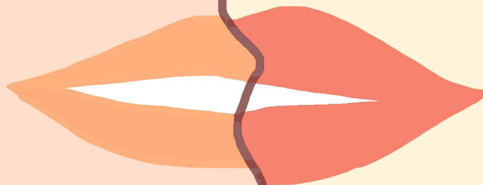
INTERFACE

–Journal of European Languages and Literatures

Visual Discourse and its Circulation between Europe and Asia



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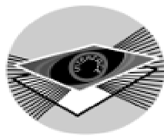

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All correspondence should be addressed to the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University, Roosevelt Rd., Section 4, No. 1, Taipei 106, Taiwan, R.O.C.

Phone:+886-2-33663215

Fax: +886-2-23645452

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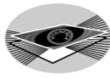
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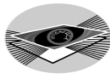
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Creative Language Forms on Signboards in Singapore and Malaysia

SELIM BEN SAID
National Sun Yat-Sen University

TERESA WAI SEE ONG
Griffith University

Abstract

The development of technology has created multilingual environments where digital communication and electronic devices have become an essential component in most people's daily life. The omnipresence of hypertext and digitised interfaces have created new affordances for the combination of communicative and linguistic resources and the production of creative writing forms. This study presents a multimodal examination of 'creative writing forms' on signboards collected in Singapore and Malaysia. These creative forms are categorised into (1) objects stylised to represent letters, and (2) creative word play. The results reveal that creative language forms feature simplified and visually concise communicative conventions (often prevalent in electronic communication; e.g., chat, SMS, etc.), which are becoming more visible in the physical landscape of our everyday life. Through the results presented in this study, one can gain a deeper understanding of the contemporary linguistic landscape, the creative language forms witnessed—particularly in Asian countries—and the fast changes engendered by economic globalisation that are impacting literacy and language practices in modern urban environments.

Keywords: Linguistic landscape, creative language forms, multimodality, Singapore, Malaysia

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Creative Language Forms on Signboards in Singapore and Malaysia

With the advent of globalisation and the fast development of modern technology and the internet, language has become more malleable, digitised, creative (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015; Hollington, 2019; Hollington & Nassenstein, 2019; Inagawa, 2015; Järlehed & Jaworski, 2015; Pitzl, 2018; Swann & Deumert, 2018; Swann & Maybin, 2007) and, some would argue, commoditised (Rubdy & Tan, 2008). Electronic devices and equipment dominate most of our daily life, making digital communication ubiquitous and almost unavoidable. This mode of communication is now progressively crossing over from the virtual into the physical landscape (Dejica, Hansen, Sandrini, & Para, 2016; Gee, 2011; Zappavigna, 2018). Symbols and communicative affordances (Kress & Bezemer, 2015) used in digital interaction can be encountered in the physical landscape, as exemplified on signboards of large agglomerations and multilingual cities. Interestingly, these observed linguistic practices are more symptomatic of urban multilingual contexts. According to Blommaert (2012), in 'superdiversified' environments, people are more likely to blend available linguistic and communicative resources to create complex linguistic and semiotic forms. These hybrid forms of communication, which may be an epiphenomenon of globalisation and its resulting hypertextualised communication patterns, are progressively 'de-standardising' our traditional writing practices. Nevertheless, they are increasingly perceived as a practical means to save time and space in the current fast-evolving world (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti, 2015).

This paper, which builds on current debates on creativity in language use and display (Aikhenvald & Storch, 2019), aims to investigate and discuss the forms of creative language use on signboards collected from two adjacent countries, Singapore and Malaysia. In particular, alphabetical letters, which are blended with images or symbols to form words/phrases, are examined and analysed in view of the latest linguistic

landscape literature (Peck, Stroud, & Williams, 2019; Pütz & Mundt, 2019), but also through the analytical lens of multimodality (van Leeuwen, 2005, 2011) and language creativity (Aikhenvald & Storch, 2019; Deshors, Götz, & Laporte, 2018). Following an overview of the sociolinguistic backgrounds of Singapore and Malaysia, which contextualises the linguistic situation and language dynamics of the two countries, a discussion of the theoretical foundations, literature adopted, and methodology, is presented. The findings of the study are then discussed in the subsequent sections.

1 Sociolinguistic Overview of Singapore and Malaysia

Singapore and Malaysia are multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual neighbouring countries located in Southeast Asia. Singapore is situated at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. Both Singapore and Malaysia were colonised by the British Empire, from which they gained independence in 1957. Singapore was part of Malaysia until 1965. The countries rifted over political and economic issues. Since then, Singapore developed independently and today it has become one of the world's leading cities. Malaysia has also progressed in its own unique way and is currently moving towards a knowledge-based economy.

Singapore has a population of 5.63 million, which consists of Chinese (74.3%), Malays (13.4%), Indians (9.0%) and other ethnicities (3.2%) (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2019). Four official languages are used: English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil (David, 2008). English is widely spoken and is the language of education and administration. Singapore implements a bilingual policy in schools, where English is learned as a first language and mother tongues are taught according to different ethnic groups (Mandarin for Chinese, Bahasa Melayu for Malays, and Tamil for Indians). The aim behind the maintenance of mother tongues is to promote the use of local languages and thereby enhance ethnolinguistic vitality (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) through the preservation of traditional cultures and values (David, 2008). According to Simons and Fennig (2018), Singapore boasts 24 living languages as well as several immigrant languages, such as Indonesian, Japanese,

Korean, Thai, and Urdu. Due to the variety of languages found in Singapore, the cityscape is filled with a multitude of signs, many consisting of bilingual and multilingual texts. As Singapore is a fast-paced, vibrant country embracing technology, electronic communication has become part and parcel of the communication trends of the city-state.

Malaysia has a population of 32.6 million. According to the Department of Statistics (2019), the Malays form 69.1% of the population, the Chinese constitute 23%, the Indians, 6.9% and other ethnic groups make up the remaining 1.0%. Simons and Fennig (2018) note that Malaysia has an estimated 136 languages—134 are living and two are extinct. The major languages are Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil. Several other languages include Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, Teochew, Iban, Kadazan, Dusun, Punjabi, and aboriginal languages. After independence, the Malay language became the de facto language of choice among most Malaysians and is now recognised as a national lingua franca. This status is verified by Article 152 of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (Manan, David, Dumanig, & Naqeebullah, 2014). The Malay language is used as a tool for nation-building to consolidate Malaysian identity through a common language. English continued to officially function in the administration, education, and law sectors until 1967. The post-1970 period saw a drastic change in the education policy, which removed English as a language of instruction and established the Malay language. Nevertheless, the four main languages are widely encountered on signboards in all major cities in Malaysia. This diverse pattern provides space for each ethnicity to ensure its equality and to live harmoniously 'under one roof'.

In summary although Singapore and Malaysia have different language policies, due to the common history of the two independent nations, English remains an important language of broader communication in both countries. Moreover, the linguistic landscapes of Singapore and Malaysia are replete with bilingual and multilingual signboards that attest to the multilingual and multicultural fabric of the two respective societies.

2 Creativity and Language Play

A key notion discussed in this paper is 'creativity'. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2019) defines 'creative' as 'involving the use of skill and the imagination to produce something new'. Similarly, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2019) describes the same word as 'having or showing an ability to make new things or think of new ideas'. Both definitions emphasise the idea of innovation and novelty. Creativity is part of the modern and promoted values that are highly valued in the domains of technology, employment, and education. According to the World Economic Forum, creativity is listed as one of the top ten skills in 'The Future of Jobs'. It is also celebrated in several curricula in different countries within different educational ministries and part of several schools' values.

In applied linguistics, creativity has been mostly theorised by sociolinguists. For example, a definition of creativity in relation to speech is provided by Carter and McCarthy (2004, pp. 63-64), who state that creativity includes "offering some new way of seeing the content of the message; making humorous remarks … playing with language form to entertain others … oiling the wheels of the conversation". This definition emphasises that an important ingredient in linguistic creativity is stretching the boundaries of the language in addition to humour and playfulness. This permeability of the language is an important feature of creativity, which also brings about innovation and/or novelty into language forms. Commenting on this aspect of novelty, Carter and McCarthy (2004, p. 64) also explain that "linguistic creativity imply change and normally involve a single producer who brings about 'novel' changes to the language or to forms of language in ways which are innovative and schema-refreshing". In his subsequent work, Carter (2007, p. 602) envisions creativity as involving re-creation as well as creation, remembering as well as dismembering, and re-vision as well as vision. This conceptualisation of creativity is echoed by Swann and Maybin (2007, p. 491), who argue that creativity in language allows us not simply to reproduce but to "recreate, refashion, and recontextualise linguistic and cultural resources".

A dimension of creativity that has been theorised by Deumert (2014) hints at the fluid property of languages and how they can be flexible and malleable resources. She contends that “all language is liquid, signs can always be manipulated, twisted, and changed in new contexts”, as “creativity is located at the interface of the old and new, sameness, and difference” (Deumert, 2014, pp. 84, 171). Bringing this understanding of creativity to the linguistic landscape, fluidity can also be understood as the flouting of language norms or the departure from conventional uses of the language.

This last observation emphasises another important feature of creativity; namely, not only does it do-things-with-words (as discussed in pragmatics and particularly under Austin’s speech act theory), it plays with linguistic form. This idea is pointed out by Swann and Deumert (2018, p. 5). The above conceptual models, which have theorised the concept of creativity, has guided the data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases of this project.

In view of the sociolinguistic literature on creativity and language play, the expression coined for this paper as ‘creative language forms’ accounts for the use of language in innovative, playful, and sometimes incongruous or eye-catching ways. We also envision this term to encompass language forms in which alphabetical letters are blended with images/graphic elements in a stylised form.

3 Linguistic Landscape Studies

Linguistic landscape studies is a subfield of sociolinguistics that has become a growing niche over the last two decades. The term ‘linguistic landscape’ was initially used to describe the functions, roles, and effects of signs in a landscape. Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) define linguistic landscape as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings … of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration”. In this definition, the linguistic landscape of a territory

has two basic functions—informative and symbolic—and it serves to reflect the linguistic characteristics of a geographical region, and symbolise the value and status of the in-group language within that sociolinguistic setting. This definition has since expanded and incorporated semiotic artefacts, which Shohamy and Waksman (2009, p. 328) define as "all possible discourses that emerge in changing public spaces". With this expanded definition, scholars have looked at numerous landscapes from different perspectives, such as bilingualism and multilingualism (Backhaus, 2007; Rasinger, 2018), second language acquisition (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008), grassroots literacy (Juffermans, 2008), identity (Johnson, 2017), language ideology (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2009), language commodification (Leeman & Modan, 2009), and language policy (Barni & Vedovelli, 2012). Nevertheless, creativity remains a rather under-researched topic in this domain of inquiry. In the next few paragraphs, the most relevant and recent studies related to the current project are discussed.

Hsu (2008) explores creativity in the linguistic landscape of English advertising in Taiwan. The copywriter's motivations, discourse domains, socio-psychological effects, and attitude of both English-literate and illiterate readers are discussed in the research. According to the interviews of copywriters, English mixing conveys a sense of internationalism, high quality, authenticity, metropolitan orientation, urban experience, middle-class lifestyle, and a trendy taste appealing to a younger generation of readership. According to Hsu, brand names for local products that use English as a strategy of marketability drives consumers to think the brands are more international and fashionable. To attract young consumers' attention, mixing intra-sentential English vocabulary in the body copy of advertisements is a common tactic in Taiwan. Different English mixing strategies are used between high-end and low-end products. For high-end products, English mixing is used to describe the product to create a sense of professionalism and high quality. For low-end products, easy-to-read English is used to create a sense of familiarity. Direct translation of Chinese grammatical structure into English mainly characterises nativised English usage in Taiwan's advertising discourse. Hsu's (2008) study explores why English

mixing advertisements have become popular in Taiwan and delves into the examination of attitudes towards this phenomenon from both copywriters' and readers' points of view.

Luk (2013) analysed bilingual texts in Hong Kong's cityscape and mass media to account for linguistic creativity and language play. She collected ten examples of bilingual visual language play through ethnographic observations and analysed their textual properties, semantic features, and socio-pragmatic use. In her results, four major findings can be highlighted:

1. creative phonological and lexical crossover between Chinese/Cantonese and English, such as bilingual punning and hybridised intra-lexical code-mixing

2. use of bilingual texts to complement and/or boost the meaning of the texts in the other code

3. use of cross-linguistic puns to create 'double-voiced discourse' and 'double meaning' through a visual parody

4. typographical design and spatial arrangements to produce playful effects of the texts.

Luk (2013) concludes that even though the analysis evolved around a small data sample, the findings provide evidence of bilingualism and the impactful role of English in local, intra-societal communication. The data also shows that the ownership of English has increased as a source for local communication. Further research is suggested to explore the linguistic ideologies and identities behind these playful bilingual texts.

Jaworski (2015) added a new dimension to the semiotic resources in which words, phrases, logos, and marketing slogans are integrated with new, creative topography and orthography that involves innovative uses of punctuation marks, diacritics, and titles. His data, collected through various commercial districts in different cities across the world, includes

different types of graphemic marking: dot (full stop, period, point), three dots (ellipsis), comma, title, apostrophe, exclamation mark, colon (and semicolon), umlaut, underscore, circumflex, 'invented' or 'misplaced' diacritics, brackets, mathematical symbols, and prefixes (<i->). Jaworski (2015, p. 231) calls this "new, translingual, middle-brow register" as 'globalese', which is part of the 'global semioscape' (Thurlow & Aiello, 2007). Globalese is readable and the meanings are understandable, but they form indistinguishable boundaries between words and pictograms on a global scale. His study suggests these creative ways of using non-standard orthography and topography are dominating the contemporary urban landscapes, and indicates cosmopolitan 'practice and competence' (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002).

A study by Curtin (2015) has delved into the construct of linguistic creativity in Taipei's linguistic landscape. According to Curtin (2015), creativity is a common activity that plays with linguistic, social, and cultural boundaries and is best understood in relation to normative (language) ideologies and practices. Bilingual environments seem to be especially conducive to linguistic creativity. As argued by Curtin (2015), Taipei's linguistic landscape, rife with cultural and historical background, provides a fertile environment for creative linguistic landscaping. As the economy grows, Taipei's linguistic landscape now employs sophisticated design elements, such as typeface, colour, and image. Colour and script point to the distinctive Taiwanese-Chinese identities of shops. An important observation made by the author is that Taipei's linguistic landscape is an engagement in power relations, especially with the use of Mandarin characters. As she notes, since the Kuomintang government promoted Mandarin as the national language of Taiwan, the ethnolinguistic diversity and history of the island has been erased. The creativity in Taipei's linguistic landscape can also be used to challenge this authority. In one of the collected examples, the owner implies that "knowing onlookers" read the name of the shop in Taiwanese Southern Min (the majority language of the island with a writing system that has not been fully standardised). Most importantly, the creative practice in Taiwan's commercial linguistic landscape, often shares two features: a breaking of prescriptive norms, and a blurring of boundaries.

3.1 Research Questions

From the literature reviewed above, it can be inferred that with the exception of the few studies discussed, creative language forms are in much need of further investigation and the findings of the current study can further contribute to the existing literature by exploring and examining the different categories subsumed under the label 'linguistic creativity'. Subsequently, the aim of this paper is to expand on the nascent literature on creativity in street signage through the collection and analysis of photographs of signboards from two countries that are not examined in the afore mentioned studies, Singapore and Malaysia. The initial hypotheses that guided the data collection were revised in light of a preliminary analysis, and the following research questions will be discussed in the remainder of this paper:

1. What are some forms of creativity on shop signs?

2. How is creativity indexed through the use of semiotic and linguistic resources?

These research questions were chosen to fit the findings of the remaining analysis and the revised hypotheses.

3.2 Multimodality as an Analytical Framework

To answer both research questions, a multimodal approach (Sebba, 2013) is adopted in this study, based on the idea that writing in itself is multimodal (Kress, 2010). Stroud and Mpendukana (2010, 2012) argue that both visual and textual layers or elements play important roles in the analysis of public signage such as advertising billboards and shop signs. Sebba (2013) emphasises that some written texts are linear and make little or no use of layout or lettering fonts, while other texts make full use of the visual medium for complex layout, multilayering, and the use of a range of graphic devices. Kress and van Leeuwen (1998, p. 187) observe that many texts "are no longer just written, but 'designed', and multimodally articulated". Hence, it is vital to examine the interaction

and blending between textual and graphic or visual elements on signboards to build a foundation for understanding creative language forms.

3.3 Data Collection and Methodology

Spolsky (2009) observes that when literacy is more widespread, there are more possibilities for signs to be visible and present in the linguistic landscape. To validate his argument, he provides a comparison of the density of signage and languages between Times Square in New York and an isolated African village. This scholarly debate raises the problematic issue of statistical count and language diversity in the data collection process. Inadequately selected research sites may hinder the investigation and potentially lead to misleading results. Taking such an issue into account, Singapore city (Singapore), and both Kuala Lumpur and Penang (Malaysia) were selected as research sites to ensure a triangulated data collection (Ben Said, 2011). The rationale for the choice of these locations is attributed to these cities being urban, modern, and multilingually diversified. Moreover, these locations were neighboring cities and were sites previously colonised during British dominion. Despite practicing different language policies, English remains a language of considerable importance in the selected sites, particularly as a language of broader communication.

The data for this study was collected during autumn 2014. The collected data is a small representative sample of 'creative language forms' of signboards found in Singapore's and Malaysia's cityscapes, but are not meant to be statistically representative of the integrality of the two countries' complex linguistic landscapes. Shopping malls around Singapore city were first visited and photographs of signboards taken with a digital camera. After traveling to Malaysia, data was then collected from Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Both locations are sizeable cities in Malaysia and are filled with modern developments; hence, they provide rich insights about the use of creative language forms in the linguistic landscape. A total of 50 signs were collected for this study through opportunistic and informal sampling.

4 Findings

The findings regarding the examination of creative language forms are separated into the following two categories:

1. objects stylised to represent letters

2. creative language play.

4.1 Objects Stylised to Represent Letters

In early records of human writing systems, people used marks, artefacts and objects to communicate. For example, rocks would be placed in a specific position to mean something, such as a reminder of a deceased person, or indicate a pathway. Marks were used for the specific purpose of communication, but they did not relate to any language in particular (Coulmas, 1991). Other objects, such as sticks, knot-strings, and pebbles were used as means of communication, but these resources and affordances were not always systematic or efficient. Hence, in the subsequent evolution, writing pictures that resembled letters were drawn or engraved in a more or less systematic and iconographic method to convey messages. Words and phrases were gradually developed through graphical conventionalisation; that is, pictures were linearised, stylised, and associated with specific meanings (Coulmas, 1991).

For example, the native Americans extensively used pictures to serve the purpose of communicating messages (Mallery, 1893). Pictures that consisted of artificially-produced graphical marks were used as memory aids as they were related to language. These pictures later produced sentence writing (Friedrich, 1966), even though there was no relation between parts of grammar. Nevertheless, the function of these pictures was iconic, and they served a variety of purposes, such as being harboured as shop signs or transport billboards. In the present-day, iconic signs are used for a variety of purposes, including advertising and touristic marketing. A tourist may not understand a language in a foreign

country, but the iconic signs can transmit particular messages to them. Similarly, written symbols are formed from pictorial designs.

The data collected in the current study shows that visual elements are stylised to replace alphabetical script in various shop names. This situation has become a common practice in Asia for commercial purposes (Rubdy & Tan, 2008). Images are used for decorative or symbolic purposes, but also to target cosmopolitan consumers and audiences. These pictures act as 'language objects' (Jaworski, 2015) on shop signs, and they contain an element of performance and dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981) to communicate with consumers. The metalinguistic elements contained in the image act as an icon for consumers, allowing them to decipher the content and message of the sign, even if the foreign readership is not fluent in the English language. Some examples are given below:

Figure 1. 'The Laundry Corner', Singapore.

In Figure 1, a pair of trousers hanging on a washing line is stylised to resemble a lower case <n>. This letter/pictogram is used to replace the <n> in 'Laundry'—this picture is used as a representative element of clothes to inform customers about the laundry shop. 'Laundry' is written in a playful manner and features a windy effect often seen when clothes are hung to dry in the sun.

Figure 2. ‘YY Snooker Centre’, Penang.

In Figure 2, two snooker balls are used to replace the letters <oo> in ‘Snooker’. The phrase ‘A Best Place to Play Snooker’ conveys a promotional message advertising the value of the business for customers. In the top left corner of the sign, the Malay translation of ‘Snooker Centre’, *Pusat Snuker*, is written for local customers who may not be fluent in English.

Figure 3. ‘International Horse Show’, Kuala Lumpur.

In Figure 3, horseshoes that resemble the letter <o> are substituted for the <o> in 'Horse' and 'Show'—this graphic element serves as an icon which visually evokes an equestrian theme, blending harmoniously with the related lexical item 'Horse', in addition to the picture of a horse drawn above the words. 'Horse Show' is written in large, bold font and placed at the centre of the sign in order to capture the audiences' attention.

Figure 4. 'Durian Durian', Singapore.

Figure 4 shows a picture of half a durian replacing the letter <d> in 'Durian', with one piece of the fruit's flesh/pulp replacing the dot in <i>. The picture of half a durian is used as a marketing strategy to capture customers' visual interest. In addition, as the fruit is rather exotic to foreign travellers visiting Singapore, the visual and textual stylisation may add to the interpellation (Althusser, 1971) of customers. It is possible that foreigners may have heard about the notorious odour of the durian; however, they may not know what the fruit looks like. Hence, the picture of half a durian is used as a metalanguage. The durian flesh is used to decorate the shop sign in order to look trendy and evoke a 'durian' theme.

Figure 5. 'EpiLife', Singapore.

In Figure 5, various types of electronic gadgets such as mp3 players, wires, plugs, USB sticks, and adapters are creatively juxtaposed to form the shop name 'EpiLife'. To provide some background, 'EpiLife' is a shop in Singapore that sells several types of mobile devices, including leading brands such as Samsung, LG, Sony, and HTC and a large selection of earphones, headphones, and portable speakers. An online store is also available for people who prefer internet shopping. The eye-catching use of pictograms is a stylish, fashionable, and innovative way to inform consumers about the newest electronic gadgets sold in the fast-moving city-state of Singapore.

Based on the discussion of the data above, it can be argued that graphic elements such as images and pictures are stylised to replace letters of the alphabet on shop names to serve several purposes: (1) symbolise and represent a shop's products and services, (2) be used resourcefully as a commodity, and (3) index style, innovativeness, and creativity. In particular, while the graphic elements are used to communicate visually or non-verbally with consumers, the coalesced letters allow for an easy reading of the content of the signs. In this respect, the creativity in these signs lies in the hybrid combination of linguistic and semiotic elements, which are used as multimodal resources or affordances, and signal modernity, and vibrancy. With respect to readership, if the audience of these signs is 'excluded' from the signs (i.e., being unable to read the language contained therein), they are not excluded from the visual stylisation, which enables them to interpret the sign with relative ease.

4.2 Creative Language Play

According to Bruner (1972), 'play' is viewed as providing a means to social adaptation, to learning of skills without suffering consequences of errors, and as a means to the understanding of rules which later be put to the service of social and ideational functions. In the context of language use, the word play has been used in early literature announcing the advent of research on creativity. For instance, 'play' accounts for innovative uses of the language (Cook, 1996, 2000). This term fulfils the notions of fantasy and the unconscious (Cook, 1994).

Language play is defined by Luk (2013, p. 237) as:

> The artistic and creative manipulation of the linguistic properties of a language (eg., phonology, morphology, and syntax) to achieve playful (or 'ludic') effects as an alternative to the conventional and serious functions of language use for information transmission.

Some scholars term 'language play' as speech play, linguistic creativity, or verbal arts, but these are similar to the concepts in poetic uses of language. As a form of expression, language play in advertisements is not directly related to persuading consumers and audiences, but it usually has some broader meanings and implications (Cook, 1994).

In the data, there were several signboards categorised under the label 'creative language play'. Innovative spellings that are commonly used in electronic communications, such as SMS, communication apps, and chats, can now be observed on signboards. Electronic communication norms are progressively being exported onto physical signboards demonstrating thereby how digital literacies (Gee, 2017) have seeped into conventional sign-design practices. Phonological crossover and playful pun that evoke creativity are becoming a common practice in Southeast Asia and particularly within the emerging Tiger Cub Economies (Edwards, Ho, & Choi, 2017).

Figure 6. 'belif', Singapore.

In Figure 6, 'belif' is spelled with <f> instead of <ef>—this spelling is usually encountered in electronic communication, and allows for linguistic parsimony and the economy of space and time. Specifically, the interface of SMS allows users to type only up to 160 characters in one text. Nevertheless, 'believe in truth' is written next to 'belif' to render a comprehensible version for the shop and its overall theme. It is possible that the word 'belif' is used in this shop to capture the attention of customers and to provide a modern, urban touch to the sign.

Figure 7. 'Purpur', Singapore.

A similar spelling anomaly, on the surface, occurs in Figure 7, where the name of the shop is strategically mispelled as 'purpur'—the word 'purpur' has a quasi-similar pronunciation to the colour 'purple'. It is also written in purple colour to keep with the theme of the label or inscription. The deliberate flouting of orthographic conventions is used as a marketing strategy. More specifically, as is the case in modern electronic communication, the traditional orthography is stretched, played with and, as Deumert (2014) argues, 'manipulated', or 'twisted'. It is also possible that the spelling of this sign is a linguistic 'wink' (Lamarre, 2014), which aims to debunk or debase the prescriptive norms relating to language use. Therefore, the orthographic 'misspelling', in addition to being creative, can also be regarded as 'transgressive' (Pen-

nycook, 2009).

Figure 8. 'Durian Mpire', Singapore.

Figure 8 shows 'Mpire' spelled with <m> instead of <em> for the usual spelling of 'empire'. This creative spelling of <m> that resembles the pronunciation of <em>, is commonly known as phonological 'crossover' (Luk, 2013). A phonological crossover is "the use of bilingual pairs of words that are homophones or near-homophones (i.e., where the pair of words only shares the initial sound or the vowel or the rime)" (Luk, 2013, p. 243). As a phonological crossover of <m>, 'Mpire' is used to display a modern spelling that is creative and reminiscent of electronic communication. It is also catchy and fulfils the objective of attracting those passing by and the potential clientele. The visual depiction of the thorns of a durian are also used as a background and a drawn out white durian is appended to the left side of the signboard. All elements are harmoniously placed together and coincide to evoke the same theme.

Figure 9. 'Sogurt', Singapore.

Figure 9 is an example of morphological blending, which is a common way to generate words in the English language. Typical examples of this linguistic phenomenon are expressed in words such as 'smog' (smoke + fog), or 'brunch' (breakfast + lunch). However, the term 'sogurt' is a neologism and a creative blend that is not typical of the phenomenon of blending and also not a part of the corpus of the English language. It blends the two elements 'so good' + 'yoghurt' and also consists of another linguistic alteration discussed above, namely phonological crossover. Specifically, the pronunciation of 'sogurt' 'resembles the pronunciation of 'so good'. The product advertised consists in a premium frozen yoghurt. A 'heart' is placed on top of 'sogurt' —a common creative language icon or element that is also used as an emoticon in electronic communication (Danesi, 2016). Jaworski (2015) claimed that the 'heart' or 'love' ideograph that appears on any physical landscape is part of the 'global semioscape' (Thurlow & Aiello, 2007) or 'globalese', a cultural-commercial register that indexes spaces as 'global' (Jaworski, 2013, 2014, 2015).

Figure 10. 'Hairitage Hair Studio', Penang.

Figure 10 shows a banner of a hair salon, 'hairitage'. The creator combines two words, 'hair' and 'heritage', to form the playful and creative blend 'hairitage'. Phonically, 'hairitage' resembles the pronunciation of 'heritage'. This playful pun suggests the need to fulfil a creativity effect which is also impactful in terms of its marketable impact on the audience. It is a commonly used technique in the advertising industry (Hashim, 2010, p. 524).

The abovementioned data fulfils a number of creative functions: (1) to convey a contemporary, urban lifestyle, (2) to capture customers' attention, (3) to stretch the language rules in a transgressive, non-conformist, and innovative manner, and (4) to fulfil creative impact for the purposes of advertisement and commodification. In addition and as mentioned earlier, while these creative uses of the language may on the surface exclude an audience of non-English speakers, through visual, iconic, and graphic elements, some signs still allow for an easy interpretation of the intended meaning by both speakers of English and other languages.

5 Conclusion

Through the results presented in this study, there are indications of new methods being used to produce written language forms on signboards, such as combining graphic elements with alphabetical script to form appealing names for shops, as well as creating playful puns and adopting new spellings. These 'creative language forms' are mainly designed to capture customers' attention, index modernity, and fulfil a commodifying purpose. As emphasised above, the literature reveals important lacunae when it comes to the investigation of 'creative language forms' on street signs, it is hoped that the findings of this study will further add to the scholarly debates and discussions of such innovative forms. More specifically, more research attention ought to be cast on further understanding the different types of linguistic creativity on signboards not only in Singapore and Malaysia, but in other contexts and environments as well. Based on the findings of our study, it is possible to infer that Singapore and Malaysia are moving into the digitised era where the language of signboards is becoming similar to the language found on electronic platforms and interfaces. These hybrid forms are a growing trend in several Asian cosmopolitan centres crafted with the intention to save space and reduce the time needed to read or peruse signs. As a result, the fast changes induced by economic globalisation and electronic communication are creating more innovative literacy practices, where multimodality, creativity, and hybridity are becoming the new norms.

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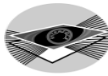 INTERFACE
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The Conceptualist, Surrounded by Words and Objects

GENICHI IKUMA
Hokkaido University

Abstract

This paper discusses human-object relationships in Moscow Conceptualism, a central circle of Soviet unofficial art in the 1970-80s. The ideal image of humans and objects in Conceptualist works has been studied. For example, the American art historian Matthew Jesse Jackson reads the New Man in terms of the relationship between human beings and objects in unofficial art. Meanwhile, Ekaterina Degot interprets the interrelation between humanity and objects in Conceptualism in terms of the interrelation between the self and others. Yet, previous studies did not particularly focus on objects and subjectivity in Conceptualism. There is a strong possibility that Soviet objects influenced the works of Conceptualists. These objects would be keywords in Moscow Conceptualism studies. Thus, I would like to make an assumption to understand the Conceptualist view: Did they try not to rule the outer environment but to analyze the objects surrounding them instead? In other words, this paper is concerned with demonstrating how Conceptualists updated the interface between themselves and surrounding objects. I will investigate the Conceptualist attitude towards objects, to offer a revised understanding of Conceptualists as artists reflecting on their subjectivity via objects. Trends of unofficial art began to change in the 70s as Conceptualism was formed: artists were interested in new forms such as “actions” and “installations.” Kabakov, an originator of Conceptualism, began his career in painting and illustrations for children’s books, while younger generations were engaged in genre-straddling activity from the beginning. Given such stylistic diversity, this study covered different types of artists to gain better insight into objects in Conceptualism. In addition, since this school was not a monolithic organization, looking at other artists of the same age is useful. Thus, this paper first discusses works by Vladimir Yankilevsky who was not exactly a conceptualist. His contemporary Ilya Kabakov’s works are also studied to understand objects in Conceptualism. Lastly, texts and performances by younger Conceptualists Pepperstein and Monastyrski are discussed in detail.

Keywords: Moscow conceptualism, performance art, human object relationships

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The Conceptualist Surrounded by Words and Objects

The public image of unofficial Soviet art is that of a resistance movement against the Soviet ideology. Artists such as Komar and Melamid who play with ideology have impressive attitudes. Unlike them, artists of Moscow Conceptualism (hereafter, Conceptualism) took a slightly different approach. Of course, they were sometimes involved with the problem of ideology, but they preferred to reflect on the fact that they are surrounded by an ideological environment rather than improving it. While Russian Avant-garde and Socialist Realism tried to rewrite a world view, Sots Art (Soviet version of Pop Art) appropriated its image. In contrast, Conceptualists were no longer attracted to such an active approach. Instead, they took note of how Soviet subjects are surrounded by ideological objects.

The most well-known among Soviet-style subjectivities would be the concept of the New Man. The American art historian Matthew Jesse Jackson (2010) reads the New Man in terms of the relationship between human beings and objects in unofficial art (p. 151). Meanwhile, Ekaterina Degot (2012) interprets the interrelation between humanity and objects in Conceptualism in terms of the interrelation between the self and others. She has written about Andrei Monastyrski (1949-), a leader of the Collective Actions group, and his works known as “action objects.” According to Degot, the artistic relationship here recalls constructivism. She notes that in constructivism, objects function as “comrade-things.” An example is Stenberg brothers’ (1930) *Mirror of Soviet Community* (Fig. 1). Degot notes that “in this object—a newspaper—he sees his mirror reflection, his own true image” (2012, pp. 30-31). However, as I will describe later, in addition to the projection of an ideal figure like the New Man, we can also find another kind of relationship. In other words, objects may not fully function as mirrors in Conceptualist works. This question about the status of objects in Conceptualism forms the basis for the present study.

Figure 1: Stenberg brothers, *Mirror of Soviet Community* (1930). (from Degot, 2011)

Keti Chukhrov (2012) also points out that the Conceptualists dealt with an already conceptualized world. She mentions Soviet objects like pliers that exist only for the specific function of bending something and asserts that Soviet objects are inseparably linked with their ideal usage, which she describes as "eidetic" (Chukhrov, 2012, p. 84). There is a strong possibility that these objects influenced the works of Conceptualists. These Soviet objects would be keywords in Moscow Conceptualism studies. Thus, I would like to make an assumption to understand the Conceptualist view: Did they try not to rule the outer environment but to analyze the objects surrounding them instead? In other words, this paper is concerned with demonstrating how Conceptualists updated the interface between themselves and surrounding objects.

In this regard, we should ask, "How and in what forms do humans encounter things?" To answer this question, I would like to examine a range of relationships in artists' expressions. In the next section, I will

discuss Vladimir Yankilevsky, who relates to the older painters of the 1950s and 1960s. While he is not exactly a Conceptualist, his concerns are similar to theirs (and he belonged to the same circle of artists as Kabakov in the 1960s.) Next, in Section 3, I will investigate objects in Conceptualism by reviewing the notion of Kabakov's "bad quality." In Section 4, I will investigate an essay by Pavel Pepperstein, a central figure of the younger generation of Conceptualists. Finally, in Section 5, I will analyze the performances of Collective Actions to reveal their view of objects.

1 Radiant life and its absence in Yankilevsky

> Khrushchev then offered what he regarded as examples of good artists and artworks. He mentioned Solzhenitsyn, Mikhail Sholokhov, the song "Rushnichok," and trees painted by some artist, in which the little leaves were so alive.
>
> (Yankilevsky, 2003-a, p. 75)

> "You have an angel and a devil inside of you. We like the angel but we'll eradicate the devil".
>
> (Yankilevsky, 2003-a, p. 75)

The above passages come from Yankilevsky's recollections of a conversation between Khrushchev and the sculptor Ernst Neizvestny (1925-2016) at the Thirty Years of MOSKh exhibition held in 1962. This served to determine the course of unofficial art since Khrushchev severely criticized the tendency toward abstraction among painters. Ely Beliutin(1925-2012), who organized the exhibition, sent a letter to the authorities saying "they wanted to sing the praises of 'the beauty of Russian womanhood'" (Yankilevsky, 2003, p. 75), although Beliutin himself was involved in abstract painting. Yankilevsky must have been surprised by Beliutin's behavior, which could be viewed as a recantation. In a way, this duality of pursuing the avant-garde and ingratiating the authorities corresponds to the "angel" and "devil" within Neizvestny. On the angel side, there were the "trees painted by some artist, in

which the little leaves were so alive," and "the beauty of Russian womanhood." These represent beauty, health, aliveness, and the conception of an ideal life. On the other hand, Khrushchev saw abstraction as the "devil" for him and the USSR. Hearing this conversation, Yankilevsky must have sensed the collision or dichotomy of the two principles. After that, the devil Khrushchev failed to eradicate must have searched for another relationship with the medium of art (i.e., "things"), retaining this structure of two contrary principles while moving deeper underground.

The art critic Ekaterina Degot (2002, p. 163) calls Yankilevsky's work "explosive anthropology". Though she does not fully clarify this statement, we can understand that his creation expresses "a mutation of human being and machine" (Degot, 2002, p. 163). What "explodes" in his works, therefore, is the human shape and the human itself. Most humans he describes are strange combinations of machine and monster. In Yankilevsky's works, there is an image of the human body in which the human shape "explodes." Here, the outline of the human body is not closed but has an open existence outside the body.

The passage below describes Yankilevsky's aesthetic of two principles and bodily representation. His works do not reflect the lively ideal advocated by Khrushchev but question such an ideal, pointing to the barriers posed by Soviet life.

> The theme of "male principles" is also the theme of the "portraits." Several ideas such as "a prophet," "the living and the dead," "I and he," and "father and son" are connected in this theme. The theme "the living and the dead" is a theme of disagreement between "inside" and "outside." It has always been impressive for me that a living man is "not equal" to himself in the sense that his life crosses over the outer border like radiation. It is an energy of the eyes, language, listening, and thinking. When this energy as radiation goes out —that is, when the human dies— the mask is equal to himself; in other words, the death remains. This collision between the facial outline —which

> "resembles" but is dead, like the mask— and the living energy is also a theme of my "portraits."
>
> (Yankilevsky, 2003-b, p. 29)

This collision between two spheres is imprinted on the human body, and Yankilevsky's work expresses this situation. Yankilevsky suggests that the human being does not correspond to itself. Here, movements "of the eyes, language, listening, and thinking" cause the person to be discordant with himself or herself. In this sense, we can understand Degot's notion of "explosive anthropology" as a radiant movement of energy transfer between such spheres as "man and woman," "life and death," "inside and outside," "self and other," and "parents and children." It is important to note that these binary components are represented and conceived through the human body. Based in the human body, living energy radiates from inside to outside. The passage below shows that for Yankilevsky, the functions of the human body are directly connected with beauty of life:

> What is beauty? In my opinion, it is life. Why does a dead body cause unconscious fear? Why is it that the more natural a mannequin is made, the more unnatural it looks, and the more it resembles the dead? Probably because life is radiation and energy transfer. It is necessary that a nostril inhales air, eyes see, an ear receives a signal of sound, a brain digests information and makes decisions, and a controversial sense called telepathy is provided in order to keep human beings living.
>
> (Yankilevsky, 2003-b, p. 102)

We can say that "telepathy" for Yankilevsky also represents the ability of humans to connect inside and outside. This ability is necessary to "determine a position for himself, keep balance, and so that human legs go in the necessary direction" (Yankilevsky, 2003-b, p. 102). In other words, life for Yankilevsky is an adjustment between inside and outside the body and locating oneself in the relationship between inside and outside. A mannequin is a mask that only corresponds to itself and looks dead because it lacks radiation and transfer through difference.

Importantly, telepathy provides the orientation for walking and is not expressed as something fixed. Further, this transfer is not transparent but opaque, and it requires a groping process.

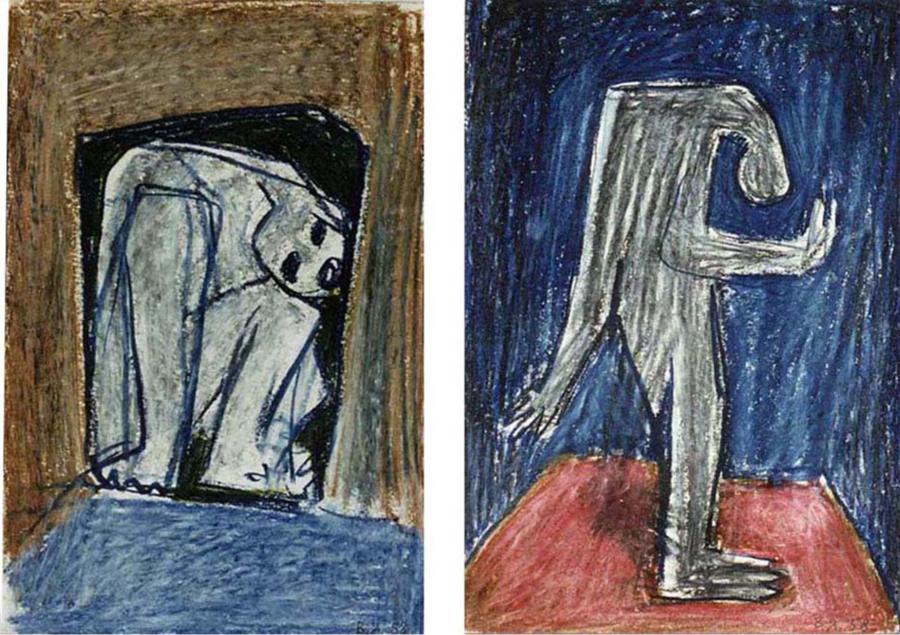

Figure 2: Yankilevsky, *Man in the Box* (1958). (from Yankilevsky, n.d.-a)

A wall and a box appear as things that disturb such a linking with the outside and solidify a body, as with the dead. For example, there are two figures in Yankilevsky's *Man in the Box* (Fig. 2, 1958): a man doubled over in a box is shown on the left while on the right a figure stands freely, arms and neck bent mysteriously. The man in the box bears some resemblance to the mannequin Yankilevsky refers to, and the other man is rather similar to the monster. This contrast shows that a human lacking a connection to the outside looks like a mannequin—that is, a dead thing. This shows that since 1958, Yankilevsky has embraced this idea that humanity dwells in the intersection between inside and outside. Since then, Yankilevsky has further developed this idea by making a series of works called *People in Boxes* (Fig. 3, 1990), in which people

strike strange poses inside boxes. Their existence is depicted as covered or blocked by things, especially walls. The presence of two black garbage bags is suggestive as well.

Figure 3: Yankilevsky, *People in Boxes* (1990). (from Yankilevsky, n-d.-b)

Does Moscow conceptualism always evoke the kind of alienation we find in Yankilevsky's works? In a poem by Yankilevsky (2003-b, p. 105), a character becomes a picture: "you become a picture / and crucify yourself / so that someone could revive / you once again." Thus, becoming a picture internalizes a hope for revival by the other person in the poem. In becoming a picture (i.e., a passive existence), the character in the poem wants to entrust his revival to someone else's subjectivity. Does this type of conceit share common ground with conceptualist aesthetics? In the next section, I will describe the nature of subjectivity in relation to things in Kabakov's thinking.

2 Kabakov's "Bad Quality"

The Russian art historian Ekaterina Bobrinskaya (2013, p. 333) finds a genealogy of "bad art" in Soviet unofficial art, referring to the idea of Kabakov's "bad quality." It is said that at the beginning of his artistic

activities, Kabakov realized that surrounding things were "bad" and that his works were "bad" as well. Here, "bad" does not refer to aesthetic quality but to the unstable borders or outlines of things. His thinking about "bad quality" begins with sculpture. According to Kabakov, a sculpture is a reckless trial aiming to slip away from whole material and obtain a separate form. In this correlation between a cohesive whole and the individual form, he sees "antagonism between two principles, namely, subjective living things and unaware dead souls" (Kabakov, 2008, p. 54). He calls his works "bad" because they contain the theme of being absorbed into a cohesive whole and escaping from it. In his works, this "bad quality" is closely associated with narrative, which creates meaning:

> Now this is what I was feeling when I started to create objects-paintings. Finally, they had to maintain this double nature. On the one hand, "things" must have spoken something, suggested some connection, looked like something (paintings, plots, anecdotes, namely, meanings). On the other hand, they had to disappear slowly into something integral and faceless, or the nothing, with other objects in the room in which they exist—that is, a wall, chairs, an overcoat, a desk, and so on.
>
> (Kabakov, 2008, p. 55)

The idea that "antagonism between two principles, namely, subjective living things and unaware dead souls," hides in the thing itself reminds us of the collision of two principles in Yankilevsky's aesthetic. However, Kabakov's interests are more social. According to Bobrinskaya (2013, p. 336), his themes refer to the "mechanism of the interpretation of the 'social sphere' and its interaction with an individual, a private person." It would appear, then, that Kabakov's point about separation from a cohesive whole could apply to the position of unofficial art and the shape of the human being it describes. In this sense, "bad quality" and "bad art" are metaphors for the artists' situation. In addition, it is worth noting that Kabakov's ephemeral imagery of "bad quality" comprises a kind of speaking, which coincides with the artist's situation and is deeply tied to Moscow conceptualism.

While there is not room here to fully trace Bobrinskaya's argument regarding "bad art" in the genealogy of unofficial art, we should not overlook the theme of "garbage" in relation to conceptualism and the importance of the artist's gesture in abstract expressionism. Regarding abstract paintings, Bobrinskaya (2013, p. 353) focuses on how artists handle the connection between inside and outside: just as Western pop art and neo-Dada emerged in opposition to the idea in abstract expressionism and informalism that the expression of the artist's mentality could be directly connected with the social sphere, there is also a protest against the expression of the artist's mentality in "bad art." Moreover, just as the gesture of painting itself is more important than canvases and colors in abstract expressionism, Soviet expressive abstraction, according to Bobrinskaya (2013, pp. 355, 359), was an explosion of individuals and liberation from the traditional painting that was affected by social restrictions.

A skeptical attitude to such expressive art questions the artist's image as a born genius or superman. Previous research supports this point. According to Jackson (2010, p. 25), Kabakov's teacher by negative example was Anatoly Zverev (1931-1986), a painter with expressive tendencies who was a central figure in the first generation of unofficial art. Zverev's natural gift for making all things he touched gold, and for accomplishing five-year plans in four years despite his uncultured nature, was difficult for Kabakov to accept. Moreover, this image of Zverev was similar to that of government officials such as Khrushchev and Brezhnev. In other words, Kabakov saw the signs of the "superhuman" qualities associated with Khrushchev and Brezhnev in the figure of the unofficial artist, who was generally thought of as the opposite of politicians. We can say that Kabakov tried to deny this type of lofty subjectivity, and it is suggestive that he mentioned an alchemical aspect of Zverev's work. We can suppose that the expressive and transparent relationship between artist and canvas in Zverev's work was strange to Kabakov. His concerns in this regard—Does everything the artist touches, every vestige of an artist's breath, become approved as artwork? Is the canvas a transparent medium? —must have influenced his work.

Zverev appears again as the starting point for the "aesthetic of garbage," which is the main feature of "bad art." According to Bobrinskaya (2013, p. 344), he embodies the "aesthetic of garbage in the way that he paints with such garbage like a rag." Here, artistic activity becomes an attraction while an artwork becomes a thing to which an artist only temporarily attaches value (Bobrinskaya, 2013, p. 344). It is by way of this temporariness that Bobrinskaya situates Zverev in the history of "bad art." However, considering that Kabakov wanted to overcome his style, Zverev's "magical" creation can be viewed as representative of what Kabakov wanted to update—namely, subjective authority.

The "aesthetic of garbage" is an essential theme for conceptualists like Kabakov and Monastyrski. Bobrinskaya (2013, pp. 379-380) takes Monastyrski's "action objects" as examples. For his work *Pile* (1975), Monastyrski asked his friends to place useless things from their pockets on a desk and write their name, what they put, and the time on a list. Here, a pile of garbage-like things becomes a work of art. In the installation *Box with Garbage* (1986), Kabakov also connects garbage with words and interpretation by attaching tags with "verbal garbage" written on them—like abusive language or fragments of conversation—to garbage scattered in a box. Thus, Bobrinskaya (2013, p. 373) concludes that for Moscow conceptualism, garbage played a supplementary role to the viewer's perception and documentation after it. This repeats the formulation that conceptualist work is completed only through discourse and documentation (Ioffe, 2013, p. 218).

However, we cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the fact that garbage is more than just a substitute for discourse. There were words written on the surface of garbage, namely, words expressed as garbage. If so, it could be argued that this gives words the shape of garbage. As is common with anthropologists, the anthropologist who documents the voices of the people is not always fully integrated with them. Kabakov might have been keeping his distance from the Soviet world by expressing words as garbage. Given his installation, *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (1985), in which the room full of Soviet objects like posters becomes a vaulting board towards the outer world, objects cannot be considered merely as substitutes for words (Groys, 2016, p.

3). Considering this, the next section will re-examine the relationship between objects and words in Pepperstein.

3 Pepperstein's infection by things

The main problem for Pepperstein is his relationship with things, and things are a cause of suffering (Pepperstein, 1998, p. 149). Though he does not give a clear reason, in his essay "Passo and Deactivation of Triumph (Пассо и детриумфация)" (1985), as well as the later commentary "Ice in the Snow (Лед в снегу)" (1996), we find that he was keenly aware of difficulties one may face with things. The problem of things appears to be an obsession with him.

At the beginning of "Passo and Deactivation of Triumph," Pepperstein classifies the types of relationships between human beings and things (1998, pp. 81-83). According to him, these are of three types: the first is in which things hate people, the second is in which things love people, and the third is in which people obsess over things. A typical example of the third type is a collector, for whom things become an object of passion and are seen as an embodiment of passivity. It is therefore all the more important, Pepperstein says, to find out if we can recognize activity within things (1998, p. 84). In his opinion, discourse about it can be divided into two attitudes: a magical and scientific attitude to feel the radiant energy of things and to consider things as a certain type of body and a psychoanalytic attitude to see only the semiotic aspect of things.

Pepperstein's discourse does not completely match these attitudes. In the middle of the text, he brings up the idea of combining characteristics previously expressed as "inner activity" or "the soul of objects" into a new term "passo," which derives from passivity but means more than that. He described its elusive nature:

> If "passo" represents speculative essence of objects, "passonarity (пассонарность)" is a field where passo reveals itself, namely, the place where our perception still can "jump into" while "pas-

> so" itself "jumps out" at the other end, allowing us to see it for only a moment, as a shaky, slippery, and indefinite shadow.
>
> (Pepperstein, 1998, p. 89.)

This movement can also be noted in another distinct term "Deactivation of Triumph (детриумфация)." Based on the theological way of understanding the world that natural world always gets rid of the tendency toward chaos and triumphs over its own uncertainty by shaping cosmos, Pepperstein defines this term as a deviation of things from fixed forms (1998, pp. 89-90). According to Pepperstein, environment controls the forms of things, but once the environmental balance is lost, the "passo" of things becomes free and things start transforming (1998, p. 90). Thus, these two new terms he introduced are closely connected to each other, and both relate to deviation, which reminds us of the "bad quality" of Soviet life that Kabakov described.

Then, what kind of relationship with such things does Pepperstein envision? After all, his main interest seems to be narrative: how we can talk about things. He says some people feel action of things and what matters is how we construct phrases (Pepperstein, 1998, p. 87). If this action of things means "passo," why is it related to the manner of talking about things? The following text shows it is in the event of narration that the catalyst for a certain deviation or transformation is hidden.

> A thing is an occurrence, but it obtains a special time in which it is realized. We use words when we talk about things. At that time, we potentially want to "talk by things," namely, talk about things by things. That's why we have a hunger for terms. In addition, we need, indeed, new terms because the introduction of a new term is always inconvenient and even illogical, but on the other hand, it has an enchanting power, just like a thing with inanimate loud laughter that falls from the sky. This laughter of things is infectious, even if it seems like a sound of knocking or bursting. The reason for the above is that it infects us not by laughter but by objecthood. We associate it with a skeletal frame within ourselves and other things that constitute us.
>
> (Pepperstein, 1998, p. 88)

The idea behind the thought that we talk by things, the objecthood of which infects us, may be a way of recognizing that words can be thought of as things. It is worthy of attention that Pepperstein especially emphasizes the introduction of new terms. This text ends with the final sentence that time given to such new terms as “passo” is very short, and that those terms are made to be born and die before your own eyes (Pepperstein, 1998, p. 92). As long as the life and death of terms cause the transformation of texts into things, it can be said that Pepperstein tries to demonstrate the behavior of “passo” in the very same text. This brief moment of shape formation reminds us of the “bad quality” that Kabakov argued. What is different here from Kabakov is that Pepperstein showed that a subject is also associated in some way with such action of deviation, that is, “passo,” describing the event of infection by objecthood. This is why narration has a connection with the behavior of things.

The term “thing-object” Pepperstein introduced in “Ice in the Snow” would be another example of that. First, he distinguishes things and objects. He provides representative examples of these two types: a treasure repository as a thing and a machine as an object. According to him (1998, p. 162), a machine is a conglomerate of objects that have an instrumental character and are designed as extensions of the human body. On the other hand, a treasure repository in this context is a thing that reflects the nonhuman world (such as the light from stars, the moon, the beauty of flowers). Pepperstein thinks this kind of dual principle, which is somewhat akin to Yankilevsky’s aesthetic, can potentially become integrated and give birth to a “thing-object” (1998, p. 162). Here, the human body is extended but also connected to the nonhuman world.

At this point, Pepperstein focuses more directly on the transformation of human beings, which was indirectly suggested in the description of “passo.” In other words, in his world of “thing-objects,” people can be affected by “passo” in relation to the passive activity of things, regardless of whether it is through words. Pepperstein’s suffering due to things may have its origins in their potential transformation. In my view, he alone cannot form this kind of understanding of things. Therefore, I

would like to investigate whether transformation caused by things can also be observed in other conceptualists' activities.

4 The Collective Actions Group

In this section, I will discuss the performances of the Collective Actions group. However, first, I would like to briefly touch on the early works of Monastyrski, by referring to Degot's (2012) argument. She notes the elimination of inequality between the subject and object as one of the aims of communism (Degot, 2012, p. 30). This aim, she says, took the form of eliminating the inequality between the artist and the artwork, and there was a practice of regarding an artwork as a kind of unalienated subjectivity—that is, as a "comrade-thing" (Degot, 2012). As mentioned earlier, Degot regards Stenberg brothers' *Mirror of Soviet Community* as a comrade-thing that reflects the truth of the citizen who reads the newspaper (Degot, 2012).

Figure 4: *Finger* by Monastyrski (1978). (from Monastyrski, n.d.-a)

Degot notes a similarity between Monastyrski's action object *Finger* (Fig. 4) and the Stenberg brothers' mirror (2012). The viewer of *Finger* (in this case, Monastyrski) puts his arm through the open bottom of a black box, pushes a finger through the white circular part of the box, and points at himself. The parallel between these two works is that both objects (the newspaper and the box) "gaze" at the viewer. Behind the relationship, there is a reflected image between humans and objects, which intends to turn objects into "comrades." Degot sees a dual objectification of the subject in *Finger*: the artist is objectified both as an object that is being pointed at and as a fictional character (2012, p. 31). However, can we really say this work has the same composition as the Stenberg brothers' mirror? Certainly, Monastyrski's finger is objectified, but this is an asymmetric confrontation, different from the mirror image of the viewer in the newspaper (i.e., fingers have a different shape than faces). Therefore, we can suggest that the reflective similarity between the subject and the object is not emphasized but deconstructed using the black box. In other words, in this work, he disconnected his finger from his body. The following passages describe how Conceptualists have been disconnecting their own components and visualizing them as objects in the performances of Collective Actions, in a similar fashion.

Pepperstein is a member of the youngest generation of Moscow Conceptualists. Therefore, it is highly possible that his vision of infection by objects was developed based on observations of older conceptualists' activities. In other words, Collective Actions may have influenced the development of Pepperstein's thought. Through relationships with objects, Collective Actions seems to incorporate interfaces in interacting with the environment into components of their works. It is especially easy to notice the signature image of "being enclosed" in their performances. In what follows, I would like to analyze some actions of Collective Actions from this point of view.

> **THE TENT**
> Twelve stylized paintings of size 1x1 m each created by N. Alexeev were stitched into one cloth and put up like a tent in a forest not far from Moscow.
> Moscow region, Savyolovskaya railway line, Depot station.
> 2nd October, 1976.
>
> (Collective Actions Group, n.d.-a)

Despite its simplicity, one of their earliest actions, *The Tent* (1976), is important in terms of "enclosure." In this action, a tent was created out of several clothes. Judging from the description of this action, even going inside the tent is not valued as essential content, setting aside the question of whether they really got inside or not. On the other hand, in *For N. Panitkov (Three darkness)* (1980), the tent's interior attracted their attention. In this action, Panitkov, one of the main members of Collective Actions, sat down on a chair that was placed on a snow field. After that, a roof-like structure was constructed above his head, using some boards. Participants covered it with snow, and something like a snow hill was formed. Next, a blackout cloth was overlaid on this snow hill. Furthermore, they constructed a huge box made of clothes and papers around this snow hill while a radio was loudly playing. The title of the action refers to these three levels of enclosure. As in Yankilevsky's work, there was man in the box in this action. Put simply, the most prominent part of this action was Panitkov's being surrounded by darkness, severalfold.

> 7. Panitkov, having spent all the time in darkness inside his hill (the first darkness), stands up and rises the board.
> 8. After unsealing the hill, Panitkov is still surrounded by darkness (the second darkness of the cloth), as the hill is covered with cloth.
> 9. After dragging off the cloth, Panitkov still finds himself in darkness (the third darkness of the cloth).
>
> (Collective Actions Group, n.d.-b)

However, it is said that this darkness was not perfectly completed because of some trouble. This result is suggestive to a certain degree. At

any rate, the theme of enclosure was just beginning to be clearly realized by them. The state of being enclosed gradually started to lead Conceptualists to more complex performances, beyond a mere expression of a sense of limitation. In a suggestive statement, Monastyrski connects the theme of enclosure to the dimension of documentation. By doing so, he shows that separation and enclosure are two sides of the same coin in this context.

> In the actions before *10 Appearances* and *Playback*, the events of the actions unfolded in a real exurban field (fields). After these two actions, these were already rather photographs of exurban fields, it was as if we separated ourselves from reality with a factographic membrane. We were clothed in dive suits of factography, in which we maneuvered in the subsequent actions. But even the places of these manipulations were similarly "packaged up" in a membrane of factography, changed somehow [...].
>
> (Monastyrski, n.d.-b)

In the action titled *Playback* (1981), participants observed a trace of a hammer on the wall of the artist's apartment and heard sounds from tape recorders placed in front of and behind them. These recorders broadcasted not only the hammer blow sounds that were recorded before the action but also the sounds they made as they entered the room. They were surrounded by traces of themselves and simultaneously experienced two kinds of sounds, made by themselves and others.

In *Music within and outside* (1984), they created similar conditions, focusing their eyes on outer surroundings. First, organizers recorded sounds of a tram near a station while loudly playing musical instruments. The next day, Romashko, a member of Collective Actions, listened to these sounds on his headphones, standing at the same station where they had recorded. The following passage is cited from a text by Monastyrski who describes how they planned to make the sounds they called *Music within and outside*.

> First of all, we thought of a French horn and oboe to be played by S.Letov (hereby we utilize the peculiar feature of “Letov’s tails” which was once planned for the action “Music of the Center”, but failed to put it into practice. Its nature is the following: Letov starts playing his instrument while a tram passes by and keeps sounding for a minute or two after it has already passed by the recorder. In “Music of the Centre” there was train instead of trams. Therefore, the recording is expected to contain a kind of acoustic traces, or tails – transport noises transform into musical tone). Secondly, we use a drum, N. Panitkov’s Buddhist ritual shell, a couple of bells, ringing of an alarm clock, a Chinese mouth harmonica and sometimes various vocal sonoristics.
>
> But these things are secondary on the record, its primary content is the sound of trams passing by, while musical instruments are only embedded from time to time. Therefore, we were to record a soundtrack for “Music Within and Outside” – it seemed a fine name for this piece. A viewer’s visual attention could be focused on passing trams, anticipation of them, watching them run etc. At this point some peculiar coincidences could occur of recorded trams with real ones passing by.
>
> (Collective Actions Group, n.d.-c)

To sum up, there was a coincidence between the three elements: previously recorded ambient sounds of the tram, the sounds of musical instruments that organizers played in tune with it, and the sounds of the tram on the day of action. This blurred the border between inside and outside. This kind of interest in coinciding sounds is also present in Monastyrski’s text, *The Autonomy of Art* (1981), in which he describes how one day he simultaneously heard sounds of a vomiting person and the calling of a crow, and felt these were doubly interlocked (2009, pp. 188-189). This man seemed to feel an attachment to the crow, repeating synchronized sounds. Be that as it may, it is arguable whether such image of happy coincidence is kept in the actions of Collective Actions. Rather, the key phrase “Letov’s tails” might indicate restructuring in the seemingly integrated environment of the Soviet world.

In relation to this, it is worth emphasizing that enclosure by objects and the environment could be associated with the participants' consciousness. Monastyrski seems to think that the surrounding environment can be a field that reflects participants' consciousness. In other words, participants are enclosed by their consciousness.

> Clearly, at this point in the "demonstration," we are surrounded by a fairly large "field" of expectation, it is as if we have gone fairly deeply into it and away from the edges and have now closed in upon ourselves—in the same way that the thing that was being demonstrated to us was in reality a demonstration of our perception and nothing else.
>
> (Monastyrski, n.d.-c)

It follows from this that his aim was to cause the emergence of a participant's field of consciousness, built on a foundation of real environmental fields, and to connect the inside with the outside. This could mean that, to participants, these activities were also the objectification of their own consciousness as an outer event. A series of actions called *Slogan* displays these characteristics. In the first action from this series, *Slogan-1977* (1977), a phrase from a collection of poems by Monastyrski—"I DO NOT COMPLAIN ABOUT ANYTHING AND I ALMOST LIKE IT HERE, ALTHOUGH I HAVE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE AND KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THIS PLACE" (Collective Actions Group, n.d.-d) —was quoted and placed among the trees in the forest as a slogan. Since this was only the fourth action performed by Collective Actions, this slogan could be interpreted as the externalization of the voice of the imagined participants who entered the place of action for the first time.

The series of slogans covers a broad range of contents, but *Slogan-86* (1986) is the most notable among them. The action *Slogan-86* consisted of burying objects such as a map and lights into a hole dug on a hill. After that, participants took two photos of the landscape: one that includes the place where things had been buried and another that did not include it within the frame. There was no material slogan. If so, what is

expected as a slogan here? Surprisingly, it is the preface for the fourth volume of *Journeys to the Countryside*, a collected record of actions by Collective Actions, that was not present in the place of the action. In fact, the slogan exists outside the time and space of the action, despite the participant's expectation that it would be there.

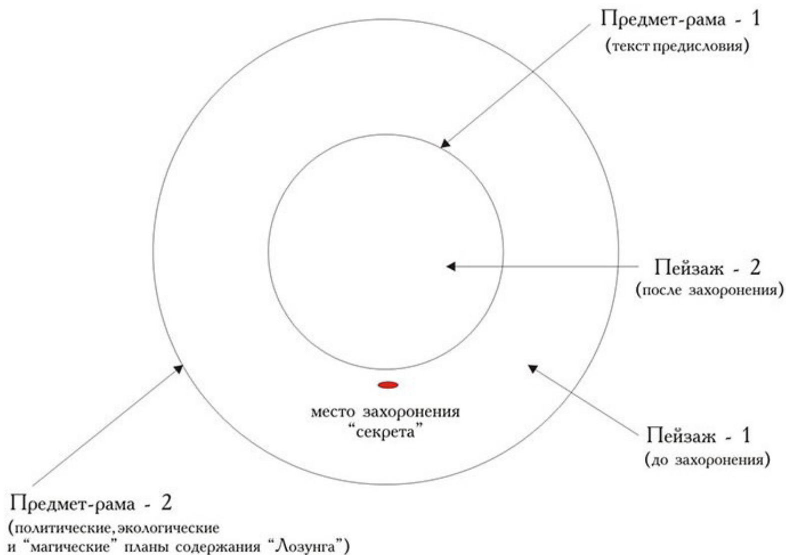

Figure 5: Illustration of the action, *Slogan-86* (1986).
(from Collective Actions Group, n.d.-e)

Figure 5 explains the structure of *Slogan-86*. To interpret this structure, a chronological process must be considered rather than a spatial relationship among elements. First, the outmost circle is described as a "frame" for which explanations such as "politic, ecological, and 'magical' plans" are provided. Additionally, another "frame" is located within this frame, which is what this action treats as the slogan, namely, the preface for *Journeys to the Countryside*. "Landscape-1" is located between these "frames," and it is written that "Landscape-1" predates the

burying. Moreover, the location of burial for the objects such as a map and lights is shown as “the place of interment of the secret” in the area of “Landscape-1.” Lastly, in the center of the circles, there is “Landscape-2” which is explained as existence after burial. This structure is highly conceptual. However, if we consider the fact that the description of the action emphasizes temporal sequences such as before and after burial, it could be said that the figure shows the chronological process in which real landscape gets defined by several contexts. The landscape before burial is originally surrounded by “political, ecological, and ‘magical’” contexts, while taking a photo after burial is based on the concept of the “invisible slogan” (i.e., the preface that is invisible to participants). As such, that preface has some effect on the landscape as secondary context.

In any case, the preface written by Monastyrski was objectified as a component of the outer landscape and became the object of the line of sight as well as the field of consciousness that enclosed participants. This kind of intersection between the extended self and the outer non-human world with thing comes across like Pepperstein’s concept of the “thing-object.”

An approach to the problem of such externalization can also be observed in other actions like *For D. A. Prigov (The secret oak-grove)* (1992). This action is described below.

> The participant (Prigov) and the action’s organizers (S. H. and A.M.) met at VDNKh metro station and took a trolley bus to the Botanical garden’s main gates. After approaching the eastern corner of the fence surrounding an oak grove, A.M. with a folder in his hands containing sheets from Prigov’s book “The catalogue of abominations” scaled up to size A2 detached himself from the group and while walking along the northern side of the oak grove rolled the sheets and put them on tops of the fence’s poles (each 100 meters approx.). This action was performed on the whole outer perimeter of the secret oak-grove’s fence and involved all 20 pages of the book.

> After A.M's having put on the first roll on the fence's pole, Prigov and Haensgen followed behind him. Prigov took the rolls off the poles, unfolded them and read the verses aloud in front of S. H.'s video camera.
>
> When the last sheet of the compilation was taken off (near the eastern corner of the grove, where the movement started), A.M. fixed the pages between two black cardboard sheets (the "front page" side was marked with an inscription "To D. A. Prigov") and handed the such crafted big black notebook over to Prigov.
>
> (Collective Actions Group, n.d.-f)

At first, Prigov's book left his side, taken apart into huge pages. Next, Monastyrski placed these pages on the poles which surround the secret place. After that, Prigov encountered his pages again as external objects in the outer environment. Pages of his book, once enlarged and in open air, must have been a different being before him. So, this indicates that the surrounding field could function as space into which their own consciousness and words are released. As such, we can observe that the Collective Actions group has sought to give expression to the fact that they were enclosed by objects and words, in ways that are somewhat different than Pepperstein's observation on the death and life of terms as objects.

5 Conclusion

It is a fact that Conceptualism was a community without a uniform manifesto. However, sometimes we can also discover common traits in the activities of these artists. This paper tried to present a visualization of such common traits in Conceptualism. It could be said that observations of nature of things and human beings in Soviet life by pioneers (Yankilevsky and Kabakov) laid the groundwork for a more complex style adopted by the younger generation (Monastyrski and Pepperstein). Kabakov, of course, is well known as the artist who creates works full of words. However, it is worth mentioning that the younger generation

allows both things and words the possibility of outward movement, closely connecting the problem of words with that of things.

That being so, a kind of externalization can be regarded as a shared feature of their vision. They have variously expressed the movement toward the outside: for example, radiation by Yankilivsky, deviation by Kabakov, "passo" by Pepperstein, and the use of the surrounding environment by the Collective Actions Group. These have a commonality in their tendency to break away from a ready-made environment.

Expression of their own ideas into the outside like slogans of the Collective Actions Group may be conjures images of expressive abstract paintings of the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, Bobrinskaya (2013, pp. 358-359) shows that reflective attitudes of conceptualists are not completely unrelated to the explosive nature of abstract paintings, comparing Kabakov and Lev Kropivnitsky, one of the central figures of Lianozovo. To put it briefly, she argued that the externalization of psychological impulse was one of the thresholds in conceptualists' activities. However, it should be considered that the theme of externalization has been updated even in the following generation. For them, the movement of externalization does not mean mere explosion of an artist's inner surface anymore. They do not inscribe their soul in medium, but rather seem to remove their own components from themselves to see them from another perspective with the help of things and the surrounding environment.

Historically speaking, it would appear that they shifted the tendency of Soviet unofficial art from the expression of an artist's overflowing soul to the reflective externalization of the artist's self through relationship with things. The voices of participants describing the impression of action were frequently recorded in the Collective Actions Group, which can be interpreted as a process of externalization. It may be the practice of talking about things by things that Pepperstein writes about. The issue of the analysis of such narrative should be addressed in further research.

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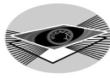
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Russia/Russians on Ice: Imagined Identity and Cross-cultural Communication in *Yuri!!! on ICE*

TIEN-YI CHAO
National Taiwan University

Abstract

Yuri!!! on ICE (2016; 2017) is a Japanese TV anime featuring multinational figure skaters competing in the ISU Grand Prix of Figure Skating Series. The three protagonists, including two Russian skaters Victor Nikiforov, and Yuri Purisetsuki (Юрий Плисецкий), and one Japanese skater Yuri Katsuki (勝生勇利), engage in extensive cross-cultural discourses. This paper aims to explore the ways in which Russian cultures, life style, and people are 'glocalised' in the anime, not only for the Japanese audience but also for fans around the world. It is followed by a brief study of Russian fans' response to YOI's display of Russian memes and Taiwanese YOI fan books relating to Russia and Russians in YOI. My reading of the above materials suggests that the imagined Russian identity in both the official anime production and the fan works can be regarded as an intriguing case of cross-cultural communication and cultural hybridisation.

Keywords: *Yuri!!! on ICE*, Japanese ACG (animation/anime, comics, games), anime, cross-cultural communication, cultural hybridisation

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Russia/Russians on Ice: Imagined Identity and Cross-cultural Communication in *Yuri!!! on ICE*

Yuri!!! on ICE (ユーリ!!! on ICE; hereinafter referred to as YOI)[1] is a TV anime[2] broadcast in Japan between 5 October and 21 December 2016, featuring male figure skaters of various nationalities. According to a study conducted by the Kadokawa Ascii Research Laboratories Inc., the anime was "the most-tweeted fall anime…with 1,440,596 tweets" between 24 November and 14 December in 2016 (Pineda, 2016). The story is mainly about the relationship among Japanese figure skater Yuri Katsuki (hereinafter referred to as Yuri K) and two Russian skaters Victor Nikiforov (hereinafter referred to as Victor) and Yuri Plisetsky (herein after referred to as Yuri P), on their way towards the ISU (International Skating Union) Grand Prix Final (GPF) championship. Later YOI turned out to be extremely popular not only in Japan but also in many countries around the world; it has also achieved monumental merits, including Top One TV Anime Series of the Tokyo Anime Award Festival with 64,774 votes (Komatsu, 2016), Top One of the Best Anime of 2016 MEGA POLL (Anonymous, 2016), and Top One Anime of the Year 2016 in Crunchyroll's The Anime Awards (Guest Author, 2017).

Apart from the appealing settings of figure skating, the plot of YOI is also innovative, if not subversive, compared with mainstream sports anime. As shown in episode 1, the 22-year-old Yuri K is the top male skater in Japan, entering GPF for once though ending up in the last sixth place. In the subsequent episodes, he struggles to overcome his previous failure, kicking off a fresh start in the new season with the coaching of

1 An earlier version of this article was presented at the Eighth International Symposium on European Languages in East Asia at National Taiwan University in Taipei, Taiwan, on 30 September 2017. I am grateful to the delegates for their useful questions and remarks. I am also indebted to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments and the Journal's editors for their proficient assistance in editing and proofreading.

2 Unless otherwise specified, the term "anime" is used in this article to refer to Japanese animated works.

his long-time idol Victor. Then the 27-year-old Victor, a Russian skater and five-time world champion, has known Yuri K at the previous GPF event. He decides to travel to Japan to coach Yuri K after being impressed by a video footage of Yuri K's skating, an imitation of Victor's performance in GPF championship. Soon the 17-year-old Russian skater Yuri P, winner of Junior Grand Prix Final and Junior World Championships, also visits Japan to compete with Yuri K for Victor's coaching. Later Victor develops a relationship with Yuri K that, as the author Mitsurō Kubo states in a magazine interview, is reminiscent of soulmates:

> As the last part depicting ordinary life before the Grand Prix Final, I wanted to create a relaxing episode….The ring Yuuri [Yuri K] gave Victor also carries the meaning of a symbol that the two of them are like soul mates.
>
> (Toraonice, 2017)[3]

Given its reputation as an anime celebrating affectionate friendship between men and even gay marriage, YOI soon attracted scholarly attention, with a handful of journal articles and MA theses published since 2017. Most of these studies share a dominant interest in fandom (Heinrich 2017, McInroy & Craig 2018, Zhang 2018) and the anime's portrayal of same-sex friendship and affection among the male characters, from the perspectives of Boys' Love (BL)[4], homosexuality, and queer studies. Laws (2017, pp. 10-11), for example, compares YOI with two famous Japanese BL works, *Sekai-ichi Hatsukoi*: *World's Greatest First Love* and *Junjou Romantica*. She contends that the popularity of these works indicate significant progress in the acceptance of homosexuality in Japanese media. Berndt (2018, p. 1) takes a different angle of cross-culturalism, arguing that "[t]he transcultural consumption of Japan-derived popular media has prompted a significant amount of academic research and teaching", though she only mentions YOI briefly as "a recent popular series by female directors" (Berndt, 2018, p. 6, ft. 12).

3 In the original Japanese interview, Kubo uses the Katakana 'ソウルメイト' to describe this relationship. See the scanned image of the magazine page: https://karice.wordpress.com/2017/02/21/p559/

4 Boys' Love (BL) is a specific sub-genre in Japanese ACG (animation/anime, comics, and games), featuring erotic or romantic love between men.

Building on Berndt's study of "transcultural consumption of Japan-derived popular media", my paper seeks to focus on the creation of imagined Russian identity, as well as issues relating to cross-cultural communication in YOI. As I will elaborate later, the anime's cross-cultural features help in attracting huge attention from fans in Japan and worldwide. More importantly, YOI presents interesting and inspiring cases of cultural hybridisation and glocalisation through a series of figure skating training and events in an international setting. In this study, I will explore two issues: the first is the ways in which YOI and its fan works present the imagined features of Russia, including the country, its culture, and its people; the second is the extent to which this may suggest an effort to facilitate cross-cultural communication and cultural hybridisation. In the remainder of the paper, I will first discuss YOI's characterisation from the perspective of "Cool Japan" and Koichi Iwabuchi's theory of "cultural odor" (2002, 2004). Then I will address the YOI production team's treatment of Russia and Russian memes in the anime. This is followed by a case study of Russian and Taiwanese fans' response and fantasy about Russia and Russians presented in YOI, with a focus on online forum comments, doujinshi (i.e. fan-made fiction and manga), and cosplay. In so doing, my study is expected to contribute to Japanese anime studies by exploring and complicating the nuances regarding the image of Russia and Russian in YOI.

1 Globalised and "Culturally Odorless" Characterisation in YOI

YOI's chief achievement lies in facilitating cross-cultural communication, in particular among the three protagonists Victor, Yuri K, and Yuri P. Indeed, in the real world of competitive figure skating, most major events are international, involving numerous hosting countries and skaters of various nationalities. This provides the YOI production team with a rich cross-cultural context for creating the anime. The choice of such an international theme and characterisation can be seen as a growing trend in Japanese ACG (anime, comics, games). In order to investigate "how foreigners are constructed, reproduced, and contested through language and visual clues in anime that feature foreign char-

acters", Ito and Bisila (2018: p.1, 3) conducted a survey of 17 Japanese anime, including YOI, and 73 foreign characters with 14 different nationalities. As I will elaborate in Section 2, the foreign characters in anime of this kind may still be based on conventions, if not stereotypes, as the production teams of Japanese anime perceive and present the characters' foreignness.

YOI's international settings in both the plot and characterisation also echoes with Iwabuchi's notion of "culturally odorless" products. In *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, he argues that

> it is no accident that Japan has become a major exporter of culturally odorless products. Japanese media industries seem to think that the suppression of Japanese cultural odor is imperative if they are to make inroads into international markets.
>
> (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 94)

Here the term "cultural odor" refers to a culture's unique features that serve as "labels" for people outside of that culture to identify it. Later in his study of Pokémon, Iwabuchi (2004, p. 56, 58) again points out that Japanese global commodities (i.e. consumer technologies, comics and cartoons, computer and video games) are "culturally odorless". Such a marketing strategy is also applied to anime, especially those are intended to display little or no Japanese nationality; by quoting from the world-famous Japanese anime director Mamoru Oshii (1996), he asserts:

> Japanese animators and cartoonists unconsciously choose not to draw realistic Japanese characters when they wish to draw attractive characters.…His characters tend to be modeled on Caucasian types. Consumers of Japanese animation and games may be aware of the Japanese origin of these commodities, but they perceive little "Japanese bodily odor".
>
> Iwabuchi (2004, p. 58)

Although Iwabuchi's idea of "culturally odorlessness" helps in interpreting YOI's globalised chracterisation, still there is a complicated vortex of cultural exchanges in it. One the one hand, Yuri K the Japanese skater has long been admiring Victor as his role model, while at the same time he is ambitious to win the championship of the next GPF. In some ways this may imply Japan's long-term endeavor since Meiji Enlightenment to imitate and then surpass European countries, while Russia's Peter the Great also launched a large-scale project of Europeanisation in the early eighteenth century. According to Schönle, Zorin, and Evstratov (2016, p. 1):

> The changes initiated by the emperor Peter the Great…arguably represented the most far-reaching attempt at enforced Westernization until the Meiji restoration in Japan in 1868 and the Ataturk reforms in Turkey in the 1920s.

Bukh (2007, p. 10) also notes the similarities shared by Japan and Russia:

> Both are presented as haunted by the question of whether they belong to Europe or Asia, embarked on the road to modernization in mid-19th century with the abolition of serfdom in Russia and Meiji Restoration in Japan.

On the other hand, both Victor and Yuri P are attracted by Yuri K's performance and potential for the championship, hence deciding to visit Yuri K in Japan. Upon their arrival, the two Russian skaters are soon amazed and enchanted by the local food and culture, in particular the hot spring in Yuri K's home-run hotel and home-made *katsudon*[5] (カツ丼; deep-fried pork cutlet with egg sauce, served with rice).[6] There are also scenes featuring Victor and Yuri K enjoying *katsudon* with satisfaction.[7] Victor and Yuri P's response to Japan and Yuri K the Jap-

5 The cultural icon of *katsudon* in YOI will be discussed in Section 2 of this paper.

6 An image of the *katsudon* from YOI can be found here: https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/yurionice/images/8/88/Katsudon-2.png/revision/latest?cb=20161203142113

7 Images showing Victor and Yuri P devouring *katsudon* after their arrivals in Japan: http://www.fictionkitchenpodcast.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/YOI-Victor-eating-katsudon-

anese may suggest many European and American visitors' perception of Japan, Japanese culture, and Japanese people—it involves a sense of amazement and appreciation, induced by the exoticism they expected and experienced during the visits to Japan. Yet at the same time they may be in awe of Japan's potential of catching up and even surpassing the dominant European/American cultures and countries.

In YOI, the enthusiasm or even cult of Japanese food expressed by Victor and Yuri K can be elaborated in two ways: one is Western countries' orientalism towards Japan in the 19th century, and the other is Japanese government's policy of "Cool Japan". As Holt (2016, pp. 128-129) points out:

> Japan plays an intriguing role in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about culture and civilization….Japan also became a model of secular civic virtue—a quality that could be instilled by cultivating "correct" taste and responsible habits of consumption.

Since the 1980s, Japan has endeavoured to export its national image to the world; polls about Japan's national image were carried out in various countries between 1996 and 2011, including Russia in 2010 (Hashimoto, 2018, p.47, 50). In 2015, the Cool Japan Strategy Promotion Council 2015 issued a proposal for measures to attract foreign fans of Japan and to rediscover "Japan's goodness" —all based on foreigners' views (Hashimoto, 2018, pp. 52-53). The target products of Cool Japan include

> games, manga, anime, and other forms of content, fashion, commercial products, Japanese cuisine, and traditional culture to robots, eco-friendly technologies, and other high-tech industrial products.
>
> (Hashimoto, 2018, p. 52)

Hence in YOI, the overly positive impression held by Victor and Yuri

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screen-shot-1.jpg; https://vignette3.wikia.nocookie.net/yurionice/images/7/79/Yuri_p_eating_katsudon-1.png/revision/latest?cb=20161224161719

P about Japan (including hot springs, food, Yuri K and his family and friends) can be seen as a device created deliberately to present the image of “Cool Japan”, not only to the foreign characters, but also to the anime’s audience around the world.

The intricate relationship between Japan and Russia is also transformed into the relationship among the Japanese and Russian protagonists in YOI, especially that between Yuri K and Victor. Such a relationship can be regarded as a parallel to Japan’s admiration, imitation, and ambition to surpass its role models, namely Russia and other Western-European countries. This seems to resemble the Japan-Russia relationship in history—both had perceived each other as rivals since the Meiji period, while Japan sought to construct its own national identity (the Japanese “Self”) by seeing Russia as the “Other” (Bukh, 2010). Both countries’ quests for their new identity and position in the world also fit well the quests for self-development of Yuri K, Victor, and Yuri P in YOI.

2 Imagined and Mixed Identity: Russian Culture, Life Style, and People in YOI

In many aspects YOI demonstrates features of globalisation and glocalisation by creating mixed identity of facts and fiction. As mentioned in the introduction, two of the three protagonists of YOI are Russian, namely Victor (the world champion and Yuri K’s coach) and the young junior skater Yuri P (later the gold medalist of the Grand Prix Final). It is generally accepted that the chracterisation of Victor was based on the American actor John Cameron Mitchell, while that of Yuri P the Russian female skater Julia Lipnitskaia (Hanashiro, 2016). The writer Kubo affirmed that it was her idea to model the characterisation of Victor and Yuri P on real-world figures, as she appreciate Mitchell and Lipnitskaia’s charms and charisma (Kubo, 2016). She even posted a photo with Mitchell on Twitter to demonstrate her affection and admiration towards the actor.[8] Although the production team has admitted no connection

8 Source of image: https://i.pinimg.com/originals/72/98/14/7298141f4432318d89c06d02ce61e617.jpg

between Victor and any male competitive skaters, along with a tweet by Victor's voice actor Junichi Suwabe (2016) denying such a liaison, many fans have speculated about the similarities between Victor and Plushenko. Plushenko's princely style, highly artistic performance (high GOE, i.e. Grade of Execution), and mastery of extremely challenging techniques, are all visible in the portrayal of Victor in the anime. Some of the YOI audience even pointed out that Victor's signature movement of hushing looks identical to "Plushenko hush of the crowd in Sochi 2014 Olympics" (Hanashiro, 2016), an alluring gesture that made "the arena [go] wild" (Newcomb, 2014). Apparently Victor shares many qualities with Plushenko, as "a showman and one of the best men's skaters to ever grace the ice at the games" (Newcomb, 2014).

One may wonder to what extent YOI is unique in mixing real-life figures in the modern world into character design. Except works based on history (especially the Japanese War States Period), most of Japanese anime seem to focus on fictional characterisation. Insofar I have found only two representative works that base their chracterisation on real people. The first is the TV anime adaptation of Inoue Takehiko's sports manga *Slam Dunk*, broadcast in Japan between 16 October 1993 and 23 March 1996. Since Takehiko is an NBA fan, fans have found convincing evidence showing that many of the characters in *Slam Dunk* are modeled on NBA stars, such as Hanamichi Sakuragi for Dennis Rodman and Kaede Rukawa for Michael Jordan (Detroitja, 2008). The other example is a TV anime adaptation of Akimi Yoshida's manga *BANANA FISH* (1986-1994), broadcast in Japan between 6 July and 20 December 2018 (Seko & Utsumi 2018). According to Beaty (2013, pp. 24-28), the appearance of the protagonist Ash Lynx is believed to be inspired by former Swedish tennis player Stefan Edberg (1966-present; early stage only) and later the American actor River Phoenix (1970-1993), while the other protagonist Eiji Okumura is said to share the look with the Japanese actor Hironobu Nomura.[9] Still, this kind of "real-person" characterisation is rare in the Japanese anime industry, which makes the case of YOI significant and note-worthy.

9 https://bananafishlovers.tumblr.com/post/176168085069/so-i-bet-new-banana-fish-fans-have-a-lot-of

Back to the fictional characterisation in Japanese ACG, Victor appears to bear similar visual traits with Russian characters in other Japanese anime, though with differences in personality. For example, his silver hair is in common with two other famous Russian ACG characters, namely "Russia" (the personification of the country Russia; he is named "Ivan Braginsky" by the manga artist) in the anime series *Hetalia: Axis Powers* and the Japanese-Russian volleyball player Lev Haiba in *Haikyuu!!*.[10] All these three characters have silver hair and blue eyes; Victor and Russia are also of similar height (Victor is 180 cm; Russia is 182 cm; Lev is 194 cm). Yet there are sheer differences in their personality: Victor is sociable, charismatic, and level-headed (in episode 1, for instance, he is extremely friendly to fans and fellow skaters, warmly inviting Yuri K to have photos taken); Russia is shy, childish, and pushy; Lev is insolent, egotistic, but candid. The above comparison reveals that significant visual conventions are applied to Russian characters in Japanese anime, while their personality traits vary to a great extent.

Whether or not Victor's friendliness and enthusiasm should be regarded as part of typical Russian identity, there are two issues emerging from his characterisation: one is how are foreigners presented in Japanese anime; the other is to what extent do world-famous Russian figure skaters share the national identity with the majority of Russians. To discuss the first issue, I would like to refer to Ito and Bisila's study (2018) again. According to their findings, over 80% of the foreign characters in their selected anime are male, while "65% of the characters depicted as white" (Ito & Bisila, 2018, p. 4). They also discovered that the stereotypical "harmless" American style of characters "tend to be white with blond hair and blue eyes, and are unable to speak 'proper' Japanese" (Ito & Bisila, 2018, p. 4). They made an important conclusion that:

> These are NOT a reflection of reality; rather, these are constructed to reflect a certain viewpoint. Thus, *anime* depictions is not "neutral" at all. Our results suggest the ideology of *nihonjinron*

10 Images of Lev in *Haikyuu!!*, Victor in YOI, and Russia in *Hetalia*: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/213146994847625182/?autologin=true; retrieved April 2, 2019.

is operating behind the scene.

(Ito & Bisila, 2018, p. 6).

Such an ideology of "Japaneseness" (by which I would refer to as the visual conventions of Japanese ACG) may be mingled into the characterisation of Victor as well. Like the Western ACG characters in the above study, Victor appears in YOI as a white young man with light-coloured hair and blue eyes, looking harmless and sexy, and speaking Japanese with occasional Russian and English words to mark his foreign identity.

Apart from the intervention of Japanese ACG conventions, it should also be noted that a majority of international figure skaters are far more "globalised" than people in their home countries. For example, famous Russian skaters such as Plushenko and Evegenia Armanovna Medvedeva do share the "non-Russian" features with Victor (i.e. friendliness, proficiency in English, open-mindedness), making them extremely popular in media and fandom worldwide. Like Victor, these Russian sports athletes enjoy foreign cultures and international exchanges, as Medvedeva tweeted about her cosplay of Yuri K in YOI; she even received a YOI gift from a fan at Grand Prix 2016 and a hand-drawn YOI picture from Kubo in November 2016 (Baseel, 2016). These qualities appear to be "international" (or "culturally odorless") rather than "Russian"; such qualities are also shared by many figure skaters from other countries who are active in international skating events and competitions.

Compared with Victor, the YOI production team seemed to create Yuri P as a more culturally hybridised figure, namely a cool Russian bearing Japanese *moe* ("cute") elements. The chracterisation of Yuri P is based on the Russian figure skater Lipnitskaia, who is known for her talent, temper, and passion for cats (all shared by Yuri P). Fierce and competitive, plus the mixed nature of harshness (hence nicknamed as "Russian Punk") and an angelic look (aka "Russian Fairy") —all these qualities make Yuri P a heart-throb for YOI fans. Lipnitskaia's appealing image as a "wild kitty" contributes to Yuri P's charms as a rebellious and "cat-like" boy. His first appearance in episode 1 makes one thing of a spoiled

and bad-tempered teenager, as he confronts aggressively the defeated Yuri K by shouting at the poor and depressed Japanese skater in the male toilet after the GPF.[11]

Yet as the plot develops, it is gradually revealed that Yuri P is actually kind and caring to Yuri K, though in his own tough and concealed ways. This may echo with the identity of Russians imagined by people outside Russia, as complicated and mysterious. As Smith (1990) states in a *New York Times* article, the Russian character features a "combination of coldness and warmth". This seems to share the characteristics of *tsundere* in Japanese *otaku* culture. According to Kinsui & Yamakido (2015, p. 33), the term refers to a mentality (especially of young women; such a feature is also attached to male characters in Japanese ACG works targeting at female audience) involving "excessive coldness" towards one's beloved while the real feeling about the loved one can be passionate or even crazy.

With his "tough love" to his friends and fans, Yuri K bears a typical trait of *tsundere,* which is an important element of *moeness* (cuteness) in Japanese *otaku* culture. Like many popular characters in Japanese ACG, the *tsundere* Yuri P is very often portrayed as a kitten, featuring a combination of coolness and cuteness. This is obvious in his outfit and many visual displays of him in the anime and the spinoffs. For instance, a scene in episode 8 shows Yuri K wearing cat ears, a common ornamental device for ACG fans and cosplayers, at a gathering with his fans (aka "Yuri Angels").[12] Another example is the Chibi figure of Yuri P, designed by Sanrio as part of the YOI goods; it actually contains the key visual features of Hello Kitty.[13] As Steinberg (2012, p.90) points out,

> [T]he idea that character goods allow for inter- or intragenerational human communication has become a privileged explanation for the prominence of characters in Japan.

11 Source of image: https://vignette3.wikia.nocookie.net/yurionice/images/7/7c/Bathroom.PNG/revision/latest?cb=20161201030028

12 Source of image: https://i2.wp.com/luxasblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/yurio-nekomkimi.jpg

13 Source of image: https://i2.wp.com/wowjapan.asia/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/news_xlarge_yuri_kitty1.jpg?resize=640%2C183

I would like to add that YOI's "character merchandising" is not only "inter- or intragenerational", but also "international", as the "foreign" characters (i.e. Yuri P, Victor, and many other skaters from various countries) are all culturally hybridised, with foreign and Japanese identities mixed and matched. To quote from Price (2001, p. 156),

> A funny thing about anime: no matter how popular it is in the West and how universal it just might be, there is no way to disguise its very "Japaneseness".

Accordingly, Victor and Yuri P appear to be "foreign" with their Russian nationality, while they all bear a certain degree of "Japaneseness", no matter it is a hidden feature of traditional Japanese spirit or a strong presence of Japanese otaku culture.

In addition to characterisation, the intricate relationship based on admiration and competition between Victor and Yuri K reminds the audience of a similar bond between Plushenko and Yuzuru Hanyu, the Japanese gold medalist in figure skating. Even though the YOI production team has never disclosed any connection between these two star skaters and the characterisation of Victor and Yuri K, the two pairs do have things in common. Hanyu, for instance, is known as a die-hard fan of Plushenko since childhood. He not only wore a similar haircut of his idol but also imitated many of Plushenko's jumps and spins. He even admitted in an interview that his own growth and development were largely based upon his admiration and emulation of Plushenko (Yuuki, 2017). As Poulsen (n.d.) describes in an article for the *Healthy Living Magazine*, Plushenko also paid much attention to Hanyu, a rising star in the world of ice skating, in the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The article also contain a telling photograph showing Plushenko observing Hanyu closely at the ice rink of the Iceberg Skating Palace in Sochi, which indicates the two skaters' competitive and idol-fan relationship.[14]

The two skaters have been in touch since then and are still performing together at various ice events, including the Japan-based Fantasy on

14 Source of image: http://www.healthylivingmagazine.us/Articles/419/article_image11.JPG

ICE series in May and June 2018. Plushenko's tweet during the performance, for instance, showed his admiration of Hanyu: "With strong Yuzu 💪",[15] with a photo of the two skaters doing a powerful manly gesture on Plushenko's official Instagram.[16] More recently, Plushenko posted an uplifting message on his Instagram to encourage Hanyu, who felt defeated and regretful after winning only the silver medal in the ISU World Championship in March 2019:

> My great friend Yuzu, with all difficulty and injuries, you perform such a great performance at world championships in Japan, I know how difficult was this for you, but you are the best skater in my heart.
>
> (Plushenko, 2019).

Such a profound friendship in the real world of figure skating helps in justifying the affectionate friendship between Victor and Yuri K in YOI —unlike their battling ancestors in the nineteenth century, now the Russian and the Japanese young athletes, like many of the youngsters in both countries, are able to establish a much more friendly and mutually beneficial relationship.

Although the plot of *YOI* does not focus on Russian culture, there are a number of scenes in the anime that give the audience a taste of Russia. In episode 1, the story starts with Sochi Grand Prix Final in Russia. Donko (2016) confirms that this scene is based on a real geographical landmark in Russia, namely Iceberg Skating Palace, a 12,000-seat multi-purpose arena in the Sochi Olympic Park. The venue was used during the Winter Olympics, but also hosted a real Grand Prix of Figure Skating Final in 2012.[17] There are also shots of the cityscape of St. Petersburg in episode 12, including Tuchkov Bridge,[18] which is located "between the Yubileiniy Palace of Sport[s] and the Petrovskiy Stadium" (Anonymous, n.d.). Notably, Plushenko used to be trained at Yubileyny Sport Club in

15 Source of image: https://twitter.com/EvgeniPlushenko/status/874881798299422721

16 Source of image: https://www.instagram.com/p/BVT4CpnBpLB/

17 Image of Sochi Gran Prix Final in YOI ep.1: https://www.crunchyroll.com/anime-feature/2016/10/22/feature-anime-vs-real-life-yuri-on-ice

18 Source of image: http://likeafishinwater.com/2016/12/28/weekly-review-of-transit-place-and-culture-in-anime-209/

St. Petersburg, as recorded by the ISU official biography (ISU, 2014). A few simple Russian words can also be heard in the lines by Victor, such as *dasvidaniya* (до свидания; meaning "goodbye") in episode 2 and *vkusno* (вкусно; meaning "delicious") in episodes 1 and 5.[19]

The insertion of Russian culture and language in YOI is a common hybrid device in Japanese ACG, mainly with a purpose to create a sense of exoticism. As Dorman (2016, p. 15) argues,

> The fact that anime [particularly works such as *Akira*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and anime produced by Studio Ghibli] has been so widely successful while often appearing to be "un-Japanese" aesthetically.

Notably, the phenomenon of cultural hybridity is pervasive in the anime film *Ghost in the Shell*, since

> [w]ithin this city, recognizable Japanese urban characteristics are difficult to distinguish among an intricate sprawl of multiple languages and ethnicities, a Chinese street market, the Taiwanese Daija Mazu Festival, and allusions to Jakob Grimm's tale of the Golem.
>
> (Dorman, 2016, p. 43).

Metaphors of cultural hybridisation also appear in mainstream *shōnan manga*, such as the mixture of Western/Eastern alchemy, martial arts, Western fantasy literature, and steampunk (based on the development of science and technology in the first half of the twentieth century) in *Full Mental Alchemy* (Chao, 2014, pp. 177-178). Additionally, Von Feigenblatt (2012, p. 2) regards Japanese anime (with three cases selected: *Naruto Shippuden*, *Bleach*, and *Onigamiden*) as showcases of "two important cultural currents, namely hybridity/globalism and *Nihonjinron*".

In response to the above views, I would like to draw from the most

19 Source of image: https://68.media.tumblr.com/ad3a46735dfb5e962271fde84de655b4/tumblr_oglw2f7lzC1svzpkxo1_400.gif

significant (and successful) example of cultural hybridisation in YOI: *katsudon pirozhki*. The pastry is an invention of Yuri P's grandfather Nikolai Plisetsky in episode 9. The old man shows a worrying look in episode 8 as his grandson takes a bite of his hand-made *pirozhki* and then simply asks, "Have you tried Japanese-style pork cutlet rice bowl before? I had some in Japan, which were super tasty!".[20] Here Yuri P's words indicate that his fondness of Japanese culture is gradually affecting his native Russian identity (symbolised by his love of the *pirozhki* made by his grandfather in the past), hence his grandfather Nikolai's anxiety. Later Nikolai comes up with a solution, namely making *pirozhki* with the fillings of *katsudon* —"an awesome twist on the popular Japanese food" (Bushman, 2016). This innovative cross-cultural treat soon becomes Yuri P's new favourite. In episode 9, he gives Yuri K a bag of *katsudon pirozhki* as a birthday gift and a friendly gesture, though in his signature *tsundere* manner. Yuri K is clearly impressed by the *katsudon pirozhki* and Yuri P's good will, which comes in a way to develop their relationship further.

The intriguing creation of *katsudon pirozhki* can be seen as a metaphor of cultural hybridity, a new identity "in-between". The "hybrid" pastry succeeds in mingling the Japanese and Russian ingredients into a new cross-cultural product of wonders. In Homi Bhabha's words, it creates a "third space", meaning

> differential temporal movements within the process of dialectical thinking and the supplementary or interstitial "conditionality" that opens up alongside the transcendent tendency of dialectical contradiction.
>
> (Mitchell, 1995, pp. 80-84).

It also suggests the trend of globalisation and glocalisation among the young, web-based generation who may actually be more "international" and "borderless" than their parents and grandparents. This is perhaps because "*Anime*'s popularity across barriers of language and nationality is an extension of such unity in diversity" (Price, 2001, p. 168), which

20 Translated by the author of this paper from the Chinese subtitles.

encourages the audience to be more open-minded to cross-cultural communication.

3 The Image of Russia and Russians Fantasised by YOI Fans in Russia and Taiwan

The discussions in Section 2 suggest that the portrayal of Russian people and culture in YOI is a hybrid of the exotic “foreignness” of Russia and the formulaic “memes” attached to Russian characters in Japanese ACG. In this section, I will examine the ways in which YOI fans in Russia and Taiwan perceive and imagine the Russia and Russians presented in this anime, in particular the characterisation and the lifestyle. As Lamerichs (2013 p. 170) states in her comparative study of ACG fandom in Japan, USA, Netherlands, and Germany,

> anime fandom appears to be a homogeneous community but after these observations, local practices emerge. *Doujinshi* and cosplay make the balance between the local and international identity of fans visible and show its practices and social make-up to be locally anchored.

Her case studies of fan activities inside and outside Japan help in the understanding of the phenomenon of glocalisation in ACG fandom. The above studies have also intrigued my own research on Russian and Taiwanese YOI fans’ reaction to the anime’s rendition of Russia and Russians.

In this section, I choose to discuss Russian and Taiwanese YOI fans, which have not been explored by recent studies, to further investigate the impact of cross-cultural communication and glogalisation. I am curious about the ways in which Russian YOI fans perceive and interpret the anime’s Russian characters and settings —do they agree with them? Are there any issues relating to authenticity or national identity? Additionally, I would like to explore YOI fandom in my homeland Taiwan, where fans have long been appreciating and consuming Japanese ACG since the 1960s. As Jin-Shiow Chen (2007, p. 15) points out, in

the early 2000s, 95% of the imported manga and anime products in Taiwan were translations from Japanese works, hence

> Taiwan's animé/manga fan culture has mainly to do with Japanese animé and manga, and even fans' sociocultural activities conform with those of Japanese culture.

Many Taiwanese fans of Japanese anime or/and manga have actively participated in activities of fandom, in particular *doujinshi* (fan manga or fan fiction) and cosplay (Chen 2007, Martin 2012). Hernandez & Hirai (2015, p. 158) also comment in their study of the influence of Japanese ACG in Asia that Taiwan is an important hub of importing introducing Japanese ACG and cultural products:

> Taiwan, which is one of the most important hubs for the consumption of Japanese popular culture in East Asia, has also historically played a key role.

Nowadays Japanese ACG is still dominating Taiwanese fandom (with a small portion of fan works dedicated to US fiction/comics/media and Chinese ACG), while an increasing amount of works starting to "translate" the Japanese ACG memes with a local Taiwanese flavour. Based on Chen's and Martin's studies of Taiwanese ACG fandom, I hope to find out how Taiwanese YOI fans, especially those who create fan works or cosplay, imagine and interpret Russia and Russians in the anime, and whether or not their participation facilitates any "cultural translation" that contributes to the globalisation and the glocalisation of YOI.

Here my discussion would start with Russian fans' reception of YOI 's presentation of Russian memes, or rather, its hybrid settings combining Russianness and Japanese ACG features. Given the imagined and dramatised Russian identity in YOI, one may wonder if the "real" Russian people would embrace such an identity. The data collected from online ACG forums and tweets show that a majority of the Russian audience of YOI celebrated the anime's Russian characters and culture with enthusiasm. YOI "seems to be quite popular in Russia", with a Russian

franchise agent and quite a few fan communities on social media (Jun / Джюн, 2017a).[21] Some Russian YOI fans

> like Victor because his personality is very similar to Russians in real life; they would even totally agree with a number of Victor's personal traits. The Russian World champion skater Medvedeva has also mentioned that she had something in common with Victor, while Yuri P's characteristics are a bit far from reality.[22]
>
> (Jun / Джюн, 2017b).

So far the reaction has been overly positive; even the seemingly bromance-like or even "queer" display of the relationship and interaction between Victor and Yuri K succeeded in arousing the Russian fans' woos, wows, and yooooos.[23] As a Russia-based Japanese Twitter user commented,

> *Yuri!!! on ICE* was received warmly by its Russian audience…. Many of Russian men tend to be extremely homophobic. Yet an emerging group of people seemed to change their mind after the release of this anime.[24]
>
> (Jun / Джюн, 2017b).

There are Russian artists doing fan books or cosplay to support LGBT values in YOI; this includes the well-known Russian cosplayer Gesha Petrovich (https://twitter.com/geshapetrovich), who have played the roles of Victor and Yuri P.[25] Even Medvedeva, who has multiple identities ranging from a world-famous figure skater, a self-acclaimed *otaku*, to a die-hard fan of YOI, chose to cosplay Yuri K instead of YOI's Russian characters, which might indicate her cult of Japanese

21 Translated by the author of this paper.

22 Translated by the author of this paper.

23 For a detailed discussion of queer elements in *YOI*, see Caitlin Casiello's blog article, "Gaps in the Ice: Queer Subtext and Fandom Text in *Yuri!!! on Ice*", *Animation Studies* 2.0, December 26, 2016. https://blog.animationstudies.org/?p=1730

24 Translated by the author of this paper.

25 Gesha Petrovich cosplayed Victor: https://worldcosplay.net/photo/6386532
Gesha Petrovich cosplayed Yuri P: https://www.facebook.com/GeshaCosplay/posts/tiger-xdyurionice-cosplay-%E3%83%A6%E3%83%BC%E3%83%AAonice-yuriplisetskyyurio-professional/769989199861023/

otaku culture.[26] These Russian fans may still be a very small group of gay-friendly people, where the society is still largely uneasy, or even hostile, to gay people.

(The Editorial Board, 2016).

If YOI presents a fanticised version of Russian identity, then the fans around the world create an even more interesting phenomenon by expanding and reinterpreting such a fantasy. For instance, cosplayers of Victor and Yuri P on Youtube emphasised the two Russian characters' light-coloured hair, even though the cosplayers may still look "Asian/*otaku*" to Westerners.[27] For example, even the famous Asian cosplayers of Victor and Yuri P, such as Baozi & hana (https://zh-tw.facebook.com/hanaandbaozi/) and KumaQi (https://zh-tw.facebook.com/kumaqi/), are unable to fully conceal their own Asian looks.[28] On the other hand, Western cosplayers who play the role of Yuri K may find it difficult to present the protagonist's Japanese look and temperament.[29] Perhaps the cosplayers' nationality or ethnic origins are not the real issue to YOI fans, since it is the imagined identities (including the conventional visual traits in Japanese ACG dedicated to these characters) of the "Russian" Victor and Yuri P, as well as the "Japanese" Yuri K that make the most of sense.

In Taiwan, YOI fans also highlight the crossover of Russian and Japanese cultures as a major source of interest. A quick survey of Taiwan's largest *doujinshi* website (https://www.doujin.com.tw) reveals that there are 347 fan fiction/manga on YOI, many of which focus on

26 Source of image: https://twitter.com/JannyMedvedeva/status/799326889517219840

27 Source of images:
https://www.google.com.tw/search?q=yuri+on+ice%2Bcosplay&rlz=1C1RQEB_enTW589TW589&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X& ved=0ahUKEwjZuOvSqpXWAhVBFJQKHSRaAtEQ_AUICigB&biw=1366&bih=662#imgrc=_

28 Sources of images:
Baozi & hana performed Victor kissing Yuri K: https://www.facebook.com/BLisonlyone/posts/%E5%8C%85%E8%8A%B1%E5%A4%AB%E5%A4%AB%E5%95%8A%E5%95%8A%E5%95%8A%E4%BA%B2%E4%BA%B2%E4%BA%B2/1302713743101898/

KumaQi cosplayed Victor
https://worldcosplay.net/zh-hant/member/KumaQi/characters/154250

29 Sources of images:
Eli G Hidalgo cosplayed Yuri K: https://worldcosplay.net/photo/6666933
Lowen cosplayed Yuri K: https://www.acparadise.com/display.php?c=92025

the cross-cultural relationship between Victor and Yuri K, while there are a small number of fan works addressing Russia or Russian culture. For instance, extensive narratives surrounding *katsudon pirozhki* are pervasive in local fan fiction, even with an extension to other Japanese foods (Tianhaicong, 2017, p.141):

> Regardless of Victor's hostility, Yurio said to Yuri, "I told Grandpa that you liked *katsudon pirozhki*, so he made a new kind of Japanese-style *pirozhki*, telling me to bring them to you."
> "Thank you so much! May I have a bite now?"
> Yurio accepted his request. Yuri split the *pirozhki*,
> "What…is this made of azuki beans?"
> "Yeah. The ones I gave you last time were savoury. These are sweet ones."
> "Well…thanks a lot," somehow Yuri noticed his vision blurred with tears.[30]

Another feature often presented in Taiwanese YOI fan books is the fantasised Russian landscape, especially St. Petersburg. As mentioned in Section 2, the anime presents only a few scenes about Russia, such as the Grand Prix Final in Sochi (episode 1), the Rostelecom Cup Moscow (episodes 8-9), and the final scene in St Petersburg (episode12). These scenes are further elaborated and fantasised in the Taiwanese YOI fan books. Many of them provide an extensive description of the imagined life of Victor and Yuri K (and occasionally Yuri P) living and training together in St. Petersburg, such as *Bonjour! Saint-Pétersbourg* by manga artist AKRU (2017), *How's the Weather in St. Petersburg* by Boys' Love illustration artist ZawarC (2017), and *Story of St. Petersburg* by amateur novelist Hane (2017), to name just a few.[31]

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30 Translated by the author of this paper. Original Chinese text (by permission of the author of the fan book):
尤里無視敵意滿滿的維克托，又說：「我跟爺爺說你喜歡吃皮羅什基，他就做了新的日式口味，要我拿給你。」
真是太謝謝了！我現在可以吃嗎？
尤里應了一聲，勇利把皮羅什基掰開：「咦？這是紅豆餡？」
嗯。上次是鹹的，這次換甜的。」
勇利感覺眼前鏡片浮起一層水霧：「這真是……謝謝啊。」

31 A list of Taiwanese YOI fan books featuring St. Petersburg can be found here: https://www.doujin.com.tw/books/search/0/1/6IGW5b285b6X5aCh

Most of the fan book authors had no experience of long stays in Russia. Even though many of them may have consulted extensive resources about Russia, or even visited the country to collect data (so did the YOI production team), the Russian people, culture, life, and landscape presented in their works are more like a fantasised version of Russia created by YOI, than Russia in the real world. In these works, Russia is an ideal "promised land" for Yuri K and Victor to fulfil their quest for love and life. Russian people, including Yuri P, Yakov (the Russian coach of both Victor and Yuri P), and all the other members of the Russian national figure skating team, are like angels on earth who care and support Yuri K and Victor. No matter it is fantasy, misreading, or misinterpretation, such an idealistic portray of Russia and Russians to some extent corresponds with the aspiration of Kubo (2016), as she reassured her fans in a tweet that in the world of YOI, all sorts of lovers are welcome, respected, and supported.[32] In that sense, both the anime and the fan books of YOI turn Russia into a "Utopia", a place of love, hope, and wonders, like many dreamlands created by Japanese ACG, inspiring artists, writers, readers and fans to transgress and transcend the existing boundaries in the real world.

4 Conclusion

This paper has presented the imagined Russian identity in YOI in three aspects, namely Russia & Russians imagined by the anime, cross-cultural interaction between the Japanese and the Russian characters, and Russia fantasised by YOI fans. As Kubo announced with excitement that "We observed Yubileyny sports club in St. Petersburg" with a drawing illustrating the main characters of YOI,[33] the production team has endeavoured to mix reality and fantasy of Russia and Russians in this anime. The above discussions demonstrate that the imagined Russian identity provides both the YOI characters and audience with an idealistic world to realise their dreams. In addition, the cross-cultural

32 The original Japanese tweet by Kubo: "この作品を現実の皆さんがどのように思われても、この作品の世界の中では絶対に何かを好きになることで差別されたりはしないです。その世界だけは絶対に守ります。" (https://twitter.com/kubomitsurou/status/806843079244201985)

33 Source of image: https://www.instagram.com/p/BSm87-JgyZD/

communication and cultural hybridistion (especially *katsudon pirozhki*) highlighted in YOI and its fan books indicate an effort by the production team (and even the whole nation of Japan) to acquire the knowledge of Russia and Russian cultures, then turning it into something both "global" and "local".

By comparing the various adaptations and interpretations of "Russia/ Russians on ICE", my study contributes to the studies of Japanese ACG by triggering a further set of questions. Part of the success of YOI's globalisation is the fans' enthusiasm and support voiced on the Internet; given the rapid development of social media, would the issue of cultural appropriation be resolved by the "borderless" nature of online users, or rather intensified by the users' lack of awareness of the real local culture? Would the formulation of "Cool Japan" be applied to other cultures via ACG, such as the "Cool Russia" created by YOI? What if it is drastically different from the "real Russia"? How would the ACG audience perceive such a difference? With the forthcoming YOI anime film *ICE ADOLESCENCE*[34] in December 2019 (announced by the production team to be based on Victor's teenage life in Russia and Europe), I would expect more scholarly attention on the Russian elements of this new work. It is hoped that both YOI and *ICE ADOLESCENCE* will inspire future research to explore the above questions, though perhaps one thing is for sure at this stage: the borderlines of countries, cultures, and those between virtuality and reality, are blurring in the new world of Internet and multimedia.

34 Official website: https://yurionice-movie.com/en/

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