Akihabara and the Visual Culture of “Otaku:”

Media Booms and Moe in the Heisei Period

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Located in eastern Tokyo, the Akihabara area shifted from a dense cluster of stores selling home appliances and consumer electronics to a symbolic site of manga/anime subculture during the Heisei Period (1989-2019). Specifically, images of bishōjo, or manga/anime-style cute girl characters, became more visible there than anywhere else in Japan or the world. This presentation examines the transformation of Akihabara in terms of a historic concentration of adult computer game producers and players in the area, overlapping booms in manga, anime and gaming and the rise of the internet, which brought fans together and allowed them to share objects of affection and desire. Particularly important to the transformation of Akihabara and its subsequent visual culture is “moe,” or an affective response to fictional characters. As fans responded to characters and producers franchised them across media and material forms, Akihabara made public the private affection and desire associated with “otaku.”

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No prior registration necessary / Lecture in English

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