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I. INTRODUCTION

What is an idol? At the most literal level, an idol is an object of worship. Not all worship is necessarily idolatrous. Art historians Michael Cole and Rebecca Zorach, in the introduction to *The Idol in the Age of Art,* wrote that "Idolatry, to follow one conventional definition, consisted of a misdirection of attention; to idolize was to bestow honor on humans that rightly belonged to God."[1] Whether this honor was given to statues of saints or heroes, or images of gods made by human hands, idolatry could be seen as privileging human conceptions of the divine over the divine itself.

Voltaire, in his *Philosophical Dictionary,* wrote that "there has never been a people on earth who has adopted the name of 'idolater.' This word is an insult, a term of outrage."[2] The words "idol," "idolater" and "idolatry" are generally used pejoratively to describe devotional objects, practitioners, and practices alien to one's own belief system. Expanding on Voltaire, historian Jonathan Sheehan observed that, "There never has been a people who self-identify as idolaters. Idolatry is and has always been a charge made against someone else, a language of judgment used at certain times and for certain effects."[3] Accusations of idolatry served to create borders between groups, dividing the followers of one faith from those with different practices. "The charge of idolatry implies an 'other,' usually a very specific other. […] 'The idol' was a slippery category, one necessary for making value distinctions among groups, whether Catholic/Protestant or European/Non-European, but also

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1 Michael Wayne Cole and Rebecca Zorach, eds., *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World*, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co, 2009), 2.

2 Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, La Salamandre (Paris: Impr. nationale éditions, 1994), 291–304; Quoted in Joan Pau Rubiés, "Theology, Ethnography, and the Historicization of Idolatry," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 571, doi:10.1353/jhi.2006.0038.

3 Jonathan Sheehan, "Introduction: Thinking about Idols in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 4 (2006): 564, doi:10.1353/jhi.2006.0039.

one that, because of its broad availability and its vague applicability, inherently revitalized the values of those who depended on it."[4]

People may not self-identify as idolaters, but there are performers who self-identify as idols. In contemporary Japanese media culture, the term "idol" has a specific meaning: anthropologist Patrick Galbraith defines it as "a word used in Japan to refer to highly produced and promoted singers, models, and media personalities. […] From popular music and photo albums to fashion and accessories, idols are produced and packaged to maximize consumption."[5] While the use of the term "idol" is not limited to Japan (celebrities are "idolized" across the world), its Japanese meaning specifically references manufactured personalities that operate across different media. "In Japan, it is entirely possible for an idol to perform across genres and media outlets simultaneously, with all these images playing off one another. Constantly present and exposed, the idol becomes 'real,' the basis of feelings of intimacy among viewers, though this is independent of 'reality.'"[6] This variety of idol exists in a transmedia space, jumping between media without being tied to any one in particular. These idols are referred to as such by their producers, their devotees, and themselves, defying Voltaire's pejorative assessment of the term.

In this thesis and its accompanying body of work, historical and contemporary conceptions of idolatry are engaged using Baroque imagery and methods. The term "Baroque" can potentially refer to the early-modern era of the 17th century AD; a style of art, architecture, literature, music, and theater that developed around that time; or both. Media

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4 Cole and Zorach, *The Idol in the Age of Art*, 5.

5 Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, eds., *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

6 Patrick Galbraith, "Idols: Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism" in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture,* Galbraith and Karlin eds., 186.

theorist Angela Ndalianis wrote that the term "[...] implied an art or music of extravagance, impetuousness, and virtuosity, all of which were concerned with stirring the affections and senses of the individual. The baroque was believed to lack the reason and discipline that came to be associated with neoclassicism and the era of the Enlightenment."[7] To some contemporaries of the period and early art historians, the Baroque was seen as an aberration opposed to the rationality of classical aesthetics. "The word Baroque conjures up strangeness and the bizarre, as well as a certain ostentation and over-ornamentation. A sense of bewilderment and unease about the Baroque has been expressed by critics since the period itself that the term describes."[8]

The word "Baroque" has no definitive etymology: John Rupert Martin, a scholar on the Baroque, wrote that "it matters very little whether the word can be shown to derive from the Portuguese *barroco,* a 'rough or imperfectly shaped pearl', or from the syllogistic term *baroco,* the mnemonic name invented for the fourth mode of the second figure of formal logic, or from some other source altogether."[9] This particular syllogism (if every A is B and some C is not B, then some C is not A) was characterized by philosopher and literary theorist Gregg Lambert as being "strained and artificial," a charge also levied historically against the Baroque itself.[10]

Whatever the word's origins may be, it denotes an era and the distinctive style that emerged during that time. Writing about manifestations of Baroque sensibilities in today's popular culture, Ndalianis observed that:

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7 Angela Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, Media in Transition (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 7.

8 Vernon Hyde Minor, *Baroque & Rococo: Art & Culture* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 13.

9 John Rupert Martin, *Baroque*, 1st U.S. ed, Icon Editions (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 11.

10 Gregg Lambert, *On the (new) Baroque*, Rev. ed, Critical Studies in the Humanities (Aurora, Colo., USA: Davies Group, 2008), *xxiii*.

> Whatever the term's origins, it is clear that, for the eighteenth and, in particular, the nineteenth century, the baroque was increasingly understood as possessing traits that were unusual, vulgar, exuberant, and beyond the norm. Indeed, even into the nineteenth century, critics and historians perceived the baroque as a degeneration or decline of the classical and harmonious ideal epitomized by the Renaissance era. […] Until the twentieth century, seventeenth-century baroque art was largely ignored by art historians. The baroque was generally considered a chaotic and exuberant form that lacked the order and reason of neoclassicism, the transcendent wonder of romanticism, or the social awareness of realism.[11]

The Baroque and idolatry have been entwined at multiple points in history. Baroque sacred art and architecture was partially a Catholic response to Protestant iconoclasm. The Council of Trent, an ecumenical council held by the Catholic Church several decades prior to the dawn of the Baroque, reaffirmed the manufacture and veneration of images:

> As we can read in the edicts of the Council, the Roman Catholic Church defended the use of sacred images. The last official statement by the Church on this matter had been the condemnation of the iconoclasts – those who destroyed sacred images in the belief that they were idols – at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787. According to the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent, because saints intercede for us by praying to God on our behalf, their images (and relics) are appropriately 'invoked' (called upon, prayed to) so as to provide aid and blessing. […] The devoted are instructed by such images, reminded of the stories and articles of faith, miracles, and grace of God. And if anyone disagrees with this, 'let him be anathema.'[12]

The Baroque emerged in Catholic Europe in the decades following the Council, spurred on by the Church's reaffirmation of sacred imagery. The Baroque's ties to idolatry also involved instances of cultural misunderstanding that stemmed from the expansion of European culture to Africa, Asia, and the Americas during pre-modernity. The Baroque era of the 17th century was in the center of what Cole and Zorach characterize as the "age of idolatry:"

> If we were to look for a new art historical designation for the period from 1400 to 1800 CE, we could very well refer to it as the 'age of idolatry.' To be sure, this was not the first time that artists and writers had concerned themselves with the 'idol': idols had long been a preoccupation of theologians and had

[11] Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, 7-8.
[12] Minor, *Baroque & Rococo*, 47–48.

> been common motifs in European art since the middle ages. It would be difficult, nevertheless, to find another moment in the history of the West when the idea of idolatry seemed so vivid and the danger of it so widespread. This was, after all, a time of renewed iconoclasm on a massive scale – in the course of the sixteenth century, paintings, sculptures, manuscripts and drawings from Antwerp to Rome, from Geneva to the Americas became definitively designated as 'idols' through their ritual destruction. The backdrop for these acts included encounters with non-European cultures and intra-European confessional conflict, both on a previously unimaginable scale.[13]

Historically, the main attributes of the Baroque as an artistic style were theatricality, illusionism, and ornamentation. William Egginton defined theatricality as "a model according to which the perceiver, analogous to a spectator in a theater, synthesizes raw data through the medium of the stage and its characters."[14] In his book *The Theater of Truth,* on the Baroque and its contemporary manifestations, Egginton wrote:

> The Baroque is theater, and the theater is baroque. From the moment of its inception in the late sixteenth century, the modern European theater, that institution coterminous with the division of the world into an audience and a stage, has been driven by the same troubled relation that has prodded its historical fellow traveler, modern philosophy: the relation between truth and illusion. […] For in a theatrical world the seeker is constitutively rent by appearances, and appearances promise an unspoiled ground that is only ever encountered as yet another theatrical space; or, rather, the ground on which we stand, so sure of its reality, is revealed again and again to be yet another of illusion's snares, to be explained away yet again in the service of an ever receding truth.[15]

This corresponds to the Baroque predilection towards illusionism, which "assumes the existence of a veil of appearances, and then suggests the possibility of a space opening just beyond those appearances where truth resides. In painting and architecture this strategy corresponds to the well-known baroque techniques of trompe l'oeil, anamorphosis, and what Heinrich Wölfflin referred to as the painterly style, in which the borders between bodies are blurred and spaces in the painting are left unclear."[16] Another Baroque technique involved the use of *mise-en-abîme* (French for "placed in the abyss"), an illusionistic device of self-

[13] Cole and Zorach, *The Idol in the Age of Art*, 1.

[14] William Egginton, *The Theater of Truth: The Ideology of (neo)baroque Aesthetics* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010), 71–72.

[15] Ibid., 39.

[16] Ibid., 3.

referentiality. Examples of *mise-en-abîme* include dreams within dreams, a story within a story, or the dizzying feeling of standing between two mirrors and seeing your reflection repeated in an infinitely deep illusionistic space. Baroque works of art play with this border between the real and the illusionary, a space made physical by the frame: "[O]ne might be reminded of those Baroque works hanging in museums where the frame itself, with all its beautiful and intricate motifs and multiple serifs, rivals the representation of the interior content, producing a disorienting and distracting effect in the spectator whose attention is constantly drawn away from the center of the work to a point where inside and outside fall into confusion and cannot be distinguished *(chiaroscuro)*."[17] The emphasis on ornament and decoration, in the frame and elsewhere, was a third attribute of the Baroque. To Lambert, Baroque ornamentation was not strictly ornamental (i.e. non-functional): the Baroque "incorporates the ornamental attributes of surface and design as corporeal predicates that unfold to express the presence of an underlying *unity* – a presence that is not represented by the work, but implied, or embodied as an emotional effect produced in the spectator or witness."[18] The effect and purpose of Baroque ornamentation was, in this view, to suggest the presence of an absent force that could unify the disparate decorative elements: floral motifs, swirling leaves, twisting serifs, and pleated folds.

The Baroque has cultural significance beyond its visual grandeur. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze devoted his book *The Fold* to examining the Baroque through his interpretation of the writings of Gottfried Leibniz. Deleuze wrote:

> The Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait. It endlessly produces folds. It does not invent things: there are all kinds of folds coming from the East, Greek,

[17] Lambert, *On the (new) Baroque*, *xiii*.
[18] Ibid., 8.

> Roman, Romanesque, Gothic, Classical folds. . . . Yet the Baroque trait twists and turns its folds, pushing them to infinity, fold over fold, one upon the other. The Baroque fold unfurls all the way to infinity.[19]

Deleuze's characterization of the Baroque as an infinite re-folding of cultural elements into different forms echoes theories of postmodernity. Several theorists have concluded that our contemporary media ecology resembles the historical Baroque in numerous ways.[20] In her book about these parallels, Angela Ndalianis wrote:

> In suggesting parallels between the two periods, I do not propose that our current era stands as the mirror double of the seventeenth century. Different historical and social conditions characterize and distinguish the two periods. There are, however, numerous parallels between the two that invite comparison in the treatment and function of formal features, including an emphasis on serial narratives and the spectacular: forms that addressed transformed mass cultures. […] The neo-baroque combines the visual, the auditory, and the textual in ways that parallel the dynamism of seventeenth-century baroque form, but that dynamism is expressed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in technologically and culturally different ways.[21]

The essence of the Baroque is – and was – one of serialism, intertextuality, and polycentrism. Serialism refers to the existence of a work not as a singular entity but as a series of smaller parts that can potentially be used by the consumer to create the work in total (or in another configuration of his or her choosing). Polycentrism is a concept related to serialism: it refers to the lack of a central reference among the parts that make up the whole. Any individual part could be seen as central to the totality of the work: it is up to the viewer/reader/consumer to decide his or her point of entry. Serial and polycentric baroque forms are ever-expanding and potentially infinite: according to Ndalianis, "[s]tories refuse to be contained within a single structure, expanding their narrative universes into further

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[19] Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.

[20] Major theorists of the "Neo-Baroque" include Angela Ndalianis, Omar Calabrese, Gregg Lambert, and William Egginton.

[21] Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, 5.

sequels and serials. Distinct media cross over into other media, merging with, influencing, or being influenced by other media forms."[22] This lack of containment within a single medium (or a single work) is a kind of intertextuality. Works speak to each other across space and across time, referencing, drawing from, and reflecting upon each other like a house of mirrors.

Japanese popular culture from around 1995 to present can be characterized by similar transmediality and plasticity. Works are produced and consumed not as monolithic masterpieces but in series of episodes (or series of series) that leap between media. Japanese media theorist and cultural critic Hiroki Azuma, in his book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, discussed the various ways in which these works can be constructed:

> In today's market for otaku culture, the previously accepted order is no longer dominant; no more do original comics versions debut, followed by anime releases, and finally the related products and fanzines. For example, a proposal for an anime series may make its way into a PC game, and even before the anime production is complete it garners fan support through radio dramatizations and fan events, and even spawns related products that hit the market. Or, conversely, the commercial success of a PC game or trading cards could lead to the publication of fan anthologies […] or novelizations, with the anime and comic versions only following later.[23]

The "work" in question does not exist as an individual entity or even in a particular medium. It exists as a franchise: a polycentric database of multimedia products that are connected intertextually. In the 1980s, manga writer and cultural critic Eiji Ōtsuka wrote that, in the consumption of such products, "What is being consumed is not the individual 'drama' or 'goods' but rather the system hidden behind them. However, the system (or the grand narrative) itself cannot be sold, so, in appearance, installments of serialized dramas and

[22] Ibid., 25.

[23] Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, English ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 39.

'goods' get consumed as single fragments that are cross sections of the system."[24] The system hidden behind today's franchises is not a "grand narrative" but is more like a grand database that can be accessed by the consumer from any angle or trajectory in any order. In that manner, such franchises, including idols and the media that feature them, evoke the polycentrism and intertextuality of the Baroque and its contemporary manifestations.

In his book *Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche sought to take his titular hammer to what he called "not idols of the age but *eternal* idols."[25] Nietzsche's hammer was not the destructive bludgeon of the iconoclast, though. He intended that the idols be "touched with the hammer as with a tuning fork" to "sound [them] out," proving their hollowness to the world.[26] Nietzsche's attitude provides a third way of looking at idols. Instead of seeing idols as divine images like a devotee, or as blasphemous objects to be destroyed like an iconoclast, a different view is suggested: "They are not to be destroyed, but 'sounded' with a delicate, precise touch that reveals their hollowness […] and perhaps even retunes or plays a tune upon them."[27] From this perspective, the idol is not an end in itself but something to be repurposed towards a different end. This approach is similar to the one taken by this thesis and its accompanying body of work. Just as Nietzsche's hammer looks destructive at first glance, the work presented here appears worshipful but also uses that appearance as a means to a different end. The work presented here neither worships nor seeks to destroy the idol's image. Rather, it

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[24] Eiji Ootsuka, *Monogatari Shōhiron: "Bikkuriman" No Shinwagaku* (Tokyo: Shin-yo-sha, 1989), 17–18; Quoted in Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, English ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 30.

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 22.

[26] Ibid.

[27] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Idolatry: Nietzsche, Blake and Poussin" in *Idol Anxiety,* Josh Ellenbogen and Aaron Tugendhaft, eds., (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011)., 61.

listens: not for a hollow sound but for the sounds of other works echoing across time and space.

II. IDOLATRY

The history of idolatry runs parallel to the history of religion. For every religious belief, there are likely a number of other faiths that view it as idolatrous. The civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia produced some of the first religions as well as the first idolaters. The faith of the Mesopotamians involved the worship of cult statues that represented a large pantheon of gods and goddesses. Karel van der Toorn, a Dutch scholar of ancient religions, characterized Babylonian religious practices as being based on such images:

> Both official cult and private devotion were centered around images. In Babylonian religion, each city had its own god. Comparable to a human ruler, the god resided in his 'house' (*bītu*) or 'palace' (*ekallu*) within the citywalls [*sic*]. The presence of the god was manifested in the shape of an anthropomorphic statue. Made of wood and covered in precious metal, the image was placed in the recesses of the temple, in a spot where the glaring daylight and the noises of the outside world could hardly penetrate. There, in the secrecy of his private quarters, the god enjoyed all the trappings of a daily cult.[28]

The term "cult image" refers to a specific type of image of a deity. Scholar of Semitic religions Michael B. Dick wrote, "The adjective 'cult' adds a consideration of the functionality of this image. In distinction to votive images, private divine statues, or images of the monarch, the cult image is the focus of public *latreia* and marks the official presence of that deity, around which that deity's ceremonies revolve."[29] The cult image was the public image of the deity, its mode of interaction with the world, and the worshipers' point of access to the divine. The cult image was seen as the god itself: "[I]n Mesopotamian religion the offerings were not placed before the statue but before the god. The statue was the living

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[28] K. van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book: Analogies Between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 233.

[29] Michael B. Dick, "The Mesopotamian Cult Statue: A Sacramental Encounter with Divinity," in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East / Edited by Neal H. Walls*, ed. Neal H. Walls, American Schools of Oriental Research Books 10 (Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 48.

embodiment of the deity; the deity was the reality, not the statue! By contrast, offerings made before *statues* of living kings and other mortals are designated as such."[30]

In order for a cult image to function as the embodiment of a deity, it had to undergo the two-day long *mīs pî* ritual. *Mīs pî* involved a series of symbolic performances in several locations: the workshop in which the image was made, the banks of a sacred river, an orchard outside the city walls, and finally the "holy of holies" in the temple where the image/god would reside.[31] Two of the sub-rituals of the *mīs pî* process involved rewriting the history of the image's creation to exclude human involvement. In doing so, the image would truly be a god, since any image not made by human hands would have to, by necessity, be of miraculous origin. On the first day of the ritual,

> The image was seated on a reed-mat. The priest presented some offerings to Ea and Asalluhi and threw tools and turtles, made of silver and gold, into the river. The symbolic animals are surely best understood as offerings to Ea, while the sinking of the carpenter's tools implied that the god of the artisans reclaimed the instruments he had used as the medium of his work. He receives the witnesses of the human involvement in the making of the statue. The image was thus isolated from the tools and thereby divested of its human past.[32]

By casting the tools that crafted the image into the sacred river, the priests were giving them back to the gods and insinuating that the image had been crafted by the gods all along. On the second day, in an orchard outside the god's home city, the image was further removed from its human origins:

> The image stands within the magic circle in the orchard; the craftsmen stand before Ninkurra, Ninagal, Kusigbanda, Ninildu and Ninzadim, the priest binds their hands and, in a symbolic act, cuts them off with a sword of tamarisk wood. According to the ritual tablet, this rite of separation is accompanied by an assertory oath by the craftsmen who each swear […] 'I did not make (it, i.e. the statue); (I swear) I

[30] Ibid., 49.

[31] Angelika Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth: The Consecration of Divine Images in Mesopotamia," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 49.

[32] Ibid., 55.

> did not [make (it)]' […] Only the gods of craftsmanship are responsible for the divine product. Rite and oath are meant to annihilate all traces of the statue's earthly origin. The making of the image which had taken place in both heaven and earth has now been divested of its earthly qualities and reduced to the heavenly sphere.'[33]

In the symbolic amputation of the hands that created the statue, its history was rewritten: it became a product of heaven rather than earth, crafted by the gods rather than by human hands. Nevertheless, its materiality remained intact following the completion of the ritual. Thus, such cult images existed in a space between heaven and earth, having its origins in both and neither simultaneously:

> The ritual itself was based on belief in the supernatural origin of the divine statue or symbol created by 'inspirational co-operation' […] between the gods and mortals. On the one hand, this lineage required the following ritual in order to release the image from the human aspect of its origin, thereby enabling it to become a pure and perfect god. On the other hand, it was this origin, and this origin only, which made the mouth opening possible, because the divine descent alone enabled the statue to become vivified as an active and effective god. It was this origin which constituted and established the relationship between the image/symbol and the deity, and it has to be seen as the incorporation of the statue to the god and of the god to the statue, or as a substantial connection of both. A cultic statue was never solely a religious picture, but was always an image imbued with a god, and, as such, it possessed the character of both earthly reality and divine presence.[34]

Michael B. Dick, in his essay "The Mesopotamian Cult Statue: A Sacramental Encounter with Divinity," likens the *mīs pî* ritual of the ancient Mesopotamians to the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist.[35] Dick draws attention to the analogies between the public display of consecrated hosts and processions of Mesopotamian cult statues: "The similarity between the theology of the cult image and the Eucharist becomes even starker during the Christian Middle Ages when the liturgical function of the Eucharist like that of the Mesopotamian cult image was primarily to be viewed and exhibited in procession."[36]

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[33] Ibid., 62.
[34] Ibid., 46.
[35] Dick, "The Mesopotamian Cult Statue: A Sacramental Encounter with Divinity," 43.
[36] Ibid., 44.

According to historian of early modern Christianity Lee Palmer Wandel, in her book *The Eucharist in the Reformation*, the sacrament of the Eucharist consists of two separate doctrines: "transubstantiation" and the "real presence" of Christ.[37] The former doctrine states that, "the bread 'changes in substance' into the body, and the wine 'changes in substance' into the blood of Jesus Christ."[38] The latter doctrine is concerned with the nature of Christ's presence in the sacrament itself: "In the twelfth century, Berengar of Tours gave a particularly forceful, and therefore provocative, formulation to a radical position: if Christ had truly died and was by the right hand of the father, then his 'presence' at the altar could not be his body or blood. Berengar was forced to recant and to swear to Christ's *real presence* – that Christ's body and blood are truly, in reality, present in the bread and wine."[39] Wandel goes on to characterize the sacrament in terms of Aristotelian physics, a major strain of intellectual thought in the medieval era: "These two doctrines, transubstantiation and the real presence, were, in fact, distinct, as Luther would argue. But medieval scholastics took up Aristotelian physics, specifically Aristotle's particular terms, *substance* and *accident*, to explain how the bread and wine continued to look like bread and wine – the 'accidents' of their appearance as absolutely distinct from their 'substance,' which was Christ's body and blood."[40]

The Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist was decried as idolatrous by some Protestant groups during the Reformation. Quoting John Calvin's *Institutes*, Wandel wrote, "Calvin rejected utterly the adoration of the elements [of the Eucharist]. Adoration was, foremost, not

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37 Lee Palmer Wandel, *The Eucharist in the Reformation: Incarnation and Liturgy* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 21.
38 Ibid., 20–21.
39 Ibid., 21.
40 Ibid., 21–22.

what God had commanded – it had no scriptural basis – and it directed attention to earthly elements, away from Christ, who is in heaven. It was idolatry: 'For what is idolatry if not this: to worship the gifts in place of the giver himself?' He targeted specifically host processions: 'Let us therefore remember that this promise was given to those who observe the command joined to it, but that those who transfer the Sacrament to another usage are without any word of God.'"[41]

During the Council of Trent, in which the Church's use of sacred images was re-established, the doctrine of the Eucharist was also affirmed. Opening the Council's sessions regarding the Eucharist was a list of "articles of the heretics," ten objections to the Church's doctrine that the Council sought to discuss: "4. Christ was not to be adored in the Eucharist, nor venerated in feasts, nor carried around in processions, nor brought to the sick, and that these forms of adoration are in reality idolatry. Luther... also in the Augsburg Confession."[42]

Hiroshi Aoyagi, a Japanese anthropologist specializing in idols and their cultural significance and impact, likened the veneration of pop idols to a secular religion in his book *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*:

> The study of idol performances as a symbolic phenomenon calls into question the religiosity of idol performances. In saying this, however, I do not mean to treat idol performances as a religious praxis. I intend to consider idol performances as a secular religion by highlighting analogies between idol performances and religious rituals using concepts such as 'charisma.' Doing so unfolds the mechanism of idolatry: that is, the way in which social relationships, networks, and institutions are built around objects of popular worship. I will keep intact the distinction between religion, which consists of community rituals that are performed to influence the nonhuman realm, and popular culture, which consists of commercial events and representations, even though I will discuss the *religious aspect of popular culture* [Emphasis in original].[43]

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41 Ibid., 163.

42 Ibid., 217.

43 Hiroshi Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles: Idol Performance and Symbolic Production in Contemporary Japan*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 252 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center : distributed by Harvard University Press, 2005), 30.

Expanding on this premise later in the book, Aoyagi wrote that he considers "the mystic orientation of those who worship young, media-promoted personalities as their charismatic role models to be *analogous* to the pattern of idolatry found in new religious movements and the way these movements are differentiated from the rest of society."[44] He proposed a list criteria that link idol cults to religious cults: both types of groups function as alternatives to conventional lifestyles, are devoted to charismatic figures, aim to satisfy personal desires and produce powerful subjective experiences, maintain explicit boundaries between insiders and outsiders, require a high degree of commitment from devotees, and legitimize themselves by claiming possession of esoteric knowledge.[45] In the case of an idol cult, the "charismatic figure" is not a cult leader but the idol herself. Aoyagi wrote that, "One crucial aspect of charisma lies in the power of these personalities to transform themselves and the society in which they are positioned meaningfully."[46] Idols have been placed in positions in which they can exert influence over people. Most of the time, this power is used to generate profits for the companies that employ them. Aoyagi argues that an idol's plasticity is, in itself, meaningful and charismatic: "successful idols […] are considered charismatic because they demonstrate the transformation from an ordinary young person to an extraordinary figure that influences the public. In Japan, charisma encompasses a person's abilities to face challenges, overcome struggles, and accomplish dreams against all odds. It also includes the person's ability to surpass the limits of tradition and attain a new meaning in life that can inspire other members of the society."[47]

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[44] Ibid., 208.
[45] Ibid., 209.
[46] Ibid., 34.
[47] Ibid., 35.

Devotion to pop idols may not overtly invoke the supernatural, but it could be argued that such veneration does in fact attempt to access a "nonhuman realm." An idol could be seen as a nonhuman entity channeled by a human performer. Like Mesopotamian cult images or the Christian Eucharist, idols have both material and spiritual dimensions. Babylonian cult statues, after undergoing *mīs pî,* were situated between heaven and earth, containing elements of both but belonging to neither. Likewise, the Eucharist maintains the appearance of bread and wine but, to the believer, has actually been transformed into the substance of God. Idols also occupy this tenuous space between matter and spirit: an idol is embodied by a performer (like a shaman channeling a spirit into her body), but the performer is not necessarily the idol.

The various aspects of an idol's being are manufactured by management agencies, called *jimusho* in Japanese. W. David Marx, in an essay on these companies, wrote that they "create idols and *tarento* (celebrity performers) rather than simply managing successful performers. In the most common pattern, *jimusho* scout unknowns and then 'debut' them to the public with an intentionally crafted look, personality, and style."[48]

Aoyagi contends that idols are not completely passive in the creation of their public personae: "Producers try hard to symbolize marketable personalities, while performers struggle to mold themselves into symbolic images, in order to establish their positions in the market economy that conditions contemporary urban society."[49] From this perspective, the idol has a kind of plasticity, an ability to shape her image to fit the demands of the market and the strategies of her producers. Media theorist and artist Heather Warren-Crow, in her

[48] W. David Marx, "The Jimusho System: Understanding the Production Logic of the Japanese Entertainment Industry," in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, ed. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 49.

[49] Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*, 10.

book *Girlhood and the Plastic Image*, wrote that the term "'plastic' operates reciprocally to designate either a force that molds or material that is molded. The plastic image conducts itself accordingly. Images are pliable; they can be sculpted like clay and circulated like money. […] But images are not passive. They actively shape bodies and model identity."[50] This plasticity, according to Warren-Crow, is not a gender-neutral phenomenon:

> [O]ur operative notions of image plasticity are entwined with conceptions of the plasticity of girls. […] I work with an understanding of girlhood as 'an idea of mobility preceding the fixity of womanhood and implying an unfinished process of personal development.' This is the cultural work that girls are expected to do. Their discursive duty is performed by their blossoming physiques, unstable body images, and variable identities – all of which hare generated and exploited by an image culture obsessed with youth and transformation. Here I'm not only talking about images *of* girls. Additionally and more incisively, I'm claiming that some images *are* girls.

In terms of idols, they are able to receive forms from outside (i.e., the particular traits desired by their producers) as well as form themselves (it is up to them to embody those traits in a publicly adorable manner). This plasticity is also expressed through the transmediality of idol production. Idols have to remain pliable in order to occupy particular market niches and jump between media as necessary. Agencies create characters with intentionally crafted, adorable personalities who can be promoted through a variety of media: pop idols bounce between music, television, film, commercials, and talk shows; AV idols appear in videos, magazines, and photobooks, and occasionally go on talk or variety shows, appear in pink or mainstream films, or release music albums.

One form of overlap between pop and AV idols is the "image video," a type of video produced to promote idols of both varieties. According to Galbraith,

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[50] Heather Warren-Crow, *Girlhood and the Plastic Image*, Interfaces, Studies in Visual Culture (New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2014), 2.

> In experiencing the immediacy of images and interacting with them on their own terms, fragmented, multiple, and shifting gazes are possible. A ready example is the idol 'image video' (*imēji bideo*). Originally a way for companies to showcase products, the image video was quickly picked up by the idol industry to showcase girls (and notably retains this gender bias). In addition to almost all female idols, even aspiring actresses might release image videos; they are common enough to be available for purchase in convenience stores in Japan. These videos began with nudity, but are now a genre of non-nude erotica (*chakuero* or *chiraizumu*). The viewer sees the idol from a first-person perspective (i.e. the camera is positioned to act as eyes), usually alone in a private setting, and often engaged in everyday activities. There is a tendency towards voyeurism and peeping, such as seeing the idol in bed or in the shower. She is seen in (staged) unguarded moments – unpretentious, trusting, and innocent – making the viewing feel intimate. Facial close-ups are common, which tends to increase feelings of intimacy. […] If not already in a swimsuit or underwear, she strips off her costume down to them as the viewer watches. Each video contains multiple 'scenes,' set apart by theme, location, and costume (walking on the beach in a bikini, working in the kitchen in a maid outfit, waking up in the bedroom in pajamas). The idol appears almost doll-like, her body unchanging even as her surroundings, appearance, and role change compulsively. In each scene, especially while stripping or in swimsuit/underwear, the idol adopts various positions and poses, making sure that there is ample time to see each from multiple angles. Movement is interspersed with repetitious close-ups of isolated body parts – eyes, lips, hands, legs, buttocks, breasts. The camera does not linger too long, focusing in only to be swept out again. Movement of the camera (gaze) and the idol is persistent, as is the presence of (images of) supple flesh.[51]

For pop idols, image videos are not necessarily pornographic, but they often feature erotic or fetishistic elements. For AV idols, the content of an image video is notably toned down from most other releases: AV image videos contain nudity but lack sex scenes, instead serving to promote the idol's other videos. To that end, footage from other releases is sometimes reused in image videos: AV idol Minori Aoi's image video *Tenshi no Buruma* contains footage from several of her other releases, such as *Pure Heart* and *Angel,* chiefly consisting of the idol in and out of various costumes.[52] According to Galbraith, and some of the idol fans he interviewed in his work, one of the chief attributes of an idol is a sense of purity, whether real or imagined. This purity...

> […] also implies a sort of chastity or virtue on the part of the idol, which interacts with sexual desire in interesting ways. In order to keep the idol 'pure,' it is necessary to displace sexual desire from the idol onto other images/objects. The pure relationship with the idol is maintained by replacing her with a series of interchangeable objects, or what [Thomas] LaMarre refers to as 'soft-porn images of bodies.' […] [I]t is interesting that the image video offers what appear to be 'soft-porn images' of the idol's

[51] Galbraith, "Idols: Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism," 195–196.

[52] Masami, *Tenshi No Buruma*, vol. 65, Bishoujo Eros Renshakan (Eichi Publishing Inc., 1999).

> body, but nonetheless the idol maintains her pure (unspoiled) image. This suggests the possibility of dissociation of images (or fantasies) of the same idol from one another. One might likewise consciously shut down or deny intertextual linkages that threaten the preferred image of the idol.[53]

To Galbraith, idols are immaterial beings that require material objects to ground them in reality. This leads to the production and consumption of idol goods: "Even as interactions and pleasures are immediate and intense, the idol as image evaporates without constant replacements to evoke and ground her. This leads to purchasing photographs, videos, and other goods emblazoned with the image of the idol (and imbued with her 'soul'). In the form of a physical commodity, the idol can be possessed, handled, displayed, collected."[54] The idol, like the Eucharist, requires physical "accidents" to embody her "substance." Like a cult image, she exists somewhere between two realms, between the physical and the "spiritual." According to Galbraith, "[t]he idol oscillates between an unreachable ideal (the pure) and the infinitely available material (the sexual)."[55]

A devoted fan could potentially track down the performer who embodied his favorite idol, but this gesture would be futile, as the performer and the idol are not the same being. The performer and idol could, from a Baroque point of view, be seen as folds of the same substance: neither can exist without the other (without the idol, the performer would just be another ordinary person; without the performer, the idol would have no physical presence), yet they also cannot exist simultaneously. The idol folds on top of the performer when the cameras are rolling; once they are turned off the fold is reversed. The fold of the idol is

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[53] Galbraith, "Idols: Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism," 196–197. The "displacement" mentioned here by Galbraith is basically fetishism, the transference of desire from the idol to some other object, like her costume, underwear, et cetera.

[54] Ibid., 197.

[55] Ibid., 199.

manifest in the videos and products that constitute her materiality; the fold of the performer is manifest in her life, something that the viewer and fan cannot access.

In his book on Leibniz and the Baroque, Deleuze outlined a blueprint for an allegorical "Baroque house." This house is divided into two levels: a large ground floor that is open to the outside world and a small upper room, filled with drapery, "blind and closed, but in the other hand resonating as if it were a musical salon translating the visible movements below into sounds up above."[56] In this allegory, the performer's life – her humanity – could be seen as the upper floor, sealed off from public view but still a fold of the same substance as the open lower floor. The viewer must remain on the lower floor, gazing up at the movements of the drapery and wondering if anyone actually occupies that obscure, inaccessible space above.

[56] Deleuze, *The Fold*, 4.

III. TRAJECTORY

In his book *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, Hiroki Azuma outlined the trajectory of Japanese popular culture from modernity's grand narrativity to the database consumption of postmodernity:

> In the shift from modernity to postmodernity, our world image is experiencing a sea change, from one sustained by a narrative-like, cinematic perspective on the entire world to one read-up by search engines, characterized by databases and interfaces. Amid this change, the Japanese otaku lost the grand narrative in the 1970s, learned to fabricate the lost grand narrative in the 1980s (narrative consumption), and in the 1990s, abandoned the necessity for even such fabrication and learned simply to desire the database (database consumption).[57]

Computer scientist and media theorist Lev Manovich, in his book *The Language of New Media*, called the database "a new symbolic form of the computer age, […] a new way to structure our experience of ourselves and of the world."[58] Because this world "appears to us as an endless and unstructured collection of images, texts, and other data records, it is only appropriate that we will be moved to model it as a database."[59] On the most basic level, a database is nothing more than a "structured collection of data."[60] Unlike a narrative, which proceeds linearly from beginning to end, a database has no fixed boundaries beyond the material constraints of the hardware on which it runs. Databases "appear as collections of items on which the user can perform various operations – view, navigate, search. The user's experience of such computerized collections is, therefore, quite distinct from reading a narrative or watching a film or navigating an architectural site."[61]

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57 Azuma, *Otaku*, 54.
58 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 219.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 218.
61 Ibid., 219.

Manovich presents narratives and databases as being in opposition to each other: "As a cultural form, the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list. In contrast, a narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events). Therefore, database and narrative are natural enemies. Competing for the same territory of human culture, each claims an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world."[62] Azuma similarly places these concepts in opposition to one another while proposing that the database form is an evolved type of narrativity: a narrative for an age that can no longer believe in narratives. According to Azuma, this shift from narrative to database began with the first sparks of postmodernity in the 1960s and 70s:

> From the end of the eighteenth century to mid-twentieth century in modern countries, various systems were consolidated for the purpose of organizing members of society into a unified whole; this movement was a precondition for the management of society. These systems became expressed, for instance, intellectually as the ideas of humanity and reason, politically as the nation-state and revolutionary ideologies, and economically as the primacy of production. *Grand narrative* is a general term for these systems.
>
> Modernity was ruled by the grand narrative. In contrast, in postmodernity the grand narratives break down and the cohesion of the social entirety rapidly weakens. In Japan that weakening was accelerated in the 1970s, when both high-speed economic growth and 'the season of politics' ended and when Japan experienced the Oil Shocks and the United Red Army Incident.[63]

Azuma correlates this breakdown of narrativity with Japan's social issues at the time and the ways in which individuals reacted to them. He suggests that, in the absence of tenable grand narratives or ideologies, individuals began to construct their own "shells of themselves" out of fragments of "junk subcultures."[64] This was the point of origin of Japan's *otaku* phenomemon.

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62 Ibid., 225.
63 Azuma, *Otaku*, 28.
64 Ibid.

The term *otaku* refers to a subculture that originated in Japan but has become a global phenomenon.[65] Aoyagi characterizes otaku as individuals who simply "fanatically consume what they like."[66] Azuma defines the word as:

> [A] general term referring to those who indulge in forms of subculture strongly linked to anime, video games, computers, science fiction, special-effects films, anime figurines, and so on. […] Originally, 'otaku' was used to refer to the supporters of a new subculture that emerged in the 1970s. Unfortunately the term became widely known in connection with [the Miyazaki murders], and as a result otaku in Japan were largely associated with those with anti-social and perverted personality traits. Right after Miyazaki's arrest, one weekly magazine described otaku as those 'without basic human communication skills who often withdraw into their own world.' This remains the general perception.[67]

The murders referenced by Azuma took place in the late 1980s and were perpetrated by a man named Tsutomu Miyazaki. Following his arrest, Miyazaki was characterized by the news media as an otaku:

> Between 1988 and 1989 police discovered the bodies of four small girls who had been brutally murdered. The perpetrator of these notorious crimes was a plump, timid-looking 26-year-old man named Miyazaki Tsutomu. The mass media, searching for an image to explain the criminal and his motives, turned their cameras on Miyazaki's room, where they found 5,763 video tapes – *anime*, special effects movies, and violent pornography. […] As a result, *otaku* was fixed in the public mind as a person who has retreated into a fantasy world, is unable to tell the difference between reality and illusion, and is sexually attracted to small children.[68]

From this perspective, the stereotypical otaku is someone who, like Cervantes's Don Quixote, constructs his sense of self from fragments of the media to which he has been exposed:. As Quixote assumed the role of knight errant after reading picaresque novels, the otaku becomes an otaku through interaction with anime, video games, and other such media. Just as Quixote tried to joust a windmill he thought was a giant, an otaku seemingly cannot

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65 Internationally, *otaku* may or may not adopt that particular name for themselves or be referred to as such by outsiders. In English, they tend to be called "japanophiles" or, more pejoratively, "weeaboos."

66 Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*, 205.

67 Azuma, *Otaku*, 3–4.

68 Morikawa Kaichiro, "おたく Otaku/Geek," trans. Dennis Washburn, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 25, no. 1 (2013): 60, doi:10.1353/roj.2013.0002.

distinguish between the fictional world of *anime* and the real world outside. Azuma takes issue with this characterization of otaku, claiming that their preference for fiction is not a delusion but an alternative value system:

> Since not all otaku are mental patients, it follows that they generally possess the ability to distinguish between fiction and reality. […] The otaku choose fiction over social reality not because they cannot distinguish between them but rather as a result of having considered which is the more effective for their human relations, the value standards of social reality or those of fiction. […] Otaku shut themselves into the hobby community not because they deny sociality but rather because, as social values and standards are already dysfunctional, they feel a pressing need to construct alternative values and standards.[69]

Azuma goes on to characterize this construction of alternative values (such as the value of fictional drama in place of social interaction) as being related to the collapse of grand narrativity: "This is a postmodern characteristic because the process by which the coexistence of countless smaller standards replace the loss of the singular and vast social standard corresponds precisely to the 'decline of the grand narrative' first identified by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard."[70] In the past, fiction had served to support and propagate ideologies and the grand narratives of society. As grand narrativity became increasingly detached from experiential reality, fictional narratives were used to fabricate replacements: to "forge the grand narrative that had been lost."[71] These replacements were fabricated in a number of ways: according to Azuma,

> [I]t was common to discover a worldview or a historical view in the otaku products of the late 1980s. Take *Gundam*, for example: since its first television series was broadcast in 1979, works that continued the series, such as *Mobile Suit Z(eta) Gundam, Char's Counterattack,* and *Mobile Suit Double Z Gundam,* were conceived of as belonging to the same fictitious history. Accordingly, the desires of *Gundam* fans necessarily and faithfully embarked on a close examination of this fanciful history; in reality *Gundam*-related books were already shrouded in timelines and mechanical data […]. [A]t this point a narrative other than reality (i.e., fiction) is constructed.[72]

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69 Azuma, *Otaku*, 27.
70 Ibid., 27–28.
71 Ibid., 35.
72 Ibid., 34.

If grand narratives could not be sustained in reality, they could be approximated in fictional universes. The *Gundam* franchise of the 1980s was distinguished by its sense of continuity: its constituent TV series and cinematic films all referred to a consistent world with a consistent (and obsessively charted) history. This world and its history could be seen as a manufactured grand narrative, albeit one that has been fragmented due to having been expressed through a large number of products across various media.

Azuma, quoting Japanese sociologist Masachi Ōsawa, called the period of time in which fictional narratives functioned as replacements for grand narratives the "fictional age:"

> According to Ōsawa, the ideological circumstances of postwar Japan can be divided into two periods – *the idealistic age* from 1945 to 1970 and *the fictional age* from 1970 to 1995. To render it in my own terms, the idealistic age' is the period when grand narrative functioned alone while the 'fictional age' is the period when grand narrative functioned only as a fake.[73]

This "fictional age" overlapped with the era of the pink film in Japanese erotic cinema. Pink films are still being produced to this day (with some overlap with the AV industry, such as AV idol Sora Aoi starring in a pink film in 2004)[74] but they are no longer a dominant medium and lack the cultural pull they had back in the "fictional age," or in the "idealistic age" in which the genre originated. In *Behind the Pink Curtain,* an encyclopedia and history of pink film, Jasper Sharp, a writer on Japanese film, defined the pink film as "an independently-produced movie, shot on 35mm film by professional or semi-professional casts and crews, whose main lure is its sexual content."[75]

Pink film emerged as a genre in the 1960s in Japan, in the twilight of Ōsawa's "idealistic age" and in the midst of a catastrophic plunge in cinema attendance in Japan,

[73] Ibid., 73.

[74] Sharp, *Behind the Pink Curtain*, 332.

[75] Jasper Sharp, *Behind the Pink Curtain: The Complete History of Japanese Sex Cinema* (Godalming, Surrey: FAB, 2008), 9.

which dropped from over a billion in 1958 to just 373 million in 1965.[76] Sharp blames this decline on the popularization of television: in 1965 sixty percent of Japanese homes had a TV, a number that rocketed to 95% by 1970.[77] With the film industry in crisis, pink film emerged as a way to draw people back into theaters by showing provocative content that could not have been broadcast into their homes. This content was censored according to Japanese law: human genitalia, pubic hair, or penetrative acts could not be shown. Despite having been censored, pink film kept the film industry afloat during an era when cinema had lost its cultural relevance.

In a brief aside in his encyclopedia of pink film, Jasper Sharp provided an accurate, if brief, critique of AV, the environment in which it emerged, and its succession of pink:

> [T]he AV that appeared [in the 1980s] adapted its form for this new generation of viewers, young men living alone away from their families and their usual social circles, working long hours and going home to an empty apartment. The early AV producers recognized this market, and were clearly aware that in terms of shooting, video was more portable, faster (it didn't require development in a lab), and incurred far less costs in that it didn't need such large crews to work on it (though it is often forgotten that the price of the raw tape was actually surprisingly high at this period). Because the cassettes were viewed in private, no one cared about the story either.[78]

Although pink films were far cheaper than "conventional" features to produce (some costing as little as six million yen, at a time when most film budgets were between forty and fifty million) AV producers were able to undercut their competition by shooting on reusable video tape.[79] With the emergence of home video technology, erotic content no longer needed to be viewed outside the home in a theater. On AV's succession of pink film, Sharp wrote:

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[76] Ibid., 45.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 216.
[79] Ibid., 47.

> Like similar products across the globe, the technical quality and production values of most AV films (though not all) remain low, with the content of the films often stripped down to their mere fundamentals of a girl and a camcorder. Sex is everything, as the camera plunges unabashedly into the nooks and crannies of its subject matter. […] Nevertheless, competition from AV and the increased working hours of the post-bubble economy has seen pink's theatrical venues robbed of many of its original patrons.[80]

From Sharp's perspective, AV didn't need the artistic pretensions of pink film: it just needed to satisfy the desires of lonely salarymen in their empty apartments. Sharp went on to describe the wider media environment of 1980s Japan:

> The rapid explosion of AV in the early '80s ran concurrent with other developments in the adult market, such as the growth of pornographic manga, idol photo collections and more explicit magazines known as the *bini-hon*, or 'vinyl books,' so called because they were sold, both in specialist shops and from vending machines, in plastic bags designed to stop kids from catching an illicit eyefull of their contents – surprisingly, while Japan had its tasteful nude calendars and glamour and girlie magazines during the late '60s and '70s, it was only in the '80s that magazines such as these, devoted solely to pictures of girls in standard pornographic poses, took off. All were subject to the same legal requirements as film in terms of what they could depict. Video just masked the more objectionable images with mosaics; magazines framed or blurred what one wasn't supposed to see; while manga just left large swathes of details un-inked.[81]

Most pink films used camera angles, strategically-placed props, and *maebari* (skin-colored stickers used to cover genitalia) to avoid filming prohibited content.[82] AV releases caught the prohibited content on camera and covered it with pixelated mosaic censors in post-production, allowing the viewer a less inhibited, but still mediated, view of the action. The introduction of the mosaic censor brought with it a new, less formal style of cinematography, as well as a different kind of eroticism. Since the mosaic frustrates and fractures the act of viewing, the viewer has to piece the action together himself from the pixelated fragments shown on the screen. Cultural anthropologist Anne Allison, describing a

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[80] Ibid., 15.
[81] Ibid., 218.
[82] Ibid., 14.

censored video still, wrote: “Fuzzed out to avoid realism, this pubic area is still eroticized despite, or perhaps because of, the artifice rendered on it.”[83]

Pioneering Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, in his book *Understanding Media*, characterized different media as being “hot” or “cool,” depending on the amount of participation required of the viewer:

> There is a basic principle that distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone, or a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like TV. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition.' High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is, visually, 'high definition.' A cartoon is 'low definition,' simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience.[84]

McLuhan goes on to give an example of this continuum between hot and cool using the “feminine image” of a girl wearing glasses: “The principle that distinguishes hot and cold media is perfectly embodied in the folk wisdom: 'Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses.' Glasses intensify the outward-going vision, and fill in the feminine image exceedingly, Marion the Librarian notwithstanding. Dark glasses, on the other hand, create the inscrutable and inaccessible image that invites a great deal of participation and completion.”[85] Commenting on this, Heather Warren-Crow wrote that “[t]he alluring, dark void of their orbits encourages viewers to fill in the blanks and complete the picture.”[86] The mosaic censor found in AV is a cooling device akin to dark glasses that invites the viewer's

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83 Anne Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan* (Boulder, Colo: WestviewPress, 1996), 159.

84 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1st MIT Press ed (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994), 22–23.

85 Ibid., 31.

86 Warren-Crow, *Girlhood and the Plastic Image*, 59.

participation in completing each frame's image. The video is made more, not less, erotic from this loss of detail and information.

Different methods of censorship, and different methods of getting around them, were used in print media, such as magazines and photobooks. Restrictions on published photographs were eased in the aftermath of the publication of the erotic photobook *Santa Fe*[87] and the ensuing "hair controversy:"

> A collection of photos all of singer-actress Miyazawa Rie by photographer Shinoyama Kishin, *Santa Fe* was one of several Japanese publications in 1991 that not only showed pubic hair on female models but also, and more noteworthy, were not censored for doing so. Circumventing the obscenity laws that, enacted at the turn of the century, had prohibited the visibility of pubic hair in public media, these photos were passed by the censors on the grounds that their display of pubic hair was artistic rather than obscene. In the case of *Santa Fe*, only a handful of the photos even showed hair, and in all but one, it was so buried in shadows as to be barely visible.[88]

Rie Miyazawa, the model featured in the photobook, was not an AV idol: "For this *aidoru tarento* – a teen idol popularized on the basis of her wholesome good looks and pure character – the crotch shot destabilized her place of cuteness and propriety within the public imaginary."[89] The photographer of *Santa Fe*, Kishin Shinoyama, went on to make several other volumes of nude photos of famous actresses and non-AV idols, such as Chiaki Kuriyama in *Shinwa Shōjo*[90] and Riona Hatsuki in *Riona*.[91] Shinoyama's work blurred the line between AV idols and their "civilian" sisters, creating spaces that could be occupied by either or both. His non-AV models were depicted in situations and circumstances that would be familiar to any AV fan.

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87 Kishin Shinoyama, *Santa Fe: Miyazawa Rie* (Asahi Shuppansha, 1991).

88 Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*, 148–149.

89 Ibid., 149.

90 Kishin Shinoyama, *Shinwa Shōjo: Kuriyama Chiaki* (Shinchosa, 1997). Interestingly, journalist Akio Nakamori contributed text to this volume: Nakamori was an early theorist on Otaku and covered the Miyazaki murders mentioned earlier in this section.

91 Kishin Shinoyama, *Riona*, 1998.

Following Shinoyama and Miyazawa's breach of the hair barrier, production of AV idol photobooks and magazines boomed. In the era before *Santa Fe*, such publications had to go to great lengths to obscure the pubic area and any of its forbidden hair. Similarly to the censorship practices of pink film directors, this meant putting the model in staged and unnatural positions or using props or clothing to make sure everything was acceptably covered. Post-*Santa Fe*, models had more freedom to pose in a more "natural," less rigid style. All the photographers would have to do was airbrush on *extra* pubic hair to cover any glimpses of genitalia that may have been exposed: an ironic requirement considering the hair's previous contraband status. This style of photography (using natural and/or airbrushed hair to obscure genitalia) was called *hea nūdo* – hair nude – and is the dominant style in men's magazines and idol photobooks to this day.

AV was formed by the needs of Japan's workers during its economic bubble and the technology of home VHS tapes. From the beginning, the narrativity of such videos was tenuous: narrative elements were chopped into discrete scenes that could be easily viewed out of order. Similarly to pink film, AV actors and actresses played characters that only existed within these narratives. Some early AV releases were shortened, re-edited versions of pink films: "In [the 1980s], AV was dominated by the established pink movie studios like Toei and Shin Toho. They simply transferred films they had already shot to video and made them available to the new home-viewing market, often in shortened versions. With the market quickly growing, the studios soon started to make films directly for video viewing. These films, even though shot on video, just continued the pink film tradition and adhered to

the pink film rules and limitations."[92] Even AV idols, who could be seen as characters in their own right, were often cast as playing particular roles. As AV evolved as a genre, this cinematic vestige was discarded. By the 1990s, AV releases tended to feature the idols playing themselves rather than discrete characters within the video's narrative.

The idea of idols playing themselves complicates the narrativity of AV: idols are characters who persist from video to video, sometimes playing particular roles, sometimes not. The focus of each video is on this character, the idol, who remains the same between videos and across media. An idol's identity is constructed with the release of each video, magazine feature, and photo album that contains her image. In this sense, the idol only truly exists in the mind of the viewer, and each viewer has a different image of the idol based on the particular media to which he or she has been exposed. Any one fragment could drastically change the idol's overall image and character, but it would have no effect if the viewer has never seen it. There can be as many idols as there are viewers, but the idol also exists as a complete image, the sum of every single media fragment put together. Whether any viewer can see this complete idol is a different matter.

Idols exist as fragmented beings: each idol could be seen as a database of media artifacts, accessible in any desired order by the consumer. Idols are databases on two levels: each idol is not only a database of videos and photos but is simultaneously a database of what Azuma calls "*moe*-elements."[93] The Japanese term "*moe*" has no direct English equivalent. Patrick Galbraith, in his book *The Moé Manifesto*, gives a history of the word and its use:

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92 "Midnight Eye Feature: Company Matsuo and the World of Japanese Adult Video," accessed April 26, 2015, http://www.midnighteye.com/features/company-matsuo-and-the-world-of-japanese-adult-video/.

93 Azuma, *Otaku*, 42. *Moe* is pronounced as two syllables, like "mo-eh" rather than like "moh."

> Linguistically speaking, *moé* (萌え) is the noun form of the verb *moeru*, meaning to burst into bud or to sprout. There is a youthful vitality to the word, reflected in its use in Japanese poetry from as early as the eighth century. […] In the 1990s, *otaku* gathering online to talk about manga and anime characters began to use the word *moé* as slang for burning passion. The story goes that they were trying to write the verb *moeru* (燃える), "to burn," but computers would often mistakenly convert this as the homonymous verb *moeru* (萌える), "to burst into bud." In this contemporary usage, *moé* means an affectionate response to finctional characters. There are three things to note about this definition. First, *moé* is a response, a verb, something that is done. Second, as a response, *moé* is situated in those responding to a character, not the character itself. Third, the response is triggered by fictional characters.[94]

Moe-elements are aspects of a character that trigger a response of empathy or affection in the viewer or consumer. Also referred to by Azuma as "affective elements," they include physical attributes (clothing, costuming, hairstyle, etc.) as well as modes of behavior, individual actions, and even small details such as a particular tone of voice.[95] Beginning in the 1990s, media producers in Japan realized that fans were more interested in the *moe* elements of characters than in narrativity, storylines, or continuity. In an interview with Galbraith, Azuma noted that,

> Feeling *moé* for a character has little to do with your feelings for the work the character appears in. The extreme example is the manga and anime series *Lucky Star* (2007). I get the impression that most of its fans have never seen the original work. And actually *Lucky Star* doesn't even have an overarching narrative that ties the episodes together. There are just many, many cute characters.[96]

Azuma characterizes the desires of these fans as such:

> For them, a grand narrative or fiction with a *Gundam*-style world was no longer desirable, even as a fantasy. *Gundam* fans' extraordinary adherence to the consistency of the timeline of the "space century" or to mechanical reality is well known. By contrast, many *Evangelion* fans required settings to empathize with the story's protagonist, to draw erotic illustrations of the heroine, and to build enormous robot figures, and showed obsessive interest in data to that extent, but beyond that they seldom immersed themselves into the world of the works.[97]

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94 Patrick W. Galbraith, *The Moe Manifesto: An Insider's Look at the Worlds of Manga, Anime, and Gaming* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Pub, 2014), 5–6.

95 Hiroki Azuma, "The Animalization of Otaku Culture," trans. Yuriko Furuhata and Marc Steinberg, *Mechademia* 2, no. 1 (2007): 183, doi:10.1353/mec.0.0023.

96 Galbraith, *The Moe Manifesto*, 173.

97 Azuma, *Otaku*, 37.

According to Azuma, the moment at which *moe* overtook narrative in Japanese media occurred in the final episode of the TV anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. One of the main characters of that series, Rei Ayanami, had been characterized over the course of the twenty-five previous episodes as having a particular personality and history that originated from the overall narrative: she was one of a series of clones created as weapons of war to fight off an alien invasion. Her personality was morose, anhedonic, and apathetic throughout the series. In the final episode, the viewer is given a glimpse of an alternate reality in which the events of the series never took place. Rei is seen running down the street, wearing a school uniform and carrying a piece of bread in her mouth. Azuma characterizes that moment as the point at which the desire for narrativity officially ceded power to the desire for affective characterization, a trend that had been building among fans (and exhibited in their "secondary" productions) but, until that moment, had not been co-opted by producers:

> [*Evangelion*] is a work that initially aspired to grand narrative in a very straightforward way. As the title suggests, it is an evangelical narrative of human salvation. In any event, the grand narrative broke down spectacularly in the last episode of the TV series. Moreover, what appeared at the moment of its breakdown was the world of secondary or fan production. Specifically, what appeared in the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth episodes of the TV series *Evangelion* was the world of secondary production as already in circulation through the Comiket (comic market) and personal computer communications. In other words, its creators made a parody of the parody in advance. And, in their rather wolderful way, they pieced together an autocritique of their impasse. […] [Director Hideaki] Anno flirted with the impossible task of constructing a grand narrative in the 1990s, but in the end it proved impossible, and all that remained was Ayanami Rei as a *moe kyara*, that is, an affective figure. In this respect, I think that the scene in the twenty-sixth episode of *Evangelion* in which Ayanami Rei appears running with bread in her mouth marks a turning point in *otaku* culture, the moment when […] the Era of Fictional Histories gave way to the Era of Affective Response to Characters (*kyara moe*).[98]

The interesting thing about *Evangelion* as an artifact of its time (the mid 1990s) is the fact that it not only straddled the line between narrative and characterization, but, according to Azuma, *was* that line. The producers were on both sides of that line as well: the series

[98] Azuma, "The Animalization of Otaku Culture," 182.

began with a traditional episodic narrative, but the narrative broke down towards the end of its run and the series degenerated into montages featuring the characters that had previously occupied narrative roles. They were allowed to float freely, untethered to the narrative that had created them, existing not for the sake of furthering a story but simply to evoke affective responses in the viewer.[99] The character of Rei was ripped from the grand narrative and shown for what she actually was: a database of individual elements (such as her light blue hair, red eyes, school uniform, or slice of bread), each designed to evoke a *moe* response. In post-*Evangelion* media, characters have been designed not as representations of complete human beings but as mash-ups of these interchangeable affective elements. For example, following *Evangelion*'s breakout popularity, many characters resembling Rei began to appear in anime, manga, and videogames. Azuma doesn't attribute this emergence to parody, pastiche, or quotation, but rather to a new mindset within media production and consumption:

> The emergence of Ayanami Rei did not influence many authors so much as change the rules of the *moe*-elements sustaining otaku culture. As a result, even those authors who were not deliberately thinking of *Evangelion* unconsciously began to produce characters closely resembling Rei, using newly registered *moe*-elements (quiet personality, blue hair, white skin, mysterious power). Such a model is close to the reality of the late 1990s. Beyond Rei, characters emerging in otaku works were not unique to individual works but were immediately broken into *moe*-elements and recorded by consumers, and then the elements reemerged later as material for creating new characters. Therefore, each time a popular character appeared, the *moe*-element database changed accordingly, and as a result, in the next season there were heated battles among the new generation of characters featuring new *moe*-elements. [100]

In his interview with Galbraith, Azuma elaborated on this idea:

> The characters are designed in such a way as to draw people in; they are amalgamations of elements of design that fans respond to as *moé*. This is different from a novel, for example, where the characters

[99] AV idols could be seen in a similar light: removed from the constraints of pink film's narrativity, their purpose was not to further a story but to evoke emotional or physical responses in the viewer.

[100] Ibid., 51–52.

> are important because of their role in the story, and the story is what makes the characters interesting. *Moé* media is the opposite, because the characters themselves are interesting and do not require a story. If you look at this phenomenon through the lens of what I call database consumption, you can observe that stories can be broken down into characters, and characters can be broken down into elements of design, and this can all be remixed endlessly to create feelings of *moé.* The original work and whatever narrative it might have had matters less than fans' response to the characters. It is possible in the Japanese market to like a character without having any interest in the original work.[101]

Idols, like anime and video game characters, can also be seen as arrangements of *moe* elements. Media scholar Jason G. Karlin wrote:

> Similar to what is called *moe* in Japan's *otaku* subculture, affective identification here is a system written on the body or the representation of the body that is decoded through the cultivation of familiarity and intimacy (i.e., fan knowledge). […] For the fan with a high degree of familiarity and intimacy, each expression or movement in the idol's performance serves as a mass of references to a database of fan knowledge about [the idol]. This database of fan knowledge is highly intertextual, drawing on a level of familiarity with idols and celebrities that is only possible through the autopoietic machine of the Japanese media system.[102]

The advent of "image characters" could be seen as the ultimate expression of this embrace of the database. An image character is a character conceived separately from any narrative or story; as implied by the name, the usage of such a character revolves around its image. They are used in marketing or appropriated for use in transmedia franchises, such as *DiGi Charat*'s character Dejiko:

> The main character of [the anime series] *DiGi Charat* known as Dejiko follows this transition [from narrative to database]. The character design for Dejiko combines various affective elements, such as bells, cat ears, and the maid uniform.[...] Dejiko has been a powerful force in the *otaku* market for some two years, surely because it exemplifies the major trend in *otaku* characters today: the goal is not to design a 'singular and unique human' but to assemble innumerable basic elements.
> Of particular interest is the lack of narrative background for the character. Dejiko is not a character or personage from a specific story but the 'image character' for a game and anime shop called 'Gamers.' Then, at some point, because it is prominently featured in merchandising and commercials, Dejiko became so popular that anime and games were constructed around this figure. As young *otaku* consumers and industry producers will attest, the 1990s saw a rapid decline in the importance of fiction and narrative within *otaku* culture. Nothing symbolizes this transformation so perfectly as Dejiko.[103]

[101] Galbraith, *The Moe Manifesto*, 173–174.

[102] Jason G. Karlin, "Through a Looking Glass Darkly: Television Advertising, Idols, and the Making of Fan Audiences," in *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, ed. Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 81.

[103] Azuma, "The Animalization of Otaku Culture," 182–183.

Idols could be seen as embodied image characters like Dejiko. The fact that idols are embodied by performers doesn't present much of an obstacle for producers, as the plastic identities and bodies of idol performers can be molded in whatever manner they see fit. The performer may be a "singular and unique human" but the idol is not: she is a character created *ex nihilo*, lacking any story or history from which to organically emerge.

The world of *otaku* media (anime, manga, and video games) and the world of idols do not exist as separate, autonomous spheres: they frequently intersect, merge, and clash with each other. As Galbraith noted,

> [A]lmost every manga magazine has an idol on the cover, and contains at least one section of glossy 'gravure' (*gurabia*) photographs of idols in swimsuits. In these magazines, ostensibly dedicated to serializing manga (and targeting both boys and men), drawings of 'fictional' women appear right beside photos of 'real' women. […] This became possible partly because of the way idols have been presented in such 'boys' magazines.' Historically, one of their emphases was collecting, categorizing, and controlling information about objects of interest. In this sense, idols fell in line with bugs, gadgets, and imaginary creatures. These magazines catalogued idols, providing pictures, measurements, and biographical statements for fans. Taking the manga magazine as a microcosm of the larger system, it is clear that idols underwent mechanical reproduction as images, and were associated with fiction, and were fragmented and datatized (marketed and memorized in terms of parts).[104]

Writing about a service that allowed idol fans to chat with their idols and each other, Aoyagi noted that, "Whether they focused on the idol's features, behavior, or events related to her, fans took joy in knowing every detail about their idol. Programs such as the Idol Net [the online service] provided these fans with an opportunity to examine and reinforce their knowledge about their idol, as well as a privileged moment to demonstrate this knowledge before her."[105] This could be tied to Karlin's assessment of an idol's *moe* potential as being

[104] Galbraith, "Idols: Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism," 191–192.
[105] Aoyagi, *Islands of Eight Million Smiles*, 213.

drawn from each fan's individual database of idol knowledge. This knowledge can, through social media (and its predecessors, such as Idol Net) be shared, traded, and collected by groups of idol fans: "Indeed, much fan communication on blogs and social media revolves around sharing and discussing media with other fans, who understand the nuanced meanings that are exclusive to the fan community. The ineffable quality of affective identification with idols or celebrities compels the fan to want to convey the experience to others."[106]

The compulsion to collect, trade, and catalog has been characterized by media and videogame theorist Samuel Tobin as a "time-honored male pursuit," and "[e]xchanging knowledge and facts as commodities is a more stereotypically masculine trait, as opposed to a stereotypically feminine, connected way of knowing."[107] Writing about *Bikkuriman* stickers (a set of 772 collectable stickers, packaged with chocolate candy, that were popular in Japan in the 1980s) Ōtsuka noted that

> Comics or toys are not consumed in and of themselves; rather, by virtue of the existence of an order behind these products or of a 'grand narrative' of which they comprise a portion, each begins to take on value and to be consumed. So it becomes possible to sell countless similar products (like the 772 different Bikkuriman stickers) because consumers are led to believe that they themselves approach the overall picture of the 'grand narrative.' For example, the creators of lines of character 'products' such as 'Mobile Suit Gundam,' 'Saint Seiya,' 'Sylvanian Family,' and 'Onyanko Club' had prepared a 'grand narrative' or an underlying order ahead of time, and this selling of concrete 'goods' was directly tied to the consumers' knowledge of it.[108]

In marketing collectible goods, there is the notion that a complete collection will yield some greater insight into the collection's "grand narrative." From the point of view of the producers, the satisfaction of completion has to be made impossible in order to maintain

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[106] Karlin, "Through a Looking Glass Darkly," 83. Karlin's "ineffible quality" could be conflated with Aoyagi's definition of "charisma."

[107] Samuel Tobin, "Masculinity, Maturity, and the End of Pokémon," in *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, ed. Joseph Jay Tobin (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 243.

[108] Ootsuka, *Monogatari Shōhiron*, 13–14; Quoted in Azuma, *Otaku*, 29–30.

consumption. Anne Allison, writing about the erotics of censorship, wrote that, "since desire stimulates buying only when it remains perpetually deferred, sexuality must be dangled in front of the consumer in such a way that it promises an excitement that can never be fully realized; that is, to commodify sexuality requires that it be shaped into a form that is both capable of exciting and unable to definitively satisfy."[109] The collection can never be complete because that completion would put an end to consumption.

Recalling the infinite expansiveness of the neo-Baroque, such collections must be constantly expanded and spun off into different forms to perpetually stimulate consumer interest. With the Baroque, however, the collection can never be complete: there is always a piece missing or a new one to find. Fragments fracture into further fragments, frustrating any efforts at seeing a clear picture of the whole, if such a thing exists at all. Writing about idol "costume cards,"[110] Galbraith said,

> Ostensibly, if one owned all the pieces in the set, the costume could be reassembled, adding a material basis to the image, which by then would have multiplied a hundred times over. In the end, however, the idol as image cannot be possessed; feelings of closeness are paired with infinite distance, completion with infinite deferral. This is why it is actually much better that there is no climax (pornography), as the foreplay and fetishizing can continue endlessly (image videos). The unobtainable image continues to seduce in commodity form. There is no point of culmination or external end, only a continuous movement that requires ever more images, pieces of images, objects and traces.[111]

With idols, the missing piece that prevents the completion of any collection of idol goods is the one that no collector can hold: the humanity of the idol's performer. The idol remains baroque by nature of this constant absence. The *otaku* remains a collector (and thus a consumer) because of the promise that the next piece will be the missing one, the one that

[109] Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*, 154.

[110] Idol goods consisting of a card with a photo of an idol wearing a costume, with a piece of that costume attached to it, allowing the viewer to hold a piece of clothing supposedly worn by the idol.

[111] Galbraith, "Idols: Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism," 197–198.

will make everything clear and strip away the veils of illusion, but every single time this promise is broken. There is no missing piece because there is, ultimately, no way for the eternal absence to be filled. If a rabid fan was to try to track down his favorite idol on the streets of Tokyo, it would be an exercise in delusion on par with Don Quixote's duel with a windmill. An idol doesn't exist in a form that can be seen person-to-person: she exists, ultimately, as a database of databases accessed through another database: a database of branded products, each containing images that reference databases of affective elements, both mediated by the viewer's database of idol knowledge.

Each idol, and each image of an idol, can be seen as a single iteration drawn from the global database of possible arrangements of affective elements. Like a digital image on a computer screen, these elements can be endlessly rearranged, with enough possible variations to produce new content until the sun goes out. John Simon's online art piece *Every Icon*, which has been running non-stop since 1997, is an example of the endless variation that can come from the rearrangement of simple elements: the piece is a 32 by 32 pixel grid in which each pixel can either be black or white.[112] One pixel at a time, each possible iteration of white and black pixels is explored sequentially with the hope of eventually producing every possible monochrome image within the limits of the frame. This process is expected to take longer than most of us can imagine: artist and media theorist Patrick LeMieux wrote a program that can calculate the time it would take for *Every Icon* to generate a given pattern. According to his program, the fifth pixel of the second row is due to turn black on November 6, 2018, with the sixth pixel following on August 15, 2040; the year when the icon will turn

[112] John Simon, "Every Icon," accessed May 8, 2015, http://numeral.com/appletsoftware/eicon.html.

completely black is a 264-digit number.[113] The fact that such nearly infinite possibility exists within such limitations (two colors and 1024 squares) speaks to the power of variation.

Far from only existing in databases and computers, this kind of variation, creating endless content from the rearrangement of finite elements, is a Baroque phenomenon as well. Ndalianis likened the variability of contemporary media to the Baroque form of the fugue, a musical form that systematically exhausts the possibilities of its initial subject:

> As with the serial technique of the fugue in music, which was introduced during the baroque era, most famously by Johann Sebastian Bach in his *Art of Fugue* (1750-1751), a polyphonic experience ensues. In the *Art of Fugue*, Bach manipulated one main theme in a cycle of fifteen fugues: The theme is developed, extended, and repeated in cyclical motions; the dialogue between melodies highlights both repetition and variation and, above all, emphasizes virtuosity of performance. The listener recognizes this virtuosity only when each cycle – each fragment – is considered in relation to the system as a whole. […] Although they involve alternative media, neo-baroque serials involve a similar game of reception that engages the audience on the level of the relationship between fragment and whole.[114]

This play between the fragment and the whole constitutes one way of viewing the idol: as a fragmented fragment or a database of databases, the idol is the embodiment of a single iteration drawn from a sea of infinite potential. The idol can also be viewed as the full set of idols, a cycle of individual fragments that is constantly expanding and has no constant, singular form that can be seen with human eyes. As long as producers continue to create new arrangements of affective elements, new idols will emerge into this Baroque conglomeration of ornate intertextuality, theatrical affection, and illusionistic humanity.

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[113] Patrick LeMieux, "Every Icon Editor v1.1," accessed May 8, 2015, http://patrick-lemieux.com/Every_Icon_Editor/. The time scales at play in Simon's *Every Icon,* and made evident by LeMieux's program, are at opposite poles of human comprehension: the microtemporal processes of the computer are used to express a macrotemporal timeframe that exceeds the predicted lifespan of visible matter in the universe.

[114] Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, 69.

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