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Pop Cosmopolitanism

Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence

On the way to the north Georgia mountain cabin where I go many summers to write, I stopped at a grocery store in Clayton and overheard a conversation between the grocery clerk and a customer ahead of me in line. The grocery clerk, a white girl with a broad southern accent, was trying to explain why she had a Japanese name on her employee badge and found herself talking about an alternative identity she assumes through "cosplay," the practice of anime fans dressing up like favorite characters. Drawing a blank from her listener, she tried to explain what anime is and found herself referencing children's shows like Pokemon and Yu-Gi-Oh! Again, the adult man looked at her with limited comprehension but gestured toward his son, who was newly attuned to the exchange and happy to acknowledge his own interests by pulling Yu-Gi-Oh! cards out of his pocket. Finally, the confused man asks, "How in the world did you ever get interested in that?" I might have pointed him toward the issues of Shojin Jump, the Japanese comics magazine, which was on sale in a small-town grocery store that didn't manage to carry Entertainment Weekly, Time, or Newsweek. The father may have been baffled but his son was growing up in a world where Asian media products were readily at hand. When the customer left, I signaled that I was a fellow "otaku," that is, a fan of Japanese media, and she opened up to me about her local club's plans to go to a major anime convention in Atlanta in a few weeks, and about rumors that there might be another anime fan working at the Wendy's down the street. She is what this essay calls a pop cosmopolitan, someone whose embrace of global popular media represents an escape route out of the parochialism of her local community.

"Pop Cosmopolitanism" was my attempt to situate my work on par-

ticipatory culture and media convergence in a global context. I have spent much of my life focused almost entirely on American popular culture and have been reluctant to write about other people's culture. Then I woke up one morning and realized that globalization had profoundly altered the nature of American popular culture. As I suggest here, to write about American popular culture today demands a global framework.

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If there is a global village, it speaks American. It wears jeans, drinks Coke, eats at the golden arches, walks on swooshed shoes, plays electric guitars, recognizes Mickey Mouse, James Dean, E.T., Bart Simpson, R2-D2, and Pamela Anderson.

—Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited* (2001)¹

The twain of East and West have not only met—they've mingled, mated, and produced myriad offspring, inhabitants of one world, without borders or boundaries, but with plenty of style, hype, and attitude. In Beijing, they're wearing Levis and drinking Coke; in New York, they're sipping tea in Anna Sui. While Pizzicato Five is spinning heads in the U.S., Metallica is banging them in Japan.

—Jeff Yang, *Eastern Standard Time* (1997)²

Bert and Bin Laden: Rethinking Cultural Imperialism in an Age of Media Convergence

The story made its rounds in the fall of 2001: a Filipino-American high school student created a Photoshop collage of *Sesame Street*'s Bert interacting with terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden as part of a series of "Bert Is Evil" images he posted on his homepage. Others depicted Bert as a Klu Klux Klansman or having sex with Pamela Anderson. In the wake of September 11, a Bangladesh-based publisher scanned the Web for Bin Laden images that could be printed on anti-American signs, posters, and T-shirts. CNN reporters recorded the unlikely image of a mob of

angry Pakistanis marching through the streets waving signs depicting Bert and Bin Laden. American public television executives spotted the CNN footage and threatened to take legal action: "The people responsible for this should be ashamed of themselves."³

This story illustrates several themes that will be central to my argument: first, it suggests the rapid flow of images across national borders in an age of media convergence, a flow that is facilitated both by commercial strategies (such as the localization and global distribution of *Sesame Street* and CNN) and by grassroots tactics (such as the use of Photoshop to appropriate and manipulate these images and the Web to distribute them). Second, it suggests that those media flows are apt to be multidirectional, creating temporary portals or "contact zones" between geographically dispersed cultures (in this case, Bangladesh and San Francisco). Third, it suggests the unpredictable and contradictory meanings that get ascribed to those images as they are decontextualized and recontextualized at the sites of consumption. Finally, the story suggests the increased centrality of teens and youth to the global circulation of media in an era where a teen's Web site can become the center of an international controversy.

I have spent my career studying American popular culture, adopting an approach based on older notions of national specificity. In recent years, however, it has become increasingly difficult to study what's happening to American popular culture without understanding its global context. I mean this not simply in the predictable sense that American popular culture dominates (and is being shaped for) worldwide markets, but also in the sense that a growing proportion of the popular culture that Americans consume comes from elsewhere, especially Asia. This essay represents a first stab at explaining how and why Asian popular culture is shaping American entertainment.

Our analysis must start with the concept of media convergence. Most industry discourse about convergence begins and ends with what I call the black box fallacy: sooner or later all media is going to be flowing through a single black box in our living rooms and all we have to do is figure out which black box it will be. Media convergence is not an endpoint; rather, it is an ongoing process occurring at various intersections between media technologies, industries, content, and audiences. Thanks to the proliferation of channels and the increasingly ubiquitous nature of computing and telecommunications, we are entering an era where media will be everywhere and we will use all kinds of media in relation

to each other. We will develop new skills for managing that information, new structures for transmitting information across channels, new creative genres that exploit the potentials of those emerging information structures, and new modes of education to help students understand their impact on their world. Media convergence is more than simply the digital revolution; it involves the introduction of a much broader array of new media technologies that enable consumers to archive, annotate, transform, and recirculate media content. Media convergence is more than simply a technological shift; it alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres, and audiences. This initial wave of media changes exerts a destabilizing influence, resulting in a series of lurches between exhilaration and panic. Yet, media convergence is also sparking creative innovation in almost every sector of popular culture; our present media environment is marked by a proliferation of differences, by what Grant McCracken calls *Plenitude*.⁴

In a forthcoming book, I will describe and document the social, cultural, political, legal, and economic ramifications of media convergence.⁵ In this essay, I will be focusing on the interplay between two forces:

Corporate convergence—the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a smaller and smaller number of multinational conglomerates who thus have a vested interest in insuring the flow of media content across different platforms and national borders.

Grassroots convergence—the increasingly central roles that digitally empowered consumers play in shaping the production, distribution, and reception of media content.

These two forces—the top-down push of corporate convergence, the bottom-up pull of grassroots convergence—intersect to produce what might be called global convergence, the multidirectional flow of cultural goods around the world. Ulf Hannerz is describing global convergence when he writes: “[World culture] is marked by an organization of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity. . . . The world has become one network of social relationships and between its different regions there is a flow of meanings as well as of people and goods.”⁶

Global convergence is giving rise to a new pop cosmopolitanism.⁷ Cosmopolitans embrace cultural difference, seeking to escape the gravitational pull of their local communities in order to enter a broader sphere of cultural experience. The first cosmopolitans thought beyond

the borders of their village; the modern cosmopolitans think globally. We tend to apply the term to those who develop a taste for international food, dance, music, art, or literature, in short, those who have achieved distinction through their discriminating tastes for classical or high culture. Here, I will be using the term “pop cosmopolitanism” to refer to the ways that the transcultural flows of popular culture inspires new forms of global consciousness and cultural competency. Much as teens in the developing world use American popular culture to express generational differences or to articulate fantasies of social, political, and cultural transformation, younger Americans distinguishing themselves from their parents’ culture through their consumption of Japanese anime and manga, Bollywood films and Bhangra, and Hong Kong action movies. This pop cosmopolitanism may not yet constitute a political consciousness of America’s place in the world (and in its worst forms, it may simply amount to a reformation of orientalism), but it opens consumers to alternative cultural perspectives and the possibility of feeling what Matt Hills calls “semiotic solidarity” with others worldwide who share their tastes and interests.⁸ . . . Pop cosmopolitanism cannot be reduced to either the technological utopianism embodied by Marshall McLuhan’s “global village” (with its promises of media transcending the nation-state and democratizing cultural access) or the ideological anxieties expressed in the concept of media imperialism (with its threat of cultural homogenization and of “the West suppressing the Rest,” as Ramaswami Harindranath describes it).⁹

The media imperialism argument blurs the distinction between at least four forms of power: economic (the ability to produce and distribute cultural goods), cultural (the ability to produce and circulate forms and meanings), political (the ability to impose ideologies), and psychological (the ability to shape desire, fantasy, and identity). Within this formulation, Western economic dominance over global entertainment both expresses and extends America’s status as a superpower nation; the flow of cultural goods shapes the beliefs and the fantasies of worldwide consumers, reshaping local cultures in accordance with U.S. economic and political interests. The classic media imperialism argument ascribed almost no agency to the receiving culture and saw little reason to investigate actual cultural effects; the flow of goods was sufficient to demonstrate the destruction of cultures.¹⁰ Ethnographers have found that the same media content may be read in radically different ways in different regional or national contexts, with consumers reading it against

the backdrop of more familiar genres and through the grid of familiar values. Even within the same context, specific populations (especially the young) may be particularly drawn toward foreign media content, while others may express moral and political outrage. Most will negotiate with this imported culture in ways that reflect the local interests of media consumers rather than the global interests of media producers.

To be sure, there is probably no place on the planet where you can escape the shadow of Mickey Mouse. Entertainment is America's largest category of exports. The Global Disney Audiences Project, for example, deployed an international team of scholars to investigate the worldwide circulation of Disney goods. They found that in eleven of the eighteen countries studied, 100 percent of all respondents had watched a Disney movie, and many of them had bought a broad range of other ancillary products.¹¹ But, while still strong, the hold of American-produced television series on the global market has slipped in recent years.¹² Local television production has rebounded and domestic content dominates the prime evening viewing hours, with American content used as filler in the late-night or afternoon slots. Hollywood faces increased competition from other film-producing nations, including Japan, India, and China, which are playing ever more visible roles within regional, if not yet fully global markets. Major media companies, such as Bertelsman, Sony, and Universal Vivendi, contract talent worldwide, catering to the tastes of local markets rather than pursuing nationalistic interests; their economic structure encourages them not only to be the intermediaries between different Asian markets but also to bring Asian content into Western countries. Many American children are more familiar with the characters of *Pokemon* than they are with those from the *Brothers Grimm* or *Hans Christian Anderson*, and a growing portion of American youth are dancing to Asian beats. With the rise of broadband communications, foreign media producers will distribute media content directly to American consumers without having to pass through U.S. gatekeepers or rely on multinational distributors. At the same time, grassroots intermediaries will play an increasingly central role in shaping the flow of cultural goods into local markets.

Adopting a position that if you can't beat them, merge with them, the American entertainment industry has become more aggressive in recruiting or collaborating with Asian talent. Sony, Disney, Fox, and Warner Brothers have all opened companies to produce films in Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, and other languages aimed both at their

domestic markets and at global export. American television and film increasingly is remaking successful products from other markets, ranging from *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, which are remakes of successful Dutch series, to *The Ring*, a remake of a Japanese cult horror movie, or *Vanilla Sky*, a remake of a Spanish science fiction film. Many of the cartoons shown on American television are actually made in Asia (increasingly in Korea), often with only limited supervision by Western companies.

These shifts complicate any simple mapping of the relationship between economic, political, and cultural power. We still must struggle with issues of domination and with the gap between media have and have-not nations, but we do so within a much more complicated landscape. . . . The result is not so much a global culture that eradicates local differences but rather a culture that continually produces local differences in order to gain a competitive advantage within the global marketplace. Arjun Appadurai writes, "Electronic mediation and mass migration . . . seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination. Together, they create specific irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces."¹³

Pokemon and Iron Chef: Strategies of Corporate Convergence

The flow of Asian goods into Western markets has been shaped through the interaction of three distinctive kinds of economic interests: (1) national or regional media producers who see the global circulation of their products not simply as expanding their revenue stream but also as a source of national pride; (2) multinational conglomerates who no longer define their production or distribution decisions in national terms but seek to identify potentially valuable content and push it into as many markets as possible; and (3) niche distributors who search for distinctive content as a means of attracting upscale consumers and differentiating themselves from those offering things already on the market. For example, in the case of world music, international media companies such as Sony identify international artists and market them aggressively in their local or regional markets. As those artists are

brought westward, the companies make a commercial decision whether they think they will open mainstream, in which case they retain distribution rights within the United States, or niche, in which case they subcontract with a boutique label or third-party distributor.¹⁴

In a compelling analysis of the impact of Japanese transnationalism on popular culture, Koichi Iwabuchi draws a distinction between the circulation of cultural goods that are essentially “odorless,” bearing few traces of their cultural origins, and those that are embraced for their culturally distinctive “fragrance.”¹⁵ In some cases, mostly where they are targeting niche or cult audiences, these goods are strongly marked as coming from some exotic elsewhere; in other cases, especially where they are targeting the mainstream, their national origins are masked and the content retrofit to American tastes.

As Iwabuchi has documented, Japanese media industries sought ways to open Western markets to their “soft goods,” or cultural imports based on the overseas success of their hardware and consumer electronics. Seeking global distribution for locally produced content, Japanese corporations such as Sony, Sumitomo, Itochu, and Matsushita bought into the American entertainment industry. They saw children’s media as a sweet spot in Western societies. Much as Hollywood’s ability to compete in international markets rests on its ability to recoup most of its production costs from domestic grosses, the success of Japanese-made comics and animation meant that these goods could enjoy competitive prices as they entered into Western markets. . . . In Japan, more than 200 animation programs are aired on television each week and about 1,700 animated films (short or feature length) are produced for theatrical distribution each year. Japanese media producers had created a complex set of tie-ins linking their comics, animated films, and television series to toys, which allows them to capitalize quickly on successful content and bring it to the largest possible audience. They hoped to export this entire apparatus—the programs, the comics, and the toys—to the West. In the domestic market, anime and manga appeal to a broad cross section of the public, but as they targeted the West, Japanese media companies targeted children as the primary consumers of their first imports. As this generation matured, the companies anticipated that they would embrace a broader range of Japanese-made media.

Illustrating the deodorization process, Anne Allison shows how *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* was stripped of any specific connotations of Asianness and remade for distribution in the West, not simply

through redubbing the dialogue, but by recasting the characters with multiracial American actors and reshooting some of the footage in southern California.¹⁶ She contrasts the *Power Rangers*' success with the relative failure of *Sailor Moon*, which made fewer efforts at retooling for American tastes and remained less clearly compatible with American genre conventions. While the success of these exports can be ascribed to their "freshness" and distinctiveness, that difference was understood more in terms of genre innovation than of their Japanese origins. *Pokemon* was more open about its Japanese roots yet still underwent modifications, such as changing dumplings into doughnuts, to make it more accessible to the U.S. market.¹⁷ . . . By contrast, Allison argues American cultural exports typically retain recognizable ties back to the United States, a claim supported by the findings of the Global Disney Audiences Project, which found that the majority of consumers in a worldwide survey saw Disney as distinctly American or Western in its cultural values and orientation.¹⁸

Allison overlooks, however, the degree to which the national origins of children's programs are being blurred worldwide: children's programs are more apt to be dubbed into local languages even in countries where subtitling is the norm for adult fare, and many forms of localization occur in American children's programming as it enters those markets. *Sesame Street* is an obvious example. Consumers worldwide know *Sesame Street* but they don't recognize Bert or Big Bird because the Muppets are redesigned for local tastes. The American-based Children's Television Workshop works closely with local media companies to generate new content appropriate to local cultures and languages while setting content and technical standards that must be met by any *Sesame Street* franchise.¹⁹ The difference between the remaking of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* for the American market and *Sesame Street* for the Japanese market may be less clear-cut than Allison proposes, based on the degree of control the producing country exercises and the degree to which local audiences are aware of the transformations that have occurred. . . .

For an example of how "fragrance" may enhance commercial prospects, consider the cult success of *Iron Chef*. Produced by Fuji International Television, the series entered North America in the mid-1990s through Asian-language television stations, where it developed a cult following among channel-surfing pop cosmopolitans.²⁰ The Food Net-

work brought the series to an even broader audience. On the one hand, much of its appeal comes from its clever appropriations from Asian martial arts traditions. The Chairman, played by Kaga Takeshi, lives in a castle and rules over an army of "Iron Chefs." American fans express a fascination with the ornate decor and costumes, the pomp and circumstance surrounding the cooking competitions, the mystique of clan loyalties, and the preparation of foods with exotic and unfamiliar ingredients. While the series was dubbed for its Food Network broadcast, the mysterious Chairman speaks Japanese with English subtitles. Opening segments situate the chosen ingredients within Japanese history and culture. At the same time, the show frequently pits Japanese cooks against representatives of other world cuisines, with recurring characters embodying Chinese, French, and Italian traditions. Each week, the rival chefs have to prepare a broad range of dishes based on an assigned ingredient, sometimes distinctly Japanese, sometimes foreign; the cooking battles are often a struggle between chefs committed to a traditional Japanese approach and those who assimilate and transform Western approaches. *Iron Chef* balances two distinctive kinds of audience interests: on the one hand, the high camp surrounding its martial arts theatricality, and on the other, a growing public fascination with international cuisine at a time when once-exotic ingredients are more widely available in Western grocery stores.²¹ Confident that they understood its appeal, UPN sought to remake it for an American audience, recasting William Shatner as the illusive Chairman, employing U.S.-based chefs, and displacing its martial arts borrowings with references to professional wrestling. As UPN entertainment division head Tom Noonan explained, "Candidly, this show isn't about wasabi or pudding or sushi. It's about the Iron Chefs that compete against each other in this sort of intense, very theatrical, over-the-top, gladiator-like style."²² The series was widely seen as a failure to successfully Americanize Asian content. As the *San Jose Mercury* explained, "something's lost during the translation."²³

At the moment, Japanese style is marketed as a distinctive "fragrance" to niche or cult audiences and "deodorized" for broader publics, but this distinction is starting to break down as American consumers develop a preference for those qualities they associate with Japanese cultural productions. Much of this process of recontextualizing Japanese content, at the moment, is occurring on the grassroots levels.

The “Desi” and the “Otaku”: Tactics of Grassroots Convergence

Cosmopolitans and locals, Hannerz notes, have a common interest in preserving cultural differences in the face of pressures toward homogeneity. The locals care little about diversity per se but want to hold onto their own traditions. The cosmopolitans recognize that they will not get the diversity they crave “unless other people are allowed to carve out special niches for their cultures and keep them.”²⁴ Grassroots convergence serves the needs of both cosmopolitans and locals. A global communication network allows members of diasporic communities to maintain strong ties back to their motherlands, insuring access to materials and information important to their cultural traditions and preserving social connections with those they left behind.²⁵ Cosmopolitans use networked communication to scan the planet in search of diversity and communicate with others of their kind around the world.

This section documents the role of grassroots intermediaries in shaping the flow of Asian cultural goods into Western markets. Specifically, we will consider two kinds of cultural communities: the role of the South Asian diasporic community (the “desi”) in preparing the way for Bollywood films and Bhangra music, and the role of Western fans (or the “otaku”) in insuring the translation and circulation of Japanese anime and manga. In both cases, grassroots cultural production and distribution demonstrated a demand for Asian content that preceded any systematic attempts to commercially distribute it in the West. Yet, we underestimate the impact of these grassroots intermediaries if we see them as markets or even marketers; they also play a central role in shaping the reception of those media products, emphasizing rather than erasing the marks of their national origin and educating others about the cultural traditions they embody.

The westward flow of Indian media content reflects successive generations of South Asian immigration. Immigrant grocery stores became the initial points of distribution for Hindi videos, which enabled a nostalgic reconnection with the world left behind.²⁶ Bhangra emerged in the club cultures of Europe and North America, building upon regional traditions from India, but expanded to reflect points of contact with reggae, hip hop, and techno within an increasingly globalized youth culture.²⁷ As Sunaina Marr Maira writes, “A uniquely Indian American subculture allows second-generation youth to socialize with ethnic peers while reinterpreting Indian musical and dance traditions through the

lens of American popular culture."²⁸ Cultural shows on college campuses and festivals in local neighborhoods enabled participants to perform and attendees to reaffirm ethnic identities.²⁹ Combining classic dance and current club styles, the cultural shows construct India as both timeless and contemporary, as both a world away and right in one's own backyard, reflecting the conflicted character of diasporic culture. In Boston, Los Angeles, and elsewhere around the country, theaters (still mostly ma-and-pa operations) are opening that exclusively show Hindi-language films. The United States and Britain now account for 55 percent of international Bollywood ticket sales.³⁰

Pop cosmopolitans are increasingly being drawn toward Indian fashion, music, and cinema, surfing the circuits of distribution that enabled first- and second-generation immigrants to maintain ties within the diaspora. Perhaps they stumbled into an immigrant grocery store in search of ingredients for a favorite curry and left with a few videos. Perhaps they caught some Bhangra at a local club. Perhaps an Indian-born friend invited them to one of the culture shows. Perhaps they happened onto a Bollywood Web site or flipped across an Indian-language cable station.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that Indian styles are increasing appropriated by Western performers, such as Madonna's use of henna and Indian religious iconography in her "Ray of Light" tour or Baz Luhrman's imitation of a Bollywood aesthetic in *Moulin Rouge*. These Western appropriations have further increased American awareness of the richness and vitality of Indian popular culture, as suggested by the surprising box office success of Mira Nair's film *Monsoon Wedding*.³¹ Seeking to tap British interest in all things Bollywood, Andrew Lloyd Webber commissioned *Bombay Dreams*, an original stage musical with an all-Asian cast and with music by distinguished Bollywood composer A. R. Rahman.³² As Webber explained, "There are more people seeing Bollywood musicals on screens on any given night than there are people watching plays in the West End."³³ American and British film companies are helping to finance the production of Hindi-language films with expectations that they will do well not only in Asia but in the West. Summing up these trends, Indian-American filmmaker Kavita Munjai claims, "The young generation is flocking to see Hindi blockbusters. India is the flavour of the day in America now."³⁴

As Maira notes, the "desis" display deeply ambivalent feelings toward Indo-chic, sometimes proud to see their national culture gain greater

visibility, sometimes uncomfortable with the way Western consumers misunderstand or misuse these traditions, and sometimes uncertain whether their own hybrid identities give them any stable position from which to police the authenticity of these new transcultural appropriations.³⁵ What does it mean that Indo-chic flourishes at a moment when, post September 11, there is also a rise in “Paki-bashing”? Does the decontextualized consumption of cultural goods necessarily lead to a greater understanding between what remain distinct and largely isolated ethnic populations? Does the ability to dance to the Other’s music lead to any real appreciation of the Other’s social condition or political perspective? Conflicts arise from the fact that the “desi” and the pop cosmopolitans are consuming at cross-purposes: one seeking to make peace with their parent culture, even as they carve out a place for themselves in the new world; the other seeking to escape the constraints of their local culture and tap into the coolness they now associate with other parts of the world.

The pop cosmopolitan walks a thin line between dilettantism and connoisseurship, between orientalist fantasies and a desire to honestly connect and understand an alien culture, between assertion of mastery and surrender to cultural difference. These same paradoxes and contradictions surface when we turn our attention to American fans of Japanese anime, the “otaku.” “Otaku” is a Japanese term used to make fun of fans who have become such obsessive consumers of pop culture that they have lost all touch with the people in their immediate vicinity. American fans have embraced the shameful term, asserting what Matt Hills calls a “semiotic solidarity” with their Japanese counterparts;³⁶ constructing their identity as “otaku” allows them to signal their distance from American taste and their mastery over foreign content. While a minority of “otaku” are Asian or Asian-American, the majority have no direct ties back to Japan. Sean Leonard, the president of the MIT Anime Society, whose interest stemmed from his initial exposure to Japanese children’s programming, is typical of many of his generation:

I first discovered anime around when I was in 10th grade. I started hearing and watching a little *Sailor Moon*, which aired periodically on USA. What really got me into it, though, was when a Mexican friend of mine lent me the first ten episodes of *Fushigi Yuugi* (The Mysterious Play), fansubbed. It’s a really cool shoujo series, and it was totally different, and totally more complex, than anything else I had seen before. I

resolved that I really liked anime and that I would pursue it. Shortly thereafter, I decided to look at anime from an academic perspective: I wanted to figure out its history, its creators, its principles, and all of that stuff.³⁷

Initially, anime, like Bollywood videos, entered this country through small distributors who targeted Asian immigrants. Fans would venture into ethnic neighborhoods in search of content; they turned to a handful of Japanese bookstores in New York and San Francisco for manga, which had not yet been translated or distributed in North America.³⁸ The Web enabled fans to start their own small-scale (and sometimes pirate) operations to help import, translate, and distribute manga and anime. As Leonard explains, "Fansubbing [amateur subtitling] has been critical to the growth of anime fandom in the West. If it weren't for fans showing this stuff to others in the late 70s-early 90s, there would be no interest in intelligent, 'high-brow' Japanese animation like there is today." On college campuses, student organizations build extensive libraries of both legal and pirated materials and host screenings designed to educate the public about anime artists, styles, and genres. The MIT Anime Society, for example, hosts weekly screenings from a library of more than 1,500 films and videos.³⁹ Since 1994, the club has provided a Web site designed to educate Americans about anime and anime fan culture. Last year, it also launched a newsletter with interviews, commentary, and reviews.

Increasingly, larger commercial interests are capitalizing on this growing "otaku" culture. Disney, for example, has purchased the American rights to the films of Hayao Miyazaki (*Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away*), redubbed them with the voices of American film stars, and insured their distribution across North America. The Cartoon Network features a wide array of anime series as part of its late night "adult swim" programming. ADV Films, the major importer of anime series for the American market, has announced the launch of a twenty-four-hour Anime network.⁴⁰ Tokyopop, a San Francisco-based company, will publish four hundred volumes of translated manga for American consumption this year. Shueisha, the Japanese comics publisher, launched a monthly English-language version of its successful weekly *Shonen Jump*, predicting that it would be selling one million copies a month in the American market within the next three years. It is a striking mark of the growing competence and confidence of American manga fans that

Shonen Jump is being published Japanese style—with text designed to be read from back to front and right to left—rather than flipping the pages.⁴¹

Ethnographers who have studied this subculture disagree about the degree to which otaku seek any actual connection with real-world Japan or simply enter into an imaginary world constructed via anime genres. As Susan Napier writes, “The fact that anime is a Japanese . . . product is certainly important but largely because this signifies that anime is a form of media entertainment outside the mainstream, something ‘different.’”⁴² Napier suggests that fans are attracted to the strange balance of familiar and alien elements in Japanese animation, which openly appropriates and remakes Western genre conventions. Some anime fans do cultivate a more general knowledge of Japanese culture. They meet at sushi restaurants, and some clubs build partnerships via the Internet with sister organizations in Japan. Members often travel to Japan in search of new material or to experience that fan culture more directly; some study Japanese language in order to participate in various translation projects. As American fans go online and establish direct contact with their Japanese counterparts, it creates an opening for other kinds of conversation. Discussion lists move fluidly from anime- and manga-specific topics to larger considerations of Japanese politics and culture. These different degrees of cultural engagement are consistent with what Hannerz has told us about cosmopolitanism more generally: “[In one kind], the individual picks from other cultures only those pieces which suit himself. . . . In another mode, however, the cosmopolitan does not make invidious distinctions among the particular elements of the alien culture in order to admit some of them into his repertoire and refuse others; he does not negotiate with the other culture but accepts it as a package deal.”⁴³ What cosmopolitanism at its best offers us is an escape from parochialism and isolationism, the beginnings of a global perspective, and the awareness of alternative vantage points.

The Mangaverse and the Animatrix: Forms of Corporate Hybridity

American films and television programs become absolutely mainstream as they are introduced into Japan, China, or India. They come with

massive marketing campaigns that make it hard for anyone anywhere on the planet to remain unaware that they have Jedi in their midst. Historically, imported media products have been marginalized in the American market. European cinema shows only at art cinema venues; British comedies are packaged for elite public broadcasting audiences, and Asian content gets absorbed into the outer reaches of the cable dial. Foreign media gets introduced on the fringes of an expanded menu of options without touching the mainstream. But at least some Asian media is gaining unprecedented visibility and influence. *Pokemon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* are unavoidable aspects of contemporary children's culture. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* played at the multiplexes. And Madonna's borrowings from Bhangra made it into the top 40 charts. As these trends continue, major American media companies seek new models of collaboration with international artists. We might describe these developments as corporate hybridity. Hybridity has often been discussed as a strategy of the dispossessed as they struggle to resist or reshape the flow of Western media into their culture.⁴⁴ Here, hybridity can be seen as a corporate strategy, one that comes from a position of strength rather than vulnerability or marginality, one that seeks to control rather than contain transcultural consumption.

Christina Klein has examined the distinctly transnational status of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.⁴⁵ Its director, Ang Lee, was born in Taiwan but educated in the United States; this was the first film Lee had produced on Chinese soil. Its financing came from a mixture of Japanese- and American-based media conglomerates. The film was produced and co-written by Lee's long-term collaborator, the American James Schamus. The cast included performers drawn from across the Chinese diaspora—Zhang Ziyi (Mainland China), Chang Chen (Taiwan), Chow Yun-Fat (Hong Kong), and Michelle Yeoh (Malaysia). Lee describes *Crouching Tiger* as a "combination platter," stressing its borrowings from multiple cultural traditions. Schamus agrees: "We ended up making an eastern movie for western audiences and in some ways a more western movie for eastern audiences."⁴⁶

We are apt to see more "combination platter" movies as Hollywood assimilates a generation of Hong Kong directors, technicians, and performers it recruited following Chinese reunification. Exploiting political turmoil and economic disarray in Hong Kong, American media companies raided what had emerged as a powerful competitor worldwide. On the surface, this recruitment parallels similar moments in film history

when Hollywood sought to buy out competing national cinemas or to imitate styles and genres, which had proven successful in the global marketplace. Yet, it is one thing to absorb Arnold Schwarzenegger or Mel Gibson, another to absorb Jet Li or Chow Yun-Fat. Their marked ethnic and racial differences could not be easily ignored as Hollywood sought to create Western vehicles for these Eastern stars. In some cases, the films tap orientalist fantasies, as when Chow Yun-Fat is cast in *Anna and the King* or Michelle Yeoh appears as a seductive foreign agent in *Tomorrow Never Dies*. In other cases, the films deal explicitly with themes of cultural relocation and assimilation, as in Jackie Chan's *Shanghai Noon* or *Rumble in the Bronx*. Director John Woo has maintained similar themes and styles but relocated them to Western genres and performers (*Face/Off*, *Mission: Impossible 2*). More recently, however, Woo has drawn on his outsider perspective to revisit key moments in American cultural history, exposing the forgotten role played by Navahos in transmitting messages during World War II in *Windtalkers*.

American media producers are similarly responding to the growing popularity of anime and manga by soliciting Japanese-style content to augment their existing franchises, bringing a distinctly Asian style to bear on characteristically American content. In 2002, for example, Marvel Comics experimented with a new *Mangaverse* title, which reimagined and resituated its stable of superheroes within Japanese genre traditions: Spiderman is a ninja, the members of the Avengers assemble into a massive robot, and the Hulk turns into a giant green monster.⁴⁷ Initially conceived as a one-shot novelty, *Mangaverse* proved so successful that Marvel has launched an entire new production line, Tsunami, which will produce manga-style content for the American and global market, mostly working with Asian or Asian-American artists.⁴⁸ . . .

The Matrix is perhaps the most successful and visible example of this absorption of Japanese pop culture influences into the American mainstream. The directors, the Wachowski Brothers, hired Japanese manga artists to do the film's storyboards and Hong Kong martial arts choreographer Yuen Wo Ping to stage the action sequences, hoping to produce a live-action counterpart to *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira*. In anticipation of the release of *The Matrix Reloaded*, Warner Brothers commissioned the Animatrix, a series of short animated prequels created by Yoshiaki Kawajiri, Takeshi Koike, Mahiro Maeda, and a range of other distinguished Asian animators, which could be downloaded from the Web.⁴⁹

These examples of corporate hybridity depend on consumers with the kinds of cultural competencies that could only originate in the context of global convergence, requiring not simply knowledge of Asian popular culture but an understanding of its similarities with and differences from parallel traditions in the West. These products allow pop cosmopolitans to demonstrate their mastery, counting on them to teach other audience members how to decode the works. At the same time, the *Mangaverse* and the *Animatrix* provide an opening for fans of more mainstream franchises to savor the “fragrance” of Asian popular culture, potentially expanding the market for cultural imports.

Pedagogical Implications

Many current efforts toward multicultural education start from assumptions of ethnic purity or cultural authenticity at odds with the current moment of global convergence. Our classrooms are increasingly internationalized, though ties to mother countries break down over multiple generations. Our students come from mixed racial or ethnic families that owe allegiance to multiple cultural traditions; they may have strong identifications with youth subcultures that cut across national and racial borders; they may engage in patterns of intercultural consumption that heighten their awareness of other traditions and practices. Children’s media have been central to current corporate strategies of global convergence, but youth have played central roles as grassroots intermediaries facilitating the flow of Asian popular culture into the American marketplace. As such, they already inhabit a different kind of cultural landscape than their parents’ generation, a space betwixt and between different national or ethnic traditions that includes an awareness of Asian perspectives.

Darrell Hamamoto, a professor of Asian-American Studies, told *USA Today* that this trend toward “Asiaphilia” will do little to alter the stereotyping of Asian-Americans: “It’s all superficial and there’s no depth to it. Beneath this adoration of all things yellow, all things Asian, comes this condescension. In its most benign form, it’s patronizing and in its most severe form, it’s a killer.”⁵⁰ He may well be right. There is no guarantee that pop cosmopolitanism will lead to any real understanding between different cultures, since, as Hannerz notes, it often involves the selective appropriation and repurposing of other cultural traditions for

one's own interests: "Cosmopolitanism often has a narcissistic streak." Yet, Hannerz also warns against too easy a dismissal of cosmopolitanism as a kind of dilettantism, suggesting that the "surrender" of oneself to a foreign culture enables fresh perceptions upon which a deeper understanding can be built. While the uneven flow of cultural materials across national borders often produces a distorted understanding of national differences, it also represents a first significant step towards global consciousness.

Pop cosmopolitanism is generating its own intelligentsia, its own critics, historians, translators, and educators. These fans and consumers are also producing their own vernacular theories of globalization, their own understandings of the role Asian content plays in American cultural life, their own explanations for why this material is becoming so accessible to them. Educators need to recognize that these patterns of consumption generate a hunger for knowledge, a point of entry into a larger consideration of cultural geography and political economy. What kinds of educational intervention build upon that hunger and push it toward a greater understanding of America's place in the world? What kinds of pedagogical interventions might displace orientalist stereotypes with a more nuanced account of cultural difference and national specificity?

Shigeru Miyagawa's multimedia project *Star Festival* offers one glimpse of what this kind of intervention might look like. *Star Festival* offers a virtual environment in which students can explore and learn more about contemporary Japanese culture and society. Based on Miyagawa's own personal history, the project depicts a Japanese-American professor's return to the city where he was born and his attempts to resolve internal questions about his cultural identity. The Professor has dropped his personal digital assistant (PDA) and the player has recovered it; while searching through the city for its owner, the player learns things about Miyagawa's family history and about the cultural traditions that drew him back to Japan. What emerges is a picture not of a pristine Asian culture cut off from Western life but one that exists in dialogue with American influences. In one key sequence, we visit a shop that constructs papier-mâché figures used in cultural festivals. Alongside more traditional Japanese icons, we see re-creations of Tarzan, Superman, John Wayne, Rambo, and an array of other Western pop culture figures. *Star Festival's* curricular guide identifies a range of classroom activities that students at varied grade levels can complete as they work their way through the CD-ROM. Some involve learning more about

Japanese cultural traditions, such as origami or fish printing. Others involve learning more about the player's own mixed cultural and racial identities, such as constructing a family tree and documenting one own family's migrations. Miyagawa sees the project as not simply enabling students to learn more about Japan but also to learn more about themselves and to develop a greater respect for the diversity of cultural identities within the current classroom.

Pedagogical interventions need not be that elaborate. Teachers can bring examples of Asian pop cultural materials into their classrooms, drawing on the expertise of students to spark debates about what these materials mean and what kinds of cultural changes they represent. For example, I introduced my MIT students to Sheila Chandra's album *Weaving My Ancestor's Voices*. Chandra, whose mother was Indian and father Irish, has produced a new kind of pop music based on the fusion of elements drawn from classical Indian and Celtic musical traditions. I played some selections from the album for my students, read her liner-note explanation of how she was trying to use music to make sense of her mixed cultural heritage, and asked them what they thought. One Indian-born student with a strong background in classical music objected: "I can't listen to it. It sounds all wrong to me." A second-generation "desi" retorted, "But the music sounds the way we feel. We feel all wrong." This exchange sparked a larger discussion of how these hybrid forms of music express the conflicts and contradictions of inhabiting a diasporic culture. As the conversation expanded to include students who were not from Asia, further differences in perspective emerge. One second-generation "desi" had dismissed Bollywood films as "corny" and "amateur" compared to Hollywood blockbusters, while a pop cosmopolitan celebrated their vibrancy and originality. Suddenly, students were debating who has the right to judge the merits of these films and what criteria should be applied. If carefully supervised to ensure a climate of mutual respect, such classroom discussions can focus attention on the different investments students make in these imported cultural materials depending on their own personal backgrounds and intellectual interests, which in turn paves the way for a larger consideration of the uneven flow of cultural influences across national borders, of the cultural traditions from which these materials originate, of the different factors that promote or threaten diversity worldwide, and of the larger history of exchanges between East and West that might take us from the Silk Road to the World Wide Web. The goal should not be to push aside

taste for popular culture in favor of preference for a more authentic folk culture or a more refined high culture, but rather to help students build upon what they have already learned about cultural difference through their engagement with Asian media imports and to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how these materials reflect the current “garage sale” state of global culture.⁵¹