THE PLEASURE AND POLITICS OF VIEWING JAPANESE ANIME

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation, situated in a Foucauldian framework, begins with a view of visual culture as a discourse where knowledge, pleasure, and power of images intersect. This dissertation first argues that a depthless visual field is discursively formed in and through Japanese culture, which constitutes recurring themes and particularities of Japanese anime. Features of postmodernism, described by Jameson and Baudrillard, are significantly embodied in anime images. By examining three anime works, *Cat Soup* (2001), *The Grave of Fireflies* (1988), and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), my dissertation argues that anime demonstrates postmodern “depthlessness,” which questions former understandings of “representation.”

Second, my dissertation investigates how anime images generate a specific kind of pleasure, and how this pleasure offers anime otaku a chance to develop not an escape from ideological constructions, but new ways of creative production in the practitioners’ own favor. By examining two anime works, *Fooly Cooly* (2005) and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1999-2001), I argue that anime images deliberately deploy (1) void signifiers, (2) bodily senses, (3) liminal conditions, and (4) taboos and prohibitive themes to generate visual pleasures that may function as resistance to regulatory power. Further, the pleasure of viewing anime empowers anime otaku to go beyond mere image consumption, to actively and constantly change, manipulate, and subvert anime images through practices.
Anime otaku’s pleasurable practices demonstrate de-assurance of their supposed identity and engender an imperceptible but playful politics that strays from the social orders in which they reside.

The fundamental argument of my dissertation is that anime itself is a site of viewers’ education about anime, and that anime as an alternative discourse empowers viewers, youth and adolescents in particular, to participate in creative practices that may generate an imperceptible politics in their own favor. My dissertation uses anime as a specific example to revisit three propositions in Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE): (1) the paradox of visual culture, (2) problems of representation of postmodern media, and (3) limitations of ideological critiques in art education. I argue that the alternative discourse of anime has potentials to decenter the movement of VCAE, and I conclude with a list of what anime is… and what anime does… to discuss what anime can teach us in art education.
Dedicated to my parents, Wen-Cheng Shen and Taiying Wang
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USAGE OF JAPANESE WORDS

The singular and plural forms of a noun are the same in Japanese. The commonly known Japanese words related to anime are not translated in this dissertation. These words are used in both singular and plural forms depending on their context.

Anime (an-nee-may)
Anime is a Japanese word derived from French “animated,” commonly known as “Japanese animation.”

Manga (mahn-gah)
Manga, literally meaning “humorous pictures,” refers to comic books in Japan.

Otaku (oh-TAH-kuu)
The word “otaku” originally means “your residence” or a polite way of saying “you” or “thou” in Japanese. After the 1980s, the word connotes obsessive fans. There are various kinds of otaku in Japan, such as train otaku, Sci-Fi otaku, etc. This word is specifically used to refer to anime otaku in this dissertation.

Dōjinshi (doh-JIHN-shee)
Dōjinshi is manga-like fanzines. In other words, dōjinshi are hobby magazines and comic books produced by amateurs. Literally, “dōjin” means individuals who share the same interests and “shi” means magazine.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Statement of Problem

Various scholars proposed the interdisciplinary study of visual culture in the late-90s (Bryson, Holly, & Moxey, 1994; Heywood & Sandywell, 1999; Mirzoeff, 1998, 1999; Mitchell, 1995; Walker, 1998). Recently, art education informed by visual culture, often entitled “Visual Culture Art Education” (VCAE), is emphasized as a new movement following the movement of Discipline-Based Art Education (Dorn, 2005). According to Kerry Freeman and Patricia Stuhr (2004), “Visual culture is the totality of humanly designed images and artifacts that shape our experience” (p. 816). They see visual culture as an all-encompassing category that includes fine art, advertising, folk art, television and other performing arts, housing and apparel design, mall and amusement park design, and other forms of visual production and communication. Freedman (2003b) proposes a disciplinary reform in which art curricula and educational objectives are connected to students’ everyday experience and contemporary visualization. Duncum (2000; 2002; 2003a) specifically looks for the theoretical adequacy and practical usefulness of visual culture in the field of art education. Other scholars emphasize
pedagogical approaches to visual culture, situating VCAE in the frameworks of critical
theory, cultural studies, and poststructuralist and feminist studies (Darts, 2004;
Eisenhauer, 2003; Tavin, 2003b; Wilson, 2003). At the Visual Culture Retreat held at
Pennsylvania State University in 2003, art educators discussed distinctions between
teaching visual culture and pedagogy of visual culture. Teaching visual culture is defined
as “a hierarchical transferring of predetermined information about visual culture,” and a
pedagogy of visual culture is defined as “a nonhierarchical and democratic pursuit of the
meanings that surround images” (Wilson, 2005, p. 191). Discussions about teaching
visual culture center on the content and curricula in school systems; and discussions
about pedagogy of visual culture emphasize an investigative approach to meanings of
images in relation to everyday experiences for both teachers and students.

Examining Visual Culture Art Education

It is fair to say that VCAE embraces postmodern philosophy and critical theory,
aiming to foster resistance to visual domination and to provide frameworks of critical
interpretation of images as their educational objectives. There are at least three major
objectives of VCAE: (1) it challenges the boundary between high art and popular culture
and extends the range of visual artifacts in art education curricula; (2) it critically inquires
into a postmodern view of representation; and (3) it suggests educational applications of
these challenges and inquiries. Given the assumption that anime is part of visual culture, I
first examine these three objectives of VCAE, and then concentrate on art educators’
research about anime.
An extension of visual artifacts in art education curricula and a challenge of the high art and popular culture boundary. The first proposal of VCAE is to extend the range of visual artifacts in art education curricula in connection with students’ everyday experiences (Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004). Media images, fine art and crafts, food display, theme parks and toys, fashion and cosmetic surgery, and home decorations, etc. are inclusively considered as subject matters of research. Proponents of VCAE claim that it challenges the boundary between high art and popular culture (Duncum, 2000, 2002; Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Tavin, 2000a, 2000b), while others argue that the boundary no longer existed since the Avant-Grade and Pop Art movements (Camp, 2004; Efland, 2004, 2005; Richardson, 2004). Freedman (2003) suggests that the curriculum of VCAE is more democratic because it effaces the distinction between high and popular culture, challenges the supremacy of a Western canon of art, and increases equal access to various visual forms that embed different group values. Efland (2004, 2005) opposes this view, arguing that the value of high culture has been critiqued and the definition of art has been questioned since the 1960s. Contemporary art has engaged social consciousness and resisted a bourgeois ideology for decades, and it is somewhat misleading to presuppose a coherent value of high art. For Efland, the resistance to elitist value and the pursuit of democratic education should not result in an end of discussions about artistic values. Efland is concerned with “the leveling tendency” of VCAE—the belief that there is no pre-established or privileged hierarchy of visual objects—from a practical perspective. If no parameter is defined, it is difficult to justify what kinds of visual objects are worth studying.
The paradox of VCAE is that while it disavows taking an object-oriented approach, it is grounded in visual artifacts as its domain. One must use visual artifacts as examples or study subjects in teaching and researching of VCAE. Efland’s critique on the leveling tendency of VCAE points out the danger with which the specificity of different visual artifacts is overlooked. How certain visual artifacts are circulated, defined, grouped, and compared with others is as important as the meaning depicted and belief concealed/revealed by those artifacts.

**Critical inquiries into a postmodern view of representation.** VCAE suggests critically inquiring into issues of representation in relation to identity, ideology, gender, race, and ethnicity, etc (Duncum, 2000, 2002; Freedman, 2000, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Tavin, 2007). Duncum (2002) claims that it is art educators’ purview to examine representational aspects of images. Freedman and Stuhr (2004) advocate a postmodern view of representation that investigates both the viewed and the viewers. Tavin (2007) asserts that this postmodern view of representation connects viewers’ response to images with the material conditions as a process of socialization and signification. Not only does context of images represent a set of social values, but also a viewer’s interpretation of images represents his or her personal beliefs and reflects that viewer’s particular socio-cultural context. Freedman, Stuhr, and Tavin’s arguments of “a postmodern view of representation” provide a starting point for this dissertation to further investigate into the concept of “representation” in relation to postmodern media merits. Why do postmodern media put conventional understandings of representation at stake? How do we discuss images that challenge the concept of representation? How are various media and viewer
groups involved in different understandings of representation? Building upon VCAE’s proposal of “a postmodern view of representation,” I would like to undertake further investigations about the relationship between representation and the anime medium.

*Educational applications.* Applications of VCAE can be generally categorized in two ways: curriculum reform and pedagogical tactics. Freedman and Stuhr (2004) propose a disciplinary reform that reconceptualizes art curricula, educational objectives, and contemporary visualization in conjunction with students’ everyday experiences. They argue that current art curricula put too much weight on the formal and technical aspects, and neglect the complexity of cultural and social contents of arts. Therefore, they advocate a postmodern curriculum that connects students’ experiences of visual culture with social issues. Freedman and Stuhr suggest that the curriculum of VCAE allows students to investigate images, artifacts, and ideas in relation to their own experiences, and these investigations can be accomplished by an integration of creative production and critical reflection. As they state, “Creative production is inherently critical, and critical reflection is inherently creative” (p. 825). For them, the emphasis on social and cultural contexts, the reflective thinking of self-experiences in relation to the visual, and the integration of creative production and critical reflection foster a more adequate framework for students to learn about contemporary life and images.

The other educational application emphasizes a pedagogical approach. For example, Tavin (2003) parallels critical pedagogy and visual culture, emphasizing their theoretical allegiances. First, they both challenge former ways of knowing, such as positivistic approaches, problematizing the natural view of knowledge and the dominant
structures of institutions. Second, critical pedagogy and studies of visual culture recognize, analyze, and critique how social, political, and economic realities shape the subjects’ values, thoughts, experiences, and practices. Third, critical pedagogy and studies of visual culture are both transdisciplinary. Tavin (2003) argues that critical pedagogy and visual culture focus on the realm of students’ everyday experiences as a site of struggle. He suggests that art education informed by visual culture should embrace critical pedagogy to engage students in the interpretation of everyday visual experiences through social perspectives.

Freedman, Stuhr, and Tavin’s studies have insightful views on how to apply VCAE to students’ everyday experiences. Nevertheless, they are devoid of references to the pleasures of visual culture. Visual culture deliberately deploys pleasure and affect as a key component of our daily routine. While VCAE emphasizes students’ everyday experiences, few studies discuss pleasure in relation to VCAE in depth. David Boughton (2004) argues that the visual culture is seductive and pleasurable for students because it is highly complex, and thus art educators face the difficulty of assessing students’ learning outcomes in this complex network of visual pleasure and seduction. Laurie Hick (2004) uses the concept of “play,” arguing that art education is a discipline that constantly encourages our students to challenge boundaries. Likewise, Oliva Gude (2007) advocates that “play” is the first principle for the 21st-century art and cultural curriculum. Among them, Boughton confronts the complexity and the seductive power of images, but he does not explain what the complexity of visual seduction consists. Hick and Gude deploy “play” as a pedagogical approach to visual culture, but their discussions lack a sufficient
examination of the politics of students’ pleasurable practices. I suggest paying more attention to the pleasure of visual culture and educational applications of pleasurable practices.

Studies of anime in art education

Studies of anime\(^1\) are interdisciplinary; they have appeared in a wide range of academic courses, including Japanese studies, literary studies, media studies, anthropology, education and art education (C. W. Chen, 2003; J. S. Chen, 2002; Hochtritt, 2004; Iwabushi, 2002; Lamarre, 2002a, 2004; Napier, 2001; Naramura, 2003; Parsons, 2004; Steinberg, 2004; Toku, 2001; Toku & Wilson, 2004; Tominaga, 2002; Wilson, 2003). In the following discussion, I concentrate on examining studies of anime within art education.

Art educators pay particular attention to anime and manga fandom that is related to students’ learning and identity formation (J. S. Chen, 2002; Parsons, 2004; Toku, 2001; Wilson, 2003). Jin-Shiow Chen (2002) investigates issues of female youths’ identities through interviews and analyses of their dōjinshi works. The term “dōjinshi” is applied to manga-like fanzines, hobby magazines, and comic books produced by amateurs. “Dōjin” means individuals who share the same tastes, and “shi” means magazines (Toku & Wilson, 2004). Chen conducted interviews with two female dōjinshi artists, questioning what is lacking in their “self-images.”\(^2\) By analyzing the interviews

\(^1\)I include many studies that do not explicitly separate anime and manga due to their close correlation in society.

\(^2\) Although Chen does not give a detailed explanation of this term, I interpret that her use of the term regards how individuals understand themselves by identifying the world around them.
and their anime-influenced works, she concludes that both female students represent their ideal Other in their fanzines, unconsciously making the self invisible.

Brent Wilson (2003) also uses dōjinshi to explain complex non-hierarchical systems in visual culture, arguing that it is impossible to conduct a structural and diagrammatic curriculum for visual culture. After observing the phenomenal anime and manga fan gathering in Tokyo, Wilson (2003) argues that structuring such practices of visual culture into current curriculum would simplify and distort their features, and “probably drain them from their most potent educational quality” (p. 225). Concerned with the impossibility of establishing this kind “rhizomatic manifestations of visual culture” within art curricula (p. 223), Wilson suggests art educators establish a “pedagogical tactic” of visual culture. He says, “Its basic feature is that teachers should take the initiative to shift the locus of pedagogy from the formal art classroom to a space between school and the realms of contemporary art and popular visual culture” (p. 225). This pedagogical approach emphasizes students’ learning beyond school, encourages students to bring what they already learn outside of the art classroom, and links art curricula with visual culture.

Further, Toku and Wilson (2004), fascinated by the theme of male-to-male relationships (yaoi) in Japanese girls’ manga, examine female dōjinshi culture in Japan. They argue that by depicting fictional male-to-male relationships, females create an imaginary space unreachable by the heterosexual constraints for women, such as gendered characters, marriages, and families. They argue that the yaoi and dōjinshi culture manifest various ideas examined in art education informed by visual culture. For
instance, issues of ideology, desire, fantasy, and social constraints are profoundly infused into adolescents’ self-learning and artmaking.

In addition to these studies of anime fandom culture, some studies have demonstrated how anime functions as a means to approach cultural negotiation, identity formation, and artmaking assessment. Masatoshi Tominaga (2002) examines the negotiation of cultural meaning in viewing anime. Juxtaposing American students’ perceptions with intellectual and political leaders’ views, Tominaga notes that cultural negotiation occurs by means of popular culture. Lisa Hochtritt (2004) conducted her dissertation research with twelve high school students, demonstrating that collaborative artmaking projects inspired by popular culture, including anime, help students articulate their identities. Michael Parsons (2004) examines students’ self-assessment of their anime-manga influenced drawings. He argues that students’ self-correction in the drawing process functions as a means for art educators to negotiate criteria of art assessment with students. Based on this view, Parsons believes that self-assessment in artmaking enriches students’ learning and thinking.

In general, art educators’ studies of anime provide insightful understandings of students’ interests and identities; however, two important issues may be raised beyond these studies. First, these studies emphasize student-centered research, whereas they generally overlook the specificity of the anime medium. Second, while most studies focus on issues of identity and students’ interests, the pleasure of viewing and the politics of pleasurable practices are overlooked in these analyses.
The Purpose of the Study

According to Japanese literary and cultural scholar Susan Napier (2001), “anime is the ideal artistic vehicle for expressing the hopes and nightmares of our uneasy contemporary world” (p. 11). Anime not only presents a transcultural aesthetic, but also illustrates the internal human struggles and playfulness of the postmodern conditions.

Why is anime significant in postmodern conditions? What are the distinctive features of anime? How can anime benefit art education? First, my dissertation specifies anime as a distinctive discourse for research of visual culture. Framing anime in Jameson and Baudrillard’s postmodern concepts, I suggest that anime images demonstrate postmodern depthlessness in both formal qualities and viewing experiences. Second, I take Foucault’s account of pleasure to investigate the pleasure of viewing as resistance to normalized sexuality and regulated power. My dissertation examines how anime embodies the pleasures of evasion and transgression, which may momentarily free viewers from their supposed identity and social orders, engendering playful practices with an imperceptible politics in viewers’ own favor. Finally, I suggest art educators reexamine the adequacy of ideological critiques and approaches to representation of postmodern media, and embrace the usefulness of pleasures that may engender unpredictable politics in participants’ own favor.

Definitions of Key Terms

Anime

Anime (ah-nee-may), a Japanese word that derives from the French word for “animated,” is well known as “Japanese animation” among English speakers. Although
Japan started producing short animation in the early twentieth century, many argue that this particular style of animation first appeared in the 1960s (C. W. Chen, 2003; Gerow, 2005; Lamarre, 2002a; Poitras, 2001). Aaron Gerow (2005) distinguishes “anime” from animation in general, defining it as “a particular style of animation that resulted from certain solutions to the problems of limited animation on television, once influenced in part by manga and other media” (Gerow, 2005, p. 1).

The anime market has grown extensively in Asia, Europe, and North America since the late 1980s. In 1988, the anime film Akira became an international hit by blasting the world with the graphically violent and gruesome anime. According to Napier (2001), Akira is “unquestionably a masterpiece of technical animation” and “a complex and challenging work of art that provoked, bewildered, and inspired its audiences” (p. 5). The worldwide success of Akira solidified its status as a landmark of Japanese animation and, since then, the term “anime” has been commonly used to refer to “Japanese animation” in the West.

Anime works include many genres that Western audiences are accustomed to seeing in live-action film—romance, comedy, tragedy, adventure, and horror—ranging from childhood adventure to graphic pornography. Appealing to various types of audiences, anime plays a notable role in Japanese popular culture and occupies a huge amount of Japan’s cultural export. Anime accounts for more than fifty percent of Japanese film production, and the number of newly-introduced anime on television now reaches 75 programs per week in Japan (Naramura, 2003). According to the Wall Street Journal, broadcasting rights for Japanese anime in the U.S. were valued at $495 million,
and toys featuring these anime characters brought in $4.7 billion in 2002. \(^3\) Anime has become an extension of mainstream media in the United States, and Hollywood has begun to integrate “anime aesthetics” in recent action movies. For instance, *Animatrix* (2003), a collection of several animations detailing the back-story of the universe within the film *Matrix* (1999), was commissioned and produced by the Wachowski Brothers with Japanese and Korean anime directors. The Wachowski Brothers even claim their film *Matrix* was highly influenced by *Akira*.\(^4\) Another recent case of anime influences is in the film *Kill Bill* (2003). Its director, Quentin Tarantino, includes a short anime to represent one character’s bloody past. Not only has anime impacted the mainstream market, but its artistic value has also gained attention in the United States and Europe. In 2002, the anime film *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki became the first animation film to receive the Gold Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival, and won the Oscar for the Best Animated Feature film in 2003.

*Animation*

“Animation” refers to moving images in which imagery and motion are created, rather than recorded. Maureen Furniss (1998) defines animation as the art of movements formed by the artist’s rendering of successive images. She emphasizes, “animation is not the art of drawings that move, but the art of movements that are drawn” (p. 5). “The art of movements” is thus the notion of animation for Furniss. This notion of animation is taken

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\(^4\) From the producers’ interview in the DVD of *Animatrix*. In the DVD, the producers, the Wachowski Brothers, filmed a series of interviews with the directors and scholars who deal with anime, including Susan Napier.
from the mainstream animation works in the United States, which emphasize smooth motions and artistic expressions in movements.

On the contrary, anime often highlights “moving drawings”—the art of drawings that move. Lamarre (2002a) has an insightful discussion about “the art of movements” of Western animation and “the motionless aesthetic of moving drawings” of Japanese anime in his article “From Animation to Anime: Drawing Movements and Moving Drawings.” He argues that, due to the limited production budgets and technical constraints in the 1960s (the developmental stage of the anime industry), Japanese animators strategically used fewer drawings to illustrate motion. For instance, they moved foreground objects and background drawings in oppositional directions to make the objects appear to be floating. They used many close-ups of characters’ facial expressions instead of drawing their full figure motions. Anime presents a set of deliberately moving drawings through which a quality of limited motion may be distinguished from animation.

Visual culture

Visual culture is where the visual is central to the ways of knowing. Hal Foster and Rosalind Krauss (1996) suggest, “visual culture does double service: it is both a partial description of a social world mediated by commodity images and visual technologies, and an academic rubric for interdisciplinary convergences among art history, film theory, media analysis, and cultural studies” (p. 3). Visual culture on the one hand is a culture dominated and interpreted by images; on the other, it is a convergence of disciplinary studies.
Drawing a distinction between “visual culture studies” and “cultural studies,” James Elkins (2003) claims, “it would be fair to say that visual culture is less Marxist, further from the kind of analysis that might be aimed at social action, more haunted by art history, and more in debt to Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin than the original English cultural studies” (p. 2). In other words, visual culture studies are grounded in the interpretation of images and in the description of the gaze where the construction of subjectivity and fantasy are formed within the social and cultural condition.

Visual Culture Art Education

VCAE is considered a new movement, or a new approach, following Discipline-Based Art Education in the United States (Dorn, 2005; Efland, 2004, 2005; Herrmann, 2005). There are many labels of this movement in art education. For example, Visual Culture Studies (VCS) (Bauerlein, 2004; Smith, 2004), Visual Culture Education (VCE) (Chalmers, 2005). I use Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE) for three reasons. First, it precisely refers to studies of visual culture in the field of art education. Second, it is used by one of the influential proponents of this movement, Duncum (2002), and it is most commonly used by its critics and advocates.

Conceptual Frameworks

There are two important conceptual arenas informing my dissertation: Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard’s descriptions of postmodernity, and Michel Foucault’s concept of pleasure in relation to power. These two arenas are interrelated and complementary, although I use them for different purposes.
Jameson’s postmodern depthlessness, which addresses aesthetic issues with social-political circumstances, and Baudrillard’s simularcum, which describes the simulation and infinite reproduction of images, are the ground to situate anime in visual culture. Jameson and Baudrillard’s observations on cultural features and their transformation in today’s consumer society provide a context to analyze anime and to understand the culture in which it resides. By illustrating the correspondence between their concepts and the features of anime, I argue that anime is a postmodern medium that challenges the former understanding of representation.

In order to go beyond observations and descriptions of postmodernism, Foucault’s concept of pleasure is useful to investigate the pleasure and politics of anime-related practices. From a Foucauldian viewpoint, pleasure may function as a “creative resistance” that empowers participants to act out a politics in their own favor.

*Jameson on postmodernism*

Postmodernity has its specific relation to modernity. On the one hand, postmodernity is viewed as a continuation of modernity. On the other hand, postmodernity presents a breakdown from modernity, a radical shift of conceptual and cultural fields. A modernist position attempts to interpret humanity by means of a universal rationality along the lines of Western science, such as Freud’s or Marx’s theory, whereas a postmodernist position does not believe in a grand narrative that can explain humanity universally. In general, features of postmodernity demonstrate free-floating relationships between signifiers and signified, a breakdown of grand narrative replaced by great plurality, and a slippery refusal of modernity (Hauke, 2000).
This dissertation does not take a contradictory position between the modernist and postmodernist concepts as a focal point, nor do I attempt to explain the great plurality of postmodern theories. Rather, I concentrate on Jameson’s descriptions of postmodern cultural features to situate anime as a postmodern medium. Jameson (1991) is the first scholar who uses the term “postmodernism” to characterize the cultural features of “late capitalism,” linking aesthetic issues with socio-economic circumstances. The term “late capitalism” refers to a particular socio-economic condition, where the exchange of services and information are more emphasized than the exchange of manufacturing products. Jameson’s engagement with postmodernity goes beyond its association with modernity, and he provides “characteristics” or “features” of postmodernity by exemplifying aesthetic products (art, film, literature, and architecture). My dissertation focuses on his concepts that correspond to anime’s features: (1) depthlessness, (2) pastiche and the nostalgic mode, and (3) the schizophrenic as postmodern decentred subjects. Postmodern depthlessness describes not only surface plays of signifiers in formal qualities, but also a rejection of the former “deep mode” in the conceptual field. Postmodern pastiche presents a breakdown of the signifying chain where signifiers no longer hold a sense of their origin. The nostalgic mode refers to a discontinuous sense of time through which history becomes merely a style, a group of nostalgic signifiers. As a result, the disjuncture between signifiers and signified and the collapse of a linear sense of time intensify the fragmentary sense for postmodern subjects, which Jameson uses “the schizophrenic” as a metaphor to describe. Postmodern subjects no longer possess a unified identity; they constantly shift their positions for the present time, rendering
themselves unrelated, fragmentary, and heterogeneous signifiers. I will identify these postmodern features of the anime medium to argue that anime entails a new economy of signifiers and challenges the conventional understanding of representation.

Baudrillard on simulacrum

Although Jameson’s concepts are used to analyze cultural and formal features of anime, Baudrillard’s (1983) insights of visual simulations and reproductions illustrate the technical involvement of the anime medium and its impact on society. I use his concept of simulacrum to analyze how computer technologies are used to produce anime, and how technologies influence the styles of anime and interact with anime signifiers.

Baudrillard argues that our society is situated in the current state of simulacrum through visual simulations and reproductions. First, visual simulations constantly perfect themselves to transcend the real, and he argues that contemporary images are more real than real. Second, he claims that reproductions of images reach their “fatality.” Reproductions of images can no longer be a means to an end, but can only be an infinite repetition of other images. Today’s images manifest the state of simulacrum, which cannot make claims to any reference, origin, or the physical world.

Foucault on pleasure

In The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, Foucault (1990a) investigates the discourse of sexuality in which power and pleasure intersect. For Foucault, discourse is a “network of pleasures and powers linked together at multiple joints and according to transformable relationships” (p. 46). Discourse is the means for power to control sexual practices and to monitor pleasure, while pleasure is simultaneously taken as an incitement to sustain
discourses. Foucault sees that medical examinations, psychiatric investigations, pedagogical reports, psychoanalytic studies, and family controls, etc., all constitute the discourse of sexuality. Through this discursive formation of sexuality as a discourse, sexual practices and pleasure are regulated and disciplined: sexual practices between husbands and wives (the productive ones) are encouraged; children’s sexual practices are monitored; and normal and pervert sexuality are defined. However, Foucault refutes the prominent argument of psychoanalysis, “the repressive hypothesis,” which examines issues of sexuality on the basis that sex is repressed (p. 10). Foucault argues that power both constantly attends to sexual practices and pleasure and simultaneously incites discourses of sexuality with pleasure, rather than simply repressing practices, pleasure, and discussions about sexuality.

In this sense, Foucault asserts, “pleasure and power do not cancel or turn back against one another; they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another. They are linked together by complex mechanisms and devices of excitation and incitement” (p. 48). Pleasure, for Foucault, is not just an intensified bodily experience as an outcome of sexual practices; it has at least two contradictory forms: one comes with actions and practices that exercise power, especially the power that attends to surveillance; another comes with actions and practices that escape that power. Pleasure and power are not boundaries that simply violate each other; rather, they trace, invade, and assert each other to incite discourses as “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure” (emphases in the original, p. 45).

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5 Foucault argues that due to the need for human labor in the 19th century, only heterosexual practices within the system of the family were considered “productive” sexual practices.
At the end of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1990a) claims, “the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures” (p. 157). Foucault refutes the synthesis of psychoanalysis that “desire,” which is structured by the inherent lack of human sexuality, influences human thoughts, behaviors, and practices. Instead, Foucault proposes that pleasure as a discursive and intensified surface operation unfolds constraints of human sexuality. Following Foucault, Ladelle McWhortor (1999) argues that the history of sexuality is a history of the elaboration of “desire” as a central concept and as the basis of human identities and cultures. She argues that making sex-desire central to analyses, critiques, and political activities has the risk of simply reproducing structures and values in the current sexual networks of power. McWhortor advocates pleasure that may empower individuals to create new possibilities of sexuality. Because “normalizing discourses have not colonized pleasure as they have colonized desire,” pleasure may constitute a counterattack against normalization (McWhorter, 1999, p. 184). She claims, “Pleasure, on Foucault’s view, is not just a state of the body and/or mind that occurs following some particular accomplishment or stimulus. Pleasure is not just an outcome. Pleasure, like power, is creative” (p. 177).

Therefore, Foucault and McWhortor advocate the use of pleasure and the expansion of various possibilities of pleasure as a means to resist the current state of power and the current structure of discourses. Foucault (1990b) discusses “the use of pleasure” in ancient Greece in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*. He argues that Greek sexuality was part of an attempt to take care of oneself by careful management of actions
and practices. Foucault is interested in Greek sexual practices as “the use of pleasure” insofar as it constituted techniques of the governance of the self. McWhortor (1999) elaborates Foucault’s point of pleasure to oppose normalization of the subject. She asks,

What if we deliberately refused to separate practice from result and simply engaged in graduated disciplinary practices for their own sake—for the pleasure they bring—rather than for some goal beyond them? What if we used our capacities for temporal development not for preparation for some task beyond that development but for the purpose of development itself, including the development of our capacities for pleasure? What if we used pleasure rather than pain as our primary disciplinary tool? (p. 182)

By asking these questions, McWhortor makes “the development of our capacities for pleasure” as a key to enable the subject’s creative opposition and active resistance to regulatory power.

Unlike the psychoanalytic concept of “desire,” which can never be fulfilled due to the inherent “lack” of the self, pleasure must be sought through actions and practices. Jeremy Crampton (2003) argues that pleasure is linked to actions and practices more than desire—“they [pleasures] don’t need to reach out for something they don’t have” (p. 182). Desire is less connected to practices, and it is always articulated through language. Thus, Crampton argues that pleasure may function better while we attempt to understand actions and practices. He says, “practices of pleasure offer a chance to develop not an escape from politics, but a new politics in our favor” (p. 183).
Foucault is interested in “the use of pleasure” as technologies to carefully manage the self. McWhortor suggests that pleasure enables the subject’s creative resistance to normalizing discourses. Crampton argues that pleasure is linked to actions and practices, and it may function better when we attempt to understand actions and practices. My dissertation suggests that art educators pay more attention to the pleasure involved in visual culture. Because teaching and learning occur through the subject’s actions and practices, understanding pleasure may be more useful for VCAE than articulating abstract ideas such as desire, unconsciousness, and ideology.

Research Design

Phenomenological Inquiry

The methodology of this dissertation research is philosophical inquiry. By saying “philosophical inquiry,” I mean two fundamental things: one advances the coherence of general principles and the other is being aware of the limits of knowing. A philosophical inquiry is concerned with analyzing, reasoning, reflecting, and questioning the formation of fundamental beliefs and principles that guide our practices. Louis Lankford (1992) claims, “the alliance of inquiry and conclusions reflects the dynamic possibilities of means-ends relationships and allows for ongoing revision” (p. 196). A philosophical inquiry involves ongoing processes of redescription, reexamination, and problematization.

Lankford suggests five aims in conducting philosophical research: (1) to justify reasons for being, (2) to clarify ideas, (3) to synthesize ideas, (4) to recommend, and (5)
to raise questions. My dissertation treats Lankford’s aims as the primary inquiry process that advances the coherence of general principles for studies of anime.

First, “to justify reasons for being,” asks the purpose of research. What is the purpose of this study? What does this study try to accomplish (in art education)? These are questions that initiate philosophical research. Second, in order to accomplish the goal of this study, redescriptions of the involved anime images and conceptual frameworks in a clear manner is important before offering implications for art education. Third, Lankford argues, “one of the valuable functions of philosophy is to bring ideas together” (p. 198). Working through a philosophical inquiry is about connecting various theories and ideas with a logical coherence. Fourth, recommendations for the field follow analyses and syntheses. Finally, Wanda May (1992) argues that “more than finding the answers, doing philosophy is calling into question” (p. 228). To raise questions, I argue, is central to postmodern thinkers, such as Foucault, and this aim is linked to my second inquiry process—being aware of the limits of knowing. Foucault always questions normative terms and dominant discourses. Without understanding what limits current ways of knowing, an inquiry may not be able to address the unsaid and unthought. It is in this spirit of philosophical inquiry that I approach my study.

An inquiry process grounded in Foucault’s thinking

At the beginning of my research, I struggled with finding a clear definition of Foucault’s method. My struggles came from the belief that I could simply apply Foucault’s method in the same way that one applies content analyses, ethnography, and other sociological methods. Foucault’s work is often difficult to pin down, and it is
always possible to organize his analyses in different ways. Foucault (1991) refuses to define his ways of research in a structural framework. Foucault sees his work more as experiments than as systematic analyses, and his goal is to talk about unknown topics with a “non-defined method” (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 53). He states,

I wouldn’t want what I may have said or written to be seen as laying any claims to totality. I don’t try to universalize what I say; conversely, what I don’t say isn’t meant to be thereby disqualified as being [of] no importance… I like to open up a space of research, try it out, and then if it doesn’t work, try again somewhere else.

(Foucault, 1991, p. 74)

Following Foucault, my investigations draw upon various resources. My dissertation research is ongoing, mobilized, and dynamic in order to open up a space of research. The analyses of anime are coherent with detailed visual and textual materials, and they purposefully reveal the “unvoiced” and “unthought.” Grounded in Foucault’s thinking, the inquiry process of this dissertation is to show how certain events and phenomena reach their specificity as discourses, how different discourses relate to each other, and how an alternative discourse may potentially decenter the dominant ones.

**Mapping the textual terrain**

Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 reviews the history of anime, the socio-economic conditions of anime in the United States, and the literature of anime. In Chapter 3, I first explain Baudrillard’s and Jameson’s postmodern concepts, concentrating on “simulacrum,” “depthlessness,” “pastiche and the nostalgic mode,” and “the schizophrenic.” Second, I show these features through three anime works: *Cat Soup*
(2001), *The Grave of Fireflies* (1988), and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996). Jameson’s “depthlessness” not only describes the formal features of anime images but also corresponds to the viewing experiences of anime. Baudrillard’s “simulacrum” addresses visual simulations in contemporary media, and provides technical and social aspects to analyze *Cat Soup*, a computer-generated anime. I analyze *The Grave of Fireflies*, an anime depicting a “true story” about a brother and sister during the World War II, through “postmodern pastiche and the nostalgic mode” in which history becomes mere stylistic signifiers. Jameson’s account of “the schizophrenic” illustrates the fragmented sense of postmodern subjects in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. To that end, Chapter 3 argues that anime as a postmodern medium demonstrates the peculiarities of anime signifiers, which challenge former understandings of representation.

While Jameson and Baudrillard’s postmodern theories provide a well-framed socio-cultural aspect to understand anime signifiers, their works are less concerned with pleasure and its potential politics in relation to these depthless signifiers. My dissertation uses Foucault’s account to further investigate pleasure and the playful politics of anime. In Chapter 4, I first underpin how Foucault’s concepts of pleasure, power, and sexuality relate in *The History of Sexuality*. Second, I explore the pleasure of evasion and transgression by examining two anime works: *Fooly Cooly* (2005) and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1999). I argue that pleasure is not simply found in surface qualities accepted by passive viewers, but rather, it has the potential to flow freely in power relations as Foucault suggests. The pleasure of viewing anime has the capability to engender an imperceptible but playful politics for viewers to stray from social orders and their
supposed identities. Viewers thus indulge in creative actions and practices, although these actions and practices may not be critical.

The final chapter suggests a rethinking of art educators’ approaches to visual culture through the pleasure and politics of viewing anime. The fundamental argument of my dissertation is that anime itself is a site of viewers’ own education about anime, and anime as an alternative discourse deliberately generates specific kinds of signifiers and visual pleasure. Through anime signifiers and pleasures, viewers, youth and adolescence in particular, are empowered to participate in creative production in their own favor. My dissertation suggests that the depthless features of anime may help art educators rework the concepts of representation and further develop more adequate understandings of postmodern signifiers. It also suggests emphasizing the educational applications of pleasure and the imperceptible politics in students’ pleasurable practices.

The selected anime works

My goal in studying visual culture is to critically understand its characteristics, effects, and social functions through a subjective position. The use of the word “critical” implies an informed process of evaluation and judgment. Acknowledging that the process of studying visual culture cannot be value-free, I pay careful attention to my critically informed evaluations and judgments in relation to my subjectivity as a researcher. In terms of the selection criteria, many Japanese anime works contain complexities with cultural significances as a proof of their dramatic, artistic, and intellectual credits. However, one cannot generalize the intellectual complexities and artistic qualities in EVERY anime. The selected anime works are primarily based on their correspondence to
the ideas discussed in this dissertation, and I justify their intellectual complexity and artistic qualities by my long-term engagement with anime and manga.

My second criterion is based on the popularity of the selected works in Japan and the United States. The selected works are originally released in Japan, and they have been published and distributed in the United States after 1997. With the distributors’ acknowledgements of their prior popularity in Japan, these works are officially licensed, translated, and distributed for general audiences in the United States.

*Rationale and Significance of the Study*

*The personal rationale*

During my college years, I took many courses in law, business, and urban planning, hoping to pursue a career in business, real estate management, or urban policymaking. Although I was at a high-ranking university in Taiwan, there were no art-related courses for me to take. I did not take art courses in college, nor were quality art classes provided in my elementary, middle, or high school. The educational system focused more on subjects included in the college-entry exam. Art was usually excluded, and art education was out of the scope—at least from my experience. After graduation, by fate or by accident, I became a manga artist and illustrator, working for several publishers. I also published short stories on *Star Girls’ Monthly Magazine* and five manga between 1993 and 2001.

Although the description of my experience may seem trivial, I would like to address two points about it. First, art education for me—artmaking skills, artistic taste, and arts knowledge—was rooted in anime and manga, as well as in other forms of
popular culture. Without taking formal drawing and painting classes, I learned how to draw, exploring various media by imitating and altering the manga and anime works I liked, eventually establishing a personal style based on these experiments. In the same manner, I developed my own criteria to evaluate the contents and aesthetic qualities of anime and manga, and I learned to understand and respect various kinds of life, value, and personal philosophies from individual manga artists and anime works. Heavily influenced by a mixture of popular culture (Chinese, Japanese, American, and Taiwanese), I am looking for the positive effects and educational potentials of popular culture. Positioning my dissertation in art education informed by visual culture, which embraces contradictions and indeterminacies, allows me to provide an alternative perspective through my research of and interest in anime.

Figure 1: A cover image of *Clair de Lune*
The significance for art education

This dissertation contributes to art education in two ways. First, my dissertation specifies anime as a postmodern medium, providing concrete examples for studies of visual culture. Wilson (2003) warns us that it is almost impossible to construct a model (no matter how complex it is) for studies of visual culture, but I suggest that more concrete examples of visual artifacts can bring diverse models for VCAE.
Second, anime has a significant impact on adolescent culture. The majority of anime features adolescent characters, deals with issues of adolescent sexuality, and promotes a youth resistance to the mainstream adult world. Paradoxically, anime is significantly (and problematically) grounded in youth consumption. Parents and teachers are concerned with the large amounts of anime consumption and the negative effects of anime on youths. This position of anime means that it is uniquely suited to investigate the power relations of visual culture, and to examine a discursive formation that is not oriented to institutional power. Ultimately, it may facilitate an epistemological alternative and reflexivity for art education.

*Limitations of the Study and Unanswered questions*

*The limitations*

It is impossible to encompass the enormity of postmodern theories and to include every facet of anime in one study. In my dissertation, I do not include discussions about genres of anime. While selecting my materials, I do not target one or two genres, nor do I try to include a sample from every genre. The very idea of genre, categorizing and sorting similarities and differences within a medium, fundamentally contradicts postmodernist epistemological frameworks by Jameson, Baudrillard, and Foucault.6 Most of the selected anime either have fluidity among genres or have difficulty being fitted into any of them. Second, my dissertation emphasizes looking at anime in a particular cultural context - the United States. Although anime has already become a hit in Asia, Europe,

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6 See Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s arguments that conventional approaches of genres cannot handle media, and Foucault’s “What is an author?” that questions the categorization and reproduction of discourses under “the name of an author.”
and North America, discussions outside of the United States are not the focal point. They may serve as complements, but not as necessities to this study.

Third, the translation from Japanese to English in anime, including subtitles and dubbing, may be considered as an important site of cultural differences through language. The issue of translation is important, however, the selected anime works are discussed on the basis of their English translations.

Finally, although the media scholar Mark Poster (2002) claims that all media is mixed-media, where the visual is rendered in and through the non-visual, I do not discuss the audio in the selected works. My dissertation concentrates its analyses of anime on the visual. I acknowledge that the above issues of the genres of anime, of discussions outside of the United States, of translations of anime works, and of non-visual elements are limitations of my dissertation.

Unanswered questions and a suggestion for further inquiry

Whereas my dissertation aims to examine, diversify, and extend discourse on visual culture in art education, issues regarding educational practices of anime within school systems will remain unanswered.

Wilson (2003) argues that visual culture would not be able to fit in an “objective-bound” curriculum, and trying to make it fit might kill the most intriguing (educational) quality of visual culture. Thus, Wilson proposes a “pedagogical tactic” that supervises and manages students’ learning outside of school-time and curriculum. He brings up the example that an art teacher assigned students manga-style drawing as homework. This is an accessible means for teachers in practice. However, this pedagogical approach to
visual culture may not adequately demonstrate what students learn from anime, and it ignores the complexity of anime. It is inadequate if we treat anime merely as popular culture texts, and simply practice pedagogy of visual culture without paying attention to the discursive formation of and social practices regarding anime.

Thus, contrary to Wilson, I propose that the next logical line of inquiry should be a concern with a curriculum of anime. A curriculum is an educational practice tightly bound to ideological values and political beliefs. Curriculum is an embodiment of Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge. The “democratic curriculum” advocated by Freedman is not simply an inclusive curriculum of various visual objects, but rather a process of power negotiations. Therefore, inquiries into an anime curriculum are appropriate to be the next line of studies through which issues of power/knowledge in current educational systems will be redefined and revised.

Although this dissertation does not focus on educational practices in school systems, I hope that it may serve as a starting point for art educators to develop a curriculum that embraces contradictions and the indeterminacy of power relations of visual culture through students’ pleasurable practices.
CHAPTER 2  
FRAMING ANIME

This chapter reviews the history of anime in Japan, the socio-economic conditions of anime in the United States, and the literature about anime. First, this chapter traces the origin of anime in the 1960s, highlighting the remarkable manga artist and animator Osamu Tezuka’s contributions to anime in Japan. Second, this chapter situates anime in the United States in order to provide a socioeconomic context for my dissertation. Third, this chapter reviews the literature of anime. By reviewing the history, socio-economic conditions, and literature of anime, this chapter argues: (1) anime is a culturally hybrid medium that has particular artistic qualities; (2) anime has a significant social influence and economic impact in the United States; and (3) anime images enable a set of discussions and empower certain agencies as otaku whose practices constitute the discourse of anime.
The Origin of Anime

Although Japan started producing animation shorts in the early 1910s, it is suggested that the significant development of “anime” began in the 1960s (C. W. Chen, 2003; Gerow, 2005; Lamarre, 2002a). According to Aaron Gerow (2005), the director of the Film Studies Program at Yale University, the 1960s to 70s is the period that “a particular style of animation [resulted] from certain solutions to the problems of limited animation on television, once influenced in part by manga and other media” (para. 1).

There are three points to Gerow’s argument. First, he distinguishes anime with a particular style developed in the 1960s from previous animations in Japan. Second, this style, known as limited animation, was a result of the difficult technical and financial circumstances of animation production. Third, manga and other media played influential roles in developing this style.

To what was the particular style that Gerow refers? Why were the 1960s (or the difficult technical and financial circumstances in the 1960s) significant in developing this style of animation? How did this particular style of animation get connected to manga?

Many studies (Animefan25, 2001; C. W. Chen, 2003; Drazen, 2003; Gerow, 2005; Lamarre, 2002a; Macadam, 2001; Patten, 1996, 2004; Poitras, 2001; Printing, 1998; Sanchez, 2003; Schodt, 1986) direct answers to these questions to one person’s

Lamarre (2004) argues that whereas the attempt to locate the origin of anime and to define anime in a narrower sense establishes a set of discussions regarding a historical lineage for anime, it studiously avoids historical questions. For example, he asks how a history of anime has been organized and how issues of sexuality play a role in developing such a history. Lamarre sees these discussions more as a discourse than a history. They attempt to define a historical moment, to promote a set of objects, and to establish an identity. I agree with Lamarre’s argument and acknowledge that my dissertation is part of this discourse. However, this chapter provides historical, social, and cultural information of anime as these pieces of information are not yet circulated enough to be history.

Limited animation is a non-realistic approach of the low-cost animation production. It uses abstract art, symbolism, and limited movement that depend on the play of viewers’ imaginations.
contributions to Japanese anime: Osamu Tezuka. This section first discusses Tezuka’s significant influence on both manga and anime, and how his anime production under difficult technical and financial conditions became a particular style of animation—anime. Identified as the founder of anime and manga, Tezuka influenced many later animators and manga artists in Japan. A brief review of Japanese anime industry during the 1960s to 1990s follows.

Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989)

Tezuka was born in 1928, Toyonaka City, Osaka, and devoted himself to making anime and manga throughout his life. Tezuka created 50,000 pages of manga and produced 60 series of anime on television and film before he died in 1989. Respected as “the God of manga,” Tezuka was the one who revolutionized the form of Japanese manga (C. W. Chen, 2003; Hairston, 1999; Napier, 2001; Schodt, 1986, 1996). It is suggested that manga is deeply rooted in Japanese pictocentric traditions (Brehm, 2002; Napier, 2005; Schodt, 1986, 1996). The origin of manga can be traced back to the temple scrolls, called “chojugiga”—humorous pictures of birds and animals—in the 12th century (Napier, 2005; Toku, 2001). Later in the early 18th century, Japanese woodblock prints “ukiyo-e” or “the floating world” featured graphic narratives that included not only actors and courtesans of the time, but also imaginative subject matter, such as demons, ghosts, and extremely creative pornography, such as depictions of rape and penetration of men and women by tentacle creatures or fictional monsters. Historically, graphic narratives have been an expressive art form of human imagination in Japan (Napier, 2001).

Schodt (1996) indicates that Tezuka was aware of the limitations of the manga
styles at his time, and therefore he applied “cinematic techniques” into his manga.

According to Tezuka himself,

I felt that existing comics were limiting. Most were drawn as if seated in an audience viewing from a stage, where the actors emerge from the wings and interact. This made it impossible to create dramatic or psychological effects, so I began to use cinematic techniques. French and German movies that I had seen as a schoolboy became my model. I experimented with close-ups and different angles, and instead of using only one frame for an action scene or the climax (as was customary). I made a point of depicting a movement or facial expression with many frames, even many pages. The result was a super-long comic that ran to 500, 600, even 1,000 pages. (Translated by Schodt, 1986, p. 63)

For instance, Tezuka’s manga *New Treasure Island* (1947) was the first to use eight pages of panels to depict a car arriving, from far away to close-up to protagonist’s face (see figure 1). Panels are used to simulate cameras and characters’ moves, transforming still panels into cinematic illusions. The purpose of these panels is not to develop plots, but to create “dramatic or psychological effects” (Dai Nippon Printing, 1998). Another of Tezuka’s cinematic techniques is to use multiple aspects/panels to bypass a single moment, setting a wandering eye on different aspects of a place, an idea, or a mood (McCloud, 1993). The cinematic techniques not only result in relatively more pages and panels of manga, but also establish manga as an art form that expresses human internal thoughts and emotions rather than simply depicting stories or plots.
Tezuka’s anime: Astro Boy

Tezuka (1999) believed that anime would be more accessible to global audiences than manga. He thought that watching anime would be less limited by words and translations than reading manga because anime could be easily dubbed into different languages. Throughout his life, Tezuka never made a profit from his anime, but he kept producing anime through the support of the profits made from his manga (Tezuka, 1999). As a well-established manga artist, Tezuka used storylines and visual styles of his manga as the basis of his anime. Tezuka not only promoted the view that anime is a global medium, but also influenced the convergence of manga and anime in Japan.

Tezuka’s first anime Astro Boy (also the first animated TV series in Japan) appeared in 1963. Based on his manga, Astro Boy is a little-boy robot built by a scientist
as a replacement for his dead son. Tezuka not only adopted the story of his manga but also strategically used the concepts of selectivity and fragmentation of manga images. Moving images have their distinctive capability to create an illusion of motions and continuous events. Unlike moving images, manga by its nature can only represent fragments of motions and events. It requires the viewer’s engagement to read these fragments in order to understand its narrative structure. In other words, the viewer needs to cognitively fill meanings in the “gutters” between two panels of manga. As Scott McCloud (1993) claims, a comic is the “juxtaposed pictorial in deliberate sequence where the images are selective, limited, fragmentary instead of a whole set of sequential or continuous images in film” (p. 9). Based on this view, manga is a set of selective and fragmentary images.

Tezuka applied the concepts of selectivity and fragmentation from manga into his anime so that he could strategically use fewer drawings to make motions. His poor budget for animation production was the major reason for him to take this approach. The more images an animation uses, the more it costs. In the United States, animation studios often receive a higher budget for their production costs, which enables animators to render more drawings per second thus creating smoother and more fluid images. For instance, Disney used twenty-four images per second to simulate realistic motions in Snow White. However, due to technical limitations and financial constraints, Tezuka limited his anime to five or six frames per second. Astro Boy used about 1,200 drawings for a 24-minute animation, whereas Disney would use about 17,000 drawings to tell the
same story. According to Tezuka (1999), “In comparison [with Disney animation], Astro Boy is practically motionless” (my emphasis, p. 39).

Motionlessness thus evolved into anime’s particular style rather than became a creative constraint. Anime emphasizes detailed drawings, smooth transitions of plots, and interesting storylines more than fluidity of motions. For instance, animators use close-up shots that depict characters’ emotions instead of shots that illustrate their actions. Designing characters’ large eyes and abstract backgrounds (while reducing characters’ bodily movements and psychical environments) can drive viewers’ attention to “dramatic and psychological effects.” Animators draw important plots and shots in great detail so that these drawings can be repetitively used. Technical and financial difficulties did not stop Japanese animators’ enthusiasm for anime production. Rather, it encouraged animators to indulge in artistic styles that would not necessarily be bound to fluidity of motions (C. W. Chen, 2003).

Japanese anime industry

Tezuka’s approach to limited animation created more chances for animation programming on television. In the 1960s, there was a demand for television programs, and anime became a large part of the programming schedule due to its low production cost (Poitras, 2001). Weekly TV programming resulted in the serial plots and episodic storylines of anime’s narrative structures. It also reinforced anime’s connection to the ubiquitous manga, which emphasized long-running episodic plots (Napier, 2005).

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9. According to Furniss (1998), animation is an “art of movement,” and this idea has dominated American animation studies and productions. Based on this concept, the fluidity of motions becomes the ideal quality in American animation.
The commercial success of anime attracted many talented people who were interested in cinema. In fact, the anime industry offered more job opportunities than live-action films in Japan. Famous anime directors, such as Yoshiyuki Tomino (the creator of *Gundam* Series), Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost in the Shell*), and Hideaki Anno (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*), who started their careers around that time, often express their strong interests in film. Both Oshii and Anno have directed live-action movies. The newer generation of Japanese animators changed the perception of anime as “children’s stuff.” The anime industry embraced the richness of contents and a variety of genres, and anime was brought to the same social and intellectual status as film.

In the 1970s, *mecha* became a trend among anime genres. Mecha, short for mechanical, is used to describe the popular anime genre of giant robots and machines (Sanchez, 2003). In 1979, *Mobile Suit Gundam* first appeared as a TV program. It was a mecha anime involving anti-war beliefs, a complex representation of human behaviors, and contradictions between morality and politics. Its dark tone was not intended to be children-friendly. It gained significant attention from adult audiences and opened the anime-related merchandising market, including robotic-model toys, novels, and original art books. Anime secured its local popularity and market (including anime-related products) as a foundation to further extend its global influence.

In the 1980s, “original video anime” (OVA) appeared and broadened the platforms of anime. OVA are anime works released directly for retail sale without being previously shown on TV or in theaters. They usually target small groups of audiences who have special interests. As a result, more genres and subject matters were involved in
anime, including *Shojo* (girls’) and *Hentai* (pornographic or sexually perverted) anime.

In the 1990s, intellectually sophisticated anime was increasingly appearing, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1997), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). By the end of the 1990s, Japanese commentators agreed that anime was worthy of intellectual study (Napier, 2005).

**Anime in the United States**

In order to situate my study of anime in a particular social context, I categorize anime’s growth in the United States into three stages: (1) the developmental stage (the 1960s to 1970s), (2) the global distribution (the 1980s to 1990s), and (3) the current anime boom.

*The developmental stage.* In 1963, NBC Enterprises bought Tezuka’s *Astro Boy* but did not know how to sell it to American audiences. The broadcasting company asked Fred Ladd, who had done many cartoon dubbing, to reproduce *Astro Boy* based on the original (Deneroff, 1996; Ladd, 2006). Ladd produced 104 out of 193 episodes of the original show for the American market. Following *Astro Boy*, *Giganto* (1965), *Kimba, the White Lion* (1967), and *Speed Racer* (1967) appeared on US television. These works were not only reproduced and dubbed in English, but were given an “American personae,” according to Ladd. An American style of humor was injected, and sexual and violent elements were taken out in the versions shown in the United States. Although these works opened the anime market in the United States, the recognition of “Japanese animation” was not significant. Many viewers were not aware that these works were from Japan because of English-dubbing and their American personae. During this period, the
access of anime was limited and anime works were reproduced based on American audiences’ tastes.

*Global distribution.* Anime extensively got attention in Asia Pacific, Europe, and North America in the 1980s. In 1988, the anime film *Akira* became an international hit by showing the world with graphically violent and gruesome anime. According to Napier (2001), *Akira* is “unquestionably a masterpiece of technical animation” and “a complex and challenging work of art that provoked, bewildered, and inspired its audiences” (p. 5). *Akira* was adopted from Katsuhiro Otomo’s famous manga, and the film became a box office smash across the world. The worldwide success of *Akira* made it a landmark of Japanese animation, and since then, fans started using the term “anime” instead of “Japanese animation.”

After the success of *Akira*, anime’s artistic value and its distinct visual style received attention in the United States in the 1990s. Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* (1996) is set in the near future as a science-fiction anime. Elaborately depicting techo-cyber culture, *Ghost in the Shell* demonstrates anime’s specific visual style to present complex narratives of an imaginary world. Contrary to Oshii’s high-tech, near-future, urban-setting, and cyberpunk imagery, Hayao Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke* (1997) rewrites and displaces Japanese mythologies and traditions. *Princess Mononoke* was Miyazaki’s first anime film gone to theater release worldwide, and later, with his other theatrical successes such as *Spirit Away* (2002) and *Howl’s Moving Castle* (2004), Miyazaki became recognized as one of the most important “anime auteurs.”
A phenomenon of *shoujo* (girls) anime also appeared during this period. In 1995, the anime TV series *Sailor Moon* began its run and caught attention from female viewers. The shoujo genre diversifies the predominantly male consumption of anime. By the end of the 90s, anime had established its global distribution and popularity, intriguing a cultural and economical reciprocity of animation production. Anime became distributed and licensed widely in the United States.

*The current anime boom.* Anime’s artistic value is recognized and widely discussed in the current stage. For example, Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* was awarded the Oscar and the Gold Bear in Berlin Film Festival in 2002, and anime-influenced art, such as Takashi Murakami’s and Yoshitomo Nara’s works, has exhibited internationally. More than 20,000 anime fans participated in Otakon every year, a largest anime fan gathering on the East Coast (Napier, 2005). Likewise, Hollywood has begun to integrate an “anime style” in recent action movies. For instance, *Animatrix* (2003), a collection of several animations detailing the back-story of the universe within the film *Matrix* (1999), was commissioned and produced by the Wachowski Brothers with Japanese and Korean anime directors. The Wachowski Brothers claim that their film *Matrix* was highly influenced by *Akira*.\(^\text{10}\) Another recent case of anime’s influence is in the film *Kill Bill* (2003). Its director Quentin Tarantino includes a short anime to represent one character’s bloody past.

Meanwhile, anime-related products increasingly have impacted on the US-Japan trade. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, in 2002 the broadcasting rights of Japanese

\(^{10}\) From the producers’ interview in the DVD of *Animatrix*. In the DVD, the producer Wachowski Brothers filmed a series of interviews with the directors and scholars who deal with anime, including Susan Napier.
anime in the U.S. were valued at $495 million, and toys featuring these anime characters brought in $4.7 billion.\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Yu-Gi-Oh} and \textit{Pokemon} ranked in the top ten of American children’s TV programs. Many anime works are redeveloped for and reintroduced to American audiences. For instance, Kids’ WB, a Saturday morning cartoon programming by the CW Television Network, cooperates with Japanese anime house Toei Inc. to produce anime works targeted at both the U.S. and Japanese markets. Sony Pictures Entertainment invests more than $ 250,000 per episode to reproduce Tezuka’s \textit{Astro Boy} in high-definition format with 24 frames per second instead of its original “jerky” four or five frames per second. Anime increasingly influences animation and film production in the United States. “Anime” is no longer a term associated geographically with Japan, but a hybrid medium that was originally developed in Japan.

\textit{Literature review of Anime}

\textbf{Susan Napier’s three expressive modes of anime}

Considered as the first scholarly text about anime in the United States, Susan Napier’s (2005) \textit{Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle} (formerly \textit{Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke}) examines what she calls “three expressive modes of anime” in relation to Japanese cultural identity (p. xiii). Situating anime in a global society, Napier argues that anime deals with universal issues while being “a heterogeneous kind of cultural self-representation” (p. 292). She argues,

In a world where American domination of mass culture is often taken for granted and local culture is frequently seen as either at odds with or about to be subsumed into hegemonic globalism, anime stands out as a site of implicit cultural

resistance. It is a unique artistic product, a local form of popular culture that shows clear indications of its Japanese roots but at the same time exerts an increasingly wide influence beyond its native shore. (Napier, 2005, p. 9)

Napier sees anime as a site of cultural resistance that contrasts with American cultural domination and globalization. Anime has clearly influenced and been influenced by a plethora of Western cultural products. Anime is complex and rich because it has borrowed texts from Western popular culture. For most Japanese viewers of anime, their culture is never a purely Japanese one. On the other hand, while being under the influence of globalization, anime “remains an original product of the concatenation of circumstance that have created the culture of modern Japan” (p. 27). Napier argues that the root of Japanese culture—the heterogeneous kind of cultural self-representation—makes anime transcend national and cultural boundaries.

Paying attention to anime’s nexus position in globalization, Napier categorizes anime works into three expressive modes that are deeply rooted to Japanese culture: the apocalyptic, the festival, and the elegiac. The apocalyptic mode illustrates a society with profound anxieties about the future. The end of the world is an important element in postwar Japan. The failure of the emperor (tenno) who was seen as God by the Japanese and the atomic-bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the most obvious reasons for the anxieties of apocalypse. Napier argues that anime can easily present all kinds of destruction through its rendered images without reliance on costly special effects; therefore anime lends itself particularly well to the apocalyptic mode (see Figure 5).
The festival mode plays with the stereotypical notion of the Japanese as a group of repressed and quiet people. It offers a vision of social and familial disorder by playing the reversal of stereotypes in Japan. For Napier, anime is one of the best means to make dramatic overturning. She claims, “As with the festival space itself, the space of animation is one that allows for experimentation, fluidity, transformation, and ultimately an entry into a world more radically Other than anything in conventional live-action cinema” (emphasis in the original text, p. 31). In other words, the non-representational feature of the anime medium creates the sense of “otherness” for every viewer. Thus, the dramatic overturning of stereotypes becomes less offensive but more playful.

Picture taken of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945. The picture was taken from one of the B-29 Superfortresses used in the attack. According to Napier, this kind visual effect easily presents the apocalyptic mode—an anxiety of the end of the world—in anime.

Figure 5: Images of the apocalyptic

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12 Picture taken from http://www.archives.gov/research_room/research_topics/world_war_2_photos/images/ww2_1623.jpg
Page: http://www.archives.gov/research_room/research_topics/world_war_2_photos/world_war_2_photos.html

13 Picture is from http://saiyan-rebirth.com/Anime%20Index/akira/images/akira.jpg
According to Napier, “the word ‘elegiac’ literally refers to a poem about death written in a style of lamentation and may be taken in a wider sense to refer to a mood of mournfulness and melancholy, perhaps mixed with nostalgia” (p. 31). The elegiac is a strong Japanese cultural expression and consciousness of the passing traditions of love, youth, and beauty. The elegiac arises from an awareness of loss, but it also offers poetic fragments of hope, beauty, and even transient visions of coherence to shore up a profound sense of destruction. Many anime works poetically use visual signifiers in fragments to express the elegiac mode. For example, subject matters such as running water, passing trains, or withering leaves, etc. often appear in anime scenes without any connection with the narratives.

Napier (2005) argues that anime does not simply represent the fantasy of an ideal world that is coherent and composed. Rather, she says, “they [the world and characters of anime] are uncanny evocations of a protean world of imagination that is both familiar and unfamiliar to the viewer, a world of simulations, possible states, and possible identities” (p. 293). The apocalyptic is based on the coherence between rebirth and dissolution, often at the mercy of the forces of technology, while the festival celebrates the effacement of social boundaries and hierarchies. The elegiac mode offers a dark tone of mournfulness for anime, which is contrary to the tone of brightness and innocence in American mainstream animation. For Napier, the three expressive modes allow the play of the viewer’s psyche to a more liberating degree, but they do not offer a single overarching vision. Anime is far more than simply an escape valve for the masses. It is also far more than simply “a reflection of Japanese society” or “a compensation for Japanese social
anxieties” (p. 33). The subversive aspect of anime is a prominent element in comparison with much of American popular culture. She asserts,

Much of the best of anime resists any attempt at “ideological containment” and, given the dark tone of many its most memorable texts, could well be considered a cinema of “de-assurance” rather than one of “reassurance,” which film scholar Robin Wood asserts is the dominant tone of most Hollywood films (p. 33).

Napier’s text identifies that anime is complex and sophisticated and that it is worth scholarly investigation. With her knowledge of Japanese culture, she examines anime in relation to issues of cultural identity and globalization, and to the expressive modes through which anime de-assures common values and ideological constraints. For Napier, anime enables its audiences to understand Japanese culture and to rethink globalization. Her approach generally implies a cultural-oriented position for anime studies. Thomas Lamarre (2004), whose work is reviewed in the following, critiques her position on anime because it implies an approach to narrative structures and Japanese cultural authenticity that limits anime as an academic text instead of as a social practice. Although Napier provides an insightful account of reading anime from a Japanese cultural expert’s perspective, she pays less attention to a non-hierarchical visual field in which no authentic reading counts. Her approach may reduce the viewing experience of anime to a structural interpretation of narratives and to an object-oriented analysis, based on an expertise of Japanese culture.
Thomas Lamarre’s otaku movement and the discourse of anime

Thomas Lamarre, also a scholar of Japanese studies, takes a poststructuralist approach to anime and otaku practices. The Japanese word *otaku* literally means “your residency.” In Japan, it is used to describe obsessive fans in general, whereas in the United States it commonly refers to obsessive anime and manga fans. Lamarre’s article “An Introduction to Otaku Movement” (2004) is informed by Derrida, Foucault, Žižek, and Deleuze and Guattari. Primarily situating his analysis in Japanese commentaries of otaku, he sees otaku practices and discussions of anime as a discourse, where the otaku subjects are empowered to construct their own knowledge in and through a non-hierarchical visual field—anime. Lamarre (2004) raises the tension between two paradigmatic oppositions of otaku practices. On the one hand, otaku practices can be seen as an alternative space of knowledge production that resists modernist and disciplinary society. On the other hand, otaku and their practices can be seen as a postmodern cultural symptom, in which disciplinary boundaries give way to constant learning and endlessly transforming subjects. He reviews Japanese commentaries on otaku culture, arguing these various discussions on otaku and anime have a surprisingly common view of how anime images work, particularly in relation to the formation of a specific kind of cult fan—otaku. For Lamarre, these discussions form a *discourse* in a Foucauldian sense. He claims, “I see these discussions more as discourse than theory. Their theoretical paradigms appear less to address fundamental questions than to define a historical moment, promote a set of objects, or establish an identity” (Lamarre, 2004, p. 158).
Lamarre exemplifies four instances to support his view. First, he argues that all discussions share a common sense of the history of anime by locating its origin in the Japanese styles of limited animation first evidenced in Tezuka’s *Astro Boy*. He argues that by stating an origin of anime with a linear historical structure, the discourse of anime reinforces the idea of “defining a historical moment” as part of knowledge construction.

Second, Lamarre argues that discussions of anime have a common view of anime aesthetics. Anime images operate in a non-hierarchical visual field where the viewing experience is akin to rhizomatic information. He uses otaku’s obsessive viewing practices as an example. Otaku often replay videos of their favorite series again and again through which they begin to perceive minor differences in animation styles within each episode of a series (while non-otaku may not be able to tell differences). Lamarre argues that this kind of practice makes the viewing experience akin to scanning for information, rather than reading a story. Japanese commentator Azuma (2001) argues that this tendency to scan for information of anime images results in *the end of narrative structures* and *the rise of a database structure* of the viewing experience. The end of narrative structures refers to the postmodern collapse of grand narratives and ideologies. The rise of a database structure, or “data-basic world,” indicates a new way of viewing in which viewers actively read the pool of information rather than passively receive meanings of individual signifiers (Lamarre, 2002b, p. 3). In other words, otaku’s viewing experience is no longer built on perceiving the meaning of narratives, but on processing a database of visual signifiers. As Lamarre claims, “What was peripheral becomes central; or rather there is a breakdown in the visual ordering of central and peripheral that results in a non-
hierarchical visual field of information” (my emphasis, p. 159). Based on this point of view, anime is an over-visualized world fared on a database structure, in which the non-hierarchical operation of visual signifiers is the key of anime formal qualities and viewing experiences.

Third, there is no primary producer and no clear boundary between production and consumption in this non-hierarchical visual field. For instance, an anime series is the work of many different creators, so the concept of authorship is at stake. An anime series often consists of various visual styles and storylines by different animators and writers, and thus anime images do not represent a coherent system. Lamarre claims, “What might appear as stylistic inconsistency to non-otaku viewers appears to the otaku as a dense aggregate of the works of a series of artists or producers, from which emerges a cooperative system. In brief, production is as distributive as vision” (p. 160). There are multiple agencies involved in animation production, and a claim of a primary producer/artist becomes inadequate.

This breakdown of production hierarchies extends to the relationship between otaku and anime producers. Lamarre describes that anime otaku are “budding producers” (p. 161). Although otaku do not officially participate animation production, their consumption is so active and thus it has an impact on anime production. Otaku are not the passive mass; they are active viewers who are able to influence production. A remarkable example is the anime studio Gainax, which produces Neon Genesis Evangelion and many other famous anime. Gainax was formed by a group of otaku (who were college students at the time) in the early 80s, and one of its founders, Toshio Okada, calls himself
“Otaking” (King of Otaku), and currently offers courses about otaku culture at Tokyo University. It is clear that the conventional boundary between production and consumption, producer and consumer, do not adequately fit anime and otaku.

Lamarre’s fourth point argues that otaku practices demonstrate an effacement of the boundary between viewers and the viewed. He asserts,

The distributive visual field involves a breakdown in perceptual distance, which results in a purely affective relation to the image. Anime breaks out of its television frame, and the distance between viewer and image collapses into a moment of affect. (p. 161)

Lamarre uses cosplay (costume-role-play, in which anime fans dress as anime characters) as an example. The otaku practice of cosplay allows anime images to immerse into a personal reality. The psychological affect of anime images thus breaks the imaginary frame and comes into the material. Anime images not only demonstrate a radical break of a definable subject position, but also efface the boundaries between the imaginary and the material plays.14

At the end of Lamarre’s article, two issues are raised in his critique of otaku practices: the issues of sexuality and of Japanese cultural authenticity. He argues that otaku practices in relation to anime are predominantly male.15 For Lamarre, these practices and discussions seem only to imagine “constituent power (and strategies of refusal) through recourse to male potency as an autonomous force, and images of women

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14 The subject’s viewing position refers to the idea that images designate an ideal position for their intended spectators at the imaginary level (Cartwright & Sturken, 2001).
15 Lamarre separates anime otaku and manga otaku here. In fact, more female participants involve themselves in manga otaku practices, and the number of female participants is growing in anime otaku practices.
remain the fantasy of masculine autonomy” (p. 183). Otaku practices do not necessarily present a radical break from the preconceived socio-sexual formations. Rather, they perversely re-inscribe the preconceived gender roles.

Second, Lamarre critiques a modernist tendency that marks a historical and geographical break from the Western media to Japanese anime in otaku practices and anime discourse. Lamarre says, “In a predictably modernist fashion, the historical break between modern and postmodern is re-inscribed as a geopolitical break” (p. 178). By treating anime as a national culture or geopolitical rupture, this discourse begins with a fixed cultural authenticity rather than a non-hierarchical mediation of cultures. For example, American otaku’s concern with “a loss” in translation indeed constructs a Japanese authenticity of anime. Contrary to this tendency, Lamarre argues that anime should not be operated as a text in a fixed relation to others. He asserts, “Anime may not be lost in translation but only opened. …It is less a matter of a loss of an original cultural meaning than a multiplication of meanings that were already implicit in or at least enabled by the layering of the original image” (p. 183). In other words, Lamarre is less concerned with anime’s authentic meaning from a Japanese culture expert’s view, but more with its multiplied meanings in the era of globalization.

Lamarre’s poststructuralist approach to otaku practices, or to the discourse of anime, suggests a new attention to the “constituent power of anime,” which can be conceived as an alternative of knowledge construction and subject formation. However, questions remain unanswered in Lamarre’s arguments. What are the particularities of anime images that make anime viewers/otaku indulge in their active practices rather than
mere by images consume? What are the issues of sexuality in the discourse of anime? How can this alternative discourse help us rethink the current disciplinary and institutional knowledge construction? My dissertation follows Lamarre’s attention to the constituent power of anime, further investigating these unanswered questions.

Summary

By reviewing the history, socioeconomic conditions, and literature related to anime, this chapter argues: (1) anime is a culturally hybrid medium that has particular artistic qualities; (2) anime has a significant social influence and economic impact in the United States and in global society; and (3) anime empowers certain agencies as otaku to form a set of discussions and practices that constitute the discourse of anime.

First, anime has its particular artistic qualities. Arguably, anime’s artistic qualities are not only influenced by Japanese pictocentric traditions but also are the result of difficult circumstances of anime production during the 1960s to 1970s. Whether the argument in regard to the origin of anime is sound or not, the “non-hierarchical” feature of anime images is commonly accepted as part of anime’s artistic qualities and viewing experiences. Second, within the framework of globalization, anime functions as a cultural practice that integrates its local elements with other cultural influences. Developed in Japan, anime does not claim Japanese cultural authenticity, but engages in the global flow of cultural exchange. Third, anime’s socioeconomic influence is profound and its deep relation to consumer culture shall not be ignored. Anime otaku’s practices are closely tied to consumer culture but they do not follow the conventional mode of consumption-production that emphasizes corporate-controls and capital flows. Chen (2003) argues that
the socioeconomic impact of anime is not from corporate controls but from otaku practices. Japanese anime studios and officials did not systematically distribute and license anime overseas until recently. Many famous anime works were illegally spread among anime otaku and later official distributions followed. The same pattern happened in many East Asia countries and in the United States. Anime otaku function as an active agency that initiates global distribution of anime, therefore forming their influences both socially and economically. Based on this point of view, anime is not a product, not an object of consumption, and not even one kind of cultural commodification. Rather, anime images enable discursive formation where discussions of anime and otaku practices constitute the power of anime.

Anime is not simply a visual form; it generates particular kinds of artistic features and it empowers viewing subjects to indulge in practices of their own favor. Interestingly, it is often suggested (Azuma, 2005; Lamarre, 2004; Napier, 2005) that anime’s constituent power primarily emphasizes resistance or strategies of refusal, and the viewing subjects informed by anime tend to create meaning in their own favor, and further influence anime production and society. Anime is deeply contradictory because it constitutes a systematical discourse that simultaneously shows the subordination and resistance of institutional and disciplinary power. As the complexity of socioeconomic contexts and the constituent power of anime are, investigations of anime images and otaku practices provide an alternative to rethink institutional and disciplinary structures and to access power relations of visual culture.
CHAPTER 3
ANIME AS A POSTMODERN MEDIUM

This chapter highlights anime as a medium that demonstrates postmodern features described by Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard. This chapter first explains why it is important to consider anime as a medium rather than as a genre of animation or a sub-category of film. Second, I discuss the concepts of Jameson’s “postmodernism” and Baudrillard’s “simulacra” that correspond to anime’s distinctive features and to certain recurring themes. More specifically, the following concepts: (1) simulacrum, (2) depthlessness, (3) pastiche, and (4) the schizophrenic, are explored through analyses of three specific anime works: Cat Soup (2001), Grave of the Fireflies (1988), and Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995-1997). Finally, this chapter argues that the postmodern features of anime position the concept of representation at stake, and suggests that we re-examining our understanding of representation among different media.

Anime as a Medium

A “medium” is defined differently in the fields of art and communication. A medium in art refers to the materials or forms to create a work, such as paint or stone. In communication, a medium refers to an intervening means by which something is
communicated or expressed. A medium is something we use when we want to communicated indirectly (Buckingham, 2003b). A medium involves in specific technologies through which messages are transmitted; and its plural form “media” (often used in the singular “the media”) describe the constellation of media industries that influence the public (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

Napier (2001) argues, “anime is a medium, not a single television or film series, not even a single genre” (p. 245). This dissertation treats anime as a medium for three reasons. First, anime includes various genres and forms. Second, anime is attributed to a specific group of technologies, which engenders its own visual appearance. Third, the visual features of anime are extended to various cultural productions and phenomena, such as the artworks influenced by anime, anime cosplay (a contraction of “costume” and “play”), and anime conventions. Therefore, the term medium is used to specify the common and recurring peculiarities of anime and its culture in this dissertation. As the conventional approaches to genres or forms may not adequately handle anime, this chapter takes Jameson’s and Baudrillard’s accounts to illustrate the nature of contemporary media, underpinning the need for simultaneous attention to the multiple dimensions of a medium—the technical, the aesthetic, and the social.

Jameson and Baudrillard on media

Jameson (1991) argues that media have transformed older forms of communication—for instance, language, images, and texts—into a material production of culture. He says, “Culture has become material that we are now in a position to understand that it always was material…We have a word for that discovery—a word that
has tended to displace the older language of genres and forms—and this is...the word
*medium*” (emphasis in the original, p. 67). For Jameson, medium *is* a material production
and reproduction of culture, and is constituted by three components: a particular group of
technologies, a form of aesthetic production, and a social institution.

Individual media specify their own aesthetics through a particular group of
technologies. Jean Baudrillard (1994) argues that technologies determine how signifiers,
including images, texts, and other information, are produced and delivered by that
medium. Because the signifiers produced and delivered by media always involve one or
more technical processes, the dialectical relationship between signifiers and their
meanings has been muddled during technical processes. In addition, because media
technologies allow for an infinite recycling and endless duplication of images, meaning
of these images have been dissolved and dissuaded rather than representing the world
(Baudrillard, 1994). For Baudrillard, images become mere signifiers that are carried
through media technologies, and *how* a medium communicates is prior to *what* it
communicates.

In terms of the aesthetic dimension, Jameson (1998) argues that society shifted its
focus from production of goods to the aesthetic reproduction of culture. Media plays an
important role in transmitting intensified and stylized signifiers to render culture, and
culture becomes materialized and stylized through media. Consequently, contemporary
media cannot be taken merely as a means to deliver content or information. Media
inherently equip their specific aesthetic qualities to materially reproduce culture.
The social dimension of media involves new modes of distribution, consumption, and reproduction in consumer society. Contemporary media no longer hold a clear distinction between the modes of production and of consumption as in former industrial society. Rather, media simultaneously distribute and consume content or information, reproducing signifiers in regard to or regardless of meaning. The mixed modes of a medium are usually guided by some given principles within its domain. These given principles, whether visible or invisible, function as a social mechanism, controlling and regulating the mixture of media consumption, distribution, and reproduction in society.

Animation and Anime

My dissertation specifies the distinctive technical, aesthetic, and social features of anime with recognition of common peculiarities between anime and animation. Animation in general suggests an “active materialism of production” (Jameson, 1991, p. 77). That is, animation actively accumulates signifiers and their meaning to construct its own logical truths and worlds, differentiating itself from representational media such as photography, video, or live-action film by claiming that it has no innate relationship to the physical world. Animation has the potential to visualize (or “materialize” in Jameson’s term) various kinds of abstract ideas. For example, an animation can be freed from the force of gravity, and its characters can be altered from the human form to other objects, etc. As Paul Wells (1998) argues, “animation can defy the laws of gravity, challenge our perceived view of space and time, and endow lifeless things with dynamic and vibrant properties” (p.10). Contrary to live-action film and video that have to be recorded in the physical world (they therefore claim an inherent relationship to the
physical world), animation actively renders simplified graphics as its own “vocabulary,”
demonstrating an imaginary materiality of verisimilitudes.

Although animation refines everyday experiences and subverts the accepted
notions of the physical world, it still approximates real-world conditions while
simultaneously distancing itself from these conditions through depthless, flat, and two-
dimensional images. Since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the first animated
feature by Disney, the animation industry has demonstrated a realistic approach to
movements and characters’ motions. Animators’ craftsmanship is built upon whether
they are able to make characters “alive”—to give the illusion of motion. By juxtaposing
the correlation to the real-world conditions and visual qualities of the imaginary,
amination structures its own worlds where viewers are fully aware of the visual
constructions but are distanced from social and political consciousness and orders.

Acknowledging that anime shares some peculiarities with animation, this chapter
specifically highlights the features of anime based on Jameson and Baudrillard’s
postmodern concepts. In the following, I discuss (1) how computer technologies are
utilized to create certain visual qualities for anime; (2) how anime signifiers generate a
profound sense of depthlessness and the loss of linear time; and (3) how overly loaded
visual signifiers of anime result in a schizophrenic sense for postmodern subjects.

*Computer Simulation of Anime*

*Baudrillard’s simulacrum and simulation*

*The simulacrum is never what hides the truth — it is truth that hides the fact that
there is none* (Baudrillard, 1994).
“Simulacrum,” a term famously used by Baudrillard, refers to a simulated world where the distinction between the “real” and “unreal” is effaced due to the endless proliferation of signifiers. Today’s images, endlessly proliferated and recycled, change our sense of the material world, continuously simulating a space that is “more real than real”—a simulacrum. To be more specific, Baudrillard’s idea of simulacra is threefold:

1. A simulacrum involves artificial processes or operations.
2. A simulacrum is “hyperreal,” in which the distinction between the real and unreal no longer exists.
3. A simulacrum does not have an ultimate reference—no origin or “deep” meaning.

It is its own simulation (Baudrillard, 1994).

The first necessity of simulacra is artificial involvement. Baudrillard (1994) proposes that through technologies of copying, manipulation, and recombination, images are designated to perfect themselves in order to manifest themselves to be “reality.” Whereas in the past technologies were used to transmit reality through images, they now transform images into reality.

Baudrillard’s idea of simulacra profoundly challenges the former concept of representation. Whereas representation was used to imply the correlation between signifiers and their real-world counterparts, “simulation envelopes the whole edifice of representation itself as simulacra” (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 170). In a society of simulacra, visual simulation replaces production of goods, and images endlessly reproduce signifiers that do not have concrete references or real-world counterparts. Since the relationship between signifiers and meanings is void, images altogether simulate a system that has no
ultimate references or “deep” meaning. With the artificial resurrection, images replace real-life experiences without valid origins. Images can no longer be a means to an end, but can only be simulacra where they infinitely repeat and reproduce themselves.

*Computer simulation and the visual styles of anime*

*We may therefore speak of our own period as the Third Machine Age...* (Jameson, 1991, p. 36)

Jameson (1991) claims that we are in the “Third Machine Age” where machines—computers—are indeed machines of reproduction rather than of production (p. 36). Computers do not aim to produce any material goods, but to restructure information and thus reproduce information. Computers make very different demands on human capacity of processing imagery. Jameson (1991) writes,

> It is immediately obvious that the technology of our own moment no longer possesses this same capacity for representation...but rather the computer, whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power, or even the casings of the various media themselves, as with that home appliance called television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself. (p. 37)

Through computer technologies, images, particularly animated images, deal with fewer and fewer issues of representation, but evolve more and more simulations within themselves as simulacra. Animation production has progressively built its ability to perfect images by using computer technologies. This became a global trend, and anime studios are confronting a technological and conceptual shift. The following examples
demonstrate two ways in which anime studios incorporate computer technologies. The first attempts to simulate the photorealistic appearance for animation, whereas the second proposes a computer simulation of cel animation (or hand-drawn animation).

Computer simulation of the photorealistic appearance. Digital theorist Lev Manovich (2001) calls the simulation of the photorealistic appearance “digital realism”—“the idea to simulate any object in such a way that its computer image is indistinguishable from a photograph” (p. 184). The idea of the photorealistic appearance through computer simulation is not merely a return to the long established Western hegemony that attempts to represent “the real.” Rather, computer simulation engenders a claim that images are simulacrum where the real never existed. Images of digital realism do not have the prior existence of physical objects and subjects, and they break down the representational relationship between signifiers and physical reality.

In terms of moving images, cinema has a long tradition of being credited with the drive toward “a total and complete representation of reality” (Bazin, 1999). Although the perfect representation of reality or “realism” may be a mythological or a utopian ideal, various cinematic techniques have been developed in an attempt to reach that ideal. These techniques include camera movement, depth of field, alignment through perspective, controllability of lights, and the manipulation of cuts, shots, and duration that gives spectators a particular sense of time. The first style of computer-generated anime adapts these cinematic techniques that are built upon the approaches to “realism,” not only through simulation of the photorealistic appearance, but also through simulation of camera movements, of lights and shadows, and of characters’ motions. Computer-
generated photorealistic images provoke a sense of being between the “real” and “unreal,” and simulate a space between a flattened surface and a three-dimensional virtual world.

*Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (2001), an anime film based on a popular Japanese video game series, was completely created on a computer platform and was the first that attempted realistic human characters. The photorealistic qualities of human characters and three-dimensional virtual environments present everything as hyperreal, granting viewers an involvement between the real and unreal. Whereas a viewer might acknowledge the main characters are not real human beings, he or she might concede they are “lifelike.” As film critic Robert Ebert (2001) describes the female protagonist,

> She has an eerie presence that is at once subtly unreal and yet convincing. Her movements (which mirror the actions of real actors) feel about right, and her hair blows convincingly in the wind. The first close-up of her face and eyes is startling because the filmmakers are not afraid to give us a good, long look--they dare us not to admire their craft. (para. 2)

The terms “subtly unreal and yet convincing” and “feel about right” describe the viewer’s sense of hyperrealism. The point, as Ebert argues, is not to replace actors and the real world, but to transcend them—“to penetrate into a new creative space based primarily on images and ideas” (para. 7). This anime film moves away from the traditional notion of representation that involves references and origins in cinema. With every effort to approach convincing imaginary, this kind of simulation not only breaks down the kinship

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16 Although the film *Final Fantasy* is a multinational production, I use it as an example because it consists of the same elements, settings, and visual qualities of its video game series.
chain between “the referent” and “the original” in cinema, but also challenges our former understandings about film and animation, effacing the boundary between them. Whereas the actors or actresses, objects, and environments of the physical world must exist prior to live-action film, the photorealistic simulation builds and constructs every element in a digital virtual space, absorbing but also masking the fact that no origin is behind its photorealistic veil. Final Fantasy creates a world that is neither live action nor animation, but a simulacrum.

Computer simulation of cel animation. Contrary to the Japanese video game industry, which embraces photorealistic appearances in its anime production, other anime studios, especially several established ones, have resisted computer-generated images and the previously discussed approach. While these studios take advantage of computer technologies that increase effectiveness and reduce production costs, they try to preserve a “hand-drawn aesthetic” that is based on drawing and coloring styles of cel animation. Hayao Miyazaki, the most famous anime auteur, recently proclaimed that computer-generated images cannot exceed ten percent of the total in his work, and he desires the “less real, less accurate, and less perfect” of these images. This style, which simulates a sense of cel animation and hand drawings by utilizing computer technologies, can be found in many anime works. For example, Miyazaki’s Princess Mononoke (1997) and Howl’s Moving Castle (2004) combine hand-drawn characters and computer-generated backgrounds and effects. The anime short Kakurenbo: Hide and Seek (2005) has the visual style of cel animation while all elements are built through and within computers.

Computers, as a powerful contemporary apparatus in the “Third Machine Age,” simulate the handmade qualities for anime to preserve “the past,” a nostalgic aesthetic from cel animation.

*Cat Soup* (2001) is an experimental anime but gets attention on the commercial anime market in the United States. The director Sato Tatsuo takes a short story from Nekojiru’s adult manga and expands it with his own view. The story about two kittens’ journey is indeed simple. The sister kitty got seriously ill, and half of her soul was taken by a peculiar purple being, who can be interpreted as Death. The journey started at the point when the little brother pulled back the other half of his sister’s soul, and ended when her soul was restored. However, this bizarre journey is not structured by the characters’ actions or motivations. Rather, it simply exists as an uncanny but playful visual treat, which illustrates morbidity and mutilation in a bright, innocent, and non-threatening way.

In terms of utilizing computer technologies, *Cat Soup* successfully gives spectators an illusion of cel animation by its flattened appearance, whereas motion—including camera movements with the coordinated lights and shadows, the perspective alignments, and dynamic effects (such as smoke, water, fire)—implies a three-dimensional virtual space. The director Tatsuo explains, “When we say ‘digital’ for this piece, we mean that we used it as a tool to heighten the 2D imagery and to create a sense of three dimensionality.”¹⁸ On the one hand, the visible—each still image in *Cat Soup*—depicts a supreme flatness that lacks visual perspective and context. The forms and shades are simple, and the backgrounds are minimal, which leave more space for

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¹⁸ From the director’s commentary in the DVD.
viewers’ imaginations to play (see Figure 6, 7, and 8). On the other hand, the invisible — the camera, the motion, the lighting—is animated in ways that entail a three-dimensional space within the flattened surface. Traditional cel animation often makes viewpoints still, as if the camera is set to shoot a stage, so that animators only need to draw characters’ motion on the top layer with the same background underneath. With computer technologies, animators can easily change viewpoints and move multiple cameras within a simulated three-dimensional space. For example, in the opening sequence of *Cat Soup*, the camera view was at the bottom of a bathtub, looking up at the boy kitty dipping his face in the water (see Figure 9). The camera then traced the boy kitty, flying away from the bathroom and through the house, entering his sister’s bedroom. As a result, viewers may have a displaced sense, through which their views associate with the camera and travels three-dimensionally in a flattened imagery. By juxtaposing visual flatness and three-dimensional movements, *Cat Soup* possesses a subtly unfamiliar handmade style, manifesting an implosion of a deep world through the flattened images within itself.
**Figure 6: Cat Soup**

It presents the visual style of anime that is based on handmade, flattened, and nostalgic qualities.
©Nekojiru Yamato Do Co., Ltd./Nekojiru Family
Image courtesy Central Park Media

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**Figure 7: Cat Soup**

©Nekojiru Yamato Do Co., Ltd./Nekojiru Family
Image courtesy Central Park Media

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**Figure 8: Cat Soup**

©Nekojiru Yamato Do Co., Ltd./Nekojiru Family
Image courtesy Central Park Media

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**Figure 9: Cat Soup**

The opening sequence of Cat Soup, in which the space, movements, lights, and shadows coordinate three-dimensionally.
©Nekojiru Yamato Do Co., Ltd./Nekojiru Family
Image courtesy Central Park Media
The Depthlessness of Anime

A postmodern feature: Depthlessness

Jameson (1998) echoes Baudrillard, claiming that postmodern culture is situated in the transformation of reality into images. Due to this transformation, a new mode of “depthlessness,” as Jameson (1991) proposes, visually and conceptually takes away the previous “depth mode.”

Jameson (1991) uses Andy Warhol’s painting Diamond Dust Shoes (1960) as an example to argue that the visual/literal/physical qualities of depthlessness depict no illusion of depth, illustrate no visual perspective, contain no markers of context or explanation, and present a loss of expressiveness and emotional content in art. The supreme formal feature of flatness and the lack of visual perspective are also presented through digital culture that centers on two-dimensional screens and architecture such as flat skyscrapers full of reflecting windows.

Conceptually, this new mode of depthlessness rejects at least five former models of which it is believed that deeper meanings could be found beyond surface appearances. These former models include: (1) the interpretive or hermeneutic model, (2) the dialectical model of essence and appearance, (3) the Freudian structure of unconsciousness and repression, (4) the existential model of authenticity or inauthenticity, and (5) the semiotic opposition between the signifier and signified.

The rejection of the hermeneutic model is based on the poststructuralist critique of the very concept of “truth.” Hermeneutical practices propose that human beings use representational systems (for instance, languages or images) to deliver meanings about
the world around us, and we attempt to investigate the true meaning of the world beyond these representational systems. Since poststructuralists seek to abandon the metaphysical baggage of “truth,” the dialectical relationship between essence and appearance no longer remains. In the mode of depthlessness, there is nothing beyond the surface as an ultimate point, such as Althusserian ideology or Freudian unconsciousness, and there is nothing absolutely primary to interpret. Therefore, nothing can be considered as the “origin” or “authentic.” Jameson claims that we are left with “multiple surfaces” of textual and signifying plays where the chain between the signified and signifier has been broken, and the matter of meaning is no longer the priority.

*Superflatness: the non-hierarchical visual field of anime*

Japanese artist Takashi Murakami and cultural scholar Thomas Lamarre both suggest that anime reflects postmodern depthlessness. While Lamarre (2004) uses the term “a non-hierarchical visual field” to describe this aesthetic growing out of anime, Murakami (2005), who belongs to the generation marked by the influences of manga and anime, calls attention to Japanese cultural consumption characterized by “superflatness.”

There are three characteristics of superflatness. First, it demonstrates that cultural boundaries—those boundaries between high and popular, subjects and objects, and production and consumption—no longer exist. Murakami combines the aesthetic of traditional Japanese painting *nihonga*—the “finely worked flat surface and the translation of pictorial concept into lines and planes rather than volumes”—with his obsession toward anime and otaku culture (Brehm, 2002, p. 11). *Nihonga* literally means “Japanese painting.” According to Steinberg (2004), *nihonga* is a relational term used to distinguish
“contemporary traditional practices from Western-influenced Japanese painting” (p. 460). Murakami also founded the Kaikai Kiki Co. Ltd. (formally the Hiropon Factory), an art production workshop where artists create collaborative artworks that borrow language and styles from anime and manga. Characterized by horizontality, bright acrylic graphics and flat unblemished surfaces, Murakami's work is an inspired mix of Japanese traditions, popular anime, and otaku culture without a claim of their hierarchy.

Murakami (2005) describes “superflatness” as “the sensibility that our psychical and material world has been transformed into flattened surfaces—the working environment of computer monitors, the entertaining elements on screens, and the forceful integration of data into images” (p. 152). He further claims that contemporary Japanese customs, art, and culture are all extremely two-dimensional—the visual field devoid of perspective and the conceptual field devoid of hierarchy. In the superflat mode of cultural consumption, all hierarchies, divisions, boundaries, and genres have been effaced, leaving only the highly reified commodities. Artists like Murakami, whose work has been exhibited in large museums, clearly acknowledge the limitation of official art institutions and strategically make their “art” available in popular venues. Today reproductions of art can be purchased in bookstores, T-shirt shops, museum shops, or on the Internet. However, Murakami’s Kaikai Kiki Co. Ltd. not only offers a place for art production but also functions as a corporation through which artists actively engage in production, distribution, and marketing of their works. Margrit Brehm (2002) argues,

What distinguishes these products from museum shop articles is not only that the artists themselves undertake their design, production, and distribution, but also
that they reverse the reception process. Whereas the museum shop aims the production an arty public who recognize the art in them, [Kaikai Kiki’s] articles initially find their own fans by being *trendy* and *amusing*. (p. 15, emphasis in original)

Murakami’s superflatness takes one step further from Andy Warhol and Pop Art. It is no longer a case of transforming everyday aesthetics into art. It shows not only that both high and popular realms draw from anime and manga images, but also that artists being consumers of anime strategically use their work to attract both insider and outsider groups—the group who consumes anime and manga and the group who consumes art.

Second, in this non-hierarchical visual field, viewers may relate themselves more to images than to stories (Lamarre, 2004). Hiroki Azuma (2001) uses anime otaku’s (obsessive fans) viewing practice to explain this point. An obsessive anime otaku may replay videos of his or her favorite series, trying to find out minor differences among each episode. What might be considered as inconsistencies or trivial details become a substantial part in otaku’s viewing practice. He or she watches for the purpose of scanning for information, rather than reading a story. As a result, the viewing practice deals less with linear *narratives*, but more with structures of *database*. As Azuma (2001) asserts, “Our society is losing the grand narrative but constructing the grand database in its place, and the simulacra covering the postmodern surfaces are actually controlled and regulated by the database” (part 2, para. 4). Similarly, the anime director Oshii emphasizes that the quality of anime is determined by the combination of “information structures” in each image and “information flux” through continuous images (SAC, 2006,
p. 70). Information structures present how signifiers, including images and texts, are organized to be one anime image, and information flux refers to how images and sound are arranged sequentially to be animation. How information is processed and reassembled within and through anime images becomes the core of viewing experience (SAC, 2006). Anime, as an over-visualized medium, accumulates previous elements and fragments to be an anonymous database, from which a new kind of visuality emerges.

Third, whereas the linear perspective brings a two-dimensional surface into a consistent, singular, and a homogeneous kind of order that is united by one vanishing point, the superflat is more like an accumulation of independent images and styles that do not promise a consistent viewpoint (Azuma & Murakami, 2000; Looser, 2002). When the director Tatsuo was asked to comment on Cat Soup, he said, “This anime is a collage. We don’t look for consistency.” An online review of Cat Soup also says, “Cat Soup has no point. With so much creativity on display, does it need one?” (Huff, no date, para. 3)

There is no real dialogue in Cat Soup; only during few moments there are dialogues in “cat” language (noises sounding like a foreign language), which makes it difficult for viewers to associate with characters’ views, emotions, actions, and motivations. In film theory, a subject position of a viewer refers to identification with characters or with the camera. While watching Cat Soup, it is difficult for viewers to identify themselves with any character because they seem to be distanced. Not only because characters are in forms of cats, non-human, or surreal human-like beings, but also because their motivations and emotions are missing. The absence of expressive elements and the emotional depth manifests a psychological flatness for viewers. In addition, viewers

19 From the director’s commentary on the DVD
cannot be the voyeurs who associate with a unified camera gaze. Because the superflat anime images do not promise a homogeneous gaze, the singular vanishing point though camera view, there is no unified subject position of spectatorship implied through the camera lens.

Pastiche and Nostalgia Anime

Postmodern pastiche

Jameson (1998) argues that in today’s consumer society, the vitality of signs leads to another postmodern feature—pastiche. Signifiers in postmodern pastiche no longer hold the sense of their “origin.” Rather, they incorporate referenced texts within themselves to the extent that the boundaries between the pastiche and the original are effaced (Homer, 1998). As Jameson (1998) asserts, “postmodern pastiche is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter” (p. 5). In other words, postmodern pastiche is a “blank parody” without any political claim, purpose, or rationale, leaving us with nothing but “a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm” (Jameson, 1991, p. 17). Hence, postmodern pastiche does not intend to be socially critical; it is its own vivid and joyful playground of signifiers.

Jameson (1991) describes that “the past as ‘referent’ finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts” (p. 18). In postmodern pastiche, the past is no longer seen as history, but as vibrant styles of imagery. Media images generate a lost sense of history, and the past is turned into a series of styles and stereotypes, as nostalgic imagery. It is an imagery that aestheticizes the past
to be a glossy mirage for today’s pleasure. The past can no longer be perceived as history, but functions as a repository of genres, styles, and codes ready for commodification, and historical signifiers become deliberate styles or built-in features.

*The past for the present: Grave of the Fireflies*

Isao Takahata’s anti-war anime *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) illustrates Jameson’s idea of history as nostalgic imagery in postmodern pastiche. This anime is based on Akiyuki Nosaka’s autobiographical novel, which tells a story about himself and the loss of his little sister during World War II. The young protagonist and his baby sister, who lost their mother in a firebombing while their father was serving in the military, struggled to survive under severe war-conditions. This anime evokes traumatic feelings by depicting a boy and his little sister’s suffering and ultimate death. The elegiac quality of the images and cinematic expertise of realistic motions convey intensive depression for its viewers. Film critic Robert Ebert describes *Grave of the Fireflies* as “an animated realism film.”

A realism film employs naturalistic settings and straightforward narrative structures. Actors and actresses may be amateurs, and cinematography takes a naturalistic setting, for instance, taking camera shots for long durations and avoiding editing cuts. *Grave of the Fireflies* uses many cinematic approaches to realist film in order to suggest a sense of a *true story*. It pays remarkable attention to detailed motions and daily activities. The director even uses an amateur voice actress, a five-year-old girl, to play the protagonist’s baby sister. Naturalistic camera settings, ordinary characters, and common

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20 From Robert Ebert’s interview in the DVD of *Grave of the Fireflies*, and Napier (2005) also has the similar view.
daily activities allow viewers to easily associate with and feel sympathy for the protagonists. Paradoxically, anime images, with a sense of flatness, distance viewers from the brutality and violence of the war scenes. As Napier (2001) argues, “if it were a work of live-action film, it would have been burdened by the weight of special effects, violence, and unbearable trauma” (p. 167). Because anime simplifies representation and dehumanizes its characters, it allows viewers’ imaginations more space to play. Viewers can more easily merge into the characters and narratives while being in a psychological buffer zone that dissolves the intensive trauma and depression.

When Jameson (1991) describes “nostalgia film,” he argues that it should not be understood as a matter of “old-fashioned representation of historical content,” but an approach to “the past through stylistic connotation, which conveys pastness by the glossy qualities of the image” (p. 20, emphasis in original). In Grave of the Fireflies, there is no discussion of the causes of the war, no broader explanation for the children’s suffering. Iris Chang (1997), the author of The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II, points out that Japan has a tendency to shift the burden of responsibility for a devastating war onto the Japanese military and government, canceling out Japan’s responsibility for Pearl Harbor and its ten-years aggression against China. Consequently, many Japanese, including Japan’s government, continue to treat the aggression and war crimes as the isolated acts of individual soldiers or “even as events that simply did not occur” (p. 200). Grave of the Fireflies does not suggest any political or social issues of history but provides a nostalgic imagery of a present view—a view of Japan as a victimized subject during World War II (Napier, 2001).
While this work provides a present view regarding the past, *Grave of the Fireflies* has been valued and appraised in many Asian countries that were invaded by Japan as well the United States. In other words, this work does not arouse much controversy regarding “political correctness,” but presents a popular pastness that is accepted by audiences from different nationalities. Through the dehumanizing nature of anime characters, the superflat anime aesthetic, and the past as nostalgic imagery, this anime alienates the past and displaces its viewers from its referential historical event (World War II), inviting intensified emotional experiences with the play of nostalgic signifiers. This anime is thereby driven back inside a psychological space that reconstructs a sense of pastness as its particular style.

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21 Film critic Ernest Rister compares the anime *Grave of the Fireflies* to the film *Schindler List* (1993), whereas Chang and many Chinese activists urge Hollywood to produce a film in order to awake the general public about the forgotten Holocaust in Nanking and Japan’s purposeful ignorance of its war crimes.
Figure 10: Grave of the Fireflies
An image presents full of depression and hopeless emotion.
©1988 Akiyuki Nosaka/Shinchosha Co. Image courtesy Central Park Media

Figure 11: Grave of the Fireflies
An image of the war scene.
©1988 Akiyuki Nosaka/Shinchosha Co. Image courtesy Central Park Media
The Schizophrenic and Anime Subjects

The schizophrenic

Jameson (1991) uses “schizophrenia” as a metaphor to describe the decentred and fragmentary sense for postmodern subjects. He explains that his use of Lacan’s account of “schizophrenia” has nothing to do with a clinical diagnosis, but offers “a suggestive aesthetic model” (p. 26). He argues that human beings used to think (or were constructed) that they were unique individuals, whereas this postmodern model of schizophrenia wipes out this former illusion, reducing individuals to fragmentary, random, and disjunctive material signifiers. The devastation of history and the dysfunctional signifying chain result in “the schizophrenic” as postmodern subjects (p. 26). First, the conventional sense of the subject is the result of a temporal unification of past and future with one’s present, formed through the function of language. The conventional sense of the subject involves a unique personality, individuality, and private identity on the basis of linear narratives (past, present, and future), simultaneously processing the function of language and being formed through language. However, due to the loss of a sense of linear time (both at the public and personal levels), a postmodern subject is unable to structure a unique self with a concrete, stable personal identity. Jameson (1998) calls this postmodern feature “the death of the subject” (p. 5). He states, “if we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life” (p. 27).
Second, Jameson attributes this postmodern model of schizophrenia to “a breakdown in the signifying chain,” which is contrary to the former linear relationship between the signifier and signified that constitutes a meaning (p. 25). Postmodern schizophrenia features a series of unrelated signifiers, suggesting the mode of “depthlessness” where signifiers do not represent anything deep. In addition, postmodern pastiche and nostalgia transform the past into signifiers for the present, intensifying the fragmentary sense, random relationships, and the disjunction of history. As a result, a postmodern subject, the schizophrenic, cannot organize events and experiences into a coherent linear structure, but is loaded with random and fragmentary pieces of present time. The subject is thus reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers and functions as series of fragments in the present time.

Neon Genesis Evangelion and postmodern subjects

Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995-1997) plays a significant role in anime industry, history, and discourse because it has been continuously discussed, debated, challenged, and referenced since the series began. This series consists of twenty-six TV episodes and two feature films, Death and Rebirth (1997) and The End of Evangelion (1997). Regardless of its commercial success, this work is groundbreaking because it radically subverts many conventions of popular anime.

Evangelion begins with a classical storyline of mecha anime. This genre of anime often depicts the combination of human beings and giant robots, with a human inside guiding the powerful robotic body. Mysterious alien creatures called Angels were attacking the Earth, and only few young people, including the male protagonist Shinji
Ikari, a fourteen-year-olds schoolboy, could synergize grant robots called EVA to fight Angels. However, this clichéd storyline is subverted by a play of a large amount of religious signifiers, mostly Christian and Judaic, and complex psychoanalytic content. The religious texts and myths are devices to add visual effects and de-familiarize the conventional mecha genre. According to the assistant director of Evangelion, Kazuya Tsurumaki, “we thought it would be mysterious because Christianity is an uncommon religion in Japan. None of the staff who worked on Eva are Christians. There is no actual Christian meaning in the show. We just thought the visual symbols of Christianity look cool” (Jamieson, 2005). As Napier (2002) asserts, “the narrative’s actual execution completely defamiliarizes this rather hackneyed story line” (p. 424).

As it would not be adequate to summarize this series in several paragraphs, I concentrate on how Evangelion presents a problematic view of a unified reality from two aspects: (1) the overly loaded signifiers that evoke a fragmentary and disjuncture sense for its viewers, and (2) the schizophrenic as a symptom for all protagonists, as “postmodern subjects,” who lose touch with reality.

In the film of The End of Evangelion, when Shinji’s “ego” was almost destructed during the final fight, the director Hideaki Anno cut from anime images to live action scenes.22 Live action segments, including ordinary daily subject matters such as sky, cars, trains, and urban buildings, began with the play of music Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring (the English title of Bach’s catata). Contrary to general viewers’ expectation of an

22 In Neon Genesis Evangelion, Shinji’s “ego” symbolizes individual subjects of humankind. To the end of this serious, Shinji’s defense of Angel’s attacks becomes a process that destroys Shinji’s ego, and it is revealed that a powerful group who controls the earth believes that humankind will be “evangelized,” and “all souls will be at peace” if Shinji’s ego is destructed.
exciting final fight in anime, the director Anno presents static camera shots of daily objects in live action with voiceover of Shinji and the female protagonists Rei:

(Live action: Crowed streets, people are walking in slow motion.)

Shinji (voiceover): *Hey, what are dreams?*

(Live action: A packed movie theater with screen texts: *Does it feel good?*)

Shinji (voiceover): *I don't understand... I don't understand reality.*

(Live action: Crowed streets)

Rei (voiceover): *You can’t bridge the gap between your own truth and the others’?*

Shinji (voiceover): *I don't know where to find happiness.*

Rei (voiceover): *So you only find happiness in your dreams.*

(Live action: Crowed streets, camera slowly zooms in and focuses on three actresses who dressed as the three female protagonists, Misato, Rei, and Asuka)

Shinji (voiceover): *Then, this is not reality? This is a world where no one exists?*

Rei (voiceover): *No. It is only a dream.*

Shinji (voiceover): *Then I don’t exist here either.*

Rei (voiceover): *This is a convenient fabrication that attempts to change reality.*

Shinji (voiceover): *Is that wrong?*

Rei (voiceover): *You were using fantasy to escape reality.*

Shinji (voiceover): *Why can’t I dream that I am along?*

Rei (voiceover): *That is not a dream. That is a substitute of reality.*

(Live action: Audiences seem to be complaining in the packed theater.)
(Live action: Cut to an empty theater)

Shinji (voiceover): So, where is my dream?

Rei (voiceover): It is the continuation of reality.

Shinji (voiceover): But where is my reality?

Rei (voiceover): It is at the end of your dream.

(Flashing Japanese texts and images, including fans’ graffiti and emails such as “everybody should just die” or “go dead, Anno!”)

This scene, like many others in Evangelion, is loaded with signifiers—images, texts, scripts, voice, and music. These various forms of signifiers can overwhelm its viewers who dare to interpret the meaning of them. First, it contains live-action montages and flashing texts while its viewers are accustomed to anime images. The dreary footage of ordinary objects and daily views become a strong contrast to the vividly rendered graphics of giant robots and an apocalyptic world. The first shot of a packed theater appears with the screen texts “does it feel good?” to make viewers immediately wonder to whom this question is addressed. Viewers are vulnerably distracted from the narrative and forced to process unrelated signifiers simultaneously. The packed theater looks like a mirror that reflects the viewing subjects, and “does it feel good?” seems to be a dialogue between the images and them. Viewers thus may suddenly acknowledge their problematic position, which shifts from a position of looking to a position of being looked at. Their subject position is thereby questioned and their reality is interfered with.

Although Napier (2002) argues that it is the animation medium that contains the qualities of the unreal to reflect the real, Evangelion does not simply stop at the point that anime
reflects the real. By using more than six forms of signifiers (animation, live-action footage, texts, scripts, human voice, music, etc.) simultaneously, *Evangelion* no longer processes a coherent universe of anime fantasy, but is possessed by pure signifiers that intensify the schizophrenic sense for its viewers.

Resulting from the postmodern model of schizophrenia, there are now only fragmented and decentered subjects described by Jameson. Increasingly in postmodern visual culture, the real has become something to be played with, questioned, and ultimately mistrusted. The protagonist’s confusion about dreams, reality, fantasy, and his own truth in relation to others presents a postmodern subject’s dissociation of himself from his environment and deterioration of personal identity. The apocalyptic view in *Evangelion*, or the “utopia” for the protagonist Shinji, is “the sea of LCL,” “the primordial soup of life” where individuals’ shapes no longer exist, “an ambiguous world where it is impossible to tell where you end and other people start,” and “a fragile world where you exist everywhere, and thus exist nowhere.”

The advance of technology and its increasing capabilities destruct both material and spiritual realms. Napier (2002) argues that we are in a new state in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer screen or television. Machines increasingly dominate human bodies, construct, and ultimately interfere with social reality, and we are in a world in which reality and fantasy fuse into techno-surrealism and nothing is ultimately “knowable.” Without synergizing the grant robots EVA, Shinji cannot be a complete subject. The vulnerable adolescent protagonist can only make connections with others or “reality”—to identify the self—by wielding powerful body armors—machines.

23 Quoted from Rei’s script in *The End of Evangelion*. 
Thus, machines embody individuals but simultaneously schizophrenize their subjects. *Evangelion* describes the postmodern subjects’ strong sense of the schizophrenic, a notion of identity as fluctuating, in which machines are the most significant embodiment of subjects.

*Representation and Anime Depthless Signifiers*

If [media images] fascinate us so much it is not because they are sites of the production of meaning and representation…. it is on the contrary because they are sites of the *disappearance* of meaning and representation, sites in which we are caught quite apart from any judgment of reality, thus sites of a fatal strategy of denegation of the real and of the reality principle. (My emphasis, Baudrillard, 1987, p. 28)

*Representation* suggests a relation between two things (e.g. x represents y), and it often indicates an arbitrary linkage between surface qualities and repetitive meaning. A conventional view of visual representation can be considered fourfold:

1. When an image represents x, this x must exist prior to that image.
2. The obstacle of representation is that an image can never fully represent x (an image *cannot be* x). An image can never accurately and objectively mirror the thing represented, but only functions as the mediation for viewers to experience and perceive certain viewpoints (Cavallaro, 2001).
3. When an image represents x, this image is conceived as a certain determinacy of meaning and validity of interpretation since representation is commonly
understood as “let’s agree to represent this with that used in this way” (Mitchell, 1990, p. 13).

4. The above status of representation can be attributed to a long-standing search for the Real, which sustains a Western ideology of images (Cavallaro, 2001). Conventional understandings of images as a system of representation is becoming challenged because of its struggle to adequately examine anime and contemporary visual culture. First, it presupposes a prior existence to images—whether materially or conceptually—that may lead us to an endless search of the origin, the Truth, or the Real beyond representation. Images thus are positioned into a second order, as surface qualities to something deep that is concealed and revealed by representation. Second, representation is intimately connected with the conception of repetition. In other words, representation only acquires meaning to the extent that it may be repeated in society. Arguably, today’s images becomes a mere simulacrum—a pure simulation bearing no relation whatsoever to reality—“through which representation had passed on its way to unqualified simulation” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 305). Images are possessed not only through the reflections and masks of reality but also as part of the real rather than representation of the real. Finally, Cavallaro (2001) argues that realist techniques of imaging conceal the process of production so as to mask the artificiality of images and to encourage viewers to believe that representation reflects the world. Thus images assert themselves as an objective and transparent depiction of the world and serve as a vital means to support cultural ideology. Representation becomes a problem when images blind us and conceal reality. Technologies perfect images to the point where the real and
unreal cannot be distinguished in contemporary visual culture. Nevertheless, a new
consciousness of “seeing is no longer believing” is formed. Viewers may not be as naïve
and blinded as they used to be, and situating representation of being reflections and
masks of reality as part of ideological construction simply ignores that fact that viewers
may be more sophisticated and complex, and overlooks their ambivalent reactions to
images (Eisenhauer, 2006).

Jameson’s depthlessness and Baudrillard’s images as simulacra provide a
postmodern view of visual culture where a new economy of signifiers—a world of mass-
mediated commodification—entails and consequently promotes an altered attitude toward
representation (Stam, 2000). The anime medium demonstrates a challenge of
conventional understandings of representation. An anime image does not automatically
entail a prior existence. Anime images are not intended to accurately mirror the world,
but rather actively construct a world or multiple worlds for viewers.

Anime images do not serve as masks to blind viewers from the artificiality of
images; they do not claim transparency, objectivity, and validity. Viewers of anime
acknowledge the artificiality of images and are conscious of the construction of anime
images. As a result, viewers may be freed from the determinacy of meaning in anime
signifiers. For instance, anime characters do not represent human bodies, but rather
constantly challenge our understanding of “human.” Anime characters’ gender does not
entail a biological sex, but rather persistently shapes and alters our understanding of
“gender.” Whereas images of representational media ask us to reflect upon the
relationship between what we see and what we already know, anime images disrupt this
process, constantly and consistently challenging the relationship between what we see and what we know, inquiring into the potential of what is not-yet-known.

Summary

Anime harbors a positive power that denies the original and the copy, the real and the referential. When Deleuze (1990) describes moving images and simulacra, he claims, “there is no longer any privileged point of view except that the object is common to all points of views. There is no possible hierarchy, no second, no third, …The same and the similar no longer have an essence expect as simulated, that is as expressing the functioning of the simulacrum” (emphasis in original, p. 262). Anime demonstrates this claim. Anime images have the involvement of artificial resurrection. Through this artificial involvement, anime images construct their own logic as simulacra. They guarantee a world where no original is beyond representation and no authentic meaning exists behind pure signifiers. The viewing experience is information-based, not narrative-oriented, and the depthlessness promises plural viewpoints for its spectators. Endlessly recycled signifiers as pastiche reduce history to a stereotyped and clichéd set of images that pander to nostalgia. The rupture of linear time and a signifying chain shatters postmodern subjects in a schizophrenic dispersal. Relying on the visual depthlessness, anime manifests postmodern pastiche and schizophrenia, arousing seductive yet productive pleasure for its viewers, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

ANIME PLEASURES AS A PLAYGROUND OF SEXUALITY, POWER, AND RESISTANCE

The depthless quality and non-transparent artificiality of anime images challenge conventional understandings of representation. The postmodern features discussed in the previous chapter, depthlessness, pastiche, and a decentred and schizophrenic sense for subjects, I argue, evolve into a specific kind of pleasure for viewers and participants. This chapter pays attention to the pleasure of viewing anime and pleasures involved in anime-related practices, arguing that anime pleasure enables anime otaku’s playful practices and engenders an imperceptible politics in viewers’ own favor. First, I briefly review theories of pleasure and concentrate on Foucault’s (1990a) *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: Introduction* that connects pleasure to power and sexuality. Second, by examining two anime works, *Fooly Cooly* (2003) and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1999-2001), I argue that anime images embody the pleasure of evasion and the pleasure of transgression as a form of resistance to regulatory power and normative sexuality. Evasive and transgressive pleasures empower anime otaku to go beyond image consumption, actively and constantly changing, manipulating, and subverting anime images in their practices,
such as creating amateur manga, peer-to-peer networks and websites, and participating anime conventions and cosplay (costume-role-play). The anime otaku’s practices demonstrate de-assurance of their supposed identities and engender an imperceptible but playful politics that strays from social structures in which they reside. This chapter argues that anime pleasures offer an opportunity to develop not an escape from ideological constructions, but new ways of creative production and resistance in the practitioners’ own favor.

Pleasure, Power, and Sexuality

What is pleasure?

The psychoanalytic pleasure. For Freud (1914, 2003), the pursuit of pleasure is what motivates the subject. Freud argues that human civilization is built upon two fundamental principles: the reality principle and the pleasure principle. The reality principle deals with basic human needs that reply on social and economic facts, such as looking for food, clothing, and shelters. The reality principle obtains its social and economical stability through laws, regulations, norms, and prohibitions. The pleasure principle depends upon a series of feelings through which the subject follows the instincts of sexuality and aggression to pursue whatever feels good (Kazlev, 2004). However, to maintain the social and economical stability, the subject sometimes has to counter his or her pursuit of pleasurable experiences. According to Freud, the subject thus subordinates the pleasure principle to the reality principle and turns his or her energy to produce something socially and economically useful. He argues that the subordination of
pleasurable experiences is a process of repression that results in human civilization (Felluga, 2002).

Pleasure and jouissance. Lacan (1966, 2002) reworks Freud’s concepts, using the term “jouissance” to refer to a transcendence of “the pleasure principle.” Jouissance is a French word that may be translated literally as “pleasure” or “enjoyment.” It connotes the enjoyment of the surplus value of property and rights. In psychoanalytic and feminist discourses, this word is particularly used to refer to sensuous and sexual gratification (such as orgasm) as a temporary fulfillment that can be used and enjoyed, but cannot be exchanged by individuals (Wolfreys, 2004). In other words, jouissance is linked to the enjoyment of certain kinds of surplus values and these values are not interchangeable.

While Freudian pleasure depends on the subordination of laws, regulations, norms, and prohibitions, Lacanian jouissance always comes from the transgression of them. According to Dylan Evans (1996),

The pleasure principle functions as a limit of enjoyment; it is a law which commands the subject to “enjoy as little as possible.” At the same time, the subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go beyond the pleasure principle. However, the result of transgressing…is…pain… The very prohibition creates the desire to transgress it, and jouissance is therefore fundamentally transgressive. (emphasis in the original p. 91-92)

Roland Barthes (1975) also discusses plaisir (translated into pleasure) and jouissance (translated into bliss) in relation to reading and writing texts. He refers to a text of
pleasure as “the text that comes from culture and does not break with it,” and claims that it “is linked to a comfortable practice of reading” (p. 14). A text of pleasure comforts and contents readers by its stable point of view, and satisfies readers’ convention-derived expectations. On the contrary, a text of jouissance “imposes a state of loss,” discomforting readers by unsettling readers’ historical, cultural, and psychological assumptions (p. 14). A text of jouissance evokes a crisis of the consistency of readers’ tastes, values, memories, and a breakdown of readers’ relation with language. For Barthes, pleasure involves the recognition, confirmation, and negotiation of the social order and the subject, while jouissance is an enjoyment of evasion through which the subject escapes from social and self controls. Therefore, pleasurable texts reaffirm their meaning but texts of jouissance are an escape from their meaning, which is always a byproduct of social processes, and reproduces social orders for the reading subjects (Fiske, 1989).

*Aesthetic pleasure.* In modernist art theory, aesthetic pleasure is characterized as a unique state of experiences obtained through works of art. It is suggested that aesthetic pleasure involves a disinterested and distanced state of mind. According to Steven Connor (1992), “For aesthetic pleasure to be valuable… it must be disinterested, and consequently, universal pleasure; this is to say pleasure without individual profit, advantage, or gratification” (p. 203). In order for one to be in a disinterested state, this kind of pleasurable experience cannot be grounded in the subject’s personal desire, needs, or susceptibilities (Levinson, 1996). Contrary to the psychoanalytic pleasure, aesthetic pleasure resides in an art object or a communal experience, and it should not subordinate
to the real world status (social and economic facts) of these objects or experiences.

Although individuals cannot experience each other’s pleasure from a psychoanalytic view, aesthetic pleasure always seeks the acquisition of knowledge from particular kinds of objects and/or common experiences. Therefore, unlike psychoanalytic pleasure that is individual, personal, and incommunicable, aesthetic pleasure ought to be communal and constantly looks for a universal ground.

Pleasure and Power

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: Introduction*, Foucault (1990a) investigates the relationship between pleasure and power through discourses of sexuality. For Foucault, pleasure resides at least in two contradictory forms of power: one comes from actions and practices that exercise power, especially power that is attributed to surveillance; another comes from actions and practices that escape from that power. He writes,

> The pleasure that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light; and on the other hand, the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it. The power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing; and opposite it, power asserting itself in the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting. … These attractions, these evasions, these circular incitements have traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries not to be crossed, but *perpetual spirals of power and pleasure.* (emphasis in the original, p. 45)
The first kind of pleasure that exerts power over others and/or over oneself is present in Feminist critiques of Hollywood cinema. For example, Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1979, 1999) analyzes the patriarchal desire behind Hollywood cinema through a psychoanalytic approach. She argues that Hollywood cinema effectively constructs a male voyeuristic position that enjoys watching fetishized female bodies. Although Mulvey situates her argument in psychoanalysis through which desire becomes a key to initiate the pleasure of images, the same instance can be examined through a Foucauldian lens that centers on pleasure and power. The example in her argument, Hollywood cinema, engenders the (visual) pleasure that comes of excising a patriarchal power over the object “woman” by means of cinematic codes. This kind of pleasure to which Mulvey refers comes from operating power over the subordinated, just as the male voyeuristic gaze does on female bodies in Hollywood cinema.

On the other hand, pleasure not only exists in the viewing experiences that exercise power over others, it also resides in the practices that exercise the patriarchal power over the female self. A female subject may enjoy being looked at, and thus she may be obsessed with objectifying herself—wearing high heels, dieting for a slim body, and having plastic surgeries—for the pleasure of being looked at by disciplining and subordinating herself to the patriarchal power. Mulvey’s approach to Hollywood classical cinema exemplifies the kind of pleasure that relates to power.

Pleasure not only embodies itself in its engagement with power but also engenders resistance to power, functioning as a strategic utility and a floating unity in the ongoing interplay of power and resistance. Contrary to the previous kind of pleasure relating itself
to power, the second pleasure, according to Foucault, comes from evading or opposing that power. It is this kind of pleasure in relation to anime images and practices to which this chapter pays attention. This kind of pleasure is commonly related to evasive and transgressive actions and practices, as resistance to regulatory power. Foucault’s power and resistance do not present a binary or an all-encompassing opposition between the ruler and the ruled as Marxists suggest. Power is not something that certain institutions or agencies can hold, acquire, or share. Power only appears when it is exercised. Power is from below, from a matrix of relations, and thus “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95). Foucault (1990a) argues that resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. Power depends on “a multiplicity of points of resistance” (p. 95). Resistance, for Foucault, is always a plurality. Pleasure and power are always each other’s condition of existence, and they rely on each other to proliferate themselves. Therefore, pleasure may be one of the most effective aids to learning and the most direct stimulus to de-stabilize power relations.

Pleasure and sexuality

Considering sexuality as a discursive formation in power relations, Foucault (1990a) claims that “the rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures” (p. 157). Foucault raises three important points that are worth discussing further: (1) the deployment of sexuality, (2) the regime of sex-desire, and (3) the counterattack through bodies and pleasures.

The deployment of sexuality. For Foucault, because modern society demands healthy and productive workers, the discourse of sexuality was developed in order to
discipline, shape, and regulate bodies to be productive and healthy. He argues that sexuality has been deployed as a truth claim that saturates heterosexual norms through which the productivity of bodies is ensured for the subjects. Foucault claims,

> Between each of us and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness. (Foucault, 1990a, p. 77)

Sexuality becomes a truth for us, and we as “the sexed subjects” can only find who we are through our sex. Issues of our identity and subjectivity cannot be detached from sexuality. Sexuality structures the grand binary system of the normal/pervert, male/female, adult/child, and heterosexual/homosexual as a means to discipline and regulate bodies.

*The regime of sex-desire.* Psychoanalysis proposes that human desire is driven by the inherent lack of human psyche, and human thoughts and activities regarding sex are structured by that desire. To find the truth of oneself, one must investigate his or her very desire driven by this lack. Hence, desire has a psychological depth and can be latent or manifest, apparent or hidden, or repressed or sublimated. Desire expresses what one really wants, who he or she really is, and one’s true subjectivity (Davidson, 2001).

Contrary to psychoanalysis, Foucault argues that liberating desire cannot free us from the deployment of sexuality; rather, it *reaffirms* the regime of sex-desire that insists upon sexual difference and structures a binary system of sexuality. Judith Butler (1999) argues that the regime of sex-desire functions Oedipally to induce lack and desire in
relation to a sexually different other. Desire comes from the projection of an ideal other onto a different sex, and thus the concept of “sex-desire” presupposes sexual difference through which a subject’s desire follows the lack inherently in his or her sex both biologically and culturally. McWhortor (1999) argues that the history of sexuality is a history of the elaboration of “desire” as a central concept and as the basis of human identities and cultures. She says,

The history of sexuality is a history of the elaboration of desire as a concept and as the basis of human identities and culture. If we make desire central to our analyses, critiques, and political activities regarding sexual networks of power, we run the risk of simply reproducing the structures and values that hurt us and of missing opportunities to create new possibilities for ourselves. (p. 176)

For Foucault and McWhortor, sex-desire may not be the cause of sexuality, but a byproduct of the deployment of sexuality. Sex-desire also presents how sexual identities have been created in discourses and imposed upon bodies in order to discipline and regulate bodies.

*The counterattack through bodies and pleasures.* Because the notion of sex-desire persists in a heterosexual norm, efforts on liberating and investigating it only reinforce the regime and reproduce the same structure of sexuality. Foucault suggests a shift of attention from desire to pleasure that has not been touched by normalized discourses. For Foucault, pleasure is a discursive and intensified surface operation that unfolds social constraints and the regulatory power of human sexuality. He claims,
I advance this term [pleasure] because it appears to me to escape those medical and naturalistic connotations that this notion of desire bears within itself.…. Desire is not an event, but a permanence of the subject, on which all this psychologico-medical armature is grafted. The term “pleasure,” on the other hand, is free of use, almost devoid of meaning. There is no “pathology” of pleasure, no “abnormal” pleasure. It is an event “outside the subject,” or at the limit of the subject, in that something which is neither of the body nor of the soul, which is neither inside nor outside, in short, a notion not assigned and not assignable. (Cited from Davidson, 2001)

McWhorter (1999) also argues that because “normalizing discourses have not colonized pleasure as they have colonized desire, pleasure may constitute a counterattack against the normalized power that constitutes sexual norms” (p. 184). For Foucault and McWhorter, abandoning the term desire frees their discourses from the deployment of sexuality, allowing them to subvert the current structure of power. Pleasure is a more useful to counterattack to normalized sexuality since it does not directly imply a causal relationship between the subject’s sex and his or her psyche.

Butler (1999) reworks Foucault’s concept, asserting that pleasure signals a moment to free ourselves from our time as a tactical reversal to counter the grids of power that deploy sexuality. Pleasure can induce the subject to experience a temporality outside of the constructions, providing a possible path to the dissolution of the subject.

Butler (1999) questions Foucault’s natural position on “bodies and pleasures” in her *Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures*. She argues that although Foucault refutes the synthesis of “sex-desire,” the very idea of “sex-desire” in fact must be presupposed in order for bodies and pleasures to become a tactical reversal under the name of sexuality in its regulatory sense.
During a pleasurable experience, the subject’s body may be momentarily released from its social definition and control, presenting an expression almost devoid of meaning. Thus, this experience may transcend the limits of meaning. Foucault is more interested in pleasures that transgress and evolve into something unanticipated or even unintelligible.

His account of pleasure as a temporal experience contains the potential to resist regulatory power and offers possibilities to evade meaning and to transgress normalized body discourses. More specifically, in opposition to psychoanalysis, which confines subjects through the linkage between sex and desire, Foucault asserts that human beings can invent pleasure(s) that free them from regulatory power and normative sexuality.

The Pleasure of Viewing Anime

Contemporary visual culture deliberately deploys pleasures that embody power relations in society, and I suggest that studies of pleasure may serve as an alternate yet effective starting point to approach visual culture. If we make efforts to articulate the pleasure of viewing and accompanied activities, we should be able to understand power relations in contemporary visual culture more adequately.

Unlike abstract terms such as ideology, desire, or fantasy that always look for something beyond the visual, pleasure closely involves practices and activities, such as viewing, reading, writing, or artmaking (of course it also exists in eating, drinking, and having sex). A Foucauldian analysis of pleasure does not intend to unveil something behind images, such as ideology, desire, or fantasy, but to understand the effects and functions of pleasure that is accompanied by actions and practices. In addition, Foucault argues that taking pleasure as the center point has an advantage: it can never be exhausted.
because pleasurable experiences can never be fully defined and articulated. Not only does pleasure multiply, distort, and overflow meanings, definitions, values, and classifications, but everyone has a potential to invent his or her own pleasure. Pleasure is always creative and productive, though it may not be critical. It has no means to an end and it may destabilize regulatory power through practices.

I propose that the pleasure of viewing anime is threefold. First, like aesthetic pleasure, the pleasure of viewing anime has a common ground—anime works. The pleasure of viewing anime is both individual and communal. Second, anime works often present various themes related to sexuality (J. S. Chen, 2002; Craig, 2000; Desser, 2003; Drazen, 2003; Lamarre, 2006; Ruh, 2006). Thus the pleasure of anime often deals with the deployment of sexuality. Third, the pleasure of anime is often associated with resistance, since anime is always situated in a youth subculture that evokes a politics different from the mainstream (Brehm, 2002; Lamarre, 2004). On the basis of these three propositions, I focus on the pleasure of evasion and the pleasure of transgression to discuss how sexuality is played and enjoyed (instead of being constructed and normalized) through the anime FLCL and Revolutionary Girl Utena.

The pleasure of evasion in FLCL

The pleasure of evasion signals a moment through which the subjects may experience a sense of being “out of control.” John Fiske (1989) argues,

Anything out of control is always a threat, and always calls up moral, legal, and aesthetic powers to discipline it. The signs of the subordinate out of control terrify
the force of order…they demonstrate how escaping social control, even momentarily, produce a sense of freedom. (p. 69)

The pleasure of evasion is a temporal escape from social control and is often expressed in excessive and illogical behaviors. Through a sense of “being-out-of-control,” the pleasure of evasion challenges the social order structured by regulatory power, and extends possibilities that are not confined within everyday life. In the following, I argue that *FLCL* provides possibilities of temporal escape for its viewers by centering on a meaningless play of signifiers and on an overwhelming sense of bodies.

*The meaningless play of signifiers.* The title, *FLCL* (pronounced as “furi kuri” or “fooly cooly”), purposefully refers to a void of meaning with which viewers cannot identify. Like the title, signifiers in *FLCL* are not intended to signify anything in particular; rather, they are often displaced in context to condemn the process of meaning-making. Meaningless play empowers its viewers to momentarily evade the meaning structured by social context in which the viewers reside.

The story of *FLCL* begins as follows: An ordinary boy, Naota, lives in an ordinary town, and his life is not exciting until all of a sudden extraordinary things begin to happen. The ordinary town where the protagonists live seems to be ordinary, yet viewers immediately see a giant iron located in the town, which occasionally spews out steam and smoke (see figure 12). When a giant iron is purposefully set to be *ordinary* and *normal* as a city hall in a town, the logic of social order is displaced by illogic imaginary. Thus *FLCL* brings viewers into a realm where the ordinary/extraordinary, logical/illogical, and normal/insane cannot be distinguished.
The random storyline continues. A mysterious girl, Haruko, appears on her Vespa and smashes Naota over his head with a bass guitar, causing a large horn to grow on his forehead. Thereafter, robotic beings and some miscellaneous phallic-shaped items emerge from his forehead. These illogical events continue to happen to this ordinary boy. A robotic being with a television face comes out from his head and later becomes a housemaid in his family. His brother’s girlfriend, Mamimi, who finds consolation in an actively affectionate relationship with Naota while the brother is away in the United States, (mis)recognizes this robot as God (see figure 13). She also calls it “Canti,” after a character in a video game she constantly plays. The mysterious events never seem to have an impact on the inhabitants, and they do not function as developments for later plots. In *FLCL*, the only logic is the consistency of the illogical, and the illogical is normal. As Naota remarks frequently in the series, “Everything is normal. Nothing is happening” (Imaishi, 2003).

Signifiers in *FLCL* are void because they are displaced—they are taken out of the context of normal scenarios, or they are muddled in order to strip them of common sense. A giant iron located in an ordinary town is a displacement of an ordinary object. A housemaid robot with a TV head, wings, and a halo (which is an antenna) is a random play of signifiers. Because signifiers in *FLCL* are disassociated from their social context, viewers are freed from their regulatory meanings. The meaningless play of signifiers opens possibilities to be out-of-control, inducing viewers’ pleasures that evade social orders, and thus, even momentarily, subverting regulatory power and social norms.
The overwhelming senses of bodies. The pleasure of evasion not only comes from a breakdown of the signifying chain and an escape of regulatory meanings, but also from an overwhelming emphasis on bodies. First, loud rock and roll music and fast paced montages enliven viewers and excite their visual and aural senses in FLCL. The director Kayzuya notes that FLCL is an “imagination being made physical and tangible, just as it is for me when I take whatever is in my head and draw it” (citied in Ruh, 2006, p. 141). Throughout the series, music plays a significant role in initiating viewing pleasure. The energetic rock soundtrack gets louder and picks up speed during the action scenes, and images, texts, and dialogues flash too fast for anyone to catch them. This emphasis on bodily senses makes linear interpretations impossible; it disrupts the process of meaning-making and cognition. As a result, the overwhelming bodily senses frees viewers from the linear process of meaning-making.

Second, with the enhancement of aural and visual senses, FLCL boosts viewers’ pleasure by concentrating on bodies. Fiske (1989) argues that pleasure is concerned with bodies, not the bodies of individuals, but with the body discipline—“the materiality of life that underlies and precedes individuality, spirituality, ideology, and society” (p. 83). FLCL uses many close-ups to detail images of bodies and to knead bodies like dough, breaking them into angles, volumes, or curves. This pleasure of looking at bodies in FLCL might be taken as scopophilia—a pleasure human beings take in seeing others as objects of their sexual desire. Viewers can sense the control of a voyeuristic position through many low-angle shots and many close-ups of female body parts. Many camera shots of female characters, such as Mamimi and Haruko, are taken from low angles,
showing their short skirts and the underneath. When two police officers try to gaze at Haruko’s crotch, both her body and the officers’ gaze are clearly illustrated. However, Haruko has a full awareness of their gaze, and she is in control while being looked at (she controlled what to show and how to show her body). In this particular instance, viewers may not experience a sense of objectifying Haruko’s body; rather, they experience the juxtaposition between the pleasures of looking and being-looked-at—the voyeuristic pleasure and the power position that initiates this pleasure. Being-looked-at is no longer situated as a vulnerable state. While viewers are able to gaze at Haruko from low-angle camera shots through which her body indulges viewers’ pleasure, she is always looking back at viewers from a higher position. Therefore, the pleasure of viewing FLCL is not simply scopophilia structured by the inherent lack based on sexual desire. Rather, it is a pleasure that temporally engenders viewers to escape from the “body discipline.”

Third, because anime characters are not real humans, but an idea of human beings, they are not confined by the body disciplines that materially precede social orders. Characters in FLCL can have robots and objects such as guitars physically growing from their bodies. Thus anime permits a greater range of alternative forms of bodies through which viewers may momentarily experience outside of disciplinary bodies, rather than being an avenue of passive control by desire.

The pleasure of evasion comes from being temporarily out-of-control, which is engendered by void signifiers and overwhelming senses of bodies. The void signifiers break down the relationship between images and their repeated meanings in society. When signifiers are not confined to repeated meanings, the viewing experience become
unpredictable and fluid. The overwhelming bodily senses disrupt the process of viewers’ regulatory interpretations, and thus the viewing experience allows viewers to call into question of the body discipline, providing opportunities for viewers to challenge social control and norms.

Figure 12. A scenario of *FLCL*
A giant iron is located in an ordinary town.
© 2001 Studio GAINAX /KGI
Figure 13. The robotic God in *FLCL*.  
© 2001 Studio GAINAX /KGI

Figure 14. The powerful position of Haruko.  
© 2001 Studio GAINAX /KGI
Transgression is defined as the process of “cross-over,” which is moving from “an ordered rational state to an unordered and irrational state” (Lusty, 2005, p. 1). Transgression is an action that demands limits for its very existence. Foucault (1998) argues that transgression not only presupposes limits, but also constitutes them by overcoming them and momentarily opening them up to the limitless. Hence, transgression is threefold: (1) It presupposes and reaffirms its limits; (2) it does not present a victory over limits, but opens up possibilities of contestation, testing the boundaries of limits; and (3) limits and transgression reply to each other. Transgression reveals limits as a flashlight in the darkness; both transgression and limits are visible only at the moment when transgression crosses limits.

Like many other anime, Revolutionary Girl Utena (1999-2001) consists of three forms: a manga, a television series of 38 episodes, and a film, known in English as Adolescence of Utena (Kunihiko, 2001). An opening script begins Revolutionary Girl Utena in every TV episode:

*Narrator: Once upon a time....

...There was a princess grieving over the death of her mother and father. Before this princess appeared a prince traveling upon a white horse. His appearance gallant, and his smile gentle, the prince enveloped the princess in the scent of roses and wiped away her tears.

*Prince: Little one bearing up alone under grief, please lose not thy strength and nobility when thou grows.*
Prince: As a token of this day, please retain this.

Utena: Pray, shall we meet once more?

Prince: This ring should guide thee to me.

Narrator: But because of the strength of her admiration for the prince, the princess made up her mind to become a prince herself!

(Pause)

Narrator: But was [it] such a good idea? (Web resource, Sato, 2003).

A gentle prince traveling with a rose ring, a female protagonist’s journey to look for her prince, and a dreamy and pink-colored visual style code this anime to be a conventional fairy-tale romance that implicitly tells girls how to live their lives happily. However, Revolutionary Girl Utena deliberately structures these conventional codes of fairy-tale romances as limits for viewers to transgress through pleasure. This anime first reaffirms what constitutes an ideal life for girls in conventional fairytales, and then it initiates visual pleasure by transgressing this ideal. This process of reaffirming-and-transgressing simultaneously highlights and contests limits for girls in and through fairy-tale romances.

The limits for girls in fairytale animations. What have been constructed as limits for girls in and through fairytale animations? Disney has represented, reproduced, and reinforced an ideal girlhood for female youths through its animated images since its first animated feature, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937). Typically, an evil witch persecutes a beautiful princess, and the prince fight with the witch in order to save the princess. Through this typical storyline, Disney divides women into two contradictory
roles: the beautiful princess and the evil witch, such as Snow-White and the evil queen, Cinderella and her foster mother and sisters, and Sleeping Beauty and the evil fairy, etc. The princesses, whether Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, or Snow-White, are all pretty and young, and have very limited mobility. She learns that in order to be happy she must be loved; to be loved she must wait. In most cases, she does nothing but waits; she has no qualities other than her beauty. On the contrary, the evil witch, who often has an elderly face and furious expression, uses magic or super power to transform herself in order to enact her will against the princess. The evil witch is independent (presented by the absence of her friends, family, and spouse), vibrant (sometimes presented by her hysteric expression), and powerful (she defeats the prince). She actively pursues what she wants, which is often the same as what the princess already has and wants: beauty, youth, and happiness.

Due to growing female self-consciousness and the feminist movement, female characters have gradually changed since the late 1980s. Little Mermaid (1989) and Mulan (1998) are two significant animations of heroines’ adventures. In Little Mermaid, the female protagonist Aria has an active personality and motivation to pursue her love. She saves the prince and looks after him. She has a stronger personality than the former female characters in Disney animations. However, her emotions and actions are affected by her love for the prince and, hence, she reacts against her father. Her happiness derives from being able to be with her lover rather than from her own achievements. In Mulan, the female protagonist Mulan accomplishes a victory for her country and saves the emperor. However, although Mulan was more successful than her prince, Disney assumes
that viewers would happily opt for her marriage rather than Mulan being awarded a medal or a position of “power.” While the two works affirm the female protagonists’ autonomous selves through their adventures, the protagonists are still restrained in the notion of “being-for-others,” namely, their princes. Identically, the fathers play a critical role in indicating the heroines’ journeys, and their actions, adventures, and decisions are for the purpose of being loved. The process of looking for female autonomous selves is built upon and limited by the notions of a binary system of gender and heterosexual relationships.

* A temporal revelation of limits. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* targets young female viewers, and the pleasure of transgression is intensified particularly when viewers are more familiar with and confined by the limits of a binary gender system and heterosexual relationships. The female protagonist Utena is guided by her rose ring to the Ohtori Academy (as it was described in the opening script), which is supposed to be an elite private school in Japan yet it has bizarre European features, such as a rose garden and rococo architecture (see figure 3). In this academy, Utena finds a mysterious castle hanging upside down in the sky, a mysterious girl, Anthy Himemiya, who embodies the most disturbing characteristics of feminine passivity, a group of students in the student council who continue dueling with each other in order to win Anthy as a “bride,” and finally, Anthy’s brother, Akio, the president of this academy who seems to control all the mysteries and who may be the prince for whom Utena is searching.

The Ohtori Academy functions as a perfect setting for the pleasure of transgression. This academy is in an extremely confined condition, a “baroque
apocalypse,” where adolescent emotions, identities, and interpersonal relationships are at their most problematic (Napier, 2005, p. 172). Napier (2005) refers to this kind of setting as a *liminal world*, arguing it occurs in “a place that is not a place and a time that is not a time, and hosts the emergence of a society’s deepest value” (p. 171). This liminal world does not represent certain places (high schools in Japan) at a certain period of time (contemporary Japan), but is instead a temporal revelation of the limits where some of the strongest social values are deeply rooted.

Instead of being another Cinderella-styled story, in which the princess would pine for the return of her prince, Utena wants to be a prince because of her admiration of the prince’s nobility and bravery. When Utena finds that Anthy is suffering because of others, she immediately decides to become a prince in order to save Anthy. The word *become* is critical in this case. Utena *is* not a prince but rather *becomes* a prince (although the series also implies that she can never be one). To establish an identity one needs a non-self, an *other*, who enables one to occupy the “self” position. Commonly in fairytales, a prince takes action to save the sufferer and to pursue what he wants. The concepts of “prince” and “princess” are stably held in place by being paired with their binary opposite. Utena, the prince-to-be, needs Anthy’s existence and her suffering so that Utena can perform as a prince and project herself as a prince. Contrary to Utena’s active persona, Anthy is disturbingly passive—she serves the one who won the dual as a master; she cooks, cleans, and ministers to his or her needs; and she appears to have no willpower of her own. Being a prince requires establishing a binary boundary of self (prince) and other (princess), and Utena is able to *become* a prince because Anthy as the
其他完成了优羽。优羽采取的行动和战斗没有拯救安由，但使优羽能够实现王子身份并把安由作为他的另一面来完成优羽作为王子。

如果把优羽的旅程和她成为王子的意愿看作是身份形成的过程，这部动画片确实表现了优羽成为王子过程的失败。随着情节的逐步复杂化，优羽的天真、虚伪和自私想成为安由的王子的思想明显地被展现出来。在优羽与阿基奥的最后决斗中，安由的弟弟和现实中的王子，优羽宣布，“我要让你的妹妹自由。”优羽在几乎赢得决斗的时候，安由背叛了她，刺穿了她的心脏。最后，似乎一切在大须贺学院回到了正常，除了优羽从学院消失了。这使得观众对一个无意义的结尾感到失望。

优羽成为王子的失败暗示了一个范式的转变，从对女性主体身份的质疑转向对实践和快乐的调查。伊丽莎白·格罗斯（2005）建议，这是一个理论选择。一个关注通过与他者的认同和认同时确认身份的主体理论，可以用来解释这部动画片，例如，把优羽成为王子的旅程看作是确认身份和认同时的确认。相反，格罗斯建议一种“非个人”的理论，在这种理论中，机关和主体是与非人类力量的分离的，快乐有潜力动员，而不是认识主体（p. 189）。格罗斯的替代
view of non-human forces that mobilize subjects is taken in this dissertation, and I view pleasure as a key to investigate the politics of viewing anime.

The pleasure of Revolutionary Girl Utena does not come from a political claim that helps its young female viewers to recognize their identity, but from a stance that reveals social constructions and allows viewers to transgress regulatory power temporarily during the viewing process. First, by using a female protagonist as a prince-to-be, Revolutionary Girl Utena breaks the linear chain of the “prince-princess” vis-à-vis the “self-other” that takes a binary system of gender and sexuality for granted. Revolutionary Girl Utena deliberately sets up three limited identities based on fairytales: the princess, prince, and evil witch. Along with the storyline, viewers are exposed to a progressive uncertainty in terms of the protagonists’ identities—Utena has a strong will to be a prince but this will is depicted as naïve and selfish; Anthy has mysterious power while being extremely passive and submissive; and the “real” prince, who should be (and is) full of bravery and nobility, has a romantic relationship with Utena and an incestuous relationship with his sister Anthy. Not only are the protagonists full of internal conflicts and identity issues, but also their interpersonal relationships cannot be attributed to the process of self-identification through others. Unlike many fairy-tale animations, in which the other must exist in order to sustain the self, this anime portrays ambivalent boundaries, even no boundaries, between the “self” and “others.”

Second, the theme of “becoming a prince” in Revolutionary Girl Utena does not present a happily reversed process of female identity formation. It is far more ambiguous regarding issues of female identity and subjectivity. The word “become” implies
uncertainty, changing, and a moment that entails a prediction of the future and a redirection of the past. “Becoming someone” enacts a splitting self; it is a multiplication or proliferation of identification that puts the idea of “I” into question. Because *Revolutionary Girl Utena* enables viewers to split the “I,” the pleasure comes from fragmentation and dissimulation of the subjects. Viewers can no longer settle into a single subject position, but only involve a temporal mobility that allows them to shift their subject positions among protagonists with pleasure.

*A transgressive pleasure of sexuality.* *Revolutionary Girl Utena* has a sweet and sugary visual style while in many instances it presents inappropriate, obscene, and sometimes extremely disturbing sexual content. It includes cases of incest, rape, promiscuity, and homosexuality, which are considered by many as taboos in animation. Visually, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* avoids explicit nudity and violent images, but gives viewers a purified version of taboos and prohibitive themes. These matters are presented through sugary and flowery yet disturbing metaphors and symbols. For instance, an important visual motif, an elevator, is used as a state of transition and transformation before the protagonists’ dueling. The design is a long-extending pillar with a cage-styled platform (see figure 16 and 17). This fragile, unstable, and dangerous elevator is a visual metaphor and is also used while protagonists have psychological conflicts or make confessions (see also figure 18). In many scenes, flowers are arranged in a puzzling array, and mysterious shadow characters suddenly show and practice plots without a linear connection of the story (see figure 19 and 20). It is inevitably misleading if we attempt to examine these images under the framework of “representation.” Representation positions
a real before itself and thus becomes a reproduction and consolidation of that real (Butler, 1990/2000). Contrary to the fixed relationship between visual representation and the real, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* strategically enacts a fluid relationship between images and meaning, thus providing transgressive pleasure.

Conceptually, transgression of taboos is not simply to violate the Law. According to Foucault (1998), “Transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps...to recognized itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall” (p. 73). Contrary to the common theme of male-to-male relationships, female-to-female relationships are relatively less visible in anime. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is one of the few popular anime depicting female-to-female homoerotic encounters, but these encounters do not imply a homosexual identity for the protagonists. Whereas the subtext of Utena and Anthy’s relationship is clearly homoerotic, this anime portrays their relationship on the basis of their desire for the prince. Utena keep her obsession to Akio, kissing and having sex with him. A sexual undertone between Anthy and Akio is continuously illustrated throughout the series. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* simultaneously invokes and disavows pre-existing notions of homosexuality and heterosexuality. The protagonists’ genders do not allow viewers to predict their sexual relationships; rather, these fluid sexual relationships reveal a temporal contestation between gender identity and sexual desire.

Further, although incestuous elements are never literally depicted, they are indirectly associated through visual metaphors and symbols. The incestuous relationships are implied not only in the encounters between Anthy and Akio, but also among other
protagonists—a twin brother and sister in the student council who have an obsession with each other, and a male protagonist who falls in love with Utena and has a traumatic childhood due to his stepfather’s sexual abuse. For Lévi-Strauss and structuralists, the incest taboo becomes the way in which sexual positions are occupied, and masculine and feminine are differentiated. The incest taboo secures heterosexual family structures and kinships (Butler, 1990/2000). While the regulatory discourse of sexuality institute the viewer and embody him or her as a coherent and singular subject within social norms, the viewing experience engenders a momentary contestation between limits and transgression, testing the boundaries of normative sexuality rooted in heterosexual structures and kinships. By transgressing various taboos and prohibitions of sexuality, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* offers unpredictable pleasures that potentially erase categories of sexuality, even as they are invested in these very same categories.
Figure 15: A Rococo-styled campus in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*  
©1997 Be-Papas/Chiho Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo  
Image courtesy Central Park Media

Figure 16: The elevator and stairs extend toward the castle in the sky in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*  
©1997 Be-Papas/Chiho Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo  
Image courtesy Central Park Media

Figure 17: A front view of the elevator in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*  
©1997 Be-Papas/Chiho Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo  
Image courtesy Central Park Media

Figure 18: A top view of the elevator in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*  
©1997 Be-Papas/Chiho Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo  
Image courtesy Central Park Media
Figure 19: Visual metaphor and symbols
©1997 Be-Papas/Chiho
Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo
Image courtesy Central Park Media

Figure 20: Visual metaphor and symbols
©1997 Be-Papas/Chiho
Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo
Image courtesy Central Park Media

Figure 21: Utena and Anthy in the TV series
©1997 Be-Papas/Chiho
Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo
Image courtesy Central Park Media

Figure 22: Utena and Anthy in the film Adolescence of Utena
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Saito/Shogakukan/Shokaku/TV Tokyo
©1999-2000 Shojo Kakumei UTENA
Seisaku Iinkai
Image courtesy Central Park Media
Examining Anime Otaku’s Productive Pleasure

The term “otaku” literally refers to a polite way of saying “you” or “your house,” and is partly characterized by subjects’ creative endeavors around the artifacts that they love. In the 80s and 90s, otaku had a very negative representation in Japanese society: obsessed fans, technological fetishists, avid collectors, antisocial outcasts, and even borderline psychopaths (Eng, 2002). In 1989, 26 year-old Tsutomu Miyazaki kidnapped, molested, and murdered four little girls. When the police arrested him, they found a huge collection of anime and manga. The Japanese general public then perceived him to be an anime otaku. For a long time, this term described a marginalized group that had been stereotyped as antisocial.25 Recently, this term is being revisited due to anime’s significant influence in global society. For instance, Toshio Okada, the founder of Gainax studio and affectionately known as the “Otaking” (King of otaku), lectured about otaku culture at Japan’s most prestigious university, Tokyo University. He attributes to otaku a pioneering role in the global information society, as a new type of experts who focus on information accuracy through a collaborative process (Azuma, 2005; Eng, 2002; Lamarre, 2004). In 2001, William Gibson (2001), an author of the cyberpunk genre in science fiction, proclaimed that otaku was “the passionate obsessive” and “the information age’s embodiment of the connoisseur,” who is more concerned with the accumulation of data than of objects (para. 17). Contrary to the former negative representation of an isolated geek group, Lawrence Eng (2002) redefines otaku as “reluctant insiders” who have a particular ethic to technologies, which is to acquire

25 American anime fans believe they are more socialized and have long debates on whether “otaku” is an appropriate term to describe anime fans in the United States. See Eng’s discussion on American representations of otaku culture.
information accuracy and to engage in hyper-sociality based on their passion for anime. While examining the pleasurable activities and practices by anime otaku, this dissertation argues that defining or identifying a particular group by their interests in anime objects is problematic and misleading. Anime otaku indulge in looking for anime information more than anime objects, and information is inherently rhizomatic. Instead of being formulated as a group with similar interests or politics, anime otaku are empowered by pleasures that de-assure subjects’ supposed identities as a playful politics without coherency.

**Anime otaku’s pleasurable practices**

*Pleasure is an accompaniment to practices.* In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1990b) argues that the ancient Greeks used various pleasures as part of their attempts to take care of themselves through careful managements of sexual practices. For Foucault, pleasure is an accompaniment to practices, as *askèsis*—“an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought” (p. 15). He suggests that when one encounters pleasure, the experience may enable him or her to further reflect, experiment, and reformulate the self through practices. Individuals experience various pleasures in different activities, but the pleasures that they experience are so close to these activities as they are indistinguishable. Jeremy Crampton (2003) argues that pleasure is linked to practices more than desire, and through pleasure we may find a more effective way to understand actions and practices. He says, “The reason for this is that whereas desires are at some remove from activities by both time and nature, pleasures are close to the activities. They don’t need to reach out for something they don’t have” (p. 182). Unlike the abstract descriptions of “desire,” which can never be
fulfilled due to the inherent lack of the subject, pleasure is always accompanied by actions and practices. In Foucault’s view, pleasure is opposed to desire, as surface is to depth, as bodies are to subjects, and as activities of thought are to thoughts of being.

Otaku is a doer, not a mere consumer. Eng (2002) says that otaku are heavy and specialized consumers of specific media products: “people who do not shop on impulse, but inhabit the opposite extreme of the spectrum, obsessive and completely self-conscious in their consumption” (p. 3). However, beyond consumption, anime otaku actively and constantly change, manipulate, and subvert anime works in their practices. Their practices include creating amateur anime and manga that imitate or adapt styles of their favorite anime, an extension of visual signifiers to their bodies, known as anime cosplay (costume-role-play), peer-to-peer networks and websites, and some of their practices become a voucher of the contemporary art world, such as Takashi Murakami’s work. Otaku do not passively consume anime works; they act out their pleasure of viewing anime through otaku practices.

Buckingham and Sefton-Green (2004) use one of the most popular anime, Pokémon, as an example, arguing that scholarly textual analyses cannot adequately handle how anime images are used. They argue that images of Pokémon were designed to generate activities and social interaction, rather than being “consumed” in a passive sense. Anime is clearly not just a “text” in academic terminology or a set of objects that can be isolated for critical analyses. Images of anime do not provide simple meaning and one-way functionality for viewers; rather, they require actions on the part of viewers.

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26 “Cosplay” is a contraction of the English words “costume” and “play,” referring to one of the otaku phenomena that centers on dressing as characters in one’s favorite anime or manga.
Anime is the materialization of pleasure that enables otaku to actively and constantly *indulge* in acquiring new information of anime products, imitating and subverting anime signifiers, and interacting with other participants in order to exchange *knowledge* about anime. Anime otaku’s practices are not the process of becoming a recognized authority—the knower; it is a pleasurable process of becoming a thinker through practices, which means that the subject must continually challenge his or her knowing by doing.

**Anime otaku’s de-assurance of identity**

*De-assuring identity through pleasure.* Foucault advocates to break up the equation of the forms of pleasure one enjoys and one’s supposed identity (Rabinow, 1997). For Foucault, pleasure plays a fluid role in power relations: it is capable of being bound to regulatory discourses while it is also capable of leading the subjects to the unpredictable. Investigating pleasure may shift our focus from *discovering* one’s identity and subject position to working on practices in one’s favor. Grosz (2005) criticizes feminist studies focusing on identity issues as “a useful fiction” to imagine that we as subjects are masters or agents in discourses and/or power relations (p. 193). She argues that focusing on identity issues

…is misleading, for it makes the struggle about *us*, about our identity and individualities rather than about the world; it directs us to questions about being rather than doing; it gives identity and subjectivity a centrality and agency that they may not deserve…. (p. 194, emphasis in the original)

For Foucault and Grosz, identities are accomplishments or effects of discourses and/or power relations (Grosz uses “inhuman forces”) that constitute us as subjects. Although
subjects function as a foundation of thoughts, actions, and changes, they are generally the result of enculturation processes. Focusing on identity issues may drive us to be overly concerned with individual differences and particular subjectivities rather than going beyond what we are supposed to be. Focusing on identity issues may also result in a re-assurance of subjects’ struggles in power relations. On the contrary, because pleasure is fluid among discourses and between power and resistance, pleasure may unleash subjects from the struggles of affirming self-recognition (Grosz, 2005). Pleasure enables subjects to de-assure their identities, leading them to unexpected and surprising encounters.

**Being otaku is about pleasure, not about identity.** Otaku is a postmodern invasion of the former idea about “fandom” and “subculture.” Subculture, as Dick Hebdige’s (1979) study of British punk culture, was a form of resistance to cultural hegemony, persisting in a unique style as an identity against the ruling ideology. Recent media studies tend to view anime fandom as a subculture, which is about making personal identities (Kelly, 2004; Kinsella, 1998). Whereas such studies pay attention to the emphasis on how visual representation influences subjects’ identity formation, they overlook the power of anime pleasures that enable otaku to evade their everyday selves and to invent their favored practices.

Anime otaku’s practices demonstrate a schizophrenic quality of postmodern subjects. For instance, unlike the punk youths who use their bodies as a political claim of their uniqueness, otaku’s cosplay makes their bodies into pure signifiers of playfulness, refuting a unified identity. They experiment various dressing styles, transgress gender codes, and mimic multiple personalities. An otaku accumulates information, narratives,
and visual signifiers from the anime medium, later producing their personal narratives and signs. Instead of being attached to a single work, series, or genre, they consistently look for variation within the anime medium, shifting their positions without any claim to originality and individual uniqueness. Being otaku is about enjoying the fragmentary, random, and disjunctive play of signifiers, through which the pleasure of evasion voids bodily disciplines, and the pleasure of transgression de-assures one’s supposed identity.

*Anime otaku’s playful politics*

*A politics of imperceptibility.* Pleasure is not necessarily tied directly to a larger political framework or system of justification, but may be a “politics of imperceptibility” (Grosz, 2005, p. 194). Pleasure can be seen as the struggle of *imperceptible* power through which a subject is enabled to *invent* something entirely different from the everyday life. As Grosz (2005) asserts,

> Engaging in whatever sexual and other pleasures one chooses may produce political effects, but it is not primarily the political that is at stake in this relation. It is instead a relation of production or assemblage, which may have political effects at particular moments, but is primarily productive or creative rather than critical. (p. 194)

Although this politics of imperceptibility may not have a coherent and critical goal or agenda (thus it may not be sufficient to achieve a goal-oriented politics), it benefits us because of its open-ended practices. These open-ended practices are usually playful, active, creative, and without boundaries between the oppressed and the oppressing. McWhortor (1999) suggests that pleasure enables creative opposition and active
resistance. Pleasure requires the viewing subject’s active engagement with images to produce pleasure. Taking pleasure instead of desire as a central issue shifts the focal point from viewer’s passive acceptance of images to the creative function of viewing practices. Producing pleasure requires the subject’s “will”—energy and self-esteem. It empowers subjects to produce meaning of and for the self, and it may eventually result in politically active resistance of the regulatory power and normative discourses.

*The otaku playful politics.* The contemporary Japanese artist Takashi Murakami claims, “Otaku are an underground, but they are not opposed to the system” (p. 20). In Murakami’s *Superflat* exhibition (1998-2001), strong social and political themes are noticeably absent but there are hints of tongue-in-cheek subversion, appropriation, and parody. The atmosphere of this exhibition was light-hearted and fun, with no scathing portrayals of oppressors or sympathetic appeals from the victimized (Eng, 2002). Murakami’s *Superflat* presents otaku resistance as a cynical carnival without resorting to outright social critique. Azuma (2005) argues that otaku have no narratives, objectives, themes, and no political implications, but this lack of political meaning has political meaning. Eng (2002) asserts that otaku is a significant alternative to other forms of resistance engaged by reluctant insiders who are ethically concerned with information accuracy. “This resistance is less outwardly political and rebellious to the system. Otaku do not rely on authorized sources of product information and distribution, but have established their own networks of information and trade” (p. 20). Lamarre (2004) also points out the “odd” relationship between otaku and authorized sources. He writes,
Oddly, otaku activities seem both to expedite and to slow corporate-controlled movement of anime around the world. They provide the (dimensionless) point where global markets coalesce and disperse, where they accelerate, gaining or losing speed. Otaku movement comes before official networks, yet the official networks do not subsume it. Even if the official networks leave otaku activities behind them, otaku activities persist in their own particular ways. The relation between otaku movement and corporate markets is not one of mutual reciprocity. While the two seem always to occur in conjunction, the one does not simply reflect the other (p. 152).

Otaku’s practices break up the conventional mode of production, consumption, and distribution. In Japan, anime otaku produce their “fan art” and later they may become anime producers. One remarkable example of otaku becoming anime producers is Toshio Okada and the Gainax studio he founded, which is discussed in Chapter 2. In other countries, such as Taiwan and the United States, anime otaku share anime works (unofficially and in many instances illegally) in their own translations with others online before the official versions are distributed. The officials—Japanese anime producers and distributors—usually do not treat otaku’s imitations of anime images or personal distributions as a violation of the law. On the contrary, the officials take otaku’s practices as a lead, as a significant indicator of a successful work. Otaku practices may originate in the regulatory power structure. However, they betray and stray from that structure, producing a playful politics in their own favor.
Summary

The primary purpose of this chapter is not to justify anime pleasure, but to show how anime and its pleasure are able to excite, simulate, enliven, and empower viewers to continue their pleasurable practices. Many studies of anime and its fans focus on the pleasure of viewing as if it is a surface through which we can understand the human psyche and how identities are formed. On the contrary, this chapter argues that pleasure is an accompaniment to other activities, as an external form of the “will to power” (Grosz, 2005). This chapter concentrates on anime pleasures situated in the form of resistance, as an evasion of the regulatory power and a transgression of normative sexuality. Further, this chapter examines de-assurance of identity and the playful politics in anime otaku’s pleasurable practices.

Art educators’ attention to representation of images in relation to subjects’ desire and identity may simply reduce analyses to a byproduct of political effects, drawing our attention to the moral, ideological, and aesthetic emphases of images. This line of analyses directs us to a discovery of anime images, through which we risk our efforts on merely investigating the effects of images. Alternatively, this chapter argues that pleasure is a starting point to invent the new, the unthought, and to stray from regulatory power through anime images.
CHAPTER 5
WHAT CAN ANIME TEACH ART EDUCATORS?

Why anime? What are the distinctive features of anime? What can anime teach art educators? This final chapter uses arguments from previous chapters about postmodern features of the anime medium and about the pleasures of anime as a means to rethink VCAE. In Chapter 2, I present a discursive formation that promotes a particular style of animation as anime, generates a set of discussions regarding an origin (and a historical lineage) of anime, and empowers certain agencies to continuously and constantly participate in this process. I argue that this discursive formation makes anime a discourse, in which specific kinds of signifiers and visual pleasure intersect to empower viewers to participate in creative practices. In Chapter 3, I privilege the anime medium, examining the technological, aesthetic, and social features of anime in a postmodernist framework. Computer simulation of visually depthless qualities, endlessly recycled signifiers, and a lost sense of linear time and self challenge conventional understandings of representation. Chapter 4 examines anime pleasure, including the pleasure of viewing and anime otaku’s pleasurable practices. I argue that anime pleasure engenders an imperceptible politics that
de-assures viewers’ supposed identities and promotes resistances in viewers’ creative practices.

The fundamental argument of my dissertation is that anime itself is a site of viewers’ education about anime, and that anime as an alternative discourse empowers viewers, youth and adolescents in particular, to participate in creative practices that may generate an imperceptible politics in their own favor. Recently art educators in the United States advocate Visual Culture Art Education (VCAE), which presents a change in the content and pedagogy of art education that responds to students’ everyday visual experiences (Darts, 2004; Duncum, 2000, 2002; Eisenhauer, 2006; Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Hicks, 2004; Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2007; Tavin, 2000a, 2000b, 2003a, 2003b; Taylor, 2007; Toku & Wilson, 2004; Wilson, 2003). I agree with proponents of VCAE who urge art educators to pay attention to the complexity of visual culture in educational practices and to revise conventional art curricula. Following in their footsteps, I suggest a rethinking of VCAE using the anime discourse and anime pleasures. I first examine three propositions: the paradox of visual culture, problems of representation of postmodern media, and limitations of ideological critiques to contemporary visual culture. These propositions may or may not be explicitly discussed in art educators’ writing, but they are inherent in approaches to and discussions of VCAE. Using anime as a means of revisiting these three propositions, I conclude with a list of what anime is... and what anime does... to discuss what anime can teach educators about the politics of viewing anime.
Three Propositions

The paradox of visual culture

Mieke Bal (2003) argues that the paradox of visual culture is that while it disavows taking an object-oriented approach, it is significantly grounded in its object domains. Visual culture education focuses on specific questions of various visual artifacts (for example, ideology, representation, gender, ethic, identity formation, etc.) but these visual artifacts significantly lack clarity as a domain. For Bal, a domain refers to a set of artifacts that consist of particular ways of seeing, an ideological structure that maintains the social status for future works, and a group of agencies who constantly participate in discussions in order to define and redefine this domain. I agree with Bal’s argument about the paradox of visual culture, and I argue that this paradox consequentially leads a leveling tendency in VCAE.

Occupying the middle-ground between the modernist and postmodernist, and between conventional art education and VCAE, Efland (2004) is the first art educator who exposes this paradox of visual culture and points out the leveling tendency of VCAE. He questions what visual artifacts are worthy of educational attention, and inquires into the problem of democratizing and diversifying art education without leveling visual artifacts. Conventional approaches to art education set an object domain for fine art. A conventional view of art education constantly defines and redefines a group of artifacts as works of art, maintains a set of values to sustain the art’s social status, and determines whether certain aspects are visible in curricula. On the contrary, proponents of VCAE claim that visual culture is an encompassing category of various
visual forms (Freedman, 2003; Freedman & Stuhr, 2004; Herrmann, 2005; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2007), and the spirit of VCAE is to contest the process of inclusion and exclusion, and to efface the boundary between high art and popular culture. The attempt to encompass various visual artifacts in our teaching practices and research, I argue, consequentially leads to a leveling tendency in VCAE. As a result, one major challenge to VCAE in teaching practices is the lack of criteria to select visual artifacts worthy of educational attention (Dorn, 2005; Heise, 2004; Smith, 2004).

To address the paradox of visual culture, I argue that art educators should pay attention to the specificity of each domain as individual discourses. Our attention to the specificity of an object domain not only addresses the technological, aesthetic, and social characteristics of this domain, but also refers to how a group of particular images are brought together, and how certain common values and ideologies are appraised in order to differentiate these images from others and to sustain a discourse about this group of images. In other words, VCAE should genealogically investigate how an object domain is discursively formed, and how power and pleasure are embodied through images and intersect within discourses. It is the discursive formation of a domain worthy of educational attention, and it is the specificity of each domain worthy of our research efforts.

Problems of representation of postmodern media

I argue that discussions of representation fail to address the infinitely recycled signifiers of postmodern pastiche and the manifestation of technological advancements in postmodern media. I suggest a rethinking of VCAE’s emphasis that takes representation
as a central issue. Freedman (2003) claims in *Teaching Visual Culture*, “From an educational standpoint, understanding the importance of representation is critical because we can help direct the construction of knowledge in ways that enrich students’ experiences with art” (p. 14). Duncum (2000) argues that art education informed by visual culture should focus on investigations of representation rather than descriptive or functional aspects of images. He asserts, “When images act only in a functional way they are of interest to design educators but not art educators. As soon as they are viewed as representational, however, they become part of our purview” (2002, p.18). For Freedman and Duncum, emphasizing the representational aspect of images permits an approach to beliefs, attitudes, and values embedded in images, and this emphasis provides an educational objective to justify VCAE. I do not hold my position against VCAE’s approaches to examining representational aspects of images. I agree that discussions of representation can help us unmask the transparent layer of imaging while dealing with representational media. However, I argue that art educators should rethink the emphasis on representation in our examinations of postmodern media.

The former understanding of representation that is implanted in repeated and agreed meanings of signifiers no longer adequately functions in analyzing the free-flowing relationship between the signifiers and signified of postmodern media. The former notion of representation implies an ultimate point of origin, and refers to socially conceived meanings which are agreed on and repeated in society. However, postmodern media possess a breakdown of signifying chains in which signifiers are self-referential and infinitely recycled. As a result of technological advancements, postmodern media
allow imaging alternations, adaptations, and simulations. Ultimately, repetition of signifiers becomes infinite in these technological processes, and the ontological status of the origin disappears in postmodern media. Thus, postmodern media challenges the former concept of representation that is intimately connected with repeated meanings and origins.

Because postmodern media manifest their artificiality through technological advancements, discussions of representation become inadequate to address the intensified artificiality of postmodern imaging. Among conventional understandings, representation becomes a focal point of discussions when the artificiality of images is concealed. Cavallaro (2001) argues that realist techniques of imaging conceal the process of production and mask the artificiality of images, and thus images present themselves as a transparent layer that reflects the world. Representational media, such as photography, film, and video, possess recording technologies, through which creditability of images is developed, production processes seem to be objective, and the artificiality of images becomes invisible. Discussions of representation are useful to examine these representational media, because they challenge the view that images are transparent and objective, unmasking the artificiality of imaging. On the contrary, technologies of postmodern media do not aim to conceal the process of production or to mask the artificiality of images. Rather, they manifest postmodern pastiche, a technologically advanced realm of imagining alternations, appropriations, sampling, and visual simulations, through which artificiality becomes normalized for images.
Postmodern media such as anime, computer animation, digital cinema, video game, and web images demonstrate features of depthlessness and pastiche which do not suggest a prior existence or an origin. Technological advancements of these postmodern media are so intense that technologies are used to manifest the artificiality of images, whereas technologies of representational media are used to mask artificiality of images. For example, computer animation and digital cinema, through which the recorded and the rendered images are made indistinguishable, guarantee no origin, objectivity, credibility, and authenticity of images, but manifest postmodern pastiche where free-flowing signifiers, multiple readings, and ambivalent reactions are normalized. Since postmodern media manifest the artificiality of images and free-flowing signifiers, using conventional understandings of representation to examine these depthless images is limited and inadequate.

Limitations of ideological critiques in VCAE

The final proposition argues that ideological critiques are limited while examining contemporary visual culture, and art educators should avoid undertaking ideological critiques as a fundamental tactic in VCAE’s practices. In discussing ideological critiques, I situate the notion of “ideology” in Marxist formulations. That is, ideology functions as an instrument that reproduces social order and hierarchies, and the dominant ideology makes the ruling class’ interests appear to be the interests for all. Thus, people’s social reality is guided by the dominant ideology, and these people, especially the ruled, participate in their own oppression without realizing it. I first review how ideological critiques play a primary role in discussions of VCAE. Then I argue that ideological
critiques have shortcomings in examinations of visual culture for three reasons: (1) ideological critiques fail to recognize today’s depthless mode of images and infinitely recycled signifiers; (2) teaching ideological critiques arbitrarily transmits values from teachers to students; and (3) ideological critiques cannot effectively engender resistance in practice.

“As visual pronouncements, images are ideological, they teach us what and how to see and think” (Garoian & Gaudelis, 2004, p. 299)—this prevalence in current discussions of VCAE asks for an examination of ideological constructions and struggles transmitted by and through images. Duncum (2002) argues that the primary task of VCAE is to investigate how an image is used to focus on beliefs, attitudes, and values, and to examine ideology embedded in the viewers and the viewed. Duncum (2003b) further asserts that ideology works not because it calls particular attention to itself, but because it grounds itself in taken-for-granted, common-sense assumptions. He suggests that art educators pay attention to “how ideology works through aesthetic means or conversely how aesthetics work to promote ideology” (Duncum, 2002, p. 10). Studies of VCAE provide a wide range of strategies to unmask dominant beliefs and values within popular visual artifacts, positioning images as an effective means to seduce viewers into ideological constructions (Chung, 2005, 2007; Duncum, 2006; Freedman, 2003; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2007).

The first reason to support my argument about the shortcomings of ideological critiques is that ideological critiques fail to recognize today’s depthless mode of visual culture. In Marxist formulations, ideology is a process through which certain concealed
values and beliefs operate in a systematic manner to constantly and continuously benefit the dominant group and effect social reality (Powers, 2001). Art educators use these formulations in examining visual culture, and so generate critical awareness of the dominant values and beliefs in and through images (Chung, 2005, 2007; Duncum, 2006; Freedman, 2003; Keifer-Boyd et al., 2007). However, I argue that these examinations of ideology presuppose two descriptions that can no longer adequately exemplify postmodern visual culture. The first presupposed description is that images possess something deep, concealing and thus revealing the dominant ideology. The second presupposes an overarching world-view through which the dominant values and beliefs constantly and continuously operate to maintain benefits for certain groups in society. A postmodernist view of visual culture requires an understanding that images are depthless and self-referential as simulacra. Instead of treating images as a thin layer that reflect or mask reality, a postmodernist argues that we live in a world where images are reality. Further, postmodernity is “plagued by the collapse of overarching world-views” (Dean, 2002, p. 4). Postmodern visual culture collapses overarching world-views and embraces multiple competing conceptions of realities. Marxist formulations of ideological critiques assume an overarching view of ideology, which posit a totality that not only fails to face the notion of self-referential and depthless images as the real, but also refuses to confront today’s proliferation of images as competing conceptions of realities.

The second reason to support the possible shortcomings of ideological critiques is that teaching ideological critiques arbitrarily transmit certain values from teachers to students. Ideological critiques reduce the problem of domination to the idea that “people
don’t know what they are doing.” In educational applications of visual culture, it is commonly suggested that viewers are naïve and ignorant, duped into mindless compliance with oppressive structures of power through images (Buckingham, 2003a, 2003b). I disagree that unmasking ideology of images ought to be the primary task of VCAE, especially when students’ reactions to images are reduced to “people don’t know what they are doing.” I disagree with Freedman’s (2003) claim,

Without a curriculum that enhances critical capabilities, students tend to see the range of visual culture with an uncritical eye, undervaluing the creative and the distinctive. And without experiences that actually promote thoughtful engagement of students with the processes of visual culture production, they will not come to understand the complexity of these processes, their importance to daily life, or their power to transform knowledge and experience. (p. 210)

This passage implies that students are naïve and mindless, incapable of critically engaging in the complexity of practices of production without being taught. This passage also implies a pedagogical approach that promotes political ways of thinking but simultaneously de-politicizes them as “knowledge” in curricula and teaching practices (Eisenhauer, 2006). Most importantly, this passage reflects a kind of arrogance from the knower, who situates him or herself in an authoritative position to enlighten those-who-do not-yet-know. As Foucault’s (1997/1984) noting reminds us,

I see nothing wrong in the practice of a person who, knowing more than others in a specific game of truth, tells those others what to do, teaches them, and transmits knowledge and techniques to them. The problem is such practices where power –
which is not itself a bad thing—must inevitable come into play is knowing how to
avoid the kind of domination effects where a kid is subjected to arbitrary and
unnecessary authority. (pp. 298-299)

What distinguishes a critical approach from an uncritical one and who defines what
counts as critical awareness are power questions in the knowledge construction of VCAE.
Highlighting ideological critiques—the approaches to unmasking ideologies within
images—may allow teachers to foster critical awareness of ideological constructions, but
it also inevitably transmit certain arbitrary values from teachers’ authoritative position to
their students. Because educational applications of ideological critiques imply the idea
that “students don’t know what they are doing,” and inevitably transmit arbitrary values
from teachers to students, I argue that ideological critiques may not promote a
satisfactory approach to art education that reflects on how power relations figure in
teaching and learning practices.

The final reason to support my argument about shortcomings of ideological
critiques is that ideological critiques may not be able to effectively generate resistance to
regulatory power in doing. Žižek (1989) calls today’s society “post-ideological” where
people are no longer blinded in participating in their own oppression, but have a critical
distance between what they know and what they do (p. 33). He writes,

People no longer believe in ideological truth; they do not take ideological
propositions seriously. The fundamental level of ideology, however, is not of an
illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy
structuring our social reality itself. (p. 33)
For Žižek, in our postmodern time, people know well that their actions follow a false consciousness, but still, they are doing these actions. Žižek’s account of ideology shifts the focus from what we know to what we do, to the persistence of our actions regardless of whether we know or not. Žižek argues that ideological constructions are less about whether we have critical awareness of the imposed beliefs and values, but more about how our actions persistently embody these beliefs and values. Dean (2002) uses the example of discount cards in the grocery stores to explain Žižek’s account of ideology. Many grocery stores in the United States issue discount cards that provide a small amount of discounts for customers. Dean (2002) argues that although customers know that the function of discount cards is for the store to collect information about their buying habits and product preferences, they still persistently use these cards while shopping. She vividly describes how her actions contradict her critical awareness,

I willingly let the store track me and my purchases, facilitate its edging out of smaller, local markets, and help it tighten its hold on my consumption—and often for saving of only about thirty cents. I’m neither coerced into using my shopper’s card nor deceived about its function. I’m not deluded into thinking that the store really wants to save my money. I cynically accept that it is trying to make money, and I actually help it do so by shopping there. I don’t need a critique of ideology to expose my false consciousness. I have a critical distance from my actions, from what I’m doing, but still I do it. (my emphasis, p. 5)

For Žižek and Dean, ideological critiques function less as resistance to dominant power structures but more as a pervasive cynicism in postmodern culture. Individuals’
persistent actions reveal certain beliefs and values as ideology that is, in turn, paradoxically criticized by the individuals. Following them, I argue that teaching ideological critiques in VCAE may only foster a pervasive cynicism where teachers perceive themselves as elitists and outside of ideology. VCAE ought to engender productive resistance rather than the crass triumph of a pervasive cynicism. I argue that art educators should shift our attention from ideological critiques to the persistence of our actions, which materialize our underlying beliefs and values. In other words, we ought to engender resistance that can be effectively carried through and in doing. Under certain circumstances, pleasurable practices can disrupt our daily routines, destabilize current power structures, alter our persistent actions, and thus lead us to unpredictable politics. I suggest that art educators should investigate pleasure that is fluid in power relations and is accompanied by creative practices.

**Conclusion**

I argue that art educators should treat anime as an alternative discourse that allows us to revisit these three propositions—the paradox of visual culture, problems of representation of postmodern media, and the limitations of ideological critiques in VCAE. The object domain of anime, including images, discussions, websites, cosplays, anime-toys, and anime-related artworks, not only proliferates particular kinds of pleasures and practices, but also materializes an alternative discourse that is not based on institutionalization and regulatory power. The features of depthlessness, pastiche, and schizophrenia of the anime medium pose a challenge to conventional understandings of representation. Anime pleasure, including the pleasure of viewing and anime otaku’s
playful practices, functions as an imperceptible politics which not only frees viewers from their supposed identity and social orders momentarily, but also may discursively generates unpredictable resistance in creative practices. This dissertation suggests that VCAE should pay attention to the specificity of anime, revise our emphasis on representation in postmodern media, and encourage pleasurable practices that may engender alternative politics in students’ own favor. Following I conclude with a list of what anime is and what anime does, hoping that anime can help us rethink our current approaches to visual culture.

What Anime is: The Specificity of Anime

Anime is a privileged medium in my dissertation, and I suggest that art educators should examine anime as an alternative discourse, rather than reduce the multiple facets of the anime medium to a single academic text as curricular and pedagogical revenues. By paying attention to the specificity of anime, including investigations of the aesthetic, social, and technological aspects of the anime medium, and inquiries into the constitutive power of viewing experiences and pleasurable practices of anime, I summarize what anime is as the following.

Anime is a culturally hybrid medium that transcends geopolitical and sociopolitical boundaries. A particular style of animation was developed under difficult technical and financial circumstances as anime during the 1960s and 1970s in Japan. Rooted in Japan’s picture-centric traditions, anime was highly influenced by Disney animation and Western cinema. Demonstrating its local elements from Japan, anime’s visual style is adopted by Hollywood action movies and widely accepted by viewers from
East and South Asia, Europe, and the United States. Anime does not make a claim to
Japanese cultural authenticity, but engages in the global flow of cultural exchange. The
worldwide acceptance and adaptation of Hollywood action movies to anime styles
present anime as a culturally hybrid medium. Socially, anime is paradoxically placed in
both the mainstream and the marginalized; it simultaneously serves as cultural
commodification and social practice. The mainstream popularity vis-à-vis anime
subcultures demonstrate anime’s capability to flow between social hierarchies. Anime
images, anime-inspired artworks, and anime-related fan practices, constitute a
culturally hybrid medium that transcends geopolitical and sociopolitical boundaries.

*Anime is an economically efficient production in a serial format that challenges
the conventional mode of consumption-production.* Developed under difficult technical
and financial circumstances, anime became an economically efficient production in a
serial format. As a cultural commodification, the major function of anime is to follow
capital flow, to gain maximum profit, and to achieve noteworthy popularity. Whereas
anime production is closely tied to consumer culture, anime otaku’s practices do not
follow the conventional mode of consumption-production that emphasizes corporate-
controls and capital flow. Chen (2003) argues that the socioeconomic impact of anime is
not from corporate controls but from otaku’s practices. Japanese anime studios and
officials did not systematically distribute and license anime overseas until recently. Many
famous anime works were illegally spread among anime otaku and later official
distributions followed. The same pattern happened in many East Asia countries and in the
United States. Anime otaku functions as an active agency that initiates global distribution of anime, therefore spreading their influences both socially and economically.

*Anime is a non-hierarchical visual field manifesting the artificiality of images in which viewing experiences are determined by a database structure of anime signifiers.*

The development of anime is closely tied to technological advancements. Ozamu Tezuka, the father of anime, established a motionless style of animation by utilizing the strengths of manga language and limited animation under difficult technical and financial circumstances. Although current computer technologies advance the perfectness of imaging, technologies are used to simulate cel animation and to render hand-drawn qualities to preserve a particular visual style for anime. Anime images actively construct alternative worlds far away from reality, manifesting its artificiality through technological advancements.

Furthermore, anime accumulates previous visual elements and fragments to an autonomous database, in which signifiers, including images, texts, and sounds function as free-flowing information nodes that can be processed and reassembled by viewers. How information is structured in each frame and how information flows through sequential frames become the core of viewing experiences of anime. Anime images structure a non-hierarchical and depthless visual field in which viewing experiences rely on a database of anime signifiers rather than meanings of individual signifiers.

*Anime is an alternative discourse where pleasure and power intersect.* Anime images enable a discursive formation where discussions of anime and otaku’s playful practices constitute the politics of anime. Sexual and violent elements in anime and anime
otaku’s techno-fetishism have resulted in a long-standing status of negative images for anime in Japanese society. On the other hand, being built upon youth and adolescent culture, anime images often embody the pleasures of transgression and evasion, and otaku’s practices always function as multiple knots where power and pleasure encounter and interact. Anime otaku actively learn about the images they view, gather at anime conventions and panel discussions, build networks through Internet, and create their own artworks and criticism. Although these practices are never institutionalized and legitimatized, they are discursively constituted by and through a group of particular signifiers and practices as a discourse. Anime is not simply a visual form; it generates a particular kind of visual qualities and viewing experiences, and it empowers viewers to indulge in practices with a playful politics in their own favor. It is often suggested that anime’s constituted power primarily emphasizes resistance or strategies of refusal, and anime’s viewing subjects tend to create meaning in their own favor and further influence anime production and society (Azuma, 2005; Lamarre, 2004; Napier, 2005). The politics of anime is deeply contradictory because it constitutes a systematic discourse that simultaneously shows subordination and resistance to regulatory power.

What Anime does: VCAE and Anime

Anime challenges conventional understandings of representation. Media educator David Buckingham (2003b) claims that we are now in a new phase of representation, in which multiple readings and ambivalent reactions to media are the norm. Tavin (2007) suggests that art educators deploy a “postmodern view of representation” to prioritize viewers’ response to images (p. 43). He states, “It begins with the basic premise that
responding to images is primarily a process of socialization and signification, and always connected to the material conditions of the world” (p. 43). VCAE asks for a new understanding of representation through which responses to images are always involved as sociopolitical processes and practices.

Following these views about a new understanding of images, I argue that anime as a postmodern medium demonstrates depthlessness through which an image does not automatically entail a prior origin. By overwhelming viewers with signifiers, anime intensifies the schizophrenic sense for viewers, manifesting a loss of touch with reality and an absence of expressive and emotional depth. The visually depthless qualities of anime create a psychological buffer zone, through which viewers are emotionally and sociopolitically distanced from reality.

Anime actively constructs alternative worlds by manifesting its artificiality. Viewers acknowledge illusionistic aspects of anime images, and thus are freed from determinate meanings of anime signifiers. Anime signifiers are not understood as representations through a systematic, preexisting framework of codes and symbols. Unlike representational media that constantly take viewers’ reflection of the relationship between what they see and what they know for granted, anime images disrupt this reflective process, and thus displace what we see and what we know.

To treat anime images adequately, I argue that VCAE should emphasize database structures of visual signifiers. The rise of database structures of visual culture indicates a new way of viewing in which viewers actively read the pool of information rather than passively receive meanings of individual signifiers. Anime images operate in a non-
hierarchical visual field where the viewing experience is akin to rhizomatic information. Otaku may obsessively replay DVDs or videos of their favorite series again and again through which they begin to perceive minor differences in animation styles within each episode of a series (while non-otaku may not be able to tell differences). This kind of practices makes viewing experiences akin to scanning for information, rather than reading a story. Peripheral elements and signifiers of anime, which are not made for building a story, become central, adopted and appropriated by otaku to use in their fanzines, costumes, and endless discussions. Otaku’s viewing experience is no longer built on perceiving the meaning of narratives, but on processing a database of visual signifiers.

*Anime posits an educational application to study creative practices that emphasize pleasure more than ideological critiques.* If anime images manifest depthlessness and postmodern pastiche that do not entail an ultimate point of the higher order, it is inadequate to assume that certain values and beliefs hidden as ideology are concealed and masked in and through anime images. While analyzing anime, I take a postmodernist standpoint, and assert that anime signifiers do not refer to an origin. Ideological critiques of anime reduce our analyses of anime to demystification of individual signifiers. Ideological critiques also find a strange place in analyzing anime precisely because anime images already manifest their artificiality to distance viewers from social reality. Unmasking the artificiality of images is clearly pointless. Moreover, ideological critiques do not provide a useful account of anime otaku’s practices that are embedded in evasive and transgressive pleasures.
Art educators informed by VCAE have expressed concerns about visual pleasure and imagery seduction that embody the dominant forms of social and economic arrangements. Tavin (2003b) recommends that art education focus on “privilege, power, representation, history, and pleasure within the intertextual circulation of images” (p. 208). Boughton (2004) points out the difficulty of assessing educational outcomes while exploring the seductive power of visual culture. Oliva Gude (2007) suggests “play” to be the first principle for 21st-century art and culture curriculum. Duncum (2005) argues that it is beneficial for art educators to understand and explore why and how we are seduced by images. He urges art educators to embrace an aesthetic that is entirely embodied and willing to deal with all “bodily sensations” (p. 18). Duncum (2006) also suggests that art educators investigate how aesthetics and ideology are in play through popular culture. He asserts, “while acknowledging the undoubted pleasure that popular culture offers, teachers are rightly concerned whether the socially reactionary ideology of much popular culture influences the way their student see the world” (p. 3).

Taking up these art educators’ attention to pleasure and play, I suggest a rethinking of the productive functions of pleasure in educational applications. I argue that pleasure functions as a rallying point to tackle the insufficiency of ideological critiques and to redirect our attention to pleasurable practices and their politics in VCAE. Ideological critiques of visual culture have shortcomings when they deal with postmodern signifiers and practices, as Žižek and Dean have argued. When knowing is not enough to challenge the dominant ideology in the current postmodern condition, when knowing simply becomes a pervasive cynicism rather than liberating us from
ideological constructions, when one says, “yes, I know… but I still do it anyway,” educators must explore more effective tactics to generate resistance in doing and reconfigure critical approaches.

*Anime pleasure functions as an accompaniment to otaku’s practices.* When anime otaku encounter pleasure in their activities, their experiences enable them to further reflect, experiment, and reformulate the self and knowledge through practices. Individuals experience various pleasures in different activities, but the pleasures that they experience are so close to these activities as they are indistinguishable. Anime otaku actively and constantly change, manipulate, and subvert anime works in their practices with pleasure. Otaku do not passively consume anime works; they act out their pleasure of viewing anime through otaku practices. Anime is the materialization of pleasure that enables otaku to actively and constantly indulge in acquiring new information of anime products, imitating and subverting anime signifiers, and interacting with other participants in order to exchange knowledge about anime. Anime otaku’s practices are not the process of becoming a recognized authority—the knower; it is a pleasurable process of becoming a thinker through practices, which means that the otaku subject must continually challenge his or her knowing by doing.

*The goal of anime otaku’s practices is to increase their capacities for pleasures.* McWhortor (1999) challenges the separation of educational objectivities from pleasure, and suggests that pleasure is the goal of creative practices. She asks,

> What if we deliberately refused to separate practice from result and simply engaged in graduated disciplinary practices for their own sake—for the pleasure
they bring—rather than for some goal beyond them? What if we used our capacities for temporal development not for preparation for some task beyond that development but for the purpose of development itself, including the development of our capacities for pleasure? (p. 182)

Anime otaku are self-directed learners, and their learning reflects loosely structured yet sophisticated and effective learning principles in a community (Tobin, 2001). They act lavishly in their praise for the works they admire, perform constructive criticism, willingly collaborate with others to acquire accurate information about anime, and, finally, actively re-arrange information while participating in the discourse of anime. Their learning process does not have a clear goal or objectivity, but rather, it is lightheartedly self-disciplined to increase their capacities for pleasures through creative practices. Pleasure is what intrigues and motivates anime otaku to be self-disciplined to acquire further information, develop capacities of pleasure, and build up loosely structured communities and collaborations. Not only is pleasure the primary tool to cultivate otaku’s knowledge about anime, but it is also the ultimate goal of anime otaku’s practices. Anime pleasure is close to practices that do not have a clear objective, and these practices are for their own sake through which participants’ capacities for pleasure are further developed. Although otaku’s pleasurable practices do not have a clear goal of fostering critical awareness and resistance to the dominant ideology, they disrupt the persistent actions in daily routines and lead to practicing the unpredictable, which may eventually subvert regulatory power in and through doing.
Anime pleasure generates multiple resistances that do not directly attack the dominant power structures. Ideological critiques are too attached to the dominant power structures. These critiques demonstrate a battle-based model that directly attacks the dominant ideology—which appears to present a singular vision of resistance rather than resistances as plural. The disadvantage of a direct attack against the dominant ideology is that a direct attack habitually repeats the power-resistance dichotomy, putting too much weight on causality between signifiers and meanings, and reducing images as a means to convey hegemonic or resistant meanings through representation. My Foucauldian approach to anime pleasure, however, is less concerned with unmasking hidden ideologies of images, and more concerned with the ways through which multiple powers and resistance can come into play. For Foucault, pleasure can exist for its own sake without necessarily being bound directly to any form of power or resistance. Such a mobilized quality of pleasure allows unpredictable establishments and creative inventions that may subvert current power structures, or what McWhorter calls “productive resistance.” I argue that an effective application of VCAE is less about discovering the ideology concealed in visual pleasure and images, but rather, it is more about using pleasures to arrive at a multiplicity of productive resistances.

Anime pleasure engenders imperceptible politics that de-assure the otaku subjects’ supposed identities. Pleasure is not directly tied to a politics of recognition, in which the subjugated groups and minorities strive for a validation from the subjugating groups and authorities (Grosz, 2005). Depending on various circumstances, pleasure may function as a re-assuring or de-assuring process for subjects. Pleasure may rely on the
regulatory power in the disciplinary practices, but at certain moments it allies itself with resistance, as an alternative to the process of institutionalization for a disciplinary subject. Pleasure and subjects’ actions are each other’s conditions of existence, but pleasurable practices rarely require recognition or validation for the subject. Pleasure engenders a politics of imperceptibility, which is concerned more with what we do than who we are. As Grosz (2005) challenges,

> It is a useful fiction to imagine that we as subjects are masters or agents of those very forces that constitute us as subjects, but it is misleading, for it makes the struggle about us, about our identity and individuality rather than about the world; it directs us to questions about being rather than doing; it gives identity and subjectivity a centrality and agency that they may not deserve, for they do not produce themselves but are accomplishments or effects of forces before and outside of identity and subjectivity. (Emphasis in original, p. 193-194)

It is misleading to treat otaku’s practices as struggles to render a particular category of identity, and it is a mistake to view otaku as an identity category. Rather, otaku’s pleasurable practices function more ably as a mode of rendering mobile, fluid, and transformable politics that do not strive for recognition. Anime otaku leave their practices, traces, and effects everywhere but can never be identified with a unified group or organization. Otaku’s practices produce, proliferate, and transform anime signifiers, through which otaku subjects are empowered to break the routine of capital flow, to fracture the unities of subjects, authors, and texts, to cross and transgress categories,
disciplines, cultures and societies. Otaku’s practices engender a playful politics that de-assures participants’ supposed identities and forms productive resistances.

Closing Thoughts

By the time of writing the closing thoughts, I taught a class called “Visual and Cultural Discourse beyond Anime” at The Ohio State University between 2003 and 2005, and I am currently teaching a class called “Anime History and Perspectives” at The University of Utah. In the beginning of every quarter or semester, I ask my students, “Do you need me to teach you anime?” My students often answer “no” to me. There are always some students engaging in creative practices related to anime and manga in my classes. Without being taught, these students know more about Japanese words and culture, possess more sophisticated drawing skills (and, sometimes sewing skills in order to make costumes), have a better understanding of computer technologies, and construct their own critical views of anime. Anime itself is a site of viewers’ education about anime, and the pleasure of viewing anime empowers the viewers to construct their knowledge about anime and to participate in creative practices. Whatever the course is called, I never think that I have taught anime. I teach Jameson and Baudrillard’s postmodern concepts, poststructuralist discussions about subjectivity, and some feminist writings about gender and sexuality. I ask students to use anime as examples to explain these concepts and theories. I encourage class discussions and enhance students’ understandings about postmodern theory by using anime as an example, but I do not teach anime. When it comes to anime, students are the knower, who actively participates.
in knowledge construction and in creative practices of anime. They know more about anime than I do.

The pleasures and constituent power of anime are complex, and investigations of anime images and otaku practices function as an alternative discourse to rethink VCAE. VCAE is a change in art education that responds to contemporary issues by focusing on representation and on resistance to the dominant ideology. The endeavors of politicizing images raise the tremendous liberating impact on this field. They not only extend the range of artifacts for study but also give rise to new forms of political consciousness that thoroughly reshape the field. Foucault, in his way of specifying the constructions of knowledge, examines how a particular discourse operates its history and effects, and how different discourses relate to each other. An alternative discourse does not reconfigure the entire field or redefine the very conditions that sustain the field; rather, an alternative has the potential to decenter the current discursive formation in that field. The focal point of this dissertation is not about what art educators can teach students about anime; rather, it is about what anime can teach art educators. This dissertation does not advocate teaching and learning anime specifically in school systems since I argue that anime is a site of viewers’ education about anime, and anime otaku are effective self-learners. This dissertation argues that anime functions as an alternative discourse that potentially decenters current emphases and approaches in VCAE. I hope that my analysis of anime can enable new ways of thinking about pleasure and knowledge construction in art education.
REFERENCES


