

Transcultural *otaku*: Japanese representations of fandom and representations of Japan in anime/manga fan cultures

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“Otaku is a Japanese word coined during the eighties, it is used to describe fanatics that have an obsessive interest or hobby... The Japanese think of otaku the same way most people think of nerds - sad and socially inept. Western Anime fans often use the word to describe anime and manga fans, except with more enthusiastic tones than the Japanese.” (<http://www.thip.co.uk/work/Competition2/what.htm#otaku>)

This paper will consider the transcultural appropriation of Japanese representations of fandom. The Japanese term “otaku” is similar to pathologising representations of media fandom in the US and UK (where fans are stereotyped as geeks: see Jensen 1992). Although writers dealing with Western fans of Japanese anime and manga have noted these fans’ positive revaluation of the term “otaku” (Schodt 1996 and Mecalado 2000), such writers have not considered this transcultural ‘(mis)reading’ in sufficient detail (Palumbo- Liu and Ulrich Gumbrecht 1997; An 2001). And it should be noted from the outset that by placing misreading in scare quotes, I want to express certain misgivings about this mis-concept.

The US/UK appropriation of a (negative) fan stereotype from a different national context raises a number of questions. Firstly, although fans have long been viewed as active, appropriating audiences (Jenkins 1992), this process of appropriation has been largely explored via the relationship between fans and their favoured texts rather than between fans and “foreign” representations of fandom. Discussions of fandom have been typically severed from discussions of national identity, often by virtue of the fact that certain “traditional” fan objects and their US/UK audiences (Napier 2001:256, referring to *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, and we might add *Doctor Who*) have provided an object of study for scholars placed within the same “national contexts” as the fan cultures they are analysing.

Secondly, where national identities *have* been analysed, they have been perceived either as part of a process of ‘Othering’ within fan cultures, with quirky British TV being valued over glossy US TV (see Tulloch and Jenkins 1995), or as part of an ‘exoticisation’ (see McDonagh 1991), with the Italian *giallo* being valued over Hollywoodised horror. National identity and fandom have also been viewed as

semiotically interlocked, usually in the case of film stars or icons analysed as synecdochal of national cultures (e.g. Street 2000 on Ewan McGregor, fandom and the British film star). Set against these familiar narratives of transcultural misrecognition, transnational Othering and the nation as iconically-imaged “imagined community”, I want to argue here that fandom and national identity might have a more complex relationship, one that does not simply locate fan cultures ‘in’ a given national context, ‘against’ other national contexts, or as ‘appropriating’ transcultural products in a global economy/culture.

What possibilities does this multiple negation leave open? In other words, what types of transcultural fandom may have been neglected and marginalised in prior studies of fan cultures?

It could quite fairly be said that *manga* and *anime* fandom have provided one high-profile arena and focal point for this debate. And many of the previously well-established blind spots with regard to fandom and national identity have been replayed here. Discussion has centred on the relationship between Western anime fans and the texts that they consume, with Annalee Newitz arguing that:

“When Americans are anime otaku... [a]s much as they may dislike or avoid American culture – and even if they are from Asian racial backgrounds – *they are still Americans, and they are rejecting their national culture in favour of another national culture*. Furthermore, the act of doing so seems to threaten them with feminization and disempowerment. This suggests that fans are engaging, consciously or unconsciously, in an imperialist relationship where Japan is dominant.” (Newitz 1994:10-11)

This argument marks out anime fandom as an object of academic fascination precisely because it is alleged to reverse narratives of US cultural imperialism, and because clearly identifiable lines surrounding a national “context” appear to be breached. And although it may be the case that “anime otaku in America consume anime as a way of dealing with – in a displaced form – their investment in American popular culture.” (Newitz 1994:2) this qualification hardly dents Newitz’s focus on the boundaries of national context. Fans may encode or translate their passion for US popular culture via anime (since Newitz argues that the typical forms and narratives of anime are closely related to US pop culture), but this smoothing over of cultural difference is

framed within a strident (and italicised) emphasis on fans' rejection of "their" national culture. The notion of a securely-enclosing national context is also reproduced in Isolde Standish's work on audiences for *Akira*, which explores:

"the culturally specific codes and practices which a Japanese spectator employs to create meaning and derive pleasure from *Akira*. (Obviously, Western audiences will apply different – non-Japanese – codes and practices in their construction of meaning, thus leading to a different interpretation of the film.)" (Standish 1998:70n2)

This emphasis on cultural particularity and difference, leading to a potential fixing of cultural/national context, has also shaded into work on 'techno-Orientalism', where it is alleged that the West's perception of Japan can only be a type of failed vision framed by the fears and desires of Western cultures:

"It seems that the West can never see Japan directly. It is as if the Japanese were always destined to be seen through the fears and fantasies of Europeans and Americans. Japan is the Orient, containing all the West most lacks and everything it most fears. Against Japanese difference, the West fortifies and defends what it sees as its superior culture and identity. And so the West's imaginary Japan works to consolidate old mystifications and stereotypes: 'they' are barbaric and 'we' are civilised; 'they' are robots while 'we' remain human." (Morley and Robins 1995:172)

And within this imaginary, Japanese fans (otaku) are also Othered. Although the "*otaku* are the postmodern people" (Morley and Robins 1995:170), they are constructed in both dominant Japanese and 'Western' accounts as indicating "the unhealthy nature of individualistic lifestyles. Otaku represented new Japanese who lacked any remaining vestiges of social consciousness and were instead entirely preoccupied by their particularistic and specialist personal pastimes" (Kinsella 1998:page 16 of 19, online version). US/UK media fans have been semiotically marginalised and stereotyped in a variety of ways, being imaged as "social misfits who have become so obsessed with [a TV] show that it forecloses other types of social experience ('Get A Life');... [and being] feminised and/or desexualised through their intimate engagement with mass culture ('Have you ever kissed a girl?)" (Jenkins 1992:10). These figures and tropes are replayed in US and Japanese coverage of Japanese otaku, an infamous example occurring in Karl Taro Greenfeld's *Speed Tribes*, where Snix, a twenty-five year old Otaku (1995:278) is quizzed on his sex life:

“When asked if he has ever had sex, Snix stares at the ceiling for about thirty seconds. He breathes deeply.

“That depends on your definition of sex,” he says.
Intercourse with a human, male or female, he is told.
He shakes his head.” (Greenfeld 1995:281)

Lost to the sensuous, real world of human contact, otaku are seemingly infantilised, and absorbed into mediated unreality. However, the cross-cultural coincidence of a set of highly negative fan stereotypes should perhaps provoke us to pause for thought. Are supposedly bounded ‘national contexts’ and ‘national differences’ at work here? Seemingly not. Are we dealing with a nightmare of sameness in which a global and homogenised culture seeps across East and West? Again, seemingly not.

I would suggest that what the figure of the otaku radically presents to both fan and academic audiences in the US/UK who are prepared to pay attention is a transcultural homology, and one which is not imposed by forces of globalisation, even if it may relate to forces and tensions of late capitalism. Sharon Kinsella’s cautioning note is extremely important here:

“Often, points of striking and unexpected similarity between cultural trends in contemporary Japan and those of other late industrial societies provide social insights that are at least as profound as those discovered at points of cultural difference, which are almost habitually focused upon in the academy. Points of similarity in the cultural developments of different societies illustrate the pervasiveness of international social and cultural processes. Amateur manga is a good example of this point. ...The yaoi style emerging from Japanese *dojinshi* is clearly the Japanese equivalent of Anglo-American slash... in fact there are actual links between amateur manga and fanzine production in these different countries.” (Kinsella 1998:page 12 of 19, online version)

That is to say, without falling back into notions of the “universal” (as does Gill 1998:51) or a rather simplistically “shared technological culture” (Telotte 2001:116), we might take note of cultural similarities and differences. In this instance, national contexts are neither entirely bounded and different, and nor do they inevitably generate or sustain transcultural ‘appropriation’ or ‘misreading’. Instead, it is possible here that US/UK fan cultures may *recognise* their own cultural devaluation in the figure of the otaku, provoking a transcultural identification. To an extent this recognition and selection of ‘foreign’ representations as relevant to a subculture’s experience or “structure of feeling” remains an appropriation of sorts, but it is not an

appropriation as the term is commonly used. For a start, it logically *implies* no transformative action on or with the texts being ‘appropriated’, consisting instead of a selection based on criteria of relevance. Paul Willis’s long-term investigation of “cultural homologies” (1978 and 2000) is undoubtedly relevant here. In his early work on motorbike boys and hippies, Willis emphasises how a homological relationship can be established between cultural groups and artefacts:

“The artefact, object or institution in such a [homological] relationship must consistently serve the group at a number of levels with meanings, particular attitudes, bearings and certainties. It must help to support, return and substantiate particular kinds of social identity and the practice and application of particular kinds of sensibility – conscious and unconscious, voluntary and automatic. Items which have this kind of relationship to a social group are likely to be sought out and pursued by, rather than be simply randomly proximate to, a social group.” (Willis 1978:191)

Cultural texts and objects that can function in this way are therefore selected “from countless possibilities, and... [placed] in personal *mises en scene*, in precise micro-circumstances” (Willis 2000:72). Homologies can also be explained via “integral” analysis, in Willis’s terms, which seeks to account for the “‘objective possibilities’ of a cultural item” and how these “might be expected to marginally change the sensibilities, structure of feelings and characteristic concerns of the social group concerned with it.” (Willis 1978:201) From this, it can be noted that homology is not pure reflection since cultural groups select out homological objects/texts/artefacts, while their subcultural or fan-cultural “structure of feeling” may also be subtly modified through the process.

US/UK anime fans, I’m arguing, select and use anime or manga as a type of homological series of texts, but they also show a related tendency to identify with and select out Japanese representations of fandom, thus identifying with the “badge of honour” (Napier 2000:254) of the term ‘otaku’. And while it could be argued that there is an active appropriation of the term involved here, since a Japanese insult is converted into a marker of subcultural difference, this ‘conversion’ is at best partial and unstable, as Newitz has pointed out:

“In Japan, the term otaku is a kind of insult; it refers to a person who is so involved with a particular type of fan subculture that he or she becomes obsessed, even insane. One way otaku gets translated into English is with the derogatory term ‘fanboy’. In

America, fans of Japanese animation often call themselves otaku with pride, although they are quick to point out that the term is, in fact, insulting.” (Newitz 1994:1)

Even when the term is proudly reclaimed, then, its insulting nature is nevertheless testified to and re-emphasised, in a rather good example of the ‘multi-accentual’ sign (see also Pustz 1999:xii on the term ‘fanboy’ in comic book fan culture, and Hills 2002 on the discourse of ‘cult’ fandom). This is not a clear ‘(mis)reading’, but rather a (re)-valuation based on transcultural recognition and identification. Such identification, while allowing the fan culture to voice its marginalised status and subcultural difference, also carries a significant modification: by emphasising cross-cultural similarities this semiotic exchange programme suggests that fan experiences are not only ‘subcultural’ but cross-cultural if not somehow inevitable or natural. Fandom is potentially legitimated via this identification, which does not only concern “difference“ and the exotic, but also carries implications of a ‘universal’ (transcultural) struggle for fan recognition. It could even be suggested, rather provocatively no doubt, that US/UK anime fans drawing on representations of otaku are performing, in subcultural spaces, a project analogous to Marxism in the sense that they are partly discounting or operating across national contexts in order to build a sense of (semiotic) solidarity. Taking this appealing analogy – the fan internationalist where ‘fans of the world unite’ - too far is likely to get me into trouble, not least because there is rarely an “explicit” politics to this fan cultural activity, and fan “semiotic solidarity” sounds ominously close to the concept of “semiotic democracy”, which didn’t meet a very warm welcome in the annals of cultural studies...

However, it is worth holding on to the fact that US/UK anime fans show a tendency to consume Japanese representations of fandom as well as, and alongside, Japanese animation. Recent work in the field has tended to emphasise how national differences are dissolved or rendered irrelevant to transcultural fan consumption. Susan Napier (2000:242), for example, criticises earlier studies (Pointon 1997 and Newitz 1994) for their “one-note description” of US anime/manga fans, and goes on to view anime and manga’s US appeal as a matter of ‘difference’ that is disarticulated from ‘Japaneseness’:

“The fact that anime is a Japanese... product, is certainly important but largely because this signifies that anime is a form of media entertainment outside the mainstream, something ‘different’” (2000:242).

By effectively divorcing fan ‘difference’ from images of Japan, Napier successfully wards off accusations of Orientalism, but potentially at the cost of falsifying many fans’ communal revaluation of - and identification with - the term “otaku”. I want to argue here that Napier prematurely closes off the question of how Japanese-ness functions, by assuming that this ‘quality’ can be easily semiotically mapped or recognised (through Japanese stereotypes or markers of difference). ‘Japanese-ness’ has to be assumed to correspond to a limited set of signifiers such that analysts can recognise these signifiers at work, or so that fan-respondents can judge whether ‘Japanese-ness’ is relevant to them. This is a significant point, and I will return to it later.

Napier asked anime fans in her survey whether they knew what the term ‘otaku’ meant, and found that:

“answers... were somewhat surprising. In Japan, the word is used derisively to describe anime fans, but in the West it has, to some extent, been adopted as a badge of honour among fans. Despite this, a full 30 percent surveyed had no idea what it meant... This finding is intriguing because it would seem that such an exclusive term would appeal to the fan subculture by suggesting an intimate relationship with Japan... For a few respondents this was clearly the case... But many others showed little interest in the term beyond a basic definition while others obviously did not care.” (Napier 2001:254)

However, this doesn’t quite tally with Napier’s general conclusion that “it is the ‘Otherness’ of anime rather than its specific ‘Japanese-ness’ that is one of its fundamental appeals to the fans.” (Napier 2001:255). Rather, it suggests that the considerable *majority* of fans were aware of the meaning of otaku (presumably 70%) while others were clearly strongly invested in an imagined “relationship with Japan”. If anything, this indicates that, as work on other fandoms has long been aware (see Hills 2002), there is no ‘single’ fan culture surrounding a given text or set of texts, but instead there are different fan interpretive communities and factions. Napier’s data makes sense in relation to this key finding in fan studies (see also Tulloch and Jenkins

1995), but her interpretation closes down this issue in favour of reaching a generalisable conclusion.

Despite this problem, Napier's argument – that national identity and national difference don't seem to be activated in anime fans' readings and pleasures – has been broadly reproduced in a number of other important accounts. Although Napier is careful to separate her interpretation of Western anime fans from that of Annalee Newitz, Newitz actually makes a very similar argument, noting that:

“the officers [of Cal Animage, a California wide, campus-based animation club – MH] I interviewed seemed least interested in discussing the national origin of anime. ...they finally told me that asking them about Japanese culture in anime was to pose the wrong questions... the fans I interviewed and those I surveyed had consistently confused responses when I inquired about the national origin of anime. Many fans claimed that Japan is the only source of good animation, and criticized American popular culture for being... ‘stupid’, ‘simplistic’... But at the same time they often did not want to connect their enjoyment of anime to any feelings they might have about Japan specifically” (Newitz 1994:4)

Again, ‘Japaneseness’ was downplayed by these fans. And Anne Allison, agreeing with the thrust of Napier's account, offers the following support:

“most of the (US) viewers and fans I spoke with about *Sailor Moon* did not regard this [‘Japanese-ness’] as a decisive factor in their reception of the show. ...for almost no one I spoke to or communicated with over the Internet was the Japaneseness of the characters and story identified as more than a minor concern (comments such as ‘it's cool that the characters are Japanese’ or ‘I got tired of seeing letters I couldn't read’)” (Allison 2000:86)

Allison, also drawing on the work of Koichi Iwabuchi, argues that it is “the creation of imaginary worlds that strike[s] fans with a mixture of familiarity as well as fantasy...” that is important to anime fans, particularly where the “construction of a desirable, imaginary world is disconnected from literal place in the sense that where these products come from (and where they are consumed...) matters little in the pleasure of consumption.” (Allison 2000:85). Like Napier, Iwabuchi, and Newitz to an extent, Allison's work downplays national identities in favour of the pleasures of popular culture and the construction of fan identities.

However, while this style of conclusion - emphasising the liminal 'placelessness' of anime and its disarticulation from national identities and contexts - has clearly found favour in what could be described as an emergent body of literature, it carries some difficulties. Alongside the argument already put forward, that Napier's conclusion necessarily marginalises a considerable fraction of anime fans who identify with the term *otaku* and Japanese devaluations of fandom, there are at least three related problems.

Firstly, there is the question of whether fans' apparent disinterest in 'Japaneseness' can be entirely accepted, for as Newitz has written:

"Their ambivalence about anime's status as Japanese culture, it seems to me, tips us off to how important this issue really is for *otaku*. ...As much as *otaku* get pleasure out of anime, it seems to me that their enjoyment depends on avoiding anxieties and questions that they have about anime's relationship to Japan." (Newitz 1994:3 - 4)

In other words, rather than Japaneseness actually becoming culturally irrelevant, anime fans may be performing their identities in ways that create national identity as a structuring absence, as that which remains unspoken or non-articulated rather than disarticulated.

Secondly, there is the previously alluded to matter of what counts as 'Japaneseness': fans may be drawing on aspects of anime's 'Japaneseness' or cultural difference without explicitly recognising this as 'Japanese'. Examples could include how US/UK fans of mecha relate to diegetic bodily transformations and the fetishisation of technology and technologised power, as well as how US/UK anime fans more broadly relate to specifically Japanese notions of heroism in anime. Morley and Robins (1995) consider the former point, concerned as it is with 'techno-orientalism':

"The association of technology and Japaneseness now serves to reinforce the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world. The *otaku* generation - kids 'lost to everyday life' by their immersion in computer reality - provides a good symbol of this. These children of the media "despise physical contact and love media, technical communication and the realm of reproduction and simulation in general" (Grassmuck 1991:201)" (Morley and Robins 1995:169-170)

However, Morley and Robins complicate this by observing that “there is also the sense that these mutants [otaku] are now better adapted to survive in the future” (Morley and Robins 1995:170), and it is this positive valuation of techno-orientalism that otaku-identifying fans adopt. While consuming images of techno-power, then, anime fans may be exoticising, desiring, and identifying with, connotations linked to ‘Japaneseness’ without pursuing this semiotic chain on to its ‘Japanese’ conclusion. A cultural system of value could therefore be reproduced through fan agency and activity even without fans explicitly discussing ‘Japaneseness’.

Where the matter of heroism is concerned, Antonia Levi has argued that most “manga and anime heroes are... clearly identifiable albeit in a different way from America’s flawless heroes.” (Levi 1998:72) Levi goes on to mark out the key differences between US and Japanese heroes:

“Heroism in most manga and anime is internal: heroes must be sincere and they must be selfless, at least at the moment of heroism. It is not necessary for a manga or anime hero to be a saint, to fight for the right side, or even to be successful. Anyone who sincerely gives his or her best efforts to almost any task can be a hero... the Japanese concept of heroism exists apart from ideology or victory. That is an idea that appeals to many Americans, particularly Generation X.” (ibid.)

This suggests, again, that anime fans may be attracted to anime because of its cultural difference, but that they may perceive this difference as a matter of aesthetics rather than cultural/national difference. And again, fans may “exoticize” anime on the basis of its tragic, sincere heroes, relating this to a “structure of feeling” within the fan culture that (much like the identification with otaku) centres on fandom’s painful cultural marginalisation and its powerful sincerity (see An 2001 who puts forward a similar argument to account for the cult of John Woo’s *The Killer* rather than anime).

Moving on from the matter of occluded or semiotically attenuated ‘Japaneseness’, there is, finally, the counterfactual performance of fan identity, where fans go further than identifying with otaku and develop a wider interest in Japan and Japanese culture on the basis of their anime fandom:

“Even among non-Asians, Japan – since it is the source of favorite anime and manga – is regarded as a sort of cultural mecca. Japanese otaku-fan Toshio Okada’s article

on this phenomenon... appeared in the Japanese news magazine Aera on October 2, 1995: “Why wasn’t I born in Japan?” was the reported lament of one U.S. high school student... “Americans aren’t cool. I wish I was Japanese”” (Schodt 1996:331-2)

All of which indicates that while we may benefit from viewing Western anime fans as playing down and deactivating ‘national’ origins and interpretations, we also need to remain alert to the ways in which national identities may yet be either explicitly or implicitly performed through anime fandom. We also need to consider how the ‘exoticisation’ of anime may not be entirely disarticulated from notions and connotations of Japaneseness, even if the term ‘Japaneseness’ is itself disavowed by fans. For example, Jonathan Clements has argued that much of the success of anime in the US can be attributed to the mediating and ‘exoticizing’ role of US science fiction fandom, and that, in a sense, the one fan culture (anime) emerged through the concerns of the other (science fiction fandom):

“many of the most important American sf novels and films of the... [1980s] used Japanese settings, characters and themes. Darko Suvin has written of a “nipponizing vocabulary” in the landmark sf works of the period... the vogue for “Japanesquerie” linked anime and manga to a sub-genre of science fiction... This has had a definite influence on the kind of material that is published. Most of the anime and manga available in the English language are within the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror, for these are the niches which companies can easily expect to reach from points-of-sale in science fiction bookshops. Whereas the manga and anime publications in Japan cross every conceivable genre of publishing, the translated works still tend to reflect the buying preferences of the early audience of science fiction fans.” (Clements 1995:40)

This also indicates that fractions of anime fandom should not be viewed as ‘isolated’ fan cultures (see Hills 2002 for more on this), but may need to be linked to other ‘parent’ fandoms or subcultures and their related ‘exoticisations’ and otherings of Japanese culture.

In this piece I have argued that a focus on media representations of fandom must be central to any analysis of US and UK fans’ self-identifications as “otaku”. Japanese culture’s pathologisation of fandom is taken up as a “badge of honour” by fractions of US and UK fans (Napier 2000:254) through a set of ‘practical logics’:

- US/UK use of the term “otaku” acknowledges that fandom is hegemonically devalued both in Japan and ‘the West’. The Japanese fan is therefore linked to the non-Japanese fan: fan identity is prioritised over national identity. This identification can be read as an attempt to ‘naturalise’ fan identities by implying that fandom is an essentially transnational/transcultural experience.
- However, arguably US/UK “otaku” continue to use stereotyped images of Japan within their construction of ‘transcultural’ fan identities. The desire to legitimate fan culture as transcultural continues to draw on stereotypical connotations of ‘Japaneseness’ as linked to technologised power and/or flawed heroism or fanaticism.

The term “otaku” becomes, in its transcultural circulation, a ‘shifter’: a mobile sign of self and other, simultaneously exoticising and legitimating the self-as-other and the other-as-self. Such subcultural “homologies” (following Willis 1978 and 2000) cannot be seen entirely as utopian (no-placed) attacks on orientalist visions of Japan. Stereotypical connotations of ‘Japaneseness’ are drawn on within a subcultural project aimed at legitimating fan culture and revaluing/combating both ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ fan stereotypes. Prioritising fan identity means that US/UK anime fans render national identity invisible at one level (Napier 2000; Allison 2000) while simultaneously reinstating stereotyped national ‘differences’ in support of fandom’s cultural value. There is no fixed or fixing ‘national’ context at work here; *contra* Bourdieu’s model of “cultural fields”, anime is not produced and consumed by Japanese and US/UK otaku in different and incommensurable ‘national-cultural’ fields. Bourdieu’s approach, drawn on by David Palumbo-Liu, reinstates the securely bounded national contexts that I began by criticising:

"The meaning and function of a foreign work are determined at least as much by the field of destination as by its field of origin. This is so first of all because its meaning and function in the field of origin are often completely ignored. In addition the transfer from one national field to another is made across a series of social operations: an operation of selection...; an operation of marketing...; and... an operation of reading" (Bourdieu 1990 in Palumbo-Liu 1997:9)

This approach seemingly neglects to consider transcultural homologies at the subcultural level (although it could be argued that Bourdieu’s transnational or

‘universal’ emphasis on similarly structuring aspects of cultural and economic capital itself moves partly in this direction: see Palumbo-Liu 1997). Meanings and functions in the field of origin and field of destination may be *similarly* structured, with the result that ‘relative homologies’ (not relationships of identity or sameness) can be meaningfully and non-appropriatively sustained across national contexts. When Sharon Kinsella reminds us of the need to consider cultural similarities, and when Annalee Newitz, Susan Napier and Anne Allison all address the apparent ‘irrelevance’ of Japaneseness to Western anime fans, their work creates the possibility of responding to Palumbo-Liu’s observation that we “have yet to meet the challenge of accounting for phenomena now being produced... that circulate in spaces that refuse to be contained in our academically prescribed categories.” (Palumbo-Liu 1997:12) Cultural and national contexts are one version of “academically prescribed categories”, as are categories of “appropriation” and “globalisation”. The case of anime suggests that we need to refuse these terms, or at the very least supplement them by recognising that subcultural homologies (the way subcultures use certain texts to articulate their group identity) can become transcultural homologies (subcultures can use representations of other national subcultures to articulate a shared identity or devaluation). The common cultural marginalisation of fandom in Japan and America can therefore allow for the transcultural circulation of texts and representations that are used to mark out the ‘differences’ of fan cultures rather than, *or as well as*, national differences. The dimension of national identity is thus tactically deactivated or backgrounded in such practices, rather than forming a powerful/determining context to fans’ readings, pleasures and attachments. But I have suggested that this dimension is *not*, after all, wholly disarticulated from the practices of Western anime fans.

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