IAN CONDRY

THE SOUL
OF ANIME

COLLABORATIVE CREATIVITY AND
JAPAN'S MEDIA SUCCESS STORY

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For Nick, Jackson, and Alec

CONTENTS

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND NAMES

✳ All interviews and sources in Japanese were translated by the author. Japanese names are given in Western order, with given name followed by family name (e.g., Hayao Miyazaki, Mamoru Oshii, Shinichiro Watanabe, Mamoru Hosoda).

A note on name order: The tradition for English-language scholars is to use Japanese order (i.e., Miyazaki Hayao). In contrast, English-language newspapers, magazines, and trade publications tend to use Western order. In my first book, *Hip-Hop Japan* (2006), I went with scholarly tradition. I may have been influenced by my years of Japanese-language study; Japanese order sounds more authentic to me, like reading manga pages "unflipped" (the original Japanese orientation, reading right to left). Scholars tend to make an exception, however, for Japanese authors who have published in English. I suspect this is mainly due to citation practices in academia. If we want to cite the 2009 translated book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* and we write the author's name in the Japanese order, Azuma Hiroki (2009), there is a danger that people less familiar with Japanese will look for the reference under "Hiroki 2009," his given name. It is possible that some scholars want to avoid a kind of linguistic imperialism as well. In any case, current scholarly practice creates a confusing system: Western order for Japanese scholars with English-language publications, and Japanese order for everyone

else. Given that Japanese scholars are increasingly publishing in English, and moreover they introduce themselves and present name cards (*meishi*) in English using Western order, I have decided to write Japanese names with given name followed by family name. To be honest, it sounds a little strange to me, but if it leads to less confusion, the change will be worth it.

Who Makes Anime?

* *The Soul of Anime* examines the worlds of Japanese animation to explore the ways cultural movements succeed—that is, gain value and go global through forces of collective action. By some estimates, a staggering 60 percent of the world's TV broadcasts of cartoons are Japanese in origin (JETRO 2005).[1] Anime feature films encompass a range of works from mass entertainment, like *Pokémon* and *Spirited Away*, to art-house favorites including *Ghost in the Shell* and *Summer Wars*. Anime ("AH-nee-may") refers to Japanese animated film and television, but the worlds of anime extend well beyond what appears on the screen. Anime is characteristic of contemporary media in its interconnected webs of commercial and cultural activities that reach across industries and national boundaries. In the United States and elsewhere, anime fan conventions draw tens of thousands of participants, many dressed as their favorite characters. Anime clubs on college and high school campuses are becoming as common as sushi in American supermarkets. A vast array of licensed merchandise depends on anime characters as well, characters often born in manga (comic books), but also in videogames, light novels, and even TV commercials. Scholars, fans, and media observers are producing a growing body of literature aimed at extending and deepening our understandings of the diverse field of Japanese animation. What distinguishes this book is my effort to use fieldwork in animation

studies and other sites of anime-related production to explore ethno-
graphically the social side of media. I start with the logic and practices of
making animation and use this perspective as a way to think about cultural
production more broadly. I argue that collaborative creativity, which oper-
ates across media industries and connects official producers to unofficial
fan production, is what led to anime's global success. Put simply, success
arises from social dynamics that lead people to put their energy into
today's media worlds. This collective social energy is what I mean by the
"soul" of anime.

Anime is a success in the sense that it became a sustainable form of
creative expression and a style recognized as "Japanese" that went global
without the push of major corporations (at least at first) and thus repre-
sents a kind of globalization from below. In other words, anime demon-
strates the diversity of actors involved in the transformation of a small-
scale, niche cultural form into something that reaches wider audiences and
influences people around the world. Why did Japan, of all places, become a
global leader in animation? How did the cultural universe of anime ex-
pand from being a (mostly) children's genre to something of value for
teenagers and adults as well, and why did this not happen in the United
States until much later? What can anime tell us about the emergence of
media forms that depend not only on corporate backing but also on
grassroots and independent efforts to extend audiences and impact? These
questions give us the opportunity to rethink how we understand the
emergence and spread of distinctive cultural forms as something other
than a game of "follow the money." Instead, we need to follow the activity,
the energy, the commitment of those who care, starting with what is most
meaningful to them. Anime is instructive because it reveals the centrality
of a kind of social energy that emerges in the space between people and
media. For me, the soul of anime does not point to some ultimate, internal
essence of the media as an object. Rather, the soul of anime points to this
social energy that arises from our collective engagements through media,
and as such, it gives us an alternative way to think about what is of value in
media. This, in turn, suggests dynamics for producing creative platforms
on which to shape new futures.

The book's central thematic is the interplay between an internal logic of
anime as a kind of portable creative platform (glossed as "characters and
worlds" but somewhat more complex) and the social contexts in which
anime gains its meaning and value—what I'm calling the "social side of

media," which includes both paid labor and fan activities. By looking at cultural production across categories of producers, we can gain insight into the workings of contemporary media and culture by reflecting on pre-Internet examples of user-generated content, viral media, and the complexities of transmedia synergies. Overall, this is a story of the emergence of a media form that, as it matured and spread, gained both wider mass audiences and deeper, more niche-oriented fans in Japan and overseas. The example of anime is all the more striking, and more provocative in terms of thinking about how cultural movements go global, once we recognize that anime studios succeeded despite relatively modest economic returns. The idea of collaborative creativity enables us to map the broader connections of anime beyond the media forms themselves.

Many studies of animation begin with a question about the object—what is anime?—but I suggest a different entry point: Who makes anime? The chapters of this book can be read as an attempt to understand anime's value in terms of a circle of interaction across categories of producers. Rather than beginning with the contrasts between production and consumption, answering the question "Who makes anime?" starts from a different place, making central not only the roles of anime creators but also the roles of manga artists, sponsors, merchandisers, and fans as part of wider processes of production.[2] In the chapters that follow, I examine, in turn, the making of anime by looking at how professional animators design new anime around characters and worlds (chapters 1–2); the emergence of different approaches to anime, such as feature films versus TV, as a way to think about the transmedia connections that are necessary to make anime successful, notably the key role of manga (chapter 3); how synergies between anime creators and toy companies pushed the development of robot anime that emphasized "real" (i.e., grownup) themes and helped to expand audiences for anime from children to adults (chapter 4); how "cutting-edge" studios design their own workplaces as (more or less) open spaces for creativity (chapter 5); how online file sharing and the practices of "fansubbing" expand the cultural universe of anime amid fierce debates over the legitimacy of copyright (chapter 6); and how Japanese *otaku* (obsessive fans) channel their desire for anime characters, even to the point of wanting to marry them, and whether this should be viewed as a deeper descent into a closed-off niche world or, instead, as an unusual gesture toward mass appeal (chapter 7). In the conclusion, I return to some of the larger questions about how cultural forms travel from niche to

mass—or, perhaps more accurate, from niche to more widely dispersed niches—and the diverse ways in which media is related to collective action. In this circular journey, we can see how the value of anime arises from its movement, a fluidity not confined to a single location or to unique, original authors. This understanding of value as arising from living social relations in dynamic interaction shares inspiration with some foundational anthropologists and their approaches to culture and economy, including Bronislaw Malinowski (1984 [1922]) and Marcel Mauss (1990 [1923]), both of whom found models of economic action centered on rational individuals hopelessly naïve, a lesson relevant today and still explored by many. By drawing attention to the circulation and reworking of cultural forms, *The Soul of Anime* speaks to the often unpredictable potential of ongoing, collaborative projects.

Because collaboration is often contentious, chaotic, and fluid, we can observe in anime a political struggle over the control and circulation of value. The term "collaborate," when used in relation to new social media, tends to have a positive meaning of "working together," but we might note that it can mean "working for the enemy," too. In contrast to a notion of participation, which implies less hierarchy, collaboration carries hints of disciplined structure. This is appropriate because creating animation usually requires a specialized, often workmanlike repetitiveness in which mimicking the drawings of others with great precision, over and over, is a basic principle of production. In some ways analogous to the contrast between "working together" and "submission to the enemy," the study of popular culture more generally can lead to optimistic readings of collective projects that tackle complex problems through innovation and shared commitments, or pessimistic readings that emphasize the dreary, constricting forces that reproduce hegemonic structures of inequality. This binary of oppression and liberation is difficult to escape, especially in our current era, when even promises of "freedom" often seem to impose the constrictions of free-market capitalism, or neoliberalism, in the name of consumer choice. That is why looking at a specific case study such as anime in detail can offer unique insights into the workings of media today by giving us a chance to track what happens when something moves across platforms and across national boundaries. In this respect, the lessons of anime with regard to questions of creativity and control echo against a backdrop of broader social and economic change globally.

Ethnography and Fieldwork in Anime Studios

As a cultural anthropologist, I approach these issues by attending to some of the nuances of social life and then use those details to develop larger theories about the workings of media and culture. My research centers on ethnographic fieldwork, primarily in several anime studios in Tokyo, between 2004 and 2010. I spent three and a half months in the summer of 2006 attending script meetings, voice recordings, and editing sessions, and I conducted interviews with dozens of creators. In the years before and after, I made one or two brief trips to Japan annually to continue my research. My main field sites were Gonzo, Aniplex, and Madhouse, but I also visited Studio Ghibli, Production I.G., Toei Animation, Sunrise, and several other smaller operations where I observed creators at work. During one voice-recording session, I was even recruited to be a voice actor for a couple of lines (in Japanese) when an extra was needed (see chapter 5). For comparison with practices within the United States, I spent a day at the Cartoon Network studios in Burbank, California, and I interviewed a Korean American anime director who works in the United States, Japan, and South Korea (chapter 3). In Japan, I observed labor at a high-end toy factory (the Bandai Hobby Center in Shizuoka), and I met with Japanese anime magazine writers, publishers, scholars, and fans. My research also extended beyond today's workplaces, both in thinking historically and in other realms of fandom. I attended anime conventions in Boston (2006–2009) and Los Angeles (2011) and the enormous "fanzine" convention Comic Market in Tokyo (August 2006), and I follow many aspects of online anime fandom in both Japan and the United States. I also watched a lot of anime, and I read what other academics, fans, and commentators have to say. I benefited from many discussions with students, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and elsewhere, regarding anime and other forms of Japanese popular culture.

Fieldwork can be a somewhat haphazard, unpredictable process. As a result, it is often difficult to achieve a perfectly balanced mix of examples and insights. Although I observed a lot, I might mention that in my efforts to visit anime studios, whether through cold calls (via email and phone) or personal connections, I failed to get access or interviews far more often than I succeeded. The collection of examples I report on here arose because of the goodwill of people who often didn't know me well, and for that I am grateful. I hope I'm not *too* grateful. The anthropologist Brian

Moeran (1996) notes an interesting by-product of fieldwork in his ethnography of a Japanese advertising agency—that is, his fierce loyalty to the firm he studied. While he analyzed the meanings of meetings, something I also do, he grew attached to his informants, a finding that I'm sure many fieldworkers can appreciate. Does this distort the findings of a researcher? Perhaps. But the flip side is that if you don't spend time at an anime studio or at an advertising agency, you're more likely to see only the content of an anime or an ad, and there is a risk of ignoring (or underplaying) the people and the labor behind the effort. Is this not a bias as well?

At the same time, I acknowledge that the examples I use lean toward the male end of the anime spectrum. Gender in anime is a topic that deserves more attention than my limited access could achieve. All of the studios I visited had female employees, but except for Studio 4°C, with its female chief executive (see chapter 5), few were in the top positions. Female animators were clearly on staff, but in the meetings between those with more power—such as producers, scriptwriters, directors, and key frame artists—I estimate that about one in five or six (at most, one in three) were women. For anime genres, as well, I note that my discussion of mecha (giant robot) anime and the links with merchandising could apply equally well to magical schoolgirl anime (chapter 4). Whereas giant robot anime excelled as a marketing tool for robot toys, magical schoolgirl anime played a similar role in promoting magic wands and other "transformation" devices as toys (Allison 2006). Of course, gender dynamics mean more than that some anime is for boys and some is for girls. For example, the anthropologist Laura Miller (2011) persuasively argues that the promotion of so-called Cool Japan by the Japanese government is also skewed toward "male geek culture" and thereby ends up erasing the creativity of young women. Gender issues are an extremely important aspect of anime studies. Although the limitations of fieldwork may be a poor excuse for some of the absences here, I had to work with the cards I was dealt. Rather than asserting a questionable objectivity, anthropologists tend to write from a perspective that is necessarily "partial" in both senses of the word: committed to certain ends and incomplete (Clifford and Marcus 1986). I might add that this ethnography of anime creativity at times gives less emphasis to narrative and representation not because I think this is unimportant, but because my aim is to move us toward questions of production, participation, and engagement in particular social contexts.

A Parlor Bet and Other
Social Contexts of Anime Production

Given the substantial international influence of anime, readers might be surprised by the crowded, often disheveled look of the places where animators work. I was surprised by the piles and piles of paper, the intensity of hand-drawn work, and the sheer amount of labor required. I was also impressed by the workers' focus, energy, and commitment to working together on enormous projects. Collaborative creativity is more than jargon for animators.

Most of Tokyo's anime studios are scattered in the suburbs west and north of the city, generally in the pie slice formed by the Chuo train line (heading west from Shinjuku) and the Seibu Ikebukuro line (heading northwest from Ikebukuro). The buildings tend to be nondescript, concrete slabs that could be mistaken for the countless condos and small office buildings extending in all directions from Tokyo's center. For all of its international impact, Japan's anime production remains in many ways a cottage industry. A report by the Japanese advertising firm Dentsu estimates that roughly seven hundred small companies are working in "anime-related production," and of those, four hundred firms are working on "anime production" itself. Some of the larger studios include Toei Animation, Studio Ghibli, Nihon Animation, Shin-Ei Dōga, Studio Pierrot, GDH (Gonzo), Production I.G., Sunrise, and Madhouse, but there are hundreds of others. A studio can employ anywhere from fifteen to a few hundred people, and the studios rely on local freelance animators as well as large offshore animation production houses primarily in South Korea, the Philippines, and China. By some estimates, 90 percent of the frames used in Japanese animation are drawn overseas, although the work of design and storytelling is more often done in Japan. Many anime firms cooperate in production, especially when crunch time comes, and individual animators' career paths can lead through several studios. The studios operate as a fragmented but complexly networked epicenter of what has become an increasingly global business.

Inside the workspaces, the commonalities among the studios I visited—the lived-in atmosphere, the backlit desks for the animators (some of whom, inevitably, were face-down asleep), the rows of computers for others—were reminders of how anime production in Japan has, and has not, evolved since the industry began in the late 1950s. Most of the dozen

1. Friends react with ridicule to the proposition of Winsor McCay (far right) that in one month's time he will create drawings that move, as dramatized in *Little Nemo* (1911).

anime studios I visited were work-worn and bare bones. Although anime studios also had a playful side, with musical instruments and other pastimes lying about, they are places of strict deadlines, where the work literally piles up.

To spend time in an anime studio is to be struck by the labor of making media. My working definition of "animation" is a media form that is created one frame at a time. A tremendous amount of work is required, with painstaking attention to detail, to create *each frame* of film (or, at least, multiple frames per second). It's a crazy idea. In fact, in the film *Little Nemo*, a short from 1911 that mixes animation and live action, the American cartoonist Winsor McCay portrayed his start at "drawing pictures that will move" as a parlor bet against his cigar-smoking friends. In the film, he draws several sample characters on a sheet of white paper and explains that by using film, the cartoons will move. His friends guffaw, rubbing his head to see if perhaps his skull is cracked (see figure 1). The film then cuts to McCay's stylized workplace, and we see the thousands of pages of paper, barrels of ink, and a playful reference to the inevitable

missteps of creating animated work. In the end, however, McCay suc-
ceeds, wowing his friends with the magic of animation. One wonders,
would he have had the energy to do all that work if it weren't for his
friends waiting in anticipation?

Let's jump ahead almost a century and take a closer look at work in an
anime studio by visiting a morning meeting with an anime director in the
early stages of creating a film that went on to win the Best Animated
Feature award from the Japan Academy Prize Association in 2010.

Summer Wars Storyboards and the Energy in the Room

In the summer of 2008, the director Mamoru Hosoda was deep into
creating the storyboards for his feature film *Summer Wars*. It was a year
before the film's scheduled release, and the work was heating up. Hosoda
and his co-writer Satoko Okudera had already composed the original story
and completed the script; Hosoda was in the process of turning the script
into storyboards. He says he works on storyboards in family restaurants
(*fami resu*), such as Denny's, where he draws for stretches of six to twelve
hours—at least, during the several months it takes to complete them.
Hosoda's storyboards are highly regarded among anime professionals, and
some are published as books (Anime Style Editors 2006; Hosoda and
Summer Wars Film Partners 2009).

Generally, anime directors in Japan are responsible for the storyboards,
which are drawn on roughly letter-size pages. Each page is composed of
five frames stacked vertically, with space alongside each frame for noting
the action, dialogue, effects, and timing of the scenes and cuts. For the
hour-and-a-half film, Hosoda would eventually produce a little over five
hundred pages of finalized storyboards, with countless drafts discarded
along the way. In July 2008, the producer of *Summer Wars* invited me to
observe a meeting between the director and his computer graphics team. I
was struck by how storyboards help guide the collaborative creativity of
anime production in distinctive ways.

On the day of the meeting, Hosoda met me at the entrance to the main
offices of Madhouse, then near Ogikubo Station in western Tokyo. A light
rain fell as Hosoda led me to a small office building nearby. The producer
met us on the sidewalk and led us up three flights of stairs, laughing and
apologizing that the elevator was out. Madhouse had rented a floor of the
building to be the primary workspace for Hosoda's film. It was not a fancy
location. There were shelves with stacks of paper and small desks with a

lightboard for drawing on the thin pages used for character movements. Each person's carrel was decorated haphazardly with unique collections of figurines, magazines, and manga.

Feeble air conditioners hummed in the small, muggy room, which was barely large enough for the ten of us around a table. An array of snacks and canned coffee, apparently bought at a nearby convenience store, was spread out in the middle of the table. Work in an anime studio is not glamorous, and a lot of it is solitary. The film's young producer, Yūichirō Saitō, introduced everyone in the room, including me as an observer and a couple of other Madhouse staff members. Except for an assistant producer for Madhouse, the rest of the group were men. Most of the people were from Digital Frontier, a leading computer graphics production company that works in film, videogames, and more. Hosoda began the meeting with comments about the earthquake that had rocked northern Japan the night before, with shocks reaching hundreds of miles away in Tokyo, where my hotel had swayed unnervingly for a long minute shortly before midnight. But this was still three years before the Tōhoku (northeastern Japan) earthquake of March 2011 and the devastating tsunami and nuclear crisis that followed. The quake we experienced in 2008 caused little damage. At the meeting, Hosoda asked whether anyone had injured friends or family, and no one did. "Well, it was just an earthquake," he concluded. Then he lit a cigarette and got down to business.

We each had a stack of paper in front of us: the current draft of the storyboards for the first half of the film. Over the next three hours, Hosoda led us through the roughly three hundred pages, sometimes skimming quickly and sometimes stopping to discuss certain issues in more detail. He discussed "camera angles" (as they would be drawn), the possible effects that could be used, and above all the look and feel that he was aiming for. He noted that some of the scenes should look "cartoony" (*kaatūni*), in contrast to the more photorealistic 3D computer graphics animation (full 3D CG) used, for example, in the film *Appleseed: Ex Machina*, on which several of the CG team members in the room had worked. For Hosoda's film, most of the character movements would be hand-drawn. Many of the backgrounds were hand painted, as well—notably, those featuring the luxurious rural home where much of the action takes place. Even this hand-drawn work, however, would be scanned into computers to be assembled and edited. The computer graphics would be used especially for certain scenes that were best done with computer modeling, such as the virtual

world setting (although this was not 3D in the sense of requiring glasses to give the illusion of depth). At one point, Hosoda noted a scene that required a boy to look out the back of a car as it moved down the street. "This scene we're going to need your help on," he said, explaining that it was very difficult to portray a receding landscape without using computers.

As the meeting went on, many drawings were pulled from other stacks of paper on the shelves around us, depicting the designs of characters in various poses, the settings in the vast virtual world (another main location of the film), and other rough sketches of diverse visual elements (a flowchart, a card-labyrinth game) that would appear. The papers were passed around, examined, and commented on, sometimes marked up with red pencil and photocopied. There was discussion of different decisions that would have to be made as the production progressed, especially about how to get the different visual elements to work together. Hosoda listened carefully to people's questions and suggestions, but he also decided things firmly after opinions had been aired. This was Hosoda's third full-length feature film, and he looked comfortable in his role as the director.

Hosoda trained as an oil painter in art college, and his visual sensibility shows through in the nuances of his storyboards. He is adept at shaping the contours and tempo of his films. Consider, for example, two pages of storyboards for *Summer Wars* that depict one of the early battles for the online avatar King Kazuma, a virtual martial arts champion bunny rabbit (Hosoda and Summer Wars Film Partners 2009: 26–27). The scene appears as part of the opening credits sequence. The storyboards convey the layout and the staging of a virtual battle (see figure 2). At the bottom of each page, the director writes the number of seconds of the movie depicted in the five drawn frames. In this example, the left-hand page (scene 5, cuts 11–12) reads "4 + 0," which means four seconds plus zero frames (at twenty-four frames per second). The right-hand page (cuts 13–14) accounts for "2 + 0," only two seconds of film. Note the hand-drawn touches. The picture sometimes spills out of the frame as a camera is directed to pan across a larger background, a process now done by scanning images and manipulating them on a computer. We can see the dialogue (*serifu*) drifting out of its prescribed box. We can sense a little of Hosoda's voice in the multiple exclamation points, the sound effects drawn large, and the drama of the drawings.

Hosoda's storyboards were filled with this kind of kinetic energy. Even in the morning in a sweaty room with canned coffee, we found ourselves
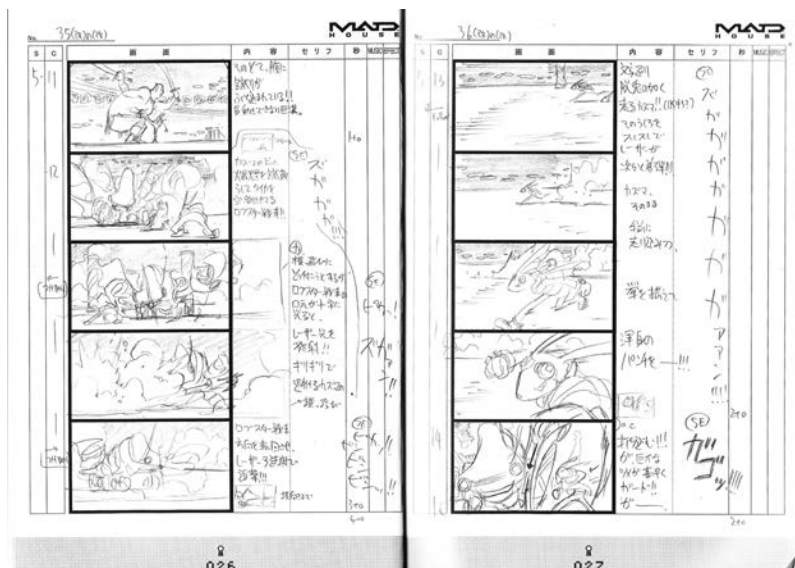
2. *Summer Wars* storyboards (Hosoda and Summer Wars Film Partners 2009: 26–27).

being pulled into the world of the film. We sensed the tension between the characters as they faced their respective challenges. We flipped through the storyboards, page by page, scene after scene, and the visual storytelling was clearly taking shape in the minds of the CG team. But to be honest, the film did not really take shape for me. I found it very difficult to imagine, based on the sketches and scribbled directions, what the final product would actually become (see figure 3). Here, too, a personal history of certain experiences was required to make sense of the drawings, and I lacked that experience.

Even so, there was something about being in a meeting like that, with others in the room intensely focused on the project at hand, that has a galvanizing effect. The collective attention helped build connections, bring focus, and clarify the roles of the many people needed to complete such a large project. Such meetings did more than convey abstract information about a mechanical process of production; they helped reinforce a sense of engaged commitment. The energy in the room was contagious, and this energy begins to give a sense of something larger than the media object itself, something emerging from a collective commitment among those who care. Storyboards helped achieve that focus of attention, and that focus began to take on a life of its own.[3]

3. King Kazuma (crouching) battles a lobster tank in *Summer Wars*.

By the end of the three-hour meeting, the members of the computer graphics team had an understanding of the scenes they would have to design, at least for the first half of the film that was discussed. Hosoda and his producer had a clearer sense of things that still needed to be worked out. Meetings like this regarding background paintings, characters' movements, special effects, voice acting, music, and so on, would continue in the months that followed. After the meetings, the more solitary work of drawing and constructing the scenes would continue. Much of the practice of animation is focused downward, toward a page of paper or a computer screen. As an ethnographer, however, I found the meetings indispensable because they clarified some of the underlying logic of making animation and allowed me to experience the energy of working closely with others—sharing information, working out goals, dividing up the labor.

Storyboards are intriguing because they are integral to the process of production, but in the end they are regarded as waste, a useless by-product, and in most cases are thrown away. This highlights something we intuitively know: What we see on-screen represents a small slice of the labor involved in the overall projects. Hosoda's job is to guide much of that work, but it was readily apparent that problem solving, creativity, and innovation would be required, to a greater or lesser extent, at many stages in the process. Moreover, success itself depends not only on production inside studios, but also on many factors the creators cannot control. This

fundamental unpredictability requires creators to take a leap of faith into projects when they are uncertain of the outcome. Both history and futurism play a role in guiding the creative action that flows through anime projects, revealing how our cultural assumptions go into creating the worlds we inhabit. Writers about anime get the luxury of knowing how things turned out, but this can give a false impression of the perspective of working in media worlds. In this regard, anime gives us a concrete example to think through the social dynamics of purposeful creativity in a global context. Anime exists not only as media but as labor and energy that connects creators, businesses, and fans. Collaborative creativity can offer a way to rethink the value of contemporary media, not only as content, but also as connection. In turn, it allows us to extend analyses across locales, platforms, and kinds of producers.

This doesn't mean that anime creators are getting rich. The value of the cultural success of anime as a global phenomenon and the energy of the participants are not easily translated into monetary rewards for the studios. This means low salaries for animators; it also has broader significance. Japan, like other advanced industrial nations, is facing the challenge of developing new industries, especially now that manufacturing increasingly is moving overseas to low-wage nations. When I began this project in the early 2000s, I imagined that the "content industries" (the Japanese term for media, publishing, and entertainment) might be a powerful engine of economic growth; the reality is more complicated. Although the work of creating scripts and storyboards, designing characters and background artwork, and drawing key frames is generally done in Japan, much of the drawing of "in-between" frames by lower-wage animators is done overseas in South Korea, the Philippines, and China. Depending on how you measure it, "Japanese" animation is made mostly outside Japan. For the Madhouse producer Yūichirō Saitō, however, that really isn't an issue as long as the quality of work is solid. "We just want to make good animation; we are not so concerned about national origins," he said.[4] Still, given the budget constraints of making animation and the tremendous amount of work required, we find that cultural success and economic success mean different things. Some people are quick to blame unauthorized online access to anime as the culprit, but other factors are important, too, including how low budgets are related to the history of Japanese animation and the terms set by early TV series like *Astro Boy* (see chapter 3).

For workers, the pressure of working quickly and cheaply, combined

with the uncertainty of the success, adds to the precarious nature of the business. When I spent time at Gonzo and Madhouse in 2006, they both occupied entire floors of flashy corporate buildings, but they have since moved, and Gonzo was forced to downsize. When I visited Production I.G. in the summer of 2010, it had just relocated a few months before. The new digs took up five floors of a small building and included a large metal model of a plane that had been made for a promotional event and had appeared in Mamoru Oshii's film *The Sky Crawlers*. The CEO of Production I.G., Mitsuhisa Ishikawa, said that some people complained that the space was too clean to be an animation studio, but he implied that it wouldn't take long for the place to get that cluttered and messy, even a little grimy. Of course, all studios have some kind of newfangled face for meetings with media, potential sponsors, and others. The waiting areas are replete with posters, pamphlets, and merchandise pushing their current projects. But backstage, as it were, animators work among piles of paper. Stacks upon stacks of drawings are organized in large manila envelopes. At Toei Animation, a powerhouse in children's programming, a longtime key-frame animator took time out from his work to show me his drawings and said he was happy that he had remained in anime work (see figure 4). He acknowledged that after almost eight years working on the same series, he was a little tired of drawing digital monsters who do battle, but he wasn't complaining. Such is the reward of certain kinds of success.

For many, a career in anime can be short-lived. According to an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, nine out of ten animators leave the industry within three years to move to other areas of work. The average salary for animators in their twenties was estimated at $11,000 per year and only twice that for animators in their thirties (Hayashi 2009).[5] Long hours are the norm, and many animators work freelance, moving from project to project, often without benefits. Most animators burn out or simply can't make a living on the pay they receive for their drawings. Those who remain tend to be the ones who work quickly and who can handle the grueling pace.

In terms of economic success, anime seems more of a cautionary tale than a model of entrepreneurial innovation. The same *Wall Street Journal* article noted that some animators leave the business for more lucrative work in videogames. In fact, when several representatives from the Japanese videogame company Square Enix visited MIT in March 2009 to give a seminar on the making of the *Final Fantasy XII* game, I was excited to

4. Key-frame animator, Toei Animation, August 2006.

share my insights about the workings of characters and the intriguing parallels between anime and videogame production. But the director, Hiroshi Minagawa, also had something to ask me about my study of anime: "Why are you studying such an old-fashioned and unprofitable industry?" Good question.

Why Study Anime?

For me, the answer to the question "Why study anime?" lies in an interest in uncovering the dynamics of cultural movements that don't rely on the promise of exorbitant wealth as the measure of success. Anime has become a globally recognized style—or, more accurately, a generative platform for creativity—despite relatively modest economic returns. Some researchers describe animation as a business, with a kind of "follow-the-money" approach (Raugust 2004; Tada 2002). But in an era of user-generated media, when amateur productions can rival those of professional studios, we need a wider perspective to map how emergent cultural forms develop and take

hold. Japan, as the world's third largest economy and a robust epicenter in the import and export of popular culture, provides a useful location for unraveling the dynamic political struggles over the meanings of popular culture, both as cultural resource and as commercial product.

But what leads to success? Malcolm Gladwell argues that we have a strong tendency to misconstrue stories of success because we place too much explanatory weight on the individual abilities of remarkably successful people. These successful people, Gladwell (2008: 19) says, "may look like they did it all by themselves. But in fact, they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways that others cannot." Both the Beatles and Bill Gates had "extraordinary opportunities" in the sense that they were able to practice their skills for many, many more hours than their peers and competitors. Hard work, yes, but Gladwell brings attention to the serendipity of being in the right place at the right time (something that can be said for global media). So far so good. But his notion of "cultural legacies" gives too much credence to essentialist stereotypes, and in making the case that social context is integral to any success, he doesn't take his argument far enough. He describes remarkably successful programmers, lawyers, and musicians and how they benefited from their surroundings, but in the end we see primarily successful *individuals*. If the trick to understanding success is grasping the crucibles in which people ended up being successful, then shouldn't those crucibles be our scale of analysis? And, if so, what scale is that? In the case of anime, there are good reasons to argue for focusing on any of a number of levels: the auteur animator, the innovative studio, the larger pop culture scene, the national characteristics of Japan, or a transnational realm of animation art and entertainment. In this book, my aim is to give a sense of the interaction of these different levels. Let's start with Japan as a nation.

What Is the Relationship between "Japan" and Anime's Success?

It is easy to understand why the nation itself seems to define the key crucible of creativity, in part because many people, Japanese and foreigners, make the case that anime represents Japan. In English, "anime" means "Japanese animation," although in Japan, it more commonly means all animation worldwide, with "Japanimation" used to specify national origin.

The Japanese government occasionally uses anime and manga characters in public diplomacy efforts. In 2004, the Japanese government sent water-tank trucks to Iraq as a form of overseas development assistance and placed the flags of Japan and Iraq on the side. The Iraqis noted, however, that the Japanese flag might not be recognized by local citizens. In response, the Japanese government decided that it would also include on each of the donated trucks a large sticker of Captain Tsubasa, the title character of a soccer manga and anime, who is well known to Iraqis and others in the Middle East as "Captain Majid."[6] Compared with Japan's flag, the anime character was a more readily recognizable image of Japan (Asō 2007).

Some government officials hope that the overseas success of anime will constitute a kind of "soft power," which is, as the political scientist Joseph Nye (2004) describes it, the ability to influence other nations through the attractiveness of a nation's culture and ideals. In March 2008, Japan's minister of foreign affairs named the Doraemon character (a futuristic blue robot cat featured in manga and anime) a "cultural ambassador." Since the character is very popular in China but largely unknown in the United States, the choice clearly reflects an orientation toward Asia rather than America. At the ceremonial event, a person dressed in a Doraemon costume declared, "I hope through my cartoons I will be able to convey to people overseas what ordinary Japanese people are thinking, what sort of life we are leading and what sort of future we are trying to create!"[7] I find this rather silly, of course, but given my own country's efforts to gain international influence through Predator drone strikes, I have to admit that these examples of Japan's attempts at cultural diplomacy, even if they are a bit dubious, have the advantage of doing less harm than air-to-surface missiles. Even so, what, exactly, anime might mean for the future of Japan's foreign policy is unclear. The cultural studies scholar Koichi Iwabuchi (2002b) sees a worrisome new "soft nationalism" that aims not only to spread Japanese culture abroad but to define the boundaries of authentic culture at home.

Japanese popular culture certainly is a driving force in youthful interest in Japan overseas (a boon to Japan studies programs everywhere), but I am skeptical that it can have a deep influence on support for Japanese government policies. Or, rather, when foreigners feel a connection, it is to the Japanese people or Japanese "culture" rather than to the national government. The earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, and the nuclear

crisis that followed clearly brought an emotional outpouring from people around the world, but whether this brings support or outrage toward the Japanese government will depend on how that government's response is ultimately viewed. For this and other reasons, the transnational intimacy toward Japan is more about the people (or an image of the people) than the government (Condry 2007). Besides, there are other things anime promotes, such as an understanding of how transmedia franchises can work, that are likely to be more influential than a vague connection to the national interest. In other words, when people assert a connection between Japan and anime, we might bear in mind the question of what ideological commitments are served. The questions we ask can shape how we view the objects we study. So if a simple link to Japan is not enough, then what explains the popularity of anime overseas? Some locate success in the internal characteristics of media, but I would argue that can be only a partial explanation.

"What's so special about Japanese popular culture? Why is it gaining such popularity outside Japan?"[8] Questions posed this way encourage us to think that there are some general, overall characteristics of Japanese popular culture that explain its success, regardless of whether success is defined in terms of aesthetic excellence, market achievements, or impact with an audience. Lasting success is often theorized in terms of a kind of resonance with audiences or eras. There are many examples of this, but let's consider one by the Asian studies scholar Timothy Craig (2000). He makes good points about the processes by which Japanese popular culture drew inspiration from overseas to speak to everyday concerns of Japanese people, but I worry about overarching national or ethnic assertions of cultural resonance as a way to explain popularity. For example, Craig proposes the following: "Japan pop speaks in special ways to Asia and the West. For other Asians, Japan's pop culture has a resonance that is derived from ethnic similarity and from shared values, tastes, and traditions. . . . For Western pop culture consumers, much of Japan's pop appeal comes not from its familiarity but from its *difference* from what we are accustomed to in our home cultures" (2000: 15–16).

Although the idea of resonance can hinge on either similarity or difference, it tends to reinforce what the cultural studies scholar John Whittier Treat calls the "stalled historicity" of Japan studies by Westerners, whereby European and American scholars are "motivated to produce Japan as the cultural counterpart or rival (and thus both similar and different)" (1996:

1). We can also see this in *A Reader in Animation Studies*, which includes
an essay pointing to "constants in Japanese television serials" such as the
presence of a heroine who is an orphan or of other characters without
family (Raffaelli 1997: 124). Notions of resonance need not always distort
history by reinforcing ideological assertions of national uniqueness, but
resonance does tend to imply a static relationship between individuals and
media or performance. This is not a problem when the resonance is small-
scale (again, how far to extend this scale is an interesting question). The
social energy in Hosoda's storyboard meeting can be viewed as a kind of
"resonance," and I am very interested in the meanings that can arise from
that kind of intersubjective vibe. But when "resonance" is used to explain
much larger formations—that is, when the success of a certain pop culture
franchise is explained by its resonance with a kind of cultural background
—I become skeptical. Yet this style of cultural analysis is widely used, and it
relies on a particular assumption that culture should be viewed as widely
shared patterns characteristic of a whole society.

This theory of cultural resonance is not unique to the United States or
"the West," either. In an issue of the Japanese magazine *Nikkei Entertain-
ment*, the editors propose that it is the power of a certain style of popular
culture—namely, a "circle of friends" mode—that explains what they iden-
tify as a recent trend in Japanese pop culture hits. They contrast this with
an earlier era's *Zeitgeist* centered on "charisma" (*karisuma*), which in Japan
emphasized having a standout personality as a path to success:

> There was an era [the late 1990s] in which charisma was the word getting all
> the attention. . . . The TV drama *Beautiful Life*, featuring [the pop idol]
> Takuya Kimura as a charismatic beautician, was a remarkable hit (recording
> a 41.3% rating in the Tokyo area). At the time, it was the middle of the "lost
> decade" after the economic bubble burst. People wanted to see their dreams
> realized again, and they were drawn towards a desire for "charisma." But in
> the 2000s, the recession further deepened. Charisma could no longer be
> depended upon. It may be that what began to pull at our hearts was the idea
> of a "circle of friends" (*nakama*) that drew together its strength for a
> common purpose. (Kanai and Hirashima 2010: 21)

This reproduces the idea of cultural resonance as an explanation for media
success, though here it is not a resonance with "Japan" or "Asian tastes and
values" but, rather, a resonance with a particular era within Japan. Same
logic, different scale. The editors of *Nikkei Entertainment* offer several

examples to prove their point, including the manga and anime *One Piece*, a pirate adventure where the characters work together to solve problems, and K-Pop (Korean pop music) singing groups with many members. The problem is that there are many other examples of circle-of-friends-type works (*nakama mono*) that do not become hits. In that case, the important "resonance" was not only the characteristics of things that succeeded or only in the overall spirit of the times. The question of what differentiates hits from also-rans requires a more dynamic model of success. Cultural analysis itself can and should be more subtle than overarching claims of resonance suggest (Yoda and Harootunian 2006). The context of Japan is different from that of other countries in crucial ways, but that doesn't mean that all pop culture forms from Japan are successful overseas. So taking "national culture" as an explanation for success doesn't make sense; it would be better to try to understand Japan as a context in which certain media forms could develop in distinctive ways, energized in part through fan relationships (Kelly 2004). A contrast between manga in Japan and comic books in the United States is a case in point.

How is it that Japanese manga is so diverse, speaking to wider audiences, and constituting so much more publishing volume than comics in the United States? History provides clues. In the 1940s, American comic books dealt with extreme themes, including gruesome violence and salacious romance. But an uproar surrounding the presumed negative impact on children led a consortium of magazine publishers to establish a Comics Code in 1954 that regulated the content of comic books so they would be appropriate for children (Hajdu 2008). In Japan, manga was a cheap and accessible form of entertainment that took off in the postwar period. Manga dealt in a variety of extreme content, and there were occasional uproars among parent–teacher organizations in Japan, but no similar authority was established (Schodt 1983, 1996). Manga artists were freer to develop works that spoke to teens and adults than were their counterparts in the United States, although, as Sharon Kinsella (2000) points out, commercialism in the manga industry in the 1980s put something of a damper on counterculture themes that thrived in earlier decades. Roughly 60 percent of anime productions are based on popular manga. The deep catalogue and the wide range of characters with a devoted fan base create an important comparative advantage for Japan vis-à-vis the United States. In this way, we can see how the emergence of anime is related to the context of Japan but relates to a finer level of detail than the overall

"culture" of Japan. Clearly, popular culture with adult themes has a "resonance" in both Japan and the United States, but institutional and commercial forces guided the development of the world of comics in distinctive ways (see chapter 3).

In contrast to assertions of cultural resonance, I propose exploring in more detail the feedback loops that enable new styles to emerge and be sustained. The idea of emergence can help elucidate the connections between creators, businesses, technologies, and fans and the ways in which energy flows between them to sustain a variety of projects and activities. I borrow the term from the work of the anthropologist Michael M. J. Fischer, though many others are experimenting with similar ideas (see, e.g., Clarke and Hansen 2009; Johnson 2001). Fischer reminds us that culture is not a "thing" or an unchanging pattern of norms and values, as portrayed in, say, Gladwell's "legacies" or the *Nikkei Entertainment* editors' characterization of eras. Rather, culture is better viewed as "a methodological concept or tool of inquiry" that has been refined over the years to "allow new realities to be seen and engaged as its own parameters are changed" (Fischer 2007: 3). In this regard, ethnography provides the tools to look for cultural dynamics in local settings in terms of their practical impact in guiding behavior and beliefs.

Fischer finds inspiration in analogies drawn from new techno-sciences, especially life and information sciences, which can help us think of cultural and social patterns as "emergent out of mutations, assemblages, viral transivity, rhizomic growth, wetwares and softwares." New information technology and media environments can be viewed as "culturing new connectivities" (Fischer 2007: 31–32). Animation offers its own sets of metaphors of creativity, from storyboards to key frames and voices (at the level of studio production) and then extending across vehicles of conveyance for the characters and the worlds they inhabit, whether as videogames, toys, or cosplayers (short for "costume players"). In other words, rather than starting with "Japanese culture" as the explanation for creativity, and in contrast to using resonance with a cultural backdrop as the explanation for media success, I want to draw attention to how cultural forms emerge from social practices and how value depends on multifaceted uses. From this perspective, the crucibles of creativity have to be understood at a finer level of detail than simply "Japan" and particular studios; we need more broadly to understand anime as a "field," in Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) sense, of communication and competition. This idea of emergence works in

tandem with a notion of social energy, a kind of unseen force, or dark energy, that best explains the expansion of the anime universe. An ethnographic lens zeroes in on the ways people organize their activities around media. The social in media is connected to cultural action. A brief visit to an anime convention in Boston can show what this means.

Anime Music Videos

At the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, an enormous room with about six hundred people was filled to capacity, including many of us standing around the back and sides. It was May 2006 at the Anime Boston convention, and we were watching the Friday night session for anime music videos (AMVs). The energy in the room bubbled as we watched parodies, action sequences, and dramatic videos with complex love triangles. Participation was integral, too, since we were each given a sheet of paper to mark our votes for the best in a range of categories.

Anime music videos use clips from anime edited together with the music of a popular (or obscure) song. At anime conventions in the United States, the AMV events are usually packed with people and excitement. That Friday night, we had gathered to watch the twenty-six finalists in the AMV contest. The crowd was quiet and watched politely, though occasionally exploding with laughs and cheers when particularly clever connections were made. The video that drew the most laughs of those I saw was a spoof on the opening credits to the American TV show *Friends*, which combined the theme song and actors' credits (Jennifer Aniston, Matthew Perry, etc.) with images from anime. Another AMV re-edited the opening to *Batman Begins* with *Naruto* (action ninja anime) clips. The level of proficiency in the video editing was spectacular. The AMV that won the "Best in Show" award was made by a female video editor living in Italy, who had combined clips from the series *Princess Tutu* (2002) with the Swedish pop song "Håll om mig" (Hold me now) by Nanne Grönvall. The video displayed great ingenuity in portraying the tension between characters in the anime, and the images flowed with the emotional rise and fall of the song. Even people worried about copyright infringement can recognize the creativity of such an AMV, but does our appreciation of such creative works erode the foundation of intellectual property?

Where should the line be drawn in terms of the circulation and control of AMVs? Here the world of anime does not provide a single answer.

Manga publishers and anime studios tend to reject the idea that the "free publicity" generated by unauthorized distribution of AMVs outweighs the losses they attribute to unlicensed downloading and streaming. When forced to choose, they care more about control than publicity. Nevertheless, participatory communities of fans of all kinds appear to feel increasingly empowered to make things and put them online. There is simply too much out there to police fully, and since much of the sharing is noncommercial, there is not much benefit to the industry to pursue lawsuits, especially given the experience of the Recording Industry Association of America in the United States. The RIAA sued some and threatened to sue tens of thousands more consumers accused of downloading music illegally. This effort is widely regarded as a public relations disaster, and it failed to curtail downloading. With AMVs, some bands and record labels have asked that their work not be used (a request that is largely granted by AMV creators). At AnimeMusicVideo.org, a website that helps support AMV creators by making videos available for downloading, sponsoring contests, and providing a forum space for discussions, each time you download an AMV a disclaimer appears that reads, "This video is purely fan-made and is in no way associated with the musical artist or anime company in any way."[9] The phrase "in no way associated" might be better read as "unauthorized, but please don't sue us." The description of each AMV generally lists the artist and title of the song (and, often, the lyrics), as well the anime productions that were sampled for it. Many AMVs lovingly portray scenes from a single series, but some sample dozens, even more than a hundred different shows (e.g., "Jihaku" by Fantasy Studios or the "AMV Hell" series). Disclaimers aside, AMVs gain some of their value from an association with the songs and anime that they feature. Familiarity with a song or anime does something in terms of drawing us in.

At the same time, this world of AMVs is an intriguingly hybrid space, ignoring copyright in some regards but asserting the importance of authorship. The cultural space of AMVs is neither a free-for-all defined by disrespect for copyright nor a postmodern utopia of share-and-share-alike pastiche. The participants still hold strong opinions about originality, authorship, and fairness, even if those principles contradict copyright law. When you sign up to become a member of AnimeMusicVideo.org, which is free, you are greeted with a range of stipulations about the types of works that will be accepted. A submitted AMV must be created by the author or group that is submitting it (i.e., it has to have been edited by that person or group). The clips must come directly from a file of the anime,

not from other people's AMVs. The rules also stipulate that you should not use pirated software, or "warez." (Although this rule is unenforceable, I imagine it could discourage discussion on the AnimeMusicVideo.org site of where to get free copies of expensive video-editing software.) On one hand, one could argue that these gestures at ethical behavior are too limited compared with the damage done by further encouraging copyright infringement through sampling and remixing. On the other hand, as many people point out, good AMVs can introduce both anime and songs to new audiences and amplify the affection fans have for long-running anime. I and at least a few others were introduced to *Princess Tutu* and the Swedish pop singer through the AMV, which gained attention because of its fine workmanship. Shouldn't some credit go to the AMV artist? More broadly, if we are to grasp the value of anime, shouldn't we acknowledge the hard work of organizing conventions, as well as the openness of fans in attending AMV screenings and voting on the winners? To grasp the complexity of production and value, I explore a range of perspectives and ultimately draw the conclusion that the greater the circulation is, the more value is created (see chapter 6).

If we also consider the thousands of fans who dress as their favorite characters, where should we locate the force of desire for this kind of participation in anime? Cosplay, a Japanese contraction of "costume" and "play," illustrates the centrality of "characters" as a kind of platform on which others can build, yet that process of building itself becomes a personal expression (Allison 2006; McVeigh 2000; Steinberg 2008). Dressing as a character, sometimes performing *in* character, is rewarded by the attention one receives. Fan conventions are a space where dressing up is *appreciated*—note the language of value—in terms of an ethic that accords status to do-it-yourself costumes above store-bought wear. We shouldn't underestimate the value of cosplay as a social lubricant, as well. Fan conventions are certainly about a love for anime, but that frisson of excitement around flirting with others often seems to be an important part of the scene. Costumes facilitate conversation, acting as a visual celebration of alliance with specific worlds of anime fandom but also working as an ice breaker for people who haven't met. Even for people unaccustomed to the thrill of cosplay as practitioners, it is easy to observe and feel the energy at an anime convention. Collaborative creativity raises the question not only of who makes anime but also of what anime does. The answer depends on what we think of media and culture.

Media and Cultural Studies: Contexts, Not Borders

Anime can provide insight into recent shifts in media and cultural studies. In some ways, media studies is morphing from a focus on individual technologies (radio, film, television, the Internet) to the study of what moves across media—characters, celebrities, brands, stories, worlds, civic action, for example. Those of us who work in "area studies" such as Japan studies face an analogous shift as we adapt cultural studies to an age of globalization. Just as media can no longer be defined by what happens within a particular technological platform, so, too, can culture no longer be defined solely by national or ethnic boundaries (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b). Some of the most interesting theorizing of media and culture over the past two decades wrestles with these issues in some way.

At the same time, anime studies has been developing as an intellectual field, in part because anime provides such fertile ground for a variety of disciplinary angles. Many scholars offer nuanced readings of anime texts, taking varied approaches to questions of identity, technology, sexuality, and power and often wrestling with our unease regarding the future. The number of studies of anime has grown exponentially in recent years, reaching across genres and forms, including claymation, computer graphics, and hand-drawn "cel-type" animation. "Cel" is a reference to transparent celluloid sheets that were used for animation in the past. Characters would be drawn on these sheets, laid across background images, and filmed using a multiplane camera (see LaMarre 2009). By contrast, Winsor McCay drew movements and backgrounds for every frame in *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918). The literature and film scholar Susan Napier is among the pioneers in arguing for scholarly recognition of the art of anime, of the deep philosophical themes that much Japanese animation explores. Her work also traces the continuities in the desire for Japan by Westerners, from Impressionist artists in the 1800s to anime fans more recently (Napier 2005, 2007). Many scholars offer nuanced readings of anime, often relying on a mix of interpretation of the narrative content of certain works along with consideration of the technology of making animation (one frame at a time, the illusion of movement based on a series of still drawings, and so on), and this takes many forms (Brown 2010; Looser 2006; Lunning 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; Macwilliams 2008). Although much scholarly research on anime emphasizes the interpretation of narratives within films or series, a wider variety of work is appearing to deal with

varieties of fandom and cross-media synergy with things like science fiction writing and the character merchandise business (Bolton et al. 2007; Poitras 1999; Ruh 2004; Steinberg 2008). Into this mix, my aim is to add insights to be gained from ethnographic fieldwork. Just as we can learn from considering anime in relation to audiences, so, too, can we see scholarly studies of animation as efforts to build a certain kind of field of debate, another gambit in the process of determining what makes anime important. Textual interpretation and ethnographic fieldwork are clearly complementary approaches.

Anthropology's commitment to participant-observation fieldwork shines a light on the active relationships and dynamics of production, and this can bring a new perspective to anime studies and to media studies more generally. The media scholars W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (2010: viii) identify two broad methodological approaches to media studies: the empirical and the interpretive. For them, empirical studies, especially from sociology, economics, and communication, tend to focus on mass media and their political, social, economic, and cultural impact, particularly by attending to what gets distributed to audiences. The interpretive approach, associated with the humanities, including literary theory, film studies, and cultural studies, tends to focus on "the constitution of media" and how this shapes "what is regarded as knowledge and what is communicable" (viii). Mitchell and Hansen, however, hope to go beyond these binaries of empirical and interpretive and "to exploit the ambiguity of the concept of media—the slippage from plural to singular, from differentiated forms to overarching technical platforms and theoretical vantage points" by using media as "a third term, capable of bridging, or 'mediating' the binaries." Even with this definition, however, we can see that both the empirical and the interpretive approaches primarily analyze media as particular kinds of objects with the capacity to convey cultural understandings. Media is seen as a collection of "affordances," that is, the capabilities of technologies to relate information or enable interaction in particular ways, for example, in the differences between Twitter and a massively multiplayer online videogame. To take seriously this notion of media as a "third term" that mediates binaries, we need to view media in its multiplicity of roles: as a conveyer of meanings, as a platform for others to build on, as a tool of connection, and as a process that can activate collectivities. In this respect, anthropologists tend to spend less time with the interpretation of media content than with the practices around media and

how these interactions, modes of communication, and day-to-day lived experience generate meaning in terms of behavior and beliefs.

Raymond Williams (2006 [1980]: 141) has commented that what is striking to him is that "nearly all forms of critical theory are theories of consumption. That is to say, they are concerned with understanding an object in such a way that it can profitably or correctly be consumed." Although he wrote this in 1980, noting that questions of "taste" and "sensibility" dominated discussions of texts, the criticism remains apt, particularly in the many studies of Japanese popular culture that start with the story from a particular media text and then discuss its significance. This approach can play a useful, critical role, but it also portrays only part of the workings of media. Williams implies a different question: What would it mean to develop a critical theory of production?

Media anthropologists have attempted to redress the overemphasis on consumption by looking in more detail at how institutions, transnational pressures, and a diverse range of actors negotiate the complex challenges of making their productions, whether it is Bollywood films (Ganti 2002), Kazakh soap operas (Mandel 2002), or amateur videos by Miao ethnic minorities in China (Schein 2002), to name a few important studies. Faye Ginsburg, for example, traces the complex tradeoffs that occur when aboriginal groups in Australia attempt to use television to recuperate their collective stories and histories. While access to media outlets for the aboriginal community does provide some measure of redress for the erasure of many of these stories from national Australian narratives, she finds that "retelling stories for the media of film, video, and television often requires reshaping them, not only within new aesthetic structures but also in negotiation with the political economy of state-controlled as well as commercial media" (2002: 40–41). From these perspectives, media production is a site where agency, structure, and power intersect in contested negotiations over meaning and representation.

My own sense is that something may be gained if we shift from a concern with the "cultural power" of media toward a critical theory of production that explores how "value" is produced. The anthropologist David Graeber proposes moving beyond the definition of value in terms of the economistic individual evaluating objects' exchange value or use value, and beyond the overly holistic and static structure of a society's "values," because neither is much help in developing social theory that can accommodate people's efforts to change society purposefully. Instead, he encour-

ages us "to look at social systems as structures of creative action, and value, as how people measure the importance of their own actions within such structures" (2001: 230). This approach is useful for thinking about anime because as we map the "structures of creative action" as social systems, we can observe some of the ways value materializes through collaborative creativity. "Soul" as a collective energy gestures toward ethnographic insights that begin with *that which is most meaningful*, in the hope that if we start from there, we can begin to see how people value media and use it as a means to help organize their social worlds. Indeed, the transformation of social media may be not the online networks themselves but, rather, the paradigm shift in consciousness that accompanies a sense of media as something we participate in through our activities in particular social networks. As Einstein wedded the Newtonian duality of space and time, so, too, we might see the interconnection of media and culture not in terms of vehicle and representation (technology and message) but, rather, as an integrated actualization of the social.

This brings into focus the *social in media*. In what ways is media part and parcel of our social world? Beginning a look at anime in terms of labor and production is more apt for our social media moment, because it reminds us that conveying "messages" and "images" is only part of the work that media does. Yet the easy response that social media is all about "connection" tends to be too general and too limited to act as a convincing theoretical advance. Although "social media" is often taken to refer to a certain kind of online platform, it makes more sense to me to think of the social as an analytical perspective on what media is and does. Anime's dependence on a *collaborative creativity* makes it a useful test case of the dynamics that lead to what some are calling "spreadable media"—that is, media that moves across particular channels of communication (Jenkins 2009a). But what happens if we turn that concept of spreadable media on its head? Rather than emphasizing the media object that is spreadable, might we gain a different perspective by thinking in terms of the people who do the spreading, the economic and social motivations that drive those actions, which ultimately lead to a nuanced co-creation of value? Value can mean very different things, depending on whether the context is a storyboard meeting or an AMV contest. This multiplicity complicates analysis and begins to give a sense of the distributed innovation that provides force to anime as a cultural movement.

An ethnographic perspective on anime offers tools for media research

in terms of socially committed actors, looking at how media provides a center of gravity for certain kinds of interests and activities. These themes are explored by others, as well. Following Jonathan Zittrain (2008) and his interest in the potential of an open, participatory, customizable Internet, I view anime characters as a generative platform of creativity. The anthropologist Brian Larkin (2008) works in similar directions in his concept of "infrastructure." Thomas LaMarre (2009) argues that the "anime machine" can point the way to rethink our relationship with technology. Henry Jenkins (2006) theorizes in terms of the design of transmedia storytelling. Anne Allison (2006) gauges the interaction between play and consumerism in Japanese toys. What these approaches share is a sense of media technology less as a guiding structure than as something to build on and push in innovative directions. Our understandings of value are what guide these energized efforts.

Collaborative creativity, social energy, generative platforms, and value in specific contexts—these are the tools of cultural analysis that I use to explore anime in terms of the emergence of a cultural movement. I use the term "soul" to reflect on ethnographic insights that begin with the energy and intentions of those most deeply involved in this cultural world, to focus on *that which is most meaningful*—or, less holistically, *what matters to people*, a kind of shorthand for deep meaning. If ethnography aims to understand the perspectives of the participants in a cultural community, this seems a good place to begin. I would underscore that this "soul" is not some kind of internal essence, like the problematic notions of the "soul of Japan" or the "soul of the samurai," as if there is some unchanging central, generative core that explains everything about anime. Quite the contrary: The soul I refer to here is best envisioned as a kind of energy that arises from the ways anime connects people; a connection that operates as a conduit of interest and activity; a soul, in other words, that arises out of collective action. I hope this can illuminate the power of ideas manifested in material production but that gain life across media platforms and across categories of producers. The value of media emerges in places that can be far removed from the locales of production and beyond the specific content of the media forms themselves.

Put another way, rather than looking primarily *into* anime media to understand the resonance of the content, I explore anime by looking outward at the social relations, emergent business networks, and day-to-day activities that expand the cultural universe of anime. I see the driving

force as a kind of "social energy" that pushes outward while being guided in patterned ways. Such a perspective suggests that the energy works locally in terms of being activated through relatively intimate social networks rather than across national settings or wide categories of people as a whole. It may be that our places in our smaller social worlds and networks provide the key to the emergence of new systems of value.

Outline of the Book

To get a sense of what collaborative creativity means for anime, we need to look at diverse spaces of production and various understandings of success. Professional animators, toy companies, manga artists, transnational youth, and specialized otaku all contribute in their own ways to the making of anime, and they bring distinctive perspectives on understanding anime's value and meaning.

Chapter 1 expands on the theoretical underpinnings of this ethnographic approach to anime. I go more deeply into the work of Mamoru Hosoda to observe practical steps in creating animation and to see how he explains the bigger picture. There are technologies of direction and control (the storyboards, checklists, deadlines), as well as complexly distributed labor and expertise. This extends the discussion of a critical theory of production that centers on value within structures of creative action. Hosoda's recent work converges on a seemingly paradoxical trend in society, especially in his films *The Girl Who Leapt through Time* (2006) and *Summer Wars* (2009). New communication technologies enable wider collaborative networks to form around solving complex tasks, but at the same time, we find ourselves facing increasingly personalized, individual futures. This further sets up the theme of thinking about relationships between niche and mass.

In chapter 2, I discuss how new anime projects are built up around characters and worlds and propose that we think of this combination as a kind of creative platform. Indeed, what anime studios make is not only audiovisual narratives but, more fundamentally, long-lasting characters (and their worlds), which ideally can be spun off across media forms for years to come. We visit script meetings for a children's anime called *Zenmai Zamurai*, and I discuss the logic of two other samurai anime aimed at teens and adults: *Samurai Champloo* (2004) and *Afro Samurai* (2007).

In chapter 3, I explore the development of early postwar anime (late

1950s and 1960s) and the contrasts between the production of feature films and that of television. While some creators, such as Yasuo Ōtsuka at Toei Animation, focused on the joy of animated movement in feature films and pioneered styles of full animation, others, such as Osamu Tezuka and Mushi Productions, worked on radically limiting the number of frames needed in order to deal with the budgets and schedules of television animation. Both approaches speak to the artistry of animation but communicate differently and tend to rely on different connections across media. This divide deepened as sponsors and merchandisers recognized the marketing potential of cartoon entertainment. Outside influence was integral, as well, and we consider the influence of Disney and the central role of manga. Some argue that the media world of manga is an ideal of democratic capitalism in that the most successful comics are also the best comics. Why? With low costs to produce and consume and tight feedback loops between publishers and readers, manga developed in an intense field of competition generated by a combination of skilled creators, a deep catalogue, and a ready-made fan base. I would argue that the emotional attachments people build with characters over the years is part and parcel of the platform of characters and worlds. The platform that anime builds on, therefore, is not only characters and worlds but also the social energy that attaches to them.

In chapter 4, I discuss mecha (giant robot) anime and the transition from children's series to those aimed at teens and adults (1970s–90s). Although anime is sometimes regarded as significant because it provides particular kinds of fantasyscapes—virtual worlds of possibility, realms of unbridled imaginative leaps—I would argue that anime is equally important for the connections it makes to the "real." In fact, the term "real anime" increasingly became a means to talk about grownup themes. As creators and audiences matured, new styles of anime emerged, a process we can see in the shifts over time among *Astro Boy*, *Mazinger Z*, *Gundam*, and the works of Gainax, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion.* Fieldwork at a Bandai brainstorming session rounds out the discussion of anime and toys in terms of both nostalgia and futurism. Given the example of *Gundam*, which initially failed on TV but then succeeded through outside activities of fans and merchandisers, we are faced with the fact that sources of success clearly don't lie solely within the media form. This adds another dimension to thinking about platforms and contexts.

In chapter 5, I discuss fieldwork at the Gonzo studios, where I observed the making of *Red Garden* (2006), a late-night TV series aimed at teens

and young adults. As in chapter 1, I describe some of the day-to-day labor and what I heard about the bigger picture from the director Kou Matsuo and from Shin Ishikawa, chief executive of Gonzo. Along with making comparisons with Studio Ghibli and Studio 4°C, I explore the question of what makes a studio cutting edge. How does a studio make something new but that also has a foundation on which others can build, a kind of "avantcore"? I focus on the idea of openness, of creating a space for others to fill, as an important element in collaborative creativity, not unlike the space between frames of a comic strip ("the gutter").

Where do overseas audiences fit into the picture? In chapter 6, I examine how transnational anime fans provide a fascinating perspective on digital technology and the copyright wars. The phenomenon of fansubbing, whereby fan groups translate the most recent broadcasts of Japanese anime and make them available online for free, constitutes a kind of civil disobedience aimed at improving the anime industry. There are heated debates about whether this is a legitimate practice and if it is, under what circumstances. Fansubbing extends our understanding of the social energy around anime fandom and is emblematic of a wider range of fan activities. But is this aspect of collaborative creativity better seen as debilitating destruction? Although the copyright wars tend to be judged on the basis of "the effect on the market," the history of media illustrates that "the market" is such a hodgepodge of legal and ethical systems that one person's "piracy" can be seen as another's legitimate activity. In the early twentieth century, Hollywood (an antipiracy torchbearer today) was established as a renegade industry, avoiding Thomas Edison's patents. Today, the fierce debates about fansubbing among anime fans point to the possibility of a social resolution to online sharing (i.e., the emergence of a largely agreed-on set of values guiding sharing, use, and commodification). I'm not alone in seeing this as a better fix than the variety of technological or legal solutions proposed otherwise.

In chapter 7, I consider some niche Japanese fans, stereotyped as the notorious otaku, some of whom argue for the benefits of an awkward revolution: falling in love with anime characters. I begin with a discussion of an online petition asking for legal recognition of marriage with a 2D character, one offshoot of a larger world of "*moe*" (pronounced "moh-ay") attractions. How are we to interpret the deep-felt emotion people have toward virtual characters? Might this niche attitude gain mainstream respectability? Some theorists see in *moe* a radical break with other forms of media consumption, but I see this as a further extension of collaborative

creativity. The *moe* phenomenon seems to imply an intensely personal subjectivity, a cul-de-sac where emotional attachments flow only inward, without reciprocity. A closer look, however, reveals the enduring connection to broader social collectives—for example, in the desire to have emotional attachments publicly validated and thereby to rethink ideas of manhood, consumption, and love.

In the conclusion, I discuss some of the insights of collaborative creativity. I return to the themes of collaborative networks versus personalized media, the value of anime from a laborer's perspective, and the possibilities for overseas expansion of audiences for anime and Japanese film. In the end, I consider what this ethnographic approach to anime production can tell us about globalization from below and about wider possibilities for emergent cultural action in the future.

For me, anime offers a solution to some of the analytical puzzles that arise from media's fluid mobility today. Instead of looking for some core or essence within media, I would encourage instead a look at how logics of production build a kind of generative platform and how this collaborative creativity operates across categories of producers. Anime provides a distinctive, though not unique, approach to the question of *what moves across media forms*—namely, characters and worlds (and the emotional attachments that build energy around them). Anime also offers a perspective on the *movement of culture* across borders, specifically by showing how boundaries are less important than questions about how people use media in specific social settings. There are multiple, networked crucibles of creativity, and we can learn about their dynamics through participant-observation fieldwork.

In sum, collaborative creativity aims to bring into focus the multiplicity of modes of production and what, exactly, collaboration means.[10] Who is collaborating with whom? Who "owns" the results of collaboration? Whose creativity is valued and whose is recognized and within which spheres? How is collaboration something more than mere circulation, and in what ways does it overflow the categories of production and consumption? Collaboration tries to hold in dynamic tension the objects, the related people, and the contexts. As we will see, this reshapes the ways to think about the "Japaneseness" in the globalization of anime by showing that origins are less important than the contexts. Let's return to the work of Mamoru Hosoda to see where these ideas lead.

Introduction. Who Makes Anime?

1 The figure comes from an English-language report by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), which quotes METI (2004). The 60 percent figure is widely quoted both online and in print. I cannot verify its accuracy, but I will note that when I asked the head of Cartoon Networks Studios, he said, "That sounds about right."

2 I acknowledge the advice of an anonymous reviewer in suggesting this analytical direction, and I have borrowed some of the reviewer's phrasing in this paragraph and the next.

3 The converse is also true. Where there is little of that energy, there is also the danger of little being accomplished. A Japanese friend who was trying to break into the anime screenwriting business once reported that meetings around a faltering project were low energy and pointless.

4 Yūichirō Saitō, interview by the author, August 2008.

5 The cost of living in Tokyo is comparable to that of major American cities, so it would be difficult, though not impossible, to support oneself on that level of pay.

6 See http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2004/10/1026-2-l.html (accessed April 9, 2008).

7 See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs press release, available online at http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2008/3/0319-3.html (accessed April 9, 2008).

8 According to Craig, these were the questions most asked by journalists who were interested in the conference on Japanese popular culture that he organized in 1996, which resulted in his edited volume *Japan Pop!* (Craig 2000: 6).

9 See http://www.AnimeMusicVideos.org (accessed June 8, 2006).

10 Special thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting some of these analytical directions.

One. Collaborative Networks

1 Mamoru Hosoda, interview by the author, March 2006.

2 Ibid.

3 Mamoru Hosoda, interview by the author, November 2010.

Two. Characters and Worlds

1 The Japanese word *sekaikan* is usually translated as "worldview," but in the case of anime production, the term more often evokes the idea of a particular context or background setting, such as "space colony in the near future" or "samurai-era Japan." Because "worldview" tends to imply "how one looks out at the world"—that is, a subjective orientation—I use the term "world" to specify the usage of sekaikan in anime studios.

2 Ryotarō Kuwamoto, interview by the author, July 2006.

3 This episode appears as " Shippo no Pū': Hoka Zen 48-wa," *Deko Boko Friends*, DVD, Shogakukan, 2004, PCBE-51041.

4 Kuwamoto interview.

5 This episode is available (in Japanese only) on the DVD *Zenmai Zamurai: Zenmai Zamurai Tanjō*, DVD (2006, ANSB 2321).

6 Kuwamoto interview.

7 Satoru Nishizono, interview by the author, July 2006.

8 Momoko Maruyama, interview by the author, July 2006.

9 Shinichirō Watanabe, interview by the author, March 2005.

10 Ibid.

Three. Postwar Anime

1 Personal communication, editor Kasai at *Oricon Style* (web magazine), August 15, 2006.

2 This version of the story is told in the documentary *Ōtsuka Yasuo no ugokasu yorokobi* (Yasuo Ōtsuka's joy of movement), produced by Studio Ghibli in 2004. The story is also related, though somewhat differently, in Ōtsuka 2001.

3 Peter Chung, interview by the author, November 2006.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

Four. When Anime Robots Became Real

1 During fieldwork from 2005 on, I was struck by how many people, especially those in their fifties, responded to the question, "What do you think about anime?" by talking about manga. These categories—comics and animation—are not distinct in Japan.

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