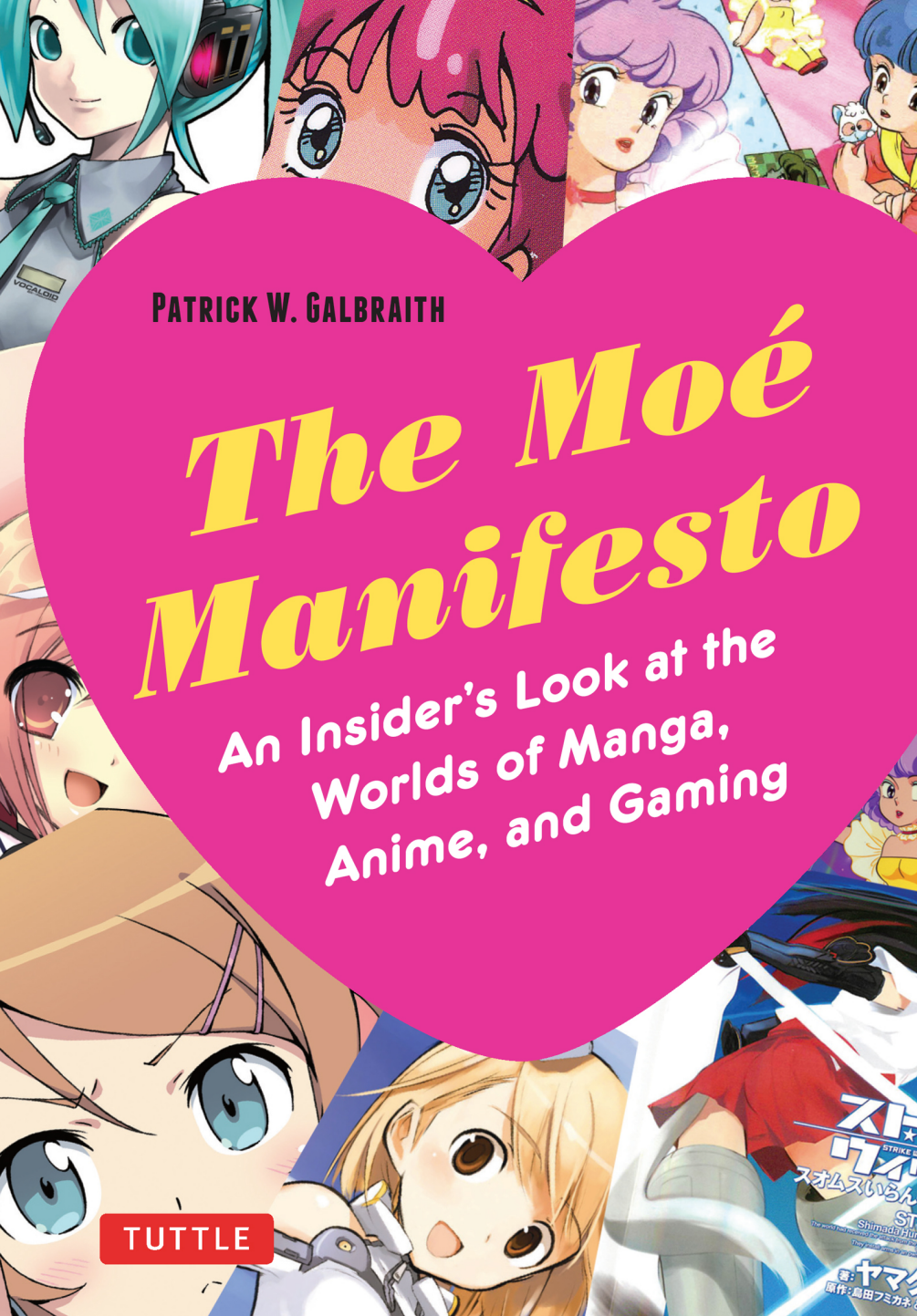
Patrick W. Galbraith
The Moé Manifesto
An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming
TUTTLE

"*Moé* is a hall of mirrors in a cultural fun palace; a twist in the psyche; an etymological thicket; and a sometimes conroversial social phenomenon. I can't imagine a better guide to the *moé* world than scholar Patrick W. Galbraith, with his lavishly illustrated, interview-based book."

—Frederik L. Schodt, author of *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*

"Galbraith has crafted the most definitive *moé* treatise to date."

—Brian Ashcraft, author of *Japanese Schoolgirl Confidential*

"What exactly is *moé*? Galbraith takes a fascinating look into all the elements that make up this word through in-depth interviews and character analysis. —Danny Choo, www.culturejapan.com

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PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMON MCGLOWN

Falling in Love with Japanese Characters

"Are you familiar with Japanese *moé* relationships, where socially dysfunctional men develop deep emotional attachments to body pillows with women painted on them?" asks James Franco, guest starring on the NBC sitcom *30 Rock* in January 2010. Later in the episode, the actor is shown holding a pillow with an anime girl crudely drawn on it. Franco calls her Kimiko. Viewers cannot suppress their laughter.

The laughter comes from a growing worldwide awareness of Japanese popular culture, including the antics of some of the more extreme fans of manga, anime, and games. Just as anime and manga are understood to be distinct from cartoons and comics, fans of anime and manga are in a category of their own: *otaku*. While talking about *moé*, Franco offers a concise description of *otaku*: "socially dysfunctional men" who are entirely too attached to fictional girl characters. From where did the writers of *30 Rock* get this idea? Perhaps a July 2009 article in the *New York Times* that describes "*moé* relationships" with body pillows as a social phenomenon in Japan. Given the prevalence of such articles in the popular press, many watching *30 Rock* shook their heads, smiled, and thought, "Yes, James Franco, we know *moé*!"

But what does *moé* even mean? The *30 Rock* viewer sees a man with a body pillow, which he seems to love. Is that *moé*?

Used as part of an inside joke, it seems that everyone implicitly understands *moé*—it needs no explanation. James Franco holds aloft exhibit A. He says it's a Japanese thing. We know they're weird, right? Case closed.

In order to formulate an independent opinion about *moé*, we need some definitions and context. Linguistically speaking, *moé* (萌え) is the noun form of the verb *moeru*, meaning to burst into bud or to sprout. There is a youthful vitality to the word, reflected in its use in Japanese poetry from as early as the eighth century. Moé can also be a given name, which in manga, anime, and games is typically reserved for young girls. The word is pronounced *moé* (i.e., with the final "e" sound stressed separately as "eh").

In the 1990s, *otaku* gathering online to talk about manga and anime characters began to use the word *moé* as slang for burning passion. The story goes that they were trying to write the verb *moeru* (燃える), "to burn," but computers would often mistakenly convert this as the homonymous verb *moeru* (萌える), "to burst into bud."

In this contemporary usage, *moé* means an affectionate response to fictional characters. There are three things to note about this definition. First, *moé* is a response, a verb, something that is done. Second, as a response, *moé* is situated in those

***Moé*: an affectionate response to fictional characters**

responding to a character, not the character itself. Third, the response is triggered by fictional characters.

The characters that trigger a *moé* response, sometimes called *moé* characters (*moé kyara*), are most often from manga, anime, and games. Material representations of characters—figurines, body pillows with the character image on them—can trigger *moé*. Sounds and voices are described as

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMON MCGLOWN

Figurines can trigger a *moé* response

moé when associated with characters. A human can trigger *moé* when dressed in character costume, just as an object can be anthropomorphized into a *moé* character. What is important here is that the response isn't to the material object, sound, costume or person, but rather to the character.

To return to our definition, *moé* is a response to fictional characters, and when we talk about *moé* we are necessarily also talking about how people interact with fictional characters.

Available evidence suggests that interacting with a character in a manga, anime, or game, one can become significantly attached to that character. Indeed, some *otaku* describe such attachment in terms of "marriage." This can be as casual as calling a favorite character "my wife" (*ore no yome*) or as serious as announcing a long-term, committed relationship. Author and cultural critic Honda Toru, for example, has said that he is married to Kawana Misaki, a blind high-school girl from the game *One: kagayaku kisetsu e* (1998). A shy man, Honda is also something of a radical who advocates *moé* relationships in books he has written, for example *No'nai ren'ai no susume* (Recommending imaginary love), published in 2007.

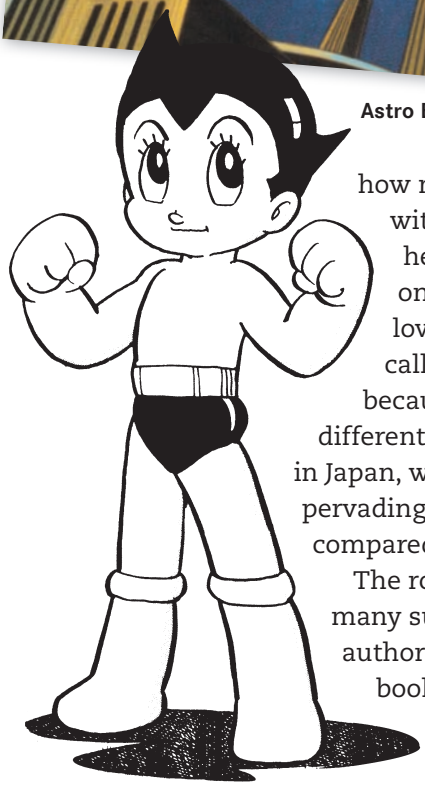
Many have followed in Honda's footsteps. On October 22, 2008, a man called Takashita Taichi set up an online petition asking the Japanese government to legally recognize marriage to fictional characters. Within a week, a thousand people had signed it. On November 22, 2009, a man calling himself Sal 9000 married a character from the game *LovePlus* (2009) in an official-looking ceremony held in Tokyo. "I love this character," the man told CNN. "I understand very well that I cannot marry her physically or legally." Remember James Franco's body pillow? Well, on March 11, 2010, a Korean man announced his marriage to the character drawn on his body pillow.

On the one hand, these marriages are playful performances by *otaku* that we perhaps shouldn't take too seriously. On the other hand, however, these marriages do significant work. As anthropologist Ian Condry sees it, *otaku* are demonstrating their devotion to others in a political move to gain acceptance of attachment to fictional characters. These public declarations of love for fictional characters pose important challenges to accepted norms. Honda Toru calls the awakening to *moé* relationships a "love revolution" (*ren'ai kakumei*), which entails the embrace of fictional characters and liberation from oppressive social and gender norms. For the record, Honda doesn't care about legal recognition of his marriage, because he refuses the authority of institutions that he sees as corrupt to legitimize his love.

To understand *moé*, we need to consider how it is possible to become attached to the characters of manga and anime in the first place. Comparisons to comics and cartoons risk grossly misrepresenting the status of manga and anime, which are vibrant forms of mass media in Japan. Consider Tezuka Osamu's *Astro Boy* (1963–1966), which in 1963 was adapted from a popular manga series into a weekly TV serial, had product tie-ins and sponsors, spin-off merchandise and toys. Media researcher Marc Steinberg argues that this became the basic model for character franchising in Japan, which is now ubiquitous. Encountered constantly in this pervasive way, characters are a very real and intimate part of everyday life in Japan.

As psychiatrist Saito Tamaki sees it, fictional characters can become the object of romantic love for those growing up with them. One's first love can just as easily be a manga character as it can be an idol singer on TV or a girl in your class. When I first met Saito, I was a little shocked by how easily those words rolled off his tongue. I pressed him on

Astro Boy



how normal it is to fall in love with fictional characters, and he turned the question around on me. "Why is it strange to love manga characters?" I recall the scene vividly even now, because it revealed to me how differently characters are regarded in Japan, where there is such an all-pervading manga and anime culture compared to the United States.

The roots of *moé* go deeper than many suspect. Helen McCarthy, author of a number of reference books on manga and anime, notes similarities between the postwar manga of

***Lost World* (1948), Tezuka Osamu**

Tezuka Osamu and contemporary offerings. McCarthy zeros in on Tezuka's *Lost World* (1948), in which a scientist in an alien world has developed a method of genetically engineering females from plant matter. The scientist intends to sell the plant women as slaves, and his prototypes are made attractive to tempt potential buyers. Another scientist on the planet befriends one of the plant women, Ayame. Later, the two are left stranded in the alien world and decide to live as "brother and sister." As McCarthy writes on her blog, "This is essential *moé* —an innocent, literally budding girl, a geeky young man with the heart of a hero and protective instincts to do any father proud."

While largely agreeing with McCarthy's analysis, Meiji University professor Morikawa Ka'ichiro points out the physical attractiveness of Ayame, which, he argues, was extremely stimulating for young male readers. Many early postwar manga artists in Japan list *Lost World* as a major influence. In this sense, says Morikawa, Tezuka could be considered to have sown the seeds of *moé* culture.

Among the first to respond to Tezuka's work by making explicit the attractiveness of his characters was the manga artist Azuma Hideo. In the late 1970s, Azuma combined the rounded character bodies associated with Tezuka's manga with the expressive character faces associated with *shojo* manga (manga for girls), which resulted in a hybrid form known as the *bishojo*, meaning cute girl.

Fans of *bishojo* characters were among those manga and anime enthusiasts first labeled *otaku*. The columnist Nakamori Akio, writing in the subcultural magazine *Manga Burikko* in 1983, used the word *otaku* to mean something like geek or loser. Azuma Hideo is named explicitly in Nakamori's articles about *otaku*, and those attracted and attached to *bishojo* are called all sorts of names in addition to *otaku*—including

Azuma Hideo's "cute girl"

PHOTO COURTESY ANDREW LEE

leeches and slugs! The ferociousness of Nakamori's reaction reflects a more general discomfort with the ways men were interacting with *bishojo* characters. Cultural critic Takekuma Kentaro recalls being shocked and dismayed at the increasing popularity of *bishojo* manga, even as manga editor Sasakibara Go and sociologist Yoshimoto Taimatsu point to the late 1970s as a crucial time of "value changes" (*kachi tenkan*) among Japanese fans.

The years 1978 and 1979 are crucial. Famed creator Miyazaki Hayao gave his fans two female characters—Lana, from the TV anime *Future Boy Conan* (1978), and Clarisse, from the animated film *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979)—and they gained an incredible following. As journalist Takatsuki Yasushi writes in his book, *Lolicon: Nihon no shojo shikoshatachi to sono sekai* (Lolita complex: Japan's girl lovers and their world), published in 2010, fanzines about Clarisse were abundant enough to have their own category: Clarisse magazines (*kurarisu magajin*). Also in 1979, Azuma Hideo and friends published the first volume of the legendary fanzine *Cybele*, which stressed a cute aesthetic over realism and opened the eyes of many fans to the charms of *bishojo* characters.

PHOTO COURTESY HOWARD HIROKAZU KAWAI

***Gundam* fanzines**

Further, in 1979, the anime series *Mobile Suit Gundam* aired on Japanese TV. Often considered a "realistic robot" anime, and much loved by *mecha* fans outside Japan, the series was at first heavily criticized by established sci-fi fans inside Japan, who were dismissive of the melodramatic emphasis on human relationships and scathing about the shallowness and excitability of fans of the series. Though it is not much remembered today, news reports from the time detail how *Gundam* fans would dress up as characters from the series and make a spectacle of themselves on the streets of Harajuku, one of the epicenters of Tokyo's youth culture. Fans of *Mobile Suit Gundam* have long peppered their fanzines, which are at least ostensibly about robots, with images of cute girls.

After *Gundam* came *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* (1982–1983), again praised for its realistic robots, but at the same time featuring extended scenes of melodramatic romance. In his book, *Bishojo no gendaishi* (Contemporary history of *bishojo*), published in 2004, Sasakibara Go goes as far as to argue that the narrative drive of *Macross* is the love triangle, not the battle with invading space aliens. For all of their attention to mechanical design and battle sequences, *Macross* fans pay equal attention to the beautiful character designs and idol performances included in the work. The production of this mash-up work, and its popularity among anime fans, can be seen as evidence of interest at the time in both robots and *bishojo*.

While anime specialty magazines such as *Gekkan Out*, *Animec*, and *Animage* were publishing articles about the booming interest in *bishojo* characters in the early 1980s, fans were seeking out cute female characters in TV anime such as *Magical Princess Minky Momo* (1982–1983) and *Creamy Mami, the Magic Angel* (1983–1984). Creators were shocked that the number of adult male fans had swelled to the point that

they were forming fan clubs for favorite characters and appearing at promotional events. Enthusiasm for *bishojo* characters gave birth to magazines like *Lemon People* (from 1981), and games and animation like *Lolita Syndrome* (1983) and *Lolita Anime* (1984).

COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI

Manga Burikko

An important forum for expressing affection for fictional characters was provided by *Manga Burikko* (1982–1985), a subcultural magazine that included manga in various styles, from realistic, gritty drawings to cute illustrations of *bishojo*. From June to August 1983, *Manga Burikko* published a column by Nakamori Akio, mentioned above, that made fun of fans of Azuma Hideo, Minky Momo, and *lolicon* fanzines (so-called Lolita-complex works, which feature youthful or young-looking characters), calling these fans *otaku*. This was the first time the word had been used in the media to describe manga and anime fans, and the criticism seemed to be aimed squarely at the readers of the magazine. Naturally, there was blowback, and the reader response section of *Manga Burikko* became a forum for discussing the appropriateness of affection for fictional characters.

Because *Manga Burikko* marketed itself as a "*Bishojo* Comic Magazine for Dreaming Boys" (*yume miru otoko no ko no tame no bishojo komikkushi*), it is not surprising to find that most of its readers supported love for fictional characters—what we might now call *moé*. The author of one letter published in the August 1983 issue goes so far as to call himself, with more than a hint of pride, someone with a "two-dimensional complex" (*nijigen konpurekkusu*). In time, Nakamori's column was canceled, and the fans got what they wanted: more *bishojo* characters and less flack for loving them.

In another interesting development, the realistic drawings that were once part of *Manga Burikko* gave way to a softer *shojo*-manga aesthetic. Otsuka Eiji, the editor of *Manga Burikko*, was a fan of *shojo* manga himself, and the magazine regularly featured contributions by female manga artists such as Okazaki Kyoko, Shirakura Yumi, and Sakurazawa Erika. *Manga Burikko* was also a platform for male artists who were appropriating the style of female

COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI

Takanezawa Moé in *Manga Burikko*

artists, much as Azuma Hideo did in the 1970s, and this resulted in further evolution of the *bishojo* character.

Take for example the August 1983 issue of *Manga Burikko*, where Hayasaka Miki, a male artist, uses four color pages to introduce a girl character named Takanezawa Moé (notice the name). On the third page, Moé's elder sister, a female manga artist, is revealed to be in charge of taking some photos of Moé for this spread in *Manga Burikko*. What the viewer is seeing on the page in the drawings by Hayasaka are the "photos" taken by Moé's elder sister. In drawing what the older sister saw through the camera's viewfinder, Hayasaka is not just drawing a girl in a style inspired by girls' comics, but he is also visualizing Moé from the viewpoint of a girl.

Character design and desiring reached new heights in the 1990s with the manga series *Sailor Moon* (1991–1997), which, though written by Takeuchi Naoko—a woman—for young women and girls, explicitly calls its main heroine a *bishojo*. The cute, round character designs that were used for the TV anime (1992–1997) attracted many adult male fans. Also in the 1990s, the *bishojo* character moved from niche, subcultural, *otaku* publications to mainstream manga magazines. *Bishojo* games, in which players "date" *bishojo* characters—often called dating simulator games outside Japan—also reached a non-*otaku* market when Konami's *Tokimeki Memorial* was ported to the PlayStation in 1995. Finally, the success of TV anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–1996) saw an exponential growth in demand for figurines of its main female characters. As stores began to carry *bishojo* games, fanzines, and figurines, the Tokyo district of Akihabara transformed into the center of *moé* culture.

In 2004, a report by the Nomura Research Institute revealed that sales of manga, anime, and games were strong in the 1990s, despite an economic recession in Japan, and called

Astro Boy and Hello Kitty revamped as *moé* characters

for the "revaluation" of *otaku*. Japan was ready to reconcile with its outcast sons, as can be seen from the social excitement around the *Densha otoko* (Train Man) novel, film, and TV series (2004–2006) about true love between an *otaku* and a career woman. The final episode of the TV series drew an astonishing 25.5 percent of the national audience, and Japan scholar Alisa Freedman notes that *otaku* were now positioned in the media as potential dates for lonely women. At the same time, some *otaku* protested the normative message of *Densha otoko*—grow up and get a date!—and planted signs in Akihabara reading "Real *Otaku* Don't Get Hot for the Three-Dimensional" (*somo somo shinjitsu no wota wa 3D ni yokujo shimasen*).

Regardless, following memorable scenes of the protagonist of *Densha otoko* blissfully saying "*Moé*!" the word became popular in the media in 2005. What followed was a "*moé* boom," where nationally beloved characters such as Astro Boy and Hello Kitty were recast as *moé* characters, which is to say revamped by artists popular with *otaku*.

Newsweek Japan in its March 21, 2007 issue devoted its cover story to the spread of manga, anime, and games around the globe, a phenomenon it called the "*moé* world" (*moeru sekai*). But American fans preferring sci-fi and *mecha* were not so sure what to make of all these cute girls in their anime. The April 2009 issue of *Otaku USA* magazine features a special report on *moé* in which American *otaku* experts give their opinions. One of them, Daryl Surat, calls *moé* "a sham, a heroin substitute to the narcotic they call 'love'" and "the Dark Side of the *Otaku* Force." In a separate blog post, manga critic Jason Thompson writes about feeling ashamed by *moé*, which he associates with a Japanese obsession with cuteness and youth. Many of the debates hinge on *moé* media's melodramatic emphasis on human relationships and the

***Moé* in the headlines**

shallowness and excitability of *moé otaku*, which recalls the disdain that traditional sci-fi fans held for fans of *Mobile Suit Gundam* decades ago.

This book, *The Moé Manifesto*, has a title that brings back memories for me. I remember marching with the Revolutionary *Moé* Advocates Alliance (*kakumei-teki moé shugisha domei*) on the streets of Akihabara on June 30, 2007. I remember men and women, young and not so young, dressed up as anime characters or in the classic attire of Japanese student radicals of the 1960s. I remember people joining the march, and their numbers swelling to five hundred people. I remember singing and dancing as well-practiced political slogans trailed off to be replaced by the growing roar of the crowd. One group near me shouted over and over again, "Let me keep my Haruhi!" referring to the main female character of the anime series *The Melancholy of Suzumiya Haruhi*. Many women, and some men, were dressed up as Haruhi.

This revolutionary *moé* alliance came together in shared love of fictional characters, and in protest to developments

in Akihabara aimed at curtailing public displays of affection for characters (in which people would dress in character costume and make a spectacle of themselves singing and dancing in the street), which were said to be disturbing to businesses and tourists. What these protesters wanted was to maintain the space where they could publicly express their love for *bishojo* like Haruhi. Years later, I was at an anime convention in the United States, and saw firsthand the criticism of so-called *moé otaku*, who there, too, were thought to be somehow disruptive and disturbing.

After all this time, I still can't quite understand the position of the anti-*moé* camp, which calls certain fans "*moé* pigs" or worse. Why should it matter so much if someone is in love with a character and wants to share that love with others? Such actions aren't harming anyone, and in fact might be both helping the individual and invigorating the manga and anime industries and fan communities. Love is never an easy thing to understand, and it can be embarrassing to watch the silly things that people do when they are in love, but I for one think we should embrace love rather than condemn it.

I decided to call this book *The Moé Manifesto* in hopes of capturing some of the spirit of camaraderie that I felt on the streets of Akihabara in 2007. Let me speak as an advocate of *moé*, and propose an alliance between all those who love manga, anime and games. It is no secret that I love anime; beginning when I was fourteen years old, I started tattooing my favorite characters, all *bishojo*, on my body. I personally find that I have a lot in common with Japanese fans of *moé* media. It's too easy to draw lines in the sand and point fingers at those who are different; sci-fi fans did so with *Gundam* fans, Nakamori Akio with *otaku,* and some American *otaku* with *moé otaku*. Rather than push others away, I wonder if it might be more fun to enjoy manga and anime together.

Think about *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*, an anime that brought *mecha* and *bishojo* fans together, and that brought me together with some of my best friends, none of whom are into *moé*. Manga and anime spread around the world because of fans who love and share them. Let's not turn to hate.

When I was younger, my hero was Okada Toshio, an anime producer who was once called the King of *Otaku*. I still respect Okada, but I increasingly disagree with him. For example, Okada has made it clear that he does not like *moé*, which he considers merely an obsession with cute girl characters by superficial fans. To me, that characterization is unfair. Few people are as sincere in their love of manga, anime, and games as those I encountered in Akihabara. Even if their love is for characters rather than the work as a whole, why should that make them superficial? All this talk about love brings up

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANNY CHOO

The Revolutionary *Moé* Advocates Alliance marches in Akihabara

my second problem with Okada's critique: I don't think the *moé* phenomenon can simply explained as ogling cute girls. That doesn't explain Hayasaka Miki drawing from the perspective of his character's elder sister, or men dressing up as Haruhi on the streets of Akihabara, or the impulse to marry a fictional character. Something else is going on here, something that we've missed in our rush to judge and trivialize.

The Moé Manifesto aims to provide a space to linger on the issue of love for fictional characters. It provides interviews with artists and creators, cultural critics, fans, and scholars. The focus of the interviews is primarily Japanese men considered *otaku*, because the image of the Japanese male *otaku* crystallizes social anxiety about *moé*. When talking about *moé*, the interviewees often take a political stance; some are critical while others are supportive. The reader will notice that I have also included interviews with women, for example Ito Noizi, who draws Haruhi. Women have long been involved in the production of *bishojo* characters (which therefore can't rightly be described as male fetishes), and they have interesting things to say about Japanese male *otaku* and *moé*. The point is to expand the range of opinions that we hear about *moé* so that we can see beyond stereotypes and open up room for discussion. Contrary to the opinion expressed through James Franco in *30 Rock*, *moé* is not something that we should just have a laugh about and move on.

In a book of this size it is impossible to offer a complete survey of all aspects of the phenomenon, but I hope that *The Moé Manifesto* provokes a debate about *moé* and the possibility of a different kind of love.

And so it begins.

Patrick W. Galbraith

Interview with

Ito Kimio

Ito Kimio, born in 1951, is a professor at Kyoto University Graduate School of Letters. His area of academic specialization is cultural sociology, and he is one of the founders of "Men's Studies" (*danseigaku*) in Japan. Ito believes that although gender roles have changed in the post-industrial world, this is more true for women than for men, who still tend to be defined by a narrow set of expectations. The ideal man in Japan, for example, remains the salaryman, who is productive at work and a provider at home. In this interview, Ito recalls his personal anxiety about masculinity as a young man growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, surrounded by a militant student movement and on the cusp of adult manhood, Ito took pleasure in things feminine, such as *shojo* manga (manga for girls), and sought in them an alternative to masculine bravado.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

From Social Movements to *Shojo* Manga

An Alternative to Masculine Bravado

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): What do you research?

Ito Kimio (IK): My research is on politics in a broad sense. Not political parties and voting, but rather the everyday politics of oppression, resistance, and compromise. I observe issues of authority and power relations in culture. I mean culture in a broad sense too—as in the way of thinking about and looking at things. So my work at the broadest level is about politics and culture, and I'm particularly interested in the effect of politics and culture on men and masculinity in Japan.

PG: You have also written on popular culture.

IK: I have written several books on manga and anime as part of my larger interest in boys' culture. You might not be aware of this, but before the Second World War, Japanese print media targeting boys was filled with images of extremely feminine masculinity. A good example is the work of Takabatake Kasho, who was a popular illustrator from the 1910s to the 1930s. Though these are prewar images, they resonate with the contemporary *shojo* manga that

COURTESY OF YAYOI MUSEUM

Takabatake Kasho's beautiful boys

Takabatake Kasho's beautiful boys

COURTESY OF YAYOI MUSEUM

feature beautiful boy characters. Nor are they dissimilar to the kinds of illustrations you get in "boys' love" manga. But at the time, these images represented the strong young men of a proud military nation, and before 1945 you would often see this type of character in war scenes. After 1945, *shonen* manga (manga for boys) didn't feature many war scenes, but when you get to the 1970s, you have popular *shonen* manga about school gangs and martial arts, a world of bodily violence. Or you have stories about giant robots, a world of mechanical violence.

PG: What was it like in Japan in the 1970s?

IK: In the 1960s there had been huge social movements in Japan against wars in Asia and our security treaty with America. After a decade of demonstrations and protests, the student movement died off, leaving a sense of fatigue on the political left. Going into the 1970s, there was a sense that young men had run out of steam—even their manga weren't that interesting. On the other hand, girls' culture started to expand rapidly. Consumer culture was on the rise, and with it so-called cute culture (*kawaii bunka*)—Hello Kitty and fancy goods. This was also a time when *shojo* manga was really maturing. Women such as Oshima Yumiko, Hagio Moto, Takemiya Keiko, and Yamagishi Ryoko were all creating manga at this time. The early 1970s was the peak of

the *shojo* manga scene in Japan, overshadowing anything going on in *shonen* manga.

PG: I understand that you were reading *shojo* manga, too.
IK: Right. *Shojo* manga provided an outlet for my anxieties about gender at the time. I was probably also critical of the macho world depicted in *shonen* manga. My unease with gender norms drew me to genres targeting female readers such as "boys' love" by writers such as Hagio Moto. There were a few others around me in the student movement also reading *shojo* manga, but it is a fact that most of society thought we were strange. More men,

The 1960s: a decade of protest in Japan

COURTESY OF SHINSENSHA

mostly college students, started reading *shojo* manga a little later. It wasn't that big of a trend, but they were reading Mutsu A-ko, who writes manga with a feminine touch (*otomechikku*), all about romance and everyday life, rather than the epic adventures you'd get in *shonen* manga. Men were searching for alternatives and this is one of the things they found.

PG: You recall being isolated and thought of as strange, but you weren't alone in reading *shojo* manga. Harada Teruo, the first president of the Comic Market, Tokyo's twice-yearly gathering for producers of fanzines, was a huge fan of Hagio Moto. In fact, he participated in the fan production of an animated version of her manga *November Gymnasium* that was screened at the first Comic Market in 1975. Many of the contributors to the legendary fanzine *Meikyu* were into *shojo* manga. Author Otsuka Eiji wrote a book about the premiums given away with *shojo* manga magazines. Why do you think that so many men were into it?

THOMA NO SHINZO © 1975 MOTO HAGIO/SHOGAKUKAN

Hagio Moto wrote "boys' love" manga

IK: Girls' culture was more interesting. Immediately after the Second World War, boys' culture was far more abundant and diverse in Japan. From the 1970s, however, the amount of *shojo* manga increased dramatically as girls found a place for themselves in the new consumer culture. Boys and men started to borrow from them as they searched for their own place in a changing society.

PG: How would you position *otaku* in this larger field?
IK: One of the hallmarks of today's consumer society is that people maintain a certain amount of distance from each other while using popular culture to mediate interactions and make friends. *Otaku*—the hardcore fans of manga and anime who appeared in the 1970s—are an example of this dynamic. Looking at this issue from a gender studies perspective, *otaku* are those boys and men who are attracted to the bright colors of girls' culture and reject the monotone of adult male culture. But *otaku* maintain physical distance from the opposite sex and instead they form intimate relationships with fictional characters from manga and anime. *Otaku* are said to have a "two-dimensional complex" (*nijigen konpurekkusu*), meaning that they prefer fictional characters over real women. To me, this culture of maintaining a distance from the human body and idolizing fictional characters connects to what we now call *moé*.

PG: So can you clarify your definition of *moé*?
IK: *Moé* is a feeling for two-dimensional entities. One doesn't have to risk getting hurt in a relationship with a fictional character, and can also control the character. *Otaku* are not good at navigating relationships with real women, but they can manage fictional women.

PG: And would you argue that this is a more general phenomenon in the world today?
IK: Something similar can be observed in societies where people spend more time interacting with media and technology than they spend interacting with people. *Moé* almost seems like a migration into the two-dimensional world. The physical body is left behind, and along with it what it used to mean to be a man in relation to women. This seems like another example of seeking an alternative to masculinity, but instead of just reading *shojo* manga as the young men of my generation did, these men are actually entering into relationships with characters from *shojo* manga.

Interview with

Kotani Mari

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

Kotani Mari, born in 1958, is a Japanese sci-fi critic and one of the founders of the Japanese Association of Feminist Science Fiction. Her books, *Seibo Evangelion* (Evangelion as the immaculate virgin), published in 1997, and *Techno-gothic*, published in 2005, put forward a feminist perspective on popular culture. In this interview, Kotani recalls her own experiences in the early Japanese sci-fi fan community and suggests that men labeled *otaku* are similar to women because they are marginalized in society.

Memories of Youth

A Feminist Perspective on *Otaku*

Seibo Evangelion

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): How did you first develop an interest in feminism?

Kotani Mari (KM): I was confronted by the preferential treatment of men when I worked in a company in my twenties. It didn't matter in school, where we were all basically equal and distinguished by grades, but in the company men were getting the good posts and being promoted faster. In addition to this, everyone was telling me to get married. I graduated from a college of science with a degree to practice pharmacology, thinking this would be a lifelong career, but when I entered the world of work I was shocked at the pressure I felt to abandon that path. This heightened my awareness of gender issues at a time when feminist ideas were gaining ground in Japan.

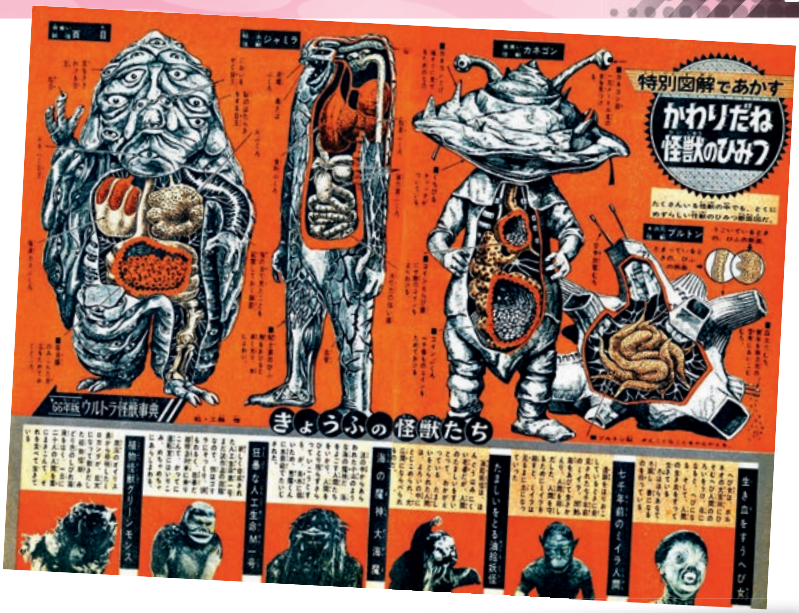
PG: You also brought feminism and gender critiques to discussions of popular culture.

KM: I am a fan of sci-fi, an *otaku*, and I often get together with other sci-fi fans to talk about our interests. In these discussions, I can see that there's a gap between the way men and women read sci-fi, because of the gap in their experiences of the world.

Women tend to focus on characters and human relationships, while men focus on robots, special effects, technology, and monsters. The genre of manga for girls, *shojo* manga, focuses on character psychology and relationships, and girls grow up reading these stories. Female manga artist Hagio Moto creates sci-fi manga that women enjoy because she basically just brings the interests of the *shojo* manga reader to her sci-fi stories. Hagio is known for her sensitivity to issues of gender, and in addition to writing sci-fi, she was one of the pioneers of "boys' love" manga, which girls were crazy about in the 1970s. Some boys liked them too—especially the intelligent ones.

PG: You describe yourself as an *otaku*. What does that mean?
KM: When I got into sci-fi, the word *otaku* was not widely used, and it was not used in a positive way. It referred more to collectors, like someone who has every item in a collection and keeps lists and catalogs of the items. Sci-fi fans would have meetings to discuss particular works, and there were people with outstanding knowledge who were capable of making insightful comments. They were called sci-fi maniacs, and were especially respected. Others were called sci-fi fans, because they were enthusiastic, but not as deep. The word *otaku* was sort of a negative assessment of collectors that had access to materials but were not able to talk about sci-fi in an interesting way. They were strange and a little annoying. Eventually, however, all fans of certain forms of popular culture, especially manga and anime, came to be known as *otaku*. That is usually how people use the term today.

PG: In your writing about the gender dynamics of *otaku* culture you have compared *otaku* to women. Can you explain what you mean?
KM: I did not mean that *otaku* are women, just that they are not ordinary men. In Japan, ordinary men adhere to the ideals of so-called salaryman society—in which men graduate from a university, enter a company, get married, buy a house, have children,



Sci-fi fans often catalog *kaiju*

send their sons to university, and expect to receive a pension and be taken care of by their wives when they retire. *Otaku* are the outsiders of salaryman society; they do not adhere to these gender norms. In the 1970s and 1980s, the range of behavior acceptable for men and women was relatively narrow. In those decades, *otaku* were seen as dropouts or troublemakers. In the article you refer to, I made the point that both women and *otaku* were marginalized by salaryman society during this era. The situation changed, however, in the 1990s, when gender norms loosened.

ILLUSTRATION BY NONAME

PG: Some have said that since the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* first aired in 1995, male fans have been more interested in characters and character relations. [See Honda Toru, page 119 and Azuma Hiroki, page 175.] Such *otaku* are said to be into *moé*. What is your opinion on this?

KM: I don't think that *moé* represents a dramatic break in the male approach to fantasy. I think that male *otaku* treat characters the same way that they treat any other object of their attention—they try to master them by memorizing information about them, whether they are fans of *kaiju* (monsters from special effects movies and TV shows), idol chasers, or *otaku* who are into manga and anime characters. The equivalents of *moé*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NONAME

A *kaiju* reimagined as cute girl

characters when I was younger were *kaiju* and robots. There are many different *kaiju* in special-effects TV shows and films, and fans of my generation were devoted to cataloging them. To me, it seems like *kaiju* have been replaced with fictional girl characters from manga, anime, and games, whose details are cataloged by male fans in the same way. Whether you are dissecting a *kaiju* or breaking down a character design to isolate the discrete *moé* elements, the basic impulse is the same. Boys and men also do this with robots and with idols.

PG: Are you suggesting that idols are much the same as fictional characters?

KM: I don't really see much difference between idols and fictional characters. An idol exists only in the media and is distant from real women. Like fans that worship images of idols, *moé otaku* are not committing to the real girl, but rather the fictional girl character. I think that *moé* is the phenomenon of directing your desires toward media images. Producers modify

media images of women according to what consumers like. The feedback loop has tightened considerably, and these images are now extremely sophisticated. *Moé* characters respond to very specific fantasies in a way that reality cannot. You could say that these images of women are independent of reality.

PG: What do you think of the focus on youthfulness, which extends from idols to fictional characters, and seems to be a central tenet of *moé* culture?

KM: The period of life regarded as most valuable in Japan is from middle school to high school. This is the period of adolescence, of youth, that is the most pure. The world seems to be so full of promise, you know? Everyone has hopes and dreams, which they have not yet compromised by joining the institutional culture of the salaryman society. Two things seem universal. One, this is the time when people start to fall in love, and two, everyone is wearing a school uniform. The uniform is really ambiguous in Japan. Wearing a uniform is all about standardization, of course, but at the same time the uniform is tied to this period of personal awakening in our lives. Everyone feels something about the uniform that they wore and saw others wear every day. Also, the uniform is only worn in middle school and high school. There are no uniforms in elementary schools or universities. So, the uniform is worn only between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, an age at which one's experiences are so intense that the image of a young person in a uniform resonates with us for the rest of our lives.

COURTESY TWINTAIL ASSOCIATION JAPAN

Idols, like *kaiju* and anime characters, are also cataloged

Interview with Otsuka Eiji

Otsuka Eiji, born in 1958, is a critic, manga writer, and editor. He was introduced to ethnography as a university student and went on to write many insightful books on Japan, including *Shojo minzokugaku* (Native ethnology of girls), published in 1989, in which he details the rise of consumerism and its intersections with the girls' culture that many consider key to the emergence of what we now call *otaku* culture. As a young man, Otsuka himself was a reader of *shojo* manga (manga for girls) and editor of the subcultural magazine *Manga Burikko* (1982–1985), which provided a space for men to produce *bishojo* manga (manga featuring cute girl characters). In 1983, *Manga Burikko* hosted a debate about *otaku*, a term they used to refer to men who produced fanzines and were attracted to fictional girl characters. In this interview, Otsuka reflects on the meaning of *otaku* and *moé*, and cautions against approaches that imagine Japan to be unique or special.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

From *Shojo* Manga to *Bishojo* Magazines

"*Moé* is not cool"

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): How should we define *otaku*?

Otsuka Eiji (OE): To tell the truth, I don't really know. The word *otaku* was first used by writer Nakamori Akio in *Manga Burikko* back in 1983 when I was in my twenties and working as the magazine's editor. It was the first time the term was publicly used to refer to enthusiastic manga and anime fans. But I still don't think there is any social significance to *otaku* or issue worth arguing about. In other words, in every country there are fans, for example of *Star Trek*, and long ago there were fans of *Sherlock Holmes*. Fan cultures and subcultures transcend borders; in Japan *otaku* is simply a word that refers to fans.

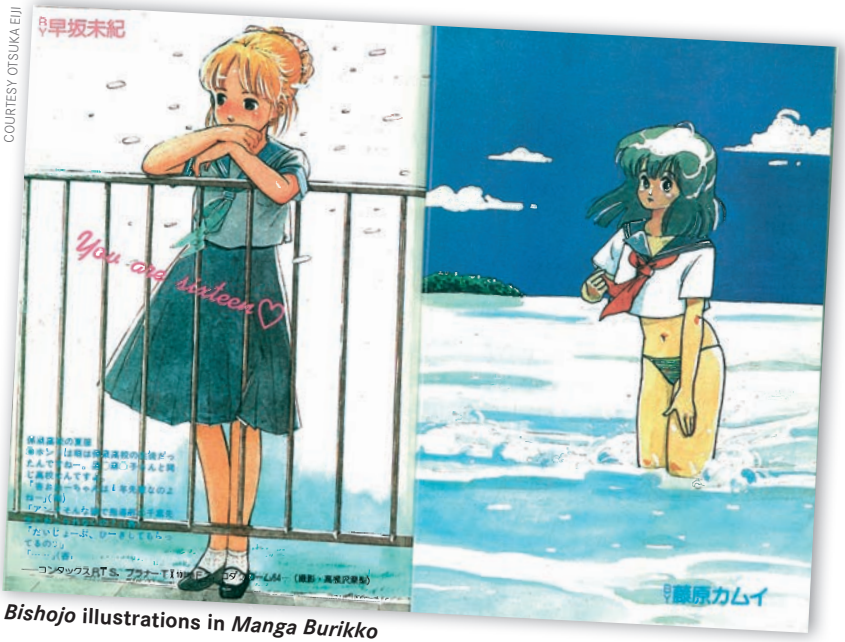
PG: Why do you think Nakamori chose this particular word to refer to Japanese fans?

OE: The term *otaku* is a second-person pronoun, equivalent to you. It was used among sci-fi fans in the 1970s. By the 1980s, the market for manga and anime had expanded, and it

Manga Burikko

COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI

COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI



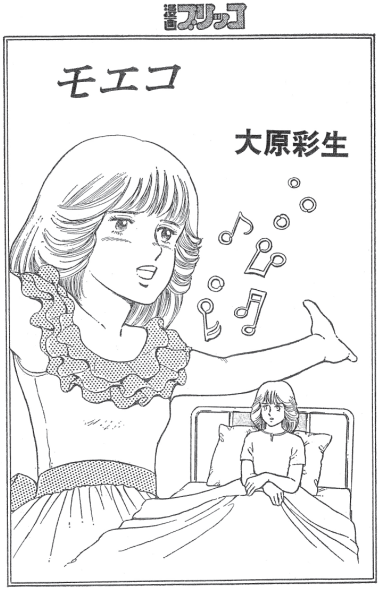
Bishojo* illustrations in *Manga Burikko

supported a wide variety of specialty magazines, which provided space for new artists to work in niches. Also, with the success of the Comic Market, Tokyo's twice-yearly gathering for fanzine producers, more events appeared where people could bring along fanzines they had made that expressed their interests, however niche they might be, and find an audience. These fans realized that they were minorities at school or work, but could talk about anime, manga, and games—the topics of subculture that interested them—when together. The problem is that in Japan, there isn't a proper word to express "you" in a situation where you want to speak passionately and personally about something to someone who isn't a friend or a member of your family or company, someone whose name you don't know, and to whom you haven't been introduced formally. Calling the person by the second-person pronoun *anata* would sound strange as this is a

word used between married couples. There is another second-person pronoun, *kimi*, but the relationship suggested by the term is too intimate. As a result, fans used the term *otaku*, which is a sort of honorific, somewhat ambiguous second-person pronoun. Nakamori saw young people referring to one another using the term *otaku*, which sounds a little eccentric, especially when used by men, and used the term to ridicule them.

PG: You published Nakamori's article criticizing *otaku* in *Manga Burikko*, which might seem like an odd decision. After all, the magazine was catering to the niche interests of manga fans.

OE: The magazine I edited, *Manga Burikko*, targeted a subculture of manga fans. It not only carried *bishojo* manga, but also manga by female artists such as Okazaki Kyoko and Sakurazawa Erika. Things weren't as subdivided back then, and manga *otaku* were interested in all sorts of things. Though he was into idols and such, Nakamori saw himself as above *otaku*. There was a distinction being made at the time between *otaku* and the "new breed" (*shinjinrui*), who were fashion leaders, trendsetters, and basically the cool kids of consumer culture. They knew about the right things—the popular and trendy things. Nakamori believed he was a representative of the "new breed," and so he made fun of *otaku*.



COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI

A page of manga from *Manga Burikko*

PG: When did the term *otaku* come to the attention of the public?

OE: It came later. In 1989, a guy named Miyazaki Tsutomu killed four little girls. Because he had

several thousand videotapes in his room, attended the Comic Market, and produced fanzines, a connection was made with *otaku*. News reports on Miyazaki described him not just as a serial killer, but also as an *otaku*, and this was what really brought the term to the public and shaped perceptions of it. The media implied that Miyazaki committed the crime because he couldn't tell the difference between reality and fiction. I argued that it was too simplistic to just connect the crime to media fandom. Most of his videotapes were recordings of news, sports, and movies. He did record TV animation, but almost totally randomly, which suggests that he was not attached to a particular genre as *otaku* tend to be.

PG: Why do you think the media's panicked reporting about Miyazaki Tsutomu brought about such a negative reaction to *otaku* subculture?

OE: First of all, the crimes he committed against these four girls

Manga Burikko

COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI

COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI

Manga Burikko

were gruesome and shocking. They needed to be explained in a way that made sense to the Japanese, who are proud of the relatively low instance of violent crime in their country. The 1980s was a time when new media was emerging, and society was perplexed. There was no Internet yet, but there were computers, VCRs, videogames, and so on. At the same time, manga and anime fans were becoming more active. People feared the emergence of monstrous youth who couldn't distinguish between fiction and reality. Miyazaki seemed to be the incarnation of all the fear and anxiety in Japanese society at the time.

PG: You have been critical of attempts by the Japanese government to promote manga and anime as part of a "cool Japan" image. Can you elaborate on your position?

OE: It's foolish to say that manga is art or part of high culture. It's only manga, and there is nothing wrong with that. I'm not putting manga down, I'm saying let's just accept it for what it is. Going back to your previous question about how we should define *otaku*, one thing we can say is that *otaku* are people who

make their own value judgments. They know what they like and support it. If what they want doesn't exist, they make it. That was the premise of *Manga Burikko*, where people could produce the manga that they wanted to read but no one else was producing. Animation company Gainax did the same thing with anime—they produced what they as fans wanted to see. Garage-kit maker Kaiyodo did it with figurines. They weren't doing these things because they wanted to be positively evaluated by outsiders. In contrast to the "new breed" who liked things because they were trendy or cool, *otaku* liked manga and anime just because they liked them, no matter how uncool they appeared. The "new breed" wanted to be cool, but *otaku* did not. The "new breed" found mainstream support, but *otaku* did not. *Otaku* are a subculture, which is fine. But now the government and academics claim manga is high culture, and it is praised as such in America and Europe. I find that utterly ridiculous.

PG: You mentioned earlier that *Manga Burikko* was really targeting the subculture of manga fans. Can you say a little more about the magazine?

OE: There was a manga artist, Azuma Hideo, who featured *bishojo* characters

Manga Burikko

COURTESY OTSUKA EIJI

in his works. Like most *otaku*, Azuma was not after recognition—he simply drew what he wanted to see. Azuma spent his career publishing in niche magazines before he and some friends published a fanzine called *Cybele*, which sparked widespread interest in *bishojo*. After *Cybele*, people talked about a "*lolicon* boom." When people recall this moment, they often talk about *Manga Burikko*, along with its rival magazine *Lemon People*. What Azuma started and we carried on with these magazines evolved into what we now call *moé*.

PG: How would you define *moé*?

OE: *Moé* is something you feel when looking at a character. It existed in the novels of the Meiji period (1868–1912), which was a time of modernization in Japan. To regard *moé* as something postmodern [see Azuma Hiroki, page 170] is mistaken. Those who do so simply want to present their feelings toward fictional girls as unique and special. And popular and academic media encourage this. We have a situation now where educated anime fans are styling themselves as cultural theorists, and then you have Americans and Europeans responding to all of this, thinking that Japan possesses something special in its *moé* culture. This Orientalist fantasy feeds right into the nationalistic strategies of government officials in Japan, who seek to appeal to the world for recognition as cool. First of all, *moé* is not cool, and neither is *otaku* culture. These so-called phenomena are taken out of context and blown out of proportion. It seems strange to me to fixate only on *moé*, and to ignore bestselling manga such as *Vagabond*, *20th Century Boys*, *One Piece*, or even my own *Multiple Personality Detective Psycho*, none of which feature cute characters or relationships with them. I think it's true to say that the majority of mainstream manga and anime have nothing at all to do with *moé*. Instead of looking at things rationally, everyone is buying into a fantasy created by the media, intellectuals, and government officials.

Interview with

Sato Toshihiko

Sato Toshihiko, born in 1945, is the founder and president of the animation studio Production Reed. He was involved in planning *Magical Princess Minky Momo* (1982–1983), an anime series targeting young girls and featuring a transforming magical girl heroine. *Minky Momo* also found a dedicated audience among male *otaku*, which came as a surprise to Sato. In this interview, Sato explains the genesis of *Minky Momo* and his intentions for the original work, which is a classic of Japanese animation and exemplar of the "magical girl" (*maho shojo*) genre.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRONIKI CHRISTODOULOU

On Magical Girls and Male Fans (Part One)

A Different Sort of Heroine

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): How did *Minky Momo* come to be?

Sato Toshihiko (ST): It is perhaps not well known outside of Japan, but anime in the 1970s and 1980s were coproduced with sponsors, especially toy makers. So you have an anime about robots sponsored by a company that makes robot toys. The anime serves as a kind of advertisement for the toys. In our case, the sponsor was the toy maker Bandai, and they said that they wanted us to do a show for girls that would be about transformation. The toy that they would sell would be a magic wand. Bandai didn't touch the animation series itself. We were allowed to create original work within the frame set up by the sponsor. First we built the character, Minky Momo, and then we discussed how she should transform. The little girl would wave a magic wand and transform into an adult woman, but what else? At the time in Japan, there still weren't many places outside the home where women could

Minky Momo waves her wand

work. So we thought that Minky Momo should transform into an independent working woman. We would have her use her wand to transform and take on many different careers.

PG: How did you settle on these careers?
ST: We collected data from kindergarten kids. We passed out a questionnaire about what they wanted to be when they grew up. There was a lot of variation in the answers, but girls tended to choose something familiar, such as school teacher, doctor, flight attendant, and so on. We had Minky Momo transform into other things as well, including a police officer and a horse race jockey. So we expanded from the familiar to the exotic. The idea was that girls can become whatever they want to be when they grow up. My daughter was in kindergarten at the time, and I wanted her to have a lot of dreams. In the story, Minky Momo is the princess of the land of dreams, which really resonated with me personally.

PG: Why do you think that transformation is so important as a theme?
ST: It is common for little girls to dream of transforming into adults.

Minky Momo as police officer

Minky Momo uses magic to transform immediately, condensing and accelerating the process of growing up. But the transformation is temporary; she isn't stuck as an adult. She can transform many times and become many different adults. This is not a theme unique to *Minky Momo* or to Japan, of course. You see transformation in *Alice in Wonderland* and in Disney animation. The *Harry Potter* series is all about transformation too.

PG: Is transformation something that appeals just to girls?
ST: No, I don't think so. There are anime for boys that involve transforming robots. Then you have transforming superheroes such as Kamen Rider. The difference is that boys transform to become stronger and defeat evil. By defeating evil, they become heroes. Boys buy the merchandize, for example Kamen Rider belts, to act out that moment of transformation.

PG: You are saying that Minky Momo wasn't about becoming stronger and defeating evil?
ST: Right. There aren't any villains in the series. Rather than defeating evil, Minky Momo helps people who have lost their dreams. It's a very positive message about making dreams come true by transforming into someone that can help others in the world.

PG: What do you think about anime series such as *Sailor Moon* and *Pretty Cure*, which have girls fighting evil?
ST: Toei Animation brought out both of those series, which did very well. We did something similar with *Idol Tenshi Yokoso Yoko* (1990–1991). That sort of good-versus-evil model is fine, but it's not the only approach. *Minky Momo*

Minky Momo and family

Minky Momo: a different sort of heroine

offers a different sort of heroine and worldview that I hope will always be popular.

PG: Was *Minky Momo* a success from the beginning?
ST: Actually, no, in the beginning it didn't create much buzz. But after about six months on air, the ratings started going up and Bandai's toys started to sell. If this hadn't happened, then the show would have been cancelled.

PG: Who was the intended audience for *Minky Momo*?
ST: It was the consumer group who would buy the toys produced by Bandai—little girls from three to five years of age.

PG: Did you expect that there would be adult fans?
ST: No, not at all. I still can't believe it. The show started in spring 1982 and these guys started showing up after about six months. It was completely unexpected, but this guy came to our

studio and told me he was the head of a *Minky Momo* fan club, which was made up of members between eighteen and thirty years of age. I was shocked! He said he thought Minky Momo was cute. It is still hard for me to understand. Minky Momo is cute, yes, and she is someone that everyone likes. I expected this response from five-year-old girls and their mothers, who might be watching TV with them, but not adult men.

PG: This was a time when anime fan clubs were on the rise.
ST: Yes. I was aware that there were fan clubs for the anime *Mobile Suit Gundam*, but still I was not expecting there to be a fan club for *Magical Princess Minky Momo*.

PG: Later iterations of *Minky Momo* were well received among these male *otaku*. The animation quality was excellent, and the character was voiced by well-known voice actress Hayashibara Megumi. Were you deliberately targeting these fans so that they would buy videocassettes of the series?

Minky Momo: magical girl

SATO TOSHIHIKO

Minky Momo: princess of the land of dreams

ST: No, not at all. We have never taken such fans into consideration. We did, however, deal with issues such as children who don't want to grow up. In the second series, we moved more toward depicting the world of grown-ups instead of little girls. There are multiple levels to the series.

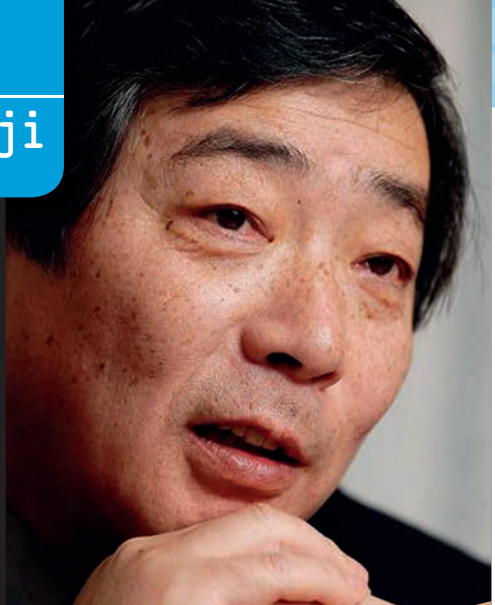
PG: *Minky Momo* has been around since 1982. How do you think the series will continue to develop in the future?

ST: For the thirtieth anniversary, we did a stage musical, which brought the series to a new generation. Those who watched *Minky Momo* as children are now mothers with their own children, whom they brought with them to the musical. I was glad to see children who'd never encountered the character before accept her wholeheartedly. They will be the next generation of fans. There have also been figurines, toys, and merchandise, which expand the chances for new encounters with the character. We are thinking of rereleasing or perhaps remaking the series. In any case, I think that the character of Minky Momo will continue to be an influential example of the magical girl genre.

Interview with

Nunokawa Yuji

Nunokawa Yuji, born in 1947, is the representative director of anime production company Pierrot. The many works he has produced include the anime version of the manga series *Urusei yatsura* (1981–1986) that featured Lum, a buxom alien girl in a bikini, who is considered one of Japan's first cartoon sex symbols. Nunokawa was a key figure in the production of Pierrot's *magical girl* anime series, which includes *Pastel Yumi, the Magic Idol* (1986), *Magical Emi, the Magic Star* (1985–1986), *Fancy Lala, the Magic Stage* (1988, 1998), and, most famously, *Creamy Mami, the Magic Angel* (1983–1984). In this interview, Nunokawa talks about what *Creamy Mami* meant to his company and to fans.



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On Magical Girls and Male Fans (Part Two)

Kindness Rather than Strength

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): Tell me a little about the development of *Creamy Mami*.

Nunokawa Yuji (NY): Magical girl animation has a long history in Japan, going back to *Sally the Witch* (1966–1967) and *Little Meg the Witch Girl* (1974–1975). These were standard shows for girls to watch. *Creamy Mami* is part of this lineage. It was the first time Pierrot had made an original anime series that wasn't based on a manga, and the start of our very successful magical girl series. Toy maker Bandai approached us to make the series, as it was an opportunity for them to market a line of related toys. When we discussed the story with Bandai, we came up with the idea that

Pierrot's magical girls

we would make our main character transform into not just an adult woman, but an idol singer. This idea evolved into the story of a little girl who transforms into an idol and lives a double life in Japan's showbiz world.

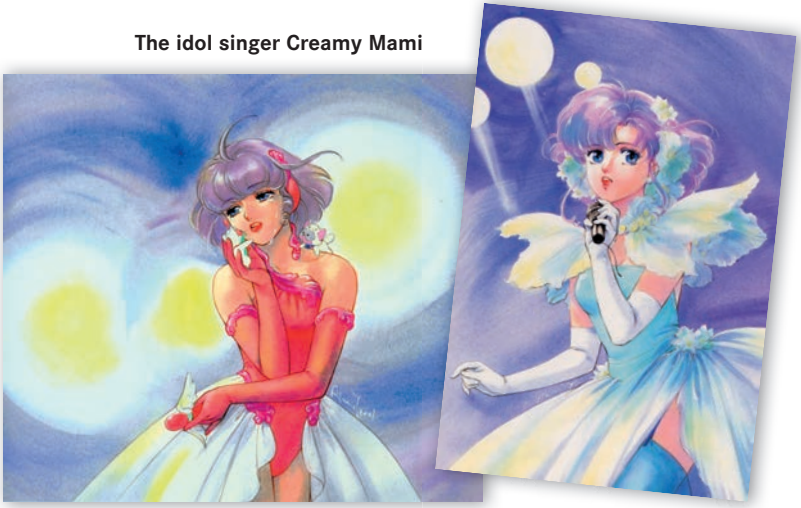
PG: Why did you settle on idols?

NY: For children, idols inhabit a dream world. Children watch idols on TV and want to be like them. Everyone in Japan was really into idol singers in the early 1980s, but there weren't any anime about them. So we decided that *Creamy Mami* should be an anime series that focused on the life of an idol singer. But this was an idol our audience of little girls could relate to, because she had transformed from a little girl that was just like them. The music in *Creamy Mami* was performed by an actual child idol, Ota Takako, which was unusual. The character designer, Takada Akemi, put a lot of effort into the fashion worn in the series, too.

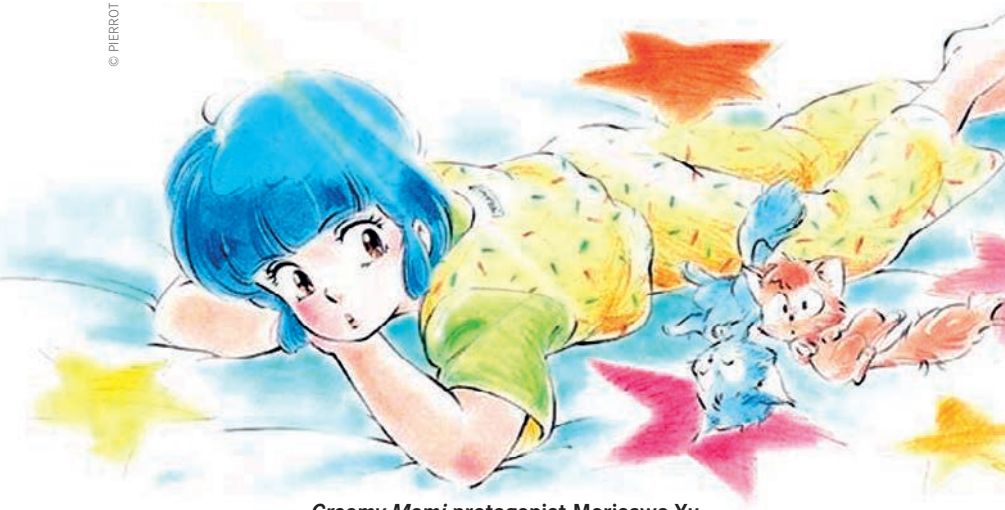
PG: To what extent did Bandai shape the show?

NY: Because the budgets are so tight in producing TV anime in

The idol singer Creamy Mami



***Creamy Mami*: transformation**



***Creamy Mami* protagonist Morisawa Yu**

Japan, you need to have a sponsor. And the sponsor needs to sell toys that are related to the anime. So you need to have a theme that children are drawn to. Transformation is a theme that children are interested in: for boys, it's the transforming machine; for girls, it's the transforming human. The need for transformation is probably an unwritten rule for TV anime targeting children in Japan.

PG: So Bandai decided to sell magic wands and you decided that the character would use a magic wand to transform into an idol singer. What else did you want to do with the series?
NY: We wanted to make an animation that was not just cute, but also dramatic. The story of a young girl who transforms into an idol allowed us to pursue surprisingly deep themes. *Creamy Mami*'s protagonist, Morisawa Yu, is in elementary school, and she is starting to mature and develop feelings for a boy. Her transformative powers allow her to suddenly become an idol, a young woman that is older than Yu, more mature and in charge of herself, which is why little girls are attracted to her. The boy

***Creamy Mami*: cute and dramatic**

that Yu has feelings for, however, falls in love with the idol singer. Yu has to struggle to get him back, but this is a struggle with herself. We wanted to depict psychological conflict. We didn't exactly plan it from the beginning, but the drama built in each episode to a finale that left everyone in tears. *Creamy Mami* has stronger dramatic elements than other magical girl series, which made an impression on a lot of people. To this day it has many devoted fans.

Children are attracted to transformation themes

PG: Such a nuanced approach to human relationships might be a little unexpected in a show for children, especially one designed to sell toys. It reminds me of Tomino Yoshiyuki's anime *Mobile Suit Gundam*, which was originally meant to sell children robot toys, but then developed into a realistic depiction of war, which attracted adult viewers.

NY: *Creamy Mami* did all right. We got consistently high ratings, especially for the final episode. People later said that it was very influential.

PG: Idol Nakagawa Shoko loved the series as a child, and went on to achieve fame herself.

NY: I'm happy that *Creamy Mami* lives on in people's hearts.

PG: How was it that you were able to produce such high drama in *Creamy Mami*?

NY: In Japanese animation, especially TV animation, due to the budget constraints, we can't animate the movement of characters much. But we get to have weekly episodes that continue for

many months. *Creamy Mami*, for example, was fifty-two episodes long, and it ran for a whole year. Because we had that much time, we could develop the characters properly. Because the series had to end, however, we had a limit to how far we could go, and we needed to develop the story toward a conclusion. So, even though we had budget constraints that limited us in drawing the movement of characters on screen, we were able to create dramatic stories that moved the characters and audiences. In terms of movement, American animation is much sharper and smoother, but Japanese animation focuses on creating good drama. Japanese anime has a reputation for being interesting for adults, which stems from a commitment to the story and drama. Making anime in Japan is closer to writing stories for adults. From a business standpoint, it works well for sponsors, because they don't need to invest much in the animation, but the series has a good story and is stretched out over a long period of time, which attracts and holds viewers' attention.

PG: So you weren't surprised to see adult fans of *Creamy Mami*. Were you surprised to see male fans?

NY: Well, yes, that was quite a big surprise for us. From about the middle of the series we became aware of the existence of male fans. I was even more surprised to find that when we did events for *Creamy Mami*, the audience was predominately male. Before that, magical girl events didn't really draw male fans. They might have been there, but they weren't visible. Male fans of magical girls increased after *Creamy Mami*. At the time the word *otaku* wasn't well known to describe this type of anime or manga fan, but I think that *Creamy Mami* can definitely be considered one of the factors for the spread of this phenomenon.

PG: Did you try to target these adult male fans?

NY: Not at the time, no. We didn't even think about it, since the sponsor was selling toys that targeted little girls. We didn't realize that we could sell videos at first, as they were quite expensive.

PG: What were your feelings about the *otaku* fans?
NY: As I said, we didn't make *Creamy Mami* for them. We'd been asked to make an original TV anime that would sell toys to girls, and we developed characters and drama within these limitations. If the series remains in people's hearts, we are glad. If the audience got more out of the series than we intended, then we are honored as creators.

PG: Why did Pierrot stop making magical girl series?
NY: It was simply due to the declining number of children in Japan. The number of children is shrinking, which means the number of toy companies is shrinking and finally that there are fewer robot and magical girl series for children. There is only one major series for little girls at any one time now, and that's enough.

PG: What does the anime industry look like today?
NY: There are more series being made and they target diverse viewers, but at the same time it is harder to create long-lasting series. It is hard to find a sponsor willing to invest in a series that will run for a year unless it is based on a proven manga series. Instead, animation series tend to be short, about twelve episodes, and oriented toward selling DVDs or Blu-ray discs rather than toys. The toy makers don't want to invest a lot of money producing toys for a series that might not be a hit. So, they wait and see if a short series will be a hit before making toys, but by then new series have appeared and no one is interested in the older ones. In Japan, we've always had a lot of domestic demand for anime, so we haven't necessarily had to look overseas, but now that dynamic is changing. We need to reach out to overseas markets, which is why there is so much anxiety about fans streaming anime for free online. It wouldn't matter if licensing and DVDs and Blu-ray sales weren't so important, but now those are precious sources of income.

PG: Is the magical girl still relevant today?

NY: *Sailor Moon* in the 1990s was probably the height of success for the magical girl genre, but I think that people still have a longing for protagonists that display kindness rather than strength. Of course our company makes epic adventure animation such as *Naruto* and *Bleach*, but I personally can no longer believe in male heroes. Maybe fighting isn't the way to resolve conflict. But if a male character said that, it would seem weak and pitiful, because we judge them based on some notion of what it means to be a man. The solution is to have female characters resolve the conflict in a way that is impossible for men. Miyazaki Hayao, one of the most celebrated directors of animated films in Japan, shifted in the 1980s from male protagonists to female protagonists. I think that he did this because it allowed for a different approach to the world. That's why so many people prefer magical girls to male heroes. Regardless of what era people live in, they desire peaceful change, and that is ultimately what the magical girl is all about.

Interview with POP

POP (a self-professed seventeen-year-old) is an illustrator who popularized the word *moé* with his debut work, the manga *Moeru eitango*: *Moetan* (2003), where a cute girl character teaches the reader English using bizarre scenarios straight out of anime, manga, and games. His recurrent character has a round face and massive eyes, which along with the use of pastel colors gives his images a soft and feminine look. Despite being an influential figure in the *moé* boom of the 2000s, POP seeks to distance himself from the word *moé* in its contemporary use, which he feels is not true to the word's original sensibility. In this interview, he explains what *moé* means to him.

Talking about *Moé* at the Heart of Akihabara

Drawing as a Way of Life

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): Where does your penname come from?

POP: I like the letter P and I wanted to call myself Popuri (the Japanese word for potpourri). But at that time there was a character called Popuri from the anime *Fushigi Maho Fan Fan Pharmacy* (1998–1999), and I didn't want it to look like I was taking that name. So I erased the end of Popuri and my name became POP.

PG: *Fan Fan Pharmacy* is a magical girl show, right? Where you into that genre?

POP: Not that particular series, but I was into magical girl series before then. I loved *Creamy Mami, the Magic Angel* (1983–1984) [See Nunokawa Yuji, page 54], but in those days I was basically holed up in arcades and didn't spend much time watching anime.

PG: When did you decide that you wanted to draw professionally?

POP: I've been drawing pictures on a daily basis ever since I was a child. It was kind of part of my lifestyle. My parents worked and

***Moetan*: Nijihara Ink**

I was often alone at home. I didn't like to go out and play with others, so I drew. Like many children, I watched anime and tried to draw the characters, but this didn't really evolve into anything special at first. As I got older, I started going to Tokyo's Akihabara district to buy video games, the ones that simulate relationships with girl characters. To advertise the games, staff members of these stores would hand draw characters on signs or posters. I loved to see those drawings. I think that's most probably where my desire to draw professionally comes from.

***Moetan*: Nijihara Ink**

PG: Did you go to Akihabara often?

POP: I didn't start going there until the late 1990s. In grade school, I was mostly hanging out in arcades playing more general games. I didn't have any friends with similar interests, so I sort of pursued hobbies on my own. My parents didn't care, as long as I studied and eventually took over the family business. At university, I met a guy who was deeply into the *otaku* world of manga, anime, and video games. I learned from him that there were events where people sell fanzines, and he asked if I wanted to produce one with him. We started going to Akihabara, where we could gather information about events. My father passed away in 2002, and I had to consider whether to take over the

family business, but then my debut work *Moetan* took off and I decided to pursue a career as a professional illustrator.

PG: *Moetan* features a cute girl character that is now widely recognized and much loved. Where did you learn to draw her?
POP: Rather than *being* good at drawing, you could say that I have *become* good at drawing. I was inspired to start practicing drawing girls while hanging out in arcades, where you sometimes find what's called a communication notebook, in which visitors write messages or draw pictures. In one particular notebook, there was a prompt to draw cute girl characters—so-called Lolita characters—but I didn't know how and I really regretted that, so I began to practice drawing them over and over again. Somewhere along the way I developed a certain amount of skill at drawing cute girl characters. I was probably interested in them anyway, but it was my desire to participate in that communication notebook that got me drawing cute girls repeatedly and with an eye for detail.

***Moetan*: pastel colors**

PG: Do you have other influences more generally?
POP: I have always liked picture books and media for children. There is a big bookstore in Tokyo called Sanseido, and I can easily spend the whole day in the children's section there. I also like Disney and Sanrio [licensor of cute character goods including Hello Kitty]. My tastes run

Everyone can relate to POP's cute girl characters

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toward genres that are usually considered to be for children or girls. Often I am the only man in a store full of kids and young women.

PG: You actually did an illustration for Sanrio as part of their promotion for their Hello Kitty products, right? You're a Hello Kitty fan, so that must have been exciting.
POP: I like things that are cute, and I've always preferred pastel colors. As a creator, I want to draw cute pictures that reach an audience from children to adults. Some people say that my drawings are gender neutral and can be enjoyed by both men and women. Because my name and style are gender neutral too, and I don't make public appearances, no one really knows whether I am a man or woman. When Sanrio asked me to drawn an illustration of a girl who loves Hello Kitty, I wanted to make it cute and accessible to women. The basic image of the cute girl is

the same as the one in *Moetan*, which proves that *Moetan* is not just for *otaku*. It isn't that I want to draw works that are only for kids, but I also don't want to draw works that are only for *otaku*. I hope to make something that everyone can relate to. Ideally, my work would be read by grandparents sitting with their grandchildren.

PG: Are you attempting to change your style to reach this wider audience?

POP: Well, I'm known for drawing cute girl characters and that's what I want to be recognized for. If I can't be accepted for the work I do, or need to change it to be accepted, that's too bad.

PG: Since *Moetan*, your work has been associated with *moé*. What does that word mean to you?

POP: Personally, I'd rather not even use the word. *Moé* is misused these days. The verb *moeru* in Japanese means a plant bursting into bud. *Moegiiro* refers to a yellowish or light green color. I associate *moe* with these things but now it is used to mean simply cute girl characters. I feel this is an abuse of the word. Fans might kill me for saying this, because *Moetan* was my debut work and it was in part responsible for the

***Moetan*: Pastel Ink**

spread of the word *moé*. But after *Moetan*, companies were just branding everything "*moé*" to sell products.

PG: For you, personally, what makes something *moé*?
POP: Whether or not someone has put love into it. If someone has put their heart and soul into a drawing, then it's *moé*. A drawing that has powerful emotion behind it has much more impact than one that merely employs technical skill.

PG: When viewers call your drawings *moé*, what do you think they are responding to?
POP: When I draw cute girls, I focus on specific parts of the body that I personally like. I structure the illustration so that I can draw these parts. For example, I like thighs, and so I draw full-body portraits from a low-angle perspective. I also like armpits and bellybuttons. Put these together and there is a certain pose that works best. I think because I have been drawing this type

of character for so long, and obviously put so much into making the character pose just right, the fans' response can be described as *moé*.

PG: Do you ever have trouble drawing a character?

POP: Yes, absolutely. If you have an image in your mind, then you can draw it, but where does the image come from in the first place? If the image is not there, then my hand doesn't move. I can try for hours or days and nothing comes out. Those are the times that I go to Akihabara and just take in all the sights and sounds. It doesn't even have to be Akihabara, but just somewhere other than where I am. I watch or read things to get ideas, too. When my head is full of all these outside influences I go to a café somewhere and put it down on paper. When I don't have to use the computer for creating, I usually work outside. I probably spend more time wandering around Akihabara than a salaryman spends in his office. Drawing is a way of life for me. They say that the basic necessities for life are food, clothing, and shelter, but I can't live without drawing. This is not simply because it is my job and I need money to live, but because drawing is my life.

Interview with Momoi Halko

Momoi Halko, born in 1977, is a Japanese singer, voice actress, media personality, and producer who enjoys hanging out in Tokyo's Akihabara district and talking about *bishojo* characters and idols as much as any *otaku*. Despite being one of the most recognizable voices of cute girl characters in anime and games, Momoi is surprisingly ambivalent about the *moé* phenomenon. There was a time when she wanted to wash her hands of the whole thing, but she now considers *moé* fans as a misunderstood subculture of men struggling with and against gender norms. In this interview, Momoi stands up for those fans.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

The Voice of *Moé* Asks for Understanding

The Struggle against Gender Norms

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): You first became well known for your writing about computers and games. Can you tell us how you first got into that?

Momoi Halko (MH): I was really isolated in middle school because I was a big fan of anime and games but no one else was. Dial-up Internet in the 1990s was a godsend for me. In high school, I started to blog about my interests to make friends. An editor saw my blog and asked if I wanted to write for his magazine. I did, and then other magazines started to approach me. So I kind of became known as a writer. I was already going to Akihabara a lot, and from about 1996 I started singing live out on the street. I wrote my own music, recorded onto a cassette, which I would play back when I sang. My music was inspired by the sounds of games and computers.

PG: What was the response like?

MH: Well, other *otaku* seemed to like it. I released a CD titled *Mail Me* in 2000, but it wasn't a big hit. Then, one day, I was walking down the street in Akihabara and saw this group of guys gathered around a TV in front of a store watching a demo movie for a *bishojo* game, a type of video game where players simulate romance with the opposite sex. The

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Under 17

movie was playing, the music was blasting, and the guys seemed to be totally into it. I thought to myself, "This is it!" I was interested in games and computers, and *bishojo* games were popular in Akihabara. My voice is high pitched and people used to say I sounded like an anime character, which gave me a complex. But *bishojo* games feature anime-like character designs, so my voice was actually very suitable. In 2002 I formed a group called Under 17, which sang the opening music for *bishojo* games. Our music was really energetic, and we performed live, which earned us a lot of fans.

PG: You also debuted as a voice actress around then, right?
MH: My first role in anime was Nakahara Komugi from *The Soul Taker* in 2001. My first leading role was a spin-off series, *Nurse Witch Komugi* (2002–2005), where Komugi is an idol and visits Akihabara. I felt very close to this role. In fact, I even wore Komugi's costumes when I sang her songs at live performances. At the time, anime fans were into cosplay (getting dressed up as a favorite anime or manga character) but it wasn't something that voice actresses and singers did. Fans were happy to see me getting into character.

PG: Komugi is a young girl character with a high-pitched voice, and so is Mii, the character you voice in the anime *Popotan* (2003). Because you play these kinds of characters, you have become associated with the concept of *moé*. What does *moé* mean to you?
MH: Basically, when *otaku* say that they feel *moé* for a character, they mean, "I love that character."

Nakahara Komugi

Nurse Witch Komugi

Coming out and saying stuff like this became much more common in the 1990s because of the success of the *bishojo* game *Tokimeki Memorial* (1994) and the TV anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–1996). It used to be taboo to say that you loved a fictional character, but for people my age it was not so strange for someone's first love to be Fujisaki Shiori from *Tokimeki Memorial* or Ayanami Rei from *Evangelion*. These characters were super popular and people were crazy about them. This was all the more true in Akihabara, where you could buy figurines of these characters. [See Morikawa Ka'ichiro, page 127.] I've come to think that spending my youth in Akihabara, surrounded by anime, games, and idols, was a special kind of education. The feeling of *moé* seemed natural in such an environment. The word *moé* became more widely famous when *Densha otoko*, a TV drama about *otaku* that was filmed in Akihabara, was aired in 2005. But by that time *otaku* were kind of already tired of the word.

PG: You have been very outspoken about what it means to feel *moé* for characters. Can you elaborate?

MH: You could define *moé* as guys that are in love with fictional girl characters, but it's more complicated than that. For example, men who feel *moé* for characters might cross-dress or decorate their bags with cute key-chains or wear cat ears to events. The

Toho Project series of games, which are very popular with men, feature cute girl characters wearing ornate costumes. The focus on fashion and style strikes me as very feminine, sort of like *shojo* manga (manga for girls). Lots of men cosplay as the cute girl characters from this series. More than a desire to date a cute girl or anime character, it is a desire to become her. I'm friends with the professional fighter Nagashima "Jienotsu" Yuichiro, who's a famous *otaku*, and he's certainly that way. He cosplays as cute girl characters not because he wants to cross-dress, but because he wants to be that character. When I was working on *Nurse Witch Komugi*, I met with the character designer, Watanabe Akio. He also did the characters for the anime series *Bakemonogatari* (2009). His girl characters are really cute, right? He uses bright colors and designs incredible costumes. I asked him how he drew such cute pictures and he told me, "It's because I become Komugi-chan." He doesn't approach characters objectively, but rather from the inside out. It's probably similar to when I become a character and perform her voice. Or when Nagashima as a fan becomes the characters that he loves. *Moé* can't simply be described as guys feeling romantic love for fictional girls.

Nurse Witch Komugi

PG: Are you suggesting that *moé* should be though of as beyond gender?

MH: *Moé* isn't bound to being male or female. The response transcends gender. *Moé* is a third gender. If you think about the characters in anime, manga, and games, you'll notice there is a lot of androgyny. There are characters who we call *otoko no ko*, which sounds like the Japanese word for "boy" but is written with the Chinese characters "man" and "daughter." So, it means something like boy-girl. They appear to be girls, but are actually boys. It's part of a larger trend toward feminization. In anime, you have weaker male characters—for example, Amuro from *Mobile Suit Gundam* and Shinji from *Neon Genesis Evangelion*—and stronger female characters. These days, no one is interested in the male characters, but everyone likes the female ones. In *bishojo* games, male players don't want strong male protagonists, because that might get in

Are these *moé* characters girls or boys?

K-On!

the way of their imaginary relationships with the female characters, on whose lives the game is almost entirely focused. Actually, if you think about anime series such as *Lucky Star* and *K-On!* that are popular with *otaku*, male characters don't really appear at all. But then you have women reading "boys' love" manga, where there are no girls, and the female readers are identifying with the male characters. I know that lots of women play *Tokimeki Memorial*, too, which is a game about dating cute girls. So you have women becoming male characters and men becoming female characters. That's the flexibility at the heart of *moé*.

PG: Why do you think that *bishojo* characters like Komugi and Mii tend to be young?

MH: It might be a desire to return to childhood. It doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman, the image of the carefree child playing in the backyard is appealing. The freedom and innocence is intoxicating. There was an incredible backlash when fans learned Nagi, the main character from the manga *Kannagi* (2006–present), might have had a boyfriend in the past. The goddess was reduced to the level of a realistic girl, which ruined the fantasy for them.

PG: You started making music for *moé* games and anime when you were quite young. How did you approach the making of this music?

MH: As a young girl, I put my own heart and emotions into my music. Those fans who felt *moé* probably identified with that female spirit. *Moé* is a very spiritual thing. It isn't just some pattern. There was a time when I was asked to put keywords like "big brother" or "meow" into my music, but I didn't like it. Someone was making a calculated business decision to put those words into the song to trigger a response in *otaku*. It's the same with anime specifically designed to trigger *moé*. It seems forced and lacking in soul. I'm not interested in the business side of things.

PG: Do you still consider your songs to be about *moé*?

MH: That's a real dilemma for me. One of the reasons I disbanded Under 17 was because I didn't want to reproduce a patterned *moé* formula. But when I started getting invitations to perform at conventions overseas, I learned that fans consider *moé* a really great thing. They want me to sing Under 17 songs and do Komugi's voice. They think it's cool and fun. The same way that *moé* is able to transcend gender, it can also transcend nationality. That has given me confidence and helped me reconsider the value of *moé* and my experiences in Akihabara. *Moé* is a subculture. It's punk rock. The older generation doesn't understand, and people who are into *moé* are often treated like criminals. But that is changing, and I will continue to do my part to help spread understanding of *moé*.

Tokimeki Memorial

Interview with Toromi

Toromi (age unknown) is an artist whose talents include voice acting, character design, illustration, singing, and composing. She is most famous as the voice of Mii, one of the characters in the *bishojo* game *Popotan* (2003). Sometimes categorized as an "underground idol" (*chika aidoru*), Toromi distributes her music at fan events and online. She also illustrates the jackets to her own CDs. In 2009, Toromi was asked to draw characterizations of Buddhist deities for Ryohoji Temple in the Tokyo suburbs. Her characters, which resemble those in *Popotan*, are prominently displayed on a sign in front of the temple, which some now call the "*moé* temple" (*moedera*).* In this interview, Toromi talks about what it means to draw as a professional, and how *moé* images draw attention and open up dialogue.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY HACHIFUKU

* To view these images, visit http://ryohoji.jp/top.html/

Notes from Underground

The Voice of Mii-chan

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): When did you start drawing?
Toromi (T): I've liked to draw ever since I was a child. I started to draw professionally when I got a job as an assistant at the game company Petit Ferret.

PG: Was that your main job at the company?
T: No. At first I was doing voices for them. My debut was the voice of the character Mii in the *bishojo* game *Popotan* (2002). The main visuals were drawn by Poyoyon Rock [aka Watanabe Akio]. I also sang one of *Popotan's* theme songs, produced by *Under 17*. [See Momoi Halko, page 72.] But then I started assisting the illustrators, scanning, fixing, and coloring their original drawings, and this was the first step toward becoming a professional illustrator myself.

PG: Is that where you first learned to draw?
T: Yes. I learned on the job. You don't study to become a sales clerk, right? It was the same for me. I don't mean to be arrogant, but I think that

A Buddhist deity made into a *moé* character

IMAGE © RYOHOJI TEMPLE

people who can draw can simply draw, and people who can't simply can't. It's just a fact.

PG: So when you realized you could create your own work, you started working independently on your own projects. How do you approach illustration?

T: The most important thing is the data provided by the client, who tells me what kind of character he or she wants. For example, if you ask me to draw a girl character, I will ask you about her age, favorite things, the colors associated with her, and so on. It is difficult to draw a character if someone just says "make it cute."

PG: How would you describe the characters that you draw?

T: In terms of drawing style, I prefer clean, bold lines and bright colors. In general, I draw young girls. I get almost no requests for male characters or older women. Such requests only come when I'm asked to provide multiple characters that work together. In that case, each character has to be distinct from the others, so there will be different ages, body shapes, and so on.

Ryohoji Temple manga

PG: Who are your clients?

T: Right now, the toy company Bandai has got me drawing an illustration for a sign in Tokyo's Akihabara district. A store called Tokito has asked me to draw characters to promote their samurai goods. I'm working on a character for a seller of the Okinawan souvenir cookie,

Toro Benten

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PHOTOGRAPH BY KEIKO NISHIMURA

"People want cute."

chinsuko. I've designed the image character for Ametan candy. I'm working on a manga about Ryohoji Temple in a magazine from the publisher Kadokawa. People often don't know my name, but they know my characters.

PG: Do you have a sense of who is attracted to your drawings and music?

T: Well, when I'm creating, I don't usually have a particular audience in mind. I don't select my audience—I want to be selected by them. I'm grateful if anyone likes my work. My fans are diverse, ranging from little girls to adult men. And also people from outside Japan—I recently got an e-mail from a fan written in English.

PG: Do you put yourself into your work?

T: I think so, at least when I'm singing. The style of my music is called dempa, which is high pitched, fast, and cute. When I'm singing, I immerse myself in the story of the song, which makes me emotional and even makes me cry sometimes, but I don't

do this when I'm drawing—I have to be detached and think how best to fulfill the client's request. It isn't about me.

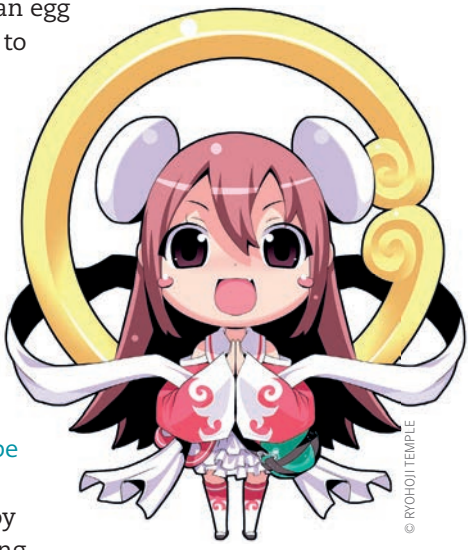
PG: As a woman, do you find it difficult to draw female characters that appeal to men?
T: That's not something I think about. I don't make work that appeals only to men, and I don't get requests for that kind of work. People want cute. Whether it's a cat or a girl character, cuteness is what people are after.

PG: Would you describe your works as *moé*?
T: I personally don't use that word to describe my work. I was drawing before people used the word *moé*, after all. But it's fine if someone describes my works as *moé*. I wouldn't disagree.

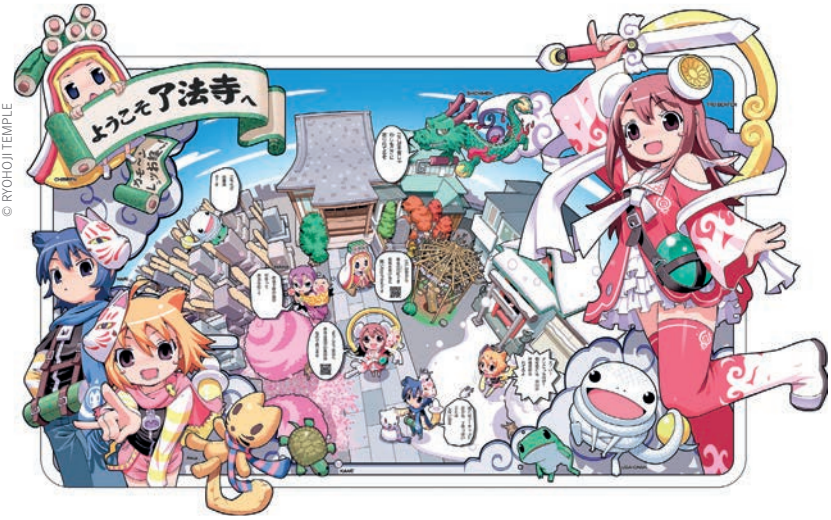
PG: What does *moé* mean to you?
T: It's related to shyness. *Moé* is a feeling that you want to hide, an embarrassing feeling. Something on the inside, like the filling in a chocolate or the yolk in an egg cooked sunny-side up. You want to savor it, and you don't want to show it or share it with others.

PG: *Moé* is like the yolk of an egg?
T: It's similar to that feeling when you like a classmate, but you don't want him to know. You can't say it out loud or share it with others.

PG: OK, so the love that cannot be spoken.
T: Yeah. You can't stare at the boy you like, but you can keep stealing



Manga deity Toro Mini



Above: The Ryohoji Temple notice board; below: Toro Benten

glances at him. There was a time in my life where I said the word *moé* all the time, like screaming it out loud when I looked at cute characters, but it didn't feel right to me. *Moé* is something private.

PG: But girls do talk about the boys they like.

T: Girls are shy about revealing their feelings but they want to be heard, so they end up saying mean things about the boys they like. They can't face up to how they really feel, so instead they attack.

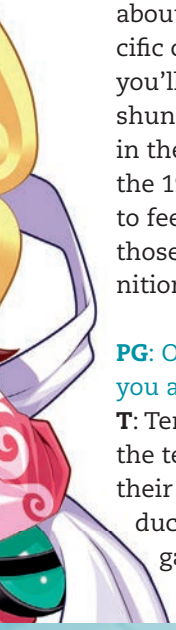
COURTESY HACHIFUKU

PG: You are explaining *moé* using the example of shy girls talking about the boys they like, but it is most often associated with male fans of anime, manga, and games that hang out in Akihabara. One might infer from this that *moé* is a phenomenon of shy men talking about the girl characters that they like.

T: Right. There was a time not too long ago when men couldn't say that they liked cute girl characters. It would be weird to say that you are in love with an anime character, right? That longing that cannot be expressed is *moé*. Now things are more open. It's all right to talk about being in love with specific characters. It's not like you'll be labeled an *otaku* and shunned the way people were in the 1990s. So, for me, the word *moé*, which first appeared in the 1990s, really reflects the time in which men were awakening to feelings of affection for girl characters, but couldn't express those feelings directly or openly. I am not so sure about the definition of *moé* now.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KEIKO NISHIMURA

Toro Benten



PG: On the subject of the expanding appeal of *moé*, I'd like to ask you about your work with Ryohoji Temple.

T: Temples in Japan have notice boards outside that advertise the temple and promote its events. This temple wanted to make their notice board more eye-catching. A mutual friend introduced me to the Buddhist priest, and he asked me to do manga-style illustrations of the gods. I wasn't sure if we ought to

be caricaturing the gods, but the priest assured me that this was not at all indiscreet. He told me that Buddhism is about helping people live happy lives. I wanted to bring people to the temple and assist in its mission.

PG: I notice you changed the names of some of the gods. How did that come about?
T: I was working on an illustration of the goddess Benzaiten, and saved the file as Toromi Benzaiten, or, for short, Toro Benten. Someone thought that this was a character name and printed it. The name stuck, so I guess it must have been the gods' will!

PG: Your van is decorated with images of Toro Benten, right? She's very popular! There is a figurine of her, and videos of her dancing and singing. Her voice is your voice, and you cosplay as her at events held at the temple. Have people said that this is too much?
T: If you're not doing too much, then you're not doing enough. You may as well do nothing. If you're not stimulating people, they won't pay attention. It is funny that now, when people are saying that the temple is doing too much, is precisely the period when people are finally coming to the temple and enjoying it.

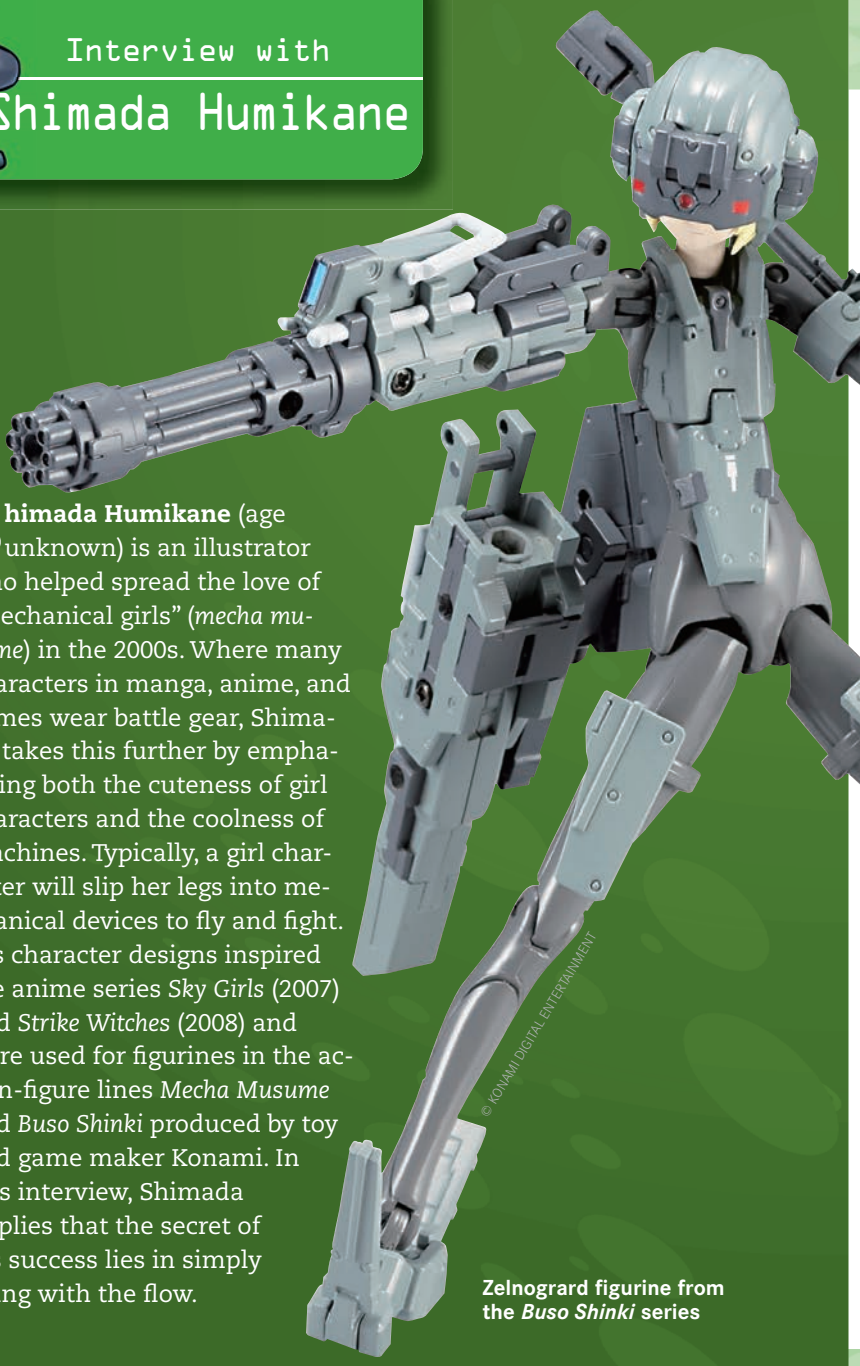
PG: Even prefectural governments have used manga-style or *moé* characters to encourage tourism in Japan. Do you worry that misunderstandings might occur?
T: Misunderstanding is part of being interested. It's nothing to be worried about. It's the beginning of a discussion, which may lead to understanding. I am happy if my characters bring people to Japan and open up a discussion.

PHOTOS COURTESY HACHIFUKU

Ryohoji Temple in the Tokyo suburbs is now known by some as the "*moé* temple" (*moedera*)

Interview with

Shimada Humikane



Shimada Humikane (age unknown) is an illustrator who helped spread the love of "mechanical girls" (*mecha musume*) in the 2000s. Where many characters in manga, anime, and games wear battle gear, Shimada takes this further by emphasizing both the cuteness of girl characters and the coolness of machines. Typically, a girl character will slip her legs into mechanical devices to fly and fight. His character designs inspired the anime series *Sky Girls* (2007) and *Strike Witches* (2008) and were used for figurines in the action-figure lines *Mecha Musume* and *Buso Shinki* produced by toy and game maker Konami. In this interview, Shimada implies that the secret of his success lies in simply going with the flow.

Zelnograrad figurine from the *Buso Shinki* series

Bridging the Gap between *Mecha* and *Moé*

Cute Girls and Cool Machines

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): What are your hobbies?

Shimada Humikane (SH): I don't have anything that you could call a hobby. If I'm forced to say, then I guess it would be watching B-level action and horror movies—genres that you can laugh at and forgive even if they're just awful. Rather than thinking about what you are seeing, you can just enjoy it.

Strike Witches

PG: Would you consider yourself an *otaku*?

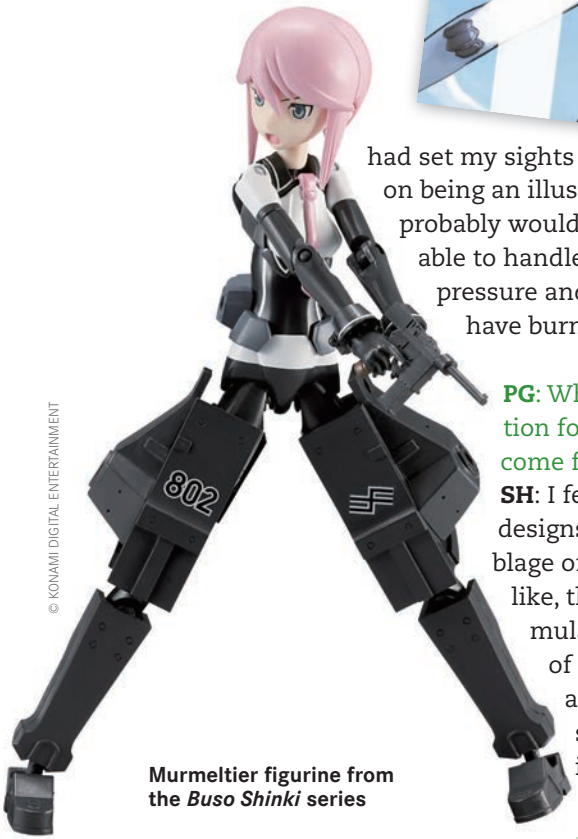
SH: To me, the word *otaku* carries this image of a deep, intense person who has mastered one specific genre. By that definition, I can't really say that I'm an *otaku* of anything. When I'm drawing, I study things that are necessary for my work, but I would never call myself a specialist or researcher. If you get too caught up in the material then you'll never get the job finished. As a professional illustrator, I try to exercise a degree of moderation.

PG: Why did you decide to pursue drawing as a career?

SH: At first I was just drawing for fun and never thought to make

Sky Girls

it my career. Like many others, I was creating my own fanzines and sometimes that led to requests to do work for companies. While doing this type of work, drawing somehow became the center of my life. I started publishing commercially in my mid twenties. I think that if I had set my sights on being an illustrator in my teens, I probably wouldn't have been able to handle all the pressure and might have burned out.



Murmeltier figurine from the *Buso Shinki* series

PG: Where does the inspiration for your illustrations come from?

SH: I feel that the character designs I do are an assemblage of the things that I like, things that have accumulated over the course of my life. There was a time when I had a streak of contrarianism and wanted to

Asuka figurine from the *Buso Shinki* series

Zelnograd figurine from the *Buso Shinki* series

Murmeltier figurine from the *Buso Shinki* series

make things that were different from other people's work, but these days I'm not so ambitious. I don't think that what I do is particularly unique.

PG: Really? So the mechanical girl is for you nothing new?

SH: As a genre, it has existed for a long time. Girls and technology are common in manga and anime, and these are things that I like, so it seemed natural for me to mix them together. There wasn't any logic behind it. I just thought the drawings looked cool.

PG: Was it a conscious choice to make your characters youthful?

SH: It's fun to draw cute, young girls. Besides, speaking from a market standpoint, those are the drawings most in demand. I think that's all there is to it.

PG: What do you focus on when drawing?

SH: As I've said, I try to design characters that I think

Strike Witches: **armed and cute**

are cute or cool. Also, I pay close attention to colors and hues I use for characters and their costumes, so that they portray a calm image.

PG: What does *moé* mean to you?

SH: Isn't it something like looking at a puppy or kitten and feeling that it is cute, in an asexual way? But there isn't wide support for the concept as I have described it, so maybe I don't know what *moé* means.

Asuka figurine from the *Buso Shinki* series

PG: Do you think that there has been a *moé* boom?

SH: *Moé* has been around in *bishojo* manga and games from way back. *Moé* is a catchy word and may appear at first glance to be a new genre or phenomenon, but that's probably only because of increased media usage of the word in the 2000s. *Moé* was around before then and it will remain long after the word falls out of use.

PG: What's next for you?

SH: I don't know what will happen in the future, and I would describe myself as a follower, not a leader. But as long as there continues to be an environment where I can do what I want to do, I will carry on, whether it's for a commercial or amateur market .

Above: *Strike Witches*; right: Murmeltier figurine

Interview with Maeda Jun

Maeda Jun, born in 1975, is a writer for the company Key, which produces computer games targeted at an adult male audience. Though he incorporates humor, Maeda's stories about young love are highly melodramatic, and often bring players to tears. Games of this type have a category all of their own: "crying games" (*nakige*). Three of Key's releases: *Kanon* (1999), *Air* (2000), and *Clannad* (2004), were adapted into TV anime and became pivotal to the discussion of the *moé* phenomenon. In this interview, Maeda talks about the background to Key's games.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY VISUAL ART'S

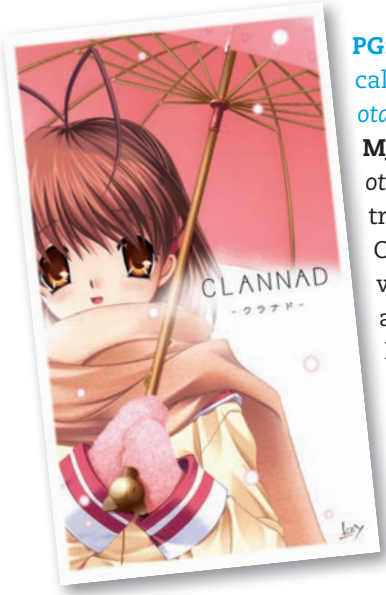
This page: *Clannad*, Fujibayashi Kyo; far right: *Kanon*, Kawasumi Mai

The Crying Game

Moving Players to Tears

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): Can you tell me about your hobbies?

Maeda Jun (MJ): Basically I like to play role-playing games, specifically those featuring cute female heroines. I can't get into a game unless I feel *moé* for the character. If you love the character, then you invest in the world where she exists. As a player you think, "I can continue this quest for her sake!" I enjoy feeling that way.



PG: Would you call yourself an *otaku*?

MJ: Yes, I am an *otaku*. I'm actually an extremely stereotypical *otaku*. Of course I am the way I am with games, but I am really a music *otaku*. Some months I buy as many as a hundred CDs. I listen to a variety of genres—J-pop, anime songs, Western music, post-rock, metal, techno, trance, jazz, whatever. My room is filled with mountains of CDs.

Clannad: Fujibayashi Kyo and Ryo

PG: You like to emphasize music at Key, right?

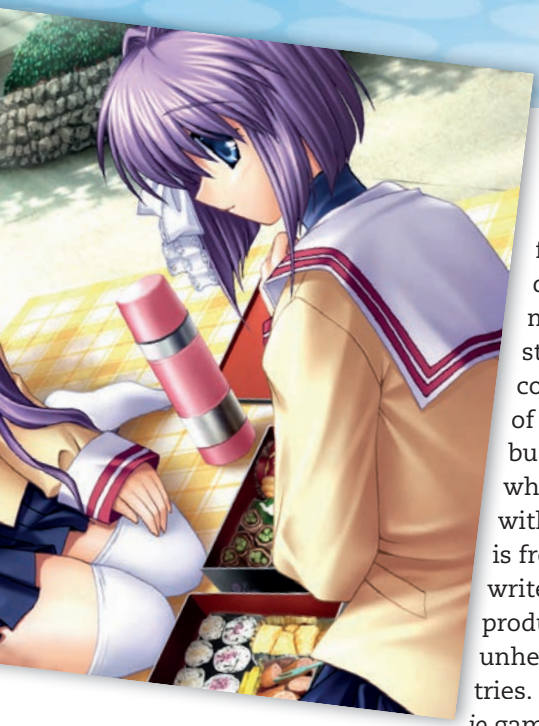
MJ: Right. We try to match emotionally moving scenes with music that is equally moving. Since *Kanon*, we have tried to use music with personality, in other words, music that is not simply in the background. In *Air*, we had the main heroine, Misuzu, sing a song called "*Natsu kage*: Summer Lights." The music went with the image on screen, and players were moved.

PG: How did you get into making this type of adult game?

MJ: I wanted to work in the game industry and interviewed at companies like Capcom and Namco, but I didn't make the cut. Then I tried smaller companies, but they also rejected me. Finally I interviewed with companies making *bishojo* games—dating simulator games featuring cute female characters—and eventually was hired. At the time, these companies would hire anyone, even if you didn't have the right education or experience. Even someone like me could get in and find some measure of success. The late 1990s and early 2000s was the time when *bishojo* games were getting interesting, so I count myself fortunate.

PG: *Bishojo* games offer a lot of opportunities for creators.

***Kanon*: Sawatari Makoto**



MJ: Because these games are not expensive to produce, there is a lot of room for experimentation. You don't have to worry too much about reaching a mainstream audience the way that commercial games do. Instead of having a committee making budget-related decisions about what games to make, control is with the individual creator, who is free to take risks. As a scriptwriter, I get to shape the end product in a way that is virtually unheard of in other media industries. I can create stories for *bishojo* games that would be impossible in commercial games, because they would be seen as too niche. This creative freedom leads to innovation and fresh ideas and that's why so many *bishojo* games end up being adapted into anime series.

PG: What is your approach to writing scenarios for *bishojo* games?

MJ: Writers are divided into two types: there are those that begin with the characters and build a story around them, and there are those that begin with the story and then build the characters. I fall into the latter category. This is an industry based on *moé* characters and creating them is the premise of a lot of works, but I am the type of person who puts a lot of emphasis on story. If the characters are good but there is no story, then the player won't be moved. It's a real waste.

***Kanon*: Piro**

***Kanon*: Tsukimiya Ayu**

So, I start with the story, and that will determine the setting and situations that the characters move through until they reach a climax that moves the player. [For a contrasting approach to *moé* as anti-narrative, see Azuma Hiroki, page 170.]

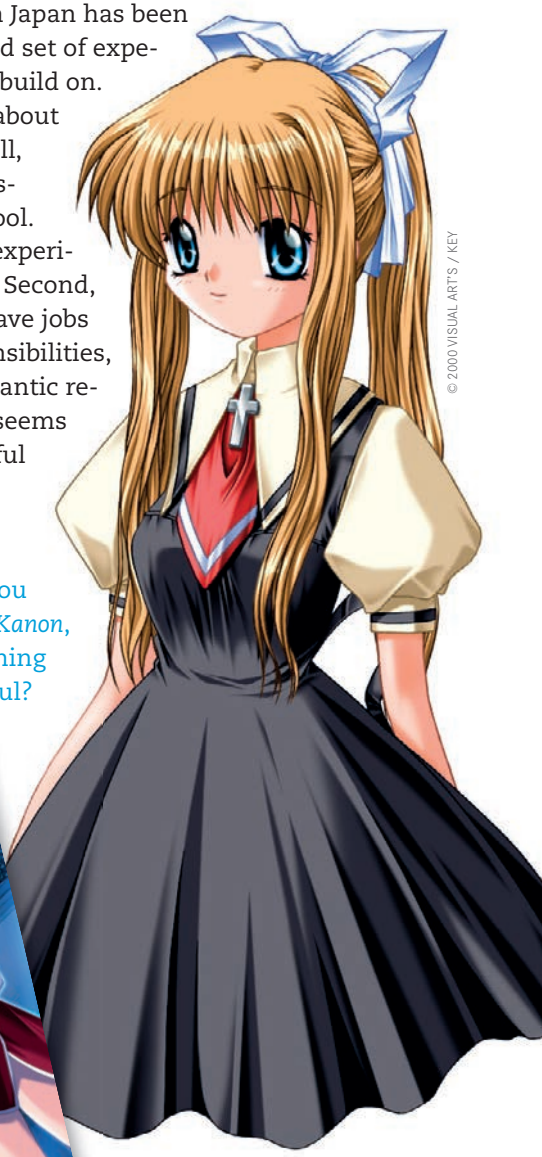
PG: Many of your game scenarios have a school setting. Why is that?

MJ: It is a sort of unwritten rule of the *bishojo* game world that the setting should be high school. Not middle school or university, but high school. This is beginning to broaden a bit, but it is still the norm. The time and place that everyone agrees on, the aggregate desire of players, is high school. That is where the *bishojo* game players want to project themselves and their

***Clannad*: Sakagami Tomoyo**

emotions. Almost everyone in Japan has been to high school, and this shared set of experiences is something that we build on. It's easy to write love stories about that time of life, too. First of all, not everyone had the best possible experiences in high school. So they want to go back and experience it as it might have been. Second, this is a time before people have jobs and families and adult responsibilities, all of which detract from romantic relationships. School romance seems kind of like a dream of youthful freedom.

PG: Is there a certain type of character and scenario that you have found to work well? Do *Kanon*, *Air*, and *Clannad* share something that has made them successful?



Left: *Kanon*, Kawasumi Mai; above *Air*, Kamio Misuzu

***Air*: above, Tono Minagi; right, Kirishima Kano**

MJ: I think the reason that these three works have attracted so much attention is because they are emotionally moving stories. I don't think any other producer has come up with games that have such an intense range of emotions. Key's works amp up the emotions to the greatest possible level. I guess that's why our games are called crying games, because they move players to tears. In the 1990s, there were moving and heartwarming games, but it was more like players would sit back, nod, and say, "This is a situation when I could cry." Playing the games that we make at Key, people actually cry. At first I was surprised that *bishojo* games had come to a point

where they could have such an impact on players, but then I came to think of the tears as a sign of our ultimate success. It is very difficult to create games that move people the way ours do.

PG: Was Key the originator of crying games?

MJ: Not exactly. Crying games began with story-centric *bishojo* games. First, at the company Elf there was a creator named Hiruta Masato, who made a game called *Classmate* (1992). Hiruta was followed at Elf by another creator named Kenno Yukihiro [aka Kanno Hiroyuki], who made the game *The Girl Who Chants Love at the Edge of this World Yu-No* (1996). Then, a creator named Takahashi Tatsuya at the company Leaf made games such as *Shizuku* (1996), *Kizuato* (1996), and *To Heart* (1997). Hiruta, Kenno, and Takahashi were pioneers. All we did at Key was follow the work of those three people at Elf and Leaf. It is not as if we invented crying games. *Bishojo* games had just reached a new level in the late 1990s, and we rode the wave. But the actual term "crying games" only came into use around the time we made *Kanon*

***Air*: Kirishima Kano**

***Kanon*: Sawatari Makoto**

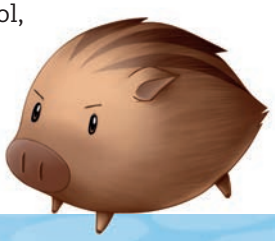
in 1999, and that's why people sometimes think the genre originated with us.

PG: What does the word *moé* mean to you?

MJ: It's a reason to live. If it were to be taken away, many people would no longer be able to survive.

PG: Why do you think that *moé* is so important to so many people today?

MJ: Many people feel insecure. You go to school, but you might not be able to get a job, and even if you do it might not be a full-time position. Without a stable income, it's hard to start a family. There is a general move



toward isolation. People don't have a direction or a purpose. That is why I said that *moé* is a reason to live. Once people find something meaningful to them, they pursue it. Manga, anime, games, or whatever it may be provides a reason to live and a passion that can be shared with others. *Otaku* gather on video-sharing sites such as Nico Nico Douga and massive bulletin boards such as 2channel. This is an age where people struggle to live together. Everyone feels like they are fighting for what they believe in. That is why fans are so passionate and outspoken, and that energy fuels the *moé* boom. With so many people taking manga, anime, and games so seriously, it has become impossible to deny the importance of *moé*.

Above: *Clannad*, Ibuki Fuko and Okazaki Tomoya; right: *Kanon*: Kawasumi Mai

Interview with

Ito Noizi

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Ito Noizi, born in 1977, is an illustrator and character designer for adult games at the company UNiSONSHIFT. Her illustrations have appeared in the games *Wasurenagusa Forget-Me-Not* (2002), *Nanatsuiro Drops* (2006), *Alice Parade* (2007), and *Flyable Heart* (2009). She also illustrated the UNiSONSHIFT novel *A Clockwork Ley-Line: unmei no mawaru mori* (2012). In addition to her work at UNiSONSHIFT, Ito has illustrated the *Shakugan no Shana* and *Suzumiya Haruhi* series of young-adult novels, both adapted into hit anime series. She designed Neon-chan, the character mascot for the Osaka district of Nippombashi. In this interview, Ito talks about how she got started on her career as an illustrator and her perspective on *moé* as a female artist.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY SOFTPAL

Girl Drawing Girl

On *Bishojo* Games

IMAGES © UNISONSHIFT

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): Is Noizi your real name?

Ito Noizi (IN): It's a pen name. I took Ito from the name of the guitarist in the band Siam Shade, and Noizi refers to Noisy, the name of the bass player from the band Sex Machineguns.

PG: I take it that you like rock music. What else are you into?

IN: I like to go shopping for clothes with friends, although I sometimes go alone and just look at clothes. I'm a very normal person.

PG: Your characters tend to be very fashionable. Do you get ideas for your character designs while looking at clothes?

IN: Yes. While walking in front of store windows, ideas for illustrations will come to me. The things I see become a reference for me.

PG: When did you start drawing?

IN: It wasn't until middle school that I really wanted to draw. I had a friend who

Facing page: *Shakugan no Shana*; above and left: *Flyable Heart*

was good at drawing, and I would always bring her paper and a pen and ask her to draw me cute girls from manga and anime. Being near someone so talented inspired me to start drawing myself. At the time, I never dreamed I would become a professional illustrator.

PG: So did you start off drawing cute girls like the ones your friend drew?
IN: Yes. It was just the usual stuff girls like to draw. Princesses and cute girls in fashionable clothes like the ones you see in *shojo* manga (manga for girls).

PG: When did you decide to make a career out of it?
IN: When I was in high school, games like *Street Fighter* were booming. My little brother was totally into fighting games, and

Left: Suzumiya Haruhi; above: *A Clockwork Ley-Line*

I would go with him to the arcades. Seeing these games and watching him play, I decided I wanted to try to design game characters.

PG: So how did you come to UNiSONSHIFT?
IN: I applied for jobs at major companies such as Capcom, but I failed all my interviews. In the end UNiSONSHIFT hired me and I've been with them ever since. At the time, I only knew about mainstream games and had never even heard of *bishojo* games (cute-girl games targeting adults). But as these are the kind of games UNiSONSHIFT make, I knew I had to design characters for these games if I was going to be a professional. So I concentrated on practicing and improving my skills every day. Up until I got a job at this company, I had only been drawing what I wanted to draw, but now I had to think about how the players, who are predominantly male, would respond to my illustrations.

PG: What was the first game you worked on?
IN: I was a key artist (*gengaka*) for the game *Be-reave* (1999). I was just one of many who contributed to that work.

***Nanatsuiro Drops*: Akihime Sumono**

PG: Did you find it difficult to imagine the response of male players to your character designs?

IN: At first it was very difficult. I had no idea what the players wanted or would respond to. But if you don't do what feels right for you, it isn't fun and the end result isn't very good. So the real trick was finding a balance between what I wanted to draw and what I thought that the players wanted to see.

PG: What do you focus on when you create a character?

IN: I want the character to have an impact. I put a lot of thought into the pose and the clothes they wear. I also put a lot of thought into which colors would suit each character best. I try to capture aspects of personality in the design. If someone is energetic, she may like to eat, so I might put a donut in her mouth in one pose. These little quirks or habits really bring the character to life.

PG: Do you think of your characters in terms of reality or fantasy?

IN: Both. Sometimes the idea comes from my imagination and I add elements of reality to it, and sometimes the idea is based in reality and I add elements of fantasy to it. Complete fantasy is impossible, I think. I don't use models, but when I don't have a particular image, I might think in terms of an actress or artist. But I don't look at pictures when I draw or base them on anyone specifically.

Neon-chan

PG: Do you identify with your characters?

IN: Not on a personal level, no. But when I draw a character I become them. Whether the character is a boy or girl, I kind of get inside them. I perform the character like

an actress. I think to myself, "What was she thinking when she made this face?" When I am thinking along with the character, I sometimes make the face that I am drawing. At that moment we are one and the same. But eventually the character takes on its own life.

PG: Your character illustrations are widely praised by fans as *moé*. What does that word mean to you?

IN: Something that comes hard and fast at your heart. Maybe every time we think, "That's good," we are feeling *moé*. People use it loosely now, but in the beginning I think it meant when you saw a character and thought, "Oh, how cute!" It's not a particularly new or special feeling.

PG: Do you draw with the intention of triggering a *moé* response in your audience?

IN: No. Some people think that maids or cat ears are *moé*, but I don't pay attention to such things. I just draw what I like. If people think that it's *moé*, then I am very grateful.

***Wasurenagusa Forget-Me-Not*: Eario**

PG: Do you have any idea why people might think that maids or cat ears are *moé*?

IN: Well, maids because they devote themselves entirely to the service of others. They are like a symbol of love. Cat ears because they are a symbol of fantasy, or what does not exist in reality. You can draw a character with elf ears or wings and the effect would be the same. It's a way to separate the character from the everyday and from humans. Besides, cats are cute! If you add cat ears to a girl then it doubles the cuteness. People may be thinking, "I want to touch her ears! Her tail is so fluffy!" Something like that, I guess.

PG: Which of your characters do you find to be most *moé*?

IN: Akihime Sumomo from the game *Nanatsuiro Drops* (2006). She is a magical girl, and there is a long history of men being attracted to such characters. [See Sato Toshihiko, page 46, and

Nanatsuiro Drops

Nunokawa Yuji, page 54.] I don't really know what guys find *moé*, but the magical girl character tends to be a small girl with lots of energy—the kind of girl that is just too cute to exist. The original target audience for magical girl anime was young girls, and therefore the magical girl character is a young girl just like them, except she has magical powers. The little girls watching can dream of being like her. If you stop and think about it, men just want to be a part of that world. They think that it would be splendid if such girls existed and they could be close to them. Men desire a world where magical girls exist. I think men who are into *moé* are similar to girls in their tastes.

PG: Why do you think that there is an emphasis on youthful characters in manga, anime, and games?

IN: Because that is when girls are the cutest. They are innocent, pure, and sincere. They don't strategize and play games with people. There is also the school setting to consider. A lot of manga and anime are set in schools, so the age of characters has to be relatively young. School is something that people can relate to either as a student now or in the past. This is the time of the best and worst experiences of life. Everything is super-emotional and meaningful. It is easy for creators to imagine scenarios in the school setting, to fantasize about things that they didn't or couldn't experience. You can enjoy a sort of pseudo-experience of the everyday, only in a more exciting and fulfilling way.

PG: Do you think that there has been a *moé* boom?

IN: Manga and anime are certainly reaching wider audiences. The TV anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* ushered in a whole new generation of fans in the 1990s. So many people were talking about *Evangelion* that they called it a social phenomenon. People who liked *Evangelion* spoke openly about liking characters from the show like Rei or Asuka. More recently, people talk about loving my character Haruhi. It's no longer embarrassing to like characters this way. That is why *moé* has spread.

Interview with Honda Toru

Honda Toru, born in 1969, is an author and cultural critic. He became famous in 2005 when he wrote the books *Denpa otoko* (Rambling man) and *Moeru otoko* (Man, bursting into bud), which espouse his philosophy on *moé*. He went on to write the books *Mo'dan no tetsugakushi* (A philosophical history of unpopular men) in 2006, *No'nai ren'ai no susume* (Recommending imaginary love) in 2007, and *Sekai no denpa otoko: mo'dan no bungakushi* (Rambling men of the world: a literary history of unpopular men) in 2008. From Honda's perspective, *moé* is a response from men who feel marginalized by a society in which there are few acceptable male roles beyond that of salaryman. In such a society men must work hard and buy into romance by purchasing gifts and going on expensive dates. Calling this a system of "love capitalism" (*ren'ai shihonshugi*), Honda advocates an alternative: relationships with fictional characters—what he refers to as a "love revolution" (*ren'ai kakumei*). In this interview, Honda explains how he came to this conclusion, and why he thinks his point of view deserves to be taken seriously.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRONIKI CHRISTODOULOU

Denpa otoko

The Love Revolution Is Here

Why One Man Recommends Imaginary Love

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): What are your hobbies?

Honda Toru (HT): Anime, manga, games—all the usual stuff. Fantasy was important for me from an early age as an escape from home and school. I struggled with depression in high school. I actually wanted to drop out and kill myself. It sounds stupid, I know, but anime saved my life. You see, I was watching *Fist of the North Star* (1984–1988) and I didn't want to die until I saw the end of the battle between Kenshiro and Raoh. The story was so drawn out that by the time it finally ended I was over my depression. When I went to university, I thought I'd give up anime, but in 1992 along came *Sailor Moon* and I fell back in deeper than ever. I started drawing *Sailor Moon* fanzines. In 1995, when the Kobe earthquake destroyed our house, I was about ready to give up on life again, but that same year the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*

No'nai ren'ai no susume

Sekai no denpa otoko

Kawana Misaki

came along. It was really the one-two punch of *Evangelion* and then *bishojo* games (dating simulator games) that sealed my fate as an *otaku* in the late 1990s. I have played *bishojo* games ever since, and right now I'm totally hooked on *LovePlus*. You can interact with a two-dimensional girl in real time, which is like a dream come true for me, because I have no interest in three-dimensional women. I'm not even interested in idol singers. Years ago I married a character from a *bishojo* game, *One: kagayaku kisetsu e* (1998). Her name is Kawana Misaki.

PG: Was Kawana your first love?

HT: No, she wasn't. I can't even remember anymore which character was my first love. When I was a kid watching Tezuka Osamu's anime on TV, I couldn't understand the stories, so I focused on the characters. Tezuka is the father of Japanese anime, really classic, but his characters are cute. I definitely felt something for Sapphire from *Princess Knight* (1967–1968) and Melmo from *Marvelous Melmo* (1971–1972). Sapphire is both a boy and a girl, and Melmo is both a child and an adult, so I was confused but intrigued. My favorite character of all time is still Asuka from

the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. That was a series that did a great deal to establish the conventions of character *moé*, but the director, An'no Hideaki, betrayed all the fans by brutally killing Asuka in the movie that ended the series. Personally, I think that one of the reasons why you had all these people turning to fanzines and *bishojo* games in the late 1990s was because fans were so upset with the ending of *Evangelion* and were searching for some kind of compensatory satisfaction.

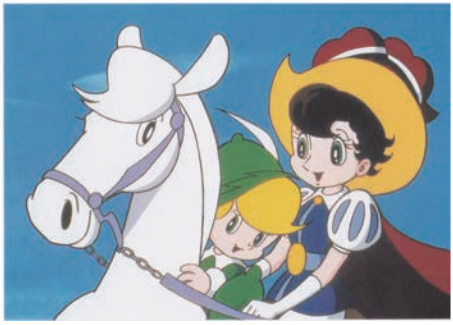
PG: What does the word *moé* mean to you?
HT: It's a feeling like love, but a sort of bittersweet love. It's like falling in love for the first time. The other part of *moé* is a feeling of calm (*iyashi*). You look at a cute character and your heart is at

LovePlus

ease. *Moé* is the warmth and solace that cannot be found in human society. *Moé* characters tend to be separated from humans and reality in some way, so you might have girls with cat ears or robot girls or alien girls. There is a sort of purity to these characters—they are not tainted by our world. Tezuka understood this. There is a story in his manga *Phoenix* (1967–1988) where a man falls in love with an alien, Tamami, who looks like a beautiful girl.

PG: Right. And in *Lunn Flies into the Wind* (1985), one of Tezuka's short animations, a young boy falls in love with a girl in a

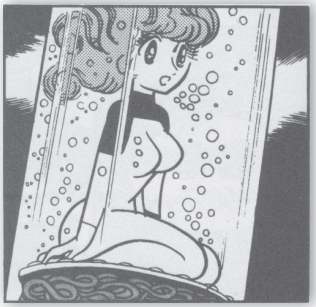
Below: *Princess Knight*
Right: Melmo



Lunn Flies into the Wind

poster and treats the poster as a person. It's a very tender story, and in some ways seems to anticipate *moé* relationships, although eventually the boy finds a "real" girl, so the conclusion is conservative. Tezuka was always interested in relationships with nonhumans, even though he gave them human form. Why do you think these nonhumans have to look human?

HT: People are lonely and project desires onto objects around them. In *moé* culture, anything can take the shape of a cute girl. Machines. Utensils. World nations. As long as it is female, and human in shape, a *moé* character does not have to be based on a human. You can get a lot of pleasure from anthropomorphizing objects into cute characters. You can't have a relationship with an object, but if it is in the shape of a girl then there are more possibilities. A cat, for example, can be represented by a cute girl with cat ears and a tail. It's obvious that the cat-ear phenomenon began with someone thinking "I wonder what a cat would be like if it were a human?" Then all sorts of desires get wrapped up in that image.



***Phoenix*: Tamami**

PG: Why do you think that *moé* characters tend to be young?

HT: Because that makes them vulnerable, which inspires us to protect and nurture them. The character needs support, love, or care, even if she is strong and independent. If she

is not at all vulnerable, then she can live on her own. It would be hard to approach such a perfect being. Being vulnerable means that you need others, and these characters can't survive without support.

PG: Who tends to have an interest in *moé* characters?
HT: Clearly we are talking about those who are marginalized—Japanese men in particular, who seem to be getting weaker. After the Second World War, the value of men in Japan was determined by their productivity at work. The man who earned money was able to spend it, showing that he was a worthy mate. This then became the only way to be a man, the only way to be favorably appraised by women. I call this the era of love capitalism, meaning that dating and courtship were increasingly tied to consumption. Trendy dramas aired on television that promoted going to fancy restaurants or taking a ski vacation. So those men who failed or dropped out of the system looked for love elsewhere, for example in manga and anime. The situation got worse when the economy tanked in the 1990s, which made it harder to get that job and be that ideal man. There were a few men who had love and a lot of men who didn't. I call this the love gap (*ren'ai kakusa*). *Moé* provides a low-cost, low-stress solution to this problem. It is love on our terms. *Moé* is a love revolution that challenges people's commonsense notions about the world. You don't need much capital to access *moé*, and you can do it in a way that suits you. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that everyone should give up on reality; I'm just pointing out that some of us find satisfaction with fictional characters. It's not for everyone, but maybe more people would recognize this life choice if it wasn't always belittled. Forcing people to live up to impossible ideals so that they can participate in so-called reality creates so-called losers, who in their despair might lash out at society. We don't have to accept something just because people tell us that it is normal or right or better.

PG: So, you don't have to "be a man" or "get the girl."
HT: Exactly. Think about anime series such as *K-On!* (2009). It's just a bunch of girls hanging out in a high school. There is no romantic angle at all. Fans watch the show to see cute girls acting cute. It's just like women looking at Hello Kitty and saying, "She's so cute!" But then men can also watch *K-On!* and imagine relationships with the girls. But there is no script for how they should relate. In a world without male characters, how should the male viewer identify? It's a complicated question, and the answer is totally open to the imagination. *Moé* fans are so busy turning everything around them into cute girls that it is not impossible that they turn into cute girls themselves.

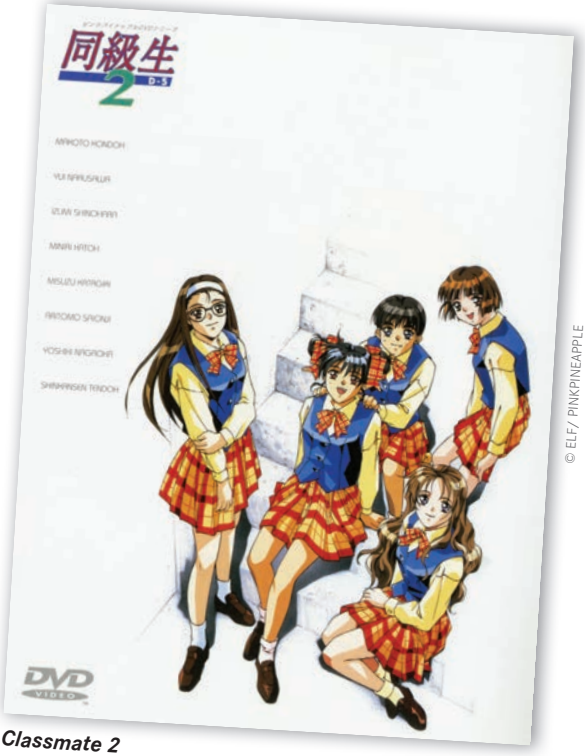
PG: Are there any other reasons why *moé* culture should have taken hold in Japan rather than in another country?
HT: Manga and anime play a much larger role in Japan than comics and cartoons do in other countries. When Tezuka Osamu started producing his manga after the Second World War, they were immediately widely popular. They were cheap and accessible in a society where there were few other entertainment options. Then Tezuka adapted his manga into anime, which also spread quickly. Now in Japan, manga and anime are a part of growing up for kids of all backgrounds. You get used to seeing cute characters everywhere. Many people learn to draw them, and with more and more people drawing, character designs get better and better. The attention paid to manga and anime characters in Japan is unique in the world.

Tezuka: ***Don Dracula***

Nowhere are there cuter characters in greater numbers than in Japan. This is clearly one reason why *moé* settled here.

PG: Would you say that *moé* is about a physical attraction to characters?

HT: I don't think *moé* is just about physical attraction. People who pursue *moé* are looking for something deeper. In *bishojo* games, there is one girl that the player loves and wants to be with, and the story is about how the player finds his way to her. In the 1990s, there were *bishojo* games that were all about the fantasy of multiple partners. The game *Classmate* (1992) was very much that way, but in its sequel, *Classmate 2* (1995), the objective was to find true love with one girl. The sequel was much more



Classmate 2

popular than the original. And this is not an isolated example. In the 1990s, you had all sorts of games about love and romance being released by companies such as Elf and Leaf, and then in the 2000s there were the crying games (*nakige*) released by Key [see page 98]. As the name suggests, crying games are all about emotion, not physical attraction. Despite what some people might think, these games are something like romance novels. It's the relationships that are *moé*.

PG: Do you think *moé* is somehow compensating for a lack of love in the real world?

HT: It may seem that *moé* is compensatory, but that is not always the case. These days, it is often the other way around. People don't imagine a relationship with an anime character because they couldn't find a girlfriend, but rather they fell in love with a character in the first place. Any relationship with a human woman after that is compensatory. We have grown up in a media environment where it is possible to fall in love with manga and anime characters. Some people never stop feeling love for them. So it's not necessarily about dropping out of society—it's also about being brought up in a world that sets one up to be a *moé otaku*. [For more on growing up in media environments, see Saito Tamaki, page 178.]

PG: What do you think is the future of *moé*?

HT: Some day soon this hierarchy of "real" and "artificial" will break down. Society is not ready to accept love for only two-dimensional girls. We still need a middle ground between the two- and three-dimensional worlds, for example maid cafés, where women dress in costumes and perform as characters. The future is knowing that we are in love with fiction and accepting it. We don't have to "wake up" just because someone tells us that the "real" world is inherently better than the world of *moé* fantasy. Someday we will be able to accept that the world of dreams is a good world.

Interview with Morinaga Takuro

PHOTOGRAPH OF MORINAGA TAKURO COURTESY MORINAGA TAKURO

Morinaga Takuro, born in 1957, is an economic analyst, media personality, writer, and lecturer at Dokkyo University. Morinaga is said to have *otaku* leanings, which come out in his discussion of *moé*. For example, he argues that the majority of Japanese men are ugly and poor, and women's inability to deal with this accounts for falling marriage rates. Men who can't find partners instead fall in love with characters from manga, anime, and games. In 2005, Morinaga published the book *Moé keizaigaku* (*Moé* economics), where he talks of *moé* as a proud culture of men who have reached enlightenment. His ideas on *moé* appeared in a controversial article published in the *New York Times Magazine* on July 21, 2009. In this interview, Morinaga explains the economics of *moé*, his fears about *moé* "fundamentalists," and his hope for wide acceptance of *otaku*.

FIGURINE PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMON MCGLOWN

For Love or Money

A Lesson in *Moé* Economics

Moé keizaigaku

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): You are an economist. Why study *otaku*?

Morinaga Takuro (MT): Economics often assumes that people make rational decisions. Humans, however, don't operate rationally. The research theme that I have pursued all these years is why people go crazy, and through this research I became interested in the *otaku* market. *Otaku* will pay any amount for things that they value, but these things are worthless to others. They also buy a lot! You end up with small-scale suppliers producing diverse products for a limited number of buyers. The producers and consumers tend to be the same people. For example, the people making and selling maid costumes use what money they make to buy figurines or trading-card games. The result is what I call the Akihabara block economy. The money circulates around from place to place within a narrow closed market, and no one actually makes a profit. As an economic analyst,

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMON MCGLOWN

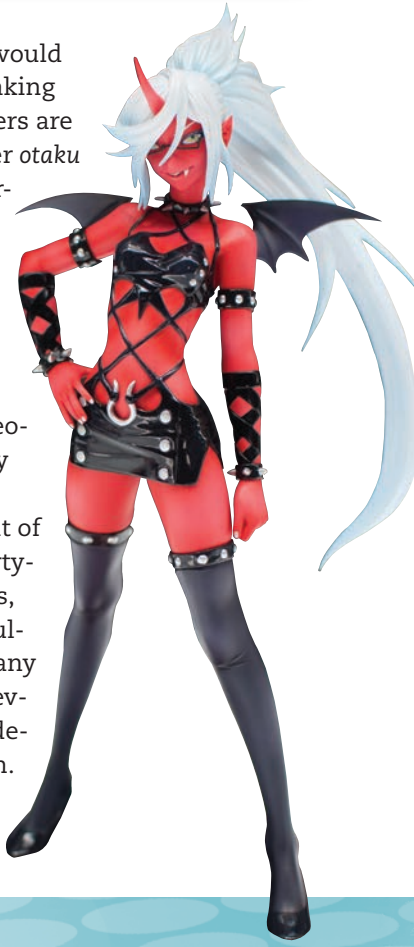
Figurines (left and far left): part of the *otaku* market

Above and right: *otaku* goods

what I see looks absolutely crazy. Why would anyone produce things if they aren't making money? The answer is love. The producers are *otaku* and they want to produce for other *otaku* who appreciate their work. They are pursuing what they love.

PG: You have also written about the economics of love.

MT: Right. The marriage market is as crazy as the *otaku* market. In the last twenty or thirty years, the number of people not getting married has dramatically increased in Japan. The national census survey of 2005 revealed that 49.4 percent of men between the ages of thirty and thirty-four were unmarried. In the 2010 census, that figure rose above 50 percent. Our culture is polarized into those that date many people and those that date no one. For every one man who meets the criteria of desirability, there is any number of women. Those men who don't meet the criteria can't find a partner. Women say that



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMON MCGLOWN

they want a "standard" (*futsu*) man. Not normal, but standard. Standard in the sense of a middle-class working man, the sort that was common in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. In Japan, we call such men salarymen. Women want to date someone from the middle class who is a stable, reliable earner. At the same time, the middle class is rapidly disappearing. Most people are in the lower class, which is not desirable, or the upper class, which is out of reach. So those few examples of the middle-class man are in high demand.

***Otaku* producing for other *otaku*: Danny Choo's Mirai Suenaga mascot character**

PG: How does this situation make people go crazy, to borrow your word?

MT: Well, alternative lifestyles are developing within the group of people without partners. From the deep despair of having a small income and few prospects comes the urge to abandon all hope for a human partner. You could call it crazy, but actually it's enlightenment. Those who cannot find human partners begin to have desires for manga, anime, and game characters, or what they call "two-dimensional" women. For them, it is better than the real thing. Unlike a human woman, a character will do what they want.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMON MCGLOWN

PG: You have written a book on *moé* economics. First of all, what does the word *moé* mean to you?

MT: *Moé* is a feeling of love for fictional characters. When you love something that is not a human woman the way you would love a human woman, that feeling is called *moé*.

This page: more *otaku* goods

PG: When did you first start to notice *moé*?

MT: It was around the year 2000 that *moé* became a legitimate phenomenon. Japan went into deflation in 1997, and the gap between those who have and those who don't really widened. Men without adequate income could not get married, and in fact could not even get into a romantic relationship. The numbers of these men rapidly increased at the end of the 1990s. As these men turned to manga, anime, and games to find love, *moé* blossomed.

PG: Why do *otaku* like young characters?
MT: *Otaku* tend to be weak, especially in male-female relationships. They are disempowered both economically and in the love market. People into *moé* are losers in the love market. In order for them to feel secure and happy, their partner has to be younger and appear to be within their control. What they need is a character that is even weaker than themselves. So characters tend to be small, cute, and young looking.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIELE MATTIOLI

PG: Now that you have told us what the word *moé* means to you, could you give us a definition of *moé* economics?
MT: The *moé* market does not lie with the people I call the "fundamentalists"—the term I use to describe those who are completely satisfied with two-dimensional love. These fundamentalists comprise less than 10 percent of the market. For those who can't be satisfied only with the two-dimensional world, there is a need for material. The *moé* market is concerned with providing this three-dimensional material to people looking for satisfaction in the two-dimensional world. Figurines of anime characters, cosplay, maid cafés, and so on are all ways of making the two-dimensional part of the three-dimensional world.

PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR

Maid cafés: 3-D satisfaction

PG: Why do you think the *moé* market is so much more robust in Japan than, say, the United States?

MT: *Moé* is more visible in Japan, because of the excess of unmarried men who turn to manga, anime, and game characters. And Japan is probably the only place in the world that is producing characters that can be a target for love. Also, because manga and anime are part of Japan's popular culture, people are widely exposed to two-dimensional characters and develop feelings of affection for them. That is why it is possible to formulate an alternative such as *moé* in Japan. But, again, I think that the pressures contributing to the phenomenon are shared globally, and that *moé* will become a big market in other countries too as more and more men end up on the losing side of the economy.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMON MCGLOWN

PG: Is *moé* a form of resistance to society?

MT: I wonder if we can call it resistance. It's a preference. Those who are into *moé* say that two-dimensional women are far superior to three-dimensional

This page: *otaku* goods – who buys all this stuff?

women. I originally thought that *moé otaku* retain feelings for three-dimensional women, but it seems that fundamentalists lose interest entirely. So, it isn't that they despise the real world—it's more that they don't care about it. There are fundamentalists who have completely gone over to the two-dimensional world, for whom the chance of returning to the three-dimensional world is close to zero. They still aren't that large of a population, but their numbers are increasing, and it's creating a tough situation. In truth, I am a little worried about the future of Japan, because romantic relationships with fictional characters do not result in the birth of actual children. Where will the next generation of workers come from? The pension system will collapse. I want those in the two-dimensional world to return to our world, or keep one foot here, but I am often seriously criticized by them for my efforts. It's not that I don't understand their feelings. I myself am a huge fan of Ayanami Rei from the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Once you give yourself over to the two-dimensional, you've found your utopia. I know only too well how hard it is to give that up.

***Neon Genesis Evangelion*: Ayanami Rei**

PG: Can anything be done to address this issue?

MT: I was communicating by mail with an *otaku* who has gone over to the two-dimensional, and I asked him to come back. He told me he would, if I could prepare a human woman who was more attractive than the character he was dating and place her in front of him. That's an impossible request! How can I prepare a woman or place her anywhere? In anime, women fall from the sky into people's lives.

In Japan, we have to go and approach them. It's not that these men lack the ability to approach women—they simply don't want to. If it was a lack of ability, then men could just train to interact with the three-dimensional world. But fundamentalists have no desire to interact with the three-dimensional world in the first place.

PG: You paint a bleak picture, but you also defend *otaku* in the media.

MT: The image of *moé otaku* in Japan is still pretty negative. I basically consider myself an *otaku*, and a friend to *moé otaku*. That said, it is a problem of degree. Recently, I have come to think that it can be dangerous to take the love of manga, anime, and games too far. Most of the negativity toward *otaku* springs from misunderstandings, but some of the responsibility lies with *otaku*. For example, not taking a shower. Some *otaku* think to themselves, "Why waste ten minutes in the shower when I can use that time to play a *bishojo* game?" If you don't even take the time to clean yourself

Japan makes characters that are a target for love

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMON MCGLOWN

up, it is extremely difficult to have a social existence. People will judge you. Japanese are a little fussy about cleanliness anyway, and women are particularly so. You probably can't get a date if you don't shower. It isn't entirely the fault of women that some people can't find a partner. Both sides have to compromise. If not, then we are headed for a divided society.

PG: What do you think the future holds for *moé otaku*?

MT: The model of success today is the entrepreneurial man who takes his company public and ends up with millions, an apartment on the waterfront, lots of friends, and a beautiful wife. The opposite end of the spectrum is the *otaku*, who is thought to be a complete and utter failure. But the model of success that I have described is crumbling. I think that *otaku* might come to be seen less as losers and more as models of happiness. Consuming what you need to be happy and not worrying about being the richest or most powerful might become the new standard. If both men and women make compromises, *otaku* might even be able to get married.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMON MCGLOWN

Interview with

Higashimura Hikaru

Higashimura Hikaru, born in 1983, is a fan of the illustrated novels aimed at young-adult readers known as "light novels" in Japan, and has spent much of his adult life studying *moé*. He has published numerous fanzines on the subject, and is one of the founding members of the *Moé* Studies Research Circle (*Moégaku kenkyukai*) at his former university in Ehime Prefecture. In 2009, Higashimura moved to Tokyo to live and work in Akihabara, the district that has become a spiritual center for fans of manga, anime, and video games. He now introduces himself, in a manner typical of the multilayered gags of fan culture, as a teacher at Akihabara University.* In this interview, Higashimura talks about his approach to *moé*, making useful comparisons between *moé* and romantic love.

* Visit http://upfg.lullsound.com/akiba-u.ac.jp/

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY HIGASHIMURA HIKARU

The *Moé* Studies Research Circle

Taking *Otaku* to School

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): When did you first hear the word *moé*?
Higashimura Hikaru (HH): When I was in high school in the 1990s, I belonged to a computer club and was introduced to a *bishojo* game called *To Heart* (1997), which I really enjoyed. I remember talking about the game with an upper classman, who said to me, "This character is *moé*, isn't she?" That's the first time I heard the word.

PG: Was *moé* something that people often used to talked about at that time?
HH: Yes. As I understand it, the term *moé* first appeared in the early to mid 1990s. This was a time when anime featuring the cute girls known as *bishojo* evolved into well-crafted products that could be enjoyed by an adult audience. In that decade, there were anime series such as *Sailor Moon* (1992–1997) and *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1998–2000), both of which were based on manga drawn by women. There was a boom in male fandom around anime heroines. Within that fandom, the word *moé* was used to describe something different from the feeling you get from the usual male-oriented robot anime.

Left: *Cardcaptor Sakura*; above: *To Heart*

Lynn Minmay

PG: What you are describing—men attracted to manga and anime produced by women for women—reminds me a lot of early *otaku* engagement with *shojo* manga (manga for girls).

HH: Awareness of the attractiveness of anime characters has existed since the mid-1970s, which was reflected in the rise of fanzines at the time. In the 1980s there must have been *moé* for characters such as Lynn Minmay from the anime *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* (1982), but no one had a word for it. Basically, the 1990s was a continuation of what had come before, but fans were growing in number along with the increasing amount of high-quality anime series. These days, people get excited over one hit series such as *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (2011), but in the 1990s, there were several such series released every year. There were more fans with more characters to talk about, and spaces were created where people could discuss their feelings for these characters in a supportive environment.

PG: What does *moé* mean to you?

HH: *Moé* is a special affection for a character, or, to be precise, the emotional reaction of a human being toward a fictional character. In my view, other cultural, economic, and social aspects of *moé* should be treated separately as the "*moé* market" or the "*moé* cultural

sphere." My focus is on *moé* proper. It's different from romantic love, because with *moé* you cannot expect a response from the object of affection. Love at first sight is very similar to *moé*. Both depend on an object's appearance or behavior. The starting point of love at first sight is when you experience extremely positive feelings toward a person you know very little about. The difference between *moé* and romantic love is a difference in results. It's hard to marry someone with only a feeling of love at first sight. To live with someone you need to experience and accept the differences between you. But you don't need to make this kind of compromise when you have a relationship with a fictional character.

Top: *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*; bottom: *Sailor Moon*

PG: Does the *moé* relationship evolve?

HH: It's possible to lose interest in characters or become more interested in them, and the preference for specific character designs or situations that trigger *moé* may change. But *moé* is, in essence, a feeling of affection for fictional characters, and that doesn't change.

PG: Could a fan have a *moé* response to a real person, performing as a character? Say in a maid café?

HH: It's possible to have a *moé* response to a person dressed up as a maid. The question here is what exactly is the object of *moé*? It is not the person who is dressed up as a maid, but the maid character itself. Someone who loves maid characters would not necessarily feel the same way about the person if she were wearing a different costume. The attraction is to the maid character, which exists as part of a fantasy. This is a little confusing, but let's consider someone who says, "I like girls who behave like maids." This might mean that this person would like to have a relationship with a human whose character is like a maid. If that is the case, then we are not talking about *moé*. But if this person's affection is for a maid character, which is to say that he is in a relationship with a fictional character without wanting a response, then we are talking about *moé*. In another example, *otaku* feel *moé* for the actresses that provide the voices for anime characters, but they don't expect a response from them. Getting a response would make it a relationship between humans, which is not *moé*.

Are maids *moé*?

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRONIKI CHRISTODOULOU

PG: Could a fan have a *moé* response to an object?

HH: That's a difficult question. People do feel *moé* for objects. I recently went to an event for train fans. I myself am deeply interested in trains, and I often travel around Japan just to see specific trains. Each one has its own set of traits, personality, or

character. At this event, fans were anthropomorphizing trains. They drew illustrations of trains as cute girls and sold fanzines about them. Attending this event, I thought that these fans were expressing their feelings for the trains. A train obviously cannot respond to these feelings, so we are talking about *moé*. The fans were expressing their interest in the trains, and using the illustrations of the trains as cute girls to make others interested in the trains. They were showing other fans trains in a new light. For example, the Sobu train line in Tokyo carries a lot of commuters every day. Though this train is a nonhuman object, it has a hardworking character, which can trigger a *moé* response. People discover stories in objects and feel *moé* for them. It isn't even the cute character that is drawn, but the object behind it that triggers the *moé* response. This is not always the case. There is a manga called *Afghanis-tan* (2005), where the country of Afghanistan is anthropomorphized as a cute girl and the reader learns about her relationships with her neighbors. In this case, I am not sure that fans are responding with a feeling of *moé* to the actual country of Afghanistan.

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Wait, are trains *moé* too?

PG: Would you say that this response is distinct from being impressed by a building or factory?

HH: There is a feeling of veneration for massive things, but this isn't necessarily *moé*. For example, one might feel a sense of awe when standing in front of a life-sized model of a robot from the anime *Mobile Suit Gundam*, but one might also be moved by looking at a small figurine of a *bishojo*. But it is the world or story of the object in front of you that moves you, not the object itself. So, to return to my earlier example, *moé* does not mean being moved by the physical presence of a train, but rather being moved by the imagined character of the train. Either way the person is responding to a non-human object, but they are responding to different things.

Afghanistan: *moé*?

PG: Do you think that the more realistic a character, the less it elicits a *moé* response?

HH: I believe it's possible to have *moé* feelings toward realistically drawn or depicted characters, but this goes unnoticed. Characters like those from the anime series *Lucky Star* are for *moé* beginners because aspects of character design and behavior are obviously designed to be cute and elicit a response from viewers. In fact, if you look at the information provided by the designer in the liner notes of the DVD, you will see that so-called *moé* elements (*moé yoso*) are clearly defined. It is teaching the viewer how to read aspects of cuteness in character design. On the other hand, literary novelists such as Dazai Osamu or serious filmmakers such as Oshii Mamoru hide the *moé* elements

of characters deep down. It is not expressed on the surface. In these kinds of works, readers or viewers have to discover the *moé* elements by reading into the characters, story, and situation. The process is intensive in terms of cognitive labor, thus not many people are willing to do it.

PG: Why did you decide to study *moé*?
HH: By studying *moé* I can comprehend the nature of my community and explain it to others, which might lead to greater understanding and tolerance. Because *moé* is not explained well, it remains unfamiliar and strange to people. As a general rule, people fear the unknown, which is why *moé* fans are often regarded as somehow perverse. It is necessary to define and explain aspects of *otaku* culture such as *moé*. We need to explain to others that there is nothing to fear—we just do things a little differently.

PG: Some people think that *moé* is dangerous because it shows an inability to distinguish fantasy from reality. Do you agree?
HH: No, I don't agree at all with that stereotype. On the contrary, the deeper you pursue *moé*, the more you understand that it is about fiction. The character is fictional—something that exists in the realm of ideas. I don't think that there is any danger from *otaku*, however obsessive they may be, because they understand that it is the fiction of the character they find attractive.

PG: What do you think is the future of *moé*?
HH: The *moé* boom ended in about 2009, but the number of people who belong to the *moé* community remains the same. There are still plenty of manga, anime, and games out there, and fans have a built-in support system for their activities through university clubs and fan events. They can also come to Akihabara to immerse themselves in the *moé* world. I think that in the future we will see more and more people responding affectionately to fictional characters. But even in the best-case scenario, *otaku* will never become mainstream. *Moé* will always be a subculture.

Interview with Soda Mitsuru

Soda Mitsuru, born in 1984, is a fan of manga, anime, and games who has spent much of his adult life studying *moé*. He has a PhD in library science and specializes in planning and organizing museum events. He is the author of an upcoming book on *moé*, but publishes most of his work in the form of fanzines. A quiet and unassuming man, Soda introduces himself as the head of the The Philomoé Association (*Hogaku kyokai*).* In this interview Soda makes important connections between *bishojo* media (media featuring cute girl characters) and *shojo* manga (manga for young girls).

* Visit http://www.geocities.jp/mhpcsouda/hougaku-index.htm

PHOTOGRAPH OF SODA MITSURU COURTESY OF SODA MITSURU

The Comic Market

PHOTOGRAPH BY ADRIAN LOZANO

The Philomoé Association

Discours de la moéthode

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): When did you start writing about *moé*?

Soda Mitsuru (SM): I wrote my undergraduate thesis on *moé* in 2006. Around the middle of 2005, I read every magazine article I could find with the word *moé* in it—about fifty or sixty articles in total. Because of the lack of a clear definition, everybody was talking about different things, so I decided to get some concrete data. I started with the university clubs that were coming to Tokyo's Comic Market, Japan's largest gathering for producers of fanzines. I distributed about five hundred questionnaires and received three hundred responses. There were twenty questions, including things like, "What is *moé* to you?" "Where did you first hear about *moé*?" "Can you feel *moé* for a real person?" I summarized these results in my thesis and in my own fanzines, which I then distributed at the Comic Market.

The Soul Taker

PG: When did you first notice the word *moé* becoming more widely used?

SM: I remember a commercial for the anime *The Soul Taker* (2001), where voice actress Momoi Halko, who plays one of the characters, says "*moé moé*." [See Momoi Halko, page 72.] It was

probably after that time that the term spread. Right around then, the company Pony Canyon started producing anime under the name *Master of Entertainment*, or, for short, "m.o.e."

PG: Are you personally into *moé* media?

SM: Yes. Like many of my generation, I was into anime series such as *Martian Successor Nadesico* (1996–1997) and *Gunslinger Girl* (2003–2004). Of particular importance to me was the anime *Noir* (2001). In high school, I had severe asthma and was frail and weak. I would wake up around two o'clock every morning, feeling as if I was suffocating. I'd watch anime until I was calm enough to sleep again. *Noir* was airing then, and I honestly feel like it saved my life. During my most intense *moé* period I was head over heels in love with the character Cagalli from the anime series *Gundam Seed* (2002–2003). I kept an online diary called "Cagalli and Me." This is an embarrassing confession, but once, while watching the show, I got so excited that I fell over and smacked my head against the wall.

Top: *Gundam Seed*; bottom: *Martian Successor Nadesico*

***Gunslinger Girl*: Henrietta**

PG: But your fanzines have always been informational?
SM: Yes. I was always more interested in informational fanzines rather than those that dealt in fan fiction or art. I first found out about the world of fanzines from small events that were held in my hometown in Tochigi Prefecture, but most of the participants were girls and the events tended to be dominated by fanzines about boys' love. My brother and I went to the Comic Market for the first time in 1996. I was in middle school then, and was inspired by all the informational fanzines about the *Gundam* franchise. From there I gradually started producing my own fanzines. I wanted to go to university in Tokyo so that I could participate in the Comic Market.

PG: How did you decide to write fanzines about *moé*?
SM: Well, there were already so many informational fanzines on the *Gundam* franchise by that point that I didn't see what I could add. *Moé* was a buzzword at the time, so I thought that I could write about that instead. I had a friend who went to the University of Tokyo, and when I was visiting him I found out about there was an *otaku* group that was researching maids, so I joined them. We were all university students learning philosophy and theory, and we decided to apply this to *moé* as a kind of parody. For example, we changed Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* into *Discours de la moéthode*, making his discourse on method into our discourse on *moé*. We called ourselves the *Hogaku kyokai*, or in English, The Philomoé Association. The roots of the word "philosophy" are the

Noir: "It saved my life"

Greek words *philos*, "to love," and *sophia*, "wisdom," so we switched sophia for *moé*, making us an association for the love of *moé*.

PG: Were you serious about studying *moé*?
SM: Yes, I was serious about it. People were saying that *moé* was just about cute girl characters, which made me a little mad. I wanted to explain what anime meant to me, using the seriousness of academia to counter the trivialization of *moé* by critics.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMON MCGLOWN

Maids: subject of research

PG: What does the word *moé* mean to you?
SM: First, *moé* is the expression of feeling for fictional characters. Second, *moé* can mean the production of such expression—the creation of those fictional characters by the production companies. Third, there is the more political use of *moé* when it's used to describe the attention paid to anime outside of Japan. So you can talk about *moé* as a feeling, a market, or a political stance toward the spread of Japanese media in the world. All three of these ways of talking about *moé* were there in the articles I researched as a student in 2005. It is my position that we need to separate these three things and talk about each on its own terms if we are going to make any progress in the discussion about *moé*.

PG: Do you think there is a certain character type that is *moé*?
SM: The specific triggers of *moé* are all fads. In the 1990s, illustrations of *bishojo* became more and more detailed, vivid, and beautiful. This was especially pronounced in *bishojo* games, which

use fewer images than animation and have to make each one detailed and appealing. But whatever we might say about the things that these images of *bishojo* share, none of them are essentially *moé*. They are just specific instances of things that triggered *moé* at one particular time.

What I think is important about *bishojo* games is that they emphasize characters, both in terms of illustrations and stories, and the players interact with these characters and develop feelings for them. If *moé* is a feeling for characters, then the more characters are emphasized the greater the chance of *moé*. So, I am less interested in the specifics of character design than in how we interact with characters. As I see it, the strategy of evoking emotional responses in readers was established in *shojo* manga. For example, in *shojo* manga, artists give the characters larger eyes, because this makes them cuter and more expressive. In *shojo* manga, readers spend more time getting to know characters in everyday situations, which increases empathy. Finally, artists will sometimes write out the character's thoughts, allowing the reader to access them. In all these ways, *shojo* manga heightens the emotional response of the reader. This strategy was transferred from *shojo* manga to *bishojo* manga, anime, and games. If you look at the eyes of *bishojo* characters, for example, they are huge. You don't see this much in *shonen* media (media for boys); the large eyes are obviously inherited from *shojo* manga. In *bishojo* games, players spend long hours interacting with characters, usually simulating a romantic relationship, so producers put great emphasis on character design, and consumers

***Shojo* manga: large eyes**

Pigtails and glasses: *moé*?

feel great empathy with the character—so much so that they can be moved to tears. [See Maeda Jun, page 98.]

PG: So you would not agree that specific elements of character design are more or less *moé*? [For more on this approach, see Azuma Hiroki, page 170.]

SM: I don't think that *moé* is a matter of character design, though it is easy to get that impression because of the prevalence of *bishojo* media. In the late 1990s, *bishojo* manga, anime, and games were on the rise. In *bishojo* games, which feature numerous cute girls that the player can interact with, you will often

find that visual elements are used to differentiate characters. Certain designs—for example, blonde with pigtails or black hair with glasses—are popular and people will buy games featuring such characters. It is easy to get the impression that the character designs or even specific elements such as pigtails or glasses are *moé* in and of themselves, but that would be a mistake. If we return to the three ways to approach *moé* that I laid out before, you will see that character design focuses on production and market, not on inspiring *moé* as a feeling. There is no guarantee that a character in glasses will inspire *moé* in the player.

PG: How would you respond to people who say that *moé* is just about ogling cute girls?

SM: I think that's a misconception. There are many cute girl characters in manga, anime, and games, but that really isn't the point. In many popular *bishojo* games, for example those produced by Key [see page 98], *moé* is evoked in the emotional scenes where we see the human aspects of the character. So is it just about the cute girls? No, I don't think so. That's a really impoverished way to think about *moé*. It's certainly not my experience watching *Gundam Seed* or *Noir* or any of the other anime series that moved me.

PG: What do you think the future holds for *moé*?

SM: There has been some decline in the sales of manga and anime generally, but I don't think *bishojo* manga, anime, and games will disappear, nor will the feeling of *moé*. As a buzzword among marketers and politicians, however, *moé* has lost its purchase. *Moé* has been analyzed and used so much that there's really no need to say the word out loud anymore. The legacy of the *moé* boom is that we are all more aware of the powerful attraction of characters from manga, anime, and games. Spaces have opened up for discussing and sharing feelings for characters, and those spaces will remain open and allow for continued fan activities.

Interview with

Morikawa Ka'ichiro

Morikawa Ka'ichiro, born in 1971, is a design theorist and professor at the School of Global Japanese Studies at Meiji University. He is best known for his book *Shuto no tanjo: moeru toshi Akihabara* (Learning from Akihabara: the birth of a personapolis), published in 2003, in which Morikawa shows how the Akihabara district of Tokyo has been taken over by the hardcore fans of manga and anime known as *otaku* and has come to reflect their tastes. Morikawa translated this concept into his *Otaku*: Persona=Space=City exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2004. He is the driving force behind the plan to construct the Tokyo International Manga Library, which will permanently house not only his work from the Venice Biennale, but also archives of early anime magazines and fanzines. In this interview, Morikawa gives an analysis of the transformation of Akihabara into an *otaku* neighborhood.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

Learning from Akihabara

How *Moé* Transformed a Neighborhood

Morikawa's exhibit in book form

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): In your book, *Shuto no tanjo*, you call Akihabara a "*moeru*" neighborhood. Can you explain what you mean?

Morikawa Ka'ichiro (MK): When *Shuto no tanjo* was published in 2003, the term *moé* was not widely understood among the general public in Japan. Most people only knew and used *moé* in the classic sense, a nominalization of the verb *moeru*, meaning "to sprout" or "burst into bud." So, when I called Akihabara a *moeru* neighborhood, it had a double meaning. For those who weren't acquainted with *otaku* culture, it meant something like a neighborhood that was coming into its own. For *otaku*, it meant a neighborhood where people pursue *moé* through manga, anime, and games. In the first chapter of the book, I explain how you can separate people into those who know what *moé* means and those who don't. It's like an *otaku* litmus test. Even among *otaku*, not everyone understands

Shuto no tanjo: moeru toshi Akihabara

Artist John Hathway imagines Akihabara as a place of magic and mystery

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what *moé* means. For those who are interested in manga, anime, and game characters, the description of something as *moé* conveys a lot of information. Saying something is *moé* is an indirect way of expressing feelings.

PG: How do you define *moé*?
MK: It's an expression of affection for fictional characters, especially the characters of manga, anime, and games.

PG: Can *moé* be used to describe a response to objects or real people, too?
MK: It depends on the situation. If a person uses the word *moé* in reaction to an object, you would have to differentiate if he or she is intrinsically interested in the object or in what the object is representing. If it's the latter case, this is certainly *moé*. It is important to keep in mind that *moé* is a response to fictional characters. If a person is reacting to a real person, then they might use the word "cute" (*kawaii*) to describe them. This is not the same as saying the person is *moé*, which means you are

***Kyoryu wakusei*: Moé**

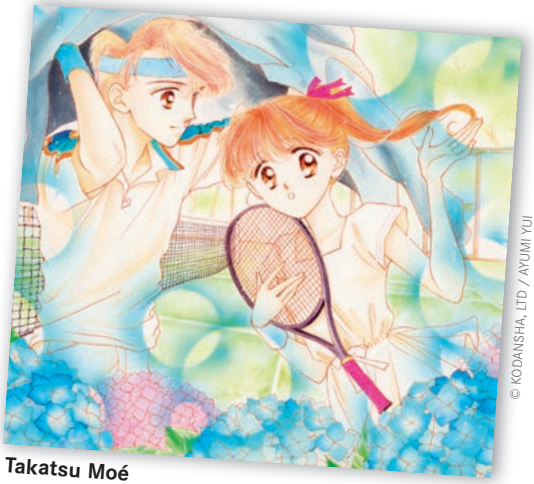
responding to a fictional character represented by the person. This is a little confusing, and the nuance was lost during the media boom surrounding *moé* in the mid-2000s, when people basically used *moé* and *kawaii* interchangeably. In the beginning, *moé* was used only in response to fictional characters.

PG: How was the word *moé* first used among *otaku*?
MK: There were originally two usages of *moé*. The first usage was to express a burst of affection. So, you would see a character and respond, "*Moé*!" The second usage was to describe your affection for characters to another *otaku*, for example, "This character is *moé*." It was a way to express your taste, which facilitated communication with others. What is important to note is that in both these cases, the communication was computer mediated, before

the Internet was well established, and therefore the word was never spoken out loud. There have been TV shows in Japan like *Densha otoko* (2005), where *otaku* are shown crying out the word *moé*, for example, and people think this is what really happens. But this is not at all true, and in fact just makes *otaku* look silly.

PG: When *moé* was first used in computer-mediated communication, what was the context?

MK: In the first half of the 1990s, people were using modems and local bulletin-board systems such as Nifty Serve and Tokyo BBS to communicate about manga, anime, and games. In the first chapter of my book, I talk about three characters—Moé from the anime series *Kyoryu wakusei* (1993–1994), Takatsu Moé from the manga *Taiyo ni sumasshu!* (1993), and Tomoé Hotaru from the anime series *Sailor Moon S* (1994–1995)—as central to *moé*. The importance of these characters is not necessarily that they were archetypes, but rather that they were popular and each had *moé* as a name or part of their names. When fans would discuss their feelings for these characters online, they would type something like, "*Moé-chan, moé moé*." *Moé* comes from the verb *moeru*, but this can either mean "to burn"(燃える) or "to burst into bud" (萌える). These verbs have the same pronunciation but are written with different Chinese characters. So, *otaku* intended to type something like "I am burning with passion for this character named Moé," but the computer would convert the input *moé* the wrong way and use the verb "to burst into bud" instead of the verb "to



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Takatsu Moé

burn." Everyone was too caught up in the discussion to care, and the meaning was still conveyed. Eventually, the word *moé* using the Chinese character for "burst into bud" came to be slang among *otaku* to express affection for a fictional character.

PG: The three characters that you mention—Moé, Takatsu Moé, and Hotaru Tomoé—are all young. Would you say that young characters are more likely to inspire *moé*?
MK: Not necessarily, no. Affection can be felt for a variety of fictional characters.

PG: Can you share with us your thoughts on the *moé* boom?
MK: It depends on what you mean by boom. The real peak among *otaku* was in the early 2000s. My book, *Shuto no tanjo*, in 2003 was in some ways a summary of the *moé* phenomenon among *otaku*, and after that it spread out to the general public. The watershed year was 2005, when the word *moé* was used in the popular television drama *Densha otoko* and its usage became widespread. That was when *otaku* sort of abandoned the word. You could say that as *moé* heated up, *otaku* cooled down. *Otaku* still use the term, but not

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMON MCGLOWN

Radio Kaikan

nearly as much as before. Some use it almost as a joke, while others use it as a way to market products to non-*otaku*, for example souvenirs for tourists to Akihabara.

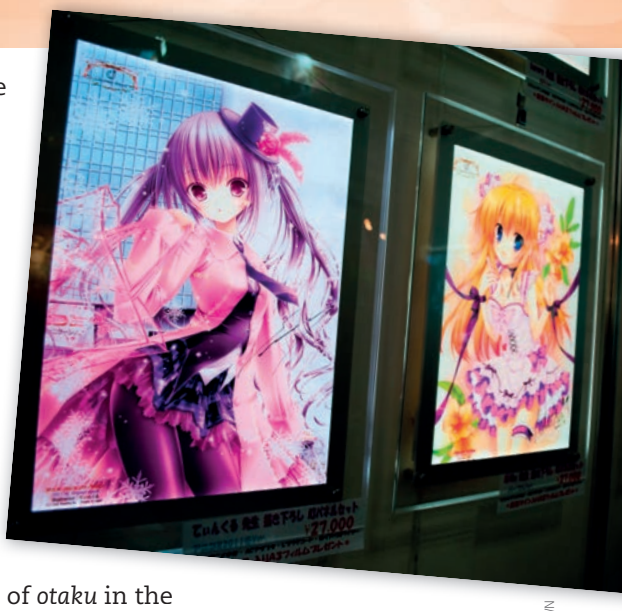
PHOTOGRAPH BY RAMON MCGLOWN

Akihabara maid café

PG: Tell us about Akihabara's transformation into a *moeru* neighborhood.

MK: Akihabara is a neighborhood that was transformed by *otaku* tastes in the 1990s. Stores in the area shifted from selling household appliances to selling personal computers, which meant a shift in customers from families to computer specialists and hobbyists. Stores carrying personal computers also carried games for them, especially *bishojo* games or so-called dating simulator games, which targeted *otaku*. So you had *otaku* coming to Akihabara to buy these games at stores such as Messe Sanoh. There was a massive boom in *bishojo* games when *Tokimeki Memorial* was ported to Sony's Play Station in 1995. The Comic Market, a gathering in Tokyo for producers of fanzines, was also growing in the 1990s, and there was a shop in Akihabara called Toranoana where they sold fanzines all year round. Finally, the TV anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–1996) was a massive hit, and infused new energy into the market for figurines of its main *bishojo* characters. When the figurine maker, Kaiyodo, moved its Tokyo store to the Radio Kaikan in Akihabara in 1997, they began to sell ten times the amount of product they had before. This inspired other companies selling manga, anime, and games to move to the area, which sealed Akihabara's transformation into an *otaku* neighborhood. So Akihabara became a *moeru*

neighborhood because there were clearly more stores dealing in *bishojo* media and merchandise. And this overlaps with the increasing activity of *otaku* online, who were discussing *moé* and spreading the word about Akihabara. The transformation of Akihabara was only possible because of the geographic concentration of *otaku* in the neighborhood.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RAMON MCGLOWN

PG: And your Venice Biennale exhibit *Otaku*: Persona=Space=City is in reference to this.

MK: Yes, that's right. It was an architectural exhibit, showing Akihabara's transformation. I wanted to be specific, and show that this was not just a transition from shops specializing in one type of commodity to another. Rather, my argument was that the geographic concentration of *otaku*, who share personality traits and tastes, came to be reflected in the urban space of Akihabara. On all the signs—everywhere, actually—you can now see images of *bishojo* characters of the type preferred by *otaku*. It's as if private interests have entered into public space—as if the contents of an *otaku's* bedroom have spilled out into an entire neighborhood of Tokyo.

PG: Why did you decide to include an explanation of *moé* in your exhibition at the Venice Biennale?

MK: *Moé* is a part of recent *otaku* culture that I couldn't overlook.

As a way to introduce *otaku*, I had panels on the wall explaining the evolution of anime. Basically, I argued that boys who were interested in sci-fi had become disillusioned about the future. These boys first shifted to sci-fi anime and then to just anime. Instead of dreaming of the future, they dreamed of *bishojo* characters.

PG: You also included as part of the exhibition a series of panels on the wall that explained some key traditional Japanese aesthetics such as *wabi* and *sabi*. The panels that explained *moé* and other contemporary words were placed alongside them. Can you tell us what your intentions were here?

***Otaku* tastes reflected on the streets of Akihabara**

MK: I had several motivations for doing this. First of all, I received funding to go to the Venice Biennale and do this exhibition on *otaku* and Akihabara and so I needed to make sure I explained the project in a way that would make sense to people whose job it is to fund the promotion of Japan. In addition to that, in using the *moé* panel I wanted to parody the famous 1978 exhibition Ma: Space-Time in Japan by the architect Isozaki Arata that explored traditional Japanese aesthetics. Finally, I wanted to suggest that we cannot possibly know how the culture of today will be judged in the future, so it is meaningless to make distinctions between high and low culture. We should learn about *moé* while we can and save the judgments for later.

Interview with

Ito Go

Ito Go, born in 1967, is a manga critic and professor at Tokyo Polytechnic University. He is best known for his book *Tezuka izu deddo: hirakareta manga hyogenron e* (Tezuka is dead: toward an expanded discourse of manga expression), published in 2005, in which he argues that manga is not just about the story: readers have often met the characters in the form of anime and games before they come to the manga, which changes their approach to the reading. Simply put, because of their previous relationship with a particular character, fans can relate to a manga story in ways that go far beyond the author's original intention. Ito also separates "character," which is fully contained within a particular story, and *kyara*, which has its own existence outside the story. Think Mickey Mouse and you've got a pretty good idea what Ito is getting at. For his sensitivity to fan relations with characters and *kyara*, Ito has been praised as a leading voice in the study of *moé*. In this interview, Ito talks about "the pleasure of lines," which allows him to make surprising connections between *moé* artists and manga greats Tezuka Osamu and Otomo Katsuhiro.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

The Pleasure of Lines

Riding the New Wave

Tezuka izu deddo

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): Can you speak a little about manga in the 1970s?

Ito Go (IG): From the mid 1970s to the early 1980s, many new creators appeared, for example Morohoshi Daijiro, Otomo Katsuhiro, and Hoshino Yukinobu. Though their styles are very different, their works are considered part of the movement known as "New Wave" comics. Manga artists associated with New Wave comics pushed the limits of existing genres, and were characterized by their sensitivity to the lines they drew. At the same time that the Germans and Brits were using synthesizers to make New Wave music, the Japanese used pens and paintbrushes to make independent manga and anime. That was the start of *moé*.

PG: What is your definition of *moé*?

IG: To me, it is a psychological effect that is triggered by a character image. Sometimes it triggers a physical reaction. I find it somewhat dubious to simply define *moé* as desire. I feel it is closer to the feeling triggered by listening to techno or minimal music. When listening to rave, techno, and trance, there is a bodily sensation. At some point, what you hear is no longer the

boring repetition of sound, but pleasurable music. *Moé* is similar to this. There is a moment when suddenly you understand and feel the pleasure of images and lines. At that point, what you are looking at is no longer the boring repetition of image, but pleasurable characters. There is a bodily sensation of looking at them. It might seem strange to compare techno and *moé*, but for me there is a lot of resonance. The high-pitched, squeaky voices of the singers associated with *moé* [see Momoi Halko, page 72, and Toromi, page 80] are like the sounds generated by machines. There was something called Nerd Core or J-Core, where people remixed the sounds of *moé* music and voices into pleasurable patterns, and this continues today on the video-sharing site Nico Nico Douga. Vocaloids, which are virtual idol characters that sing songs in a synthetic voice, fit naturally into this kind of context. Techno music is based on the pleasure of repetition, and is what is left after the lyrics and message are gone. To me, *moé* is the pleasure of repetitious images of cute girl characters without story or meaning.

Vocaloid Hatsune Miku

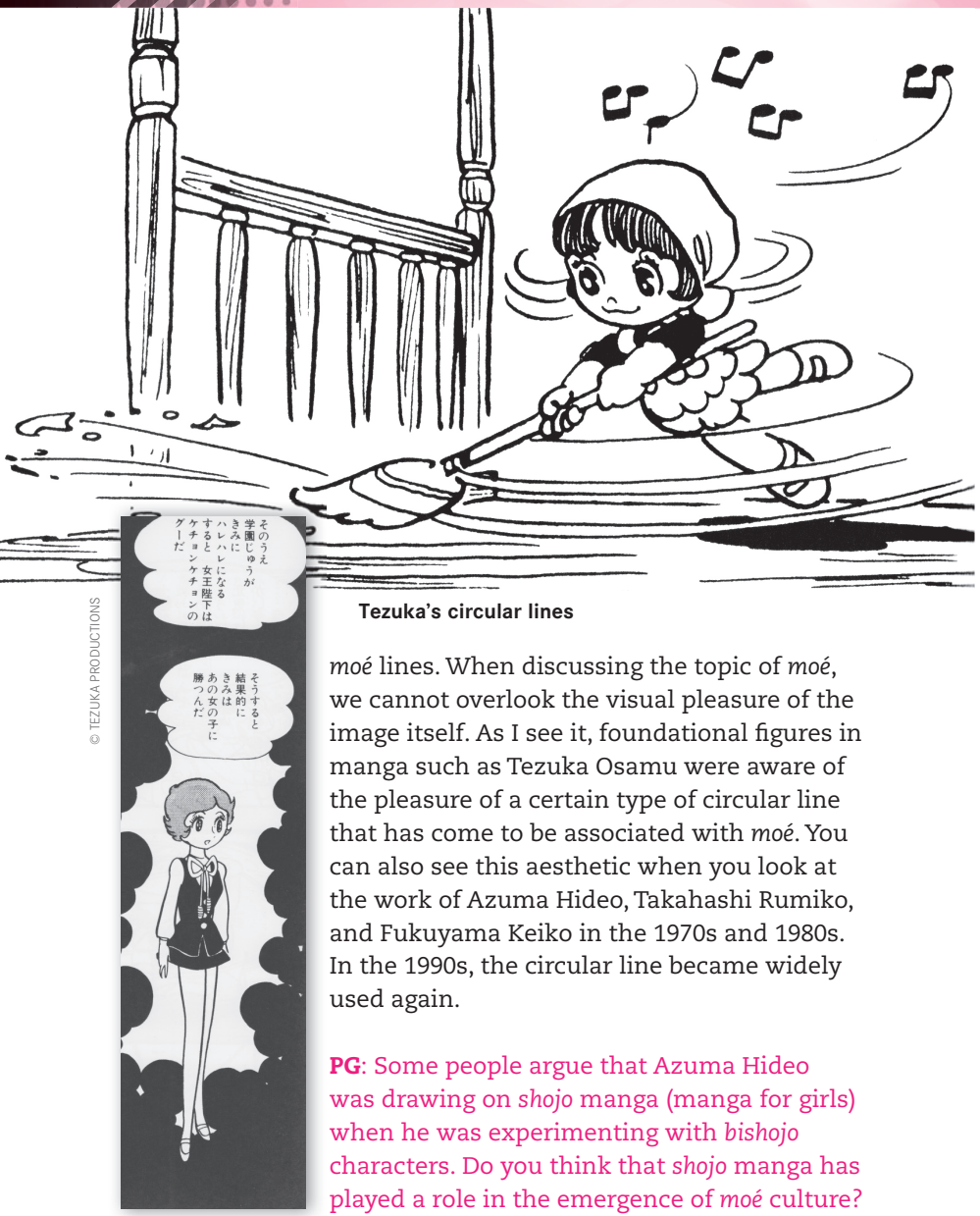
PG: Earlier you mentioned that manga artists associated with the New Wave comics movement were sensitive to the lines they drew. Is this related to *moé?*

IG: The year 1983 is a watershed in Japanese manga history. Around this time, line drawing becomes much sharper. An awareness of what is referred to as "the pleasure of lines" (*byosen ni yoru kairaku*) appears with Otomo Katsuhiro. One of the characteristics of the creation of *moé* characters is the sophistication of certain lines. Designers of *moé* characters tell me they are very sensitive to the lines they use to draw character forms. They even tell me that they have a "line fetish" (*byosen fechi*). Otomo is known for his realism and gritty sci-fi, which might seem to be very different from the cute girls associated with *moé*, but in fact they are connected. I found out that one of my friends, who was really into the *bishojo* game *To Heart* and draws *moé* characters, is actually obsessed with Otomo.

PG: What does "the pleasure of lines" mean?

IG: With *moé*, slight movements of the body are expressed, and body parts are emphasized, with fewer lines. One line enables the viewer to imagine a three-dimensional body. The trend is away from the real human body toward something cute. This is abstraction, but it is not unreal. The use of just a few lines enable us to imagine a certain three-dimensional entity, just like a mathematical model. Games like *The Idolm@ster* (2005), which use polygon character design, are a good example of the characteristics of typical

The Idolm@ster



Tezuka's circular lines

moé lines. When discussing the topic of *moé*, we cannot overlook the visual pleasure of the image itself. As I see it, foundational figures in manga such as Tezuka Osamu were aware of the pleasure of a certain type of circular line that has come to be associated with *moé*. You can also see this aesthetic when you look at the work of Azuma Hideo, Takahashi Rumiko, and Fukuyama Keiko in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, the circular line became widely used again.

PG: Some people argue that Azuma Hideo was drawing on *shojo* manga (manga for girls) when he was experimenting with *bishojo* characters. Do you think that *shojo* manga has played a role in the emergence of *moé* culture?

IG: The influence of certain aspects of *shojo* manga is strong. There are, however, slight differences between *shojo* manga pictures and *moé* pictures, most especially in the eyes. *Moé* eyes are not sparkly, though *shojo* manga artists such as Yabu'uchi Yu and Tanikawa Fumiko are close to *moé*. The connection between *shojo* manga and *moé* culture is the appreciation of cuteness and feminine aesthetics. There were a lot of men reading *shojo* manga in the 1970s, including author Otsuka Eiji. [See Otsuka Eiji, page 38.] Otsuka's generation had strong gender norms, which he refused in reading *shojo* manga. His argument was that an appreciation of cuteness was one way to resist the masculine capitalistic system of the postwar era. I think he's right. Male *otaku* like cute things. Many *moé* artists say that they want to be a cute girl. *Otaku* are the weak boys, but their weakness is also flexibility. All these stories in manga and anime about switching gender and transforming are a testament to

Takahashi Rumiko (top) and Fukuyama Keiko (bottom) used circular lines

NAISHO NO TSUBOMI © 2005 YU YABUUCHI / SHOGAKUKAN

Yabu'uchi Yu: close to *moé*

that flexibility. There should be a new form of maturity derived from this new masculinity, but we are still governed by rigid social expectations about how men should behave.

PG: I would like to ask you to reflect on the importance of characters in Japan.

IG: In Japan today, we relate to characters in so many different forms. In a way, all characters are becoming unbounded, because we see them moving from manga to anime to games to toys and so on. My word for characters that exist beyond a single narrative context is *kyara*. As the character moves between these different narrative contexts and media forms, fans share the sense that this character exists. What's more, fans are contributing to the development of characters through their interactions with them.

PG: Can you give us an example?

IG: The mascot character of Shimotsuma City in Ibaraki Prefecture, Shimon-chan, is a beautiful example of how this works. The people at the local government who created the character simply intended her to be a cute mascot—she has round, soft lines and butterfly wings. So far, this really isn't that interesting, but Shimon-chan has a great number of fans among *otaku*. Why?

Well, it turns out that the pattern on the wings of this particular type of butterfly differs according to sex. Shimon-chan is supposed to be a cute girl character, but her wings have the gaudy pattern of the male butterfly. So, in the *otaku* community, Shimon-chan is imagined to be a male cross-dressing as a cute girl, and so now she's considered by many to be *moé*.

The creators did not write that story for her. In fact, wanting to be politically correct, the local government has officially stated that Shimon-chan has no gender. But the fans continue to draw her and write stories about her. Someone in the Shimotsuma government updates Shimon-chan's Twitter account, which fans follow and use to interact with her. We are clearly talking about *kyara*, or *moé kyara*, when talking about Shimon-chan. Fans interact with manga, anime, and game characters in a similarly unbounded way today. To understand *moé* we ought to be paying less attention to specific works and more attention to the relationships that fans have with characters.

SHIMON-CHAN, COURTESY SHIMOTSUMA CITY

Shimon-chan, mascot of Shimotsuma City

Interview with Azuma Hiroki

Azuma Hiroki, born in 1971, is a cultural critic and writer, who came to public attention in 2000 with his book *Fukashina mono no sekai* (The overvisualized world) and an essay he wrote for pop artist Murakami Takashi's Superflat exhibition catalog. He then became involved in a series of key debates about *otaku* that brought together well-known experts in the field of manga and anime, including Kotani Mari, Ito Go, and Saito Tamaki. These debates were published in 2003 as the collection *Mojo genron f-kai: posutomodan, otaku, sekushuariti* (Net discourse final version: Postmodern, otaku, sexuality). His 2001 book *Dobutsuka suru posuto modan: otaku kara mita nihon shakai,* translated and published in English as *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* in 2009, puts forward his theory that *otaku* are less interested in narrative in manga, anime, and games, and more interested in characters that they can break down into *moé* elements such as cat ears, maid costumes, and so on. In this interview Azuma lays out his argument and talks about the politics of writing about *otaku*.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

Applying Pressure to the *Moé* Points

The Death of Narrative

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): Can you talk a little about *otaku* and postmodernity?

Azuma Hiroki (AH): One of the things often said about *otaku* activity is that it represents a retreat from public space. *Otaku* show no interest in social issues, and shut themselves into the domain of hobbies. This mental state only occurs when consumer society reaches a certain level of maturation, and there are no larger political or social goals. Japan reached that level of maturation in the 1970s. My assertion is that this state is similar to what is called postmodernity in sociology and philosophy. Of course, postmodernity is a complicated concept, and it doesn't simply mean a retreat to the private. What I am saying is that there is no grand narrative that is shared by everyone and holds society together. The decline of that grand narrative coincides with postmodernity. Until the 1970s, Japan was unified by shared experiences of the Second World War, the destruction of the nation, and

Top: ***Fukashina mono no sekai*****; bottom:** ***Mojo genron f-kai***

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Otaku: Japan's Database Animals

its rebuilding. People were interested in the same social phenomena. By the 1970s, the process had run its course, and people began to lose interest in the grand narrative, or splinter off to pursue other narratives. Those who started to pursue fictional grand narratives through the medium of anime were known as *otaku*.

PG: In your book, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, you talk about the ways in which *otaku* consume media. Can you explain what you mean?

AH: I argue in my book that *otaku* don't approach a work just as a narrative; they also break the work down and focus on its elements. These can be elements of the production such as characters and settings, or aspects of the design, or the artwork in key frames. As consumers, they want to know how the work is produced, so that they can break it down and reconstruct something else. This phenomenon is postmodern, and it's not unique to *otaku*—it happens everywhere in the world. What *otaku* are doing can also be seen in the remixing culture of hip-hop music, for example. But *otaku* comprise the only subculture born in postwar Japan. While many other trends come from abroad, manga and anime inspired a unique fan culture in Japan.

PG: What does *moé* mean to you?

AH: When I published my book in 2001, the word *moé* was extremely minor in Japan. It has since spread and is used widely. In the original meaning, it was something only used when talking about characters—you didn't say you felt *moé* for a human being. *Moé* referred to a sort of perverse way of experiencing feelings of love—loving a fictional character as though it was a real person.

But when the word spread into the mainstream it lost a lot of its original meaning.

PG: How does *moé* relate to *otaku* consumption of media?
AH: Feeling *moé* for a character has little to do with your feelings for the work the character appears in. The extreme example is the manga and anime series *Lucky Star* (2007). I get the impression that most of its fans have never seen the original work. And actually *Lucky Star* doesn't even have an overarching narrative that ties the episodes together. There are just many, many cute characters. People refer to *Lucky Star* as *moé* media because it is all about how much the fans love the characters. The characters are designed in such a way as to draw people in; they are amalgamations of elements of design that fans respond to as *moé*. This is different from a novel, for example, where the characters

Lucky Star

are important because of their role in the story, and the story is what makes the characters interesting. *Moé* media is the opposite, because the characters themselves are interesting and do not require a story. If you look at this phenomenon through the lens of what I call database consumption, you can observe that stories can be broken down into characters, and characters can be broken down into elements of design, and this can all be remixed endlessly to create feelings of *moé*. The original work and whatever narrative it might have had matters less than fans' response to the characters. It is possible in the Japanese market to like a character without having any interest in the original work.

PG: To demonstrate this point in your book, you use the example of the character Di Gi Charat, the mascot of the store Gamers. She is an assemblage of elements of character design that fans like, and though she was in the beginning not attached to a manga or anime narrative, Di Gi Charat became very popular. The *Toho Project* series of games and the *Hetalia: Axis Powers* web comics (2006–present) have also become mega successful franchises because so many fans love the characters. What do you think of such phenomena?

AH: The ability of creative people in Japan to develop characters is truly impressive. The character designs are also excellent. But on the other hand, the ability to develop narratives is suffering. The manga

Hetalia: Axis Powers

and anime *Lucky Star*, which became successful without a story, is symptomatic of the Japanese market. Japanese manga is traditionally built on a foundation of great stories, beginning with Tezuka Osamu's manga after the Second World War. In TV anime, we have works such as *Space Battleship Yamato*, *Mobile Suit Gundam*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Story is important to the success of these works, but this is not the case with *Lucky Star*. Creators are focusing more on developing characters, because characters are what the fans want. And if the fans love the characters, then they will buy the Blu-ray Discs, the music CDs, and the figurines. Director Kamiyama Kenji purposefully developed a story for the anime series *Eden of the East* (2009), but the market is against people like him.

Mascot character Di Gi Charat

PG: How do fanzines fit in with your argument?

AH: Fanzines are important as an example of narratives breaking down and fans focusing on characters. Anime characters were the focus of successive booms in fanzines in the 1980s. I first visited Tokyo's gathering for producers of fanzines, the Comic Market, in 1984 or 1985, and fanzines devoted to characters from manga and anime series such as *Urusei yatsura* (1981–86) and *Captain Tsubasa* (1983–86) were everywhere. The fans were responding to characters, without a doubt. Actually,

to me, *Urusei yatsura* is really an ancestor of *bishojo* games and *moé* media—a completely useless male character is surrounded by all these cute girl characters, including Lum, an alien girl who wears a bikini and is in love with this male character. The tendency to prefer characters and consume them independently of the story is much more pronounced after 1995 with the massive fan response to the characters of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Fanzines became even more popular in the 1990s.

PG: Do you think that *moé* has gone global?
AH: Since the early 2000s, people in the government have run out of things to do and have taken to promoting manga and anime under the banner of Cool Japan. They think manga and anime will become part of global popular culture. The people behind the Cool Japan program are a bunch of megalomaniacs with delusions of grandeur. Japanese manga and anime may be popular overseas, but there is a difference in taste. In Japan, *otaku* are into anime production houses such as Kyoto Animation and Shaft. Overseas, people want to see animation released by Studio Ghibli and Production I.G. Japanese *otaku* are into anime directors such as Yamamoto Yutaka and Shinbo Akiyuki, but people overseas like Miyazaki Hayao and Oshii Mamoru. And I think it's true to say that the United States, for example, really only accepts a slightly watered down version of *moé*. But having audiences with different tastes might encourage creators in Japan to go in new directions, which would be healthy for the anime industry as a whole.

PG: Why do you think that *moé* is more prevalent in Japan?
AH: Japan has the Comic Market. This is not just a market for fan-produced works, but a system teaching people how to break down anime and manga and create new works. This not only strengthens the tendency to consume characters, but is a mechanism for bringing up a new generation of producers and consumers. The pedagogical function of the Comic Market is incredible. Without this, the *otaku* consumption pattern wouldn't

have progressed so rapidly. Look at the size of the Comic Market [550,000 people attended in three days in 2008]—there is nothing like it elsewhere. When middle school students attend this event, they think that this is what anime and manga are about. People buy products and they circulate. It is amazing what a central and important role this market plays. There is nothing like this elsewhere in the world.

PG: How would you like *otaku* and *moé* to be studied?

AH: First, we should be aware that the ways of evaluating manga, anime, and games differ from country to country. It is necessary to understand diversity. We also have to be aware of history. When we examine history, we find that definitions are changing all the time, including definitions of words such as *otaku* and *moé*, and this is a political and social process. Definitions are always political. It would be useful to consider how *otaku* are seen from abroad, and for Japanese and non-Japanese to exchange their ideas. This would require Japanese to be able to speak in other languages, and for those interested in studying Japan to read Japanese and gain a deeper understanding. There is a tendency to focus on images when discussing *otaku* culture, but I would to grateful if scholars took more of an interest in the discourse, debates, and history surrounding the subject. You can't study *otaku* without taking account of environmental factors.

Di Gi Charat

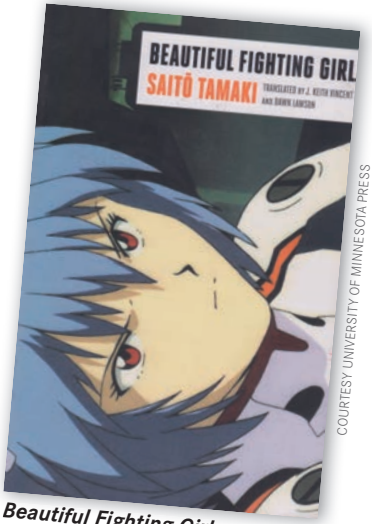
Interview with Saito Tamaki

Saito Tamaki, born in 1961, is a psychiatrist specializing in puberty and adolescence. He is most famous for his book *Sento bishojo no seishin bunseki* (2000), translated and published in English as *Beautiful Fighting Girl* (2011), which is an exploration of *otaku* sexuality. Saito's work is something of a response to a period of *otaku* bashing in Japan in the 1990s, when pundits in the mass media debated whether serial killers such as Miyazaki Tsutomu or representatives of the apocalyptic cult Aum Shinrikyo might be *otaku* that have lost sight of reality and social norms. With a sensitivity that was rare at the time, Saito spoke with fans of manga, anime, and games, and came to the conclusion that these fans are not confused about the difference between reality and fiction, but rather are attracted to fictional characters as such. In this interview, Saito revisits his book, and explains how a love of manga and anime fiction leads to the development of unique orientations of desire.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FRITZ SCHUMANN

Otaku Sexuality

Unique Orientations of Desire



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Beautiful Fighting Girl

Patrick W. Galbraith (PG): How did you become interested in *otaku*?
Saito Tamaki (ST): As someone influenced by the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, I take an interest in people who are interested in something. *Otaku* are extremely clear about their desires. They know precisely what they want and, as we see in discussions of *moé*, they can express this in vivid detail. I am interested in the way they talk about their interests.

PG: What is your definition of *moé*?
ST: *Moé* is quasi-love felt for a fictional character. There are those who attempt to analyze it further, but I think that the basic points are that it is something felt for fictional characters and that it is something like love.

PG: What do you mean when you talk about *otaku* sexuality?
ST: *Otaku* can fulfill their desires interacting with fictional characters, which exist in what they call the "two-dimensional" world. When I wrote my book in 2000, it was assumed that drawings of cute girls were a substitute for real girls. The thinking was that those who could not make it with women in reality projected their desires into fantasy. But with *otaku* that was

never the case. The desires for the three-dimensional and the two-dimensional are separate.

PG: In your book, you say that desire can be asymmetrical. Can you explain?

ST: Desire does not have to be symmetrical—you can desire something in the two-dimensional world that you don't desire in the three-dimensional world. Let me give you some examples. There is a truism in *otaku* culture that those who feel *moé* for little sister characters in manga and anime don't have little sisters. If these men actually had sisters, then the reality of that would ruin the fantasy. If the object exists in reality, then it is not *moé*. So, you can feel *moé* for maid characters in manga and anime, but that has nothing to do with actual women who are paid to work as housekeepers. These men don't have maids, and if they did, the fantasy would be ruined. You see, the maid character in manga and anime is nothing at all like a real maid, so therefore desire for her is asymmetrical. This is not just something among male *otaku*, either. The women who read "boys' love" manga do not necessarily have gay friends or an interest in homosexual men.

***Oreimo*: little sister Kousaka Kirino**

PG: Can you explain why desire for fictional characters is so pronounced in Japan?

ST: It is my impression that if men come into contact with manga, anime, and games, a certain portion will become *otaku*. This has little to do with personal history, and much to do with environmental factors such as encountering the right character at the right time of life and being among people who don't discourage falling in love with a fictional character. If you compare American comics and cartoons with Japanese manga and anime, you will notice that the Japanese characters are much cuter. From the very beginnings of Japanese manga and anime, you have artists such as Tezuka Osamu, who drew extremely cute girl characters.

PG: Were mainstream anime creators intentionally producing characters that fans would fall in love with in the 1970s?

ST: In the 1970s, mainstream anime was still being produced without an awareness of the adult audience. When people say that Miyazaki Hayao, Japan's most celebrated director of animated films, or Tomino Yoshiyuki, who created the Gundam universe, are *otaku*, I think that they are a little off. These men have never really understood what their work meant to fans. For example, according to Otsuka Eiji, Tomino tried to evoke the issue of Palestine with the original TV anime *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), but anime fans did not consider these larger political issues and instead loved the characters. Tomino was seeking to capture the reality of human existence. For him, it made sense for a character to take a shower, which was a realistic part of daily life. The character in the shower, however, was Sayla from *Mobile Suit Gundam*, and she was extremely popular among fans. Tomino did not realize the impact that it would have to show this character nude on screen. Legend has it that people were snapping photographs of Sayla on their viewing screens. Tomino didn't expect this reaction—he simply wanted to make his characters more realistic and human, but he inadvertently

stimulated desire for a fictional character. Tomino doesn't like *otaku* and criticizes them, which is an example of an anime director struggling with the legacy of his work.

PG: And do you think Miyazaki Hayao is in a similar situation?

ST: Actually, it's my personal belief that Miyazaki is even more tormented than Tomino. As I see it, one of the central issues in Miyazaki's works is sexuality. This is blasphemy against so beloved a creator of family entertainment I know, but allow me to explain. When Miyazaki was a high-school student, he saw *Hakujaden* (*Panda and the Magic Serpent*), made in 1958, Japan's first feature-length animated film to be made in color. Miyazaki writes that he fell in love with the young heroine, a girl named Bai-Niang, and it was this that inspired him to chose a career in animation rather than manga. I'll be blunt: Miyazaki's love of this fictional character is reflected in his repeated use of a young heroine in all of his works. The characters that Miyazaki created—Lana from the TV anime *Future Boy Conan* (1978), Clarisse from the animated film *The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979), Nausicaä from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984)—were instrumental to the increase in numbers of fans of the cute girl characters known as *bishojo*. To put it another way, Miyazaki was at the center of *otaku* culture in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But Miyazaki does not like the *otaku* that love his characters or write fanzines about them even though he himself fell in love with Bai-

***Mobile Suit Gundam*: Sayla**

The anime *Gunbuster* is considered a classic by *otaku*.

Niang and made the young female protagonist a central characteristic of his work.

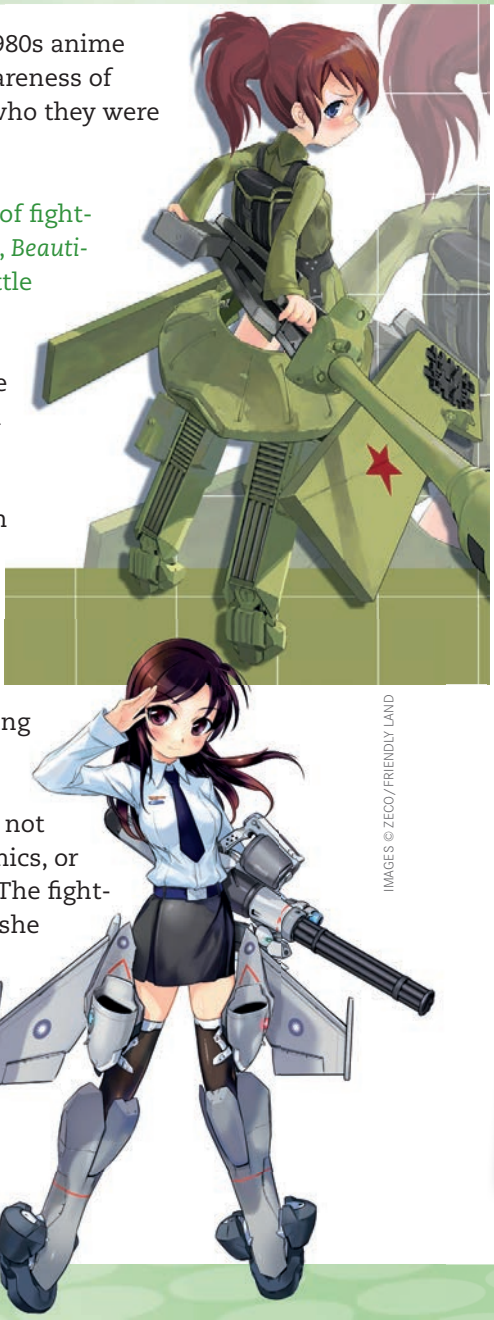
PG: In contrast to the 1970s, the 1980s was a time when fans began to produce anime for other fans.

ST: Right. One of the characteristics of early anime was that the creators were completely unaware of the influence their works had on viewers, and there was a gap between what these creators intended and what the fans got out of it. In the works of the anime studio Gainax, however, and in anime series such as *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross* (1982), it is clear that *otaku* were at the reins right from the start. In *Macross*, they simply combined transforming fighter planes with idol singers. Okada Toshio, one of the founding members of Gainax, said he just combined giant robots with cute girls to produce the anime *Gunbuster* (1988), which is considered a classic by *otaku*. This is

a good example of how by the 1980s anime creators had a much greater awareness of what they were producing and who they were producing it for.

PG: That leads us onto the topic of fighting girls and the book you wrote, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*. Can you talk a little about this?

ST: Fighting girls are popular because they combine two of the things that *otaku* love more than anything—robots and girls. You have scenarios where the girl herself can be a robot, or she can be wearing mechanical armor that looks like underwear and holding a bazooka, or she can be riding inside a giant robot. I think it is safe to say that the icon of the fighting girl—the young and innocent heroine who takes up arms—symbolizes *otaku* culture. Up until the 1980s this was not something seen in cartoons, comics, or science fiction outside of Japan. The fighting girl is not at all realistic, but she is all-powerful in the world of fiction. *Otaku* value things that are impossible in reality or exist only as fiction, and the fighting girl is the ultimate example.



Military vehicles as *moé* characters

Nanoha: The Movie 1st

Glossary

Akihabara	Tokyo district full of stores selling electronics, computers, anime, manga, and games.
bishojo	Cute girl, typically referring to characters in manga, anime, and games. Think *Sailor Moon* and its titular heroine.
bishojo game	A type of game where players simulate interactions with cute girl characters. While themes vary, there is often a focus on romantic relationships. The target audience is over eighteen years of age, computer savvy, and male.
"boys' love"	A genre of manga and young-adult novel that centers on romantic relationships between beautiful boys and men. With roots in the 1970s, it blossomed commercially in the 1990s. The target audience is young, straight, and female.
Comic Market	Japan's largest gathering for buyers and sellers of fanzines which began in 1975 and now takes place in Tokyo twice a year, each time for three days, drawing up to half a million people. Also known as Comiket or Comike.
cosplay	Short for "costume play." Dressing up as a character from manga, anime, or games.
dating simulator game	See *bishojo* game.
lolicon	Derived from "Lolita complex," the word is used in Japanese in connection with manga and anime that feature youthful or young-looking girl characters.

***Bishojo*: cute girl characters**

Cosplay

maid	Pronounced "meido" in Japanese, this term is associated not with actual housekeepers but rather with a popular character type in manga, anime, and games.
maid café	A café aimed at a clientele of manga, anime, and game fans, where the waitresses dress up in maid costumes.
mecha	Abbreviation of mechanical. Can refer to any mechanical device in a sci-fi setting, or a sci-fi genre centering on robots or machines controlled by people from inside.
moé	Pronounced *moé* (i.e., with the final "e" sound stressed separately as "eh"). As the interviews in this book reveal, the meaning of this work is contested, but a working definition is an attraction to or affection for a fictional character.
otaku	According to the Japanese dictionary *Kojien*, this word is used to refer to people that have a great deal of knowledge about a specific hobby interest but that are lacking in "social common sense." The word is typically applied to fans of manga, anime, and electronic games.
salaryman	The stereotypical Japanese office worker, who wears a suit and devotes his life to the company.
shojo manga	Manga targeting girls. The focus tends to be on emotions and romantic relationships. Think *Rose of Versailles*, *Boys Over Flowers*, *Fruits Basket*, and *Nana*.
shonen manga	Manga targeting boys, but read widely across gender and age boundaries. The focus tends to be on action and adventure. Think *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto*.

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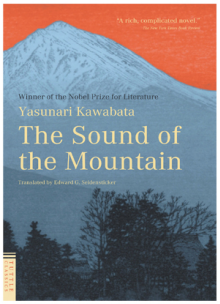

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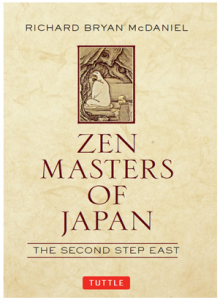

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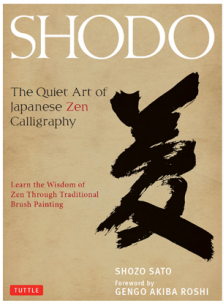

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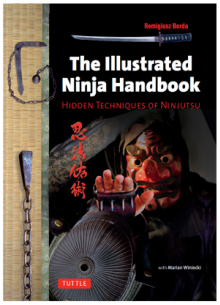

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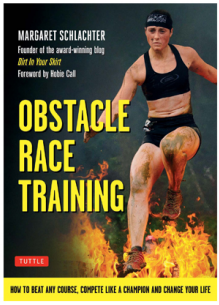

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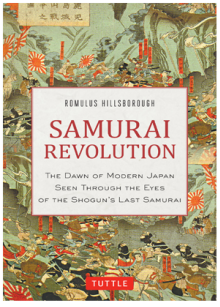

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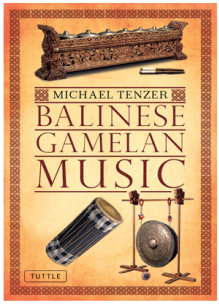

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Patrick W. Galbraith is the author of two books, *The Otaku Encyclopedia* and *Otaku Spaces*, and an expert in Japanese popular culture. His writing has appeared in *Metropolis* magazine, *Otaku USA*, *The Japan Times*, and *The Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*.

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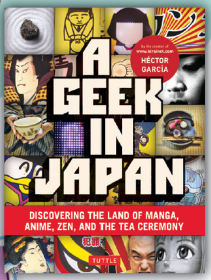

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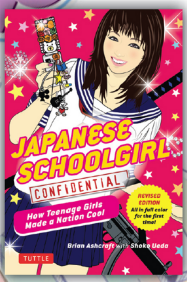

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Devoted fans of Japanese anime, manga, and video games use the term *moé* to refer to the sense of emotional attachment that they develop for their favorite characters. Characters like Suzumiya Haruhi have cult followings, and fans of Hatsune Miku, a "virtual idol," have made her one of the biggest stars in Japan today. *Moé* is one of the driving forces behind the success of Japanese anime and manga throughout the world.

Author Patrick W. Galbraith is the world's leading expert on *moé* and for this book has interviewed leading figures in the world of Japanese manga and anime to provide the first in-depth survey of the subject. In this book you will learn about the very first *moé* characters—such as Ayame by Tezuka Osamu—and how they influenced an entire generation of manga artists; what constitutes the ideal *moé* relationship; and why some fans even marry their fictional sweethearts.

With more than 100 illustrations of *moé* characters old and new, this is a book that is sure to delight fans of manga and anime.

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