



# THIS FEELS FAMILIAR



E. Winslow Funaki



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# THIS FEELS FAMILIAR

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Furniture Design of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island

by

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2020

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グランピーグラミーへ  
感謝を込めて、この論文を捧げます。

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for sparking the epiphany that mixedness, queerness, and ambiguous objects are intimately related. A huge chunk of gratitude goes to my students who probably taught me way more than I taught them. I am forever indebted to my friends for their kindness, love, and support: Lisa, Barrett, Wu, Emily, Kit; Kara, Isabelle, and Travis, for making me take breaks and always building me up; David, for pointing out fucked up shit when he sees it, for making me feel like my convictions aren't crazy, and for the gossip; Brynn, for crafts, snacks, and cats; Matt, for his sincerity and openness; Aleks and Sophie, for sharing my outrage; KP, for his commiseration; and my dearest friend, Christina, for giving so much of herself and being there for me in my worst moments. I want to thank my parents for their constant love and encouragement, my brother for his competitive energy, and Dan, for letting me turn his house into an artwork, for pretending like my stress, grumpiness, and breakdowns were no big deal, and for his love.

## Abstract

This is a book about in-betweenness. It's an examination of how we identify people and objects, the categories we use to do so, and those that don't fit squarely into one or the other. It considers the grey areas of identity--race, gender, species, function, living, inanimate. It slips and slides through the ambiguous and indefinite, forever moving, always simultaneously being "both," "all," "neither," and "none."



It feels familiar but it is also hard to pin down. It references known objects—shopping carts, step ladders—but is never really that thing. It seems to follow a system of logic but that logic isn't immediately clear to you. There is “logic” but it is not logical. Perhaps it wasn't made by a human. Or for a human. It seems useful but then it isn't. As if its maker only half understood what would make an object helpful.

It feels familiar—it isn't entirely alien. It is never a sealed box that just materialized out of nowhere one day. It was clearly made and its construction is both visible and understandable. Sometimes it seems like the maker just made do with the materials at hand. There are no mysteries and no expertise is required. It is almost boring in its straight-forwardness.

It feels familiar. Almost like a friend. It moves and squeaks sometimes. Not a person or an animal but something related. Something which not only interacts with but shares attributes with a person.

It feels familiar. Just when you think you've got it cornered it throws out something else and rolls away.



## Rock Lite

Camouflage (or attempts at it) usually involve failure. A successful blend goes unnoticed. A successful fake rock just looks like a rock and no one thinks twice. Camouflage and disguise always produce dual objects. What the object actually is and what it is pretending to be. There is a tension between inside and outside, form and surface.

People tend to look at the outsides and make judgments. In Fukuoka, Japan (the country's sixth largest city) people often try to speak to me in Japanese. I know that they can see from my face that I am not fully Japanese but they are willing to bet that I might be fluent. In Kitakyushu, a somewhat smaller city about an hour's drive to the northeast, they know from 50 feet away that I am an English speaker.

If it looks like a rock but it is made of plastic is it a rock? It is definitely a "rock" and not just a blob (unless no parts of it are reading as "rock," in which case it is really failing). If it is made out of rock but it looks like a countertop it is rock but not a rock. Engineered stone is rock but also plastic. It is rock but not a rock and it is also "rock" but not "a rock."

Oftentimes, however, when the plastic rock tries to assert its plastic-ness, it will still be referred to as a rock because that's what it looks like. Its surface says, "Rock." Is the rock's identity defined by the interior or the exterior?

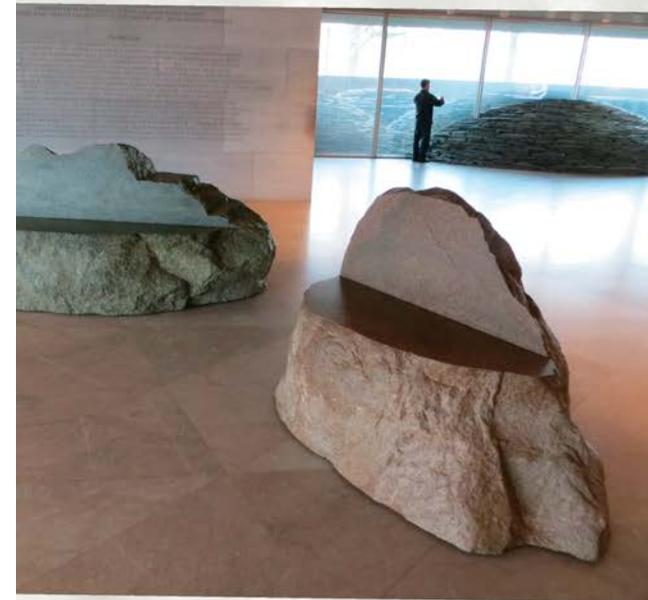
At the same time, the engineered stone countertop might try to claim its rockness and be met with the retort, "Yes, kind of, but you're not really a rock." The engineered stone is composed of more rock than the plastic rock yet its obvious composite nature makes others feel differently.

What about the "rock" that is not really trying in earnest? It has all the signifiers of rock on its surface but it is also not trying to hide its non-rock attributes. It still has a big light stuck into it and is obviously not a rock found in nature. This rock is not trying to pass as something it isn't. It isn't an imposter if that's not its intent (is it?). It is existing as its own discrete thing. It isn't either a light or a "rock" but both. Why does this seem absurd? Because a lot of effort goes into making it look like a rock without really trying.

You can disguise a water fountain in a park as a tree stump but if the guise is too effective, no one will ever be able to find the water fountain. Which makes you wonder why you should bother at all. The reason you will probably be given is that it is better for things to blend into their environment, even a little bit. "Cohesiveness" and sameness are valued.

At the same time, the light rock is absurd. It has taken two categories that don't normally go together and melded them into one object. But why are the categories separate? There is nothing mutually exclusive about rocks and lights.

The rock light can't really "pass" as a rock (although it is still a "rock"). I can't really pass as fully white or fully Asian. My brother can sometimes pass as white. But this is also contextual. People who are not used to seeing Asian people pick up





on my Asian features more. In Asia, my white features become a lot more apparent. But sometimes I look so ambiguous to people that they can't really tell. I had a teacher in middle school who thought I was Italian (mainly because my last name ends in "i").

The light needs to blend in but the rock can't also be a light. The rock light can't win. Its insides and outsides don't match. As a "rock" it is not afforded the same allowances as a rock. A boring grey rock might metamorphose into a colorful, speckled one the second it rains but nobody accuses it of being an imposter. But the rock light is wishy washy. It is both a rock and a light but also neither. It is forever a silly object.



Wobbly Aesthetics, Performance, and Message  
Comparing Japanese *Kyozukushi* with *Shinto* Architecture



Can't Without Faces  
Childhood, Religion, and Intergeneration in Contemporary  
By  
Resumen David C. Lee, Ph.D.  
The University of Texas at Austin, 2018  
SUPERVISOR: John W. Traphagen  
In various ways religion is largely not dogmatic. From branches of  
"you without seeing someone to create without seeing" that is what makes  
perhaps a particularly interesting case study in religious institutions and not  
dogmatic in the Japanese approach to religion, but also because there is also  
strongly in religious children with the belief system of Shintoism and Islam  
The rock from which the Japanese have the word about the center of it  
the body form of the traditional religion, but rather prefer books that are  
and attitudes about the face and tradition are not constrained to the child's  
but rather come easily as part of learning the traditional cultural aspects of a  
was a constant part. Because their religious institutions about the child's



## Star Trek

[By creating] a new world with new rules, I could make statements about sex, religion, Vietnam, unions, politics and intercontinental missiles. Indeed, we did make them on Star Trek: we were sending messages.

-Gene Roddenberry, quoted in *American Science-Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate, and Beyond*

The first iteration of *Star Trek*, retroactively dubbed, *The Original Series (TOS)*, aired from 1966 through 1969. Given the time period, the cast of recurring, named characters is surprisingly diverse. One quarter of these characters are not white and over sixty percent are not American. It is an optimistic view of human life in the 2260s, particularly from the point-of-view of Cold War, Civil Rights Era America.

Despite all this, there is still one point of racial anxiety and it rests in Spock, the ship's first officer and science officer. Spock is half human and half Vulcan, the only member of the crew with any alien origins. To make Spock a mixed-species character and not simply the ship's resident alien was a very deliberate choice. Spock is for the most part, culturally Vulcan, preferring to suppress his emotions in favor of pure logic. In many episodes, he serves as a simple foreign entity and is



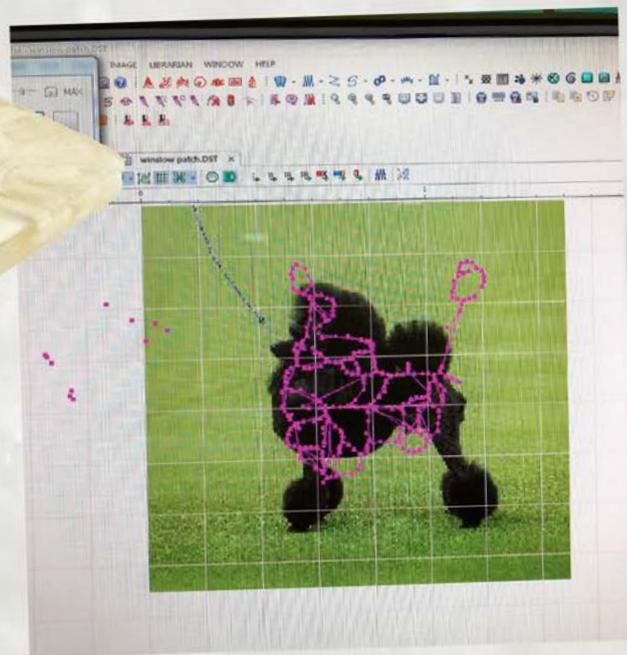


There is one mixed-species character who is virtually untroubled by being mixed, Deanna Troi, the ship's counselor on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (*TNG*) (1987-94). Deanna is half human and half Betazoid, a psychic species who, except for some slight differences in the look of their eyes (they appear to have large pupils with no irises), look just like humans. Deanna displays almost no inner conflict whatsoever. What conflicts do arise are almost always centered around Deanna's Betazoid mother, Lwaxana. Deanna is placed in the familiar narrative of the immigrant or the child of an immigrant who disagrees with her mother's Old World ideas. These clashes in themselves tend to be minor and are only exacerbated by the separate issue of Lwaxana's big personality. In every situation, Lwaxana is quick to forgive her daughter—if it is even a situation that calls for forgiveness—and is always asserting that she just wants Deanna to be happy.

Of the three mixed-species characters, Deanna appears the most human. Unlike the actors who portray Spock and B'Elanna, Marina Sirtis (who plays Deanna) did not have to undergo any special effects makeup. At most, she may have had to wear some colored contacts. If it weren't explicitly stated, viewers might not know that Deanna was not full human. I don't think it is coincidental that the mixed character who is able to pass as Human (read white) also has the least struggle. It seems that Deanna's life is less troubled because she looks human, looks beautiful. She has none of the grotesqueries of brow ridges or pointy ears. Although I know that my race-species metaphor only goes so far, this does seem to suggest that only those with passably white skin and features can be as glamorous and carefree as Deanna.

Although not mixed-species, there is one *TNG* character who offers a different model of the in-between. Lieutenant Commander Data is an android with artificial intelligence. As a synthetic lifeform, he is definitely not human but more than just a machine. He exists in a space between man and the





synthetic lifeform, he is definitely not human but more than just a machine. He exists in a space between man and the man-made; he was designed but is also capable of designing, himself. With only a few other sentient androids in existence, Data is nearly one-of-a-kind. He is alone.

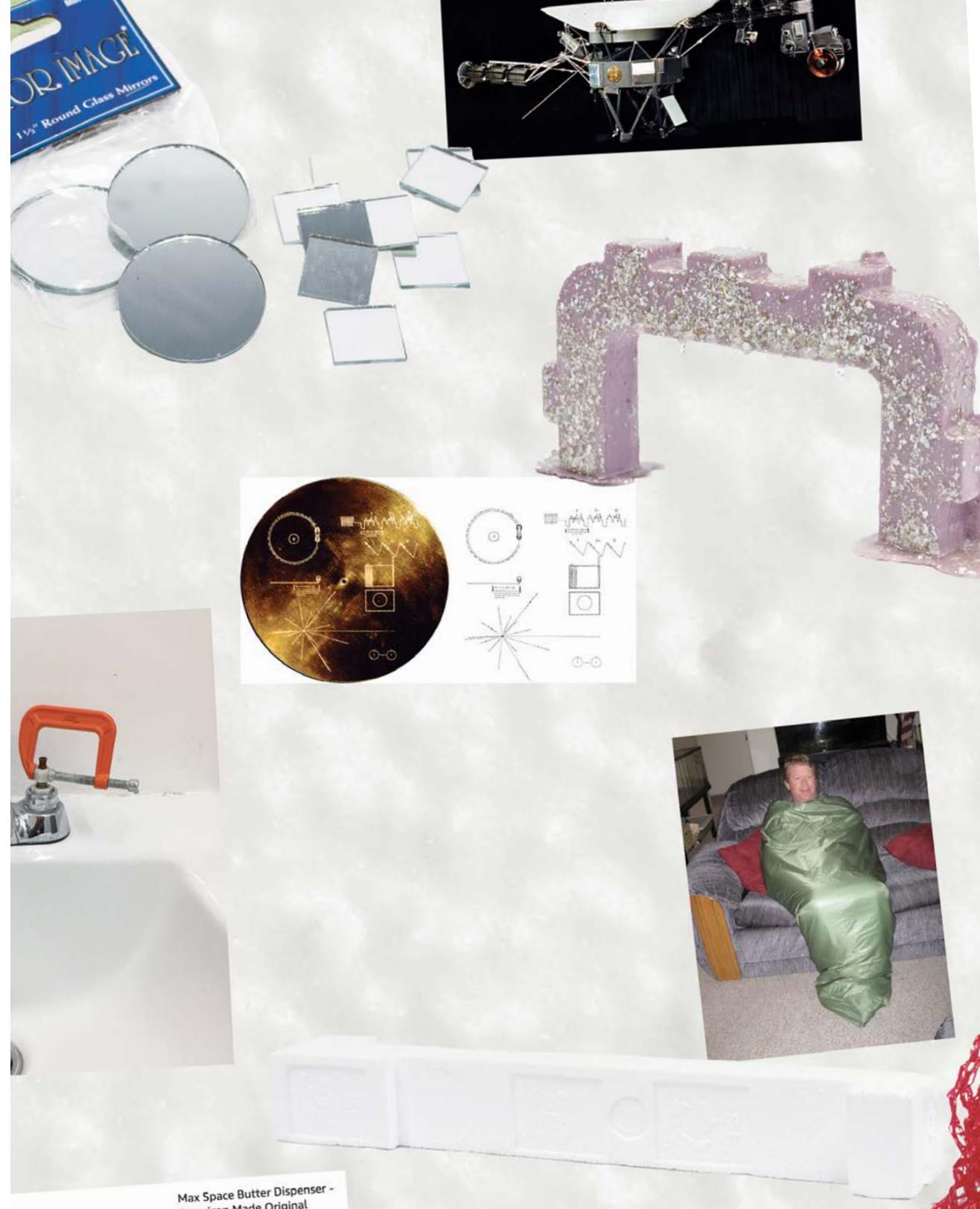
Like the mixed-species characters, Data's foreignness is a source of curiosity for his shipmates. They occasionally ask him questions about how he experiences the world as an android. Unlike McCoy's interactions with Spock, however, they don't constantly point out his difference. Even when Data commits a human faux pas, the humans around him gently explain his mistake rather than accuse him of being rude or cold.

Data's peers lovingly understand him as an other. More significantly, he sees them in the same way. He asks even more questions about human behavior than they ask about his. These lines of questioning, about the nuances of relationships, manners, and feelings, often end with his counterparts saying, "I don't know," or "That's just how it is." Data forces the humans, including Star Trek viewers, to see their culture—and their humanity—from an outside perspective. Rather than feeling sorry for a character that will never belong, viewers are made to consider that they, themselves, could be the other.

Like Spock, Data does not display emotion; in fact, his hardware cannot support it. In several episodes, Data develops or searches for upgrades that will allow him to experience the less computable aspects of consciousness like emotion and dreaming. His living and mechanical sides are intimately linked; improvements to one lead to improvements in the other. While Data is, in many ways, a Pinocchio character who wants to be more human, I don't think his aspirations have to do with being accepted and embraced by his biological shipmates. Rather, Data seeks a richer existence for himself, seeking the ineffable aspects of human experience while recogniz-

ing that his growth as a sentient being parallels his growing complexity as a machine.

Most of the mixed-species characters exist in a binary. People can be one species or another and the mixed characters are never enough of either. In Data, we find a character who is a fusion. He is both fully sentient and synthetic. His identity is based on addition, with multiple wholes stacked on top of one another, rather than fractions.





## AIBO

In 2015, Kōfuku-ji, a temple in Chiba prefecture, Japan held the first ceremony for departed AIBOs, robot dogs produced by Sony from 1999 to 2006. In 2014, when Sony announced that it would not continue servicing old AIBOs, A-Fun, a company founded by a former Sony employee, began repairing the robots. A-Fun collects unwanted or broken AIBOs for parts to repair wanted but malfunctioning robot dogs. The company asked the head priest of Kōfuku-ji, Bungen Oi, to hold a service for the “organ donor” dogs. For each ceremony, the AIBOs are brought to the temple and tags with the names of the dogs and their owners are placed around the dogs’ necks. Members of A-Fun attend the services as surrogates for the dogs’ families and pray while Oi burns incense and chants sutras. Perhaps somewhat creepily, an AIBO dressed as a priest also chants.<sup>1</sup>

There are a number of Buddhist ceremonies for discarded objects in Japan, traditionally things like needles and dolls.<sup>2</sup> Called *kuyō*—the same word used for services for aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyō*) and deceased pets (*petto kuyō*)<sup>3</sup>—these services bear a resemblance to Buddhist funerary practices. The burning of incense is strongly associated with human

<sup>1</sup> James Burch, “Beloved robot dogs honored in funeral ceremony,” *Travel*, *National Geographic*, May 24, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Angelika Kretschmer, “Mortuary Rites for Inanimate Objects: The Case of Hari Kuyō,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27, no. 3-4 (2000): 387, 402.

<sup>3</sup> Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 84.

## General Service for Dogs

...te farewell to mechanical pets, with a historic temple.



## biography of things: production as process

...andies simply are. This is, certain things produced, even, and can be seen to circulate as they are being exchanged for other things for money. This view, of course, frames a commodity as an item with use value. I shall, for the moment, accept this as the sufficient for raising certain preliminary issues, as the argument warrants. ...the production of commodities is also process: commodities must be not only produced, but also culturally marked as being a part of the total range of things available in a society, and considered appropriate for marketing. ...the same thing may be created in a system of use at market. And finally, the same thing may be used as a commodity by one person and an object by another. Such shifts and differences in whether something reveals a social economy that stands as a summary of visible transactions.



funerals and rituals for remembering relatives and ancestors who have passed away. Just as most Japanese people are cremated after death, the discarded objects are often burned after the ceremony.

As in other *kuyō*, the AIBOs are being thanked for the happiness they brought to their families as well as the sacrifice of parts for the continued happiness of other AIBO owners. A-Fun invests time and money into these services which from a strictly business perspective they do not have to do. I highly doubt that holding a ceremony like this even cross the mind of any western business owner and if it did, it would only be deemed worthwhile if a high level of cuteness and quirkiness were a part of the brand. While I'm sure that A-Fun receives publicity from these ceremonies (although they are closed to the public), it is not really necessary since the AIBO-owner community appears to be quite robust, sharing repair tips even before A-Fun came on the scene.<sup>4</sup> All of this suggests that A-Fun holds these *kuyō* because they feel that they should, that it would be disrespectful not to.

As a child, my father was constantly telling me to respect my things. I assumed that this was something that all parents told their children. In particular, I can remember him telling my brother and I not to put stickers on our computers. Since stickers in no way impede the function of the computer and knowing that my father would never resell a computer out of fear of identity theft, I knew there was no financial motive for this. When we would ask why, the answer was always because "it isn't nice." I used to think that his "not nice" just meant tacky but as I grew older and saw the ways that my peers treated their possessions, I realized that I had been trained since early childhood to treat objects with a level of respect and perhaps "not nice" actually meant the act of being unkind to the computer.

<sup>4</sup> Burch, "Beloved robot dogs."

My father was born and raised in Japan. He came to the U.S. when he was seventeen to attend school. Although I have never lived there long-term, I've spent enough time in Japan to know that the Japanese have a very different attitude towards inanimate objects than Americans. Most objects there are respected in a way that is reserved for a very few, special objects in the States. Influenced by Shinto, humans, animals, objects, and even deities all function on the same plane.<sup>5</sup> Hierarchies exist, of course, but the separations aren't so great that the various members can't socialize.

In *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, tidying expert Marie Kondo repeatedly anthropomorphizes household objects. Socks, for instance, should never be balled up in your drawer because they are “resting.”<sup>6</sup> Kondo also famously “greet” the homes of each of her clients by bowing and mentally introducing herself. Western audiences often find this to be sweetly eccentric—especially after the release of her Netflix series—yet the idea of talking to your home is grounded in Japanese culture.<sup>7</sup> Children are taught that it is polite to say, “*Itte-kimasu*,” (I’ll be back) upon leaving home or school (or, as they reach adulthood, the workplace) and, “*Tadaima*” (I’m here!) upon arrival. They are encouraged to do so even when returning to an empty house.<sup>8</sup>

Concern for the feelings of “inanimate” objects is instilled in Japanese children from a young age. *Tatami no Kamisama* (*Kami* of the Tatami) by Mori Hiyori is a children’s book in which a grandmother teaches her grandchildren to be gentle with her tatami mat floor out of respect for the tatami *kami*. An illustration shows the family in a room with three *kami*, one embodied in the tatami, one in the *kamidana* (a Shinto home altar), and one in the *butsudan* (a Buddhist altar generally set up in remembrance of deceased family members).<sup>9</sup> *Tatami no Kamisama* very simply illustrates a worldview very different from that of the West. Although there are very real practical and financial reasons to be delicate with the tata-

<sup>5</sup> Fabio Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* trans. Cathy Hirano (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2014), 81

<sup>7</sup> *Tidying Up With Marie Kondo*, season 1, episode 1, “Tidying With Toddlers,” directed by Jade Sandberg Wallis, written by Marie Kondo, featuring Marie Kondo, released January 1, 2019, streaming.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Davis Cox, “Gods Without Faces: Childhood, Religion, and Imagination in Contemporary Japan,” (doctoral thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2018), 255.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*: 279-80.



**you-only-liberate-once**  
my host mom in Japan referred to her Roomba as “Roomba-san” and when it would get stuck she would just look over it and softly say “ganbatte, Roomba-san...ganbatte” as it made distressed beeping noises at her

**whoopsrobots**  
“**Ganbatte:** *Cheer up, Be courageous, Do your best!*”

Source: kibibarel

270,106 notes





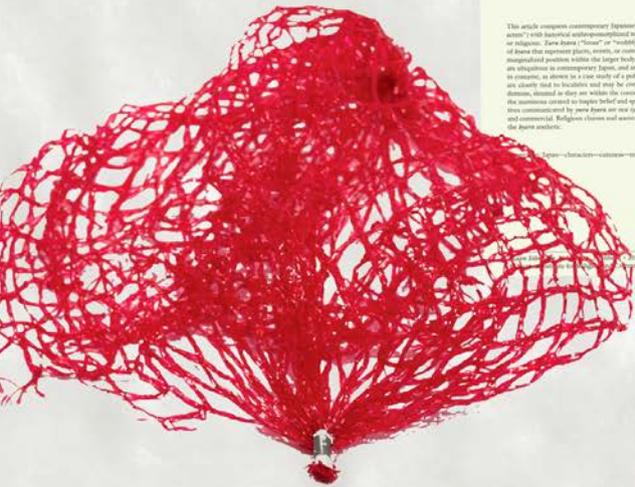
DEBRA F. UNGER  
Miyazaki International College

Wobbly Aesthetics, Performance, and Message  
Comparing Japanese Kiseru  
with their Anthropomorphic Forebears

This article compares contemporary Japanese kiseru known as kiseru ("char-acture") with historical anthropomorphized imagery considered as being spiritual or religious. Kiseru known as "kiseru" or "kiseru" (char-acture) are a subcategory of kiseru that represent places, events, or commodities, and occupy a widely recognized position within the larger body of kiseru material culture. They are ubiquitous in contemporary Japan, and are sometimes created by humans in contrast, as already in a new variety of public covers and vessels. They are closely tied to facilities and may be compared to historical devices and devices, viewed as they are within the context of popular representation of the numerous control to inspire belief and open action. However, the kiseru are constructed by their form and the highly religious art, the idea and commercial. Religious figures and scenarios also frequently incorporate the kiseru aesthetic.

https://char-acture.com/marketing-religion

2022, 09-11



Josh Wilbur Faint  
Childhood Robots and Insouciance in Contemporary Japan

By  
Miyazaki Faint (Ed. 2012)  
The University of Iowa, Iowa, 2012  
SUBSCRIPTION: none to this paper

Whether they appear in high-tech robotics, from Roomba through the elegant  
gears of a vintage watch, or in the most common of toys, from the  
plastic figurines of a child's play set to the colorful characters of a doll, the link  
between the human and the robot is a long and varied one. It is the link  
between the human and the robot, the link between the human and the robot,  
the link between the human and the robot, the link between the human and the robot.

The link between the human and the robot is a long and varied one. It is the link  
between the human and the robot, the link between the human and the robot,  
the link between the human and the robot, the link between the human and the robot.



Supernatural Apparitions and Domestic Life  
in Japan  
Kaishiki Kusano

Since the rise of digital communication in the mid-20th century, Japan has  
been blessed with an array of new products from the computer, the  
cellular phone, the internet, the television, and the video camera, as well as the  
video camera, which has been directly responsible for the rise of the  
video camera. The video camera is a product of the video camera, which has  
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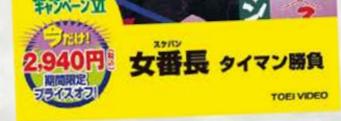
mi—the same reasons I thought my father had for telling me to take care of my things—these are not given to the children. Instead, they are provided with a narrative that asks them to think about how their actions will affect the feelings of others. Just as young school-age children are learning not to be rough with their peers, they are also learning not to be rough with objects and the two lessons reinforce one another.

It is no wonder then that this is the culture that produces so many cute, friendly robots. The line between living and non-living is so blurred that it is not disturbing to see robots in the mall hocking cell phones or insurance policies or helping the elderly to feel less lonely. Yet in the west, an inanimate object clearly trying to befriend you comes off as creepy. Our descent into the uncanny valley is much steeper. I feel comfortable anthropomorphizing a Roomba or a 3D printer because it goes about its business and doesn't really care about me. Sometimes it fails or gets stuck and I can project my human experience onto it, perceiving its struggle as cute. When it becomes more than a projection, however, when my feelings are sent back to me, it is disturbing. Even the most realistic robots, like Sophia, the first robot granted citizenship by a country, are disconcerting. It is difficult to trust Sophia's empty eyes and rubbery skin zipped up at the back of the neck. Her simulated facial muscles do nothing to help. You can't help but feel manipulated, especially when, as she's done in recent years, she's trying to get you to buy something.<sup>10</sup>

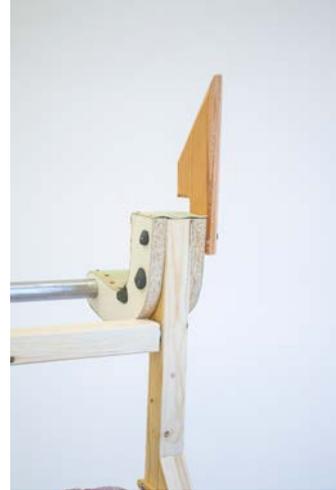
To my very American, childhood eyes, AIBO was simply a thing, a toy, and not a very interesting one at that. My grandfather had one when my brother and I were kids and we both found AIBO entertaining for all of fifteen minutes. For A-Fun, however, although they are trading in AIBOs, the dogs are more than mere commodities. The dogs are being scrapped for parts yet it is acknowledged that their worth is greater than their material constituents. At the same time, however,

<sup>10</sup> Emily Reynolds, "The Agony of Sophia, the World's First Robot Citizen Condemned to a Lifeless Career in Marketing," *Robots, Wired*, June 1, 2018.

everyone seems to agree that the AIBOs are not alive. Priest Oi says, “Even though AIBO is a machine and doesn’t have feelings, it acts as a mirror for human emotions,” which would seem to agree with a conventional western idea of inanimate objects. Paradoxically, though, Oi immediately follows this with, “Everything has Buddha-nature.”<sup>11</sup> Everything has Buddha-nature because everything is capable of attaining Buddhahood and such a state of enlightenment suggests that objects have a level of consciousness.



<sup>11</sup> Burch, “Be-  
loved robot dogs.”



This empty functionalism is well summed up by the word 'gizmo'. A gizmo does have an operational value, but whereas the function of a machine is explicit in its name, a gizmo, in the context of the functional paradigm, is always an indeterminate term with, in addition, the pejorative connotation of 'the thing without a name' or 'the thing I cannot name' (there is something immoral about an object whose exact purpose one does not know). The fact remains that it works. As a sort of dangling parenthesis, as an object detached from its function, what the 'gizmo' or the 'thingummy-jig' suggests is a vague and limitless functionality - or perhaps better the mental picture of an imaginary functionality.

-Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*

These are some objects to be seen. They are functionally specific while aesthetically vague. They look like they do something, but what? We get only small clues in handles, hinges, and conveyor belts. They are otherwise anonymous and opaque. Yet they are not just piles of exposed parts that get the job done. They are clad, painted, and dyed. Their edges are clean and their surfaces glimmer. They were meant to be seen in use. To see them demonstrated is to know them.

## The Rotolactor

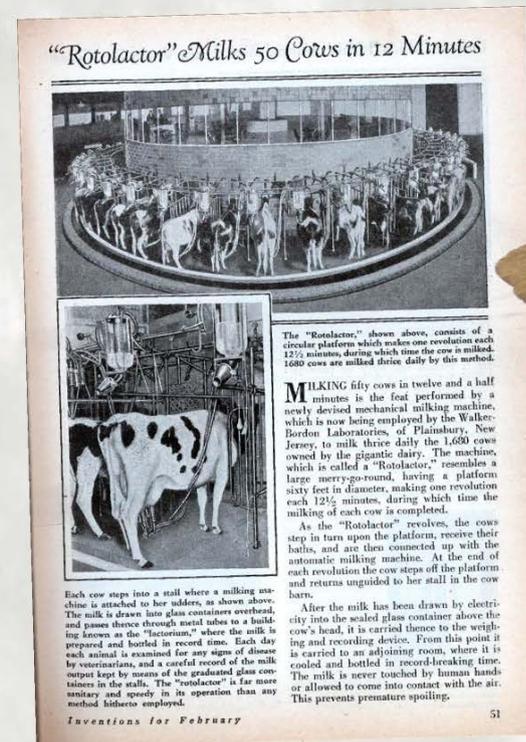
Designed by Henry W. Jeffers for Walker Gordon Dairy in 1930, the Rotolactor was the first rotary cow milking parlor. Cows were driven up a ramp and into one of fifty stalls where they were hooked up to an automatic milking machine. The stalls were arranged in a circle on a rotating platform which “resembles a large merry-go-round”<sup>12</sup> and in the twelve and a half minutes it took to make a full revolution, each cow would be milked and dropped back off at the ramp.

A subsidiary of Borden Dairy, Walker Gordon was located in Plainsboro, New Jersey. It was also the home of Elsie the Cow, a registered New Jersey heifer and spokesperson for Borden. She greeted visitors at the Rotolactor exhibit at the 1939 New York World’s Fair. By the time it closed in 1940, the Rotolactor, with Elsie’s help, became one of the top attractions of the Fair. Sadly, Elsie died in a traffic collision the following year. Her tombstone is on Plainsboro Road,<sup>13</sup> a ten-minute drive from my childhood home.

Like nearly all industrial machines, the Rotolactor is both complex and highly specific. Every component has been honed for its one particular task. There are no extraneous parts and it is pretty useless at doing anything other than

<sup>12</sup> “Rotolactor” Milks 50 Cows in 12 Minutes,” *Modern Mechanics and Inventions*, February, 1931.

<sup>13</sup> Neil Genzlinger, “Jersey; Elsie Didn’t Start Out a Jersey Cow, but...,” *The New York Times* (New York), August 15, 1999.

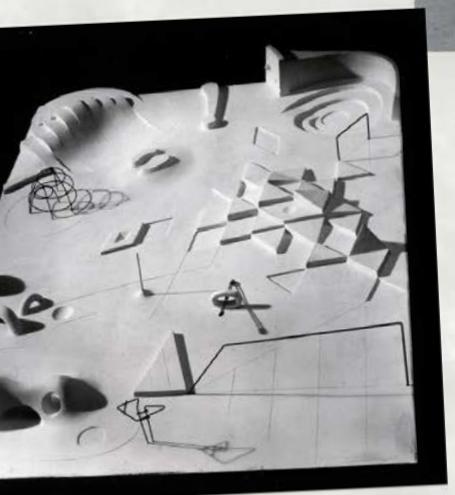


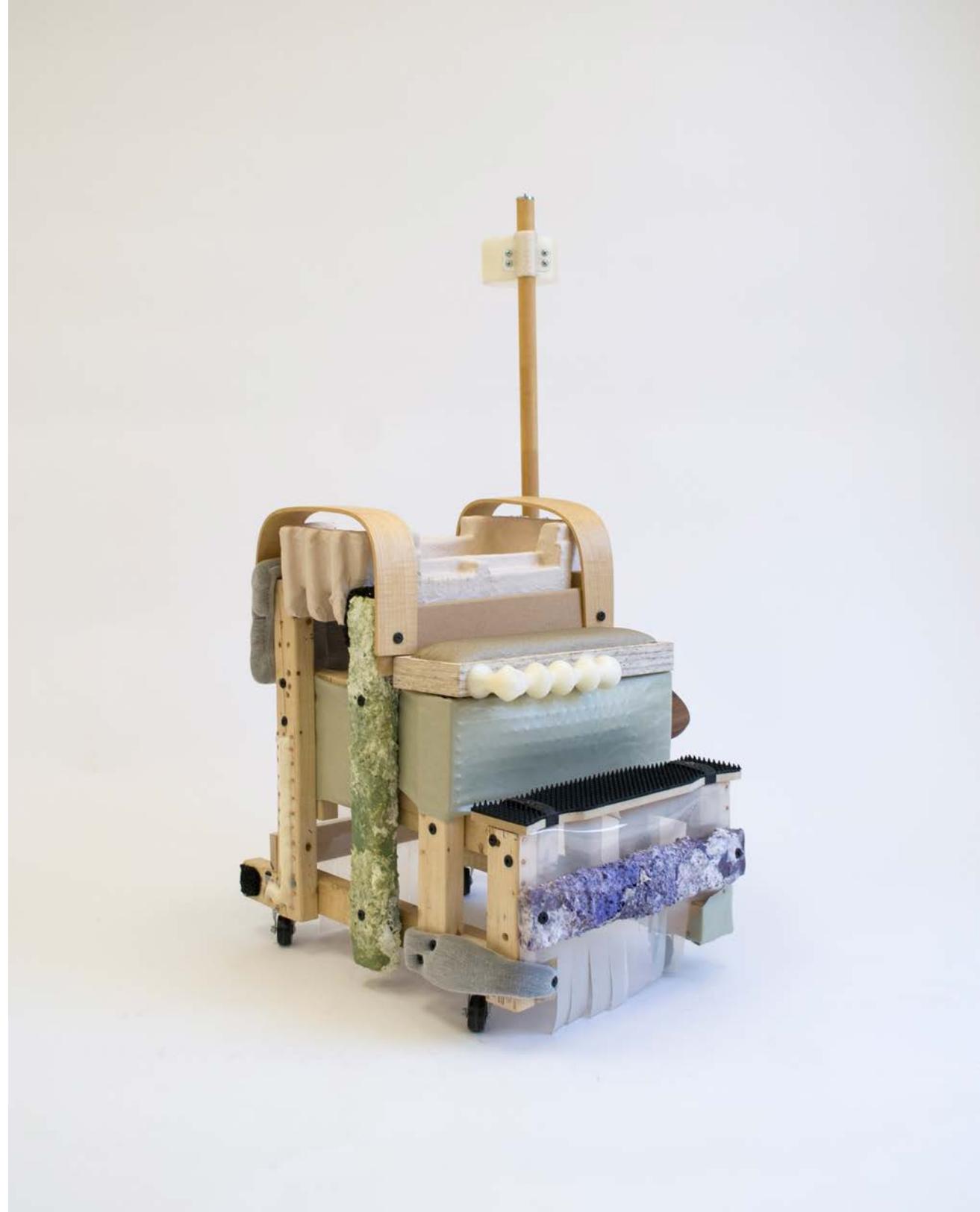


service. In other words, we have designed a...  
 Although it has largely been forgotten since...  
 One type of...  
 For example, in the...  
 household...



milking cows. It looks useful, even if, vacant of cows, that use might be unclear, confusing, or terrifying. Despite its utilitarian look and its function as a piece of industrial farm equipment, the Rotolactor is not without aesthetic refinement. In fact, it is exactly the kind of technological innovation to be considered glamorous in the thirties. Entitled the "Dairy World of Tomorrow," Borden's exhibit was housed in a round building with huge windows allowing visitors a glimpse of the gleaming, slowly rotating carousel of cows and uniformed workers inside. The roundness, the shininess, the sheer newness recall Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion House. It is sleek and clean, a utopian vision of the future of dairy.





## The Dolly

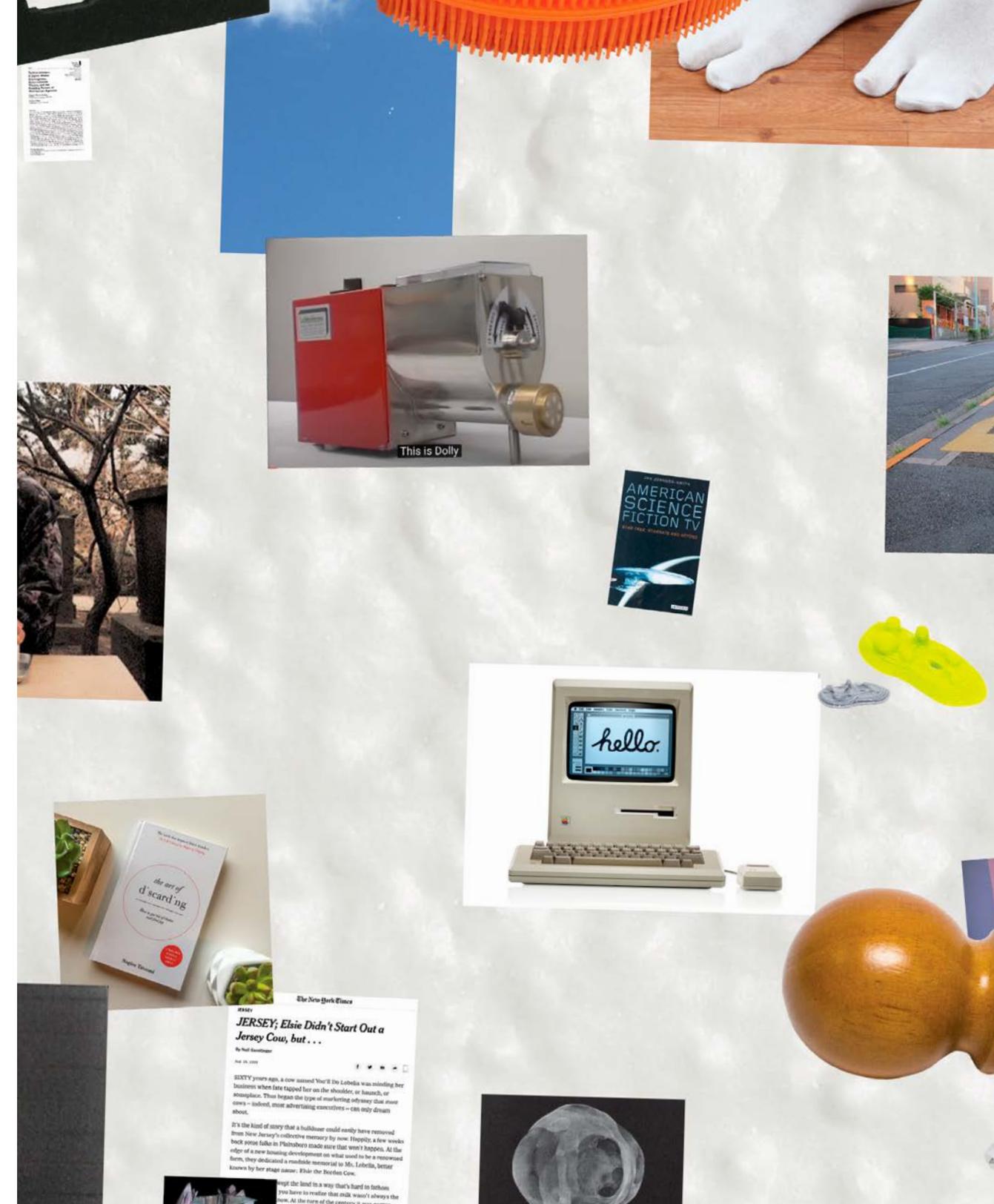
The Dolly Mini P3 Pasta Machine looks at once very streamlined and aesthetically considered but also incredibly utilitarian. It has been selectively refined. In a nearly three-minute video,<sup>14</sup> shiny red powder coated aluminum meets formed stainless steel sheet meets the heavy brass of the die through which the pasta is extruded. It is deliberate, specific, attractive. At the same time, however, it features a heavy coiled electrical cord and huge emergency stop button that can both be purchased from McMaster-Carr. A radiused rectangular hole in the plastic lid serves as both a handle and place to pour in liquid ingredients. The contrast is slightly jarring but also makes sense. You wouldn't have thought that these parts go together yet now that they are, you are buying it. It is a large machine, not intended for domestic use but not for a large-scale pasta operation either.

The ravioli machine advertised with P3 has a similar aesthetic and as the sterile environment and lab coat worn by the machine's operator suggest, it is meant only for small production facilities or serious ravioli enthusiasts. It is composed of simple forms, mainly cylinders and rectangular prisms that are bolted together. There is a pleasing mix of gloss and matte finishes on its different components. A hand crank on the

<sup>14</sup> Simone di Vincenzo, "Dolly Mini P3-Pasta Machine," Youtube, June 22, 2009, video, 2:47.



back drives two rolls of wide, flat pasta sheets on either side of a tall stainless steel cylinder containing the ravioli filling. As the handle is turned, a sheet of ravioli cascades down below. Each component is functionally specific yet anonymous. Every design choice seems deliberate but vague. Like the Roto-lactor, it is clearly functional but without the bright, synthy, muzak-filled video to demonstrate, the use of this object is unclear.



## The Curl-a-Dog™

At scale, specificity makes sense. In a domestic setting, however, it quickly becomes absurd. Few objects are as specialized as As-Seen-On-TV kitchen gadgets, the Curl-a-Dog™ chief among them. A “Spiral Hot Dog Slicer” for “Gourmet Tasting Hot Dogs,” it is essentially a small hinged box, not unlike a casket, with plastic fins along the inside. When a hot dog is placed into the casket and closed, it is cut into a helical shape. This is ostensibly for more even cooking and to create pockets to hold toppings and condiments. Despite the heavy branding associated with gadgets like this—the bulk of their appeal is created through marketing and not their actual functionality—the Curl-a-Dog™ is surprisingly plain. The name of the product is almost illegibly stamped on the outside of its injection-molded body. Without the extensive, unappetizing renders, photos, and TV commercials featuring grilled hotdogs, this product, too, is hilariously precise yet nearly unreadable.

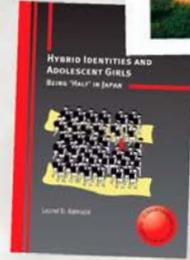


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**Curl-a-Dog™** THE AS SEEN ON TV BRAND

**Massive Flavor in Every Bite!**



## Greener Paths

Do you think... that they will think... his arm is permanently attached in this position?

-Laurie Anderson, "Say Hello"

At the opening of *Greener Grass* (2019) Lisa, a suburban soccer mom, turns to Jill, another mom, and remarks that Jill's new baby daughter is cute. This prompts Jill to then offer her baby to Lisa.

"Are you sure?" Lisa asks.

"Yes! I'm sure! Take her. She's yours now" Jill promptly replies.<sup>15</sup>

You would think they are talking about a scarf or a piece of costume jewelry. At this point, it is clear that the rules in *Greener Grass* are a bit different. The film's highly stylized "Wes Anderson-meets-80s-music-video aesthetic"<sup>16</sup> and the fact that all the adults have braces, dress in monochromatic outfits, and drive golf carts has told us as much. By the time that Jill's older child falls into a pool and emerges as a golden retriever in the middle of the film we are simply along for the ride. Of course Jill is still rushing to get her dog-son to school

<sup>15</sup> Jocelyn DeBoer and Dawn Luebke, dir... *Greener Grass* (2019; New York: IFC Midnight) Hulu.

<sup>16</sup> Andee Tagle, "Suburban Satire: 'Greener Grass' Offers Surreal, Pastel-Hued Truths," Review, *NPR*, October 17, 2019.

on time, apologizing to Miss Human as she enters the classroom. Jill explains to Miss Human that, “He’s a dog now,” to which she replies, “Oh. Well, he’s tardy.”<sup>17</sup>

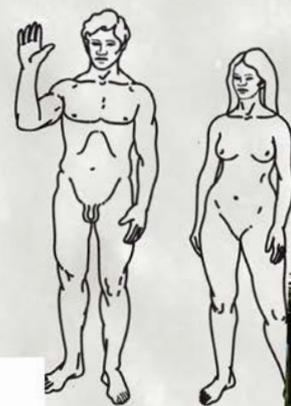
Not having grown up in the world of *Greener Grass*, we missed out on certain bits of knowledge—what behaviors are acceptable, how much ownership a parent should feel over their dog-child, the importance of perfectly color-coordinated ensembles. These kinds of knowledge are rarely transmitted explicitly—they are the kinds of things we pick up as children through observing our parents, teachers, and other children. It is “knowledge that is located in society.”<sup>18</sup> It is the reason that we are at greater risk of committing social faux pas when we travel to a new place with a different culture. Coming from New York, for example, we might not realize that in Tokyo, you stand on the left side of the escalator and not the right or that no one ever, ever jay-walks. Grasping the subtleties of when and where shoes need to be removed, even in urban, public spaces might take weeks.

Objects often have formal cues that lend insight into the culture that produced them. For example, school desks with cast iron legs with holes for them to be bolted to the floor are the product of a teaching philosophy in which students sit in rows and face the teacher. Unfixed school desks offer more flexibility to break into groups or a circle, a very different philosophy.

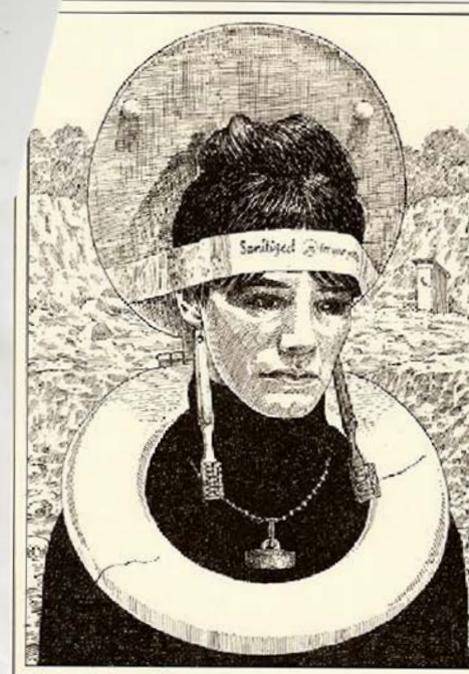
What happens when we encounter an object we simply don’t understand? A curvy path of textured tactile pavement—to help guide pedestrians with visual impairment—on an otherwise straight sidewalk is reinforced by green plastic bollards with stripes of reflective tape. There is no obstacle the path is circumventing, just the artificial one created by the erection of the bollards. There are no significant structures immediately before or after the meandering path. Approaching this path, we understand what we are meant to do—we can read the cues—but we don’t understand why.

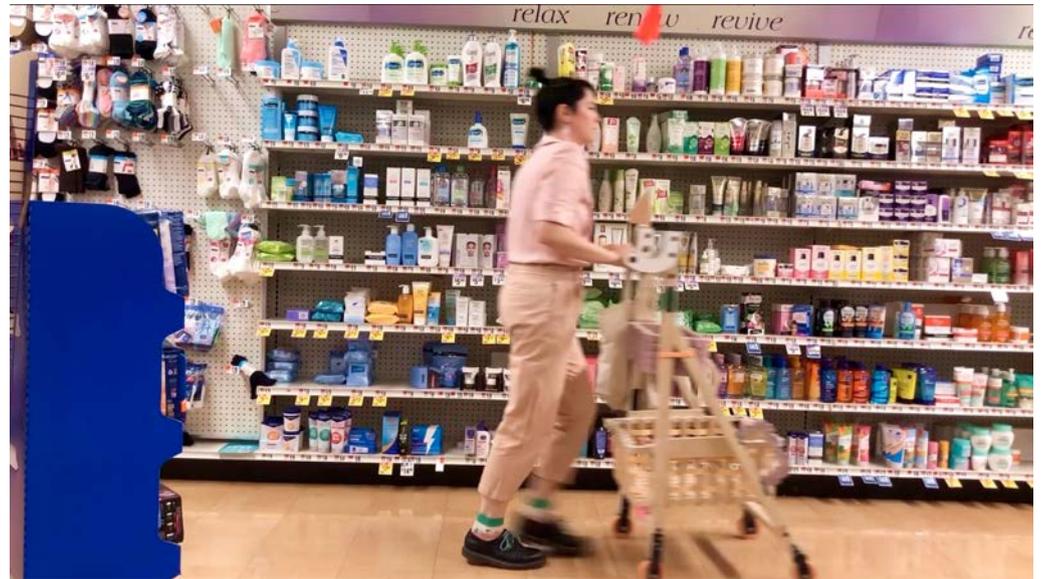
<sup>17</sup> DeBoer and Luebbe, *Greener Grass*.

<sup>18</sup> H. M. Collins, “Tacit Knowledge and Social Cartesianism,” in *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 138.



Just like *Greener Grass*, this small instance of pedestrian infrastructure appears to follow a system of logic but one that we just aren't privy to. We can take a stab at it—that the path is to avoid an invisible sinkhole or an undetonated bomb or perhaps a kind of urban choreography—but we will probably be wrong. We will probably project our own wishes and invest far more importance in the thing than its creators did. We will probably puzzle over this object for years and hang its picture on the wall and show it in every presentation and write essays about it. We will relish the strangeness and the mystery and the wrongness. We have felt a version of this wrongness before and it is a ticklish pleasure. It is more fun.





## Shapelessness as a Form of Resistance

Like a cool breeze, he turned his shapelessness into a form of resistance.

-Will Harris, *Mixed Race Superman*

At the end of the 19th century, Japan opened its first schools of higher education for women. Suddenly, the daughters of wealthy families were being sent to Tokyo to study and live alone for the first time. The idea of the “schoolgirl” was a new one; previously, women would have only held the roles of girl/daughter or wife/mother. There was no in between. Yet education was not seen as an alternative to marriage. On the contrary, its “purpose” was to make these women into “good wives” and “wise mothers.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite the pro-social underpinnings of their education, schoolgirls, or *shojo*, were seen as “privileged outsiders” in Japanese society.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the concept of such a transitional phase between child and wife was so foreign to the concept of womanhood that *shojo* literally translates to “‘not-quite-female’ female.”<sup>21</sup> This liminal space allowed *shojo* both physical and metaphorical freedom. Although they were initially

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Frederick, “Not That Innocent: Yoshiya Nobuko’s Good Girls,” in *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. Laura Miller, Jan Bardsley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 68.

<sup>20</sup> Melanie Czarnecki, “Bad Girls from Good Families: The Degenerate Meiji Schoolgirl,” in *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. Laura Miller, Jan Bardsley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 53.

<sup>21</sup> Frederick, “Not That Innocent,” 68.

assumed to be “sweet and innocent,”<sup>22</sup> *shojo* were now living outside of the home, away from the supervision of family, making affairs with male university students and married men possible. These dalliances provoked media scandals, “[serv-ing] as cautionary markers while they simultaneously provid-ed racy subject material.”<sup>23</sup>

Just as *shojo* were now able to fraternize with men, the dor-mitories and boarding houses in which they lived brought them into close contact with a great number of women their own age. Unlike the affairs with men, schoolgirl romances with women were condoned and understood to be normal. Despite the potential threat to the social emphasis on fami-ly such relationships represented—such as that depicted in Nobuko Yoshiya’s 1919 novel, *Two Virgins in the Attic*, in which two young women eschew marriage and run away together—these women were still seen as “inexperienced and pure, if sexually unregulated.”<sup>24</sup>

The purity of *shojo* reached beyond their “virginity.” In media, including Yoshiya’s work, they were associated with all things considered romantic and feminine at the time: “sentimentali-ty, interest in flowers, clothing, dolls, and dreamy thoughts of the moon and stars.”<sup>25</sup> Despite their sometimes “unladylike” behavior, femininity was being thrust upon these women, or the idea of them.

Women’s education was one of a number of reforms put in place during the Meiji Era (1868-1912) intended to modern-ize and “civilize” Japan in an effort to compete with Western powers. This resulted in the westernization of many aspects of life including dress and education. Reformers saw the statu-s of women as tied to the status of the country<sup>26</sup> and thus adopted a more Westernized education system for women—those who could afford it, of course. It was therefore in the state’s best interest to keep women’s schools open. *Shojo*, as a group, could leverage their in-between status to simul-

<sup>22</sup> Czarniecki, “Bad Girls,” 60.

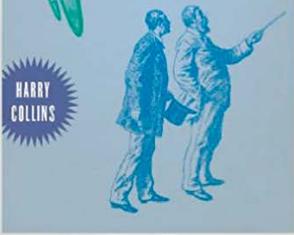
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> Frederick, “Not That Innocent,” 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Czarniecki, “Bad Girls,” 51.





**Pinky Violence: Shock, awe and the exploitation of liberation**

Pinky Violence films, exploitation movies from 1960s and specifically on subject portrayals of gender and sex. Utilizing and broader sexuality through the character of the subject. Evolution of both the cultural and the historical factors. Evolution of Pinky Violence films demonstrates how the changing roles of the film and an analysis of the changing cultural violence as an unbridled, and hence unbridled, area to cinema. By doing so, the article ultimately attempts to film as a valuable source of unbridled material that can be constructed of gender in Japanese cinema.

**KEYWORDS**  
 Pinky Violence  
 subject  
 exploitation film  
 sexuality  
 gender in Japanese  
 film  
 female transgression



taneously meet the state's need to modernize, provide men with the stories of promiscuous, young women they desired, pursue their own romances while remaining pure in the eyes of the public, get their educations, and go after a more independent, self-determined lifestyle.

Eventually, this girlish, romantic version of the schoolgirl was absorbed into the social structure. The image of *shojo* as shy, obedient, and virginal, became less of an image and more of a real social constraint. By the 1970s, gangs of slightly younger middle and high school girls formed in clear rebellion against the specifically gendered and classed roles they were meant to play. They made alterations to their iconic sailor girl school uniforms—cropping the blouses, adding Converse sneakers, and lengthening the skirts in reaction to the sexualization of the schoolgirl in manga and anime, perhaps a holdover from the sensationalized Meiji era accounts of *shojo* romances. The skirts had the added benefit of concealing razor blades, chains, and other weapons.<sup>27</sup> As the weapons make clear, this was more than just a rebellion of dress.

Unlike their male peers marginalized by class or ethnicity, school girls looking to defy the social order could not find a home in the heavily patriarchal yakuza. Instead they formed their own, equally violent gangs who committed petty crimes and fought one another in the streets.<sup>28</sup> This quite literal assault on social structure could not be tolerated, of course, and unlike the previous *shojo*, there was really nothing in-between about these women. The schoolgirl was no longer a new role to be molded and pushed. At this point there were deeply-rooted behavioral expectations that these women were fully rejecting: “In a society so circumscribed, where small infractions may be taboo—why not go all out and be really ‘bad?’”<sup>29</sup> Where earlier *shojo* had some space to negotiate between good and bad, these gangs embraced the delinquent identity.

<sup>27</sup> Beth Webb, “How Vicious Schoolgirl Gangs Sparked a Media Frenzy in Japan,” *Identity, Vice*, February 16, 2016.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley, “Introduction,” in *Bad Girls of Japan*, ed. Laura Miller, Jan Bardsley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6.



Figure 1: Schoolgirls in Japan. Transfiguration: Men-made Objects as Demons in Japanese Schools

Because of their unapologetic “badness,” they were quickly reclaimed. Following the same process Dick Hebdige describes for the recuperation of various British subcultures, they were labelled and made into commodities.<sup>30</sup> Dubbed *sukeban*, meaning “girl boss,” these women became the subject of a slew of violent and sexually graphic exploitation films. Catering to a male audience, these “Pinky Violence” films often featured amateur actors who were real-life *sukeban*, supplying their own clothes and doing their hair and makeup themselves.<sup>31</sup> Not only was the subculture commodified, but the bodies of the women who participated were as well. Through these films, the *sukeban*’s rebellion was folded back into society in a defined and controllable way. By the 80s, the delinquent schoolgirl spirit dispersed and morphed into a number of other subcultures and gangs.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Dick Hebdige, “Two Forms of Incorporation,” in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1988), 94.

<sup>31</sup> Beth Webb, “How Vicious School Girl Gangs.”

<sup>32</sup> Claire Marie Healy, “Remembering Japan’s Badass 70s Schoolgirl Gangs,” *Fashion Feature, Dazed*, November 5, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Noriko T. Reider, “Tsukumogami ki and the Medieval Illustration of Shingon Truth,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 232.

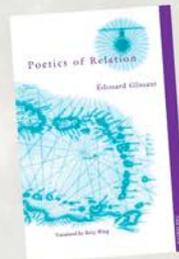
<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Lillehoj, “Transfiguration: Man-made Objects as Demons in Japanese Scrolls,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 54, no. 1 (1995): 24.

<sup>35</sup> Reider, “Tsukumogami ki.”

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: 234.

How do objects rebel? In Japanese folklore, they come to life and eat their human owners. Meaning “tool specters,”<sup>33</sup> *tsukumogami* are a subcategory of *yōkai*, (usually) evil monsters.<sup>34</sup> *Tsukumogami* first appear in literature in the late Heian period (794-1185) and increase significantly during the Medieval period. One such piece of literature is *Tsukumogami ki* (Record of Tool Specters) dated to the Muromachi period (1336-1573).<sup>35</sup> *Tsukumogami ki* tells of a number of old objects discarded during the traditional end-of-year house cleaning. Angry at being thrown out after years of loyal service, the objects consult Zōkashin, a creation god, who turns them into specters. The *tsukumogami* then exact revenge by kidnapping and consuming their former owners. Eventually, the *tsukumogami* decide to repent for their evil deeds and convert to Shingon Buddhism. Through diligent ascetic practice, the *tsukumogami* are able to achieve Buddhahood.<sup>36</sup>





Like the delinquent schoolgirls, *tsukumogami* embrace their “badness.” In fact, they ask for it. Tired of the way society treats them, they not only reject the roles they are meant to play, but they violently lash out. Just as the *sukeban* are recuperated through film, the *tsukumogami* are converted to Buddhism and again become productive members of society.

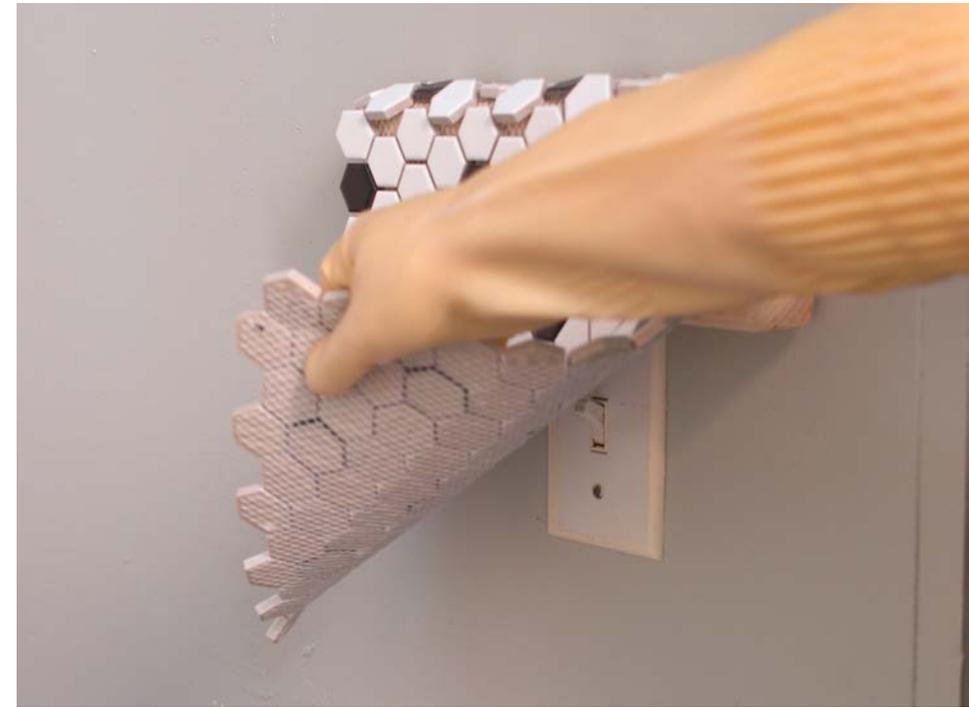
*Sukeban* and *tsukumogami* make their positions known. Through their appearances and actions, their identities are clear. So what of the objects that can’t be so readily pinned down? Objects that might look somewhat like one thing but function like another? An object that sort of looks and acts like a Roomba (but clearly isn’t) might function the same way as a Roomba, but if it didn’t, you would be neither surprised or upset. It couldn’t be said to be rebelling. It just wouldn’t be an object that you would call a Roomba. It is Roomba-like. A Roomba-type object. But its identity is its own.

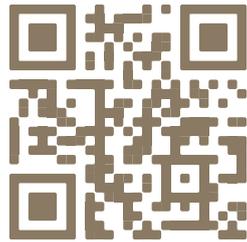
Or it might be entirely unreadable. You might detect elements of a set of stairs or a walker but the object doesn’t function that way, so maybe you’re mistaken. You can’t even break it down into its constituent parts, saying it’s thirty percent stepstool, forty-two percent shelf, sixteen percent cupholder, and twelve percent miscellaneous wood scraps. There is no DNA test for this object. It can’t really be picked apart. “It is that which cannot be reduced.”<sup>37</sup>

It offers up no answers but like *shojo*, it can twist itself into whatever form is needed. It can be a sculpture one minute and furniture the next, something to be looked at, then something to be used. Something helpful, something funny, something decorative, something useless. It can be all of these identities and none of them is a lie. Its power lies in its slipperiness and if it risks apprehension it glides into a new position and reframes itself yet again.

<sup>37</sup> Edouard Glissant, “For Opacity,” in *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997) 191.







## Afterword

In 1938, Howard Koch, playwright for Orson Welles's Mercury Theater, noticed a map of New Jersey hanging in a gas station, closed his eyes and pointed to a random spot. When he opened his eyes, his finger had landed on Grover's Mill, an unincorporated farming village within West Windsor Township, New Jersey. This became the setting for his *War of the Worlds* radio drama.<sup>38</sup>

Grover's Mill is adjacent to my hometown and I used to drive by the mill itself everyday on my way to school. This odd fact was surprisingly not emphasized in town. It seems that some residents felt that Welles had played a cruel joke on them.<sup>39</sup> There was but a single coffee shop whose name made reference to aliens, although I can't remember it now. I'd always been fascinated more by the story surrounding the broadcast than the radio drama itself which ends, frankly, quite anti-climactically. It was put on as a mock news report describing the alien invasion, evidently a new technique for fiction. Without the borders of a proscenium arch, many of the people who tuned in during the middle of the broadcast assumed that the Earth was really under attack by Martians. My grandmother's nextdoor neighbors in western Massachusetts packed up

<sup>38</sup> Lauren Otis, "On The Map; 60 Years After Invasion, Some Revisionist History in Grovers Mill," *The New York Times* (New York), October 25, 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

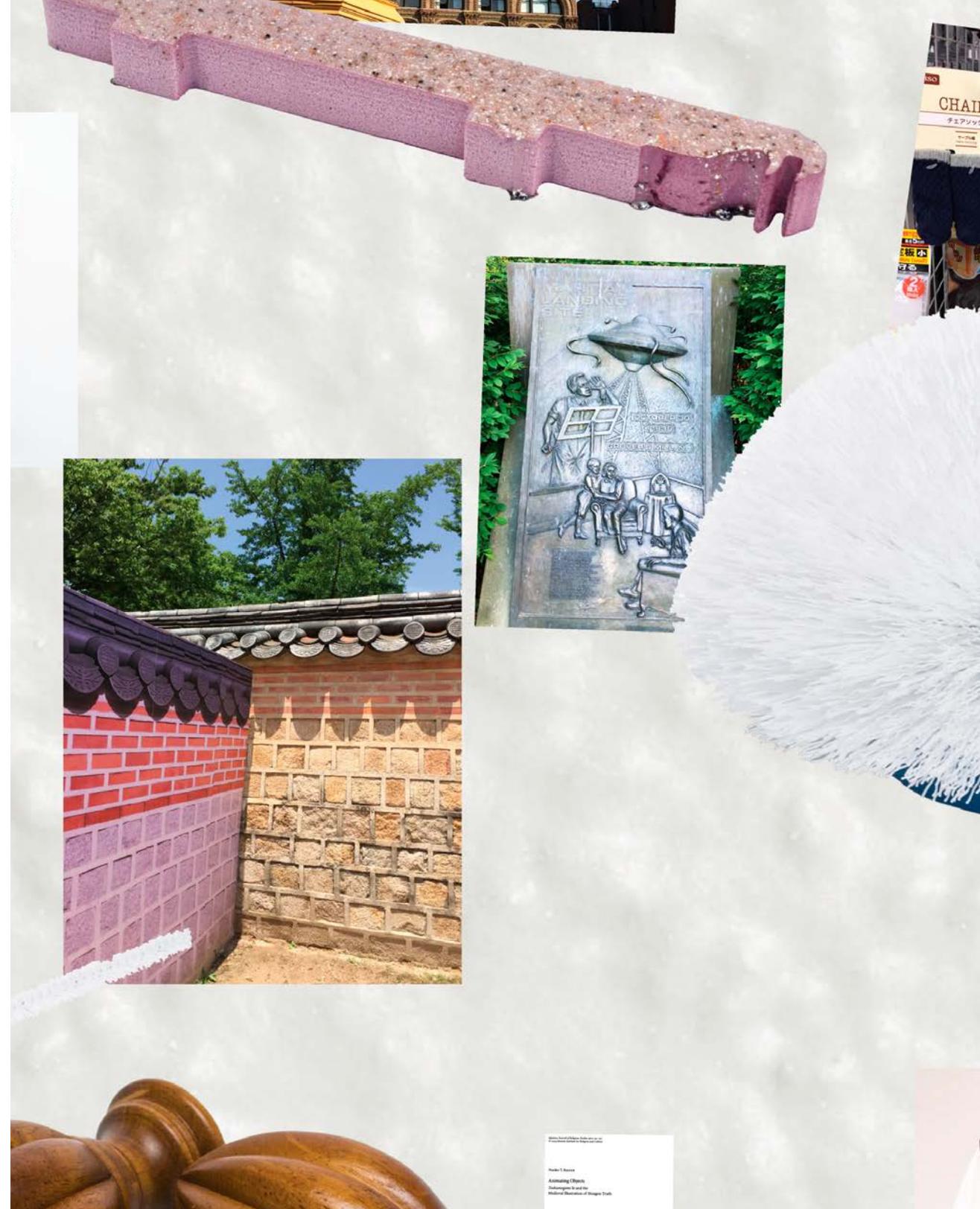
their car and drove off. As the story goes, the farmers living in my town ran out with their shotguns ready to defend the community, and possibly the planet, from the alien threat.

I felt I needed to write about *The War of Worlds* but wasn't entirely sure how. Through a series of shower thoughts and pre-slumber contemplations, I came up with some ideas. Initially, I wanted to write about my personal and geographic connection to this minor historical event. It occurred to me that, perhaps through some kind of folkloric osmosis, the event had sparked my interest in aliens. Then I considered the panic caused by Welles's meta-media broadcast. How does something come to be believed? Where is the line between "real" and "imposter," especially when it comes to media? It seems quaint in our time of fake news. I then learned that the original text by H. G. Wells was intended as an allegory for British colonialism,<sup>40</sup> which fit in with some other writing I was doing about race and culture. I could never quite get any of these ideas to stick, however.

Then COVID-19 began to rapidly spread around the globe and everything changed. I didn't do any work for several weeks. This isn't entirely true, I suppose. "Working" and "making" just changed. They became simpler and smaller.

Then one night, just before falling asleep, I remembered my original complaint about *The War of the Worlds*. Since I first heard a recording of the Orson Welles broadcast in the fifth grade, I had always hated the way the story ended. The Martians invade and quite quickly crush any human attempts to repel them. With their heat rays, the Martians kill countless people and destroy towns and cities. Eventually, the narrator believes, in utter despair, that he is the last person on Earth. Only then does he stumble upon the dead bodies of the Martians in their mechanized exoskeletons. They died after being infected with an Earth pathogen to which they had no immunity.

<sup>40</sup> A. Brad Schwartz, *Broadcast Hysteria: Orson Welles's War of the Worlds and the Art of Fake News* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015), 85.



Thank them for giving their owners more fun memories. It is also a way for owners to release their love and affection.

On Sept. 20, Obama was one of many donors who took their dolls to the temple to be prepared for their final journey. They included traditional items such as 1000 paper dolls and representing emperor and empress, attendants, court musicians and guards, which are traditionally given on the March 3 annual Ancestor (Jin Ji Festival), when families with daughters display them as a way of expressing hope for their future happiness. As well, that day in the temple, numerous red and white ribbons or streamers (streamers were among the many "offerings" made).

At 7 p.m., the monks started reading sutras in front of a monument on which several dolls were displayed. The monks then bowed their heads to a small altar, where more than 1000 paper dolls were placed to honor. Obama and the other ancestral spirits all got their hands together to pray as if they were attending a funeral.



As a trained scientist,<sup>41</sup> H. G. Wells may have found this a captivating end to his story. I personally find it anticlimactic. At this moment, however, the idea of a contagion that stops everything is suddenly relevant.

Wells was known to have predicted a number of phenomena in his writing including the internet, nuclear war,<sup>42</sup> and in my interpretation, climate change.<sup>43</sup> In reading the original 1898 text, I discovered that more than just the demise of the Martians resonates with the situation today. On several occasions, the narrator hides inside deserted homes, knowing that going outside could expose him to the aliens who would kill him. Even if he managed to conceal himself amid the trees, the Martians had released poisonous particles into the air, "the touch of that vapour, the inhaling of its pungent wisps, was death to all that breathes."<sup>44</sup> Trapped inside the house with the windows and doors shut tight, he thinks only of reuniting with his wife, whom he had left with family early on in the novel.

When the particles dissipate and the protagonist can go outside, he encounters almost no people. Even in the middle of London, "the streets were horribly quiet,"<sup>45</sup> something which we have all grown accustomed to. Although we now have the benefit of text messages, phones, and Zoom, the narrator gives voice to many of our thoughts when he says, "I felt intolerably lonely."<sup>46</sup> On our solitary walks, we encounter ruins, not of burned down houses and toppled buildings as he does, but of future plans, celebrations, jobs, weddings, family get-togethers, holidays, exhibitions.

After it all ends, after the sickness, the narrator remarks at how strange it is to see people going about their business, gardening, sightseeing, children playing. "Strangest of all," he says, "is to be able to hold my wife's hand again,"<sup>47</sup> to hold his loved ones again, a pleasurable strangeness I am greatly anticipating.

<sup>41</sup> Brian Handwerk, "The Many Futuristic Predictions of H. G. Wells That Came True," *Smithsonian Magazine*, September 21, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1898), 13.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 288.





## Source Salad

Ashley, Robert, composer. *Perfect Lives*. Featuring Robert Ashley, Jill Kroesen, David van Tieghem, “Blue” Gene Tyranny. Commissioned by The Kitchen, 1978. Aired 1984, Channel 4. Ubuweb.  
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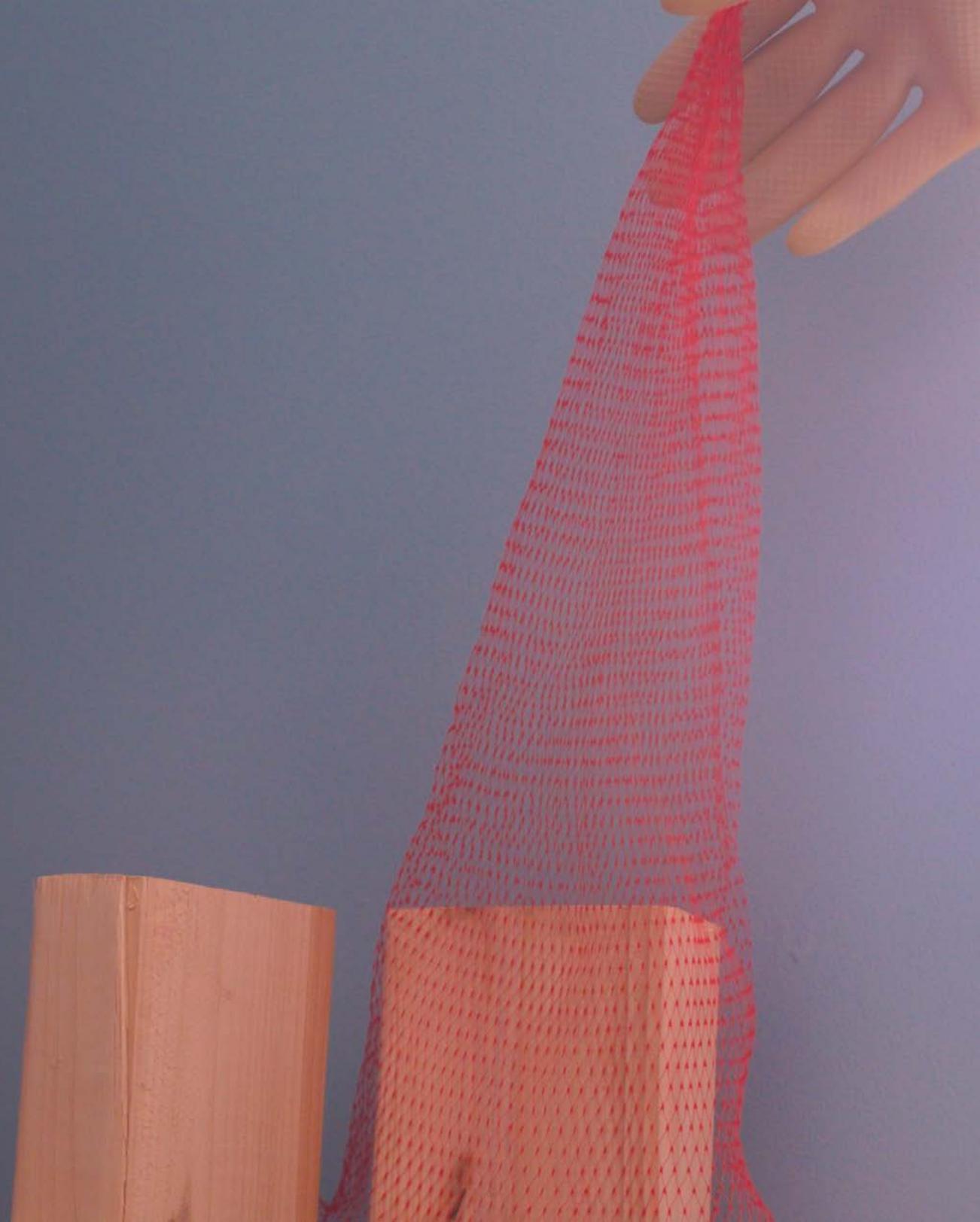
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Pinky Williams: Shaky, sure and the multiplication of her range



Max Space Butter Dispenser - American Made Original White



Small text block, possibly a caption or note.



MIXED-RACE SUPERMAN WILL HARRIS







