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<title>Finding Potential for Gender and Sexuality in 2D</title>

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<h1>Finding Potential for Gender and Sexuality in 2D</h1>

<div id="topnav">

<a href="index.html">Introduction</a>

<div id="topnav">

<a href="primarytheroistsandtexts.html">Primary Theorists & Texts

<div id="topnav"

<i href="data.html"><i>Eromanga-sensei</i>, 2D Sexuality and Postcolonialism</a>

<div id="topnav"

<a href="analysis.html">Fan Works, Lewding & Gender/Sexuality</a>

<div id="topnav"

<a href="part3.html"><i>Interspecies Reviewers</i>, Funimation & Said

<div id="topnav"

<a href="conclusion.html">Conclusion</a>

</div>

<div id="sidenav">

<div id="research">

<a href="#">School</a>

<a href="#">Theory</a>

<a href="#">Works Cited</a>

</div>

</div>

<article class="introduction">

<h2>Introduction</h2>

<article class="primary theorists & texts">

<h2>Primary Theorists & Texts</h2>

<h3>Patrick W. Galbraith - <i>Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan</i></h3>

<h4><i>Moe</i> and its Sexuality Implications</h4>

<h4>2D & the 2D Complex</h4>

<h3>Edward Said - <i>Orientalism</i>

<h4>Pure Versus Political Knowledge</h4>

<h4>Methodology</h4>

<h5>Strategic Location</h5>

<h5>Strategic Formation</h5>

<h4>The Personal Dimension of Orientalism</h4>

<h3> Otsuka Eiji - <i>World & Variation: Reproduction & Consumption of Narrative</i>

<h4>Grand Versus Official Narratives & Narrative Consumption</h4>

<h3>Jim Rodolfo - <i>Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery</i></h3>

<h4>Rhetorical Velocity</h4>

<h2><i>Eromanga-sensei</i>, 2D Sexuality & Postcolonialism</h2>

<h3>Galbraith's Definition of <i>Moe</i> and the 2D Complex</h3>

<h3>Gender in <i>Eromanga-sensei</i></h3>

<h3>Sterling Griff's Unwillingness to "Describe" <i>Eromanga-sensei</i> & Said</h3>

<h3>"Child Exploitation" & Galbraith</h3>

<h3>The Australian Associated Press on Griff & Postcolonial Rhetoric</h3>

<article class="fan works, lewding & gender/sexuality">

<h2>Fan Works, Lewding & Gender/Sexuality</h2>

<p>One of the most controversial aspects of otaku culture, according to many in the English-speaking side of sites like Reddit and Twitter, is the practice of “lewding” anime and manga characters in fan works. According to the top-rated definition of the term on Urban Dictionary, lewding is the activity of depicting a “character that is seen as attractive and sexualizing it through artwork or memes” (Urban Dictionary?). As seen in the usage example in that Urban Dictionary entry, English-speaking cultures associate extensive negative stigma with the act of doing so using anime or manga characters that would be considered under-age in real-world Western countries: “"Bro she's 13 wtf lewding that's just wrong…\*BAM BAM\* ‘FBI OPEN UP!’” (Urban Dictionary?). As this webtext explains throughout, otaku studies have thoroughly explored the very same tradition in anime’s native Japanese otaku culture.

In order to discuss the practice of lewding in fan works, this section will refer to Otsuka Eiji’s concept of narrative consumption, Jim Ridolfo’s theories of rhetorical velocity, and an essay in which Daisuke Okabe and Kimi Ishida discuss the segmented otaku community of fujoshi (an excerpt from the collection of translated Japanese academic work <i>Fandom Unbound</i>). After first explaining Japanese fiction’s long history of appropriating narratives, this section will discuss how fan works of the anime series <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i> (which is relatively popular among anime fans in the English-speaking world) participate in the Japanese culture of appropriating from other cultural texts in order to explore both gender and sexuality in a way only possible in the realm of the 2D. This section aims to show how the lewding of anime or manga characters is a practice which has risen organically from those characters’ Japanese roots with an implicit intention to explore the potential of expressing gender and sexuality without the boundaries of either the xenophobic Japanese world or those of the physical world as a whole.</p>

<h3>Boy's Love Doujinshi as an Outlet for Fujoshi</h3>

<p>In what is commonly understood as a practice in gender and sexuality expression, the female otaku known as <i>fujoshi</i> read and write derivative works based on popular otaku media (anime, manga, games etc.) that “read in” homosexual relationships between male characters that are not homosexual in the source material (Okabe & Ishida 210). The otaku media genre involving male homosexual relationships is called <i>yaoi</i> or “boy’s love” (BL), and the derivative manga that often features reimagined versions of source material characters is called <i>doujinshi</i>. Okabe and Ishida’s essay “Making <i>Fujoshi</i> Identity Visible and Invisible” is in part focused on how the <i>fujoshi</i> community goes to great lengths to conceal their identity as <i>fujoshi</i> due to the heavy stigma Japanese have associated with them (Okabe & Ishida 207). After all, the very term <i>fujoshi</i> is a play-on-words that at once can be translated as “rotten women” if written in Japanese hiragana characters or as “respectable women” if written in Chinese kanji characters (Okabe & Ishida 207). However, with the comfort of concealment and a zealous in-group community, <i>fujoshi</i> can explore the nature of gender and sexuality vicariously through the characters in BL doujinshi despite homophobic or generally xenophobic sentiments in mainstream Japan (Galbraith ??). Because doujinshi are derivative works, <i>fujoshi</i> can experience this exploration of gender and sexuality either passively through reading the doujinshi of others, or actively through creating their very own doujinshi.</p>

<h3>Narrative Consumption & Rhetorical Velocity in <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i></h3>

<p>What the <i>fujoshi</i> described in Okabe and Ishida’s work engage in is what Otsuka Eiji refers to as narrative consumption. As Eiji explains it, narrative consumption is a form of experiencing fictional media in which “consumers are [first] tricked into consuming a single cross-section” narrative that takes place within a larger diegetic world (Eiji 109). Eiji makes clear that in the case of anime such as <i>Mobile Suit Gundam</i>, the “single cross section[s]” that the consumer begins with are the small narratives presented in each anime episode or figures and toy replicas of characters within that small narrative (Eiji 109). Otaku, who obsessively consume these small narratives, begin to comprehend a “worldview” or grand narrative that each small narrative takes place within (Eiji 109). Eiji explains that the process of accumulating knowledge of grand narratives through the consumption of small narrative commodities gives rise to an understanding that “cross-sections” entirely different from the ones presented in those commodities can be imagined so long as they are in accord with the diegesis that grand narratives imply and small narratives illustrate (Eiji 109).</p>

Hiroki Azuma, whose seminal 2001 book <i>Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals</i> was published in Japan twelve years after Eiji's theory of narrative consumption was published in 1989, takes those theories of narrative consumption to the next level. One of the most interesting segments of <i>Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals</i> is one in which Azuma speculates about how the creators behind 1995’s critically acclaimed anime <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i> supposedly anticipated that the narrative consumption habits of otaku would be extremely profitable for them. Azuma suggests that through extensive merchandising and little pushback against doujinshi featuring <i>Evangelion</i> characters, the producers of the show implicitly encouraged narrative consumption to the furthest degree. To materialize this argument, Azuma explains the circulation of derivative <i>Evangelion</i> fan works and doujinshi in the otaku community and at Japan's premiere doujinshi convention, Comic Market. In his own words:

<blockquote>…the original creator’s production company, Gainax, developed the derivative works sold in the Comic Market and at the same time created plans for related concepts; for instance, there are mahjong games, erotic telephone card designs using the <i>Evangelion</i> characters, and even simulation games in which players nurture the heroine [Rei Ayanami]. These are all far removed from the originals.</blockquote>

<blockquote> The important point here is that this change exercised a strong influence on the structure of the original itself, as well as on the recycling of the originals and the related projects. … [Hideaki Anno] (the director of <i>Evangelion</i>) anticipated the appearance of derivative works in the Comic Market from the beginning, setting up various gimmicks within the originals to promote those products. For instance, a scene from a parallel <i>Evangelion</i> world is inserted in the final episode of the television series. In that parallel world with a completely different history, [a Rei Ayanami] dwells with a completely different personality. But in fact the scene depicted there was already a parody of an image that had been widely circulated as a derivative work at the time of the original broadcast. That is to say, an extremely warped relationship is interwoven into this work, where the original simulates in advance the simulacra. (Azuma 37-38)

</blockquote>

<p>The approach taken by Gainax and director Hideaki Anno is a direct exemplification of the theory of rhetorical velocity professed by Jim Rodolfo. In Rodolfo’s words, rhetorical velocity is a “rhetorical concern… pertaining specifically to theorizing instances of strategic appropriation by a third party” (Rodolfo & DeVoss). Rhetorical velocity is the potential for any cultural text to be reinterpreted, repurposed and redistributed by a party besides the one that composed the initial material. That sort of reinterpretation is the very vehicle by which doujinshi culture functions. In a webtext titled <i>Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery</i>, Rodolfo and co-author Dànielle Nicole DeVoss explore the potential of writing with rhetorical velocity in mind, which they refer to as “composing for strategic recomposition” (Rodolfo & DeVoss). Undoubtedly, the creators of <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i> exercised this composition style with perfection. As stated in Hiroki Azuma’s discussion of the series, Gainax and Hideaki Anno strategically composed <i>Evangelion</i> in such a way that it afforded its otaku audience an immense grand narrative upon which they could create <i>Evangelion</i>-inspired doujinshi and other fan works, an activity that the creators indulged in themselves when they included an entirely different small narrative featuring the series’ characters in its last episode. This mode of composition was exactly what Rodolfo and DeVoss would consider one that accounted for “strategic recomposition” because endorsement of derivative works to the extent that such fan works were actually featured in the series itself made for an active fanbase which not only produced and circulated <i>Evangelion</i> doujinshi but also vehemently purchased <i>Evangelion</i> merchandise, of which there was plenty (Azuma 37).</p>

<h3>The Japanese Tradition of Narrative Consumption</h3>

<p>In Otsuka Eiji’s work, he at one point uses the practices of kabuki theatre as an example for his theory of narrative consumption. Eiji explains the kabuki tradition’s notion of <i>sekai</i>, or “world”, through the lens of his very own concepts of the “worldview” and grand narrative (Eiji 111). As he excerpts from the entry on <i>sekai</i> in a dictionary of kabuki terminology, the parallelism between the concepts becomes quite clear.</p>

<blockquote><i>Sekai</i>: Terminology specific to kabuki and puppet theatre (<i>ningyō

jōruri</i>). A concept that refers to the historical era or events that constitute

the background of the work. In fact this concept includes everything from

the names of the characters that appear in the work to the basic personality

traits of these characters, the nature of their relations, the basic storyline,

the basic aspects and developments that should be dramatized, and so on.

While this “world” is mostly founded on the commonly known

popularhistory of Japan, oral traditions, and so on, it also contains generic

content developed through the repeated dramatic adaptations and

performances in the form of preceding Kabuki and Japanese puppet theatre

as well as medieval performing arts, and thus it does not necessarily refer to

any established sourcebook or original text. Therefore, each individual

“world” is not a permanent or unchanging thing; some new “worlds” emerge

and others fall into disuse and remain in name alone as a result of the

formation of genres as well as the fashions of the time. The authors thus

create their works by dramatizing newly invented “variations” that are

based on a particular world, which is commonly known to the actors and

their audiences, or by mixing multiple “worlds.” (Hattori Yukio et al.)

</blockquote>

The habits of the doujinshi community certainly resemble the above definition of <i>sekai</i> because both doujinshi and kabuki theatre draw from grand narratives in order to create small narratives which are separate from the various other preexisting cross-section narratives that were also told within that same “worldview”. In short, Eiji has shown that in some sense <i>sekai</i> is practically synonymous with his own concept of a diegetic grand narrative. What follows is that kabuki theatre and doujinshi are both art forms that to some extent depend upon their respective traditions of narrative consumption in order to create new works. Considering this notion, Eiji claims that “what is quite interesting about… doujinshi is that this is not at all an unusual state of affairs, when put in the light of the history of Japanese narrative creation” (Eiji 111). From this claim about otaku doujinshi culture, Westerners might come to understand the deep roots of appropriating narratives that have existed in Japan since at least the seventeenth century Tokugawa period, when kabuki theatre was first performed. Naturally, this practice has extended into the otaku fandom in the English-speaking world.</p>

<h3>The Otaku's Right to Gender and Sexuality</h3>

<p>Proceeding from this discussion is an understanding that that the expression of gender and sexuality composed by <i>fujoshi</i> in writing BL doujinshi extends into other parts of the otaku fandom, including the <i>Evangelion</i> community, wherein both Japanese and English-speaking fans conduct similar experiments with gender and sexuality. However, in the community surrounding <i>Evangelion</i> fan works (which were encouraged by the creators of the series itself), a broader range of sexualities and gender identities are explored. In the case of gender, otaku of any gender in the physical world may vicariously experience gender through a wide variety of <i>Evangelion</i> characters, be they Asuka Langley Soryu, Gendo Ikari or otherwise. In identifying with a character, otaku are able to virtually experience the events of that character’s life either in the <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i> source material or in fan works, and these events often take into account that character’s gender identity. Regarding sexuality, by identifying with certain <i>Evangelion</i> characters, otaku may vicariously experience passive and active sexual relationships from the perspective of characters that span a broad range of genders, sexualities and circumstances (Galbraith ??). Japanese otaku in general have in their corner the same sorts of safe space to navigate such 2D experiences and relationships, just as the <i>fujoshi</i> do regarding BL fan works. This safe space in tandem with the freedoms that the realm of the 2D provides work to establish a community of support and understanding in the Japanese otaku culture.</p>

<p>This is all to say that if Japanese otaku can in a healthy way find enlightenment in crossing boundaries set upon them by how their gender and sexuality are perceived in real world Japan, it makes sense that otaku in the English-speaking world may find similar pleasure in such freedom of expression. For this reason, it is justifiable to regard as culturally insensitive, closed-minded, and generally toxic the shaming of otaku gender and sexuality expression in the form of lewding. If narrative consumption of the 2D realm leads to otaku flourishing in regard to their comprehension of gender and sexuality, it is rather xenophobic to say that the lewding that some of those otaku partake in is “just wrong”, regardless of the otherwise arbitrary age demographics and relationships of purely fictional characters. In order to promote understanding, acceptance, and eudaimonia in regard to gender and sexuality, it is necessary that people refrain from rhetoric that stigmatizes, restrains, and subjugates a community that allows for liberating expression. Many otaku find their community to be a safe haven compared to an outside world that generally holds more conventional standards of gender and sexuality, and this ability to come to terms with their identities ought not be stripped from them.</p>

<article class="interspecies reviewers, funimation's 'standards' & said">

<h2><i>Interspecies Reviewers</i>, Funimation's "Standards" & Said</h2>

<h3>The 2D Complex</h3>

<h3><i>Interspecies Reviewers</i> as a Celebration of 2D Sexuality</h3>

<h3>The Political Knowledge and Strategic Position of Funimation</h3>

<article class="conclusion">

<h2>Conclusion</h2>

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