

Reference

4 references from reading list

(1) Benjamin, W. (1969) '*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*', in Arendt, H. (ed.) *Illuminations*. Translated by H. Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 1–26.

- Drawing on the book's discussion of "display value" replacing "ritual value," I gained a deeper understanding of how "cuteness" functions as an aesthetic form dependent on display and circulation. This theory led me to realize that the contextual conflicts I had constructed might themselves reinforce the images' display attributes, thereby aligning them with the platform's logic of dissemination. Consequently, I began to reflect on the limitations of my current approach, striving to dismantle the inherently "cute" imagery of cartoon characters and place them within a war-torn context, thereby shattering the public's conventional positive perception of them.

(2) Jencks, C. and Silver, N. (2013) *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*. Revised edn. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 38–53.

- Through the concept of "Adhocism" proposed by Jencks and Silver, I have come to understand that creation need not rely on a complete, unified, or closed system, but can generate meaning through the temporary combination and reuse of existing elements. This approach directly challenges my current single-strategy approach centered on "contextual conflict": rather than a one-time, stark juxtaposition, Adhocism emphasizes continuous splicing, adjustment, and reconfiguration. Consequently, I began to rethink the relationship between Hello Kitty and images of war, shifting from a "fixed structure of opposition" to an "ever-changing relationship of combination," allowing meaning to emerge through the process rather than being predetermined.

(3) Latour, B. (1986) 'Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together', Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present, 6, pp. 1–40.

- Drawing on Latour's analysis of "visualization as power," I have come to understand images not merely as tools for expressing or representing reality, but as operational media capable of participating in the construction, organization, and mobilization of reality. Latour argues that the power of images lies in their ability to "bring together" things that are inherently dispersed, complex, and difficult to grasp directly, and to facilitate their transmission, comparison, and manipulation across different spaces and contexts through standardization, flattening, and portability. This perspective directly challenges my current research approach, which treats Hello Kitty and war imagery as a "conflict of content." Previously, I focused more on the semantic tensions between images—such as how the opposition between "cuteness" and "violence" creates cognitive dissonance and emotional dissonance. However, Latour's analysis has made me realize that this method remains confined to the level of "what images express," while overlooking how images are organized, mobilized, and embedded within larger systems.

(4) Laranjo, F. (2014) 'Critical Graphic Design: Critical of What?', Modes of Criticism, 1. Available at: <https://modesofcriticism.org/critical-graphic-design/>

- Through this article, I realized that the crisis facing "critical graphic design" does not stem from a lack of political stance or social concern among designers, but rather from the fact that "critical" has gradually been transformed into a label rather than a rigorous method or practical approach. In this context, criticism no longer relies on the depth of its content or the effectiveness of its methods, but often seeks recognition through specific visual forms, tones, or cultural references. This directly challenges my current research trajectory. Although I have attempted to create a stark contextual clash by placing Hello Kitty within a war context, thereby revealing the role of "cuteness" in obscuring reality, I have

gradually realized that this strategy itself can easily be categorized as a “critical style” and quickly identified and consumed within existing discursive frameworks. In other words, while my work may adopt a critical stance in form, it may not necessarily constitute a substantive intervention into the issues at the methodological level. This has led me to reflect: if criticism remains confined to visual juxtapositions or symbolic conflicts, does it merely replicate the highly familiar modes of expression already prevalent in contemporary design culture?

Other reference:

(5) Ireland, A. and Kronic, M.B. (2024) Cute Accelerationism.

- Through this book, I came to realize that “kawaii” is not merely a consumerist aesthetic that obscures reality, but rather an accelerating force that actively drives cultural and technological progress. The author argues that “kawaii” is not a static attribute, but rather a process that constantly expands, permeates, and reinforces itself, continuously replicating and upgrading through internet culture, subcultures, and technological systems. This perspective directly challenges my current approach to understanding cuteness as a mechanism of soft control: if cuteness itself is an accelerator, then it not only obscures reality but also constantly reshapes it. The book puts forward a very radical view: cuteness not only influences culture but also transforms the subject itself, making people compliant and even turning them into “cute” beings. This has directly deepened my understanding of mechanisms of emotional control, revealing that control is not merely externally imposed but is internalized through desire and pleasure. Compared to my original emphasis on the veiling of reality, this theory argues that people are not deceived but are actively drawn in and participate in the process. Consequently, I have shifted my research focus from exposing the mechanism to explaining why people are willing to enter into it.

(6) Yano, C.R. (2013) *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific*. Durham: Duke University Press. doi: 10.2307/j.ctv1131ccn.

- Through Yano's analysis of Hello Kitty's cross-cultural dissemination, I realized that it is not an isolated visual symbol, but rather a complex system embedded within global capital, brand strategies, and processes of cultural translation. The reason Hello Kitty has been accepted across different cultures is precisely because of its blankness and openness, which allow it to carry multiple meanings. This perspective challenges my previous approach of treating Hello Kitty as a fixed symbol within a war context, as such an interpretation still assumes that its meaning is stable and can be subverted in a single instance. This insight has directly deepened my research: I originally believed that cuteness operates by obscuring reality, but I now realize that it functions more as a mechanism that actively prevents the fixation of meaning. Consequently, my research has shifted from exposing hidden realities to analyzing how this ambiguity is produced and maintained. Consequently, I have come to understand Hello Kitty as a cultural apparatus that is constantly being rewritten, rather than an object that can be deconstructed in a single stroke.

(7) Menkman, R. (2011) *The Glitch Moment(um)*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.

- "Cuteness" relies heavily on a smooth, seamless, and conflict-free visual presentation, whereas glitches serve to disrupt this sense of perfection. By introducing visual errors, disruptions, and unpredictability, I can interfere with the emotional security mechanisms of "cuteness." This approach expands the scope of my research: rather than merely creating a conflict of meaning by introducing "war," I directly dismantle the consumability of "cuteness" at the formal level, preventing viewers from easily entering into a comfortable emotional relationship with it. In the process of image production, I experiment with adding glitch-like effects, such as compression artifacts, data corruption, or encoding errors—which can

serve as interventions into the visual stability of “cuteness,” thereby stripping it of its function as a smooth object of consumption.

(8) Nagle, A. (2017) Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right. Zero Books.

- Through Nagle’s analysis of the culture wars on the internet, I have come to realize that images and styles are never neutral but are deeply embedded in ideological struggles. She points out that cultural conflict is essentially a clash between different aesthetic, emotional, and value systems. This perspective has expanded my research: I no longer view “cuteness” merely as a mechanism of emotional control within platform capitalism, but have begun to understand it as a cultural form that takes a stance. Nagle emphasizes that memes, satire, and humor in internet culture are not marginal phenomena, but powerful political tools capable of rapid dissemination and the shaping of group identity. This directly challenges my current, relatively serious critical approach: while I attempt to provoke reflection through visual conflict, in the online context, this method may be less effective than meme-based expressions. Consequently, I have begun to consider shifting my “cute” intervention strategy toward more viral forms.

(9) Grosser, B. (2019) ‘Ben Grosser: Understanding the perception of social media’, CLOT Magazine.

- Grosser points out that social media simplifies complex social relationships into comparable numbers through quantitative metrics, thereby shaping a cognitive pattern of “more is better.” This directly challenges my expectations regarding “critical expression”: even if my work exposes problems, it may still fail due to “insufficient visibility,” or be misinterpreted as successful content because it is “too visible.” I had previously understood “cuteness” as a mechanism of emotional control, but Grosser helped me see how this control is concretely implemented at the interface level. For example, the “like” button, notification systems, and infinite

scrolling all continuously reinforce the user's emotional feedback loop. This allowed me to transform the abstract concept of "emotional control" into concrete objects that can be analyzed and intervened upon.

(10) Allison, A. (2008) Pocket Capitalism and Virtual Intimacy: Pokemon as Symptom of Postindustrial Youth Culture.

- Allison (2008) introduced the concepts of "pocket capitalism" and "virtual intimacy," framing *Pokémon* as an interface mechanism where emotion and capital intertwine within post-industrial youth culture. This perspective is crucial to my understanding of the governance of "cuteness." It helps me see that "cuteness" is not a static aesthetic, but rather a process that transforms relationships into manageable, accumulative micro-capital structures through portability, gamification, and emotional attachment. The cycle of training, collecting, and trading in Pokémon is highly isomorphic with the continuous mobilization of attention and emotions in platform capitalism, thereby reinforcing the everyday mechanisms of "soft control." At the same time, the article also points to a latent tension: virtual intimacy is not entirely a one-way form of discipline, but rather creates an illusion of participation through interaction. This insight helped me situate Hello Kitty within the context of World War II; when the emotional interface loses its "safe context," the operational logic that relies on obscuring reality is exposed and rendered ineffective.

(11) Onuoha, M. (2016) The library of missing datasets. [Mixed-media installation].

- First, in this project, I observe that "absence" is redefined as a structurally produced void, not merely a technical error. Within the context of platform capitalism, I understand these voids not as accidental omissions, but as inevitable byproducts of the processes of filtering, categorizing, and constructing training data. In other words, I see that what the "missing datasets" reveal is precisely which content is permitted to enter the

computable world, and which is excluded from the order of visibility. This stands in direct contrast to my research on the logic of “cuteness.” The “cuteness” I discuss constructs a superficial world that is “fully visible yet conflict-free” through highly saturated emotional symbols within the platform ecosystem, whereas this project specifically points to the parts systematically silenced beneath this surface, those elements unsuitable for being cutesified, commodified, or emotionally smoothed over.

Consequently, it offers me a methodological counter-path: I do not merely analyze “how cuteness obscures reality,” but further point out that this obscuring itself relies on the continuous exclusion of the uncute, the uncalculable, and the non-consumable.

(12) Somerset House (2024) Cute. Available at:
<https://www.somersethouse.org.uk/whats-on/cute>

- This project made me realize that “kawaii” is no longer merely a visual style within consumer culture, but has become a cultural system capable of being curated, institutionalized, and platformed. Although the exhibition sought to reveal the controlling forces and complexities underlying “kawaii,” its overall presentation—including AI-generated cat images, toy-like spaces, soft rounded-corner designs, and the logic of social media dissemination—actually continued to perpetuate the emotional appeal of “kawaii.” This project directly challenged my current approach of creating contextual conflict through “Hello Kitty × WWII,” as it made me realize that works critiquing “cuteness” themselves can be repackaged as a consumable visual experience and reabsorbed by platforms and cultural institutions. Consequently, I began shifting my research focus from “manufacturing visual conflict” to how to prevent criticism from being re-cutenized, and further explored how cuteness continues to produce emotional attachment and the desire to look within exhibitions, AI generation, and social media systems.

Extended critical analyses

(1) Somerset House (2024) Cute.

Having studied this exhibition, I find its core contribution lies in its transcendence of the traditional logic that views cuteness as a childish, apolitical aesthetic style, instead defining it as a contemporary cultural structure, emotional mechanism, and technological phenomenon. The exhibition reveals how cuteness functions as a dominant logic that permeates various domains, ranging from physical dolls to AI algorithms. This aligns closely with my research, which examines how cuteness has transformed from a consumer aesthetic into a soft control mechanism that shapes emotions and behaviors within platform capitalism. By situating Hello Kitty within the historical context of World War II, a period that cannot be romanticized, I create a stark contextual clash to disrupt its original emotional safety mechanism. This reveals how cuteness relies on obscuring reality to function, and explores ways to disrupt and resist this logic of control. At the same time, the exhibition made me realize that cuteness exists not merely at the level of visual content, but has become a holistic cultural environment that permeates interfaces, interactions, algorithms, and modes of viewing. It not only shapes what people see, but also subtly shapes how they feel and how they respond.

The exhibition's visual form itself embodies its core concept. In the spatial design, the curatorial team made extensive use of rounded, voluminous geometric panels, vacuum-formed structures mimicking toy packaging, and soft gray tones. This visual language reconstructs the core of cuteness, harmlessness and inclusivity within the physical space.

Particularly noteworthy is the typography: the exhibition features Futura Maxi, with its exaggerated size and thick strokes. This typographic approach creates a visually friendly sense of pressure, combining the authority of modern design with the approachability of cartoon-style aesthetics. This paradoxical rhetorical device reveals the essence of control mechanisms: by creating a highly immersive, soft, and relaxing environment, it lowers the subject's defenses,

thereby achieving emotional capture. Even when addressing serious issues such as surveillance and control behind the concept of cuteness, the exhibition's material form continues to evoke a sense of intimacy in the audience. This intertextuality between form and content perfectly illustrates my point: by softening the harsh edges of reality, cuteness establishes a robust mechanism for emotional security. At the same time, this immersive visual experience made me realize that emotional control does not necessarily rely on coercive ideological indoctrination, but is more often achieved through soft operational mechanisms embedded within contemporary visual culture. In the exhibition, these mechanisms appeared through immersive spatial design, oversized rounded typography, tactile material surfaces, playful interface-like navigation systems, and emotionally reassuring atmospheres that encouraged prolonged engagement. Rather than forcing obedience, these design strategies subtly reduced critical distance and produced a sense of familiarity, comfort, and emotional attachment.

This exhibition profoundly challenged my existing understanding of critical graphic design. In the early stages of my research, I tended to believe that simply creating a sense of discomfort through contextual conflict, such as placing Hello Kitty in a World War II setting, could shatter aesthetic myths. However, the exhibition made me realize that in today's platform culture, conflict and contradiction themselves are easily transformed into new visual content for consumption. Images with a sense of contrast, such as Hello Kitty navigating the midst of war often prove more compelling than pure cuteness; they are quickly labeled as ironic or cool. This made me realize that simple visual juxtaposition may merely be creating another critical visual style without truly disrupting the underlying logic of control. As the exhibition demonstrates, if criticism remains confined to the level of the image, it is likely not only to fail in disrupting the system but to become a source of the system's self-renewal. Consequently, I have begun to rethink the direction of my future practice: rather than merely creating visual conflict, I need to focus on how images are disseminated, consumed, and processed by algorithms, and attempt to

intervene in the operational logic of cuteness at the levels of platform mechanisms, viewing structures, and modes of interaction.

(2)Yano, C.R. (2013) *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek across the Pacific*. Durham: Duke University Press. doi: 10.2307/j.ctv1131ccn.

After studying Christine Yano's *Pink Globalization*, I came to understand that Hello Kitty is not merely a cute character, but rather the result of the interplay between transnational capital, emotional culture, and consumer systems. Yano introduced the concept of pink globalization to describe how Japan's kawaii culture has entered global markets through commodities, media, and brands, gradually evolving into a global emotional language. She particularly emphasizes that Hello Kitty's success stems not merely from its visual design, but from its capacity to be continually reinterpreted across different cultures: it can represent innocence, yet also imply fashion, irony, sensuality, and even identity.

This perspective is directly relevant to my research. I had originally tended to view Hello Kitty as a visual symbol that obscures reality, and by placing it within the historical context of World War II, I sought to create a contextual conflict to disrupt its original emotional safety mechanism. However, Yano's research made me realize that the power of cuteness does not reside merely on the surface of the image, but in its highly open, ambiguous, and constantly recodable nature. In particular, Hello Kitty's classic mouthless design renders her a surface for emotional projection, allowing viewers to actively project their own feelings onto her. This implies that the war-contextual conflict I sought to create may not necessarily undermine the operational logic of cuteness, as Hello Kitty inherently possesses the capacity to absorb contradictions and readapt to new contexts. She may even transform war imagery into a form of consumer visual culture characterized by a sense of contrast.

Yano's core argument is reflected not only in her theoretical framework but also in her research methodology and textual structure. Rather than approaching the subject solely through brand history or visual analysis, she

integrates interviews, consumer culture, fan behavior, and cases of transnational communication to view Hello Kitty as a constantly evolving cultural network. She continually establishes connections between commodity—user—national image—emotional identification, and this research approach has had a significant influence on my methodology. I began to realize that if I remained confined to the level of a single image or a single instance of visual conflict, I could not truly grasp the complexity of cuteness as a mechanism of platform capitalism. This is because cuteness truly operates by forming long term impacts through repetitive dissemination, emotional attachment, and cross-media circulation, rather than through a one-time viewing experience.

Furthermore, this book challenged my existing understanding of critical design. In the early stages of my research, I tended to believe that effective critique could be achieved simply by disrupting the emotional structure of cuteness through stark historical contrasts. However, Yano points out that Hello Kitty culture is itself built upon a highly ambiguous wink mechanism, it is both innocent and ironic, both harmless and commercially manipulative. This made me realize that cuteness is not merely a mask for reality, but a system capable of actively absorbing complexity, contradiction, and criticism. Consequently, I began to reflect: if my work merely remains at the level of juxtaposing “Hello Kitty × War” imagery, it risks being repackaged by the system as a more cool or ironic visual style, without truly addressing the emotional control structures inherent in platform capitalism.

The greatest impact this book has had on my future project development lies in shifting my attention from static image analysis toward systems of emotional circulation and participation. Rather than treating cuteness as a visual style to decode, I now understand it as an operational structure maintained through repetition, interaction, algorithmic recommendation, merchandising, and cross-platform dissemination. This shift has fundamentally changed my approach to graphic design practice. Instead of producing singular critical images, I want to experiment with design systems that simulate or expose the repetitive emotional infrastructures through which cuteness maintains user

attachment. This may involve investigating collectible formats, interface behaviors, scrolling patterns, companion aesthetics, or forms of algorithmically encouraged intimacy. Through this approach, I hope to examine not only what cute imagery means, but how it continuously organizes attention, emotional habits, and modes of participation within platform culture.