

**PLASTIC NARRATIVES: KAIYODO AND THE EVOLUTION OF DATABASE  
CONSUMPTION**

by

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This thesis looks at Azuma Hiroki's Database Consumption Model, laid out in the 2001 book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, to examine the role of non-narrative goods in the *otaku* marketplace. While *Otaku* focuses on narrative goods such as video games and anime, we can better understand post-modern consumption patterns in the *otaku* subculture by also looking at the non-narrative goods which comprise a large percentage of the *otaku* marketplace. First, we will briefly review the Database Consumption model and compare and contrast it with other theoretical work on post-modern consumption. Second, we will compare the history of toy company Kaiyodo with Azuma's three Eras of post-war narrative consumption. Third, we will examine the role of Database Consumption in Kaiyodo's "Revoltech" toy line.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the anime and video game industries surpassed the size of the steel industry in Japan, both in terms of the domestic market and exports (Leonard 3). In 2007, the size of the domestic marketplace for all *otaku* products (including video games, anime, manga and so on) was estimated at around \$2 billion (Azuma xv). Moreover, this figure only includes the domestic market - the market for these products is growing most rapidly in markets of vital importance for other Japanese products, such as China, East Asia, and Russia. As strange as it seems, for Japan's economic future, plastic and silicon weigh more than steel.

In recognition of the need to switch from an industrial-based economy to an intellectual property-based economy, in 2004 Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) set up the "Japan Brand" Program to exploit the popularity of Japanese entertainment overseas in advance the economic and diplomatic goals of the nation. While not all of the Japanese entertainment considered by the Japan Brand Program would be considered part of the *otaku* marketplace ("trendy dramas" being a notable exception), the program puts the *otaku* industry in a central position. Examples of this not be seen in the appointment of cartoon cat Doraemon as "anime ambassador" or the establishment of an international "Nobel Prize of manga." In attempting to manage overseas perceptions of Japanese products and Japan in general, the Japan Brand aims to restructure "Japan" from a nation to a narrative. With these changes in mind, it

can be said that understanding the *otaku* industry is essential to understanding the future of Japan's trade relations.

But it is one thing to appoint a cartoon cat as ambassador and quite another to understand the intricacies of the *otaku* marketplace. Who are *otaku*? What motivates their consumer behavior? Is the consumer behavior of Japanese *otaku* the same as that of, say, American consumers of *otaku* products? As a somewhat marginalized segment of Japanese society, *otaku* occupy an in-between, uncertain state; admired for their economic power, yet subjected to stereotyping and surface-level pronouncements of “*otaku* are like this...”

Originally, the word “*otaku*” was a polite second-person pronoun, like “you,” used at the prestigious Keio Gijuku Yochisa Primary School. Animators at Studio Nue used it in their seminal anime *Super Dimensional Fortress Macross*, and it quickly became a popular term in the Science Fiction convention circuit (Okada 3). Science Fiction and anime fan's frequent use of the word led to its current association with the *otaku* subculture, as a cultural label and self-description. The infamous serial murders of Tsutomu Miyazaki, and their subsequent media coverage as “*otaku* crimes” led to the negative connotations of the term - associations with social and sexual deviancy (ibid 6). It is a complex term, imply consumption of certain products such as anime and video games, but also a separation from mainstream Japanese culture that can sometimes take a sinister tone.

In its current usage, the term *otaku* primarily refers to a strong emotional relation to certain forms of media, that is, anime, manga, and video games. While non-*otaku* also consume these forms of media, *otaku* have a stronger affective bond with them, viewing them as central to their lives. *Otaku* can still be used as a pejorative term, but it is above all a self-description; though it started as a second person pronoun, it is now a first-person identity. For the *otaku*,

anime, video games, and so on art not simply works of art that exist outside of the self, but part of their central self-definition. As Azuma points out, one of the primary criteria for *otaku* in judging media is “it made me cry,” or to rephrase, “I felt an emotional connection with it.”

One of the first serious attempts to get beyond surface-level stereotypes of *otaku* was Azuma Hiroki's (1971-present) *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. The original title was *Dōbutsuka suru posutonmodan: otaku kara mita nihon shakai*, or roughly translated, “Animalizing Postmoderns: Japanese Society as Seen by *Otaku*.” Instead parroting social stereotypes of *otaku*, it attempted an academic understanding of what the *otaku* subculture means for post-modern Japan. The book was an instant best seller, with over 16 re-printings and translations in French, Korean, and English. Released in 2001, three years before the establishment of the Japan Brand program, the book struck a nerve with a society that was struggling with understanding this complex, divisive, and economically significant subculture. Interestingly, it remains the only Japanese academic work on the *otaku* subculture to receive an English translation.

In it, Azuma lays out what he calls the “Database Consumption Model,” which has formed the basis of most later writings on the *otaku* subculture, Japanese and Western. With the end of Modern Grand Narratives and the rise of alienation, narratives are no longer formed in reference to a normative social structure, but simply on the level of an emotional affective alliance between the consumer and character design elements or narrative tropes. Azuma argues that this Database Consumption has arisen in response to changes in Japanese society, changes in how people relate to themselves and to the world around them. These changes are not limited to the *otaku* subculture, they impact Japanese society as a whole. By understanding the *otaku*

subculture, we can come to a greater understanding of what it means to live in a post-modern society.

In *Otaku*, Azuma argues that there is no essential difference between “narratives and coffee mugs,” that is, that *otaku* consumers see no essential difference between traditionally narrative “primary goods” like anime and video games and traditionally non-narrative “secondary goods” like coffee mugs and t-shirts. Despite this, his model has been almost without exception used to discuss primary goods. Azuma himself limits his study primarily to traditionally narrative goods - video games, anime, and light novels. The single exception is the series of *Bikkuriman* stickers that Ōtsuka Eiji previously looked at in *Narrative Consumption*.

The Database Consumption Model is a powerful tool for understanding the *otaku* subculture and post-modern consumption in general, but it remains myopic in its focus on traditionally narrative goods. The *otaku* marketplace is diverse and complex, with a staggering array of products and services that go far beyond primary goods like anime and video games. While Azuma's work forms the foundation (or at the least, an important point of reference) for subsequent work on the *otaku* marketplace, it needs to be expanded upon. By deepening our understanding of this marketplace, we will be able to better understand just what Database Consumption is and how to use it for critical analysis.

In light of this, the purpose of this study is to examine the utility of Azuma Hiroki's Database Consumption Model in explaining the historical production and consumption of traditionally non-narrative secondary goods. Since a single study cannot hope to examine the incredible width and depth of the entire secondary goods market, I will focus on the history and products of Japanese toy company Kaiyodo. In doing so, I hope to develop a deeper

understanding of the Database Consumption model by examining an area of the *otaku* marketplace largely neglected by both Western and Japanese scholars.

Founded in 1964 as a small Osaka hobby shop by Miyawaki Osamu (1928-present) and currently run by his son Miyawaki Shūichi (1957-present) Kaiyodo is a model success story of Japan's post-industrial intellectual property based economy. It also provides a uniquely situated test case for examining both Azuma's model of historical development and the production and consumption of secondary goods. By looking at Kaiyodo's history and products, I will determine the validity of the Database Consumption Model with the other half of the equation - secondary, non-narrative goods such as toys. After all, one cannot say that there is no distinction between narratives and secondary goods without paying equal attention to secondary goods.

This study will be divided into three main sections. First, I will briefly review Azuma's Database Consumption Model (DCM), taking special consideration of his proposed division of narrative consumption into three periods; the Era of Reason (1945-1970), the Era of Fiction/Hybrid Era (1970-1989), and the Era of Animalization (1989-present). Although Azuma allows for overlap between the periods, he also identifies specific historical events as embodying the overall transitions. I will compare Azuma's periodization against those of other critics such as Okada Toshio and Anne Allison. Second, I will overview the history of Kaiyodo and its products, both in terms of founder Miyawaki Osamu's published accounts of his view of his company's products over time and in comparison with Azuma's model. Third, I will closely examine a specific Kaiyodo product, Sci-Fi Revoltech Series No.010 Woody, from the three-fold perspectives Woody as a character in a narrative (Pixar's *Toy Story*), as a Kaiyodo product (how it was designed, advertised, etc.), and its reception by domestic Japanese and foreign consumers. By looking at how Kaiyodo products have been received by domestic Japanese and foreign

consumers, we will be able to take a glimpse beyond “Japanese society as seen by *otaku*” and into how Database Consumption functions outside of Japan.

## 1.1 AZUMA VS. HEGEL – PERIODIZATION IN *OTAKU: JAPAN’S DATABASE*

### *ANIMALS*

Azuma Hiroki's Database Consumption Model was first proposed in *Dōbutsuka Suru Posutomodan* (English title *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*), and is based in large part on Eiji Ōtsuka's work on Narrative Consumption and Hegel's three-stage model of historical development (as read by Alexandre Kojève). While Hegel's model describes the Pre-Enlightenment, Modern, and Post-Modern stages, Azuma looks only at the decline of Modernity and the gradual rise of Postmodernity during a seventy-five year period between 1914 and 1989, with the 1970s as the focal point of a hybrid modern/postmodern consumption (72).

Although this model has the “beginning of the end” of Modernity as starting around 1914, Azuma pays particular attention to three Eras which most clearly illustrate the demise of the Modern Grand Narrative and the rise of Postmodern consumption. The three Eras have a considerable amount of overlap and the year divisions should be considered as embodying a general trend, not complete breaks.

The first era is the Era of Reason, lasting from 1945-1970. Technically, this era can be considered as extending back to the start of the twentieth century, but the focus is on this era's decline, not its beginning. Azuma places the beginning of its decline at the end of World War II and its end with the 1970 Red Army airplane hijacking incident. In this periodization,

the Red Army incident is seen as symbolic of the discrediting of historical Grand Narratives such as Communism in general.

The second era is the Era of Fiction, lasting from 1970 to 1989. This era is marked by the emergence of what Azuma calls fictional Grand Narratives. In essence, consumers who had grown up with historical Grand Narratives still felt a need for them, and thus turned to fictional Grand Narratives to take their place. Azuma gives two years for the end of this era; worldwide, he points to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, but for Japan the year 1995 is given due to the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks.

The third and current era is the Era of Animalization, beginning in 1989, or 1995 in Japan. This third and supposedly final era is characterized by the breakdown of fictional Grand Narratives (in addition to the previous social/historical Grand Narratives) and the rise of Database Consumption. This era is given the term “animalization” in accordance with the terminology of Kojève. Essentially, the end of Grand Narratives is also the end of history, and with the passing of history, humanity reverts back to an “animal-like” state. Hegel's historic struggle between slaves and masters is resolved and there is no longer any need for social/historical Grand Narratives. Though there will still be history in the sense that years will pass, new buildings will be built, and new music created, with the end of the historical process there will be no essential difference between this human activity and birds building nests and cicadas singing in concert. The reason 1995 is put forth as the most significant year for Japan is the terrorist attacks by Aum Shinrikyo and the end of television anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

This contrast between a major terrorist attack and the end of a television show may seem like a strange contrast at first, but it is important to remember that Azuma is specifically developing a periodization of the *otaku* subculture. Naturally, events that are of

minor importance to society as a whole can be of great importance to a subculture. Far from trivializing tragic events such as the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks, this should be understood as an example of the interactions between a culture and a subculture, just as Azuma is examining *otaku* subculture in order to understand Japanese culture as a whole. But while Azuma points to the Aum Shinrikyo attacks and the end of *Evangelion* as his main guideposts to the beginning of the Era of Animalization, it is worth remembering that there was another important event in 1990s Japan that marks the end of a Grand Narrative: the end of the Bubble Economy. The loss of the mass middle class and the guarantee of lifetime employment also exercised an important role in breaking down Grand Narratives in Japan.

Azuma portrays the shift from Modern Narrative Consumption to Postmodern Narrative Consumption as shifts made inevitable by historical processes originally described by Hegel and expanded upon by Kojève. He traces the development and change of consumer tastes in narratives from modern realism based in a Grand Narrative, to hybrid fictional Grand Narratives which provided a replacement for the Grand Narratives lost in society as a whole, to complete postmodern rejection of Grand Narratives in favor of a “database” of affective elements with no Grand Narrative at all.

In the Age of Reason, Modern Grand Narrative consumption is an interaction between the consumer and “smaller narratives” (individual books, television shows, and so on) which reflect the worldviews of Grand Narratives. In this model, consumers find meaning in the interaction of these smaller narratives with the grand narratives of society.

Examples of these Grand Narratives would include Communism or traditional religions. The common feature is that they attempt to explain all phenomena according to a single perspective, a single “grand unified theory of everything.” While Azuma claims that this

perspective corresponds to Hegel's Modern period, in fact it bears a closer relation to his Pre-Enlightenment period. Hegel describes the Modern as already being a period of Alienation, in which all Grand Narratives are considered arbitrary and subjective. Thus, we have the figure of the Moral Valet, who views all “noble” actions of his employer as being in reality motivated by selfish considerations.

Consumers in Azuma's supposedly modern Era of Reason are members of a *sittlichkeit* community, which recognizes social laws as part of the underlying architecture of the universe - a Grand Narrative. Human individuals recognize each other by these laws, and do not suffer alienation. Hegel quotes from Sophocles' Antigone to show the relationship between individual self-consciousnesses and these eternal laws:

“They are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting,

Though where they came from, none of us can tell.’

They are. If I inquire after their origin and confine them to the point whence they arose, then I have transcended them; for now it is I who am the universal, and they are the conditioned and limited. If they are supposed to be validated by my insight, then I have already denied their unshakable, intrinsic being, and regard them as something which, for me, is perhaps true, but also is perhaps not true...” (437).

Now, this *sittlichkeit* worldview does not apply perfectly to relatively more recent Grand Narratives, such as Stalinism. Azuma points this out on his section on cynicism by citing Slavoj Žižek:

“To exemplify this connection (the relationship between Hegelian philosophy and Lacanian philosophy) let us refer to Stalinism - more specifically, to its obsessive insistence that whatever the cost we must maintain the appearance: we know that behind the scenes there are

wild factional struggles going on; nevertheless we must keep at any price the appearance of Party unity; nobody really believes in the ruling ideology, every individual preserves a cynical distance from it and everybody knows that nobody believes in it; but still, the appearance is to be maintained at any price that people are enthusiastically building socialism, supporting the party, and so on...” (Azuma 70).

This excerpt, written in 1989, shows the hybrid nature of Communism towards the end of the Soviet Union. It is a (Hegelian) Modern, alienated worldview masquerading as a (Hegelian) *sittlichkeit* Pre-Modern Grand Narrative. This complicates Azuma's usage of the 1970 Red Army incident as a guidepost to the end of pure Modernism in Japan. Were the members of the Red Army alienated or un-alienated? Did they truly believe in Communism as an all-encompassing worldview or were they alienated and cynical? If they truly believed in it as an all-encompassing worldview, then they would be better categorized according to Hegel's Pre-Modern Era. If they were alienated and cynical, then they would be better categorized according to Hegel's Modern Era and fictional hybrid Grand Narratives from Azuma's Era of Fiction.

We have mentioned fictional hybrid Grand Narratives, but it would be prudent to discuss them at length at this juncture. In Azuma's intermediary stage, the social Grand Narrative is lost, but consumers have a lingering desire for the comfortable familiarity of these lost Grand Narratives. Fictional Grand Narratives are necessary for consumers to find meaning and enjoyment in smaller narratives, even though the fictional Grand Narrative is tacitly understood to be confined to the realm of fiction and not as applicable to society as a whole.

Azuma's examples of this hybrid Grand Narrative include *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), which has a fictional historical timeline detonated by the initials “U.C.” (Universal Century). All of the episodes of *Gundam*, including those of its derivative works and sequels (at

least, until the 1990s), take place in this shared universe. It roughly corresponds with our own historical timeline, with the year UC 001 taking place around AD 2053.

But the need for a fictional Grand Narrative goes well beyond a consistent timeline. While the *Gundam* universe makes use of fanciful Science Fiction technology such as the “Minovsky Particle,” a selling point of the series is its technological consistency. While the Minovsky Particle may not exist in the real world, it always functions according to fictional “rules” - a fictional law of physics. The Mobile Suits (giant robots) of *Gundam* were also subjected to technical scrutiny. Magazines and manuals of each Mobile Suit's blueprints and exact technical specifications became immensely popular, and added another layer of “realism” to the show.

Other authors have commented on this aspect of 1970s-1980s *otaku* culture. In *Otakugaku Nyūmon* (1996), Okada Toshio gives the example of the extreme measures taken by legendary animator Itano Ichiro to ensure the ultra-realism of spaceship battles. Wanting to animate the firing of missiles as realistically as possible, Itano strapped fireworks to his moped and fired them while driving at high speed (35). Wanting to get a better sense of how humanoid robots would fire missiles at each other, he rounded up a group of friends, strapped fireworks to their arms, and then ran around a field with them, firing these “missiles” at each other (36). The concern for realism was an all-encompassing goal, which drove animators to develop new and innovative techniques.

Alienation, cynicism, obsession with realism, the use of fiction to ease longings for the lost *sittlichkeit* of an earlier period - what Azuma describes as the end of the Modern is what Hegel describes as the beginning. Now, Azuma may be intentionally using the term “Modern” in accordance with its popular usage as opposed its strict Hegelian definition.

Alternately, the trend toward alienation may have been stronger in the pre-1970 period than his periodization implies. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that a distinctly Pre-Modern mindset underlies Azuma's description of the Era of Reason.

In the final stage of Azuma's periodization, Grand Narratives (including the fictional Grand Narratives) are no longer necessary or desirable to consumers. Smaller narratives no longer must be based on a Grand Narrative in order to create meaning; instead, they draw from a "Database" of affective *moe* elements. Enjoyment for consumers comes from the creation of emotional attachments to these familiar affective elements, not from the now-discarded sense of realism, authorship, authenticity, or originality.

Smaller narratives are no longer considered original, stand-alone works which reflect a Grand Narrative, but a simulacra composed of elements pulled from the Database - the grand non-narrative. Consumption still takes place on the level of the smaller narrative, but also from direct enjoyment of the *moe* elements themselves, divorced from any narrative at all.

What constitutes a *moe* element? On the most visible level, *moe* elements are elements of character design - physical attributes such as eye color, clothing, height, age, and so on. Azuma gives the example of Dejiko, a character designed as a mascot by secondary-goods company Broccoli to appeal to as many *moe* elements as possible (43). Dejiko's physical *moe* elements include such things as cat ears, green hair, "hair like antenna" and big feet. These elements have all been pulled from the database of character designs popular in the late 1990s among *otaku*.

*Moe* elements, however, are not limited to physical characteristics. They can be personality traits, such as the "cool, reserved, robot-like" personality type made popular by *Evangelion's* Rei Ayanami. They can also be narrative clichés, such as the "destined lover," or

the “young girl with a terminal illness” popular in visual novels. As with the physical traits, enjoyment of these non-visual *moe* elements is not based on realism or originality but rather on their emotional resonance with consumers. In fact the most frequently cited source of enjoyment for consumers of visual novels is not artistic merit or creativity, but rather the ability to make the consumer cry. What consumers seek “is not the narrative dynamism of old,” or the illusion of Grand Narratives and realism, “but a formula, without a worldview or a message, that effectively manipulates emotion” (Azuma 79).

Having laid out the basics of Azuma's model, let us now look at alternate periodizations and consumption models.

## **1.2 ALTERNATE PERIODIZATION AND CONSUMPTION MODELS**

### **1.2.1 Okada Toshio: *Introduction to Otakuology* and *You Otaku Are Already Dead***

The first periodization of *otaku* history was proposed in Okada Toshio's *Otakugaku Nyūmon* (Introduction to Otakuology), a 1996 book based on a seminar taught by Okada at the University of Tokyo. Okada's periodization is surprisingly close to Azuma's, even though it does not take any cues from Hegel or Kojève. Otakuology is, if anything, closer to Nietzschean philosophy in that it presents *otaku* as a “new type” of humanity (taking the term from *Gundam*) more capable of processing visual information and resisting social pressures than “normal” humans (14). The message is that *otaku* are an advanced, improved version of humanity.

Okada presents three generations of *otaku*, with his periodization based around what media they were most interested in and the technology than used to enjoy it. The three generations are:

First Generation - Born in Showa 30 (1955), Okada describes them as the “Special Effects Generation.” The SFX Generation was interested in *Godzilla*, *Ultraman*, and classic American Sci-Fi such as *Lost in Space*.

Second Generation - Born in Showa 40 (1965), Okada describes them as the “Anime Generation.” As with Azuma's Second Generation, they were interested in anime such as *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Space Battleship Yamato*.

Third Generation - Born in Showa 50 (1975), Okada does not give them a special generational label. This generation is described as having a wide variety of interests; garage kits, video games, voice actors, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, *dōjinshi* fan comics, and dating simulators.

Given that Okada consistently sets ten years between generations, it is interesting to see that he does not attempt to describe *otaku* born in Showa 60 (1985), perhaps because they would only have been eleven years old at the time of publishing. Okada did, however, revisit the issue of the emerging Fourth Generation of *otaku* in his 2008 book *Otaku wa sude ni shindeiru* (You *Otaku* Are Already Dead).

In this book, Okada lays out his grievances against the younger generation of *otaku*, claiming that they have destroyed what it means to be an *otaku* (thus, “you *otaku* are already dead”). His complaints are varied, but they can perhaps be summed up in two points: *moe* subculture and the younger generation’s desire for social acceptance.

It is interesting that *moe* subculture is such a point of contention for Okada, to the point where he cannot consider *moe* a legitimate form of *otaku* culture. Okada's anger at *moe*

fans is largely based on his experiences with *moe* fans that claim one cannot be an *otaku* if one does not “get” *moe* subculture. Okada, the self-proclaimed “Otaking,” takes issue with this, seeing as how he was a leading figure in the *otaku* community decades before *moe* existed. Okada repeats at length how the older generations of *otaku* had a sort of Big Tent policy, in which fans of anime, SFX shows, Science Fiction, and military equipment could all get along as one happy family.

Okada's view of *otaku* as a “New Type” of humanity, essentially the next stage in evolution, means that he views mainstream Japanese society with disdain. He contrasts the calendars of normal people, going on Christmas dates in December and celebrating New Year's in January with the *otaku* calendar, which centers on the release of new anime and the summer and winter Comic Market. *Moe* fans, who he sees as desiring the approval of mainstream society, are counter-revolutionaries; a backwards step in *otaku* evolution.

Okada's work is interesting not just because his periodization is so similar to Azuma's, but because it so clearly encapsulates changes in the *otaku* community. Born in 1958, Okada is very much an exemplar of the First Generation, with very strong sense of the Grand Narrative. For him, being an *otaku* is not simply about being a fan of anime or video games, it is about being a member of a sub-cultural group with a very specific worldview. Much like the Red Army or Aum Shinrikyo, he has an “us vs. them” mentality with society-rejecting *otaku* on one side and everyone else on the other. The influx of *moe* fans who do not share these social values (or indeed any sort of Grand Narrative) has overwhelmed the “true” *otaku*, making it impossible to have a legitimate *otaku* subculture.

Having declared the death of *otaku*, Okada went on to write books on dieting and positive thinking for career success. It was a bizarre end to the reign of the Otaking, who had

helped create anime giant Gainax, wrote *Otaku no Video*, and helped usher in an era of international mainstream success for the *otaku* industry. In many ways a victim of his own success, Okada's tireless efforts to redefine *otaku* as something other than sexual deviants paved the way for critics such as Eiji Ōtsuka and Azuma Hiroki.

### **1.2.2 Anne Allison: *Millennial Monsters***

Turning now to a western scholar, Anne Allison's work does not focus on the adult *otaku* industry in particular but rather on “Japanese toys and the global imagination” in general. While her work focuses more on child consumers than adults, the familiar theme of the breakdown of Grand Narratives to Database Consumption emerges once again, this time without a Hegelian background.

Allison also begins her work in 1945, looking briefly at Japanese toys in the era of reconstruction, which she sets as lasting from 1945 to 1960. While Japan had a flourishing toy industry before World War II, wartime necessity ended the production of toys. With the end of the war, Japanese toy makers resumed production, with the toys being approved for export to the United States in 1947 (38). Allison gives the example of the Kosuga jeep, modeled after U.S. military vehicles and constructed from recycled ration cans as a notable example from this era.

In addition to toys, Allison also presents some examples of important media franchises from this era such as Godzilla and Tetsuwan Atomu. Godzilla in particular is discussed by Azuma and Okada as important to First Generation *otaku*, although Allison focuses more on its overall social impact. She describes the movie monster as being “scarred yet empowered by a particular historical event—a nuclear blast that disturbs his home but also rewires him as an atomic cyborg...Out of the scars of war, Japan was to rebuild itself by becoming embedded, like

Gojira, with new technologies that would forever alter national identity, state policies, and subjectivity” (46). The film spoke to the social Grand Narrative concerns of First Generation *otaku* in a way that few other media properties could rival.

After discussing the era of reconstruction, *Millennial Monsters* jumps forward to the millennial era. While Allison does occasionally reference media properties or toys from the 1960-1980s period, for the most part she skips over Azuma's Era of Fiction in favor of the 1990s-early 2000s. But the picture she paints of millennial Japan is strikingly similar to Azuma's Era of Animalization. Japanese society is “fragmented” and “detached”; the social mantra of “one family, one TV” has become “one person, one TV” (70). Alienation extends even to how people commute. Using the train system “becomes an experience of liminality when travelers are betwixt and between destinations,” as travelers move from physical location to physical location while also moving from social identity to social identity” (71).

The key words for Allison are atomism and mobility, “the effect, in part, of global capitalism with its flows of images, finance, ideas, people, and goods across geographic borders and of New Age technologies that enable high-speed travel, global communication, and virtual reality (leading to the compression, as well as fictionalization, of time and space)” (72). This atomism and mobility leads to a state which Allison describes as “polymorphous perversity,” a “continual change and stretching of desire across ever new zones/bodies/products” (277). Just as travelers move between physical locations and social identities on the train, so consumers move across brands, products, and consumer identities by the action of consumption.

This continual breaking down and reassembly of identity bears a distinct similarity to the breaking down and reassembly of Database elements. Consumers break down and reassemble their own identities in the same manner that *moe* characters are broken down and reassembled

into new narratives. Consumption is a form of identity-making, in which the consumer assembles an identity not from a core sense of self based in a Grand Social Narrative, but in the continual change of new products, new affective alliances, and new selves. “Whether a Kitty-chan key chain, Doraemon cell phone strap, or Pikachu backpack, these commodity spirits are 'shadow families': constant and reliable companions that are soothing in post-industrial times of nomadicism, orphanism, and stress... 'Parents die, but characters remain forever’” (91).

It is easy to overlook this part of Database Consumption in favor of more sensationalistic items such as cat ears and maid cafes, but the essential fact remains that it is not just narrative goods that are subject to databasification, but consumers themselves. Post-modern consumers do not crave Grand Narratives for the simple reason that Grand Narratives are no longer part of their lives. Unlike the transitional Hybrid consumers, the memory of Grand Narratives is no longer comforting because post-modern consumers have never experienced Grand Narratives as a part of their lives. Living in a world of polymorphous perversity, of constant change and reassignment of identity, post-modern consumers are simply applying the logic of their day-to-day lives to fictional characters.

### **1.3 DATABASE CONSUMPTION SUMMARY**

Azuma's Database Consumption Model, and his periodization of the 1945-early 2000s period, both complements and sheds light on other theories of post-modern consumption. While his model is built to explore the *otaku* subculture, its thesis is that “the essence of our era (postmodernity) is extremely well disclosed in the structure of *otaku* culture” (6). In other words, it should not surprise us that there is overlap between the Database Consumption Model

and theories that look beyond the scope of the *otaku* subculture. Ultimately, it is a theory of postmodernity, not simply of *otaku* subculture.

This explains why Azuma uses both the release dates of certain anime (*Gundam*, *Evangelion*) and events which impacted Japanese culture at large (the Red Army incident, the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks) to build his periodization. While it might not be appropriate to use the end of *Evangelion* as a turning point in Japanese culture as a whole, it is appropriate to use it as a turning point in *otaku* culture. Okada uses only the release dates of anime for his periodization (and not, say, traditional “family dramas”) precisely because he is not concerned with society at large.

Looked at in this light, Azuma's periodization and Database Consumption Theory becomes a powerful tool for looking at the development of postmodern consumption patterns. It still, however, has the weakness of focusing solely on primary narrative goods (anime, manga, video games) as turning points for the *otaku* subculture. *Otaku* consumption is not limited to narrative goods; many anime are produced at a loss, with profits coming only from secondary goods such as toys, t-shirts, and other licensed products. In the next section, we will look at how Azuma's periodization and Database Consumption Theory apply to non-narrative goods by looking at the history and development of Kaiyodo, one of the *otaku* industry's premier developers of toys.

## 2.0 THE HISTORY OF KAIYODO

In order to understand how Azuma's theory applies (or fails to apply) to Kaiyodo, it is important to review the history of Kaiyodo, which can also be roughly grouped into three phases. The first phase, lasting from 1964 to 1980, was characterized by the sale of plastic model kits known as *puramokei* and slot racing cars. The second phase, lasting from 1980 to 2006, was characterized by the manufacture and sale of garage kit models and small toys packaged with food items. The third phase, beginning in 2006 and continuing to the present, saw the release of the Revoltech toy line, designed by Kaiyodo and manufactured in China.

These three phases, of course, do not line up exactly with Azuma's three Eras discussed in the last section. Indeed, Kaiyodo was not directly involved with the *otaku* industry until 1980, almost twenty years after the company was founded. Prior to 1980, Kaiyodo's corporate philosophy was very steeped in the Grand Narrative concerns of art, education, and the transmission of cultural heritage, concerns very far afield from the society-rejecting 1980s *otaku*. In his memoir, *Tsukurumono wa yozora ni kirameku hoshi no sū hodo mugen ni aru* (Things to Make Are as Infinite as the Stars in the Night Sky) company founder Miyawaki Osamu describes initially feeling a great antipathy to the "long-haired and noisy" *otaku* garage kit enthusiasts who

frequented Kaiyodo. However, once we take into account the broader social changes described by Azuma, the lives of Miyawaki Osamu and Shūichi, and technological changes in the hobby industry, Azuma's periodization takes on a more relevant shape.

In April of 1964, Miyawaki Osamu opened a small hobby shop named "Kaiyodo" in Moriguchi, Osaka. According to Miyawaki Osamu's memoir, he knew he wanted to start a business, but was conflicted between opening a hobby shop and an *udon* restaurant. Unable to decide, he balanced a wooden sword on its point and decided that if it fell to the right, he would open an *udon* restaurant and if it fell to the left, he would open a hobby shop. As you might guess, the wooden sword fell to the left and Kaiyodo was born.

Kaiyodo was a small shop, starting out at approximately six yards square. But business was brisk, and the sudden popularity of American slot cars in the winter of 1964 allowed Kaiyodo to expand to thirty-two square yards within their first year of operation. This expansion allowed Kaiyodo to construct a slot-car racing course in the store. Although the slot car boom subsided soon after the expansion, Kaiyodo was already well on its way to success.

Aside from slot cars, Kaiyodo mainly sold plastic model kits. These kits were mostly of famous ships, airplanes, and so on, and were a hit with both children and adult enthusiasts. But Miyawaki Osamu was not content to simply sell toys. From the very beginning, he had a passion for social issues and was determined that his voice be heard. In 1965, he self-published the first of many Kaiyodo magazines, *Umi no awa*, attempting to explain his vision of plastic models as a tool for social change.

Miyawaki Osamu saw plastic models as a means of developing children's imaginations and personalities. In contrast to the "education mamas" who saw grueling study as the means of securing happiness, Miyawaki Osamu saw play as contributing to a child's mental, physical, and

social well-being. These would be common themes in Miyawaki Osamu's future publications, such as 1966's *Kaiyo* or 1985's *ARTPLA*.

Miyawaki Osamu did not contain his social visions to essays and magazines. After the end of the slot racing boom, Miyawaki Osamu dismantled the slot-car racing course and once again expanded the store to allow construction of a "model pool." This model pool was branded as a place for city children to escape from the summer heat. Miyawaki Osamu brought in live eels so that children could experience nature and learn how to catch them. Of course, it also encouraged children to buy model ships and submarines since they now had a place to play with them. By concerning himself with the well-being of his customers, Miyawaki Osamu was able to build a business strategy which adapted to his customers' needs.

Once summer ended, the area was converted to a play area for model tanks. Kaiyodo opened a "Plastic Model Classroom" which taught children how to construct and display models (such as model tanks) of their own. Miyawaki Osamu then rented out the local Community Center and hosted what he described as "Japan's First Model Kit Show." Students of the Plastic Model Classroom and other model enthusiasts put up their constructions for display and judging as works of art.

Convinced of the artistic value of model kits, Miyawaki Osamu began selling pre-constructed and pre-decorated model kits to Osaka-area businesses. This "Art Plastic" became a pet project of Miyawaki Osamu's, as he felt that these miniature versions of historical vehicles helped transmit cultural information to people who might never be able to see the real thing. In 1972, Kaiyodo collaborated with model company Imai Kagaku in designing a Roman Trireme model kit.

Despite this foray into production, Kaiyodo would not be directly responsible for an original toy again until the 1980 garage kit boom. Technical limitations and the high cost of production presented two great barriers. Even in the production of Art Plastic pieces, Miyawaki Osamu had to create new tools such as the "Spray Ace" and "Plier Ace" to get the effects he desired (88). Plastic Models required the creation of metal forms, which cost several million yen to produce. Such an upfront investment was simply beyond the means of a small hobby shop such as Kaiyodo.

All of this changed with the introduction of Vacuum Form and Resin Kit models, the two technical innovations which led to the 1980 garage kit boom. While the technical details of the Vacuum Form and Resin Mold processes are not relevant to the current discussion, their low cost and high level of detail were nothing short of revolutionary for hobby enthusiasts of the era. Hijiri Saki of the magazine *Uchusen* claimed that the term "garage kit" had been coined in imitation of American "garage bands," who created music suited to their own tastes in the comfort of their own homes. Similarly, hobby enthusiasts were now able to create models of their own choosing.

Miyawaki Shūichi, son of Miyawaki Osamu, took the garage kit boom to heart. He specifically complained about the inadequate level of detail in officially licensed merchandise for Ultraman and Godzilla, noting that despite the fact that the Ultraman TV show used miniatures, the toys lacked all but the vaguest similarity to the miniatures. They were models of Ultraman "in shape only." With the Vacuum Form and Resin Mold processes, however, Miyawaki Shūichi and his fellow enthusiasts were able to spend all of their spare time creating models which lived up to their exacting technical standards.

Although garage kit models were a boon to Kaiyodo, by 1997 the cost of producing metal molds had fallen enough that Kaiyodo was able to start producing toys using this process. Inspired by the success of Todd McFarlane's bloody and highly detailed Spawn toys, Kaiyodo produced a series of Fist of the North Star figures that were well received (133). Around this same time, Kaiyodo was approached by candy maker Furuta to produce a series of toys to be included with chocolate eggs, for which they also used the metal mold process (149). Although Kaiyodo's chocolate egg toys were models of real animals, they outsold similar products with licensed characters (chocolate eggs with Hello Kitty and Pokémon prizes). While technological innovations reduced the cost of producing toys, Kaiyodo's technical proficiency and exacting attention to detail proved to be a formidable factor in driving sales.

While market research showed that children far preferred licensed characters to Kaiyodo's non-licensed animal figures, Kaiyodo's chocolate egg prizes continued to out-sell those produced by larger companies such as Bandai and Kinder Surprise well into the early 2000s (150-152). Kaiyodo and Furuta parted ways in 2002, but producing the chocolate egg prizes gave Kaiyodo invaluable experience in working with Chinese manufacturers to create metal form figures (183). Kaiyodo was now able to pursue a variety of other products, from figures based on classic anime such as *Laputa* to mini-figures of Sony's robot dog Aibo.

This experience proved invaluable in 2006, when Kaiyodo released its first Revoltech figure. The first figure released was No.001 Shin Getter 1, from the *New Getter Robo* anime series. This was quickly followed by other giant robot figures from anime series such as *Patlabor* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. As the number and variety of Revoltech figures increased, it was broken down into sub-categories such as Fraulein Revoltech (young female characters), Sci-Fi Revoltech, Yamaguchi Revoltech (sculpted by famed modeler Yamaguchi

Katsuhisa), and the Pixar Figure Collection. The Revoltech series has remained popular, and Kaiyodo consistently showed strong profits even in the midst of the 2008 global recession (Teikoku Databank 1). 2010's Sci-Fi Revoltech Series No. 010 Woody proved particularly popular in both Japanese and international markets.

With the release of the Revoltech line, Kaiyodo has reached its hereto highest levels of popularity and commercial success. The line has drawn imitators such as Good Smile Company's figma and Nendoroid series, but Revoltech figures remain ahead of the curve in terms of detail and quality. By combining customizability with detailed craftsmanship, Revoltech figures combine older *otaku's* desire for accurate reproduction with younger *otaku's* desire for "polymorphous perversity." I will discuss the Revoltech line in more detail in Part Three, but first let's look at how Kaiyodo stacks up against Azuma's theories.

## **2.1 THE HISTORY OF KAIYODO AND AZUMA'S PERIODIZATION**

In weighing the validity of Azuma's Era divisions against Kaiyodo's history, any number of apparent conflicts arise. For example, Azuma's Era of Fiction, in which Grand Narratives supposedly lost weight, begins in 1970, a time at which Miyawaki Osamu was still very much concerned with social issues of art, education, and social responsibility. His conflicts with art critics over "art plastic" as a legitimate form of art shows a concern with overarching social narratives of aesthetic value. Miyawaki Osamu was not satisfied until "art plastic" was accepted as legitimate by those he saw as social authorities; in this case, prominent Osaka businessmen and art connoisseurs. We could also look at the year 1995, the beginning of the Era of Animalization in Japan. Kaiyodo shows no sign of moving toward Database Consumption,

which Azuma claims is the main characteristic of this period, until the 2006 release of the Revoltech series.

How can we account for these discrepancies between Azuma's timeline and Kaiyodo's history? Should we move the beginning of the Era of Fiction forward to 1980 and the rise of garage kits, or the beginning of the Era of Animalization forward to 2006?

I think there are two main ways to explain the discrepancies between Azuma's periodization and Kaiyodo's history. First, Azuma does not base his periodization around the toy industry, but around major historical events and the release of influential anime. For example, the Era of Fiction begins in 1970 due to the Red Army Incident, which Azuma explains as discrediting Communism, one of the last Grand Narratives. Also significant to this Era are the 1974 broadcast of *Space Battleship Yamato* and the 1979 broadcast of *Gundam*, two of the most significant small narratives for First Generation *otaku*. Both of them have fictionalized Grand Narratives that typify the Fictional Era.

The Era of Animalization begins in 1995 for Japan due to the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks and the broadcast of the final episodes of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Azuma calls Aum Shinrikyo "the very image of revolution as fiction," pointing out that "the young people who carried it out were under the influence of...*Space Battleship Yamato*...or *Mobile Suit Gundam*...or else New Age Thought" (178). By brainwashing their members with an apocalyptic fictional Grand Narrative and brainwashing them in the same manner one might train a dog, Aum Shinrikyo had one foot in the Era of Fiction and one foot in the Era of Animalization. In the case of *Evangelion*, the breakdown of the series in the final episodes mimicked the breakdown of fictional Grand Narratives into simulacra; the inability of director Anno Hideo to produce a

convincing fictional narrative. This event had a strong psychological influence on viewers at the time, who described the trauma of viewing the end of *Evangelion* as "Eva Shock."

But these social changes and developments in the anime industry had very little impact on the hobby industry. No matter the level of technical detail Gundams had, no matter how detailed the fictional history of its alternate timeline, Miyawaki Shūichi laments the poor level of detail in Japanese toys up to the advent of garage kits. While the low price of printing allowed *dōjinshi* artists to reinterpret the fictional histories of *Gundam* or *Captain Tsubasa* according to their own interests, the high cost of casting metal forms prevented modelers from doing the same.

So no matter what social changes or changes in consumer preference took place, the hobby industry lagged behind the anime industry due to technical and financial limitations. As a counterexample, the *Bikkuriman* chocolates, released in 1977, were able to successfully attract the attention of Second Generation *otaku* due to the much lower relative cost of producing chocolate and collectable cards.

Second, if we look at the birth dates of Azuma's Generations of *otaku* in comparison to the personal histories of Miyawaki Osamu and Shūichi, we get a much closer fit. Miyawaki Osamu was born in 1928, well within the period of Modernity. It should not be surprising that he continued to have an interest in social Grand Narratives well after 1970. While the Red Army Incident in Tokyo was naturally a national news item and *Space Battleship Yamato* was nationally broadcast, it should not be altogether surprising that an Osaka-based small businessman with a young child to care for did not consider them major life events.

1970s anime, however, did have a major impact on Miyawaki Shūichi, a First-Generation *otaku* born in 1957. Azuma gives 1960 as the average year of birth of First-Generation *otaku*,

and indeed Miyawaki Shūichi describes himself as being up to four years older than his fellow modelers (Miyawaki Shūichi 90). His concerns over the lack of detail in officially produced merchandise is very much in line with an Era of Fiction *otaku*.

Now, Azuma does not cover this in *Otaku* since it was published in 2001, but I think it is important to remember that there is now a fourth generation of *otaku*, born around 1995, who have only ever known the Database Consumption model. These Fourth-Generation *otaku* would have been around ten years old when the first Revoltech was released and well into their teens in 2010 when Revoltech Woody was released. The toy industry once again lagged around ten years behind social changes and the anime industry, just as garage kits came a full ten years after the Red Army Incident. Garage Kits and Revoltechs were not agents of change, but rather emerged in response to social change through technological innovation. While the toy industry is not an indicator of recent social change, it may perhaps be an indicator of more long-term social changes. Even in 1970, the future of Kaiyodo did not lie with Miyawaki Osamu's "art plastic," artistic vehicles of real-world cultural heritage, but with Miyawaki Shūichi's obsession with the fictional technical details of Ultraman and Godzilla.

For a more detailed look at how Database Consumption applies to the Revoltech line in particular, let us take a look at Sci-Fi Revoltech Series No. 010 Woody.

### 3.0 REVOLTECH AND CREEPY WOODY

Having examined Azuma's periodization against Kaiyodo's history, I would now like to do a case study of a particular Kaiyodo product: Sci-Fi Revoltech Series No. 010 Woody. I will trace the history of the figure through three distinct phases. First, I will briefly examine Woody in Pixar's *Toy Story* (1995). Second, I will examine Kaiyodo's Sci-Fi Revoltech Series No. 010 Woody, and the Revoltech brand in general. Third, I will examine how international consumer created new narratives using Revoltech Woody by recombining Revolver Joint elements into the so-called "Creepy Woody."

### 3.1 PIXAR'S WOODY

*Toy Story* was first released in 1995, the year of the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks and the end of *Evangelion*. Although the movie was not released in Japan until 1996 and its Japan box office came in only at 1.5 billion yen, *Toy Story 2* (2010) saw a much higher box office at 3.5 billion yen and *Toy Story 3* (2010) would go on to have the 23rd highest-ranking Japan box office of all time.

Although *Toy Story* was released well after 1989, the year Azuma gives for the worldwide rise of the Era of Animalization, it has a surprisingly strong social narrative. Specifically, it deals with a fictional society of toys and the morality of play. It deals with a set

of “rules” that govern interactions between toys and their owners. This is not an explicit contract (there is no “10 Commandments of Toys”) but rather an underlying set of assumptions that the fictional toy society takes for granted. Toys have two primary needs: the need for self-preservation (i.e., to remain alive, to retain their physical integrity) and the need for recognition by the owner (in the form of “play time”). This play time is the metric by which toys judge their personal worth, but attempting to artificially increase the amount of playtime received is viewed as a moral transgression. Toys are also expected to hide their ability to talk and move of their own volition when humans are around, although they seem to do so instinctively as well as intentionally. The movie does not explain why toys must hide their secret lives, though the rule against artificially influencing their owner's opinion of them may be one explanation.

The story follows the adventures of the toys belonging to a child named “Andy.” Chief among these toys is Andy's favorite, a cloth cowboy doll named “Sheriff Woody.” Woody functions as the leader of Andy's toys. As a sheriff, he functions as a sort of Commander-In-Chief, organizing the toys, enforcing the Grand Narrative moral concerns, and even commanding the armed forces (in the form of green plastic army men). Once Andy gets a new toy named “Buzz Lightyear,” a power struggle ensues in which Woody must deal with Buzz's position as Andy's new favorite and Woody's resulting loss in social status.

Right from the start, *Toy Story* feels more like something from the Era of Fiction. We are given a fictional toy society with a fictional Grand Narrative which governs morality and a toy's place in the world. While these rules are not explicitly stated in the form of a constitution or code of laws, we can gain a sense of the rules by examining deviant behavior. For example, about midway through the movie, the conflict between Woody and Buzz Lightyear leads to a physical altercation in which Woody pushes Buzz out of a window.

When Woody pushes Buzz out of the window, he is committing three crimes: first, he threatens Buzz's physical integrity (the other toys accuse him of being a “murderer”); second, he “cheats” by taking independent action to secure Andy's attention; third, his actions risk exposing the toys' true nature. These crimes undermine the laws, the social contract, which “Sheriff Woody” is supposed to enforce.

The actions of users are also defined in moral terms, most explicitly seen in the contrast between Andy (Woody's owner) and Sid (the boy next door). Andy's positive behavior allows for a certain amount of transformative play - he uses a plastic T-Rex as a bank robber and Slinky Dog as a “force-field.” While this play is partially transformative in that Andy assigns his toys new roles and personalities (new identities) during playtime, it leaves their bodies and true identities intact once playtime is over. This is parallel to how Andy manipulates his own identity. During playtime he dresses up like his favorite toys, temporarily assigning himself a new identity before returning to the real world of family and friends.

In this way, the relationship between toy and owner is reciprocal: both have fluid identities during play, both find meaning and enjoyment in play, and both base elements of their own identities on the other. Andy wears a cowboy hat in imitation of his toy, Woody finds status and identity in having Andy's name written on his foot.

Sid's play, however, is highly unbalanced. He too takes on new identities during play, but these identities are antagonistic and superior to the identities he assigns his toys. Sid casts himself as an enemy soldier throwing explosives at an action figure, as a torturer interrogating Woody, and as a rocket scientist strapping Buzz to “the Big One.” While Andy puts up posters of his toys, identifying himself with them, Sid has posters of rock bands and does not engage in imitative dress up. In other words, Andy views his toys as affective objects and engages in a

mutual exchange of affection and recognition, while Sid views his toys as mere objects to impose his destructive desires upon. Andy upholds the rules of toy society and Sid breaks them.

The most significant example of this is Sid's deconstruction and reassembly of his toys. Sid does not temporarily alter his toys' identity by imaginative play, he uses tools to physically dissect them and switch their parts with other toys. These hybrid toys lose the ability to speak, even with other toys. Their communicative ability is destroyed when Sid physically imposes his own artistic expression on them. While this is portrayed as a loss of self for the toys, we might also question whether this also represents a replacement of the corporate narratives expressed in an unmodified toy with a consumer narrative expressed by a modified toy.

I would argue, however, that the loss undergone by Sid's modified toys is not simply the loss of a built-in corporate narrative. Too-close identification with the designer's message is seen as Buzz Lightyear's primary character flaw. At first, he truly believes himself to be the galaxy-protecting Space Ranger described on his packaging (introducing himself with a verbatim marketing blurb). It is only when he sheds this packaged identity and takes his "proper place" in a bond of affective identity with his owner that he finds true happiness as a toy.

So then, a toy's identity has two aspects. One is a base personality at least partially imprinted by their manufacturer (Woody acts as a sheriff, Slinky Dog is loyal). The second is an affective alliance with their owner bestowed by mutual play. Loss of the first aspect by physical modification removes their ability to speak, to communicate effectively as individuals. Removing the second aspect reduces them to clone-like products lacking an individual personality to express. Nature and nurture are both required to make a fully rounded toy.

Sid's violation of the toy society's unspoken rules is used by Woody as a justification for a toy uprising. In order to save Buzz from being blown up by "The Big One," Woody breaks the

rule against revealing the toys' true nature. He moves under his own volition and speaks with Sid directly. Although the modified toys cannot speak, they shuffle, zombie-like toward Sid, terrifying him and ending his reign of terror. Transgressive play nullifies the social contract, allowing Woody to take action against a human, which would be unthinkable under normal circumstances.

Woody's story is one of fall from grace and redemption. He starts as Andy's favorite toy, a privileged position which gives him recognition from both Andy and the other toys. He enforces the rules of toy society not by physical force or coercion, but by force of personality. Buzz threatens Woody's privileged position, causing Woody to break the rules for his own benefit. Woody is then ostracized from toy society until he saves Buzz both from the physically destructive Sid and Buzz's own delusions of being a real Space Ranger. In doing so, Woody restores toy society to its ideal state: Buzz is saved from physical destruction, learns to form an affective bond with Andy, and the humans (with the exception of Sid, who is now cast out of the social contract) are none the wiser. Once again, this fictional toy society is clearly situated in the Era of Fiction.

Here we see one of the limitations of Azuma's periodization. While 1989 was an extremely significant year for Grand Narratives, as the Berlin Wall fell and Communism became increasingly discredited worldwide, it was by no means the “end” of Grand Narratives in general. If anything, the fall of the Berlin Wall strengthened Grand Narratives in the West, as the fall of Communism was argued to prove the inherent “correctness” of Capitalism. While the Aum Shinrikyo terrorist attacks of 1995 certainly had a great impact on Japanese society, it did little to discredit Grand Narratives outside of Japan.

This weakness of Azuma's periodization should not come as a surprise. After all, Azuma himself admits that the fall of the Berlin Wall did not end the Grand Narrative in Japan - why should we be surprised if it survived in other countries as well? Since *Otaku* focuses on Japanese society, it is understandable that he did not make an exhaustive list of when the Era of Animalization began in every country and geographical region. We could debate just when the Era of Animalization began in America (or indeed if it has begun at all), but I think it is sufficient to note that a periodization intended primarily to explain changes of Japanese society requires significant adjustment when working with other societies.

Let us compare *Toy Story* with a more recent example. *The Lego Movie* (2014) also deals with a toy society, albeit one that is much less aware of the existence of humans. The villain of this world, President Business (also known as Lord Business) has an evil plan built not around the physical disassembly of toys, but rather placing them in permanent stasis. By using the power of “Kragle” (Krazy Glue), he plans to permanently cement all of the inhabitants of this world into a single, perfect world. The toys (in this case, Lego mini-figures) are told to “follow the instructions” not only when building with blocks, but in their daily lives and interpersonal relations. Central to defeating President Business' nefarious plot is using the power of imagination and creativity to create non-standard Lego models which go against the instructions.

Humans also appear in this film, but as distant, god-like figures. The two human actors, a father and a son, use Lego mini-figures to act out the parts of hero and villain. The father, who wants to build perfect Lego dioramas which are permanently glued into place, conflicts with the son, who wants to use the Lego pieces for play. The affective alliances between these humans and the Lego mini-figures is even stronger than that between Woody and Andy. President Business is an avatar of the father, and the main character Emmet is an avatar of the son. At one

point, the father and son literally “speak through” their avatars, as Emmet delivers a speech to President Business which also functions as an emotional appeal to the father. The day is saved when the father, impressed by the unusual models his son has built, accepts the value of modularity as a form of creative self-expression.

While physical destruction is still a concern for the Lego mini-figures (at one point, Emmet is threatened with melting), physical modification is viewed as liberating and expressive. Emmet even attaches a wheel to his head, using his neck as an impromptu axel for a vehicle. The inability to think creatively, to modify oneself and the world around the self, is seen as the ultimate horror, not disassembly and reassembly. Affective alliances are formed strongly with Lego mini-figures, but their value lies in their modularity, not in creating accurate models of a “real world.”

These themes would seem to place *The Lego Movie* closer to Azuma's Era of Animalization than *Toy Story*. But regardless of when we might place the beginning of the Era of Animalization in America, it is clear that *Toy Story* was produced with Grand Narrative concerns in mind. Polymorphous perversity, in the form of Sid's physical dismantling of toys, is portrayed as a socially deviant, immoral act. Social norms, fictional social norms at that, are portrayed as binding and legitimate. Pixar's Woody is a product of the Era of Fiction, not the Era of Animalization.

### **3.2 SCI-FI REVOLTECH SERIES NO. 010 WOODY**

Sci-Fi Revoltech Series No. 010 Woody (“Revoltech Woody”) was released for sale in Japan in July of 2010 as part of a series of Revoltech figures modeled after Pixar characters. Pixar's

Woody, of course, is a computer animated representation of a cloth doll, which is itself a representation of a wooden puppet from the fictional TV show *Woody's Roundup*. So when we talk about Revoltech Woody, we are talking about a plastic representation of a computer simulation of a cloth doll version of a fictional wooden puppet - which is itself constructed to recall the cultural ideal of the Wild West Cowboy. Strictly speaking, Revoltech Woody is an imitation of an imitation of an imitation of a fictional imitation of an inaccurate portrayal of a historical group of human beings.

Kaiyodo has taken great care in making Revoltech Woody an accurate representation of Pixar's movie character. As the blurb on the back of the box states, "Pixar's CG toy becomes a real toy!" Care has been taken to tie the toy to the movie character by attention to the smallest details - Andy's name written on the right boot in a childish scrawl, an empty gun holster. Perhaps the only major departures from the toy depicted in the movie is a difference of materials (a plastic toy instead of a cloth doll), size, and the lack of a pull-string voice box (although a non-functional string is included).

Revoltech Woody figure comes in a cardboard box decorated with images of the toy and diagrams of its accessories and functions. A text blurb on the back explains briefly who Woody is, accompanied by a technical breakdown: what scale the Revoltech model has been crafted in, its size, its number of posable joints. Another blurb on the right side extolls the virtue of the "Revolver Joint System" which gave the Revoltech series its name and allows for their wide range of posability and customization.

A flap on the front opens, revealing the toy itself (behind a plastic window). Further images and diagrams explain in more detail the endless possibilities of combination and recombination possible. The other side of the flap has an essay on Woody's role in the *Toy Story*

movies by manga artist and essayist Yamamoto Naoki. Beneath the essay is a series of images from the movies, with explanatory footnotes. The essay begins with a nostalgia-inducing speech about the plastic models and toy robots of youth. Yamamoto uses the bulk of the text to outline Woody's personality and important events in the *Toy Story* trilogy. Beneath the text are images from the movies, with further explanatory text. Revoltech Woody is placed side by side with Pixar's Woody, showcasing the iconic scenes which the consumer can reproduce with the Revoltech toy.

Additional notes detail the movies' release dates, director, production company, and other details of a distinctly historical nature. This reflects Kaiyodo's concern with models as a tool for transmitting “cultural heritage.” The box serves both to appeal to potential consumers, but also as a vehicle for preserving and conveying cultural information. So then, contrary to what we might expect from a toy aimed at supposedly postmodern, animalistic *otaku*, the box text takes care to record Woody's historical context.

The packaging does not just put Woody (the character) into a historical context, it also takes pains to establish the historic position of value of Sci-Fi Revoltech Series No.10 Woody. While Azuma's Third-Generation *otaku* supposedly place no special attachment to the position of author, artist, or creator, Woody's packaging proclaims the toy to be “sculpted by Matsumoto Eichiro” no less than six times (four times in English, twice in Japanese). Describing Woody as “sculpted” frames it less as a toy and more as a work of art, echoing Miyawaki Osamu's “art plastic.”

The concern with historicity also manifests in information which assures the consumer of Revoltech Woody's exact technical specifications. The box lists the toy's size, scale in relation to the original character, and number of movable, posable joints. These posable joints are a

particular point of interest, since the box boasts that Revoltech Woody is a “realistic model with the ability to be put into any pose imaginable.” This possibility (along with the accessories) fulfills a historical function, in that it allows the consumer to reproduce Pixar's Woody with the highest possible accuracy. As opposed to traditional sculptures (or plastic models and garage kits), which reproduce a figure in a single point of time in a static pose, Revoltech Woody has the ability to be constantly recast as an almost infinite number of “Woodys.” It attempts not just to reproduce an accurate physical likeness of Woody, but rather a dynamic emotional likeness of Woody, mimicking the original Pixar character's full range of expressivity.

This attention to detail is surprising, given Azuma's claim that Third-Generation post-modern consumers are animalized, ahistorical beings. Not only is fictionalized history from the Second Generation present in Yamamoto's essay detailing the world of *Toy Story*, First Generation concerns are also addressed by defining *Toy Story*'s place in real-world social history as the world's first fully computer animated feature-length film.

However, the packaging does not simply present Revoltech Woody as an accurate representation of Pixar's Woody. It also takes pains to establish it as part of the Revoltech brand. This second appeal is, if anything, more strongly made than the first. The word “Woody” appears 17 times on the entire box (5 times in English, 12 in katakana), including Yamamoto's essay and the captions for the accompanying pictures. In contrast, the word “Revoltech” appears 28 times on the box (18 in English, 10 times in katakana), not including the usage of similar words such as “Revolver Joint.” The entire bottom and right sides of the box are given over to advertisements/explanations of the Revoltech brand, with no reference to Woody. In fact, the only surface on the box which does not prominently display the Revoltech name is the inside flap

with Yamamoto's essay. The Revoltech brand name is even more important than the Kaiyodo company name, which appears only 10 times total.

This emphasis, this repetition of the Revoltech name is not simple advertisement of a brand name, but an attempt to emphasize the unique functionality of Revoltech toys. The bottom of the box has a series of four diagrams and explanatory text on “How to make poses like the ones on the package.” The right side of the box is dedicated to a full explanation of the Revolver Joint system, specifically mentioning that parts from one Revoltech figure can be swapped out for those of another. The back of the box details all of the different parts and accessories included with the figure - different hands, faces, articles of clothing and so on which can be swapped out to create the consumer's preferred version of Woody. This is the essence of the appeal to Revoltech; it is not a simple appeal to brand loyalty, but a promise of flexibility, customizability, and adaptability. To say that a figure is “Revoltech” assures the consumer of a certain level of control over the consumption experience, the ability to easily create and recreate infinite versions of a character through the Revolver Joint system.

The toy itself provides any number of examples of this. Revoltech Woody has fourteen primary Revolver Joints (neck, right shoulder, left shoulder, right elbow, left elbow, right hand, left hand, waist, right hip, left hip, right knee, left knee, right ankle, left ankle). The hands can be removed and replaced. Revoltech Woody comes with seven different hands, one of which “belongs” to Buzz Lightyear. Revoltech Woody also comes with two faces, one with a normal expression and one described as the “evil plan” face. The faces can be removed and the positioning of the eyes can be adjusted to “look” in any direction. Finally, Revoltech Woody comes with a detachable cowboy hat, a microphone, and “Lenny,” another *Toy Story* character that Woody uses as a pair of binoculars.

So what we have in Revoltech Woody is a figure custom-made for the Third-Generation consumer. Whereas garage kits come as a set of dissected pieces meant to be assembled into a pre-determined whole, Revoltech Woody comes as a pre-assembled whole intended to be dissected. The arms of a garage kit model must be carefully cut from a plastic frame, painted, and glued into place. Revoltech Woody can be disassembled and reassembled in seventeen different places with the absolute minimum of effort. While the packaging presents Revoltech Woody as a vehicle for cultural information, the figure itself resembles nothing so much as Dejiko - a simulacra made up of database elements which can be switched around at will to cater to the particular tastes of consumers.

In *Millennial Monsters*, Anne Allison defines the “polymorphous perversity” as consisting of “continual change and stretching of desire across ever new zones/bodies/products” (277). While Allison points out examples of this in diverse Japanese media products from Power Rangers to Pokémon, this quality of polymorphous perversity is perhaps most clearly seen in the Revoltech line. Whereas a Tamagochi may be gender-queer and Pokémon may take place in a deconstructed, ultra-fluid postmodern environment, the Revoltech system has the capacity to break down media properties that started with social narratives (such as the morality of play in *Toy Story*) and convert them into polymorphous perverse collections of database elements.

The Revoltech line is not simply a brand to which consumers are meant to form an affective alliance with. It is a physical database of *moe* elements, the Tinami search engine rendered in plastic. While First and Second Generation consumers may be attracted to the cultural and historical information provided by the packaging, the toys themselves consist of continual change, of an infinite variety of possible bodies which can be easily assembled and disassembled. Whereas a garage kit consists of a limited number of parts intended to be

assembled into a single “correct” finished product, a Revoltech figure comes with too many parts. No matter how a consumer puts together Revoltech Woody, he or she will still have “left overs,” extra hands and faces. Revoltech Woody is not designed to be completed, he is designed to be eternally “incomplete.” Like a split atom, his power consists not in wholeness, but in the released energy of separation.

One of the main features of Azuma's Database Model is that it has a “double-layer structure of information and appearance” (33). The underlying information forms the database, which is “read up” by consumers into individual small narratives. Kaiyodo Woody has the exact same structure. First, Pixar's Woody was converted into the underlying structure, the “accumulation of encoded information” comprised of the individual Revolver Joint pieces (Azuma 32). From these pieces, any number of small narratives can be constructed, of which the “historical” one presented in the essay or *Toy Story* are only one option among many.

Whereas *Toy Story* presented physical disassembly as an act of horror which destroys a toy's ability to speak, the Revoltech system presents physical disassembly as a means of creating any number of Woodys suited to the consumer's particular tastes. Instead of destroying a toy's ability to communicate, the Revolver Joint system, with its excess of hands and faces, allows for the toy to “communicate” a much wider array of potential emotions than a traditional, static toy.

Unlike Sid, who dissects his toys from a position of egocentric non-recognition, postmodern animalistic consumers engage in recombinative play because they feel an emotional attachment to characters and to the *moe* elements from which they are constructed. Like the gamers Azuma describes, who “break” the code of their favorite visual novels so that they can create new scenarios and engage in further play, animalistic consumers of Revoltech Woody are

able to pull him apart and reconstruct him in order to engage in an almost infinite array of emotionally engaging play scenarios.

Like the toys in *Toy Story*, Revoltech Woody comes with a pre-constructed corporate narrative. In *Toy Story*, Buzz Lightyear internalizes the marketing blurb that appears on his package, a short description of his role as a Space Ranger. Kaiyodo's marketing blurb far outstrips this message both in length and in detail. However, while Buzz Lightyear struggled to create a new identity distinct from his built-in blurb, Kaiyodo Woody has had no such trouble

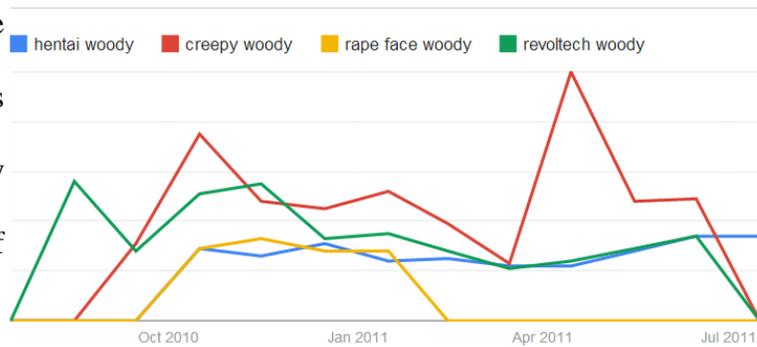
In a sense, Revoltech Woody is a microcosm of Kaiyodo and of Azuma's three Eras. He addresses Grand Narrative concerns of historicity and technical accuracy while also functioning as a Database-driven simulacrum. Here we see Miyawaki Osamu's concern for plastic models as art and as vehicles for cultural heritage, Miyawaki Shūichi's concern for accurate representation of fictional characters, and Third Generation concern for polymorphous perversity in a single product. Consumers can relate to Revoltech Woody in their own manner of choosing.

While Pixar's Woody was clearly from the Era of Fiction, the international response to Revoltech Woody leans more toward the Era of Animalization. By breaking down Pixar's Woody into a series of Database elements, Kaiyodo transformed an Era of Fiction character into an Era of Animalization toy. It should not surprise us that Third Generation consumers were able to easily repurpose a toy with parts that can be interchanged with hundreds of other Revoltech figures away from its original corporate narrative to an original one. It may surprise us just what form this new, consumer-driven narrative took.

### 3.3 CREEPY WOODY

With two re-printings already under its belt, Kaiyodo Woody is one of the most successful Revoltech figures and certainly the most internationally well-known. Released in July of 2010, the figure, intended only for the Japanese domestic market, was by August already on its way to international notoriety under a variety of monikers.

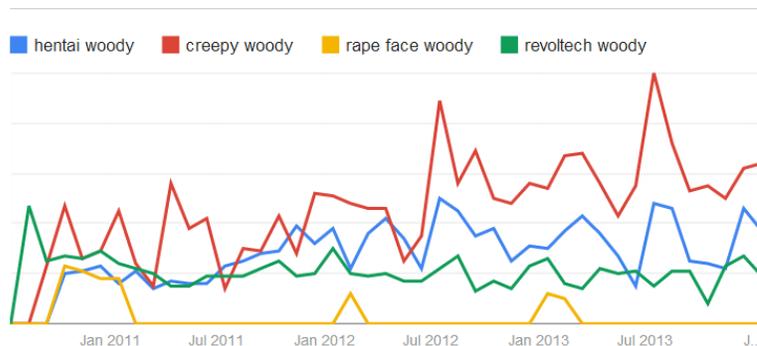
Interest over time. Web Search. Worldwide, Jul 2010 - Jul 2011.



**Figure 1 'Google Trends search volume July 2010- July2011'**

The most widely used name in English is “Creepy Woody,” followed by “Hentai Woody,” “Revoltech Woody” and lastly, the name most antithetical to everything that Pixar’s down-to-earth hero stood for, the infamous “Rape Face

Interest over time. Web Search. Worldwide, Jul 2010 - Jan 2014.



**Figure 2 'Google Trends search volume July 2010-January 2014'**

Woody.” While “Rape Face” is the least frequently used English name, consumer recreation and play using Revoltech Woody has, on the internet at least, very much centered on themes of rape, sexual deviancy, and all around “creepiness.”

In Japan, the three most popular terms are (in no particular order) “*warudakurami uddi*” (Evil Plan Woody), “*hentai uddi*” (Hentai Woody), and “*riborutekku uddi*” (Revoltech Woody).

It is interesting that “Hentai Woody” is used in both languages, though it is difficult to determine what significance to attach to this. Is the Japanese term popular in English because English-speaking consumers assign a Japanese identity to the toy or is the term used simply in imitation of the Japanese consumers who first had access to the figure? At most, we can perhaps use it of an example of the extent to which the term “hentai” has been adopted by English-speaking internet users.

Where did this narrative of rape and sexual deviancy come from? It was certainly not from Pixar, and it seems unlikely that Kaiyodo, with their rigid adherence to accurate representation and the ideal of models as vehicles for cultural heritage, would intentionally distort Woody's character. Is this distasteful narrative purely the creation of an international group of morally deviant *otaku*?

The roots of Creepy Woody, surprisingly enough, lie in the movie *Toy Story* itself, that is to say, with Pixar's Woody. In an early scene in the movie, Woody has some fun at Buzz's expense by pointing and shouting “Buzz, look, an alien!” Buzz, who still believes



Figure 3 'Buzz Lightyear and Woody in *Toy Story* (1995)

himself to be an actual Space Ranger, looks around Andy's room for the non-existent extraterrestrial, much to Woody's amusement.

Pixar's Woody's face of amusement apparently struck a chord with Revoltech Woody sculptor Matsumoto Eiichirō. It served as the basis for Revoltech Woody's alternate face, which

came to be known as the “*warudakurami kao*,” the “evil plan face” apparently conveying Woody's “evil plan” to trick Buzz. The sense is one of a childish joke, a mischievous scheme. Pixar's Woody is perhaps taking advantage of Buzz's naiveté, no lasting harm is done – or so it appears. In truth, Woody's lapse of conscience has started him down a slippery slope of moral degradation, which ends in the troubling narrative of “Rape



Figure 4 'Smiling face and evil plan face'

Face Woody.” As Sir Walter Scott might warn, “Oh what a tangled web we weave/when first we practise to deceive!”

In discussing the “Evil Plan” face, we must remember that it appears on screen for less than a second as part of a series of humorous facial contortions. But once the face is isolated from that sequence of rapidly moving pictures and cast into unmoving plastic, it takes on something of a sinister aspect. It looks less like a smile and more like a leer. No longer doubled over in audible laughter, Revoltech Woody now gazes silently at us rather than Buzz. Once the laughing face is taken out of its original context, the joke suddenly lacks a concrete target. It becomes up to the consumer to decide just what Revoltech Woody is laughing at, the direction of his eyes and the object of his scorn. Is he laughing or is he leering? What evil plans lurk beneath the eyes of Revoltech Woody? Only the consumer can decide.

Consumers wasted no time in creating their own narratives with Revoltech Woody, narratives very much at odd with those of Pixar and Revoltech. These new narratives took two forms. First, Revoltech Woody was physically disassembled and combined with different parts from the Revolver Joint database. In some cases, consumers physically modified these parts and/or combined them with parts from non-Kaiyodo toys. Revoltech Woody was reassembled and placed into dioramas with other toys. Second, consumers used cameras and image editing software to create electronic images which were shared via the internet with other consumers. It was this form of Revoltech Woody which became the nexus of a fan-created character: Creepy Woody.



Figure 5 'Creepy Woody and Aegis'

Creepy Woody has a versatile range. His consumer-created narratives run the gamut from the amusing, the disturbing, the pornographic, the violent, and everything in-between. They take the form of still images taken with cameras, stop-motion animations created by continuously posing and reposing the figure, multi-panel comics, and Western-style memes made with images and text. He poses with other Revoltech figures, but also with Nendoroids, figmas, Western action figures, live animals, and with human beings. These increasingly outlandish narratives of social and sexual deviancy preserve elements of Woody's original database while combining them with new and bizarre elements. Many of the images reference

Woody's identity as a cowboy by having him “lasso” other characters. Others, such as the one shown above, reference lines from *Toy Story*, only now given a sinister meaning as he accosts a figma toy.

Space does not allow us to examine even a fraction of the Creepy Woody images which have proliferated on the internet. There are hundreds, if not thousands them, many of which can be found on both English and Japanese language websites. Many of them are shockingly inappropriate. However, there are a few common threads that can be easily picked out.



**Figure 6 'Three Creepy Woodys in one'**

First, Creepy Woody is most frequently used in conjunction with similarly constructed toys. Revoltech, Nendoroid, and figma action figures all come with multiple parts that can be assembled and reassembled in much the same fashion as Revoltech Woody. This wide selection of database elements makes it easier for consumers to construct original narratives in ways which would not be possible with “regular” toys. Even when non-posable toys or non-toy objects are used, it is the versatility of Revoltech Woody that initially makes the consumer's narrative possible.

Second, Creepy Woody has a distinct personality from Pixar's Woody or even Revoltech Woody which emerged from these uncoordinated consumer narratives. His personality is extreme, offensive, and socially deviant, but it is also remarkably consistent despite there being

no single authoritative “author” who defines how he should behave. Rather, there is an informal network of consumers which have collectively created behavioral patterns which transcend place, time, and language. Creepy Woody is a vile, depraved individual, but he has the same depraved personality in both Japanese and English. In *Toy Story*, a toy's personality is informed both by “official” corporate narratives and by interaction with the consumer. Andy's toy Woody has a distinct self-hood independent from the wooden puppet of Woody's Roundup. Creepy Woody is consumed as a new character, created by



**Figure 7 'Good vs. Evil'**

Revoltech database consumers and established by their collective social recognition.

Third, Creepy Woody is consumed by both Japanese and Western consumers in a way that is compatible with Azuma's Database Consumption theory. The modularity of the Revoltech figure, already broken down into a number of *moe* elements, encourages disassembly and reconstruction very much in line with the process of breaking down visual novel data to create new narratives or breaking down the *moe* elements of anime characters to create the Tinami search engine. The *moe*, the emotional connection and affection clearly extends to the individual elements that make up Creepy Woody (i.e. the “creepy” face) even when completely divorced from the figure of Revoltech Woody and juxtaposed with elements very different from what the sculptor intended.

The idea of Creepy Woody has even transcended the original Kaiyodo figure, the plastic physical object. The “creepy” face of Creepy Woody is referenced in images without any toys in them at all, and his facial expression has been transferred onto other characters.



**Figure 8 'Creepy Woody face used by fans of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (2010)'**

What began as an oddly contorted laughing face and became a particular plastic object has at last become a semantic shorthand for sociopathic sexual deviancy.

In line with Allison's polymorphous perversity, Creepy Woody is gender-queer. He is portrayed not just as a heterosexual male deviant, but as a cross-dresser, as a female, as a homosexual, as a bondage enthusiast; in short, with any and all forms of sexuality imaginable. Allison claims that the “money shot” for *Power Rangers* or *Kamen Rider* are the mechanical details of their trans-human forms, the “bodily secrets” that allow their perverse transformation (107). Similarly, the money shot for Creepy Woody images is that same power to transform into new, perverse forms.



**Figure 9 'Polymorphously Perverse'**

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of Creepy Woody is how thoroughly he has displaced the original narratives encoded in Revoltech Woody for Western audiences. Since the cultural and technical information on Revoltech Woody's packaging is written in Japanese, this information is lost to non-Japanese audiences.

The First and Second Generation concerns are effectively no longer present, so Revoltech Woody is almost entirely branded as a Third Generation product.

Since Revoltech Woody was not intended for international sale, non-Japanese consumers wishing to purchase it generally rely on online sellers to acquire the product. Searching Amazon for “Creepy Woody” brings up Revoltech Woody as the first result. Consumer reviews emphasize that, yes, this is “that Woody.” While some reviewers do mention the high level of technical detail, the most conspicuous reason given for interest in the product is that it is “Creepy Woody,” not that it is “Revoltech Woody.”

This then, is the curious case of Revoltech Woody. While it would be difficult to argue that the international reception of Revoltech Woody “proves” that the world outside Japan has also moved into the Era of Animalization, it does at least show that Japanese and English-speaking consumers were able to recognize the same Database elements without reference to language. Though we might debate the relative animalization of Western and Japanese societies, there is at the very least a similar mechanism to Database Consumption going on among English-speaking consumers.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

There are still many aspects of *otaku* culture, of the *otaku* industry that have yet to receive proper critical analysis. In this paper, I have looked at only one company, which produces only one type of product - toys. But the *otaku* marketplace is a vast and diverse field, with a bewildering array of products and services. In looking at Kaiyodo, I hope to have established a first step in using the Database Consumption Model to understand the *otaku* marketplace in its entirety, not just conventionally narrative goods like video games and anime.

And the Database Consumption Model does seem to have great utility in understanding the history and products of Kaiyodo. From the social Grand Narrative concerns of founder Miyawaki Osamu to the fictional Grand Narrative concerns of Miyawaki Shūichi, from Art Plastic to databasified Revoltech figures, Azuma's model has great predictive and explanatory power for toy companies as well as narrative goods. There are discrepancies between Azuma's periodization and Kaiyodo's company history, mostly caused by limitations on Kaiyodo's part in capital and technology. The cost of metal forms provided a high barrier to production for Kaiyodo in its early years, an obstacle that was not overcome until the development of the Vacuum Mold process. Falling costs of materials and labor (in addition to the investment capital raised by the production of garage kits) allowed Kaiyodo to overcome these limitations and produce metal forms of their own. While concerns for social history and artistic integrity remained central to Kaiyodo's corporate philosophy, the company followed the model of the

anime industry in outsourcing mass production to China, taking advantage of cheap materials and labor. The significance of technology and capital for the *otaku* industry is something left undeveloped by Azuma. Further examination of the role of technology and capital may reveal important implications for the industry as a whole, not just toys.

Although Azuma looks at post-modern consumption in very different terms from critics such as Okada, Allison, and Lukács, some intriguing similarities emerge. As much as Okada may lament the “death of *otaku*,” his doom-saying reveals an essential agreement that something essential has changed in the subculture. While Okada portrays it as a death resulting from the weaknesses and inadequacies of *moe* fans, Azuma understands it as a shift in how consumers relate to products and to society. And these are by no means contradictory arguments. Okada and Azuma are both pointing out the death of a Grand Narrative, of the idea of normativity in the *otaku* subculture. Azuma, having no particular attachment to this subcultural Grand Narrative, is simply more able to note its passing without mourning than the self-styled “Otaking.”

One question that still needs to be better explored is how the Database Model applies outside of the *otaku* subculture. After all, Azuma's goal was understanding Japanese society by looking at *otaku*. I have advanced Gabriella Lukács' work on trendy dramas and *tarento* as one possible example of Database Consumption outside of the world of *otaku*, but trendy drama are still another primarily (though non-traditional) narrative good. How does the Database Model apply to non-narrative goods like clothing, food, and so on? If, as Azuma claims, there is no difference between narratives and coffee mugs, what about narratives and staple goods such as coffee and rice? Certainly, narratives of health, safety, and self-sufficiency play an important role in the domestic Japanese agricultural industry and in international food trends. The key

words of “organic,” “local,” “all-natural,” and so on can be considered a form of narrative that transcends the food items themselves.

Moreover, how does the Database Model apply outside of Japan? There are tantalizing hints of this in the internationalization of Revoltech Woody, or the philosophies of play in *Toy Story* and *The Lego Movie*, but these are mere glimpses, not the whole picture. Is it appropriate to look at the “English-speaking internet” and the “Japanese-speaking internet,” as if all English-speaking cultures were the same? Where does Japan end? While we have discussed some aspects of how Database Consumption may operate outside of Japan, we are still far from having settled the question. Allison takes a more international view than Azuma, looking at the reception of Japanese goods both inside and outside of Japan. However, her “polymorphous perversity” has considerable overlap with Azuma’s Database Consumption. Both describe the death of cultural narratives, of the single, unified self, of the bold line between the consumer and the product. While there still may be crucial distinctions between the Japanese and international markets, the runaway success of Japanese cultural goods described by Allison indicates that these differences may not be as big as we thought. In my opinion, the most surprising thing about the Database Model was its predictive power in explaining the transformation of Pixar’s Woody into the consumer-created Creepy Woody. The manipulation of plastic Database elements, the desire on the part of consumers for modularity, the creation of a new character simulacra from the component parts of old characters - this is a clear example of Database Consumption, that apparently works just as well outside Japan as within.

It may be strange to fill the Conclusions section with so many unanswered questions, but I believe that this is the best conclusion that can be come to: despite the promising information gleaned from looking at Kaiyodo and the Revoltech brand, there are still many aspects of

Database Consumption that have not been fully developed. The conclusion is that there are still many, many questions.

But this is a strength of the Database Model, not a shortcoming. It was developed to answer what was considered a very strange question at the time: just what are these *otaku*? Any model that can answer so many questions while opening doors to newer, stranger ones is one worthy of serious consideration. As the *otaku* become less of a subculture and more of a part of mainstream society, these questions will only become more pertinent. Okada may rightfully claim that “you *otaku* are dead,” but this is largely because so much of post-modern culture has become *otaku*-like. While Grand Narratives are dying, databasified small narratives are becoming increasingly important to daily life, whether in the form of the Japan Brand's redefining of Japan or a child's personal interactions with a Pokémon. While some may fear the effects of animalization and the radical reorientation of self and society, as Hegel pointed out, the end of the Modern Era does not mean the end of meaning, but rather a new form of meaning. The Hegelian hope is for a society that combines rationality and *sittlichkeit*, a new normativity based not on an assumption of how the world eternally is, but on rational decisions about how it can be. Database Consumption is part of this meaning-making, and a better understanding of it means a better understanding of this process and what it means for our future.

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