8. Manga Production, Anime Consumption

The *Neon Genesis Evangelion* Franchise and its Fandom

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The animated TV series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*EVA*) is one of the most iconic works in the history of anime. The primary reason is, of course, its cultural impact and commercial success: After its first broadcast in 1995–96, the show became a national phenomenon, whose appeal spread far beyond its initial intended audience. It revitalized the TV anime market and popularized new strategies of anime production, effectively reshaping the industry. Predictably, the series spawned a huge complex network of narrative texts in various media together with an endless flow of merchandise. A quarter of a century later, the *EVA* franchise is very much alive and growing with the latest animated movie—*Evangelion: 3.0+1.0 Thrice Upon a Time*—released on 8 March 2021.

The initial *EVA* boom also coincided with a surge of changes in the so-called otaku market, a site of production, dissemination and consumption of anime, manga, video games and other media (as well as goods and services) that share common aesthetics, narrative tropes and genres, and maintain strong material and conceptual links with one another. At the end of the 20th century, this complex environment generated by cultural industries and dedicated consumers reached another evolutionary stage marked by increasing visibility and popularity of previously marginal subculture in Japan and overseas; the emergence of new media forms such as visual novels;[1] and changes in prevalent modes of fan consumption. Particularly conspicuous was the resurgence of fictional characters as the main object and source of

1. Digital novels with interactive elements and multiple endings. Visual novels are by definition multimodal: images, voice acting and soundtrack are essential parts of the narrative, along with the verbal track.

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a fannish affect commonly known as *moe*. The shift in fan interests and practices around 2000 was so radical that it made the anime producer and cultural critic Toshio Okada announce the death of 'authentic' otaku (cited in Maejima 2010: 107). These new developments have been addressed by various cultural critics and researchers, including Gō Itō (2005, with regard to manga), Marc Steinberg (2012, 2015, in relation to strategies of franchise development) and Satoshi Maejima (2010, discussing the concept of *sekai-kei* and its application).[2]

One of the earliest and most influential accounts of this transition belongs to cultural critic and publicist Hiroki Azuma. His landmark monograph *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (2009 [first edition 2001]) connects the new trends in the local otaku market and fan practices with the global ideological and cultural changes, namely, the arrival of postmodernity in the second half of the 20th century. While the book covers a number of important issues, from the nature of affect to the role of computer technologies in 21st-century fandom, it constantly comes back to production and consumption of narratives. Following French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, Azuma associates the postmodern condition with the dissolution of 'grand narratives,' ideological or intellectual frameworks that once served to unite society, imbue socio-political activities with meaning and answer existential questions (2009: 26–29). On the level of subculture, this process is mirrored by the emergence, and decline, of another type of 'grand narratives' described by Azuma's fellow cultural critic Eiji Ōtsuka (2001a, 2001b). Ōtsuka uses the term 'grand narrative' to designate a collection of settings that constitutes a fictional world (or universe) spacious and elaborate enough to host an unlimited number of 'small narratives,' that is, discrete narrative works (the most obvious example would be the *Star Wars* universe conceived by George Lucas). According to Azuma, who combines both Lyotard's and Ōtsuka's definitions

2. Sekaikei: a variety of "works [of popular culture] that were created in the late 1990s–2000s under the influence of *EVA*; that incorporated the highly familiar elements and genre codes of otaku culture such as giant robots, beautiful girl-warriors, or private detectives; and depicted the interiority of young people (mostly male)" (Maejima 2010: 1351, trans. mine). See Chapter 7 by Zoltan Kacsuk for *EVA*'s impact on both otaku-related industries and critical thought.

of the term, during the transition from modernity to postmodernity the void left in place of the 'real "grand narratives"' is partially covered by fictional 'grand narratives.' Operating on the same principle, the latter invite fans to look for a single totality behind discrete stories and pieces of information. With the full arrival of the postmodern, the need for 'grand narratives' of any kind disappears altogether, and the nature of works and franchises that sustain otaku culture changes accordingly. For a new generation of fans, original and derivative works become indistinguishable; interest in consistent and expansive fictional universes gives way to spontaneous play with a 'database,' an intersubjectively constructed and shared virtual archive of units of meaning. Azuma famously calls this new mode of fan engagement 'database consumption.' As the market responds to the demand by database consumers, transmedial representations of carefully crafted fictional worlds (such as Yoshiyuki Tomino's *Gundam* anime) give way to stories, settings and characters fabricated straight out of the 'database.' The latter approach to storytelling and franchise development is exemplified by the *EVA* franchise, which according to Azuma has been produced and consumed as 'an aggregate of information without a narrative [that is, a shared storyworld], which all viewers could empathize with of their own accord and read up convenient narratives' (2009: 38).

Azuma's database model convincingly explains operating mechanisms of both Japanese otaku culture in particular and popular culture in general. At the same time, his postulates are definitely not set in stone. The novelty of the database concept and its allegedly lasting supremacy in Japanese popular culture have been challenged and sometimes dismissed (see Maejima 2010; Ōtsuka 2014; Uno 2008). From the perspective of Western Fan Studies, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* provides a number of valuable and astute insights into sensibilities, interests and activities of the global fan community,

but is much less convincing when Azuma insists on the correspondence between certain franchise types or modes of fan engagement, and particular periods in socio-cultural history.

This chapter aims to question and rectify certain assumptions in Azuma's theory. The *EVA* franchise serves as a convenient vantage point for this inquiry. First, as a primary example drawn by Azuma himself, *EVA* allows to address his postulates directly. Second, *EVA* can be called one of the weak links in Azuma's chain of argument: he finds all symptoms of a truly postmodern condition in the franchise and its fandom, but does not provide a detailed overview for either. The following discussion attempts to fill this gap in two steps. The first half investigates the *EVA* franchise as a transmedial network of narrative texts with the focus on its content, structure and meaning. It is largely informed by Narratology and Literary Studies, employing instruments for storyworld analysis developed by Jan-Noël Thon and Marie-Laure Ryan, as well as Yūji Yokohama's overview of recurring themes in the *EVA* franchise. The second half of the discussion shifts to the level of consumption as it examines prevalent interests of *EVA* fans and corresponding modes of engagement. This part is informed first and foremost by Western research on fandom, in particular by Henry Jenkins' and Jason Mittell's case studies. This two-partite structure helps illuminate the valid points of Azuma's argument and develop a more comprehensive account of fan activities in Japan and overseas; it also demonstrates that database consumption, an allegedly new and pervasive mode of fan engagement, is in fact a long-lasting, global trend, and one among many others.

Azuma's Theory and the Significance of Franchise Structure

From the perspective of Fandom and Media Studies, Azuma's attempts to provide cultural and psychological background for the emergence of certain franchise types make for an interesting discussion point.

As briefly mentioned above, Azuma expects transmedial franchises launched at the early stages of postmodernity to share a certain set of traits, exemplified by *Gundam*. Such projects develop a single fictional world in a methodical manner, with contents distributed through multiple channels seamlessly blending into a consistent whole. By contrast, constituents of fully postmodern franchises like *EVA* are loosely connected by settings and/or characters only and lack any underlying cohesion. Azuma's claims can be disputed in several ways.

First, the history of entertainment franchises in Japan and overseas defies clear-cut linear succession of commercial, as well as storytelling, strategies. For example, the *Gundam*-like model Azuma associates with the 1980s was described by US media scholar Henry Jenkins as a novel phenomenon of 'transmedia storytelling' that emerged in the early 2000s (2006a: 93–130). Conversely, one of the first world-driven proto-franchises was launched in the United States at the dawn of the 20th century, when L. Frank Baum introduced to the public his *Land of Oz*. Soon afterwards, Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912) gave start to a sprawling, haphazardly developed and contradictory character-driven franchise (see Freeman 2017 for more on both projects). One hundred years later, Ōtsuka classifies transmedial franchises of the otaku market of today into settings-, world- or character-based, with the addition of projects that employ time loop as a plot device to explain away contradictions (2014: 30). In other words, both world- and character-driven franchises appeared almost simultaneously, long before the arrival of postmodernity, and have lasted well into the 21st century.

Second, challenges of maintaining consistency and continuity in transmedial and transtextual networks are the recurring topic in English-language Fandom and Media Studies, but explanations are usually found in technical and legal circumstances of production (medium specificity, distribution of authorship, licensing practices, etc.). The bulk of related research reveals that such material obstacles and the resulting discrepancies in content are an intrinsic part of franchise development; projects famous for their world-building aspects,

such as Lucas' *Star Wars*, just as often fail to establish direct correspondence between the entirety of officially released titles and a single cohesive fictional world (Thon 2015: 37–39; Wolf 2012: 270–271). As testified by fan paratexts, even the *Gundam* franchise has generated several alternate universes over the years (Falldog 2020). It seems, then, that even *relatively* cohesive franchises can be better understood through a conceptual triad offered by Narratology and Media Studies scholar Jan-Noël Thon. To quote Thon at length:

> Instead of assuming that transmedial entertainment franchises generally represent a "single world," then, such an approach allows for a systematic distinction between the local medium-specific storyworlds of single narrative works, the glocal but noncontradictory transmedial (or, in quite a few cases, merely transtextual) storyworlds that may be constructed out of local work-specific storyworlds, and the global and often quite contradictory transmedial storyworld compounds that may, for lack of a better term, be called transmedial universes. (2015: 31–32)

Following this logic, the fictional 'grand narrative' behind *Gundam* anime works is in fact just one of several 'glocal noncontradictory *transtextual* storyworlds' within the vast *transmedial* universe of *Gundam*. What about *EVA*?

It is an established fact that at least two *EVA* works share a storyworld: the TV anime and its direct sequel, the animated feature film *End of Evangelion* (*EoE*, 1997). Furthermore, Yoshiyuki Sadamoto's manga *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*NGE*, 1993–2014) constitutes a close adaptation of the TV anime. As such, it creates a separate storyworld, which nevertheless provides "the satisfaction of expectations and the answering of questions raised over the course" of the TV series (Abbott 2005: 65–66). Is it possible that other such work constellations exist? Azuma claims that this is not the case, but does not provide any concrete evidence in support. As a matter of fact, he does not mention any narrative works in the franchise apart from the TV anime and animated movie *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Death & Rebirth* (1997). If Azuma's definition of the fictional 'grand narrative' allows for co-existence of several non-contradictory storyworlds

within a franchise, then it seems reasonable to look closer into the structure of the *EVA* franchise and determine whether it is really that different from *Gundam*.

Since the primary focus of this study lies on (story)worlds, it borrows a set of analytical tools from Narratology. Thon's terminological apparatus introduced above is used throughout the chapter to describe the overall structure of the *EVA* network and its medium-specific segments. Thon also provides a useful classification of possible relations between work-specific storyworlds, namely a relation of redundancy or expansion (both of which allow to perceive works in question as representing one and the same storyworld), and a relation of modification (which inevitably results in two discrete, albeit overlapping, storyworlds). In order to create a systematic account of modified elements, this study relies on the breakdown of storyworld constituents by narrative and literary scholar Marie-Laure Ryan (2014). The analysis is supplemented by an overview of recurring themes and characters in *EVA* texts. As will be explained later, both themes and characters can determine the overall cohesion of a franchise and, furthermore, imbue it with underlying meaning separate from and independent of Ōtsuka's 'grand narrative.' With central question and methodological approach set down, the last step is to establish the object of analysis. This task requires a brief discussion of its own.

The Breakdown of the *EVA* Franchise: Preliminary Thoughts

As mentioned in the Introduction, the *EVA* franchise has thrived for 25 years. Unsurprisingly, it now contains a large amount of narrative texts in practically every medium associated with the otaku market: from manga series to visual novels to a parody audio drama to arcade games. Covering the entire agglomeration of works is far beyond the scope of this chapter, so a selective approach is required. It should be noted from the beginning that non-contradictory storyworlds that comprise transmedial universes often hold different hierarchical positions. Their status depends on many factors, including the media at

play, the work count and authorial presence. For instance, Azuma can insist that *Gundam* sustains a single cohesive storyworld because the franchise is dominated by animated TV series. For almost half a century, TV anime, together with manga, has remained the key medium of the otaku market, only recently joined by video games, light novels and live-action movies (Iida 2012; Joo, Denison & Furukawa 2013). The sheer number of the series and Tomino's direct involvement in their production solidified the supreme position of a corresponding storyworld in the *Gundam* franchise.

The *EVA* franchise also unfolds around the TV anime, which establishes essential settings, introduces all key characters and, together with its direct sequel *EoE*, tells the complete story. Despite this initial similarity, duly noted by Azuma (2009: 36), the storyworld of this core work is clearly not expanded through a serialization in the same medium. What about transmedial development? Fan-generated paratexts often provide valuable insights into franchise topography. The notion of 'canon'[3] widely used by Western fans has been instrumental in describing relevance of work-specific storyworlds and their interrelationships (Fanlore 2020). While canonical status of franchise constituents is always in flux, it is only possible to debate canonicity of a work if its storyworld "could, at least in principle, be comprehended as a noncontradictory expansion of a previously represented storyworld" (Thon 2015: 37). It follows that if the TV anime forms the basis of the *EVA* canon, then any work included in the canon would be automatically assigned to the same storyworld, unless otherwise stated. "Shin-seiki's Tiers of Canonicity" published at the major fan site *The NGE Fan-Geeks Project* suggest the following outline of canonical and semi-canonical works:

1. The anime itself and its scripts and storyboards. The Director's Cuts are the final or official version and take precedence over the On Air version in the event of any theoretical contradiction.

3. Canon is a set of established truths shared by a particular fan community. It is comprised of facts culled from official texts and paratexts, but may also include statements by official producers and indubitable conclusions based on officially released information.

2. Statements made by the show's creators, principally Hideaki Anno.
3. Official supplemental sources such as theatrical programs, Newtype Filmbooks, and Cardass Cards.
4. The Manga (sic!), which is actually its own continuity. At best it can be used to support the anime when they are in explicit agreement; it should never be used to contradict the anime.
5. Statements made by those responsible for adapting Evangelion (sic!) for release outside of Japan. In the English speaking world this would be representatives of A.D. Vision or Manga Entertainment. (Shin-seiki 2020)

It goes without saying that fans outside of the *NGE Fan-Geek* community might have other views on how the *EVA* canon works. Still, this particular paratext seems to support Azuma's conclusion that there is no overarching 'grand narrative' behind the *EVA* franchise. On the other hand, "Tiers of Canonicity" most likely evaluate the entirety of *EVA* works vis-à-vis anime and anime alone, and therefore it is conceivable that a 'grand narrative' on a smaller scale might still exist on the periphery of this transmedial network. After all, it is not unusual for large-scale transmedial franchises to "establish two clearly distinct storyworlds via a high-profile modifying adaptation while still aiming at a further expansion of each of these storyworlds" (Thon 2015: 35). In the otaku market, such expansion is usually carried out via manga, video games or light novels. While official *EVA* producers have generally disregarded purely textual format, the franchise boasts a wide range of narrative-based games, which both adapt and expand on the anime. The preferred structure of the *EVA* games, however, undermines their world-building capacity: most of them involve multiple possible scenarios, as well as random events, generating countless incompatible storyworlds.[4] A game like *Neon Genesis Evangelion 2* is acknowledged as a *source* of valuable canonical information (Shin-seiki 2020), rather than a self-standing alternative to the

4. See Chapter 9 by Selen Çalık Bedir.

anime series. Ultimately, such alternative is found in manga: Authored by the character designer of the first TV series and the subsequent films, Sadamoto's *NGE* is said to generate 'its own continuity,' with a storyworld distinct from, albeit largely overlapping with, the storyworld of the TV anime and *EoE*.

There are currently six officially released *EVA* manga titles apart from *NGE*. If at least some of them established relations of redundancy or expansion with Sadomoto's series as well as works in media other than anime, they could form a new transtextual or transmedial storyworld, that is, a fictional 'grand narrative.' The following sections examine all seven works, including *NGE*, in order to confirm or disprove this proposition.

Part I. *EVA* Manga: Monochrome Drawings, Kaleidoscopic Narratives

The Storyworlds of *EVA* Manga

In recent otaku-oriented franchises, manga series often succeeded successful releases in some other medium (see, e.g., the novel-based *Higurashi When They Cry*, the light novel-based *Full Metal Panic!* and the anime-based *Psycho-Pass*). In each case, the manga series have maintained strong ties to the other franchise constituents. *EVA* is similar on the level of franchise chronology: six officially released manga titles followed either the first anime or animated movies *Rebuild of Evangelion* (2007–present), with *NGE* being the only exception (it is worth mentioning that even though Sadamoto's manga was launched before the TV series, it had been conceived as an adaptation and ended up running for 20 years, long after *EVA* had come to an end). But, contrary to the cases above, the official *EVA* manga have developed in a disorganized manner. The resulting discord is already evident in generic and tonal shifts (see Table 8.1): In addition to the serious, action- and mystery-oriented *NGE*, the manga sector includes a five-volume parody bordering on satire (*The Legend of Piko Piko*

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION (NGE)	YOSHIYUKI SADAMOTO Monthly Shōnen Ace, Young Ace	» 14 VOL.	
	Dec. 1994–June. 2013	ACTION/MYSTERY/DRAMA	
ANGELIC DAYS	FUMINO HAYASHI Monthly Asuka	» 6 VOL.	
	Nov. 2003–Dec. 2005	MELODRAMA/MYSTERY	
THE SHINJI IKARI RAISING PROJECT (SI Raising Project)	OSAMU TAKAHASHI Monthly Shōnen Ace	» 18 VOL.	
	Jun. 2005–Feb. 2016	COMEDY/SLICE OF LIFE EROTICA	
PETIT EVA: EVANGELION @SCHOOL (Petit Eva)	RYŪSUKE HAMAMOTO Shōnen Ace	» 3 VOL.	
	May 2007–Sep. 2009	COMEDY	
CAMPUS APOCALYPSE	MING MING Monthly Asuka	» 4 VOL.	
	Oct. 2007–Sept. 2009	URBAN FANTASY/ADVENTURE MYSTERY	
THE SHINJI IKARI DETECTIVE DIARY (SI Detective Diary)	TAKUMI YOSHIMURA Monthly Asuka	» 2 VOL.	
	Feb. 2010–Nov. 2010	COMEDY	
THE LEGEND OF PIKO PIKO SCHOOL STUDENTS (Piko Piko)	YŪSHI KAWATA (SCENARIO), YUKITO (ART) Young Ace	» 5 VOL.	
	May 2014–2019	COMEDY (PARODY)	
The derivative work celebrated in the EVA fandom			
RE-TAKE	STUDIO KIMIGABUCHI	» 6 VOL. (NC-17)	» 3 VOL. (PG-13)
	2004–2006	ALTERNATE UNIVERSE/FIX-IT/DRAMA MYSTERY/ACTION/PORNOGRAPHY	

Table 8.1. List of the official *EVA* manga series in chronological order. License: CC BY 4.0.

Middle School Students), a set of four-panel gag comic strips (*Petit Eva: Evangelion@School*) and four titles that cover genres from drama to erotica to urban fantasy (*The Shinji Ikari Raising Project*, *The Shinji Ikari Detective Diary*,[5] *Angelic Days* and *Campus Apocalypse*). With that said, the proliferation of genres by itself (with the exception of parody) should not preclude the existence of a single storyworld behind a range of works. Therefore, this section offers a comparative analysis of storyworld elements as delineated by Ryan (2014: 34–37) in order to define relations between the seven manga titles and the core *EVA* works (i.e., the TV anime and *EoE*) in a systematic fashion (see Table 8.2).

To start with physical and mental events that constitute the fabula of each narrative and organize its storyworld, all of the manga titles do away with the elaborate apocalyptic tale of the anime series and focus instead on school comedy, gags and romantic relationships (the only exception being *Campus Apocalypse*, which brings together supernatural battles, Armageddon and a sinister conspiracy, but still opts for an entirely new 'urban fantasy' setting). The topography, natural laws and props of the respective storyworlds change accordingly.

The easiest to trace are transformations of the Angels and Evas, the iconic entities of the *EVA* universe. In most cases, the Angels maintain their anime design—one of the few recurring motifs across distinct manga titles—but their nature diverges greatly. In *SI Raising Project*, the Angels are no more than manifestations of computer viruses in virtual reality, although from time to time taking familiar shapes. In *Campus Apocalypse*, the Angels are specter-like beings originating from the Life-Tree of Yggdrasil. As they can survive in the outer world only by possessing people, most of them take the form of beautiful men and women (and an occasional cat). In *Angelic Days*, the nature, origin or goal of the Angels remain unexplained (while battles serve mostly to intensify romantic relationships), but their design is again borrowed from the core works. In *Piko Piko*, Angels seem to be the product of collective nostalgia: supernatural creatures who strive to

5. The manga *The Shinji Ikari Detective Diary* (abbr. *SI Detective Diary*) has nothing to do with the game *Detective Evangelion* (Broccoli 2007). A two-chapter manga adaptation of the game by Seijūrō Mizu was serialized in *Monthly Shōnen Ace* (2006–07), but never published in book format, which limits its availability.

Table 8.2. Comparison of storyworld components (after Ryan 2014) in the *EVA* manga vs. the TV anime. License: CC BY 4.0.

	Characters	Species, objects and social institutions	Setting (particular locales & topography)	Natural laws	Social rules & values	Events	Mental events
NEON GENESIS EVANGELION (NGE)	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
ANGELIC DAYS	O	O	O	R	O	R	O
THE SHINJI IKARI RAISING PROJECT (SI Raising Project)	L	R	L	R	R	R	O
PETIT EVA: EVANGELION @SCHOOL (Petit Eva)	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
CAMPUS APOCALYPSE	O	R	R	R	O	R	R
THE SHINJI IKARI DETECTIVE DIARY (SI Detective Diary)	L	R	R	R	R	R	O
THE LEGEND OF PIKO PIKO SCHOOL STUDENTS (Piko Piko)	R	O	R	R	R	R	R

I: ALMOST IDENTICAL **O: OVERLAPPING TO SOME EXTENT** **L: LOOSE SEMBLANCE** **R: RADICAL DEPARTURE**

reverse the flow of time. *SI Detective Diary* does not feature Angels at all, and the Evas are radically transformed, presented as humanoid servants magically summoned from jewellery (an earring, a bracelet, etc.). The only Eva that visually evokes its prototype is Asuka's Dos (Span. two). In *Campus Apocalypse*, Eva is a person's will manifest in the form of a weapon (Asuka's Eva is a whip, Rei's the Spear of Longinus, etc.). In *SI Raising Project*, there are no Evas altogether, only entry plugs used to access the virtual reality. *Piko Piko* and *Angelic Days* both utilize standard *mecha*-like Evas, but *Piko Piko* regularly alters their appearance and function comically. If central entities like Angels and Evas are usually incorporated into the manga storyworlds (albeit in a different form), the localities and props are often erased completely. For instance, GeoFront appears only in *Angelic Days*, while *Campus Apocalypse* and *Piko Piko* feature the NERV Academy and National Middle School of Defence NERV as their primary stage. In *SI Raising Project*, the organization itself is called Artificial Evolution Lab and resides in an ordinary building. In fact, Tokyo-3 transforms into a regular city in all titles where it is mentioned.

Social norms and values get increasingly modified the closer the principal mode approaches parody. At the same time, they are inevitably entwined with characterization. The most obvious example is *Piko Piko*, which, in essence, presents a five-volume chronicle of nonsensical, often hilarious abuse that a couple of reasonable, but disgruntled teenagers (Asuka and Shinji) suffer at the hands of irresponsible and infantile adults (including Misato, Ritsuko, Gendō Ikari and Kaji). Far from protecting the Earth, the primary goal of adults in the *Piko Piko* series is to have as much fun as possible at the expense of their students. The concerns of the children across the titles are also far from stable: Frantic self-searching, traumas and quest for self-acceptance are confined to *NGE*, while other manga series foreground romantic vicissitudes (*SI Raising Project*, *Angelic Days*) or

momentary struggles in the face of local crises (*Campus Apocalypse*, *SI Detective Diary*).

To summarize, all manga titles maintain a relation of modification, rather than expansion or redundancy, with the core *EVA* works. They also all form distinct mutually incongruous storyworlds. This undeniable lack of cohesion within the manga segment of the franchise does not mean, however, that the manga titles in question cannot contribute to the transmedial and transtextual storyworld formation in other ways. After all, the place a narrative takes in a "transmedia [sic] network" (Ruppel 2012) and, one may add, its relevance for the hypothetical 'grand narrative' is determined by several parameters. One is the connections it holds with other franchise constituents, another is its self-sufficiency and completeness. For example, *NGE*, which also adapts the storyworld of the TV anime and *EoE* through modification, manages to supplement and enrich its source, making additions acknowledged by at least some fans as (semi-)canonical. As such, it can potentially contribute to the formation of the 'grand narrative.' Additionally, *NGE* forms a self-standing storyworld, which can be expanded to create a separate canon. It remains to be seen if the same applies to other manga titles.

EVA Manga as Parts of the Transmedial Network

Regarding relations between the manga and works in other media, *SI Raising Project* and *Angelic Days* adapt computer games, *The Shinji Ikari Raising Project* and *Girlfriend of Steel 2nd* respectively. Incidentally, both games employ multiple choice as their main mechanics: Branching dialogues and scenes allow the player to reinforce and break various relationships, learn more about the characters and arrive at different (not always happy) endings. In other words, in terms of gameplay and pleasures offered, both games approximate visual novels. The challenge of adopting a visual novel to a manga is

obvious: The game may offer the player half a dozen storylines leading to romance with six different characters (as is the set-up in *SI Raising Project*). Manga adaptations of games have to choose between the bigger story and the individual romance, and thereby they face the risk of alienating a number of their potential readers. In addition, the first game defies a straightforward adaptation, since it introduces several 'parallel worlds' and at one point even addresses its own structure (see Yokohama 2006: 57–58). A manga adaptation of such a multithread, multilevel narrative could actually try to recreate the metaleptic[6] game on its own terms. And yet, both adaptations chose simplification as their primary strategy. Osamu Takahashi, the artist and writer in charge of *SI Raising Project*, selected the happiest of the game's parallel worlds, the so-called "Campus Ark," limited the range of the protagonist's recurring love interests to three without finalizing any of the potential love stories, and added a moderate amount of heavily altered battles to what otherwise reads as a semi-erotic school comedy. Fumino Hayashi in *Angelic Days*, on the other hand, chose to develop only the romantic Shinji-Asuka plotline and supplement the adapted material with two volumes of original content. In summary, *SI Raising Project* and *Angelic Days* heavily edit their source works, from settings to plotlines to characterization, until it becomes impossible to see them as extensions of the game storyworlds. To reiterate, the same applies to their relations with the core works of the *EVA* franchise.

Despite their lineage as adaptations 'once removed,' both *SI Raising Project* and *Angelic Days* may pass as stand-alone texts. In contradistinction, parodical works like *Piko Piko* and *Petit Eva: Evangelion@School* cannot be consumed outside of the *EVA* franchise. They require familiarity with the TV anime, *NGE* or *Rebuild of Evangelion*: unless the reader recognizes lore-related facts, patterns of character behavior, trademark phrases, etc., the humour of these parodies falls flat. *SI Detective Diary* can be described in similar terms: its plot and characters are so underdeveloped that it is impossible to process the story

6. Metalepsis happens whenever "the author enters or addresses the fictional world he or she created, and when characters leave their fictional world or address their author and their readers" (Kukkonen 2011: 1). Furthermore, the metalepsis is likely to occur whenever "characters become readers and authors within their own fictional world and produce a secondary fictional world" (ibid.: 8), as happens with Shinji in *SI Raising Project*.

without referencing the 'database' of *EVA*-related information or its primary sources (the core works). All three, however, can be removed from the transmedial network without affecting its legibility. *Campus Apocalypse* is a curious case: despite its equally tenuous connection to the canonical storyworld, it presents an unexpected opportunity to bind all narratives into one continuity through the concept of multiple realities. Despite the bold attempt to validate digressions and contradictions between work-specific storyworlds, *Campus Apocalypse* has not been included in "Shin-seiki's Tiers of Canonicity." All in all, it remains an interesting rift on the *EVA* 'database,' but too much of a digression itself to become an integral part of the franchise.

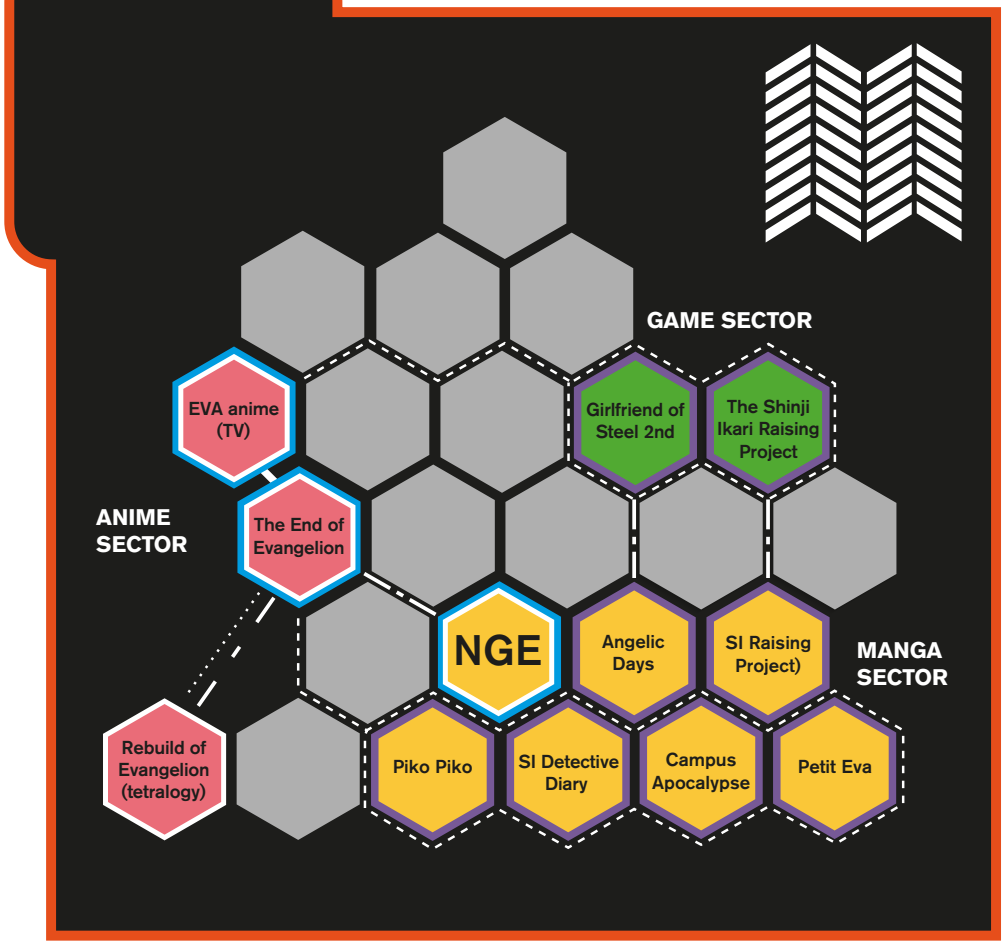
The subordinate status of the manga titles is best illustrated by gaps, hanging plotlines and contradictions that riddle their narratives. Even the romantic comedy *SI Raising Project* accumulated a remarkable amount of blanks while running: What has the Artificial Evolution Lab been preparing for throughout 18 volumes? What happened to Kaworu, who simply stopped appearing in the middle of the series? Who is Mana Kirishima, beyond a new romantic interest and comic relief? What is the role of SEELE in this continuity? And so on. Some of these questions may be answered by the game, but its material is adopted too selectively (in other words, the game might answer who Kirishima is, but leave obscure all other mysteries and blanks). The same applies to more rounded works like *Campus Apocalypse*, which carefully closes its central plotlines, but leaves much of its idiosyncratic existents and natural laws obscure. Various Angels (in human form) are shown in ominous manner only to vanish quickly. The very mechanism of Kaworu's ultimate sacrifice remains unclear. The fate of Asuka's parents serves as an important plot device, but readers never learn what exactly happened.

This proliferation of blanks resembles the strategy of transmedia storytelling that media scholar Geoffrey Long calls negative capability: Empty spaces are deliberately worked into the narrative in order

to spark the audiences' curiosity and imagination (2007: 53, 59), to establish possible vectors for future franchise extensions and, ultimately, to open up the characters and the storyworld for further development (ibid.: 133, 167). Despite formal similarities, however, most of the lacunas discussed here do not have the same functionality. Since each manga work is created as an isolated 'alternate universe' with little to no connection with the main continuity, there is no hope that those blanks will be filled by any existing franchise constituent (of course, a possibility remains that at least some of these texts will be expanded or supplemented in the future). A more productive explanation of gaps and inconsistencies may be gained in view of Marie-Laure Ryan's concept of generic landscapes. As one of the principles that guide the mental reconstruction of textual universes, generic landscapes "predict what will be shown and hidden in a certain type of text, what will be given or denied significance" (1991: 57), and these landscapes are assembled from "the themes and objects characteristic of a certain corpus" (ibid.: 55). One only needs to replace 'genre' with 'franchise' or 'transmedial universe' to see the familiar database principle at work. However, contrary to the 'database,' generic landscapes have the power to determine the relevance of various pieces of information and can thus easily overrun the need for a proper diegetic explanation. Thus, in every setting, SEELE would appear at regular intervals and leave sinister hints; Misato would be the main person in charge of Shinji and his friends and a middle-school teacher, regardless or her actual abilities or qualifications; Gendō Ikari would always be pointedly absent from his son's life, and so on. All of these narrative pieces and characterizations stir the sense of recognition in a regular *EVA* consumer and are accepted more or less smoothly as parts of *EVA*'s generic landscape. *EVA* literacy presumes both awareness of such recurring formulas and high tolerance toward loose ends. This, however, means that most of the narratives can be successfully parsed only by readers already familiar with the core of the network (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3. Transmedial network of *EVA* narratives (partial) and its topology. License: CC BY 4.0.

STORYWORLDS TABLE



- ANIME SECTOR
- MANGA SECTOR
- GAME SECTOR

- Loose adaptation (database principle)
- Direct adaptation without storyworld expansion
- Possible sequel
- Direct sequel (storyworld expansion)
- Primary sources of the EVA database
- Knowledge of the primary sources is required to adequately understand and interpret the work

As demonstrated above, most of the manga titles utilize plotlines, settings, narrative conventions and characters of the *EVA* franchise (i.e., its 'database') without making any new contributions. To paraphrase, all of them with the exception of *NGE* hold a subsidiary position vis-à-vis the core of the franchise, depending on it in a unidirectional fashion. Even transmedial adaptations included in the list do not lead to the formation of bigger narrative clusters or chains of meaning traversing and connecting multiple texts. In short, the manga sector of the *EVA* network can be visualized as a conglomeration of disconnected texts that form distinct and contradictory storyworlds and share a 'database' instead of a 'grand narrative.'

But it still might be too early to accept Azuma's claims, since they can be challenged from a different angle. In his chronology of changes in thought, commercial production and fannish consumption, Azuma juxtaposes narrative works of the modern period, which project the "real 'grand narratives'"; franchises of the transitional period that replace ideology by elaborate and consistent worlds; and postmodern franchises that supposedly discard either. However, it is entirely conceivable that values, messages or deeper meanings can be integrated into a franchise regardless of its structure. It goes without saying that even design features, characters/creatures, or settings disentangled from a single fictional world have significant cohesive power and thus function as core elements in transmedial universes (Heinze 2015: 88). Furthermore, consistent characterization shapes the intersubjective interpretation of the entire group of texts involved; it may engender a sort of message, as well as thematic unity. Likewise, consecutive adaptations may generate unequivocally interconnected 'families' of texts facilitating and sustaining certain readings, even when the story transforms with each iteration.[7] Azuma's focus on fictional 'grand narratives' as a bridge between modernity and postmodernity makes him disregard all other sources of cohesion or potential for delivering messages in transmedial franchises. The following two sections will

7. See Kopylova (2016) for an extended analysis of such transmedial project.

therefore extend the line of inquiry to examine characters and themes across the *EVA* manga titles.

Characterization in the *EVA* Manga

If characterization is to serve as a vehicle for ideas and messages, it must avoid contradictions and breaches in internal logic. This does not mean, however, that a character should stay fixed throughout a range of narratives: such strategy would work only for 'flat' characters (Forster 1955: 65–82) defined by a single trait or quality. 'Rounded' characters (ibid.) akin to the *EVA* protagonists must react to changing circumstances, but in a consistent and convincing manner. Is this rule maintained in the *EVA* manga?

In *Piko Piko*, Asuka and Shinji behave remarkably out of character (joining forces to beat up Gendō Ikari at the end of the second chapter), but this happens in outlandish settings which amuse rather than surprise. More conspicuous is the tendency in other manga texts to reproduce Shinji and Asuka as recognizable types regardless of their current background. As mentioned above, all manga series, with the exception of *NGE* and *Campus Apocalypse*, transpose the characters into much safer, happier environments and occupy them with trivial problems. For instance, in both *Angelic Days* and *SI Raising Project* Asuka's parents (or her single mother, in the latter case), as well as Shinji's mother Yui, are alive and well. It seems that both children have been raised in happy families. Nevertheless, it is in these two titles that Shinji is at his most vulnerable and indecisive, while Asuka is as fierce, petulant and asocial as ever. *Detective Diary* follows suit, although in this case both Shinji's and Asuka's family circumstances remain unknown. In the absence of any diegetic explanation, such quirks can only be taken as an intrinsic part of the characters' personalities. Needless to say, this is contrary to the initial characterization of Asuka and Shinji in the core *EVA* works, where their drawbacks

and weaknesses are firmly grounded in childhood traumas. Prevailing here is the mode of database consumption described by Azuma, where a character is broken down into elements that elicit strong affective reactions in the consumer, and that are then recorded into the database and mechanically reproduced regardless of any particular narrative setting (2009: 42–52). Characters "are imagined not as humans who live one life recounted in one story, but rather as bundles of latent behavioural patterns that can reveal themselves under varying circumstances in various stories" (Azuma 2007: 46; transl. mine).

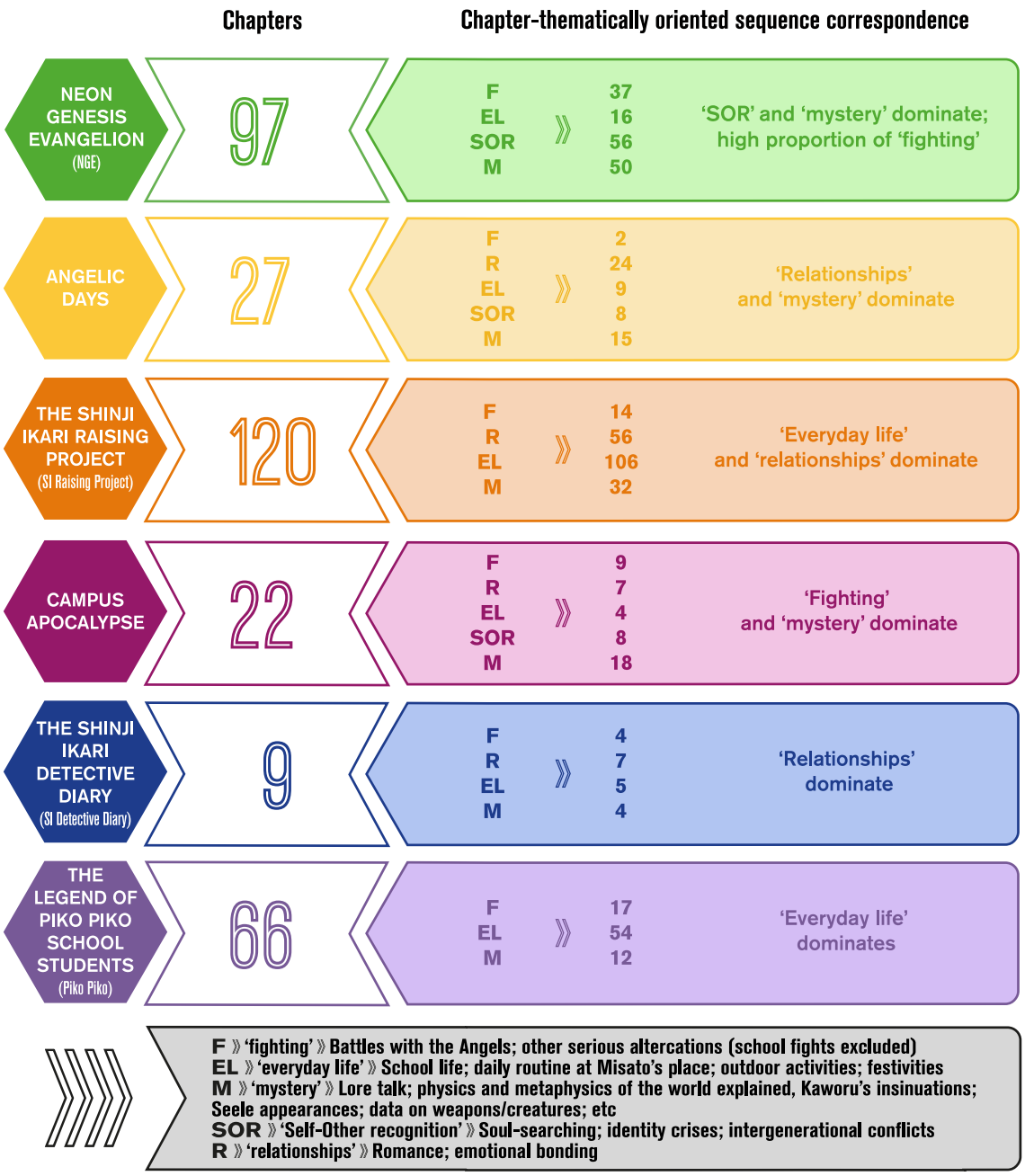
The other two recurring children, Kaworu and Rei, go through a chain of metamorphoses, sometimes taking the form of character development within the confines of an isolated story (Rei in *Angelic Days*; both in *Campus Apocalypse*). But even basic character settings change noticeably between works. Thus, *Piko Piko* features a coldly aloof, egotistical Rei and an eccentric, but affable Kaworu. In *Angelic Days*, the two are much more down-to-earth, active and involved. In *Campus Apocalypse*, both are forced to negotiate social awkwardness and lack of confidence. It is possible to view such transformations as rearrangements of database elements, but Azuma's theory does not explain at which point the combination associated with a particular existent loses recognizability and effectively turns into another character. Cultural critic Tsunehiro Uno argues that characters can never break free from their originating narratives (2008: 522–546). In Uno's opinion, a character exists only if recognized, acknowledged and shared by a certain community. Each new act of creative consumption entails the reconfirmation of the character and, consequently, of the narrative shared by the community. This act of bonding around a character and its originating narrative, conversely, strengthens the ties within said community. Uno's argument helps to explain how fans can enjoy even radically transformed characters and still keep to the established image, namely, by consuming the gap between the widely shared character image and its novel interpretation. But this leaves unanswered why particular characters remain stable while others

change incessantly. One possible explanation is that both endlessly reproduced in-built characteristics (in the cases of Asuka and Shinji) and radical instability of characterization (in the cases of Kaworu[8] and Rei) are parts of *EVA*'s generic landscape. Characterization in the manga sector of the franchise thus functions as an effective means to trigger recognition or generate a sense of play, but it is less expedient in carrying coherent meanings across works.

Thematically Oriented Threads in the *EVA* Manga and the *EVA* Franchise

Even an incohesive group of texts aggregated through a chain of loose adaptations may still be bound by a set of recurring themes and motifs. Such a set is indeed found in both core and peripheral works of the *EVA* franchise. Literary scholar Yūji Yokohama (2006) identifies four major themes in the TV anime, *EoE* and the game *The Shinji Ikari Raising Project*: 'battle' (*sentō*), 'everyday life' (*nichijō*); 'spy drama' (*supai-geki*) and 'Self-Other recognition' (*jita ninshiki*). The template provided by Yokohama is useful for the current analysis, but his wording is rather confusing. 'Everyday life' might be self-evident (involving, for instance, all comical scenes at Misato's place), but 'spy drama' is the term associated with a specific subgenre that has little to do with *EVA*. In Yokohama's discussion, it refers to the entire set of mysteries, secrets and hints strewn across the narrative, as well as the Human Instrumentality Project plotline, which does not involve elaborate espionage. In order to avoid terminological conundrum, then, Yokohama's four terms are modified to 'fighting,' 'everyday life,' 'mystery' and 'Self-Other recognition' (SOR). As demonstrated by Yokohama, these four themes permeate the *EVA* works under discussion in the form of recurring threads. Their interplay directly influences narrative outcomes, as during the final stages of the game (2006: 57–59), or generates polysemic nodes within the narrative.

8. Notably, Kaworu undergoes significant changes even in the core works. One possible line of inquiry into derivative *EVA* works would be to see if Japanese fans had always (re-)constructed Kaworu and Rei as fundamentally unstable entities.


Chapters
Chapter-thematically oriented sequence correspondence
NEON GENESIS EVANGELION (NGE)
97
F 37
EL 16
SOR 56
M 50
'SOR' and 'mystery' dominate; high proportion of 'fighting'
ANGELIC DAYS
27
F 2
R 24
EL 9
SOR 8
M 15
'Relationships' and 'mystery' dominate
THE SHINJI IKARI RAISING PROJECT (SI Raising Project)
120
F 14
R 56
EL 106
M 32
'Everyday life' and 'relationships' dominate
CAMPUS APOCALYPSE
22
F 9
R 7
EL 4
SOR 8
M 18
'Fighting' and 'mystery' dominate
THE SHINJI IKARI DETECTIVE DIARY (SI Detective Diary)
9
F 4
R 7
EL 5
M 4
'Relationships' dominate
THE LEGEND OF PIKO PIKO SCHOOL STUDENTS (Piko Piko)
66
F 17
EL 54
M 12
'Everyday life' dominates
F » 'fighting' » Battles with the Angels; other serious altercations (school fights excluded)
EL » 'everyday life' » School life; daily routine at Misato's place; outdoor activities; festivities
M » 'mystery' » Lore talk; physics and metaphysics of the world explained, Kaworu's insinuations; Seele appearances; data on weapons/creatures; etc
SOR » 'Self-Other recognition' » Soul-searching; identity crises; intergenerational conflicts
R » 'relationships' » Romance; emotional bonding

The same set of thematic threads can be traced across the six manga titles, with the addition of a fifth type, namely, 'relationships' (see Table 8.4). In the TV anime and *NGE*, relationships are part of SOR, but the latter category far exceeds problems in the relationship-building or romance prevalent in the *EVA* manga. SOR is tied to existential crisis, as vividly expressed by Shinji's frantic screaming in *EoE*: "Don't leave me alone! Don't abandon me! Please don't kill me!" SOR becomes quite literally a question of life and death not only for the protagonist, but also for the entire humanity. In contrast, most of the manga titles, with the exception of *Campus Apocalypse* and, to a lesser extent, *Angelic Days*, assume a lighter attitude.

Furthermore, there is an obvious division between the manga works in terms of leading themes: Prevailing in *NGE* is SOR, closely followed by mystery. Mystery is also the key theme in *Campus Apocalypse*, which fits many new terms, concepts, actors and events into its four volumes. *Angelic Days*, *SI Detective Diary* and *SI Raising Project* downplay the fighting and foreground relationships. But *SI Raising Project*'s real emphasis lies on everyday life (although this is difficult to evaluate, because at times it is not easy to distinguish between meaningful interpersonal interactions and gratuitous fan service, that is, details and scenes irrelevant to the story or character development and added with the sole objective of pleasing fans).[9] *Piko Piko* also allots most of its space to everyday life, but eschews relationships altogether.

To summarize, the thematic threads of the core narrative are not shared equally by all manga series. Moreover, the key thread related to SOR is adopted only in a couple of titles. Relationships and everyday life, on the other hand, stand out as the most pervasive themes. Yet, regardless of setting, genre and story, every manga series arrives at the same combination: Shinji and the other children realize the importance of Others, reconfirm their friendships and romantic ties, and decide to move forward ('fight') in their everyday life. Such repetitiveness stands in stark contrast to the anime sector of the *EVA* franchise.

9. For the extended explication of the term 'fan service,' see Lexicon (n.d.).

Table 8.4. Correlation and combinations of thematically oriented sequences in the *EVA* manga. License: CC BY 4.0.

The sense of progress conveyed by the line-up of TV series, *EoE* and *Rebuild of Evangelion* has been noted even by commentators who underscore the introverted impulse in the first anime. For instance, in his 2008 monograph, Uno repeatedly raises the *EVA* anime series as an example of escapism in contradistinction to *EoE*, which he accepts as reconfirming the value of social interaction (2008: 982–1005). Likewise, Maejima positions the TV anime *EVA* as the forbearer of the sekai-kei genre, with its omission of society and persistent introspection, and juxtaposes it with *Rebuild of Evangelion*, which depicts busy social life around Shinji and presents him as more confident and outgoing (2010: 2288–2308). In other words, the protagonist's—and his world's—forward momentum is found not only within separate animated titles, but also across them. In the meantime, each manga resets the characters' progress, so that they are forever stuck in the present (with the possible exception of *Angelic Days*, where the children have to go separate ways at the end). To reiterate, *EVA*'s most ostensible message ("accept yourself—learn to live among the others") is either reinforced (in the animated films) or undermined (in the manga) on the level of network structure, depending on the medium.

EVA Manga as Fanworks?

Apparently, the *EVA* manga constitute a set of disjointed works that correspond to a wide range of equally disjointed storyworlds. Even when borrowing heavily from stories in other media, they do not form a consistent 'grand narrative' or a thematically organized network within the franchise. Instead, each title freely plays with settings and characters, at times leading to bizarre results. Manga characterization is marked by two opposite tendencies: characters' personalities either remain fixed without regard for circumstances and environments, or they change from title to title seemingly at random. Most of the manga are too riddled with gaps and contradictions to be consumed as isolated works, and they stray too far from the canonical settings to

serve as effective entry points into the franchise. But they can be easily understood by readers familiar with the core works. Incidentally, the *NGE* is the only manga series that provides new information or new angles on the *EVA* canon. It is also the only valid entry point into the franchise, which allows the reader to immediately master the information needed for efficient consumption of other *EVA* works. The rest of the manga titles offer the pleasures of play and variation instead. All of them rearrange relationships between characters, prioritizing different vectors of friendship and romance; or to use fan slang, each promotes its own set of established and potential pairings. Film scholar Jason Mittell describes such an approach to franchise development as the What If? extension:

> None of [such] extensions reward viewers with trailheads into deeper narrative experiences, flesh out the fictional universe, or relay any seemingly vital story events. Instead, they allow us to spend more time with characters whom we have grown close to over the course of the television serial. (2015: 313)

Mittell also points out that this extension mode has clear precedents "in the realm of fan production and consumption practices" (ibid.: 325). Indeed, almost all aspects of the *EVA* manga line-up discussed so far bring to mind the often-criticized follies of fan fiction: incomplete storyworlds that utilize elements of the *EVA* universe, but do not expand it in meaningful ways; inconsistent characterization; focus on romance, eroticism and comedy to the detriment of plot coherence, etc. If generative principles and organizational logic of a franchise reveal themselves through its narrative-based parts, then the manga sector of the *EVA* franchise corresponds perfectly, and ironically, to Azuma's claim that the anime studios GAINAX and Khara have been developing *EVA* and its franchise as "an aggregate of information without a [grand] narrative," where no fundamental difference between official and fan creativity, 'original' and derivative works exists (2009: 37–38). While this may appear convincing in view of the above, Azuma's line of argument requires closer inspection.

Did GAINAX's *EVA* project really mark a shift in the paradigm of cultural production and consumption? Has database consumption really changed the logic of entertainment? Has it entirely replaced all other paradigms? And how valid are Azuma's claims beyond the narrow segment of the Japanese fan community? The second part of this chapter departs from the *EVA* manga to reintroduce Azuma's line of thought and juxtapose it with general principles that define fandoms and fan activities.

Part II. Engaging *EVA*: Fans and Their Practices

Azuma's Theory and the Early History of the *EVA* Fandom

As pointed out in the Introduction, Azuma repeatedly mentions the *EVA* anime and its franchise as a watershed marking the transition between two modes of cultural production and consumption, which he describes as the inevitable consequence of the advancement of postmodernity in the 1970s and the corresponding decline of Lyotard's 'grand narratives' (Azuma 2009: 26–29). While the early otaku allegedly substituted those ideological frameworks with fictional worlds, the next generation represented by the *EVA* fans was content to play with database elements, their interest in narratives and messages remaining superficial (ibid.: 75–86).

Azuma's understanding of the first generation is partially informed by a series of essays written around 1990, in which Eiji Ōtsuka introduced his model of 'narrative consumption': consumers notice the existence of a 'grand narrative,' or a fictional world, but can access it only fragmentarily, through officially released works and products (Ōtsuka 2001a: 7–40). Once fans' mastery of this fictional universe grows, it becomes a 'story-generating system' for producers and consumers alike (Ōtsuka 2014: 20–29).

Ōtsuka took his point of departure from the contemporary 'hunger' for stories, related to the 'liberation' of narratives "from specific social formations and contexts" that characterized premodern Japan

(2001a: 23–27). Allegedly, in the absence of closed communities and shared narratives, people lose their sense of belonging. Ordinary stories, especially if disconnected from any specific worldview, can no longer satisfy them; thus, the need for a new type of narrative content. Azuma picks up the idea of the world-based franchise as a substitute for the communally shared worldview, and connects it with Lyotard's postmodern condition. However, Azuma's reading of Ōtsuka's model seems reductive when he analogizes fan investment into fictional universes with ideology or religion, something that easily results in prejudiced accounts of fandom as Jenkins has demonstrated (1992: 13). John C. Lyden, scholar in both Film and Religious Studies, seems to follow Ōtsuka's line of thought seamlessly when he writes:

> What can be said about both [religious and fan activities] is that the narratives in question have potentially contributed in some significant way to the formation of communal identity, a set of shared ideas about ultimate meaning and values, and a set of practices that reinforce or express these. (2012: 782)

Shared narratives, including, but not limited to, fictional universes and transtextual or transmedial fiction have cohesive power on a par with mythology, and thus serve as a vehicle for community building. However, contrary to religious doctrine, the content per se is not prescriptive: Values and practices of the group are extraneous to it (which is why fans of the same cult text often split into separate, mutually exclusive groups). Fans' engagement with the content is mostly shaped by a range of desires and motivations other than the need for grand narrative, first and foremost the desire to possess the object of adoration (Fiske 1992: 40), either by means of some material object associated with it[10] or through the accumulation of data. Fans' "epistemophilia," or "pleasure in knowing [and] in exchanging knowledge" (Jenkins 1992: 129), is well-documented in English-language Fandom and Media Studies.

10. For the respective business model, namely character merchandising, see Steinberg (2012).

Forms and formats of information are, of course, subject to change depending on fan community, platform and type of content. With world-driven franchises like *Gundam* or *Star Wars*, the preferred type of knowledge concerns the fictional world (= universe) itself and usually takes the form of an encyclopedia. Fans, correspondingly, develop "the desire . . . to map and master as much as they can know about [fictional] universes, often through the production of charts, maps, and concordances" (Jenkins 2009: web; see also Murray 1997: 84–87).[11] Far from simply cataloguing, they bring in external texts, cross-reference data from various sources to bury gaps, seek diegetic explanations for inconsistencies (Gwenllian-Jones 2004: 91–96; Long 2007; Wolf 2012: 33–64; Maj 2015) and "import knowledge from the real world to fill out incomplete descriptions" (Ryan 2014: 35). Fan activities described by Jenkins, Wolf and others seem perfectly in rhyme with the accounts of the *Gundam* fandom by Azuma and Maejima, who both note the proliferation of printed materials "shrouded in timelines and mechanical data" (Azuma 2009: 34), with fan-produced mooks like *GUNDAM CENTURY* eventually included in the official canon (Maejima 2010: 2511).[12] In other words, the mode of engagement with works of fiction perceived by Azuma as typical of the first otaku generation (2009: 34–37, 54) has been part and parcel of fan communities outside Japan since the emergence of 'Trekkers.'

For Azuma, the new generation of otaku is exemplified by *EVA* fans who "did not really have a concern for the entire world of *Evangelion* [and] focused exclusively on the settings and character designs as objects for excessive interpretation or 'reading up' . . . and for *chara-moe*"[13] (2009: 37). But there are other accounts concerning the early *EVA* fandom. The most direct evidence is given in Hiroshi Daimon's report (1997) which documents the activities of members of the official GAINAX message board SGAINAX during the initial series' run (4 October 1995–27 March 1996).

11. Creators of imaginary worlds have been driven by encyclopedic impulse for centuries. See Wolf (2012).

12. See Maj (2015: 88–89), and Wolf (2012: 45–46) for similar cases in the fandoms of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Star Wars*, respectively.

13. Azuma himself does not provide a definition of the term, which is best understood as an intense affection for a character.

According to Daimon, digital fandom emerged immediately. A month after the series' start, the number of posts had already reached such a scale that two new sections were added to the General Discussions: the first one devoted specifically to puzzle-solving and theory-building, the second to *chara-moe*, fan fiction and character-centered discussions (1997: 196). Reportedly, the latter was the most popular, with the character of Rei enjoying a huge following from episode 5 onwards. Despite this overlap with Azuma, Daimon's brief account pictures the fandom in a different way: Apparently, right from the start, computer-savvy viewers were fascinated by the show's numerous puzzles. Theories proliferated. Even though the Angels were eventually demoted to 'monsters of the week,' users' interest in the mysteries of the Human Instrumentality Project and the Second Impact never waned. In addition, *EVA* enthusiasts reached beyond the TV anime to facilitate interpretation: They discovered intertextual links, played their theories against the perceived image of GAINAX as an idiosyncratic producer, tried to factor in complications of the production process and so on (1997: 195–199). Incidentally, the exploratory efforts of the fandom bore some tangible fruit in printed form. Two Japanese-language books published in 1997, *Evangerion kenkyū josetsu* (Kabutogi 1997) and *EVA no tabekata, ajiwaikata* (Evangelion Roppongi Committee 1997), collected all kinds of trivia, guesswork and analyses. Evident here are attempts to decipher and interpret, rather than playing with database elements.

All this factual evidence is corroborated and elaborated by Maejima's treatise on the sekai-kei genre, which positioned the *EVA* anime as a watershed between generations and tastes. Maejima identifies two distinct sides of the *EVA* series (and *EoE*): for the most part, *EVA* constitutes a model case of a text "made by otaku for otaku," while the last two episodes and the subsequent movie redefine it into what Maejima calls "otaku literature" (*otaku no bungaku*). In other words, the target audience for the larger part of the *EVA* anime were

the users who engaged in heated discussions in the puzzle-solving section of the SGAINAX message board. These older otaku were genre-savvy, capable of recognizing and following intertextual links, with a keen eye to visual nuances and small details and a detached, even 'cynical,' attitude toward the object of their interest (2010: 383–420). In the last two episodes and *EoE*, *EVA* substituted the mystery-driven narrative with minute exploration of the protagonist's interiority. Correspondingly, the younger otaku shifted their priorities to empathizing with Shinji or admiring the beautiful heroines in a rather unsophisticated, straightforward way (ibid.: 546–561).

Following Azuma, Maejima notes how moe swept over otaku culture in the late 1990s. However, for him, the moe boom and the concurring database consumption both mark the revival of an interest in stories instead of what he calls the "worldview consumption" (2010: 1141–1161). This is not the only point where the critics' arguments part ways. Even though both agree that *EVA* heralded a fundamental change in fans' consumption patterns, for Azuma, this new mode means the dissolution of narratives into isolated units (the database elements), while Maejima underscores the turn toward interiority and self-reflexivity. Furthermore, Maejima regards database consumption as transitory, soon to be replaced by other paradigms, both old and new (ibid.: 1834–1862). Thus, 'narrative consumption' (i.e., consumption of consistent storyworlds) supposedly reappeared in 2004 with the huge success of the *Fate* media franchise (ibid.: 1813–1829) and played a significant part in the development of the equally popular *Suzumiya Haruhi* franchise (ibid.: 1831–1862), which initially seemed to embody Azuma's database model. The *Haruhi* light novels pulled a group of colorful, but stereotypical, characters designed to induce moe response through a series of equally stereotypical situations. The basic premise of the story—the heroine's ability to change reality itself—gave consumers a free hand to create new derivative episodes with their favorite characters. The release of the non-linear anime adaptation in 2006, however, instigated an additional encyclopedic

impulse in the old-timers, who found themselves cataloguing information, explaining obscure references and creating guiding paratexts for the newcomers. *Fate* and *Suzumiya Haruhi* are hardly exceptional cases; indeed, making several approaches to the franchise available for the fans is a common practice these days both in Japan and overseas.

EVA Franchise: A Watershed or a Multipurpose Playground?

For all their discrepancies, Azuma's and Maejima's accounts of the *EVA* fandom, or of fandoms in general, are not irreconcilable. Barring the last two episodes, the *EVA* anime series encourages a mode of engagement that is related, but not identical, to the older, encyclopedic one. Azuma emphasizes the gap between the two, while Maejima focuses on similarities. At any rate, different modes of engagement stem less from a generational gap than the operative principle and inner logic of different franchises. Contrary to *Gundam*, *EVA* was delivered to consumers not in the form of a TRPG (tabletop role-playing game) sourcebook, which is Ōtsuka's preferred analogy for narrative consumption (2014: 20–23). Instead, it was a perfect cult text, designed "to be open, to contain gaps, irresolutions, contradictions, which both allow and invite fan productivity" (Fiske 1992: 41). Fans bent on deciphering *EVA*'s endless mysteries, hints and promises were required to scavenge for information in every direction possible. To paraphrase, they had to become what Mittell (2015) calls "forensic." There certainly is an affinity between encyclopedic and forensic fandoms, to the point that they are sometimes difficult to distinguish. Both approaches involve dedicated exploration of fictional universes and the related materials, but the incoming information is utilized differently. While *Gundam* fans catalogued facts or mulled over technical details, *EVA* fans engaged in "excessive interpretation" or "reading up" (Azuma 2009: 37). Exploring a fictional universe and gradually filling its gaps offers a kind of pleasure that is different from

playing with possibilities. Therefore, it seems reasonable to draw a line between the two modes.

The forensic mode of engagement has been discussed in connection to non-Japanese cult shows and transmedial franchises such as *Twin Peaks* (1990–91), *Lost* (2004–10) and *The Matrix* (1999–2009). Much of what Mittell and Jenkins have to say about online communities built around *Lost* and *Twin Peaks* coincides with Daimon's and Maejima's accounts of the *EVA* fandom: users' heavy reliance on new technologies, such as VCR and wiki software; the "ludic hypothesizing across . . . gaps in the narrative" (Mittell 2015: 161); the "continued circulation and elaboration of multiple" theories (Jenkins 2006b: 124); or fans' constant awareness of the authorial figures and repeated appeals "to extratextual discourse and intertextual linkages" (ibid.: 119). Similarities do not end with fan activities either: Just like the *EVA* anime, *Twin Peaks* and *Lost* interweave and splice major themes and genres, such as 'rational' and 'supernatural,' Science Fiction and action-adventure, mystery and soap opera (Angelini & Booy 2010: 29; Jenkins 2006b: 126; Mittell 2015: 305–306). In the light of the initial backlash against the *EVA* anime's two last episodes, it is significant that all of the aforementioned projects enjoyed dedicated following, but failed to satisfy forensic fans in the long run (Mittell 2015; Jenkins 2006c; Angelini & Booy 2010: 23). Such an outcome is almost inevitable with shows and franchises that make their regular consumers "presume that there is an answer to be found by drilling down and analyzing" (Mittell 2015: 52) and encourage them to compete both among themselves and with the official producers. It is impossible for the official creative team to outsmart fans' collective intelligence. Fans' interpretations will always be more comprehensive, multifaceted and nuanced (Jenkins 2006c). Furthermore, creators running a popular large-scale project have to constantly balance expectations of actively forensic fans, who want to be properly rewarded for their effort, with the demands of regular audiences, who want the core text to be understandable without

extensive, time- and labor-consuming collective work (Jenkins 2006a: 96). As a result, more often than not,

> the pleasure [for forensic fans] is greatest in the middle—once there are enough pieces of information out there to enable multiple competing versions of the story to be placed into circulation and to be debated but before the series starts to close down possibilities. (Jenkins 2006c: web)

Under these conditions, Anno and Studio GAINAX arguably conducted a brilliant maneuver when in the last episodes they radically changed the rules of the game and redefined not only their core text, but also the required mode of engagement (Maejima 2010: 1098–1115). As is evident now, the move paid off despite the initial outrage of the forensic fandom. Not only did the self-reflective quality of the series' finale draw the attention of a wider public, making *EVA* a national phenomenon (ibid.: 351–356, 447–488); it also accommodated the precedence of characters that facilitated the prolonged development of the *EVA* franchise and defined the next generation of otaku.

As already noted, the transformed status of fictional characters in Japanese popular culture has been widely discussed. Azuma contributed to this discourse by connecting character-oriented consumption with the 'database.' Even if database consumption is not as new as suggested, it has certainly gained new significance with the rise of the Internet and the rapid growth of online fan communities. The most prominent manifestation of database consumption is probably the wiki site TV Tropes (active since 2012), which currently hosts thousands of articles covering all manners of cultural tropes, from plot devices to character morality types. The site also demonstrates that database is more than a collection of building blocks: Its elements may serve as beacons that help consumers navigate an increasingly complex mediascape. In other words, database elements may function very much like genres (and, certainly, every genre is itself a database

of elements), but with a broader reach. It is also possible to understand database as a form of intertextuality. Either way, it facilitates fans' movement between media and titles, but does not necessarily dictate how to engage with each text. Another important point is the relation between database and characters. Azuma himself contends that the database includes a wide range of narrative elements, including entire plotline templates (2009: 42). Conversely, consumers' focus on characters does not automatically entail database consumption.

Illustrative in this regard are Azuma's and Maejima's different definitions of moe: for Azuma, the term denotes the immediate affective response to specific elements and their combinations, as well as fleeting sentimental reactions to 'small narratives' (2009: 78–86), while Maejima seems to associate with moe the more traditional identification with and empathy toward characters (2010: 1034–1056, 1119–1136). Notably, these variations in consumers' emotional engagement are not unique to Japan. Moreover, quite often, both approaches are applied simultaneously by members of one and the same fandom or even by one and the same person, depending on context. In order to acknowledge this variability, all modes of fan engagement that prioritize characters and their relationships (rather than fictional universes, stories or enigmas) are hereby identified as 'affective.' Considering how central the combination of affective mode with database consumption is for Azuma's argument, one may ask if it only emerged in the 1990s, and whether it has completely displaced the encyclopedic and forensic modes.

As a matter of fact, the affective mode of fan engagement had existed in manga- and anime-related culture long before the arrival of the third otaku generation, even before the new wave of *bishōjo* games[14] in 1996 that would become the main vehicle of male-oriented *moe* narratives in the post-*EVA* period (Maejima 2010: 635–671; see also Sayawaka 2012: 197–198). That mode, however, had been

14. A subgenre of visual novel games that requires the player to foster relationships with a set of beautiful heroines. See Azuma 2009: 75–76.

associated with an isolated part of Japanese fan community, namely "enthusiastic female fans of yaoi and, to a lesser extent, BL manga" (Galbraith 2011: 220) known as *fujoshi* (Jp. rotten girls).[15] Much like Azuma's new otaku, fujoshi allocate most of their attention to characters, consume officially released titles and derivative works with similar vigor and, most importantly, utilize their own 'database' of character types and relationships in pursuit of moe affect (Galbraith 2011: 220–221; S. Azuma 2010: 252–253). These practices have continued since the late 1970s (S. Azuma 2010: 254). Thus, Azuma's failure to acknowledge them appears all the more surprising, even allowing differences between the female fujoshi and male otaku of today.

According to sociologist Sonoko Azuma, otaku engage with single heroines, whereas fujoshi focus on relationships between characters (2010: 253–254). This argument, however, disregards the fact that Hiroki Azuma's 'database' includes not only visual elements, but also character types, "settings [and] stereotypical narrative development" (2009: 42), all of which might shape character relationships and relationships with characters. Conversely, Sonoko Azuma acknowledges that fujoshi do get infatuated with isolated male characters, but have to withhold corresponding fantasies under an unspoken rule (2010: 267). The difference, therefore, lies in the established practices and rules of the community, rather than members' emotional engagement.[16] Following Hiroki Azuma (2009: 94), Sonoko Azuma emphasizes the lack of meaningful social interactions in the male otaku community, as opposed to fujoshi, who are heavily invested in communication (2010: 258). It is indeed possible to juxtapose "exchanges of information" that, according to Hiroki Azuma, constitute the larger part of otaku communication (2009: 93)[17] with so-called *moe* talk (about favorite pairings and scenarios) that "affirms commonality, intensifies intimacy, and accelerates play behaviour" in fujoshi groups (Galbraith 2011: 222–227). Still, the discrepancy between the two communities does not preclude their major common points: database

15. Incidentally, the explosion of bishōjo game genre was closely followed in the 2000s by the boom of *otome* and BL games, which have a similar design, but target female consumers.

16. The male otaku playing a bishōjo game does not necessarily identify with the 'stand-in' protagonist, and the female BL reader need not step back as the onlooker (see Galbraith 2009; Mizoguchi 2008).

17. Azuma himself allows that otaku "form cliques" (2009: 92), "buy and sell derivative works, and discuss their impressions of new works" (ibid.: 94), which implies both social interaction and emotional exchange.

consumption and the priority of affective experiences. In the light of these similarities, it is possible to hypothesize that the changes in the otaku culture of the 1990s resulted from the gradual diffusion of the female mode of engagement in Japanese fandoms. At any rate, as a pinnacle of those changes, *EVA* did not embody radical novelty. Rather, it successfully appropriated a model that had previously remained marginal and, for the most part, unofficial. Moreover, the transition to the affective mode of engagement was neither immediate nor final.

Despite Azuma's claims to the contrary, numerous sources (Daimon 1997; Maejima 2010; Yokohama 2006) testify that, right from the start, the *EVA* fandom employed both forensic and affective modes of engagement. The former was not even abandoned after the series had taken its decisive turn toward the affective, as can be seen from the subsequent publications on *EVA* trivia and mythology. As a matter of fact, forensic aspects of the franchise made their way into the 21st century, first and foremost in the form of the *Rebuild of Evangelion* tetralogy (2007, 2009, 2012, 2021). At a first glance, the three films released so far seem to tell a new version of the same *EVA* story, much in line with the What If? principle implemented in the manga works. But while changing the events and relationships, *Rebuild of Evangelion* openly addresses the mysteries and ambiguities of the *EVA* anime, filling in the gaps that fans have puzzled over for years. Admittedly, for a part of the audience, the storyworld of the new tetralogy has drifted too far away from the storyworld of the TV series to serve as a proper point of reference. However, this ambiguity may generate new discussions and theories, the driving force of forensic fandom. Even more importantly, certain scenes, lines and settings in the new movie heavily imply the possibility of multiple time loops. If this device is indeed introduced diegetically, the entire structure of the *EVA* franchise might change. The core works could get fused into one continuity, forming a single storyworld. Even with the tetralogy almost complete, it is difficult to predict how *EVA* will develop, but

the fans continue to elaborate on the loop theory and scour the promotional videos for clues and hints concerning the possible outcome of the new movie series. Forensic fandom lives on.

EVA's Versatile Fandom and Modes of Engagement: A Case Study

The multiplicity of approaches, or the ways in which the fans address official works, is evident not only in their interpretative practices, but also in their creative endeavors. Despite negative stereotypes belittling fan-produced texts as overly relationship- and character-centered, there exist countless examples of fanfiction (the most common form of fan creativity in the West) earnestly invested in world-building and exploration, or in explaining and supplementing the canonical events. When it comes to *EVA*, however, the most illustrative example and the one that connects fans globally is again found in the medium of manga.

The derivative work in question is an adult *dōjinshi* (Jp. fan-made publication) entitled *RE-TAKE*. This six-volume series by the circle Studio Kimigabuchi might be the most widely known fanwork among English- and Russian-speaking fans; in Japan, it was popular enough to warrant the release of a three-volume all-age version (with explicit sex scenes removed or censored)—and, paradoxically, a two-hour live-action adaptation by the adult video maker TMA (2008).[18] What caused such a success? Overseas, at least, *RE-TAKE* is known for its elaborate plot: Instead of drawing a string of loosely connected pornographic scenes involving Shinji and Asuka (as to be expected), Studio Kimigabuchi created a full-fledged sequel to the anime. Taking the final scene of *EoE* as its starting point, *RE-TAKE* leads the characters to an optimistic ending grounded in the events and settings of the source series. Table 8.5 summarizes the relationship between the storyworlds of the *EVA* anime and *RE-TAKE*.

18. The 30-minute all-age cut of TMA's *EVER RE-TAKE* can be found on the Niconico Video site.

Characters	R/I	R » Rei 2, Kaworu, Gendō Ikari I » Other Characters
Species, objects, and social institutions	I	An added supernatural entity » expansion of the source storyworld
Setting (particular locales & topography)	I	
Natural laws	O	Expansion of the source storyworld
Social rules & values	I	
Events	R	Alternate Universe
Mental Events	O	

RE-TAKE

I: ALMOST IDENTICAL

O: OVERLAPPING TO SOME EXTENT

L: LOOSE SEMBLANCE

R: RADICAL DEPARTURE

Table 8.5. Relationship between the storyworld elements of *RETAKE* and the *EVA* anime. License: CC BY 4.0.

Clearly, there is a significant overlap between the two storyworlds. Changes in natural laws and the list of existents are inevitable because *RE-TAKE* keeps expanding the storyworld. In addition, as a first step in establishing a transmedial continuity, the dōjinshi splices the storyworld of the anime with the storyworld of *NGE*. The most radical, unequivocal departure occurs on the level of events, because *RE-TAKE* does not simply move the plot forward, but utilizes the concept of parallel universes to replay the part of the story that corresponds to the last third of the *EVA* anime. The mental events, defined as "the character's reactions to perceived or actual states of affairs" (Ryan 2014: 36), change accordingly. In terms of characterization, *RE-TAKE* seems to take an approach already observed in the officially released manga works. That is, it attempts to carefully reproduce the mindsets and typical reactions of the leading pair Shinji and Asuka, while Rei 2's and Kaworu's mentalities are reworked to fit the needs of the story. However, there is no consensus among fans as to whether the latter two are completely out of character or can be read as plausible interpretations of Kaworu and Rei in the TV series and *NGE*.

As for the major *EVA* themes analyzed in the first part of the article, *RE-TAKE* includes all of them, with emphasis on fighting, mystery and relationships. Particularly important is its ambition to imitate the cryptic narration style of the TV series, on the one hand, and to provide a non-contradictory explanation for the unfolding events, on the other. As a result, the dōjinshi simultaneously provokes and satisfies the forensic impulse in readers. Furthermore, it delivers an emotionally gratifying denouement lacking in the source series. Considering all of the above, *RE-TAKE* looks like a model instalment in the franchise developed under the principles of continuity and consistency, where all works correspond to a single non-contradictory storyworld. At the same time, as a fanwork, it is tied to moe sensibility and database consumption. The former reveals itself in gratuitous sex scenes found in the original six-volume edition of the dōjinshi. The latter is reproduced quite literally in battle scenes that

remix and repurpose Sadamoto's artwork.[19] Following the same logic of database consumption, *RE-TAKE* has spawned a small franchise of its own. In addition to the aforementioned adult video adaptation, a soundtrack CD was released in 2006 and, in 2017, Studio Kimigabuchi launched a sequel series *RE-TAKE Kai* (once again in the form of adult dōjinshi), which builds the new *EVA* movies into the continuity.

RE-TAKE is therefore a fanwork shaped by all three modes of engagement: the affective mode determines its focus on characters and their relationships; the forensic mode drives it to cover gaps and resolve puzzles left by the TV series, but also supply its own enigmas; and the encyclopedic mode makes it anticipate, perhaps even surpass, the *Rebuild of Evangelion* movies by developing a cosmology capable of uniting all Shinji- and Asuka-focused *EVA* texts, official or not, within one continuity. In a never-ending cycle of consuming and producing meanings, *EVA* fans across nations took different approaches to the text. The affective mode of engagement obviously prevailed: Shinji x Asuka shippers[20] enjoyed the story (as well as the juicy scenes), while Rei supporters rejected it for character mistreatment. But the most interesting response so far has been a 5,000-word essay by a forensic Russian fan, who addresses every contradiction, loose end and enigma in *RE-TAKE* (Red Priest Rezo 2007). For this person, the dōjinshi's main achievement lies in the interpretive framework (the parallel world theory) it offers—in other words, Red Priest Rezo recognizes and appreciates its hermeneutic value. Certainly, this telling reaction comes from outside of Japanese otaku community. However, it is a direct response to something that the Japanese otaku community created and promoted. The official segment of *EVA* manga might conform to the logic of database consumption, and yet its unofficial counterparts might suddenly evoke other models and modes of fan engagement, as they strive to answer the needs that the official works have left unsatisfied.

19. For an analysis of several such scenes by a disgruntled fan, see https://imgur.com/a/bU86w#0

20. Fans who support and promote a particular romantic relationship.

Conclusion: From Fan Studies to Media Studies

Azuma's database model has helped explain a major tendency in the contemporary consumption of popular culture, throwing light on a significant component of fandom life within and without Japan—the 'database.' Most researchers readily accept Azuma's theory, especially the parts concerning practical application of the 'database' by fans. But as demonstrated above, Azuma's understanding of otaku culture in particular and fan culture in general is limited: He broke a heterogeneous fan community with a set of multifarious practices and motivations into several 'clear-cut' segments, which he then lined up and matched with particular stages of Japanese socio-cultural history. Thus, encyclopedic and forensic modes of engagement (which Azuma conflates into one) are associated with the transitional stage between modernity and postmodernity; affective mode of engagement and 'database consumption' are understood as both signs and consequences of postmodernity that finally revealed itself in the 1990s.

However, when considering various accounts of fan activities in Japan and elsewhere, it becomes obvious that reading strategies and rules of meaning-production do not replace each other neatly and linearly—rather, they co-exist in different proportions and with varying degrees of visibility at any time, in every fandom. Needless to say, fans can read, dissect and repurpose a certain text in radically different ways even when it does not invite them to do so, and even small fandoms often divide into segments according to "desirable and undesirable ways of relating to cultural objects, desirable and undesirable strategies of interpretation and styles of consumption" (Jenkins 1992: 16). At the same time, all modes of engagement have much in common, and the principles governing fandom communities remain more or less the same, including interconnectedness of research, communication and creativity (Jenkins 1992, 2006b; Toton 2008), knowledge functioning as the main currency within the "cultural

economy of fandom" (Fiske 1992: 42; Jenkins 2006b: 125), and the "dual interpretive stance" that combines "a sense of proximity and possession . . . with a sense of ironic distance" (Jenkins 1992: 65–67). It is this common ground that allows a franchise, indeed, a single work, official or fan-produced, to support and encourage multiple responses, affects and interpretations.

The *EVA* anime was, in fact, a text designed from the start to support and encourage several modes of engagement, and the *EVA* franchise inherited the approach. As stated before, the official *EVA* manga works follow the principles of affective database consumption, while new animated features call forth the forensic, or even encyclopedic, impulse. To enjoy *EVA* as a transmedial franchise, the consumer does needs not only "multimodal literacy" (Delwiche 2017: 1055–1063), but also the ability to switch between different modes of engagement. This last point is important not only when considering *EVA* specifically or fandom in general—it has rather important implications for Anime Studies, in particular for their new, media-oriented strand concerned with how highly segmented, serialized, transmedially engaged and open-ended anime texts "work within local and global media environments" (Berndt 2018: 7), which include various discrete and overlapping (rather than homogenized) consumer groups and their tastes and practices. That is not to say that more conservative research informed by Literary and Film Theory, as well as Cultural Studies, cannot benefit from paying more attention to the aforementioned media environments. As demonstrated by numerous inquiries into franchises and their discrete constituents, the juxtaposition between texts designed for interpretation, or 'reading,' and texts meant to instigate affective responses, material consumption or fan exchange (Berndt 2019: 472) is rather moot. Reading a TV anime, however, would mean taking into account its intended audience and anticipated responses, its transmedial links and potential vectors of expansion—in other words, the modes of engagement the text most readily lends itself to. From this point of view, too, it seems unreasonable

to discard various demands, values and approaches that characterize Japanese fan culture in favor of one single model, no matter how prominent it is. This very variety warrants the range and complexity of transmedial franchise development within and without Japan. One expects that acknowledging it should produce a rather similar effect on academic inquiries into anime, as well as other media involved with the contemporary otaku market and popular culture in general.

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