



ANIME:  
THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICATION OF THE OTAKU

BY

JEREMY SULLIVAN,  
B.A.





## ANIME: THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICATION OF THE OTAKU

ANIME:  
THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICATION  
OF  
THE OTAKU

By

Jeremy Sullivan, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by Jeremy Sullivan, September 2005

MASTER OF ARTS (2005)  
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Anime: The Cultural Signification of the Otaku

AUTHOR: Jeremy Sullivan, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Lorraine York

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 103



## Abstract

Technology has allowed nearly instantaneous communication around the globe and this study examines how cultural transmission occurs through the consumption of television and film. Anime, a term used to refer to a genre of animation that is of Japanese origin, has become immensely popular in North America and has come to simultaneously come to signify a commodified Japanese youth culture. However, the spectrum of Japanese animation is restricted and controversial anime that includes offensive themes, violent, sexual or illicit material are not televised, or publicized except when associated with negative behaviour. The Otaku are labeled as a socially deviant subculture that is individualistic and amoral. Their struggle for autonomy is represented by their production, circulation and consumption of manga and anime, despite the insistence of the dominant Japanese and North American cultural discourses. This study will examine how publicly circulating definitions, media review, historical relations and censorship have affected the portrayal of otaku subculture in Japan and internationally.

## Acknowledgements

A special thanks to my thesis supervisor Lorraine York. Without her patience and guidance this project would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my thesis committee members Tsuneko Iwai and Anne Savage for the generous support and input.

# Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction – Defining the Otaku	1
Chapter 2: Genealogy – Cultural Evolution and Alternative History	38
Chapter 3: Iconic Anime	71
Conclusion	91
Appendix 1: The Otaku Alliance website	93
Appendix 2: A Story of Communication: The Kazuya Tsurumaki Interview	99
Bibliography	105



# Chapter 1

## Introduction – Defining the Otaku

This study is an inquiry into the construction and communication of culture through contemporary image production. Specifically, the representation of Japanese culture in animated motion pictures and television series and their relationship to a burgeoning generation of Japanese youth is the focus of this thesis.

Japanese culture has never been more globally available than it is now. Traditionally the Japanese have placed great emphasis on their national autonomy, which has meant over 200 years of self-imposed isolation, but for the last century the people inhabiting the urbanized island chain of Japan have emerged to figure themselves as an interconnected, wealthy global superpower. Their products are now shipped around the world and they have acquired a reputation for efficiency, productivity and ingenuity. The emergence of the Japanese nation as a world power has coincided with the success of Japanese digital media. Though internationally well-respected, the production of images and their representations of Japanese society and subcultures are a complicated matter. In fact, digital technology has allowed the primary means of Japan's cultural signification to be expressed through visual media, namely television and film.

The object of this chapter is to unpack the varied definitions of anime and its followers in order to better understand how Otaku culture has been socialized, both stigmatized by mainstream media, and to a lesser extent glorified. McLuhan's observations of media effects on individuals, social groups and global communities are particularly pertinent in their reflection of anime's transnational, digitized

communication. Communities can no longer exist autonomously when cultures are exported and imported globally. Foucauldian analysis of Otaku culture reveals a veritable multiplicity of definitions for terms which have sprung into use over the last half century in order to describe anime and its Japanese roots. Chapter Two will examine historical influences and power relations that have affected the development and labeling of the genre. John Fiske and Pierre Bourdieu will figure importantly in my discussion of particular anime series in Chapter Three as latent ideologies, identities and narratives are related to anime and its place in the field of culture. Anime has no unified agenda, and neither do the Otaku, and yet both terms can be used to signify particular styles and identities. Are there stable cultural identities being projected through globally consumed Japanese animation? The construction of the Otaku subculture, as evidenced in the example of *Neon Genesis: Evangelion*, is both externally and internally defined, for virtual (animated) and real (consumption and review) worlds parallel each other.

Understanding the Japanese national initiative, which has moved from Total War, to rapid industrialization, to technological pioneer in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, can be accomplished through news media, reading histories, and reports on international policies. However, insight into Japan's people, their psyche and social organization is accomplished by a more in depth study of their culture, which for my purposes will include animation. Painting and sculpture no longer take precedence as pre-eminent cultural objects. Their meaning is limited by technologically archaic communicability and stimulation, whereas animation is transmissible in the form of relatively cheap copies and continually changes its shape, colour and sound. The animated film has the ability to

take any subject and to explore its relationship with contemporary society. Animation is the tool with which a team of artists collectively design a film, which reflects McLuhan's idea that "The method of our time is to use not a single but multiple models for exploration—the technique of the suspended judgment is the discovery of the twentieth century as the technique of invention was the discovery of the nineteenth" (McLuhan 69). The subject of anime and the degree to which it reflects, reveals and promotes cultural identities must be approached in the same fashion, as its discursive operation is dependent on so many historical, social, economic and political factors. Animated visual culture and its accompanying innovations in digital communication have now become the conventional means by which impressions are made and perspectives guided and to that end, the Japanese, as in any Western nation, pay particular attention to the ways in which their cultural agents produce objects that reflect particular ideologies.

For contemporary Japanese the most important visual form has become anime. It has attained a pre-eminent position in Japanese society because of its financial success, its popularity, its basis in manga, an already immensely popular form, and its close association with a generation of youth. The success of anime as an exported cultural form is another reflection of the power and influence of the form, but that success has not come without cost.

As the technology of visual media has become more sophisticated, a complex system of signs has evolved to represent the interests, identities and designs of Japanese society. This has created a conflict of interests both abroad and within Japan itself. In analyzing the anime genre, current anime theorizing has emphasized the contentious



nature of Japanese visual culture and its suppression; however, my interest will relate to how, in a Foucaultian sense, mainstream culture asserts control through restricting circulation and censoring content, while at the same time generating a 'discursive explosion' which is visible in media exposure and the development of terms and categories to define anime and its fans. This particular cultural field and the way in which it is constituted can be contextualized by the discursive rendering of both Japanese subjects and those consuming Japanese culture through exposure to imported anime media and products.

## Discursive Operation

Anime, as an innovative 20<sup>th</sup> century form of media, has developed a complex system of signs which both characterize it in the minds of the population and distinguish it from other televisual forms. The status of Japanese animation as a creative outlet for artists and its status as an important signifier of contemporary cultural work is reinforced not only by its widespread acceptance domestically and its popularity abroad, but also by the attention it has received in the media, in the academic discipline of cultural studies, in the dedication of its fans, and in the commodification of its images.

That system of signs, as the elements of a discourse that represents the Japanese in a sort of meta-narrative, can be understood through anime's production of knowledge and terms. With a simple modification of Foucault's model of the repressive hypothesis in his interpretive work on representations of sex over the centuries, one can apply it to the representation of Japanese animation: "But more important was the multiplication of

discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail” (Foucault 18). A substitution of the word Japanimation for the word sex accurately describes the impetus for description, delineation and detail by which the media in particular have come to associate Japanese animation with types of action, feeling and even people. Appropriately, much of the anxiousness about the genre stems from its deviance from established codes of conduct, especially those concerning gender roles, psychology, sex and violence.

The possible applications of the repressive hypothesis and its parallels to Japanese animation are further exemplified by the emphasis that any nation, but especially Japan, places on a work ethic. The Japanese are renowned for their technology and efficiency and since their animation is an international symbol of their culture, it is no surprise that representations of ideologies that deviate from model productivity, in addition to questioning conventional social relations, are not welcomed. Foucault observed this very same pragmatic perspective in the production of sexual discourse: “All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality, is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?” (Foucault 37) The same social forces are present in the effort to define, distribute and control visual culture. Japanese animation is a product which is consumed

by the public on a mass scale, and as such its implications cannot be understood without examining the labels under which it operates and is exchanged.

## Post-modernism

Japanese animation has a tendency to resist categorization as it can take anything for its subject as long as it bears resemblance to animation of actual Japanese origin. A work of art created in the post-modern era which rejects the strictures of modernity should be considered post-modern. Anime has transcended cultural boundaries within and without Japan and integrated tradition, the foreign and the avant-garde. Animation's almost limitless capacity for portrayal allows it to traverse time and space, while blurring the distinctions between high and low culture which were such an integral part of the modern work of art. As Jameson notes in *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*,

The second feature of this list of postmodernisms is the effacement in it of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture. This is perhaps the most distressing development of all from an academic standpoint, which has traditionally had a vested interest in preserving the realm of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism, of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, and in transmitting difficult and complex skills of reading, listening and seeing to its initiates. (Jameson *Postmodernism 2*)

Jameson notes that academia in particular has an interest in the delineation of high culture and cites television and *Reader's Digest* as agents of the conflation. The key element here is the degree to which control and review are imposed on various media. In the past, specific purpose and critique were applied to the concept of elite culture, but given the plethora of media that are now available this process of defining the realm of high culture



is a nearly impossible task, though censors and producers as well as award shows still attempt to maintain a media canon. It is no surprise that what is entertaining is what takes precedence in television programming. The same vested global capitalist interest affects the consumption of Japanese anime.

When the idea of postmodernism blurring the distinctions between high and low culture is applied to Japanese animation the stakes are much higher, as many other factions of society have questioned the meaning of the animation, which has to do with the relationship between its content, its meaning and its consequences. There are more factions than the academic that have an interest in how animation is received in Japan. The media, the fans, the academics, lawyers and critics all have contributed to the variegated face of visual culture which the Japanese have presented to society both domestically and internationally.

Furthermore, particular types of Japanese animation, those that have yet to be colonized by the mainstream both domestically and in North America, occupy a subcultural space reserved for the new generational movement. There is also something of a post-modern impulse in the way the discourse of anime is constructed. It is in many ways oppositional, as its ideologies often run counter to the emphasis on collectivity and productivity that are the basis of modern industrial Japan's success. Characteristically, as Jameson explains, postmodernisms

emerge as specific reactions against the established forms of high modernism, against the established forms of high modernism, against this or that dominant high modernism which conquered the university, the museum, the art gallery network, and the foundations. Those formerly subversive and embattled styles—Abstract Expressionism; the great modernist poetry of Pound, Eliot or Wallace

Stevens; the International Style (Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies); Stravinsky; Joyce, Proust and Mann—felt to be scandalous or shocking by our grandparents are, for the generation which arrives at the gate in the 1960s, felt to be the establishment and the enemy—dead, stifling, canonical, the reified monuments one has to destroy to do anything new. (Jameson *Postmodernisms* 3)

The establishment is indeed the enemy of the Japanese animation that challenges traditional or modern lifestyles. Instead of being recognized for its ingenuity, its social commentary and its exploration of forbidden territories of the psyche and of the mind, it is correlated with the social regression of a generation, as well as being blamed for a myriad of crimes ranging from pedophilia to murder. Its contentiousness coupled with its incorporative, category spanning tendencies demonstrate how Japanese animation represents a post-modern subculture to its adherents and critics alike.

In its diversity, Japanese animation demonstrates an ideology that is post-modern in its incorporation of various styles, but even more importantly it operates more freely than most contemporary visual forms because it is based on acceptance rather than restriction. Anime series, like their American counterparts, have their comical and scripted mainstream elements, as well as stock characters, but at the same time anime is used to pioneer new styles, colours and subjects with a minimalist budget unattainable in live action series. Anime can take anything for its subject as long as it can connect to Japanese culture, whether it be through aesthetics or by point of origin. Thomas Lamarre comments on both the labeling of the genre and its potential to convey new meaning through its relationship to contemporary and conventional cinema: “A host of commentators in Japan have likewise situated anime in relation to the emergence of something new – the postmodern, the post-human, the post-national, non-identarian

politics and, more recently, the digital and new media. Tatsumi Takayuki (1993) addressed the ceaseless play of derivativeness in Japanese SF and anime, which suggested to him a sort of post-national ‘japanoid’ mode” (Lamarre 185). Positioning anime amidst other forms of cinema calls attention to its tendency to create and explore new worlds that are not contained within traditional grand narratives. Rather than reproduce the status quo, anime works with deviant models of reality.

The first task then, is to come to an understanding of the relationship between a particular type of animation and the Otaku subculture which, when it began to be visible in other parts of the world and came to be called Japanimation, also came to symbolize Japanese culture itself.

## Definition

### Japanimation

To begin a discussion of Japanese animation and its implications for Japanese culture, one must first address the use of its historical label: *Japanimation*. The terminology is important because it clearly denotes the association between the visual and the cultural. What one consumes on the screen is a product of Japanese origin, which through a simple English, linguistic compound, came to symbolize the genre internationally. The Japanimation fan base, as well as anyone consuming media concerning the subject, tended to pronounce the word as an abbreviation of “Japan” “Animation” and, according to Wordiq “it saw its most usage during the 1970s and 1980s, which broadly comprise the first and second waves of anime fandom” (Wordiq 1).



In a broad sense it was also used to denote the distinctive boundaries between cultural production in the post World War II era. However, in the late 1980s the term fell into disuse as it was replaced by the label *anime*. Circulating definitions of the word are available on Urban Dictionary, a slang dictionary with definitions supplied by the website's contributing visitors and users. The North American context of this public internet source and its interest in fine distinctions between varying use of terms contribute to the formation of anime and otaku discourse. It is a perspective on popular culture which includes hypocrisy and stereotypes. Now that anime is widely accessible as an international form of media entertainment it is subject to the assumptions, false or not, of the populations in which it is distributed. Some definitions represent a more acute understanding of anime history and meaning, but every definition is a recent submission and has been voted on by hundreds and read by thousands.

### 1. Japanimation

Term that describes Japanese animated cartoons made in the 1980s or earlier, usually television series made on small budgets resulting in Bullwinkle-style art and as much story as possible crammed into a half hour. This term has been generally replaced with the word anime since the 1990s.

*Kyojin no Hoshi, Heidi of the Swiss Alps, and The Flanders' Dog are the most well-known japanimation titles within Japan.*

Source: The 2-Belo, Jan 7, 2004 (Urbandictionary.com)

One might argue that the international exposure of the visual form and its subsequent absorption into American mainstream culture which blurred the boundaries necessitated the generation of a new term, but this post makes another pointed observation about the production characteristics of early Japanese animation. Less money was used in its

creation, video editing technology was inferior and its subjects were less controversial. The portrayal of ‘bull-winkle style’ art drew little reaction from society at large. That is, the style and content, as well as the technique used in producing the animation was not remarkable enough to illicit a significant negative or positive response from its audiences. The animation was steadily consumed domestically and in North America, but in limited doses and with little controversy. Additionally, while the animation carried the label ‘Japanimation’ abroad, it never really attained the notoriety that its replacement, ‘anime,’ would receive. Moreover, the altering of terminology coincided with the veritable explosion of animated series along with the box office domination, the transmission of video over the internet and the opening of international markets. Japanimation no longer effectively encapsulated the multifarious nature of the genre.

The term Japanimation has recently been re-invested with a meaning that has once again made it distinctive from anime and practical as a descriptor of Japanese cultural production. In fact, in Japan the term Japanimation is now “much more commonly used... to refer to domestic animation. Since anime or animeshon is used to describe all forms of animation, Japanimation is meant to distinguish Japanese work from that of the rest of the world” (Wordiq 2). The word, after falling into disuse, has been resurrected to signify a purer form of the genre for the Japanese and ironically, it also creates a purer definition of anime for the North American audience. For now any imported animation, as well as those deemed unfit for televising all constitute ‘Japanimation.’ ‘Anime’ on the other hand, though it maintains its status as an over-arching general signifier of the genre, comes to signify any Japanese *influenced* show that is consumed by North Americans.

Thus, the division between the American and Japanese cultures has been re-imagined and the following comic post is example of the invisible lines of force that underpin the consumption and reception of Japanese animation:

## 2. Japanimation

Animation made in Japan. The only way Japan can express their hatred towards America without George Bush getting medieval on their buttox.

Reporter: Master Japanimator Mr. Miyazaki, what is your opinion on American Japanimation?

Miyazaki: Amedica hazu veddy BAD infruencu 1 chidren. It always "daddy I wann fuck," or "will Joe get chiku," or same such unoriginal thing in Amedican Japanimation. So I base all my Japanimation antagonist on Amedican pigs.

Reporter: Really?

Miyazaki: Yes. In my view, my Japanimation "Spirited Away" is about young Amedican chiku trapped in Japan for somes days. But in end triumphs by learning Japanese way.

Reporter: It seems so. I also feel a sense of American antagonism in your Japanimation "Nausicaa."

Miyazaki: Ho! Ho! My Japanimation/Japanimanga "Nausicaa of Valley of Wind" Amedican antagonism exist to. Torumekia/The 3rd Army wish to defeat the wasteland by destroying EVERYTHING. Hai-domo, VEDDY AMEDICAN. On other hand, the valley people have learned to live in harmony with nature. THAT IS JAPANESE WAY.

Reporter: So the same thing seems to be going on in your Japanimation "Mononoke" too?

Miyazaki: In "Princess Mononoke", Eboshi and iron maker veddy Amedican! They kill whatever in way and hog recources because they are pigs. Ashitaka and his village are Japanese way! They keep to themselves. But demon boar try to change village to Amedican, and Ashitaka is cursed and tempted by Amedican way. But in end Ashitaka triumphs by using Japanese way!

Reporter: Any final comments?

Miyazaki: We Japanese learn much during seconds world war. But Amedican really lose in the end, because they become even more pigs.

Source: [LOLz @ Japanimation](#), Dec 30, 2004 (Urbandictionary.com)

Although it is clearly a parodic treatment of a Miyazaki interview, this post identifies some underlying ideologies that contend in the field of cultural production. Public perceptions are at work here in trying to discern the identity of the outsider. The joke not only highlights the differences and misunderstandings inherent in conveying meaning from culture to culture, but reinforces an America-centric view of anime. The history of diplomatic relations is brought to bear alongside stereotypes as the phony Miyazaki resists the hegemonic influence of America, a point which will be addressed in a subsequent chapter.

The term Japanimation suggests the problematic exoticism, which the censors have continually guarded against, of imported cartoons to North Americans. Furthermore, it simultaneously signifies Japanese culture as a whole and ironically, the transgressive behaviour of a generation of its youth. This third post, which was made earlier this year, again crystallizes another public perception of Japanese animation:

### 3. Japanimation

Less common term for anime which an anime geek(otaku) will shun you for using; not to be confused with hentai

*Not all anime is porn.*

Source: [Geek-O-Man](#), Feb 28, 2005 (Urbandictionary.com)

This post makes another association between Japanese culture and the transgression of moral codes. The word animation is very seldom used in America; instead shows are

known as cartoons, or even more playfully, as ‘toons.’ The majority of cartoons, though the trend has been significantly altered in the past several decades<sup>1</sup>, fall into a range designed to be consumed by children. As is alluded to in the above post, it is a gross misperception that anime always contains explicit content, but it is also a mistake to measure another society’s standards by our own. The fear of imitable, explicit content and its availability is another part of the moral panic that has arisen out of the creation of deviant anime forms and the perception and consumption of them domestically and abroad.

### Anime

Anime, a term first coined in the 80s, replaced ‘Japanimation’ as the signifier of Japanese cartoons. The term has come to signify Japanese culture to North Americans as a sort of imported exotic cartoon, while simultaneously representing social transgression in Japan. Anime is derived from the Japanese transliteration of the English word “animation” and now stands in as the most pervasive signifier of any cartoon of Japanese origin, another example of the meeting of Japanese and American cultures that shows how intertwined they have become on a descriptive level. Yet that signifier is unanchored and the current, broad definition unsatisfying. The dynamic and ever-expanding reach of anime prevents any clear understanding of its content beyond the cultural moment.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cartoons such as Family Guy and South Park, despite huge viewing audiences and no evidence of correlative damaging behaviour, have been incessantly harassed and censored for their explicit content. Family Guy was cancelled, but has since become one of the most popular DVDs of all time (and has now returned to regular television during a primetime slot in response to audience demand) and South Park is now in its 8<sup>th</sup> season.



A prime example of this phenomenon occurs in *Evangelion*, a series that is adult-oriented, includes children as its protagonists, conspirators and aliens as its antagonists, violence, pornography, comedy and scenes appropriate to drama, soap opera, fantasy and sci-fi. It is a popular myth that the series' creators are insane, but the show's eclectic defiance of categorization is again a point of cultural intersection in which "two or more heritages combin[e] to form a third form... [namely] transculture, following Fernando Ortiz" (Mirzoeff 26). The idea of transculture is one that aptly describes the interplay of cultural ideologies in anime and the contributions of multiple parts of several societies. The specific details of the interplay among Japanese subcultural expression, mainstream Japanese culture and American culture will be discussed further in chapters two and three.

Anime is prone to many misperceptions as a result of its resistance to definition and the lack of accurate information attached to the label. The selection at any national or transnational movie rental store will provide ample evidence of this hanging signifier, as you browse the various sections, arriving finally at "anime." The anime section includes anything with animated Japanese content and production values without regard for specific audiences and that places the genre in the position of 'foreign' within the field of North American cultural production. As opposed to the foreign film category itself, which encompasses anything outside the sphere of American production, anime in particular is somehow specific to 'Japaneseness' in a way that no other visual genre is connected to a parent culture. This approach further alters the reception of anime in North America, for as Bourdieu observes, "The meaning of a work (artistic, literary,

philosophical, etc...) changes automatically with each change in the field within which it is situated for the spectator or reader” (Bourdieu 30-31).

Despite the inability of anime, as a sign, to properly define its own constituents there are some characteristics with which it has become associated. First, it is common for strongly action-themed anime to feature multiple themes that “involve humor, romance, and even poignant social commentary, whereas most Western action films have little to offer beyond the action element” (Wordiq 2). Second, production values are of a completely different sort than the highly evolved, sophisticated techniques in use by studios such as Dreamworks and Pixar. Unlike these American counterparts, anime has a curious nostalgic investment in antiquated, one might say traditional, visual production techniques. Part of this was dictated by the initial financial and production conditions in which the pioneers of anime found themselves:

Osamu Tezuka<sup>2</sup> adapted and simplified many Disney animation precepts to reduce the budget and number of frames. His intent was to use it as a temporary measure to allow him to produce one episode every week with inexperienced animation staff. Anime studios have perfected techniques to draw as little new animation as possible, using scrolling or repeating backgrounds, still shots of characters sliding across the screen, and dialogue that involves only animating the mouths while the rest of the screen remains absolutely still, a technique not wholly unfamiliar to Western animation. Some fans argue that the best anime emphasizes sophisticated direction over actual animation (character movement), providing an illusion of motion where none exists. The overall effect of these techniques – reduced frame rate, many still shots, scrolling backgrounds – has led some critics to accuse anime of choppiness or poor quality in general. (Wordiq 2).

---

<sup>2</sup> Osamu Tezuka gained popularity as a manga writer and illustrator up through the 1950s. He is widely credited as the most influential animator in Japan and, indeed, his career parallels the rise of the Japanese animation industry. Inspired by his great love for cartoon animation, Disney in particular (it's said he saw Walt Disney's *Bambi* 80 times), he set up Mushi Studios, his own production company, (1961-1973) which became a springboard for a number of influential animators who were to follow, including Katsuhiro Otomo (*Akira*).

The difference in anime production values from their American counterparts has been inherited by current anime even though many series have become financially secure. Notable exceptions are often the product of big budget films originating from the Studio Ghibli, where the famous anime director Hayao Miyazaki works his creative magic. In fact, in many respects these movies rise above the already immensely varied and technically skilled roster of anime films, and are inevitably box office smashes, as well as hits outside of Japanese theaters. *Spirited Away* was the best selling Japanese movie ever and also the first anime feature film to ever win an Academy Award (2002). It is now the highest grossing film in Japan, passing *Titanic* in 1997. Some TV and OVA series, such as *Cowboy Bebop* and *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, have higher production values and are animated rather well, bypassing the usual “shortcuts” used in animating a majority of the other series. (Wordiq 2).

However, even the technology, finances, personnel and experience at the disposal of Miyazaki in the Ghibli studio do not appear to have necessitated the rapid implementation of new techniques. In the Ghibli museum, a monument to anime that includes tours and attractions for children and adults alike, “Miyazaki writes in the museum’s catalogue, that ‘imagination and premonition’ and ‘sketches and partial images’ can become the core of a film” (Talbot 66). In Miyazaki’s case, the enormous success of his films seems to have impressed upon his audiences the idea that his production values deviate from those of traditional anime, but his personal investment in the aesthetics of the genre are still quite visible in that “he not only draws characters and storyboards for the films he directs; he also writes the rich, strange screenplays, which

blend Japanese mythology with modern realism” (Talbot 64). The polished, realistic animation of the final product can be attributed as much to Miyazaki’s obsession with detail, as to the mechanisms (for example: the outdated storyboard) with which they are produced. The more important connection to be made, however, lies in the original relationship between manga and anime, as well as in their ongoing interaction and cultural investment.

### Manga

In its most simple definition, manga signifies Japanese comic books; however, it has taken on other meanings to new audiences. It is in many ways the natural predecessor of anime in terms of its technology and, even more importantly, it is the basis for much of anime’s ideological roots. Not only have manga series been literally adapted for distribution as animated motion pictures, but they are also source of much of its countercultural content. Several popular Japanese cartoons have been developed based on the popularity of a comic book series and that connection with a tradition of avant-garde cultural material has allowed anime to supercede all other forms of film in Japan:

The simplest explanation for this reversal of fortune between animation and live-action is the former has ridden to success on the coattails of its older cousin, Japanese comics, or manga, a medium that emerged as a main focus of Japanese popular culture after World War II, and has grown particularly pervasive since the 1970s. It is true that many successful anime were based on popular manga and anime have been heavily influenced by manga’s pictorial conventions. Another important factor is cost. (Kenji 2)

This tendency parallels the production of superhero movies in the United States by companies such as Marvel. However, rather than having a single company with a virtual

monopoly, Japanese sources are much more varied with thousands of independent artists and companies contributing to the pool of comic literature available to the public. The homogeneity with which North Americans are prone to view foreign visual media production is exemplified by the following post:

### 1. Manga

Contrary to what most people in the West think, manga (both the singular and plural form are the same) have NOTHING to do with pornography. Some manga are pornographic, but that's just a small percentage of manga.

Manga, in Japanese, means "flowing words" or "Undisciplined words". It is an ancient art that has been used for centuries as a form of entertainment. It's basically Japanese comic books, which can be easily translated to English. However, just saying manga are comics from Japan is wrong.

First of all, in the US and in Europe, most comics are addressed to young children between the ages of 9 and 13. That is not the case of manga. There are 6-7 major types of manga, each having its own audience. Kodomo manga is for children. Shonen manga is for boys ages 12-18, Shoujo manga is for girls age 12-18. Josei manga is for adult ladies above the age of 20, mainly working women. Seinen manga is for young men between the ages of 18 and 30, and Hentai manga is pornographic, adult manga.

As you can see, saying "comics from Japan" is wrong. Another difference between manga and Western comics is that each comic volume has its own plot, while manga volumes all follow the same plot. The artwork is VERY different. Manga has its own particular artwork, especially when it comes to human faces, particularly the eyes, chin, nose, mouth, forehead... Manga is also read from RIGHT to LEFT. (Yes, even the English ones).

In Japan, 40% of all book & magazine sales are manga. That's a huge number, considering the Japanese read A LOT. In 1998, about 3 billion manga volumes were printed in Japan, I'm sure that number is higher now.

*Many manga have been translated to English and are sold everywhere. GTO, Excel Saga, Inu Yasha, Fushigi Yugi, Naruto, Pretty Face, Hunter x Hunter, Confidential Confessions, Love Hina, and Berserk are all examples of manga.*

Source: Simon B., Oct 2, 2003 (Urbandictionary.com)

In Japan knowledge of the genre is so widespread and pervasive that you can hardly ignore its images and effects if you consume contemporary literature. This unregulated influence on representations, narratives and fantasies has resulted in critics and mainstream media that have focused on amateur manga as the principle conveyor of immoral images. This has more to do with concern over the formation of large groups of youth whose operation is in conflict with the collective interests of society, which are dictated by the elite members of Japanese society who possess both the means of production as well as significant legislative and media influence. The amateur manga movement was born out of this ever-present generational desire for originality or re-invention and unconventional expression, which could be accomplished through unregulated circulation:

The amateur manga movement is remarkable in that it has been organized almost entirely by and for teenagers and twenty-somethings. Amateur manga is not sent to publishers to be edited and distributed. It is, instead, printed at the expense of the young artists themselves and distributed within manga clubs, at manga conventions and through small adverts placed in specialist information magazines serving the amateur manga world. Through the 1980s it grew to gigantic proportions without apparently attracting the notice of academia, the mass media, the police, the PTA, or government agencies such as the Youth Policy Unit (Seishonen Taisaku Honbu), - which were established precisely to monitor the recurring tendency of youth to take fantastical departures from the ideals of Japanese culture. (Kinsella 1)

The resultant moral panic that became a widespread response to especially deviant forms of amateur manga will be developed and explained further in a subsequent chapter, but it is important to note that the immediate effect of the Japanese interrogation of their own



subculture was to represent the genre of manga and by association anime, as a contentious and potentially dangerous visual medium.

As is evidenced by the indignation of the author in the above post, the definition of manga is quite different in a Western context. The oversimplification of manga as pornographic comics for adolescent to adult audiences ignores the inherent creativity in producing art that has free play and is fundamental to the production and consumption of amateur manga. By free play I return to the definition of the Japanese animated project as a post-modern phenomenon whose morally unrestricted content is at its root incorporative rather than exclusive. This can only be accomplished by producing a text directly, without censorship, enforced production values and publisher authorization. The selection and consumption of manga is then more fully in the hands of the audience. Free play is based ideologically on acceptance and the full range of creativity that is available through relatively inexpensive production values. It is to these countercultural ideas that anime gestures to through its relation of form, content and tradition to manga.

### Otaku

The Otaku are a group within Japanese society identified by their interest in visual media, technology and by their seclusion. The word Otaku is most described as a variation of the North-American term 'nerd' or 'techno-geek.' The connotation of the word is primarily negative in that it implies a retreat or disconnection from society which is viewed as unproductive in the sense of one's contribution to society (selfishness) and in the sense that it is detrimental to personal development (anti-social behaviour). Again,

for the purposes of demonstrating how widespread the term is and its variant meanings, Urbandictionary.com provides a simple view of the term's use in North America:

### 1. Otaku

Otaku is the honorific word of Taku (home).

Otaku is extremely negative in meaning as it is used to refer to someone who stays at home all the time and doesn't have a life (no social life, no love life, etc)

Usually an otaku person has nothing better to do with their life so they pass the time by watching anime, playing videogames, surfing the internet (otaku is also used to refer to a nerd/hacker/programmer).

In the Western culture, people confuse otaku to be something positive like "Guru". If you think about it, it's not really good to be called a guru if it means you are a total loser who can't socialize with other people except through the Internet.

Other Japanese words which have been confused by Westerners also include but not limited to: Anime, Manga, etc

*otaku no jinsei ha yabai na! (it sucks to live the life of an otaku!)*

Source: [death\\_to\\_all](#), Apr 7, 2003 (Urbandictionary.com)

The main negative stereotypes, that mirror some of the suppressive attitudes that still persist in Japan today, are clearly articulated. The Otaku are labeled as 'losers' because their extensive interest in manga and anime is associated with their behaviour. That attitude is in itself a fallacy, for no one has been able to establish a causal relationship between behavioural tendencies and overexposure to a barely categorizable genre of visual media. None the less, the Otaku have come by their identity through their 'obsession' with the cultural production that they themselves have created and characterized. The fact that this particular post, in 210 responses, was given 160 thumbs

up and 50 down as an accurate definition speaks also to its unstable meaning. This second definitional proposal elaborates further on the multiplicity of meaning and cultural context of the word:

#### 4. Otaku

Otaku has multiple meanings. Casual anime fans use this word in the context of being a well established fan who knows much about anime and manga. Japanese see this term as derogatory which represents a person who is a lifeless nerd. Wapanese<sup>3</sup> see this as derogatory given their strong belief that because they watched some anime that all the sudden they are Japanese. This is a high-context word, in the American dialect, given the type of people using the word and the context of the discussion this OTAKU could mean expert or geek, complementary or derogatory.

*Larry has a wealth of knowledge about anime, he is a real otaku.*

Source: Tabenokoshi, Dec 28, 2003 (Urbandictionary.com).

The duality of the term, and its different uses from nation to nation, shows how the sign is misconstrued and misused to designate deviance instead of interest. Obsessive interest is acceptable when applied to innovation which serves a practical collective interest, but not when engaged in fantasy. Interestingly, with the advent of digital technology, people have the ability to contribute, interact and work out of their rooms. Thus, the stigmatizing of the Otaku on the basis of their withdrawal can be understood as a product of antiquated viewpoints, the vestiges of a traditional lifestyle. However, the ironic truth remains that the constellation of personality traits defined as 'Otaku' are praised when applied, as Hayao Miyazaki does, in a way that produces and reveres Japanese traditional

---

<sup>3</sup> A term that describes a Caucasian person who not only consumes Japanese visual culture, but who also adopts stereotypical behaviours and involves themselves in the outward show of the culture without having real experience, extended exposure or insight. A white person 'posing' as Japanese.

ideologies, but it continues to be condemned when embodied and consumed by a large portion of Japanese youth.

Furthermore, as a signifier, the word Otaku is often ambiguous in its attempt to encapsulate the identities of its contingency and, as a result, it is an accurate public perception of the subculture that is constantly at stake. Japanese society, like American, moves to define and re-define the liminal spaces of its youth culture. As Grassmuck explains, etymologically, “Otaku, like *shinjinrui*,<sup>4</sup> is derived from the everyday language, and in the original sense means ‘your home’, then in a neo-confucian *pars pro toto* ‘your husband’, and more generally it is used as the personal pronoun ‘you’ (since Japanese individual cannot be thought of without his connection to his household)” (Grassmuck 4). Its current signification is much more complex, for anime series’ creators are catering to a second generation of Otaku, one that is saturated with images and information. Audiences are not simply in a certain ‘mode of being’ that results from their association with manga and anime forms; they also model themselves for and after the images they consume.

The reaffirming aspect of the both the simulation and the real are traceable through the swift, shifting definitions of Otaku culture. As Kinsella argues, concern over the content of manga and the censorship of postwar Japanese youth culture are correlated with the idea that “individualism (*kojinkshugi*) has, as we know, been rejected as a formal political ideal in Japan. Institutional democracy notwithstanding, individualism

---

<sup>4</sup> A word varying widely in meaning. “As a non-technical term it can refer to any new kind of generation. But sometimes it gets connected with a specific group of people for awhile. Like the [Japanese] yuppies of the late 70’s”. (Grassmuck 3).

has continued to be widely perceived as a kind of social problem or modern disease throughout the postwar period” (Kinsella 2). This generational divide and powerful pressure for national cohesion through a national identity and traditional values gave rise to a sizeable underground subculture that “despise[s] physical contact and love media, technical communication, and the realm of reproduction and simulation in general. They are enthusiastic collectors and manipulators of useless artifacts and information” (Grassmuck 1). Their aversion to social exposure and a sequestering of their cultural interests were the initial political impetus of Japanese youth political radicalism, which “became completely obscure by the early 1970s, younger generations, youth culture, and young women, became the focus of nervous discourse about the apparent decay of a traditional Japanese society” (Kinsella 2). This anxious discourse, directed by concern over Japanese moral slippage and an emphasis on productivity, has further exacerbated the generational differences in Japanese culture and, as a consequence, has provided an occasion for the Otaku to re-work definitions of themselves through anime.

The animated characters, in their complicated psychological and social portrayals, are central to the identity of the Otaku. I will focus on one means of identification with anime, through imitation. A perfect example is the principal character of *Neon Genesis: Evangelion*, Shinji, whose fashion, adolescence, shyness, immersion in information technology and fear of his estranged father all echo the general perceptions of the Otaku mode of being. Here, Shinji is presented as a transitory figure, one who exists in the not too distant future of 2015 and is informed by Otaku discourse, while at the same time channeling the psychological and social angst he feels in the familial and scholastic

environments into a focused effort to save the world by piloting a partly biological robot of Godzilla proportions. This identificatory process stems from the international perception that the Japanese “are mostly accepted and praised for their technology. A shaky base to build an identity on. Changes in attitudes and mentality are most visible with the young. The wish to understand what they up to brings forth the coining of a ‘new generation’ just about every year. The term otaku has had many predecessors in the debates about contemporary popular culture” (Grassmuck 2). Otaku identification, in Shinji’s case, is grounded in real-life parallels, also in the vision of Shinji as an Otaku hero. However, that heroism exists in a world of pure fantasy in an epic conflict beyond the scope of everyday Japanese life. It is that explicit separation of reality and fantasy, and as a consequence the remote possibility of simulation, that is the essential difference which, as the film theorist Richard Dyer suggests, points toward the “hero ‘produc[ing] a fresh point of view, a feeling of integrity and [that] makes a new man” (Dyer 24). The Otaku can both identify with Shinji’s feel of failure and immersion in a high pressure world of technology, as well as fantasize about his special stature as an EVA pilot destined to save the world, or die trying.

A large part of anime’s appeal is derived from its unrestricted content, which has come to define a countercultural meaning for the Otaku and represents the essential divide in generational interests. In the Japanese cultural milieu, manga, in particular, contains graphic violence, nudity and language and often, as is the case with *Berserk*, the comic form gives rise to an animated series. In addition, the Otaku are true connoisseurs of the genre and identify more strongly with anime stars by consuming them voraciously

in all their marketed forms. The visibility of characters such as Shinji and Gatts, from Neon Genesis: *Evangelion* and *Berserk* are restricted to specialized movie stores and the internet. Audience relations in these instances are illustrated by Dyer's argument that "by embodying and dramatizing the flow of information, the stars promote depoliticized modes of attachment (ie. acceptance of the *status quo*) in its audience" (Dyer 27). Dyer outlines "displacement of values" as one specific means of audience identification, but the resulting celebrity status and reinforcement of the status quo remain constant.

## Communication

Visual culture theory – Animation, visual media and communication

How can the discourse on anime be articulated and interpreted? As has been demonstrated in the preceding definitions of its various signs, it has become a stereotypical representation of Japanese society. At its very root, this perception is fundamentally flawed as it fails to take into account the anxiety with which mainstream Japanese society treats its own deviant animation. Anime itself is a medium which can convey the countercultural impetus of subgenres such as amateur manga. McLuhan proposes this idea in stating that the medium *is* the message: "The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as 'content.' The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content. The 'content' of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or of speech" (McLuhan 233). The content is de-emphasized as the effect of the medium on the viewing audience takes precedence.

Discussions of anime have almost entirely revolved around the content of the genre rather than its form. The overriding concern about the consumption of the visual content is that it is consumed without addressing its status as a Japanese meta-narrative. Anime represents a layering of form and content which is difficult to deconstruct. The content of anime is often a medium unto itself, as McLuhan suggests, such as a comic or novel, but it is also complicated by its animated form. Farther removed from reality than its dramatic, live actor counterparts, the form of anime is explicit. At the same time that it is being recognized as a completely fictitious creation it is also being interpreted by the public as having a communicative ability and an influence that parallels the ambiguous truth of dramas, historical fictions and other visual media that produce readily imitable figures. The medium of manga is the content of anime and it carries with it all the cultural and social implications of that genre, especially in its signification to foreign cultures.

For anime to truly signify itself transculturally, it must retain its ideologies rather than turning them aside only to be re-inscribed with the interests of the dominant culture, whether it be in Japan or abroad. The process of normalization is what divests the genre of its subcultural, deviant form of expression and that is affected by media portrayals and control of the means of production. In North America the anime that exhibits these deviant models are misinterpreted, censored and over-ridden by reliance on conventions imposed on the animated community.

The production of knowledge on the subject of anime and its relationship to cultural identity is disproportionate to the rapid proliferation and influence of the genre.



If anime is to be considered 'Japanese,' as it is almost unilaterally in its definitions, then its discourse should reflect its status as a cultural hybrid of intrinsic value to the diversity of a foreign culture (Japan), which is often considered and constructed as homogeneous by the public and it should also recognize the importance of presenting the entire range of anime rather than restricting its expression to the forms which are most compatible and palatable to the public.

It should come as no surprise that it is the generation of youth that intuitively understand the contradictions that exist within the anime genre. As aforementioned, anime is in some ways a traditional generational territorial battle, in which the older generations' values clash with the new, but more importantly rapid change in technology has had widespread social repercussions. McLuhan notes that "Youth instinctively understands the present environment—the electric drama. It lives mythically and in depth. This is the reason for the great alienation between generations. Wars, revolutions, civil uprisings are interfaces within the new environments created by electric informational media" (McLuhan *The Medium is the Message* 9). Anime exists as a testament to this media revolution, in which the meaning of the genre and its specific manifestations are restricted by the perspectives inhabited by those in power. It is profoundly affected by those latent ideologies (of the mechanized age) that inform understanding of a new media. McLuhan goes on to observe that "Our time is a time for crossing barriers, for erasing old categories—for probing around. When two seemingly disparate elements are imaginatively poised, put in apposition in new and unique ways, startling discoveries often result" (McLuhan 10). The Otaku have become such a media-

educated social group, whose method of interaction with their peers and with society at large has become increasingly digital.

What I mean to point out here, by observing the uncanny parallels between the general observations of McLuhan and the current social environment of the Otaku, is how a culture can disseminate through digital means, despite over-arching, outdated restrictions and conventions. Another startling Western parallel can be derived from the rise of the punk movement. British youth found a stable identity through which to channel their social angst by contorted the sounds and styles of rock music. Their recognizable visual markers, as well as their reputed comportment and attitudes served to strengthen their influence as a subculture. Punk, in turn, then became a driving political force, but was soon imitated, popularized, distributed and finally, many critics argue, diluted. Ironically, the popularity of anime gave birth to an underground movement, as with British punk, but its countercultural roots have been stigmatized rather than embraced. The Sex Pistols are marked as the paragons of punk, but we see no such critical examination, or acceptance of the ground-breaking, intoxicating, psychic and social turbulence of *Neon Genesis: Evangelion*. Change, especially when it involves radical new images and perspectives that run counter to the establishment, are rarely received with open arms. It is true that “Our time is a time for crossing barriers, for erasing old categories—for probing around. When two seemingly disparate elements are imaginatively poised, put in apposition in new and unique ways, startling discoveries often result (McLuhan 10). However, rather than be overcome by the pervasiveness of manga and its youthful cry of exclusion, bursting powerfully (and most visibly to a North

American audience) in the form of marginally successful anime movies, the Japanese media suppressed deviant anime and North America reinforced the social stigma with its strict censorship policies and Disneyfied audience. As a result, Miyazaki's *Princess Monoke* and a host of other mainstream anime movies have become valued cultural signifiers, though their socio-political significance encompasses little more than box office success and reflection of traditional Japanese values and spirituality. For the Otaku, anime has become a cultural and artistic genre over-written by its popular manifestations.

Controversial anime is loaded with internal as well as external conflict. One might label this project as escapist, but it might be better understood as a project of reality-construction. The Otaku have rejected the socio-political conditions into which they have been forced to exist, and their relation to each other, and the ideas which they circulate are strengthened through digital technologies' ability to present and circulate media. McLuhan pronounced in *The medium is the message*, "Electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of "time" and "space" and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men. It has reconstituted dialogue on a global scale. Its message is Total Change, ending psychic, social, economic, and political parochialism. The old civic, state and national groupings have become unworkable. Nothing can be further from the spirit of the new technology than 'a place for everything and everything in its place.' You can't go home again" (McLuhan 16). McLuhan's reflections have implications for the way we understand cultural definitions, especially considering the speed and range of communication at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Ironically, the meaning of the word ‘otaku’ is in direct opposition to McLuhan’s theory of technology. It further highlights the inaccuracy of the labeling of the Otaku, and reveals the term’s contradictions. Staying at home no longer implies the loss of social connectivity; in fact the reverse is true for the Otaku. The virtual and the animated have that potential to invest their lives with meaning, whereas the grind of real life and the competitive Japanese educative process have failed to do so. The unsettling, disturbing, hybridization and loss of identity characterize the Otaku.

The centrality of communication forms and of the influence that modern media technology has over the production, consumption and ultimately the reception of anime can again be examined by its relation to the educational process. McLuhan’s analysis of media and its effect on education demonstrates how the older generation, used to a classroom space as well as other traditional physical spaces, might be alarmed by the seclusion, access and consequently, the values of Japanese youth.

## **your education**

There is a world of difference between the modern home environment of integrated electric information and the classroom. Today’s television child is attuned to up-to-the-minute “adult” news—inflation, rioting, war, taxes, crime, bathing beauties—and is bewildered when he enters the nineteenth-century environment that still characterizes the educational establishment where information is scarce but ordered and structured by fragmented, classified patterns, subjects, and schedules. It is naturally an environment much like any factory set-up with its inventories and assembly lines. (McLuhan 18).

It is precisely because of this educational environment that the Otaku are stigmatized.

However, their socialization is more a reflection of their lack of options, rather than any collective refusal to participate in the system: “Reproached for their inability to

communicate and the difficulty they have in functioning in everyday life, *otaku* are sometimes taken to task as symbolic of the anomie of contemporary Japan” (Steinberg 453). Despite this perception they are, in a very real sense, very deeply involved in the system. Collectively, they represent a pool of artistic/animated knowledge as well as electronic and media *sagesse* that is unparalleled. This fact has not gone unnoticed as “Over the past few years... the otaku have come to be recognized as veritable subcultural heroes, ones, moreover, who are unique to Japan. Okada has been a central figure in this celebration of the otaku, asserting that the otaku not only represent a new type of media-savvy human endowed with superior sensory faculties, but are also the true inheritors and propagators of traditional Japanese culture” (Steinberg 453). Okada’s valorization of the otaku is somewhat extreme, but his positive perspective runs directly counter to the conservative opinions of the subculture. The polarization of his account is extreme, as the mantle of “inheritor of traditional Japanese culture” falls rather heavily on the shoulders of the social recluse, but Okada’s emphasis on the Otaku’s attunement to today’s media has important implications for the social group and their signification domestically and abroad.

In order to examine how ideologies are specifically embedded in anime I will be relying on the theoretical work of John Fiske. In his article on “The Codes of Television” he makes a concentrated effort to understand the patterns of images which are prevalent in visual culture. By deconstructing a particular anime series and juxtaposing it with social conventions, as well as physical and individual signs in society, one can more fully

understand how the psyche of the Otaku might be constructed and how the identity of the Japanese might be expressed and constructed out of the animated form:

*Figure 1* The Codes of Television

An event to be televised is already encoded  
By social codes such as those of:

Level one:  
'REALITY'

appearance, dress, make-up, environment, behavior, speech,  
gesture, expression, sound, etc..

∨

these are encoded electronically by  
*technical codes* such as those of:

Level two:  
REPRESENTATION

Camera, lighting, editing, music, sound

∨

which transmit the conventional codes, which shape the  
representations of, for example:  
narrative, conflict, character, action, dialogue, setting, casting, etc...

∨

Level three:  
IDEOLOGY

Which are organized into coherence and social acceptability by  
The ideological codes, such as those of:

Individualism, patriarchy, race, class, materialism, capitalism, etc... (Fiske 135)

Structuring an interpretation of anime in this way reveals how the traditional values of Japanese society are adhered to, re-invented, or questioned by the technical and visual codes that are at work. However, reading visual media in such a way is limiting and there are several other alternative views that, when used in conjunction with analyses of

embedded codes, will provide some further insight into figuring of Japanese animated images.

What Fiske refers to as the ‘oldest’ and ‘most respectable’ academic approach to televisual media is the *functional tradition*. Based on a theoretical framework developed to analyze the press, the functional tradition is an approach used in the sociology of mass communications. In order to more fully understand the relationship between the messages built into anime, the reality of the Otaku, “and the functions performed by [anime] for that audience” (Fiske 70) the embedded interests of the Otaku subculture must be examined. The media-audience relations described by the functional tradition can be simplified into three categories: individualism; abstraction; and functionalism.

### 1. Individualism

Audiences are composed of individuals, who are affected by social forces, but who also have needs that stem from their own attributes and experiences. The Otaku in particular fit well into this category as they form a social group through their isolation, interests and habits. The question is: how does the individual receive the messages and how are his needs met through exposure to animation and, additionally, how are those individuals who are not ‘otaku’ affected differently by the same anime media? The individualist approach “presupposes a one-to-one relationship between the mass communicator and the individual viewer which is justified by reference to the one-to-one model of face-to-face communication” (Fiske 71). Discussion and the expansion of understanding of visual media can be a social activity, but the consumption of it is often solitary. According to Fiske, it is “From this assumption, which leaves our of account the

fact that much of an individual's response is culturally determined and not internally motivated, has grown the habit of regarding television viewer as an individual with certain psychological needs" (Fiske 71). Anime presents a unique opportunity for individual audience identification in that it projects a heroic image of the otaku, while also exploring the psychological effects of the subculture at the same time. Further analysis of specific anime, namely *Neon Genesis: Evangelion*, will demonstrate the communicable messages, veiled as a double-edged sword.

## 2. Abstraction

Less applicable is the second aspect of the functional approach, which emphasizes the universal experience of the viewer. Fiske notes that, "the assumption is that an individual's psychological needs are much the same no matter what society or culture he belongs to. Certainly a man's culture can be included as one of the factors which influence these needs, but nevertheless the basic notions imply a kind of universality and timelessness about human relations, which derive no doubt from humanist myths about the existence of a universal 'human nature'" (Fiske 71). This idea is reflected in the transcultural nature of media itself, especially anime. There is a niche in the North American market completely dedicated to the anime genre in both visual and physical product form. The linguistic barrier is overcome through dubbing, but the reality is that anime such as *Berserk*, is only available with subtitles and yet it is circulated, downloaded and viewed without the benefit of a translating voiceover. As a result of its emphasis on unilateral meaning "this approach tends to disregard the historical processes which have produced such formative developments as the division of labour, class



oppositions, regional cultures, economic differentials and the various subcultures, in favour of general psychological needs” (Fiske 71). Sentimentality, morality and rationality can all be measured in visual media, whether its purpose is to entertain or to inform in Europe, North-America or Asia. Chapter 2 will emphasize the importance of the general effect of anime on people with reference to the history of cinematic and animated censorship history in Japan and the United States.

### 3. Functionalism

This approach bears more resemblance to Foucault’s discursive analysis than either of the two mentioned above. It assumes “that television is used by its viewers to satisfy their psychological needs, in a more or less conscious and active way. Functional analysis concentrates on the relations between the different parts in a system, in order to discover how they work and the functions they perform” (Fiske 72). It is in essence a more complicated sociological extension of the psychological stimulus-response model, but it retains the critical view of the systematic nature of media and discourse. The subjectivity of the Otaku is under review as they are influenced and influence the creation and distribution of anime. Their identities and needs are both exposed and satisfied by the narratives which they consume so avidly. The relationship between the viewer, the communicator, the selection of media “and such external factors from the social and cultural experience of the viewer as can be identified (or better still quantified), are all described in terms of their effect upon each other” (Fiske 72). Undertaking this approach to analyze anime and its architecture will put into perspective the negative and positive effects it has on audiences. Furthermore, it will demonstrate how the current system

itself dictates how anime is figured internationally and understood meaningfully (or not).

These models will provide a theoretical means for the social construction and representation of Otaku culture in a subsequent section, Chapter 3: Identification.

Anime, such as Evangelion, are cultural signifiers that communicate and inform the public of the existence and persistence of an Otaku subculture that deviates from mainstream Japanese animated imports in their social commentary, explicit content, production, distribution and most importantly their audience.

## Chapter 2

### Genealogy – Cultural Evolution and Alternative History

In ages past the tales of foreign cultures were transmitted through an oral tradition defined by the voices of returning warriors and bards. Writing replaced the oral tale, which was replaced by the technology of print, which was in turn superseded by the invention of digital data storage. Cultures also undergo evolution and the history of Japanese-Western relations has had a large influence on the themes and attitudes presented in anime, especially *Neon Genesis: Evangelion*. It is the traditional values, latent Japanese ideologies and western animated paradigms that have profoundly affected the Otaku animated discourse. Chapter Two is a discussion of these forces and anime's position as a televisual and cinematic media in the field of cultural production. In fact, mainstream Japanese and North American culture have caused the genesis of *Evangelion* as a countercultural object through media review and censorship.

In the twenty-first century, culture is consumed voraciously by children and adults alike through television, but the effects of the old technologies remain especially strong in the anime film genre. Thomas Looser notes the importance of televisual media: "Film is, arguably the art of the twentieth century, and even perhaps the central medium of modernity" and specifically marks the centrality of Japanese animation: "The influence of Miyazaki Hayao, whose animated films consistently break Japanese film box-office records, and those of Japanese *anime* in general, is locatable within an increasingly global interest in new media – an interest that is accompanied by a sense that new media are inaugurating new modes of sociality" (Looser 297). The strong undercurrents of

historical relations with the west, Japanese traditions and past Japanese cultural forms namely, edo and manga, and American influences such as Disney have created a hybridized cultural form that is associated with the Otaku identity in Japan. On the subject of cultural identity Edward Said observed:

I think that identity is a product of the will. Not something given by nature of history. What prevents us, in this voluntary identity, from encompassing several identities? I do it. To be Arab, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Jewish, is possible. When I was young, that was my world. We traveled ignorant of borders between Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon. At school there Italians, Jews, Spaniards or Egyptians, Armenians, it was normal. I am with all my force opposed to this idea of separation, of national homogeneity. Why not open our spirits to others? Now there's a real project for you. (Lee 1)

Said's appraisal of racial and national identities is an optimistic perspective which has considerable application to the subject of Otaku culture, but it fails to encapsulate the various realities that the Otaku must occupy. They are simultaneously the promise of a future generation, the westernized youth of an advanced Asian society, and the stigmatized nerds and consumers of censored, controversial media. Individuals labeled as Otaku are subjects of all of these discourses. At the beginning of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* he describes the effect that controlling representations of sex had during the Victorian era:

At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain frankness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century. It was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions, when anatomies were shown and intermingled at will, and knowing children hung about amid the laughter of adults: it was a period when bodies "made a display of themselves." (Foucault 3)

In the same fashion, the Otaku have been defined by their consumption of images deemed to be counter-productive, deviant, inappropriately violent and sexually illicit. The codes governing the development and expression of Otaku subculture have their basis in Japanese-Western relations and in the current productions values, review and censorship policies that affect the understanding of anime.

To understand the context, historically and currently, of the Otaku subculture requires a reduction in the amount of noise created by the misinterpretation and stigmatization of both a social group and its associated art form. This project describes the pedagogical function of anime as it is distributed as a cultural educative media. In mainstream television the educational process is focused on consumerism and children's entertainment, whereas less marketable, controversial animation such as *Evangelion* do not fall into the niche market of United States cartoons. How has the relationship between Otaku and anime come to affect their public representation? The formation of a group identity labeled as Otaku has become increasingly associated with the development of countercultural animation and the public knowledge on the subject is affected by cultural preconceptions. Lack of exposure and public appreciation for the purpose of adult-oriented sci-fi anime has crippled a cultural form which has the ability to provide an outlet for the voices of a new generation of youth and insight into the subtleties and conflicts of Japanese society.

The brand of countercultural anime which features Otaku models and images, the type which includes *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* and *Berserk*, are designed to appeal to young adults. The principal characters, and primary subjects for identification and interpretation, due their complexity and depth, range from adolescence to youthful adulthood. Television broadcasting in the United States has only accepted mainstream anime which fits neatly into the commodified cultural field of children's cartoons. Near fanatical devotion that has been observed on the part of anime fan bases, only mainstream anime that fits into the niche of adolescent cartoons have been accepted for television broadcast in the United States. Anime has been assigned a certain position in the field of televisual culture that puts it in close proximity to the heteronomous pole according to Bourdieu's theory. He presents the field of cultural production as a model containing the oppositional forces of heteronomy and autonomy, into which we can generally situate types of anime as being 'artistic' and hence meaningful, or 'economic' and profitable:

The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. 'bourgeois art') and the autonomous principle (e.g. 'art for art's sake'), which those of its advocates who are least endowed with specific capital tend to identify with degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise. The state of power relations in this struggle depends on the overall degree of autonomy possessed by the field, that is, the extent to which it manages to impose its own norms and sanctions on the whole set of producers, including those who are closest to the dominant pole of the field of power and therefore most responsive to external demands (i.e. the most heteronomous); this degree of autonomy varies considerably from one period and one national tradition to another, and affects the whole structure of the field. (Bourdieu 40).

North Americans have inscribed anime into their own animated paradigm which labels animated pictures as children's visual media. As aforementioned, only recently, under heavy controversy have adult cartoons such as *South Park* and *Family Guy* been approved, but the same sort of open-minded gesture has not been made to the anime community, despite the massive mainstream success of these other adult cartoons. As a consequence, the controversial type of anime which has become attached to the Otaku bears with it a social stigmatization which has yet to be overcome.

Accessible by internet ftp and file-sharing sites for over a decade, anime series such as *Evangelion* have only recently become available via internet order, but it still carries an exorbitant price tag of \$150.00 American. Clearly, it is a series that operates outside American mainstream culture when one considers the information circulating about the amorality and sometimes offensive nature of anime and its clash with American cartoon ideology. In addition, translation and cultural differences have allowed these visual texts to be over-written by the Otaku narrative, which will be explored in relation to specific anime in the third chapter, and has caused them to be invested with a particular social significance.

The moral panic which still haunts the reception of anime including explicit nudity, violence and turbulent, often extreme displays of emotion even those instances that bordering on insanity, is the result of this kind of cultural transmission. It is consumed in a roundabout way, digitally and with minute amounts of popular and government regulation. In this regard the underground anime community resembles the circulation of pornography through filesharing, and is often treated similarly. However,

'hentai' is a completely different type of anime, one that is a simple model of live action pornography and has none of the detailed characters, plots or symbols which are conventional in anime series. However, that distinction is lost amid the concern for the modeling of violent and deviant behaviours.

Otaku stereotypes and anime stock characters are offered openly within Japanese animated films and reinforced by public literature, which is the result of the pedagogical process of anime. With regards to the formative and instructive power of film, "Not only are new media technologies increasingly, in the twentieth century, given greater weight as the material grounds for change in social experience, but claims are also commonly made that new media forms bring new possibilities (or, for some, impossibility) of the emergence of emancipatory conditions of identity and of the world" (Looser 298). The critical pedagogy I discuss in this chapter relates to this discourse and its repercussions for our understanding of foreign animation.

How have North Americans been exposed to Japanese perspectives in the post World War II era? It is primarily through Japanese visual media, which happen to be overwhelmingly dominated by anime, but Westerners have also learned through the consumption of Japanese products. Japanese products that are now widely available are mostly of the computer or automotive type, but anime figurines, video games, comics, etc. comprise a large part of the market in social if not economic terms. Culturally, anime products are even more significant than the expensive mechanized and computerized products because they represent a distinct, pre-packaged set of ideas. Whereas automobiles come with features and an advertisement that depicts the car with a



certain feeling, of speed, power, comfort or safety, anime products have more than a simple label and an accompanying superficial image. They are associated with a developed character and embedded in a narrative that sometimes stretches out for hundreds of episodes. It is not surprising that the anime series that are aired mirror the mainstream North American cartoons in their palatability and focus on a pre-teenage audience. The stigmatized Otaku identity is what television broadcasters are trying to avoid. The question then becomes, genealogically, what do these series demonstrate to audiences about the self-representing Japanese subcultural group identity? An alternative history: Otaku heroism.

### Historical Antecedents

Tradition has always played an integral role in the lives of the Japanese and their notions of a cohesive nationality have supported their governing interests for hundreds of years. In fact, Japan is one of the most ethnically dense countries in the world with more than 97% of its people being of island descent, with the next highest ethnicity, the Koreans, comprising approximately 1% of the population. All questions of the accuracy of this type of census aside, this is how the Japanese are represented to themselves and to the rest of the world: A definable feudalistic society, ruled by an emperor for the better part of a millennium, symbolically relinquished its power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be replaced by an American occupation after Japan's defeat in World War II. At this point in Japan's history we can begin to see the intermingling of Western ideas with the developing technology and industry that was to make Japan a global economic force.

The formation of Japanese culture was heavily influenced by these interactions with Western powers and animated subculture in particular has been shaped by its relationship with traditional Japanese values, Western influences and the radical content of the very animated pictures that Otaku consume and project.

The following section owes much to the work of Michio Kitahara, whose translation and historical referencing have offered up clear definitions, interesting possibilities and perspectives of Japanese cultural relations dating from antiquity to the modern era. Relying on a psychoanalytic frame of reference, Kitahara interprets Japanese relations with the west as a social psychological function of ego defenses. He traces the conflicts and resolutions of these historical interactions, which while difficult to confirm have become recurrent themes in Japanese media. The self-imposed and foreign-influenced changes to the ideologies that underpin Japanese culture have a place in the genealogical roots of Otaku culture. As Foucault traced the social construction of sexuality through the power of discourse and its influence of the subject, so too will I examine the shifting position of the Japanese subject ending with the current generation and its Otaku contingent.

The Japanese have often held themselves at a distance from other cultures as they occupy an island physically separated by an expanse of water. However, millennia ago, as it is today, the exchange of information, technology and ideas with the cultures of the continent was integral to the development of the nation, as it is today. Michio Kitahara writes of the earliest external definition of the Japanese:

The first statement regarding the Japanese appears in documents about the Chien Han Dynasty (202 BC-8 AD). But the description is very brief, merely stating that the Japanese exist in the east. The Chinese wrote that the barbarians in the east, namely the Japanese, were docile and obedient by nature and that they were different from other barbarians in this regard. Much later in time, when Japan was eager to absorb the advanced culture of the Tang Dynasty (618 AD-907 AD) the official document of the dynasty described the five barbaric countries in the east, including Japan. According to these records, two different names were used in referring to the Japanese islands, and 628 characters were used in the description. This is much less than the number of characters devoted to the description of the three countries on the Korean peninsula; for them, 9901 characters were used. (Kitahara 16)

Unsettled by their inferiority to the Koreans in the eyes of China and envious of the rich language, architecture, philosophy and science of their imperial neighbour, the Japanese sent students from their own cities, though they were often mistreated, to bring back knowledge to the islands. This was a pivotal era for Japan, in which it absorbed, imitate and even improved Chinese innovations. The Chinese recorded their view of the Japanese in literature, which then shaped a discourse that influenced their future relations, and the formation of Japan's own culture. The Japanese created a culture for themselves by identifying with the Chinese, much as the Otaku have now integrated Western culture into their media by projecting their own identities, subsumed by Western appearances, products and ideologies. However, the extent to which the Otaku themselves are in control of these portrayals is questionable, just as the Japanese of antiquity were clearly unable to deny the influence of such a dominant power as the Chinese.

## Encountering the West – Cultural Discourse

### Denial of oriental roots

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan had long since ceased its isolationist policy in the face of American and European pressure to open their doors. In fact, their culture was now being constantly measured physically, economically, politically and even artistically against western civilization. The consequence of this was the imposition of several ideologies which attempted to compensate for the supposed superiority of the westerners. Kitahara observes the first of these discourses and frames it as denial:

The denial of Japan's oriental roots was expressed as a pseudo-science with several theories on the origin of the Japanese being proposed immediately after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war.

For example, in 1904, Taguchi Ukichi argued that the Japanese were actually 'Aryans,' pointing out that, unlike the Chinese, many Japanese had fine white skins. He seems to have confused race and language, and when he uses the term 'Aryans,' he seems to mean 'Caucasians', but he also seems to have meant the peoples speaking the Indo-European languages. As a result, Taguchi went to great lengths trying to show the significant differences between the Chinese language and the Japanese language. The point he wanted to make here was that the Japanese are different from the Chinese. His conclusion regarding the origin of the Japanese was that the Japanese belong to the same 'race' as the Indians, the Persians, and the Latins. (Kitahara 66)

Denial is the most simple of the psychoanalytic defense mechanisms which Freud expounded in his monumental works and it seems appropriately applied here as a theory of social psychology. An individual spurred on a public discourse which denied the Asian roots of the Japanese and relocated them as Caucasian descendents. In fact, many Asian countries have had to face the real effects of this ideology as some people have gone so far as to opt for cosmetic eye surgery in order to make themselves look more 'western.' Doug Daniels decided to conduct a study which involved him asking a Canadian classroom a specific question. He addressed each student, "I'm going to read you a list of names of different nationalities. I want you to tell me whether you think

they are “white” people or not. Don’t stop and think about it—I don’t want your scientific opinion but just what we absorb from our popular culture. Just pretend you’re on a psychologist’s couch doing word associations and answer as quickly as possible” (Daniels 51-52). In answer to the question, “who is white?” the Japanese were consistently marked with a no with an occasional yes, whereas the Chinese were a definite no. Though the pseudo-science of this racial profiling ideology has long since been discounted, we can see the social effects of it still at work in Otaku subculture. Anime has a close affinity with western appearances and the imaginary landscape will often appropriate western images. Many anime films over-write their Japanese characters as western subjects, or at least they construct them as cultural hybrids. The Otaku in particular have come to occupy this conflicting intermediary position in the field of culture and their representation will be examined in full detail with reference to *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* in Chapter 3.

### Acceptance of ‘Japanese Inferiority’

Another perspective which came to be prevalent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one that involved feelings of despondency. Rather than deny the accusations, another option was to accept westerners as ideal and to focus on emulation. This discourse that the Japanese themselves internalized is very closely related to the denial of Japan’s Asian heritage by Ukichi:

As a result of the intense anti-Japanese feelings in the West, another response was to accept the western view that all orientals were racially inferior. This is an understandable response because the Japanese consistently identified with

westerners, and to take on the attitudes of the peoples they identified with was logical and natural. For example, Count Aokuma Shigenobu, a politician and educator, stated in a book that the Japanese were inferior to the Europeans. The skin colour of the Japanese was ugly, so were Japanese facial features, posture, and behaviour. The Japanese smiled too much without reason. Like animals, they looked down instead of looking forward. They had not made any significant contributions in philosophy, religion, literature, or the arts. Racially and culturally, the Japanese were a second-rate people, said Okuma. (Kitahara 66)

Okuma's book was published in 1913, after the Russo-Japanese War in which Japan was successful, so it is curious that after a victory such an ideology would take root.

However, the derisive attitude of many westerners imposed upon the Japanese a discourse which caused a pessimistic vision of the future to form. Japanese novels during the period included war themes that would pit Japan against Russia or another western nation and conclude in their own defeat. This motif of the struggle against foreign invasion and acceptance is continued by controversial science fiction anime, which situates the characters in a struggle against physical foreign bodies and their own personal demons. Identity formation and the quest for acceptance by others and of oneself is the defining characteristics of Shinji, the protagonist of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

### Belief in 'Japanese Superiority'

Interestingly, the same historical events and attitudes seemed to have also caused the opposite effect in many Japanese subjects. These differences in ideologies, one a reaction of inferiority the other as superiority, demonstrate the effect that discourse can have on entire populations. The Otaku perceive their consumption of anime as a compliment to their cultural development, whereas the media would describe it as an

impediment. Generations before the Otaku culture manifested itself, Western civilization had increased its influence all over the globe, which was demonstrated by the presence of technology, military and the assertion of political agendas by Western powers. However, Japan had hardly begun its integration and absorption of western culture and Japan considered itself not only external, but often oppositional to western interests:

Yet another result was to reverse the feeling of inferiority and to insist on the 'superiority' of the Japanese in the form of reaction formation. After the Sino-Japanese War, as mentioned earlier, the Japanese soon began to despise the Chinese and a similar change in attitude was observed towards the Russians, although to a lesser extent. Indeed, after the Russo-Japanese War, some Japanese began to think that the Russians were not superior to the Japanese after all. Of the three responses that followed the Japanese realization that they were rejected by the West, both the first and second alternatives did not continue to exist to any significant extent. (Kitahara 68)

Sentiments of self-deprecation and superiority alike were founded on public knowledge circulated by politicians, writers and artists and then distributed by the media. This ideology shows few latent effects in Otaku culture, except in the valorization of Japan as the last bastion of human strength in *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* and other anime films with similar apocalyptic themes. The Otaku identity is not constructed around the possibility of real superiority, but more around the imaginary prospect of their being situated as saviours of their own culture, which often happens to extend itself to include many aspects of western civilization.

### Rise of Anti-Western Extremism

The militaristic right-wing radicals gained strength in Japan, as they did in Germany and Italy. International politics prevented any substantial cultural media to be communicated between the west and Japan that was not related to propaganda that demonized the opposite side. Anti-Japanese discourse continued unabated, despite the fact that

Japan decided against an active role in World War I as an ally of Great Britain, and, as it happened, was on the winning side. But anti-Japanese feelings in the West intensified further with Japan being seen as a growing power and a potential menace. As a result, the extent to which the Japanese reacted also increased considerably.

The existence of international tension and conflict in racial terms which was identified by many political activists and politicians alike became undeniable when the League of Nations was contemplated as a means of maintaining peace after World War I. This was to be discussed at the peace conference in Paris in 1919, and the position the Japanese held was that abolition of racial discrimination must be clearly included in the agreement among the future member nations before such an international body was formally constituted. (Kitahara 69)

Japan as a whole was thus in a similar position to the Otaku in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Discriminated against on the basis of stereotypes and misunderstandings in general, and simply mistreated and disrespected politically, the Japanese extremists were able to use the cultural divide to take power. Likewise, the Otaku have suffered as a group for a few cases of criminal behaviour which have been over-exposed and they have also been defined negatively, but without the ability to organize a political agenda in the way that the Japanese imperial government did concerning their rights and identities:

At Paris, the Japanese proposal was violently opposed, especially by the Commonwealth nations, led by Australia. The delegates from Canada, New Zealand, and Australia argued, in effect, that they should accept the Japanese as equals, they must also accept the Chinese and the Indians as equals as well, and



that such a consequence was absolutely unacceptable. Prime Minister Hughes of Australia refused to discuss the matter any further and left the conference. The Japanese proposal was thus rejected. (Kitahara 70)

The results of this rejection were catastrophic and came partially in the form of a Japanese offensive in the Pacific. In the current cultural climate this ideology has nowhere to take root, except in the realm of fantasy. However, Otaku subculture has invested itself in identification with occidentilism. Otaku discourse remains affected by racial difference, but it incorporates westernization rather than opposing it.

### World War II Ideology

Ultimately, the interaction between international politics and the discriminatory messages in the media and literature created a crisis in Japan. Kitahara discusses the ideology predominant in World War II in these terms:

Indeed, reaction formation, which was already apparent after the Sin-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, became increasingly explicit. For example, in 1924, Ikuta Choko published an article entitled 'The Age of the Easterners is Coming.' In this work, he takes up the earlier ideology of the East versus West. In his opinion, for a long time, the world was dominated by easterners, and that was a happy age. Westerners began to dominate the world only relatively recently, but already the surface of the earth has been contaminated by them. The easterners produced a large amount of culture and little civilization, whereas the westerners created a large amount of civilization and little culture. Therefore, the West is unhealthy. If the easterners again control the world, the earth can be saved, he says. (Kitahara 73)

*Neon Genesis: Evangelion* has some close affinity with the reaction formation Kitahara describes. Reaction formation can be understood simply as a psychological defense mechanism that keeps forbidden thoughts, impulses and feelings out of conscious awareness by instigating their opposites. The relationship dynamics between Japanese

and western culture have changed significantly over the past sixty years, but the concept of an eastern saviour and refuge lives on in the Otaku figure of shinji. In 1926 Tokutomi wrote an article entitled “Is the world going to be divided in two or three?” in which he asks this poignant question:

Shall we deal with the races in the East by presenting a new version of the dubious scientific hypothesis that the Japanese belong to the white race and by following them? Or shall we become the leading people of the world-wide equality movement by maintaining the pride of being one of the races in the East and as the core race among what the westerners call the ‘coloured races’? Which alternative shall we take? We need the most careful consideration here. (Kitahara 74).

How has Japanese identity been re-inscribed in the visual text of anime films? The Otaku discourse presents these images within the history of Japanese cultural relations and instructs its audiences on the nuances of life within a fluid identity constructed by public knowledge and animated characters.

## Edo Art

Contemporary anime has a close affinity with the Japanese art of the Edo period. Edo was so named for its nostalgic impulse to recapture the “authentic” Japan. It is an art form that attempted, and continues to attempt, to align itself with the pre-western and to oppose the onslaught of modernist images. In fact, Marc Steinberg observes that, “There was an Edo boom in the Japan of the 1980s and 1990s. In television, in manga, in literature and in critical theory, the Edo period caught hold of the popular imagination. Edo was the site of the lost-but-not-forgotten authentic Japan, the pre-Western ‘outside’

of modernity” (Steinberg 450). The success of Miyazaki’s Edo themed animation, for example *Princess Mononoke*, is a testament to the popularity of works that involve ‘Edo-viewing,’ a vision of Japan’s past.

The Otaku have consumed this type of anime along with the general population and sought out “the grand narrative (*okina monogatari*) that subtends them. The grand narrative is the ‘world view’ or ‘order’ that is consumed through the ‘small narratives’ (*isana monogatari*) which the products constitute: ‘Whether comics or toys, it is not the things in themselves that are consumed, but rather the grand narrative or order that is contained therein” (Steinberg 452). However, anime which is categorized as Edo-viewing, though it is consumed voraciously by the Otaku, has a less firm association with their identity. The projection of Edo-viewing in art has been theorized by Carol Gluck:

In ‘The invention of Edo’, Gluck identifies three main ‘positional forms’ of what she calls Edo-memory: the narration of the nation-state, in which Edo figures as ‘an impediment to or a resource for the modern nation-state’; oppositional Edo, whereby Edo-memories constitute a ‘heritage of protest’ that animates the struggle against the modern nation-state and its hegemonic power formations; and commodified Edo, ‘which possessed, in quantity and reach, perhaps the largest share of the memory business’. In this last form, Edo figures as ‘commodified nostalgia’, ‘the favored site in the terrain of popular memory, whether in commercial media, historical fiction, museum and monuments or the theming of Japan in history lands’ (Steinberg 451).

The narrative which underlies a series such as *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* has little traditional imagery and focuses almost exclusively on the westernization of Japan, its technology and education and its effects on its people: “The historical reality at the end of the twentieth century is that many parts of Asia are constituent agents, not simply exploited objects, of modernity. It is a modernity that is scored by the claws of

colonialism, left full of contradictions, of half-finished processes, of confusions, of hybridities and liminalities” (Lee 2). It is a vision of the future which imagines an eastern hemisphere at the center of a world crisis rather than re-inventing a cultural mode infused with traditional Japanese society, whether dominant or in flux.

## Manga

Manga is technologically more antiquated than anime, but it is also a more pure form of cultural transmission simply because it is less mediated. Amateur manga is idyllic in this sense as it requires only the individual and his writing tools to create and is distributed freely. The production choices are minimal and advertisement is accomplished subtly through word of mouth and by reputation. Steinberg refers to the Japan cultural theorist Otsuka Eiji for a model of consumption that entertains the possibility of a localized cultural product: “Otsuka sees this completion of the circle of production and consumption as the final stage of the consumption of narrative: ‘this points to a state of affairs where the production and consumption of the “product” are unified. All that will be left will be a multitude of consumers who produced and consume products made by their own hands” (Steinberg 452). Despite these positive aspects of manga, namely free expression and the ability to consume and produce culture in a close knit social setting, manga subculture had in it the beginnings of a moral panic:

In 1989, however, amateur manga subculture and amateur manga artists and fans were suddenly discovered, as if through infra-red binoculars, and dragged from their teeming obscurity to face television cameras and journalists, police interrogation and public horror. Amateur manga artists became powerfully

characterized as anti-social manga otaku or ‘manga nerds’ in a sudden panic about the dangers of amateur manga, which spread through the mass media. Amateur manga artists, referred to as manga otaku, were rapidly made into symbols of Japanese youth in general, and became centre stage in a domestic social debate about the possible state of Japanese society which continued through the early 1990s. (Kinsella 1)

The perception of youth and their conduct became a subject that was linked to the discourse of manga comics and subsequently the anime films that developed out of those controversial narratives. Public knowledge of the issue was restricted to the social consequences of behaviour and consumption of unregulated literature, but the element of protest was overlooked: “The principal reason for the enormous expansion of manga from a minor children’s medium to a major mass medium during the 1960s was precisely because university students began to read children’s manga instead of the classics. By spending hours with their noses buried in children’s manga books obtuse students demonstrated their hatred of the university system, of adults, and of society as a whole” (Kinsella 2-3). Unfortunately, children’s anime, while entertaining, did not hold the same countercultural status as manga, and in the 1980s and 1990s shows such as *Dragon Ball Z*, *Sailor Moon* and *Pokemon* appeared on American broadcasts with cleansed lines, images and narratives. The production of Japanese manga in mini communications, (as opposed to mass communications), correspond “...closely to the type of Anglo-American fanzine networks described by John Fiske as ‘shadow cultural economies’” (Kinsella 4). Anime was the new technology of visual media that conveyed this sense of Otaku identity and moral concern to mainstream culture at the global level.

Anime

The uncertain derivation and definition of the word anime is outlined in chapter one, but the main purpose of the word remains clear: to make Japanese animation distinct. The now common use of the post-war abbreviation for animation has historical significance as a national artistic endeavour:

Animation, together with cinema, came under the scrutiny of public educators, censors and national ideologues – at the same time that film reformers were arguing for effective uses of camera and narrative in cinema. The point of intersection for these diverse concerns was the construction of a national cinema for international dissemination. Cinema in Japan emerged as a national cinema, formed by specific discourses on ‘Japan’ and on ‘cinema’. Animation in Japan was inseparable from this ‘Japanese cinema.’ (Miyao 191)

It has been suggested that the origins of anime can be garnered from the illustrated sketch books and scrolls, but the technology is so vastly different that such theories will not be entertained here. The Pure Film Movement in Japan happened to coincide with the first animated productions and so pioneering animated films became representations of Japanese culture transmitted to foreigners.

Anime is a visual narrative that is necessarily a part of this international discourse, which often includes references to mythology, tradition and style which make it comprehensible to foreign audiences. In the present these origins, from edo, to manga, to the pure film movement make certain anime more continuous and complex, but the paradigm of western animation affects Otaku cultural transmission most acutely:

The problem is not simply that anime productions go far beyond the fact that they are not just children’s or SF programmes; it is not simply that we should define anime in much broader terms. The problem is, rather, that attempts to define anime tend to ignore the way in which an object like anime is historically and socially constructed. Any empirical definition of anime would have to include

some forms and exclude others. There could never be a completely neutral, objective definition. Indeed, the current tendency to think of anime as ‘SF animation programming for children’ stems from an attempt to define it in the realm of television and mass-media marketing. Yet, clearly television interests shape a sense of anime that is designed to ignore those products that do not seem immediately marketable. And this means that a kind of historical perspective is already denied. (Miyao 193)

Postwar Japan was a nation in recovery, ravaged by half a decade of war on multiple fronts, but following the American occupation and the revitalization of their economy the Japanese came to be figured quite differently in the international community. Rather than being racially discriminated against for their appearance and culture, western culture was impressed and intimidated by their adaptability and progress. As a result “in the 1970s, the rapid-growth economy was in part dependent on technological research and scientific applications, and Japan became seen as a techno-society in which information, machines and electronic devices permeated all aspects of social reality” (Miyao 192). The Otaku identity is intimately tied to the ideology present in manga, but technology, especially digital and communications media, have provided the means to distribute mass amounts of culture to the supposedly individualistic and anti-social present day youth.

### Anime – Science Fiction

Anime that is defined by mechanized, technological or futuristic themes falls under the heading of “science fiction.” As a genre its social commentary often relates to the advanced, industrialized society of twenty-first century Japan. Despite the fact that the Japanese have produced many cultural narratives which involve visions of the future, “Science fiction like its more recent progeny Cyberpunk, has rarely been thought of as

anything other than an American and European genre. It has been with the advent of Japanese manga and anime that there has been an awareness of non-“Western futuristic fantasy” (Lee 1). These fantasies, embedded as they are with real and imagined technology are often reflective of the concerns of rapidly developing societies. To theorize Otaku consumption of anime with regards to their own interaction and interest in technology, by definition, is to establish their investment in anime and its subsidiary position to that of mainstream anime. The content and interest of science fiction countercultural anime is to elaborate on the personal, social and environmental consequences of Japanese culture in a technologically advanced world. Naturally, the lack of recognition and the supposedly limited economic viability of mature-themed anime in foreign markets have suppressed both the distribution of the media itself and possible interpretive frameworks. This effect in the anime genre parallels Bourdieu’s understanding of the literary field of culture:

The science of the literary field is a form of *analysis situs* which establishes that each position – e.g. the one which corresponds to a genre such as a the novel or, within this, to a sub-category such as the ‘society novel’ [*roman mondain*] or the ‘popular’ novel – is subjectively defined by the system of distinct properties by which it can be situated relative to other positions; that every position, even the dominant one, depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constituting the field; and that the structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field. (Bourdieu 30)

Anime, such as *Evangelion*, are restricted by the imposition of genre categories in North America and plagued by critics in Japan. However, its value is inherently related to its critique, which is at odds with the acquisition of specific profits related to reputation



and prestige in mass culture. The Otaku identity manifests itself through these virtual societies in the form of manga or anime that challenges authority and conventional media entertainment.

For example, Hong Kong, the most modern and westernized of China's cities having been inherited and recently ceded by the British, has become the model for Chinese capitalist development. However, with the Chinese population approaching 1.5 billion, representing a third of the world's people, Richard Rogers has predicted that the "Chinese regnant authority [must commit] to planning for sustainable cities, [as] it will soon be faced with massive congestion, pollution and social dissatisfaction on an even larger scale than is endemic to the cities it is using as role models" (Lee 1). Science fiction anime has made visual media the arena for the envisioning of such social consequences, but the projection of identity is even more important than the larger themes and social narratives, such as the implications for unimpeded progress. In these films the Otaku identity is more fully expressed, but is still located within the traditional Japanese discourse which valorizes the past greatness of the East and condemns the lifestyle of the Otaku:

The questions addressed by Rogers are practical and materially real. The French writer and critic Serge Latouche is also concerned with the non-material condition of the non-West. However, in his discussion of what non-Western societies have lost, 'the loss of sense that afflicts them and gnaws at them like a cancer', there seems to be a nostalgia for an imagined past 'authentic'. For Latouche the non-Western world is under-developed, exploited, marginalized, left-behind. It is not, however, that Latouche does not take account of Japanese, South-East Asian and increasingly Chinese modernization, but that there is an erasure of the modern realities of Japan, Hong Kong, parts of South-east Asia and of China in modernization is seen entirely negatively, in terms of cultural loss, a nostalgia for some authentic local, without any place given to renewal, redeployment and the

ingenuity of human creativity that can be forged of hybridity. Even there one might argue, there is loss, loss of 'cultural identity'. But in such arguments there is always the whiff of the Orientalizing tendency to valorize the East in terms of its past greatness" (Lee 1-2).

Paradoxically, then, Japanese culture cannot produce objects of modernity; neither can it reach into the past for a definite identity, unless it is one that is constructed relative to the over-arching influence of the west. The solution lies not in attempting to equalize a playing field dominated by foreign culture over the past century, but to recognize the inherent beauty in the Otaku culture which 'dealienates' itself culturally, but is condemned on moral grounds. Gregory Lee demonstrates this process through the comparison of English and eastern culture:

But if there is a 'loss of sense' in the modern world, an alienation, its transcendence, its overcoming, the process of dealienation will not simplistically achieved by a return to 'nativist' traditions of 'the East' any more than it will be by a 'return' to Morris dancing in England. Like, Said, we would advocate not a pseudo-universality, nor a slight-of-hand multiculturalism (that is not the hybridity we intend), but rather the encouragement of new and composite identities based on new material realities that give rise to new imaginaries" (Lee 2).

It is always through a western lens that we must view the development of the Otaku subculture. What makes anime so interesting is that over the last several decades it has become consumed and desired, but with so much hesitancy that the identity invested in its narratives of turmoil and conflict have been perceived as undermining Japanese identity rather than reconstituting it. The Science Fiction anime film utilizes the threat of the alien other and identification with the other in order to create the composite self:

Japanese popular culture, on the other hand, in particular Japanese comics, abounds with characters representing or constituting selves, 'alien identities'. As Susan Napier recently wrote:

In other post-war media such as film or manga, the alien sometimes seems omnipresent, a staple of popular culture throughout the post-war period. One can trace a fascination with the alien back as early as 1953 to the scaly prehistoric monster in the movie *Godzilla*, which became first a domestic and then an international hit. In recent years perhaps the most striking rendition of the alien has been the aforementioned series of grotesque metamorphoses undergone by Tetsuo in the 1989 comic and animated film *Akira*.

Thus, to discuss the alien in Japanese fantasy is to bring up issues of identity, desire and, also, ultimately of power. The alien is the Other in its most fundamental form, the outsider who simultaneously can be the insider, and it is this polysemic potential that is enthralling and disturbing to the reader. The alien threatens the collectivity more than any other presence. (Lee 8)

In the re-imagining of Otaku identity in anime, there is a completely different view of their place in society. Fantasy anime constructs Otaku as the saviours of the collective interests of society, often in a sacrificial way, rather than as individualistic dissenters. This narrative of a society in flux is not well received by those governing the content and distribution of film productions. The purposeful instability and modeling of countercultural scenes, mostly behaviours and images, is simultaneously the allure and the stigma of the Otaku generation:

The alien popularly presented in the fantastic in post-war, as well as more recent, 'postmodern', Japanese comics and animated films is used not simply to shock readers, but to awaken them to the smug comfort of the mainstream capitalist spectacle. The fantastic in this variety of comics and animated films can be construed as constituting a subversion of modernity and so, these genres of Japanese comics and animated films with a limited number of exceptions such as *Akira*, are generally defined as deviant and occluded by dominating mediators (Lee 8).

The history of anime has been profoundly influenced by the historical discourses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the cinema, but perhaps the most interesting effects on its development have come from the knowledge available through the internet. Thousands of anime websites and Otaku websites have sprung up over the last decade and they have

introduced a myriad of perspectives. The technology has re-routed all sorts of media to desktop access rather than convoluted chains of production and distribution, which is beneficial for the foreign consumer. The discourse has opened itself and made the Otaku subject more available and malleable, but it has prevented the imposition of a single over-exposed amoral identity:

Cyberspace is gaining ground, cyberpunk cultures and the so far unlimited fields of interests in cyberspace, ensure the possibility of different means and directions of identification and cultural development for those who have the necessary knowledge, desire, and economic means to detour cyberspace. The terms ‘cyberpunk’, ‘cyberspace’ and ‘cybernetics’ come from the Greek word ‘kybernetes’ or pilot, ‘cyber’ cultures hint at Greek traditions of autonomy and agency foregrounded so eloquently by Castoriadis in his re-reading of pre-modern Greek democracy. No formulaic domination can be permanently in control of cultural preferences of the generations in which we may find the new pilots navigating to achieve towards their desired cultural identities, and constructing their ideal cultural imaginaries (Lee 9).

The most notable example of the extension of the Otaku subculture is through the internet. Individuals who have garnered their information from various first and secondhand sources pool their knowledge to educate the public. Their unity is demonstrated wholeheartedly by the headline in the source code of the (unofficial) Otaku Alliance webpage,

<title>The Otaku Alliance :: Otaku of the World, Unite!</title>

United by their interest in untampered anime the Otaku site is run by a group of staffers who are anime and manga ‘experts.’ They post regularly about television, translation, censorship, production and quality issues to inform a dedicated fanbase. Their ideology is boldly stated beneath their shaded Otaku banner: “We are a group of fans dedicated to

fighting companies that have treated anime titles unfairly. Right now we are a host to the DBZOA as well as DBZ Uncensored. Please have a look around and enjoy your stay” (<http://www.dbzoa.net/>). (See Appendix 1)

## Censorship

The ideologies traced in the previous sections dramatically affected the development of anime films and subsequently the formation of Otaku identity. Essentially, the Otaku cannot exist outside the predominant discourse of national cinema or divest themselves of the normative effects of that discourse. Foucault’s description of force relations describes an impetus for control and political power imposed discursively on a subject such as anime:

In short, it is a question of orienting ourselves to a conception of power which replaces the privilege of law with the viewpoint of the objective, the privilege of prohibition with the viewpoint of the objective, the privilege of sovereignty with the analysis of a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced. The strategical model, rather than the model based on law. And this, not out of a speculative choice or theoretical preference, but because in fact it is one of the essential traits of Western societies that the force relationships which for a long time had found expression in war, in every form of warfare, gradually became invested in the order of political power. (Foucault 102).

Otaku culture does not ‘fit’ the mold which has been pre-determined by national ideology and by demand. Therefore their type of ‘controversial’ anime’s reception domestically has been less than favourable as it necessarily inherits the preconceptions based on previous Japanese film exports. The films of the mainstream, child-oriented blockbuster anime, of the type that are televised in the United States, are not subject to the same level

of discrimination. However, some anime series are cleansed of any deviant lines, plots or imagery while also encouraging the social stigmatization of the dedicated fans and serious consumers of anime, the Otaku. This conclusion, that the Otaku represent a social threat, is known in sociological terms as a moral panic:

During the moral panic, the behaviour of some of the members of society is thought to be so problematic to others, the evil they do, or are thought to do, is felt to be so wounding to the substance and fabric of the body social, that serious steps must be taken to control the behavior, punish the perpetrators, and repair the damage. The threat this evil presumably poses is felt to represent a crisis for that society: something must be done about it, and that something must be done now; if steps are not taken immediately, or soon, we will suffer even graver consequences. The sentiment generated or stirred up by this threat can be referred to as a kind of fever; it can be characterized by heightened emotion, fear, dread, hostility, and a strong feeling of righteousness. In a moral panic, a group or category engages, or is said to engage, in unacceptable, immoral behavior, presumably causes or is responsible for serious harmful consequences, and is therefore seen as a threat to the well-being, basic values, and interests of the society presumably threatened by them. (Goode 31)

The repercussions of this perspective in Japan is that anime and manga fans are simultaneously members of mainstream pop culture, but are also shunned, devalued or even harassed by police once they reach a certain age and are identifiable. For example, amateur manga artists have produced and consumed comics for decades and yet in the early 1990s their visibility forced them to conform to some extent to the strictures of the governing powers of Japan:

The practical results of the new and hostile attention directed at amateur manga were the partial attempts of Tokyo metropolitan police to censor sexual images in unpublished amateur manga and prevent their wider distribution at conventions and in specialist book shops. In 1993 guidance about the appropriate contents of dojinshi were distributed at Comic Market for the first time. The Comic Market preparation committee determined to attempt the enforcement of public bylaws prohibiting the sale of sexually explicit published materials to minors of 18 years and under, despite the fact that a large proportion of amateur manga is produced

and sold by minors. In the Comic Market participant application brochure of August 1994, organizers warned amateur artists that, “Comic Market is not an alternative society, it is a vehicle orchestrated by you which thinks about its useful role in society. It has become necessary for us to seek social acceptance.” (Kinsella 12)

The public opinion of anime was further inflamed by an incident involving a manga artist. Over a year long period Miyazaki Tsutomu murdered four small girls before being arrested and imprisoned. The resulting media coverage revealed that he had large collections of girls’ manga, lolicon manga, anime and hentai. It was also reported that he was a manga fan (Otaku) and that he had written animation reviews and attended the Comic Market in Tokyo. As a consequence of this, soon

After the Miyazaki murder case, the concept of an otaku changed its meaning at 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. Youth were referred to as otaku youth (otaku seishonen), otaku-tribes (otaku-zoku), and the otaku-generation (otaku-sedai). The sense that this unsociable otaku generation were multiplying and threatening to take over the whole society was strong. (Kinsella 13).

Miyazaki’s alienation and lack of social relationships were emphasized as the probable cause of this tragic series of events and a moral panic ensued. The media even went so far as to implicate the loss of his grandmother and a lack of proper role models as contributing to the murders. Essentially, it was claimed that there was a psychological link between his consumption of media and the criminal act. The explicit anime substituted for familial or scholastic social models as the teaching agent. His case “implied that the decline of Japanese-style social relations represented by older generations of Japanese fulfilling traditional social roles had contributed to Miyazaki’s

dysfunctional behaviour. Emphasis on Miyazaki's apparently careless upbringing suggested, at the same time, that freer contemporary relationships were no substitute for fixed traditional relationships" (Kinsella 12). Unfortunately, this incidence became symbolic for the entire Otaku generation, though the correlation between manga/anime was speculative and millions of similar products were consumed without criminal consequences.

In North America, where Otaku are neither well-known, prevalent or easily identifiable except through online fan participation, censorship has been implemented to render anime series appropriate for children and the abstract, explicit anime which is so prized by 'hardcore' North American anime fans is not broadcast:

The commercial emphasis in the US has fallen predominantly on programmes for children, particularly those programmes identifiable as science fiction (SF). Yet, because the content of these programmes is markedly violent, Japanese broadcasts must often be re-edited to make them suitable for North American children. Plots insist on some form of poetic justice in which those who do wrong are punished and those who do good are rewarded. New, recognizably ethnic, characters are introduced as a gesture towards ethnic diversity. Violent scenes are eliminated, and, because series must be cut into thirty-minute episodes in agreement with the patterns of American programming, the epic sweep of many anime series is dramatically curtailed. A prime example is Matsumoto Reiji's SF epic *Uchu-senkan Yamato* (*Space Cruiser Yamato*, 1974). Shown on TV in the US as *Starblazers* in 1979, episodes were re-worked and reduced to a repetitive formula whereby the *Starblazers*, guardians of peace in the galaxy, confront another powerful villain every week. (Miyao 192)

The tendency to cleanse something of its 'foreignness' is what prevents these anime series from conveying an accurate sense of Japanese culture. The removal or addition of images and characters in order to provide a product that is more familiar is misleading. This common procedure, of editing visually and audially during translation into English



is what groups like the Otaku alliance guard against, and online censorship sites oppose. Essentially, it is “in the name of Americanization or so that they will meet broadcasting and censorship standards, which differ from the country of their original broadcast” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship\\_of\\_Anime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship_of_Anime)) that these changes are made.

There are many ways in which anime shows can be altered. A frequent alteration that is imposed is the removal of native or cultural references that alter the setting and background images to make the series more familiar. There is also an arbitrary tendency to cleanse anime of religious and cultural references that may be deemed offensive, but this is seen as a heinous crime by anime fandom as the cuts are made unilaterally, without attention to context. Censors simply observe a controversial scene, image or line and remove it based on its real life parallelism or its modeling of deviance. Lesser offenses include the addition or deletion of a musical score, blunting of sharp objects and the removal of still and long panning shots. The subtleties of the censoring vary from film to film and series to series, but dubbing that alters anime converted from manga originals in particular tend to be dramatically altered and are avoided by connoisseurs of the genre:

Editing of anime is controversial with fan circles. Some fans avoid watching a dub because they consider it too edited.

## Notable Examples

- *Cardcaptor Sakura* (*Cardcaptors*)
- *Digimon*
- *Dragon Ball* and sequels *Dragon Ball Z* and *Dragon Ball GT*
- *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (renamed *Warriors of the Wind* in the US and *Windaria* in other countries, now known as its original title after Disney re-took the rights to the film from its old US distributor, New World Features)

- *Magical Doremi* (*Ojamajo Doremi* in Japan)
- *One Piece*
- *Pokémon* (*Pocket Monsters* in Japan)
- *Sailor Moon*
- *Shaman King*
- *Tokyo Mew Mew* (*Mew Mew Power*)
- *Yu-Gi-Oh!* the second series anime (*Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters* in Japan) and its sequel, *Yu-Gi-Oh! GX* (*Yu-Gi-Oh! Duel Monsters GX* in Japan) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship\\_of\\_Anime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship_of_Anime))

It is interesting to note that even these mainstream anime series are not conveyed properly to the public, though they are suitable for being televised in their entirety in Japan. This difference is seen as a moral conflict, but as is evidenced by the aforementioned benefits to the otaku, it can be seen as an opportunity for a stable identity in which they can express and communicate themselves despite the popular belief that they are anti-social. The social position that they occupy is a result of the overall process of interacting ideologies that define anime and otaku identity. As Bourdieu proposes,

The *space of literary or artistic position-takings*, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field – literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc. – is inseparable from the space of literary or artistic positions defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces. The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement in their struggles to defend or improve their positions (i.e. their position-takings), strategies which depend for their force and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations [*rappports de force*]. (Bourdieu 30)

The predominant discourse of the Japanese cinema, as well as the censorship policies and standards in the United States, are so influential that hardly an episode is broadcast

without some tampering. Even more important, the decisions about violent and sexually deviant series such as *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* are never publicized because even the mainstreamed popular shows have become iconic through their struggle with American broadcasting and their dubbing interventions. Even the Japanese equivalent of Disney, auteur Miyazaki and his Studio Ghibli, once had to deal with censorship issues:

Perhaps the most controversial event in anime censorship is with popular, award-winning director Hayao Miyazaki's 1984 movie, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. In 1987, the company New World Features bought the rights to the film, renamed it *Warriors of the Wind*, and later heavily edited the movie's content and renamed the characters to appeal more to a young American audience. Later, Miyazaki filed lawsuit against the company, therefore removing the rights of his film from New World in 1995. Walt Disney Pictures bought the rights to the film and re-dubbed it, releasing the uncut version on DVD with a re-dubbed, more accurate English track on February 2005.  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship\\_of\\_Anime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship_of_Anime))

Miyazaki is hardly representative of the Otaku community as his blockbuster films have been hailed as animation masterpieces (his film *Spirited Away* won the 2002 Oscar for best animated film). As Margaret Talbot recently wrote in *The New Yorker*, “With few exceptions, we seldom know the names of directors of children’s films, but if you have seen a Miyazaki film you know his name” (Talbot 64). Americans have wholeheartedly embraced this type of anime and have accepted the identity of the innocent child that is paired with the iconic director. The striking beauty and animation similarities aside, the content of the films as well as the supposed adverse effects of deviant anime on its dedicated fans remain the media force that portrays the Otaku as the dark side of Japanese culture.

## Chapter 3

### Iconic Anime

The previous chapters have examined the public knowledge which informs our understanding of Japanese anime in general and its association with cultural identity had been examined. For the purpose of this concluding section the details of one particular exemplar, *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* will be examined as iconic means of Otaku cultural expression. The series is set in the year 2015, as the last of the human race seek refuge in the remnants of the technological advanced society of Japan. The souls and the future of the human race hang in the balance as the secret agency NERV recruits young adolescents as the pilots of their only defense against the alien invaders, the bio-mechanical behemoths the EVA units. It immediately captured the hearts of the Otaku as it portrayed rebellious youth in a struggle against authority, with responsibility and their own identity. It harbours some ingrained ideologies relating to the psychology of Japanese youth and their struggle with identity that have some interesting implications for its Japanese and North American audiences. *Evangelion* is the model Otaku animated series, consumed voraciously by the public in an aftermath of controversy. The narrative is a self-reflexive commentary on the Otaku lifestyle that demonstrates the intrinsic value in properly interpreting an animated project of special cultural significance.

The youth culture of Japan in the late 1970s increasingly invested itself in the production and consumption of manga and anime that reflected the growing gap between themselves and the post World War II generation. However, that countercultural agency began to stagnate with the arrival of new animation techniques and an ever-increasing

international market: “Of course, not all anime rose to the level of non-juvenile entertainment or art. In fact in the late 1980s, with young adult anime showing signs of staleness, the focus began to revert to children’s films” (Kenji 2). The apparent ‘staleness’ of the genre was somewhat superficial, however, as the focus seemed destined to shift with the differing censorship standards in the United States. The visibility of anime in the 1990s was accomplished primarily through the broadcasting of such American mainstream anime successes as *Sailor Moon*, *Pokemon* and *Yugi-oh!*

The rhetoric which insists on categorizing animation as a medium for children’s entertainment is not restricted to non-Japanese cultural commentary. Japanese critics have suggested that despite its ability to produce cheap, often impressively beautiful and stylish images, “...anime’s very format has an inherent weakness. Because its characters are relatively small and simplified pictures painted on cels (thin pieces of plastic), they lack the fleshy presence of actors, nor can they rival the subtlety of good actors’ performances. Compared with live-action films, their reality is literally two-dimensional, which is why animated films were for so long regarded as fit only for children’s (or family) entertainment” (Kinji 2). Hence, in order to succeed, *Evangelion* had to undergo intense criticism as an object of Otaku culture entering the mainstream where it was subject to the scrutiny of the media, censors and to the predominant mainstream animation discourses.

## Reception of NEON GENESIS: EVANGELION

The centrality of the animated picture is largely due to its ability to project fantasy without the encumbrance of Hollywood expenses, but “the simplest explanation for this reversal of fortune between animation and live-action is that the former has ridden to success on the coattails of its older cousin, Japanese comics, or manga, a medium that emerged as a main focus of Japanese popular culture after World War II, and has grown particularly pervasive since the 1970s” (Kinji 2). In domestic Japan, the connection between the countercultural drive of amateur manga and animation was weakened, and on the international market it was never really apparent in any meaningful way.

However, in the midst of this process, “In the languishing field of young adult anime, the avant garde sci-fi work *Shin Seiki Evangelion* (Neon Genesis Evangelion) scored a major box office hit and won a huge cult following. Moreover, children’s anime are as popular as ever. In all, it appears that anime has taken center stage in the Japanese film industry, pushing live-action movies into the wings” (Kenji 2). *Evangelion’s* initial reception was hardly enthusiastic, but when it was aired at a time slot suitable for adults the 26 episode series met with renewed interest.

The implications of its success are myriad for the series straddles a genre that is intensely critical of itself and is viewed as essentially Japanese by the fans, media and public discourse. *Evangelion* is an example of a film caught between cultural discourses; symbolic meaning and marketable media. These two forces are not only considered to be oppositional in general, but they affect the reception and understanding of an anime series in terms of how it fits into the cultural field. Pierre Bourdieu describes the field of cultural production as follows:

It is thus the site of a double hierarchy: the *heteronomous* principle of *hierarchization*, which would reign unchallenged if, losing all autonomy, the literary and artistic field were to disappear as such (so that writers and artists became subject to the ordinary laws prevailing in the field of power, and more generally in the economic field), is *success*, as measured by indices such as book sales, number of theatrical performances, etc. or honours appointments, etc. The *autonomous* principle of hierarchization, which would reign unchallenged if the field of production were to achieve total autonomy with respect to the laws of the market, is degree specific consecration (literary or artistic prestige), i.e. the degree of recognition accorded by those who recognize no other criterion of legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognize. In other words, the specificity of the literary and artistic field is defined by the fact that the more autonomous it is, i.e. the more completely it fulfils its own logic as a field, the more it tends to suspend or reverse the dominant principle of hierarchization; but also that, whatever its degree of independence, it continues to be affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those of economic and political profit. (Bourdieu 38-39)

The crisis here, for both the Otaku and the adult-oriented, controversial anime series is that they operate in the autonomous pole of the cultural field and have received critical acclaim from academics, youth culture and smaller media sources, but are formally denounced through censoring and social stigmata. *Evangelion* is problematic for this model as it has been both critically acclaimed, and rejected. It has shifted from autonomy to heteronomy and its purpose as a marketable product has been questioned.

### Public Response

The *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* series was first aired in Japan in October of 1995 and concluded with its 26<sup>th</sup> episode in March of 1996. Its popularity steadily grew as word spread about its mysterious alien conflict and acute psychological moments. In 1996 the director Hideaki Anno as well as the production company Gainax received an influx of fan mail expressing a mixed reaction to the series finale. “Death and Rebirth”

the concluding episode, which was sold separately as a movie was supposed to tie up the loose ends left by Anno, exterminating the aliens and providing some insight into Shinji's fate. Instead, the movie's apocalyptic battle pitting man and machine against alien invader resulted in the destruction of all but the Shinji and Asuka, the last two EVA pilots. Some of these fan responses included simple disappointment about its lack of resolution and others went so far as to make death threats. As a result of these outcries,

Gainax launched the project to create a movie with a "proper" ending for the series in 1997. Due to scheduling difficulties, they released *Death and Rebirth*, consisting of a character-based recap of the entire series ("Death") and half of the "proper" ending to *Evangelion* ("Rebirth"). The project was completed later in the year, and contained the complete section of "Rebirth", i.e. *End of Evangelion*. The film made around \$12 million at the Japanese box office. (Blockbusters in Japan usually make \$40-60 million, and a movie is considered to have done well if it makes more than \$10 million). (<http://www.answers.com/topic/neon-genesis-evangelion>)

Reactions to this second conclusion were equally varied and *End of Evangelion* was again considered controversial by many fans as well as the media. A popular theory is that the movie was an act of revenge on the part of Anno, who may have been frustrated by what he considered to be the pinnacle of the Otaku experience of anime in that he had invested himself completely in the creation of a disillusioned relatable otaku hero that was never meant to be conclusive or stable. His new ending, steeped in Christian mythology integrated with a futuristic Tokyo re-emphasized the eclectic aspect of his work as the sun set on *Evangelion*, its world destroyed and the series decidedly finished. This point of view is supported, or said to be supported, by the biographical details of Anno's own life. Hideaki Anno had a long history of depression prior to his creation of *Evangelion* and much of the show is said to be based on his own experience of depression



and his own subjectivity is projected on to Otaku characters. The complicated relationships between Shinji, his father and his re-created mother are also reflective of the psycho-analytic therapy which he underwent for treatment of his depression. In fact, as a consequence many of the characters of *Evangelion* exhibit signs of mood disorders and are generally unstable.

A second theory, which adds to the mystery of the series, suggests that the movie was planned by Hideaki Anno as a response to the censorship restraints, though much more lenient in Japan than North America, which prevented him from expressing the story of Otaku children in a dying world to its fullest extent. Furthermore, the low budget of the original series would also have restricted how detailed, animated and explosive a final episode could be produced. Anno may have anticipated his ability to finish the series with more spectacular visual technology once the series was sufficiently popular and financially secure. Some specific details in the series foreshadowed the release of the movie for the benefit of anime fans:

The theory of a pre-planned ending in addition to episodes 25 and 26 is backed up by some evidence, including a still in the intro depicting unit 01 with wings and still-frame shots of the death of Misato and Ritsuko which appeared in the TV ending. The death of these two characters correspond to events in *End of Evangelion* and would tend to disprove the theory that the tragic and violent end of various characters in *End of Evangelion* is due to Anno's frustration towards some fans. In addition, the plot of *End of Evangelion* does seem to match that of the TV series, providing closure to things such as the Instrumentality Project, the true purpose of NERV, and the private agenda of Gendo Ikari.  
(<http://www.answers.com/topic/neon-genesis-evangelion>)

Whether or not the series was ‘pre-planned’ or written on the fly, the series shows a marked shift in tone in the sixteenth episode entitled “Splitting of the Breast.” At this

midpoint in the series the characters almost universally take on a much more aggressive posture, which reflects Otaku agency, but is also said to be a product of Anno's creative mood and the rapid shifts are symptomatic of mood disorder. The frustration of the director, it is suggested, is embedded in the film and had largely to do with his immersion and understanding of Otaku subculture. The reclusive Anno rarely is available for commentary on his work, but his "right-hand man," Kazuya Tsurumaki, was quoted in the attached interview responding to the following question:

**-- Now even businessmen are debating the mysteries of "Eva" in bars.**

**(laugh)**

KT - (laugh) For example, Hideaki Anno says that, "Anime fans are too introverted, and need to get out more." Further, he should be happy that non-anime fans are watching his work, right? But when all is said and done, Hideaki Anno's comments on "Evangelion" + "Evangelion" are that it is a message aimed at anime fans including himself, and of course, me too. In other words, it's useless for non-anime fans to watch it. If a person who can already live and communicate normally watches it, they won't learn anything.

(<http://www.evaotaku.com/html/Tsurumaki.html>)

The wording of Tsurumaki's answer suggests that Anno meant the series as a formative project. The project was one that had specific references to Hideaki Anno's own life experience and to that of any Japanese anime fan who identified with otaku subculture. Identification was the central trope around which Anno designed his series. His reconstruction of the otaku character coupled the tragic, as mainstream would have otaku represented, as loss, and the heroic, as the subculture would represent themselves. Despite this effort the shift in tone midway through the series is said to have "corresponded with a shift in Anno's worldview that would lead him to abandon the 'otaku lifestyle' and temporarily leave anime for more serious live-action film"

(<http://www.answers.com/topic/neon-genesis-evangelion>). However, this theory simply relies on coincidental professional details for support, and it is equally likely that the Anno's decision to produce live-action was born out of the same frustration that the otaku feel toward media and public response to their creativity and lifestyle.

*Neon Genesis: Evangelion* was produced at a pivotal time in the development of Japanese media in which it demonstrated that the low budget animation of a prized iconic Otaku film could be successful. However, its marketability was at once its success and its failure. The movie proved that there was a public interest in a complicated, disturbing psychological narrative of futuristic Japan that could rival the traditional and indigenously Japanese themed anime films of Miyazaki and popular mainstream series. Its critics label the *Evangelion* series as a marketing ploy and its psychological and religious overtones as superficial. This point of view is in fact supported by the sponsorship of two of the primary backers, Sega and Bandai. Their investment in the company was completely centered on commercial interests that pertained primarily to the immense consumer Japanese animation and video game market of the United States. Anno was accused of exploiting the symbolism of Christianity to give the series an edge over similar "giant robot" or "mecha" anime such as *Gundam Wing*. The profound effect of *Evangelion* on the design and production of anime is evidenced by the quick succession of animated sc-fi Eva type series:

*Evangelion* had, and continues to have, a strong influence on anime in general. The psychological nature of the show influenced later works such as *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997) and *Serial Experiments Lain* (1997), both which, like Eva, center around an ambiguous world-changing event to come. More

superficially, it started a wave of using Christian symbolism in other anime and related fields. The creators of the video game Xenogears (1998) have stated that the game was very much influenced by *Evangelion*. In the Digimon Tamers series, a lot of Evangelion elements were used in the backstories for the three main children, their friends, and D-Reaper. The same can be said for both WarGrowlmon and Gallantmon Crimson Mode, as they were modeled after EVA-01. (<http://www.answers.com/topic/neon-genesis-evangelion>)

The mixed reviews and responses to the series finale, coupled with the rumors of corporate interest, detracted from the public image that Hideaki Anno projected, despite reports of many creative conflicts between himself and the sponsors. Anno is not widely regarded as an auteur such as Hayao Miyazaki, but he retains a cult following that praise his work as an anime benchmark.

## Latent Ideologies

In the preceding chapter several ideologies proposed by Michio Kitachara were outlined as possible underlying forces in the political and cultural climate of World War II. The history that he represents is evidenced by some of the consequences of tensions in Eastern and Western relations. The first, “Denial of Oriental Roots” is clearly represented in the narrative of both *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* and *Berserk*. In *Evangelion* the setting is Japan as it is envisioned in the year 2015, with no real evidence of traditional Japanese architecture, clothing or conduct. In fact, the series completely reimagined Japan as an ultra-modern society on the brink of collapse due to the incessant invasion of a much superior foe. The fear which these alien invaders invoke is enough to warrant a retaliatory M2 bomb, whose atomic explosion as it hits an attacking Angel

wracks the countryside, echoing World War II events. *Evangelion* carries inherent technological and social relevance that does not exist in series such as *Berserk* that are based in a world of pure fantasy and exist as an alternative form of cultural escapism as its Caucasian characters of varying shapes and sizes attempt to prevent their world from being corrupted by demonic gods. Instead, *Evangelion*'s characters are readily transferable to a current Japanese social setting, excepting their Caucasian appearances.

What Kitachara describes as “Japanese inferiority” is somewhat ambiguously represented in *Evangelion*, but it is often either viewed as a stoic determination to fight in the face of overwhelming odds. The re-imagining of a generation of youth culture displaced and under the absolute control of the authorities protecting Tokyo 3 is symbolic of the Otaku aversion to society's impositions. Not only are all the adolescents expected to respect all the restrictions in place because of the war, their contribution, especially those select few such as Shinji and Asuka who pilot the giant cybernetic Eva that are the only defense against the AT (Absolute terror) fields of the aliens, is forced upon them.

Ultimately, “Japanese superiority” comes in the unexpected form of the same children who are constructed as inferior. This is always the double-bind as the technology and western images they consume simultaneously label them as progressive, but divergent from authentic Japanese culture. The Otaku have reached a certain celebratory status, but it is one based on infamy rather than heroism. However, it is in within the context of the anime medium that Hideaki Anno was able to envision Otaku culture as the double-edged sword. The future of the world is at stake and the Otaku, both literally as the procreators of the next generation and as the saviours of mankind that

can defend the last bastion of humanity from the Angels, must ensure the survival of Japan in its projected futuristic form. The “Rise of Anti-Western Extremism” which Kitachara suggests was a reaction to anti-Eastern sentiments in the West is erased in Anno’s vision. He accomplishes this by establishing hybridized identities including the often emphasized fact that Asuka, the principle female character, is half-Japanese. This seemingly small detail has little influence on the outcome of the series but has had a , effect on the interpretation of the cultural significance of *Evangelion*. She is constructed as a positive hybrid, as evidenced by her emergence as a popular culture icon in the United States. The Weezer song “El Scorcho” describes her as follows:

Goddamn you half-Japanese girls  
 Do it to me every time  
 Oh, the redhead said you shred the cello  
 And I'm jello, baby  
 But you won't talk, won't look, won't think of me  
 I'm the epitome of public enemy  
 Why you wanna go and do me like that?  
 Come down on the street and dance with me

I'm a lot like you so please, hello, I'm here, I'm waiting  
 I think I'd be good for you and you'd be good for me  
 (Weezer *Pinkerton* Track 7)

The cultural transmission of Asuka as a desirable hybrid character is clearly expressed by the punk version of a courtly love poem. The Weezer track describes Asuka’s Japanese heritage as alluring and her proficiency with cello as alluring. Here we have an example of a popular American song with a little known allusion to Otaku culture ending in a fantasy union of Japanese and American cultural icons. The political undertones of extremism have no resurgence in the *Evangelion* narrative as North American anime fans

have embraced the series as an implicit gesture towards individual connections and ethnic hybridization.

Anno's ability to construct a narrative overlaid with social and cultural significance must be noted here, as he imagines a struggle of humanity against itself on multiple levels. The wider significance of the catastrophic conflicts with encroaching aliens provides a commentary on post World War II society, while the deeply involved introspective plot featuring Shinji provides an identificatory model and extends symbolically the otaku discourse as one that pertains to youth culture at large.

**-- But, don't all the people watching "Evangelion" now actually have this type of anime-fan complex? Doesn't everyone share some feelings of uneasiness at not being able to get along with the world.**

KT Yes, maybe that's so. Hideaki Anno's statements certainly are true when looking at the small circle of anime fans, but stepping back and looking at the much wider circle of Japanese people in general, we may find many of the same types of problems. They're not problems specific to just anime fans.  
(<http://www.evaotaku.com/html/Tsurumaki.html>)

Anno has repeatedly emphasized the exclusivity of Evangelion and suggests that only Otaku, those with a firm understanding of anime plots, characters, themes and culture can grasp the meaning of his work. However, primary identification is not the only goal of the films. Anime should connect not be restricted to youth culture, for the same reason that it should not be altered. The "anime-fan complex" is viewable in Evangelion and is on display for any audience, culture or age group. Hideaki Anno's story is meant to be infused with the complicated interactions of Eastern and Western culture, which is edifying for anime audiences. *Evangelion* is a commentary on the Otaku lifestyle,

catering to the Otaku who understand it best, but it is centered in an entertaining, if somewhat disturbing, vision of a post-apocalyptic Japan.

## Western Aesthetics

In the continuing debate about the content and value of anime films, the ethnicity of Japanese animated characters has become a major concern. The trend of “ethnic bleaching” is commonplace in Manga and is reflected in Japanese society, although the Otaku in *Evangelion* are somewhat more ambiguous. The series “features a Japanese girl, Rei, and Asuka, a girl who is one-quarter German and three-quarters Japanese. Apart from Asuka’s Caucasian attributes of light brown hair and blue eyes, there are no significant differences in the facial features or physical development of the two girls” (Kenji 4). We can conclude from Rei’s blue hair and the universally similar construction of characters in *Evangelion* that the future implies a union of ethnicities rather than a suppression of it.

As a North-American consumer one cannot interpret these images without considering the inherent critique in re-imagining the world as ethnically bleached. The wide eyes and bright colored hair and western dress are all desired symbols in Japan. The stylized animation of *Evangelion* visually flattens the differences between the cultures, but retains the specific undertones of Otaku culture. Many critics label this western image consumption as detrimental or escapist. This projective fantasy is what



makes the interpretation of anime such a daunting task because the borders of cultural meanings become so entangled, but

it is important to remember that the ‘bargaining, interaction and exchange’ of the communication process itself functions as part of the entertainment, bonding us as viewers, via the message, to the reality of our culture, and thus lifting the burden of an isolating individualism from our shoulders. This is not the kind of gratification, however, that is easy to articulate for social scientists’ questionnaires. It’s easier to say that ‘TV takes you out of yourself. (Fiske *Reading Television* 80).

The prospect of rampant individualism is a major factor in the stigmatization of Otaku, but ironically, the consumption of animation is the means by which they explore reality, can make personal allegorical references and reinforce their subcultural value system. Contrary to this specific treatment of western aestheticism by Japanese anime fans, in mainstream culture it has been suggested by many, including a well-known fashion illustrator Nagasaka Setsu, that Japanese actors are inherently inferior aesthetically, and it is possible that the animated film is a means for Japanese actors to overcome their inhibiting Asian looks.

At the ideological level the overwhelming prevalence and valorization of “pseudo-Caucasian” characters would seem a detrimental message to an audience that is 99.9% composed of ethnic Asians. However, *Evangelion* is created as a open text, fully aware of its own impetus and operating within a continuum of anime pictures steeped in western aestheticism and Otaku myth. On the subject of visual media’s communicative tendencies Fiske points out:

Television is certainly aware of the arbitrariness of its many of its own codes, and while not criticizing them, certainly celebrates them. What we, the audience then

do with the message is another matter. We are certainly not suggesting that we are constantly and consciously defamiliarizing the message in order to criticize or isolate the ideological framework within which we live. What we do suggest is that taking television as we find it, we, the audience, are spontaneously and continually confronted with this framework and must negotiate a stance towards it in order to decode and thus enjoy the entertainment in which it is embodied. (Fiske *Reading Television* 19).

*Evangelion* is an anime film that has reached beyond its original context. The complicated interactions of cultural ideologies signify conformity to North Americans, escapism to the Japanese and evolution to the Otaku. Often these media-audience relations are ignored when consuming anime, but even more unsettling are the media reviews which, as mentioned, have deterred distribution of the genre and understanding of the Otaku fascination with Japanese animation. In a media environment complicated by differences in culture, language, technology and ideology the message of anime is often a complicated matter, which McLuhan describes as a process of global cultural transmission in *The Global Village*:

The book of nature contains innumerable borderlines and interfaces. The resonant interval may be considered an invisible borderline between visual and acoustic space. We all know that a frontier, or borderline, is a space between two worlds, making a kind of double plot or parallelism, which evokes a sense of the crowd, or universality. Whenever two cultures, or two events, or two ideas are set in proximity to one another, an interplay takes place, a sort of magical change. The more unlike the interface, the greater the tension of the interchange. (McLuhan *The Global Village* 4).

Descriptions of Asian culture are often constructed as the conventional opposite East-West dichotomy. In *Evangelion* these cultural forces confront each other in a space whose tension is derived from those invisible and nostalgic definitions of Japanese and American culture respectively. To identify with a westernized character such as Shinji is

at once an admission of divergence from traditional values and an inhabitation of the desire to be in an ethnic landscape different than modern Japan. This desire is significant because it represents an affinity with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century ideologies of Japanese inferiority that were outlined in Chapter Two. The Otaku have learned to fantasize about a certain body type in the same manner as North Americans have re-created their celebrities, cartoons and toys as Barbie and Ken dolls. Anime films and manga, *Evangelion* included, demonstrate the same idealized and almost universally unattainable ideals as American television, comics and magazines.

The prospect of the *Evangelion* myth and its potential to unify a significant portion of Japanese youth under a banner of deviance, despite the film's popularity, was a major reason for its dedicated cult following. The epic conflict of the Otaku children, who are essentially enslaved and abused by the reigning authority, communicates a unilateral sense of indignation and frustration. The technology of the internet as a medium for the distribution of *Evangelion*, and the monitor as a digital means of reception, has caused the film to have an impression on audiences in an ever-widening circle across the globe. McLuhan sensed this phenomenon in his ruminations on Blake and the developing processes of communication in the twentieth century:

Today, deep in the electric age, organic myth is itself a simple and automatic response capable of mathematical formulation and expression, without any of the imaginative perception of Blake about it. Had he encountered the electric age, Blake would not have met its challenge with a mere repetition of electric form. For myth is the instant vision of a complex process, and the instant speed of electricity confers the mythic dimension on ordinary industrial and social action today. We live mythically but continue to think fragmentarily on single planes. (McLuhan *Understanding Media* 25)

*Evangelion* should not simply be taken as representative of Japanese culture, nor of otaku culture, except that it captures many of the perceptions that have already been explained in my first chapter. The Otaku identity is not meant to be reproduced or imitated, but exists as a narrated projection of mainstream subcultural construction. Anno's masterwork is in fact a meta-commentary, an animated comment on a prevalent social myth.

## Psychological Conflict and Otaku Identification

### Primary identification with Shinji

In western society Genesis signifies the first of the five books of Moses and biblical imagery is certainly apparent, especially in the later episodes of the *Evangelion* narrative, but its simple meaning "to come into being" is also a central trope of the series. The plot, heavily influenced as it is by Christian myth, derives much of its meaning from hybridizing a Japan in the near future with a Western religious and ethnic paradigm. The second impact has occurred<sup>5</sup>, and an alien race is encroaching upon Japan as the last vestiges of humanity hang on for dear life. Shinji Ikari, the protagonist, is profoundly affected by the social circumstances into which he is thrust and exhibits signs of oedipal tension with his abusive and overbearing father, Gendo Ikari. Shinji is re-introduced to his father in the first episode, after a three year absence. His father runs a secret organization called NERV which possesses the only technology capable of defeating the

---

<sup>5</sup> The First impact was a meteor that landed in Antarctica containing the first Angel that ravaged the earth. *Evangelion* is set in 2015 and begins with the second impact, another, and supposedly the final, alien (Angel) invasion.

AT (absolute terror) fields of the alien invaders (the angels). When Shinji's eyes take in the awesome sight of the EVA, a cybernetic Godzilla size robot made from advanced robotics technology and the tissue of his cloned mother, he poses the question, "Is this my father's work?" to which his father, just arriving, responds, "Correct. It has been a long time" (*Neon Genesis: Evangelion* Ep1). The interplay between Shinji and his father provides disconcerting parallels to the social pressure that Otaku feel to succeed in a highly competitive modern society that prides itself on efficiency and advancement. Shinji internalizes the devaluation his father feels for him and it works itself out through displays of defeat, frustration and anger. The following discourse with his father exemplifies his psychological dilemma:

Shinji Ikari: "Is this my father's work?"

Gendo Ikari: "Correct. It has been a long time."

Shinji: "Why did... you send for me?"

Gendo: "You know why I sent for you."

Shinji: "So you're asking me to take this thing out there and fight?"

Gendo: "Correct."

Shinji (incredulous): "How could you do this to me? I thought you didn't want me? Why did you have to call me now father?"

Gendo: "Because I have use for you."

Shinji: "But why, why me?"

Gendo: "Because there is no one else who can."

Shinji: "No I can't. I've never even seen anything like this before. There's no way I can do this."

Gendo: "You will be instructed."

Shinji (yelling): "But still... there's no way I can pilot that thing!"

Gendo: "If you're going to do it, do it now. If not then leave."

Shinji does not wish to conform to the demands of society embodied by his estranged father and he will become even more horrified by the machinations of NERV when he discovers his father's laboratory filled with extra clones of his mother, who happens to be

one of the other Otaku pilots, Rei. Episode Four is entitled “Hedgehog’s Dilemma” because of Shinji’s propensity to feel threatened whenever he gets close to another person. Answers.com describes Shinji in terms of a psychoanalytic process, much as Ikara mapped out the psychology of modern Japanese identity:

Although the series starts as a regular mecha anime, the focus tends to shift from action to flashbacks and analyses of the primary characters, particularly the main character Shinji Ikari. The director, Hideaki Anno, suffered from a long depression prior to creating *Evangelion*; much of the show is based on his own experiences in dealing with depression and in psychoanalytic theory he learned from his psychotherapy. As a result, characters in the anime display a variety of mood disorders and problems with emotional health, especially depression, trauma, and separation anxiety disorder.  
(<http://www.answers.com/topic/neon-genesis-evangelion>)

This psychoanalytic perspective helps drive the plot for the world-shattering events are often subsumed by psychological drama. In fact, the most common opinion on *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* is that it “describes an individual’s existentialist search for identity, calling to mind Jean-Paul Sartre’s famous desperate axiom: “Hell is other people” (Kinji 2). In the opening lines encouragement is offered to the Otaku figure in the form of a Japanese theme song accompanied by rapid images from the series. Shinji’s narrative exposes the loneliness, disorder and anti-socialism that stereotyped Otaku, but it does not label them as unproductive sites. Instead, though Shinji’s introversion and personal demons are apparent, his struggle is created by circumstances of epic proportions in which his personality flaws and self-deprecation become impediments to his necessary functioning as an EVA pilot. In *Evangelion* the mind of the adolescent Otaku becomes the center stage for the events that unfold and like the Otaku youth that consume it, it is that control and application of that potential that become the obsession of the society

Tokyo 3. The film puts the social and psychological state of the Otaku into a science-fiction setting infused with western aestheticism, but as Susan Napier ardently defends, anime plots and style, not to mention subject matter, I would argue, are distinct from other animation:

Not only is anime non-American but, as film scholar Susan Pointon emphasizes, it is uncompromisingly non-American. Anime is, of course, full of references to indigenous Japanese culture but, even more significantly, its narrative structures, style, pacing and overall emotional tone differ notably from that of American animation and from American cinema in general. Whereas American cinema participates in what I call a “dynamics of reassurance” in which happy endings are virtually guaranteed and no “good” character can die, Japanese animation is remarkable for its often downbeat emotional tone, emphasizing painful complexity over easy closure, grief over gladness, and world destroying events over world affirming ones. Far more intricate and challenging than most American animation, and often more so than most Hollywood blockbusters, anime offers visions of the modern world that range from zany romantic comedies in which the boy often does not get the girl, to surprisingly bleak apocalyptic films and television series that juxtapose heroism and self-sacrifice within a generalized sense of cultural despair. (Napier 14)

*Evangelion* sits neatly within the paradigm which Susan Napier outlines, as a world teeters on the brink of destruction. The animated Otaku hero Shinji is the pivotal figure of the film as he simultaneously represents the promise of a new generation, while struggling with the fear of failure. He embodies the anxiety of an Otaku who, fearing social situations, prefers to relinquish his civil duty as a capable EVA pilot. He is tortured by the steady gaze of his father, the older generation, whose condescension, absence and abuse have left Shinji with lasting feelings of abandonment. The final scene of the concluding episode continues this theme of the personal existential struggle against the world and oneself. Shinji, having fallen in love with Asuka over the course of the series, engages with her in a climactic final battle against the angels. After defeating the

angels in an intensely painful epic conflict, Shinji attacks Asuka, though she is the only other human left on earth. The scene is stark with images of the destruction and renewal present in Christian myth from Adam and Eve to Noah's Ark, but with the potential for the end of the human race hanging in view as the scene come to a close. Whether the trauma Shinji has undergone has broken him or not, the audience is not meant to know. Ultimately, the implication is that he is alone, with Asuka or without. Bereft of pragmatic and rational ideologies the scene makes a final impact that echoes the introversion and displacement of the Otaku.



## Conclusion

Otaku identify with the objects which they consume on many levels, especially when they involve a rejection of mainstream model behaviour. Anime is an open-ended



text and *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* is a perfect example of its inconclusivity. Anime discourse has discouraged the representation of Otaku identity in public perception, censorship and cultural difference. The recognition of these processes is not a resolution, but a realization that they exist and an acknowledgement of the cultural value they represent to the anime fans that form a definite youth culture in Japan and a dedicated group of otaku 'allies' in North America. The final addendum to this examination of anime cultural transmission is the simple fact that current technology has allowed media to circulate nearly instantaneously around the globe, performing a pedagogical function in distant nations and cultures. Anime is a form of entertainment that has become popular enough that is part of mainstream television in North America. Its darker side, the adult-oriented, sci-fi and explicit anime series have been associated with socially introverted and imitative Otaku. The misconceptions of the media have stagnated the flow of countercultural Japanese animation, but the restriction and stigmatization of controversial anime is misinformed. A single viewpoint is no longer sufficient to define and unpack the meaning of animated art, especially those televisual media such as *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* which incorporate countercultural, pop cultural and foreign cultural components into its fabric. The stigmatization of the Otaku and censoring impede the communicative process of the subculture. Reporters, critics and consumers beware: superficial and general observations about anime culture are grossly misleading, but they are inherently valuable because of their depth, controversiality, countercultural and other ideologies.

## Appendix 1



## Otaku Alliance

- [Home](#)
- [Chat](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [DVD Reviews](#)
- [Fan Submissions](#)
- [Forums](#)
- [Links](#)
- [News](#)
- [Opinions](#)
- [Store](#)
- [Webring](#)

## DBZOA

- [Alliance](#)
- [Banners](#)
- [DBZ Uncensored](#)
- [Episode Summaries](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Opinions](#)
- [Project Shinonome](#)
- [Truth](#)

## Hosted Sites

- [DBZ Uncensored](#)

## Welcome to the Otaku Alliance

We are a group of fans dedicated to fighting companies that have treated anime titles unfairly. Right now we are a host to the DBZOA as well as DBZ Uncensored. Please have a look around and enjoy your stay.

**Opinions: Song sung blue...**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Thursday, August 18, 2005 - 04:13 AM  
[Update](#)

*Everybody knows one...*

Sorry, that's been in my head all day.

Tonight we have two new [Opinions](#) up. One is about the DBZ redub, which I unfortunately have not gotten around to writing anything about (and at this point probably won't). It's by our former staffer presently known as Seashore. Check out why he thinks this redub is nothing to celebrate--whether you agree or disagree, it's a good read. The other lists principles a dubbing company ought to follow, according to the author's opinion, and particularly where FUNi went wrong. Also, we have the script for the [Bardock Special](#) up in Project Shinonome.

## Other Stories

- [Song sung blue...](#) (Aug 18, 2005)
- [More GT Clips](#) (Jul 30, 2005)
- [Scripts, Tips, and Clips](#) (Jul 24, 2005)
- [I'm Still Here...For Now](#) (Jul 10, 2005)
- [DBZ Redub to Air on CN](#) (Jun 14, 2005)
- [Winx/Dbzoa](#) (May 22, 2005)
- [Finally...](#) (May 02, 2005)
- [Just checking in...](#) (Apr 24, 2005)
- [GT script archive complete](#) (Apr 13, 2005)
- [Webring News](#) (Apr 08, 2005)

## Categories Menu

- [DBGT Uncensored](#)

Yugioh Uncensored



**Truth: More GT Clips**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Saturday, July 30, 2005 - 05:37 AM

Update

More video and audio clips from the FUNimation and Blue Water dubs of DBGT are up in Truth. Thanks again, SSJ Conan!



**Truth: Scripts, Tips, and Clips**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Sunday, July 24, 2005 - 05:25 AM

Update

Okay, I thought it was good title.

A few things tonight. First off, the Project:Shinonome scripts for Buu Saga episodes 212-220 have been re-formatted; they look MUCH better now and are easier to follow. Thanks, crusader, for your help with these. Next, we have a new Editorial by SSJ Conan, reviewing the DBZ games for the PlayStation2--very informative. And last but not least, we've added both audio and video clips from the Blue Water DBGT dub to the Truth section. Thanks SSJ Conan for those also.



**Project Shinonome: I'm Still Here...For Now**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Sunday, July 10, 2005 - 04:21 AM

Update

I'm really sorry about the lack of updates. It's been hard for me to devote much time to the site lately. I realize that it will only get worse for me once I start graduate school this September, which is why I've made the decision to retire from the OA staff sometime in August. But more about that later. I still want to do what I can for Project Shinonome, and tonight I've added REFORMATTED scripts for episodes 202-208. You may have

(Mar 22, 2005)

• DBZ Uncensored

(Nov 14, 2004)

• DBZOA (Dec 06, 2004)

• DVD Reviews (Oct 16, 2004)

• Fan Submissions (Jan 13, 2005)

• Links (Jun 25, 2004)

• News (May 22, 2005)

• Opinions (Aug 18, 2005)

• Otaku Alliance (Apr 08, 2005)

• Project Shinonome (Jul 10, 2005)

• Truth (Jul 30, 2005)

noticed that, although we always HAD those scripts, they were quite messy and hard to follow. Thanks a million to crusaderoflight88 for redoing these.

Sorry again about the inactivity lately; hang with us, it WILL get better.



### **DBZ Redub to Air on CN**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Tuesday, June 14, 2005 - 05:31 AM  
DragonBall News

Well, despite my recent lack of updates, I have not fallen off the face of the Earth. I have some significant DBZ news: tonight Cartoon Network will begin airing FUNimation's redub of the early episodes of DBZ. The following is from FUNi's website:

"Starting on Tuesday, June 14, Dragon Ball Z joins the Cartoon Network schedule in the 10:30 p.m. ET (9:30 p.m. CT) timeslot. It will run in this spot Monday through Thursday and will feature the Ultimate Uncut Special Editions. That's right. You will get the chance to see Dragon Ball Z the way it was meant to be seen, from the beginning."

Well, we shall see. I'll definitely be watching, and I'll probably write up something about my impressions. Also, I should note that I'm not entirely sure whether they mean 10:30 in all timezones except Central, or if they mean 8:30 Mountain and 7:30 Pacific. My guess is the former but check your local listings to make sure.





### **News: Winx/Dbzoa**

Posted by: GreatSaiyaman777 on Sunday, May 22, 2005 - 06:35 PM

PostNuke

Hey, I'm back. First, I know what I said earlier but the site's not ready yet. It should be up in June. With school out and a long stretch of summer and me anxious to start it up, believe, you don't have much longer to wait. Secondly, for those wondering why the Dbzoa was down... the domain name wasn't renewed in time so the site was temporarily off. Leia renewed it, then a few days later it came back. Third- so why am I here posting early?

[Read more...](#) (5274 bytes more) 1 Comment  

### **Opinions: Finally...**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Monday, May 02, 2005 - 01:01 AM  
[Update](#)

I promised, didn't I? And it's still Sunday night, at least here, so I haven't broken it. I added [Episode 199](#) to Project:Shinonome, and I also did an Episode Summary for the same episode, thus completing the Anoyoichi Budoukai minisaga. In addition, we have a new [Opinion](#) up, about the pros and cons of the first DBZ redub DVD.

P:S Countdown -- 22



### **Just checking in...**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Sunday, April 24, 2005 - 04:51 AM  
[Update](#)

I am seriously sorry for the lack of updates lately. I just haven't been getting done what needs to be done. I promise, however, that I will have something--at least something, probably more--next weekend. I don't think anymore that I'm going to finish the GT Uncensored comparisons but I do have 2 more to complete, and without a doubt I still intend to finish Project S.

Thanks for your patience.

P.S. Star Wars is coming in less than a month!! Have you got your tickets yet?



**Project Shinonome: GT script archive complete**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Wednesday, April 13, 2005 - 05:12 AM  
Update

The script for GT episode 13 has been added to the Project S archive, making our collection of GT scripts complete! Beautiful. Also, sorry for my lack of updates lately, I promise I will get back on track.



**Otaku Alliance: Webring News**

Posted by: SSJLeia on Friday, April 08, 2005 - 02:35 AM  
Update

Hey, I just want to thank the people who have submitted their sites to the Webring already, we're off to a good start! I also apologize for not getting back to any of you yet. We're also off to a SLOW start; I've been out of town the last few days and the approval process is new for all of us. Your sites will be reviewed within the next couple of days, and you'll receive an email if we add them to the ring.



## Appendix 2

A Story of Communication:

The Kazuya Tsurumaki Interview

Translated by Bochan\_bird / Presented by EvaOtaku.com

PROFILE • Kazuya Tsurumaki

Director. Born February 2, 1966 in Niigata Prefecture, Japan.

His representative work as an animator is "Fushigi no Umi no Nadia (Nadia - The Secret of Blue Water)". He debuted as producer on "Nadia Cinema Edition", and as director on "Gunbuster! Shinkagaku Kouza". He served as Director Anno's right-hand man as Deputy Director of the TV series "Evangelion", where he took a particularly active part in the SF settings. Mr. Tsurumaki also participated as the production and art director and setting assistant for various episodes.

**-- So, "Neon Genesis Evangelion" is finally complete.**

Why did you decide to conclude the series in the form of a movie?

KT - Yes, it's finally over. I honestly think it would have been best simply to end it with the TV series. Frankly speaking, I feel that everything after that was a bit of unnecessary work, although I guess normally one should feel happy about having their work made into a movie.

**-- Do you feel that the time you were able to put into the project showed up in the degree of completion of the finished work?**

KT I wonder.... I mean we certainly had enough time, but the psychological uplift I felt during the TV series just wouldn't come back to me. I'm sorry to sound so retrogressive, but it's just that the feeling of tension during the TV series was probably the best of my life.

**-- What do you mean by "feeling of tension"?**

KT - It felt really good toward the end -- after finishing the work for episode 16, and especially from episode 20 onward. Of course, physically I was dead tired, but my mind was still sharp as a knife. I felt that I was utilizing my natural abilities to their maximum potential.

**-- Episode 16 made quite an impression, and seemed to mark a turning point for Evangelion.**

KT - That's because it was the first episode where the direction of drawing from the inside like that appeared.

[Note: Episode 16 "Shi ni itaru yamai, soshite (A Fatal Disease, and then...). Part A consisted of action scenes concerning the 12th Angel, while Part B depicted Shinji's mental and emotional struggles inside his inner universe after being trapped inside the Angel. Mr. Tsurumaki handled the story boards, production and setting assistance for this episode.]

**-- Did you plan the episode to portray Shinji's inner feelings from the start?**

KT - No. That episode was situated close to episodes 10, 11 and 12, and was originally just another episode in which an Angel appeared. However, amidst the flow of the mysteries surrounding the Angels gradually being resolved, we decided to insert an episode where an Angel appeared to take an interest in humans.

**-- I see.**

KT - The first draft of the scenario was actually a dialog between Shinji and the Angel. However, we felt it would be too anti-climactic to have an Angel start talking like some pulp fiction alien (speaks while tapping his Adam's apple with his hand) "Your analog mode of thought is incorrect." So we came up with the idea actually used in this episode, which was to have Shinji converse with himself.

**-- There was a line in that dialogue -- something like, "We can't weave our lives only out of things we like...." That line was pretty intense. I would have thought it would strike right to the heart of anime fans, but there was almost no reaction from anyone. (laugh)**

KT - Well, most people don't pay close attention to the dialog when watching a TV anime. That is to say, we hear the words, but they don't enter our minds. I'm that way too. Hideaki Anno understands this, and started to incorporate expressions that convey the message to the viewers in a more direct manner. Thus, elements which attempted to somehow convey the message within the bounds of the story gradually became fewer, and expressions which were more introspective or emotionally expressive became more frequent.

**-- Up to that point, you had tried to express the theme through the medium of what was happening to Shinji, but then the message became more direct.**

KT - Right about the same time as we were doing episode 16, Hideaki Anno was working on episode 14, which has that poem-like monologue by Rei Ayanami. It was probably about then that we began to see the direction of "Eva" -- that we were moving toward that kind of introspective story. That's why we made Part A of episode 16 like a normal story. By this meaning, the boundary between Parts A and B of episode 16 could be considered the dividing line between the front and back of "Evangelion". [Note: Episode 14 "Zeele, tamashii no za (SEELE, Throne of Souls). At the start of Part B, Rei's inner feelings are depicted by a poem-like monologue.]



**-- What did you think about developments during the second half of the TV series?**

KT - I didn't mind it. The schedule was an utter disaster and the number of cels plummeted, so there were some places where unfortunately the quality suffered. However, the tension of the staff as we all became more desperate and frenzied certainly showed up in the film.

**-- I see.**

KT - About the time that the production system was completely falling apart, there were some opinions to the effect that, "If we can't do satisfactory work, then what's the point of continuing?" However, I didn't feel that way. My opinion was, "Why don't we show them the entire process including our breakdown." You know -- make it a work that shows everything including our inability to create a satisfactory product. I figured that, "In 10 years or so, if we look back on something that we made while we were drunk out of our minds, we wouldn't feel bad even if the quality wasn't so good."

**-- Really?**

KT - So, no matter what the final form, I feel it was great just being able to make it to the end of the TV series.

**-- The conclusion ultimately took the form of a movie with two separate spring and summer releases.**

KT - I was aghast when I found out it wouldn't be concluded only with the spring release, and that our work would be extended until summer. After seeing the reaction of the fans to the spring release, I was pretty depressed. That's when I started having those feelings of doubt again that, "I knew it - just a lot of unnecessary work." It was really a shock.

**-- You served as director for this movie "THE END OF EVANGELION".**

KT - Director in title only -- the work was no different from producing the TV episodes. That's why I'm credited as producer of the episode 25' portion.

**-- Did you work at all on the final episode?**

KT - As director, no. But I did help out with the cinematic coloring at the last moment.

**-- How did it feel being able to do episode 25'?**

KT - I didn't make any special effort just because it was going to be on the big screen, but tried to approach it with the same feeling as when making the TV series. I didn't want to become overzealous or anything.

**-- So, you were able to work in a relaxed manner?**

KT - I was probably more enthusiastic about episodes 1 and 2. Still, it was a tremendous task.

**-- Were there any scenes that you really liked or gave special attention to?**

KT - When Eva-02 takes the Lance through its left eye. It's actually quite difficult to express sensations such as pain like that, but when I watched the rush film I thought we did a pretty good job. It's not often that you get to feel that.

**-- Changing the subject, the work "Evangelion" is said to essentially reflect Director Anno's mental images/landscape. Being involved in a project like this, were there any areas where you disagreed with Director Anno's way of thinking or doing things?**

KT I think that anyone who works as a director should have those aspects. After all, works containing these portions are the most interesting. In that sense, works that are billed as so-called "entertainment" aren't very entertaining to me.

**-- So, you were in agreement all the way?**

KT - Of course. However, that doesn't mean that I can synchronize with Shinji's feelings. It also doesn't mean that I can sympathize with Shinji's = Anno's feelings.

**-- I see. Then, it's true that Shinji's feelings are Director Anno's feelings?**

KT - To tell the truth I'm not sure, but at the very least I tried to work on the project from that viewpoint. That's why in the scenario planning sessions I was always saying something like, "Isn't that a little too hero-like for Shinji to say? Hideaki Anno isn't that much of a hero."

**-- In episode 25' Shinji becomes completely despondent.**

**Does this mean that Director Anno had also experienced that?**

KT - I think Hideaki Anno's tension after the TV series had ended had probably fallen to about that level.

**-- Looking at the flow of Shinji's emotions, I feel some dissonance when watching movie episode 25' immediately after seeing episode 24.**

KT - That may be true in terms of emotional flow. This is because from the viewpoint of the people making the movie, work on episode 25' started almost a year after episode 24. TV episode 25 is much more emotionally linked to episode 24.

**-- Was this cinema edition made to match Director Anno's state of mind?**

KT I believe so. There was a time when Hideaki Anno clearly wanted to attempt a more cathartic development.

It didn't end up that way, but I don't think we lied.

**-- When you say "lie", do you mean to suddenly conclude with something like "love saved the world"?**

KT - Exactly. And we didn't do that with this movie. I feel no dissatisfaction at the ending. I really like it.

**-- At the end of this movie, Shinji seems to have reached a sort of settlement regarding troubles of the heart.**

KT - Well, my personal view is, "Do we really need to complement these troubles of the heart?" Regardless of whether or not we are complemented, have troubles, or find our answers, interpersonal relations exist, and the world goes on. I thought the last scene meant to say that life goes on, but I could be wrong.

**-- In the end, Evangelion was a story about communication -- at least judging from that last scene.**

KT - That was the intent from the start of the TV series. That was what I tried to produce from episode 2 onward.

**-- Yes, that was the scene where Misato and Shinji talk while measuring distances from each other in Misato's apartment, right? Although they appeared to be getting along fine with each other, Shinji was thinking, "She seems okay, but....", while Misato was thinking "I wonder if he sees through me?"**

KT - there were other scenes in episode 2 as well. For instance, when Misato talks to Shinji but doesn't enter his room. Even in episode 3, they are having a casual morning conversation, but are not looking at each other. Like they looking through a slightly opened door, but not connecting. This is the same between Shinji and Rei, and between Shinji and his father. It's no wonder there was a lot of distant, awkward communication.

**-- I see. So, the theme remained the same throughout the series?**

KT - That's right.

**-- What are your thoughts looking back on Evangelion now?**

KT - Well, I really liked the atmosphere while we were doing the TV series. A TV series is the only way you can get responses while still in the production phase. We'd take feedback like, "They didn't like today's episode," or "Wow! Today's episode was a big success!" and reflect it to the episodes we were currently producing. In this sense, it was like a live performance. Hideaki Anno probably felt terrible after reading that absurd e-mail criticism or having the series praised to death in an insulting manner in sub-culture magazines. But that's because "Evangelion" is a story about communication including misunderstandings such as these.

**-- Now even businessmen are debating the mysteries of "Eva" in bars. (laugh)**

KT - (laugh) For example, Hideaki Anno says that, "Anime fans are too introverted, and need to get out more." Further, he should be happy that non-anime fans are watching his work, right? But when all is said and done, Hideaki Anno's comments on "Evangelion" + "Evangelion" are that it is a message aimed at anime fans including himself, and of course, me too. In other words, it's useless for non-anime fans to watch it. If a person who can already live and communicate normally watches it, they won't learn anything.

**-- But, don't all the people watching "Evangelion" now actually have this type of anime-fan complex? Doesn't everyone share some feelings of uneasiness at not being able to get along with the world.**

KT Yes, maybe that's so. Hideaki Anno's statements certainly are true when looking at the small circle of anime fans, but stepping back and looking at the much wider circle of Japanese people in general, we may find many of the same types of problems. They're not problems specific to just anime fans.

**-- Finally, do you have some message for the fans?**

KT Don't drag the past around. Find the next thing that interests you.

**-- Does that mean not becoming fixated on "Evangelion"?**

KT - Yes. It's always better to let something that has finished end.

## Bibliography

### Primary Text

Anno, Hideaki. *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. ADV films, 1995.

### Secondary Texts

"Anime: Definition." *Wordiq.com*. <http://wordiq.com/definition/anime>

Adams, Alan Kenneth and Lester Hill. "Castration Anxiety in Japanese Group-Fantasies." *Journal of Psychohistory* 26, (Spring 1999): <http://www.geocities.com/kidhistory/japanca.htm>

*Against Anime Censorship*. September 29, 2004.  
<http://petitiononline.com/censorsp/petition.html>

Allison, Anne. "Cyborg Violence: Bursting Borders and Bodies with Queer Machines." *Cultural Anthropology* 16 (May 2001): 237-265.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*. Ed. Brian Wallis. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

- Brown, Delmer M. *Nationalism in Japan: An Introductory Historical Analysis*. Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955.
- Buck, Pearl S. *The People of Japan*. New York: Simon and Scuster, 1966.
- Buruma, Ian. *A Japanese Mirror: Heroes and Villains of Japanese Culture*. East Kilbride: Thomson Litho, 1984.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Daniels, Doug. "The White Race Is Shrinking: Perceptions of Race in Canada and Some Speculations on the Political Economy of Race Classification." *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Dreyfus L., Hubert and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. London: British Film Institute, 1979.
- "Editing of Anime in International Distribution."  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship\\_of\\_Anime](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Censorship_of_Anime))
- Fiske, J. "The Codes of Television." *Media Studies: A Reader*. P. Morris and S. Thornham. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.
- Fiske, J., John Hartley. *Reading Television*. London: Methuen & Co., 1978.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- Fuery, Patrick and Kelli Fuery. *Visual Cultures and Critical Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. New York: Bantam Books, 1965.
- Gluck, C. "The invention of Edo." *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*. Stephen Vlastos (ed). Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 1998: 262-284.
- Goldstein, Bernice Z. and Kyoko Tamura. *Japan and America: A Comparative Study in Language and Culture*. Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1975.

- Goode, Erich and Nachman Ben-Yehuda. *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.
- Grassmuck, Volker. "I'm alone, but not lonely" Japanese Otaku-Kids Colonize the Realm of Information and Media: A Tale of Sex and Crime from a Faraway Place. December 1990. <http://waste.informatik.hu-berlin.de/Grassmuck/Texts/otaku.e.html>
- Jameson, Fredric. *Signatures of the Visible*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Oxford Press, 2001.
- Kellner, Douglas. *Critical Perspectives on Visual Imagery in Media and Cyberculture*. <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html>
- Kenji, Sato. "More Animated than Life." *KJ #46: Media in Asia*. <http://www.kampo.co.jp/kyoto-journal/media/animated.html>
- Kinsella, Sharon. "Amateur Manga subculture and the Otaku Panic." *Journal of Japanese Studies* (Summer 1998), 1-15.
- Kitahar, Michio. *Children of the Sun*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Lam, Sunny S.K. and Gregory B. Lee. *Wicked Cities: Cyberculture and the Reimagining of Identity in the "Non-Western" Metropolis*. [http://www-scd.univ-lyon3.fr/externe/lee/lee\\_lam.htm](http://www-scd.univ-lyon3.fr/externe/lee/lee_lam.htm)
- Lamarre, Thomas. "Introduction: between cinema and anime." *Japan Forum*. 14(2): 183-189. BAJIS, 2002.
- Looser, Thomas. "From Edogawa to Miyazaki: cinematic and anime-ic architectures of early and late twentieth-century Japan." *Japan Forum*. 14(2): 297-327. BAJIS, 2002.
- MacKinnon, Catherine. *Only Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- McLuhan, Marshall. "The Medium is the Message." *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw Hill Companies, 1970.
- . *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.
- . *Understanding Media*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964.

- McLuhan, M. and Bruce Powers. *The Global Village*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *An Introduction to Visual Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Miyao, Daisuke. "Before anime: animation and the Pure Film Movement in pre-war Japan." *Japan Forum*. 14(2):191-209. BAJIS, 2002.
- Myths, Misinterpretations, & Misconceptions: Censorship in Comics*.  
<http://library.thinkquest.org/3177/gather/censor.html>
- Napier, Susan J. "Peek-a-boo Pikachu: Exporting an Asian Subculture." *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* Fall 2001.  
[http://web.mit.edu/lipoff/www/hapr/fall01\\_health/pikachu.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/lipoff/www/hapr/fall01_health/pikachu.pdf)
- "Neon Genesis Evangelion." *Answers.com*. <http://www.answers.com/topic/neon-genesis-evangelion>
- Pollack, David. *Reading Against Culture: Ideology and Narrative in the Japanese Novel*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Steinberg, Marc. "Otaku consumption, superflat art and the return to Edo." *Japan Forum*, 16(3): 449-471: BAJIS, 2004.
- "A Story of Communication: The Kazuya Tsurumaki Interview." *The End of Evangelion*. Trans. Bochan\_Bird. (<http://www.evaotaku.com/html/Tsurumaki.html>)
- Sturken, Marita and Lisa Cartwright. *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Talbot, Margaret. "The Auteur of Anime." *The New Yorker* 17 Jan. 2005: 64-75.
- Tobin, Joseph J., ed. *Re-made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- [Urbandictionary.com/Japanimation](http://www.urbandictionary.com/Japanimation).  
<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Japanimation&r=d>
- Weezer. "El Scorcho." *Pinkerton*. Geffen Records, 1996.
- Wicke, Jennifer. "Celebrity Material: Materialist Feminism and the Culture of Celebrity" *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 93:4 (Fall 1994): Duke University Press, 1994.



