Video Essay Script Draft
What Does the Popularity of Database-Oriented Anime Reveal About the Lifestyle in Postmodern East Asia Society?

[Introduction]
<Slide: Title card with visuals of iconic anime, from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* to *Re: Zero*>

Anime is something more than entertainment; it is a mirror to the societies that create the anime. Today, we will discuss one of the interesting shifts that have recently happened within the anime world: that is, database-oriented anime. What does this say about the lifestyles of people in postmodern East Asia? The thesis goes as follows: this shift reveals deeper social and cultural anxieties in a fragmented, fast-paced society.

<there will be an image of the cover of Hiroki Azuma's *Database Animals* to introduce the idea of database-oriented consumption.>
"Let's begin by making sense of this shift, and what it says about the contemporary in East Asia."

[I: Brief History of Anime]
<Slide: A timeline of anime history with key shows such as *Astro Boy*, *Dragon Ball*, *Evangelion*, and *Re: Zero*.>

"Anime has always been a reflection of the change in society in Japan. Starting with Tezuka's *Astro Boy* in the 1960s, grand narratives full of optimism for rebuilding society after World War II were presented. Moving on to the 80s and 90s, anime changed into complex storytelling often exploring deeper messages about society-*Neon Genesis Evangelion* is the exact example.

But a new trend emerged as we entered the 2000s: anime started fragmenting its storytelling. As Hiroki Azuma argues in *Database Animals*, postmodern society's collapse of 'grand narratives' caused an important change in the way anime is consumed. Instead of engaging with cohesive stories, fans began focusing on 'database consumption'-interacting with isolated traits and character archetypes. According to Azuma, 'Database consumption allows users to bypass narrative entirely and consume only the elements they find personally fulfilling' (Azuma, p. 28).

<There will be an infographic illustrating "Narrative Consumption" versus "Database Consumption," using examples such as *Evangelion*'s Rei Ayanami to typify traits such as "stoic" and "enigmatic."

This modular form of consumption is a reflection of the fragmentation in postmodern lifestyles. No longer is the fan required to trace the story but can select points of contact that appeal to them, which is not simply a creative transformation on the one hand but a reflection of changed methods of engagement with culture as a whole.

[II: Lifestyle Changes in East Asia Society]

Slide: Images of Japan's bustling cities, juxtaposed with office workers sleeping on desks and family dining tables with empty chairs.

"Let's zoom out to understand the societal backdrop behind this shift. Japan's Bubble Economy burst in the early 1990s, triggering a period of   stagnation. During this time, traditional lifetime employment systems   crumbled, replaced by outcome-based wages and non-regular employment.   According to Kanai's article on *karoshi* (2009), 'the number of   non-regular workers increased by 1.7 million between 1995 and 2001'   while regular employees who worked over 60 hours per week rose by 490,000 (Kanai, p. 212)."

<there will be a graph comparing the rise of non-regular employment from Kanai's data.>

"This shift led to intense competition, longer working hours, and precarious employment. Kanai emphasizes that these conditions weren't individual   choices but systemic pressures, describing *karoshi* as 'the collapse of living rhythm due to excessive fatigue' (Kanai, p. 209)."

Beyond economics, these changes deeply affected social structures. With the rise in demands for work, the transmission of traditional family bonds weakened, isolating an individual. What was the result of this? Escapism through media, most specifically anime, increased. Galbraith links this development in his book *The Moé Manifesto* with the growth of *moé*-an emotional investment in false characters. He provides the following passage: 'Moé is a response to feelings of loneliness in everyday life when contact with other human beings seems beyond one's grasp' (Galbraith, p. 8).

<there will be a table showing statistics related to Japan's declining birth rates and increasing solitary lifestyles.>

"In a fragmented world, anime provides a unique form of comfort. By engaging with fragments like character archetypes or settings, fans can build their own emotional worlds, free from the complexities of real life."

[III: Case Study]

A: *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

Including, but not limited to, key visuals such as Shinji in the cockpit, Rei Ayanami's character profile, and merchandising materials like figurine and poster artwork.

"*Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) is a seminal work that delves deep into themes of trauma, identity, and human connection. The protagonist, Shinji Ikari, is a 14-year-old boy recruited to pilot a giant mecha, the Evangelion Unit-01, to combat mysterious beings known as Angels. However, the series transcends typical mecha

tropes by focusing on the psychological struggles of its characters.

The storytelling has changed a lot in the last episodes. Episodes 25 and 26, entitled 'Do you love me? ' and 'Take care of yourself.', respectively, have dropped their conventional ways of storytelling and are fragmented, introspective explorations of Shinji's psyche through abstract imagery and internal monologues. This reflects the director, Hideaki Anno's intention to portray inner turmoil and existential crises that the characters go through. According to *Looper*, 'The last two episodes of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* are, to put it reductively, unusual... comprised mostly of opaque philosophy.. •

largely opaque philosophy.' Despite its complex narrative, *Evangelion* was followed by a a vast array of merchandise and spin-offs which focused on a few particular aspects of the show's characters and design. For example, Rei Ayanami's mysterious personality and unique character design made her a cultural icon. There were figures, posters, and even fan conventions in her name. This quality falls in line with what Hiroki Azuma has termed 'database consumption', wherein the consumer revels in the fragments of the work, rather than its cohesive narrative.

Azuma remarks, 'In the age of database consumption, the grand narrative is replaced by a collection of settings and characters that can be recombined in various ways.'

This shift from narrative engagement to database consumption reflects the fragmented nature of postmodern East Asian society, in which individuals often find comfort in the isolating aspects of media with which they personally identify."

B: *Re:Zero − Starting Life in Another World*=

<Slide: Key visuals from *Re:Zero*: Subaru in various perilous situations, character profiles of Rem and Emilia, and scenes depicting the fantasy world.

"*Re:Zero* series, 2016, probably is the most popular representative of isekai-a genre where the protagonist gets transferred to a parallel world. Subaru Natsuki is a young average guy who suddenly finds himself in a fantastic world. Unlike typical isekai protagonists who usually get some ridiculously strong powers, Subaru's special ability is 'Return by Death,' which makes it possible for him to return every time he dies. The mechanism of this anime supposed him to suffer from traumatic experiences continuously in his efforts to change the outcomes and save people close to him. The series does utilize some of the now overly used isekai tropes: it's a medieval fantasy setting with some magic and certain character archetypes. Half-elf heroine Emilia embodies the trope of being 'distant yet kind-hearted'; Rem, the loyal maid, represents unwavering devotion. These character designs pander to the specific tastes of certain fans, making database consumption easier.

As *CBR* notes, 'Re:Zero's participants often steal the show, but *Isekai Quartet* makes great use of each property while sticking true to the characters' depictions in the original anime.'

While *Re:Zero* offers a somewhat interesting but vague narrative, in this case, *Re:Zero* depends on tropes and character archetypes very recognizable by the audience of anime. Audiences like specific elements that meet their wishes but tend to isolate and engage with those components outside the overall story. This perhaps has demonstrated a societal inclination toward escapism and personalization of media use indicative of the fragmented lifestyle and pace in postmodern East Asia.

[**Conclusion**]

<Slide: A split image of a busy street of Tokyo and a quiet otaku room with various anime merchandise>

"So, what does the popularity of database-oriented anime tell us? It tells of anxieties about postmodern life: the isolation produced by intense work cultures, the loss of traditional narratives, and the seeking of connection in fragmented forms. Anime is no longer about stories; it is about creating personal worlds from modular pieces."

"As we see this trend grow, it begs a question of what the future may bring with it: will we find new ways to connect or will our consumption stay in fragments? One thing is certain: anime will keep reflecting the life we live and the dreams we escape to."

<there will be a final slide inviting comments and discussion on how viewers experience database-oriented anime.