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Introduction: Frictive Pictures

“Friction,” as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing reminds us in her 2005 ethnography of global connection, “is not just about slowing things down. Friction is required to keep global power in motion. […] Friction inflects historical trajectories, enabling, excluding, and particularizing” (6). Friction might include anything from bitter feuds between environmental activists, indigenous populations, and rainforest loggers in Indonesia, as in Tsing’s study, to miscommunications in a classroom that force students to explain what they (think they) mean by “Asian.” In all cases, however, it works as the place where “the rubber meets the road” (6), propelling participants forward into unstable collaborations and conflicts.

While friction might seem like an odd concept to apply to animated images created with glossy, transparent cels and incorporeal pixels, in the following pages I will demonstrate how the global circulation of animation is dependent on the embodied frictions of fan viewers and the media platforms they use. Anime fan communities became possible due to the movement of cartoon content through different media platforms introduced across the world throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, from film to television to the Internet. But the movement traced here is not only the smooth flow of products from one national audience to another. It is rather an intersection of multiple levels of animated experience, from the practical and political pressures faced by animation producers, through the barriers of censorship and (mis)communication that shape distribution, and finally to the many and varied ways that animation fans engage with the texts and each other across geographical distance and cultural difference. Anime fans, in the way they form communities of cooperative knowledge sharing and conflicting views, illustrate how shifts in media technology create new kinds of connectivity. Beyond the exoticism of the “Japanese otaku” and the globalist triumphalism of “Americans (or Canadians, or Koreans) who like Japanese cartoons,” today’s anime fan communities are transcultural
ventures, driven as much by the productive frictions between viewers on individual, cultural, regional, and national scales as by long-standing conceptions of animation as a global language or borderless medium. Instead of limiting the discussion to “anime fans in Japan” or “anime fans in America,” we must compare the histories of animation audiences in different locations and time periods in order to understand how today’s anime fan communities work to build global connection.

Two Problems with the “Anime in America” Discourse

The question “Why is anime so popular with fans outside of Japan?”—and more specifically, “Why is anime so popular in America?”—has generated a great deal of interest, not only in English-language scholarship but also among Japanese-speaking scholars. Variations on the “anime in America” discourse echo from the earliest published American fan writings on anime by Frederick Patten in the 1970s (2004) to scholarly books such as Antonia Levi’s *Samurai from Outer Space* (1996) and Roland Kelts’ *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (2007). These works are primarily designed to tell us how “we” can understand “them” (and so reposition ourselves) through animation. Even in Japanese-language scholarship, it is possible to find exhaustive studies such as Kusanagi Satoshi’s aptly titled book *How Did Japanese Anime Come to Be Watched in America?* (2003), which work in an equal but opposite fashion by asking how “we Japanese” can be understood through “their” eyes. The individual experiences and personal identities of fans (and scholars) become conflated with national identities, placed on the grand theater of the world stage. In works such as these, there is a powerful dialectic of self-Other identity, operating in different registers in North America and Japan, which makes the globalization of anime a compelling topic of study for personal and professional reasons.

While interest in this topic can be based in a genuine grappling with lived experience (and I do not exempt myself here!), it is only one aspect of the globalization of animation. The “anime in America” discourse is a highly problematic starting point for discussing the formation of a global media community of animation fans because it carries with it a number of troubling underlying assumptions about who the audiences and producers of animation are and how they are influenced by media globalization.

The first major issue with this discourse is that it tends to see the globalization of animation as something that happened largely after World War II between the nation-states of Japan and the United States (and at
best, a roster of European nations such as France, Italy, Germany, and Spain), via Disney films and major Japanese films and television series. Most commonly, scholars trace the influence of Disney—the exemplary American—on Japanese creators such as famed manga artist and animator Tezuka Osamu, followed by a corresponding infiltration of the West by Japanese “anime style” (e.g., Ōtsuka and Osawa, 2005). This point-to-point exchange may be taken as proof of anime’s “hybridity” and “transnationalism” or critiqued as a battle of cultural imperialisms. The geopolitical limitations of this discourse, however, disregard a great deal of community formation that happened outside the major national centers of the United States and Japan.

“Transnational”—or as I will shift to calling it “transcultural”—media globalization is not just a trading of texts between powerful nations. It does not develop whenever “we” influence “them” or vice versa. It is a movement of media and bodies that takes place across multiple sites. To watch a televised anime program such as Voltron: Defenders of the Universe (1984) in Canada in the 1980s, as I did in my childhood, required much more than the twin poles of Japan as the source and Canada as reception site, but entailed mediation through the multi-city relays of American cable television broadcasting and the labor of South Korean animators.

While this volume inevitably returns to some canonical American and Japanese examples, such as Disney and Tezuka, to create a comparative study of animation and its fan audiences, it often views them from a slightly “off-centered” perspective. For instance, it looks at the Disney Studio’s hemispheric relations with Latin American audiences, and at the translations of Tezuka’s works created in Canada for Anglophones and Francophones, rather than following the well-worn path of influence between Disney and Tezuka themselves. It also introduces a number of previously unstudied animated works, from prewar Japanese shorts such as “Chameko’s Day” (1931) to the South Korean web-cartoon There She Is!! (2003–8). Its aim is not to provide a comprehensive historical survey of all world animation produced or distributed in the past 100+ years, or even of Japanese anime. (For that, see Bendazzi 1994 and Clements 2013, respectively.) The goal of this volume is rather to look at the complex flows and frictions that have developed between specific animation producers and audiences in the Americas and East Asia at key moments of historical transition, from the birth of animation in the early twentieth century1 to the flourishing of digital imagery in the early twenty-first. Rather than ask “Why is anime popular in America?” (or anywhere else) the question now becomes: How do people form connections through animation across various cultural, national, ethnic, and gendered differences? How have the media technologies available in different historical
and geopolitical moments affected the kind of community that fans can build? In short, what can one do with animation, locally and globally?

A second assumption that studies of global animation fan communities tend to make is that any new mass media technology, be it cinematic, televisual, or digital, has the potential to either imprison or empower audiences. The former approach, focusing on media's oppressive potential, might be termed the “Disneyfication discourse.” The Disneyfication discourse follows the earlier work of Frankfurt School cultural theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1947) in asserting that the global mass media is ultimately a force of cultural homogenization and corporate control. In the American context, critics such as Lee Artz have argued vocally against “Disney’s menu for global hierarchy” (2005, 75) and “corporate media hegemony” (2003, 3). In the Japanese context, Ōtsuka Eiji and Ōsawa Nobuaki have likewise argued that “anime and manga are a subspecies of Disney with the same invasive power” (2005, 15), as illustrated by the Pokémon boom of the mid-1990s. Economically and politically, the exercise of “soft power” through animation is alternately decried as “reward[ing] exploitation” (Mōri 2009, 81) or celebrated as “cultural diplomacy” (Sakurai 2009, 12). The common denominator is that in this model, audiences are assumed to be passive recipients of cultural messages delivered through the global mass media.

And yet, much scholarship on anime fans themselves takes a diametrically opposed stance. Following the seminal work of Henry Jenkins in the field of Fan Studies, it has become commonplace to argue that anime fandom is a bottom-up social formation which defies or “poaches on” corporate property through grassroots action. Susan Napier’s 2007 book *From Impressionism to Anime*, for instance, describes the practice of forming anime fan communities as a “strongly grassroots activity” (2007, 150) taking place in a mediated “fantasyscape” which people around the world may “enter and exit as they please” (2007, 11). Essay collections that include both Japanese and American contributors, such as Mizuko Ito, Daisuke Okabe, and Izumi Tsuji’s 2012 volume *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* also select essays that highlight the liberating potential of cultural exchange through animation while minimizing its corporate imbrications. From a political economy approach that sees primarily mass media oppression, we have shifted to a cultural studies approach that emphasizes fan empowerment above all. While the “political economy vs. cultural studies” divide in scholarship has been roundly decried (Grossberg 1995; Curran and Morley 2006), much work on animation is palpably indebted to one tradition or the other.
This book, however, acts as an intervention into the polarized discourses on media globalization, which frame animation as either the neo-imperial domination of Disneyfication or as a wellspring of active, resistant readings. It argues that anime fans around the world are neither dupes of corporate mass marketing and nationalist soft power initiatives, nor radically empowered techno-activists forming utopian global villages. Rather than focusing on top-down oppression or bottom-up resistance, *Anime Fan Communities* demonstrates that it is in the productive frictions, or the multiple intersections and collisions between different uses of media texts at corporate and interpersonal levels, that transcultural fan communities are born.

Transcultural globalization, then, is not vertical and linear, taking place solely as transactions between the “top level” of national governments, industries, and major film studios and the “bottom level” of radical creators and viewers. It is lateral and rhizomatic, as various media platforms allow for the circulation or blockage of visual texts and human desires. Following the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), we might envision animation’s circulation as a field of relations that can be stratified when systems of cartoon production, distribution, and consumption are put in place, de-stratified when the former levels of professional and amateur or national and international are disrupted, and re-stratified when new or existing power formations are reified and reinforced through animated media. In this way, transcultural connection is not a self/Other dialectic, as many scholars assume when they position fans and industries in different nations as two fixed, well-defined, pre-existing opposites that clash to produce something new (for instance, corporate America vs. subcultural Japanese anime fans = new hybrid culture). Rather, transcultural community is a reciprocally creating mediated relation between people in urban and regional contexts, as well as national and international structures, like so:

\[
\text{localized users} \leftrightarrow \text{material media texts and technologies} \leftrightarrow \text{(trans)national contexts.}
\]

This relation is not inherently libratory. Indeed, it is intimately bound up with histories of imperialism and structures of multinational capitalism. But neither is it inherently oppressive, since today’s transcultural media environment, as I will show, allows fans unprecedented access to each other and to the means of media production. Transcultural globalization thus presents risks and potentials, all of which need to be weighed in the balance.
Transcultural, Animation, Fan Community

The main conceptual tool I am using to reimagine the global media cultures of animation is a model I term the “transcultural animation fan community.” I define a “transcultural fan community” as a group in which people from many national, cultural, ethnic, gendered, and other personal backgrounds find a sense of connection across difference, engaging with each other through a shared interest while negotiating the frictions that result from their social and historical contexts. Transcultural animation fan communities are ones in which members of various backgrounds interact with and through animated texts in mutual, if sometimes asymmetrical, collaborations. Such collaborations may involve producing art or animation at amateur and semi-professional levels, or they may be based on everyday practices of viewing, commentary, and contestation, such as tweeting or posting to blogs about anime, to name just a few of the commonest practices. “Collaboration” can also take on a darker connotation of complicity, since even the kinds of active production and consumption lauded in fan studies may allow fans to reaffirm oppressive discourses such as racism and homophobia and to participate without reflection in compulsive consumerism. At base, however, the activity of a transcultural animation fan community allows the different perspectives of participants, who may not be equally positioned in terms of language ability or social status in a given collaboration, to come into conjunction or conflict through a many-to-many forum of communication. The simultaneous mutuality and asymmetry of the engagement—or, its friction—is what sets transcultural animation fan communities apart from earlier modes of animation spectatorship.

The kind of fan community I’ve just described is a relatively new phenomenon, since it is enabled by the multidirectional communications technologies of the Internet available to many people (though certainly not all) since the turn of the millennium. At present, many transcultural communities are only just emerging, and their full impacts have yet to be determined. Precisely for this reason, however, transcultural animation fan communities also serve as one small example of the larger changing environment of media globalization taking place in the early twenty-first century. This global media environment is increasingly commercialized and subject to different kinds of copyright legislation and institutional control (Iwabuchi 2010, Sarikakis and Thussu 2006). And yet, it is still shot through with eclectic, creative potentials (Georgiou 2006, Ito 2010). Transcultural animation fan community, in encouraging a recognition and reimagining of both the problems and potentials of contemporary media globalization, provides a valuable means for both fans and
academics to work through the frictions of global cultural exchange to form productive collaborations across difference.

While I have described transcultural animation fan communities as emerging in the digital era, they did not spring fully formed from the brow of the Internet. They have their roots in a number of previous forms of media technology and media globalization, beginning with the birth of film animation at the turn of the twentieth century. To ignore the historical formations out of which contemporary transcultural animation fan communities were born risks creating a model that is shallow at best and totalizing at worst, overlooking how uses of animation change over time as well as between places. Throughout this book, I argue that changes in material media technologies and in geopolitical conditions across time have a strong impact on the kinds of individual viewing positions and collective communities that can form around animation. The very word “transcultural” cannot be understood without taking account of the shifts in terminology for global relations, such as “international,” “postnational,” and “transnational.” These terms are not the same old sawhorses in different saddles. They represent significant theoretical and conceptual changes that are necessary for understanding the particular kind of relations indicated by the word “transcultural.”

*Internationalism* is based on the classic conception put forward by Benedict Anderson of the nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1991, 6). This view of nationalism supposes a “unisonance” (145) or univocal quality created and promoted by print media, such as the newspaper and novel, and also by songs such as anthems, which allow citizens to form a common sense of identity together with millions of people they have never met. Anderson’s “imagined communities” are thus foundational for thinking about both the social and the *virtual* aspects of nationalism, particularly where media are concerned. Still, in his focus on sovereignty and unity, Anderson’s work follows modernist theories of International Relations laid out since the 1920s, which naturalize the “division of political authority into territorially distinct sovereign states” (Deibert 1997, 8). It is important not to underestimate the influence of the sovereign state model on animation, since animation continues to be part of the system of “national cinemas,” in which films are intimately tied to national identity via the sovereign land, national citizen, or government funding agency that produced them.

In the decades following the end of World War II, however, film production was challenged by television, and the modernist organizations of the state were increasingly at loggerheads with intellectual discourses of postmodern fragmentation and decentered economies of multinational
capitalism. Arjun Appadurai argues that the late twentieth century saw a “general rupture in the tenor of intersocietal relations” (1996, 2), which he calls the “emergence of a postnational political world” (22; my emphasis). To theorize the postnational, Appadurai draws on Anderson’s dimension of the imaginary, but sees it as a “social practice” (31) acted out through a number of intersecting dimensions of cultural flows or -scapes. There are financescapes of capitalism, ethnoscapes of immigration and diaspora, and mediascapes of information and imagery, among others. These -scapes radically alter how people may form communities and understand themselves together, with the result that “we are in the process of moving to a global order in which the nation-state has become obsolete and other formations for allegiance and identity have taken its place” (169). Furthermore, “what are emerging are strong alternatives for the organization of global traffic in resources, images and ideas—forms that either contest the nation-state actively or constitute peaceful alternatives for large-scale political loyalties” (169). Where animation is concerned, the postnational media climate allowed for ever-broader communities of fans oriented toward television programs. As less optimistic critics have noted, however, the late capitalist form of postnationalism also encourages fans to behave as “communities of consumers” (Chua 2006, 27) for the spin-off goods and products advertised on TV. Postnationalism, in its social and consumerist dimensions, is thus the immediate forerunner of the twenty-first century’s transnational virtual communities.

Transnationalism is not simply another word for postnationalism or the smooth transfer of information and people across the fading borders of a globalized world. Where postnationalism is almost always defined through metaphors of global flow as “cascades” (Appadurai 150) or “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2000), transnationalism takes into account the friction that Tsing describes as a key feature of contemporary globalization. Tsing defines friction as “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (2005, 4). In her case studies based on fieldwork in Indonesian rainforests, she recognizes that globalization is often economically and socially oppressive. But she also shows that there is still hope for contestation in and through the very sites of inequality. Even those who are unequally positioned within a single situation can form coalitions or collaborations, as Western environmental activists and indigenous rainforest inhabitants did when protesting Japanese logging in Indonesia in the 1990s. That is not to say that transnational collaborations are simply acts of uniting “us” against “them” to achieve a common goal. Tsing argues that “There is no reason to assume that collaborators share common goals. In transnational collaborations, overlapping but discrepant forms of cosmopolitanism may
inform contributors, allowing them to converse—but across difference” (13). This concept of collaborative friction thus adds a dimension of constructive “cross-talk” (Brydon 2004, 70) to Appadurai’s -scapes, without falling into the limited, homogeneous structures of internationalism.

What, then, is transculturalism? In short, it is the cultural dimension of transnationalism. Though there is often slippage between “nation” and “culture,” these two things are not necessarily the same. We may speak, for instance, of youth culture as a formation that is nationally inflected, but primarily determined by a non-national category: age. Or, we may speak of women’s culture, or of a series of women’s cultures, as groups with different orientations and contexts that remain linked by discourses of gender and femininity. We may also speak of a fan culture in this light, as something that exists differently in different nations, but has similarities based on consumption of the same texts, overlapping forms of interpretation, and so on. As a form of collaboration across these kinds of differences, transculturalism does not entail the creation of a holistic multicultural unity, a “melting pot” in which all are purported to be equal no matter their actual histories or lived experiences of discrimination. Neither does it divide people into isolated cultural groups based on quasi-essentialized ideas of ethnicity, nation, or gender, as in the “mosaic” model of multiculturalism. It is rather a process of crossing, of “interconnection across difference” (Tsing 2005, 4) in the transnational mode. Following the position of Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way on transnationalism, I see transculturalism as “a thing contested, interrupted, and always shot through with contradiction” (627).

Recognizing that transnationalism and transculturalism are themselves contested concepts, I do not intend to fix them into rigid definitions. I am rather using them descriptively to think through the changes and continuities in animation fan communities in various contexts over the past century. In short, I argue that the cinematic technologies and production practices developed in the early twentieth century were compatible with and enhanced modernist internationalism, as the television cartoon series was in synchronicity with the fragmentations of postnational globalization at its birth, and web animation promotes a transcultural orientation today.

If media can be described as “in synch” with an era or mode of globalization, however, that is not to imply that eras or media technologies absolutely determine the content or use of animation in the same way all over the world. As Thomas Lamarre argues in his 2009 book The Anime Machine, when discussing the development of animation we should be cautious about applying the strict ruptures of the “modernity thesis” and the underlying technological determinism of the “specificity thesis” that
so often accompanies it. The specificity thesis of film theory, which gives primary importance to the mechanical properties of media technologies when discussing their effects on audiences, is often the target of critiques of technological determinism and universalism in contemporary film studies. However, Lamarre provides a valuable caveat to this critique when he states that “at some level it is impossible to separate questions about material specificity (of cinema or animation) from questions about material conditions or historical formations (modernity or postmodernity)” (2009, xxiii). If the media technologies of animation, as they were formed and reformed drastically in various locations over the course of the twentieth century, do not completely determine the content and effects of cartoons, they do undeniably involve different physical practices of both animating and viewing. Therefore, they must provide at least some new avenues for interaction between creators and audiences, and among audience members themselves. Examining how diversely positioned creators, critics, and fans have done things with animation provides a solid base for determining what we can do now to address the continuing historical issues and emerging transformative potentials of transcultural animation fan communities.

Animation

Compared to “transcultural,” “animation” is a much less disputed term, though not without its subtleties. Etymologically speaking, to “animate” is to give life, spirit (animus), or motion. As such, animation is often theorized in relation to movement. Gilles Deleuze, in the opening pages of his *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* states that

> the cartoon film, if it belongs fully to cinema, does so because the drawing no longer constitutes a pose or a completed figure, but the description of a figure which is always in the process of being formed or dissolving through the movement of lines and points taken at any-instant-whatevers of their course. […] It does not give us a figure described in a unique moment, but the continuity of the movement which describes the figure. (1986, 5)

Deleuze’s theoretical statement echoes the oft-quoted 1968 axiom of practicing animator Norman McLaren, who said that “Animation is not the art of drawings that move but the art of movements that are drawn” (Furniss 1999, 5). Looking at the “movement which describes the figure” or at “movements that are drawn” takes on a double sense in the study of transcultural animation fan communities, which are, as I have just
described them, based on a “process of crossing,” a form of mobility, however frictive or diverted it may be.

That said, however, animation does not move in the same ways across the board. The materials used in animation, whether paper puppets, clay models, drawings on clear celluloid, individual pixels, or mathematical vectors, each have their own particular limitations and capabilities. The distribution platforms they are created for also make a difference. Within the corpus of cel-style animation, I focus on three different intersections of animation and technology: cinematic animation, television’s “limited” animation (often identified with “anime” style), and web animation, also called Flash animation.

Cinematic animation technically includes any work produced for and viewed through projection in a film theater, a historical corpus largely associated with hand-drawn cel-style animation. In fact, since the early days of cinematic animation, there have been many competing techniques in North America and Japan for creating movement. These include drawing an entirely new picture, background and all, for every frame of film (a technique used by Émile Cohl starting in 1908 and in Kitayama Seitarō’s “changing paper method” [suikōhō] first employed between 1917 and 1921), or reusing one sheet of paper for a static background with a number of others, either torn off or overlaid, for moving elements such as characters’ limbs (e.g., Raoul Barré’s 1912 “slash system” or Kitayama’s “cut-out method” [kirinukihō]).

The system that became dominant by the mid-1930s in both Japanese and North American studios, however, was the technique of drawing and painting on clear celluloid sheets patented by Earl Hurd in 1914, for which “cel-style” is named. As Lamarre ably describes, the major technological apparatuses used in cel-style production in both America and Japan were the animation stand, which allowed sheets of celluloid representing background, midground, and foreground elements to be evenly stacked in layers for photography, and later the multiplane camera, in which the distance between each layer could be adjusted independently to create a greater sense of “movement into depth” (2009, 19). In describing the kind of movement-into-depth that the multiplane camera allowed, Lamarre follows the basic argument (though not the deterministic overtones) of Paul Virilio’s theorization of “cinematism,” “the use of mobile apparatuses of perception, which serve (1) to give the viewer a sense of standing over and above the world and thus of controlling it, and (2) to collapse the distance between viewer and target, in the manner of the ballistic logic of instant strike or instant hit” (5). The kinds of national and international spectator positions that may be formed through such movements will be discussed in Chapter 2 on propaganda animation.
As Lamarre argues, the animation stand’s layered cels also offered the potential for another kind of movement, which unlike cinematism is “not about movement into depth but movement on and between surfaces” (7). He calls this planar movement animetism or the “animetic interval” (7). This kind of movement is associated more with the so-called limited animation styles of television cartoons, particularly (though not exclusively) in Japanese anime, where flatness is emphasized and naturalistic motion decreased. It may involve technically still images with diagonal lines creating a sense of dynamism, and as such, it has been theorized in greater depth by Marc Steinberg as a form of “dynamic immobility” (2012, 6). While I wish to keep Lamarre’s sophisticated approach to animation through media theory, I will also incorporate Steinberg’s approach of looking at television animation as a postnational industrial practice, in connection to the practices of distribution and consumption surrounding television cartoons and their marketing to children, and not only in relation to aesthetics and media theory. Television animation, defined most simply as works produced for consumption through terrestrial or satellite television broadcast, is thus considered primarily through its usages by both corporations and fans to form different kinds of collective movements.

In contrast to both film and television animation, which share a celluloid base, Computer Generated (CG) animation represents a different ontological condition for the animated image than that discussed by either Lamarre or Steinberg: namely, the digital. As Vivian Sobchak (2009) has discussed, digital animation poses particular problems when it comes to the materiality of the image. Unlike the hand-drawn cel animation of film and TV, digital animation is created through the mathematical calculation of pixel positions or line vectors. As such, it holds in tension the impression of images as “automated,” or created automatically by a soulless computer program, and as “autonomous,” depicting the movements of lively, seemingly self-directed characters. While as Sobchak says both the automatic and autonomous conceptions of animation may erase the actual labor of living human animators from the minds of audiences, I argue that viewers are also continually aware that what they are seeing is created, and can be recreated by ordinary people with widely available digital editing and animation software. In my view, it is the pull between digital intangibility and hands-on malleability that marks computer-generated animation.

In its surface visuals, digital animation may still operate in either a cinematic mode (for instance, the photorealistic animations of dinosaurs in the 1993 film *Jurassic Park*), or an animetic mode, imitating the flatness of television animation. This latter mode is more associated with
animation on the Internet, and in particular the genre known as “Flash cartoons,” created using the Adobe Flash (formerly Macromedia Flash) program. In both the West and Japan, Flash animation or “web anime” commonly draws on the “dynamic immobility” (Steinberg, 6) of previous television programming and merchandise, but to an even more exaggerated extent, creating both a continuity and a break between the aesthetics and ontologies of former modes of animated movement. In addition, as a program available to amateurs as well as professionals, Flash enables online economies of animation production and distribution among fans themselves not possible in film or television. The balance of rupture and continuity in media formats, as well as forms of globalization and community, plays a key role in understanding animation’s technological and social movements, particularly when it comes to fan communities.

Fan Communities

Up to this point, I have used the term “fan community” neutrally and unproblematically, counting on a common recognition of its meaning as a group of people who collectively enjoy and are dedicated to a particular text, genre, or performer. But just as with the various modes of globalization, conceptions of “fan communities” have varied in the decades since they were first studied.

The first generation of Western fan scholars, active in the late 1980s and early 1990s, includes authors such as Camille Bacon-Smith, John Fiske, Henry Jenkins, and Janice Radway, among others. Their works are mainly concerned with contesting popular and etymological associations of “fans” with “fanatics,” devotees overcome by an “excessive and mistaken enthusiasm” (Jenkins 1992, 12) which renders them either dangerously obsessed or pathetically duped, or both at once. Negative conceptions of fans in the West since the 1920s extended beyond individuals as well, since “the concept of the fan involves images of social and psychological pathology” that manifest in tropes of the “hysterical crowd” as well as the “obsessed individual” (Jensen 1992, 9). These negative discourses create a definitional lose-lose situation, with the fan caught between action and passivity, self and society. The active solitary fan is a lone maniac, while the passive solitary fan is an isolated loser who should “get a life”; collectively active fans are hysterical (often female) mobs, while the great mass of passive fans are duped audiences hypnotized into uncritical acceptance of the culture industry.

In response to such stereotypes, scholars of fandom—particularly Jenkins in his *Textual Poachers*—tended to reappropriate and revalue
the definitional terms to create an equal but opposite win-win situation.
The fan as “textual poacher” is a creative actor within consumer culture.
She (and women are most often the focus of early American fan studies)
reaffirms her sense of “commonality and community” (Jenkins 1992, 58)
by sharing her individual affective experiences of viewing “alone, with a
box of hankies nearby” (58). She writes fan fiction or creates art in order
to express her own preferences and personal views of the object of her
fandom, but she also works within the collectively determined fan “meta-
text” or “fanon” that is created parallel to the canon of a media text. In
this positive revaluation, fans are productive in reception and together in
individuality. First generation fan scholars thus often worked by taking
the tropes and characterizations of the dominant discourse and trans-
forming them into the polar opposites of the criticisms launched against
them.

While the construction of the fan given above is generally based on
American and British examples, we might also see the Japanese otaku
as defined by a similar, but not identical, history of extreme negativism
followed by reappropriation. Ideas of isolation and sociality are still key
in Japanese portraits of otaku, as are the figures of the passive, infantile
fan and the dangerous criminal. But due to the particular sociohistorical
conditions in which the otaku subculture arose, the way these attributes
are framed and emphasized differ in some points from the Western con-
cept of the fan.

For instance, unlike the term “fan,” which has its roots in ideas of
fanatical excess and abandon, “otaku” is a formal second person pronoun
literally meaning “your residence.” It was first used to characterize anime
and manga fans as awkward “social rejects” (Galbraith and Lamarre 2010,
363) in a 1983 Manga Burikko magazine column by Nakamori Akio titled
“Studying ‘Otaku.’” It has since come to denote an obsession with any-
thing from trains to military paraphernalia, though it retains a special
connection to anime subculture. A sort of wordplay, it refers “both to
someone who is not accustomed to close friendships and therefore tries
to communicate with peers using this distant and overly formal form of
address, and to someone who spends most of his or her time alone at
home” (Kinsella 1998, 310–11).

As Sharon Kinsella describes, this image of the loner otaku coined and
debated in subcultural circles was lifted to the level of a mass media panic
by the 1988–9 case of the serial child-murderer Miyazaki Tsutomu, whose
cache of amateur manga and anime provoked widespread concern about
the dangers of otaku who “cannot make the transition from a fantasy world
of videos and manga to reality” (1998, 309). While the delusional maniac
figure is also found in sensationalistic Western reporting (for instance, on
John Lennon’s killer Mark David Chapman), it is interesting to note that the Japanese press focused not only on Miyazaki himself, but on otaku as an entire generation of antisocial, infantile, and isolated youths, also called the “shinjinrui” or “new type people,” who were not exposed to the harsh realities of World War II or the scarcities of the reconstruction period. While some of the negative discourses around fans and otaku are the same, then, their slant is slightly different, with otaku appearing as symptomatic of a particular generational shift within postwar Japan.

The negative popular discourse around otaku, as with that around fans, has been contested by scholars who attempted to reclaim or recast the otaku image in the years following the Miyazaki incident. The premier scholar of “otakuology” (otakugaku) in the 1980s–early 1990s was anime producer and critic Okada Toshio, cofounder of the Gainax animation studio and also of what Lamarre describes as the “Gainax discourse” on anime. The Gainax discourse, like Western fan studies, emphasizes that “Producers are, above all, fans; and fans are budding producers” (Lamarre 2006, 367). This production, however, is not seen to be enabled primarily by social practices of community building, as in Jenkins’ work, but by a particular canon of male-created and -targeted science fiction anime texts and the aesthetics of “dense, nonhierarchized visual space” (366) they exemplify. The result is a somewhat ahistorical portrait of animation fandom, and also one that is much more male-biased than early work on Western fandom. In Japan, then, we may see both crossover and distinction in the definition of fans among first-generation scholars.

Such revaluations, while useful for combating overly negative fan stereotypes and “otaku-bashing,” have not passed unquestioned in later generations of fan studies. As Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington argue, the “Fandom is Beautiful” approach of American first-wave fan scholars “did not deconstruct the binary structure in which the fan had been placed so much as they tried to differently value the fan’s place in said binary” (2007, 3). Instead of being entirely negative, fans become a bit too entirely positive, overlooking the complexities and complicities of fan production. The late 1990s and early 2000s thus saw a backlash against such perceived utopianism among scholars who “highlighted the replication of social and cultural hierarchies within fan- and subcultures” (6). In English-language scholarship, second wave authors such as Cheryl Harris, Mark Jancovich, and Sarah Thornton argued that “fans are not seen as a counterforce to existing social hierarchies and structures but, in sharp contrast, as agents of maintaining social and cultural systems of classification and thus existing hierarchies” (Grey et al. 6). Criticisms of anime for maintaining a political and economic structure of “cultural nationalism,” such as that launched by Ōtsuka and Ōsawa in their 2005
book Why Is “Japanimation” Failing? likewise represent a break from celebratory official policies and scholarly discourses alike. The phrases “sharp contrast” and “break,” however, suggest yet another swing of the binary pendulum, this time from agency back to structural control, or, from cultural studies to political economy.

Such sharply divided positions have produced a third wave of fan scholars who focus on the very problem of dualisms. Grey et al. find the hallmark of the third wave to be its attention to fandom not as a special category, but as “the fabric of our everyday lives” (9), with fan studies “providing answers to the pressing issues of global modernity” (9). I agree with their description, but would like to add that a major contribution of third wave scholars (and, I hope, of my own work) is the care they take in self-reflexively addressing the “moral dualisms” of fan studies as an academic discipline which relies on identifying “‘good’ and ‘bad’ instances of popular culture” and dividing fans into the institutionally acceptable categories of “resistant” or “complicit” readers (Hills 2002, xii). Hills likewise questions the very division of “academics” and “fans,” positing a hybrid “aca-fan” identity for those scholars who both study and belong to fan culture. At the same time, Hills recognizes that “Any and all attempts at hybridising and combining ‘fan’ and ‘academic’ identities/subjectivities must . . . remain sensitive to those institutional contexts which disqualify certain ways of speaking and certain ways of presenting the self” (2002, 20). Third-wave fan studies, much like postcolonial and third-wave feminist studies, thus depend on a close attention to one’s own speaking voice and the politics of claims to representation. And so, while I do identify myself as an anime fan, I must acknowledge that I also write as a white Canadian female academic. I have challenged some of the limitations on my previous knowledge by conducting surveys and participant observation at major fan events in the United States, Japan, and (to a lesser extent) South Korea, as well as in my home country of Canada, but my “insider” knowledge is not complete and is always inflected by my positioning. This is an aspect of the asymmetries that continue to haunt both transcultural scholarship and transcultural fandom.

Careful attention to how fandom is discursively framed is particularly required for anyone attempting to engage in the contemporary field of “otaku studies” (otakuron), from inside or outside of Japan. This is because even very recent scholarship still tends to pathologize otaku as a breed of isolated loners comparable to another notorious antisocial group in Japan, the hikikomori or “social recluses” who refuse to leave their houses (Saitō 2009). Otaku may be framed in generalizations such as “a culture in which the major theme is the avoidance of others” (Kashimura 2007, 341), and seen as yet another in a series of posited generation breaks in
Japanese society. The need to go beyond such tropes is pointed out by Tagawa Takahiro in his 2009 article “Direction of Otaku Studies,” which pays attention to the question of who defines otaku and how they do it. In particular, he notes the masculinist bias of otaku studies, and calls for a greater attention to the subculture of female fans of homoerotic works known as fujoshi, or “rotten women.” The project of studying fujoshi is in fact already well under way among female scholars such as Kotani Mari and Antonia Levi, and it is one I take up in Chapter 6, where a fuller definition of fujoshi may be found. Finally, however, Tagawa suggests that we ask not “what are otaku?” (or fujoshi), but rather “how do otaku live?” (2009, 79), as male or as female fans, personally and socially, at home and in the world. Tagawa’s position has resonance with Hills’ commitment to looking more at “what fandom does culturally” than “how fandom can be fitted into academic norms of ‘resistant’ or ‘complicit’ readings” (2002, xii). It is within these currents of third-generation fan and otaku studies that my understanding of fandom is positioned.

The issue of community is also of great importance in fan studies. When Western scholars such as Henry Jenkins sought to grant fans a level of academic acceptability in the mid-1990s, they often did it by relying on the trope of community. This should perhaps come as no surprise. Nicholas Jankowski posits that the term has historically been one of the “most fundamental and far-reaching concepts of sociology” (citing Nisbet’s 1966 pronouncement), and remains “central to present day studies of the Internet” (Jankowski 2002, 37) and media generally, both fields on which fan studies draws heavily. Indeed, the term “community” has been so widely and differently defined in everything from business to journalism to activism that many scholars have begun to criticize its overuse, particularly in relation to new media. Some find it too loaded, preferring terms such as “network” (Castells 2010), while others have “decried [both ‘community’ and ‘network’] as being so diverse in their understandings and applications as to be almost useless” (Willson 2010, 749). There have been calls for redefinitions and protestations of the need to get “beyond the diluted community concept” (Fernback 2007, 49).

I would argue, however, that like globalization, community is a difficult concept to grasp not because it has no meaning or too many meanings, but because it is a keyword with context-specific definitions. It is only useful when it is in use, being considered in relation to some problem, text, or practice, rather than as an abstract set of norms or a typology of generalized human interaction. For that reason, as with my other key concepts, I do not propose to give yet another universal (re)definition of this slippery concept, but only to show how the term operates at a particular juncture: in the meeting with transcultural animation fans. We need
not go “beyond the diluted community concept” to accomplish this focus on processes and usages. Rather, as Diana Brydon and William Coleman suggest, we should also consider practices of “renegotiating community,” turning attention to “the ways in which communities renegotiate their identities and their functions within changing global circumstances, sometimes finding new ways to cooperate across differences and forging new alliances and sometimes solidifying older patterns of exclusion” (2009, 17).

Overall, then, I argue that transcultural animation fan communities are one such site of renegotiation. Like other communities, they are practices of inclusion and exclusion. They are grounded in local, embodied experience and in the virtual, mediated “work of the imagination” (Appadurai 1996, 5). They are commercial and personal, a place where various forms of social organization clash/converge. They are rhizomatic, multiple but linked. All these things, as I demonstrate in the coming pages, are part of today’s anime fan communities.

The Chapters

This book considers the changing faces of animation spectatorship by tracing animation audiences through three eras, each of which is given its own section: one on international cinema, one on postnational television, and one on the transcultural Internet. However, these periodizations are not absolute and exclusive. I do not want to lock each era, medium, and mode of globalization into a deterministic and totalizing whole, as if film animation can only be international in one way, having developed at one time. Rather, I pay attention to how discourses of, say, modernity, the international, and cinema were created in uneven yet interlinking ways in North America and East Asia at different rates of change. I then demonstrate the kinds of animation fan communities they enabled. In this way, I highlight the different communities that have crystallized in particular national, historical, and technological contexts, envisioned as moments of shift and friction.

To prevent the three parts from imposing a single static view of “the early twentieth century” or “the postmodern era,” I have split each part into two chapters which highlight different trends in animation within the broad era covered, be they trends toward affirming locally or globally dominant discourses, or attempts to work against or through such discourses in various ways. While the overall thrust of the book progresses chronologically from earlier to later works, each chapter provides particular moments from the United States, Canada, Japan, and/or South Korea.
that cut across the progressive, developmental format by revealing the many contesting approaches to “modern internationalization” or “transcultural community” that exist at any given time. In this way, my structure aims to provide a “trans-historical” as well as transcultural view.

Part I: Animation and the Miraculous Cinema contains two chapters which demonstrate the utopian internationalist and imperialist drives of American and Japanese animation from the birth of animation in the silent era up to 1945.

Chapter 1, titled “Cartoon Internationale,” looks at the formative years of silent and early sound film animation in the United States and Japan. This chapter demonstrates the cosmopolitan aspirations of animators who self-reflexively depicted celluloid stars and their cartoon audiences through national and international frameworks. The major case study compares the depictions of Betty Boop as a “cartoon ambassador” to Japan in two short films: the Fleischer Brothers’ “A Language All My Own” (1935) and Ōfuji Noburō’s “Defeat of the Tengu” (1934). Through close analyses of these films and archival evidence of their reception, I demonstrate how animators used highly mobile, easily transferrable cute characters to interpellate audiences at home and abroad as fans and world citizens, even as those same “international” characters inevitably became inflected by locally rooted ethnic and gendered stereotypes. Chapter 1 provides a positive view of filmmakers’ attempts to form genuine cross-cultural connections, but does not fail to recognize the social, economic, and political motivations that shaped film animation’s global circulation from the beginning.

Chapter 2, “World War Cute,” delves more deeply into issues of cinematic imperialism by considering how animators’ reflexive tactics of representing audiences in other nations came to be used in World War II propaganda films. Propaganda shorts and features considered include the Walt Disney Studios’ “Education for Death” (1943), Saludos Amigos (1942), and The Three Caballeros (1944), and Seo Mitsuyo’s “Momotarō’s Sea Eagles” (1943) and Momotarō’s Divine Ocean Warriors (1945). Special attention is paid to the figure of the “cute ethnic Other” in these films, such as Disney’s Uruguayan “Little Gauchito” character and Seo’s adorable South Pacific jungle animals. These figures, it is argued, embody the complex play of connection and distinction that arose when animators attempted to build international links between subject-viewers of different races and cultures, and at the same time to establish their own nations as natural imperial rulers.

The overall purpose of Part I is thus to establish animation’s unique ability to reflexively represent and appeal to viewers of diverse backgrounds, and to highlight its complicities in national and international imperialist discourses.
Part II: After These Messages: Television Animation in the Age of “Posts” reveals how certain tropes of cinematic animation, such as the reflexive depiction of audiences, continued into the postwar period but also changed drastically with the coming of television, which relied on globalized, postnational structures of media distribution. Its two chapters provide two different perspectives on TV audiences between 1962 and 1998: the “kid vid” market for children’s cartoons and the demographic of teen and adult anime fans.

Chapter 3, “Kid Vid: Children and Science Fiction TV Fandom,” addresses the common trope of passive TV viewers by showing how science fiction programs such as Hanna-Barbera’s The Jetsons (1962/1985) and Tezuka Osamu’s Astro Boy (1963/1980) participated in global media economies that depicted children as manipulable consumers of homogenized, “culturally odorless” (Iwabuchi 2002, 24) cartoons and sponsored products. The child fan, as a demographic that cut across former organizations of (inter)national audiences, is shown mainly as a member of advertiser-sponsored fan clubs, often to the multinational distributors’ economic gain. That said, this chapter also takes note of the discrepancies between how child audiences were depicted in cartoons of the 1960s–80s, and how actual audiences of adult media activists and unruly child viewers reacted to advertising in animation. It thus suggests that participation in commercialized media may hold nascent potential for more critical engagements in fan community, however restricted or co-opted that potential may be.

Chapter 4, “Channel Surfers: Cowboy Bebop’s Postnational Fans” expands on the potential of children’s fan clubs to look at the birth of anime fan communities among teens and young adults in North America and Japan in the 1970s–90s. Exploring the underground media economies enabled by the development of VCR and DVD technologies, this chapter shows how fans built a sense of community—or, a “community of sentiment” (Appadurai 1996, 8)—across geographical distance based on a shared interest in a common genre: science fiction anime. Watanabe Shinichirō’s 1998 science fiction anime series Cowboy Bebop provides a perfect example of the flows and frictions of the postnational media environment, illustrating the kinds of communities that can flourish (and fail) through changing media technologies.

Though they may seem quite polarized in approach, these two chapters are united by a close attention to how fans use television programs to create affective bonds. In this way, Part II provides the immediate historical and theoretical bases necessary to understand today’s transcultural animation fan communities.
Part III: Online Conversations Across Difference looks at the communities that have grown up around web animation since the year 2000. It expands the earlier America/Japan focus to look at the complex cultural exchanges between South Korean and Japanese fans, as well as between these regions and North America.

Chapter 5, “Love at First Site,” focuses on the Flash animation series *There She Is!!* (2003–8) by the South Korean artist trio SamBakZa. This award-winning series of five shorts depicts the forbidden interspecies love between a cat and a rabbit, and has become one of the top-ranked Flash animation series on the aggregator site Newgrounds.com. It is read through ethnographic observations of how English, Korean, and Japanese-speaking fans worked through the difficulties of cross-cultural communication on the SamBakZa website’s multilingual bulletin board as the series was being released. Examining the shorts and message boards together reveals that the process of forming transcultural community is not a smooth one, but is fraught with ongoing social and historical conflicts. This chapter also demonstrates, however, that working through such frictions in an online forum allows for mutual, if sometimes asymmetrical, cultural exchange. The process of interpreting animation seen here is productive and in fact constitutive of transcultural community.

Chapter 6, “World Conflict/World Conference: *Axis Powers Hetalia*,” illustrates how earlier ideas of media and community are both reified and transformed within the visual environment of the media mix. It analyzes a work that spans many media platforms: *Axis Powers Hetalia* (aka *Hetalia: Axis Powers*, 2006–pres.), by Himaruya Hideka. This controversial parody of the nations involved in World War II is available as a web manga, print manga, web anime, and theatrical film. In its many versions, *Hetalia* is a prime example of how the twentieth-century media mix described by Steinberg (2012) has grown into a highly structured “contents industry” (Azuma 2007) in recent years. As part of its particular niche market within the contents industry, *Hetalia* has been targeted to female fans in both East Asia and North America. Women’s collective uses of multimedia texts reveal the role of gendered cultures in online collaborations across difference.

The aim of these final chapters is to illustrate the many semi-autonomous cultures of nation, language, ethnicity, and gender along which animation fandom is still divided, while revealing the points of cross-over that make such communities transcultural. In this way, we can gain insight into our changing ways of living together in a world animated by the flows and frictions of global crossings, social clashings, and mediated imaginaries.
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