

REFASHIONING THE ROMANTICS

Contemporary Japanese Culture –Aspects of Dress



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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Clothing is often perceived as a device to create, define and demarcate the gender binary. Accordingly, there are sets of preconceptions regarding ways in which men and women are assumed to engage with fashion. The research presented here reviews three of these ideas, some of which have been challenged by scholars but which are, still persistently, present in popular culture. Such preconceptions assume that men prioritize functionality over aesthetics and are the bearers, not the objects of the gaze, while women's fashion is represented through multiple binaries of sexualisation and restriction, and female sartorial ornamentation is seen as symbolic of subservience. I investigate these presumptions via three contemporary Japanese cultural texts –(a) Japanese young men's fashion magazines, (b) Japanese female performers' appropriations of Lewis Carroll's "Alice" in their music videos, and (c) *Lolita* fashion and Tetsuya Nakashima's film *Kamikaze Girls* (2004), respectively.

My study of these three selected texts explores the following possibilities that: (a) through negotiating the male reader's desire to attract admirers and narcissistic impulse, young men's fashion magazines endorse an idea that "crafting" the pleasant "look" is a part of quintessence of self-assurance and the idea of a good, successful life; that (b) kinds of Japanese cute (*kawaii*) and girlish aesthetics demonstrated by the Japanese singers allow them to accentuate their "cute" femininity without a hint of sexualisation, and; that (c) one of the heroines in *Kamikaze Girls* engages in both conventionally "masculine" and "feminine" activities while almost always dressed in the highly elaborate, girlish *Lolita* fashion. My examinations of these texts arguably renders the cultural and social-psychological conceptions of "gender performativity" and "androgyny" effective and credible.

The Japanese context is appropriate for this aim because this is where, particularly since 1868, European sartorial styles have been actively promoted, both politically and aesthetically. Consequently, Japan has become an ethnographically unique space where the subtle marriage of European dress style and Japanese aesthetics has taken place. Along with the theme of fashion and gender, this research attempts to unearth the meanings behind processes of Japanese adaptation, appropriation and restylisation of European sartorial and aesthetic concepts. Japanese appropriation and refashioning of European sartorial concepts, this research argues, offers a unique interpretive illustration of the aesthetics of fashion and transnationality.