Boys Who Leap Through Time: Technology, Youth and Visions of the Future
Ian Condry, MIT

What can we learn about varieties of contemporary Japanese masculinity by looking at the making of anime? Here, I consider anime less as it appears on screen than in the ways producers and consumers, especially so-called otaku, theorize and put into practice particular ideas of youth, technology, and visions of the future. In recent years, a widening interest in anime as one element of Japan’s “gross national cool” has altered the status of the otaku – maniac fans of manga, anime, and video games – such that their obsessions have become a flashpoint for debates about national direction. Similarly, anime creators are struggling to respond to generational changes they see in today’s youth. Learning from the making of anime depends on navigating between consumption, for example in the otaku fascination with “moe” (a variously defined aesthetic yearning), and practices of production, whereby many anime producers often question the presumed importance of otaku fans. In particular, I analyze the moe phenomenon, and the perspective of an award-winning anime director, Hosoda Mamoru, whose recent feature film offers, he says, an alternative to otaku-centered formulations of anime.

Keywords: anime, otaku, Japanese popular culture, gender, technology