Takashi Murakami: Okada-san, Morikawa-san, thank you for coming. Our topic today is the culture of *otaku* [literally, “your home”]. After Japan experienced defeat in World War II, it gave birth to a distinctive phenomenon, which has gradually degenerated into a uniquely Japanese culture. Both of you are at the very center of this *otaku* culture.

Let us begin with a big topic, the definition of *otaku*. Okada-san, please start us off.

Toshio Okada: Well, a few years ago, I declared, “I quit *otaku* studies,” because I thought there were no longer any *otaku* to speak of.

Back then [during the 1980s and early 1990s], there were a hundred thousand, or even one million people who were pure *otaku*—100-proof *otaku*, if you will. Now, we have close to ten million *otaku*, but they are no more than 10- or 20-proof *otaku*. Of course, some *otaku* are still very *otaku*, perhaps 80 or 90 proof. Still, we can’t call the rest of them *faux* *otaku*. The *otaku* mentality and *otaku* tastes are so widespread and diverse today that *otaku* no longer form what you might call a “tribe.”
Kaichirō Morikawa: Okada-san’s definition of *otaku* sounds positive, as if they’re quite respectable.

In my opinion, *otaku* are people with a certain disposition toward being *dame* [“no good” or “hopeless”]. Mind you, I don’t use this word negatively here.

To some extent, people born in the 1960s are saddled with the baggage of an “anti-establishment vision.” In contrast, *otaku*, especially in the first generation, have increasingly shed this anti-establishment sensibility.

It’s important to understand that although *otaku* flaunt their *dame*-orientation—an orientation toward things that are no good—it’s not an anti-establishment strategy. This is where *otaku* culture differs from counterculture and subculture.

**TM:** Indeed, *otaku* are somewhat different from the mainstream. They have a unique *otaku* perspective, even on natural disasters. For example, the reaction of Kaiyōdō’s executive, Miyawaki Shūichi, to witnessing the destruction of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 was, “I know it’s insensitive to say this [after such terrible disaster], but I think *Gamera* got it wrong.” You know, the aftermath of a real earthquake was used as a criterion in *otaku* criticism.

**TO:** At the time of the earthquake, I raced to Kobe from Osaka, hopping on whatever trains were still running, taking lots of pictures. I agree, *Gamera* got it wrong. To create a realistic effect of destruction, you need to drape thin, gray noodles over a miniature set of rubble. Otherwise, you can’t even approach the reality of twisted, buckled steel frames. It was like, “If you call yourself a monster-filmmaker, get here now!”

When Mt. Mihara erupted in 1986, the production team of the 1984 Godzilla film went there to see it. They were true filmmakers.

**Wabi-Sabi-Moe**

**TM:** Morikawa-san will present an exhibition about *otaku* and *moe* [literally, “bursting into bud”] at the architecture biennale in Venice in 2004. Your association of *otaku* with architecture is unique. Please tell us about it.
I was most impressed by your phrase, wabi-sabi-moe, in the exhibition thesis. Moe is not an easy concept to comprehend, but when you linked the three ideas linguistically, it made a lot more sense.

Those who are unfamiliar with the concepts of wabi and sabi [meaning "the beauty and elegance of modest simplicity"] must surely wonder what’s appealing about feigning poverty.

Likewise, with moe, until you get the concept, I’m sure people question the origins of this seeming obsession with beautiful little girls,bishōjo. But once you get it, you start to feel like moe might become a megaconcept, exportable like wabi and sabi.

KM: The truth is, I made up that phrase to pitch the show. But suddenly it was a headline in the Yomiuri newspaper.

TO: That’s awesome. The fact that it became a headline means everybody can understand it.

KM: It’s a play on something the architect Arata Isozaki did in his exhibition, Ma, in Paris in 1978. He provided logical English explanations for such traditional concepts as wabi and suki [meaning "sophisticated tastes"] on exhibition panels.

The key Japanese words—such as wabi, sabi, and suki—were inscribed in classical calligraphy and accompanied by lengthy English explanations printed in Gothic fonts.

I decided I’d do the same with moe.

There is a huge gap between people who know the word moe and those who don’t. Every otaku person knows moe. For them, it’s so basic. But it’s not like all young people know the term. While at graduate school, I asked my colleagues about moe but almost none of them knew it.

It dawned on me that most mainstream people just don’t know it.

TM: That disparity is really intriguing.

KM: It clearly corresponds with another gap between those who know that Akihabara is now an otaku town and those who don’t.

Those who do know couldn’t care less that others
are finally catching up, while those who don't know still think of Akihabara the way it's been portrayed in commercials for household-appliance stores. This gap reflects the state of Japanese culture and society today.

To those who are unfamiliar with *moe*, I only half-jokingly explain, "In the past, we introduced foreigners to such indigenous Japanese aesthetic concepts as *wabi* and *suki*. These days, people abroad want to know all about *moe*." A lot of people respond, "Oh, is that so..."

**TM:** Morikawa-san, I'd like to ask you, then: What prompted *otaku* to gather in Akihabara?

**KM:** *Otaku* are self-conscious about being condescending to, when they go to fashionable places like Shibuya.¹⁴

But they feel safe in Akihabara, because they know they'll be surrounded by people who share their quirks and tastes.

Over time, the focus of *otaku* taste shifted from science fiction to anime to *eroge* [erotic games], as young boys who once embraced the bright future promised by science saw this future gradually eroded by the increasingly grim reality around them. I think they needed an alternative.

---

¹⁴ Morikawa-san, a former resident of Akihabara, reflects on the changing landscape of the otaku scene over time.
I think *kawaii* [literally, “cute”] is the concept Murakami-san exported throughout the world.

Granted, Murakami-san's *kawaii* is alarming enough. But I wonder why I was further alarmed by Morikawa-san’s formulation of *wabi-sabi-moe*. In a previous conversation we had for a magazine article, you said, “*Otaku* is about the vector toward *dame*.”

As a way of expanding on that, when *otaku* choose this orientation, they head in the direction of becoming more and more pathetic. At the same time, they enjoy watching themselves becoming increasingly unacceptable. If you think about it, in a very, very loose sense, this is *wabi* and *sabi*.

I suspect this orientation is inherent in Japanese aesthetics. If you look for a Western equivalent, it would be Decadence, or the Baroque, though their is a tendency toward excessive decorativeness. I imagine such people think of themselves not in terms of “See what we’ve done. We’re amazing,” but more like, “See what we’ve done! How pathetic we are!”

**TO:** I have said this many times, but I am a “derailed” *otaku*.

Neither of your situations applies to me.

When I am talking to Okada-san, I remember feeling like I could never keep up with the distinctive climate of the *otaku* world.

So, I now want to explore the real reasons why I escaped being an *otaku*.

**TM:** That's not just true with *otaku*, though. The world of contemporary art is exactly the same. If you can’t discuss its history, you won’t be taken seriously and you won’t be accepted on their turf. I kept being reminded of this while listening to you two talk.

**TO:** In other words, just as you once had to know the history of contemporary art, now you have to understand *moe*, right?
Otaku vs. Mania

TM: This may be a frequent question, but what is the difference between otaku and mania?^{14}

KM: In otaku studies, we often argued about this distinction. Generally speaking, three differences have been articulated.

First of all, mania are "obsessives" who are socially well adjusted. They hold down jobs and love their hobbies. In contrast, otaku are socially inept. Their obsessions are self-indulgent. This point is raised mainly by the self-proclaimed mania, critical of otaku.

The second point concerns what they love. Mania tend to be obsessed with, for example, cameras and railroads, which have some sort of materiality (jitta), while otaku tend to focus on virtual things such as manga and anime. In other words, the objects of their obsessions are different.

The third point relates to the second one. A mania tends to concentrate on a single subject—say, railroads—whereas an otaku has a broader range of interests, which may encompass "figures,"^{15} manga, and anime.

Taken together, I would say—although Okada-san may disagree with me—that someone who is obsessive about anime likes anime despite the fact that it's no good, dame. That's mania. But otaku love anime because it's no good.

TO: Mania is an analogue of otaku. Obsessives are adults who enjoy their hobbies, while otaku don't want to grow up, although financially, they are adults. These days, you're not welcome in Akihabara if you aren't into moe.

I was already a science-fiction mania when otaku culture kicked in. I can understand it, but I can neither become an otaku myself nor understand moe. [Laughs]

TM: And I'm nowhere near Okada-san's level. I failed to become an otaku. Period. [Laughs]

TO: I believe otaku culture has already lost its power. What you find in Akihabara today is only sexual desire. They all go to Akihabara, which is overflowing with things that offer convenient gratification...
Figure 2.13
Takeshi (left) and Yoshimi from DiGiCharat
© Nihon TV

Figure 2.14
Akihabara
© Akishiyu Moeji
of sexual desire, made possible by the power of technology and the media.

KM: But I think the sexual desire in Akihabara is different from that in Kabuki-chō.¹⁹

TO: Kabuki-chō is about physical sex.

Because the heart of otaku culture shuns the physical, it has renamed seijyoku [sexual desire] as moe.

Sexual fantasies are becoming more and more virtual and “virtual sexuality” proliferates in Akihabara.

KM: Many otaku think they like what they like even though they know these things are objectionable, when in fact they like them precisely because they are objectionable. This gap between their own perception and reality has made it difficult to distinguish otaku from mania.

If we define otaku through this orientation toward the unacceptable, it’s easy to explain the three differences between otaku and mania. Because if you like something that’s socially unacceptable, you will appear antisocial.

Another consideration is that material things are considered superior to the immaterial. So if you are interested in the debased, you naturally gravitate...
In addition, *otaku* don't just purely love anime or manga, they choose to love these things in part as a means of making themselves unacceptable. That is why their interests are so broad.

This *dame*-orientation is evidenced by the history of *otaku* favorites. Up until the 1980s, people who watched anime—any kind of anime, be it Hayao Miyazaki or Mamoru Oshii or whatever—were all considered *otaku*. Today, Japanese anime is so accomplished that one film even won an Academy Award. As a result, grown-ups can safely watch, say, Miyazaki’s anime without being despised as *otaku*.

The upshot of this is, as soon as anime and games earned respectability in society, *otaku* created more repugnant genres, such as *bishōjo* games and *moe* anime, and moved on to them.

**TM:** Morikawa-san, you’re saying the essence of *otaku* is their orientation toward *dame*, the unacceptable.

**KM:** Yes, yes. But *dame* does not define something as bad or low quality. It’s the self-indulgent fixation of *otaku* on certain things that is socially unacceptable.

**TO:** I totally disagree. Morikawa-san and I have two vastly different conceptions of who are the core tribe of *otaku*.

Morikawa-san, your *otaku* are “urban-centric”; they are the hopeless *otaku* who roam about Akihabara. That’s why you say *otaku* are *dame*-oriented. You have to remember that only about fifty thousand people buy *Weekly Dearest My Brother*. It’s wrong to define them as core *otaku*.

In my experience, *otaku* like science fiction and anime not because these things are worthless, but because they are good. *Otaku* are attracted by things of high quality.

Some *otaku* obsessions become hits, others don’t. But according to Morikawa-san’s definition, the question of “quality” becomes irrelevant in *otaku* culture.

But what’s survived in *otaku* culture hasn’t become unacceptable. It’s survived the competition because its quality has been recognized.

Once something like a *bishōjo* game achieves a certain level of quality, you buy it even if you don’t actually like *bishōjo* games. I feel *otaku* are tough
customers who demand high standards. As a producer of videos and manga magazines, I was keenly aware of their standards and thought, "They make me work really hard because they won't fall for cheap tricks."

**Generational Debate**

**TM:** I have to confess, I don't think I fully understand the moe sensibility.

**TO:** The moe generation is mostly made up of otaku thirty-five or younger. I myself belong to the previous otaku generation, so frankly I don't understand moe.

The generational shift is abrupt. Some people below a certain age know what moe is about. But those of us above that age can't figure out why they likebishōjo so much. It seems to us that they like anything involving beautiful young girls.

There is a generational debate. The liveliest topic in the otaku world these past few years has been this generational debate.

Among themselves, otaku refer to belonging to this generation or that.

**KM:** I'm not that interested in the generational debate. Once you have a clear definition of otaku, then you can have a generational debate. But there is no generally accepted framework for understanding otaku. So it's futile to subdivide otaku.

**TO:** Morikawa-san, what is your definition of otaku?

**KM:** If you track the central focus of so-called otaku through the generations, Okada-san's generation focused on science fiction, followed by a generation that favored anime, which in turn followed by another interested in moe anime and bishōjo games. How did this evolution take place? Manga provide a handy example. Before I was born [in 1971], college students reading manga on the trains were considered a serious social problem.

Back then, manga were for children. Grown-ups were supposed to watch TV dramas. Foreign TV dramas were better than domestic ones, and films were even better than that. And European films were considered more sophisticated than Hollywood.
movies. There was a clear cultural hierarchy, and manga were at the bottom. The spiteful label of *otaku* was attached to grown-ups who had unacceptable tastes and still enjoyed kids' stuff.

As far as society is concerned, today's *otaku* taste for *moe* is more repugnant than watching porn. Eroticism is not the only motivation that informs their fascination with *moe*. They have a strong urge for what is unacceptable.

*Otaku* who buy *Weekly Dearest My Brother* not only feel affection for toy figures, but also enjoy being the kind of people who "buy embarrassing, tasteless things."

**TO:** *Otaku* are bashful. They are intelligent but so bashful that they're more comfortable with children's anime than with regular movies.

They can shed their reserve if a serious idea is filtered through a "Made for Children" label. I suspect that people who love toys and figures, manga, and anime love them because they can see the world through this filter of reticence.

*Otaku* consume this stuff because of the twist that indulges their shyness.

At any rate, I have never seen an orientation toward the unacceptable among *otaku*.

For example, *Space Battleship Yamato* dates from the first half of the 1970s, followed by *Mobile*...
Suit Gundam. Now, Morikawa-san, would you say Gundam was more unacceptable than Yamato? I don't think so.

The more examples I show you, the less solid your theory becomes.

KM: Well, let me repeat myself. Being no good, dame, doesn't mean the quality is poor. On the contrary... the quality is very high, but it's a matter of self-consciousness on the part of otaku. They are concerned that their self-indulgence appears socially unacceptable.

TO: Well, then, do you mean from the mid- to late 1970s, things got progressively more unacceptable from Yamato to Gundam, and then Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind? I don't think so.

An inclination for dame appears to exist because otaku have shifted to bishōjo these past few years. Within this limited context, you may have a point, but veteran otaku have to disagree.

KM: Generally speaking, I see a downward spiral. Aum Shinrikyō was influenced by Gemma Wars. In the 1980s, otaku dreamt of Armageddon; they fantasized about employing supernatural powers to create a new world after the end of the world.

But Aum's subway attack in 1995 thoroughly shattered the post-apocalyptic otaku dream of creating a new world in which they would be heroes.

After their apocalyptic fantasies collapsed, they steadily shifted to moe. Before their Armageddon obsession, there was science fiction, which provided otaku with an alternative to the actual future. In the broadest terms, moe has replaced the "future."

TO: But your definition of science fiction is narrow. In Japan, science fiction was viable as a literature of alternative futures only through the 1930s. From the 1960s onward, science fiction became socially conscious, a lens into alternative societies.

In Japan science fiction was associated with the future only during the brief period between World Wars I and II. As you know, Japan Sinks by Sakyō Komatsu, a blockbuster in 1973, wasn't a story about the future. Futuristic science fiction never took off here.
M: Morikawa-san, how do you define the “future”?

K: The future is not merely a time yet to come. It’s a vision of the world based on scientific understanding.

T: Again, that is true only through the 1940s. Even the visions of the future presented by Robert A. Heinlein and Isaac Asimov were discredited by the harsh attacks from the New Wave movement. Whether we’re talking about science fiction or anime, our views are so divergent. I don’t see things the way you do, Morikawa-san. Not at all.

K: You mean, we have an unbridgeable gap?

T: Not necessarily. I am sympathetic to your observation that Expo '70 prefigured an otaku landscape, and that today’s otaku are fascinated with moe. But as far as your definition of otaku is concerned, I think you are wrong. Because we are reading different “texts.”

M: I’m beginning to see a crucial generation gap between Okada-san and Morikawa-san. Speaking from my generation, I, too, find otaku more compelling than moe.

T: Murakami-san, I know you are preoccupied with otaku, but I don’t think otaku will generate anything more interesting than moe.

I belong to a group of model-tank makers. When I meet with them, I can’t tell them apart from the guys who obsess about moe. They carry backpacks and wear sweatsuits. They look like stereotypical moe enthusiasts, but you never know which toy figure—bishōjo or model tank—they’re going to pull out of their backpacks.

If we refer to them as a “tribe,” they all belong to the same tribe, but the model-tank guys are never into bishōjo. Actually, they hate bishōjo.

K: How are they different from mania?

T: To answer your question, I have to go back to my own definition of otaku. The sole difference between mania and otaku is their social acceptability. Otaku are mania who are socially rejected. Conversely,
the hobbies of *mania* are those that are socially accepted.

For example, the moment girls decide that motorbikes aren’t cool, motorbike *mania* become motorbike *otaku*. It’s just a matter of societal labeling. That’s the only difference between *mania* and *otaku*.

**KM:** Doesn’t that mean they are oriented toward the unacceptable?

**TO:** No, it doesn’t. Even if a motorbike *mania* suddenly becomes a motorbike *otaku*, he doesn’t become an *otaku* because he is unacceptable. He only becomes unacceptable because society says he is.

Let’s use an extreme example. It’s possible that one day the Japanese people will suddenly be defined as unacceptable. Say we become the enemy of the world for some reason.

Would you then say we Japanese are inherently unacceptable? I don’t think so. It boils down to the question of societal labeling.

**KM:** In that case, let’s suppose that one day anime is legitimized and enters school textbooks. Would *otaku* obsessed with anime today still love anime then? I think not. That’s not plausible.

**TO:** If anime became so wonderful that schoolteachers recommended it to their students, would *otaku* still seek out anime? I seriously doubt it.

**KM:** Does that mean they are oriented toward the unacceptable?

**TO:** Yes. Even if societal labeling affects what they are attracted to. In fact, many *otaku* support Mamoru Oshii’s latest animated film, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence.*

**Morikawa-san,** when you talk about *dame*, the unacceptable, aren’t you talking about “literature” (*bungaku*)? For practitioners of *jun-bungaku* (*literally, “pure literature”), literature was about becoming unacceptable. After *Evangelion* came out as a TV anime series in 1995, everybody fell in
Then, literature was relevant only within the realm of pure literature. Some rock musicians may have liked it a bit. But, thanks to Evangelion, ordinary people, young people enthusiastically embraced it. Eva made it OK for the main character to be pathetic. By the standards of conventional anime, it's inconceivable that Eva's main character doesn't try harder. But that's precisely what makes him so appealing today. While literature used to shock and surprise us in the past, anime shocks and surprises us today. A dame-orientation is not a new thing; in the old days, a dame-orientation was called literature.

KM: Don't you think Gundam got a similar reception? The main character was a computer geek.

TO: In Gundam, one thrust of the story was the main character's desire to be recognized by others. So Gundam and Eva are completely different.

KM: As I said before, the 1980s-era fascination with the apocalyptic was shattered by Aum. I think moe emerged as an alternative, to fill the void.

TO: I see. To me, Eva was all about "Since I can't do anything about changing the world, I will do something about myself." Don't you think "robot anime" is all about "trying to change the world"?

Morikawa-san, you talked about the apocalyptic. One step before that is "social reform" (yo-naoshi). One of the key concepts for understanding otaku is "a child's sense of justice." The reason grown-ups are enthusiastic about Kamen Rider and the "warrior team" genre (sentai mono) is because that basic sense of justice, which we abandoned in society long ago, is still meaningful in the world of these TV shows.

Of course, there's also the terrific monster designs and pan-chira [the fleeting display of girls' panties], but that's not enough to keep the boys interested. That basic sense of justice worked until Eva. But with Eva, it became clear that no one could save the world. And Eva complicated the whole thing, raising issues such as "Maybe I should at least save myself" and "What's wrong with me, thinking only soiei's sense of justice?" that's it. Everyone, you talked about the apocalyptic. One step before that is "social reform" (yo-naoshi). One of the key concepts for understanding otaku is "a child's sense of justice." The reason grown-ups are enthusiastic about Kamen Rider and the "warrior team" genre (sentai mono) is because that basic sense of justice, which we abandoned in society long ago, is still meaningful in the world of these TV shows.

Of course, there's also the terrific monster designs and pan-chira [the fleeting display of girls' panties], but that's not enough to keep the boys interested. That basic sense of justice worked until Eva. But with Eva, it became clear that no one could save the world. And Eva complicated the whole thing, raising issues such as "Maybe I should at least save myself" and "What's wrong with me, thinking only
about saving myself?" \textit{Eva} marked a turning point. Whatever we discuss today, we cannot avoid \textit{Eva}.

\textbf{KM:} After \textit{Eva}, a genre called \textit{sekai-kei} \textit{[literally, "world-type"]} emerged, and it’s very popular now. In this genre, private feelings and emotions are directly linked to the fate of the world.

\textbf{TO:} \textit{She, the Ultimate Weapon} is the definitive \textit{sekai-kei}.

\textbf{KM:} And \textit{Eva}.

\textbf{TO:} Reading just a couple volumes of \textit{She, the Ultimate Weapon} will give you a sense of the \textit{sekai-type sensibility}.

In the typical logic of \textit{sekai-kei}, the same weight is assigned to one’s private emotions and the end of the world. In \textit{She}, the world comes to an end. The main character witnesses the annihilation of the world, which happens to be caused by his girlfriend. His love for her and his despair over the destroyed planet are expressed through the same emotion.

But making a \textit{sekai-kei} ends artists’ careers.

\textbf{KM:} You mean, like Hideaki Anno, who created \textit{Eva}?

\textbf{TO:} That’s right. Anno-san has been in rehabilitation ever since \textit{by getting away from anime and working on live-action films}.

\textbf{By Way of Conclusion: Otaku and Art}

\textbf{TM:} While listening to you two, it dawned on me that \textit{otaku} is much like Pop in the art world. There are many kinds of Pop, each of which is generationally defined.

The \textit{otaku} Okada-san believes in is comparable to the serious medium of "painting" in art, while the \textit{otaku} defined by Morikawa-san is akin to my work, as a "failed \textit{otaku}.

\textbf{TO:} Right. Murakami-san, you marketed \textit{shokugan} \textit{[literally, "food toys"]} last year. I think the toy figures of \textit{Weekly Dearest My Brother} are far more \textit{otaku} than yours, precisely because you are a failed \textit{otaku}. Their work is more creative, whereas your \textit{shokugan} are very commercial. If you ask me
which is "art." I would say those of Weekly Dearest My Brother.

But the problem is that your work is more recognized socially as art—which makes it so hard for me to understand art.

**TM:** In today's discussion, a few things became clear: the huge gap between those who know moe and those who don't, as Morikawa-san told us; the generational debate among otaku; and the three different positions we have—that is, I am in art; Okada-san, in otaku; and Morikawa-san, in moe.

**KM:** Okada-san, I don't know if it's a fair categorization, but generationally speaking, your otaku experience was from a time when people respected otaku for their achievements.

I had the opposite experience, belonging to the generation that suffered otaku-bashing. In our discussion, I emphasized the unacceptability of otaku, and you said I was "completely wrong." I wonder if this reflects our contradictory experiences.

**TO:** For argument's sake, let's assume you define otaku as the self-proclaimed fans of gyarugē and bishōjo figures, who are about thirty or younger today. If you say this group of people have such and such dame-orientation, I would have to agree.

But I don't think otaku are limited to this group. Otaku encompass many diverse types. That's why I can't agree with you.

And this brings me back to my initial statement, which is that I quit otaku studies, because I thought that there were no more otaku.

**TM:** We'll have to reconvene some other day to discuss more about the relationship between otaku and art. Morikawa-san and Okada-san, thank you so much for today's discussion.

(March 31, 2004)
Translator's Notes
The translator wishes to thank Toshio Okada, Kaichirō Morikawa, and Yoshiyuki Mashimo for their assistance in compiling the notes.

1. The term otaku signifies "obsessed fans, primarily of anime and manga." First introduced to the print media by the critic Akio Nakamori in 1983, the word defies any simple (or simplistic) definition. While the word otaku sometimes carries a derogatory connotation in Japan, it can have a positive meaning as a Japanese loanword in the West, signifying knowledgeable or hardcore fans of anime. For its etymological origin, see Noi Sawaragi's essay in this volume.

2. The word dame (pronounced "dah-mé") originated in the Japanese a9of 90sangspaces of no benefit to the player claiming them—i.e., useless spaces. In contemporary idiomatic Japanese, this versatile word variously means "no good," "worthless," "incompetent," "unacceptable," "pathetic," or "inept."

3. Established in Osaka in 1964, Kaiyūdo is a pioneer in shokugan (literally, "food toys"); see note 41) and "figures" (see note 18). The company initially worked with confectionary manufacturers, but since 1982 it has devoted its best to developing original products. These now amount to some two thousand different items, ranging from "capuca toys" featuring characters from Evangelion (see note 38) to those of the natural history series Aquanal and Dinosala.

4. The Great Hanshin Earthquake struck the region between Kobe and Osaka early in the morning on January 17, 1995. More than 6,000 people died, with more than 43,000 injured and nearly 520,000 evacuated. In an earthquake-prone country, it was one of the most devastating single events, comparable to the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, which destroyed much of Tokyo and its environs.

5. Gamera is a tokusatsu (special effects) monster-film series featuring a gigantic mutant tortoise (kame in Japanese, and hence the creature's name, Gamera). The original Gamera cycle consisted of eight movies produced from 1965 to 1980, with a second series of three movies appearing from 1995 to 1999. In each installment, Gamera wreaks havoc on Tokyo and other Japanese cities while battling an array of other giant monsters.

6. At 764 meters, Mt. Mihara crowns Mt. Oshima, located on Izu Oshima Island south of Tokyo. When the volcano erupted in November 1986, the island's entire population, some ten thousand altogether, evacuated the island within a day, as the flowing lava rapidly encroached upon residential areas.


8. The term moe originated in a computerized transcription error, when the character meaning "to burst into bud" (moeru) was substituted for the homonym meaning "to catch fire." Moe in otaku jargon denotes a rarefied pseudo-love for certain fictional characters (in anime, manga, and the like) and their related embodiments. For further detail, see Otaku: Persona = Space = City (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 2004).

9. The presentation of Otaku: Persona = Space = City at the Venice Biennale's Ninth International Architecture Exhibition (September–November 2004) was organized by commissioner Kaichirō Morikawa. It included works by the architect Kenzō Tange, the otaku critic Toshio Okada, the company Kaiyūdo, and others.

10. The best-known bishōjo is Usagi Tsukino (Serenia in the U.S. version) of the popular TV anime series Sailor Moon (first broadcast in Japan in 1992). Her full title in Japanese is bishōjo
ishi, or "pretty-girl warrior." **Moe-typebishōjo** (such as the ten-year-old Digiko of *Digimon Harat*, a 1999 TV anime series) are generally young, innocent-looking girls.

11. Arata Isozaki (b. 1931) is a leading architect-theorist who represents Japan's avant-garde and postmodern architecture. He designed the Museum of Modern Art, Gunma (1974) and the Tsukuba Civic Center (1982); among others: and created *Electric Labyrinth* for the 1985 Milan Triennale. He is Artistic Director of Yokohama 2005: International Triennale of Contemporary Art.

12. Organized by Arata Isozaki, the exhibition MA: *Space-Time in Japan* was first presented at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1978. Under the theme, "Ma is the place in which a life is lived," as articulated in the accompanying catalogue (the English edition published by the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Isozaki visualized different manifestations of *ma* (literally, "space") in Japanese culture through diverse installations.

13. Akihabara is a huge electronics and electronics shopping district in Tokyo. Long dominated by household-appliance stores, Akihabara began to change in character in the 1990s, when large-scale stores specializing in personal computers and related products prompted its diversification, which in turn drew younger customers to the area. The rapid infiltration of otaku culture beginning around 1997 completely changed the face of Akihabara, Keioōdō was a pioneer in this transformation, moving its stores from the fashionable Shibuya district, and was followed by other stores specializing in commercial and privately made merchandise related to anime, manga, and games, such as *dōjinsshi* (fanzines) and character-based products.

14. "Shibuya is a district of Tokyo controlled by the Sazan and Tokyō groups, companies that promote a fashionable and sophisticated urban lifestyle through their consumer products. A such, the whole town has become a gigantic advertisement." (Morikawa)

15. **Eroge** is an abbreviation for "erotic games." It is a subcategory of *bishōjo* games (see note 22) that includes sexually explicit, adult content, and is thus unavailable to people under the age of eighteen. The most representative eroge is *To Heart*.

16. For *kawaii* in contemporary Japanese art and pop culture, see Midori Matsui's essay in this volume.

17. In Japan, a person who has a fanatical enthusiasm for or interest in something is called *mania*, derived from the English "maniac."

18. "*Figures*" (pronounced *figyua* in Japanese) are a counterpart of American "action figures," broadly encompassing plastic representations of popular characters, from anime, and manga.

19. Kabuki-cho is an area no more than a few hundred meters square, northeast of Shinjuku's subway and railroad hub in Tokyo. In addition to many small restaurants and bars, it is crowded with massage parlors and other purveyors of sex.

20. Hayao Miyazaki is an anime artist, film director, manga writer, and founder of the anime company Studio Ghibli. He first made his name with his manga *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1982-94) and its cinematization in 1984 (see note 27). Often centering on such themes as the conflict of nature vs. science and technology or the destruction and rebirth of civilization, he has created such popular anime films as *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (Oscar Nomro no kamikakushi, 2003), which won the Academy Award for best feature-length animated film.


22. Little girls are [*eroge*](note 22) that includes sexually explicit, adult content, and is thus unavailable to people under the age of eighteen. The most representative eroge is *To Heart*.
22. Bishōjo games have two categories: erogē (“erotic games”; see note 18) and gyarugē (“‘gal games”; see note 43). While the former include sexually explicit content, the latter do not. It should be noted, however, that the labeling criteria vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, depending on the intended medium for the game software (i.e., a computer or a “game machine” such as PlayStation and GameBoy).

23. Exemplars of the moe-anime genre are DiGiCharat (1999; see note 10) and Love Hina (2000).

24. Released in 2004, Shokan watashi no onii-chan|Weekly Dearest My Brother is a series of boxed sets, each containing a bishōjo-centered comic booklet and a figure. These depict the lives of girls attending a fictional private elementary school; figures are produced by Kaiyōdō. To date, six different boxes have been issued in total. See pl. 20.

25. Space Battleship Yamato (Uchū sensan Yamato; broadcast in the S. as Star Blazers) was a breakthrough TV anime series, first broadcast in Japan in 1974. See pl. 27 and Sawaragi’s essay.

26. Mobile Suit Gundam (Kidō senshi Gandamu), first broadcast in 1973, was a TV anime series that spawned a long line of sequel series. See pl. 30.

27. Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (Kaze no tani no Naushika, modified and released in the U.S. as Warriors of the Wind) first took form in 1982 as a serialized manga epic (serialized through 1994), created by Hayao Miyazaki (see note 20), who went on to direct the 1984 film based on the manga. Princess Nausicaä, who grows up in a safe haven insulated from the polluted world a thousand years after a great war, uses her intellect, heart, and courage to protect everything she loves.

28. For Aum Shinrikyō, an armed cult group that released deadly Sarin gas on Tokyo subways, see Sawaragi’s essay.

29. Genma Wars (Genma tai sen), a story about people with supernatural abilities who fight Genma (Phantom Demon) to protect the Earth, originated as a series of books by Kazumasa Hirai. The novels were adapted by Shotaro Ishinomori as manga, and were subsequently made into an anime film in 1983 (released as Harmagedon in the U.S.).

30. For the science-fiction novel Japan Sinks (Nihon chinbotsu), see Sawaragi’s essay.

31. “New Wavescience fiction, characterized by its philosophical bent, arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Representative writers include J.G. Ballard in the U.S. and Koji Yamasaki in Japan.” (Ogada)

32. Expo ’70, held in Osaka in 1970, was the first World’s Fair in Asia. Under the theme of “Progress and Harmony of Mankind,” it featured a wide range of technological triumphs as well as projections for the future—from space technology (the U.S. pavilion exhibited a moon rock and an Apollo spacecraft) to a monorail, moving sidewalks, and electric cars, to computer-linked information services.

33. Oshii’s Innocence (2004, released as Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence in the U.S.) was nominated for the Cannes Film Festival in 2004.

34. “As opposed to popular and mass literature, jun-bungaku (pure literature) aspires to achieve the purity of art, eschewing popular tastes and a wider reception. Within Japan’s literary establishment, jun-bungaku often means the "I" novel, which focuses on the author’s private experiences and feelings. Representative writers of jun-bungaku include Yukio Mishima and Osamu Dazai.” (Ogada)
vangelion, commonly known as Eva, is shorthand for the TV anime series Neon Genesis Evangelion (Shin-seiki Evangelion, or "New Century Evangelion"), first broadcast in 1995–96, and its cinematic adaptation (1997), both created by the anime studio Gainax. See pl. 33.

"Robot anime" is a popular genre of anime that features powerful or otherwise extraordinary robots as protagonists or the central theme of the story. The very first robot anime was Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atom), which was also the first anime TV series in Japan, broadcast in 1963. In recent years, robot anime has become "giant robot anime," the most representative example of which is Mobile Suit Gundam (see pl. 30).

Masked Rider is a TV special-effects series, first broadcast in 1971–73. The heroes of the title characters, who are "altered humans" battling against the evil organization Shocker, have been perpetuated by spin-off Riders in subsequent series, which continue to this day.

"The warrior team" genre, which originated in the special-effects TV series Kidō Butôdai Goēronji, or "Secret Team of Five Rangers" (released in the U.S. as Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers), has enjoyed tremendous popularity in Japan since Goēronji was first broadcast in 1973. The "team" concept, derived from the "double riders" scheme of Masked Rider, customarily allows the inclusion of one female fighter.

She, the Ultimate Weapon (Saishū hēki kanojo) originated in 2000 as a serialized manga by Shin Takahashi (translation published as The Last Love Song on This Little Planet). It was made into a TV anime series in 2002, and adapted as a game in 2003.

Hideaki Anno is a screenwriter and director whose best-known work is the TV anime series Neon Genesis Evangelion and its cinematization (see pl. 33). After Evangelion, Anno shifted his interest from anime to live-action films, and in 1996 directed the feature film Love & Pop, based on Ryû Murekami's novel; he created his first special-effects scenes in his 2004 film, Cutie Honey.

Contemporary shōkugan originated in pangu gashî (literally, "toy card"), first introduced in 1955, which were candies packaged with small toys and targeted at children. In 1999, the shōkugan boom was launched by Furuta's "Choco Egg," a chocolate shell containing elaborately detailed plastic animal and insect figures manufactured by Kaiyūsō, which set the standard for things to come. The extremely high quality of today's shōkugan has made them objects of adult— and childhood—fascination, as demonstrated by Murakami's shōkugan series, Superflat Museum (2003).

In 1989, a landmark event turned otaku into a household word: the serial murders of young girls by Tsutomu Miyazaki. When the enervating mass media discovered that the alleged murderer's room was filled with numerous volumes of manga and thousands of videotapes of anime and other genres of popular culture, the whole nation was stunned by his obsessive nature. The word otaku was closely associated with Miyazaki's profile—a weirdo unable to form meaningful relationships with grown women or distinguish reality from fantasy. The mass media went on the attack against otaku, and children interested in anime and games were frequently harassed and ostracized at school.

Syōkūgū is an abbreviation of "gal games." It is a subcategory of kikyō game (see note 22) that does not contain sexual content, and is thus available to people under eighteen. The most representative example is Tokimeki Memorial.