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Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
AND NEW HORIZONS

Edited by Patrick W. Galbraith, Thiam Huat Kam
and Björn-Ole Kamm

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Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan

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Historical Perspectives and New Horizons

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For those who came before, and those yet to come

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Notes on Contributors

Aida Miho is a Ph.D. candidate in International Studies at Hiroshima City University. Her areas of research include male and female fan cultures in Japan and otaku-related cultures and practices. In particular, she has studied the relationship between *fujoshi* and otaku through perspectives provided by gender and queer studies. Aida has published on a wide range of topics, including the space of identity at fanzine events, maid cafés and patterns of communication in contemporary Japan.

Alisa Freedman is Associate Professor of Japanese Literature and Film at the University of Oregon. Her books include *Tokyo in Transit: Japanese Culture on the Rails and Road* (Stanford University Press, 2011), an annotated translation of Kawabata Yasunari's *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* (University of California Press, 2005) and a co-edited volume on *Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Mobility, and Labor in Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2013). She has authored articles and edited collections on Japanese modernism, urban studies, youth culture, gender discourses, television history and intersections of literature and digital media, along with publishing translations of Japanese novels and short stories.

Patrick W. Galbraith received his first Ph.D. in Information Studies from the University of Tokyo, and is currently pursuing a second Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. He is the author of *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An Insider's Guide to the Subculture of Cool Japan* (Kodansha, 2009), *Tokyo Realtime: Akihabara* (White Rabbit Press, 2010), *Otaku Spaces* (Chin Music Press, 2012) and *The Moe Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime and Gaming* (Tuttle, 2014), as well as the co-editor of *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (Palgrave, 2012).

Thiam Huat Kam is a Ph.D. candidate in Media Studies at the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. His research interests include the logics and conditions of contemporary capitalism, the practices and politics of participatory consumption, and media fandom in Japan. He has published articles on 'otaku' labelling and the common sense on consumption in *Japan Forum* (2013) and *Japanese Studies* (2013).

Björn-Ole Kamm received his Ph.D. in Japanese Studies from Heidelberg University (Cluster 'Asia and Europe'), Germany, and is currently Senior Lecturer at the Kyoto University Graduate School of Letters. His studies on Japanese and German users of the so-called boys' love genre were published as a monograph, *Uses and Gratifications of Boys' Love Manga* (Kovac, 2010), and in the journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* (2013). Supported by fellowships from the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo (DIJ), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Kyoto University, his

current work focuses on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in networked communities of interest, the agency of stereotypes and 'cultural brokers' within the transcultural sphere of roleplaying games.

Kikuchi Satoru is a professor in the Department of Cultural Information Theory and Social Science, Faculty of the Humanities, at Shinshu University. His research field is cognitive and educational psychology, and his current work investigates cognitive biases that affect the development and strengthening of pseudo-scientific and paranormal beliefs. He is a committee member of the Japan Skeptics Association and has published on a number of topics related to the occult, critical thinking, media use and effects, and biases and stereotypes prevailing in public discourse. His works include *Teaching and Audiovisual Media Ver. 2* (Shichōkaku media to kyōiku hōhō, ver 2, 2006), *The Psychology of Self-Deception* (Jibun damashi no shinrigaku, 2008) and *Why Do We Believe in Pseudo Science?* (Naze giji kagaku wo shinjiru no ka, 2012).

Nishimura Keiko is a Ph.D. student in Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She received her master's degree in Japanese Studies from the Graduate Program in Global Studies at Sophia University. Her work focuses on human communication online and human interaction with automated programs. Recent publications include 'Social Media, Information and Political Activism in Japan's 3.11 Crisis', coauthored with David H. Slater and Love Kindstrand (*The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 10, Issue 24, No. 1, 2012), and 'Where Program and Fantasy Meet: Female Fans Conversing with Character Bots in Japan' (*Transformative Works and Cultures*, Vol. 12, 2013).

Okada Toshio is an anime producer, author and lecturer. He is a co-founder of Daicon Film, which produced legendary opening animation for science fiction conventions in 1981 and 1983, and General Products, one of the first stores to produce and sell 'garage kits'. From this experience, Okada became the president of Gainax, where he worked on such classic anime as *Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise* (1987), *Gunbuster* (1988–9) and *Otaku no Video* (1991). After leaving the company, Okada lectured on the topic of otaku culture at the University of Tokyo from 1994 to 1997. During this time, he wrote several books on otaku culture, including *Introduction to Otakuology* (Otakugaku nyūmon, 1996), *University of Tokyo Otaku Studies Course* (Tōdai otakugaku kōza, 1997) and *International Otaku Studies* (Kokusai otaku daigaku, 1998). Having also appeared widely in the mass media, Okada is an authority on otaku and is sometimes called the 'otaking' (king of otaku). He is currently a visiting lecturer at Osaka University of Arts.

Ōtsuka Eiji is an author of stories for manga, an ethnologist and an educator. As a professor at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, he is involved in a project on otaku culture during and after the Pacific War in Japan, and as a specially appointed professor at the Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies at the University of Tokyo, he is involved in a project on Kadokawa and the media mix. In his current positions at these institutions, Ōtsuka draws on his vast personal and

professional experience. He was the editor of *Manga Burikko*, a niche manga magazine that hosted the first debate about 'otaku' in 1983, and worked at a division of Kadokawa in the 1980s, where he helped to develop a media mix strategy based on niche markets. Ōtsuka has published widely on topics such as subcultures, consumption, literature and politics, and three excerpts of his work have been translated into English and published in the *Mechademia* series (2008, 2010 and 2013).

Lien Fan Shen is an associate professor in the Department of Film and Media Arts at the University of Utah. She earned her Ph.D. in Art Education at Ohio State University and an MFA in Computer Art from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Her creative work includes manga, animation and digital arts. Shen is the author of five manga published in Taiwan, including *Let's Fall in Love* (1996), *I'll be Your Paradise* (1997–8) and *Clair de Lune* (2000–1), which was named Best Romantic Comic in Taiwan. Her animation work has received several international awards, and has been screened and exhibited in Singapore, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Netherlands and the United States. Shen's scholarly research focuses on the intersection of pleasure, power and politics in viewing animation, as well as the subject's persistent practices in visual fields. Her current project investigates female masculinity in Taiwan through animated documentary.

Yamanaka Tomomi received his master's degree in Education from the Graduate School of Education at Yokohama National University, and is currently a lecturer at Shiga Bunkyo Junior College. He specializes in otaku studies and light novel studies, and is the author of *Light Novel, Where Are You Going? From the 1980s through 2000s* (Raito noberu yo, doko e iku: 80 nendai kara 00 nendai made, 2010) and is coauthor of *Light Novel Studies: An Introduction* (Raito noberu kenkyū josetsu, 2009) and *Light Novel Studies* (Raito noberu sutadizu, 2013). His academic publications include 'Cultivating "Otaku" History: About the "Blank Six Years" in the 1980s' (2010) and 'Finding Aspects from the Present Genre Formation: An Analysis of Light Novels' (2010).

Foreword

Otaku Culture as ‘Conversion Literature’¹

Ōtsuka Eiji

Translator’s introduction

Known to fans for his work on manga, anime and games such as *Mahō no rūju rippusutikku* (*Magical Rouge Lipstick*, 1985), *Madara* (1987) and *Multiple Personality Detective Psycho* (1997), Ōtsuka Eiji is also among the most important cultural critics in Japan today. While working at the publisher Kadokawa, Ōtsuka developed the idea of ‘narrative consumption’, which became a crucial component of corporate ‘media mix’ strategies integrating fan activities.² Ōtsuka would later go on to write how-to manuals for producing character-based fiction. Two of his books, *Monogatari shōhiron* (*A Theory of Narrative Consumption*, 1989) and *Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata* (*How to Make Character Novels*, 2003), were the inspiration for Azuma Hiroki’s *Dōbutsuka suru posuto modan* (*The Animalizing Postmodern*) one (2001) and two (2007), which helped open the field for new academic approaches to ‘otaku’ culture in Japan and abroad.³

Despite gaining recognition through English translations of Azuma’s work (and his own), Ōtsuka is for his part dismissive of academic interest in ‘otaku’. Faced with Azuma’s discussion of postmodernity, Ōtsuka scoffs, recalling how he and others jokingly put critical jargon into niche media and marketing theory in the 1980s, which has come to be taken as serious scholarship in the 2000s. For some time, Ōtsuka was content to simply laugh at new academic approaches to ‘otaku’, which to him seemed like the ultimate farce, or what he describes as an ‘un-self-aware Alan Sokal’ incident. Though present at and involved in various key moments in the debate about ‘otaku’ – as the editor of *Manga Burikko*, where the term was first used to describe uncool fan cultures in 1983, his argument against the word as discriminatory helped define it (see Yamanaka, this volume); in writings after the arrest of serial killer Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989, his insistence that ‘otaku’ were being demonized in the media ultimately served to spread the word to the wider public (see Kamm, this volume) – Ōtsuka sees no value in discussing ‘otaku’ in the academy.⁴ It is good for a laugh, but nothing more.

However, against the backdrop of increasing scholarly attention to ‘otaku’ both inside and outside Japan, Ōtsuka no longer finds the joke to be funny. Particularly upsetting is the tendency toward Orientalist knowledge production about others to define the self, if not also auto-Orientalism, which comes with its own essentializing assurances about who ‘we’ are. For example, Ōtsuka finds it repugnant that some

scholars attempt to link 'otaku' culture – manga, anime, games, related merchandise and personages, and fan activities surrounding them – with premodern Japan.⁵ Others locate 'otaku' in postwar or postmodern Japan, which, though often explicitly arguing otherwise, risks presenting 'otaku' as a Japanese phenomenon.⁶ In the 2000s, such connections offered to the Japanese government new tools for its nation-building project, whereby 'otaku' culture, which was popular overseas, was claimed as Japanese culture. To put it bluntly, the growing academic interest in 'otaku' culture catered to and was reciprocally influenced by a government strategy to promote 'Cool Japan'.⁷

Discussions that position 'otaku' in premodern, postwar or postmodern Japan represent, as Ōtsuka sees it, a concomitant erasure of modern history – a history of fascism, war and abandoned leftism.⁸ By missing these connections, we also miss the opportunity to critique the gradual conservative slide occurring in Japan today, which is reflected in 'otaku' culture and discussions of it.

In his Foreword, written for this edited volume, Ōtsuka insists upon a modern history of 'otaku'. In explaining the broader context of writing about 'otaku', he states clearly his issues with 'otaku' research as it is emblazoned in personages like Azuma Hiroki. Ōtsuka also calls out Murakami Takashi, whose contemporary art and 'Superflat' theory have done much to introduce the world to 'otaku', but in the context of postwar US–Japan relations. In an earlier time, this situation was referred to as 'bilateral narcissism',⁹ whereby Japan's special postwar relationship with the United States snapped into focus even as its prewar relationships with Asia blurred in the background. Area Studies often played into this by producing knowledge about and sustaining interest in 'Japan'; not only were American scholars studying Japan, but Japanese scholars began to do the same, with increasingly tight feedback loops contributing to new 'theories of Japanese-ness' (*nihonjinron*) in the 1970s.¹⁰ Though the special relationship between Japan and the United States was somewhat destabilized in the 1990s by the end of the Cold War, the global spread of Japanese popular culture at the same time encouraged renewed interest in the nation.¹¹ The study of Japanese popular culture tends to posit an entity called 'Japan', and taking 'Japan' as the most manageable (and marketable) frame of reference reinforces boundaries, an example of what has been called 'methodological nationalism'.¹²

In his characteristically provocative way, Ōtsuka argues that uncritical studies of 'Japanese popular culture' are complicit with a nationalist agenda.¹³ The Japanese government is certainly more than happy to fund 'otaku' research of manga and anime as Japanese culture gone global, which exposes the aligned interests of scholars and conservative leaders such as Asō Tarō who carry on about 'Cool Japan'.

In this way, Ōtsuka demands an accounting of politics, or at the very least a critical reflexivity about the conditions that make our research possible and what its effects might be. Ōtsuka's criticism is at times brutal, and extends to everyone writing about 'otaku', including those in this edited volume. He is clearly ambivalent about writing about 'otaku' at all, and asks the reader of this book to be relentlessly critical of the contributions. One might presume that he is talking about Okada Toshio – whose seminal work, *Otakugaku nyūmon* (*Introduction to Otakuology*, 1996), ties 'otaku' to Japanese culture and resonates in part with Azuma and Murakami,¹⁴ though his more

recent critiques also resonate with Ōtsuka (see Okada, Chapters 5 and 9, this volume) – but the warning should apply equally to everyone.

In his Foreword, Ōtsuka means to raise questions about ‘otaku’ and the politics of writing about ‘otaku’ in certain ways. In the process, he introduces names, dates and events, which he maps in a way that may be unfamiliar to the reader. He does this not only so that the reader can find his or her bearings, but also to highlight uncomfortable connections that may serve to ‘splash cold water’ on the overheated discussion of ‘otaku’ as part of ‘Cool Japan’. The barrage of information and its idiosyncratic presentation – he writes ‘otaku’ in *hiragana* in the original Japanese manuscript, another way to insist on history (see Introduction, this volume) – can be confusing, even disorienting, but that is also one of the strengths of Ōtsuka’s writing. He succeeds in introducing uncertainty into the discussion of ‘otaku’. After debating ‘otaku’ for thirty years, Ōtsuka announces in his Foreword that this will be the last time he writes on the topic. He wants this to be the end of it, but, as has been the case for Ōtsuka so many times in the past, the intervention may rather serve to inspire new interest in ‘otaku’. For our part, the editors hope that this Foreword will lead to debate about ‘otaku’ in contemporary Japan and raise questions of social and political significance that are often obscured by naturalizing and trivializing discourses.

Foreword

Outside of Japan, or in work written in a context outside of Japan, there are times when, to put it somewhat ironically, people seem to believe that in an island nation in the Far East, alongside ‘*samurai*’, ‘*geisha*’ and ‘*ninja*’,¹⁵ a bizarre social group called ‘*otaku*’¹⁶ exists. These ‘*otaku*’ are seen to have roots in the tradition or postmodern condition of that island nation. I am tempted to start here by writing a fake essay – something like, “The “*otaku*” system should be taken as middle-class thought in a Kantian system that was finally established in the delayed modernity of Japan; “*otaku*” refers to an existence where one cannot bear the antinomy of the heightened awareness of the impossibility of comprehending the “*ding an sich*” and even hates the “*sublime*” in the background of the thing in itself, but cannot avoid clinging to the incomprehensibility of “*moe*” – to mimic the Sokal hoax.¹⁷ That is how meaningless and futile I at times think that the current discourse surrounding ‘*otaku*’ is.

We would do well to notice that among people in the cultural sphere of the non-West (*hiseiō-teki bunkaken*), including Japan, there is a technique of survival (*shoseijutsu*) whereby one performs in accordance with the stereotypes and labels desired by others in order to avoid cultural friction. The discourse surrounding ‘otaku’ produced by the Japanese is in no small part something customized with the awareness that it is ‘for overseas’ (*kaigai muke*) consumption. However, this sort of ‘reserved criticism’ (*hikaeme na hikyōsei*) is, at the very least inside of Japan, certainly in the process of coming undone. In other words, even if limited to ‘otaku’ theory, the current state of affairs is that the perversion of speaking in accordance with Western expectations is no longer understood as a perversion, even by Japanese speakers. I think that ‘otaku’ and their ‘culture’ becoming an object of academic attention is an

accurate reflection of the state of affairs where ‘jokes’ (*jōdan*) have been converted into something ‘serious’ (*honki*) in Japan in the past thirty years. That is the primary point that I want to stress in this Foreword. What I can say, and this is not a joke, is that the conversion of jokes into something serious is in no small part the achievement of a sort of cultural revolution that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s in an island nation in the Far East.

I will not go into all of the details at this time, but we should consider a little more the fact that the people coming up during and in the fallout of the two failed student movements that occurred in postwar Japan – the conflict over the US–Japan Security Treaty (*anpo tōsō*), or the Anpo movement, in the 1960s, and the All-Campus Joint Struggle League (*zenkyōtō undō*), or the Zenkyōtō movement, before and after 1970 – are not only the ideological defenders of the subculture that was established before ‘otaku’ culture, but also those who created the genres and set the stage for the first generation of ‘otaku.’¹⁸ These defeated members of the student movement acquired nourishment to live from the lowest levels of the Japanese industry and media hierarchy, children’s culture, or from TV, which was still of low status, or from underground media such as pornography magazines and ‘pink films’.

For example, Suzuki Toshio, who played a central role as chief editor of *Animage* (Tokuma Shoten) and later in founding Studio Ghibli, was during his days at Keio University part of a New Left sect. After he got out, Suzuki became a researcher at the ‘Children’s Culture Research Centre’ (*kodomo bunka kenkyūjo*). It is said that the marketing research centre targeting children was, to begin with, founded by students of the social sciences who were involved with the Anpo movement against the US–Japan Security Treaty in the 1960s. After the end of the Zenkyōtō movement in the 1970s, this research centre took on people such as Suzuki Toshio; Shibuya Yō’ichi, a founding member of Rockin’ On, Inc.; Kitsukawa Yukio; Murakami Tomohiko, a manga critic; and so on. This is something that I always point out, but we should not overlook the fact that Tomino Yoshiyuki – who gave the characters of his *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979–80) Islamic names and made the theme of that anime the ‘promised land’ – is the underclassman of Adachi Masao, a former member of the Red Army. Or that Yasuhiko Yoshikazu, who did the character designs for *Gundam*, had an activist pedigree in the New Left, even though it was garden variety for young people at the time. The Palestinian issue is there in the background of the original *Gundam*. We must rework how we grasp *Gundam* to account for it as converted leftist culture (*tenkō sayoku no bunka*). I have argued this elsewhere (Ōtsuka, 2012a), and will not repeat it here.¹⁹ For now, suffice it to say that we should be aware that in Japanese intellectual history, Marxist youths’ moderate conversion through the medium of ‘children’s culture’, even if it is not as extreme as Oguma Hideo and other poets coming under the control of the Ministry of Home Affairs through the regulation of children’s literature in wartime, is one form of conversion in Japan. On the other hand, pornography publishers called ‘*erohonya*’ consistently played the role of catching the excess runoff of converted leftist youth in the 1960s and 1970s.

For that reason, when I entered the field of media production in the early 1980s, the older editors’ ‘attributes’ (*zokusei*) were associated with their positions in the student movement in the 1960s and the names of New Left sects with which they were affiliated

from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s. There were a number of people who had come out of a New Left sect among the editors at Serufu Shuppan, the publisher of *Manga Burikko*, where I worked as an editor. You could say that our proximity to these political converts served to implant deep in those of us from the younger generation 'a complex about our lack of politics' (*seijisei no ketsujo to iu konpurekkusu*) and 'a disgust for politics' (*seijisei e no kenô*). It is a trivial thing, but let me point out that there is a large disassociation surrounding 'politics' (*seijisei*) among those of us who directly felt the presence of the previous generation with experience on the left and those who missed it by the breadth of a hair. Even though critics of the first group such as Miyadai Shinji, Kayama Rika, Fukuda Kazuya and Tsubouchi Yûzô were of the generation called 'otaku' or 'new breed' (*shinjinrui*), we can also see the political meaning of dividing along the lines of a '1955 system of liberal and conservative'. I will not go into any further detail than this, but we must think a little more about the relationship between 'otaku' culture and Japanese leftist movements.

When we do, we must not overlook the fact that the Zenkyôtô movement was itself a sort of pop culture that the new mass of students encountered at universities, where it began the process of massification (*taishûka*). It was characteristic for these university students to regard 'pop culture' as 'counter culture' and to use it as a tool of criticism toward the social system and capitalism. This is clearly apparent, for example, in the stance whereby such students found the theme of class conflict in Shirato Sanpei's *gekiga* (graphic novels). Glorifying 'yakuza movies' as 'anti-establishment' occurred in the same context. However, as Tatsumi Yoshihiro writes, from the beginning, *gekiga* was not made by university students, but rather by proletariat youth (Tatsumi, 2008). The true nature of 'disparity' (*kakusa*) in the background of the superficial homogeneity of contemporary Japanese society begins after the Second World War with the babyboomers (*dankaisedai*), specifically the stratification of junior high school students after graduation on their way to university and cohort hiring, which has since then advanced into fixed 'classes' (*kaikyû*). However, *gekiga*, mediated by the Zenkyôtô movement into the 1970s, changed from 'working-class' culture to the white-collar culture of 'university students'. The result: de-politicization (*datsu-seijika*) of *gekiga* and its incorporation (*taiseika*). In this sense, it is symbolic that Hirokane Kenshi, a *gekiga* artist who became a university student along with others of the babyboomer generation, is a cultured man who represents Japanese neoliberalism. In this sense, someone really ought to seriously examine how *Gundam* as 'conversion literature' (*tenkô bungaku*) has had an effect on the revival of nationalism in Japanese society.

The 'losers' (*haisha*) of the Zenkyôtô movement in this way came round to become the leaders of children's culture and subculture from the 1970s onward. At the time, subculture was given two contexts by them. The first is the marketing context. Taking as its object the capitalist system, this is the attitude of evaluating everything as a commodity and the masses as consumers who can be manipulated. This is the departure point of the contemporary practice of unequivocally defining people on the web as 'users'. Why was it that only the business dimension called the 'media mix' expanded in Japanese otaku culture from the 1980s? To state it in an extreme way, the ideology of 'otaku' culture in Japan since the 1980s is 'marketing'. There is a tendency to compensate for the emptiness of that reality by intentionally connecting 'otaku' culture with

‘tradition’ (*dentō*). The second context, however, even though it is in collusion with capitalism, coexists with a mentality that still evaluates subculture as ‘counter to the establishment’ (*taisei e no kauntā*). These two ways of thinking were claimed as the fundamental frameworks of criticism by the first generation of ‘otaku’.

If I stress that my ‘Theory of Narrative Consumption’ was primarily created as marketing theory for Dentsu and Kadokawa Shoten, then this is because I witnessed the scene of ‘illicit collusion’ (*yagō*) between marketing and contemporary philosophy (that is, structuralism and poststructuralism) as the faddish thinking of the Zenkyōtō generation after their conversion. Contemporary philosophers in Japan in the 1980s for the most part received support from advertising companies. A generation later, I started my own career as a critic amid all of this. So if you ask why Suzuki Toshio stresses his profile as a marketer, you must think about the question within the context that I have been discussing. You can also think of the trend of marketing theory in the 1980s as one ‘form of conversion’ (*tenkō no keishiki*) in Japan. ‘Otaku’ culture was for one thing established in this context.

Another thing to keep in mind is the issue of the mentality of regarding subculture as counterculture. Here we must not forget that semiotics was the thinking that replaced Marxism. The Zenkyōtō generation and the preceding political generation, even after their conversion, continued to take subculture, the bottom of the cultural hierarchy, as an anti-establishment tool. This went on to become a ‘means’ (*hōben*) of assertive support for them in a state of affairs called ‘the becoming youth culture of children’s culture’ (*kodomo bunka no wakamono bunka-ka*) – for example in animation and manga, which had come to the fore by the 1980s. They had abandoned Marxism, but in some way sought to change (*henkaku*) the system; they could not rid themselves completely of their ambition as vague revolutionaries (*aimai na kakumeika*). Abandoning Marxism and taking up semiotics, they, in a manner of speaking, desired a state that we could call a culture of semiotic disturbance (*bunka no kigōron-teki kakuran*). This is tied to the attitude of ‘participating in meaningless subculture to invalidate the hierarchy of bottom and top’. A good example of this is Chikushi Tetsuya, who comes from the generation of Anpo in the 1960s and presented the general idea of the ‘new breed’ (*shinjinrui*) in *Asahi Journal*. With the title the ‘Flag Bearers of the New Breed’ (*shinjinrui no kishu-tachi*), this series of interviews followed ‘The Gods of the Young’ (*wakamono-tachi no kamigami*), but while the interviews of the ‘Gods’ series were with young people who had distinguished themselves in the business world or academy or won literary prizes – that is, success stories within the existing hierarchy – the ‘New Breed’ series focused on people who were simply young and had accomplished nothing at the time. The ‘new breed’ was a ‘tag’ (*tagu*) given to these young people as a sign and nothing more. *Asahi Journal*, a brand within the old hierarchy, in order to invalidate hierarchy, stamped its authority on ‘youth who have accomplished nothing’ (*nanimo nashieteinai wakamono*) (Ōtsuka, 2004a). Leaving aside the issue of how reflexive he was about the desire to invalidate hierarchy by randomly applying the ‘tag’ of ‘new breed’, Chikushi was clearly complicit with it.

However, needless to say, this sort of ‘destruction of hierarchy’ (*hieraruki kuzushi*) in reality was not advancing a leftist cultural strategy. The primary cause for this was that university students had replaced the working class as the mainstream consumers of

Japanese popular culture. ('Yankees' represent the class and culture of those who dropped out.) Amid the backdrop of university students – who should be the bearers of 'cultivation' (*kyōyō*) – transforming into simply consumers of culture (*bunka no shōhisha*), subculture changed into the consumer culture of the 'middle class' (*chūkansō no shōhi bunka*), not popular culture as the culture of the working class (*rōdō kaikyū no bunka toshite no taishū bunka*). The first step in this process was *gekiga* becoming white-collar culture, as I stated earlier, but this spread to other areas, as well. Next, the generation born around 1960 (in other words, the first generation of otaku), which refused to let go of manga and anime as 'children's culture', birthed a situation where a new market could be realized. Concretely, in the first half of the 1980s, it became commercially possible to establish anime magazines such as *Animage*, and magazines such as *Manga Burikko*, which would become the source of what we now call 'moē'.

As I have already written, the appearance of anime magazines such as *Animage* and media such as *Manga Burikko*, where I was editor, came about in the form of the Zenkyōtō generation offering a place for the activity of the first generation of 'otaku'. For example, at Tokuma Shoten, with editors from the 1960s' Anpo generation and the 1970s' Zenkyōtō generation as the front line of employees, the first generation of 'otaku', who were university students at the beginning of the 1980s, were actively providing 'subordinate work' (*shita bataraki*) as writers, freelance editors, part-timers and so on. Among those who worked as part-timers at *Animage*, we find such luminaries as Ōtsuki Toshimichi (a producer at King Records) and Hashimoto Shinji (an operating officer at Enix); among those who worked part time at *Animec*, a rival magazine published by a different company, we find Inoue Shin'ichirō (the president of Kadokawa Shoten). In this way, the first generation of 'otaku' entered the world of media as what nowadays we call 'irregular employees' (*hiseiki sha'in*). Needless to say, I was one of these people. We were just part-timers, but amid being placed in collusion (*kyōhan kankei*) with the older generation's thinking about the 'overturning of culture' (*bunka no tentō*), we succeeded in making a number of media into outlets for our own culture. *Animage* and *Manga Burikko* increased their circulation in this way. The result was that 'otaku' subculture (*otaku-teki sabukaruchā*) became visible on the surface of society.

Actually, both conservatives and leftists have written critically about this state of affairs. Etō Jun calls the overturning of literature by inferior culture such as manga the 'subcultural-ization of literature' (*bunka no sabukaruchā-ka*) (Etō, 1989),²⁰ and Yoshimoto Taka'aki calls the state where substructures can no longer be even stratified or a superior culture decided 'multilayered indetermination' (*jūsō-teki na hikettei*) (Yoshimoto, 1984, 1985). Related to the collusion with the subcultural-ization of all of Japanese culture – as a strategy of relativizing hierarchies, based on the claims of semiotics, structuralism and poststructuralism – is contemporary philosophy as marketing theory. Structuralism was originally a method of relativizing the ossified thought and ethnocentrism of the West,²¹ but for the society of 'Japan', which is non-Western and continually at a standstill with the form of Western modern individualism and publicness, I think that relativism through structuralism was an unnecessary strategy in the first place. That is why discourses along the lines of cultural semiotics and poststructuralism – talking about inferior culture using the high cultural discourse called 'contemporary philosophy' – was only a game of pronouncing the confusion of

cultural hierarchy and its deconstruction. To put it another way, the stubborn, festering, anti-establishment movement of the Zenkyōtō generation was no longer even comprised of students.

In this way, the chaos of ‘cultural hierarchy’ in postwar Japanese society, which had never been stable in the first place, began. With the tag ‘new breed’, young people who were nobody were for a brief moment of the same rank and file as those with social authority. Similarly, by talking about *shōjo* (for girls) manga or professional wrestling using contemporary philosophy, we were captive to the hallucination of deconstructing academism. The bad influence in Japan of Roland Barthes, who talked about professional wrestling in terms of semiotics, is unexpectedly large. Of course, this was a really bad ‘joke’ (*akushitsu na jōdan*), but many people were telling it, with the convenient fiction that the act of telling the joke was in and of itself a kind of ‘critique’ (*hihyō*) of cultural hierarchy. The reason why I cannot avoid saying that my own criticism in the 1980s was first of all and more than anything a ‘joke’ is because people like me must bear the responsibility of participating in the playful confusion of value emblazoned in talking about trivial subculture using the high-culture rhetoric called contemporary philosophy, against the backdrop of the older generation’s failed ‘revolution’.

Let’s get back to ‘otaku’. In the 1980s, Nakamori Akio proposed the notion of ‘otaku’ in *Manga Burikko*, a magazine that I edited. I objected to what Nakamori wrote, saying that the word ‘otaku’ as he used it was not criticism, but rather ‘discrimination’ (*sabetsu*). Those are all of the facts. In the background of this, for the ‘new breed’ that was trying to earn social standing by manipulating ‘signs’, it was necessary to put a different tag on those of the same generation who resembled them but were different. In other words, it was necessary to discover an object for semiotic differentiation. This is not the slightest bit different from how in the past the modern West, in order to affirm its own ‘civilization’ (*bunmei*), needed the Other as ‘savage’ (*mikai*). ‘Otaku’ is a term of semiotic discrimination (*bunka kigōron-teki sabetsu yōgo*) presented by people who happened to be labelled a certain way (‘new breed’), based on the ‘distortion’ (*konran*) of cultural hierarchy, and who tried to make that label into a special privilege. It follows, as I wrote in ‘*Otaku no seishinshi (Intellectual History of ‘Otaku)*’, that it is not the case that ‘otaku’ and the ‘new breed’ actually ‘look alike’ (*yoku nite iru*) – rather, we should say that they are exactly the ‘same’ (*onaji*) (Ōtsuka, 2004a). From this point, the tag ‘otaku’ was converted from a tool of semiotic criminals, who enjoy fabricating difference and hierarchy, to something for the purpose of social standing or, to put it another way, to secure a new hierarchy. The transformation of ‘otaku’ in *hiragana* to ‘otaku’ in *katakana* is nothing other than the creation of a ‘new breed’ of ‘otaku’. By changing ‘otaku’ to ‘otaku’, this concept was reset as the top of a hierarchy. It is necessary to consider why people like Okada Toshio, Azuma Hiroki, Morikawa Ka’ichirō and the rest of them use the *katakana* form of ‘otaku’. In the end, this leads to Cool Japan, the conservative turn and the nationalism of an ‘otaku’ culture that is now ‘Japanese culture’. Further, we have the *otaku* postmodernism theory, which was championed by Azuma Hiroki, the late arrival to poststructuralism, who takes seriously the ‘joke’ of the ‘first generation of otaku’ and speaks with good intentions.²²

If you sort it out, this is the extent of the discourse surrounding ‘otaku’ and ‘otaku’. Since before Azuma Hiroki arrived on the scene, ‘otaku’ and ‘otaku’ theory has had an

affinity with contemporary philosophy, especially structuralism and poststructuralism. So of course it is highly compatible with contemporary academic and critical discourse. In the 1980s, I alluded to Asada Akira on the cover of *Manga Burikko*, and Inoue Shin'ichirō actually cited Foucault and Derrida in articles that he wrote for *Animec*. Our 'embarrassing experiences' (*hazukashii keiken*) speak to the times of the first generation of 'otaku', who could not quite become Alan Sokal. We were playing around as a joke, but could not really become honestly critical. That was our limit. In a sense, perhaps it is possible to say critically that only Taku Hachirō, who played up the stereotype of the 'otaku' that society desired after the Miyazaki Tsutomu incident and succeeded in making everyone believe that he was a real 'otaku', provides an example of something that we cannot help but still evaluate as a Sokal hoax (Ōtsuka, 1991). So, when people speak again about 'otaku' and '*otaku*', many probably feel that in a way it is faithful to the transition of critical theory and contemporary philosophy since the 1980s. Maybe this is the discourse itself surrounding 'otaku', but by birthing the 'change' (*henyō*) that really deconstructed cultural hierarchy while being a parody of the critical theory of the day and envisioning cultural hierarchy's relativization and deconstruction, a 'twist' (*nejire*) has been engendered whereby that existence comes to hold critically persuasive power. That is probably the essence of the discourse surrounding 'otaku' today. To the extent that '*otaku*' has become the 'serious' (*honki*) research object of the academy, the existence called 'otaku', and even the character (*seikaku*) that it was made to shoulder as the disrupter of order, has been purged. Be that as it may, as far as such critical spirit (which disrupts order) itself was in the first place lacking, the loss of the character is nothing to regret in the slightest.

In the past, in a short essay (Ōtsuka, 1992), I wrote that after the double failure of the 'revolution' of the Anpo and Zenkyōtō movements in the 1960s and 1970s, a bloodless revolution occurred at the beginning of the 1980s by 'semiotic conversion of main culture and subculture'. In a slightly broader context, it may appear that I foretold that the internet, since the 2000s, is achieving the relativization of social stratification that Marxism could not, at least to a certain extent. But to me what I wrote in that essay is nothing more than a 'joke'. Taking it seriously or to mean more than it does is no different from a well intentioned postmodern 'misreading' (*godoku*) of my 'Theory of Narrative Consumption', which states that the work is claiming the deconstruction of the privileged author and the flattening of the hierarchy of authorship.

What I have done so far is no more than recollect my personal experiences in a somewhat biased form, but, if there is one thing that I would like to stress, it is the importance of historical and political context in order to inspect the formational history of the notion of 'otaku' and '*otaku*'. I assert here that inspections of only what goes on within 'otaku' culture – and, of course, the leaping arguments into theories of Japanese culture – are absolutely unpersuasive. It appears as though '*otaku*' culture itself has been scrupulously de-politicized, but those currently responsible for it are also the bearers of historical revisionism and neoliberalism in Japan. Against a state of affairs of de- or anti-politicization (*datsu naishi hi seijika*) and de-historicization (*datsu rekishika*), it need not even be said that there is nothing to be gained from contemporary de-politicized and de-historicized 'otaku' or '*otaku*' theory. That is why, if '*otaku*' theorists want to make statements about the existence of bearers of culture and social

stratification called 'otaku', no matter what, I think that it is necessary as a prerequisite of the argument to consider from a Marxist perspective the extent of changes in the substructure of Japanese society that gave birth to this existence, or at least how far it is possible to take such an explanation. The 'otaku' issue is one that must be considered in the context of class change in Japanese society.

That said, I myself just cannot be interested in contemporary 'otaku' theory, which is a discourse that in the past we engaged in as a 'joke' and now is an un-self-aware Sokal-like recapitulation. After I spent the majority of the 1990s at the trial of murderer Miyazaki Tsutomu, which was the trigger for the publicizing of the word 'otaku', I have since the 2000s been living as an 'unrepentant old leftist' (*kakure mo shinai kyū sayoku*). I am from my very roots sceptical of the 'revision' of the constitution, have been involved in movements to restore public speech such as the 'Constitutional Preamble for Children' (*kodomotachi ni kenpō zenbun*) (Ōtsuka, 2002), as well as a trial to stop the deployment of Japan's Self-Defence Forces to Iraq (Ōtsuka and Kawaguchi, 2009). (Because of our lawsuit, the Supreme Court declared the deployment of the Self Defence Forces to Iraq to be unconstitutional.) In a world where the privilege of authors is deconstructed and everybody gets one's hands on the infrastructure, the problem of how people tell stories becomes important once again. Aware of this issue, and from the idea that education surrounding 'writing' (*kaku*) is necessary, I have for several years been immersed in constructing curricula for an education in 'how to write' (*kakikata*) (Ōtsuka, 2003). That is how I have come to live. While acting as an 'old leftist', I continue to produce manga as a 'commodity' in the capitalist system. I live a double life, and have no need of philosophy or theory to resolve the 'contradiction' (*mujun*). After this, I probably will not be involved even a little in the argument – which is akin to a theological debate (*shingaku ronsō-teki*) – surrounding 'otaku'. I do not acknowledge the value of talking about 'otaku'.

However, at least at present, there are two things related to the issue that I have some critical interest in, which I will close by touching on. The first is the question of what historical context (*rekishi-teki bunmyaku*) to give to 'otaku' culture, and the second is the necessity of guiding attention to 'class' (*kaikyū*) in 'otaku' theory. On the first point, there is the issue of the origin of 'aesthetics' (*bigaku*) in the field of what is usually concretely listed as 'otaku' culture: manga, animation, special effects TV shows and films, railroads, models of military vehicles, uniforms and so on. For example, and this is a somewhat improper way of saying it, why do otaku feel that the war machines and uniforms of Nazi Germany are 'beautiful'? In Japan, compared to the West, there is a tendency to detach criticism of Nazism and the Holocaust from the cultural items that they brought about. Of course these things should be criticized, but I think that we cannot avoid facing the fact that the 'aesthetics' of fascism are the root of 'otaku' culture. This is connected to questions such as why is Miyazaki Hayao, who is politically an antiwar pacifist, at the same time a military fanatic who cannot deny the attraction and beauty of war machines? I cannot think that the formation of the Fleisher brothers' and Disney's aesthetics in America are unrelated to the First and Second World Wars. There is an aesthetics of culture in times of war, whether one wants to acknowledge it or not, and life under fascism is a similar state of affairs. In the state of war in Japan, from the Manchurian Incident in 1931 to defeat in 1945, amid the fascism of these

times, scientific realism met with avant-garde art and theory. The relation of this to the formation of manga and animation is an issue I have drawn attention to (Ôtsuka, 2013).²³ For example, in Japan, Disney animation was taken to be avant-garde, and when this was conjoined with the realism of Eisenstein's Soviet films and documentaries, the result was the animation *Momotarô: Umi no shinpei* (1945), which was produced with funds from the Navy. We see here a phenomenon that should be called 'an unholy alliance of Disney and Eisenstein' (*dizunî to eizenshutein no yagô*). I take this as the position to see the establishment of 'otaku' aesthetics in wartime Japan. In fact, the technique that was established here is the methodological origin of Tezuka Osamu's manga and Studio Ghibli's animation in the postwar period.

We can in this way enumerate a number of origins of 'otaku' culture in wartime Japan. Tsuburaya Eiji appeared as a director of special effects (*tokusatsu*) during the war, which marks the beginning of Japanese SFX history. Takayama Ryôsaku and Narita Tôru, the designers of the early Ultra series of special effects TV shows, were avant-garde artists during the war, and they put that experience into practice after the war with their 'monsters' (*kaijû*). Aesthetic appreciation of the 'beauty' (*bi*) of trains, which is now associated with train *otaku* or 'tecchan', is just an extension of the aesthetics of the avant-garde grasping the beauty of machines in national policy documentary films (or culture films) during the war. As is clear from the fact that the first episode of the TV anime *Tetsuwan Atomu* (1963) is 'homage' (*inyô*) to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), the concept of the 'robot' is not just inspired by American pulp fiction and SF, but rather is more directly connected to Karel Čapek and Lang. The motif of the 'artificial human' (*kaizô ningen*) was established by Tezuka, who also gave a 'scientific rationality' (*kagaku-teki gôrisei*) to the bipedal talking animals of Walt Disney. Postwar Japanese manga and animation was a direct application of Eisenstein's montage theory, and this is intimately related to the issue of the popularization of montage theory during the war. The birthplace of the style depicting realistic military weapons on the box art of plastic models in the postwar period lies in Fujita Tsuguharu's style (the so-called 'Fujita Style') of drawing military weapons during the war. If I dare to write it, knowing that I will be misunderstood, Japan's 'otaku' culture is the 'relative' (*shinseki*) of Leni Riefenstahl. In this way, you can see as much as you like how the origin of postwar Japanese subculture's aesthetics and methods lies concretely in the Fifteen Years War. Is this 'wartime aesthetics' (*senjika no bigaku*), or 'fascist aesthetics' (*fashizumu no bigaku*), or maybe both? That investigation should involve a comparison with investigations of aesthetic formations under war and fascism in places outside Japan. Of course, the two arguments should not be mixed up, but in the category of things that war and fascism have created we must at the very least include Japanese 'otaku' culture.

However, many of the contemporary arguments surrounding 'otaku' culture cannot stand historical investigation. For example, in *Dôbutsuka suru posuto modan* (*The Animalizing Postmodern*), Azuma Hiroki argues that Japanese 'characters' (*kyara*) are constructed based on the random assemblage of parts (Azuma, 2001). It is a postmodern discourse (he calls it 'database consumption'), but it is, unaware of itself, based on the discourse of Tezuka Osamu, who in the first place talked about manga in terms of semiotics, saying that his characters were no more than combinations of patterns

(Ôtsuka, 2010). Further, Tezuka's 'manga symbol theory' (*manga kigō setsu*), to the extent that it is a direct invocation of Eisenstein's discourse of evaluating Japanese culture in its entirety as 'montage', is based on the thinking of the 1920s. Under Japanese fascism, as a matter of fact, 'theories of Japanese culture' (*nihon bunka ron*) based on Eisenstein's montage theory became a trend (Ôtsuka, 2012b). Ironically, the 'theory of Japanese culture' of Azuma's postmodern 'otaku' theory is itself a repetition of history.

A necessary procedure for the historicization of the 'otaku' issue is a consideration of the extent to which this wartime 'otaku' aesthetic carried over into the postwar period. In this context, we can for the first time explain the relationship between Tokuma Shoten and Studio Ghibli. Not long after the end of the war, Tokuma Yasuyoshi, a former leftist youth, was the substantive owner of Shinzenbisha, which brought the world the work of Abe Kobo and other postwar authors called *après-guerre*. The trigger for Takahata Isao, the ideological pillar of Studio Ghibli, to aspire to create animation was a piece of wartime anime criticism, namely Imamura Taihei's *Manga eiga ron* (*Manga Film Theory*, 1941), which was first reissued in the postwar period by none other than Shinzenbisha. In other words, it is not surprising that Studio Ghibli was born from Tokuma Shoten. The homage to Tokuma Shoten and Tokuma Yasuyoshi in *From Up on Poppy Hill* (2013), a film for which Miyazaki Hayao was in charge of the script, makes sense if you think of the existence of this publisher that connects wartime avant-garde to postwar subculture. In 2013, Murakami Tomoyoshi composed a photo page in Tokuma Shoten's mass-market magazine *Asahi geinō*, but no one noticed that it was an extension of the graph montage that was popular during the war.

Based on case-by-case examinations like this, you can finally rid yourself of, for example, Murakami Takashi's statement that in Japan the 'war' erased everything and the 'postwar' period gave birth to a sudden mutation called 'Superflat' culture – and all the other postmodern *otaku* theory in its entirety. You can also finally rid yourself of arguments that are no more than variations of *Japonisme* that tie Japanese popular culture to 'tradition' such as *ukiyo-e* and *emakimono* in order to compensate for the anti-historicism (*hi-rekishhi-sei*) of *otaku* culture. What is important at this time is the obvious procedure of looking at 'manga' and 'anime' only in its particular history. In the history of a culture as a whole, we have to consider to what extent the politics of a certain time (concrete policies) have an impact on the aesthetics of creators. The fact that Japanese subculture was under the direct influence of the avant-garde and modernism in the 1920s should always be the starting point of the argument. It is a huge error to assume the existence of a unique Japanese culture called 'otaku'.

My second critical interest related to 'otaku' is the issue of 'class'. This is simultaneously an issue of 'otaku' expression and cultural and social identity. To begin, in places outside Japan, we must ask questions that raise the issue of class in the following way: to what strata in a given society do the recipients of 'otaku' culture such as Japanese manga and animation belong? This is nothing more than an impression from the times that I have attended events related to Japanese manga and anime in Europe, and I am aware of my carelessness as I write this, but I felt that, relatively speaking, the frequency of minorities was rather high among these recipients of 'otaku' culture. Of course, this is a politically delicate issue, but if researchers from overseas are going to talk about 'otaku' in Japan as a social category, then it is probably essential to consider what the social category

might be in their own country. This is something that can be thought about in relation to Michael Bitz's point about when he was teaching high school students in New York 'how to draw manga' and it became clear that the act of drawing 'manga' using Japanese-style characters fulfilled a definitive role in the restoration of their social and cultural identity (Bitz, 2009). In other words, it is possible to at least hypothesize that 'otaku' expression has the function of mending social, cultural and mental identity for those who are somehow minorities in a given society.

Of course, such a hypothesis taken too far can turn into fostering simple racial and social discrimination. However, if researchers are going to state that in Japan there is 'otaku' culture, which has some peculiar social characteristic, and if they are going to tie this to some social category, then they should make similar arguments in their own countries. If they cannot do so, then they should throw out the subjective impression that in Japan alone 'otaku' exists as a social category. Asking the question of who exactly is an 'otaku' is certainly related to the question of why individuals want to argue about 'otaku' and that culture in the academy – why you yourself want to argue about this in the first place. Why are all of you attracted to 'otaku' and 'otaku' culture? Is it just pure academic curiosity that is utterly unrelated to your social identity? People who research 'otaku' should ask themselves such questions. If all of you are researching 'otaku' in the academy as a demonstration to yourselves that 'I am not an "otaku"', then this is not the slightest bit different from Nakamori Akio separating 'otaku' from the 'new breed' to say that they were different from him. To put it bluntly, how different is your 'otaku' research from his? What you are doing is probably not so different from anthropologists standing on the side of 'civilization' called the West and researching the 'savage'.

This issue of 'otaku' culture and identity also provides insights into 'character' (*kyara*) research. I do a workshop in Japan where I ask high school students to write a picture book structured like a *Bildungsroman*, where the reader is characterized by a personality that is prepared in advance (Ötsuka and Shichiji, 2010). It is through this workshop that I have arrived at the hypothesis that the act of using a 'character' to tell a story is related to the issue of restoration of identity. I see connections with Kobayashi Hideo, a literary critic who said that his brother-in-law, Tagawa Suihō (author of the manga *Norakuro*), by substituting a character for himself, was able to escape the narrow path of the I-novel (*shi shōsetsu*) and 'slovenly talking about the self' (*darashinaku jiko o kataru*) (Kobayashi, 1979). You could say that Kobayashi is implying that the 'character' (*kyara*) functions as a container of 'self' (*watakushi*). In this way, how 'otaku' culture is tied to social stratification, and at the same time, what sort of social function it has, will be important points of inquiry in the future.

Because of the incident in which Miyazaki Tsutomu murdered four little girls in 1988 and 1989, the word 'otaku' came to be used as a discriminatory term for manga and animation fans, just as I predicted it would in the first place when Nakamori used it. As a strategy to evade that context, 'otaku' came to be written in *katakana*. Surely the way of thinking whereby 'otaku' and the surrounding culture are said to be a reserve army of criminals (*hanzai no yobigun*) is nothing other than discrimination. However, we probably should not reject the possibility that the anxiety surrounding adolescence and social and cultural identity is tied to the 'character' of 'otaku' culture, and that it might serve a function in addressing that anxiety. Of course, this is not limited to

Japanese 'otaku' culture, and it is probably necessary to consider whether or not there is a similar side to 'geek' culture as well, for example.

Further, it is also necessary to critically examine the connection of identity and 'character' to explore the extent to which 'otaku' culture prolonged the life of the system of the modern self (*kindai-teki jiga*) and history that postmodernism announced to be ineffectual. This is a point that could be considered along with what I wrote in the revised edition of my 'Theory of Narrative Consumption,' namely that the 'otaku' culture of Japan in the 1970s and 1980s held onto replacements for the 'grand narrative' (*ōki na monogatari*). What has lived on, mediated by the temporary structure of subculture, is a demand for a 'grand narrative' and 'self' that the postmodernists told us should already be invalid, and this desire for identity and place is related to the shift to the right among 'otaku' in Japan. For this reason, in various places outside Japan, it is probably a good idea to be aware of how 'otaku' culture gets caught up in nationalism. Problematizing the connection of national identity and 'otaku' in this way can also become a political criticism of the ridiculous 'Cool Japan' strategy being pursued by the Japanese government.

Finally, I will write a little about this edited volume. Here we see brought together studies that organize debates about 'otaku' up until now, studies that aim to make the discourse about 'otaku' into something about 'Japanese culture,' and a number of studies that must be read critically. It is comprehensive, but these translated essays probably cannot escape being caught up in the constant bias surrounding the discussion of 'otaku.' I do not think that research by academics about popular culture and its bearers is particularly meaningful (so many other more important issues exist), but because I am a 'war criminal' (*senpan*) who is partially responsible for all this, I cannot denounce it. In that sense, it is very important to read as critically as possible the work of the first generation of 'otaku.' I committed to this edited volume because of my apprehension about the discourse surrounding 'otaku' and Japanese popular culture, which continues to be an 'un-self-aware Alan Sokal,' and because I am thoroughly critical of the use of what is more than anything an un-self-aware 'joke' in order to bolster Japan's political propaganda. The latter is a serious risk right now. I write 'otaku' as 'otaku' and think of the name of the criminal Miyazaki Tsutomu when I write that word, because it was the arrest of Miyazaki at the end of the 1980s that splashed cold water onto our wandering, vain thinking. The incident woke us up from our playful 'theorizing.' I do not defend Miyazaki's crimes in the slightest, but for this edited volume, I want to take up his position and splash cold water on the discourse surrounding 'otaku.'

Notes

1. Translator's note (TN): this Foreword was written for this edited volume and submitted in January 2014 with the title "'Tenkō bungaku" toshite no otaku bunka.' Following the conventions of this edited volume, 'otaku' is italicized when written in *katakana* and not when written in *hiragana*. The primary translator of this foreword is Patrick W. Galbraith, who also wrote the translator's introduction. To avoid confusion, we have decided not to leave *tenkō* in Japanese, though it is an important concept in twentieth-

century Japanese literature and intellectual history. Because the concept, translated here as ‘conversion’, informs Ōtsuka’s writing, we will offer a brief note on it at the outset. In the 1930s, against the backdrop of rising Japanese military aggression in Asia and repression of the people on the home front, politically motivated authors underwent ‘conversion’, which they channelled into their writing. Ōtsuka sees something similar occurring in politically motivated students ‘converting’ into media producers in the 1970s. By calling the media artefacts of ‘otaku’ culture ‘conversion literature’, Ōtsuka conjures up the spectre of facism, which he sees on the rise in Japan today as it was in the 1930s. For more, see Honda, S. (1957), *Tenkō bungaku ron* [*On Conversion Literature*], Tokyo: Miraisha.

2. TN: for an English-language excerpt of this work, see Ōtsuka, E. (2010), ‘World and Variation: the Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative’, in F. Lunning (ed.), *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 99–116. Marc Steinberg’s Translator’s Introduction is an excellent situation of Ōtsuka’s work. For a more theoretical discussion, see Steinberg, M. (2012), *Anime’s Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Chapters 4 and 5.
3. TN: a full English translation of Azuma’s first book was published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2009, but a partial translation was published in *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire* in 2007 and again in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* in 2012. This publication record demonstrates nothing if not great interest in Azuma’s work, which has been highly influential in discussions of ‘otaku’. The widespread interest in ‘otaku’ is further demonstrated by the decision to give Azuma’s book the English title *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals*, which prioritizes ‘otaku’ over ‘postmodern’.
4. TN: Ōtsuka has, however, published a collection of his essays on ‘otaku’ and been involved in a published debate on the subject. See Ōtsuka, E. (2004), *‘Otaku’ no seishinshi: 1980 nendai ron* [*Intellectual History of ‘Otaku’: A Theory of the 1980s*], Tokyo: Kōdansha; and Ōtsuka, E. and Nakamori, A. (1989), *M no sedai: Bokura to Miyazaki-kun* [*The Generation of M: Miyazaki and Us*], Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan.
5. TN: See Steinberg, M. (2004), ‘Otaku Consumption, Superflat Art and the Return to Edo’, *Japan Forum*, 16 (3), pp. 449–71.
6. TN: Murakami, T. (2005), ‘Earth in My Window’, in T. Murakami (ed.), *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 98–149.
7. TN: David Leheny raised this issue in an early critique of ‘Cool Japan’. See Leheny, D. (2006), ‘A Narrow Place to Cross Swords: “Soft Power” and the Politics of Japanese Popular Culture in East Asia’, in Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi (eds), *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 211–33.
8. TN: consider that this erasure in discussions of ‘otaku’ resonates with revisionist history, a recurring issue in Japan whereby certain wartime occurrences are omitted from textbooks or framed so as to downplay military aggression in Asia.
9. TN: citation at p. 606 in Harootunian, H. and Sakai, N. (1999), ‘Japan Studies and Cultural Studies’, *Positions: East Asia Culture Critiques*, 7 (2), pp. 593–647.
10. TN: Dale, P. (1986), *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness*, London: Routledge.
11. TN: Asada Akira refers to this phenomenon as ‘the return to J’ (*J kaiki*), for example in ‘J-pop’, where the national point of origin returns to refer to music in global circulation. See Asada, A. (2000), ‘“J kaiki” no yukue’ [‘Whereabouts of “the Return to J”’], *Voice* (March), Tokyo: PHP, pp. 58–9.

12. TN: citation at p. 93 in Iwabuchi, K. (2010), 'Undoing Inter-national Fandom in the Age of Brand Nationalism,' in F. Lunning (ed.), *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 87–96.
13. TN: Ōtsuka makes this concern clear in an interview. See Galbraith, P.W. (2014), *The Moe Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime and Gaming*, North Clarendon: Tuttle, pp. 38–45.
14. TN: see LaMarre, T. (2006), 'Otaku Movement,' in T. Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (eds), *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 358–94.
15. TN: Ōtsuka writes these three words in *katakana*. They are italicized here in keeping with the edited volume's italicization of words written in *katakana*.
16. When you write the word 'otaku' in Japanese, you have to choose between *katakana*, as I have written it here, and *hiragana*. This is a serious issue in social context, which drops out completely when you write the word in English.
17. TN: Ōtsuka is referring to an incident where Alan Sokal, a physics professor at New York University, submitted a bogus essay to *Social Text* in order to test the journal's intellectual rigour. The essay was accepted and published in 1996. The acceptance of Sokal's bogus essay is often seen as a critique of the nonsense of postmodern theory. See Sokal, A. (1996), 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity,' *Social Text*, 46/47, pp. 217–52.
18. I do not actually think that there is any meaning in defining generations, but I am referring to people born in the second half of the 1950s and into the 1960s, who in their youth just barely saw the defeated form of the Zenkyōtō movement in the 1970s.
19. TN: see Ōtsuka (2010).
20. For more on Etō's argument, see Ōtsuka (2004b).
21. TN: what is translated as 'ethnocentrism' here is 'white-culture centrisnm' in Ōtsuka's original text.
22. TN: Ōtsuka is referring to Azuma, H. (2001), *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* [*The Animalizing Postmodern: Japanese Society Seen from Otaku*], Tokyo: Kōdansha. The text was translated into English as Azuma, H. (2009), *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
23. TN: for a translated excerpt of this argument, see Ōtsuka, E. (2008), 'Disarming Atom: Tezuka Osamu's Manga at War and Peace,' in F. Lunning (ed.), *Mechademia 3: Limits of the Human*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 111–25; and Ōtsuka, E. (2013), 'An Unholy Alliance of Eisenstein and Disney: The Fascist Origins of Otaku Culture,' in F. Lunning (ed.), *Mechademia 8: Tezuka's Manga Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 251–77.

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Years later, Galbraith and Kam would reunite at the ‘3rd Mechademia Conference on Anime, Manga, and Media Theory from Japan’ held at Dongguk University, Seoul, in December 2012. Over lunch, Galbraith and Kam spoke about the possibility of an edited volume on ‘otaku’ research, emboldened by Lien Fan Shen’s talk at the conference and a particularly explosive keynote address from Ōtsuka Eiji. To say that the conference was stimulating would be a gross understatement. A special thanks to Frenchy Lunning, Alexander Zahlten and the organizers, as well as Jaqueline Berndt, Marc Steinberg and other active members of the audience who made the event so productive. After the conference, Galbraith and Kam contacted Kamm, who joined as the third co-editor of this volume.

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Introduction

‘Otaku’ Research: Past, Present and Future

Patrick W. Galbraith, Thiam Huat Kam and Björn-Ole Kamm

‘Otaku’ is a Japanese word that has entered the English lexicon like sushi and geisha (Schodt, 2009, p. 6). Most often associated with the wired fan cultures surrounding Japanese manga, anime and games, ‘otaku’ have come to be a ‘taken-for-granted feature of the global cultural landscape’ (Itō, 2012, p. xxvii).¹ Stated somewhat differently, writers interested in Japan, fan cultures, media, technology and cultural studies have taken up ‘otaku’ as a granted object of analysis. Against this background, *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan* is intended to de-naturalize ‘otaku’ by demonstrating the word’s contingency. Chapters offer in-depth analyses of moments when the meaning of ‘otaku’ was debated in contemporary Japan, and in the process open the term ‘otaku’ to debate. We start from the premise that nothing about ‘otaku’ can be taken for granted.

As Ōtsuka Eiji points out in his Foreword, one of the major issues in the discussion of ‘otaku’ is the lack of history. He sees in theorists such as Azuma Hiroki, Murakami Takashi or Okada Toshio – who position ‘otaku’ in relation to postmodernism, the postwar period or premodern Japan, respectively – a flight from the specifics of modern history. Following Ōtsuka, *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan* insists on history. We do this not to better understand ‘otaku’ as an object of analysis, but rather to question the very existence of such an object. In individual chapters and across chapters, we observe debates about ‘otaku’, where the meaning of ‘otaku’ is anything but certain. The chapters in this edited volume, many translated from Japanese and available in English for the first time, centre on key moments in the ongoing debate about ‘otaku’ in contemporary Japan. We focus on three decades spanning the 1980s to the 2000s, drawing on key dates – 1983, 1989, 1996 and 2005 – names – Nakamori Akio, Ōtsuka Eiji, Miyazaki Tsutomu and Okada Toshio – and media – *Manga Burikko*, *Otaku no Video*, *Otakugaku nyūmon (Introduction to Otakuology)* and *Densha otoko*. This is certainly not an exhaustive list, but these dates, names and media are the ones most often organized by commentators to construct a coherent history of ‘otaku’. Bringing together into one edited volume chapters discussing these key aspects of the ‘otaku’ discourse in Japan allows us to unsettle the points of history as we ‘know’ them.

In the remainder of this Introduction, we position this edited volume in the existing literature on ‘otaku’, and discuss in some detail three major limitations to

previous approaches. Specifically, we examine the limitations of treating ‘otaku’ as a coherent object of analysis, creating a taxonomy of fans and following a social constructionist approach. The first limitation is the most crucial, and to some extent informs everything that comes after it. We conclude by suggesting a revised labelling approach as a response to these limitations. Considering the past and present of ‘otaku research’ and ‘otakuology’, we believe that a labelling approach, which demands careful analysis of social and media dynamics in specific contexts, might be one possible direction for the future.

On ‘otaku’ research

Let us begin with Ōtsuka Eiji, who has been involved in key debates about ‘otaku’ in Japan for the past thirty years. In 1983, Ōtsuka was the editor of a magazine called *Manga Burikko*, which provided a corner for regular content submissions from *Tokyo Otona Club*, another even smaller magazine. In this corner appeared a column titled ‘“Otaku” Research’ (*otaku’ no kenkyū*), and its author, Nakamori Akio, is credited with being the first to use the term ‘otaku’ as a label for certain kinds of fans (see Galbraith, this volume). Note here that Ōtsuka’s role in this original story about ‘otaku’ is itself debatable (see Yamanaka, this volume). From his Foreword, however, it seems clear that Ōtsuka positions himself as part of some early generation of ‘otaku’, specifically university students working part time in niche media and fan marketing in the early 1980s. Students like Ōtsuka began to use critical theory to talk about the things that they liked, in part just for laughs, but also as a sort of rebellion meant to undermine meaning (if not also the authority of the academy). With the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu – a child molester and murderer labelled ‘otaku’ (see Kamm, this volume) – in 1989, ‘otaku’ became a much more serious topic of discussion. Just a few months after Miyazaki’s arrest, Machiyama Tomohiro edited together a series of articles on gamers, hackers, idol fans, fanzines and so on and released it as *Otaku no hon* (*The Book of Otaku*, Machiyama, 1989), which became a bestseller. Ōtsuka and Nakamori reunited for a dialogue titled *M no sedai: Bokura to Miyazaki-kun* (*The Generation of M: Miyazaki and Us*, Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989), which returned them to the discussion of ‘otaku’; it was published in the same month as *Otaku no hon*. The 1990s would see various authors writing about ‘otaku’ in popular and pop-academic texts and in both Japanese (Nakajima, 1995; Taku, 1991; Miyadai, 1994; Takekuma, 1995; Okada, 1996; Ōtsuka, 2004) and English (Grassmuck, 1990; Greenfeld, 1993; Newitz, 1994; Gibson, 1996; Schodt, 1996; Kinsella, 1998).²

The incitement to discourse after the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu laid the groundwork for academic interest in the subject of ‘otaku’ in the 2000s. Responding to what he saw as an aversion of the core problematic of ‘otaku’, psychiatrist Saitō Tamaki wrote a book about ‘otaku’ sexuality (Saitō, 2000). The following year, Azuma Hiroki, a young academic with a Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo, published an analysis of postmodernism as seen through ‘otaku’ (Azuma, 2001). Saitō, Azuma and others came together for discussions about ‘otaku’ culture, which were collected together and published as *Mōjō genron F-kai* (*Net Discourse Final Version*, Azuma, Saitō,

Takekuma, Nagayama, Itō and Kotani, 2003). What followed was a wave of new academic writing on 'otaku' and related topics (Morikawa, 2003; Itō, 2005; Kitada, 2005; Murakami, 2005; Ōsawa, 2008). Further, as academic writing on anime (and, to a lesser extent, manga) began to flourish in North America, this new wave of Japanese academics began to be translated into English and the word 'otaku' became standard vocabulary (Azuma, 2007, 2009, 2012; Itō, 2006; Saitō, 2011; Kitada, 2012; Morikawa, 2012). It is telling that the English translation of Azuma's book turns the original title, *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* (*The Animalizing Postmodern: Japanese Society Seen From Otaku*), into *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. In the span of less than a decade, between 2001 to 2009, 'otaku' had moved from a marginalized research topic to a central one, from subtitle to book title, from Japan to North America.

What is concerning about this is how 'otaku' have in the process become 'taken for granted'. Consider the first words in Azuma's book: 'I suppose that everyone has heard of "otaku"' (Azuma, 2009, p. 3). Whether written in Japanese in 2001 or English in 2009, Azuma is probably correct in the assumption that his readers have heard of 'otaku'. He does not explain what it means, but rather just offers a list of objects such as anime and computers that everyone 'knows' are associated with 'otaku'. Starting from this 'otaku' that everyone has heard of, Azuma then launches into a discussion of the postmodern, which, as he has stated, was the goal of the book.³ To put it another way, the book is not about 'otaku', but rather talks about them in relation to critical theory. The result, however, is that 'otaku' becomes the unquestioned starting point, the assumed background to what we are talking about, because we already 'know' what that word means.

Ōtsuka is particularly pointed in his criticism of Azuma, whom he charges with contributing to the discourse on 'otaku' in his theoretical work, legitimizing it with his academic credentials and taking seriously the joke of 'academic' writing about 'otaku' from the 1980s.⁴ For Ōtsuka, the tendency to talk over the subject of 'otaku' as part of a theoretical argument is on par with the bogus essay published by Alan Sokal, a physics professor who produced a nonsense article that was published in an academic journal focusing on postmodern cultural studies. Worse, however, is that the Sokal affair of writing about 'otaku' is no longer self-aware or intended as an intervention, but rather has become acceptable academic practice.⁵ As Ōtsuka sees it, the problem is not that scholars are getting 'otaku' wrong, but rather that they are assuming that 'otaku' exist and producing a discourse about them. From Nakamori's original "'otaku" research' in 1983 to Okada Toshio's 'otakuology' (*otakugaku*) in 1996 to the blossoming of new academic approaches to 'otaku' in the 2000s, Ōtsuka calls for a critical reading of them all (and himself, and every contributor in *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan*). For him, writing about 'otaku' is not only meaningless, but also potentially harmful, insofar as it contributes to the continuation of stereotypes and existing relations of power that produce 'otaku' as an object of analysis. If we do not consider the dynamic of knowledge-power, and our relation to the object that we construct in our writing, then our "'otaku" research' is no different from Nakamori's opening salvo in 1983. Through our academic discourse, 'otaku' become visible, something we have all heard about, something that is 'known'.

In the process, much of the internal debate about 'otaku' is lost. It is easy to assume that all of the writers mentioned above – in Japan, Europe and the United States in the

1990s and the 2000s – are all talking about the same thing; they are ‘otaku’ scholars writing about ‘otaku’. However, even a cursory examination of the writing of these individuals reveals wildly different approaches to ‘otaku’, which does not mean the same thing to all people at all times. When these ‘otaku’ scholars are not talking past one another, they are constantly embroiled in debates (Azuma, Saitō and Kotani, 2003; Okada, Morikawa and Murakami, 2005; Ōtsuka and Azuma, 2008). Indeed, one might say that the word ‘otaku’ first appears as part of a debate about manga and anime fandom in *Manga Burikko* in 1983, a debate that pitted Ōtsuka against Nakamori (Yamanaka, this volume), who would again debate with each other after the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989 (Kamm, this volume). If one looks at the content of Machiyama’s *Otaku no hon*, there is very little consistency between articles, because the contributors did not share the same vision of ‘otaku’. We can agree with Azuma and suppose that (almost) everyone has heard of ‘otaku’, but with the small caveat that there is no agreement about what is meant by ‘otaku’. There is only a debate waiting to happen, a debate that is closed down by treating ‘otaku’ as something ‘taken for granted’ and already ‘known’.

Otaku/Otaku/OTAKU

Since its founding in 2006, the annual publication *Mechademia* has become a major outlet for writing on Japanese media and popular culture and translations of Japanese theorists. The editorial policy of *Mechademia* is not to italicize ‘otaku’, because the term is already part of the English language. Indeed, the word ‘otaku’ was included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2007. It would seem, then, that any debate about the term is settled: those who know the term know what it means, and those who do not can look it up in the dictionary. Certain academic and popular approaches contribute to the sense that the meaning of ‘otaku’ is evident. As Thomas LaMarre points out, ‘Often commentators present themselves as otaku in order to authorize their knowledge – they present themselves as native informants. . . . The problem is that such a stance tends to make definitions of otaku appear self-evident, while reinforcing received stereotypes’ (Galbraith and LaMarre, 2010, p. 362). These stereotypes are often informed by media and critical commentary, which we would do well to interrogate. Limiting the scope and meaning of ‘otaku’ to, for example, manga or anime fans before any investigation takes place closes down rather than opens up discussion of our assumptions. The object of analysis is made certain so that our ‘otaku research’ (*otaku kenkyū*) or ‘theories on otaku’ (*otaku ron*) can proceed, with uncertainty settled or written off the page. LaMarre also points out a tendency among the new wave writing about Japanese popular culture in the late 1990s and 2000s to construct histories and spin theories of ‘otaku’ to ‘promote a set of objects, or establish an identity’ (LaMarre, 2006, p. 365).⁶ Though LaMarre tries to extract value from this ‘otaku’ discourse, Ōtsuka Eiji is significantly more critical of attempts to promote a set of objects and establish an identity.

As Ōtsuka hints, the knowledge-power relation in the literature on ‘otaku’ evokes the basic idea of Orientalism (Said, 1978), whereby authors and institutions in ‘the West’ write about ‘the Orient’ and, in so doing, subordinate the Other and define

themselves in relation to it. In this way, 'otaku research' often resembles that of Nakamori Akio, who defined himself in contrast to the 'otaku' that he was writing about (see also Yamanaka, this volume). Indeed, as can be seen in the case of Nakamori, in *Orientalism*, the Other is described as primitive or effeminate, which positions the author as civilized and manly. Much of the popular writing on Japan might be accused of indulging in Orientalist fantasy, whereby that nation is the Other to Western modernity, as evidenced by weird or perverse media and customs (discussions of tentacle sex in books on anime come to mind). Similarly, in the discourses on 'otaku', we can observe the dynamic of representing a bizarre Other, which allows the writer to affirm his or her own non-deviance, normalcy or superiority. As Lien Fan Shen argues in her chapter in this volume, 'otaku' is often a fantasy that sustains normativity. *Otaku no Video* – released in 1991 by Gainax, the anime studio that Okada Toshio co-founded – sets up such a fantasy to allow its viewers to look pleasurably at a weird other/object from a safe distance, only to shatter it at the end, forcing them to confront their interaction with the image and distorted gaze.

In these ways, it becomes apparent that 'otaku' has become a coherent and stable, if not also stabilizing, object of analysis, but it is not always apparent who or what is meant by 'otaku'. Take for example two important moments in the otaku discourse, 1983, when Nakamori Akio published his column, "'Otaku" no kenkyū' ('"Otaku" Research'), and 1996, when Okada Toshio published his book *Otakugaku nyūmon* (*Introduction to Otakuology*). These two dates, names and media are often seen together in histories of 'otaku', when in fact these authors are writing about different things. Nakamori writes in a niche magazine for manga fans and makes fun of those who he thinks are uncool or weird, which he identifies against. Okada writes a popular book meant for wide circulation, where he praises fan culture, which he identifies with. Both of these are interventions into the debate about 'otaku', but they are not referring to the same set of objects or attempting to establish a similar identity. Indeed, they do not even write 'otaku' in the same way. In Nakamori's writings, 'otaku' is in *hiragana*, while in Okada's writings it is in *katakana*, which is typically reserved for foreign loan words or to place emphasis on something, as in italics. Okada also writes 'otaku' in roman letters when referring to non-Japanese fans of manga, anime and games, which then feeds back into his discussion of an 'otaku' identity that is at once Japanese and global (see Okada, Chapters 5 and 9, this volume). The tone is markedly different from Nakamori's writings, though both are ostensibly writing about 'otaku'. Hence the seemingly coherent and stable term 'otaku' contains within it divergence and tension.

The construction of 'otaku' as a coherent object is often accompanied by an organization of key dates, names, people and events into a narrative. The repetition of these 'facts' is so common in the discussion of 'otaku' as to be taken for granted, but in fact we do not know from their invocation how Nakamori defined 'otaku' in *Manga Burikko* in 1983 (see Galbraith and Yamanaka, this volume), how the media defined Miyazaki as an 'otaku' in 1989 (Kamm, this volume) and how these two things are connected. Indeed, so taken for granted is this history that we do not even notice, as Yamanaka Tomomi points out, that there are 'six blank years' (*kūhaku no roku nenkan*) between these two dates (Yamanaka, 2010). We do not know what happened in these six years because we repeat the canonical dates rather than doing the archival research

necessary to go beyond them. The result is that we do not see how 'otaku' got from a low-circulation manga magazine to a mass media debate.

With the advent of the Cool Japan campaign and the popularity of *Densha otoko* in the 2000s, the story has transformed into a 'triumphant narrative' of 'otaku', which can be seen for example in Mizuko Ito's work:

[Otaku] was transformed into a social category by columnist Nakamori Akio, who published a column on 'Otaku Research' in a magazine in 1983. In 1989, a full-blown 'moral panic' about otaku arose after the arrest of Tsutomu Miyazaki. Miyazaki had abducted, murdered and mutilated four girls. Photos and footage of his bedroom, crammed with manga and videotapes, many of the Lolita-complex and pornographic variety, flooded the popular press, and Miyazaki became the poster boy of the otaku subculture. After this, 'otaku' came to be used and recognized by the mainstream as a stigmatized label for somebody who is obsessed with anime, manga, and games and out of touch with everyday social reality. Okada (1996) and others have argued against the stigmatizing use of the term, and a more positive vision of otaku as innovative popular-culture enthusiasts has increasingly taken hold.

Ito, 2012, p. xxi; see also xiv-xv

This narrative is not unique to Japan, as it has an uncanny parallel in the mainstreaming of fans in the Anglo-American contexts in recent years. Like the tale of the Anglo-American fans becoming part of everyday culture, the narrative of 'otaku' has arrived at a point where all its aspects are 'known' and can be 'taken for granted'. We sympathize with Gayle Rubin when she writes, 'It astonishes me how quickly people forget even recent history, and how much they are willing to project current attitudes back as a fictive chronological sequence' (Rubin, 2011, p. 295). The repetition of dates, events and names in a fictive (in the sense of constructed or made, not necessarily false) chronological sequence serves to stabilize the narrative rather than open it up to interrogation. Given the limited array of 'facts' to draw on, is it any wonder that Sharon Kinsella, who wrote a foundational article on 'otaku' (Kinsella, 1998), has recently criticized the 'repetitive academic attention' paid to 'otaku' (Kinsella, 2013, p. 18)? While Ōtsuka points out academic arguments about 'otaku' occurring without any ground, Kinsella points out how academic arguments ground the discussion in fetishized 'facts'. Both agree that 'otaku' scholars are talking about fiction.

The chapters in *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan* are arranged in a chronology from the 1980s to the 2000s, not to produce a coherent narrative, but to interrogate some of the key dates and events. Two chapters focus specifically on the serialization of Nakamori's "'Otaku" Research' in *Manga Burikko* in 1983. Patrick W. Galbraith contextualizes Nakamori's column in the development of fictional girl characters as an object of desire for men, which comes into tension with dominant discourses on social and sexual maturity – a tension that still exists today. Yamanaka Tomomi delineates the politics surrounding the serialization of Nakamori's column, noting how an attempt to define the self against 'otaku' and Ōtsuka's editorial strategy came together in *Manga Burikko*. Björn-Ole Kamm's chapter questions the reductive understanding of the

media's role in creating a 'moral panic' in their reporting on the Miyazaki Incident in 1989 and 1990. Alisa Freedman's chapter examines the *Densha otoko* boom in 2005, highlighting how the franchise appropriated 'otaku' to advocate conformity to the notions of heterosexual marriage and family at a time when there were increasing national concerns over declining marriage and birth rates. Kikuchi Satoru's chapter documents how, in the wake of *Densha otoko* and the Cool Japan campaign, much negativity and stigma is still attached to the term 'otaku', which is often disavowed by policymakers and large enterprises in their development of a place-brand for Akihabara. Thiam Huat Kam's chapter, based on interviews conducted in the period after the *Densha otoko* boom, demonstrates that the label 'otaku' is still applied to people who are perceived to be disgusting. These chapters, in different ways, point to deep-seated anxieties that continue to haunt discourses on 'otaku', which are concealed by the 'triumphant narrative'.

Furthermore, 'otaku' is constituted as a coherent object of analysis in part by overlooking significant differences between 'theories on otaku' in Japan. The writings of Ōtsuka, Okada, Azuma, Morikawa Ka'ichirō and Saitō Tamaki do not converge into a coherent discourse, let alone a body of knowledge, on 'otaku', but constitute points of disagreement among these writers. Okada, in *Otaku wa sude ni shinde iru* (Chapter 9, this volume), charges that Saitō and Morikawa focus on only small isolated aspects of 'otaku'. In his Foreword to this volume, Ōtsuka criticizes Azuma and scholars working with postmodern theory for failing to take into account the historical connection between 'otaku' and fascism in Japan. Azuma's argument on 'otaku' as postmodern animals is formulated in part as a response to Saitō's conceptualization of 'otaku' as a (sexual) subject (Azuma, 2009, pp. 129–31). All of these writers, in their own ways, are debating 'otaku' in contemporary Japan. Aida Miho's chapter in this volume succinctly captures some of these debates by identifying key similarities and differences in 'theories on otaku'. Significantly, Aida indicates how discussions of 'otaku' shifted in the two decades since Nakamori's 'creation' of the category, which reflects changing social recognition and acceptance of the various media fandoms in Japan that are called 'otaku'.

When we write 'otaku' in English, it appears in roman letters, which effaces the tension of multiple versions and meanings of the word. As Ōtsuka points out, the choice of whether to write 'otaku' in *hiragana* or *katakana* remains in Japanese, where it quickly becomes political. For example, in insisting on writing 'otaku' in *hiragana*, Ōtsuka is essentially tying it to the past and to Nakamori and Miyazaki Tsutomu, the serial killer, which serves to challenge the cool or global 'otaku' identity. Ōtsuka's choice to write 'otaku' in *hiragana* stands in stark contrast to the *katakana* form that appears in the media and government papers, and is his way of resisting the abstraction and smooth circulation of the word by reinserting the history of discriminatory use in the 1980s and 1990s. The goal, as he sees it, is to splash cold water onto the overheated discourse.

In *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan*, in order to reintroduce productive tension into the term 'otaku', we do not allow the term to settle on one single English form. Instead, in order to capture the complexity of the Japanese discourse and invigorate debate, in the translated chapters that appear here, we render 'otaku' in three different ways. When the word appears in *hiragana*, it is unitalicized: otaku. When the word appears in *katakana*, it is italicized: *otaku*. When the word appears in roman

letters, it is capitalized: OTAKU. This systemization is imperfect, and sometimes it is unclear what 'otaku' the author is discussing. That is also the point. We hope that the reader will pause when seeing the word 'otaku', written in different ways on the page, and consider what it means in context.

Taxonomy of fans

The spread of Japanese popular culture around the world in the 1990s, and the existence of fans of it, caught the attention of academics in the 2000s (cf. Iwabuchi, 2002; Aoyagi, 2005, Chapter 7). Koichi Iwabuchi, who famously suggested that Japan might be another global hub for popular culture that de-centres the United States, later came to question the academic excitement about overseas fans of Japanese popular culture. Iwabuchi suggests that writing about fans of Japanese popular culture in an uncritical way only serves to feed into the discourse about Cool Japan and the government's dreams of cultivating 'soft power' through the dissemination of manga, anime and games, which will win them the hearts and minds of the world (Iwabuchi, 2010, pp. 92–3). Certainly we can see a similar dynamic in writing about 'otaku' at this time. In the 1990s, even as 'otaku' was being taken up as an identity among manga and anime fans in the United States (Schodt, 1996, p. 43), the existence of passionate fans of Japanese popular culture overseas filtered back into the 'otaku' discourse in Japan. In the work of Okada Toshio, for example, LaMarre notes the discovery of 'Japan' in 'otaku' overseas, which lends itself to nationalistic thinking (LaMarre, 2006, pp. 369, 387–8). Morikawa's exhibition on 'otaku' and Akihabara, shown at the Ninth Biennial International Architecture Exhibition in 2004, was funded by the Japan Foundation; outside the exhibition hall was a sign reading 'GIAPPONE/OTAKU' (Cather, 2012, pp. 244–6); Morikawa's work also featured in Murakami Takashi's *Little Boy* exhibition, which dealt heavily with 'otaku' culture and was held in New York in 2005 and sponsored by the Japan Society. From here, it is not so far of a leap for a conservative politician like Asō Tarō, in a rally in Akihabara in 2007, to say, 'Thanks to *otaku*, Japanese culture, what has been called subculture, has undoubtedly been transmitted to the world. . . . We should be proud of this.'⁷ This is the type of nationalistic 'otaku' discourse that Ōtsuka warns about.

In his writing on soft power and pop-culture nationalism, Iwabuchi raises questions about uncritical approaches to fan cultures. The celebration of Cool Japan and writing about fans of Japanese popular culture around the world tends not only to reinforce the government's rhetoric about soft power and global influence, but also to take scholars away from difficult questions that might undermine 'Japan' as the object of affection and analysis (Iwabuchi, 2010, pp. 89, 93).⁸ It is quite clear that branches of the Japanese government are supporting fan conventions and practices overseas, and funding trips to Japan for fans and academics, as part of its Cool Japan strategy (Galbraith, 2013, paragraph 9). Iwabuchi refers to this phenomenon as 'inter-nationalism', which entails the 'reworking and strengthening of the national in tandem with the intensification of cross-border media flows' (Iwabuchi, 2010, p. 89).⁹ (It is useful here to recall Ōtsuka's words about 'otaku' and the existing structures of power that construct them as an object of analysis, or in this case the institutions that support and enable such research.)

As Iwabuchi points out, there is a tendency for scholars to automatically and uncritically reproduce 'fans' generally and 'otaku' specifically as an object of analysis, or, to put it another way, 'fan' can 'become a received taxonomic category that preframes our understanding and our research questions in an objectifying manner' (Iwabuchi, 2010, p. 88). Two aspects of Iwabuchi's critique should be underscored: first, the tendency to objectify fans, who are then criticized or celebrated, and second, the tendency to arrange fans into a taxonomy. As Stuart Hall said of popular culture more generally, the definitional and archival impulse tends to freeze objects into static forms and miss the dynamics of contestation and struggle over what does and does not count, which is the realm of politics (Hall, 2009, pp. 446–9). If, as Iwabuchi reminds us, 'fan' is a 'discursively constructed taxonomy' (Iwabuchi, 2010, p. 87), then there is nothing given about it. We echo Iwabuchi in arguing that there are in fact 'no fans', but only ways of 'making' fans – and the same goes for 'otaku'.¹⁰ These ways of seeing fans, these discursive constructions, should be denaturalized and opened to interrogation.

Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan does not provide a taxonomy of 'otaku', but rather questions the dynamics of how and why certain people and practices come to be seen as 'otaku' at certain times. In a recent edited volume, *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* (Ito, Okabe and Tsuji, 2012), the reader is introduced to fans of trains, users of an online bulletin board, costume players, gamers, people who gather in the Akihabara area of Tokyo or attend events to buy and sell fanzines and more. In *Fandom Unbound*, 'otaku' are men and women in Japan and the United States involved in a variety of activities. Why these particular activities or people are included in the volume is unclear, but here they are, together in one volume and arranged into what appears to be a taxonomy. If one were to ask why these fans and not others are represented in a book on 'otaku', two answers come immediately to mind: first, these fandoms are theoretically interesting, and second, they fit the author's image (shaped by media and critical discourse) of 'otaku'. The overall result, as LaMarre suggests, is reinforcing received images of 'otaku'. In contrast to *Fandom Unbound*, consider *Otaku Spaces* (Galbraith, 2012), where twenty people identified by others or identifying themselves as 'otaku' are interviewed, photographed and placed side by side. The result is an undermining of any coherent 'otaku', as we see the vast differences between these people, and the struggle for a position with and against received images and existing discourses. The inclusion of people that the reader might not personally identify as 'otaku' (and identify with or against as such) is itself a provocation. For Iwabuchi, what is needed to counter the taxonomy of fans is 'critically contextualized studies that go beyond an objectifying understanding of "fan"; or, put another way, studies that 'avoid reproducing "fan" as a fixed taxonomy' (Iwabuchi, 2010, p. 88). While Iwabuchi's goal is to 'show the significance of understanding committed media culture engagements in everyday life', which requires fieldwork on contemporary fan cultures, we worry that fieldwork suffers from its own bias in the selection of informants. Our volume instead foregrounds historicity to show how certain people and practices were understood as 'otaku' at certain moments in time, and suggests the significance of that process of identification.

Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan raises questions about the viability of even conceptualizing 'otaku' as fans. Thiam Huat Kam has argued for a move away from the understanding of 'otaku' as a subculture or fandom as it often, explicitly or implicitly,

leads to the delineation of distinctive cultural boundaries, histories and characteristics without accounting for why certain fans are seen as 'otaku' (Kam, 2008, 2013). Kam highlights how the labelling of people as 'otaku' is intricately linked with 'common sense' about, as well as anxieties over, what constitute appropriate consumption practices in contemporary capitalist societies. In his chapter in this volume, Kam focuses on the labelling of people judged to be directing their desire toward fictional characters and entities perceived to be non-sexual in order to explicate how 'otaku' labelling is grounded in concerns over the channelling of capacities that emerge with media usage, which is not exclusive to any particular fandom. To be clear, we are not arguing that fan activities should not be studied, but rather that it might be better to focus on the activity in question rather than assuming that calling it 'otaku culture' or those involved in it 'otaku' reveals anything. Such a grouping or labelling often obscures more than it reveals, especially when 'otaku' becomes shorthand for all sorts of unspoken assumptions and received stereotypes. A taxonomy of fans that does not question the logic of classification only serves to perpetuate certain values and concerns as 'commonsensical'.

Social constructionist approach

A major inspiration for the approach in *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan* is provided by Sharon Kinsella's journal article on 'otaku' (Kinsella, 1998). This article is groundbreaking not merely because it is one of the first academic writings on the subject in English, but also because it analyses 'otaku' as a social discourse, an insight that is too often overlooked. Kinsella shows how concern with the perceived individualism of youth and their refusal to take on 'adult' roles and responsibilities contributed to a discourse on social problems in Japan from the 1960s to the 1990s. This discourse on individualism, immaturity and antisocial behaviour underpins what Kinsella calls the '*otaku* panic', her tag for the moral panic in Japan about '*otaku*' youth that was sparked by the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989. As Kinsella argues in a much-cited passage, 'After the Miyazaki murder case, the concept of an *otaku* changed its meaning in the hands of the media. *Otaku* came to mean, in the first instance, Miyazaki; in the second instance, all amateur *manga* artists and fans; and in the third instance, all Japanese youth in their entirety' (Kinsella, 1998, p. 311). Kinsella's argument – together with those of Tuuka Toivenen and Yuki Imoto, who build on her work – represents a social constructionist approach, which examines the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world, or how reality is socially constructed. This approach is in many ways the closest to our own, as it draws attention to the process, as well as the historical and sociocultural contexts, in which a category such as 'otaku' is constructed.

However, while it marks a significant step in a desirable direction, and serves as an important corrective to much of the existing literature on 'otaku', it does not venture far enough. That is, while this approach posits 'otaku' as a constructed category, it questions little of everything else, for example the media. In Kinsella's analysis, there are very few references to what is meant by 'the media.' Camera crews and reporters, several magazines and Ōtsuka Eiji and Taku Hachirō are mentioned, but the discussion is brief

(Kinsella, 1998, pp. 308–11). As Kinsella's article has been cited again and again, 'the media' has become something of a 'black box' (Latour, 1988, p. 3). Writers know and state with confidence that there was something like an 'otaku' panic, but the specifics of what print and broadcast media referred to 'otaku' and in what way is less than clear. We do not know how, when, under what circumstances and by whom Miyazaki Tsutomu was identified as an 'otaku'. These missing dynamics are significant, in that this event is said to have had an enormous impact on the social construction of 'otaku'. Björn-Ole Kamm's chapter in this volume seeks to break open the 'black box' of 'the media' in 1989 by examining the role of various actors reporting on the Miyazaki Incident. Kamm demonstrates that 'the stereotyped' and 'the mass media' can not be divorced in the formation of 'otaku' as a discourse. Significantly, those who purportedly challenged 'otaku stereotypes' were complicit in establishing 'otaku' as an object of knowledge and cultural management.

We also question how the social constructionist approach emphasizes interested agents or claims-makers that shape the discourse on 'otaku'. Though we agree with Ōtsuka that one should always consider an author's motives and stakes in writing about 'otaku', we do not follow Toivonen and Imoto's approach to 'translators', which tends to reduce people to rational actors and miss the complexity of their actions. Toivonen and Imoto argue, for example, that Okada Toshio 'actively worked to change the perception of *otaku*' and describe him as a 'major activist' whose writing, teaching and media appearances contributed to an improved image of 'otaku' in the 1990s (Toivonen and Imoto, 2013, p. 73), but they encounter some trouble explaining his turn away from 'otaku' during the 2000s (see Okada, Chapter 9, this volume). This confusion comes from the assumption that there is a coherent 'otaku community' and that Okada is speaking about 'otaku' in a consistent way (Toivonen and Imoto, 2013, p. 77). If we look at Okada's writings, however, we can see that in 2008 he introduces a distinction between *hiragana* and *katakana* renderings of 'otaku', and in the process argues that 'otaku' does not refer to a coherent object. Further, his ideas about 'otaku' have changed, as have his identifications with the term. Consider, for example, a dialogue between Okada and Morikawa, mediated by Murakami Takashi (another of Toivonen and Imoto's translators) and included in his *Little Boy* catalogue. Okada, introduced as an 'otaku expert' and once called the '*otaku* king', says, when faced with the 'otaku' being discussed by Morikawa and Murakami, that he cannot 'become an *otaku*' (*otaku sono mono niwa narenai*; Okada, Morikawa and Murakami, 2005, p. 170). This might seem strange, but in fact Okada refers to himself in the dialogue as a 'science-fiction maniac' (*SF mania*) rather than 'otaku'. When the topic shifts to the difference between maniacs and 'otaku', Okada explains:

The sole difference between *mania* and *otaku* is their social acceptability. *Otaku* are *mania* who are socially rejected. Conversely, the hobbies of *mania* are those that are socially accepted. For example, the moment girls decide bikes aren't cool, motorbike *mania* become motorbike *otaku*. It's just a matter of societal labeling (*retteru o hatteiru dake no mondai*). That's the only difference between *mania* and *otaku*.

Okada, Morikawa and Murakami, 2005, pp. 177–8

Okada's argument that 'otaku' is nothing other than a label, and his dis-identification with the term in 2005 seems to challenge Toivonen and Imoto's simple understanding of him as an 'otaku' activist with a clear relation to the 'otaku community' and clear motivations. It is striking that the 'otaku king' does not identify as an 'otaku' in this context. This is because what he means by 'otaku' is not the same as what Morikawa and Murakami mean (see Okada, Chapter 9, this volume). In this way, it is difficult to plot Okada's position in the social construction of 'otaku', because he is variably oriented to the term and says different things about it to different people at different times (and even in the same publication).

The social constructionist approach may show different perspectives on a given group of people, but it remains 'grounded, at least implicitly, on the assumption that the cosmos is endowed with a single order (for instance a single social structure, or a single material world). Indeed, it needs this if its explanations are to work' (Law and Lien, 2013, p. 364).¹¹ When we consider this in relation to discussions of 'otaku', we can see clearly the issue: social constructionism needs to assume a social wherein things are constructed. While 'otaku' is destabilized, the 'context' of its construction, the social, needs to remain stable for the argument to make sense. Thus we can see why Okada Toshio and other key individuals are emptied of all internal conflict: they need to be plotted into a larger story of changing social perceptions and new social constructions of 'otaku'. Okada's words are not translated or discussed in detail, because he is a stable point in a larger systemic analysis, which is itself nothing more than a narrative about 'society' and the 'social construction' of 'otaku'. One cannot avoid feeling at times that it is not some reified society that constructs 'otaku', but rather the analyst who organizes dates, events and names into a coherent narrative about 'otaku'.

It is for this reason that approaching 'otaku' in terms of social constructionism seems inadequate. Not only is the content of articles, writings and so on not explored, but also the interested agents, claims-makers or translators impacting the discourse are abbreviated, rationalized and moved like chess pieces on a board. All of the conflict at certain moments – the debates themselves, the ambiguity of the individuals involved – are glossed over. In addition, we face the problematic selection of interested agents, claims-makers or translators. An inattentive reader might not even notice how Ōtsuka Eiji has dropped out of Toivonen and Imoto's analysis, or how Okada has become the 'otaku' spokesman where it was Taku Hachirō for Kinsella. These shifts are significant, because, just as Okada Toshio is denied his own complexity, he takes the place of figures who are less 'known' and susceptible to rationalization, for example Ōtsuka Eiji, or even Taku Hachirō, whom Ōtsuka sees as playing up the 'otaku' stereotype in an Alan Sokal-like experiment. (In a similar way, LaMarre sees Okada as 'playing' the academy in his pseudo discipline of 'otakuology'; LaMarre, 2006, p. 370.) The ambiguous agents are not included, because they do not make sense in the overall social narrative being constructed by the analysts. Once the debate is settled in the present and on the page, then we can, as Gayle Rubin (2011) points out, make sense out of the past as a fictive chronology, rather than deal with specific historical moments. It is our intention in *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan* to do just the opposite: to present a more robust discussion of dates, events and individuals to disrupt what is 'known' and open up 'otaku' for debate.

A revised labelling approach

In this final section of the introduction, we would like to suggest an approach that has been fruitful for our thoughts on 'otaku': labelling. Labelling is similar to other approaches in that it is 'labelled' as an approach, but, in fact, rather than presenting a homogeneous and coherent whole, labelling incorporates quite heterogeneous and only partially connected ideas. The two scholars often credited with articulating the approach, Howard S. Becker and Erving Goffman, in fact differ in their own approaches, as can be seen from *Outsiders* and *Stigma*, both originally published in 1963. What unites Becker and Goffman is a common dissatisfaction with social theory of the 1950s and 1960s – a dissatisfaction not unlike our own with discussions of 'otaku'.¹² Until Becker and Goffman intervened in the discourse on criminality and youth delinquency, deviance was treated as an inherent quality of people or actions. To paraphrase this common-sense notion of deviance, the deviant commits deviant acts because s/he is deviant. Critiquing this tautology, Becker attempted to show via his studies on dance musicians and marijuana users that, '[s]ocial groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction creates deviance [thus, deviance is an effect of labelling, not an inherent quality]. The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label' (Becker, 1963, p. 9). Similarly, Goffman highlights the demand for 'normalcy' as the source for deviant labels and stereotypes (Goffman, 1963, p. 7). Normalcy, being the product of the modern nation-state's attempt to measure and control its population via statistics, allows for statements about what is normal or average. This measuring and subsequent production of normalcy is a key component of governmentality via a network of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, which allow the exercise of knowledge-power (Foucault, 1991, p. 102). Negative labels and stereotypes vis-à-vis a common-sense logic of 'normalcy' have been characterized as a specific rhetorical figure through their imperviousness to conflicting information (Pickering, 2001, p. 25). Unlike psychological or analytic categories or schemas, which change through new information, stereotypical labels do not, as their function is to fix the labelled in a subordinate position to the ones doing the labelling (see the discussion on Orientalism above).

This approach to labelling was an intervention into hitherto common social scientific practice, which assumed stable criteria for deviance outside a community's contingent rules and responses to specific acts. Labelling questioned assumed-to-be given features of social settings, such as objective deviance, and treated them as collective actions or achievements instead. It fell, however, in its own trap by repeating the notion of stable criteria due to a typology that knew 'secret deviance' (Becker, 1963, p. 20). If 'deviant behavior is behavior that people so label', then 'secret deviance' does not make sense, as it assumes a criterion of deviance independent from the community response (Pollner, 1978, p. 274). Such a typology is still within the confines of common-sense notions of deviance, for example employed by judges or law enforcement. We aim at a different notion of labelling that does not assume any 'true' criteria for deviance, but rather is more interested in the interdependent co-production, the dynamic co-creation of worlds shared by the labellers and the labelled, the making of labels, stereotypes and kinds of people such as 'otaku'. This 'constitutive' labelling approach is

not there to judge whether ‘deviance’ or any other label has been applied correctly. We do not want to show how ‘otaku’ have been represented wrongly, that the true ‘otaku’ is not like the received image or to promote ‘epistemological’ scepticism toward the relation between representation and the world. Rather, our approach ‘eschews the implication that the world pre-exists representational practices and favours instead the assumption that practices . . . *perform* the world’ (Woolgar and Lezaun, 2013, p. 325). We want to look into the shared contingent enactments of ‘otaku’ by media, by ‘ordinary’ people and by self-identifying ‘otaku’.

Instead of explaining one specific instance of ‘otaku’ or constructing a general theory, *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan* explores the contested, processual and relational production of ‘otaku’ in over thirty years of discourse and practice. Our aim is not to reassemble the different dates, events and names into a singular, linear, coherent account of ‘otaku’. In the following chapters, we show that the major characteristic of ‘otaku’ discourse is uncertainty, both in the sense of what is meant by ‘otaku’ and who can speak as, about and for ‘otaku’. This uncertainty is relational, which becomes apparent through the association of the many oxymoronic certainties ascribed to ‘otaku’. Our engagement with labelling is not intended to question the reality of ‘otaku’, but rather to focus on the dynamics of labelling. If we look carefully at the many instances of performing ‘otaku’ in practice and discourse, we encounter complex interferences with other objects, such as gender or age. ‘If we recognize and analyse these interferences then the question of evaluating performance becomes more and more complex’ (Mol, 1999, p. 82). In this way, it becomes more and more difficult to talk about ‘otaku’ with any certainty.

By arguing that the labelling of people as ‘otaku’ is always contingent on a particular nexus of power, we hope to address the doubt that Ōtsuka expresses in his Foreword about the meaningfulness of ‘otaku research’, which extends to this edited volume. From our perspective, ‘otaku’ deserves no less attention than other social issues in contemporary Japan. At the heart of ‘otaku’ are logics of knowledge-power, heteronormativity and capitalism, as well as the attempts to manage people and capacities according to them. We offer this edited volume as an attempt to illuminate the fantasies, anxieties, values and concerns that we have naturalized and must engage with in order to critically understand the social dynamics animating people in contemporary Japan and beyond. Because many of the chapters here are translations of existing work in Japanese, not all of them employ or agree with the revised labelling approach or even the project as it has been outlined in this Introduction. We welcome the internal tensions in the discussion of ‘otaku’ in contemporary Japan – in fact, we insist on them – which we hope will open into debates about what each of the contributors is talking about and why it matters. In this way, a return to ‘otaku research’ from the past will unsettle the present and perhaps open new paths for the future.

Notes

1. This statement comes from the anthropologist Mizuko Ito. Another variation is provided by the anthropologist Ian Condry, who writes, ‘there is a little bit of otaku in all of us’ (Condry, 2013, p. 203). Condry makes this statement at the conclusion of a

- chapter on the practice of ‘marrying’ manga and anime characters in Japan, ostensibly as a way to undermine approaches to ‘otaku’ that cast them as ‘weird’, ‘abnormal’, ‘different’, ‘other’ or ‘Japanese’. While this is a commendable goal, if everyone is an ‘otaku’, this means effectively that no one is an ‘otaku’, as the distinction is arbitrary. Contrary to Condry, however, as Matt Hills points out, imagined national differences return among ‘otaku’ to make ‘Japan’ and ‘not Japan’ significant ways of identifying with and against certain fans and fan practices (Hills, 2002).
2. Miyadai was among the first to write about ‘otaku’ in articles published in *Chūō kōron* in 1990, which were collected as chapters in his 1994 book. Likewise, Ōtsuka’s book, *‘Otaku’ no seishinshi (The Intellectual History of ‘Otaku’)*, which was published in 2004, is a collection of essays that he wrote about ‘otaku’ from 1997 to 2000 in the journal *Shokun!*
 3. Personal interview with Patrick W. Galbraith conducted on 16 October 2009.
 4. To his credit, Azuma has recently said that, ‘We . . . have to be aware of history. When we examine history, we find that definitions of words such as *otaku* . . . are changing all the time, and this is a political and social process. . . . I would be grateful if scholars took more of an interest in the discourse, debates, and history surrounding the subject [of *otaku*]’ (Galbraith, 2014, p. 177). That is precisely our aim for this volume.
 5. Ōtsuka is not alone in his critique. Alexander R. Galloway, in his musing on the legacy of postmodern theory more generally, wonders if ‘we are all Alan Sokal now’ (Galloway, 2012, pp. 125–6).
 6. LaMarre’s example is the Gainax Discourse, which promotes a certain history of anime and fandom culminating in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–6). One might also point out the problematic return to the Japanese premodern period in Murakami Takashi and Okada Toshio’s contributions to this discourse. On this point, in addition to LaMarre (2006), see Steinberg (2004).
 7. The Japanese is: *‘Otaku no okage de Nihon no bunka, subukaruchā to iwareru bunka, wa machigaenaku sekai e hasshin sareteiru. . . . Ware ware wa motto hokori ni omotte ikaneba ikan no janai ka’*. The connection of ‘otaku’ subculture to Japanese culture is striking, as is the positioning of ‘otaku’ as a source of global success and national pride.
 8. Considering the institutionalization of ‘Japan Studies’ more generally in the United States, Naoki Sakai refers to a dynamic of ‘bilateral narcissism’ (Harootunian and Sakai, 1999, p. 606), where Japan and the United States see only each other and find themselves in relation to the other. This relationship was supported by the US government during the Cold War.
 9. In an earlier time, Asada Akira called it ‘the return to J’ (*J kaiki*), for example in ‘J-pop’, where the national point of origin returns to refer to music in global circulation (Asada, 2000). Calling animation from Japan ‘Japanimation’ or ‘anime’ is another example. This construction of Japan in a feedback loop is very much related to the geopolitical position of Japan in the postwar period (Novak, 2013, p. 10).
 10. In his master’s thesis, Thiam Huat Kam wrote that, ‘no group of people is “otaku” in the absolute sense, independent of any temporal or spatial context’ (Kam, 2008, p. 123).
 11. This might be traced back to Émile Durkheim and his approach to ‘the social’, if not the ‘structural-functionalism’ that followed him, which approached society as an organic whole. For an example of this thinking, see Margaret Mead, who discusses examples of deviance from the preferred gender temperaments of three primitive societies in the Pacific (Mead, [1935] 2001, Chapter 18).
 12. Our approach is inspired not only by Becker and Goffman, but also related moves in the sociology and philosophy of science – ‘making-up people’ (Hacking, 1999) – anthropology (Strathern, 1992) and empirical studies of ontology (Mol, 1999; Law, 2009; Law and Lien, 2013).

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Section One

The 1980s

“Otaku” Research’ and Anxiety About Failed Men

Patrick W. Galbraith

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ‘“Otaku” Research’ (*‘Otaku’ no kenkyū*) column published in *Manga Burikko* in 1983. Written primarily by Nakamori Akio, but also including a contribution by Eji Sonta, ‘“Otaku” Research’ is often identified as the first example of media labelling manga and anime fans as ‘otaku’. While some accounts note that the overall tone of the column was negative, most discussions are brief sketches within larger arguments (for example, Kinsella, 1998, p. 311), which overlook the specifics of the debate about ‘otaku’. A close reading reveals that Nakamori and Eji Sonta were responding not to sci-fi anime fans, or those most often identified as the ancestors of ‘otaku’ today (Morikawa, 2004, pp. 22–7; Murakami, 2005, p. 122; Azuma, 2009, p. 6), but rather male fans of manga and anime who were attracted to fictional girl characters. To understand the ‘“Otaku” Research’ column, which is foundational to debates about ‘otaku’, it is necessary to place it in the context of what is sometimes called the ‘*lolicon* boom’ (*rorikon būmu*). Beginning in the 1970s, men began to read *shōjo* (for girls) manga, watch anime featuring *shōjo* (girl) characters and to experiment in niche magazines and fanzines with what would come to be called ‘cute eroticism’ (*kawaii ero*) and ‘cute girl’ characters, or *bishōjo*. All of this was wrapped up in ‘*lolicon*’, which meant attraction not to young girls, but rather to *shōjo* manga, *bishōjo* characters, cuteness and, ultimately, an orientation of desire toward the ‘two-dimensional’ (*nijigen*) (Akagi, 1993, p. 230). By the early 1980s, men with such an orientation had gained enough visibility to become both a consumer demographic and a target of criticism; it is not a coincidence that *Manga Burikko*, a magazine associated with *lolicon* and featuring *bishōjo* characters, was the site of the intervention by Nakamori and Eji Sonta. It was here, in the pages of this magazine, that the contours of a problematic ‘otaku’ identity would be defined.

Desire for fictional characters

To understand the discourse about ‘otaku’ in 1983, it is necessary to look back at the evolution in the 1970s of a specific character form called *bishōjo*. Though often translated as ‘beautiful girl’, a more accurate translation of *bishōjo* is ‘cute girl’. The

distinction is not arbitrary, and hinges on the loaded word ‘cute’ (*kawaii*) (for a discussion of the place of cuteness in Japan, see Kinsella, 1995). In Japanese comics, bold lines, sharp angles and dark cross-hatching are associated with ‘realism’, most notably *gekiga*, or ‘dramatic pictures’, which were popular with young men and student radicals in the 1960s. As Shiokawa Kanako notes, ‘This style is a direct antithesis of the *manga* (whimsical picture) style, from which many “cute” icons of today have emerged’ (Shiokawa, 1999, p. 97). ‘Cute’ is about soft lines, round shapes and light shading, a style often seen in works for children and girls, but popular with a much broader demographic in contemporary Japan. As we will see, the character form called *bishōjo* is the result of men consuming across gender/genre boundaries and appropriating *shōjo* manga and anime.

In the 1970s, even as critics opined that mainstream manga for boys had stagnated and the *gekiga* movement had lost its edge, *shōjo* manga was undergoing a revolution. Female artists developed various techniques to explore the emotions and psychological states of their female characters, and also experimented with representations of sex. For *shōjo* manga, sex was something of a taboo, but female artists of the 1970s were able to circumvent conventional gender roles and expectations by drawing sex between *bishōnen*, or ‘beautiful boy’ characters (McLelland, 2005, pp. 67, 72). Not only did female readers respond favourably to this new *shōjo* manga, but male readers also took notice (Itō, 2010; Galbraith, 2014, pp. 26–8). Though there already existed erotic *gekiga*, the representation of sex using the cute, round characters of *shōjo* manga was new, as was the attention paid to the psychology of the characters involved. Contributors to the legendary fanzine *Meikyū* – who would go on in 1975 to found the Comic Market, a gathering for producers and buyers of fanzines – were male fans of *shōjo* manga (Shimotsuki, 2008, pp. 11–12, 21–2, 45–6, 64–8, 76–83, 96–9; Yoshimoto, 2009, pp. 73–7). The leanings of these men are clear in the fact that they placed advertisements for the Comic Market in *shōjo* manga magazines, but did not start advertising in manga magazines for boys until later.

While the organizers of the Comic Market were men, girls and women dominated convention attendance in the 1970s (Yoshimoto, 2009, pp. 78–9). Indeed, girls and women were central to the formation of anime fan clubs in the early 1970s, and many were brought together by a shared interest in male characters (Sasakibara, 2004, p. 21). As manga and anime fandom reached new heights in the late 1970s, specialty magazines took over the function of providing information about and critiques of manga and anime, and fanzines shifted to ‘parody’ of favourite characters. Again, girls and women were at the leading edge, producing imaginary sexual encounters between male characters poached from manga and anime. Exposed to the outpouring of professional and amateur creative energy around beautiful boy characters, male fans began to experiment with *bishōjo*, or cute girl characters, and ‘cute eroticism’ (*kawaii ero*) (Yoshimoto, 2009, pp. 81–3; Takatsuki, 2010, pp. 105–11; Morikawa, 2011, p. 182). Cute eroticism, or the expression of eroticism in the manga style, was a distinct departure from the *gekiga* style and its ‘realism’.

The man most associated with the early development of the character form called *bishōjo* is Azuma Hideo, a professional manga artist. Though nude photographs of girls (so-called *shōjo* nudes) and erotic *gekiga* were circulating in the 1970s, Azuma was

uninterested in them (Azuma and Yamada, 2011, p. 32). As an example of the broader trend of male artists inspired by *shōjo* manga (Kinsella, 1998, p. 305), when drawing his female characters, Azuma added the emotive faces of characters from *shōjo* manga to the squat and round character bodies associated with Tezuka Osamu and found the result to be thoroughly erotic (Azuma and Yamada, 2011, pp. 30–1). Azuma’s characters, his *bishōjo*, are notable for their stylistic simplification, roundness and cuteness, which aligns them with manga rather than *gekiga*. In addition to the manga aesthetic, Azuma notes that his work shares with *shōjo* manga a ‘lack of reality’ (*riariti no nasa*) (Azuma and Yamada, 2011, p. 30). The wide support for Azuma in the 1970s speaks in part to a growing demographic that preferred manga and cute to *gekiga* and realism (Takatsuki, 2010, pp. 64–5), which might also be described as a turn toward unrealism.

Responding consciously to the overwhelming prevalence of fanzines for girls and women at conventions (Azuma and Yamada, 2011, p. 32), in 1979, Azuma Hideo contributed to a fanzine titled *Cybele*, which places *bishōjo* or cute girl characters in sexual situations.¹ It was a unique expression of sexuality. While Azuma had long intentionally parodied the male position in his professional manga works, in his contribution to *Cybele*, male characters are replaced with animals. Not only does this choice make the work visually distinct from the realism of *gekiga*, but Azuma’s desire to ‘erase himself’ (*jibun wo keshitai*) (Azuma and Yamada, 2011, pp. 35–6) from the page is also a significant departure from the ‘heroic’ male inserter seen in erotic *gekiga* (Akagi, 1993, pp. 231–2).² Reflecting on the decision to make *Cybele*, Oki Yukao, who acted as editor, recalls that seeing *shōjo* manga featuring male-male romance and fanzines placing male anime characters in sexual couplings made him feel that even cute girl characters who are sexualized and involved in sex might be allowed (Morikawa, 2011, p. 181).

However, for many manga fans, the content of *Cybele* was nothing short of scandalous (Takekuma, 2003, p. 107). In a dialogue published in the March 1982 issue of *Gekkan Out*, Azuma recalls that it was something of a ‘taboo’ (*tabū*), even among manga and anime fans in Japan, to talk about the erotic appeal of cute or manga-style girl characters. The reaction to *Cybele* from many other artists, especially those producing *gekiga*, was negative. On the other hand, there was a visible and controversial fandom lining up at conventions to buy copies of the fanzine. Distinct from the erotic *gekiga* that came before, *Cybele* is an example of ‘pornographic’ drawings that stimulate despite being unrealistic – or precisely because they are unrealistic. By Sasakibara Gō’s estimation, the arrival of *Cybele* and the preference for cute eroticism and unrealistic sex that it heralded marks a historic ‘change in values’ (*kachi tenkan*) among manga and anime fans in Japan (Sasakibara, 2004, p. 37).

The striking success of *Cybele* can also be seen as a symbolic ‘coming out’ of fans of the fictional girl characters who appeared in anime. Though often ignored, the phenomenon of desire for fictional girl characters has a long history in Japanese anime fandom. It is often said that complex anime narratives (which required regular viewing) such as *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974–5) inspired a surge in the number of mature viewers, but what is less commented on is that men were watching anime made for children and girls, as well as watching anime for its girl characters (Takatsuki, 2010, p. 97). In 1974, many anime fans watched *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* instead of *Space*

Battleship Yamato (Yoshimoto, 2009, p. 106). Even when *Yamato* did become popular in reruns, fans rallied around its female characters. In the special issue of *Gekkan Out* devoted to *Space Battleship Yamato*, released in June 1977 and recognized as a turning point in the history of anime fandom in Japan, we find nude drawings of the character Mori Yuki (Yoshimoto, 2009, p. 117). In descriptions of how fans began to watch anime in a more intensely focused way, we find not only references to *Getter Robo* (1974–5), but also *Urusei Yatsura* (1981–6), which features Lum, a *bishōjo* character that captured the hearts of a generation of young men (Okada, 1996, pp. 11–15). Theatrical screenings of the film adaptations of *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1981–2) were not only marked by declarations of the ‘new age of anime’ as a mature art form, but also adult male fans taking photographs of the character Sayla Mass during her shower scene, which is credited with demonstrating the demand for, and inspiring future creators of, pornographic anime (Saitō, 2011, p. 104). *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* (1982–3) is as much about falling in love with the cute girl character Lynn Minmay as it is about giant robots fighting in space (Sasakibara, 2004, p. 108).

At the end of the 1970s, Miyazaki Hayao directed the animated film *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979), which featured the girl character Clarisse, who inspired an intense following among adult male anime fans (and even her own genre of fanzines, ‘Clarisse magazines’). The increasing visibility of these fans led to a series of articles on the ‘*lolicon* boom’ (*rorikon būmu*) in specialty magazines such as *Gekkan Out*, *Animec* and *Animage* (Takatsuki, 2010, pp. 97–8). Among manga and anime fans at this time, *lolicon*, a contraction of ‘Lolita Complex’, did not refer to the desire of an older man for a young girl per se, but rather the desire for fictional girl characters; the term was associated with male *shōjo* manga fans, Azuma Hideo, and fanzines about girl characters popular among men.³ In magazine articles about the *lolicon* boom, Miyazaki’s works featured prominently, which made the director uncomfortable. Though he admits to ‘falling in love’ with the heroine of an animated film that he saw as a young man (Miyazaki, 2009, pp. 19, 49, 70; Saitō, 2011, pp. 87–9; Condry, 2013, p. 192), in the June 1982 issue of *Animage* magazine, which includes an interview with Miyazaki alongside its ranking of favourite characters (which included Clarisse from *The Castle of Cagliostro*), Miyazaki comments that he ‘hates’ (*kirai*) those who use the word *lolicon*. The ire of the great director did not, however, curb the enthusiasm of fans of fictional girl characters, as evidenced by the publication of specialty magazines such as *Lemon People* (from 1981), the formation of fan clubs for TV anime like *Magical Princess Minky Momo* (1982) and *Creamy Mami, the Magic Angel* (1983), and the production of erotic games and animation such as *Lolita Syndrome* (1983) and *Lolita Anime* (1984).⁴ Yoshimoto Taimatsu notes of this time the increasing sexuality of manga and anime characters, whose fictional bodies were real objects for human desire (Yoshimoto, 2009, pp. 168–70).

The case of *Manga Burikko*

Manga Burikko was first published in November 1982, at the height of the *lolicon* boom. The magazine started its life publishing erotic *gekiga* – rather realistic depictions of sex, often combined with violence – and also included photographs of nude girls.

However, in 1983, Ōtsuka Eiji, a male reader of *shōjo* manga who wanted to produce new wave *shōjo* manga, went from working as a part-time editor at *Manga Burikko* to becoming its driving force (see Yamanaka, this volume). On the one hand, Ōtsuka solicited contributions from female artists such as Okazaki Kyōko and Sakurazawa Erica, and on the other he encouraged experiments with *bishōjo* characters and cute eroticism by both men and women. His editorial influence is clear from the May 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, which features a manga aesthetic in unmistakably cute drawn images. The cover announces that this is a ‘*Bishōjo* comic magazine for dreaming boys’ (*Yume miru otoko no ko no tame no bishōjo komikkushi*). Note the use of the word *bishōjo*, reserved almost exclusively for cute girl characters from manga and anime, and the description of readers as ‘dreaming’, which sounds like the starry-eyed girls drawn in, and drawn to, *shōjo* manga. The shift in the content of *Manga Burikko* earned it a reputation as a *lolicon* magazine (in addition to increasing its female readership to approximately 15 per cent by November 1983).

The trend in the content of *Manga Burikko* away from *gekiga* and realism toward manga and cute continued in the following months, and the reader response section offers critical insights. In July 1983, Eguchi Shigeki, a reader from Yamagata Prefecture, writes to the magazine that he prefers the new emphasis on ‘light’ eroticism. In August 1983, Kawaguchi Toshihiko from Hokkaidō Prefecture writes, ‘I have a two-dimensional complex (*nijigen konpurekkusu*). I don’t feel anything for the photographs [of nude girls and gravure idols] in the opening pages of the magazine. For that reason, I’d like you to stop with the photographs and run only manga.’ Complaints continued, including a letter from Suzuki Yōko from Miyazaki Prefecture, who praises the artists featured in *Manga Burikko*, but explains, ‘I feel nothing for manga that is simply about penetration or girls being raped. I psychologically can’t accept it.’ It seems that the editors finally yielded to reader demand in November 1983, symbolized by the issue’s subtitle: ‘Totally *bishōjo* manga’ (*Maru maru bishōjo manguwaa*).⁵ Nude and gravure idol photographs are entirely absent, and remained so for the rest of the magazine’s existence.⁶ In addition, ‘realistic’ depictions and graphic sex are far less prevalent, and gradually faded from the pages of *Manga Burikko*. This transformation is interesting not only because the power of the readers is on display, but also because of the realization on the part of the editors that the readers of the magazine did not want or need the ‘real thing’, be it photographs or ‘realistic’ drawings. (Note that the rejection of photographs of real girls and realistic drawings by *Manga Burikko* readers echoes Azuma Hideo’s own rejection of these things, as well as his preference for unrealism, which is crucial to *bishōjo* characters and cute eroticism.)

Not only were both men and women drawing for *Manga Burikko*, but there was also a significant blurring of the line between male and female artists. For example, in the August 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, a male manga artist named Hayasaka Miki uses four colour pages to introduce a cute girl character named Takanezawa Moe. On the third page, Moe’s elder sister is introduced as a female manga artist who is in charge of taking some photos of Moe for this spread in *Manga Burikko*. At this point, the reader realizes that the drawings that s/he sees on the page are the ‘photographs’ that Moe’s elder sister took of her. While the older sister calls Moe ‘cute’, and the view of her is

certainly voyeuristic, the gaze is presented as feminine and not sexual. In drawing what the older sister saw through the camera's viewfinder, Hayasaka is not just drawing a girl in a style inspired by girls' comics, but he is also visualizing Moe from the viewpoint of a girl (= Hayasaka as female manga artist and older sister).⁷ The *bishōjo* character has an ambiguous relation to 'real' women, and the men drawing and drawn to her seem to share that ambiguous relation to women. Indeed, for its critics, *Manga Burikko*, which seemed to support a rejection of 'real' women and ambiguous relation to fictional girls, represented a problem of failed masculinity.

'Otaku' as failed men

Nakamori Akio's column, "'Otaku' Research' (*'Otaku' no kenkyū*), first appeared in *Manga Burikko* in June 1983, precisely when fan desires for *bishōjo* characters and cute eroticism were increasingly reflected in the pages of the magazine. In the column, Nakamori positions himself as the voice of reason in contemporary manga and anime fandom. Significantly, he begins the first instalment of his column by relaying his first ever visit to the Comic Market, a gathering for producers and buyers of fanzines. Founded in 1975, Nakamori estimates in 1983 that the Comic Market drew over 10,000 people. Though women originally dominated the event, the fanzine *Cybele* and *lolicon* boom had inspired more men to participate, and Nakamori dutifully discusses both the women and men that he encountered. To Nakamori's eyes, these women and men are 'manga maniacs' (*manga mania*); their shared excitement for fictional characters, reflected in their fanzines, exposes them to be lonely losers who are freaking out over suddenly being in the presence of other manga maniacs.

In this first instalment of his column, Nakamori expands from the Comic Market to criticize many different groups of people – fans lined up outside of theatres waiting to see an animated film, trainspotters, idol chasers, sci-fi enthusiasts – all of whom he decides to lump into an invented category called 'otaku'. However, Nakamori reserves a special disdain for manga maniacs. Consider this excerpt: 'There are those dressing up as anime characters, those in the creepy style you see in Azuma Hideo's manga, those simpering and pushing girls to buy their *lolicon* manga, those running around for no reason . . . Man, my head was about to explode.'⁸ The people Nakamori describes here, who he decides to call 'otaku', are part of the controversial fandom of men producing fanzines featuring cute girl characters and cute eroticism, as can be deduced from the references to Azuma Hideo and *lolicon*.

In the second instalment of "'Otaku' Research', published in *Manga Burikko* in July 1983, Nakamori makes clear the primary target of his criticism. Rather than devoting an entire instalment of the column to trainspotters, idol chasers, computer nerds or any other conceivable group, Nakamori focuses on *lolicon* and men sexually attracted to fictional girl characters. The pathologizing tone of his writing begins with the title: 'Do "Otaku" Love Like Normal People?' (*'Otaku' mo hitonami ni koi o suru?*). The answer, apparently, is no, 'otaku' do not love like normal people, because they are attracted to fictional girl characters. Nakamori explains:

‘Otaku’ ... are content with carrying around pin-ups of anime characters like Minky Momo [from *Magical Princess Minky Momo*, an anime series for girls aired in 1982] and Nanako [from *Nanako SOS*, a manga by Azuma Hideo that was adapted into a TV anime in 1983]. Maybe I’ll call it a two-dimensional complex. They can’t even talk to real women. In less extreme cases, they gravitate toward idol singers who don’t display their femininity, or they become warped and get into *lolicon*. These guys will never accept nude photos of mature women.

Considered against the first instalment of the column, it is abundantly clear that Nakamori has refined ‘otaku’ to mean men who desire fictional girl characters. Note that female fans of manga and anime, who were included in the first instalment of Nakamori’s column critiquing otaku, have completely dropped out of the discussion. In this second instalment, the problem is a lack of women. What seems to bother Nakamori is that otaku are not interested in real women. He sets up a hierarchy of sexual objects: real women (*jitsubutsu no onna*), nude photos of mature women (*seijuku shita onna no nūdo shashin*), idol singers who do not display their femininity (*josei-teki sonzai o anmashi apīru shinai aidoru kashu*) and finally, at the bottom, anime characters (*anime kyara*) like Minky Momo and Nanako. At the top of the hierarchy, desire is normal and healthy, while at the bottom it is abnormal and sick; only those who are ‘warped’ (*kussetsu shite*) ‘get into *lolicon*’ (*rorikon shitari suru*). Lest we forget, the *lolicon* that Nakamori is talking about is not men desiring young girls, but rather men desiring fictional girl characters. Nakamori gives a name to this abnormality: a two-dimensional complex (*nijigen konpurekkusu*). Recall that Kawaguchi Toshihiko, a reader of *Manga Burikko*, defiantly admits in a letter to the editor that he has such a ‘complex’ and does not accept nude photos of women (mature or otherwise); Nakamori would certainly call this man an otaku. Nakamori finds such otaku to be disturbing because he perceives them to be sexually uninterested in real women and to instead prefer, in some warped way, fictional girl characters.

For Nakamori, otaku ‘definitively lack male skills’ (*kettei-teki ni dansei-teki nōryoku ga ketsujo shi*), or, put differently, otaku turn to fictional girls because they are not real men. He elaborates:

And, maybe because of the lack of male skills, but these guys are strangely faggy, you know? These are adult men in their twenties who, when they get their hands on a poster or something with their favourite anime character on it, get so overwhelmed with happiness that the jump up in the air with their legs bent behind them ... It really makes me sick. Really, there’s no way guys like this could ever get with a woman.

Otaku, referring to men with a ‘two-dimensional complex’ or who are associated with ‘*lolicon*’, lack male skills and are ‘strangely faggy’ (*myō ni okama-ppoi*). The word translated here as ‘fag’ is *okama*, which in Japan is often used as a pejorative term for effeminate men or men who cross-dress and act like women. Nakamori’s logic is that otaku are not only unable to get women, but also that they are ‘women’ or failed men. To put it another way, Nakamori’s issue has shifted from a lack of women in the lives of

otaku men to otaku men as 'women'. In comparing the uncontrolled excitement and bodily response of otaku looking at posters of anime characters to men cross-dressing as women, Nakamori suggests that both are unnatural. The behaviour of otaku, like *okama*, is for Nakamori frankly 'disgusting' (*kimochi warui*). These are adult men, Nakamori reminds the reader, and they ought to act in line with their age and sex.

The third instalment of Nakamori's column, released in August 1983, further reveals the monstrosity of otaku, whose queer existence requires further research. To that end, Nakamori visits a hangout for manga and anime fans in Shinjuku called Free Space. This time, he brings his girlfriend with him so that he can point out otaku to her and make fun of them on the spot.⁹ In one memorable scene, Nakamori and his girlfriend come across a café and reading area, where they spy seven to eight men at a table with anime magazines and posters between them. In exaggerated terms, Nakamori explains his girlfriend's response, which includes an involuntary shriek, goose bumps and uncontrollable shaking. Calling these 'otaku among otaku' (*otaku no otaku*), Nakamori relays his own disgust at these creatures, whose laughter no longer even sounds human – regardless of sex – but rather like 'slugs' (*namekuji*) or 'leeches' (*hiru*).¹⁰ What some might see as friends talking about their shared interest in manga and anime instead appears to Nakamori to be a 'hellish festival' (*jigoku no shukusai*), and he cannot suppress a shudder of his own. The nature of Nakamori's rhetoric, which has escalated from the first to the third instalment of his column, is almost comical; it could even be a parody of the stereotypical view of manga and anime fans. Whether or not Nakamori is entirely serious, the effect of his writing is the same: the otaku is abnormal and needs to be researched by the normal man; the otaku is the funny man, whose antics beg the comedic intervention of the straight man. This time, Nakamori has his girlfriend with him, an outsider whose utter disgust with these men lends credibility to his critique of otaku as failed men who will never be with a real woman. Nakamori has his girlfriend with him, while these men are huddled around anime magazines and posters, which seems to drive home the social and sexual immaturity of otaku. Standing with his girlfriend on the outside, looking down at these failed men, Nakamori is positioned as different from (and above) them.

Due to reader backlash and his own discomfort with the content, *Manga Burikko's* editor Ôtsuka Eiji decided to not publish any more of Nakamori's articles (see Yamanaka, this volume), but a final instalment of '“Otaku” Research' did appear in the December 1983 issue. Written by Eji Sonta, who is identified as a member of Nakamori's circle, this parting shot is billed as a conclusion to the '“Otaku” Research' column. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *lolicon* is the major focus, and the author builds an argument about the social and sexual immaturity of otaku around it. Eji Sonta argues that otaku are men who are unwilling or unable to grow up and accept reality; by reality, he means the roles and responsibilities taken on by adults that make them full members of society. Eji Sonta acknowledges the widespread appeal of youth and rejection of adult society in Japan (see Kinsella, 1995, pp. 250–2), but, as he sees it, otaku take it even further: 'The essence of manga maniacs and anime fans . . . insisting on 'lolicon' is the feeling of not wanting to mature and wanting instead to maintain a state of moratorium. . . . Usually, as we stretch ourselves and act grown up, we get closer and closer to real adulthood, but otaku absolutely refuse to vector themselves toward

general psychological maturity.’ By Eji Sonta’s estimation, manga and anime fans interested in *lolicon* are abnormal. Rhetorically, he sets up a contrast between what is ‘normal’ (*futsū no ba’ai*) and the ‘case of otaku’ (*otaku no ba’ai*), whose insistence on *lolicon* marks an abnormal refusal to grow up. Holding onto *lolicon*, which is to say insisting on a relationship with fictional girl characters, is seen as a sign of social and sexual immaturity. For Eji Sonta, manga and anime fans, or rather the otaku among them characteristically interested in *lolicon*, have taken things too far: ‘A famous *lolicon* manga artist once said, “Even otaku boys have plenty of chances to be friendly with girls in reality, so rather than being broody and closed off you should be proactive.” That’s exactly right.’ Eji Sonta enlists the testimony of a manga artist associated with *lolicon*, who stresses that otaku have opportunities to be friendly with girls ‘in reality’ (*genjitsu ni wa*). That is, *lolicon* should not foreclose interactions with the opposite sex; the fictional girl character should not be a replacement for a real woman. The critique is now explicitly directed at the male readers of *Manga Burikko*, who are assumed to be part of the *lolicon* phenomenon and attracted to fictional girl characters: ‘As a real problem, take a good look at your reflection in the mirror. There you are with a smirk on your face as you look at this *lolicon* magazine. After all, it’s weird. Not to mention that you are seriously jerking off to this stuff, which I just can’t think of as anything to celebrate.’ It is clear that Eji Sonta is building on Nakamori’s earlier critique of manga maniacs and *lolicon*, which was also an implicit critique of *Manga Burikko* readers. Indeed, while it is most often translated as “‘Otaku” Research’, another plausible translation for the title of Nakamori’s column, “‘Otaku” no kenkyū”, is ‘(My) research of “you.”’ Eji Sonta picks up on and develops Nakamori’s argument, bringing the discussion of otaku to its conclusion. In the above quote, he makes clear that sexual attraction to fictional girl characters, localized in the act of masturbating to a *lolicon* magazine such as *Manga Burikko*, is ‘weird’ (*bukimi na mon*). The word translated here as weird (*bukimi*) can also mean ‘creepy’, ‘uncanny’ or ‘ghastly’. The word before this, translated as ‘after all’ (*yappari*), carries with it the connotation in Japanese of something that was already known and has been confirmed. It’s a confirmation of a common-sense position. In this way, Eji Sonta tells his reader that sexual attraction to fictional girl characters, which was beginning to be discussed among manga and anime fans in terms of sexual orientation, is abnormal and nothing to celebrate.

By Eji Sonta’s estimation, otaku are not only weird, but they are also a ‘real problem’ (*genjitsu mondai*), a position that requires a little unpacking. To begin with, it is important to bear in mind that otaku are associated here with *lolicon*, which has a very specific meaning essential to understanding what Eji Sonta sees as the ‘real problem’. Among manga and anime fans at this time, as Akagi Akira points out, *lolicon* was used to identify ‘an existence that seeks two-dimensional images (manga, anime) rather than realistic things’ (*genjitsu-teki na mono yori mo nijigen [manga, anime] no imēji o motomeru sonzai*) (Akagi, 1993, p. 230). In his discussion of *lolicon* in the 1980s, Akagi points out that the object of affection is not actual girls, but rather ‘cuteness’ (*kawai-rashisa*) and ‘girl-ness’ (*shōjo-sei*) (Akagi, 1993, pp. 230–1). While it may seem idiosyncratic, in fact Akagi’s explanation of *lolicon* is consistent with Azuma Hideo’s professed preference for ‘roundness’ (*maru-kkoi no ga suki*), which he associates with manga, cuteness and something ‘girly’ (*shōjo-pposa*).¹¹ As argued earlier in this chapter, Azuma’s *bishōjo* characters are identifiable

by their cuteness and 'lack of reality', and the success of his fanzine *Cybele* and the *lolicon* boom that followed reflect growing support for this 'unrealism'. As Azuma did before them, the readers of *Manga Burikko* rejected photographs of real women, as well as more realistic drawings, because they preferred fictional girls drawn in the cute or manga style. These are the otaku who Nakamori and Eji Sonta see as a 'real problem'. If we translate literally this phrase from Eji Sonta's writing, then otaku, the men who masturbate to the fictional cute girl characters in *Manga Burikko*, pose a 'reality problem' (*genjitsu mondai*). They have a problem with reality, which makes them a real problem.

When Miyazaki Tsutomu, a sexual predator and serial killer targeting girls between the ages of 4 and 7, was arrested in 1989, it is widely understood that the media reported that he was an otaku (Kinsella, 1998; Kamm, this volume), which included discussions of *lolicon* (Schodt, 1996, pp. 45–55). However, in explaining Miyazaki's crimes in terms of confusion about the difference between reality and fiction, and conflating sexual attraction to fictional girl characters with the molestation and murder of actual children, we lose sight of the original problem of *lolicon*, which underpins the debate about otaku in *Manga Burikko*. Without noting the important distinction that Akagi Akira makes between *lolicon* as it is commonly understood – that is, an older man sexually attracted to young girls – and as it was used among manga and anime fans in Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, it is difficult to understand the 'real problem' that otaku posed for Nakamori and Eji Sonta. The problem was not that they were confused about the distinction between fiction and reality, but that otaku preferred fiction to reality, cute girl characters to real women.

For Nakamori and Eji Sonta, *lolicon* seemed to be an orientation toward fictional girl characters that reflected and reinforced the social and sexual immaturity of otaku. Shigematsu Setsu, drawing on Akagi's work, eloquently explains the 'real problem' that otaku posed: for Nakamori and Eji Sonta, *lolicon* meant an orientation toward 'two-dimensional images of cuteness', which 'replace a lack of desire for the "real thing" – a lack of desire that young men are "naturally" supposed to possess for real young women' (Shigematsu, 1999, pp. 131–2). Men with such an unnatural lack of desire for the real thing, and an unnatural abundance of desire for fictional girl characters, were called otaku by Nakamori and Eji Sonta. Shigematsu astutely refers to *lolicon* as a 'fetishism for cuteness', which resonates with the critique of otaku in terms of 'two-dimensional fetishism' (Schodt, 1996, p. 48). Sexual desire for fictional girl characters, an orientation toward the fictional, cute and unreal, was sometimes referred to among manga and anime fans as a 'sickness' (*byōki*) (Akagi, 1993, p. 231; Yoshimoto, 2009, pp. 174–5).¹² Being 'sick' this way, lacking 'normal' or 'natural' desire for real women, derails reproductive maturity. Otaku are a 'real problem' because they refuse to adjust to social reality and instead maintain an orientation toward fictional alternatives.

Conclusion

In some ways, the story of manga and anime fans, Nakamori Akio and Eji Sonta, and otaku is an old one. In his foundational work on fan studies, Henry Jenkins points out that fans are often depicted as feminine or asexual due to the stereotype that excessive

consumption forecloses other types of social experience (Jenkins, 1992, p. 10). Fans are often told to ‘get a life,’ by which critics imply that the life that fans already have is not an acceptable one. In Japan in the early 1980s, the discussion of otaku clarified that what was unacceptable was men who preferred fictional girl characters to the real thing, which was taken to be a rejection of socially (re)productive roles and responsibilities. Otaku were told to ‘get a life,’ and critics stated outright that making a life with fictional girl characters and others who share a love of these characters is not an acceptable alternative to making a life with a real woman. In the discussion of otaku – who were seen as failed and (socially, sexually) immature men, if not outright queer – *lolicon* emerged as a key concern.

At a time when manga and anime circulate worldwide, and anthropologists write that otaku are a ‘taken-for-granted feature of the global cultural landscape’ (Ito, 2012, p. xxvii) and ‘there is a little bit of otaku in all of us’ (Condry, 2013, p. 203), it may seem as if the discourse about otaku is entirely more positive. However, the perception of otaku as failed men persists in Japan today (see Kam, 2013, pp. 159–61, 163–5; also this volume). Beyond Japan, we still regularly see the term otaku associated with sexual attraction to fictional girl characters. In the span of just a few days in October 2013, the *Guardian* published an article claiming that ‘young Japanese aren’t having sex,’ which included descriptions of men romantically involved with fictional girls (Haworth, 2013), and *BBC News Magazine* reported on ‘a new breed of Japanese men, the *otaku*, who love manga, anime and computers – and sometimes show little interest in sex’ (Rani, 2013). What is striking here is that Nakamori and Eji Sonta might have written these sentences. The discourse about otaku in Japan in 1983 demonstrates the process of labelling problematic manga and anime fans, a process that continues abreast with the normalization and naturalization of ‘otaku.’ “Otaku” Research’ also reveals deep-seated anxieties in media and consumer societies about potential deviation from proper social and sexual development, which continues to haunt the discourse on ‘otaku.’

Notes

1. In an article in the April 1981 issue of *Animec*, it is suggested that many of those involved in the production of *Cybele* wanted to become *shōjo* manga artists.
2. *Shōjo* manga and fanzines featuring male-male romance, written by and for women, similarly erase the female character and likely point of identification from the page. As is the case for female readers of *shōjo* manga and fanzines focusing on male characters, the engagement of male readers with female characters in *bishōjo* manga and fanzines is complex.
3. The word *lolicon* was first introduced to the world of manga by Wada Shinji (male) in his manga *Kyabetsu batake de tsumazuite* (*Stumbling Upon a Cabbage Field*), published in the June 1974 issue of *Bessatsu Margaret*, a *shōjo* manga magazine. In a dialogue published in the March 1982 issue of *Gekkan Out*, Yonezawa Yoshihiro recalls that the word *lolicon* was used among male *shōjo* manga fans in the 1970s. Yonezawa, himself one of those fans, is credited with introducing the word *lolicon* to general anime fans in an article published in the December 1980 issue of *Gekkan Out*.

4. For more on the fan clubs for *Magical Princess Minky Momo* and *Creamy Mami, the Magic Angel*, see Galbraith (2014, pp. 46–63). Arguably, given that the negative response to them was crucial to the formation of the ‘otaku’ discourse, fan clubs for magical girl shows are at least as important to ‘otaku’ history as fan clubs for ‘real’ robot shows such as *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*. It is not only the case that robots became realistic at this time, as Ian Condry (2013, Chapter 4) points out, but also, and perhaps more importantly, that male fans took fictional girl characters as real objects of desire (Yoshimoto, 2009, pp. 168–70).
5. The previous issue, October 1983, has the subtitle ‘Two-dimensional idol comic magazine for boys’ (*Otoko no ko no tame no nijigen aidoru komikkushi*). The focus on two-dimensional idols, as opposed to three-dimensional ones, gives the impression that the fictional girl characters from manga and anime, as opposed to gravure or pin-up models, are now the focus of the magazine. The preference for fictional girl characters rather than the real thing, for two-dimensional idols rather than real ones, was a crucial issue in the debate about ‘otaku’ in *Manga Burikko*.
6. The editors reveal that the least popular pages in the last issue were photographs of the gravure idol Kawai Kazumi. Steamy photos of then 18-year-old in various states of undress appeared right after a section titled ‘Uniforms are Correct! Sailor-suit Illustration Collection’ (*Seifuku ga tadashii! Sērā fuku irasuto shū*), which features drawings of young, ethereal girls, mostly clothed. The contrast between these *bishōjo* and Kawai is stark and significant. At the risk of redundancy, I will state the significance again: readers of *Manga Burikko* did not want the ‘real thing’ – in this case, the flesh-and-blood idol, Kawai Kazumi – but rather were drawn to fictional girl characters.
7. The complexity of identifications with cute girl characters has been noted by others, for example Sharon Kinsella, who writes of otaku, ‘the infantilized female object of desire held so close has crossed over to become an aspect of their own self-image and sense of sexuality’ (Kinsella, 2000, p. 122; see also Yomota, 2006, p. 155).
8. This and all other block quotations are translations by Nishimura Keiko, and are consistent with her work on Yamanaka’s chapter in this volume. For a full English translation of Nakamori Akio’s first and second instalments of the column, and a full English translation of Eji Sonta’s last instalment of the column, see Nakamori (2008a, 2008b) and Eji Sonta (2011). I have chosen not to use these unofficial, but widely circulated, translations because they miss some of the nuance of Nakamori’s column, for example translating *myō ni okama-ppoi* as ‘kinda effeminate’ rather than ‘strangely faggy’.
9. Interestingly, Nakamori identifies his girlfriend as a second-year high school student, which suggests that she is sixteen or seventeen years old. That is, Nakamori’s girlfriend would, in places that recognize the legal age of consent to be eighteen, be categorized as ‘underage’. Apparently, *lolicon* is for Nakamori more of an issue of desiring fictional girls than it is of an older man with a younger woman.
10. In addition to this new imagery of otaku as subhuman, Nakamori maintains the imagery of otaku as failed men who are ‘strangely faggy’. At the end of this instalment of the column, Nakamori writes that he and his girlfriend visited a park in Shinjuku at night, where they saw otaku and *okama* (men dressed as women) side by side.
11. This comes from an interview in the April 1981 issue of *Animec*. In discussing *lolicon*, Kinsella refers to the genre as ‘ultra-cute (*chō kawaii*) girls’ manga written by and for men’ (Kinsella, 1998, p. 305). While we have seen in the case of *Manga Burikko* that men and women both contributed to the emerging *bishōjo* form, Kinsella is right to stress cuteness, which Azuma Hideo and Akagi Akira deem as essential to *lolicon*.

12. Fans reclaimed the word ‘sickness’ and used it in a humorous, self-deprecating way, if not also as a badge of honour. In a dialogue published in the March 1982 issue of *Gekkan Out*, Azuma Hideo is introduced as ‘the man who spread lolicon and sickness in the world’ (*yo ni rorikon to byōki o hirometa hito*).

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Birth of ‘Otaku’: Centring on Discourse Dynamics in *Manga Burikko*¹

Yamanaka Tomomi

Introduction

Through the hit media franchise *Densha otoko* (*Train Man*, 2004–5) and so-called ‘moe boom,’ the term ‘otaku’² has disseminated rapidly and even come to be recognized as a keyword that represents Japanese subculture. Against this backdrop, there are more instances of otaku being taken up by various academic disciplines such as sociology. In literary studies, otaku have been discussed as readers of so-called ‘light novels,’³ and there was a special issue on *moe* in the literary journal *Kokubungaku* (National Literature, November 2008) titled “‘Moe’ no shōtai’ (*The True Nature of ‘Moe’*). Although the buzz about otaku is a recent phenomenon, its history can be traced back to 1983, when a column by Nakamori Akio titled “‘Otaku’ Research’ (*‘Otaku’ no kenkyū*) was published in *Manga Burikko*, a minor *lolicon* magazine.⁴ This column is recognized among scholars as the first instance that the term ‘otaku’ was used in published material in the contemporary sense, and hence is significant for ‘otaku’ studies. Furthermore, as I will explain in detail in this chapter, it is also recognized that the column was problematized as discriminatory content within *Manga Burikko*, triggering a heated debate among the readers and editors of the magazine, which led to wider recognition of the word.⁵

The concrete phases of this incident, which cannot be overlooked in any examination of the history of otaku, have been mentioned in the testimonies of those involved with *Manga Burikko*, as well as earlier sociological studies.⁶ While these are important studies full of insights, they also have several serious problems. For example, due to reliance on the memories and recollection of the participants to explain the situation, and the difficulty in collecting materials, these studies forego conducting any comprehensive analysis and instead focus only on certain aspects of *Manga Burikko*. Therefore, the broader picture of what was happening in the pages of *Manga Burikko* at the time of “‘Otaku’ Research’ has yet to be fully grasped. This chapter intends to clarify the situation by conducting an empirical analysis of *Manga Burikko* and related materials. Furthermore, by placing emphasis on close reading of collected materials, the present study aims to bring to light the discursive dynamics within *Manga Burikko*, especially the value judgements and power relations involved in the debate about otaku.

Nakamori Akio and “Otaku” Research’

To begin, what was actually written in the “Otaku” Research’ column? The column was comprised of four serialized instalments published in June, July, August and December 1983 in a corner of *Manga Burikko* titled ‘Tokyo Otona Kurabu Jr’ (‘Tokyo Adult Club Jr’). The column was a special edition (*shucchō ban*) of a short-run magazine titled *Tokyo Otona Kurabu* (*Tokyo Adult Club*), whose chief editor was Nakamori.⁷ Of the four instalments of “Otaku” Research’, Nakamori wrote the first three.

The first instalment of the column, published in the June 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko* and titled “Otaku” Research: The City is Full of “Otaku” (*‘Otaku’ no kenkyū 1: Machi ni wa ‘otaku’ ga ippai*), points out the characteristics of the ‘young men and women in their teens, mostly junior high and highschool students’, who gather at Comiket:⁸

I was surprised not by the fact that more than 10,000 young men and women gathered, but rather by their bizarreness. How should I say it? You know, every class has one of those people who can’t do sports, is withdrawn in the classroom, even during breaks, lurking in the shadows obsessing over a *shogi* game or something. They’re like that. Their hairstyle is either ruffled long hair clearly parted 7:3 at the front, or a dowdy, close bowl cut. They tottered back and forth, smartly clad in shirts and slacks their mommy bought at the ‘all ¥980/1980’ rack at Itō Yōkadō or Seiyū, their feet shod in ‘R’-branded knock-offs of Regal sneakers that were popular several years ago, shoulder bags bulging and sagging. The boys are either skin and bones – borderline malnourished – or squealing pale-faced piggies (*warau shirobuta*) with chubby faces so fat that the arms of their silver-plated glasses dug into the sides of their brow. All the girls sported bobbed hair and were mostly fat, having tubby legs like tree-logs covered in white high-socks. Usually they’re the unnoticed corner-dwellers with downcast eyes, having no friends whatsoever, but today there are so many of them that I wonder where in the world they emerge from – 10,000 of them milling around! And as if they’re trying to get out of their usual gloominess, these people were just freaking out. There are those dressing up as anime characters, those in the creepy style you see in Azuma Hideo’s manga, those simpering and pushing girls to buy their *lolicon* manga, those running around for no reason . . . Man, my head was about to explode.⁹

To further illustrate the types of people he is talking about, Nakamori goes on to list examples other than Comiket or manga fans: ‘those guys who camp out before the opening day of anime movies; dudes who nearly get themselves run over trying to capture photos of the “blue train” as it comes down the tracks; guys with every back issue of *SF Magazine* and the Hayakawa science-fiction novels lining their bookshelves’. Then he proposes to use ‘otaku’ as an ‘umbrella term that covers these people, or the general phenomenon’, including people who used to be called “maniacs” or “fanatics” or . . . “the gloomy tribe”. He states that he ‘will discuss in detail . . . from the next instalment on’ how he came up with the term, and ends by calling the readers out: ‘Take

a good look around yourself; there they are, “o-ta-ku”... By the way, are you (otaku), “otaku”?’

In the July 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, Nakamori followed up with “‘Otaku’ Research: Do ‘Otaku’ Love like Normal People?” (*‘Otaku’ no kenkyū 2: ‘Otaku’ mo hitonami ni koi o suru*). Here, Nakamori narrows his focus, which involves confirming the origin of the term ‘otaku’ and analysing their habits and behaviours:

So previously I said that we decided to designate those swarming millennial gloomy-maniac boys we see these days as ‘otaku’. Probably you guys can already guess the origin of ‘otaku’, but don’t you think it’s pretty gross that junior high-school kids call one other ‘otaku’ at Comiket or anime conventions? And well, they’re still men, and entering puberty they’ll start having a few erotic desires, but if you look at their style, the way they talk, and their character, it’s clear that they’ll never get women. ‘Otaku’ definitively lack male skills. So they’re content with carrying around pin-ups of anime characters like Minky Momo and Nanako. Maybe I’ll call it a two-dimensional complex. They can’t even talk to real women. In less extreme cases, they gravitate toward idol singers who don’t display their femininity, or they become warped and get into *lolicon*. These guys will never accept nude photos of mature women.¹⁰

Nakamori then lists the strange behaviour of men who are over twenty – for example, they ‘jump up in the air with their legs bent behind them’ – to argue that ‘otaku’ are ‘strangely faggy’, which he links to their lack of masculinity. Though he says that these men will never ‘get with a woman’, Nakamori concludes with the chilling thought that because ‘all people get married in the end’, “otaku” will marry “otaku-women” (*otaku onna*) and give birth to “otaku-children” (*otaku kodomo*).

The third instalment of “‘Otaku’ Research’ was published in the August 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko* with the title ‘I’ve Wandered into Otaku-land’ (*‘Otaku chitai ni mayoi konda de’*). The quotation marks are gone from ‘otaku’, indicating that the term is fairly established. Nakamori notes, ‘When I invented the term otaku nobody knew it, so I played around with it.’ In the column, Nakamori describes the experience of taking his girlfriend (Yumi, a second-year student in high school) to Free Space, a bookstore in Shinjuku, where ‘otaku’ hang out:

I was calling otaku ‘otaku’, like saying, ‘See, that’s an otaku, there’s another otaku over there, oh and that guy is super otaku.’ The guys I was talking about didn’t understand what otaku means, so their expression was blank like (the protagonist of) *Oshin*.¹¹ Yumi was trying so hard not to laugh, like, ‘Hahaha, stop it, Akio’, with a deep blush on her face. A corner of Free Space was sectioned off and turned into a makeshift café, but you could hear a bizarre laughter coming from inside. You can’t really understand what it’s like unless you’ve heard it, but it’s like cheerloomy – cheerful plus gloomy. If a slug or leech had a voice, it would probably sound like what we heard. The sound is extremely unpleasant. Yumi looked in there to see what was going on, then she shuddered, saying ‘Oh my!’ and reflexively fell back, trembling. Curious, I also looked in – and then I understood. There were seven

or eight super otaku – otaku among otaku – swarming, spreading anime magazines and posters on the table, making jokes that only they understand and laughing so hard. This horrifying sight was like a hellish festival or an All Japan Otaku Cup Kanto Region Grand Final match, and I myself shuddered in horror. Yumi was shaken, saying, ‘Oh no, I have goose bumps,’ ‘Oh, I even got hives,’ ‘Yikes, where do all these people come from!’¹²

Nakamori then asks a Free Space worker where these ‘otaku’ came from. The worker responds, ‘They don’t have other places to go,’ and when Nakamori asks about the ‘habitat’ of ‘otaku’ before the appearance of Free Space, the worker replies that, ‘each individual was adrift.’

Above is the content of Nakamori’s “‘Otaku’ Research.” What is notable throughout the column is the apparent contempt toward otaku. In the first instalment, Nakamori creates the category of otaku, which he defines through shared characteristics, appearance and interests. Then, by asking readers to agree with his statement, ‘you know, every class has one’ (*doko no kurasu nimo iru desho*), he tries to gain sympathy from readers, who know that these people exist because they have encountered them, too. Further, Nakamori describes those who fit in the category of otaku as ‘bizarre’ (*iyō*), and judges them with contempt as ‘gross’ (*kimoi*), comparing them to ‘pale-faced piggies’ (*shirobuta*) and a ‘slug or leech’ (*namekuji toka hiru*). Nakamori positions himself as someone who is definitely not an ‘otaku,’ but rather looks at ‘otaku’ from the outside.

In Nakamori’s writing, the logic of enclosure through image and notion (*aru imēji, gainen ni yotte nanika o kakoikomu*) is in effect. This recalls Edward W. Said’s work on Orientalism (Said, 1978). Orientalism signifies the structure of domination of the Orient (East) by the Occident (West). To be specific, the dichotomy of West/East involves simultaneous definitions of superior/inferior, advanced/backward and active/passive, which come with connotations of discrimination and prejudice and serve to differentiate the two sides. Orientalism is a term that describes the attempt to define oneself through the Other, as the Occident defines itself against the Orient. Applying this logic to the case of “‘Otaku’ Research,” Nakamori is situated as the Occident and otaku the Orient. What, then, are the notions differentiating the two sides?

In order to clarify this point, let us look at the positioning of the three instalments of the column. The first instalment, which is the introduction, is an account of how Nakamori came to create the category of ‘otaku,’ mostly through explanation of characteristics such as appearance and interests. The second and third instalments seem to be the core of his argument (the essence of ‘otaku’), which is telegraphed by Nakamori’s statement at the end of the first instalment that he will explore the issue of otaku in detail in subsequent instalments. The second instalment ridicules ‘otaku’ who will never have a girlfriend, and, in the third instalment, Nakamori brings his own girlfriend and jeers at the ‘otaku’ gathered at Free Space. In other words, for Nakamori, having or not having a girlfriend is a standard that distinguishes whether one is otaku or not, and a factor that expands the difference between the two sides. Adding to this, Takahara (1990, p. 262) notes that, ‘80s youth culture as represented in Nakamori has a clear front and back (*omote to ura ga hakkiri shite*).’ She continues, ‘if the front is the

“fashionable” (*oshare*) culture that is represented in “trends” and “brands” (to be exact, it is more like “à la mode” [*ossharē*]), the back is “otaku” culture that is represented in anime and Comiket (an abbreviation for Comic Market, a fanzine convention), where the former is thoroughly desired as ideal, and the latter is completely despised. A few years after the release of “‘Otaku’ Research’, Nakamori attracted attention as the frontrunner of ‘*shinjinrui*’ (new breed) culture, which became part of the culture of the ‘front’, in Takahara’s terms.¹³ Thus, Nakamori’s “‘Otaku’ Research’ was an attempt to show his belonging to the culture of the ‘front’ by scorning ‘otaku who will never have girlfriends.’¹⁴ In other words, Nakamori designated otaku as the negative exemplum, against which he attempts to define himself.

‘Otaku’ recognized as a discriminatory term

The readers of *Manga Burikko* at the time of “‘Otaku’ Research’ were, according to the reader-submission corner, high school and university students interested in *lolicon* manga, mainly around the age of seventeen and 80 per cent male.¹⁵ On the one hand, one of the characteristics of otaku that Nakamori identified is the ‘lack of masculinity’, which leads to them developing a ‘two-dimensional complex’ or becoming ‘*lolicon*’. As seen in the use of the word *lolicon*, the demographic designated as ‘otaku’ by Nakamori coincides with the readership of *Manga Burikko*. Seemingly aware of this, at the end of the first instalment of his column, Nakamori asks readers provocatively: ‘By the way, are you (otaku), “otaku”?’ Nakamori’s hatred of otaku is not limited to the ‘otaku’ defined in his column, but also goes beyond to encompass the readers of that column in *Manga Burikko*.

As a result, Nakamori’s column triggered a controversy over ‘otaku’, which involved the readers and the editorial board of *Manga Burikko*. Nakamori notes in the July 1983 issue of *Sage* that the column immediately sparked ‘a surge of Nakamori Akio bashing from those who claim to be otaku, and the continuation of the series may be in jeopardy’. The first signs of this movement against Nakamori can be seen in the September 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*. The instalment of “‘Otaku’ Research’ for this issue was cancelled ‘due to the sudden illness of the author’. At the same time, a male reader’s counter-argument to Nakamori was printed in the reader-submission corner titled ‘Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu’ (‘Shinjuku Minor Club’). The reader states, ‘If I may, your essay is something like pointing out handicapped people, saying that they are an unpleasant presence, and proudly calling yourself a normal person.’ In addition, the editor of *Manga Burikko* commented, ‘Actually, we received quite a lot of this kind of response, but many of them were just being emotional and failed to deliver a clear message. We couldn’t publish those, but now finally this one is worth reading, although it’s also more or less unclear in the argument.’ What is clear is that this submission was intentionally printed in support of the readers who were the target of Nakamori’s scorn. Concerning Nakamori, the editor says: ‘Mr. Nakamori himself doesn’t understand his position as being a part of “otaku” . . . [H]is unproductive column bothers us, too, so we have demanded improvement.’ The editor takes a critical stance against Nakamori, which is also an indication of the consideration given to the readers. Although the

editor writes, ‘This issue’s cancellation of “‘Otaku’ Research” was the author’s decision, which has nothing to do with the editorial board’, in fact Nakamori, in the October 1983 issue of *Sage*, argues against the decision to cancel the column, which he suggests involves the editorial board.

After the September 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, the situation surrounding “‘Otaku” Research’ and ‘Tokyo Otona Kurabu Jr’ became chaotic. The ‘notification in the margins’ (*rangai oshirase*) of the ‘Tokyo Otona Kurabu Jr’ column in the October 1983 issue states: “‘Otaku’ Research”, which is apparently gathering some fanatic fans, is cancelled again due to Mr. Nakamori Akio’s ongoing vacation. Let’s wait for the next development.’ Note that the reason for the cancellation of the column is different from the reason given in the September 1983 issue. In the November 1983 issue, ‘Tokyo Otona Kurabu Jr’ itself was cancelled, with a notice at the back of the issue stating, “‘Tokyo Otona Kurabu” is cancelled in this issue for certain reasons. It will come back in the next issue, so look forward to it!’

In the December 1983 issue, in place of Nakamori’s column, which it was now apparent had been cancelled, another contributor to *Tokyo Otona Kurabu* wrote a column under the penname Eji Sonta. The column, titled “‘Otaku” Research: Conclusions’ (*‘Otaku’ no kenkyū: Sōron*), did not soften the tone of contempt found in Nakamori’s three instalments. To paraphrase the argument, ‘No humans can live forever in the moratorium period. At some point, everybody has to grow up.’ The change in tone suggests that *Manga Burikko*’s editors wanted the dissolution of criticism, that is, the end of “‘Otaku” Research’ as a simple denunciation of the readers. While the tone of Eji Sonta’s instalment of the column is still full of contempt, readers are invited to consider the broader implications of the argument, which is ultimately about maturity and society.

In the January 1984 issue of *Manga Burikko*, Nakamori appears in the final instalment of the ‘Tokyo Otona Kurabu Jr’ section, where his column had been published the year before. The article is titled ‘Why Okazaki Kyōko and Sakurazawa Erica Aren’t a Hit in *Burikko*’ (*Okazaki Kyōko, Sakurazawa Erika wa naze Burikko de ukenai no ka*), but, rather than the topic at hand, Nakamori uses the space allotted to him to speak about otaku, while making light of the abovementioned criticisms of him from readers and the editorial board:

Hi, unproductive Nakamori Akio here (lol). Yeah! How’re you guys doin’? First appearance in five month yo. I was doing a serialized column in *Burikko*, titled “‘Ota**” Research’, which went for three installments and caused quite a stir. Apparently, ota** is now designated as a discriminatory term and I can’t use it anymore. So, in this kind of situation, there is a method called paraphrasing (*iikae*). You know, there are people whose eyesight or speech is impaired. Using this paraphrasing, o**ku would be people whose sense of reality is impaired (*genjitsu kankaku no fujiyū no hito*), whose fashion sense is impaired, whose ability to make friends is impaired, whose cheerful mood is impaired. . . . No wait, now it sounds increasingly discriminatory. Hi, I’m normal Nakamori who laughs at the disabled (lol). Nakamori who makes a fool of not only Takarajima girls and Pompu Boys, but also female college students (Please buy *Tokyo Otona Kurabu* number 3).¹⁶

In the six months since Nakamori created the category of 'otaku', it is clear that a context had emerged in which otaku could be interpreted as a discriminatory term. What contributed most to this formation is the editorial board of *Manga Burikko*. The cancellation of Nakamori's series and the selection of readers' submissions hint at the editorial board's power, which goes beyond supporting readers and includes denouncing 'otaku' as a discriminatory word.

The editorial strategy of Ōtsuka Eiji surrounding 'otaku'

The person who wielded this power is Ōtsuka Eiji, the editor of *Manga Burikko* at the time. In *Otaku no seishinshi: 1980-nendai-ron (Intellectual History of Otaku: A Theory of the 1980s)*, Ōtsuka comments on the editorial system he employed at *Manga Burikko*:

From the May 1983 issue through the September 1985 issue, I was virtually the sole editor of the magazine. Indeed, my name is on the copyright page from the latter half of this period. In the postscript, four names were always written, but, in addition to my name, they are the names of a publisher, a staff member in charge of production, and an editor from another porn magazine publisher through whom we were buying articles and manga manuscripts in the initial months. The postscripts note four people, but for all intents and purposes there was only one editor – me.

Ōtsuka, 2004, p. 20

However, at the time when "Otaku" Research' was serialized, the situation seems to have been a little different:

For the first year, I was receiving pay for editing with the promise that an editor from another porn magazine publisher, whose name is in the postscript, who mediated between Serufu Shuppan and me, would do half of the editing work. He, a professional editor using a penname, was in charge of several articles and the reader-submission section for a while, but eventually drifted away from the editing.

Ōtsuka, 2004, p. 21

In sum, up until the May 1984 issue, editorial work for *Manga Burikko* was done by two people, Ōtsuka and another person. A look at *Manga Burikko* from 1983 through 1984 confirms that the 'editor from another porn magazine' is Ogata Genjirō, who appears in the magazine under the penname Ogata or Oguwata.¹⁷ It is clear that Ogata was editing 'Tokyo Otona Kurabu Jr', the corner where the "Otaku" Research' column was published, and 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu', the reader-submission section.¹⁸ That is, Ogata was involved in editing "Otaku" Research' in the June, July and August 1983 issues, and commented on reader submissions in 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu' in the September 1983 issue.

However, a question arises: why did Ogata publish Nakamori's "Otaku" Research' in the beginning, but then discontinue it after three instalments and criticize him in the

reader-submission section? To answer this question, we need to focus on the other editor, Ōtsuka, who later clearly stated that it was he who 'discontinued' (*uchikitta*) the column. Further, on this discontinuation, Nakamori notes:

From the beginning of the series, Mr. Ogata, who was in charge of my section, informed me that the content of my writing needed to be modified. He told me that it was due to objections made by Mr. Ōtsuka Eiji, who later became the chief editor of the magazine. After many negotiations, the series faced discontinuation. . . . Although indirectly, it was clear that one of the causes for the discontinuation of the series was pressure applied by Mr. Ōtsuka.

Nakamori, 1989, pp. 94–5

It is clear from these excerpts that Ōtsuka was the one who wielded greater power on the editorial board. Ōtsuka's influence seems clear in that he was able to exert 'strong pressure' to discontinue Nakamori's column. Therefore, it is possible to see the comments made by Ogata in 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu' as being written in line with Ōtsuka's intention to cancel the column. Ogata yielded on the content because Ōtsuka was growing more powerful and taking over the magazine. It is not until the June 1984 issue of *Manga Burikko* that the details of the cancellation of Nakamori's column were made known to readers. The explanation was made by none other than Ōtsuka Eiji. Why was the explanation for the column's cancellation made so late?

Looking through articles in *Manga Burikko*, it seems clear that it was necessary for Ōtsuka to establish an environment where he could actively state his opinion. In 1983, unlike Ogata, Ōtsuka was not in charge of the reader-submission section in *Manga Burikko*, and thus had no place to state his opinion. Ogata's comment in the September 1983 issue took into consideration Ōtsuka's intentions to state his opinions more directly. However, the 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu' section in the February 1984 issue of *Manga Burikko* suddenly declared a separation of reader-submission sections. While Ogata was in charge of 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu', a new reader-submission section titled 'Dakyō Tsūshin' ('Compromise Correspondence') was established, with Ōtsuka in charge. With this as a turning point, Ōtsuka's self-expression in *Manga Burikko* became more prominent. For example, in the corner titled 'Manga no shinsō' ('The Truth of Manga') in the April 1984 issue, Ōtsuka criticizes teachers who confiscated *Manga Burikko* from students, declaring that he will create 'confiscation insurance' that would send out the same issue to readers whose copy has been confiscated by the authorities. 'Manga no shinsō' was to this point a corner that centred on the introduction of manga and magazines. However, from this point on, it became more of a platform for Ōtsuka to state his opinions. Readers' responses to what Ōtsuka stated in 'Manga no shinsō' then began to gather in 'Dakyō Tsūshin'. For example, responses to the 'confiscation insurance' were already taken up in the next issue with Ōtsuka's comments. In other words, 'Dakyō Tsūshin', while gathering readers' responses to Ōtsuka, began to function as a platform for debate between Ōtsuka and the readers. By setting up such an environment, Ōtsuka was able to actively state and argue his opinions. In addition, by having the authority to decide which readers' letters would be

printed in the magazine, it became possible for Ōtsuka to intentionally create a flow of discussion that went along with his intentions.

It was precisely at the moment when this environment was established, in the June 1984 issue of *Manga Burikko*, when Ōtsuka used his 'Dakyō Tsūshin' corner to explain the details of the cancellation of Nakamori's column. Ōtsuka did this in a page-long response to a reader's letter that said: 'Recently attacks on otaku by manga artists and editors have worsened. It was at first healthy critique, but now it has become a theme of manga and a swarm of verbal abuse, and it's all very unpleasant. . . . [P]lease tackle this problem.' Ōtsuka responds:

I have been thinking about this problem, which needs to be clearly addressed. First of all, because the term 'otaku' will not make sense for new readers, I will explain. This is a made-up derogatory term to describe *lolicon* fans and anime fans, created by Mr. Nakamori Akio from *Tokyo Otona Kurabu* in a column previously published here in *Burikko*. It is probably a rare term that has this much clarity about its intention to discriminate. In terms of Mr. Nakamori's "Otaku" Research, I had expressed my 'discomfort' to Mr. Ogata, who was in charge. My reason was that the objective of Mr. Nakamori's text seemed not to be 'healthy critique', but rather 'discrimination'. In the end, we had to ask him to exit stage right, but what struck me was that there were quite a few people, including our readers, who supported his text. Certainly, the emotion and brilliance (?) of 'otaku' as a discriminatory term is that it allows one to have fun without taking any responsibility. In the end, the term 'otaku' has completely taken root [and now is being used widely to discriminate against others].¹⁹

It is clear from the opening of Ōtsuka's response that he seems to have been waiting for the opportunity to argue his position against discrimination of otaku. Considering these background details, the very opportunity was made possible by the conditioning of an environment in *Manga Burikko* for his self-expression.

What Ōtsuka went to all this effort to argue is that otaku is a discriminatory term. He emphasizes the point in the statement, 'It is probably a rare term that has this much clarity about its intention to discriminate.' Thus, in a response to a reader facing discrimination, Ōtsuka issues a stern warning to supporters of Nakamori, including *Manga Burikko's* readers, who 'have fun without taking any responsibility' for how the term 'otaku' is now being used to discriminate against others. Ōtsuka could not overlook the movement that promotes discrimination of 'otaku', and summarizes the attitude that one should take against this problem:

Probably, humans can only see things according to the values of where they stand. This cannot be helped, but it is possible to acknowledge other various values, and see one's own value through others. I hope otaku criticism is based on such a view. At the same time, it would not be fruitless for manga fans to look at themselves through the eyes of an outsider.²⁰

I have noted that the logic of Orientalism was in effect in Nakamori's writing on otaku. This comment from Ōtsuka suggests that he had seen through the discriminatory logic

of evaluating the self through an Other, which may be precisely why he sought a 'healthy critique' that acknowledges the values of both sides.

The 'Dakyō Tsūshin' corner published in the July and August 1984 issues of *Manga Burikko*²¹ again carried reader responses to Ōtsuka's statement. In the July issue, four reader submissions were printed, including some that were positive about Ōtsuka and others that were negative: 'Looks like you're trying to win readers over to your side with smooth talk. . . . Sounds like you're saying "People making fun of otaku are devils!"' Without arguing his position, Ōtsuka responds with this disclaimer: 'Various opinions are gathered here. . . . I intentionally do not make comments on each opinion. Let us know if you have more to say.' However, another reader response published in this issue accuses Ōtsuka of exactly the opposite, which is to say expressing his opinions too much: 'Editors should stay in the shadows. Isn't it better to suppress your opinion (as an editor)?' In response to this, Ōtsuka notes his policy as an editor: 'Certainly this [what you have proposed] is one way of being an editor. However, I think that there is also another way – to state one's opinions and listen to critiques. Of course, it is needless to say that the opinions should be in the best interest of the magazine itself.' It is clear from this that Ōtsuka was fully aware that he was using the magazine as a platform for his own self-expression. The August issue printed two submissions from readers that argued that 'otaku' should not be criticized outright, but that there are points that otaku should reflect on themselves, and 'it is important to have the spirit to say what is good is good and what is bad is bad'. In response to this, Ōtsuka notes, 'Concerning the otaku issue (*otaku mondai*), we received various letters again this time. It looks like we have a conclusion (*ketsuron ga deta*) for the time being. Before criticizing anime and manga fans for being this or that, it is certain that we have to be straight (*aratame nakute wa naranai*) about the people who are called "otaku".'²² By saying 'we have a conclusion', Ōtsuka put an end to the discussion of 'otaku' in the reader-submission section of *Manga Burikko*. Looking at the selection of letters from readers and the editor's comments in response to them, what is apparent is Ōtsuka's intention to lead the discussion to the conclusion he provided in the June issue. In other words, he exercised his power to make readers incorporate his opinion that 'otaku' is a discriminatory word and that it is impossible to have a healthy critique without mutual understanding of different values.

There are several reasons that Ōtsuka stuck to the issue of 'otaku' for so long. The first is to defend his readers. The image of people who Nakamori described as otaku coincides with the image of *Manga Burikko*'s readers. If the editorial board did not move to defend its readers, it might lose them, jeopardizing the continuation of the magazine. Since Ōtsuka became the editor of *Manga Burikko*, he pointed it in the direction of what he calls a 'cute girl comic magazine' (*bishōjo manga-shi*), keeping the appearance of a *lolicon* magazine while promoting manga artists such as Okazaki Kyōko, Sakurazawa Erica, Shirakura Yumi and Fujiwara Kamui.²³ In the explanation later provided by Ōtsuka, the purpose of this move was to include in the market of the magazine not only the people called 'otaku', but also the population later called 'shinjinrui' (new breed), which included people such as Nakamori (Ōtsuka, 2004, pp. 26–7). However, the market that he saw as most important was comprised of the people Nakamori called 'otaku'. In order to protect the market, and at the same time to

cloak the contradiction of having both 'otaku' and 'shinjinrui' in the same market, Ōtsuka criticized Nakamori's 'otaku' discrimination and cancelled his column. Another reason for Ōtsuka's long engagement with the issue of 'otaku' is that the unproductiveness of "'Otaku' Research" went against his editorial policy. To Ōtsuka, who noted that 'opinions should be in the best interest of the magazine itself', Nakamori's writing, which was one-sided discrimination, was not in the best interest of the magazine. On the contrary, the column had a negative effect – it was not productive. Therefore Ōtsuka cancelled Nakamori's column and, as if to pick up the pieces and smooth things over, drove away the ungrounded discrimination of otaku.

Nakamori, who started the controversy, later criticized Ōtsuka's position. He writes: 'It is rare to have a case like this, where the reader-submission section is "privatized" into an editor's stage to state his opinion (and target young readers in the manner of Hirose Takashi's lecture, with an argument of "anti-discrimination" that is impossible to go against)' (Nakamori, 1989, p. 96). Further, he notes that Ōtsuka's insistence that otaku is a discriminatory term actually made it into one: 'Just forcefully claiming that, "It's a discriminatory word!" and one-sidedly labeling the word as such is simply a form of word discrimination' (Nakamori, 1989, p. 98). Certainly, it is possible to see the discriminatory intent of Nakamori's writing. However, it was Ōtsuka who strongly made readers recognize this discrimination. It is thus understandable that Nakamori explains Ōtsuka's use of the reader-submission section as a form of 'privatization' and his campaign against the use of 'otaku' as a form of 'word discrimination'. In a way, Ōtsuka was every bit as involved in making 'otaku' a discriminatory term as Nakamori was.

Self-tormenting 'otaku' and enlightened activity by the editorial board

Through Ōtsuka's clever editorial strategy, the context to understand 'otaku' as a discriminatory word was firmly established in *Manga Burikko*. This can be seen in the reader-submission section and the fact that some readers accepted the context and sympathized with Ōtsuka's claims. However, not necessarily all readers accepted Ōtsuka's position. In the column 'Okazaki Kyōko's Life Consultations on Love' (*Okazaki Kyōko no ai no jinsei sōdan*), published in the March 1984 issue, the following question was posed by a reader: 'Miss Kyōko, I need your advice. I'm a senior in an all boys' high school, and have no chance to meet women. I'm fat. I also wear glasses. I'm an anime fan. I'm an otaku. I'm worried that I'm going to have a gloomy adolescence (*kurai seishun*). What is the right way for me to live?'²⁴ Similarly, in the other reader-submission forum, 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu' (which was run by Ogata), in the April 1984 issue, a reader who did not understand the slang 'friend of my right hand' (*migite no otomodachi*) (note: object of masturbation) used by Ogata in the March issue, asked, 'I'm a country boy, Mr. Odawata.²⁵ I didn't understand until this month the meaning of "friend of my right hand" (sob). After all I'm a stupid, fat *otaku*. (Laugh, laugh . . .).'²⁶ These readers call themselves 'otaku' by reasoning that they do not have the opportunity to meet women, do not have sexual knowledge and/or are fat. This image of otaku

seems to have originated from Nakamori's column and the insistence that 'otaku' are those who cannot 'get women'. In contrast to Nakamori, who used the standard of 'being able to get women' to position himself as not an 'otaku', there emerged amongst the readers of *Manga Burikko* those who positioned themselves as 'otaku' for precisely that reason. Such readers, by claiming that they are 'otaku', humiliate and laugh at themselves in a self-deprecating way.

In response to the appearance of such readers, the editorial board of *Manga Burikko* attempted to stop the humorous usage of otaku. In Takekuma Kentarō's column, 'Turbulent Lion Newspaper' (*Fū'un raion shinbun*), which started from the March 1984 issue with an installment titled 'What We Need Most is "Love"' (*Bokutachi ni ichiban hitsuyō nanowa 'ai' nan da*), the author writes:

He, a self-claimed 'journalist' [author's note: referring to Takekuma], could not be described as a beautiful man even as a form of flattery. Nearsighted and short, he speaks too fast and sometimes stammers, repeatedly utters boring jokes and is dressed in otaku fashion. To put it bluntly, he is human garbage (*nigen no kuzu*). Certainly, he might be unpleasant. However, if you are not able to love Mr. T.K., you don't even have a right to speak of love. All our female readers should write a letter to him at once.²⁷

Takekuma, speaking in the ironic third-person, explains himself as a person who is 'dressed in otaku fashion' and 'unpleasant'. Again, 'otaku' is used in a derogatory way, but it is qualitatively different from Nakamori talking about others. Closer to the readers talking about themselves in the reader-submission section, Takekuma differs in his positive attitude that demands 'love' from female readers. He almost seems to be saying, 'I'm an otaku. So what?' Behind the publication of Takekuma's column is the intention of the editorial board to impress upon readers that it is possible to have a positive attitude and pursue relationships with women even if one is an 'otaku'.

It is also possible to see such an intention in other opinions published in *Manga Burikko* after the March 1984 issue. First, in the April 1984 issue, Ogata comments on the reader response about the 'friend of my right hand' published in 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu': 'Unnecessary self-depreciation is also pathetic. Straighten up, man! Otaku is merely an issue of self-consciousness.' Similarly, in the 'Dakyō Tsūshin' corner published in the August 1984 issue,²⁸ the very same reader response that Ōtsuka regarded as 'reaching a conclusion' in the otaku issue, reads in part: 'I personally don't like sports and I'm not cool, but I don't care and am just happy. I think it's important to have the spirit to say that good stuff is good and differentiate it from bad stuff.' The editorial board of *Manga Burikko* feared that readers might be trapped in a negative spiral by defining themselves as otaku and becoming unnecessarily self-deprecating. In order to counter this, it seems that they treated otaku as 'an issue of self-consciousness', and tried to enlighten readers to take a positive attitude like Takekuma. Especially for Ōtsuka, who regarded 'otaku' as a discriminatory term, it would not be possible to ignore readers that uncritically accepted such negative connotations. Ōtsuka suggested that the attitude readers should take is as follows:

I would not want you to follow the example of science-fiction fans that create a closed society when they were discriminated against by literature buffs. If possible, I would like you to move forward as far as possible – starting from here. This *lolicon* magazine is the starting line, not a shameful ending. I think that what matters is how far you can go.²⁹

What Ōtsuka asked for from readers is that they grow and have an open mind, without being trapped by the term 'otaku'. In this regard, there is a high possibility that, similar to the time of the 'otaku' debate in 1983, Ōtsuka's intentions were at work behind the enlightened activity of the editorial board in 1984.³⁰

Conclusion

'Otaku' first appeared in the writings of Nakamori Akio, who intended to position himself as belonging to the mainstream or cool culture by looking down on 'otaku' as men who are 'not able to have relationships with women'. While some *Manga Burikko* readers reacted against Nakamori's writing as discriminatory, others took on a self-deprecating attitude and positioned themselves in the spitting image of 'otaku'. It is clear that at this time there were two interpretations of 'otaku': discriminatory or self-deprecating. Ōtsuka, who regarded Nakamori's contempt of 'otaku' as one-sided discrimination, exercised his authority as an editor of *Manga Burikko* and adopted an editorial strategy that ensured that the term 'otaku' would be recognized as discriminatory. At the same time, he was issuing a warning to readers who self-deprecatingly regarded themselves as 'otaku'. Just as he wanted a productive debate in the magazine, he wanted readers to live a full life. The discursive dynamics within *Manga Burikko* from 1983 to 1984 were a large factor in shaping the 'otaku' discourse that was to come.

Notes

1. Translator's note (TN): this is a translation of Yamanaka Tomomi (2009), "Otaku" tanjō: *Manga Burikko* no gensetsurikigaku o chūshin ni, *Kokugo kenkyū*, 27, pp. 16–34. The primary translator for this chapter is Nishimura Keiko.
2. The definition of 'otaku' is elusive and the discussion ongoing. In this chapter, I put this issue on hold, because my aim is not to provide a definition or clarify. For the sake of convenience, in this chapter, 'otaku' means 'individuals or groups that are inclined to certain hobbies and fields such as manga, anime and games', with reference to Okada Toshio (1996) and Azuma Hiroki (2001). TN: For a discussion of 'moe', see Galbraith, P. (2009), 'Moe: Exploring Virtual Potential in Post-Millennial Japan', *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Galbraith.html> (accessed 1 August 2014).
3. TN: light novels are a genre of serial storytelling that targets youth with entertaining stories embellished with cover art and illustrations of characters drawn in the style of manga and anime.

4. *Manga Burikko* was published by Serufu Shuppan (later Byakuya Shobō) in 1982, and started out as an *ero-gekiga* (erotic, realistic comics) magazine. However, from the May 1983 issue, the style of the magazine changed from realistic *gekiga* to anime-like *lolicon* manga (*anime chō no lolicon manga*). Beginning with a *shōjo* (for girls) manga-style illustration on the cover, the magazine transformed into a '*bishōjo komikkushi*' (cute girl comic magazine). This change increased the number of copies sold, and *Manga Burikko* came to be regarded as one of the two major *lolicon* magazines, second only to *Lemon People* (published by Amatoriasha). The core readers were men in their teens, but, after the change in content, the magazine gained female readers as well. Nakamori Akio is a columnist, writer and author of *Tōkyō tongari kizzu* (*Tokyo Edgy Kids*, 1988a) and *Oshare dorobō* (*Fashion Thief*, 1988b). Because of his column, "*Otaku*" *no kenkyū*, Nakamori is known as the godfather of otaku.
5. Nagayama Kaoru (2006) notes that Nakamori's writing sparked a controversy in the pages of *Manga Burikko*, which then developed into a debate between Nakamori and Ōtsuka Eiji. In the process, the term otaku/*otaku* was disseminated.
6. For sociological studies of otaku, see Miyadai (1990), Ogawa (1994), Namba (2005) and Matsutani (2008). TN: in Miyadai and Matsutani's titles, 'otaku' is in *katakana*, while in Ogawa and Namba's titles it is in *hiragana*.
7. This short-run magazine was first published by Nakamori Akio and Endō Yu'ichi in 1982. Its content centred on columns written about subculture.
8. Comic Market (abbreviated as Comiket), established in 1975, is Japan's largest fanzine sales event.
9. *Manga Burikko*, June 1983, pp. 200–1.
10. This quote is from the web page 'Manga Burikko no sekai: Densetsu no bishōjo komikku zasshi' ('The World of *Manga Burikko*: The Legendary Bishōjo Comic Magazine'), which is available at www.burikko.net/people/otaku02.html (accessed 9 July 2014).
11. TN: *Oshin* was a TV drama aired on NHK from 1983 to 1984. The protagonist is a seven-year-old girl from a poor family sent away from home to make her own way at the end of the Meiji Period.
12. *Manga Burikko*, August 1983, pp. 174–5.
13. The interview series titled '*Shinjinrui no kishu tachi*' ('The Flag Bearers of the New Breed') by Chikushi Tetsuya started from the 14 April 1985 issue of *Asahi Journal*, and Nakamori was introduced as 'editor' in the 26 April 1985 issue.
14. Miyadai (1990) notes of *shinjinrui* and *otaku* that, 'In the process by which it expands to a large scale, a culture will be differentiated into leaders and followers. . . . At the beginning of the occurrence, amongst the leaders, *shinjinrui* culture and *otaku* culture remained undifferentiated, and the core leaders were like those people around us.' Miyadai points out that, among the readers of *Manga Burikko* before 1983, there were leaders of *otaku* culture who merged with *shinjinrui* culture. In terms of Nakamori's article, Miyadai notes the process of 'self-differentiation by the leaders of *otaku* culture from their followers. In this way, we see a "class conflict within *otaku*" (*otaku no kaikyū tōsō*), or a movement of differentiation within *otaku* culture.'
15. According to survey results published in 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu' in the September and November 1983 issues of *Manga Burikko*.
16. *Manga Burikko*, January 1984, p. 160.
17. Ogata Genjirō (now Ogata Katsuhiko) was an editor for the erotic magazine (sold from vending machines) *Korekutā*, published by Kaimeisha (an alternative name

- for Gun'yūsha). This can be gathered from comments by Ogata himself published in 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu' in the January and May 1984 issues of *Manga Burikko*.
18. In the November 1983 and June 1984 issues of *Manga Burikko*, Ōtsuka notes that Ogata is in charge of both 'Shinjuku Mainā Kurabu' and 'Tokyo Otona Kurabu Jr'.
 19. *Manga Burikko*, June 1984, p. 190.
 20. *Manga Burikko*, June 1984, p. 190.
 21. In the August 1984 issue, the title of the corner was changed to 'Dakyō Posuto' ('Compromise Post').
 22. *Manga Burikko*, August 1984, p. 191.
 23. TN: the first three of these are female manga artists associated with the *shōjo* (for girls) genre. For more, see Galbraith, this volume.
 24. *Manga Burikko*, March 1984, p. 189.
 25. TN: 'Odawata' was one of the pennames used by Ogata.
 26. *Manga Burikko*, April 1984, p. 188. We might note here that 'otaku' in this reader response is written in *katakana*, while the word was originally written in *hiragana* by Nakamori. TN: Yamanaka points this out because it might indicate a sort of differentiation from the negative, old understanding of otaku. Okada Toshio also used the *katakana* version of *otaku* in his writings. See Okada, this volume.
 27. *Manga Burikko*, March 1984, p. 185.
 28. Called *Dakyō Posuto* from the August 1984 issue on.
 29. *Manga Burikko*, June 1984, pp. 190–1.
 30. TN: Yamanaka has a note here promising another article on the discourse around otaku in 1989, when Miyazaki Tsutomu, who was arrested for molesting and murdering children, was called an otaku in the mass media. At this time, Ōtsuka and Nakamori reunited for a debate about otaku. For more, see Kamm, this volume.

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Opening the Black Box of the 1989 *Otaku* Discourse¹

Björn-Ole Kamm

Introduction: Assembling *otaku*

The number of publications on *otaku* or *otaku* culture is ever increasing.² Most of these publications begin with a shared claim, which goes something like this: existing knowledge of *otaku* is riddled with false representations, such as an inability to bond with others, and thus these misrepresentations need to be remedied (Okada, 1996, pp. 10–14; Honda, 2005, p. 8; Nagayama, 2005, p. 13). The scholarship on *otaku* in Japanese, English and German reproduces the well-known narrative of how the term was created within the confines of discriminatory columns by Nakamori Akio in 1983 (see Galbraith and Yamanaka, this volume), and later diffused via a mass media moral panic following the arrest of a child molester and murderer in 1989 (Kinsella, 1998) and sarin gas attacks by a supposedly anime-inspired cult in 1995 (Gardner, 2008). Echoed by most later studies, the first book on *otaku*, apply titled *Otaku no hon* (*The Book of Otaku*, Machiyama, 1989), starts by refuting definitions and images of *otaku* as dark or antisocial, which the authors argue has become a dominant view since the mass media coverage of the ‘Tokyo-Saitama Serial Abduction-Murders of Little Girls’ from 1988 to 1989, later abbreviated as the ‘Miyazaki Incident’. Because the mass media allegedly called the suspect, Miyazaki Tsutomu, an *otaku* and portrayed him as but one example of a much larger problem (cf. LaMarre, 2004, p. 184; Manfé, 2005, p. 22; Ishimori, 2009, p. 9; Itō, 2012, p. xxi), scholars highlight the need for disassociating Miyazaki from other *otaku* and for rectifying the false image of *otaku* based on him (Okada, 1996; Kikuchi, 2008, and in this volume; Galbraith, 2010). In the next step, authors proclaimed that only *otaku* should be allowed to define the term. From Okada Toshio’s *Otakugaku nyūmon* (*Introduction to Otakuology*, Okada, 1996, and Chapter 5 this volume) to more recent work (Enomoto, 2009), contributions to the study of *otaku* are concerned with correct meanings and who holds the power to control these meanings, which leads them to go against the mass media or society itself.

In this chapter, I will show how both advocates for and critics of *otaku* were very much entangled and co-produced a distinct way of making truth claims about *otaku* in 1989 and 1990, which is still the prevailing ‘mode of ordering’. Previous studies of *otaku* critique reductionism, which they detect in judgemental explanations of *otaku*

behaviour or motives based on only a few media readings and the assumption that media users passively absorb media content. Reductionism, however, is not only an issue in explanations of *otaku*. It also surfaces when readers are told that the mass media started a witch-hunt against *otaku*, that they portrayed them wrongly, and other forms of broad criticism. The adversary – be it the mass media, society or mainstream culture – appears to be an integral part of the stories told about *otaku* from the outside as well as from the inside. It is one of the most salient techniques for ordering *otaku* – for ordering the narratives told about *otaku*, their place in the world, and the material embodiments of these narratives (Law, 1994). During interviews with fans of popular culture I conducted in Japan,³ the term *otaku* and the mass media's misrepresentation always featured one way or another. When a number of my interviewees said that one might associate some of their activities with *otaku*, but then insisted that they and their activities in no way resemble the negative portrayals in the media, I nodded in agreement. I had read about the negative stereotype in so many scholarly accounts before. The schema of the *otaku* witch-hunt of 1989 and 1990 was engraved in my understanding of the *otaku* discourse. I naturally agreed that the mass media plays the role of bashing *otaku* and creates negative hype to feed moral stances. Whenever someone starts a killing spree at a school or murders their immediate family (e.g. Fujiwara, 1988), the mass media will draw connections between the crime and the person's playing video games or using some other medium. We all 'know' how these moral panics work (cf. Cohen, 1972; Ferguson, 2008).

After some time, however, the 'naturalness' of my response to these statements began to give me pause. How exactly did the mass media create this moral panic over *otaku*? What exactly are we referring to as the mass media? What happens inside this 'black box' (Latour, 1988, p. 3)? The form of critiquing the mass media dominant in the *otaku* discourse could be called a 'reverse bias', which finds expression in the metaphor (and actual practice of) 'fighting fire with fire'. In order to critique perceived misrepresentations and reductionist stereotypes, the same rhetoric is employed and the mass media in their diversity are reduced to a single-point actor. Symptomatically, a question never asked is why the mass media or the many humans and non-humans compromising them are so reductionist. Asking this question would destabilize the image of a hegemonic and powerful actor because one would have to look at the many different bits and pieces inside this black box. This chapter aims to do just that: to trace the 'black-boxed' actors, enrolled in different ways and enrolling others in different ways, but nonetheless co-creating a network of objects, ideas and people that would produce a distinct subject position (Foucault, 2002, p. 57) from which to make claims concerning *otaku*. I do not want to side with the mass media against *otaku*, but rather to complicate the black-and-white picture of the discourse.

In this chapter, I am thus interested in the dynamics of *otaku* as an 'interactive kind' of people. Interactive kinds (Hacking, 1986, 1999) are categories that have an effect on the self-images of those so labelled and are themselves affected by those labelled when they change their self-images, behaviour or outlook. I am interested in the devices of ordering to establish what is to count as true, or the protocols and techniques of assembling and creating the very possibility for *otaku* knowledge. *Otaku* are assembled in many areas of life and through many disciplines, including psychiatry, criminology,

psychoanalysis and, most prolific, media and (sub-)cultural studies. A number of definitions indicate a link between *otaku* (behaviour and personality) and media, situating the *otaku* discourse within a cluster of other media-related discourses governed by a logic of cause and effect: personality determines media use, media content dictates behaviour. The ontological argument is that things can be traced back to general and determinable reasons, which is to say 'that they were shaped by large-scale, long-range factors of one kind or another' (Law, 1994, p. 96). This argument correlates with reductionism and a logic of cause and effect, and also an inherent distinction between those that drive and those that are driven. This study, however, neither takes the *otaku* as a given, nor does it see the mass media as a single driving force.

A study of modes of ordering or assembling such as this one is 'relational, with no privileged places, no dualisms and no a priori reductions. It will not distinguish, before it starts, between those that drive and those that are driven' (Law, 1994, p. 13). This means it does not assume distinctions to be given in the nature of things. Relative distinctions between the drivers and the driven are treated as emerging effects that may be sustained. This approach translates into the basic idea of symmetry, which 'is simply a methodological restatement of the relationship between order and ordering. It says, in effect, that we shouldn't take orders at face value. Rather we should treat them as the outcome of ordering' (Law, 1994, p. 12). Ordering is a process, uncertain and conditional. Ordering and what is perceived as its effect, order, are neither a necessity of the social nor something fixed forever. A study of ordering is modest and thus 'superficial', accepts appearances – even 'those complex appearances of customs, laws and knowledge endeavors' (Kendall and Wickham, 2001, p. 55) – and concentrates on describing them as best as possible. So the following account does not explicate 'hidden reasons' for why the mass media bashed *otaku*, but rather describes contingent modes of ordering of 1989, which have produced a space to speak about *otaku* and made it sustainable as a subject position.

How were *otaku* produced, assembled or ordered during the controversy surrounding the Miyazaki Incident? To open this black box, I also have to open another one, the so-called 'mass media'. Figure 3.1 shows how these black boxes fit into one another. I open

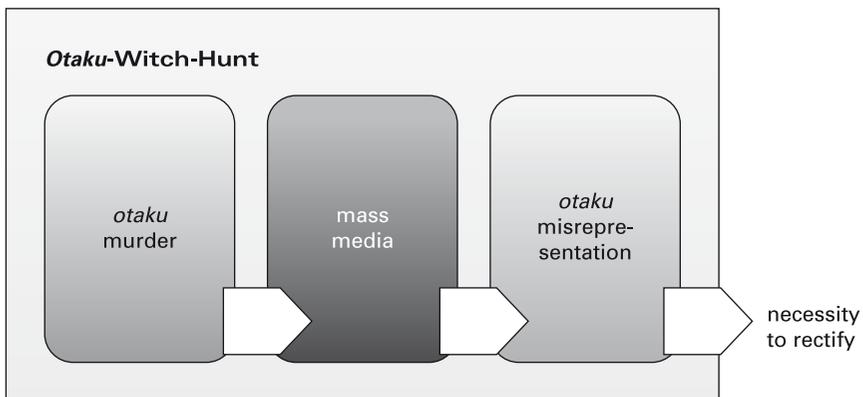


Figure 3.1 Black boxes inside black boxes

the latter box, 'mass media', through a qualitative content analysis of newspaper, tabloid and journal articles that dealt with Miyazaki's case between August 1989 and December 1990. These articles and their respective authors, as well as other voices in their texts, show some of the bits and pieces making up the 'mass media'. My analysis includes articles published in Japan's two largest newspapers, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun*, in addition to other newspapers such as the *Nikkei Shimbun*, *Mainichi Shimbun*, *Tōkyō Shimbun*, *Sankei Shimbun*, *Akahata* and regional newspapers. I also analyse journals, tabloids and magazines such as the *AREA*, *Nikkan Gendai*, *Yūkan Fuji*, *Chūō Kōron*, *Tsukuru*, *SPA!*, *Uwasa no Shinzō*, *Shūkan Bunshun* and *Shūkan Hōseki* and others. This large corpus allows me to unpack how some elements of the 'mass media' took up the term *otaku*, and also to answer the following questions: Which elements of the network 'mass media' made the connection between Miyazaki and *otaku*? Which actors called out misrepresentations and black-boxed the murder, media and the relation between the two? By paying attention to the diversity of the inner black box, the outer 'witch-hunt box' is opened in tandem. This allows me to show that the line between attacker (mass media) and the attacked (*otaku*) is blurry at best, and that dividing the actors along this line produced *otaku* in such a way that many academic disciplines were able to jump on the bandwagon. For many actors, the production of *otaku* during the Miyazaki Incident was thus a question of cultural ordering.

Point of entry: Qualitative content analysis

As larger newspapers, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Asahi Shimbun*, *Nikkei Shimbun* and *Mainichi Shimbun* offer indexed digital databases of their articles, a broad number of sources could be directly accessed. Digital databases include article texts and in many instances scans of original publications, which allows for an analysis not only of the text, but also of the style of presentation (for example, style of headlines and use of images). Most regional daily newspapers, such as *Tōkyō Shimbun*, *Ōsaka Shimbun* and *Kanazawa Shimbun*, as well as the tabloids such as *Nikkan Gendai* and *Yūkan Fuji*, do not offer digital databases, which made it necessary to access microfilms of issues published between 1989 and 1990 from university or prefectural libraries and the National Diet Library in Japan. Concerning journals and magazines, a most valuable point of access was *Ōya Shōichi bunko zasshi-kiji-sakuin-sōmokuroku* (Web OYA-bunko), a general search catalogue of journal articles. The web version allowed me to easily search by matching articles in journals such as *Chūō Kōron* and *Uwasa no Shinzō*, and I could then retrieve the applicable materials from the Ōya Library or other institutions. 'Yellow press' publications and broadcasts, such as *Shūkan Pureibōi* (*Weekly Playboy*) or '3ji ni aimashō' ('Let's meet at three', TBS) that could have offered further windows into the 'black box' had to be excluded from the following analysis, because these media neither offer archives themselves nor are they accessible via public libraries. Direct enquiries, for example to the broadcaster TBS, were met with negative replies. The often 'spectacular' mode of presenting information (see below) in such publications and broadcasts, however, is seen in other tabloids, such as the aforementioned *Nikkan Gendai*, which function as primary examples of how actors of the 'yellow press' dealt with the murder case.

The terms I used for the digital searches were:

- Miyazaki Tsutomu, including both versions of Miyazaki⁴ in *kanji* as well as in *hiragana*;
- *Tōkyō Saitama renzoku yōjo yūkai satsujin jiken* (Tokyo-Saitama Serial Abduction-Murders of Little Girls), including other designations such as *renzoku yōjo satsujin jiken*;
- *otaku*, in both *hiragana* and *katakana*;
- *mania*;
- *manga*;
- *anime*;
- *lolicon*;
- combinations of these terms.

The choice of terms was based on a review of the scholarly literature that referred to ‘*otaku* bashing’ in the mass media and ‘*otaku* culture’ more generally (in which *mania* is often used as an older term for media fans and hobbyists). The non-digital sources were later scanned and preprocessed to make them accessible to qualitative data analysis software. I made use of the application ‘MaxQDA’, which allowed me to store digital copies of all the texts, organize them into sets (newspapers, journals, tabloids) and later code text segments.

Qualitative content or data analysis is not interested in retrieving and reconstructing supposed or hidden meanings, but rather is an evaluation strategy without a priori formulated theoretical criteria, which would be typical for quantitative methods (Lamnek, 1995, p. 197). Thus, the category or code system has to be developed from the material and is not a grid of previously determined terms as would be the case in quantitative content analysis (the so-called ‘code-book’). The system is what structures later analysis, which focuses on formulating categories for the ordering modes concerning the Miyazaki Incident and relationships drawn between the child molester and murderer and the term *otaku*. Through repeated readings, the formed categories were tested for their reliability (see Mayring, 2004).

Otaku and the mass media

What is referred to by a term such as ‘the mass media’? It links to a tremendously large network of humans and objects comprised of many different bits and pieces. There are the communicators, such as individual journalists, as well as institutions like publishers or editorial boards, all equipped with political allegiances, stories about their trade and strategies for their direction. Then there are technologies and infrastructures such as televisions, servers, satellites, printing machines, paper, *kanji* and *kana*, which function as intermediaries when they do their job, and as mediators when they do not. Lastly, there are products, such as broadcasts, newspapers or journals, articles, pictures and the like. The homogenizing approach to the mass media portrayal of the Miyazaki Incident and *otaku* turns all these heterogeneous humans and objects into a single-point actor, a

single attacker, despite different stories about their position in the world, such as liberal or conservative and different locations in the network. Only a very limited number of scholarly texts on *otaku* actually cite or refer to newspaper⁵ or journal articles. The first question I ask is thus how the communicators (journalists) came to know the term *otaku* and what connections they drew between Miyazaki Tsutomu and the term. Until 1989, *otaku* as 'gloomy manga fan' had only been circulating within the sphere of a limited number of people, for example, the producers and consumers of *Manga Burikko* (see Galbraith and Yamanaka, this volume). In most cases of relating the narrative of *otaku* bashing, the columnist Nakamori Akio coined the term *otaku* in this small-scale *lolicon*⁶ magazine in 1983. How was the term then transferred from a niche-market magazine to 'the mass media'?

The narrative of the Miyazaki Incident begins with four elementary schoolgirls (aged four to seven) going missing in Saitama prefecture starting from July 1988. Since that time, *Asahi* published thirty-three and *Yomiuri* nine articles on the case. The coverage increased rapidly from 16 December 1988, a day after the body of the third girl was found and the missing person case turned into a homicide. The remainder of the year saw fifty-three articles in *Asahi* and nineteen in *Yomiuri* concerning the case, asking whether the other two girls had also been murdered. The first non-human actants⁷ arrived on the scene on 20 December 1988, when postcards, cardboard boxes with body parts of the second victim, and confession notes signed 'Imada Yūko'⁸ arrived at the home of the victim and the *Asahi* offices in Tokyo. These non-human actants reordered the news reporting tremendously; stories were suddenly on the front page.⁹ Photos of the dead girls and printed notes sent by the killer also helped the police in constructing a profile of a highly proficient camera and printing specialist.¹⁰

Five months later, the police arrested a twenty-six-year old printing assistant, Miyazaki Tsutomu, for molesting a six-year-old girl. This arrest came about not because he matched their profile, but rather because the father of the girl alerted the police. Beginning on 9 August 1989, Miyazaki gradually confessed and the girls' bodies were subsequently found. Media coverage from 10 August focused on the course of events and the victims' families. The suspect's parents were interviewed and Miyazaki's father vehemently expressed disbelief concerning his son's guilt.¹¹ Like so many others, Miyazaki's father posed the question that would drive speculation for months: why would my son do this? The journalists coerced the father to open his son's room and, in so doing, he also inadvertently opened the door to the answer that the mass media would provide (at least according to the standard way of telling the history of *otaku* [cf. Itō, 2012, p. xxi]): Miyazaki did this because he was an *otaku*. In Miyazaki's room, investigators found a large number of videotapes and anime- or manga-related magazines. Photos taken of the room were featured in most newspaper and journal articles afterwards (for example, in *SPA!*, see Figure 3.2). Apparently, not a few horror and slasher videos as well as porn and *lolicon* magazines were part of his collection.¹² During the trial, Miyazaki's room and his video collection would play their part in attempts to explain his behaviour and mental state.¹³

However, how were these objects linked to *otaku*? Until 17 August 1989, the use of *otaku* (either in *hiragana* or *katakana*) was limited to a form of address ('you'), as is still common in certain contexts (see Nakagawa, 2011, p. 40).¹⁴ On this day, however,



Figure 3.2 Miyazaki Tsutomu's room, depicted in Ôtsuka and Nakamori, 1989a, p. 99; picture used with kind permission of SPA!, Fusôsha: 'Miyazaki's Room is the Room of Our Generation!'

Shinbunka, a special-interest newspaper for publishers, printed an article by Ōtsuka Eiji (1989a), a manga author, critic and editor who used the term *otaku shōnen* (otaku-boys) in an attempt to defend video collectors against a witch-hunt that he believed to be unfolding. Not coincidentally, Ōtsuka was also the editor of *Manga Burikko*, which ceased publication in 1985. Ōtsuka’s stance was republished in an article in *Asahi* on 24 August 1989.¹⁵ This is the first and only article in *Asahi* in 1989 in which the term *otaku* was used in this way. *Yomiuri* published three articles using *otaku* in the same year. The use of the term in both newspapers in conjunction with Miyazaki remained limited (see Figure 3.3). A more common phrase at the time was *mania*, used to mean someone who is very enthusiastic about a given topic;¹⁶ though it referred to the habit of collecting, it did not have negative connotations beyond ‘know-it-all’. After photos of Miyazaki’s room circulated on TV and in newspapers¹⁷ and tabloids,¹⁸ Miyazaki was soon called a *bideo mania* (video *mania*) or *kamera mania* (camera *mania*) due to his more-than-amateur-grade equipment.¹⁹ Sometimes he was also called an *anime mania* or *lolicon*, as well.²⁰ Accounting for articles that drew attention to Miyazaki’s hobbies and media use, twenty-three were published in *Asahi*, fifty-six in *Yomiuri* and thirteen in *Mainichi* in 1989. Including a few more in 1990, only 12.5 per cent of the coverage in Japan’s largest newspapers between August 1989 and December 1990 (in total 1,034 articles) is concerned with Miyazaki as a video collector or anime fan. Summarizing accounts of the year 1989 refer to him as a print shop employee and do not mention his interests.²¹

The mode of ordering to be input into the accounts on anime, manga or video *mania* is one of balance, drawing a line between the average enthusiast and Miyazaki

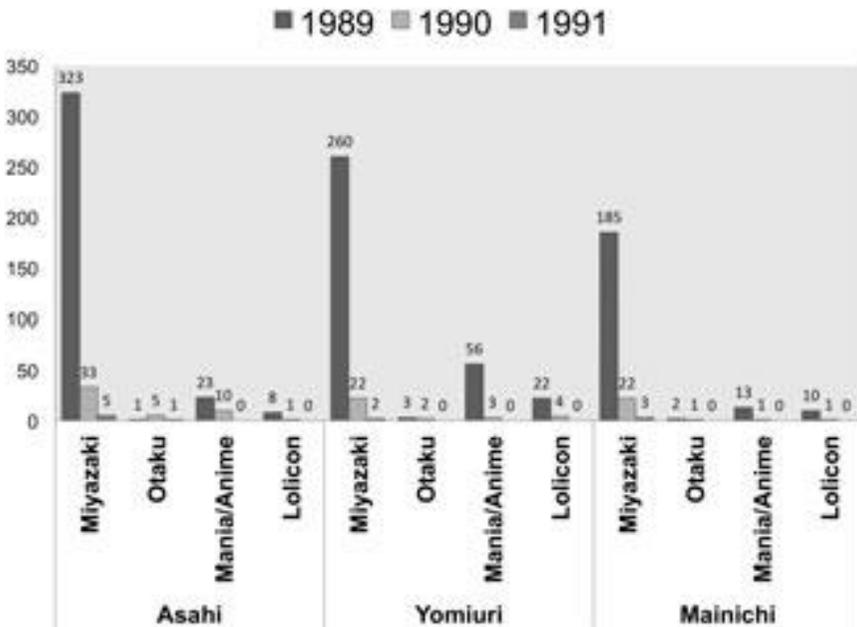


Figure 3.3 Articles on Miyazaki and his interests (August 1989–December 1991)

(‘he is no ordinary video collector’).²² This is even the case when concerns about horror videos were voiced or large gestures made towards the problems of the young generation or society as a whole.²³ Journalists themselves generally do not state that anime fans are dangerous, but rather quote or interview experts such as psychiatrists, who give conflicting accounts, and informants, who describe Miyazaki in negative terms and fear that this incident might lead to the representation of anime and video *mania* as psychopaths.²⁴ This latter way of dealing with or ordering the incident is what I call the ‘mode of disclaiming,’ which is realized by disclaiming the association of *otaku* with negative traits, but nonetheless always has to make the connection before it can reject it.

Lolicon, however, is openly criticized in the light of a child pornography incident three years earlier²⁵ or the lack of youth protection laws.²⁶ Furthermore, journalists did visit video rental stores, manga shops and the Comic Market, Japan’s largest sales event for fanzines. By coincidence, the summer Comiket in 1989 (C36) had opened its doors on 12 August and received a great deal of attention following the Miyazaki Incident. Apparently, the amateur manga authors had reacted quickly and already were offering Miyazaki quizzes, comics and t-shirts.²⁷ Still, they expressed concern at being seen as potential child molesters or murderers and so highlighted how Miyazaki differed from the ‘average’ fan.²⁸ Ōtsuka also expressed this fear and draws a line between the suspect and others in light of the idea that Comiket is home to an army of Miyazakis-in-the-making (Ōtsuka, 1989b, p. 440).

Tabloids and the Miyazaki reserve troops

‘As you can see, there are 100,000 possible culprits like Miyazaki Tsutomu here’ (*Goran kudasai. Koko ni 10 man nin no Miyazaki Tsutomu yōgisha ga imasu!*)! The renowned reporter Shōji Noriko supposedly said this on the wide show (talk show) *3ji ni aimashō* (*Let’s meet at three*) on TBS. Another version has her talking about ‘Miyazaki reserve troops’ (*Miyazaki-yobigun*) in reference to the participants of Comiket. Curiously enough, Shōji did not work for TBS in 1989, but rather Fuji TV. Unfortunately, neither TBS nor Fuji TV were forthcoming when I contacted them concerning their wide shows. While there are traces of these broadcasts on the net, nobody is sure who used the phrase for the first time and in what context.²⁹ Whether or not it was in fact Shōji who spoke these words, most wide shows on major TV channels such as Nihon Terebi, Fuji, TBS and Asahi featured the murder case as their main topic between 14 and 18 August. Wide shows in Japan are very much in line with what is called the ‘yellow press’ in the US and Europe and order their topics accordingly, which is to say by presenting in the ‘mode of the spectacle’. It should not be surprising, then, that TBS titles one instalment of a wide show ‘Are the Miyazaki Reserve Troops Increasing? Brutality!! The Background of the Murder of Little Girls’ (*Miyazaki-yobigun wa fueru ka? Zangyaku!! Yōjosatsugai no haikai*).

Regardless of who coined the term *Miyazaki-yobigun* on TV, it does not appear in print before 5 September, when the phrase was picked up in a *Yomiuri* column not by a journalist, but rather by the manga critic and playwright Takatori Ei³⁰ who debates if Miyazaki was a symbol of the younger generations or an outcast even among *otaku*.³¹ Ōtsuka reacts a month later in an article in the literary magazine *Chūō Kōron*, in which

he criticizes the phrase and discusses the ways that his life does and does not resemble Miyazaki's (Ōtsuka, 1989b).³² Despite Ōtsuka's attempts to mitigate, tabloids such as *Nikkan Gendai* and *Yūkan Fuji* were more or less explicit about tying Miyazaki to video fandom. Similar to wide shows, tabloids use large, screaming headlines such as 'The Unparalleled Serial Killings of Young Girls by a Lonely Anime Enthusiast', 'The Abnormality of a 26 Year-old Young Man',³³ 'Little Girls' Bane Miyazaki: The Insanity of an Immature Man'³⁴ and 'Six Questions and Riddles Concerning this Abnormal Crime,'³⁵ including 'Why did he become like this?' and 'How large are the Miyazaki reserve troops and are they on the increase?' The spectacular questions were followed by speculative answers.³⁶

In August 1989, Miyazaki featured on the front page of most tabloids, but answers to the questions raised above were often squeezed between regular columns on politics and leisure. Concerning the question of whether there were more people like Miyazaki, the reader does not learn much about the case at hand from the enrolled experts, but rather reads about child abuse in the US and in Europe, where these crimes are apparently common; Hirai Tomio, a psychologist from Tokyo Kasei University, for example,³⁷ explains that since more women are aiming for a career, the number of lonely men has increased and the distortions reflected in horror videos are also spreading. Following the logic of cause and effect, most explanations of Miyazaki's motive focus on his parents; like so many others, he suffered from a father who was always at work and an overbearing mother.³⁸ Similar to the articles in newspapers such as *Asahi* and *Yomiuri*, tabloid journalists do not judge or explain themselves, but rather enrol experts to speak on the matter. Jurists and mothers talk about the barely functioning school system and *ijime* (bullying), philosophers complain about imported individualism, and risk managers focus on drug abuse.³⁹ While the headlines are much more lurid than those in the newspapers, in the body text, even tabloids appear to follow a similar mode of balance. 'Balance' in the sense that everybody – parents, school, employers, videotapes, society – receives blame. This blame-slinging is, of course, also critiqued by other journalists who also publish in 'the mass media.'⁴⁰ Further, these large-lettered, vicious headlines were not reserved for Miyazaki. Tabloids embody both spectacle and balance in such a complete way that everybody and anybody is attacked, no matter his or her political, societal or vocational allegiance. Politicians are usually all morons, crime suspects all perverts. So, in 1989 the child murderer Miyazaki was without a doubt of interest. However, even more newsworthy that year was the new value-added tax: even from August to September, directly after Miyazaki's arrest, *Nikkan Gendai* had more front pages on the recently introduced tax than on him. In general, the tabloids had lost interest by September. Journals and magazines, on the other hand, had time to prepare and took over in October. Manga artists, critics, editors and media professionals would crystallize as the most vocal group in condemning or explaining Miyazaki.

Managing otaku

One of the most prolific writers was the aforementioned Ōtsuka Eiji. As a former editor of a *lolicon* magazine, manga author and critic, Ōtsuka was soon contacted by

journalists to give comments on the incident, but in a short time began to feel like a criminal himself (Ōtsuka, 2004, p. 318). This compelled him to step forward and defend Miyazaki and all the others who might now receive undue attention. Ōtsuka did this on several occasions in newspapers,⁴¹ but also in his own writings, which were published in journals as well as books (Ōtsuka, 1989b; Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989a, 1989b). As one important reason for his media engagement, Ōtsuka points to the magazines he saw in pictures of Miyazaki's room, which included back issues of the *lolicon* magazine that he edited (Ōtsuka, 2004, p. 319). The objects – books, magazines and videos – in Miyazaki's room enrolled commentators and established the network of people and ideas that should constitute the *otaku* discourse. Without the presence of these objects, Miyazaki would have been an 'ordinary' serial killer. While journalists, psychiatrists, jurists and social scientists (Abe, 1989; Oda, Tsuka and Yoshioka, 1989; Iwai, Kimura and Shibata, 1989) were attempting to define and manage the incident – and subsequently Japanese culture or perceived social problems (Kinsella, 1998) – the videos and magazines called manga critics into action to concurrently manage the construction of *otaku* as we have come to know this (interactive) kind since.

Unlike these critics, Miyazaki's lawyers, Suzuki Junji and Iwakura Keiji, did not focus much on an *otaku* connection in the courtroom or in their public statements. Their aim was to have their client declared a victim of circumstance.⁴² Similar to newspapers and tabloids, these lawyers tried to enrol specialists to give reasons for their client's mental disorder and subsequent disconnection from other humans. The juridical system, its courts, its lawyers and judges, embodies one of the most prominent modes of ordering in the controversy surrounding Miyazaki: cause and effect. This mode is characterized by the search for a single answer or factor, or perhaps multiple factors, which caused Miyazaki to commit his crimes, building on the certainty that there is a distinct, determinable cause explaining his deeds. In the trials, these factors included mostly society, the school system, bullying, bad parenting and, to a certain extent, horror videos. First, Miyazaki had congenitally disfigured hands and suffered from discrimination at school. Second, a lack in parenting was attested, the father described as a workaholic – a *mania-sei*⁴³ he apparently transferred to his son. Miyazaki, like many other neglected youths, was said to have found love in fiction, with his TV as a 'comforting uterus'.⁴⁴ Further, his only close human relation was with his grandfather, who died in 1988. With this man died Miyazaki's last connection to 'reality', and he retreated further into the fantasy world of his videos (here the videos play the role of 'symptom'). Evidence for Miyazaki's move into this fantasy world was seen in the resemblance of his crimes with homicides depicted in horror movies (the role switches from symptom to 'manual' or 'template').⁴⁵ If one focuses in on the impressions of urban housewives⁴⁶ as they were published in newspapers and tabloids, the fractured family, the stressful education system and working mothers in a consumer society were criticisms and fears embodied by Miyazaki.⁴⁷ Although Miyazaki's lawyers attempted to create a network involving psychiatrists and sociologists to establish their client as mentally ill and so bypass the death penalty, they were not able to pass the 'obligatory point of passage' (Callon, 1986), which in this case was a psychological assessment by experts from Keiō University. The experts announced Miyazaki sane enough to be aware of his deeds.

Despite their focus on psychological and circumstantial reasons for Miyazaki's behaviour, another strategy of the lawyers was the enrolment of a different group of specialists and the attempt to highlight their client's disconnectedness. During the trial, they asked Ōtsuka to give insights into the 'societal background' and make clear how removed Miyazaki was even from other collectors and visitors to Comiket. This mirrored Ōtsuka's own attempts at clarifying Miyazaki's position in the world, collected into the volume *M no sedai* (*The Generation of M*; the 'M' in this title refers to Miyazaki as becomes clear in the subtitle *Miyazaki and Us*). The book includes several essays by psychiatrist Kayama Rika, writers Ōizumi Mitsunari and Yazaki Yōko, the columnist Yamazaki Kōichi, among others, and is framed by two conversations between Ōtsuka and Nakamori Akio dated 4 September and 3 October. Ōtsuka expresses difficulty in distancing himself from Miyazaki, because of the perceived similarities between their rooms (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, pp. 18–20). Regardless of the question of whether Miyazaki really killed the four girls, Ōtsuka's urge to defend him was born from the assumption that the mass media and police were only looking for a scapegoat and found a likely suspect in the horror movie collector. What put him off was how the media also wallowed in the gory details of the case, fabricating 'narratively fitting' facts (*Yomiuri's* fake 'murder hideout', Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 33) and turning the incident into a horror movie in itself (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, pp. 36–7) and Miyazaki into an alien (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 43). Ōtsuka and Nakamori agree that the character 'Imada Yūko' – Miyazaki's penname as a serial killer – was a creation made possible through the attention of the media. To put it another way, the media co-created the murderer (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 51). The crime journalist Ichihashi Fumiya later echoed some of these ideas in an elaborate fabrication theory (Ichihashi, 2001). Ōtsuka also wanted to speak up for those youths and young adults who lived in similar environments ('Miyazaki's Room is the Room of Our Generation!', Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989a; see Figure 3.2 above). Though these young people had similar interests as Miyazaki, the media had turned his apparently quite normal room into the 'room of a girl murderer' (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, pp. 24, 28). Ōtsuka, less so Nakamori, sees a need to stand up for their generation, who were brought up in a time of media saturation (manga and anime, later games) and material affluence, but without father figures ('maternal era with no fathers', Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 81). This discourse mirrored the 'societal' explanations above and called the 1980s the 'decade of boys' crimes' (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 65), which in their view resulted from parents treating their children as tools for the fulfilment of their own dreams (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 72). Thus, Miyazaki is a product of the post-war era (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 84). In this sense, these critics side with Miyazaki as a symbol of their generation, which does not mean that they support the alleged crimes.

In the next instance, however, Ōtsuka and Nakamori discuss how Miyazaki differed from the average *mania* down the street in the way he arranged his collection and had several movies on a single tape (instead of one tape per work, the 'normal' way of doing it; Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 96). With the death of his grandfather, Miyazaki's childhood had ended and he had to leave home and step out into the world. He had tried to enter *otaku* society or *mania* society, but failed miserably (1989b, p. 97). From the

perspective of these two critics, the killings were moreover not on purpose, but rather the result of an over-identification with the girls, a peculiar expression of love (1989b, p. 195), and the desire to create a new kind of family after losing his former one (1989b, p. 202). Ōtsuka repeated these musings in several other publications and also during the trial. The jurists, however, were interested in an immediate causal explanation and did not care about his statements, which failed to deliver the ‘answers’ they were looking for: ‘[Ōtsuka] makes clear that the *otaku-zoku* are different, but he does not provide a direct motive or explanation.’⁴⁸ That is, he did not provide an explanation for Miyazaki’s crimes.

Establishing *otaku*

A number of commentators declared Miyazaki a symbol of the times,⁴⁹ even though they disagreed on what he actually symbolized. While the priming effect of violent media content was an issue, the trial proceedings and the strategy of the lawyers focused on family problems and bullying.⁵⁰ For the jurists, and also some journalists, the *otaku* issue was not the main point of debate, and the ‘flight from reality’ was more of a symptom. Contrastingly and important to note, literary critics, authors, manga artists and editors intensively discussed the idea of a link between Miyazaki and *otaku* and the question of whether his crimes resulted from media use.

The manga critic Fujita Hisashi criticized the jurists for equating Miyazaki’s motive with him being *otaku*,⁵¹ despite the fact that this is not something that the lawyers ever actually did in a printed public statement. A large number of literary journals such as *Bungeishunjū*, *Tsukuru*, *Uwasa no Shinzō* and *Chūō Kōron*, as well as magazines such as *Takarajima*, published special issues on Miyazaki and *otaku* in 1989, the most popular being the aforementioned *Otaku no hon (The Book of Otaku, Machiyama, 1989)*. Yonezawa Yoshihiro, one of the founders of Comiket, believed that Miyazaki perceived the world through a media lens, seeing others only as dolls.⁵² Nakamori Akio blames the TV as a surrogate parent (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 100). Columnist Izumi Asato compares Miyazaki’s top ten list of movies and his *Ultraman* collection with those of your average *mania* and detects no differences.⁵³ Critics and artists alike were quick in signing contracts with publishers, Ōtsuka and Nakamori spearheading these ‘creations of other stories’ that would bring them closer to Miyazaki’s inner narrative (Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 194ff.). Especially, Ōtsuka would publish almost every day in 1989 (attested by Nakamori; Ōtsuka and Nakamori, 1989b, p. 176) and write a whole column on Miyazaki in the following years.

In late 1989, Ōtsuka experienced what he would later call a ‘world of “proposals”’ (*‘kikakusho’-teki sekai*), and the beginning of what he designates as subculture journalism (Ōtsuka, 2004, p. 322ff.). Ōtsuka saw it as a chance to defend Miyazaki and others, even if it meant following the lead and ideas of the publishers. Now major journals and publishing houses were interested in what was going on in Japan’s youth and ‘subcultural’ realms, which provided the chance to rectify what many critics, editors and authors perceived as a personal attack. (Miyazaki’s writing skills were often likened to those of a ‘real’ critic,⁵⁴ and so they saw themselves negatively identified with him.) Ōtsuka later surmised that elite manga and anime fans and producers (including

himself) attempted to distinguish themselves from their followers through the tool formula of 'Miyazaki as otaku' (Ôtsuka, 2004, p. 37; see also Miyadai, 2006, pp. 196–8). The formula is similar to the disclaiming mode of ordering: the elites repeatedly endeavoured to order *otaku* culture by fixing or repairing a mistaken image springing from the Miyazaki Incident and disassociating themselves from him. However, and ironically, by declaring that Miyazaki was not an *otaku*, these elites repeatedly gave voice to the link between collecting popular media and social ineptitude, making a connection that they intended to critique.⁵⁵ By confronting 'wrong' knowledge and building alliances with publishers, Ôtsuka and Nakamori, and later Nakajima Azusa (see Aida, this volume), Okada Toshio (see Okada, Chapter 5, this volume), and many others established the scholar-as-*otaku* position from which to speak true knowledge. Using the media as a platform, they positioned themselves as those who know how things truly are, at times even emphasizing that they are the 'real' *otaku* (with the right to speak about *otaku*). As I highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, a first gesture in most scholarly or critical treatises on *otaku* or Japanese popular media remains this self-declaration, self-positivisation (vis-à-vis wrong *otaku* images and/or Miyazaki as *otaku*), which then leads to the claim of offering a better understanding. Through the network of videotapes in Miyazaki's room, his lawyers' attempts to enroll specialists, and critics' attempts to capture public attention, the question of 'who is an *otaku*' became a question of managing *otaku* culture by establishing the only 'real' *otaku* position describable within the discourse – that is, the position of denying *otaku* as antisocial, which first needs to declare *otaku* antisocial to make sense. In this way, critics such as Ôtsuka made a connection between Miyazaki and *otaku* even as they denied it.

Conclusion: Recursive modes of ordering

I conclude by summarizing the modes of ordering that I could impute through my analysis. The most prominent mode of ordering the Miyazaki Incident and *otaku* remains reductionism, or cause and effect. Exemplified by the juridical system, the controversy in 1989 and 1990 emphasized the search for a single (maybe multiple, but in any case direct) cause(s) leading to Miyazaki's crimes. There is no denying that horror videos and *lolicon* magazines appear as actants in this search. They are introduced as actors by acting on Miyazaki as templates for the murders, which make him act. These non-humans are also treated as symptoms, though, or an expression of the larger problems of society, such as the school system, bullying and bad parenting. If we look at the analysed articles only quantitatively, it is clear that the latter issues received more attention than *otaku*. In the form of a reverse bias, this mode of ordering (reductionism) is also guiding the critique of the mass media, highlighted by an opposition to, but also following the mode of, the spectacular embedded in tabloids. Loud, attention-drawing terms such as *yobigun* are not ignored, but repeated continuously and filled with meaning by those who stage themselves as knowing better, highlighting the dynamics of interactive kinds. While journalists and jurists debated links between the crimes and the media found in Miyazaki's room, manga and anime critics and producers, those who know better, gave them the key term for this controversy: before Ôtsuka used

otaku in his discussion of Miyazaki and the wrong impression of *otaku*, or Takatori mused about Miyazaki and the *otaku-zoku*, no mainstream journalists had used the term in this way. Ōtsuka and others are the ones that made the connection.

One of the major aims of this chapter has been to show that the rhetorical creation of single entities (for example, *otaku* culture) or single-point actors ('the mass media') out of heterogeneous and diverse networks does not bear much explanatory value. The involved actors are very much entangled, which complicates the black-and-white picture of 'the stereotyped' (the driven) versus 'the mass media' (the drivers) – not to forget the videos and magazines that enrolled so many other actors, 'drivers' and 'driven' alike. The driven very much drove the debate in a specific direction by repeatedly engaging with the link between Miyazaki and *otaku*, either by defending or denying its plausibility. Next to psychiatrists and sociologists, these *otaku* critics had a chance to act as 'experts' and took it. For this creation of a space to talk about *otaku*, the most salient mode of ordering is the mode of disclaiming. This mode is characterized by a push-and-pull-scenario: stories are told about good *otaku* by banishing the bad traits on Miyazaki. By repeating negative portrayals, a reason is created to rectify these portrayals. This process is recursive, in that each statement on *otaku* allows for another statement, be it a clarification or a rejection. The ordering of the Miyazaki Incident in this mode allowed actors to draw and sustain attention, a pattern that gave direction to many later statements on *otaku* within the discourse.

Notes

1. The archival research conducted for this chapter was funded through a fellowship from the Global Center of Excellence for Reconstruction of the Intimate and Public Spheres in 21st Century Asia at Kyoto University. The author would like to thank Itō Kimio at the center for his support and suggestions, which greatly contributed to the research.
2. Amongst others, Machiyama (1989); Grassmuck (1990, 2000); Taku (1991); Nakajima (1995); Okada (1996); Schodt (1996); Kinsella (1998); Saitō (2000); Azuma (2001); Morikawa (2003); Macias and Machiyama (2004); Honda (2005); Hotta (2005); Manfé (2005); Nagayama (2005); NRI (2005); Okada and Karasawa (2007); Azuma and Ōtsuka (2008); Media Create (2008); Okada (2008); Galbraith (2009); Yasuda (2011); Itō (2012).
3. For my dissertational project on translocal collectives of role-players, I conducted more than three years of fieldwork in online and offline situations, which included twenty semi-structured, narrative interviews in Japan with individuals aged between eighteen and forty-two, as well as a number of interviews with business and industry members.
4. Miyazaki's name was and often is mistakenly written as 宮崎. The correct *kanji*, however, is as follows: 宮崎.
5. One text touching on this question is Kinsella (1998), but its focus is on amateur manga and its social context. The only other is a recent quantitative content analysis of the terms' use in newspapers (Nakagawa, 2011).
6. *Lolicon* or *rorikon* (from Lolita complex) refers to manga, anime and other media with underage characters in at times sexual situations, or 'girls' comics for men' (cf. Takatsuki, 2010; Galbraith, 2011, and in this volume).

7. Within the partially connected projects often referred to as the ‘sociology of translation’ or ‘empirical ontology’, the term ‘actant’ rather than actor is used to stress that material causes as well as human actors may be determinants of social interactions and outcomes. The concept of actants in a network also underscores the interaction between material and human factors in any process. Actants may be sea scallops in the study of a network of marine biologists by Callon (1986), or technology in an organization, or data supporting a scientist’s arguments. Human actors define the representation of material actants, affecting how the material environment interacts with actors in the network. Though representation is necessary for non-human actants, for some adherers to the sociology of translation an ‘actor’ is any system element that influences others in the network, be it a human being, a text or an artefact.
8. A pun on words, meaning ‘Now I am telling.’
9. First example: “‘I Killed Mari-chan’ – A “Claim of Responsibility” Signed with a Woman’s Name and Sent to the Asahi Head Office’, *Asahi*, 11 February 1989, morning issue, p. 1.
10. ‘The Suspect in the Ayako-chan Incident Complies with the Criminal Profile of a Printing Specialist and Photo Mania’, *Asahi*, 10 August 1989, evening issue, p. 1.
11. ‘Ayako-chan Incident – “Miyazaki,” a Man with a Face Like a Noh Mask’, *Yomiuri*, 11 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 27. In 1994, when the evidence against his son appeared overwhelming, the father would commit suicide (‘Feature: Tokyo District Court Decision on the 14th – Focal Point is Adoption or Rejection of “Diminished Capacity”’, *Yomiuri*, 10 April 1997, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 15).
12. During the news reporting the number of tapes in his collection increased from 2,000 to 8,000 and later settled at 5,763 or 5,787 (cf. *Yomiuri*, 11 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 27; *Yomiuri*, 15 August 1989, Tokyo, evening issue, p. 3). These discrepancies were reason for some to believe in evidence fabrication through the police or the photographers (Ichihashi, 2001).
13. ‘Serial Abduction-Murders of Little Girls – First Trial Hearing and Statement Summary of the Defense’s Opinion’, *Yomiuri*, 30 March 1990, Tokyo, evening issue, p. 3.
14. Also based on my quantitative context-analysis of 3,065 articles in *Asahi*, *AREA* (from 6 November 1975 until 26 March 2012), and 1,946 articles in *Yomiuri* (from 17 September 1977 until 13 April 2012).
15. ‘Things Reflected by the Miyazaki Incident: The “Abnormality” of Social Phenomena Gathering at the Crime Scene’, *Asahi*, 24 August 1989, morning issue, p. 17.
16. Examples include *kā mania* (car maniac), *bijutsuhin mania* (art maniac), or *bideo mania* (video maniac).
17. *Asahi*, 11 August 1989, morning issue, p. 27; ‘Ayako-chan Incident: Unbelievable Man! Whirling Anger, Unfading Sorrow’, *Yomiuri*, 11 August 1989, morning issue, p. 24; ‘Scattered Photos of Little Girls in Own Room – Also Videos Dense – Miyazaki of the Ayako-chan Incident’, *Mainichi*, 11 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 22.
18. *Nikkan Gendai*, 12 August 1989, p. 6; *Yūkan Fuji*, 12 August 1989, p. 1.
19. *Asahi*, 10 August 1989, evening issue, p. 1; ‘The Confession Statement in the “Mari-chan Incident” Resembles Miyazaki’s Private Writings: Experts’ Analysis with a 95% Probability’, *Yomiuri*, 12 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 1.
20. *Yomiuri*, 11 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 27.
21. ‘Year 89 Events File’, *Asahi*, 31 December 1989, morning issue, p. 12.
22. ‘The Uncontrolled Horror Videos in the Background of the Little Girls’ Murder’, *Yomiuri*, 16 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 11.
23. ‘The Uncontrolled Horror Videos in the Background of the Little Girls’ Murder’; ‘Miyazaki Tsutomu, the Soil of Complex Predilections’, *AREA*, 29 August 1989, p. 6;

- [89 News File] Fashions & Keywords – Closing to a Bewildering “gannen” (Commentary), *Yomiuri*, 31 December 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 11.
24. ‘Collector Miyazaki, Craving the Limelight Through Video Collections’, *Asahi*, 15 August 1989, morning issue, p. 23; ‘Lurking Tips? Wrestling with Videos’, *Asahi*, 19 August 1989, morning issue, p. 31; *Asahi*, 24 August 1989, morning issue, p. 17.
 25. *AREA*, 29 August 1989, p. 6.
 26. *Yomiuri*, 16 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 11.
 27. *AREA*, 29 August 1989, p. 6.
 28. *Asahi*, 19 August 1989, morning issue, p. 31; *AREA*, 29 August 1989, p. 6.
 29. Several blogs deal with this question (eg. Hokke-Ookami, 2010; polient, 2010).
 30. ‘Colors of Insanity – The Miyazaki Prosecution (3)’, *Yomiuri*, 5 September 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 30.
 31. *Otaku-tribe*. The *-zoku* was used to create other groups as well, e.g. *Taiyō-zoku* (young delinquents), *Takenoko-zoku* (street dancers).
 32. On a side note, *yobigun* seems to have been a popular phrase that year, as it was used in many different contexts. In addition to the Miyazaki Incident, university golf club members were also called a ‘standing army of professional golfers to be’, for example in ‘International University Golf Tournaments’, *Yomiuri*, 5 September 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 18.
 33. *Nikkan Gendai*, 16 August 1989, p. 1, both titles.
 34. *Yūkan Fuji*, 12 August 1989, p. 1.
 35. *Nikkan Gendai*, 17 August 1989, p. 1.
 36. As Gill (2012) points out, most tabloids are usually ordered in a similar way and order a businessman’s trip home from work in a similar fashion.
 37. *Nikkan Gendai*, 17 August 1989, p. 13.
 38. ‘Background of “Slaughter-Demon” Miyazaki’, *Yūkan Fuji*, 18 August 1989, p. 4.
 39. ‘Miyazaki – Serial Abduction Murder of Little Girls: What Is the Essence of His Crime?’ *Nikkan Gendai*, 22 August 1989, p. 3.
 40. *Asahi*, 24 August 1989, morning issue, p. 17.
 41. ‘We Want to Tell the Story of the Little Girls Serial Murder in Our Own Words: Question by the Generation of the Accused Miyazaki’, *Asahi*, 6 January 1990, evening issue, p. 11; “‘Why’ Key to the Clarification of Motives: Serial Abduction-Murders of Little Girls Incident, First Trial on the 30th”, *Asahi*, 23 March 1990, evening issue, p. 3; ‘Questioning “Modernity and Abnormality:” Serial Abduction-Murders of Little Girls Incident Trial’, *Asahi*, 13 April 1990, morning issue, p. 16. He will also comment again in 1995 (after the sarin gas attacks by *Aum Shinrikyō*, which was said to follow an anime ideology), in 1997, during Miyazaki’s sentencing, and on many other occasions from 2000 until 2008, when the execution sentence of Miyazaki was finally carried out.
 42. ‘First Trial Hearing in Serial Girl Murder Case, Statement Summary of the Defense’s Opinion – Delusion of Being inside Uterus’, *Nikkei*, 30 March 1990, evening issue, p. 18.
 43. *Mania-sei*, being a maniac.
 44. *Yomiuri*, 30 March 1990, Tokyo, evening issue, p. 3.
 45. ‘He Wanted to Throw Her Away in a Bizarre Way: Miyazaki’s Successive and Detailed Testimony in Ayako-Chan Incident’, *Asahi*, 12 August 1989, morning issue, p. 22; ‘[SEE – SAW] Horror Videos Cautiously as Dreadful Background for the Serial Abduction-Murder of Little Girls’, *Yomiuri*, 23 August 1989, Tokyo, evening issue, p. 15.
 46. *Asahi*, 13 April 1990, morning issue, p. 16.
 47. Similar problems had already been discussed since the 1960s (cf. Kinsella, 1998).
 48. *Asahi*, 13 April 1990, morning issue, p. 16.

49. “Controversy 89” (September) How to Puzzle Out the “Miyazaki Incident” (Series); *Yomiuri*, 29 September 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 15; *Yomiuri*, 31 December 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 11; *Asahi*, 6 January 1990, evening issue, p. 11; ‘Why Did the “Virtuality” of Videos Become a Real Crime? Attention to the Public Hearing of the “Little Girls Serial Murder” (Commentary); *Yomiuri*, 30 March 1990, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 13; *Yomiuri*, 30 March 1990, Tokyo, evening issue, p. 3. See also Yokota (1989).
50. ‘Breaking with “Children Are the Purpose of Living” – Symposium on “Children’s Independence and the Fetters of Family”’, *Yomiuri*, 16 September 1989, Tokyo, evening issue, p. 8.
51. *Asahi*, 13 April 1990, morning issue, p. 16.
52. *Asahi Journal*, 25 August 1989, p. 17.
53. *Shūkan Bunshun*, 7 September 1989, p. 69.
54. ‘The Emotional Complexities of Three Families Due to Miyazaki Tsutomu’s “Confession” in Ayako-chan Abduction and Murder Case’, *Yomiuri*, 12 August 1989, Tokyo, morning issue, p. 26.
55. This mechanism of the *otaku* discourse can be observed in Okada Toshio’s later attacks against the younger generations of pop-cultural fans (Okada, 2008, and Chapter 9, this volume).

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Section Two

The 1990s

Traversing *Otaku* Fantasy: Representation of the *Otaku* Subject, Gaze and Fantasy in *Otaku no Video*

Lien Fan Shen

Introduction

Derived from an honorific meaning ‘your’ or ‘your house’, the Japanese word *otaku* was appropriated in the 1980s to refer to obsessive fans, particularly those attracted to manga, anime and videogames. In 2009, the *New York Times* published an article on a related phenomenon, ‘Love in 2-D’ (Katayama, 2009). Adorned with a photo of a middle-aged man holding a gigantic pillow upon which is printed the image of an anime character, the article describes the genuine love that male fans feel for the female characters of anime and videogames. The article describes ‘love in two dimensions’ as a ‘phenomenon’ in Japan and suggests that 2-D lovers are a subset of ‘*otaku* culture’. Given the impact of articles like this one in the *New York Times*, the people and practices labelled ‘*otaku*’, whether inside or outside Japan, appear vital and complex. Indeed, ‘*otaku*’ continue to attract the attention of scholars around the world, who research a wide variety of related material, practices and ‘phenomena’. Broadly speaking, there are two directions in the study of fans of manga, anime and videogames. The first involves anthropological and sociological aspects of fan activities and consumption, or seeing ‘*otaku*’ as a discourse in which the consumption practices of individual subjects intertwines with sociocultural power (Kinsella, 1998; Desser, 2003; LaMarre, 2004; Galbraith, 2010; Kam, 2013). The second investigates representations of *otaku* and related social politics (Freedman, 2009; Stevens, 2010).

Rather than looking into representations of *otaku* in general, this chapter investigates representations of *otaku* in anime. Specifically, the chapter focuses on *Otaku no Video* (1991) and explores how this anime reflexively represents *otaku*. In order to position *Otaku no Video* in sociocultural context, the chapter begins with a review of representations of *otaku* in the media, with special attention to how a fictional identity – ‘*otaku*’ – has been constructed since the 1980s. Due to the particulars of history, the term *otaku* referred mostly to men at the time when *Otaku no Video* was produced and circulated. While I am aware of the importance of the gender politics surrounding *otaku*, in discussing the term in context, this chapter inevitably becomes somewhat

male-centric. After covering this background, the chapter moves to examine *Otaku no Video*, specifically representations of the *otaku* object, subject and gaze. Drawing on Žižekian concepts, I argue that anime representations of *otaku* possess reflexivity that enables viewers to traverse *otaku* fantasy. The representation of *otaku* in anime involves deliberate self-awareness about the gaze and fantasy for and of *otaku*. Thus, *otaku*, paradoxically functioning as both object and subject, may allow us to further inquire into contemporary subjectivity in consumer society.

General representations of *otaku* in media

According to Azuma Hiroki (2009), the term *otaku* emerged in the 1970s and was used to refer to people involved in various subcultures in Japan. In the 1980s, due to advances in technology and niche media in Japan, including specialty magazines and original video animation, fan cultures surrounding manga and anime came to fruition. The term *otaku* was initially used only among fans, but became known to the general public after the ‘Miyazaki Incident’, when a twenty-six-year-old man, Miyazaki Tsutomu, molested and murdered four girls between the ages of four and seven. When Miyazaki was finally arrested in 1989, police found thousands of videotapes in his room. The media cast a negative image of *otaku* by repeatedly showing photos of Miyazaki’s room overflowing with videotapes and focusing on his interest in manga and anime (see Kinsella, 1998; Kamm, this volume). Because Miyazaki was portrayed to the public as a stereotypical ‘*otaku*’, the term came to mean not only immature social misfits, but also perverts and potential sociopaths. The media attention given to Miyazaki Tsutomu fuelled a moral panic against manga and anime fan cultures, stigmatizing *otaku* as loners on the edges of Japanese society. Media scholar Volker Grassmuck uses a comment by a journalist to illustrate the media perception about *otaku* in the 1990s: ‘They are easily visible because they don’t care about the way they dress. They talk different, and look to the ground while talking face-to-face. They are not into physical activities; they are chubby or thin, but not fit, never tanned. They don’t care for a good meal; they think they can spend their money on more important things’ (Grassmuck, 1990, para. 3). Grassmuck argues that detachment and distance are common qualities of *otaku*. He cites the 1990 edition of *Basic Knowledge of Modern Terms*, which states that, ‘[*otaku*] has been used as [a] discriminatory word among manga and anime maniacs . . . It indicates the type of person who cannot communicate with others, is highly concerned about details, and has one exclusive and maniac[all] field of interest’. The image of *otaku* as withdrawn and detached, interested in unconventional subjects, and not participating in ‘normal’ activities made it easy for the mainstream media to portray them as a threat to the order of cohesive Japanese society (Hairston, 2010). Mainstream media in the 1990s repeatedly represented *otaku* as ‘generally loners’, ‘on the edges of society’, ‘withdrawn’, ‘having interests in unconventional subjects’ and even ‘sociopaths’ (Kinsella, 2000; Azuma, 2009; Galbraith, 2010; Kam, 2013).

The global popularity of anime made Japanese government officials recognize media and fan cultures as contributing to Japan’s soft power, which in turn appeared

to contribute to a shift in representations of *otaku* in the next decade. One landmark work, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–6), became an enduring worldwide cult franchise with a passionate fan base, but also received a great amount of media attention outside of fan circles. Because this series attracted an enormous amount of attention as a ‘social phenomenon’ in Japan, it contributed to a shift in the image of *otaku* from socially withdrawn to postmodern subjects. (Azuma’s book, originally released in 2001 and tying *otaku* to *Evangelion* and postmodernism, also plays a part here.) The *otaku* image was further normalized by *Densha otoko* (*Train Man*, 2005), a love story with an *otaku* as the protagonist that was made into a popular movie and TV series (see Freedman, this volume). While *Densha otoko* perpetuates stereotypes of *otaku* – not caring about their meals or the way they dress, talking differently, not able to greet people properly, and spending a significant amount of time and money on manga and anime – it notably portrays *otaku* as ‘mostly normal’ or ‘potentially normal’. They are no longer perverts or potential sociopaths; they are isolated from others physically, but connected through technology; they have friends; and they want to love and be loved in the same way ‘normal’ people do.

In the 2000s, *otaku* were still portrayed as distanced and detached, but representations shifted from ‘they are lonely’ to ‘they are happy and satisfied with themselves’. For example, in the *New York Times* article about love in 2-D, a ‘phenomenon’ that the reporter associates with ‘*otaku*’, interviewees are quoted expressing genuine enjoyment of their romantic relationships with fictional characters and suggest that their relationships are ‘purer’ than ‘normal relationships’. The reporter writes of her subject, ‘he knows it’s weird for a grown man to be so obsessed with a video-game character, but he just can’t imagine life without Nemitan’ (Katayama, 2009). Other media representations of *otaku*, for example *Welcome to the N.H.K.* (2006) and *Genshiken* (2002–6), also show that *otaku* are neither lonely nor withdrawn, but rather are happy without longing for outsiders’ understanding. In *Welcome to the N.H.K.*, the protagonist, Satō Tatsuhiro, is a *hikikomori*, or someone who withdraws completely from society and retreats to his or her room. In contrast to Satō, his neighbour, Yamazaki Kaoru, is portrayed as a videogame/anime *otaku*. Although both characters share similar problems when interacting with others, Yamazaki does not withdraw from society. Contrary to Satō, who locks himself in his apartment and fears all interaction with others, Yamazaki continues attending a trade school, constantly – and shamelessly – expresses his unconventional interest in fictional characters, and actively pursues his dream of producing videogames. *Welcome to the N.H.K.* deliberately illustrates the difference between *hikikomori* and videogame/anime *otaku* through the contrasting examples of Satō and Yamazaki. In *Genshiken*, a story about a college anime club, Kasukabe Saki is the only ‘normal’ person in a clubroom full of *otaku*. The series not only shows the conflicts between Kasukabe and the *otaku* characters, but also presents her efforts to fit into their happy *otaku* world. In addition, since she is the only ‘normal’ person, she is distanced and detached in her own way, while all other members embrace one another and share their *otaku* interests. In these sorts of media representations – animated and targeting an audience of anime fans – *otaku* actively form and participate in their own communities, and they are happy in their expanding world of manga, anime and videogames.

In this way, in the 2000s, the portrayal of *otaku* shifted from ‘they are lonely’ to ‘they are happy in their extended world’. This is quite different from the late 1980s to the early 1990s, when *Otaku no Video* was produced and circulated. This was a particularly critical time, when negative representations of *otaku* were common. To put it another way, at this time, a fictional identity of ‘*otaku*’ was formed and could be claimed (or denied) by ‘true’ *otaku* (see Kamm, this volume).

What are *otaku*?

In this section, I examine negative representations of *otaku*, which position *otaku* as a fantasized object, in order to contextualize the paradoxical representation of *otaku* in *Otaku no Video*. Grassmuck (1990) argues that the media created and gave an identity to *otaku*, and that it is natural that young people would want to become the object of media attention when they are always already living a mediated existence. He explains *otaku* as a media phenomenon in the following ways: one, the media created *otaku*; two, *otaku* live in the media; three, the media construct an *otaku* identity; and four, any search for *otaku* is also a search into media history. For Grassmuck (1990, para. 3):

Otaku are a product of hyper-capitalism and the hyper-consumption society . . . Originally it was connected with a precise, stereotyped image. It symbolized a human relationship for which the other forms of saying ‘you’ would be too intimate. *Otaku* referred to the space between them, [in which] they are far from each other [and] not familiar. . . . They are children of media and technology.

Grassmuck uses the phrase ‘information fetishists’ to describe *otaku* as members of a generation living in an era of information technology, who are concerned more with accumulation of information than meaning. Similarly, William Gibson (2001) refers to *otaku* as ‘passionate obsessives’, seeing *otaku* as ‘the information age’s embodiment of the connoisseur’. Azuma (2009) calls them ‘Japan’s database animals’, arguing that *otaku* are representatives of a postmodern culture where each act of consumption promises access to a database of information. For these scholars, *otaku* are obsessively involved with collecting information, media consumption and fetishism, as well as energetically diffusing their views to the mainstream.

Contrary to Grassmuck’s view on *otaku* as an identity, Thomas LaMarre (2004) sees discussions by and about *otaku* as a discourse. LaMarre reviews Japanese commentaries on *otaku* and indicates that these discussions have a surprisingly common view about how the anime image works in relation to the formation of a specific kind of cult fan. What LaMarre calls ‘the Gainax discourse’ appears to ‘define a historical moment, promote a set of objects, or establish an identity’ (LaMarre, 2004, p. 158). LaMarre also draws attention to *otaku* practices as alternative forms of knowledge production that resist modernist and disciplinary society. While I follow LaMarre’s view on the Gainax discourse, in which non-disciplinary formation of anime knowledge gives way to constant learning and self-cultivation to empower the *otaku* subject, I find problematic his analysis of *otaku* representation. When LaMarre takes up the example of *Otaku no*

Video, he argues that it represents a transformation of disciplinary knowledge into a practice of self-cultivation in the animated story, but does not represent a radical break from received socio-sexual formations and existing gender roles insofar as the *otaku* is 'homosocial' and a 'normative heterosexual' (LaMarre, 2004, p. 175). LaMarre discusses the live-action interview segments featured in *Otaku no Video* as follows (p. 166):

The businessman sees his *otaku* days in retrospect as the best time of his life. Other *otaku* are obsessed with pornography, with weapons, garage kits, games, collecting or piracy. . . . In other words, the *otaku* is not a unitary type that can be defined on the basis of any action or belief other than obsession with anime. All are men, and there is a general homosocial bias, but theirs is such an unqualified masculinity that it appears pathetic – in both senses of the term in English.

In analysing these segments as if he is talking about 'real' *otaku*, LaMarre ends up describing *otaku* in a very similar way to the mainstream media. To my mind, LaMarre would do well to recognize the reflexivity of the *otaku* representation, both in these live-action segments and the juxtaposed animated segments. Further, while discussing *otaku* in terms of discourse and even Žižekian concepts, LaMarre returns on multiple occasions to a discussion of 'who are the *otaku*' (LaMarre, 2004, pp. 162, 164, 170). While LaMarre draws attention to the Gainax discourse, his question about 'who are the *otaku*' in a way restages a similar problem of identity. In both cases, *otaku* are the object of academic inquiry or discourse.

This chapter aims to shift the focus from the question 'who are *otaku*' to a different set of inquiries. As Thomas Looser has said, '*otaku* may be a fictional group, but it holds a strong and strange relationship with us.'¹ While media constructs an identity for *otaku* as those who obsess over information consumption and fantasized elements, I would like to follow through on LaMarre's approach to *otaku* as discourse, and to expand on Looser's provocation that *otaku* are a fictional group that is in relation with us. Rather than asking 'who are *otaku*', I investigate anime representation of the *otaku* subject in *Otaku no Video* as part of the *otaku* discourse. *Otaku* may not be a real group of people, but rather a fantasy that functions both as the object of scholarly and media interest and as the subject that can be only perceived through informatic obsessions.

Otaku no Video (1991)

Among various media representations, I argue that representations of *otaku* in anime are significant. Anime representations of *otaku* begin with a strong self-awareness of the mainstream (mis)representation of *otaku* and often act as subversions of such (mis)representation. *Otaku no Video* is the first anime portraying *otaku* and placing them into a history of anime fandom in Japan. The title literally means 'your video', a phrase that originated among fans as an extra-polite way of addressing others while exchanging anime videos.² This anime was produced by Gainax, an anime production studio that was formed by a group of university students known for organizing conventions, producing amateur films and starting Japan's first sci-fi specialty store in

the early 1980s. Gainax grew from these humble beginnings to produce *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, an animated TV series that became a 'social phenomenon' in Japan in the 1990s. *Otaku no Video* came out in 1991, just two years after the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu. Okada Toshio, one of the founders of Gainax, penned the screenplay and would go on to be a vocal proponent of *otaku* culture in the 1990s (see Okada, Chapter 5, this volume).

Otaku no Video is an original video animation, a format mostly supported by fans, and comedy-satire portraying the lives and dreams of a group of *otaku*. It is comprised of two episodes, '1982' and '1985'. In '1982', the protagonist, Kubo Ken, begins as a clean-cut, 'normal' Japanese college student. Kubo is a member of his university's tennis club and has a girlfriend named Yoshiko. One day, he bumps into an old high school classmate, Tanaka, who introduces Kubo to his group of friends comprised of *otaku*, including a female illustrator, an information geek, a martial artist and a weapons collector. Kubo gradually gets sucked into this *otaku* circle and lifestyle, and experiences a series of dramatic changes: he stops playing tennis and starts to gain weight; he ceases to care about his appearance; and his girlfriend leaves him. Because Kubo had been 'normal' up until this point, he attributes his dramatic downfall to discrimination against *otaku*, which he is determined to overcome. At the end of '1982', Kubo declares that he will become the 'otaku king' and conquer Japan and the human race with *otaku* culture.

In the second episode, '1985', Kubo and Tanaka start their own enterprise, Grand Prix, to sell 'garage kit' models of anime characters by mail order. Their company grows rapidly, and opens branches and offices throughout Japan. As Kubo makes a risky decision to build a factory in China to expand production, his friends turn against him and he loses his position at the company. Kubo later reunites with Tanaka, who has been ousted from the company as well, but is nonetheless still lined up to buy new garage kits from them. Kubo immediately forgives Tanaka's betrayal, telling him, 'Are we not *otaku*? As *otaku*, we will live on, bar none.' With the help of an artist, Kubo and Tanaka create a new character called Misty May. The sale of Misty May anime and related products allows Kubo and Tanaka to once again reach the peak of their ambitions. The story concludes with Kubo and Tanaka building a theme park called Otakuland, spreading *otaku* culture around the world, and then, years later, leaving a post-apocalyptic Earth on a rocket hidden in the now decrepit Otakuland – along with a reborn crew of their old *otaku* friends – to find the promised land of *otaku*. Though certain aspects of *Otaku no Video* resonate with the history of Gainax, which also got its start producing amateur animation and selling garage kits, the story itself is mostly fantasy, as can be gathered from the above synopsis.³

Notably, the fantasy of the animated story is broken up by live-action interviews with 'real' *otaku*. These interviews, called 'Portraits of *Otaku*', are presented in a documentary mode. *Otaku* interviewees speak and answer questions anonymously, their faces blurred by digital pixilation and their voices digitally altered. While the anime story emphasizes an *otaku* carnival, fantasy and dreams, the interviews manifest the negative portrayal of *otaku* to the extreme. For example, a computer programmer who is interviewed shamefully denies that he dressed up like an anime character as a university student, only to have it revealed that he keeps part of his costume in the

office with him. A college dropout is flustered when asked point blank if he has any 'real friends'. A gamer is obsessed with a female character in an adult game, while another attempts to manufacture glasses to defeat the mosaic that covers genitals in pornographic videos – and is shown masturbating during the interview. Augmented by techniques such as poor lighting, unappealing backgrounds, masked faces and altered voices, these segments function as visual statements to dehumanize the *otaku* subject and reinforce negative stereotypes: the interviewees do not care about the way they dress; they talk differently; they look into other directions while talking (or do not even face the camera); they are overly fat or thin; they are pale and have messy hair. After these 'Portraits of *Otaku*', charts and statistics based on the production staff's research are shown to elaborate on the aspect of *otaku* culture revealed in the interview; an authoritative voice-over explains the significance of these numbers.⁴

Perhaps it goes without saying, but these interviews are deliberately constructed and every bit as fictional as the animated segments of *Otaku no Video*. Indeed, it has been suggested that some of those interviewed are members of the Gainax team or their friends performing *otaku* stereotypes.⁵ Juxtaposing the fantasized anime segments and mock-documentary live-action segments, *Otaku no Video* visually renders the complex 'strange relationship' between the *otaku* subject and viewer. Rather than simply responding to the question of 'who are *otaku*', this anime challenges the presupposition that sees *otaku* as an identity and instead shows how *otaku* functions simultaneously as an object and subject that can only be perceived through the distorted *otaku* gaze. Further, by using animation, *Otaku no Video* allows viewers to experience a Žižekian 'traversing fantasy' through the subject's reflexive view. In the following sections, I examine the *otaku* object, subject and distorted gaze in *Otaku no Video*, a film that provides complex representations of *otaku* and encourages the viewer to acknowledge his or her strange relationship with *otaku*.

The *otaku* object in *Otaku no Video*

Otaku is a fantasy that functions as both object and subject and can only be perceived through a distorted gaze. Media representations including anime can be understood in terms of the Lacanian gaze, not only to the extent that *otaku* are rendered visible as the object, but also in that *otaku* are able to perceive themselves as the subject. I argue that *Otaku no Video* is an anime that shows precisely how the *otaku* subject perceives his or herself as the object, and further unmasks the imaginary identity of *otaku* as a fictional group for viewers.

Using the photo that accompanied the *New York Times* article on love in 2-D as an example of *otaku* representation in the media, we see an ordinary, chubby, balding, middle-aged man in a shirt and jeans. There is nothing about him out of the ordinary – except that he is holding a big pillow upon which is printed a mostly nude female character. He squeezes the pillow in his arms against his torso, as if holding on to something that others would take away. In order to represent this ordinary middle-aged man as an *otaku*, which is to say in order for viewers to identify him as an *otaku*, the journalist must display him with the pillow. This pillow, while being a

totally empty sign of consumption with no real women and no real sex behind it, not only renders *otaku* visible, but also allows the *otaku* subject to perceive himself as worthy of media attention. Through passionately pursuing anime, *otaku* become visible to others. Thus the *otaku* must constantly consume anime in order to stabilize his or her subject position in society and secure an identity as '*otaku*'.

Why are *otaku* worthy of such media attention? If there is nothing special about *otaku*, why do we continue to have this strange fascination with them – to be in the 'strange relationship' with them that Looser points out? When Žižek approaches contemporary racism, he argues that one fantasized anxiety of racists centres on the uneasy feeling that the other has access to certain kinds of strange enjoyment that 'we' do not (Myers, 2003). Žižek describes such anxiety as follows: 'what gets on our nerves, what really bothers us about the "other", is the peculiar way he organizes his enjoyment' (Žižek, 1991, p. 165). In Žižek's approach to discrimination, whether of a racial or *otaku* other, 'our' anxiety comes from the fantasy that they are different from us (Myers, 2003; Žižek, 2008). What bothers 'us' is the alien and unfamiliar way that *otaku* enjoy themselves, and *otaku* receive media attention precisely because of the peculiar way that they organize their enjoyment. The peculiar, strange, *otaku* enjoyment – holding a pillow, which he treats as his girlfriend – positions this ordinary middle-aged man as the fantasized object and makes newspaper readers see his otherness. *Otaku* is a fantasy that allows us to think that a harmonious society is possible. *Otaku* exists within our desire for the other and enables the construction of 'they' (weird) versus 'us' (normal), which thus ensures social normalization. In other words, mainstream representations of *otaku* not only reaffirm what is normal in contrast to the peculiar enjoyments of *otaku*, but also mask the impossibility of a harmonious society.

Differing from the representation of *otaku* in the *New York Times*, *Otaku no Video* unmasks that *otaku* as the fantasized other by juxtaposing *otaku* as both object and subject, simultaneously. In *Otaku no Video*, the episode titled '1982' starts with an animated segment that takes place in the offices of Grand Prix during the New Year's holiday. The protagonist, Kubo, picks up the phone and hears a hesitant voice. Without any proper greeting, the voice says, 'Mr. Okada said that MJ t-shirts can be printed . . .' Okada is the surname of the screenplay writer, Okada Toshio, and MJ likely refers to the monthly magazine *MJ Materials* published by the toy company Bandai.⁶ This scene ends with Kubo saying, 'Man! What's with these idiots, calling up right after the New Year? Dammit! Do I hate *otaku*!' This scene seems unrelated to the rest of the animated story, but it is actually quite significant. By simultaneously presenting *otaku* as object and subject – the *otaku* caller and the protagonist, Kubo – this scene establishes the trajectory of the story. The *otaku* caller is positioned as the object of alienation and unfamiliarity for viewers. He is unmannered, talks about unfamiliar things, uses coded language and exhibits a peculiar enjoyment of anime by enquiring about MJ t-shirts during the New Year's holiday. Neither his identity nor his presence ever matters. As viewers, we do not see this *otaku*, save for his projection through the call, which includes coded language and peculiar interests. This absence of the *otaku* object ensures his otherness and thus allows both viewers and the *otaku* subject to perceive his fictional identity as *otaku*.

The *otaku* subject in *Otaku no Video*

On the other hand, Kubo is the one who acts 'normal', complaining about the *otaku* caller's strange behaviour in this opening scene of *Otaku no Video*. Later, viewers learn that Kubo will become the ultimate *otaku*, the 'otaku king' (a title claimed by Okada Toshio, the script writer of *Otaku no Video*). This first episode is titled '1982', the year that Kubo embraces the *otaku* life, but the opening scene in the offices of Grand Prix is oddly set in 1991, the year that *Otaku no Video* was released. In this way, Kubo and the viewer inhabit the same present – 1991 – interrupted by the unwelcome call of the anonymous (and annoying) *otaku* other. Kubo is rendered as the subject 'we', the viewers, who project *otaku* as the object of otherness by proclaiming, 'Dammit! Do I hate *otaku*!' Kubo's rest was interrupted by this *otaku* caller's peculiar interest in MJ t-shirts. Kubo's line echoes Žižek's mocking of contemporary racist fantasy: 'if only they weren't here, life would be perfect, and society will be harmonious again' (Myers, 2003, p. 108).

The opening scene of *Otaku no Video* establishes Kubo's subject position as 'us', and the animated story to come shows Kubo as a 'normal' guy who enjoys 'normal' things. However, as the story progresses, Kubo becomes an *otaku*, whose subject position is embodied by his peculiar enjoyment. The animated story deliberately represents how the subject Kubo is interpolated through the foremost quality of the contemporary subject, consumption, which shifts from 'normal' to 'peculiar'. The contemporary subject is constituted by 'something in me more than myself on account of which I perceive myself as worthy of Other's desire' (Žižek, 2008, p. 10). Kubo begins his university life as an ordinary student, but one obsessed with tennis. He has many trophies in his room, his club mates call him 'tennis boy' and his girlfriend says, 'I envy people who can focus their minds on something [that is, tennis]'. Yet Kubo cannot find his place in his tennis club, because his strong interest does not involve consumption. Kubo looks bored when depicted at gatherings with his tennis mates, who converse about surfing, driving a Porsche and getting a new boathouse sweatshirt. Consumption allows the subject to perceive oneself worthy of the Other's desire, and only through embracing consumption is the subject able to perceive his or her subject position in society. Kubo is not involved in the same sort of consumption as those in his tennis club, or rather is uninterested in participating in this sort of consumption.

The very first *otaku* encounter occurs after Kubo leaves a tennis club gathering, where he shares an elevator with a group of *otaku*. Kubo does not know that the leader is Tanaka, a classmate from high school, but he cannot avoid listening to their boisterous conversation. The conversation is still about consumption, but unlike the tennis club, Tanaka and his *otaku* friends talk about and reference anime such as *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* (1978–9), *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979–80), and *Magical Princess Minky Momo* (1982–3). Contrary to his lack of interest in the consumption talk of the tennis club, Kubo is gradually sucked into the consumption of anime information and products. After he comes to visit Tanaka's group at their home base, members of the *otaku* group show him video collections of anime, give him quizzes about anime and present him with various kinds of knowledge about anime. Two kinds of consumption, anime information and anime products, are equally important for the *otaku* subject.

For the *otaku* subject Kubo, the consumption of anime information is that ‘something in him more than himself on account of which he perceives himself as worthy of Others’ desire’ (Žižek, 2008, p. 10). Kubo becomes an *otaku* through his peculiar enjoyment of the fetishization of information about anime, but achieves his goal of becoming the *otaku* king by buying (and then learning to make and sell) anime products. Only through consumption of both anime information and products can the *otaku* subject stabilize his or her subject position in society. Put another way, only through peculiar enjoyment of obtaining anime information and products obsessively is the *otaku* subject rendered visible for viewers.

Whereas the consumption of luxurious brand-name products and goods functions as a screen masking the fact there is nothing at the core of the contemporary subject, the peculiar consumption of anime presents an alternative in society. Anime, as a totally empty sign, demonstrates the fact that the core of the *otaku* subject is void. In the *Otaku no Video* episode titled ‘1985’, Kubo and Tanaka start their second business, Giant X, with a new anime character called Misty May. Tanaka describes Misty May as an anime of the magical girl genre, in which the girl heroine gains superpowers when she transforms. While Misty May is a fantasized anime product in *Otaku no Video* (an anime character in an anime), garage kits produced by the characters in *Otaku no Video* can actually be purchased by viewers (a garage kit of Misty May was produced by the sculptor Bome, for example). As Misty May is simply a void in the first place, the *otaku* subject must constantly structure his or her reality around fantasy. Further, anime provides a space in which fantasies can be shared and reinforced, simultaneously individual and communal, teaching the *otaku* subject to desire. While one may simply perceive Misty May as the object of *otaku* desire, it rather exhibits that there is nothing at the core of *otaku* desire and makes this fact unavoidable for the consumer subject. By pursuing fantasized objects on a daily basis, the *otaku* subject allows his fantasy to structure a material reality, and thus *otaku* fantasy interpenetrates the individual’s very existence. Misty May reveals precisely that the contemporary subject needs to pursue something in the subject more than the subject him or herself, and that something is always a void.

Mockumentary as *otaku* gaze

Lacan’s concept of the gaze is not what we usually associate with the active process of looking at objects, but rather an objective mode in which our desire is triggered visually and access to the unseen is available for us (McGowan, 2007). Lacan uses Hans Holbein’s painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) to explain his idea of the gaze. *The Ambassadors*, being a double portrait, is famous for the mysterious symbol of an anamorphic skull placed in the bottom centre of the composition. According to McGowan (2007, p. 7), the skull un masks the neutrality of the viewing process and reveals the viewer’s involvement in the visual field:

The skull is a blank spot in the image, the point at which spectators lose their distance from the picture and become involved in what they see, because its very

form changes on the basis of the spectator's position. One cannot simply look straight at the picture and see this object; one must move one's body and turn one's head. The gaze exists in the way that the spectator's perspective distorts the field of the visible, thereby indicating the spectator's involvement in a scene from which the spectator seems excluded.

For Lacan and McGowan, *The Ambassadors* is a privileged example because the distorted gaze is rendered explicitly in the form of an anamorphic skull. I argue that the live-action interview sections of *Otaku no Video* – 'Portraits of *Otaku*' – function in a way similar to the anamorphic skull in *The Ambassadors*: that is, one cannot simply look straight at the video to see the object, but rather the spectator's perspective on the image and position in relation to it distorts the field of the visible. These live-action segments of *Otaku no Video* allow the viewer to perceive their involvement in the portrait and the distorted perspective that makes the *otaku* object visible.

There are a total of ten 'Portraits of *Otaku*' in the two episodes of *Otaku no Video*. The ten people interviewed include a college dropout, computer programmer, video collector, survival gamer, porn addict, garage kit fan, American anime fan, player of adult games, man who steals the cels used to make anime and finally a 'true *otaku*'. These segments start with on-screen text noting the person's pseudonym, birth year, occupation and years as an *otaku*. Interviewees' faces are blurred and pixilated and voices are digitally altered; a subtitle explains, 'Voice has been altered at the subject's request. Please bear with us,' implying a shameful sense of self-consciousness. Each interviewee answers a set of questions through which his peculiar enjoyment is revealed. At the end of each segment, a survey about a sub-category of *otaku* is presented and a voiceover comments on the 'data' and 'facts'. Not only do the 'Portraits of *Otaku*' respond to the enquiry 'who are *otaku*', but they also simultaneously render the otherness of the *otaku* subject and dehumanize the *otaku* object for viewers.

All of these segments follow the same format, with the exception of the last one, the 'true *otaku*'. The last of the 'Portraits of *Otaku*' begins with a pseudonym, but instead of the birth year, occupation and years as an *otaku* shown in previous segments, the text describes this person as 'a true *otaku*, whom our staff discovered as a result of seven weeks of ongoing investigation'. The subtitle provides detailed information about when this segment was shot (late at night on 21 June 1991) and about the shooting circumstance (the subject was returning from a meeting to buy stolen animation cels). Different from other interviews, this segment uses a handheld camera to present a first person perspective. From the inside of a slow-moving car, viewers see this 'true *otaku*' carrying shopping bags and walking along a street under the cover of darkness. Viewers are fully aware that the camera is chasing after him, as if 'we' the viewers are holding the camera, sitting in the car with the crew, following this *otaku*. Eventually one of the camera crew gets out of the car and tries to capture the *otaku* on the street. 'We', the viewers, see this 'true' *otaku*'s face clearly: a clean-cut young man who is confused as to why he is the prey in this hunt.⁷ The segment ends with a physical altercation, when the crew – who remain invisible in the shots – catch up with the man and try to open his shopping bags and the man pushes the camera away and runs; the last thing we see is screen noise. Contrary to the other interviews, in which

interviewees' (fictional) identities are somewhat revealed but faces and voices are masked with digital technology, this final segment openly presents a clear shot of the subject's face and his real voice asking, 'What do you want?' The segment makes explicit the distorted gaze of the viewer. 'We' know there is a hidden camera, 'we' know we are chasing this man, 'we' are trying to capture him, and 'we' eventually see him on screen. If this is a parody of the violence of media chasing down *otaku* on the street and putting a camera in their face, then it is one in which 'we' are involved.

In other words, this final segment of *Otaku no Video* about a 'true *otaku*' is the point at which viewers lose their distance from the *otaku* object and become involved in the viewing process. The segment reveals that images of *otaku* are not simply there to be seen, and that seeing is not a neutral activity. 'Portraits of *Otaku*' at first allows viewers to look at the *otaku* object from a safe distance with voyeuristic pleasure, but the final segment forces viewers to insert themselves into the relationship of viewing, through which the *otaku* subject sees *us* and takes into account our presence as a spectator. While in everyday experience we do not see how media representation shapes the structure of reality and how media fabricates a fictional identity of *otaku* to sustain normativity in society, the live-action segments in *Otaku no Video* make visible this distorted gaze, and in the process force viewers to understand that seeing is not a neutral activity.

Traversing fantasy in *Otaku no Video*

The term 'fantasy' is often understood to be a particular genre of creative works, which depict magical and fictional universes that do not exist in our physical reality. In psychoanalytic frameworks, fantasy is an imaginary scenario that connects the gaps between the subject and its never-fulfilled desire structured by ideology. In other words, fantasy serves as a way for individuals to imagine 'a path out of the dissatisfaction produced by the demands of social existence' (McGowan, 2007, p. 23). There are three levels of fantasy: simple daydreams, creative works and entire belief systems. McGowan argues that all films, even realist ones, belong to the realm of fantasy, since the very representation of reality mediates that reality and moves it into another form. Fantasy allows the subject to imagine, momentarily, the possibility of satisfying its never-fulfilled desire. A Lacanian thesis of fantasy is always on the side of reality, suggesting that fantasy supports the consistency of reality and provides a framework through which we see reality.

However, a common misunderstanding is that fantasy is a realization of desire, or, put somewhat differently, that if we desire something we therefore fantasize it to embody our desire. Žižek (2008) argues that it is the other way around. Fantasy actually constitutes desire or provides coordinates of desire. He asserts that, 'fantasy teaches us how to desire' (p. 7). Desire used to define one's sexuality and thus one's sex-desire becomes the core of the subject.⁸ Žižek extends poststructuralist concepts of the subject, arguing that there is never inherent desire within the subject as the core for the subject. Rather, there is always nothing at the core, and fantasy merely functions as a screen masking this void of the subject. For Žižek, not only does fantasy constitute

desire, but also, through fantasy, the subject's transgressed enjoyment gets domesticated. Thus Žižek advocates 'traversing fantasy', or ways of experiencing fantasy that acknowledge that there is nothing behind fantasy and understand how fantasy masks the empty core of the subject (Žižek, 1989, 2008).

Otaku no Video presents precisely this experience of 'traversing fantasy' through its juxtaposition of animated *otaku* fantasy and the distorted gaze of the mock documentary. While the fantasized anime presents the *otaku* dream of conquering the world as a distorted hope for mainstream acceptance, the interview segments reflect the *otaku* subject's high level of self-awareness about the negative representation of *otaku* in Japanese society. One may argue that *Otaku no Video* is the object of *otaku* desire, but this argument simplifies the complexity of the viewing experience and representation of *otaku* in anime. *Otaku no Video* allows the *otaku* subject to access the fact that there is nothing at the core of *otaku* desire. By pursuing fantasized objects on a daily basis, *otaku*'s fantasy structures a material reality, which is paradoxically the positive condition of the subject's existence, allowing the *otaku* subject to be seen in society. In addition, by viewing *Otaku no Video*, the *otaku* subject acknowledges the subject self as a mere object in the world. According to Lacan, if the subject sees himself seeing, then a reflexive relation between the subject and gaze is formed. Once the subject perceives this, his representation belongs to him. Žižek (2008) further explains this common problem of the contemporary subject, who sees objects in the world but cannot see itself seeing. Yet if the subject can reflexively see itself not as the subject but as one more represented object in the world, then the subject is able to traverse fantasy. While many of us still live in our fundamental fantasy, misrecognizing ourselves as an autonomous entity in the world, anime representations of *otaku* show us ways in which the *otaku* subject sees the self reflexively as an object and enquires into its position in social relation. This chapter concludes that the uniqueness of anime representations of *otaku* is due to the strong self-awareness and reflexivity of anime. *Otaku no Video* allows us to rethink media representations of *otaku* and paradoxical relationships between the object and subject of *otaku*, and thus to traverse *otaku* fantasy in order to further investigate contemporary subjectivity in consumer society.

Notes

1. This quote is from a keynote speech by Thomas Looser delivered at the '3rd Mehademia Conference on Anime, Manga, and Media Theory from Japan' held at Dongguk University, Seoul, in December 2012.
2. Lawrence Eng (2003) summarizes that the term *otaku* was originally used among fans as an extra polite form of address when they met one another at conventions. It was also used by the main character in the anime series *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* (1982–3). During the early history of anime culture, clubs and conventions, fans often exchanged videos, and '*otaku no bideo*' was used to say '(this is) your video'.
3. In *Otaku no Video*, the protagonists' company is called 'Grand Prix', later renamed 'Giant X'. While Grand Prix merely resembles the sound of the word 'Gainax' when spoken quickly, Giant X is actually the meaning of 'Gainax' in a local dialect of

- Japanese. The Grand Prix offices in *Otaku no Video* are drawn based on Gainax's business offices, and the physical features and personality of the character Tanaka are based on Okada Toshio. For more, see the US DVD distributor AnimEigo's webpage at: www.animeigo.com/liner/anime/otaku-no-video (accessed 7 June 2014).
4. The validity of these numbers is certainly open to debate, especially when the animated segments play so loosely with the 'facts'. Further, in *Otaku no Video*, after animated segments end and before live-action segments begin, important dates and events are typed out on a black background like a news bulletin, but the news appears entirely random and irrelevant and becomes increasingly fantastical as the story progresses.
 5. While there is no official confirmation about the identities of the interviewees in 'Portraits of *Otaku*', it is believed that some subjects were Gainax employees and friends at the time of filming. For instance, Lawrence Eng (2004) points out that Gainax animator Satō Hiroki has admitted to being one of those interviewed in *Otaku no Video*.
 6. Bandai is the largest maker of model kits in Japan. Starting in 1979, Bandai published a monthly magazine about its products, which became very popular among anime fans in the 1980s. The title of this magazine changed to *MJ* in 1988. Although AnimEigo, the distributor of the North American edition of *Otaku no Video*, claims that 'MJ' stands for *Mighty Jack*, a sci-fi series from 1968, based on the story of the animated segments of *Otaku no Video*, it is equally likely that it refers to anime model kits in general.
 7. Although this person's identity remains unconfirmed, his face resembles a winner in the manga category of *TV Champion*, a Japanese television show that challenges competitors to an array of tasks in order to crown them 'king' of their respective categories.
 8. Foucault (1990) challenges the construction that places desire at the core of the subject.

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Introduction to Otakuology¹

Okada Toshio

Translator's introduction

Few other names are as associated with *otaku* culture as Okada Toshio. Co-founder of Daicon Film, which produced legendary opening animation sequences for science-fiction conventions in 1981 and 1983, and General Products, one of the first stores to produce and sell 'garage kits' and expand the hobby market for adults, Okada went on to co-found Gainax, an anime production studio, and work on classics such as *Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise* (1987), *Gunbuster* (1988) and *Otaku no Video* (1991).

Okada began to speak publicly about *otaku* in the 1990s, which was a turbulent time in Japan. The year 1989 marks the death of Emperor Shōwa – and Tezuka Osamu, the 'God of Manga' – and the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu, a twenty-six-year-old man who molested and murdered four girls between the ages of four and seven. For many, Miyazaki's horrendous crimes were a sign of eroding social bonds and too much manga and anime, which led to associations with '*otaku*' (see Kamm, this volume). Anxiety about the youth and future of Japan would only grow in the 1990s, when Japan's economic bubble burst and the disintegration of home, school and work relations led to widespread social and political unrest. Then, in 1995, another horrifying crime: the religious group Aum Shinrikyō released sarin gas on the Tokyo subway, killing thirteen and injuring over 1,000. When Aum's interest in apocalyptic anime came to light, it seemed a foredrawn conclusion that they were an '*otaku* cult', who, just like the '*otaku* murderer' Miyazaki Tsutomu, had lost touch with reality.

Against this backdrop, Okada grasped the mantle of '*otaku*' – even going so far as to identify as the '*otaku* king' or '*otaking*' – and began to appear in the media to talk about his people. Perhaps more astonishing is that, from October 1994 to March 1995, Okada lectured on subculture and *otaku* at the University of Tokyo, Japan's most prestigious institution of higher learning. He would go on to write several books on *otaku* culture, including *Otakugaku nyūmon (Introduction to Otakuology)* in 1996. In that publication, Okada draws attention to the viewing practices of anime fans in the 1970s and 1980s. These fans, Okada argues, began to perceive differences in animation styles within and between episodes of popular series, and, in the process of this more intense and focused viewing, became amateur anime critics (and then creators). In the conclusion, Okada overturns negative stereotypes of *otaku* in two ways: first, by discussing the successes

of Japanese subculture overseas, and second, by linking *otaku* to Japanese premodern history. This discourse about *otaku* thoroughly challenges negative stereotypes – taking *otaku*, seen by many as the antithesis of Japanese society after the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu, and calling them the legitimate heirs of Japanese culture – and at times reads almost as a perverse joke. Nonetheless, Okada's '*otaku* Japan' anticipates certain aspects of Murakami Takashi's 'Superflat' and the government's 'Cool Japan' campaigns in the 2000s.

Much about Okada's work speaks to its time, and it certainly should be read in the context of its intervention. Any evaluation should also take into account his position as the '*otaku* king'. However, such a limited reading of Okada's contribution would be unfortunate. His work is far more complex and challenging than it is often given credit for. Not only is Okada well versed in developments of '*otaku* culture' inside and outside Japan, but his writing brings new perspectives to old questions. For instance, Okada's discussion of counterculture resonates with classic discussions of subculture; his reading of the rock star who refuses to be on time resonates with Dick Hebdige's work on punks and 'chaos', but at issue for Okada is philosophy, not style. Interestingly, by Okada's estimation, ways of thinking and organizing the world differ in Japan, where there is not such a strict distinction between cosmos and chaos (or adult and child). Okada further complicates things by suggesting that *otaku* culture is something different still from counterculture and subculture.

Ultimately, Okada perhaps succeeds precisely to the extent that he is out of place and time – a Japanese voice from the past disrupting present-day assurances about '*otaku*' by framing things in a way that may challenge the reader and provoke new thinking. The value of Okada's work is demonstrated by the fact that it is mentioned in practically every account of *otaku* in Japan that deals with history, but there is a tendency to talk about his work in reductive or dismissive ways rather than actually read or engage with it. To counter this rather vexing bias, the editors are pleased to present this excerpt from Okada's *Otakugaku nyūmon*, available here for the first time in English.

Part 1: Subculture and *otaku* culture

Videogames are not art

I once talked to the artists of the French group Atelier Alma, who are supported by the French government, which funded a recent exhibition of their work in Japan.² Their atelier is a remodelled Napoleonic fortress. In sum, they are 'proper' artists. So I asked them, "To what extent would you evaluate videogames such as Mario or Sonic as art?" In am aware that videogames, as new media, are not valued as art. Although MITI (the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, now the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) seems to have an eye on them – almost as if to say, "This might earn foreign money" – the Agency for Cultural Affairs is simply ignoring videogames. It will be some time before an exhibition on videogames is held at a national museum devoted to art. Being a creator as I am, however, I thought that Atelier Alma's impression might differ.

I believed that they surely must have this new 'art' on their radar. I wanted to hear how they saw Nintendo, as artists and as a rival.

Lawrence, the leader of Atelier Alma, laughed at my question. 'Videogames are not art. My children like playing them, and they will just play games endlessly if I leave them to their own devices. Gaming is only allowed for one hour on Sundays in my home. I take my family, including my children, to museums on holidays and I teach them what art is.' I must have appeared as if I had no education. Art, for Lawrence and his group, is something to be learned through education, not something 'fun' that children would naturally engage in. Fun has no connection to 'art'; they are essentially unrelated. The message is that, 'Art must be learned through education.' Don't get me wrong – I am not accusing Atelier Alma of being 'old fashioned'. I was just surprised by the difference in our perceptions. In the culture in which the members of Atelier Alma live, 'art' is part of 'education' and the culture of adults. It follows that the 'culture that children enjoy' is the 'culture of something different', something antagonistic to art and legitimate, formal culture.

The dominant culture's view of children

What Lawrence is trying to teach his children – what I referred to above as 'legitimate, formal culture' – is dominant culture.³ Dominant culture broadly signifies things that are taught in institutions, including art, literature, science, history and classical music. To put it bluntly, all the things that have always been studied at a university comprise dominant culture. It is normal in the European cultural sphere in which artists such as Atelier Alma live to educate oneself in the ways of the dominant culture. Those who cannot do so are seen as 'low class'. In Europe, which is still permeated by an atmosphere of class society, 'not acquiring dominant culture and lowering your class status' is almost comparable to suicide.

A 'culture for children' exists in any society, but this is not a culture 'to be enjoyed by children' so much as 'to educate children to be proper adults'. 'Proper adults' here means 'citizens with established identities' (*jiga ga kakuritsu shita shimin*). If you are having trouble understanding my point, imagine the father figures in *Mary Poppins* and *Peter Pan*. They are bankers, entrepreneurs and bureaucrats. The message is clear: 'Respectable adults = citizens of class society'. Proper adults are those who have an education and high social standing. Dominant culture's way of thinking is that all children should become respectable adults/citizens. The culture of children is given to them with the objective of education. The European intellectual toys now gaining popularity among young mothers in Japan are all made in accordance with this policy. Lego and puzzle games, which are popular in Japan, are made to serve the objective of educating children.

This approach to culture for children sounds straightforward, but actually it is very different from the Japanese way of thinking. In Europe, children are only given educational and safe materials. Within this dominant culture, people would neither allow children to select their own TV programme nor buy videogames for them. The 'culture of children' is not a culture made by children, but rather a culture given to them by adults. In a dominant culture such as the one seen in Europe, Japanese anime would

never be included in the culture of children, which has education as its objective. Not only is there no immediate educational value to anime, but there are also extremely crude scenes where people hit others or use dirty words. The effect of watching anime is not deepening one's knowledge of art and music. There are no works that would pass muster to be included in dominant culture. European dominant culture thinks that things such as anime can never be given to children. For them, Japanese anime appears to be 'subculture'. 'Counterculture' is the culture that opposes the dominant culture, but 'subculture' is made by young people who fail to be 'proper' adults. Thus, those who think themselves to be proper adults do not think much of Japanese anime. This is because it is the adults' obligation and responsibility to guide children on the proper path toward acquiring knowledge and a place in dominant culture.

Children as chaos

Allow me to explain why the dominant culture exercises such oppressive power. The roots of this lie in Greek philosophy and Christianity. First, there is a traditional way of thinking in Greek philosophy, which is as follows: 'There is a reason for everything in the world. Everything exists logically, and if humans make an effort and become smart enough, everything can be explained.' This idea is modified somewhat by Christianity, which posits that part of the world is orderly (cosmos) and another is not (chaos). Cosmos is the world of God, and chaos is the world of demons.

The sound of church bells exemplifies this worldview. In a medieval fortress city, there was always a church in the centre. This layout comes from the idea that the area where one can hear the bell is secured by the church. The area in which the church bell is audible is cosmos, the world of God, and the forest where one cannot hear the bell is chaos, the world of demons. God has no responsibility for what happens in the forest. In fact, medieval European cities were constructed by clearing the middle of a deep forest. It was probably natural to think that one step outside the city would lead to the world of demons. In *Dragon Quest*⁴ you see an open field outside the city where monsters stroll about. This videogame rendering of the medieval world is based on the way of thinking that I have just described.

Within this medieval worldview, science was born. Originally, science meant studying the world of demons such as forests, oceans and plants to find order and reintegrate them with the cosmos. In other words, science was a religious war to shed light on the 'demon world' and claim it as 'God's world'.

In the dominant culture that was born in this way, centred on science, what is regarded as most important is the quality of being orderly and logical. In contrast, as children behave however they feel, their very existence is chaos, which is to say a bad state of being. A child is regarded as somebody that needs to grow and enter the cosmos, which also means to become an adult and a human. British people leave their children with a nanny, who is ultimately an other, and let her discipline them. This is a tradition coming from a dominant culture that regards chaotic children's behaviour as 'bad' (*aku*). Now, hiring a nanny and letting her discipline the children is something only rich people can do. The dominant culture targets and is supported by such people. In other words, 'people who acquired the dominant culture are

proper, genteel people'. That is to say, understanding this culture is proof of belonging to a certain class.

However, from around the time of the Industrial Revolution, Europe was striving towards the 'acquisition of wealth'. All Europeans acquired a certain 'class'. This is called the 'popularization of aristocratic culture' or the 'foundation of citizen culture'. Necessarily, adults fashioned a culture for children and forced it on them as an engine to fashion them into respectable citizens. From this oppressive stance that 'children should watch this and only this' or 'you have to be an adult in this way' emerged a 'culture of resistance'.

Transformation from counterculture to subculture

The source of resistant power – which says, 'I don't like this class society culture/dominant culture' – is oppressive power. The greater the oppressive power, the greater the resistant response. In this way, 'counterculture' is born. 'You call yourselves "respectable citizens", but you guys just make war all the time. We are not gonna be "respectable citizens" like you! Class society? Screw it (*kuso kurae*)! Dominant culture? Screw it!' This is the principle philosophy of counterculture. So when a rock star comes late to a meeting, what is at issue is not style, but philosophy. 'Coming on time? Why should I submit to such a cosmos way of thinking! We are chaos!' This is the essence of counterculture.

Now, this travelled to the new continent, North America, where consciousness about class is less apparent than in Europe. Yet, the source of energy for the counterculture is 'resistance against oppression by class society'. Looking around, we do not see a class society as rigid, as in Europe. So, what are they resisting? Here, counterculture shifts to subculture. The term subculture is often framed this way: 'I'm not sure, but it must be youth culture.' This understanding is correct to a certain extent. The youth of America did not have class to resist. To put it another way, without class, there was no reason to resist. Thus they decided to resist 'being an adult' in and of itself. 'Being young is right as it is! Being an adult is wrong as it is!' Simultaneously, one cannot ignore the argument that subculture is consumer culture because it was born in America. As an antithesis of puritanism by the settlers, subculture became a culture in support of mass consumption. These are the twin philosophical principles of subculture, which is sensitive to the mood of the young, who are the consumers of the time. It values things that are considered 'chaos' in the dominant culture, and it highlights the sensibility of 'children' as the representatives of chaos. Therefore, when a doodle by Keith Haring⁵ is valued as art, it means 'subculture won against dominant culture'.

Let us summarize the argument so far. Culture originally belonged to a fraction of aristocrats and wealthy people. However, with farmers becoming 'citizens', such aristocratic culture opened up to the masses. The proof of being a good (class-conscious) citizen is determined by whether or not one has acquired the popularized aristocratic culture, the 'dominant culture'. However, those who argue against such class society bring counterculture into being. This spread throughout the world via criticism against war, but in areas with less severe oppression there was no 'class to resist against', and thus counterculture was forced to transform. 'All right, then. Let's go with resisting

adults! Hurrah for youth! Hurrah for consumers!' This is subculture. This is the basic map of Western culture at the end of the twentieth century.

Japanese subculture as fashion

After its defeat in the Pacific War, Japan excitedly imported Western thought and culture. The basic stance was that Japanese thought and culture until then had been completely wrong and that was why we did the wrong thing and entered the Pacific War, which ended in our defeat. This was the Japanese way of thinking at that time. Actually, what seems to be ill remembered is the fact that right after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan imported Western thought and culture wholesale, adopting a policy of wealth and military power that led to imperialism. 'American style is cool! Japanese style is uncool!' This kind of hysteria was the driving force for the emergence of a 'cultural colony' (*bunka-teki shokuminchi*). More than fifty years have passed since the end of the Pacific War. Japan's economy has recovered – the country has even surpassed the level of those countries that were in the 'winning group of WWII'. However, the culture of this country has not moved out of the shadow of the colonial idea that 'American style is cool!'

Even worse, there are still musicians who try to debut in the Western market (and fail), bolstered by their success in Japan, asserting the nonsensical idea that 'There are elements of a Japanese subculture that appeal to the world!' Japanese fashion and subculture are not beyond imitation. Imitation comes naturally, because Japan does not originally have ideas such as resistance against adults. Thus, the Japanese can only imitate what is on the surface. The uncoolness of Japanese fashion and subculture is 'the uncoolness of fashion without philosophy'. It is the uncoolness of wearing a Malcolm X cap with a smile and being questioned by a black guy, who asks, 'Do you really understand!?' Thus, in terms of subculture, Japan is not valued at all in the world – not desired in the least. If the country called Japan were to disappear right now at this very moment, the world probably would not suffer a loss in the cultural sense.

The only exception is 'otaku culture' (*otaku bunka*).⁶ Otaku culture such as anime, videogames and manga is something desired by people around the world. Let me make this absolutely clear: *Otaku* culture is not subculture. It has developed in a very different way than what I outlined earlier as 'aristocratic/dominant culture', as 'counterculture', as 'subculture'. From what, then, did *otaku* culture evolve? In order to address this question, I will start with 'the concept of children'.

Japan, a country generous to children

In Japanese culture, children are not considered to be chaotic entities. Rather, being in the state of a child is a wonderful thing, which signifies an innocence that is not yet lost. Thus (the eccentric Zen Buddhist monk) Ryōkan, who played with children, is seen as a holy man. In Japanese culture, a child is not an incomplete adult, but rather is regarded as a primordial human figure. Similarly, traditional Japanese culture is generous to children. In the world of Kabuki⁷ and Noh,⁸ you can quite often see three-year-olds standing on stage. Of course, their art has not been perfected, but the audience of

Kabuki and *kyōgen*⁹ permits and enjoys their presence. Children appearing on stage would be unthinkable in the world of ballet, the pinnacle of a comparable Western form of theatre. Instead, in Kabuki, three-year-olds are treated like all the other professional actors. There are no excuses made for them. Although there is a difference between master and apprentice in the world of Kabuki, there is no difference between children and adults. The path from child to adult is treated more naturally, like a continuum.

Children are not the chaos that disturbs the world of the cosmos. Similarly, the forest outside of town is not ‘demon territory’. Forests and children are positively regarded as a ‘state that is closer to nature’. In such a society, a culture that is against adults cannot be born. Just as the border between village and forest is ambiguous, so is the border between adults and children. Aristocratic culture existed in Japan. However, this culture developed in Kyoto around the time of the Ōnin War (1467–77).¹⁰ When the capital shifted to Tokyo during the Edo Period (1603–1867), Kyoto was virtually a remote, abandoned area. Without any connection to the aristocracy, an advanced consumer society flourished among the people.

Freedom of *otaku* culture

Japan-style culture (*Nihon-gata bunka*) is alive in *otaku* culture. Thus, in the Japanese ‘culture of children’, we treat a child as an individual human being with the same entitlements as a fully-fledged person. Of course, there are things that they cannot do or understand on account of their age. However, we do not jump to the conclusion that they would not understand something and so should not be exposed to it. Even as we let a three-year-old take the stage in *Kabuki*, we introduce mature themes such as desire and conflict in such materials without hesitation. There is no fear of exposing the child to such themes.

For example, Japanese anime for children often depict the darkness of the mind and conflicting feelings. In *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (1974), the emotional conflict within the grumpy Alm-Onji (Alps-Uncle) is given more weight than in the original series.¹¹ In robot anime, the pilots’ internal anguish over a future war is depicted. *Crayon Shin-chan* (1992–ongoing) depicts humanity buffeted by the whims of capitalist society.¹² In such cases, the content is of course presented in such a way that younger children can understand and enjoy it, but, at the same time, essentially mature themes are inserted. It is fine if not all the children watching fully understand. But an intelligent twelve-year-old might, and a less intelligent eighteen-year-old might not. If possible, anime creators would like to astound viewers in their twenties and thirties.

Otaku culture evolved from this ‘culture of children’, which is unique in the world. *Otaku* works are created within this worldview and form a synthetic art (*sōgō geijutsu*) that borrows the form of children’s culture. The reason why Hollywood has swept the world is because it has a framework that could be understood by anyone in the multi-ethnic nation of the United States of America. Many works have been produced that are widely accessible and still offer deep messages. Japanese *otaku* culture is similarly widely accessible, meaning that anyone can enjoy it. Even though it is produced for

children, it also carries deep messages and high drama. That is why anime is starting to sweep the globe. As seen here, there are two important characteristics of Japanese culture: one, the culture of children, and two, the consumer culture established during the Edo Period.¹³

Otaku culture = artisan culture

I consider *otaku* culture to be a legitimate heir (*seitō keishōsha*) of artisan culture, which was part of the consumer culture of the Edo Period. In other words, the *otaku* form of enjoyment (*otaku-teki na tanoshimi*) is the gratification of appreciating an artisan's work. This means admiring the work's craftsmanship, learning about its origin and appreciating its refinedness. With its way of appreciating a work at the level of 'world' and 'design'¹⁴ as well as the abstract level of judgement, *otaku* culture has evolved in a similar direction.

Consider the artisan culture of the Edo Period. No matter how fine a pipe is, for those who do not know anything about pipes, it is just a pipe. At best, they might notice a difference in patterns or the expensive price. In the Edo Period, such people would be deemed unsophisticated. Those who understand pipes experience them differently. Customers who understand the codes of the creator are called '*iki*', meaning 'sophisticated'. For example, 'This pipe is not tinwork but rather is made out of silver, which has a good colour and is rarely used because it is hard to work on. Such craftsmanship!' Or, 'If you look closely, doesn't the pattern resemble plovers? I see, if the smoke from the pipe is like a wave-washed beach, plovers would be circling above it.' Creators also make things with the sophisticated (*iki*) customer in mind, hoping that they will understand the ideas behind their work, and viewers respond to these thoughts. If creators cut corners, customers respond with severe criticism. It is the same with Japanese gardens. Viewers have to understand that this garden is a recreation of 'Clearing Weather at Awazu' (*Awazu no seiran*)¹⁵ or it does not make sense. This interaction between creators and customers is a unique characteristic of Japanese culture. The relationship between sender and receiver is exactly the same in *otaku* culture. Structurally, the pipe example is no different from someone watching *Mahōjin Guru Guru* (*Magic Circle Guru Guru*, 1994) and understanding, 'Hmm, I see, this is a parody anime of role-playing games. It actually has good sense.'¹⁶

In Japanese culture, if there are no customers with sophistication (*iki*), the artisanal culture cannot exist. The reason why *rakugo*¹⁷ is becoming extinct is the decrease in customers who understand the principles behind it. No matter how much effort you place in intricate plans to follow a worldview, if nobody understands what you are doing, it is no use. You start to wonder what direction would make it more interesting. Reluctantly, you start going back to the same old pattern without any direction. Then you lose more customers because you have become boring and predictable. We can observe this vicious cycle today.

In the Western art world, the creator is a god. Artists never listen to the receivers' opinion, because there is no need to listen. If an artist listened to them, s/he would be regarded as an imposter (one whose integrity is compromised) pandering to the masses. Regarding this point, Japanese culture evolved through the competition

between creators and receivers. One might ask, then, whether the creators and the receivers are equal. The answer is no. Actually, the receiver who ‘understands the beauty of a work and can put this understanding into words’ has a higher status in Japanese culture. For example, there was a job called ‘connoisseur’ (*mekiki*) in the world of the tea ceremony. They were regarded with greater respect than the actual artisans who kneaded the clay and put fire in the kiln to make the instruments of the ceremony. Sen no Rikyū (who had a profound influence on the world of the tea ceremony) could not make a teacup to save his life, but whatever teacup he regarded as quality was in turn highly regarded by the family that owned the teacup. It is not that everybody blindly believed his words because he had higher status. Rather, his words were able to draw out the beauty of the teacup.

When Sen no Rikyū explained the origin of a teacup, praised its craftsmanship and was moved by it, the teacup that used to be just a thing was elevated into a work of art. Another story that illustrates this structure is a *rakugo* routine titled ‘*Hatena no Chawan*’. The story is about a simple teacup, a little dirty, which even leaks. But Kinbē, a teashop owner, named this object ‘*hatena no chawan*’. He noted that the water leaking from nowhere was interesting, because it contributed to the special charm of the cup. The teacup received a revaluation and all of a sudden became extremely popular, even gaining the approval of the emperor at the time, and its value rose drastically. The teacup had not changed. A new point of view was provided, and now the leaks were seen as a valued aspect of the object. A shift in the point of view translated to massive revaluation of the object.

Part 2: *Otaku* are the legitimate heirs of Japanese culture

Those at the top of *otaku* culture know how to appreciate it

There is a book titled *Tondemobon no sekai* (*The World of Unbelievable Books*), which was a bestseller in 1995 and 1996. It is a book introducing unbelievable (*tondemonai*) books on UFOs, the occult, the Jewish conspiracy and so on. It is actually quite fun to read. However, if you read the books introduced in this book, you realize many times over that they are quite boring and nonsensical. What is really interesting is not the ‘unbelievable books’, but the perspective of the person who introduces these books. Here lies the importance of ‘narrating what and how it is interesting’. If one can talk about what makes something interesting, then even ‘unbelievable books’ may see the light of day. This follows the same structure as ‘*Hatena no Chawan*’, described above.

In this way, those at the top of *otaku* culture are the educated appreciators, strict critics and patrons. They have to be the ultimately sophisticated people who have all three of the core *otaku* abilities: the eye of sophistication (*iki*) to discover beauty in works; the eye of the craftsman (*takumi*) to evaluate the art of craftsmanship; and the eye of the expert (*tsū*) to grasp the work’s social positioning. This is the established *otaku*, or the splendid *otaku* that I have been talking about at length in this book. The splendid *otaku* has perfectly acquired *otaku* knowledge to appreciate works. Of course, for the creators who catch his attention, he never hesitates to spend money. On the other hand, he will harshly evaluate those works and creators that cut corners. These

actions are not meant for him alone, but are also in the interest of cultivating creators, and ultimately contributing to *otaku* culture as a whole. *Otaku* understand this point.

Of course, among creators and people in the mass media, there is a tendency to misunderstand *otaku* culture as comparable to Western subculture, which leads to such thoughts as ‘creators are above the fans in any case’. The message is clear: ‘Art comes directly from the creators’ heart. Appreciate it gratefully. It’s your fault if you don’t understand. Go home and do your homework!’ It might not be as direct as that, but even creators fall victim to these misunderstandings. There are many *otaku* who have been overwhelmed by this attitude, but they should not be. If you blindly praise a chef too much, the restaurant will go bad. Only when you evaluate on your own can you hope for better food. In other words, evaluating art leads to the healthy formation of artisan culture.

Is it possible to establish ‘otakuology’ (*otakugaku*) – the study of *otaku* culture? Swordsmanship (*kendō*) will never become swordology (*kengaku*). The tea ceremony (*sadō*) will never become teaology (*chagaku*). Studying or researching something is only possible if the object of study is expansive and external. However, swordsmanship and the tea ceremony seek perfection in their internal world. Thus, they are a ‘way’ (*dō*). *Otaku* might be similar. I may have been mistaken in titling this chapter *Introduction to Otakuology* (*Otakugaku nyūmon*). Rather than otakuology (*otakugaku*), maybe ‘the way of *otaku*’ (*otakudō*) would be the more correct approach.

A society of liberal brainwashing

How will the world change with the shift from an advanced industrial society (*kōdo keizai shakai*) to an advanced information society (*kōdo jōhō shakai*)? On this topic, in my previous book, *Bokutachi no sen'nō shakai* (*Our Brainwashing Society*, 1995), I wrote about the results of Alvin Toffler’s *The Third Wave* (1980) and Sakaiya Taichi’s *Chika kakumei* (*Knowledge-Value Revolution*, 1990). In the conclusion of that book, I argued that our society is moving from liberal economic competition to liberal brainwashing (*jiyu sen'nō shakai*). That is to say, the economic activities that had only been accessible to aristocrats and elites have been opened to the general public. To put it another way, economic activity is free. A liberal brainwashing society appears as a society that has opened up brainwashing activities, once limited to politicians and the mass media, to the general public. Given this change, the Western-centred value system of rationalism and democracy is certainly on its way toward imminent collapse.

This is due to one huge change, namely the decline of dominant culture. Now, the value system that belongs to the dominant culture is in decline, and subculture, which is the heir of counterculture, is the only one surviving. However, it is easy to foresee that subculture, which gains energy from going against dominant culture, will lose its power in the future. Subculture based on mass consumption has its limits. In a liberal economic society, children are supposed to grow up as soon as possible. Children and the elderly are nothing but a burden on society. Healthy people desire children to be part of the production process as soon as possible.

However, our new society seems to be somewhat different. There is no clear-cut transition marked in one’s life, such as ‘you become an adult at age twenty’, ‘after

graduating from college you are a member of society’, ‘you retire at age sixty-five’. From children to adults to the elderly, a gradual change seems to have become accepted in this society. For instance, in developing countries, the elderly are increasingly receiving education. In Japan, the average age when one becomes a member of society (*shakaijin*) is rising, as many young adults enter graduate school or re-enter education for professional training. Even after they get a job, they enrol in classes at a culture school (*karuchā sukūru*).¹⁸ Thus, the system whereby at age twenty-two (after graduating from a four-year university course) everyone became a member of society with a job – this system is collapsing in earnest. *Otaku* culture is a perfect fit for this society, as it is ready-made to be enjoyed by children and adults alike. Furthermore, in an advanced information society, various value systems mix and good *otaku* are likely to be born.¹⁹ In twenty years, when the children of today become adults and the first *otaku* generation enters retirement, the dominant culture will be long gone, subculture will not be as apparent, and *otaku* culture will be mainstream in the world.

I am not trying to say that Western culture is wrong. However, Western rationalism was imported into Japan in quite a twisted form. The adult figure that everybody aspires to be was not as absolute in Japan as it was in the West. As a result, we have an incomplete, half-baked value system. In addition, in the shift to zero economic growth in an advanced information society, the value system centred on Western rationalism and the dominant culture is obviously collapsing. No one is able to stop the problems such as the ‘occult fad’, ‘crimes by religious cults’, and ‘commodified sex’ that have come as results of that shift.²⁰ This is visible in Japan from early on due to its incomplete, half-baked Westernization, but these signs can be seen all over the world. This is clear from the phenomenon of *otaku* worldwide.²¹

Western dominant culture based on Greek philosophy and Christianity has its lethal-weapon: subculture. Eastern culture based on Confucianism, and Japanese dominant culture that favours Zen and the tea ceremony, has its lethal-weapon: *otaku* culture. These two are competing against each other for the hearts and minds of youth all over the world. Nobody knows which will emerge as the major value system for the next generation. Subcultural artists in the world are instinctively trying to incorporate *otaku* culture. Now the creators who do not understand *otaku* culture will be the failures. Further, the world will evolve into a completely networked society. How far up will Japanese *otaku* culture climb in this network?²² I am excitedly keeping a close eye on developments.

Notes

1. Translator’s note (TN): this is a translation of Okada Toshio (1996), *Otakugaku nyūmon*, Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, Chapter 7. The primary translator for this chapter is Nishimura Keiko, and the introduction is by Patrick W. Galbraith.
2. TN: for more on this group, see ‘Atelier Alma’, www.atelier-alma.com/mirei-l-r-artiste-francaise-lyon-gravue.aspx (accessed 30 June 2014).
3. TN: Okada uses the idiosyncratic term ‘main culture’ (*mein karuchā*).
4. TN: a classic Japanese role-playing video game first released by Enix in 1986.

5. TN: Harring was an artist and social activist whose work responded to the street culture of New York City in the 1980s by expressing concepts of birth, death and war.
6. TN: Okada writes *otaku* in *katakana*, a script used for foreign loanwords and to make words stand out. This is a conscious choice, as Okada writes earlier in *Introduction to Otakuology* that he and others were acutely aware that Nakamori Akio, who wrote *otaku* in *hiragana*, used it as an insult.
7. TN: Kabuki is a form of Japanese theatre known for stylized drama, elaborate make-up and the fact that an exclusively male cast plays all roles.
8. TN: Noh is a form of classical Japanese musical drama that has been performed since the fourteenth century. Many characters are masked, with men playing male and female roles, and movements are slow. Musical accompaniment lends to a trance-like atmosphere.
9. TN: a traditional form of comic theatre that developed alongside Noh.
10. TN: the Ōnin War began as a dispute between Hosokawa Katsumoto and Yamana Sōzen and escalated into a nationwide war. It initiated the Warring States Period, a drawn-out struggle between various warlords to rule Japan. During this period, the official capitol, Kyoto, became increasingly less relevant.
11. TN: Okada's point here is a little oblique, but he seems to be suggesting that the nature of this character's emotional conflict is not revealed. The tension is not resolved, and there is no clear right or wrong established at the outset. Okada speaks more to this point in an interview in Galbraith, P.W. (2009), *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An Insider's Guide to the Subculture of Cool Japan*, Tokyo: Kōdansha, pp. 174–7.
12. TN: this anime series features a young boy who causes trouble for others and then criticizes their efforts in covering for him. Searing social criticism sits alongside fart jokes, but it is still a popular show for children.
13. TN: for more on this aspect of Okada's thinking, see Steinberg, M. (2004), 'Otaku Consumption, Superflat Art, and the Return to Edo', *Japan Forum*, 16 (3), pp. 449–71.
14. TN: Okada suggests parenthetically that the readers refer to Chapter 4 of *Introduction to Otakuology*. For reasons of space, we have not translated that chapter for this edited volume.
15. TN: 'Awazu no Seiran' is a woodblock print by Hiroshige from his Ōmi Hakkei series.
16. TN: Okada is intentionally choosing an anime series that his readers may know, but likely did not pay much attention to, because it is aimed at children and seems at first like standard fare for kids. The point is that a sophisticated viewer sees it differently.
17. TN: a form of Japanese verbal entertainment. A storyteller sits on stage with a paper fan and small cloth for props and, without standing, tells a long and complicated comical story. The story always involves dialogue between two or more characters, which are differentiated by pitch, tone and slight turns of the head.
18. TN: a 'culture school' offers lessons to adults ranging from English conversation to flower arrangement. In contrast to institutions of higher learning in Japan, culture schools are softer in approach, focusing on liberal arts education and exploring hobbies among likeminded people in a supportive environment.
19. TN: for more on the fit between *otaku* and new regimes of capitalism, see the discussion of Okada's work in LaMarre, T. (2006), 'Otaku Movement', in T. Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (eds), *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 358–94.
20. TN: crimes by religious groups brings to mind Aum Shinrikyō, a group that released sarin gas on the Tokyo subway in March 1995, killing thirteen and injuring over

- 1,000. Okada discusses this event in more detail in Okada, T., Morikawa, K. and Murakami, T. (2005), 'Otaku Talk', in T. Murakami (ed.), *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 165–85. For a lucid discussion of Japan in the 1990s, which situates Aum in the same moment as anxiety about commodified sex, see Leheny, D. (2009), *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Chapter 2.
21. TN: Okada points the reader to Chapter 2 of *Introduction to Otakuology*. For reasons of space, we have not translated that chapter for this edited volume.
22. TN: for more on the rise of *otaku* in networked society, see Itō, M. (2012), 'Introduction', in M. Itō, D. Okabe and I. Tsuji (eds), *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. xi–xxxii.

Section Three

The 2000s

The Construction of Discourses on Otaku: The History of Subcultures from 1983 to 2005¹

Aida Miho

Introduction

Without even noticing, we have come to use the word 'otaku' in our everyday life. For example, 'health otaku' or 'cosmetics otaku' evoke certain kinds of images. In most cases, these kinds of images signify people who collect, possess, and accumulate enormous amounts of information or artefacts. In this chapter, the term 'otaku' is used in this way. The category of 'otaku' was created in 1983 and now has a twenty-two-year history. During that time, many writers have contributed to the discourse on 'otaku'. This chapter offers an overview of discourses on 'otaku' and attempts to highlight changes in the focal points of these discourses.

What might these changes mean? There are two possibilities. One is that there have been actual changes in the people or activities called 'otaku', and the focal point of the discourse has shifted accordingly. Another possibility is that there have been changes in the public perception of 'otaku', regardless of their actualities, and the focal point has shifted in response to public demand. Henceforth, this chapter will use 'actual otaku' to describe the culture called 'otaku', or any concrete activities related to it. We cannot say that 'actual otaku' have never changed. In twenty-two years, the number of activities or people involved in the culture called 'otaku' has increased and diversified. We tend to think that theories on 'otaku' reflect the actualities of otaku. However, it is impossible for anyone to grasp 'actual otaku' in their entirety. Thus, this chapter will focus not on 'actual otaku', but rather on 'otaku discourses' or 'theories on otaku'. Consequently, I must emphasize that discourses on 'otaku' – i.e., theories on 'otaku' (*otaku ron*) – and 'actual otaku' must be strictly distinguished.

This chapter will first look at the birth of the category of 'otaku' and its definition at that time. In the second section, I look at the appearance of theories on 'otaku', and clarify the tendencies seen in them. In section three, I refer to the new focal point that appeared after the initial theories on 'otaku' had settled down. Section four looks at the most current focal point at the time of 2005. Changes in discourses on 'otaku' do not reflect changes in 'actual otaku', but rather changes in society's perception of 'otaku'. By mapping the changes in theories on 'otaku', this chapter attempts to decode changes in the subcultures of contemporary Japan.

Birth of the category of 'otaku'

'Otaku' as a category was created by Nakamori Akio and intended to distinguish something that could not simply be described as 'mania'.² Nakamori was referring mainly to the peculiar appearances of 'otaku' and the culture favored by 'otaku'. First, Nakamori noted their appearances as follows (1989, p. 91):

Their hairstyle is either ruffled long hair clearly parted 7:3 at the front, or a dowdy, close bowl cut. They tottered back and forth, smartly clad in shirts and slacks their mommy bought at the 'all ¥980/1980' rack at Itō Yōkadō or Seiyū, their feet shod in 'R'-branded knock-offs of Regal sneakers that were popular several years ago, shoulder bags bulging and sagging. The boys are either skin and bones – borderline malnourished – or squealing pale-faced piggies (*warau shirobuta*) with chubby faces so fat that the arms of their silver-plated glasses dug into the sides of their brow. All the girls sported bobbed hair and were mostly fat, having tubby legs like tree-logs covered in white high-socks.

Here, Nakamori is presenting a group that is either ignorant or unconcerned about fashion and is in generally poor physical health. This description is of those gathered at the Comic Market,³ and who are 'young men and women in their teens, mostly junior high and high school students' (Nakamori, 1989, p. 93). Nakamori pronounces that the word 'otaku' will be a 'precise single umbrella term that covers these people, or the general phenomenon' (p. 93).

Aside from the aforementioned Comic Market, Nakamori provides other examples of the culture that 'otaku' are involved in. He casts a wide net (p. 92):

Come to think of it, manga fans are out there, not just at Comiket. Those guys who camp out before the opening day of anime movies; dudes who nearly get themselves run over trying to capture photos of the 'blue train' as it comes down the tracks; guys with every back issue of *SF Magazine* and the Hayakawa science-fiction novels lining their bookshelves; science boys with thick glasses who gather at the 'maikon' shops; those who get a spot early in the morning for an idol autograph event; a mommy's boy attending a big-name cram school who is simply a sardine-eyed dumbhead without his textbooks; an audio-nerd bro.

These quotes outline rather thoroughly almost all elements that are associated with the term 'otaku'.

First, let us look at what 'otaku' are passionate about, or the direction of their passions. Those who are not involved in these interests might have some difficulty in understanding what gets 'otaku' excited. Why do they need to take photographs of trains to the extent that they 'nearly get themselves run over'? Why do 'science boys' gather around 'maikon',⁴ a machine that attracted only minor interest at the time? People who have no involvement in this culture will find it difficult to see these things as meaningful. Furthermore, even when they are difficult to understand, these activities are filled with 'fastidiousness'. The smart arrangement of science-fiction novels

and magazines on one's bookshelf is an example. The incomprehensibility of these activities is a major factor affecting the image of 'otaku'. What is the cause of this 'incomprehensibility'? Clearly, it is an issue of whether something's value is socially recognized or not. For instance, few people would consider stuntmen as 'otaku'. This is because stuntmen are seen as necessary in the arena of entertainment. Besides self-satisfaction, stuntmen also attain a certain level of fame and income. Stunts are dangerous, but if we follow the words of Nakamori, taking photographs of trains is also a dangerous activity. However, compared to stunts, the meaning of taking photographs of trains is not apparent. Thus, it is considered to be an 'otaku' activity.

Let us look at the elements that Nakamori employed to characterize the appearance of 'otaku'. First, the objects the 'otaku' place on their bodies are very distant from the objects recognized as 'attractive'. Second, Nakamori depicted 'otaku' as beings who lack bodily charm. Lastly, there are the personality traits of 'otaku'. Nakamori presents a portrait of 'otaku' that is characterized by introversion: 'people who are withdrawn in the classroom even during breaks, lurking in the shadows obsessing over a *shogi* game or something, 'sardine-eyed dumbhead', and so on. This definition of 'otaku' did not become widespread in 1983, probably due to the obscurity of the magazine in which Nakamori's article was published. (This column was also cancelled after just three issues.) If the special characteristics of 'otaku' are their involvement in activities that are difficult for the general public to understand and an inconspicuous personality, then there is really no reason for the general public to take notice of 'otaku'. However, while the general public did not take notice, some *mania* became accustomed to following Nakamori and calling some people or activities 'otaku'.

'Otaku' as a personality problem

The full-fledged discussion of 'otaku' began in 1989, spurred by the arrest of a man suspected of kidnapping and murdering four young girls, who eventually received the death penalty. For the sake of convenience, this chapter will refer to this person as 'M'. From the time when M committed his crimes until his arrest, various media speculated on his profile. The level of concern generated by M can be glimpsed in the following account:⁵ 'The police and mass media continued with a frantic search, but the vicious criminal Imada Yūko evaded detection and even audaciously sent out criminal declarations ... The real identity of Imada Yūko, whom everyone feared to be a professional criminal, was actually an utter amateur' (Yokouchi, 1989, p. 150). After his arrest, M's room became a central focus of reporting. In his room, there were piles of videotapes – some 6,000 of them – and magazines that blocked the windows as well as as many as four video cassette players. M's personal hobbies and preferences emerged as one of the keys to understanding his string of vicious crimes. Comments on the state of M's room sought to link his personal hobbies and tastes to his crimes.

The category of 'otaku' surfaced along with the gaze that sought to penetrate into M's interiority. The similarities between the special features of 'otaku' and M's hobbies were singled out and reported on. To repeat, 'actual otaku' are difficult to grasp. Nonetheless, 'otaku' hobbies were connected to M's crimes. The representative

interpretation can be summarized as follows: due to the intensification of his 'otaku' hobbies, M could not differentiate between reality and fiction and, as a result, he murdered young girls in reality. Nevertheless, the validity of this interpretation is questionable:

The mass media arbitrarily branded the possession of 6,000 videos as abnormal. But what is the basis for that judgment? For example, if books, records or CDs are fine, what's wrong with videos?

Yokouchi, 1989, p. 150

He possessed a huge number of videos. However, does the possession of 5,000 videos make someone an *otaku*? If it is a hundred videos, does that mean that the person is not an *otaku*?

Tezuka, 1989, p. 138

The manner of collecting videos is slightly different [between M and otaku]. He records at triple speed. The son of Komatsu Sakyō,⁶ who is a male mania working at Dentsū, often says, 'Mania do not record at triple speed. I do not do so.' (Laugh) I thought, 'Oh, I see.' And, one [of M's] tape[s] contains multiple titles. That is also not the way of a mania.

Ôtsuka and Nakamori, 1989, p. 92

However, these objections and doubts were not popularized.⁷ The chain of activities surrounding the serial kidnapping and murders of young girls brought about the following impacts on the category of 'otaku'. First, 'actual otaku' were overlooked while at the level of discourse 'otaku' were connected with the image of a vicious criminal. Second, through the discourses that made the category of 'otaku' a social problem, the term 'otaku' became widespread. In addition, theories on 'otaku' began to emerge.

'Unbalanced specialist'

In 1985, Miyadai Shinji and the other members of Rise Corporation undertook the task of classifying university students around Tokyo according to their lifestyles.⁸ This questionnaire was entitled '172 Questions for University Students'. The results of the analysis were published in issue twenty-two of the magazine *Campus Sensor* in December 1985. The research subjects were '1,500 university students in their third and fourth years of education, randomly selected from a register possessed by Recruit' (Miyadai, 1994, p. 154). First, let us take a look at the five clusters, with simple explanations, that Miyadai and his co-researchers presented as the result of their investigation:

Unbalanced specialist: Their special characteristic is that they are extreme into something (mania). They are people with discerning tastes in areas such as music, anime, photographs, computers and manga. However, because they are so passionate about a narrow domain, they become 'gloomy laggards' in other domains.

Faddish average person: High level of sensitivity to media, with high interpersonal skills and strong orientation towards the opposite sex. They follow blindly and are swayed by trends. They are equivalent to the core of *shinjinrui* (new breed).

Cutting-edge people with discerning tastes: Wealthy with high disposable income. Accustomed to playing since high school. They act in small groups and do not follow blindly. They are the source of trends and correspond to the cutting edge of *shinjinrui*.

Unpolished energetic people: Although they have a strong desire to win and move upward, they have low sensitivity to media and a warm heart. In a certain sense, they are the rich kids in sports clubs at famous universities.

Gloomy laggards: They have low interpersonal skills, no field of specialty, shut themselves away at home and are completely inconspicuous. In a certain sense, they are equivalent to 'unbalanced specialists,' but with their wings clipped. Laggards means in English 'latecomers,' and is used by marketers.

Miyadai, 1994, pp. 155, 159–60

Among the five clusters, Miyadai and his co-researchers think that 'unbalanced specialists' (distribution ratio 15 per cent) are equivalent to 'otaku'. The special characteristics of this cluster are described as follows:

Their interests are very one-sided, and they can only see the world through a filter. . . . They are generally dirty and indolent about their clothes, and thus others give them a wide berth. However, they characteristically do not pay any attention to such matters. . . . The scope of their association is limited to the friends within their domain. They are sensitive to only one domain, but are insensitive to other domains when compared to the other clusters. They are generally deeply involved and aim for the comfortable 'way of partial charisma.' Their passion becomes greater in minority groups where members are similar and have no other interests.

Miyadai, 1994, pp. 155–8

In other words, Miyadai's portrait of 'otaku' is as follows: they can only interact with people who share their interests or they cannot interact at all with others. Miyadai sees this special characteristic as a 'personality type'. The objects of their interests – in the words of Miyadai, the 'cultural type' of 'otaku' – are extremely biased, and they are nonchalant about areas outside specific 'cultural types'.

Building on the research that he helped conduct in 1985, Miyadai connected the category of 'otaku' with 'specialists' in an article published in 1991. The 'otaku' here is one that can not be easily accepted by people other than those who belong to the same cluster. Miyadai asserts that 'specialists' are 'unwashed and indolent about their clothes, and thus others give them a wide berth'. Why did Miyadai present a discourse where 'otaku' are beings that are 'given a wide berth'? Miyadai explains that cultural types (for example, *shinjinrui* or 'otaku') and personality types are now overlapping. The reason he gives for this is that, 'in communication, symbols that allude to class (class codes)

have become irrelevant' (Miyadai, 1994, p. 166). Japan in the late 1980s was at the stage of an advanced consumer society. Miyadai is arguing that in an advanced consumer society, the motivation for consumption is not ostentation, or the 'narrative' of being ordinary and possessing particular goods, which Miyadai connects to class codes. Miyadai explains that, 'the narrative accompanying consumption is fragmented due to the "lack of clues to communication" brought about by the growing irrelevance of class codes, and is compensated by a narrative that can be chosen through individual responsibility' (p. 168). In other words, what to consume and what narrative to create through consumption are left to the discretion of each person. However, the narratives accompanying consumption are not created freely by individuals, because the objects that are consumed are part of particular narratives from the start.

Building on these premises and following Miyadai's argument, I will summarize the process through which cultural types and personality types came to overlap. First, the ability to decode the invisible narratives that are conferred to objects will determine the interlocutors of communication and the objects that will be consumed. Based on the premise that the narratives accompanying consumption are clues to communication, people with a high level of ability to decode narratives will be experts at communication. In contrast, people with a low level of ability can only retreat from communication, where the condition for participation is proper decoding of the narratives accompanying consumption. In this way, the ability to decode narratives accompanying consumption is linked to communication skills. Those who excel at decoding narratives become experts at communication. Miyadai sees these people as those called *shinjinrui*. In contrast, those who have a poor ability to decode narratives and are not able to participate in what Miyadai calls *shinjinrui*-style communication are 'otaku'. Miyadai concludes that 'otaku' culture functioned at this point as a 'relief code', or an escape from the dominant form of communication through decoding of narratives. In this way, in the system worked out by Miyadai, people with high interpersonal skills come to be known as *shinjinrui*, and those with low interpersonal skills come to be known as 'otaku'. This is what Miyadai describes as the overlap of personality with cultural type. Nevertheless, Miyadai argues that in 'otaku bashing', 'what is discriminated against is ultimately the personality type' (Miyadai, 1994, p. 191). If that is the case, what is the meaning of listing things such as 'music, anime, photographs, computers and manga' in which 'specialists' display their 'discerning tastes'? The explanation that Miyadai finds is the overlap between cultural types and personality types, which refer to those associated with this list of things.

An arbitrary separation appears and disappears in Miyadai's argument. Let us take a look at what Miyadai attempted to separate: 'In the process by which it expands to a large scale, a culture will be differentiated into leaders and followers... At the beginning of the occurrence, amongst the leaders, *shinjinrui* culture and *otaku* culture remained undifferentiated, and the core leaders were like those people around us' (p. 164). However:

At the beginning of the 1980s, it became apparent that the surface of media was swept over by *shinjinrui* culture... The further the process of expansion moves, the higher the threshold of major culture becomes for 'the people left behind

(laggards). What functioned as the 'relief code' is the aspect of 'otaku culture' with which *shinjinrui* leaders were originally related.

Miyadai, 1994, pp. 164–5

Miyadai represents 'otaku culture' as a 'relief code', where 'relief' is from the lack of clues to communication. In other words, 'otaku culture' in Miyadai's discussion is easier to participate in than *shinjinrui* culture; it is a mechanism through which clues to communication can be obtained and friends who share a culture can be found.

On the other hand, Miyadai describes 'gloomy laggards' as 'unbalanced specialists' with their wings clipped and who have low interpersonal skills. In that case, is 'otaku culture' a sufficient 'relief code'? In the first place, 'gloomy laggards' would not be able to obtain clues to communication even from 'otaku culture'. This is because they are 'unbalanced specialists' with their wings clipped. Miyadai sees 'unbalanced specialists' as 'otaku'. At the same time, 'unbalanced specialists' were 'given a wide berth'. The overlapping personality type is communicating with those who share an interest in a biased culture. Miyadai observes a link between a certain cultural type and personality type, which is the crux of his theory on 'otaku'. However, Miyadai does not touch on the position of the cluster 'gloomy laggards', who are considered to have a deeper problem with the lack of communication clues than 'unbalanced specialists'. In other words, in discrimination against 'otaku', what is being discriminated against is the personality type of 'otaku'. In Miyadai's argument, where personality types overlap with cultural types, the condition of 'gloomy laggards', who express the special characteristic of 'otaku' more strikingly, is not comprehended. Miyadai's argument suggests a perspective that attempts to grasp 'otaku' as a personality problem, even when it continues to conceal the difficulty of arguing that 'otaku' have a certain personality type due to their cultural type.

Distortion in identity formation

'Otaku' have often been criticized. One discourse that is taken as the basis of this criticism posits that 'otaku' 'do not distinguish between fiction and reality'. Ōsawa Masachi's theory on 'otaku' adopts a stance that does not refute such criticism. Before I refer to Ōsawa's theory on 'otaku', I will examine the discourse on the failure to distinguish between fiction and reality, which he supports, albeit passively. Can fiction be distinguished from reality? Even if it can, the significance of the discourse on the failure (or the ability) to distinguish between fiction and reality will greatly differ according to the ways that they are distinguished.

Here, we have to think about the real and reality. The real simply refers to reality.⁹ 'Reality' expresses the appearance of reality. We tend to think that we are living in the real, but if people who have the same experience in the same location experience different 'realities', then what we recognize as real is only one perception that emerges as a result of our attribution of meanings. This is not the real but what should be called 'reality'. We attribute significance and perceive 'reality' as real. In other words, if an object is real to a person, it is because that person attributes the meaning of real to that object. However, even if the object of meaning attribution is the same, it is unlikely for

all people to attribute to it the same meaning. It is said that young women who apply make-up on trains are increasing recently. We could support this act, acquiesce without supporting it, or make it the target of criticism. People holding these three different opinions will attribute clearly different meanings to the place (is the train a place for applying make-up?) even when they are located in the same reality of being on a train. That is 'reality'. Without exception, we do not sense 'reality' because the object of perception is real. Instead, we construct each individual 'reality' and, based on respective judgements, attribute (or do not attribute) the meaning of real. If we return to the distinction between fiction and reality, there is no difference between the two as a problem of 'reality'. When people who are not familiar with '6,000 videotapes' see reports on how M conducts his daily life in his room, they cannot feel the 'reality' of that environment. Thus, many people perceive M's room to be a strange thing. This is evidence that supports the argument that we do not necessarily feel 'reality' towards reality. It is not the case that something is real because many people feel its 'reality', nor is it not real just because many people cannot feel its 'reality'. Ultimately, the real is supported by the meaning of 'reality' that each of us attributes to it. In other words, 'reality' is not related to so-called reality.

Fiction is certainly not reality, but we are able to sense the 'reality' in fiction. People who were touched by *Ippai no kakesoba*¹⁰ (*A Bowl of Buckwheat Noodles in Broth*), which brought about a fad in the past, probably saw the 'reality' in that fiction. Even if they thought that it was real, it was in reality a fairytale created by Oguri Ryōhei. In other words, *Ippai no kakesoba* is fiction. People who perceived it as a true story felt the 'reality' of this fairytale, which is fiction, and hence mistook this fiction for the real. To say that they had perceived it as reality because it was circulated as a true story is merely creating an alibi. Even while M's room was also reported as an indisputable reality, people who did not feel the room as real judged M as 'not distinguishing between fiction and reality', and felt 'reality' in that discourse. 'The distinction between fiction and reality' seems to be at first glance something that is self-evident to the extent that it does not require consideration. However, the fiction or reality we accept could be reduced to the problem of 'reality' that we individually attribute. There is no distinction between the two in terms of 'reality'.

Ōsawa understands 'otaku' as a problem of self-identity. According to Ōsawa, 'for *otaku*, the valuation of (seemingly) meaningless daily work and immersion in anime is completely inverted' (Ōsawa, 1992, p. 217). Ōsawa defines the possession of self-identity as follows: the kind of person I am is decided by myself. Furthermore, the norms (in the broad sense) I should follow can be decided (by myself). The self-identity referred to by Ōsawa is acquired in the following way. First, it is necessary to have an other who can become a model for the self, i.e., an other who is desirable and whom the self can become. Ōsawa names this the 'immanent other'. Second, at the same time, it is necessary to have an other who determines the ideality of the 'immanent other', i.e., an other who provides the standards to judge whether the 'immanent other' is ideal. Ōsawa names this the 'transcendental other' or 'instance of the third party'. Ōsawa argues that self-identity is constituted through identification with these two types of other.

Based on the above, I will summarize the mechanism through which humans acquire self-identity. First, the immanent other is subordinate to the transcendental

other. Due to the functioning of the transcendental other, the immanent other appears as an other who is, or can become, desirable to the self. There are also occasions when a relationship called ‘antecedent projection (of the instance of the third party)’ arises between the two others. The premise is the existence of an other – represented by Ōsawa as ‘the other’ – who is absolutely different from the self and is determined only by absolute difference. Since ‘the other’ is absolute difference from the self, it cannot predetermine the immanent other. However, when ‘the other’ projects the transcendental other or instance of the third party onto the self, its absolute difference is concealed. Then, it appears as if the transcendental other or the instance of the third party is subordinate to ‘the other’ that was given the position of the immanent other. This is what Ōsawa calls the mechanism of the antecedent projection of the instance of the third party. Ōsawa argues that ‘in *otaku*, the two types of others that determine self-identity, that is, the transcendental other (instance of the third party) and the immanent other come extremely close to each other’ (1992, p. 228). Based on the above premises, Ōsawa analyses the self-identity of the people who are involved in the culture of ‘otaku’. For example, pop-idols should in the first place be in the position of the unreachable transcendental other. However, pop-idol ‘otaku’ love pop-idols who do not seem to be distant from themselves. In other words, what should originally be the transcendental other becomes almost like the immanent other (the other who is, or can become, desirable to the self).

What about *yaoi*, a culture maintained mainly by women? The culture of *yaoi* usually finds romantic relationships between male characters in existing works. All types of narratives that can be the basis for the formation of romantic relationships between men are included in *yaoi* in the broad sense. I would like to take a moment to use Ōsawa’s terms to consider the acquisition of self-identity by *yaoi* ‘otaku’. In romance, women look for ideals. In other words, what is predetermined as the immanent other is the ideal female image. In this case, the instance of the third party that determines the ideal female image is the transcendental other that holds the masculine viewpoint. In *yaoi*, the instance of the third party predetermines men as the ideal object. In other words, this instance of the third party is not a masculine object, but a self that internalized it, the feminine object. Here, the immanent other, the person whom the self could imitate, is extremely close to, or is not separated from, the transcendental other. Hence, Ōsawa might argue that in the case of female *yaoi* ‘otaku’, male characters emerge as objects that are desirable and imitable.

In Ōsawa’s argument, the transcendental other is close to the immanent other in ‘otaku’. While there can be other immanent others, there is only one transcendental other. However, when the two become proximate, or when the transcendental other is embedded at the level of the immanent other, there can be more than one transcendental other. This impedes the original function of the transcendental other. The result comes down to ‘the disclosure of the dimension of “the other”’ (Ōsawa, 1992, p. 242). According to Ōsawa, the transcendental other is the ‘instance that produces the unity of reality itself’ (p. 243). However, as could be seen from the examples of pop-idol ‘otaku’ and *yaoi* ‘otaku’, ‘otaku’ render ineffective the function of the transcendental other. Therefore, ‘otaku’ cannot attain the ‘unity of reality itself’. The self-identity that ‘otaku’ form is based on a transcendental other that is secondarily constituted. The

self-identity attained there is ‘the territory seen as non-reality, the territory of fantasy’ (Ōsawa, 1992, p. 243) produced as reality.

Thus far, we have looked at Ōsawa’s theory on ‘otaku’, but while it seems to touch on what in this chapter I call ‘actual otaku’, Ōsawa’s theory on ‘otaku’ depends on discourses by others.¹¹ Ōsawa presupposes that idol ‘otaku’ prefer ‘pop-idols who do not seem to be distant from themselves.’ But what about the category of ‘B-level pop-idols’, which exists in a similar manner to the category of ‘B-level gourmet food’ in the world of epicurism? Whether one loves a top-ranked pop-idol or a particular B-level pop-idol is simply a matter of one’s tastes. If the enthusiasts of B-level pop-idols can be defined as ‘otaku’, then this is merely a matter of the relative value accorded to the object of preference. In other words, the pop-idol ‘otaku’ whom Ōsawa discusses is not, as he claims, a problem associated with the process of self-identity acquisition. ‘*Yaoi*’ is also a category. If I may be so bold, ‘*yaoi*’ is an attempt by fans to appropriate the fiction that they are presented with. The kinds of meaning read into fiction depend on the discretion of the receivers, regardless of what kinds of fiction it is. Those involved recognize that a work and its characters appear as the creation of the individuals who read into it a meaning different from the author’s intention and reconstruct it as a different narrative. In other words, ‘*yaoi*’ is nothing but an attempt to produce fiction from fiction. Such a production of fiction is an issue of meaning attribution. Hence, any attempt to address it as a problem of self-identity is unjustifiable. According to Ōsawa, ‘otaku’ have to acquire their self-identity in ‘the territory seen as non-reality, the territory of fantasy’. However, as I have explained, reality does not mean the real. We are merely perceiving as real the respective ‘realities’ that we each give meaning to. If the shape of reality differs according to people, then the delineation of non-reality and reality itself is meaningless. Even so, Ōsawa addresses ‘otaku’ as a problem of self-identity based on ‘non-reality’. Like Miyadai, Ōsawa’s theory on ‘otaku’ is an attempt to grasp ‘otaku’ as a fixed personality.

Unsocialized beings

Asaba Michiaki published his discussion on ‘otaku’ in the same year that M was arrested. His argument can be summarized into the following four points:

1. Otaku is a problem of identity.
2. Otaku are people who are not socialized.
3. The emergence of proto ‘otaku’ took place in the 1970s.
4. The reason for (3) can be sought in the fact that the world has transformed organic ‘reality’ into mere information.

Let us consider each of these points, beginning with ‘otaku’ as a problem of identity. Asaba classifies otaku into proto ‘otaku’ and secondary ‘otaku’. What Asaba calls secondary ‘otaku’ is the ‘passive mania’ who merely indulge in the information that has been commodified by earlier ‘otaku’ (proto otaku):

The ‘otaku’ culture that was established by model students who strongly suffered the influence of schooling¹² in the late 1970s began to demonstrate the expansion

of the younger generation and generate qualitative changes in the mid 1980s. For one, early 'otaku' entering their twenties advanced into the side of media production as creators, planners and editors. The activity 'otaku' undertook through fanzines on a subcultural basis – the parodies, the dictionary of terminologies, and the indices of information – were commodified as articles in magazines and magazine books.¹³ Then there emerged the masses of secondary 'otaku' who enjoy these finished products. . . . Secondary 'otaku', who could be said to be the dramatically expanded range of youths with relatively low creativity, are weak in the independent experimentation processes that go into collecting, organizing and alternatively reading information. Correspondingly, when compared to proto 'otaku', they decline into passive mania who lack the intellectual training and creative ability and only enjoy the constant flow of information.

Asaba, 1989, pp. 253–4

Asaba also views 'otaku' as people who are not socialized. Focusing on the differences between male and female 'otaku', Asaba (1989, pp. 255–6) writes:

Around the 1980s, male 'otaku', including a great many with a Lolita complex, entered employment in a way corresponding to their personality and began to recede from 'otaku' activities. Men are given some kind of position through employment and have a higher possibility to receive opportunities for socialization. In contrast . . . young female 'otaku' continue to make the best use of 'otaku' events and circles as places for sociality among women. In the case of these young women, it is common for them to continue their 'otaku' activities and relationships in spite of employment and marriage. In the present androcentric society, this is a reflection of the current situation where young working women could not find their identity in the workplace.

In other words, men tend to obtain opportunities for socialization through employment. Socialized 'otaku' begin to break away from 'otaku'. On the other hand, female 'otaku', even having gone through employment and marriage, continue 'otaku' activities and relationships. This is not limited to women, as anyone who cannot discover an identity in the workplace can continue on as 'otaku' indefinitely. In Asaba's analysis, 'otaku' could not find the foundation for an identity in areas other than 'otaku' activities.

According to Asaba (1989, pp. 233–4), 'otaku' hobbies that are the foundation of identity are acquired during schooling:

Middle school is a period when one becomes aware of one's self, seeks, and is distressed with a unique status in the small society called school, where only people of the same age are gathered. People who are inferior in sports and sociability, or people who are conscious that their egos are strong and that they are different from the norm, tend to discover their identity in specialized hobbies and knowledge. However, the value of specialized knowledge in science fiction and anime are incomprehensible to ordinary students. Originally, they should look again at their own value objectively and grasp the chance for socialization, but

what will happen if there is a society where the value of specialized knowledge and information is openly recognized?

Asaba is describing an 'otaku' figure that does not feel the necessity to look at the self's value objectively and hence fails to obtain 'opportunities for socialization' and is instead fastidious about hobbies that are difficult for others to understand. According to Asaba, instead of being socialized, 'otaku' 'form solidarity through the sharing of obscure information' (p. 238). To join in solidarity through information sharing, the quality and quantity of information possessed by people is important. Solidarity built on obscure information supports the identity of 'otaku'. This analysis of Asaba coincides with the introverted image of 'otaku', which was one special characteristic identified by Nakamori in his creation of this category.

Asaba sees the transformation of the information environment as the common point between *shinjinrui* and proto 'otaku'. He describes the element that divides *shinjinrui* and proto 'otaku' as an issue of personality – whether they are introverts or extroverts. Allow me to summarize the 'otaku' described by Asaba. First, it is a being that is 'introverted' and is not 'socialized'. Second, it sees its identity by attaining a shared consciousness through sharing passionate knowledge. This knowledge is usually the kind whose value is not recognized. In other words, Asaba argues that 'otaku' are brought into being by the common consciousness of people who fail to acquire the appropriate values of the appropriate stage of their life. However, why do 'otaku', who are 'passive mania' lacking 'creativity' as a result of the expansion of the range of participants, have to attain 'consciousness of solidarity'? Because they share 'specialized knowledge'. Antagonism rather than solidarity, due to the sharing of 'specialized knowledge', is an aspect of 'actual otaku'.¹⁴ Asaba argues that 'otaku' turn inwards to the world of hobbies and the solidarity of sharing that world. By 'socialization', Asaba means taking interest in objects whose value is generally recognized. For Asaba, 'otaku' are unsocialized beings. Hence, 'otaku', when socialized, will stop being 'otaku'. Asaba's concern is with neither '*shinjinrui*' nor 'proto otaku', but rather 'secondary otaku'. He is not criticizing 'otaku' so much as the increase in unsocialized beings. At the time that Asaba's argument was published, 'otaku', as a common target of bashing, was probably the most fitting word for him to develop his theory. Thus, Asaba also analysed 'otaku' as a personality problem.

'Communication deficiency syndrome'

In critiques of 'otaku', a lack of communication ability is often raised. The aforementioned theory on 'otaku' by Miyadai, for example, argues that 'otaku' culture functioned as a 'relief code' for people who were left out from the communication style dominated by the *shinjinrui*. Nakajima Azusa singles out the special characteristic of communication among contemporary people and names it the 'communication deficiency syndrome':

To describe this in a straightforward manner:

1. They cannot think of others. In other words, they lack imagination.
2. This completely changes when they become acquaintances. In other words, they only perceive as 'human' those who enter into their field of vision.

3. There are various forms of maladjustment, but the basic one manifests as either excessive or impotent adaptation (Nakajima, 1991, p. 29).

Nakajima argues that everyone adapting to contemporary society has communication deficiency syndrome. Her concern is when the condition becomes abnormal. For Nakajima, communication deficiency syndrome is 'adaptation taking the name of maladjustment' (1991, p. 29). Furthermore, communication deficiency syndrome 'sometimes bursts out in a flash in the original form of maladjustment, for example in the Miyazaki incident [the molester and murderer of children discussed above as "M"]'. Even when it does not lead to this type of incident, it will become, for the surrounding people, a permanent trouble such as paranoia and *otaku*¹⁵ (p. 29). If we follow Nakajima's argument, actual murderers and 'otaku' are problems on the same level. In addition, Nakajima asserts that 'otaku' are 'trouble'. This assertion is made possible by a line of sight that places murderers alongside 'otaku', rather than alongside 'communication deficiency syndrome'. Nakajima (1991, p. 52) clearly sees 'otaku' as a problem, but it does not lie with 'communication deficiency syndrome':

The population that could not find their place of belonging in the actual world and were forced out of it obtain a fictional space where they could infinitely appropriate and discover a territory where they would be allowed to be themselves. The selection and appropriation by the founding *otaku*, who are mania of manga and anime, are a number of works that contain elements that are easy to communalize in their fantasy, which is the typical process by which they derive their common fantasy.

According to Nakajima's interpretation, 'otaku' establish their place of belonging by (fantasizing that they are) appropriating a fictional space and sharing this behaviour. Nakajima characterizes 'otaku' as beings who are 'forced out' from reality and whose place of existence is fiction. For Nakajima, like many of those already discussed, 'otaku' is also a personality problem: 'Whatever they are, they basically have the type of personality that symbolically creates "a relationship more important than human relationships" between themselves and non-human things, matter, media and their creations. They prioritize this relationship and regard it as more important than the society established between human beings' (1991, p. 172). 'The problem is whether these people will mature' (1991, p. 265).

What is distinctive for Nakajima is firstly that 'otaku' retreat from reality and seek their place of belonging in the sharing of fiction. The phrase 'relationships more important than human relationships' is another way of stating this. Secondly, this marks a personality problem. Thirdly, these special characteristics are evidence of immaturity, where maturity is desirable. In other words, 'otaku' should quit being 'otaku'. However, as I have repeated a number of times, fiction and reality only attain 'reality' when we attribute meaning to them. Being reality does not mean that something is real. We attribute the meaning called 'reality'. It is this sense-making that allows us to feel the real.

Nakajima (1991, pp. 91–2) severely criticizes male 'otaku', but adds a qualification when using 'otaku' to address female 'otaku' (whom she regards as equivalent to women with an interest in '*yaoi*')

These female mania (they correspond to 'female *otaku*', but since I am unsure if it is fine to address them as such, I will vaguely call them mania) are extremely strict about the rules for interacting with one another. They care about these rules of interaction much more than normal girls. For them, friends are everything in the world, which makes them the extreme opposite of male *otaku* who immerse themselves in a world that exists only between themselves and machines or works.

The reason for Nakajima's qualification is evident: if the female mania interested in '*yaoi*' correspond to 'otaku', then Nakajima (who wrote many stories about male–male romance) is herself a pioneer of the culture that interests 'otaku'. When Nakajima was writing her book, 'otaku' were usually the targets of bashing. While Nakajima herself was probably not directly exposed to the bashing as an 'otaku', she attempts to position herself as not belonging to the category of 'otaku'. In defining men as 'otaku' and adding a qualification for women, she places herself outside the category of 'otaku' by using sex as an index.

Nakajima says that everyone has 'communication deficiency syndrome', but among all of these people 'otaku' are especially 'troubled'. Hence, female mania who are into *yaoi* are not 'otaku', because this culture is maintained by women that she does not call 'otaku'. In stating this, she is arguing that she does not belong to the category of 'otaku'. Accordingly, 'communication deficiency syndrome' manifests itself among male 'otaku'. By stating that female 'otaku' care about their friends, Nakajima is trying to argue that female 'otaku' are less related to 'communication deficiency syndrome', or are not 'trouble' the same way that men are. Because she associates 'otaku' with a fixed personality, she had to create the category of 'communication deficiency syndrome'. 'Communication deficiency syndrome' is a discourse produced by Nakajima to separate herself from the category of 'otaku'. This discourse demonstrates that she was also ensnared by a viewpoint that comprehends 'otaku' as a personality, which was spread through standardized images.

Contradiction in the category of 'otaku'

Thus far, among theories on 'otaku', I have mainly looked at those with the central argument that 'otaku' are retreating from communication and reality. On the other hand, there are glimmers of a perception that 'otaku' are 'specialists in a certain culture'. This comes through much more strongly in the work of Okada Toshio, who interprets 'otaku' as specialists. Okada's discourse goes back to the reason the nomenclature of 'otaku' was adopted. The etymology of 'otaku' (it does not matter if this is an actual fact) is that this word was used as a second-person pronoun:

The accepted opinion for the time being in the *otaku* industry is that the rich kids who graduated from Keio University were the first to use the term '*otaku*'. They were ardent science fiction fans and a number of them . . . produced the number one anime popular with *otaku*, *Super Dimension Fortress Macross* [1982–3]. In 1982, they were indeed the total *otaku*, a source of inspiration. Since they called

one another *otaku* in front of fans at science fiction conventions, it is impossible that other *otaku* did not imitate them. For *otaku*, who have many opportunities to speak with people that they meet for the first time out of the necessity to exchange information, the term ‘otaku’¹⁶ is convenient, as it is a light form of address.

Okada, 1996, pp. 8–9

In addition, the Keio University group used the second-person pronoun ‘otaku’ for characters in anime. In this way, ‘otaku’ as a second-person pronoun became widespread. However, when ‘even the novice fans who came to the Comic Market’ began to call one another ‘otaku,’ science fiction fans stopped calling one another “*otaku*” (Okada, 1996, p. 9). According to Okada, this was around 1982. Okada introduces a unique distinction to ‘otaku,’ namely ‘the rich kids who graduated from Keio University’ and ‘novice fans who came to the Comic Market.’ To state his conclusion in advance, Okada defines the former group as *otaku*, but not the latter.

Okada’s theory on ‘otaku’ can be summarized as ‘the three eyes of otaku.’ Concretely, the three are ‘the eye of *iki*,’ ‘the eye of *takumi*’ and ‘the eye of *tsū*.’ The ‘eye of *iki*’ is the ‘unique viewpoint that discovers the beauty in works, and the viewpoint that watches over and enjoys the growth of authors’ (1996, p. 80). The ‘eye of *takumi*’ is ‘the engineer’s eye that dissects works that are created by human hands, and identifies the techniques, production processes and systems’ (p. 128). Lastly, the ‘eye of *tsū*’ is ‘the journalistic viewpoint, the disposition of the curious onlookers’ who discover, read and enjoy the ‘human drama’ in every genre; ‘it does not refer merely to the experts on circumstances in the industry, but to the viewpoint of the “dilettante” who displays understanding of the traditions and formalities of well-established stores and guides beginners into a deep world’ (p. 177). Okada provides concrete examples to explain the three viewpoints. For example, he demonstrates how the ‘eye of *iki*’ is used to read the visual world of the movie *Bladerunner* (1982) and the timetables of Hollywood movies. He uses the ‘eye of *takumi*’ to explain the opening sequence to *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979). Using the ‘eye of *tsū*,’ he traces the characteristics of the rise and decline of weekly magazines for boys’ manga.

When Okada speaks about ‘otaku,’ he takes a position that strictly differentiates ‘splendid *otaku*’ (1996, p. 227) from those ‘otaku’ who are not. For Okada, the problem does not lie with ‘otaku’ and ‘non-otaku,’ but rather internal divisions among ‘otaku.’ According to Okada, ‘splendid *otaku*’ are as follows (pp. 227–8):

The splendid *otaku* has perfectly acquired *otaku* knowledge to appreciate works properly. Of course, for the creators who catch his attention, he never hesitates to spend money. On the other hand, he will harshly evaluate those works and creators that cut corners. These actions are not meant for him alone, but also in the interest of cultivating creators, and ultimately contributing to *otaku* culture as a whole. *Otaku* understand this point.

Okada attempted to verbalize the behaviours of ‘splendid *otaku*.’ However, it should be remembered that this is also another theory on ‘otaku,’ which should not be conflated with ‘actual otaku.’

Okada does not question issues of identity and relationships with society, which, as we have seen, are a major point of contention in theories on 'otaku'. This is the special feature of Okada's theory on 'otaku'. The interiority of 'otaku' touched on by Okada is an issue of whether or not he is speaking about 'splendid *otaku*'. However, in the perception of the general public, what Okada calls 'splendid *otaku*' appear as the same 'otaku' who visit the Comic Market. Okada continues to differentiate 'novice fans' from 'splendid *otaku*', launch an enterprise that commodifies the culture loved by 'otaku', and enjoy success. The possibility of circulating this type of 'otaku' discourse might be attributed to the fact that it had been seven years since the serial kidnapping and murders of young girls, which meant that 'otaku' bashing had abated. However, Okada is not so different from the authors previously discussed as all of them posit 'otaku' as a uniform personality or figure, regardless of whether they speak about it in a negative or positive way.

Theories of 'otaku'-style consumer society

The following theories on 'otaku' focus not on the interiority of 'otaku', such as personality and identity, but rather on behaviours. In this section, I will take up two theories on 'otaku' that attend to forms of consumption, which also figure in Miyadai's theory on 'otaku'. Miyadai defines as the motivation for consumption the choice of 'narrative' for the purpose of communication, which accompanies the consumption. However, aspects that could not be explained by Miyadai's theory came to be seen in consumer practices. As a result, there emerged attempts to understand contemporary modes of consumption distinctive to 'otaku'. At this point, 'otaku' are no longer discussed as unique beings. Rather, the consumption behaviour of 'otaku' is the focus, and 'otaku' consumption is one form of adaptation in an advanced consumer society.

Narrative consumption

Ōtsuka Eiji (2001) argues that everyone has the desire to narrate, but it is extremely difficult for ordinary people to tell a story without any material. People fulfil their desire to narrate by collecting narrative fragments that are already prepared (small narratives) and integrating them into a grand narrative that they access through consumption. The prime example is *Bikkuriman* stickers, which were hugely popular with children. *Bikkuriman* stickers are merely premiums given away with *Bikkuriman* chocolates, but children bought *Bikkuriman* chocolate in large numbers not to eat the chocolate so much as to obtain the stickers. What is consumed is neither the chocolate nor the premium stickers, but rather the narrative. On the front of *Bikkuriman* stickers, there is an illustration of a character and its name, while the back of the sticker contains information relating to the character and a simple text suggesting relationships with other characters featured on other stickers. Children bought *Bikkuriman* chocolates to gain access to the 'grand narrative', which is a collection of the 'small narratives' provided on the backs of stickers. The greater the amount of information, or the greater the number of 'small narratives' collected, the greater the possibility of approaching the complete 'grand narrative'. In the case of *Bikkuriman*, the method of accessing 'small

narratives' is to obtain the stickers, or to purchase *Bikkuriman* chocolate that comes with the premium of the stickers.

While the chocolates and stickers are ostensibly consumed, the actual object of consumption is the narrative concealed by these objects. In this way, Ōtsuka analysed the success of *Bikkuriman* chocolates, which reveals a common form of consumption he calls 'narrative consumption'. Ōtsuka (2001, p. 29) summarizes the distinctive features of narrative consumption as follows:

1. The direct or ostensible object of consumption is not 'narrative software', but objects or services.
2. These objects or services are either ordered through a 'narrative' or given a direction to be ordered.
3. Consumers, through their consumption behaviors, create, experience or perform 'narratives'.

In addition to *Bikkuriman* stickers, Ōtsuka lists a number of other commodities as examples of narrative consumption. One of these is the toy 'Silvanian Families', which are consumed to express the daily life of anthropomorphic animals by combining them with props. Anime fans are often more enthusiastic about the settings underlying anime and the creation of the narrative's timeline than the content of the anime itself. That, or they participate in activities that are now called 'derivative production'. This means that television anime is consumed not as an episode of television programming, but rather as access to a 'grand narrative', or even the 'little narratives' used to tell a story. Ōtsuka argues that narrative consumption, as seen from the success of *Bikkuriman* chocolate, is a form of consumption not limited to 'otaku' but widely undertaken by ordinary people. 'Otaku' are not exceptional.

Database consumption

What do people consume when the 'grand narratives' that Ōtsuka discusses are lost? Azuma Hiroki's response is a form of consumption where consumers each read meaning into a chain of things that have become equal in value, not a grand narrative that is already provided. Azuma's argument proposes that our society has reached this stage, as evidenced in the consumer behaviour of 'otaku'. Azuma characterizes contemporary society as a state of 'disorder of grand narratives' (Azuma, 2001, p. 45). Here, the 'disorder of grand narratives' refers to the situation where people cannot 'grasp well the magnitude of "society" supported by traditions and "god"' (2001, p. 45). Azuma explains that 'otaku' consumption is geared towards compensating for this 'disorder of grand narratives'. 'Otaku' consumption is described in the following way: 'A work is no longer evaluated by itself, but rather assessed by the quality of the database that underlies it. Since this database takes on different expressions depending on user readings, consumers, once they acquire the "settings", can produce any number of derivative works that are different from the original work' (p. 53). Derivative works are 'works that reduce the settings of the original work into the database and are presented as simulacra that are arbitrarily extracted from that database' (p. 119). Derivative works

are not original works, but both are of equal value. 'Settings' exist in the deeper layer of the original. If the narrative that is the original work can be extracted from the settings, then secondary works can also be made.

Azuma grasps this phenomenon as a two-layer structure. The two-layer structure is formed from a surface level and a deep level. The surface level contains the simulacra called works (original or derivative works). The database, which is the settings that serve as the basis for reading various simulacra, exists at the deeper level. According to Azuma, since the 1990s, what is being consumed is the database: 'A different type of consumption has emerged, where illustrations and settings, which are fragments, are consumed individually and unrelated to the narrative of the original work. Consumers arbitrarily intensify their empathy towards these fragments. This new consumption behavior is called "character *moe*" by *otaku* themselves' (p. 58). 'A "character" is a type of output that is combined from elements that are already registered and generated according to the program (sales strategy) of each work, rather than the specific individuality of the author. Actually, *otaku* are fully aware of this situation' (2001, p. 67).

A brief explanation is necessary for the concept of '*moe*'. 'Elements that are already registered' are read as 'settings', which is equivalent to 'database', while 'output' is read as a 'work', which is equivalent to 'character'. '*Moe*' is the root behaviour, or desire, when characters without narratives are individually consumed according to the unrestricted devotion of the consumers. The object of '*moe*' is not restricted to completed characters. *Moe* is sometimes directed towards one of the parts that constitute a character. Conversely, it is possible to feel *moe* towards a character because it has a specific part. Azuma calls the parts that evoke '*moe*' the '*moe* elements'.

In the two-dimensional world of anime and games, characters with appearances that could not possibly exist in reality are often favoured. In the case where one loves a character that has cat ears attached to a human head, it is called 'cat ears *moe*'. In the case where affection wells up when one sees a girl character wearing spectacles, it is 'bestaced girl *moe*'. In the case where one feels *moe* towards characters that wear white, it is known as 'white garment *moe*'. If one feels *moe* towards a single character, one might become for example 'Ayanami *moe*'.¹⁷ With the exception of concrete characters' names, the word placed in front of the term '*moe*' is what Azuma calls '*moe* elements'. What is consumed is the database of '*moe*' and the character that is the simulacra generated through the combination of '*moe* elements'. Azuma calls this 'database consumption', which has become prominent among '*otaku*'. However, according to Azuma, the exposure to the two-layer structure of database and simulacra and the 'disorder of grand narratives' is not unique to '*otaku*'. Everyone living in contemporary society is in the same situation. Azuma's theory on '*otaku*' posits that under this circumstance, '*otaku*' are even more self-conscious of what they consume and what they desire.

Theories on otaku as fashion

In the newest theories on '*otaku*', the focus is on '*otaku-ish*' culture. Here, I would like to focus on two major movements: the dissemination of '*otaku*' culture and the appraisal of that dissemination.

Rise and fall of otaku culture in Akihabara

Akihabara is known as the Electric Town.¹⁸ However, Akihabara in 2005 is different from the past:

From the end of 1990s to these past few years, Akihabara has metamorphosed into a center for *otaku* hobbies such as manga fanzines and figurines, even its scenery has been continuously repainted . . . Right outside JR Akihabara Station, signboards of manga specialty shops featuring smiling girl characters drawn in the style of anime are everywhere. If you walk along Chūō Street, the main thoroughfare, you will find posters and life-sized point-of-purchase advertisements for pornographic games, which also feature girl characters drawn in the style of anime, and these posters and advertisements are displayed without reservation.

Morikawa, 2003, p. 26

Morikawa Ka'ichirō explains Akihabara as a rare example of how a new cultural sphere based on hobbies can impact the transformation of the city.

What is behind the transformation of Akihabara? Morikawa's concern lies with 'the difference between [the wearing of] fashionable clothing and the pressure from the mass media concerning *otaku* hobbies' and whether 'many large corporations that are the sponsors of mass media are making a large profit from *otaku*' (2003, pp. 34–5). The pressure from mass media that makes people wear fashionable clothing diverges from *otaku* hobbies. The former is greater as profits tend to be anticipated. Although the scale of the otaku market has expanded, huge corporations, which are the sponsors of mass media, have yet to reap enormous profits from commodities targeting *otaku*. According to Morikawa, stores in Akihabara used to sell home appliances until the 1980s, but in the early 1990s, when competition arose with the rise of suburban box stores, Akihabara began to specialize in personal computers. Likewise, the clientele of Akihabara stores shifted to 'people who are extremely passionate about personal computers and have a biased personality' (2003, p. 44). These customers not only bought personal computers, but also garage kits. As stores targeting them gathered, Akihabara transformed into an 'otaku' town. A key turning point was 1997: 'The concentration of garage kit specialty shops is merely one part of the transformation of Akihabara. Specialty shops dealing with various commodities associated with manga, anime and games – including fanzines, costume play, trading cards, dolls and character goods – have gathered and increased. This trend continues even into the 2000s' (2003, p. 47). According to Morikawa, 'the sharing of hobbies and tastes, as well as sexual fantasies about characters, forms the core' (p. 48) of the concentration of specialty shops in Akihabara. To put it differently, this is a situation where '*moe*', which I previously touched on in Azuma's theory on 'otaku', is expanding onto the streets of Akihabara. For Morikawa, 'Akihabara's metamorphosis into an *otaku* town is a natural occurrence preceded by demand and unmediated by huge corporations' (p. 69). He sees this metamorphosis of 'the city as an extension of private space' (p. 73).

At the Ninth Biennial International Architecture Exhibition in 2004, 'otaku' was chosen as the theme of Japan's pavilion, which Morikawa oversaw. One of the displays

was a miniature representation of the private rooms of 'otaku'. The rooms took on various forms according to different hobbies. However, as a point of commonality, they were all covered completely by posters with girl characters illustrated in the style of anime and crowded with garage kits and figurines. The differences in hobbies manifest in the characters drawn on the posters and turned into figurines. The displays of 'otaku' hobbies that flood the street of Akihabara are in a sense similar to the private rooms of 'otaku'. Morikawa argues that if the hobbies 'otaku' take up indicate their 'individuality', then Akihabara has acquired a new personality in accordance with these hobbies. That is to say, 'otaku' hobbies have moved out from private rooms and are expanding into the streets. Akihabara is now attracting attention not as the Electric Town, but rather the 'otaku town'. Major travel agencies cannot ignore this phenomenon. Even the Japan Tourism Board, which is known for its *Rurubu* series of travel guidebooks, published in February 2005 *Moe Rurubu Tokyo Guide: The Strongest in History! Useful Moe Style Guidebook*.

Appearance of otaku-style pop artists

Murakami Takashi is a contemporary artist whose discourse on 'otaku' is expressed through his works and activities rather than in language. Murakami produces many works that intentionally adopt 'otaku-ish' design. For example, his work *Hiropon chan* takes the shape of 'a girl with huge breasts who is doing jump rope with the milk that bursts forth from her nipples' (Okada, 1996, p. 124). Concerning this work, Murakami sought the opinion of Okada Toshio, an 'otaku' expert, who responded 'this is ugly' (1996, p. 124). From Okada's perspective, even if Murakami's work has adopted the design favoured by 'otaku', such as cute girl characters and huge breasts, it 'does not "grasp the context" of anime characters' (1996, p. 124). Hence, irrespective of the merits and demerits of its shape, Okada concluded that *Hiropon chan* is 'ugly'. Others have levelled similar criticisms against Murakami's works. According to Azuma's summary, this is due to Murakami 'lacking the ability to grasp the various special characteristics that make *otaku*-type works "*otaku*-ish", i.e., the *moe* elements' (Azuma, 2001, p. 92). In Azuma's view, while Murakami is able to take on 'otaku-ish' design into his works, he cannot access the 'database' and operate it in a way similar to 'otaku'. According to Okada and Azuma, Murakami's work is unrelated to 'otaku' culture. However, what is the reason that Okada and Azuma, who are in the position to appraise 'otaku' culture, refer to the works of Murakami in the first place? The appraisal of Murakami by Okada and Azuma is a discourse that relatively raises the value of 'otaku' culture by rendering Murakami as someone who cannot understand it and placing his works below it.

I would like to attend to the fact that Murakami's works have received high appraisal overseas. Consider the price for acquiring Murakami's works, while leaving aside the question of whether the value of art works can be measured by the amount of money that people pay for it. For example, one of Murakami's works, *Miss Ko*, was 'auctioned at Christie's for \$500,000' (Murakami, 2005, p. 277). The photograph of an artist who costumed as the character in this sold for over 1 million yen. Furthermore, 'the handbags with multicolored LV logos and cherry blossom patterns ... which were

brought to fruition on a large scale through the collaboration with Louis Vuitton brought about a profit of \$300 million for the company' (Murakami, 2005, p. 277). The example of Louis Vuitton does not directly deploy 'otaku-ish' design. However, when Murakami's takes on 'otaku-ish' design, he makes it an object of artistic appraisal and a commodity.

Why is Murakami fixated on 'otaku-ish' design? The Japan Society hosted the exhibition *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* in 2005. The exhibition, revolving around Murakami's works, 'searches for postwar Japanese culture through technologies and popular media by focusing on the youth subculture "otaku" create, and considers the ways this has influenced the cutting edge of Japanese art from the 1990s until now' (Murakami, 2005, p. iv). A section touching on Murakami's view on 'otaku' culture is published in the catalogue of the *Little Boy* exhibition:

The *otaku* culture that Murakami sees is a world of hyperbolic fantasy and also a world that is a confluence of precise techniques such as attention to detail, apocalyptic images, information and image technologies, commerce and avant-garde art. . . . Murakami asserts in this exhibition that the irresolvable contradictions in Japan's postwar history have become the explosive context for Japan's popular culture and the subculture that surrounds *otaku*.

Murakami, 2005, p. iii

Murakami's attempt has been very successful overseas. In addition, as seen from the reproduction of Morikawa's contribution to the Ninth Biennial International Architecture Exhibition in both Murakami's *Little Boy* catalogue and in Japanese museums, Murakami's attempt might also be appraised in Japan. What is meant by 'otaku-ish' design is left up to the audience. Murakami sees in 'otaku-ish' design the meeting of various forms of avant-garde and Japanese postwar popular culture and subculture. Okada and Azuma are skeptical about whether Murakami's works can be called 'otaku' culture, but through Murakami, 'otaku' culture is receiving high appraisal overseas as a genre of pop art.

In lieu of a conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at a number of authors' theories on 'otaku' and highlighted differences and changes over time. In the early stage, theories on 'otaku' discussed the personality or character of 'otaku'. The discussion then shifted to modes of consumption seen among 'otaku'. Currently, the objects made by 'otaku' are discussed, whether in terms of stores selling 'otaku' goods in Akihabara or the 'otaku-ish' design of Murakami Takashi. The changes in theories on 'otaku' is the process in which 'otaku' culture is perceived as a subculture representing contemporary Japan. Every subculture emerges as something that is not well understood or generally accepted, but then the subculture expands. Every subculture treads the path of either becoming established or coming to an end as a momentary fad. In early theories on 'otaku', the subculture of *shinjinrui* was often compared to that of the 'otaku', but *shinjinrui* is now an

obsolete word, while 'otaku' transcends generations. When a subculture becomes generally recognized, it can follow two paths: to be forgotten or to transform from subculture to mainstream culture. Currently, part of 'otaku' culture is still appraised as a subculture, but Murakami's works with their 'otaku-ish' design are highly appraised in the world of contemporary art.

On the other hand, what characterizes 'otaku' culture is its obscurity.¹⁹ When 'otaku' culture, which is founded on obscurity, loses that obscurity, can it remain as 'otaku' culture? If 'otaku' culture is defined by its obscurity, it can no longer remain as such at the moment it becomes popular as 'culture'. Currently, discourses on 'otaku' revolves around 'otaku' culture, which bears this dilemma. It is a task from now on to follow the trajectory of this dilemma.

Notes

1. Translator's note (TN): this is a translation of Aida Miho (2005), 'Otaku o meguru gensetsu no kōsei: 1983 nen – 2005 nen sabukaruchā shi', *Hiroshima Shūdai Ronshū*, 46 (1), pp. 17–58. The primary translator for this chapter is Thiam Huat Kam.
2. Nakamori's text was published in the June 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, a monthly minor lolicon manga magazine. It was titled "Otaku" Research: The City is Full of "Otaku" ('*Otaku no kenkyū I: Machi ni wa 'otaku' ga ippai*'). TN: see Yamanaka, this volume.
3. On the Comic Market, see Aida (2005).
4. 'Maikon' is an abbreviation for 'micro-computer'. At present, in 2005, computers meant for personal use have become ubiquitous and are called '*pasokon*', an abbreviation for 'personal computers'. In 1983, the computer was not a necessity and could not be handled without specialized knowledge. Hence, the act of gathering around 'maikon' was regarded as unique at the time.
5. Reports on the arrest of the suspect for the serial kidnapping and murders of young girls was circulated by the mass media. TN: see Kamm, this volume.
6. Komatsu Sakyō is a science fiction author. His representative works include *Japan Sinks* (1973).
7. These objections and doubts also manifest in the difficult task of drawing a line between 'otaku' and 'non-otaku'.
8. TN: Rise Corporation is a marketing research company.
9. TN: Aida uses 'real' (*riaru*) to refer to '*genjitsu*', which is often translated as reality. She uses '*riariti*' for the perception of realness founded on the attribution of meanings. In this translation, reality indicates '*genjitsu*' and 'reality' '*riariti*'. For another discussion concerning the notion of 'reality' in relation to 'otaku', see Kam, T.H. (2013), 'The Common Sense that Makes the "Otaku": Rules for Consuming Popular Culture in Contemporary Japan', *Japan Forum*, 25 (2), pp. 151–73.
10. TN: *Ippai no kakesoba* is a heart-wrenching story that became a fad in 1989.
11. For the sections I cite in this chapter, see Furuhashi (1989) and Nashimoto (1989).
12. TN: *gakkōka* in Japanese. This term is derived from Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1971), which argues that the institutionalization of education is leading to the institutionalization of society.
13. TN: *mukku* in Japanese. A publication on a single topic that is somewhere between a book and a magazine.

14. Refer to *Comiket Press 21* (edited by Comic Market Preparation Committee), p. 14. TN: *Comiket Press* is a publication created and circulated by the organizers of the Comic Market.
15. TN: in the quotes from Nakajima Azusa, 'otaku' is written with 'o' in *hiragana* and 'taku' in *katakana*. Hence, in following with the conventions of this edited volume, 'otaku' in these quoted passages is rendered as 'otaku'.
16. TN: in this instance, 'o' is written in *hiragana* and 'taku' with the Japanese *kanji* for 'house'. Okada refers here to 'otaku' as a second-person pronoun.
17. TN: Ayanami refers to the character Ayanami Rei in the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–6).
18. TN: in the postwar period, the Akihabara area of Tokyo has been known for its high concentration of stores specializing in home appliances, electronics and computers. In the 1990s, stores selling manga and anime merchandise became more prominent, which earned the area a reputation as the 'Mecca of Otaku'. For more on Akihabara, see Kikuchi and Freedman, this volume.
19. For example, there are two illustrators for *Moe Rurubu Tokyo Guide*, Misakura Nankotsu and Kazakami Shun. These names are probably not well known by most people, but 'otaku' would recognize Misakura and Kazakami for their work on male-oriented fanzines and games. If the tastes of the purchasers of this magazine book do not coincide with the disposition of the illustrators, then sales will drop, even if the content is excellent. It is for this reason that illustrators who are involved in 'otaku' culture, rather than widely known manga artists, are employed for *Moe Rurubu*.

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Train Man and the Gender Politics of Japanese 'Otaku' Culture: The Rise of New Media, Nerd Heroes and Consumer Communities¹

Alisa Freedman

Introduction

Train Man (*Densha otoko*) is one of the most significant recent Japanese popular culture phenomena and represents the interrelationship between the development of new media, marketing trends and notions of masculinity. A sentimental love story about an awkward nerd and a fashionable working woman based on supposedly actual events, *Train Man* was collectively written through anonymous posts on the influential 2channel internet forum from March to May 2004 and centres on the couple and the online community that encouraged them. 'Train Man', as the protagonist is called, and most of his supporters, are 'otaku', a term that brings to mind avid fans with 'passionate, single-minded intensity' for their 'object[s] of obsession' (Baker, 2004). In *Train Man*, *otaku* are portrayed as spending time and money to obtain knowledge about and own things that provide the potential for participation in global networks that run parallel to but often do not oppose local groups of family, school and work, which have formed the backbone of Japanese society. This tale of life-altering love has been sold as an internet book (professionally published paper edition of a story created and first made available online), a film, a serialized television drama, four manga series, a stage play and even an adult video. Because of the commercial appeal of *Train Man*'s successful romantic relationship, corporate interests and the mass media have promoted the protagonist as representing a new sexualized identity and a harbinger of consumer fads, while continuing to describe the existence of *otaku* fan cultures as a symptom of Japanese socioeconomic problems.

In this chapter, I argue that, along with changing the form of books and furthering cross-media promotion, the protagonist of *Train Man* has encouraged more discussions about social expectations for Japanese men in the mass media during a time of falling marriage and birthrates than any other real personage or fictional character. Media discourses about *Train Man* reached a height in 2005 and 2006, when global fandoms of Japanese *otaku* culture grew and fertility rates were declared a national problem. In articles in news magazines devoted to issues of marriage and family and the concurrent

spate of books about heterosexual relationships, Train Man has been described as a potential marriage partner for career women, a demographic blamed for marrying late. At the same time, he has been promoted as an ideal consumer – loyal to brands and willing to spend money on self-improvement. Although exposing contradictions inherent in gender norms promoted by state institutions and broadening conceptions of masculinity in the popular imagination, most journalistic accounts and marketing campaigns centring on Train Man recast patriarchal notions of love and family for the twenty-first-century internet generation. In mass media discussions about Train Man, exemplified by those in weekly news magazines targeting a middle-class educated readership, the kind of *otaku* culture represented by the protagonist has been mobilized to advocate the conservative notion that individual happiness is most easily achieved by conforming to so-called mainstream society. Reflexively, *otaku* such as Train Man have been ascribed with the potential to change the society to which they once conformed. In striking contrast, female *otaku* have often been seen in a different light. Crimes against both male and female *otaku*, especially in Tokyo's Akihabara district, are extreme examples revealing that Train Man and his fan community might not be new ideals accepted by the entire Japanese population. Members of *otaku* communities have also voiced dissent.

In this chapter, I first explore how the male character of Train Man has shaped Japanese media and invigorated the publishing industry. I then raise questions about the social, economic and ideological impact of the image of masculinity that the story conveys and how it has shaped recent discussions about women, motherhood and labour, in addition to men and marriage. To provide a more composite and perhaps less mediated examination of Train Man, I have researched untraditional academic sources, including internet forums, websites, advertising campaigns and blogs, along with widely circulating books and magazines issued by commercial presses. By analysing a limited sample of the almost countless online fan sites devoted to *otaku* culture, I attempt to understand the mixed reactions of members of the community Train Man is said to symbolize to the incorporation of the story into dominant heteronormative state discourses.²

How fans created *Train Man* and engendered media trends

Train Man was made possible by and exemplifies the cultural influence of the expansive 2channel internet forum. Founded in 1999 by the then twenty-three-year-old Nishimura Hiroyuki, 2channel receives more than 500 million page views a month (Katayama, 2008a). All 2channel users remain anonymous or are addressed by nicknames, enabling them to chat about subjects that might be taboo in face-to-face conversations. To keep topics current and save bandwidth, threads are limited to 1,000 posts, but users have the power to continue discussions by adding threads. Posts on the BBS (internet Bulletin Board System) cannot be deleted. Along with text messages, 2channel subscribers post ASCII artwork, often elaborate pictures made out of letters, punctuation marks and other printable characters.

Train Man's story began after a shy twenty-two-year old, given the handle 'Train Man' on the second day of the discussion, protected a woman from a drunk on a

Tokyo train.³ Although such harassment is not uncommon on Tokyo trains, help from a stranger is, and the woman sent Train Man expensive Hermes brand teacups to express her gratitude. While the choice of Hermes cups is unusual, gift-giving is an accepted way of showing appreciation in Japan. In a post that was part of a larger forum on computer games on a board for 'doku otoko', the title of which is a pun for men who are both 'single' (*doku*) and regard themselves to be as unattractive as 'poison' (also pronounced 'doku'), Train Man, who had never had a girlfriend, asked for advice on how to invite the woman, affectionately nicknamed 'Hermes,' on a date. From the start, Train Man appeared as an exceptionally sensitive and caring person, with whom many 2channel subscribers felt a sense of empathy and desire to help. The story developed as the online community, mostly men, offered and debated suggestions on how Train Man could make Hermes fall in love with him, and as Train Man reported the events of his new relationship and feelings about how his life was changing. The story increasingly attracted new writers and readers and spread beyond the community of *doku otoko*.

In 2004, the 57-day online conversation that included a total of 29,862 posts was edited into a six-chapter story of 1,919 posts and made available on a free website (Andō, 2005, p. 5).⁴ Fans rendered the website into other world languages, such as the 2006 English translation by 'Project Densha.' *Train Man* reached a global audience and was particularly popular in other parts of Asia and with Japanese communities in Europe and the United States.⁵ Each chapter of the online novel detailed a separate 'mission' that Train Man needed to complete in order to further his romance, and included such tasks as inviting Hermes to dinner and holding her hand. The resulting narrative of boy meets girl – and boy tries to take control of the relationship – focused as much on Train Man as it did the fan community that supported him.

Train Man and his supporters are self-identified 'otaku', a derogatory term coined in discussions of antisocial behaviour in the first half of the 1980s and made notorious by serial killer Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989.⁶ Especially from the early 1990s, *otaku* became a form of address among like-minded fans, as evident in the 1991 mockumentary *Otaku no Video*. Although applied to other fandoms, the term is now mostly used both playfully and pejoratively to denote ardent collectors of manga, anime and computer technologies. Because of the global popularity of these forms of popular culture, *otaku* has had more positive connotations abroad than in Japan. *Otaku* implies the constant desire to learn more about a hobby, either for profit or for pleasure, and the sense of pride in being able to trade in knowledge of things that are often cutting edge. Some of the world's richest and most influential men have been technology *otaku*, including Microsoft's Bill Gates and 2channel's administrator Nishimura Hiroyuki, showing the power and profitability of this form of geek culture.

Especially in discussions among fans, *otaku* are divided into subgroups. Train Man represents the 'Akiba-kei *otaku*', or the predominantly male denizens of Tokyo's Akihabara electronics district, a subculture that is not too far removed from mainstream urban society. In *Train Man*, Akiba-kei *otaku* are portrayed as manifesting both conspicuous consumption and production, giving rise to new trends, vocabularies and behaviours through the shared desire for brands and commodities. Members of

Akiba-kei internet forums, interviewees in media reports and bloggers have generally expressed a mix of shame and pride in belonging to these communities – feelings articulated by Train Man. Through an online conversation that often reads as a guide to fashion and dating in Tokyo, Train Man gained confidence, especially as he changed his clothing and hairstyle. Train Man hid, but did not denounce, his *otaku* identity. In a pivotal point in their relationship, Train Man uses his knowledge of computers to impress Hermes, whose nickname also shows an association with consumer culture.

On 9 May 2004, Train Man posted on 2channel that he had confessed his love for Hermes, and, according to the edited story, the online community celebrated. Love confessions are a stock part of Japanese fiction and film, but Train Man unconventionally discussed his fears and feelings with other characters, rather than just making the reader privy to these private thoughts. In the last posts included in the story, the 2channel subscribers tell Train Man that he has successfully graduated from his lessons on how to be an ideal romantic partner and no longer needs the advice of the *otaku* community, who have, in turn, learned from his example. His task now is to advance into ‘mainstream’ society, remembering the people who helped him get motivated and mobilize to change, but leaving his former life behind. The participants in the online discussion gave Train Man a send-off and said farewell, implying that, although a hero, he was no longer one of them. According to *Train Man* websites and blogs, it is rumoured that the couple are still together, although their real identities remain unknown.

Notably, notions of mobility are integral to Train Man’s identity formation. He had to leave one community to enter another. Ironically, Train Man’s transformation was encouraged by many 2channel subscribers, who manifest their withdrawal from society through spatial retreat, feeling more comfortable interacting with people online rather than face-to-face. In some versions of the story, a few of Train Man’s supporters were *hikikomori*, or young men who enclose themselves in their homes and refuse to participate in the world outside. While perpetuating stereotypes of women in general and of subcultures of men, Train Man has influenced the development of a new kind of romantic male hero in Japanese literature and visual media: the compassionate, motivated *otaku* with disposable income and leisure time. Train Man marks a departure from common images of the stoic middle-class businessman, a figure who represented twentieth-century Japanese social ideals. Yet to be this *otaku* hero, Train Man needed to move outside his community and prove that he wanted to, and could, conform to notions of male behaviour that have dominated the popular imagination since the postwar period. Thus, the construction of Train Man’s identity is fraught with contradictions.

As news of Train Man and his supporters spread, Japanese publishing companies vied to turn the popular website into a book. On 4 June 2004, Nishimura awarded the publication rights to Gunji Yoko, a thirty-four-year-old editor with the Shinchō publishing company. Gunji had produced five successful books since 1998, but remained a contract rather than lifetime employee. Because of the current Japanese publishing focus on so-called popular rather than more highbrow literature, and in part due to financial losses, especially in sales of monthly periodicals, it has become an industry norm to contract young editors who are familiar with book trends. As

exemplified by Gunji, this change has made it possible for women to work in higher-level positions, but, without much security, they often need to demonstrate that their jobs are necessary. Gunji was able to acquire the project from Nishimura because she proposed designing the book to resemble an online chat, complete with the ASCII artwork that appeared in the 2channel discussion, rather than developing the story into a more conventional novel with elaborate plot lines, character descriptions and eloquent use of language (Nikkei Woman, 2006, p. 62).⁷ For her efforts, Gunji was awarded the honour of the 2006 Nikkei Woman of the Year in the category of 'hit maker'. Additionally, published at a time of proliferation of 2channel user guides and the popularization of ASCII art, *Train Man* heightened the domination of Nishimura's internet empire.⁸

Although the website that originally compiled the story is still available for free and the URL address is even listed in the back of the book, more than 260,000 copies of *Train Man* were sold in the first three weeks after it was released on 22 October 2004, and sales reached 1.5 million by the spring and summer of 2005, when the film and television series aired (Densha otoko o kangaeru tomo no kai, 2005, p. 7; Ashby, 2004).⁹ According to a survey published in the 22 November 2004 issue of the news magazine *AERA*, which has focused in recent years on marriage and family issues, 70 per cent of the customers who purchased *Train Man* during the first three weeks were men and most likely 2channel participants, but, after November 2004, 46 per cent of book buyers were women, a change that was in part due to advertising campaigns and the ways that news of the story spread through television and other media (Suzuki, 2005, pp. 69, 72, 111). In general, most readers were older than those of other novels written in text-message formats, such as the teenage 'American Internet Girls' series by Laura Myracle (2004).

Produced at a time when publishing companies were seeking to revive sales, *Train Man* epitomized a new form of the book and transformed the act of reading. The collective author of the story is listed as Nakano Hitori, a common 2channel phrase meaning 'one among us' (Suzuki, 2005, p. 140). No editor's name is provided. Because the posts are anonymous and the real Train Man and Hermes are unknown, notions of copyright, royalties and press releases changed. If Train Man is real, he should receive part of the copyright, which now belongs to Nishimura. As for the internet book itself, the 364-page print publication is arranged into six missions, all entirely composed of online posts; those by Train Man are shaded in grey; a closing discussion on 16 May 2004, a week after Train Man's confession of love, serves as an epilogue (Nakano, 2004). Very little explanation is given, implying that the target reader is familiar with the story and format. The story is told almost entirely through dialogue and makes the reader feel as though s/he is overhearing a conversation in a crowd. This new narrative form allows the plot to unfold in real time. The book is full of language created by Japanese internet users, resulting in a different appearance on the page and demanding familiarity with 2channel to be fully appreciated.¹⁰ Often focused on the visuality of words and puns, aspects of this language include using homophones for Chinese characters (a technique that is not new and was used for transliteration of Western words into Japanese in the nineteenth century). This is evident even in the author's name, Nakano Hitori. In addition, long vowel sounds are shortened, short ones are

lengthened, similar but incorrect characters are used, and two-word phrases are abbreviated into two syllables, a common way of referring to contemporary buzzwords and brands.

Train Man furthered the intersection between Japanese literature and new media, demonstrating a transformation in ways that internet technology was affecting cultural production. Internet novels in a different format were published before *Train Man*, but were not commercially successful. For example, in 2000, film director Iwai Shunji posted an interactive online website as part of plans for a film about the relationship between a Hong Kong pop star and a Taiwanese teen. Japanese adolescents logged on to talk about problems, including school bullying, in addition to responding to the story about music. Iwai published the posts in the book *Riri shu shu no subete* (*All About Lily Chou Chou*) (Iwai, 2001) in August 2001 and released a poignant but horrifying film by the same title about three months later by the same distributor, Rockwell Eyes. Unlike this and other earlier internet novels, *Train Man* and the books it has inspired lightheartedly impart positive messages and begin with chance encounters.

Although a few disparaging posts and obscene examples of ASCII art appeared on 2channel, they were not included in the *Train Man* website and book.¹¹ According to the calculations by journalist Andō Kenji, only 6.4 per cent of the entire 2channel online conversation was included in the edited website and book, and there were at least four different endings that were less optimistic than the one that ended the published narrative and thereby prevented additional interpretations of the story (Andō, 2005, p. 5). Instead, the internet community appears unified in its sincere desire to help 'one of us.' A note on the last page, presumably by Nakano Hitori, praises Train Man's courage and the 2channel users' sense of community. Beneath is an ASCII-art picture of two Monā cats, the 2channel mascot along with Giko Neko, representing Train Man and Hermes. Hermes remarks that 2channel supporters are all good people, as they walk out an exit door, showing her approval of the kinds of *otaku* portrayed and the role that mobility played in their story (Nakano, 2004, p. 364). Although not included on the website, Train Man posted follow-ups explaining that he and Hermes grew closer after she read the 2channel conversation and that Hermes has 'semi-*otaku*' hobbies, but does not state what they are.

Accordingly, *Train Man* can be read as a prime example of 'pure love' (*jun'ai*) stories, which were proliferating at the time and marketed toward both men and women. Pure love stories have emerged as a distinct genre with its own defining conventions and tropes. In most cases, one or more of the characters falls in love for the first time and the couple needs to overcome obstacles to be together. The stories end or a character dies before the love can become soiled with more mundane aspects of domestic life (Shoji, 2004a; Suzuki, 2005, p. 60). To date, the most popular pure love story has been Katayama Kyoichi's *Sekai no chūshin de, ai o sakebu* (*Crying Out Love, In the Center of the World*), nicknamed '*Seka-chū*'. Published in 2001, *Seka-chū* became the bestselling Japanese book of the twenty-first century in 2004, in part because of the efforts by a Shogakukan publishing company salesman to mobilize the book's fan base and the promotion by such young actresses as Shibasaki Kō, who appeared in the movie version.

In addition to representing changes in the content and form of contemporary Japanese literature, *Train Man* exemplified the new ways stories were marketed. Namely, the phenomenon furthered the emphasis on cross-media promotion that was especially shown to be successful with *Seka-chū*, which was made into a manga, film and serialized television drama in 2004 and a Korean movie in 2005. Four manga versions of *Train Man*, using conventions of both *seinen* (young man) and *shōjo* (for girls) genres were published in 2005; one series was translated almost immediately into English and French. A play was staged in September 2005 on a multimedia set comprised of small interlocking rooms, conveying a sense of the individuals on 2channel who supported Train Man (Tanaka, 2005). Adaptations were timed to maintain the popularity of the trend. In addition, companion volumes, sociological studies and self-help books were published in the same year, marking one of the first times in recent years that popular fiction inspired examination of Japanese social structures and individual psychology. Prime examples are *Otōsan ni mo wakaruru jun'ai manuaru tettei kaiseki* (*A Complete Guide to Pure Love that Even Your Father Can Understand*) by the 'Train Man Friendship Society' and *Arigato! Densha otoko: 50 man nin ga namidashita jun'ai* (*Thank You, Train Man! The Pure Love Story that Made 50,000 People Cry*).

The most successful adaptations of *Train Man* were the June 2005 blockbuster film, shot in twenty-five days under the supervision of television director Murakami Masanori and released around a month later to mixed critical reviews, and the television series, which aired Thursdays at 10.00 p.m. from 7 July to 22 September 2005 on Fuji TV, with special episodes on 6 October 2005 and 23 September 2006. While the book is told entirely from the point of view of Train Man and his supporters, the film and television drama show aspects of Hermes' life and portray her as taking most of the initiative in the budding romance. These changes might have been due to conventions of film and television melodramas, but another possibility was the intention to make *Train Man* more appealing to the target consumer demographic of eighteen- to thirty-four-year-old female viewers. The film and drama had different casts, but the actor who played Train Man in the film made a cameo appearance in the drama and vice versa. The *Train Man* movie relied on the actor's star power, but the male lead Yamada Takayuki (who starred in the *Seka-chū* television drama) was said to be too handsome.¹²

In May 2005, Fuji TV representatives handed out fliers in Akihabara requesting 'real' *otaku* to act as extras in the television drama, which was more successful than the film in terms of character development and parodied the people it celebrated (Akiba Blog, 2005a). The last episode of this extremely popular series was viewed by more than 25.5 per cent of the national television audience (Fukui and Uchiyama, 2005, p. 16). The theme song sequence, a scene from a fictional anime series created for the *Train Man* drama, was made to seem like an existing twenty-six-episode anime series, complete with female voice actresses and merchandise. Following the success of the TV drama, an actual anime was produced under the name *Getsumento heiki mina* (*Moon-Faced Rabbit Weapon Mina*), which aired from January to March 2007 on Fuji TV. The television series ended with a very 'adult' kiss, the kind that is rarely shown in primetime, which was significantly initiated by Hermes.

The film and television series clearly visualized a class message inherent in the story. For example, the man who harassed Hermes on the train appears to be working class, and Hermes and Train Man often carry things with recognizable cultural capital (bags from designers or shops in Akihabara). Both visual forms depicted different kinds of 2channel users, and internet posts influenced the content and visual compositions. In addition to various *otaku*, the film and television drama show hurt and lonely people, including battered women, alienated married couples and hopeless youth, all of whom learn from Train Man's courage. *Otaku* characters are also used to make audiences aware of pressing national issues, such as domestic violence and acute social withdrawal. Through happy endings and stunning visual finales, the film and TV series conveyed the message that people can improve their lives if they try hard enough.

By showing in great detail the efforts made by Train Man and his community and their joy in achieving the goal of a happy romantic relationship, the media employed the commercially successful Japanese formula of what I call '*gambaru*', or 'try your best and you will succeed', films. In *gambaru* narratives, the fallen hero finds confidence by excelling at an unusual hobby or an unlikely feat with the help of a coach and other players. The coach and other players, in turn, learn to love the activity through observing the player's hard work and thereby find hope in other aspects of their own lives. Different from such American 'zero-to-hero' movies as *Karate Kid* and *Rocky*, in Japanese *gambaru* films, the individual learns to be a better member of a group or family, school or workplace. Famous examples include the films *Shall We Dance?*, the tale of a working stiff who finds meaning in middle-class life through the subculture of ballroom dancing, and *Waterboys*, based on the true story of a high-school boys' synchronized swimming team.

In 2005, different publishers created spin-off internet books in the same format as *Train Man* that were also supposedly based on true stories of *otaku* asking for love advice and sharing their relationships on 2channel. This further attests to the profitability of the Train Man phenomenon and the long-accepted Japanese cultural notion that good ideas should be emulated. For example, *Chikan otoko (Molester Man)* (Itano, 2005) began with a post by a nerd obsessed with anime and reptiles who was mistaken for a molester. The collective author's name is given as Itano Sumito, literally 'those who live online', and it was made into a film and manga. The Japanese title of the American film *Napoleon Dynamite* is *Basu otoko (Bus Man)*, which was released on DVD in November 2005 and sometimes marketed in displays near those for *Train Man*.

The gender politics of mainstream *otaku* culture

Train Man fuelled the fascination among mainstream domestic audiences for the social minority group of *otaku*, who had already become part of Japan's global image of 'gross national cool', to borrow a phrase from journalist Douglas McGray (2002), and a new form of superpower through the export of popular culture. This growing interest was exemplified by the feature exhibit at the Ninth Biennial International Architecture Exhibition Japanese Pavilion in 2004, which focused on the ways that *otaku* consumer

culture and communal networks have transformed city space and urban design (Kenzo et al., 2004).¹³ Japanese guidebooks to Akihabara proliferated in 2005 and 2006, which reflected the view of *otaku* as an urban curiosity. New large-scale buildings and shops have opened in the neighbourhood, including the Akihabara Cross Field Project, comprised of two skyscrapers. A train line linking Tsukuba to Akihabara opened in 2005 (Sugiura, 2005). Additionally, the *Train Man* phenomenon occurred at a time when nerd culture, especially that of computer geeks, was becoming popular worldwide, as evident in such American television programmes airing around the same time as *Train Man* such as *Heroes*, starring the Japanese character Hiro Nakamura, who sometimes speaks in Japanese. The word 'otaku' was included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 2007.

On the other hand, the Japanese mass media has espoused the belief that *otaku* are a cause and symptom of the possible breakdown of Japanese society and have associated *otaku* with sexual perversion and the growing gap between the rich and poor during a time of economic restructuring. This makes the promotion of *Train Man* all the more striking. Prejudices against *otaku* have even resulted in hate crimes. For example, especially between 2005 and 2007, at the peak of the discussion on *Train Man*, the media reported cases of 'otaku hunting' (*otaku gari*) – muggings and beatings of male *otaku* – and a few cases of the rape of women working as maids in Akihabara cafés. The attacks were parodied in the 2006 televised version of prizewinning author Ishida Ira's science-fiction novel *Akihabara@DEEP*, the story of a group of superhero *otaku* who protect Akihabara, which also became a manga and movie. The late-night serialized drama starred members of Johnny's Jr., the source for the young beautiful talent for Japanese boy bands, and famous young comedians dressed as stereotypes of *otaku*.

Misunderstandings and biases against *otaku* were also apparent in media discussions of Katō Tomohiro, the twenty-five-year-old who, on Sunday, 8 June 2008, murdered three random people by running them over with a truck on the street in Akihabara and then fatally stabbed four others with a knife. According to global reports, one reason why Katō committed this 'Akihabara Massacre' was because he was an *otaku*, citing as proof the fact that he posted thousands of warnings about his crime on a cell-phone internet site, spent most of his time shut in his home connecting with people online rather than in person, drew pictures in manga style when he was a high-school student and possessed several anime DVDs (Japan Probe, 2008). News articles also noted Katō's 'passion for Akihabara', without providing answers to why he would choose to attack a place he considered a sanctuary (Lewis, 2008). However, in his posts, rather than discussing *otaku* identity, Katō bemoaned that he was an underemployed temporary worker (*haken*) at a factory in Shizuoka Prefecture – he thought that he lost his job the day before committing mass murder – and did not have a girlfriend. The mainstream mass media noted other factors that could have led to Katō's horrendous crimes, including his frustrations with the Japanese educational examination system and his inability to become a lifetime company employee. Yet perhaps in response to public fears concerning Katō's crimes, the Japanese government decided to finally execute Miyazaki Tsutomu, the original 'otaku murderer', on 17 June 2008 (Foster, 2008).

The popularity of *Train Man* is in part due to its claims of realism and promotion as a 'true love story for the internet generation,' to paraphrase the tagline from the American translation (Nakano, 2007). The truth claim has, on the one hand, made *Train Man* a topic of media debates about national issues facing Japan and has made changes in the publishing industry more striking. Conversely, it has spurred debate among people who consider themselves members of the *otaku* community about whether *Train Man* is a positive role model. Conspiracy theories that *Train Man* was not true and was instead created by Fuji TV and Dentsu Advertising Company, in collusion with 2channel's Nishimura and perhaps the Japanese government, have also circulated in books and online; critics have meticulously catalogued aspects of the story that do not seem plausible. For example, if *Train Man* is twenty-two years old, why does he post on 2channel that he has been working for three years at a job that requires a university degree? Why would a youth like *Train Man* use the verb 'dial' in reference to a cell phone? The expensive brand teacups, which *Train Man* seems to have received too quickly, are a strange thank-you present for a young man. The time of the couple's first date is a bit mysterious, for *Train Man* and *Hermes* went to two restaurants in two hours, the first being a Japanese restaurant that conventionally serves meals slowly. Lastly, the website in which all of the posts were compiled was created too quickly (*Densha otoko o kangaeru tomo no kai*, 2005, pp. 459–60).¹⁴

Through a confluence of marketing forces and media discourses, the height of the *Train Man* phenomenon came in 2005, the year that former Prime Minister Koizumi declared Japan's low fertility rates to be a national problem. Having steadily declined after falling below 2.0 in 1975, birth rates reached a then all-time low of 1.25.¹⁵ Because marriage has been viewed in government and journalistic discourses as a means to paternity, late marriage also became an issue of national concern. In 2005, the average marriage age for men was 29.8 and 28 for women.¹⁶ Although fertility rose slightly by 23,000 babies in 2006, the Ministry of Health predicts that the Japanese population will drop by 30 per cent over the next fifty years, and 40.5 per cent of the nation will be older than sixty-five in 2055 (BBC News, 2007). A birth rate of 2.8 is needed to stabilize the Japanese population (Takahashi, 2006). The Japanese government has taken measures to raise the number of babies, including instituting child-care facilities, tax incentives and family leave laws, and has shown awareness that the falling birth rates are related to changes in gender roles and that both men and women need to be better able to combine responsibilities of family and work outside the home (Schad-Seifert, 2006, p. 5).

Instead of merely blaming women for selfishly choosing careers over marriage and family, *AERA* and other news magazines have published lengthy discussions about why men, especially those with so-called 'high specs' of advanced education, elite jobs and good looks, are choosing to marry late or not at all and about the need to change the 'salaryman system' so that fathers can play a larger role in the family. The main reasons given for men who do not marry are based on emotions, implying that they could marry but choose not to (Kimura and Kuzutani, 2005, pp. 17–18; Shirakawa and Kuzutani, 2005, p. 47). Popular culture has played a role in providing images that mainly support these dominant discourses, and the character *Train Man* became a means to promote marriage, and thereby parenthood.

Train Man shows that an *otaku* has the potential to become a new kind of ideal man, so long as he can acquire the looks and communication skills that make him desirable to women and help him conform to mainstream society. Train Man does not relinquish his *otaku* identity and spends as much time on 2channel discussing his hobbies as he does Hermes, but he gains confidence and charm by changing his physical appearance. Expressed in the terms used in blogs and mass media articles in jest, while implying public fears of subcultures behind the humour, Train Man went from being an Akiba-kei *otaku* to 'mote otoko' or 'popular guy', a man with the style, confidence and money to conduct himself well in romantic relationships (Fukui and Murabayashi, 2005; Sakai and Fukui, 2005, p. 16). Fashion plays a large part in the story and was the prime factor that distinguished Train Man from the men that Hermes would ordinarily choose.

Notably, global narratives of socially-inept yet intelligent men pursuing capable, stylish women seem to share similar plot conventions and, although teaching that beauty is more than 'skin deep', do not challenge gender norms. A common feature of most 'geek gets the girl' narratives is the geek's transformation scene. This climatic moment when the geek successfully appears to accept mainstream norms of masculinity and convinces the woman of his inner beauty reaffirms stereotypes of both men and women and advances consumer culture. In most cases, after the male underdog, the more empathetic character, dramatically alters his appearance, he becomes the dominant person in the relationship.¹⁷

Train Man became an icon of the fashion industry targeting men, because advertisers realized the potential of *otaku* as a consumer force aware of the social status associated with brand-name goods and willing to spend money on hobbies. Especially after the *Train Man* television drama, manuals were published to help *otaku* become more attractive romantic partners. For example, *Datsu otaku fāshun gaido* (*Fashion Guide for Escaping Your Otaku-ness*), released in October 2005 and written in manga format, is the story of an *otaku* who gets the girl because he learns how to dress. The December 2005 *Densha otoko sutairingu baibururu* (*Train Man Styling Bible*) (Kikuchi, 2005) is a compendium of winners chosen from 135 entries in a 2005 contest sponsored by the web company Apparel Click, open only to fashion academy students around the same age as Train Man, to design clothing outfits that would turn Akiba-kei *otaku* into 'moe-kei *otaku*'.¹⁸ ('Moe' is slang among *otaku* of anime and manga for affection for usually two-dimensional characters, but here it means something like 'hot guy'.) Although readers are most likely fashion designers and aficionados familiar with Apparel Click rather than the target consumers, these guides attempt to profit from the belief that all *otaku* are members of a subculture unified by shame, who desire to disguise themselves as a step to becoming more participatory members of larger society (Sakai and Fukui, 2005, p. 16). A main theme of *Train Man* is that it is okay to be an *otaku* so long as you do not look or act like one in public.

It is important to acknowledge that not all *otaku* have felt positively about the mentality depicted in *Train Man* or the discourse on masculinity it engendered. Many instead have expressed a sense of pride at being part of a community apart from greater society and were angered by the suggestion that they should change. For example, in his March 2005 manifesto, *Denpa otoko* (*Radio Wave Man*) – which sold 33,000 copies in its first three months – and the September 2005 sequel, *Denpa taisen* (*Radio Wave*

Crusade), prolific journalist and self-proclaimed *otaku* Honda Tōru criticized *Train Man* for advancing the notion that *otaku* are inferior to members of the mainstream culture, who should transform their identities to conform to the standards of 'love capitalism' (*ren'ai shihonshugi*) (Akiba Blog, 2005b; Fukui and Uchiyama, 2005, pp. 17, 19; Honda, 2005a, 2005b; Sakai and Fukui, 2005, p. 14; Yakushiji, 2005). To Honda's mind, Hermes should have been willing to change for Train Man – he should have made her into an Akiba-kei *otaku* rather than changing for her (Fukui and Uchiyama, 2005, p. 19; Sakai and Fukui, 2005, p. 14). Some *otaku* wondered why Train Man even wanted to be with Hermes rather than an anime character. For example, in December 2005, Akiba Blog reported signs placed near sales displays for the DVD releases of the *Train Man* television series in Akihabara that read 'Real Otaku Do Not Desire Three-Dimensional Women' (Akiba Blog, 2005c). Behind the extremely misogynistic slogan lay the idea that *otaku* might want to seek alternatives to mainstream visions of romance that demand that the geek change and 'get the girl'. In one episode of the television drama *Akihabara@DEEP*, the *otaku* heroes discuss the impossibility of a relationship between Train Man and Hermes.

Blogs and websites also reflect the fact that *otaku* men are finding romantic partners in their own communities. Online dating sites have been founded to pair men and women with similar hobbies to share an '*otaku* lifestyle together' (Akiba Blog, 2007). This might also imply that female *otaku* are seen as equals to men, which differs from the way that Hermes was objectified by Train Man's supporters. Female *otaku* have received more media attention since around the time of the *Train Man* phenomenon, but, rather than being embroiled in discussions about the family, they have most often been showcased as a creative force of consumers and producers of Japan's flourishing manga and anime industries, and as brave pioneer members of fandoms generally dominated by men. Although positive, these reports present female *otaku* as anomalies rather than role models and reveal aspects of gender segregation in *otaku* culture. There was a spate of articles about and guidebooks for female 'rail fans' (train enthusiasts affectionately called '*tecchan*' or '*tekko*'), when the TBS network aired a serialized television drama about the topic, *Tokkyū Tanaka san go* (*Tanaka Express Number Three*), watched by an average of only 9 per cent of the national audience on Friday nights in spring 2007 (AERA, 2005; Ariyoshi and Sugiura, 2005).¹⁹ 'Otome Road' in Tokyo's Ikebukuro district is home to shops for female *otaku*, including a butler café that was opened as an alternative to maid cafés serving men (Akamura, 2006).

Lastly, Train Man has been perceived as the prototype of a suitable marriage partner for career women, a growing demographic blamed for marrying late. On the one hand, Hermes exemplifies many of the characteristics of heroines of pure love stories (Suzuki, 2005, pp. 64–6). She is wealthy, and can for example afford to buy Train Man Hermes brand teacups as a gift, which cost about US\$220. Especially in the film and television versions, she is portrayed as the daughter of an upper-middle-class family and earns her own income as a prominent company employee, but nevertheless seems willing to quit her job after marriage. She is compassionate and forgiving of others' character flaws. Additionally, in the serialized drama, Hermes speaks English fluently and travels abroad, which, since the 1980s, has been shorthand on Japanese TV to indicate a character's sophistication.

On the other hand, Hermes is older than Train Man and, though the term is not used in the story, she represents the media figure of the 'loser dog' (*make inu*), an unmarried woman in her thirties or forties who embraces her career and spends time with friends and money on entertainment rather than family. The term 'loser dog' was popularized by Sakai Junko, a prolific essayist and author of books on relationships, in her 2003 bestselling self-help book *Make inu no tōboe (Distant Howling of the Loser Dogs)*, written partly in response to the Japanese popularity of the American television programme *Sex and the City*, which depicts marriage as one of women's life goals. The lesser-used but more positive term for these women is 'ohitorisama', coined around 1999 to refer to women who dine by themselves in restaurants; the term was adopted by feminist Ueno Chizuko in her book *Ohitorisama no rōgo (Growing Old Alone)*, (2007). Sakai advocates that, 'No matter how successful they are in their careers, unmarried women in their thirties are "loser dogs" until they find husbands or become single mothers. Wives and mothers are "winner dogs"' (Sakai, 2006, pp. 8–9; see also Shoji, 2004b). Sakai advises that 'loser dogs' should continue to spend money on themselves and look fashionable to show that they are not ashamed of their single status, which is their own choice. Yet she admonishes unmarried women in their thirties and forties to keep in mind that Japanese society has changed since the Bubble Era, the time when they came of age. They should accordingly adjust the qualities that they stereotypically value in men, such as the ability to appear recognizably elite in urban society. In her 2005 humorous essay collection *Sono hito, dokushin? (Still Single?)*, Sakai writes that the pairing of 'loser dogs' and the kind of *otaku* represented by Train Man, both of whom exemplify aspects of conspicuous consumption, may be a countermeasure to late marriage and falling birth rates (Fukui and Uchiyama, 2005, p. 17).²⁰

Conclusion

Overall, regardless of whether the story was based on real events or merely on the possibility that it could have happened, *Train Man* presents an important image of masculinity that arose from the interrelationship between new media, communities and a historical context of changing gender roles in Japan. *Train Man* has had a lasting influence on the ways that *otaku* culture has been examined in order to find possible solutions to, rather than merely being blamed for, pressing national issues, as well as to understand twenty-first-century social and economic patterns. The trans-media phenomenon symbolizes the power of online fan communities to establish cultural trends with larger political implications, and reveals how the permeable boundaries between so-called mainstream Japan and its subcultures can provide insight into contradictions inherent in the discourses underlying Japan's national growth. Few internet novels in forms similar to *Train Man* have been published since 2006, perhaps because the trend is no longer as alluring. The *Train Man* book, however, has had an enduring impact upon the ways that stories have been written, marketed and consumed, and has shaped subsequent television and film characters. While encouraging greater acceptance of communities that exist apart from larger public society, this tale of love, in the end, advocates conformity instead of alternative forms of marriage and family.

While Train Man is an entertaining role model and exemplar of the power of self-achievement, he has helped champion the social status quo of heterosexual romance (leading to marriage and childbirth) in the internet age.

Notes

1. The author would like to thank Mark McLelland, Fran Martin, David Goodman, Sato Kumiko and the members of the University of Oregon COL[TV] study group for their helpful suggestions and insights on global fandoms. This chapter was originally published online in *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (20) in April 2009. It has been reformatted and abbreviated for publication here. Thanks to Carolyn Brewer and my two anonymous readers of the *Intersections* publication.
2. I am indebted to Sato Kumiko for the suggestion that I consult Akiba Blog, a rich online resource for understanding Akihabara culture. See www.akibablog.net (accessed 9 July 2014).
3. In the original online discussion, Train Man was first referred to as 'Post 731'.
4. The official *Train Man* edited website can be found at www.geocities.co.jp/Milkyway-Aquarius/7075/trainman.html (accessed 9 July 2014).
5. The Project Densha site is www.rinji.tv/densha/ (accessed 9 July 2014).
6. Nakamori Akio (real name Shibahara Ansaku) is credited with coining the term '*otaku*' in his 1983 column titled '“Otaku” Research' (*'Otaku' no kenkyū*). The term was originally an honorific form of address, which Nakamori noticed fans use in reference to one another. Miyazaki Tsutomu was arrested in July 1989 for molesting and murdering four girls, aged four to seven. Because he possessed an exorbitant amount of videotapes and discussed his murders in reference to media, his case started a public panic about *otaku* (Macias and Machiyama, 2004, p. 14). See also Galbraith, Yamanaka, and Kamm, this volume.
7. I would like to thank Takeuchi Shiori for recommending this article.
8. The mainstream consumption of 2channel ASCII art is exemplified by the popularity of Flash animation for the song 'Fight! Kikkoman', which was based on the Kikkoman brand of soy sauce. In the song, an ASCII-art superhero fights food-related villains, including ketchup man, and teaches Giko Neko the foods that taste best with soy sauce. The song was created by 2channel users and has no connection with the Kikkoman Company. I would like to thank Henry Oshiro for bringing this song to my attention. For an English explanation of the main characteristics and designs of ASCII art, see Katayama (2008b).
9. A British English translation was published by Constable and Robinson in 2006, but an American English version was not available until 2007, when Del Rey Books, a section of Random House devoted mostly to manga, picked up the title.
10. For a list of common 2channel slang translated into English, see <http://services.4-ch.net/2chportal/> (accessed 9 July 2014).
11. For example, Train Man logged off at 12.32 a.m. on March 17, after successfully making dinner plans with Hermes. 2channel subscribers continued to chat late into the night, sharing doubts that Train Man would have the courage to start a romantic relationship. This scepticism does not appear in the edited website or internet novel. For a discussion about and examples of the 2channel threads and lewd ASCII art edited out of the published versions, see Andō (2005).

12. *Train Man* had a limited international theatrical release in 2006, but was shown mainly at anime conventions and in cities with large Japanese communities. VIZ Media released a region-one DVD for American audiences in February 2007, with the tagline 'A love story for the geek in all of us'.
13. Aspects of the exhibition can be viewed in online archives hosted at www.jpfb.com/venezia-biennale/otaku/j/exhibit.html (accessed 9 July 2014).
14. For an example of discussions of the truth of *Train Man* and differences between the official website and edited book, see www.geocities.jp/sunrisesunset77/ (accessed 9 July 2014).
15. The highest postwar fertility rates in Japan were in 1947, when 2.69 million babies were born. In 2005, 1.08 million babies were born (Takahashi, 2006).
16. Late marriage has been attributed to a variety of factors, including lifestyle changes among youth, high rates of unemployment and loss of traditional family structures and the community that supported them. According to the Japanese Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, the percentage of unmarried men and women over thirty-five in Japan rose from 7.5 in 1990 to 18.6 in 2005 (Schad-Seifert, 2006, p. 5; Brasor, 2006). Perhaps because of the improving economy, there were 18,000 more marriages nationwide in 2006 (for an estimated total of 732,000 couples) than in 2005 (Takahashi, 2006).
17. These narrative tropes were taken to extremes in the reality television programme *Beauty and the Geek* (started in the United States in 2005 with versions in the United Kingdom and Australia), in which couples comprised of a 'gorgeous but academically impaired' woman and a 'brilliant but socially-challenged' man compete in the 'ultimate social experiment' for a chance to win a US\$250,000 prize. The 'missions' in the first season were strikingly similar to those in the *Train Man* story. As a plot twist in season four (2007), one of the couples was comprised of a male beauty and female geek. According to the official programme website, this reversal raised concerns about whether or not the other men would feel intimidated and the women would try to give the 'geek' a cosmetic makeover. See the CW Network official website at <http://cwtv.com/shows/> (accessed 9 July 2014).
18. For more information on the Apparel Click contest and the winning entries, see <http://news.livedoor.com/article/detail/1449047/> (accessed 9 July 2014). In the spring of 2005, Apparel Click sponsored a fashion contest around the theme of Calpis milk soda and received more than 500 entries.
19. Examples of books on how to be a female 'rail fan' include *Joshitetsu (Rails for Women, 2007)* and *Tekko no heya (Female Rail Fan's Room, 2007)*. Many women are hesitant to admit that they are *otaku* because of the continued negative connotations of the subculture.
20. Especially since 2005, there has been a plethora of sociological studies and self-help books on men and women marrying late. In addition to Sakai, authors offering self-help books and sociological studies of *otaku* and marriage include Watanabe Shin and Saitō Tamaki.

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The Transformation and Diffusion of ‘Otaku’ Stereotypes and the Establishment of ‘Akihabara’ as a Place-brand¹

Kikuchi Satoru

Introduction

Since the end of the 1990s, Akihabara has become a sanctuary for ‘otaku’, which has contributed to its development as a place-brand. This process is related to cultural and economic changes in Japan, which impacted both Akihabara and ‘otaku’. For this chapter, a questionnaire was administered to 368 undergraduate students to examine ‘otaku’ stereotypes. The results were then compared to a questionnaire that was distributed earlier, and show that there has been a decrease in negative images of ‘otaku’ in the past decade. Further, in free comment sections, the word ‘Akihabara’ is frequently used to talk about typical ‘otaku’ fashions and hobbies. Not only is the ‘otaku’ image becoming more positive, but it is also increasingly connected to Akihabara as a place-brand.

Akihabara as cutting-edge electric town

With the JR train station at its centre, the area called Akihabara is located between Chiyōda Ward and Taitō Ward in Tokyo. Akihabara is known as a destination for buying electronic goods in Japan. Historically, it was burned to the ground during the Great Tokyo Air Raid of 1945. Right after the Second World War, merchants selling electronic parts, who had networks all over Japan, began to gather in what is now Akihabara. The development of transportation helped to attract customers. The nearby college, Denki Kōgyō Senmon Gakkō, drew the attention of merchants dealing in vacuum tubes and radios, which came to characterize the area. Due to the Stall Abolition Order by the GHQ² in Shōwa 24 (1949), merchants’ stalls were moved under the raised railway tracks of the Sōbu Line. The formation of Akihabara as an electric town around the JR station began with these stalls, which eventually expanded out from the tracks down what is now Chūō Street. Akihabara has its roots as an electric town in selling parts for radios, and developed into selling household appliances

such as televisions, refrigerators and washing machines in the Shōwa 30s and 40s (mid-1950s to mid-1960s). Akihabara came to resemble the town that people know today in the early Shōwa 50s (1970s).

However, the OPEC oil crisis triggered a decline in sales of household appliances from around Shōwa 51 (1976). That same year, the first microcomputer showroom, Bit-INN Tokyo, was opened in Akihabara. From this point, Akihabara's main products shifted from household appliances to audio and video equipment. From the end of the Shōwa period (late-1980s), Akihabara gradually transformed from an electronics town to a city for personal computers. One major factor here was box stores selling electronics setting up shop in Tokyo's suburbs. While stores in Akihabara could not compete with these new box stores based on price, they could compete by offering niche products, namely personal computers. The first large retailer for personal computers in Akihabara, *Raokkusu za konpyūta kan* (Laos, the Computer Building), opened in Heisei 2 (1990). The total revenue of computer sales exceeded that of household appliance sales in Akihabara by Heisei 6 (1994). The following year, Windows 95 was released, followed by the internet boom, both of which encouraged the growth of computer stores in Akihabara. Today, Akihabara is a cutting-edge area for personal computers and multimedia products.

Pointing to shifts in the major products sold in Akihabara, economist Morinaga Takurō (2008) argues that the products associated with Akihabara at present will be major industries in a decade. Ono Yuri (2005) adds to this that the place-brand of Akihabara is associated with 'edginess' (*sentansei*). Although suburban box stores selling electronics may undercut prices, Akihabara can still compete in terms of edginess, which is part of the area's brand identity. The Akihabara Cross Field Project, lead by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and major developers, is the realization of this cutting-edge image, and has been strongly promoted as a venture 'to establish a basis for creating and revitalizing industries through cutting-edge technology, centring on a collaboration between industry and academia'. Seno'o Ken'ichirō (2007), who participated in the Akihabara Cross Field Project, points out three appeals of Akihabara, which are as follows:

1. 'Thorough accumulation' (*tettei shūseki*): from common household appliances to electronic parts and specialty items, everything is thoroughly accumulated within the town. Whatever one is looking for, it can be found here.
2. 'Fusion of old and new' (*shinkyū yūgō*): a cutting-edge electric town has fused with the downtown (*shitamachi*) area of old Tokyo.
3. 'Multi-layered structure' (*kōsei no tajūsei*): layers of successive development exist one on top of the other. Shops dealing in electronic parts, household appliances, computers and specialty goods coexist with an interwoven history.

Similarly, brand consultant Futamura Hiroshi (2003) points to the concentration of electronic shops as the strength of the Akihabara brand, which contributes to the impression that 'you will find whatever you are looking for and discover new things'. Nevertheless, edginess also means deviance from the conservative mainstream of the time, which connotes a certain kind of 'strangeness'. This is a characteristic strongly associated with 'otaku', which I now turn to explain.

Akihabara as the 'holy land of otaku'

The name Akihabara does not only call to mind Japan's premier electric town, but also the 'holy land of otaku' (*otaku no sei'chi*). As shops dealing in home appliances and audio and visual equipment withdrew from Akihabara in the 1990s, shops dealing in videogame software, anime, manga and related products such as figurines and fanzines (*dōjinshi*) increased in number. The shift was from the top electric town to the top 'otaku' town, where 'otaku' refers not to audio-visual enthusiasts but rather to a new style of 'otaku' who are into 'moe'.³ Beyond a mere concentration of stores dealing in products that attract 'otaku', Akihabara is, as Seno'o (2007) argues, a 'crossing or interaction point and center for the dissemination of knowledge and culture', in this case the cutting edge of niche subcultures rather than cutting-edge technology. As Japanese 'otaku' culture spread around the world, foreign journalists introduced Akihabara in their home countries.

The branding of an entire area means 'creating a unified concept for diverse resources in the area, and promoting it as a local identity within and beyond the area. In so doing, an area differentiates itself from and enriches its ability to compete with other areas, and generates a sense of pride and attachment in residents' (Kitamura, Takasago, Kinda and Nakajima, 2006). Akihabara can thus be conceptualized as the 'holy land of otaku', bringing together shops for manga, anime and game enthusiasts, which forms a new identity for the area. Akihabara is one of the strongest place-brands in Japan. In a survey conducted by the Japan National Tourist Organization between 2006 and 2007, Kyoto, Osaka and the Shinjuku neighbourhood of Tokyo ranked as the top three destinations for foreign tourists.⁴ Growing numbers also visited the Ginza, Shibuya and Asakusa neighbourhoods of Tokyo. However, if we look at the gender breakdown, 10.8 per cent of male tourists visited Akihabara, compared to 5.5 per cent of female tourists. The popularity of Akihabara with men can be contrasted with the popularity of Harajuku or Tokyo Disney Land with female tourists.

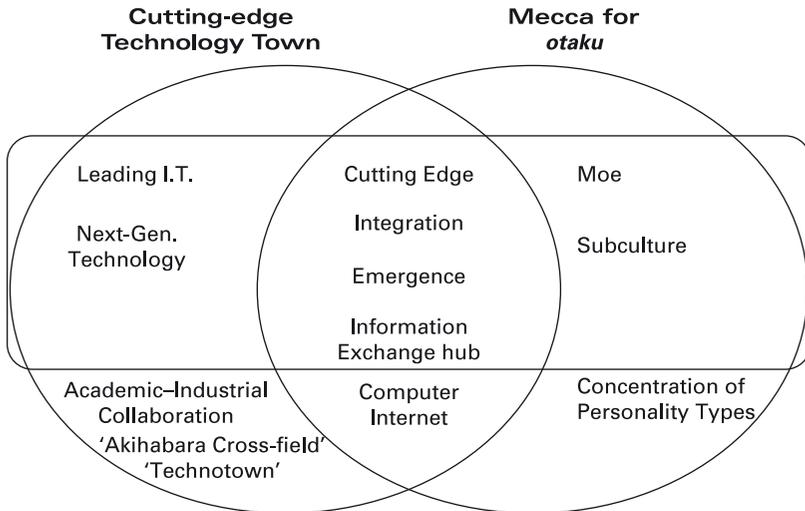
Seno'o explains that Akihabara is an image or 'ideal space' generated from the physical by layering of narratives on top of it. It is not only foreign journalists who are involved in this process. For example, the story of *Densha otoko* (2005), which features an 'otaku' protagonist and was made into a TV drama filmed on location in Akihabara, spread the image of 'otaku' and Akihabara across Japan. Similarly, the *moe* culture represented by maid cafés is also promoting Akihabara's peculiar image as a 'center of culture and knowledge'. Asō Tarō, who was elected prime minister of Japan in 2008 and is known as a friend to 'otaku', gave a speech on the street in Akihabara, which was widely reported in the news. It is very rare that the location of a prime minister's speech becomes national news, but in this case people cared that Asō was appearing in Akihabara, because the physical place is also an ideal space – the 'holy land of otaku'. Subcultural spirit forms the unmistakable place-brand of Akihabara as a city with a unique value.

Competing images of Akihabara

In his book, *Shuto no tanjō: Moeru toshi Akihabara*, Morikawa Ka'ichirō argues that Akihabara was transformed into the 'holy land of otaku' in the 1990s due to the

concentration of computer enthusiasts, who shared personality traits and a taste for *moe*-style anime characters (Morikawa, 2003).⁵ By interviewing the people involved, Morikawa identified that the media mix boom induced by the TV animation *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–6) expanded the market for products targeted at ‘otaku’ and raised the demand for anime character goods among the general public. Small-scale businesses selling figurines and fanzines gained more business in Akihabara, and other stores rushed to join them and get a cut of the expanding market. Interviews conducted by Kobayashi Takaya (2006) support Morikawa’s claim that the decline of household appliance stores and rise of hobby shops contributed to the ‘otaku-ization’ of Akihabara. Not only did this transformation not involve planning by government or big business, but it also was associated with ‘otaku’, who were ‘despised by society as the lowest of the low subcultures.’

The images of Akihabara on the one hand as the electric town and on the other hand as the ‘holy land of otaku’ do diverge, but they are not mutually exclusive. Both of these aspects of the Akihabara place-brand share the attributes of ‘cutting-edge’ and ‘emergence’ of something new. Furthermore, in both versions, the city functions to attract stores dealing in specific products and becomes a hub to accumulate and exchange information. As can be seen from Figure 8.1, the difference between Akihabara as the electric town and ‘holy land of otaku’ has to do with who is involved with innovation. As we can see in the case of the Akihabara Cross Field Project, both government and corporate interests propel cutting-edge technology. In contrast, Akihabara’s place at the cutting-edge of ‘otaku’ culture was a spontaneous, non-strategic development. The market value of cutting-edge technology is almost incomparably higher than ‘otaku’ culture. Information technology is one of the most representative and foundational industries of Japan, which



Large Scale | Traditional Market Principles Small-scale | Closed, circulating market
 Public-Private Collaboration | Enterprise-lead Spontaneous | Difficult to control

Figure 8.1 The two sides of the Akihabara place-brand

provides a variety of business opportunities for venture capitalists and continues to attract the attention of big enterprises, administrations and universities. On the other hand, 'otaku' culture supports a relatively small hobby market.

However, socioeconomic factors cannot fully account for why 'otaku' and *moe* do not feature more prominently in the branding of Akihabara led by the government and enterprise. Although the 'otaku' market for cutting-edge subculture is small compared to the market for cutting-edge technology, it has expanded rapidly since the 1990s – despite economic recession. The issue is that, for many Japanese, the world of 'otaku' is still strange and incomprehensible. For people adhering to the dominant value system, the despised subculture of 'otaku' cannot be a major driving force of the place-branding project. For others, it is not hatred for 'otaku', but rather an understanding that authorities are unable to control 'otaku' movement or the intensity of this subculture. Seno, for example, excludes *moe* from his redevelopment plan for Akihabara on these grounds.

How are 'otaku' talked about in relation to Akihabara? Using a newspaper database to search for the word 'otaku' in both *hiragana* and *katakana*, it is revealed that the first connection with Akihabara was an article in the *Asahi Shimbun* on 8 January 1993. The article discusses the change of Akihabara from a town selling household appliances to one selling computer software, and points to the area's possible future as an 'otaku town' (*otaku no machi*) where games are marketed. On 23 August 1995, an article in the *Nikkei Shimbun* discusses 'computer idols' (*pasokon aidoru*) and concludes that they can even be observed in Akihabara, the mecca of radio boys' (*rajio shōnen no mekka Akihabara*). On 11 April 1998, an article in the *Asahi Shimbun* introduces Akihabara as a town 'where a lot of cyber kids wander around in a frenzy' (*me no iro o kaeta den'nō kizuzu ga urotsuku*). All of these articles refer to an older image of 'otaku' as enthusiastic users of personal computers who gather in Akihabara.

A change in this image occurred at the end of the 1990s. On 4 September 1999, the *Nikkei Shimbun* announces the birth of new cultures in Akihabara with an article entitled, 'Stateless cyber-town Akihabara becomes a stage for the birth of an original culture of novels and anime' (*Akihabara, mukokuseki no den'nō gai, dokuji no bunka umu shōsetsu anime no butai ni*). On 22 January 2000, the *Asahi Shimbun* takes up the topic of Akihabara and men interacting with *bishōjo* (cute girl) characters in an article entitled, 'Otaku software with *bishōjo* is called Akiba (Akihabara) Style' (*Bishōjo nado ga detekuru 'otaku' na kanji no sofuto ga akiba (akihabara) kei to yobareru*). On 23 September 2003, the *Asahi Shimbun* reports that electronic stores in Akihabara have been displaced by 'shops that deal in romance games with *bishōjo* characters, manga and fanzines, and goods catering to otaku taste' (*bishōjo kyarakutā aite no ren'ai gēmu ya manga, dōjinshi nado, otaku shumi shōhin o atsukau mise*). On 28 October 2004, an article in the *Nikkei Shimbun* explains that, 'Akihabara, the nation's number one electronics town, is now a "city of *moe*", a "town for *moe*-type users"' (*Akihabara. Nihon ichi no denkigai wa ima, 'moeru toshi' 'moe-kei yūzā no machi'*). Eventually, on 27 May 2006, the *Nikkei Shimbun* titles an article, 'Transforming Akiba: An Akihabara that is not only a "holy land of otaku"' (*Akiba henshinchū, 'otaku no se'ichi' dake janai Akihabara*). As the title suggests, the assumption is now that Akihabara is in fact the 'holy land of otaku' rather than an electric town or anything else.

The origin and transformations of 'otaku'

In his book, *Otaku wa sude ni shinde iru*, Okada Toshio writes that 'people in Akihabara' is a commonly used definition of 'otaku', which he believes to be entirely incorrect (Okada, 2008). What does 'otaku' mean, then? Like Akihabara, 'otaku' have undergone a series of transformations that make the word multilayered and complex. Originally, in 1983, 'otaku' was used by Nakamori Akio to refer to young people gathering at fanzine conventions. Nakamori belittles these fans for the way they look and talk. In other words, 'otaku' was an expression with clearly discriminatory and negative connotations. 'Otaku' was used as slang among a particular group of youths until the late 1980s, and it became widely known in mass media reporting on a serial killer in 1989. In this way, most people in Japan came to know 'otaku' as people deeply invested in manga and anime who cannot build normal human relations and might commit incomprehensible crimes.

This stereotype of 'otaku' and perspective on their culture transformed rapidly in the 1990s, when economic recession meant that consumption styles common during the period of the Bubble economy declined, even as consumption of manga, anime and games did not, a fact that did not escape attention. If one looks at *Neon Genesis Evangelion* from an 'otaku' point of view, it is evaluated as the pinnacle of Japanese anime because of its elaborative visual expression and story, appealing character designs, and so on. However, what caught the attention of the mass media was its economic effect, which included billions of yen in merchandise sales in niche markets. With the dawning realization that manga and anime were promising exports, the government turned to cultivate the 'contents industry'. Part of this development was the slogan 'Intellectual Property Nation' (*chiteki zaisan rikkoku*), which was set forth in line with the national objective of strengthening Japan's international competitiveness. The 'Content Promotional Act' (*kontentsu no sōzō hogo oyobi katsuyō no sokushin ni kan suru hōritsu*) was also established.

Throughout all of this, it did not escape anyone's attention that the makers and supporters of hits such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* were 'otaku'. Within the favourable economic climate, the negative connotations of 'otaku' personality changed into 'consumers with an acute interest in something'. From the entry point that the 'otaku' market was worth about 410 billion yen, the Nomura Research Institute (NRI) (2005) described 'otaku' as 'people who have an intense interest in a certain genre, concentrate time and money almost exclusively in the pursuit of their interest, have deep and profound knowledge, and provide information and participate in creative activities'. The 'otaku' image changed from people accumulating enormous amounts of socially useless information to people with passion for something regardless of what others think, and from an introvert lacking social skills to an expert who uses technology to communicate and collect information to deepen knowledge and interests. In this way, 'otaku' were given a completely different image, not as negative consumers who were undermining the stability of Japan, but as positive producers who were the future of Japan.

However, if 'otaku' culture cannot be controlled from above or outside, as noted by Morikawa and Seno'o, then evaluations based on intentions of making them useful for the government or corporations are way off point. Despite this, after struggling with a negative stereotype for so long, many 'otaku' welcomed this change to positive reception

and elevated status. The easing of negative views about 'otaku' is linked with a general increase of the number of manga, anime and game fans. While earlier 'otaku' had to deal with the reality that their hobby was not accepted by society, 'otaku' after the mid-1990s, and especially after the success of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, did not have to worry about this stigma.

The centre of 'otaku' culture also changed. In the beginning it was science fiction and manga, then anime, and later videogame software and the internet. Since the 2000s, a sexualized style called *moe* has been at the centre of attention as the most noticeable characteristic of media targeting an 'otaku' audience. The term *moe* spread to the general public when it was used in *Densha otoko* and nominated for a Buzz Word Award (*ryūkōgo taishō*) in 2005. The increasing number of anime, game and internet users, along with the reconfiguration of 'otaku' around the boom in Akihabara and *moe*, was perceived by some to be a lowering of the bar for participation in true fandom. Okada Toshio considers 'otaku' to be about mastering one's hobbies, which requires study and investment despite rejection and belittlement by society (Okada, 2008). However, as Okada sees it, now all one has to do to be an 'otaku' is to show up in Akihabara, where it's 'enough to simply feel *moe*' (*moereba ii*). Thus not everyone agrees on what it means to be an 'otaku' or appreciates the association of 'otaku' with Akihabara, which engenders new stereotypical understandings.

Study of otaku stereotypes

In this way, 'otaku' stereotypes have gone through many transformations over time. So far, the discussion has relied heavily on 'otaku' intellectuals and cultural critics, whose opinions circulate in the mass media. The question remains whether the 'otaku' stereotype, be it negative or positive, corresponds with how ordinary young people in Japan perceive 'otaku'. To get at this question, my team distributed surveys to university students in Tokyo and Nagano in 1998 (Kikuchi, 1999, 2000). While changes in the stereotype were occurring at this time, the survey showed that the image of 'otaku' was still predominantly negative. This suggests that the re-evaluation of 'otaku' after *Neon Genesis Evangelion* occurred mostly among professionals, media producers and fans, as opposed to the general public. The majority of ordinary young Japanese shared a negative image of 'otaku' as antisocial, gloomy and childish hobbyists. From the 1998 survey responses, we were able to identify four characteristics that university students associated with 'otaku': 'immersion in a hobby', 'social introversion', 'valuing one's own style' and 'orientation toward solitude'. As a rule, these factors had a negative correlation to 'social skills', except for 'immersion in a hobby', which showed a positive correlation. In other words, these students realized that immersion in a hobby does not necessarily limit the social skills necessary for building relationships with other people.

Ten years after the 1998 survey, perceptions of 'otaku' had changed, up to the point of an 'otaku' being cast as the romantic lead in the TV drama *Densha otoko*. My team distributed another survey to clarify if the change in the general 'otaku' stereotype in the mass media registered with ordinary university students. We hypothesized that the 'otaku' stereotype had diversified, while the dominant negative image of the past had

become more positive. A total of 386 students (189 men, 177 women and two unreported, with an average age of 19.4) from private universities in Tokyo and Nara, and from public universities in Nagano and Iwate, participated in this study. We asked two open-ended questions: ‘What kind of person do you think an “otaku” is?’ and ‘What kinds of hobbies do you associate with “otaku”?’ We also asked multiple-choice questions: ‘If you were called “otaku”, which characteristics would you immediately relate to yourself?’ (They were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 4 which characteristics they most strongly identified with ‘otaku.’) ‘How would you feel if you were told that you have an “otaku” tendency?’ ‘Do you have any relatives or close friends who have an “otaku” tendency?’ The questions were the same for the 1998 survey.

We should note first that no one wrote ‘Akihabara’ in the open-ended responses concerning ‘otaku’ in the 1998 survey. As we have seen, Akihabara was seen as a town where computer enthusiasts gathered, but it was not yet seen as representative of ‘otaku’. In the 2007 survey, we expected some ordinary university students to register Akihabara’s transformation into a ‘holy land of otaku’, especially after *Densha otoko* in 2005, which helped to establish the place-brand of Akihabara. Terms such as *moe*, maid and *bishōjo*, which express sexual preference, were also not seen in the 1998 survey. We did, by contrast, see ‘idols’ and ‘figurines’. In the 2007 survey, we expected to see more references to *moe* as a central aspect of ‘otaku’ culture. In both the 1998 and the 2007 surveys, the answers to the question ‘What kind of person do you think an “otaku” is?’ can be categorized as negative, positive or other. Examples of common answers are listed in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Examples of answers to the question, ‘What kind of person do you think an “otaku” is?’

Negative (155)

- Working on something almost pathologically.
- A person that is deeply involved in a hobby, becomes increasingly unaware of the world and shows a decline in communication skills.
- Gloomy and persistent.
- Someone who withdraws into his or her home and retreats into a hobby.
- Deeply into two-dimensional objects like videogames, anime and manga to an abnormal degree.
- A lot of them do not care about their appearance. Lacking common sense.
- A person I don’t want to have anything to do with.

Positive (127)

- Can devote themselves to one thing and keep going.
- Know a lot of things to the degree of being a professional.
- Thoroughly delve into a hobby.
- Master a field.
- Not a professional, but can act like one and has comparable knowledge.
- Has an inquisitive spirit.
- Has an exceptional amount of knowledge about one thing.

Other (86)

- Own a lot of figurines.
 - People in Akihabara.
 - Put negatively, escapist from reality; put positively, people with passion.
 - People who like anime.
 - Obsessed with something.
-

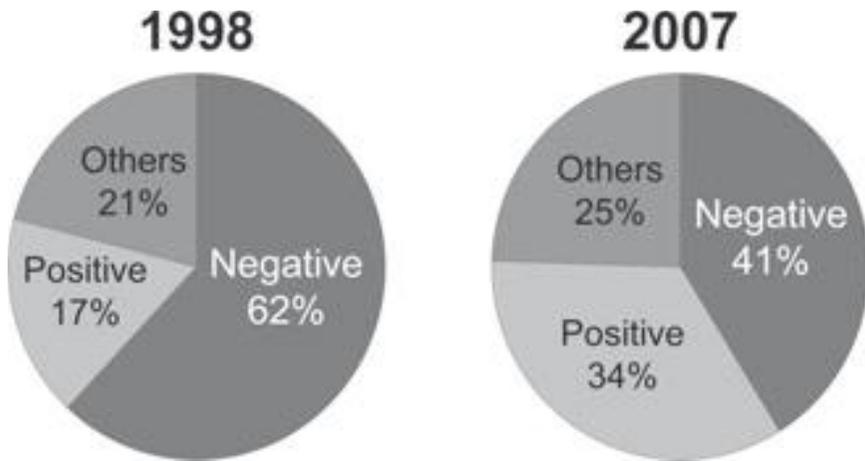


Figure 8.2 Comparison of impressions of 'otaku' in 1998 and 2007 surveys

Comparing the results to the 1998 survey, it is clear that over the past ten years more young Japanese have cultivated a positive 'otaku' stereotype. Even though negative responses are still predominant, positive responses have doubled from 17 per cent to 34 per cent, as shown in Figure 8.2.

In the 2007 survey, sixty participants wrote the term 'Akihabara' (or 'Akiba') in their descriptions of otaku. In addition, thirty-nine respondents included Akihabara (or 'Akiba') in their answers to the question 'What kinds of hobbies do you associate with "otaku"?' We conducted further analysis on the answers to open-ended questions. First, we separated the respondents' sentences into single words⁶ and then translated words with the same meaning into one consistent term.⁷ We then conducted 'text mining', which resulted in the extraction of 2,051 elements. Correspondence analysis⁸ was conducted on the sixty-five terms that had a frequency of more than five. The results are shown in Figure 8.3.

In correspondence analysis, only the relative relationships between elements are interpreted. If we look at the arrangement of the individual elements, we can interpret the horizontal line as the internal-external axis. The left side shows inner characteristics such as 'absorbed', 'obsessed' and 'interest', and moving towards the right side the words shift to comments on appearance such as 'glasses', 'bandana' and 'shirt tucked in'. We can interpret the vertical line as the positive-negative axis, where evaluations are positive at the top and negative at the bottom.

There are two groups of words clustering around the term 'Akihabara'. One group of words indicates sexual preferences with words such as 'maid', 'moe' and 'figurines', and the other group indicates characteristics of appearance such as 'fat' or 'fashionable'. 'Akihabara' is seen to be a city where people who have a peculiar interest in *moe* gather, and they can be identified by their outward appearance. This is the image of Akihabara as the 'holy land of otaku' embraced by ordinary university students. This image is not entirely positive, and is clearly at odds with the brand image envisioned by leaders of government and businesses who see Akihabara as a high-tech town or site of Cool

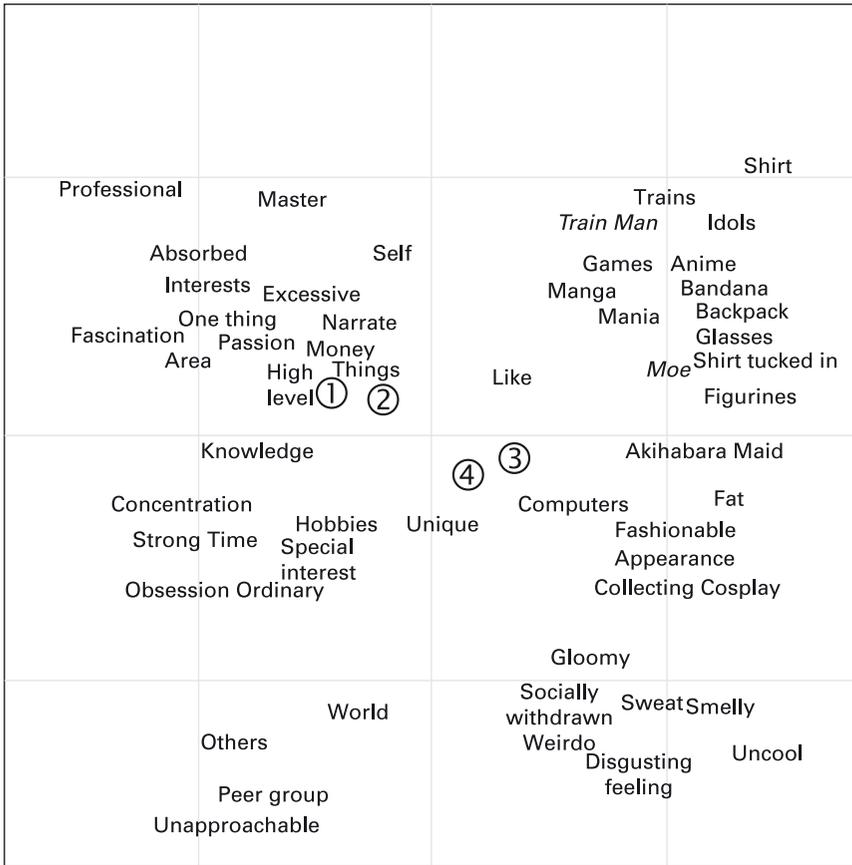


Figure 8.3 Results of correspondence analysis

Japan. We can see that keywords representing tech savvy such as ‘special interest’, ‘high’, ‘money’ and ‘knowledge’ are not really close to ‘Akihabara.’

An interesting point of the 2007 survey lies in the mapping of hobbies associated with ‘otaku’ in response to the question, ‘What kinds of hobbies do you associate with “otaku”?’ Multiple responses are possible and the percentage given is for each term within all responses. The results can be seen in Table 8.2. Correspondence analysis for the thirty-eight terms that appeared more than four times in these answers can be seen in Figure 8.4.

The results of what hobbies are associated with ‘otaku’ are telling. In both the 1998 and 2007 surveys, the most recurrent term was ‘anime’. Anime and games are also in the top three and four for 1998 and 2007, respectively. For unknown reasons, trains are in the top three in 2007. Notably, the more masculine terms such as ‘modelling’ and ‘military’ went down in rank, and terms such as *moe* and *bishōjo* are now on the list. Where Akihabara was not present in 1998, it is in 2007. Okada (2008) notes that *moe* was only a minor part of early ‘otaku’ culture, but today even ordinary university

Table 8.2 What kinds of hobbies do you associate with 'otaku'?

2007	(%)	1998	(%)
Anime	23	Anime	27
Train	12	Manga	11
Gaming	11	Games	11
Manga	9	Idols	8
Idols	7	Computers	7
Figurines	5	Figurines	6
Computers	4	Train	4
Akihabara	3	Movies	3
Maids	3	Modelling	2
<i>Moelbishōjo</i>	2	Military	2
Other	20	Other	18
n = 1,147 (368 respondents)		n = 404 (202 respondents)	

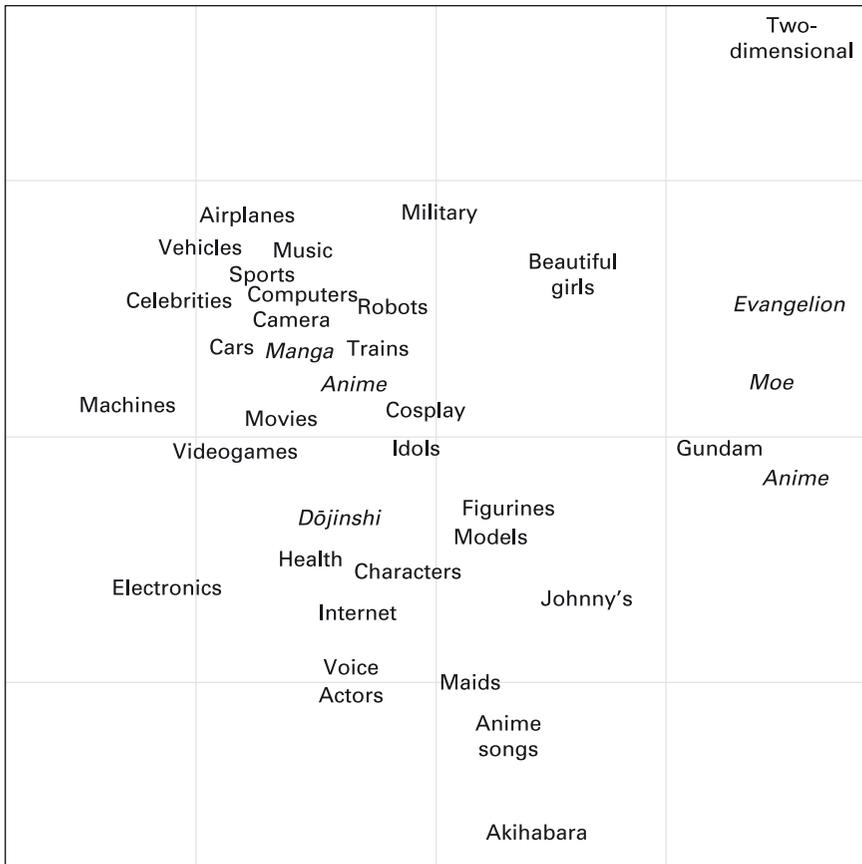


Figure 8.4 Correspondence analysis of hobbies associated with 'otaku'

students recognize it as a representative concept. In the definitions of 'otaku' by the general public that Okada has summarized, 'otaku' are 'people who feel *moe*' (*moeru hito*) and 'people in Akihabara' (*Akihabara ni iru hito*). We can see this approach in Morikawa's work, which connects *moe*, Akihabara, and 'otaku' (Morikawa, 2003). The aspect of desiring fictional characters, especially *bishōjo*, has been taken up in definitions of 'otaku' by scholars such as Saitō Tamaki (2003). Looking at the results of the correspondence analysis in Figure 8.4, it is possible to interpret the horizontal axis as the intensity of sexuality, but Akihabara is not close to *moe* or similar terms.

Figure 8.5 shows how participants responded to being called 'otaku'. The respondents strongly agreed, slightly agreed, slightly disagreed or strongly disagreed with this assessment. We have broken the responses down by gender and compared 1998 and 2007.

From Figure 8.5, we can speculate that the 'otaku' stereotype spread and became more accepted over the period. It is especially notable that the tendency for women to acknowledge themselves as 'otaku' is rising. As a former minority, 'otaku' were

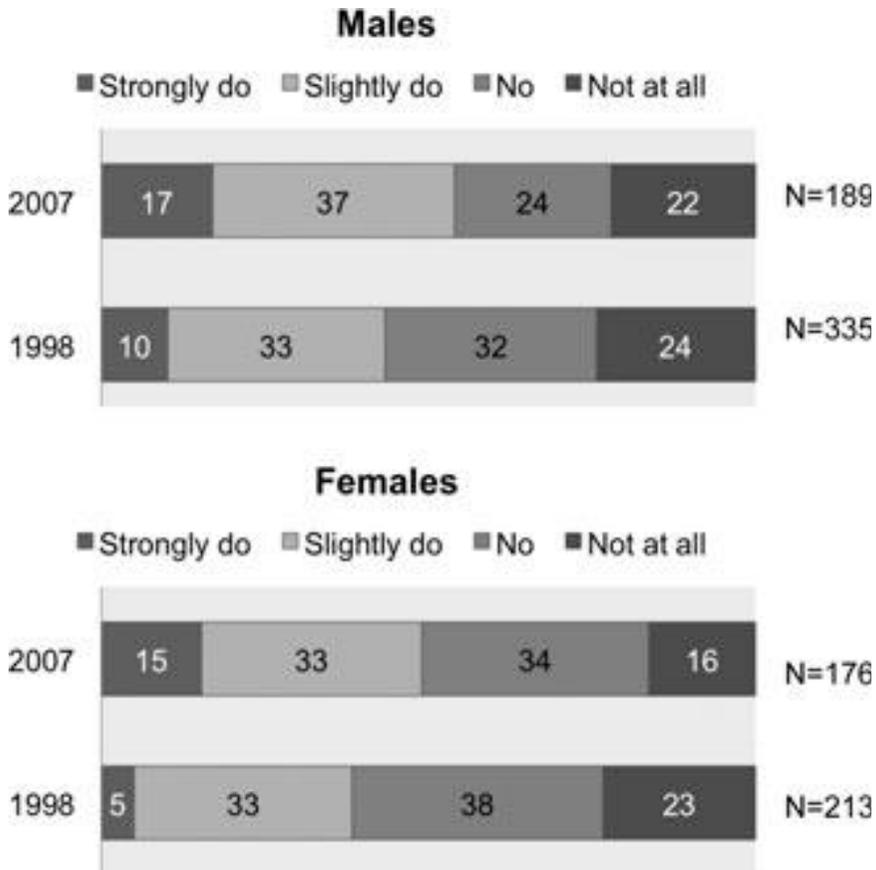


Figure 8.5 Would you agree if someone called you 'otaku'?

recognized as outsiders to the mainstream, but as more and more people become in-group members, 'otaku' culture fosters a diversification of the stereotype and more people can recognize themselves within the category. Not only are more people recognizing themselves as 'otaku', but they are also recognizing friends and relatives as 'otaku'. In response to 'Do you have any relatives or close friends who have an "otaku" tendency?' in 1998, 20 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women answered 'many', and in 2007 those numbers had risen to 29 per cent of men and 27 per cent of women. It is clear from this result that the recognition of 'otaku' as members of the 'in-group' is growing, and that people are not as quick to answer that 'otaku' are people that they would not approach and would rather not be around. Rather, there is a possibility for rapid and widespread positive change in the 'otaku' stereotype. Nevertheless, more than half of the respondents answered that it was 'unpleasant' to be told by others that they had an 'otaku' tendency. In this regard, there was almost no change at all between the 1998 and 2007 surveys. The results show that the 'otaku' stereotype is becoming more positive, but there are still negative connotations that have not been entirely expunged. When someone else calls you an 'otaku', it is still an insult.

Conclusion

By comparing the results of surveys with ordinary university students distributed in 1998 and 2007, this chapter has shown that there has been no fundamental change in the negative associations of the 'otaku' stereotype, but there has been change in several respects. Changes in the recognition of 'otaku' among average people are not as remarkable as cultural critics and spokespeople of 'otaku' would like to believe. Furthermore, as there is no unified image of 'otaku', it does not make sense to talk about sharp changes in general perception, be they positive or negative. There is a need to discuss 'otaku' carefully and with sensitivity to the conflict inherent in the word itself. In terms of place-brand, Akihabara is a clear site of reification of the transformation of 'otaku'. Morikawa Ka'ichirō's theory of an epoch-making shift from the electric town to the 'holy land of otaku' might be seen in terms of the construction of a place-brand and local identity. However, there is still a tendency to treat with ridicule any discussion of detail on the historical origin of 'otaku' or the current situation that emphasizes sexual preference for *bishōjo* and the *moe* phenomenon. The result has been confusion about the place called Akihabara and the people called 'otaku' gathering there. Local policymakers and community renovators are more likely to talk about Akihabara as the cutting-edge of technological innovation rather than the 'holy land of otaku', and when they do discuss 'otaku', they would rather avoid talking about *moe*. There still seems to be a lingering stigma attached to 'otaku'.

Notes

1. Translators' note (TN): this is an abbreviated translation of Kikuchi Satoru (2008), "Otaku" sutereotaipu no hensen to Akihabara burando, *Chi'iki burando kenkyū*, 4,

- pp. 47–78. The primary translator for this chapter is Nishimura Keiko, with assistance from Björn-Ole Kamm.
2. General Headquarters was run by the United States during the occupation of Japan after the Second World War.
 3. TN: for a discussion of *moe*, see Galbraith, P.W. (2009), 'Moe. Exploring Virtual Potential in Post-Millennial Japan', *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Galbraith.html (accessed 20 June 2014).
 4. The number of people who responded to the survey was 13,891.
 5. TN: for a translation of this argument, see Morikawa, K. (2012), 'Otaku and the City: The Rebirth of Akihabara', in M. Ito, D. Okabe and I. Tsuji (eds), *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 133–57.
 6. TN: Japanese sentences are written as a string of words without spaces between them, which can result in considerable confusion about morpheme boundaries. For this reason, it is necessary to manually check the text and break it up into individual words rather than a string of connected words. Kikuchi refers to this process as *wakachigaki*.
 7. TN: 'gross' can be expressed in Japanese in various ways, such as *kimochi warui*, *kimoi* and *seiri-teki ni iya*. In this case, Kikuchi notes that he would translate all of these as 'disgusting feeling' (*seiri-teki ken'ō*).
 8. TN: the result of a correspondence analysis is a map in which objects and their descriptions are shown together as points on a flat surface or plane. The distances between the objects represent their dissimilarity, while the closer objects are together the more similar they are. However, the distances between objects and features are not interpretable.

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The Transition of Otaku and *Otaku*¹

Okada Toshio

Translator's introduction

For a general introduction to Okada Toshio, see Chapter 5 of this volume. Here we only offer some context for this excerpt from *Otaku wa sude ni shinde iru* (*Otaku/You are Already Dead*), which was originally published in 2008. By the mid-2000s, *otaku* were attracting global attention via, for example, Morikawa Ka'ichirō's contribution to the Ninth Biennial International Architecture Exhibition in Venice and Murakami Takashi's *Little Boy* exhibition in New York. One might imagine that this global attention would validate Okada's claims about *otaku* culture in the 1990s,² but his enthusiasm was muted, to say the least. In a dialogue with Morikawa, mediated by Murakami and published in his *Little Boy* catalogue in 2005, Okada claims that 'pure *otaku*' in Japan have been replaced by ten times as many 'otaku' who are each only a tenth as intense, which is cause for him to say that he has 'quit *otaku* studies.'³ When *Densha otoko* (2005) sparked a media boom surrounding *otaku*, sometimes called the 'otaku boom' (*otaku būmu*), reports on the rise of 'light *otaku*' (*raito otaku*) and 'petite *otaku*' (*puchi otaku*)⁴ seemed to support Okada's claims about the death of 'pure *otaku*'.

Otaku wa sude ni shinde iru expands on statements made by Okada in his dialogue with Morikawa. For Okada, *otaku* are no longer what they used to be, which is to say what he remembers from the 1980s and wrote about in the 1990s. In this translated excerpt, Okada expresses his alienation from representations of *otaku* in the popular and academic press in the 2000s (he singles out Morikawa, Saitō Tamaki and Azuma Hiroki). If it is true that younger *otaku* interested in 'moe' are the centre of *otaku* culture, then Okada wants no part of it. Indeed, in his dialogue with Morikawa, who did much to popularize *moe* in his book on Akihabara and subsequent exhibition, Okada already distances himself from this version of *otaku*.⁵

Okada's book elicited enraged responses from manga and anime fans in Japan and abroad, many of which accused him of just being old and taking the predictable stance of waxing nostalgic about the 'good ol' days' and criticizing 'these kids today'. Others took personal attacks even further, saying that Okada, who had lost 110 pounds and become something of a diet guru in the media at the time, was looking to distance himself from *otaku* and *otaku* studies and join the ranks of the popular folk. Certainly

not all of these criticisms are valid. For the most part, there is a failure to register the stakes of Okada's position, which is not as simple as an early adopter saying something is not cool once it goes 'mainstream'.

It is clear that Okada is staging an intervention into *otaku* discourse. Along the way, he provides valuable insights into *otaku* as a discriminatory term in the 1980s and his motivations in founding 'otakuology' in the 1990s. Resonating with Ōtsuka Eiji, Okada raises questions about the meaning of 'otaku'. Despite his role in popularizing the *katakana* rendition of *otaku* in the 1990s, Okada now writes the term in multiple ways – *hiragana* (*otaku*), *katakana* (*otaku*) and English (OTAKU) – and seems to be variably positioned with and against it. The more Okada tries to organize his thoughts on 'otaku', the more divisions and tensions he introduces, effectively exploding the coherent object from within. Here, 'otaku/otaku/OTAKU' becomes a terrain of contested meaning. Perhaps one reason for the intensely personal and passionate responses to Okada's *Otaku wa sude ni shinde iru* was that a celebrated figure took a position and drew lines in the sand, which drew others into the debate about 'otaku', what that word means and how they relate to it.

How otaku became *otaku*

Otaku are into various things. At some point, we, in all our diversity (*taiyōsei no aru watashi-tachi*), began to be referred to as *otaku*. However, what exactly 'otaku' refers to differs by generation. In order to define *otaku*, we need some history. Originally, *otaku* was written in *hiragana*, not *katakana*. When it was written in *hiragana*, 'otaku' was a pejorative, exemplified in terms such as 'otaku tribe' (*otaku-zoku*). It probably still has a discriminatory ring, but the discrimination was much more pronounced in the 1980s, when the term began to circulate. In other words, we did not start out happily using the term 'otaku'. Rather, it all began with the public saying, 'You guys are "otaku".' We *otaku*⁶ were born at a moment in time when regular people thought, 'The end of the year is about having fun during Christmas', and said to those of us who did not participate in that fun, 'You guys are weird.' It began with people criticizing us behind our backs: 'They call each other "otaku".' It began with contempt, with people talking about us: 'They are socially awkward, gloomy and not popular with women.'

Before anyone knew it, 'otaku' turned into a generic term for anyone who was 'gloomy' or 'socially awkward'. Other people started calling everyone 'otaku', even if they were not into anime. The early days of 'otaku' were a terrible time (*tondemo nai jidai*). Come to think of it, there is still hope for the *otaku* who like manga and anime, for those people who say, 'The end of the year is all about having fun at the Comic Market.' Those are *otaku* (*jissai ni otaku na no desu kara*). They might think to themselves, 'Yeah, it's because we like this sort of stuff that people call us "otaku".' Still, it is unfortunate that people who are simply not talkative, do not stand out, or are not popular were called 'otaku'. In any case, 'otaku' in the beginning was a grouping born from social discrimination. The definition of *otaku* as 'socially awkward' is in line with this origin.

The era of otaku before *otaku*

When the term ‘otaku’ did not yet exist, there were simply a lot of tribes. There were science fiction fans, anime fans, manga fans and fans of individual works and genres. When outsiders decided to call all of them ‘otaku’, our people (*watashi-tachi no minzoku*) were born. Not exactly a people, but rather ‘prisoners put in a camp’ by outsiders. At some point in history, ‘a prison camp for weirdos’ (*hen na yatsura kyōsei shūyōjo*) was built. There were many reasons to be thrown into that camp. In the first place, people who like manga, anime and games were thrown in, but then people who were ‘somewhat gloomy’ (*nanka kurai*) or ‘somewhat unsocial’ (*nanka shakai-sei ga nai*) found themselves thrown in, too. The name of this prison camp was ‘otaku’.

We were thrown into this camp without knowing much about it, but at some point we started saying to one another, ‘I’m otaku ... apparently’. The reason why we started adopting such a derogatory and discriminatory term was just that we got sick of how society saw us and of questions like, ‘Why are you reading manga at your age?’ It began to feel like too much effort to respond that, ‘No, but *Gundam* is a great anime!’ We knew that the conversation would not end well for us and we would just end up getting hurt. Thus *otaku* of the time shouldered the burden of being called ‘otaku’. ‘I don’t like to be called otaku, but let’s just agree that the reason I watch anime is because I’m otaku. Now leave me alone.’ It was like that, somehow.

Time passed, and people started to forget that being called ‘otaku’ used to be discriminatory – the name for our shared prison camp. So the generations that followed started to think, ‘I like anime, and there’s a camp for people like me. I gotta go!’ In that prison camp, otaku were doing things that seemed ridiculous to the average person – trying to create a paradise (*rakuen o tsukurō to shitari*) or claiming to be the king (*ōsama da tte ittari*).⁷ Preferring anime (or model guns, dating simulation games, idols or manga) was not part of the normal range of hobbies. For those with only normal hobbies, an adult reading manga or watching anime was incomprehensible in the 1980s. Thus they threw them into the prison camp called ‘otaku’.

Many of those who were thrown into the camp for being ‘somewhat gloomy’ or ‘somewhat unsocial’ – and these were usually somewhat false accusations – must have started watching anime or reading manga because those around them were doing the same. They did not have much of a choice in the beginning, but then came to understand that they actually liked those things. Probably because they were thrown into the small, shared space of the prison camp, these otaku had to have a certain level of knowledge of other hobbies, even if they might be different from their own, in order to get along. For example, a manga fan would know about military fans and the things that they liked. This goes the other way around, too, in that a military fan would have a certain level of knowledge about manga fans. Although not clearly defined, there was something like a required learning (*hissu kyōyō*) for ‘otaku’.

The existence of ‘M’

To get back to the issue of discrimination against otaku, the defining moment was the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu, the suspect in a case of serial kidnappings and murders of

little girls between 1988 and 1989. He was a man who lived in a detached house next to his family, surrounded by an enormous number of videotapes; a man who only had sexual desire for very young girls; a man who did not care about fashion or hairstyles as much as other men of the same generation. This image of Miyazaki in turn defined 'otaku' (which had already been bad from the beginning) at its worst extreme. There is even a ridiculous legend about an entertainment news reporter who came to the Comic Market and reported, 'There are 400,000 people just like Miyazaki Tsutomu in here.'

However, despite this, little by little, there emerged in the media different points of view that valued otaku. By the early 1990s, two conflicting perspectives existed side by side: *otaku* as criminals and *otaku* as something with potential. Let us compare titles from magazine articles at the time: 'Look into the world of the "otaku tribe", thrown into the limelight by "Miyazaki Tsutomu"!' (*Uwasa no Shinsō*, November 1989);⁸ 'Are you infected with the "otaku syndrome!?" Complete illustrated guide of the "otaku tribe", the horrifying phenomenon spreading in Japan at the end of the century' (*Weekly Playboy*, 23 January 1990).⁹ These titles represent the view of *otaku* as criminals. However, not all the articles that appeared at this time conformed to that perspective: 'Don't be just a boring person without any skills – learn to be a specialist from "otaku"!' You can make money with otaku! *Otaku* strike back – starting now!' (*Scola*, 22 February 1990);¹⁰ 'New tide in business: Explosion of the AVCC "otaku market"' (*SAPIO*, 22 March 1990). Even after the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu, not everyone was concerned with criticism, but a strong discriminatory tone persisted. Even articles that looked at *otaku* in a favourable light took the stance of making fun of these 'rare beasts' (*chinjū*) or sympathizing with losers (*hōgan biiki*).

I, Okada Toshio, was in the middle of all this. I did not like the fact that we were being discriminated against. I thought that it was unfair, and was angry at being looked down upon. I wanted *otaku* to have pride. I wanted to do something about a situation where people were discriminated against because of their hobbies. Now, my chance had finally arrived. In the early 1990s, there was a change in the stance of the mass media. Little by little, information about *otaku* from overseas came trickling in. Videos of foreigners screaming without any hesitation 'I love Urusei Yatsura!' or 'I want a Japanese schoolgirl to be my girlfriend!' were repeatedly shown on TV.¹¹ Apparently, overseas at least, there was no discrimination against *otaku*, and anime seemed to be accepted as a 'unique and cool hobby'. There was no way that I was going to miss this chance. So I wrote a book, *Otakugaku nyūmon (Introduction to Otakuology)*.

Introduction to Otakuology

There were two approaches to tackle the misunderstandings surrounding *otaku*. One was to convey the appeal itself, saying that being *otaku* is interesting and fun. Another was to say that, while you might not know it, we are something overseas. These were my two strategies for image improvement and to convey to people that 'otaku might actually be something' (*otaku tte jitsu wa tai shita koto aru kamo yo*). This is the precise reason that I wrote *Introduction to Otakuology* in 1996. When I wrote it, I had an image of *otaku* strongly imprinted in my mind. At the superficial level, I was thinking of people

who like manga, anime and games. I also included people who like the military genre or model guns – people who seem on the surface to just like something. Underneath, however, they all have in common the intelligence and strength of will to declare, ‘I will decide what I like.’ When I wrote about *otaku*, these are the people that I had in mind.

All too often, regular people get into something simply because TV, magazines or other people tell them to. Media and social pressure impose on people that ‘these things are trendy now’. It is similar to the behaviour of young girls during a new school semester, when they wonder which group of friends they should belong to or who should accompany them to the bathroom. Everybody thinks that they need to like something to stay in the socially acceptable zone. Thus they can say, ‘the end of the year is all about having fun during Christmas’, even though they are not Christian and do not have a date. They are following along without even questioning themselves. *Otaku* are different. They prefer to decide for themselves what they like. ‘I don’t have to read Shiba Ryōtarō, Ikenami Shōtarō or Napoleon Hill just because I’m an adult. I like *Gundam*.’ As a result, it is inevitable that society does not understand and excludes them, but they do not care, because they sincerely believe that society is full of idiots. ‘Regular people become fans of stuff on TV, right? I don’t really care what everybody likes right now. I prefer *The Moomins* that I’ve been watching since I was a child.’ I think of people like that as *otaku*.

Of course, their peers exclude them for having such strong and contrary opinions, and there is a danger that at some point people might just snap. In order for one to adhere to a different value system, one needs intelligence and willpower. I consider *otaku* to be people who have both of these things in spades. In other words, what I declared at that time that I wrote *Introduction to Otakuology* was that ‘strong *otaku*’ (*tsuyoi otaku*) can ‘refuse the “norm”’ (*futsū no hitei*). To be an *otaku* is to reach beyond the ordinary. Nietzsche thought that strong contempt for the masses would create the *Übermensch*. My claim was perhaps somewhat similar. At the same time, *otaku* should to a certain extent be social. Otherwise, their ego will be crushed by the world around them and they will lose everything. Therefore I thought, ‘If someone claims to be an *otaku*, then s/he must be smart. S/he must be competent.’ That is why I opened a seminar called ‘*Otaku Cultural Theory*’ (*otaku bunka ron*) at the University of Tokyo. I thought, ‘It might mean something if the students are at the level of the University of Tokyo.’

However, there seem to be many *otaku* who are not on that level. These days, fewer people have reached the level of extraordinary intelligence that is required of *otaku*. What I mean is that on top of ordinary knowledge and common sense, they have not finished the required learning of the *otaku* world (*otaku kai no hissu kyōyō*). I feel that the world is changing and cannot help thinking, ‘How do such *otaku* make sense of themselves when they have neither intelligence nor willpower?’ Without a strong mind, the self who likes dating simulation games will be crushed by social pressure. In order to persist in one’s opinion – for example, ‘You might think I’m a pervert, but I like this and don’t really care what you think’ – one needs strong mental resilience. It follows that someone who persists with an interest in dating simulation games should not be a weak person, but, unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case.

What is happening here? Talking to *otaku* of the recent generation, I have started to feel confused. This might be the limit of my theory of *otaku* (*otaku ron no genkai*). In my definition, an *otaku* is a strong, or at least a specialized, person. An *otaku* is what an adult evolves into; the order of evolution is child, adult, *otaku*, so to speak. *Otaku* do not listen to what people say. If someone says, 'You'll be popular with girls if you quit being an *otaku*,' the *otaku* will say, 'That's absurd. There is no value in being popular if it means not being *otaku*. Girls should be more intelligent and see our worth as *otaku*, but they are hopeless.' In other words, when I think of *otaku*, I think of people who are so into something that they do not even care about being popular with the opposite sex. In fact, I for one do not care if I am popular with women or not.

Image changing for the better

In 1996, the same year that *Introduction to Otakuology* was released, I started a course titled 'Otaku Cultural Theory' at the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tokyo. The tone of the mass media was definitely favourable at the time. The tone was, 'The coming age is the age of *otaku*' (*kore kara no jidai wa otaku nan da*). At that time, I contributed an article to the journal *AERA*, which was titled 'Announcing a Course on Otakuology'. In that article, I wrote: 'In Japan, there is a persistent image of *otaku* as gloomy, ugly and without friends. Overseas, however, *otaku* are accepted as something COOL.¹² There is still quite a gap between Japanese *otaku* and those abroad.' That is how the article started off. I continued: 'Announcing a new course at the all mighty University of Tokyo. The view of *otaku* as socially inept people withdrawing into their own hobbies is outdated. *Otaku* are certainly a culture in which Japan can take pride in front of the world.'¹³ I believe it was at this time that public opinion concerning *otaku* made a turn for the better.

In order to change the 'public image of *otaku*' (*seken de no otaku imēji*) I did not just appeal to the *otaku* business world, but also and affirmatively to the media. Maybe another key to this change was my giving lectures and courses at MIT or when I presented my works at the Biennale in Venice. When the mass media introduced the strange behaviours of Michael Jackson, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and others, who I had presented as examples of world-famous *otaku* (*sekai-teki na otaku*) in *Introduction to Otakuology*, people commented, 'Oh, because they're *otaku*' (*otaku desu kara nee*). I contributed to that change. Further, Murakami Takashi, an artist uniquely popular worldwide, is recognized as an *otaku* by himself and others.

In other words, we finally reached a point where the label '*otaku* = losers and social non-conformists' was outdated. On the contrary, the image of *otaku* as potential success stories started to circulate in public, and people said, for example, '*Otaku* are, as expected, successful in this new world of IT business'. After continuously suffering from harmful rumours and discrimination that amounted to '*otaku* = those useless guys', *otaku* experienced an elevation in social status that made their previous treatment seem odd. The term *otaku*, which had actually been banned as a 'problematic term for broadcasting' by NHK, was now acceptable.

The change in perception of *otaku* came not only from the efforts of *otaku*, but also from the fact that the Japanese economy had reached its limit. With the bursting of the economic Bubble in 1991, Japanese lost the self-esteem they had in the past. In the wake of this, Japanese started to feel that whatever they did was useless. At that time, the feeling was, 'Japan still has *otaku*, which might amount to something'. I showcased the following episode in the aforementioned *AREA* article: 'Homepages created by clubs of famous US universities such as Harvard and MIT are loaded with information that reveal attentive reading of Japanese anime magazines. They write about what is going on with Shi'ina Hekiru, which shows that they are also well acquainted with voice actors and actresses.'¹⁴ Especially because it was a time of economic recession, and Japan as a whole had left no mark on the world, we all enthusiastically embraced this news from overseas, which seemed to raise the value of *otaku*. For this reason, the mass media was actually very positive about my course at the University of Tokyo. If I had said I was offering this course only a few years after Miyazaki Tsutomu's arrest and trial, the reaction might have been more like, 'What is all this about the University of Tokyo cultivating the Miyazaki reserve troops?'¹⁵ From the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, misunderstandings by parents, for example that manga and anime fans were potential sex offenders, were fading. Probably if the parents of *otaku* of this time learned that their sons or daughters were *otaku*, they would think that the kid's a handful and nothing more (*chotto komatta ko da na teido ni kangaete kurete ita*).

Expansion of *otaku*

In this way, the walls surrounding the prison camp called 'otaku' were gradually removed and it became a land called '*otaku*' (*'otaku' to iu kuni*), which covered a wide swatch of soil and allowed people from the outside to enter. *Otaku* was a multiethnic country; the people who lived there had hobbies that one would not normally embrace openly and which were a little childish. Similar to US society, different people mixed without losing their individuality. Without competing over things like the remarkable sale of video games or the robustness of manga, all different ethnicities (*taminzoku*) existed in symbiosis. There are many different ethnicities in the US, and though there are skirmishes now and then, in the end they are all pledging allegiance to the same country. In a similar way, *otaku* have something like a shared consciousness: 'Even though the things we like differ, we are all *otaku*.' Such was the condition in the 1990s for those of us who the public had called the '*otaku* tribe'.

From the beginning of the 1990s, there were frequent references to the high evaluation of *otaku* in other countries. In America, Europe and Asia, the term 'OTAKU' was circulated with a positive meaning.¹⁶ Anime like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–6), which up to now would have only been loved by *otaku*, became social phenomena (*shakai genshōka*). Miyazaki Hayao's anime gained national support, and finally also received an Oscar at the Academy Awards in the US. Excellent students from universities abroad called themselves *otaku*, and the mass media introduced almost weekly foreigners who dressed up as characters from *Sailor Moon* (1992–7).

From this, the appreciation of *otaku* in Japan increased considerably. Japanese have the inexplicable habit of valuing what is valued in foreign countries, and foreigners who were into anime served to relativize the weirdness of those of us who live in Japan.

If you think about it rationally, the fact that we are weird did not change, but, as there are weirdos in other countries as well, we started to believe with confidence that we are not the 'weird guys' (*hen na yatsu*) of Japan but 'universal guys' (*fuhen-teki na yatsu*) with a fixed number everywhere in the world. Given that, even if we were called 'weirdos', the nuance was not that we were 'disgusting', but rather more favourably that we were 'individuals' and 'interesting'. Until then, everyone believed that they would feel bad if they were called 'otaku', but this changed completely. Thanks to counter-narratives in the media and the coming of a new epoch, the public no longer nonsensically attacked *otaku*. The dark era of Miyazaki Tsutomu began to feel like a dream. In this way, we came to be able to boldly say, 'I am *otaku*'. Owing to this change, many people were now coming to *otaku* events. This was the state of affairs in the 1990s. What I am describing is the situation a little over a decade ago, but most *otaku* have already forgotten. Still, the truth is that we all experienced just how uncomfortable it is to be called *otaku* and seen that way. The reason why living as an *otaku* is easier is because the times have changed.

Otaku forebears and the first generation

Let's try to work through the narrative so far, but with due consideration of generations. *Otaku* differ in their nature by generation. The focus is currently on the third generation, which makes all others appear blurred and vague. A warning before we get started. I do not like those all-too-common discussions of generations meant to criticize young people. Certainly in every era there exists a set of mainstream values, and it might be possible to bundle together into one generation all those people immersed in a given set of values. However, times change, and with them values change, too. The march forward is as irresistible as the shift from familism to individualism. The extent to which an individual accepts changing values, or rejects the system, varies greatly.

If we compare individuals with computers, then the value system of each era is similar to an operating system. In this regard, even if the era changes, the previous operating system is not so much deleted as it is overwritten in succession. For example, I was born in Shōwa 33 (1958), which installed in me the fundamentals of the 'high-growth era' (*kōdo seichō jidai*). Even though 'anti-establishment culture' (*han-taisei bunka*) was later installed, this passed by like a flash and was overwritten by 'first generation *otaku* culture' (*dai'ichi sedai otaku bunka*). Many people were installed with 'Bubble culture' (*baburu bunka*), but I was spared that to a large extent. When 'second generation *otaku* culture' (*dai'ni sedai otaku bunka*), which I will discuss later, was installed, I changed to some degree. However, when it came to 'third generation *otaku* culture' (*dai'san sedai otaku bunka*), there was a conflict with the hitherto employed operating system due to bad compatibility. That I may understand '*moe*', the symbol of the culture of the third generation of *otaku*, but still not like it, reflects a conflict between operating systems.¹⁷

'Eras' certainly exist, but their influence differs greatly from one person to the next. This is why lumping people together as a 'generation' is always risky. One should not say, for example, 'People born in the Shōwa 30s have such and such a value system.' Still, in order to get my point across, there is no other way than to dare to speak of 'generations.' In order to explain my uneasy feeling that recent *otaku* culture is somehow different from what I know, I cannot help but act against my better judgement and risk an imperfect theory of generations. I ask my readers to bear in mind that theories about generations are imperfect. This is the minimal degree of caution necessary to stop a 'generational theory' from becoming a 'critique of kids today'.

The first generation, or the TV generation

We begin with the first generation of *otaku*. The first generation is the one christened by Nakamori Akio in 1983, which is in accordance with the first part of the definition offered by Hatena.¹⁸ It refers to those people who were involved in *otaku* activities around 1980, who called one another 'otaku', liked anime and manga or were exposed to lots of them and were seen as a little strange by those around them. I was one of them. Members of this generation are now in their forties. There were various factors contributing to the rise of this generation. Some people were drawn in through the boom in sci-fi movies represented by *Star Wars*, while others were drawn in through sci-fi novels, which soared in popularity in the middle of the 1970s. These were the people who migrated for various reasons to the continent called *otaku* in the 1980s. (Using a term such as 'immigration' (*imin*) seems somehow cool, like something out of the Gundam universe.)

You might ask, 'There have long been manga and sci-fi maniacs, so why do only the guys from the 1980s become *otaku*?' I understand the generation before the first, made up of people in their fifties, to be '*otaku* forebears' (*otaku genjin*), similar to the anthropoids and humanity's ancestors. These people might be maniacs of some kind, but they do not display the characteristics of *otaku*. For example, like the first generation, they are all haphazard when it comes to fashion, but people in their time did not see this as anything strange or in need of commentary. At the time of the forebears, everyone was kind of haphazard – a boy who cared about fashion was rather unusual – and nobody gave a fig if your hair was unkempt or not. This became impossible in the 1980s, at the time of my youth. When I look at pictures of myself during that time, I should have been embarrassed by my shoulder-length hair, but people of the forebears' generation would not be similarly embarrassed. This is because the *otaku* forebears did not experience 'alienation from society and conflict' (*seken kara no sogai to kattō*), which is a defining characteristic of *otaku*.

The first generation of *otaku* is the one that had TV sets at home since they were kids. This is key, I believe. The kids who were once called 'the TV generation' (*terebikkō*) are now in their forties. One of the characteristics of the first generation of *otaku* is that the public opinion of them was not that strict and they appeared to be 'somewhat well-raised' (*nantonaku sodachi ga ii*). *Otaku* hobbies and sociality went rather well together, and they were not really troubled about being *otaku*. They accepted without

worry that there was a difference between them and what society deemed 'normal'. That is why they show little passion for discussing 'theories of *otaku*' (*otaku ron*). Accordingly, without being noticed, many drop out from society. Passing forty, unmarried and not really caring about such things, they end up living as hermits (*yosutebito*). That is the first generation of *otaku*.

Second generation and society

The second generation of *otaku* consists of those people who are presently in their late twenties or just past thirty-five. Their youth was a time when the term and concept of 'otaku' permeated the general public, thanks to the aforementioned arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu and appearances by Taku Hachirō, who was once well known on TV as an otaku critic. It follows that this generation has bitter memories of being discriminated against. Originally, one was happy to keep on liking manga and anime after childhood, which was the case of the first generation, but it was different for the second generation. Due to Miyazaki Tsutomu, parents started wondering, 'What if our child is like him?' Even Taku Hachirō had people thinking, 'Don't put me in the same boat as this guy!' Incidentally, those of us from the first generation did not think Taku Hachirō was disgusting when we saw him. Far from thinking, 'Don't put me in the same boat as this guy', we said, 'Ah, such a guy has turned up, interesting, interesting'. The reason for this difference in reception lies in the aforementioned attitude, where from the outset we did not expect understanding from society. In general, the second generation is comprised of people who hit puberty between the early 1990s and 1995, when Aum Shinrikyō released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway.¹⁹ It is characteristic of the second generation of *otaku* to be consumed by 'a love of theories of *otaku*' (*otaku ron ga daisuki*). For them, *otaku* hobbies are their 'raison d'être' (*ikigai*) and, at the same time, their 'cross to bear'. Awareness about their interests and motivations, and an intense desire to be accepted by the public, make them passionate voices engaged in theories of *otaku*.

The cultivated third generation

The third generation of *otaku* is comprised of those in their early twenties today. This is the generation that I currently teach at universities. In talking to them, I realized that, for them, 'media is mixed' (*media ga konzai shite iru*). When talking about something, they cannot recall whether they played it as a game, read it as a manga or saw it as an anime. To give a concrete example, consider *Higurashi When They Cry*. Originally this was a fan-made indie-game, but after gaining a following it spread to drama CDs, manga and anime. So, if I talk to students who like this work and ask them whether they have read the manga version that corresponds to an episode that we are discussing, or if they have only watched the anime version or listened to the drama CD, they do not remember. For my generation of *otaku*, there was a strict distinction between the 'original story' (*honpen*) and 'derivative works' (*hasei sakuhin*), but, since the 1990s, it is

often the case that the staff of the original story also create derivative works themselves, which means that the distinction between original and derivative is blurred.

However, more important is their different sensitivity concerning distinctions of media. For the third generation of *otaku*, not only is media mixed, but there is also confusion about what works are old and new. They are a generation for whom *Evangelion*, *Sailor Moon* and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997) were already released and encountered on a level plane since childhood. They did not experience the so-called 'Eva shock' like the second generation did. They recognize that *Evangelion* was an excellent anime, but they were not shocked by it like people who are now in their thirties. In regard to all works, they emphasize how each impacted them personally over its historical significance. This might be the reason why they do not have much interest in the production team behind the anime or in exploring its relation to previous works. Rather than dwelling on a work this way, they tend to rush to the next one, which might deliver a similar experience.

Being exposed to 'shows and software specially made for *otaku*' (*otaku muke no sen'yō bangumi / sofuto*) has become commonplace, which has led to what might be called a 'cultivated *otaku* generation' (*junsui baiyō sedai otaku*). This *otaku* generation has the strong tendency to understand *otaku* hobbies as a 'place of escape where they can be pure' (*junsui de irareru tōsō basho*). The characteristic of the third generation is that they have had access to merchandise targeting *otaku* since birth. In the same way the first generation grew up with the TV and was called the 'TV generation', the third generation grew up with *otaku* media and merchandise and might be called 'natural born *otaku* people' (*kissui no otaku-bito*).

Another characteristic is that they do not experience the 'evolution of content' (*kontentsu no shinka*). The first generation saw how crude manga and anime made for children gradually evolved and grew into wonderful products. The second generation grew up experiencing a similar evolution in computer games. However, the third generation experienced only the evolution of 'media' such as the internet and mobile phones. They have grown up since birth with high-quality manga, anime and games, products that have almost already reached perfection, and are flooded with products made not for children, but rather specifically for *otaku*. The result is that the third generation has only limited aspirations to create content that they want but do not have, and similarly do not really display any sensitivity for critiquing *otaku* culture. Brought up as pure consumers, they chose *otaku* culture simply because it is interesting and easy to understand. Approaching hobbies this way, they do not ask serious questions about the *otaku* culture. As they do not question it, they do not become as passionate, even though they have been handed a precious and sophisticated *otaku* culture. They have neither the resolution of the first generation 'to cast away human life and live as a hobbyist' (*jinsei o sutete shumi-bito toshite ikiru*) nor the seriousness of the second generation 'to passionately narrate their identity' (*atsuku aidentitī o kataru*). The problem of the third generation might be that by birth they are 'consumers of *otaku* culture, which only equals an existence of being squeezed for profits' (*otaku bunka no shōhisha = kane o mushirareru dake no sonzai*).

Above I have tried to roughly explain the differences between the three generations of *otaku*. In truth, there is also a fourth *otaku* generation, which is comprised of people

who 'do not want to grow up because becoming an adult is a disadvantage, so they like *otaku* culture, which they can enter and enjoy as children.' Members of this fourth generation tend to sublimate their own abnormality (*abunōmarusa*) within an *otaku* culture hidden from the public.

Definition by academia

Although the reactions were comparably favourable when I offered my course 'Otaku Cultural Theory' at the University of Tokyo, much of society was somewhat taken aback that such a topic would be dealt with at a prestigious institution of higher learning. Since then, *otaku* research (*otaku kenkyū*) has bloomed in the world of academia. This might be a matter of course, since the number of *otaku* has increased and *otaku* culture is increasingly recognized and valued by society.

Circulating now as 'theories of *otaku*' (*otaku ron*) is a discourse about the third generation. To name a few representative scholars, there is Azuma Hiroki and his *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan* (2001),²⁰ Morikawa Ka'ichirō's *Moeru toshi Akihabara* (2003)²¹ and Saitō Tamaki's *Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki* (2006).²² To briefly summarize Morikawa's definition, '*otaku* are people who vector toward the no good' (*otaku towa dame shikō o motte iru ningen dearu*). Being *otaku* means having an orientation toward what is not good. Therefore, *otaku* project themselves onto feeble things or very young girls and go steadily bad. Reading between the lines of Morikawa's theory, *otaku* also have the tendency to go bad in real life. This is a theory of *otaku* as those who vector toward what is not good. In opposition to this, the psychiatrist Saitō Tamaki consistently gives the following definition: '*Otaku* are those who experience *moe* in response to the two-dimensional' (*nijigen de moeru noga otaku dearu*). In simpler terms, *otaku* are characterized by passionate feelings for fictional characters. Finally, Azuma Hiroki uses *otaku* as a 'general term for people who overindulge in a subculture that broadly and reciprocally connects comics, anime, games, personal computers, science fiction, special effects shows, figurines and other things' (*komikku, anime, gēmu, pāsonaru kompūta, SF, tokusatsu, figyua, sono hoka, tagai ni fukaku musubitsuita ichigun no sabukaruchā ni tandeki suru hitobito no sōshō*). This is actually more of a categorization than a definition, and it is not very useful anyhow.

These three definitions are born from the recent '*otaku* industry' (*otaku gyōkai*). Because they are authored by scholars, they seem very complex and difficult, but in truth they are not very different from the recent and familiar image in the media, which is '*otaku* are those guys in Akihabara who are always saying "*moe*". Not only do *otaku* not use the term '*moe*' in real life, but my own 'scene sense' (*genba kankaku*) leads me to disagree with these definitions, be they popular or academic. I am not saying that there are not *otaku* who feel passionate about manga and anime characters, and I am willing to consider that *otaku* are oriented toward things that are not considered good by others, but I cannot accept these as definitions of an *otaku* essence. This is no more than the disposition of one ethnicity living on the continent called *otaku*. Train *otaku* do not fit this definition. *Otaku* who enjoy *Moomin* to an excessive degree fall into the category of anime lovers, but outside this definition. And so on.

Japan is not limited to Tokyo

When one talks about the country of Japan, it seems that by default one is talking almost exclusively about Tokyo. But Japanese culture is not only made up of what is in vogue in Tokyo or what is seen on TV, which is biased toward Tokyo. Sure, many people live in Tokyo and most media production is based there, which leads the bias toward Tokyo, but it is just that – a bias. The countryside has its own circumstances and ways of life, for example people involved in agriculture or fishing. Here the primary and secondary industrial sectors, which are rarely picked up by TV or manga, have solidly taken root. Further, there are still traditions in the countryside, such as the convention that a woman should marry when she turns twenty-three. There are still many regions in Japan where the luxury of young people living alone is not permitted. In Tokyo, a shop somewhere is open twenty-four hours a day and you can get almost anything at any time, day or night, but in the countryside there is nothing but vending machines at night.

For argument's sake, envision the probable answer of a foreigner asked in his home country what Japan is like. Let's say this person has only seen Center Street in the Shibuya district of Tokyo, which is known for youth culture, fashion and clubbing. Given this, the foreigner's response might be something like: 'Japan is a country of convenience that is alight twenty-four hours a day. Girls wearing gaudy makeup are loitering everywhere, expressing "high spirits".' If it were a tourist making this claim, then I would not particularly care about the bias, but if this foreigner who only knows Center Street in Shibuya calls him or herself a 'Japanologist' and talks about 'Japan' this way, then s/he loses all credibility.

I have the same uncomfortable feeling concerning the aforementioned definitions by Morikawa and Saitō. If we agree with Morikawa that the essence of *otaku* is a preference for bad things, then it is hard to give an adequate explanation as to why there are unexpectedly so many *otaku* who are lawyers, physicians and managers. If I am told that being an *otaku* means experiencing a 'response to the two-dimensional', then I cannot help but object to the limitation of 'two-dimensional'. What about a military *otaku*? What about women burning with passion watching Takarazuka? If we agree with Saitō that, 'Otaku are those who experience *moe* in response to the two-dimensional', then a huge number of *otaku*, including me, are not *otaku*. The questions are endless. Are those burning with passion for beautiful girl figurines, which are not two-dimensional, covered by Saitō's definition? Maybe one can say that the female characters made into figurines come from manga and anime and are thus 'two-dimensional'. However, if it is the figurine that *otaku* feel *moe* for, then this is a three-dimensional, solid object. Consider that photo collections of figurines have been published, but these did not sell very well. In other words, it seems that fans adore the three-dimensional body of the figurine and do not burn with passion when it is returned to a two-dimensional image. Are we to gather from this that they are not *otaku*?

Of course, it is true that definitions are always terribly difficult. I believe that the definitions of Morikawa and Saitō are considerable efforts in making the characteristics and dispositions of the third generation of *otaku* (who are into *moe*) easily understood

and yet sensational. However, ‘vector toward the no good’ (*dame shikō*) and ‘two-dimensional *moe*’ (*nijigen moe*) – these two concepts represent nothing but small and manageable traits of some *otaku*. Just as cabbage is not equivalent to all vegetables and Tokyo is not all of Japan, the third generation of *otaku* does not represent all *otaku*. Today, however, it seems unreasonable to say that members of the third generation of *otaku* are only one kind of *otaku*. Unexpectedly, these *otaku* are reported by the media (both popular and academic) to be the current ‘centre of *otaku*’ (*otaku no chūshin*).

Notes

1. Translator’s note (TN): this is a translation of Okada Toshio (2008), *Otaku wa sude ni shinde iru*, Tokyo: Shinchōsha, Chapter 4. The primary translator for this chapter is Björn-Ole Kamm, and the introduction is by Patrick W. Galbraith.
2. TN: certainly Okada’s tying *otaku* to premodern Japan resonates with Murakami. See Steinberg, M. (2004), ‘Otaku Consumption, Superflat Art, and the Return to Edo’, *Japan Forum*, 16 (3), pp. 449–71, and LaMarre, T. (2006), ‘Otaku Movement’, in T. Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (eds), *Japan after Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, pp. 358–94.
3. TN: citation is p. 165 in Okada, T., Morikawa, K. and Murakami, T. (2005), ‘Otaku Talk’, in T. Murakami (ed.), *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan’s Exploding Subculture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 165–85.
4. TN: see Media Create (2008), *Otaku sangyō hakusho* [*Otaku Industry White Paper*], Tokyo: Media Create.
5. TN: see Okada, Morikawa, and Murakami (2005), ‘Otaku Talk’, pp. 170–2.
6. TN: Okada writes *watashi-tachi otaku*.
7. TN: this vision of striving for paradise amid discrimination is precisely the one presented in *Otaku no Video* (1991), for which Okada was the scriptwriter. One of the characters in this mock documentary, which incorporates certain aspects of Gainax’s history, claims to want to be the ‘*otaku* king’, a title that Okada himself claims. For more on *Otaku no Video*, see Shen, this volume.
8. TN: ‘*otaku*’ is written in a non-standard way here, with the ‘o’ in *hiragana* and the ‘*taku*’ in *katakana*.
9. TN: ‘*otaku* syndrome’ refers to the phrase *otakkī shōkōgun*. The first word, *otakkī*, is slang for ‘*otaku* like’ and is roughly analogous to ‘geeky’, but it is translated here as simply *otaku* to avoid confusion.
10. TN: the italicized ‘*otaku*’ is *otakkī* in the original Japanese.
11. TN: *Urusei Yatsura* (1978–87) is a popular manga by Takahashi Rumiko that was adapted into an anime and became a major rallying point for fans in Japan and the United States. As is typical, Okada writes the lines spoken by these imaginary foreigners in *katakana* to mark their poor pronunciation of Japanese.
12. TN: Okada writes ‘cool’ in Roman letters and all caps.
13. TN: it is worth mentioning that this language is very similar to that of the ‘Cool Japan’ campaign later pursued by the Japanese government, which included the mainstreaming and naturalizing of *otaku* that Okada would come to resent.
14. TN: Shi’ina Hekiru is a voice actress perhaps best known as the first voice of Mega Man (1993–6).

15. TN: after the arrest of Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989, 'criminal reserve troops' (*hanzaisha yobigun*) was a term used to refer disparagingly to manga and anime fans, who were said to be potential criminals. See Kamm, this volume.
16. TN: Okada writes '*otaku*' here in Roman letters and all caps, adding OTAKU as used by foreigners to the *hiragana* and *katakana* renderings of the word.
17. TN: *moe* refers to an affective response to fictional characters or representations of them. See Galbraith, P.W. (2009), 'Moe: Exploring Virtual Potential in Post-Millennial Japan', *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*, www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Galbraith.html (accessed 20 June 2014).
18. TN: Hatena is an internet services company in Japan. Okada is ostensibly referring to its popular 'keywords', which function as an online dictionary.
19. TN: if Miyazaki was considered an *otaku* serial killer, then Aum was considered an *otaku* cult. See for example Gardner, R.A. (2008), 'Aum Shinrikyō and a Panic About Manga and Anime', in M.W. MacWilliams (ed.), *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, pp. 200–18.
20. TN: for an English translation, see Azuma, H. (2009), *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
21. TN: for an English translation of an excerpt of the book, see Morikawa, K. (2012), 'Otaku and the City: The Rebirth of Akihabara', in M. Itō, D. Okabe and I. Tsuji (eds), *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 133–57.
22. TN: for an English translation, see Saitō, T. (2011), *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

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‘Otaku’ as Label: Concerns over Productive Capacities in Contemporary Capitalist Japan¹

Thiam Huat Kam

Introduction: the common sense on ‘otaku’

Otaku: People who are interested in a particular genre or object, are extraordinarily knowledgeable about it, but are lacking in social common sense (shakai-teki na jōshiki).

Kōjien Sixth Edition, 2008, p. 400

There seems to be a commonsensical view of ‘otaku’ as a subculture or fandom, and an often corresponding assumption of its differences from, and rejection of, so-called mainstream society and culture.² Despite calls to attend to diversity, studies predicated on the view of ‘otaku’ as a subculture or fandom assume that there are common logics or characteristics, in terms of practices or modes of engagement with popular culture, among the subcultures categorized as ‘otaku’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these distinctive cultural logics are envisaged to be found in particular subcultures: cosplayers, train enthusiasts, pop-idol fans, ‘boys love’ readers and *dōjinshi* creators.³ Yet when such logics or characteristics are seen as pervasive in everyday life, the argument can be stretched to claim that everyone is an ‘otaku’. More importantly, studies that treat ‘otaku’ as certain subcultures seldom elucidate adequately why their members are classified as such. Instead, analyses of ‘otaku culture’ commonly involve the listing of distinctive cultural traits that set it apart from normal or mainstream culture. What is ‘normal’ or ‘mainstream’ is seldom called into question. As with ‘common sense’ in the dictionary *Kōjien*’s definition of the term, the ‘normal’ is clearly that which is used to define ‘otaku’, but it has not been taken into serious academic consideration.

In this chapter, I propose to look at ‘otaku’ as a label in order to interrogate the very notions of ‘normal’ and ‘mainstream’. I argue that the study of ‘otaku’ as a label can grasp and analyse an issue that has been hitherto overlooked in the study of media usage: people’s values concerning consumption and desire, which are rooted in particular concerns and discourses. I first lay out the main tenets of the approach, and highlight its similarities to and differences from other approaches. Adopting this approach, I then focus on how and why people are labelled as ‘otaku’ for their experience of excitement over manga and anime characters, as well as objects that are considered to

be non-sexual. I will explicate why certain forms of desire are presented as healthy and normal while others are seen as bewildering and disgusting. The study of 'otaku' as a label thus reveals the values and concerns that constitute the 'mainstream' and are often articulated as 'common sense', which are especially significant at a time when the term supposedly became the object of positive appraisals. It also draws critical attention to the capacities that produce meanings, affects and values – the capacities that provoke the labelling.

The study of 'otaku' as a label and its theoretical implications

In proposing to study 'otaku' as a label, I borrow from Howard Saul Becker's insightful discussion of deviance. In *Outsiders*, Becker argues that '*social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders' (Becker, 1973, p. 9, emphasis in original). Becker thus challenges the view that deviance is an inherent quality of an act and its perpetrators. People's judgement, which includes the application of certain social rules, is crucial in how and why an act comes to be regarded as deviant.

In a similar way, the study of 'otaku' as a label asks the question of how and why certain people come to be regarded as 'otaku'. It challenges the notion that certain acts are inherently 'otaku-ish' and the people undertaking them are naturally 'otaku'. It thus contests the foundational assumption of the view of 'otaku' as a subculture, which informs studies that attempt to trace the histories and characteristics of certain acts and the groups engaging in them. Rather than taking it as given that certain groups are 'otaku' and attempting to trace their histories and characteristics, the study of 'otaku' as a label turns to the judgements involved in the designation of these people as 'otaku'. This approach takes into account two interrelated insights from Becker. First, it finds it necessary to deal with questions of value (Becker, 1973, pp. 3–5). The judgement of who is 'otaku' is made through the invocation of certain values. In failing to question why certain people are judged to be 'otaku', we risk accepting, even perpetuating, the values implicit in the judgements. Studying 'otaku' as a label hence demands an interrogation of the values invoked in calling (or not calling) certain people 'otaku', and the social and historical milieu within which they are articulated. Second, the study follows Becker's emphasis on the 'logical independence of acts and the judgments people made of them' (1973, p. 186). Studies of 'otaku' as a subculture or fandom focus merely on the practices of its members, but an understanding of these practices does not equate with an explanation of why these people are labelled as 'otaku' in the first place. We need to ask why certain judgements (of who is and is not an 'otaku') are made. In sum, a view of 'otaku' as a label demands critical attention toward acts of judgement – the act of labelling or not labelling certain people 'otaku' – and the values and concerns involved. In fact, the conflation of an act and the judgement of it could very well lead observers to explain fan or subcultural practices through the perspectives and values of those who label these practices as 'otaku-ish'. In addition, since labelling is based on perceptions about the people who are being judged, the study of 'otaku' as a label does not assume that the labelled people are necessarily solipsistic, asocial or hold perverse desires.

Approaching 'otaku' as a label is not the same as dealing with 'otaku stereotypes'. Studies on 'otaku stereotypes' focus on the types of images people have of 'otaku' (cf. Kikuchi, 2000). They might point out and challenge certain false representations of the people identified as 'otaku' by attempting to uncover the truth about them, or measuring these representations against actual actions and personality characteristics. These studies hence assume there are 'real otaku' against whom images, perceptions and representations can be verified. In other words, they share the assumption that the people labelled 'otaku' are 'otaku'. Lisbet van Zoonen, in her discussion of feminist media studies, criticizes the focus on stereotypes and distorted images, 'since there is no reference point as to what the true human, male or female identity consists of' (1994, p. 31). Similarly, there is also no 'true otaku' to which we could refer.

Insofar as it is concerned with why and how certain practices and groups become problematic, approaching 'otaku' as a label overlaps with the social constructionist approach to youth categories (Toivonen and Imoto, 2013). However, I would like to highlight a few significant differences. First, the labelling of people as 'otaku' occurs at a more quotidian and wider societal level, and is not restricted to the actors and groups identified by the social constructionist approach as the central claims-makers (Toivonen and Imoto, 2013, pp. 67–8). It is hence important to look at ordinary people's judgements on who is 'otaku', which do not necessarily coincide with the discourses articulated by the claims-makers. Second, while the definitions of groups as problematic might involve certain interests, my primary concern, following Becker, lies with the values and concerns that inform the act of 'otaku' labelling. Third, a social constructionist approach to 'otaku' renders the labelled as rather passive, at the mercy of demonization or celebration by the media and other interested agents. By looking at 'otaku' as a label that arises out of particular values and concerns, it is possible to see, as will be elaborated later, how discourses on 'otaku' are articulated as reactions to the productive capacities that they attempt to harness.

A common theme in discussions on 'otaku' revolves around the issue of communication. Some commentators characterize 'otaku' as those lacking communication and social skills, or even social abstention and disengagement (Napier, 2011, p. 156; Yiu and Chan, 2013, p. 865). It is interesting to note that early commentators on 'otaku' in Japan displayed a concern over communication in the late 1980s (see Aida, this volume). For example, Miyadai Shinji points out that the defining characteristic of 'otaku' is withdrawal from interpersonal relationship and communication (2006, pp. 205–32). In fact, Miyadai's central theme throughout his discussion of 'otaku' is communication through consumption. Nakajima Azusa even characterizes 'otaku' as suffering from 'communication deficiency syndrome' (*komyunikēshon fuzen shōkōgun*) (1991). Others counter this characterization by pointing out how 'otaku' engage actively in communication and connection (Ito, 2012) or demonstrate a social desire for public recognition and acceptance (Condry, 2013, p. 203). While these studies focus on whether or not 'otaku' are communicative, communication itself is never called into question. The study of 'otaku' as a label does not address how and why 'otaku' possess or lack communication skills, for it does not assume that the labelled subcultures and fans are 'otaku', but rather asks the question of why there is a concern over communication that drives commentators to remark on the social ability (or lack

thereof) of 'otaku'. I have argued elsewhere that this concern over communication stems from its value as a form of immaterial labour necessary for capitalist production (Kam, 2013a, pp. 50–2).

Another conundrum in research on 'otaku' revolves around gender. Some scholars describe 'otaku' as a predominantly masculine culture, replete with sexist and antifeminist desires and fantasies and shadowed by the threat of flesh-and-blood women (cf. Napier, 2011). Others have attempted to counter the stereotype of 'otaku' as male by pointing out the existence of female 'otaku', most notably female fans of boys love fiction commonly identified by the term *fujoshi*.⁴ The debate reveals a problem of treating 'otaku' as a subculture, which involves the delineation of origins and boundaries. Those who associate 'otaku' with the cultures of the internet and videogames view 'otaku' as male-centered, while those who link 'otaku' with the production and consumption of *dōjin* products and conventions such as the Comic Market see the heavy presence of women. The contending views on 'otaku' are founded on associations with different subcultures. The study of 'otaku' as a label does not explicate which subcultures are really 'otaku', but rather analyses the role of gender in the labelling of certain people, for example men who are engaging in hobbies gendered as feminine, as 'otaku' (Kam, 2013b, pp. 163–5).

The study of 'otaku' as a label also bears profound implications for an understanding of subcultures and fandoms that are the targets of the label. First, it does not trivialize fans' practice of identifying as 'otaku'. Since it does not assume that participants in certain subcultures and fandoms are 'otaku', it does not accept as natural their identification as 'otaku'. Their identification can be due to particular identity politics, or even internalization of certain norms concerning media usage (Stanfill, 2013). The study of 'otaku' as a label demands that critical attention be given to these processes. In addition, it does not dismiss those participants who do not identify as 'otaku' as merely 'otaku-in-denial'. After all, participation in certain (sub)cultural activities does not necessarily lead to self-identification as 'otaku', and the two practices should not be conflated. The approach does not presuppose that these participants should identify as 'otaku' because they are. Instead, it takes seriously the significance of the specific contexts of self-identification.

Disgusting excitement at two-dimensional characters (that are not naked)

In this section, I will present some of the findings from research I conducted in Japan between 2005 and 2008. This period is significant in that there was a revitalized social and media interest in the 'otaku' phenomenon, in part due to the popularity of the media franchise *Densha otoko* (*Train Man*), which centres on the romantic adventure of a man identified as an 'otaku' (see Freedman, this volume), and in part due to the increasing interest of the Japanese government and businesses in the political and economic potential of popular culture, whose fans are often classified as 'otaku'. In the research, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with fifty-one university students, primarily in Tokyo and Kyoto, who were asked who they do and do not

identify as 'otaku' and the reasons for this. The objective of these interviews was to trace the values they invoked in making their judgements. I then contextualized these values, which were articulated as common sense or natural facts, within certain discourses and concerns in contemporary Japan. Critical attention to the specific concerns that inform 'otaku' labelling in this period serves to complicate any narrative that postulates a development from negative stigmatization to positive celebration and 'mainstreaming' in the 2000s.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus only on aspects of the interviews that demonstrate how 'otaku' labelling is undertaken out of a concern over the proper direction of sexual desire. In the interviews, I asked the students whether and why they consider (or do not consider) as 'otaku' a list of people with certain hobbies or preferences (for example, manga and novels). Among the list of people discussed, I raised the question of those who are sexually excited by characters from manga, anime and games. In their responses to this group of people, a number of students strongly insisted that people who are sexually aroused by fictional characters, or any of their manifestations, are 'otaku':

Normal people (*futsū no hito*) usually (*futsū ni*) discover their sexual desires in the three-dimensional, so there is no need for the two-dimensional. It is normal (*futsū ni*) to feel disgusted (*kimochiwarui*) when looking at the two-dimensional. To feel excitement is to be an otaku.

Michiru, nineteen years old⁵

[People who are sexually excited by fictional characters] are otaku. These people are turning two-dimensional stuff into three-dimensional stuff in their heads. People who are sexually excited by unreal things (*genjitsu denai mono*) do not live here, but rather in the world of imagination (*kasō no sekai*). After all, sexual desire, like the desire to eat, is important, and I really wonder how they can satisfy it in the world of imagination.

Namie, twenty-one years old

The people who appear on television are human beings of flesh and blood (*namami no ningen*). These people and gravure idols in photo books are flesh-and-blood humans. It is normal (*futsū*) that men are excited by these. In the case of anime, [the characters] are not real (*riaru ni sonzai shiteru mono janai*). Figurines are not flesh-and-blood humans. If men are excited by these things, I tend to think of them as strange (*okashii*). I never get excited at these things and I wonder why some people do.

Tsuyoshi, twenty-four years old

For these students, the three-dimensional is the world of 'flesh-and-blood' humans and the only reality, while manga and anime characters belong to the realm of imagination, which is not real. To them, it is natural and normal for people to direct their sexual desires towards three-dimensional 'flesh-and-blood' humans, while it is bewildering or repulsive when desires are channelled towards two-dimensional characters. The label

of 'otaku' is applied to people excited by the unreal realm of the two-dimensional, and these judgements are invoking a value that desire should be channelled towards 'flesh-and-blood' humans.

Another student expresses reservation about calling people who are sexually stimulated by anime characters 'otaku', which he describes as something that everyone has experienced at some point in their lives, including himself. Nevertheless, he also invokes the value concerning sexual desire by articulating feelings of disgust, and even guilt, toward this excitement: 'I have experienced excitement before while watching anime. Although I felt excited, I thought, "Am I not disgusting" (*kimochiwarui*)? I even disliked myself, so I thought I should stop. I have certainly experienced excitement. Everyone definitely has experienced that to a certain extent . . . But I disliked myself. I don't know why but I disliked myself' (Takurō, twenty years old). For some students, excitement at two-dimensional characters does not make a person an 'otaku', because 'normal' people also feel excitement when they look at these characters. Sexual stimulation by manga and anime characters is articulated here as part of the ordinary. This demonstrates that people differ in their judgements over the same group, as well as what is deemed to be sexual:

[People who] look at anime characters and are sexually excited? Well, isn't that all right (*ari*)? Sexual excitement is all right. That's all right, that's ok. They are not otaku.
Kyō, twenty-five years old

I don't think [people who are sexually excited when they look at manga and anime characters] are otaku. It's normal to be excited. These are sexual, or cute. Isn't that normal?

Harumi, twenty-two years old

While some students do not see sexual arousal by manga and anime characters as particularly unusual, they also point out that people who attain excitement solely through these characters are 'otaku'. The three-dimensional, which they construe as 'real', still takes precedence over the two-dimensional as the proper objects of desire. Those who have no interest in the three-dimensional or a preference for the two-dimensional are labelled 'otaku':

I would probably get excited [looking at sexual depictions in anime]. But I prefer the three-dimensional, reality (*genjitsu*). If a person says that the two-dimensional is better, then he or she is an otaku . . . This is because it is a form of escape from reality (*genjitsu tōhi*). Two-dimensional sex is impossible.

Tomoya, twenty-two years old

There is a possibility that ordinary people who are not otaku will also be excited when they look at these [depictions of sexual activities]. Conversely, people who say that they are not excited when they see normal three-dimensional women, or are excited only at two-dimensional objects, are definitely otaku.

Chōtarō, twenty years old

Yet the issue might not simply lie in the opposition between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Some students differentiate between the sexual excitement felt looking at manga and anime characters from the stimulation of adult-oriented manga and anime. The latter is normal and the former is not. The experience of sexual excitement when looking at adult-oriented manga and anime is 'inevitable' and 'not any different from watching adult videos' (Masami, twenty-one years old). People who are excited at characters who are conducting ordinary – i.e., non-sexual – activities in ordinary anime are 'otaku'. One of the aforementioned students, who states that people are 'otaku' if they are sexually aroused by characters, qualifies his statement with regard to the illustration of sexual activities in manga and anime: 'There is a difference when it comes to the sexual stuff. Adult manga are drawn to sexually excite people. Since their purpose is to sexually stimulate, normal people (*ippan no hito*) will buy them. But *Sailor Moon's* figurines are not naked. The shrine maidens in anime are not naked' (Tsuyoshi, twenty-four years old). This student is implying that the label 'otaku' should be reserved for those who are sexually stimulated by characters that are not depicted in sexual acts. In other words, he is labelling as 'otaku' people who have the capacity to eroticize what he does not consider to be sexual. The following students share this view:

If it is not a pornographic manga, sexual depiction is not necessarily direct (*dairekuto*). When normal people (*futsū no hito*) look at it, they will never get excited. People who gain excitement through subtle depictions, or depictions which only specific people could understand, are otaku. However, if it is a direct (*chokusetsu*) depiction, even I might be excited.

Tsukasa, twenty-two years old

Adult-oriented or titillating objects are made for stimulation, so even if people feel excited, it does not feel strange. That's simply erotic. As for manga of the beautiful young girl genre, the girls are merely drawn as cute, and there are no titillating depictions. When people are excited at girls who are drawn as cute in an ordinary sense, that's somehow perverted. That image is associated with otaku.

Atsushi, twenty years old

These students view only explicit portrayals of sex as erotic and hence naturally stimulating. For these students, desire could be directed at manga and anime characters, but only when they are explicitly drawn to be sexually titillating. Here people are labelled as 'otaku' for finding eroticism in characters that are not considered to be explicitly sexual. Another student even distinguishes the characters from the sexual act in manga and anime. Those who are excited by the former are 'otaku' while those who are aroused by the latter are not: '[People who read adult manga or watch adult anime] direct their excitement not towards the characters but the [sex] act. If they look at the characters and think that they are human and are excited, they are morbid (*byō-teki na*) otaku. But if they are excited through looking at the act, they are not otaku' (Rei, eighteen years old). The value that desire should be directed towards the 'flesh-and-blood' could also be observed from the view, held by some of these students, that men

who are interested in gravure idols (models who primarily pose for photo spreads in swimsuits) are not 'otaku': 'To sexually desire adult women is, in a certain sense, natural (*tōzen*). Furthermore, gravure idols are sexy. Having sexual desire for them is not abnormal. It is normal (*seijō*) and it is not an act against society . . . I have never heard of gravure idol otaku' (Tsukasa, twenty-two years old). On the other hand, some students do not consider all forms of desire for three-dimensional women as natural, normal and commonsensical. Hence, while they constitute gravure idols as legitimate objects of sexual desire, they do not see how certain women can be sexually attractive, as evident in the following:

Photobooks and gravure are all about women in swimwear, posing on the islands of the south. If men look at these, it is healthy (*kenzen*), isn't it? Men who are excited [by these women] are not otaku. But if they buy, look and grin at photobooks where women are in maid costumes, they are otaku. I wonder why they like maid costumes.

Tsuyoshi, twenty-four years old

Gravure idols are first and foremost about breasts. Most people (*hotondo no hito*) would be interested. But Morning Musume [a female pop-idol group] are young. There is the element of Lolita Complex in Morning Musume. *Lolicon*, people who are interested in young girls, are within the territory of otaku . . . I am not a *lolicon*, so I feel that people who like Morning Musume are a bit disgusting (*kimochi warui*).

Kyō, twenty-five years old

These statements could be seen as an extension of the logic that sexual desire should be directed at only objects that are explicitly sexual. These students construe the bare flesh, which is exposed while wearing swimsuits, and specific parts of the body such as the breasts, as objects of 'natural' and 'healthy' desire.⁶ From this perspective, only women displaying sexually mature bodies are natural sources of sexual excitement. The label of 'otaku' is reserved for men who deviate from the 'normal' and 'natural' desire by desiring women who do not exhibit such a body, such as those in maid costumes (which in fact conceal much of their body) or those pop-idols who exhibit a prepubescent look.

Interestingly, the views of these students coincide with a number of academic discussions on 'otaku'. Daniel Black argues that a key feature of (a predominantly male) 'otaku culture' is the prizing of a kind of femininity that is 'simultaneously infantilized and sexualized, endearingly non-threatening and subservient' and hence 'unlikely to be satisfactorily embodied in any living human being' (2012, p. 219). For Black, 'otaku' prefer virtual idols over living idols because the former could be controlled and manipulated, suggesting that they can only build an intimate relationship based on individual and total mastery (p. 220). Through an association with a desire for ownership and control and a denial (even fear) of female biology, the desire for virtual idols becomes rather problematic, even anti-feminist, in Black's discussion. Susan Napier also associates 'otaku' with 'unreality' by noting that 'rather than deal with flesh-and-blood human beings or the mutual physicality of lovemaking, many prefer the

less threatening space of the internet or bloodless give-and-take of video games, many of which feature strong sexual references' (2011, pp. 157–8). Again, 'flesh-and-blood human beings' and 'the mutual physicality of lovemaking' are posited as more desirable than the sexuality of the internet or games. Wai-hung Yiu and Alex Ching-shing Chan compare self-gratification via female characters in manga, which they see as a trait of the (male) 'otaku', to the 'self-gratification of pedophilia' and note its 'fatal consequences': 'since they cannot love real women, they consequently fail to marry, and their sexual desires (assuming they have a heterosexual orientation) cannot be fulfilled or realized in biological terms' (2013, p. 862). Real women, marriage and biological reproduction are left unquestioned as the norms (or at least a happier state of affairs). We might point out that both students and academics are ignoring the fact that sexual desire involves imagination and fantasy. We could even argue that imagination and fantasy is reality. However, it is even more important to ask why there is such a concern over sexual desire directed at the two-dimensional, satisfied through imagination, and not reliant on the explicitly sexual (the exposed sexually mature body or the direct depiction of sex).

Unproductive and auto-productive desires

The students whose views I have outlined in the previous section are invoking a value that sexual desire should be channelled towards 'flesh-and-blood' humans and that people should only be excited by what is explicitly sexual. They label as 'otaku' anyone who sexually desires manga and anime characters, or who fantasizes about sex where it is not directly depicted, in materials that are not meant to stimulate. This converges with a number of discourses in Japan, including the notion of what might be called 'reproductive heterosexuality'. This is the form of heterosexuality that leads to potential reproduction of offspring. Vera Mackie (2002, pp. 210–12, 218–19) has noted that the ideal citizen in contemporary Japan is one who is heterosexual and fertile. In other words, the Japanese state highly values the traits of heterosexuality and reproductive capacity in its citizens. Reproductive heterosexuality is also presumed in the common sense in Japan that all people will have a heterosexual marriage (Lunsing, 2001, p. 5). The desire for 'flesh-and-blood' humans is precisely at the heart of reproductive heterosexuality; it is by harbouring such a desire that people can enter into a potentially reproductive relationship. Although the desire for manga and anime characters of the opposite sex can be seen as heterosexual, it does not result in a potentially reproductive relationship. Only relationships with 'flesh-and-blood' humans lead to potentially reproductive relationships. People who staunchly believe in reproductive heterosexuality and its manifestations in the institutions of romance and marriage deem problematic those people that they perceive to find sexual satisfaction in avenues outside of this form of sexuality. As Alisa Freedman (this volume) observes, the *Densha otoko* boom and the revived public interest in 'otaku' around 2005 intersects precisely with increasing concerns over declining marriage and fertility rates in Japan.

The emphasis on the 'flesh-and-blood' body can also be associated with several discourses articulated in Japan as an advanced capitalist society. One such discourse is

the beauty ideals of contemporary Japan, which are in turn linked to an economy that thrives on the commodification and production of the body. The current beauty ideology, which emerged in the 1990s and was derived from Euroamerican beauty standards, promotes a more mature-looking female body type, requiring extensive management and modification that leaves no flesh untouched (Miller, 2006, pp. 9, 26). Breasts, particularly, have become a new marker of feminine beauty, and hence are lavished with attention and anxiety (Miller, 2006, pp. 71–3). This beauty ideal(ogy) of the sculpted body stands in contrast to the beauty ideal of 1970s Japan, which exists to a lesser extent today in the Lolita figure, which emphasizes cuteness, innocence and the prepubescent look of an undeveloped body (Miller, 2006, pp. 25–6, 75, 80). If the current beauty regime demands the sculpting and management of the body, I would suggest that it also requires desire to be directed towards this sculpted and managed body. Gravure idols, which some students hold up as legitimate objects of male sexual desire, are exemplars of the managed and sculpted body. Due in part to photography and editing technology, gravure idols are presented as slim, depilated and often voluptuous bodies. In contrast, women who are attractive for reasons other than a mature sculpted body, be it the appearance of prepubescent body or one covered by a maid costume, are deemed unacceptable, even antithetical, to this form of beauty and the related economy. It is within this context that men who are perceived to be sexually attracted to these women are labelled as ‘otaku’.

In addition to discourses on reproductive heterosexuality and the contemporary beauty ideal, the value that desire should be directed towards ‘flesh-and-blood’ human beings is also related to what Honda Tōru calls ‘love capitalism’ (*ren'ai shihonshugi*), a system where love and sex are commodified for consumption (Honda, 2005, pp. 8, 66). Under this system, which emerged during the Bubble economy, to love is to consume certain fashions, information and hobbies according to certain rules, akin to a manual, propagated by the mass media (2005, p. 25). Specifically, a man’s love is measured by the amount of money he spends on his partner and himself, for example, in the gifts that he gives, the dates he can afford, his hairstyles and clothes (p. 67). Love capitalism also includes the commodification of sex through the plethora of sex industries (pp. 23–4). As participation requires substantial consumption power, not everyone is able or willing to participate in love capitalism (p. 45). For Honda (p. 81), ‘otaku’ are the people who retreat from love capitalism by turning to romance in the mind, which he calls *moe*.

The love capitalism that Honda delineates and critiques is an economy founded on the desire for ‘flesh-and-blood’ humans. Honda (2005, p. 80) argues that male ‘otaku’ are often attacked and criticized by love capitalism because they conduct romance in their minds and hence do not invest in this economy by dating women or employing their sexual services. I would rework the logic of his argument to suggest that some people are labelled as ‘otaku’ precisely because they are judged to lack the desire for ‘flesh-and-blood’ human upon which love capitalism operates. Honda’s account on love capitalism, though misogynistic and polemical, resonates with a number of observations on a lucrative economy constituted by certain industries and their advertisers. According to Farrer, Tsuchiya and Bagrowicz (2008, p. 179), various forms of consumption, including dining, gift exchange and entertainment, become indispensable

to dating, because they are used to mark and measure commitment and fun in a relationship. Similarly, Lunsing (2000, p. 177) observes that expressions of love have become almost impossible without lavish spending. Furthermore, hegemonic notions of masculinity require men to beautify and groom themselves to appeal to female desire (Dasgupta, 2010). Lunsing (2000, pp. 165–70) also notes a vibrant and thriving sexual economy providing diverse forms of services, such as soaplands and image clubs. The students' belief that it is natural to desire 'flesh-and-blood' human beings coincides with the requirement of love capitalism.

People are labelled 'otaku' not merely for desiring the two-dimensional, but also for finding sexual satisfaction in what is considered to be non-sexual (for example, characters performing ordinary activities or women in maid costumes).⁷ Manga and anime characters are viewed as objects that cannot (and should not) be erotic, insofar as they are instances of the unreal as opposed to the 'real' three-dimensional. What raises concern is the ability to experience excitement without depending on the 'naturally' erotic and what is created with the intention to stimulate. Honda's discussion indicates that what is problematic for mainstream society is the notion of a self-reliant sexuality, which potentially allows people to exit capitalism. I would suggest that the concern over sexual desire, which forms a basis for 'otaku' labelling, is not merely one over the failure to desire 'flesh-and-blood' humans, which is connected to the failure to engage in a heterosexual relationship that is potentially reproductive for the state and productive for capitalism, but also one over the capacity to fulfil sexual desires through imagination without depending on direct depictions of sex.

Self-reliant sexuality is akin to autoeroticism, which includes masturbation. Greg Tuck (2009, pp. 78–9) points out that while masturbation has gained greater visibility due to the growth of the mediated sex industries, it is still unacceptable. Masturbation occupies an ambivalent position vis-à-vis capitalism, encouraged and condemned at the same time. This is because masturbation poses problems for both patriarchy and capitalism, not least because the flesh and body of the other are absent (Tuck, 2009, p. 78). Since masturbation is not limited to any particular type of body or sexual orientation, it is 'beyond and prior to our sexual identities' and indicates 'a fundamental sexual capacity at odds with the binary oppositions that dominate mainstream understanding of sexual difference and orientation' (2009, p. 80). Masturbation is also seemingly 'cost free' and hence an 'anathema to a society in which only those goods and services that are exchanged have value' (2009, p. 86). Interestingly, Tuck (p. 88) observes that male masturbation is often presented as bad and wasteful, as the man 'consumes his own production and therefore does violence to the concept of market exchange'.

Like men who could conduct romance within their minds and masturbating men, people who direct their sexual desires towards manga and anime characters or what is not considered to be explicit depictions of sexuality, whom some students label as 'otaku', are deemed problematic because they are perceived to have the capacity to fulfil their own desire through imagination without going through market exchanges. More significantly, it is the autonomy and productivity of imagination that is disturbing to capitalism, because it allows people to produce erotic pleasure even from supposedly unreal characters or what is drawn without the intention to sexually stimulate. Such capacities are feared because they can produce sexual satisfaction on their own, even

from objects that are considered to be non-sexual, and without the need for explicit depictions of sexuality or bared flesh. In other words, such capacities imply the possibility of an autonomous self-reliant production that does not require the interventions of capitalism. The fear of this capacity to produce sexual fulfilment can be seen as part of the larger concern over apparently autonomous production of pleasure in general, which emanates the threat of autarky to capitalism and is also a basis for 'otaku' labelling (Kam, 2013a, pp. 56–7).

Conclusion: Concerns over productive capacities in contemporary capitalism

In this chapter, I have focused on how the 'otaku' label is applied to people who are perceived to direct their desire towards manga and anime characters, or what is not considered as explicitly sexual (for example, characters not engaging in sexual activities or women not exposing their bodies). This labelling involves the invocation of a value that desire should be channelled towards 'natural' objects of sexual desire, which is to say the 'flesh-and-blood' human or, in the case of fictional characters, those engaged in explicit sexual activity. I contextualized this value within larger concerns over the failure to engage in reproductive heterosexuality, to endorse the current beauty regime and to participate in a capitalist system where sex and romance are commodified.

Yet in stating it is 'natural' to be sexually stimulated by and interested in 'flesh-and-blood' humans, or women clad (only) in swimsuits, the students I interviewed are also naturalizing these forms of desire. They also reify notions of what constitute reality and reinforce their division from, and superior status to, imagination and fantasy. Discussions on 'otaku' often contribute to these reifications. Arguments that the desires of 'otaku' do not endanger or threaten real girls and women (cf. Honda, 2005, pp. 36–7) position manga and anime characters and the two-dimensional as divorced from reality. Tsuji Izumi, in his discussion on train enthusiasts whom he construes as 'otaku', characterizes them and 'otaku culture' in general with a 'penchant for the unreal' (Izumi, 2012, p. 4). In doing so, he reinscribes the boundary between real and unreal. These accounts fail to see that reality is itself constituted, often as the appropriate – and only – site for (sexual) desire. The invocation of a value in the labelling of a person as 'otaku' is at the same time a (re)constitution of what counts as 'normal', against which the person is judged. 'Otaku' labelling hence indicates not merely the 'making' of the people classified as 'otaku', but also the 'making' of the mainstream – the delineation of what constitutes normality or mainstream, or the normal-in-construction. What is considered normal or mainstream is as much made as the 'otaku' label to which it is opposed.

The concern echoed in the labelling of people for directing their desire towards the realm of imagination or subtle depictions of sexuality is not merely one over perceived failure, but also perceived productivity and production. The cause of concern and anxiety lies as much in the productive capacity to see sexuality in manga and anime characters. This capacity, which involves imagination, is considered productive because it produces sexual excitement and fulfilment even when there is an apparent absence of 'natural'

sexual stimuli – flesh and body of a human other or the representations of sexual activities.⁸ Concerns over the capacity to produce sexual desire and stimulation through manga and anime characters, purportedly non-sexual representations, or women who are deemed to be non-sexual, might be considered as part of the concern over what Jack Bratich (2005, 2008) calls 'audience power'. Drawing on Antonio Negri's concept of constituent power, Bratich refers to audience power or audience constituent power as 'the creative processes of meaning making, the appropriation and circulation of affects, and the enhancement of these very capacities', which are actualized 'through the mediation of communication technologies' (2005, p. 25). Audience power provokes its conceptual capture as constituted power, the forms and arrangements that represent constituent power to make it sensible and manageable (2008, p. 35). From this perspective, 'audience' is always already 'a *constituted* category, target, and sphere that was a result of capturing audience power into a manageable form' (2008, p. 38). Discourses that seek to appropriate and diminish audience power by constituting it as 'audience', 'masses' or 'consumers' are reactions to its creative forces. Such conceptual capture indicates the concern or anxiety over the production of values, significations and affects by audience power.

Building on Bratich's discussion, I argue that the term 'otaku' is like the term 'audience', in that it operates as a reactive conceptual capture of certain productive forces in Japan, including the production and channelling of imagination and sexual desire. The labelling of people as 'otaku' is a practice that harnesses and contains these creative capacities, by positing some of them as unnatural and disgusting and others as commonsensical and even valuable. Along with Bratich (2005, p. 260), I propose that it is important to look at the productivity of audience power prior to the moment when it is captured by the practices of 'otaku' labelling. What prompts anxiety from capital, and what Bratich emphasizes in the study of audience power, is the 'actual labour, the power of generation and transformation through the commonality of communication and affect', which makes culture 'a source of value for the financial economy, which can, through a persistent increase in self-valorizing activities, *autonomize* itself' (2008, p. 42, emphasis in original). Sexual desire, especially combined with imagination, can produce value for capitalism, but can also potentially undermine capitalism by producing sexual excitement and fulfilment without reliance on the logics of capital. Emphasis on this production also highlights the fact that practices and discourses that seek to represent and contain it are reactions to it. When it is cast as *an 'otaku culture' resistant to 'mainstream' or 'normal' society*, audience power is reduced to a reactive force to powerful determinants that constrain activities mainly conceptualized as consumption (Bratich, 2008, pp. 46–7). '*Otaku' as label* indicates that it is the practice of audience power that provokes the labelling. The act of 'otaku' labelling does produce the category of 'otaku', but this construction is itself a response to and a (partial) capture of the creative forces that constitute audience power. It might be useful to recall Becker's insistence that an act is independent of the judgement of it. In fact, I would contend that the judgement is a reaction to the act.

I must emphasize that what constitutes the object of concern and provokes labelling is capacities as opposed to specific groups.⁹ After all, a group might be labelled as 'otaku' by some but not by others, as in the case of the people who are excited by sexual depictions of manga and anime characters. Creative capacities are not limited to

particular subcultural groups. It could even be said that 'otaku' as a label attempts to reduce these creative capacities to certain groups, or to contain them. By isolating these productive processes to certain 'problematic' groups or a subcultural phenomenon, the label attempts to obscure the emergence and actualization of capacities as the shared condition of contemporary life. By accepting the labelling of certain groups as 'otaku', we risk adding to the reduction of commonalities among people, including the productive forces in the usage of media, which are not the exclusive prerogatives of particular subcultures. The study of 'otaku' as a label does not promise revelations about a subculture or fandom (because it does not assume that its participants are 'otaku'), but it does hold relevance for the understanding of media usage by highlighting certain productive capacities, which are the very capacities that provoke labelling in the first place.

Thomas LaMarre has made a similar argument, also drawing on Antonio Negri's discussion of constituent power, namely that 'otaku' as 'a distributed collective force of desire' are akin to constituent power (LaMarre, 2006, p. 359). LaMarre is interested in the double movement of labour power, which can be harnessed and controlled by capital and can also remain autonomous and escape constituted power (2006, pp. 360–3). LaMarre's concerns are close to mine, but I have contended that 'otaku' itself is a constituted power. 'Otaku' as a label does point towards labour, but it is not the labour itself; instead, it is applied in an attempt to capture this labour. Hence in characterizing labour power, and the possibilities it opens up, as 'otaku movement', LaMarre can only speak about them as a constituted category that evokes capital's concerns over them. Once we see 'otaku' as a label that presents certain capacities as unnatural, we begin to see how it operates as a constituted power containing the creative forces of audience power.

If 'otaku' is a constituted power that indicates a concern over audience power in contemporary Japan, what are the critical implications? By failing to acknowledge 'otaku' as a label and hence a constituted category, we risk becoming complicit in appropriating, harnessing, diminishing and containing the productive processes of audience power.¹⁰ By labelling people as 'otaku', we invoke and perpetuate certain values and concerns – notions that certain practices should, or should not, be undertaken. The practice of 'otaku' labelling subjects audience power to management by affirming that it is normal and natural to exercise productive capacities in certain ways – ways that usually converge with the logics of capital, for example the channelling of sexual interests, desires and imagination to certain sites. The production of audience power is contained, and its possibilities defused, when certain capacities, such as the one to envisage sexuality in characters performing 'ordinary' activities, are presented as unnatural, uncommonsensual and unusual, which then lead to them being isolated in the constituted category of 'otaku'. The urgent task is to locate the creative processes and their potential in producing alternatives to the logics of capitalism without turning them into the constituted power of the label 'otaku'.

Notes

1. This chapter draws on the author's master's research, which is indebted to guidance and support from faculty members at the Department of Japanese Studies, National

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2. I place the term 'otaku' in quotation marks to emphasize that it is a label rather than a referent to specific groups of people.
3. *Dōjin* refers to people with the same interest while *shi* means publication. *Dōjinshi* in the context of media fandom are self-publications, produced without the mediation of commercial publishers, which include fan-fiction manga.
4. *Fujoshi* literally means 'rotten girls'. For a discussion on *fujoshi* as an identity constructed by female users of 'boys love' fiction, see Okabe and Ishida (2012). Unfortunately, Okabe and Ishida accept as given that these users are 'otaku', even while they call attention to the politics surrounding the term '*fujoshi*'.
5. All students' names are pseudonyms.
6. Interestingly, Yiu and Chan argue that the male 'otaku' gaze is directed at the breasts of young female celebrities (Yiu and Chan, 2013, pp. 866–7). Their view is clearly different from those held by students, who think that men interested in gravure idols' bodies are not 'otaku'. This difference demonstrates that a group may be labelled a certain way by some and not others, indicating different concerns and values at work in judgement. It seems that the concern in the context of Hong Kong is men's attraction to young women who accentuate their bodies.
7. I should emphasize that I am not arguing that these entities do not arouse sexual desire. I am highlighting a view that posits stimulation by these entities as unnatural and disturbing. In studying 'otaku' as a label, it is insufficient merely to point out that those who hold this view are mistaken and that these entities do hold particular characteristics that make them erotic. Instead, I propose to ask why there is a concern over desire channelled towards entities that are not considered to be sexually stimulating.
8. Psychiatrist Saitō Tamaki's argument that 'otaku' can treat fiction as sexual objects might have pointed to the capacity of sexual imagination (Saitō, 2009, pp. 143–6). His argument certainly has to be reread in a study of 'otaku' as label. It is not that certain subcultures are 'otaku' and bear the distinctive characteristic of seeing fiction as sexual objects, but rather that the perceived capability to constitute fiction as sexual objects raises concerns and provokes labelling. Furthermore, Saitō subsumes this capability under heterosexual desire within a phallogocentric symbolic order.
9. It is important to note that this is not the same as arguing that 'otaku' is a certain set of capacities and the related practices.
10. Even the most celebrative accounts on 'otaku' reduce productive capacities to the traits of the super-consumer or the committed and sincere (heterosexual) lover – subjects that could be productive for capital.

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