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Collaborative Creativity, Dark Energy, and Anime's Global Success

協調的創造性、ダーク・エナジー、アニメの
グローバルな成功

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In this essay, I give an overview of some of the main ideas of my new book *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*. Drawing on ethnographic research, including fieldwork at Madhouse, as well as a historical consideration of the original *Gundam* series, I discuss how anime can be best understood in terms of platforms for collaborative creativity. I argue that the global success of Japanese animation has grown out of a collective social energy that operates across industries—including those that produce film, television, manga (comic books), and toys and other licensed merchandise—and connects fans to the creators of anime. For me, this collective social energy is the soul of anime.

本論文において、拙著『アニメのダーク・エナジー：協調的創造性と日本のメディアの成功例』における中心的なアイデアの紹介を行う。アニメを制作する企業マッドハウスにおけるフィールドワークを含む、人類学的な研究を行うとともに、オリジナルの『ガンダム』シリーズに関する歴史的な考察をふまえて、協調的創造性のプラットフォームとしてアニメを位置付けることができるかどうか検討する。日本アニメのグローバルな成功は、映画、テレビ、漫画、玩具、そしてその他のライセンス事業を含めて、アニメファンと創作者をつなぐ集団的なソーシャル・エナジーに基づいていると主張する。このような集団的なソーシャル・エナジーがアニメの精神であると著者は考えている。

Keywords: Media, Popular Culture, Globalization, Japan, Ethnography

In my new book, *The Soul of Anime* (Condry 2013), I examine the worlds of Japanese animation to explore the ways cultural movements succeed—that is, gain value and go global through forces of collective action. By some estimates, a staggering 60 percent of the world's tv broadcasts of cartoons are Japanese in origin (jetro 2005).[1] Anime feature films encompass a range of works from mass entertainment to art-house cinema, from primetime mainstream children's series to late night *otakii* series. I use the word "anime" to refer to Japanese animated film and television, but the worlds of anime extend well beyond what appears on screens. Anime is characteristic of contemporary media in its interconnected webs of commercial and cultural activities that reach across industries and national boundaries. In the United States and elsewhere, anime fan conventions draw tens of thousands of participants, many dressed as their favorite characters. A vast array of licensed merchandise depends on anime characters, as well, characters often born in manga (comic books), but also in videogames, light novels, and even tv commercials. What is the secret of anime's global success?

Many scholars, fans, and media observers who wrestle with this question focus on the content of anime films and series themselves or on the creators who design the characters and worlds. In my book, I start from a different perspective by using fieldwork in animation studios and other sites of anime-related production to explore ethnographically the social side of media. I start with the logic and practices of making animation and use this perspective as a way to think about cultural production more broadly. I argue that the secret of anime's success is collaborative creativity, which operates across media industries and connects official producers to unofficial fan production. Put simply, success arises from social dynamics that lead people to put their energy into today's media worlds. This collective social energy is what I mean by the "soul" of anime.

What do I mean by "collective social energy"? During my fieldwork, I witnessed the camaraderie among the many people who make anime developed through storyboard discussions and script meetings. I felt the energy at fan conventions, when hundreds of people cheered for the most entertaining anime music videos. The importance of social energy can be seen historically as well. The original *Gundam Mobile Suits* series, which began airing in 1979, was initially cancelled before the end of its first year of broadcast because the sponsor's toys were not selling well. But the intensity of fan interest led to a revival of the series, which is now one of the best-known franchises in anime. In my experience, writers who emphasize the business side of media often fail to recognize the importance of the social energy that leads to business success. From my perspective as a cultural anthropologist, there is a social life to media that extends far beyond the business world. My book aims to illustrate how that social energy operates and what it means for media success.

1 Globalization from Below

Anime is a success in the sense that it became a sustainable form of creative expression and a style recognized as "Japanese" that went global without the push of major corporations (at least at first) and thus represents a kind of globalization from below. In other words, anime demonstrates the diversity of actors involved in the transformation of a small-scale, niche cultural form into something that reaches wider audiences and influences people around the world.

Why did Japan, of all places, become a global leader in animation? How did the cultural universe of anime expand from being a (mostly) children's genre to something of value for teenagers and adults, as well, and why did this not happen in the United States until much later? What can anime tell us

about the emergence of media forms that depend not only on corporate backing but also on grassroots and independent efforts to extend audiences and impact? These questions give us the opportunity to rethink how we understand the emergence and spread of distinctive cultural forms as something other than a game of "follow the money." Instead, we need to follow the activity, the energy, and the commitment of those who care, starting with what is most meaningful to them. Anime is instructive because it reveals the centrality of a kind of social energy that emerges in the space between people and media. For me, the soul of anime does not point to some ultimate, internal essence of the media as an object. Rather, the soul of anime points to this social energy that arises from our collective engagements through media, and as such, it gives us an alternative way to think about what is of value in media. Like the cosmological "dark energy" that is accelerating the expansion of the universe yet is unseen, I think of the collective social energy that is expanding the cultural universe of anime as a kind of "dark energy" too, because it is largely unseen by commentators. Given the problematic associations of "soul" with "essence," we might think of the soul of anime in terms of a social "dark energy." This dark energy suggests new possibilities for producing creative platforms on which to shape new futures.

The book's central thematic is the interplay between an internal logic of anime as a kind of portable creative platform (glossed as "characters and worlds" but somewhat more complex) and the social contexts in which anime gains its meaning and value—what I'm calling the "social side of media," which includes both paid labor and fan activities. By looking at cultural production across categories of producers, we can gain insight into the workings of contemporary media and culture by reflecting on pre-Internet examples of user-generated content, so-called "viral" media, and the complexities of transmedia synergies. Overall, this is a story of the emergence of a media form that, as it matured and spread, gained both wider mass audiences and deeper, more niche-oriented fans in Japan and overseas. The example of anime is all the more striking, and more provocative in terms of thinking about how cultural movements go global, once we recognize that anime studios succeeded despite relatively modest economic returns. The idea of collaborative creativity enables us to map the broader connections of anime beyond the media texts themselves.

Many studies of animation begin with a question about the object—*what is anime?*—but I suggest a different entry point: *who makes anime*? The chapters of my book can be read as an attempt to understand anime's value in terms of a circle of interaction across categories of producers. Rather than beginning with the contrasts between production and consumption, answering the question "Who makes anime?" starts from a different place, making central not only the roles of anime creators but also the roles of manga artists, sponsors, merchandisers, and fans as part of wider processes of production.[2] In the chapters, I examine, in turn, the making of anime by looking at how professional animators design new anime around characters and worlds (chapters 1-2); the emergence of different approaches to anime, such as feature films versus tv, as a way to think about the transmedia connections that are necessary to make anime successful, notably the key role of manga (chapter 3); how synergies between anime creators and toy companies pushed the development of robot anime that emphasized "real" (i.e., grownup) themes and helped to expand audiences for anime from children to adults (chapter 4); how "cutting-edge" studios design their own workplaces as (more or less) open spaces for creativity (chapter 5); how online file sharing and the practices of "fansubbing" expand the cultural universe of anime amid fierce

debates over the legitimacy of copyright (chapter 6); and how Japanese *otaku* (obsessive fans) channel their desire for anime characters, even to the point of wanting to marry them, and whether this should be viewed as a deeper descent into a closed-off niche world or, instead, as another gesture toward mass appeal (chapter 7). In the conclusion, I return to some of the larger questions about how cultural forms travel from niche to mass — or, perhaps more accurate, from niche to more widely dispersed niches — and the diverse ways in which media are related to collective action.

In this circular journey, we can see how the value of anime arises from its movement, a fluidity not confined to a single location or to unique, original authors. This understanding of value as arising from living social relations in dynamic interaction shares inspiration with some foundational anthropologists and their approaches to culture and economy, including Bronislaw Malinowski (Malinowski 1984 (1922)) and Marcel Mauss (Mauss 1990), both of whom found models of economic action centered on rational individuals hopelessly naïve, a lesson relevant today and still explored by many. My efforts build on the work of many other scholars who attend to the social side of media as well (Ginsburg, et al. 2002; Ito 2010; Larkin 2008). By drawing attention to the circulation and reworking of cultural forms, *The Soul of Anime* speaks to the often-unpredictable potential of ongoing, collaborative projects.

Because collaboration is often contentious, chaotic, and fluid, we can observe in anime a political struggle over the control and circulation of value. The term "collaborate," when used in relation to new social media, tends to have a positive meaning of "working together," but we might note that it can mean "working for the enemy," too. In contrast to a notion of participation, which implies less hierarchy, collaboration carries hints of disciplined structure. This is appropriate because creating animation usually requires a specialized, often workmanlike repetitiveness in which mimicking the drawings of others with great precision, over and over, is a basic principle of production. In some ways analogous to the contrast between "working together" and "submission to the enemy," the study of popular culture more generally can lead to optimistic readings of collective projects that tackle complex problems through innovation and shared commitments, or pessimistic readings that emphasize the dreary, constricting forces that reproduce hegemonic structures of inequality. This binary of oppression and liberation is difficult to escape, especially in our current era, when even promises of "freedom" often seem to impose the constrictions of free-market capitalism, or neoliberalism, in the name of consumer choice. That is why looking at a specific case study such as anime in detail can offer unique insights into the workings of media today by giving us a chance to track what happens when something moves across platforms and across national boundaries. In this respect, the lessons of anime with regard to questions of creativity and control echo against a backdrop of broader social and economic change globally.

2 Ethnography and Fieldwork in Anime Studios

As a cultural anthropologist, I approach these issues by attending to some of the nuances of social life and then use those details to develop larger theories about the workings of media and culture. My research centers on ethnographic fieldwork, primarily in several anime studios in Tokyo, between 2004 and 2010. I spent three and a half months in the summer of 2006 attending script meetings, voice recordings, and editing sessions, and I conducted interviews with dozens of creators. In the years before and after, I made one or two brief trips to Japan annually to continue my research. My main field sites were Gonzo, Aniplex, and Madhouse,

but I also visited Studio Ghibli, Production I.G., Toei Animation, Sunrise, and several other smaller operations where I observed creators at work. During one voice-recording session, I was even recruited to be a voice actor for a couple of lines (in Japanese) when an extra was needed (see chapter 5). For comparison with practices within the United States, I spent a day at the Cartoon Network studios in Burbank, California, and I interviewed a Korean American anime director who works in the United States, Japan, and South Korea (chapter 3). In Japan, I observed labor at a high-end toy factory (the Bandai Hobby Center in Shizuoka), and I met with Japanese anime magazine writers, publishers, scholars, and fans. My research also extended beyond today's workplaces, both in thinking historically and in other realms of fandom. I attended anime conventions in Boston (2006–2009) and Los Angeles (2011) and the enormous "fanzine" convention Comic Market in Tokyo (August 2006), and I follow many aspects of online anime fandom both in Japan and the United States. I also watched a lot of anime, and I read what other academics, fans, and commentators have to say.

Given the substantial international influence of anime, readers might be surprised by the crowded, often disheveled look of the places where animators work. I was surprised by the piles and piles of paper, the intensity of hand-drawn work, and the sheer amount of labor required. I was also impressed by the workers' focus, energy, and commitment to working together on enormous projects. Collaborative creativity is more than jargon for animators.

Most of Tokyo's anime studios are scattered in the suburbs west and north of the city, generally in the pie slice formed by the Chuo train line (heading west from Shinjuku) and the Seibu Ikebukuro line (heading northwest from Ikebukuro). The buildings tend to be nondescript, concrete slabs that could be mistaken for the countless condos and small

office buildings extending in all directions from Tokyo's center. For all of its international impact, Japan's anime production remains in many ways a cottage industry. A studio can employ anywhere from fifteen to a few hundred people, and the studios rely on local freelance animators as well as large offshore animation production houses primarily in South Korea, the Philippines, and China. By some estimates, 90 percent of the frames used in Japanese animation are drawn overseas, although the work of design and storytelling is more often done in Japan. Many anime firms cooperate in production, especially when crunch time comes, and individual animators' career paths can lead through several studios. The studios operate as a fragmented but complexly networked epicenter of what has become an increasingly global business.

Inside the workspaces, the commonalities among the studios I visited—the lived-in atmosphere, the backlit desks for the animators (some of whom, inevitably, were face-down asleep), the rows of computers for others—were reminders of how anime production in Japan has, and has not, evolved since the industry began in the late 1950s. Most of the dozen anime studios I visited were work-worn and bare bones. Although anime studios also had a playful side, with musical instruments and other pastimes lying about, they are places of strict deadlines, where the work literally piles up.

To spend time in an anime studio is to be struck by the labor of making media. My working definition of "animation" is a media form that is created one frame at a time. A tremendous amount of work is required, with painstaking attention to detail, to create *each frame* of film (or, at least, multiple frames per second). It's a crazy idea. In fact, in the film *Little Nemo*, a short from 1911 that mixes animation and live action, the American cartoonist Winsor McCay portrayed his start at "drawing pictures that will move" as a parlor bet against his cigar-

smoking friends. In the film, he says that he will draw 4000 pictures in one month's time, and make his characters move! His friends think he's crazy. They laugh, rubbing his head to see if perhaps his skull is cracked. The film then cuts to McCay's stylized workplace, and we see the thousands of pages of paper, barrels of ink, and a playful reference to the inevitable missteps of creating animated work. In the end, however, McCay succeeds, amazing his friends with the magic of animation. One wonders, would he have had the energy to do all that work if it weren't for his friends waiting in anticipation? The motivation that arises from that anxiety of wanting to please one's friends and peers is part of what I mean by "social energy." It is not easily recognized in economic terms, but it plays a key role in defining what becomes successful.

Let's jump ahead almost a century and take a closer look at work in an anime studio by visiting a morning meeting with an anime director in the early stages of creating a film that went on to win the Best Animated Feature award from the Japan Academy Prize Association in 2010.

In the summer of 2008, the director Mamoru Hosoda was deep into creating the storyboards for his feature film *Summer Wars*. It was a year before the film's scheduled release, and the work was heating up. The producer of *Summer Wars* invited me to observe a meeting between the director and his computer graphics team. I was struck by how storyboards help guide the collaborative creativity of anime production in distinctive ways.

On the day of the meeting, Hosoda met me at a small office building for Madhouse Studios near Ogikubo Station in western Tokyo and we went upstairs. Feeble air conditioners hummed in the small, muggy room, which was barely large enough for the ten of us around a table. An array of snacks and canned coffee, apparently bought at a nearby convenience store, was spread out in the middle of the table. Work in an anime studio is not glamorous, and a lot of it is solitary. The film's young producer, Yūichirō Saitō, introduced everyone in the room, including me as an observer and a couple of other Madhouse staff members. Except for an assistant producer for Madhouse, the rest of the group was men. Most of the people were from Digital Frontier, a leading computer graphics production company that works in film, videogames, and more. Hosoda began the meeting with comments about an earthquake that had rocked northern Japan the night before, with shocks reaching hundreds of miles away in Tokyo. But this was still three years before the Tōhoku (northeastern Japan) earthquake of March 2011 and the devastating tsunami and nuclear crisis that followed. The quake we experienced in 2008 caused little damage. At the meeting, Hosoda asked whether anyone had injured friends or family, and no one did. "Well, it was just an earthquake," he concluded. Then he lit a cigarette and got down to business.

We each had a stack of paper in front of us: the current draft of the storyboards for the first half of the film. Over the next three hours, Hosoda led us through the roughly three hundred pages, sometimes skimming quickly and sometimes stopping to discuss certain issues in more detail. He discussed "camera angles" (as they would be drawn), the possible effects that could be used, and above all the look and feel that he was aiming for. He noted that some of the scenes should look "cartoony" (*kaatūni*), in contrast to the more photorealistic 3d computer graphics animation (full 3d cg) used, for example, in the film *Appleseed: Ex Machina*, on which several of the cg team members in the room had worked. For Hosoda's film, most of the character movements would be hand-drawn. Many of the backgrounds were hand painted, as well—notably, those featuring the luxurious rural home in Nagano where much of the action takes place. Even this hand-drawn work, however, would be scanned into computers to be

assembled and edited. The computer graphics would be used especially for certain scenes that were best done with computer modeling, such as the virtual world setting (although this was not 3d in the sense of requiring glasses to give the illusion of depth). At one point, Hosoda noted a scene that required a boy to look out the back of a car as it moved down the street. "This scene we're going to need your help on," he said, explaining that it was very difficult to portray a receding landscape without using computers.

Hosoda trained as an oil painter in art college, and his visual sensibility shows through in the nuances of his storyboards. He is adept at shaping the contours and tempo of his films. Hosoda's drawings are filled with a kind of kinetic energy. Even in the morning in a sweaty room with canned coffee, we found ourselves being pulled into the world of the film. We sensed the tension between the characters as they faced their respective challenges. We flipped through the storyboards, page by page, scene after scene, and the visual storytelling was clearly taking shape in the minds of the cg team. But to be honest, the film did not really take shape for me. I found it very difficult to imagine, based on the sketches and scribbled directions, what the final product would actually become. Here, too, a personal history of certain experiences was required to make sense of the drawings, and I lacked that experience.

Even so, there was something about being in a meeting like that, with others in the room intensely focused on the project at hand that has a galvanizing effect. The collective attention helped build connections, bring focus, and clarify the roles of the many people needed to complete such a large project. Such meetings did more than convey abstract information about a mechanical process of production; they helped reinforce a sense of engaged commitment. The energy in the room was contagious, and this energy begins to give a sense

of something larger than the media object itself, something emerging from a collective commitment among those who care. Storyboards helped achieve that focus of attention, and that focus began to take on a life of its own.[3]

Meetings like this regarding background paintings, characters' movements, special effects, voice acting, music, and so on, would continue in the months that followed. After the meetings, the more solitary work of drawing and constructing the scenes would continue. Much of the practice of animation is focused downward, toward a page of paper or a computer screen. As an ethnographer, however, I found the meetings indispensable because they clarified some of the underlying logic of making animation and allowed me to experience the energy of working closely with others—sharing information, working out goals, dividing up the labor.

3   Labor and Media Studies

Storyboards are intriguing because they are integral to the process of production, but in the end they are regarded as waste, a useless by-product, and in most cases are thrown away. This highlights something we intuitively know: What we see on-screen represents a small slice of the labor involved in the overall projects. Hosoda's job is to guide much of that work, but it was readily apparent that problem solving, creativity, and innovation would be required, to a greater or lesser extent, at many stages in the process. Moreover, success itself depends not only on production inside studios, but also on many factors the creators cannot control. This fundamental unpredictability requires creators to take a leap of faith into projects when they are uncertain of the outcome. Both history and futurism play a role in guiding the creative action that flows through anime projects, revealing how our cultural assumptions go into creating the worlds we inhabit. Writers about anime get the luxury of knowing how

things turned out, but this can give a false impression of the perspective of working in media worlds. In this regard, anime gives us a concrete example to think through the social dynamics of purposeful creativity in a global context. Anime exists not only as media but also as labor and energy that connects creators, businesses, and fans. Collaborative creativity can offer a way to rethink the value of contemporary media, not only as content, but also as connection. In turn, it allows us to extend analyses across locales, platforms, and kinds of producers.

This doesn't mean that anime creators are getting rich. The value of the cultural success of anime as a global phenomenon, and the energy of the participants, is not easily translated into monetary rewards for the studios. This means low salaries for animators; it also has broader significance. Japan, like other advanced industrial nations, is facing the challenge of developing new industries, especially now that manufacturing increasingly is moving overseas to low-wage nations. When I began this project in the early 2000s, I imagined that the "content industries" (the Japanese term for media, publishing, and entertainment) might be a powerful engine of economic growth; the reality is more complicated. Although the work of creating scripts and storyboards, designing characters and background artwork, and drawing key frames is generally done in Japan, much of the drawing of "in-between" frames by lower-wage animators is done overseas in South Korea, the Philippines, and China. Depending on how you measure it, "Japanese" animation is made mostly outside Japan. For the Madhouse producer Yūichirō Saitō, however, that really isn't an issue as long as the quality of work is solid. "We just want to make good animation; we are not so concerned about national origins," he said.[4] Still, given the budget constraints of making animation and the tremendous amount of work required, we find that cultural success and economic success mean different things.

Some people are quick to blame unauthorized online access to anime as the culprit, but other factors are important, too, including how low budgets are related to the history of Japanese animation and the terms set by early tv series like *Astro Boy* (see chapter 3).

For workers, the pressure of working quickly and cheaply, combined with the uncertainty of the success, adds to the precarious nature of the business. According to an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, nine out of ten animators leave the industry within three years to move to other areas of work. The average salary for animators in their twenties was estimated at $11,000 per year and only twice that for animators in their thirties (Hayashi 2009).[5] Long hours are the norm, and many animators work freelance, moving from project to project, often without benefits. Most animators burn out or simply can't make a living on the pay they receive for their drawings. Those who remain tend to be the ones who work quickly and who can handle the grueling pace.

In terms of economic success, anime seems more of a cautionary tale than a model of entrepreneurial innovation. The same *Wall Street Journal* article noted that some animators leave the business for more lucrative work in videogames. In fact, when several representatives from the Japanese videogame company Square Enix visited mit in March 2009 to give a seminar on the making of the *Final Fantasy XII* game, I was excited to share my insights about the workings of characters and the intriguing parallels between anime and videogame production. But the director, Hiroshi Minagawa, also had something to ask me about my study of anime: "Why are you studying such an old-fashioned and unprofitable industry?" Good question.

For me, the answer to the question "Why study anime?" lies in an interest in uncovering the dynamics of cultural movements that don't rely on the promise of exorbitant wealth as the measure of success. Anime has become a globally recognized

style—or, more accurately, a generative platform for creativity—despite relatively modest economic returns. Some researchers describe animation as a business, with a kind of "follow-the-money" approach (Tada 2002). But in an era of user-generated media, when amateur productions can rival those of professional studios, we need a wider perspective to map how emergent cultural forms develop and take hold. Japan, as the world's third largest economy and a robust epicenter in the import and export of popular culture, provides a useful location for unraveling the dynamic political struggles over the meanings of popular culture, both as cultural resource and as commercial product.

4　From Failure to Success: Fans Revive *Gundam*

The unusual story of the Gundam franchise offers another perspective on how "social energy" is a better explanation of media success compared to narrower economic interpretations. The reason is simple. The first series of *Gundam Mobile Suits* was cancelled by the sponsor because it was deemed a business failure, but it was revived when an outside toy company recognized the power of the social energy of older fans.

One of the producers of the original *Gundam* series, Masao Ueda, is someone I met during fieldwork. He described the aims of the original creators who worked with the director Yoshiyuki Tomino: "We struggled to make a show that rid itself of the kinds of lies (*usoppoi*) that characterized hero programs up to that point. In *Gundam*, the robots do not have superpowers. They are just weapons of battle. In addition, most heroes that came before were unrealistically courageous, but in *Gundam* they had doubts, and they were scared. This seemed to us to have much more reality (*reariteii*)." [6] In the original *Gundam*, this seriousness was conveyed through the gruesome destruction of war and its

real human consequences. In the first episode, one of the lead female characters, Fraw Bow, watches helplessly as her mother is killed by a blast. The series unfolds by following the Earth Federation spaceship *White Base* as it tries to escape from rebel Zeon pursuers. A complex cat-and-mouse game plays out over the course of the series, with side stories and complex conspiracies developing alongside love affairs and family trauma. According to Ueda, the creators became increasingly engrossed in (*hamatta*) the world of Gundam, and their excitement and commitment to the project grew deeper and more intense. "We wanted to make a world that seemed like it could actually exist," he said.

Much to the disappointment of Clover, the toy company that sponsored the original series, however, the Gundam toys did not sell. Ueda acknowledged that it was a difficult time for the creators (*yappari, taihen deshita*): "Clover complained in many ways. The show was too complex, too confusing. It was too dark. Children couldn't follow what was going on. Clover wanted all kinds of changes. But with animation, you have to plan episodes six months in advance to get them on air. It's not the kind of thing you can easily change in reaction to what audiences respond to." [7] What did Clover want? "It's a little harsh to put it this way, but they just wanted toys to sell. They didn't really care how we did it," said Ueda. Moreover, past examples seemed to clarify *Gundam*'s failure. In contrast to shows like *Astro Boy*, which generally reached a resolution at the end of each half-hour, *Gundam* wove complex story arcs, with storylines extending across many episodes. If you missed an episode, it would be difficult to catch up the following week. This was before vcrs and video rental stores, not to mention digital video recorders. When the toys didn't sell, Clover canceled the program early—after ten months instead of the one year that was originally planned.

But then something remarkable happened:

Bandai, then a small toy company, approached Clover and asked to buy the rights to make plastic models of Gundam robots. Clover was not in the business of making plastic models, so it was happy to sell those particular rights. A representative at Bandai recognized that with *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Star Wars*, teenagers were eager to build such models, and he thought that Gundam plastic models would be similarly successful. Sure enough, sales of Gundam plastic models (which came to be known as GunPla or *ganpura*) boomed. It is tempting to see this as a prophetic moment: Clover eventually went bankrupt, and Bandai is now Japan's largest toy company. New variations on the Gundam series are still being created. In other words, the key to *Gundam*'s success arose from the fan energy that built up among older, more hardcore fans, even though Clover's aim of selling toys to young children was a failure. The social energy is what makes possible business models, and successful business models in turn help promote the emergence of more social energy.

Other synergies helped *Gundam* as well, especially as the broader media context around anime shifted in the late seventies and early eighties (Otsuka and Sakakibara 2001). As fans matured, they founded new forms of fandom. Specialty anime magazines aimed at teenagers and older readers, such as *Animage*, had been launched with the *Space Battleship Yamato* boom. Anime fan clubs emerged around *Gundam* in high schools and colleges. Many of these fans were energized by the military and sci-fi elements of *Gundam*; in turn, "research" (*kenkyū*) into the show became an important fan activity. For example, one of the show's conceits was that "Minovsky particles" could be used as a kind of defense shield. Fans took this idea and developed detailed theories of "Minovsky physics" (*Minofusukii butsurigaku*), producing study guides and other fan-made materials. Significantly, the creators never objected to fans' interpretations of the Gundam

world. According to Ueda, "When asked about these fan works, we always said,‘it's possible that's the way it is.'" This openness helped energize fans in the 1980s and beyond, an early example of how media could be a platform for participation as much as an object of consumption. In this regard, too, we see the precursors of today's social media and a kind of prehistory of media's shift from content to platform.

Collaborative creativity in *Gundam* draws attention to the synergies among anime, the toy companies, and fans. Clearly, we need to look beyond the content of the show and the marketing strategies to understand the feedback loops that led to the emergence of a popular movement, even after the series was deemed a failure. The eventual success of the *Gundam* series illustrates the power of fans as active participants in the production of the world around the series. But we also see that explaining the phenomenon in terms of "spreadable" or "drillable" media (Jenkins 2009b) risks pulling us into a critical reading inside the world of *Gundam* when we also need to be sensitive to changes in the "outside world," including the development of anime specialty magazines and high school and college fan circles. The emergence of anime's success comes from this kind of wider dynamic.

5　Conclusion

I would argue that paradigm shift is reshaping the study of media and popular culture. We are increasingly aware of the distinction between the idea that media acts as a *conveyor of content* (like a newspaper) and, in contrast, media can also be a *platform for participation* (like Twitter). This is not so much a contrast between types of media, but rather a contrast in how we analyze media. Of course, people can participate in newspapers, like writing letters to the editor. By the same token, Twitter is also a conveyor of content. But depending on whether we think in terms of content or platform,

we raise different kinds of questions. If we think in terms of content, we tend to analyze media texts and messages. On the other hand, if we think in terms of platforms, we emphasize social practices, the emergence of relationships, and the ways networks develop through communication. It seems to me that this latter perspective can offer important new approaches to the study of media, especially as social media becomes increasingly important. During the course of my research, I found that the story of anime's success is also in many ways a kind of pre-history of social media. Anime is best understood in terms of the dark energy that characterizes the social in media.

In the examples above, I have tried to draw attention to the ways ethnography can help us see the ways in which anime operates as a platform of participation. In the example of Hosoda's *Summer Wars*, we saw how storyboards operate as a kind of platform that enables the collaborative production of anime, guiding the workflow of hundreds of people. In the *Gundam* example, we saw how the original sponsors viewed the original series failure in terms of a very limited business model (selling Clover's toys). However, a broader perspective that considered the emerging energy of anime fans – their "research," their desire to build plastic models, the growth of fan clubs and fan-oriented magazines – we saw that there was a potential for businesses to build upon, even though it was largely invisible to Clover. If we are trying to understand what makes cultural movements go global, this draws our attention to the social energy of engaged participants and the contexts in which their commitments create something. This is the idea behind collaborative creativity.

Looking at media in terms of platforms and contexts should give us new opportunities to materialize ideas through cultural practice. Ideally, it can also allow us to ask new questions: How do we balance the forces of networked collaboration versus personalized futures? What will this mean for citizenship and democracy, consumerism and markets? Where will we find the heroes to tackle today's most pressing challenges? By thinking in terms of collaborative creativity, we may come to see how even our tiny niches are connected to broader networks of people and activities, which, in turn, are shaped by diverse values that come into being as we act on them. Anime demonstrates how, with some luck and some drive, we can have greater, more extensive influence than we might imagine.

Notes: This is an overview of some of the main ideas in my new book *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story* (2013, Duke University Press, USA). FREE DOWNLOAD of the *Introduction* to the book is here: http://www.scribd.com/doc/117380368/The-Soul-of-Anime-by-Ian-Condry

Endnotes

1 The figure comes from an English-language report by the Japan External Trade Organization (jetro), which quotes meti 2004. The 60 percent figure is widely quoted both online and in print. I cannot verify its accuracy, but I will note that when I asked the head of Cartoon Networks Studios, he said, "That sounds about right."
2 I acknowledge the advice of an anonymous reviewer in suggesting this analytical direction, and I have borrowed some of the reviewer's phrasing in this paragraph and the next.
3 The converse is also true. Where there is little of that energy, there is also the danger of little being accomplished. A Japanese friend who was trying to break into the anime screenwriting business once reported that meetings around a faltering project were low energy and pointless.
4 Yūichirō Saitō, interview by the author, August 2008.
5 The cost of living in Tokyo is comparable to that of major American cities, so it would be difficult, though not impossible, to support oneself on that level of pay.
6 Masao Ueda, interview by the author, August 2006.
7 *Ibid.*

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