Praxis

Even a monkey can understand fan activism: Political speech, artistic expression, and a public for the Japanese dōjin community

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Abstract—We examine the creation of dōjinshi works critiquing the passage of the metropolitan Tokyo ordinance Bill 156 in December 2010 as a case of fan-driven political activism. Bill 156 aims to limit artistic freedom and is specifically targeted at anime, manga, and other works of visual pop culture. Fans who participate in dōjin production perform both a love for this media and an active form of citizenship that is historically fannish but transformative beyond the mere appropriation and remix of media texts. We argue that dōjin fans and works constitute a recursive public, wherein participants actively create discourse around artistic and ideological issues while engaging in added layers of discourse regarding the maintenance of their existence as a public. We examine fan discourse and dōjin works engaging Bill 156 as an object for political activism, as anime and manga otaku perform their citizenship in the wider society of Japan for their local public and for a global audience of like-minded fans.

Keywords—Censorship; Citizenship; Dōjinshi; Japan; Manga; Nonexistent youth; Popular culture; Recursive public; Tokyo

1. Introduction: Monkey politics

On December 15, 2010, the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly approved a bill to amend and update the Youth Healthy Development Ordinance (enacted in and amended since 1964) Bill 156—commonly known as the Nonexistent Crimes Bill. The bill regulates the sale and renting of "harmful publications" to Japanese youth: material that is "sexually stimulating, encourages cruelty, and/or may compel suicide or criminal behavior" in people under the age of 18 (note 1). In addition to other provisions regarding mobile phone content and pornography, the bill especially requires Tokyo's content industry to regulate manga, anime, video games, and related images (except for real-life photography) that "unjustifiably glorify or exaggerate" certain sexual or pseudosexual acts, and it allows the government to regulate these images directly if they are "considered to be excessively disrupting of social order," namely, images depicting violent acts such as rape (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-12-13/tokyo-youth-ordinance-bill-approved-by-committee). The bill does not affect materials already labeled as adult or explicit but rather media marketed to general audiences, and critics have pointed out that the language of the bill is intentionally vague while overly broad, thus allowing the metropolitan government to evaluate these works and to enforce the bill as it sees fit (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-12-15/full-tokyo-assembly-passes-youth-ordinance-bill).

The draft bill's clauses concerning artistic expression generated the largest response from the Japanese public. The artistic community—in particular, celebrated manga artists and industry professionals—erupted in protest against the bill and its predicted consequences in the spring of 2010, when the draft bill was framed in terms of depictions of youth characters in creative works (note 2). Although the bill as passed in December 2010 was reframed to restrict depictions of crimes against youth characters in creative works, the creative community's opposition has not abated. The bill is technically a local ordinance that applies only to the metropolis of Tokyo, but self-regulation on the part of the creative industry, the bulk of which is concentrated in the capital, as well as potential censorship of those companies in its jurisdiction by the metropolitan government, could have a chilling effect on the industry nationwide (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/editorial/2010-12-28).

We examine the passage of Bill 156 as an opportunity for political participation and fan activism in Japan. The affective community around Japanese popular visual culture consists of comic artists, animators, and editors, as well as fans of these visual works, who are known primarily as otaku. The fan activism we examine is not reflected in the appreciation and remix of a media property. Rather, the reactions to the Nonexistent Crimes Bill embody engagement with the dōjin medium and illustrate the cultural proximity of Japanese fans to the process of artistic creation (Ingulsrud and Allen 2009). Dōjinshi are a popular form of fan comic in Japan that frequently transform and/or parody professional works produced and distributed by manga and anime companies (Lam 2010, 232–34). Dōjin works, however, are not limited to comic books: they range from dōjin soft (fan-made software) like independent video games to dōjin music and photography CDs. We argue that dōjin works are important because while they transform media artifacts, they reveal cultural and political ideologies underlying the creation and distribution of fan works.

While dōjinshi reflect a fannish impulse to reappropriate and to transform characters and worlds, dōjin works also partake
of a specific economic relationship to commercial works: namely, the process of creating for fans, distributing by fans, and selling directly to fans. Stores around the country that stock dōjin works alongside professional products, but periodic fan events around Japan form key sites for this secondary, face-to-face market. The most notable of these is Comike, the biannual, three-day Comic Market in Tokyo that, in its 76th iteration in August 2009, attracted what was then a record 35,000 exhibitors and 560,000 attendees. While these events remain popular in Japan, many dōjin works are curated, distributed, and publicized in forums online. Additionally, dōjin creators are not necessarily amateurs. Many professional manga artists sell products—outside of their commercial contracts—in the direct-to-fan market, often with the tacit permission of their publishers. And dōjin artists at Comike, for example, frequently have some professional industry experience (Lam 2010; Ōkawa 2006). Indeed, the easy slippage in the dōjin community between professionals and amateurs, both categories being subsumed into that of fans, calls into question the very salience of the professional-fan or professional-amateur distinction (Healey 2009).

Dōjin production is a key and active praxis within otaku subculture. For decades, otaku have been viewed purely as passive consumers of media properties, swayed mentally and sexually by voluptuous female characters (or, in the case of fujoshi—female fans of boys' love comics—male characters in homoerotic scenarios) in comics, television, and video games, creating a personal space for their consumptive pleasure (Azuma 2009; Saitō 2007; Morikawa 2003; Kinsella 1998). However, as we argue, otaku are active participants in the creation and criticism of culture and politics. Through dōjin practices, otaku perform what Thomas Lamarre describes as a "compulsive intervention into the flow of media" (2009, 148, emphasis in original). Otaku are critical viewers who obsessively deconstruct media through layers of information. Yet in creating dōjin, otaku also construct and reconstruct meaning as a public of artists and media consumers, purposefully doing so outside of the hierarchies and discipline of commercial production. As agents in that public, then, otaku transform dōjin into a form of political activism.

To illustrate the ecosystem of dōjin works, artists, and ideologies, we adopt the concept of the recursive public used by anthropologist Christopher Kelty to describe free software developers and open-source principles. A recursive public is "a public that is vitally concerned with the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives" (2008, 3). Dōjin creators in and around otaku subculture epitomize a recursive public: in the creation of dōjinshi and other fan products, they engage in discussions of the viability of the alternative dōjin market and demonstrations of free expression and copyright issues.

Such dōjin practices not only rewrite popular media texts but challenge and transform state-propounded narratives of national and global politics. These acts constitute what Jennifer Chan identifies as new, postmodern forms of performative citizenship, “which does not end with the deconstruction of the networks of power behind existing metanarratives. It is centered on the production of alternatives, performed in the daily acts of activism” (2008, 14). The engagement of dōjin production with contemporary politics via its own instantiation of a recursive public constitutes a new extension of postmodern, performative citizenship into otaku subculture, specifically in opposition to narratives about youth propounded by all levels of government in Japan.

2. Regulating nonexistent crimes

The Nonexistent Crimes Bill is largely the creation of Tokyo's conservative governor, Ishihara Shintarō, who has held the office as an independent since 1999. The text of the ordinance was drafted in spring 2010, but in the face of popular and political opposition from the centrist Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ, which currently holds a majority in the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly), the bill—then popularly called the Nonexistent Youth Bill—was defeated in the assembly in June of that year. Ishihara and his allies eventually secured the bill's passage in December by incorporating many changes initially demanded by DPJ assembly members. Its clauses soliciting voluntary self-regulation by the content industry went into effect on April 1, 2011, and its restrictions on the sale and rental of the materials in question to minors took effect on July 1 (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-12-15/full-tokyo-assembly-passes-youth-ordinance-bill; http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/editorial/2010-12-28). The metropolitan government had already announced in April a list of six titles that it was planning to restrict on the basis of their content, mostly manga containing depictions of incest and rape, under the July provisions (http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2011-05-16/1st-manga-to-be-restricted-by-revised-tokyo-law-listed).

Bill 156 is part of an escalating challenge to artistic speech and expression in manga and anime. Since the 1960s, decisions handed down by Japanese courts in cases relating to the regulation of the depiction of “sexual expression” have consistently found that “protection of public welfare through censorship of obscenity is not a violation of free expression guarantees” (Trager and Obata 2004, 267). However, lawmakers in Japan have increasingly defined the public welfare to include regulation and prohibition of the exposure and sale of sexually explicit materials to persons under the age of 18, on the grounds that exposure to such depictions constitutes a “harmful influence” that has been conflated with the legal charge of obscenity. Since 2002, both professional and dōjin creators of sexually explicit manga have been arrested and eventually fined on charges of obscenity stemming from the manga’s distribution (note 3).

Yamaguchi Itsuko identifies this increased government willingness to regulate speech of all kinds as one consequence of
the advent of what she describes as “the unprecedented scale of speech on the Internet” (2002, 120). In light of uncertainty in the late 1990s over the status of cyberspace under existing legislation governing privacy and free speech, Japanese regulators have taken an increasingly activist approach to the regulation of speech both in the digital and physical spheres, transforming a de facto license for free expression into de jure regulations stipulating its scope. They have done so, moreover, at the urging of business and public interest groups, who are concerned with protecting the basic trust in the Internet necessary for commerce and preventing the propagation of speech harmful to vulnerable societal groups in cyberspace (Yamaguchi 2002). Bill 156’s regulation of crimes against nonexistent—virtual—youth, characters composed solely of images available in various physical and digital media, is both an example of the slipperiness of the regulation of speech on the Internet in Japan and an indicator of the increasing intertwinement of physical and digital commerce, whether that commerce is conducted by professionals or by fans.

3. The ecosystem of dōjin production

[3.1] Fans around the globe produce physical—and, increasingly, digital—copies of their transformative works, marketing them to other fans at cost or for minimal profit, but dōjin production has grown to occupy a critical artistic and economic niche within Japanese society. The emergence of a semicommercial mechanism and marketplace for the creation and distribution of dōjinshi within Japan has fostered a large community of artists and consumers, who participate in artistic communities both on- and offline and who frequently attend fan events to sell fan and original works to their peers (indeed, dōjin means “like-minded”).

[3.2] Dōjinshi have been the topic of many scholarly analyses, particularly in relation to the singular legal issues and questions about ongoing economic viability surrounding the dōjinshi market (Hatcher 2005; Arai and Kinukawa 2010). Additionally, dōjin seem to provide an unusual opportunity for female agency and artistic expression by fujoshi artists and consumers within otaku subculture (Kinsella 1998; Noppe 2009). Beyond these viewpoints, we see dōjinshi not only as transformative fan works, but also as a mode of production that allows for artistic and expressive freedom. Whether at fan events or online, dōjin provide fans with the opportunity to produce creative works outside of the commercial production process, thereby providing them a certain amount of agency in their creative expression.

[3.3] The first Comike was held in 1975, and though various other sokubaikai (fan events for buying and selling works) were also popular at the time, over the next few decades Comike grew to become the largest such event in Japan. The organizers of Comike envisioned a space without limitations on content or access; over time, dōjinshi available at Comike expanded beyond fan-made comics to include model kits, music, animation, and video games, while exhibitors increasingly came to be composed of smaller dōjin circles (rather than large groups) and attendance by consumers—who did not themselves produce dōjin works—increased. These smaller dōjin circles are made up of artists collaborating jointly; Nele Noppe notes that while individual artists do produce dōjinshi on their own (kojinshi), collaboration—usually within a university club—remains the norm, and the norm for circles is to market their works to the larger dōjin community (Lam 2010; Noppe 2009).

[3.4] Of course, derivative fan works sold at sokubaikai remain illegal under Japanese copyright law, and fan creators—as well as event coordinators—understand the legal juggling act that occurs between rights holders and artists. While fan works have been generally tolerated by the manga industry, for a circle to be admitted to Comike, members must submit an application form (with personal details and information about the items to be sold), so that a committee may vet each submission to ensure that no copyrighted material is being resold illegally. Also, the Doujinshi Publishers Association puts out guidelines for creators to ensure that the authors will be liable for any issues after the materials are printed (note 4). Yet with the growth of Comike and the popularization of dōjinshi as a form of artistic expression, creators and even consumers have become embroiled in issues of copyright. Some dōjin creators remain conservative on these points, going, as Nele Noppe notes, “to great lengths in order not to draw attention from people who are not involved in dōjinshi culture and might not be understanding of its activities” (2009, 129). Still, awareness of and involvement in copyright issues leads dōjin creators and consumers to engage in discourse about them.

[3.5] While copyright remains a critical factor for creators, concerns about free speech, freedom of artistic expression, and anticapitalist ideologies are also at the forefront of the dōjin community. Comike participants share the sentiment that dōjin works enjoy a distinct status separate from commercial works. Ian Condry (2011), drawing on research by Shichijō Nobushige concerning Comike participants’ opinions about dōjinshi, notes that works from the commercial world are seen as “un-dōjin-like” (dōjinteki jaa nai) and that there is a logic of the fan art world (dōjinkai no ronri) that opposes the economic logic of capitalism.

4. Recursive publics: Drawing dōjin, drawing out politics

[4.1] While otaku subculture has been consciously incorporated into state narratives marketing the concept of “cool Japan” to increase tourism, the ostensibly passive nature of otaku as ultraconsumers conflicts with the active process of political participation (Galbraith 2010). However, the creation of dōjin works within otaku subculture is an active form of participation in this community. Usually otaku themselves, professional creators of anime and manga frequently engage in discursive practices within their works that act as part of a larger conversation about symbolic and ideological meanings within the subculture. A public forms around discussion about otaku identity and consumer behaviors, and particularly around the exchange of information (Lamarre 2004). Professional studios—beyond the agency of the ordinary citizen—produce media that become important artifacts.
within these debates. Yet dōjin production allows for a greater participation in the discourse of otaku subculture.

[4.2] The creation and circulation of dōjin works also fosters its own discourse around the production of fan works, fan identity, and the status of fans within Japanese society at large. Fans who take active roles in this discourse form a public for ideological debate. Drawing on Michael Warner’s work on publics and counterpublics, Chris Kelty argues that the existence of discursive media is “not sufficient for a public to come into existence...it requires also that the public take corresponding action...the circularity is essential to the phenomenon...its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence” (2008, 48). Besides conversations between fans in clubs, dōjin circles, and online forums, the creation of dōjin works, participation at dōjin events, and—as we explain below—political appeals through media demonstrate the active circulation that occurs within this dynamic fan public.

[4.3] The production of dōjin works for and by fan creators constitutes a public in which fans converse with one another, a space that “checks its operation through shared discourse and enlightened discussion” (Kelty 2008, 39). The ecosystem of dōjin works combines practice and ideology into what Kelty terms a recursive public. Studying free software developers, Kelty describes the two faces of a recursive public: it includes “the activities of making, maintaining, and modifying software and networks, as well as the more conventional discourse that is thereby enabled,” as well as “the recursive ‘depth’ of the public, the series of technical and legal layers...that are the subject of this making, maintaining, and modifying” (2008, 29). The Japanese fan community as a recursive public is involved in the creation of dōjin works, but it also maintains and modifies its existence as a public through the process of creation (methods and technology for art and publication), dōjin events (and the ensuing semicommercial fan economy), and the relationships between creators and copyright holders.

[4.4] Kelty’s concept of the depth of a recursive public is strikingly reminiscent of Thomas Lamarre’s analysis of the superplanar image in Japanese animation, in which intervals between layers of the image are flattened so that the image itself becomes “a distributive field in which movement into depth is replaced by density of information” (2009, 133). For Lamarre, following the cultural critic Okada Toshio, otaku are people who are interested in and capable of navigating these layered images and fields of information successfully. The fan becomes “a producer, assembler, or fabricator, who engineers and navigates his or her path within the manga/anime/game world” and who is a vital part of a culture industry that moves between fan and professional production as easily as it crosses media and goods (Lamarre 2009, 185) (note 5). Such engineering is a counterpart to the ideological layering described by Kelty, and as Sandy Annett (2011) shows, fans of animation are themselves animated by the force of its moving images to perform their love for animation via fandom itself. Beyond consumption of media texts, dōjin practice allows otaku to perform what Lamarre describes as a “compulsive intervention into the flow of media” (2009, 148, emphasis in original), an intervention where fans are continuously altering the norms and terms of dōjin practice by conducting and talking about them.

[4.5] Kelty additionally posits that a recursive public is “a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives” (2008, 3). The dōjin community may criticize the limitations of the commercial market by maintaining its own fan-driven economy around its products, as when fan works portray characters in sexual situations that commercial publishers would never condone. But dōjin works often sustain a symbiotic relationship with professionally produced media, occasionally even developing into best-selling franchises and entering into the professional world of editors and publishing companies (such as Hidekazu Himaruya's Hetalia! Axis Powers). Dōjin works lend credence to alternative—and successful—forms of flexible interaction with copyrighted materials, alternatives that challenge the policies of professionals in the industry. Even companies like Gainax—whose founders started out as fans creating their own fan-made, fan-marketed model kits to fund the production of their high-budget, professional animation projects—have attempted to supervise fan works transforming their professionally produced characters and story lines (“Hostile responses not enough in battles with infringers,” Nikkei Weekly [Tokyo], December 17, 2007).

[4.6] Dōjin alternatives that critique existing forms of power are imbued with social value. Anne Allison has argued that immaterial labor, specifically in its affective form—work around information and human connection that utilizes and also produces emotional connections, like dōjinshi—has become the hegemonic form of labor in late capitalist societies, including Japan. In Allison’s assessment, the global popularity of the Japanese contents industry glorifies “youthful” characteristics of immateriality—“flexible sociality, instantaneous communication, information juggling”—in media franchises even as youth themselves are vilified for their inability to follow in their parents’ socioeconomic footsteps as a result of the immaterialization of the Japanese economy (Allison 2009, 89). Rather than full-time, lifetime employment, youth today are frequently unable to find employment that pays well enough to enable them to live outside the home, marry, and have families of their own.

[4.7] But because affective labor relies on emotions, the stuff of human connections, affective labor may subvert capitalism’s tendencies toward commodification and dehumanization via the very emotional connections that affective labor creates and relies upon, particularly when, in what Allison terms affective activism, those emotional connections are used to forge a community that can sustain its members, physically as well as emotionally. Dōjin epitomize this subversive connective potential, both in terms of the commercial market and in relation to copyright. Allison asserts that as a result of the global popularity of the multimedia Pokémon franchise, for example, Pokémon, “in being productive of capital and national value, became a brand of and for Japan itself” (2009, 92). Similarly, as youth and young adults support dōjin production, a form of affective labor that generates large sums of capital both for dōjin creators (at fan events) and for commercial rights holders (through visibility of fan works), as well
as simple affective connections among members of the dōjin community, dōjin ideologies become an ideology of Japanese youth itself—values that challenge dominant societal narratives concerning the value of youth as citizens.

5. From Monkey Business to miku: Dōjin as political work

[5.1] The dōjin community has a vested interest in the political situation concerning the Nonexistent Crimes Bill, and the public attempts to influence that situation for self-preservation as well as for activism. Bill 156 affects the existence of dōjin works and their creators—to say nothing of the artistic community at large—by regulating the sale and distribution of "harmful books" and potentially encroaching on issues of free expression that are vital to the maintenance of dōjin practice, namely in relation to regulation of the contents industry, which might police its intellectual property more strenuously to avoid repercussions under the ordinance provisions.

[5.2] While opportunities to carry out political agendas are available to dōjin artists at events like Comike, which reach thousands of like-minded individuals, the motivations of participants do not tend to promote political themes. As Ian Condry, citing Shichijō, notes, almost half of the creators polled participate primarily because creating dōjinshi and attending Comike is enjoyable (49.8 percent) or because they wish others to see their artistic work (27.1 percent). Only 8.1 percent of creators stated they participate primarily because they have a message or opinion they wish to convey (Condry 2011): creative satisfaction and expression remain at the heart of Comike.

[5.3] Though the majority of dōjinshi sold at Comike are transformative works, and most explore parodic or erotic themes, dōjin production—and fandom in general—is not always a site of resistance. Participation in fan activities is foremost an act of pleasure and celebration that may lead fans to recapitulate problematic narratives contained within the works being celebrated (Annett 2011). Still, to note that fandom does not necessarily challenge sociopolitical norms is not to reject political action as antithetical to fandom behavior. Political engagement may manifest alongside ordinary fannish participation, or certain works or people may inflect such participation with political motivations and ideologies. For example, Marilyn Ivy examines the contemporary art of Nara Yoshitomo and finds that although Nara's fans are not a priori political, through their appreciation for his work they are immersed in a parapolitics that emerges from the aesthetics and themes dominating Nara's art. His art "is based on shared affects and affections and generates forms of association and communality difficult to establish in late capitalist Japan" (Ivy 2010, 23). Nara's work, which is not limited to Japan, brings together volunteer participants and fans into a parapolitical community; the formation of this community itself is "a form of (para)political action, one that works to produce forms of solidarity resistant to right-wing politics, the justification of war, and neonationalist movements in Japan (and elsewhere)" (Ivy 2010n27).

[5.4] Similarly, certain dōjin creators and works may bring fans together around visible (or subtextual) political issues. Metacommentary within the dōjin public has emerged in various works, most notably the Manga Criticism War Erupts series, where critics, editors, academics, researchers, journalists, and authors critique issues such as free artistic expression in manga, creators' rights, copyright, and the globalization of manga to further the constructive discourse around dōjin culture (http://2chan.us/wordpress/2010/01/22/c77-acquisitions-kind-of-manga-ronso-boppatsu-vol-1/). More recently, in the months leading up to the passage of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill, many artists, creative professionals, critics, and citizens (both Japanese and international) produced information and media summarizing and critiquing the legislation (http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/13/bill-156-locked-to-go-prime-minister-expresses-concern-as-final-vote-comes-on-wednesday/). Since its passage, various commercial texts critiquing the ordinance have continued to appear (note 6). In particular, the manga publisher Shûeisha has continued to lead opposition to the bill. In a press release, a representative called the metropolitan government's stated concern for the welfare of actual youth a "pretext" for its acquiring the ability to lawfully obliterate manga that the metropolitan government couldn't stomach, and he called for readers and publishers to keep a close eye on the metropolitan government so that it does not "run wild" (Weekly Playboy magazine Web site, July 1, 2011, the day the bill's provisions took full effect; http://wpb.shueisha.co.jp/2011/07/01/5525/). On the dōjin side, a representative of the executive committee of the Comitia comics exhibition, a quarter-annual, 1-day dōjin fair in Tokyo, stated the bill forced Comitia staff members to unwillingly participate in a world they hadn't previously been connected to (i.e., politics), and—after noting their initial success and ultimate failure at making their views heard—concluded that the executive committee has no choice but to observe the government closely in the future and to protest and take concrete actions the next time regulations concerning freedom of expression are up for debate (http://blog.livedoor.jp/comitiastaff/archives/65936307.html).

[5.5] While authoritative members in the professional and dōjin realms spoke out against the legislation, some dōjin creators purposefully worked to introduce politics to the publics of dōjin events. For Comike 79 (in December 2010), a dōjinshi titled Saru de mo wakaru tojōretsu taisaku: Monkey business (An idiot's guide to Tokyo's harmful books regulation) [A counterpolicy to a metropolitan regulation that even a monkey could understand: (An idiot's guide to Tokyo's harmful books regulation)] appeared in the fan market (figure 1) (note 7). It parodies the political actors involved in the creation of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill in accordance with aesthetic tropes currently popular within otaku subculture, in the form of a bilingual comic that was marketed to an international audience of like-minded fans (including the authors of this article).
Figure 1. Cover of the Monkey Business dōjinshi. [View larger image.]

[5.6] *Monkey Business* consists of a comic and a few short essays created by three content industry professionals who also regularly produce fan works: Nogami Takeshi (manga artist), Suzuki Takaaki (anime script writer), and Dan Kanemitsu (professional translator). The manga follows the trio as they explain the current state of affairs regarding the Nonexistent Crimes Bill and how fans can become politically engaged to challenge the bill's provisions and fight its consequences. *Monkey Business* parodies the popular comedy manga *Even a Monkey Can Draw Manga* (*EAMCDM*), written by Koji Aihara and Kentaro Takekuma from 1986 to 1988. *EAMCDM* follows two manga artists who want to rule Japan by creating popular manga (Aihara and Takekuma 2002, 5) that also parodies manga genres while providing tips for the reader to draw her own. *Monkey Business* uses the same style: the three male authors are depicted as attractive women, and male politicians are represented as seductive young women in skimpy clothing. In a nod to changing tastes within otaku subculture, the manga parodies boys' love comics as well as boys' action manga (i.e., shōnen, stylized with large muscles and bold ink lines). *EAMCDM*'s political bent transfers cleanly over to *Monkey Business*—the authors want to rule the world with otaku media—but the dōjinshi creators speak of a political, global reality: Japanese popular media has taken hold of millions of international fans, and visual pop culture has become a norm in contemporary Japanese society. Indeed, the dōjinshi begins with an announcement to the community that recognizes the text's playful nature yet seriously calls readers to action: "Imagine a world where people can freely enjoy all the works they want to enjoy to their heart's content. It would be a great privilege if this book provides you some hints as to how we could make such a world a reality. Let's have fun" (Nogami et al. 2010, 3).

[5.7] *Monkey Business* epitomizes a discursive work within the dōjin recursive public. First, it illustrates issues relevant to otaku subculture, debating character-related terms like tsundere (sarcastic but fawning) and moē (cute, sexual appeal), and references manga genres that likely would fall under the purview of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill—comics featuring sexualized girls, homoeroticism, and excessive violence (Nogami et al. 2010, 10–13, 15–18, 20–25; Galbraith 2011). Additionally, at the end of the comic, the narrating characters strip to provide "fan service" for the reader—yet instead of being overtly sexually stimulating, these depictions aim to foster commonality among readers as fans who understand manga norms. While otaku subculture is not homogeneous—for instance, *fujoshi* (literally "rotten women") are very different fans and consumer-producers than male or female otaku—*Monkey Business* attempts to cater to all of its readers, even those such as *fujoshi*, who have kept a low profile until relatively recently (Annett 2011). Even more importantly, the dōjinshi never explains the details of the ordinance: it assumes that dōjin creators and readers, as part of this public, already immerse themselves in debates around these current events. Taken together, these elements constitute artistic trends and foster discourse within the dōjin community, unifying the dōjin public on common cultural ground.

[5.8] Second, *Monkey Business* deals with political issues of free speech and free artistic expression that directly impact the existence of this recursive public, particularly in response to Bill 156. The dōjinshi exemplifies engagement with the discourse of the public, with a script that deals with political action and an art style that mocks the government's legislation. In the accompanying essays, Kanemitsu even draws a parallel between the political process in government and the politics of dōjinshi: like-minded individuals coming together to work for a common goal (Nogami et al. 2010, 31). Overall, the dōjinshi frames the experience of political action from the common standpoint of the dōjin public—approaching politicians as an artist continually fails (Nogami et al. 2010, 6)—and only unity as a community, both as artists and as a generation, will bring success. "This latest battle was a case of the old values conflicting with the new values! In the near future, you and I, the younger generation will be standing in the forefront in this battle!" (Nogami et al. 2010, 28). Kanemitsu's character even calls for international recognition of the situation, heightening Japanese readers' sense of their duty to participate as citizens and to "stay diligently interested in issues like these" because international otaku are "watching us closely" (Nogami et al. 2010, 29). Ultimately, the call to political action depends on the dōjin audience as a public, a community that actively participates rather than being mere "passive
Compared to other dōjin, the Monkey Business creators undertook an unusual promotion strategy that has greatly affected its status as an important work within the dōjin public, particularly in relation to the modification of that public’s future: the creators aimed to distribute the work to the largest possible audience worldwide. Like most fan-made products, the Monkey Business dōjinshi was sold at Comike in a limited print run of about 1,000 copies, produced and distributed by Nogami’s circle, First Spear, which sold out in less than 2 hours. The team quickly began a second print run of the comic, which they are selling through dōjin stores like Tora no Ana, Nogami’s personal online mailing service, and commercial outlets such as Amazon.jp (http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/the-lull-between-the-storms-2011-update/). Although the dōjinshi was not First Spear’s most prominent entry in the official Comike catalog, Monkey Business was heavily advertised online, via art Web sites like Pixiv (to Japanese-language fans) and via Kanemitsu’s blog (to English-language fans). In contrast to dōjin creators of transformative works, who are highly concerned with limiting the distribution of their works in order to avoid direct copyright entanglements, the Monkey Business authors were liberated by their dōjinshi’s original content to promote their political agenda and to distribute their comic everywhere they can. Kanemitsu notes that they tried to keep the price as low as possible to allow ease of access while still covering printing costs (http://dankanemitsu.wordpress.com/2010/12/26/monkey-business-counterattack-on-bill-156-doujin-style/, comments). And at the end of the comic, the authors append a notice: “Taking into consideration the contents and purpose of this book, the authors of this publication provides expressed [sic] permission for others to reproduce, share, redistribute the contents of this publication...You are free to spread the word, but please don’t rip us off” (Nogami et al. 2010, 42).

Such freedom to share seems antithetical to the values (and worries) of the dōjin community that inhabits events like Comike. However, Monkey Business represents another instance in which dōjin production is reproducing its ideological inclinations as a form of maintenance and modification of its own existence as a recursive public, in this case by demonstrating possibilities for distribution of dōjinshi en masse to the global public of international otaku. As creators embrace the networked potential of the Internet, dōjin production may well begin to adopt such elements of “free culture” into its practice (Lessig 2005).

Online spaces have already emerged that dōjin artists and fans frequent to share and discuss art and media—spaces that also expand the potential and scope of dōjin publics. Platforms such as Pixiv, a Web site for artists to share pictures, and Nico Nico Douga, a video platform like YouTube, have been adopted by the dōjin community to distribute works to a massive network of users (Lam 2010, 243). Nogami used Pixiv to advertise Monkey Business to users who were following the account or looking for related materials via tagging, as a fair number of other dōjin artists do (http://www.pixiv.net/member_illust.php?mode=medium&illust_id=15196677). Additionally, he also advertised the comic on his circle’s Web site (http://www.shop-online.jp/nogamiwebshop) and encouraged discourse on blogs and Twitter. Again, the increased potential for visibility seems to contradict the guiding ideology of dōjin community as a public, namely its predilection for concealment; however, most viewers who access these media and engage with artists appear to share ideologies and care for similar issues. In other words, the dōjin public has begun to extend to certain online platforms. Yet these platforms are also used as primary spaces in which dōjin publics evolve.

For example, artists are employing Nico Nico Douga to disseminate dōjin work critical of Bill 156. On February 10, 2011, user Koushirou uploaded a video—a piece of dōjin music—to Nico Nico Douga titled “[Hatsune Miku] Hijitsuzai Seishônen Kenzen Ikusei Hô [Orijinaru—PV]” ([Hatsune Miku] Nonexistent Youth Healthy Development Ordinance [Original—PV]) (video 1). The song is one of thousands of dōjin music creations uploaded to Nico Nico Douga that have been created using Vocaloid, music composition software that pairs coded notes with audio recorded by a voice actor and feature Vocaloid’s mascot cum virtual idol, Hatsune Miku (developed by Crypton Future Media Inc.). Koushirou’s video, however, recontextualizes Miku as a political activist, herself a dark, unhealthy, nonexistent youth, as she sings a condescending song about the politicians who are passing legislation against the “infamous people who wear glasses” (megane o kaketa erai hitotachi)—that is, otaku. The song describes pop culture fans’ perception of politicians as people who “can’t see the future, they’re so befuddled by vagueness” (mirai ga miemasen ne / aimai subbokete). However, Miku sings—representing all “nonexistent youth” as well as her otaku creators—“We’re waiting for a decision / Beautiful, idealistic / Flawless, ordinary, equal, and such / Please take care of our world, okay? / Take it!” (ketsudan o omachi shiteorimasu / utsukushiku risôtekina / kanzenmuketsu no heihei nado tairana / bokura no sekai o yoroshiku ne / sai). And as Miku belts out her final lyric, a viewer’s added comment flashes in red on screen: “2012 Citydwellers Rebellion” (2012 toshi kokumin hanpatsu), suggesting an activist rallying cry for subsequent viewers. Conveniently, retailers link to commercial books explaining and criticizing the ordinance at the bottom of the video’s Web page.
**Video 1.** "[Hatsune Miku] Nonexistent Youth Healthy Development Ordinance [Original—PV]," dōjin music video critical of Bill 156.

[5.13] Nico Nico Douga acts as a vital segment of the recursive dōjin public, as thousands of Japanese fans use the platform for the dissemination of fan works via alternative distribution methods. In particular, Vocaloid grew rapidly because thousands of producers paired their songs with videos and uploaded them to the site, letting their peers distribute them freely. And though the Vocaloid software is proprietary, its creator, Crypton Inc., allows fans to appropriate Miku for certain artistic contexts like music videos, in which the Vocaloid characters become part of an "open-source culture" model (Leavitt 2011), where dōjin production using Miku and other Vocaloid idols thrives under lenient copyright allowances. (Crypton has, however, enforced its rights in specific, though rare, circumstances.) Certain limitations within the Vocaloid software's terms of service may restrict the artistic freedom of these musicians, such as using the characters to "transgress public order and morals" (http://piapro.jp/license/pcl), and therefore it is possible that Koushirou's criticism of Bill 156 may be deemed inappropriate and "legally" censored through a takedown procedure. As an amateur dōjin work spread within the dōjin public, Koushirou's video provides the public with further political awareness.

[5.14] While Koushirou's Vocaloid video epitomizes political action within the dōjin community, like creative production at Comike, not all dōjin works on Nico Nico Douga are inflected politically. However, the dōjin communities that emerge on platforms like Nico Nico Douga or Pixiv act as spatial extensions of the recursive public of dōjin creators and consumers, and the Internet allows for the expansion of the public as more fans discover a space for critical discussion around creative and ideological values. These online spaces—though currently bounded by linguistic divides—further extend global anime and manga fandom and bring people from around the world into the public who are interested in the alternative ideals of the dōjin community.

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6. Conclusion: Dōjin ideology and political futures

[6.1] Participation in Japanese dōjin communities epitomizes a recursive public that emphasizes discursive media in addition to action that impacts the maintenance of the public. Additionally, as we have argued, dōjin publics allow for political participation on the part of fans. Yet such participation also affects Japanese identity, because participation in these forms of alternative production and ideologies foster changes in civic engagement as Japanese grow up with these participatory practices.

[6.2] The alternatives of dōjin publics are important markers of cultural transition in postwar Japanese identity and citizenship. Since approximately 1960, when the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) brought popular political activism to its knees and inaugurated the so-called economist settlement, postwar Japanese democracy has been routinely characterized as illiberal and undemocratic. The gendered, male ideals of adult participation in Japanese society were centered around the figure of the salaryman, whose romanticized lifetime employment provided for his family, a household headed by the iconic *shufu* (housewife). Politics, by and large, were left to bureaucrats and career politicians, as Japan got the postwar democracy to which its citizens agreed: limited political input in return for vastly increasing economic output. Writing in 1998, Andrew Gordon termed the postwar sociopolitical order a "gyroscopic hegemony," noting that it was startlingly able to adjust itself to absorb challenges ranging from increased calls for women's right to work in the 1970s to the tribulations of the postbubble 1990s (1998, 212). In the dozen years since Gordon's analysis, the figures of the salaryman and the *shufu* have been, if not thoroughly discredited, then rendered far beyond the reach of many young people by changing socioeconomic forces, and the business-oriented social values described by Gordon are shifting to the immaterial labor (described by Allison) that has become the dominant form of hegemony within Japan.

[6.3] The immaterial, affective labor of Japanese dōjin practices constitute what Jennifer Chan calls "movement-based knowledge," which in her view "helps to construct new subjectivities about who the Japanese are and how they relate to others—
locally, regionally, and globally” (2008, 344). These dōjin practices resemble what Chan identifies as new, postmodern forms of performative citizenship, “which does not end with the deconstruction of the networks of power behind existing metanarratives. It is centered on the production of alternatives, performed in the daily acts of activism” (2008, 14).

[6.4] But in being an alternative to postwar Japanese social structures and values, the dōjin public inhabits a unique position. In surveying activists in nongovernmental Japanese organizations, Chan concludes that “these new subjectivities...need space in which to be expressed” (2008, 344); otherwise, they cannot emerge as alternatives. While Japanese NGOs must constantly struggle in competition with corporations and the state for adequate physical, fiscal, and ideological space, online and physical sites such as Comike, Pixiv, and Nico Nico Douga represent physical and ideological spaces constructed by Japanese fans of anime and manga, where those fans can constitute their own subjectivities and foster new forms of performative citizenship. These spaces and practices then become a networked platform for activism, and activism in the dōjin public is predicated on the claim that Japanese youth have a capacity for critical judgment about their own lives as well as their society—a capacity, as Bill McLelland notes, the authors of Bill 156 were careful to deny (2011, 8). Through engagement with metropolitan politics via the production of dōjin works critical of the Nonexistent Crimes Bill, fans directly challenge governmental narratives about youth—namely, their purported vulnerability, naïvete, and need for government protection—and indirectly counter state narratives about capitalism as the proper basis for economic exchange.

[6.5] Conscientious participation by the members of the dōjin public in the politics of society at large is transformative, not only in terms of appropriating and reorganizing media texts but in remaking citizen identity at large at a critical moment in Japanese history. Japan—as pundits, politicians, and ordinary people have reiterated for more than a decade—is facing a deep and continuing social and economic crisis. Since the collapse of the bubble economy in 1991, economic indicators have plummeted, along with rates of marriage and childbearing even as society on the whole ages quickly. As Anne Allison points out, state narratives have tended to blame young Japanese people for their failures to find steady jobs, marry, and have children, concealing the role of macroeconomic factors in conjunction with state policies in causing those failures (2009, 90–91). Through the creation and consumption of dōjin works, however, the dōjin public and its emergent fan activism challenge the state’s depiction of youth in crisis and provoke its members to take their identity as anime and manga fans into a larger public sphere that they, by constructing and performing a political identity for themselves, will transform in turn to reflect their dreams and desires (Nogami et al. 2010, 34; Kinsella 1998). Whether or not members of the dōjin public succeed in transforming Japanese democracy, they have already rewritten themselves as dōjin—and by extension, Japanese—citizens.

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8. Notes

1. See http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E6%9D%B1%E4%BA%AC%E9%83%BD%E9%9D%92%E5%B0%91%E5%B9%B4%E3%81%AE%E5%8F%

2. In June 2010, even nonexistent characters protested the bill: a character in the wildly popular Weekly Shonen Jump manga Gin Tama shouted in one chapter, “I object to the Ōedo Youth Healthy Development Ordinance Revision Bill!,” referencing the name of Tokyo in the manga (McLelland 2011, 10).

3. In 2002, a professional creator of eromanga and his publisher were arrested for distributing obscene materials, while in 2007 a dōjinshi creator was arrested on similar charges, having violated guidelines relating to the depiction of sexual acts and genitalia self-imposed by the dōjinshi publishers’ association the month before (http://heiseidemocracy.com/2007/08/28/editors-desk-

4. For instance, in 2007, the association issued guidelines pertaining to the censorship of genitalia, warnings about adult content, and inclusion of authors’ personal information in sexually explicit dōjinshi. See http://www.doujin.gr.jp/foradult.html.

5. Lamarre’s description of the movement of the otaku subjectile (i.e., a subject in motion) through these fields of information is analogous to the experience of navigating the Comike catalog, or Comike itself: it’s up to the fan to decide what track to take.

6. See "Books Relevant to Tokyo Regulation" (tojiōrei kanren tosho) at http://mitb.bufsiz.jp/ (left column).

7. The full text of Monkey Business is available at http://media.transformativeworks.org/twc/v10/monkeybusiness.pdf. This document may be reproduced, shared, and distributed as long as such activity does not result in financial or material compensation.

9. Works cited


