

# JAPANESE LESSONS

## What can otaku teach us about copyright and gothic girls?

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### Introduction: cultural motif or infringing character?

#### Copyright and cartoon characters

In late 2008 various websites began speculating whether the character 'Emily the Strange' too closely resembled the character 'Rosamund' from the 'Nate the Great' children's book series, published in the US beginning in the 1970s. Attention was specifically drawn to a particular image of Rosamund, dressed in a black dress, with white Mary Janes, surrounded by four black cats, with the caption 'Rosamund did not look hungry or sleepy. She looked like she always looks. Strange.'

The corresponding image of Emily, drawn from a sticker design for skateboards, also depicted Emily in a black dress with white Mary Janes, surrounded by three black cats, with the caption 'Emily didn't look tired or happy. She looked like she always looks. Strange.'

After a phony war of some months, the creators of Emily the Strange (Cosmic Debris) brought an action seeking a declaratory judgment that Emily the Strange did not infringe the rights of the creators of the Nate the Great Books, Marjorie Sharmat and Marc Simont. In turn Sharmat and Simont responded by bringing an infringement action against Cosmic Debris.

In their claim for declaratory relief, Cosmic Debris went to great lengths to establish that there has been a long history of 'gothic girls' who have appeared in popular media since the 1930s:

For many decades a common cultural motif that has appeared in many creative works involves a woman or girl with long dark hair, possibly bangs, and dark clothing who is associated with the macabre, occult, mysterious, or strange, and is sometimes accompanied by creatures such as bats or black cats.<sup>1</sup>

Attached as exhibits to the Complaint for Declaratory Relief are numerous pictures of cartoon and movie characters, such as Wednesday and Morticia from the Addams Family, and manga and anime 'goth girls' intended to illustrate that the 'gothic girl' is a common 'cultural motif'.

In response, the Complaint lodged by Sharmat and Simont, alleging infringement by Cosmic Debris, states:

Every depiction of 'Emily the Strange' includes copyrighted and protectable elements from Plaintiffs' Rosamund character; including but not limited to, Emily's short dress, dark hair with long square-cut bangs, 'mary jane' shoes, 'posse' of four black cats, persistent strangeness, and fascination with dark themes.<sup>2</sup>



Rosamund did not look hungry or sleepy. She looked like she always looks. Strange.

Copyright Images: Sharmat and Simont, *Nate the Great Goes Undercover*, 1974, p 14



Emily didn't look tired or happy. She looked like she always looks. Strange.

Nathan Carrico, *Emily the Strange*, Image produced for skateboard sticker c 1990 © Cosmic Debris

In addition, they claimed copying of numerous specific protectable copyrighted elements of Rosamund and the text of some of the *Nate the Great* books. The Complaint included a number of illustrations which depicted the similarity of Rosamund and Emily drawn from various publications.

The legal dispute was settled on 12 August 2009 when the parties released a joint announcement saying that they had reached agreement resolving all disputes between them.<sup>3</sup> Thus the question of how much similarity was too much for copyright purposes was left unresolved for the general public.

This brief dispute gave rise to a great deal of debate and speculation within Internet circles regarding the nature of appropriation and creativity and the role of copyright in facilitating or stifling cultural expression. As one commentator observed, the fact that the dispute was between two successful groups of authors coloured the nature of the debate.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Emily was a licensed character appeared to prompt people to feel that the copying of the Rosamund character was 'unfair', focusing the consideration of similarity between the characters on the issue of commercial mis-appropriation rather than upon the matter of common themes or artistic expression.

Huston argued that the consideration of issues would have been different if Emily had been a piece of fan fiction or fan art:

Scanning through the online discussion, it's hard not to think that many of Rosamund's supporters would be happy just to hear Rob Reger [the original Emily the Strange artist] break down and exclaim, 'Yes, yes. I love Nate the Great. Emily is totally based on Rosamund. I have just been too embarrassed to admit it'. And, if true, I would love to hear it as well, but, once again, what keeps this from happening is the commercialisation of copyright. In the current legal environment, such an admission is far too freighted with financial consequences to be made.<sup>5</sup>

#### REFERENCES

1. *Cosmic Debris Etc Inc vs Marjorie Weinman Sharmat and Marc Simont, Complaint for Declaratory Relief, United States District Court, Northern District of California*, 18 May 2009, at para 5.
2. *Marjorie Weinman Sharmat and Marc Simont vs Robert Reger, Nathan Carrico, Cosmic Debris et al, Complaint, United States District Court for the District of Arizona*, 4 June 2009, at para 33.
3. 'Emily The Strange And Nate The Great Creators Resolve Dispute' 12 August 2009, <EmilyStrange.com> at 10 September 2009.
4. Shaun Huston, 'Emily the Strange and the problem with American copyright law', *Short-Circuit signs*, 18 June 2009, <[http://olympus\\_mons.typepad.com/short\\_circuit\\_signs/2009/06/emily-the-strange-and-the-problem-with-american-copyright-law.html](http://olympus_mons.typepad.com/short_circuit_signs/2009/06/emily-the-strange-and-the-problem-with-american-copyright-law.html)>, at 10 September 2009.
5. *Ibid.*
6. See, eg. Megan Richardson and David Tan, 'The art of retelling: Harry Potter and copyright in a fan-literature era' (2009) 14 *Media & Arts Law Review* 31; Aaron Schwabach, 'The Harry Potter Lexicon and the World of Fandom: Fan Fiction, Outsider Works, and Copyright' (2009) 70 *University of Pittsburg Law Review* (forthcoming); Rebecca Tushnet, 'User-Generated Discontent: Transformation in Practice' (2008) 31 *Columbia Journal of Law & the Arts* 101.

And so again the debate rages that copyright is too rigid, it stifles creativity and does not reflect the realities of popular culture as a recycling machine for ideas, concepts and images. Is there room in our culture for both Rosamund and Emily the Strange, and for that matter, all of the other gothic girls appended to the Cosmic Debris Complaint? Is there something special about the consideration of these issues from an artistic or commercial context? Much has been written about the need to build a breathing space into copyright for non-commercial fan fiction, particularly in the context of Internet forums.<sup>6</sup> Further, Henry Jenkins' recasting of the fan fiction author as an active creator rather than passive consumer has been very influential in current debates regarding media convergence and the role of copyright in facilitating creativity in that environment.<sup>7</sup> However, despite Jenkins' efforts to extol the virtues of fan creativity, it is likely that the copyright law will still be interpreted in favour of the first in time creator where there is an appearance of copying of a substantial part of the original work, particularly where there has been commercial exploitation of that later creation.<sup>8</sup> For example, JK Rowling appeared to be content to endorse Steven Vander Ark's 'Harry Potter Lexicon' whilst it remained a free website, going so far as to praise it as her 'natural home' and to admit to referring to it herself, but sued for copyright infringement when the work was published as a book.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the Emily the Strange example attracted particular condemnation because it involved potentially competing commercial interests.

An earlier case which demonstrates the likely response of a US Court to the appropriation of cartoon characters considered the reworking of Dr Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* as a parody of the OJ Simpson trial.<sup>10</sup> In that case, the defendant had published a book titled *The Cat NOT in the Hat! A Parody by Dr Juice*, which provided a rhyming commentary on the key events of the OJ Simpson murder trial, based upon the Dr Seuss characters, and, in particular, with OJ Simpson portrayed as the wicked cat with striped hat and white glove (which was a key piece of evidence in the trial). The Court held that the parody work infringed copyright in the original work which was not excused on the basis of fair use.<sup>11</sup> Although the style of the work, including the words and the illustrations, mimicked the work of Dr Seuss, the Court held that the work was not transformative in that it did not critique the original work but merely used it to 'avoid the drudgery of working up something fresh.'<sup>12</sup> The attitude of the US Courts to finding a defence of fair use on the basis of it being a transformative parodic use has been somewhat inconsistent, with the Ninth Circuit in particular being reluctant to recognise satiric, as opposed to parodic, uses, which use the work as a weapon rather than a target of the critique. This approach would therefore indicate that *dojinshi* which are created to explore social themes rather than merely parody the original manga, would be found to be infringing under US copyright law.

The introduction in Australia of the defence which permits fair dealing with a copyright work for the

purposes of parody or satire may lead to a more expansive approach under Australian law, but it remains to be seen how the section will be interpreted by the Courts, and how much weight will be given to the extensive US case law.<sup>13</sup>

This article will now examine the phenomenon of amateur manga as presenting another context within which to consider the nature of the fan creator: a fervent advocate and promoter of the content or a mere infringer? This context is particularly interesting as such *dojinshi* are deliberately created for sale and are therefore commercially exploited, distinguishing them from the majority of fan fiction produced and published on the Internet, on forums such as *LiveJournal*, where commercial exploitation is actively disapproved of.

### Dojinshi markets and copyright infringement

In his 2004 book *Free Culture*, Lawrence Lessig identified the Japanese phenomenon of *dojinshi*, or amateur created manga which are commonly based upon existing manga storylines or characters and are created and distributed without authorisation from the authors.<sup>14</sup> Lessig observes that despite clearly infringing Japanese copyright law, the *dojinshi* market is allowed to flourish.<sup>15</sup> Rather than being a secret or marginal aspect of the creative industries, *dojinshi* is hailed by many as being an integral part of the manga industry in Japan, now accounting for Japan's largest cultural export. Kinsella describes the *dojinshi* scene as 'the largest subculture in contemporary Japan'.<sup>16</sup>

In order to understand the importance of *dojinshi*, it is first important to understand a little about manga. Manga and its moving picture equivalent anime are huge business in Japan. They now constitute the largest export industry in Japan, with manga alone being a US\$4.2 billion-a-year industry.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Australia, where 'graphic novels' continue to be regarded with disdain by the majority of the population (despite the growing popularity of manga titles such as *Fullmetal Alchemist*, *Deathnote*, *Fruits Basket* and *Gravitation*), manga comprises approximately 22 percent of all printed material in Japan, and the various titles cater to all tastes — male, female, adult, young people — as well as more niche markets.<sup>18</sup> Originally published in parts in serial magazines, they are later repackaged as individual volumes. Manga also serve as the source for many anime series and movies, such as *Dragonball* and *Naruto*.

Lessig suggests that the toleration of *dojinshi* creation within the Japanese publishing industry provides an example of where allowing greater 'remix' encourages and fosters greater creativity.<sup>19</sup> Therefore the latitude allowed as a practical matter for *dojinshi* in Japan provides an interesting case study regarding the attitudes to creative latitude within copyright in the popular culture context.

*Dojinshi* is sold at large conventions or markets, limited only by the number of stalls that can physically be accommodated within the particular venue. It is also distributed through clubs and through advertisements placed in specialist magazines. Comic markets ('comiket') are held twice a year and attract

7. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers, Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (1992), and Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006).

8. Section 36 Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).

9. *Warner Bros Entertainment Inc and JK Rowling v RDR Books* F Supp 2d 513 (SDNY 2008). See further, Richardson and Tan, above n 6, and Schwabach, above n 6.

10. *Dr Seuss Enterprises v Penguin Books USA Inc* 109 F 3d 1394 (9th Cir 1997).

11. S 107 Copyright Act (US) permits fair use of a copyright work, subject to four factors: (1) the purpose and character of the use (2) the nature of the copyrighted work (3) the importance of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. These factors are often cited as being more open than the equivalent Australian law of fair dealing.

12. *Dr Seuss Enterprises v Penguin Books USA Inc* at 1401, citing *Campbell v Acuff-Rose Music, Inc* 510 US 569 (1994) at 580.

13. Sections 41A (works) and 103AA (subject matter other than works) *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth).

14. *Dojinshi* may be further broken down into 'original' stories and 'aniparo' stories based upon well known manga series, see Veruska Sabucco 'Guided Fan Fiction: Western Readings of Japanese Homosexual-themed Texts' in Chris Berry, Fran Martin and Audrey Yue (eds) *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia* (2003), 71.

15. Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (2004) 25–28.

16. Sharon Kinsella, 'Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement' (1998) 24.2 *Journal of Japanese Studies* 289.

17. Daniel Pink, 'Japan, Ink: Inside the Manga Industry Complex' (2007) 15.11 *Wired Magazine* <[wired.com/print/techbiz/media/magazine/15-11/ff\\_manga](http://wired.com/print/techbiz/media/magazine/15-11/ff_manga)> at 10 September 2009.

18. *Ibid.*

## Manga and its moving picture equivalent anime are huge business in Japan ... with manga alone being a US\$4.2 billion-a-year industry.

approximately half a million people.<sup>20</sup> Kinsella observes that *dojinshi* conventions:

are the largest mass public gatherings in contemporary Japan. It is not only in this regard that manga conventions bear a sociological significance similar in some senses to that of football in Europe. Most of these contemporary artists and fans are aged between their mid-teens and late 20s.<sup>21</sup>

The nature of the people creating *dojinshi* and participating in these markets means that this is 'one of the very few cultural and social forums in Japan (or any other industrialized country) not dominated by privileged and highly educated sections of society.'<sup>22</sup> Increasingly this has meant that *dojinshi* circles are now evolving distinct cultural genres, reinforcing the conclusion that creativity is encouraged and fostered by the *dojinshi* system.<sup>23</sup> Most *dojinshi* are created by circles of creators, although some circles may consist of only one person. The creators use their own money to print a small run of their manga, usually between 100 and 6000 copies.<sup>24</sup> *Dojinshi* offer a mode of expression for amateurs who do not have the skill or opportunity to work for the official publishers. It also provides scope for stories which fall outside the official or permitted subject matter to be published, and therefore even professionally published manga authors will publish *dojinshi*. As a cultural phenomenon, it has been observed that the majority of *dojinshi* creators are female, although this too is changing over time. A typical *dojinshi* creator is young, female, living at home with her parents, and using the characters from a well-known manga to explore particular themes or issues, especially forbidden love.<sup>25</sup>

A common version of *dojinshi* is what is termed in Western fan fiction as 'slash', the homosexual pairing of the male protagonists of a popular story, and hence named after stories which featured Kirk/Spock from *Star Trek*, now shortened simply to slash. The Japanese equivalent is called 'Yaoi' (meaning 'no climax, no point, no meaning', establishing that the plot is merely a background to exploring the relationship between the key characters).<sup>26</sup> Yaoi focuses upon homosexual relationships between teen (or possibly pre-teen) boys. These boys are highly feminised and to the untrained eye may appear to be beautiful young girls with male genitals.<sup>27</sup> Like their counterparts in slash fiction, these homoerotic pairings are frequently vehicles to explore feminine feelings through a male vehicle. The sexual politics of slash and yaoi remain problematic as they are rarely an accurate description of homosexual

relationships (and indeed both have been the subject of criticism on this basis) and as Jenkins has observed:

Slash makes masculinity the central problem within its narrative development and tries to envision a world where conventional sexual identities are redefined in a more fluid, less hierarchical fashion. Slash ... posits an explicit critique of traditional masculinity, trying to establish an homosocial-homoerotic continuum as an alternative to repressive and hierarchical male sexuality.<sup>28</sup>

Yaoi may present an even more problematic genre depicting as it does under-age boys.<sup>29</sup>

### Why are *dojinshi* markets allowed to operate?

In his article 'Copyright and Comics in Japan: does law explain why all the cartoons my kid watches are Japanese imports?', Mehra identifies a number of theories that have been advanced regarding why the *dojinshi* market has not been shut down by the mainstream manga publishers.<sup>30</sup>

The first argument is based upon cultural norms and practices, suggesting that the borrowing and reuse of characters is a well-established cultural and creative practice in Japan. Mehra notes that manga emerged from the post-war industry of mass produced comic books in which it was common practice to rework and reuse existing characters and in fact real people, such as famous athletes and actors.<sup>31</sup> Indeed it has been suggested that if Osamu Tezuka, the creator of *Kimba the White Lion*, had become aware of the extensive borrowing of his themes and characters in the Disney film *The Lion King* he would have been amused and flattered rather than prompted to sue Disney for copyright infringement.<sup>32</sup> Further, there is a long cultural tradition of 'niban-te-shoho', known as 'copycat syndrome' in Japan, which promotes a belief that it is safer, superior and more appropriate to borrow rather than to innovate.<sup>33</sup>

Next, *dojinshi* may be permitted as they complement and promote the market for the official manga rather than diminish it. Further, the publishing houses do not wish to sue their fans and thereby damage the existing market for their manga. In this context *dojinshi* are characterised as fan fiction, which does more to enhance the original work than detract from it. A large number of derivative *dojinshi* indicates that the original work is popular, serves as a form of advertising for the original work and, because of its amateur nature, does not compete with the original work. When the number of *dojinshi* based upon a particular title increases or decreases this also

19. Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (2008) 79. See also Jordan Hatcher, 'Of Otakus and Fansubs: A Critical Look at Anime Online in Light of Current Issues in Copyright Law' (2005) 2.4 *SCRIPT*-ed 514, 515.

20. Pink, above n 17.

21. Kinsella, above n 16.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.* 300.

24. Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (1996) 38.

25. Pink, above n 17, and Kinsella, above n 23.

26. It may also have a more sexualised and cruder meaning, see Mark McLelland, 'The World of Yaoi: The Internet, Censorship and the Global "Boys' Love" Fandom' (2005) 23 *Australian Feminist Law Journal* <<http://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers/147>> at 20 October 2009.

27. Kinsella, above n 16, 301.

28. Jenkins, above n 7, 219.

29. McLelland, above n 26.

30. Salil Mehra, 'Copyright and Comics in Japan: Does Law Explain Why All the Cartoons My Kid Watches are Japanese Imports?' (2002) 55 *Rutgers Law Review*, <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=347620>> at 10 September 2009.

31. *Ibid.* 33.

32. Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture has Invaded the US* (2007) 45.

33. Edwin Mansfield, 'The Speed and Cost of Industrial Innovation in Japan and the United States: External vs Internal Technology' (1988) 34 *Management Science* 1157-1168 and Kiyohiko Ito and Elizabeth Rose, 'Innovations and geographic focus: A comparison of US and Japanese Firms' (1999) 8 *International Business Review* 55-74.

34. Schodt, above n 24, 42.

serves as a kind of market research for the publisher regarding the popularity trends of the original work. This is not to say that the *dojinshi* are poor quality. In fact, a side benefit of this kind of approach to *dojinshi* means that mainstream manga creators often emerge from the *dojinshi* circles. *Dojinshi* is therefore recognised as a valuable training ground for manga authors. Schodt observes: 'several of today's popular mainstream stars, such as Rumiko Takahashi, Hisashi Ishii, or the women's group CLAMP, either once worked in, or emerged from, the *dojinshi* market.'<sup>34</sup> Further, established manga authors have been known to publish *dojinshi* versions of their own stories when the subject matter is outside that which may be permitted by the publisher. Maki Murakami, author of the *Gravitation* series which focuses upon the loves and troubles of a young singer, has published *dojinshi* featuring her own characters in sexually explicit circumstances, under the *dojinshi* circle name Crocodile Avenue.<sup>35</sup>

As Lessig and Mehra have noted, whilst these factors suggest why *dojinshi* might benefit the manga industry as a whole, none of these factors explains why individual manga creators do not choose to sue *dojinshi* creators.

It has been suggested that it is simply too difficult and too expensive to litigate these matters in Japan with the likelihood that damages will also be comparatively small.<sup>36</sup>

A parallel explanation is that there is an unwritten agreement between the manga publishers and the operators of the *dojinshi* conventions, described in an article in *Wired* magazine as the 'anmoku no ryokai' (the unspoken, implicit agreement).<sup>37</sup> Recognising the value of not alienating their own market base, the manga publishers turn a blind eye to the *dojinshi* conventions provided that production remains on a limited scale.

The sole cited example of an infringement action being brought against a *dojinshi* creator related to a *dojinshi* series featuring a Pokemon displayed in a pornographic manner. In that case Nintendo prompted a criminal investigation of a *dojinshi* series leading to the arrest of the author, who was imprisoned for 22 days and fined approximately \$800.<sup>38</sup> As Mehra has pointed out, the mere fact that this isolated incident attracted so much attention and provoked such an intensely shocked response from the infringer, indicates how rare and unexpected such a prosecution was.<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusions: Lessons for the Western world?

Several authors have analysed the important role played by fansubbers (fans who provide subtitles to Japanese anime and distribute unauthorised copies to Western audiences) in introducing American audiences to anime, and hence slowly opening up a new audience for the Japanese creators, despite their early dismissal of the US market.<sup>40</sup> These stories illustrate the importance of refraining from over-enforcement of intellectual property rights in a developing market. They also demonstrate how Japanese media was

introduced to the US market, through a domestic prism of Western fans.

Interestingly of course, the Western world is just now seeming to catch up with the joy and creativity of manga and anime. *AstroBoy*, the original creation of the 'Father of Manga' Osamu Tezuka, is now showing on the big screen as a computer animation movie and *Deathnote* has been optioned for a Hollywood movie.<sup>41</sup> As Schodt has observed, 'Publishers issue manga, but the real driving force behind the spread of manga and anime in the English world is the fans.'<sup>42</sup>

So are there any lessons that Western copyright can learn from the tolerance of *dojinshi* in Japan? The tolerance of *dojinshi* creators by the manga industry provides a model for the argument that strong enforcement of copyright may not be the most effective means of fostering creativity. However, it is a fragile peace, based not upon legal immunity, but upon the unwritten, unspoken agreement of the publishers to the concept that *dojinshi* in general benefit the manga industry as a whole. The difficulty is that in an Australian context, it is likely that copyright owners would be concerned to protect the reputation of their characters, such as preventing their use in a pornographic or paedophilic context, and would therefore want to retain all rights for the purposes of tightly controlling and licensing their use. The reliance upon an unwritten agreement, tradition and custom which protects the *dojinshi* culture in Japan therefore has no equivalent in this context.

In her examination of otaku culture, Kinsella explores the role of *dojinshi* in fostering freedom of expression amongst the younger generations in Japan, with otaku being characterised as individualistic and immature in terms of social behaviour.<sup>43</sup> It is the underground 'alternative' flavour of *dojinshi* that allows this resistance culture to flourish. If this is the case, then certainly, the non-orthodox flavour of *dojinshi* should provide a role model for creativity in the Australian context in light of the new parody and satire defence.

Given the pervasive influence of the manga industry upon Japan's gross cultural industry, both domestic and export, it is inevitable that the Western world will look to the way in which the industry regulates itself and renews and fosters the creative cycle. Whilst there are key cultural differences between commercial production and innovation in Japan and the West, there is increasingly dialogue and exchange regarding approaches to regulation and enforcement of intellectual property. What this brief study suggests is that allowing breathing space for small scale amateur production maintains a vibrant interest in and importantly an emotional attachment to that industry. And in an age where attention spans are short, that is a valuable link indeed.

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35. See Maki Murakami, Wikipedia, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maki\\_Murakami](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maki_Murakami)> at 28 October 2009, and Nathaniel Noda, 'When Holding On Means Letting Go: Why Fair Use Should Extend to Fan-Based Activities' (2008) 5 *University of Denver Sports & Entertainment Law Journal* 64 <<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1376223>> at 30 October 2009.

36. Lessig, above n 15, 27 and Mehra, above n 30, 41.

37. Pink, above n 17.

38. Mehra, above n 30, 34.

39. Ibid. See also Noda, above n 35, 16-17.

40. Sean Leonard, 'Celebrating Two Decades of Unlawful Progress: Fan Distribution, Proselytization Commons, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation' (2005) 12 *UCLA Entertainment Law Review* 189; Hatcher, above n 19, 514.

41. 'Deathnote', Wikipedia, <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deathnote>> at 28 October 2009.

42. Schodt, above n 24.

43. Kinsella, above n 16, 294. 'Otaku' generally means 'geek' and has been applied both to *dojinshi* fans and Japanese youth generally. It has now been picked up in the West as referring to a fan of manga and anime or perhaps Japanese culture more generally. In Japan it has had a more negative connotation.