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Attack Of The Phallic Girls: Review Of "Sentô Bishôjo No Seishin Bunseki" (Fighting Beauties: A Psychoanalysis) By S. Tamaki

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SAITÔ Tamaki. *Sentô bishôjo no seishin bunseki* (*Fighting Beauties: A Psychoanalysis*). Tokyo: Ôta Shuppan, 2000. 286 + 11 pp. unpaginated appendix. 2000 Yen hc.

Fighting Beauties examines two of the most significant collective subjectivities to emerge from Japanese media space at the turn of the century: *otaku,* or obsessive fans of manga, anime, and video games; and "warrior girls," or the adolescent and pre-adolescent heroines of the fictive worlds favored by *otaku*. Critic TATSUMI Takayuki has given us a literary rendering of the book's title as *Fighting Beauties: A Psychoanalysis*; a more literal translation would be *A Psychoanalysis of Beautiful Warrior Girls*. The author, SAITÔ Tamaki, is a psychiatrist and author of several books on such social phenomena as child recluses, as well as of more theoretical work, drawing from the Lacanian tradition, on problems of contemporary culture. His current work is an attempt to understand the development of Japanese popular media through the psychology of its *otaku* consumers.

The subject matter Saitô stakes out here is of great interest, not only to anime and science fiction fans but also to anyone broadly concerned with contemporary culture. Not only are manga and anime fan subcultures proliferating around the globe and infiltrating numerous forms of mass media, but *otaku* aesthetics also influence the "high" art world in the work of such artists as MURAKAMI Takashi, with his "Superflat" theory connecting the attitudes and pictorial styles of anime and new media with the "flatness" of traditional Japanese picture space (see MURAKAMI Takashi, ed., *Superflat* [Madra, 2000]). Meanwhile, the figure of the fighting girl has also achieved an increased media presence in the United States in the past decade through such American movies and television series as *Mulan* (feature film,1998), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (feature film, 1992; TV series, 1997-), and the anime-influenced cartoon *Powerpuff Girls* (TV series, 1998- ; feature film, 2002), as well as such direct Japan imports as *Sailor Moon* (TV series, original broadcast 1992-1997).

In placing *otaku* at the center of his critique, Saitô is venturing into contested social and cultural terrain. While in the context of Saitô's study the word *otaku* refers, roughly, to fans of anime and other media subcultures, the term has a complex and circuitous history. *Otaku* originally derives from an honorific term for the residence of one's interlocutor ("your house"). *Otaku* is also used metonymically as a polite second-person pronoun ("you")—a circumlocution

that, as KOTANI Mari has pointed out, is employed primarily by adult middle- and upper-class women (see Kotani, "Otakuiin wa, otakuia no yume o mita wa" ("The Otakqueen Dreamt of Otakqueers) in AZUMA Hiroki et al, eds., *Môjô genron (Net-Shaped Discourse*, forthcoming 2003). According to some first-hand reports, this polite pronoun was adopted into the speech of predominantly young, male sf fans as early as the 1960s, and eventually the term itself came to signify such fans of sf, computers, anime, and so on (see also TATSUMI Takayuki's afterword in this issue). While the inappropriately polite and effeminate pronoun *otaku* may have been used ironically in this fan subculture, to those outside the subculture this stilted pronoun attested to the group's lack of social skills, and the term *otaku* acquired a derogatory tone, something like "geek" or "nerd."

With the surge of interest in anime and related media in the last ten years, writers such as Saitô have rehabilitated the term *otaku* and placed it at the center of their critical projects. (Meanwhile, the word has also migrated west and is proudly used as a self-identification by manga and anime fans in America.) While Saitô employs it as a key term in the present book, *otaku* is still far from neutral and carries its baggage of insider irony and outsider discrimination. Furthermore, the term also enfolds its gender-laden etymology as an aspect of adult female speech appropriated by adolescent males. While females clearly make up an important part of the audience of the media forms described in Saitô's book, it is unclear whether *otaku* can comfortably or equitably refer to both males and females. As I discuss below, the gendered history of the term *otaku* and the stereotypes it encourages have important consequences for Saitô's argument.

While the term *otaku* has gained a certain currency in the West, the "beautiful warrior girls," or *sentô bishôjo*, of Saitô's title may be less familiar. Since at least the 1980s, the *shôjo* or pre-adolescent girl has been as symbolically freighted a term as *otaku*, indicating not just a demographic group but an eminently marketable and intensively analyzed cultural style based on an aesthetic of "cuteness." Saitô's analysis, however, focuses not on real-world *shôjo* but on the "fighting" (*sentô*) and "beautiful" (*bi*) heroines of Japanese manga and anime. Saitô distinguishes such "warrior girls" from the "woman warriors" popular in America, such as Wonder Woman and Xena, the Warrior Princess. While remaining attuned to the mutual influence of Japanese and American popular culture, Saitô constructs a primarily Japan-based lineage of the warrior girl icon, from the 1958 animated film *Shirohebi-den (The Legend of the White Snake)* to such diverse 1990s works as *Sailor Moon, Princess Mononoke* (feature film, 1997), *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (TV series, 1995-96; feature film, 1997) and *Card Captor Sakura* (TV series, 1998-).

The author shows little interest in the relationship between warrior girls and "real-life" *shôjo,* expressing skepticism at the idea that warrior girls reflect an increasing empowerment of girls and women, and pursuing no discussion of what role "warrior-girl" media images play in the subject formation of developing females. Rather, his argument focuses on the relationship between

the fictive warrior girls and their young, male *otaku* fans. Putting it another way, we could say that, despite its title, this work is first and foremost a psychoanalysis of male *otaku,* centering on the question of sexuality. Indeed, Saitô adopts the controversial thesis that the defining characteristic of *otaku* is a formative experience of sexual excitement involving manga or anime.

Saitô begins with a general discussion of *otaku* and Japanese media, and provides support for his interpretation of *otaku* as well as comparative views from overseas in the two following chapters. He proceeds with an interesting digression on the American outsider artist Henry Darger; in Darger's highly personal fantasy world of embattled little girls, Saitô finds a compelling similarity to the iconography and psychology of Japanese manga and anime. His penultimate chapter, "A Genealogy of Warrior Girls," provides a detailed look at the development of the warrior girl icon, and subdivides her manifestations into thirteen sub-categories, such as "witch girl," "sporty heroine," "Pygmalion type," and "crossdressing (or, literally, 'costume perversion') type." Finally, Saitô concludes with his long-deferred psychoanalysis of warrior girls themselves. Extrapolating from the familiar psychoanalytical concept of the phallic mother, Saitô identifies the *sentô bishôjo* as "phallic girls," and endeavors to explain the special nature of this construct. In contrast to the mature sexuality of such Western icons as Wonder Woman and Xena, whom Saitô identifies as phallic mothers, the warrior girls or "phallic girls" are sexually innocent and yet embody a curiously potent and perverse sexuality. The innocent warrior girls are generally oblivious to their own powerful sexual appeal, which nevertheless caters to a variety of what Saitô identifies as "perverse" sexual tastes among manga and anime viewers, including pedophilia, homosexuality, fetishism, sadism, and masochism. Saitô also contrasts phallic mothers with phallic girls in terms of their lack of clear motivation as warriors. He contends that phallic mothers are typically driven to battle by a desire to avenge a trauma of real or symbolic rape, while phallic girls lack such an originary trauma or clear battle motivation, and simply fight because it is their nature to do so—battle for phallic girls is a pleasurable, ecstatic experience. Saitô sees the phallic girl as a shaman-like medium for mysterious violent forces that remain outside herself, rather than as an independently motivated subject. Thus she could be described not as a woman with a penis (the phallic mother) but as a girl who merges or "identifies" with a penis in a form of hysteria.

It is the vacuity and unreality of phallic girls, who fight without internal motivation and merge with a phantasmal phallic violence, that Saitô sees as the key to their nature. He views manga and anime as fundamentally non-mimetic media that establish their own highly "contextual" or self-referential and "self-regulating" (*jiritsuteki*) reality. The phantasmal phallic girls are at the crux of this non-mimetic and self-regulated world. The sexual excitement that the *otaku* viewer takes in the phallic girl's moment of battle-pleasure creates a link between the independent reality of the phallic girl and the psychological and physiological reality of the viewer. While he writes of *otaku* sexuality as another form of hysteria, Saitô ultimately condones *otaku* for strategically resisting the

unreality of a hypermediated world by combining it with the immediacy of their own sexual response.

Although Saitô's analysis of warrior girls is intriguing, the limitations of his perspective are clear. The gendered gaze of the male *otaku* viewing female warrior girls dominates his analysis, providing a skewed view of *otaku* and limiting his interpretation of warrior girls. While Saitô perpetuates the dominant stereotype of the *otaku* as male, recent work in English and Japanese has made even clearer the importance of female audiences for manga and anime. For example, Sharon Kinsella reports in *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (U Hawaii P, 2000) that 65 percent or more of amateur-comic producing participants of the Comic Market convention through the 1990s were women. If the participants of such mega-conventions can be taken as one important sample of the *otaku* (devoted media fan) population, then a theory that implicitly equates *otaku* with males is inadequate. The efficacy of a warrior girl icon such as Sailor Moon is arguably its ability to appeal to multiple types of viewers—young girls, adolescent males, and adults—and to remain open to the multiple desires and uses of each group of viewers. This multiplicity of address is antithetical to Saitô's attempt to fix and analyze one type of gaze.

Ultimately, Saitô's text is more instructive in identifying the pitfalls of manga and anime analysis than in overcoming them. For example, in the introductory chapter he points out the difficulty of establishing a subject position when writing about *otaku*. One approach is that of OKADA Toshio, the self-proclaimed "*otakingu*" (king of *otaku*), who takes the position of *otaku* spokesperson in such works as *Otakugaku nyûmon* (*An Introduction to Otakuology* [Shinchôsha, 1996]) and *Tôdai otakugaku kôza* (*Tokyo University Otakuology Lectures* [Kôdansha, 1997]). The opposite approach, which puts *otaku* in the position of the Other, is taken by many media commentators, who have stigmatized *otaku* as social misfits symptomatic of a degenerate society. Astutely remarking that both these approaches are forms of narcissism, Saitô strives for a third approach, that of an "*otaku* [fan/connoisseur] of *otaku*." Nevertheless, in practice his writing wavers uncomfortably between *otaku* as self and as Other, at times referring to them in the third person and adopting the vague first-person-plural pronoun *wareware* at others.

Another challenge Saitô lays down for himself is to talk about a form of popular culture that is seemingly nationally based without resorting to cultural essentialism. This is indeed a dilemma faced by writers on manga and anime in both Japan and the West: on the one hand their "Japanese-ness" is what seems to make manga and anime distinguishable as objects of analysis, while on the other, manga and anime—to say nothing of the related media genre of video games—offer an eminent example of the transnational nature of popular culture, eclectic in their iconographic roots and wide-ranging in their sites and styles of consumption. Saitô often succeeds in addressing the transnational complexity of popular-culture genres, while at other times, particularly when developing a theory of "Japanesque [cultural] space" versus "Westernesque [cultural] space,"

he falls into broad and questionable generalizations (as when he asserts that American comics and cartoons are fundamentally asexual).

Since it is regrettably still rare for Japanese cultural criticism to find its way into translation, the audience for Saitô's work will probably be limited to readers of Japanese. Those readers with access to Japanese will find that, in the process of building the arguments outlined above, Saitô offers a number of stimulating ideas about media development and consumption. Those without Japanese will still want to bear in mind the questions raised—though by no means definitively answered—in Saitô's work. Why has the image of the adolescent female warrior resonated so strongly in postwar Japanese popular culture? To whose gaze is the warrior girl's combination of sexual innocence and incipient perversity addressed, and what are the cultural and social consequences of this sexualized imagery? Are *otaku* simply a social stereotype, or—as writers such as SAITÔ Tamaki, OKADA Toshio, and artist MURAKAMI Takashi argue—are they a genuine cultural force, harbingers of a more savvy, creative consumer in a media-saturated society? As warrior girl images and *otaku*-like patterns of media consumption steadily migrate to the West, we can only hope to see more works addressing these issues.

Carl Silvio

Anime, Both Global and Local

Susan J. Napier. *Anime from AKIRA to PRINCESS MONONOKE.* New York: Palgrave, 2001. 311 pp. $16.95 pbk.

Any time a scholar writes a book that attempts to account for an entire genre, to provide some sort of critical and/or theoretical explanation for its formal characteristics and the social contexts within which it takes shape, he or she takes on a very difficult task. This job is particularly vexing in the case of anime, a genre whose very location at a nexus of culturally specific appeal and global exchange may be one of its most important definitional features. In other words, given that anime must be understood simultaneously as an art form specific to Japanese culture and as a mode of expression that draws from and appeals to a diverse array of cross-cultural contexts, how does one present a cohesive discussion of its various manifestations? This is the task that Napier successfully undertakes in her book.

This book succeeds because it does not attempt to provide a unified theory of anime. Instead, explains how anime texts respond to the questions raised by the tensions between the local and global. At the same time, the book delineates their various attempts to represent identity in a global economy. More specifically, Napier understands anime as a collection of attempts to articulate what Japanese identity might mean today in our globalized world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Central to all of her observations is the idea that anime occupies a space that both is and is not coincident with Japanese