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Abstract

Overwhelmingly dependent on Pierre Bourdieu's landmark study *Distinction* (1984), contemporary research on the sociology of art and media focuses largely on consumption as a matter of status. However, recent anthropological engagements with affect and emotion suggest an alternative approach: the analysis of media consumption as a practice of regulating mood and character. Based on interviews and focus group sessions conducted over thirteen months with a group of women with advanced degrees and working in professional fields in Japan, this article offers narratives of media consumption habits as evidence for a mode of engaging media that takes therapy rather than a politics of identity as its primary aim. The article ultimately argues for an understanding of media consumption as rooted in a practice of care that become increasingly important for women in late capitalist Japan facing the double burden of material and domestic labor demands.

Introduction

Atsuko sometimes watches movies to cry. "Crying is a very good way to relax," she said. "I remember I liked this movie, do you know *Steel Magnolias*? I often watch that movie just to cry. We conceal many emotions without knowing we have them. But by crying we can gradually release those emotions. It's like an onion unfolding." A single woman in her late thirties and a researcher at a prestigious Japanese university, Atsuko described what emerged as a common theme in my research on media practices among women professionals in Japan (women with advanced degrees working primarily in academics, law, or film production): I call it *consumption as care*. As trope it argues that a good deal of the music we consume, the films we watch, and the magazines and literature we read today is done so in private as a method of self-regulation—of caring for the self and its desires in ways that soothe, comfort, mend, manage, educate, stimulate, motivate, and inspire. In contrast to traditional sociological characterizations of media as a tool of social representation and distinction, consumption as

care operates affectively: in private, non-conspicuous places where subjects employ art as a tool to transform the body's physiological capacities to feel into potential for personal growth and management. In short, consumption as care focuses attention on media's function not as a signifier in a competitive game of distinction and self-striving, but as a tool to engage therapeutically with the stresses imposed on the self as an obligatory player in that game.

This perspective on media consumption, particularly in regards to women, is especially important for contemporary Japan for a number of reasons. First, save for a number of psychologically-focused studies from the field of communication studies (see Knobloch-Westerwick 2006 and Nabi et al. 2004, 2006) there is a general lack of sociological and anthropological research on private media consumption and its varied uses. Although Bourdieu's sweeping study of the relationship between class and taste in 1960s France demonstrated the importance of analyzing the socialization of aesthetic preferences, its enormous success may also have limited subsequent studies on the sociology of art by attracting too much attention to its public forms of consumption and too little to its private ones. One can see the effects of this even in the most nuanced and successful of anthropological studies of media consumption in Japan. Focused most pointedly on how pop-culture consumers form relationships with others through shared consumption styles, whether in terms of cute fashion (Shimamura 1991, Yamane 1991, Kinsella 1995, Yano 2013), otaku culture (Galbraith 2012), hip hop (Condry 2006), traditional ballads or enka (Yano 2003), jazz (Atkins 2001), anime (Condry 2013), TV (Lukács), or toys (Allison 2006), these ethnographies deal almost explicitly with socialization, even if in marginal settings positioned against mainstream values. As a consequence, they leave room for a study on how private practices of media consumption may operate on precisely those conflicts created by the meeting of subcultural and mainstream norms between which subjects often feel torn. More importantly, concentrating most often on youth culture (barring Yano's study on enka [2003], these studies pay little attention to the consequences that youth-saturated pop culture media spheres have on older subjects—women especially—whose underrepresentation may inspire feelings of marginalization and animosity.

A second reason for drawing attention to private media consumption is that in their treatment of art as a mode of representation and distinction, traditional sociological studies of art practices require researchers to analyze its most conspicuous forms: those practices of consumption in art, food, fashion, and media in which subjects engage as forms of expression, communication, and self-representation. This concentration on representation through

conspicuous consumption serves as the cornerstone for the field of cultural studies whose classic works deal most often with public themes of power struggles and class (Hall 1973, Hebdige 1979, Willis 1981), lifestyle (Featherstone 1995, 2007), or other forms of public identity politics (Lash and Lury 2007)¹. As this treatment of consumption within cultural studies and its relationship to power drew heavily upon the theoretical resources of the Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industries (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Benjamin 1977; Adorno 2001), the discipline established an intellectual hegemony of its own, privileging the public over private uses of art.

A third reason for this paper's emphasis on what Lukas calls "inconspicuous" forms of consumption (1997) more explicitly concerns gender. Women have occupied a prominent position in studies on consumption in Japan, as they are often targeted as both an important demographic for marketers and a resource of potent and commodifiable imagery within their advertising campaigns (Skov and Moeran 1996). Despite, or even *on account of* their visibility in media spheres, however, women have continued to occupy a marginalized status within a contemporary Japanese society in which the state responds to increasing economic challenges by imposing a double burden upon women as both contributors to the national economy and producers of the population (Roberts 1994, Ogasawara 1998, Mackie 2003, Miller and Bardsley 2005, Bardsley and Miller 2011). Paying attention to inconspicuous and private practices of consumption reveal how female subjects leverage media as a way of moderating and fashioning selves in response to increased burdens of gendered labor. These burdens place demands on women that cut across Bourdieu's class and status identities, offering a view of art and media's role not in constructing public identities but in coping with the impositions of those identities' demands.²

Aiming to shed light on these less illuminated sites of media consumption, this article draws on personal narratives from a group of individuals that for the purpose of this study I call "women professionals." These are women of Japanese citizenship, roughly between the ages of 35 and 50, and who are working in fields of expertise related to their advanced educational

¹ The title of cultural studies' most successful journal, *Public Culture*, attests to this focus on public forms of representation.

² The most recent illustration of this imposition came in a session of the Tokyo City Government in which a male legislator heckled a female assemblywoman by asking her if she couldn't have children ("*kodomo ga umenai no ka?*") and suggesting she should "get married as soon as possible" ("*hayaku kekkon shita hō ga ii?*"). That she was arguing for more services in order to enable women to better cope with the increasing burdens of childcare was a point nonetheless lost on the hecklers (Kameda 2013).

training. Most all of them hold either an MA, PhD, or a more specialized certification or commensurate experience relative to their field. In presenting personal narratives I collected through both informal and semi-structured interviews as well as in focus groups from October 2010 through November 2011, I demonstrate how media functions in an ethical rather than representational register. Ethics, as articulated by Foucault in his work on sexuality (1985) and on practices of the self (1998a, 1998b), designates a field of care, both for oneself and—because caring for oneself is always a matter of managing one’s relationships—for others as well. It is a way of developing a certain *rapprochement à soi*, a relationship with the self that enables self-work by means of its division into a self that works and a self that is worked upon (Foucault 1998b, 263; also see Faubion 2011). In exacting this work, or “self-management,” one invokes certain technologies: methods and tools employed for cultivation or regulation. In terms of media consumption among the women I interviewed, this refers to practices such as listening to music after a hard day of work, watching TV dramas in cultivating alternative desires, or, as in the case of Atsuko cited above, using film as a basic form of catharsis.

Through observations on these practices, this article demonstrates the important affective role that consumption plays in regulating the burdens of shifting—though not necessarily *precarious* (Allison 2013)—forms of labor pervasive in contemporary Japan. It argues that this affective role can be understood in two different registers of consumption, which I call the *scripted* and *unscripted*. While the former entails a set of practices committed to the fashioning and refashioning of self, the latter is focused more exclusively, and more unconsciously, on the regulation of mood. In distinguishing between these two ethical registers of consumption and offering personal narratives that illustrate them, the article also offers a conceptual framework for future fieldwork studies on how media consumption in varying and evolving ways organizes the relationship between art and ethics.

Scripted Care and Self-Fashioning

While private appropriations of art operate in various degrees of conscious recognition, when paired with major life changes they often take overtly scripted forms. I use the term *scripted care* to indicate forms of consumption that enter into the subject’s conscious recognition of the commodity consumed as something that plays a specific role in her life narrative. It is scripted because either the narrative provided by the commodity (e.g. film or novel) or the experience of the art object itself in various mediated forms—some, like music,

far less dependent on narrative—functions as a vessel for conscious reflection and self-evaluation. I contrast this form of scripted care with *unscripted care*, which operates far more affectively—on mood, feeling, and other nonconscious operations of the nervous system responding to external stimuli.

Atsuko's case, with which I opened this article, is an example of scripted care, where a particular experience with a film serves as an object for reflection. In the same interview she described another instance in which an engagement with art, this time a Brazilian music concert, served as the impetus not only for reflection but also for a major life change. In a long and eloquent narrative, she explained to me how a music concert motivated her to make a significant decision about the trajectory of her life. "Before the Brazilian concert," Atsuko recalls, "work was a kind of labor. I worked just to earn money. And just to climb the ladder." Atsuko worked for a Japanese company as a sales representative. She graduated from a notable university in Tokyo and quickly found a job. Finding an opportunity to move to another company, which seemed also like a step up in terms of her career, she then moved to a foreign trading company as an HR representative. After that she moved to yet another company. Atsuko expressed an ongoing dissatisfaction with her career but had never been able to make a job change that felt like a step in the right direction. She told me how the concert in conjunction with a number of other factors contributed to her finally making a significant change:

There were many things that happened at once; it was a kind of coincidence. So before [the concert] I had this kind of illness. I thought that event changed my values. That was event number one. Then event two was this Brazilian concert. And the third event...I was working as a training manager and before offering a course to employees at my company I had to take the course myself. But it turned out that I was the person first influenced by that course. It's called the "Seven Habits." It's very common. That training course basically tries to develop your power to pursue your career, to find your real purpose. So, through that course I kind of changed my idea of what I wanted to do in life. Then, event four: there was a kind of harassment at work. It's not sexual harassment but a kind of power harassment. You know if you work for a company or an organization, sometimes people just think about themselves and just try to protect their position, even though they kill other people, so I really hated that kind of business environment. There were many nice people

there and I still keep in touch with them but...so those things came together and I decided now would be the time to move on to another opportunity.

Although Atsuko in no way accredits the Brazilian concert as the single motivation for changing her career, placing the concert in the context of these other events in her narrative one clearly sees how art functions as a vehicle for a major shift in attitude and ethos. Here she describes the impact of the concert in more detail:

When I was working for [my last company] a senior colleague (*senpai*) invited us to go to that show. And actually he also plays guitar and is a member of a band. He just does it for fun. He worked for an insurance company as an HR director but he really likes music and he said, "My favorite artist is coming to Japan so why don't we go together?" And he is a very nice person. The three of us went: my senior colleague and me and my younger colleague (*kōhai*). So he bought two CDs for us, for preparation (*yoshū*). So we each chose one. And I liked that CD very much. And when I went there I was so just...you know that kind of atmosphere, it's like a ...like a...very different place, you know it's in the Blue Note. That was very shocking... When I went to that Brazilian show I was kind of having problems working at my office and I was not sure what I can do for my future career. I was kind of like a roaming sheep: just kind of not knowing where I should go, what I should do. When I went to that concert I was shocked by how much I enjoyed the performance. I surprisingly realized, wow, it's really okay to enjoy one's work (*Ningen wa tonishiku shigoto o shite mo yoi no da*). Since then I've tried to work and make choices in my career path all the while holding this value of "work as something to enjoy" in my mind.

For Atsuko the concert held a special status in her list of factors contributing to her shift in attitude. Indeed, Atsuko had moved companies before but had not found a place she felt comfortable. It was only in her realization that one could "enjoy one's work," as she puts it, that she seemed to have found an operative value that has sustained her career for the past ten years. Atsuko's story highlights the ability for art to serve as a script through which one can interpret one's life and at the same time mobilize it as a model for living. For her the concert serves as a landmark in her life—a symbol of transition from one form of living to another.

At the same time, it functions as a kind of mental talisman of a new ethic: enjoy one's work; enjoy one's life.

Also important to recognize is the timing and context of the concert in Atsuko's life. She recognized that had she not been facing such difficulties in other facets of her life she may not have had the same reaction to the concert: "The thing is that if I had been in a very good environment at work I might not have felt like that at the concert. I was kind of in a low position and you know when you're in that position good things look like a very bright light shining. So you are influenced by that very much." Whether the concert would have played such a significant role in her life in the absence of these other factors is less important than how the concert, nevertheless, plays a therapeutic role in her narrative. This is consumption as care, demonstrating art's capacity for ethical change and development. Atsuko does not necessarily remember particular songs or musicians—the explicit signs Bourdieu requires for art to function as a signifier of status; rather, she remembers the feeling from the night and its transformative effect. That Atsuko can readily recall this story after several years attests to the affective power of the event as narrative script.

In considering the concert's power as ethical script, we might also reflect on the cultural meanings of Brazilian music in Japan more generally. As Arturo Hamelitz suggests in his research on Brazilian musicians and fans in Japan, samba and bossa nova styles of music associated with Brazil often conjure up images of a free-spirited, laid-back culture among its Japanese consumers (2011, 2). It is safe to assume that such images play an active role in enabling Atsuko's association of the music and its musicians with an idyllic, easy-going lifestyle where one is free to "enjoy one's work." (Of course, as Hotaka Roth [2002] has shown, very few migrants have it easy in Japan.) Even the possibility of a Brazilian concert serving as a script for self-growth and labor negotiations in Japan illustrates the transnational vectors through which practices of self-fashioning are enacted in today's Japan. As Kelsky (2001) and others (Miller 2006, Sato 2003) have demonstrated, the foreign, especially in its Western guises, has long served as a potent symbol for images of escape, transformation, and desire. Atsuko's narrative reveals the degree to which in its media commodities the idealized West finds its way into everyday practices of negotiating the more locally-integrated and organized structures of Japan's workplaces.

Atsuko's application of an ethic of enjoyment to an ethic of labor suggests a particularly revealing relationship of art as pleasure to her working life. It illustrates the degree to which labor has in many sites of working culture in Japan inundated an understanding of life as

distinct from it. Although Atsuko's case seems to initially represent the total colonization of consciousness that Frankfurt School scholars blame on the culture industries, it also ultimately reveals a good deal more agency than Marxist theories of false consciousness might allow. For example, nearly all of my interlocutors made clear divisions between art that was consumed as entertainment and art consumed for work or educational purposes. From their perspectives, entertaining media content was largely distinct from their working lives and in many ways was seen as a release from it: taking a break from a hectic life in order to recover one's energy. This understanding of leisure is precisely that to which Theodor Adorno objects in an epigrammatic essay called "Free Time" (2001). In a personal anecdote he explains what he sees as its insidious nature:

Time and time again, when questioned or interviewed, one is asked about one's hobbies...I am shocked by the question when I come up against it. I have no hobby. Not that I am the kind of workaholic, who is incapable of doing anything with his time but applying himself industriously to the required task. But, as far as my activities beyond the bounds of my recognized profession are concerned, I take them all, without exception, very seriously. So much so, that I should be horrified by the very idea that they had anything to do with hobbies—preoccupations with which I had become mindlessly infatuated merely in order to kill the time—had I not become hardened by experience to such examples of this now widespread, barbarous mentality. [2001, 188-189]

Adorno's reflection represents what the Frankfurt school has established as the conventional Marxist interpretation of consumption as entertainment and leisure. For him, the resolute Marxist for whom cultural relations do not simply exist within but are wholly constituted by economic ones, the self in "free" time and space is simply a product of the capitalist mode of production that demands its workers be sufficiently rested today for the demands of labor tomorrow—so much so that "free time must not resemble work in any way whatsoever, in order, presumably, that one can work all the more effectively afterwards" (2001, 190). The free self choosing to consume entertainment in order to relax at the end of a day is an illusion for Adorno: "They need the shallow entertainment, by means of which cultural conservatism patronizes and humiliates them...This is one good reason why people have remained chained to their work, and to a system which trains them for work, long after that system has ceased to

require their labour” (193). For Adorno, the subject that returns home to her favorite TV show or novel does so not as a return to her real self as distinct from her working self, but simply as an extension of it. Entertainment media enfold the consumer into a system of economic relations of which the subject herself is a product. The system, as cultural environment, is total. In contrast to common critiques of entertainment as offering an escape from reality (*genjitsu tōhi*), reality is in fact its fundamental product.

Adorno rebels against the inundation of life by labor. The distinction sticks and is formative of his theory. The Marxist perspective which sees consciousness—the superstructure—as a product of economic relations forecloses the possibility of a more Weberian or interpretive perspective that understands consciousness, ideology, and value as capable of transforming labor as much as labor produces value—at least, and the distinction is important, in the *meaning* if not the *structure* of labor. The majority of my informants may indeed understand leisure in the fashion Adorno suspects that most subjects enslaved to the culture industries do: as a space and time away from work that in its regenerative potential enables one to face tomorrow’s toil. However, Atsuko’s narrative reveals that subjects exercise more agency than Adorno affords them, if toward an end he would even more vehemently protest.

For Atsuko, labor and life is reversed in Adorno’s terms. The lesson she takes from the Brazilian concert is not to enjoy life but, rather, to enjoy labor. In viewing the event through her recent troubles with work and career, she even constructs the performers not as artists but as laborers who simply enjoy their work. For Atsuko, then, labor is essentially the field for expressing life, for doing living itself. This perspective is consistent with the seriousness by which Atsuko understands her career choices. It was only after the concert that Atsuko was able to make a dramatic shift in her career, giving up her life in HR and business in order to enter academia, where she claims she is far happier and far more herself. Finding herself does not entail escaping from work but finding the right *kind* of work, the kind in which her real self finds expression.

Adorno would no doubt be distressed over her conclusion, but not likely surprised. Nor would Weber, albeit for different reasons, whose *Protestant Ethic* (2001 [1905]) took the capitalist system of eighteenth-century Puritan America as fundamental evidence for how labor can become a site for the expression of individual value and meaning. Similarly, contemporary Japan shows that its own version of capitalism is in no way isomorphic with counterpart capitalisms in other nation states. Although traditional hallmarks of Japanese labor

such as lifetime employment are no longer its defining ones, a good deal of culturally-rooted workplace ethics remains, including the high value placed on the worker's commitment to company and the practice of using discourses and vocabulary of labor as scripts for personal development (Ogasawara 1998).

We might also speculate on the degree to which occupying a non-married status might enable the privileging of labor as the primary cognitive frame for self-understanding. Popular works like Itoh's (2007) have demonstrated the difficulty for working women in Japan to integrate marriage and family with labor; in many cases the structural forces are simply stacked against women professionals who feel forced into the position of having to choose between one or the other. While Atsuko does want to get married in the future she feels like now is not the time as she is still struggling to find a permanent position, revealing again the degree to which labor serves as the field for not only material but also ethical work.

Atsuko-san's story exemplifies how consumption functions as a script through which to effect change in her life for the better. Musicians as happy laborers become evidence for the viability of such change and representatives of the telos of her new ethic: to enjoy one's work. The *askesis* or "effort" she applies is focused on her body's emotional states, the task being to transform its negative and pessimistic moods to positive ones. In the next section I focus more explicitly on mood as an object of media consumption, casting art as an affective in addition to an ethical tool.

Unscripted Care and Regulation

While Atsuko's case demonstrates one way art aids in the conceptual mediation of significant life changes, private media consumption often operates in less conscious ways. *Unscripted care* designates a consumption mode rooted primarily in the body rather than in the mind—in practice rather than in reflection. As such it follows closely the logic of routine. It includes things such as turning the radio on every morning after waking up, watching the nightly news while eating dinner, and listening to music on the train commute to work. These kinds of consumption fall into the routines of personal and bodily maintenance, oriented toward the ends of positive mood regulation. They are done as tools of care in managing unwanted energies often experienced as a product of labor and the stress of public life.

Take for example the time of day when people most consume visual media. The most common answer I received on surveys I distributed to my informants asking what kinds of

media they consumed on a regular basis, and when, consisted of documentaries and film: nearly all the respondents listed the time of day they consume these products as evening, after work, with a few also listing Sunday. This is, of course, what we would expect. But this is also Bourdieu's point about the habitus as practice. Routines appear natural to us in part because social structure disposes us to it—"dispositions," as Bourdieu's translator notes, being "particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of habitus...a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body) and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination" (Nice 1977, 214, Note 1). Patterns of labor in contemporary Japan require substantial time and effort from my interlocutors. Even those of them not obligated to be in an office from nine to six o'clock—teachers, university researchers, film producers—are still regularly out the door early in the morning. Not even the producers of the group, it would seem, would regularly consider watching films and documentaries during the day, save they were engaged explicitly in editing. In short, cultural patterns of labor that ascribe work to day and pleasure to night structures film and documentary viewing as nighttime practice.

Moreover, as media consumption is considered separate from work and consumed in its wake where the day's labor registers through the body's exhaustion, media consumption becomes associated with relaxation, rejuvenation, and respite. One interviewee even compared films to nutrition: "They are kind of like vitamins for me." Viewing consumption as care shifts one's analytic gaze from content to medium—to how, when, and where one engages with art. That many of my interlocutors like watching NHK documentaries is interesting; that nearly all of them take an hour to two each night to sit in front of their TV screen is illustrative: it shows how the social organization of labor and the meanings of professionalism imbedded in it produce a particular, repeated, and rather homogenous practice of watching visual media each night as a way of winding down, of relaxing. This fact points to the important affective dimensions of consumption rather than to those of signification.

"Affect" has become a key word in the social sciences over the last two decades, even inspiring Patricia Clough to call it an "affect revolution" (2007, ix). Affect is a term that draws attention to the way feeling operates in culture distinct from its manifestations as emotion. Brian Massumi's distinction between the two, which has become a shibboleth for establishing theoretical authority in new ethnographies of affect, ascribes feeling that is nonconscious and rooted primarily in the body to *affect*, and feeling that is conscious, cognitive, and communicated through scripts and narrative to *emotion* (Massumi 2002, 15). The majority of

scholars addressing affect, despite qualifications, acknowledge this fundamental distinction.³ My purpose in paying attention to affect in this article is two-fold: first, I want to illustrate how in the way private consumption functions as routine it enters into the realm of ethical care in modes of self-regulation and self-management; second, I want to draw a distinction between care that is conscious, entering into narrative and, thus, the emotional field of self-fashioning, and care that is less conscious, performed in routines directed more explicitly on the body's moods and intensities rather than on its conscious desires. I do not go so far as to say this kind of unscripted inconspicuous consumption is necessarily nonconscious; that is, practice affecting the body can certainly be made an object of conscious reflection. But the *reflection* on affect and *affect* itself are two different things. I propose to study forms of feeling that appear less consciously inscribed because I want to make clear that I am not attempting to describe affect's precise movements and consequences in the body. In fact, scholars working on affect such as Kathleen Stewart (2007) have already noted the challenges of formulating a descriptive language for that which exists outside of narrative. In short, I want to show as explicitly as possible the affective dimensions of a kind of media consumption that in contemporary Japan seems obviously and increasingly dedicated to care.

Routine

There are at least two different modes of unscripted care in which we can see consumption's affective dimensions. The first is as routine. As alluded to above, routine as practice is largely structured by patterns of labor relatively homogenous across the everyday experiences of women professionals. This means that media consumption takes place largely at night and does so to surprisingly consistent degrees. Mai's case is entirely exemplary:

I usually get home very late, like nine or ten. The commute is very long. I like to watch TV dramas. Just fifteen minutes everyday. So I record the drama everyday. And foreign news. I basically just watch BBC news, so in total, about twenty-five minutes. I usually watch those while eating dinner. Then, if I have time I would probably watch a movie.

³ See Lawrence Grossberg 1992, 2005, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri 2000, 2004, 2009, Rei Terada 2001, Philip Fisher 2002, Eve Sedgwick 2003, Sara Ahmed 2004, Theresa Brennan 2004, Manuel De Landa 2006, Patricia Clough 2007, Kathleen Stewart 2007, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth 2010.

In her rather concise description Mai's evening routine appears mechanical: she comes home, prepares some dinner, and then eats in front of the TV while watching these two programs. The first is NHK's long-running morning drama (*asadora*), which airs in fifteen minute segments each morning starting at 8:00, generally the time, it is assumed, that housewives, the show's presumed demographic, have sent their husbands off to work or their children off to school. Mai's routine suggests that the demographic extends beyond housewives. These shows usually feature a female protagonist: generally young, strong-willed, and holding to a strict, if conservative, moral code. Whether because I did not push her on it or because she didn't feel the need, Mai did not discuss the particular reasons for watching or what the show meant to her. And paired with the news program she also watches nightly, one sees how media in this case functions as an organizer of time, as something to do while eating after work. That the combined time of the shows runs what can be assumed to be an average time for consuming a meal on one's own, twenty-five minutes, further attests to its role as a marker of time and organizer of routine.

In this example, one of Marshall McLuhan's less specious claims about media rings true: "The medium is the message" (1994, 7). In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan makes a case for studying media as medium rather than as content, as the way its different forms operate on consumers and organize relations between subjects and technology. The television organizes temporality, capturing the viewer's attention in designated blocks of time—in this case, harmonizing with one's mealtime. It also organizes space, sitting the viewer in front of it and drawing her visual gaze and cognitive attention, albeit to varying degrees, to its screen. And this organization of subject and object in space and time shows a predilection for routine as Mai comes home the following day and, though not particularly mindful of it, repeats the same process.

What viewing medium as message also reveals is the degrees to which new media technologies facilitate the process of routine building. Mai programs her TV to record BBC's nightly news and NHK's morning drama while she is away. The programs sit waiting in her program queue when she arrives at home. Not only does it record these programs but it also records films as well: "I just record from the TV. I only watch BS from NHK (one of NHK's satellite broadcasts), so everyday NHK broadcasts one or two movies. And they are very interesting, from all over the world. So if I keep recording I get more than ten movies in one week. So I need to choose." Mai's account illustrates how technological objects like recording

devices participate in the organization of everyday life. In her case, technology encourages routine, presenting Mai with the digital form of a TV guide and what amounts to part of her evening schedule. If Mai happens to be working late or ends up going out with friends and as a consequence misses her shows, it is likely she will feel out of step, or that she will have to “catch up” on her shows in order to get back on track. The notion that one has to “catch up” on programming indicates the degree to which television and its increasingly integrated recording technologies have framed consumption as a matter of routine along the lines of other regular practices of care like exercise or, more typically in Japan, a nightly bath.

Interesting from the point of view of this technological perspective on routine is what these emerging technologies reveal about choice. Mai tells us that she has to “choose” which programs to watch. But how much choice is Mai, in fact, exercising? From another perspective her television’s recording device has done much of the choosing for her. Beyond that, NHK has played an even more active role in choosing Mai’s media commodities, sifting through an enormous amount of possible films to offer its audience. After then taking into account the number of restrictions on NHK in terms of what programs are even eligible for screening—cost of licensing fees, criteria of the film as worthy of “public” broadcasting or not, personal tastes of NHK employees—Mai’s agency in choosing her film appears rather limited. Her use of the word “choose,” *erabana kya*, she says, evokes debates within media studies and critical theory over the relationship between the emergence of the mass-produced culture industries and the exercise of human agency. Framed simply, does the proliferation of culture, as Featherstone writes, lead to “greater egalitarianism and individual freedom by some?” Or does it increase the “capacity for ideological manipulation” (2007, 42)? In other words, to what extent does the homogenization of production determine the homogenization of consumption? Does the increase in commodities necessarily imply the increase of choice? Does the assemblage of media institutions, communication technologies, and distribution channels afford more or less agency? Understanding Mai’s consumption habits as routine displaces these questions from the ideological sphere of personal freedom, where they have remained static since their original formulation in Frankfurt School thinkers, and situates them in a sphere of praxis, where the individual uses of media commodities sometimes have little to do with their content. Mai’s account demonstrates how within assemblages of media production and labor, consumption serves as much as an organizer of daily physical routine as it does as a field of punctuated symbolic distinction.

Mood

If media consumption has become a matter of routine in contemporary urban lives, what effects do different media routines have on our bodies? How, precisely, do they affect? The second way this article looks at how consumption-as-care operates is as a regulator of personal mood. "Mood" is an especially apt word to describe the affective field as its ambiguity and nebulous nature acknowledges the difficulty of pinning feeling to narrative script. Mood also serves the purposes of ethnographic description because it maintains the ambiguity of the affective field while allowing for the consciousness of the emotive one. To reiterate, affect and emotion are distinguished in recent affect theory on the basis of cognition, with the former not yet entering into its purview and the latter fully captured in and by it in script. The notion of mood negotiates the space between these two movements of feeling, acknowledging a conscious recognition of changes in body physiology but an ambiguity over its precise composition. One feels generally happy or generally sad or generally irritated, but not necessarily happy, sad, or irritated over a specific thing. When talking about mood the individual subject describes affective movements of the body before those movements latch onto objects. The difference between affect and emotion then, as it was once suggested to me by a reviewer, is between having a loving feeling and having a loving feeling for one's cat.⁴ One might interpret the former as a mood but never the latter.

Sianne Ngai argues that this shared space between affect and emotion is not only possible but is more fundamentally how feeling actually works. In her analysis of evocations of sentiment in Western literature she claims that affect and emotion do not exist as qualitatively different modes of feeling but can actually coalesce and dissolve into each other:

The difference between affect and emotion is taken as a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than formal difference of quality or kind. My assumption is that affects are less formed and structured than emotions, but not lacking form or structure altogether; *less* "sociolinguistically fixed," but by no means code-free or meaningless; *less* "organized in response to our interpretations of situations," but by no means entirely devoid of organization or diagnostic powers. [2005, 27, italics in original]

⁴ I credit James Faubion for this example.

Ngai's treatment of feeling allows for sites of ambiguity between feeling and one's conception of it. Consciousness in this model is up for grabs, contingent upon how affect and emotion shift in relation to one another. I want to use "mood" to describe a general affective disposition that may or may not achieve cognizance in the mind of its owner but that in either case is experienced as nebulous and unfixed.

I also want to employ the term "mood" as designating a category appropriate for a form of ethnographic engagement that attempts to hold two processes in mind at once: the outside observations by the researcher of consumption practices that affect mood as feeling, and the inside, subjective understanding of those practices by interlocutors—a distinction described in traditional anthropology as *etic* and *emic* understanding. Mood covers not only each of these perspectives but also the *relation* between the two. That is, mood is one of the only feeling words that can describe a situation where one is consciously reflecting on feelings but cannot quite explain what those feelings are. In these moments mood is ironically characterized by a clear recognition of the imperception of feeling.

Many of my interlocutors are skillfully reflective of this process. One I call Kaoru recalls the following:

The first thing I will do when I get up is to think about many things in my bed, and thank God for giving me this nice warm cozy house. Then I go to the computer to check for messages. Then I go to the stereo and turn on the music...I always listen to very dark, slow-paced kinds of music. Jazzy kind of music. So anytime of day my house is like a nightclub, even if it's a sunny morning.

Kaoru is an academic in the business field. She is single and in her late thirties. In her reflection we see both consumption as routine and mood at work. Kaoru has a regular routine with which she starts each morning. Music is a major part of it. For her it sets the tone for the entire day. It operates on both environment and self, the English "mood" being particularly interesting in this sense as it can refer equally to both. The Japanese "*funiki*," the word Kaoru uses in this situation, does not afford as much versatility, referring more exclusively to environments rather than to people, although people can certainly be the creators of these environments. I pushed Kaoru on why she thought she created these kinds of environments for herself: "I'm not sure. I just feel much more comfortable in those kinds of environments... I like the very quiet environment, and that kind of relaxing. So in that sense the music is also

at a very slow pace." In response to my question on whether it was the mood or the music that she particularly liked to listen to she said, "It's about creating an environment. So if I really like a particular kind of music I need to listen to it, but this is just kind of hearing some sound, so that's why I can work I guess."

Kaoru noted that she could work while listening to music, if it's not too dramatic, doesn't have many lyrics, and the work she is doing is not too demanding. When I went to visit her in her office on campus she was listening to music while editing a paper for publication. Since she was editing and not doing serious writing, she said, she could listen to music. I asked her what it was. She replied that it was "some classical music." That Kaoru did not—in fact, perhaps, *could* not—identify the artist was revealing. It indicates how music for Kaoru is about filling up space, creating a mood, and generally assisting with tasks that need to get done.

I encountered this approach to music in the narratives of other interlocutors. Naomi shows a similar relationship to music as a regulator of mood. She told me that she often listens to music, like many people, on the train. When I asked her what kind she replied, "Nothing really. Whatever" (*Nan demo nai. Nan demo ii*). Suspecting that I would not really be interested in knowing about music that didn't have a particular meaning to her, she told me, "It's probably not an interesting question for you." Had my interview with Naomi been conducted earlier in my research when I was less sensitive to the important heuristic role my interlocutors were telling me media and self-regulation played in their lives, I might have actually agreed, or been disappointed at the answer. However, by this time other interviewees had already been changing my views on the meaning of this kind of consumption and, as a consequence, I probed deeper.

Beginning a new story about the difficult times she had with an ex-boyfriend, she said, "At that time [of the breakup] I would always listen to something. I had time and when I listened to music it kind of picked me up. So I do the same thing now. I usually have something playing." Here, Naomi recognizes music as serving the explicit purpose of regulating mood, in this case brightening what had otherwise become a persistent depression. What is especially important about this kind of consumption, and similar to that of Kaoru's, is the lack of attention to artist names. I provide an excerpt from our dialogue below in illustration:

Me: Is this music something you really like?

Naomi: I play it to raise my energy (*tenshon o ageru tame*). Each time I go out I

listen to music. I have a set list that I play when I go out. I have a lot [of music] but the songs I listen to are only a few. And it's usually the same.

Me: Do you really like it?

Naomi: It's just sound (*oto dake da ne*). I don't really know what it is, because it's Western.

Me: What is it?

Naomi: I don't know.

Me: You just got it from someone?

Naomi: Maybe (*tabun* [laughing]).

The lack of attention to artist or even genre (Naomi describes it as Western [*yōgaku*] rather than, for example, as rock or indie) demonstrates a form of consumption in stark contrast to Bourdieu's analysis of taste as distinction and representation. This kind of inconspicuous consumption is for the private rather than public self. Played through earphones on the train, no one can hear it but Naomi. Moreover, as she indicates she plays it intentionally to raise her energy and brighten her mood, it is concentrated explicitly on the self as a shifting site of affect. Here we see consumption enter both the affective and ethical field. Naomi's mood, those affective movements and constellations of feeling, becomes the "substance" of ethical work in Foucault's terminology (1985, 26). Through it she perceives herself doubly, as both the agent and subject of ethical work. More importantly, she perceives the self as something that *requires* work and improvement—a consciousness entirely commensurate with a variety of flexible subjectivities that in late capitalism scholars like Aihwa Ong call "neoliberal" (2006). The method of her ethical work is simple: listening to music; the telos of it is, in her own words, to lift her energy (*tenshon o ageru*).

Taken together, these different vectors of ethical practice outlined by Foucault provide a convincing counterargument to analyses of consumption like Bourdieu's that understand art forms as markers of social positions to which subjects aspire in distinguishing their status relative to others, whether for the procurement of social capital or establishing affinity with one's peers. This perspective also offers an alternative view on consumption from those ethnographies of Japanese popular culture that characterize media commodities as symbols of subculture representation and narratives of identity for establishing intimacy with other fans. In contrast, these forms of private consumption serve to regulate personal and individual moods as a practice of care.

This does not, however, mean that this kind of consumption is less social than others. It may function less deliberately as an organizer of relationships but both the practice itself and the ends to which it is exercised are entirely social facts. On any given morning train commute in urban Japan, one is likely to find a large number of subjects in each train car with headphones in their ears. In other words, it is a socially recognized space for inconspicuous consumption. In fact, the space itself as public domain is inundated with ethical meaning as earphones communicate the recognition of the other's right to shared space and the message that a subject intends not to impose upon it. And if the fact that other subjects were all doing the same thing was not enough to encourage such socialization, notices inside the train illustrating appropriate moral behavior offer more explicit incentives. Finally, the mass quality of TV, music, and film made available as tools for self-regulation also reveals consumption's social nature, as these commodities are shared not only by friends but also by strangers who occupy the same channels of information distribution. Given the amazing proliferation of programs, albums, and films produced each year, the number of commodities that is regularly and popularly consumed on a mass scale is strikingly small, suggesting that consumers play a rather passive role in mass media environments still largely dominated by just a handful of major media conglomerates. Naomi isn't sure where she even acquired the music she listens to. Mai knows her programs come from NHK but is relegated to a rather passive position in selecting only from its offerings. These examples show how consumption as care constructs the sociality of art not as a marker of distinction but as a shared mode of self-regulation in everyday life: unwinding with television at the end of the day, surveying the Internet to kill time at work, reading a novel or listening to music to relax on the train commute to work.

Conclusion

The variety of personal reflections offered by my informants shows that much of media consumption is inconspicuous: it happens in private, in routines, and outside a public sphere that demands women communicate their status to others via the fashion they wear, the food they consume, or the places they shop. I argue that by offering accounts of *how* women engage in media rather than of *why*, we learn that consumption has substantially more dimensions than has thus far been considered in the sociological and anthropological literature. The conceptual frame I have presented here is that of consumption as care. While critics might argue that forms of consumption such as watching movies to relax or listening to love songs upon a

breakup is natural, something that everyone does and not of much cultural consequence, I would counter that it is precisely the seemingly natural and ubiquitous character of this practice that warrants critical attention. In fact, for anthropologists of transnationalism and global media flows, I argue that granting the idiosyncratic, the personal, and the private its legitimacy as research objects might guard against traditional approaches to culture that identify practice as necessarily belonging to a pre-given social block called "Japanese" or "American" culture. In reality, subjects are not passive products of these social categorizations but active appropriators of them as discursive objects of resistance to which their practices are directed. For example, the accounts given by my informants show how consumption as care serves as a mode that often resists the political and the hegemonic, in both scripted and unscripted ways. In the former, subjects seek out foreign media commodities precisely *because* they are recognized as foreign; in the latter, subjects engage in consumption practices as a matter of routine, as a means for managing moods that enable ambitious professionals to make it in a working world unsympathetic to women facing the double burden imposed by a Japanese state that encourages women to both work and raise a family. Idiosyncratic practices of consumption as care serve as sites where the typically "Japanese" is challenged, offering ethnographic data that complicates and enriches the meaning of Japan as it is increasingly contested within a global ecumene.

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