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## An Introduction to Otaku Movement

### Introduction: Pure Immanence

In his discussion of the transnational movement of *Pokémon*, Joseph Tobin signals that “official” networks, that is, corporate-planned and corporate-directed processes of “glocalization,” were only part of its success. He mentions the importance of “unofficial consumption networks”—“just months after the television series was first aired in Japan, pirated versions were being sold and otherwise exchanged hand to hand, by mail, and over the Internet by *anime otaku* (Japanese animation fans) in various locations outside Japan.”<sup>1</sup> In other accounts of the diffusion of Japanese animation, one finds reference to unofficial networks and pirate editions, which come prior to the corporate regulation of markets, product distribution and profits. In her discussion of the development of a market for *Doraemon* in Southeast Asia, Saya Shiraishi writes of corporations’ tolerance *vis à vis* pirate translations and editions of manga and anime, which they feel pave the way for the sale of official versions.<sup>2</sup>

It is as if the official global markets for Japanese animation had a “dark precursor.”<sup>3</sup> Another movement of manga and anime products, associated with the

activity of so-called otaku, seems to precede the corporate regulation, standardisation and homogenisation of the market. On the one hand, this “otaku movement” of anime images seems to spur or facilitate the emergence of official markets. Tobin argues, for instance, that “these informal and in some instances illegal routes of introducing *Pokémon* and other Japanese cultural products abroad did more to facilitate than to interfere with Nintendo’s global marketing mission.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, on the other hand, otaku seem to remain somehow autonomous of the official markets and corporate regulation. Tobin also suggests that “otaku are too loyal and too satisfied to suit the pace of contemporary capitalist corporations that depend on consumer restlessness, boredom, and disappointment.”<sup>5</sup> Oddly, otaku activities seem both to expedite and to slow corporate-controlled movement of anime around the world. They provide the (dimensionless) point where global markets coalesce and disperse, where they accelerate, gaining or losing speed. Otaku movement comes before official networks, yet the official networks do not subsume it. Even if the official networks leave otaku activities behind them, otaku activities persist in their own particular ways. The relation between otaku movement and corporate markets is not one of mutual reciprocity. While the two seem always to occur in conjunction, the one does not simply reflect the other.

In this respect, otaku activities recall Negri’s theorisation of labour power, which is also central to Hardt and Negri’s critique of Empire. For Negri, prior to capital’s abstract quantification and rationalisation of labour, there is living labour with ontological force. “Labour *power* is both heteronomous and autonomous, object and subject; it is made (as labour), but it makes (as power).”<sup>6</sup> Capitalism relies on labour power. It must harness the power of labour to achieve its ends but can never control it

entirely. Something of labour's power always exceeds the grasp of abstract labour. Thus, for Hardt and Negri, labour is one way to think of the "constituent power" of pure immanence, an uncontainable power, infinitely protean and continually creative.<sup>7</sup> Constituent power ontologically precedes and exceeds constitutive power—for it is pure immanence.

Interestingly enough, discussions of anime and otaku in Japan in the 1990s began to emphasise something like pure immanence, precisely at the time when anime became quite prominent in the global market. Attracted to the commercial ascent of anime, commentators started to write of the powers of anime and otaku, with an emphasis on the ways in which these broke with prior modes of organisation, production, reception, and distribution—socially, historically, and aesthetically. Anime and otaku became indicators of something radically new and different, and many commentators gravitated to explanations that evoked something like pure immanence. In many ways, speculations about Super Flat art provided the definitive statement about radical immanence in the context of the anime image.

In 2000, artist Murakami Takashi organised an exhibition entitled *Superflat* in Shibuya, Tokyo, in which he explored traits common to traditional Japanese arts and contemporary arts such as manga and anime. In this exhibition, Murakami played with what he sees as a "very typically Japanese engagement with the visual sense that wants resolutely to remain planar."<sup>8</sup> In particular he called attention to a tendency toward two-dimensionality in Japanese art, animation, graphic design and fashion, which flatness he traced back to certain Japanese artists of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that is the early modern or Edo period. In the book *Superflat* published in

conjunction with the exhibition, Azuma Hiroki discussed the theoretical implications of superflat visuality.<sup>9</sup> In general, Super Flat art objects and theories presented the possibility of a visual field devoid of perspective and devoid of hierarchy, in which all exists equally and simultaneously. Superflat, as Murakami and Azuma stress, grew out of the experiences of a sort of “otaku generation” steeped in manga and anime, which is central to the work of Okada Toshio, founder of one of the premier animation studios of the 1990s, Gainax Studios. Superflat frequently calls attention to the stylistic approaches of anime and otaku appearing in Gainax’s anime series, especially those of Anno Hideaki.

What interests me about Gainax, Super Flat and the discussions of anime and otaku associated with them is their tendency to look at anime and otaku in terms of something like constituent power. Across these anime series, art objects, cultural criticism and aesthetic theories, I see an approach to anime that consistently emphasises the effects of pure immanence—as if anime and otaku had broken with all prior formations and organisation (of vision, knowledge, and community), bringing viewers closer to a pure experience of the postmodern era. Yet, for all their theoretical ambition and conceptual insights, these discussions stop short of a theory of immanence or a theory of anime. Rather they tend toward the formation of a discourse on anime—a discourse on the powers of anime, which evokes them in terms of pure immanence. In this respect, this discourse on anime and otaku is more a symptom of the postmodern or the information age, rather than a critical intervention. Nonetheless this discourse strikes me as exceedingly important in assessing what truly is new and different about anime and

otaku, which in turn opens up possibilities for critical thinking. It may not offer a theory of immanence for anime and otaku but it points in that direction.

### **The Gainax Discourse**

Certain statements about anime in Japan show a surprising degree of regularity. I have already suggested that the works of Okada Toshio, founder of Gainax Studios and promoter of otaku culture, constitute one site of formation of a discourse on anime and otaku, together with the works of Gainax Studios, especially the animated series and films of Anno Hideaki. The success of Gainax began with an animated film *Ooritsu ūchūgun Oneamise no tsubasa* (*Wings of Honneamise*, 1987), followed by two series directed by Anno, *Toppu wo nerae!* (*Gunbuster*, 1988) and *Fushigi na umi no Nadia* (*Nadia: the Secret of Blue Waters*, 1990). These anime prepared the way for *Otaku no video*, a two-part OVA (Original Video Animation). This “mockumentary” of otaku and the foundation of Gainax Studios will be discussed in greater detail subsequently, as will the series often deemed the culmination of Gainax’s success: Anno’s *Shin seiki Evangerion* (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 1995).

Somewhat idiosyncratically, but for reasons that I hope to make clear, I also include in the Gainax discourse the “Super Flat” concept of artist Murakami Takashi and the discussions with cultural theorist Azuma Hiroki. Azuma Hiroki’s major publications begin with a rethinking of Derrida in relation to Japanese popular culture: *Sonzaiteki, yubinteki: Jacques Derrida ni tsuite* (*Ontological, Postal: On Jacques Derrida*, 1998). Azuma further established the basis for his thinking about anime and otaku in *Fukashina mono no sekai* (*On Overvisualized World*, 2000) and *Dôubutsuka suru posutomodan:*

*otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* (*Animalising Postmodern: Otaku and Postmodern Japanese Society*, 2001). His contribution to the catalogue for Murakami Takashi's *Superflat* exhibition makes important connections between Murakami's art and his theories.

Despite some obvious differences in emphasis, Murakami and Azuma show a common understanding of what anime is, and how it works—much of it consonant with Okada and Gainax, and sometimes clearly derivative from them. Generally, the theoretical emphasis of Azuma's work draws out many of the implications of what I call the "Gainax discourse." The regularity of such statements about anime and otaku is such that one might even speak of a "discourse" on anime in the Foucauldian sense, insofar as such statements do seem to imply some relation to the institutional regulation of anime entertainment.<sup>10</sup> My goal, however, is not to trace the origins of the Gainax discourse on anime and otaku. Nor is a full treatment of the ways in which these discussions connect to other discourses in Japan within the scope of this paper. What interests me about these different discussions of anime is the emergence of a common sense of how the anime image works, particularly in relation to the formation of a specific kind of cult fan, the otaku. Central to this discourse is the identification of a "distributive visual function," a sort of constituent power of anime as a visual field. But let me begin by sketching some ideas about anime common to Azuma Hiroki, Murakami Takashi, Okada Toshio and Anno Hideaki.

First, these discussions share a sense of the genealogy of anime. They try to define anime in a narrower sense, locating its origins in the Japanese styles of limited animation first evidenced in Tezuka Osamu's *Tetsuwan Atom* (*Astro Boy*, 1962), an

adaptation of his manga series to television. It was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, that various transformations of the limited animation style established the distinctive look and feel of anime, with such television series as *Uchû senkan Yamato* (*Space Battleship Yamato*, 1974), *Ginga tetsudô 999* (*Galaxy Express 999*, 1979), *Kidô senshi Gandamu* (*Mobile Suit Gundam*, 1979) and *Chôjiku yôsai Macross* (*Superdimensional Fortress Macross*, 1982), as well as the appearance of fan magazines such as *Animage*. This is the basic sketch that artist Murakami Takashi gives in the catalogue for his *Superflat* exhibition, in order to define the distinctive anime aesthetic that informs his work.<sup>11</sup> Naturally, there are all manner of other fan activities and series that might be associated with anime. Yet this basic historical lineage is central to the Gainax discourse. It also appears in much the same form in Okada's books and in Gainax's *Otaku no video*, which I will discuss below. Not surprisingly, these different commentators see the great commercial success of Anno Hideaki's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as the culmination (and guarantee) of this lineage.

It should be noted in passing that this genealogy for anime stresses male-oriented series and activities. Although some attention falls on the work of female manga artists, their work figures largely as a source of images of cute and potent girls.<sup>12</sup> In addition, this genealogy studiously avoids historical questions. While it establishes a historical lineage for anime, the problem of how one organises a history receives no attention. Azuma simply opts out of such questions. He aligns anime with the postmodern and the posthistorical. Anime is beyond, outside, or after history. Similarly, these discussions of anime tend to avoid narrative analysis, insisting the fans relate above all to the anime image, not anime stories.<sup>13</sup> In other words, along with the end of history, there is a sense

of the end of narrative. Indeed, in *Animalising Postmodern*, Azuma introduces a general opposition between narrative and database structures. Apparently, the Gainax discourse feels it necessary to eschew history and narrative because it conflates history with grand teleological narratives of modernity. Ironically, however, when these commentators make historical statements, they refer largely to the progressive emergence of new technologies—from television to VCR to computer. History returns as media history, but in its grandest form: linear evolution.

It is for such reasons that I see these discussions more as discourse than theory. Their theoretical paradigms appear less to address fundamental questions than to define a historical moment, promote a set of objects, or establish an identity. Nonetheless this discourse identifies something of theoretical interest—a distributive function at the heart of anime aesthetics and otaku culture, which functions as a constituent power. This distributive function is defined primarily in visual or aesthetic terms.

This then is the second commonality: these commentators have a common sense of the operations of the anime image, of anime aesthetics. Crucial here is an alleged transformation in vision, which also transforms how viewers interact with or relate to anime objects. In his *Introduction to Otakuology* (1996), for instance, Okada draws attention to the overly attentive, almost obsessive viewing practices of fans in the early 1980s. As they compulsively replayed videos of such favourite series as *Macross*, they began to perceive differences in animation styles within and between episodes. The result was a new attention to what might be considered flaws, inconsistencies or trivial details by other viewers. For the otaku, however, these apparently insignificant details become part of the viewing experience, making the experience of viewing akin to scanning for

information, rather than reading a story (whence perhaps Azuma's thoughts about the end of narrative structures and the rise of database structures). In effect, what was peripheral becomes central; or rather there is a breakdown in the visual ordering of central and peripheral that results in a non-hierarchical visual field of information. Azuma identifies something analogous with his concepts of an "over-visualized world" or "database structure." In their attention to the dense, non-hierarchical visual space, Okada and Azuma discover (and invent) what might be called a distributive function, much like that evoked in theories of emergent properties.

Theories of emergence look at the emergence of patterns from a simple, almost minimal network of elements interconnected in a distributive fashion, based on the self-organising capacities implicit in the system.<sup>14</sup> While there is no unified formal theory of emergent properties, observation and experimentation suggest that it is difficult for any densely connected aggregate to escape emergent properties. Internal coherences arise that are not predictable on the basis of the elements. What happens is a function of what all the components are doing; yet the global coherence does not resemble the elements. A pattern emerges. One might also think of this self-organising capacity in terms of constituent power: it is possible to quantify, organise, or otherwise work with patterns, but there is a heteronomous and autonomous power that eludes, exceeds or escapes rationalisation. This is also a cooperative system insofar as all the elements interact, at once locally and globally.

The Gainax discourse imagines something analogous in the space of the anime image. The emphasis on the dense, non-hierarchical visual space of the anime image is precisely an attempt to imagine a space of distributive interconnections, from which

emerges a pattern or patterns. Yet the pattern is not predictable on the basis of the elements. It is in its discussions of the otaku that the Gainax discourse introduces something like the cooperative system. In other words, the distributive function implicit in the idea of a non-hierarchical visual field does not only allow for emergent visual coherence. It also suggests a cooperative system, which is the third shared concern of this discourse.

Third then, related to this breakdown of visual hierarchies is a sense of a breakdown of the hierarchy of producers. In his superflat lineage of (primarily) Japanese art, for instance, Murakami Takashi singles out scenes from *Ginga tetsudô 999* (the movies) by animator/designer Kanada Yoshinori.<sup>15</sup> He thus calls attention to art production that might seem peripheral or marginal to the import of the series. But there are no peripheral producers in this non-hierarchical visual field. The Gainax discourse insists on the fact that “true” anime viewers (otaku) devote as much attention to the work of character designers and animators as to directors, producers or writers. Okada argues, for instance, that anime series are the work of many different creators, and so there is no single story. This follows from Okada’s discussion of the otaku fan’s attention to inconsistencies as a new aesthetic and new form of reception—what might appear as stylistic inconsistency to non-otaku viewers appears to the otaku as a dense aggregate of the works of a series of artists or producers, from which emerges a cooperative system. In brief, production is as distributive as vision.

Fourth, this distributive breakdown in production hierarchies extends to the relation between fans and producers. Producers are, above all, fans; and fans are budding producers. Even if fans don’t actually form animation studios, as did the Gainax

founders, they are so active in consumption that consumption becomes akin to production—as if fans had become co-producers or co-operators. This cooperative system seems to emerge unpredictably as a result of internal coherence arising from the dense packing of information elements. Consequently, the otaku co-operator “works” in an extended field of activity that is more like a theatre of operations than a site of production. But what kind of cooperation is this? The discourse on anime tends to characterise the fan’s reception as an ineluctable and obsessive cooperation with the anime world. Is it possible to think about difference, distance or conflict within this discourse? Or does it merely re-invent the “old” ideologies of Japan as a harmonious, cooperative society, that is, Japan Inc.?

To address such questions, one confronts the problem of the subject, which is a fifth topic on which these different commentators tend to agree. Basically, they all see a radical break with definable subject positions. The distributive function of the anime visually entails a non-perspectival field that prevents the formation of viewing positions and therefore forecloses a manageable or controlled relation to the visual field. In other words, the distributive visual field involves a breakdown in perceptual distance, which results in a purely affective relation to the image.<sup>16</sup> Anime breaks out of its television frame, and the distance between viewer and image collapses into a moment of affect. Characteristically, it breaks its frame into an expanded immersive anime world centred on anime figures—in the form of “cosplay” (costume play, that is, dressing as anime characters) or model kits of anime characters that fans can mould or assemble themselves, with personal touches. Morikawa Kaiichirô suggests that the anime first colonises personal space. The bedroom or the studio apartment becomes a shrine to

certain anime series and characters. Then the private room begins to permeate the city with its tastes or *shûmi*. The result is the “personapolis,” which continues to break down prior spatial and urban hierarchies, making the cityscape into a visual field of unprecedented density.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the entire city becomes a distributive field of visual information, and the end of definable subject positions results in a mass subject based on what appears to be massist aesthetics.

In sum, what I call the Gainax discourse discovers a distributive function at work in the anime image, which it uses to speak of the end of all manner of received hierarchies or organisations—such as historical relations, organisation of labour in anime production, and producer/consumer hierarchies. Somewhat predictably, it remains perplexed and ambivalent about sexual hierarchies, with its passively passionate male fans and potent girl images. The Gainax discourse does not announce the end of heterosexuality. It does, however, insist on its perversion. I will return to this, for it is in perversion that a historical relation appears, in fantastical form. Suffice it to say at this juncture, the Gainax discourse evokes the distributive visual field of anime to make claims for the end of all hierarchies—those of history, of modernity, and of the subject. Its discovery of a non-hierarchical visual field implies a theory of emergence. But in the absence of a theorisation of emergence, this discourse sees a cooperative system, which becomes a space without conflict or difference. Thus the Gainax discourse verges on a fascist ideology of massist (non)organization. Insofar as it limits its claims to a subculture (otaku), however, it is more like what Deleuze and Guattari call “microfascism.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the otaku difference becomes crucial. Are these otaku truly a subculture, or are they the mainstream? For it is only insofar as otaku differ from the mainstream or

from Japan that one can detect in the Gainax discourse a movement of difference within Japan. Otherwise, the discourse on anime simply becomes a discourse on the nation, and the Gainax discourse might inspire an especially potent brand of nationalism.

This is surely why the Gainax discourse not only evokes the subculture status of otaku but also insists on the detachment of the otaku—his distance and thus his difference from the mainstream as well as other otaku and even from his objects. The term otaku itself derives from a form of address with connotations of detachment and isolation: “you” as “your residence.” To refer to someone as “your residence” implies a distanced, highly formalised relation. To be otaku thus implies formal, potentially empty relations. Thus, while the collapse of visual and social hierarchies imparts a sense of the unbearable proximity of the image (pure affect without perceptual distances, relations and positions), the anime image is also construed, rather paradoxically, as a new kind of distance. Okada Toshio and Ootsuka Eiji stress the discernment of the otaku, for instance. As a connoisseur of distributive fields without centre or periphery, the otaku commands specific, highly refined visual skills. They see parallels between otaku and Buddhist-inflected notions of expenditure associated with the “floating world” of early modern urban life—the world of discerning players.<sup>19</sup> Or, with a nod to Kojève, Azuma has extended his thoughts on this world in the direction of posthistorical snobbery—a detached discrimination that separates man from his barbaric materialistic relations—the animalising postmodern. Discernment and snobbery are two ways of sustaining some sense of difference within the discourse on anime and otaku—some sense of the autonomy of otaku from Japanese mass culture in general.

I will likewise stress the importance of play in otaku activities but not in relation to posthistorical snobbery or precapitalist modes of consumption and expenditure. Rather what interests me is the otaku's almost feverish activity and productivity in the reception and dissemination of images. It is here that otaku activities become indistinguishable from work, hovering between labour *power* and communicative labour. It is here that the constituent power evoked in the idea of a non-hierarchical, cooperative system might make a difference—the otaku difference might make for otaku movement, theoretically and practically.

### **Otakuology: From Dialectical Tension to Perversion**

Okada Toshio first comes to mind when definitions of otaku are in question. As a founder of what is now one of the most successful animation studios in Japan, Okada's remarks carry a great deal of weight, practically and commercially. The self-proclaimed king of the otaku or "otaking," Okada has apparently devoted his life to promoting anime as an object worthy of serious attention—from the book *Otakugaku nyûmon (Introduction to Otakuology, 1996)* to such subsequent works as *Otaku no mayoi michi (The Labyrinth of the Otaku, 1999)* and *Ushinawareta mirai (Lost Future, 2002)*. Significantly, he aims to make anime and otaku worthy of academic attention. As the self-elected spokesman or mouthpiece for otaku, Okada aims to establish "otaku knowledge" as a form of knowledge on a par with disciplinary forms of knowledge. He founded the International Otaku University on the web in 1996 ([www.netcity.or.jp/OTAKU/univ/](http://www.netcity.or.jp/OTAKU/univ/)), and regularly conducts seminars at universities. Of course, it is difficult to gauge whether Okada's efforts should be seen as self-promotion or an apologia for otaku—after all, he *is* the

otaking. Should one read his heartfelt defence of the otaku as facetious, as tongue in cheek? With his “otakuology,” Okada has fashioned a sort of “play discipline” or “disciplinary play,” which oscillates between a disciplinisation of knowledge about anime and otaku, and an anti-disciplinary conceit.

Okada penned the script for the two-part OVA series entitled *Otaku no Video 1982 & 1985* (same title in English), which Gainax released in 1992. One of the first concerted efforts to portray and evaluate the otaku, *Otaku no Video* not only presents Okada’s angle on the otaku but also establishes the lineage of animation to which Gainax Studios become the legitimate heir.

*Otaku no video* is, in effect, Okada’s foundation story about Gainax as the brainchild of anime otaku. It alternates between animation and “mockumentary.” Animated segments tell the story of two friends whose passion for anime leads them to found a studio. The story begins with an average and likeable first-year university student (Kubo Akira) whose chance encounter with a high school friend (Tanaka) transforms his life. Tanaka (reputedly a stand-in for Okada) is a serious otaku, obsessed with animated television series, manga, fan clubs and amateur publications. Kubo is gradually drawn into Tanaka’s world, abandoning his healthy normal life (and his girlfriend) in favour of Tanaka’s nerdy, creepy otaku club. Together with Tanaka, Kubo becomes so impassioned about anime that the two of them form a garage model kit company—kits for assembling personalised models of figures from anime or manga series, typically of sexy women, as with Kubo and Tanaka’s buxom creation “Misty May.”<sup>20</sup> After hitting rock bottom with the commercial take-over of their first company, the two friends finally succeed with an animation company and begin to fantasise about “otakunising” the entire world. This is

the story of the foundation of Gainax Studios, but told in a fantastical form. While it spins a yarn about the triumph of youthful passion, it is full of references that construct a space of knowledge, one that apparently demands great efforts to master.

A series of mockumentary interviews called “portraits of an otaku” alternate with the animated story. In these portraits, *Otaku no Video* presents a series of different sorts of otaku who became obsessed with anime in different ways and at different times of their life. A respectably ordinary businessman tells of his passion in college for *dôjinshi* (fan-authored manga, sometimes translated as “fanzines,” which introduce new stories involving established characters or entirely new characters and stories). 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. There is even an American fan obsessed with Japan as the land of anime. 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 (to which I will return), but theirs is such an unqualified masculinity that it appears pathetic—in both senses of the term in English. They are passionate and helpless. Their passion makes them helpless, for it subjects them to anime, body and soul; and the emphasis on youthful passion or youthfulness serves to highlight a childlike subjection to the anime image.

Crucial is the move to transform discipline into self-cultivation. *Otaku no video* strives to move away from disciplinary formations and subjection toward cultivation of the self. The animated story is full of insider references, and the mockumentary segments also provide a barrage of statistical information. There is constant evocation of knowledge production. Moreover, the intensity of otaku activities implies that to be an

otaku demands not only great effort but also supreme discipline. As it constructs a space of knowledge, this otakuology verges on a disciplinary formation, which implies subjection. Yet, as the nostalgia of the businessman for his school days as an otaku suggests, otaku work is not like school or the corporation. There is, in other words, a strategy of refusal—a resistance to labour organised in received ways. Is otaku work an alternative space of work and knowledge production that resists modern, disciplinary society? Or is it a desire for a postmodernised society in which otaku skills would reign supreme—a desire to succeed in what Deleuze calls the “society of control” in which disciplinary boundaries give way to constant learning and endlessly transforming subjects?<sup>21</sup>

*Otaku no video* stages the tension between two modes of otaku production. On the one hand, with their emphasis on other kinds of networks mediated through new technologies, otaku activities seem to refuse received ways of organising and quantifying labour power. In fact, otaku activities are exceeding difficult to discuss sociologically and quantitatively. It is easier to track corporate strategies and markets. Otaku movement is very difficult to define and discuss because its boundaries are fluid and porous. Apparently, it occurs everywhere there is anime, but how does one draw the line between anime viewers and otaku? The difference between an anime viewer and an anime otaku is one of intensity and duration—a level of interest, a degree of engagement, or a quality of passion. Such differences resist quantification. In this respect, the work done by otaku cannot ever be thoroughly mastered, commercially or intellectually. Markets and corporate strategies may capitalise on otaku movement, but, as Tobin’s remarks suggest, they cannot predict or rely on it. It is in this respect that otaku movement recalls what

Mario Tronti calls a “strategy of refusal.”<sup>22</sup> The non-quantifiable work of otaku poses a challenge to received organisations of labour. When faced with their inability to direct or harness otaku movement, corporations call it theft or piracy.

On the other hand, the kinds of work associated with otaku seem already subject to constitutive power in the workplace. Collecting, exchanging, translating manga and anime, which commonly entails downloading, posting, converting files—aren’t these sorts of activities already codified in the workplace, as a form of communicative labour? In this respect, otaku movement appears as part of a general postmodernisation of society, as part of those transformations in the labour process that have been discussed in such terms as post-Fordism, flexible accumulation or cultural economy. “Essentially,” to quote John Kraniauskas, such changes in processes of production “involve the technological harnessing of the superstructure by the economic base, a ‘cultural turn’ in production putting entertainment, the symbols and electronic syntax of the information highways, social knowledges and affect to work.”<sup>23</sup> In sum, the so-called unofficial work associated with otaku hovers between strategies of work refusal and the postmodern harnessing of communicative labour. Otaku movement arises with the historical transformation of processes of production and labour, and maybe serves as a site of articulation between economies. Otaku movement—as unofficial work—is at once labour and not labour.

*Otaku no Video* offers both possibilities at once, by stressing the oscillation between discipline and self-cultivation. The statistical information that accompanies each portrait of an otaku, for instance, not only gives the impression that otakudom is far more pervasive than anyone suspects (thus implying the otaku activities are already eroding

modern disciplinisation everywhere). It also gives the impression that this is not disciplinisation. Rather, their work as otaku allows these men to know and cultivate themselves. There is, for instance, the self-conscious tone of the otaku telling their stories. They apparently understand their innermost mechanisms of desire. They may not be able to resist the lure of anime. They cannot prevent their enslavement to its buxom, potent girl figures. But they see this passion lucidly, knowingly, and almost rationally. In other words, in *Otaku no Video*, anime appears, on the one hand, as a subjective technology—literally associated with the most recent technologies of vision—that constructs subject positions. Yet, on the other hand, *Otaku no Video* evokes a space of play, in which the subjection to new technologies affords what Foucault called techniques of the self or a care of the self.<sup>24</sup>

In the animated story of *Otaku no Video*, techniques of self-cultivation often take the form of an overcoming. Self-cultivation appears as a way of transcending disciplinary formations via play. For instance, the ultimate triumph of Kubo and Tanaka with the foundation of their anime studio reinforces the idea that, if one is true to one's youthful passions, one will finally succeed. Young fans may someday otakunise the world. Naturally, such a story of individual triumph recalls the ideology of the self-made man that persists from Victorian-Meiji ideals of personal progress as commercial progress (as with *risshin shusse* or ideologies of self-made men, of commercial success, and of making one's way in the world). Analogously, readers of Foucault may detect the emergence of a self-governing subject adequate to modern states. Still, without discrediting the interpretations whereby *Otaku no Video* presents a neo-liberal ideology or a postmodern version of disciplinisation, I would like to point out that it does not fall

simplistically in either of these possibilities. Its bid for a space of play that is not automatically recuperable as ideology or discipline also suggests a refusal of work, and evokes the power of labour.

In this respect, the emphasis in the Gainax discourse on image and information over narrative provides a useful lead. After all, the experience of watching *Otaku no video* is not only that of the narrative of commercial triumph. It is equally an experience of information—the charts, graphs, and interviews. At the level of information, *Otaku no video* strives to transform communicative labour into constituent power. While the otaku's work with various visual and information technologies might well mesh with new modes of rationalisation of the workplace, *Otaku no video* presents this communicative labour as borderless and uncontainable. This labour is communicative, much as a disease is communicable—it spreads incessantly, relentlessly, without regard for hierarchies, like an airborne retrovirus; or like laughter.<sup>25</sup> Thus *Otaku no video* presents the work of otaku as a constituent power, as labour *power*. And the question posed earlier returns anew: what is the difference between an otaku and someone who watches anime or reads manga?

Many commentators see the obsessive nature of the otaku as a sign of seriousness or earnestness. But what happens when obsession is indistinguishable from play, when it constructs a space of play? Are not the viewers who treat anime as mere entertainment bringing it into a more normal set of relations, thus negating its possibilities for play? One of the hallmarks of *Otaku no Video* is its deftness in scrambling the relation between work and play, between disciplinary boundaries and their outside. It thus poses some of the most basic questions of fan culture analysis, in a potentially new way. Is it possible to

create zones of autonomy within consumerism? Can you escape capitalism from within, by practising it differently? Or is this sense of autonomy precisely the oldest trick in the book, simply manufacturing more active forms of enslavement to the commodity? How can submission to the anime image, however self-abusively aware, enable the construction of autonomous self? Isn't this just the illusion of autonomy, the ultimate reification of freedom?

These are, needless to say, problems that Adorno transmitted to fan culture analysis. When, as early as 1938, Adorno speaks of the fetishism of music, for instance, its “counterpart” is a regression in listening. And he remarks,

If indeed individuals today no longer belong to themselves, then that also means that they can no longer be “influenced.” The opposing points of production and consumption are at any given time closely co-ordinated, but not dependent on each other in isolation. Their mediation itself does not in any case escape theoretical conjecture.<sup>26</sup>

Adorno gives us an image of listeners who may well be wise to the close coordination of production and consumption but who do not for all that belong to themselves. Fan knowledge may be copious, even voluminous, yet remains regressive and unenlightened for Adorno. Famously, Adorno's perspective on the culture industry comes of his engagement with what might be dubbed high modernism. Yet even high modernism does not afford a truly autonomous realm of knowledge for Adorno. It is in its way as reified as mass culture. Consequently, the relation between mass culture and high modernism does not afford a simple ethical decision—to choose high culture over mass culture. Ultimately, their relation does not allow for dialectical movement but only for stultifying contradiction—a world moving at once forward and backward, at once avant-garde and

regressive, a world full of activities and cultural movement but effectively at a standstill. Is this what otaku movement does?

Fan culture analysis has taken issue with Adorno's recourse to high modernism (his elitism) and with his sense of the passivity of the receiver of mass culture. In contrast, fan culture analysis has proposed to follow fandom closely and seriously, to explore the activity of fans, without what is seen as Adorno's bias against mass culture. Crucial to this shift are fans like the otaku—so-called cult fans. Matt Hills, for instance, distinguishes between fandom and cult fandom: while fandom and cult fandom appear to overlap, cult fandom does seem to imply an identity that is at least partially distinct from the general fan—which is to say, not all viewers who like a certain TV series become cult fans of it. Hills suggests that this distinction between fans and cult fans “relates not to the intensity, social organization or semiotic/material productivity of the fandom concerned, but rather to its duration, especially in the absence of ‘new’ or official material in the originating medium.”<sup>27</sup> Which is to say, cult fandom perseveres in the absence of official production. If the cult fan demonstrates a kind of autonomy, it is because the cult fan's activity continues independently of the industry rather than simply following it actively. Hills' work is indicative of a turn in fan culture analysis that looks to the ways in which the cult fan becomes akin to a producer of culture and thus somewhat autonomous of official production—of the culture industry, as it were.

As a cult fan film about cult fans (otaku), *Otaku no Video* poses the question of autonomy within consumerism in a new way. Naturally, as a cult fan film about cult fans, it does risk the self-referential reification, even as it claims to transform the consumer into a co-producer of culture. Yet *Otaku no Video* raises the intensity (and duration) of

fan activities to a new pitch. While Adorno's concerns remain relevant, the new pitch or frenetic power of otakudom makes it difficult to speak solely of regression, or even of regressive co-production. Rather, as *Otaku no Video* tries to show, otaku activity shifts the problem of fandom toward a productivity akin to labour power. The implication is that fans have some relation to constituent power. This is not to say that one should not read this emphasis on labour power as symptomatic of post-Fordist or postmodern capitalism. But the critic still must consider how what is allegedly superstructural (knowledge production or communication) may not be supplemental or secondary in driving historical transformations.

*Otaku no Video* calls attention to the disciplinisation of knowledge and the rationalisation of communication. Its otakuology, as “play discipline,” strives to transform disciplinary knowledge into practices of self-cultivation and self-knowledge. As a form of “unofficial work” or “play labour,” it tries to challenge the rationalisation of labour, especially communicative labour. Such a game demands some relation to constituent power. This is where the otakuology of the Gainax discourse runs into trouble—and maybe the notion of constituent power as well.

Otakuology hints at strategies of refusal of labour and of disciplinary society: otaku are not corporate “salary men” or intellectuals. Their relation to these figures sometimes verges on a negative one, full of melancholic or nostalgic disavowal. For the otaku might easily slip into either position, dutifully yet unwillingly. After all, otaku are also situated socially, and *Otaku no Video* gives us some troubling, negative images of socially lost or fallen otaku. As if troubled by such negative images and models, otakuology seeks a positive force of self-differentiation, a way to assert their difference.

If Kubo and Tanaka succeed, it is because of their youthful passion for anime—which may happen to any man at any age anywhere. Their triumph provides one positive image of difference. Nonetheless, as the stark visual difference between the mockumentary and animated segments suggests, these two kinds of self-differentiation remain in dialectical tension—one cannot overcome the other, but neither can one work without the other.

The dialectical tension in *Otaku no Video* becomes condensed into the problems of autoeroticism and fetishism. Its emphasis on play over disciplinary knowledge enables self-cultivation, but this way of knowing one's self takes the form of playing with one's self—which is presented, quite literally in some segments, as masturbation. *Otaku no Video* hovers between the thrill and shame of playing with one's self—or is it sex with an image? In either case, the act of masturbation condenses the dialectical tension between the negative and positive self-differentiation of the otaku. It is not so surprising that sex should come to the fore. After all, doesn't sex also fall between work and play, socially, at once the site of social reproduction and self-production? What is troubling about *Otaku no Video* is its relation to women. The thrill and passion it attributes to modelling and collecting girl figurines derives from a sense of autonomy from real women and thus from social expectations associated with relations with them (work to provide the financial support necessary to marriage and family). *Otaku no Video* insinuates a sense of shame and failure in the inability of the otaku to interact with real women—with a sense of shame at social failure. In this dialectical tension between thrill and shame, between self-affirmation and self-negation, real women come to embody a condition of (im)possibility for manhood. Ultimately, otakuology seems only to imagine constituent power (and strategies of refusal) through recourse to male potency as an autonomous

force—autonomous of women. Yet images of women remain essential to the fantasy of masculine autonomy.

In sum, in playing with himself, in distancing himself from actual women, the otaku apparently refuses certain forms of disciplinisation and rationalisation—especially that of the corporate man and the nuclear family. Thus the otaku strives toward a new kind of man. Yet insofar as the otaku's images of women are palatable to the corporate man (and may historically derive from the corporate culture), the otaku does not necessarily present a radical break from received socio-sexual formations (the homosocial workplace, normative heterosexuality, and the sex industry, for instance). Rather, otakuology perversely re-inscribes received gender roles. In other words, the dialectical tension implicit in the otaku's negative and positive self-differentiation does not result in a stultifying contraction. It moves. Its movement is that of perversion.

Perversion is an especially difficult form of movement to assess, in its difference from regression and progression, or from subversion and inversion. Of course, as movement, it creates zones of autonomy, yet it is not obvious that one can track and bound these zones. Surely, to those who would see this otaku perversion purely as a Japanese phenomenon, due to the allegedly rigid or authoritarian structures of Japanese society that foreclose self-expression, I must add that otakudom is not purely Japanese. The popularity of anime, and the current internet boom in *hentai anime* (or perverse animation), serves as a reminder that this is a transnational rather than a national movement, whose origins cannot be attributed to an isolated, self-identical Japan. Otaku perversion originates in a transnational Japan; that is, a nation already in relation to the world, internally and externally.

### **Coda: Transnational Movement**

By way of conclusion, let me summarise the points that I have made thus far about the Gainax discourse's imagination of otaku movement. I will lay it out stepwise, but with the understanding that all these things happen in concert.

The theoretical stuff of the Gainax discourse lies in the idea of a distributive visual field—a non-hierarchical field layered with dense interconnections. The distributive field is a purely a-subjective formation immanent in the anime image, which is associated with new media and new technologies. Murakami calls it superflat (or Super Flat), and Azuma refers to an overvisualised world and data structures, while Okada describes it in terms of an attention to peripheral details that undermines the hierarchy of centre and periphery in the visual field. As a moment (and then an experience) of pure immanence, the distributive field promises to break prior hierarchies, identities and organisations, and to open new possibilities. At this level, the distributive is but a promise of movement—a material capture of something that opens into the future (an experience without a subject).

At the next level, the Gainax discourse deals with the emergence of patterns from the distributive visual field. Here it presents two figures—the otaku (co-operator) and the anime girl image (attractor). It tries to avoid transforming the constituent power of this radical visual immanence into a constitutive power—into a new identity, a new order, or a discourse. At this level, the Gainax discourse continues to evoke the immanence of the distributive field to challenge received norms for socio-sexual development. In particular, it strives to locate itself at a site of constituent power in relation of knowledge production

and labour—as in *Otaku no video*. Otaku activities appear as play discipline and as unofficial work, which stand in contrast to universities and corporations, for instance.

The attempt of the Gainax discourse to extend the radical immanence that it discovers in the anime image into the realm of socio-sexual development, knowledge production and labour strikes me as exceedingly important. In its extension of the logic of the distributive visual field into other domains, it not only shows how transformations in technologies of vision have far-reaching consequences. It also shows how such transformations potentially generate a shock of enlightenment, which might be prolonged into critical awareness and a politics of immanence. It is in such a spirit that this essay has belaboured the Gainax discourse.

Unfortunately, however, at another level—that of histories and nations—the Gainax discourse fails to think through the consequences of its insights about the overvisualised, non-hierarchical field. It is as if the initial limitations of its thinking about the materiality of the distributive field conspire to ruin its attempt to re-think movement through anime and otaku. What looked to be a theory of emergence turns out to be a theory of historical rupture. In a theory of emergence, one expects that the relation between elements and emergent patterns entails correspondence-without-resemblance. Which is to say, the patterns do not resemble the elements; nor are patterns predictable from elements. While the Gainax discourse tentatively opens such a theory when it thinks visually, as soon as it starts to think historically and geopolitically, it construes correspondence-without-resemblance as rupture, as a complete lack of correspondence. Dispensing with origins altogether results in a sense of historical transcendence and

overcoming. I am thinking especially of Azuma Hiroki's idea of anime otaku as posthistorical.

A theory of emergence should spur thinking about how something new (say, the postmodern) emerges from densely interconnecting prior elements (of the modern) yet does not resemble those elements. The new is an experience and actualisation of what was virtual to a set of material conditions. The Gainax discourse, however, dispenses with correspondence and thus cannot think materiality or continuity. For Azuma, for instance, a simple break marks the movement from modernity to postmodernity (or alternatively, the posthistorical). In a predictably modernist fashion, the historical break between modern and postmodern is re-inscribed as a geopolitical break: Western modernity versus Japanese postmodernity. Consequently, what began as a raid on hierarchies, subject positions and identities turns into a defence of precisely these hierarchies, positions and identities.

Let me give a last example that brings this discussion full circle. After attending the Otakon (Otaku convention) in the United States in 1995, Okada Toshio wrote of his encounter with American otaku. In his account, Okada demonstrates his profound fascination with the American otaku looking at Japan. Okada's fascination with the gaze of the American otaku recalls Zizek's discussion of the Western fascination with events in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. "What fascinates the West," Zizek speculates, "is the *re-invention of democracy*."<sup>28</sup> In Eastern Europe, the West looks for its own origins, for the authentic experience of its democratic invention. Likewise, Okada's fascination with American otaku appears as an attempt to re-invent anime and otaku, to re-discover their origins and identity. As Zizek suggests, the real object of fascination is the gaze, the

supposedly naïve gaze by means of which American otaku stare back at Japan, fascinated by its authenticity. Thus Okada stresses how proud American otaku are to be otaku—re-inventing what it means to be an otaku. Okada discovers an origin that Japan has lost but may perceive in the foreigner’s enthusiasm for Japan. “Looking at them,” Okada concludes, “reminded me of how I was once infatuated with the United States of America, land of ‘freedom,’ ‘science,’ ‘democracy.’”<sup>29</sup> In sum, the enthusiastic gaze of American otaku confirms the identity and authenticity of Japanese otaku.

Zizek’s point is to show how a national identity appears to come out of nowhere. An identity emerges from an imagined threat to, or an imagined loss of, something that never was. The threat of loss gives that past an aura of reality. This is precisely what Okada does. He follows a well-established pattern of complicity between Western Orientalism and Japanese auto-orientalism. The Western Orientalist gaze thus becomes a source of self-identity for the non-Western position, which is made subject in its relation to that gaze.<sup>30</sup> Yet isn’t this precisely what the distributive field challenges? The distributive field, devoid of perspective and hierarchy, should not allow for the establishment of positional identity on the basis of the gaze. In fact, in his discussion of the art of Murakami Takashi, Azuma works with Derrida’s critique of the Lacanian gaze. The proliferating, multiplying eyes and surfaces in Murakami’s art objects suggest to Azuma an actualised state of deconstruction. Murakami’s anime-inspired series of figures such as those devoted to his invented anime-like character dubbed “D.O.B.” do not use perspective, visual ordering or visual hierarchisation—this distributive visual field undermines any recourse to stable viewing positions. So why should the gaze return at another level?

Part of the problem is that Azuma sees in Murakami's art and in anime the arrival of the postmodern—via a complete rupture with the modern Western gaze. Unfortunately, by establishing such a historical and geopolitical rupture, Azuma recuperates the very gaze that he wishes to challenge.<sup>31</sup> Thus he speaks comfortably in terms that establish Japanese identity. Similarly, Murakami has recently begun to speak of his art to date as not really Japanese. He claims to have invented this new superflat lineage within Japanese art for the purposes of international recognition, which would allow him to return to Japan to pursue his real interests. Not only does he claim to manipulate the Western gaze but also he suggests that it is only possible to do so by recourse to something authentic. Thus the re-invention of anime becomes a re-invention of Japaneseness. Indeed, by the late 1990s, there were signs of a nostalgia movement in the anime industry—remakes of classic series such as *Astro Boy*, *Galaxy Express 999* and others, precisely those that the Gainax discourse sees as central to the definition of anime—in conjunction with the establishment of anime as national culture.

A similar movement is afoot in North America, in the academy. The field of Japan Studies has become enthralled with its new object, anime, which promises to refresh the study of Japan.<sup>32</sup> Anime draws students into the classroom in great numbers, where (ideally) the professor would then teach them about Japan society and history—via anime. Moreover, many of the introductory books on anime read it in terms of national identity or national allegory. In the words of one author, “anime is, after all, Japan talking directly to itself, reinforcing its cultural myths and preferred modes of behaviour.”<sup>33</sup> Another commentator establishes that “the ‘culture’ to which anime belongs is at present a ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture in Japan, and in America it exists as a ‘sub’ culture.”<sup>34</sup> In

other words, anime is often evoked to flatten difference. Anime is Japan, and any source of difference within anime is predictable difference within the nation (national allegory).

Analogously, university courses on Japanese animation in North America have tended to form a canon around animated films that lend themselves better to cultural hermeneutics, ones that have been distributed and acknowledged in international film festivals—the work of Miyazaki Hayao, Otomo Katsuhiro, Oshii Mamoru, Kon Satoshi and others. Yet they largely ignore the other circuits of Japanese animation with its unmanageable wealth of TV and OVA series, frequently with a daunting number of episodes. It is in the realm of TV and OVA anime—one branch of which the Gainax discourse styles as the true anime—that one must at least confront the differentiation of the mass culture into communities of taste, even if one may ultimately construe those differences as false. Although in the transnational context the Gainax discourse falls prey to the same tendency to resort to “anime = Japan,” it does grapple with differentiation in the context of Japan.

If one takes seriously the Gainax discourse on otaku and anime, the challenge of anime lies in its refusal of the sort of cultural mediation that begins with fixed cultural identities. Which is to say, the distributive visual field cannot operate as a text that would allow fixed relations to others. In this field, relations to others would not conform to the received identities and positions. All the evidence points in this direction. For instance, the reception of anime in North America really does wreak havoc with the hierarchy of cultural expertise—with respect to translation, for instance. Fansubbers, that is, fan groups who produce their own subtitled versions of anime, often well in advance of the official market translations, are remarkably more industrious than university experts in

terms of the scope and breadth of their activities in translating, introducing and promoting anime. In this simple way, the transnational otaku circuit potentially challenges the cultural hermeneutics and the complicit play of gazes that seem to dominate academic discussion of anime.

Needless to say, the transnational otaku knowledge of anime does not automatically escape the cultural hermeneutics that tends to govern the way in which Japan experts look at anime. As Okada points out, many non-Japanese otaku wish to learn Japanese precisely because they feel they are missing something available to Japanese viewers—and to cultural informants and experts. In other words, the Japanophile otaku confirms a loss in translation, allowing for cultural and linguistic expertise to fill the gap. Yet, if one takes seriously the notion of a distributive visual field, one would have to think the transnational movement of translation differently. If the anime image works as a media opening that lends itself to multiple media transformations, then the transformations of anime as it moves transnationally would have to be seen as part of the proliferation of its self-organising field. The appearance of similar attractors and co-operators outside Japan would come as no surprise. Is that not how the anime image is supposed to work? Anime may not be lost in translation but only opened. That is to say, it is less a matter of a loss of an original cultural meaning than a multiplication of meanings that were already implicit in or at least enabled by the layering of the original image. There is already a relation to American global culture in those images.

It is imperative to think about how anime, as mass culture or subculture or fan cult, produces difference, how it strives to mark an autonomous zone of anime activity

distinctive from other activities and other entertainments. A theoretical shift is needed, in order to think these new modes of reception and new zones of autonomy without positing the fixed categories and social types in advance. The Gainax discourse begins to make such a theoretical shift. Crucial is its discovery, via the radical immanence of the distributive field, of the constituent power of anime—which opens the possibility of unmaking received patterns of socio-sexual development, knowledge production and labour. I have shown, of course, how the theoretical shift of the Gainax discourse falters and fails. Yet its failure should not be taken as a failure of the politics of immanence itself (even if such a politics does not run other risks).<sup>35</sup> The aim here is to push the theoretical and political consequences of the distributive field.

Whether in Japan or elsewhere, the otaku is, above all, networked and computerised. And the distributive layering of the anime image affords a multiplex interface with other media. Oddly, however, while the otaku is always in touch (with the computer), he or she is always out of touch (with the actual world). What does detachment mean in what looks more and more like a regime of all-connectedness? Paradoxically, the otaku lays bare the non-relation at the heart of the all-relatedness of information. Potentially then, being otaku means to assert the right to non-communication at the very centre of the communications revolution, to inscribe refusal in the heart of work—which may involve a different sense of how one's labour pays off. Is the otaku relation to anime a refusal to work at the heart of new media and technologies? That otaku movement is already underway in global media transformations, and in realms of activity that are not thought of when otaku and anime are imagined in terms of fixed social or historical identities.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Tobin, “Conclusion: the Rise and Fall of the Pokémon Empire,” in Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu’s Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 269.

<sup>2</sup> Saya S. Shiraishi, “Japan’s Soft Power: Doraemon Goes Overseas,” in Peter J. Katzenstein and Saya S. Shiraishi, eds., *Network Power* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 234-71.

<sup>3</sup> In *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Deleuze writes, “To begin with, what is this agent, this force which ensures communication? Thunderbolts explode between different intensities, but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible *dark precursor*, which determines their path in advance but in reverse, as though intagliated” (119).

<sup>4</sup> Tobin, 270.

<sup>5</sup> Tobin, 280-81.

<sup>6</sup> John Kraniauskas, “Empire, or Multitude: Transnational Negri” (*Radical Philosophy* 103, 2000), 29-39.

<sup>7</sup> Ernesto Laclau, “The Immanence of *Empire*,” in Paul A. Passavant and Jodi Dean, eds., *Empire’s New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Murakami’s lecture at the Royal Institution in London, at <http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/?lid=831>

<sup>9</sup> See Murakami Takashi, *Superflat* (Tokyo: MADRA, 2000). For a more recent statement, see, for instance, Azuma’s discussion, ‘Superflat Japanese Postmodernity,’ at [http://www.hirokiazuma.com/en/texts/superflat\\_en2.html](http://www.hirokiazuma.com/en/texts/superflat_en2.html)

<sup>10</sup> A consideration of the institutional dimension of this discourse would have to begin with the perception of otaku as criminals or outlaws. For instance, after the arrest of serial infant killer Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1989, camera crews and reports exploring his home discovered collections of girls’ manga and books of analysis of girls’ culture (including those of Ootsuka Eiji). See Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 126-28. This association of anime with criminality led to a widespread discussion of the dangers of manga and anime, and of the perversity of otaku—actually, a media panic. It is in such panic that one senses the formation of a discourse, in the modes of scrutiny and regulation that begin to define the boundaries of the otaku world. Of course, the Gainax discourse does not intend to shore up institutionalised forms of scrutiny and regulation, yet, in calling attention to the grey zones of anime cult fandom, it calls attention to sites for

observation. Exploration of such a discursive construction would surely have to address the regulations of the internet in relation to prior attempts to police circulation.

<sup>11</sup> Murakami Takashi, *Superflat* (Tokyo: MADRA, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> The lineage of *dôjinshi* or amateur manga artists, whose works are most visible at the yearly Comiket (comic market), is crucial to the definition of the anime image. It was the work of women artists writing girls' manga that caught the attention of many a budding otaku—laying the basis for the Lolita complex (*rorikon*) manga for men, whose images intersect with the model kits and anime heroines more generally.

<sup>13</sup> The question of movement within the image (internal montage or the multiplanar image) seems to me particularly important, especially in relation to narrative movement. I have discussed this in “From animation to anime” (*Japan Forum* 14.2, 2002). The turn to distributive image in these commentators at once raises and ignores the issue of movement within the image. For they tend to ignore the relation of movement within the image to the movement between images, and thus to narrative. Azuma, for instance, opposes “narrative” to “database.” Yet what is needed is a better approach to narrative. In this context, perversion emerges as a quasi-narrative movement by default.

<sup>14</sup> Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 86-96. The discussion in this book is especially appropriate insofar as Varela *et al.* wish to present an alternative way of thinking the self, as an emergent property, and in relation to Buddhism.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to his work on the *Galaxy Express 999* movies, Kanada Yoshinori worked as key animation supervisor for a number of Miyazaki Hayao's films: *Tenkû shiro no Raputa* (Castle in the Sky, 1986), *Majo no takkûbin* (1989), *Tonari no Totoro* (1988), and *Mononoke hime* (1997), as well as the *Fushigi yûgi* TV series (1975). It is interesting to consider how Kanada, the paradigm of anime aesthetics for Murakami and others, impacts such allegedly non-anime films as Miyazaki's.

<sup>16</sup> As a moment of pure affect, this collapse in distance between viewer and image recalls discussions of the close-up in film theory of the 1910s and 1920s. Indeed, discussions of anime as new media often echo or repeat discussions of cinema as new media. At stake is grappling with the relation between new material conditions and new forms of experience. With the film image, early theorists often stressed how it seemed to exceed its frame and move out of the theatres into streets—sometimes with terrifying results.

<sup>17</sup> Morikawa Kaichirô, *Moeru toshi Akihabara: shuto no tanjô* [Learning from Akihabara: The Birth of a personapolis] (Tokyo: Gentosha, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write, “Only microfascism provides an answer to the global question: Why does desire desire its own repression, how can it desire its own repression?” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 215.

<sup>19</sup> Okada Toshio applies Ootsuka Eiji's take on consumption in the Edo period from *Monogatari shôhiron: “bikkuriman” no shinwa* (Tokyo: Shinyôsha, 1989) in his account of otaku in *Otakugaku nyûmon*. See Marc Steinberg, “Otaku Consumption, Superflat and the Return to Edo” (*Japan Forum* 16.3, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> The liner notes to the English video release (available on line) do a fine job tracing the references, imparting a good sense of this information-dense field.

<sup>21</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," in *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> Mario Tronti, "The Strategy of Refusal," in *Italy: Autonomia, Post-Political Politics* (New York: *Semiotext(e)*, III.3, 1980, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi), 29-30.

<sup>23</sup> Kraniauskas, 33

<sup>24</sup> I am thinking here of Foucault's later work, particularly the third volume in his *The History of Sexuality, The Care of the Self* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), in which Foucault tries to determine how the subject enters into relation with the truth. While Foucault's work builds directly on the Western tradition (and the Nietzschean idea that the first episode of the history of truth begins with Platonism), I would like to suggest, without pressing the point as an analogy, that such problems also arise in the context of Japan and China, in the history of Neoconfucianism, Buddhism and the relation of the subject to self and truth. In this context, by discussing such a care of the self in the context of cult fans, I do not mean to imply some atavistic continuity between premodern and modern or postmodern subjective formations. Rather, I wish to draw out a tension implicit in subject formation as Foucault imagined it, to which the later works are sensitive. One of the best accounts of Foucault's later work appears in Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), which I draw on here.

<sup>25</sup> The work (or power) of humour should not be readily debunked, denounced as complicity, or otherwise given away, however seriously one wishes to take it.

<sup>26</sup> Theodor Adorno, "On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening," in J. M. Bernstein, ed., *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), x. Hills rules out intensity and opts for "duration" as the factor of greatest importance, but his duration, if given a somewhat Bergsonian twist, is not far from my sense of the importance of intensity.

<sup>28</sup> Slavoj Žižek, "Eastern Europe's Republics of Gilead" (*New Left Review* 183, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Okada Toshio, "Nihon ni aisuru beikoku no otaku" (*Aera*, 2 October 1995), 43-44. The essay appears on his website: Otaking Spaceport. An English translation (Kevin Leahy) also appears on the web (from *The Rose* #47), entitled "Anime Culture Is Way Cool! America's Japanophile Otaku."

<sup>30</sup> As Koichi Iwabuchi points out, this process of Japanese identity formation usually excludes or abjects "Asia," which is in fact one of the most important markets for anime. See *Recentring globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> In his recent work, Azuma is adamant that this "superflat Japanese postmodernity" is always already hybrid. He writes, "any nostalgic return towards its traditional, original, or 'pure' Japaneseness seems a fake," and "it is the otaku culture that reflects most clearly this mixed, hybrid, bastardized condition; that is, the paradox that we cannot find any Japaneseness without post-war American pop culture." See "Superflat

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Japanese Postmodernity” at [http://www.hirokiazuma.com/en/texts/superflat\\_en2.html](http://www.hirokiazuma.com/en/texts/superflat_en2.html). Nonetheless, this hybrid postmodern field acts in a unified manner, such that he can also speak of “otaku nationalism.” Again, the problem seems to derive from his tendency to posit a historical and geopolitical break, which is then negotiated (or disavowed) through statements about hybridity and impurity.

<sup>32</sup> When I presented an earlier version of this essay, Brett de Bary spoke persuasively of this use of anime to renew Japan area studies, which led me to rethink the fascination of Japan Studies for anime.

<sup>33</sup> Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? and Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2003), viii.

<sup>34</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ernesto Laclau, in “The Immanence of *Empire*,” provides an important critique of Hardt and Negri’s politics of immanence, as does John Kraniuskas in “Empire, or Multitude: Transnational Negri.”