Otaku and *Moe:*
An Intercultural Analysis of the Fetishist Tendency of *Otaku*

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1 *Introduction*

Since the beginning of the 1990s, *otaku* オタク culture, such as *anime* アニメ, *manga* マンガ, computer games, J-pop Ｊ－ポップ and J-rock Ｊ－ロック, has become increasingly popular on an international scale. Young people in the world find *otaku* culture 'cool'. The renowned US journal *Foreign Policy* also reported the new image of Japan in this context.[1] *Otaku,* as members of this culture, usually invest substantial amounts of personal resources into consuming and (re)creating Japanese popular culture, and have attracted much media attention since the beginning of the 1980s. The *otaku* lifestyle is something particular, new[2] and influential. Now the phenomenon *otaku* is no longer exclusively Japanese, but a global one. It is therefore important to investigate this topic as an intercultural analysis.

As an essential element, Japanese *otaku* have a special bond with characters from Japanese popular culture. This bond is often of a sexual nature and also exhibits a distinctive fetishistic tendency. *Moe* 萌え, the key word for this tendency, was invented by *otaku* and means love for the characters and objects of *otaku* culture. I regard fetishism as the most important tendency for understanding *otaku* and in this study I will apply a cultural-psychological approach to an intercultural analysis of the fetishistic tendency of *otaku*. It will be based on two elements: first, a theoretical examination of fetishism and *Moe,* and second,

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1   Douglas McGray, »Japan's Gross National Cool«, *Foreign Policy* May/June 2002, 44–54.

2   Yonezawa Yoshihiro 米澤嘉博, Gendaiyōgo no kisochishiki 現代用語の基礎知識 [Basic Knowledge of Modern Terms] (Tōkyō: Jiyukokuminsha, 1991), 1222.

on two empirical surveys including an opinion poll undertaken at a famous *otaku* event, the Comic Market of December 2006, and also at the largest *otaku* event in Austria, the *AniNite* of August 2007. How does their *otakism* express their fandom? Are Japanese and Austrian *otaku* really fetishistic? What are the characteristics of their fetishistic tendency? How does this tendency relate to their relationships toward family and other aspects of their environment? What are the differences between Japanese and Austrian *otaku* with regard to their fetishistic tendency? In this study I will tackle these questions.

2   *Previous Studies on* Otaku *and the Definition of the Concept*

Before I begin the theoretical portion of this study, I wish to give an overview of previous studies of *otaku*, and thereby try to define the concept.

Research on *otaku* has been undertaken by Japanese and Western socio-logists, psychologists and critics. Basically, this research can be classified into six categories. The first category is *otaku* as the expression of the spirit of the times in the 1980s. The socialist Shinji Miyadai emphasizes the influence of consumer-oriented society. He portrays the *otaku* as a type of personality who is antisocial and concentrated on one narrow field. *Otaku* constitute a new type of customer because they do not just consume fiction, but live in the fiction.[3] The critic Ōtsuka Eiji presents a similar position and believes that *otaku* regard themselves as characters of a virtual reality and that they play within that virtual reality.[4]

The second category is *otaku* as a phenomenon of the information society. The sociologist Volker Grassmuck maintains that the central element of *otakism* is not social isolation, but its behavior toward information. *Otaku* have originated a new lifestyle with information. He describes it as follows: »*Otaku* command the information strategy by a radical limitation on only one field and fade out everything else but that field«.[5] The media theorist Michael Manfe observes the *otaku* phenomenon in the same way as Grassmuck and says that for *otaku* media

3   Miyadai Shinji 宮台真司, »Shinjinrui to otaku no seikimatsu o toku« 新人類とオタクの世紀末
    を解く [An Analysis on the Culture of »New Humans« and »Otaku« at the End of the 20th
    Century], *Chūōkōron* 中央公論 10/1990, 182–202.

4   Ōtsuka Eiji 大塚英志, *Otaku no seishinshi* おたくの精神史 [An Intellectual History of Otaku]
    (Tōkyō: Kōdansha gendai, 2004), 18.

5   Volker Grassmuck, »Eine Lebensform der Zukunft? Der Otaku« [The *otaku:* A Lifestyle for the
    Future?], in *Neue, schöne Welt? Lebensformen der Informationsgesellschaft,* ed. by Dirk Matejovski
    (Herne: Heitkamp Edition, 1999), 157–177.

is an instrument with which they can feel safety.[6] Grassmuck and Manfe focus on the distinctive type of communication on the part of the *otaku* and their emotional distance from other people. The Japanese media theorist Ōsawa Masayuki holds a similar view, and maintains that the *otaku* phenomenon is a type of communication phenomenon.[7]

The third category concerns the sexuality of *otaku*. Psychiatrist Tamaki Saito observes the central characteristic of *otakism* as being their distinctive type of sexuality and defines it as follows: »An *otaku* is someone who can masturbate to the image of an anime figure.«[8] Saito thus thinks that *otaku* culture differs from juvenile culture. Architecture theorist Kaichiro Morikawa shares Saito's opinion and maintains that this point explains the difference between *otaku* culture and Disney culture. *Otaku* culture uses sexual nuances consciously, while Disney cartoons avoid every sexual nuance in order to remain a juvenile culture.[9]

In addition, Morikawa points out as the fourth category the fact that the taste of *otaku* is definitely Japanese. In the *otaku* district of Akihabara 秋葉原 one may observe many pictures with Japanese models, the red and white colours of the Japanese flag, and many characters from the Japanese language. Typically, *otaku* do not like Disney cartoons or Hollywood movies.[10] *Yaoi* ヤオイ novel author Nakajima Azusa 中島梓 explains that the reason why *otaku* prefer Japanese popular culture is because of its elements of fantasy. In the *otaku* world they can enjoy using their imagination more freely.[11]

The fifth category concerns gender studies of *otaku*. The female *otaku* genre known as *yaoi* is the focus of this category. Sociologist and feminist Ueno Chizuko analyzes this genre, which is made up of homosexual love stories between male characters and is read mainly by women. Ueno maintains that the male character in this genre is not a real man, but a third gender[12] which does

6   Michael Manfe, *Otakismus* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005), 217.

7   Ōsawa Masayuki 大澤真幸, *Denshi Media-Ron* 電子メディア論 [Theory of Electronic Media] (Tōkyō: Shinyō Press, 1995), 244.

8   Tamaki Saito 斎藤環, *Sentōshōjo no Seishinbunseki* 戦闘美少女の精神分析 [A Psychoanalysis of Combat Girls] (Tōkyō: Ōtashuppan, 2003), 53.

9   Morikawa Kaichirō 森川嘉一郎, *Shuto no Tanjō* 趣都の誕生 [The Birth of Hobby City] (Gentōsha, 2003), 93-116.

10   Morikawa Kaichirō, *Shuto no Tanjō*, 251–255.

11   Nakajima Azusa 中島梓, *Thanatos no Kodomotachi* タナトスの子供たち [Children of Thanatos] (Tōkyō: Chikumashobō、2005), 141.

12   In gender studies in general, gender is culturally constructed while sex is biologically constructed. I use here the term 'gender' in the same way as *Geschlechtsidentität* in German.

not fit into the gendered context of Japanese society. This third gender is the idealized gender of the female.[13] Nakajima also refers to this gender aspect, explaining that Japanese women do not like their female role, and therefore in the *yaoi* world they enjoy this new gender with which they can identify.[14]

The sixth and last category is about the self-esteem of *otaku*. *Otaku* specialist Okada Tosho represents this position. He is himself *otaku* and contributes to a better image of *otaku*. For him *otaku* are an elite within their culture and they have the ambition to know more about their culture. They also wish to show their ability and knowledge of the *otaku* world.[15]

At this point, in order to define the concept of *otaku* I would like to summarize the characteristics of *otaku*. *Otaku* are a new type of consumers and like to live in a virtual reality. They use media as their instrument in order to live in safety. *Otaku* have a sexual life which is also located within this virtual reality. Because of its fantasy aspect, Japanese popular culture is the only thing which interests them. For female *otaku* the new gender is welcome in order to avoid confronting real female gender problems. Moreover, in order to have self-esteem they use their knowledge about *otaku* culture. In short, by means of Japanese popular culture, *otaku* are people who seek virtual reality in order to avoid their own reality. The way in which they accomplish this is through fetishism. In the next chapter I will investigate the concept of fetishism and the related concept of *moe* 萌え.

3   *The Psychoanalytical Concept of Fetishism and* Moe

The representative field for understanding fetishism is psychoanalysis, which provides a psychological explanation for fetishism. Fetishism was interpreted by

According to Judith Butler, 'gender' is determined by the gender performativity which is sustained by »the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them.« Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 179.

13   Ueno Chizuko 上野千鶴子, *Hatsujōsōchi* 発情装置 [The Estrum Apparatus] (Chikumashobō, 2005), 131.

14   Azusa Nakjima, *Thanatos no Kodomotachi,* 181.

15   Okada Toshio 岡田斗司夫, *Otakugaku Nyûmon* オタク学入門 [Introduction to Otaku Studies] (Tōkyō: Ōtashuppan, 1996).

Sigmund Freud as the replacement for the penis of the mother. Male children have castration anxiety and therefore do not want to admit the reality that their mothers do not have a penis. As a result, they repress their anxiety, which in turn causes fetishism.[16] However, according to this interpretation it is not possible for a female to have fetishism. Therefore, from a feminist point of view, psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel reinterprets Freud's concept of fetishism: for her, castration anxiety is denial of the reality of sexuality at the genital level.[17] This interpretation also makes it possible to understand the relationship between fetishism and *yaoi*. As I mentioned above, *yaoi* is the genre which concerns homosexual love stories between male characters and is read mainly by women. Female *otaku* do not accept, or have difficulties with accepting, their sexuality at the genital level, and therefore they can more easily enjoy sexual stories of homosexual love. This could be understood as denial of the reality of sexuality at the genital level, and therefore we can say that *yaoi* is a kind of fetishism.

As a remarkable by-product, both Freud and Chasseguet-Smirgel point out a creative aspect of fetishism relating to idealization. Freud explains the formation of idealization by the fetishist in a letter to his pupil Abraham (1909): »Fetishism arises as follows: It results from a special kind of repression, which we could describe as partial. One part of the complex is repressed and another is idealized«.[18] Chasseguet-Smirgel explains this in the following way: a fetishist denies the genital world and lives in a childish world where perversion, anal-sadistic regression, anomie and hybrid rule. This world is in opposition to the order of the father, mother and social norms. The fetishist therefore makes a fantasy world in order to create his new reality. He (or she) must idealize it because he needs to justify the new reality. That is why fetishists exercise their creative power.[19] This is also the reason why *otaku* also demonstrate creative activity. They produce their works in their favourite genres: parody, costume play, Lolita and *yaoi*. These genres show an obvious fetishistic tendency, which Chasseguet-Smirgel includes in the above.

Moe is the key word for the *otaku* fetishistic tendency described above. *Moe* is a new Japanese word which was invented by role-playing game players. This

16   Sigmund Freud, »Fetischismus« [Fetishism], in *Das Ich und Das Es* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), 329–330.

17   Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Kreativität und Perversion* [*Creativity and Perversion,* 1984], tr. by Norbert Geldner (Frankfurt am Main: Nexus Verlag, 1986), 117.

18   Quoted from Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Kreativität und Perversion,* 146.

19   Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Kreativität und Perversion,* 114–147.

word is quite familiar in the current *otaku* culture. As a noun it is used to characterize the love for a particular cartoon, comic computer game character or star of J-Pop and J-Rock by emphasizing the idiosyncratic aspects of their appearance and behavior such as glasses, school uniforms and a Lolita manner of behaving. *Moeru* 萌える as its derivative verb is consequently used in the following way: »I *moeru* Sailor Moon [a character of a famous Japanese cartoon in the 1990s]«, meaning 'I love Sailor Moon and these kinds of characters who wear school uniforms, behave in a childish and clumsy way, etc.' Shinano Shinichi 信濃信一, a researcher at the Hamagin thinktank 浜銀総合研究所, also devotes considerable attention to this expression, and even believes *moe* to be the essential criterion for distinguishing between *otaku* and general juvenile culture.[20] Cartoon director Kazuya Tsurumaki 鶴巻和哉 ultimately defines *moe* as a »mode in which the lack of information about a certain character became compensated for through individual fantasy«[21] in order to create a convenient sexual partner. Anthropologist Michael Taussig maintains that fetishism is the expression of a desire for representation in which the constructed image embodies one single idea.[22] Taussig's interpretation de-emphasizes the relationship between fantasy and fetishism and it makes it clear that *moe* is a kind of fetishism. And if *moe* is a criterion for *otaku* culture, then fetishism is essential for *otaku*.

4   Otaku's *Ego and the Cultural and Psychological Background of the Emergence of* Otaku

Psychoanalyst Masud Khan maintains that the origin of fetishistic fixation derives from a seriously disturbed and intimate relationship with the mother during childhood because wrong childhood development results in the unsuccessful integration of ego.[23] Ōsawa Masayuki analyses the *otaku* ego as follows: self-identity is constructed by two kinds of egos. One is the ideal-ego, which the individual wants to attain, like a pop star. The other is the superego in

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20   See Toda Taku 戸田拓, »Otkausedai Jigazō egaku« オタク世代自画像描く [The Otaku Generation Paints a Self-Portrait], *Asahi Shimbun* 朝日新聞 July 26, 2005.

21   Hotta Junji 堀田純司, *Moe Moe Japan* 萌え萌えジャパン [Moe Moe Japan] (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 2005), 25.

22   Michael Taussig, »Maleficium: State Fetishism«, in *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse,* ed. by Emily Apter and William Pietz (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 214–217.

23   Mohammed Masud R. Khan, *Entfremdung bei Perversionen* [*Alienation in Perversions,* 1979], tr. by Waltrud Klüwer (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 1989), 199.

Freud's terminology. And the superego is the so-called norm for many people. But *otaku* do not appreciate norms very much. That is why a character from popular culture is the only important criterion for their self-identity.[24] This could be understood as the unsuccessful integration of the ego of *otaku* which Masud Khan mentions.

Critic Asaba Michiaki points out the critical childhood of Japanese school-age children beginning in the 1980s. The social norms with regard to school changed during the 1980s; this change made all life for school-age children like school life. The norms demand that children attend a nice school in order to achieve success in the future. As a result, they needed to study harder for examinations and attend private schools after regular schools. There remained very little time to play with other children, and this made communication between children difficult. Asaba thinks that this is the cause of the *otaku* phenomenon.[25]

The maternal role in Japan has also changed since the 1980s. Cultural psychologist Yoshie Nishioka Rice reports how this has happened under the influence of current socio-economic conditions. Supporting his family financially has become a husband-father's obligation. Husbands everywhere in Japan come home too late and are too tired to do anything around the house. To stay at home and to take care of children became the wife-mother's obligation. This role separation became the norm. The educational success of children is then an important criterion for the family's success. Mothers are burdened with the heavy pressure of having sole responsibility for child rearing.[26]

This suggests that the norms with regard to school and the sole responsibility for child rearing of mothers (in short, Japanese social conditions) constitute the background of the emergence of Japanese *otaku*. In the next section, I will present the results of my empirical survey of Japanese and Austrian *otaku* with regard to this point.

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24   Ōsawa Masayuki, *Denshi Media-Ron,* 251–253.

25   Asaba Michiaki 浅羽通明, *Kōdo Shōhi Shakai ni Fuyû suru Tenshitachi* 高度消費社会に浮遊する 天使たち [Angels in the High Consumption Society] (Tōkyō: JICC Publisher, 1989).

26   Yoshie Nishioka Rice, »The Maternal Role in Japan«, in *Japanese Frames of Mind,* ed. by Shimizu & Hidetada (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 85–110.

5   *Two Empirical Surveys at the Comic Market and the* AniNite

Overview of the Surveys

Two empirical surveys were conducted by the author of this study using an opinion poll with identical questions on *otaku* in the Japanese and German languages. One was undertaken at the Comic Market コミック・マーケット at the Tokyo Big Sight 東京ビック・サイト in Tokyo on 30-31 December 2006, and the other took place at the *AniNite* at WUK in Vienna on 28 August 2007. These events were the largest *otaku* events in each country and each of them were held over three days. Their sizes, however, were quite different, with the Japanese event having a much larger attendance than the Austrian one. The Japanese event had about 430,000 visitors in three days, while the Austrian event had about 3,000. Therefore, the Comic Market was about 143 times bigger than the Austrian event. One might say that with regard to scale the Japanese event was like an expo, whereas the Austrian event was more like a concert.

The nature of these events was also different. The Japanese event served mainly as a market to sell fanzines and offer other kinds of programs such as an autographing session with actors for the synchronizing of animation. No fanzines were sold at the Austrian event, and it was combined with several programs such as a concert by the Japanese rock band Blood ブラッド and a costume play contest, etc. These differences gave the impression that the Japanese event was more commercial and strictly organized, while the Austrian event was much more casual and somewhat like a school festival.

However, the purpose of these two events was the same: a festival for *otaku*. Consequently, at each one we could find *otaku* of each country who were willing to actively participate in an *otaku* festival. It is therefore suitable to examine and compare the type of *otaku* at these two events. These surveys were not designed to analyze all types of *otaku* in these two countries, but primarily the *otaku* who attend festivals.

In addition, I also wish to describe my observations as to the differences in attitude between the Japanese and Austrian *otaku* toward my surveys. The Japanese were much more circumspect, and it was difficult to ask them to complete the opinion poll. About half of the Japanese *otaku* whom I asked declined to participate in the survey. Austrians, on the other hand, were quite cooperative and almost all of them agreed to do so. I suppose this depended on how open and social these people were, and what they think of *otakism* on their own. These factors surely influenced the outcome. I am concerned that the most

extreme *otaku,* i.e. those who are antisocial and live exclusively in an *otaku* world, were the ones who declined to participate in my survey.

In consideration of the above, I will analyze the outcomes. In any case, I believe that I did succeed in bringing to light some of the tendencies of *otaku* which are relevant to this study.

The Research Questions

In my introduction I have already mentioned my research questions for these surveys, namely: 'What are the characteristics of their fetishistic tendency?'; 'How does this tendency relate to their relationships toward family and other aspects of their environment?'; and 'What are the differences between Japanese and Austrian *otaku* with regard to their fetishistic tendency?'

In order to determine answers to these questions, I asked *otaku* at the Comic Market and *AniNite* the following 15 questions:

1.   Who are the Japanese and Austrian *otaku* (age and occupation)?
2.   Why are these events attractive to them?
3.   Which works of fanzines, *anime*, and *manga* do they like and why?
4.   Do they feel something fetishistically sexual *(moeru)* for the characters in these works?
5.   Do they create works (*manga* or novels) on their own? And if yes, in which genre? Does it have a kind of *otaku* style?
6.   Do they engage in costume play, and if yes, why?
7.   Do they collect fan products and memorabilia? If yes, which ones? And do they feel something fetishistically sexual *(moeru)* for the articles?
8.   What is their relationship like with other *otaku?*
9.   What is their relationship like with friends who are not *otaku?*
10. How is (was) their relationship with their mother, now and in the past?
11. How is (was) their relationship with their father, now and in the past?
12. What is their self-esteem like at school or in the workplace?
13. What is their self-esteem like within the fan community?
14. Do (did) they have a steady friend, now and in the past?
15. What kind of meaning does *otaku* culture have for you?

I will report my findings in the following section.

1. According to the results of my survey, who are Japanese and Austrian *otaku?*

Sex Ratio

At the Comic Market (Tokyo), I obtained ninety-two completed questionnaires, eighty-one from males (88%) and eleven from females (12%). At the

AniNite (Vienna), I received sixty-eight completed questionnaires, twenty-three from males (34%) and forty-five from females (66%). The sex ratio for my surveys at these two events is therefore quite different. Among the Japanese respondents, males predominate, while among the Austrians, females predominate.

The different results in terms of sex ratio are owing to the number of male and female visitors when was conducting my surveys. In fact, I observed more male visitors at the Comic Market in Tokyo, and more female visitors at the *AniNite* in Vienna. The output is not necessarily reflected by the exact sex ratio of visitors at both events, however. This could imply that the Tokyo event is more popular among males, while its counterpart in Vienna is more popular among females, albeit the results could have just a relative meaning concerning gender.

Age Ratio

At the Comic Market eighteen men (22% of all Japanese male respondents) and one female (9% of all Japanese female respondents) were under twenty years of age. Forty-four males (54% of all Japanese males) and eight females (73% of all Japanese females) were from twenty to twenty-nine years old. There were twelve males (15% of all Japanese males) and one female (9% of all Japanese females) over the age of thirty at the Comic Market. This means that most of the Japanese respondents are in their twenties.

At the *AniNite*, on the other hands, ten males (43% of all of the Austrian males surveyed) and thirty-four females (76% of all of the Austrian female respondents) were under twenty years of age. In the age group between twenty to twenty-nine years old there were thirteen males (57% of all Austrian males) and ten females (22% of all Austrian females). There were no males and only one female (2% of all Austrian females) over the age of thirty. This means that the Austrian *otaku* in the survey were much younger than the Japanese ones. Therefore, *otaku* culture has a markedly younger audience in Austria.

Occupation

The age ratio also reflects the ratio with regard to occupation in the two countries. The majority of the Japanese males, i.e. twenty-eight (35% of all Japanese males surveyed), are college students, including students in Masters degree programs. The second largest group, nineteen males (23% of all Japanese males) is made up of office workers. The third largest group, ten males (12% of all Japanese males), is made up of part-time workers.

Among Japanese females the largest occupation group was office workers, numbering five people (45% of all Japanese females surveyed). Among Japanese females there were only two students, one of which was a high-school student; there were no junior high school students.

Among Austrian males, the largest occupation group was also made up of office-workers, i.e. seven males (30% of all Austrian males surveyed). The second group was of students, i.e. six people (26% of all Austrian males). The third group was of high school students, with four males (17% of all Austrian males).

Among Austrian females, the largest occupational group was made up of high school students (fifteen people, or 33% of all Austrian females). The second occupation group was of junior high school students, comprising twelve people (27% of all Austrian females). The third group included both university students and office workers with six of each (each 13% of all Austrian females surveyed).

2. Why are these events attractive?

Respondents might provide more than one answer to this question. For the question about the attraction of these events I offered respondents the three following selective answers: (1) 'I can buy works by my favorite authors'; (2) 'I enjoy the feeling of being a member of the fan community'; and (3) 'I like the atmosphere of the event.'

For Japanese males, the answer selected most often was Answer 1, chosen by thirty-nine people (48% of all Japanese male respondents). The second most popular answer was Answer 3, selected by thirty-six people (44%). Eight people (10%) selected Answer 2.

Additionally, three people commented that they liked Comic Market because they can see the *manga* authors in real life. One also commented that he could see actors for the synchronizing of animation. So these kinds of live features are attractions of the event. The other respondents (three people) commented that the event is attractive to them because they can buy erotic fanzines. Two people cited the enormous size of the event.

For Japanese females, the largest group, comprising seven people (64% of all Japanese females), selected Answer 3. Both Answers 1 and 2 were selected by four people (each 36% of all Japanese females). One respondent commented on the attraction of being able to see something new.

For Austrian males, the most frequent answer was Answer 3, given by eighteen people (78% of all Austrian males). The second most often selected was Answer 2, by fifteen people (65%). The third one was Answer 1, selected by ten people (43%). One respondent commented that he liked *AniNite* because he

could meet his friends there. Another commented that it was because of the anime movie contest.

For Austrian females, the answer most frequently given was Answer 2, by 29 people (64% of all Austrian females). The second one was Answer 3, selected by 27 people (60%). The third most frequent reply was Answer 1, by eighteen people (40%). Five people (11%) also commented that they liked *AniNite* because of the costume play, and four people (9%) said that it was because of friends. One explained that it was 'cool', and another mentioned the anime movie contest.

These results show that Comic Market is an event to buy products. And it is attractive as a festival in itself, but not as much for the *otaku* community. On the other hand, the purpose of *AniNite* is not to buy products, but as a festival for the *otaku* community, while also being attractive because it is a festival in itself.

3. Which fanzine, *anime,* and *manga* authors do they like and why?

Respondents might provide more than one answer to this question. In answering this question, Japanese *otaku* at Comic Market gave names from the field of fanzines, while Austrian *otaku* at *AniNite* cited names from the field of *manga* and *anime* which are on the international market. Therefore, I do not intend here to compare the content of works, but only to show the result.

For Japanese males, most names of fanzine authors were listed just once. The author who was most frequently listed was Bekkankouべっかんこう (bOct 16, year unknown) by five people. As for the reason why they liked Bekkankou's works, two of them answered because of his drawings. One respondent liked them because of the characters, and another because of *moeru*. The second most frequently listed authors were Hiro Suzuhira 鈴平ひろ (birthdate unknown) and Kinoko Nasu 奈須きのこ (b1973) by four people for each. The reasons given for Hiro Suzuhira were the following: 'because his drawing is beautiful', 'it is a really beautiful girl', and *moeru*. The reasons for naming Kinoko Nasu were because her works had an original and fantastic atmosphere, and because the texts were nice, too. For other works generally, a majority consisting of twenty-five people (31%) wrote that they liked the drawing of their selected authors. The other frequent reason was because of eroticism (*moeru,* Lolitaロリコン, etc.) and eight people (10%) cited this factor. So we can see here that Japanese male *otaku* seek a more optical and erotic satisfaction.

For Japanese females, six people (55% of all Japanese females) gave no reply to this question. And all of the authors whom the others listed, were cited only once each. As for the reason, two of them cited the drawing. One listed the story

as the main reason, and this was the only one of all the Japanese *otaku* who said that the story is important.

For Austrian males, the most popular work was *Naruto* ナルト, and four people (17% of all Austrian males) selected it. The second most popular work was *Bleach* (the Japanese title is also *Bleach*), selected by three people (13%). The reasons given for this were the interesting stories of the works (three people) and the nice drawing styles (two people each). For other works generally, the most frequent reason was because of the story; nine people (39% of all Austrian males) selected this answer. The second most frequent reason was the drawing style, a reason selected by five people (22%).

For Austrian females, *Naruto* and *Bleach* were also the most popular. *Naruto* was selected by fifteen people (33% of all Austrian females) and *Bleach* by nine people (20%). The reasons were because it had nice drawings, a nice story, nice fighting, nice action, interesting characters and fantasy, and also that was 'funny', 'cool' and 'interesting'. For other works generally, the most frequent reason was because of the beautiful drawing, a reason selected by twenty people (44% of all Austrian females). The second most frequent reason was a nice story, selected by 19 people (42%). Six people (13%) cited nice characters, and five people (11%) said it was »funny«.

These results show that for *otaku* in both countries, beautiful drawing is the most important reason why they like these works. This optical element could be unavoidable for this culture. Nevertheless, for Austrian *otaku* the story is also very important, while this is not true for Japanese.

4. Do they feel something hot *(moeru)* for the character of the work?

For this question sixty-two Japanese males (77% of all Japanese males responding), eight Japanese females (73% of all Japanese females), eleven Austrian males (48% of all Austrian males) and twenty-seven Austrian females (60% of all Austrian females) answered 'yes'. All groups except Austrian males spoke of having a high *moe* level of feeling (more than 60 percent) and the average for all groups is 65%. This percentage is very high (more than 70%) in particular for Japanese *otaku* of both sexes.

I want to present here similar comments on their sexuality made by three Japanese males. They use fantasy from the *otaku* world for their sexual stimulation, and with it they can experience things which they may not do in reality, for example rape or sex with children. They emphasize the importance of sexual virtual reality in *otaku* culture.

These results confirm that for most of *otaku* in both countries *moe* is the most important element and therefore we could say that they are in this way fetishistic.

5. Do they create works (*manga* or novel) by themselves? And if yes, in which genre? Does it have a kind of *otaku* style?

Thirty-one Japanese males (38% of all Japanese males responding), eight Japanese females (73% of all Japanese females), eight Austrian males (35% of all Austrian males) and thirty-two Austrian females (71% of all Austrian females) answered 'yes' in response to this question. These results show that female *otaku* are definitely very creative. In each country, this group included over seventy percent of the survey participants. Male *otaku* were much less creative than the females, but still more than thirty percent of the participants answered 'yes'. This means that the creative tendency of *otaku* is also confirmed.

With regard to genre, I gave the following as possible answers: parody, *yaoi* and *moe*.

Of the Japanese males, twenty-two people (71% of thirty-one creative Japanese males) selected parody. Eighteen people (55% of thirty-one) selected *moe*. Even for *yaoi,* seven people (23% of thirty-one) said 'yes'.

For Japanese females, *moe* was most important, cited by seven people (88% of eight creative Japanese females). Parody was selected by six people (75% of eight). Five people (63% of eight) cited *yaoi*.

For Austrian males, the answer most frequently given was parody, chosen by five people (63% of eight creative Austrian males). Three (36% of eight) cited *moe* and one (13% of eight) cited *yaoi*.

For Austrian females, parody was also the most important, selected by fifteen people (47% of thirty-two creative Austrian females). Ten people (31%) selected *moe* and nine (28%) *yaoi*.

These results show that Japanese creative *otaku* consider all *otaku* genres to be very important. But for Austrian creative *otaku*, *otaku* genres except parody are less important, while one third of Austrian *otaku* say 'yes' for *otaku* genres.

6. Do they engage in costume play, and if yes, why?

Twelve Japanese males (15% of all Japanese males), four Japanese females (36% of all Japanese females), one Austrian male (4% of all Austrian males) and three Austrian females (7% of all Austrian females) engaged in *costume play* コスプレ. These are nevertheless relatively small ratios. These results show that costume play is not really important for *otaku* of all groups who participated in this survey.

Six Japanese males (50% of twelve Japanese males who engage in costume play) mention that it is because of sexual sensations. Three Japanese females (75% of four Japanese females who do costume play) enjoy making costumes, a reason also given by three of the Austrian females (100% of Austrian female costume players). Two Japanese females (50% of Japanese female costume players) said it was because of the feeling of being a member of the fan community. The only Austrian male costume player said it was because he could live in the character.

7. Do they collect fan products and memorabilia? If yes, which ones? And do they feel something fetishistically sexual *(moeru)* for the article?

For the first part of this question, fifty-five Japanese males (65% of all Japanese males surveyed), two Japanese females (18% of all Japanese females), seventeen Austrian males (74% of all Austrian males) and thirty-five Austrian females (78% of all Austrian females) said 'yes'. With the exception of Japanese females, a majority of all *otaku* collect *otaku* articles.

Also, twenty-nine Japanese males (55% of Japanese male collectors) have a *moe*-feeling for the articles. All Japanese female collectors (100%) have this feeling as well. On the other hand, only two Austrian collectors of either sex have a *moe*-feeling. Of all of the points of my survey, this was the most criticized. Many Austrians complained about this question. One Austrian male commented that this kind of fetishism is not valid for them.

8. What is their relationship like with other *otaku?*

For this question I gave selected answers and categorized them into two groups. The answers are as follows, *Part 1*: How close is the relationship? (1) 'The relationship is close'; (2) 'The relationship is moderate'; and (3) 'The relationship is not close'; *Part 2*: How do you communicate with them? (1) 'I meet them personally'; (2) 'I meet them at an event'; (3) 'I communicate with them via the Internet'; (4) 'I communicate with them by telephone.'

For Japanese males in *Part 1*, forty-eight people (59% of all Japanese males) selected Answer 1. Seventeen people (21%) selected Answer 2 for this part, and fourteen people (17%) selected Answer 3. For *Part 2*, thirty Japanese people (37%) selected Answer 1. Twenty-seven people (33%) selected Answer 3. Twenty-three people (28%) selected Answer 2. Only four people (5%) selected Answer 4.

For Japanese females in *Part 1*, seven (62% of all Japanese females) selected Answer 1. Three people (27%) selected Answer 2. Only one selected Answer 3. For *Part 2,* six people (55%) selected Answer 2. Four people (36%) selected Answer 1. Two people (18%) selected Answer 3. Nobody selected Answer 4.

These results show that most Japanese *otaku* of both sexes have a close relationship with other *otaku* and they meet others personally. Communication via the Internet is not very popular: only undertaken by 28% of the males and 18% of the females. These results do not confirm the theory of Grassmuck and Manfe.

For Austrian males in *Part 1*, fourteen people (61%) selected Answer 1. Seven people (30%) selected Answer 2. And four people (17%) selected Answer 3. For *Part 2*, a majority, consisting of fifteen people (65%) selected Answer 3. Fourteen people (61%) selected Answer 1, and thirteen (57%) selected Answer 2. Eight people (35%) selected Answer 4.

For Austrian females in *Part 1*, twenty-five people (56% of all Austrian females) selected Answer 1. Eighteen people (40%) selected Answer 2. And eleven people (24%) selected Answer 3. In *Part 2*, thirty-two people (56%) selected Answer 1. Twenty-six people (58%) selected Answer 3. Twenty-five people (56%) selected Answer 2. Ten of them (22%) selected Answer 4.

These results demonstrate that Austrian *otaku* have a tendency similar to that of to Japanese *otaku*. But they use the Internet as a communication tool much more frequently (65% by males and 58% by females) than the Japanese. The theory of Grassmuck and Manfe is valid only for Austrian *otaku*.

9. What is their relationship like with friends who are not *otaku?*

I asked this question in the same way as the question above. *Part 1*: How close is the relationship with them? (1) 'The relationship is close'; (2) 'The relationship is moderate'; and (3) 'The relationship is not close'. *Part 2*: How do you communicate with them? (1) 'I meet them personally'; (2) 'I meet them at an event'; (3) 'I communicate with them via Internet'; and (4) 'I communicate with them by telephone'.

For Japanese males in *Part 1*, a majority, comprising thirty-four Japanese males (42% of all Japanese males) selected Answer 2. The second most frequently given answer was Answer 1, selected by thirty-two people (40%). Eleven people (14%) selected Answer 3. In *Part 2*, a majority, consisting of thirty-nine people (48%) selected Answer 1. The second most frequently given answer was Answer 3, by fourteen people (17%). Answer 4 was selected by twelve people (15%). Only three people (2%) selected Answer 2.

For Japanese females in *Part 1,* six people (55% of all Japanese females) selected Answer 1. Four people (36%) selected Answer 2. In *Part 2*, nine people (55% of all Japanese females) selected Answer 1. Answers 3 and 4 were selected by only one person (9%) each.

These results show that Japanese *otaku* of both sexes have a less close relationship with friends who are not *otaku* than to *otaku*. And they meet these friends personally more often than via the Internet, which is more the case with communication with other *otaku*. This means that Japanese *otaku* adjust their medium of communication, depending on who they communicate with. In other words, for Comic Market visitors, the *otaku* kind of communication is less personal and more by the Internet, while the use of the Internet is not so frequent.

For Austrian males in *Part 1*, twelve people (52% of all Austrian males) selected Answer 1. Ten people (43%) selected Answer 2. Four people (17%) selected Answer 3. In *Part 2*, eighteen people (78%) selected Answer 1, nine people (39%) selected both Answers 3 and 4, and seven people (30%) Answer 2.

For Austrian females in *Part 1*, twenty-eight people (62% of all Austrian females) selected Answer 1, eighteen people (40%) Answer 2, and six people (13%) selected Answer 3. In *Part 2*, a majority, consisting of thirty-three people (73%) selected Answer 1. Twenty people (44%) selected Answer 3. Both Answers 2 and 4 were selected by thirteen people (29%).

These results show that Austrian *otaku* have a closer relationship with other friends who are not *otaku* than to other *otaku*. And the medium of communication is much more personal.

10. How is (was) the relationship with their mother, now and in the past?

Respondents might provide more than one answer to this question. The multiple-choice answers I offered for this question were as follows: 'very good', 'unlimited', 'alienated', 'close', 'interfered', and 'she doesn't care about me'. And I asked this for now and for the past. I will present the results of this portion in the form of tables, so as to simplify the overview.

The results for Japanese males and females with regard to the present and past relationship, respectively, are as follows:

Relationship with mother	Japanese males		females	
	present	past	present	past
»very good«	41 (51%)	37 (46%)	7 (64%)	6 (55%)
»unlimited«	23 (28%)	18 (22%)	6 (55%)	6 (55%)
»alienated«	6 (7%)	5 (6%)	—	—
»close«	—	—	—	—
»interfered«	2 (2%)	6 (7%)	—	—
»She doesn't/didn't care about me.«	2 (2%)	8 (10%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)

These results show that Japanese male *otaku* have had a relatively good relationship with their mothers, both now and in the past. But the results for the past are slightly more negative. The finding that ten percent of Japanese male *otaku* have the feeling that their mother once didn't care about them is not insignificant.

One interpretation could be that the theory of fetishism about the relationship with the mother is at least partly valid.

These results show that almost all Japanese female *otaku* except one have enjoyed a good relationship with their mothers both now and in the past.

The results for Austrian males and females with regard to the present and past are as follows:

Relationship with mother	Austrian males present	past	females present	past
»very good«	17 (74%)	13 (57%)	30 (67%)	23 (51%)
»unlimited«	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	4 (9%)	6 (13%)
»alienated«	2 (9%)	—	5 (11%)	7 (16%)
»close«	1 (4%)	2 (9%)	5 (11%)	4 (9%)
»interfered«	—	2 (9%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
»She doesn't/didn't care about me.«	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)

These results indicate that most Austrian males have a good relationship with their mothers as well, and that over half of the Austrian females surveyed have a good relationship with their mothers, but under »alienated« we see 11% for the present and 16% for the past. These percentages are not insignificant, 16% in particular is excessive. This could also be interpreted to suggest that the theory of fetishism about the relationship with the mother is at least partly valid.

11. How is (was) their relationship with their father, now and in the past?

Respondents might provide more than one answer to this question. I asked this question in quite the same way as the one about mothers, with the possible multiple-choice answers being as follows: 'very good', 'unlimited', 'alienated', 'close', 'interfered', and 'he does/did not care about me'. And in this case as well, I asked this for now and with regard to the past.

Relationship with father	*Japanese males*		*females*	
	present	*past*	*present*	*past*
»very good«	34 (42%)	33 (41%)	7 (64%)	7 (64%)
»unlimited«	22 (27%)	19 (23%)	2 (18%)	2 (18%)
»alienated«	7 (9%)	7 (9%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)
»close«	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	—	—
»interfered«	2 (2%)	3 (4%)	—	—
»He doesn't/didn't care about me.«	12 (15%)	13 (16%)	1 (9%)	1 (9%)

These results show that the relationship with fathers is generally worse than to mothers. For »very good«, the difference is 11% worse for the present and 4% worse for the past, and for »she/he does/did not care about me«, it is 10% worse for the present, and 5% worse for the past. Lastly, between 15% and 16% answered that their fathers do/did not care about them. This is a rather high figure. We could say that reports concerning absent fathers in Japanese families are hereby confirmed. And Asaba's theory on the origin of *otaku* would be valid at least in part, which means that this could explain the origin of fetishism.

The relationship of Japanese females to their fathers is quite the same for now and the past, and it is a very good one. However, note that one person each selected »alienated« and »he doesn't care about me«.

The results for Austrian males and females with regard both to the present and the past are as follows:

Relationship with father	*Austrian males*		*females*	
	present	*past*	*present*	*past*
»very good«	10 (43%)	9 (39%)	26 (58%)	25 (56%)
»unlimited«	2 (9%)	2 (9%)	3 (7%)	5 (33%)
»alienated«	4 (17%)	1 (4%)	7 (16%)	4 (9%)
»close«	—	—	2 (4%)	3 (7%)
»interfered«	—	—	—	1 (2%)
»He doesn't/didn't care about me.«	2 (9%)	2 (9%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)

These results are similar to those for the Japanese males. While »alienated, now« is 17% and quite high, this finding does not support the theory of fetishism.

The results for females, however, show that on the one hand, the relationship with their fathers is very good for over half of the group; on the

other hand, the figure for »alienated« is higher for »now« than for the past. But this also does not support the theory of fetishism.

These results show that the Japanese males are the group which statistically supports the claim of fetishism in connection with the relationship with the father. However, other groups show a different pattern.

12. What is their self-esteem like at school or in the workplace?

Respondents might provide more than one answer to this question. For this question, I gave the following possible multiple-choice answers: (1) 'I feel superior'; (2) 'I feel equal'; and (3) 'I feel inferior'.

Among Japanese males, sixty-six people (81%) selected Answer 2, and three people (4%) selected Answer 3. Two people (2%) selected Answer 1.

Among Japanese females, ten people (91%) selected Answer 2. One person (9%) selected Answer 3.

Among Austrian males, fifteen people (65%) selected Answer 2. Four people (17%) selected Answer 1. One person (4%) selected Answer 3.

Among Austrian females, thirty-two people (71%) selected Answer 2, and five people (11%) selected Answer 1; four people (9%) selected Answer 3.

These results show that the self-esteem of most *otaku* of all groups is average. But some Austrian *otaku* of both sexes show higher self-esteem, and 17% of the males and 11% of the females said they are superior, while only 2% of the Japanese males and no Japanese females answered that they feel superior. Some young Austrians commented they are just good, intelligent, etc. On the other hand, a Japanese male commented that he would not come to Comic Market if he cared about the judgments of others. Another commented as follows: »I would be depressed if I were to care about the judgement of others.« One Japanese female commented »I am just *otaku*«. These comments indicate that *otakism* does not result in pride on the part of *otaku* and that this relates to the estimation of Japanese society around them. That is why it is difficult for Japanese *otaku* to have high self-esteem.

13. What is their self-esteem like within the fan community?

Respondents might provide more than one answer to this question. For this question I gave the same multiple-choice answers as above: (1) 'I feel superior'; (2) 'I feel equal'; and (3) 'I feel inferior'.

Among the Japanese males, fifty-five people (69%) selected Answer 2. Three people (4%) selected Answer 1, and five people (6%) selected Answer 3.

Among Japanese females, eleven people (100%) selected Answer 2.

Among Austrian males, fourteen people (61%) selected Answer 2. Two people (9%) selected Answer 3, and one person (4%) selected Answer 1.

Among Austrian females, thirty-one people (69%) selected Answer 2, four people (9%) selected Answer 1, and three people (7%) selected Answer 3.

These results show that in this case most *otaku* also have average self-esteem. Among the fan community this tendency is more obvious than in other social environments.

14. Do (did) they have a steady friend, now and in the past?

Sixty-five Japanese males (80% of all Japanese males), eight Japanese females (73% of all Japanese females), thirteen Austrian males (57% of all Austrian males) and also thirty Austrian females (67%) have no steady friends. This means that 69% of the *otaku* of all groups on average do not have a steady friend at the present time.

On the other hand, thirty-eight Japanese males (67%), five Japanese females (45%), ten Austrian males (43%) and twenty-four Austrian females (53%) once had a steady friend. This means that about half of the *otaku* once had a steady friend.

A Japanese male commented that *otaku* culture serves as a compensation for not only his libido object, but for all of the people who have left him. As a result, I suggest that on the one hand *otaku* use this culture as a vicarious satisfaction for their libido object and on the other hand of all types of relationships in their virtual reality. But this does not necessarily mean that they never can have a real partner.

15. What kind of meaning does *otaku* culture have for you?

Respondents might provide more than one answer to this question. For this question I gave the following multiple-choice answers: 'It sets me free'; 'It is the source of my self-esteem'; 'It is for relaxation'; 'It is the source of my creativity'; and 'It is my secret'.

I will present the results here in the form of a table as follows:

	Japanese		*Austrian*	
	males	*females*	*males*	*females*
»It sets me free.«	15 (19%)	3 (27%)	7 (30%)	12 (27%)
»It is the source of my self-esteem.«	5 (6%)	1 (9%)	5 (22%)	2 (4%)
»It is for relaxation.«	44 (53%)	6 (55%)	15 (65%)	31 (69%)
»It is the source of my creativity.«	17 (21%)	5 (45%)	12 (52%)	36 (80%)
»It is my secrect.«	9 (11%)	1 (9%)	4 (17%)	3 (7%)

These results show that their culture means relaxation for most *otaku*. In addition, it is also the source of creativity for many *otaku*. In particular, this is its meaning for 80% of the Austrian females. This is a relevant finding. We already know that creativity is an important part of fetishism. Another important finding is that this culture is not the source of self-esteem for most *otaku*. From this we can conclude that a majority among *otaku* regard consider their activites important, but just for leisure.

6   Conclusion

In this study I examined whether my hypothesis »the essence of *otaku* is fetishism« is valid. Through the research of former studies on *otaku,* I defined *otaku* as someone who seeks virtual reality to avoid their own reality, using Japanese popular culture in a fetishistic way. And I found out that the key aspect is *moe*. *Moe* is, in short, fetishistic love in Japanese popular culture. It is mainly sexual (libidinous), creative and 'perverted'. Fetishism is caused by a disturbed relationship with the mother during childhood. With these criteria I analyzed two empirical surveys in Japan and Austria and compared the cultural psychological differences.

Now I want to answer the first research question, »How does their *otakism* express their fandom?« Both Japanese and Austrian *otaku* exhibit their fetishistic tendency mainly in two ways. One indication is the *moe*-feeling. With the exception of the Austrian males, this was the case for over 60% of the survey respondents. Another indication is creativity. In particular, female *otaku* in both countries exhibit a high creative power. More than 70% create *manga* or novels in the style of *otaku* culture. In addition, over 35% among male *otaku* create their own works.

The second research question was »How does this tendency relate to their relationship toward family and other aspects of their environment?« The survey about relationships to various environments for *otaku* show that most *otaku* of all groups have relatively good relationships with others and the medium of communication is not really virtual, but personal. In the case of Japanese *otaku,* communication via the Internet is not at all popular, while on the contrary it is among the Austrians. With regard to friendship, while Japanese *otaku* tend to have closer friendships to other *otaku,* Austrian *otaku* tend to have closer friendships with other friends who are not *otaku*. Concerning relationships with a steady partner, typically, many *otaku* of all groups have no relationship at present. This may suggest that they need virtual reality for their libidinous life.

In the case of the relationship with their mothers and fathers I may partly confirm the fetishism hypothesis for the Japanese males of the groups surveyed. Otherwise there are not many indications to be recorded.

I have already in part answered the third research question, »What are the differences between Japanese and Austrian *otaku*?« Another difference is with regard to self-esteem. For most of the *otaku* in all groups, the answer »equal« to others was predominant. But in the individual comments we have heard that Austrian *otaku* could be more self-conscious than Japanese *otaku*. On this point, we could observe differences with regard to the view of *otaku* in each society.

And related to this social condition, fetishistic tendencies are exhibited differently. But I think that the two points I referred to above make my thesis valid and this study could show that fetishism is an important aspect to understanding *otaku*.

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