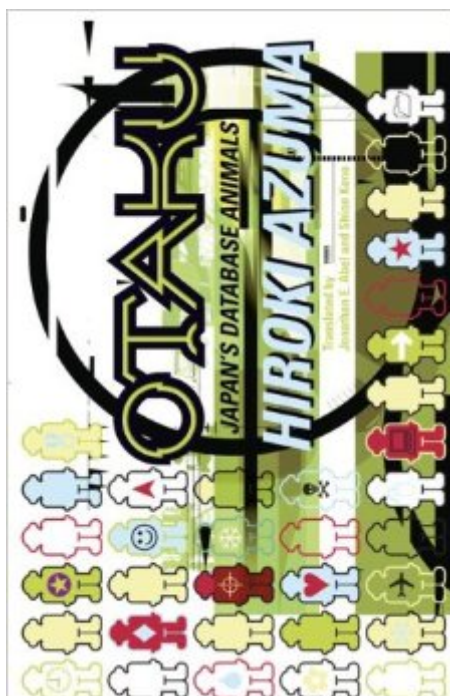


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# Otaku: Japan's Database Animals



## Synopsis

In Japan, obsessive adult fans and collectors of manga and anime are known as otaku. Hiroki Azuma's 'Otaku' offers a critical, philosophical, and historical inquiry into the characteristics and consequences of this consumer subculture.

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## Customer Reviews

In Japan, obsessive adult fans and collectors of manga and anime are known as otaku. When the underground otaku subculture first emerged in the 1970s, participants were looked down on within mainstream Japanese society as strange, antisocial loners. Today otaku have had a huge impact on popular culture not only in Japan but also throughout Asia, Europe, and the United States. Hiroki Azuma's *Otaku* offers a critical, philosophical, and historical inquiry into the characteristics and consequences of this consumer subculture. For Azuma, one of Japan's leading public intellectuals, otaku culture mirrors the transformations of postwar Japanese society and the nature of human behavior in the postmodern era. He traces otaku's ascendancy to the distorted conditions created in Japan by the country's phenomenal postwar modernization, its inability to come to terms with its defeat in the Second World War, and America's subsequent cultural invasion. More broadly, Azuma argues that the consumption behavior of otaku is representative of the postmodern consumption of culture in general, which sacrifices the search for greater significance to almost animalistic instant gratification. In this context, culture becomes simply a database of plots and characters and its consumers mere "database animals." A vital non-Western intervention in postmodern culture and theory, *Otaku* is also

an appealing and perceptive account of Japanese popular culture.

Hiroki Azuma is codirector of the Academy of Humanities in the Center for the Study of World Civilizations at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. A leading cultural critic in Japan, he is the author of seven books, including *Ontological*, *Postal*, which won the 2000 Suntory Literary Prize.

Although the work of French cultural critics is essential for an understanding of postmodernism their works are notorious for being impenetrable in English translations. Their ideas have been "big in Japan" for a long time, but anglophone readers have only become aware of this because of a handful of books about anime including this and "Beautiful Fighting Girl" by Saito Tamaki. Although this book is mainly about anime and dating simulation video games, the theory behind it applies to media outside Japan such as episodic television, science fiction, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, and role playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons*. A core idea is that consumers of this kind of fiction aren't so much consuming stories but instead consuming the systems that underpin fictional worlds. In fact, he believes that many of the anime that outsiders see as quintessentially Japanese such as *Urusei Yatsura* are actually more expressive of American culture than Japanese. This is an accessible and essential book for anyone interested in anime, video games, science fiction, fantasy and role playing as well as critical theory, postmodernism and the question of "What changed in our culture after 1968?"

*Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* is explicitly about the phenomenon of *moé* in anime, but its effect lies in a far broader sense as an explanation of postmodernism without all the flowery, gracious-sounding fluff that French philosophers love in their works. The idea of our common cultural understanding creates standards by which art is judged rather than fixed standards of virtue or arch-narratives now seems obvious in retrospect--my abbreviation of it doesn't do the entirety of the idea justice. Azuma goes further into history of the shift, from the Japanese media's perspective, from modernism to postmodernism, as well as how that created the condition of the anime industry today. I highly recommend this to any fan of Japanese culture who wants to read an interesting take on today's otaku, and also to anyone who wants a straightforward introduction to postmodernism before wading through the bog of the swamp garden known as Jean Baudrillard--pretty to look at but a chore to traverse, sacrificing clarity for the sake of aesthetics. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* is as clear as it gets, and aptly demonstrates that it can be done.

This book is an incredible look at otaku and otaku life. It works to address both the negative and positive aspects in a new and exciting way! A must read for anyone interested in navigating the lines between what is traditional Japanese cultural lines and aesthetics - and what might not be. Superb read and doesn't take a Ph.D to understand the language!

You can find much work on anime, visual novels and the Otaku culture as no more than an idealized reading from the Japan-philic perspective. This book demonstrates the writer's research and objective understanding in this topic. The writer proposes a grand model that explains the Otaku phenomena. Although the validity of this model is debatable, this explanation comes from a unique angle of sound logic and thorough research.

A well explained and in-depth look at the Otaku culture that changed my view of media and media consumption.

If you love Japanese fan culture, you have to read this book. His database animal theory is really great. Sometimes he just jumps around too much.

I thoroughly enjoyed this candid look into the world of the Otaku. However, I would also love to see a follow up to this, seeing as how the Otaku world has really come into a new age since it was published. More and more Otaku are leaving the dark recesses of their abodes and bringing their obsessions into the light of day to share with other Otaku. To put it simply ... I recommend the book, and would like to see more from this author on the subject.

I mentioned to someone how I was reading this book about how Japanese pop culture fans like to "remix" what they're reading into parodies and spinoffs. My friend said to me, "Oh, you mean like how the Tale of Genji was read in the Edo period?" I wish I could remember which of my friends said this, but they cut right through Azuma's BS for me. Indeed, a well-researched book was just published on the Genji subject: *The Tale of Genji: Translation, Canonization, and World Literature*. "Otaku" is a pretty interesting book for understanding and interpreting writers like Derrida and Kojève, but it is not the best book in that category, and Azuma's ideas of what make otaku unique are fairly dubious. It's an entertaining read, but take it with a heap of salt.

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