

Lolicon and *Otaku* Culture— The Virtual, Fetishism and Postmodernism

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Lolicon a kultúra otaku—virtualita, fetišizmus a postmodernizmus

Resumé *Lolicon* je žáner, ktorý je zameraný na príťažlivosť k mladým alebo predpubertálnym dievčatám v kultúre *otaku*. *Bishōjo* a *moe*, ktoré sú kľúčovými termínmi v kultúre *otaku*, sú istou transformáciou *loliconu*. Preto možno povedať, že obľuba *loliconu* je kľúčovým elementom v dnešnej kultúre *otaku*. Cieľom článku je určiť význam fenoménu *lolicon* v kultúre *otaku* ako súčasnej globálnej kultúry, ktorá reflektuje ducha doby, analyzujúc pritom koncepty virtuality, fetišizmu a postmodernizmu.

Abstract *Lolicon* is a genre focusing on the attraction to young or prepubescent girls in *otaku* culture. *Bishōjo* and *moe*, which are now quite essential terms in *otaku* culture, are a kind of transformation of *lolicon*, and therefore we could say that the *lolicon* preference is the core element of today's *otaku* culture. The aim of this paper is to determine the meaning of the *lolicon* phenomenon in *otaku* culture as a contemporary global culture reflecting the zeitgeist, analyzing concepts of the virtual, fetishism and postmodernism.

Keywords Japan, Popular Culture (after 1980), *lolicon* ロリコン, *bishōjo* 美少女, *moe*, *otaku* オタク

Introduction

At the latest from the middle of the 1990's, *otaku* オタク culture has become

internationally so popular and widespread that we could say that *otaku* culture is an important part of contemporary Japanese culture. This is largely due to the great success and international recognition of several *anime* アニメ works, such as Ōtomo Katsuhiro's 大友克洋 (b1954) *Akira* アキラ (1988), Oshii Mamoru's 押井守 (b1951) *Kōkaku Kidōtai* 攻殻機動隊 (Ghost in the Shell; 1995), Anno Hideaki's 庵野秀明 (b1960) *Shin Seiki Evangelion* 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン (Neon Genesis Evangelion; 1995) and Miyazaki Hayao's 宮崎駿 (b1941) *Mononoke-hime* もののけ姫 (Princess Mononoke; 1997).¹ By now scholars both in Japan and abroad are also seriously interested in *anime*. Susan J. Napier (b1955), an American researcher of Japanese Studies, comments as follows:

By the 1990s intellectually sophisticated anime were increasingly appearing. The two most important of these were Anno Hideyuki's television series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Shinseiki Evangelion, 1996–1997) and Miyazaki Hayao's film *Princess Mononoke* (Mononoke Hime, 1997). In each case the work's enormous popularity was equaled by intellectually challenging themes and ideas that stimulated a plethora of scholarly articles, not only about the respective works but also about anime itself. It was clear that anime was finally being recognized.²

Thus, anime has become a relevant field of research for many disciplines such as Japanese studies, cultural studies, media studies, film studies, and gender studies. However, *otaku* culture does not concentrate on just anime, but constitutes a much larger field and already has a history of over 40 years behind it. Meanwhile, it has built up a rich diversity. Besides anime, its media include *manga* 漫画,

- 1 Inter alia: Okada Toshio, *Tōdai Otakugaku Kōza* 東大オタク学講座 [Lecture on Otaku Studies] (Tōkyō: Kōdan sha, 1997), 65–66; Susan Napier, *Anime—From Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 6–14.
- 2 Napier, *Anime—From Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 18.

dōjinsbi 同人誌,³ computer games and light novels.⁴ It also takes in many genres such as *shōnen manga* 少年漫画, *shōjo manga* 少女漫画, *yaoi* ヤオイ⁵ and *lolicon*.

Lolicon is a portmanteau of »Lolita complex« and describes a phenomenon of preference towards underage or young female characters. In Japanese subculture discourse, this term is used both for such a preference in anime, manga, games etc. and for real underage girls. The latter is problematic because of similarity to pedophilia. In this paper, I use the term *lolicon* as an umbrella term for all such preferences for young or underage girls, but I describe *lolicon* for real persons as a three-dimensional phenomenon and *lolicon* in *otaku* culture as a two-dimensional phenomenon. Moreover, in Japanese subculture discourse, this term is frequently used also as a genre of *otaku* culture, which treats sexual contents with young or underage girls.⁶ Most of the followers of *lolicon* media are male (they call themselves *lolicon* or *lolicon otaku*).⁷ Therefore, I consider *lolicon* also as a male genre of *otaku* culture overlapping with *manga*, *dōjinsbi* and computer games.

Even though the *lolicon* genre was restrained because of the big scandal of the so-called *otaku* murder by Miyazaki Tsutomu 宮崎勤 (1962–2008) in 1989 and the social criticism afterwards, a desire for the *kawaisa* かわいさ (‘cuteness’) and eroticism of illustrated young girls by *otaku* could not really be suppressed.

- 3 *Dōjinsbi* are mainly the work of amateurs, but some professional artists also participate in this trend in order to publish their works outside the regular industry. These are often created to sell at the trade fairs, such as the Comiket in Tokyo. Fan fiction is a very similar trend toward *dōjinsbi*, however, unlike *dōjinsbi*, fan fiction is not necessarily published and sold, and therefore became popular primarily due to the increasing use of the internet.
- 4 A light novel is a *wasei-eigo* (Japanese-made English) and is essentially *otaku* culture in novel form. Its target group is the young adult demographic, such as middle- and high-school students.
- 5 Since the middle of the 1990s, this genre was discovered by commercial publishers and such works have been called boys’ love ボーイズ・ラブ.
- 6 Inter alia Yonezawa Yoshihiro, *Sengo ero manga-sbi* 戦後エロマンガ史 [Postwar History of Erotic Manga] (Tōkyō: Seirinkōgei sha, 2010), 273–280; Ajima Shun, *Manga dōjinsbi et cetera* ’82–’98 漫画同人誌エトセトラ’82–’98 [*Manga dōjinsbi et cetera* ’82–’98] (Tōkyō: Kubo shoten, 2004), 21; Takatsuki Yasushi 高月靖. *Lolicon* ロリコン (Tōkyō: Basilico, 2009), 7–8.
- 7 *Otaku* are followers of *otaku* culture and simultaneously a part of this culture. I will discuss this term in greater detail later.

Nowadays, the *bishōjo* 美少女 (beautiful girls) characters and *moe* 萌え fantasy fulfill the demand for *kawaisa* and eroticism of *otaku*, and serve as successors of *lolicon*. Thus, *lolicon* could be considered as both the origin and the core aspect of today's *otaku* culture.

However, there are still very few academic works on the *lolicon* phenomenon in *otaku* culture, probably because of its problematic similarity to pedophilia. A study on this topic involves a risky aspect, because it could be easily misunderstood and considered as a kind of support of pedophilia. My intention in this paper is of course not to support pedophilia, but to gain a deeper understanding about this phenomenon. If we avoid this topic, we could not grasp a large portion of *otaku* culture.

In this paper, I tackle the following questions: 1. How did this phenomenon arise? 2. What lies behind the *otaku*'s preference for *lolicon*? (Does it have to do with fetishism or postmodernism?) 3. What is the relationship between *lolicon* and mainstream *otaku* culture?

In order to answer these questions, I first discuss *lolicon*, *bishōjo* and *moe*, important terms for this paper. Then I investigate *otaku* and *otaku* culture theoretically, considering aspects of virtual, postmodernism and fetishism, in order to deepen an understanding of what *otaku* culture and *lolicon* phenomenon are. After that, I deal with the history of *lolicon* in its shift from a three-dimensional to a two-dimensional phenomenon. Thereafter, I describe and analyze the interaction between *lolicon* and mainstream *otaku* culture.

Considerations on the Terms lolicon, bishōjo and moe

In this section, I will closely examine the three terms *lolicon*, *bishōjo* and *moe*. By doing so, I wish to clarify how I use these words in the remainder of this paper.

Lolicon, alias 'Lolita complex', is derived from Vladimir Nabokov's (1899 to 1977) novel *Lolita* (1955), in which a middle-aged literature professor becomes obsessed with a beautiful underage girl, whom he calls Lolita.⁸ Yonezawa Yoshi-

8 *Lolita* was written in English, but first published in 1955 in Paris by Olympia Press. Because of its controversial subject, at first it was difficult for Nabokov to find an English publisher.

hiro 米沢嘉博 (1953–2006), a famous Japanese specialist on *otaku* culture, who is also known for being the co-founder and president of *Comiket* コミケ⁹ comments on the *lolicon* as follows:

Lolicon arose with the boom in *lolicon* manga of Azuma Hideo 吾妻ひでお (b1950).¹⁰

It is about the acceptance and awareness of preference towards eroticism of little girls in manga. This concept is originally very similar to the trendy word, *moe* 萌え.

This is neither pedophilia nor the defilement of girls, but a spiritual longing for affection for little girls and memories of one's own childhood. [...] It has nothing to do with sex, but the longing for the cuteness and desire for beauty.¹¹

According to Yonezawa, *lolicon* is not pedophilia: it emerged from *otaku* manga, such as *dōjinshi* »Cybele« シベール or »Comic Lemon People« コミック・レモンピープル by Amatoria-sha あまとりあ社 ('commercial publishers'), and it does not necessarily have to do with sex but, as popular examples of *lolicon* manga show, it very often contains stories with sexual content.¹² *Lolicon* manga even deals sometimes with characters who are primary-school pupils.¹³ Yonezawa points out that *lolicon* manga provided *otaku* with an »excuse« to enjoy this kind of controversial preference.¹⁴ While the *lolicon* media had been forced to change in Japanese society and in the publishing industry in order to differentiate itself from pedophilia and harmful manga, in the past three decades the *lolicon* phenomenon itself had paradoxically changed from its formerly innocent nature to that of »commercialized sex«.

9 Comiket an abbreviation of 'Comic Market' コミックマーケット is the world's largest *dōjinshi* fair, held twice a year in Tokyo. The first Comiket was held on December 21, 1975 with only an estimated 600 attendees, but since then this event is ever-growing and Comiket 84 in the summer of 2013 had about 590,000 attendees.

10 Azuma Hideo is one of the most popular *lolicon* manga artists besides Uchiyama Aki 内山亜紀.

11 Cf. Yonezawa Yoshihiro, *Sengo ero manga-shi*, 279.

12 For example »Ankoro Trio« あんころトリオ by Uchiyama Aki 内山亜紀 (*Lolicon* manga star in the 1980s), in *Lemon People* Dec 1983.

13 For example, Tsukasa つかさ, the heroine of »Andoro Trio« あんどろトリオ by Uchiyama Aki is 10 years old.

14 Yonezawa Yoshihiro, *Sengo ero manga-shi*, 279 and 280.

The new stage of *lolicon* manga is called *bishōjo* comics 美少女コミック ('comics about beautiful girls'). *Bishōjo* comics also frequently feature sexual stories about cute young girls, but these girls are the age of high-school students and never as young as *lolicon* characters. While the ages of their heroines are different, *lolicon* and *bishōjo* comics were both established in order to respond to demand for the eroticism of young girls on the part of male *otaku*, and therefore we could consider these genres as one and the same in an expanded sense. Nowadays we can observe *bishōjo* not just in *bishōjo* comics, but everywhere in *otaku* culture. Below, I will discuss how widespread *bishōjo* is in anime.

Moe is another important term used frequently in *otaku* culture, which means »I really love a certain character of *otaku* culture«. A journalist of the *Tokyō Yomiuri Shinbun* 東京読売新聞 (Tokyō Yomiuri Newspaper) defines this term as follows:

»*Moe* originally meant 'bud' in Japanese but these days, people in the *otaku* world, especially in the anime and game sector, use this word for a kind of obsession with a particular character or an element of a character such as school uniforms, glasses or Kansai 関西 dialect.«¹⁵

Since the beginning of the 2000's, this term is widespread in *otaku* culture¹⁶ and frequently used by male *otaku* when they want to express their love for cute childish female characters.¹⁷ Forty-one-year-old Ono Hideki,¹⁸ who is an *otaku* and worked for the magazine *Animege* アニメージュ, the most renowned and longest-running publication for anime in Japan, says the following in an interview by American author Roland Kelts: »When I was young, there was another word,

15 Tokyō Yomiuri Shinbun, quoted in Hotta Junji 堀田純司, *Moe moe Japan* 萌え萌えジャパン [Moe Moe Japan] (Tōkyō: Kōdan sha, 2005), 19.

16 Emoto Aki 榎本秋 ed., *Otaku no koto ga omoshiroi hodo wakaru bon* オタクのことが面白いほどわかる本 [The Book with Which You Can Amazingly Understand Otaku] (Tōkyō: Chūkei shuppan, 2009), 16.

17 For female *otaku*, *moe* does not necessarily mean cute childish female characters, but male attractive characters.

18 Ono Hideki is not his real name, but a pseudonym which Kelts gave him. This is why there is no Kanji version for that name. At the time of the interview (about 2006) he was forty-one years old.

mi-ha ミーハー.¹⁹ It kind of means ‘star struck’. About ten years ago,²⁰ the *mi-ha* were fans of the cuter²¹ characters in Manga. [...] Eventually, the *mi-ha* group became mainstream fans, the core audience.²²

Thus, cuteness and *moe*, areas of interest which originated from *lolicon*, interfuse with *otaku* culture; together, these three elements now make up the core part of *otaku* culture.

Theory of Otaku and Otaku Culture: the Virtual, Postmodernism and Fetishism

Before I discuss *lolicon* and the related visual media further, here I deal with *otaku*, who are commonly people with obsessive interests for *otaku* culture, and *otaku* culture in theoretical terms. In doing so, I try to analyze *otaku* culture as something which forms the background of *lolicon* media and as a contemporary culture reflecting the postmodern zeitgeist.

The contemporary usage of the term *otaku* originated with Nakamori Akio's²³ 中森明夫 (b1960) series of essays titled »Otaku no Kenkyū おたくの研究« (An Investigation of *Otaku*) which appeared in the magazine »Manga Burikko 漫画ブリッコ«.²⁴ In doing so, he described the *otaku* as being a type of person who is unpopular and withdrawn.²⁵ The term thus had a negative connotation right from the beginning.

Miyadai Shinji 宮台真司 (b1959), a Japanese sociologist, analyzes Japanese youths in the 1980's in his essay »Shinjinrui to otaku no seikimatsu o toku« 新人

19 Kelts wrote the term as »mi-ha«. Normally it would be written as »mihā«.

20 I.e. about 1996.

21 Kelts obviously used a comparative »cuter« to compare with other non-cute characters in manga.

22 Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 156.

23 Nakamori Akio is a Japanese columnist and editor.

24 *Manga Burikko* was a *lolicon* manga magazine, which was published from 1982 to 1986 by Self shuppan セルフ出版. Besides *Lemon People*, this magazine was very popular among *lolicon otaku*.

25 Nakamori Akio, »Otaku no kenkyū おたくの研究« [An Investigation of *Otaku*], *Manga Burikko* 漫画ブリッコ (Tōkyō: Self shuppan, 1983), 6.

類とオタクの世紀末を解く (An Analysis of the End of the 20th Century about *shinjinrui* and *otaku*). Miyadai mentions that *otaku* were considered »not cool« in contrast to members of the so-called *shinjinrui* 新人類 (‘new breed of humans’), which was another new buzzword describing youths in the 1980’s, who were driven by trends and considered »cool«. *Shinjinrui* willingly read and followed what guidebooks instructed with regard to the public’s trendy manner of consumption. In doing so, they approached consumer behavior and human relationships like »symbols«, with which they can maintain that they are members of an elite group of youth.²⁶ Thus, *shinjinrui* define themselves as individuals through the product they buy and their lives strongly influenced by commodity fetishism.

The best example of such a lifestyle was described with the novel *Nanto-naku* なんとなく、クリスタル (Somehow Crystal; 1981) by Tanaka Yasuo 田中康夫 (b1956). This novel is about relatively affluent youths who grew up in Tokyo, and their lifestyle. Tanaka depicts the consumer behavior of those youths in detail, often citing many brand names, which meant the tasteful lifestyle for young people. Such a materialistic worldview concerning luxury goods was very influential among urban youths during the 1980’s. The worldview, spread by »Nanto-naku, Cristal«, was an embodiment of typical secular worldviews and philosophies, characterized by commodity fetishism, which were developed from postmodernism and emerged in a postmodern industrial, capitalist society.²⁷

According to Nakamori, *otaku* wore clothes bought by their mothers in the Japanese general merchandise stores, such as Ito-Yokado イトーヨーカ堂 or Seiyu 西友,²⁸ which are described by Nakamori as being »not fashionable«. Thus, *otaku* apparently ignored the *shinjinrui* type of postmodern commodity fetishism. Honda Tōru 本田透 (b1969), a Japanese critic of today’s Japanese society and *otaku*, argues that while consumption plays an important role in Japanese society

26 Miyadai Shinji, *Shinjinrui to otaku no seikimatsu o toku* 新人類とオタクの世紀末を解く [An Analysis of the End of the 20th Century Around Shinjinrui and Otaku], in *Chūō Kōron* 中央公論, (Tōkyō: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 1990) 187.

27 Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 216–217.

28 Nakamori Akio 中森明夫, »Otaku no kenkyū おたくの研究« [An Investigation of Otaku], in *Manga Burikko* 漫画ブリッコ June 1983.

and love relationships are also influenced by socioeconomic concerns—in his words, »renai shihon shugi« 恋愛資本主義 (Love Capitalism)—Honda describes how important materialistic and stereotyped criteria are for Japanese women. These criteria are: high income, a high level of education and large height, and are referred to as »sankō« (three heights).²⁹ Therefore an *otaku* type male has difficulties in forming a love relationship with a real woman. That is why they have turned to the fictional female characters of manga and anime in order to experience *junai* 純愛 ('pure love') with such characters in the *otaku* virtual world.³⁰

However, even though socio-economic factors, regarding mainstream commodity fetishism, does not play an important role for *otaku*, *otaku* culture could still be regarded as postmodern. Dominic Strinati, an English sociologist, writes that postmodernism rejects the claim of any theory to absolute knowledge, or the demand of any social practice to universal validity.³¹ In doing so, previously unified and coherent ideas about space and time begin to be undermined, and become distorted and confused.³² For example, many works of *otaku* culture deal with magical, fantastic, fictional or mystical elements. Similarly, even physical validation can be called into question in *otaku* culture. This is because *otaku* culture is a world of drawing pictures and virtuality. It does not have to really concern itself with the rules of any social practice to universal validity. Thus, we could say *otaku* culture is a postmodern culture, and *otaku* can enjoy this culture without considering socio-economic factors or mainstream commodity fetishism.

Saitō Tamaki 齊藤環 (b1961), a Japanese psychiatrist and *otaku* researcher, even regards the virtual³³ as key concept for *otaku*, defining the group as follows:

- *Otaku* are people who are familiar with virtual contexts.

29 Honda Tōru 本田透, *Moeru otoko* 萌える男 [The Budding Man] (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 2005), 66–67.

30 Honda Tōru, *Moeru otoko*, 59, 81, 151, 209.

31 Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 209.

32 Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, 208.

33 Saitō uses the word *kyōkō* 虚構 ('fiction') for 'virtual'.

- *Otaku* are people who use virtual media in order to possess their objects of love.
- *Otaku* are people who can regard characters of the virtual world as their sexual objects.³⁴

As Saitō mentions here, the virtual is quite essential for *otaku* and also for *otaku* culture in general. Borrowing from Marcel Proust's (1871–1922) famous definition about dreams, memories and the past, Rob Shields, a Canadian sociologist and anthropologist, defines the virtual in everyday life as: »that which is so in essence but not actually so, and real without being actual, ideal without being abstract.«³⁵

Characters, stories or settings of anime or manga are also real without being actual, ideal but not abstract. *Otaku* can have great fun with such characters or settings and they can even create new stories with them on their own, for example in the form of fan fiction. The characters, however, exist only in the world of *otaku* culture and within the fantasies of *otaku*. No one can actually see them or touch them. But that is exactly what makes them extremely appealing to *otaku*. A 45-year-old Japanese female former *otaku* once told me³⁶ that when she was young, only drawn characters were good enough for her to adore. Different from a real person such as a pop star, they were always perfect and never disappointed her, simply because they were not actual living beings.

Since the middle of the 1980's, this kind of preference was called *nijigen complex* 二次元コンプレックス (two-dimensional complex). This is a kind of paraphilia where people love two-dimensional characters as depicted in anime, manga, or by illustrations of novels, more than real persons.³⁷ *Nijigen complex* is

34 Saitō Tamaki 齊藤環, *Sentō bisshō no seishin bunseki* 戦闘美少女の精神分析 [Psychoanalysis of fighting beautiful girls] (Tōkyō: Ōta shuppan, 2003), 30.

35 Rob Shields, *The Virtual* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2.

36 This was in September 2013. In her statement, she refers to the 1980's.

37 Kin Chen 欣陳, *Nihon manga to jikokeisei: Dokusba no jiko renai monogatari o megutte* 日本マンガと自己形成: 読者の自己恋愛物語をめぐって [Japanese Manga and Self-discovery: Considering Reader's Love Stories] (Hiroasaki University Repository for Academic Resources, 2011), 4–6.

the basis for *otaku's* familiarity with the virtual world and leads to the *moe* tendency of *otaku*. *Moe*, an obsession with a particular character or an element of a character (as discussed above), could be considered a very similar phenomenon to *nijigen complex*. By having a *moe* feeling, one focuses on character traits and details, which imply the symbolic meanings, more than the person itself. These characters are not human, but virtual creatures and therefore a commodity. Thus, we could say *moe* is similar to fetish and therefore constitutes a post-modern phenomenon.

E. L. McCallum, an American researcher for American literature and film studies, believes that postmodernism addresses issues of loss—loss of center, loss of meaning, loss of transcendent truth. In contrast, she sees fetishism as being construed as a fixation and a symptom of the resistance to change, a refusal to meet the postmodern challenge, and this explains why people in the age of postmodernism tend to exhibit fetishism.³⁸

Sigmund Freud offers another understanding of fetishism. Fetishism is for him the substitution of the mother's penis, which boys believe in.³⁹ Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel (1928–2006), a French psychoanalyst, interprets this further and defines fetishism as a perversion by which perverts aim to overcome the genital world of the father, describing it as follows: »The pervert's aim, from my point of view, is to disavow his father's (genital) capacities and to accomplish a (magic) transmutation of reality by delving into the undifferentiated anal-sadistic dimension. Having idealized it, he proclaims its superiority over the father's genital universe.«⁴⁰

Thus, fetishism is an attempt to overcome the father's »old« real sexuality and to replace it with a »new« virtual sexuality. Postmodernism is an attempt to overcome modernism, the so-called old world, and therefore fetishism can be interpreted as constituting the sexual component of postmodernism.

According to Saitō, the sexual aspect is very important to *otaku*. In addition

38 E. L. McCallum, *Object Lessons: How to Do Things with Fetishism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), xv.

39 Sigmund Freud, »Fetischismus« [1927], in *Das Ich und das Es* (Frankfurt am Main: Psychologie Fischer, 2003), 330.

40 Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (London: Free Association Books, 1984), 78.

to his *otaku* definition which I summarized above, he comments that *otaku* are people who can masturbate using an Plate of anime or manga characters as an object of eroticism.⁴¹ Yonezawa also considers this point and remarks that *bishōjo* comics—which can be used as a synonym for *lolicon* manga—are not just replacements of pictures or movies of real females, but also the source of inspiration for the male *otaku*'s sexual fantasies.⁴²

Saitō also mentions that Japanese men are generally sexually repressed and therefore are intimidated when they encounter an adult woman. Saitō concludes that this is the reason why Japanese men have a tendency towards a preference for *lolicon* media. They can only develop sexual desire for underage girls, thus feeling safety.⁴³ This claim could sound quite essentializing, but a preference for *lolicon* media on the part of some Japanese men might be explained in this way. Hirukogami Ken 蛭児神建 (b1958), a former popular *lolicon* manga artist, confirmed this and says in an interview with a Japanese author, Tsuchimoto Ariko 土本亜理子 (b1957) that: »I just could not create a story with an adult woman, because I could not make them act in my story, even though it was just a fiction. But if it was about little girls, I could let them move freely.«⁴⁴

Freud also mentions that fetishism is more easily accessible than a real sexual relationship and that it was comfortable to reach sexual satisfaction through fetishism.⁴⁵ As I mentioned above, there are similarities between the *lolicon* phenomenon and fetishism, which could be considered as a kind of sexual fixation with nonhuman objects. Now, according to the above claim by Freud,

41 Saitō Tamaki 斉藤環, *Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki* 戦闘美少女の精神分析 [Psychoanalysis of fighting beautiful girls] (Tōkyō: Ōta shuppan, 2003), 53.

42 Yonezawa Yoshihiro, *Sengo ero manga-shi*, 289. Yonezawa uses here the term *mōsō* 妄想. This term is generally translated as 'illusion', but in the context of *otaku* culture, people understand this rather as 'sexual fantasy'.

43 Saitō Tamaki 斉藤環, *Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki* 戦闘美少女の精神分析 [Psychoanalysis of Fighting Beautiful Girls] (Tōkyō: Ōta shuppan, 2003), 12.

44 Tsuchimoto Ariko 土本亜理子, »Lolicon, nijicon, ningyōai« ロリコン、二次コン、人形愛 [Lolicon, Two-Dimensional Complex and Love to Dolls], in *Bessatsu Takarajima—Otaku no Hon* おたくの本 [Bessatsu Takarajima—The Otaku book] (Tōkyō: JICC shuppan, 1989), 106.

45 Sigmund Freud, »Fetischismus«, 331.

we could possibly assume that the psychological meaning of both tendencies is also the same, namely the need for security by reaching sexual satisfaction.

The History of Lolicon: From 3D to 2D

In Japan, the term »Lolita complex« was first introduced in 1969 by Russell Trainer in his book of the same title, which referred to Vladimir Nabokov's (1899–1977) novel *Lolita*. Trainer's book presented itself as a serious psychological work,⁴⁶ even though he had no credentials as a psychologist and many authorities did not appreciate this work at all and even saw the author as a charlatan. Nevertheless it was this book which was the first trigger of the Japanese *lolicon* phenomenon.⁴⁷

At the beginning, the *lolicon* phenomenon was not a part of *otaku* culture, but its members were mainly concerned with nude photo collections of real prepubescent girls. At that time, several works involving nudity of young girls, such as *Nymphet: The Legend of a 12-Years Old Girl*⁴⁸ by Kenmochi Kazuo or *The Girl Alice and Alice from the Sea*⁴⁹ by Sawatari Hajime 沢渡朔 (b1940), were published. These works were recognized as »artistic works«⁵⁰ and also

46 Russell Trainer, *Lolita Complex* (New York: Citadel Press, 1966).

47 Takatsuki Yasushi 高月靖, *Lolicon* ロリコン (Tōkyō: Basilico, 2009), 6.

48 Kenmochi Kazuo 剣持加津夫, *Nymphet: Jūnisai no shinwa* ニンフェット 12歳の神話 [Nymphet: The myth of the 12-Year-Old Girl] (Tōkyō: Nobel shobō, 1969).

49 Sawatari Hajime 沢渡朔, *Shōjo Alice* 少女アリス [The Girl Alice] (Tōkyō: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1973).

50 Takatsuki Yasushi 高月靖, *Lolicon* ロリコン [Lolita-Complex] (Tōkyō: Basilico kabushikigaisha, 2009), 50. It may seem strange in the West that photographs of nude underage girls gained such a positive reception, even though these works were presented not pornographically, but artistically. Until *lolicon* manga emerged, mainstream pornography in Japan (around 1970) still featured grown-up women (see Yonezawa, *Sengo ero manga-shi*). Even the sales department of the Nobel Shobō, which was the publisher of »Nymphet 12-sai no Shinwa«, considered that such photographs would not sell, insisting that people aren't interested in seeing the nudity of 12-year-old girls. This possibly explains why the reception was so uncritical at that time in Japan.

experienced a small boom.⁵¹ However, the first great success of this kind was »Little Pretenders—Chiisana Osumashiyasan-tachi« (Little Pretenders—Small Artificial Girls),⁵² with female models of the age of 15 and 16. These collections of photographs were not really artistic, but rather focused on the eroticism of these girls, and in doing so, became much more popular than the aforementioned titles.⁵³

In response to such a successful work it became clear that in Japanese society in the 1980s, there was a huge demand for nude photos of young girls. It was also permitted in Japan to publish such photo collections as long as pubic hair was not shown. In this way, the Lolita complex started out as a »three-dimensional phenomenon«⁵⁴ with real persons as a model out of the general interest of the public in the 1980's.

In the *manga* world, it was Wada Shinji 和田慎二 (1950–2011), who first used the term »Lolita complex« in his work *Kyabetsu Batake de tumazuite* キャベツ畑でつまずいて (Stumbling Upon a Cabbage Field),⁵⁵ inspired by *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). However, this work was not considered as a *lolicon* manga, because the content was not erotic and quite different from the style of the later *lolicon* manga.

In 1979, the *dōjinshi* world joined the *lolicon* phenomenon. This development was actually the beginning of the history of the *lolicon* genre in *otaku* culture. The first *lolicon dōjinshi* was *Cybele* シベール, launched by Azuma Hideo, Hirukogami Ken and others. This *dōjinshi* was devoted to Clarisse, a character from the anime movie *Rupan sansei: Kariosutoro no shiro* ルパン三世 カリオストロの城 (Lupin the Third: Castle of Cagliostro; 1979), directed by Miyazaki Hayao.

51 Takatsuki Yasushi, *Lolicon*, 52.

52 Yamaki Takao 山木隆夫, *Little Pretenders—Chiisana Osumashiyasan-tachi* [Little Pretenders—Small Artificial Girls] (Tōkyō: Million shoppan, 1979).

53 Takatsuki Yasushi, *Lolicon*, 54–55.

54 In contrast to the »two-dimensional« media such as manga and anime, the term »three-dimensional« is frequently used in Japanese subcultural discourses, meaning the media with real persons.

55 Wada Shinji 和田慎二, *Kyabetsu batake de tumazuite* キャベツ畑でつまずいて [Stumbling Upon a Cabbage Field; *manga*] (Tōkyō: Shuei sha, 1974).

Clarisse is the princess of a fictitious European country, has a beautiful look and an innocent, adorable and charismatic character. These attributes strongly inspired *lolicon otaku* and Clarisse was highly idealized by them.⁵⁶ Clarisse was parodied as a *lolicon* character not just in *Cybele*, but also following other *dōjinshi*, such as *Clarisse Magazine* クラリス, launched in 1980. »AnPlate« reported in the May 1982 issue that Clarisse was in fact the origin of the *lolicon* boom in *otaku* culture.⁵⁷ However, Clarisse does not look like an underage girl. Her age is mentioned as being between 16 and 18 years old, and never younger.⁵⁸ This means that at the very beginning, *lolicon* media had not necessarily shown a preference for underage girls, but rather for young girls in general. Thus, to a certain extent the terms *lolicon* and *bishōjo* have always been synonymous words.

At the beginning of the 1980's, *lolicon* magazines began to be published by commercial publishers as well. The first *lolicon* magazine was *Comic Lemon People* (*Remon pīpuru* コミック・レモンピープル) by Amatoria sha, established in 1981.⁵⁹ This magazine recruited popular *lolicon* manga artists such as Azuma Hideo and Uchiyama Aki 内山亜紀 (b1953) and other talented *dōjinshi* artists who could draw sweet little girls. The content was comic love stories taking place at school, dealing with the eroticism of young girls. With this concept, this magazine became very popular. As a result, other publishers also started to publish *lolicon* manga magazines. *Manga Burikko* 漫画ブリッコ by Serufu Shuppan セルフ出版 (1982–85) was another famous one. »*Otaku no kenkyū*« by Nakamori Akio, mentioned above, was also published in this magazine. Other competing *lolicon* manga magazines included »Manga Hot Milk 漫画ホットミルク«, »Meron Comic« メロンComic, and »Halfrita« ハーフリータ.⁶⁰

In this way, *lolicon* had developed first as a three-dimensional phenomenon, due to the general interest in the eroticism of young girls as a real person in society, and then a two-dimensional phenomenon as *otaku* culture picked up on

56 Takatsuki Yasushi, *Lolicon*, 100.

57 *AnPlate* May 1982; quoted in Takatsuki Yasushi, *Lolicon*, 100.

58 <detail.chiebukuro.yahoo.co.jp/qa/question_detail/q1448339489> (last retrieval 17 Feb 2016).

59 Yonezawa Yoshihiro, *Sengo ero manga-shi*, 273.

60 *Subete wa ero kara hajimatta* すべてはエロから始まった [It All Started with Erotica], ed. by Shinpo Nobunaga 新保信長 (Tōkyō: Media Factory, 2000), 30–37.

this trend from the *dōjinshi* world. Finally, commercial publishers followed as well. In *otaku* culture, we can often observe this order of development. For example, *yaoi*, another genre of *otaku* culture, which concerns love stories revolving around male homosexual characters, also came about in this way.⁶¹

Interaction Between Lolicon and Mainstream Otaku Culture

In this section, I describe and analyze the interaction between *lolicon* and mainstream *otaku* culture. In doing so, I try to determine what meaning *lolicon* has for the entire *otaku* culture.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the mainstream of the visual style in Japanese erotic manga was transformed from a *gekiga* 劇画 style into an *anime* style. *Gekiga* is a Japanese term for ‘dramatic pictures’. Characters drawn in the *gekiga* style looked more realistic and mature than characters in the later anime style. The anime style was the opposite of this, with a strongly symbolic drawing style, using clear lines and a lot of screentones. Most characters in the anime style had huge eyes, a small nose, a small mouth and a disproportionately big head—in short, they looked like children. What was new here was that such a style obviously could be perceived as erotic by its target audience.⁶² This cute and erotic anime style was in fact a *lolicon* style.

However, Morikawa Kaichirō 森川嘉一郎 (b1971), a Japanese researcher of *otaku* culture, believes that the eroticism of anime girls was first discovered by Tezuka Osamu 手塚治 (1928–1989). Tezuka was a famous Japanese manga artist

61 I shall not further discuss this topic here. Please refer to the following essay of Hashimoto Miyuki 橋本美幸, »Gender, Sexualität und Identität in der Otaku-Kultur: Am Beispiel der österreichischen Yaoi-Fans«, *Kommunikation@gesellschaft, Journal für alte und neue Medien aus soziologischer, kulturantropologischer und kommunikationswissenschaftlicher Perspektive* (2012), <ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/31340/B8_2012_Hashimoto.pdf?sequence=1> (last retrieval 18 Feb 2016).

62 Yonezawa Yoshihiro 米澤 嘉博, *Sengo ero manga-shi 戦後エロマンガ*, 287. Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚英志, *Otaku no seishinshi: 1980nendai-ron オタクの精神史: 1980年代論* [The Intellectual History of Otaku in the 1980's] (Tōkyō: Kōdan sha Gendai shinsho, 2004), 44.

and also the creator of »Tetsuwan Atomu« 鉄腕アトム (Astro Boy; 1963), which was the first TV anime in Japan. Tezuka adored Walt Disney films, such as »Bambi« and »Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs« and had seen them dozens of times.⁶³ Tezuka was respected as a *manga no kami-sama* マンガの神様 ('god of *manga*') and highly appreciated for his humanistic and philosophical works. But his works were also famous for erotic-grotesque expressions or cruel violence. Morikawa supposes that Tezuka had already discovered the eroticism of girls in Disney films and applied these in his works. This assumption comes from Tezuka's description of the heroine of his work »Ayako« 奇子,⁶⁴ who has a non-human sex appeal like a mannequin doll (see Plate 1). According to Morikawa, the nonhuman sex appeal of Ayako is the same as the eroticism of female characters in the later anime, and therefore, Tezuka could have obtained a *moe* feeling from the Disney characters as well as from his own character Ayako. In doing so, he was the first to introduce the *moe* feeling into Japanese anime.⁶⁵

Tezuka's contribution to *otaku* culture was not just the introduction of the *moe* feeling, but also a very specific visual depiction of girls. His heroines are often young girls and thus drawn with huge eyes, small nose, a small mouth and a disproportionately big head. We can see these attributes in the pictures below (see Plates 1 and 2). What is important here is that Tezuka's visual style influenced the depiction of female characters in works of the *lolicon* genre. Azuma, who is considered the founder of *lolicon* manga, confesses in an interview in the magazine *Gekkan Spy* 月刊スパイ (Monthly Spy) that his drawing style, using lines without a strong accent and emphasizing curved and circular figures (see Plate 3), is influenced by Tezuka.⁶⁶ The visual style of Uchiyama Aki, another *lolicon* manga star, also shows the influence of Tezuka (see Plate 4).

63 Morikawa Kaichirō 森川嘉一郎, *Shuto no tanjō* 趣都の誕生 [The Birth of the Hobby Capital] (Tōkyō: Gentōsha, 2003), 110.

64 Tezuka Osamu 手塚治, *Ayako* 奇子 (Manga) (Tōkyō: Shogakukan, 1972-1973).

65 Morikawa, Kaichirō, *Shuto no tanjō*, 109.

66 *Gekkan Spy*, *Tezuka Osamu no kenkyū—shin no me to musubi no me* [Monthly Spy: Research on Tezuka Osamu—the Eyes of God and the Eyes of Insects] (Tōkyō: World Foto Press sha, 1991), 6.



Plate 1

Manga Ayako by Tezuka Osamu



Plate 2

Manga Ribon no Kishi by Tezuka Osamu



Plates 3 and 4

Bungei Bessatsu by Azuma Hideo (left)

Uchiyama Aki Homepage, by Uchiyama Aki (right)⁶⁷

Conversely, reinforced by the popularity of *lolicon* media products, by now a specific *lolicon* visual style has evolved in anime. One such popular anime is »Mahō no purinsesu Minkī Momo« 魔法のプリンセス ミンキー モモ (Magical Princess Minky Momo; see Plate 5). This anime was aired as two TV series in 1982 and in 1991, created by Ashi Productions. The heroine, Minky Momo,⁶⁸ is a magical girl from the land of dreams. Momo can transform into a grown-up woman and works to save people's dreams. This anime was originally produced for small girls, but Momo's coquettish charm also captivated grown-up male *otaku*, and this anime became very popular among them. Momo was not the first magical girl in the history of anime, but this kind of »loliconized« reception and

67 <<http://photozou.jp/photo/show/1293863/120229904>> (last retrieval 17 Feb 2016).

68 Anime »Minky Momo« appeared as two subsequent series: the first one was called »Sora Momo« 空モモ [Sky Momo; 1982] and the second one was called »Umi Momo« 海モモ [Sea Momo; 1991].

popularity was new. Thus, this anime established a new genre called »magical girl anime«. In doing so, this anime was strongly influential for future anime works.⁶⁹

Bishōjo senshi Sērā Mūn 美少女戦士セーラームーン (Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon; 1992–97) (see Plate 6), which was one of the most successful anime in the 1990's, and *Futari wa Purikyua* ふたりはプリキュア (Pretty Cure; 2004–05) (see Plate 7) also belong to the »magical girl« genre. These also became very popular among both small girls and grown-up male *otaku*.



Plates 5 and 6

*Anime Mahō no purinsesu Minkī Momo (left)*⁷⁰

*Anime Bishōjo senshi Sērā Mūn (right)*⁷¹

69 Animege Henshūbu アニメージュ編集部 [Animege Editorial Staff], *Roman album mahō no princess Minkī Momo* ロマンアルバム 魔法のプリンセス ミンキーモモ [Romantic Album—Magical Princess Minkī Momo] (Tōkyō: Tokuma shobō, 1994), 39, 68, 86, 124, 155.

70 <www.animecharactersdatabase.com/jp//character.php?id=46388> (last retrieval 17 Feb 2016).

71 <<http://sailormoon-gpoy.tumblr.com/>> (last retrieval 17 Feb 2016).



Plates 7 and 8

*Anime Futari wa Purikyua (left)*⁷²*Anime Shin seiki Evangerion (right)*⁷³

There is another successful anime, »Shin seiki Evangerion 新世紀エヴァンゲリオン« (Neon Genesis Evangelion) (1995–1996) (see Plate 8), which strongly stimulated the *moe* feeling in male *otaku*. *Evangerion* was a science fiction anime series, created by the anime studio Gainax ガイナックス and both directed and written by Anno Hideaki. This work was critically acclaimed, and deconstructed the mecha genre,⁷⁴ introducing psychological and philosophical elements to this work. This series became a cultural phenomenon in the 1990's in Japan and had resulted in the revival of the anime industry. The main characters, named Ikari Shinji 碓シンジ, Ayanami Rei 綾波レイ and Soryū Asuka Langley 惣流・アスカ・ラングレー, are all 14 years old; they have been forced to pilot robots and fight against an Angel which is a member of a race of large monstrous beings.

72 <bell-chan.dyndns.org/wp/Pretty%20Cure/1/> (last retrieval 22 Sep 2014).

73 <anime.com.br/fim-de-uma-era-manga-neon-genesis-evangelion-acabou/> (last retrieval 17 Feb 2016).

74 The *mecha* genre is another popular genre in *otaku* culture. *Mecha* is a Japanese abbreviation for 'mechanism' or 'mechanical'. This term is used as a synonym for 'machine' in Japan, and in *otaku* culture it is an umbrella term for fantasy machines such as robots which are piloted by humans.

While this anime contains a serious and influential story about the identity formation of these three main characters, Rei and Asuka, as young and pretty female soldiers, have attributes which strongly stimulate the *moe* feeling on the part of male *otaku*. Rei in particular became very popular. Anno designed Rei as »a bitterly unhappy young girl with little sense of presence.«⁷⁵ This does not at all sound positive, but it is just this feature that makes it possible for *otaku* to interpret her character in a more personal way. Tsurumaki Kazuya 鶴巻和哉 (b1966), an anime director from Gainax, himself admits to have a *moe* feeling for Asuka. He defines *moe* as follows: »*Moe* is the personal complementation to the missed information about a particular character.«⁷⁶

Otaku love to fantasize about their favorite characters and this is certainly one of the most important reasons why certain anime have achieved great success. Therefore, we can observe certain patterns that make an anime really popular: It must have one or more very young pretty heroines, who have both a typical *lolicon* look and magical or mysterious elements about which *otaku* can fantasize. These patterns may strongly stimulate male *otaku* to have a *moe* feeling and also the tendency of *lolicon*. Eroticism thus could be projected onto these cute anime characters by male *otaku* on their own, even though eroticism is not explicitly shown in these anime.

As a last example for anime works of the *lolicon* taste, I want to mention »Raki□Suta らき□すた« (Lucky Star) (see Plate 9). This was originally a four-panel comic strip manga by Yoshimizu Kagami 美水かがみ (b1977), serialized in *Comptiq* コンプティーク, a magazine published by Kadokawa shoten since the beginning of January 2004. This manga focuses on the cute female characters and their funny daily lives, without ongoing stories. These characters are at first high school students and become college students starting with volume 7. Thus, they are not very young, but also have typical *lolicon* features. In doing so, *lolicon otaku* can experience a *moe* feeling through these characters. This is why *Lucky Star* is considered a *lolicon* work, and became so popular that four video games

75 Fujie Kazuhisa, *Neon Genesis Evangelion: The Unofficial Guide (Mysteries and Secrets Revealed!)*. (Tōkyō: DH Publishing, 2004), 97.

76 Tsurumaki, 2001, quoted in Hotta Junji 堀田純司, *Moe moe Japan* 萌え萌えジャパン [Moe Moe Japan] (Tōkyō: Kōdan sha, 2005), 24–25.

(2005–2009), an *anime* series (2007) and even a musical adaptation (2012) have subsequently been produced. Thus, even though *Lucky Star* has no magical or mysterious elements, it has become one of the most successful *lolicon* works today.⁷⁷ This may possibly indicate a new direction in the world of *lolicon*.



Plate 9
*Manga Raki☆Suta*⁷⁸

In this section, we have seen that the *moe* feeling and the visual style of Tezuka were taken up in the *lolicon* genre and there, the *moe* feeling and a typical *lolicon* visual style have become widespread, and finally, these were introduced into today's *anime* and led *anime* to greater success.

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77 Maeda Hisashi & al. *Lucky Star*, Newtype USA (online magazine), May 2007, 67.

78 <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucky_Star_\(manga\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucky_Star_(manga))> (last retrieval 17 Feb 2016).