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# Communal Identity through Cultural Essentialism: The Evolution of the American Anime and Manga Fan Community and the Orientalism of its Conception of Japan

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**Communal Identity through Cultural Essentialism:  
The Evolution of the American Anime and Manga Fan Community and the Orientalism of  
its Conception of Japan**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in American Studies from  
The College of William and Mary

by

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## Introduction

Visit the beautiful Inner-Harbor neighborhood of Baltimore, Maryland in late July and chances are you will find yourself in the company of characters from another world.<sup>1</sup> Ronin samurai, one-winged angels, magical school girls, mechanical armor suits, and more strut side by side and talk about the media they love. Baltimore is home to Otakon, one of the oldest and biggest anime conventions in the United States, and many of the convention's thousands of attendees arrive dressed as their favorite characters from Japanese *anime* and *manga*. Anime (cartoons) a manga (comics) have become two of Japan's most lucrative exports, and their popularity and availability in the United States have grown tremendously in the last decade. The value of Japanese popular culture media imported to the U.S. has skyrocketed from an estimated \$75 million in 1996<sup>2</sup> to well over \$300 million in 2010.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, more and more Americans have been drawn into the Japanese pop-culture fandom, and the American culture industries have taken notice. The rise of the Internet has given fan communities an unparalleled medium through which to communicate, organize events, and distribute anime and manga. Major corporations—even Disney—have begun releasing anime and manga for the American market. Both the tremendous growth in the fan community and the increased attention from commercial distributors have deeply influenced the American anime and manga fandom, a community that has existed for more than forty years. Over this time, American fandom has evolved a specific

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<sup>1</sup> "Home Page" *Otakon*, accessed 10 April 2012, <http://www.otakon.com/default.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 30.

<sup>3</sup> This estimate is based on an ICv2 (Internal Correspondence version 2 – a pop culture retailer information resource) report valuing Anime DVD sales at \$160-200 million in 2010, and manga sales at \$140 million in 2009. These numbers include the DVDs and Manga books (tankobon) only, and lack the profits from television distribution, theatrical releases, action figures, posters, etc. My estimate is therefore conservative.

*Anime News Network*, Published 7 October 2010, Accessed 12 April 2012.

[http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-10-07/icv2/2010-n-american-anime-market-worth-us\\$160-200-million](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-10-07/icv2/2010-n-american-anime-market-worth-us$160-200-million)

*Anime News Network*, Published 16 April 2010, Accessed 12 April 2012

<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-04-16/icv2/u.s-manga-sales-down-20-percent-in-2009>

understanding and attachment to Japan as the source of, and setting for, anime and manga. This narrative, I argue, serves the needs of the elite, leading, more established members of the fan community. This narrative is also fundamentally shaped by Orientalist beliefs, and as such both severely distorts the understanding of the Japanese nation and reveals the needs and preoccupations of the fans.

Ultimately, my argument is that the anime and manga fandom, led by these elite fans, views Japan as “pure-Japan,” a culturally essentialist narrative created through the fandom’s viewing and interpreting of anime and manga, and filtering *all* ideas through stereotypes and resultant beliefs. This lone narrative stands in contrast to a reading of Japan as a complex place that defies description in a single narrative. The fan community idealizes the pure-Japan narrative and perpetuates it through policing new anime and manga interpretations for fidelity to the new narrative. I argue that this pure-Japan narrative evolved primarily as a means for the fandom to assert and maintain a collective identity in face of initial marginalization by mainstream society, competition from commercial distributors, and, more recently, rapid uncontrolled expansion of the community.

The anime and manga fandom in the U.S. began in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a small subcultural community. This group of fans that were highly emotionally invested in their love of anime and manga, and developed community that visualized itself as living outside the dominant mores and tastes of American life.<sup>4</sup> These fans overcame the Japanese language barrier by gathering in teams to translate and subtitle anime and manga; they confronted the dearth of Japanese cultural products available in the U.S. by creating media-sharing networks and spreading their work throughout the community. Fans labored to create materials they then distributed and consumed; through this process, they developed a close sense of community. The

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<sup>4</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd, 1979), 15.

members of the early fan community were the authorities on anime and manga in the United States, giving them power of interpretation over the media, but also status within the U.S. as cultural brokers. The rise of the internet in the early 1990s suddenly made anime and manga much easier to distribute, and the fandom soon underwent rapid growth. With this growth came increased fan demand for anime and manga, leading American publishers and distributors to import greater quantities and varieties. The community in turn confronted its own dramatic growth, along with increasing competition from American distributors and publishers. The fan community no emphasized the importance of its own narrative version of Japan and enforced the socialization of community members through their acceptance of and participation in the pure-Japan narrative.

Explosive growth in numbers and increased levels of commercial competition threatened the fan community in two main ways. First, the rapid increase in fans threatened to mainstream what had been a subcultural community, as well as to fragment the community's cohesion. Second, the larger amount of commercial distribution of anime and manga threatened elite fans' status as authorities and providers. By emphasizing and solidifying their narrative of Japan, the early fans were able to divide new fans who "belonged" and those who did not, and to enforce that belonging by accepting the elite fans as authorities over anime and manga, rather than industry.<sup>5</sup> The elite of the fan community have thus positioned themselves as the gate keepers between Japan and the United States and have therefore asserted their exclusive right to speak for and interpret Japan to America. They justify their authority based on expertise and precedent in preserving narrative authenticity. Anime and manga are the texts through which these fans interpret Japan, by means of a culturally essentialist narrative: what I name "pure-Japan." This

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<sup>5</sup> Zac Bertschy, "Interview with the Fansubber," *Anime News Network*, 11 March 2008, accessed 10 April 2012, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/feature/2008-03-11>

narrative is the preferred and dominant narrative of the fan community, and fans reify their narrative by modeling the community based on the narrative. However, pure-Japan is at best a substitution for Japan, so that even as fans represent their community with the pure-Japan narrative, they are rhetorically modeling themselves after an actual extant nation. In this essay I will trace the development of the American anime and manga community's pure-Japan narrative, analyzing its effects and consequences in the U.S., Japan, and the fan community.

The concepts of fans and fandom have been frequently disputed, challenged, and reshaped within the scholarly community; thus my first chapter, "Fandom, Narrative, and Consumption in the Formation of Identity" examines how fans use narrative in convening community. I argue that fandom is fundamentally a site of identity creation, and that fan communities are not only subcultures, but also analogous to nations in the way their members conceive of the fandom. Fans build their communities around shared narratives and consume those narratives through texts of various types. I attempt to construct a framework through which to understand how fan communities coalesce and consume their narratives, and to thereby situate the American anime and manga fan community in the larger discussion of fans and fandom.

In my second chapter, "The Evolution of the Anime and Manga Fandom: Conflict, Localization, and Status," I trace the history of the American anime and manga fandom, with special focus on the friction between the fan community and commercial American importers. This conflict has centered localization (adjusting foreign created media for consumption by an American audience), and localization has served as the battleground for authority and power over the narratives of anime and manga. Fans lay claim to authority status by arguing that their work preserves the "authenticity" or "Japaneseness" of anime and manga, while the commercial distributors claim legal and professional authority status. Fan communities perpetuate status

hierarchies that elevate those who produce fan interpretations and accept as members those who value these interpretations above commercial productions. However, these fan representations of Japan are deeply shaped by the desires and needs of the fan interpreters, and form an Orientalist representation of Japan: pure-Japan.

My third chapter, “Pure-Japan: Orientalism, Theory, and Evoking Existence,” is a dedicated examination and explication of the pure-Japan narrative. Part one of the chapter demonstrates pure-Japan’s birth from fan interpretations of Japan through anime and manga, and show how the fan community perpetuates acceptance of pure-Japan through its status-hierarchies and socialization practices. Further, I prove how pure-Japan adheres to and is fundamentally shaped by Orientalism. In part two I position pure-Japan theoretically within current Japanese criticism of anime and manga, explicating the narrative as an innovation on Azuma Hiroki’s postmodern narrative consumption models.<sup>6</sup> Anime and manga are all derivative works that make up a database of narrative features that authors use to spawn new derivative works. However, American fans seek “grand narrative” behind the database and therefore bind the database characteristics into a derivative grand narrative: pure-Japan. I also make use of Iwabuchi Koichi’s ideas of “cultural odor” and “*mukokuseki*” or the “culturally odorless” product to demonstrate that anime and manga are culturally empty, and are therefore usable by the fan community to apply pure-Japanese culture to them.<sup>7</sup> In part three I examine the ways in which the American fandom evokes pure-Japan into physical and temporal existence through anime conventions and cosplay, effectively assuming the identities of pure-Japanese and self-othering within the United States. In this way fans maintain their community identity and subcultural unity in spite of the community’s explosive growth.

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<sup>6</sup> I list Japanese names in their Japanese order: family name, individual name.

<sup>7</sup> Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 28.

Numerous scholars have valorized fans as cultural innovators and rebels against commercial hegemony. I do not wish to dispute their analyses of fan activities, but I work to show that in pursuing the object of their desire these fans have served their own interests by othering and textualizing an entire nation of people. Thus though fan activities can be highly democratic, they also are a two-sided coin, with a dangerously essentializing aspect. I hope this work serves as a theoretical and analytical contribution to further analysis of fans and fan communities.

I also feel I must position myself relative to my work. Popular culture scholar Henry Jenkins has had a tremendous influence on my understandings, and it is in his hybrid role of aca-fan (academic and fan) that I cast myself.<sup>8</sup> I am a longtime member of the anime and manga fan community, though not one of the elite fans who create and distribute content and enforce their interpretations of Japan. I have attended anime conventions, cosplayed, watched fan produced and interpreted media, and consumed large quantities of anime and manga. I have many anime fan friends and a deep affection for the American anime and manga fan community. However, I also have attempted to distance myself, to become a “participant-observer,” and to turn a more critical eye on fan activities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), ii.

<sup>9</sup> Susan J. Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 176.

## **Chapter 1: *Fandom, Narrative, and Consumption in the Formation of Identity***

The popularity of Japanese popular culture in the United States has grown from the smallest of roots into a vast fandom. Aided by expanding globalization and by the rapid advancement in communications technology at the turn of the twenty-first century, the fandom now reaches throughout the entire United States and beyond. To understand fandom's incredible growth and establish a firm basis for analysis, we must consider the nature of fandom and the making of fans. This chapter will define fans and situate their communities as subcultures, explicate how these communities function as sites of identity creation for fans, and analyze the ways in which fans create both their communities and identities through narrative consumption.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives two definitions of the word "fan:" "1: an enthusiastic devotee (as of a sport or a performing art) usually as a spectator. 2: an ardent admirer or enthusiast (as of a celebrity or a pursuit)"<sup>10</sup> These definitions are surprisingly positive considering the pejorative views of fans in the popular imagination. Fan scholar Henry Jenkins explores the origin of "fan" as an abbreviation for "fanatic:" "The term 'fan' was originally evoked in a somewhat playful fashion... it never fully escaped its earlier connotations of religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness."<sup>11</sup> Jenkins also points out that this view of fans as immature and unstable, and therefore worthy of suspicion, still undergirds many current representations and discussions of fans.<sup>12</sup> Joli Jenson argues that these portrayals of fans are actually indicative of deeper social fears and issues, specifically alienation and its consequences.<sup>13</sup> She writes that society views the present zeitgeist

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<sup>10</sup> "Fan," *Merriam-Webster Online*, accessed 23 November 2011. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fan?show=2&t=1322078929>

<sup>11</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Joli Jenson, "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14.

as “materially advanced but spiritually threatened,” and that fans are individuals alienated from traditional support (narratives) who are then “open to irrational appeals.”<sup>14</sup> In the dominant social narrative, fans enshrine their icons to a dangerous extent, toppling over the edge into pathological obsession.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, fans represent individuals who have fallen prey to the temptations that threaten everyone in the social order.<sup>16</sup> Jenkins adds to the potency of this social fear, noting that media representations of fans show them as sexual transgressors; male fans are weak and asexual, and their female counterparts are hysterical and hypersexual.<sup>17</sup>

Merriam-Webster’s contemporary definition and Jenkins’s analysis raise two conventional yet troubling traits ascribed to fans. Merriam-Webster defines usual fan activity as from the role of “spectator,” a definition I argue condemns fans to passivity; they ardently follow, but do not participate in the culture they love. Jenkins informs us that traditionally society typically views fans as inappropriate and dangerous: something has gone “wrong” for fandom to occur. Fan activities are threatening to mainstream culture, therefore fandom cultures exist as subcultures, outside social norms.<sup>18</sup> Greater society only reinforces this view because fans’ fandom remains predominantly concerned with identity creation distinct from the traditional or “normal” sources of identity. Fans challenge social norms even as they stand outside them.<sup>19</sup>

Fan communities maintain a liminal status on the margins of society, existing both within and outside of the mainstream. Fans are viewed with suspicion by members of mainstream culture, and fans view these people similarly and choose to separate from them, in what Dick Hebdige refers to as “self-imposed exile.”<sup>20</sup> Thus although their communities exist within the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Jenson, “Fandom as Pathology,” 9.

<sup>19</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Hebdige, *Subculture*, 2.

bounds of mainstream society, fans are outcasts. This relationship hinges on power; fan narratives are not the dominant discourses, yet fans refuse to relinquish their attachments to these alternate narratives.<sup>21</sup> Fan communities are therefore subcultural communities, and like other subcultural communities, fans seek out physical manifestations of their values, organize internal hierarchies, and create a collective self-image.<sup>22</sup> In spite of these internally consistent commonalities, the insider-outsider status of subcultures to the dominant culture makes community difficult to conceive of for subcultural groups. Ken Gelder writes “*Community* retains some force in subcultural studies... put to use both as a sometimes richly connotative synonym for subcultures as well as an antithetical category – just like ‘society’ – from which subcultures are to be clearly distinguished.”<sup>23</sup> Thus subcultures are on their own kind of societies, but most exist in opposition to the larger body of society and members thus often have difficulty conceiving of themselves as an actual society on their own. However, precisely because fandoms (and the fans that compose them) exist outside social norms, the conception of community is absolutely vital to fans’ identity formation and continued satisfaction with their fandom.

Fandom is a site of identity creation. Identity is a concept of great conflict within the scholarly world.<sup>24</sup> Adrian Poole gives the roots of the word as the Latin for “sameness,” “likeness,” and “unity.”<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger’s influential philosophical work defines the basic of equation of identity of “A is A,” explaining that rather than meaning that all entities “A” are the same, this means that they are *equal* and “that every A is itself the same with itself.”<sup>26</sup> Heidegger therefore concludes that identity exists as “the moment of appropriation,” between man and

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 113-114.

<sup>23</sup> Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 26.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart Hall, “Who Needs ‘Identity?’” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Adrian Poole, “Identity of Meaning” *Identity*, ed. Giselle Walker and Elizabeth Leedham-Green (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. John Stambaugh, (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 24-25.

Being into one entity.<sup>27</sup> Stuart Hall takes issue with Heidegger's approach, arguing that individual identity is perpetually in flux, rather than constant, and is primarily defined by a relationship outside the other.<sup>28</sup> Hall continues, arguing that identities are primarily constructed loci of "chaining" into established discourses, "points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us."<sup>29</sup> Essentially, he contends that people create identity by temporarily adopting established narratives as their own, and that summation of these adoptions amounts to an individual's identity. Hall calls this process "*production of self as an object in the world.*"<sup>30</sup> Thus, identity is the determination of a person as an object in the world, in direct relationships of inclusion and exclusion with the narratives that surround them, and identification is the process of their determination of which narratives they share sameness, likeness, and unity with. People shape their identities both consciously and unconsciously through their identifications (unity) with narratives (such as nation), and the resultant exclusion of other narratives. Fans produce themselves (their identities) through their identification with popular culture narratives, and the corresponding consumption of those narratives through texts. Moreover, fan identities exclude the narratives of mainstream social norms. Mainstream society is the vital other which fan identities prohibit, what Hall calls identity's "*constitutive outside;*" fans are themselves because they are specifically not part of the dominant social narrative.<sup>31</sup>

This oppositional relationship between fans and the greater body of society invokes nationalistic terms, specifically Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities."<sup>32</sup> Anderson explains "It [community] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will

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<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, 37-38.

<sup>28</sup> Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity?'" 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 2006), 7.

never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>33</sup> The members of fan communities, like the citizens of nations, will indeed never all congregate, and the true extent of their community eludes even the most fastidious researchers, but all are defined by their shared passion. Anderson gives three primary qualities shared by these imagined communities: they are limited, community, and sovereign.<sup>34</sup> The community is limited because it is not all-encompassing, not every person in the world will engage with the same narrative and therefore the community exists as those who do engage with a particular narrative, independent of those who do not. This boundary is “finite, if elastic,” but it means that an us/them relationship must be part of each community’s understanding of itself and the rest of the world.<sup>35</sup> Fans share “community,” because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each... [the community] is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship;” the members of the fandom, independent of their varying statuses within the community, are ultimately united against threats, and conceive of themselves as part of one bloc with common goals.<sup>36</sup> Anderson uses “sovereign” specifically in the context of territorial nation-states, but the concept is nonetheless applicable to fan communities.<sup>37</sup> Fans seek to establish themselves as coherent group, not within the bounds of territory, however, but within the bounds of narrative.<sup>38</sup> While nation-states are constructed with a narrative that is built and contested within their nation, about those who live within its territorial boundaries, fan communities are always based on narratives that are the work of someone else; they are always subject to the whims and plans of an original creator or producer,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>38</sup> Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

who is ultimately outside of the community.<sup>39</sup> The ideal of sovereignty is therefore useful to the study of fan communities, as the struggle to obtain control over the narrative(s) on which their communities are based, possesses many fan activities.

Moreover, just as with nations, fans seek narratives with which to construct their communities and resultant identities. Nation-states create narratives of their history (based both in fact and perception) and from those build national narratives of spirit and purpose.<sup>40</sup> These narratives are fluid, their interpretations changing and growing as old replace new in the national consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Citizens of nations construct their identities including deep attachments and emotional responses to their national narratives.<sup>42</sup> Fan communities do not, by comparison, have well established histories from which to draw their narratives, moreover, fan communities do not coalesce around the physical locales (and accompanying historical kinship) that nation-states necessarily use to generate narrative, but rather upon already extant publications (which fans expand). These publications thus always precede fandom, as the fictional work provides not only story, but also setting (worldview, as discussed below). Fans participate in identity creation based on produced narratives and their communities coalesce around those narratives. Matt Hills defines three dimensions characteristic of fandom: tautological (internal fan discourses), temporal (fandom lasting over time), and affective (emotionally felt and engaging experience of fandom), but these are all functions of fan engagements with their narratives, and all center around fandoms' narratives.<sup>43</sup> Thus, all fans are ultimately devoted to narrative, and physically consume narrative through objects.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Gellner, *Subcultures*, xx.

<sup>41</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, xiv.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xi.

Ōtsuka Eiji created his theory of narrative consumption in 1989, primarily as an explanation of Japanese consumptive tendencies and as suggestive guide for marketing.<sup>44</sup> However, in his semi-critical work he brilliantly explains how people engage with narratives by consuming physical objects. He argues that narrative consumption consists of a “grand narrative” or much larger narrative being shattered into small pieces and scattered across numerous products.<sup>45</sup> This serves primarily to benefit the producers of the narrative as they may then convince consumers that through the act of consuming all the small narratives they may grow closer to assembling the entire larger narrative.<sup>46</sup> Ōtsuka critically recognizes, however, that should the consumers gain control of the ability to make small narratives of their own, they can then produce these new small narratives limitlessly.<sup>47</sup> Fandom represents this occurrence en masse: fans begin around a produced larger narrative, but then engineer their own small narratives with the “worldview” (and its rules) of that narrative.<sup>48</sup> Thus, fans actively create their identities by devising new narratives based within a larger original narrative.

Fans naturally seek to gain control over these narratives (a challenging process, as the narratives necessarily originate from someone other than the fans). Jenkins was one of the earliest to view fans as active participants in popular culture. He describes a major conflict (and feature) of fan participation as the “ongoing struggle for possession of the text and for control over its meanings.”<sup>49</sup> This description raises several salient points. First, the narratives crucial to fandom do not simply amorously exist, but take shape in texts (be they books, movies, action

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<sup>44</sup> Eiji Ōtsuka, “World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative,” trans. Marc Steinberg, *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 103. From Steinberg’s Introduction.

<sup>45</sup> Eiji Ōtsuka, “World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative,” trans. March Steinberg, *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 106.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 24.

figures, clothing, etc.). Second, Jenkins argues that the original producers and the fan consumers struggle with each other to control and interpret these texts (and thus the narratives they contain). Moreover, Jenkins believes that through this struggle fans blur traditional role distinctions acting as both consumers and producers within the same text.<sup>50</sup>

Jenkins argues that “fans are central to how culture operates. The concept of the active audience, so controversial two decades ago, is now taken for granted by everyone involved in and around the media industry.”<sup>51</sup> Here he not only observes that fans have become participants in culture, but also that the culture industries, the very entities attempting to sell to fans, have acknowledged this fact and incorporated it into their business models.<sup>52</sup> This acknowledgement is both a business strategy and an acknowledgement of a rival (fans) for control of the narrative behind texts. Fans are not simply passive bystanders allowing narrative (and thus identity) to be dictated to them, but vital participants in cultural creation, through consumption, production, and communication surrounding narratives. This understanding captures a primary essence of fandom creativity: fans selectively use the texts they consume to spur their own creative process – both in material production and in the formation of identity.

Fans take texts that began with the intent of passive consumption and apply new meanings and uses to them. Indeed, anything can be a text, and that text holds near infinite potential meanings depending on who views it. Popular culture scholar John Fiske observes “The original commodity... is, in the cultural economy, a text, a discursive structure of potential meanings and pleasures that constitutes a major resource of popular culture.”<sup>53</sup> And, as Jenkins

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>53</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Taylor & Francis, 2010), 22.  
<http://lib.myilibrary.com.proxy.wm.edu?ID=292967> (accessed 23 November 2011)

recognizes, “What is significant about fans...is that they constitute a particularly active and vocal community of consumers whose activities direct attention onto this process of cultural appropriation.”<sup>54</sup> Fans effectively assert their ability and right to define the meanings (narrative) behind each text, and the examples of this process are endless. From fanfiction authors who apply their own narratives, characters, and adventures within in the worlds built by original commercial authors to the football fans who build elaborate costumes to wear to their favorite team’s games, fans innovate ways to interact with texts, and through them narrative. On the playgrounds of commercially created texts, fans produce their own narrative merry-go-rounds and reinterpret those provided from them to make meanings relevant to their desires and the formation of their identities.

The rest of this chapter will explain how fans specifically consume narrative through texts. Fandom can emerge around three major categories of narrative: “product,” “genre,” and “person/team,” including all the derivative texts (the material, communication, and events) produced by them. These categories broadly represent the things that people can be fans of; they are the categories of narrative fans consume through texts and thereby create identity. Additionally, the categories of narrative separate an analytical usage of fan from the colloquial. This usage difference critically revolves around narrative – “texts” that might seem to fit into one (or more) of the categories, but do not function as part of a larger narrative, are not included. For example one might say, “I am a fan of strawberry ice cream” when one means “I like the way strawberry ice cream tastes.” The attachment to strawberry ice cream does not go beyond the immediate physical gratification of the taste of the ice cream; therefore, the person eating the ice cream is not a fan of the ice cream at all. To be a fan, a “devotee” as Merriam-Webster says, is to go beyond a single, instantaneous, and fleeting enjoyment of something, but to engage with it on

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 27.

a deeper and more meaningful level: to engage with narrative.<sup>55</sup> “Product,” “Genre,” and “Person/Group” are the categories of narrative through which people find engagement with larger narratives. The greater narratives of anime and manga (once their associated products are included) exist in all three narrative categories, and each bears explanation for full conceptualization of the fan.

“Product” provides the ideal gateway to understanding the qualities shared by the three sites of fandom formation. In order to be a popular culture fan, one must engage with it materially, and through that material, interact with its narrative. In turn, that engagement must result in identity formation. “Product” includes everything from a novel, to a beer, to a pinball machine. Products are materially consumed by their fans, and this consumption is then parlayed into identity formation. The beer “Guinness Draught” is an excellent example of this. Guinness Draught is a beer available on tap in many American bars, and sold in both cans and bottles in numerous American groceries. The beer itself, as well as its delivery containers, is materially consumed by those who buy it. This process is on the surface comparable to the example of strawberry ice cream. However, the strawberry ice cream was interacted with only materially, lacking the narrative interactions with Guinness Draught contain.

By drinking Guinness Draught, a fan can consume the greater “Guinness” narrative. Guinness is a brand, with its own history and associated qualities. The Guinness website contains a link called “The Story,” and clicking on it will present the viewer with a picture of Arthur Guinness (the brewery’s founder), and text including “The history of GUINNESS® beer, draught, or stout is a stirring tale of inspiration, dedication, ingenuity and effort.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the page includes a huge interactive timeline of “the story,” including pictures and videos. By

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<sup>55</sup> Hills, *Fan Cultures*, xi.

<sup>56</sup> “The Story,” *Guinness®*, accessed 4 April 2012, <http://www.guinness.com/en-us/thestory.html#>

consuming Guinness Draught, fans of the beer are able to gain access to the “stirring tale,” the Guinness narrative. With each pint the fan consumes that narrative and can carry it forward to his identity formation. Moreover, consuming other associated products (pieces of the narrative) gives the fan access to more of the narrative for his identity creation. A quick look at Guinness’s online store reveals a lot more than just beer. Clothing lines for both men and women, decorative crystal panels, even rugby balls labeled with Guinness logos and designs, all proclaim a consumer’s allegiance to Guinness Draught far beyond merely drinking the beer. One t-shirt’s description describes it as “a paragon of taste and style”<sup>57</sup> – making obvious references not only to the shirt, but also to the beer and the person drinking it. The Guinness Fan engages qualities ascribed to Guinness, negative, positive, and indifferent, as part of their personal identity. The fan then proclaims this identity through the consumption of more Guinness items (and thus more of the Guinness narrative), and proud display of Guinness paraphernalia. Therefore, for the fan, wearing a Guinness Draught t-shirt goes well beyond merely advertising that he drinks Guinness Draught, but carries numerous other connotations and meanings; he is showing the world that he is a participant in the greater “Guinness” narrative. Product narratives can vary depending on location and the consuming audience; Guinness ads in Nigeria tie the dark beer to explicitly national and racial narratives with the slogan “Guinness: The Power of Black.”<sup>58</sup> Importantly, Guinness Draught may also be consumed by those who are not Guinness fans, but these people do not incorporate Guinness into their identities; they do not “plug in” to the Guinness narrative. It has how the Guinness fan uses the Guinness commodities to derive narrative and identity that

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<sup>57</sup> “Guinness® Toucan Harp 1759 Tee Gry,” *Guinness® Webstore*, accessed 23 November 2011, [http://www.guinnesswebstore.com/product\\_detail.asp?HDR=apparel&CAT=appmentshirt&T1=GUI+H1039+XL](http://www.guinnesswebstore.com/product_detail.asp?HDR=apparel&CAT=appmentshirt&T1=GUI+H1039+XL)

<sup>58</sup> Ruth Bender and Suzanne Vranica, “Global Ad Agencies Flocking to Africa,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Published 22 October 2010, accessed 12 April 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304741404575564193783950352.html>

separates him from someone who merely drinks Guinness Draught.<sup>59</sup> The “Guinness” narrative is a product narrative. The three categories around which fandoms form are interrelated and “Product” is an excellent gateway to the second category: “Genre.”

“Genre” is the broadest of the three categories of fandom. The meaning that genre takes here is one of form; Glenn Most defines genres as “separately existing factors, necessarily constituted in one way and no other, which are prior to the literary acts they enable and constrain.”<sup>60</sup> Genres are therefore independent, defined, forms that are constituted through the texts they influence and shape. Although Most limits genres to influencing literary acts, they actually hold sway over every kind of text, thus genres tend to include many different kinds of products, and the genre narrative may be discovered by observing the common narrative that ties these disparate products together. Genres are inexhaustible: no one author, single work, or product can fully explore all the possibilities of a genre.<sup>61</sup> Anime and manga represent a genre narrative – they are made up of movies, television shows, and comic books, as well as numerous other associated products, but all carry the same narrative form. By consuming all of these products (as texts) fans gain access to the “anime and manga” genre narrative. Another excellent example of “Genre” is Science Fiction. Science Fiction includes books, movies, action figures, role-playing games, and many other products, but all are invested by their pre-existing Science Fiction narrative form. Science fiction further exemplifies the crossover that frequently occurs between genres, and the multiplicity of some products; numerous anime, such as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Neo-Genesis Evangelion*, and *Akira*, are part of both the “anime and manga” the “Science Fiction” genre. “Sci-Fi” fans are likely to have knowledge of one, or even several of these

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<sup>59</sup> Hebdige, *Subculture*, 103.

<sup>60</sup> Glenn W. Most, “Generating Genres: The Idea of the Tragic,” in *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society*, ed. Mary Depew and Dirk Obbink, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

famous anime, however, many anime fans are unlikely to have any detailed knowledge of the “Sci-Fi” genre: therefore this crossover does not always flow in both directions. Similarly, genre can encompass completely disparate topics as well.

There are many football fans in the United States, and although football is not usually spoken of in the same breath as Science Fiction, the two are both genre narratives. Football is a sport and a genre narrative, as football fans, fans of the sport, not limited to a single team (though they may also have a defining loyalty to a specific team), have created a vast fandom, including an near uncountable number of discussion forums, statistical analyses, and photo sites – all of which are texts through which the larger “Football” narrative is accessed and consumed. Fantasy Football most perfectly shows “Football” as a genre narrative – in order to be successful at a competitive, primarily Internet based game, fans must build their own teams composed of players from any of the teams of the National Football League (NFL).<sup>62</sup> Accomplishing this task effectively requires fans to study players from all over the NFL, review their statistics, and predict how each player will fair in his many games week by week, throughout all sixteen weeks of the NFL season. All the disparate aspects of fantasy football are thereby texts that are united by their association to the “Football” genre narrative, and fans consume them to attempt to assemble it. Both the “Football” and “Sci-Fi” genres provide clear examples of how individuals and groups create distinct narratives around which fandoms form.

William Shatner has had one of the most prolific careers of any actor, participating in an incredible variety of projects from stage theatre to documentaries, and is an individual whose life and career form an example of “individual” narrative.<sup>63</sup> In spite of his tremendous personal fame, however, Shatner is nearly eclipsed by his most renowned role: James T. Kirk of *Star Trek*. As

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<sup>62</sup> “Intro to Fantasy Football,” *National Football League*, accessed 23 November 2011, <http://www.nfl.com/fantasy/help/whatis>

<sup>63</sup> William Shatner with David Fisher, *Up Till Now: The Autobiography* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 2.

the *Scientific American* describes, “Ever since the starship *Enterprise* first whisked across television screens in 1966, *Star Trek* has inspired audiences with its portrayal of a future, spacefaring humanity boldly going where no one has gone before.”<sup>64</sup> No character from any of the many *Star Trek* T.V. series, books, or movies has exceeded the fame of Captain Kirk. Both actor and character have tremendous personal followings, followings that reach intense levels of devotion. Kirk and Shatner fans identify with their hero, and create their identities based on their understandings of the narrative of each. Therefore a fan of Shatner may be more aware of his work as Denny Crane on *Boston Legal* than his time as member of the *Star Trek* cast, and similarly a Kirk fan may pay little attention to any *Star Trek* series beyond the first, and have very little cognizance of Shatner’s later acting. However, both of those shows (including all their episodes) are texts through which the larger “William Shatner” and “James T. Kirk” individual narratives are accessed and consumed. The intense debates that rage over each line that Kirk delivers, and the consistent success of Shatner’s appearances across the U.S. are testaments to the power of fan following. Shatner is a particularly interesting case, as he has intentionally blurred the line between his own personality and character. Indeed, as the website for his new one-man Broadway show proclaims, he creates the “larger-than-life and most important character he has ever played, William Shatner.”<sup>65</sup>

Fandoms grow up around individuals: movie stars, characters, singers, are but a few of the most common types. Fans materially consume these “individual” narratives by buying products associated with them, such as movie tickets, novels, and CDs. Once again, disparate products serve as the texts by which a greater association to the narrative is transmitted to its fans. Lady Gaga’s website store includes a huge variety of t-shirts, outerwear, posters, and even a wall

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<sup>64</sup> Adam Hadhazy, “The Final Frontier: The Science of *Star Trek*,” *The Scientific American*, 6 May 2009, accessed 23 November 2011, <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=star-trek-movie-science>

<sup>65</sup> “Who Am I, Really?” *Shatner’s World*, accessed 8 April 2012, <http://shatnersworld.com/about.html>

calendar<sup>66</sup> – all of which serve to allow Gaga’s fans to consume her narrative, and proclaim their identification with her. This type of consumption/identification process is not limited to individuals, however, but also deeply connected to groups.

Sports fans are some of the most devoted to “group” narratives; aligning themselves with a specific team, these fans become engrossed in the successes and failures of their team, often treating their team’s victories and defeats as deeply personal matters, even when they can do nothing to affect the outcome. Fans of NFL teams are renowned as some of the most passionate in the world, and the rivalries between these teams are often bitter and stretch back several generations. NFL fans consume their team by purchasing team gear such as jerseys, hats, and foam fingers, and by attending team games. Fans spend a huge amount of money on these activities; in 2011, average single ticket prices ranged from \$60.28 - \$244.64.<sup>67</sup> The NFL is notoriously secretive about its income, but one of the thirty-two teams reported a 2011 gross revenue of \$282.6 million with a net income of \$17.1 million.<sup>68</sup> Through this intense consumption fans garner access to the larger narratives of the team, and membership in that narrative; their identity becomes entwined with the team, even becoming *the* defining personal factor for some fans. Some groups of fans even take on their own names, such as the “Cheeseheads”<sup>69</sup> of Green Bay or the “12<sup>th</sup> Man”<sup>70</sup> of Seattle. Sports teams are only one example of how fandoms form around groups: many bands have full fan followings of their own. Fans

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<sup>66</sup> Lady Gaga USA Store, accessed 23 November 2011, <http://ladygaga.shop.bravadousa.com/?src=BUSALDGA0001>

<sup>67</sup> Taylor, Oliver “Average NFL Ticket Prices After an Exciting Week 1” *SeatGeek* (14 September 2011), accessed 8 April 2012, <http://seatgeek.com/blog/nfl/average-nfl-ticket-prices-after-week-1-2011>

<sup>68</sup> The Green Bay Packers are the only publicly owned team in the NFL, therefore the only team to release an annual financial report.

“Packers Net Income Shoots Up, Operating Profit Doesn’t” *total Packers*, (26 July 2011), accessed 8 April 2012, <http://www.totalpackers.com/2011/07/26/packers-net-income-shoots-up-operating-profit-doesnt/#comments>

<sup>69</sup> “Cheeseheads,” *Icon Wisconsin*, Wisconsin Historical Society, accessed 23 November 2011, <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/iconwisconsin/dairyland/cheeseheads.html>

<sup>70</sup> “History of the 12<sup>th</sup> Man,” *Seattle Seahawks*, accessed 23 November 2011, <http://www.seahawks.com/gameday/12th-man/history.html>

travel all over the U.S. to watch their favorite bands, sometimes even collecting even more information about the group than the band itself has. This travel and knowledge collection is textual activity – giving fans access to the narrative of their band. I choose to make “Person/Group” a single category due to their similarity; by their very nature, groups are made up of multiple individuals, and their fandoms evolve in much the same way. Fans of bands consume their music almost identically as do fans of individual artists. Fans of football players follow their players with the same ardor as fans of football teams, and use many of the same channels to pursue their fan consumption of narrative. Thus the two are complimentary and intertwined so thoroughly as to merit combination into a single category.

All of the three categories of consumed narrative are interrelated and crossover extensively. A single product, such as a Captain Kirk action figure, may exist simultaneously in all three categories, and similarly be a part of multiple fandoms. In this example, the action figure is a product and may be collected for its form alone. Alternatively, it could be part of a Sci-Fi fan’s consumption of his genre, or a William Shatner or Captain Kirk fan’s consumption of their idol. Indeed, it is not the actual product itself that determines its meaning, but the people who consume it. This process of interpretation and re-interpretation by multiple fandoms is an example of the subversive nature of cultural production by consumers, necessary in a world where physical products are rarely produced by those who use them.

In today’s world, where nearly everything we purchase is produced by an industry, being a productive consumer is key to establishing personal identity. Fiske tells us that the financial interests of industry compel it to produce products that “appeal to what people have in common, to deny social differences.”<sup>71</sup> He identifies the agenda of industry as “centralizing, disciplinary,

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<sup>71</sup> Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 23.

hegemonic, massifying, commodifying.”<sup>72</sup> Resisting this agenda are the consumers who “transform the commodity into a cultural resource, pluralize the meanings and pleasures it offers, fracture its homogeneity and coherence, raid or poach upon its terrain.”<sup>73</sup> These consumers practice “tactical consumption”<sup>74</sup> in ways meaningful to them: accessing, consuming, and reinterpreting the larger narratives. Fans are able to garner power by assuming these roles: “in this economy there are no consumers, only circulators of meanings... meanings can be produced, reproduced, and circulated only in that constant process we call culture.”<sup>75</sup> This constant interpretation and re-interpretation of texts (and the resultantly accessed and influenced narratives), is how people maintain their own identities on their own terms, rather than having their identities dictated by industry. In this process of resistance and identity creation Fans are some of the most inventive, tactical, and productive participants.

Fans find themselves in the midst of great cultural battle between the economic interests of industry and individuals’ need for identity and meaning. This battle centers around access to and ability to shape the narratives that fans use to create identity. Therefore, fans consume, create, and participate, not on some mere whim, but because in doing so they resist the homogenizing forces that surround them and affirmatively forge their own identities. In the world of late capital these identities are built around larger narratives of product, genre, or person/group, which individuals can actively consume through texts, and from which they may draw qualities to incorporate into their identity. These “fans” then create new communities to celebrate these new identities. Fandoms are imagined communities that function much as nations do, fulfilling many of the same needs for their fans. Indeed, at the heart of the existence of fans and the development

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 22.

of fandoms is the struggle for individual identity and fulfilling community in society that views fans as dangerous or as a blight. Nowhere has fan participation and active engagement with cultural texts and media production, and through them narrative, been more important than in the anime and manga fandom. The fandom would not exist in its current form without the participatory devotion of early fans.

**Chapter 2: *The Evolution of the Anime and Manga Fandom: Conflict, Localization, and Status***

John Fiske describes the people versus political, economic, and social power as the fundamental struggle of culture: a battle between the masses and those empowered above them. I have argued that this struggle is one not only over consumption, but also a fight for the ability to create the imagined communities that define identity.<sup>76</sup> Anime and manga fandom is an extremely interesting site that illuminates how struggle over culture can define communities, for it is primarily from the conflict between fans and cultural importers that the fan community has forged its identity as a community. Prejudices, opinions, and practices dating from the fandom's earliest days pervade current fan discourses decades later, and deeply effect how fans interact with each other and the culture industries. The issue which first brought the nascent fandom and the importers of anime and manga into conflict in the 1970s and 1980s, and continues to plague both today, is localization.

According to the Localization Institute, a company specializing in helping corporations expand products to a global market, "Localization is the process of creating or adapting a product to a specific locale, i.e., to the language, cultural context, conventions and market requirements of a specific target market."<sup>77</sup> As indicated by the Institute's commercial mission, localization has been and remains the primary practice of corporations. The most prominent goal in localizing a product is not to produce a realistic representation of foreign markets by faithfully reproducing those nations' cultural products to make them understandable to consumers, but to make a profit. As the Localization Institute promotional material continues, "With a properly localized product a user can interact with this product using his/her own language and cultural conventions. It also means that all user-visible text strings and all user documentation (printed

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<sup>76</sup> Fiske, *Understanding Culture*, 23.

<sup>77</sup> "Terminology," *The Localization Institute*, accessed 8 April 2012, <http://www.localizationinstitute.com/switchboard.cfm?page=terminology>

and electronic) use the language and cultural conventions of the user.”<sup>78</sup> Implied in the Institute’s position is the idea that not only must a product adapt to its target market, but that adaptation ensures that the product fits within the cultural conventions of the viewer, including language, effectively expunging any chance of cultural dissonance between the product and the consumer. From a business standpoint this may be ideal, but the localization process also dramatically reduces any potential for cultural exchange. Localization has been, and is, practiced to different degrees by importers of anime and manga, and the battle over how much localization is necessary has deeply constrained both fandom and importers.

In transfer to the United States anime and manga are often altered: sometimes to extremes. The anime that would spark the dynamic growth of the anime and manga fandom in the United States came across the Pacific in the late 1970s and the 1980s, but these series and movies did not arrive unchanged. As Brian Ruh notes “Such [television] shows took the source animation as a kind of raw material and completely rewrote the stories to make them something unique for presentation to American audiences.”<sup>79</sup> Japanese programs almost never made it to U.S. screens without “translation” and adaptation. Distributors changed cultural references, edited visual symbolism, and in many cases censored sexual or violent content they deemed inappropriate for the U.S. market.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes, especially in these earlier instances, distributors altered primary relationships between characters and substantially altered the very plots of the Japanese works.<sup>81</sup> As James Rampant comments, “this was a ham-fisted practice of

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Brian Ruh, “Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s: Localization and Longevity,” in *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 31

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 31-32

naturalization to say the least.”<sup>82</sup> Some series were nonetheless phenomenally successful in the U.S. market and abroad, and works such as *Battle of the Planets* (1978), *Voltron* (1984), and *Robotech* (1985) remain part of fan culture today.<sup>83</sup> The repercussion of this success was twofold: it taught American importers that changing the original source material was both effective and accomplishable as a marketing and distribution method, and it stimulated a dramatic increase in fan interest and participation.

Many new fans were surprised to discover exactly how thoroughly different the originals of their favorite shows were from the U.S. versions. Frederick Schodt expressed the opinion of many fans when he wrote “Many shows have been ruined by being placed in time slots for small children, where their complex plots are reedited and censored.”<sup>84</sup> Written in 1983, his book *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* was the first history of manga to be published in the United States, and is fascinating both for its history and for the opinions of early fans. As Schodt continues, “With the exception of the growing legion of fans who catch the raw animation shown on local Japanese-language broadcasts, most American TV viewers [of edited and localized anime] are unaware that they are watching Japanese animation, let alone animation based on Japanese comics.”<sup>85</sup> Importantly, when anime and manga came to the U.S. in the 1980s they were most often taken up by the fan communities in the inverse order of their original production in Japan. Jason Bainbridge and Craig Norris explain, “Whereas in Japan, it was

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<sup>82</sup>James Rampant, “The Manga Polysystem: What Fans Want, Fans Get,” in *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Toni Johnson-Woods (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 222.

<sup>83</sup>Ruh, “Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s,” 34-36. All three of these shows aired under different titles in Japan. *Battle of the Planets* was *Science Ninja Team Gatchaman* (1972). *Voltron* was a compilation of *King of Beasts GoLion* (1981) and *Armored Fleet Dairugger XV* (1982). *Robotech* was primarily *Superdimensional Fortress Macross* (1982), but included pieces of *Genesis Climber Mospeada* (1983), and *Superdimensional cavalry Southern Cross* (1984).

<sup>84</sup>Frederick L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1983), 156.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid*, 156.

almost invariably the manga which gave birth to the anime, in the West manga was more popularly thought of as one of the many adjuncts to anime.”<sup>86</sup> Spurred by their interest in versions of shows imported to the U.S., fans sought out both the original shows and the manga that spawned them. *Robotech* (made up of three different original shows) and *Ranma ½* (published in the U.S. in 1993 in a “flipped” or reverse-image format) are especially notable for spurring fan interest and investigation.<sup>87</sup> As the number of fans grew, some fans began to bypass their American corporate intermediaries and delve into the Japanese realm of anime directly.

These fans began to contact their counterparts in Japan to acquire shows. Some used their access to U.S. programming, such as *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica*, to trade for anime tapes from Japanese fans.<sup>88</sup> Even as their supply of the animation they loved increased, American fans faced numerous challenges, most notably the language barrier. As Antonia Levi comments, “Early fans of anime either learned to speak Japanese or watched Japanese videotapes with an English script clutched in one hand.”<sup>89</sup> Anime was fugitive, elusive, and limited. Thus American fans learned work together to acquire materials. By exchanging tapes and scripts by mail, fans all over the United States were able to see more and more anime. As more fans learned Japanese, they combined to create the product that would lead to the most dramatic growth in fans and tremendous conflict with the industry: the fansub.

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<sup>86</sup> Jason Bainbride and Craig Norris, “Hybrid Manga: Implications for the Global Knowledge Economy,” in *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Toni Johnson-Woods (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 236.

<sup>87</sup> Ruh, “Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s,” 37. and Meredith Suzanne Hahn Aquila, “Ranma ½ Fan Fiction Writers: New Narrative Themes or the Same Old Story?” in *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire*, ed. French Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 38.

<sup>88</sup> Sean Leonard, “Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress: Fan Distribution, Proselytization Commons, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation,” *UCLA Entertainment Law Review*, vol 2. Issue 12, (UCLA: 2005), 11.

<sup>89</sup> Antonia Levi, “The Americanization of Anime and Manga: Negotiating Popular Culture,” in *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*, ed. Steven T. Brown, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 46.

Fansubs to this day constitute one of the great pillars of anime fandom. Ian Condry explains the process: “Fansubbing is the practice whereby groups of overseas fans of Japanese animated films and TV shows... digitize, translate add subtitles to, and make available online unauthorized copies of TV series and films.”<sup>90</sup> Although fansubbing occurred before the advent of digital technology and the internet, as Condry’s definition indicates, those technological advances dramatically reduced the effort necessary to create fansubs while exponentially increasing the ease with which they could be shared.<sup>91</sup> Thus, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the fansub world took off both in production in consumption, as Japanese-speaking fans provided the means by which non-Japanese speaking fans could easily enjoy an ever-increasing amount of anime. These early fansubs expanded the audience and popularity of anime and manga by creating imports that were far closer to the original Japanese source material than the re-imagined and dubbed shows brought over by publishers and studios for official distribution. Fansubs thus filled two voids for the growing anime and manga fandom: the quantity of shows imported to the U.S. and the quality of the localization of those shows.

Fansubs, however, occupied a very tenuous legal position, and were vulnerable to the whims and decisions of the media and culture industries. As Condry points out, fansubs by their very nature are unauthorized; the vast legal ambiguity of fansubbing has induced significant friction between fans and the media culture industries. U.S. copyright law is heavily weighted towards the owners of intellectual property (both the actual creators and the commercial distributors), and thus creating with material that has already been copyrighted is legally very risky.<sup>92</sup> Lawrence Lessig observes that today’s copyright laws are frequently unclear, and the

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<sup>90</sup> Ian Condry, “Dark Energy: What Fansubs Reveal about the Copyright Wars,” in *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies*, ed. Frenchy Lunning, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 194.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 200.

<sup>92</sup> Leonard, “Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress,” 13.

line between directly copying and building upon someone else's work is "a distinction that the law no longer cares to draw."<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Lessig argues that rather than protecting authors or consumers, current copyright law primarily serves to protect industries against competition.<sup>94</sup> Siva Vaidhyathan notes that these laws have a "chilling effect" on creating new works, and both researchers agree that copyright and intellectual property law has intimidated the general public.<sup>95</sup> In spite of this highly unfavorable situation, fansubbers continued their legally murky work throughout the 1990s and 2000s, producing hundreds of series and thousands of episodes.<sup>96</sup>

When fansubs first became available, and even after they became widely available and heavily consumed online, most Japanese production companies and their U.S. distributors took no action. In his legal examination of fansubbing and its relationship to the media and culture industries, Sean Leonard describes this inaction as "*strategic ignorance*."<sup>97</sup> He explains, "In this model, a rights holder does not wish to authorize the use [of their material]; rather, the holder wishes to seek benefits that result from the unauthorized use. The rights holder allows the requestor to bear the risk of the use."<sup>98</sup> Effectively using these extralegal means, the American distributors initially neither hindered nor approved fansubbing, waiting to see what effect the fansubs would have. As evidenced by the size of the anime and manga fandom today, the questionably legal productions greatly increased the popularity of Japanese cultural products in the U.S. As they did so, however, the fansubbers became victims of their own success.

As the U.S. market for Japanese cultural products grew, distributors began to import and dub more and more shows. In many cases, the shows they brought over the Pacific were those

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<sup>93</sup> Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Creativity* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>94</sup> Lessig, *Free Culture*, 19.

<sup>95</sup> Siva Vaidhyathan, *Copyrights and Copywrongs: The Rise of Intellectual Property and How It Threatens Creativity* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 17-18.

<sup>96</sup> Anime-access.com as of 8 April 2012 has 1,925 anime series posted, with 75, 505 total uploads

<sup>97</sup> Leonard, "Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress," 14.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

that were already popular as fansubs; they had effectively used the fansubbers to distribute and test market their products for them. Companies were trying to sell products that the fansubbers had already advertised, but now the fansubs were essentially free versions of what the distributors were trying to sell; it was as if the distributors had saturated their own market by giving away thousands of promotional copies. Distributors began to crack down on fansubbers and work to get fansubs removed, enjoying the benefits of their strategic ignorance. Having allowed the fansubbers to use material illegally in order to build the market for anime, distributors now wanted to shut them down; able to deny any knowledge of these fan activities, these companies threatened legal action against fans who did not obey.<sup>99</sup> In many cases, such as Onemanga.com (shut down in August 2010), the threat was enough.<sup>100</sup> For some fansubbers, the attention of the media and culture industry represented a form of success, and from those fansubbers emerged the idea of “ethical fansubbing.”<sup>101</sup>

Negative attention from American distributors forced many fansubbers to critically consider their work and to justify their continued activity. Ian Condry points out the conflicting nature of fansubbing, “although fans feel little compunction about breaking copyright law, they...tend to maintain a deference to ideas of promoting markets, at least up to a point.”<sup>102</sup> Fansubbers have always viewed their work as being easily morally justifiable based on the premise that they are breaking the law in order to build the popularity of anime in the U.S. As Condry continues, “Much of the fansubbing discourse begins with the first principle, ‘What is good for anime?’ Although some fansub groups accept ‘donations’ to offset the costs of

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Onemanga.com was a notable scanlation site and very popular with fans of the major manga series *Naruto*. Onemanga.com attempted to follow “ethical fansubbing” but attracted too much industry attention anyway. “OM Shutdown Update” *Onemanga.com*, posted 1 August 2010, accessed 8 April 2012 <http://forum.onemanga.com/showthread.php?t=87843>

<sup>101</sup> Condry, “Dark Energy,” 203.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 195.

bandwidth, they often distribute their translations with the stipulation that their fansubs are ‘not for sale, rent, or eBay.’<sup>103</sup> Fansubbers maintain that they have never profited from their work and have done it strictly for the benefit of promoting the media they love to the rest of the U.S. Many fansubbers believe that without their efforts the fan community would neither be as vibrant or profitable as it is today. They thus seek to position themselves distinct from bootleggers and pirates by a defense that they are supporting the market by operating outside its ultimate goal of profit. Lacking any commercial goal, fans maintain that they are not pirates.<sup>104</sup> These fans sought a middle ground with distributors from where they could continue to produce fansubs and promote anime, but could do so in a way that did not compete with the economic goals of the distributors. Ethical fansubbing was this compromise.

Though riddled with grey areas, ethical fansubbing establishes a hierarchy of programming eligible for translation based on a show’s status within the distribution industry. Condry gives this hierarchy, from most to least ethical, “1. fansubs of unlicensed shows 2. fansubs of shows licensed but not yet released on DVD in the United States 3. fansubs of shows licensed and released as DVDs 4. rips (i.e., direct copies) of released DVDs”<sup>105</sup> Although Condry’s list is by no means definitive, it does provide an excellent general guideline as to how fans see their activities fitting into the industry. Moreover, ethical fansubbing demands that fansubbers cease providing their work when directly asked to by the license holder of a specific show. Ethical fansubbing was widely adopted across the fansub community.<sup>106</sup> Given all these restrictions, why would fansubbers even want to continue this work, let alone fight to do so? The answer lies in status.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 203-204.

<sup>104</sup> Lessig, *Free Culture*, 62.

<sup>105</sup> Condry, “Dark Energy,” 204.

<sup>106</sup> Leonard, “Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress,” 28.

The earliest fansubbers were in many ways patriarchs of anime fandom. They enjoyed a status of provider for other fans; without them, others would have no access to the media they all enjoyed. Their knowledge, privileged access to media, and achievements gave fansubbers a very high status within the greater anime and manga fan community. As technology advanced, more fansub groups developed, and they began to compete with each other.<sup>107</sup> The groups found numerous categories in which to compete, including the visual appeal of the sub, the amount of additional cultural information included, the seamlessness of visual editing and timing, and more. Groups vied with one another to produce the versions consumed by the larger fan community, while critiquing each others' work and tracking consumption activity through internet forums and download sites. Emerging from this competition was a new kind of status. Rather than being members of a tiny few providers, fansubbers now worked to be the best of many providers. Within the community the results of this goal range dynamically. At its best it is extremely positive as Condry describes, "Clearly fansubbers are motivated in part by a commitment to craftsmanship and a desire to have that sensibility appreciated by viewers."<sup>108</sup> However, the quest for status risks the loss of viewers' respect for fansubbers. Levi writes, "Although first and foremost a labor of love, one fan suggested to me that such efforts might also be seen as a 'glory-grabbing contest'"<sup>109</sup> Either way, gaining status and admiration as well as recognition of technical ability have definitively motivated fansubbers. With this in mind, it follows that fansubbers did not take kindly to being brushed aside and legally bullied by anime distributors. Fansubbers feel they deserve credit for building up the fandom, and enjoy the high status accorded to them as a

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<sup>107</sup> Condry, "Dark Energy," 202.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>109</sup> Levi, "The Americanization of Anime and Manga," 47.

result (indeed “ego” is cited by fans as a reason to become a fansubber).<sup>110</sup> These elite fans were naturally loathe to relinquish the fruits of their labors to industrial publishers and distributors.

The issue upon which fansubbers have staked their claim to anime is localization. There fans found an issue that was both pertinent to their desires for improved professional importations and provided an issue pretext to argue for continued fansubbing within the bounds of the community’s “ethics.” Ethics are not trivial to fans: Levi observes that “most fans and clubs...made it a point of honor to destroy fansubs once acceptable legal copies became available.”<sup>111</sup> Yet fansubbers challenged the culture industries over what a release needed to accomplish to be “acceptable,” thereby vying with the companies for control of meaning and parameters of value. Fans charged that the distributors, in their efforts to make anime appeal to the broadest tastes of American consumers, had created releases that did not do justice to their Japanese originals. Fans drew battle lines around localization, and within that “accuracy” and “authenticity.” We can only analyze the status of these battles by understanding the significances of such terms for the community. Both have their origin in the early days of anime importation, and some of the most inferior localized anime. One such importation and localization, *Warriors of the Wind* (1985), is a particularly enlightening example.

Fans today would claim that the localization of *Warriors of the Wind* committed every cardinal sin possible in translation. Yet that opinion masks the deeper implications of the fan community’s vehement and continued rejection of the film. The localization of *Warriors of the Wind* included substantial cuts, re-editing, and major story simplification from the Japanese original. Nevertheless, *Warriors of the Wind* suffered disproportionately in release compared to

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<sup>110</sup> 8thSin, 18 March 2012, “Fan Translation Guide,” *8thSin Fansubs Anime Blog*, accessed 9 April 2012, <http://8ths.in/fantranslation-guide/>

<sup>111</sup> Levi, “The Americanization of Anime and Manga,” 47.

other anime of its time.<sup>112</sup> Released just one year after *Voltron* (1984) achieved great success concurrently with the very popular *Robotech, Warriors of the Wind* was a commercial failure in its own time. The methods used to localize the film alone cannot explain this, as Brian Ruh notes, “there does not seem to be anything unusual in the way *Warriors of the Wind* was handled.”<sup>113</sup> Rather, the film suffered because the fan community saw it (and continues to see it) as a horrendous butchering of a cult text.

Produced for the U.S. market, *Warriors of the Wind* was the localized version of Hayao Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), one of the great cult texts of the anime fan communities in both Japan and the U.S. Matt Hills gives three qualities necessary for a text to attain “cult” status: auteurism, endlessly deferred narrative, and hyperdiegesis.<sup>114</sup> These qualities must all simultaneously coexist in a single work in order for it to become a cult piece. Ruh explains “auteurism:” “Cult texts are the work of a singular creative individual (or are perceived as being so).”<sup>115</sup> This sense of mastery, that the cult text is the result of a single individual whose vision and understandings of the work are the final god-like word on analysis is vital, because it makes modification to the work a blasphemy on that individual’s creation. Ruh also interprets “endlessly deferred narrative” as the existence of “overriding questions presented to the characters in the text that are never fully resolved.”<sup>116</sup> Jenkins greatly improves this simpler interpretation by adding that the text “must provide resources consumers can use in constructing their own fantasies.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, in order to become a cult text, a work must not only present fundamental questions that remain unresolved, but also must contain a variety of hints

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<sup>112</sup> Ruh, “Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s,” 43-44.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>114</sup> Hills, *Fan Cultures*, 131.

<sup>115</sup> Ruh, “Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s,” 44.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>117</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 100.

and indications of possible answers to those questions which fans may then use to construct original stories in the context of the original. “Hyperdiegesis” entails that “the events take place in a rich environment,”<sup>118</sup> again Jenkins elaborates, “the work must be encyclopedic, containing a rich array of information that can be drilled, practiced, and mastered by devoted consumers.”<sup>119</sup> Finally, Umberto Eco elucidates that this depth creates a “completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the private sectarian world.”<sup>120</sup> As these authors have indicated, a cult text must provide viewers with the resources to interact with the tiniest of details; this not only provided knowledge distinctions between fans, but also allows the cult world a realism approximating the real world. Based on these criteria, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is ideally suited to be a cult text.

*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* definitively exhibits every aspect of a classic cult text. Auteurism is the most immediately obvious quality of the film, as its director was the famed Hayao Miyazaki. Anime expert Susan Napier has called Miyazaki, “Japan’s, and arguably the world’s, greatest living animator,”<sup>121</sup> and indeed nearly every film he has created has obtained cult status. Miyazaki’s personal charisma and creative genius mean that he exercises considerable control over each of his films, and he can therefore be identified as an auteur; indeed, his films are frequently perceived as the products of his individual vision. Napier writes that “this vision is... perhaps most importantly, of *what could be*.”<sup>122</sup> As Napier suggests, Miyazaki’s firm reputation as a master storyteller rests in part on his films’ ambiguous endings; each seemingly reveals potential for further adventures. Each work seems to offer only the

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<sup>118</sup> Ruh, “Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s,” 44.

<sup>119</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 99.

<sup>120</sup> Umberto Eco, “*Casablanca*: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage,” *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1986), 198.

<sup>121</sup> Susan Napier, “The World of Anime Fandom in America,” in *Mechademia 1: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga*, ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 48.

<sup>122</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 123.

smallest taste of its characters and their adventures to viewers, and “what could be” is almost always left to the viewer’s imagination. Further, a critical part of what has made Miyazaki and his films so famous is his fantastic world-building ability: every film has a different and expansive world. Hyperdiegesis requires a level of detail that subsumes immersion and approximates realism, both in the visual texture and in minutiae, and Miyazaki’s worlds definitively achieve this. As Napier describes, “The viewer finds in each film a topography that is exotic (or even totally alien, like *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*’s future world), but at the same time so richly realized down to minute details that it seems at least potentially contiguous to our own world.”<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Miyazaki’s works are ideally suited to becoming cult texts; his unnumbered characters have infinite potential in limitless worlds that are “always recognizable Miyazaki creations. His intensely colored animated landscapes filled with his trademark images of flying machines, soaring clouds, and supernatural creatures take on a breathtaking life of their own.”<sup>124</sup> The U.S. version, *Warriors of the Wind* was and is reviled not due to localization per se, but rather because that localization violated the nature of Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* as a cult text of the community. By making any changes to the film whatsoever, let alone the drastic cuts made in the original release, the American importers were seen by fans as irrevocably abusing Miyazaki’s vision of the film and thus making the characters and their world suspect and illegitimate. Compared to fan released subs of the film, the industry release was relegated away as junk. For fans, “accuracy” means closeness to the Japanese original – that is to say – closeness to the original intent of the cult “auteur.”

*Warriors of the Wind* remains relevant decades after its fouled release because the fandom now treats almost all media from Japan as cult text. The fandom has evolved a sense of

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 122-123.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 122.

“Japan” itself as an auteur, and thus reacts just as violently to alterations to any of text from Japan as it did to the alterations that created *Warriors of the Wind*. Condry writes that, “fansubs represent an effort to make up for perceived industry short-comings,”<sup>125</sup> but those shortcomings changed over time. In the earliest days the fan community faced its greatest difficulty in the industry’s paltry importation. Little anime at all came to the United States, and a small cadre of fans worked to increase the flow across the Pacific. They established networks of communication and exchange, and simultaneously encouraged and recruited more fans. Distributors, such as US Renditions and Animeigo, saw the success of early shows and began to bring more programs across the Pacific.<sup>126</sup> With the industry growing, fans turned their attention to the quality of the localization in these newly imported shows.<sup>127</sup> Here they were severely disappointed, and thus fansubbing activities greatly increased, as fans made for themselves what industry did not provide. Even as the quality of professional localization began to increase, fans remained far more trusting of the shows localized by other fans. Forum poster “DmonHiro” illustrates how this attitude has persisted, writing of commercially released anime: “The audio/video is 🤔 Timing's a little 🤔”<sup>128</sup> Moreover, fansubbers protected their claim to localize anime based on the accuracy of their work, charging that their interpretations remained far closer to the Japanese originals, and were thereby more valid. Another poster, a fansubber called “Rika-Chama” humorously characterized the reaction of fans to non-literal translation: “most people recoil in horror because ‘HOW DARE YOU CHANGE MY GLORIOUS NIHONGO [Japanese

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<sup>125</sup> Condry, “Dark Energy,” 203.

<sup>126</sup> Lawrence Eng, “Anime and Manga Fandom as Networked Culture,” *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, ed. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, Izumi Tsuji (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 162.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>128</sup> DmonHiro, 10 April 2011, reply to “How to Become a Good Fan Translator – Guide,” *AnimeSuki Forum*, accessed 12 April 2012

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showthread.php?s=b4651a7629b2b4085f00de7adc09e8ca&t=103272>

language] INTO SOMETHING THAT ISN'T DIRECTLY WHAT IT'S SAYING”<sup>129</sup> Yet this divisive issue of localization has persisted and continues to shape the identity of the fan community; though many fans would be loathe to acknowledge it, the conflict has become necessary to the fan community.

The anime and manga fan community began as an extremely small and tight-knit community. Even once the video cassette sharing networks were established in the 1980s, and in spite of the resultant growing popularity of anime and manga, the community remained very marginal until the explosion of the internet in the 1990s. The importance of the internet to the growth of the anime and manga fandom is paramount; Napier describes it as “the single most important instrument in creating the anime fan ‘community.’”<sup>130</sup> The internet allowed quick global collaborations to make fansubs. Once limited to the privileged few who received edited video tapes. Fandom was now available to anyone who had access to a computer and bandwidth. Forums, link lists, and download bays cropped up in large numbers. This growth has continued as the fandom expands, and as Condry writes, “Today, the sharing of fan material has exploded online.”<sup>131</sup> The accompanying explosion of availability has allowed the anime and manga fandom to grow to its largest size yet, with entire websites, forums, and fansub groups devoted to single shows.<sup>132</sup> However, as Jenkins writes, “This increased visibility and cultural centrality has been a mixed blessing for a community used to speaking from the margins.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Rika-chama, 15 August 2011, reply to “How to Become a Good Fan Translator – Guide,” *AnimeSuki Forum*, accessed 12 April 2012

<http://forums.animesuki.com/showthread.php?s=b4651a7629b2b4085f00de7adc09e8ca&t=103272>

<sup>130</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 136.

<sup>131</sup> Condry, “Dark Energy,” 200.

<sup>132</sup> See Wannabe Fansubs: <http://www.wannabefansubs.org/tenma/index.php?> (Accessed 6 April 2012)

Kaizoku Fansubs: <http://www.kaizoku-fansubs.com/> (Accessed 6 April 2012)

Doremi Fansubs: <http://www.doremi-fansubs.com/index.php> (Accessed 6 April 2012)

<sup>133</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*, 142.

The mainstreaming of the anime and manga fandom has caused a significant amount of internal conflict within the community. As Jenkins continues, “Fandom’s expanded scope can leave fans feeling alienated from the expanding numbers of strangers entering their community. This rapid expansion outraces any effort to socialize new members.”<sup>134</sup> This alienation leads to consolidations of older community members, which in turn excludes newer members. As fansubber “mizune” wrote in his post providing a guide for fansubbing etiquette: “As technology has enabled more people to participate and the drama fansubbing community has grown, we’ve tried our best to encourage more fansubbers to participate while minimizing the friction between groups as the entire community transitions from ‘how things used to be’ to ‘how things are’. In the past, we saw some pretty nasty conflicts which led to unfortunate results”<sup>135</sup> Moreover, “mizune” suggested that any fansub group conflicts be worked out privately, rather than in front of other members on the open forum.<sup>136</sup> These kinds of posts are clear evidence of internal conflict in the community.

Forum seniority is another example of internal conflict. Posters with an earlier registration date and a large number of postings receive deference, while posters with recent registration dates and few posts are not taken seriously by older members. A conversation among three forum members on the “Animesuki Forums” is a powerful illustration of this. Poster “Aaerul” (join date 2009) asked, “For the most part I see the Visual Novel people they just stick to IRC [internet relay chat] mostly a very closed circle thing (some are on /jp/). Where do you hang as a fan translator?” To which “TheFluff” (join date 2005) replied, “Internet elitism rule of thumb: if you have to ask where <group of elitist people> hangs out, the answer is most likely

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>135</sup> mizune, 20 April 2008 (2:32pm), “Fansubber Guidelines Rev 2 (Draft),” *D-Addicts Forum*, accessed 6 April 2012

[http://www.d-addicts.com/forum/viewtopic\\_60545.htm](http://www.d-addicts.com/forum/viewtopic_60545.htm)

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

‘where they can avoid having to talk to people like you’. Also, if you're not on IRC you're not a real internet person.” Finally, “DreGon45” (join date 2011) wrote (to TheFluff), “Spoken like a true elitist. I bow to you sir.”<sup>137</sup> In this conversation a newer forum member asks how to find groups and become included in the community. A more senior member effectively tells him that if he does not already know how to get involved he is specifically not welcome. Finally, the least senior of the three (DeGon45) pays reverence to the oldest member, *specifically for his exclusionary remarks*.

Further, failure to socialize new members intensifies this exclusion, as those with a deeper knowledge belittle those who have not been properly “initiated” into the community, initiation being the acceptance of community standards, views, and habits in relation to anime and manga. Jenkins contends that the maintenance of these standards as vital to the fandom’s existence as a community. Jenkins defines a “cultural community” as “one which shares a common mode of reception, a common set of critical categories and practices, a tradition of aesthetic production and a set of social norms and expectations.”<sup>138</sup> Therefore, were the anime and manga fandom to sacrifice any of these evolved practices and expectations it could no longer continue as a full community, and revealingly, all are established and defended through the fandom’s conflict with the American commercial distributors over localization.

Utterly dependent on culture industries fans define themselves through their conflict with them. It is against the culture industries that the fandom has developed and solidified its critical categories and practices, aesthetic production, and social norms and expectations—in effect, its rules for membership. John Fiske asserts in his analysis of cultural alliances, “All social allegiances have not only a sense of *with whom*, but also *against whom*: indeed I would argue

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<sup>137</sup> “Where do fan translators hang?” 11 December 2011, *AnimeSuki Forum*, accessed 6 April 2012 <http://forums.animesuki.com/showthread.php?s=b4651a7629b2b4085f00de7adc09e8ca&t=108912>

<sup>138</sup> John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science Fiction Audiences* (London: Routledge, 1995), 144.

that the sense of oppositionality, the sense of difference, is more determinant than that of similarity.”<sup>139</sup> Here, Fiske observes in popular culture the same process of identification through exclusion, and reduction to us/them dichotomy, argued by Hall and enunciated by Anderson.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, as Anderson reminds us “No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind,”<sup>141</sup> and thus all communities create themselves through the othering of those around them. The older segment of the fandom maintains its staunch stance against industrial localization in reaction to those fans’ early negative experiences with localizations such as *Warriors of the Wind*, but that opinion (though somewhat outdated) is vital today to keeping the community’s collective identity rather than allowing it to become alienating.

The internet has obviated much of the face to face contact considered critical to community by early fans. Napier writes that “most older fans remember the culture of videotapeing with fond nostalgia...the intimacy of the exchanges, the pleasure of finding something new and different, and the almost total lack of commercialization during that period, a far cry, many suggest from what is like now.”<sup>142</sup> Napier’s interviews are revealing as they illustrate both desire for lost intimacy and direct sense of community and a continuing resistance to professionally imported media. Moreover, these older fans bemoan the loss of “the particular pleasure of being part of a small and very specialized community of cognoscenti.”<sup>143</sup> The internet has catalyzed a tremendous growth in the fandom and removed most face to face contact. In order to perpetuate the “horizontal comradeship” described by Anderson that is necessary to perpetuate the sense of community, by enforcing the tastes and rules of the original

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<sup>139</sup> Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 20.

<sup>140</sup> Hall, “Who Need Identity?” 5 and Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

<sup>141</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

<sup>142</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 135.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

community. Following, or failing to grasp, these “rules and codes of behavior”<sup>144</sup> has become a defining distinguishing quality for the initiated of the fandom.

As the anime fandom grows, distinguishing between the socialized and the uninitiated has become ever more important for its members. The growth of the community is staggering. A single convention in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2010, Otakon 17, had 29,274 people in attendance.”<sup>145</sup> In a community rapidly swelling, “older fans committed to traditional norms” need to distinguish between themselves and newer “fans who have asserted their rights to redefine fandom on their own terms,” and preserve their conception of the community.<sup>146</sup> Older fans have worked to preserve the fandom as they believe it should be by establishing a hierarchy that discriminates between the socialized “hardcore” fans and the pejoratively termed “casual” fans.<sup>147</sup> As new fans join the community, many desire to become part of this higher circle of acceptance, and thus accept the standards of the older fans. Socialization into this hierarchy is marked by watching the right series, watching them in Japanese, not English, and watching them as released by community fansubbers, not as officially released by the American culture industry.

Today such enforcement of proper behavior extends all the way to conflict over *which* subtitling of a series should be watched.<sup>148</sup> Subtitled editions produced by the culture industry are out of the question: they are perceived as leaving out vital cultural information and are never legally available for free. Fansubs, on the other hand are always offered for free, as fansubbers perceive themselves as craftsmen aiding and educating their fellow fans. As Condry explains, “The pedagogical orientation of fansubs, explaining words, *kana*, obscure references and jokes,

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>145</sup> “History: Stats,” *Otakon*, accessed 12 April 2012, [http://www.otakon.com/history\\_stats.asp](http://www.otakon.com/history_stats.asp)

<sup>146</sup> Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, Gamers*, 142.

<sup>147</sup> Levi, “The Americanization of Anime and Manga,” 58.

<sup>148</sup> “Which Fansub? Want to watch Naruto again,” 5 January 2012, *NarutoForums*, accessed 12 April 2012, <http://www.narutoforums.com/showthread.php?t=793642>

all reflect a desire to teach”<sup>149</sup> This teaching desire represents not only fans desire to educate other fans about Japan, but also their need to socialize new fans and maintain their personal status within the community. The fansub binds all the goals of the fansubbers into a single product, allowing them to be providers of media, instructors in how to interpret it, and enablers increasing fan participation in the “right” or socialized way.

Localization has been the most divisive issue between fans and distributors. Indeed, as I have demonstrated, fansubbing began as a reaction against severe localization and evolved as a service to other fans, a way to increase the number of fans, and a status symbol within the growing fan community. When this status become threatened by the evolving and expanding imports provided by the industry, fans defended it by emphasizing their resistance to industrial localization even further and increasing the level to which they refused to accept such localized material. Thus, the current fandom possesses a hierarchal status system in which the most active fans, the fansubbers, stand at the top and those who properly accept their productions and garner greater knowledge of them gain ever greater status beneath them.

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<sup>149</sup> Condry, “Dark Energy,” 203.

**Chapter 3: *Pure-Japan: Orientalism, Theory, and Evoking Existence***

The conflict between the American fans and the industrial importers of Japanese anime and manga has centered primarily on localization, but the effects of that battle have extended well beyond this singular concern. Although the fan community and the industry are mutually dependent – the community relying on the industry to increase the amount of cultural product brought to the United States, and the industry dependent on the fans to purchase their imported commodities – the relationship is asymmetrical. The industry is can control access to material through intellectual property laws, and it possesses far greater immediately applicable economic power than consumers. Fans, however, are able to influence public opinion, organize, and protest industry actions both economically and socially. Condry interprets fan activities as explicitly analogous to civil disobedience: the equivalent to fan’s resistance to unequal power relations in play.<sup>150</sup> This uneasy dependent-adversarial relation is complicated by the status-hierarchy of the fandom, at the top of which reside the fansubbers who import and distribute anime and manga to their fellow fans, independent of the commercial importers. Moreover, the fansubbers claim a moral and professional superiority to the industry. They rest their claim on altruism—that they offer their work free of charge, out of sheer love of the media, and on craft—their productions show greater care and are more faithful to the original. By “faithful,” fansubbers mean they preserve the “Japaneseness” of the originals; they devote vast numbers of hours to ensuring their work is as “accurate” as possible. Yet within their self-sacrificing efforts an ironic truth evades the community. Reacting against localization, the elite of the fandom have appointed themselves the American guardians of Japanese culture. Through their work on fansubs, they assert their right to interpret Japan for the rest of the country. Compounding this difficulty, the Japaneseness

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<sup>150</sup> Condry, “Dark Energy,” 203.

these fans seek to preserve is tragically not that of an actual Japan, but rather that of a fictional Orientalist “pure-Japan” of their own imagining.

Pure-Japan did not intentionally originate in the fan community; rather, it evolved through fandom’s complex development and conflict with the culture import industry. Fandom’s reaction against localization began as a protest against industry perversion of anime and manga, but once such producers improved to meet fan demands, they thereby threatened the status of fan importers. The fansubbers, thus continued their staunch stance against any kind of perceived localization. Moreover, fansubbers resisted any interpretive additions by producers. In effect, they viewed any kind of modification of Japanese media (save the addition of subtitles and superimposed written translations/explanations) as a theft of the product’s “Japaneseness.” Japaneseness – the unique qualities imbued to a product by virtue of its being Japanese – is an example of what Japanese scholar Koichi Iwabuchi calls “cultural odor.”<sup>151</sup> Thus, any tampering with a work’s Japanese cultural odor – especially mixing in any American cultural odor – was viewed by the community as unacceptable. Fans treated every piece of anime and manga from Japan as cult texts: they were relics from a sacred land.

Using Japaneseness as the mark of authenticity of a work, fans developed a sense of Japan as an auteur. Rather than communicating the vision of a story of an individual author or storyteller, however, Japan’s media was charged with communicating Japan itself to viewers. Japan’s auteurism carried a significantly deeper level of importance and authenticity, as fans were concerned not with complete understanding of each individual work, but rather with understanding Japan through each work. Thus, the ever-growing amount of anime and manga being imported to the United States by both the industry and fans (but especially the media

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<sup>151</sup> Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization*, 28.

imported by fans), was interpreted by the community and assembled into a database. This database was, in effect, a single giant cult text, with Japan as its auteur.

Recall that Matt Hills gave three qualities necessary for a work to be a cult text: a sense of auteurism, an endlessly deferred narrative, and hyperdiegesis. The fan's extensive collections of anime and manga thoroughly possess each of these characteristics, and localization represents a threat to limit them. Fans reify Japan itself as the auteur of the texts, communicating itself through them. Therefore to remove or modify any of the Japanese cultural odor from the works is to remove the auteur, and to ruin the purity of his vision. The limitless quantity of anime and manga being brought to the U.S. represents an endless number of narratives (many of which fail to definitively end in their own right), meaning that there is no foreseeable end to the narrative created by the auteur Japan. Localized narratives, however, cannot be accurately incorporated into the database, and therefore represent the death of narratives – the frightening possibility of an end to new content. Similarly, the boundless worlds created by Japanese authors in their works are all combined in the database, allowing the database to simultaneously incorporate every kind of setting from the medieval to the futuristic, and giving the database its own richly detailed hyperdiegesis. Localization represents a limit being placed on that hyperdiegesis. Localized works are recast in ways that are familiar to fans, and thereby incorporate familiar limits; by its very definition, hyperdiegesis must be limitless, and thus this process is unacceptable to fans. Fans create a narrative of Japan which they believe to be the very vision of Japan itself as auteur, one communicated to them through “Japaneseness,” one thereby highly accurate and authentic. The tragedy of this understanding is that fans have therefore replaced the multifaceted and complex narratives of Japan with the single narrative of pure-Japan. Pure-Japan is a culturally essentialist land born of the fans' database; a fantasy of displaced authenticity.

Therefore, pure-Japan is a distorted vision that must be analyzed through Edward Said's explanations of Orientalism.

### *Orientalism*

First published in 1978, *Orientalism* was a revolutionary work; today it remains an extremely influential and valuable text. Analyzing a vast range of works, Said narrates a broad worldview through which Europeans have viewed and continue to view Eastern countries and peoples and their cultures. Cultural studies scholar Sut Jhally says, "The central argument of *Orientalism* is that the way we acquire this knowledge [of the Orient] is not innocent or objective, but the end result of a process that reflects certain interests."<sup>152</sup> Those "certain interests" are necessarily imperial: though complicated and interwoven, ultimately, every factor of Orientalism is focused towards the domination of the Orient. Though unintentional, the fan community's pure-Japan is thoroughly Orientalist, and through it the community is thereby able to access and dominate Japan.

Said argues that the Orient was above all an object of Western knowledge. He lays the necessary methodological groundwork for analyzing Orientalists and their claims to authority. His two primary conceptual devices for this purpose, "*strategic location*" and "*strategic formation*,"<sup>153</sup> are both applicable to the anime and manga fandom. Referring to how an author positions himself to his text, "strategic location," he must position himself as the superior to the Orient based on criteria such as his knowledge and experience of it, and most importantly his separation from it (status as a westerner). As Said explains, "this location includes the kind of narrative voice he [the Orientalist] adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images,

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<sup>152</sup> University of Auburn Video Presentation, Part 1, 2:40, accessed 1 March 2011, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwCOSkXR\\_Cw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwCOSkXR_Cw)

<sup>153</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 20.

themes, motifs that circulate in his text—all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally representing it or speaking in its behalf.”<sup>154</sup> Through processes of acquiring, understanding, cultivating expertise, and representing anime and manga, (and through them, Japan) American fans strategically located themselves to gain power over narratives that produced a pure-Japan.

Just as the “Orient” is a world of western imagination, so too is pure-Japan. Indeed pure-Japan is itself an Orientalist narrative, a fictional representation of a real locale that empowers the viewer over the viewed. As Said writes, “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences”<sup>155</sup> Said could not have written a more fitting description of the ways readers perceive worlds of anime. The animators and directors who create anime did not manufacture such ideas. Their worlds are not meant to be accurate portrayals of the modern state of Japan, but rather, fantasies. However, these fantasies in turn provide the bases for the community’s projections. How could Japan then be anything save this incredible world of exoticism and romance?

Orientalism, as Said outlines it, removes the East from normal time and evolution. He argues that the “timeless Orient...unlike the West, doesn’t develop – it stays the same... it creates an image outside of history.”<sup>156</sup> The Orient is therefore outside of progress, outside of knowledge, fantasy, and even power. In this way the Orient is forever preserved as a subordinate and playground of imagination for the West; the Occident has agency that the Orient, by its nature, never obtain. The West has history: to be an Occidental is to be a product of history; the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>155</sup> Edward W. Said, “Orientalism,” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995), 87.

<sup>156</sup> University of Auburn, Part 1, 7:25.

East lacks history: Orientals exist and may be viewed in total historical isolation. As Said, writes, this is part of the objectification and otherization of the Orient which is vital to establishing Western superiority: “According to the traditional Orientalists, an essence should exist... which constitutes the inalienable and common basis of all the beings considered; this essence is both ‘historical,’ since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally a-historical, since it transfixes the being, ‘the object’ of study, within its inalienable and non-evolutive specificity.”<sup>157</sup> This isolation means that to visit the Orient now is to visit the same orient of Napoleon which was identical to the Orient of the Athenians. This understanding of the Orient as a place that stretches back to the beginning of time and yet exists outside of the narratives of history, evolution, and change startlingly resonates with the fan understandings of Japan through anime and manga.

Anime and manga have no temporal limits, which places them outside history. Anime and manga may take place in worlds from before recorded time to beyond the edge of human existence. Animation as a medium stretches the bounds of possibility, breaks and rebuilds laws of physics, and creates that which would never be possible in the real world. Susan Napier describes animation as “a protean art form,” for its potential to seamlessly transition from one image to another.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, animation has even been the focus of “posthuman”<sup>159</sup> studies. In anime and manga, worlds exist in every realm of history and every realm beyond history and for precisely this reason, the media exist outside of any kind of evolutive, progressive, or (most importantly) narrative history.

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<sup>157</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 97.

<sup>158</sup> Napier, *From Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 12.

<sup>159</sup> Christopher Bolton, “Introduction: The Limits of ‘The Limits of the Human,’” in *Mechademia 3: Limits of the Human*, ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xi.

Placing the Orient outside history seemingly flies in the face of basic logic and knowledge. Contemporary historians have shown that great civilizations have risen and fallen in the Orient, and that the East today most certainly differs in composition than the Orient of the first millennium. However, the Occident positions itself to claim authority to view and know the Orient. As Said explains, “The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a “fact” which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable.”<sup>160</sup> Thus even as the landscape of the Orient changes, even as empires are made and overthrown, the Orient remains a “fact” which cannot change, which exists entirely independently of history. The objectification of the Orient and the position of the West as the viewer and authority are key relationships to establishing Orientalism as a narrative for domination of the viewed by the viewer.

Orientalism establishes a mode of approaching culture designed to always provide the viewers of the Orient with the upper hand, both aiding and justifying conquest. By making the Orient a world outside of history, a place where anything is possible and order does not apply, the Orientalist both excites his own passion and justifies his conquest as the bringer of order. Essentially, a world where the conventional laws of the West do not apply demands ordering. It both offers escape to the Westerner and provides the illusion of needing the “civilizing” effect of his order. In keeping with the Orientalist ideal the landscape of pure-Japan is one to be ordered. With infinite possibility it demands systematic understanding and categorization. Importantly, Western Order must be established for Western participation. As participation is vital to the fan’s existence, he must thus apply his order to anime and manga. Fans execute this order as a community. In Orientalism the Westerner conquers the Orient through the application of

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<sup>160</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 32.

Western ordered understanding, and through it becoming “expert” on the Orient. In this tradition, fans apply their own order to understanding anime and manga and thereby gain “expert” status.

In Orientalism the West proves its superiority by becoming “expert” on the Orient; through neat categories, simplistic truths, and lore that can then be perpetuated. Thus the West believes itself the authority on the Orient – understanding the Orient far better than the Orient could ever understand itself. The Orientalist justifies this superior understanding through his understanding of Western logical order and ability to apply it to the Orient (something an Oriental could never accomplish). Accordingly, the Orient is necessarily otherized as a text for the Occident to understand and order. In this same way, American fans categorize and compartmentalize Japan through anime and manga. The media are literally texts through which fans interpret Japan. Becoming “expert” on anime and manga by garnering a large amount of knowledge about the two is accorded status in the community. Thus the fandom exalts those who effectively have the greatest knowledge of “Japan.” However, the fans have garnered knowledge not on Japanese self-representations, but rather have drawn from the media as filtered through American understandings and categorizations.

Essentially, American fans encounter Japan through a double layer of representation. The first is the media, anime and manga, which the community takes to represent Japan. However, barred by language from experiencing the media in its original form, the majority of fans can only receive it through the second layer: the elite fans who translate, interpret, and disseminate the media to them. This process inevitably is distancing, does not have to be harmful, but through Orientalism results in the limiting and containing of Japan. Said writes, “There is nothing especially controversial or reprehensible about such domestications of the exotic; they take place between all cultures... But what is more important still is the limited vocabulary and

imagery that impose themselves as a consequence.”<sup>161</sup> As the fan community has built a vocabulary and systems of understanding to talk about, produce, and consume anime and manga, it has contained Japan. This may seem counterintuitive – that an Orientalized Japan must be at once at limitless and completely bounded (and indeed, Said notes this as one of the great contradictions of Orientalisms) – but it makes sense: fandom discourse limits “Japan” to anime and manga, but within those media, Japan is limitless in narrative and interpretive potential. Once again, this emphasizes both the objectification of the Orient, that it may be contained and digested as a text, and the importance of position to this objectification. The reader of the text has power over it; again, the viewer holds power over the viewed.

Relative position is vital to this relationship: the West can only become expert on the Orient because it is outside the Orient; American fandom can only become expert on anime because fans are not creators, but interpreters. Said compels attention to this point as he writes, “I do not think this idea can be overemphasized. Orientalism is premised upon exteriority... the Orientalist... makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says.”<sup>162</sup> Separation is key to Orientalism, because it allows the West to objectify the Orient, and through that objectification otherize it. This otherizing is used to define and separate the two to create an “us” viewing an “it.”<sup>163</sup> For the anime and manga fandom such positioning is natural; as consumers of anime and manga are naturally viewers and media are texts. However, through this viewer-viewed relationship fans interpret Japan and gain power over it. Through their exteriority and position as viewers, fans appropriate Japan’s ability to speak and create their own representations for it.

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 21.

In Orientalism, once the other has been successfully viewed and understood, it can then be represented by the viewer. As Said continues “The principal product of this exteriority is of course representation... a highly artificial enactment of what a non-Oriental has made into a symbol for the whole Orient.”<sup>164</sup> Pure-Japan is this enactment, the symbol created by fans to represent Japan. In historical Orientalism, the West routinely consumes produced representations of the Orient, takes them not as representation but as the entire truth, and therefore asserts its claim to knowledge of the Orient. For the fan community the representation, pure-Japan, is taken as the whole because pure-Japan is the representation born of fan interpreted anime and manga, and are deemed the most faithful to the experience of “Japaneseness.” However, as Said notes, “The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.”<sup>165</sup> Yet in their importations, fans look for the versions that have the most fidelity precisely to the mythic narrative of “Japan.” The desire for this narrative spurs fans to engineer their representation, creating a “pure-Japaneseness.” Pure-Japaneseness is the fan community’s new benchmark of authenticity; fans judge localizations and expertise based on fidelity to the pure-Japan narrative. This is the essential part of the process of the Orientalist – representing the orient, and then further interpreting it and gaining increased expertise from and through his representations.

Said writes “To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. Authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it.’”<sup>166</sup> Similarly, in making Japan digestible through anime and manga, the community otherizes, textualizes, and gains power over it. To fans, Japan speaks through anime and manga, and is therefore unable to speak to the

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 32.

United States without the aid of those outside of it (the fans). As Said writes, “The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job.”<sup>167</sup> In reality, the Occident has knowledge (and therefore power) only of its representations of the East, not the complex realities (that defy generalization into a single narrative) of East Asia. Once the Orientalist narrative has been established, however, it becomes self-perpetuating. Said explains, “representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient.”<sup>168</sup> Similarly, once the fan community established the narrative of pure-Japan to represent Japan, the entire governance of the community, from its established traditions to its unspoken rules for gaining status, was implicated in continuing the pure-Japan narrative. Over its long history Orientalist discourse has grown to perpetuate the substitution of Orientalist representations for Oriental reality, just as the institutions of the fan community perpetuate pure-Japan. This process culminates in what is described by Said as “strategic formation.”

The second of Said’s primary methodologies, strategic formation constitutes “a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large.”<sup>169</sup> Strategic formation is the process by which Orientalist texts position themselves relative to each other, and then eventually garner cultural influence. Naturally, the authors of the texts actually position them, but many Orientalist authors are unaware of precisely the life their creations will take on once made. Strategic formation has a way of occurring organically, without the conscious knowledge of those who cause it. Each work

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 20.

is associated with previous works, and serves as a basis for future works. As Said clarifies, “Each work on the Orient *affiliates* itself with other works, with audiences, with institutions, with the Orient itself.<sup>170</sup> Works on the Orient become tied not only to all such work that spawned them and follow after them, but also to those who read them, and the places where they can be found. These works are so deeply embedded within this ever-expanding web of Orientalism, and that web expands so quickly, that they become barely distinguishable from one another as all are nigh inseparably intertwined with the Orient itself. Thus, this growing web of works forms a limitless representation of the Orient that completely replaces all but the merest shreds of actuality. As Said concludes, “The ensemble of relationships between works, audiences, and some particular aspects of the Orient therefore constitutes an analyzable formation... whose presence in time, in discourse, in institutions (schools, libraries, foreign services) gives it strength and authority.”<sup>171</sup> Essentially, strategic formation explains how a single Orientalist representation narrative grows and supplants many and multifaceted other narratives. The process is distinctly present in the construction of pure-Japan and its substitution for the complexities of narrative in Japan.

### *Pure-Japan*

Pure-Japan is a representation narrative created by the fan community. It is important to note that just as Orientalism is not a narrative built by a single individual, so too is pure-Japan a narrative constructed by numerous individuals. Strategic formation describes how an Orientalist narrative is assembled and perpetuated by unnumbered authors who simultaneously influence each other. As Said writes “Every writer on the Orient... assumes some Oriental precedent, some

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 20.

previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies.”<sup>172</sup> Each new fansubber is aware (by the very nature of his consumption of fansubbed media) of those who have come before him. His understanding and interpretations of Japan are necessarily defined through the lens of pure-Japan, because he has viewed Japan through the anime and manga that have been filtered by the earlier elites of the fan community. In this way, he will come to perpetuate their Orientalist ideas and interpretations. Similarly, the entire fandom consumes the work of an elite few who produce the media; therefore, they also must view Japan in the lens of pure-Japan built by their elites. Thus the pure-Japan narrative is self-sustaining. Once established, all future works are affiliated with the narrative, indeed, entwined with it, so that the pure-Japan narrative only continues to expand and compile within the fan community. There is no escape route to direct and unmediated experience. Said stresses the organic, and even necessary, way in which this compilation occurs in Orientalism. He writes, “I use the notion of strategy simply to identify the problem every writer on the Orient has faced: how to get hold of it, how to approach it, how not to be defeated or overwhelmed by its sublimity, its scope, its awful dimensions.”<sup>173</sup> For anime and manga fans, the vastness of Japan (and the multitude of narratives through which to describe it) could threaten their claims to authority; it is vital to the established fandom that new fans interpret anime and manga from the productions of their forbears. In this case, as in Said’s Orientalism, these fans learn from, add to, and thereby perpetuate an Orientalist representation narrative, pure-Japan.

At its core, Orientalism boils down to the specific empowerment of the viewer over the viewed, through the replacement of a Japanese authored the narrative by a representative narrative created by the viewer to control the viewed. This representative narrative is born of

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 20.

“certain associations with the East—not quite ignorant, not quite informed,”<sup>174</sup> and is produced, compiled, and reproduced as a viewing community grows. Just as more Westerners visited the Orient with the narrative of Orientalism coloring their viewing and thereby added to the narrative, so too as more fans view anime and manga (and thereby Japan) through the narrative of pure-Japan, they add to the representation narrative. The viewer “articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes, the otherwise silent.”<sup>175</sup> Finally, the substitution of the representational narrative for a Japan authored narrative means that the Orient may only exist through the will of the West; Japan becomes pure-Japan and thereby only exists through the will of the fandom, giving the viewers the incredible “life-giving” power written of by Said. In the case of the fan community, however, there exists an interesting twist to this progression – their efforts position them superior to both Japan and the rest of the United States.

By establishing themselves as the only acceptable mediators between Japan and the United States, the elite of the fan community have given themselves “flexible *positional* superiority.”<sup>176</sup> However, most interesting is that their positional superiority is over both nations. This strategic location positions the fans outside of Japan and above the rest of America, as they are (by birth) Westerners, but are the portal through which their fellows must access Japan. Fansubbers are the elite of their fan community, and they produce the materials that are the very basis of the fandom for their fellow fans. The community supports these members, as it depends on them, and additionally accords them status. The work of this elite group of fans stands in opposition to the importations produced by the American culture industry. However, in order to gain status (and acceptance) in the community, new fans must accept the superiority of the fan

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 7.

produced work, thereby legitimating the elite fans as the only true bridge between Japan and the United States. The elite fans therefore stand at the top of the American access to Japan. They are positioned above Japan as gatekeepers through which anime must pass to reach the United States, and therefore also above their fellow Americans. This positioning is threatened by the industrial importation of anime and manga, and the competing narratives created by such importations.

Having gained a positional superiority through interpretation work, elite fans must hold their status position by remaining gatekeepers; cultural importation by non-fan sources represents a circumvention of fan authority, the potential for narratives that differ from pure-Japan and are therefore a threat to it. The Orientalist representation narrative is dependent on its acceptance and consequent reproduction by future generations; pure-Japan cannot tolerate dissenting narratives and its creators must expunge them. This is not to imply that the narrative representations of Japan constructed by American corporations in their importations are actually representative of “Japan,” but rather they are *not* representative of pure-Japan, and therefore intolerable to the fan community. The two great contributions of industry localization, editing content and adding an English-language voice dub, are sacrilegious to pure-Japan advocates. The pure-Japan narrative is dependent upon the illusion or belief that it alone is the true narrative of Japan. Editing content literally represents removing some of the narrative. Moreover, English language represents an intrusion of the foreign into a narrative dependent on remaining a sacrosanct Orient. Corporate dubbing reveals fansubbers’ own “national” place in between Japan and the U.S.

The relationship between American anime and manga fans and Japan is atypical of a dominator-dominated balance: the vast majority fans believe Japan to be superior to the United States. Indeed, after interviewing numerous fans, Napier concluded, “Most anime fans when

questioned about why they liked anime answered in terms of what they perceived as Japanese superiority... versus American inferiority.”<sup>177</sup> Napier believes this preference for Japan originates in the quality of cultural products, noting Japanese cultural exports are dramatically more complex and higher quality than their American counterparts.<sup>178</sup> However, her conclusion does not account for the large number of American fans who do not only believe Japanese media to be superior, but also desire to become culturally Japanese. This desire takes numerous forms, such as adopting Japanese clothing, studying the Japanese language, and, of course, continuing to gain expertise on anime and manga. These fans do not, however, desire to become actually Japanese, but rather desire to become pure-Japanese; their narrative desire is for their own Orientalist narrative, rather than realities of the nation-state.

American fans do not seek to become members of the Japanese nation-state, a country just as complex, and facing just as many serious problems and challenges, as any other. Rather, they long for a world of fantasy and imagination, free from the bounds of reality and everyday life. Speaking as a fan, Roland Kelts writes, “At least for us [fans], Japanese narratives come from somewhere else—a somewhere that actually exists, where the rules are genuinely different and where the imagination seems boundless, free to explore.”<sup>179</sup> Pure-Japan is the narrative of this “somewhere,” and it is this narrative that American fans seek to maintain and participate in.

Thus, the American anime and manga fan community has built for itself a new nation: pure-Japan. Pure-Japan is (at its beginning) a fictional narrative, born of fan interpretations of Japan as viewed through anime and manga. The narrative is positioned between the U.S. and Japan, as a gate-keeper between them, and is therefore placed superior to both. Pure-Japan is an Orientalist narrative that grants fans power over the extant Japan, specifically the power to

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<sup>177</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 176.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

<sup>179</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 210.

interpret and represent it. The effects of Orientalism are many and varied, but the fundamental and basic process of it is simple: replacing what exists, the viewed, with a distorted representation created by the viewer. This process is specific to Orientalism, as opposed to any interpretation, because the Orientalist claims his narrative to be the *only* extant version of the viewed. For the American fan community, this created representation is pure-Japan. Fansubbers exercise their influence as authorities to make their representations the only acceptable (“accurate”) ones for other Americans. Thus, all new fans who wish to join the community are strongly encouraged if not forced to accept their standard of representation and to perpetuate pure-Japan. Furthermore, the Orientalist narratives are so powerful as to dominate the experienced visit to the actual physical place of Japan. Fan travelers seem doomed to perpetuate an Orientalist myth. Similarly, the actual, physical, Japan is replaced by the Orientalist representation narrative of pure-Japan. The fandom thus believes pure-Japan to occupy the geography where the real Japan is, and therefore invokes their narrative into existence, tied to a single place. Through anime and manga (and their associated products) fans project, build, and expand on their desire for pure-Japan, and work to bring pure-Japan into existence.

*Desire, Identity, and the American Fandom’s Need for pure-Japan to Exist*

The narratives woven by fans replace actual physical Japan with the fantasies of pure-Japan. Critically, the fandom does not recognize this substitution: in their belief, pure-Japan exists where Japan is, and is as vivid and authentic a place as the nation it has replaced. Unlike traditional Orientalists, however, the fan community’s desires for its subject raises pure-Japan above the United States in their cultural hierarchy. Thus American fans work to include themselves in pure-Japan, even to the extent of identifying more with it than with their home

nation. As the fan community works to bring the narrative into existence (or substantiate their belief that it already does), and in creative ways actually succeeds.

Pure-Japan is a narrative of infinite possibility, one not bounded by the same restrictions as the United States; naturally, the American fan community desires this narrative, and wishes to be a part of it. Pure-Japan is an Orientalist construction of the community, and like Ovid's Pygmalion, the fans have fallen in love with their own creation. Moreover, the fan community has elevated pure-Japan above the United States, assigning their narrative a greater depth and desirability than the narrative of their home nation. This discrimination between "national" narratives springs from American fans' preferences for the smaller narratives of the nations' cultural products. Susan Napier conducted many interviews with anime and manga fans, and their responses to her reveal the preferences in narrative production and resultant identification with exceptional clarity.

Napier found that the majority of her subjects assigned their preference for anime to better characterization, intricacy, and thematic challenge.<sup>180</sup> Her interviewees believed the Japanese cultural products to be superior to their American counterparts in nearly every way. One interviewed fan dramatically summed up his feelings, saying his favorite anime "adheres to a level of cinematic complexity almost incapable of being achieved on American television."<sup>181</sup> Essentially, this fan viewed the anime as surpassing American cultural production to a level unattainable by the U.S. product. Another fan said, "Anime does something with its art that U.S. cartoonists have never tried: make the characters attractive in appearance."<sup>182</sup> Though Jessica Rabbit might beg to differ with the fan's assertions, their equation of Japan with beauty and the U.S. with ugliness cannot be ignored. American fans identify with something impossible to

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<sup>180</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 177.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

achieve at home, thus making themselves cultural exiles or cosmopolitans. These fans testify a widely held belief that for the American fan community Japan is both narratively and aesthetically more appealing than the United States.

Napier writes, “One of the most strikingly consistent responses to the question of why anime is popular in America has been that, as one young female fan put it, ““Anime is more realistic [than Hollywood products].””<sup>183</sup> Fans feel anime more closely resembles reality than the products of the United States. Cultural products have long been recognized as projecting cultural desires and anxieties, yet fans find the desires and anxieties present in Japanese cultural products more applicable to their own lives than those produced by US national culture industries. Another interviewed fan evinced this idea, saying, “They [characters] feel more real than most characters in American media (both animated and not).”<sup>184</sup> American fans feel a greater kinship with the characters in anime and manga than they do with those in American media; moreover, they assign those characters greater depth, realism, and attractiveness. In concert with the narrative of pure-Japan, the characters of anime and manga are the true denizens of pure-Japan. Pure-Japan is born of fan interpretations of anime and manga; naturally, the characters of those media are the residents of pure-Japan, and are inescapably bound by the same Orientalist perceptions of that narrative. Therefore, American fans identify with the characters in anime and manga above the characters produced by their own culture, but the characters (as the fans identify them) are interpreted as part of the narrative of pure-Japan. American fans are thus identifying not with characters that are the products of Japan, but of pure-Japan. They experience

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 178.

a “transcultural longing”<sup>185</sup> for the lives and worlds of these characters, but the culture they long for is pure-Japan, a product of their own imagination.

Another of Napier’s interviewees told her, “[I feel that people see me] as a member of a group mentality that has rejected its own culture in favor of foreign ‘cartoons.’”<sup>186</sup> While the mainstream Americans this fan is rebelling against may attribute this rejection of the U.S. as being for Japan, the fan chooses the term “cartoons.” It is the narrative produced from the media itself, pure-Japan, that fans have actually chosen to embrace. Indeed, as the pure-Japan narrative represents Japan, other Americans may be forgiven for mistaking the two. This is, in fact, a startling demonstration of how powerful the pure-Japan narrative is: that it may be mistaken for Japan by those outside of the community. The changing of “national” identity fans accomplish between American and pure-Japanese, could never be possible between existent nations (at least not without physical immigration and cultural immersion). However, pure-Japan is not an extant nation – it exists only as a narrative – and fans may pass from identification as a member of pure-Japan to an American with no immediate consequences to those around them. John Fiske noted that the popular could be “characterized by its fluidity,” and that one person could form different, even contradictory, “cultural allegiances” depending on the social situation.<sup>187</sup> Like the much observed American Civil War re-enactors who are able to be “weekend warriors,”<sup>188</sup> changing from history geek to business worker identities once the work week begins again, American anime and manga fans are able to slip from fan to more normative identities depending on their needs. Their desire for pure-Japan, and to become pure-Japanese, however, remains

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<sup>185</sup> Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 211.

<sup>186</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 180.

<sup>187</sup> Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 24.

<sup>188</sup> “Weekend Warriors: Re-enacting the Civil War,” *Studio 360*, Published 8 April 2011, accessed 12 April 2012, <http://www.studio360.org/2011/apr/08/weekend-warriors/>

constant. Fiske's notion of a cultural allegiance is particularly appropriate here: though American anime and manga fans may change their overtly displayed cultural affiliation, their allegiance remains to their created nation: pure-Japan. Accordingly, these fans project pure-Japan as a place that actually exists, and numerous fan activities trace back to building pure-Japan into existence.

Pure-Japan is not a physical place, though as an Orientalist representation narrative it does represent and usurp one. Pure-Japan is inseparably associated with the actual locale of Japan, and effectively replaces it in the minds of fans. However, as Japanese are the producers of anime and manga (as opposed to pure-Japanese), and it is American fan interpretations of the media that actually create pure-Japan, American fans must construct pure-Japan through objects that are not inherently pure-Japanese. Critically, this is not a conscious process; American fans project pure-Japan onto products and further construct pure-Japan through those products because they are interpreting them through the narrative of pure-Japan that organically evolved and compounded within the fan community. Thus while each individual fan's contributions to the pure-Japan narrative are ultimately rather small, combined together they create the Orientalist database critical for sustaining and expanding the representation narrative. American Fans are assisted in this by the structures of anime and manga consumption (and resulting production) in Japan, which make the media uniquely well suited for assembly into a database and new cultural projection.

*Bringing Pure-Japan into Theoretical Existence: The Database, Mukokuseki, and Narrating the Narrativeless*

Japanese scholar and cultural critic Azuma Hiroki has written extensively on otaku culture and Japanese consumption of anime and manga. *Otaku* is a Japanese word that has come

to mean an obsessive fan, and is specifically associated with anime and manga culture. A former otaku himself, Azuma turned a philosophical postmodern lens on the otaku culture in Japan in his 2001 book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Azuma has since noted that originally the primary contribution of the book was positioning otaku culture in the broader narrative of postmodernism in Japan.<sup>189</sup> However, he offers several key insights that are especially relevant to the American fan community, specifically the propagation of simulacra and derivative works, the end of grand narrative and the substitution of non-narrative, and the assembly of a narrativeless database.<sup>190</sup>

Azuma describes the world of anime and manga culture as no longer consisting of original narratives, but describes it as consisting entirely of “derivative works.”<sup>191</sup> By derivative works he means the reproductions, fan imitations, and merchandising associated with anime and manga narratives.<sup>192</sup> He then expands this definition using the postmodern theory of French sociologist Jean Baudrillard to elucidate these derivative works as *simulacra*, material that is “neither original nor copy,” but rather an “interim form.”<sup>193</sup> Innovations by new authors on original works by other authors, such interim works are neither exactly the same, nor totally different either. They occupy a complicated space between original work and plagiarism. Fan-fiction is an excellent example of this, as fan writers use characters and settings created by the original authors, but expand them with new (and almost always, unapproved) adventures and developments. However, as Azuma continues his analysis of otaku culture he even argues that the so-called “original” works in anime and manga are actually themselves derivative. He writes,

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<sup>189</sup> Hiroki Azuma, “Database Animals,” in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, ed. Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, Izumi Tsuji (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 30.

<sup>190</sup> Azuma, “Database Animals,” 31.

<sup>191</sup> Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 25.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

“Even original works create worlds through citation and imitation of previous works. Without reference to the real world, the original is produced as a simulacrum of preceding works from the start, and in turn the simulacrum of that simulacrum is propagated by fan activities and consumed voraciously.”<sup>194</sup> Mass produced popular narratives endlessly repeat and re-cycle other works. “Originality” in traditional authorship terms, has little meaning. Thus, in Azuma’s analysis anime and manga are entirely derivative, as even new “original” works are dependent on those that came before them to stimulate desire in their consumers.

Napier describes a major factor in the appeal of anime and manga as springing from a transcendence of racial and cultural signifiers and from a fundamentally nonreferential nature.<sup>195</sup> Fans like the ways in which anime and manga offer a world stripped of obvious racial signifiers from the United States. Applying Azuma’s analysis, however, leads to a modified conclusion: anime and manga do not possess racial and cultural signifiers of any extant culture, but rather than being nonreferential they are self-referential. Napier herself illustrates this point. In refuting analyses that describe anime and manga characters as visually appearing non-Japanese and instead looking Western, she describes the characters as looking “anime” or “manga.”<sup>196</sup> She effectively lists the racial characteristics of the “anime” race as she writes, “there are certain elements—most notably the huge eyes, certain movements and gestures, and sometimes strangely colored hair or distorted body types—that are virtually standard aspects of ‘anime style.’”<sup>197</sup> Thus, anime and manga contain many racial and cultural signifiers, but these refer to “anime” or “manga.” In essence, new anime and manga, as entirely derivative of pre-existing

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>195</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 178.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 175.

anime and manga, consistently signify themselves. From this conclusion, Azuma next describes the consumption of narratives and the decline of the grand narrative.

He makes use of another Frenchman's work, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's idea of "grand narrative."<sup>198</sup> Lyotard primarily describes grand narrative in the context of academia,<sup>199</sup> but Azuma modifies the term to mean the modern-period ideal of analyzing society as a coherent whole, with specific examples of intellectual, economic, and political ideologies, most notably the idea of the nation-state.<sup>200</sup> In post-modernity, these systems break down, and Azuma argues that in the absence emerge new unnumbered "small" narratives, interdependent but lacking any cohesion.<sup>201</sup> Grand narrative directly contrasts with "small narratives" in terms of scope and significance; where grand narrative is a unifying idea that binds together disparate parts, a small narrative is the single narrative used in a single work. Thus, the deterioration of the grand narrative represents the fragmentation of unifying ideals into a vast quantity of small pieces. Such "small narratives" build on each other and are the simulacra used to make anime and manga. Azuma applies Ōtsuka Eiji's ideas of narrative consumption to demonstrate the complex way that the otaku, as consumers of these numerous small narratives, create their own small narratives.

Ōtsuka Eiji's *Theory of Narrative Consumption*, outlines the cycle in which anime and manga (as simulacra – small narratives) are produced, consumed, and reproduced.<sup>202</sup> Ōtsuka proposes that fans embrace small narratives in an attempt to rebuild the grand narrative, but they succeed only in creating a substitution that fills the void left by the grand narrative. These surrogates are ultimately hollow. Moreover, he argues that the producing industries deliberately

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<sup>198</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>199</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 130.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

facilitate these vain exercises: “It becomes possible to sell countless similar products...because consumers are led to believe that they themselves approach the overall picture of the ‘grand narrative.’”<sup>203</sup> This production/marketing strategy is a double-edged sword, as fans appropriate the simulacra produced by commercial industry and produce their own. Ōtsuka writes, “If consumers through their cumulative consumption of ‘small narratives’ get their hands on the entirety of the program that is a ‘grand narrative,’ they will freely manufacture ‘small narratives’ with their own hands.”<sup>204</sup> Thus once the process of creating simulacra (writing small narratives) has been begun by industry, it is taken over and infinitely perpetuated by fans who continue to consume, creating a feedback loop between the two. Fans are told they have agency and they perpetuate the manufacture of simulacra which ultimately serves industry.

Azuma argues that small narratives are consumed not for their narrative value, but rather for the “worldview’ or ‘settings,’ which cannot be expressed by the surface of a narrative.”<sup>205</sup> He breaks small narratives down into two pieces – a plot which makes up a small grand narrative, and a setting that is part of the greater simulacra. However, his criticism of all anime and manga as ultimately derivative means that this distinction is functionally unnecessary; both plot and setting are simulacra contributing to the common self-referentiality of the medium. Thus otaku, in attempting to reconstruct the grand narrative, or more accurately, in attempting to build a view of the grand narrative through the consumption of the small narratives of anime and manga, are actually more stimulated by the consumption of the generic settings and worldviews provided than by the narratives presented.<sup>206</sup> They are more interested in building worlds than stories. Ironically, anime and manga’s self-referentiality ensures that otaku cannot make grand narratives

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 29-30.

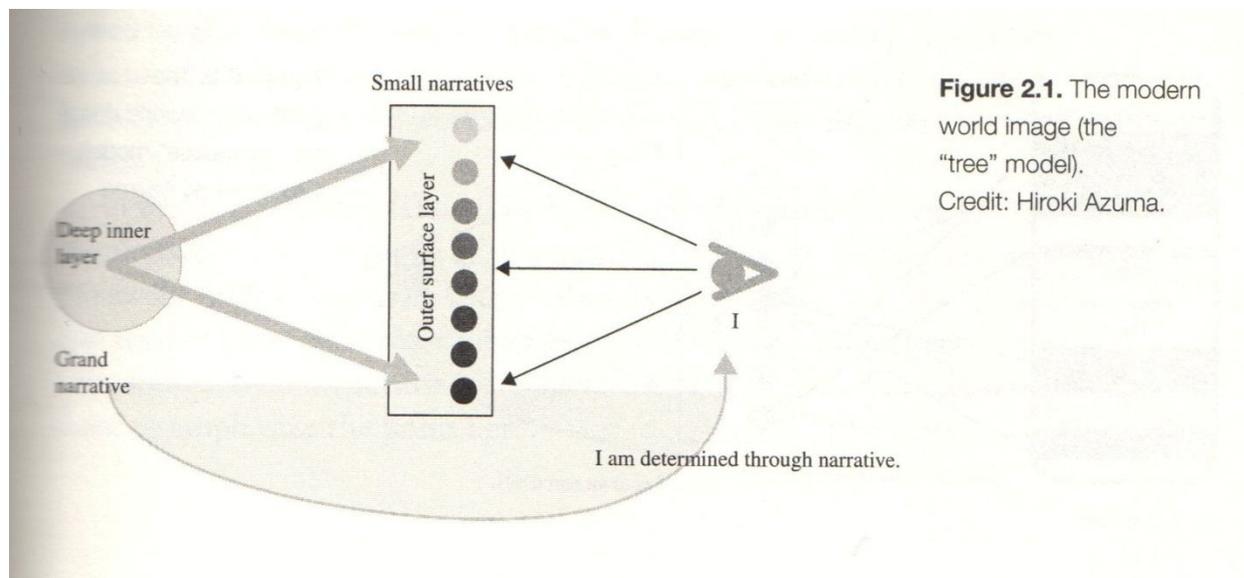
<sup>204</sup> Ōtsuka, “World and Variation,” 109.

<sup>205</sup> Azuma, *Otaku*, 31.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 31.

but only small settings and views that refer only to themselves. It is this process which Ōtsuka actually names “narrative consumption,” and is both the consequence and perpetuation of the preponderance of simulacra.<sup>207</sup> From this process, Azuma creates two crucial models of narrative production, consumption, and use in identity formation.

Azuma’s models show how people interact with narratives in understanding the world and forming identity. He calls the first model the “tree model,”<sup>208</sup> and through it demonstrates how the grand narrative functions in relation to humans and consumption. In this model, people see and immediately comprehend a surface outer layer composed of the small narratives that make up daily life. However, these narratives are informed and regulated by a deep inner layer that is equivalent to the grand narrative. Thus, the grand narrative is the motivating force behind all the small narratives that people use to construct their identities, and people (and their identities) are necessarily “determined” by the grand narrative.<sup>209</sup> (See Image)



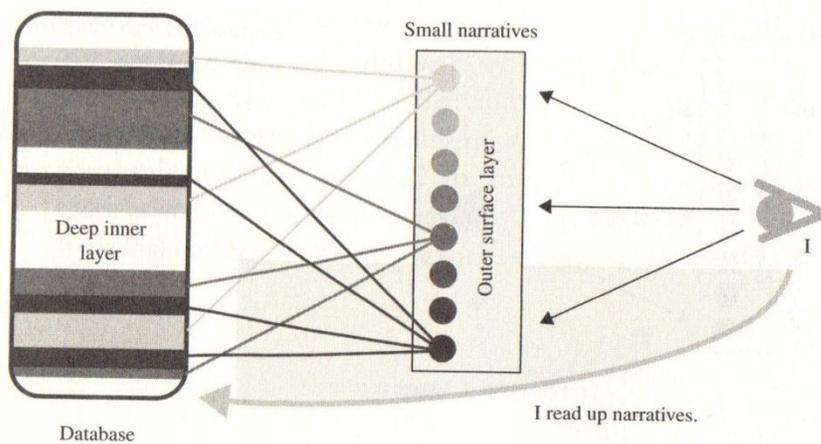
**Figure 2.1.** The modern world image (the “tree” model).  
Credit: Hiroki Azuma.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 31.

The second of Azuma's models, the "database model" represents the postmodern world in which the grand narrative has ceased to function.<sup>210</sup> This model proposes a "double-layer structure"<sup>211</sup> in which the deep inner layer is produced by the surface outer layer. Effectively, the surface layer is consumed by people, who then organize the attributes of these small narratives into a database. By drawing on this database people then produce new small narratives, that are neither originals nor copies, which others will later analyze and break down into the database. Effectively, all new works "quote" attributes from preceding works, so that all new productions is merely a recombination of previously articulated attractive traits.<sup>212</sup> Thus, this model perfectly describes the production and consumption feedback loop of simulacra, and describes how the grand narrative ceases to be consumed and is replaced by a self-perpetuating database. Critically, this change moves the agency of production of the outer layer from the grand narrative to the consumers of narrative. Thus rather than consuming grand narrative that exists as hidden information, people consume ultimately insignificant narratives that they themselves have created.<sup>213</sup>



**Figure 2.2.** The postmodern world image (the "database" model). Credit: Hiroki Azuma.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 31.

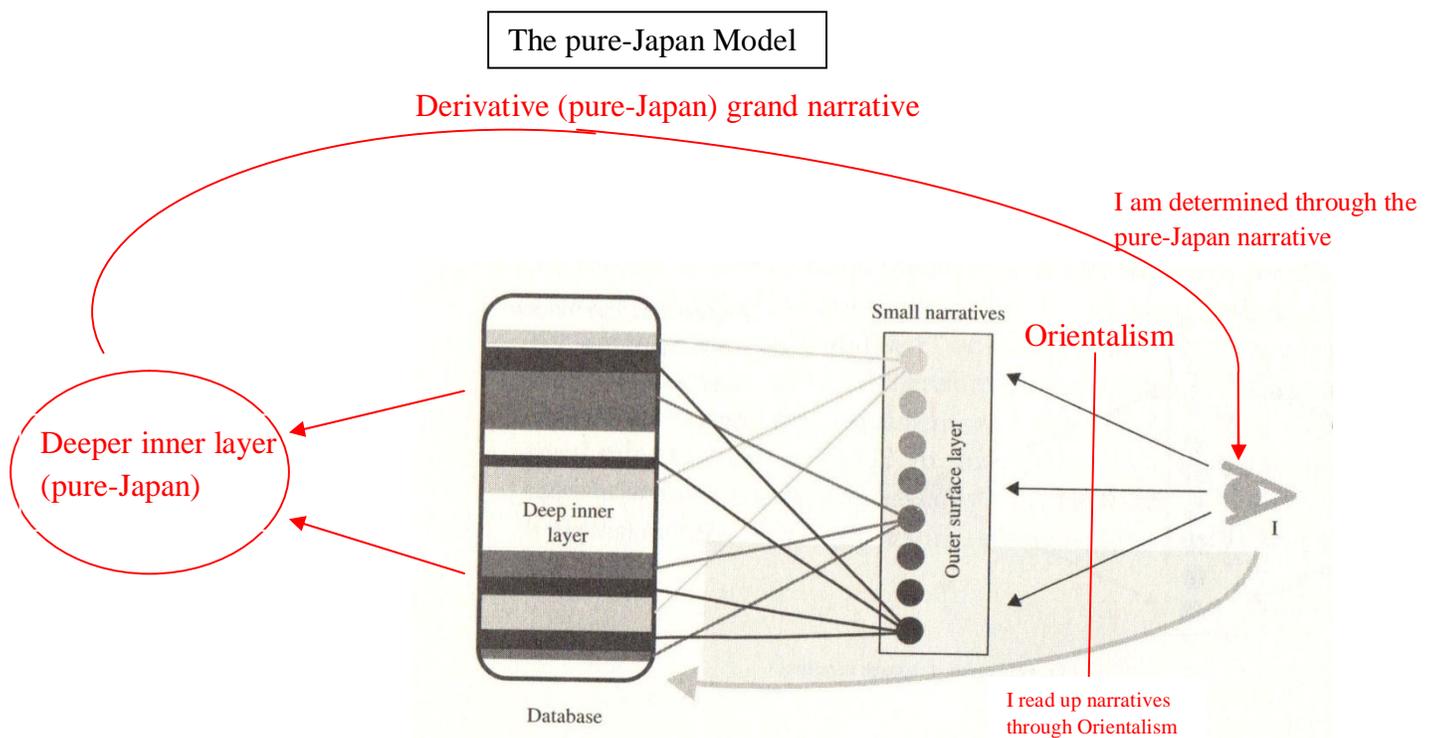
<sup>211</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 32.

Azuma's theories are complex, but are vital for theoretically analyzing the creation and perpetuation of the American anime and manga fan community's pure-Japan. Upon initial inspection it would seem that, like their Japanese counterparts, the community consumes in the "database" model, digesting narratives, assembling them into a database, and then reproducing them. However, the fan community has innovated on narrative consumption. Just as Azuma described, the original grand narrative has indeed ceased to function, but rather than merely substituting the database for the defunct grand narrative, the American fandom has built its own grand narrative. In this case, Azuma's argument concerned Japanese culture industries and fans. In Japan, the surface layer of small narratives is the anime and manga consumed by the community. Rather than being indicative of a grand narrative these products are only indicative of themselves; they are assembled by the otaku into a database from which more small narratives of their kind can then be produced. However, when anime and manga are brought to the United States American fans read them up through the lens of Orientalism (itself a grand narrative). Through the surface small narratives American fans thereby view the database, but the database they view is colored by Orientalism – in this case a belief in a grand auteur of "Japan." This process is complicated by the transnational nature of fan consumption. As outsiders, fans expect to be able to derive a grand narrative of Japan from Japanese works, and as outsiders (viewers) they are perfectly positioned to interpret for this narrative through Orientalism. Because of this belief that a grand narrative of Japan exists, fans manufacture the grand narrative, thereby creating pure-Japan from the database. Pure-Japan then exists as a grand narrative derivative from the database, and influences fans just as a normal grand narrative would. It is not a true grand narrative, but is instead an Orientalist representation narrative, yet it takes the place of the grand narrative. This process makes pure-Japan self-perpetuating, as new fans' identities are

determined based on the influence of pure-Japan, which enforces the lens of Orientalism with which they then read anime and manga. Thus, American fans reproduce the interpretations of the database characteristics as pure-Japanese, and endlessly continue to derive pure-Japan from these characteristics. The “pure-Japan Model” explains how American fans garner such a strong sense of reality from works that are fundamentally derivative and, according to Azuma, lacking in realism; this derivative nature makes these works susceptible to the interpretations that create pure-Japan.



Japanese cultural studies scholar Iwabuchi Koichi has been especially critical of Japanese cultural products, and his analyses explain how anime and manga are especially vulnerable to cultural re-interpretation and projection. Iwabuchi rejects previous terminology for explaining culture as carried in products and argues that all products carry the cultural imprint of their

nation of origin, making use of the term “cultural odor” to describe how ideas of a nation’s way of life are “associated *positively* with a particular product in the consumption process.”<sup>214</sup> He is particularly concerned with how these products are associated with the modern day life of a nation, and argues that when the positive association becomes firmly embedded with a product it is a cultural “fragrance,” and therefore desirable both to those who consume it and for the image of the country that produces the products that carry it.<sup>215</sup> However, some products do not carry any cultural fragrance, and are termed by Iwabuchi as “culturally odorless;” possibly desirable to consume, but lacking any sort of true association with the way of life of the producing nation.<sup>216</sup> It is with this framework that he criticizes anime and manga.

Iwabuchi believes that anime and manga are culturally odorless, and describes them as “*mukokuseki*,” which he defines as “literally meaning, ‘something or someone lacking any nationality,’ but also implying the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context, which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features.”<sup>217</sup> For Iwabuchi, “cultural odor” is the imprint of the grand narrative of a product’s nation of origin. Thus for anime and manga to be *mukokuseki* implies that they are not only culturally odorless, but achieve that state through an active eradication of recognizable national odor, confirming Azuma’s assessment of anime and manga as lacking grand narrative. Undeniably, anime and manga have become exceptionally popular throughout the world, and especially in the U.S., yet Iwabuchi takes no comfort in their popularity, arguing that culturally they communicate little or nothing of Japan. He writes, “Looking beneath the surface... we find a basic contradiction: the international spread of *mukokuseki* popular culture from Japan simultaneously articulates the universal appeal of

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<sup>214</sup> Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 27.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

Japanese cultural products and the disappearance of any perceptible ‘Japaneseness.’”<sup>218</sup> Indeed, it is precisely because of this active erasure of Japaneseness that anime and manga are gaining tremendous popularity outside of Japan.<sup>219</sup> What makes anime and manga global eradicates their Japanese qualities.

Following Iwabuchi, the irony of the desires of the American fan community is thus evinced in full circle. The community privileges the localizations made by its own elite based on their claims to preserve the Japaneseness of anime and manga, yet anime and manga are mukokuseki, culturally odorless, and thereby devoid of any “actual” Japaneseness at all. As Iwabuchi asks, somewhat ominously, “If it is indeed the case that the Japaneseness of Japanese animation derives, consciously or unconsciously, from its erasure of physical signs of Japaneseness, is not the Japan that Western audiences are at long last coming to appreciate, and even yearn for, an animated, race-less, and culture-less, virtual version of ‘Japan’?”<sup>220</sup> For Iwabuchi, Western audiences long for a Japan learned through products that lack any sort of “Japanese” grand narrative. He has also articulated the process by which pure-Japan is formed from a false sense of Japaneseness; however, he erroneously criticizes the West’s version of Japan as totally empty. Pure-Japan is neither race-less nor cultureless. The appeal of anime and manga does not derive directly from the removal of Japaneseness, but rather from the substitution of pure-Japaneseness into the now culturally empty shell. Any sort of Japanese produced grand narrative is gone, replaced by the derivative grand narrative of pure-Japan. Indeed, pure-Japan signifies pure-Japan, with its own culture and race. Pure-Japanese culture and pure-Japanese race are consumed by Americans in anime and manga. In this way, pure-Japan

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 33.

completely subsumes the Japaneseness of actual Japan, and fans make mukokuseki the cultural odor of pure-Japan.

Mukokuseki is a total lack of any cultural odor, yet for American fans of anime and manga that absence has been taken up as a new cultural odor all its own. Only by being mukokuseki can a product actually be considered by American fans as “authentic.” Mukokuseki products, like anime and manga, are the basis of pure-Japan, thus their cultural odor (which is a lack of cultural odor) is that of pure-Japan. Imperatively, this innovated “smell” is not recognized by fans as new or something all its own, but is mistaken for Japanese cultural odor, and substituted as Japaneseness. This is a convenient Japaneseness for the American fandom; they have made pure-Japan the object of their desire, and this distinct lack of cultural odor affords them a Japaneseness devoid of any actual racial or cultural barriers to their participation. This contradiction is beautifully illustrated by Napier, even as she lauds anime as magnificent: “‘Anime style’ transcends obvious racial and cultural signification that might create barriers to viewer identification. As one fan put it, ‘The more the art is abstracted, the more we can relate to it as realism.’”<sup>221</sup> Interpreted with an understanding of mukokuseki, this fan’s statement effectively means “the more the Japanese products are mukokuseki, the more real they appear to American fans.” Indeed, only as a de-nationalized product that anime and manga travel across borders; it is fitting that mukokuseki, the absence of cultural odor, represents cultural odor for the Orientalist representation narrative of pure-Japan. However, it does mean that the American fan community has a kind of cultural odor through which to define pure-Japan and perpetuate the illusion of its existence.

The valorization of pure-Japan explains the fundamental and widespread American fan resistance to corporate localization. The American fan community endlessly consumes, produces,

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<sup>221</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 178.

and reproduces the pure-Japan narrative, and that narrative is dependent on mukokuseki as its cultural odor. When American industry localizes anime and manga, specifically through dubbing, they swirl American cultural odor (through the English language, familiar words and phrases) with the mukokuseki odor of pure-Japan. Such localizations are thus impure in the eyes of fans: effectively, they display pure-Japanese people (the characters) speaking the wrong language. The language barrier is important to the majority of fans because although they desire to become pure-Japanese, it is vital that pure-Japan not approach the US too closely, lest its sanctity be threatened. Hybridity is not acceptable; it is the very inaccessibility of the foreign, the incommunicable, that matters to American fans. Invariably, it is vital that pure-Japan *not* be the United States, an imperative which harkens back to Orientalism.

For centuries the West has used Orientalism to separate the Orient from the Occident. Said writes, “The Orient has helped define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”<sup>222</sup> Traditional Orientalism, allowed the West to base an identity by creating the Orient as the perfect other. The fan community erects pure-Japan as a truly “perfect” other, and through this othering Japan is objectified as an object of desire. Of course, the U.S. and Japan are naturally intertwined, yet it is vital that the pure-Japan narrative seems completely independent of the United States. Iwabuchi disparages this yearning, calling it a “monological illusion,”<sup>223</sup> but the fact remains that American fans are enthralled by media that is simultaneously familiar and different to them, and enforce an interpretation of it as totally foreign.

Scholars studying Japanese media have accepted that much of the appeal of anime and manga springs from their appearance as both familiar and different to American fans. From the

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<sup>222</sup> Said, “Orientalism,” 87.

<sup>223</sup> Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*, 34.

very inception of manga the influence of American media has been present, beginning with Tezuka Osamu's early imitations of Walt Disney film art.<sup>224</sup> Matt Alt identifies Tezuka as the beginning of "the Mobius strip" of ideational exchange between Japanese and American artists – a process Kelts calls "crosspollination of influences."<sup>225</sup> Anime and manga are therefore thoroughly entwined with American comics and cartoons, even though the two appear dramatically different. This combination has allowed Americans to view Japanese media as an other, while experiencing it with a basic familiarity. However, the fandom's imagining of pure-Japan does not tolerate hybridity; in order to insist on separation between Japan and the United States, and allow themselves to continue otherizing and idolizing Japan, fans enforce foreignization in both their own and commercial localizations.<sup>226</sup> The two most common tactics are demanding that right-to-left reading direction as well as onomatopoeia and mimesis remain intact in American publication.<sup>227</sup> Thus, simply having the insider knowledge of how to read a manga volume serves as an immediate discriminator between members of the fandom and those outside of it.<sup>228</sup> Compellingly, the preserved onomatopoeic and mimetic phrases appear in their original Japanese characters and are therefore completely opaque and illegible to the vast majority of fans; their only purpose is to foreignize the text.<sup>229</sup> Yet this foreignization takes place under the banner of "authenticity." Those publications that actually foreignize the media the most are vigorously billed as the most "authentic," despite the amount of information that essentially is lost as a result.<sup>230</sup> Anime and manga are at once familiar and alien to Americans,

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<sup>224</sup> Antonia Levi, *Samurai From Outer Space: Understanding Japanese Animation* (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), 19-20.

<sup>225</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 41-42.

<sup>226</sup> Rampant, "The Manga Polysystem," 231.

<sup>227</sup> Cathy Sells, "Manga Translation and Interculture." in *Mechademia 6: User Enhanced*, ed. Frenchy Lunning (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 100.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>229</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 24.

<sup>230</sup> Sells, "Manga Translation and Interculture," 100.

their otherness exotic yet comfortable – and so it sells. Iwabuchi argues that anime and manga do not sell in concert with a consumed “Japanese” way of life as many American cultural products do, but these mukokuseki products are consumed by Americans including the grand narrative of pure-Japan. The mukokuseki carries pure-Japan, and the Orientalist and utopian fan imaginings associated with it. The untranslated sound effects carry no meaning save marking the work as “Japanese,” or in the fans’ interpretations, definitively not American, and pure-Japanese. Rather than any actual Japanese cultural transmission, what fans seek is the representation. By enforcing foreignization of anime and manga, the fandom keeps pure-Japan from getting too close to the U.S. The Orientalist representation narrative of pure-Japan is used to define the U.S. and the U.S. is used to define the other, however, the fan communities efforts and consumptive patterns remain focused on proving the existence and superiority of pure-Japan.

Pure-Japan is an Orientalist narrative that represents and substitutes for Japan for the American anime and manga fan community. Outside of the conceptions of the community, pure-Japan does not exist, but many fan efforts are devoted to demonstrating the existence of their narrative. It is important to note that this is an unconscious process. As shown by the “pure-Japan Model” fans produce, consume, and reproduce the pure-Japan narrative through anime and manga in a feedback loop that results in pure-Japan being endlessly perpetuated. This is made particularly possible by the preponderance of simulacra in Japanese cultural media, and the ultimate lack of grand narrative inherent in those works. Thus, pure-Japan is a manufactured and derivative grand narrative. As an artificially constructed “cultural package”<sup>231</sup> it requires application of a cultural odor, and fans make use of the mukokuseki or odorless nature of Japanese media to satisfy this. These works do not “smell” of Japan as it is; they are effectively narrativeless. Thus, the fandom is able to interpret their odorlessness as the smell of Japan as the

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 95.

fandom wants it to be in the form of pure-Japan: thereby applying the pure-Japan narrative to the narrativeless media. With cultural products transmitting a cultural package of values that fans desire, and by interpreting their ultimate lack of real cultural transmission as the signifier of their value, the American fandom has all that it needs to defend pure-Japan's existence and perpetuate the narrative. However, the fan community takes this a step forward by actually temporarily evoking pure-Japan into existence through one of its most important rituals: the convention.

*Bringing Pure-Japan Into Physical Existence: Conventions and Cosplay*

Conventions are one of the most vital and intriguing practices of fan communities. A staple of most fandoms, conventions are distinguished from more regular gatherings by their scale, promotion, and selection of events.<sup>232</sup> The earliest conventions centered around science fiction and/or comic books and the basic format and events have remained fairly constant from these types of conventions to Anime “cons.”<sup>233</sup> Conventions are the ultimate sites for the anime and manga fan communities, and as such, allow unadulterated expressions of pure-Japan. For a few days, each convention evokes pure-Japan into temporal, physical, and geographical existence, allowing fans to participate, interact, and live in their imagined world. Conventions afford American anime and manga fans the chance to perform as “citizens” of pure-Japan, and to thereby cement the bonds of horizontal comradeship that hold together the fandom as an imagined community. Cons create an idyllic landscape of simultaneous production and consumption, where pure-Japan is created, shown off, and purchased by fans.

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<sup>232</sup> Lawrence Eng, “Anime and Manga Fandom as Networked Culture,” 173.

<sup>233</sup> Levi, “The Americanization of Anime and Manga,” 60.

Anime conventions are tremendous communal gatherings. Even some of the smallest regular cons attract close to five thousand attendees,<sup>234</sup> and the largest garner many more than that. It is no wonder then, that these events can completely consume the hotels and convention centers where they are held. These locales become the loci of pure-Japan: places where the fictional narrative is given temporal, physical, and geographical existence. As Napier describes, “For a few brief days the world of the con is a world in itself...all consuming to the participants.”<sup>235</sup> That all consuming world is the world of pure-Japan, complete with starkly delineated borders (within and without the convention building), clear markers of those who belong and those who do not, and celebrations of the “pure-Japanese” ethnicity. As a representation narrative, pure-Japan substitutes for the actual Japan in the understandings and interpretations of fans. Therefore, explicitly nationalist and ethnic terms are appropriate for describing the physical manifestation of the narrative through fan conventions. Shannon, another of Napier’s fans, says, “The con atmosphere is one of unconditional acceptance and support,”<sup>236</sup> but to the contrary, that support is conditional. It is offered to those who follow the rules, the initiated of the fan community, the believers in pure-Japan. That so vast a majority of the attendees at cons are amongst the initiated makes cons powerful experiences for the fan community. Part festival and part professional conference in atmosphere, cons allow fans to cement “kinship” ties with each other and viscerally experience the imagined horizontal comradeship of their community.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, the con affords fans the chance to show off their knowledge capital, garner approbation from their fellows, and demonstrate their citizenship in pure-Japan.

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<sup>234</sup> Anne M. Cooper-Chen, *Cartoon Cultures: The Globalization of Popular Media* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 72.

<sup>235</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 151.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid*, 151-152.

Naturally, many of the events of anime conventions are designed to allow fans to show off their knowledge about anime and manga. Game shows, fan artist alleys, and informational panels all allow fans to present, share, and consume information regarding their media, and therefore pure-Japan.<sup>238</sup> Effectively, all these activities allow fans to actively participate in creating pure-Japan, both for themselves and for their fellow fans. Con-atmosphere is made by the coming together of these many activities that reassure fans that they are not alone, and that they are part of a community. Moreover, by successfully participating (such as winning a game show, or having a much admired art booth) fans garner status within the community of the con. Becoming well-known in the community can give fans a sense of accomplishment, respect not normally accorded to them outside of the community, as well as tangible rewards such as greater access to informational and media resources.<sup>239</sup> The most powerful example of fan participation in actively constructing pure-Japan through conventions is the iconic practice of cosplay.

Cosplay, short for costume play, involves the construction of elaborate and detailed costumes based on the outfits of anime and manga characters, wearing them to conventions, and then interacting with other cosplayers – often “in character.”<sup>240</sup> Cosplay most likely originated through crosspollination between American science fiction conventions and Japanese anime conventions, eventually gaining momentum at American anime conventions.<sup>241</sup> The practices of cosplayers have been analyzed in great detail, but several salient points include: cosplayers may be any age, gender, or ethnicity; cosplay is generally socially based; and cosplay dress is a

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<sup>238</sup> Eng, “Anime and Manga Fandom as Networked Culture,” 174.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 175.

<sup>240</sup> Eron Rauch and Christopher Bolton, “A Cosplay Photography Sampler,” in *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 176.

<sup>241</sup> Theresa Winge, “Costuming the Imagination: Origins of Anime and Manga Cosplay,” in *Mechademia 1: Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga*, ed. Frenchy Lunning, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 66-67.

distinct method assuming the identity of fictional characters.<sup>242</sup> In cosplay, especially in role-playing interaction, American fans are truly able to become the citizens of pure-Japan. In some ways a utopian vision – anyone can become pure-Japanese – the practice is nonetheless based in the Orientalist pure-Japan narrative. Fans are able to cast aside their mundane identities and become the objects of their desire, be treated as such, and do so without any consequences to their everyday lives. Indeed, they shed their own racial signifiers while claiming a race-less “anime” identity. American cosplayers, in contrast to their Japanese counterparts, also enjoy innovating on their characters and bringing them into conflict with the world outside the convention.

The differences between American and Japanese practices in cosplay highlight American fans control over their character identities that solidify a pure-Japanese identity. Differences emerge in practices in costuming competitions (a major feature of nearly every convention). In the U.S. fans tend to perform as their characters onstage through skits and sketches that take them beyond the bounds of the characters’ original forms, while in Japan cosplayers tend to merely strike a pose or quote a favorite line.<sup>243</sup> This difference demonstrates how the American fans innovate on their characters: rather than being bound by the author’s original, these fans take the character as their own and create new interactions and stories to match. This practice is important because it shows the depth with which American fans assume the identity of the character, and thereby make themselves pure-Japanese. Moreover, in Japan cosplayers are usually not welcome outside of the convention, and are limited in where they travel, whereas American cosplayers tend to enjoy leaving convention areas and thereby breaching the boundary

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 65-76.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 73.

between convention and outside world.<sup>244</sup> While this can be attributed to (and is definitely influenced by) differing Japanese and American cultural norms, the pleasure American cosplayers take from leaving the convention area is notable. When these fans, dressed as the citizens of pure-Japan, leave the convention and venture into the surrounding area, they are geographically leaving pure-Japan and returning to the U.S. However, they are marked as “foreigners” by their costuming, and experience otherizing through the stares, strange looks, and attention they attract outside of the convention. This is thus a pleasurable experience of self-otherizing, in which the fans assert their status as pure-Japanese in direct contrast to their American nationality.

Anime conventions are a powerful landscape where American fans are able to simultaneously produce and consume pure-Japan. Through participation in con events, fans show off their knowledge and cement their citizenship as pure-Japanese, while confirming the existence of pure-Japan for, and gaining status with, their fellow fans. Vendor booths allow fans to purchase the texts from which they create pure-Japan: anime, manga, and other associated products. By viewing cosplayers, and participating in cosplay themselves, fans consume the visual of citizens of pure-Japan and assume the corresponding identities. Verily, the convention is a place where, temporarily, the fandom is able to evoke pure-Japan into true existence. Napier describes it best as she concludes, “At its most fundamental level, therefore, the fan convention is a fantasy world. For a few days, fans throw off the burdens, responsibilities, and roles of ordinary life to take part in a liminal world that, while it intersects with reality at certain moments, in other ways subsumes reality to create a densely textured utopian environment.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>245</sup> Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime*, 153.

That world is the physical manifestation of the pure-Japan narrative; through their participation, American fans are able to actually create and live in the landscape of their desire.

### *Conclusion*

Pure-Japan is an Orientalist narrative created by American anime and manga fans to represent Japan, but the narrative also serves to provide collective identity for the fan community. The American anime and manga fan community began in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a small subcultural community of highly devoted and emotionally invested fans. These early fans formed identity through their participation in the community, while also compensating for a dearth of commercially available anime and positioning themselves as authorities on Japanese popular media by creating fansubs of anime. The fandom's identity grew in opposition to commercial distributors; fansubs were uncut, uncensored, and free, while industry productions were far more heavily localized and therefore "inauthentic." The community connected and grew through fansub video-tape sharing networks, yet still remained a small and fairly closed. This community faced tremendous challenge and change with the rise of the Internet. Fansubbers were able to distribute their work to a much larger audience and anime and manga's popularity grew. In the 1990s and 2000s the numbers of new fans and the amount of commercially available anime and manga both dramatically increased, threatening the subcultural status of the community.

In this millennial moment, the anime and manga community faced the prospect of losing its subcultural qualities, and being absorbed popularly and commercially into mainstream American society. To avoid subduction back into the dominant American narrative, and to thereby maintain their ability to form identity within the community, the senior members of the

fandom consolidated behind new expectations for fandom; specifically the acceptance of these elite fans as the authorities on Japan, and their fansubs as the only acceptable way in which to consume anime, and through it Japan. In mandating this rule, however, the fansubbers positioned themselves as the gatekeepers between Japan and the United States, claiming narrative control over Japan, and enforcing their own vision of the nation.

Through their interpretations of anime and manga, the elite of the fan community developed an idyllic view of Japan. Japan symbolized a haven for fans, a physical place where the normal rules of the everyday world seemed to not apply. Yet because of their conflict with commercial distributors, these fans regarded themselves as the guardians of authenticity, allowing their fellow fans to get the most authentic experience of Japan through anime and manga. Of course, fansubber localizations were, and continue to be, definitively mediated, and through them the elite of the community enforce and spread their vision of Japan to the rest of the fandom.

This narrative of Japan, however, is thoroughly Orientalist. I name it pure-Japan, because it tolerates no hybridity, no swirling of cultural odors. The narrative textualizes and essentializes the people of Japan and their nation, binding them within the interpretations made by American fans through anime and manga. Fans appropriate the right to speak from the Japanese, silencing Japanese narratives of self and nation; then consume this new narrative through anime, manga, and their associated products. Having asserted the ultimate truth of the pure-Japan narrative, however, fans raise their fictionalized “Japan” above both Japan and the United States. Fans desire their narrative, identifying more with it than with American national narratives. In their own fandom fans reify pure-Japan, both theoretically and physically, and create a nation-like subculture positioned superior to both Japan and the United States.

According to Japanese cultural critics Azuma Hiroki and Iwabuchi Koichi, anime and manga are uniquely suited to the interpretations and projections made by American fans. Azuma argues that anime and manga have all become derivative works, no longer either originals or copies, that quote from each other both in story and visual appeal. This endless quoting has destroyed the grand narrative that once resided behind the small narratives of products, and replaced it with a database of small narrative traits. Thus the originality of the author has ceased to exist, as both professional and fan authors in Japan draw on the traits in the database and recombine them endlessly. When American fans consume these small narratives of anime and manga they expect the grand narrative of “Japan” to be behind them; viewing the products through the grand narrative of Orientalism, fans thus create from the database the derivative Orientalist grand narrative, pure-Japan. New fans accept pure-Japan as a true narrative, and thus consume anime and manga through the lens of pure-Japan and endlessly perpetuate the narrative.

Iwabuchi’s analysis explains how a fundamentally derivative narrative like pure-Japan can have defined cultural characteristics in the conceptions of the American fan community. Iwabuchi is a proponent of the idea of “cultural odor;” that cultural products carry an untranslatable set of qualities by virtue of their cultural origin alone. However, Iwabuchi calls anime and manga *mukokuseki*, meaning “culturally odorless.” Thus Azuma’s database is made up of traits that are fundamentally cultureless. This allows American fans to use these traits in creating their derivative grand narrative; *mukokuseki* products lack cultural odor, and therefore fans can apply the “smell” of pure-Japan to them. As new *mukokuseki* products are produced they “smell” like their forbears, compounding the process and building the pure-Japan narrative.

Physically, fans evoke pure-Japan into existence through anime conventions and cosplay. At conventions, fans bring the pure-Japan narrative into geographical and temporal existence,

and the convention location is transformed into a new landscape and populated by fans – those who accept the bounds of pure-Japan – who effectively become the citizens of pure-Japan. In cosplay, fans assume the identities of anime and manga characters in manner, voice, and costume. Through cosplaying fans produce and consume pure-Japan, bringing the characters of pure-Japan into the physical world, and visually confirming their existence to fellow fans. Within the convention, fans have a new national identity, and when they leave (in costume) they retain this identity, becoming “foreigners” in the U.S.

Pure-Japan is a powerful Orientalist narrative created by the anime and manga fandom in the United States. Through the narrative fans build common identity, and garner positional superiority to both Japan and the United States. Moreover, the standards of the fan community make acceptance of the pure-Japan narrative effective criteria for membership, so that as the community grows the pure-Japan narrative compounds and perpetuates with it. This process prevents the fan community from being absorbed into the dominant American narrative and ensures that community identity will remain intact, at the cost of essentializing the culture, nation, and people of Japan.

**Epilogue: *Pure-Japan and Real Disaster—the American Fandom Responds to the 3.11 Tohoku Earthquake***

I have argued that pure-Japan is a world of fantasy for American anime and manga fans, and that a primary reason they find the narrative attractive is that through it they are able to experience life without consequences. By consuming anime and manga and forming identity as a member of pure-Japan, fans feel the entire spectrum of emotion without ever experiencing definitive ending. Characters may die in one series, but they will be reborn in other products, just as other characters may wed, but they will find new lovers in fan-fiction; the realms of possibility are infinite. On March 11, 2011, American fans were suddenly forced to face definitive ending when a massive earthquake, finally measured with a Richter Magnitude of 9.0,<sup>246</sup> occurred off the Pacific coast of Japan. The quake itself caused tremendous damage. Even more was done by the record 130-foot tsunami it spurred.<sup>247</sup> Nearly 20,000 people perished, and the American fan community was confronted with powerful images of disaster, suffering, and death in Japan.<sup>248</sup> The 3.11 Tohoku earthquake and subsequent effects dramatically challenged the American anime and manga fan community's pure-Japan, and forced fans to temporarily accept a version of Japan counter to their highly valued conception of the nation. The resulting actions of the communities to restore Japan to its former status confirm both their continued desire for the pure-Japan narrative, and the existence and growth of tremendous Japanese soft power through anime and manga.

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<sup>246</sup> "The 2011 off the Pacific coast of Tohoku Earthquake –Portal–," *Japan Meteorological Agency*, Accessed 19 December 2011, [http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/en/2011\\_Earthquake.html](http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/en/2011_Earthquake.html)

<sup>247</sup> Adam Mann, "Japanese People Less Likely to Evacuate During Future Tsunamis," *Wired Magazine*, Published 5 December 2011, Accessed 28 December 2011, <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/12/tsunami-wrong-ideas/#more-88444>

<sup>248</sup> Hiroko Tabuchi, "An Anniversary of 'Heartbreaking Grief' in Japan," *The New York Times*, Published 11 March 2012, Accessed 12 April 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/12/world/asia/a-year-later-effects-of-japans-disaster-are-still-unfolding.html?\\_r=2&ref=world&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/12/world/asia/a-year-later-effects-of-japans-disaster-are-still-unfolding.html?_r=2&ref=world&pagewanted=all)

In anime and manga Tokyo has been destroyed countless times by gigantic monsters, aliens, and natural disasters, but though the scenes of the 3.11 Tohoku quake were eerily similar to many such depictions, they were no fiction. As reports and images flooded back to the United States the extent of the devastation became visually available to American viewers. A BBC application layered satellite images of the Tohoku coast before and after the tsunami, allowing users to control the tsunami tide with their cursor and see the damage wracked by it.<sup>249</sup> Moreover, damages sustained by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant caused multiple explosions and systems failures, threatening to spread disaster to the rest of Japan with clouds of radioactivity, contaminated soil, and irradiated food. The media coverage and visual confirmation of devastation in Japan posed a direct challenge to pure-Japan. How could the fandom preserve its imagining of a perfect fantasy realm when confronted with images of its physical destruction?

As the initial news of the earthquake spread, the fan community turned its attentions to the concerns most pressing to it—how would this affect anime and manga production? The popular and respected site Anime News Network immediately began keeping a list of important anime, manga, and game industry members as they checked in with Japanese media to confirm that they were safe.<sup>250</sup> Nor was the Anime News Network alone in tracking these cultural personalities. Numerous personal and independently run blogs began keeping lists of their own favorite producers as they checked in.<sup>251</sup> Some forum threads even centered on each forum

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<sup>249</sup> “Tsunami: Before and After Images,” *BBC News*, Published 15 March 2011, Accessed 27 December 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12743904>

<sup>250</sup> “Anime/Manga/Game Industry Members Check In After Quake (Updated),” *Anime News Network*, Published 11 March 2011, Accessed 15 November 2011, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2011-03-11/anime/manga/game-industry-members-check-in-after-quake>

<sup>251</sup> “Japan Earthquake and Tsunami – Anime and Manga Industry Members Update,” *Riyoga’s Ramblings* (Blog), Published 11 March 2011, Accessed 18 December 2011, <http://subtlechaos.wordpress.com/2011/03/11/japan-earthquake-and-tsunami-anime-and-manga-industry-members-update/>

member reporting in as they heard from their personal family and friends in Japan.<sup>252</sup> Even Yahoo! Answers was flooded with posters asking how the disaster would change the date when their series would be released.<sup>253</sup> The feelings of the majority of Yahoo! Posters (most likely more casual fans) were best summarized by user “yoosoo” who asked, “i know this is kinda selfish but....will there still be anime and manga coming out from Japan?”<sup>254</sup> The answer was yes: anime and manga production is focused in Japan’s most populous region, Tokyo, which was only mildly affected by the earthquake, meaning that the flow of cultural material would most certainly not cease. Nevertheless, the disaster forced the entire fandom to reconsider its imagining of Japan.

One of the most interesting facets of the way the fandom imagines pure-Japan is that the imagined world is always superior to their own. The earthquake threatened not only the physical realm in which pure-Japan supposedly exists, but also the producers who create the products through which it is understood and interpreted. As many fans who worried about the creators of their favorite series noted, the death of the creator usually means the death of the series. Thus when Japan was struck by the 3.11 earthquake fans faced for the first time the potential of the death of their world. Essentially, what had once been a safe haven of imagination was no longer secure. Pure-Japan is a world to which fans can escape without incurring any consequences on their everyday lives, but the earthquake suddenly thrust those consequences upon them. Temporarily, the advantages of pure-Japan were taken away from the fandom, as no escape could be had to a world whose source might imminently cease to exist. With a new narrative of Japan driven into the lives of fans, their response showed a new understanding of Japan for the

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<sup>252</sup> “Friday 11th... 2011,” *AnimeOnline Network* (Forum), Published 11 March 2011 (10:33pm), Accessed 15 November 2011, <http://www.animeonline.net/f2/friday-11th-2011-a-51117/>

<sup>253</sup> Google search: “site:answers.yahoo.com japan earthquake anime,” 10,500 results, Accessed 31 December 2011

<sup>254</sup> “Japan Earthquake, no more anime?” *Yahoo! Answers*, posted by “yoosoo,” Published 11 March 2011, Accessed 31 December 2011, <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20110314201213AAI4Rlp>

community, as well as the existence of tremendous soft power garnered by Japan through its cultural products.

Within days of the 3.11 earthquake, many Americans started working on ways to help Japan. A country most known for scenes of its urban regions, such as hyper-developed Tokyo, Japan suffered from stereotypes as a rich country. Much of the area stricken by the earthquake, however, was rural—fishing villages, small towns, and minor cities. Sendai, the most developed region, was hit with some of the worst damage. Moreover, those places affected by the ensuing tsunami suffered damages beyond most normal imagination: whole buildings literally swept away. Those who sought to raise funds to help Japan worked to raise awareness of these circumstances and combat perceptions of Japan as a rich, well-off place.<sup>255</sup> For the numerous fans who undoubtedly participated in such efforts this was a dramatic shift in perception. Indeed, fans hoping to raise money to help Japan had to make a near 180-degree turn in their description of Japan. Far from being an idyllic utopia, Japan was now actively confirmed by fans as a place in trouble. While it is impossible to know how many fans contributed to general fundraising or what percentage of the total money flowing to Japan from the United States for earthquake relief comes from fans, the amount of relief money is staggering, and examples directly linked to fan efforts stand out.

Just under three months after the quake, on June 10, 2011, the American Red Cross made a \$46 million donation to its Japanese counterpart, specifically to provide help to victims of the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami.<sup>256</sup> The aid organization reported on its website, “As of June 6, the

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<sup>255</sup> AlertNet blogger Nita Bhalla’s web-post collected numerous other postings arguing against donating to Japan, many on the basis that Japan is a “wealthy country.”

Nita Bhalla, “Asia Views – Should we be donating to ‘rich’ Japan?” *AlertNet: A Thomson Reuters Foundation Service*, Published 16 March 2011, Accessed 12 April 2012, <http://www.trust.org/alertnet/blogs/asia-views/should-we-be-donating-to-rich-japan/>

<sup>256</sup> “American Red Cross Investments in Japan Disaster Response Reach Nearly \$210 Million,” *American Red Cross*, Published 10 June 2011, Accessed 14 November 2011,

American Red Cross had raised nearly \$253 million for the Japan earthquake and Pacific tsunami response.”<sup>257</sup> The GlobalGiving.org Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund received 47,422 donations, raising over \$6 million in support of relief and emergency services.<sup>258</sup> Even anime importation giant Funimation posted links to both charities in its official blog.<sup>259</sup> Fans sprung directly into action, lending both financial and emotional support to Japan.

Only six days after the earthquake struck, on St. Patrick’s Day, the Meltdown Comics store in Los Angeles held a fundraiser called “We Heart Japan.”<sup>260</sup> “A 3-hour benefit for the purpose of raising money to benefit victims of the large Earthquake...the event transformed the store for a few hours into something of a compressed anime convention.”<sup>261</sup> The event made fan community headlines, even garnering a story on Anime News Network. Many American fans participated in a global emotional support effort, “Prayers from Cosplayers.”<sup>262</sup> This website was devoted to images of cosplayers in costume holding signs expressing support for Japan and encouraging the Japanese people to have strength. The project included messages from fans all over the world. From the financial aid to this kind of emotional support, fan efforts in the U.S. dramatically demonstrated the soft power garnered by Japan through anime and manga.

“Soft power” was first articulated by international relations theorist Joseph Nye.<sup>263</sup> Nye defines soft power as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or

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<http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.94aae335470e233f6cf911df43181aa0/?vgnnextoid=c6706339ea670310VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD>

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> “Japan Earthquake and Tsunami Relief Fund,” *GlobalGiving.org*, Accessed 31 December 2011,

<http://www.globalgiving.org/projects/japan-earthquake-tsunami-relief/>

<sup>259</sup> “Massive Earthquake Hits Japan,” *Funimation* (Associated Blog), Published 11 March 2011 (11:03am), Accessed 31 December 2011, <http://blog.funimation.com/2011/03/massive-earthquake-hits-japan/>

<sup>260</sup> Justin Sevakis and Pinguino Kolb, “We Heart Japan’ Earthquake Relief Gallery,” *Anime News Network*, Published 24 March 2011, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/convention/2011/we-heart-japan-earthquake-relief-gallery>

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> *Prayers From Cosplayers*, Accessed 31 December 2011, <http://www.prayersfromcosplayers.com/?lang=en>

<sup>263</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), ix.

payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies."<sup>264</sup> The idea that Japan could garner substantial soft power through its cultural exports is not new, though it has been controversial, both in Japan and abroad, for some time. Author Douglas McGray first phrased Japan's specific brand of soft power as its "gross national cool," referencing the popularity of Japanese products with youth. Writing in 2002, McGray saw Japan's gross national cool at that time as impotent, suggesting that "While Japan sits on that formidable reserve of soft power, it has few means to tap it."<sup>265</sup> The 3.11 Tohoku earthquake, however, demonstrated that although Japan may not be able to consciously tap the soft power generated by anime and manga, the power is not in the least impotent, and is brought to bear by the fan communities for those cultural exports.

Indeed, while the fandom's newfound conception of Japan was as a place that could, and did, experience turmoil, that conception is a painful one, and Japan draws soft power from the fandom's work to alleviate their pain. Pure-Japan, a world created from the American imagination through interpretation of anime and manga, was temporarily destroyed by the earthquake, forcing fans to deal with a harsh reality of irrevocable endings. However, through their relief efforts, members of the American fandom have worked to rebuild Japan to "normal." But that "normal," in essence, a return to the status-quo pre-quake, is pure-Japan. Thus, American fans are deeply and sincerely invested in preserving a Japan capable of being pure-Japan, a Japan free of cares visible to American fans. Japan is therefore faced with a severe cultural dilemma: pure-Japan is an Orientalist creation that gives American fans narrative power over Japan, but the existence of pure-Japan in the minds of American fans gives Japan soft

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid, x.

<sup>265</sup> Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2002.

power through them. The work done by the fan community to help after the 3.11 earthquake, upon deeper examination, is dramatic evidence of this.

The tremendous amount of money sent to Japan from the U.S. following the Tohoku earthquake can be attributed to any number of reasons. One fact remains indisputable, however: when Japan needed aid it was given access to American financial resources, not only by the American government, but also by private American citizens and corporations. This is a compelling demonstration of soft power, to the letter of Nye's definition. Japan was able to get what it wanted (aid), not through coercion, but through the attraction of its global standing, people, and culture. The money itself, however, is merely an indicator of the flow of cultural sympathy from America to Japan. This unquantifiable "goodwill" is the ideal product of soft power.<sup>266</sup> American fans are most certainly a large base of this goodwill, drawn from their desire for pure-Japan. Whether through fundraising or messages of support, American fans demonstrate a willingness to support Japan in real terms, even as they seek to relegate it to existence as their perfect fantasy.

The 3.11 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami was a terrible disaster for Japan, causing massive damage to the country's Northeast coast, and creating long-lasting problems that will take years to repair. The United States responded to the disaster with large amounts of financial aid and voiced international support. Within the U.S., the disaster seriously shook the fan communities for anime and manga, as many fans wondered whether or not the media would be totally cut off or postponed, or at the least, if their favorite series would be lost to the chaos. More deeply, the earthquake and tsunami challenged core American fan conceptions of Japan. Built over more than four decades of consumption of manga and anime and conflict with American culture industries, "pure-Japan" is an idyllic land of imagination where American fans

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<sup>266</sup> Nye, 38.

can escape with no consequences to their immediate, everyday lives. The events of 3.11 thrust a troubling narrative of suffering Japan into the everyday lives of these fans, and images of devastation forced fans to temporarily accept a new vision of Japan as a land where death and definitive ending occur. Acting to aid Japan, fans sent money, held fundraisers, and created messages of support, the end goal of which was to help Japan return to normal. Normal, for American fans, meant pre-quake Japan, and thereby a return to a Japan capable of being pure-Japan. Revealed by this American fan desire for pure-Japan is the existence of substantial soft power created by Japanese cultural exports. Through anime and manga, Japan maintains American fans that support the nation so that it can remain pure-Japan for them. Though controversial, this soft power is undoubtedly potent, as evidenced by the tremendous efforts of the American fandom to support Japan following the 3.11 earthquake. In the fires of a tremendous disaster in Japan, deep cultural challenges were forced on American anime and manga fans, and their powerful response is indicative not only of their cultural imaginings and needs, but also of the soft power garnered by Japan as a result of those desires. Thus, Japan is faced with an intense dilemma: is surrendering the power of narrative to American fans worth the soft power gained as a result?

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