Japan and Television at
the Century's Turn

### 1996: Monday, 9 p.m.

*Long Vacation* is a primetime serial that centers on the
love relationship between an aging model with rapidly
narrowing career prospects and a young pianist about
to give up hope that he will ever make the big time.[1]
The drama features the top celebrities of 1990s Japan,
including Kimura Takuya, Yamaguchi Tomoko, Matsu
Takako, and Takenouchi Yutaka. Although the story
is so thinly drawn as to be practically nonexistent, the
drama is extraordinarily popular: the season finale
earned a rating of 36.7 percent in a period in which the
highest-rated drama in the United States, *E.R.*, could
barely reach the 20 percent mark. In 1996, *Long Vacation* came closest to television of earlier times in its
ability to draw large cross-segments of viewers to the
screen. Yet the show did not tackle concerns that occupied the majority of the population; nor did it address
problems that seemed crucial for the reproduction of
the national community. Instead, the serial concluded
with the piano player and the former model relocating

to Boston, with the last scene showing their friends joining them to attend their wedding ceremony.

### 2007: Sunday, 10 a.m.

The comedian Akashiya Sanma, one of the most popular celebrities in Japan, hosts a program that is sponsored by a different network almost every day. In all of these shows he plays himself, running off at the mouth and spending much of the time rolling on the floor with laughter. A talk show–variety show hybrid, the program I am watching features celebrity guests as well as non-celebrities who—in most cases—have come a long way to demonstrate some unique yet distinctly useless skill. In this episode, a fisherman is trying to catch a tangerine placed on a small train that is speeding around in circles. The discrepancy between the aura of earnestness imparted by the contestant's traditional fishing garb and the utter silliness of the challenge makes the situation comical. But what sends the program's host to the floor (and we shortly follow suit in front of the television) is that the fisherman keeps failing to catch the train-riding tangerine.

### 2002: Friday, 12:45 a.m.

A comedy duo known as London Boots and two young celebrity guests are sitting around a *kotatsu* (a traditional low wooden table with an electric heater underneath) in a tiny, under-furnished room, shooting the breeze over a simmering pot of *nabe*.[2] The game is the following: They have to answer questions on the cue of a studio staff member. If they answer correctly, they can enrich their dish with some lavish ingredient. If they are wrong, they will have to add an unappealing ingredient to their dinner. They rarely get an answer right, and the successive line of odd ingredients —banana, eel, strawberry shortcake, and Tabasco sauce—gradually increases the level of conviviality. The laughter of the studio staff reinforces the exaggerated casualness of the show. Staff members enter the camera frame (and our screen) only once or twice during the program to sneak a peak at the ever creepier consistency of the *nabe* dish. Yet we are made aware of their presence, as we constantly hear them laughing and making comments.

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The shows I have described are typical of the entertainment fare that Japanese commercial networks have been offering over the past two decades. They are flamboyant, often extravagantly budgeted, unhesitant to take risks, and resilient to analysis that interrogates them for ideological content. Their persuasive power comes from an intensity of affect. *Long Vacation*, for instance, captures viewers by flattering them as consumer connoisseurs who deserve nothing less than the best—the hottest celebrities and cutting-edge lifestyle trends they represent. Similarly, London Boots seduces viewers into a sense of belonging by addressing them as viewer connoisseurs who—unlike the uninitiated—know how to appreciate the studio staff's violation of an imagined boundary between televisual fiction and reality. These shows are character-driven, yet the characters do not embody sociocultural ideals. Rather, they epitomize lifestyles and attitudes. Sanma, for instance, laughs at the fisherman's unsuccessful attempts to express an attitude—perhaps one that defies the normative classification of an individual's life as either success or failure, itself an outmoded effect of the postwar era's preoccupation with economic growth. All of these programs offer a sense of belonging, albeit to a community different from the one that television produced during its heyday as a mass medium. This televisual community accommodates anyone, irrespective of nationality, who shares an understanding that attitude and lifestyle are central to identity in a world in which affective alliances have become powerful sources of identification.

This book analyzes televisual culture in Japan of the 1990s, with a focus on a new genre of primetime serials, the trendy drama (*torendii dorama*).[3] I posit that this genre was instrumental in changing television by leading to the proliferation of programs such as those I have just described. Long predating the HBO show *Sex and the City* and the more recent CW serial *Gossip Girl*, trendy dramas such as *Long Vacation* saturated their viewers with information on lifestyle trends by entertaining them with images of well-heeled young sophisticates who personify ultra-hip attitudes and enjoy consumer-oriented lifestyles while managing their love lives. These dramas epitomized television production's move away from signification to affect—in other words, from story-driven entertainment to lifestyle-oriented fare. The concomitant erosion of the boundary between entertainment and advertising opened new opportunities for further tie-ins across domestic media and leisure industries and enhanced the post-

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Fordist flexibility of the Japanese television industry. The trendy drama revitalized television at a time when mass media were rapidly losing their appeal in the wake of market fragmentation.

Anthropologists have analyzed television serials predominantly as projects that aim to establish unified visions of the modern nation and produce modern citizens (Abu-Lughod 2005; Mankekar 1999). By the mid-1980s, the simultaneous diversification of consumers' preferences and the stratification of purchasing power in Japan marked a shift in balance from family-oriented mass consumption to niche-driven consumer practices. Because they depended on revenue from advertising, commercial television networks could no longer avoid responding to marketers' demands to reach increasingly narrowing segments of the consumer market. Trendy dramas do not unite the population by interpellating them as members of particular national communities. Instead, by appealing to viewers' individuality, these serials increasingly separate viewers from each other and reunite them into new lifestyle collectivities and affective alliances. Yet ironically, in a context in which protectionist trade policies have eradicated the distinction between the concepts of the nation-state and the national market, these serials also reinforce membership in a televisual community that is essentially nationally based. This book thus asks: How are we to reconceptualize television for anthropological studies of society and subjectivity when this medium, which has been central to their reproduction, abandons its role of molding people of all backgrounds into a mass market and begins instead to compartmentalize the population into ever more distinct lifestyle collectivities? Further, how should conventional analytical models be revised to better understand the ways in which television forges selves and produces new forms of community?

### Japan in the 1990s: Recession, Class, and Lifestyle

Regarded as the "lost decade" or, even more pessimistically, as Japan's "second defeat" (the first being in the Second World War), the 1990s saw the collapse of Japan's unique economic system and a prolonged recession. The attempts to piece together explanations for the bursting of Japan's economic bubble (characterized by a massive rise in stock and land prices in the 1980s) are profuse and various. However, there seems to be a consensus that three features of industrial relations—government-

coordinated industrial policy, the *keiretsu* system, and Japan's unique human-resource-management system—were vital in safeguarding economic growth in the postwar period (Gao 2001; Tezuka 1997). A brief overview of these institutions is in order here, for their collapse, along with the concomitant erosion of the social order on which they depended, is pertinent to understanding the development of the trendy drama.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI; now the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry [METI]), the Japanese government played a central role in regulating industrial and labor relations by controlling the competition among domestic corporations. At the same time, by subsidizing unprofitable businesses, MITI was successful in preventing rapid increases in unemployment. Similarly, the keiretsu system served to keep unemployment rates at low levels by functioning as a mutual insurance system. Keiretsu refers to large industrial groups characterized by minority cross-shareholding, regular communication of top executives, and general cooperation for mutual benefit. Within the keiretsu, employment was virtually guaranteed, as members were committed to protecting each other from dropping out of competition. The third guardian of Japan's economic growth was the human-resource-management system. It functioned as a welfare program, offering a guarantee that an employer would keep its career-track male employees on the payroll until retirement.

By the 1990s, overpriced labor and government-coordinated competition were impeding economic growth. In response, Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryūtaro initiated the Big Bang plan in 1996.[4] As implied by the plan's slogan, "Free, Fair and Global," Hashimoto's cabinet tried to reform Japan's ailing economy by redefining the parameters of competition. The slogan highlights the importance of free-market principles and participation in the global economy, both of which would have had a profound impact on the institutional pillars of the era of high economic growth and, by extension, on labor and class relations. While companies tried to avoid massive layoffs, they were less capable of avoiding early retirement, transfers to lower-paying positions at subsidiaries, and, most important, hiring freezes. This meant that young people—the target audience of the trendy drama—were among the populations most affected by the recession. At the same time, younger generations were increasingly unwilling to follow in the footsteps of their parents by entering a social contract that would

reward their hard work with a financially secure yet highly regimented life. This expression of disillusionment, however, was nothing but mere self-consolation in a condition in which fewer and fewer career-track positions were available that would have required this type of commitment.

In Japan of the 1990s, a sense of nostalgia loomed over the discourses of the economic slowdown, and the term "recession" provided a consoling frame by suggesting that the economic slump was in fact transient. Although the rhetoric of the recession conveyed optimism that the postwar industrial structure and sociopolitical institutions could be revitalized to sustain economic growth, by the early 2000s it would become clear that in the 1990s Japanese capitalism had undergone something of a sea change. Whether the recession was a result of too much or too little deregulation has been the subject of impassioned debates. Whether the socioeconomic transformations of the 1990s can be understood as a shift from a liberal to a neoliberal mode of governance is a question that divides Japan scholars. It is, however, safe to say that what took place in 1990s Japan was a transition from an economic model in which the government was central to ensuring the smooth functioning of the market to a new model in which the self-regulating principles of the market started gaining an increasingly vital role in safeguarding economic growth.

An important social consequence of economic deregulation—and a pertinent backdrop to understanding the trendy dramas' preoccupation with lifestyle (*ikikata sutairu*)—was the demise of mass middle-class society (*chūkan taishū shakai*), a social formation that constituted 90 percent of the population (Vogel 1965). From the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, steady economic growth had made a range of mass commodities available to the majority of the citizenry. At the same time, the expanding mass media had tremendous success in valorizing middle-class values (Ivy 1993). While a middle-class way of life had an enormously broad appeal in the postwar decades, mass middle-class society was not so much a reality as a social construct.[5] Scholars have noted that in the early postwar period, during which the population was united under the umbrella of trauma and desire for a quick economic recovery (Gordon 2002), the hegemonization of mainstream consciousness (*chūryū ishiki*) served economic-growth strategies by rallying the population around a common goal (Kelly 2002). William Kelly suggests that the real effect of the rhetoric of mass middle-class society was to downplay and neutralize debates about social stratification,

for the valorization of mainstream consciousness "has been a process of restructuring and standardizing differences around new axes rather than homogenizing lifestyles and equalizing life chances" (Kelly 2002, 236; see also Kelly and White 2006). In fact, gaps in income and educational attainment had already started to widen in the wake of the recession following the oil crisis of the mid-1970s. The crumbling of Japan's unique industrial system in the 1990s was but the final factor in the destabilization of the ideological foundations of mass middle-class society.

The trendy dramas' preoccupation with lifestyle—an emphasis on the freedom of the individual to choose her own way of life—was not only a new strategy to reinvent television in the wake of market segmentation, as I will argue in the next section. The rhetoric of lifestyle in primetime serials also played a vital role in mediating the changing politics of class in Japan of the 1990s. In the postwar decades, television has been instrumental in producing mass middle-class society by targeting housewives (*shufu*) and salarymen (*sarariman*),[6] who epitomized middle-class status and were the custodians of middle-class values. However, maintaining the phantasm of mass middle-class society was increasingly difficult, as the disintegration of this social formation was increasingly visible, and in parallel, advertisers were losing faith in the efficacy of mass-marketing. Instead, they started looking for differences in consumers' disposable income and ways to capitalize on those differences. Toward the end of the twentieth century, scholars observed a marked shift toward the increased segmentation of the consumer market in the advanced capitalist world. Susan Strasser (1989) has noted that segmentation has coexisted with the mass market from the beginning of modern consumer culture, but she stresses that in the late 1980s the passion for targeting tightly defined groups codified increasing class distinctions. In other words, by the late 1980s in the United States, the rhetoric of lifestyle had become a coded way for marketing and media professionals to less hesitantly discuss and capitalize on class differences.

The trendy dramas' focus on lifestyle suggests that Japanese marketers and media professionals deployed similar strategies to chart the changing social terrain. By adopting new approaches to pursue consumers—for example, by using new targeting criteria such as psychographics (i.e., features of lifestyle and attitude)—Japanese marketers skillfully articulated differences among people while rendering the concept of class obsolete. The televisual obsession with lifestyle projected the impression that class sim-

ply was not an issue in Japan in the 1990s. What made lifestyle such an ideal discursive tool to navigate changing class relations and to offer new forms of identification in the 1990s was the concept's semantic fluidity. Lifestyle is a "blending of income, generation, marital status, and gender into a soup of geographical and psychological profiles" (Turow 2007, 24), but more commonly it is understood as a statement about who one is in society and who one is not (Solomon 2008). Although fraught with ambiguities, lifestyle is an appealing tool for marketers because it suggests to consumers that they can freely choose social selves for themselves while excluding as a basis for identity the position they hold within the system of production (Twitchell 2000).

However, class is not simply an affiliation of identity that designates the place of an individual in the social order based on her occupation or consumption habits; it also expresses an individual's identification with a group of people who are united by mutual interests (Williams 1976). Thus, by substituting class for lifestyle, media professionals also realign the parameters within which new collectivities can be imagined. Robin Andersen (1995) has observed that lifestyle, as a strategy to unite consumers in terms of shared buying patterns and attitudes, does not correspond to sociological categories such as real social communities defined as interest groups. Marketers invite consumers to join new collectivities by offering them a sense of belonging by virtue of sharing the same good taste. Yet these lifestyle collectivities can only masquerade as real communities, for their members are not socially interdependent and are not allied by shared interests. Put differently, lifestyle communities are collectivities without any form of authentic solidarity.

In the 1990s, the televisual rhetoric of lifestyle that celebrated difference in terms of individualism helped absorb anxieties over growing class differences. Indeed, Prime Minister Obuchi Keizo's *Commission on Japan's Goals in the Twenty-first Century* seems to resonate with televisual and marketing constructions of the new classless society.[7] It attacks mass middle-class society as the archenemy of individualism and stresses that egalitarianism impedes individuals' willingness to take risks and to use their creativity. Instead, it calls for systems that are capable of adequately rewarding "the efforts of those who take risks and display excellence underpinned by a pioneer spirit."[8] Thomas Lemke's analysis of neoliberal governmentality helps us to understand the relationship between the report's attack on

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egalitarianism and its silence on growing structural inequalities. According to Lemke (2001, 200), "The neoliberal program seeks to create neither a disciplining nor a normalizing society, but instead a society characterized by the fact that it cultivates and optimizes differences. It is therefore neither necessary nor desirable for a society to exhibit unlimited conformity." Similarly, Jean and John Comaroff (2001, 15) note that the neoliberal condition "render[s] ever more obscure the rooting of inequality in structures of production." When individualism is sanctioned as the foundation of selfhood, they surmise, class comes to be understood as yet another lifestyle choice.

In the context of a shift toward a neoliberal form of governance, the trendy dramas' lifestyle rhetoric was key in reconciling the growing dissonance between new governmental discourses on personal responsibility and older respect for hierarchy, social consensus, and mainstream consciousness. Lifestyle, individualism, and personal responsibility are keywords in the vocabulary of neoliberalism, and in the 1990s these concepts served to mobilize youth to accept new consumer and labor regimes, as well as shifting structures of exploitation (Arai 2006; Driscoll 2007). In this period, commercial television networks did not simply mediate socioeconomic changes. They simultaneously capitalized on them and were affected by them. The development of the trendy drama suggests that the revitalization of television in the recessionary 1990s was not simply a matter of ideological adjustment. In the wake of dramatic socioeconomic changes, television networks were struggling with their own problems. Thus, to preserve commercial television's central role in the domestic service economy, networks had to adjust their operations, the ways in which they pursued audiences, and the textual and stylistic norms they employed in their programs. Social and industrial factors were intimately intertwined in the development of trendy drama, and they played equally important roles in determining the ways in which these serials performed their transformational work on social anxieties and fantasies.

### Television in the Era of Market Fragmentation

Television production remained a profitable business throughout the recession. The three largest commercial networks—Fuji, Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), and Nippon Television (NTV)—all invested fortunes in ex-

panding their headquarters in the 1990s, suggesting that the economic slump left the television industry's finances largely unaffected. Indeed, market fragmentation, which was a major headache for Japanese broadcasters, predated the recession. However, this is not to say that the economic slowdown had no impact on the television industry. The recession intensified the stratification of purchasing power, a trend that gave networks an additional incentive to listen more carefully to marketers who had already begun investing in media platforms that, unlike television, were capable of reaching more narrowly defined market segments. In the second half of the 1980s, television networks realized that the economic imperative of reaching the largest possible audience by offering them middle-of-the-road narrative entertainment was no longer a viable business strategy in the face of new demands for more versatile and customized entertainment. The challenge posed to mass media by market fragmentation was by no means unique to Japan. In the 1980s, the U.S. television industry was plagued by the same problem. (These are the two largest television industries in the world, and both are self-sustaining.) A brief critical analysis of the industrial context from a comparative perspective will illuminate how industrial structures become vital in determining which stories television professionals will tell, which character portrayals they will privilege, and which audience segments they will prioritize.

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Although Japanese viewers have always had a significant preference for domestic programming, media globalization has posed an additional challenge to the Japanese television industry in the condition of market fragmentation. In the late 1980s, transnational media were increasingly interested in gaining a toehold in the lucrative Japanese market. As market diversification was intensifying, domestic networks faced the danger of losing to transnational media certain audience segments to which they could not offer more customized programming. Thus, to protect the Japanese market from transnational media, the Japanese television industry could not avoid undergoing structural adjustments to enable it to cater to more diversified domestic audiences. This is exactly how the Taiwanese television industry lost the lucrative local youth market to Japanese trendy dramas. Operating as a rigid system of mass production ill equipped to cater entertainment to the splintering local market, the Taiwanese television industry was slower than its Japanese counterpart in responding to market diversification and continued to produce family-oriented television

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dramas for middle-aged housewives. In this context, young female Tai-wanese viewers, who had become dynamic consumers to a degree similar to that of their Japanese peers, found themselves without local programming to watch.[9] It was in this vacuum that they turned to Japanese (and American) television dramas that carried fashion- and leisure-related information of interest to them.

A corresponding example is the favorable reception of the Korean drama *Winter Sonata* in Japan in 2004. It was broadcast on the national public broadcasting channel (NHK) in late-night hours, and its high ratings perplexed Japanese media critics because no foreign program had been successful in competing with domestic programming since the early 1960s. The most plausible explanation for the success of *Winter Sonata*, I have heard from Japanese media practitioners, is that this drama was popular among middle-aged women who felt marginalized in the 1990s, when most networks focused their attention on young single women. The popularity of Japanese drama serials in Taiwan and the sympathetic reception of a Korean serial in Japan confirm that, in the wake of market fragmentation, transnational media pose a very real threat even to self-sustaining national television industries.

The conflict between the diversification of consumer demands and the television industry's Fordist system of production was not specific to Japan. Fordism, the dominant mode of capital accumulation between the mid-1940s and the mid-1970s, designates a particular strategy that safeguards economic growth by integrating mass consumption and mass production. In the context of the United States, Fordist system of production also refers to a particular type of vertically integrated corporation in which a company maintains control over every aspect of the production process. For the Hollywood film industry specifically, this meant that the major studios controlled film production and distribution, in addition to owning the cinemas where their films were screened (Gomery 1986). Because these vertically integrated corporations held monopolies, they did not need to worry about consumer demand. This system, however, collapsed as a result of the antitrust ruling of 1948, which forced the studios to sell their theaters. The emergence of television at the same time offered a cheap and convenient alternative to going to the movies. This expansion in media entertainment, along with changes in lifestyles such as suburbanization, has engendered a simultaneous diversification in consumer taste

(Schatz 1997). While access to global markets arguably expanded the life-span of Hollywood's Fordist production line of entertainment that was "the least objectionable to the largest number of viewers," mass-produced fare started losing its appeal for consumers with increasingly individualized tastes in the 1980s.

Hollywood's response, as Michael Wayne (2003) suggests, took the form of post-Fordist decentralized accumulation—namely, a shift from vertical to horizontal integration and the cultivation of synergies tying together different types of media and non-media industries within one parent company. Hollywood began as a single-sector industry (film only) and transformed into a dual-sector media industry (encompassing both film and television). Today it is the center of a multi-sector, integrated culture industry producing films, television programs, videos, books, comics, music soundtracks, computer games, theme parks, and merchandise. For example, by 2001 Disney—the third-largest media and entertainment corporation in the world after Time Warner and News Corporation—owned television and cable channels;[10] parks and resorts; studio entertainment in the realm of film, television, and video;[11] and consumer products, including merchandising and licensing of Disney products.[12]

In the mid-1980s, in response to the progressive splintering of audiences, the U.S. television industry started to experiment with horizontal integration, as well.[13] In the context of the television industry, horizontal integration takes the form of multi-channel narrowcasting. The Discovery Network, for example, now comprises the Learning Channel, Discovery Health, Animal Planet, the Science Channel, Discovery Kids, Discovery en Español, Planet Green, the Military Channel, Investigation Discovery, Turbo, HD Weather, and FitTV. This type of horizontal integration and niche targeting would not have been possible without the deregulation of program production and distribution, the first step toward which was the abolition of the so-called fin-syn (financial interest and syndication) rules in 1995. These rules prohibited networks from holding a stake in program ownership and having a financial stake in syndicating the programs they aired. It also limited the number of hours of programming per week that they could produce. The fin-syn rules were a way to separate program production and distribution and to create an environment in which networks made decisions about what to air based purely on content and not on their financial interests (Lotz 2007). As soon as the rules were eliminated, networks began

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populating their schedules with shows purchased from studios they owned (e.g., NBC owns NBC Universal Television Studio) or from their affiliates. By allowing the networks to coordinate production and distribution again, the abolition of the fin-syn rules prepared the ground for horizontal integration, which in many respects is not unlike vertical integration (Schatz 1997).

Horizontal integration was the solution for Japanese commercial broadcasters, as well. Curiously, however, in the context of the Japanese television industry it did not come with the deregulation of program production and distribution. In many ways, Japanese television networks have retained their vertically integrated structure. Japanese networks own the production facilities where they produce what they air. These programs remain the property of the networks and will not be syndicated to other domestic networks. While Japanese broadcasters order feature-length narrative films from independent production studios, the films are also co-produced with television networks that assign their own producers to oversee the entire process, from casting through postproduction editing. Instead of the deregulation of program production and distribution, Japanese commercial broadcasters adopted horizontal integration in the late 1980s by expanding their business tie-ins and cross-branding practices with other media and leisure industries. Networks drew on older industrial practices to advance horizontal integration. On one hand, they capitalized on the *tarento* system—celebrities who perform in various media genres simultaneously—which worked miracles in increasing the appeal of television in the 1990s. On the other hand, networks redesigned their system of program slots (*wakugumi*), which enabled them to target distinctive subsets of viewers in particular time slots. The remodeled system of program slots also helped networks renegotiate the terms of domestic competition among themselves. In addition, they could make the argument to advertisers that while they offered them smaller segments of the consumer market, these segments were more precisely defined. Further, they stressed that while the target groups shrank, they consisted of loyal consumers, for "as you get narrower in interest, you tend to have more intensity of interest" (Mark Edmiston, the former president of Newsweek Inc., cited in Curtin 1996, 190). The tarento system and the system of program slots will be explored in chapters 1 and 3.

While the Japanese and the U.S. television industries adopted different

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forms of horizontal integration to accommodate market fragmentation, some of the newly emerging textual norms, stylistic features, and audience priorities were strikingly similar in the two contexts. In both media environments, erosion of the audience (along with commercial-skipping technology such as TiVo and other digital video recorders) has made advertisers more concerned about the efficiency of conventional commercial formats. This skepticism, in turn, pressured networks to experiment with redrawing the line between advertising and entertainment content. Branded entertainment, for instance, refers to producers' embedding products into the content of a show, weaving messages of commercial nature within the script and scenery of the program (Sandler 2007). An example is the use of GMC Yukon Hybrids in the CBS series *CSI Las Vegas*. Instead of an intrusive promotion shoved in the face of audiences, this type of advertising is believed to be more appealing to viewers because it is seamlessly integrated into the content. Curiously, a particular version of branded entertainment —as we will see in the context of the development of the trendy drama— had become a mainstream practice in Japan in the late 1980s, as well. In both contexts, branded entertainment was accompanied by a more general emphasis on style over content. John Caldwell's theory of televisuality— the televisual culture of stylistic exhibitionism in the late 1980s United States—is pertinent here. He writes: "In several important programming and institutional areas, television moved from a framework that approached broadcasting primarily as a form of word-based rhetoric and transmission, with all the issues that such terms suggest, to a visually based mythology, framework, and aesthetic based on an extreme self-consciousness of style" (Caldwell 1995, 4). Caldwell sees stylistic opulence characteristic of late 1980s Hollywood as a strategy by which primetime producers tried to protect market share in the face of audience fragmentation and an increasingly competitive national market.

In the Japanese context, the new emphasis on style was also a strategy to draw to television style-conscious young women—the new affluent segment of the population that advertisers became interested in reaching in the late 1980s. This indeed is another commonalty between the U.S. and the Japanese television industries. In Amanda Lotz's opinion, the proliferation of female-centered dramas in the 1990s United States suggests that U.S. television networks started addressing the problem of market fragmentation by producing programs for *women* "because of the extent to

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which they are and are not a niche" (Lotz 2006, 28). However, in the Japanese context, trendy dramas did not just target *women*. Rather, they were produced for *young single women*. In the late 1980s the primetime targeting of such a micro-niche by Japanese broadcasters seemed like a significant risk to take for large commercial broadcasters. In chapters 4 and 5 I explore why targeting this segment was the most reasonable way to introduce flexibility into the television industry's Fordist system of production. Although this section aims to attest to the relevance of a political economy approach to anthropological studies of television, chapters 4 and 5 will also highlight some of the limits of this approach and propose its integration with an ethnography of the socioeconomic context in which television is produced and consumed. In particular, these chapters will highlight that in the late 1980s Japanese commercial networks started targeting young women not simply because these viewers had appreciable disposable incomes. An equally pertinent factor in the networks' focus was that during this period young women occupied a privileged position in the discursive renegotiations of national subjectivity.

As with branded entertainment in the United States, style in trendy dramas, which had been "a mere signifier and vessel for content, issues, and ideas," itself became the "privileged and showcased signified" (Caldwell 1995, 5). The stylistic excess of trendy dramas spurred a shift in program production from an emphasis on stories (signification) to one on lifestyles (affect). Lifestyle-driven programs were not only more appealing to style-conscious young viewers; they were also more conducive to new forms of marketing. Just as important, lifestyle-driven shows played an important role in mediating the problematic of class in the 1990s—a period that witnessed the erosion of mass middle-class society. Trendy dramas not only forged new selves by offering new character portrayals; they also fostered new types of collectivities through new ways of pursuing viewers such as adopting psychographic targeting. While helping networks to acclimate to market fragmentation in the 1990s, the trendy drama was also vital in reestablishing television as a central cultural producer.

### Fieldwork: Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

This book builds on twenty months of fieldwork among television professionals in the three largest Japanese commercial networks (Fuji, TBS, and NTV) and viewers of trendy drama in Tokyo between October 2001 and May 2003. I spent four years in Tokyo—from 1995 to 1997 and from 2001 to 2003. During my stay between 1995 and 1997, the popularity of the trendy drama peaked, and the fieldwork I started in 2001 corresponded to the period in which the phenomenon started to wane. The creator of the genre, Ōta Tōru (2004, 82), characterized the state of drama production in a 2001 interview: "the sea remains calm for a while after a big wave. I think now it is that windless time." I conducted my fieldwork during that windless time.

For a study with a focus on drama production, curiously, the eclipse of the genre turned out to be an advantage, because for television professionals the windless time was also the time for industrial self-analysis and self-reflection. As television producers were pondering how to increase ratings for their primetime programs, they were also heavily invested in analyzing the success of trendy dramas. As my interest lay in understanding how the trendy drama reinvented the Japanese television industry by mediating and capitalizing on the socioeconomic changes of the late 1980s and 1990s, the timing of my fieldwork turned out to be ideal. At the same time, research on a televisual genre whose popularity was waning prompted me to reconsider the adequacy of conventional fieldwork methods of gathering data for an anthropological study of television. To analyze the development of the trendy drama as rooted in a specific social and historical formation, I complemented traditional ethnographic fieldwork with collecting data from less conventional sources. Specifically, for this project I complemented structured and semi-structured interviews with television professionals with interviews with television professionals published in trade journals and popular magazines. Similarly, I complemented structured and semi-structured interviews with television viewers with comments posted by viewers about dramas on Internet bulletin boards and blog sites. In the course of my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with fourteen television professionals, each of whom worked as a producer or director for one of the three largest commercial networks. I also interviewed five freelance scriptwriters. In addition to the interviews, I conducted partici-

pant observation at TBS, where I was introduced to the structure of the television industry and to the basics of program production. Finally, I observed the creation of a drama serial by attending brainstorming sessions (*uchiawase*) one of my writer informants had with the producers.

Caldwell has noted that the tremendous labor television professionals invest in producing and distributing industrial self-analyses to the public complicates the practice of fieldwork in the context of the television industry. He writes: "The fact that the new industrial narcissus places so much of this self-consciousness on the screen, outside, and in public makes traditional scholarly questions about 'behind-the-scenes' or 'authentic' industry 'inside' seem rather beside the point" (Caldwell 2008, 1). Indeed, I have derived much inspiration and many ideas from trade journals; newspaper articles on dramas; interviews with television professionals that appeared in daily newspapers and weekly or monthly magazines; memoirs; and essay collections written by scriptwriters and producers. I gleaned bits and pieces of information on dramas and their makers not only from respectable trade journals but also by leafing through thousands of tabloid pages featuring sensationalist stories of celebrity scandals.

My study of audience reception was based on a sample of thirty-four female viewers and twelve male viewers, whom I met numerous times. I limited my sample to the target demographic, but my conversations with my informants were not confined to television dramas or to television more broadly. Because their informational value expires rapidly, and because their main selling point is not the story but information on the latest trends, trendy dramas are produced for one-time viewing. Reruns of trendy dramas are generally avoided and never occur during primetime; the dramas are rebroadcast only as promotions—for instance, as vignettes in a retrospective on the works of a particular celebrity cast in a new drama. By offering a rich archive of viewers' opinions on dramas over time, the Internet compensated for the fact that I was unable to interview viewers while they were watching the serials. I used Internet sources by assembling comments about particular dramas that I analyzed for recurrent themes and for commonalties with themes that emerged in my interviews with television viewers.

While many anthropologists have highlighted a rupture between scholarly work in their native countries and fieldwork somewhere else (see Marcus 1998), in many respects my fieldwork among television practi-

tioners was continuous with my life as an academic. Writing letters to producers asking them to meet me was not so very different from writing proposals requesting funding to conduct research. These letters had to be carefully crafted; they had to give a clear explanation of my project and highlight the aspects I wanted to discuss with interviewees. My interviews with television professionals took weeks to prepare. My interviewees wanted to receive my questions in advance, and I watched and re-watched their dramas to write questions that both advanced my research agenda and convinced my informants that it would be rewarding for them to carve time out of their already overloaded schedules to meet me.

I learned from my informants in drama production not only about their work, but also about their survival strategies in a highly competitive industry—an environment not dissimilar to that of North American academia. While I anticipated that fieldwork among people in positions of power would be stressful, contrary to my expectations I genuinely enjoyed working with television professionals. Television production in Japan is an environment in which only the smartest and toughest people endure. Most of the television professionals with whom I met were exceptionally bright.

Going far beyond what I asked them to do, which was to provide me with information, they constantly pushed me to discuss my thesis with them. Some of them sent me long e-mails after our meeting, presenting me with new perspectives from which I could examine this complex business. For a fieldworker, it was an ideal working environment.

Similarly, the scriptwriters I met—all of them women—were remarkable individuals. I particularly admired the grace with which they negotiated the contradictions involved in doing creative work while striving to turn a profit. While producers and directors were full-time employees of television networks, scriptwriters were freelancers. Without any institutional safety net, writers were required to be not only extremely creative but also tremendously hardworking. One scriptwriter told me that once when she was working on a drama, she did not leave her apartment for a whole month. Most of my informants had similar stories of endurance, including eleven-hour brainstorming sessions, unstoppable nosebleeds, hernias, nervous breakdowns, and depression. Many of these female scriptwriters were very different from their target audiences. While female viewers seemed to appreciate stories concluding with the heroine's marriage to a socially

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successful and handsome man (implying that they would become full-time homemakers), all of the scriptwriters I met lived on the income they earned. One of them told me that she found the Cinderella story, on which many trendy dramas were based, just pathetic. These women did not have trouble relating to me. They perceived us as similar: women who do not think about their work as an interim phase in life, eventually to end their careers to become stay-at-home mothers. (This has been the dominant life course for middle-class Japanese women in the postwar period.)

My research on television reception was a somewhat different experience from gathering information from television professionals. While drama workers were comfortable with interviews and typically came to our meetings prepared, many female viewers I met did not understand, at least at the outset, how someone could do serious research on something as unserious as television dramas. In other words, many of my informants wondered about, and in some cases straightforwardly questioned the suitability of, television dramas as the subject of academic research. They reasoned that work in general was boring and tedious, while dramas were fun and enjoyable. In other words, dramas were supposed to make one forget about work. It took me a while to understand that my relationship to my work was a sensitive issue to some of my informants. Most of my female interviewees had graduated from two-year women's colleges, which meant that the work available to them was not necessarily appealing. These women had no choice but to leave the business of moneymaking to their husbands. I realized that to be able to connect with my viewer informants, I had to be careful about how I spoke about work so as not to antagonize them and remind them of their vulnerability.

Although audience reception is not the focus of this study, I have learned crucial lessons from my conversations with viewers. My most pertinent observation was that viewers did not seem to enjoy discussing the stories of trendy dramas with me. They seemed more comfortable chatting about the tarento who were also the center of drama discussions on anonymous blog sites and other Internet-based drama forums. Indeed, I never ceased to be surprised by the massive amount of knowledge viewers acquired about the tarento. I was struck by the sheer volume of detail my informants could command about the personal and public lives of media celebrities. It was precisely this aspect of my reception research that directed my

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attention toward the importance of lifestyle in trendy dramas and the ways that television professionals capitalized on the tarento system to heighten the emphasis on lifestyle.

Deriving inspiration from the anthropology of media that enjoyed some sort of a boom while I was designing my project (Ginsburg et al. 2002; Mankekar 1999), I began my fieldwork with an interest in how primetime dramas reproduced a sense of national community in the wake of dramatic socioeconomic changes in the 1990s. However, the first realization I reached was that this approach was not as seamlessly applicable to commercial television networks as it was to the government-controlled media on which anthropologists have primarily focused. Additionally, this analytical framework was not very helpful in a period in which the television industry itself was undergoing a transformation. The fact that television's industrial system was changing required me to step outside the field of anthropology and borrow analytical tools from other disciplines such as media studies. Yet an interest in how television produced certain subjectivities coupled with an understanding of media consumption as always embedded in a wide web of other social practices persistently distanced me from media studies. This position and this approach were less common among media scholars, who tend to be interested in people only insofar as they are engaged with media.

Anthropological studies of television, on the other hand, tend to privilege an interest in the viewers (and less often producers) of media, stressing that it is exactly a focus on "people and their social relations—as opposed to media texts or technology" (Ginsburg 1994, 13) that distinguishes an anthropological approach to media from other disciplinary approaches. Because "the strength of anthropology lies in its concern with people and lived practices" (Askew 2004, 2), even when anthropologists study people's engagement with media, they emphasize that media consumption is only one aspect of individuals' lives and it thus has to be analyzed in dialogue with other aspects of their informants' experiences. In anthropology, however, this focus on the consumers of media often comes together with a perception of media institutions as static entities that function as ideological apparatuses of governments.[14]

At the same time, anthropological studies of media assume television to be a mass medium and attribute much of its importance to this characteristic. Lotz (2007, 33) has noted that this understanding has had quite a

broad appeal in media and cultural studies, as well: "The notion of mass media and the scale of such businesses are important to political economy approaches examining the assemblage and distribution of labor and capital, while the mass audience was crucial to cultural approaches because of the necessity for programs to be widely shared within culture." Anthropologists have adopted this understanding, arguing that the significance of the medium was exactly that—as Michael Curtin (1996, 181) put it—it provided a common hearth where people gathered "both to be warmed by popular entertainment and to reflect upon the most pressing issues of the day" (see also Askew 2004; Dickey 1997; Ginsburg et al. 2002; Spitulnik 1993). For instance, in mapping the field of what she calls the anthropology of culture and media, Faye Ginsburg (1994, 9) considers "visual media as distinctive artifacts through which the societies and cultures that produce them are reproduced and contested or changed." Inspired by Benedict Anderson's work on the role of print media in the construction of imagined communities (1983)—most notably, the nation-state—anthropological projects on television often draw on the assumption that the study of television is also the study of the nation (Mankekar 1999; Abu-Lughod 2005; Wilk 2002). It seems to me, however, that Curtin (1996, 185) has a point when he argues that television as a mass medium is "a symptomatic expression of a social order built upon a historically specific form of capitalism." This observation brings me to an obvious but nevertheless noteworthy claim: television is not static. Further, as media scholars have emphasized, television's mode of production has had an impact on the politics of television (including stylistic and narrative forms and strategies of pursuing audiences) that we cannot neglect. "The production base," Caldwell (1995, 7) writes, "is both a product of shifting cultural and economic needs and a factor that affects how we receive and utilize television."

My argument that the development of the trendy drama was symptomatic of a shift from narrative- to lifestyle-oriented entertainment has derived from my observation that the tarento were not only central to drama producers; they were also the main source of pleasure for viewers. In other words, I would not have seen this connection without bringing the sites of drama production and audience reception into the same frame of study. By highlighting that the key source of enjoyment in watching dramas is not primarily the dramas' narrative arc but, rather, the information provided on consumer trends, I aim to underline the limitations inherent in the

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popular approach that focuses on analyzing ideologies encoded in mass culture for understanding agency and pleasure.[15] In studies of television, agency is often equated with the power of television professionals to encode messages in their programs (Hall 1980 [1973]; Morley 1980). Agency is also understood as the ability of viewers to make choices in decoding meanings within the semiotic confines of televisual texts. In chapters 2 and 4, I aim to show that in a media economy in which the line between entertainment and advertising is increasingly blurred, agency cannot be understood without going beyond a focus on the text and without bringing audience reception and program production into dialogue with each other.

I alluded previously to the intimate relationship between Fordist media production and the approach that centers on analyzing mass culture for ideological content. Here, I want to suggest that in the same way that post-Fordist production strives ''toward a continual interactivity or rapid communication between production and consumption'' (Hardt and Negri 2000, 290), research on post-Fordist media requires a more dynamic analytical framework that links these two realms. Because it could count on stable demand, Fordism was based on a unidirectional flow of communication between production and consumption. Post-Fordism, on the other hand, is based on the idea that production planning is constantly informed by fresh data on market conditions, and commodities will be produced according to the most recent demands of the market. In the fields of media studies and cultural anthropology, television production and reception have been examined separately (Ang 1985; Davila 2001; Dornfeld 1998; Morley 1992). This trend reflects an understanding of television as a mass medium whose producers and consumers are not in dialogue with one another. My study of the trendy drama, however, illustrates that the growing need for mediation between production and reception leads to an increasing degree of interdependence between these realms.[16] Trendy dramas depart from their predecessors in that their producers increasingly engage viewers in program production. I will show that by involving viewers in drama production, television networks appropriate the power to draw the parameters within which viewers will find the programs pleasurable. I do not question the capability of viewers to decode televisual texts in ways unintended by their producers. I do, however, aim to highlight the fact that in the era of lifestyle-driven, post-textual televisual production, the crucial site of conflict over meaning—what Stuart Hall (1980 [1973])

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called semiotic warfare—previously located between producers and viewers has moved to the realm of program production, which has become the primary ground where dominant values and subjectivities are contested and reproduced. Further, I suggest that the relationship between producers and viewers should be understood not as semiotic warfare but as a semiotic game.

Although a concern with Japan and Japaneseness is not as central to my study as it has been to many other ethnographic studies of Japan, I consider this book to be in dialogue with Japan studies.[17] The trendy drama is less amenable to a discussion of Japaneseness than other popular cultural forms such as *enka* (sentimental songs reminiscent of the traditional *min'yō* genre) or as the all-female Takarazuka Revue. The former has been more explicitly mobilized in the public construction of Japaneseness (Yano 2003), while the latter was deployed ''as a powerful instrument in forging a national culture'' (Robertson 1998, 91). In trendy dramas, Japaneseness is not invoked in the same way. In fact, the genre is produced for a segment of the population, young single women, who in the 1990s were commonly derided for their antipatriotic attitudes and were represented in the popular media as the nemesis of the salaryman—the emblem of national prosperity.

While this book does not prioritize a focus on the construction of a nation and its subjects, it does suggest that the trendy dramas generate a space where viewers gain an understanding of the communities to which they belong in terms of the codes they share as consumers. Néstor García Canclini (2001, 43) has written: ''The definition of a nation, for example, is given less at this stage by its territorial limits or its political history. It survives, rather, as an interpretive community of consumers.'' In Japan, where protectionist trade policies tend to eradicate the distinction between the concepts of the nation-state and the national market, the consumption of information on local consumer trends presented by domestic media revives and reinforces membership in the national community. In other words, by enabling their viewers to participate in Japanese consumer culture, trendy dramas become venues for viewers to embrace a form of membership that resonates with García Canclini's (2001) notion of consumer citizenship. For instance, while abroad young women continue to watch Japanese trendy dramas to stay informed on the current consumer and cultural trends in Japan. This practice suggests that trendy dramas did enable young female viewers to think of themselves as members of the

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Japanese national community and to cultivate an emotional connection to their homeland.

### The Outline of the Book

Chapter 1 situates trendy drama within the postwar history of Japanese television broadcasting and highlights how television producers started capitalizing on the tarento system in tandem with the development of this new genre. The tarento perform in various entertainment genres simultaneously, and accordingly they are over-exposed to viewers, who thus enjoy "intimate" relationships with them. At the same time, they also serve as lucrative sources of profit for media corporations as they make top-down forms of media convergence possible; their cross-genre and transmedia deployment functions to expand revenue opportunities and reinforce viewers' commitment to media institutions (see Jenkins 2006a). Chapter 1 will thus argue that the Japanese television industry has reinvented itself for the post-Fordist era by producing a new type of flexible commodity (more precisely, image commodity[18]), the tarento. As the tarento gained primacy in media production, a new media economy emerged in which these celebrities became the links between media institutions. At the same time, the transmedia circulation of the tarento has generated an intimate televisual culture that viewers enjoyed as a source of stability in the wake of massive socioeconomic changes.

By analyzing the failure of a drama titled *Dokushin Seikatsu* (Single Lives; TBS, 1999), chapter 2 investigates the connection between the new emphasis on the tarento in drama production and the shift from story-based programming to lifestyle-oriented entertainment. *Single Lives* was based on one of the most controversial murder cases in Japan in the 1990s. In March 1997, a career woman was found strangled in downtown Tokyo. Police investigations revealed that she lived a double life: she was a female executive by day and a sex worker by night. This chapter shows that while the producer aimed to offer story-driven entertainment centering on a critique of gender discrimination, such a message did not appeal to or reach the target audience. My audience survey concludes that it was not the story line that drew women to the drama. Rather, the audience mainly focused on the tarento and whether their roles in *Single Lives* suited their private and screen personas. This chapter will examine why viewers find

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the tarento to be the most appealing aspect of television dramas and how this post-textual pleasure forces us to reconsider the dominant understanding of agency in television studies.

Chapter 3 turns to the analysis of the "young female scriptwriter boom" in the 1990s. In parallel with the development of trendy dramas, an increasing number of young female scriptwriters entered the television business. I suggest that this trend illustrates the growing interdependence between drama production and reception. While the new target audiences were young single women holding non-career-track positions, producers and directors (overwhelmingly male) were career-track employees of elite media corporations. Young female writers were employed to serve as translators between male producers and young female viewers. In the fields of media studies and cultural anthropology, television production and reception have been treated as separate analytical categories, and agency has been analyzed in terms of how viewers negotiate or resist the meanings proposed to them by the culture industries. By contrast, this chapter aims to highlight the fact that in the era of post-Fordist televisual production, the crucial site of struggle for meaning, previously located between producers and viewers, has shifted to the realm of program production.

Chapter 4 centers on love dramas (*ren'ai dorama*), the most popular subgenre of trendy drama until the late 1990s. I argue that love dramas tapped into and reinforced the so-called parasite single subjectivity—young single women who live with their parents to maximize their disposable income. As these young women have "grown up" to become the wealthiest and savviest consumers of the past two decades, they have also become the target of an impassioned neo-nationalist discourse that blames them for the dwindling birthrate, the crisis in the construction business, and, ultimately, the economic recession. At the same time, the service sector, including the television industry, is making enormous profits targeting these young single women. This chapter demonstrates that trendy dramas reproduce the contradictions within which single women are enmeshed in contemporary Japan: while these dramas encourage their viewers to become elite consumers, in reality young women nonetheless remain marginalized from the normative world of work and wage labor. However, I will also show that female viewers are quick to learn how to benefit from the new post-Fordist media economies. They enjoy love dramas via the tarento, who become positive role models of social success for them by

suggesting that style (a function of consumer professionalism) is indeed the key to self-determination.

Chapter 5 examines another subgenre, the so-called work drama (*oshi-goto dorama*) that networks started to produce more intensively in the late 1990s. By then, the love dramas' portrayal of young men and women preoccupied with their love lives seemed increasingly incongruous with the prolonged economic recession and the concomitant socioeconomic transformation, both of which produced much anxiety and uncertainty about the future. A common thread in interviews with the producers of workplace dramas is that this new subgenre aimed to reintroduce the notion of "socially responsible entertainment" (*shakaisei wo obita entāteinmento*) into commercial broadcasting. Although this seems to challenge my claim that trendy dramas are emblematic of the massive commercialization of the televisual medium in the 1990s, in chapter 5 I argue that what producers called "social responsibility" was indeed a successful strategy to draw a new audience segment to television—namely, young male viewers, who previously had not been keen on watching trendy dramas. Here I focus on the highly popular workplace drama *Shomuni*, whose heroine, I assert, became a positive role model for many male viewers, mainly because she was persistent in making the best of her job and having fun while doing it. I argue that the heroines of workplace dramas reconciled a deepening conflict between the old work ethic of the postwar period and the new spirit of consumerism of the 1980s. Specifically, while employers expected young men to devote their lives to their companies, marketing discourses, especially from the mid-1980s, encouraged self-centeredness. Workplace dramas managed to draw a new audience segment to the medium precisely because they successfully mediated the breakdown of the dominant postwar divide between the "female consumer" and the "male producer." Equally important, by reintroducing values such as fun and individualism into the realm of wage labor, workplace dramas such as *Shomuni* offered labor fantasies that made neoliberal initiatives for individual responsibilization more palatable in conditions in which corporations were increasingly forced to reform the country's unique human-resource-management system.

Chapter 6 explores the overseas travel of trendy dramas. Here I probe the central argument of this book within a global context. I suggest that market fragmentation not only has transformed national television industries, but it has also reconfigured transnational cultural power by greatly diversifying

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the transborder flows of television content. I demonstrate this by analyzing the global circulation of *J-dorama* (trendy drama abroad). I argue that the globalization of Japanese cultural commodities in the 1990s reflects a marked shift in Japan's place in the U.S. and European imagination at the dawn of the new millennium. Unlike earlier generations of Japanese popular-culture commodities that Western audiences consumed without knowing or caring much about the programs' origins, what characterizes the Japanese cultural exports of the 1990s (such as J-dorama) is that their consumers cultivate an interest in the place and context of these programs. My case study of the transnational distribution of Japanese dramas thus sheds light on a new configuration of global cultural order. At the same time, the dominantly illegal overseas reproduction and distribution of J-dorama illustrates an under-explored aspect of cultural globalization. Namely, it shows that in the wake of rapid developments in media distribution technology and intensifying flows of people across national boundaries, de-centered and alternative (bottom-up) practices of media circulation have come to complement the centralized (top-down) mode of distribution that had previously characterized international television trade.

Finally, in the epilogue I revisit my discussion of the image commodity. While the book analyzes the development of the image commodity in a particular national framework, the epilogue will resituate my discussion in a broader context. It argues that the development of the image commodity in Japan in the 1990s was not an isolated phenomenon but an example that illuminates how intangible commodities are gradually succeeding tangible goods as the new motors of advanced capitalist economies. Previous chapters describe various reasons that intangible commodities became the new center of economic gravity in recent decades. The epilogue focuses on a particular aspect of the image commodity—its capacity for affective capture. It highlights that while the mobilization of affects has always been paramount to the operation of the culture industries, the centrality of the image commodity to post-Fordist media economies suggests that the culture industries are less and less timid about exploiting the potential for value to be produced from the manipulation of affective capacity. Here, at last, I stress that this trend calls for new analytical tools that, unlike theories of signification, are capable of registering and theorizing the primacy of affect in the production and reception of televisual entertainment.

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