Preface and acknowledgements

In 2015 I was invited by Sarah Teasley and Jilly Traganou to write an article for a special issue of the *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* (Vol. 28) dedicated to design and society in modern Japan. The article I submitted focused on Suzuki Hachirō and Ishioka Eiko, two art directors who broke new ground in the 1970s with ad campaigns that employed 1960s' protest movement politics in the branding of commercial companies.

My research for that article was the catalyst for the writing of this book (and also made its way into the book as Chapter 2), but more importantly, it took me back to the 1980s in Tel Aviv, where I spent my youth in underground clubs (The Penguin and Liquid), listening to subversive music (Bauhaus, Nina Hagen, Grace Jones, Amanda Lear, and Minimal Compact), dressed in queer clothes inspired by David Bowie, Freddie Mercury, and Elton John, and going to weekly screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in the small Paris Cinema. The critical aspects of counterculture and subculture expressed through clothes, music, and design objects became a significant part of my life during those years – long before I realised that these elements serve individuals as a public display of their attitudes towards social issues like gender, status, race, identity politics, body politics, and social affiliation to a subculture. About ten years later, in the 1990s, I found myself in Tokyo as a student enjoying the exciting new visual and material world around me, which seemed subversive but which, to my surprise, was not meant for rebellious youngsters and students due to its expense.

As a student of Japanese Studies, who grew up on classic Orientalist texts such as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, I became fascinated with the impossible conflation of luxury and avant-garde. I later realised that this marriage is not unique to Japan; rather, it is rooted in postmodern ideology, where late capitalism and the post-Fordism service culture

came to collaborate, joining forces with avant-garde ideas and aesthetics to create 'cultural capitalism', to borrow Slavoj Žižek's term. This avant-garde culture does not protest against the capitalist system but rather uses it creatively as a platform for generating change.

While Japanese designers were not the only ones to do it, they were certainly pioneers in understanding the potential of the capitalist system for placing avant-garde on the shelf alongside other styles, branding it as 'luxury' and elevating this genre to perfection. It is the Japanese designers I got to know in Tokyo who introduced social criticism through their objects that are the basis for this book.

I would like to thank the many designers in Japan, including Ronen Levin who worked in Tokyo during those years and introduced me to Japanese design and designers, for the wonderful works they have created over the years. I would like to thank Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem and the different scholars in the Department for Visual and Material Culture for sharing with me their knowledge and theories in a wide range of disciplines. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude for the encounter with sociological and anthropological theories facilitated by Eva Illouz (who taught me the power of critique), Tamar El Or (who taught me about the intellectual power of material), Yona Weitz (who taught me the power of field research), the writings of Sara Chinski (which helped me link critical theory to the world of culture), and Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni and Jennifer Robertson, scholars of Japanese sociology, who helped me formulate and focus the research and better understand the Japanese context.

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A note on translation

All translations from Japanese and Hebrew texts are the author's own translations. The original text is not included in the book due to space limitations.