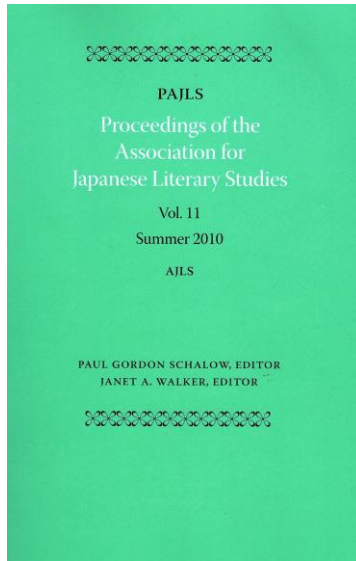


“Perversely Reading Manga”

Mary A. Knighton 

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Note: The author directs readers to her more recent articles:

““Becoming Insect Woman’: Tezuka’s Feminist Species.”

Mechademia 8 (2013): 3–24.

“Tezuka Osamu’s Feminist Manga ‘Diary of an Insect Shōjo’s
Vagabond Life’ [『昆虫少女の放浪記』 (*Konchū shōjo no hōrōki*,
1955)]” *Mechademia* 8 (2013): 25–33.

Perversely Reading *Manga*

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With the passing of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009) earlier this year, colleagues both on this panel and outside this conference have shared the desire to recognize the extraordinary impact Sedgwick has had on literary as well as gender and queer studies, no less in Japan than in North America. One can attend to neither student nor American and Japanese colleagues' work in these fields without some sense of the watershed moment in the disciplines that her scholarly contributions represent.

Queer studies developed as an academic discipline out of feminist and women's studies, registering yet an earlier "post" to the one of "postgender" that this conference takes up; as such, it may well tell us something about the future of gender studies, possible missteps past and to come, as well as the liberationist aspirations of appending "post" in the first place. In *Feminism Meets Queer Theory* (1997), the editors and contributors debate the shift in gender studies signaled by Gayle Rubin's early essays, "The Traffic in Women" and "Thinking Sex."¹ Rubin had argued that gender and sexuality are separate, and that this separation apparently marks out theoretical object choices for the gender studies field as well: feminist work emphasizes gender while queer studies focuses on sexuality. Foundational to these developments in gender and literary studies was Sedgwick, who continued to argue for a separate space for queer studies. The work of Biddy Martin engages in a productive questioning of this divide so well articulated and defended by Eve Sedgwick, persistently asking what it means to do sexuality without gender. As a consequence, queer critics have raised the stakes of how we make our academic object choices.² In this paper, I will engage some tensions in the fields of Japan area studies and gender/sexuality studies by considering the case of *fujoshi* (腐女子) within the larger *manga* (漫画) culture, an increasingly dominant field for our academic consumption, production, and teaching. This will branch off at times into a polemic I wish to raise along the way—a provocation, really—about our

¹Weed and Schor 1997.

²Martin 1994.

academic practices: When do we as educators in Japan “area studies” in the corporate university find ourselves and our teaching overly compromised by youth and consumer culture?

The Latest Yaoi Avatar: *Fujoshi*

Let’s take the case of the young women known as *fujoshi* and their *manga*. Together, they make up a contested category, having evolved most directly out of *yaoi* (やおい homosexual comics for ostensibly straight female readers) and BL (same-sex, “boy’s love”-themed comics) cultures, all traceable back to 1970s *shōjo* comics (少女まんが) and 1980s “ladies’ comics” (レディースコミック), which is when explicitly sexual subject matter in comics for women began to appear.³ *Fujoshi manga* began to reach mainstream attention in Japan recently in geographical terms: Otome Road (乙女ロード), east of Ikebukuro Station, in that more gritty, working-class part of Tokyo that is Ikebukuro. Written up in a 2005 edition of the Tokyo weekly, *AERA* magazine, *fujoshi* suddenly became common currency with their perverse and parodic self-naming; that is, *fujoshi*, a term usually meaning a proper lady (婦女子)—and alluding somewhat euphemistically to pornographic “ladies’ comics”—had evolved into a “rotting” one (腐女子).⁴ This provocative self-naming and identification set off a flap in the media during these celebratory *otaku* boom years surrounding the internet and film sensation, *Train Man* (『電車男』), and *fujoshi* as *otaku* too were easily sensationalized in the context of their *yaoi* connections. Yet, what really was new here, besides *fujoshi* in a new consumer avatar from *yaoi* to BL? Was there something else behind this initial mainstream attention to a well-known subcultural phenomenon?

It is clear that *fujoshi* self-naming and textual inversions caught public attention because of the timing, just at the historical moment when *otaku* shifted from negative connotations into celebrity gear, but also precisely because of their particular articulation as *fujoshi*, not as *yaoi* or Boy’s Love fans. As journalist Sugiura Yumiko points out, the very idea of female *otaku* had, first of all, been proclaimed both impossible and nonexistent.⁵ Certainly that they emerged amidst a social and political context in which ostensibly hetero women were letting their baby-making

³Useful histories of *shōjo manga* and the subgenres—homosocial, then homosexual, as well as pornographic—that have come out of it can be found in Fujimoto 1992; Kinsella 2000; Mizoguchi 2003; Shamooin 2004; Suzuki 1998; Welker 2006.

⁴Sugiura 2005; 2006.

⁵Sugiura 2006. Sugiura’s first chapter explores this “invisibility” of the female *otaku* and the media figures prior to 2005 who had theorized their nonexistence. “Otaku” is variously defined or received in negative and positive ways as “nerd” or “geek,” and usually refers to young men who are obsessive fans of *anime*, *manga*, or gaming. Negative connotations derive from this obsessive “fanboy” image, associated with pathological types as well with the contemporary social problem of *hikikomori* (ひきこもり), individuals who fear, or refuse, to leave their “rooms.” Patrick W. Galbraith, for one, notes the term’s likely etymological origins in お宅, a polite second-person reference to one’s home; moreover, this is the kind of language used in housewives’ conversations that may have been mimicked by stay-at-home boys talking with one another (Galbraith 2009).

machine bodies go to rot, no longer marrying and procreating, helped them to turn some heads; that is, periodic panics about the extinction of the Japanese pop up on the evening news as new government agencies, policies, and incentives are put into place to get women to marry and have babies, such as the so-called Gender Equality Bureau (男女共同参画局 *danzo kyôdô sankakukyoku*).⁶ In this context, *fujoshi* set themselves apart from other fans of BL and *yaoi* with the term *fujoshi* itself, stressing a decadent female subjectivity at a nexus of sexual cross-identifications; indeed, *fujoshi* render themselves as *subjects-in-process*, not as consumer objects, as do BL and *yaoi*, which refer to subgenres of *manga*. *Fujoshi*, as Sugiura Yumiko points out, are no longer women trying to “find themselves” (自分探し) but women who *erase* themselves in their fictions; they draw male characters, refuse heterosexual stories, and get off on homosocial and homosexual coupling between men. They overtly seek onanistic pleasure in not only reading and consuming such stories but also in writing them and teaching each other how to write them.

While we might be intrigued by *fujoshi* sexuality and their cross-identifications, there is reason to be wary of ascribing too much political subversiveness to such fan cultures or to the content of their *manga*. Indeed, an insidious heterosexual appropriation and fictionalization of homosexuality may be at work for these avowedly straight *fujoshi*.⁷ As “fag hags,” they may displace their disappointed

⁶Kazuko Suzuki notes that *yaoi* comics “repeatedly describ[e] extremely negative images of mothers” (p. 259) in Suzuki 1998. The Gender Equality Bureau, a government office formed in 1994, became a cabinet post in 2001 and its role became highly publicized under increasingly conservative Koizumi and Abe administrations, 2001–2007. New governmental attention directed at gender appeared to be less about feminist issues or “equality” per se than about birth rates, the aging population, and perceived challenges to traditional gender roles by gay rights activists and feminist-centered, “gender free” theories espoused by scholars such as Ueno Chizuko, sociology professor at the University of Tokyo.

⁷The *uke/semi* (受け/攻め “insertee/insertor,” or passive/dominant) relationships of homosexual and homosocial characters mimic heterosexual arrangements. Young men are staged in roles and drawn with such androgynous physical attributes that they can be visually “read” as either sex. Indeed, in some scenes, characters’ sexual positions and sexual parts are drawn so ambiguously as to warrant claims that in these *manga* we see a *yaoi ana* (*yaoi hole*), a style of representation rather than any attempt at real, representational male bodies.

As Keith Vincent has delineated, questions about straight women’s right to draw homosexual men kicked off the 1990s’ *yaoi* debates in the form of this comment by gay activist Satô Masaki:

The more confused images of gay men circulate among the general public the harder it is for gay men to reconcile these images with their own lives and the more extreme their oppression becomes. Those among them who are able to live by their genitals alone might be all right. But the truth is that they are far outnumbered by gays who live their whole lives without ever having sex with another man. For gays like these, *yaoi* and *okoge* are a real nuisance, people they’d rather see dead. Gay sex is looked upon by men with disgust and by women with curiosity. When you’re spying on gay sex, girls, take a look at yourself in the mirror. Just look at the expression on your faces! You can all go to hell for all I care. (Quoted in Vincent 2007)

Sugiura’s field research on *fujoshi* reveals that the use of *uke/semi* is complex in its variations, and is used to refer to many kinds of relationships outside of sex, such as one newspaper’s dominance over another. This makes clear the emphasis on power structures in *fujoshi manga*.

heterosexual relationships onto “safe” gay ones, or revitalize their tired heterosexual desires with a sexuality they perceive to be transgressive and illicit.⁸ Keith Vincent has put forth some of the best arguments about this in his work on *yaoi*.⁹ Just as importantly, though, Bidy Martin offers a critique of “extraordinary homosexuals” and any assumption that political power or subversive potential inheres in male homosexual representations, sexual practices, or identifications, any more than in heterosexuality or other sexualities; for Martin, such “extraordinary homosexual” power is often set into motion at the expense of complex and diverse lesbian, female, and feminine identifications and sexualities that must remain fixed.

So while the political potential of *fujoshi manga* is questionable at best, that hardly invalidates the fact that *fujoshi* themselves—despite themselves—cause productive trouble: they trouble heterosexuality, including mainstream feminist work in the Japanese and North American contexts, and even trouble complacent queer studies definitions of who gets to read and write homosexual desire and practices. Accusations no less by gay activists than straight men or women that yaoists are misogynist in denying their own femininity are not only heterosexually presumptive but simply fail to grasp how feminist consciousness itself starts from a desire not to be a “woman,” and rather, struggles to revise what that might mean.¹⁰ *Fujoshi* are causing some gender trouble; what remains to be seen is how such trouble plays out, whether it is sustained, and what forms it assumes.

There has already been a popular culture reaction, in the form of a recent film; we might call it *Okoge* redux.¹¹ Last year, the film *Fujoshi kanojo* (Dir. Kaneshige Jun, Film Partners Productions, 2009) came out, a film in which the idea of *fujoshi* itself is sensationalized and “normalized” for heterosexual entertainment.¹² The *fujoshi* in the film is a career woman (Matsumoto Wakana plays “Yoriko”) in her twenties who is seeing a young man (Daito Shunsuke plays “Hinata”) still in college. It opens with a serious romantic moment where he asks her to see only him, and she hesitates, fearfully replying that first she has to tell him something: she is a

⁸Suzuki argues that for girls today *yaoi* “grows out of their despair of ever achieving equal relationships with men in a sexist society and their quest for ideal human relationships” (pp. 243–44).

⁹Vincent 2007. Here, and in various talks over the years, Vincent has explored the *yaoi* phenomenon and its debates in depth, increasingly via a wider literary and historical context and not simply a youth culture one (in this case, the fiction of Mori Mari). His analysis in this essay, as well as in conference talks, centers on the various sides in the *yaoi ronsou/yaoi* debates that appeared in *Choisir* in the 1990s and are particularly illuminating.

¹⁰I discuss this concept of “feminist misogyny” in Knighton 2007.

¹¹A 1992 film directed by Takehiro Nakajirô that brought the term *okoge*, referring to a “fag hag,” a woman who is not homosexual herself but who seeks out the company of gay men, to international attention.

¹²The film and subsequent *manga* claim their origins in the “real-life story” relayed online by “pentabu,” a blogger, a man who remains anonymous and has begun *Fujoshi kanojo 2* already online. The film site is fujoshi.gyao.jp.

fujoshi. He does not really know what that means, so he immediately dismisses it as an obstacle. The rest of the film is the process of her opening his eyes to just what *fujoshi* means, and us the viewer, too, while they fall in love with each other. *Fujoshi kanojo* ends with *kare* going to London to get her back, and with a final big victory kiss as the final scene. The film's title makes clear from whose point of view this story is told, as it plays with the fantasy not of the girl whose desires are queered, but with those of the ostensible heterosexual viewer for whom her strange appeal is not only in her beauty but also in how the right man can straighten her out in the end. This *fujoshi* is depicted as a smart, successful businesswoman who wants a man with whom she can be not just equal but apparently superior, a relationship which requires her boyfriend to wait on her hand and foot. The most striking scene in the film is not her *kare* in apron cutting carrots in the shape of stars, dropping everything at her beck and call, or running her bath for her when she gets home from a long day at work; rather, it is a scene near the end when he is crouched on the floor before her while she sits on the sofa, knees pulled up to her chin, and he obediently clips her toenails slowly and deliberately, head bowed at her feet level with her sex, clip . . . clip . . . clip . . . as they talk about her plan to abandon him to go to London to pursue her career.

The *fujoshi* relationship to men we see here assimilates her to a former notion of "feminist" that in postwar Japan did not refer to women at all, but to men who were "nice" to women, treating them like ladies, opening doors for them, and waiting on them. It is telling that the film largely avoids the real fantasy life of *fujoshi* and the contents of their productions in *manga*; only then could it render this one *fujoshi*'s desires, and Hinata's for her, as comical rather than unsettling for the straight viewer. Real *fujoshi*, though, showing a desire for equality strikingly imaginable only in gay male bodies in relationships sexual and otherwise, are not so easily reducible to Japan's feminism of a few decades ago or recuperable in today's hetero-presumptive society. In this sense, *fujoshi* appear to be *postfeminist*: as Kazuko Suzuki and Akiko Mizoguchi point out, *fujoshi* reject female baby-making bodies that are inherently vulnerable, and do not hesitate to depict rape and violence, causing some critics to see their *manga* as angry or even a form of "revenge" against men and heterosexual inequality.¹³

Certainly for *fujoshi*, the boundaries of their activities as reader and writer are blurred, as are the boundaries of their practices of imagination and reality. They encourage each other (and are warned) to look "normal," or straight, but secretly to practice their fantasies of *uke/semi* (受け/攻め) in all their relationships with others, from the most intimate to the most casual among strangers, and in effect "to closet" their prolific writing and consumption of BL texts. In a sort of mimicry of illicit behavior and identification with the persecution of homosexuals for the open expression of their desires, *fujoshi* encourage each other less to deny than to embrace their *fujoshi* selves within a homosocial community of other

¹³Suzuki 1998; Mizoguchi 2003.

fujoshi.¹⁴ Their onanistic pleasure is expressed as *môshô* (妄想), a delusional absorption in imaginative brain sex not without its onanistic charge, and less a complement than a counter to the male otaku *moe* (萌え). Kotani Mari has called *fujoshi* literature “C *bungaku*,” that is, a clitoral rather than phallogocentric literature, in her analysis of it via Luce Irigaray and Inagaki Taruho.¹⁵ Yet, despite what appears to be a very phallic subject matter, focused as it is on all male relations, the real matter is actually in the hands of female readers, who parody and rewrite and use these texts quite literally for their own sexual amusement and mind-game pleasure.

That is, of course, the point of Matt Thorn’s essay, so aptly titled “Girls and Women Getting Out of Hand: The Pleasure and Politics of Japan’s Amateur Comics Community.” And, as Thorn has noted, while a North American counterpart to *yaoi* exists in the form of slash fiction (which is parodic fiction, not *manga*), slash remains a little-known market with a small readership while *yaoi*/BL is increasingly mainstream in Japan, and growing in global readership, thanks to Internet publishing and dissemination via scanlations.¹⁶

Yet it was not in celebration of *fujoshi* that I first went to Otome Road; on the contrary, it was out of mixed feelings of defensiveness about labeling *fujoshi* and yaoist fans as mere “fag hags,” and also out of my own failure to intellectually—and not always erotically—appreciate the political, aesthetic, and cultural power of *yaoi*/BL texts.¹⁷ I needed to think about them more. Moreover, precisely because

¹⁴Mizoguchi 2003. Mizoguchi argues that *fujoshi* and the readers of *yaoi* subgenres such as BL are overwhelmingly women writing and reading each other’s works, and that while many older participants have married, many in the younger generation have not and are not in heterosexual relationships. The close writing, feedback systems, and circulation of their erotic works among other women create a highly female-centered world despite the *manga* content. While the number of lesbian *fujoshi* or yaoists is difficult to ascertain, made more difficult by the “closeting” of their reading and writing, that they are a demographic is clear: See Mizoguchi 2003; Suzuki 1998; Sugiura 2006; and especially Welker 2006, who notes that “activist, scholar, and *manga* fan Mizoguchi Akiko goes further, declaring that she ‘became’ a lesbian via reception, in [her] adolescence, of the ‘beautiful boy’ comics of the 1970s” (p. 843).

For two well-known examples of “guidebooks” to *fujoshi*, see: *Bokutachi no ki ni naru fujoshi* 2007; *Fujoshiteki rabutan* 2004. I find these contemporary versions of “conduct manuals” fascinating, as they both define and commercialize *fujoshi*, but also get revised with observation and feedback from *fujoshi* fan communities. They claim to provide a guide to just what a *fujoshi* is, looks like, the shapes her fantasies take, and how her identifications are to be practiced.

¹⁵Kotani 2007.

¹⁶Thorn 2004. “Slash” refers not to horror or “snuff” violence, but rather to the slash mark used in largely North American, parodic fanfiction to indicate the two male figures put in homoerotic or sexual relation to one another, such as K/S for the popular Kirk/Spock fictions based on the *Star Trek* characters.

¹⁷Many of the works cited in these notes do sociological and cultural anthropological work, giving valuable statistics and reviewing the history of *yaoi* and BL works while giving brief summaries of seminal *manga* plotlines. My objective in this essay is, rather, to raise questions and speculate about *fujoshi* themselves. To review this history, in particular, see Mizoguchi 2003; Suzuki 1998; Thorn 2004; Vincent 2007. The 2007 special issue of *Eureka/Yuriika* is particularly insightful for its analysis and commentary on *fujoshi manga* history. Other excellent essays that give a wider context and read specific works with attention to visual and diegetic detail include Aoyama 1988; Welker 2006; Shamoon 2004. Cultural anthropologist Sharon Kinsella’s essay examines the market mechanisms and attendant problems of youth culture gone globally commercial, in addition to chronicling the *otaku* panic (Kinsella 1998).

the feminist = gender studies and queer = sexuality studies divide appears to be at work in the discourse around these texts and fan cultures, I remain drawn to them for the provocative and contrary ways *fujoshi* functions as sign and as subject position. Myself a feminist critic adapting and evolving in what many tout as a post-feminist or postgender environment, I look at *fujoshi* and their media and take heart. In them, I see Biddy Martin's defense of diverse femininities with their attendant sexualities, and Kotani Mari's embrace of an *okoge* feminist category that implicitly challenges "fag hag" labels and opens up a space for queer studies critics who may be "queer" but not always gay.¹⁸ At an even deeper level, my turn towards *fujoshi* has been guided by a memory, one of reading Eve Sedgwick years ago as a graduate student. Then, it triggered a paradigm shift for me in thinking gender, to see how she broke down simplistic binary theoretical and political frames by writing about the myriad configurations sexual practices and arrangements actually assume, including those of ostensibly straight women whose sexuality is shaped by homosexual male fantasies or cross-identifications.¹⁹ Of course, Sedgwick was talking about herself to no small degree, too, and she put herself on the line of her texts. What would it mean to question and reread *fujoshi* and their object choices via a Sedgwickian critical lens?

A Sedgwickian Lens on the Masturbating *Shôjo*

One of Sedgwick's most controversial essays was "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," presented at a 1989 MLA conference and used by conservatives and media to lampoon tenured academics' so-called "work." Included in *Tendencies*, a collection of her essays mostly written co-terminously with *Epistemology of the Closet*, this essay reads the historical discourses of masturbation from Austen's own time and then reads Austen's proper mannered fiction to theorize a potentially disavowed subtext of onanistic pleasure and danger in Austen.²⁰ Sedgwick's argument was unconvincing to me, at first, and not least because somehow Austen the writer herself seemed to get lost, as if she were not an aspect of the discursive threads of history that also needed to be taken into account, including her access to and reading of these other kinds of texts. Moreover, the theoretical tool of "disavowal" used here seemed to be cutting a fine line between the surprising recognition of a purloined letter in front of us all the time and a too-convenient term for willful reading despite evidence to the contrary. But more careful and skeptical reading soon brought me up short; I had misunderstood, and the misunderstanding was itself a form of illumination. As her readers know, Sedgwick's sentences carry ideas that are not easy to consume precisely because her language and syntax work to say things in new ways, not in prefabricated ones.

¹⁸Kotani 1999; Martin 1994.

¹⁹In the *yaoi* context, a way of thinking also expressed by Fujimoto Yukari (Fujimoto 1991).

²⁰Sedgwick 1993.

In rereading her Austen essay, I find we have no New Historicist project of recuperating the repressed texts of history in the fiction, as I had first understood it to be; no, Sedgwick's goal is much more theoretically provocative than that. Neither is the essay so much about Austen, though Sedgwick clearly enjoys associating the proper canonical Austen with the corrupting discourse of sexuality, particularly in that dirty word "masturbation," to thoroughly make her point. That point, in short, is that the discourse of "masturbation" so demonized and medicalized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, closely associated with "neurasthenia," acts in a synecdochal relationship if not actually as the focalized crossover point on the homosocial/homosexual continuum. In Japan's late Meiji context, sexology imported from the West led to similar medicalized, public health concerns about "self-comfort" practices, as Greg Pflugfelder and Sabine Frühstück each has shown.²¹ That is to say, between the universal, unmarked, repressed and confessed *one* sexuality and all those others that are non-procreative, pleasure-seeking, medicalized as diseased and madness-making, exists autoeroticism in a space fully apiece historically with the latter sexualities and yet also always already a repressed part of the former. Exploring masturbation, Sedgwick suggests, is a way to explore the crossover and queering lines of sexualities that disrupt our binary thinking in straight or gay. In bridging sexualities named and those that dare not speak their names, masturbation offers a meeting place for multiple sexualities. Such a site of sexuality *in common* extends to us the vista of a time when we laugh at the idea of criminalizing homosexuality, barring gay marriage, and fearing our kids are gay in much the way we laugh today at the idea of going blind from masturbation.

This essay is special in Sedgwick's body of work: rather than gay male sexuality, it forefronts women's pleasure and the female homosocial/homosexual continuum, charting a course in the unarticulated spaces of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female sexuality. Moreover, it so wittily speculates on how male and female onanistic pleasure leaks out, despite itself, in the act of reading. The link between "reading," especially fiction, and "immoral" pleasure was of course of great concern to Victorians, as Taylor Stoehr and Steven Marcus have, each in different ways, representatively argued.²² Certainly, in Japanese literary culture as well, lying around reading raised moral questions at different points in history, and not just about laziness; successive panics over comic culture and *otaku* are contemporary versions of this.²³ Here, as in much of her work, Sedgwick strived to create for us precision tools for reading more finely and subtly for the crossover

²¹For a discussion of the sexology-inspired repression and control of practices of masturbation from the Meiji Period in Japan, see Frühstück 2000; Pflugfelder 1999.

²²Stoehr 1966; Marcus 1966.

²³Classical examples would include the *Genji's* "Fireflies" chapter or *Sarashina Nikki* as they stage debates about the immoral aspects of fiction for susceptible young women's minds. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, of course, remains a touchstone for such dangers in Anglo-European literature. See Kinsella regarding *otaku* panic.

points of intellectual and bodily pleasures in texts, still a scandalous project, as media responses to her Austen talk testify, and as the continuing absence of a more or less canonized or celebrated female Portnoy suggests.²⁴

Our academic object choices and our sexual ones, too, can be risky business. Sedgwick exhibited a kind of relentless rigor in her work of reading and writing that went a long way toward solidifying the foundation and legitimacy to queer studies. Her valor in doing so, I hardly need mention. She not only talked and wrote, but she ACTed UP, walking the walk, something that I reflect upon today when all our students write “feminist” essays but few dare call themselves “feminist” in what, to me, has yet to register as a “postgender” era.

Despite my interest here in a Sedgwickian reading of *fujoshi* subject-formations, I declined to read closely their narrative and artistic productions, bearing as they do the marks of a youth culture increasingly packaged, mass-produced, and consumer-generated. Critics point it out again and again, but *fujoshis'* own descriptor of their comics as *kusatte iru* (rotten), not to mention the meaning of the acronym-like *yaoi* (*yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* literally means “no climax, no punch line, no meaning”), reminds us that these writer-artists recognize and themselves evaluate their own works as amateurishly “bad writing”; they produce them for fun within their fan circles. These comics are often limited aesthetically and creatively by the formula used, in this case the *yaoi* and pornographic ones.²⁵ *Yaoi* works tend to take famous characters from existing mainstream fictions and revise them to fit a BL mode, and their techniques of narrative, as critics usually note—or rather stress by the very brevity of any aesthetic considerations—are not as complicated as occasional visual techniques to evade the censors have been.²⁶

²⁴Unless we take something like Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* as the female Portnoy; it certainly exercised a strong measure of influence on Japanese postwar feminism.

²⁵See Linda Williams, ed. *Porn Studies*. Duke University Press, 2004, particularly Deborah Shamoons' “Office Sluts and Rebel Flowers: The Pleasures of Japanese Pornographic Comics for Women,” which unsentimentally and without moralistic bias analyzes the internal dynamics, individual pleasures, and social significance of this pornography for Japanese women. Like many of the essays in this collection, Shamoons' too discusses pornography without falsely inflating its literary value; however, she refuses Anne Allison's condemnation of such works as a kind of patriarchal brainwashing (99; Allison 1996). Her analysis of the visual techniques of “ladies' comics” and what they can do that film cannot is particularly useful. Also, in her comparison of BL *manga* content to that of “ladies' comics,” Shamoons contends that both are sexually explicit, but that BL is something of a variation on ladies' comics in that its male-male liaisons really function as heterosexual ones while evading the narrative problems of pregnancy or connotations of the “bad girl.” Shamoons' suggestion that “ladies' comics” and BL, sold side by side in bookstores, may be purchased by the same readers is important to keep in mind.

²⁶See Suzuki 1998: “anyone can be a writer of Yaoi, as it does not require a high level of technique” (252). Sharalyn Orbaugh argues for *yaoi's* subversive potential as a result of its massive *dōjinshi* fan cultures, a huge underground, almost invisible force operating beyond the reach of capitalist structures in “Creativity and Constraint in Amateur *Manga* Production” (Orbaugh 2005). However, in her “Girls Reading Harry Potter, Girls Writing Desire: Amateur Manga and Shōjo Reading Practices,” Orbaugh tones down her prior stress on *yaoi* anti-capitalist subversion to highlight the creativity in the parodic practice of revising and rewriting well-known fictional characters such as Harry Potter for different and often privately circulated ends in *yaoi* fan circles. (Orbaugh 2010).

But then, how many *manga* do we deeply “read” rather than quickly consume, including *fujoshi manga*? Is this way of talking about it even useful, the notion of “reading” versus “consuming”? Should such works be taking up more and more of our syllabus and curricular space, displacing other works of history and literature? Sharalyn Orbaugh points out more empirically what many of us had already sensed: most studies of *manga* to date deal with them in (1) descriptive, plot summary terms, or (2) analytical and cultural anthropological terms—that is to say, close readings of *manga* in aesthetic terms are relatively scarce.²⁷

The larger transnational, as well as socio-cultural, technological, and historical dimensions of the *manga* and *anime* phenomena should get its share of our attention, of course. For me here, this means *fujoshi* themselves, in their perverse acts of writing and acting out their onanistic identifications, often against their society, if definitively, and problematically, *not* against their consumer culture. Foregrounding this youth culture and consumer context is vital: the market places a relentless focus on *fujoshi* as voracious consumers of goods and as writers for *dōjinshi* (同人誌 fanzines). But this putative subculture is actually thoroughly infiltrated by intense marketing to “alternative” consumer sectors and “fans,” a kind of marketing that is increasingly inseparable from fan writing itself.²⁸ A subculture’s fan-generated marketing niche, when well-contained within larger publishing and online vending interests, disrupts any simple notions of mainstream versus margin even if it evades complete co-optation. We might compare this to cell phone novels or reality programming, as well as the broad-based commercialization of *shōjo* not merely in *anime*, *manga*, and gaming, but, in the past decade or so, in our academic discourses too.

This takes us back to my opening polemic; there, I asked whether, or when, popular culture fields as practiced by academics in the university are not so compromised by consumer culture that they are rendered masturbation of a different sort than the quite literal onanistic pleasure I have been praising. First, I should clarify what this question does *not* ask, per se: it is *not* a rhetorical question, but rather a sincere interrogative lobbed into this space where not only I, but many of you and those on our panel, work in gender and sexuality and popular culture as well as in literature, big or little L, as you like to define it. This is *not* a question about pornography, its pleasures, its value, or practical uses, and neither is it a question about high and low distinctions or subgenres. I am certainly *not* arguing

²⁷Orbaugh 2005, pp. 104–124. The new serial *Mechademia*, edited by Frenchy Lunning and published by University of Minnesota Press, increasingly proves itself to be an exception.

²⁸In contrast to Orbaugh, I question the subversive potential of *dōjinshi* that appear in mainstream bookstores and online on often highly commercial sites, sites that also get writers to compete with one another for publication in more lucrative formats, not just for private consumption online. This process perpetuates a site for “belonging” and self-generates readers/writers for greater consumption and fan interaction, with “profits” not wholly owned by the participants. As technology enables more sophisticated publications, it also makes possible wider dissemination and easier financing of *yaoi* activities as commercial ventures.

that we should not teach *manga* and *anime*, and popular culture. Rather, my question really has to do with proportionality and politics: our roles as culture purveyors and educators in this historical moment, a time when curricular and budget concerns together with semester time constraints make it hard to put popular culture products in some historical or cultural perspective to a general student audience less interested in Japan than in gaming; a time when hyped youth trends are aimed at the buying power of parents, as well as academics in higher education, via the youth market we teach; a time when social networking media aid and abet the specialized channeling of marketing pathways, and educators are pressured to make use of new media as much for their own sake as for pedagogical or class management purposes; and a time when massive transnational exchanges and academic production “exoticize” youth cultures as strange or somehow “emergent” (more often as “cool” fashion than in Raymond Williams’ sense of that term).

Some would disagree. Timothy Burke, in his response to the collected essays in *The Modern Girl Around the World*, draws upon his research on Zimbabwean women to caution against trivializing fashion and consumer choices as a less political or significant form of agency. He provocatively points out the logical loop in classical liberal, capitalist thinking that cannot help but grant agency to those who consume, even if those consumers are, by almost any other measure, living under highly constrained conditions. For Burke, consumption can be a significant form of self-fashioning in late capitalist societies, and certainly in developing countries aspiring to be like them, where sometimes the only choices individuals have are those of limited material consumption. However meager or frivolous it might first appear, such consumption is one avenue to agency and should not be hastily dismissed.²⁹

Steve Ridgely, at a popular culture conference at Tokyo’s Sophia University in the summer of 2009, reminded his audience that now popular culture studies as visual culture, mixed high and low, is well established as a Japan Studies field, and has indeed been institutionalized via the work of such scholars as John Treat, Alan Tansman, Marilyn Ivy, Jennifer Robertson, Deborah Shamoan, Christine Marran, several essay collections, and the provocative new serial *Mechademia*. In this context, then, the risks of doing popular culture are not political ones so much as what Ridgely called those of “hypertrendiness” plagued by methodological problems.³⁰ One such methodological problem, Ridgely argued, is simply completion and accuracy of a study when, for instance, prolific serialization, as with *Naruto*, goes on and on with no end in sight and little way to keep up with, much less finally analyze it. Clearly, such conditions often create reliance on students or on “native informants” whose native status above all as youth, as Japanese, or as

²⁹Burke 2008.

³⁰Steve Clark Ridgely of University of Wisconsin-Madison presented at Sophia University’s conference, entitled “Studies of Japanese Popular Culture: Examining the Art and the Nature of the Gap with Miyadai Shinji and Azuma Hiroki,” which took place on July 11, 2009, in Tokyo on the Ichigaya campus. The website for this conference is http://www.fla.sophia.ac.jp/icc/2009/Studies_of_Japanese_Popular_Culture_1.htm.

members of the target subculture in itself legitimates and underwrites the re-presentation of it in other cultural contexts.

Despite Burke's warning that those in developing countries should not be denied their measure of consumption-as-identity, and Ridgely's claim that politics are no longer involved with deciding to teach consumer and popular culture in Japan area studies, it strikes me that this field is rife with political choices that deserve more scrutiny. Certainly I agree that there is a measure of self-expression in consumption, be it in developing or developed countries, but to displace vital means of social, economic, and political agency onto daily consumer choices is, at worst, to fetishize consumable objects, and at best, to refuse to make necessary distinctions. In highly developed economies such as Japan, consumerism raises red flags precisely to the degree that its massive, if uneven, shaping force is taken for granted, simply naturalized, as if intrinsic to the popular culture apparatus. Provocative research by Kukhee Choo reveals how Japan's METI and MEXT are putting massive government weight behind the soft power of the popular culture "contents" industries. We might not want to forget this in a context of government downsizing in its support for the humanities at Japanese universities, or the increased pressures we often face in the U.S. to garner larger classes of students by advertising a load of "Cool Japan" *anime* and *manga*.³¹

Some may say that, as academics, we are in the business of merely following trends and *describing* them, not *prescribing* anything moral or political in choosing our objects for teaching, but as educators and scholars in the knowledge and pedagogy industries, even as on both sides of the Pacific support for humanities education and jobs in literary studies as well as academic presses continue to disappear, how can we afford to ignore such matters?³² If we cannot make a better case for the role and contents of a humanities education beyond the "cool" flows of youth markets, then we probably deserve this rapid decline. What better place to ask such questions than here at a literary conference in Japanese studies that centers on gender work and feminist scholarship, and features many new, up-and-coming young scholars? Personally, I have never understood how one can be a feminist literary critic without there being something political as well as something literary at stake. It is as impossible for me to separate the feminist and queer

³¹Kukhee Choo, of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, presented her research at the same conference as Ridgely held at Sophia University in 2009 that showcased presentations by Miyadai Shinji and Azuma Hiroki.

³²I might add that at the Sophia University popular studies conference, there were rather more questions and highly skeptical ones about popular culture's subversiveness than simple enthusiastic support from the audience. Many audience members took pains to give concrete details or historically specific examples in the face of theoretical abstractions, noting qualities in *manga* and *anime* complicit with mainstream or reactionary positions, and not only celebrating what makes Japan cool and original in the global frame. This may reflect how conference participants who live in Japan have greater access to an everyday context in which to situate these works; that is to say, a leavening sense of the way many Japanese people across the spectrum enjoy or ignore them in Japan, much less marvel at the overseas success of a popular culture they see as lowbrow productions aimed at youth.

political projects, as it is to separate the literary project from representational challenges for gender and sexuality; even more impossible would it be to separate all these from what Annette Kolodny called long ago our “Dancing through the Minefield”; in short, we bring our sexual politics to the academic workplace, our practices of pedagogy, and our role in bridging the university and the rest of the world.³³ Pandering to youth culture and our students’ demographic is not the only or best way to be more relevant or useful, much less to advocate the literary or even the *literate*, in what we do. Of course, Mizumura Minae (水村美苗) has made much-publicized points along these lines as well, and they do not strike me as merely conservative reaction against popular media culture.³⁴ As the nature of the university system changes, along with the way it finances its operations and procures its teaching labor, I frankly ask myself—not only you—if the path we now tread is the right one.

A final agonistic question, on top of all this about consumer youth culture and the governmental and institutional machinery behind it, is how do we as educators in area studies and in literary studies choose our objects of study without becoming part and parcel of a reverse Orientalism? Such a reverse Orientalism is one where Japan markets back at us, and we take up, at times uncritically, newly re-imagined ideas and images of “Japan,” often via its hypertrended “cool” youth culture products. That it is backed by Japanese governmental, institutional, and corporate entities, and integrated into our own institutional structures for understanding and creating the meaning of “Japan” is the very definition of Orientalism that Edward Said once gave us.

The Post~ Prefix: Past and Future Erasures

Emily Apter in her recent tribute to Sedgwick in *ArtForum*, noted that prominent queer theorists have recently been turning to other fields:³⁵

[Editors of the 2007 Special Issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* on queer theory] noted a sharp trending away from queerness by queer theorists themselves: ‘Judith Butler has been writing about justice and human rights, Michael Warner about sermons and secularism, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick about Melanie Klein and Buddhism.’ In pondering whether there was continuity between past and present interests in the work of these theorists, [editors] Halley and Parker posed the question: “Can work be regarded as queer if it’s not explicitly ‘about’ sexuality?”

A similar question had earlier been raised with respect to feminism. Could work be regarded as feminist if it was no longer about women? Sedgwickian queer theory answered yes and arguably came into focus around the “woman question.”

³³Kolodny 1985.

³⁴Mizumura 2008.

³⁵Apter 2009, pp. 62–63.

Apter here begs the question of any “post” to feminist and queer work, the question that this conference raises; rather, her examples point to a deepening of inquiry and complicating of these fields in interdisciplinary ways. Gender and sexuality have given us epistemological tools for doing our work, no matter what discipline we are in. These queer studies scholars continue to link their fields to larger terrain that matters to them, including politics, applying their methodologies to pressing issues where and when they arise, on a wider palette. Just such engagement with our complex world in their roles as feminist intellectuals and educators is what I find so inspiring in their examples, and demonstrates the epistemological shake-up that feminist and gender studies has been, and might continue to be.

If there is a “post” paradoxically marking the future of gender studies, it is surely the “posthumanist” one. But as theorists of the posthuman and posthumanist remind us by means of their own struggles to define the field, the direction is far from clear. Cary Wolfe, for one, in *What is Posthumanism?* poses the problem in these terms: Is it a transcending, an extension out of, or an intensification of the ongoing Enlightenment humanist project?³⁶ These questions are not so different from those faced by scholars in feminist and gender studies, as their own epistemological project also wrestles with ways to take into account race, class, cross-cultural and (trans)national vectors. Both the postgender and the posthumanist share the problem, for instance, of how to mark those historically and “always already” of lesser “human” status or those whose gender/sexuality has not counted. And what of those whose realities are not shaped by unlimited access to various media and other technologies, much less those bearing the technological and military brunt of our advanced societies’ global hegemony?³⁷

I would like to wrap up my homage to Sedgwick and this essay’s polemic by briefly turning to the feminist and “posthuman” questions raised by a *manga* that has my attention these days: *Ningen Konchûki* (『人間昆虫記』), or “A Record of Human Entomology.” It is a *manga* by auteur *mangaka* (漫画家) Tezuka Osamu (手塚治虫).³⁸ It falls among the darker, sexual work of Tezuka along the lines of his *Vampire* series. This 1970–71 *manga* tells the story of a socially mobile, attractive woman named Tomura Tokiko and the man who is in love with her. It is his role to learn her mysterious secret: that secret is that Tomura Tokiko periodically

³⁶ Wolfe 2010. These possible directions are laid out in the “Introduction: What is Posthumanism?”

³⁷ While the deep failures of the humanist enlightenment project necessitate profound rearticulations and certainly some new direction, it is far from clear that it has been replaced by something better in an unarticulated “other” space called the posthumanist; indeed, the “posthumanist” may serve to rationalize technologies of inhumanity, war, and mass consumption and communication by redefining the “human” in disturbing ways that both describe, and implicitly justify, some groups’ violent and hegemonic dominance and control over others. In that sense, the posthumanist would look a lot like some of the humanist failings we would like to put behind us.

³⁸ Tezuka 1995.

molts out of her female skin and metamorphoses into new women, each time specified by Tezuka, curiously enough, as new insects. The four chapters of the *manga* break down and add up to (1) *Haruzemi no shô* [春蟬の章 The Summer Cicada Chapter], (2) *Unka no shô* [浮塵子(うんか)の章 The Leafhopper Chapter], (3) *Kamikiri no shô* [天牛(かみきり)の章 The Long-horned Beetle Chapter], and (4) *Kirigirisu no shô* [きりぎりすの章 The Grasshopper Chapter]. A feminist reading of this seems almost too available, and in line with its times: that of women, “changeable as water,” fickle, and frighteningly closer to nature than men—a woman who is her body first, and inhabits her mind second (if at all). Or more positively, it depicts a woman’s almost supernatural capacity for birth, not only for reproduction but whole-cloth physical and psychic transformation. Considering the early 1970s period of publication, it suggests a critique of vampiric, self-serving career women as well (the lesson of *All About Eve*). Blogger fans of Tezuka often describe this *manga*’s story as a critique of Japan in its high-growth bubble period, and I take that to mean one in which Japan sold out in order to give birth to itself immaculately as an “economic miracle.”

Tomura Tokiko starts off as an actress and by means of each of her avatars sexually seduces and then sucks dry by turns her male mentor partners, duping at least one female in a lesbian tryst. Her forte is mimicry, and the one man, Hachigasu, who has known her from her earliest days at the theater, defines her true nature for us. As he puts it, she mimics for survival and to prey upon others just as do certain insects, with their camouflage coloring and behavior. She is accused of having no self for herself; as a thief of others’ talents she resides temporarily in her empty shell before moving on to inhabit others’ selves. In other parts of the *manga*, meanwhile, side stories develop of Japan’s relationship with its Asian neighbors, particularly China and Korea, and the competitive economic arena within which Japan’s special postwar relationship with the U.S. and the historical backdrop of wartime crimes yet unatoned for always linger.

Tezuka’s *manga* opens and closes with two books. At the start, Tokiko has won the Akutagawa Prize (芥川賞) for a book she stole from a female friend who, at the discovery and announcement of Tokiko’s criminal success at her expense, hangs herself. The title of that book was *Ningen Konchûki*. The book at the end discovered by Hachigasu is Tokiko’s diary, her life story told as confession of her deeds and crimes, the tale of a modern poison woman (*dokufu* 毒婦), we might say, giving ample evidence of her “true self.” She had kept this record in order to recall and narrate her life story to the wax image she had made of her long dead mother; this wax figure sits in a room of Tokiko’s childhood home in her native village, a place where she periodically returns in a kind of “homing instinct.” She tells her story to this grotesque replica of her aged dead mother before and while nursing, herself an adult woman, at her mother’s waxen withered breast, regressing to infantile sucking for some nourishment beyond a physical need. It is here that she gains strength for regeneration, in a “home” that serves all at once as a kind of mausoleum to childhood, a primitive animal den, and a chrysalis for that necessary rebirth.

We begin to see that Tezuka's *manga* and Tokiko's book are one and the same, suggesting that, like Tezuka, the diary and life story of Tokiko too are outside the story in *Ningen Konchûki*; after all, *Ningen Konchûki* is not just the book in the book that wins the prize at the start of the *manga* narrative but is the very book, with its insect chapters, that we hold in our hands. This opens our eyes to the fact that, despite the book's overwhelming focus on Tokiko, she is not the only insect here; the main male characters' names—*Hachigasu* (蜂賀須) and *Arikawa* (蠶川)—are notably entomological. Hence, Tokiko's problem may not be hers alone. It is in this sense that Tezuka's insect woman rewrites Imamura Shôhei's (今村昌平) Tome from his 1963 film *Nippon Konchûki* (『にっぽん昆虫記』), where the story of Tokiko, like that of Tome, is the story of Japan. Tezuka, a decade later and in a different medium, uses his stylized, "cartoonish" artistic techniques to effect a sharp contrast to the serious ways he sees modern Japan selling out; the satirical edge effected by such a contrast suggests that 1970s Japan's selling out is not mitigated by the same rural poverty and postwar desperation of Imamura's prostitute, Tome. Tezuka's new national allegory relies on highly gendered and sexualized representations to caustically critique Japan's materialism and the price of its adaptive transformations and affluence in the postwar period.

In the end of *Ningen Konchûki*, Tokiko has been confronted for her crimes, but she escapes prosecution by fleeing to Greece, where she stands among ancient ruins in the final frames. Such an ending implies that after destroying her home in Japan, including burning down the home with the waxen idol figure of her mother in it, her homing instinct has guided her to a new home, one that functions as an almost originary site of decay. Tokiko represents something larger than herself, no longer finding her home in host individuals marked for success, but now herself standing in elsewhere for a Japan that is empty (*munashii* 虚しい); empty at the core, "she" continues to purvey and mimic Western civilization's decayed values and legacy. Thus metonymically aligned with Greece's ruins, Tokiko as her nation's trope, stands at the edge of extinction atop the Parthenon. The logic of her success is finally expressed as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*, in fact, as inevitably leading to her own abrupt erasure. In this reading, it suggests narratives of Japan we all recognize; what complicates it, however, is the need to cast it in gendered and species terms.

The topic of species is one taken up in Thomas Lamarre's essay in a recent volume of *Mechademia*, "The Limits of the Human." Lamarre focuses mostly on humans become animals in wartime *manga* and *anime*,³⁹ but it is safe to say that Azuma Hiroki's "database animals" as well as cyberpunk "meat puppets" and cyborgs buttress the theoretical background. This discourse, whose content is dominated by *manga*, *anime*, and technologies of gaming and war, is on the cutting edge of one take on the posthuman. Here we might note that a concept of "species" appears in Sedgwick's work as well. She points out in her Austen essay and in

³⁹ Azuma 2009; Lamarre 2008.

"Axiomatic," her brilliant manifesto in *Epistemology of the Closet*, that until the sexual definitions of "homosexual" and "heterosexual" emerged in the late 19th century, the imperative to categorize and regulate the diversity of sexualities did not exist. But then, suddenly, this profusion was reduced to *only one* sexuality, the normative heterosexual one. As Foucault put it, "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."⁴⁰ Sedgwick writes: "Foucault, for instance, mentions the hysterical woman and the masturbating child, along with 'entomologized' sexual categories such as zoophiles, zooerasts, automonosexualists, and gynecomasts, as typifying the new sexual taxonomies, the 'specification of individuals' that facilitated the modern freighting of sexual definition with epistemological and power relations."⁴¹ The human becomes divided against itself, and sexual perversions become a means for marking off who counts as human and who constitutes another species.

In Tezuka's *manga*, we have the species-ification of female heterosexuality as an aberrant and frighteningly adaptive insect-like one that is intrinsically and obsessively concerned with its own survival at all costs; this female species then functions as national allegory for Japan's means of negotiating its success and its identifications on the postwar, late capitalist stage. Meanwhile, in *fujoshi*, what do we see if not masturbating "girls" adapting within a voracious consumer culture in which they themselves are an incessant target of consumption, identifying ambivalently at best with their own species-ification? And at this point, should we not expand this term etymologically to encompass the sense of "species" as "currency," to suggest the money motive so naturalized within consumer culture as well as the profitability of merchandizing cool trends to youth? In such a context, *fujoshi* perhaps express their potential and present desires to survive somehow elsewhere than the straight and narrow, via the species of coupling homosexual men they read, and write, into being from their closets. As Lamarre's essay on reading Japan's wartime *manga* in our time of war and amidst great transnational challenges explicitly argues—and as I aimed to express here—whatever *manga* we take up in our highly political times, our object choices speak us.

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⁴⁰Foucault 1980, pp. 45, 105.

⁴¹Sedgwick 1990, p. 6.

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