Representations and Reality:
Defining the Ongoing Relationship between Anime and Otaku Cultures

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Abstract

This major research paper investigates the ongoing relationship between anime and otaku culture through four case studies; each study considers a single situation that demonstrates how this relationship changes through different interactions with representation. The first case study considers the early transmedia interventions that began to engage fans. The second uses Takashi Murakami's theory of *Superflat* to connect the origins of the otaku with the interactions otaku have with representation. The third examines the shifting role of the otaku from that of consumer to producer by means of engagement with the hierarchies of perception, multiple identities, and displays of sexualities in the production of fan-created works. The final case study reflects on the 2.5D phenomenon, through which 2D representations are brought to 3D environments. Together, these case studies reveal the drivers of the otaku evolution and that the anime–otaku relationship exists on a spectrum that teeters between reality and representation.

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Introduction

The origins of anime date back to the 1960s when post-war science fiction anime, such as *Astro Boy*, appeared on television screens. As popularity grew, so did the fan bases around these science fiction anime series. This technological development started the relationship between anime and the *otaku* (オタク). The term otaku emerged in the 1980s and is used to describe a person who shows a high degree of interest in a form of media—what is also known as a fan. Otaku is used in this paper opposed to fan because they represent a specific culture that engages with Japanese culture and media. Through an examination of the ongoing relationship between anime and otaku culture—from the origins of anime in the 1960s to the present day multi- and new media instantiations of anime texts and tropes—this MRP will examine the interdependence of this art and its fans to ask: What are the principal drivers behind the evolution of the otaku; and, how do these drivers effect change in both otaku culture and the relationship otaku have with anime representations? This paper addresses representation as the various forms that fiction, specifically anime, can take, which hover between stillness and motion, as well as the two-dimensional (2D) and the three-dimensional (3D) on a spectrum that ranges from reality to various altered forms. For the purposes of this discussion, reality is considered as a state of existence where ideas manifest as an object or embody a subject.

To understand the anime–otaku relationship, this MRP will present four case studies that examine individual situations where changes in anime or otaku culture occurred. The first case study considers early television (TV) anime series, specifically *Astro Boy*, and its relation to anime fan culture through transmedia such as manga and merchandise; the study demonstrates how anime engages with the spectrum of representations between stillness and motion. The

second case study examines Satoshi Kon's anime film *Perfect Blue* (1997) and the continued proliferation of otaku culture. This section uses Takashi Murakami's art movement and theory *Superflat* to highlight the connection between the origins of the otaku and in documentation of otaku in scenes from the film *Perfect Blue* and the apocalypse terrorism perpetuated by the cult Aum as examples. The third study analyzes fan-created works and how otaku shifted from being the consumer to the producer, which will reveal the intimate relationship that is established between otaku and anime when they produce forms of representations in addition to consuming them. By examining this shift in identity, this study considers the rearrangement of the hierarchies of perception, using otaku identities in original video animation (OVA) work and various displays of sexualities in *dōjinshi* (fan-made comics, typically based on erotic desires) as examples. The final case study reflects on the phenomenon of the two-point-five dimension (2.5D), through which otaku engage with 2D representations in 3D environments. Specifically, this section examines 2D idols, 2.5D stage plays, and the fan-activity cosplay to observe representations of anime through the act of live performance. Through these case studies, the MRP will reveal how the otaku's interaction exists on the spectrum between reality and representation, and the drivers that will cause the otaku to evolve.

Case Study 1: *Astro Boy* and the Transmedia Construction of Early Fan Culture

This case study analyzes how the aesthetic and economic innovations of early made-for-TV anime series, such as *Astro Boy*, relate to the construction of early anime fan cultures, specifically through their use of transmedia to engage fans with various manifestations of anime in commodity items. The study considers the development of television-broadcast anime, which in the 1960s was an evolving form of the moving image derived from its source material, manga. Furthermore, this study notes the beginning of anime as a genre through *Astro Boy*'s innovations in animation, and its use of merchandising to fund anime and create of a transmedia world for otaku.

The first section of the case study frames the relationship between anime and otaku culture through the history of *Astro Boy. Astro Boy*, which is commonly regarded as the first anime, presented aesthetic innovations. Its creator, Osamu Tezuka (1928-89)—often referred to as "the Godfather of Manga"—used limited animation, which is an animation style that uses fewer frames per second and focuses on sound and voice. The second section examines *Astro Boy* through the lens of film studies scholar Marc Steinberg who engage the theories of Christian Metz and Jean-François Lyotard to define the use of representations that creates the "Astro Boy Economy," a financial system that provides a foundation of all otaku culture.

Anime Aesthetic Innovations: Osamu Tezuka, Manga, and Anime

Anime on television began with Osamu Tezuka. Tezuka produced the *Astro Boy* manga in 1951 and began to expand his audience. Over time, a base formed around his work. In 1963,

his interest in animation pushed him to transform the *Astro Boy* manga series into a televised, animated series.

1 *Three-frame shooting*: using one image over three (or more) frames, or a maximum of eight images (usually less) per second, instead of full animation's 12 images per second;

2 *Stop-images*: using a single, still image for scenes where movement is not required; shot–reaction–shot scenes, crowd scenes, even dialogue scenes where the voice gives the character life when the still image does not;

3 *Pull-cels*: a single image is pulled across the background; or the background is pulled under the image; this is particularly prevalent in flying scenes, or vehicle scenes where objects are moving in a single direction;

4 *Repetition*: movement loops for repetitive actions such as walking; often used in combination with the pull-cel technique: the body is still, the legs move, and the background 'flows by' underneath;

5 *Sectioning*: only the essential part of the character moves, while the rest stays immobile; this is especially prevalent in talking scenes where only the mouth moves, but is used to some degree in almost all scenes in which there is movement (such as walking scenes, where the torso is immobile but the legs are moving);

6 *Dual-use or cel bank*: a 'bank' of images or movements is created to eliminate the need to draw every image of every episode; particular movements and backgrounds are archived and then re-used across episodes, further reducing the production time;

7 *Short shot length*: longer shots require more movement, shorter shots do not; hence a series of still images of shorter shot length are used instead of a longer take that requires more movement. (Yamamoto, 1989: 105–6)

Figure 1 List of labour-saving devices in limited animations, developed during the production of *Astro Boy.* Found in Steinberg's article "Immobile Sections and Tran-Series Movement: Astro Boy and the Emergence of Anime" on page 198-9.

While Tezuka's animation company, Mushi Production, lacked the technical capacity to produce full animation, they responded by developing limited animation, a style of animation that uses fewer frames per second and requires fewer people on staff (See Figure 1). With this act of transforming manga into anime, Mushi Production influenced an emerging style that sits halfway between conventional animation and still drawings in post-war Japan, and this style

shaped the future of anime. Steinberg describes the experience of *Astro Boy*[1]*'s* animation as follows:

> In *Astro Boy* we find segments of movement interspersed with segments of stillness (a character runs into a scene, stops to listen, with a pause on the listening pose); scenes where the only movement is that of the character's mouth, or Astro Boy's large eyes; a quick alteration between still image (such as in shot-reverse-shot sequences) to give inter-scene dynamism without intra-image movement; and a style of movement that is itself more like a series of poses rapidly alternated (running being composed of a series of images in which the character's legs are extended, together, then extended again).[2]

Astro Boy with its limited animations references manga as its source material and creates an experience of movement even with the limited motion and stillness. American-Canadian Japanologist Thomas Lamarre describes this experience as *animetism*, detailing how "the eyes remain intent on looking at the effects of speed laterally, sideways or crossways" rather than following the Cartesian depth perspective in *cinematism*.[3] The use of *animetism* in limited animation displays a flat composition where "movement is '*on and between surfaces*'" and reveals one of many modes to capture motion.[4] These innovations generated by Tezuka and presented in *Astro Boy* show the first transformation of one form of representation into another, which then leads to more representations.

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[1] Steinberg uses *Astroboy*, but since *Astro Boy* is the commonly accepted name, the quotation was edited it for consistency.
[2] Marc Steinberg, "Immobile Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astro Boy and the Emergence of Anime," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journa*l, Vol 1(2) (2006): 190–206, 192.
[3] Thomas Lamarre, "Cinematism and Animetism," in *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2009): pp 3-44, 6.
[4] Lamarre, 7.

The Transmedia Astro World: The Birth of Fan Culture through the Astro Boy Economy

Astro Boy was the first anime series to use a merchandise marketing strategy to fund its production. Anime follows the strategy of transmedia, or media mix as it is known in Japan, to sell character-based goods. Transmedia is a media environment where a particular franchise releases interconnected products for a wide range of media platforms—animations, comics, video games, theatrical films, soundtracks—paired with commodity items such as cell-phone straps, T-shirts, bags, figurines, and more.

The world of *Astro Boy* was formed around its merchandise. Through different commodities, images of Astro and his friends were sold to *Astro Boy* fans. These sales helped to fund the production of this anime because the costs to produce weekly episodes was not covered by the broadcast fees that the TV stations and sponsorships offered.[5] To cover this cost, animation companies license their characters to merchandise companies that then sell them to the public. By purchasing character merchandise, the public can support the production of television anime through the income that licensing provides, as this revenue cycles back to the production company and allows them to continue an anime.

Concerning these commodities, Steinberg describes how the images of Astro "function as lures that [lead] the subject back into the world of *Astro Boy*, a world no longer left behind when the spectator (of the TV series or manga) transform[s] back into 'student,' or 'child.'"[6] For example, Meiji chocolate bars included stickers and package advertisements of Astro and friends as a bonus. The sticker acts as a *lure* that brings the fan in and out of the anime world. The

[5] Marc Steinberg, "Immobile Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astro Boy and the Emergence of Anime," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journa*l, Vol 1(2) (2006): 190–206, 192.
[6] Steinberg, 200-1.

sticker, here, is a stand-in for any form of transportable commodity adorned with a character, like badges or acrylic charms, that allows the viewer to bring this character with them no matter where they go. This style of merchandising begins the "Astro Boy Economy," which shares the immobile image with the world while establishing the cycle where merchandise can fund anime production.

The origin of the "Astro Boy Economy" is discussed in Steinberg's article "Immobile Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astro Boy and the Emergence of Anime." Steinberg attempts to engage with the development of anime through the transmedia actions of *Astro Boy*. To arrive at a discussion of the relationship between *Astro Boy* and its fan culture, Steinberg begins by considering Metz's arguments in "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema" in order to address the spectator investment in media. Metz considers both theatre and cinema, and determines that theatre has two problems: first, the spectator's level of investment can determine the success of performance; and, second, due to the theatre environment, with actors and audience members in the same space, the audience's ability to lose themselves in the spectacle diminishes.[7] In contrast, cinema creates an unreal experience due to the separation of the film from the spectator. In film, both the illusion of the reality through acting and the capture of movement on screen create a higher spectator investment.[8] With this idea of cinema in mind, Steinberg wonders how to judge spectator investment when movement is animated, as it is with anime. To address this question, Steinberg considers Lyotard's argument in his essay "Acinema." Steinberg summarizes Lyotard's argument as "Film production is the art of

[7] Marc Steinberg, "Immobile Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astro Boy and the Emergence of Anime," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol 1(2) (2006): 190–206, 193.
[8] Steinberg, 193.

managing this libidinal investment[9] through managing of an economy of movement."[10] Movement can be ordered in the structure of cinema to create an impression of reality, and, in this "figure of return"[11], cinema creates an economy where there is a loop between the production and the consumption of a film. If Lyotard wishes to produce acinema, a "consumption without return" and a "consumption without production," the movement in cinema needs to be organized to two extremities: immobility or excessive movement.[12] Once organized, acinema is at the pole of excessive movement. Steinberg is interested in the opposite pole where commodity or the immobile image funds cinema, which he calls a serial circulation of commodities.[13] This is the "Astro Boy Economy"; the immobile anime image captures the spectator into a cycle and generates an economic loop.

The "Astro Boy Economy" structures fan culture. The different forms of media and commodities fuel relationships and create fans through a heightening of spectator investment. Merchandising has now become the first mode of support for anime production as a result of the "Astro Boy Economy." Fans engage in purchasing and collecting habits to fuel their interest in anime, and then this cycle repeats itself—making collecting and merchandise apart of otaku culture.

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[9] Libidinal investment is an interest in energy and specifically libidinal energy which propels an instinct such as sexual desire.
[10] Marc Steinberg, "Immobile Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astro Boy and the Emergence of Anime," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journa*l, Vol 1(2) (2006): 190–206, 194.
[11] Lyotard refers to a figure of return as an organization of movement.
[12] Steinberg, 196.
[13] Steinberg, 196.

In the End

This case study reflected on the beginnings of the anime–otaku relationship in response to the *Astro Boy* series, and how this particular series aided in the development of fan culture and the use of character licensing in the anime industry. This analysis revealed how anime and otaku culture affect each other in a relational loop. The loop begins with *Astro Boy*, which transformed the still image of manga into a series of moving images known as anime. Next, the manga fan follows and adapts to the manga as anime. The production and consumption of character merchandising then continues to draw otaku into the 2D worlds, which, in turn, loops back to fund the production of anime, while the innovations in *Astro Boy* such as limited animation and *animetism*, produced a still image to use on merchandise. These original acts surrounding *Astro Boy* reveals how anime and otaku culture have been interdependent since the beginning, founding a relationship that has continued to evolve as both components have grown.

Case Study 2: *Perfect Blue* and the Proliferation of Otaku Cultures

The following case study examines both the connection between the otaku's origins and development, as expressed in artist Takashi Murakami's *Superflat* art movement, as well as the documentation of otaku culture as it is seen in Satoshi Kon's film *Perfect Blue*. The case study begins by examining otaku history through its relation to *Superflat*, which is described by Murakami in the essay "Earth in my Window." This is followed by a consideration of the activities of the religious group Aum Shinrikyo, and an analysis of a fan character that appears in Kon's anime series *Paranoia Agent* as a means of understanding two characters in his film *Perfect Blue.* These examples demonstrate the origins of the otaku's further proliferation through gaining an obsession, worshiping an idol, and creating a different identity to further interact with anime.

Otaku Origins and Murakami's Superflat

Murakami is a contemporary Japanese artist whose art blurs the distinction between low and high culture and is known for his art movement and theory called *Superflat*. In his article "Earth in my Window," Murakami defines *Superflat* as a concept to describe anything that has flattened out and lacked depth, and this can be any image with flat colours since there is nothing to give it volume. Murakami uses *Superflat* as a visual method of describing the cultural state in post-war Japan and the effects it had on otaku culture.

Murakami makes two observations about Japan. The first details how Japan, as a whole, is *Superflat*; Murakami observes everything—from its social customs to its art and culture—to

be 2D.[14] The comment draws upon the history of 2D images in Japan, from manga and fine art, and describes how popular characters such as Hello Kitty, Doraemon, and Pikachu infiltrate the daily Japanese life. Murakami is also referring to the "flattening" of both social class and popular taste in Japan, to the point where low and high culture have little distinction from one another. Therefore, the flattened image defines Japanese society, art, and culture. Murakami's second observation details how *kawaii* (cute) culture has taken over Japan and created a "population embracing immaturity," which "creates a nation that is preoccupied with anti-aging," and that this interest "may conquer not only the human heart, but also the body."[15] This remark presents Japan as a place that lacks depth, but that is also full of youth because of its collective obsession with cuteness.

These observations offer insight into the otaku and their relationship with anime. Murakami's *Superflat* relates to Lamarre's concept of *animetism* where movement is presented across a surface that was noted in the first case study. Through anime, the otaku can enjoy moving *Superflat* representations, which, in turn, form a relationship between reality and 2D representations. Anime started as children's animation, but the otaku or adult fan's interest in these animations evokes *kawaii* culture. *Kawaii* culture influences anime through cute images, which explains the appeal of licensed characters such as Pokémon and Hello Kitty to otaku. This influence of *Superflat* and *kawaii* encourages otaku to continue their relationship with anime through embracing 2D imagery and immaturity.

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[14] Takashi Murakami, *Earth in my Window*, in Little Boy: Superflat, 100.
[15] Murakami, 100.

Murakami's notion of the otaku began from the 1950s to late 1960s when the first generation of otaku were born, which coincided with the 1960s American hippie peace movement.[16] The otaku reflect the hippie movement because it was a peaceful moment at the time of their origins—taking place nearly a decade after Japan had recovered from the war and its occupation. In 1962, the otaku gathered at the Osaka Science Fiction Convention (also known as DAICON) for the first time.[17] DAICON was an event by otaku for otaku though it predated the 1980s term "otaku." DAICON occurred due to the growth of the fan bases surrounding various fiction series; for example, anime, such as *Uchū Senkan Yamato* (*Space Battleship Yamato*, or *Star Blazers* in the United States) from the 1970s had a supporting fan base that attended DAICON. Additionally, Murakami notes that the otaku thrived during the 1970 World Exposition in Osaka because the exposition's theme was "Progress and Harmony of Mankind," and this was a perfect scenario for the future of Japan because it suggested "a tranquil and peaceful world with human progress represented by technology and space development."[18] This exposition became a symbol for the first generation of otaku as members of Japanese society. This proposes the birth of the otaku occurred before and outside fan culture. The hippie movement, DAICON, and the 1970s World Exposition create the origins of the otaku in postwar Japan and encourage the otaku to become their own movement.

[16] Takashi Murakami, *Earth in my Window*, in Little Boy: Superflat, 119.
[17] Murakami, 112.
[18] Murakami, 119.

Aum Cult: Otaku and Apocalypse Terrorism

Aum Shinrikyo (or simply Aum) is a religious group that turned to apocalypse terrorism. They best known for the Subway Sarin Incident, an attack on the Tokyo subway line on March 20, 1995 where sarin gas was released. The group, however, had a positive beginning. Aum Shinrikyo grew out of a yoga group led by Shōkō Asahara (birth name Chizuo Matsumoto) and emerged in the mid-1980s as one of the New Religions. Many of its teachings were drawn from Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist sources, and they practiced yoga and meditation. However, Aum also maintained a link to contemporary sources including media such as anime and manga.[19] The religion modified sources from the past and the contemporary as a way for its followers to gain a form of enlightenment.

The problems began when the Aum presented prophecies about an apocalyptic event. This event was the supposedly fated "Harmagedon"[20] that was expected to take place in 1999. Asahara's prophecies about Harmagedon were optimistic in the 1980s, but, as religion scholar Richard Gardner describes, the Aum's teachings were ignored and turned pessimistic in the 1990s.[21] At this time, Asahara "pronounced that the world was inevitably moving toward a cataclysmic war that only a small fraction of the world population would survive."[22] The shift in the prophecies shows there was an additional source influencing the predictions, which was anime. The prophecies align with events seen in two 1980s anime *Uchū Senkan Yamato* and *Akira*. Harmagedon is also referenced in the 1983 film *Harmagedon: Genma Taisen* (*The Great*

[19] Richard Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyo and a Panic about Manga and Anime," in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. Mark Williams. Sharpe: London (2008): 201-218, 201.
[20] Gardener uses *Harumagedon*, but since *Harmagedon* is the commonly accepted name, it is used for consistency.
[21] Gardner, 201.
[22] Gardner, 201.

Battle with Genma) and is where the term Harmagedon became popularized. The apocalyptic events in these three anime portray a science fiction situation where the world undergoes trauma and destruction caused by either humanity or an external civilization.[23] Through an interpretation of these anime, the Aum came to be believe that their members would survive and continue civilization by developing supernatural powers. This fantasized way of thinking was enforced by the Aum's teachings, and it guided its members to believe the future presented in anime were real, predicted events.

The Aum's prophecies demonstrate the power of anime. The formation of their prophecies become an example on the reality–representation spectrum. This spectrum proposes that there are different degrees of combinations between the reality and representation. The engagement with representations by Aum shows a form of interaction between otaku and anime: the action of bringing a 2D representation into reality.

Documentation of the Otaku: Paranoia Agent vs. Perfect Blue

The following section examines representations of reality documented in anime through the work of director Satoshi Kon. Kon's anime *Paranoia Agent* and his debut film *Perfect Blue* both use their characters to break down fan stereotypes and document representations of otaku. *Paranoia Agent* documents the character Mitsuhiro Maniwa, a detective on the case of Shōnen Bat[24] and *Perfect Blue* presents the characters Me-Mania and Rumi Hidaka. The section relies on film studies scholar Kerin Ogg's analysis of Maniwa that is presented in their essay "Lucid

[23] Richard Gardner, "Aum Shinrikyo and a Panic about Manga and Anime," in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, ed. Mark Williams. Sharpe: London (2008): 201-218, 203.
[24] In the English dub, Shōnen Bat is named Lil' Slugger.

Dreams, False Awakenings: Figures of the Fan in Kon Satoshi," which offers an understanding of the actions of Me-Mania and Rumi's actions as well.

Paranoia Agent is a mystery series that revolves around a cast of characters as they engage with the case of Shōnen Bat. As the series progresses, it shows how its character Maniwa becomes lost in representations. While Maniwa is not an anime otaku, he exhibits the anime–otaku relationship in the way that he engages with the world of Shōnen Bat that surrounds him. In the beginning, Maniwa focuses on his job as a detective; he is not notably obsessive about anything, with one exception. During an interrogation, Maniwa's partner, Keiichi Ikari, grows frustrated with the suspect, a teenage boy named Makoto Kozuka, who claims his acts as Shōnen Bat were part of a reenactment of his favourite video game. Meanwhile, Maniwa encourages the teen to continue speaking by consulting the game's strategy guide and acting like a character who guides the protagonist in a game named Maniston the Wandering Minstrel.[25] This scene reveals the detective's ability to change his persona and adapt to an alternate representation of the real world. At this point, Maniwa is not an otaku, but he still enjoys engaging with 2D representations. By roleplaying in Kozuka's story, Maniwa demonstrates that he can understand they are interacting with representations through reality.

As *Paranoia Agent* continues, Maniwa grows increasingly obsessed with Shōnen Bat and adopts other identities to aid his investigation. In addition to Maniston, he also becomes Radar Man, a caped superhero, and engages in battle with Shōnen Bat, during which Maniwa as Radar Man interacts with different representations of his opposition. Even in his off-hours the detective

[25] *Paranoia Agent*, Episode 5, "Seisenshi" ("The Holy Warrior"), *directed by Satoshi Kon, (2005, Tokyo Madhouse), anime*, March 8, 2004 on Wowow.

is obsessed with the Shōnen Bat phenomenon, which, as Ogg describes, "turns into [an] all-consuming obsession after his and Ikari's ouster from the force."[26] The series shows Maniwa's focus on different representations of Shōnen Bat as he continues his investigation. The stages of Maniwa's obsession—from figurines speaking to him and fighting Shōnen Bat to becoming the next Ancient Master—reveal a fan's mutable ability to interact with representations. Further, Maniwa illustrates how the person does not have to be obsessive to begin with; they can have no interest and still gain the otaku trait without much effort. A person or otaku might go as far as to change their identity, so that they can further engage with representations of their obsession.

Perfect Blue continues Kon's documentation of otaku. The film follows the character Mima Kirigoe at a pivotal point in her career as she graduates from being an idol singer in the music group CHAM! and becomes an actress.[27] The film shows the reaction her fans have to this career change, specifically that of her manager Rumi and her stalker Me-Mania. Similar to Maniwa, Rumi and Me-Mania demonstrate the otaku's ability to change their identity to further interact with representations of their interests. While Maniwa becomes an otaku as the series progresses, Me-Mania and Rumi are portrayed to viewers this way from the outset. Ogg's analysis of Maniwa aids in the understanding the otaku in *Perfect Blue*.

The *Perfect Blue* characters Me-Mania and Rumi show two distinct interactions that indicate a change in the relationship between otaku and anime. Me-Mania, whose real name is Mamoru Uchida, adopts another persona to engage with an obsession, just like Maniwa. In place of Maniwa's Shōnen Bat, Me-Mania has the idol Mima. Me-Mania is referred to as an idol otaku

[26] Kerin Ogg, "Lucid Dreams, False Awakenings: Figures of the Fan in Kon Satoshi," *Mechademia*, Volume 5, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2010): 157-174, 167.
[27] *Perfect Blue*, directed by Satoshi Kon, (1997, Tokyo Madhouse), anime.

because he worships an idol. His room is piled with magazines, and the walls are plastered with posters of Mima in CHAM!. Me-Mania is focused on the representations of Mima as an idol, as opposed to the current representation of Mima that is the actress. The idol Mima can be seen as flat image because this past idol representation of Mima is a 2D image in person's memories. Me-Mania reflects the interests in the 2D that Murakami describes in his *Superflat*. This also applies to Rumi, who changes herself to become the perfect idol, taking on the identity of the "real Mima." This change of character is similar to Maniwa as Radar Man; instead of saving the city, Rumi believes herself to be saving Mima's fans. As the "real Mima," Rumi attempts to bring attention to the 2D representation of Mima the idol by adding depth and importance through embodiment. Rumi is granting idol Mima importance when everything is of equal value. This means that, even in the *Perfect Blue* world, everything is 2D and lacking depth. There is no hierarchy to signify importance of anything, but *Perfect Blue* documents when otaku give importance to specific representations, which draws attention to the spectrum between the reality and representation. *Perfect Blue* proposes that the otaku is surrounded by *Superflat,* and that they will find various ways to interact with these representations, which further deepens the anime–otaku relationship.

In the End

This case study considered the relationship between the origins and the proliferations of the otaku in relation to Murukami's *Superflat* theory. Murakami contends how the otaku arose during the hippie peace movement, which was prior to and outside of fan culture. The followers of Aum and the otaku characters in Kon's anime show how there is a need for what Ogg describes as *distanced fanning*, where one can engage their passions without shutting out

reality.[28] Otaku culture continues to show the countless ways that the otaku can interact with anime on the spectrum between reality and representations, which continue to affect the anime–otaku relationship in the present.

[28] Kerin Ogg, "Lucid Dreams, False Awakenings: Figures of the Fan in Kon Satoshi," *Mechademia*, Volume 5, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2010): 157-174, 170.

Case Study 3: Fan-created Works and the Shift of Otaku from Consumer to Producer

In response to the rise of collaborative and community-based events in the otaku community, the following case study considers what happens to the relationship between otaku and anime when they become not only the consumers but also the producers of representations. The otaku's simultaneous acts of consuming and producing are considered through the theories of both Lamarre and Japanese psychologist and critic Tamaki Saito. Lamarre addresses the rearrangement of perception, the so-called *otaku perception*, while Saito highlights what he terms *otaku sexuality*, which concerns the different displays of sexualities in fan-created works. These theories are applied to the characters in the anime *Wotakoi: Love is Hard for Otaku*, specific fan-created works, original video animation (OVA), and *dōjinshi* in order to understand otaku's creations and desires.

Before becoming producers, the otaku began as consumers who fueled their desires for anime characters through interactions with 2D representations. The otaku have multiple ways of engaging with these desires, including: acts of love, ownership, and the worship of fiction. The otaku identity can become tied to sexuality when representations of anime characters begin to drive their erotic needs as a male or a female, which then further develops their desires. In "Otaku Sexuality," Saito describes how the otaku "have an affinity for fictional contents, resort to fictionalization in order to possess the object of their love, [and] have multiple orientations when it comes to enjoying fiction," continuing with how, for the otaku, "fiction itself can be a sexual object."[29] *Otaku sexuality*, as it is defined by Saito, drives the ongoing relationship

[29] Tamaki Saito, "Otaku Sexuality" in *Robots Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan csicsery-Ronay, Takayukie Tatsumi. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2007): 222-249, 227.

between reality and representation. As such, the otaku can involve themselves in a sexual relationship with anime because the individual develops feelings of love and sexual attraction toward representations of an anime character, as if the character is a romantic partner. These feelings of attraction drive otaku to form desires that then drive their interaction with representations.

Hierarchies of Perception

As consumers, the otaku are critical about the content they consume; they often participate in sharing their opinion to critique what they see. This raises the concept of *otaku perception*: a form of connoisseurship where the viewer, through examination, picks up on details in an anime, breaks down its components, and makes judgements as a means of evaluating their consumption.[30] *Otaku perception*, a concept established by the anime producer, author, and lecturer Toshio Okada, lets the otaku reorder the importance of an anime's components to see a different hierarchy of these components—allowing for various readings of the anime that are different from the original intent of its director and producer. Lamarre considers this concept in his essay "Otaku Imaging" to examine how otaku perceive anime. According to Lamarre, the hierarchy of production and the hierarchy of elements in a visual field are altered based on the otaku's interpretations.[31] The importance of staff members and visual elements may change to suit the otaku's interpretation. These alterations are like Murakami's *Superflat* as the relevance of anime elements become flatted. The viewer can choose what to

[30] Thomas Lamarre, "Otaku Imaging" in *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2009):144-154, 145.
[31] Lamarre, 145.

highlight because all elements in anime are equal, so there is no depth to decide to suggest which is most important. This process of examining and critiquing the presentation of an anime demonstrates how the otaku perceive anime as critical consumers.

Therefore, these two interpretations of the otaku—*otaku sexuality* and *otaku perception*—together establish an identity that is both fond of fictional content and keen on its details. The otaku form a relationship with anime, and, due to their desire, they deconstruct, manipulate, and reform the existing components of this anime to shape the object of their desire. By acting on these otaku interpretations, the otaku becomes a producer of fan-made content.

Original Video Animations and Otaku Identities

The work of original video animation (OVA) exposes the otaku's aspirations to create their desired content themselves. OVA is a medium through which the otaku becomes producers, where they can either animate licensed characters or create their own in order to generate animations. As producers of OVAs, otaku become character designers, animators, and background artists, taking content from other sources and repurposing them for new creations. Specifically, creations like DAICON animations—the animated opening sequences for DAICON—and fan animations—such as the parodies of anime opening sequences—display the otaku's dedication to using their skills and to taking on different identities in order to create content.

DAICON animations demonstrate the ability of the otaku to produce animations for consumers. In 1981 and 1983, Okada along with his friend and fellow-anime-producer Takeda Yasuhiro selected the freshmen art students Hideaki Anno and Hiroyuki Yamaga from at Osaka

University to make animated films for the opening of DAICON.[32] In these animated opening sequences, the amateur animators cited a range of characters from anime, SFX films, and science fiction films to create what Lamarre describes as "the sense of the otaku idiom created for and by the otaku."[33] The animators of OVAs know their audience, as they are otaku animating content for otaku. By sharing the otaku identity, they are able to focus attention on otaku desires and successfully target their audience—acting as both producers and consumers.

Otaku also produce OVA to provide commentary on otaku culture. Okada aided in the production of a two-part OVA series that were called *Otaku no video 1982* (*Otaku's Video 1982*) and *Otaku no video 1985* (*Otaku's Video 1985*) and were made for a production studio called Gainax. *Otaku no video* presents animated segments that tell the story of two friends whose passion for anime leads them to the creation of a production studio called Gainax and its associated otaku empire. The OVA takes a fantastical form, that includes black and white mockumentary-style interviews with otaku who have their faces obscured and voices altered to protect their privacy.[34] While this OVA is propaganda for Gainax, it shows the company's core motive: creating content for otaku by otaku. As commercial producers, otaku have an advantage because they are also a part of their target audience. Otaku can take on the multiple identities of producers and consumers to further foster their relationship with anime.

The creation of OVAs does not stop at the commercial level. *Wotakoi: Love is Hard for Otaku* is a popular anime about otaku participating in romantic relationships, and its opening sequence, "Fiction" by Sumika, has become a popular cover project for fans who animate non-

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[32] Thomas Lamarre, "Otaku Imaging" in *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2009):144-154, 146.
[33] Lamarre, 146.
[34] Lamarre, 150.

Wotakoi characters doing the dance from this chorus.[35] The dance uses hand and head gestures that will work with any pairing of characters. Many of these animations are posted to Nico Video[36], YouTube, or TikTok. For example, there are *Haikyu!!* [37] parodies of various characters dancing to the chorus of "Fiction" (See Figure 2). While many fans are not as skilled in animation as the makers of the DAICON animations, there is still a marked commitment to recreating the dance with their favourite characters. The OVA is one of the many styles of content that are made by fans for fans. Through the creation of OVAs, the otaku can take on multiple identities that highlight their relationship with anime.

Figure 2 *Wotakoi* "Fiction" Dance parody with Hinata (above) and Kageyama (below) from *Haikyu!!* OVA animated by Sorata (@soratxn). (Posted on September 26, 2020) on TikTok.

[35] *Wotakoi: Love is Hard for Otaku*, Episode 1, "Narumi to Hirotaka no saikai. Soshite…" ("Narumi and Hirotaka Meet Again, and..."), directed by Yoshimasa Hiraike, (2018, Japan A-1 Pictures), April 13, 2018 on Fuji TV, 2:37.
[36] Nico Video is the Japanese equivalent of YouTube.
[37] *Haikyu!!* is a popular volleyball sports anime based on a manga by Haruichi Furudate.

Gendered Fan Production and the Comic Market

The production of *dōjinshi*—independently produced and sold, fan-created comics—display gendered fan production, as female and male otaku create comics based on their gendered desires. Producers of *dōjinshi* sell comics to other otaku at comic markets such as Komikku Maaketto (Komiket). Komiket creates a setting for the exchange of producer and consumer to occur.

Female otaku engage with a specific set of desires when creating *dōjinshi* and tend to enjoy creating *yaoi dōjinshi* in the adult genre. Female creators often shift the message of a story to render its subjects as homoerotic.[38] *Yaoi dōjinshi* illustrate fantasies about a male homosexual relationship that the creators desire for themselves and the characters. The creators depict gay sex with the *seme* ("active") and *uke* ("passive") characters. The creation does not necessarily depict intercourse, but, as Saito describes, it acts as the "signal of an emotional climax; it is the rising psychological excitement and euphoria leading to this act that are drawn with real care."[39] These women create *yaoi dōjinshi* in order to realize their desires and then sell them to other fans at Komiket. This establishes an intimate relationship between anime and the female otaku through the projection of their desires into their comics.

Through its characters Narumi Momose and Hirotaka Nifuji, *Wotakoi* provides an example of gendered *dōjinshi* production. This anime series, which is based on a manga, uses otaku characters to show interpretations of fan-created content and otaku acts based on gender. The gendered production of *yaoi dōjinshi* is demonstrated in an episode of *Wotakoi* wherein the

[38] Tamaki Saito, "Otaku Sexuality" in *Robots Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan csicsery-Ronay, Takayukie Tatsumi. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2007): 222-249, 229.
[39] Saito, 231.

viewer sees Narumi speaking to Hirotaka on the computer about completing a *dōjinshi* that she will be selling in three hours at Komiket in the vendor's hall.[40] Narumi's character reveals the act of a female otaku further fictionalizing fiction as means to manifest her desire. Through the female's manifestation of placing male characters in a relationship, Narumi's creation of *yaoi dōjinshi* symbolizes a female otaku's sexual desire.

In the female otaku's creation of y*aoi dōjinshi*, she emphasizes gender and sexual differences that will lead to the presentation of her sexual desires. Saito describes how when a woman desires something, her own position is less acute than that of the other, whereas, when she identifies with the object, the subject has a versatile position.[41] As woman and an anime character, Narumi's subject position is the object and, also, the agent of desire, so she does not need to search for a position because she relates to the object. This suggests women are usually the *uke*, and she naturally reacts to her desires in this way; however, when she is creating the story of the *dōjinshi*, the woman, Narumi, is being active by owning her desire. This act is classified as *seme*. In the creation of y*aoi dōjinshi*, Narumi continues her *uke* role, but, also, takes on the *seme* role. Participating in both roles allows her to identify with the male relationship that she draws. *Yaoi dōjinshi* reflects the female otaku's desires because the act of illustrations in these roles of the *seme* and *uke* symbolize her desires.

While female otaku portrays male characters to present their sexual desires, a male otaku does not operate in this same way. Saito claims that a man must know his subject position, and,

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[40] *Wotakoi: Love is Hard for Otaku*, Episode 3, "Sokubai-kai to gēmu-kai" ("Sales Event and Gamers Meetup"), directed by Yoshimasa Hiraike, (2018, Japan A-1 Pictures), April 27, 2018 on Fuji TV, 3:23.
[41] Tamaki Saito, "Otaku Sexuality" in *Robots Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan csicsery-Ronay, Takayukie Tatsumi. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2007): 222-249, 231.

once he locates it, he can desire an object.[42] A male otaku finds their agent of desire when they find their *waifu*[43] and engage with a subject position that encourages him to own his desire. An example of this projection is shown in *Wotakoi* through Hirotaka's room where he has two shelves of *bishōjo*[44] figurines.[45] These *bishōjo* figurines operate as manifestation of his multiple *waifu*. By displaying them, Hirotaka owns his desires through the purchase of the commodity, establishes his subject position as a *seme*, and also faces his desires as they sit on the shelf. The male otaku, bound to this relationship with anime in which he must own his desire, operates differently to the female otaku.

The gender of the otaku directs the creation of *dōjinshi* and forms a fan's representation of the source material. The female otaku excludes herself from the text and instead uses it to represent her desires through the male homoerotic relationship. In contrast, the male otaku locates his desire and asserts his presence by owning this desire. These characteristics of gender direct the content that the otaku create for themselves.

In the End

This case study examined what occurs when, in addition to being consumers, the otaku become producers through the production of fan-created works. The interpretations of otaku from Lamarre and Saito show the otaku's ability to take original content and transform it into another form, specifically through the creation of OVAs and *dōjinshi*. These forms of fan-created work reveal the multiple identities and sexualities that the otaku take on, such as artists and

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[42] Tamaki Saito, "Otaku Sexuality" in *Robots Ghosts and Wired Dreams*, ed. Christopher Bolton, Istvan csicsery-Ronay, Takayukie Tatsumi. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press (2007): 222-249, 231.
[43] Waifu means wife and refers to a female character that otaku wish to marry.
[44] *Bishōjo* means beautiful young girl.
[45] *Wotakoi: Love is Hard for Otaku*, Episode 3, *"Sokubai-kai to gēmu-kai" ("Sales Event and Gamers Meetup")*, directed by Yoshimasa Hiraike, (2018, Japan A-1 Pictures), April 27, 2018 on Fuji TV.

animators, to project their desires. The representation in *Wotakoi* and real fan-created works demonstrate an otaku's engagement with *otaku perception* and *otaku sexuality* to create their own anime or manga. Much like Narumi and Hirotaka, the otaku affectionately show their appreciation for a series through the objectification of their desire. As a result, the anime–otaku relationship becomes intimate and even sexual. Additionally, the culture of fan creation allows otaku to engage in transmedia and to manifest their desires as a commodity. This recalls the economic innovations of *Astro Boy* that were noted in Case Study 1. Otaku have the power as both consumers and producers to decide what representation their desires will take. The creation of fan representations enable the otaku to focus their desires and obsessions into a personal form. By being both producer and consumer, the otaku can create a positive interaction with anime that further strengthens their relationship with it.

Case Study 4: 2.5D, 2D Representations, and Adding Depth

The following case study investigates what occurs when 2D representations are adapted to a 3D environment, as seen in 2D idol, two-point-five-dimension (2.5D) stage plays, and cosplay. This case study reflects on phenomenon of the 2.5D, which refers to a space between 2D and 3D. Based on the work of anime scholar Akiko Sugawa-Shimada, this analysis reveals the relevance of the 2.5D to otaku culture through an examination of its use in everything from stage plays and musicals to anime, idol concerts. The 2.5D is embedded in otaku-related content which provides an understanding for the origins of this phenomenon in otaku cultures.

The 2.5D Idol Intervention

The idols of 2D and their live concerts provide an understanding the 2.5D phenomenon. Miku Hatsune is an iconic anime character used to sell voice synthesis software. The existence of Miku Hatsune has transformed music and anime culture while also offering a model for the ideal character. Miku encompasses both the abilities of a human performer and the imaginative capabilities of a fictional character. Her name, Miku Hatsune, means the first sound of the future, which refers to her start as a voice synthesis software that is "based on Yamaha's Vocaloid technology"[46] The software allows its user to create music through a sound bank of voice samples and an array of tools that can input a melody and lyrics. When the user plays the music, Miku sings. This software revolutionizes thoughts about music as it enables the fans to create their own unique audio experience. As a form of technology, Vocaloid continues to evolve and improve the user's creation, but the software is only part of the phenomenon that is Miku. In

[46] "One of Japan's Biggest Pop Stars Isn't Human," uploaded by Bloomberg Markets and Finance. October 29, 2017. Accessed February 19, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CB0FEuBlbbo , 1:20.

simple terms, she is an idol much like Mima in *Perfect Blue* when she was in the music group CHAM!. An idol is a singer and dancer who engages with an array of jobs in the entertainment industry. The idol was a rising character type in the early 2000s when Miku was created, and Miku fans caused a surge in 2D idols. Since 2D idols are anime characters who perform as idols, this development changed how otaku think about music. A 2D idol manifests a perfect performer who has an ageless, idealized body and a talented singing voice that is contributed by an actor behind the scenes. Miku is the epitome of the 2D idol and greatly impacted the 2.5D phenomenon.

Miku transformed the entertainment industry; she can be considered a character, a software, an instrument, and an idol. While fans were producing music using Miku's software, she also sang "over a hundred thousand songs in multiple languages and performed sold-out concerts around the world."[47] Miku's concerts took place in a 2.5D space in which she takes the stage of an auditorium that is lit up by the audience's penlights being waved in support of her performance. She comes from the 2D world, but she is also able to enter the 3D world where fans are able to actually interact with her. The 2.5D concert created a different way for the otaku to interact with 2D representations.

Miku creates an intervention that reconsiders 2D, 3D, otaku culture, and music all in one. When she emerged in the early 2000s, her existence intervened in 2D and 3D. Her concerts are a 2.5D experience that includes a 2D avatar and thousands of real-life fans. The appearance of 2D

[47] "One of Japan's Biggest Pop Stars Isn't Human," uploaded by Bloomberg Markets and Finance. October 29, 2017. Accessed February 19, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CB0FEuBlbbo , 0:11

representations in reality create an alternative form of interaction during the concert and further strengthens the ongoing relationship between anime and the otaku.

The Significance of the Stage Play

The origins of the 2.5D began in Japan during the 1970s when the adaptions of anime into stage plays and musicals started to bring 2D content into reality. The stage play is a theatrical performance where actors engage with a story on stage, while the musical adds singing and dancing components to those of the stage play. These stage plays and musicals are a popular pastime in Japan, and so anime was adapted for the stage.

The stage plays *The Rose of Versailles* (1974) and *Saint Seiya* (1991) started the productions of anime stage adaptions that would later come to be called the 2.5D or 2.5 *jigen* stage play or musical. The popularity of the 2.5D stage play arose through an idea from casting director Makoto Matsuda. In 2015, Matsuda reflected on his experience in an interview with non-fiction writer Norio Kohyama for Performing Arts Network Japan. Mastuda started the 2.5D stage play in the early 2000s when he gave director Yukio Ueshima a book of the original *Tenisu no Ōujisama* (*The Prince of Tennis*) manga. Matsuda wanted Ueshima to aid him in turning the popular Shōnen Jump manga series into a musical, but Ueshima was unfamiliar with directing stage plays.[48] Moreover, neither had ideas for turning a sports manga into a musical nor any knowledge of tennis. As a result, the rehearsals consisted of trial and error. They decided to try

[48] Makoto Matsuda (Chairman of the 2.5D Musical Association), interviewed by Norio Kohyama, Performing Arts Network Japan, Dec 24, 2015. Accessed October 12, 2020. https://performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/1511/1.html

and use the stage lift in the venue, the Middle Hall at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre, and this resulted in making the musical look like a concert.

On the opening day of *The Prince of Tennis Musical*, April 30, 2003, about half of the 834 seats were filled. But, by the end of the first act, the musical showed promise. In the interview, Matsuda notes, "When the play is good, you will hear a rush of conversation between the people in the audience when intermission begins and the audience lights come on."[49] When that occurred, Matsuda scheduled a second set of performances because he knew this musical was going to be successful. The musical appealed to many *The Prince of Tennis* manga and anime fans. However, Matsuda did not account for the popularity of the 2.5D stage. Over a decade later, Matsuda is the Chairman of the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association, while *The Prince of Tennis Musical* continues its run with recent adaptions to the long-running anime series.[50] Since the creation of the 2.5D stage play, there is now a permanent theatre in Tokyo called the AiiA 2.5 Theater. Furthermore, the Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association works to promote various stage plays both locally in Japan as well as internationally.

Matsuda's work provided a foundation for anime on the stage; it demonstrated that there is an audience for bringing 2D into 3D, much like the first transformation of manga into anime as is illustrated by the first case study. This audience is, in part, composed of the existing fans of the source material. As the phenomenon has developed, it has proven how almost any 2D content can be transformed into plays and brought in to the 3D. The popularity of the 2.5D stage encourages franchises to engage with transmedia and allows for different adaptions of series that

[49] Makoto Matsuda (Chairman of the 2.5D Musical Association), interviewed by Norio Kohyama, Performing Arts Network Japan, Dec 24, 2015. Accessed October 12, 2020. https://performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/1511/1.html
[50] Makoto Matsuda (Chairman of the 2.5D Musical Association), interviewed by Norio Kohyama, Performing Arts Network Japan, Dec 24, 2015. Accessed October 12, 2020. https://performingarts.jp/E/pre_interview/1511/1.html

continue to this day. Since the rise in popularity of the stage play, 2.5D continues as an evolution of fan culture based on its definition of and connection to 2D content. Anime scholar Akiko Sugawa-Shimada defines 2.5D culture as "any cultural practices exercised within the blurry boundary between the 2nd- and 3rd-dimensional spaces and with the deep participation of fans."[51] Essentially, the fan can experience an altered reality when engaging with 2.5D. In the example of the stage play, 2D content is brought into a 3D environment through actors, special effects, and costumes.

While many franchises are adapted to the stage, the adaptation of the idol franchise *Tsukiuta* is of particular interest. *Tsukiuta*—a project using "original characters based on the theme of 12 months"—is described as a "story decorated with music and voice."[52] The franchise is composed of four idol units[53]: Six Gravity, Procellarum, Fluna, and Seleas from the fictional production company Tsukino Production. The 2D content of *Tsukiuta* is transformed for its stage component, *Tsukiuta Stage* (*TsukiSta*). The tenth stage production, *Tsukiuta Kitan Taikyoku Denki*, opened on January 29, 2020 at Hulic Hall Tokyo and features Six Gravity and Procellarum. In this play, the actors along with the use of special effects bring the fictional *Tsukiuta* world to life and adds depth to 2D representations by transforming it into a play, which allows fans to enter the world of their favourite idols.

TsukiSta is unique since on more than one occasion the plays diverge from the idol storyline. *Tsukiuta Kitan Taikyoku Denki* was based on the theme that *Tsukiuta* used at the

[51] Akiko Sugawa-Shimada, "Emerging "2.5-dimensional" Culture: Character-oriented Cultural Practices and "Community of Preferences" as a New Fandom in Japan and Beyond." *Mechademia* 12, no. 2 (2020): 124-139, 125. muse.jhu.edu/article/761075.
[52] Tsukino Production, "Tsukiuta." Retrieved from web address. https://tsukino-pro.com/tsukiuta/.
[53] An idol unit is a group of idols like CHAM!.

Animated Girls' Festival convention in 2016; it tells the story of the meeting and new relationship of two species: human and the demons called *Gokuzoku*[54] (獄族). This meeting of species takes place in a fantasy world called IF, a world based on *yin* (night) and *yang* (day) where *yin* dominates.[55] In highly detailed costumes, Six Gravity and Procellarum engage in action, comedy, and drama in a world separate from the original 2D content. This 2.5D stage play allows fans to see different worlds of characters, including those where they are not idols. The fantasized storyline fills the curiosity of the fans who wonder about alternate universes for the characters. Furthermore, the different outfits of the characters are manifested in reality. Idols have many elaborately designed costumes and, if they are 2D idols, it is rare that a 3D version is made. *TsukiSta* brings these costumes to life as an extension of the characters.

At the end of the *TsukiSta*, the characters return to their idol counterparts with a concert. The *TsukiSta* concert entrances fans through an expression of what Sugawara-Shimada's has termed *virtual corporality* (kyokô teki shintai), which refers to the virtual embodiment of "actual human bodies as well as human bodies that look unreal."[56] Through *virtual corporality* fans are confronted with the live performance of real people, wearing accurate costumes of the idols, who dedicate themselves to learning the persona of the characters. While the actors perform as idols, fans can engage with the characters by waving coloured penlights as a show of support. These concerts bring the 2D idols into reality through the work of the actors on stage and the

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[54] *Gokuzoku* (獄族) means Prisoner.

[55] Rie Koike, "[Report] 2.5-Dimensional Dance Live Tsukista. 10th act Tsukiuta Kitan Taikyoku Denki opens!" 25news.jp, 25 news, January 30, 2020, p 2. Accessed February 19, 2020. https://25news.jp/?p=46266,

[56] Akiko Sugawa-Shimada, "Emerging "2.5-dimensional" Culture: Character-oriented Cultural Practices and "Community of Preferences" as a New Fandom in Japan and Beyond." *Mechademia* 12, no. 2 (2020): 124-139, 124. muse.jhu.edu/article/761075.

audience's participation. The concert further develops a 2.5D experience that entertains fans through representations and allows the fans a direct interaction with the 2D world and its characters.

Tsukiuta is one of many examples of 2D content being transformed into stage plays and musicals that reveal the interaction between otaku cultures and a various forms of representations. *Tsukiuta*, however, acts as an encompassing example because its transmedia nature targets other variations of otaku such as those interested in an anime, manga, music, video games, and stage plays. Cultural acts, like collecting merchandise and using penlights, become congruent between otaku cultures. In addition, the *virtual corporality* element of *Tsukiuta* appeals to the fans who like to see handsome, talented actors play their favourite idols. These actors are the most important element of *TsukiSta* because these performances presents an additional mode of interaction for the otaku. While this interaction through plays seems like nothing new, it can be seen as a development in the anime–otaku relationship that calls on past conventions. The 2.5D stage play also echoes Christian Metz's argument concerning spectator investment in cinema and theatre in his essay "On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema" as discussed in Case Study 1. The issues of spectator investment, or the audience's ability to lose themselves in the spectacle, continues to be a predominate issue here because the 2.5D stage play operates the same as any other stage play.[57] The 2.5D stage play involves theatre elements such as directors, actors, and costumes and continues to have spectators in the same environment as the actors. However, the 2.5D stage, as opposed to a regular theatrical production, is successful due to the spectator's active investment in the stage's source material and the fame of actors,

[57] Marc Steinberg, "Immobile Sections and Trans-Series Movement: Astro Boy and the Emergence of Anime," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journa*l, Vol 1(2) (2006): 190–206, 193.

which allow the viewer to get temporary lost in the spectacle. The spectators acknowledge that this is a theatrical and 3D representation of the source material and enjoy it as a form of entertainment. This demonstrates how the 2.5D stage enables fans to interact with a representation of 2D characters through embodiment and performance in reality.

Cosplay and Performance

Cosplay, short for costume play, is the act of dressing up and performing as a 2D character. In recent years, this hobby has become mainstream, and it is now something that many people know about. This section looks at the research stage involved in the creative process and act of cosplay, which overlaps with representations. Also, performances of gender and embodiment are addressed as important aspects of cosplay.

To begin the creative process, the cosplayer starts with the research stage. This stage allows the cosplayer to plan the making of the costume and to study the source material, which will lead to the otaku's representation of a character. The cosplayer chooses a character based on personal criteria.[58] One otaku may choose to cosplay their favourite character, while another may decide they like a character's design and then wish to create it. After this decision, the cosplayer examines various resources in order to build their imitation of the character. They look for different perspectives of a character's outfit, expressions, poses, and any type of gesture that the character makes. This close examination aids in the imitation that the cosplayer will embody. By taking notes of the appearance, the cosplayer knows how to act and display their bodies to represent the character. For example, *Tsukiuta* fans cosplay the outfits of its idols. The character

[58] Theresa Winge. "Costuming the Imagination: Origins of Anime and Manga Cosplay." *Mechademia* 1 (2006): 65-76, 69. Accessed May 22, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/41510878.

You Haduki is the flirt of Procellarum. As You matures, his flamboyant side starts to mellow out and his appearance begins to reflect this growth. When a cosplayer wishes to cosplay You, they must consider his angular jaw, toned arms, broad shoulders, and flat chest. Also, they must consider the age for the personality of the character. The 19-year-old You in 2015 shows poised, large gestures that differ from those of the 24-year-old You in 2019, when his attitude has turned cheeky and laid back, which is also reflected in his poses (See Figure 3).

Figure 3 Various cosplays of You Haduki. Top row (left to right): casual 2019, comfy from Season 2 anime, Bottom row (left to right): Tobu Zoo Collaboration, "Lots of Love LOLV," *Lunatic Party*. Photos by author.

In the article, "Cosplay, Cuteness, and Weiniang: The Queered Ke′ai of Male Cosplayers as ″Fake Girls″," Chinese studies scholar Shih-chen Chao comments on how male cosplayers often have fair skin, long eyelashes, big eyes, shiny lips, small, oval faces with sharp, pointed

chins, and thick bangs when crossplaying[59].[60] Conversely, a female crossplaying a male character must consider the other end of the gender spectrum in order to embody a masculine persona. Rather than innocent, cute features, the focus is on bold, angular ones. These attributes change depending on the type of character because poses and gestures are unique to a character. Through this process, the cosplayer knows how to change their identity to present this character in 3D.

The research stage establishes a persona for the cosplayer to perform. The performance refers to Chao's notion of performance which is described as "an action to entertain an audience, rather than simply do or execute."[61] Therefore, cosplay is a performance of a character to engage with others. The act is comparable to Metz's comments about theatre, as noted in the first case study. While the spectators cannot lose themselves in the spectacle of a theatre performance due to it being in the same space, the performance of cosplay differs in one crucial way. Cosplay provides direct interaction with the cosplayer as opposed to the distant interaction between the actors and spectators that occurs with a stage. As a result, cosplay evokes a higher spectator investment because the spectators is directly engaged in the cosplayer and their performance. Rather than continue the problem of theatre, cosplay highlights them and turns them into benefits of the 2.5D space, where otaku can further engage with representations.

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[59] Crossplay is the term use to define cosplaying another gender, in this case males cosplaying female characters.
[60] Shih-chen Chao, "Cosplay, Cuteness, and Weiniang: The Queered Ke′ai of Male Cosplayers as "Fake Girls"," In *Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*, edited by Lavin Maud, Yang Ling, and Zhao Jing Jamie, 20-44, 28-9. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017. Accessed June 28, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1rfzz65.7.
[61] Shih-chen Chao, "Cosplay, Cuteness, and Weiniang: The Queered Ke′ai of Male Cosplayers as "Fake Girls"," In *Boys' Love, Cosplay, and Androgynous Idols: Queer Fan Cultures in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan*, edited by Lavin Maud, Yang Ling, and Zhao Jing Jamie, 20-44, 21. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017. Accessed June 28, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1rfzz65.7.

Cosplay becomes a representation of anime between 2D and 3D by allowing an act of performance through imitation and embodiment to bring a 2D character to life. This act of embodiment through performance adds depth to the motion seen in anime, not unlike the transformation of manga into anime where flat images are granted motion. This hobby creates an additional interaction with animated representations through the act of fan production, as discussed in the second case study, via the creation of cosplay. These interactions work because this hobby "showcases emotional ownership over a media text or character by forging a personal, embodied relationship between player and character."[62] Cosplay encourages otaku to replicate a 2D character's outfits however they wish and to form a relationship with anime by manifesting the otaku's ideas and fantasies through the choices they make during the creative process. In comparison to *dōjinshi*, where the otaku considers events to create a story, cosplay allows the otaku to examine which fabric will suit the character's outfit in order to produce a replica. Additionally, this embodiment engages *virtual corporality*, as noted in the above section on stage plays. Otaku embody fictional or virtual bodies and changes their identities to be someone else through the act of cosplay. In a sense, it is as if everyone is *Perfect Blue'*s Mima. The cosplayer is Rumi, and temporality takes on Mima's persona to act as an idol. Cosplay has become a hobby based on becoming someone else for the cosplayer's own satisfaction, and it enables an additional method for the otaku's interaction with their favourite characters.

[62] Nicolle Lamerichs, "Embodied Characters: The Affective Process of Cosplay." In *Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018, pp 199-230, 213. Accessed September 5, 2020. doi:10.2307/j.ctv65svxz.14.

In the End

This case study reflected on the experience of 2D characters being brought to reality through transmedia representations and cosplay. As seen in 2D idol and stage play culture, the 2.5D is an extension of otaku culture where the anime–otaku relationship changes as a result. This change begins with the 2.5D events as acts of transmedia. These events transform 2D content to concerts and stage plays which presents the otaku with various anime representations to interact with as noted in Case Study 1. As a result, the events attract various types of otaku such as those interested in anime, video games, and more who wish to further participate with the 2D source material that they already love. These various types of otaku become 2.5D fans, which leads to the inclusion of different cultural acts, such as the purchasing of merchandise, similar to the fans of anime, or they will go to stage plays in order to support the character actors, like the otaku who follow idols, in 2.5D culture. Therefore, 2.5D culture is an amalgamation of existing otaku cultures, which then creates a phenomenon and completely evolves the anime–otaku relationship.

Conclusion: The Otaku Evolution and Representations

This MRP examined the ongoing relationship between anime and otaku cultures in order to consider the following questions: What are the principal drivers behind the evolution of the otaku; and, how do these drivers effect change in both otaku culture and the relationship otaku have with anime representations? This research developed an understanding about the role of reality and representation in the otaku's relationship with anime. The four case studies presented technological and historical events that reveal the drivers of the otaku evolution, including: the innovations of limited animation and *animetism*; the use of stillness and motion in anime; the introduction of 2D–3D spectrum to describe an otaku's interactions with anime; the use of the *Superflat* to describe Japan; the role of otaku as both consumption to production; and the use of *virtual corporality* to define the embodiment of 2D characters. These forces shaped anime as a cultural phenomenon that is simultaneously 2D and 3D. Through their interaction with anime, the otaku are embedded in the spectrum between reality and representation. These various forms in the spectrum between reality and representation force the otaku to adapt and learn different skills to further their engagement with various anime representations. The fluid spectrum lets the otaku evolve and further interact with a range of interactions, such as anime on a screen or a conversation with a cosplayer, which, in turn, further defines the otaku's relationship with anime.

Through the establishment and use of the reality–representation spectrum, the otaku's interactions with anime can be further defined as interactions between reality and representations. The otaku are constantly learning and adapting to further engage with anime representations. This reveals the otaku enter an evolution, the otaku evolution, much like

humanity that proposes the current incarnations of the otaku are intellectual, unique, and often underestimated. They are a movement that continues to change much like their hippie counterpart. While the otaku is now embedded in fan culture, they show a way to sort and engage themselves in the current flood of mass media; they use their skills and adaptability to navigate the heavily representational world. With the otaku at the forefront of this interaction using their knowledge of navigating a world full of representations, they show insight about human interactions with representations. The conversation about the anime–otaku relationship does not end here because the relationship is not only defined by its interaction with spectrum of reality and representation. The relationship is also defined by how humans interact with representations. Therefore, the anime–otaku relationship has the potential to provide a further understanding of this aspect of humanity.

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