ORGANIZING ATTENTION: CARING FOR JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE IN
THE NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Organizing Attention is both a critical inquiry into the configurations of the Japanese

popular culture of anime and manga in relation to Japan's social economy, and a

theoretical consideration of how cultural industries and hyperindustrial technologies of

consumer capitalism mutate attention formation. The existing literature in the

bourgeoning field of anime and manga studies has largely adhered to the approaches of

media studies and cultural studies, with both strands developing formal analyses on a

premise that media is a carrier of content tethered to the imaginary topos of Japanese

culture. Drawing on theories offered by Bernard Stiegler, I propose a paradigm shift by

highlighting attention-capture capacities of media as artifacts in making, remaking or

unmaking a cultural milieu, irrespective of the content being represented. Beginning with

the instance of the attempted censorship of explicit anime, I argue against the grain that

efforts to institute parental controls bespeak a structural carelessness by delegating care

for youth to technologies and entertainment industries. What is at stake is that attention-

capturing technologies of the entertainment and advertising industries short-circuit

attention and desire by subjecting the mind to the incessant stimulation of consumption.

On the macro level, anime and manga's emerging as the forerunner of Japan's global soft power since the 1990s is part of the larger shift from biopower to what Stiegler calls "psychopower," where the mind, formed by ways of organizing attention, becomes the site of governmentality. My project assembles analyses on different articulations of Japanese popular culture, from Japan's self-Orientalizing discourse in the 1990s, canonical anime such as *Ghost in the Shell* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion,* to the most recent virtual waifu phenomenon. I demonstrate how anime and manga as forms of psychopower constellate geopolitics, social psyche and libidinal economy. Specifically, otaku, the moniker for "maniac" fans, epitomizes the issues in Japan's consumerist-driven ideology after WWII and its neoliberal turn in the new millennium. By showing how otaku play, I conclude my study by emphasizing that the potentials of technologies are entangled with the way we organize attention.

Acknowledgements

As readily suggested by its title, this dissertation is the result of a very long process of learning how to organize attention. My writing, like every technical object, has woven into it a whole spectrum of temporal experiences. Developing from one chapter of a project on British-American science fiction, this dissertation began as a distraction, so to speak. Penning it over an extensive span of time, at some point I realized that I was becoming otaku, the subject I wrote about, in the sense of swinging back and forth between psychological dissociation and excessive investment. Thankfully, Ed Cohen, my dissertation advisor, my intellectual as well as spiritual mentor, guided me to attend to my attention and turn my inattention and distraction into creative movements. Ed regularly rejected taking on the role of superego, refusing to discipline my continuous shifting interests or to call out my inattention. Instead, he cared for the needs I myself did not recognize or did not want to acknowledge. Most preciously, he has encouraged me to make my dissertation a transitional space to play with the wildly meandering ideas, to engage in an open-ended journey, to take care of the self that is in a perpetual process of making, remaking and unmaking. His attention, *attente*, a "critical waiting" to use Stiegler's words, is what has made this wildly heterogenous project possible.

Speaking of critical waiting, I also want to thank my other dissertation readers, Harriet Davidson, Paul North, and Satoru Saito, for their patience, compassion, and unconditional support. While I had exposure to manga and anime growing up in Taiwan, I relied on my longtime friend, Yurio Miyazawa, who "initiated" me to the fascinating, fanatic and at times frightening world of Japanese otaku. At the same time, the students I

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encountered while working in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures offered me great inspiration with their avowed passion and dedication to manga, anime and videogames as "American" otaku. The graduate courses I took in Comparative Literature, English, Women and Gender Studies at Rutgers equipped me with a set of critical tools to tackle an interdisciplinary cultural studies project. The Proust seminars I took with the late great Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick at CUNY Graduate Center shaped my writing in unexpected and delightful ways. Eve's reparative reading practice for joy still lures me away from the totalizing tyranny of criticism that tends to proliferate adversarial negation. The kindness and humor of my psychotherapist, Martin Gliserman, shored me up when I was feeling most vulnerable. The dialogues with Martin on my childhood, on trauma, and on Donald Winnicott reanimated my passion and energized me into finishing up my dissertation with an affirmation of the transgressive power of play.

I have been very fortunate to have a network of supportive professors and friends at Rutgers, who have taken care of me throughout the years: Elin Diamond, Josephine Diamond, Mary Gossy, Elizabeth Grosz, Jorge Marcone, Andrew Parker, Richard VanNess Simmons, Weijie Song, Kurt Spellmeyer, Dietrich Tschanz, Ching-I Tu, Janet Walker, Ban Wang, to name a few. My family and friends back in Taiwan and around the world have always cheered me on whenever I was about to abort my graduate studies. Finally, I am forever indebted to my partner, Andrew Libby, who has more faith in me than myself. All his spontaneous ideas about Plato, Kant, Enlightenment, Winnicott and play that kept unfolding as we took long walks in the park gave my project contours. My project is a written record capturing those beautiful transient and transformative moments of intellectual interchange.

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Introduction: Organizing Attention

"My mission is to spark joy in the world through tidying," Marie Kondo, speaking in Japanese with a soft but assured voice, introduces the basis of her organizing methods in the beginning of her Netflix show, "Tidying Up with Marie Kondo." Prior to becoming a world-renowned home organizing guru and the author of the bestseller *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*, Kondo worked as an administrative assistant in a Shinto shrine. Her famous KonMari Method, premised on the intangible affective register of "joy," is a modern rendition of Shinto relationality emphasizing the animate aspects of things and the animate relation between people and things. Petite in figure, jovial and always respectful in demeanor, Kondo helps her clients steer through their cluttered homes. This involves not only getting rid of mess or doing a makeover, but "cultivating empathy for the things that surround us," as *The Atlantic* aptly describes it.[1] Assuming a role akin to a Shinto priest, Kondo transforms the chore of cleaning up into a spiritual ritual. For instance, she guides the family in question to quietly thank the house and its objects for the service they provide, and "wake up" books by tapping on them before organizing a bookshelf. Her much-satirized question, "Does it spark joy?" used to decide whether to keep a certain item, aims to evoke her clients' memory and "wake up" the connection between their belongings and themselves. Sorting things out is then a symbolic practice of configuring

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[1] Sarah Archer, "Tidying Up with Marie Kondo Isn't Really a Makeover Show," *The Atlantic*, January 9, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/01/tidying-up-with-marie-kondo-netflix-show-kon-mari-review/579400/.

personal history and making a departure from the past towards the future. The "magic" of tidying up, as promised by Kondo's book, is derived from a reanimated relationship to an intimately animate domestic place. Or more accurately, what is animated is attention and care that then reestablish a cognitively and affectively embodied bonding to things and to ourselves. Tidying up is thus ultimately an exercise in organizing our attention and decluttering the mind through objects and things, whereby we get our life back in order.

Situated on the other end of the "Japanese" cultural spectrum governing the forms of attention and its organization is the figure of otaku, as well as the subculture of anime (the Japanese word for animation) and manga (comics), which is created by otaku and at the same time creates otaku. Before coming to refer exclusively to zealous fans of manga and anime, otaku in its original Japanese usage meant "your home," and was by extension a second-person honorific pronoun used between distant equals. When Nakamori Akio first debuted the term "otaku" in his two-part essay on *Manga Burikko*, an obscure magazine known for its erotic and explicit contents that went out of business within three years, he used the term to poke fun at his readers, not necessarily to deride them.[2] By dedicating a specific native lexicon to the already-vibrant fandom of manga and anime, Nakamori defines the otaku craze for manga as one of many kinds of distractions from study. He makes a list of illicit objects of attention for schoolkids, ranging from manga, science fiction, trains, and celebrities to *shogi* (Japanese chess). In the surprising grouping of manga and shogi, Nakamori's initial conception of otaku compares the attention capture by manga, an external stimulus, to the exercise of cognitive skills and mental concentration when playing shogi, a respected traditional pastime. Notably, the

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[2] Matthew ALT, "What Kind of Otaku Are You?" *Néojaponisme*, April, 2, 2008,
http://neojaponisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/.

cover for the first installment of Nakamori's essay is a photograph of *Our Gang*, a.k.a. *The Little Rascals*, the short-film series portraying children and their adventures that ran from the early 1920s to the mid-1940s in the United States.[3] That is to say, though Nakanori failed to realize the full implications of his light-hearted caricature, "otaku" from the get-go connoted a global phenomenon of attention capture originating in child and youth entertainment and surpassing the limited confines of anime and manga.

Otaku did not enter the mainstream consciousness until the Japanese media labelled Miyazaki Tsutomu "the Otaku Murderer" in the wake of his arrest for killing four young girls during 1988 and 1989. In Miyazaki's home, cluttered with thousands of videotapes, the police found the footage he took of his victims amid a massive collection of anime and horror films. After this incident, otaku becomes a stigmatized identity marker entangled with the "media" of anime and manga. It comes to embody the adverse effects of anime and manga and evoke the image of socially unkempt and inept animals cooped up at home and consuming obsessively. Yet Nakamori's essay begins with Comiket, the world's largest fan convention, swarming with anime and manga devotees who showcase and sell their fanzines (*dōjinshi* in Japanese). On the one hand, the Comiket event bespeaks anxiety over the contamination of public space by otaku. On the other hand, it also signifies the centrifugal movement enabled by otaku attention that configures an economy around their single-minded focus on manga and anime. In fact, after the Miyazaki incident, the otaku community's effort to recuperate the otaku identity, led by the Gainax studio among others, proceeds through the double movement of affirming the otaku's intimate interactions with images on the personal level while

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[3] Akio Nakamori, "Otaku no Kenkyu" (Otaku's Research: Part 1) *Manga Burikko,* June 1983, http://www.burikko.net/people/otaku01.html

strengthening the otaku's grassroots networks and unofficial markets into a full-fledged economic force. Gainax's 1995 anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is the pinnacle of success for this subcultural movement, proving the commercial potential of otaku. More saliently, the otaku's solipsistic and withdrawn sensibility, as portrayed in *Evangelion*, comes to epitomize the zeitgeist of a post-bubble Japan, where the already tenuous social fabric that accompanied economic uncertainty was further destabilized by the Aum Shinrikyo sarin subway attack that occurred months before *Evangelion*'s release. In other words, the subcultural imaginary formed by the attention of otaku encapsulates Japan's reality. At the same time, otaku also facilitate a relatively autonomous economic reality divorced from Japan's depressed economy. The otaku movement enacts the process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, in Deleuze and Guattari's idiom, spawning a continuous and steadily growing market outside Japan and recruiting global viewers into the devout fandom of anime and manga. For instance, Crunchyroll, one of the biggest anime streaming services, with one million paid users, was founded by four UC Berkeley graduates who largely fit Nakamori's description of otaku and developed their passion towards anime "in the dorm and on campus," where they were supposed to study.[4]

By the new millennium, otaku emerges as the *de facto* frontier of Japan's soft power and the face of Japan's "national cool."[5] However, positive or negative, otaku becoming the index for Japanese popular culture and Japan in general is partly the doing of the "West," beginning with the discourse of techno-Orientalism in the 1980s. Quoted in David Morley and Kevin Robin's treatise on techno-Orientalism, Stephen Beard notes

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[4] Otaquest, "Interview with Kuo Gao - Co-Founder of Crunchyroll [Episode 1]," YouTube video, 3:34, September 5, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1T9A9apSDs.
[5] Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy*, no. 130 (May - June, 2002): 44–54.

that the genesis of otaku is intertwined with a "re-invention of Japan as a land of high-tech enchantment": "a new breed of 'radically bored' teen information junkie, *otaku*, who shun bodily contact and spend all of their waking hours gathering data on the most trivial of media."[6] Otaku is seen as the embodiment of Japan, which was on the brink of disembodiment through engulfment by a vortex of technology and information. Apathetic otaku clinging to data and devices stand out as a prominent stereotype of the Japanese people, who were racially profiled as unfeeling and dispirited like machines. There exists a metonymic relationship and slippage of meaning between otaku, Japan, Japaneseness, and technology. Otaku, who remained marginalized and eschewed in Japan during the 1980s and early '90s, turn into the token of Japan through the techno-Orientalist discourse of the West. Specifically, the way (the) otaku attend and relate to things, i.e. "data and media" as Beard specifies, comes to configure the geopolitical relation between Japan and the "West."

Paradoxically, the otakuzation of Japan and the Japanese by the techno-Orientalist discourse of the West has helped rehabilitate otaku back into the mainstream. Valorized by the Orientalized gaze and riding on the success of series such as *Evangelion*, otaku themselves have produced "reverse discourses," in Foucauldian terms, to speak on their own behalf and reclaim the identity. In his "Introduction to Otakuology," Okada Toshio, the co-founder of Gainax, appropriates the term *shinjinrui* ("New *Homo Sapiens*") and attributes it singularly to otaku who have an "evolved" vision.[7] Okada goes as far as

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[6] Stephen Beard, quoted in David Morley and Kevin Robins, "Techno-Orientalism," from *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 169.

[7] Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 144.

declaring otaku "the true heirs of Japanese culture" by virtue of their connection to the

urban culture of Edo.[8] Okada's claim was supported by Takashi Murakami, an

internationally renowned artist who materializes in his artwork the eccentricities shared

by the Edo period and contemporary Japanese culture. Regardless of the veracity of

Okada's claims, there is an underlying anxiety to nativize or indigenize the otaku

phenomenon to make it unambiguously "Japanese," free of contamination and influence

from the West and the United States. Thomas Lamarre remarks how Okada's

championing of otaku betrays his ethno-nationalistic leaning and amounts to complicity

in reiterating *nihonjinron*, the ethnocentric discourse of "Japaneseness."[9] Hence, the

figure of otaku is elevated as the gatekeeper of the "Japanese essence," epitomizing a

recreated cultural heritage and governing an imaginary relation between the feudal past

and the "postmodern" present. The idea of the otaku sensibility as rooted in Japan's

tradition colludes in Japan's post-bubble strategy, as Iwabuchi Koichi points out, which

sells the brand name of "cool Japan" and promotes "soft nationalism."[10]

It is in this particular influx of discursive effort to "domesticate" otaku that

Azuma Hiroki's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals,* marks a significant breakthrough by

disarticulating otaku from the grip of nativist and ethnocentric approaches.[11] Published in

2001, with an English translation only becoming available in 2009, Azuma's book is

arguably the most popular, thoughtful and scathing critique of otaku. He couches his

theoretical inquiries in an accessible, journalistic style and argues from the vantage point

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[8] Okada Toshio, quoted in Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 149.
[9] Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*.
[10] Iwabuchi Koichi, "'Soft' Nationalism and Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global," *Asian Studies Review* 26, no. 4 (2002): 447-469, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357820208713357.
[11] Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Kono Shion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

of having once been a fully committed otaku. In Jonathan Abel's assessment, Azuma mediates high theory and the "low" culture of otaku, with the purpose of bringing together these two different and often mutually exclusive readerships: readers of rigorous academic discourse and consumers of anime and manga.[12] As Azuma declares himself, his major intervention is to shed light on the "unique aspect of otaku culture" to go "beyond the framework of Japan and coincide with broader postmodern threads."[13] By translating the "native" phenomenon of otaku with by-then globalized, universalized, and commodified critical theories, Azuma attempts to examine the patterns and casualties of postmodern consumerism at large. The prevailing approaches to understanding otaku and the subcultures of anime and manga are dominated by two distinct but mutually informed tenets: media studies and Japanese studies. Both share a similar assumption in treating anime and manga as representations and cultural products. The former prioritizes the circulation and distribution of anime and manga as forms of media while the latter considers how cultural meanings and historical specificities that are identified as uniquely "Japanese" transpire in the texts. *Otaku: Japanese Database Animals* initiates a much-needed paradigm shift from content analysis and cultural models to the broader historical ramifications of otaku practices.

Azuma's critical inquiries are premised on Alexandre Kojève's famous metaphors of post-historical creatures: one being the relapse into "animality" as characterized by the American way of life, and the other being the "snobbery" seen among the Japanese. Kojève suggests that post-historical humanity reverts back to animality when it revels in consumption and entertainment. The alternative to the re-animalized man is the Japanized

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[12] Jonathan Abel, Translator's Introduction to *Otaku*, xv-xxix.
[13] Azuma, *Otaku*, 24.

man, the embodiment of snobbery. In Azuma's observation, the notion of Japanese snobbery made a glorious return during the 1980s. Just as Kojève foresaw that Japanization would supersede animalization and become the *de facto* mode of global civilization, and as Japan happened to have a short-lived economic leverage over the US, the thriving nationalistic discourse on Japan and Japaneseness took Kojève's words verbatim and celebrated Japan's ascent to the world stage. Azuma's theoretical maneuver, as indicated by the title of the book, is to extricate himself from pervasive ethnocentrism, and to snub the Japanese snobbery, so to speak. Instead of attributing snobbery to Japan, Azuma argues against the grain that the contemporary Japan epitomized by otaku has inadvertently fallen into "the animal age."

Utilizing Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of petits récits, Azuma sees the disappearance of the "grand narrative" as the watershed moment that signifies the "rupture" from modernity to postmodernity, proliferating infinite "small narratives." In Azuma's schematic conceptualization, the fault line between modernity (grand narrative) and postmodernity (small narrative) is also the distinction between "narrative consumption" and "database consumption," the transition from ideology to fiction, the schism between reality and simulacra, as well as the devolution from the "idealistic age" to the "fictional age" and an even more debased "animal age." Azuma goes to great lengths to include graphs so as to illustrate the difference between the modern and postmodern world images. The former he labels as the "tree model" and the latter "the database model." Due to the lack of a grand narrative, i.e. ideology, lying in the "deep inner layer," the tree model of viewing is replaced by the rhizome-like "database" compiled by readily commodified and highly sentimentalized "elements" of the

characters or setting.[14] Granted, the phenomenon of fragmentation and kitsch is a shared concern of postmodern theorists, but the overdetermined axiom of postmodernity vis-à-vis modernity in Azuma's critique warrants caution. With that all-too-convenient prefix of "post," the hypothesis that postmodernity is a roughly datable historical era that comes naturally after modernity has become an established assumption. By upholding postmodernity's definitive historical "threads" while trying to apply Kojève's two eminent metaphors or "riddles," Kojève's notion of the post-historical is readily reified and equated with postmodernity. As Giorgio Agamben reminds us, when it comes to Kojève's post-historical formulations, "It is impossible to distinguish between absolute seriousness and an equally absolute irony."[15] At the same time, Azuma observes, otaku have an obsessive habit of categorizing "types" of characters that they adore and fetishize into "*moe*-elements," i.e. small narratives. In doing this, they construct a database. Yet ironically, the proliferation of nomenclatures, concepts, and graphs in Azuma's book speaks to an unmistakable pressure to taxonomize, establish, and cement a "science" cataloguing otaku's behaviors—not unlike the assembling of a "database" which he criticizes otaku for doing. Considered in this light, the method of knowledge-building unique to the otaku fandom—and this applies to Azuma's study of otaku as well— proceeds through a science of classification and a system of naming, which is a defining feature of the *modern* episteme that Foucault talks about in *The Order of Things.* Postmodern or not, animalistic or not, Azuma's theoretical approach enacts what Ian

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[14] Azuma is referring to *moe. Moe,* derived from the word, *moeru* (萌える), refers to the action of sprouting or budding. The homophone of *moeru* (燃える) means to burn, to get fired up. The word comes to express infatuation and passion towards characters, or certain aspects of characters.

[15] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 10.

Hacking calls "engines of discovery" in reinforcing otaku as a people with their peculiar traits.[16]

Despite the risk it takes of reifying Kojève's metaphors, Azuma's critique is also at its most lucid and most useful when it returns to Kojève's formulations of animality. In Azuma's rehash of Kojève, humans distinguish themselves from animals because the former are defined by desire while the latter is driven by need. Different from animalistic need that can be easily gratified, like hunger being satiated after eating food, human desire cannot be exhausted because the circuit of desire does not stop at obtaining the desired object. The self-consciousness that characterizes humans makes human desire "the desire of the other," and such "intersubjective desire" is the basis for social relations.[17] The American style of consumer society creates worldwide animalization, whereby the intersubjective structure is eradicated and replaced with a closed-off circuit of lack and satisfaction predetermined by high capitalism's mechanically manufactured sense of need. Azuma writes about the disappearance of "the intervention of the other", and the lack of real social communication to obtain the object of desire.[18] It must be noted that Azuma is not critical of lack of "communication" *per se*. On the contrary, from the early 1980s, otaku had developed and learned to depend on online correspondence and tightly-knit fan communities to further their interests and reproduce derivative works and spin-off products. That Japanese anime and manga could establish themselves as a global franchise with a cult success is also very much contingent upon the lively and interactive communities that offer freely-circulated pirated media, whose fan-made

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[16] Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," *London Review of Books* 28, no.16 (August 2006): 23–26, https://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n16/contents.
[17] Azuma, *Otaku*, 86-87.
[18] Ibid., 87.

subtitles ("fansubs") often end up being much more accurate and detailed than those of the official release. Azuma does not deny the existence of communication and relation within otaku culture, but for him, otaku communication and relation are driven by animalistic need, and any real social relation that goes beyond otakuland is circumvented. The objects of desire for postmodern consumers such as otaku are no other than the "elements" filtered and preselected by search engines, and the encounter with the "other" is as easy as plugging into a readily programmed database and interface.

By recourse to Kojève's distinction between human desire and animal need, Azuma is concerned with the animalization of postmodern consumption, for the circuit of desire is intercepted and re-engineered into a system akin to a database, through which the need and the market constitute a closed feedback loop. Every novelty that gets introduced into the market is simply an "aggregate" generated by sampling and recombining "multiple data," i.e. rather "meaningless fragments" in Azuma's words. More precariously, it is also this reproduction of the predictable "meaningless fragments" that gratifies consumers and brings them emotional satisfaction, for the affective register of otaku has been preformatted and streamlined by the database. Although otaku are known for their obsession with anime and manga, Azuma concludes, they also demonstrate dissociative behavioral patterns in "living without connecting the deeply emotional experience of a work (a small narrative) to a worldview (a grand narrative)."[19] However, Azuma does not quite explain the cause of the otaku's psychological dissociation and the correlation between psychic overinvestment and disinvestment. Nor does he consider the creative potential that dissociation actualizes. For example, the

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[19] Ibid., 84.

dynamic of psychically overinvesting and disinvesting is itself the product of creative actions or semi-autonomous decisions. Notably, Azuma is sympathetic towards otaku's disengagement from "reality": "Otaku shut themselves into the hobby community not because they deny sociality but rather because, as social values and standards are already dysfunctional, they feel a pressing need to construct alternative values and standards."[20] That is to say, the grand narrative has already been broken, failing to cohere as real or promising any "deeper, inner meaning." Therefore, it is not simply that otaku prefer fiction over reality as Azuma suggests, whereby the self is knowingly reduced into a "pure idle spectator" of the meaningless, fictional contents they construct.[21] Quite peculiarly, Azuma upholds a categorical difference between reality and fiction while implicitly privileging reality as a stable reference point—even though the "social reality" speaks otherwise. Moreover, "media content" is not inherently meaningful or meaningless as Azuma implies. The meaning is produced through actively embodied psychic investment and engagement, that is, a process of paying attention and forming desire. What's really at stake, I argue, is the spiritual crisis that creates a debilitating sense of distrust and disaffection, with otaku turning in on themselves as the eminent expression of such disengagement.

Azuma's *Otaku* was written out of a genuine concern for the otaku fandom he had grown out of. As he does elsewhere, he warns of the rowdy energy and trash talk permeating Japanese online culture, which was established by otaku in the 1980s.[22]

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[20] Azuma, *Otaku,* 27.
[21] Ibid., 69.
[22] Mike Sunda, "Visualizing Japan's 'Ugly' Online Desires with Cultural Critic Azuma Hiroki," *The Japan Times*, June 27, 2015, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/06/27/books/visualizing-japans-ugly-online-desires-cultural-critic-hiroki-azuma/#.XquAaZNKhAY.

Ultimately, Azuma's underlying goal is to rebuild trust. This explains why he, in the wake of the Tōhoku Earthquake, wrote an affirmative piece for the *New York Times* titled "For a Change, Proud to be Japanese," in which he envisions that "maybe the Japanese people could use the experience of this catastrophe to rebuild a society bound together with a renewed trust."[23] Azuma felt hopeful when witnessing the Japanese, in an exception and for the first time in a long time, engage with "the public" either by scathing criticism or ardent support of relief efforts. In other words, the Japanese demonstrated that they *cared* and *paid attention*, whereby they fostered a temporary sense of *philia* and trust to weather the impact of a natural crisis. Azuma's underlying concern as I see it is the organization of attention and libidinal investment, which are the foundations of the socius, and the "public." The symptoms he sees exhibited in otaku, which also exist in online culture and in the entire Japanese population, are rooted in the deformation of attention and hence the disintegration of the spirit, *esprit*. A collapse of spirit is more catastrophic than natural disaster, sweeping away public life and trust.

My dissertation attempts to address the pervasive spiritual crisis which Azuma has left unarticulated by examining the necessary relationship between attention, care, and the libidinal economy as exemplified in Japanese popular culture. Inspired by Azuma's work, a significant part of my project is devoted to the critique of consumer capitalism. However, I hesitate to circumscribe my analysis to a hypothesis of "postmodern consumption" for many reasons. Within the historical context of Japan, when it was first imported during the 1980s, the theory of postmodernity quickly became a commodity as knowledge and a voucher for resurging nationalism. The ideology of

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[23] Azuma Hiroki, "For a Change, Proud to Be Japanese," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/opinion/17azuma.html?mtrref=www.nytimes.com.

"overcoming modernity," i.e. overcoming the West, underpinning Japan's war effort during World War II found its second life in the concept of postmodernity. Being widely misconceived as the evolution of modernity, postmodernity gave the Japan of the 1980s a theoretical mandate confirming that Japan had surpassed the West. At the same time, consumption alone cannot fully explain the varying practices within the subculture of anime and manga, which has established a global cultural-industrial complex with a stake in geopolitics. For instance, the American's remake of Oshii Mamoru's anime classic, *Ghost in the Shell*, became a site of negotiation for American racial politics with the controversial casting of Scarlet Johansson. Anime and manga are not simply made for consumption. They enact a political economy producing continuously unfolding networks and relations.

Drawing on the theory of the French philosopher, Bernard Stiegler, I substitute the overused paradigm of "postmodern consumption" in analyzing popular culture with the concept of "attention-capture." The notion of postmodern consumption often implies consuming cool, high-tech media, but much of the subculture of anime and manga, as Lamarre reminds us, is decidedly "low-tech," such as reading and drawing fanzines or cosplay. Attention-capture underlies literally every aspect of the subculture of anime and manga, irrespective of high-tech and low-tech "media" and occurring in both consumption and production. In a broader sense, forming attention, which is the prerequisite of exercising memory, in a technical milieu is what defines human life. In his *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stiegler argues that the attention control of the cultural industry targets drives and enacts a short-circuiting of desire by drive.[24] As

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[24] Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

Stiegler emphasizes, the production of desire occupies a temporal space that *defers* (as in

différance), *waits* (as in *attende*, from attention), and takes care of the objects of desire as

the irreducible Other, instead of consuming them as quickly exhaustible and easily

disposable objects. Such is the ecology of the mind. Most crucially, desire production

necessitates attention formulation, which grounds the possibilities for the transmission of

the reality principle—with its inherited knowledge of how to live, how to think, how to

love and enjoy, and how to *take care*.

For in the process of internalizing the reality principle, children learn by

repetition, with each repetition being different and unique, with each repetition making

them more intelligent—intelligent in the sense of knowing to reflect one's relation to

one's ancestors and the collective. This process is necessary for forming a young mind

that is capable of responding to both the sanctions of the reality principle and demands of

the pleasure principle through the delicately complex psychic apparatuses of assimilation,

resistance, modulation and compromise. The education and transmission of this capacity

to respond is also the cultivation of responsibility, since one can "respond to what one is

given." (9). That's why responsibility is a "*learned* social competency," which is a

defining step in preparing the minors towards maturity and intelligence.[25] As young

minds respond through différance, they are in the process of becoming, with the

potentialities of simultaneously being transformed by and transforming the social.

Stiegler sums up the importance of the circuit of desire for the culture and community:

"Such a production process connects the generations spiritually, culturally, and

communally. But desire can also generate ancestry through filiation, the creating of

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[25] Ibid., 1.

families, and taking on the obligation to educate children by transmitting to them the fruits of desire: a sense of culture and community."[26] That is to say, desire creates the education of *philia* as "the libido's most socially sublimated form," which is the bulwark of public life.[27]

It is clear that Stiegler and Azuma share a critical stance towards consumption. To reconceptualize Azuma's critique with Stiegler's parlance, restoring the sense of *philia* is the antidote to psychological dissociation. Otaku's dissociation from "the grand narrative" is a disconnect from intergenerational knowledge caused by the short-circuiting of desire into drive. Stiegler maintains that late-stage consumer-driven capitalism is "hyperindustrial" capitalism in the sense of inducing hyper-attention to the extent of exhausting psychic energy. Psychotechnologies employed by the marketing and cultural industries are apparatuses of attention-capture that make the mind teem with premature drive, i.e. "animalistic needs" as Azuma describes, without the guidance of or *philia* to any symbolic authority. Notably, Stiegler's parameters stave off the conceptual fallacy in the binary formation of ideology (the grand narrative) versus fiction (the small narrative), since according to a classical Marxist formulation, ideology is itself a fiction, akin to an optical illusion created by *camera obscura*. Moreover, despite his scathing critique of consumerism, Stiegler emphasizes that psychotechnologies as memory-aid effecting attention raise a pharmacological question. *Pharmakon*, in Derrida's famous postulation, is poison and cure at once. While the consumption of otaku is considered a social ill, otaku, as Azuma notes, nevertheless have established their intergenerational legacy, which is by Stiegler's definition a cultural milieu and the foundation of *philia*.

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[26] Ibid., 13.
[27] Ibid., 193.

This legacy may or may not be coterminous with the "grand narrative," but functions as a limited sense of symbolic authority to enable and modulate the production of desire, which in turn constitutes an intersubjective self, as readily implied in the original meaning of otaku, "*you*." How do social relations among otaku, which Azuma deems futile and meaningless, create a self-sustainable economy? Can the culture industry of anime and manga enact a culture of care with political potential, such as how queer kids in Russia would refer to each other as *yaoi* (a manga genre portraying male-male love) and *yuri* (a genre about lesbians) to escape Vladimir Putin's censorship?[28] I elaborate on the pharmacological nature of the psychotechnical system of Japanese subculture, providing some explanations as to the self-organizing force of anime and manga subculture.

By positing attention-capture as the locus of my critical inquiry, I hope ultimately to bring to light that global political economy is defined by "the disposition of attention," to recast Foucault's exposition of governmentality.[29] The disposition of attention, although intangible and amorphous, comes to "designate a level of reality, and a field of intervention," which is by definition economy according to Foucault.[30] Global youth culture is, in effect, a governance of youth attention. The intervention and organization of attention now takes place from early childhood through the cultural industry. Japan, the primary example of my inquiry, has for a long time been typecast as the "spiritual foil" of the West. Japan's soft power also capitalizes on the West's eroticization of its culture and

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[28] Mark Gevisser, "Life Under Russia's 'Gay Propaganda' Ban," *The New York Times*, December 27, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/28/opinion/life-under-russias-gay-propaganda-ban.html.
[29] Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984,* trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 2015), 201-222.
[30] Ibid., 218.

navigates itself as a torchbearer of "spirituality" that has been lost in the West.[31] Yet as I mentioned above, the techno-Orientalist discourse of the 1980s paints Japan as a nation of emotionless robots who only have affinity to machines. I argue that Japan as the "spiritual other" is not based upon its holding the "Japanese" secret of living a good life beyond "material" wellbeing as it is marketed. Rather, from Zen in the 1960s, the Sony Walkman in the '80s, anime in the 1990s, and Pokémon GO in 2016, to its most recent manifestation, the KonMari method, Japanese soft power is fundamentally what Stiegler terms "psychopower," a complex of techniques and procedures targeting the mind by regulating consciousness and organizing attention. Zen uses meditation to harness the chaotic mind, while the Walkman saturates the mind with constant stimuli wherever one goes; Pokémon GO invites gamers to get out of the house for a change, but glues their mind to their cell phone screens. By considering soft power such as attention-capture mechanisms as a form of psychopower, I resist the reifying of Japan as an unequivocal cultural identity, with Japanese popular culture as the dominant expression of Japan and Japaneseness. As ADHD has become an epidemic in the United States, and Chinese youth have been institutionalized by their parents in the infamous Linyi clinic to "cure" their internet addiction through torture and electroshock therapy, hyperindustrial globalization also indicates a widespread spiritual crisis that makes cultural distinctions obsolete—for there is no longer "culture."[32]

In the first chapter, "Paying Attention: De/Culturing the Global Youth," I use the Nonexistent Youth Bill proposed by the then-Tokyo governor in 2010 as an instance to

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[31] Christopher Harding, "Marie Kondo and the Life-Changing Magic of Japanese Soft Power," *The New York Times,* January 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/18/opinion/marie-kondo-japan.html.
[32] China Youth Daily - *Global Times*, "Teenagers Left Traumatized by 'Electroshock Therapy," *Global Times*, August 28, 2016, http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1003311.shtml.

introduce psychopower as the *de facto* neoliberal economic order. The Nonexistent Youth Bill is a local bill imposing censorship on "content" directly or indirectly portraying fictional ("nonexistent") youths engaging in sexual acts. In a brief historical overview, I show how minors and youths become a site of governmentality where biopower and psychopower intersect. Biopolitical governance, according to Foucault, implements a normative model of childhood development with institutional interventions and disciplinary procedures to optimize life processes and maximize the effect of population as an aggregate. Psychopower enacts a grammatization of the mind through audio-visual apparatuses and cultural programming to allot "brain time" and turn population into market segments. I give a detailed account of Stiegler's theory of technics and memory in relation to desire production in order to move away from the sender-receiver model of mass communication, or an interpretive content analysis model that treats media as "message." With Stiegler's emphasis on the mutual constitution between technical objects and humans, I argue that parental control and rating systems misconstrue the critical issue at hand. Content regulation, such as that mandated by the Nonexistent Youth Bill, is part of psychopower, complicit in furthering rather than circumventing the interest of the cultural industry in the name of protecting youths and minors. A neoliberal globalization advocating standardization of youth consumption is a collective minoritization and structural immaturity that operates by delegating the responsibility of education to the programming industry.

Hence, the received notion that youth culture should be tailored to the consumption of minors is part of governmental rationality in justifying control and masking structural irresponsibility. In the second chapter, "Becoming Minor: Theorizing

Japan's Popular Culture," I try to complicate the normative notion of "minors" beyond a given demographic category. The popular conception of anime and manga as Japan's most prominent youth culture is not quite accurate, for there exists a variety of genres for all ages and walks of life. For instance, Japan's aging population has also yielded a new popular genre featuring the elderly and their quotidian struggles to appeal to a demographic hitherto not considered to be manga readers.[33] While anime and manga constitute a common part of growing up, and their images saturate everyday life in Japan, they are not consecrated as "major" culture. I examine the humble roots of anime and manga as a kind of "junk culture," as they literally emerged amidst the ruin of World War II. By introducing Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "a minor literature," *eine kleine Literatur,* I show how the lack of universal institutionalization and canonization enables the subculture of manga and anime to actualize the potential of "becoming minor." Differing from a counterculture whose resistance is galvanized by a dominant ideology with a clearly-set direction, a minor culture, such as that of anime and manga, undergoes the processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. As a minor culture, anime and manga are what Bruno Latour calls "modern hybrids," but not in the sense of being art forms combining distinct cultural features of "Japan" and the "West." Rather, they undertake the important work of translation dealing with the psychic undercurrents and unruly energy pushed beneath the surface since Japan's defeat in the war, followed by the American occupation and the thwarted student movement of the 1960s.[34] That is to say,

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[33] Kyodo, "Manga Starting to Feature Elderly Characters," *The Japan Times*, July 17, 2018, "https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/07/17/national/social-issues/new-genre-manga-casts-elderly-characters-leading-roles/#.XJU0mihKiUk

[34] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

the subculture of anime and manga has historically been a modulating force organizing

libidinal energy, and it has functioned in post-bubble Japan as the major "supplement," in

Derrida's definition, to sustain and revitalize Japan's economy.

Paradoxically, by virtue of being a minor culture never formally officiated as

authentically "Japanese," the Japanese popular culture of manga and anime has emerged

as the most expedient and disarming means for Japan to make a reentry into the world's

cultural map. In my third chapter, "Chapter 3: Interfacing East and West: Techno-

Orientalism and Japan's Soft Power," I conduct a historical analysis of how the

racializing discourse of techno-Orientalism in the 1980s has, not incidentally, valorized

Japan's nationalism and ethnocentrism as embodied in the discourse of *nihonjinron.* As

Iwabuchi observes, Japan's cultural strategy in the 1990s has reenacted "an asymmetrical

totalizing triad between 'Asia,' 'the West,' and 'Japan'" in its effort to reorient Japan

back to Asia.[35] This triad, as Iwabuchi points out, recalls Japan's wartime colonial

discourse of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which strove to annex Asia into

a united front led by Japan against the imperialism of the West. According to Iwabuchi,

the "virtual" creatures and characters in the subculture of anime and manga that defy any

unambiguous racial markers help Japan smoothly transition from a "faceless" economy in

the 1980s to "stateless" (*mukokuseki*) soft power in the 1990s.[36] I extend Iwabuchi's

study of transnational cultural flows in Asia to the convergence between the globalization

of anime and the eastward frontier narrative in American cyberpunk of the 1980s.

William Gibson's concept of "cyberspace" promises the navigability of the foreign to

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[35] Iwabuchi Koichi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese* Transnationalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 7.
[36] Iwabuchi, "Soft Nationalism," 455.

gratify epistemophilia, as Wendy Chun points out.[37] In line with the globalist desire of cyberpunk, the face of the anime figure, which appears quasi-Asian, quasi-Western, but belongs to neither, comes to symbolize the expansive geopolitical "interface" of global capitalism that simultaneously invents, reconfigures and also disfigures the imaginary cultural entities of the "East" and the "West." I use the original anime of *Ghost in the Shell* as an example of how Japan's soft power navigates itself by reanimating and recreating an imaginary Japan, as readily indicated by the "ghost" in the title, through a relation to an equally imaginary "West."

In my fourth chapter, "When Libidinal Economy Runs Amok: The Cautionary Tale of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," I reconsider the legacy of *Evangelion* in light of Stiegler's theory of the relationship between psychotechnologies and libidinal economy. Lauded as one of the best, if not the best, anime series ever made, *Evangelion* has spawned a formidable industry, including within the academic sector. Many scholarly works are drawn to the apocalyptic mythos and the Jungian strands woven into the intricate plots and complex symbolism of Hideaki Anno. Some emphasize technical prowess and the traits of "otaku perception," given that *Evangelion* is recognized as a culmination of *mecha* (abbreviation for "mechanical") anime and the otaku lineage of animation.[38] My analysis aims to bridge these two divergent approaches by elucidating the mutual enmeshments between the desires of machines and humans. The leitmotif of the child being forced to pilot the giant robot in *mecha* anime is symptomatic of a broken system of care, with the child left literally and figuratively to its own devices. The

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[37] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
[38] Lamarre, *The Anime Machine.*

solipsism punctuating *Evangelion* is related to the loss of the symbolic authority to guide psychic energy and foster attention. As a consequence, the main protagonist, Shinji, is consumed by debilitating self-hatred and self-destruction. By presenting *Evangelion* in the historical constellation of the *shinjinrui* Generation, the Aum Shinrikyo subway attack, and the bursting of Japan's economic bubble, I identify its messianic longing as a spiritual crisis stemming from the mind being deprived of the desire to imagine a future. I venture to argue that the psychic incapacity to desire a future is the cause, not the result, of a failing economy, for the economy is fundamentally a libidinal economy.

The broken system of care portrayed in *Evangelion* has become a bleak social reality in neoliberal Japan. In chapter five, "Precarious Home, Proletarian Youths in Neoliberal Japan," I discuss how Japan's neoliberal discourse of self-responsibility, *jiko sekinin*, has produced a precarity of care and a scarcity of love. I use the peculiar phenomenon of virtual *waifu* (wife) derived from otaku subculture to examine how the ideal of love and home can be quantified by the culture and service industries. Marrying a virtual *waifu* from the 2-D world originally emerged as a discontent with the "love capitalism" of the 1980s, during which consumerism and materialism converted romance and companionship into transactions, as evidenced by the common practice of *enjo-kōsai* (compensated dating). However, finding oneself a virtual *waifu* as a form of self-care and self-help ultimately subscribes to the logic of neoliberal capitalism and submits the self willingly to the control of the service industry. Considered this way, the otaku's marriage to a virtual *waifu* is quintessential neoliberal self-responsibility in a warped sense. Care is computed into a commodity among the many choices proffered by the privatized care market, which is precisely the goal of the neoliberal reform pushed by Koizumi

Junichirō. Yet the destruction of care and the deformation of home life does not begin with Japan's neoliberal turn. Using the anthropological study of Ann Allison, I make the daring argument that what destroys home is the postwar ideology of my-home-ism (*mai hōmushugi*). According to Allison, consumerism is constitutive of the social contract of my-home-ism: the compensation for hard work is an ideal home furnished with the newest electronics and a family car.[39] I discuss how the psychotechnological reconfiguration of home life by the consumerist revolution of my-home-ism has created dependency, or what Stiegler calls "proletarianization," in the name of convenience. While my-home-ism helps create Japan's economic miracle, it also risks undoing the tender function of home in cultivating care and intelligence beyond a consumerist calculus.

Otaku, carrying the original meaning of "your home," expose and amplify the problems inherent in the ideology of my-home-ism. Paradoxically, the practices of otaku also suggest the possibility of a "cure" in a pharmacological sense through their devotion to play. In my last chapter, "Otaku: Home in on Play," I revisit the Miyazaki incident and reconsider otaku together with the figure of the *shōjo* (young girls), the object of Miyazaki's consumption as play. Otaku and *shōjo* are often associated with consumerist malaise or bliss, for they participate in unproductive play. Otaku in particular bear the brunt of castigation for they fail their gendered economic responsibility by investing their libidinal energy in the wrong place. For Japan's enterprise society (*kigyō shakai*) institutes "play" as part of corporate routines, such as after-work drinking. The ideology of my-home-ism has equated play with consumerist rewards. Using Donald Winnicott's

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[39] Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

study of child's play, I make a contrary claim that otaku and *shōjo* carve out a remedial

transitional space of play which is vital to reanimate the self's relation to things and to

others. In Winnicott's object-relation theory, by attending and growing attached to the

object, the child learns self-care and to care for the object, for the object is part of the

child's own creation. Hence, play is an embodied affective and cognitive exercise of

taking care, and the beginning of social relations. What's really at issue, as reflected in

Miyazaki's murders, is not too much play or consumption, but the need to relearn how to

play. I do a close reading of Gainax's *Otaku no Video* to show the potentialities in the

transitional play of otaku. Otaku's seemingly "unproductive" psychic investment in their

play is in fact the creative, self-organizing force driving the subcultural economy of

anime and manga.

The phenomenon of play is not limited to childhood. What defines object

relations is simultaneously working out psychic energy and "tidying up" one's attention

in relation to objects, and the "joy" of play emerges from a reanimated relationship

between self and others, between self and an imaginative world of which the self is an

integral part. Play, when playing it right, is about creating a psychic order. In this way,

play is similar to the decluttering method laid out by Marie Kondo, or the practice of

housekeeping advocated by Isomachus in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*.[40] As Isomachus

asserts, the ability to give order to things in the intimate home space is the foundation of

economy. While otaku are stereotypically perceived to live in clutter and their minds to

overflow with information and images, my dissertation aims to investigate how their

ways of organizing attention, or the lack thereof, reconfigure political economy. To argue

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[40] Yung In Chae and Jonathan Hanink, "Socrates Wants you to Tidy Up, Too," *The New York Times*,
January 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/22/opinion/marie-kondo-socrates.html.

in broader terms, do the attention-capture apparatuses of the culture and program

industries leave any attention to be organized? This is the most urgent concern I address

in my project.

Chapter 1. Paying Attention: De/Culturing the Global Youth

I.   Legal Drama: "Protecting" the Youth from the Nonexistent Youth

In early 2010 the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, under the initiative of the then-governor Shintaro Ishihara, introduced the bizarrely named Nonexistent Youth Bill as an amendment to the Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youth.[1] Prior to this revision, Japan's existing national laws included clauses banning child pornography, and the prefecture of Tokyo used a rating system to prohibit the sale of "harmful materials" to minors younger than 18 years of age. The proposal aimed to restrict the representation of sexual intercourse and/or the appearance of fictional characters engaging in such acts when those characters are coded as minors under the age of 18 through portrayals of age or clothing, belongings, school year, background, or other context clues such as the recollections of others and the character's voice. Drafted per the recommendations of the 2008 Tokyo Youth Affairs Conference appointed by Ishihara, the Nonexistent Youth Bill was perceived as a war waged against anime, manga and games wherein "nonexistent youth" is the main feature. From its inception, the bill sparked a heated debate and encountered fierce opposition within Japan from manga writers and publishers as well as from leading Liberal Democratic Party members, who saw the bill as infringement upon freedom of expression and a free license

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[1] The Monologue of an Anonymous Observer of Intellectual Property Policy, "番外その２２：東京都青少年保護条例改正案全文の転載" (Extra #22: The Reprint of the Full Text of Tokyo Youth Protection Ordinance Revision Bill), February 27 2010, http://fr-toen.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2010/02/post-cbc1.html.

for government censorship in the name of protecting the health of youth.[2] The term
"nonexistent youth" especially drew scrutiny. Legislators were forced to modify the bill
after it was put on hold and rejected by the Assembly on multiple attempts to pass it.[34]
The finalized version of the bill, Bill 156, dropped the term "nonexistent youths" but
expanded the definition of "harmful materials" by including depictions of characters of
age 17 or younger involved in sexual and pseudo-sexual activities that encourage anti-
social behaviors. Specifically, the bill advocates that images that "unjustifiably glorify
and exaggerate" sexual acts which are deemed illegal in real life, such as incest or rape,
should be regulated irrespective of the age of the characters depicted. As manga scholar
Yukari Fujimoto contends, the bill changed from a "nonexistent youth bill" to a
"nonexistent (sex) crime bill," whereby sexual acts "which are contrary to violating
criminal codes and stipulations," in the bill's exact wording, are subject to penalty "even
when they are only drawn on paper," says Fujimoto.[5] Apart from the ludicrous-sounding
commitment to purge "non-existent crimes," Bill 156 is rife with glaring contradictions
and loopholes: it targets manga while exempting real-life photography, live-action film,
and literature; it claims to apply criminal laws in the imaginary realm of fiction for youth,

[2] Mark J. McLelland, "Thought Policing or the protection of youth? Debate in Japan over the "Non-existent youth bill," *International Journal of Comic Art* (*IJOCA*), 13(1), 2011: 348-367, https://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1272&context=artspapers.

[3] Christopher Macdonald, "Tokyo's 'Nonexistent Youth' Bill Officially on Hold (Updated)," *Anime News Network*, March 19, 2010, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-03-19/tokyo-virtual-child-porn-bill-officially-dead-till-june.

[4] Egan Loo, "Tokyo's 'Nonexistent Youth' Bill Rejected by Assembly," *Anime News Network*, June 16, 2010, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-06-16/tokyo-nonexistent-youth-bill-rejected-by-assembly.

[5] Dan Kanemitsu, "Bill 156 – The Nonexistent Crimes Bill (Fujimoto's Analysis Translated)." *Dan Dan Kanemitsu's Paper Trail*, https://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/05/bill-156-the-nonexistent-crimes-bill-fujimotos-analysis-translated. Kanemitsu, a manga translator, has given the most comprehensive coverage available in English on the Nonexistent Youth Bill and Bill 156 in his blog and *Anime News Network*.

but leaves out sexual activities between characters of minor age, the omission of which deviates from its initial conception as a regulation of nonexistent youth. While it contains articles on parental control of internet use, the ordinance exempts mobile downloads but requires publishers of books or DVDs to self-regulate sexually explicit contents.

Given the many absurdities and inconsistencies, Bill 156 appears to be a scare tactic and legal posturing with no clear vision or plausible plans to enforce the law despite its ostensibly ambitious scope. In his report on the bill and its ramifications, Dan Kanemitsu sees the bill as a tool for "thought control" and political propaganda.[6] The sloppy language, as well as ambiguous and therefore highly disputable terms such as "nonexistent youth" or "anti-social," created a perhaps deliberate ruckus and intensified oppositions, with the effect of swaying public opinion into a polarized battle between freedom of expression and the protection of minors. As Kanemitsu emphasizes, the industry did not at all reject government measures to limit minors' access to harmful publications but was concerned about the potential abuse of bureaucratic power that would arbitrate and define "harmful publications" at its whim. Consequentially, manga authors and publishers could be thrown into a legal limbo with no control over their creations. Not surprisingly, the media sensationalized the bill by fixating on the ban of excessive "sexual" contents while overlooking the full scope of the bill, especially in the Western press. In Mark McLelland's observation, the Western media failed to present the debate surrounding the bill, and "engaged in the same kind of Orientalized and pathologizing depictions of Japan's supposed lack of morals that have been familiar since

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[6] Dan Kanemitsu, "Editorial: How Bill 156 Got Passed," *AnimeNewsNetwork*, December 28, 2010. https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/editorial/2010-12-28

the mid 80s."[7] The bill was presented in Western news outlets as a series of much belated

efforts by Japan to finally rectify its longstanding ill repute as a major source of child

pornography. The bill censoring subject matter in the virtual worlds of manga and anime

was wrongly conflated with a ban on live-action porn, despite the bill's categorical

exemption of images and films of "real" minors. Furthermore, Japan had had a wide

range of legal stipulations in place to counter child pornography since 1999. In fact, as

McLelland indicates, the United States and Europe hosted the greatest number of

websites images and videos of actual child sexual abuse at the time. The misleading

Western coverage of the bill led Kanemitsu to exclaim in exasperation that "Bill 156 is a

morality issue, not a pornography issue" in bold characters, with morality and

pornography in capital letters.[8]

However, when considered in a global context, the bill was meant to be mistaken

and interpreted, at least in part, as a "pornography" issue by the West. As reported by *The

Guardian* in 2008, Japan finally set forth legislation to criminalize possession of child

pornography, but no mention of manga and anime was made to respond to criticism from

child advocacy groups. Japan's move then was a concession to international pressure,

specifically from the United States, and a step closer to become "in line with most other

developed countries," as *The Guardian* comments.[9] Thus, the Nonexistent Youth Bill or

Bill 156 was a follow-up measure Japan undertook to further comply with and conform to

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[7] McLelland, "Thought policing or the protection of youth? Debate in Japan over the "Non-existent youth bill,"6.
[8] Dan Kanemitsu, "Something People Overseas Can Do – Fight Misconceptions about Bill 156 and Japan," *Dan Kanemitsu's Paper Trail*, December 14, 2010, https://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/14/something-people-overseas-can-do-fight-misconceptions-about-bill-156-and-japan/.
[9] Justin McCurry, "Japan to Outlaw Possession of Child Pornography," *The Guardian*, March 11, 2008, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/11/japan.internationalcrime.

a universalized—that is, Western—paradigm of heathy youth development. The bill was also seen as a response from the Japanese side to the trial of Christopher Handley, an Iowa comic collector, who was charged with obscenity by the United States District Court, also in 2010, for possession of materials depicting the sexual abuse of minors. Many of the items seized by the court at Handley's home were ordered and shipped from Japan. With Handley's case in the background, the Nonexistent Youth Bill serves as a normative synchronization of global legal systems by imposing unequivocal and uncontestable notions of youth, of health, and of obscenity. The push from the West for Japan's legal reforms, from a ban on pornography to the regulation of manga and anime, overrode Japan's definition of obscenity shaped by its historical particularities. By lumping together pornography with anime and manga, and by "branding" them as a uniquely Japanese contamination and corruption of global youth, Western allegations indiscriminately maligned a varying set of aesthetic and subcultural practices of anime and manga that have remained largely harmless in terms of "stimulating" imitative criminal acts, in the way that the bill suggests that fictional depictions are capable of being "sexually stimulating." Admittedly, there was the infamous case of Tsutomu Miyazaki, dubbed "the Otaku Murderer," who murdered and mutilated girls during 1988 and 1989. Not unproblematically, prosecutors and media attributed his crimes to his obsession with collecting anime and horror films. Studies since then have consistently shown that Miyazaki was an isolated incident, and that fans of erotic manga and anime, tend to be sexually conservative.[10] The number of serious criminal offenses committed by

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[10] Saito Tamaki, "Otaku Sexuality," trans. Christopher Bolton, in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, eds. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 222—249.

otaku has been disproportionately low considering the culture's longstanding history and the continuously expanding fandom.

What was at issue was not whether imagination can spill over to reality and inexorably lead to actual crimes, as the bill's logic presumes. Bill 156 was certainly not the first nor the last attempt to contain popular culture. Since the nineteenth century, images and representations in popular culture have been a source of public moral panic, as instanced by the links retroactively created between Jack the Ripper and Robert Louis Stevenson's fictional creation. What needs to be asked is why anime and manga at this particular historical moment became the targets of censorship both *within and outside* Japan. If taming the influence of anime and manga were for children's wellbeing, the Nonexistent Youth Bill and its progeny Bill 156 were long overdue and unnecessary, since the Miyazaki case happened a good two decades before and Miyazaki himself was executed two years before the bill was first introduced. The subculture of anime and manga has become a force of its own, sweeping the globe and defining childhood with franchises like Pokémon. In actuality, the stakes of Bill 156 were never simply about keeping youths healthy, but about maintaining the status quo of the post-capitalist global economy. In the aforementioned report, *The Guardian* named Japan and Russia the only G8 nations as of 2008 that still permitted the owning of child pornography provided it was not for commercial use. Governance over youth and their health was a constitutive part of trade agreements and global markets. Notably, what Japan was pressured to implement was more than a normative model of youth development towards maturity. It was a neoliberal ideal of youth based on *consumption*. This explains why, as tension and

drama built up around Bill 156, voices emerged within Japan blaming the government for not doing enough to promote Japan's cultural products abroad, leading to the rise of South Korea as a market rival.[11] As a response to the criticism, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) founded the Creative Industries Promotion Office to launch the campaign "Cool Japan," a term derived from Douglas McGray's formulation "Japan's gross national cool" in *Foreign Policy* back in 2002.[12] METI announced the inclusion of animation as one of the "strategic sectors" to "drive the nation's economic growth" in June 2010, while in the same month Ishihara vowed to push through regulations on anime and manga in a revised bill after the original Nonexistent Youth Bill was rejected. At the end of the year, as the Nonexistent Youth Bill was recreated as Bill 156 and gained momentum in the Assembly, the Japanese government pledged to inject over 19 billion yen into the creative industry in 2011 with the objective of retaining and capitalizing on "Japan's national cool."[13]

Japan performed a self-contradictory maneuver: on the one hand, it planned to pump capital into manga and anime industries that had hitherto thrived on their own through grassroots dissemination without any government support. On the other hand, it took measures to rein in the industries' creativity by instituting self-censorship on the part of creators for fear of incurring fines and losing sales avenues. Bill 156 was passed in December of 2010 despite resistance and was projected to take full effect starting July 2011. To protest the bill, ten major manga publishers threatened to boycott the upcoming

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[11] "Promoting 'Cool Japan,'" *The Japan Times* Editorials, August 15, 2010, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2010/08/15/editorials/promoting-cool-japan/#.W8p05MRReUn
[12] Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy*, No. 130, May—Jun. 2002, 44-54.
[13] Mairi Mackay, "Can Japan Profit from Its National 'Cool'?" CNN, November 19, 2010, http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/11/19/japan.cool.money/index.html.

2011 Tokyo International Anime Fair, arguably the biggest anime tradeshow in Japan. The then-prime minister of Japan, Naoto Ken, had to mediate between the publishers and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government headed by Ishihara to ensure that the Fair would proceed as planned. Unexpectedly, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan just days before the Fair was scheduled to take place. In the aftermath of the quake and the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Fair was cancelled. The project of Cool Japan was also put off until 2012. Looking back years after Bill 156 and Cool Japan were put into effect, both failed to yield the substantial results they had aimed for. The dearth of cases where manga works were restricted or considered for restriction by Bill 156 suggests that Ishihara manufactured a moral crisis to further his bid for a fourth term as governor, which he indeed won in 2011. Cool Japan, despite its flashy-sounding title and ambitious aims, was criticized unanimously by celebrity entertainers, industry insiders, and journalists alike for squandering an exorbitant budget of 84 billion yen on inept business ventures that were at best tangentially related to the content industry that made Japan "cool." Investments in obscure products such as the abacuses and gauze makers, or antiquated shopping venues like upscale department stores overseas and tourism TV channels, showed how clueless and disconnected from the creative sector the Japanese government actually was.[14]

II.   Globalization through Governmentalization of Youth

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[14] Master Plaster, "After Four Years Cool Japan Is '4.4 Billion Yen in the Hole' and Continuing to Show Few Results," SoraNews, April 30, 2018, https://soranews24.com/2018/04/30/after-four-years-cool-japan-is-4-4-billion-yen-in-the-hole-and-continuing-to-show-few-results/.

In the meantime, anime and manga, two of the mainstays of Japan's cultural soft power, have continued to grow and make inroads globally regardless of the Cool Japan project. According to the Association of Japanese Animation (AJA), Japan's anime industry has entered another wave of "anime boom" and set a record in 2016 by surpassing the 2 trillion-yen mark in revenue for the first time. AJA attributes the growth of the market to a whopping increase in overseas sales since 2013, while the domestic market remained stagnant due to the decline of traditional distribution channels like TV, video or other physical media, and merchandise.[15] The vibrancy of Japan's anime industry has come to be sustained more by international than native consumption. The importance of Bill 156 was eclipsed when Japan decided to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2013. The pledge to unify copyright laws and intellectual property rights provisions to be on par with the regulations of the United States worried the fandom and the industry alike, as fan-derivative activities, from fanzines to cosplay, have been an integral part of anime and manga subculture driving its global success. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, a TPP enthusiast, had to issue a special statement identifying *dōjinshi*, the Japanese term for self-published works, as *shinkokuzai*, a crime that cannot be prosecuted without a formal complaint from the victim.[16] Insofar as it does not share the same market as the original work and thereby causes the potential loss of profits of copyright holders, Abe reassures, *dōjinshi* is deemed *shinkokuzai* and remains off-limits to TPP's unilateral copyright enforcement. Obviously enough, Abe's statement itself is as

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[15] The Association of Japanese Animation (AJA), "Anime Industry Report 2017 Summary (Revision)," January 2018, http://aja.gr.jp/english/japan-anime-data.

[16] Eric Stimson, "Prime Minister Abe: Dōjinshi Safe Under TPP," *Anime News Network*, April 4, 2016, accessed November 27, 2018. https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/interest/2016-04-09/prime-minister-abe-dojinshi-safe-under-tpp/.100782.

arbitrary and flimsy as the many provisions mandated by TPP, since the profitability of the original products has always been inseparable from and positively enmeshed with the sale of *dōjinshi* and fanart. Comiket, the *dōjinshi* fair held biennially in Tokyo and a Mecca for fan-derivative works, has thrived in the grey area of copyright violations and tacit permissions from publishers and original creators. Established in 1975, Comiket has grown to be the world's largest fan convention, attracting regularly more than half a million attendees and navigating what John Fiske calls "a shadow cultural economy" of fandom that bolsters and supplements the cultural industries of anime and manga.[17]Abe's appeasement of anime and manga fans indirectly acknowledges such a shadow cultural economy and the high stakes of TPP ratification in dismantling a low-cost and yet lucrative unofficial economic sector.

As Donald J. Trump took office and withdrew from TPP on the third day of his presidency, the imminent threat posed by TPP's copyright provisions was temporarily held off. Notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that from Bill 156 to TPP, from a local morality-based ruling to an international trade agreement stipulating copyright protections, the youth subculture of anime and manga is being turned into a site of governmentality, a field of intervention where an ensemble of apparatuses of power with varying degrees of intensities transact and interact. In his lecture on governmentality, Michel Foucault argues that the shift from the Machiavellian "art of government" to modern political science as we know it today happens when population starts to be conceived as a problem. With exponential population growth in the eighteenth century, specific issues such as mortality, birthrate, education, and health in general gave rise to a

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[17] John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: The Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 2002), 30-49.

new set of knowledge that rendered population a statistical amalgam irreducible to the

administrative power of the state. Disciplinary techniques henceforth become

disarticulated from the juridical-political rule of the sovereignty and rearticulated into

governmental apparatuses, specifically targeting population with a clear objective of

maximizing the economic effects of population. Economy is no longer narrowly defined

as and modelled by the family, which remains instrumental in institutionalizing marriage,

reproduction, and vaccination, to name a few. Rather, economy comes to denote an

isolated level of reality distinct from and yet intertwined with the sovereignty and

administrative disciplines, encompassing a whole complex of calculations and procedures

exercised to administer life from disciplining bodies on the individual level to managing

a population as a collective aggregate. In Foucault's conceptualization, "[t]he new

science called 'political economy' arises out of the perception of new networks of

continuous and multiple relations between population, territory, and wealth."[18] What

ensues is governmentality, that is, modes of intervention in regulating and mobilizing

"the field of economy and population."

    Such new economies of power usher in what Foucault terms biopower,

accompanied by "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the

subjugation of bodies and the control of populations."[19] Notably, Foucault premises his

concept of governmentality on Guillaume de La Perrière's definition that "government is

the right disposition of things, arranged so as to lead to a convenient end."[20] As Foucault

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[18] Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Power: The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 3* (New York: The New Press, 2015), 217.
[19] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 140.
[20] Foucault, "Governmentality," 208-209.

emphasizes, the notion of government in La Perrière does not entail territory, but instead foregrounds the "imbrication of man and things" and calibrates men in relation to things which, apart from resources and subsistence tied to the territory, also includes "customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking." In other words, governmentality proceeds not merely from the force of biopower that regulates the microphysics of the body and the macroeconomics of the population—rather, in addition to aiming at "the disposition of things," the intervention of government also aims at *men's* disposition shaped by and shaping their enmeshment with things. The art of government shifts to a science, constituted of modes of knowledge (*savoir*) that keeps men's temperament, inclination, desire, and bodily conduct constantly in check through disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms at home, school, work, in the military, etc. To wit, government is concerned about both the body and mind of a population.

Foucault's concept of governmentality, with biopower as its agent has gained critical currency, in an era of neoliberal globalization wherein the nation-state is deterritorialized and reterritorialized by the market.[21] Traditional forms of sovereign power keeps retreating, with their importance replaced by the population which, when managed properly, propels consumption and production, which in turn accumulate capital and wealth beyond the physical confines of a given territory. Built on Foucault's theories, treatises on the current stage of globalization have noted that the tandem movement of market integration and race wars waged in the name of defending a peaceful global order an ongoing biopolitical project with the life of the multitude at stake.[22] Considered in this

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[21] Leerom Mevovoi, "Global Society Must be Defended: Biopolitics Without Boundaries." *Social Text* 91, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer 2007): 53-79.
[22] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

way, the Nonexistent Youth Bill and TPP are exercises of biopower that zone in on a demographic, i.e. the youth consuming manga and anime, upon which both moral order and geopolitical economic security are predicated. Yet at the same time, instruments of governmentality include the regulation and discipline of consumption patterns, specifically, of the desire and attention of the target demographic. The political economy of neoliberal capitalist globalization simultaneously enacts biopower and what Bernard Stiegler names psychopower, in creating a brave new world under a global, totalizing governance operating from the inside out.

A cursory look at Ishihara's attempt to regulate and censor cultural productions might seem all too familiar and nothing out of the ordinary: the State and the Law try to contain the cultural life of communities in the name of protecting the "youth." The fear of contamination of the youth outlined in Bill 156 is, in a way, a restage of Socrates's legal drama in twentieth-first century Japan, with the difference being that more than the health of the youth, who will soon become the mainstay of the republic, is at stake: the global political economy is as well. The implicit assumption in Ishihara's discourse and the bill for which he vouches is that the minds of the youth are a *tabula rasa* susceptible to the influence of improper cultural contents and therefore needing protection. As expected of Ishihara, who is infamous for his vitriolic essentialist discourse of *nihonjinron* ("Japaneseness"), he sees the passage of the bill as intrinsic to Japanese values by arguing that "[i]t is the conscience of the Japanese. You cannot possibly show such things to your own children" when first proposing the bill.[23] "Your

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[23] Lucy J. Miller, "Ishihara Shintaro's Manga Moral Panic: The Homogenizing Rhetoric of Japanese Nationalism," in *Intercultural Communication in Japan: Theorizing Homogenizing Discourse*, edited by Satoshi Toyosaki and Shinsuke Eguchi (New York: Routledge, 2017), 145-158.

own children" and the appeal to "the conscience of the Japanese," in Ishihara's slippery

equation, speaks for the entire Japanese population and their naturally-endowed moral

character. Yet, the idea of protecting a specific demographic population called the

"youth" (*shōnen*) in the legal domain was not introduced until the end of the nineteenth

century as part of the modernization effort. The concepts of "youth" and "protection"

were first linked together when Japan attempted to modernize its legal systems and

institute juvenile jurisprudence during the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). In Yoshinaka

Nobuhito's historical account of Japanese juvenile laws, there were no concrete legal

writings and law enforcement regarding juvenile offenders before the mid-nineteenth

century.[24] Earlier criminal laws were largely written in Chinese and heavily influenced by

Confucian philosophy and its ethical system, in which the notion of the youth or the

"minor" was either barely mentioned or imbedded in a social hierarchy governed by

elders and moral superiors.[25] It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century

when Japan strove to break away from the legacy of Chinese laws and embrace the legal

systems of the West, that the youth assumed a distinct legal identity that demanded

special guidance and "protection."

Notably, youth emerges as a governable, governmentalized category as Japan

embraces the "delinquent" of the modern, i.e. Western, police state as Foucault suggests

in *Discipline and Punish*.[26] The Kei-ho (penal code) of 1880, the first set of criminal

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[24] Yoshinaka Nobuhito, "Historical Analysis of the Juvenile Justice System in Japan," in *Hiroshima Hogaku (The Hiroshima Law Journal)*, Vol.20 No.3 (1997): 302-292.

[25] In Confucius' moral orbit, the youth, the children, have a similar position to that of women, whose well-being is solely dependent on the virtuous endowment of the patriarchs, exemplified by the figures of the father, the teacher, the noble sage and the king. In other words, if the patriarch can adhere to moral principles, his virtue will naturally exude and as a consequence, the minor—the children, the youth and the women—will be taken care of.

[26] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

codes written under the influence of European law, categorized juveniles into three age groups (under the age of 12, age 12 to 15, and age 16 to 19), according to which different degrees of criminal responsibility and punishments were given. The Disciplinary Institute (*Choji-jyo*) was also implemented at this time to house the juvenile offenders specifically; although allegedly intended to "educate" them, the basic function of the Choji-jyo system, as Yoshinaka points out, "remained in punishment and chastisement completely."[27] However, in 1990, the Kanka-ho (Reformatory law) took on a different role than the incarceratory function of the Choji-jyo system and Kai-ho. The Kanko-ho, the predecessor of the Shōnen -Kyogo-ho (Law Concerning the Education and Protection for Juveniles) of 1933, signified a major shift in that it aimed to incorporate the then-prevailing progressive ideals of "juvenile protection" in Europe and America, and became a kind of "quasi-welfare law for juveniles."[28] In addition to the pre-existing Choji-jyo, Kanka-in (reform school) was established to protect and educate juvenile offenders in the form of home or private schooling. The educational institution of Kanka-in was later turned into a research facility as Kyogo-in (child Education and Training Home) in which studies on the personalities of juveniles were conducted. Institutions were henceforth established to develop tactics and knowledge so as to enact "apparatuses of security," in Foucault's words, through disciplining in the name of safeguarding youth.[29]

Although this law governing the welfare of juveniles was not given precedence after the implementation of the Shōnen-ho (Juvenile Law) in 1922—a criminal law for

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[27] Yoshinaka, "Historical," 298.
[28] Ibid., 298-297.
[29] Foucault, "Governmentality."

juveniles that has until now remained the main legislation for the treatment of juveniles—certain aspects of the welfare law were incorporated into the Shōnen-ho. Protective measures such as "individualization of treatments" tried to factor a juvenile's background and temperament into the prosecution process, and therefore a division with a similar function to Kyogo-in was set up in order to study each individual juvenile's proclivity and analyze the relationship between the juvenile and the offense he or she committed.[30] Moreover, as the child-saver movement in the United States inaugurated juvenile court and initiated a series of reforms regarding the legal treatments of juveniles at the turn of the twentieth century, Japan followed suit and adopted the practice of subclassifying the "pre-delinquent juvenile" from the rather general term "juvenile offenders."[31] In other words, the Shōnen ho of 1922 was not simply punitive by nature; it was also preventative through a systematic procedure of examining and rectifying the behavior and propensities of the youth (*shōnen*). Foucault's studies on the emergence of homosexuality in the history of the West provide a template for understanding this development: the youth at this moment in Japanese legal history became a persona, a character with a carefully documented biography. Even the future of the youth needs to and can be prescribed through legal intervention.[32] As Yoshinaka points out, precisely because of this "forward-looking character," the Shonen-Ho was originally named "the Law of Love." Such a euphemism as "the Law of Love" dramatizes the inherent contradiction in a juvenile criminal law like the Shonen-ho which claims to incorporate justice in love and vice

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[30] Ibid., 296.
[31] Ibid., 295.
[32] Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Vol 1.*

versa—whatever love means in this context—and where the enactment of justice is simultaneously a noble cause of "love."

So, what does the history of Japanese juvenile criminal law have to do with Ishihara's aforementioned crusade to protect the youth by banning sexually explicit materials in manga, anime and related software such as video games? A position shared by both the supporters and the opponents of Ishihara's new bill is that at issue here is the "content." For the advocates of the Nonexistent Youth Bill and Bill 156, any potential danger posed by manga, anime and video games lies in the content, especially that which contains representations of sex and sexuality. As aforementioned, Ishihara's targets are not simply pornography or portrayals of "abnormal" sexual acts involving violence, which have already raised concerns within and outside Japan.[33] Ishihara campaigns to snuff out any depictions of sex once and for all, including any allusions to "the sex life of married couples." Therefore, unsurprisingly, he vows to purge all deviant forms of sexuality when presenting a revision to the bill: "We've got homosexuals casually appearing on television. Japan has become far too untamed. I'll go forward with [this bill] with a sense of mission in heart."[34] Sex and sexuality—whether normal or abnormal, real or virtual—are indiscriminately ferocious monsters that need to be tamed, controlled and eliminated. Paradoxically, when the dissenters, constituted by the producers and creators

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[33] For instance, in 2009, the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women observed that Japanese pornographic video games and cartoons are predominated by the portrayals of "rape, gang rape, stalking and the sexual molestation of women girls." The contents of these video games and cartoons risk "normalization of sexual violence." Notably, the committee urged Japan to include virtual child pornography in Japan's revised Act Banning Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. See more information at: http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2009-08-28/united-nations-group-urges-japan-to-ban-explicit-games-manga.

[34] "Japan: Governor Should Retract Homophobic Comments: Top Tokyo Official Calls Homosexuals 'Deficient,'" *Human Rights Watch,* last modified February 1, 2011, https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/01/japan-governor-should-retract-homophobic-comments#.

of anime, manga and video games specifically, protest that the new restriction is an infringement on their freedom of expression, their concern is also centered on the "content." For them, portrayals of sex and sexuality, like any other representations, are considered artistic expressions and therefore should not suffer censorship.

However, considering how juvenile jurisprudence came into existence in the Japanese context, both camps seemed to miss another dimension of the issue at hand. While much of the debate revolve around the "content" of anime, manga and video games, that is, what can be shown and what should remain closeted, I argue that what is also at stake is the status of the "minor," the "youth" whose wellbeing is dependent upon the media "contents" designated as appropriate or inappropriate for them. As I point out earlier, the Nonexistent Youth Bill forbids sexual illustrations of youths in books, drawings, films and animation, but the ban does *not* apply to photography or film of real children or youth. To put it simply, depictions of sexuality are bad enough, but titillating images of virtual youths engaging in real or virtual sex are especially threatening. The real target of the bill is the desire, the mind of the youth. Ishihara is not a lone fighter in carrying out his mission of protecting the youth from the temptations of natively produced virtual media such as anime and video games. Long before Ishihara's foray into the virtual world, American conservative Christians launched an online petition addressed to President Bush, declaring that "Anime is a perverse, evil, insidious form of animation from the dark land of Japan, and is corrupting America's youth at unprecedented rates."[35] The petition denounced two popular *shōnen* romance mangas,

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[35] http://www.petitiononline.com/cutiepie/petition.html. Dennis Fuller created "The Lets Save America-Ban Anime Now Petition to George Bush" as part of the campaign for Responsible Americans against Child Exploitation. The petition collected a total of 8833 signatures; however, the precise number of supporters remained unclear. Quite a few anime fans left signatures in order to sabotage the campaign. The

Ah My Goddess and *Love Hina*, for either encouraging illicit love affairs between a young girl and an old man or blatantly portraying stories that verge on pedophilia and pornography. Most perniciously, these shows "cause children under the age of 18 to think they are capable of love."[36] Hence, anime is an evil foreign threat, and banning anime is a task of utmost national urgency since "anime is a dark scourge upon our beautiful nation, and we don't need this Japanese filth corrupting the hearts of the children."[37] From America to the other shore of the Pacific, from a micro-level grassroots online petition to macro-level legal reform, a truly global effort seeks to rescue gullible, easily impressionable youth before anime and manga cause moral degeneracy and emotional confusion, because the minor under the age of eighteen wouldn't know yet how to "love." Not coincidentally, this proposition that the minor lacks the right kind of judgment and capacity to love corresponds to the "Law of Love," the prototype of Japanese juvenile law: precisely because the minor cannot love properly, the law needs to render love to the minor—even through legal intervention involving discipline and punishment.

III.   Culturing the Children

As demonstrated earlier, the establishment of Japanese juvenile law was greatly influenced by European and American laws, and the transformation of youth into a

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petition was closed. Numerous anime/manga forums and blogs mention this petition. To access Fuller's petition letter, see Doris V. Sutherland's blog entry, "'Ban Anime Now': Geekdom's Love-Hate Relationship with Censors," March 6, 2017, https://dorisvsutherland.wordpress.com/2017/03/06/ban-anime-now-geekdoms-love-hate-relationship-with-censors/.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

distinct identity and its gradual entry into the public discourses of law is very much a

modern phenomenon and an experience shared by the West.[38] From Rousseau's *Emile*,

the hitherto nebulous being of the minor has become a clear blank slate endowed with the

capacity of knowing, and the responsibility of society is to provide education and

guidance so as to cultivate the minor towards maturity. In his book *Taking Care of Youth*

and the Generations, Bernard Stiegler revisits Kant's treatise on enlightenment,

highlighting the importance of rethinking youth as *Bildung*, the *formation* in education

towards both personal and collective maturation, which is the basis of *Kultur* (culture)

and *Aufklärung* (enlightenment).[39] The Kantian ideal of enlightenment has a decisive

impact in shaping the romantic imagination of youth, which ushers in the beginning of

the modern education system, outlining and tracking the development of an individual

from childhood to adulthood. As a response to this education reform, children's books,

for instance, have evolved into a definitive literary genre as children's literature. The first

periodical devoted to the reviews of children's books, aptly named *The Guardian of*

Education, further classifies "the rising generation" into different age groups by

cataloging books to be reviewed with indexes like "Examinations of Books for Children"

(for children under fourteen) and "Books for Young Persons" (for readers between

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[38] This is not to say that youth rarely appears in the social imaginary before Japanese modernity. Quite the contrary, the evanescent beauty of youth has always been a predominant theme in Japanese classical literature, as best exemplified in *Tale of Genji* and poetry during the Heian period. The figure of the beautiful young man is central to portraying male-male friendship, and this motif has persisted and remained much alive in today's popular culture, constituted by anime and manga. See Paul Schalow's *A Poetics of Courtly Male Friendship in Heian Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2006). *Shōnen* (young boy) and *shōjo* (young girl) are unmistakably the major subjects of anime and manga, and even have become a sub-genre by themselves.
[39] Bernard Stiegler, "The Battle of Intelligence for Maturity," in *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 17-35.

fourteen and twenty-one).[40] When printing technology became more affordable and widely available from the nineteenth century onward, these "indexes" also served to carve out distinctive market niches as books gradually became mundane commodities and hence part of cultural industries.[41] At the same time, the concern for the "rising generations" enabled various social movements and propelled reforms that attended to the rights and wellbeing of the minor. Apart from the aforementioned child-saver movement, whose insistence on prevention and education as intervention had an impact on the emerging juvenile judicial system, the Factory Acts in England during the first half of the nineteenth century pushed for the regulation of child labor. However, the "productivity" of rising generations is not only regulated in public institutions such as schools and workplaces. The scientific disciplines of sexology and psychoanalysis gave rise to the figure of the masturbating child, whose undue indulgence in sexual desire in private domains also requires monitoring and control.[42] These examples attest to the long-term processes and continuously expanding mechanisms for culturing the minor as a population whose physical and cognitive development, as well as its libidinal energy, needs to be *economized* so as to become *rightly* productive.

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[40] M. O. Grenby, "'A Conservative Woman Doing Radical Things': Sarah Trimmer and *The Guardian of Education,"* in *Culturing the Child, 1690–1914: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers*, ed. Donelle Ruwe (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press/Children's Literature Association, 2005), 137-162. Trimmer, one of the key figures presiding on the editorial board of *The Guardian of Education*, sees the radical thinking and democratic fervor inspired by the current French revolution as dangerously atheistic. She also regards the ideas promulgated by Rousseau as controversial and heretical and believes that the damage created by this kind of radicalism will "infect the minds of the rising generation, through the medium of *Books of Education* and *Children's Books*" [emphasis Trimmer's] (Trimmer, Sarah. *The Guardian of Education*.T1:2, 10, 81, 145). Therefore, her mission is to safeguard tradition, and her very first task is to select the right kind of children's books, namely Christian books, for parents. Although Trimmer's political stance differs significantly from later contributors such as William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Trimmer's notion of the "rising generations" becomes the blueprint for the board.

[41] Benedict Anderson, *The Imaginary Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[42] Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*.

The modern history of youth is, in many aspects, configured by what Foucault calls biopower, and the culturation of this new species called youth is one of the effects created by the biologizing force of the modern state. In the final chapter of *History of Sexuality* and in the lecture "Faire Vivre et Laisser Mourir: La Naissance du Racism," Foucault introduces the concept of biopower by first mapping out the shift from the classical sovereign right to "to take life and let live" to biopower's intervention in order to "make live and let die."[43] For Foucault, techniques of power work in two different but mutually inclusive mechanisms of individualizing the body through disciplinary practices while optimizing population through bio-regulation of the state. Sexuality, as Foucault contends, is one of the most important "concrete arrangements (*agencements concrets*)" that coordinate "the disciplinary technologies of body" and "the regulatory technology of life."[44] The epistemological pressure centered on sexuality locates the body in a network of power which is simultaneously normalizing and productive, since this modern form of power, i.e. biopower, aims to regularize the biological processes of man-as-species and dictate "how to live." As Foucault further elucidates, biopower is the technology of the body, and more specifically, it deals with "a global mass of the body": "what we are dealing with in this new technology of power is not exactly society (or at least not the social body, as defined by the jurists), nor is it the individual-as-body. It is a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they might be indefinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted."[45] And this Malthusian body defines biopower, which in turn becomes the driving force of capitalism: "[t]his bio-power was without question an

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[43] Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, and '*Society Must Be Defended': Lectures at the College de France 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 1997).
[44] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 249.
[45]Ibid., 245.

indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes."[46] Capitalism, Foucault emphasizes, is the product and the reinforcement of this formidable biologizing impulse, not vice versa.

Similarly, this double process of biopower also underlies the treatment of youth: on the one hand, as in Japanese juvenile law, the policy of "individualization of treatments" and the emphasis on the "background check" through pseudo-scientific research gives birth to a singular body with personality and history, based on which the punishment is meted out. On the other hand, the law goes beyond inscribing the youth's body with discipline: the ultimate purpose of the law is to utilize youth for production and thereby maintain the "health" of youth; i.e., to *make them live* is crucial. Legal actions are conceived and undertaken to ensure the mental as well as physical health of youth: as instanced by the Factory Acts, the restriction of work hours of child labor is imposed so as to stretch the lifespan of each individual youth; the inception of Japanese juvenile criminal law also marks the institutionalization of welfare care for youth, the latter of which transforms into the Child Welfare Law of 1947 (the Jido-Fukeshi-ho). And in the twenty-first century, the concern for the health of youth has become an international affair and the battle is elevated to a different level, that is, *how to protect the youth from the non-existent youth in the virtual world?* Moreover, concomitant with the centripetal force of biopower that thrusts the youth body into assembly lines, there is a centrifugal force that systematically expels the useless, "unproductive" populations. In

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[46] Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, 141.

Japan in particular, the aging population has caused much anxiety and is said to be held

partially responsible for the intractable economic slump that has plagued the nation since

the bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s. In the aftermath of the Tōhoku

earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan on March 11, 2011, many news commentators

argued that although Japan had always survived natural disasters and successfully rebuilt

the nation after two atomic bombings, this time it might be much more difficult to

recover due to the burden of an aging population.[47] In other words, the elderly devolves

into a racialized species, a "burden" that threatens to slow down the production machine

of capitalism while the youth becomes "a rising generation" worthy of "investment."

IV.   From Biopower to Psychopower: Attention Capture and Collective Minoritization

What exactly does the law invest in the minor, particularly in an age in which post-

industrial capitalism is less driven by production than by consumption? If the function of

the law is never singular but plural and is at once prohibitive and productive, then what

kind of subject does Ishihara's bill aim to produce—a subject who is barred from any

sexuality-related contents but who can nevertheless access and "consume" other

materials? What if the process of consumption itself is sexual? Given that Ishihara's new

bill is an amendment to the Tokyo Youth Health Ordinance, then what specific "kind" of

health does Ishihara claim to safeguard and what does this ideal of health entail?

Moreover, supposing that this ruling, together with the petition for banning anime, can

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[47] Alan Wheatley, "Special Report - Japan quake unlikely to shock economy," Reuters, last modified March 14, 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-55538620110314.

reorient the *attention* of the minor towards presumably "healthier" materials, what if the "attention" in question is already missing in the first place, considering ADHD is recognized as a pervasive epidemic among young generations?[48] In what specific ways does attention matter in the preservation of youth, or as described in the petition of "Let's Ban Anime Now," how does the seizure of youth's attention come to be an important issue verging on a national crisis?

Bernard Stiegler addresses the problem of attention deficiency and hyper-attention created by the televisual programming industries; for Stiegler, "attention capture" defines the predominant service economy in the current phrase of capitalism in which "the State's biopower is transformed into market psychopower."[49] Stiegler argues that Foucault's notion of biopower is "the formative condition" for capitalism in the nineteenth century, under which optimizing the productive force is the primary concern. Techniques of discipline are created by the state, and the state forms and anatomizes the "social atoms" as individuals who, once under disciplinary control, will be a-*mass*ed together as a population for production.[50] From the twentieth century onward, as Deleuze also points out, societies of control have gradually replaced these disciplinary societies.[51] The latter is a technique of power that organizes and disciplines social relations in "spaces of enclosure"—from the family onto school, the factory, the military, prison and the hospital, but as the new technologies deterritorialize economic forces, together with increasing overproduction after World War II, the disciplinary power of the nation-state

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[48] N. Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes," in *Profession*, (2007): 187-199, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25595866.pdf.
[49] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 128.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Gilles Deleuze, "Society of Control," in *L'Autre Journal*, no. 1 (May 1990).

has transformed into the management and modulating function of the market, the enclosed factory into the ever-expanding global corporation, profit into stock. The individual body under this matrix of control is reduced to a "code," data or sample. Stiegler elaborates on Deleuze's idea and emphasizes that this "state of the market" exercises its control through "psychopower," specifically through the psychotechnologies of marketing industries devoted to "stimulate" buyers and create needs and "motivations" to consume: "It is no longer a question, then—and today less than ever—of controlling the population as a producing machine, but rather as a consuming machine, and the danger is no longer biopower but psychopower as both control and production— production as motivations."[52] Therefore, "market revolution" ensues when research is done to control, *program* and condition the motivation as well as the behavior of consumers. Ernest Dichter, the American psychologist pioneering market-oriented motivation research, declares that the premise of his research is to find "the means of pre-conditioning the client to buy through 'engraving certain characteristics in the brain.'"[53]

Hence, the challenge faced by service industries is not simply the excess of commodity, but the problem of how to "cultivate" a population of consumers ready to subscribe to a "service," a kind of product that can be as intangible as "experience" or "affect." One salient example is the entertainment industry, which claims to provide consumers with excitement and satisfaction when they consume audio-visual products. However, following Stiegler's conceptualization of psychopower, a commonplace marketing strategy such as TV programming literally *program*s the brain, and the advertisement cliché of "attention capture" in fact fittingly describes the psychic control

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[52] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 131-132.
[53] Ibid.,132.

enacted by the televisual industry. According to Herbert Marcuse, quoted by Stiegler, television has become an "automatic superego" manipulating attention,[54] whereby the audience is expected to *pay attention,* in both a literal and figurative sense. With the advent of new technologies such as the Internet, attention has come to be the most prized, profit-producing asset and investment, along with megadata, as Facebook illustrates. In the past decade, scholars from the fields of information technology and economics have coined the term "the attention economy" to describe "the new currency of economy."[55] For instance, Thomas Davenport and John Beck argue that attention is a "scarce commodity" that can be monetized, and in their overtly simplified definition, attention is a one-time event that the subject cathects on one piece of information: "[Attention is] is focused mental engagement on a particular item of information. Items come into our awareness, we attend to a particular item, and then we decide whether to act."[56] Some e-commerce analysts push Davenport and Beck's argument further, claiming that attention is the only "payment" levied to "free" social networking and microblogging services like Twitter.

However, the attention economy is certainly not new, nor is "attention capture" an innovative technique enabled by new electronic technologies. As Stiegler notes, "strategies for concentrating attention are not unique to our time: to concentrate or capture attention is to *form* it. Reciprocally, to form attention is to capture it, as every teacher knows."[57] The Greeks came up with different techniques of forming and

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[54] Ibid., 9.
[55] Thomas Davenport and John C. Beck, *The Attention Economy: The New Currency of Business* (Cambridge: Harvard Business Review Press, 2001).
[56] Ibid., 20.
[57] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 17.

capturing attention, which entailed technologies of the *spirit* (*espirit*) through the practice of *hypomnemata*, i.e. writing, and technologies of the body, including dancing, exercise regimens, gymnastics and even the daily routines of walking and running.[58] These attention-capture techniques involve what Foucault calls the "technologies of the self," incorporating practices (*askesis*) towards *epimeleia*, care of the self, through which "individuals were led to focus their *attention* on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen" (emphasis added).[59] In particular, *hypomnemata*, as Foucault explains in one interview, is itself a technological intervention redefining the culture of self in the time of Plato: "This new technology was as disrupting as the introduction of the computer into private life today."[60] Functioning as a notebook, reminder and memorial, *hypomnemata* is a kind of writing that records, registers and accounts for what has been taught, learned and thought about. In other words, writing, in Stiegler's words, "is already an 'auto-capturing' of attention" by concentrating and maintaining the attention on the otherwise transient speeches and thoughts.[61] Thus, Foucault emphasizes that *hypomnemata* is "a material memory" and its goal is "to make of the recollection of the fragmentary *logos* transmitted by teaching, listening, or reading a means to establish as adequate and as perfect a relationship of oneself to oneself as possible."[62] Ultimately, writing, as an exercise for "the *techne tou biou*," art of living, is a sociopolitical act of *taking care* of as well as taking *responsibility* for oneself since this "self" in question is

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[58] Ibid., 36.
[59] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality: Volume 2*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1985), 5.
[60] Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 363.
[61] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 24.
[62] Foucault, *The Reader*, 365.

not secreted in conscience waiting for confession or salvation, as in self-writing in

Christian literature, but a self that is always being shaped and aiming for "the perfect

government of the self."

Hence, writing at its earliest inception is not a process of individualization in

which individuals are disciplined into social atoms and further projected onto a "machine

of production" (as the *author as producer*) and a "machine of consumption" (as the

prospective *reader and consumer*). Rather, writing as a technique of forming attention is,

as Stiegler asserts, "a process of individuation that is both psychic and collective."[63]

Stiegler's notion of individuation derives from what Gilbert Simondon calls

"transindividuation":

> [T]he concept of 'transindividuation is one that does not rest with the individuated 'I' or with the interindividuated 'We,' but is the process of co-individuation within a preindividuated milieu and in which both the 'I' and the 'We' are transformed through one another. Transindividuation, then, is the basis for all social transformation and is therefore a way of addressing what happens within education.[64]

In other words, in providing and creating a milieu for co-individuation of trans-

individuation, writing is fundamentally pedagogical and communal. In a crucial way,

hypomnemata is writing towards a pedagogy of self: by keeping an account of and

contemplating the happenings, the discourse and even hearsay in a given community, the

self can learn to govern and be governed like a sovereign rule over the *polis*. Thus,

hypomnemata has a dual function of both "personal and administrative use" given that it

aims to take care of the self as a way to take care of the social, and vice versa. Moreover,

the practice of *hypomnemata* points to the fact that there is a temporal dimension to the

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[63] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 17.

[64] Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, "Transindividuation," in *e-flux Journal* 14 (March 2010), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61314/transindividuation/.

process of transindividuation enabled by writing. As *hypomnemata* is never an end product but under continuous revision and expansion, it becomes, in Foucault's words, "an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation."[65] The draft, the "accumulated treasure" of *hypomnemata* also provides the raw material for the development of treatises and theses.[66] To put it more specifically, writing as a practice can cultivate tradition, lineage and ultimately create a sense of "generation," in the sense of generating the next phase of individuation for the individual (i.e. self-transformation); generating co-individuation and transindividuation, of which the individual is part and without which the process of individuation will not occur in the first place; and ultimately generating an intergenerational relation as the premise of education.

The issues of "generation" and "education" become a primary concern when writing as a practice materializes into published books—*publications*—during the Enlightenment. As Stiegler explains, for the Enlightenment thinkers like Kant, public, as implicated in the word *publication*, refers to the public space, "the literate world" and "the republic of letters." Writing goes beyond the "auto-capturing" of attention in the practice of *hypomnemata*; with the innovation of printing technology, the circulation of a wide variety of publications, and the expansion of literacy facilitated by educational reform, writing is an exercise of addressing oneself to and capturing a reading public with the anticipation of reciprocity. At this point in history, the book more than ever has become the material *form* of forming attention, the major psychotechnique of attention capture. And most importantly, as Steigler contends, the literate "public" shaped by the emergent book culture is "a public capable of reaching that specific form of attention

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[65] Foucault, *The Reader*, 364.
[66] Foucault, *The Reader,* 374.

shared by the book and its author."[67] Notably, this specific form of attention does not simply mean the activities of writing/reading or imparting/receiving knowledge, but the cultivation of the critical faculty, the exercise of *critiquing* and *being exposed to critique*, and having the will as well as the courage to take up the responsibility of thinking and knowing. Writing is like what Socrates calls a *pharmakon*, which is simultaneously a cure and a poison, as well as a scapegoat. With this *critical* form of attention, Stiegler argues, "the book can just as likely suspend the reader in *immaturity*—starting with the writer as first reader—to 'replace understanding,' in which case the auto-capture of attention can become auto-alienation of the writer by the book itself, which writes him" (emphasis added).[68] In order for the book to provide a milieu for the public to form a critical sense of understanding, what matters is not so much what to think as *how to think*. By forming this crucial public space, the book also constitutes "nootechnics" as a mental and *spirit*ual technique to attain maturity.

This maturity should not be misunderstood as maturation of age, but instead points to a not necessarily linear and oftentimes fluctuating process to which the individual must *carefully attend*, and through which the individual learns to think *responsibly* as the individual in the collective. As Stiegler emphasizes, there is no such thing as "individual intelligence": "If maturity consists of the ability to think for oneself, such thinking is only thinking insofar as it takes place *before* the entire literate world (the sole basis for democratic majority—in both senses) as the circulation of thought that is always surpassing itself, thought *for* the other and *through* the other (through the other as

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[67] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 23.
[68] Ibid., 24.

thinker)."[69] As this sense of maturity underlies the Enlightenment paradigm of Bildung,

then education, in the broadest sense of the term, should not be reduced to the current

model of education that focuses on schooling while other loci of education—including

the family, workplace, courtroom, therapy couch, media, and any virtual and physical

spaces where the circuits of transindividuation and "inter-generational transmission" take

place—are largely either left unattended or relegated to institutional control and corporate

management. And with the increasingly institutionalized and corporatized school system,

school education is downgraded into a mere mechanism of giving "credits" and issuing

"credentials." The destruction of education does not simply indicate the malfunction of

school systems; rather, it deforms critical understanding, curtails the circulation of

thought and intelligence (which Stiegler defines as *interlegere* that connects "the

generations containing mind and *spirit*"),[70] and will eventually lead to "a state of

structural minority" and collective psychical "minoritization."

Stiegler's diagnosis of "minoritization" provides a refreshing and vitally

important framework in reconceptualizing the definition of the "minor." As outlined in

earlier sections of this chapter, the distinction between a "minor" and an "adult" comes to

be defined by a streamlined and streamlining model of education that produces and

oversees the individual from childhood to adulthood. In the meantime, the jurisprudential

notion of the minor and "age of majority" also naturalizes, necessitates the process of

"growing up," and conceives the transformation from immaturity to maturity as a

biological continuum, whereby the maturation process is imagined as a biological

destiny, and the psychological quality of maturity is all too readily conflated with the

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[69] Ibid., 34.
[70] Ibid.

physical state of adulthood. The function of the law, as exemplified by the establishment of juvenile law in Japan as well as in other modernizing and modernized societies, is to "align" the psychological and physical processes of maturation; to be more precise, the law provides the social and cultural imaginary for such an alignment to even exist as a norm. In a sense, juvenile delinquents and pre-delinquents are simultaneously biological mutations and psychological aberrations, in need of legal "treatment" as a "realignment procedure" so as to ensure the completion of a naturalized process towards "maturity." However, if education is most fundamentally about forming and sustaining attention, and maturity means the ability and the responsibility to exercise a critical form of attention, then such a synchronized *progression* towards psychological and physical maturity is in fact a fiction—which is why the external forces of the law and education system must constantly monitor this progression. This institutional matrix, comprised of the State, the school, the family, and psychiatry, enforces what Foucault identifies as a process of "normalization" through "the discovery of childhood" as the target of techniques of power and knowledge, whereby childhood becomes governmentalized. It is through the "government of children" that child development is normalized so as to ensure normative adulthood and legitimize the "government of men."[71]

As a matter of fact, a mature adult as imagined by the law can at any time easily "revert" back to be what Stiegler calls "an adult minor." Extending the Kantian idea of Aufklärung, Stiegler sees adulthood as "the affirmation of courage and will against laziness and cowardice." An adult minor is one who, due to laziness and cowardice, "avoid(s) the dialectical responsibility of thinking *at all,* and thus of knowing what [one]

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[71] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Picador, 1999), 48-50.

should 'serve.'"[72] Paradoxically, the hyper-industrial service economies, under the self-ennobling banners of "serving the public" and "serving what the public deserves," effect wholesale minoritization of adults by actively encouraging the relinquishment of the responsibility of thinking and knowing to programming industries and "customer specialists." Most perniciously, the service industries and cultural capitalism usurp and utilize the legal concepts of the minor and the major (adult) by turning them into prescriptive profiles of consumers, namely "target audiences" and consumer groupings. The distinction between the major and the minor comes to be defined by purchasing power and consumption habits, and attention is only formed insofar as it can make one finish an online "transaction." Whereas the critical form of attention required of a mature educated adult, as Stiegler emphasizes, entails "an *attende*, such waiting and a *critical* waiting,"[73] for the service industries and digital marketing that prize instant gratification above anything else, waiting could mean boredom and loss of attention, and hence the possibility of losing customers or clients. Therefore, on the one hand, service industries deliberately customize a market "segment" specifically for underage minors; on the other hand, the entire hyper-industrial service economy is predicated upon a "minoritized" form of attention. In other words, digital economies not only arrest the development of the minor by capturing their attention in immaturity, but also lead to the phenomenon of the adult minority and perpetual minoritization.

As mentioned earlier in this section, many argue that the attention economy has become the new mode of economy, and that attention is simultaneously the commodity

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[72] Stiegler, Taking Care, 22.
[73] Ibid., 38.

and payment in the "free economy" created by the web.[74] Michael H. Goldhaber, one of the early exponents of the attention economy, asserts that "attention transaction" has replaced monetary transaction, and attention is now a "wealth" indicator: "[G]etting attention is not a momentary thing; you build on stock you have every time you get any….Thus obtaining attention is obtaining a kind of enduring wealth, a form of wealth that puts you in a preferred position to get anything this new economy offers."[75] That is to say, attention is the new currency constituting a new form of property; moreover, "receiving" attention is similar to making a good investment, and the attention receiver is like a smart banker holding "stocks" with a competitive edge. Peculiarly, judging from Goldhaber's elaboration of the dynamics of the attention economy, he seems to lean more towards the "receiving" rather than the "giving" end of the attention transaction, as if one can really distinguish the individual receiving the attention from the individual whose attention is taken away—just like what happens in monetary transactions. Furthermore, in another text, Goldhaber portrays receiving attention as an indicator of "popularity" and hence a status of power: "When one has a huge number of fans, this attention wealth can be quite powerful."[76] Indeed, "free" social networking services such as Facebook and Twitter accumulate wealth by propagating and normalizing this mode of attention-capture as a means to amass "fans" and "followers." Admittedly, in Negri and Hardt's theoretical imagination, the Internet can constitute the new "common" and initiate the movement of the multitude, as instanced by the 2008 United States presidential election in which

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[74] Chris Anderson's two *New York Times* bestsellers, *The Long Tail* and *Free: The Future of a Radical Price* are good examples of such an argument.

[75] Michael H. Goldhaber, "The Attention Economy and the Net*," First Monday: Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet.* Vol. 2, Number 4-7, April 1997.

[76] See the abstract of Goldhaber submitted to the conference on "The Internet as Playground and Factory: A Conference on Digital Labor," Nov.12-14, 2009, New School, New York City.

Barack Obama utilized Facebook and Twitter during his campaign. Ironically, eight years later, Trump rose to power and won the 2016 presidential election, also by mobilizing the multitude through Twitter. More often than not, social networking services in the digital age turn out to be mere dramaturgy for self-promotion and self-aggrandizement, as exemplified by Trump. Whether the attention economy per se is the "new" economy, as Goldhaber insists, remains in question, especially given that the assumption of an existing "free" economy is itself a myth built upon willful unknowing and ignorance of the prevalence of economic injustice and inequality around the globe. And even if instant digital media has the potential to institute a political common, it takes much more than "fifteen minutes of fame" and the cult of celebrity to unravel the miasma of politics. The difficulty is not so much how to take the first step of calling for political change as how to *sustain the critical attention* required to foster and monitor long-term political transformation. It takes "an *attende*, a waiting and a *critical* waiting," as Stiegler puts it, a waiting full of rigor and vigilance, to really effect political change.

Therefore, the politics derived from attention capture should not be simply subsumed under the economy of receiving and getting attention; rather, the urgent task at hand is how to form and sustain attention, and specifically a critical form of attention. As introduced earlier, in Davenport and Beck's book, attention capture is narrowly and mistakenly defined as the "transaction" between the human subject and information, a singular event that begins when information enters the human subject's "awareness," and ends when the subject reacts to the stimuli. Not surprisingly, considering that Davenport is a scholar specializing in the business process of engineering and knowledge management, attention capture as identified by Davenport and Beck is a process in which

the human subject manages the information and acts accordingly. But Davenport and

Beck fail to account for how this human subject's awareness and attention come to exist

in the first place, and how the subject "chooses to act" on one particular piece of

information instead of others. The conceptual problem of Davenport and Beck's model,

and of the terms "attention economy" and "attention system" as renamed by Goldhaber,

lies in precisely this "splitting" of attention from a larger trans-individual, inter-

generational milieu in which the individual is situated in a commodified imaginary of

individualized selfhood. Goldhaber, in a similarly problematic fashion, also argues that

"getting attention is of primary value to individuals rather than organizations, and

attention also flows from individuals."[77] This discrete, individualized, and yet utterly

decontextualized and truly "digitalized" notion of attention capture is precisely what

Stiegler criticizes: current technologies short-circuit attention, and consequently deform

collective retention and eradicate cultural memory, which constitute the necessary

conditions for the emergence of transindividuation and inter-generational relations, that

is, education.[78] The enchanting dream of "getting connected" promised by service

industries and digital marketing in reality leads to a total disconnect between generations,

between the individual and the cultural environment in which they are embedded.

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[77] Goldhaber, "The Attention Economy and the Net," *First Monday*, Vol. 2, No. 4, April 7, 1997, https://www.firstmonday.org/article/view/519/440.

[78] As Stiegler points out, the techniques of forming attention are conditioned by the continuum of primary retention, secondary retention, and tertiary retention. Secondary retention creates the "condition" for primary attention, and primary retention and secondary retention together form the pretention as anticipator. Most importantly, Stiegler examines attention-formation on a collective level by defining tertiary retentions as supported by collective secondary retentions; that is, tertiary retention constitutes a cultural milieu from which primary retention derives. In a way, attention is "historical" since it documents cultural memory and the retention of memory will enact in the domains of bodily stimuli. Thus, the technique of forming attention is not only a process of individuation, but also necessarily a transindividuation that has a concrete impact on the next generations.

Moreover, the psychotechnologies of hyperindustrial economies not only sunder transindividual and intergenerational relations, but also engineer a new terrain of transindividuation threaded by digital networks. Stiegler defines the new attentional technologies enacted by high-tech industries and digital networks as the "psycho*technological"* system vis-à-vis the "psycho*technical*" apparatus as exemplified by the psychotechniques of attention-capture in the practice of *hypomnemata*. First, it is worth noting that by no means does Stiegler aim to privilege traditional literary practices and simply condemn new technologies, as many critics nostalgically lament the demise of writing and reading. Quite the contrary, in his homage to Foucault's treatise on *hypomnemata*, Stiegler emphasizes that writing was also at one time in history seen as a technological intrusion, and as demonstrated by the Enlightenment ideals of *Bildung* and *Aufklärung*, the activities deriving from the then-emerging book culture—including reading, writing, thinking, critiquing, teaching, publicizing and circulating—constitute what Stiegler calls the "technics."[79] In addition, Stiegler submits that the book is also a "pharmacological artifice" in the sense that the book can be a poison, short-circuiting attention if one does not engage in the process of *individuating* oneself towards a critical form of attention and understanding.[80] However, in psychotechnological systems of power, short-circuits and *individualization* (instead of *individuation*) become the norm, and moreover, psychotechnologies herald "a new age of reticulation" and reconfigure the

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[79] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1, the Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). Stiegler's idea of technics is derived from the Greek word techné, which means craftsmanship and art, as distinguished from the Greek word episteme that refers to "disinterested learning." For Stiegler, technics is not a theory of the "technical objects" per se; rather, he argues that the object would only become the object "only in its realization, in the experience of the object itself, or, as it were, on stage, and not at the time of conception" (75-76). In other words, technics is a study of the process of technical objects *becoming* objects and *performing* as objects.
[80] Stiegler, *Taking Care*. 24. See also Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff's "Transindividuation."

process of trans-individuation which by now has become "grammatised, that is, formalized, reproductible, and thus calculable and automatable."[81] Paradoxically, the theory of "attention economy" as proposed by Davenport and Beck is itself the *grammatization* of an uneven and messy process of attention capture into a highly regulated model. Such a knowledge production provides "discursive regularities" and cognitive consistencies, such as a law mandating production procedure, to impose and justify the control of psychopower. Moreover, the phenomenon of a term like attention economy coming into vogue and branding itself a quasi-academic discipline is the very symptom of the marketing impulse embodied by psychotechnologies. As Stiegler concludes, the politics created by psychotechnologies is "a de facto economic psychopower," and most damagingly, it enforces "a psychopolitics of law" to foster this economy.[82]

V.   Global Youth Culture is a Global Youth "Problem": Globalization as Minoritization

Stiegler's notion of "the psychopolitics of law" is useful to further problematize Ishihara's proposal to impose a ban on the sale of sexually explicit anime, manga and video games to minors under the age of eighteen. Ishihara's proposed bill attempts to censor certain materials harmful to the proper formation of youth under the *care* of the law, but in a significant way, designating the "right" materials for youth is no different

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[81] Bernard Stiegler, "Within the Limits of Capitalism, Economizing Means Taking Care," *Ars Industrialis*, http://arsindustrialis.org/node/2922.
[82] Stiegler, *Taking* Care, 35.

from proscribing the "wrong" materials. This ordinance, whether unwittingly or not, has identified minors as consumers, a target audience with what Stiegler calls "available brains."[83] Ishihara's onslaught against the anime and manga industries remains prescribed by economic psychopower in preserving consumer habits and availing the industries by ensuring the available brain of the minor for the market. If the law aims to render a kind of *care* and "nurturance," in Ishihara's new bill, the intended care for the minor is at most care and assurance for the market. Moreover, the legal assumption that cultural industries should be held accountable for corrupting the youth is in fact the alibi concocted by the law for not taking on the full responsibility of rendering *care* to the minor. That is, by delegating the task of taking care of and educating the youth to the cultural industries, the law can thereby be relieved of its responsibility by simply imposing a ban on any content seen as unfit for the minor.

Specifically, as discussed in the precious section, education is the process of enacting transindividuation and inter-generational circuits, and the importance of *how* to think comes before *what* to think in the formation of critical attention towards maturity. Arguing this way, Ishihara's approach amounts to the destruction of education since, first off, Ishihara believes that plying the youth with innocuous materials can "purify" their minds: i.e., what matters is what to watch and what to think. Secondly, by blaming anime, manga and videogames for corrupting the youth and demanding that these industries effect change, Ishihara in fact short-circuits the individuation and transindividuation processes by singlehandedly surrendering the wellbeing of the minor

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[83] Ibid., 3.

to the tutelage, or rather the psychotechnological control, of cultural industries.[84] By

simply imposing prohibition as Ishihara's bill proposes to do, the law does not

necessarily constitute "care" and cultivate a sense of "responsibility," both of which are

the foundations for the "*philia*," the affective social bonding that connects generations.

With regard to the "care" of the law, Stiegler writes:

> Mildew, or a cockroach, or lice infestation, can be 'treated,' but law can never be protected by a 'treatment': it requires careful nurturance. This is the case because what guarantees respect for law is not its repressive apparatus, which is always improvisatory, but the *feeling* it can create when it has been culturally internalized. And this nurturance, this *care,* which alone can create this sense of both of intimacy *and* familiarity (as *philia*), is grounded in a *shared* responsibility—at least in a society of laws.[85]

According to Stiegler, the negative procedure of imposing restriction and punishment is

temporary and contingent since it induces only external short-term attention. The law has

to enact the equally, if not more, important procedure of giving *long-term attentive care*

if it is to positively interiorize and corporealize the collective psyche and social body it

aims to govern.[86] As shown in my introduction of modern Japanese juvenile

jurisprudence, Japanese juvenile law has developed and retained both punitive and

reparative apparatuses and at one point, it was even named as "the Law of Love" as if to

demonstrate the intimate dimension of the law. Although an inherent contradiction exists

since the law, like a *pharmakon*, can kill and "save" at the same time, this dual function

of the law performs the indispensable process of articulating the contradiction between

the individual and society, and of becoming a "we" from which a commonality of *philia*,

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[84] However, Stiegler does not necessarily negate psychotechnologies, or the service industries and cultural industries that enforce psychotechnologies. Rather, by pointing out the symptoms of psychotechnologies as *pharmaka*, he aims to see the possibilities of transforming psychotechnological industrial politics to noopolitics, a way of living *intelligently*.

[85] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 3.

love, can emerge.[87] That is to say, *the law is responsible* for facilitating a public space,

"an associated milieu" in Stiegler's words, for the individual and social learning to be

responsible *collectively*. Considered this way, Stiegler's notion of care in the domain of

law resonates with the productive function of biopower as observed by Foucault.

      Ishihara's bill ostensibly assumes the stance of caretaker and promises to "treat"

the problem of the cultural industries since certain media contents are detrimental to the

"healthy development of youth." However, this ordinance in reality sanctions and

legitimizes a system of carelessness and irresponsibility on various levels. On the one

hand, youths are inculcated to consume, and the sense of "care" required to form

attention is short-circuited into an automated drive to consume, as long as they consume

the "right" materials. On the other hand, the law is complicit in instituting the marketing

strategy of monopolizing youth brains and abdicating the responsibility of caretaking to

the entertainment and cultural industries. The public space of the law becomes a de facto

marketplace where industries can culture youth as consumers *in the name of the law*. In

the Japanese context, one would tend to think that the traditional Confucian value system

still has a hold in society, albeit tenuously, in which a marked sense and structure of

generations forms the basis of education. However, in Ishihara's proposed bill, the

anonymous cultural industries are expected to assume the responsibilities of parents and

teachers—as a matter of fact, Tokyo Teachers' Association is one of the strongest

advocates for this bill. The law in this sense represents a collective irresponsibility and

symptomizes what I mention earlier as "the structural minority": youths are arrested in

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[87] Yuk Hui,"Individualization and the Play of Memories," review of *Acting Out,* by Bernard Stiegler, *Parallax* 16 (2010): 117–20.

their immaturity while the adults, the parents, even the lawmaker are similarly infantilized by becoming self-righteously and complacently irresponsible.

This danger of collective minoritization and infantilization of the masses as reflected in Ishihara's bill is certainly not a local phenomenon specific to Tokyo or Japan. As mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, parents, educators, and policymakers across the globe, specifically those in the first world, call for legal countermeasures to censor inappropriate contents in imported Japanese cultural materials, and even the United Nations has urged Japan to regulate and moderate its most vibrant and lucrative cultural industry. This pressure from the international "community" is part of the reason that Ishihara was able to launch his cause with unprecedented support.[88] This global concerted effort to impose a patina of legal control over Japanese anime, manga and video games demonstrates the fact that global capitalism has led to a system-wide failure in education and an all-out eradication of the intergenerational relations upon which education and intelligence (*interlegere*) are premised. Globalization has literally become a *leveling* force obliterating the differences between the global and the local, the East and the West, parents and kids, elders and youths, the law and its subjects by effecting minoritization of the masses. Postcolonial discourses have argued that globalization is simultaneously minoritization since it subjects the minority, the subaltern, to erasure. However, with its psychopower grip on traditional familial and community structure, particularly the global expansion of the psychotechnological apparatus via digital networks, the current phrase of globalization is a much more saturated and penetrating

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[88] Interestingly, according to statistics, Ishihara is immensely popular among voters over fifty years old while younger generations detest him, and many Japanese netizens see him as a ghost from Imperial Japan. This contrast also speaks to the problem of an intergenerational disconnect in the Japanese context.

form of minoritization that indiscriminately short-circuits attention and infantilizes populations on a global scale.

This is not to say that racial and class differences do not matter anymore. Certainly, a lot can be said about the fear of contamination from "the dark land of Japan," since despite Marshal McLuhan's mantra of the "global village," political discourses and business practices have continued to reconfigure and reenact, rather than eliminate, cultural boundaries by marking and reinscribing racial difference. As Iwabuchi Koichi observes, the popularity of Japanese cultural products abroad has given rise to "brand nationalism" within Japan.[89] At the same time, ever since the emergence of popular culture, as best exemplified by nineteenth century England, popular culture has been seen as a monstrous force that plagues the population, and cultural guardians have to wage an Arnoldian battle against moral decadence and imminent mob rule. However, what we are faced with is not "the Japan problem" or "the sexual monster." Nor is our battle an Arnoldian feat aiming for excellence and a kind of elitism against the vulgarization of culture. Rather, as Stiegler contends, our battle is "the battle of intelligence for maturity," that is, a fundamental effort to recover and secure the common ground of education and social development. Granted, the anxiety of parents and educators over the impact of media consumption on their kids are understandable and legitimate. Yet, by ascribing the potential problems of youth to one form of "global youth culture" of a Japanese origin is, ultimately, a damage-control procedure intended to contain the perverse effects of global psychopower formation. In particular, when an educational precept such as "provide the

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[89] Iwabuchi Koichi. "Undoing Inter-national Fandom in the Age of Brand Nationalism." *Mechademia* 5, no. 1 (2010): 87-95.

education the children deserve" has been hijacked by marketing industries and turned into a pervasive and generic advertising campaign slogan like "giving the children what they deserve," the crisis of education can no longer be solved by simply imposing a "parental control" filtering and blocking unwanted contents.[90] In fact, the hyper-industrialized service industries have distorted the word of "*de-serve*" to the letter by debasing the political implications embodied in the word "to serve"—which for Kant underlies a public use of reason and maturity—and instead "serving," or rather feeding the masses with a manufactured belief that they need to, and may "choose," to consume what they "deserve."

However, it is important to note that consumption alone does not necessarily cause the destruction of education and lead to the consequence of mass minoritization. Stiegler argues that global capitalism encounters its limits not only in production but also in consumption, because it substitutes the libidinal energy of desire for "drive-driven energy."[91] Stiegler distinguishes desire from drive: the former entails long-circuit psychic investment, i.e. attention, on the objects of desire, while the latter is a force propelling consumers to consume and thereby consummate, that is, *to complete by using up and destroying,* the objects. Different from the automated drive which is basically short-circuit, desire is derived from a complex psychoanalytic process of identification and dis-dentification, through which a minor comes to internalize what Stiegler calls "tertiary

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[90] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 3. Stiegler uses a poignant example of how one French TV Channel tried to sell its program to its "target audience," children and adolescent, with a campaign slogan as "Children deserve '*better than that*'" with "that" indicating adults, parents and grandparents of the minor. For Stiegler, this advertising campaign is "prescriptive" and leads to "generation inversion": "[T]he segment designated 'minors' becomes prescriptive of the consumption habits of the segment that is ostensibly adult—but is in fact infantilized" (3).
[91] Stiegler, "Within the Limits."

retentions," that is, socio-cultural memories inherited and transmitted across generations. The transmission of "generational inheritance" is crucial for psychic individuation since it enables the ongoing intermediation processes between id, ego and super-ego and connects the conscious to the unconscious, which according to Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, as quoted by Stiegler, is similar to "a *trans-individual* reality…To Freud, the unconscious is in no case reducible to an invisible storehouse unique to each person."[92] Thus, the formation of psyche does not end with the sedimentation of the conscious and ego; rather it is necessarily a psychotechnical *process* of co-individuation and transindividuation.

This psychic process and system constitute an "associated symbolic milieu" whereby children get in touch with the Real and the Symbolic as embodied by the law through an intergenerational relationship. Education, in the psychoanalytic sense of the word, means exactly this intimate yet at times rough process of linking the child to the reality principle, "the living ancestors," and learning to formulate, in Stiegler's words, "the reality principle in its many forms of knowledge (knowing how to live, knowing what to do, knowing how to think [*savoir-vivre, savoir-fair, savoir-théorique*])."[93] In a sense, access to the reality principle is an initiation rite that implicates the minor in a maturation and socialization process, with the presumption that adults in their maturity take on the responsibility of educating children on how to *respond to* the task of "growing up" with the aforementioned "knowledge" inherited *for* and across generations. In Stiegler's critique of a French TV channel (Canal J) advertising to a youth target audience, the attention capture of young minds is also a simultaneous capture of this "response system," while this response system is a kind of intergenerational inheritance

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[92] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 6-7.
[93] Ibid., 7.

that provides "survival kits" to the minor, crucial for fostering a sense of responsibility

for both adults and youth:

> To capture the attention of young minds' in this sense means to capture the attention of the *systems* formed by those minds [of the adults], as ego with id, such that consciousness is, according to Freud, responsible for teaching the *that*, the id, to compromise with the reality principle, but equally in which young minds 'resonate' in their relation to the id, *respond* to it, thus responding to their ancestors, fathers, and grandfathers, and *their* ancestors, if it is true that 'responsibility' means responding to what one is given.[94]

For the psychic economy, "responsibility" is more than an abstract ethical ideal or moral

value. In the most realistic sense, responsibility is an economizing means of utilizing

inherited knowledge to cushion the impact of the reality principle. At the same time,

responsibility is also a coping mechanism since it channels, by way of *responding to*

instead of simply repressing, the unruly force of id, which inherits characteristics from

"ancestors, fathers, and grandfathers" and bears traces of "the transgenerational

superego," that is, the Symbolic. In a way, the process of learning to be responsible is

enacted by the symbolic authority which is also an intergenerational inheritance; although

the symbolic is repressive in nature, it also establishes a "safety net" and a "containment

procedure" to reorient potentially uncontrollable psychic energy and minimize the

damage when the id clashes with the superego.

The Freudian schema of psychic individuation is bleak and susceptible to violent

rupture from time to time, but it nonetheless addresses and accentuates the practical value

of an intergenerational relationship in *sustaining* psychic and collective development.

However, this potentially self-sustaining libidinal economy is destroyed by the service

economies. As Stiegler points out, when Canal J claims "children deserve '*better than*

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[94] Ibid., 9.

that,'" with "that" (ça) being the French word for "id*,"* this advertising campaign on the

one hand dissociates adults as well as the minor from the associated symbolic milieu

where intergenerational transmissions take place; on the other hand, it imposes direct

control over the id by bypassing the long-circuit and blocking the outlet for the id's

uncontrollable psychic energy.[95] The television and service industries seem to solicit

pleasure, prioritizing the pleasure principle over the reality principle. Yet, in fact, the

service economy turns out to have the full force of what Stiegler calls "*mechanical*

repression," an "automated superego," by grammatizing both the pleasure and reality

principles while inaugurating "the new age of reticulation" and obviating the

intergenerational relationships that are responsible for fostering the development of

youths and minors. The symbolic authority is taken over by the TV programming and

advertising industries, and the "drill" provided by the symbolic authority is replaced by a

remote control that makes the psychic mechanism of avoiding pain and looking for

pleasure as easy as flipping TV channels. If the television and audiovisual industries are

indeed held responsible for youth violence, it is not the contents that elicit violent

reactions; rather, it is the outburst of an "overcensured id" that is left unattended and

uncared for.[96]

In a libidinal psychic structure, the channeling and diversion of psychosomatic

energy from the unbounded pleasure principle of the id to a regulatory reality principle

requires the sublimation of desire into social and socializing expressions, which in turn

will become the basis of another long-circuit of psychical and collective individuation.

Sublimation, intrinsic to libidinal energy, is a conservation mechanism as, similar to the

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[95] Ibid., 3.
[96] Ibid., 9.

endothermic phase transition in chemistry, sublimation enacts the transformation of the

substance rather than simply eliminating the material once and for all. Similarly, the

reality principle, by forestalling instant gratification, is a moderating and modifying

apparatus of keeping desire in check with reality. Hence the reality principle entails "the

search for satisfaction [that] does not take the most direct routes but instead makes

detours and postpones the attainment of its goal according to the conditions imposed by

the outside world."[97] This delay and postponement in the fulfillment of desire inscribes

temporality in libidinal structures and demands "an *attende*, a waiting." To *sustain* the

waiting also opens the space and possibility for attention formation and *taking care,* the

foundations for technologies of mind, and a *spirit* of maturity. With its inherent

conservation and modifying functions through sublimation and the reality principle, the

libidinal structure constitutes an ecology of psychic energy. And the *sustainability* of a

libidinal economy lies precisely in this "ecology of *spirit,*" which can serve as an antidote

to the "culture of waste" caused by consumerism. As Stiegler argues, the global energy

crisis is connected to a psychical restructuring of psychotechnologies which short-circuit

desire into drive:

> The third limit of capitalism is not only the destruction of the reserves of fossil fuel, but the limit constituted by drive to destruction of all objects in general by consumption, in so far they have become objects of desire, and not objects of desire and attention—the psychotechnological organization of consumption provoking the destruction of attention in its all forms, on the psychical level as well as the collective level.[98]

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[97] J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), 379.

[98] Stiegler, "Within the Limits." In this essay, Stiegler is responding to Jeremy Rifkin's idea about green energy.

As I argue earlier, if globalization is a force of minoritization leading to structural immaturity, then what is at risk is not simply the wellbeing of youth and the enlightenment ideal of education, which for most of the world remains an unaffordable luxury, but the physical environment in which humans and other living beings cohabitate. In a way, the mundane question "how to take care of youth" is also the urgent issue of how to "take care of the world." While United States and other industrial countries take up the initiative of finding "new" energy sources, the capitalist taxonomy of the "new" again defies the reality principle, which according to Laplanche and Pontalis, is "the transformation of free energy into bound energy."[99] In the fiction of "free economy," energy literally becomes unbound and unbounded. Even the claim to be developing re*new*able and sustainable energy fails to address the problem of consumption, particularly the mode of *careless and mindless* consumption that will inevitably *consummate*—complete and finish—the resources we manage to find and invent. As the Fukushima nuclear disaster illustrates, the fundamental task is to resuscitate and recover a system of "care" and attention formation, which can help retie the bonds between generations and reestablish a sense of "a shared responsibility" to "*respond to what one is given*" as a corrective and remedy for a forward-looking drive to discover and even consume what one does not have now. Thus, an environmental movement is, and should be, a fostering of care and attention *by and for* generations, which can sustain psychic and material lives individually and collectively.

VI.   "Paying" Attention is the Global Youth Culture: An Afterthought

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[99] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, 379.

Stiegler's recourse to Freudian psychoanalysis and the Kantian notion of education (*Bildung*) will certainly encounter resistance from scholars in regional studies: Stiegler risks reinscribing the Enlightenment claim of the universal and discounting the particularities of the "local." And there is indeed a limit and cultural constraint upon the psychoanalytic conceptualization of individuation, since in the contexts of Japan and of Asia, the establishment of the nuclear family that underlies the Freudian genesis of desire has until now remained a rather new and urban phenomenon. However, on the one hand, becoming modern for Japan and other non-Western countries means adopting a universal (i.e., Western) ideal, and this includes the ways that youth is cultured in the domains of law, education, psychology, biology and technology. As demonstrated by the history of Japanese juvenile law and the emergence of a "youth" culture constituted by fans of Japanese anime, manga and video games, the identity of youth is unmistakably modern and "Western": youth comes to be a unique subject in jurisprudence and a cultural, or rather culturable, identity. On the other hand, when cultural critics and literary scholars use the paradigms of the global vs. the local, the universal vs. the particular, the East and the West, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, the underlying assumption is that cultural texts and practices are produced and consumed in a way that would eventually initiate even a minimum degree of identification or disidentification. The perennial concern for the mimesis of representation has by and large dominated critical analyses of "culture" across different disciplines, and the legal attempt to censor "media contents" for the minor, like Ishihara's bill, also assumes that "culture" enacts a mimetic process whereby children and adolescents will be under the influence of and "*respond to*" cultural

materials through mimicry. Yet, Stiegler is asking the most basic yet profound questions: *what if kids don't respond at all?* To put it bluntly, what if kids just don't give a damn because they don't even *care* to begin with?

Failure to respond has multiple implications: it means children's inability to respond because they do not know "what to do" and "how to think," which is part of intergenerational inheritance; it also means that children reject, ignore, or simply do not care to take up the responsibility to "respond to what one is given" and participate in the process of transindividuation. And in the most familiar scenario, children just do not pay attention. This pedagogical failure to elicit response and transference has been a concern for millennia, which is why from early on, the ancient Greeks developed different techniques to form attention and take care of the self. But as Stiegler argues, the psychotechnological control of new technologies has destroyed the system of care through attention capture, and the global expansion of digital networks gives rise to a global epidemic, that is, attention deficit disorder:

> The fact that the United States suffer so massively from *attention deficit disorder*, that there are a million *otaku* children in Japan, that China has had to take action against the effects of video games—but alternatively that the battle *of* and *for* intelligence has also resulted in the same creation of universities with global outreach, in such places as Saudi Arabia, result from the same psychotechnological system of global psychopower formation." [100]

If, as Davenport and Beck propose, capitalism has evolved into an "attention economy," then capitalism indeed contains within it the seeds of its own demise by depleting attention and creating a global population suffering from attention deficit disorder. In the current service economies, even "paying" attention is no longer a cure but a symptom of the drive to consume. In fact, if not paying attention is a global youth "problem," then

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[100] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 35.

paradoxically it is also true that "paying" attention constitutes a global youth *culture* since, as I demonstrate in this chapter, consumption has become the de facto force culturing the youth. Cultural forms, with historical and geographical specificities, are reduced to "brand names" and a global youth culture is literally "global" since it is uprooted from any psychic and collective identification.

Therefore, Stiegler's theoretical intervention is a crucial one. His emphases on intergenerational relationships and transindividuation might appear commonsensical, but in the most realistic sense, without intergenerational relationships, without "tertiary memories" which are accumulated social or cultural memories, the children have no way to identify themselves with a given community and they will not know how to think "*for* the other and *through* the other."[101] In other words, without the recovery of a system of care and attention formation *by and for* generations, the cultural identifiers of the East vs. the West, the global vs. the local, the universal and the local, which are seen as given in our critical practice, will become invalidated since what is left of "culture" is only consumer culture. At the same time, it is important to note that Stiegler is not simply condemning or arguing against new technologies. Stiegler emphasizes that the psychotechnological systems enacted by the new technologies, like the psychotechnique of writing, are also a kind of "pharmacological artifice" that can be a poison and a remedy at the same time. Psychotechnologies have led to what I call earlier the minoritization of the masses, but they also have the potential to create a different kind of "noopolitics." As Stiegler puts it, "But this new phenomenon could also be the pharmacological and organological condition for a new individual and collective

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[101] Ibid.,34.

intelligence, a new maturity, and a new critique."[102] The intervention of a theory like Stiegler's allows us to understand how these psychotechnologies become psychotechnologies of capturing attention, what the implications and consequences are of attention capture, and ultimately *how to use* these technologies and transform them to become technologies of "intelligence," that is, technologies of taking care and attention formation. As further elaborated in his book *Technics and Time*, he is interested in the process of technical objects *becoming* objects and *performing* as objects, that is, technics.

In this chapter, I problematize the normative notion of the minor and examine the phenomenon of minoritization, i.e. systematic immaturity, as a result of attention capture by the digital economies. In the next chapter, I trace the history of Japanese anime and manga to see how entertainment presumably made for children and minors can embody political potential to subvert the government of youth and become a "minor" culture, in Deleuze and Guattari's definition of "minor." To what extent, and how, do practices of "junk culture" turn marginalization and minoritization to its advantage? I demonstrate that the Japanese subculture of anime, manga and video games experiments and "works with," rather than completely surrendering to, psychotechnological control and establishes its own traditions and lineages—with a vivid sense of "generation," albeit not necessarily the one recognized and affirmed by Japanese norms. I reconsider youth culture in light of Bruno Latour's theory of the hybrid and the concept of a minor literature proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in an attempt to explain why the subculture continues to progress and multiply amidst Japan's prolonged economic malaise.

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[102] Ibid.,35.

Chapter 2. Becoming-Minor: Theorizing Japan's Popular Culture

I.   An Inquiry Into the Notion of "Global Youth Culture"

In the first chapter, using Stiegler's concept of attention capture, I argue that globalization is a force of minoritization that leads to a structural minority and an infantilization of the masses. However, I also caution that Stiegler's reinstatement of the Enlightenment paradigm of education can be problematic in certain ways. For one thing, whereas Stiegler's theoretical intervention is crucial in reframing the definition of the minor, the notion of psychic immaturity and maturity can easily fall back into the narrative of development and progress. Moreover, the defenders of public education see corporatization of school systems today as lethal to the ideal of education, and yet education for "profit" is not a new phenomenon, as exemplified by the Sophists of the ancient Greece, who were accused of downgrading teaching and crippling the foundation of the republic by insisting on receiving payment for their "services" in advance.[1] (Coincidentally, in the tradition of Confucius' teaching, giving "payment" in exchange for private tutoring is a standardized practice and highly formalized.) That being said, is corporatization of education, or a model of education that functions like "service industries," necessarily damaging? Can it be just another form of transindividuation that

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[1] In his polemical treatise, "Against the Sophists," Isocrates distinguished himself from other "common herds" even though he himself was a Sophist. He criticized other Sophists who exacted a small fee from their students for not trusting their students and therefore failing to an example of virtue and truth: "They distrust, that is to say, the very men to whom they are about to deliver the science of just dealing—and they require that the fees advanced by their students be entrusted for safe keeping to those who have never been under their instruction, being well advised as to their security, but doing the opposite of what they preach" (5).

looks degraded or downgraded to us because it is moving away from the pinnacle of Enlightenment selfhood that we still view as normative or desirable? What else could education be? Could it become a "care for the self" again?

Particularly in the context of Japan, the question regarding how to cultivate maturity among minors can be most confounding, given that "youth" genres and "youth" media as constituted by anime, manga and video games are Japan's most renowned cultural exports, which have survived the economic recession and whose acclaimed global influence has helped formulate what Iwabuchi calls "soft nationalism."[2] During the past several years, Japan has lost its competitive edge in virtually every new-tech industry that defined the Japan Rising phenomenon in the '80s—even in videogame sales, Sony and Nintendo no longer monopolize the market. Nonetheless, as *Pokémon*, *Wii* and *PlayStation* have entered the general lexicon, as fans and publishers of Japanese manga, anime and video games have a regular, if not the major, presence in Comic-Con meetings in the United States, Japan's "youth culture" is in a way Japan's last saving grace since it symbolically retains Japan's global appeal. As discussed in my previous chapter, it is an obvious disgrace for Ishihara that Japan promotes a youth culture that contains sexual portrayals or any provocative depictions of "non-youth." Ishihara's ban is a welcome move for moral purists, but it is also regarded by many as controversial and risky. Specifically, "nonexistent youth" points to the two major genres, *shōnen* (young boy) and *shōjo* (young girl) in Japanese manga industry, and *shōnen* and *shōjo* have come to be recognized as the staple personae of Japanese anime with the global popularity of cult cyberpunk films such as *Akira* (1988) and works by Hayao Miyazaki. This domestic

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[2] Iwabuchi Koichi, "'Soft' Nationalism and Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global," *Asian Studies Review*, Vol 26, No. 4 (December 2002): 447-469.

pressure to impose censorship on the representations of "virtual youths" could end up

being a suicidal policy eradicating the trademark of Japanese popular culture, which

remains vibrant across the globe despite the dwindling economic dominance of Japan. In

Ishihara's presumption, "imaginary" youths closely correlate to the "real" youths who

consume the materials. Given that manga, anime and video games from the outset are

conceived as the new "media" that specifically cater to the younger generations on the

one hand and proliferate imaginary creatures such as "nonexistent youth" on the other,

the ban has first and foremost to regulate this multimedia industry since it is the symbol

of "youth culture."

Indeed, when Osamu Tezuka, the father of Japanese anime and manga, began his

career after World War II, he was greatly inspired and influenced by Walt Disney and

aimed to bring joy to children. However, Japanese manga and anime have outgrown their

American progenitors by establishing a richly complex and diverse tradition far beyond

the confines of entertainment for minors, both in terms of content and target audience.[3]

To a certain extent, Ishihara's allegation and the "concern" from the United Nations

committee speaks to the anxiety over how this presumed "kids' genre" has gone out of

bounds. For zealous fans within and outside Japan, the unique Japanese conglomerate

consisting of anime, manga and video games is an ultimate achievement for art that has

no peer in American comics and cartoons, the latter of which is disparaged as simply

corny and cheesy. However, even in the United States, the familiar identification of

comics as a genre for minors has also become untenable, as best instanced by the cross-

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[3] Frederik L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (New York: Kodansha, 1983). With a forward by Osamu Tezuka, this book is arguably the first book giving a comprehensive overview of Japanese manga tradition to English-speaking world.

pollination between graphic novel, a potentially sophisticated genre for (young) adults, and comic books, which are often considered a rudimentary pastime for children. In other words, while educators and policymakers observe the legacy of Rousseau and see "the minor" as a natural state of development with budding possibilities and therefore in need of careful tutelage, cultural production and consumption *in practice* does not guarantee the seamless fulfillment of a romantic/Romantic ideal of childhood and youth through the inculcation of the "right" cultural materials.

Oddly but not surprisingly, the worldwide subculture formed by anime, manga and games is often seen as a self-evident manifestation of "global youth culture." Granted, as mentioned earlier, *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga are predominant and long-standing genres targeted specifically to a youth readership, and *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga reading is a common experience shared by the youth in East Asia. However, *shōnen* and *shōjo* are two rather coarse categories incapable of giving a full grasp of the infinitely expanding and infinitesimally differentiated market of Japanese manga. In his overview of American comics and Japanese manga, Ray Mescallado observes that in the States "comics are defined in the public and among their fan base by a handful of genres—and one in particular, superheroes—that appeal primarily to a very specific demographic: white male post-adolescents." In comparison, in the highly saturated market of Japanese manga, "there are comics and animation for just about every demographic conceivable."[4] Apart from the familiar market segmentation based on age and gender, Japanese manga offers a dazzling range of subject matter, from the mundane work life featured in "salaryman" and "office lady" manga to post-apocalyptic narrative as best exemplified by

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[4] Ray Mescallado, "Otaku Nation," *Science Fiction Studies,* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Mar. 2000): 133-142.

Akira, from Miyazaki's nostalgic portrayal of a mythical arcadia to a future inhabited by

armored robots and combat cyborgs as imagined in *mecha* manga, and from explicit

sexual perversity in *hentai* manga to conscientious engagement of social problems in

shakai manga.[5] Most interestingly, since manga and the multimedia industry derived

from or associated with manga have become a cultural fixture of Japan since WWII, the

myriad activities of fans and the phenomenon of "community building" as it unfolds in

the formation of manga/anime fandom in turn appeal to the interest of manga writers and

anime producers. In other words, Japanese manga has an inexhaustible source of material

that can go as far as forecasting end-of-the-world devastation, or as intimate as self-

referencing back to the fandom it constitutes and is simultaneously constituted of.

At the same time, a seemingly well-circumscribed manga "genre" can encompass

a full spectrum of subject matter, some of which might easily overlap the tropes of other

"genres," and even those of highbrow media other than manga. For instance, the highly

influential *shōjo* manga classic *The Rose of Versailles,* serialized in 1972 and adapted

into an anime in 1979, tells a pseudo history of the French Revolution, and its nuanced

detailing of the Bastille and Revolution can be said to be an innovative re-creation of

jindaimono (historical series), typically seen in kabuki theaters. The cross-dressing of the

main female protagonist Oscar Francois de Jarjayes and her romantic involvement with

Marie Antoinette might not appear novel for the Japanese adult audience of the

Takarazuka Revue, the all-women music troupe founded at the very beginning of the

twentieth century. However, given that *The Rose of Versailles* first appeared in *Margaret*,

the *shōjo* manga magazine targeting young female readers from age eleven to fifteen, the

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[5] Toni Johnson-Woods, Manga*: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

same-sex love between women as in *The Rose of Versailles*, judging from the rhetoric of Ishihara and his cohorts, can hardly be rendered "proper" for youths despite its legendary status in the history of Japanese manga. In reality, *The Rose of Versailles* has become one of the forerunners for the *yuri* genre that depicts romance between women *for* female readers. In Ishihara's monofocal obsession with identifying sexually explicit contents publications as "harmful," he seems to overlook the manifold expressions of eroticism that cannot be conveniently contained within a narrow genital-centered definition of sexuality. Most significantly, taking *the Rose of Versailles* as an example, the underlying themes of revolutionary fervor, class consciousness and cross-class alliance pose much more of a threat to the status quo and established social conventions than, say, virtual representations of full-frontal nudity or abnormal "sexual acts."

Scholars of media studies, particularly those influenced by British cultural studies, see the growing population of minor consumers as an emerging class of young technocrats enabled by and enabling a "techno-capitalism," and the rise of global youth culture as a ramification of what the Frankfurt School calls the "cultural industry" that has by now aggressively and successfully enlisted the minor in the capitalist system. Irrefutably, new technologies, as Stiegler contends, inaugurate psychotechnological control that disintegrates the intimate intergenerational relation and creates a generational reversal by prescribing the definition of the minor as one distinct category of consumer. While Stiegler sees technologies as techniques of attention-capture that keep reconfiguring an inherently volatile relationship between the minor and the adult, the conventional approach of equating the new "media" with young consumers tends to treat "media" as static technological objects or tools and youth as a self-contained

demographic consisting of "post-adolescent and pre-adults." The youth are imagined as active and agile users of these tangible technologies, and "mass culture" in our brave new world of technology and communication is driven by the global mass of youth. However, such a reified and reifying view of technology and youth overlooks the broader effect and mutual enmeshment that occurs when the "human" *relates* to technology. Moreover, in the field of media studies, the theoretical precept of "mass culture" is certainly useful in understanding the modern emergence of the "masses," or "the population" in domains of cultural production and consumption. Analyses of contemporary mass culture have two pronounced tendencies that either situate humans as the ultimate "end" to technological means, or criticize technology for reducing humans into automaton consumers or raw materials. Both theoretical orientations share a premise that treats humans and technology as discrete entities, yet as critical scholars on techno-culture such as Donna Haraway and Stiegler demonstrate, the complex valence of technology exceeds the "uses" prescribed by humans while at the same time redefining humanity, including the given notion of youth. [6]

Even if we are to accept the biological definition of youth as an organism in a transitional phase, it remains problematic to propose that, as Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner contend, "youth generally comprise the most media and technologically literate sector of their societies" and hence youth is "perceived as a primary engine for the growth of global media culture."[7] The booming success of the Nintendo Wii gaming

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[6] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181.
[7] Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Global Youth Culture," https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/globyouthcult.pdf

console since 2007 is a good counterexample demonstrating that new "media" and technologies are no longer the gadgets, the "toys" exclusively catering to the younger generations. Pictures of old citizens in retirement homes playing Wii to get fit are circulated on the internet, and video game consoles have come to be common paraphernalia as part of "home entertainment" in regular households.[8] The blanket assumption that a global "youth" culture is propelled by new media, and vice versa, downplays a much more diverse and intensely penetrating marketing strategy that renders new technologies rather mundane, at least in the First World. To bracket the "new" media together with young consumers, again, risks reifying and conflating the "new" and "youth" whereby an abstract idea of "new" becomes substantiated and naturalized through the insertion of a biological being such as "youth." This glossy image of new technologies paired with young bodies is indeed the most standard advertising trope utilized by the service economies of hyperindustrial capitalism. From the catchy Apple commercials with delirious youths dancing to the "new" generations of iPhone, to the most banal pop-up ads showing how the Botox treatment can restore youth to wrinkled skin, youth serves as a stable signifier, a definitive entity, supplementing an ever-evolving and expandable taxonomy of "newness." Yet, this is not to say that "youth" remains circumscribed in biological schema and susceptible to the irrevocable force of time. On the contrary, this fusion of youth and new technologies transforms youth into an atemporal ideal that is always re*new*able through the intervention of "new" technologies. Consuming new technologies is tantamount to pursuing an enticing dream of staying young and *becoming "minor"* again.

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[8] In 2012, ABC reports that a woman of 100 years old keeps her mind sharp by playing Nintendo DS, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/technology/2012/02/centenarian-keeps-her-mind-sharp-with-nintendo/.

II.   A Minor Culture or a Minority Culture?

Not coincidentally, *becoming minor*, in both the literal and figurative sense of the word, is the prevailing sentiment in the subculture of *anime*, *manga* and video games, and to a larger extent, *becoming minor* constitutes the unique appeal of contemporary Japanese popular culture, as best exemplified by the *kawaii* (cute) aesthetics propagated through the global franchise of Hello Kitty. On the one hand, admittedly, young girls and young boys, or imaginary creatures that demonstrate preadolescent characteristics such as Pokémon, are still the most representative and identifiable figures of Japanese manga. On the other hand, as Mescallado emphasizes, the multimedia synergy between anime-manga-video game produces series after series and unleashes endless spin-off products in "sheer volume" and with a vertiginous speed. The formidable (re)productivity and the enduring regenerability of this distinctively Japanese cultural-industrial complex demonstrates the energy and vitality that typically characterize a "young" industry, especially compared to its predecessor, American comics, which only sporadically produce hit series and whose heyday is long gone. In Mescallado's astute but skewed comparison, "[A] hot Japanese *manga* series has a level of media saturation that the American comics industry sees only once a blue moon (last time: Batmania; next time: X-mania)."[9] According to Mescallado, both American animation and American comics do not possess either "full" or "consistent legitimacy" that guarantees the easy transition from manga to anime, or vice versa. For X-men fanatics and Disney devotees,

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[9] Mescallado, "Otaku Nation," 133.

Mescallado's verdict on American animation and comics is surely problematic and overly simplified. At the same time, his admiration for Japanese manga also blinds him to the fact that although manga is deeply ingrained in Japanese culture and a key revenue generator for the Japanese economy, manga and its byproducts, anime and video games alike, are rarely endowed with the "legitimacy" Mescallado craves in American animation and comics.[10] Manga's lack of legitimacy is also one of the reasons that Ishihara's proposal has gained solid support from his constituents amidst criticism and resistance from the industry and manga fans. It is true that Japanese manga and anime are Japan's major cultural outputs, and within the local context of Japan, manga and anime enjoy perennial popularity unrivalled by any other cultural forms. However, despite its highly acclaimed influence and stature, despite its widely-circulated availability and routinized presence, manga as well as the cultural constellation it enables still remains a "minor culture."

What I mean by "minor" here cannot be simply equated with the postcolonial notion of minor. In postcolonial studies, the buzzword "minor" is often inextricably connected with "minority." The postcolonial "minor" describes a politically disenfranchised and culturally marginalized condition stemming from a given minority—be it ethnic, religious, economic or political subgroup—having been subordinate to a mainstream hegemonic power. The best instance of this can be seen in some postcolonial theorists' discussion of "minority literature" and "minor literature." In their exposition of "minority discourse," David Lloyd and Abdul JanMohamed put it provocatively but reductively: "Cultures designed as minorities have certain shared experience by virtue of

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[10] Jonah Asher and Yoko Sola, "The Manga Phenomenon," WIPO (*World Intellectual Property Organization*), September 2011, http://www.wipo.int/wipo_magazine/en/2011/05/article_0003.html.

their similar antagonistic relationship to the dominant culture, which seeks to marginalize them all."[11] Lloyd later modified his view by applying (and misconstruing) Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor literature. Compared to minority literature that is "a literature of minorities," minor literature, he writes, "is so termed in relation to the major canon, and its characteristics are defined in opposition to those who define canonical writing."[12] Clearly, for Lloyd, there is not much difference between "minority literature" and "minor literature" since they share the same combat position vis-à-vis a solidified and solidifiable enemy that is the "dominant culture" or "major canon." Moreover, in Lloyd's definition, it remains unclear who or what defines the characteristics of minor literature. As Graham Huggan points out rightly, "[T]he insistence on the counter-hegemonic function of 'minor' culture risks setting up a series of potentially essentialized straw categories— 'major literature,' 'the dominant culture,' and so on—against which it allegedly reacts and on which it continues to some extent to depend."[13] This familiar discursive repertoire of master vs. servant, the dominant vs. the oppressed, canonization vs. marginalization finds its stage in the theater of "minor/minority" literature countering "major" literature.

Undeniably, there are minorities and there exists the suppression of minorities. A discursive formulation such as Lloyd's seeks to valorize heretofore unwittingly unattended or deliberately overlooked cultural expressions that derive from less privileged communities. And notably, other postcolonial theorists, largely inspired by Homi Bhabha, utilize a much more nuanced and refined analysis to address the

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[11] Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd, "Introduction: Towards a Theory of Minority Discourse: What is to be Done?" in *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, eds. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 1-16.
[12] Ibid., 381.
[13] Graham Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 84.

postcolonial condition of the minority. The political valence of the "minor" as configured

by postcolonial discourse is located in an inexorable dialectics or irreconcilable paradox

between the "major" and the "minor" culture. The theoretical axis of inside and outside,

incorporation and exclusion, subject and abject has instituted in common parlance

discussion of the minor culture, but regrettably, minor culture is still habitually

circumscribed to mean the minority cultural formation. However, some poignant

questions remain, and complications ensue when the concept of "minor" is tied up with

"minority": what if a racial minority has overwhelming economic control, such as the

Chinese communities in the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, but still remains

marginalized culturally and politically?[14] What if the "minority culture" is incorporated

into the mainstream market, like the commodification of rap and hip-hop, or even

elevated into part of "high culture" as with the canonization of jazz? What if a minority

does not produce a counterculture, but instead willingly conforms to the establishment

rather than challenge it? In the context of Japan, manga and the industry it represents are

irrefutably "mass culture," in the Frankfurt School's sense of the word, and the audience

of anime and manga is by no means the minority of Japanese population. It is the

majority.[15] What if a "mass culture" with popularity and iconic prominence like anime

and manga remains steadfastly a "subculture," and the minoritization of anime and

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[14] On April 23, 2010, one ex-police officer in Manila of Philippine kidnapped a tour bus packed with Hong Kong tourists, leading to nine deaths and several injuries. This incident was covered in Chinese news extensively, most of which painted Philippine a country with inept government and apathetic, barbaric citizens. However, as Amy Chua and others point out repeatedly, the economic inequality along the racial fault line in Southeast Asian countries is a volatile time bomb, which can easily detonate and cause an episode such as the Manila hostage crisis or fuel a nationwide rampage like the 1998 May Riots of Indonesia.

[15] Asher and Sola, "The Manga Phenomenon." Asher and Sola states that "Manga is a major part of Japan's publishing industry, accounting for over 25 percent of all printed materials in the country."

manga culture also manifests itself in the public reception of anime/manga fandom, which is often portrayed as a mass of infantilized, minoritized adults?

This is not to say that the postcolonial definition of "minor" and "minority" is not important. In fact, a comparative history of American comics and Japanese manga shows that the emergence of Japanese contemporary manga bears witness to its colonial minor status after Japan's defeat in WWII. As mentioned earlier, Mescallado observes that the reading demographic of American comics is mainly white male young adults, which has much to do with the dominating superhero (or superheroine) genre. The *Superman* series, which first appeared in 1938 and initiated the golden age of American comic books, was known to be a reinforcement of an American imaginary in which an individual hero has the capacity for moral righteousness to correct and triumph over evil. The popularity of *Superman* and other similar genres was sustained through and boosted by American's involvement in World War II, since the nationalistic sentiment fostered and demanded by the war found its perfect embodiment in the fictional figure of Superman. Concurrently, as the American economy quickly recovered through war mobilization, burgeoning optimism, together with the shifting geopolitical climate in which the United States was expected to replace Europe and emerge as the new world superpower, justified and amplified Superman's American heroism. Similarly, World War II had a profound influence on Japanese manga*,* but the conditions under which Japanese contemporary manga came into existence after Japan's "unconditional surrender" in 1945 could not be more different.

Almost every manga fan is familiar with the story about the emergence of *manga* after World War II through a central figure, Osamu Tezuka. The story has it that Tezuka

broke onto the scene amidst rubble and waste and inaugurated singlehandedly the distinctive tradition of Japanese manga as we know it today. Anecdotes relate how Tezuka grew up in want and scarcity; how he even used his own blood to color his drawings; how he gave up a promising career as a medical doctor to be a manga artist with the noble ambition to educate as well as entertain the young generation; and, most appropriately, how Tezuka's individual triumph was a microcosm of a postwar Japan that persevered through destitution and eventually metamorphosed into one of the major economic powers in the world. All in all, Tezuka, Japanese manga and the entire nation of Japan were imagined to share the same destiny of successfully redeeming and reinventing themselves. This exalted path, borrowing Frank Schodt's witty metaphor, is similar to the transformation "from phoenix to Godzilla," since on the one hand, a phoenix is a mythical creature reborn in fire and the *Phoenix* series happens to be acknowledged as the apex of Tezuka's oeuvre; on the other hand, *Godzilla* is the first global pop cultural icon produced by postwar Japan, but paradoxically, the monstrosity in *Godzilla* vividly recalls the indelible memory of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.[16] Granted, these historical accounts of Tezuka and postwar Japan are awe-inspiring, or at least self-assuring for the Japanese themselves, especially given that the political milieu during the Allied Occupation was unmistakably a colonial one and that the following US-

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[16] In the original Japanese version of *Godzilla* (with the Japanese title of *Gojira*), the creator Tomoyuki Tanaka intended to tell a story of a half-gorilla, half-whale monster Gojira emerging from Pacific Ocean in the wake of deep-sea H-bomb tests. Tanaka's initial intention was to warn his audience of the potential toll and damage brought by the atomic age. However, as *Gojira* went global and became Americanized, the monster and the symbolic meanings embodied in its creation were reduced into a giant entertainment prop. Critics and fans have pointed out this cultural mututation and mutilation: "The American versions inevitably stripped out the stories' popular mythological resonances, their evocation of Japanese theater, and the imaginary management of postwar collective emotions." Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi, "Introduction," in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction Origins to Anime*, eds. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 20007), viii.

Japan alliance forged in the Cold War era imposed the continuous subjugation of Japan to the United States. Even today, Japan remains a political minor at the mercy of the United States for its national security, currency value, and everyday cultural content of anime, manga and video games. The narrative that Japan as beat-up underdog could rise to the top of the game, to a certain degree, seemed to offer an exemplary tale of colonial struggle and resistance. This explains why Ishihara's essay, "The Japan That Can Say 'No,'" which he coauthored with Akio Morita, the co-founder of Sony, became an instantaneous hit in 1989 with its gutsy racial attacks against the US. It was the fame of the essay, combined with other incendiary writings and xenophobic remarks, which earned Ishihara popularity and eventually got him elected governor of Tokyo—not just for one term, but for four consecutive terms.[17] Ishihara's self-endowed saviorhood was little different from Superman's: in the late '90s, he wanted to save Japan from the grip of the United States, and now in 2011 he crowns himself as the moral gatekeeper for the youth.

However, for Japan's neighboring countries, a postwar Japan could never be "qualified" as a minor in the postcolonial definition of the word, considering its imperialist aggression before WWII and its cultural and economic dominance in the region from the 1980s. The contribution of postcolonial discourse is to critique the systematic violence of the colonial machine, and illuminate the layered complexities, the constitutive ambivalence of the messy postcolonial terrain. The notion of "minor" should be understood as a *contingently situated position* that allows for the articulation of highly contentious and diversely entangled social-historical relations. The realization of this

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[17] An authorized English translation of the essay is included in the eponymous book published in 1991 by Simon & Schuster, with a foreword by Ezra Vogel.

situatedness is crucial since it opens up the space for dialogue and creates the possibility

for what Haraway calls "encounters" that do not necessarily have to end up with

confrontation and competition.[18] However, once the concept of minor gets reified into an

identity, a fixed marker for an ethnicity, a nation, or a culture, then it can easily fall into a

discursive trap, an interminable vicious circle between self-victimization and gratuitous

self-aggrandizement. Ishihara, as well as countless politicians, thrives on manipulating

the public's emotions by perpetuating these two mutually reinforcing but ultimately

crippling affects. Unfortunately and not surprisingly, bell hooks' empowering idiom

"Marginality is a site of resistance" was contorted into Ishihara's mantra "The Japan that

can say no."[19][20]

Moreover, when it comes to manga, it is really a misconception that Tezuka is the

one and only "founding father" of Japanese manga, who, not unlike a revolutionary hero,

created the manga industry from scratch and weaponized this art form for Japan to

conquer the "world," namely the United States. Quite the contrary, as mentioned

elsewhere in my dissertation, Tezuka often openly confessed his love toward Walt

Disney, and his drawing is acknowledged (and even criticized) as very Disneyesque. A

quasi-Western style of manga, with a panel strip form and commercial serialization,

appeared long before Tezuka. Most crucially, it simply betrays historical veracity to put

Tezuka, manga and Japan as a nation on one ideological continuum. For one thing,

Tezuka was an outspoken critic of war due to his childhood experience of WWII. Even in

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[18] Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
[19] bell hooks, "Marginality is a site of resistance," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* (New York: MIT Press, 1990), 341-343.
[20] The title of Ishihara's essay is clearly aimed to challenge the stereotype of Japan being subservient and compliant, always bowing down to the demands of the West and saying yes.

his best known but most conservative work, *Astro Boy*, the overarching theme is still

concern for the misuse of nuclear weapons, although admittedly the "good" guys always

look Japanese (or at least Asians) and the bad guys appear Caucasian. *Black Jack*, the

medically themed manga conceived during a dark period in his career, is less about the

superhuman feats of a legendary surgeon and more about revealing the existing social

problems *within Japan*: poverty, corruption, pollution, and the degeneration of medical

ethics through the corporatization of hospitals and health care. Most importantly,

Tezuka's liberal-leaning politics were not simply an individual "choice." In fact,

Tezuka's predecessors, manga writers when Japan first launched its modernization

project, had already set the tone for manga as a politically informed and at times

potentially revolutionary medium.

Notably, contemporary manga as discussed in my dissertation is definitely not one

of the "new media" imported from the West, since on the one hand, it inherits drawing

techniques from Japanese traditional woodblock painting. On the other hand,

thematically, the mythical or quasi-mythical stories surrounding demons, ghosts, animals

and imaginary beings in traditional Buddhist and Shinto paintings also get carried over to

manga and anime, as instanced by Miyazaki's works and the children's pet creature

Pokémon. Even the sexual "perversity" in *hentai* manga has its indigenous root in *shunga*

(erotic painting), which is why conservatives in their vendetta against Japan's sexually

explicit manga, anime and video games like to draw on paintings like *The Dream of The*

Fisherman's Wife by the great master Hokusai Katsushika in 1814 and further

essentialize the Japanese as an inherently bestial species from time immemorial. In

Schodt's informative account of the history of Japanese manga, manga was injected with

a modern form after Commodore Perry landed in Japan in 1853, ending Japan's two hundred years of existence under the *sakoku* (locked country) edict. Early modern manga closely resembled political caricature in British newspapers in the second half of the nineteenth century. The manga that appeared during this period vividly parodied and yet truthfully reflected bias and jealousy, anxiety and frustration as Japan was forced to open up to the West in all different facets of social life. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, manga started to emulate Western comics in simplifying the details of the drawing and taking on what would be later categorized as a "cartoonish style"; at the same time, manga adopted the panel strip format as a response to the demand created by the emergence of newspapers and magazines, where manga could appear regularly with a continuous theme.

Up to this point, the development of Japanese manga to a large extent corresponded to that of American comic books. However, the miracle of Japan's rapid modernization took its toll, creating economic inequality. Radical leftist thinking was brewing in the air, and manga, as a popular and widely circulated genre, provided an easily accessible popular platform for political artists to voice their dissent toward Japan's domestic policy and international imperialist expansion. In the meantime, when the worldwide depression in 1929 worsened the economic woes Japan had felt after World War I and the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, right-wing militarists seized the civilian government in the 1930s and eradicated freedom of speech and expression with police control and tight censorship. As the Japanese war effort intensified, manga, a medium that used to carry a critical edge, was mobilized into part of the war machine and "converted" into mere political propaganda that aimed to either glorify "national

solidarity" or assail the enemies of Japan.[21] It was not until the Allied occupation of

Japan that intellectuals and artists found a temporary reprieve and embraced a political

freedom which ironically was granted as a result of Japan's defeat. Even more ironically,

it was also the United States that killed this aspiration for Western liberal democracy,

planted during America's occupation of Japan when the US pressured Japan's

government to put a stop to the student movement in 1968.

III. Manga as a Modern Hybrid

From my brief historical review of manga, we learn that first of all, manga is a

hybrid, but *not* simply in the rudimentary sense that manga is a fusion that combines the

characteristics of the imaginary cultural identities of East and West, traditional and

modern. Such features of "hybridity" come to define just about every cultural activity and

artifact, and together with Jamesonian "pastiche," it becomes an axiom in understanding

the workings of global capitalism and transnational cultural flows, such as the

popularization of manga and anime beyond Japan. Initially, hybridity, as proposed and

expounded upon in Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*, is an indispensable theoretical

intervention to undercut the instrumental narrative of the colonial machine in its

essentializing strategy to construct innately homogenous natives.[22] By re-appropriating

and subverting the derogatory term "hybrid" used by the colonizers to inhibit and contain

the monstrosity of miscegenation, Bhabha mutates the notion of hybridity into a "mutual

and mutable" subject position that emerges from the interstices, the *in-between* space,

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[21] Schbodt, *Manga!,* 56.
[22] Homi K.Bhabha, *Narration and Nation* (London: Routledge, 1990)

which Bhabha calls the *third space*. The *ambivalence* and indeterminacy of the third

space create possibility for "initiat[ing] a new sign of identity, and innovative sites of

collaboration and contestation."[23] Certainly, Bhabha's emphasis on hybridity aims to defy

categorical violence in colonial governmentality and enable an inclusive cultural politics

that celebrates creolization and embraces Derridean contamination. Yet, paradoxically, as

the notion of hybridity attempts to undo the fixity of colonial essentialism, the hybrid "in-

betweenness" as imagined to herald "a new sign of identity" also risks being reified and

reduced into an equally essentializing discourse that segregates "hybridity" in an

amorphous but nonetheless distinct *third space*. As ambivalent as it is, a hybrid identity is

still a category defined through well-defined categories. As anthropologist Nicholas

Thomas laments, "Hybridity is almost a good idea, but not quite."[24] In the most practical

sense, what do we do *after* we "reveal" the delightful fact that everything is more or less

a hybrid, and what does this discovery of hybridity really matter to our critical practice of

studying and understanding cultural forms? Hybridity as a critical concept is necessary to

keep essentialism and fundamentalism in check, but Thomas cautions that a general and

generalized concept such as hybridity should not act as a self-serving end statement, a

denouement to a theoretical play that oscillates between "dull purity" and "seductive

pollution." Thomas uses the instance of anthropology and warns of the tendency of

hybridity to become a binding paradigm instead of one that promises different

possibilities: "I find that the interest hybridity enables critics and curators to celebrate

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[23] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.
[24] Nicholas Thomas, "Cold Fusion" from *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol.98, No.1 (March 1996), 9-16.

their own capacity for acknowledging cultural difference, while refraining from engaging the stories and works that emerge from ground remote from their own."[25]

Moreover, in the case of Japan and manga, it is overtly simplified to define manga as simply a hybrid bearing features of the East and the West, the traditional and the modern. Specifically, the supposition that a hybrid as "the third place" can easily collude with and replicate such an essentialized identity formation as "the Japan-Asia-the West triad," whereby Japan posits itself to be this "third place," this "new identity" emerging between, even transcending, the two unequivocal entities of Asia and the West while simultaneously incorporating elements of both. As discussed at length elsewhere in my dissertation, a modern Japanese identity, according to Iwabuchi Koichi, is imagined to be constituted by "'an asymmetrical totalizing triad' between 'the Asia,' the West,' and 'Japan.'"[26] Iwabuchi emphasizes that, although Japan is manifestly located in the geography of Asia, in Japanese mental mapping, Japan also indubitably exists outside Asia. This duality of Japan being "part of" but also simultaneously "different from" and even "above" Asia comes to underlie the expansionist modernity developed from the late nineteenth century onward. The political slogan "Escape Asia, Enter the West" (*datsua nyuo*), introduced during Japan's modernization project, saw Asia as Japan's inferior and a negative image of a past from which Japan had to move away if Japan as a nation was to survive Western imperialism. The discursive effort of "de-Asianization" does not necessarily aim for Japan to sever its tie with a coherent cultural imaginary called Asia. Rather, it is through this symbolic gesture of disarticulation that a putative unified

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[25] Ibid., 9.
[26] Iwabuchi Koichi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2002), 7.

Japanese identity can be articulated through its relationship with the other two equally

unified identities that are "Asia" and the "West." This triangulation maneuver was further

utilized in the late 1930s, but with Japan reorienting itself back to Asia as Japan

intensified its military effort in the name of building a new East Asian order through a

pan-regional "solidarity," termed the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Japan's

return to Asia was intended to assimilate the rest of Asia under its control. With its

success in absorbing the experiences of Western nations, and its irrefutable cultural

proximity to its Asian neighbors, Japan saw itself as the unambiguous frontier of Asia

capable of "reconciling" the two different cultures of East and West, and ultimately

mitigating and countering the threat from the West on behalf of "Asia." In other words, a

modern Japanese identity is not unlike a hybrid, which allegedly is a mixture of the two

essentialized categories of "East" and "West" and yet fundamentally different from both.

This surely begs the question of whether Japan is indeed a hybrid, but what has higher

stakes is how the fabricated belief that Japan is a hybrid, a "third place," could transform

into cultural narcissism and imperialist nationalism with the real consequences of war.

In fact, the triad of "Japan-Asia-the West" is a symptom of what Bruno Latour

calls a "modern Constitution," through which a procedure of separation gives birth to a

medley of distinct entities—Japan, Asia, East, West, the traditional and the modern—

while simultaneously instituting binary opposition or asymmetrical incommensurability

between these divisions.[27] However, this "modern Constitution" of Japan also enables

intersections and hybridization between these separate categories, as instanced by Japan's

strategic and discursive re-embedment in Asia when Japan invaded other Asian countries

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[27] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

under the banner of establishing regional unity, when Japan restructured its relation to the "West" after Japan's surrender in 1945, and again when Japan sought to expand its cultural outreach to a thriving Asian market during the 1990s. As Latour argues in *We Have Never Been Modern*, the compartmentalizing and dichotomizing tendency of the "modern Constitution" charts out ontologically distinct categories and classifies each category by way of setting up a series of hierarchized binarisms: nonhumans vs. humans, nature vs. culture, subject vs. object, science vs. God, language vs. being, and so on. Yet, paradoxically, the "work of purification" that produces these uncontaminated, uncontaminable and mutually exclusive categories also facilitates and depends on the "work of translation" that proliferates hybrids and intermediary "networks" among these naturalized and separate categories.[28] As a sociologist of science, Latour shows that science is not an unmediated reality of the natural world, and neither is the so-called uncontestable scientific "fact" produced in a lab completely insulated from personal biases, political investments and discursive mash-up. However, Latour does not go to the other end of the theoretical spectrum, insisting that science is constructed and that scientific facts are at best fabrications ridden with individual proclivities and cultural idiosyncrasies. Rather, Latour proposes to see science as "collective," creating "delicate networks" through the translation and hybridization of seemingly divided constituencies—things as objects, human as subjects, language as representation—in the modern Constitution.

Ultimately, Latour's project does not simply aim at addressing the problematics of the "discipline" of hard science, but to a larger extent, Latour illuminates how underneath

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[28] Ibid., 11.

the monist guarantee in modern Constitution is the interbreeding *practice* multiplying

hybrids. In Latour's metaphor, we cease to be modern and become "hybrids" once we

start to commit to a kind of intellectual practice that tries to retie "the Gordian Knot" by

crisscrossing established categories and normative epistemes.[29] The hybrid, in other

words, is no longer a distinct "third place," and neither is it a "new" distinct identity. The

hybrid is an ongoing process and exercise of threading back and forth, mixing and

weaving gods, science, souls, politics, fictions, laws, industries and things together

without reducing one category to another. Considering the mutual inscription of manga

and Japanese modern history, I argue that from its modern emergence and reconception,

manga is a Latourian sense of hybrid. More than simply a popular genre or Japan's staple

cultural product, manga embodies a continuous *practice* and *process* of mediating and

modulating the myriad of experiences in Japan's encounter of modernity. Surely, to a

certain extent, every existing cultural form can be seen as one of the many hybrids a

modern Constitution breeds, such as the daily activities of thinking, reading, and writing.

In the most ordinary sense, Latour's treatise on the Modern Constitution asks us to "pay

attention," in Stiegler's sense of the word, to how our living reality often belies what the

doctors, scientists, politicians, psychologists, sociologists—in short, an army of

"experts"—claim to be regulated by mutually exclusive disciplines, and we are hybrid

ourselves when we think in "collective" without resorting to the familiar subject/object,

nature/culture, nonhuman/human distinctions.

First and foremost, manga is a site where this "collective" takes place. One of the

most striking features of manga is that a multitude of different creatures cohabit in the

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[29] Ibid., 3.

universe of manga. The share of animals, robots, mythical beings, monsters, and cyborgs in manga is equal to, if not greater than, that of humans. As discussed in the next chapter of my dissertation, the surprisingly intimate relationship between humans and nonhumans, especially machines, portrayed in manga and anime does not necessarily point to an unthinking and uncritical infatuation with technology, in the sense that techno-Orientalist discourse tends to cast Japanese as machine-loving and machine-like creatures. Rather, such a racial stereotype of Japan mirrors the neurotic and paranoid relationship between humans and nonhumans conceived by the modern Constitution. Secondly, precisely because Latour's notion of hybrid can be a mundane occurrence, by treating manga as one of the hybrids a modern Constitution proliferates, one can circumvent the nativist impulse of seeing manga as a uniquely Japanese phenomenon. From Mescallado's observation, fans of Japanese manga and anime often demonstrate an "aggressively Japanophiliac" attitude by declaring that "Japanese comics are superior to American comics with such vigor that one suspects they see manga as an artform that American funnybooks simply can't aspire to, and creators such as Rumiko Takahashi and Masamune Shirow as *auteur* geniuses with no peers in America."[30] Oddly but not surprisingly, in his appraisal of Japanese manga vis-à-vis American comics, Mescallado is also inadvertently in awe of the Japanese manga industry in terms of both quantity and quality, and openly confesses his admiration for the sophistication of narrative in Japanese manga, the versatility of genres, and the capacity of the manga industry to expand itself into a global multimedia conglomerate. However, when Mescallado envies the astounding feat that the Japanese manga industry has accomplished and which comic

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[30] Mescallado, "Otaku Nation," 132.

book publications in other countries would be capable of only "once in a blue moon," he

unwittingly turns "Japanophiliac" by branding the success of manga as exclusively

Japanese while tacitly suggesting that the formidable model set up by manga is a much

vied-for exception, a marvelous anomaly that cannot be easily emulated.[31]

As I have discussed earlier, the tendentious difference in the development of

available genres between Japanese manga and American comics is pretty much shaped by

historical contingencies, as can be said about every other literary movement and cultural

production. The predicament Mescallado encounters is an understandable one: comic

books are consumable cultural products that combine narrative and painting and,

therefore, manga that carries similar characteristics to and appears derivative of Western

comic arts has become the comics' cultural "other." Such a cross-cultural analysis of the

rupture and the continuum between manga and comic books is important; however, such

an approach might risk reinforcing and naturalizing the often contradictory relationship

between the cultural re/production and the "culture" it allegedly stems from. Surely, if

one is to conduct a myopic study of the genre per se, "Western" comics suffer from

arrested development compared to their ever-growing "Eastern" offspring, i.e. Japanese

manga. Yet, Mescallado in fact hits the mark right from the outset when he unabashedly

declares his love for "junk culture":

> Junk culture from a different shore: for the most part, that is exactly what the
> ever-burgeoning flow of translated Japanese comics (*manga*) and animation
> (*anime*) to America has been. Don't get me wrong: I count myself as *otaku*—that
> is, a dedicated fan of *anime* and *manga* (though the term has broader usage in
> Japan, encompassing any fanatical hobbyist)—and I *love* junk culture. I've
> devoted a great deal of time and energy to studying American comics both as an
> academic and a journalist, and I agree with Jules Feiffer's contention, in *The
> Great Comic Book Heroes* (Dail, 1965), that one of comics' greatest assets is its
> "junk" stigma and the freedom this allows the medium. But without that sense of

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[31] Ibid., 132-134.

junk-culture perspective, without the understanding that this is ephemera that only occasionally aspires to art, the desire to elevate the accomplishments of certain creators—or to exoticize *manga* and *anime* simply because they're Japanese…— would be too temping.[32]

On the one hand, the very existence of the binarized and asymmetrical categories of "junk culture" versus "canon," "high culture" versus "low culture" attests to how the partitioning and stratifying structure of the modern Constitution ramifies itself by "disciplining" culture into a distinctive hierarchy. On the other hand, just as the hybrids created by and yet simultaneously segregated from the purified imaginary of the modern Constitution, "junk culture" is not unlike the filth produced by and excreted from the "canon." Striving to elevate junk culture *beyond* the ghettoized bottom of the cultural hierarchy and embalm it with the sublime hallmark of "art," to wit, the desire for purification, is part of being modern. Similarly, the insistence on the singularity and even insularity of the junk culture through attributing the cultural spectacle to a (Japanese) national character is also a modern belief to keep each invented "category" impervious and exclusionary to each other.

However, just like the hybrids begotten and propagated by the modern Constitution, junk culture, occupying the lowest rung of the ladder, does the "dirty job" of mixing and experimenting, which is why junk culture remains much stigmatized. But this is also why junk culture permits a certain sense of freedom, although only temporarily and not without restrictions. One of the most prominent examples is British-American science fiction, a literary practice that has been regarded as "trashy" and "pulpy" from its inception in the nineteenth century. But the fact that SF never really crosses the threshold into the "literary canon" has made SF a fertile and convenient

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[32] Mescallado, "*Otaku* Nation," 132.

testing ground for all different kinds of creative ideas. Most crucially, while the modern Constitution institutes science as a clearly demarcated realm of study dedicated to revealing irrefutable truths (since science is intended to be the unmediated reality of the natural world), science fiction as a diverse and malleable mode of discourse blatantly smuggles fiction's implied sense of fabrication, i.e. human imagination, into the deified establishment of science that is believed to be undefiled with human intervention. In other words, as science replaces God and gradually hypostatizes itself into a new faith of modernity, the blasphemous emergence of science fiction "contaminates" the belief in pure, unsullied science by engaging in the ongoing processes of hybridization between the supposedly autonomous, dichotomized categories of matter vs. language, nature vs. culture, and scientific truths vs. imaginative fabrication. The instance of science fiction suggests that junk culture is not simply a fixed set of cultural forms cheaply made for mass consumption or brainless entertainment responsible for dumbing down the population. Nor does junk culture necessarily provide a euphoric space—as proponents and fans would protest in their defense of it—for an underground community impervious to the hegemonic cultural forces, which might even become a radical counterculture subverting the mainstream and conventional.

On the contrary, more often than not, junk culture *is* the mainstream and the subcultures deriving from junk culture are diverse and can hardly be generalized. Some SF communities, for example, are indeed politically radical, but notoriously sometimes in a fascist, right-wing way. In fact, when we treat culture as the hybrid of the modern Constitution, the "trashiness" of junk culture does not come to lie in the intrinsic aesthetic "value" of certain finished cultural "products" which are considered to be inferior to the

sophistication of "high culture." Rather, junk culture literally functions as a "recycling bin" in doing the work of assembling and reassembling. Like a porous field, junk culture embodies within itself the uneven *processes* of absorbing and regurgitating all different kinds of materials. The shelf life of junk culture might be short, but this ephemerality, which is supposed to be the "genetic defect" of junk culture, can turn out to be the vantage point for a timely, although not necessarily refined or well-thought-out, inquiry into and response to the social and political milieu in which it is embedded. The "transience" that defines junk culture also signifies an end to the logic of singularity and the aesthetics of originality; instead, technological reproduction has made reproducibility and recyclability the de facto mode of junk culture.

Many theorists proclaim that the advent of "postmodernity," as evidenced by the burgeoning of different types of "junk culture" and cultural "industries" enabled by capitalism, has undermined—or at least destabilized—the normalized order and hierarchy between high and low culture, between serious art and comic pastime, and between irreplaceable origin and disposable copy. In particular, the phenomenon of manga and anime demonstrates the impossibility of distinguishing East from West, the origin from the copy, since the forms of anime and manga are clearly influenced by American comics and Disney's animation, while Japan, in/famously known for its capacity for innovative imitation, has adopted the forms but developed its own "variations" that are drastically different from the "original." While apologists of postmodernism trumpet free play and celebrate boundary crossing, opponents see postmodernism as the vulgarization of taste and ultimately the demise of "culture." The anxiety and excitement over junk culture and popular culture is nothing new. Nor is the debate between "culture and anarchy," as

demonstrated by Matthew Arnold's earnest attempt in the nineteenth century to preserve the "sweetness and light" of culture against erosion from the plebeians. Nonetheless, whether one loves or hates junk culture, whether one is for or against the commerce-driven cultural productions and reproductions of postmodernity, junk culture and popular culture remain to a large extent conceptualized in a contentious position *against* high culture. Moreover, in Mescallado's assertion, being "low" and in the "margin" renders to junk culture the much-prized freedom of which canonized high culture is deprived. Admittedly, marginality can be a productive space that allows different kinds of possibilities, but there still exists a range of conventions and formulas that the creators from a given subculture are expected to follow in order for their works to be recognized and identified by the followers of the subculture. In reality, the rules of a marginalized culture can be more strictly guarded and scrupulously enforced so that the boundary and the identity of this subculture can stay intact. As dirty and gratuitous as junk culture can get, it constitutes, at least *performatively*, a distinct universe of its own lineage and permitted diversions. That is why, as Thomas Lamarre mentions, the break into the mainstream and the potential of entry into the canon can encounter resistance from members of an obscure or misunderstood subculture, for the potential "redemption" of junk culture might mean the loss of its own critical edge, which would be a dead end for its carefully nurtured community and the cultural forms associated with the community.[33]

Yet, by introducing the Latourian notion of hybrid into a by-now banal and banalized understanding of popular culture, the relationship between high and low, the original and the duplicate, and the "inside" and the "outside" of one particular culture is

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[33] Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 153.

not necessarily governed by the axiom of exclusion and competition, but by a much more complex mechanism that encourages a mutually complementary and supplementary dynamic between each ostensibly well-defined category. This is not to argue in a commonsensical way that since these existing categories are human constructions to begin with, there surely exist natural connections despite the artificial barriers implemented in-between. Once again, the dichotomy of the artificial and the natural is one of the Great Divide of modernity and, even if these categories are constructions, they nonetheless substantiate a set of discourses that have the real consequences of organizing and disorganizing the living realities of everyday life, allowing some possibilities while prohibiting others. In the aforementioned instance, the "genre" of science fiction straddles science and fiction and thrives on creating monstrous hybrids that meld together two seemingly irrelevant and incommensurable realms. In a paradoxical but significant way, science fiction performs on behalf of science the work of imagination and indeed, as SF fans point out, the wildest fantasies of SF writers often precede and get realized in the hard and hardened discipline of science. For instance, in his novel *Neuromancer* published in 1984, William Gibson coined the term "cyberspace" and foresaw how global information networks would reconfigure social interactions and remap geopolitics.[34] There have been disputes about whether it is a coincidence when SF writers and scientists share similar visions (in fact, quite a few SF writers are scientists-turned-writers) and the argument about whether the innovation first appeared in SF or the scientific idea itself is already immanent in the scientific knowledge available to the writers when they are

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[34] Fredric Jameson, "A Global Neuromancer," *Public Books*, July 1, 2015, https://www.publicbooks.org/a-global-neuromancer/. Jameson argues, "[C]yberspace is a literary invention and does not really exist, however much time we spend on the computer every day."

writing. Such disputes and arguments further demonstrate the entanglement and mutual enmeshment between SF and science. The trafficking of ideas goes both ways and the translation between science and fictionality makes the categories of SF and science, and the disciplines of humanities and science unsafe on the one hand. On the other hand, it is also the unmistakable marginality and "lowness" of science fiction that upholds and cements the haughty imaginary of science as pure, objective and imagination-free.

Manga, like science fiction in the West, is the most significant as well as the most prolific mass genre from twentieth century Japan, particularly after WWII. The example of science fiction, especially the myriad ways it interacts with and supplements science, helps to reconceptualize and resituate manga *not* by way of its formal affinity with American comics or through an exotic lens of seeing manga as one enigmatic Japanese subculture that has a tremendous following among young generations around the globe. Studies on the "forms" of manga and anime, such as Lamarre's seminal work, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, offer useful approaches to making sense of the ever-awe-inspiring image productions of *anime* that are often rendered secondary to the classical methods of "textual analysis." Lamarre's explanation of the differences between "full animation"—a practice standardized first by Walt Disney's studios—and "limited animation"—a deliberate choice made by some cult Japanese anime makers in their insistence upon using coarser forms in order to distinguish themselves from "mainstream" anime makers and US-born animation—is particularly important for illuminating the cultural politics within an ostensibly impersonal, neutral and neutralized field of technology. However, the worrisome aspect of Lamarre's work and other similar studies is that, to begin with, it risks further occultizing of Japanese anime and the

subculture it established by turning anime and animation into a "science," or a kind of "philosophy" as Lamarre himself would prefer to name it, with minutely charted-out systems and organizing principles for something as nebulous as perception. In response to Takashi Murakami's famous Superflat movement and by drawing upon the manifesto of Okada Toshio, the self-endowed king of otaku, Lamarre's project proceeds with the underlying assumption that *otaku* are, in Okada's words, "people with a [highly] evolved sense of sight."[35] This "taxonomic impulse" of modernity, in Foucault's terms, has instituted itself into the mandatory procedures of knowledge production, which also include administering the apparatus of the most mundane activities such as seeing. Lamarre, influenced by the great cause of Okada, tries in a subtler and more thoughtful way than Okada to "rescue" otaku from social ostracization and victimization. But on the other side of this specialization and "speciation" of otaku as intelligent fans with an unusual visual sensibility is precisely the familiar racialized narrative, specifically in the context of Japan, portraying otaku as social scum ogling away amidst various video consoles and in front of computer screens.

Undeniably, the growing serious interest from the academics of the "West" in the subculture constituted by manga, anime and video games is a much belated and needed acknowledgment of a "junk culture" and the fans identifying with this junk culture, particularly given that this junk culture and the fan communities associated with it still by and large suffer vilification and ridicule in the context of Japan. However, the alarming fact is that the enduring success of manga, anime and video games abroad does not guarantee the vindication of this subculture and its followers within Japan. As Iwabuchi

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[35] Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 144.

warns emphatically, the ethnocentric and culture-centric discourses from the early 1990s, as evidenced by Ishihara's inflammatory call for an Asian united front led by Japan against the United States in the essay "The Japan That Can Say No," have paved the way for a broader and much more refined "soft nationalism" or "brand nationalism."[36] The cultural "contents" conveyed through a variety of media such as television, manga, and anime and video games have boosted the "hard power" that is established through sales of "consumer technologies" and further upgraded and transformed Japan into an economic force with irreplaceable, reproducible cultural "soft power." In a way, the nationalistic discourses appropriate the phenomenon of a disparaged subculture receiving unprecedented attention from the West and repackage it as an inspirational tale of how Japan could redeem its underdog status and triumph over the West. As quoted by Iwabuchi, one popular magazine wrote in 1992: "Who said that Japan only imports superior foreign culture and commodities and has nothing originally Japanese which has a universal appeal? Now Japanese customs, products and systems are conquering the world!"[37] In other words, the idiosyncrasies embodied in various Japanese cultural products can be conveniently and readily patented as a logo for "original Japaneseness," and the contradiction between particularity and universality is easily explained away by the ruthless but oversimplified logic of competition; that is, the conqueror of the market has the final say in "universality." Ishihara's move to enforce censorship of sexual portrayals of youths might seem risky and controversial at first, but ultimately Japanese policymakers and official cultural discourses have never given the subculture of anime,

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[36] Iwabuchi Koichi, "'Soft' Nationalism and Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global," *Asian Studies Review* 26, No. 4 (December 2002): 447-469. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357820208713357
[37] Ibid., 451.

manga and video games its due. Moreover, Ishihara's bill performs the symbolic gesture of purification of a junk culture, since presumably cultural exports such as manga, anime and videogames are synonyms for "Japaneseness," and Japan, as a respectable "modern" country, should clearly sever its tie with impropriety.

One of the reasons I propose to use Latour's concept of hybrid to reconceptualize manga and anime is not simply to circumvent what Mescallado describes as the Japanophiliac exoticization of anime and manga that is quite common among American fans, but also to undercut a kind of self-Orientalizing discourse that has been revived within Japan as part of the effort to propagate "soft nationalism." At the same time, although anime constitutes a specific medium, a study devoted solely to "media" and "technology" per se might risk reifying or even fetishizing the "form" while overlooking the volatile and shifting social relations that take place in the use of the "media." Fundamentally, what makes a junk culture and popular culture like that of anime and manga interesting and indispensable is precisely the "relationality" it enables, in spite of and because of its "trashiness" and "lowness." Earlier, I examined the limits of Mescallado's approach to situate anime in the anime-comics continuum or divergence, for a comparative study based on a shared origin and formalistic similarities or differences might lead to a facile conclusion that one excels over or is inferior to the other. But if the function of a "junk culture" is to engage in the filthy work of hybridization whereby clandestine relationality emerges amidst irreconcilable contradiction, as exemplified by the relationship between science fiction and science, then manga and anime should not be subsumed under the same rubric of "genre" or

"media" as American comics and animation.[38] Latour's definition of hybrid is useful in

understanding junk culture or popular culture, for first and foremost, Latour recognizes

and acknowledges the hierarchical and asymmetrical relations built into the Constitution

of modernity, and yet his sense of hybrid does not look for salvation or purification. Nor

is the hybrid a biological destiny trapped as well as secured in the Bhabhaian "third

place." The hybrids of the modern Constitution are not identity items, but refer to the

unfolding practice of crisscrossing differently striated domains without fear of getting

"messy." Fundamentally, what the hybrids set out to do resonates with what Deleuze and

Guattari describe as the open-ending processes of deterritorialization and

reterritorialization.[39] While Deleuze and Guattari initially use the concept of

deterritorialization and reterritorialization to explain the uncoupling of the necessary

relationship between labor, means of production and nation-state in late capitalism, they

also utilize the concept to argue for a "minor literature," whose language keeps

unmapping from one terrain and remapping to another without settling into a distinct

ontological designation. A minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, "doesn't

come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major

language."[40] That is to say, a minor literature is defined by *relationality* and the

discourses this relationality constellates, not by its inherent identity as a minority

speaking a distinct "minor language."

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[38] American comics can also be conceived as a modern hybrid, but with a different genealogy from manga. However, a hybrid, in Latour's sense, should not be mistaken as a "genre."

[39] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[40] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.

IV. A Minor Literature as *Eine Kleine Literatur*

In fact, Latour's notion of hybrids helps to clarify the misunderstandings of what Deleuze and Guattari call a "minor literature." First published in France in 1975 and translated into English in 1986, Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* is arguably one of the founding books of the emerging field of postcolonial studies at the time, and their concept of "minor literature" has since then become a "major" critical paradigm, invigorating critiques and analyses of colonial machines and the postcolonial condition. However, most of the theoretical undertakings, as I discussed earlier, seem to be carried away by the heavily loaded word "minor," which in both English and in French (*mineure*) connotes the meanings of being inferior in status and secondary in importance. Henceforth, a minor literature is readily conflated with "minority literature" and indeed, Deleuze and Guattari do not evade the term "minority" in their definition of a minor literature as what "a minority constructs within a major language." In particular, Deleuze and Guattari's project is to offer a reading of Kafka by way of "minor literature," and given Kafka's unmistakable marginal "identity" as a Jew living in Prague and writing in German, the concept of a minor literature inevitably comes to define the politically oppressed minority. Yet, notably, Deleuze and Guattari are not the first thinkers to draw up the idea of a "minor literature." Rather, their concept is an extension of and a creative take on Kafka's conception of initiating a kind of writing practice called "*eine kleine Literatur*," which in German simply means a "little" or "small" literature—no more, no less—devoid of the extra layers of meaning that emerge as this "*eine kleine Literatur*" is translated into "*une Littérature mineure*" in French and

"a minor literature" in English. Considering this rudimentary definition of "small literature," a minor literature does not have to, as Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih criticize Deleuze and Guattari, rest solely on the "binary and vertical relationship" with the major, whereby a minor literature is necessarily born *within* a major literature and yet destined to work *against* the major.[41]

Kafka's original idea of "small literature," in the most literal and ordinary sense of the word, registers Kafka's humble positioning of his own writings as "small"—like a little kid learning to write—*in relation to* the great writers and daunting traditions that came before him. In Réda Bensmaïa's foreword to the English translation of *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, he relates Kafka's position:

> If we reread Kafka's *Diaries* in light of what the authors bring out in this book, it immediately becomes apparent how important it was for Kafka to situate the type of writing and rewriting he was practicing. Commentators have been too quick to label as mystical (neurotic?) or metaphysical meditations that always took the form of a radical questioning of classical or traditional literary writing. Kafka does not read and admire Goethe and Flaubert to imitate them, much less to move beyond (*aufheben*) them according to some teleological schema like that of Hegel, but to *determine and appreciate the incommensurable distance that separates him from their ideal of depth or perfection*" (xiv, italics added).[42]

According to Bensmaïa, in *Diaries* and other quasi-"theoretical" texts, Kafka's meditation on his own writing and reflection on what kind of "literature" he and some of his peers were creating does not assume, as critics (probably including Deleuze and Guattari) would like to imagine, a polemical position in situating himself with regard to the "classical or traditional literary writing" and the masters such as Goethe and Flaubert.

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[41] Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: Thinking through the Minor, Transnationally," in *Minor Transnationalism*, eds. Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–23.
[42] Réda Bensmaïa, "Foreword: The Kafka Effect," trans. Terry Cochran, in Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka*, ix–xxi.

In a stunningly realistic way, Kafka was not devoted to "becoming the masters." Nor was he writing toward heroic transcendence. In fact, Kafka's idea of "small literature" is a paradox and a radicial ideal, since the premise of a small literature is to give up a sense of mastery by unlearning the habit of emulating and the impulse to "surpass" all literary predecessors—which is not unlike becoming a "little kid" again. But Kafka does not mean to disregard the masters and traditions altogether by simply imagining an enclosed writing space, a historical vacuum, within which he can "freely" do his writing experiments. On the contrary, Kafka's small literature is derived from an acknowledgement and appreciation of the irreducible gap and "incommensurable space," in Bensmaïa's words, between the writing exercises of small literature and the canonized works of the masters. A small literature does not neurotically flaunt itself, criticize the establishment, and yet secretly yearn for the same kind of "perfection" and "depth." And most tellingly, a small literature affect-wise does not occupy a negative and reactive emotional space reeking of adversarial or victimizing sentiments which, regrettably, has come to often totalize the identity formation of a racial, political or sexual "minority." In this regard, a minor literature deriving from Kafka's idea of "a small literature" can be drastically different from "a minority literature" that refers pointedly to literary and cultural productions from minority groups, especially given that the discourses on minor and minority have largely been straitjacketed by the dogma and practice of colonial rule. This rule has not only instituted a vertical hierarchy between the dominant major and the oppressed minor, but also predetermines a dialectical relationality between one minority subgroup *against* another. As Lionnet and Shih submit, "There is a clear lack of proliferation of relational discourses among different minority groups, a legacy from the

colonial ideology of divide and conquer that has historically pitted different ethnic groups against each other."[43]

Kafka's idea of "a small literature," like Latour's hybrids, offers precisely what Lionnet and Shih are looking for, i.e. a kind of relational discourse. According to Lionnet and Shih, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizome suggests an refreshing "lateral and nonhierarchical network" and opens up possibilities for "uncontainable, invisible symbolic relations of geography that become the creative terrain on which minority subjects act and interact in fruitful, lateral ways."[44] Yet, for Lionnet and Shih, "a minor literature" as conceived by Deleuze and Guattari replicates a centripetal model whereby the social and psychical identification of the minor is, or at least "*appears,*" always mediated by and through the major (italics in original). Lionnet and Shih's critique is well-justified, but as my explanation of Kafka's "small literature" demonstrates, what is at issue is not the dialectics between the "major" and the "minor," or between differently situated minority groups. The task for critical thinking is not to look for a "third space" alternative, or move beyond and outside of a dialectical relationality. Rather, what matters is *how* to work with dialectics, acknowledge the uneasy incommensurability, *appreciate* and *transform* the irreducible contradiction embedded in a dialectical relationality into the source, the space for creative exercise and critical practice. And this open-ended process of working with rather than working against the dialectics, transforming instead of overcoming "the incommensurable distance," is what defines the small literature as "small," as "minor," for it does not presumptuously promise a solution and an answer, or a "grand" scheme.

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[43] Lionnet and Shih, *Minor Transnationalism*, 2.
[44] Ibid., 2.

This is not to say that Deleuze and Guattari refuse to acknowledge Kafka's personal life and the painful history of the Jewish community, or the interrelations between the "individual" and the "collective" that come into play in Kafka's works. Rather, an over-determined reading of Kafka enacts a regulating apparatus that itself becomes an oppressive machine *par excellence*. Moreover, the diagnosis that Kafka is a victim of a dysfunctional family, or a martyr of class and racial struggle, produces a deadening and all-consuming negative affect that can be usurped and exploited into a reductively adversarial discourse, in the same way Ishihara turns Japan's position as the "underdog" into an abrasive xenophobic cause to rally "Japan" against the "West." In fact, Deleuze and Guattari, in their blasphemous piety, refuse to "capture" Kafka or blindly put him on a pedestal. In their unorthodox homage to Kafka, they push for a radical experimentation that involves a risk of "killing" the anointed master Kafka by, for instance, literalizing Kafka's known metaphors and invalidating their symbolic value. The outcry of Joseph K's "Like a dog" in *The Trial* is one of the most notorious examples where the metaphor is readily hardened, habituated to reflect imposed or self-inflicted denigration and an all-out negation of the fictional character of K, which inevitably and truthfully points to the dehumanized underdog status of Kafka and of the ethnic minority of Jews. For Deleuze and Guattari, "Like a dog!" does not have to point metaphorically to the self-abasement of a guilt-ridden Kafka, or to the overall mistreatment of Jews in Prague but instead, "it has become becoming—the becoming-dog of the man and the becoming-man of the dog."[45] Deleuze and Guattari aim to destroy, as inspired by Kafka, all the metaphors in Kafka and insist on attending to the metamorphosis, the becoming,

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[45] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka,* 22.

since they refuse the formulaic inquiry of finding resemblance between an animal and a man, and the standardized conclusion of subsuming an animal into a consecrated statue of man.[46] They embrace Kafka's language at its face value and treat the metaphor as first and foremost a mode of articulation, derived from a relation between the incommensurable domains of "the animal" and "the words": "The animal does not speak 'like' a man but pulls from the language tonalities lacking in signification; the words are themselves 'like' the animals but in their own way climb about, bark and roam around, being properly linguistic dogs, insects, or mice."[47] The irreducible incommensurability between a "human" language and the natural world, and the deterritorialization of the one domain onto the other is what the enunciation of "like a dog" embodies and what keeps unfolding in *eine kleine Literatur*.

The practice of moving towards a minor literature is characterized by an emphasis on the "becoming" between a man and an animal, on a reversible *deterritorialization* that escapes the grip of teleology and undercuts the totalizing pathos of either failure or triumph. Deleuze and Guattari put it in a subversively simple paradox: a minor literature is to "simply write like a dog" (but a dog can't write—exactly, exactly)."[48] Precisely because a dog can't write or speak "like" a man, we have to write like a dog (that can't write like a man). What Deleuze and Guattari propose here is a reiteration of Kafka's modest idea of a small literature in relinquishing the sense of mastery, and most profoundly, a complete affirmation of writing *despite and by "virtue" of the inability and impossibility to write.* To quote Deleuze and Guattari's appraisal of Kafka, "Kafka marks

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[46] Franz Kafka says, "Metaphors are one of the things that makes me despair of literature," in *Diaries*, 1921, as quoted in Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka*, 22.
[47] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 22.
[48] Ibid., 26.

the impasse that bars access to writing for the Jews of Prague and turns their literature

impossible—the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the

impossibility of writing otherwise."[49] Kafka is exemplary of *eine kleine Literatur*, not

because he can write like a master from the position of being an ethnic minor, but

because he turns the impossibility of writing and the inability to write into the

impossibility of not writing. The call to "write like a dog" cannot be mistaken as "writing

as an "underdog," for Deleuze and Guattari aim to shift the exacting politics of Identity

and Being—for instance, a clichéd identification of Kakfa as a beleaguered minority, an

underdog Jew—to a transformative and affirmative politics of *doing* and *becoming*—for

Kafka, to become this improbable Jewish Prague writer writing in German, to become a

dog that can't write like a man but still writes, and to become a "becoming-minor" with

all force:

> How many styles or genres or literary movements, even very small ones, have
> only one single dream: to assume a major function in language, to offer
> themselves as a sort of state language, an official language (for example,
> psychoanalysis today, which would like to be a master of the signifier, of
> metaphor, of wordplay). Create the opposite dream: know how to create a
> becoming-minor.[50]

Thus, a becoming-minor is simultaneously a linguistic, artistic and political undertaking.

Resonating with Proust's comments that "beautiful works are written in a kind of foreign

language,"[51] a becoming-minor is to "become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in

relation to one's own language."[52] Like the way Kafka uses the German language to do

many "little" experimentations from within the major German literary canons, the politics

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[49] Ibid.,16.
[50] Ibid, 27.
[51] Marcel Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. John Sturrock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), 93.
[52] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 19.

of a becoming-minor does not aim at overturning the "major," but is committed to defamiliarizing the familiar and the given so as to open up different possibilities and potentialities.

V. The Subculture of Anime and Manga: A Becoming-Minor

I argue that Deleuze and Guattari's movement of "becoming-minor," combined with Latour's notion of hybrid bearing the process of translation, offers a much-needed paradigm shift in understanding the globalized youth culture of anime and manga. In the first chapter, I examine how the demographic of minors and youths emerges as a target of governmentality, which enacts a political economy through normalizing child development via disciplinary mechanisms and regulating measures towards subsequent normative adulthood. A minor, once protected and secured by legal statutes and other institutionalized efforts, is calibrated by the calculus of biopolitical governance as an aggregate. The imaginary life trajectory of an inchoate child matures into an individual with full capacity to partake in the "disposition of things" and comes to obtain a "level of reality," to borrow Foucault's words, which facilitates continuous input of interventional techniques and knowledge (*savoir*) to ensure the smooth transition.[53] Using Stiegler's concept of psychopower, I examine how the attention-capture apparatuses of hyperindustrial psychotechnologies highjack the psychic maturation process, which is the premise of political economy, and create structural immaturity and collective minoritization. The mind of the minor is literally vacated into a "blank slate" readily

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[53] Michael Foucault, "Governmentality," in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, ed., James D.Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1994), 201-222.

available for the bombardment of advertising and entertainment, dispossessed of the

desire and critical faculty to establish a sustainable relation with things, to "imbricate"

oneself in the "complex of men and things." As the government is defined by "the right

disposition of things," the government of youth through regulating consumption

behaviors and propelling drives ends up undoing itself by redefining "the right

disposition of things" to simply disposing of, i.e. consuming and discarding, things. The

intelligence presumably derived from the relation with things, with technical objects, is

destroyed and the desires enabling the libidinal economy short-circuited. The political

economy thus is turned into a short-termist "diseconomy."[54]

As mentioned in the opening of the chapter, Stiegler's critique remains by and

large within the framework of the Enlightenment, and his definition of intergenerational

inheritance through care is informed by the axioms of Aufklärung and Bildung. The

movement of enlightenment is, in historical hindsight, a major justification project

providing rationality and instrumentality in transforming the art of government towards

the "science" of government. Maturity, as the ultimate end of development, legitimizes

and institutes the narrative of economy that connotes careful management of growth and

progress—for both body and mind—so as to ensure an incremental effect. To economize

is to take care, as Stiegler maintains, and vice versa, as the destruction of a system of care

through the consumerist deformation of attention has a direct correlation to the crises of

capitalism.[55] In this regard, Stiegler's theory shares with capitalist governance the

implicit assumption that minors and youth are part of preparatory procedures to realize

[54] Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).
[55] Bernard Stiegler, "Within the Limits of Capitalism, Economizing Means Taking Care," *Ars Industrialis*, accessed January 18, 2019, http://www.arsindustrialis.org/node/2922.

maturity, to become individuated through interpellation by culture and thereby capable of "responding" to the demands of culture. In Stiegler's exposition, minors and youth need care so as to undergo what Stiegler terms the "transindividuation process," where the individual and the community mutually transform and become associated with a psychotechnical milieu. While critical of how contemporary audiovisual attention-capture apparatuses have disrupted, dissociated such a transindividuation process, Stiegler also acknowledges the pharmacological potential of psychotechnologies in creating a different kind of transindividuation. Notwithstanding, Stiegler does not quite contemplate and elaborate on how exactly an alternative mode of transindividuation works, and whether an orthodox model of "child development" is still viable in late-stage capitalism.

What if the transindividuation process is not organized by the teleology of maturity and enlightenment (Aufklärung) for minors and youths? What if minors, in failing to "respond to" to the symbolic authority upheld by the dominant Culture, respond to an unsanctioned subculture which, derived from the Culture, enforces a transindividuation process? What if the minor's failure or inability to respond to the call of maturity is a kind of response to a symbolic authority that has consistently failed them? What is the possibility that cultural industry, despite its ills, enacts imaginative "play" in the Winnicottian transitional space, which Stiegler sees as vital to transindividuation and maturation? What if "play" is not transitional but extended interminably into a life-long project, to the extent that it not only generates a complex of economic relations but also supplements the so-called "national economy"?

The subculture of manga and anime raises these critical questions by disarticulating a predetermined relationship between minors and youth culture. Granted,

when Tezuka started drawing manga amidst the rubble of post-war Japan, he was inspired, like the Walt Disney he adored, to bring joy to kids.[56] As if configured by Tezuka's unassuming ambition, the taking-shape of anime and manga into a subculture constitutes an unequivocal paradox. On the one hand, it assimilates Western images of childhood by entertaining the imagination of children, alongside a modern governance through schooling and legal regulations which I explain in the last chapter. On the other hand, anime and manga are "loaned" media associated with the terror of wars Tezuka had experienced first-hand, the subsequent defeat of Japan and the American occupation, and yet they also bring a temporary reprieve from everything mentioned above. It is said that after having watched Disney's *Bambi* more than 80 times in the movie theater, Tezuka modelled his manga figures on the exaggerated features of Disney's cartoon character to create known manga figures like Astro Boy as a warrior of peace. Considered this way, the practice of anime and manga is a movement simultaneously *towards* and *away from* the dominant and hegemonic. To use Deleuze and Guattari's terms, Tezuka uses the "major" language to realize his little dream, to do different things rather than explicitly endorsing or confronting the power. Admittedly, after anime and manga rose to global prominence, there have been various strands of effort, from both domestic and international fans, to locate the origin of manga and anime and debate whether manga and anime are rooted in Japanese tradition or constitute a prime example of cultural appropriation. However, the subculture of anime and manga emerges unmistakably through neither *being* the original nor a direct copycat. Parallel to the protean, "virtual" characters populating anime and manga that resist fixed racial identification is a

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[56] Schodt, *Manga! Manga!.*

subculture performing the unfolding processes of "becoming" and aspiring towards a "becoming-minor."

The subculture of anime and manga *appears* to play into rules laid out by the "master," that is, cultural capitalism and colonialism permeating harmless child entertainment like Disney, while decisively deviating from the rules through unabashedly proliferating, continuously differing practices unsanctioned and uncontainable by the master's rules. From highly respectable manga/anime creators to fans cosplaying in Comiket, unabashed mimicry, sometimes in the most literal sense to every minute detail, is both an homage to and a self-conscious differentiation from the original. Specifically, anime and manga subculture fundamentally belong to a "minor culture" which, built on reverence for and familiarity with the masters, goes forth and multiplies with a clear self-acknowledgement of its own situatedness. Similar to how minor literature does not hold on to a grandiose claim of authority and universality, a minor culture recognizes the master's status but simultaneously divorces itself from its grip by deliberately proliferating derivatives through imitation. This explains, at least in part, why Japanese fans were less perturbed than international fans about Disney's blatant plagiarism of Tezuka's *Kimba the White Lion* in *The Lion King* or the "whitewash" in the casting of Scarlett Johansson as Major from *Ghost in the Shell*. By decentering the importance of *being* the singular origin or the uncontestable master, anime and manga subculture, which took off first and foremost as fan practice—Tezuka was an avowed fan of Disney—has since then obfuscated and destabilized the authority dictated by capitalist institutions, such as the law of intellectual property rights, or the demands of minority representation in casting decisions. Anime and manga flourish in the gray zone of "becoming-minor,"

where they develop a distinctive subset of economic practices and relations that begin

modestly and economically—very often right at home as suggested by the literal meaning

of otaku ("your home"). Formalistically, the technique of limited animation as the

defining feature of anime which I mention earlier is also an economic choice, for it

significantly cuts down the production cost and time by recycling animation cels

(celluloids), spending as little time possible for drawing and using as fewer frames

possible for animation.[57] Starting out as a cheap, affordable solution, limited animation

turns what is considered primitive, rough and outdated into a visual aesthetics and

cultural "trademark" markedly different from standard full animation.

This economic and aesthetic practice of becoming-minor, I suggest, is why the

industry of anime and manga remains unscathed and continues to grow despite Japan's

precipitous economic decline, because it has never been completely subsumed under

national economy. The missteps of the Cool Japan campaign pushed by Japan's

government I bring up in the last chapter show a glaring ignorance of the subculture

which it purports to apprehend, and yet such an ignorance and obvious lack of knowledge

(*savoir*) has been a blessing in disguise, shielding the subculture from institutionalization

and institutions of government. Nonetheless, this does not mean that a becoming-minor

necessarily promises radical potential in dethroning capitalist governance and

reconfiguring politics. The technical milieu constituted by anime and manga seemingly

enacts its own transindividuation process, in Stiegler's theoretical parlance, with its own

inheritance and demarcation of "generations" in terms of the TV programs kids have

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[57] Rich, "Anime's Great Deception—the Difference between Anime and Cartoons," *Tofugu,* July 1, 2015, https://www.tofugu.com/japan/anime-vs-cartoons/

grown up with.[58] But this individuation can very well be the collective disindividuation programmed by consumer governmentality, or "algorithmic governmentality," which exerts a far more totalitarian control.[59] In other words, the movement of a minor culture can easily fall into stasis, risking being reified and exploited.

As Azuma warns on several occasions, right-wing discourse since the end of the Cold War has gone underground, and "become subculturized, falsized, and otaku-ized."[60] The online culture established by otaku is rife with dark undercurrents, which Azuma calls Japan's "ugly" desire, which has always lain hidden in the unconscious as the unresolved conflict from Japan's modernization and war aggression.[61] Suppressed jingoistic and isolationist impulses are de-territorialized and re-territorialized into the otaku subculture, which absorbs the virulent energies and translates their existence to the Internet. The explosive presence of outspoken online far-rightists valorized by Shinzo Abe's nationalistic policies is alarming, but as Azuma emphasizes, the "visualization" of this hitherto closeted right-wing tendency is a necessary step for the Japanese to confront the reality of such "ugliness." However, long before the recent resurfacing of right-wing xenophobic discourses online, Japan's cultural capitalism, as Iwabuchi notes, has followed the wartime legacy by reenacting an "asymmetrical and totalizing triad"

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[58] Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals,* trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Kono Shion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 6-7. Azuma distinguishes otaku into three generations. The first generation was born during the 1960s, watching *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam* in their teens. The second generation was born during the 1970s as the beneficiaries of the diverse and more mature contents brought by the first generation. The third generation, born in the 1980s, watched *Neon Genesis Evangelion* during junior high.

[59] Antoinette Aouvroy and Bernard Stiegler, "The Digital Regime of Truth: From the Algorithmic Governmentality to a New Rule of Law," trans. Anaïs Nony and Benoît Dillet, *la Deleuziana: Online Journal of Philosophy*, No. 3 (2016):6-29. http://www.ladeleuziana.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Rouvroy-Stiegler_eng.pdf.

[60] Azuma, *Otaku*, 24.

[61] Mike Sunda, "Visualizing Japan's 'ugly' online desires with cultural critic Azuma Hiroki," *The Japan Times*, June 27, 2015, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/06/27/books/visualizing-japans-ugly-online-desires-cultural-critic-hiroki-azuma/#.XETH6s9Ki9Z.

between Japan, the West and Asia.[62] In the next chapter, I revisit the historical

formulation of the "Japan-Asia-the West triad," and show how techno-Orientalism in the

1980s, the offshoot of the same old Orientalism, has helped legitimize this triad in

repositioning Japan as the forerunner of Asia and yet distinct from it. I examine how the

branding effort and taxonomic pressure of global consumerist capitalism coalesces with

and recuperates Japan's nationalism in reifying the imaginary entities of the West and the

East, with Japan as the sole representative of the East. Most stealthily, anime has

provided an ideal platform for the reifying impulse to unfold unchecked by virtue of its

being a minor (small) culture. I use the example of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) to show how

a minor culture can be simultaneously "arrested" by and elude the logic of late

capitalism.

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[62] Iwabuchi Koichi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 6-11.

Chapter 3. Interfacing East and West:

Techno-Orientalism and Japan's Soft Power

There is no universal capitalism, there is no capitalism in itself; capitalism is at the crossroads of all kinds of formations. It is neocapitalism by nature. It invents its eastern face and its western face, and reshapes them both—all for the worst.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari[1]

Hi, everybody!
We are YMO
From Tokyo, Japan
We don't sight see, we dance.
You understand?
We are the number one dance band in Tokyo.

Yellow Magic Orchestra, "Tighten up (Japanese Gentlemen Stand up Please)"[2]

I.   From the Margin to the Center

I end chapter two with Azuma Hiroki's warning that a long-suppressed

xenophobic extremist discourse has percolated through the ghettoized otaku subculture

and found a new momentum and presence, albeit limited in scope thus far, since the

hawkish Shinzo Abe took office. Ironically, Shintaro Ishihara, the avowed nemesis of

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[1] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 20.
[2] DiscoSaturdayNightTV, Yellow Magic Orchestra - Tighten Up [+ Interview] *Soul Train* 1980, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0Ytic5OMfg. Yellow Magic Orchestra (referred as YMO) performed a cover of Archie Bell and The Drell's 1968 hit, *Tighten U*p, on *Soul Train* in 1980. The opening lines of the original version are, "Hi everybody, I'm Archie Bell of the Drells, from Houston, Texas. We don't only sing. But we dance just as good as we walk…." YMO was the only Asian musician or band to appear on *Soul Train*. When the song was released as a single, the full title was "Tighten Up (Japanese Gentleman Stand Up Please)."

otaku who proposed the Nonexistent Youth bill during his tenure as Tokyo governor and a challenger to Abe in the 2012 general election, shares a political stance similar to that of right-leaning otaku and Abe. The only difference is that Ishihara knows no bounds in clamoring openly in public domains for the jingoistic nationalism which has hitherto been censored since Japan's defeat in WWII. Similarly, Ishihara's prodigal career trajectory of a novelist-turned-politician runs a striking parallel to the way Japan's popular culture, the subculture of anime and manga included, comes to simultaneously configure and to be configured by politics. Ishihara won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize when he was barely out of college with his novel *Season of the Sun* in 1955, which turned him into a literary sensation overnight. The novel was adapted into a film the next year, for which Ishihara also wrote the script. The film starred his own brother, Ishihara Yujiro, who was labelled the James Dean of Japan, riding partly on the surge of posthumous fame of James Dean in Japan during 1956. Like Dean's *Rebel without A Cause* but far more salacious, the release of *Season of the Sun* was an iconoclastic social event, and its explicit portrayal of the aimless and reckless youth lost in sex, violence, and decadence gained the Ishihara brothers a cult following. Japan's disenchanted youth found a highly stylized expression through Ishihara's flamboyant nihilism and dubbed themselves the "Sun Tribe" (*taiyo zoku*). With subsequent publications such as *Crazed Fruit*, which also was made into a film, the Sun Tribe, the Japan's equivalent of French *nouvelle vague*, became a denominator for a genre of films made by and about Japan's postwar generation.[3] Admittedly, the Sun Tribe was only a fad, which never attempted to revolutionize cinema

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[3] Michael Raine, "*Crazed Fruit*: Imagining a New Japan—The Taiyozoku Films," *The Criterion Collection,* June 28, 2005, "https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/373-crazed-fruit-imagining-a-new-japan-the-taiyozoku-films.

as *nouvelle vague*. Nor were Ishihara's works truly exceptional enough to earn him a place in the literary canon. In his essay on the Criterion Collection of the film *Crazed Fruit*, Michael Raine sees Ishihara's shot to stardom as the end of an impervious elite literati circle and "the final victory of celebrity culture in Japan."[4] More crucially, Ishihara adapted deftly to the mid-fifties advertising consumerism dogma that "sex sells" and that images of sexualized bodies of youth, through writing and especially through the silver screen, can catch attention and provide audiences thrills. What Ishihara tried to sell was exactly the image of "the angry and highly sexed youth" as a vogue and a lifestyle.

Hence, if Ishihara was a trailblazer and trendsetter in any way, it was in his early realization of not only the commercial potential of youth culture, but also the political potency of a seemingly inconsequential subculture, such as the celebrity cult he and his sibling created. *The New York Times*' piece on Ishihara during Japan's 2012 general election, titled "A Fringe Politician Moves to Japan's National State," attributes Ishihara's rise to political prominence partly to his brother, and partly to his own name as a novelist, a scriptwriter, and later a lawmaker: "His fame gave him a special status in Japanese politics as a radical who was tolerated by the mainstream, though not taken seriously—until now."[5] Ishihara's political career was buoyed by a celebrity status earned decades before as a name for the rebellious youth culture, while his radical political views were shielded from serious public scrutiny precisely because he was on the "fringe." As a creator of a minor youth culture, especially one that has gone passé, he was exempted from being "taken seriously." In other words, he was famous enough to obtain

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Martin Fackler, "A Fringe Politician Moves to Japan's National State," *The New York Times,* December 8, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/world/asia/shintaro-ishihara-right-wing-japanese-politician-makes-gains.html.

"attention" as his political capital, but his lack of any traditional political backing and past ties to Japan's popular culture made him an outlier and an unlikely candidate, and therefore unworthy of serious attention. In fact, when Ishihara announced his candidacy for Tokyo governor, his opening line surprised many: "I am the elder brother of Ishihara Yujiro," which aimed specifically to address his by-then-deceased brother's fans and those who once worked for and with him. Ishihara's statement might sound outlandish in Japan, where politics were run by stringent rules and precepts, but it worked. For instance, the actors in his brother's production company, who named themselves "Ishihara Army Corps" (*Ishihara gundan*), became fervent supporters of Ishihara's governor campaign.[6] Considered this way, the improbable rise of Donald Trump in 2016 trod the same path as that of Ishihara. Similar to the way in which Trump's ascent to power is the culmination of an American political imaginary that has been created and recreated by TV culture since the end of World War II, Ishihara's rise from a youth cult figure to a far-right conservative politician intimates how postwar Japan comes to imagine itself, not through the official mainstream culture, but through the unsanctioned youth subculture. Ishihara's move from "the fringe to the national stage" also coincides with the movement of the popular culture of anime and manga from the margin to the center, with newly-found prominence in configuring cultural geopolitics.

The haters and critics of Ishihara often mistake him as a typical case of a rebel turned reactionary in old age. However, both Ishihara's literary and political discourses have been informed by a consistent and earnest desire to restore Japan's pride by severing Japan from its Asian neighbors and ridding itself of American influence. As Reine

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[6] Nakao Hidehiro, "The Sun Also Rises? What the New Tokyo Governor Symbolizes," in *Asian Nationalism in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Roy Starrs (New York: Routledge, 2013).

explains, Ishihara's stories in the mid-1950s express "a generational and geopolitical resentment toward Japan's postwar gerontocracy and its American masters."[7] In 1989, at the height of Japan's economic prowess, Ishihara together with Sony's chairman, Akio Morita, co-authored and published the infamously controversial essay, "The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First Among Equals." This essay, together with other similarly incendiary essays by Ishihara, was included in a book that was translated into English and published by Simon & Schuster, with a foreword by a reputable Harvard professor, Ezra Vogel.[8] The book arguably puts Ishihara on the front line of Japanese nationalism under the international limelight, with his no-holds-barred harangue on American business culture and trade policy. The book calls for Japan's independence from servitude to the United States. The catchy and combative book title, *The Japan That Can Say No*, sets a precedent and inspires similar publications, such as *China Can Say No* when China's economy began to take off and tried to renegotiate its international status in the post–Cold War world order.[9] Ironically, despite his staunch anti-Western, that is, anti-American stance, Ishihara's career thrives and feeds on the "American masters" he condemns. When being criticized for not writing literature and even for not being fully literate, he defended his works as "novels of ideas," blending together "sentiment and self-assertion" akin to those of Earnest Hemingway.[10] In his novels, Ishihara depicts a licentious foreign influence on youth, that is, "dreg culture," that appeared during the American occupation. At the same time, his novels are a response to American

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[7] Raine, *Crazed Fruit.*
[8] Ishihara Shintaro, *The Japan That Cay Say No*, with a foreword by Ezra Vogel, trans. Frank Baldwin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991). Morita declined to be included in the English translation of the book, for fear of a negative impact on Sony.
[9] Song Qiang et al. *China Can Say No: the Post-Cold War Era of Political and Emotional Choices* (Beijing, China Federation of Literary and Publishing Company, 1996).
[10] Raine, *Crazed Fruit*.

consumerist youth culture, and he had no compunction cashing in on the Sun Tribe by turning youth, its sexed body, and its anger into image commodities.[11]

Ishihara's *The Japan that Can Say No* is smartly premised on the Western racializing discourse around Japan and Japanese in the 1980s, which scholars name techno-Orientalism. In this discourse, Japan's success is explained away through essentializing the Japanese as technologically advanced but ultimately an unfeeling and unthinking mass devoid of individuality and intellectual capacity. Ishihara plays into the Western stereotype but turns it into a vantage point from which to launch an equally essentializing discourse of "Japaneseness" (*Nihonjinron*), with the opposite aim of justifying Japan's superiority. Therefore, as Ishihara asserts, Japan does not need to bow down to the West. In other words, the West's racializing and marginalizing discursive efforts to contain the threat of Japan, such as techno-Orientalism, provides a platform to hardline nationalists like Ishihara and revalorizes Japan's nationalism that remains very much alive but becomes muffled after its defeat in WWII. Ishihara discriminates indiscriminately against ethnic and sexual minorities, antagonizes the anime and manga fandom (as I mention in chapter one), and even risks angering the nation by claiming the tsunami to be "divine retribution" for the egotism of the Japanese.[12] All of these, as Lucy Miller identifies, are part of his crusade to defend his vision of what qualifies as Japanese.[13] Miller sees Ishihara embody the "intersection of moral panic and

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Justin McCurry, "Tokyo Governor Apologises for Calling Tsunami 'Divine Punishment,'" *The Guardian*, March 15, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/15/tokyo-governor-tsunami-punishment.

[13] Lucy J. Miller, "Ishihara Shintaro's Manga Moral Panic: The Homogenizing Rhetoric of Japanese Nationalism," in *Intercultural Communication in Japan: Theorizing Homogenizing Discourse,* eds. Satoshi Toyosaki and Shinsuke Eguchi (New York: Routledge, 2017), 145–158.

nationalism": a Japanese identity can only be secured through homogenizing, exclusive rhetoric.

However, I want to call attention to the fact that Ishihara, as an unabashed provocateur, is a master in capturing and manipulating attention, which he learned from the Sun Tribe's success. His obsession with imposing content control to regulate anime, manga and videogames may appear self-contradictory, since after all he is arguably one of the first who to sexualize youth and commodify youth culture. Yet, what's really at stake is that anime and manga, being attention-capture apparatuses, have the dangerous capacity of undermining Ishihara's ideal of the Japanese by virtue of reshaping their "interest" and dampening their "spirit." Without a doubt, although his remarks are as offensive and aggravating as they can be, Ishihara is probably indeed genuinely concerned about the spiritual malaise he sees among the Japanese. As quoted by Miller, Ishihara, in *The Japan that Can Say No,* condemns Japan's workaholic corporate practice as a "collective avarice to compensate individual spiritual poverty." For Ishihara, the Japanese are caught by the "gulf" between the "metaphysical dimension" of "the tea ceremony, Noh, Zen, and the martial arts" and "their mundane, uninspired daily lives," and as a consequence they "*pour their energy* into accomplishing corporate directives" (emphasis added).[14] The passage of Bill 156 speaks as much about the moral panic as about the anxiety over how the misguided spiritual energy will prevent youth from fulfilling their "nature" as the authentic Japanese. For Ishihara, it was only "natural," and befitting the "conscience" of the Japanese that Bill 156 got passed, because a real

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[14] Ibid., 148-149. See also Ishihara, *The Japan That Can Say No*, 100–101

Japanese could not possibly get interested in sexually obscene materials in anime and manga, let alone show them to minors.[15]

As much as Ishihara disapproves of anime and manga, the popular culture in question has, unbeknownst to him, moved far ahead of him by realizing his lifelong agenda of reviving Japan's nationalism through global dissemination. Ishihara's political career is driven by his unwavering drive to make Japan rise above Asia and the West, specifically America. This is an inherited, but publicly disavowed and silenced legacy of Japan's empire. Yet, beneath official pacifist policy, this legacy has been preserved, resurrected and translated into Japan's minor culture, such as the popular culture constituted by anime and manga. This legacy of imperial Japan is not necessarily reflected in the "contents" *per se,* but by the way the minor culture navigates cultural flows and captures attention. As Iwabuchi points out, the expansion and saturation of Japan's soft power in Asia during the 1990s triangulates Japan's cultural identity simultaneously *with* and *against* "Asia" and the "West": while Japan is on par with the West in terms of economic and technological progress, Japan shares unmistakable cultural affinity and geographical proximity with its Asian neighbors.[16] Yet at the same time, Japan is at the forefront of the Asia-Pacific region, in both a physical and figurative sense, for being the first Asian nation to successfully modernize itself and to have more than once challenged the supremacy of the West. Thus, Japan acts on behalf of Asia but rises above it as an intermediary between "Asia" with its traditions, and the West with its formidable alien force of modernity. Iwabuchi identifies Japan's reembedding in and

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[15] Ibid., 150.

[16] Iwabuchi Koichi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

above Asia in the 1990s as a replay of a totalizing and unequal triad between "Japan,"

"Asia" and "the West." This is a continuation of the ideology of Japan's empire from the

late 19th to mid-20th century, with the difference being that Japan takes on a new role as

the borderless frontier of popular culture. Japan reassuming the privileged position of the

"face" of Asia, or that of the newly defined Orient, is paradoxically enabled and

legitimized by the western discourse of techno-Orientalism that denigrates Japan as a

"faceless" economy while unwittingly conflating Japan with the Orient.[17]

In this chapter, I examine the mutual imbrication between the "Japan-Asia-the

West" triad underpinning Japan's cultural transnationalism since the 1990s and the

techno-Orientalism of the 1980s, specifically through the figure of cyberpunk. To a

significant extent, Japan's becoming a cool cultural frontier is a response to the narrative

of an eastward frontier in the genre of cyberpunk. Or to put it in a broader historical

context, the boom of Japan's soft power is an appropriation of the "Western" racializing

discourse on the Japanese and the Orient in general, as foreshadowed by Yellow Magic

Orchestra's cover of *Tighten Up* in 1980. As the first and only Asian musicians to

perform on *Soul Train*, the band delivered an electronic cover of a funk classic. In so

doing, they audaciously played with and subverted the stereotypes of the Japanese in the

'80s: rich tourists ("we do not sight see"), not cosmopolitan enough to know English

("you understand?"), workaholics obsessed with being "number one," and very rigid to

the extent that they can't dance. The Japanese, the so-called "Orientals," performing on

stage were not only technologically savvy—YMO is widely considered an influential

pioneer in electronic music—but also *soulful,* as they were singing and dancing to black

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[17] Ibid., 2.

music on *Soul Train*. The stereotype re-appropriated from the West transforms into a positive "selling point," a locus of attention so to speak, in cultural consumptions and transactions. As Iwabuchi points out, in the regional context of Asia, Japanese nationalism is camouflaged and smuggled within "soft" popular culture which is often literally "faceless," such as Hello Kitty or virtual characters in anime and manga.[18] I argue that in the global context beyond Asia, the reductive East-West dyad propagated by techno-Orientalism coalesces with the triad of Japan-Asia-the West to give Japan a pliable but distinct and indispensable cultural identity. Japan is at once traditional and modern, even postmodern—simultaneously at the center and on the fringe. On the one hand, Japan racially and geographically belongs to the Orient, i.e., the non-West, which in the Western imagination remains steeped in tradition. On the other hand, Japan is also an exception to the image of the Orient by virtue of by its mastery of modernity: it is not only better than its Asian peers but surpasses its western rivals. Japan becomes the frontier of the future while providing a spiritual foil for the West with its roots in tradition. In the last section of this chapter, I use the example of *Ghost in the Shell* to demonstrate how Japanese popular culture proceeds globally by evoking the imaginary axis of East and West, center and margin, while inserting a cultural identity called Japan at the nexus of East and West.

II.   Cyberpunk Going East: Situating the new cool Orient in the age of globalization

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Hailed by *Wired* to be "a cyberpunk triumph," the release of the Wachowskis' *The Matrix* in 1999 pushed the genre of cyberpunk to the cultural forefront as the definitive expression of our science fictional living present.[19] One striking feature of *The Matrix* compared to its renowned cyberpunk precursors, such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* or William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, is the absence of East Asians. This is ironic, considering that *The Matrix* has often been belittled by hardcore anime fans as a rip-off of Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell,* and the Wachowskis openly professed their love for *Ghost in the Shell*. Cyberpunk at the cusp of neoliberal millennial capitalism no longer needed to posit the physical presence of the "Orientals" as the "Other" to be conquered and tamed, for it succeeded in absorbing the Other, to use Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor, by defacing the Eastern face into the Western face. Looking back, Gibson's *Neuromancer*, lauded as cyberpunk's inaugural manifesto, denotes a watershed moment. While the figure of cyberpunk and the then-novel concept of cyberspace offered new possibilities of imagining subjectivity and humanity in relation to technologies, they also helped usher in the wildest wet dream of neoliberal global capitalism: one can simply "jack into" a borderless, faceless, and bodiless world where money runs barrier-free. Yet, cyberspace is by no means an equalizer but instead a polarizing, dichotomizing force. For neoliberal capitalism, as a different phase of the biologizing power that is capitalism, needs to create the Other to proceed. In their important work, "Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic," cultural studies scholars David Morley and Kevin Robin point out that the production and consumption of cyberpunk has propagated and depends on a kind of techno-Orientalism in which after the Cold War an ambiguous "Orient" is represented as

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[19] Declan McCullagh, "Matrix: A Cyberpunk Triumph," *Wired*, April 2, 1999, https://www.wired.com/1999/04/the-matrix-a-cyberpunk-triumph/.

a new object of fear and fascination.[20] Japan, unmistakably the "Orient" in terms of race,

culture and geography, was imagined an arch-nemesis by the West during the 1980s. The

economic dominance of Japan may be regarded as a precursor of the subsequent

phenomenon of the East Asian Miracle in the '90s and China Rising today in the twenty-

first century. However, "the Japan Problem" for the West resonates across different

dimensions: Japan's success in leading global high-tech (cultural) industries is

particularly intimidating and yet fascinating. Discourses of techno-Orientalism as detailed

by Morley and Robins reflect concentrated discursive efforts articulated by the West to

make sense of a modern Japan, or China, and contain the threat of the Orient within an

Orientalist tradition.

In the genre of cyberpunk, this Orientalized Other portrayed is East Asia, Japan

and China specifically, and it speaks to the phenomenon of "Asia Rising" from the 1980s

onward. During the 80s, the successful economic expansion of Japan, for mainstream

Western media and politicians, signified the threat from "little yellow men" as declared

by the former French Prime Minister, Edith Cresson."[21] For instance, in Ridley Scott's

iconic 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the cityscape of Los Angeles deteriorates into a dystopian

wasteland packed with Chinese and Indian smugglers, while a geisha with a mocking

face can hardly be contained in a giant Times Square-ish TV screen. Similarly, from the

very beginning of William Gilson's *Neuromancer*, the "sprawl" of Chiba City, a suburb

of the Tokyo metropolis, gathers "professional expatriates" of various ethnicities. The

dingy streets of Chiba constitute the contemptible, fallen bodily reality vis-à-vis a virtual

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[20] David Morley and Kevin Robins, "Techno-Orientalism: Japan Panic," in *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (New York, Routledge, 1995), 147-173.
[21] Ibid., 147.

experience that guarantees "bodiless exultation of cyberspace."[22] With the dissolution of the Japanese bubble economy in the '90s, China has replaced Japan and become the emergent "problem" that challenges a Western-dominated world order. Therefore, not surprisingly, in Neal Stephenson's 1995 novel, *The Diamond Age*, a neo-Victorian revival—culturally as well as technologically—relocates to Shanghai. Here, Shanghai is transformed into both the frontier of the future and the symbol of a nostalgic past, and the hybrid of "Atlantis/Shanghai" presages a potential union of the East and the West, the old and the new. In other words, the geographical and ethnic specificities of the "Orient" of cyberpunk shift in accordance with the fluctuations of a volatile and unpredictable global economy.

Cyberpunk's gesturing towards to the East, in both a figurative and a literal sense, is not an entirely "new" geopolitical condition. For centuries, Japan, among others, has occupied the position of an exotic other, capturing the imagination of Western connoisseurs with its material and spiritual culture: woodblock painting, Japanese garden, haiku, kabuki, tea ceremonies, geishas, samurai, and Zen, among others. The movement of Japonisme, as Morley and Robins observe, perceives Japan as embodying inscrutable differences that vacillate between aesthetic finesse and militant aggression. This is encapsulated by the famous phrase which represents Japan is both "the chrysanthemum and the sword," as Ruth Benedict famously recapitulated in her anthropological study of Japan first published in 1948.[23] Benedict's formulation, though highly problematic in hindsight, has fundamentally informed American's imagination of Japan, as well as

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[22] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: An Ace Books, 1984), 6.
[23] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1989).

Japan's newfound self-definition as instanced by Ishihara's discourse on Japaneseness

(*nihonjinron*). Mark Holborn further explains that until the 1980s, "the West's absorption

of Japan is inconclusive and rarely described. *Japonisme* was the first stage in the

imitation of a Japanese aesthetic. It was primarily decorative and involved the borrowing

of Japanese motifs and design elements. Oriental views provided the West with the

spectacle."[24] What *is* often described is Japan's absorption of the West, as best

exemplified by the Meiji Restoration in the mid-nineteenth century and, more than one

century later, the American occupation of Japan. Japan's drastic evolution into an

industrialized mode of production and forced institution of a democratic constitution bear

testimony to the universalized values of Western modernity. In other words, the early

stages of Orientalist interest in either an exotically beautiful or a dangerously belligerent

Orient were shored up by the unambiguous hegemony of the West and securely framed

within asymmetrical cultural relations. The differences ascribed to the Orient could be

easily modulated and therefore appreciated *aesthetically,* given this comfortable gap

between power differentials and access to cultural capital. This is not to say that

Japonisme is all innocuous. The fear of "little yellow men" always goes hand in hand

with the seemingly purely aesthetic fascination with the Orient and its culture.

Yet when it came to the 1980s, the rather benign attitude towards the ethnic and

cultural differences manifested in the aesthetics of Japonisme was replaced by explicit

anxiety and hostility not unlike the "Yellow Peril" brewing in the late nineteenth century.

In particular, Japan's technological innovation and capitalistic mode of economic

expansion caused anxiety in the West. Japan not only succeeded in reinventing itself and

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[24] Mark Holborn, quoted in Morley and Robins, "Techno-Orientalism," 148. See also Mark Holborn, *Beyond Japan* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993).

freeing itself from its capitulatory position following World War II, it also "surreptitiously" appropriated some of the core symbols of the "Western culture" by, for example, purchasing Rockefeller Building and Columbia Pictures.[25] Several confounding questions ensued from the phenomenon of Japan Rising: What if the copycat (i.e., Japan) equals, or even surpasses the original (i.e., the West)? What if this well-contained Orient exceeds the prescribed imaginary limits of the Orient and can pass as both the Orient and the Occident at the same time? What if the consumption of the Orient does not take place in episodic spectacular events but becomes mundane practice in everyday contexts,[26] as manifested by the hefty market share of Japanese cars in the States and in the world?

These questions bring the identity of Japan into renewed focus. It is crucial to note that although Japan is part of the "East" or an imaginary "Orient" in a broader sense, Japan is never simply the synonym of the East and the Orient to begin with. Given the particular role America plays in modern Japanese history, it is tempting to see the inroads that Japan has made into the U.S. as the triumph of a previously colonized "East" and the decline of an imperial "West" respectively. However, such a simplified reading reflects what Harry Harootunian calls "the bilateral narcissism of the United States and Japan." That is, the United States has always self-indulgently seen itself as the embodiment of Western ideals and Japan prides itself as the leading modern nation among Asian countries.[27] In fact, this duality of East vs. West under late capitalism reenacts the colonial history of the first half of the twentieth century, when Japan invaded other Asian

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[25] The irony here is that most of the American film studios were established by the migrant Jews, who belong to the original definition of the "Orient."

[26] By saying this, the Chinese Olympic opening ceremony in 2008 in some ways feeds on this familiar Orientalism from the East through self-Orientalization, i.e. showcasing the Orient in a spectacular extravaganza.

[27] Harry Harootunian and Naoki Sakai, "Dialogue: Japan Studies and Cultural Studies," *Positions* 7:2 (1999): 593-647.

countries in the name of establishing the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and

paradoxically justified its imperialist pursuits as protecting Asia against Western

imperialism. Binary conceptions of global transmutations of power such as East vs. West

and the Orient vs. the Occident, eclipse the complex historical positioning of Japan and

brackets Japan in an unequivocal category called "the East" against a presumably

unequivocal dominance of the West. Indeed, compared to the unambiguous ideological

divide of the Cold War era, the distinction between this newly emergent East (Japan) and

West in different historical moments and geographical contexts is defined less by a logic

of confrontation and more by a dynamics of transculturation—asymmetrically,

contingently and yet contiguously. Most discussions of late-capitalist globalization have

concentrated on the impacts of globalization on community and cultural formation on the

local level. In a classic Marxist critique, the all-encompassing global capital flow

simultaneously weakens and reinforces local identities, including ethnic, national and

cultural belonging. However, this familiar spatial dialectic and the uneven dynamics

between the global and the local seem incapable of explaining the complexity of Japanese

identity formation.

If the emergent American cyberpunk genre in the 1980s is a constitutive force of

techno-Orientalism, then given the historical involvement between Japan and the United

States, the motif of "Go East" in cyberpunk does not simply show in the present or future

tense the shifting geopolitical balance of power from West to East, from the U.S. to Japan

specifically. Cyberpunk's foray into Japan is also very much a nostalgic move that

reinvents the unknown territory of the "Orient" and resituates it in a narrative of the

global frontier. However, while American cyberpunk is an attempt to make sense of a

postmodern high-tech Japan and see if an "Orientalist" approach to Japan can contain the threat of Japan, paradoxically Japan has throughout its modern history selectively embraced its Orientalized status and strategically performed self-Orientalization in order to simultaneously produce a counter identity to the West and forge an affiliation with its Asian neighbors. In fact, the high-tech Orientalism propagated by American cyberpunk in the 1980s retroactively reenacts the Orientalization of Japan by *both* Westerners and Japanese themselves. For the West, the Orientalization of Japan serves the function of coping with present economic anxiety by reinstating an old epistemological structure that derives from a long history of colonial and imperial expansion. For Japan, similarly, self-Orientalization in the context of the 1980s recalls the nationalist and imperialist discourses before its defeat in World War II. And yet at the same time, this self-Orientalization also produces a kind of "soft" nationalism that celebrates Japan's "disarming" success in globalizing the world with its technology and cultural imaginations. Thus, Japan recasts the narrative of American cyberpunk—
Ghost in the Shell, for instance—and redelivers it to the West as Japan's unique innovative adaptation. Most importantly, self-Orientalization becomes an effective means for Japan to market itself as "different" in the age of global capitalism.

III.   The Self-Orientalization of the Orient

In the following, I examine the self-Orientalization of Japan in Japan's modern history to see how Japan mutates and replicates the colonial relationality of Orientalism to effect self-identification, which in turns transforms into self-commodification during

the 1980s. In his book on Japanese popular culture in Asia during the 1990s, Iwabuchi calls attention to the peculiar permutations in Japanese identity discourses at different historical junctures.[28] As mentioned earlier, Japanese cultural formations from the late nineteenth century to the end of World War II had been "extroverted" as evinced through its imperial ambition to incorporate the entirety of East Asia under its sovereignty.[29] But after the defeat of Japan in World War II, this outward-looking and aggressive stance drastically changed into a conservative and exclusive one consumed with anxiety to define a unique Japanese identity.

I argue that this extrovert-turned-introvert shift in Japanese identity formation might be seen as an attempt to erase its colonial past in the region of East Asia while at the same time fending off the threat of foreigners (*gaijin*) and alien influence felt by the increasing presence of Westerners, mostly Americans, during the period of American occupation. In his discussion on center-periphery cultural dynamics, Ulf Hannerz notices the distinct ways in which the Japanese relate themselves to their own culture. American culture does not apply limitedly to Americans *per se* since the majority of "Americans" in the U.S. are or once immigrants, and the French see disseminating their own culture as a "*mission civilisatrice.*" However, the Japanese, as Hennerz observes, "find it a strange notion that anyone can 'become Japanese,' and they put Japanese culture on exhibit, in the framework of organized international contacts, as a way of displaying irreducible distinctiveness rather than in order to make it spread." Notably, these "cultural brokers" introducing Japanese culture are mostly non-Japanese.[30] However, while these discourses

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[28] Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*.
[29] Ibid., 7.
[30] Ulf Hannerz, "Notes on the Global Ecumene," *Public Culture* 1, No. 2. (May 1989): 66–75. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-1-2-66

of *Japaneseness* (*Nihonjiron*) constitute officially sanctioned norms of identity formation, as Iwabuchi and Hannerz both emphasize, they remain quite estranged from contemporary Japanese urban culture.[31] The discourse of *Nihonjiron* aims to create an atemporal Japanese identity on display, *for themselves* as well as for the outsiders. To put it more explicitly, postwar Japan paradoxically recuperates Western Orientalist stereotypes and tropes (the Japonisme aesthetic for instance) as a strategy of self-Orientalization in order to invent and preserve the presumable homogeneity and uniqueness of Japan as a nation and an ethnicity. It is through this self-Orientalizing discourse that Japan aims to sever its tie from the rest of Asia while re-imagining itself as a unique whole against an all-powerful West. This deflected, partial self-identification through the gaze of the other, specifically the West and America, is not simply psychological. American occupation after WWII significantly truncated Japan's military power and amputated its constitutional sovereignty, with the purpose and effect of disengaging Japan from its colonial connections with Asia. As many Asian countries gradually fell into the grip of communism, the American Cold War worldview also lent itself to demarcating a separate geography called "Japan," which is precariously situated between "Asia" and America and needs protection from the latter. This postwar Japan is confronted with anxiety and the necessity—whether real or imaginary—to depend economically and politically on the United States. America has become, after WWII, the significant Other defining Japanese cultural and political geography. Not coincidentally, the recourse to a traditional, mythical Japanese essence permanently fixed in well-defined

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[31] Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 6-7.

space and time seeks to ensure its racial purity against cultural contamination from the West and the ever-evolving flow of capitalist time.

As Iwabuchi explains, this postwar effort to locate a distinct Japanese identity through de-Asianization against the domination of the West finds its historical precedent in the late nineteenth century, when Japan embarked on a full-fledged project of modernization, i.e. the Meiji Restoration. As reflected by the popular slogan "Escape Asia, enter the West" (*datsua nyuo*), the success of Japanese modernization requires rigorous differentiation from its "backward" Asian neighbors in its march towards the West. While the West was seen as possessed of an unmistakable material dominance, Asia—heretofore simply a nebulous placeholder for the Japanese—began to cohere into a distinct entity, from which a modern Japan would escape, against which a modern Japan would define itself and beyond which a progressive Japan would transcend. As Iwabuchi suggests, Japan has a double and yet self-contradictory claim for Asia: "Japan is unequivocally located in a geography called 'Asia,' but it no less unambiguously exists outside a cultural imaginary of 'Asia' in Japanese mental maps."[32] This duality points to the fact that 'Asia' has overtly and covertly played a constitutive part in Japan's construction of national identity. While 'the West' played the role of the modern Other to be emulated, 'Asia' was cast as the image of Japan's past, a negative portrait which illustrates the extent to which Japan has been successfully modernized according to the Western standard.[33]

Moreover, Japan's reconfiguration of its geopolitical relations with Asia and the West demonstrates how Japan appropriates what Naoki Sakai terms "the cartographic

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[32] Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 7.
[33] Ibid.

logic of the West."[34] If, as Iwabuchi contends, Japan's modernity and national identity

has been created through an asymmetrical totalizing triad between "Japan," the "West"

and "Asia," this triad does not simply highlight how these three imaginary categories are

freighted with symbolic referents in configuring a modern Japanese identity. Rather,

Japan's continual positioning itself within this triad can also be read as a carefully

orchestrated maneuver of "charting" and "mapping" the world in terms of its national

interest. At one level, the "Japan-Asia-the West" triad addresses Japanese modernity's

mission of de-Asianization by articulating a unique Japanese identity and de-colonization

from the Western power. And yet, from the late nineteenth century to the first half of the

twentieth century, this triad not only propelled Japanese modernization, but also

emboldened its imperial outreach toward Asia as well as America. This triadic identity

has become a tool for Japanese imperialism and helped naturalized its colonial

governance of "inferior" Asia (Taiwan and Korea) and justified its literal advance into

the West (the attack on Pearl Harbor).

This "Japan-Asia-the West" triad continued to resonate during the 1980s and the

1990s, this time as an expedient marketing strategy that guarantees the success of

capitalist expansion. As outlined earlier, postwar Japan turned its imperial gaze inward

and utilized a self-Orientalizing discourse to create the cultural binary between an

imaginary "Japan" and the "West." But this cultural introversion of Japan once again

becomes extroverted from the 1980s, as Iwabuchi's studies on the spread of Japanese

popular culture in Asia demonstrate. The circulation of "Japanese" pop cultural icons

such as Hello Kitty and Lolita Fashion materialize bubbly, endearing Japanese cuteness

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[34] Naoki Sakai, quoted in Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 186.

(*kawaii*) into an everyday lexicon and mundane objects. Meanwhile, the founding of

Nintendo in 1989 and the inaugural release of Sony PlayStation in 1994 has, from the

early '90s onward, entirely "annexed" Asia under the sway of Japanese "coolness" and

technological avant-gardism. Much-delayed attention to Japanese pop culture from the

"Western" hemisphere is not accidental. As the western economy suffered from visible

decline from the 1980s on, the cultural and economic policy of Japan concentrated on re-

embedding itself back into Asia through a systematic, transnational collaboration

establishing an intra-Asian economic and media conglomerate. This emphasis on Japan's

"connection" to Asia gained further currency when Japan's economic bubble dissolved in

1989 and other Asian countries, the "Four Asian Dragons" (South Korea, Singapore,

Hong Kong, and Taiwan) in particular, stunned the world with their rapid industrial

growth and burgeoning foreign reserve. For Japan, whose economy relies more on

exports than domestic consumption, a gradually modernized Asia promised a booming

market. But what distinguishes Japan's economic infiltration of Asia from its expansion

in the West is that, for mainstream Western costumers, Japan has made its incursion into

the West masked in faceless technology but nonetheless embodying irreducible

differences. For Asian consumers, Japan appears to share cultural, if not racial,

proximity, particularly through a fabricated notion of "Asian values."

On the one hand, the Asian Miracle coincided with the ending of the Cold War

Era. The "Asian Boom" phenomenon seems to suggest a shift in the paradigm of the

liberal economy that had underlined the narrative of the Cold War, i.e. economic wealth

as the corollary of liberal democracy.[35] These polarized axes of capitalism vs.

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[35] Paul Krugman, "The Myth of Asia's Miracle," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1994, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1994-11-01/myth-asias-miracle.

communism and democracy vs. totalitarianism cannot sufficiently explain the rise of

Asian countries where, in many instances, a highly centralized regime—if not an

authoritarian one—has provided the very conditions of economic development.

Confronted with an ever braver new world, marked with bifurcating forces and

intensifying flows, conservative thinkers such as Samuel Huntington try to retain the

model of confrontation and competition by resurrecting the arcane idea of "civilization"

so as to reassure the comprehensibility of a world divided by difference into

"civilizations."[36] Huntington's call for an organic "civilization," in fact, tries to provide

ideological underpinnings for the geopolitical realignments from two "blocs" to multiple

"regions" or "zones," as manifested by the establishment of various multinational

trading entities, including EU, APEC, and NAFTA. Although Huntington's list appears

to offer a scientific and detailed examination of differences and similarities, his rules of

nomenclature still largely rely on presumably hermetic notions of space, religion, race

and cultural traditions. In the case of Japan for instance, despite distinguishing Japan as a

separate civilizational entity, Huntington still subsumes Japan under the category of "the

Eastern World." Under the façade of a liberal "acknowledgement" of "cultural"

particularities lies a familiar anxiety to contain the differences so that volatile and

fluctuating geopolitics can thus become predicable and manageable.

Huntington's approach, not surprisingly, found its precedent in Japanese identity

formation during the '80s. The cultural imaginaries of "Japan" and the "East" became

further reified as "America's Japan" saw an unprecedented chance and practical need to

extricate itself from the hold of America: Japan re-emerged on the world stage as an

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[36] Samuel P Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49. doi:10.2307/20045621.

economic superpower, and yet all of its international trading was still done in dollars.

Furthermore, the American government could impose pressure and easily manipulate the

currency exchange between America and Japan. The trade war between America and

Japan during the 80s impelled the re-articulation of *Nihonjinron* discourse, but at the

same time, Japan also made a conscious effort to reassert its Asian roots. Compared to

the postwar Japan that deliberately framed itself in terms of a nostalgic past, the

Nihonjinron discourse propagated in the 80s envisioned a Japan that is forward-looking, a

Japan that surpasses Western modernity and becomes the name for the future.

The most notorious instance of this discourse is precisely Ishihara's *The Japan

That Can Say No*, where he claims that Western supremacy has come to an end because

the West has lost its competitive edge to Japan in terms of both cultural refinement and

technological innovation. While Ishihara glorifies a Japanese technological superiority

that is unmistakably indebted to Western civilization, he disarticulates Japan's triumph

from Western modernity: "How preposterous to assert that somehow modern Japan

sprang full-blown from Western seeds!"[37] Furthermore, he draws on an Orientalized

"East" to define "Japanese" ethnically and culturally, as a strategy to denounce the moral

decay in the West: "our national gift for improving and refining everything from

Buddhist art to semiconductors" demonstrates "Eastern ways of values." He asserts, "We

are in and of the Orient."[38] Ishihara's rhetoric explicitly invites an essentialization of the

imaginary "East" and "Orient" against a degenerate "West," while implicitly identifying

Japan as the very center and perfect embodiment of the Orient and Eastern values. Not

surprisingly, when he co-wrote the book *The Voice of Asia* with Malaysian Prime

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[37] Ishihara Shintaro, quoted in Morley and Robin's "Techno-Orientalism," 149.
[38] Ibid.

Minister Mahathir Mohamad, Ishihara repackages his militant Japanocentric stance into an ennobling cause of "Asianism" and calls for an Asian economic bloc with Japan as the lead to counterbalance Western global power.[39] In identifying America/the "West" as a common enemy and oppressor, Japan can deny the brutality of its imperialism in the past and use its victimhood in the atomic bombings to justify its longstanding economic exploitation in the region by calling for a united front against the West. The Japanese turn towards Asia from the '80s onward is, in many ways, a revival of Japan's prewar assimilationist colonial policy that aimed to incorporate Asian under the "benevolent" governance of the Emperor. Such a discourse blatantly erases the colonial violence Japan instigated in Asia during its imperialist expansion. Ishihara infamously states that Japan has always been a nation constituted by its Asian racial others, disguising the ethnic nationalism which persists in Japanese domestic politics and of which Ishihara himself is a vehement advocate. He also fails to account for the fact that the presence of ethnic minorities in Japan represents in part the "remnants" of Japanese colonialism in the past on the one hand, and the evidence of its capitalist exploitation in the region by trafficking cheap migrant workers on the other.[40]

This renewed effort towards the racial and geographical incorporation of Asia from a rising Japan is driven by the practical need of establishing Japan/Asia Inc. as a guarantee of free license for Japanese capitalist imperialism in the region. Japan once again is placed in an intermediary position, or rather figured as the frontier of Asia, with a self-endowed mission to negotiate, dramatize and even reinvent the differences between

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[39] Ishihara Shintaro and Mahathir Mohamad, *The Voice of Asia: Two Leaders Discuss the Coming Century* (New York: Kodansha USA, 1996).

the imaginary entities of the "East" and "the West." Japan itself remains distinct and yet deftly moves between these two crudely bracketed categories. Henceforth, with a distinct Japanese identity loosely and yet deftly triangulating between Japan, Asia and the West, the differences enabling and enabled by this triangulation can be further materialized into "interest"— both literally and figuratively. Before World War II, the differences underlie military and imperial rhetoric; in the 1980s, these differences constitute "cultural interests" and carve out a lucrative market for globalized cultural industries.

Following Iwabuchi's argument that Japan contingently self-Orientalizes itself at specific moments in history in order to effect either imperial or capitalist maneuvers by enacting and reenacting the dynamic and uneven triad of "Japan-Asia-the West," a unidirectional critique such as techno-Orientalism requires careful reconsideration. First, as Iwabuchi concludes, "there is a complicit mutual othering of 'Japan'" through Western techno-Orientalism and revived Japanese nationalism that celebrates the essential difference of Japan from the West and affirms the affinity of Japan with Asia. Secondly, an important question remains: what is this "technology" associated with the phenomenon of Japan Rising that is both threatening and enticing? Or to put it differently, what constitutes technophilia and/or technophobia in the discourse of techno-Orientalism?

IV.   The Cultureless, Technophilic Orient

When Morley and Robins proposed the concept of techno-Orientalism in the mid-1990s, they aimed to underscore the familiar pattern of how the West encounters a

potentially menacing Oriental other. They described how different discursive formations proliferated in the 1980s as an attempt to regulate and "contain" the danger Japan posed. In responding to the economic confrontations between the new Orient—Japan specifically in this case—and the West, the revival of Orientalist discourses in the West and the self-Orientalizing stance taken by Japanese nationalists like Ishihara tend to operate on two different, yet complementary, levels. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on the essential and essentialized differences possessed by the Japanese as a culture and as an ethnicity. One pronounced tendency in these essentializing discourses is to portray Japanese society as homogenous with collectivity coming before individuality and creativity. For the West, the Japanese are a nondescript mass, working like machines and conforming to the formidable work ethic imposed by their tradition and society. It is peculiar that these critiques of the Japanese overlook the inextricable relationship between the puritan work ethic and the development of capitalism in the West as Max Weber lays out. For Japanese nationalists, the discipline and self-control that the Japanese uphold marks a stark contrast with a selfish and chaotic society such as the U.S., which for them testifies to the decay and decadence of the West. On the other hand, because of the irreducible differences manifest in Japanese society, the success of Japan is considered either an aberration (since it disorients from the imagined linear progression of the modern and "compresses" the historical timeline required for the development of a liberal economy) or is celebrated as exemplary (because it transcends and even "refines" a universal model of Western modernity which Japan is supposed to emulate and follow).

For Morley and Robins, the anxiety or excitement over the phenomenon of "Japan Rising" in the 90s ultimately poses the question of the assumption of modernity. They emphasize:

> Japan is significant because of its complexity: because it is non-Western, yet refuses any longer to be our Orient; because it insists on being modern, yet calls our kind of modernity into question…[Japan] potentially offers us a way beyond that simple binary logic that differentiates modern and traditional, and then superimposes this on the distinction between Occident and Orient. In so far as Japan complicates and confuses this impoverished kind of categorization it challenges us to rethink our white modernity.[41]

Morley and Robin's critique of the discourse of "techno-Orientalism" that emerges from the 1980s aims to illuminate the racialized structure and the logic of exclusion inherent in the universal, universalized project of modernity. It does so by recuperating and redressing the powerful theoretical paradigm established by Edward Said and by paying attention to the underlying element of modernity, i.e. technology. Nevertheless, Morley and Robins ultimately fail to undo, instead feeding off of, a series of dichotomies, despite their effort to undermine the primary oppositions of the Orient and the Occident, the traditional and the modern. In their conclusion, they write,

> It seems that the West can never see Japan directly. It is as if the Japanese were always destined to be seen through the fears and the fantasies of European and Americans. Japan is the Orient, containing all the West most lacks and everything it most fears….What is at stake is the identity of Western modernity, no less. It was the West that created modernity and modernity has always been associated with the imaginary space and identity called 'Western.' On this basis, we can say that modernity was endowed with an ethnicity (albeit an ethnicity that was invisible to the West)…The logic of technological progression and progress which underpinned the modernization project was always dynamic, always expansionary, always threatening to transcend and betray its Western origins and exclusiveness."[42]

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[41] Morley and Robins, "Techno-Orientalism," 171.
[42] Ibid., 173.

For Morley and Robins, a "real" Japan—which can never be seen "directly"—is posited as a still-unknown geographical space against a misunderstood, "misrepresented" Japan filtered by the fearful West. In other words, they inadvertently follow the tradition of the Orientalists and reproduce a mythical Orient. Moreover, the West's faceoff with Japan is reconfigured as the encounter between an unquestionable "origin" of modernity and its potentially more powerful "offspring." Nonetheless, although the racial identity of modernity is called into question, the basic constitution of modernity and how and why "technology" comes to be a key element in defining "modern" is rarely questioned. There seems to be a natural and naturalized substitutive relationship between two equally hypostatized and rather mythologized concepts of technology and modernity: Japan is unquestionably modern due to its manifest sophistication in technology, while Japan's preservation of its cultural traditions is particularly striking since the country is able to produce the most high-tech products imaginable. Ironically, the discourses of techno-Orientalism that Morley and Robins criticize, on the one hand, share this basic assumption that technology, like modernity, is a unique invention of the West, a material testimony to the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. What Japan is good for is, again, generating a kind of "imitative innovation," and it can only go as far as being a creative "copycat." On the other hand, however, it is precisely this phenomenon of excessive mimicry uncontainable by the imaginary trajectory of Western technological modernity that is the most fascinating and terrifying aspect of Japan's modernity. Japan's mastery in "technology" does not simply demonstrate its success in perfecting hardware and software technologies. Most significantly and alarmingly, Japan has developed a

distinctive attitude towards technology, which confuses the underlying distinction between machines and humans in the Western model of modernity.

Among different examples of techno-Orientalist writings brought up by Morley and Robins, Japan is often portrayed as "the greatest 'machine-loving' nation of the world," a society in which 'machines are priceless friends.'"[43] Indeed, this blanket portrayal of Japan is not entirely unfounded. Some scholars argue that Japan displays a much less neurotic and paranoiac relationship with technology compared to the West. In their introduction of the relationship between Japanese science fiction and anime, Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi argue that Japan has established a model of "technological hypersociality," which can be demonstrated, for instance, in their love for robots.[44] The popularity of toy robots in Japan's postwar years was only the beginning. They maintain that from Astro Boy to Pokémon, "[a]ffectionate ambivalence has extended to each new step in the process of imagining virtual creatures."[45] The relatively accepting attitude and unabashed curiosity towards science and technology among the Japanese can be seen in the treatment of technology in Japan's dominant subculture of anime and manga. Anime and manga, like the genre of science fiction in the West, has been a crucial platform in popularizing scientific knowledge and exploring various ramifications precipitated by technological modernity. Yet, it is mistaken to argue that Japanese have no reservations about science and technology. War memories, particularly of the two atomic bombings, are evoked time

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[43] Ibid., 168.
[44] Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Takayuki Tatsumi, "Introduction," in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), vii—xxli.
[45] Ibid., ix.

and again in various anime and manga throughout different periods of time. The recent Fukushima Nuclear Daiichi Disaster in the wake of the tsunami is another devastating example of how reckless scientific modernity can ravage Japan. It is critical to note that the accommodating attitude, whether voluntary or enforced, of the Japanese towards machines and their *seemingly* uncritical embrace of technology are derived from a sense of historical urgency. The project of Japanese modernization, i.e. the Meiji Restoration in the nineteenth century, had to respond immediately and efficaciously to the imminent invasion of Western imperialism. Ironically, for the West, Japan's open acknowledgement of the relationship between humans and machines became a derogative identity marker during the eighties. Because of their love for machines, Japanese degenerate into machine-like beings without emotions and individuality. Japanese's close affiliation with high technologies does not ameliorate this negative image of Japan. On the contrary, Japan's pioneering innovation and precocious embrace of so-called "postmodern" technologies in the 80s downgrades the Japanese into a species of walking dead who live off simulated images and disembodied information.

The genre of cyberpunk is largely responsible for disseminating such a stereotype of Japan, while unwittingly helping to brand Japan as "postmodern"—different from, and potentially better than Western-defined modernity. For instance, in *Blade Runner*, as Stephen Beard puts it, Japan is reinvented "as a land of high-tech enchantment," producing "a new breed of 'radically bored' teen information junkies, *otaku*, who shun bodily contact and spend all of their waking hours gathering data on the most trivial bit of media."[46] A "postmodern" Japan, just like the stigmatized figure of otaku portrayed here,

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[46] Stephen Beard, quoted in Morley and Robins, "Techno-Orientalism," 169.

is all about artificiality without real essence. A metonymical relationship exists between Japan and technology. Japan is not a geographical space or a cultural identity, but solely defined by its seamless interface with and delirious self-erasure by technology. What is at issue here is not that the Orient realigns geopolitics. Contrary to the belief that the advent of postmodernity in the age of late-capitalism has enabled a kind of all-encompassing globalization rendering national boundaries obsolete and irrelevant, discourses of techno-Orientalism show that markers of nationality and ethnicity are more present than ever. At the same time, manufacturing a cultural identity and demarcating a "national character" provide a semblance of difference which can be readily commodified.

Morley and Robins argue that ultimately the discourses of techno-Orientalism betray the incoherence and discrepancies of the fiction of Western modernity: modernity is by no means a unilateral destiny and it has an unequivocal racial and geographical preference for the white, male, and eurocentric. While Morley and Robins criticize the Orientalist tendency in techno-Orientalism, I complicate their argument further by calling attention to how the "techno" part of techno-Orientalism comes to be reified as part of the modern Constitution which I introduce in Chapter 2. Schematically, techno-Orientalism performs what Bruno Latour calls the Great Divide of modernity. According to Latour, the Great Divide segregates humanity from its nonhuman others, the modern from the traditional, the natural from the artificial, while the constitution of modernity depends on the hybrid, mutual contamination of these segregated and singularized entities.[47] While mastery of modern technology is the password to becoming modern, the establishment of modernity also calls for rejecting the tie between humans and machines or nonorganic

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[47] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

others in order to insulate humanity within the sanctuary of modernity. It is the Great Divide of Western modernity that permeates the myth of technology and mutilates human experiences by cutting off connections with non-human others. While the model of Western modernity dictates a schizoid and closeted relationship between man and machines, the open acknowledgement and dynamic entanglements that the Japanese establish with machines and technology offer a different kind of *relationality* that does not guarantee human exceptionalism or solidify humans and machines into immutable and mutually exclusive ontologies. The Japanese are depicted as monstrous precisely because they are *perceived* as openly engaging in the dirty work of "interfacing" technology and humanity. What Japan presents to the West is the West's own virtual reality and artificiality created by the fiction of a universal and universalized modernity.

V.   From Faceless Economy to the Inter/Face of East and West

Admittedly, the racial stereotype propagated by techno-Orientalism is part of a calibrated business maneuver adopted by Japan in its early global expansion during the 1980s. Japan played it safe by bracketing itself off to the provision of material technological artifacts such as automobiles, the Walkman, and electronics. However, Japan's strategy underwent a shift in the 1990s to focus on non-material cultural contents. As Iwabuchi explains, two aspects of technology define Japan as a high-tech nation: one is made-in-Japan technological "hardware," including gadgets such as the Sony Walkman or video game consoles, and the other is cultural "software" as evidenced by the exports

of Japanese manga, anime, video games, soap operas and others.[48] Notably, while Japan

prevailed over the West in the '80s with "hard" technical devices, it was not until after

the Japanese economic bubble burst that Japan's cultural industries began to gain global

presence and successfully gave birth to various Japanese "fandoms" outside Japan. In

short, Japan has transformed from a "faceless" economy to a creative powerhouse, a

global brand, and the face of "cool." Mitsuhiro Takemura identifies this phenomenon as

the change from manufacturing consumer technologies (such as the Walkman or

camcorder) to carefully crafting a sense of "digital Japanesque." "Digital Japanesque" has

a clear purpose of restructuring Japanese cultural and "aesthetic capital" in the era of

digitalized globalization: "Unless Japanese products embody a clearly articulated

Japanese identity and sensibility, they will not reach a global standard."[49] The task facing

Japan, Takemura emphasizes, is to retrieve its "cultural gene" and rescue an "original"

Japanese value by taking back the initiative of self-representation, especially considering

how the West has (mis)appropriated Japan as "a cheap copy of Western Japanesque."

This reassertion and reinvention of "Japaneseness" is a deliberate attempt to

regain the prerogative of representing Japan, to relocate it from the West back to Japan

itself. However, it does not necessarily mean a complete rejection of Western

Orientalized depictions of Japan. The "global standard" in Takemura's account is not so

much about whether Japan should try to reach any externally-set standard as about

whether it should create a niche market by way of creating a niche (or flexible) identity.

For instance, although the Western distortion of Japanese culture around the world

dismays cultural critics like Takemura, popular discourses actually welcome the

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[48] Iwabuchi, "'Soft' Nationalism."
[49] Ibid., 453.

ubiquitous mis/representations of Japan as a positive sign of how Japan has successfully

globalized—Japanized to be exact—the world. For instance, after the emergence of

western otaku, Okada Toshio, the co-founder of Gainax, one of the key anime production

studios, boasts of the export of otaku culture:

> Literature, music, art, are not a kind of Japanese culture on which we can
> pride ourselves. Even if Japan ceased to exist in the world now, there would
> be no impact on the world cultural scene…Japan is not home of any sort of
> [Western] culture. The only exception is *otaku* culture, which makes Japan
> the Mecca of the World.[50]

As an anime creator and producer, Okada's affirmation of a "low-brow" and

stigmatized popular culture such as *otaku* at the expense of "high" Japanese culture

is not surprising. In a sense, Okada's remarks demonstrate a complacent self-

assertion, self-exoticization through the Orientalized gaze of the West. And yet

concomitantly, scholars such as Shōichi Inoue defends the absence of Japanese

influence over the "world cultural scene" as the necessary consequence of the

untranslatability of Japanese high culture. This absence of Japanese influence is an

almost necessary operating procedure. An authentic Japanese culture, particularly

that which embodies an authentic Japanese tradition and "essence" with examples

such as judo and Zen, can only be "grotesquely" adapted and localized outside

Japan in the process of cultural dissemination.[51] Inoue's fascination with the

spectrum of "grotesqueness" in the foreign misappropriation of Japan, as Iwabuchi

rightly observes, demonstrates another tactic for preserving a 'pure' Japanese

culture that is simply unattainable outside the context of Japan. What Inoue

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[50] Okada Toshio, quoted in Iwabuchi's "'Soft' Nationalism," 454.
[51] Inoue Shōichi, quoted in Iwabuchi's "Soft' Nationalism,"461-462.

propagates is Japanese exceptionalism and singularity. Moreover, I argue that a discourse like Inoue's in fact works as a supplement to Okada's statement: it is precisely the ultimate untranslatability of a true Japan that exonerates and even encourages pulpy fabrications of Japaneseness through a junk culture. To use Latour's concept of hybrid I introduce in the second chapter, Japanese popular culture is doing the work of translating the "East" to the "West," and vice versa, while serving the function of keeping the true "Japanese" culture contamination-free. Moreover, the fact that the unfathomable interiority of Japan remains steadfastly intact and inscrutable exudes an ever-enticing sense of quasi-Oriental mystique, which in turn guarantees inexhaustible reproductions and consumptions of a popular culture that carries a semblance of Japaneseness. Untranslatability itself then becomes an expedient strategy for both cultural survival and money-making in the name of unattainable Japanese singularity.

Thus, Japan's aforementioned self-Orientalization and cultural narcissism, derived from its supremacy in technology and economic dominance during the 1990s, has developed into a difference phase/face. Techno-nationalism, the Japanese counter-discourse to techno-Orientalism, is reoriented into what Iwabuchi calls a software-based "soft nationalism" by infusing "Japanese sensibility" into the production and circulation of Japanese cultural goods. While Iwabuchi defines soft-nationalism as nationalism in the form of "cultural software" versus technical hardware, I see Japan's soft power as inextricably intertwined with the fluidity, the malleability of popular culture. In particular, the "virtual" enterprise built by Japanese anime, manga and video manga amplifies the potential of the soft power. Iwabuchi characterizes the ambiguity in the

medium of manga and anime as "culturally odorless"—*mukokuseki,* which literally means "stateless" in Japanese—given that racial and cultural markers in manga and anime become blurry and unmoored from any perceivable and verifiable referents. Indeed, the articulation of Japaneseness in the mode of *mukokuseki* is paradoxically a disarticulation of any tangible Japaneseness from geographical specificities and cultural realities. The appearance of Japanese culture also connotes the disappearance of it, and the euphoria over the "Japanization of the world" should be held in check.[52] However, this dialectics of dis/appearance with regard to the representation of Japaneseness still implies the existence of a finite substance of "Japaneseness" that awaits recognition and discovery; at this same time, it treats the production of meaning as a linear and organic process that proceeds directly from representation without any mutation.

I propose instead that we view this ethereal and nebulous quality that characterizes Japanese popular culture as the very emblem of how globalization has deterritorialized and reterritorialized familiar political and cultural borders, in Deleuze and Guattari's lexicon.[53] Migration and relocation of both population and capital have certainly created ruptures in the *experiences* and any given "natural" affiliation of culture and nationality. And most importantly, a globalization propelled and compelled by works of imagination through the saturation of popular culture, as Arjun Appadurai suggests, also transforms cultural expressions and ethnic and national identifications into a space of contestation

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[52] Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). I borrow Abba's concept of dis/appearance to examine the improbable imaginary of Japaneseness in Japanese popular culture, especially the subculture of anime, manga and video games.
[53] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus.* See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

and *imagination*.[54] Japanese anime, manga and video games are brilliant media technologies, not simply because they sell something as distinct and exotic as "Japaneseness." Rather, the steadfast refusal of realism and the audacious flirtation between exaggeration and approximation embraced by Japanese popular culture maximizes imaginative capital and invites imaginative investment. For instance, the characterization of Japanese anime and manga figures demonstrates a sense of "virtualness" that leans towards hyperbole and fantasy while bypassing realism and verisimilitude. For many readers and audiences, it is a confounding experience when they first encounter Japanese anime, manga, or video games and try to identify the "ethnicity" of the characters: they look Caucasian but exhibit typical Japanese mannerisms, even if their dialogue is dubbed into English. However, although these virtual and plastic forms show the imaginative valence of popular culture, it does not mean that Japanese popular culture embraces the full play of imagination without a structure or reference point.

According to Mary Grigsby, Western influence over Japan has rendered Japanese characters in a set of idealized Westernesque features, including a tall slim body, long legs, and enormous round eyes on a tiny fair-skinned face with hair colors other than black. The Japanese conception of "Westerners" is exclusively white.[55] Granted, neither Japanese people nor Westerners resemble these anime and manga characters. As Wendy Chun points out, since all animation images evade "indexicality," exaggerations of bodily features in Japanese anime/manga can be read as a caricature of racial and racialized

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[54] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

[55] Mary Grigsby, as quoted by Wendy Chun, *Control and Freedom.* Tezuka, as a big fan of Walt Disney's cartoon, admittedly mimics Mickey House's disproportioned big eyes and creates the prototype of Japanese anime/manga figures. It is important to bear in mind that the "origin" of Japanese anime/manga human characters are "humanoid animal" or "humanoid robot," not real human characters.

differences. Moreover, the distinction between the Japanese and Westerners is not completely absent. Characters that are supposed to be "Westerners" are depicted with more "realistic" details, while Japanese protagonists turn invariably "Japanoid," which Ueno Toshiya defines as "not actually Japanese… [since it exists] neither inside or outside Japan."[56] More sinisterly and pointedly, while Japanese characters are de-Asianized and take on phantasmagoric, quasi-Caucasian features, other "Asians" remain framed in the old generic racial stereotypes which, Chun maintains, bear a striking similarity to the "Yellow Peril" political campaign. Frederick Schodt also registers this Asianization of Asian people when he introduces Tezuka and the art form of manga into the United States: "Chinese and Korean Characters are frequently drawn with slant eyes and buckteeth, in much the same stereotyped fashion Japanese were depicted by American propagandists in World War II."[57] While Asians are Orientalized into the primitive Others that can only be found in picture books, Schodt also notices that so-called white foreigners (*gaijin*) often suffer from the same animalistic characterization through being depicted as "big hairy brutes." In other words, both Asians and Westerners are degenerated into humanoid creatures to which Japanoid Japanese bear no resemblance and share no racial proximity.

This racial constellation of Japanoid Japanese, Asianized Asians and Caucasian Westerners visualizes what Iwabuchi identifies as the triad of "Japan-Asia-the West." Japan is imagined to occupy an ambivalent intermediary position between two racially and culturally marked others. Japanoid images do not divulge or exhibit an identifiable

[56] Ueno Toshiya, as quoted by Wendy Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 210.
[57] Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 66.

essence that is unmistakably Japan or Japanese. Rather, the "in-betweenness" of Japanoid images produces a virtual Japan refracted through the prism of mutual mirroring that takes place back and forth between Japan, Asia, and the West, each of which is itself semiotically and culturally unstable. To be explicit, there is no singular and discrete "Japaneseness" unveiled through Japanoid images. Instead, an indefinite sense of Japaneseness transpires through the contrast and the constant positioning of one *against* and/or *with* another between Japan, Asia, and the West. Although Japanoid images seem to execute a paradoxical move of self-erasure and surrender so-called "identity" to that of the West (Japanoid characters look more like Caucasian Westerners than Caucasian characters do), the visual opacity of Japanoid images ensures the unpresentability of an imaginary authentic Japanese culture. That is, the presumed authenticity of Japan as a cultural and racial entity can be preserved with the absence of "direct" representations. At the same time, the obscure Japanoid image also creates a vacuum that enables plastic definitions and identifications of Japaneseness without claims of origin. Specifically, the "Japan" of the visual triad of "Japan, Asia and the West" encompasses a varying spectrum of inarticulate sentiments and fluid lineaments. This can only be made intelligible through deliberate transparency in the presentations of "Asia" or the East vis-à-vis the "West." In other words, by cementing the West and Asia or the East into clearly-defined racial and cultural entities, Japanoid images can elude the heftiness of identification and exploit the full potential of virtuality. While the East and the West respectively become a steerable geographical space and a recognizable race, "Japan" can either stand in for the East or the West, or both. Yet, "Japaneseness" remains beyond grasp, even while it continues to attract and evade *attention* at the same time. The

virtuality embodied in Japanese popular culture thus becomes an effective technology for manufacturing an alluring sense of Japaneseness in a structure similar to a closet. In other words, the "face" of Japan—both figuratively and literally— keeps passing like a chameleon through the banal and banalized faces of East and West while the real identity of Japan remains a secret to be revealed.

Thus, the familiar countenances of the West as well as the East make up the tender new face of Japanese popular culture. The face of anime and manga is what I call the "inter/face" of East and West, which is also the new phase/face of neoliberal capitalism. As foreseen by Deleuze and Guattari, "[Neocapitalism] invents its eastern face and its western face, and reshapes them both—all for the worst."[58] In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari uses the dynamic concept of "deterritorialization and reterritorialization" to examine how capitalism utilizes the cartography of colonialism in remapping the global surface. The two-fold movement of capitalism does not simply deculture and reculture any given "indigenous" society as in old colonial practices, it also revives and rewrites the binary paradigms, the axioms, employed by colonial practice: the East vs. the West, the foreign vs. the domestic, and the global vs. the local. Thus, capitalism's invention and reshaping of its Eastern and Western faces signifies a kind of territorial and cultural re-appropriation inherent in the colonizing operation of the capitalist machine. For Deleuze and Guattari, contemporary capitalism is an "axiomatic" system that decodes and deterritorializes flows, and subjugates these otherwise incommensurable flows into "a general isomorphy."[59] When global capitalism reinvokes and reinvents the cultural

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[58] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 22.
[59] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 459. See also Alberto Toscano, "Axiomatic," in The Deleuze Dictionary: Revised Edition, ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2005), 21-23.

geography of the East vs. the West through the mapping of communication networks, it also creates a fiction by equating these entities onto the same plane of virtual visualization. It thus creates exactly "a general isomorphy." The two faces of capitalism, East and West, demonstrate the "axiomatic" organization of geopolitics that the "desiring machine" of capitalism keeps reinventing and operating on. They do not point to the physical territory of the East and the West respectively.

Thus, the Eastern face and the Western face of capitalism embodied by Japanese popular culture do not simply refer to the rudimentary construction of physical facial features for fictional figures in anime and manga. Most importantly, the "interfacibility," the "commensurability," of the Eastern face and the Western face mean symbolic disembodiment and defacement. Late capitalism, through global fiber optic networks, levels out—or "flatlines," to borrow Gibson's metaphor—physical localities and codifies them into geographical coordinate axes on a digital map. Imaginary cultural entities called the East and the West are literally taken and reified as their "face value." This is instanced by the Western outcry against not casting "an Asian face" for the role of Major in the American remake of *Ghost in the Shell* despite that Oshii, the director of the Japanese original, defends the casting choice, emphasizing that Major is a cyborg assuming a quasi-Japanese body and name.[60] In effect, the "quasi" quality that characterizes Japanese anime and manga is a symptom of late capitalist globalization: just as Japanese popular culture, despite its cool versatilities and iridescent novelties, reinscribes the most archaic but persistent asymmetrical relation between East and West,

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[60] Liz Shackleton, "How Asian Audiences Reacted to 'Ghost In The Shell' and the 'Whitewashing' Row," *Screendaily,* April 13, 2017, https://www.screendaily.com/features/how-asian-audiences-reacted-to-ghost-in-the-shell-/5116824.article. Asian audience were more critical of "lumping all Asians together," or having the "wrong" Asian than having Scarlet Johansson playing the role of Major.

neoliberalism never liberates itself—never intends to—from the old imperialist quest of conquering the Orient.

VI.   Cyberspace: Face-Off of East and West

As Morley and Robin imply, the narrative of cyberpunk is an Orientalist dream relived. Notwithstanding, it is important to note that the Orientalism permeating cyberpunk is one of the most dangerous types: cyberpunk does not directly deal with the Orient *per se*, but constructs a quasi-Orient that is readily navigable for pleasure in cyberspace. First introduced in Gibson's *Neuromancer*, cyberspace is famously defined as "a graphical representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system" that generates "a consensual hallucination."[61] Case, the protagonist of Gibson's novel and arguably the forerunner of the hacker, is a console cowboy, the information junkie, who smuggles data for profit and jacks into cyberspace for pleasure, "liv[ing] for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace." Cyberspace and high-speed information networks, in Chun's astute observation, are depicted as "a commercially viable frontier of mind" and foresee the possibility of e-commerce through uploading and downloading digital bits.[62] Cyberpunk narratives that imagine cyberspace as a global matrix saturated with profit and navigable pleasure have underlined the ideology and development of computer technology.

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[61] Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: An Ace Books, 1984), 51.
[62] Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 172.

Cyberspace, as Jameson insists, is first and foremost a "literary invention."[63] Despite Gibson's techy and highly metaphysical definition, one of the functions cyberspace serves in the narrative economy of *Neuromancer* is to ease, or completely erase, the bodily and psychological discomfort of being confronted with foreignness or being in a foreign land. Notably, the "foreignness" in *Neuromancer* is not necessarily "Oriental" in the most conventional sense. The novel opens in the urban sprawl of Chiba City, Japan, where aliens, expatriates and hustlers with different nationalities try to get rich by smuggling information. Confronted with this "sprawl" of unruly foreignness, Case often dreams of cyberspace: "All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and corners he'd cut in Night City, and still he'd seen matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void…" [64] Case's fantasy of cyberspace can be said to be an attempt to "encase" the messiness and decadence of a foreign metropolis like Chiba in a borderless and yet steerable cyberspace. The disoriented feeling of instability derived from the encounter with foreignness can be reoriented into well-oriented navigability in cyberspace. In other words, cyberspace is the smooth interface that smothers the incommensurability between a rough, unknown East and a familiar West.

Chun emphasizes that cyberspace becomes the very embodiment of the Oriental in the sense that cyberspace becomes an eroticized and exoticized space which can be "jacked in" and off at wish. The navigability and penetrability of cyberspace recalls the Oriental female body, and cyberspace becomes a virtual and "knowable" Orient in contrast to the other "real" but relatively inscrutable Orient—Japan. Moreover, by conflating information networks with the Asian metropolis, the threat of the foreign

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[63] Jameson, "A Global Neuromancer."
[64] Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 4-5.

embodied by the double Orients—cyberspace and Japan—can be symbolically contained

through datafication and codification. Chun contends,

> Thus, cyberpunk's twin obsessions with cyberspace and Japan as the Orient as not
> accidental….It orients the reader/viewer, enables him or her to envision the world
> as data. This twinning sustains—barely—the dream of self-erasure and pure
> subjectivity. Most simply, others must be reduced to information in order for the
> console cowboy to emerge and penetrate. The dream of bodiless subjectivity must
> be accompanied by bodiless representivity.[65]

The subjectivity of a white male cyberpunk is secured through codifying the Oriental

Other to representable visual data, and his sense of self is further buttressed by his ability

to "crack in" and "decode" the mystery of the Oriental. With a definite presumption of

femininity, Chun's identification of cyberspace as the female Oriental body might be an

over-determined reading at the risk of effeminization of the Orient. Nonetheless, Chun

calls attention to the fact that the ongoing process of coding and decoding is an important

aspect of high-tech Orientalism.

In Said's critique of the tradition of Orientalist writings, the hegemony of the West is

defined by its prerogative of inventing the Orient and representing it through systematic

discursive constructions.[66] But the working of high-tech Orientalism in the 80s

complicates the issue of mis/representation of the Orient since the dynamic of coding,

decoding and re-cording does not stop at transforming a certain locale into visual data. In

fact, the information networks strive to permeate the entire globe and produce a matrix

similar to what Deleuze and Guattari call the plane of immanence. The West as well as

the East are reduced into "nodes" in a computer network where data flows crisscross and

overlap, through which East and West constitutes a kind of relationality that is no longer

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[65] Chun, 195.
[66] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

vertical and trickle-down in structure, but one that is horizontal and spatial on a planar global surface. Moreover, as the case of *Neuromancer* shows, the "interfacing" of imaginative cyberspace and the exotic urban landscape sees the further collapse of the distinction between space and place. The "identity" of the Orient is uncoupled from geographical certainties and cultural specificities of locales and spaces Instead, it becomes a shifting virtual space that can infinitely expand as networks of information and capital keep seeking new uncharted territories. If cyberspace is the aforementioned "commercial viable frontier of mind," the Orient codified by cyberspace and information technology paradoxically resonates with the Wild West in frontier stories in that both induce the desire to explore the possibilities of new settlement. The difference is that cyberspace renders the physicality of the Orient irrelevant and grafts the pleasure of navigation on a smooth surface created by digital mapping and imaging.

As Chun maintains the navigability of cyberspace propagates a familiar sense of "epistemophilia," that is, a desire to seek out and to know.[67] Every navigator of cyberspace is like a detective surfing in the web of information and trying to uncover the mystery: "this epistemophilia is tied intimately to the promise of finally getting to know the other, who is never banal and who always has a secret to be revealed."[68] This desire to know reinforces a kind of cosmopolitanism in global capitalism, and while presumably a borderless cyberspace makes dissemination and circulation of information easier than ever, the mode of "knowing" is largely defined by the ability to access and process information without necessarily involving the complexity of learning and thinking. Moreover, cyberspace remaps the globe through intense coding and visualization,

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[67] Chun, 195.
[68] Ibid.

including "mak[ing] the invisible visible so that it can be navigated," or rendering "the invisible capital visible so it can be mapped."[69] Therefore, the "knowledge" produced through the navigation of cyberspace conflates the visual with the virtual. In other words, even the difference between East and West can be representable and readable through visualization, whereby the relationality between the two can be easily "known" and controlled.

Said criticizes how Western imperialism and colonialism set up a dialectical relationality between the Orient and the West through which the Orient cannot be grasped by itself and can only be known through its contrast with the West. Technological interventions such as the computer and information networks therefore represent an even more sinister version of colonialism through the operations of global capitalism in that borderless visualization and all-luminous visuality promise a deceptive kind of virtual transparency in the cultural translation process between East and West. As Rey Chow puts it, extending Walter Benjamin's idea of translation, "the light and transparency allowed by 'translation' are also the light and transparency of commodification."[70] Through a constant positioning and repositioning of the axiomatic East and West, capitalism renders the geographical and cultural identification of each of the two categories irrelevant. What matters is only the visible "difference" between the two which can be read and decoded. The East-West relationality reconfigured by contemporary global capitalism is not necessarily dialectical, but the knowing enacted through information technologies is only virtual and metaphorical, since it levels out all

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[69] Ibid., 177.
[70] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 201.

the incommensurabilies— between the visual and the bodily or the land and the map, for instance— with the smooth interface of cyberspace. And cyberspace is not the only "technology" that produces an interface of East and West. Ultimately, globalization is the technology of re/producing culture through the axiomatic operation of East vs. West.

VII.   The Case of *Ghost in the Shell*

Oshii Mamoru's film *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) is an exemplary work demonstrating how Japanese popular culture operates on the axiom of East and West while reinstating the "Japan-Asia-the West" triad as the specter of global capitalism.[71] For many critics and Japanese anime and manga fans in the West, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira* (1988) are the definitive works of Japanese cyberpunk, and the fact that the Wachowskis credit these two films as inspiration for *The Matrix* bears testimony to the success of Japanese cyberpunk. However, it is crucial to note that "cyberpunk" is an imported if not imposed label that the West uses to identify and market films like *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. Japanese anime and manga have fostered an immensely rich tradition with diversifying genres, but "cyberpunk" is not a popular and established "category" recognized by lay fans in Japan, except among some Japanese scholars who study Japanese and Western science fiction. In a way, the critical attention given to *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*, and their influence on the blockbuster hit *The Matrix*, reflects the narcissism of the West. After all, cyberpunk, a genre that originates from the West, essentially came full circle by travelling to the East and then back to the West. Interestingly, *Akira* brought Japanese

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[71] Ghost in the Shell, directed by Oshii Mamoru. Tokyo: Production IG, 1995.

anime onto the international stage long before anime auteur Hayao Miyazaki was introduced widely to the West. *Ghost in the Shell* was the first anime Japanese film that had a simultaneous release in Japan, Britain and the United States. Both made it into the art house theaters of the West and became more of a cult phenomenon abroad than in Japan. Although *Ghost in the Shell* first appeared as a TV series before being adapted into film, the TV series of *Ghost in the Shell* was broadcast on cable, and up to this day cable is not common in Japanese households. The limited accessibility and relative anonymity of *Ghost in the Shell* in its native country marks a stark contrast to the popularity and recognition it receives abroad. The gap between its domestic invisibility and global eminence is further intensified when the film director Oshii redresses the detective narrative in the TV series of *Ghost in the Shell*. The series is strung together as a series of criminal cases that embody a localized critique of corruption in Japan, turning it into a highly contemplative narrative that bears closer resemblance to Western cyberpunk than any of the recognizable and readily available "genres" of Japanese anime and manga.

At first glance, what triggers the story-telling in the film *Ghost in the Shell* is the mystery of the Puppet Master, an artificial life form that ghost-hacks people and manipulates them as puppets (*ningyo*, which means both doll and puppet in Japanese) by inserting false memories. However, the real galvanizing figure of the story is the iconic Major Motoko Kusanagi, the female cyborg belonging to Section 9, a secret intelligence agency of the Japanese government. Her mission to hunt down Puppet Master represents her own existential crisis, and eventually a spiritual quest both for herself and for the intended audience. Susan Napier, in her book on Japanese anime, distinguishes *Ghost in the Shell* as "a genuinely metaphysical work that is concerned …with such philosophical

questions as whether one can possess a soul in an increasingly technological age."[72] As suggested by the title *Ghost in the Shell*, this is a story about searching for the intangible, disembodied "ghost"—whether it is memory, consciousness, soul, spirit—encumbered inside the external shell of body, specifically one which owes its existence to government and has to be maintained regularly by the biotech companies that give it birth.

So, if this familiar motif of looking for memory or soul is made to sell, then how can it sell well? Since this film has simultaneous domestic and international release, how can it create a bi-cultural win-win situation? What does the trick? As Bolton, Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Tatsumi point out, "The producers of Japanese science fiction have always been familiar with their Western counterparts, and in new media they have often had an eye on Western markets. As a result, Japanese science fiction texts have frequently been double coded, evoking Japanese national concerns and popular myths while resonating strong with foreign audiences."[73] Thematically, *Ghost in the Shell* tries to cater to Western audiences by creating a hybrid narrative of two major figures of contemporary American science fiction. One is cyberpunk which simultaneously revels in and laments disembodied subjectivity (as seen in Gibson's *Neuromancer*) and the other is the android whose body and memory are the property of the big corporation that invents and enslaves quasi-humans (as portrayed in Scott's *Blade Runner)*. Notably, Oshii's target audience is not the general public, but a specific population of hardcore anime fans who are attuned not only to the genre of cyberpunk or the figure of cyborg and android, but also to the Western critical discourse on cyberpunk and the cyborg. For instance, in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence,* the sequel to *Ghost in the Shell,* Oshii even named the female police

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[72] Napier, *Anime from Akira*, 104.
[73] Bolton, Csicsery-Ronay Jr., and Tatsumi, "Introduction," vii-viii.

forensic expert Haraway as an allusion to Donna Haraway.[74] Moreover, the kind of "affectionate ambience" mentioned above that defines the Japanese relationality to machines and non-human others is modulated to a feeling of anxiety towards machines and technology as we see in Western science fiction. And yet, Oshii's maneuver is not solely informed by a "Western" global cosmopolitanism. The implication that *ningyo*—such as the doll, the puppet, even the cyborg—might have the ghost also evokes Japanese Shinto beliefs, in which the ontological distinctions between the animate and inanimate are blurred. Although Oshii and Shirō Masamune, the creators of the manga *Ghost in the Shell*, both use the English word "ghost," the ghost in Japanese literary, theatrical, and spiritual traditions has always been an important presence. In order to customize itself to its intended domestic audience and international audience, the film *Ghost in the Shell* has to depend on and re-create the cultural imaginaries of the East and the West, the old and the new.

More specifically, the visual text that Oshii creates invents cultural imaginaries of East and West that can be narrativized and visualized, so as to generate a cognitive mapping for the audience to recognize and to know. Chun addresses the impulse to visualize in the cyberpunk genre: "Cyberpunk makes the invisible visible so that it can be navigated; it structurally parallels Jameson's quest to make invisible capital visible so it can be mapped."[75] The tradition of Japan and even the rather abstract spiritual beliefs of Shinto are the "invisible capital" that must turn visible and visualizable so that the complexity embodied in a "foreign" visual text can become comprehensible and even profitable. In fact, the reciprocal act of seeing and the potential of visuality are not "new"

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[74] Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence, directed by Oshii Mamoru, Tokyo: Production IG, 2004.
[75] Chun, *Control and Freedom,* 177.

phenomena for Japanese cultural formation. Like any process of identity formation, cultural identity is never a coherent self-definition within an ostensibly "unified" culture; rather, it depends on the image mirrored through the gaze of the Other. And more importantly, cross-cultural identification always proceeds along the uneven alignment of power. Kumiko Sato in her studies of Japanese cyberpunk argues that "the dynamically fluid and interactive nature of culture [is] formed by the sense of "how they see us" rather than "what is our culture."[76] "How they see us" is key to the construction of post-colonial identity, especially in the history of East Asia. From the mid–nineteenth century, "how they see us" was the banner used in propaganda calling for political reform in response to the threat of Western imperialism. "How they see us" is almost the synonym for racial inferiority and national shame.[77]

When American cyberpunk was introduced to Japan in the early '80s, "how they see us" took on meaning and became the rhetoric of self-Orientalization. As Sato points out, the way American cyberpunk depicts Japan as the new frontier of the future while still deeply rooted in its feudal past, has enacted an exciting "(re)discovery of Japan" in this exoticized Japanoid Disneyland. What is "gained" in the cultural translation is the fantastic image that glosses over the anxieties underlying Japanese modernity. That is, how can Japan retain its cultural/racial uniqueness when embracing universalized Western ideals such as democracy and technology? A modern Japanese identity is a hybrid that is produced through, in Sato's words, "the incompatible binary oppositions

[76] Sato Kumiko, "How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context." *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, no. 3 (2004): 335-355. doi:10.1353/cls.2004.0037 (accessed February 3, 2019).
[77] Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

between Japanese particularity and Western universality."[78] In American cyberpunk, this seemingly smooth interface between the East and the West takes on, for the Japanese, the old mission of Japanese modernization. It creates, in Sato's words, "the discourse of historical coincidence that retrospectively produces the history of the prosthetic Japanese identity."[79] And this paradoxical, prosthetic Japanese identity that fuses together premodern Japan-ness with futuristic technology becomes the very grammar of contemporary Japanese cyberpunk."

Sato's analysis provides a more historically-informed reading of *Ghost in the Shell*. The story is structured as a reversal of American cyberpunk by installing a female cyborg as the superhero, Major Kusanagi, who surpasses her male colleagues not only in her strength, but more significantly in her "spiritual" awareness. And yet, this deviation from the phallic narrative of "jacking into" cyberspace by the Western male cyberpunk cannot be viewed simplistically as evidence of a "developed" modern Japan and as the salutary influence from the importation of Western feminism. On the contrary, to begin with, she possesses an almost impossibly "sexy" body produced by a fantasy of a non-Asian woman (a Western fantasy of a non-Asian women as well as an Asian fantasy of a non-Asian woman): disproportionately long legs, voluptuous breasts and big eyes (although the major notably does not have blue eyes.) All of these are standardized features ascribed to the female in Japanese pornographic anime. On the other hand, this highly sexualized image is neutralized by portraying her as a mother figure for her less capable male cyborg fighters. Moreover, her identity crisis might be interpreted as the universal predicament of any modern subject, and yet, in Japanese literary tradition, self-

[78] Sato, "Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context." 343.
[79] Ibid., 353.

introspection is a specifically female genre that can be traced back to Lady Murasaki's

Tale of Genji and Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* written more than one millennium ago. In

fact, from the end of the nineteenth century, the establishment of modern Japanese

literature depended on this hitherto deprecated narrative of the female psyche to

document the painful experience of modernity and construct a modern Japanese

subjecthood.

It is through depicting Kusanagi as strong and yet melancholic, sexy and yet

maternal, that this "Major" is turned into the puppet, the doll, the fetish that melds

together the gender stereotypes of old and new, East and West. In a similar fashion, the

idea of the ghost is also a paradox that glues together the incongruous cultural domains of

science and religion. Inspired by Arthur Koestler's writing "ghost in the machine," the

manga creator Shirō Masamune takes up Koestler's notion and critiques the Cartesian

dualism of mind and body. When this is transferred to the film, although the title remains

the same, the depiction of the Major and her existential angst falls back on the model of a

Cartesian interiorized self, encased and imprisoned in the physical body. The Major's

doubt directed towards her cyborg body is a modernist and modern critique against the

way corporate capitalism incorporates our body and reduces it to pure machine. The

"solution" to this, as suggested by the film's ending, is to give up this body altogether and

evolve into an "immanent Overmind," paradoxically through the motif of Christian

transcendence. Koestler's theory of evolution of the physical mind is repackaged into a

kind of Western Christian ontological transcendence, alluding to Saint Paul's hope of

unification with God when the Major first hears the calling from the Puppet Master to

merge with him: "For now we see through a glass, darkly."[80] As we learn from Donna Haraway's ironic metaphor of the cyborg, situatedness is part of our humanity and it is recognizing our rooted, situated position that enables us to "connect."[81] Does *Ghost in the Shell* then reinscribe a conservative ideology by appealing to the transcendental and the universal?

Apart from using the idea of the ghost to patch up the Western scientific and theological discourses on the mind, the film also sells the Japanese traditional belief in ghosts derived from the Shinto religion. An obvious example is the technical device of thermo-optic camouflage. By wearing this thermo-optic camouflage, characters literally become invisible and turn into ghosts. On the visual level, the director subtly uses the language of cinema to conjure the ancient animistic ghost. Greatly influenced by Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell* follows the noir tradition and takes exceptional care in delineating its urban setting. In the lyrical sequences depicting the cityscape of Hong Kong through the Major's eyes, trams and neon lights are juxtaposed with boats and vintage street signs; traditional Japanese music shuts out the hustle and bustle of the city, transporting it to the distant tranquil past. The montage of multiple temporalities and dimensions indirectly visualizes the Shinto and Buddhist notion of immanence, which, according to popular belief, accounts for the existence of ghosts. At the same time, eventually, the immanence that saturates the texture of the film becomes destiny for the Major when she interfaces with the immanent Overmind, Puppet Master.

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[80] 1 Cor. 13:12.
[81] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Here, we can see the film plays "smart" and performs an expedient marketing strategy. It conveniently approximates the Eastern belief of immanence with the transcendent Christian God and equates different cultural practices of "spirituality" on the same plane of visuality without forgetting to mark the difference. The viewers can take what they want. Moreover, apart from blending the "spirituality" of both East and West, *Ghost in the Shell* approaches "science" by drawing upon the culturally identifiable imaginary of the East and the West. A cyborg like the Major is the invention of and the object of study for cybernetics. At the same time, the question of whether an inanimate entity can have a soul and spirit is always embedded in Japan's Shinto tradition. Moreover, since the Major's quest for an authentic memory and pure soul ultimately reflects our underlying notion of humanity, the film needs to address the "science" of human life. In the famous scene in which the Major is amputated in an exchange of gunfire and finally merges with the Puppet Master, Oshii deliberately locates the scene in a deserted museum of natural history. As the gunfire intensifies, the camera directs the audience's view towards the bullets hitting the wall. What the gunfire illuminates is the painting of the tree of life on the wall. The Major's becoming a ghost and pure consciousness by merging with the Puppet Master is not only spiritual transcendence, but also biological destiny. And yet, after the Major "evolves" into a disembodied ghost, she does not disappear into cyberspace. Her consciousness returns and resides in the young girl's body. Since there is not a real equivalent in the East to the theory of evolution, the film narrative uses a catchy and yet simplistic way to present one of the most readily recognizable Eastern ideas about life, i.e. the Buddhist belief in reincarnation. *Ghost in the Shell* is "cool" because it manages to visualize and articulate a smooth assemblage of

disparate and incommensurable ideas. Admittedly, these ideas are often cultural clichés, but it is precisely the knowability of these clichés that allows the audience to navigate through a presumably rich and complicated text that addresses science and spirituality, East and West, modern and traditional.

What is represented is a postmodern pastiche that conceals all of its contradictions into a smooth surface and beautiful image, *at the expense of historical particularities*. In the case of *Ghost in the Shell*, what is at stake is not only Japan's painful memory of forced modernization and the complicated history of the involvement between Japan and America. The fact that the disembodied Puppet Master is an American is telling, since America literally plays the role of puppet master in modern Japanese history. Japan's entry into modernity through the Meiji Restoration is a direct response to Commodore Matthew Perry's gunboat diplomacy and America's imperialist expansion in the nineteenth century. One century later, the defeat of Japan in WWII and the postwar American occupation of Japan literally turned Japan into a puppet of the United States. Although the master-slave hierarchy between the U.S. and Japan is figured by the relationship between the Major and the disembodied Puppet Master, nevertheless the ultimate union of the two seems to become a necessity— just like spiritual and biological evolution. *Ghost in the Shell*, when it first appeared in the early 1990s as a manga and TV show, embodied Japan's social crisis at that particular moment: the bubble economy of the 80s collapsed, and politicians' underhanded deals with business scandalized the whole society. The TV show relentlessly and explicitly criticizes Japanese politics. In the film, the pointed social criticism is diluted in several ways: on the one hand, it has to do with the shame and fear in "how they see us," especially since the film is produced for

international release. Therefore, the localized political messages must subside and be

transfigured into universal discourse with philosophical and spiritual overtones, and such

abstraction can also call forth a kind of cosmopolitanism bleached of race and nationality.

And most importantly, specific cultural anxieties are safely guarded through the

deliberate choice of using Hong Kong as the background.

In the interview, Oshii elaborates why he chose Hong Kong as the setting for

Ghost in the Shell:

> In "Ghost in the Shell," I wanted to create a present flooded with information, and it [Japan's multilayered world] wouldn't have lent itself to that. For this reason, I thought of using exoticism as an approach to a city of the future. In other words, I believe that a basic feeling people get perhaps when imaging a city of the near future is that while there is an element of the unknown, standing there they'll get used to this feeling of being an alien. Therefore, when I went to look for locations in Hong Kong, I felt that this was it. A city without past or future. Just a flood of information.[82]

In order to visualize the ubiquitous Net from which the Puppet Master emerges and to

which the Major is drawn to, Oshii needs to create a "flat" image of the city—"flat" in

the sense of being unburdened with the past and familiarity.[83] Ironically, the film was

made in 1995, two years before Hong Kong's return to China. The colonial experience

was never so present, but the memory of Hong Kong's particular history becomes the

unpresentable ghost and invisible other, haunting the film's touristic and forward-looking

gaze. The city looks like Hong Kong but not quite—rather, it is a surreal postcard that

interfaces images of tourist sites: the streets turned into a river conjure images of Saigon

and Venice while the skyscrapers recall the cityscape of New York. The local

particularity of Hong Kong is paradoxically lost by transforming Hong Kong into a

hyper-visible hybrid. From a Marxist perspective, the exoticism Oshii claims to use is

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[82] Quoted in Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 203.
[83] Oshii's definition is "flat" is related to Takashi Murakami's Superflat movement.

simultaneously an attempt to exorcize the phantom of history, and this relocation into Hong Kong perniciously participates in the logic of global capitalism by reducing the space of Hong Kong into a consumable image.

Figure 1. In *Ghost in the Shell,* Johnson Road of Wai Chai located in Hong Kong Island are turned into rivers, trams into boats, but the landmark, Mei Wah Building remains identifiable.

Paradoxically, the erasure of Hong Kong's history signifies the return of Japan's history, specifically Japan's historical involvement with Asia. As I discuss earlier, after the 1980s Japan reinstated its triad identity of "Japan-Asia-the West," which was formulated during prewar imperial expansion, in order to re-embed itself back into the booming market of Asia. This need to reconnect with Asia was even more urgent after the collapse of the Japanese domestic market in 1989. Therefore, Hong Kong for Japan symbolizes the rediscovered "Orient," the new frontier of commerce. Ueno describes Oshii's escapade to Hong Kong as an attempt to visualize Japan's (economic) imperialism: "[T]he choice of Hong Kong represents an unconscious criticism of Japan's role as sub-empire: by choosing Hong Kong as the setting of this film, and trying to visualize the information net and capitalism, the director of this film, Oshii,

unconsciously tried to criticize the sub-imperialism of Japan (and other Asian nations)."[84]

As Chun points out, Japan's re-Orientation can be seen in Oshii's use of street signs and

commercial billboards:

> *Ghost in the Shell* relentless focuses on street signs that function as literal
> signposts for the foreign audiences…Oshii glosses over the historical reasons for
> this informatics functioning: a Japanese audience can read these Chinese and
> English signs, even if they still look foreign, because of historical connections
> between East Asian countries via Confucian study and modernization. [85]

For an American viewer who does not know any Asian languages, the bilingual

signs register exoticism—"an element of unknown" as Oshii claims—and yet the English

signposts render a certain familiarity and presumably might help the viewer navigate an

Asian city. For the Japanese viewer, the Chinese characters embedded in Hong Kong's

cityscape evoke Japan's shared cultural heritage with Asia, while simultaneously

distinguishing Hong Kong as a different locale from Japan since not all Chinese

characters carry into the Japanese writing system. Although Oshii aims to create for both

Japanese and Western audiences a foreign city of the future submerged in a sea of

information without the shadow of the past, he relies on a clearly-demarcated sense of

familiarity and "knowability" which can help manage and contain the threat of

foreignness as well as identify the difference.

By enlivening the tired division of East vs West while simultaneously defacing

both, *Ghost in the Shell* conglomerates differences in interest and interest in differences.

It conflates cool cybernetics with existential spirituality, deflates geopolitical conflicts by

incorporating them into a transcendental union, and erases historical memories and

geographical specificities by assimilating them into a carnivalesque expo show that

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[84] Ueno, quoted in Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 201.
[85] Chun, *Control and Freedom,* 205.

induces and gratifies the scopic desire of the tourist gaze. The cosmopolitan impulse to travel and to "know" embodied in the cyberpunk narrative justifies the colonizing desire of global capitalism by re-creating a new Orient—or even by multiplying a whole variety of Orients. In U.S. cyberpunk, a booming Asia beckons as the next wide open frontier. The way Japanese popular culture navigates itself since the 1990s is less a criticism of techno-Orientalism and more an appropriation of the Orientalized gaze through the double gestures of self-Orientalization and going further "native" by annexing Asia as Japan's Orient. By venturing westward to the United States and simultaneously going eastward towards Asia, Japanese popular culture needs to keep multiplying the Orient. *Ghost in the Shell* for instance creates this assemblage of "foreignness" and "otherness." In the film, apart from Americans as foreigners and Hong Kong people as Japan's primitive other, Major is a Japanoid cyborg who is a racialized slave laborer dispossessed of her own body and memory. She is created solely for the purpose of doing dirty work for the Japanese government. The horizon of the "Oriental" keeps infinitely expanding with the global panoply of capital flows. Chun identities this plastic definition and multiplication of the Orient as the "dispersal" of high-tech Orientalism: "High-tech Orientalism seems to be all about dispersal, specifically the dispersal of global capitalism and networks."[86] The plethora of "differences" encompassed by the category of the Orient is both the symptom and the prescription of global cultural capitalism. The hyper-visibility of various kinds of the Orient is both the effect and the engine of global capitalism. What remains the same is the structure of categorical violence involved in replicating the axiomatic binary between non-Orient and the Orient, West and East, and

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[86] Chun, *Control and. Freedom,* 242.

human and nonhuman. The immanent global capitalism renders the Orient more present than ever, but the identity of the Orient can still only be known through a reductive and hierarchically dialectical relationality with an equally imaginative non-Orient. The complexity and inherent incommensurability contained within each category is turned into comprehensibility and interfaciality by the cognitive mapping enacted by global fiber optic networks. The East as well as the West is reduced into a mere trope, a virtual marker without physicality.

In this chapter, I examine how Japan's popular culture since the 1980s has helped transformed Japan's faceless economy into a recognized, respectable global brand. However, if recast in Stiegler's theoretical paradigm, Japan's transition from a mere manufacturer of electronic gadgets to the eminent producer of cultural content points to a formidable evolution of the psychotechnological milieu and attention-capture industry. As elaborated earlier, the success of Japanese popular culture lies in the Orientalist structure deeply ingrained in capitalism and its offspring, neoliberal globalization. Specifically, Japanese popular culture reinscribes the epistemological structure of Orientalism by titillating audiences with their desire to know, to pin down the unknown, and to navigate the global frontier. To wit, global cultural capitalism is premised on the desire to know, which is also the foundation of Enlightenment. What happens then if there is no longer any "desire" left as hyperindustrial capitalism completely rewires the psyche and short-circuits desire by drive? When desire is deformed, access to symbolic authority is denied—and vice versa. Without symbolic authority, there will be no "consensus," which is the definition of cyberspace as "consensual hallucination," and hence a constitutive part of commerce. In my next chapter, I turn to *Neon Genesis*

Evangelion, lauded as the most influential anime, to show the psychological, social, and economic apocalypse enabled by the cultural industry.

Chapter 4. When Libidinal Economy Runs Amok:

The Cautionary Tale of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

"Everyone, deep in their hearts, is waiting for the end of the world to come."

Murakami Haruki, *1984,* quoted in *The Big Short*[1]

"The reproducibility of the technical machine differs from that of living beings, in that it is not based on sequential codes perfectly circumscribed in a territorialised genome."

Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*[2]

I.   The Genesis of New *Homo Sapiens*

Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion,* widely touted by fans and critics as one of the most influential anime series ever made, has spawned a lucrative franchise active to this day with a loyal domestic and international fanbase.[3] First aired as a weekly show during prime time on TV Channel 12, a station known for its anime programs, *Evangelion* was a slow burn: at first the series did not garner much buzz among the general public, but it slowly gained momentum through word of mouth.[4] By the end of its

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[1] *The Big Short*, directed by Adam McKay (Hollywood, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2015).
[2] Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 42.
[3] *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Platinum collection*, DVD, directed by Hideaki Anno (1995; Houston, TX: ADV Films, 2005), DVD. In this chapter, I use the translation of this platinum collection.
[4] Christophe Thouny, "Waiting for the Messiah: The Becoming-Myth of Evangelion and *Densha Otoko*," *Mechademia* 4 (2009): 111-129.

five-month run in March 27, 1995, the series had taken audiences by storm and become

one of the biggest cultural phenomena in 1990s Japan. A copious array of tie-ins and

spin-off merchandise of *Evangelion*, whether authorized productions or fan-generated

derivative works and activities, had sprung up. Film sequels, manga, video games and

other assorted media products followed. The first *Evangelion* film was released in 1997

in two installments upon the request of fans to "remediate" the ending of the original TV

series, which I examine closely in this chapter. In 2007, Anno launched the *Rebuild of

Evangelion* film trilogy as a reboot and put out one installment every couple of years with

a new studio. Each installment managed to reap box office success while receiving

critical accolades, which in turn continues to consolidate the legacy of *Evangelion* and

keep the fandom alive. A fourth film, the allegedly "final" chapter of the *Rebuild* series

was appended to the *Evangelion* franchise and slated to open in 2015, two decades after

the original TV series ended. But as expected, the release date was pushed back and is

still undecided, partly because Anno has been entangled in the making of the sequel to

G*odzilla*, the first and arguably still the biggest post-war Japanese entertainment

enterprise, and partly because it is by now the standard practice of the *Evangelion*

enterprise to defer release dates, edit titles or scrap contents entirely with the non-

accidental effect of building fans' frustration—and their *attention*.[5]

At a cursory glance, the production saga of *Evangelion* does not warrant any special

consideration, since interminable reproduction is the *de facto* mode of global multimedia

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[5] Anno's sequel to *Godzilla*, *Shin Godzilla* (*Godzilla Resurgence* is the English title), was released in 2016. Anno revamps the franchise by drawing on the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster and the Tohoku earthquake in his rendition of *Godzilla*. According to *Box Office Mojo*, *Shin Godzilla* was the highest-grossing live-action film, and ranked second in 2016 Japan's annual box office after the anime *Your Name*, which also features the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami.

entertainment franchises. Mary Shelley's bid for her "hideous progeny" to "go forth and prosper" is actualized in the ever-shifting and expanding forms of popular culture. This phenomenon is further accentuated by the infinite "add-ons" enabled by optical networks. The multiplications that stretch an initial five-month shelf life to a span of twenty years and beyond testifies to a kind of metatextual *genesis* readily alluded to by the title of Anno's *magnum opus*. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in its most literal sense means "a gospel book of new genesis."[6] (Mariana Ortega). Crowned as the apotheosis of post-apocalyptic *mecha* (the abbreviation of mechanical in Japanese) anime, intratextually both the visual and diegetic registers of the series are overloaded with tantalizing Judeo-Christian references and symbols. Judging by the basic narrative structure, *Evangelion* strives to conceive a blending of mythology and technology in much the same way as the *Star Wars* sagas do. The very first recognizable image that enters the opening credits before the introduction of the series title is the Kabbalistic tree of life. The diagram reappears in the same sequence as the superimposition of the silhouette of Misato Katsuragi, the survivor of what is identified as The Second Impact, a doomsday that nearly wipes out humanity and ruins the natural ecology of Earth. Hence, on the literal level, "new genesis" points to the inception of a new world order in the aftermath of an apocalypse. Granted, the setup could not be more familiar. *Mecha* anime, a genre which by definition deals with mechanical devices such as robots or humanoid machines, inherits and innovates on the template of science fiction, whereby the Armageddon scenario constitutes part of the ensemble of *mecha* anime. Like its successful predecessors such as

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[6] Mariana Ortega,"My Father, He Killed Me; My Mother, She Ate Me: Self, Desire, Engendering, and the Mother in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*." *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 216-232.

Mobile Suit Gundam (1979), *Evangelion* features giant human-pilot robots—aptly named Eva, which is technically an abbreviation of *Evangelion* but also means "life" in Hebrew—to ward off regular attacks by Angels: "Shinto," i.e. Apostles, in the original Japanese. Angels are alien entities of unknown origin, and the first Angel, Adam, is revealed to be the real cause of The Second Impact. As it turns out, The Second Impact is not a natural disaster initiated by a meteorite as it is claimed, but an orchestrated catastrophe authorized by a secret organization dubbed Seele, the German word for *soul,* whose goal is to engineer a new humanity as per the instruction of the equally secretive Dead Sea Scrolls. The heavy-handed, overwrought use of metalepsis and a quasi-mythical setup reeks of being contrived, and yet it is precisely the features of excess and pastiche that prompt viewers and scholars alike to label all too readily *Evangelion* an exemplary "postmodern" text. Or, to a larger extent, *Evangelion* is the very emblem of Japan's postmodernity.

Azuma Hiroki in his seminal book, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* identifies the postmodern in the figuration of the otaku and its cultural formations and discusses how the mainstream success of *Evangelion* pushed the hitherto much misunderstood otaku identity and community to the cultural forefront.[7] *Otaku*, a derogatory term for fans of manga, and video games, was finally able to break away from the stigma associated with the Miyazaki incident and came to be considered in a different light. Okada Toshio, one of the key players in Gainax, the studio that produces *Otaku no Video* and *Evangelion*, rode the wave of *Evangelion*'s popularity and published "The Introduction to

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[7] Azuma Hiroki*, Otaku: Japan's Database Animals,* trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Kono Shion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Otakurology" in 1996.[8] In his manifesto, Okada hails otaku to be a 'new type' of people

with "an evolved vision" that meets the demands of a postmodernity inundated with

goods, information and images.[9] Okada's pronouncement sounds unabashedly grandiose

and self-congratulatory, with the clear intent to redress stereotypes by going to the

extreme of nearly racially profiling otaku as distinguished visual creatures situated

"above" average viewers. However, Okada does not coin the term "new type" out of the

blue. The discourse of New *homo sapiens*, *shinjinrui* in Japanese, an identity marker

approximate to Generation X in the post-WWII West, was all the rage in the previous

decade. The emergence of *shinjinrui* has much to do with the movement of the "New

Academism" (abbreviated as *nyū aka*), which refers to a cultural shift initiated by a group

of scholars in the early 1980s who ventured beyond the confines of academia and

appealed to the masses by introducing Western theories and critical paradigms,

postmodernism included, in relatively plain language and accessible style. Writers

associated with this movement were dubbed *shinjinrui* and turned into media sensations

overnight. High theory became what Marilyn Ivy calls an "informational commodity"

and the vogue of the New Academism ushered in "a spectacle of a thoroughly

commodified world of knowledge."[10] Jonathan Abel notes that academic criticism and

intellectual discourse were commercialized into a fashion, a "lifestyle," through mass

marketing, and the New Academism was often problematically understood as an openly

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[8] Ibid., 5. For the translation of the original Okada Toshio's text, see "Introduction to Otakurology," translated by Keiko Nishimura, with an introduction by Patrick Galbraith, in *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan: Historical Perspectives and New Horizons* edited by Patrick Galbraith, Thiam Huat Kam, and Björn-Ole Kamm (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).
[9] Azuma, *Otaku*, 5.
[10] Marilyn Ivy, "Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts: The Consumption of Knowledge in Postmodern Japan," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, eds. Marilyn Ivy and Harry Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 21-46.

avowed affirmation of consumerism.[11] That is to say, intellectual discourses and idioms made forays into consumerist popular culture, and vice versa. As Abel observes, the fact that Azuma's book on otaku, first published in 2001, could become a best seller that had gone to its 17th printing (and counting) by 2008, was a testimony to the legacy of New Academism in the new millennium.

Not quite incidentally, otaku as the object of Azuma's critique, together with works like *Evangelion,* considered by Thomas Lamarre to be the paramount example of "otaku imaging," also thrived on the movement of New Academism. On the one hand, the narrative Anno constructs is almost unnecessarily convoluted, overlaid with a train of biblical signifiers tweaked and translated into a novel virtual medium. *Evangelion* appropriates these foreign terms to build a deliberately obscure and obscuring system of hermeneutics that demands of the audience an exclusive kind of literacy instrumental to understanding the tangled fictional world of *Evangelion*. Hence, it is not surprising to see that an electronic encyclopedia exists with continual contributions by fans for fans.[12] As most critics agree, *Evangelion* succeeds in constructing a hermetic otherworldly narrative woven through with explicit mysticism that invites a cult following. Azuma identifies the kind of "self-contained fiction" embodied by *Evangelion* as an instance of the postmodern simulacra, the "small narrative" disconnected from the "grand narrative," a shared moral fabric that is rooted in social reality. Azuma's diagnosis is articulated from the urgent concern of the pervasive apathy and inertia that has aggravated the already stagnant political landscape of Japan. The infinitely exhaustive knowledge built around a media franchise like *Evangelion* is at its best a database of decontextualized small

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[11] Jonathan Abel, "Translator's Introduction," in Azuma's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, xv–xxix.
[12] http://evangelion.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page and https://wiki.evageeks.org/Main_Page

narratives, a layered mirage passing as real, that forestalls the possibility of developing

into a "grand narrative" and in turn instigating social change. While it is difficult to sum

up his quasi-scientific tabulation regarding otaku's database consumption in a few words,

Azuma's treatise is notably predicated upon a common, but not unproblematic,

assumption that postmodernity marks an unmistakable historical "rupture" from

modernity, with the concomitant phenomenon of centripetal grand narratives being

superseded by centrifugal small narratives programmed by a consumption database.[13] By

implication, Azuma posits the small narrative as the antithesis to the grand narrative in

the same vein that postmodernist theories oppose the simulacra to the real, the derivative

to the original.[14]

However, I argue that the consumption patterns Azuma identify as intrinsic to the

subculture of otaku are not *sui generis* of Japan's postmodernity in the 1980s, but have

been plaguing the masses ever since the advent of popular culture in the nineteenth

century, with the emergence of population and sophisticated printing technology. First

off, Azuma's worry over the disappearance of the authentic grand narrative is not so

remote from Matthew Arnold's defense of culture and unity against the threat of ignoble

philistines who embody the symptoms of fragmentation. Secondly, Azuma's emphasis on

postmodernity as "an age of fiction" recalls Plato's allegory of the cave, a perennial

concern about the dialectics between perception and reality. The presumably unforeseen

phenomenon Azuma claims to be associated with otaku and postmodernity is, therefore,

not entirely "new"—probably a "derivative." This by no means implies that the

importance of Azuma's critical discourse should be discounted. However, this

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[13] Ibid., 8.
[14] Ibid., 32.

assemblage of different newness, including New Academism, New *homo sapiens*, Neon

Genesis Evangelion (a gospel of new genesis), and new consumption patterns such as

database consumption, warrants caution. As instanced by New Academism in the 1980s,

what if theoretical paradigms are sold and consumed as a series of "small narratives," as a

package of fancy terms that encourages name-dropping without producing critical

thinking? Azuma's own multi-printing book written for the general public is clearly an

ennobling discursive effort and a corrective procedure to inject a "grand narrative" into

what he sees among otaku and contemporary consumers, with debilitating practices of

consumption circumscribed in fabricated worldviews. Yet, what if his theoretical model

ends up being subsumed and reconstellated under otaku's "database," setting off another

infinite loop of the self-referentiality and self-labelling that is the defining feature of

popular culture? Specifically, what if this 2001 model becomes a critical indictment of

otaku as "database animal" which becomes another reverse discourse (to borrow a phrase

from Foucault), and a cool piece of "infotainment," in contemporary digital parlance, that

works to *rebrand* and recommodify the not-so-new *homo sapiens*, i.e. otaku that have

existed for several decades? Is it possible to "distinguish" a theoretical categorization

from market-driven taxonomy?

II.   Multimedia? Technical Ensemble of Memories and Attention

In this aspect, *Evangelion* demonstrates a keen awareness of itself as a commodity

and an artifact made for consumption. In Mariana Ortega's assessment, the show is "a

rumination and critique on its own nature as cultural and ideological product, art and

artifice"[15]. *Evangelion* has a built-in self-commentary, if not self-critique, that destabilizes the distinctions between text and context, the virtual and the real, the critical and the commercial, to the extent of deconstructing itself altogether. In the opening, immediately after the smooth introduction of major characters, as the tempo and rhythm of the theme song builds up to the climax, the image sequence also syncs up and flashes across the screen rapidly. All of the sudden, the viewers find themselves engulfed in an onslaught of images: each individual shot jumps to the next in less than a split second, and there is no evident correlation between shots. Most remarkably, this montage is not simply composed of a choppy succession of images, but punctuated and interrupted, albeit briefly and almost imperceptibly, by still images of English terms in all capitalized letters printed on the black screen.
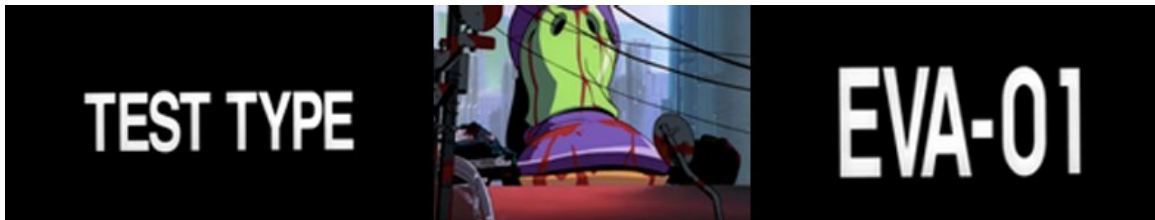

Figure 2. The opening sequence of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* juxtaposes intertitles written in English and animation images.

On a basic level, the insertion of English intertitles renders "textual" information in a literal way, which functions like flash cards to provide a learning aid and background knowledge to the viewers. On the intertextual level, as Dennis Redmond astutely observes, these informative "cut-scenes" delivered in non-Japanese are also the signature of Japan's consumerism. He contends, "English neologisms are an enduring feature of Japanese consumer culture, and Japanese ads frequently cite wildly incongruous English

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[15] Ortega, "My Father," 217.

catch-phrases with the same carefree abandon that ads for luxury fashion goods quote

French and Italian terms."[16] Redmond also notes that Anno at times gives distinctly

different titles in both English and in Japanese for the same episode. The obvious import

of foreign wordings and linguistic mash-up are instances of *Evangelion*'s attempt at

cosmopolitanism and self-branding itself as a global media product.

However, Redmond's interpretation only accounts partially for the complexity

implicated by Anno's deceptively ad-hoc visual experiments. In the penultimate episode

of *Evangelion* (episode 25) after the final Angel is killed, the narrative takes a complete

departure from the generic premise of *mecha* anime and shifts its focus solely to probing

the characters' psyche. Anno strips off all the paraphernalia associated with machines and

robots as well as the spectacular fight scenes between Evas and Angels that gave

Evangelion and himself a cult following in the first place. Instead, Anno conducts a series

of "case" studies, through brief but in-your-face quasi-psychoanalysis sessions forcing

each protagonist to confront his or her own emotional traumas and hang-ups. From

episode 1, Anno makes it clear that the series is simultaneously a war drama and a

psychological drama. As Susan Napier points out, contrary to the adolescent heroes

depicted in *mecha* anime who readily embrace combat as part of the adventure and as the

chance to prove oneself, Shinji is ambivalent throughout the entire series towards the

ennobling and therefore privileged world-saving "mission" to pilot the Eva.[17] Other child

pilots and adult characters alike are also revealed to suffer in a myriad of ways from

lingering unsolved psychological issues. Markedly, these image sequences are punctuated

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[16] Dennis Redmond, *The World Is Watching: Video as Multinational Aesthetics* 1968–1995 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 126-127.
[17] Susan J. Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

explicitly by silent-film intertitles written in white Japanese letters against the black background. In some instances, the black and white placards reveal the muffled internal dialogues of an individual character. For instance, the captions make insistent inquiries into the motives of Shinji's piloting the Eva: "Why do you pilot the Eva?" After Shinji answers in a diffident fashion "Because everybody tells me to pilot it," the caption then asks again, "That's why you pilot the Eva?" In other instances, the placards identify the issue manifested in a character with psychological terms such as "separation anxiety" or "attachment behavior." On the one hand, the aforementioned New Academism of the 1980s popularized psychology and turned psychological idioms into everyday lexicon and a hip set of hermeneutic ventures. In a similar vein to the argument of Redmond, these intertitles that either attempt or explicitly provide highly formulated and institutionalized "diagnoses" are another example of commodification of knowledge imported from the West. Personality tendencies and disorders become "consumable" items, part of the self-branding effort to distinguish *Evangelion* as a unique exception among *mecha* anime.

On the other hand, the print letters, either in English or in Japanese, are orthographic knowledge produced and accumulated through what Bernard Stiegler calls mnemonic activities—in this case writing—which are tertiary retentions, the exteriorization of memory and the mind ("*esprit"* in French). As I examine in other chapters, Stiegler's consistent concern in his oeuvre has always been that technicization, specifically through mnemotechnics, shapes and defines the "process of homonization."[18] Technical objects, or so-called "material culture," including language and images, are

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[18] Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010), 9.

tertiary retentions that bear the collective, intergenerational memory that precedes the

primary and secondary retention from which tertiary retention is derived. Arguing in

Stiegler's theoretical parlance, *Evangelion* is indeed a *mecha* anime *par excellence,* for it

begs the question of what counts as human by simultaneously representing and

embodying a vertiginous technical ensemble. While most critical analysis, following the

narrative exegesis, maintain rightly that *Evangelion* as a cultural product of the late 1980s

examines the mutual imbrication of humans and technology, the series makes a far more

radical and yet downright basic inquiry in examining the ways technics constitutes the

genesis, as foretold in the series' title, of humanity and the world as it is. To put it

explicitly, instead of treating "technology" as an external menacing force, *Evangelion*

demonstrates the process of hominization as technicization. Therefore, the narrative of

probing an individual psychological history of a "character" is, not surprisingly,

accompanied by written characters, since *logos,* the technics of writing, marks an

increasingly sophisticated system of tertiary retention in human history.[19] Noticeably,

apart from intertitles inscribed with printed words, the visual register of the last two

episodes of *Evangelion* is crowded with other equally retro, "primitive" techniques like

painting, real-life photographs, and animation cels that show the creation process of the

anime. Such a "multimedia" pastiche tends to be conveniently labeled as the trademark of

postmodernity, but it also renders a composite of different phases and apparatuses of

tertiary retention, showcasing what Stiegler calls *mnemotechnical milieu*, whereby an

individual co-individuates and transindividuates. This mnemotechnical milieu constitutes

no less than the genesis of an individual. If, as Napier argues, self-identity is integral to

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[19] Ibid., 9–10.

Evangelion's storyline, the wild visual juxtaposition provides a parallel germane to the theme of searching for the origin and potentialities of an individual identity.

When reframing the series in Stiegler's paradigm of tertiary retention and retentional technologies in general, *Evangelion* as a series made in the late 1990s is a visceral commentary on the condition of and a "new" constellation of challenges posed by the intensified control of psychotechnological systems. I hesitate to identify *Evangelion* squarely as a product of "new" technologies per se. Granted, the introduction of the VCR into the standard household entertainment appliance repertoire in the 1980s and 1990s, as Thomas Lamarre points out, significantly changed the viewing experience and contributed to the production of a work like *Evangelion.* Lamarre classifies Japanese anime into two major lineages: the old type, exemplified by Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli, is highly esteemed for its artistic animation with a delicate painterly style approximating the depth of field, while the new type such as Gainax, the studio headed by Anno that produced *Evangelion*, distinguishes itself with a focus on graphic design and the mechanical process in the making of animation. Lamarre calls the new type "otaku imaging," since manga fans (i.e. otaku), with the aid of new technologies, could make all different kinds of "intervention[s] into the image flow": they could record the anime on videocassettes, do repeated viewings, pause, slow down or fast forward particular segments.[20] Viewing is no longer a passive experience, but "a way of acting on images" and, as Lamarre emphasizes, "Otaku perception is also otaku action."[21] It was through these new techniques of perception that otaku started to note how different

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[20] Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 144–154.
[21] Ibid., 149.

elements are assembled together and cultivate unique expertise on, for instance, key-animators and in-between animators whose work is often overshadowed by that of the director or producer. Hence, Lamarre intimates, otaku imaging is characterized by an exploded view unfolding in a multiplanar diagram, detailing the parts and the interrelationships of the parts. Lamarre's distinction of otaku imaging from classical art animation aims to examine the democratizing possibilities of the otaku lineage of animation in destabilizing the hierarchy between celebrated auteurs and nameless animators, image and sound engineers. Interestingly, Lamarre's treatise on otaku imaging is predicated upon the "attention" of otaku. In fact, his definition of otaku refers exclusively to those who are able watch with "close attention": "Otaku then are people who began to look at anime with *close attention* to how it was put together" (emphasis added).[22]

The implications of Lamarre's rather straightforward exposition are manifold. In his attempt to explain the specific ways otaku becomes a new type of being with "evolved perception," a quixotic notion formulated by Okada Toshio, self-named king of otaku ("otaking"), Lamarre writes, "The overall impression is of a studious and even compulsive *intervention* into the flow of media images" (emphasis original).[23] Does the "studious" and "compulsive" intervention of otaku, derived from close attention, refer to the dual modalities of "hyper attention" and "deep attention"? On the one hand, the layering of images or more accurately, the multiplanar vision in what Lamarre sees in "otaku imaging," entails careful study of each frame and its constituent elements, which can only be achieved by deep attention. Technological innovations have made it possible

[22] Ibid., 144.
[23] Ibid., 148.

and increasingly convenient to arrest certain frames of images with, for instance, a VCR's pause function and the applications of image capture and screenshots that are built into the basic operations of cellular phones. The by now mundane, seemingly effortless and unthinking act of "image capture" is a "capture of attention," albeit taking place unwittingly and fleetingly. At the same time, when viewers are confronted with an influx of images and sounds, they have to exert *hyper* attention as well as deep attention. For example, the second part of the same opening sequence of *Evangelion* is interspersed with strings of screenshots from the series that run on the screen at full speed, with each frame flipping by in a split second and yet still registering its presence since the next frame that is perceptibly different and disjointed from the previous one. While such a sequence *might* give rise to close attention or "deep attention" enabled by the technology-assisted practice of "capturing" and studying images *after* the fact, its immediate effect is to disrupt, or rather to *split,* attention to the ever-shifting frame of reference in a swift disorienting outpouring of images.

That is to say, the viewers are forced to stay alert and on their toes when confronting the sudden explosion of information that spills over from frame to frame, just like the child pilots from the series entering combat mode inside their Evas. The close attention that Lamarre sees as integral to "otaku imaging" and "otaku action" is not necessarily an "evolved perception" created by deep attention on a fixed object towards minute details within a freeze-frame, a "capturable" image. Quite the contrary, *Evangelion* calls for, both thematically and visually, a kind of attention relatively "primitive" in the evolutionary schema of retentional techniques, similar to the attention paid by hunters and food gatherers in the pre-Neolithic era. In his studies on the

relationship between different stages of men in the West and the attention structure of the

human mind, Paul Shepard quotes Ortega y Gasset's explanation of a hunter's

"universal" attention:

> The hunter knows that he does not know what is going to happen…thus he needs
> to prepare an attention which does not consist in riveting itself on the presumed
> but consists precisely in not presuming anything and in avoiding inattentiveness.
> It is a "universal" attention, which does not inscribe itself on any point and tries to
> be on all points.[24]

Interestingly, and paradoxically, the splitting of attention enacted by *Evangelion*'s

opening sequence is a *totalizing of attention* and ultimate psycho-control that demands

the viewer to be "on" all the time towards the multiple moving stimuli. Gasset's concept

of "universal" attention is what is generally called "hyper attention" today. While hyper

attention, considered the hallmark symptom of ADHD, has been widely medicalized as a

clinical disorder, Katherine Hayles explains along the lines of Gasset and Shepard that

hyper attention indicates a different, not necessarily worse or impaired, mode of

retention. In her seminal essay "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in

Cognitive Modes," Hayles lays out the respective pros and cons of two different

modalities of attention.[25] According to Hayles, hyper attention comes first and is

necessitated by the survival-based need to remain vigilant to imminent dangers from the

environment. Therefore, hyper attention "excels at negotiating rapidly changing

environments in which multiple foci compete for attention," Hayles writes. In

comparison, deep attention is a "luxury" developed through collective effort to foster

safer surroundings, which in turn allows a sustained concentration without distraction on

[24] Paul Shepard, *Nature and Madness* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1982), 22.
[25] N. Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes," in *Profession* (2007), 187–199, https://doi.org/10.1632/prof.2007.2007.1.187.

a "single medium," or on "a noninteractive object such as a Victorian novel or complicated math problems." It is worth noting that Hayles does not privilege deep attention over hyper attention. Rather, she sees it as an urgent task for educators to recognize the limits of a traditional pedagogy premised on deep attention and the formation of it, for hyper attention has become the *de facto* cognitive mode for the generation of millennials who came of age in a highly mediated environment with constant stimuli.

It is very tempting to attribute the pervasive phenomenon of hyper and split attention to information overload and rampant consumerism since the advent of so-called postmodernism. Indeed, postmodernism has been established as the standard framework when unpacking the myriad of ramifications arising from the change from industrial capitalism to post-Fordist capitalism. Schizophrenic aesthetics, split signs, and disoriented pastiche are all the topoi of postmodernity. For instance, the image collage and fragmentation conveyed by the opening sequence of *Evangelion* can be readily explained as quintessential symptoms of postmodernity in which, as Azuma argues, no "grand" narratives provide universal and universalizing ideologies or values. Concomitant with the breakdown of a central core belief is the infinite proliferation and reproduction of insignificant parts. In the case of otaku, Azuma adds, they fall back on consuming a database comprised of small narratives, such as mobile suit designs, fictional setups, down to any seemingly insignificant random elements like eyeglasses or ears that generate a feeling of *moe—moe* being popular slang referring to "burning with passion."[26] Azuma argues that consumption of these "small narratives" insulates the

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[26] Azuma, *Otaku*.

audience within simulacra from the real, denying the possibility of moving towards

coherent and cohering grand narratives which for Azuma point to grander contexts such

as ideology and historical consciousness. Ostensibly, Azuma's lament over the loss of the

grand narrative strikes a chord, albeit remotely and problematically, with Gasset's notion

that the focal point of attention is no longer fixated on and embedded in any shared,

"presumed" position. Azuma's indictment of otaku's animality also resonates with the

"evolutionary reversion" in the retentional mode back to a primitive phase. Nevertheless,

Azuma's critique and the postmodernist theorists' treatise on consumption still by and

large revolve around the *object* of (visual) consumption, be it tangible goods or cultural

or affective contents like *moe* elements. Yet, the "all points" under the lookout of hyper

attention that Gasset speaks of can easily be turned into the object of consumption. In his

exposition on attention economy, Jonathan Beller writes, "*to look is to*

labor…Increasingly, part of the value of the commodity…comes from the amount of

(unpaid-for) visual attention it has absorbed."[27] Steven Shaviro further explains that to

look, i.e. to invest attention, is work in itself that participates directly in the processes of

production and circulation from which "surplus value" derives, but it is also at once an

act of consumption. [28] In Fordist industrial capitalism, value is destroyed once it is

consumed. In comparison, in today's post-Fordist hyperindustrial capitalism, virtual

consumption can keep producing surplus value precisely because it is a kind of labor,

such as the affective labor proposed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.[29] Routines

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[27] Jonathan Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 181. This passage is quoted in "Gamer" by Steven Shaviro.
[28] Steven Shaviro, "Gamer" in *Post-Cinematic Affect* (Washington: Zero Books, 2010), 93–180.
[29] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

such as surfing aimlessly online or gaming for entertainment (which is the primary instance Shaviro examines) are what Shaviro encapsulates fittingly as "a capture of energy and attention," exemplifying the concepts of "affective labor" and "immaterial labor" proposed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.[30]

Nevertheless, how does the value extracted from this attention economy *sustain* itself when it depends paradoxically on "a capture of energy and attention"? As attention economy becomes a buzzword, critical discourses of different strands have addressed the emergence of "new" modes of production and consumption. Yet, what if the apparatus of attention capture ends up depleting psychic energy, devalorizing value and ultimately destroying economy altogether when economy means first and foremost to *economize*? What if the affective labor that Hardt and Negri claim "produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion" amounts to what Stiegler calls "miserable consumption" characterized by despair, aggression, or even worse, an epidemic of unfeeling carelessness that risks liquidating, slowly but surely, the libidinal economy that is the foundation of capitalism?[31][32] Undoubtedly, concepts like "affective labor" and attention economy provide much needed paradigmatic shifts by relocating the focus away from the by now hackneyed trope of "media consumption" to the act of consumption, and consumption as production. Nevertheless, media or the object of (virtual) consumption *matter*, for they are technical objects embodying and materializing the tertiary retentions which, as sedimentations of prior

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[30] Shaviro, "Gamer," 98.
[31] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 108–109.
[32] Bernard Stiegler, "The Disaffected Individual in the Process of Psychic and Collective Disindividuation," trans. by Patrick Crogan and Daniel Ross, August, 2006, *Ars Industrialis, http://www.arsindustrialis.org/disaffected-individual-process-psychic-and-collective-disindividuation*.

mnenotechnical activities through time, will in turn shape by grammatization the course of retentional processes. In other words, it is the gradually layered and accumulated tertiary retentions that configure the possibilities of the present towards a foreseeable future. Thus, the things we consume and produce can never be easily identified as either "material" or "immaterial," but rather both. Material culture for instance, an oxymoron combining tangible "materials" and intangible "culture," is constituted by technical memories that are at once inscribed with and inscribing human memories. Therefore, economy is fundamentally a "retentional economy," as Stiegler calls it, the well-being of which depends on what can be retained, *psychically* and *cognitively*. In the post-Fordist economy, where attention is considered the new "currency" and a hard-won commodity, the "ecology of the mind," to borrow Stiegler's words again, is at stake.

III.   Psychotechnologies as Psychopower

Although *Evangelion* is lauded as the epitome of the phenomenon of *shinjinrui* (New *homo sapiens*) who came of age in the 1970s, it anticipates and precipitates, through the series itself and the psychotechnical industry it spawns, the intensifying control of retentional systems with the consequences of rewiring and unwiring the human mind. As a series that premiered in post-bubble Japan, *Evangelion* is demonstrably a bleak portrayal with the notional narrative of post-apocalypse, of the different crises that had been percolating for decades and finally erupted to the surface in Japan during the 1990s, partly because an economy in continuous decline could no longer uphold the illusion of social cohesion and stability. Anno confronts this illusion head-on from

episode 1. The series opens with a loudspeaker declaring a state of emergency in the Kanto area accompanied by the loud thumping of helicopters, while the camera glances over the sparkling blue water, a gargantuan Angel swimming under water, UN tanks lined up ready to attack, to deserted train stations and crumbled buildings. Although set in 2015, this less-than-a-minute-long establishing shot in the first episode deftly "assembles," in Lamarre's and Azuma's vocabulary, the images of cataclysmic historical events into shifting frames. The fact that the first of a series of Angels, the nemesis of civilization, makes its debut underwater is meaningful, mirroring the myth of Godzilla, the sea monster made into an icon by the mega blockbuster hit *Godzilla* (1956) and its sequels. Godzilla, waking up to nuclear bombings and therefore wielding radioactive strength, is widely known to signify the horror of the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the subsequent hydrogen bomb testing at Bikini Atoll of the Marshall Islands. Similarly, the Second Impact in *Evangelion* is a manmade disaster caused by a failed experiment conducted by Seele. At the same time, the camera scans the painted letters "UN" on the tanks before panning out to give a panoramic view of the formidable size of the brigade employed in the defense. The presence of non-Japanese troops within the territory of Japan is a recurrent theme in *mecha* anime, illustrating the enduring influence of the occupation period during which Article 9 was instituted to restrict Japan's military to self-defense only. The still-life shot of tilted, dilapidated buildings evokes the still-fresh memory of the Kobe earthquake that hit Japan in January 1995, months before *Evangelion* went on air in October. While the earthquake with a death toll of thousands aggravated the uncertainty felt from the economic recession, the Aum Shrinrikyo gas attack that took place two months later in a Tokyo subway further

terrorized the nation and sent ripples of shock waves through the already volatile social

fabric. Anno makes an explicit and unmistakable reference to the attack by letting the

camera survey empty train stations in response to the call for evacuation. To a significant

extent, the series of *Evangelio*n is intimately connected to the Aum Shinrikyo incident,

not simply in terms of timing, but in the sense that both *Evangelion* and the attack pushed

to the fore a myriad set of social issues hitherto overlooked or shielded by the grandeur of

economic affluence. If the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist act is considered by many a defining

moment of the Lost Decade from 1991 to 2000, it is not that the act crystallizes the crisis

and fear after the burst of the economic bubble. Rather, it forces a redefinition of the

economic problem as deeply rooted in the problem of the mind, *esprit*, which manifests

itself in the breakdown of social structure, the absence of binding symbolic authority, the

inability to desire and imagine a future, and ultimately the rise of a doomsday cult like

Aum Shinrikyo that, similar to the mysterious Seele organization in *Evangelion*,

proselytizes and *executes* verbatim the end of the world as the only viable and "true"

solution. To sum up, the "crisis" of economy is the crisis in the mind, *esprit.*

The narrative of *Evangelion* revolves around a *dispirited* fourteen-year-old, Shinji

Ikari, and from the get-go, Anno makes it clear that the problems engulfing the

contemporary youth have much to do with audiovisual retentional apparatuses. Shinji is

first introduced into the story indirectly through the voice of Captain Misato Katsuragi,

who complains about "losing sight of him" while we see her hand on a steering wheel,

adjacent to a GPS-like gadget on the side tracking a moving arrow on the digital map.

The camera glances over to the piles on the passenger seat and zooms in on the ID card

that shows an image capture of a demure Shinji, with his full name, an identification

number and barcode listed underneath. The camera cuts to Shinji, in school uniform, making a call from a public telephone booth to Misato, with a picture of Misato in his hand, but the call can't go through due to the state of emergency. He murmurs to himself that he should have gone to the shelter instead of waiting out in the open for a stranger to pick him up during evacuation. Then Shinji raises his head looking into the deserted highway, as a specter of a girl, who we learn later to be Rei, another fourteen-year-old pilot, also in school uniform, appears and disappears in the blink of an eye, followed by windows and power lines clattering with the arrival of the first Angel. This prelude, which comes before the on-screen intertitle giving the visual cue for the beginning of episode 1, foresees the identity crisis Shinji will be struggling with for the next twenty-six episodes and beyond in the film sequels. A cursory reading of the sequence points to the specific ways in which an individual identity is mediated by "machines" or "technologies," as can be expected and predicted from the *mecha* genre. The fact that Misato depends on a digital map to locate Shinji and obtain a "sight" of him demonstrates how an individual is disembodied into virtual, retractable, and therefore tractable and trackable data in the information network. An identity can be neatly captured, framed and hemmed in by an ID card, much in the same way that an individual is profiled and targeted both as a consumer and a commodity through their Facebook account. Personhood then becomes an aggregate of signs without depth or interiority, as does the culture of a consumerist society like Japan. Takashi Murakami self-parodies the cultural bubble of post-war Japan through his "Superflat Movement" by populating the canvas with bubbly, cute anime figures. The infamous crimes committed by Tsutomu Miyazaki, aka The Otaku Murderer, demonstrate the extent of the impact brought by insatiable

consumption. As the news commentaries in Japan put it, the four little girls Miyazaki killed and mutilated, like the anime characters he watched obsessively each day, are made for consumption—and allegedly, he did consume the body parts of the girls he murdered.

Yet, such a critique of rampant consumerism reinforced by increasingly innovative technologies and information networks, albeit valid and important, risks instituting the "Great Divide," in Bruno Latour's lexicon, between humans and machines, between the consumer and the consumed.[33] Intriguingly, the diegetic setup in this particular segment is defiantly low-tech and not at all "postmodern." Since telecommunications and advanced "technologies" are unavailable, the only means for Misato and Shinji, then still strangers to each other, to have a rendezvous is through a photograph of the other. What a photo captures, in the fleeting "Kodak moment" so to speak, is the exteriorization of memory and materialization of experience. Similarly, the map Misato uses to locate Shinji is also a spatial representation of memory retained and recorded through generations. On the most basic level, photography and cartography, no different from the ancient mnemonic technique of writing, bear the processes of making-technical of memory, with the difference being that the industrial and *mass-reproducible* hypomnemata signal a different and an unprecedented scale of reformatting and reordering, i.e. regrammatization, of body, perception and cognition. In his influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin uses the advent of photography as a prime example of the modern technological situation,

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[33] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

whereby the auratic singularity, the autonomous experience of a work, dissipates in its infinite replicas.[34] For Benjamin, aura, albeit invisible and ineffable, is deeply rooted in its context, and the context is ultimately collectively determined, particularly through the communal rituals performed in a given time and space. Mechanical reproduction severs and displaces the work of art from its meaningful placement, which thins out and diminishes the aura that is a trace of collective memory.

IV.　　The Broken Link Between Generations

The temporal and collective dimension of aura Benjamin describes is coterminous with Stiegler's notion of the pre-individualized milieu in which a singular "I" doing the embodied act of remembering (*anamesis*) and the multitude of "we"—including the innumerable ones who have left remnants of time through technical objects *(hypomnesis)*—keep unfolding unto each other.[35] Hypomnesis is the material evidence as well as the means connecting individual time with collective time. Drawing on Gilbert Simondon's concepts, Stiegler calls this unfolding process "co-individuation" whereby social transformation takes place, and this collective context an "associated hypomnesic milieu" in which anamesis is inextricably associated with hypomnesis. In Mark B. N. Hansen's concise explanation, an associated hypomnesic milieu is when "hypomnemata facilitate the deployment of memory in the constitution of meaningful symbolic practices

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[34] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* edited by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 217–251.

[35] Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, "Transindividuation," in *e-flux Journal* 14 (March 2010), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61314/transindividuation/.

and communal functions."[36] Arguing this way, Benjamin's indictment of the loss of the aura and the disenchantment of modernity portends a "dissociated hypomnesic milieu" whereby hypomnemata are disarticulated from anamesis, with the former turned into commodities by automated assembly-line production while the latter is streamlined into a mere reflex of consumption. Considered in terms of hypomnemata, mass culture is inherently a paradox: hypomnemata as technical artifacts, including a piece of art, after being uprooted from the collective from which they derive through mass reproduction, re-culture a mass that is equally or even further removed from the collective. For scholars of the Frankfurt School, the mass of mass culture, comprised of duped consumers, is a collectivity deprived and incapable of any desire for unique rituality and authenticity. In contrast, Stiegler sees in this paradox a pharmacological condition: there is embedded potentiality for spoon-fed consumers to intervene in hypomnemata, and this thereby enables a process of re-individuation to re-auratize, re-enchant the world.

In *Evangelion*, the key to "re-generating," as cued by the very title of the series, the wasteland and revitalizing this civilization on the brink of extinction is hypomnensis. Tellingly, the gaze of Shinji glances from a photograph of Misato Katsuragi over to the specter of Ayanami Rei, who appears for a second on the highway littered with deserted cars and disappears right before the Eva unit 000, the giant robot Rei is presumably piloting at the moment, intrudes into the frame on her way to combat the first Angel. The uncanny presence of Rei is the first instance of quasi-telepathic communication between characters, upon which Anno heavily relies in his exploration of the human psyche. As a

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[36] Mark B.N. Hansen, Introduction to "Memory" by Bernard Stiegler, from *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, eds. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N, Hansen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 64–87.

matter of fact, one of *Evangelion*'s technical gimmicks is A.T. Field (an abbreviation of "absolute terror field"), the formidable weapon and shield Angels wield, and A.T. Field often comes in the form of telepathy that disarms the psychological defenses of the pilot by inducing memory and triggering buried emotional wounds. Given that *apocalypse,* originating from the Greek, means to "unveil" and disclose, the apocalyptic setting of *Evangelion* works as a fitting metaphor for Anno's preoccupation to lay bare the warped desires and mis/calculated drives on both the individual and institutional levels that lead to global crisis. Apart from his penchant for Jungian, mystical renditions of the mind, Anno, unwittingly or not, interlaces a pandemic psychic tumult and breakdown with the shifting technicity of retentional devices and a re-grammatization of self-exteriorization. In this particular overture to the series, the introduction of Rei signifies the inception of a different kind of hypomnemata from industrial memory aids such as the photograph and digital map. Rei, as the audience learns later, is a humanoid cloned from the remains of Shinji's long-deceased mother. In the most physical and literal sense, she is a remainder, a reminder bearing the remembrance of the previous generation. Ironically, however, the mysterious appeal and enigmatic "aura" Rei exudes is derived in part from her *tabula rasa* state, which also makes Rei-related merchandise highly prized and collectible since Rei is created readily like a doll. Like Philip K. Dick's androids, Rei is shown through the course of the story to develop her own emotions and memory. The case of Rei manifests some characteristics of mnemotechnology, which per Mark Hansen's expositions of Stiegler's theory is "the embedding of memories within technological systems that systematically order memories according to their own logics."[37] Contrary to

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[37] Ibid., 65.

the earlier mnemotechniques that were used at first primarily as a supplement to store and extend memories, mnemotechnologies have a life of their own to the extent that they generate embodied acts of remembering and cognition, which is perceived as the potentialities as well as threats posed by artificial intelligence such as IBM's supercomputer.

A fine distinction between mnemotechniques and mnemotechnologies is debatable, however, considering mnemotechniques such as writing are more than memory "backups." As tertiary memories, hypomnemata even in their most archaic form enact a process of grammatization that determines the future primary and secondary retentions in a way similar to how mnemotechnologies "systematically order memories according to their own logic," as described by Hansen.[38] Andrew Leroi-Gourhan, as quoted by Stiegler, argues that in the "process of humanization…as a process of exteriorization, all technical objects constitute an intergenerational support of memory, which, as material culture, overdetermines learning and amnesia activities."[39] The material setting of *Evangelion* takes Leroi-Gourhan's argument to the letter. Apart from the instance of Rei, nearly all the Evas have memories built in, specifically the "souls," in Anno's peculiar religious strand of naming, that belong to the dead parent of each respective child pilot. These cybernetic robots are thus materializations of the aforementioned "intergenerational memory." Every time the child pilot sits in the cockpit capsule called the "entry plug" and attempts to synchronize to the highest degree possible with the robot so as to fully maneuver the humongous sentient cyborgs, the child is plugged in, both biologically and mentally, to the memory of a previous generation that is otherwise lost

[38] Ibid.
[39] Stiegler, *A New Critique*, 9.

or unforgotten. While the story begins with the standard trope of child soldiers fighting off a series of external attacks from Angels, the narrative stealthily and steadily turns inward to zoom in on what unravels in the enclosed, bounded space of the cockpit where different generations encounter and interface within each other. The making and unmaking of individual identity hinges on the relationship between the living memory of the pilot and the dead memory reserved in the hypomnemata, i.e. between anamnesis and hypomnesis. The dramatic tension of the series lies in how the traces of the past inscribed and preserved in the robots trigger, reboot, rewire and undo the child's recollection and embodied cognition.

In other words, the fictional universe of *Evangelion* does not simply encompass the military industrial complex as it pertains to the genre of *mecha*-robot anime. More accurately, Anno, unwittingly or not, paints a military industrial hypomnesic milieu in which the technics of memory determines the *desire* for humanity's future, or lack thereof. The story takes place in Tokyo-2, a newly-built city after Tokyo was annihilated by the Second Impact. The political condition of *Evangelion* is a brave new world where the sovereignty of nation-states is superseded by the global military-political oligarchy. Tokyo-2 is now under the jurisdiction of Nerv, a nominal subdivision of the UN, but both Nerv and the UN are puppets of Seele, a faceless cabal who only appears as a voice through video projections on a monolith-like screen. The roundtable discussions of Seele are staged as virtual conferences held between company executive officers. The layers of power structure and conflicts between different governing bodies on the one hand showcase an Orwellian dystopia of crushing bureaucracy and social hierarchy; on the other hand, the stratified social constitution portrayed in the series points to

intergenerational schisms and tensions within Japanese society after WWII. Redmond charts the generational differences in *Evangelion*: the autocratic ruling of Seele represents the postwar Japanese conservatives; the senior managements of Nerv, including Shinji's father, Gendo Ikari, exemplify the class of efficient technocrats of the 1970s; Misato and Ritsuko Akagi, the former being the captain and the latter the chief woman scientist of Nerv, are the beneficiaries of the Western ideals popular in the 1980s, such as sexual liberation and women entering the work force; lastly, the 14-year-old Shinji and other child pilots of the same age represent the youth of the 1990s, who were adroit at new devices and most importantly, neutral and malleable enough to absorb information and "interface" with technology.[40] From Redmond's outline, the generation gap appears to run along the fault line of differences in attitudes towards "technology": from technology as a mere instrument of power to technology as part of selfhood.

But the fact that Anno explicitly makes "technology" the materialization or exteriorization of memory blurs and complicates the generational fault lines. In addition to Rei and Evas serving as a type of hypomnemata, the operations of Nerv and the local Japanese government are coordinated and maintained by Magi, a bio-supercomputer with the personality of Ritsuko's mother transplanted into the program. The master brain from which all actions and maneuvers ensue is depicted, almost in an ironically literal way, as a body of intertwined cerebrum lobes. It is also by no means incidental that Anno denominates these ruling entities with names that are indicative of human consciousness and memory: he uses the German words *Nerv* and *Seele* to signify "nerve" and "soul" respectively. Unmistakably, Anno's avowed dedication to Jungian psychology, coupled

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[40] Redmond, *The World Is Watching*, 131.

with an extravaganza of Christian or Kabbalah symbolisms, often invites tantalizing interpretations of the series as a mythology of mind. Especially considering the opportune timing of its release right after the Aum incident, the series' foreboding treatise on the occultation of social relations and its messianic, if not phantasmagoric, longing for a wholesale end-of-the-world purge provide a glimpse into the psychological undercurrents that led to an unprecedented incident of domestic terrorism and the outbreak of "cultural crisis" in postwar Japan.

In her essay "When the Machines Stop," Napier connects the aesthetic and ideological underpinnings of the apocalyptic discourse in *Evangelion* to what Scott Bukatman terms "terminal identity" enabled by virtual networks, whereby reality remains unknowable even after the machines stop.[41] While technology and its impact on human identity have for long constituted topoi of "cultural crisis" ever since Japan's modernity project and its experience with two atomic bombings, the pressing concerns for intergenerational disconnect and the erosion of childhood among others, Napier mentions, have added to the spectrum of the crisis. She writes, "[*Evangelion*] also deal[s] with the issues that are perhaps culturally specific to Japan: the increasing distrust and alienation between the generations, the complicated role of childhood, and most significant, a privileging of the feminine, often in the form of the young girl, or *Shojo*."[42] Napier's analysis in the essay and in her book on *Evangelion* highlights the characters' psyche, particularly that of the children in their rites of passage, and the symbolic gender

[41] Susan J. Napier, "When the Machines Stop, Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal. Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments: Lain*," in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, eds. Christopher Bolton, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, and Takayuki Tatsumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 101–122.
[42] Ibid., 108.

bodies as instanced by Eva's maternal force. She concludes that the series culminates in

the deconstruction of the "technical instrumentalities of the *mecha* genre" and revealing

the "essential unreality" of animation as a medium: "In the solipsistic world of

Evangelion, mecha are finally unimportant except as a means to know the self. Even the

human body is less important than the mind that creates its own reality."[43] Quite

surprisingly, Napier's popular reading does not render a difference between human mind

and artificial mind, though the mutual enmeshment of both of these continues to inscribe

memories into the body, perception, and retention. It is by this process that we come to

register reality. In the meantime, as Napier remains loyal to Anno's leaning towards

Jungian archetypes by identifying Nerv as the patriarch, Evas as maternal, and Angels as

simultaneously the father figure and the abject feminine that Shinji has to learn to

repudiate, the intergenerational problems she mentions as unique to Japan are reduced to

the timeworn model of the Oedipal triangle. If intense interfacing with technology

exacerbates the cultural crisis as Napier observes, then how do technological intrusions

into everyday life challenge and dismantle the familial and inter-generational

relationships which, according to psychoanalysis, shape the contours of our fantasy in the

psychic process of negotiating with what Napier posits as the real?

Yet *Evangelion* does not at all shy away from *mecha*'s technological determinism

to "concentrate on the complex and vulnerable psychology of its human protagonist" as

Napier claims.[44] Quite the contrary, as exemplified by the Magi system and Rei, the show

rejects steadfastly an insulated view of psyche that is well contained within an organic

human mind, even if the narrative gives the impression of an unmistakable sense of

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[43] Napier, *Anime*, 102.
[44] Ibid., 104.

solipsism. Anno's take on "psychology" and the mind constellates the living and the

dead, the past and the future, the organic and the artificial, the bodily and the psychical,

the individual and the collective. To recapitulate my point by returning to these two

examples, the Magi system, with personality implants from the scientist who conceives it,

is a truncated, decorporealized memory reproduced, incorporated and absorbed in the

military industrial complex. Rei is brought to life by Gendo Ikari (Shinji's father) as a re-

corporealization and a substitution of his own wife so as to continue the couple's

unfinished project. At the watershed moment when the secret of Rei's birth is unveiled,

Ritsuko brings Misato and Shinji deep into the underground of Nerv where the leftovers

and debris from the failed experiments are stored. The camera first surveys the bones

littered in the dark recess, and then shifts to a grotesquely inflated human-like brain wired

up and encased in a metal cover, buttressed by a thin spinal-cord-like column with Eva's

entry plug hatched inside. This humongous brain, as Misato assumes, is the basis for the

Dummy System equipped in each Eva to simulate the bio-neuro data of its pilot. The

scene reaches its climax as Ritsuko lights up the giant water tank with a multitude of Reis

in it, staring and smiling eerily back at the unexpected spectators. Ritsuko explains, these

"dummies" are merely empty vessels in the image of Rei, while the physically embodied

Rei whom they know is the only one "born with the soul." Evas are not made with

"souls," Ritsuko further relates, but they have souls (presumably salvaged from the

pilot's parent) embedded in them. Ritsuko goes on to moralize by way of mythologizing

the creation of artificial life as human hubris and the ensuing consequences as retribution.

As a trademark of *Evangelion,* the visual diegesis supersedes and even counters the

narration. For the audience who have been given hints regarding the identities of Rei and

the Evas, the shock comes less from the revelation itself than the face-off with an imposing, domineering mass of brain, and being surrounded by a monitor-like water tank screening soulless bodies of faux-Rei reproduced by the brain. This obscenely surreal rendition of Nerv's "manufacturing plant," in Ritsuko's description, demonstrates the workings of what Stiegler calls psychopower through manufacturing and programming the mind. In the 19th century, the monstrous procreation of Frankenstein unleashes the imagination and possibilities of a self-cultivable mind capable of developing critical faculties. The menace imposed by Frankenstein's creature lies equally in his herculean body and intelligent mind. At the turn of the 21st century, the monsters we are confronted with and are in danger of becoming are the soulless walking dead, mindless "dummies," in the real sense of the word, engineered and streamlined by psychopower.
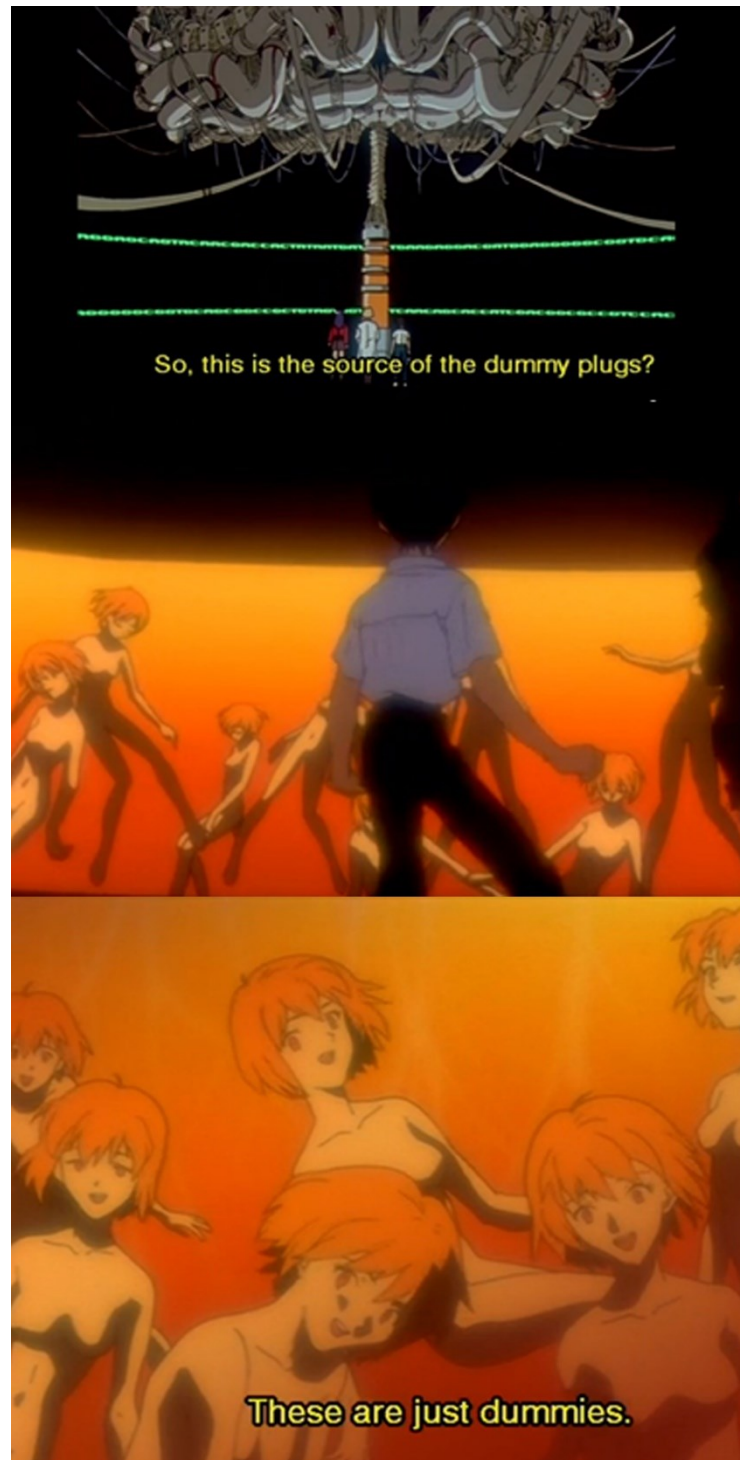
Figure 3. Shinji visits Dummy Plug Plant, finding himself surrounded by dummies of Rei and the metallic brain producing Rei.

V.   **Social Relations Undone**

As fans and critics have noted, throughout the entire series, Anno deliberately and problematically equates a myriad of cognitive and psychological terms, including soul *(tamashii)*, mind, heart, brain, and self-image, which explains why *Evangelion* is an overcoded cultural text inviting contentious and divergent readings. However, regardless of confusion and collapsing of these terms, the visual metaphor of the Dummy System as a "manufacturing plant" begs the underlying question of the *genesis* of mind, or temporal consciousness as phenomenologists term it, the retaining processes which form memory as the seat for the soul, the self-image, the desire or the will. Most revealingly, while *Evangelion* inherits a SF motif of monstrous reproduction and the fear of it, it goes beyond the generic confines of *mecha* by turning to the fundamental but urgent issues regarding the relationship between the reproducibility of mnemotechnics and the becoming of individuals in the age of psychotechnologies. Extending Gilbert Simondon's concept of individuation, Stiegler asserts that mnemonic technical objects underlie and enable the unfolding process of individuation. To reiterate what I discussed earlier, hypomnemata as tertiary memory, from the most archaic of mnemotechnics as stone engravings to the most innovative mnemotechniques like electronic or digital recordings, are the exteriorization of memory. These techniques or technologies exteriorize memory through the codification of retentional flow into discrete units, for instance, transcribing speech and inscribing bodily gestures into a system of language and a pattern of human behavior respectively: the former gives rise to *logos* while the latter becomes the basis for the automation of the industrial revolution. In other words, this discretization and

formatting process enabled by technics make speech and gesture "analytically reproducible," which is the very definition of grammatization.[45] The various forms and artifacts of tertiary memory, the hypomnemata, are the objective sedimentations of collective past experience that allow the already grammatized temporal units to be retained in the present of primary retention, and then filters *what* is retained and projects *how* it will be retained *subjectively* in the secondary retention.[46] Hypomnemata from the Neolithic era have been the indispensable "media" enabling a circuit of production reproducing "prosthetic memory": memory and intelligence are located in the interplay between brains, between the technical and the organic, between the individual and the preceding generations who grammatize the means of perception and retention. According to Stiegler, the reproducibility of technics enables and expands the process of individuation into a long circuit of transindividuation, whereby *différance* emerges through every repetition in an unreproducible moment and temporality.[47] This transindividuation constitutes a sustainable "culture" that allows différance paradoxically through its own reproducibility. Most significantly, the process of transindividuation is an ongoing becoming, through which the individual receives their intergenerational inheritance and learns to imagine a future.

To summarize, the history of humanity is the history of the co-constitution between the human and the technical. The end of humanity then is the disruption and deconstruction of this co-constitution process. To understand what Napier tags as

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[45] Stiegler, *A New Critique*, 10.
[46] Bernard Stiegler, "From Psychopower to Neuropower: Autonomy and Automation," Lecture presented at Rutgers University, New Jersey, April 10, 2013.
[47] Bernard Stiegler, "Teleologics of the Snail, or the Errancies of the Equipped Self in a WiMax Network," in *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 479-492.

"apocalypse psyche" permeating the narrative of *Evangelion* and of the Aum Shinrikyo

cult, it is imperative to account for the short-circuiting of the transindividuation process,

which impedes an imagination built upon the past towards the future. Fittingly, family, as

the primary site of intergenerational milieu wherein individuals become

transindividuated, is the eminent focal point of *Evangelion*. Mari Kotani, as quoted by

Napier, goes as far as to suggest that *Evangelion* is fundamentally a "family romance"

and applauds the series' critical potential in challenging the patriarchal order by affirming

the repressed feminine.[48] Granted, from the first episode, Anno identifies explicitly

individuals' psychological issues as inextricable from dysfunctional familial

relationships. The first encounter between Shinji and Gendo after years of separation is

one filled with outright tension and utter disappointment. When Misato picks up Shinji

and tells him up front that she is taking him to his father, Shinji is already ambivalent due

to the memory of being abandoned by his father, which is shown through a flashback

sequence of two distinctive black-and-white still images of luggage, a boy crying

helplessly alone in a train platform, followed by a color animation of a train rushing by.

Notably, this sequence keeps replaying throughout the series as the singular childhood

memory Shinji has of his father. Shinji nevertheless anticipates meeting the only family

member he has left, especially after hearing about his father undertaking a job of great

importance to protect the human race. Little does he suspect that he is sent in for purely

"business" reasons and that he has been signed up, unwillingly and unaware, for the same

cause as his father.

       The meeting takes place in "Evangelion Cage," the factory-like compound that

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[48] Napier, *Anime*, 211.

stores and maintains off-duty Evas. After an eye-opening tour of Nerv's headquarters and the artificial metropolis Nerv has erected underground, Shinji is brought face-to-face with Eva-01, whose mammoth body is invisibly submerged in water, caged in and unwired, with only its metallic sculpted head showing. While Shinji is checking out the strange oddity in bedazzlement and wondering if the Evas are his father's secret acts, Gendo's voice is heard unexpectedly from overhead. Shinji raises his head and sees his father greeting him from the control room situated right above Eva. The next shot cuts to Gendo's profile view against a wall of four monitors, each of which monitors and records Shinji's facial reaction with numbers streaming across the screen. The same visual composition is interposed several times in the highly charged interchange between Shinji and Gendo. It is not until this moment that Shinji is commanded to navigate the brutish machine he was introduced to only minutes earlier. The Angel is pounding the city, and Shinji's agreeing to the job on the spot is an urgent matter of life and death. Shinji, feeling cheated, refuses to comply and further confronts Gendo about why he was summoned. Gendo responds to Shinji's exasperated inquiry coldly, "You know exactly why" and confirms Shinji's worst fear about his indifferent father: "I called you because I have a need for you." To add to Shinji's agony, Gendo does not plead for him to stay but instead orders him to leave immediately if he is not going to take on the task as requested. The camera zooms in on Gendo's face as he retorts, showing Gendo's eyeglasses are overlaid by reflections of the multiple monitors we see earlier, giving the impression that Shinji's shame, as expressed in his lowered head and hidden face, literally multiplies under Gendo's unforgiving gaze. It is almost as if Gendo is addressing Shinji through the looking glass of screens rather than as a real person who stands in front of him yearning

for attention.

Figure 4. The scene of the reunion between Shinji and his father.

The way the reunion scenario plays out may not be subtle; quite the contrary, it verges on being overacted, unapologetically melodramatic, and devoid of realism. Nevertheless, the staging of the "reunion" scene could not be more ironic and indicative of the impasse between generations, and more alarmingly, the degree to which psychotechnologies have eroded and undone the process of transindividuation leading to the impasse. Hypomnemata, as memory aids in both psychological and physiological aspects, form a necessary *supplement* enabling the transmission of intergenerational memory, whereby family for instance becomes a viable and vital unit for biological, economic and cultural reproduction. That is, hypomnemata are intrinsically regenerative, *engendering* social relations as the elemental infrastructure of human life. In *Evangelion*'s dreary but accurate outlook of the new millennium which is precisely our living present—the Second Impact took place in 2000 and the story ends in the year of 2016—mnemotechnical devices short-circuit, hijack rather than engendering and strengthening the intergenerational tie. As shown in the sequence I detail above, Gendo's perception of as well as his attention to his own son is *distracted* and rerouted by the videotaped image. It is almost as if his relationship to his son only exists to the extent of what appears on the screen. Shinji's identity, his past experience and his future potential are framed, hemmed in by the captured stream of images in the recordable present, and even his present state is programmed into a string of numbers. The distraction and the capturing of perception are correlated to the thwarted and twisted desire requisite for striking international bonds and the transindividuation process at large. Shinji shows his vulnerability by telling his father "I thought you didn't need me," but Gendo turns his words around and answers him matter-of-factly, "I called you because I have a need for

you." Shinji's notion of need implies a sense of emotional attachment and commitment, whereas Gendo has no pretense about the instrumental nature of his "need" for Shinji, irrelevant to their personal relationship. In another scene, Gendo identifies Shinji openly to his colleagues as the substitute for Rei who is severely wounded, while Rei herself is a substitution tailored after his late wife. The existence of Shinji, like Rei, is devalued into a substitutable object at the disposal of an operation like Nerv whose proclaimed mission is, without irony, to salvage humanity. Gendo and the conglomerate of Nerv and Seele go to great lengths to reproduce the "updated" version of the city of Tokyo down to Yui Ikari, Gendo's wife, so as to provide a semblance of order and civilization. Paradoxically, the "disposability" and the devaluation of both things and people are the underlying problems leading to the world destruction Nerv aims to avert.

VI.   Libidinal Diseconomy and the Messianic Longing

In *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, Stiegler makes a vital connection between the hyperindustrial capitalist model of disposability and the prevalent feeling of apocalypse.[49] In this book and elsewhere, Stiegler grounds his critique of the short-termism of the current consumerist market in the very basic concept of desire. In particular, he builds on Donald Winnicott's theory to emphasize the importance of "transitional objects" for the formation of attention and the circuit of desire. By fostering an object relation in this transitional space, the infant becomes "attentive" and grows attached to the object, in the process of which the object, being the object of desire, takes

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[49] Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013).

on symbolic value that cannot be calculated or easily replaced. The object relation is

fundamentally imaginary even if the object is fixed tangible matter, and this

"intermediate experience" deriving from the transitional space, albeit as an illusion,

underlies the capacity for imagination and fantasy. Stiegler furthers Winnicott's idea and

argues that transitional objects, like the toys with which children play or the lullabies

parents sing to their children, are tertiary memories which are "social and cultural

memories subsequently materialized—both socially materialized and materially

socialized."[50] Time with transitional objects effects the embedding within the inherited

symbolic materials and the beginning of individuation in the transindividuated milieu, i.e.

education. In a nutshell, the psychical investment in the object in this transitional space

enables a person to bridge to a shared reality, and the way we accommodate the world

never takes place in isolation. The initiation of worldly experience in this transitional

space constitutes, as Stiegler insists, "the basis of all systems of care and nurturance."[51]

However, hyperindustrial capitalism has nullified this process of taking care and installed

in its stead "a systematic infidelity" by legitimatizing "disposability" as the standard

modus operandi in the forever renewable production process:

> Now, these thingly supports of everyday life, which supported the world and the
> making-world essentially grounded in and through this making-trust, have
> become *disposable and structurally obsolescent*….namely, the chronic
> obsolescence of industrial products henceforth furnished and swept away by a
> permanent innovation leading to an inevitably self-destructive short-termism.
> Today, it has become perfectly normal to see objects disappear into garbage
> disposals and garage *sales as quickly as they appear on the market* (italics
> original).[52]

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[50] Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 6.
[51] Ibid., 15.
[52] Stiegler, *Life Worth Living*, 63.

Although there is no mentioning of market and consumption in *Evangelion,* the series in

a radical way envisions the end stage of capitalism where there is no commerce, for the

system of "care" is destroyed, and henceforth the circuit of "desire" that is necessary for

producing enduring and irreducible value is preemptively short-circuited into reflexive

drive. For Gendo, Shinji is only worth something, insofar as his biopsychological value,

in the most technical sense of the word: he is commensurable with the preprogrammed,

pre-pre-calculated "sync rate." Precisely because of this commensurability and

calculability, Shinji's life is rendered valueless, and consequently substitutable and

disposable.

Working in tandem with the disposability of objects and human life is the

disappearance, the disposability of symbolic authority, the superego without which the

unruly libidinal drives cannot be sublimated and transformed to socially useful psychic

energies. Feminist scholars, including Napier and Kotani, highlight the unflinching

portrayal of the patriarchy in *Evangelion*. Indeed, on the most straightforward and surface

level, the faceoff between Shinji and Gendo instantiates the violence of the patriarchy and

the intergenerational disconnect attributed to an aloof and abusive father. The *mise-en-*

scene as shown in Figure 3 depicts how the patriarch imposes himself upon the child he

has forsaken, with Gendo's distant silhouette hovering over Shinji who, still in uniform,

looks up to the authority as humbly and unnervingly as one in a school disciplinary

session. Strikingly, what sticks out between Shinji and Gendo is the hulking head of Eva,

whose deep-seated eyes seem to keep a close watch over Shinji. It is almost if Eva is a

proxy for authority. Or, conversely, the minute figure of Gendo is only the distant

extension of Eva. The visual alignment foreshadows the confusion and psychic nihilism

Shinji will be experiencing for the rest of the series. As Gendo forfeited his responsibility as a parent years ago and later attempts to exert his fatherly influence while simultaneously deferring, diverting it to Eva and the political-military institution, the symbolic authority and superego required for Shinji to have a *desire* to work is dispersed and liquidated. For a good part of the show, we see Shinji struggling with and trying to make sense of the ostensibly ennobling, privileged mission to save the world. After he kills the last Angel that appears in the form of a teenage boy named Kaworu, he undergoes a psychological meltdown, for he considers himself to have committed a homicide. In the imaginary dialogue prompted by the title card, he is asked why he pilots the Eva. Sitting in a chair despondently with half of his face hidden in shame, Shinji answers, "Because everyone tells me to do it," and when pressed for more explanation, he stutters but tries to defend himself: "It's…it's for the good of everyone, so why does it matter?" This psychoanalytic session in the penultimate episode is more unsettling than revealing. After completing a series of daunting tasks, Shinji does not get a bit of gratification, but instead feels more miserable than ever. Although he presumably fulfills the expectation of "everyone" and works for the public "good," none of his deeds is beholden to a transcendental ideal that, deriving from the tender *process* of the transitional spaces, invests his work with spiritual value, thereby giving meaning to his existence and making it possible for him to imagine a future.

In his hallucination, he calls out to "everyone," his mother included, demanding an answer and guidance on what to do next, but to no avail. The unavailability of "response" also means the absence of a dependable, *responsible* authority to teach a young mind like Shinji's to respond properly to the demands made of him and the responsibility with

which he is endowed. Shinji is left to his own devices, both literally and metaphorically. In his mind, he pictures his tiny body squeezed tightly by the massive hand of Eva, about to be killed in the same way as he terminates Kaworu earlier. He remonstrates with Eva whether he should be obedient and "get back in this thing to fight." Noticeably, he identifies Eva as "mother" and protests in exasperation "Mother, say something! Answer me!" For Shinji, his beloved mother who commits her life work to making Eva an extension of herself is also an accomplice colluding to perpetuate the mechanical repression encapsulated in "this thing." This explains part of the reason why I hesitate to identify Shinji's ambivalence and struggle as discontent with patriarchy, or to see Eva as a "feminist robot" assimilating the hero into "the cyborg's feminized matrix," as Kotani proposes. Kotani's argument can be well-substantiated by the instances in which each child pilot experiences being stuck in and absorbed by Evas, wherein he or she finally gets in touch with repressed desire and fear, the "abject" which Lacanian psychoanalysis accords with the "feminine." However, this return back to the unconscious is not mediated through an intergenerational authority, but a direct and total "capture," like the capture of Shinji by "this thing." In his outline of the different generations in *Evangelion,* Redmond sees the children as representing "the informative 1990s." The peculiar and mythical belief that only children of age fourteen have "neural flexibility" to synch with Eva, as Redmond infers, is "a canny reference to the ability of the Nintendo kids to meld with a given technology far faster than any adult."[53] Redmond's passing remark may sound apocryphal, but it pinpoints a socially endorsed trend to exploit the neuropsychological malleability of young minds for the profit-driven psychotechnical

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[53] Redmond, The *World Is Watching*, 131.

industries. As the inchoate mind gets exposed, the process of "melding with" with psychotechnology is the irreversible process of surrendering the *id* to the dominion of what Herbert Marcuse calls the "automatic superego." The id, as a consequence, is swept away, synchronized by and even turned into "this thing" Shinji fears and has no control of. Time and again in the series, we see Evas taking over the children's consciousness, breaking away from their armor bindings, and acting out violence in an unexpected way. In one instance, Eva-01 devours the Angel alive like a wild beast, almost if it has unleashed untamed instinctual drives in Shinji's stead. The collapse of a psychic structure by the capture of the id *unnerves* the mind, making it vulnerable, and ultimately risks triggering the death-drive and an all-out destructive response at the expense of the future.

Thus, Nerv's operation is a contradictory and ultimately self-defeating one on different fronts. While it strains every nerve—with children's neurological state literally on the line—to protect human civilization, it also unnerves and incapacitates young minds by eliciting drives that cannot be easily controlled and contained. At the same time, since desire is short-circuited and the process of individuation in a transindividual milieu undercut, a collective cause such as working for "the good for everyone" is a hollow and untenable ideal, beyond the grasp of Shinji's debilitated imagination and impaired desire. Napier is correct in pointing out that *Evangelion* is an exemplary text giving a timely portrayal of the "cultural crisis" unique to Japan with regard to childhood and the generational gap. In fact, in his prescient insight, Anno sees the real crisis as rooted in the deformed *economy of desire*, which affects not just the limited scope and time frame of family and childhood, but also ramifies itself in all domains of social relations, particularly economy and the political economy constituted by social relations.

The prevailing feeling of despair and loneliness in *Evangelion* that entraps Shinji and others cannot be easily attributed to past traumas; rather, it is a structural malaise instituted by Seele/Nerv. It is almost no surprise that the end of the world is revealed to be part of a political scheme and business plan calculated by Seele/Nerv. Their hidden agenda is to push the Human Instrumentality Project with an objective to euthanize the human species and start "anew," a new genesis as indicated by the series' title, by eradicating the old humanity and world altogether. The Human Instrumentality Project (which should be more accurately translated as the Human Completion or Complement Project) is intended, not necessarily maliciously, to dissolve the barriers and differences between individuals towards a single existence of homogenous consciousness. Yet, such a "perfect" existence is fundamentally a non-existence, for existence as *ex-sistere* means to be outside of the self, from which *différance* and singularities emerge through the relation maintained with what is outside of the self. This relation is also the formation of desire that opens up to the infinite and the future.

Granted, the Human Instrumentality Project may be simply a plot device to drive the narrative forward, but it resonates closely with the teaching of complete salvation and divination through destruction propagated by the Aum Shinrikyo cult. Rather than enacting a doomsday scenario by organizing a mass killing in a terrorist attack, Seele/Nerv have systematically and gradually encroached upon the very possibility of existence by terrorizing the mind, depriving it of the care needed to foster desire and instead bombarding it with sensory shocks and stimulants. The mind of Shinji, and possibly that of the audience, is at first in awe at the dazzling spectacles of combat but slowly becomes desensitized (which also explains, at least in part, why Anno shifts his

narrative focus from physical fights to internal warfare with one's self to retain the audience's attention.) Effectively, the Human Instrumentality Project has realized itself through warping consciousness to the extent that nothing matters anymore, least of all defending the public "good for everyone." What *Evangelion* presents is a dystopia far scarier than the ones envisioned in *Brave New World* and *1984*. This dystopia needs no more totalitarian regimes to put forth brainwashing political propaganda for mind control, because there is not much of the "brain" left to *retain* political discourse, and not enough of the psychic energies conserved to imagine, let alone to actualize, a shared collective future. Most crucially, it is the disarticulated military-industrialhypomnesic milieu that impels the all-leveling force to homogenize consciousness. Hypomnemata, when articulated with anamnesis, as Hansen notes, "facilitate the deployment of memory in the constitution of symbolic practices and communal formations."[54] But in the case of *Evangelion*, artificial memories are the instruments for Nerv/Seele to further their interest through manipulating the mind and standardizing memory, including methodically exacerbating psychic implosion towards a state of spiritual disenchantment and nihilism.

This spiritual nihilism is, according to Stiegler, the inexorable misery of the libidinal "diseconomy" with the short-circuiting of the desire by drive. On the most immediate level, Anno, with a known history of chronic depression while being revered as the forerunner of otaku emerging from the generation of *shinjinrui* (the "new type"), offers a harrowing insider's account on how *shinjinrui* who rode on the success of Japan's economy in the 1980s are in fact a "lost" generation impoverished by consumption and by the absence of symbolic authority. What's worth noting is that Anno

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[54] Hansen, "Memory," 66.

has reframed, far ahead of his time, the issue of consumption from commodity or the act of buying to include consuming and exhausting psychic energies. From the moment the series is set in motion with the opening which I analyzed earlier, the audience is required to negotiate a clutter of images and information, in conjunction with a speed of animation that alternates between vertiginous acceleration and still interval. The audacious soundtrack, which includes works by Bach and Beethoven, further amps up the viewing experience. In one of the notable fight sequences where Shinji and Asuka in their respective Evas collaborate to defeat an Angel, the symphony performs with grandeur and magnificence the classical track, as the combat happening on the screen is entirely muted. We see the pair putting on a show, with their coordinated gun attacks, synchronized gymnastics, somersaults and agile spins in their robot bodies, in a quixotic fashion best described by the track's name, "Both of You, Dance Like You Want to Win." The audience gets carried away with this warrior ballet while forgetting the severity of the war. The unsettling dissonance and the incommensurable contradiction between the excess of the audiovisual experience and the despair of the thematic matter make *Evangelion* an indefinable paradox, both as an affirmation and a scathing critique of the otaku culture Anno himself is derived from.

On the one hand, in Lamarre's and Okada's commendation of the series as the pinnacle of the otaku movement and otaku imaging, *Evangelion* helps propel and consolidate, domestically and abroad, an alternative "economy" that manages to remain alive and kicking in spite of global economic fluctuations. The encyclopedic array of information and the multisensory feast jam-packed with references simultaneously gratifies and feeds on what Lamarre identifies as the otaku's proclivity to study, unpack,

and "intervene" in the flow of images. Azuma goes as far as to suggest that the series, compared to other predecessors of the genre proper such as *Gundam*, is a "simulacrum," "an aggregate of information without a [grand] narrative" encouraging viewers to "empathize of their own accord and each could read up convenient [small] narratives."[55] These convenient small narratives tailor-made to their own respective interpretative preferences, when translated in terms of commerce, mean a resplendent variety of derivative and continuously derivable products that will be put on the market. Without question, Anno himself is complicit in the mass-commercialization of the otaku culture, for he is completely in tune with how the "culture" of otaku and *shinjinrui* thrive on consumption and consumerism of which his own work is both the beneficiary and benefactor. In his defense, the way Anno unrelentingly pushes the limits of the narrative and the visual to the breaking point such that the series cannot cohere and fails to arrive at a finite meaning is analogous to the way Seele/Nerv exploits Shinji's psychic energies to the extent that he is spiritually disowned and disenchanted. In other words, the series of *Evangelion* as a product of "cultural" industry self-deconstructs the "culture," much in the same way the psychopower of Seele/Nerv ends up turning against itself by enabling uncontrollable destructive psychic responses. If the narrative economy is an economy of desire at the microcosmic level in the sense that it can only proceed with a psychic "investment," then the collapse of the narrative economy bespeaks a psychic disinvestment. Anno, who began working in the industry in the 1980s when *shinjinrui* became the "cultural" vanguard who embraced consumerism as a lifestyle, is keenly aware of how aggressive consumer-oriented marketing and entertainment programming

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[55] Azuma, *Otaku,* 38.

can make and break the subculture of otaku at the same time. The creativity and productivity with which the otaku is known to "generate" infinite and shifting objects of obsession is, on the flip side, susceptibility to "capture" by the programming industry, and the manifestation of permanent short-termism as desire is short-circuited by the reflexive drive to buy, to consume and to invest attention.

The implications of libidinal short-termism go beyond the limited cases of the otaku subculture and the generation of *shinjinrui*. The collapse of a bubble economy, as Japan experienced more than two decades ago, is only the inevitable consequence of short-termism that permeates aspects of our psyche, cognition, social relations and political economy. Political economy, as Stiegler reminds us, is fundamentally libidinal economy, and for a libidinal economy to sustain itself, it depends on the circuit of desire to produce value that "cannot be completely calculated."[56] The psychical investment in the incommensurable and incalculable value is what *economizes* the libidinal energy and generates the long-term interest, both materially and psychically. Stiegler writes, "[Value] is only worth something inasmuch as it is inscribed in the circuit of desire, of one who only desires what remains *irreducible* to the commensurability of all values. In other words, value is only worth something inasmuch as it evaluates what has no price."[57] However, with programming and cultural industries that transform brain time, life, love, and even *attention* to completely calculable commodities, "value" is paradoxically "devalued" for there is no longer any "remainder" to be desired and to set off the next circulation of production and consumption. Psychical investments that bolster the libidinal economy are downgraded and short-circuited into *disinvestments*. An economy

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[56] Stiegler, "The Disaffected Individual."
[57] Ibid.

solely organized around consumption and the market perpetuates short-termism and is bound to fail. The disappearance of commerce, the "diseconomy" portrayed in *Evangelion* is precisely the radical ramification of the wholesale short-termism enforced by Seele. Moreover, when the potentialities and possibilities enabled by the circuit of desire are short-circuited and undermined in *toto*, when life and "life time" become a consumable and calculable commodity with a price tag, life is devalued and therefore completely expendable. In fact, the cult of Aum Shinrikyo and the terrorism it provokes is on a continuum with, not a deviation from, the establishment of the materialistic and consumerist Japan it repudiates and aims to transcend above. The end of the world becomes viable and an "actionable option" just as the service industry makes life insurable and memory downloadable. In his influential book *24/7*, Jonathan Crary laments that our global neo-capitalism has eroded our last precious, incalculable "interlude"—that is, sleep—by synchronizing our brain time and biological rhythms to be compatible with the forces of production and the market. Sleep, hitherto a blasphemous exception to and blunt denial of capitalist time, now needs to be managed and can be bought, with the help of sleep aids, so as to maintain functionality and productivity. By a similar logic, as the uncertain and yet "unalterable givens of a nature," such as sleep, become flexible and programmable, death and apocalypse can be orchestrated and customized to one's need.[58]

VII.   Coda:

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[58] Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013).

As the "Lost Decade" of 1991–2000 in Japan extends to the Lost 20 Years and beyond, as the global economy shows no definitive recovery since the 2008 financial crisis, capitalism is inevitably leading to its own demise as Marx predicts. In Stiegler's contemporary reading and timely reinterpretation of the first volume of *Capital* by Marx, he says, "The consumerist model has reached its limit because it has become systematically short-termist, because it has given rise to a systematic stupidity that structurally prevents the reconstitution of a long-term horizon."[59] In retrospect, *Evangelion* is startlingly prophetic, unveiling libidinal short-circuits as both the symptom and the cause of structural short-termism perpetuated by the psychopower of hyperindustrial capitalism. Yet, as despairing as it is, *Evangelion* attempts to end on a positive note and points to the possibility of repairing this short-termism by rebuilding "a long-term horizon," in Stiegler's term. In the infamously controversial last episode that caused uproar for the lack of a customary *mecha* ending, Anno defies both the genre and anime proper by creating a torrent of black-and-white, vintage-feel still life photography, strewn with monochrome screen captures of the virtual world from *Evangelion*. As the voice-over dialogue digs into the labyrinthine question of self-formation and self-identity, which at this point has reiterated itself *ad infinitum* to the degree of being tiresome and gratuitous, the image sequences actually speak more than words. A slideshow of photographs shows material objects that define Japan's modern life, ranging from a shopping cart loaded with empty soda cans, an electronic tower, the shadow of a bicycle on the pavement, public staircases, a mailbox, industrial waste, the construction site wine cellar. This stream of images of "real" objects is inserted with close-up shots from the

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[59] Stiegler, *A New Critique*, 5.

fictional world of *Evangelion* on material objects inscribed with indelible memory for the characters, such as the luggage Shinji is left with in his abandonment or Gendo's broken glasses Rei holds on to as a symbol of her love towards him. This intersection of the real and the virtual demonstrates on the one hand the Superflat sensibility in which the hierarchy and depth of image disintegrate, and the series' self-reflexivity on its own nature of being an artifice on the other, especially coming right after Anno returns to the basics and presents us a sequence showcasing the making of the animation.[60] First we see still images of hand-drawn characters in simple watercolor as if rendered in traditional animation celluloid (often abbreviated as cel) against the white canvas of the screen; then Shinji appears in a sketch drafting in the empty void at a stuttering speed, which accentuates the "in-betweens" vital to the motion images (see Figures 4).

Interestingly, this sequence showcasing the genesis of animation is accompanied by narration announcing the discovery of the world of "freedom" for Shinji. In Napier's deconstructive reading, she sees the combination of the visual and narrative registers as "highlighting [animation's] unreality to the 'real.'"[61] Shinji's newfound freedom to change the world mirrors the way Anno effaces the virtual universe he has built up to this end point and, to the utter bewilderment of the audience, recreates an alien alternate universe in which Shinji is the boy next door with a happy family, acting his age, as innocently cheerful as the delightful hero in a slice-of-life comedy anime. Napier concludes, "*Evangelion*'s final apocalyptic vision is an ironic one: even when we think we can control the reality around us, we are actually at its mercy, cartoon characters in

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[60] Lamarre, *The Anime Machine,* 110–123. In the chapter, "Structures of Depth," Lamarre situates Murakami Takeshi's Superflat movement in historical, aesthetic and socio-technical contexts. See also the section, "Discord between Murakami Takashi and the Otaku," from Azuma's *Otaku*, 63–65.
[61] Napier, "When the Machines Stop," 115.

the hands of the fates or the animators."[62] My reading is very different from Napier's, though. Granted, the story *Evangelion* tells is fiction and therefore "unreal"—the sequence that makes the audience aware of the elements and processes of animation production indicates the indisputable materiality and tangible reality of animation as a medium. The juxtaposition and the "flattening" of difference between the photo of the real and that of the virtual are telling: the way we relate to material objects in our reality is also the way these characters relate to the objects in the so-called virtual reality, and vice versa. By extension, by showing us how animation is made—the composition is constituted of cels and the movement modulated through in-betweens—Anno calls attention to how the animator, *animators* more accurately, relate to their material object—that is, animation.

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[62] Ibid., 115.

Figure 5. The final episode of *Evangelion.*

The radical visual reduction to the beginning of animation is by no means Anno's authorial manipulation and self-assertion as Napier implies. Quite the contrary, Anno is paying an open acknowledgement to the multitude of others, from the in-between animators to the forebears who leave behind a cultural inheritance and those who will inherit it in the future, whose contributions have made the series of *Evangelion* a continuously unfolding technical object with its hypomnesic milieu. The relation we have with the object then is a relation with intergenerational inheritance, which constitutes our existence as outside of our (limited) self. This relation is what Stiegler calls the system of care, which is also aptly expressed through the two different but interconnected titles of the episode: "The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World" and "Take Care of Yourself."[63] The intentional word play between "love" in Japanese (ai) and "I" in English couldn't be more telling. While it is tempting to read the linguistic slippage as another instance of solipsism, I argue though that "love," or "I," is unmistakably situated in the constellations of "world" and "care," specifically worldly care and care for the world. Love and self-care can only happen when the "I" can identify and embrace the multitude of "us," when the individuation of "I" coincides with the coindividuation of "we" in a worldly milieu enriched and fortified with intergenerational knowledge, experience and memories. Such a "worldly world" is one capable of genesis. In Anno's portrayal, the world of freedom that scares and unmoors Shinji is a blank void with absolutely nothing and nobody in it except Shinji himself suspended in the air. Shinji can only feel secure

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[63] Gwern Branwen, "Neon Genesis Evangelion Source Anthology," last modified January 20, 2019, http://www.gwern.net/otaku. As Branwen notes, it is very likely that Anno names his last episode after the short story, "The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World," by American sci-fi writer Harlan Ellison. He also calls attention to how the word "love" in the Japanese original (世界の中心でアイを叫んだけもの) is written in katakana (アイ) instead of in kanji (愛), both of which are pronounced as "ai" but the former is a transliteration of the English "I."

again when we see a horizontal line drawn on the screen to literally "ground" Shinji on earth. As Gendo narrates, with an unexpectedly gentle voice, this line is a "restriction." Yet, the line as restriction also gives Shinji a tangible world he can stand upright and walk on, which inspires him to further realize that his quest for self-knowledge and actualization is intertwined with infinite others who continuously give shape to the self-image he strives for. In other words, Shinji's individuation can only be put in effect when he and others are coindividuated together in a material milieu that has something, even a restriction, to hold on to, to work on and negotiate with.

It is this process of transindividuation that equips us with imagination and fantasy. The inopportune ending that completely transforms the entire cast as if they were characters from another anime series irrelevant to *Evangelion* is, after all, not as scandalous as it seems to be. In this reboot version, Shinji has a fresh new start without having to go through any family separation and the grief it causes. Everybody acts their own ages and gets on with life ever-so-happily. While this "utopia" where everything is restored to the norm is clearly a figment of Shinji's imagination and a wild fantasy, what matters is not the "unreality" of it in relation to the reality construed in *Evangelion* and the shared reality of the audience. The capacity of imagination, not the content of it, is in itself the restorative power that renders the care and transforms an inchoate individual to maturation. Paradoxically, Shinji can only proudly declare "I am me!" and receive unanimous congratulations for his growth once he returns from his fantasy world to the familiar setting of *Evangelion,* for he finally is able to imagine himself *outside* of himself towards different possibilities of the future. This is also the moment when Shinji can finally stop hating his father and begin parting from his dead mother, as the epilogue

writes: "To my father, thank you. To my mother, farewell. And to all the children…Congratulations!" Anno comes to a denouement that negates his initial premise. The world does not need an apocalypse to start it all over. Instead, the articulation of the desire towards the future is the most important remedial care and antidote to the short-termist, self-destructive capitalism we have today. The transmission of this possibility, and ability, to desire the future, is the responsibility we have to our ancestors and the most precious gift we can give to the generations that are to come.

Chapter 5. Precarious Home, Proletarian Youths in Neoliberal Japan

I.   Virtual *Waifu* and Familial Crisis

In December 2016, a two-year old fledgling company based in Tokyo, Vinclu Inc., released a video introducing Gatebox, the first-ever home robot that purports to provide companionship with its personalized and personified features. The trailer begins with a female voice-over greeting a sleeping man in the morning.[1] The man rises up to meet the voice, a hologram in the form of a female anime figure projected within a glass tube, i.e. Gatebox, which has a size and shape similar to a French press coffee maker. He presses the magic button of the Gatebox. In response, the virtual maid, literally in a French maid costume, greets tenderly again, "*ohayo*" ("good morning"), and reminds her master, or rather husband, to bring his umbrella since the forecast says it will rain. The scene of the husband leaving home and the virtual wife seeing him off to work unfolds as do the most ordinary and yet symbolic family rituals; the two exchange the expressions of *ittekimasu* ("I am going") and *itterasshai* ("see you later"). The trailer then follows the man's routines as an average salaryman: bus commute, business meeting, coffee break, late work hours. Amidst the humdrum of everyday activities and work, our lone salaryman is supported by lovey-dovey texting with his virtual partner over the phone. The trailer comes full circle to conclude with the man lying in bed ready to sleep. Before he and his virtual partner say *oyasuminasai* ("good night") to each other, he speaks in a

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[1] Gatebox Lab," Gatebox - Promotion Movie "OKAERI"_english," December 13, 2016, YouTube video, 2:00. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkcKaNqfykg.

quiet and wistful monologue, "You know, somebody's home for me, [which] feels great. I thought so on my way home." The camera cuts back to the shot where his tired face looks up and sees his lit-up apartment in the dark on his way home, realizing that his virtual partner, the genie living in Gatebox, has it all prepared for his return. The punch line of the ad, etched against the starry night above a cityscape, exhorts the viewer to "Transcend dimensions to meet" (which is reductively translated as "Living with your favorite character" in the official English trailer). While offering a comprehensive service catering to the practical needs of the buyer, Gatebox takes it up a notch by promising customization to one's emotional life, imagination and desire, traversing different dimensions and enabling a sustained living encounter with one's significant—albeit nonexistent and fictional—other.

Our anonymous, plain-looking salaryman predates Ryan Gosling's replicant from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) in fulfilling the perennial Pygmalion-esque romantic fantasy of owning a customized, responsive virtual partner. Gatebox's preview went viral and the video, posted on the Facebook page of Tokyo Otaku Mode, accumulated a million views in no time.[2] In stark contrast to the sentimentalizing narrative of the trailer, Tokyo Otaku Mode's caption to the video goes straight to the point: "Gatebox is open for pre-orders! Get your virtual *waifu* here (US and Japan only)." Tokyo Otaku Mode, one of the biggest English online news portals and vendors for fans of Japanese anime, manga and videogames (i.e. otaku), has made it clear that Gatebox is another money-grabbing gimmick, capitalizing on the subculture of otaku known for its increasingly bewildering practices. *Waifu*, an affectionate moniker popularized by otaku in reference to their

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[2] Tokyo Otaku Mode, "Gatebox PV," Facebook, December 14, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/tokyootakumode/videos/1487875427906674/

beloved two-dimensional female characters, has crossed over into mainstream culture and materialized itself into a highly-prized commodity. With shipping included, Gatebox asks for a steep price of three thousand US dollars per piece. However, despite its tantalizing commercial slogan and sleek design, Gatebox has met with more cynicism than enthusiasm outside Japan. The comments posted under the Tokyo Otaku Mode Facebook video and the video on Youtube are predominantly critical or apprehensive, to say the least. Among the most upvoted comments, one finds the ad utterly depressing, and another trolls that he will only consider getting the product at "the lowest point of my life" (but adds that he will place the order immediately). While there is outcry condemning the losers resorting to anime characters for companionship, some viewers condemn the product outright and attribute Japan's low birth rate to the substitution of 3-D women with virtual *waifu*. Still some others are sympathetic and hopeful that such an emotional support, albeit artificial, could curb depression and reduce suicide rates, both of which are known to be serious issues affecting Japan's youth. To sum up, Gatebox, a novelty toy for anime and manga lovers, has come to epitomize a set of issues whose ramifications reverberate beyond the confines of the otaku community. On the microcosmic level, it reflects the malady of an individual's emotional life, and on the macrocosmic level it represents Japan's reproductive crisis.

Situated in the center of the debate is the figure of otaku, or more accurately, the otaku suiting up as the salaryman and conversely the salaryman closeted in his otaku desire. The otaku's illicit love affair and its perverse rendition of home life—otaku is originally a second-person honorific for "home"—is recalibrated to simultaneously bolster the productivity and relieve the burden of the overworked salaryman. A wild

fantasy and plaything of the "loser," i.e. otaku—who are often wrongly profiled as those

who drop out of the state-corporate system and fall back on their self-construed, self-

enclosed home-as-world—becomes a means to shape and fortify the reality of the

salaryman, the hero and backbone of Japan's economy. In fact, since the new millennium

the Japanese government has been relying on this tool and using it to rebrand itself as a

global cultural vanguard amidst stagnant economic growth. Otaku culture and the

industrial complex it has created becomes the trademark of "Cool Japan" and the driving

force of what Iwabuchi Koichi calls "soft nationalism."[3] At a cursory glance, Gatebox, as

a cool product, unabashedly exposes the ills, the "uncool part of a faltering Japan.

Nevertheless, the record-breaking 22K comments and 118K shares, together with heated

comments on Japan or the Japanese, testifies to the success of the campaign of Japan's

soft nationalism. Several months later, Vinclu stepped up its game by offering the option

of "Living with Hatsune Miku," the Vocaloid celebrity. In December 2018, CNN and

other major English news outlets report that a school administrator in Japan threw a fancy

wedding marrying Hatsune Miku. The bespectacled happy groom professes his love and

gratitude to the hologram companion floating within Gatebox: "She really added color to

my life… and lifted me up when I needed it the most."[4] The virtual *waifu* becomes a

beacon, helping her master navigate life both literally and figuratively.

Remarkably, Gatebox upgrades and reboots their marketing strategy by selling the

everyday life of otaku *in toto*, including their banality and loneliness, without any

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[3] Iwabuchi, "'Soft Nationalism' and Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture Goes Global," *Asian Studies Review* 26, no. 4 (2002): 447-469. DOI: 10.1080/10357820208713357
[4] Emiko Jozuka, Hidetaka Sato, Albert Chan and Tara Mulholland, "Beyond Dimensions: The Man who Married a Hologram," CNN, December 29, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/12/28/health/rise-of-digisexuals-intl/index.html.

compunction to lay bare the disintegration of home and the drudgery a salaryman goes through to retain even a tiny fraction of the ideal of home. As elaborated in chapter 3, Iwabuchi identifies Japan's soft nationalism as an insidious kind of narcissism that uses the innocuous aesthetics of cuteness to mask the violent history of its colonial past and of its ongoing social problems of ethnic exclusion. The cool image of Japan proffered by Japan Inc. is therefore a spectacle *par excellence* in Guy Debord's words, because it is a spectacle "of a paralyzed history, a paralyzed consciousness."[5] In contrast to the Hello Kitty empire, the quintessential icon of Japanese cuteness created in a euphoric vacuum of historical consciousness, Gatebox rides on an excess of quasi- or pseudo-knowledge and information. Online comments that seem informed and demonstrate basic knowledge of Japan are part of the calculus of global cultural capitalism that parcels out historical, social and political consciousness as a byproduct. In this context, a crisis rooted in the shared living present can be easily remedied by a fancy gadget. Under the global neoliberal economic order, the overworked middle class, the intrusion of work into personal life, and the commodification of care by the service economy are common agonies. A *waifu* is only a few steps ahead of online dating sites and Facebook, all of which have been effectively re-engineering social relations. Yet, by openly identifying the woe of the salaryman/otaku as uniquely Japanese, the problems can be easily bracketed off, thereby making a product like Gatebox manageably exotic, despite its outrageous appearance. Consuming the spectacle of miseries inflicted on the salaryman and that of the magic redeeming their lives distracts the viewer, dissociating them from both their own time and historical time in which their time is embedded.

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[5] Guy DeBord, *The Society of Spectacle* (Zone Books: New York, 1995), 114.

In *The Society of the Spectacle,* Debord posits that post-Fordist capitalism proceeds on the principle of "time-as-commodity." From paid work hours to free time spent in consumption, "time manifests nothing in its effective reality aside from its exchangeability."[6] Advertising and the cultural industry compete to solicit attention and time from targeted consumers with incessant exhortations of image-as-spectacle, which enacts "*the violent expropriation of their time*" (emphasis original).[7] While the digital revolution, heralded by the advent of the new telecommunications, ushers in the so-called "knowledge economy" and promises the potential of what Negri and Hardt call "the common," it also undercuts both knowledge and the common by streamlining the retentional process into capitalist, fiber-optic time.[8] The cultural programming industry exerts unprecedented psychic control by preprograming and reprogramming the human mind and specifically its retentional temporal structure where consciousness and knowledge are formed. Just as memory can be quantified into gigabytes ready for purchase, so can consciousness and affect be marketed for sale. Sound bites are intangible commodities peddling warped, if not false, consciousness, contributing to the "spectacle's distractions" operated by the global sprawl of consumerist capitalism. The know-it-all snobbism that pervades the Internet can easily be an echo chamber in an infinite loop, a series of unthinking automatic responses to further the capitalism's grip on the mind. The varied strains of feedback to Gatebox, regardless of whether they express curious skepticism, the sympathetic bewilderment, or the outright disavowal, conform to the logic of consumerism that has redefined life solely in terms of

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6 Ibid., 110.
7 Ibid., 114.
8 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

gratification, or lack thereof. In Debord's indictment, "[D]issatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material."[9] Capitalism assimilates the impulse to rebel and the sentiment of displeasure as it propels the next round of production and consumption.

The idea of the virtual *waifu*, before being monetized into a high-end business with Gatebox, was introduced as a critique against the capitalist commercialization of love. According to *The New York Times Magazine*'s in-depth report, 2-D love, which oxymoronically refers to "a real relationship with imaginary characters," started out as a "self-help" practice uncircumscribed by capitalist logic.[10] The avid advocate of the 2-D movement Honda Toru coins the term "love capitalism" or "romance capitalism" in his 2005 book, *Moe Man* (*Moeru Otoko*), to attack how the capitalist materialism of the 1980s boom has corrupted dating and companionship, turning them into mere forms of consumption.[11] The love market is reserved exclusively for those who have money and looks. The phenomenon of *enjo kōsai* ("compensated dating") in which older men pay money or give expensive gifts in exchange for "dates" with teenage girls is one notorious example of love-for-sale. Honda is convinced that imaginary romance with virtual characters fends off the corrosion of materialism and sustains the sanctuary of romance. Honda's initial intended audience was his otaku cohort. The fetishization of virtual characters, expressed by the loan word *moe* (signifying both/either "burning" and "budding passion"), had been a well-established offshoot of otaku subculture. The

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[9] Ibid., 38.

[10] Lisa Katayama, "Love in 2-D," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 21, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/magazine/26FOB-2DLove-t.html.

[11] Patrick W. Galbraith, "Moe: Exploring Virtual Potential in Post-Millennial Japan," *electronic journal of contemporary japanese studies* (*ejcjs*), October 31, 2009, http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Galbraith.html.

movement picked up momentum outside otaku culture and has since then offered an alternative to single men who do not have the economic, social or cultural capital required to be a marriage prospect. Some prefer virtual over real romance to bypass the strictures of an interpersonal relationship and consider 2-D love freer and purer because they do not need to fulfill socially-coded expectations or fret about being turned down or judged. One interviewee, an otaku with a "real" wife and a respectable career, sympathizes with 2-D lovers and says, "These guys don't want to push ahead in society; they just want to create their own little flower-bed world and live there peacefully."[12]

The ideal of a virtual wife or 2-D love promises some potential, in a limited sense, to become a counterculture by providing a different model for masculinity and encouraging imagination that does not culminate in consumption. Honda goes so far as to suggest a retraining of the mind and a rewiring of the synaptic responses in the brain are required in order to live in a 2-D lifestyle. The same interviewee mentioned above applauds 2-D love as "enlightenment training," "like becoming a Buddha." Granted, as different cases from *New York Times Magazine*'s report show, 2-D companionship has helped some people through hard times by offering a much-needed emotional buffer, a handy distraction—pain management, so to speak. However, 2-D love is premised on virtual characters from particular series, which are media franchises owned by corporations. Honda sees revolutionary potential in 2-D love, for practices of fantasizing and nurturing a virtual partner, as he claims, enable otaku men to experience "feminine" budding emotion.[13] In its attempt to redefine masculinity, 2-D love unwittingly

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[12] Katayama, "Love in 2-D."
[13] Galbraith. "Moe."

reimagines and reinscribes Japan's gendered familial-economic structure in relegating women to the role of domestic partner and caregiver. What's at issue here is more than the objectification of women by animating them symbolically, in a fashion similar to Pygmalion, as material objects and images ranging from low-cost pillowcases to the exorbitant Gatebox. In *accessorizing* care and love, the 2-D movement at its core still operates by the principle of the late-capitalist service economy, which reduces care, as well as the desire to love and the need to be taken care of, into an algorithmic calculation. *Moe* for instance is minutely differentiated into "types" and "levels" or "scales": passion and romance can be evaluated and categorized. The mind is indeed rewired, with affect and cognition susceptible to market calculation. By responding to and growing dependent on the image-commodity as a kind of need and "help," the nondescript, not-yet-fully-existing self is paradoxically reified into a putative and virtual self which the marketing and merchandizing industry posits and imputes.

Honda's quixotic but well-meaning cause ignores the fundamental fact that consumption is not limited to buying or spending money. As Debord elaborates on "time-as-commodity," the society of spectacle is constituted by the commodified "time of spectacle: in the narrow sense, as the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and in the broadest sense, as the image of the consumption of time."[14] The time invested in "raising" a *waifu*, which Honda sees as an escape from prescribed masculinity to femininity, is simultaneously consumption and production. The commodity of the 2-D movement is not *waifu* per se with its different "embodiments" in pillowcases or tube-encased hologram, but the image of the consumption of family time, to add to Debord's

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[14] Debord, *Spectacle*, 112.

argument. What is produced in 2-D love is a neoliberal subject readily computable by the industry—a subject that knowingly takes upon themselves the freedom to make a rational choice among market solutions as a kind of self-responsibility to take care of their private life. In other words, Honda's crusade of "pure love" is built on the same principle as the 1980s "love market" which he criticizes: both make love object choice compatible with market logic, with the only difference being that the latter is a market constituted of real people while the former is a market of virtual, imaginary characters. Honda resists capitalist-instituted love relations and hopes to reaffirm love, through the "training" of 2-D love, to affirm the self-worth of someone like himself who is excluded from the love market. Yet 2-D love makes up a market of its own, in which love is also devalued into exchange relations. The imagination and fantasy involved in 2-D love neatly dovetail with a prefab, manufactured ensemble of products and services to further the market. The industry and the subject it interpolates constitute a closed-loop system, through which dissatisfaction, specifically the threat of a dissatisfied customer, can be safely contained with infinitely upgradable and renewable commodities.

For many, like those interviewed by *The New York Times Magazine*, 2-D love has given 2-D lovers a sense of purpose. Through bonding with and cathexis to their 2-D partners, a Winnicottian transitional space is created wherein one learns self-care by caring for their love object. One salaryman adopted 2-D love to overcome his suicidal thoughts and sublimate, in the psychoanalytic sense, his death drive to the productive energy of care. Yet, with the industrialization of self-help and self-care, the transitional object and space is turned into an ultimate end in itself, and psychic sublimation is overdetermined by consumption, through which self-help risks becoming a self-

perpetuating, if not self-deluding, addiction. In turn, the industry keeps feeding and feeding on this addiction, offering a dizzying spectrum of services-as-goods or goods-as-services, such as a marriage certificate with one's virtual *waifu*, even if the marriage is not legally binding. Precisely because this particular kind of addiction as self-help is profitable and well-contained at home, rarely spilling over onto the street, the bigger structural failure that makes single men turn to 2-D love is reduced into a localized issue. As referenced by *The New York Times Magazine*, studies on the phenomenon claim that the problem lies in the inability of Japan's youth to "navigate modern romantic life." People in their 30s, the age group that is supposed to engage in childrearing, are equally inexperienced. A handbook-turned-bestseller specifically targets readers in their 30s and gives them a step-by-step manga-illustrated guide on how to proceed from dating to sexual activities and marriage.

The inability or the unwillingness to initiate and maintain a "real" relationship with the clearly directed goal of marriage is easily explained away as the lack of health or sex education for particular demographics. The remedy is to reorient them—through a self-help, do-it-yourself guidebook—back onto a normative path towards a heterosexual reproductive unit, i.e. family, the basis of Japan's "family-corporate system." While 2-D love is a symptom of discontent and of the pandemic failure of Japan's corporate state to offer an extensive, sustainable network of social support, i.e. care, beyond capitalist calculation, the "solution" provided is to put both body and mind into a calculus that no longer works. With chronic economic woes, the resulting decline of lifelong employment and the dwindling number of potential spouses with a high or stable income, the love capitalism of the 1980s is no longer viable, and marriage in general becomes

unaffordable. Ironically, the 2-D movement provides a convenient alibi for the very failure from which the movement was derived. That is, in times of economic hardship, an individual can and should fend for oneself by becoming resourceful and "adaptive," to the extent of finding oneself a facile partner from a fictive world. Even better, a simulated relation as such continues on the one hand to provide "raw material," as Debord attests, capable of generating profit through more production and consumption. On the other hand, self-help via a virtual relationship helps contain the "anomaly" of the assembly line, like Gatebox helping to maintain the work routine of a salaryman who toils away, like every other salaryman, with his only consolation a virtual *waifu* waiting for him at home. Self-help at all costs (and Gatebox is indeed costly) for the sake of keeping the self functioning is a testimony to the self-responsibility required of a good neoliberal citizen.

II.   From Self-Help to Neoliberal Self-Responsibility

During his term of office from 2001–2006, Prime Minster Koizumi Junichiro implemented a series of structural economic reforms, including deregulating labor, defunding public services and privatizing care, to cut down government spending and revitalize the economy. Koizumi's neoliberal turn is couched in the ideology of self-responsibility (*jiko sekinin*), whereby the government shoves the state responsibility of care onto the individual, from everyday livelihood matters such as employment to the exceptional circumstance of war. In 2004, a year before Honda introduced 2-D love in *Moe Man*, five Japanese civilians doing independent news reporting or providing humanitarian aid in Iraq were abducted and held hostage by a militia. From the

negotiation process to their release, and again after the hostages' safe return back home,

Japan's government relentlessly lambasted the hostages as "troublemakers" and waved

the banner of "self-responsibility" by denouncing its own citizens for refusing to comply

with government orders by travelling to a government-declared war zone.[15] Although no

ransom was paid, the government wrote an invoice to each individual hostage as a token

of the "moral responsibility" the hostages owed. The mainstream conservative media

followed suit by smearing the hostages as antisocial delinquents, going to the extreme of

shaming their families for the same lapse in *jiko sekinin*. Yet these individuals were

acting responsibly in offering aid— "responsible" in a Western/individual sense, and in

the sense that what they were doing improved Japan's standing as a moral leader in an

international context. The focus of public debate deflected attention from the bigger issue

of Japan's remilitarization under Koizumi amidst economic uncertainty—for which the

state is responsible under the social contract—to the individual state subjects who

undertook an anti-war peace action as a defiant reminder to the government of its

responsibility in getting Japan involved in a controversial, American-led war.

The hostage saga, in an unexpectedly expedient way, gave Japan's administration

extra leverage to legitimize and firmly uphold the economic motto of "self-reliance, self-

responsibility" as the dominant ethos of a neoliberal Japan. In the era of global market

fundamentalism, *jiko sekinin* signals a reassertion of the neoclassical capitalist doctrine of

laissez-faire, which gives the government license not to care for its people, who are

encouraged to pursue their self-interest with minimal state intervention. As Marie

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[15] Adam Taylor, "Japan and Hostages: A Nagging Feeling That It's Their Fault," *The Washington Post*, January 20, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/01/20/japan-and-hostages-a-nagging-feeling-that-its-their-fault/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.33a0d093a518.

Thorsten points out, the Japanese civilians exercising their freedom by venturing to Iraq embody the very spirit of borderless neoliberalism that the Koizumi administration presumed to advocate.[16] Yet the hostages were punished for the decision they made outside the dictates of the nation-state. Thorsten identifies the hostage crisis and its aftermath as creating what Giorgio Agamben calls "the state of exception" that takes place in extreme conditions of war and political upheaval, during which the law and social norms come to a halt, but not to an end. The state imposes its arbitrary rules by forfeiting the rights of citizens, while reducing their bodies to "bare life." In the case of the Japanese hostages, they are symbolically stripped of citizenship by communal ostracization and taken captive again, with their parents included, by a "feudal kind of joint liability," as Takahashi Tetsuya observes.[17] Notably, though, the public shaming largely orchestrated by the Koizumi government was more than a feudal, paternalistic gesture exhorting its protégés to behave responsibly. It is through the rearticulation of self-responsibility that the neoliberal regime disarticulates itself from its constituents, while rearticulating its power by forcing the citizens to *respond unilaterally* as state subjects to the interpellation of the state. If responsibility, Takahashi elaborates, can only be defined in a reciprocal relationship with others, the unhospitable reception of the hostages from both the government and the public demonstrates a collective irresponsibility in a charade of nationalism. Specifically, the foregrounding of *jiko sekinin* legitimizes a racializing discourse in producing an underclass whose life value is

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[16] Marie Thorsten, "The Homecoming of Japanese Hostages from Iraq: Culturalism or Japan in America's Embrace?" Japan Focus 7, no. 22 (2009): 1-23. https://apjjf.org/-Marie-Thorsten/3157/article.pdf.

[17] Takahashi Tetsuya, quoted in Thorsten, "The Homecoming," 4. See also Takahashi Tetsuya, "Philosophy as Activism in Neo-liberal, Neo-nationalist Japan" (interview by Lee Hyo Duk), trans. Norma Field, Japan Focus 5, no. 17 (2007): 1-24. https://apjjf.org/-H-D-Lee--Takahashi-Tetsuya/2566/article.pdf.

calculable, billable as the invoice the Japanese government wrote to each hostage, and therefore disposable. The state of exception constituted by the Iraq War is in effect a *modus operandi* of neoliberal bio-power to "make live and let die" by managing the population with the apparatuses of in/exclusion.

The doctrine of neoliberal self-responsibility, though, does not simply reflect the further permeation of biopower. The fact that the Koizumi administration adamantly refused to take responsibility, to respond to the crisis it authored, signifies the failure of the symbolic authority, both as a sovereignty and as the parental figure in the affective filial relation the government maintains in the treatment of the hostages. In *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Bernard Stiegler begins by examining the implications of the change in French law that would begin to try minors as adults to circumvent repeated juvenile delinquencies. In Stiegler's indictment, displacing the responsibility of the adult society onto the minors has obfuscated that responsibility as a "*learned* social competency" transmitted through the means of care and education from adults, without which the minors cannot arrive at "maturity" (emphasis original).[18] For an inchoate self to cultivate a consciousness capable of caring for one's instinctual needs (the Freudian id) as well as responding to the demands of the superego, the accountability of the state and the collaboration of the community are required. In other words, self-responsibility is fundamentally and necessarily a shared civic responsibility. To undermine the distinction between adults and minors in judicial rulings is to disregard the responsibility required of the former and the care demanded by the latter, which will ultimately "increasingly [lock] the young—and their parents—into a self-perpetuating irresponsibility" and "a structural

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[18] Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 1-2.

immaturity."[19]

Ironically, Japan's corporate state used *jiko sekinin* as an ideological buttress to shift in full gear to neoliberal governance, clamoring for a more "mature" form of capitalism premised on self-reliance and cutthroat competition. The bestselling critic Asada Akira identifies the postwar Japanese economy as a distinct case of "infantile capitalism" vis-a-vis the "mature capitalism" practiced in the United States and other places.[20] According to Asada, Japan's economic miracle was propelled by "the infantilization" of the Japanese people, who submitted themselves to lifetime employment in exchange for security and care into perpetuity. The absence of intrinsic value to drive individual excellence, as well as the tendency towards dependence manifested in subservience, were a boon to Toyota's lean production.[21] While Asada's observation essentializes historical coincidence in subjectivity formation, the value and individuality he sees lacking in Japanese infantile capitalism finds its full expression in consumption as Japan evolved to "mature capitalism." Individuation proceeds through consumption, and individuality comes to be defined by one's desire to buy. Anthropologist Marilyn Ivy notes that the service industries and advertising during the 1980s and 1990s started to solicit "feeling" and "sensibilities," and correspondingly, "Producers have been compelled to appeal to (and create) highly-targeted, diversified, and nuanced types of consumer desire."[22] Consumption is self-fashioning and self-expressing, giving consumers a highly-prized individuality liberated from the yoke of

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[19] Ibid., 2 & 9.
[20] Asada Akira, "Infantile Capitalism and Japan's Postmodernism: A Fairy Tale," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, eds. Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 273-278.
[21] Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 27-28.
[22] Marilyn Ivy, "Formations of Mass Culture," in *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993), 254.

Japan's feudal, group-oriented society. Japan's consumerist individuation paves the way

for a neoliberal subject shaped and mediated by the market. Koizumi's idea of *jiko*

sekinin is in many ways an extension of "love capitalism": both construct an imaginary

subjectivity, whether enforced or voluntary, that is independent if not isolated, self-reliant

if not self-withdrawing, in a consumerist vacuum. In an attempt to economize through the

privatization of social services, Japan's neoliberal state abdicates its authority to the

hyper-developed market, the "hypermarket" as Stiegler names it, in which everything can

be "evaluated" with a price tag.[23] As demonstrated in the hostage crisis, the hostages

were asked to pay *literally* for their (mis)deeds, for the disservice they did to the public,

for the "service" the government rendered for their repatriation, and for the *love* they

owed to their country. In other words, the Japanese government has indirectly endorsed a

kind of "love capitalism," but on a different scale and scope that peddles patriotic love

rather than romantic.

Love, care and responsibility alike, as part of the shared symbolic order

constituting the common wealth, are valuable precisely because they cannot be evaluated.

As the hypermarket converts symbolic value into calculable, private and privatizable

commodities, the society is downgraded into one that is loveless, careless, and

irresponsible. As the global hypermarket overreaches its bounds and colonizes every

aspect of human life, it flattens the world into one without any horizon to situate the self

and anchor social relations. The borderless world that global capitalists fantasize about

and flaunt is in reality an expansive wasteland that annuls the very basis of such fantasy,

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[23] Bernard Stiegler, "The Disaffected Individual in the Process of Psychic and Collective Disindividuation," *Ars Industrialis*, trans. Patrick Crogan and Daniel Ross, August 2006, http://www.arsindustrialis.org/disaffected-individual-process-psychic-and-collective-disindividuation.

for fantasy necessitates a situating of the desiring subject among the multitude and beholdenness to a symbolic authority that marks the horizon, giving shape and language to fantasy. To wit, fantasy is an expression of *philia,* signifying nascent maturity through internalization of a socialized order. Argued this way, Japan's neoliberal turn to "mature capitalism" is a self-defeating cause, since it conflates fantasy with consumption and kills off *philia* by making the market the ultimate authority. In Stiegler's critique, the world of the hypermarket is "where 'to love' must become synonymous with 'to buy,' a world, in fact, where no one longer loves."[24] Political economy is fundamentally a libidinal economy rooted in spiritual value—spiritual in the sense that value is derived from psychical investment and therefore cannot be completely subsumed under the calculus of market capitalism. Stiegler explains, "[Value] is only worth something inasmuch as it is inscribed in the circuit of desire, of one who only desires what remains *irreducible* to the commensurability of all values. In other words, value is only worth something inasmuch it evaluates what has no price" (emphasis in original).[25] For the value to remain valuable, it has to be symbolic. That helps modulate the drive towards a sublimated social relation and produces a "remainder" that propels and sustains the circulation of exchange in the long term. For the libidinal economy to retain its economy, it has to create a reserve to retain psychic energy.

As Jonathan Crary warns in his book *24/7*, the late-capitalist consumerist regime erodes sleep and reorganizes biological time.[26] However, the hypermarket expands its control not only through biopower, but also through what Stiegler calls psychopower in

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the End of Sleep* (New York: Verso, 2013).

usurping "brain time" and unwiring the mind. In post-industrial capitalism, the service industry and mass marketing increasingly tighten their grip on the mind with the "saturation" of audiovisual apparatuses: saturation not in the sense of market penetration, but in the overconsumption of the senses. Inundated with unremitting stimulation from advertising and cultural programming, the nervous system, as if shot with adrenaline or injected with drugs, is turned "on" high all the time. Stiegler calls late-stage capitalism the "hyperindustrial epoch," in which the new phase of psychotechnologies, such as mass media and cultural programming in the service of consumerism, develop techniques of attention capture with an unprecedented intensity and magnitude, demanding that the mind remains hyperactive and hyper-alert. Psychotechnologies keep pushing the limits of attention saturation at the expense of enervating awareness and intoxicating the mind. On the one hand, information overload causes indigestion, or cognitive congestion, which Stiegler compares to urban traffic that jams up and comes to a deadlock. On the other hand, the industrial hypomnemata has systematically impoverished memory, as memory and the capacity to remember are passed on to an expanding assortment of devices. Memory can literally be bought as a product and stored as a service. Hypomnemata, conceived by our ancestors as mnemonic aids exteriorizing and supplementing the living memory (*anamnesis*) for the purpose of education, has become a convenient alibi for an idle, inattentive and dull mind. The dependence on artificial memories (*hypomnesis*), coupled with the insatiable craving of sensory stimulation, leads to a proletarianization of knowledge, a confusion of consciousness and eventually a loss of mind (*espirit*), all of which are requisite for a responsible civic life.[27]

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[27] Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge, UK: The Polity Press, 2010).

Civilization is established by a psychotechnical system wherein the mutual unfolding of hypomnesis and anamnesis is also the co-creation of the "I" and the "We" towards the infinite becoming. Borrowing Gilbert Simondon's theory, Stiegler identifies such a process as "transindividuation" in a technical milieu supported by mnemonics that enables the co-individuation of the individuated "I" and the inter-individuated "We" (Stiegler and Rogoff).[28] Therefore, a technical milieu is by default associated and extensive in terms of temporality, organized by connecting individuation to the collective inheritance accrued through the passage of time in exteriorized memory. The mutually transforming processes between the "I" and the "We" create a Winnicottian transitional space in which the psychic individual, being a recipient of care and heir to intergenerational knowledge, learns adaptive self-care so it can respond to risks and challenges, that is, *self-responsibility* in its most profound sense. An associated milieu is the key to learning how to work with things (*savoir faire*) and how to live (s*avoir vivre*) with the support of exchanged and accumulated experience. In brief, the technical milieu constitutes the formation of knowledge and the critical faculty. With the technical milieu of the hypermarket being dissociated and cheapened into a TV menu screen, a barcode scanner, or one-click buying, both the "I" and the "We" are transfixed indiscriminately to one and only one category: customers. The capture of "brain time" severs and undercuts the technical prosthetic process that articulates "life time" to the past and towards the future. Both life time and brain time are disarticulated and "short-termed" into commodities that can be evaluated—as by a life insurance company—and compartmentalized—as instanced by pricing advertising in accordance with different air

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[28] Bernard Stiegler and Irit Rogoff, "Transindividuation," e-*flux* 14, March 2010, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/14/61314/transindividuation/.

time slots.

Not only is the "long-circuit" of a technical system broken apart, the circuit of desire as well as that of the libidinal economy is mutilated. In his *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, Stiegler ascribes the financial short-termist tendency which precipitated the 2008 stock market crash to cognitive and affective disaffection. The unrelenting solicitations of advertising campaigns short-circuit desire into unmediated drive. Consumerist psychotechnologies, through means of attention capture, exploit the instinctual drives by spoon-feeding services and products to brains whose consciousness is readily stupefied and retention destroyed. Consumption, when propelled by the circuit of desire, is a productive process whereby an individual and its social relations are produced and transformed towards a sublimated symbolic value. Quoting Marx, Stiegler states that consumption "contributes to the production of some aspect of man."[29] In other words, a "productive" consumption enacts transindividuation and sustains an associated milieu wherein consumption and production are inscribed onto each other, manifesting in the reciprocal transformation of the "I" and "man," i.e. the collective "We." Thus, transindividuation constitutes a "structure of existence," in Stiegler's words, that translates the psychic process into the economic relation, and vice versa. Yet, the hypermarket removes consumption from a contributive and contributable milieu, undoing the self-and-socius reproductive practice of consumption and yielding self-destructive addiction. A consumer is induced—not seduced—to buy despite *and* against itself. 24/7 audiovisual programming and advertising campaigns bypass the circuit of desire that has the important function of modulating libidinal force, and succeed in seizing the id and

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[29] Stiegler, *A New Critique*, 26.

soliciting an automatic response. The putative self that the hypermarket targets is in fact a disenchanted self, voided of its imaginary function that deflects the violent death drive and equips the psyche with a positive sublimating mechanism to work through negotiating with the symbolic to build a sociosymbolic relation and worldview. The psyche, without the buffer of an ameliorating imaginary and a sublimated symbolic order constituted by and constituting the circuit of desire, is laid bare and becomes an open target for the bombardment of advertising. The bliss of customers' "instant gratification" is a death knell in disguise, a nod to the death drive, correlating a wide spectrum of protracted mental and emotional problems to the short-circuiting of desire by drives. One of them is the rapidly growing number of children and youths diagnosed with ADHD in developed and developing countries. The failure to economize libidinal energy leads to a devaluation of all values, and most perniciously, the devalorization of the mind (*espirit*), since desire, which makes value symbolic and therefore valuable beyond calculation, is destroyed.

Thus, hyperindustrial capitalism has degenerated into a dehumanizing, totalitarian dis-economy. When the process of self-formation is hijacked and rewired to respond automatically to the various siren calls of consumption, the psyche in the shaping is disindividuated and dissociated from the socius, a collective milieu in which exchange relations and commerce take place. Commerce, etymologically speaking, means to "converse" with and within the community, which also implies a transgenerational transindividuation, similar to a form of education whereby unruly psychic energy gets socialized and taken care of through cumulative collective effort. Without transindividuation as a mediating safety net, a drive-propelled consumerist economy,

built on sand, is ineluctably risky: it undoes the foundation of commerce through

disinvesting in the spirit that enables the symbolic exchange, i.e. transindividuation,

whereby value is derived. Stiegler contends that when capitalism goes to the extreme, it is

no different from communism, for the psychic individual is turned spiritless, demotivated

and subject to an unremitting regime of marketing that supersedes sovereignty and

imposes a far more brutal and totalizing control than totalitarianism. With

transindividuation as the structure of existence actively destroyed, unbridled capitalism

tyrannizes body and mind beyond the sphere of economy, making survival a daily battle

as in a war zone. Thus, Japan's hostage crisis is not simply another example of Japan's

unforgiving collectivism or the protracted subordination of Japan to the United States

since the end of World War II. It is a metaphor for daily terrorism as the new normal

created by late-stage capitalism. Specifically, the emotional incarceration the hostages

underwent after their safe return back home bespeaks the real crisis that had been

brewing for decades: home is no longer home, and the sense of *philia* required for

building the community is in jeopardy.

III.   Precarious Home and the New Breed

In *Precarious Japan*, Ann Allison gives a bleak anthropological account of how

post-bubble Japan is now a "relationless society" (*muen shakai*), in stark contrast to the

postwar Japan organized by the principle of *amae*.[30] Psychoanalyst Doi Takeo postulates

amae as the Japanese trait of needing to be loved or feeling entitled to "depend on the

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[30] Allison, *Precarious Japan,* 15.

benevolence of others." *Amae* used to nestle together family, school and work—the three

pillars of corporate familism—into a bind of dependency and a bond of care. The basis of

Japan's corporate familism is the picture-perfect imagination of "my-home-ism," in

which home is portrayed as a middle-class haven equipped with ever-more-innovative

consumer electronics (like Gatebox) and a Toyota car.[31] The emergence of my-home-ism

in the 1970s offered a small and attainable ideal as a substitution, or rather a distraction,

for the radical political beliefs that were all the rage at the time but soon put to rest.

Specifically, as Allison identifies, my-home-ism is "at once a consumer dream and social

contract," whereby domestic felicity with material comfort is the reward for hard work,

for aligning oneself with the normative course of life from being a diligent student at

school, to a reliable bread earner at home, to a loyal worker to the company.[32]

Exclusively reserved for men, the ideology of my-home-ism consigns women to

the role of housekeeping and child rearing. Men rely on women's unpaid domestic labor

so as to devote all their time to the company, while the state depends on mothers to

reproduce and educate their kids to be a reproductive force. The company, which depends

on men's labor, promises in return tenure and incremental wage increases, implicitly

intended for men to raise their families. Configured this way, the company is the

extension of the family providing paternalistic care and authoritative benevolence, which

rationalizes after-work business entertainments (*karaoke* or visits to hostess bars, for

instance) and extended overtime as part of familial duties and obligations. The mutual

enmeshment between the public workplace and the private home, between labor and

leisure, between loyalty and love, is conditioned by and conditions the reciprocal affect

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[31] Ibid., 22.
[32] Ibid.

of *amae.* Allison recapitulates, "Dependency, performance, and affect melded in a very particular architecture in these 'Japanese' relations of nestled (family and corporate) belonging."[33] For a salaryman, entering a big company is very like tying a marriage knot in the sense that he is expected and expecting to make a lifelong commitment, both physically and emotionally. In other words, the salaryman readily enters a "virtual marriage," not with a 2-D partner, but with the company which he will "*amaeru*" (the act of expressing *amae*) for both his material and affective wellbeing.

At the height of Japanese economic prowess, nationalistic discourses on Japaneseness (*nihonjinron*) embraced *amae* to be the *de facto* socio-psychological infrastructure giving Japan a competitive edge over individualistic capitalism elsewhere. In Doi's conception, *amae* is considered an infantile psyche prevalent among Japanese people who, being overly invested in their own needs, become attached and submissive to their perceived caregivers and thus create for themselves authority figures they can depend on.[34] Admittedly, Doi's model is as essentializing as *nihonjinron,* and his account, mostly based on anecdotes, needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Nonetheless, his concern over the Japanese being locked into insular self-interest and tenacious conformity is warranted. As a parental-filial bond that comes to define every aspect of social relations, the structure of need and its fulfillment is readily defined and managed by perceived "parental" figures—from "education mama" at home, to the boss at work, to the policymakers of the state. These policymakers have the final say regarding the extent to which and the specific mode in which "care" is rendered. Allison gives familiar examples of how kids with good grades at school are rewarded with "consumer treats,"

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[33] Ibid., 26.
[34] Doi Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (New York: Kodensha, 1971/2014).

and the salaryman's diligence and loyalty are repaid not only with a salary, but with

company-sponsored recreational activities, such as tours and visits to the hostess bars

mentioned earlier. That is to say, Japan's state-instituted enterprise society (*kigyo shakai*),

coupled with the ideology of my-home-ism, calibrates an economy of "care" streamlined

to the consumerist economy and petit bourgeois lifestyle. While Doi problematizes the

psychological dependency on the caregiving of others, the bigger issue lies in the fact that

the ideal and the administering of "care" remains by and large entrenched in a primordial

stage of gratifying the instinctual drive, specifically the drive to consume. *Amae* as the

wish for dependency, or more accurately put, the desire to perform self-care by entrusting

oneself to the care of others, was an inherited cultural legacy and an expedient strategy to

rebuild community as the Japanese tried to survive postwar devastation and the political

vacuum immediately following the defeat.[35] But when computed into a kind of

"unofficial economy" buttressing economic development, the moral and spiritual value of

amae is systematically devalued into pure calculation by state corporate capitalism.

When the bubble burst in the 1990s, the close-knit social relations, the "socio-

affective ties" in Allison's words, fostered by *amae*-based corporate familism also slowly

dissipated. Allison's ethnography tracks how job insecurity and work scarcity in post-

bubble, neoliberal Japan have created a new social underclass, namely the "precariat,"

which she defines as "the precarious proletariat of irregular workers."[36] She expands the

discussion on precarity to the affective and cognitive registers, arguing that precarity,

sensed and lived as everydayness, is "of an affective turn to desociality that, for many,

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[35] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 27.
[36] Ibid., 7.

feels painfully bad."[37] This feeling of being misplaced or out-of-place overwhelms and contaminates the social, manifests itself in the phenomenon of the "relationless society" (*muen shakai*), in which "it is difficult to survive and difficult to muster up the kind of civic responsibility to sense beyond one's own pain to that shared by others…."[38] Precarity is a pervasive existential crisis, for it debilitates the formation of a consensus and the *philia* required for a civic order (*polis*) as the individual turns in upon itself and becomes estranged in its own island. The pain inflicted on the precariat is derived from "having a life that no one grieves upon death and living a precariousness that no one *cares* to share with you in the here and now" (emphasis added).[39] For Allison, economic precarity incapacitates the ability to care for self and others, to the extent that Japanese society as a whole suffers "the deficit of care."

Writing amidst the Tohoku Earthquake of 2011, Alison sees the ruin and nuclear waste left by the earthquake as literalizing a toxic social landscape existing already: the economic impasse, the miasma of politics, the dearth of social welfare, and most precariously, the overwhelming sense of hopelessness and homelessness. The exodus in the wake of the earthquake sheds light on "ordinary refugeeism," such as the increasing number of internet café refugees, also dubbed "cyber-homeless," who are low-wage, dispensable workers taking shelter in the tiny cubicles of internet cafés for lack of stable income to afford housing. Occupying the same continuum as net refugees is the better-known *hikikomori*, the Japanese modern-day radical recluses who cage themselves in a room and voluntarily cut off all social contact, including with their own family members.

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[37] Ibid., 15.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 15.

Allison quotes one *hikikomori*'s self-description that their existence is akin to "homeless at home."[40] Since Japan's welfare is built on familism, the dissolution of family is both the immediate cause and the consequence of a disintegrating welfare state. In the past, not the government, but Japan's corporations, with their familial structure maintained by the bond of *amae,* used to administer care for the entire household whose head, the salaryman, is supposed to work for the company for life. In other words, before the Koizumi government justified privatization in the name of self-responsibility, the Japanese state abdicated its responsibility to the private sector. Family and its reenactment of corporate familism were expected to accept the liability by absorbing the impacts of economic fluctuations and other unexpected risk factors until they could not absorb any more; then, the idea of home itself becomes a liability. Due to work insecurity, many members of the younger generation opt out of marriage, or resort to more economic means like virtual *waifu* instead of asking someone else's hand.

With the shift to a neoliberal hiring policy that prioritizes flexibility and minimizes job protection, permanent employment is no longer a guarantee and an unspoken obligation. Prospects of home vanish without the dependable employment required to sustain a family, and without government assistance, which is often not accessed due to the shame and stigma attached to receiving welfare. Moreover, although the number of homeless in Japan is relatively low compared to other developed countries, the feeling of not belonging, of being existentially uprooted and adrift, seeps into the corners and cracks hidden from the public view, at the net café and at home. Lonely death (*kodokushi*) has developed into a new normal: elders are dying alone unnoticed in their

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[40] Ibid., 3.

homes or residences, only to be discovered weeks or months later when the odor of their

rotting bodies betrays their presence. *The Washington Post* reports that an industry has

burgeoned from the increasing number of lonely deaths, providing a whole package of

services such as cleaning up the apartment and selling insurance policies to landlords.[41]

Not only is home vacated of its symbolic function of nurturing life and care: on the

contrary, it cements, if not expedites, the process from social death to actual death. The

physical "home" to which that one retreats for a solitary existence and quiet death is not

an inviolable and immutable sanctuary, but a liability, a volatile item, listed on insurance

policies subject to the fluctuations of the insurance market. If the dignity of living is hard

to come by—people are trapped in a Kafkaesque existence of being self-incarcerated in a

cell that can hardly be called home—the dignity of death is further denied and reduced to

a number projected by an insurance policy that protects property and property owners,

not dwellers, sealing death off and "cleaning up" any trace of an existence that is already

under erasure when alive. The capitalist calculating machine continues clicking even

when "life time" comes to a halt. The social fabric of home that ties generations together

and carries both mental and physical life towards an imagined and imaginable future is

shredded and turned into a definitive balance sheet.

While Allison's project charts the effects of neoliberal precarity experienced at

the most intimate level of the social fabric, the family, I argue that the "social contract"

bounded by postwar my-home-ism has long strained familial relations by mutating the

process of transindividuation through consumerism. Specifically, the unnerving anomaly

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[41] Anna Fifield, "Cleaning Up after the Dead," *The Washington Post,* January 24, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world/wp/2018/01/24/feature/so-many-japanese-people-die-alone-theres-a-whole-industry-devoted-to-cleaning-up-after-them/?utm_term=.e4ed3ed474e0.

of *hikikomori* and the deviant subculture of otaku, the two high-profile phenomena

claimed to represent Japan's troubled youth, are the direct corollary of "my-home-ism."

Before coming to connote anime and manga fanatics, the word otaku was originally an

honorific term for home (*taku*) and by metaphorical extension an honorific for the

second-person pronoun 'you.' The etymological slippage between *otaku* as "your house"

or "your family," as a reciprocal term of address between distant equals, and *otaku* as a

derogative designation for fans of anime and manga trapped in a fantasy land of their

own making, is not merely coincidental. The shifting meaning of otaku also reflects the

changes and the challenges that occur in the space called home, or factors that share

similar functions to home in enabling the process of transindividuation. In Azuma's

studies on otaku, he traces the "origin" of otaku culture back to the 1970s, when the first

generation of otaku entered adolescence watching *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974) and

Mobile Suit Gundam (1979).[42] While charting the generational differences of otaku in

terms of the time period in which they were born and the media contents they consumed

as they grew up, he proposes to see the emergence of otaku culture as part of the

concerted ideological effort to "domesticate American culture" after student- and worker-

led anti-American movements fizzled at the end of the 1960s.[43] The surrender to

Americanization in the 1970s shows most prominently in Japan's rapid transformation

into a full-fledged consumer society in tandem with its meteoric ascent to global

economic prominence. As historian John W. Dower also notes, the mottos of my-home-

ism and my-car-ism propagated by mass media led average civilians to "bask in Japan's

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[42] Azuma Hiroki, Otaku: *Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Kono Shion
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 4-5.
[43] Ibid., 11.

international influence as a new economic power and become consumed by materialistic pursuits."[44] The advertising campaign of *mai hōmu* ("my home"), first introduced to market electronics such as refrigerators and electronic rice cookers in the late 1950s, entered mainstream discourse, aiming to "domesticate" libidinal energy by turning it inward from public sociopolitical domains to a newly commodified home space.

Henceforth, the sense of belonging is redefined by material belongings and the objects of consumption. By the 1970s, color TV was inducted into the "new three sacred treasures," which by now were redefined as the "three Cs"—car, color TV, and cooler (air conditioner). For more than a millennium, the three imperial regalia of mirror, jewel and sword with a mythical origin were emblematic of Japanese national identity and belonging. As Allison notes, they find their modern equivalents in the family-school-corporate triad of Japan's enterprise society.[45] The ever-shifting repertoire of postwar national symbols from household appliances to cars and television, and on to the latest upgrade of the three sacred treasures in the digital age—flat-screen television, digital camera and DVD recorder—bespeaks a persistent and intensifying consumerist reconfiguration of everyday family life. The rice cooker and fridge during the mid-1950s reduced women's domestic chores and consigned women to the role of "education mama" (*kyōiku mama*), whose full-time unpaid job is to help their children with their studies and drive them to excel at school while the salaryman father is largely absent, slaving away at work.[46] The introduction of the three Cs by the 1970s, which shaped the formative years of the first generation of otaku, marks a decisive break from the earlier

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[44] John W. Dower, *Ways of Forgetting, Ways of Remembering: Japan in the Modern World* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 220.

[45] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 22.

[46] Ibid., 26.

Fordist family by introducing the luxury of having a "break." The idea of leisure and

entertainment has now become firmly ingrained in the structure of middle-class family

life: while "family time" expands centrifugally away from the domestic space through

family car ownership, it also contracts centripetally around the television set that displays

the world in a colorful palette.[47] The bourgeois revolution first initiated by the Meiji

Restoration in the mid-nineteenth century reached a new height, heralding the birth of

shinjinrui (new *homo sapiens*) with which otaku is identified. Similar to the immediately

preceding *danso* generation (with *danso* implying "dislocation" and "gap"), the new

breed, as the moniker of *shinjinrui* intimates, aimed self-consciously to deflect from the

cultural mores adhered to by their parents, the baby boomers.[48] Contrary to the baby

boomers, whose memory of postwar devastation and post-1968 disempowerment had

given way to the experience of the stifling but effective state-corporate machine that

helped build a solid middle class, both the *danso* and *shinjinrui* generations, beneficiaries

of newly accumulated wealth, embraced consumerism and welcomed commodified

individualism. Consumption and spending habits became a statement of personal

lifestyle. As the *danso* generation lavished their income on the hardware associated with

"the three Cs," cars and AV gadgets for instance, the *shinjinrui* generation spent both

their *time* and money on "software," i.e. the media and specifically popular culture

disseminated through mass media. If the *danso* generation prided themselves on

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[47] Sepp Linhart, "From Industrial to Postindustrial Society: Changes in Japanese Leisure-Related Values and Behavior," in *Shōwa Japan: Political, Economic and Social History 1926-1989, Vol.1*, ed. Stephen S. Large (London: Routledge, 1998), 211-244.
[48] Kristie Wong, "Gen X? Millennials? A Quick Guide to Japan's Generation Cohorts," Btrax, September 28, 2016, https://blog.btrax.com/gen-x-millennials-a-quick-guide-to-japans-generation-cohorts/. See also David Hole, Le Zhong, and Jeff Schwartz, "Talking about Whose Generation? Why Western Generational Models Can't Account for a Global Workforce," *Deloitte Review*, no. 6 (2010):84-97. https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/talking-about-whose-generation-ages-and-attitudes-among-the-global-workforce/US_deloittereview_Talking_About_Whose_Generation_Jan10.pdf.

"acquiring worldliness" through oversea travels, *shinjinrui* took several steps further by translating cosmopolitanism into varying strands of local practice that went beyond tangible material consumption. The foray into the world takes place right at home: one's own room is turned into a playground, a base for space-time odyssey.

Shinjinrui, often compared to Generation X in Japan, rebelled against the vertical, collective structure of Japan's workplace that glues each individual to a hermetically tight group with an unbending hierarchy. As Alison observes, starting in the late 1980s, youths with financial backing from their parents and buoyed by a still-bright economic outlook, preferred flexible part-time jobs to conforming themselves to the predetermined, lifelong track of the salaryman.[49] The option of being temp workers, *furītā* in Japanese, was initially marketed by job agencies as a "new-age" style of living to sell the highly-priced ideal of freedom. *Furītā*, its English equivalent being "freeter," refers to "freelance worker" and weds two seemingly mutually exclusive concepts, freedom and worker. When *furītā* was first launched as a viable lifestyle choice, it signified a kind of privilege and entitlement, for the term in its initial definition excluded pre-existing contingent labor, which provided no alternative but to work part-time on demand or by short-term contracts. Such a "peripheral" work force, consisting of women such as housewives and men lacking education credentials, for instance, had been integral to Japan's economic miracle, for it provided flexibility, namely dispensability, to Toyota's lean Just-in-Time production.[50] During the first Lost Decade, the term *furītā* lost its sheen as a lifestyle alternative, but instead became a damning curse on the fast-growing population of the neoliberal precariat in Japan. Short-term employment used to

[49] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 28-29.
[50] Ibid., 25.

promise a dream—escape from the cultural norm—but it turned into a nightmare engulfing the entire nation after the economic bubble burst. *Shinjinrui*, with its open disavowal of inherited work ethics and embrace of imported Western values, is often singled out as the quintessential example of corrupted youth, a new breed of generic mutations and spiritual degeneracy as implied by the derogative nomenclature "new *homo sapiens.*" While policymakers and older generations like to blame the youth and their laziness, starting from *shinjinrui,* for the country's irrevocable economic downtown, few are willing to address the inextricable relationship between the dispiriting zeitgeist and the "tradition" of my-home-ism implemented by the state. Consumption is a part of the deal written in the social contract of my-home-ism: one commits his own lifetime to work in order to buy a home and afford a dream family life.

That is to say, *shinjinrui* does not constitute a singular watershed moment by deviating from the trajectory of home-school-work preordained by Japan's enterprise society. Nor does *shinjinrui* fall completely out of alignment with institutionalized industrial subjectivity—after all, *shinjinrui* are abiding citizens in the sense that they adhere to the doctrine of consumerism and are "industrious" in consuming objects and ideas. Considering how the ideology of my-home-ism purports to reorganize libidinal investment through work and consumption, the emergence of *shinjinrui* unmistakably signifies the final culmination of a decades-long ideological endeavor. The attention of *shinjinrui* was successfully "distracted" from the real world to a world mediated and framed by the color TV set. In so doing, *shinjinrui* upgraded the consumerism part of my-home-ism to the next level by engaging in immaterial consumption. They were arguably the first generation who consumed media voraciously, and the objects of their

consumption extend far beyond what was shown on television. *Shinjinrui* propelled the

"New Academism" movement, shortened to *nyu aka*, by translating theories of

postmodernism and French poststructuralism into middlebrow-mass-market bestsellers.

Scholars and critics have commented on the rise of New Academism as a prominent

phenomenon prompted by the saturation and sophistication of the market. Through clever

advertising campaigns and a bourgeois consumer culture in avid pursuit of distinction and

taste, the movement created what Ivy describes "a spectacle of a thoroughly commodified

world of knowledge."[51]

In his English introduction to Azuma's book on otaku, Jonathan Abel traces the

shaping of the otaku subculture, as well as the ensuing "theories" of otaku like Azuma's,

to the historical juncture of the 1980s. The ascendency of *shinjinrui* and New Academism

provided a "theoretical" underpinning to an already existing but fledgling and largely un-

self-aware community of otaku, thereby valorizing it. For instance, Asada's rigorous

scholarly book, *Structure and Power*, became an unlikely hit and an instant sensation.

Although the subject was esoteric and the language hardly digestible, the book injected

psychoanalytic locutions such as the *schizo* and the *parano* into everyday vocabulary.

Theories, or pop-theories, popularized through New Academism, have informed

critically-acclaimed anime works such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* which I analyze in

another chapter. *Shinjinrui*'s commodification of knowledge offers a glamorous avenue

for self-commodification and self-branding. Okada Toshio's "Introduction to

Otakuology" adopts the wannabe-intellectual posturing of *shinjinrui* and writes a self-

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[51] Marilyn Ivy, "Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts: The Consumption of Knowledge in Postmodern Japan," in *Postmodernism and Japan*, eds. Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 21-46 (26).

congratulatory manifesto, declaring otaku to be a people with "evolved" perception. An intellectual was no longer deemed as a haughty ideal beyond reach, but a vogue one could buy oneself into. Concurrently, the impervious and elitist circle of *bundan* ("the world of letters") formed since the Meiji Restoration was forced open and thrust into the media spotlight during the 1980s. Asada himself was made into a celebrity with a devout following, pursued in the same way an anime character is worshipped by otaku, or a pop singer idolized by fans.

Thus, critical discourses had coalesced with cults of personality, and knowledge was turned into a kind of "informational commodity," as Ivy calls it. On the one hand, *shinjinrui* had the choice of *furītā* offered by career agencies as a kind of service, and on the other hand they fed on creative cultural products, ranging from idol singers to TV shows to abstruse-sounding theories from the West. The convenience brought by then-new personal electronic gadgets, coupled with the leisure given by the temp job option, made *shinjinrui*'s brain, especially their "brain time," available and readily expropriated to produce surplus value through consumption. *Shinjnrui* rejected being evaluated by the biological time they were available to work. They ended up being evaluated by the brain time they had available to buy and consume. With the ventures of New Academism and various "individualistic" pursuits that ranged from free floating jobs to the single or childless lifestyle, *shinjinrui* aimed to extricate themselves from a postwar corporate capitalism that turns home and school, two vital vehicles for psychic individuation, into cogs in the nation's reproductive machine. Yet as mentioned above, the individualism they championed was inextricably intertwined with late-capitalist consumerist individuation, whereby their subjectivity was the prime target and commodity of the

service and cultural industries. Such individuality is a preprogrammed, tailor-made product that aims to further the industry's growth while arresting the development of a psyche and cutting it off from any transindividualizing milieu in which the process of individuation produces the individual in a close proximity to the coindividuation of "We." The psyche is made to stay honed in on consumption and subjected to the control of the industry's automated superego, in Herbert Marcuse's words, that dictates the formation and expression of the "self" within the confines of the industry.[52]

Shinjinrui is ultimately an outgrowth and amplification of my-home-ism, not an exception or a cause for trouble to its order. Inevitably, the movement of *shinjinrui* was readily co-opted by the state for different purposes. One cardinal feature in New Academism's rendition of western theories is that it gears itself towards and limits itself to a sense of self-reflexivity heightened by individual consumption power and Japan's global economic prowess. Postmodernism and psychoanalysis in particular gained a wider currency than others, for they meshed with the commodification of self-identity impelled by the advanced phase of consumer culture. The fad of postmodernism in the 1980s reanimated centuries-old studies of *nihonjinron* (Japaneseness), revamping narcissistic ethnocentricism by identifying Japan as the embodiment of postmodernity on its upward quest to phase out the West, viewed as still stuck in modernity. New Academism was spun into a nationalistic discourse, and *shinjinrui*, chided as a subhuman creature, was exalted to be the frontier of "Japaneseness," with its open avowal of the postmodern lifestyle. *Shinjinrui*, shunning a rigid career path, give a raison d'etre to a hiring practice that glamorizes temporary employment at first, and have slowly made it

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[52] Herbert Marcuse*, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boson: The Beacon Press, 1964).

part of the new neoliberal normal, particularly after Koizumi's economic reforms. *Furītā* used to emblemize prestige and freedom but has now turned into a curse and a permanent enslavement.

More alarmingly, *shinjinrui* as a generational marker for the youth of the 1980s makes a drastic departure from the left-leaning student activism of the 1960s, or the failed 1936 coup d'état orchestrated by young military officers in the name of protecting the Emperor's power. The anti-establishment impulse of *shinjinrui*, if any, was driven and neatly contained within a consumerist haven, which is precisely the ideological purpose of my-home-ism. Rebellion does not need a cause, but it certainly comes with a cost in an unabashedly literal way: for instance, in the way the Koizumi government billed the hostages, who defied government orders and rebelled for a cause. Youth revolt can be a precious gift, for it channels libidinal energy to vitalize the political economy, articulating through fantasy or anger the desire for and an unmistakable psychic investment in the socius, the "We." However, the most precarious precarity Japan is confronted with is the overwhelming lethargy, apathy, and disaffection among the youth, who do not seek help or go vote and organize protests even if they have been living on the edge and constantly pushed towards the brink of existence. Their spirit shrivels in misery masked in consumerist euphoria, which lures them to be chained to a space which is called "home" but is effectively an echo chamber with a closed feedback loop that only reinforces the misery. My-home-ism ultimately destroys home and its social reproductive function altogether.

**IV.	Transitional Space Displaced, Play Unlearned**

In his report "The Kids Are All Wrong," W. David Marx provides a contrary view to the popular, long-standing opinion lamenting that "the kids are all wrong" and that the youth is destroying Japan.[53] Written as a response to a torrent of attacks accusing individuality-oriented *yutori* education of making children "stupid," Marx sees the problem less in youth underperforming academically than in their settling prematurely for an underachieving and nonachieving life. What's at stake is not whether the kids have done anything substantially wrong. It's that they simply are not bringing themselves to do anything at all. In Marx's observation, it is almost part of the "tradition" for Japan's parental authorities to blame their offspring for failing their expectations, and each generation just keeps hitting a lower rock bottom than the last. Since generation cohort segmentation is also market segmentation, whereby each generation label is simultaneously a niche customer categorized by its buying power and consumption habits, the "adults'" incriminating discourse against youth also bows to the logic of consumerism: the youth is condemned for consuming either too much or too little, and for consuming in a way that does not directly contribute to Japan's corporate economy. The *shinjinrui* are notorious for their excessive consumption: they have radically recast the postwar doctrine of "work-to-consume" into the postindustrial principle of "consumption as work." Yet viewed in retrospect, the *shinjinrui* appear to be driven by a yearning for alternatives, and driven to consume products and services that claim to give them a reprieve, however deceptive and short-lived, from social norms. In comparison, youth in post-bubble Japan after the *shinjinrui* generation are demotivated and dispirited

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[53] W. David Marx, "The Kids Are All Wrong," *Neojaponisme,* January 9, 2008, http://neojaponisme.com/2008/01/09/the-kids-are-all-wrong/.

to the extent that they do not buy into consumption as self-expression with the prospect of bettering their future. They show no interest or patience to venture into what they do not know or understand, when the existing structure they know of has denied their possibilities and potential. They are not driven to perform, and neither are they bothered to misbehave or rebel.

Going against the grain, Marx argues that what has gone wrong is that contemporary Japanese youths rarely go out of their way to rectify the wrong passed down from their parents. The fact that they do not even take the trouble to make trouble evinces a debilitating paralysis and a slow social death. Japan's corporate society has straitjacketed the youth on all fronts, and their future is damned either way. The kid either survives the cutthroat school system only to enter an equally, if not more, oppressive corporate environment where job security is no longer a given, or strays from their predetermined life path and became permanently stuck in the status of *furītā* and NEET (not in education, employment, or training). Japan's youth are "rational actors," Marx stresses, in choosing not to participate in any productive actions oriented towards the state, including organized uprisings against the status quo. Instead, in Marx's apt analogy, "They are sad puppies, moping instead of channeling and sublimating anger into productive action."[54] They simply play it safe by retreating into their comfort zone securely confined by trivial and largely forgettable communication, "without much emphasis on the content" as Marx notes, with those whom they follow and become acquainted with through ephemeral communities mediated by their electronic devices. Marx's main concern is precisely this void of "intellectual content" pervading the

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[54] Ibid.

personal, the educational, the sociopolitical and the cultural domains. After materialism overtook Marxism in the 1970s and became the reigning principle of Japanese society, cultural expressions, from literature and art to fashion and the popular culture that once defined Japan's creative moments in the 1980s and 1990s, pivoted to follow capitalist logic and devolved into mere means of driving consumption. For youth, there is neither *drive* nor money to buy anymore. The drastically diminished consumer power of youth has forced companies to re-strategize their marketing to target the older citizens who own the country's assets. What is left for the youth to consume is only the highly generic, insipid media programmed to ensure they stay put. Marx identifies, "[T]his is the sad irony of Japanese youth today: they are post-materialists in a society where culture has been constructed as an empty vehicle for commercial transaction."[55] In a nutshell, Japan is plagued with a kind of cultural capitalism without culture, as libidinal economy has reached its limit by exhausting its drives to propel political economy.

In a call to arms, Marx hopes that Japan's youth can look beyond their sheltered selves, "creatively" shake up the dysfunctional system they have inherited, and envision the potential of "the Internet and new social forces" in stimulating creativity and motivating those who are excluded from the career path dictated by neoliberalism. However, Marx does not explain exactly what these new forces are, nor does he consider whether the Internet will end up commodifying these new forces and draining and banalizing youth's creative energies, which is what has already happened and continues to happen in the "shell" Japan's youth retreats to. Seemingly benign technologically-mediated communication and the happy-go-lucky communities it temporarily builds are

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[55] Ibid.

considered by Marx to be so many symptoms illustrating the inertia and escapism among youth. The contradiction between seemingly carefree liveliness and abject self-abnegating withdrawal, according to Allison, underlies the tenuous existence lived and experienced on a daily basis in precarious Japan. She begins her book by introducing *hikikomori* as the prime example of such contradiction. While *hikikomori* cloister themselves in voluntary social isolation and feel exiled in their own home, they gnaw obsessively at the delusion fed by gaming and Internet surfing. The advertising slogan for NHK's *hikikomori*-focused series *NHK ni yōkoso*, "non-stop hikikomori action", speaks volumes of the strenuous existence that puts *hikikomori* permanently on edge.[56] The compulsion to "plug in" despite and against themselves is a phenomenon not limited to the obviously troubled group of *hikikomori*. Studies on cellphone use have found immense competitive pressure among teenage girls to master "instant communicative ability" in order to stay popular and remain included in a bubbly, tenuous social network that requires a strictly-controlled, self-censored performance. Instead of sharing uninhibitedly the intimate experience of pain and struggle, one is expected to hold back and read the cues, *kuuki wo yomu* (often abbreviated as KY) in Japanese which literally means "reading the air," so as not to burden others and destabilize the delicate effervescence. The "connectedness" and relationality maintained through such socially-coded transactions are fickle and vulnerable and lock the individual in a chronic state of psychic stress.

For Allison and Marx, youth withdrawal from social and economic life is one of the many concurrent symptoms of a stagnant economy, and most gravely, a zeitgeist that

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[56] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 3.

is bursting alongside the economic bubble. Both attribute the anguish or apathy among youth to the devastating consequences of a post-bubble, neoliberal Japan that no longer renders care and hope to its nascent generations. I argue however that Japan's postwar socioeconomic restructuring *allegedly* predicated on my-home-ism is a precarious system to begin with. *Mai hōmu* ("my home"), a sociolinguistic intervention retaining its original English syntax, prepared an unapologetic shift to what I term "possessive familism." As mentioned earlier, the electronic sector in the mid-1950s introduced *mai hōmu,* assigned the housewife a role of consumer, and injected the ideas of "private life" and "leisure" into a domestic space decorated with the new three sacred treasures. By the late 1960s and 1970s, *mai hōmu* entered a different dimension, with government provisions encouraging homeownership among middle-class nuclear families. In response to the housing crisis caused by major cities' overpopulation amidst the rapid growth from 1955–1961 and Japan's economic miracle in the "Golden Sixties," the construction and sale of the residential "new towns" developed in the vicinity of metropolises during the late 1960s and 1970s and reconfigured Japan's urban, domestic and psychological landscape.[57] What came along with the urban sprawl was the contraction of community into a dormitory settlement that first confines family life within the walls of an apartment-cell, i.e. "*mai hōmu,*" and then frames domesticity and individuality around television and computer screens. Today, the electronic bulletin boards youths get hooked on, the shell *hikikomori* shut themselves in, and the net café where itinerant workers find shelter are mutations and offshoots of my-home-ism that has gone off-kilter. But has my-

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[57] Philip Brasor and Masako Tsubuku, "Japan's 'New Towns' Are Finally Getting Too Old," *The Japan Times*, Nov. 1, 2011, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2011/11/01/how-tos/japans-new-towns-are-finally-getting-too-old/#.XIH_JVNKhAY.

home-ism ever worked?

Allison identifies my-home-ism as "guided by the principle of reproductive futurism," promising a middle-class, "aspirational normality."[58] On paper (recall that *mai-hōmu* started out as an advertising slogan circulating in print), my-home-ism promises a kind of futurism that prompts upward mobility, or at least class stability if one follows without fail the streamlined road map of home-school-work. However, Japan's possessive familism turns home and school, two vital transitional spaces for psychic individuation, into cogs in the nation's reproductive machine and completely calculable variables for driving consumption. From Toshiba's rice cooker, Sony's Walkman and PlayStation, to Gatebox, myriad dazzling technological innovations have constituted an extensive scale of grammatization that exteriorizes and discretizes the temporal flow of consciousness (in listening to music), bodily gestures (in making rice), and desire (of having a virtual *waifu*) to a highly-industrialized, profit-oriented mnemotechnical milieu. The creative individuation and maturation that traditional transitional spaces enable become what Stiegler calls "proletarianization."[59] The sophisticated material culture Japan is famous for and takes pride in is paradoxically the culprit, at least in part, in effecting proletarianization. For Stiegler, the proletariat does not refer to the economically dispossessed but to those who are affectively and cognitively deprived as a result of being disindividuated, dissociated from the circuits of transindividuation. In *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, Stiegler likens this rupture of transindividuation to the process of *proletarianization*. In the classical example of proletarianization, industrialization has stripped the worker of skills and knowledge by passing them on to

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[58] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 47.
[59] Stiegler, *A New Critique*.

machines, causing the workers' alienation from tools, specifically from the embodied experience and memory learned from wielding the tools. Workers are dissociated from a technical system, a sociotechnical milieu constituted of intergenerational memory that facilitates individuation: workers become *homo sapiens* through participating in production. Human existence, as readily implied by its Latin root, *ex-sistere*, is actualized through its standing and continuously unfolding relation with objects outside of oneself.[60] The milieu, once dissociated from embodied acts of memory, denies the "existence" of workers, as well as the pursuit of "consistence" whereby human existence, in conjoining with its objects, mutually transforms towards the social and the collective. Without the workers' contributions that simultaneously individuate and transform the milieu, a milieu is reduced into an *indifferent* bureaucratic machine such as the one installed by Stalin, which imposes a state-controlled individuation unmediated by any movement of différance. Différance creates differentiation, dissimulation through temporal deferral, and in enabling différance, the process of individuation produces singularities that reject commensurability and defy calculation, thus inducing the circulation of values. An economy short-circuiting individuation and disabling différance is a devaluating diseconomy, spawning proletarians deprived of know-how, and thus lacking the motive to live, to desire an infinite future. In other words, the proletariat mass-produced by a dissociated industrial milieu is a precariat who does not *care* to work, because work is simply driven by needs and degraded into a mere means of "subsistence" devoid of any spiritual, communal value.

The "consumer revolution" brought by *mai-hōmu-shugi* has further deepened the

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[60] "Vocabulary-English Version," trans. Robert Hughes, Ars Industrialis, http://www.arsindustrialis.org/vocabulary-english-version.

spiritual crisis of industrial proletarianization. With home electronics getting smarter and smarter, human intelligence and motive are further proletarized from a young age starting right at home, the transitional space fundamental for individuation and transindividuation. The subject's becoming the subject, i.e. individuation, depends on the co-individuation of "We," for the transitional object embodies more than memory traces of the mother. The object, bearing what Stiegler calls "tertiary memory," is first and foremost the exteriorization of memories and materialization of knowledge accrued through generations. The transitional object is, therefore, the medium of initiating the preliminary stage of learning the ways of the world and internalizing the rules passed down by the forebears. This is how a given "culture" is transmitted and its authority fortified. In this regard, the transitional space enables a psychic apparatus of embedding the reality principle in the pleasure principle, inscribing the Symbolic in the Real. As Stiegler insists, "To play with the child is to take care of the child, opening the paths by which transitional spaces are created, paths that simulate the origins of art, culture, and ultimately of everything that forms the symbolic order…."[61] Parents giving and being given time to play with kids constitutes a kind of "tender complicity" that transforms the raw instinctual drives in *id* to a long circuit of desire capable of sustained imagination and fantasy, which is the symbolic sublimation of the intergenerational desire stored in the unconscious. Freudian laughter, or Silvan Tomkins' affect system, is embedded in the "play" that unfolds in the object relation in transitional space. It is in this space that individuation proceeds either through the partial and contingent filiation between id, ego and unconscious, as in Freud, or through a self-modulating feedback mechanism of

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[61] Bernard Stiegler, *Taking* Care, 14.

embodied affects learned from errors and inscribed as repeatable "scripts" which form the process proposed by Silvan Tomkins.[62]

Play involves risk-taking, and the risk entails being thrust out of a still-amorphous and yet potentiated self to confront as well as to configure transindividual reality, through which the self comes to fuller existence. Existence as *ex-sistere* implies a paradoxical move of literally standing outside of the self and, by extension, human existence is conditioned by the precarious state of being pushed out of the self and thrown into what is to emerge and to become, which is the very definition of learning. The attention invested in playing is the initial and indispensable step of taking care of the impending psychic chaos by learning to create and maintain a relationship with objects. It is through paying attention and taking care that the self channels its libidinal energy, in expressions of fantasy, towards the future. Such is the long circuit of desire that defines human existence in its capacity of caring about what is to come to the extent of imagining futurity. Therefore, transitional space as Stiegler attests "is first and foremost a system of caring" by laying down "the basis of all systems of care and nurturance"[63] In this way, the existence of the transitional space is instrumental to the existence of the self and the culture it belongs to. As Stiegler closely follows Winnicott's conception, the transitional space is a developmental phase wherein the subject, presumably an infant, simultaneously creates and gets in touch with reality through its object-relations. By growing attached and *attentive* to the object, the primary caregiver (like the mother) or its substitute (such as a blanket or a doll given to a clinging baby), the subject experiences

[62] Silvan Tomkins, "What Are Affects?" in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, eds. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995): 33-74.
[63] Stiegler, *Taking Care*, 15.

love or gratification and learns to cope with frustration or loss, all of which prepare the subject to interface and interact with the world through an imaginary and imaginative relationship of *care*. To render it in Simondon's lexicon, the transitional object facilitates the process of transindividuation, and transitional space constitutes an associated milieu. The subject learns, through the intermediation of the object, an external reality while having an initial grasp of the internal reality of "me." In the meantime, by learning to care for the transitional object of its own making, the subject also fosters a rudimentary sense of *philia* as the object is also part of "me," the subject. The fantasy imbued in the transitional object testifies to the infant's creativity and imagination at play in this first attempt at independence from its caregiver. At the same time this *philia* with the object as integral part of "me" is also self-love and self-care.

In his opinion piece titled "The Tyranny of Convenience" for *The New York Times*, Tim Wu identifies convenience as "the adaptation of the ethos of the factory to domestic life."[64] Starting from convenience food brought by the invention of canning in the early 1800s to the modern wonders of washing machines and microwave ovens, these "labor-saving devices" have ingrained the idea of "industrial efficiency" and "scientific management" into everyday household life. Unmistakably, argues Wu, convenience is an equalizer in certain regards, making available time and leisure that used to be the prerogative of aristocrats, and henceforth affording the freedom of learning and the possibilities of self-cultivation to a wider population. Yet when upheld as the sole organizing principle that has shaped the individual's early life at home, convenience is prone to what Wu identifies as conformity, or to what Stiegler calls stupidity, by short-

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[64] Tim Wu, "The Tyranny of Convenience," *New York Times*, February 16, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/opinion/sunday/tyranny-convenience.html.

circuiting the learning process that is individuation. Every technological marvel portends

a further dispossession and surrender of savoir faire. In postwar Japan, the enslavement

and stupefaction caused by the march of convenience proceed precisely through my-

home-ism. The ongoing tirades against kids' stupidity in Japan fail to see that the lack of

incentives to learn and work is also, at least in part, due to my-home-ism. As the idea of

home has been increasingly defined by homey, "smart" gadgets that will come to include

a hologram *waifu,* the embodied knowledge hitherto acquired through physical and

psychical labor has also gone obsolete, and the mind has subjected itself, in the most

banal and literal way, to the remote control of the programming industry. To put it

simply, a smart home "smarts" intelligence and stunts individuation. As discussed earlier,

Doi observes how *amae,* the desire to be taken care of as in parent-child relations,

underlies Japanese's intrapsyche and behavioral dependency. To reframe Doi's notion in

Winnicottian theory, *amae* points to an incomplete, passive transitional experience that

renders a paradoxical sense of mastery from voluntarily relinquishing to parental figures

both the imaginative capacity and the creative authority to mold external reality. This

entails a renunciation of maturation and results in atrophied self-care. While

policymakers and economists exploited the notion of *amae* to justify Japan's neoliberal

shift from "immature" capitalism, very little attention is given to how the

psychotechnological reconfiguration of household by my-home-ism has reinforced

dependency in the name of convenience. The prefab technical assemblage of domestic

comfort has made it needless to have any say and access to the knowledge of how to live

and how to act. Japanese's convenience revolution continues to expand in scope beyond

the household, culminating in revamping 7-Eleven, an American convenience chain that

went bankrupt in 1990, into a formidable empire and a regular fixture in the urban landscape across East Asia. As a result, the convenience industry reterritorializes and deterriorializes home: home can shrink into a *hikikomori*'s cell or relocate into a net café refugee's cubicle. My-home-ism, in instilling convenience and comfort in domesticity, is a simultaneously risky project as it undoes the constitution of home. As metonymized by the physical dilapidation of New Towns in 2010s, my-home-ism has devolved into an antiquated dream hollowed of its meaning and promise.

Concurrent to the spatial remapping of home is the temporal reorganization of attention, desire and psychical energy at large. The ultimate goal of my-home-ism is to create leisure, "free time" so to speak, for middle-class Japanese to keep buying gadgets that promise more leisure and conserve time. Granted, per the initial blueprint outlined by the economic triad of family-school-work, the time saved from housekeeping was to be spent on childrearing, on preparing the kids for the challenges at school and at work. In this regard, home is conceived as a transitional space wherein the child, through care, is expected to foster a sense of *philia* through transindividuation. Yet with the introduction of the color TV as a staple of leisure since the mid-1960s, family time came to be managed and monopolized by industrial temporal objects, i.e. media, which transformed home into a private, privatized audiovisual milieu. This domestic audiovisual milieu, as Stiegler warns, becomes the *de facto* transitional space in our hyperindustrial epoch, as the entertainment and culture industry usurps the parenting role in administering what kids should watch and *when*, from media content, formats, time slots, to the software enabling "parental control." Carelessly, the culture industry *conveniencizes* the care of the transitional space by turning play into preprogrammed entertainment that comes

handy and easy. Consequentially, fantasy, together with its function of propelling différance, is short-circuited and desublimated into drives. As transitional objects are mass-produced and outsourced to the culture industry, what's lost is the intermediary space of learning to be resourceful and creative when faced with external reality and inner needs, which is the very process of becoming independent and cultivating individuality. It couldn't be more absurd that Japan's youths are admonished for lacking independence and motivation when all the while they have been profiled to be a key consumer demographic since the boom of the 1970s. Being prompted to invest prematurely their libidinal energy and time to a milieu controlled by psychotechnologies, the youths are consumed by the objects of their consumption, becoming disinvested and disaffected, not only in their social surroundings, but also within themselves.

Thus, while industrialization causes the proletarianization of workers, hyperindustrialism and hyperconsumerism eventuate a proletarianization *en masse* that dismantles knowledge of how to do (*savoir faire*), how to live (*savoir vivre*) and how to be (*savoir être*). The proletarianization is inextricably connected to what Allison identifies as a sense of "desociality" felt among the precariat in neoliberal Japan, and to youths' overwhelming feeling of dejection as noted by Marx. Whether it be the precariat grieving the precarity of job security, or the youths debilitated by the precarity of future, they tend to shrivel in miseries and are bereft of the ability to develop *philia.* They are unable to express their shared pain through organized action and instead commiserate with each other by consuming formulaic cultural products. As a response to Marx's essay, the kids are wrong in not knowing and caring to do any wrong, to transgress a system that has wronged them. The desire to transgress first arises from the intimate

experience of experimenting and working with symbolic authority through play. In Winnicottian psychoanalysis, play takes place in a transitional place for the child to cultivate their fantasy life and acquire a meaning-making process which it carries over to adult life. Through an object relation, primarily with the mother as the proxy of the dual role of the caregiver and the symbolic authority, the child first builds an illusionary reality under its grasp and subsequently encounters disappointment when the caregiver and authority does not completely fulfill its need. The infant's awareness of the gap, the schism between the feeling of omnipotence and that of impotence, is the intermediate area of experience, which is a productive space of play, transitioning to the desire to express itself in arts and science, in religion, imagination—namely in culture. In other words, play is vital to the shaping and fortifying of culture. Most critically, play is by definition transgressive: on the one hand, the child comes to negotiate with authority through the act of transgressing the boundary between self and other; on the other hand, it learns to channel frustration and anger by way of sublimating them into creativity. The child, whose need is thwarted by an external authority, has the first inkling of how it itself co-creates authority by recognizing itself as such. The realization of being part of the authority gives rise to a robust ego that is capable of producing a guided desire to challenge and revolt against a tangible target: the caring authority providing the guidance.

To wit, play as a means of transgression is an effortful undertaking that involves discomfort and inconvenience, whereby the child is simultaneously transformed by and transforms the symbolic order. Such a process of mutual becoming is transindividuation. However, when the transitional experience is conditioned by industrial temporal objects that keep feeding and feeding on "hassle-free" entertainment, the unconscious, as the

carrier of the symbolic order established by the forebears to guide their descendants, has

its contents and functions nullified. By erasing frustration in the spirit of maximizing

convenience, the culture industry that purports to "educate" kids on the parents' behalf

has effectively undermined its own foundation by eliminating the symbolic order, i.e.,

culture, accrued from intergenerational inheritance. Youths, being dissociated from a

symbolic milieu that enables and motivates learning, remain perpetually infantilized and

proletarianized. Since the transindividual link is broken, the authority does not embody

any intimately-produced symbolic value—quite the opposite, it depreciates itself into a

system of calculus devaluing all values into pure numbers. Much like the Koizumi

administration, the "authority," no longer a constitutive part of either the individual or the

collective, carries out mechanical repression ironically in the name of the common good

and social cohesion. The common ground of "us" is under siege, deterritorialized by the

alien and alienating authority of "they," the latter of which is an ultimately irresponsible,

undependable authority without any bearing and beyond reach. Worse still, the "caring

authority" built on the dyad between the mother or the caretaker and the child is wiped

out; what frustrates and angers the youths is that they no longer know why they are

angry, what they should be angry at, and how they can express their anger.

As a result of the attention and libidinal energy being captured by

psychotechnologies, the *id*, subject to control and blocked from access to the symbolic as

the intermediary, is a time bomb that will go off at unexpected times once triggered. The

exponential increase in random killing sprees and school shootings committed by youths

is not only the devastating phenomenon of a gun violence epidemic or a warning sign of

fundamentalist religion. The problem, surprisingly, lies in a paradoxical condition

prevailing our hyperindustrial epoch: in a new brave world popularized with glittering technologies to play with, the kids no longer know how to play.

This is not to say that technology is all bad and dumbing down the youth. Like hypomnesis as a pharmakon of memory, the culture industry also poses a pharmacological question as to the potentialities of psychotechnologies producing a re-associated milieu and creating the transitional experience of play. In the next chapter, I turn to the early emergence of the otaku fandom, which has enacted a quasi, or pseudo, transitional space of a different kind with its own set of rules. Otaku, being a staple figure of corrupted youth in Japan, is in/famous for willing to withstand every inconvenience to play. For the older generations of Japanese, "play" is unmistakably a foreign concept, a glaring offense to the work ethic that has shored up the nation and its people through tough times during the postwar recovery. Surprisingly enough, just as Japan's bubble burst and keeps shrinking, the tertiary sector led by the otaku-related culture industry came into full bloom in the 1990s and gained global dominance in the 2000s. The antipodal developments in the continuously thriving culture industry and the irrevocably declining economy begs questions such as: How does the otaku's blasphemy in treating play like work manage to sustain a vibrant subcultural economy? At the same time, why does creative energy, seemingly abundant in Japan's gaming industry, for example, in both producers and consumers, fail to spill over and transgress into other sectors of the economy and of the society as a whole? In sum, what are the possibilities and limits of "otaku play"? These are the questions I try to address in the next chapter.

Chapter 6. Otaku: Homing in on Play

I.   Between the Otaku Murderer and a *Shōjo* Novel

In my final chapter, I want to begin by revisiting the historical moment when the term otaku erupted into public consciousness and came to identify the fans of anime and manga, or pop culture-related products, in a decidedly negative way. From August 1988 to June 1989, Miyazaki Tsutomu terrorized the greater Tokyo region and shocked the entire nation by abducting and killing four little girls from the ages of four to seven years old. Miyazaki allegedly dismembered and sexually molested the dead bodies of his victims. He also drank the blood and ate part of the remains. After the police arrested Miyazaki, they found his dwelling overflowing with a sizeable collection of anime and slasher films, accompanied by an assortment of technological paraphernalia, ranging from Beta and VHS players to a personal computer and a fax machine. Among thousands of videotapes he owned was the footage he took of the corpses. Following the Miyazaki arrest, the Japanese press quickly linked the incident to the subculture known as *otaku-zoku*, a primitive "tribe" (with tribe being the literal meaning of *zoku*) that consisted of socially inept young males obsessed with anime and manga. The term seemed to imply that the crime could be easily bracketed off by labelling Miyazaki as the Otaku Murderer and therefore "un-Japanese," as *The New York Times* observes.[1] The media, coupled with

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[1] As quoted by *The Wired*, Karl Taro Greenfeld, "The Incredible Strange Mutant Creatures Who Rule the Universe of Alienated Japanese Zombie Computer Needs," January 1, 1993, https://www.wired.com/1993/01/otaku/.

law enforcement authorities, recreated the events in lurid detail and turned the serial

murderer into a sensation. Otaku, the identity label affixed to Miyazaki, became a symbol

ready to be consumed in the same way as *shōjo*, the Japanese word for young girls and a

prominent figure of anime/manga subculture, was made to be consumed by someone like

Miyazaki, who literally consumed *shōjo* in its rawest form.

In his essay "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: Shōjo Culture and the Nostalgic

Subject," John Whitter Treat calls attention to the confluence of Miyazaki's murders and

the publication of Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen*. Both happened in 1988, both generated a

lot of media buzz, and both pertained to the *shōjo* culture.[2] Born as the daughter of

Yoshimoto Takaaki, one of the most respected postwar intellectuals whose high-brow

writings are famous for being obtuse and austere, Banana Yoshimoto debuted under a pen

name that connotes the complete opposite of her father's elitism. Banana, a humble

everyday foodstuff, "insinuates something as perishable and consumable, as domestic and

playful," Treat observes.[3] Similarly, Banana's bestseller revolves around the mundane

setting of the kitchen, permeated with a fuzzy nostalgic longing for home, deliberately

devoid of a critical edge and historical consciousness as what is considered to be "pure

literature." Diverging from the high style characterizing the generation of Banana's

father, the narrative in *Kitchen* approaches the readers, presumably teenage girls, using

the intimate address of you (*anata*). This contiguity between the authorial voice and

audience makes *Kitchen* further removed from the establishment of "literature," but

closer to the everyday language as seen in television, manga, anime, and pop songs.[4] In

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[2] John Whittier Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: *Shōjo* Culture and the Nostalgic Subject." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993): 353-87, doi:10.2307/132644.
[3] Ibid., 356.
[4] Matsumoto Takayuki, as quoted by John Treat, 361.

fact, Banana attributed her literary endeavors, not to her father, but to Stephen King and

shōjo manga writer Iwadate Mariko. As suggested by the Warholian iridescence of its

bright pink book cover, *Kitchen* is a story inspired by *shōjo* manga, with subject matter

related to *shōjo* and written for the demographic of *shōjo*. True to her pen name, Banana

herself embodies *shōjo* sensibilities by openly recognizing her own stories as disposable,

perishable commodities. She even expresses the wish to have a limited shelf life for her

works, asking that bookstores remove her previous publications from the shelves

whenever she has a new release. Her book is no different from toys in the display

windows of department stores, which can be easily replaced by new ones. In unabashedly

embracing the label of a *shōjo* novelist and "popular writer," Banana thrives on the

consumerist logic of late capitalism.

According to Treat, Banana's generation witnessed the growing sophistication of

Japan's consumer culture, with the introduction of modern boutiques, brand-name

clothing, and Western fast-food chains. As beneficiaries of economic affluence and the

increased outsourcing of production, adolescents and the idea of youth become

disarticulated from the industrial milieu of labor and rearticulated into a postindustrial

milieu defined by consumption. As I mention in Chapter 5, Japanese generational cohorts

are defined by objects of consumption, and Banana describes her own age-cohort in

similar terms: "[we] came into contact with exactly the same kind of consumer products."

In other words, commodities form generational identity. At the same time, however,

shōjo has an immediate association with the processes of coming-of-age and thus applies

to all generations: it is not tied to any one particular generation born at a certain period of

time. In this respect, the *shōjo* identity is at once atemporal and ephemeral, universal and

transient. As anthropologist Jennifer Robertson observes, *shōjo* in Japanese means "not-quite-female female," distinctive for its "heterosexual *inexperience* and homosexual *experience*" and situated in an unidentifiable space outside capitalist economies premised on sexual reproduction.[5] Treat contends that the *shōjo*, by virtue of being "off production line," are considered "pure play as pure sign" signifying consumption, unbounded by "a real referent" in the economy of postmodern Japan.[6] During the years before getting married the *shōjo* "participate in a uniquely *un*productive culture." With their consumption and outright unproductivity, the *shōjo* "cannot exist as wholly 'real' in an economy otherwise committed to value."[7] Banana's assuming a *shōjo* "subject position" is paradoxically a willful self-objectification that proceeds through a complacent sense of narcissistic self-referentiality and guarantees an interminable simulation of *shōjo* insofar it is insulated from the heterosexual reproductive economy. According to Treat's arguments, the same consumer culture driving Banana to success and turning her into a celebrity idol (*aidoru*) is also the culprit in Miyazaki's consumption of four little girls as if they were "empty signs," mass-produced dolls in the image of the *shōjo* made for play.

Treat's diagnosis of Japan's "postmodernity" is not without problems. To put it in Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical paradigm, by positing the *shōjo* as the newly instituted "axiom" of Japan's consumer capitalism, Treat unwittingly enacts a similar axiomatic system. Capitalism relies on this system to calculate and organize its flow: real vs. unreal, modernity vs. postmodernity, production vs. consumption, productivity and unproductivity. In particular, by defining the *shōjo* strictly as "sheer consumption" and "a

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[5] Jennifer Robertson, quoted by Treat, 364.
[6] John Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home," 362.
[7] Ibid.

uniquely unproductive culture," Treat overlooks the "mutual dependence," as Marx puts it, between production and consumption.[8] The fact that the *shōjo* "participate in a uniquely unproductive culture," in Treat's own words, intimates a kind of interest, engagement, and even desire on the part of the *shōjo*. Desire is what propels not only consumption, but production. As Marx explains, "consumption creates the need, an internal object, as aim, for production."[9] What if this need is a desire to "play," which in Japan's socio-economic and gender structure is only permitted through the figure and figuration of the *shōjo*? This also explains why the otaku, mostly referring to male anime fans, are frowned upon: by exhibiting the unmistakable desire to play, and by blasphemously inhabiting the sanctuary of play reserved exclusively for the *shōjo*, the otaku fail in their gendered duty by being unproductive, or more precisely, being productive in the wrong place. At the same time, the *shōjo*'s reduction into an "empty sign" of play is not a new cultural symptom induced by consumerism, but an expression of perennial sexism, now cloaked in Warholian iridescent pink—just like Banana's book cover. Women's labor in Japan, as Allison attests, has been systematically marginalized and discounted, which includes their work in the kitchen—the title and the subject of Banana's story. The *shōjo*, relieved from the domestic chores they had to perform earlier in the twentieth century during times of economic hardship and war, come to be situated in the ambiguous phase of "not-quite-female female." They are thereby conveniently assigned to the other end of the capitalist axis of production as the consumer, who simply plays and does not work. Treat's essay begins with a quote from Ōtsuka Eiji's book on

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[8] Karl Max, "Grundrisse: Introduction," Late August – Mid-September 1857, Marxist Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm.
[9] Ibid.

the phenomenon of *shōjo*: "The Japanese are no longer producers. Our existence consists solely of the distribution and consumption of 'things' brought us from elsewhere, 'things' with which we play."[10] Subsequently, Ōtsuka names this consumerist lifestyle *shōjo*. Notably, in severing production from distribution and consumption, Ōtsuka also unequivocally aligns consumption with play, which are united in the figure of *shōjo*. Such an easy equivalence drawn between the *shōjo*, consumption, and play is manifestly a disavowal of the productive potentialities of all three.

To be perfectly clear, I am not contesting that consumerism has reshaped Japan's youth culture and social formation at large. The fundamental problem I find in Ōtsuka's approach, as well as Treat's, is the assumption that play—like the "pure play" signified by *shōjo*—and productivity are mutually exclusive. By conceptually segregating play from productivity, they risk endorsing, or siding with, the existing institutions of family, education and corporations that have been streamlined to maximize productivity for "Japan, Inc." Yet clearly the system is broken, or on the verge of breaking, partly because it devalues "play" amidst the drive for productivity and efficiency. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 5, the respective functions of home and school serve the singular purpose of contributing to Japan's enterprise society (*kigyo shakai*). Kids have to be studious in exchange for "consumer treats,"[11] such as Sony's newest PlayStation consoles as rewards for academic excellence. That is to say, before becoming *shōjo* or otaku, prior to entering adolescence, kids have been embedded in an inextricable and distorted relationship between play, work, and consumerism: work is a means to play, and play is necessarily (i.e., systematically) mediated by consumerism. Then, if they are lucky enough to survive

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[10] Ōtsuka Eiji, quoted in Treat, 353.
[11] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 26.

the cutthroat educational system and succeed in entering the much-vied-for big companies, Japanese corporate culture further denies the necessity of play by integrating it into work regimens. After-work karaoke and drinking, similar to the consumer treats rewarded to kids, appear to be rituals dedicated to play and leisure, but ultimately these "perks" are extended work hours with the clear goal of binding employees to their company by eliciting a sense of duty and loyalty. Performance at work in turn is rewarded with a comfortable domestic life, adorned with novel electronics and high-end home entertainment. In effect, play has no place in what Allison terms the social contract forged by Japan's my-home-ism: it is mistranslated through consumerism as entertainment or leisure, that is, not work and unproductivity. If anything, play is subsumed under the economy of "reward": it has the economic utility of extracting and extending productivity. To put it simply, play is reduced to a consumerist reward that can only be earned by being productive.

Given that consumerism has always been instrumental to my-home-ism and Japan's economic miracle, criticism of the *shōjo* and otaku culture is less concerned with the consumerist takeover of youth and more with the anxiety over a kind of play that, being extricated from an economy of reward, is disarticulated from any authorized definition of productivity and work, Treat connects Miyazaki and Banana to examine the crisis of the institutions of family and family value by way of the *shōjo*, which he considers the emblem of Japan's consumerist culture. I argue, however, that the concurrent "events" of a *shōjo* writer's shooting to stardom and an otaku embarking upon a killing spree do not signify a cultural shift and a social rupture caused by consumerism. They are different articulations of the persistent structural problem of the Winnicottian

transitional space, with its delicate functions levelled into a smooth assembly line ready for the "lean" Japanese production that Toyota is known for. Miyazaki's gory act of "disassembling" the bodies of his victims is a reverse literalization of Japan's economic motto in the most perverse way possible. Granted, Treat's and Ōtsuka's apprehension towards the *shōjo* are well warranted. *Shōjo* and otaku alike becoming identity markers indeed speak of the "capture" of youth by consumerism. Considered in a broader historical framework, youth is a "transitional" identity only made possible with a modern governmentality that organizes the increasingly complex matrix composed by population and economy.[12] A series of interventional techniques administered by institutions such as families, schools, and workshops re-invent youth as a "transition" to incorporation into the productive body required by industrial capitalism. By comparison, post-industrial capitalism, with its service economy, reorganizes and renews the procedure of this transition: youth are first led to consume, in the hope that they are *motivated* to work in order to consume more. The issue raised by otaku and *shōjo*, it may seem, is how consumption fails to align them to production proper. However, what needs to be controlled and governed is not consumption per se. This is the fallacy of Ishihara's Nonexistent Youth Bill which I introduce in chapter 1. What needs to be protected is the ability to play and the space of play.

As defined by Foucault, who draws on La Perrière's definition, "government is the right disposition of things."[13] What needs to be attended to and intervened on then is youths *in their relation to things*. Ōtsuka is half correct when he laments that "[o]ur existence consists solely of the distribution and consumption of 'things' brought us from

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[12] Foucault, "Governmentality."
[13] Ibid., 208.

elsewhere, 'things' with which we play."[14] For Ōtsuka, playing with "things" is squarely at fault especially given that these "things" are intangible signs "without substance," having no bearing on any "matter of life and death."[15] However, borrowing Winnicott's paradigm, I propose the opposite: playing with things is vital to learning how to *dispose* oneself in an unfolding relation with "things," which constitutes the premise of government and enables the social relations required by any economy. According to Winnicott, a prominent feature of transitional phenomena is that "in playing, and perhaps only playing, the child or adult is free to be creative."[16] In transitional space, whether the thing the child plays with is tangible or not does not matter, for fundamentally the object holding children and their caretaker together "does not exist," as Stiegler emphasizes in explaining Winnicott.[17] There are not preexisting transitional objects, so to speak. It is in playing that the child produces the object it has a relation with, and through the relation that the child has the first inkling of its "self" by recognizing that the object is "not me." Yet the object is always a part of the child because the child constitutes its own subjectivity through its relationship with the object. What the child is playing with is not the object, but different possibilities it can establish with things outside itself, that is, imagination. Playing is a means of "reality check," as the child tests the limits between self and others. Thus, the transitional experience enacted by playing is precarious and creative at once, emerging through the unmistakable incommensurability as well as the mutual malleability between me and "not me," between the interior and the exterior world. Both are part of the child's own making, defining its own sense of belonging.

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[14] Ōtsuka Eiji, quoted in Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home," 353.
[15] Ibid.
[16] D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971/2005), 71.
[17] Stiegler, *Worth Living*, 1.

Most critically, in Winnicott's account, "the transitional phenomena have diffused, have spread out over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world' as perceived by two persons in common,' that is to say, over the whole cultural field."[18] The transitional experience can and does go beyond the stage of child development, evoked again in the domains of art, religion and science. Because the transitional object is symbolic by nature, like how the blanket is a stand-in for the mother's breast, the child learns to create and read symbols and signs, and to read them creatively and imaginatively. In other words, the transitional experience is playing with signs. It is not prescribed by a monofocal meaning or a definitive referent. This sign is active, in effect, without have a predetermined meaning (hence not empty) and without yet being touchable or palpable. It is active by virtue of its position in a network of other signs within a signifying system. As discussed in my other chapters, Stiegler recasts Winnicott's theory by focusing on the "care" that defines the transitional space. For Stiegler, "To play with a child is to take care of the child." Specifically, playing with the child helps foster its nascent attention, and forming attention is to build and fortify the bond with one's ancestors and the symbolic order. The transitional object that holds the child's attention opens up a transitional space in which the child learns to take care while being taken care of through the object *consisting* of intergenerational inheritance. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the transitional space is the beginning of social relations built on a tender feeling of attachment and protection which, in Stiegler's words, makes the child trust that "life is worth living."[19] Because the transitional object is both internal

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[18] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 7.
[19] Stiegler, *Worth Living*, 2.

and external while at the same time neither *simply* internal nor *strictly* external, the object takes on value owing to its incommensurable and infinite character.

Therefore, I venture to argue that play in the transitional space is also an economic practice that produces value. The object-relation established in the transitional space pertains to the psycho-economic dimension of governmentality, for children learn through experimentation, through play, to configure themselves in "disposition of things," developing *savoir faire* through the "imbrication of men and things": things which include "customs, habits, way of acting and thinking" as Foucault explains.[20] The function of institutions is not simply to impose punitive and preventive measures. Quite the contrary, institutions exercise governmental techniques of organization by embedding men in a *productive* relation to things. In this respect, institutions—families and schools especially but not limited to these two—can be pivotal sites where the transitional experience happens. The disciplinary mechanism of the institution can become productive rather than inhibitive: on the one hand, inasmuch as play in the transitional space entails rule-making and rule-breaking, so-called discipline offers a template of rules and produces a governmentalizable subject in relation to rules. Rules are the things one learns to dispose of. Even giving up on rules is a relation to rules. On the other hand, playing as a creative and multivalenced practice can rewrite the rules of the game and become productively transgressive. This is the reason why David Marx, in his concern over the dispirited Japanese youths of today, sees the young rebel soldiers involved in a coup d'état in 1936 as "good kids in warped sense."[21] The army together with the Imperial Rescript on Education—the institutions associated with coercion and dogma—

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[20] Foucault, "Governmentality," 208–209.
[21] Marx, "The Kids Were All Wrong."

effected the transitional space of producing resistance, for rebellion starts as an attempt to play with, at great risk, a different relationship to authority and a different "disposition of things" than what is dictated.

To return to the Miyazaki case and Banana's novel, the link between them is not exactly consumer culture perpetuated through the figure of _shōjo_ as empty sign as play. Treat and Ōtsuka criticize the _shōjo_ for playing with the empty sign; yet, considering that playing in Winnicott's definition is symbol play, the appeal of the _shōjo_ lies precisely in creating possibilities of play as transitional space. The subcultures of _shōjo_, _shōnen_ (the Japanese word for young boys) and otaku are often lumped together under the umbrella term of youth culture, but this is an interesting misnomer because many fans extend what is considered a youthful fascination far beyond their adolescence. Banana and Miyazaki are instances of this extension. Some otakus will treat the subcultural practice as a lifelong undertaking, going to the extent of tying the knot with their favorite anime characters, as I discuss in Chapter 5. "Youth culture" promises a reliving of the transitional experience, whereby the imaginative life is reanimated through entertaining and experimenting with possible ways of ordering oneself to things. To wit, youth culture has the potential to use playing as a practice to create the transitional space where the process of enchantment and reenchantment transpires. Most relevantly, this reenchantment process is a fundamentally worldly experience rendering a sense of _philia_, because playing is the interplay between the subjectively conceived inner reality and objectively perceived _shared_ actual reality.[22] "Playing leads to group relationships," as

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[22] Winnicott, _Playing and Reality_, 69–70.

Winnicott puts it, and the group formed by playing together in configuring their relations to things constitutes the basis of the subculture and produces the economy.

We should not however make the mistake of thinking, though, that youth subculture is by default the transitional place where imagination and creativity are given free rein. Play is an acquired skill and not all playing is transitional. It requires the transitional space to "hold" the children with care, trust and rule, as they play on the tightrope of risk-taking and risk-making, illusion and disillusion, gratification and dissatisfaction. In the case of Miyazaki, play went awry; rather, he had probably never learned how to play and therefore failed to acquire the knowledge of how to have "the right disposition of things" through the mental exercise of distinguishing inner and external objects. Instead, Miyazaki simply disposed of things, i.e. the four girls he abducted, as if they were disposable objects. His "consumption" of their dead bodies showed the breakdown of psychic boundary between fantasy and fact on the one hand, and an appalling but despairing self-identification with the disposable on the other. The media's solipsistic obsession with his media collection evaded the bigger issues of why he turned to media consumption in the first place, and why he replicated *verbatim* what he saw on the screen. He had no transitional space available to establish self-worth in the process of navigating the inner and outer realities. The public's accusation of Miyazaki's family, which led to the suicide of Miyazaki's father, also evaded collective responsibility for the crisis of the family as the core social institution creating the transitional space to forge intergenerational bonds. The pervasive lament of the loss of family values often willfully ignored the fact that the devaluation of family had begun long before with the celebrated post-WWII ideal of my-home-ism. To a certain extent,

Miyazaki's rundown bungalow encapsulates the horror in the fiction fabricated by the ideology of my-home-ism: the home as the psychological "holding" place was degraded into a hoarding place crammed full of products and high-tech devices. My-home-ism promises the possession of things by prioritizing work over play. While the mind is prematurely captured and denied access to the symbolic order, which shapes the transitional space and guides play, "things" end up dispossessing the mind and have it at their disposal.[23] In other words, the mind, which paradoxically learns to "govern" itself through playing, through channeling the unconscious and exercising the imagination, becomes ungoverned, easily triggered to and by violence.

Contrary to the popular belief that consumerism and popular culture are to be blamed for cultural decay as epitomized by Miyazaki's crime, I urge that we shift the focus to how to rebuild the transitional space and learn how to play—with or without consumption. Winnicott describes the goal of his psychotherapy as "bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play."[24] Ironically, the subculture of otaku stigmatized in the wake of the Miyazaki incident has demonstrated a concerted effort to subvert the "backup" function of home as defined by Japan's enterprise society into the primal site of economic production *through play*. Compared to *shōjo*, who have never had a place in Japan's economic blueprint, the otaku poses a series of greater threats through their deviation from a preordained career track and occupying the "home" consigned to women. Most brazenly, the otaku embrace play as work by transforming home into a playground, a factory and a laboratory all at once. In the following sections of the chapter, I use *Otaku no Video* to examine otaku's varied array

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[23] Stiegler, *Taking Care,* 13-16.
[24] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 51.

of practices and to illustrate the potentialities as well as the limits of what I call "the

otaku play." Do the otaku introduce possibilities of opening up the transitional space, or

do they simply simulate and banalize the ideal of play into consumption, as Azuma

Hiroki argues in his book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*? How does the otaku

configure their relations to "things" through play, or the simulation of play? How does

the "community" of otaku diversify or discipline play? How is otaku subjectivity

simultaneously articulated to and disarticulated from mainstream Japan? Does otaku play

destabilize the state's symbolic authority and become an economic force beyond its

control?

II.   *Otaku no Video*

Otaku no Video ("the video of the otaku" in English), released in 1991 by Gainax,

consists of a two-part original video animation (abbreviated as OVA), *1982 Otaku no

Video* and *1985 Sequel to Otaku no Video*.[25] Distributed in a VHS format without either

theatrical screening or television broadcast, the "film" has a set agenda beyond

addressing its presumed audience, i.e. the anime/manga fans being identified or

identifying themselves as otaku. *Otaku no Video* introduces the fan community that

suffered scrutiny, if not discrimination, after the Miyazaki incident. If Miyazaki's arrest

is a "coming-out" of otaku in the sense of otaku coming onto the radar of the Japanese

public, *Otaku no Video* operates as what Foucault calls a "reverse discourse," with the

objective not only to introduce otaku culture, but also to "brand" otaku as the vanguard of

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[25] *Otaku no Video*, DVD, directed by Mori Takeshi (1991; Wilmington, North Carolina: AnimEigo, 2002), DVD.

Japanese anime and manga. While *Otaku no Video* appears to be a rigorous project aiming to rectify otaku stereotypes, it also maintains a touch of self-parody and self-criticism of the fandom it purports to defend. At the same time, the mini-series is punctuated with melancholy, nostalgia and a feeling of wistfulness, which has something to do with the sensitive timing of the release. Made two years after the infamous Miyazaki incident and right at the moment when Japan's economy began to fizzle and dive into what the historians and economists called "The Lost Decade" of the 1990s, *Otaku no Video* had to work with and negotiate the growing unease and uncertainty felt among the Japanese. This unceasing sense of anxiety and despair continued to escalate, culminating in the Aum Shinrikyo gas attack of 1995, the first home-grown terrorist attack in Japan in the period after World War II. Up until today, Japan has not rebounded from its economic slump of the 1990s: the "Lost Decade" has become "Lost 20 Years," and extended into a third "lost decade" with no sure indications of full recovery in sight.

As readily implied by its title, *Otaku no Video* is first and foremost a work about otaku's relationship with the still-new "technology," i.e. video. It marks a departure from earlier fan practices that hitherto focused mainly on the meanings of storytelling and the "depth" of narrative structure.[26] In Thomas Lamarre's observation, Gainax's works, *Otaku no Video* included, signify a different kind of viewing practice whereby fans begin a more dynamic and versatile relationship with images through the devices of videocassettes and the VCR. Prior to VHS and VCR, anime fans relied on the traditional mnemonic technologies of writing, drawing and printing to mimic, reproduce and interact with the images they are fascinated with. Due to the constraint of the technical condition,

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[26] Thomas Lamarre, "Otaku Imaging," in *Anime Machine*, 144-165.

as Lamarre points out, fans would depend exclusively on the "novelization" aspect of anime and manga.[27] As VHS and VCR became affordable in the course of 1980s, their newly introduced capacity to store and record images, the functions of fast-forward, rewind and pause enabled viewers to study and pay much closer attention to the composition and sequences of images. Moreover, they were given the possibility to manipulate and play with the images. Lamarre, following the argument of Okada Toshio, the self-endowed Otaku King, argues that perception is transformed by technologies into "a way of acting on images" since viewers are able to intervene "directly into the production and flow of images."[28] Notably, manga and anime fans have never been passive consumers in the first place. They attend conventions regularly, re-create narratives in fanzines (*dōjinshi*) and act out their fantasy through cosplay. These "low-tech" fan activities have remained a constitutive feature of anime and manga subculture. However, facility of videos and recording devices further equip the viewer as a bona fide "professional amateur." Viewing is more than consumption and entertainment. It demands attention, whereby viewers accrue knowledge and information amidst the flow of images. By vigorously studying the image captured and replayed on the screen, anime fans become experienced connoisseurs and vigilant critics. The intimate and interactive relationship between viewers and images is the beginning of amateur anime production, which, to borrow Lamarre's concept, is the evolution from "otaku imaging" to "otaku movement."[29]

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[27] Lamarre, *Anime Machine*, 145.
[28] Ibid., 146.
[29] Thomas Lamarre, "An Introduction to Otaku Movement*" EnterText* 4 (1) 2004:151–187.

If we are to identify the phenomenon of "otaku imaging" in terms of Stiegler's critique of the attention control of the cultural industry, the image-capture capacity of technologies also means the further capture of attention: so-called otaku imaging as explained by Lamarre indeed entails both deep and hyper attention. Argued this way, VCR and VHS as psychotechnological apparatuses have regrammatized body and mind, with the mind made to fixate on image flows, and the body glued to the screen. The phenomenon of otaku poses some confounding paradoxes to existing theoretical paradigms. Despite and by virtue of sensory and cognitive saturation, otaku movement proceeds in an associated hypomnesiac milieu, wherein "hypomnemata facilitate the deployment of memory in the constitution of meaningful symbolic practices and communal functions," as Hansen explains Stiegler's discussion of anamnesis and hypomnesis.[30] At the same time, the so-called otaku movement defined by their viewing practices could simply be a gimmick, a new "brand" pushed by the cultural industries which exercise control in a minutely and pervasively calculated manner such that "symbolic practices" are truncated into mere "consumption patterns." The "database consumption" of otaku which Azuma describes is a radical version of the dissociated hypomnesiac milieu. A database structure, with its retrievability and navigability, creates a *simulation* of otaku creativity and productivity, while circumscribing the possibilities of otaku by prefab data and their seemingly infinitely-expandable combinations. The consequence of database consumption, in Azuma's account, is to insulate otaku from the broader historical context and narrative. The disconnect, the "dissociation" from history manifested in otaku consumption portends the vacating, the dissolution of a symbolic

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[30] Hansen, "Memory,"66.

authority, to put it in Stiegler's terms. The only and one authority left is consumerist

capitalism, as Azuma and Stielger concur.

However, what if the symbolic authority that outlines the dominant history

narrative is in itself defunct and responsible for propagating consumerism, as the

ideology of my-home-ism assembles a "symbolic" order made up by consumerist

symbols of the cooler, car and color TV?[31] What if the otaku, in their disillusionment

with "reality" defined by the symbolic authority, turn to the technical milieu of anime and

otaku wherein they invest their libidinal energies towards a symbolic order shared

exclusively among otaku? This symbolic order may or may not be coterminous with the

symbolic regime upheld by mainstream society, and it is as illusory as the hegemonic

symbolic authority otaku is indifferent to—and otaku are clearly aware of it.[32] Otaku

make a conscious choice of one kind of fiction, i.e. the simulated world they create, over

the other—the fiction reified as "real" by Japan's enterprise society since post-WWII.

Identifications such as "otaku imaging" or the otaku lineage of animation are more than

denominators for a specific set of techniques of anime viewing or making, which can be

easily co-opted into a marketing label. The idea of "lineage" or different generations of

otaku as demarcated by Azuma, although ludicrous-sounding to outsiders, gives a

structure to the otaku fandom as cultural tradition does to a given society. Otaku

perception, as extolled by Okada, destabilizes hierarchy in that the various functions of

VCR made viewers take note of the work done by the crew hitherto deemed as secondary

or periphery, such as the drawings of in-between animators.[33] While Okada and Lamarre

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[31] Gluck, "The Past in the Present," 75.
[32] Saito, "Otaku make a clear distinction between fiction and reality," as quoted by Patrick W. Galbraith.
[33] As discussed in Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 144-145.

identify otaku's image-scanning ability as enacting an "exploded view" or "a distributive perceptual field," I want to call attention to the simple fact that otaku *acknowledge* anime as a technical object embodying intergenerational memory and collaborative work. Otaku's attentive viewing, albeit performed alone at home as stereotype has it, is fundamentally a collective endeavor to honor the work gifted by an invisible multitude of forebears and peers who share passion for anime. The otaku lineage of animation and its viewing practice, in effect, function as a *contingent* shared symbolic authority which, of otaku's own making, offers an ideal for otaku to identify with, look up to, and sometimes rebel against. In other words, *otaku create for themselves a symbolic authority they care for.*

Different from Okada and Lamarre, I see that when otaku play, they are not playing with images. In a tentatively transitional space constructed by images, they are playing with fantasy, which is outside and greater than themselves but is also a constitutive part of themselves. This is how the experience of wonder and a sense of belonging is derived for otaku and fans of youth culture in general. Play in this sense does not necessarily correlate to "technology." Nor does it take place only through "otaku perception" as framed by video equipment. Fans committed to cosplay play not only with physical embodiment of images; they also play with the ancient and "low-tech" skill of sewing and tailoring. Cosplayers' subjectivity is fashioned through a transitional space, through the incommensurability between the virtual character they perform in public space and the tactile feeling transpiring through their fingers when they labor away at their cosplay costume. In the fandom of anime and manga broadly defined by play, otaku stand out as a conspicuous anomaly for playing with an intensity and persistence that they

produce a system of knowledge and install a set of complex rules to regulate how and what to play. As Lamarre discerns, Okada embarks on a self-designed quest to institute "'otaku knowledge' as a form of knowledge on par with disciplinary form of knowledge." The idiosyncratic notion of "otakuology" Okada propagates has shaped "a sort of 'play discipline' or 'discipline play,' which oscillates between disciplinization of knowledge about anime and otaku and an anti-disciplinary conceit."[34] Lamarre's analysis of otaku imaging and Azuma's critique of otaku database consumption, derived from or coextensive with Okada's, also inadvertently reflect and reinforce the epistemological pressure and institutionalizing impulse. However, I am curious how otaku, in rejecting the institutions of family, school, and work, negotiate institutional impulses to arrive at a sense of subjectivity and selfhood through playing disciplinarily. Do otaku simply build another institution in a form of mental prison? Can "play discipline" or "disciplinary play" be practices of askesis prompting "an exercise of oneself in the activity of play," to recast Foucault's definition?[35]

Scripted by Okada, *Otaku no Video* is considered by Lamarre to be exemplary of what he calls the "Gainax discourse" in the sense of implying "the institutional regulation of anime entertainment."[36] To add to Lamarre's argument, Gainax's discursive effort as presented by *Otaku no Video* is a kind of playbook. It is worth noting that when Nakamori Akio first debuted the term "otaku" back in 1983 to identify "fanatic" fans of anime and manga, he itemized it among an ever-expanding inventory of teenage

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[34] Lamarre, "Otaku Movement," 164-165.
[35] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume 2 of The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Book, 1985), 9. Foucault defines askesis as "an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought."
[36] Lamarre, "Otaku Movement," 156.

obsessions, from shogi (Japanese chess) playing to the celebrity craze, that distract youth from the one and only correct object of obsession and attention, that is, schoolwork.[37] In Nakamori's satirical ridicule, the consequence of these teenage obsessions is to see "boys who spent their childhoods going to the best schools turn into timid fish-eyed losers."[38] Formerly known as Daicon Film, Gainax is an anime studio founded by the "losers" Nakamori threw jibes at. It started out as a group of students-as-amateurs who found their passion in "play" rather than in study. Okada Toshio and Takeda Yasuhiro hosted the Osaka Japan Annual SF Convention for the years of 1981 and 1983, where they screened the amateur films made by Hideaki Anno and Yamaga Hiroyuki, who were then freshly recruited by Okada and his cohorts. A Comiket-like convention, which Nakamori identified in his essay to be a place teeming with freaks and lunatics, was the stage to showcase and scout new talent outside the purview of the industry—and still is. By the time *Otaku no Video* was released, Gainax had savored commercial success and proved itself as a force to be reckoned with, as demonstrated by the technical finesse of popular series such as *Gunbuster* and *Nadia*, both directed by Anno. *Otaku no Video* is a peculiar project for being surprisingly "low-tech," with an amateurish quality both in terms of distribution and production. It is distributed as OVA, which means the series is only available as a videocassette for home viewing only, with no theatrical screening or television broadcast. The distribution format is almost Gainax's self-referential humor in the sense that it plays into the stereotype of otaku being an antisocial creature chained to its own residence for excessive video viewing.

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[37] Matthew ALT, "What Kind of Otaku Are You?" *Neojaponisme,* April 2, 2008, http://neojaponisme.com/2008/04/02/what-kind-of-otaku-are-you/.
[38] Ibid.

The two-episode run of *Otaku no Video* is a juxtaposition of animation and mockumentary. The animation segment, "Graffiti of Otaku Generation" is a semi-autobiography of Gainax documenting the rise and fall of Okada's group in a manifestly fictional narrative. The mockumentary, "Portrait of Otaku," contains interviews of otaku with pseudonyms, but as revealed later, all of the interviewees were affiliated with Gainax. In both animation and live-action segments, barely any noteworthy cinematic techniques are utilized. *Otaku no Video* retains the feel of a homemade video, or a student's term project without thematic coherence and aesthetic elegance, lacking the flashy design that Gainax is known for. It certainly pales in comparison to *Neon Genesis Evangelion* released four years later, whose engineering prowess and intellectual sophistication cement the status of Gainax as the apotheosis of the otaku lineage of animation. The muted colors, grainy images, and austere overtone of *Otaku no Video* cannot be simply explained as Gainax's preemptive self-policing and self-censoring gesture of bowing to public prejudice against otaku. Rather, *Otaku no Video* pays homage to otaku by returning to basic techniques, embodying in its production the grassroots fan activities from which Gainax was derived from. The purposefully low quality of Otaku no Video is in itself a nostalgic gesture conjuring the past of novice otaku experimenting with image production. The sentimentality of nostalgia felt on the metatextual level is consistent with the textual level of representation of "otaku history." In fact, nostalgia is the common thread binding together divergent and incongruous accounts of otaku either in visual narrative or storytelling, either in animation or in mockumentary.

At first glance, "Graffiti of Otaku Generation" from *Otaku no Video* is one of many conventional *shōnen* anime, utilizing the motifs of romance to portray the shaping

of Gainax's group, and its quest to establish an otaku empire despite all the travail. The anime centers on a college freshman, Kubo Ken, who is introduced to the world of otaku after a chance encounter with his old friend from high school Tanaka, a stand-in for Okada. Kubo starts out as a run-of-the-mill young man, living a standardized lifestyle for a male college student: playing sports, having a girlfriend, socializing and bonding with other male students through topics like cars. Before reuniting with Tanaka, Kubo treads a familiar trajectory towards a middle-class dream life delineated by my-home-ism: a college degree, a relationship that may blossom into a heterosexual reproductive marriage, and the prospect of procuring a good job from networking with schoolmates. But Kubo's life turns topsy-turvy after he bumps into Tanaka in the elevator one day. The encounter scene is highly staged, unfolding in the theatrical dramaturgy of mecha anime. In the enclosed tiny space of the elevator, Tanaka and his league of friends put on an impromptu cosplay without costumes by communicating with one another in a secret language which Kubo is not privy to. The simple action of closing the elevator door gives a cue for a role play with dialogue between a space crew: "Captain! All crew members present and accounted for"; "Very well! Launch!"; "Roger! Auxiliary engines engaged!" But the "repertoire" of Tanaka's group is not solely imitative of anime and manga. In a well-defined but loosely scripted setting, they "play" spontaneously —"play" in both senses, of putting on a show, and of experimenting in the Winnicottian sense with the boundaries between imagination and reality. One of Tanaka's friends assumes an uber-courteous but hilariously outlandish speaking style, inquiring of Kubo "Art thou a friend of our liege, Tanaka?" Besieged by a band of weirdos, Kubo is dumbfounded, but not without wonder. However, as viewers are informed later, the "play" unfolding in the

elevator transports Kubo back to his high school days when he was a zealous fan, and reawakens his dormant passion for anime and manga. Okada's playing with his otaku-mates not only transforms the setting of the elevator into a space capsule; it also launches a time machine thrusting Kubo back to a past of which Kubo has fond memories, which he associates with "play."

This chance encounter in the elevator is a rite of passage that initiates Kubo as well as the audience to the coded practices, the rituals, the performativity, and the sociality unique to the otaku community. The elevator as the enclosed interior space appears to outsiders as indicative of the closetedness, the stasis, and the social withdrawal that characterize otaku. But for otaku, the elevator recalls the motifs of space or time travel, the fighter jet cabin in the *mecha* anime. It is a device of mobility that promises an exciting adventure. In Kubo's case, as the elevator is going down, Kubo is also symbolically descending into the underworld inhabited by otaku. Soon after, Kubo meets up with Tanaka and visits the secret "homeland," the flat where Tanaka and his group engage in otaku activities. After Kubo gets involved in the fandom, he forsakes study, neglects his girlfriend, and becomes disheveled mentally and physically, all of which play into the stereotype of otaku. However, the narrative arc of "Graffiti of Otaku Generation" follows the narrative arc of the "self-made man" myth, as Lamarre notes.[39] Kubo goes through ups and downs but eventually establishes a global otaku enterprise. But the story takes an even more fantastical turn at the end. By the year 2036 when Tokyo is destroyed and sunk underwater, Kubo and Tanaka, with their aging bodies, recover at the bottom of the sea the Tokyo "Otakuland" (a mimicry of Disneyland) they built forty years ago. As

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[39] Lamarre, "Otaku Movement," 169.

they enter the toy space capsule in the playground of Otakuland, as if in a dream, they see in the cabin their old otaku friends, those who Kubo meets in the elevator at the very beginning of the story. All of them, including Kubo and Tanaka, are young again. In their rejuvenated bodies, they undertake a space odyssey where the destination is the "otaku planet" in another universe. The dream of otaku, thus, lives on beyond the limits of time and space.

In "Graffiti of Otaku Generation," the forward-looking narrative is catapulted by a reanimation of the past facilitated by a cabin-like elevator, which comes full circle as the story of Kubo and Tanaka ends with them reliving their youths in a cabin drifting in outer space. Rather strikingly, the last act of the story does not proclaim vindication or triumph. To the contrary, the dive into the phantasmagoric realm aims almost if to deconstruct the otaku fantasy of the future and the overall fictive narrative of the otaku's heroic journey told in "Graffiti of Otaku Generation." What is the left at the end of the journey is a summoning up of past memory when Kubo first meets Tanaka's friends in the elevator. The predominance of nostalgia is a notable contradiction in the tale of the otaku's quest to conquer the world and beyond. In his nuanced reading of nostalgia in *Kitchen*, Treat sees that "[t]he novel suggests an 'already always' nostalgia, postmodern in nature because it is so guilelessly simulated."[40] For Treat, contemporary nostalgia as the logic of Japan's postmodernity "lacks any determined past to validate it," and thus becomes a desire without an object. The past retroactively reproduced is "the exercise of nostalgic, 'false' memory."[41] Most precariously, nostalgia is deployed as a supplement to the lack

[40] Treat, "Shōjo Culture," 376.
[41] Ibid.

of the ability to imagine a future, and a self-sabotaging reflex to preempt both the future and the present.[42]

Granted, "Graffiti of Otaku Generation" creates a "nostalgic subject," who according to Treat, generates nostalgia with an invested agency.[43] The ending registers an impulse to nullify the pursuit of the future, and subsequently substituting the future with a past. However, the viewer of *Otaku no Video* is *made aware* that both the future and the past are figments of imagination that are piloted by a group of otaku who play with different possibilities of molding the future and the past. But the temporality in "Graffiti no Video" is however not set to a free play. In a stunning quasi-modernist move, a future can only be imagined after the past, which is equally imaginary, is contingently located and created—Kubo starts to envision the future with an evocation of the past through the encounter in the elevator. The elevator is an ad hoc transitional space where Kubo first experiences wonder when witnessing Tanaka and his gang of otaku friends play out fantasy to make and transform reality. The wonder of play sets forth Kubo's *desire* to resuscitate and reinvent his past, and thereby to imagine a future different from what is dictated. The story only gives an amorphous contour to Kubo's past with a brief flashback to his high school days. Simulated or not, nostalgia is other than a paralyzing force, because his search for the past is *en route* to the future. That is to say, the transitional experience produces his subjectivity and individuality, facilitating the appearance of a personal history in relation to that of others. The motif of a hero's homecoming in *Otaku no Video* is presented by a return to this transitional place. Kubo does not reunite with his otaku friends in Tanaka's flat where videos, manga and otaku-

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[42] Ibid., 379.
[43] Ibid., 384.

related paraphernalia abound. They convene again in a space cabin, a scenario which their initial encounter in the elevator tries to enact through play. What is "home" to otaku is play, whereby they arrive at a sense of self from intersubjective relations, and obtain a semblance of agency by exercising their imagination through relating to the objects they read, watch, and play with. In Stiegler's term, the play in the elevator and in the cabin constitutes a transindividuation milieu where otaku are transformed together with others, even if tentatively. Admittedly, Okada possesses a self-aggrandizing tendency, as evidenced by designating otaku as the sole survivor in a dystopian future for instance. Yet, Okada understands that the core of otaku is still play, the transindividual milieu where otaku feel "at home" playing out their dreams and creating symbolic relations. The triumph of otaku is not defined by its "outward" expansion like what Kubo undertakes, but the ability and the desire to play unfolding in quotidian spaces like elevators or homes.

Notwithstanding, play entails a reality check. The fictional narrative of "Graffiti no Otaku" driven by otaku's will to triumph and transcendence is intercepted, punctuated by the chilly reality represented in the live-action documentary. Generically, "Graffiti of Otaku Generation" is a romance that portrays Kubo's romance with the otaku world. Kubo embodies the pathos of a Romantic hero in pursuit of the sublime— an "otaku sublime" in this case. His journey pushes further into an extraterrestrial space, and he does it for the greater good of the otaku at the expense of sacrificing the chance of living a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. And yet, while the story "Graffiti of Otaku Generation" glorifies the heroics and creates a myth out of otaku, the mockumentary "A Portrait of an Otaku" does the opposite by demythologizing and de-romanticizing the

ideal of otaku as depicted in "Graffiti of Otaku Generation." "A Portrait of an Otaku"

conducts interviews of individual otaku from different walks of life, and each individual

interview is a case study by itself. All the interviewees are given pseudonyms, and

according to the voice-over narrator, the interviewees' voices are altered and their facial

features are blurred with mosaics at the request of their subjects. Since each case study is

inserted within the story of Kubo, the live-action interview of an otaku undercuts the

fictional diegesis and purports to function as a reality check for the fanciful world

concocted by Kubo and his adventurous gang.

The transition from "fiction" to "reality" is prompted by a black-screen intertitle

indicating a date and a presumably real historical event that happened on this specific

date. The viewer can literally hear the typewriter tapping the letters unto the screen. For

instance, right after the elevator scene where Tanaka and his groupies are symbolically

conducting the rite of initiation for Kubo, the camera cuts to an intertitle reading, "1982,

3.18~ Broadcast Premiere of 'Magical Princess Minko Momo'" (figure 1). In the next

shot, the camera settles in the corner of a coffee shop where a middle-aged man is chain-

smoking while waiting to be interviewed. Then his "resume," including his fake name,

his year of birth, his real job, and specifically his "years as otaku," appears on the screen

(figure 2). The dim lighting, coarse texture and subdued tone of the real-life interview

pulls the viewer away from Kubo's colorful fictive universe back to the reality a veteran

otaku is confronted with. The sequence's montage plays with an array of techniques and

genres of image-making: animation, intertitles used in early news reporting and silent

films, text overlay to the video. The viewer is put on the spot, being trained, just as otaku

train themselves, to access and absorb a sudden onslaught of information and audiovisual

images in a short span of time, while navigating between "fiction," "history," and

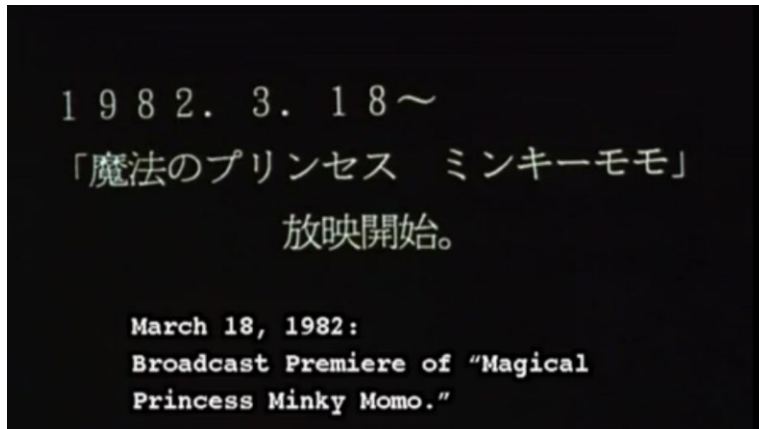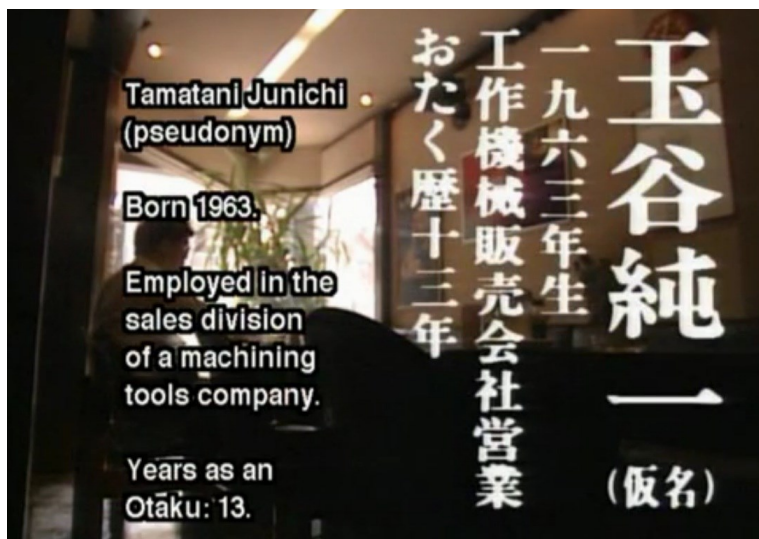"reality" hidden in the corners of everyday life.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Despite seeming differences, fiction, history, and reality are manifestly entirely of

otaku's making. The so-called "history" is tweaked into the history of anime releases. As

I mentioned earlier, the interview subjects were workers of Gainax at the time Gainax

produced *Otaku no Video* and therefore they were not reliable "samples." However, the

credibility of these interviewees and the validity of each case study is not the real issue

here. Thematically, each case study works either as a supplement or as a counterpoint—

in most situations both—to the happenings in the story of "Graffiti of Otaku Generation."

"Graffiti of Otaku Generation" celebrates the camaraderie and bravado of otaku, but the

documentary of "A Portrait of an Otaku" deconstructs the mythos established by the

fiction narrative of Kubo's adventure as an otaku. In a reverse way, Kubo's undeterred

determination in keeping up his "otaku career" completes the unfulfilled ambition of

these interviewees. Kubo's loyalty to his otaku identity and his otaku mates also provides

a great solace to these real otaku subjects who, after reverting back to a mundane work

life, have always reminisced, publicly or secretly, about the carefree days when they were

otaku. For instance, the interview subject in the coffee shop, when asked whether he had

any real friends when he was a full-fledged otaku in college, he at first rebuffs the

interviewer's question but then delivers an elaborate answer. Speaking with melancholy

and nostalgia, the interviewee begins by talking about his friends: "I had a lot of friends

to watch anime and go to Comic Market together with." Probably having already self-

internalized the stereotype of otaku being the loner, he adds immediately, "Well…I don't

know if I can call them my 'real friends.'" Yet, unlike the "geek" which otaku are

typecast as, his account of the past has none of the detail of the "things" he was obsessed

with during his otaku days, but is all about how he related to his "friends" by doing

otaku-related things together, such as drinking and discussing anime all night, or catching

early trains to the fanzine market. After recounting the mundane details, he acknowledges

that "I had tons of friends to do things like that with!" For the interviewee, "that," as a

pointed and yet ambiguous signifier, points to the transitional object inaugurating the

relationality that makes up his identity and the things he plays with. The interview proceeds almost like a therapy session, through which the interviewee comes to appreciate relationality, regardless of whether his playmates can be called friends or not. The relationship, as he reveals, extends beyond school days: his juniors in the club still pay him visits from time to time. The interviewee affirms, "I had the best time of my life when I belonged to the SF club in college. It was very fulfilling." What he reminisces is the transitional experience, where he feels a sense of belonging, where a feeling of "philia" is derived.

The interviewee's experience in college parallels and foresees Kubo's involvement with Tanaka's club. Although the subject in the first interview cannot identify whether these friends he met back in the college SF club could be counted as "real friends," his vivid memory and detailed account of their undertakings together testify to the fact that there exists among the otaku, even if temporarily, a sense of companionship and commitment. Interestingly, in "Graffiti of Otaku Generation," right before Kubo steps into the elevator to have his fateful encounter with Tanaka, his male senior classmates are making fun of Kubo's masculinity being compromised by playing a "girly" sport like tennis. It appears doubtful that Kubo has "real friends" before getting connected to Tanaka and his cohorts. The fact that the conversation between these senior classmates revolves around status symbols such as cars, or the latest fashion items, shows that these so-called "normal" guys are no different from otaku. They also have obsessions as otaku do, with the difference being that the objects of their obsessions help them to become conforming middle-class male subjects. *Otaku no Video* refuses to acknowledge the norm as in any way nobler and better than the otaku way of life. Like everyone else,

otaku are relational creatures, with the only difference being that they are selectively social.

Besieged by media bashing of otaku at the time of its release, *Otaku no Video* could not openly defend otaku, but it utilizes a strategy of quietly interspersing the "real" and the "fiction," the normal and the abnormal (otaku), and dramatizes the uncanny similarities and unassimilable differences in between. In particular, the series gives the image its own diegetic economy irreducible to narrative diegesis. The faceless and voiceless interviewer in "Portrait of an Otaku" acts as a stand-in for the suspicious public, and the interview questions are designed to perform a prescriptive taxonomy based on a stereotype of otaku so as to put otaku in his correct (non)position in the society. For instance, on behalf of those who scoff at otaku's social standing and upward mobility, the real-life interview in the coffee shop concludes by asking a blunt but most predictable question: "When did you graduate?" As if following a script, the subject hesitates but eventually tells the interviewer "Actually, I dropped out." This final set of questions and answers pigeonholes otaku into the category of "loser." However, this answer should not be interpreted as an admission of defeat, since it is more of a performance to appease the mainstream audience. In the entire interview, the highlight is the subject's recounting of his SF club activities and his otaku "friends." As he recalls his past, the camera no longer fixates on his face, which we only see in profile or blurred. Instead, his recollection is accompanied by visual "evidence" of old black-and-white photographs, in which the young crowd rushes into train stations, swarms into Comiket-like events, and gathers around fanzine stands. The photographs are meant to serve as evidence, but as "images of reality" they remain incommensurable and irreducible to the "fake" account of the

interviewee. As a mockumentary, "A Portrait of Otaku" has no valid reference value. Yet the creative negotiation between fiction and reality actualizes the transitional experience.

In other words, *Otaku no Video* does not purport to provide an authoritative study of otaku, but invites us to play. We are prompted to play together *with* and play *like* otaku by actively configuring fantasy and fact. The visual composition gives the viewer a first-hand on-site tutorial of how otaku play. As a live-action documentary, "A Portrait of an Otaku" is supposed to render a reality which functions as a metanarrative to comment and contains the fantasy portrayed in the fictional narrative of "Graffiti of Otaku Generation." However, the case study is a performance choreographed by Gainax: each interview enacts a stereotype but simultaneously destabilizes it, and the interviewees are not reliable subjects. In the meanwhile, the fictional narrative in anime resonates with reality. For instance, Kubo and Tanaka coauthor the book *The Japan that Can Say 'Oh No!"* after their international expansion, its title mimicking the 1989 publication of *The Japan That Can Say No* by Ishihara. Kubo and Tanaka's company makes a successful turnaround by the production of garage model kits, which had a counterpart in "reality" when *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s collectible anime figures hit record sales in Japan. What the film presents is what Steven Shaviro calls "a *flat ontology*," in which both the media of anime and that of documentary assume "the kind of status and the same degree of actuality."[44] In "A Portrait of Otaku," there exist irreconcilable contradictions between the scripted "plot" of the interview and the image diegesis. The mockumentary as a visual segment by itself also proceeds on a plane of diegesis different from the anime. The intertitle that marks the transition between the anime and the documentary is also another image

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[44] Shaviro. "Gamer," 104.

register that embodies another plane of (non)diegesis. Each intertitle reports a historical event, real or imaginary, ranging from the British invasion of the Falkland Islands on May 1, 1982, a nuclear waste explosion accident on the moon in 1999, to the launching of a space battleship in 2035. The viewer is not able to make out the meanings of these dividing intertitles because they are not tethered to the diegesis of either the documentary or that of the anime.

Borrowing Lamarre's conceptualization, diegetic and non-diegetic registers unfold like multiple planes on the single plane of *Otaku no Video*.[45] Or in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, these multiple planes are planes of immanence with parallel, intersecting or contradicting information or non-information. The viewer is led to meander through the similarities as well as disparities, complementarities as well as incommensurabilities, between the planes of images. The "meaning" is always immanent among the "fragments" of the film, but it fails to cohere and transcend into a monopolizing and all-encompassing "message," i.e. ideology, which Azuma calls "the grand narrative." The breakdown of the hierarchy between the real and fiction, and the impossibility of locating a diegetic center, according to Okada, define what Okada calls "otaku perception," or Lamarre terms "Otaku Imaging." The diegetic decentralization, and the malleable interplay between fiction and reality, also constitutes what Deleuze and Guattari term "line of flights" and enables a kind of "nomadic creativity."[46] The viewer of *Otaku no Video* is forced to unlearn the habit of searching for truth and relearn how to steer through the slippery boundaries between fantasy and fact. In other words, viewers

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[45] Lamarre, "Otaku Movement."
[46] Tim Rayner, "Line of Flight: Deleuze and Nomadic Creativity," *Philosophy for Change*, June 18, 2013, https://philosophyforchange.wordpress.com/2013/06/18/lines-of-flight-deleuze-and-nomadic-creativity/

are like toddlers again, who have to take risks, embarking on cognitive and affective lines of flight without a safe anchor. To argue in Winnicott's paradigm, *Otaku no Video* embodies the transitional experience of play beyond the presumed subject matter that is otaku. Unable to arrive at a definitive set of meanings, we as viewers cannot but to give up mastery. Instead, we become open to different possibilities and gain a contingent sense of agency in participating in the game of "working out" the boundary between fiction and reality, even if the boundary is only tentative and susceptible to change. Considering that play in its basic definition means "to exercise or occupy oneself, and to be engaged with some activity," the "work" we do as viewers is fundamentally play, and this play is akin to the play in the transitional space.[47] We play as creative process, not to create truth, but to create becoming with potentialities.

Certainly, the kind of play valorized by *Otaku no Video* and otaku subculture worry cultural critics and the society at large. Specifically, the absence of "history" or reality as an indubitable and immutable reference creates the impression that otaku subculture encourages escapism, which is indirectly responsible for the Miyazaki incident and related to the Aum Shinrikyo subway attack. In *Otaku no Video*, history is represented as intertitles, serving the simple function of cuing the shift from between anime and live-action. However, the history is reproduced in sound bites, as we literally hear the sounds of the typewriter keying onto the screen a certain historical event in one line. As Jameson reminds us, this what-happened-in-history type of history is not a historical reality, but a blatant reduction and a reification of what cannot be reproduced

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[47] OED.

and represented into "a kind of thing" that can be grasped by dates.[48] History, part of the "grand narrative" in Azuma's term, is indeed lost in translation. However, in actuality, the Japanese government since the defeat of WWII has shown a concerted effort to evade and willfully ignore history as grand narrative. Up to today, history lessons taught in Japanese high schools are notorious for glossing over or omitting altogether Japan's war crimes. What replaces history is a narrative of economic prosperity and social cohesion that promises consumerist wellbeing earned by hard work and sacrifice for the company. The narrative of a man being rewarded with a sweet home if he devotes himself first to school and later to the company is a cultural imaginary mistaken for a universal reality. In this regard, *Otaku no Video* is a work of raw realism because there is no ultimate or totality of reality to fall back on in post-WWII Japan.

Azuma in his book examines the reasons that otaku prefer fiction to reality and emphasizes that it is not that otaku have difficulties distinguishing fiction from reality. Rather, with Japan's social values and standards falling apart, otaku find it more expedient to construct an alternative in a fictional world to a reality that fails to consolidate into a grand narrative. Despite the fact that Azuma finds otaku's foray into fiction problematic, he is sympathetic to otaku: "[I]t is [otaku who may be said to be socially engaged and realistic in Japan today, by virtue of not choosing the 'social reality.'"[49] Quite peculiarly, Azuma's argument, like Treat, is predicated upon an assumption of treating reality and fiction as two ontologically distinct entities exclusive and dialectical to each other, with a finite reality coming before the fiction. Yet the

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[48] Frederic Jameson. "Nostalgia for the Present," in *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991), 279-296.
[49] Azuma, *Otaku*, 27.

"social reality" is a reified narrative believed to be real. My-home-ism makes up a picture-perfect ideal of a home furnished with a car, neat home appliances, and a good wife who is also a caring mother. In contrast, *Otaku no Video* presents a domestic life that veers away from the normative discourse of "home": one interviewee turns his dwelling into a media library which is almost an intended allusion to Miyazaki, but the interviewee does it for the purpose of archiving and serving his network of otaku friends. Precisely because the interviewee is not a reliable subject and his "home" is staged, viewers cannot locate the "reality" of the otaku's home as an anomaly in order to confirm the ideal home delineated by my-home-ism as more real and normal. *Otaku no Video* is indifferent to truth and reality; instead, it revels audaciously in play by proliferating and converting everything—the otaku's life included—into images. For the social reality proffered, i.e. following a course of life from a diligent student to a loyal salaryman, is fundamentally an image, unattainable by many but nevertheless upheld at the expense of exclusion and violence experienced as an everyday living reality.

Often reductively labelled as postmodern image creatures on the receiving end of criticism, otaku and their relation to images form an embodied critique of social "reality" consolidated by and consolidating a prescriptive set of images and narratives. Because they are playing, what registers the difference between reality and fiction is the varying degrees of bodily and cognitive intensities as the *effect* of reality. Therefore, it is not that otaku choose social reality outright over fiction as suggested by Azuma. Rather, they see the mutual imbrication, mutual contamination and enmeshment between the plane of fiction and the plane of reality. In this regard, otaku practice is not simply a blindfolded escapade into an insulated world identified as "fiction." On the contrary, to a certain

extent, otaku devise a coping strategy, a way of engaging with "the world" by playing—for play is by definition an engagement. What otaku create in play is a plurality of worlds embedded in and yet irreducible to the "world" in question, whereby the world is transformed. The city of Tokyo is literally recreated into an otaku playground. As Morikawa Kaiichirô points out, otaku make home a "personapolis" constellated with symbols of anime and manga, and in turn the imaginative private universe invades the public space and constellates urban life, with giant anime billboards colonizing Tokyo's cityscape and the district of Akihabara inundated with anime fans from all over the world. Otaku's "little" fantasy also reshaped the music landscape, with Vocaloid holograms of anime characters, Hatsune Miku being the most famous, topping music charts and becoming both a domestic and international sensation. Miku hit the English news headlines in 2014 in the United States when "she" opened for Lady Gaga's tour. When Vocaloids started to gain popularity in the early 2000s, the hosts of music shows struggled to find words to introduce "it" as they were supposed to give a few personal tidbits about the singer. While "it" is perceived as yet another cultural fetish and technological oddity that can only originate from and happen in Japan, the Vocaloid is by no means an innovation: it simply materializes by exteriorizing the image-making principle of popular music industries. Talent management agencies, such as Johnny & Associates that helped make J-pop a cultural phenomenon in Asia during the 1980s and 1990s, produce idols and singers as images with highly-formulated sounds. The Vocaloid, borrowing the imaginary form of anime, echoes the imaginary nature in the manufacturing of pop stars. Starting from a transitional practice, otaku's play is a force that keeps deterritorializing and reterritorializing the landscape and culture.

III.   Self-Organizing Force of Otaku as a Minor Culture

Instead of shaping into a "counter culture" that rebels loudly against authority, the otaku's practices constitute the minor culture I introduce in Chapter 2. Being fully aware of their belittled social status and likely choosing to stay "lowly" in the Japanese cultural hierarchy, otaku are committed to their "little" plays, which Azuma condemns as consumption of "small narratives." By virtue of not taking themselves seriously and instead simply playing, otaku carve out a cognitive space where they allow themselves not to treat the authority as the immutable truth and thereby create a different relation to authority. Both intratextually and extratextually, *Otaku no Video* indicates a movement towards what Deleuze and Guattari term a minor practice. A minor practice does not pursue an epiphany or a grand narrative; it only offers "collective assemblages of enunciations."[50] The narrative and visual economy of *Otaku no Video* contains is a collective of multiplicities and is always in flux: it emerges, mutates, flips inside to outside, permeates by smuggling fiction within reality, and vice versa. To wit, it deterritorializes and reterritorializes, actualizing the diverging force of the minor practice.

A series of "case studies" done in the form of interviews conducted in *Otaku no Video* is obviously a reaction to the regulating mechanism imposed from "outside" after the Miyazaki incident. Almost as if to push the external epistemological pressure to the limit *from inside*, after each interview, the impassive voice-narrator speaks through pseudo-scientific graphs or a statistical diagram that sums up the case studied. The

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[50] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 18.

indexibility of otaku performs a discursive *gesture* to categorize what otaku is: his personality, his social position, his peculiar hobbies, and his sexuality. Yet, by multiplying partly real and partly forged narratives that refuse to cohere, only to contradict, what the viewer takes away is not "*a* portrait of otaku" as the documentary promises, but "graffiti of otaku," which is the title of the animation segment of the show. A portrait, usually done on commission, indicates a unified polished account officialized by an authority. In contrast, graffiti, deriving from the Italian word *graffio*, means to scratch a writing or drawing into the surface to show "a ground of different color" underneath the superficial layer, according to OED.[51] Thus, a graffiti suggests unevenness, friction and differentiation. It also connotes an evasion of authority and an embrace of the multitude since it is done without permission and open to public view. By stealthily substituting portrait with graffiti, *Otaku no Video* effectively launches a silent coup by usurping the external authority it purports to respond to, and replacing it with the self-organizing force of the minor culture in gearing up to the iconoclastic event that is the airing of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. I call it a self-organizing force rather than self-governance, because self-governance implies containment by rationality, as Foucault points out.[52] The shaping of the otaku subculture takes place in play, and while play has a set of rules and organizing principles, these rules are not hardened institutionalized disciplines but open to self-differentiation, whereby the rules are being negotiated and rewritten. Therefore, otaku movement, in Lamarre's term, is propelled by forces that diverge and intersect, organizing a "collective assemblage" called otaku.

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[51] Oxford English Dictionary, "graffito," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/80475#eid2641113.
[52] Foucault, "Governmentality."

From the onset, *Otaku no Video* is Okada's attempt to situate Gainax and himself as an insider's authority and spiritual leader for otaku in a distorted but meaningful way. When judged retrospectively, more than Okada's "otakuology" which aims to institutes an epistemology of otaku, *Otaku no Video* as I see it is more relevant in the sense that it organizes a field of play. Most critically, it functions as a community support needed for play. Figuratively speaking, *Otaku no Video* assumes a self-delegated parental role, by *caring* about how otaku play, what they play and who they play with. In so doing, Gainax serves an intermediary by buffering the impact from the external authority while introducing it, and rechanneling the energy to the transitional space of play, to the invested object relation. The case studies interspersed in the fiction of animation mark a tentative limit of play even though they are also part of the play, and demarcate a pliant border of the imagination even though they are part of the imagination. In the first interview, the revelation of the interviewee's dropping out of college gives a nod, but not a full bow, to a punitive mainstream ideology dictating that too much play leads to failure. The admission of the "external" and the "outside" through the caretaker is integral to play, but the "external" authority does not get to determine and define all the undertakings inside the transitional space. By acknowledging functioning cultural rules, i.e. a college diploma as the basis for being a dutiful citizen in Japan, *Otaku no Video* breaks the myth of otaku as imperviously antisocial. At the same time, it also breaks away from established social norms by making "failure" only one among the many possibilities and singularities of otaku's play. Specifically, *Otaku no Video* downplays socially-perceived "failure" by play, by playing with failure towards an open becoming.

As a minor experimental work among Gainax's impressive oeuvre, one of the salient features of *Otaku no Video* is its undercutting of the pathos of failure and victimization that ensued from the criminalization of otaku since the Miyazaki incident. The mini-series maintains a low-key humor peppered with self-denigrating jokes. In another interview, the interviewee, a business manager dressed in suit and tie, denies his past of participating in cosplaying, but he gets caught immediately when staff members present to him the cosplay costumes and gadgets he owns. Obviously, the interview is an outright farce to engender laughter from its intended audience, i.e. otaku and those are interested in the otaku subculture. Laughter is a symbolic means of connecting the viewer with the interviewee to the transitional space of play. We as viewer laugh, not at the interviewee, but out of surprise at the subversion of expectations, the temporary suspension of received social conventions. That is to say, a reordering of things happening in play gives rise to feelings of joy and surprise. For its target otaku audience, this light-hearted vignette on the "closetedness" of otaku made by veteran otaku is at once a self-parody and a self-introspection. Both are attempts at a reorganization of the relation of the self to itself. Having the audacity and capacity to self-critique by way of self-ridicule, as demonstrated in *Otaku no Video*, is a testament to the otaku's community having developed its own subjectivity and self-organizing principle. Laughter and humor are not expressions of shame or embarrassment, but indicative of the otaku's self-affirmation derived from the transitional space of play where they come to acquire a sense of self in relation to things.

The brilliance of *Otaku no Video* is that it shows how otaku develop a limited sense of *savoir faire* and *savoir-vivre* through play. While the interviews and the

questions asked seem to "frame" otaku in a pathological taxonomy, these case studies as interviews also function as a reverse discourse to establish otaku as a minor culture with its own taxonomy, with its own division of labor, social networks, and specifically, its own diverse technics of creativity. Otaku are incredibly resourceful: they work with different materials, utilize an array of devices and skills, whereby they develop much more active, dynamic and versatile relations to themselves, to things, and to other otaku. Otaku are often mistakenly associated with cool, "high-tech" gadgets. However, if otaku are "techies" in any way, it is in their desire and openness to go through trial and error in the process of crafting their imagination through the technical object, whereby they learn know-how. What is really "cool" about otaku's practices is the magic emerging from the liminal experience of exercising their creativity in working intimately with the objects—even if with the most ordinary, "uncool" objects.

In one instance, the interviewee demonstrates how to make a "garage model kit." As he insists, he prefers garage kits to plastic models, since the latter are only mass-produced industrial products while the former requires "heart and soul" in the construction. During the interview, we see him put tender care into the figures and hear him elaborate on the techniques of assembling and painting. Noticeably, the garage model kit requires no fancy tools or materials, but entails time, patience and most importantly, an exercise of memory. The skills of coloring application and putting the garage kit pieces together are the embodied practice of memory, i.e. anamnesis, whereas the garage model kit, as a "toy," is a form of hypomnesis externalizing the memory not only of the interviewee, but of generations of otaku who also build garage kits. That is to say, as the interviewee works in solitude on his figures, he becomes embedded and

"transindividuated," in Stiegler's terms, in an "associated hypomnesic milieu." He is no longer a mere consumer who buys the garage kit, but a creator who organizes his physical and psychical energy to engage in meaning-making labor. This engagement in the meaning-making process is precisely the symbolic practice animating the transitional space. With his playful but serious endeavor to animate his favorite female anime character in a Pygmalion-like fashion, what the interviewee animates is his creative potential, and an imaginary bond between him and the object, a coextensive relation between him and other garage-kit makers.

In his comprehensive analysis of *Otaku no Video*, Lamarre notices that otaku practices are "techniques of self-cultivation" that overcome and transform "disciplinary formations via play."[53] Paradoxically, it transcends discipline by recourse to ideology. For instance, the success story of Kubo and Tanaka, for instance, calls to mind the enduring Victorian-Meiji ideal, *risshin shusse*, that the individual rises and gains prominence in the world through "commercial success."[54] When read contemporarily, the narrative of a "self-made man," Lamarre cautions, presages Japan's ideological shift to neoliberalism, and reinforces the modern disciplinization of the "self-governing subject" as Foucault lays out. Nevertheless, despite the inherent contradictions that oscillate between discipline and ideology in an attempt to outplay either, Lamarre remains affirmative of *Otaku no Video* for putting forth "a space of play that is not automatically recuperable as ideology or discipline," which "also suggests a refusal of work, and evokes the power of labor."[55] For Lamarre, otaku's "labor power" and "communicative

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[53] Lamarre, "Otaku Movement."
[54] Ibid., 169.
[55] Ibid., 170.

labor" in a space of play are demonstrated in their "almost fetish activity and productivity in the reception and dissemination of images."[56] Following Hardt and Negri's theory, Lamarre identifies the way otaku deal with images that defies hierarchy and requires cooperation as an example of "constituent power." It is through their constituent labor in the space of play that confounds the relation between work and play.

Consonant with Lamarre's view, I see the limits of otaku "self-cultivation." In Winnicott's definition, the sense of mastery derived from the transitional space of play is illusory. Otaku *savoir faire* derived from otaku play can easily become reified into expressions of cosmopolitan capitalism, and translated into lucrative creative industry and savvy consumer culture. Moreover, by scrambling the distinction between "social reality" and fiction, can otaku play reach a stasis and induce debilitating cynicism and inert detachment, given that not all play is transitional? What if otaku fantasy signifies a revival of "the occult and mysticism," as cautioned by Azuma, which is also hinted at in *Otaku no Video* as Kubo and Tanaka renew themselves and find an afterlife in another planet? [57] What is the difference between otaku's play with fantasy and Aum Shinrikyo's promise of magic powers? As I identify the otaku subculture as a self-organizing force of a minor culture, does it move towards implementing a falsified sense of "autonomy within consumerism" with "active forms of enslavement to the commodity," which is Lamarre's concern? [58] These questions do not admit of simple answers.

However, as I've demonstrated in this chapter, I complement Lamarre's approach by focusing on what happens in play rather than prioritizing the "images" otaku consume

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[56] Ibid., 164.
[57] Azuma, *Otaku*, 28.
[58] Lamarre, "Otaku Movement," 171.

and disseminate. For according to Winnicott, what constitutes play is not the object, but the toddler's *relation* to the object. The transitional object, the blanket for instance, exists insofar as the toddler knows and grows attached to it. In the case of otaku, images and information are only *means* to open the space of play: they do not determine play and neither are they the finite "products" of play. Lamarre follows the lead of Gainax's "discourses" by distinguishing a strand of images and information unique to otaku. However, such an approach can verge on a "branding" effort, which is likely to be Gainax's ulterior motive, as "images" produced by Gainax indeed became trendy commodities after the airing of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Most unsettlingly, the bracketing of otaku's space of play as image consumption and production recalls the public's response to Miyazaki's murders. Meanwhile, multivalenced possibilities, as well as risks, in the transitional space of play are made to conform to the reductive capitalist axiom of production and consumption. Play becomes part of the capitalist's calculus, with Miyazaki as an unfortunate example of miscalculation. This is what kills play and the transitional space.

Play is all about relationality, as manifested by the relationship between the toddler and the object, and the relationality established by play is symbolic by nature since it arises from two incommensurable domains, such as reality and imagination, fact and fantasy. *Otaku* as an honorific second-person address, "you," indicates a relation, albeit an unfamiliar relation. One apocryphal account has it that otaku was first used in situations in which fans encountered other fans from different circles but with similar interests. Thus, otaku, in its origin use, points to the relationality established by virtue of play. *Otaku no Video*, before its said discursive formations through images, is

fundamentally an attempt to forge an alliance with and among its otaku viewers, in the same way Tanaka recruits Kubo into his otaku adventure. Moreover, because the relationality is symbolic and cannot be calculated, play is an invaluable practice producing value that keeps revitalizing fandom and the subculture which creates and is created by the fandom.[59] In *Otaku no Video*, after he gets deeply involved with Tanaka's group, Kubo when being asked whether he has a new job answers, "Yes…but I don't get paid for it." The "unpaid work" on the one hand snipes at the unwritten rule in Japanese corporate culture and Japan's enterprise society, under which the salaryman's after-work entertainment and women's domestic labor are work without pay. Yet on the other hand, fans' unpaid work, that is, their "play," constitutes an ongoing economic force, divergent from the main economy and unharnessed by the nation-state. Lamarre sees that fans' unpaid work disarticulates the Fordist organization of labor processes and introduces a "communicative labor" that carries visual information beyond borders. My interest is different from Lamarre's, since a communicative labor, or any type of labor, requires bodily and cognitive engagement and investment. What distinguishes otaku is that their labor engagement takes the form of play. As I emphasize earlier, to play is to engage to work. This "engagement" instills a sense of bonding which permeates and expands, constituting and constitutive of the community.

Hence, the otaku's play, based at home, redefines what it means to be home and rewrites the grammar of socio-economic relations. It creates a spatial-temporality that cannot be completely synchronized and mapped by capitalist time and cartography.

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[59] Stiegler, "The Disaffected Individual in the Process of Psychic and Collective Disindividuation." As Stiegler emphasize, "[Value is only worth something inasmuch as it evaluates what has no price. It cannot, therefore, be completely calculated."

Otaku fandom is like a vortex that pulls fans inward to the space of play, but this centripetal force is also a centrifugal movement with the relationality in play actualizing collaborative networks and contributive economy. *Otaku no Video* showcases how the otaku community uses their networks to negotiate and overwrite the limits imposed by the TV programming industry. In one interview, the otaku owns a formidable collection of videos, but has no time to watch everything he has recorded, let alone analyze or produce images as Lamarre and Okada expects of otaku. His "archival fever," so to speak, is boosted by his engagement with a cooperative network whereby he obtains his collections and contributes his labor. "By the time you got to my level, you're hooked into a vast network," he professes proudly. In fact, the interview is interrupted by a phone call from his network of friends asking him to record a TV program that is live on-air at the moment, and he records it immediately on demand. He emphasizes that the guiding principle for an anime video collector is to record on schedule and expresses his reliance on those who live in rural areas where uncommon shows are broadcast. Strikingly, he is less concerned about images and information than his relation and commitment to the network. Moreover, video recording is an effort aimed at capturing equally the temporal and the image flow. With the aid of new technology, and more critically with the help of the network, otaku attempt to reorganize allotted brain time and the contents controlled by the cultural programming industry. Collaborative practices premised on relationality, such as video recording, content sharing and fan subbing, are strategies to bend the rules and evade the grip of capitalism, whereby they also call forth a contributive economy that starts from the otaku's home but develops into a global economic force.

Dominant studies on otaku fandom and youth culture at large mainly address the patterns of consumption and productions as the articulations of postmodernity and global consumerist capitalism. In this chapter, by giving a Winnicottian reading of *Otaku no Video*, I propose a paradigm shift to explore the transitional space of play and the relationality established by play. It is not to deny the gravity of the situation of complacency, apathy and possibly anomie pervading postmodern youth, and the correlation between youth's disaffection and the attention-capture apparatuses of cultural industries, which I discuss in earlier chapters. However, precisely because consumerism keeps eroding the spaces where the transitional experience occurs and turns play into consumption, it is imperative to safeguard the transitional space and make youth play. The *shōjo* culture, albeit equated by critics as postmodern consumption, is an active engagement by turning *shōjo*, the non-identity in Japan's economic blueprint, into a productive signifying practice. The energetic engagement of otaku with their cohorts and with their objects constitutes a stark contrast to the social miasma and cultural lethargy felt in Japan since the economic bubble burst. This contrast also shows itself in the economy, as the subculture of anime and manga and Japanese youth culture at large have gained a global presence and its economy continues to grow at a steady pace even as Japan's economy has suffered from stagnant growth for decades. While I agree with critics that the otaku phenomenon is created by and in turn creates indirectly Japan's political and economic impasse, I also see that otaku's "retreat" to play as providing a possible corrective to revitalize the spirit, *espirit*, and reanimate the desire required of the libidinal economy. It doesn't mean at all that otaku is the correct model of play—quite the opposite. But given Japan's stringent social strictures, their commitment to play offers

different imaginations of relationality to self, to work, and to things. As the transitional

space of play is a form of "taking care," as Stiegler suggests, guiding youth in how to

play is the beginning of shaping their savoir-faire, savoir-vivre, and in turn taking care of

the national and global economy at large

Conclusion

One evening, in the midst of wrapping up this dissertation, I took a brief break and, like millions of users worldwide, got on Twitter to check the trending news. Before realizing what had happened, a video auto-played in my Twitter feed as soon as the webpage loaded: a man in the car was speaking, showing some objects in the passenger's seat which were difficult to make out. The camera followed him out of the car, and it was not until at the end of the clip when he was about to enter a yard with a machinegun in his hand that the viewer came to realize he carried firearms in the car. Still, if there were no caption indicating the footage as the unfolding shooting situation in New Zealand, the killer's live broadcast of massacre appeared at first to be a video capture from social media's livestreaming, or a segment from a hyperreal videogame. Minutes later, the video on my feed was taken down, but it had already gone viral.[1] The next day, tabloids, *The Scottish Sun* for instance, had the screencap of the suspect's face from the streaming as its front cover, reported the mass shooting with a sensationalized headline, "Facebook Terrorist," recalling "The Otaku Murderer" the Japanese media used to label Miyazaki after his arrest in 1989. The video, the then-new technology, became the tool for Miyazaki to perpetuate crimes: he recorded his killing of the victims as part of his video collection, and hence was castigated as "The Otaku Murderer." Exactly thirty years later, the internet and social networking services play the key role in inciting and normalizing

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[1] Drew Harwell, "Fewer than 200 people watched the New Zealand massacre live. A hateful group helped it reach millions," *The Washington Post*, March 19, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2019/03/19/fewer-than-people-watched-new-zealand-massacre-live-hateful-group-helped-it-reach-millions/?utm_term=.fa33a5cbcaaa.

violence. My good intention of caring for the world by attending to the news inadvertently helped "feeding" careless and disaffected terrorism—not in the limited sense of watching explicit footage that spouted hate, but in the broader sense of subjecting my senses and brain to the unprompted, desensitizing bombardment of Twitter feeds. The mental "break" I was looking for ended up being a surrender of my attention to be rewired up instantaneously by Twitter's algorithmic calculus.

In the wake of New Zealand atrocities, criticisms were yet again directed at tech giants such as Facebook and Twitter for failing to stop the violent videos from circulating, and warnings were made for the correlation between digital reticulated networks and the global rise of right-wing extremism and white supremacy groups.[2] Noticeably, much of the debate over the problems and challenges posed by the "new" media revolves around the urgency and viability of regulating the content, as if the content alone is responsible for radicalization and for inducing imitative violence. Such a concern, underlying the procedures of censorship, has persisted throughout history, despite the change of the "media" form. From the Athenian court that accused Socrates for corrupting the youth with his "teachings," to Ishihara who proposed the Nonexistent Youth Bill, and to advocates of parental control, the recurring anxiety over the influence of content is often misplaced. What may corrupt the mind, as Socrates warns, is artificial memory, which for Socrates is writing as hypomnemata, because it impairs memory and creates a lazy mind. At the same time, the hypomnemata as the exteriorization of thought,

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[2] Weiyi Cai and Simone Landon, "Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing. So Are Their Connections," New York Times, April 3, 2019 , https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/03/world/white-extremist-terrorism-christchurch.html.

also provide the supplement to memory and subsequently define the way attention is exercised and organized.

In fact, as Bernard Stiegler emphasizes, the human's tools since the Paleolithic Age are fundamentally "hypomnesiac" in nature. By extending Heidegger's theory, Stiegler argues that technical objects are tertiary retentions, which as sedimentations of intergenerational memory traces constitute a psychotechnical milieu conditioning the interplay between primary and secondary retention.[3] To put it simply, artifacts, with their retentional function, embody cultural memory and embed the individual in the community. The temporal experience woven by primary, secondary, and tertiary retentions foregrounds the past and the present in shaping protention, the projection of an indeterminate future.[4] This anticipation for an indeterminacy of the future is an *attente*, a waiting by holding attention and care, which is also the formation of desire for the infinite and the incalculable. The violence triggered by "new" media, with the drive-driven consumerist economy it thrives on and bolsters, has more to do with the mutilation and mutation of this *attente* than with the kind of content being circulated. The increasing incidents of apocalyptically destructive acts performed in the name of extremist ideologies bespeak a crisis of the spirit, *esprit*, stemming from the loss of knowledge and desire to anticipate the future. The weapon the killer of New Zealand massacre wielded is not the semiautomatic rifle, but attention-capture apparatuses that generate and reproduce a chain of automatized responses, which ultimately amalgamates to no response at all. With every eruption of violence, we cannot help but go through the same predictable

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[3] Daniel Ross, "Care and Carelessness in the Anthropocene: Introduction to a Reading of Stiegler and Heidegger," University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 11 May 2018, Academia.edu,

[4] Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 38.

cycle of shock, disbelief, anger, condemnation, and online grieving, but the incident will quickly fall into oblivion as soon as it stops trending. The horizon of the future keeps retreating from view, and in its place is a disaffected and careless consumerist interface governed by calculable time, specifically computable brain time. Digital algorithms, for instance, decide when I should watch a livestreamed clip of massacre and determines when the incident will be forgotten. Hence, in response to mass shootings, gun control, while important, can only fix part of the problem. The larger structural issue lies in the control of the mind that deforms attention and paralyzes care.

Premised on attention, my dissertation uses the case of Japanese popular culture to shed light on the global ramifications of the toxic "spirit" beyond the confines of Japan and its subculture of anime and manga. I seek a different direction other than the two existing dominant approaches to anime and manga: media studies and cultural studies. While sharing a similar concern with the recent trend of media studies with regard to the impact of digital and relational technologies such as SNS, I resist the temptation of reifying the commodified distinctions between the "new" and the "traditional" media. For anime and manga, although perceived as the emblem of a "cool" Japan, entail a whole range and variety of practices ranging from high-tech or low-tech media. Following Stiegler's treatise, media, whether old or new, and irrespective of the content they disseminate, are technical objects bearing the exteriorization of memory accumulated and inherited from our ancestors. Considered this way, media is not a finished and finite text produced for audiences to consume, as suggested by the interpretative paradigm of "media triangle" that proceeds through the sites of text, production and audience. Rather, media functions as a kind of technical memory enacting an open-ended prosthetic process

to remedy the finitude of human retention while simultaneously configuring retentional flows, that is, attention. This indeterminate process, made possible by determined objects that materialize the past, is the basis of culture, whereby the present "I," in becoming articulated with the "we" from the past, opens up the future. Insofar as anime and manga are cultural artifacts, the study of Japanese popular culture for which anime and manga constitute the mainstay entails an inquiry into organization of attention. While cultural studies examines articulations of subjectivity and identity, or the lack thereof, in "cultural" transactions between the subaltern and the hegemonic, the local and the global, my emphasis is not how certain cultures inform the production of the subject. Especially in late capitalism, a cultural identity is readily a commodity, a brand, such as Japan meaning cool, and a subject is reduced to being a consumer. The culture being levelled into a sleek logo devoid of any singularities is rooted in psychotechnological apparatuses that destroy attention and undermine the desire for an indeterminable future that holds the cultural imagination. In our hyperindustrial epoch, in which advertising and programming industries have manufactured an epidemic of ADHD to further the grip of consumerism, the task of cultural studies is the corrosion and transmutation of the retentional milieu, without which cultural formation is not possible.

Therefore, my project begins by examining the censorship of anime and manga, proposing a critical intervention that prioritizes attention formation over content analysis. The phenomenon of anime and manga emerging to be the driving force of Japan's "soft power" intimates first and foremost malleable attention processes facilitated by the cultural industry of anime and manga. Cultural industries, built on industrialization of temporal experience and memory, exercise what Stiegler terms "psychopower" by

regulating the disposition of psychic energy in a targeted population to maximize

economic effect. In this respect, the otaku's "database consumption" that Azuma Hiroki

identifies as the symptom of Japan's postmodernity is consonant with the global "big

data" which, as a technique of psychopower, computes human behaviors and relations on

both micro and macro levels into a complex web of statistics and algorithms. That is to

say, the ways in which attention is organized and "spent" not only defines a subculture

constituted by anime and manga fans, but also comes to navigate geopolitics, such as

Japan's reorienting itself back to "Asia" through its popular culture, as I discuss in

chapter three. The U.S. electing the first Twitter president, and the recent surge of global

right-wing violence around the globe are all part of the ramifications of psychopolitical

governance that turns the mind at once into a battle ground of war and a repository for

wealth and power.

In this sense, the anime and manga subculture on the one hand offers a primary

example demonstrating the dire consequences of psychopower, with audio-visual

psychotechnologies constantly capturing attention and depleting libidinal energy.

Specifically, otaku, as a token figure connoting social dissociation caused by excessive

media consumption, epitomizes the consumerist reorganization of "home"—which is the

original meaning of otaku—through the ideology of my-home-ism. Otaku's apathy and

carelessness for the socius in contrast to their busyness in consumption result from the

short-circuiting of desire by drive, which also leads to Japan's decades-long stagnant

political economy. On the other hand, anime and manga as forms of techne also embody

transformative potentials. As Stiegler emphasizes, just as writing is a pharmakon that

simultaneously strengthens or weakens memory, psychotechnologies also constitute a

pharmacological condition. While admittedly anime and manga enslave the mind with their reproductions and spinoffs, they nevertheless condition the possibility of attention formation. The diverse and diversifying fan activities for instance are practices of organizing attention, which transforms a consumer into a producer. The key to the transformational potential of anime and manga, I argue, lies in play. Play, in Winnicott's definition, is indispensable to learning to attend to, and work out aggressive instinctual drives through the language of imagination. In other words, to play is to take care of the mind, whereby unruly psychic energies get organized and transformed through sublimation into the symbolic order of culture expressed in the form of fantasy. My last chapter shows how otaku play, precisely because play ties in to the critical issue of care. Playing with the transitional object initiates and shapes the temporal experience. With the precarious risk entailed in configuring the boundary between self and others, between reality and imagination, play implies an indeterminate future as the infinite other while recognizing the limit of the present as the self. Knowing the indeterminacy of the future, we anticipate it with care, *Sorge* as Heidegger names it, and with careful attention.[5]

In an age in which consumer technologies make us depend on and become addicted to products or services to care for us, we become proletarianized, deprived of the desire to know how to do and how to live, as Stiegler contends. To wit, our capacity to care for ourselves has been impeded, which also means that we no longer anticipate the future.[6] The nihilism of the hyperindustrial epoch is the "symbolic misery," in Stiegler's words, permeating debilitating and disaffecting carelessness. Returning to the incident of

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[5] Ibid.

[6] In a personal conversation, Prof. Ed Cohen helped me re-identify the important connection between care and attention in light of Stiegler's reading of Heidegger.

New Zealand Christchurch mosque attack, it is not simply the problem on the part of

Facebook and Twitter for failing to block and remove the livestreaming of the shooter's

killing spree. The fact that no one reported the video until twelve minutes into the live

feed points to the system-wide carelessness that leads to the failure to respond in a way

that fulfills the responsibility as a fellow human being. Yet, at the same time,

technologies, despite their toxic tendency, can also render care. In the days following the

massacre, images of New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, wearing hijab when

paying tribute to the victims and consoling the survivors of the shooting went rival. Her

collected, compassionate responses and her deliberate care to deny the "notoriety" the

suspects sought turned social media, the weapon that helped the suspect perpetuate terror,

into a cure bringing the grieving community and nation together.[7] The careful or careless

way technology is treated shapes the orientation of collective retentions in therapeutic or

toxic ways.

As Stiegler reminds us, every technical object, with its retentional makeup,

contains a "determined past" whose calculability and certitude make us careless and

inattentive to the finitude of our memory and being. Yet, the same technical object, in

embodying the knowledge accumulated from the past, creates the possibilities of

anticipating by caring for the future.[8] Japanese popular culture and anime and manga

demonstrate how both sides of the questions raised by technics can never be fully

disentangled from each other. Given that the diverging tendencies are not determinable in

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[7] Masha Gessen, "Jacinda Ardern Has Rewritten the Script for How a Nation Grieves After a Terrorist Attack," *The New Yorker*, March 22, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/jacinda-ardern-has-rewritten-the-script-for-how-a-nation-grieves-after-a-terrorist-attack

[8] Ross, "Care and Careless in the Anthropocene: Introduction to a Reading of Stiegler and Heidegger," Lectured, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 11 May 2018, https://www.academia.edu/36611128/Care_and_Carelessness_in_the_Anthropocene_2018_.

advance, what's at stake is to care for how attention is organized, reshaped and

reorganized, for care for attention holds the key to the future.[9] Therefore, I hope my

project will not be understood as another totalizing, overdetermining critique of

technology, for we simply don't know what will become of the future. Knowing the

unknownability and indeterminacy of the future amidst the pandemic of carelessness of

our times is what opens up the possibility of the future, and the ultimate practice of taking

care.

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[9] In the conversation with Prof. Ed Cohen, he points out the indeterminacy of the otaku phenomenon. This is an important reminder not to replicate the over-determining tendency, the capitalist calculus I criticize in my dissertation.

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