Realism and animation? Realism in animation? The association of the two terms may seem incongruous to those more familiar with notions of filmic realism. *Realism* is undoubtedly a term much more closely associated with film than with animation. In part we can understand this to be a product of film’s relationship with profilmic reality; film offers an image and style of movement that is an iconically and indexically faithful portrait of the profilmic events that occurred in front of the camera. This also comes in part from the greater prominence of debates around realism at various stages within film discourse, criticism, and theory. Film’s phenomenological reproduction of reality, or its artificial or semiotic construction of realism (depending on whom you ask), was one of the key dividing lines between the supposed naive phenomenological approach of André Bazin and the more critical approach of writers associated with 1970s screen theory. Finally, the link between film and realism is made all the stronger by the multiple film movements that have evoked concepts of realism—from Italian neorealism to the kitchen-sink realism of the British new wave to the long-take, long-shot aesthetic of what is sometimes called slow cinema or contemporary contemplative cinema that informs contemporary transnational art cinemas.

Animation has traditionally had a far more tenuous relationship to realism. It is not in any obvious way a realist form. While there is no inherent contradiction between drawing and realism—indeed realism as a concept emerges from both literary studies and painting in the nineteenth century—animators have tended to embrace nonrealistic styles of drawing and movement in their creations. Similarly, realism has historically not been a key component to animation criticism or theory. What theoretical works on animation there were tended to emphasize...
the nonrealistic quality of animation—one need only think of Sergei Eisenstein’s fragments on Disney, wherein the theorist-filmmaker finds the plasmaticness of animation of the greatest interest.3

One site where theoretical, critical, and practical interest in realism in animation first comes together is around the work of Disney. Walt Disney famously pushed his animators toward a greater verisimilitude of movement and weight displacement in the drawing of their characters. Disney’s drive toward realism was also taken to new levels in his attempt to reproduce the filmic production of depth in the form of the multiplane camera, a camera with multiple levels of glass separated spatially, allowing animators to produce a cinematic illusion of depth (from differentiation between foreground, middle ground, and background to the simulation of racking focus and the creation of out-of-focus parts of the shot). Disney aimed for the production of what Paul Wells, borrowing a term from Umberto Eco, calls “hyper-realism.”4 Hyperrealism is an appropriate term because it implicitly traces a lineage of animation from Disney to the three-dimensional computer-generated imagery (3-D CGI), a more recent development in animation wherein we encounter the problematic of realism. This heightened form of realism is often known as hyperrealism, or, in Andrew Darley’s coinage, “second order realism.”5

What makes Darley’s term second-order realism so useful is that it clearly states what is sometimes ambiguous: that the referent for CGI’s realism is not “the real world” or the profilmic but rather cinematic conventions of realist representation: the perspective of objects recorded by a monocular camera lens, lens flare, perspectival depth, motion blur, and so on. This distinguishes Darley’s work from that, say, of Stephen Prince, whose seemingly similar term, “perceptual realism,” ultimately refers to what the referent of the image, if it had existed, would have looked like to the perceiver. Prince’s interest lies in how “even unreal [i.e., animated] images can be perceptually realistic”—how nonindexical, nonphotographic images could still seem to us to be perceptually real.6 When Darley defines second-order realism as “an attempt to produce old ways of seeing or representing by other means,” he ultimately takes one step further and forward by suggesting that animated realism—in Disney as in contemporary CGI—is in fact a representation of an older form of representation: the animated reproduction of standard photographic techniques.7
Realism and Animation: Japanese Debates

This brief sketch of the state of debates on realism in animation studies provides us with a ground from which to approach the place of realism and animation within Japanese critical discourse of the 2000s. Two of Japan’s main animation critics and public intellectuals, Ōtsuka Eiji and Azuma Hiroki, have organized part of their critical work around the question of realism in animation. However, the principal manner in which these writers engage with realism resembles (and exceeds) Darley’s conception of second-order realism. Animation, for these writers, is not a medium capable of reproducing realism as much as it is a medium that itself provides the basis for “animation-like” work within a different media form. Realism is first and foremost a set of conventions proper to a historically produced configuration of a given medium, rather than a visual resemblance to a given reality. Moreover, Ōtsuka and Azuma push the debate one step further by suggesting that realism applies not to animation’s imitation of another medium (cinema) but rather another medium’s imitation of animation styles and problems.

In addition to providing this different take on the relation between animation and realism, my discussion of Ōtsuka and Azuma’s writings also provides a gateway into the ways that animation has been engaged with and theorized within recent Japanese critical discourse. Beginning in the late 1990s and really taking off in the early 2000s, public intellectuals such as Ōtsuka and Azuma, as well as Saitō Tamaki, Kasai Kiyoshi, Uno Tsunehiro, Itō Gō, and others, organized their critical activities in part around commentary on Japanese animation, its associated forms of media (comics, novels, and games), its cultures of consumption, and the critical terminology that often develops out of its fan cultures. In this sense the trend in critical thought known as zeronendai no shisō (thought of the oughts) has seen the unprecedented prominence of animation as a critical node around which much criticism, commentary, and theorization were organized. Granted, one may argue that something similar occurred in the Anglophone world as well around the beginning of the millennium. This trend is embodied in Lev Manovich’s famous claim that animation, previously cinema’s maligned twin, would become the moving-image category par excellence, with live-action cinema becoming a mere subset of animation. The appearance of journals such as animation: an interdisciplinary journal and the increasing number of scholars working on some aspect of animation are certainly
proof of a rise in the extent and purview of animation scholarship in the Anglophone world.

Yet the parallels also offer some instructive contrasts. While Manovich and many of the contributors to debates around animation in the Anglophone world come from the field of film and media studies, the Japanese critics I have mentioned come from the fields of literary studies, critical theory, and criticism. While many now have academic positions, they come as much from the world of criticism as from academia, a positionality that is reflected in their writing. They write for a broad public readership and frame their discussions of animation very much within wider debates around contemporary “expressive cultures,” as they are often called. To be sure there are also a growing number of more academic animation scholars in Japan, often with close ties to film studies, such as the film and animation scholar Katō Mikiro and the animation historian Tsugata Nobuyuki (both, interestingly, based in Kyoto, while Azuma, Ōtsuka, and others are based in Tokyo—leading to the suggestion that the latter group’s work should be called Tokyo criticism rather than Japanese criticism). Here I would like to focus on the Ōtsuka-Azuma debate around realism in order to provide a clearer sense of the approach to animation adopted by these writers and to highlight the prominent place of animation within Japanese cultural criticism since the late 1990s. Indeed, the significance of these debates lies both in their theory of realism and in their manner of situating animation within wider cultural and media spheres—in their manner, that is, of situating animation as the environment for a wider media culture. This work on animation debates in Japan will not undertake the rereading of the existing film theory canon for traces of animation criticism, but it will create a portrait of other spaces, milieus, and media ecologies in which animation criticism is being developed, and from which film theory may itself learn. Let us turn then to an examination of the animation criticism in Japan since the late 1990s, with an eye to what it may teach us about the specificity of animation’s media ecologies and the critical discourses developed around them.

**Ōtsuka Eiji’s Three Realisms**

Ōtsuka’s importance lies in his intervention in two fields: manga criticism and the development of a theory and practice of what he dubbed “narrative consumption.” I have introduced and discussed the latter aspect of his work elsewhere, but to sum up briefly: Ōtsuka worked as
an editor since the late 1980s for one of the main producers of books, comics, magazines, and animation programs for the hard-core fans known as *otaku*, Kadokawa Books. During this time he also formulated a theory of narrative consumption that has been a constant reference for Azuma and others within the zeronendai group. The second principal field of his critical work lies in his manga criticism, and in his reinterpretation of the development of postwar Japanese manga (comics), anime (animation), and *otaku* culture. From his award-winning early book *Sengo manga no hyōgen kūkan: Kigōteki shintai no jubaku* (The expressive space of postwar manga: The spell of the semiotic body) through his seminal *Atomu no meidai: Tezuka Osamu to sengo manga no shudai* (The Atomu thesis: Tezuka Osamu and the main theme of postwar manga) to his most recent project on the importance of the prewar and wartime periods on the aesthetics, cinematic style of montage, and themes of postwar manga, found in his *Eiga shiki mangaka nyūmon* (An introduction to cinematic manga artists), Ōtsuka aims to bring to light the historical conditions for the development of manga style and themes that, along with anime as its offshoot, constitute the principal media of *otaku* culture.

Within this work on the aesthetic and conceptual parameters of postwar manga and anime—the two are often treated as interchangeable and possessing a common expressive base—Ōtsuka develops three conceptions of realism. The first is most fully developed in *Atomu no meidai* and is what we may, for lack of a better term, call *biological realism*. Ōtsuka had long been dealing with a particular tension in postwar manga between the generic, nonrealistic, semiotic drawing style and the importance of interiority within much postwar manga, and *shōjo* (girls’ manga) in particular. The “semiotic theory of manga” was first elaborated by Tezuka Osamu, in an interview in the magazine *Pafu* where he describes his drawings as mere signs or patterns. According to Tezuka, his drawings are completely detached from any referent or external reality, and insofar as they refer to anything, merely refer to drawing styles developed within Disney animation or Tagawa Suihō’s wartime manga (both major influences on a young Tezuka).

The twist that Tezuka gives to these signs is to be found in what is for Ōtsuka a representative scene from an unpublished manga that a young Tezuka wrote in 1945, wherein the so-called semiotic body of a character is shot—and actually bleeds. For Ōtsuka this single comic frame, wherein a sign bleeds, becomes the defining moment of postwar manga and anime. What is born here is the tension between semiotic abstrac-
tion “completely cut off from a referent” and “a fleshly body that bleeds if shot.” This tension between a character that is a semiotic drawing that has no relation to a real-world referent and yet somehow also possesses a fleshly, physical body that can bleed, die, and have sexual relations with other characters forms the expressive basis for postwar manga and anime. This is the “main topic of postwar manga,” which is also the birth of “a new kind of realistic [riarizumu teki] expression that is not dependent on realistic [shajitsu] illustrations.”

The second conception of realism that Ōtsuka develops is a much more conventional one: the realism of mechanical objects, particularly vehicles and weapons, that Ōtsuka refers to as “scientific realism,” “the realism of the depiction of weapons,” and “graphical realism.” If the first form of realism is a nonpictorial realism—a realism of bodies or biological realism whose referent is the real-world body that can die—the second form of realism is a pictorial realism, or photo-realism; this is a drawing style that deploys linear perspective to generate a sense of visual resemblance to real-world objects, or their photographic representations. This latter form of realism is deployed most often in the drawing of technical objects such as fighter planes, guns, and military gear. In keeping with his thesis that the roots of the otaku arts of animation and manga are to be found in fascist, wartime Japan, Ōtsuka traces this realistic depiction of machines to the photography and technical drawings of the wartime period, a style quickly imitated by animation and comics of the time and adopted by postwar manga and animation artists like Tezuka. Indeed, there continues to be a tendency toward the realistic depiction of guns, weapons, and military gear in contemporary animation, which often uses 3-D CGI selectively to represent warships, planes, and the like, while cel-style animation is used for characters. The distinction Ōtsuka notes between the semiotic realism of characters and the graphical realism of machines is alive and well to this day.

The third form of realism that Ōtsuka identifies fundamentally differs from the first two: it is neither a realism whose referent is the biological body nor a realism whose referent is the machinic or its photorealistic depiction. It is, rather, a realism whose premise is the environmental ubiquity of animation and manga; a realism whose referent is anime and manga: “manga-anime realism.” Ōtsuka first introduces the term at the end of his Monogatari no taisō (Narrative exercises), published in 2000, and further develops the concept in his 2003 book, Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata (How to make character novels). Ōtsuka first develops this concept as a way of grappling with the
specificity of what he calls “character novels” but which have since become known as “light novels” (raito noberu, or ranobe for short). Light novels are a new genre or supergenre of pulp fiction that takes the worlds and characters of manga, anime, and video games as their objects. These novels are generally breezily written, have covers with drawings in the style of manga or anime characters, and include periodic illustrations of these characters throughout the books. They are an extension of young-adult literature, but have, since the 2000s, become widely read and an integral part of the expressive universe of manga-anime and their otaku consumers. These novels’ form is also related to the main form of high literature in Japan, known as the “I-novel” (shishōsetsu), called such for its first-person narration and characterized by its naturalism or realism.

Whereas the I-novel was based on the naturalistic mode of copying or sketching the world of the author-as-I (with a presumed transparent relationship between the two worlds within critical commentary), the character novel is based on the “copying” of the fictional world of (actual or potential) anime, manga, or video games. As Ôtsuka writes: “Character novels are novels that adopt ‘characters’ instead of the I-novel’s ‘I’ and use anime-manga realism instead of naturalistic realism.” I-novels and the naturalistic form of literature associated with them are “ways of writing prose that transcribe the reality that we live in as a sketch [shasei].” Light novels deploy the techniques of capturing reality—sketching, transcribing, copying—proper to the I-novel yet turn them on the worlds of anime and manga; they are novels that sketch the fictional world of anime rather than that of reality, “applying the techniques of naturalism not to ‘reality’ but rather to ‘anime.’” Unlike I-novels, which assume a relation between the real world and the world of fiction as mediated by the interiority of the first-person protagonist, light novels based on the principles of anime-manga realism assume that the world of fiction has a relation to the world of anime or manga and that the “I” is in fact an anime or manga character.

The realism of anime-manga realism is then not a matter of fidelity to a real-world referent — the perceptual realism that Prince sees operating within 3-D CGI, for instance. Rather, it is a style of writing that imports the nonnaturalistic, nonrealist media of Japanese animation and comics into a literary form that operates according to principles of naturalism. It is an operational realism that, in writing anime-manga characters into the naturalistic style of the I-novel, produces a sense that the character itself—a mere conglomeration of codes or patterns, as Tezuka first suggested—has an “I” and hence possesses interiority. This manner of
writing characters as if they had interiority is then an interesting evo-
lution of the first form of realism that Ōtsuka identifies as the legacy
of Tezuka: the intersection of the semiotic body with the fleshly body.
However, it is also the product of a particular form of medial transposi-
tion whose effects become most apparent through the theoretical work
of Azuma.

Azuma Hiroki’s Transmedial Realism

Anime-manga realism is a realism produced by the intersection of a par-
ticular expressive milieu (anime and manga and their production of a
specific media environment) and the naturalistic formal devices asso-
ciated with the I-novel. With the ascendancy of the light novel in the
first decades of the 2000s, a set of highly stylized media forms seem-
ingly quite distant from realistic depiction—animation and comics—
becomes the ground for a realism that depends less on these forms’
visual proximity to a real-world referent and more on their constitution
of a consistent and self-contained media milieu. The environmental per-
vasiveness of anime and manga styles throughout at least one segment
of the Japanese media ecology gives rise to the sensation of realism. That
codes can become naturalized and are subsequently experienced as real
is a lesson we have known at least since Roland Barthes’s Mythologies;
the twist here is that the naturalization takes place through a particu-
lar subgroup of closely interlinked media forms: animation and comics.
Hence, what we have is a distinctly transmedial realism: a realism that
depends on, first, the aesthetic consistency of anime and manga styles,
and, second, the migration to a form of literature whose presumption is
a naturalistic relation to the real world.

What about video games, that other medium so closely linked to the
media ecologies of manga and anime? Are games also open to the real-
isim associated with anime and manga? For Ōtsuka the answer is clear:
no. Video games have a reset button, which goes against the importance
of flesh and blood and the possibility of death that is at the heart of the
anime-manga expressive world and is the basis for its realism.24 This is
the point at which Azuma Hiroki enters the debate.

Azuma, a relatively younger scholar in a critical milieu where inter-
ventions are often defined around generational divides, rose to promi-
ience after publishing Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan (The animalizing
postmodern; translated into English as Otaku: Japan’s Database Ani-
mals). Azuma’s importance comes in part from his mentoring of younger
scholars, and from his creation of journals and book series that publish critical debates relating to anime, manga, games, light novels, and the consumer group—otaku—that has become the privileged focus of their analyses. But his importance also comes from his own critical interventions into and creation of debates around areas ranging from anime consumer cultures to Internet architecture and the security state post-9/11. His critical work has, as Endō Toshiaki has written in an overview of Japanese critical debates of the 2000s, become “the very ‘environment’ within a particular sphere of the world of criticism.” One of Azuma’s most important contributions in this regard was his *Gēmu-teki riariazumu no tanjō: Dōbutasukasuru posutomodan 2* (The birth of game-ic realism: The animalizing postmodern 2).

As the title suggests, the core of this work revolves around an engagement with Ōtsuka’s concept of anime-manga realism. Against Ōtsuka, Azuma argues that there is such a thing as “game-ic realism.” Video games, and the logic of the “replay” that informs them, have completely permeated light novels and so-called novel games (text-heavy computer games with a minimum of branching and a limited degree of user input). The most noticeable manifestation of this is the prevalence of the trope of the loop in light novels throughout the 2000s, though the transformation of the position of the reader, brought in line with the point of view of the player, is also another place that the game-ic is observed within the light novel. If anime-manga realism deals with the “paradoxical theme of expressing the fleshly body through the use of signs,” then game-ic realism deals with the paradoxical feat of using a content or meaning-oriented medium such as the novel to express the experience of games—an experience whose primary feature is, according to Azuma, two-way communication, or communication for communication’s sake.

Exploring Azuma’s theory of game-ic realism would lead us too far astray from the topic of animation and realism. What I would like to hone in on here is the theoretical framework that Azuma develops for understanding how trends such as anime-manga realism and game-ic realism can come into being. For while Ōtsuka develops a theory of what anime-manga realism is, he does not offer a sense of the media processes at work in this transformation. And it is precisely here that Azuma’s significant contribution is to be found. The very condition for the development of anime-manga realism or game-ic realism is the permeation of the imagination by the logic of these media forms. The imagination these media inspire has been environmentalized to such a degree that
the media’s defining traits become the basis for the operation of other media forms. Azuma writes:

We all live in a specific environment of the imagination. In premodern societies people lived among the accumulation of myths and folktales told by storytellers, the modern author or reader or citizen lived within naturalism, and the postmodern otaku live within the database of characters. These various environments determine the author’s forms of expression, as well as the form of consumption of the works.

Moreover, what is important here is that this environment functions across works and across genres.29

This environment also functions across media forms. In a move evocative of debates around realism in animation, and particularly of the term second-order realism, Azuma suggests that what we encounter in postmodern works grounded in the animation cultures of Japan is “the realism of an artificial environment.”30

This move is not only of interest in the context of the Japanese debates. It also promises to take us one step beyond debates around realism in much Anglophone scholarship on animation and realism insofar as the basis for this realism is not to be found in an adherence either to the perceptually real (with its insistence on the fidelity of the representation to “our” phenomenological perception of real things) or to the filmic real (a second-order realism or photo-realism that insists on filmic representation as the ground, or as the first-order realism). In part because they are far removed from any imperative to portray people or things with fidelity to phenomenological reality or photographic representations, the vibrant worlds of Japanese anime, manga, and games form the basis for an alternative sphere of expression. Anime, manga, and game-ic realisms develop as forms of fidelity to nonrealist modes of representation. This is not the hyperreal, in the sense of a realm of representation that replaces the real. Nor is it of necessity an unreal world, going with the popular and critical assumption that animation must be about the fantastical or the nonexistent. It is a different realm of expression that, as Azuma properly emphasizes, is real, that is, has a reality of its own, as well as a form of causality proper to it (here we may recall Azuma’s comment to the effect that imaginative environments determine the forms of expression and consumption of works).31 Realism, then, designates the operation of transcription or transposition from one medium to another, and references the existence of the consistent yet nonrealist realm of expression of anime and manga.
Conclusion

The work around animation and realism in recent Japanese criticism is of interest for two reasons. The first is for the ways the work differs from common discussions of animation and realism that start with the premise that animation can realistically depict the world (whether in terms of the visual level through movement style and 3-D CGI or, as is also claimed for animation, on the emotional level). These discussions instead presume that the environmental pervasiveness of animation’s style or theme within a given expressive media ecology can, when its principles or problematics are translated through a different regime of expression (the naturalist novel), lead to a form of expression (the light novel) whose style can be called anime-manga realism, or, under different conditions, game-ic realism.

Second, this work is of interest for the way it takes up an issue—realism—that has played a central role in film theory, and in animation studies in the Anglophone world, and shifts the register at which the issue is considered. Film studies started from and, in some respects, has recently returned to questions of realism from the premise that cinema’s force comes from the automaticity of film’s recording of reality. The primary engagements of animation studies with realism have been equally organized around issues of second-order realism and photo-realism in the consideration of CGI. Azuma’s and Ōtsuka’s writings shift the ground from a question of fidelity of representation to realism as a technique of transmedia transcription that assumes anime-manga as an expressive regime or referent that is autonomous (not referentially bound to the real) yet visually and thematically consistent. If one of the problems with this Japanese criticism is its emphasis on literature and other media instead of dealing with the specificity of animation, then this is also the criticism’s greatest contribution: to put animation (and its cultures of consumption) in dialogue with a wider media ecology, one that includes literature, comics, and games more than film. Perhaps the end result is that these theories animate media theory more than they do film theory. But these critics should not be faulted for ending up in a different place (a transmedia theory of animation environments) after starting from a different problem (an examination of the impact of anime and manga on literature): both animation studies and film studies can benefit from this transmedia approach to realism. Indeed, this group of writers and the problematics they develop in their debates shows the value of expanding the canons of film and animation.
theory to include writers from as yet underexplored critical milieus. For it is in these milieus that we may find the potential to overturn some of the most naturalized assumptions in the canons of film and animation theory—such as the continued presumption that realism has to relate to the perceptually “real.”

Notes

All translations from Japanese sources are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

1. At this point I am content to assume the common understandings of animation and cinema. Animation will hence be understood to be frame-by-frame work, most commonly encountered as cel, puppet, or CGI animation; cinema will be the automatic recording of some profilmic real. It is the existence of this real, in some form, that marks the common understanding of cinema as bound (by ethics if not by nature) to some form of realism. For a classic display of this association of animation with the unreal and cinema with the real (or a particular form of “rapport with the real”), see Andrew, What Cinema Is! I do not share this view; indeed this chapter is about thinking through the particular forms of realism that animation develops, and asks us to theorize.

2. Hayward, Cinema Studies, 311.


4. Wells, Understanding Animation, 25. Wells’s discussion of realism and animation in Understanding Animation is both thorough and wide-ranging, and this chapter is indebted to it.

5. Darley explicitly sees the realistic CGI animation of Pixar as “continuing a tradition of cartoon realism stretching back to the early efforts of Disney and his animators.” Darley, Visual Digital Culture, 83. Debates about the stakes and implications of the extension of filmic realism (or photorealism) into animation gained fruitful food for thought in Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within (Hironobu Sakaguchi, 2001), an early attempt at a full-length, full-CGI animated film that attempts to replicate filmic realism. It was an instructive failure (critical, box-office, and aesthetic) that also formed the basis for several important critical interventions into questions of CGI realism. See LaMarre, “New Media Worlds”; Monnet, “A-Life and the Uncanny in Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within”; and Sobchack, “Final Fantasies.”


8. While I call Ôtsuka and Azuma “animation critics,” they are perhaps better described as “subculture media critics”—animation being one of the principal media forms around which the subculture of anime-manga-game fandom is organized.

9. For instance, the term sekai-kei (world style), which describes a particular genre of animation and became a flashpoint for critical debate in the mid-2000s, first
developed out of web-based fan discussions in 2002. See Maejima, Sekai-kei to wa nanika, 27–28.

10. Manovich, “What Is Digital Cinema?”; a revised and extended version of this essay was included in Manovich, The Language of New Media.

11. By “criticism” (hihyō) I refer to the general category of critical writing aimed toward a general public by authors who are as likely to be unaffiliated freelance writers as they are to be academics. In the case of this subculture criticism in particular, it must be kept in mind that the forums of discussion are monthly magazines, collections of debates and essays, and paperback books aimed at an interested general audience, rather than an academic audience. Moreover, one of the features of criticism in Japan at least since the 1980s is what we might call its market orientation. Azuma, for instance, has explicitly made “winning” at the marketplace the measure of good criticism. By this measure a bestseller becomes the sign of good criticism. While certainly more critics would decry this position than accept it, Azuma is not alone in taking this stance. On criticism and the market, see Endō, Zeronendai no ronten, 53. See also Marilyn Ivy’s “Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts”—an analysis of the consumption of theory in the 1980s, which continues to be of critical importance to this day.

12. For a brief introduction to this aspect of Ōtsuka’s work, see my “Translator’s Introduction” to his “World and Variation,” 99–104; I give a fuller account of his work at Kadokawa in chapter 5 of Anime’s Media Mix.

13. Tezuka uses the words kigō (sign) and patān (pattern). Cited in Ōtsuka, Sengo manga no hyōgen kūkan, 6.

14. Ōtsuka, Atomu no meidai, 63, 158.

15. The question of sex is an important one for Ōtsuka for two reasons, which become most clear in a later work, coauthored with Ôsawa Nobuaki, “Japanimē-shon” wa naze yabureru ka. First, Ōtsuka sees the problem of the relation between the semiotic and the corporeal or biological body playing itself out in the development of shōjo girls’ manga in the 1970s with the “1949er” (24 nen gumi) generation of women manga artists, whom Ōtsuka understands to be artists who both “inherit and develop” Tezuka’s problematic. Second, the doubled semiotic-corporeal body is at the heart of the moe phenomenon of so-called two-dimensional love—the sexualization of and attraction to manga, anime, game, and other drawn characters within contemporary male otaku culture. See Ōtsuka and Ôsawa, “Japanimē-shon” wa naze yabureru ka, 157, 169. For a theoretical treatment of moe that situates it as a postmodern phenomenon (and against which Ōtsuka is writing) see Azuma, Otaku.

16. Ōtsuka, Atomu no meidai, 171.

17. Ōtsuka, Atomu no meidai, 144–48; Ōtsuka and Ôsawa, “Japanimē-shon” wa naze yabureru ka, 54. The last term, graphical realism, is a translation of shajitsuteki riarizumu, which could also be rendered “realistic realism”—here mobilizing the two senses of the term realism: the convention of realism (the transliteration riarizumu) as produced by the tradition of realistic (shajitsuteki) depiction, most notably through the technique of linear perspective.
18. On the politics and geopolitics of the use of 3-D CGI in otherwise cel-style animation, see Bolton, “The Quick and the Undead.”

19. Ōtsuka, Monogatari no taisō, 210; Ōtsuka, Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata. Ōtsuka is a peculiar writer in the sense that much of his theory is presented in the form of how-to books, reflecting his belief in the need for a close relationship between theory and practice.


21. Ōtsuka, Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata, 22.

22. Ōtsuka, Monogatari no taisō, 209–10.

23. Ōtsuka, Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata, 27.

24. Ōtsuka, Kyarakutā shōsetsu no tsukurikata, 142–43.

25. This focus on the male otaku and the exclusively male group of academics and commentators organized around Azuma have fostered a sense that gender critique is unnecessary, or irrelevant. Not surprisingly, this stance has provoked some outrage, as well as also a countertrend that focuses on the female otaku (fujoshi) instead. See, for instance, Sugiura, Fujoshika suru sekai.

26. Endō, Zeronendai no ronten, 22.

27. While the term ludic realism may be a smoother translation of the term geemu-teki, I opt for game-ic to keep the resonances with the term (video or computer) game that Azuma is unambiguously referring to.

28. Azuma, Gēmu-tekariarizumu no tanjō, 175.

29. Azuma, Gēmu-teki riarizumu no tanjō, 64.

30. Azuma, Gēmu-teki riarizumu no tanjō, 72.

31. Azuma suggests that while the character database is a “virtual existence that may only exist within the minds of otaku,” its economic effects in terms of the sales of hit light novels mean that “it is unmistakably a real existence.” Azuma, Gēmu-teki riarizumu no tanjō, 44–45.

32. Andrew’s What Cinema Is! and Rodowick’s The Virtual Life of Film rather remarkably agree on the fact of film’s digital transformation, all the while reaffirming cinema’s relation to the real—through the mediation of Bazin, in the former, and Stanley Cavell, in the latter.