It would not be an overstatement to suggest that Ōtsuka Eiji is one of the most important writers on anime and manga subcultures in Japan. He has also been one of the most important writers on fan cultures. If the intersection of subcultures and fan cultures is so marked in Japan, it is at least in part because the term *subukaruchaa* in Japan has a different valence than the English term “subculture” as deployed in Anglo-American cultural studies, where it carries the sense of an oppositional culture (as Anne McKnight rightly remarks in her essay in this volume). In Japan it has more the sense of a micromarket segment or even a particular fan culture—hence Japanese criticism uses the formulation “otaku subculture” or “anime/manga subculture” where English-language criticism might more readily use “fandom.” The highly varied nature of Ōtsuka’s writings stems in part from this particular valence of the term “subculture” in Japan and in part from his own intellectual proclivities, leading him to move from semiotic readings of manga¹ to discussions of media politics,² from the cultural ethnography of the shōjo³ to
the analysis of fan or otaku modes of consumption,\(^4\) and to his rethinking of contemporary Japanese literature.\(^5\)

Moreover, though clearly interested in textual readings of manga in particular, Ōtsuka has also had a long-standing investment in ethnographic modes of analysis. The fascination with ethnography and ethnographic modes of analysis Ōtsuka developed during his undergraduate studies was reignited during his later work as a freelance editor for “lolicon” (torikon) and science fiction comics and videogame magazines. During this time he began to see his editorial work as a kind of “fieldwork” geared toward the development of an “urban ethnography.”\(^6\) It was in this vein that Ōtsuka published his first of many critical works of the late 1980s. The essay presented here, “World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative” (“Sekai to shukō: monogatari no fukusei to shōhi”), is taken from one such work of urban ethnography published in 1989, *Monogatari shōhiron* (A theory of narrative consumption).\(^7\)

In fact it was this critical ethnographic work that led Ōtsuka to develop a strong sense of the consumption patterns of youth and the potential for the further development of what in Japan has been called the “media mix” (analogous to what in North America has been called “transmedia storytelling”). At the time, the concept of the media mix—designating the synergetic combination of multiple media types to promote consumption across commodity forms—was strongly informed by the model of the “blockbuster film–novel–soundtrack” trinity developed by Kadokawa Haruki, then president of Kadokawa Shoten (Kadokawa Books).\(^8\) Yet as the initial success of this model wore off and the massive investment required for the production and promotion of Haruki’s films destabilized Kadokawa Shoten, the vice president of the company—Haruki’s younger brother Tsuguhiko—developed a different media mix strategy based around targeting niche markets, with a strong interest in the emerging video game market. Ōtsuka’s work as an editor for such niche, otaku-oriented magazines and his expressed sense of the potential for a media mix different from that which was promoted by Haruki led him to be hired into what at the time was a subdivision of Kadokawa Shoten.\(^9\) It was here that, working as an editor for Kadokawa, Ōtsuka developed his “theory of narrative consumption.”

It was also here that Ōtsuka first put his narrative consumption theory into practice as the writer of the manga–novel–computer game–etc. media mix, *Madara* (1987).\(^10\) He would follow the success of this work with other manga and novels or “light novels” such as the *MPD Psycho* (1997–present, *Tajū jinkaku tantei saiko* or Multipersonality detective psycho) series and
Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service (2000–present, Kurosagi shitai takuhaibin). This “creative” work or narrative “practice” (as Ōtsuka refers to this work) in turn affected his critical interests. Indeed, Ōtsuka has since been involved in both the writing and the theorization of the light novel—a “new” form of novel that includes numerous illustrations in the style of anime or manga, which many argue defines the broad genre. Ōtsuka’s early involvement in the genre also led him to write several how-to books purportedly serving as guides for aspiring light novel writers. In fact these books are as much theories of the light novel (and its relation to the modern Japanese novel) as guides on how to write the books. As such, Ōtsuka occupies the rare position of critic, fiction writer, and how-to-guide author—with each of his facets influencing the others. The essay translated here is of unique interest, as I will suggest, in part because it offers both the result of a particular form of “urban ethnography” of children’s media consumption and a foretaste of the niche-oriented media mix narratives Ōtsuka would later develop. But the importance of “World and Variation” also arises from its privileged place in the work of Ōtsuka’s younger interlocutor Azuma Hiroki.

Azuma, whose work was introduced in Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire, is another of the most important theorists of otaku and media cultures in contemporary Japan. He is also profoundly indebted to Ōtsuka insofar as the latter provides a kind of theoretical framework in dialogue with which Azuma develops his own theories of contemporary otaku consumption, the light novel, and the video game. Indeed, we might say that Azuma’s two books on otaku and the postmodern are responses to two different works of Ōtsuka. Azuma’s first otaku book, Dōbuttsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai (The animalizing postmodern: Otaku and postmodern Japanese society), while heavily indebted to Jean-François Lyotard’s suggestion that the postmodern is characterized by the decline of grand narratives, is written in close dialogue with Ōtsuka’s suggestion in the essay translated here that consumption is informed by the fragmentary and piece-by-piece attempt to approach a certain totality (which Ōtsuka himself terms “grand narrative”) otherwise hidden from view. That these fragments are narrative fragments and this totality a kind of “worldview” developed by and in particular narratives is the reason for the title of the book from which the essay comes, Monogatari shōhiron (A theory of narrative consumption). Azuma’s second volume, Geemu teki riarizumu no tanjō: Dōbuttsuka suru posutomodan 2 (The birth of game-ic realism: The animalizing postmodern 2) is similarly in dialogue with Ōtsuka’s work on the light novel, particularly with the latter’s Kyarakutaa shōsetsu no tsukurikata (How to make character novels), wherein
Ôtsuka develops the concept of manga/anime realism and suggests that this concept cannot be extended to video games. Azuma’s objection to the second part of this statement (i.e., Ôtsuka’s suggestion that the concept of manga/anime realism cannot be extended to a consideration of video games) provides the starting point of the second volume of *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan*, just as his dialogue with Ôtsuka’s *Monogatari shōhiron* was the starting point for his first volume.

While it is my sense that Azuma could not have written his two volumes of *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan* without the productive dialogue with Ôtsuka’s work, it was undoubtedly Azuma’s engagement with Ôtsuka’s *Monogatari shōhiron* that gave the book—and particularly its core essay translated here—a second life. First republished in *Shōsetsu torippaa* (Novel tripper) in its spring 2001 issue alongside a long conversation between Azuma and Ôtsuka as well as an essay by Azuma, the essay had been out of print since its initial 1989 publication and, hence, as the editors of *Shōsetsu torippaa* note, “difficult to read.”¹⁴ The book from which “World and Variation” comes was in fact expanded and republished in paperback by Kadokawa in October 2001 as *Teihon monogatari shōhiron* (A theory of narrative consumption: Standard edition), so it is very much thanks to Azuma’s engagement with it in the early 2000s that the essay gained what we can now call its canonical status within manga and anime criticism. As such, this essay is key to evaluating Azuma’s work on otaku postmodernity and his transformation of Ôtsuka’s theory of narrative consumption, and key also to evaluating work—such as that of Itō Gô—that appeared in their wake. This is the first reason for its importance and for its translation here.

The second reason lies in its fascinating analysis of a particular historical phenomenon: the consumption of “Bikkuriman Chocolates”—candies that came with sticker premiums or freebies bearing the image of and information about a number of different characters. This analysis alone positions this text as a valuable document in the history of the material culture of Japanese children—one that both differentiates the Bikkuriman phenomenon from earlier premium booms (such as Tetsuwan Atomu stickers and Kamen Rider cards) and permits a greater understanding of more recent sticker or card booms. It also suggests, by example, the importance of paying close attention to the relationship between the premium and the candy, and the mode of consumption of candies and their premiums in analyses of children’s material culture.

Third, this essay extends the analysis of this phenomenon into a theoretically sophisticated account of “contemporary” consumption more generally. Of course, how contemporary this account will seem to readers depends on
the degree to which they agree with Azuma’s argument that this form of consumption has been superseded by a mode of consumption based around the relation between “moe element” and database, rather than narrative fragment and totality. While there is certainly much of interest in Azuma’s account of consumption today, this author for one believes that Ōtsuka’s account has as much explanatory value today as it did when it was initially published in 1989. Indeed, even as he (disparagingly?) characterizes the work as “late 1980s marketing theory” whose “largest readership was among advertising agencies,” Ōtsuka himself, in the “Afterword” to the 2001 republication, admits a certain contemporaneity to the work, noting the continuing presence of “narrative consumption” in both television commercials and the media mix strategies used by Kadokawa Shoten. Given the increasing global diffusion of the media mix model—with writers such as Henry Jenkins suggesting its importance for recent Hollywood franchises such as The Matrix—this essay offers an important and sophisticated account of how this transmedia storytelling works. Moreover, while there may have been (and continues to be) a sense in which Ōtsuka’s work functioned as a kind of handbook to marketing practitioners, it provides a clear sense not only of how this marketing mechanism operates but also of what the critical potentials of inciting the desire for “totality” might be. Indeed, there is a sense in which Ōtsuka’s so-called marketing theory functions not unlike the Marxist criticism of writers like Walter Benjamin, insofar as it provides a quasi-utopian analysis of a particular social system (i.e. the society of consumption in which sign value and narrative replace use value) that points to a liberatory and indeed subversive transformation that will develop from within the system itself.

Finally, the attention this essay pays to fan production and consumption—and its implicit suggestion that narrative consumption and the Comic Market (or Komike) host the kernels of an active model of consumption—dovetails with contemporaneous theoretical and ethnographic work in Anglo-American cultural studies that similarly emphasizes the importance of understanding consumers as active creators rather than passive receptors of media forms. As such, this essay can be read in relation to a larger academic trend toward the rethinking of the position of the consumer in the 1980s and 1990s, and offers a glimpse of how these changes were conceptualized by one of the more interesting Japanese critics to emerge at that time.

For the interest of this work in its own right and for its importance in orienting the English-language reader in contemporary debates around anime, manga, the otaku, and contemporary consumption in Japan, I am thrilled to present a translation of what has come to be one of the most important texts
in Ōtsuka’s oeuvre, and indeed one of the more influential texts in anime/manga studies in Japan. There are certain aspects of this essay that bear witness to its age—for example the reference to Baudrillard and his theorization of the society of mass consumption in terms of the consumption of pure signs, a theory that was all the rage in 1980s Japan. And I cannot pretend that this work is beyond fault or without its share of theoretical inconsistencies, which I leave the reader free to evaluate. Yet at the same time my sense is that this essay has aged remarkably well. Like so much of Ōtsuka’s work, this essay displays a slightly casual or off-hand manner and yet it also sparkles with insight and even flashes of intuitive genius that have allowed it to outlive its time and its object of study, as well as its more recent critiques. It is my hope that this translation will enable current fans and theorists of manga, anime, and media mix culture to better critically grasp the power of narrative consumption in contemporary Japan and beyond, and perhaps even to incorporate Ōtsuka’s insights into their own creative and critical practices.

WORLD AND VARIATION: THE REPRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION OF NARRATIVE

Jean Baudrillard’s assertion that within today’s consumer society what people consume are not physical “things” that have a use value but rather “things” as signs has clearly become the felt reality for those of us who live in late 1980s Japan. We are all too conscious of this state of affairs where the things in front of our eyes exist only as signs and where it’s impossible for them to have any other kind of value. Indeed, we even have the sense that it would be strange to expect any kind of use value from things.

We might say that Bikkuriman Chocolates (Bikkuriman Chokorēto), an explosively popular hit among children through the years 1987 and 1988, is a representative commodity in this regard. It was all too clear that the children consumers and the candy-making producer were both in complete agreement that Bikkuriman Chocolates’ “chocolate” had absolutely no value as a food product. When buying Bikkuriman Chocolates, children took out the “Bikkuriman sticker” and threw the chocolate away without hesitation. Despite having the word “chocolate” in its name and despite this being at least formally the main product (hontai), the chocolates of the Bikkuriman Chocolates commodity were completely unnecessary.

Granted all candy makers strove to differentiate their products. Yet even as candy makers released things that seemed to deviate from their original use
value as food, like outrageously spicy snacks, “cute” candies garnished with the shapes of animals, and so on, all the same these candy makers fiercely defended the premise that these snacks would in the end wind up in the mouths of their consumers. Super-spicy foods could only be felt to be spicy once they were eaten, and cute candies could only remain commodities so long as their consumers—even as they exclaimed, “Oh they’re too cute, I can’t eat them”—ate them. Even those candies in the “premium-included” (omaketsuki) format never denied the use value (nutrition) of their main product: the candy. We find the best expression of this in the classic copy phrase of the original premium-included candy, Glico: “Three hundred meters in one tablet.” On the other hand, in the case of Bikkuriman Chocolates, the product took the form of “chocolate” for the sole reason that its producer was a candy maker and of necessity sold the products by riding on the food distribution line. The main product of the commodity was the sticker; the chocolate was only there to play the role of a medium (i.e., a container for the sticker).

Well then, if Bikkuriman Chocolates dispensed with the use value of chocolate, what on earth was the object of consumption of these things? Since children were feverishly collecting the sticker premiums, common sense would lead us to think that the answer would be the stickers. To be sure, that answer would be correct if we were talking about the case of the Kamen Rider Snacks [Kamen Raida Sunakku or Masked Rider Snacks]—when, from 1971 through 1974, children similarly threw the snacks away and collected only the card premiums, a phenomenon that was treated as a social problem and eventually led to the forced stoppage of production. With Kamen Rider Snacks the device introduced in order to differentiate this snack from others ended up negating the commodity’s original use value (as a food product) while this device (the sticker) alone took off and became the main product of the commodity.

However, the systems of consumption of Kamen Rider Snacks and Bikkuriman Chocolates are decisively different. In the case of Kamen Rider Snacks, characters from manga writer Ishinomori Shintarō’s live-action special effects (tokusatsu) drama Kamen Rider adorned its packages. This phenomenon of adding value to a product by riding on the coattails of characters from television and manga popular with children is the most classic method of differentiating one product from another, and in no way or form is it unusual. However, in the case of Bikkuriman Chocolates, there was no original television series or comic—and therein lies its decisive difference from Kamen Rider Snacks. To be sure, there are anime and comic versions of Bikkuriman, but these are secondary commodities produced after Bikkuriman
Chocolates became a hit product. In other words, there was no original work that Bikkuriman Chocolates could ride on the coattails of—as Kamen Rider Snacks had done. It is here that we find the singularity of the Bikkuriman commodity.

What, then, was the motivation that led children to go crazy over Bikkuriman and scoop up its chocolates? The following are the devices built into Bikkuriman (this repeats what I have written elsewhere):

1. Every sticker contained the drawing of one character. On the reverse side of the sticker there was a short bit of information called “Rumors of the Devil World,” describing the character drawn on the front of the sticker.

2. With one sticker alone this information amounted to little more than noise. But once the child had collected a number of them and put them together, the child began to vaguely see a “small narrative” emerging—the rivalry between characters A and B, the betrayal of D by C, and so on.

3. This unexpected appearance of narrative functioned as a trigger to accelerate children's collection.

4. Moreover, with the accumulation of these small narratives, a “grand narrative” reminiscent of a mythological epic appeared.

5. Child consumers were attracted by this grand narrative, and tried to gain further access to it through the continued purchase of chocolates.

Since I will go into the specifics of the content of Bikkuriman’s grand narrative later in this book I will not explain it here, but suffice to say it is an expansive mythological chronicle reminiscent of Deguchi Onisaburō’s Reikai monogatari (Tales of the spirit world) and the Indian epic poem Mahābhārata. In order to gain hold of the system of this grand narrative, child consumers purchased stickers, which were the differential fragments of information. Therefore, what the candy maker was “selling” to children was neither the chocolates nor the stickers, but rather the grand narrative itself.

By comparison, Kamen Rider Snacks were merely selling stickers—based on a character from a popular TV program—that rode on the main product of the candy snacks.

This strange form of consumption can in fact be seen particularly clearly in the commodities of comics and anime or even toys that have children as
their objects. Be they comics or toys, these commodities are not themselves consumed. Rather, what is consumed first and foremost, and that which first gives these individual commodities their very value, is the grand narrative or order (chitsujo) that they hold in partial form and as their background. Moreover, it is by convincing consumers that through the repetition of this very act of consumption they grow closer to the totality of the grand narrative that the sales of countless quantities of the same kind of commodity become possible (in the case of the Bikkuriman stickers there were 772 in total). Mobile Suit Gundam (1979–present, Kidō senshi Gandamu), Saint Seiya (1986–89, Seinto Seiya), Sylvanian Families (1987, Shirubania famirii), Onyanko Kurabu—all of these commodities followed this mechanism by setting up their grand narrative or order in the background in advance and by tying the sales of concrete things to consumers’ awareness of this grand narrative.

But what is this grand narrative or order that supports commodities from the background?

In the field of animation it is what is known as the “worldview.” For example, if we were to compare this to Mobile Suit Gundam, one episode or one series of the anime would be a fragmentary commodity, corresponding to the sticker. Within a Gundam episode or series, the official narrative will be told through a main character such as Amuro or Char. The general viewing audience will only watch for this “official narrative.” However what the anime producers are making is not only this single narrative episode. Within a single episode there are countless detailed “settings” prepared yet not directly represented within this episode, including, in the case of Gundam, the era in which the main characters live, the place, the relations between countries, their history, their manners of living, the personal histories of the respective characters, the nature of their interpersonal relations, and even, in the case of the robots, the concordance between the functions matching their design and the science of the era. The greater the number of settings prepared, the greater the sense among audience members that the drama of each episode is real. The ideal is that each one of these individual settings will as a totality form a greater order, a united whole. This accumulation of settings into a single totality is what people in the animation field are accustomed to calling the “worldview.” So, when seen from the perspective of the totality called

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CHILD CONSUMERS PURCHASED STICKERS, WHICH WERE THE DIFFERENTIAL FRAGMENTS OF INFORMATION. THEREFORE, WHAT THE CANDY MAKER WAS “SELLING” TO CHILDREN WAS NEITHER THE CHOCOLATES NOR THE STICKERS, BUT RATHER THE GRAND NARRATIVE ITSELF.
the worldview, the official drama of a concrete single episode or single series of an anime program becomes merely the extraction of a series of events that occurred during a specified period around a single individual arbitrarily chosen to be the central character from within this large world. Theoretically speaking, this also means that countless other dramas could exist if someone else were made the central character.

This will perhaps be easiest to understand if it is compared to a computer game. The totality of the data programmed into one video game would correspond to the worldview. The term “program” can be defined as the order, understood as the totality of all the possibilities that can be recalled from within the world that exists enclosed within a particular video game. By contrast to this, each individual drama corresponds to one game play. Each individual “play” using the same video game will offer up a different development depending on the player and the game. One episode of *Gundam* corresponds to one game play; the possibility exists that a different narrative will appear, depending on the player.

The general consumers we have been discussing thus far have been satisfied with the consumption of the drama developed within one game play. The grand narrative (or worldview) found in the background has been, much like the video game program, an essentially invisible existence and not an attribute seen by the eyes of the game’s consumers. However, the anime otaku (mania), using information outside that found in the drama of each individual episode as a clue, has tried to dig out the worldview hidden in the background.31 When we look at special issue *mooks* based around a specific anime, we find a wealth of data on its setting that doesn’t appear on the surface of the work but that comes via the inference of otaku based on the television broadcast of the images as well as on supplements necessary to their own way of reconstituting the worldview.32 Similarly, the creation of video game strategy guides and game-world maps also bears witness to the behavior of a consumer intent on revealing the hidden program. Early video game otaku put their utmost into discovering programming errors referred to as “bugs” or “cheats” (*urawaza*). For example, one of the cheats in *Super Mario Brothers* involved turning the main character Mario around. This cheat or rupture in the program could only be inferred once the player had grasped the fact that in the proper program, Mario was always supposed to be facing sideways. Early anime otaku also feverishly sought the points of

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contradiction internal to the drama. Yet this interest in programming errors necessarily led them toward an interest in the totality of the program.

While all was fine and well when this interest in the program itself was limited to particular otaku, we are now in a situation where this interest is becoming the common sense of all consumers of anime, comics, and toys. It is here that we can glimpse the new phase today’s consumer society is entering. What is being consumed is not an individual drama or thing but the system itself that was supposedly concealed in the background. However since it’s quite impossible to sell the system (i.e., the grand narrative) itself, consumers are tricked into consuming a single cross-section of the system in the form of one episode of the drama, or a single fragment of the system in the form of a thing. I would like to call this state of affairs “narrative consumption.”

Probably everyone has a vague sense of this state of affairs in which this thing called a commodity is consumed in relation to “narrative.” However, as we have seen, two kinds of narrative coexist within today’s stage of consumption, and consumption takes place in reciprocal relation to both of these. By two kinds of narrative I refer to, on the one hand, the “small narrative” as the concrete commodity or single episode of a drama, and the “worldview,” “program,” or “system” that in this work I’ve been calling the “grand narrative.” What we have been consuming until now has only been the former, the small narrative. However, as the Bikkuriman phenomenon has made clear, the new consumer is in the process of incorporating the grand narrative as an object of consumption. That said, since it is almost impossible to make the grand narrative itself into a concrete commodity, what is being consumed is the grand narrative in its differential and fragmented “small narrative” commodity form. The difference in the form of consumption between Kamen Rider Snacks and Bikkuriman Chocolates lies in this very point.

However, the commodity that takes such a “narrative consumption” as its premise has an extremely dangerous side to it. That is to say, if, at the end of the accumulated consumption of small narratives, consumers get their hands on the grand narrative (i.e. the totality of the program), they will then be able to freely produce their own small narratives with their own hands. Let’s think of the following case as an example. If someone were to reproduce a single one of the 772 Bikkuriman stickers starting with “SuperZeus” without the permission of the copyright-holding candy maker, this would be a crime. A sticker produced in this manner would be a “counterfeit.” There have already been countless incidents like this. However, if this same person were to create a 773rd character not found among the 772 stickers, yet consistent with them and following the Bikkuriman worldview, and if this person were
to sell this character as a sticker, what would happen then? This would not be a reproduction of any of the existing 772 existing stickers. Consequently, in this sense it would not be a counterfeit. Moreover, seeing as this 773rd sticker would be consistent with the 772 others, it would have the same value as the 772 originals. Within this phase of narrative consumption, cases such as this one arise wherein we are no longer capable of distinguishing whether a given commodity is “real” or “counterfeit.”

In fact, this state of affairs is not merely hypothetical but has already become our reality. The genre of work called Tsubasa dōjinshi is a case in point. There was once a soccer manga called Captain Tsubasa (1981–88, Kyaputen Tsubasa), which was serialized by Takahashi Yōichi in the magazine Shōnen Jump. Originally made for boys, it became a great hit and was turned into an anime series and a video game. The book release of the manga sold more than a million copies.

However, at some point girls in their late teens began writing and self-publishing dōjinshi that used the main character from Captain Tsubasa, and this phenomenon expanded across the country in the blink of an eye. Hundreds, even thousands of these Tsubasa dōjinshi have been produced, and famous dōjinshi can sell upward of ten thousand copies per volume. These girls have used the Tsubasa characters and their human relations to create and sell their respective Captain Tsubasas.

It would be incorrect to call these girls’ works “parodies.” A parodic work is one that depends on the existence of a strong original work toward which it then holds an ironic, mocking, or parodic stance. However, these girls extracted the Tsubasa “program” from Takahashi Yōichi’s Captain Tsubasa and wrote their respective Tsubasas by following the order of this program in their own individual, creative ways. For these girls, the original work was merely the raw material from which to extract the Tsubasa program. Once the program was in the hands of these girls, the original work itself became merely one possible drama that appeared from within the larger framework of the program. Moreover, since these girls stressed the relations between boys within Tsubasa when extracting the program and then exaggerated these relationships further, the Tsubasa dōjinshi’s characters became entirely different from those of the original work. This is a state of affairs that is subtly different from what is called plagiarism or piracy. The program called Tsubasa was itself hidden in the original writer’s work. But it was countless amateur writers who extracted this as a program and then, following this, wrote dōjinshi versions of Tsubasa. The concrete examples of dōjinshi “works” were at the very least not instances of plagiarism. Seemingly taking advantage of this ambiguous
situation, several publishing houses based around the commercial publication of dōjinshi versions of Tsubasa appeared and subsequently got into trouble with Shūeisha, the copyright holder of the “original work.”

Putting debates around copyright law aside, what is quite interesting about the Tsubasa dōjinshi is that this is not at all an unusual state of affairs, when put in the light of the history of Japanese narrative creation. In Kabuki and Japanese puppet theatre (ningyō jōruri) we can clearly detect a similar sensibility in which the competence or originality of an author is judged by examining the appearance of various small narratives from a shared grand narrative. Within the terminology of Kabuki there is the concept of “world” that has almost the exact same meaning as the term “worldview” within the anime industry. Here I will quote from the “world” entry in Hattori Yukio et al.’s Kabuki jiten (Kabuki dictionary):

_Sekai_ (world): Terminology specific to Kabuki and puppet theatre (ningyō jōruri). A concept that refers to the historical era or events that constitute the background of the work. In fact this concept includes everything from the names of the characters that appear in the work to the basic personality traits of these characters, the nature of their relations, the basic storyline, the basic aspects and developments that should be dramatized, and so on. While this “world” is mostly founded on the commonly known popular history of Japan, oral traditions, and so on, it also contains generic content developed through the repeated dramatic adaptations and performances in the form of preceding Kabuki and Japanese puppet theatre as well as medieval performing arts, and thus it does not necessarily refer to any established sourcebook or original text. Therefore, each individual “world” is not a permanent or unchanging thing; some new “worlds” emerge and others fall into disuse and remain in name alone as a result of the formation of genres as well as the fashions of the time. The authors thus create their works by dramatizing newly invented “variations” that are based on a particular world, which is commonly known to the actors and their audiences, or by mixing multiple “worlds.”

As we can see here, the term “world” has the same meaning as “worldview” or “grand narrative,” and each individual small narrative corresponds to the term “variation.” There even existed among Kabuki authors something like a crib called the Sekai kōmoku (World catalogue). Thus in Kabuki the talent of an author was judged by the particular excellence of their ability to cut out a variation from this world and perfect a single theatrical work (Figure 1).
1. Worldview and single narrative episode (as circle and intersecting lines, that is, there are countless narratives)

2. The parameters of the Kabuki world (within which countless variations or variants exist)

3. The original work and its parodies are of equal value as "variations"

**Figure 1.** The relations between worldviews and narratives.
The works of Tsubasa dōjinshi prescribed the world of Captain Tsubasa on which different girls brought their own creativity to bear in making their own variations. Understood within the framework of the world/variation axis, the only effective standard of judgment for the countless Tsubasa works—including Takahashi Yōichi’s main branch of Tsubasa works—becomes not which of these is the original work (a question that becomes meaningless) but rather the relative merit of each variation.

In this way, at the same time as narrative consumption motivates the excessive consumption of the kind shown by the desperate child consumers of Bikkuriman stickers, it also bears within it the possibility of a new stage wherein consumers themselves begin to create commodities and consume them on their own terms. At this future point in time, the commodity producers (okurite; literally “senders”) will become excluded from the system of consumption and will no longer be able to manage the commodities they themselves had originally produced. For this reason, the final stage of narrative consumption points to a state of affairs wherein making a commodity and consuming it merge into one. There will no longer be manufacturers.36 There will merely be countless consumers who make commodities with their own hands and consume them with their own hands. Let us be clear here: this would mark the closing scene of the consumer society that saw the endless play of things as signs.

Notes


2. See in particular the articles collected in Ōtsuka Eiji, Sengo minshu shugi no rihabiriteeshon (The rehabilitation of postwar democracy) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 2005 [2001]).


7. Ōtsuka Eiji, “Sekai to shukō: Monogatari no fukusei to shōhi” (World and variation: The reproduction and consumption of narrative), translated from the 2001 republished edition, *Teihon monogatari shōhiron* (A theory of narrative consumption: Standard edition) (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2001 [1989]). *Monogatari shōhiron* can alternatively be translated as “a theory of narrative consumption” or as “on narrative consumption.” While the latter translation has been the preferred one, considering Ōtsuka’s remarks about the work in his 2001 “Afterword” and elsewhere, in which he describes the book as a work of theory (*riron*)—even if merely “marketing theory”—I opted to include “theory” in the title. Two other “urban ethnography” books by Ōtsuka from the same period are *Shisutemu to gishiki* (1988) and *Shōjo minzokugaku* (1989), cited earlier.

8. The best account of Kadokawa Haruki’s media strategy is to be found in Yamakita Shinji’s *Kadokawa Haruki no kōzai: Shuppankai, eigakai o yurugaseta otoko* (The merits and demerits of Kadokawa Haruki: The man who shook up the publishing world and the film world) (Tokyo: Tōkyō Keizai, 1993).

9. Ōtsuka Eiji, “Boku to Miyazaki Tsutomu no ‘80 nendai, #17: Komikku to media mikkusu” (Miyazaki Tsutomu and my 1980s, #17: Comics and the media mix), *Shokun!* (April 1999): 264–69. For an account of the differences between Kadokawa Haruki and Tsuguhiko’s media mixes that agrees with Ōtsuka’s assessment, see Shinoda Hiroyuki’s “Daisōran’ hete Kadokawa Shoten: Shin taisei no ‘zentô’” (Kadokawa Shoten has gotten through the “great unrest”: An “outlook” on the new system), *Tsukuru* (May 1993): 70–82.


15. Once again I refer the reader to Azuma’s *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals* and the translation of a brief essay that recapitulates some of its arguments, “The Animalization of Otaku Culture,” in *Mechademia* 2.

16. Ōtsuka, *Teihon monogatari shōhiron*, 323, 326. In Ōtsuka’s discussion with Azuma first published in *Shōsetsu torippaa*, he similarly suggests that *Monogatari shōhiron* was “marketing theory written in order to make inroads into Kadokawa Shoten and Dentsū,” the latter being Japan’s largest advertising agency. He also positions Azuma’s work as mere marketing theory. Ōtsuka and Azuma, “Hiyō to otaku to posutomodan,” 15, and Ōtsuka and Azuma, *Riaru no yukue*, 37.

17. For Jenkins’s account of transmedia storytelling, see his description of the *Matrix* franchise in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

18. This approach is perhaps best represented by the work of John Fiske in, for example, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987).

19. Ōtsuka himself notes that it was this “shameless” use of the then popular semiotic approach that led him to resist republishing this book until 2001. Ōtsuka, *Teihon monogatari shōhiron*, 319.

20. I am rendering Ōtsuka’s opposition between 物 (mono, “things”) and モノ (mono, in italics as “things”), which in this context refers to things as material objects (物) versus things as pure signs (モノ). Ōtsuka does not give a citation for the Baudrillard work to which he refers, but Baudrillard’s “sign value” theory of consumption (wherein the value of a thing comes from its place in a system of signs rather than from some inherent “use” found in the material object) is found in his *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Sage, 1998), and *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996). Both of these Baudrillard texts were highly influential at the time of Ōtsuka’s writing, and Ōtsuka himself explicitly refers to them in other works, for instance “Shōhi shakairon saikō” (1994, *Rethinking society of consumption theory*) republished in Ōtsuka Eiji, *Sengo minshu shugi no rihabiriteeshon* (The rehabilitation of postwar democracy) (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 2005 [2001]), 288–309. This and all other notes are by the translator.

21. Aside, of course, from their purely relational “sign value.”

22. Bikkuriman Chokoreeto might be literally translated as “Surprise Man Chocolates.”

23. While *hontai* usually means “main body,” given the context I am translating it as “main product.” For the term *shōhin* I am reserving the term “commodity.”

24. As Glico’s “running man” mascot indicates, its ad copy means that you could run three hundred meters after eating one tablet or grain of Glico’s caramel. Glico included its first premium in the 1920s. I am translating *omake* as “premiums”; other translations could be “giveaways” or “freebies.” For more on premiums and candy, see the collection of essays, *Kodomo no Shōwa shi: Omake to furoku daizuhan* (A Children’s history of the Showa period: An illustrated book of *omake* and *furoku*) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1999).

25. Presumably in this sentence where Ōtsuka writes “sticker” he means “card,” since the Kamen Rider Snacks revolved around the collection of cards, not stickers. Incidentally a very similar inversion occurred in the first case of a sticker premium in Japan, Meiji Seika’s Tetsuwan Atomu–based sticker campaign of 1963–66.

26. That is, *Monogatari shōhiron*, to which this piece serves as an introductory essay.
27. In fact, what Kamen Rider Snacks were selling weren’t stickers but cards, as Ōtsuka properly notes in the earlier part of this essay.

28. *Chitsujo*, here translated as “order,” refers not to the “order of events” as a temporal succession but rather the “law and order” sense of the term.

29. *Seinto Seiya* (written *Seitoshi Seiya* in the kanji) is a manga and anime series; Sylvanian Family is a line of plush toys; and Onyaku Kurabu (literally “Kitten Club”) is an all-girls idol group from the 1980s.

30. Amuro and Char are two of the main characters appearing across multiple *Gundam* series.

31. While Ōtsuka uses the term “anime mania”—which we might translate as anime fanatic or maniac—rather than “anime otaku,” I employ the latter term since this is the one most in use today and corresponds with the term mania in use at the time of Ōtsuka’s writing, in the late 1980s.

32. A “mook” is a cross between a magazine and book. Mooks are usually information-heavy books based around a particular subject.

33. The first Bikkuriman sticker character.

34. *Dōjinshi* are fan-written and fan-distributed works, mainly manga, novels, or video games, based on an existing manga or anime series.


36. Ōtsuka is distinguishing here between individual producers who make (*tsukuru* or *tsukuridasu*) their own products and companies or manufacturers (*seisansha*) that mass manufacture their products.