the algorithmic and interfacial features of these platforms inevitably impart their biases on self-brands, the platforms ultimately fade into the background, becoming habitual and infrastructural creating the impression that the interactions between self-branding subjects and their consumer-fans are unmediated.

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[293] Syndrome, PONY. "포니야부탁해 3 화 '가족사진을 부탁해' / 'PONY ON-AIR' EP-03 (With Sub)." YouTube. October 04, 2018. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6f24_0H__tU.

[294] The Try Guys. "75 Things That Will Restore Your Faith In The Internet | Try Guys Live!" YouTube. June 27, 2018. Accessed May 12, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uijxor59CXc.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have examined a number of processes that are implicit to the neoliberal construction of self-brands on social media through Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics. By way of conclusion, I present a condensed version of my argument, reiterating the most important concepts. Finally, I point to the relevance of my research to thinking about neoliberal self-branding, a process in which we are all constantly engaging whether we are conscious of it or not.

When social media users scroll through their Instagram feeds, they may not think of this action as labor. When they get dressed in the morning, put on makeup, and snap photos, they may not think of these actions as labor, either. Yet as neoliberal rationalities have permeated most aspects of life since the mid-1990s, our actions as neoliberal subjects increasingly participate in market competition and generate value, and thus they can be considered forms of labor. Neoliberalism's privatization of things like education and healthcare, its flexibilization labor, and its emphasis on market competition has created a condition in which neoliberal subjects must be *entrepreneurs of the self* in order to survive. Chapter 1 outlined the way this socio-economic configuration gained hegemony in Japan and South Korea, both of which experienced significant restructuring in the 1990s. In both localities, it became harder for individuals to land a full-time, stable job that would provide them with the means to procure the now-privatized and commodified necessities like health care because there simply were not as many of these types of jobs.

As scholars like Jesook Song, Yoonkyung Lee, and Changwook Kim have shown, young people trying to get jobs in Korea increasingly had to market themselves as individuals in order to be hired in the competitive job market: they sold not only their labor power but also themselves as people. Jesook Song gives the examples of young creatives who sought jobs in the design industry. Simply being educated at a good university and having good design skills (two feats in themselves) are no longer enough to attain long-term, stable jobs: rather, young designers must "make [themselves] appealing by 'framing' [their] own stor[ies] and showing it in a distinctive way," and have a "'mentality of self-

development' rather than following only money and welfare benefits."[295] Anne Allison and Mori Yoshitaka describe a similar situation in Japan, focusing on the population that is unable to commodify the self or market it to the extent necessary to survive in neoliberal markets. Precarious populations like freeters, hikikomori, and NEETs reveal what is at stake in neoliberal subjects' commodification of self: the ability to live and thrive.

Simultaneous with the rise of this intense market competition is the widening of the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Under neoliberal capitalism, those who are wealthy stay wealthy, while it is extremely difficult for those of lower economic standing to transcend their positions.[296] As a result of an increasing awareness of this inequality, I argue that subculture emerges as a form of protest that allows neoliberal subjects to feel as if they can push back against the inherent inequalities of the neoliberal system. Dick Hebdige theorizes subculture as the appropriation of signs from a dominant ideology, which gives these signs hegemonic meanings by which mainstream society understands them. Subculture takes these signs and assigns new meanings to them, a process which has subversive potential.[297] However, because this resignification of signs is so inherently bound up with the consumption of commodities, something that upholds the health of neoliberal markets, I also argue that its power to effectively push back against the neoliberal logic of the free market is limited.

I have applied this framework of subculture versus mainstream to my analysis of Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics, as understanding the significance they hold in their respective localities makes clearer the ways community of consumers and producers forms around them. Anne McKnight acknowledges that "subculture in Japan is defined as a community formed around the conventions of representations in one medium of information culture" rather than the "nonnormative or marginal position" of subculture in theorizations like Hebdige's.[298] However, I point to *yami kawaii,* a subset of Harajuku fashion, as an example in which Japanese subculture still appropriates signs and resignifies them, even if this resignification is not intended to be oppositional or deviant. As I

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[295] Changwook Kim, "The Political Subjectivization of Korean Creative Workers: Working and Living as Urban Precariat in Creative City Seoul," 5.
[296] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 16.
[297] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* 91.
[298] Anne McKnight, "Frenchness and Transformation in Japanese Subculture, 1972–2004," 125.

described above, Harajuku fashion thus aligns with subculture as a means to resignify normative meanings and images without effectively upending neoliberal conditions. In contrast, I understand South Korean cosmetics to be mainstream because they are tools with which neoliberal subjects can subscribe to hegemonic beauty standards and norms. Rather than resignifying the normative meanings associated with commodities, South Korean beauty consumers mobilize these commodities to conform to hegemonic beauty standards.

Subcultural Harajuku fashion and mainstream South Korean beauty also expand beyond their domestic localities to gain consumers transnationally. Most importantly, they are appropriated by their respective states as tools of nation branding. Koichi Iwabuchi describes the way the Japanese state mobilizes "kawaii" aesthetics and Harajuku (which are often associated with each other) to boost Japan's soft power. As part of the "Cool Japan" nation-branding project, Harajuku fashion is used as a way to promote Japanese popular culture abroad, with an eye toward bolstering trade and fostering an interest in Japanese culture. As well, it aids in what Iwabuchi calls "pop culture diplomacy," which aims to smooth over rocky international relations, especially with neighboring nations that seek reparations for pre-war and wartime imperialism.[299] In the process of moving abroad, Harajuku fashion becomes even more subcultural: a small but devoted population dresses up in Harajuku fashion, attends conventions and meetups, and consumes commodities from Harajuku. As part of "Cool Japan" nation-branding, Harajuku fashion is equated with other subcultures like anime fandom and the cosplay community, thus shaping the consumption and practice of Harajuku fashion transnationally.

South Korean cosmetics are used similarly, as part of South Korea's nation-branding project, called *Hallyu,* or the Korean Wave.[300] Together with other forms of South Korean popular culture, especially K-Pop, the cosmetics industry has been supported by South Korea's government as one of its most important exports. Similarly intended to foster interest in other parts of South Korean culture (like food), popular cosmetics brands have

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[299] Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pop-culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Question of 'international Cultural Exchange'," 422.

[300] Jung Bong Choi, "Hallyu versus Hallyu-hwa: Cultural Phenomenon versus Institutional Campaign" 1. ; Kim Suk Young *K-Pop Live,* 5.

become increasingly available in neighboring countries as well as in the Americas and Europe. And, although the cosmetics industry is mainstream in South Korea, it becomes subcultural upon moving transnationally. While its increasing availability has also made more consumers aware of it, the number of those who are knowledgeable about South Korean beauty is small compared to other, local beauty cultures.

Following these observations about the transnational movements of Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics, I have explored the mechanisms by which neoliberal subjects self-brand, laying out the relationships between the self, branding, and marketing. Firstly, I lay out the process by which an individual's identity can be associated with their clothing and makeup stylization. Fashion and makeup have long been lauded as ways to express one's identity, but I turn to Judith Butler's theorization of performativity to understand why exactly that is. She posits that "identity," which typically understood as an interior, intrinsic part of the individual, is actually performed on the surface of the body via a series of practices and habits, repeated over time.[301] This creates the impression of a coherent identity, which I then link to Bourdieu's notion of taste. Much like the notion of identity, taste appears to be individual-specific and localized, but it is actually constructed by the individual's social surroundings, especially class.[302] As taste positions itself as the apparent cause of self-stylization, which is the performance of identity, it creates the impression that the identity is also individual-specific and localized.

Crucially, performing identity through taste requires consistent practice especially because of identity's constructed nature. If the performance fails to repeat, this risks revealing the fact that identity is actually an amalgamation of signs, actions, and discourse on the surface of the body, rather than something pre-discursive and interior.[303]

I have also analyzed how this performed identity is commodified and made into a brand. I argue that the taste of self-branding subjects can be read as a form of immaterial labor because the commodities these subjects consume according to their tastes are indicative of their identities as consumers; in other words, their consumption produces a

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[301] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 185.
[302] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction,* 16.
[303] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 192.

branded taste and lifestyle.[304] These branded tastes and lifestyles are what self-brands offer as their main products. Crucially, the productive consumption of self-branding subjects also produces what Maruizio Lazzarato calls "ethical surplus," or social relations and communities, as well as emotional investments in the self-brand.[305] Following Adam Arvisson, I have noted that one of the most important things that contributes to a brand's success is its ability to offer possibilities for being and action to consumers.[306] In other words, consumers need to be able to see how they can mobilize a brand's product to create new meanings, develop their own self-brands, and effectively participate in neoliberal markets. However, brands also need to engage in brand management to guide the consumer creation of ethical surplus, community, being, and action so that these new meanings and uses are aligned with the brand's identity.[307] Thus, self-branding subjects engage in a number of branding and marketing techniques to control what Arvidsson calls the "ambience" of their brand, which effectively guides the possible new meanings that consumers can make.[308] Some of these techniques include partnerships/sponsorships, cross-platform promotions, brand extensions, and live events.[309]

I argue lastly that brand management of the sort I described above can be understood as a form of self-management, and that self-stylization through Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics can be understood as neoliberal techniques of the self in the Foucauldian sense. This is because, as embodied processes, they all allow neoliberal subjects to perform self-care. Foucault defines self-care care of the soul, which is achieved through self-knowledge.[310] Using the film *200 Pounds Beauty* as an example, I have argued that fashion and cosmetic stylization is a way to know the self because it helps the neoliberal subject construct a coherent identity that fits within the imperatives of neoliberal governmentality: even if this identity is not pre-discursive, it appears to the individual as if it is.

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[304] Min-Ha T. Pham, *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet,* 5.
[305] Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture,* 10.
[306] Ibid., 8.
[307] Ibid., 76.
[308] Ibid., 16.
[309] Ibid., 78.
[310] Michel Foucault, "'Technologies of the Self.' Lectures at University of Vermont Oct. 1982," 1.

In the final chapter I have examined the way self-branding neoliberal subjects use social media platforms to help construct their brands and engage with their brand's consumers, who also double as fans. Taking Instagram and YouTube as my main platforms of interest, I first explained the way these platforms both facilitate and limit the kinds of self-brands that neoliberal subjects can create. Although many such social media platforms posit themselves as egalitarian tools of empowerment that allow neoliberal subjects the same opportunity to self-brand and gain a following, I showed the way these platforms in fact introduce implicit biases into both self-brands and their ability to generate attention.

Another important feature of platforms as a basis of neoliberal self-branding is that they collapse the activities of traditional brands and self-brands, which reinforces the economic nature of users' activities on these platforms. I turned to Pony Syndrome's use of both Instagram and YouTube to exemplify some of the ways self-branding subjects can mobilize these platforms in their branding.

In doing so, I also emphasized the central importance of the extremely short temporality that characterizes social media and other forms of new media. I argue that not only is this temporality extremely short, it necessitates users to engage in constant and live updating so that their brands continue to grab attention and stay relevant. Instagram and YouTube facilitate live updating with their live-streaming features, which allow users to broadcast their activities to viewers, who can watch in real-time. I argue that these live-streams, during which self-branding subjects share details of their private lives with their viewers, are extremely effective in generating a sense of intimacy with their viewers, which keeps the viewers invested in the brand. This entails a fundamental disruption of the distinctions between public and private, but also between live and mediated, as viewers can now achieve a sense of intimacy that was previously associated with in-person interaction. Along with the "private public self" comes the creation of mediated liveness.[311] By way of example, I pointed to Harajuku fashion influencer and model Haruka Kurebayashi and her use of live-streaming on YouTube, as she replied in real time to her fans' comments, shared details of her private life, and promoted live events where her fans could meet her face-to-face.

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[311] P. David Marshall, "The Promotion and Presentation of the Self: Celebrity as Marker of Presentational Media," 45.

The main takeaway from this chapter is that social media platforms can be understood as the infrastructure of self-brands. As forms of presentational media, they distinguish themselves from mass media like film and TV in that they allow the mediated quality of interaction to fade from consciousness. These platforms fade into the background as they become habit, allowing self-branding neoliberal subjects and their consumer-fans to feel as if their connections are unfiltered and unmediated.

Main Takeaways

Ultimately, the processes I describe in this thesis by which neoliberal subjects self-brand on social media using Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics point to *the simultaneous development of neoliberal self-branding and social media platforms in Japan and South Korea*. Both the neoliberal practice of self-branding and social media platforms have local histories, impacted by the drastic political, economic, technological, and social changes that arose in the second half of the 1900s. However, my analysis of the simultaneous development and interdependence of these two conditions is not limited to Japan and South Korea as localities. Especially on internationally popular platforms like Instagram and YouTube,[312] neoliberal subjects based in a variety of localities also engage in processes of self-branding, becoming microcelebrities and influencers. North America and Europe in particular generate a large number of popular self-branded subjects, such as comedy quartet The Try Guys, lifestyle blogger Safiya Nygaard, and makeup guru Tati, all of whom are American, or Turkish cosplayer and Harajuku fashion fan Anzujaamu. The processes I described by which an individual's identity is associated with their physical appearance, and the way this identity is commodified and marketed, is not confined to Japan and South Korea as localities.

As Marc Steinberg explains in his book *Platform Economy: how Japan transformed the consumer Internet,* "the platform as mediatory device or mechanism rewrites prior relations between companies and consumers, such that the economy and society are now governed by platformic relations, which is to say: defined by the management of social, economic, and cultural relations by means of platform mediation."[313] In other words,

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[312] With the exception of localities whose governing bodies restrict access to the platforms, such as China.

[313] Marc Steinberg, *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Consumer Internet.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 30.

although platforms may have local or regional specificities in their functions, user populations, or origins, platforms reach far beyond those specificities in their structuring of neoliberal lifeworlds. The same is true of YouTube and Instagram, the platforms I analyzed in my discussion of self-branding: although they are American in origin, their users are spread globally. Thus, the neoliberal modes of governance they facilitate are not limited to the U.S., but rather extend beyond any one specific locality. Similarly my analysis of Harajuku fashion and South Korean beauty as tools by which to self-brand offers an angle from which to approach a transnationally occurring phenomenon. It describes the way in which neoliberal subjects seek to conduct themselves according to neoliberal governmentality and to survive in a world that is both increasingly competitive and unequal.

Although the processes I describe in this thesis are indeed transnationally applicable, I wish to reiterate the specificity of the Japanese and South Korean examples I use in my analysis. They are different from microcelebrities like the Try Guys or Safiya Nygaard in that influencers like Haruka Kurebayashi and PONY Syndrome must engage with both local and transnational audiences to add value to their self-brands. As I addressed in chapter 3, in an attention economy characterized by an extremely short temporality, self-brands can generate value simply by commanding the attention of their audiences. However, brand expansion through merchandise and the cultivation of intimacy through live events are also important resources for generating not only attention but also revenue. Local audiences are therefore an important subset of consumers, as they have access to live events and merchandise that international audiences do not.

While influencers from places other than Japan and South Korea also need to engage with both subsets of their audience, the labor that influencers in North America must perform to reach these audiences is much less than their international counterparts. This is because the platforms that influencers like the Try Guys use to connect with their local audiences (specifically *American* platforms like YouTube and Instagram, among others) also enjoy immense international popularity.[314] This is not the case for influencers like

[314] While international platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter also have a large user base in Japan and South Korea, they coexist with local and regional platforms like Ameba, Line, KakaoTalk, and others in a way they don't in North America.

Haruka Kurebayashi or PONY Syndrome. For example, alongside her YouTube and Instagram accounts, Haruka Kurebayashi updates a personal blog on popular Japanese social media platform Ameba.[315] This blog includes written text as well as images, often of Kurebayashi herself, and many of the posts remind her followers of the time and place of her local live events. Kurebayashi's Ameba blog is an important resource by which she communicates specifically with her local fans: the blog is written entirely in Japanese, making it difficult for international fans who do not speak Japanese to consume the content. Although her following on Ameba is meager (5,121 subscribers)[316] compared to her following on internationally popular platforms like YouTube and Instagram, where she has millions of subscribers, she maintains it to ensure that her local fan base has access to exclusive content that is less available to her non-Japanese-speaking audience, and to encourage these local fans to support her brand in a way that her international fans cannot.

Along with the issue of local versus transnational audiences and the platforms that influencers use to reach them, non-Western self-branding subjects also must communicate in English to reach a wider international audience. As I mentioned in my examination of Hallyu in chapter 1, PONY Syndrome's makeup tutorials and other videos have English subtitles, as her self-brand is coopted into the state's project to cultivate its soft power abroad. The addition of these English subtitles constitutes a form of additional labor for PONY Syndrome. As well as cultivating her self-brand through physical performance and practice, and on top of the embodied and immaterial labor she must perform in recording videos, taking pictures, and writing captions, PONY Syndrome must also either learn a new language and add the subtitles herself, or hire someone who knows English to perform this labor for her. She must choose between dedicating additional time and labor to reach her international audience and using some of the revenue she generates from her brand to hire someone to help her reach this audience. This is an obstacle which English-speaking influencers do not face, as they can communicate with both international and local audiences without the additional labor of either learning a new language or adding subtitles or translations to their content.

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[315] Haruka Kurebayashi, Ameba, accessed Aug. 10 2019. https://ameblo.jp/90884-1u1-90884/.
[316] Haruka Kurebayashi, Ameba, accessed Aug. 10 2019. https://ameblo.jp/90884-1u1-90884/.

Bringing these popular "western" examples of influencers together with Haruka Kurebayashi and PONY Syndrome highlights the disparity between "western" and East Asian self-branding subjects: rather than simply being analogous examples of the way self-branding subjects use social media to construct and market their self-brands, my analysis highlights the additional labor in which East Asian influencers must engage to successfully construct and market their self-brands on social media. While "western," especially North American influencers are able to communicate with local AND international audiences on the same platform, using a language they already speak, East Asian influencers do not enjoy these privileges.[317]

"Ideal" Neoliberal Subjecthood

In sum, self-branding individuals on social media are striving to be "ideal" neoliberal subjects. By commodifying their identities and making them available to consumers, self-branding subjects saturate their entire existence with economic rationality: their every action is subsumed within their participation in neoliberal markets. They are the epitome of the imperative to be an entrepreneur of the self, as they are produced by constant consumption. They are predicated on a making visible of unified taste and lifestyle, and thus they show how constant participation in capitalist consumption is not only desirable but necessary if an individual wants to live and thrive in neoliberal capitalist environments and be consumable themselves.

Yet, much as Judith Butler claims that gender is a constant performance and that an ideal embodiment of gender can never be achieved[318], ideal neoliberal subjecthood can never be achieved. Neoliberal capitalism necessitates constant participation in markets, especially through cycles of consumption and production. However, reaching ideal neoliberal subjecthood would erase the need to participate in neoliberal markets. If an ideal subjecthood were achieved, the individual could become static, and there would be no incentive to continue this cycle, which is used as a tool by which to strive for ideal neoliberal subjecthood. Influencers on social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube

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[317] For more on the specificity of East Asian influencers in the types of labor they perform, and an elaboration on the role of race in the cultivation and marketing of self-brands, see Min-ha T. Pham's book *Asians Wear Clothes on the Internet: Race, Gender, and the Work of Personal Style Blogging.*

[318] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 26.

are positioned as exemplary neoliberal subjects because they have saturated their entire existences with economic rationalities, and yet in order to maintain this ideal status, they must constantly consume commodities and produce (taste, lifestyle, metadata, desire, and more.) Thus, neoliberalism necessitates that ideal subjecthood never be achieved, which paradoxically makes self-branding subjects even more perfectly suited to perpetuate neoliberal market rationalities: they are destined for a life of endless consumption and production. Whether neoliberal subjects choose to mobilize Harajuku fashion and South Korean cosmetics or other commodified cultural objects to do so, this hyper-economic, constantly updating, highly mediated, branded existence is necessitated for all individuals in neoliberal lifeworlds.

Appendix

Figure 1:
Yami kawaii's beloved poster child, Menhera-chan, wielding a strawberry impaled on a boxcutter. Image source: https://www.lafary.net/english/44870/

Figure 2:
An ad for a plastic surgery clinic, photographed in South Korea. Image source: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2018/05/rise-invasive-plastic-surgeries-south-korea-180519132009971.html

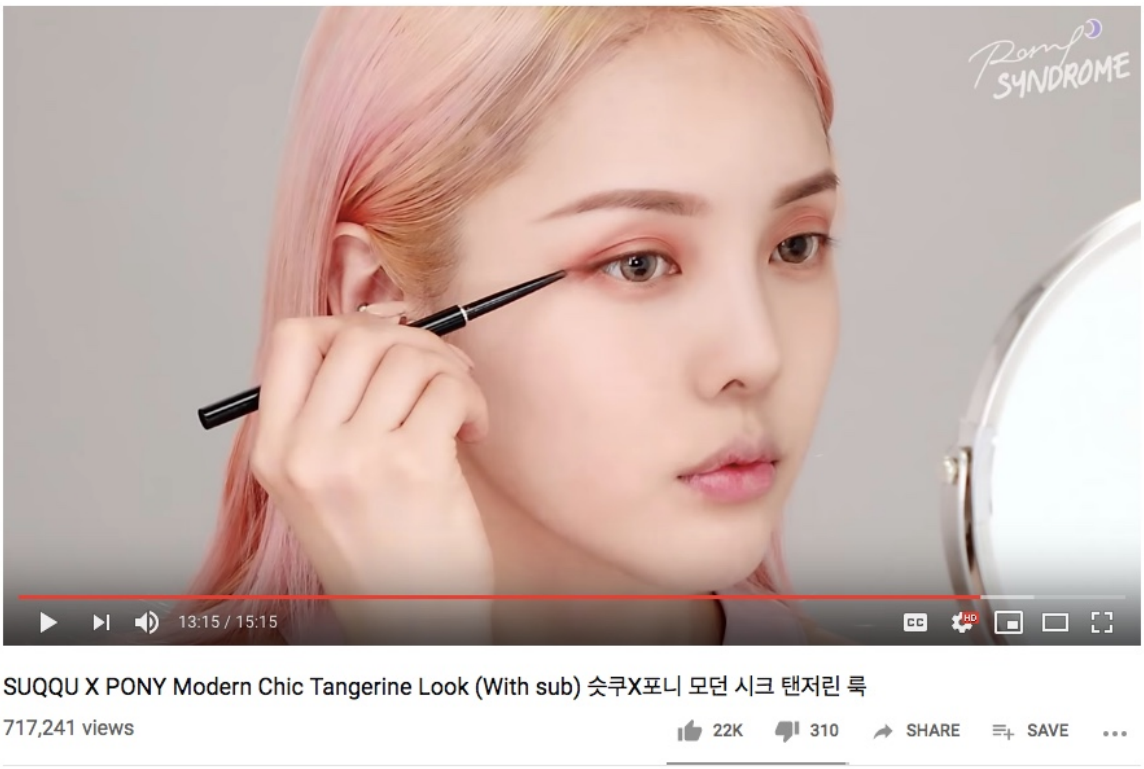
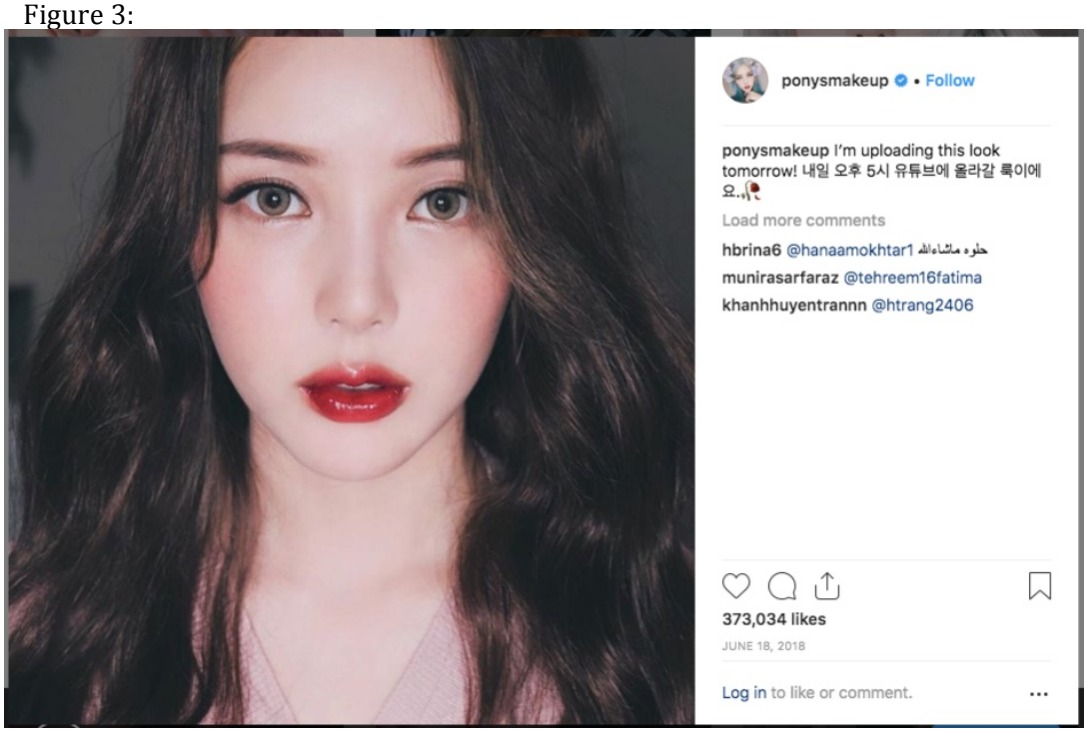


Figure 3:



igure 4:
'ony Syndrome's June 18th, 2018 post on Instagram, promoting the release of a
ew "for-Instagram" makeup tutorial the following day on her Youtube channel.

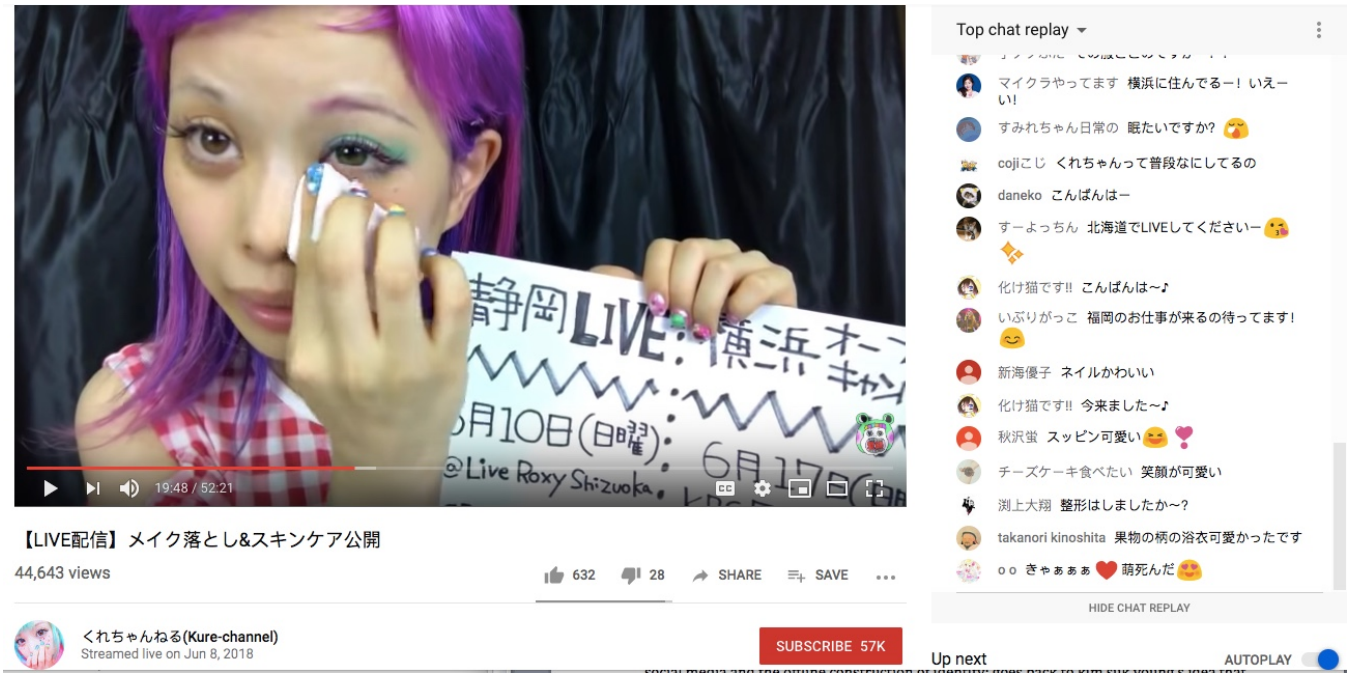


Figure 5:
Haruka Kurebayashi taking off her makeup in her YouTube live-stream on June 8th, 2018.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dP5VnV7I3ak

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