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What is This?

Anytime, Anywhere

Tetsuwan Atomu Stickers and the Emergence of Character Merchandizing

Marc Steinberg

Abstract

Japan's first weekly, 30-minute animated TV series, *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy), is not only commonly regarded as the first instance of what is now known as 'anime'; it is also regarded as the point of emergence of the commercial phenomenon of character-based merchandizing. Interesting enough, it is not so much *Tetsuwan Atomu* the TV series as the practice of including Atomu stickers as premiums in the candy maker Meiji Seika's chocolate packages that really ignited the character merchandizing boom. The key to the success of the stickers – along with the use of the already popular figure of Atomu – was their ability to be stuck anywhere, and seen anytime. This anytime-anywhere potential of the stickers arguably led to the new communicational media environment and the cross-media connections that characterize the anime system and the force which drives it: the character. Part historical, part theoretical, this article will explore the thesis that it was the 'medium' of stickers that led to the development of the character-based multimedia environment that is a key example of – and perhaps even a precursor to – the ubiquity of media that is the theme of this journal issue.

Key words

anime ■ character ■ consumption ■ Japan ■ mass culture ■ media theory ■ merchandizing

WITH ITS call to think about contemporary media ubiquity in terms of transformations in media and geopolitical spheres, the title of this journal issue, and of the Tokyo conference from which it stems, also provokes questions of a more historical nature. That is, in

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thinking about the contemporary ubiquity of media one begins to wonder: when did media become ubiquitous? And how did they become ubiquitous? This article proposes to provide one answer to these questions through a historical analysis of character-based merchandizing in Japan. Before we can address these questions, however, the more fundamental question we should pose is – what does it mean for media to be ubiquitous?

In recent years the term 'ubiquitous' has most frequently been associated with the term 'computing'. Seen as the next stage in the information revolution, 'ubiquitous computing' (also known as 'pervasive computing') promises to embed chips in the everyday objects that surround us, de-centering computing from the computer console to the realm of things. 'Thing-centered computing', Malcolm McCullough writes (2004: 69), 'is coming to be for the 2000s what network-centered computing was to the 1990s and personal computing was to the 1980s'. The National Institute for Standards and Technology defines ubiquitous computing as: '(1) numerous, casually accessible, often invisible computing devices, (2) frequently mobile or embedded in the environment, (3) connected to an increasingly ubiquitous network structure' (quoted in McCullough, 2004: 7). Everything from kitchen appliances to clothing promises to be or already is embedded with computer chips that will enable both their programmability and their intercommunication. In this context, then, the term ubiquitous would seem to denote two phenomena: the 'thingification' of computing (the insertion of computer chips and computing into everyday objects or things), and its 'environmentalization' (the expansion of computing outside of the computer and into everyday objects such that computing becomes both de-localized and pervasive, a kind of environmental surround). Computing becomes located within everyday objects at the same time that it is de-centered from the medium of the computer.

So defined, however, this dual process of thingification and environmentalization is not unique to the sphere of computing, but rather characterizes contemporary media more generally. This general ubiquitization of media has been the subject of Scott Lash and Celia Lury's recent analysis of the logic of branding and contemporary media culture in their *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (2007). Here they isolate a logic that arguably characterizes all attempts to make media ubiquitous: 'the mediation of things and the thingification of media' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 25). Things are turned into media objects ('mediation'), and media are dispersed into the general environment in the form of things ('thingification'). What the ubiquity of media entails, then, is a re-conceptualization of what it is we mean by the term 'media'. Displacing the common-sense, classical communication studies conception of 'the media' (as denoting the major mass media of radio, television, film, print), we must begin to understand everyday objects from branded T-shirts to airplanes as media forms unto themselves.[1]

If the brand is one place to turn for an understanding of the ubiquitization of media, character merchandizing and its own particular history is another. Character merchandizing is a term that refers to the licensing, production, marketing and consumption of goods and media based around the image of a character. The World Intellectual Property Organization provides the following definition:

> Character merchandising can be defined as the adaptation or secondary exploitation, by the creator of a fictional character or by a real person or by one or several authorized third parties, of the essential personality features (such as the name, image or appearance) of a character in relation to various goods and/or services with a view to creating in prospective customers a desire to acquire those goods and/or to use those services because of the customers' affinity with that character. (1994: 6)

In an expanded sense, this is a practice that depends at once on the thingification of the character image (the becoming-everyday-thing of the image – in the form of notebooks, coffee mugs, figurines, mobile phone straps, and even airplanes, all of which become bearers of the character image) and the environmental diffusion of this thingified image. At the core of the practice of character merchandizing is, as I will suggest in this article, the ubiquitization of the character image that results from these two interwoven processes.

While character merchandizing is commonly used worldwide, it has gained particular traction in Japan, where images of characters are quite literally everywhere. The character is one of the most important means for promoting the consumption of products – from material goods like subway passes to media objects like the video game. Insofar as the sale of access to the character image has become a major element of the 'contents industry',[2] and is buttressed by intellectual property laws, the character has become one of the major sites of capital accumulation in the age of 'cognitive capitalism'.[3] Yann Moulier Boutang (2007a: 77) defines cognitive capitalism as an era 'founded on the accumulation of immaterial capital, the diffusion of know-how [*savoir*] and the driving role of the knowledge economy'.[4] The character and the practice of character merchandizing which subtends it are key forms of immaterial capital and, by extension, principal sites where the nature of the operations of contemporary capital can be considered. Indeed, the increasing economic importance of the character was signaled indirectly by former Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirô (2003) in a policy speech, in which he declared his 'aim of establishing Japan as a nation built on the platform of intellectual property'.

The character thus offers itself as a site for thinking the ubiquity of media in Japan, Asia and the world, and for understanding the nature of contemporary capitalist accumulation. A major turning point for the practice of character merchandizing came with the emergence of television animation or anime in 1963 with *Tetsuwan Atomu*, and the corresponding sticker-based marketing campaign developed by its television sponsor Meiji Seika.

This was a transformative moment in the history of postwar Japan insofar as it not only gave rise to a style of animation that is increasingly captivating global audiences; it is also the moment when certain techniques or modes of media connectivity were developed. Character merchandizing is one such technique of media connectivity. As such, character merchandizing was involved in the development of media thingification and environmentalization and was a major factor in the rise of what is now known as the 'media mix'. 'Media mix' is a term used widely in industry and popular discourse in Japan to describe the creation of serial connections between and across media texts. The typical pattern has been for a media text to begin as a comic serialization, which is then turned into an anime series, a live-action film, a video game and a novel.[5] We are familiar with this phenomenon in North America through franchises such as *Star Wars* or *The Matrix*, and by the terms 'media convergence', or 'repurposing' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Jenkins, 2006). The character has been key to the development of the media mix in Japan, and the media mix strategy was, in turn, key to the intensification of character merchandizing and the ubiquity of media that results.

This article will present one pre-history of the development of this contemporary media ubiquity and the media mix by looking specifically at the case of Japanese character merchandizing. In doing so it also aims to provide a historical and theoretical view of the media mix and character-based merchandizing prior to the era under consideration by Anne Allison (2006) in her *Millennial Monsters* (which focuses on examples of the media mix in the years 1993–2000), or Azuma Hiroki (2001), who similarly focuses on the 1990s in his *Dôbutsuka suru posutomodan* (The Animalizing Postmodern).[6] While I cannot go too far into the history of the media mix here, this discussion of character merchandizing will allow me to develop some theoretical points about its basic characteristics, including its strategies for producing synergetic relationships between various media series. Focusing on a key moment in the development of character merchandizing in Japan – the emergence of Japanese-produced television animation and the simultaneous development of a candy marketing campaign based around the animated character – this article proposes to tease out the attending shifts within Japanese media culture, examine the workings of the character as a form of relational or connective technology, and better grasp the nature of media ubiquity in the Japanese and other media spheres. Finally, this particular inquiry into the historical 'when and how' of media ubiquity will permit us to suggest the importance of grasping the specificity of media operations and the relation between materiality and immateriality within the current social-cultural-economic configuration known as 'late' or 'cognitive' capitalism. Against the tendency to view cognitive capitalism as defined principally by its immaterial dimension (the immateriality of knowledge or information and the intellectual property laws that guarantee its commodification), we should think of it rather as something of a material-immaterial combine. The immaterial value of the character and its very existence as a media form cannot, I will argue, be thought independently of its material proliferation as a thingified image.

Character Histories

It goes without saying that character goods and character merchandizing in one form or another have existed for some time. Modern Japan's first character boom came in the 1920s and 1930s.[7] Nogami Akira (2004: 25), a researcher of toys and children's culture, argues that Shô-chan was Japan's first 'mass character', rising to popularity after its serialization as a comic or manga in newspapers as *Shô-chan no bôken* (The Adventures of Little Shô) in 1923. Norakuro, based on Tagawa Suihô's comic of the same name, was the most popular character of the 1930s, and brought a flood of Norakuro-based character goods in its wake: card games, sugoroku, figurines, handbags, shoes, pencil cases, harmonicas and masks (Saitô, 1978: 70). American characters like Betty Boop and Mickey Mouse also entered Japan at the time, and there was a thriving market for (mostly unlicensed) goods based on these American characters (Ôtsuka and Ôsawa, 2005: 37; Saitô, 1978: 51). While this period saw the first possibilities of the character as the stimulator of consumer desire, these characters disappeared with the growing militarization of Japan in the 1930s and the eventual ban of manga in 1941, which at the time was the primary character medium (Akiyama, 1998: 158).

The second rise of the character came in the mid- to late-1950s, based around Japan's increasingly vibrant and image-centric magazine culture. In the early postwar period children's magazines were primarily devoted to serialized novels. However, during the early to mid-1950s, manga and the intermediate medium of *emonogatari* (lavishly illustrated serial narratives that nonetheless were more text-based than manga) became increasingly prominent, eventually overtaking serial novels in page space by the late 1950s. This trend marked what commentators referred to as the increasingly visual nature of children's culture (Abe, 1962: 37–8; Ishiko, 1994 [1974]: 100; Kan, 1968: 107). It was at this point that the media connectivity or 'convergence' that in Japan is now known as the 'media mix' began to be formed. Whereas the later incarnation of the media mix would be based around the anime-manga nexus, during the late 1950s these trans-media connections revolved around the manga-radio nexus, particularly in the case of the *Akadô Suzunosuke* 'boom'. *Akadô Suzunosuke*, the tale of a boy swordsman-in-training, began as a manga by Takeuchi Tsunayoshi serialized in a popular boys' magazine from 1954 to 1960. But the *Akadô* boom really took off with its serialization as a radio drama as of 1957 with film versions and a TV series following soon after. Some writers at the time, such as the children's literature specialist Kan Tadamichi, pointed to *Akadô* as marking the beginning of the media mix in Japan (1968: 93; see also Saitô, 1975: 48).[8] However, one of the key elements of the later form of the media mix was still missing: the consistency of the character image across media. This image-consistency would only be achieved with the subsequent development of anime. Yet the catalyst for the rise of character media was the combination of anime's formal characteristics with a particularly successful marketing campaign based around the distribution of another, more humble medium: the sticker.

The Tie-in that Binds: Anime and Character Merchandizing

The first weekly, 30-minute television animation show produced in Japan was Tezuka Osamu's *Tetsuwan Atomu*, aired in North America as *Astro Boy*, and first broadcast on 1 January 1963. This series is also commonly regarded as the birth of what is now known as anime. While the production of animation in Japan goes back to the 1910s, the particular stylistic characteristics, production methods, marketing practices and TV-basis of anime began with *Atomu*. Nonetheless, three forms of animation production were key to TV anime's development. First, limited animation TV shows from the US such as *The Huckleberry Hound Show* and *The Flintstones* were aired on Japanese TV by the late 1950s and early 1960s. The very existence of these programs demonstrated that it was indeed possible to create animation programs for television's taxing weekly schedule – a feat that until this point was thought to be impossible (Yamamoto, 1989: 64). Second, some of the characteristics of the limited animation used in *Atomu* had already been developed by Japanese animators, who survived the low years of the 1950s by producing commercials for the new medium of television.[9] Television began broadcasting in Japan in 1953, and many of the early commercials were animated, or made up of a composite of live-action and animated footage (Naitô, 1964). Tsuagata Nobuyuki (2004: 123) writes that 'it is no exaggeration to say that commercials animation truly fostered the growth of postwar Japanese animation, and especially TV anime'. Finally, a third important site for animation production during the 1950s was the Toei Animation Studio, which produced some of the first full-length color animation feature films in Japan and modeled itself on the full animation style of Disney.[10]

However, despite the importance of these precursors, Tezuka was the first person in Japan with the audacity and will to give weekly, 30-minute TV animation production a go. He was also the one responsible for establishing the stylistic and commercial modus operandi of most TV anime that was to follow. This includes the decision to sell the anime episodes to TV stations at well below the cost of production, in a bid to out-sell the competition in advance, as well as placate TV station executives who worried about the exorbitant production costs of TV animation.[11] What this move meant was that Tezuka's Mushi Productions Studio – and TV anime subsequently – had to rely on other sources of income to take the production of anime out of the red. This is where character merchandizing comes in.

The importance of merchandizing for the development of Japanese anime cannot be overstated. Indeed, the explosive popularity of the *Tetsuwan Atomu* TV show was not the only factor that led to the production of subsequent TV anime later that year. Two other important commercial motivations for the production of other anime shows in Japan were the potential profits to be made in merchandizing fees and the growing importance of the character as a means of advertisement for the TV show's sponsor (Yamakawa, 1964a).[12] And the spark that lit the fuse for the real take-off of character merchandizing and for the concomitant rise of character marketing – advertising based around anime characters – can in large part be credited to the Atomu and friends sticker campaign started by Meiji Seika, *Tetsuwan Atomu*'s television sponsor. This was a campaign that marketing historians argue initiated a new era in advertising (Kojima, 1978: 50).

Meiji Seika was at the time and to this day one of the largest candy makers in Japan. Its star was in the ascendancy in the early 1960s with the successful release in 1961 of a new kind of chocolate candies: Marble Chocolates. Marble Chocolates were much like M&Ms or Smarties – in fact they were designed to imitate them (Ôhashi, 1963: 4) – but they were sold in an innovatively shaped cylindrical box. They were also the object of an extensive advertising campaign that featured the 6-year-old Uehara Yukari, a girl so associated with these chocolates that she became known as Marble-chan, or Miss Marble, and was a celebrity in her own right. Thanks to the effects of this ad campaign, sales for Marble Chocolates rose at an incredible rate (Meiji Seika, 1968: 99–102). However, these sales began to peak and decline in the face of a challenge from another major candy maker, Morinaga. Specifically, this challenge came in the form of Morinaga's development of a veritable copy of Marble Chocolates called Parade Chocolates, which had the same candy shape and most importantly the same cylindrical box. To top it off the Morinaga chocolates came with an *omake* or premium: a badge bearing the faces of various TV characters, such as *The Three Stooges* and *Kurorin-mura to kurumi no ki*, a puppet program popular at the time (Tsunashima, 1998: 26; 1999: 56).

In order to meet this challenge from Morinaga, the Meiji marketing department decided to include a premium of their own in their Marble Chocolates to induce sales. After some deliberation, they settled on using the image of the hero of a recent TV show of which it was the sponsor: the atomic-powered yet good-hearted character Atomu from *Tetsuwan Atomu*. This first Meiji-Atomu sticker campaign was a commercial success. Meiji received 3.7 million requests for stickers between July and September 1963, which were sent out by mail after receiving two proofs of purchase from Marble Chocolate boxes ('Tetsuwan Atomu', 1964: 22). After the success of their first campaign, Meiji continued with several other campaigns, all based around Atomu stickers or, later, rub-off labels or 'magic prints' either included in the boxes of candies or mailed after sending in proofs of purchase. In fact it is interesting to note here that the stickers were themselves a technological development within the printing industry, using an emulsion process that until that time had been developed in the US but was not yet in use in Japan (Kushima, 2006: 204–5; Tsunashima, 1998: 26–8).[13]

The importance of this Meiji sticker campaign has been acknowledged by several Japanese writers. Some, like the toy collector and historian Kitahara Teruhisa (2003), the writer Tsunashima Ritomo (1998), or the

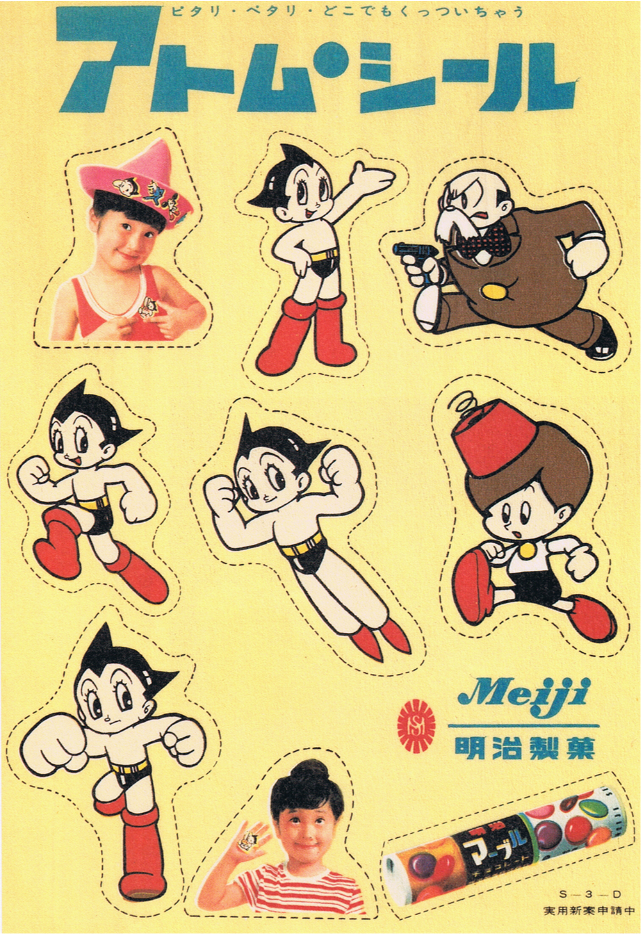
ピタリ・ペタリ・どこでもくっついちゃう
アトム・シール
Meiji
明治製菓
明治
マーブル
チョコレート
S—3—D
実用新案申請中

Figure 1 Atomu Sticker Sheet. The first Meiji Seika-Tetsuwan Atomu sticker sheet, released in July 1963. Reprinted from Tsunashima, 1999. © Tezuka Production Co., Ltd

anime historian Tsugata Nobuyuki (2006) see in the Atomu sticker boom the very foundation of the present state of character marketing. For these writers, the reason we see Pokémon or Hello Kitty notebooks throughout Japan and indeed across the world is in some part due to Meiji's forerunner of the character business: the Atomu sticker campaign. However, while these writers may be historically correct, they fail to suggest why it is these stickers were as successful as they were. They also tend to naturalize the children's desire for the stickers and the ubiquity of the image that they allow. To counter this naturalization we must begin from the premise that, as Ueno Chizuko (1992: 68) put it, 'commodities produce desire, not the reverse'. In the next section I would like to explore the particular ways in which the stickers functioned as what Ueno terms 'mechanisms for the release of desire', such that we might begin to grasp the reasons for their popular success. In so doing I will pay particular attention to the transformations in the 'media ecology' (Fuller, 2005; Guattari, 2005) that the stickers and their synergetic relationship with the television program brought about.

Stickers and the Environmentalization of the Image

The first and most apparent reason for the popularity of the stickers was the explosive popularity of the anime series itself. The TV show was based on the *Tetsuwan Atomu* manga that had been serialized in the popular boys' monthly magazine *Shônen* (Boy) from 1951 until 1968. *Tetsuwan Atomu* was one of the more popular series of the time, and Atomu was a widely recognized and well-liked character whose popularity only grew with the advent of the television series. The excitement of the manga readers at seeing one of their favorite characters animated and moving on the TV screen was certainly one of the reasons that ensured *Tetsuwan Atomu* held an average of 30 percent weekly viewership.[14] The popularity of the TV series also introduced a whole new generation of readers to the manga, making the comic itself – both in the magazine and book form – an object of feverish consumption. Indeed, we see here an early example of the synergetic effect that characterizes what is now called the media mix. While some writers have, as we noted above, remarked on the synergetic relationship between radio and manga in the 1950s (Kan, 1968), this synergetic effect between comics and other media reached new levels of intensity with *Atomu*.

Why this might be so can be explained by the disjuncture between the manga image and the film or television image in earlier series such as *Akadô Suzunosuke* – the disjuncture between drawn and photographic images. In these earlier series, the drawn manga version was 'translated' into a live-action actor for the film or television versions. The disjuncture between the drawn and the photographic led to strategies of pairing the live-action hero with the manga hero in advertisements using the character, an iteration that arguably diminished the impact of both. The gap between its different styles and incarnations rendered the character itself unstable. The persistence of this problematic gap in early attempts at character merchandizing is likely one of the reasons *Akadô*'s popularity was fueled more by the radio version than the TV or film versions of this series (Saitô, 1975: 49): the radio version gave acoustic body to the character without infringing on the aesthetic consistency of its drawn, manga representation. The same must be said for an earlier 1959 to 1960 live-action version of *Tetsuwan Atomu*, which failed to become the social phenomenon that the later series would.[15] The image gap between live-action actor and the non-realistic, simply drawn manga character is arguably a major reason for the difference in popularity of the two *Atomu* television series. The revolution of 'TV manga', as anime was known at the time, lay in the close match between the manga image and the televisual anime image. There was no longer a gap between the character of the manga and the character of the TV series, as there had been with live-action. *Atomu* and subsequent anime provided a higher degree of stylistic consistency between the manga and its versionings than had hitherto been possible – and this matching of the character images only heightened their affective power.

This leads us to the second reason for the success of the stickers, which comes from their extension of this graphical consistency between manga and television anime to the realm of the stickers themselves. The stickers were alternately traced from the cels of the anime series and the pages of the manga, and so had a mimetic relationship to the form of the anime or manga characters (Mushi Productions, 2001: 43). Of course we must acknowledge here that one of these images was moving, the other still. However, the disjuncture between the moving image of the anime and the still image of the manga was not as great as might be imagined, not the least because the style of 'limited animation' developed at Tezuka's Mushi Productions Studio extensively used still images of characters and background.[16] Indeed this is a style that characterizes much of television anime to this day. Unlike the Disney style of full animation, the limited animation style of Mushi Productions involved minimizing the use of movement to the greatest degree. Electric *kamishibai* was the aim here.[17] So even where there was movement, this often involved pulling the still image of Atomu over an equally still background, generating a sense of movement by, in Thomas Lamarre's (2002) terms, 'moving the drawing' rather than 'drawing the movement'. Atomu was both still and moving at the same time: *graphically still dynamism*, we might call it. Here the graphical stillness of the image is combined with a sense of movement as the character image is pulled across the background (or vice versa: the background pulled under the drawing of the character).

The stickers reproduced this graphical dynamism, all the while being still images. They replicated the poses in which Atomu flies through the sky, points to the credits, or throws a punch, recalling the dynamism of the moving image even in their stillness. This combination of graphical stillness with implied dynamism allowed the sticker image to recall the dynamism of Atomu on screen. There was a graphical match created between the sticker image, the anime image and the manga image, allowing all three to resonate together in what had become an extensive, inter-communicating Atomu environment.

Yet even as the stickers communicated with the manga and the anime, they also had a material specificity of their own which was the third, and perhaps most important, reason for their success. This specificity had three components to it. First, the *mobility* of the stickers; they were small, highly portable, and came included in the relatively affordable Meiji candy. Second, their adhesiveness or *stickerability*; the stickers could be placed anywhere, and attached to any surface. And finally, following from the first two aspects, they could be *seen anytime*.

We might sum this up as *any movement, anywhere, anytime*. The stickers could travel with the young Atomu fan to any location (school, the

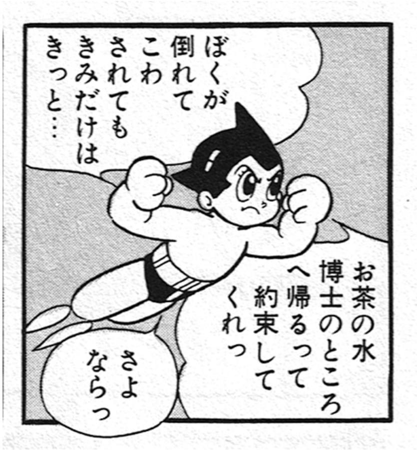
ぼくが倒れてこわされてもきみだけはきっと…
お茶の水博士のところへ帰るって約束してくれっ
さよならっ

Figure 2 Flying Atomu: Manga. One frame from the *Tetsuwan Atomu manga*, 'Robotto uchûtei no maki' chapter serialized in *Shônen* magazine in 1964. Reprinted from Tezuka, 1980. © Tezuka Production Co., Ltd

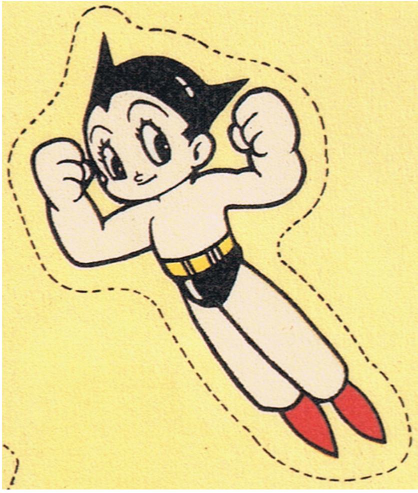

Figure 3 Flying Atomu: Sticker. Detail from the 1963 Meiji-Atomu sticker sheet. Reprinted from Tsunashima, 1999. © Tezuka Production Co., Ltd

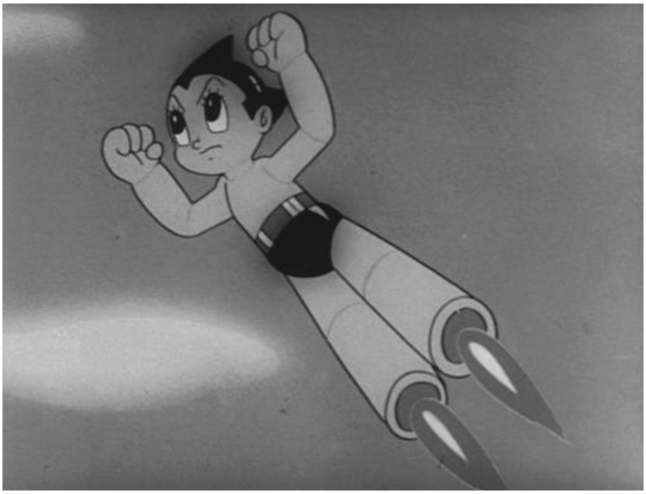

Figure 4 Flying Atomu: Anime. One frame from the title sequence of the 1963 *Tetsuwan Atomu anime*. © Tezuka Production Co., Ltd / Mushi Production Co., Ltd.

playground, the kitchen) and could be affixed anywhere. Stickering their shoes, clothes, desks, refrigerators, ceilings, school bags and books ('Tetsuwan Atomu', 1964; Tsunashima, 1998), the graphically still dynamism of the Atomu image was suddenly able to be anywhere and everywhere, accompanying young fans in all walks of their life, always there to remind them of their favorite character and his narrative world. Unlike the TV show, which only aired once a week, or the manga, which was bulky and less mobile, the sticker could be anywhere and everywhere. Moreover, while the TV anime Atomu or the manga Atomu were embedded in specific material environments (the living room and the TV set for one; the manga book or magazine for the other), the sticker image of Atomu was abstracted both from its narrative setting and material apparatus. No longer embedded within a particular narrative or material assemblage, the stickering child was free to re-imagine the Atomu world as she or he pleased. While undoubtedly the sticker functioned as a conduit for the child's participation in the existing character world, the abstraction the sticker made possible also allowed the child to engage this narrative world differently. Much like the torrent of Atomu toys, which would come later in 1963, the sticker gave to the child consumer the ability to re-imagine the Atomu world.[18]

The abstraction and adhesion that the sticker enabled point to what seem to be the two most important aspects of the Atomu boom: first, the ability to consume the character and its world at anytime and anywhere; and second, the power to transform all of one's possessions and surroundings into elements of the character world. Tsunashima Ritomo, a child at the time of the Atomu sticker boom, suggests as much in the following passage:

> When I ask myself, 'What were Atomu stickers' greatest appeal?', I feel like it must have been that you could make everything around oneself into Atomu character goods. When Atomu stickers first appeared there weren't very many character product stationery goods. Most of the stationery products . . . were just serious products made only as studying tools, and were not things that children felt much affection towards. However, as soon as one stuck an Atomu sticker on those serious stationery goods, it immediately became an Atomu character product, and something one felt affection for. Nowadays things have characters on them from the start, so there is no need for this procedure. Probably the Atomu sticker boom was born precisely because it was at a time before the present inundation with character goods. (1998: 31)

In this passage Tsunashima points to the way the material transferability of the sticker led to the proliferation of impromptu character goods. This led to the transformation of goods from being 'tools' based on their use value for studying to image-based commodities. We can read into this transformation the beginnings of a social transformation often described in terms of the shift from the modern to the postmodern, insofar as postmodernity's commodity culture sees, to quote Brian Massumi (1993: 15), 'Use-value [being] overshadowed by fulfillment-effect, or image-value'. That is, we see here a shift from things taken from the perspective of their use, to things seen from the point of view of their affect-laden image-value. Or rather, a shift from things taken from one kind of use to another, affective kind of 'use': comfort, communication or familiarity. This is an important transformation that Anne Allison (2006: 13) also highlights, arguing that what we witness with the rise of character goods is the 'reenchanting [of] the everyday world', a process that transforms lifeless commodities into intimate companions. As children stickered their surroundings with the image of Atomu, they also transformed their surroundings into an Atomu environment, 'reenchanting' their world through the proliferation of Atomu character goods. Moreover, as things became mediatized through the transformative function of the image-sticker, they also became incorporated into a communicational network that expanded the reach of the media into and onto the everyday objects of Atomu's young fans.

Commentators contemporaneous to the sticker boom like Yamakawa Hiroji had already noted the communicational aspect of the stickers. Yamakawa (1964b: 48) described how the stickers themselves became the basis for a new kind of sociality based around their trade and exchange, developing a new kind of communication that he termed '*mono-komi*' or 'thing communications'.[19] In a play on the Japanese term for mass communications (*masu-komi*), Yamakawa deploys the term *mono-komi* to refer to the exchanges or trading of stickers that in turn generated communicational exchanges between children. But the term also points to wider changes developing at this time as consumption itself came to be oriented around communicational exchanges and the constitution of communities of consumption. The stickering of items previously devoted to study incorporated these objects and the children who used them into an Atomu world, leading to what might be called, following recent re-readings of Marx, the 'real subsumption' of the children's world by the proliferation of Atomu images (Marx, 1976: 1019–38; Negri, 2005 [1989]; Read, 2003: 103–51). Among other things, the real subsumption of society by capital sees the increased importance of communication for the processes of consumption, as Adam Ardvisson (2006) has emphasized in the context of the logic of brands, as Allison has noted in her reading of the Pokémon phenomenon (2006), and as Yamakawa (1964b) implied in his comments on communication through things in the context of the Atomu stickers.[20]

Children, whose emergence as a new market segment in Japan is usually dated to the proliferation of television sets in the early 1960s and was significantly accelerated by the rise of anime and the consumption of Atomu-based products (Saitô, 1975: 49–52; Takayama, 1972: 311–14; Akiya and Takayama, 1966: 57; Yamakawa, 1964a: 46), became newly recruited consumer-producers at this time. Communication among peers and the participation in communicative modes of consumption become two of the driving forces in the constitution of consumption *as* production in cognitive capitalism (Ardvisson, 2006: 10, 36–7).[21] It is also a key dynamic within the consumption of character-based merchandise that we see operating here. Communication offers not only the possibility of play, but is the basis for the participation in communities of consumption (or, as in *mono-komi*, in the exchange of goods) whose operations we already see in the case of the consumption of the Atomu stickers.[22]

Yet the process of real subsumption involves not only the recruiting of young consuming subjects as producers within cognitive capitalism through the element of communication. It also involves the expansion of the image into the daily life of the child consumer. Here we might turn to Brian Massumi's consideration of real subsumption, which he defines as the 'two-pronged expansion of the capitalist relation': first, there is an *extensive expansion*, 'whereby capitalism pushes its geographical boundaries to the point that it encompasses the entire globe'. And second, there is 'an *intensive expansion*, whereby the last oases of domestic space are invaded by the four irrepressible dense points' of commodity/consumer and worker/capitalist (Massumi, 1992: 132). Television anime and the sticker brought about not only the extensive expansion of capital (incorporating a new market segment, the child, into the sphere of mass consumption); they also brought about an intensive expansion, expanding consumption into the domestic space of the home and the environment of the child in hitherto unimagined ways, colonizing interior space with the Atomu image. The sticker's portability and powers of adhesion permitted the character image to enter places previously immune to the intrusions of character media – for example the classroom, the kitchen, the realm of study (through notebooks and the desk), and the child's body.[23] The child's whole environment became populated with Atomu images. The mediatization of things pointed to above was thus accompanied by the environmentalization of media. This process, moreover, points to the decentralization of the media image from the television or manga into the everyday life and objects of the Atomu consumers. In this process we can discern a shift in emphasis from the media text as a centered, singular or periodic entity, to a spatial and temporal expansion of the media text and the creation of a diffuse media environment, wherein the image of Atomu connects TV anime to manga to sticker and so on.[24] The narrative-world and image-world of *Tetsuwan Atomu* subsumed the lived world of its child consumers through an extensive and intensive expansion into their lives.

Television, Trans-Media Flow, Worlds

It is no coincidence that this transformation in the nature of media – from an emphasis on text to an emphasis on media environment – occurred alongside the rise of the new medium of television. Unlike film, television works according to the logic of flow and segmentation that significantly differs from the relatively self-enclosed filmic text.[25] Indeed the concept of televisual flow – the blurring of the barriers between commercials and programming, and between one program and the next – can be productively expanded to account for the type of trans-media 'flow' that we see with character media such as Atomu.[26] Here we can read the crossings between Atomu manga, TV anime, toy and sticker in terms of a kind of flow and segmentation within Atomu media, where Atomu here functions as a kind of character 'supertext' that connects various other media types and temporalities of consumption.[27] Other characters – such as Atomu's main competition at the time, the character and series *Tetsujin 28-gô* – would constitute other such supertexts. If this transformation signals anything, it is not only a ubiquity *within* media (Atomu is everywhere on TV) but a true ubiquity *of* media: media texts are found everywhere and in multiple media forms (manga, TV, stickers, toys). This environmental ubiquity brought about a transformation of consumption practices whereby the object of consumption became a particular textual and material world – a world of Atomu, or a world of Tetsujin, depending on the supertext in question.

Theorist Maurizio Lazzarato's emphasis on the importance of the creation of worlds in and by contemporary capital is particularly apposite here. In *Les Revolutions du capitalisme*, Lazzarato writes that:

> In reversing the Marxist definition, we can say that capitalism is not a mode of production but a production of modes or fashions, a production of worlds. . . . The expression and the effectuation of worlds and of the subjectivities which are included therein, and the creation and realization of the sensible . . . precedes economic production. (2004: 96)

Moreover, Lazzarato (2004: 96) continues, 'consumption consists not in buying or destroying a service or product as political economy and its critique teaches us, but means first and foremost belonging to a world'. In the emergence of anime and its partner practice of character merchandizing we find one of the key sites from which to observe the process of the real subsumption of life by the material expansion of the image, and the production and consumption of narrative and character worlds within contemporary capital. Moreover, based on our discussion of it here, we can now offer a more precise definition of the phenomenon of character merchandizing: it is the dual process of inciting the desire for the ubiquity of a character and its world and providing the means for this desire to be satisfied through the material availability of the character image. The Meiji-Atomu campaign of 1963 brought both of these operations together, in some ways for the first time. If this campaign is so important for the history of character merchandizing in postwar Japan, it is because it effectively incited the desire for character ubiquity and provided one of the more ingenious means of satisfying this desire: through the consumption of the mobile and eminently transposable sticker, and the participation in character worlds this consumption allowed.

Character Technology

But here we must repeat the question with which we began this article: how did media become ubiquitous? Thus far I have only answered half of this question. That is, I have suggested that the Meiji sticker campaign was one of the bases for the material expansion of media towards a spatially and temporally dispersed yet continuous media environment. However, what this account has backgrounded is the simultaneous development of another kind of media technology whose characteristics inform that of the sticker itself.

I am referring of course to that particular technology called the ‘character’. I should note here that I am using ‘technology’ in the more abstract sense of a device or mechanism that allows audio-visual media and other tie-in objects to connect. In this sense I am using the term technology much like Michel Foucault (1977: 30; 2003) discusses technologies of power or of the self, or Naoki Sakai (1997) refers to literature and translation as ‘subjective technologies’ – that is, technologies that constitute the subject.[28] I would like to point out two main attributes of the character here.

The first is mobility, or what Itô Gô (2005: 54) has recently referred to as the ‘autonomy of character’.[29] The character – as a named, visual figure that possesses recognizable attributes[30] – is independent from any particular medium. Rather the nature of the character is to travel across and between media, being embodied in each medium in distinct ways. The drawn character is particularly well-suited to cross-overs between manga, anime and video-games, and more recently the new genre of the ‘light novel’ which has anime-style illustrations on the cover and at periodic intervals throughout the book, and whose characters are thus also understood to be manga or anime characters.[31] The drawn character also translates particularly well into three-dimensional objects such as toys and figurines, whose production was an essential part of the animation industry beginning in the 1960s, and increased in importance through the 1970s as toy-makers replaced confectionaries as the main sponsors of anime series (Ôtsuka and Sasakibara, 2001: 201). And the character of course has no resistance to being transposed onto the surfaces of other media forms such as lunch-boxes and notebooks and candy packaging. The most basic form of the character requires neither movement nor sequential progression (the ‘fancy goods’ phenomenon of the 1970s and onward, pioneered by Hello Kitty, made this eminently clear), and is thus fundamentally transposable. The nature of the character is to be found precisely in this trans-media travel, in its ability to incarnate – or actualize – in multiple different media types.[32]

The second main attribute is the communicative nature of the character. Here, however, I am not referring to that aspect of communication discussed above in relation to Yamakawa’s concept of ‘thing communications’ or to the more recent work that emphasizes the character’s role as a support for interpersonal communication (Allison, 2006; Kayama and Bandai, 2001). What I am pointing to rather is the way that the character acts as a kind of ‘communicative medium’ or ‘technology of connection’ that allows for the communication or connection of media themselves. The character is not only actualized or ‘thingified’ in different media – be they celluloid, paper or plastic – each of which has its own specific material traits and specificities. The character is also an abstract device that allows for the communication across media series (and media materialities) to take place. The character is abstract because it is always in excess of its particular material incarnations. That is to say, the character cannot be reduced to any one of its incarnations, but must be thought of both in its incarnations and in the ways that it exceeds them. It is this surplus that in turn allows different media and different material instances to communicate.

The effect of synergy, therefore, arises not simply from the number of different visual media series the character is materialized in, but through the work the abstract device of the character undertakes in connecting these material instances or media series. It is the character's work of connecting different media, of allowing diverse media series to communicate, that gives rise to the synergetic effect. And it is this synergy that in turn gives the character's multiple incarnations their persuasive force.[33]

The character is a principal agent in the formation of the communicational environment that is the basis for contemporary media synergy and media ubiquity. The brand (whose theory is very productive for thinking about the character) is another.[34] Both, I might add, serve as prime vehicles for rethinking the relation between media materiality and the immaterial in Japan's present. Such a rethinking is necessary for two reasons. First, an understanding of character commerce like that developed here suggests the continuing importance of material forms for the development of the immaterial entities that constitute the basis of the traffic in intellectual properties so fundamental to cognitive capitalism. An understanding of character merchandizing suggests that we see cognitive capitalism as based not only on the buying and selling of immaterial intellectual properties but on the buying and selling of the material incarnations of this intellectual property – in material forms like the toy or the sticker (for characters) or shoes and sweatshirts (for the brand). Second, this rethinking is necessary to counterbalance the legacy of postmodern theories of consumption that dominated discourses on visual and cultural practices in the 1980s and continue to be highly influential into the present day in Japan, Europe and North America. These theories emphasize the consumption of immaterial signs – what is called semiotic consumption – over and above the material object being consumed (Asami, 2002; Ôtsuka, 2001 [1989]). They built upon Jean Baudrillard's (1981: 66) highly influential work of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which argued that 'the logic of consumption . . . is a logic of the sign and of difference'. Baudrillard and other writers emphasized that consumption only operated within a particular system of relational differences that functioned on the model of the Saussurian concept of language.

While this work is highly important for emphasizing the relational basis of consumption and for critiquing the presumed neutrality of needs, it also tended to give rise to the presumption that all consumption was motivated by the systemic and differential consumption of immaterial signs or signifiers. In short, it neglected to leave space for a consideration of the persisting importance of material products in supporting these signs and motivating consumption. Undoubtedly what is being sold today are product-images, and in the case of image-media, images as products. Nevertheless, the semiotic or imagistic level of the object and its material substrate are nowhere near as separable as the proponents of this immaterialistic theory of consumption assume. Rather, as I have attempted to show in this consideration of the sticker, modes of consumption and media conditions are intricately linked to both material and immaterial phenomena. There would have been no explosion of character merchandizing (as an immaterial phenomenon) without the abstraction and mobilization of the character image in the form of the sticker (as a material form). Hence we are confronted with the renewed need to examine the materiality of the forms in which moving image media forms are embedded, even as we must rethink and expand the notion of the medium itself to encompass such entities as the sticker.

The Ubiquitization of Character Media

In conclusion we might say that the technology of stickers as media that could be anywhere and anytime accelerated the development of the character as a technology of connection and the practice of merchandizing which depends on it. In turn, the abstract technology of the character allowed the communication between the various media series to take place, making Atomu stickers more than just stand-alone objects. The communicative aspect of the character fit perfectly to the materially mobile nature of the stickers in a co-creative process whose ultimate result was the generation of consumer desire, the ubiquitization of the character image, and the beginning in earnest of the practice of character merchandizing that underpins the growth and transnational expansion of Japanese animation. An important pre-history of the contemporary 'mediation of things' and 'thingification of media' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 25) may thus be found in the seemingly low-tech medium of the sticker.

As I have shown in this article, the sticker, in coordination with the medium of anime, is historically important for the way that it brought about the commerce in character images in Japan. In this sense the Meiji-Atomu campaign offers one site from which to develop answers to the questions of why characters are ubiquitous in Japan and how media became ubiquitous. But this marketing campaign also provides an exemplary model for thinking about the logic of character merchandizing more generally. Whether as trading cards, notebooks, T-shirts, or airplanes, character commerce works through the thingification of the image, the transformation of use-objects into affective image-objects, and the environmental diffusion of these image-objects. As we have seen in this article, if character images are everywhere in contemporary Japan and, increasingly, throughout the world, it is perhaps because it is 'in their nature' to be so. Like brands, idols and other technologies of media connectivity, characters – insofar as they operate according to the principles of character merchandizing – are made to be everywhere.[35] In this sense, they are one of the prime examples of the technologies of media ubiquity that populate and organize daily life in cognitive capitalism. Coming to terms with life under cognitive capitalism thus increasingly means coming to terms with this odd entity – both connective technology and new kind of commodity – called the character.

Notes

1. The major difference between ubiquitous computing and the more general conception of ubiquitous media is that the emphasis on the former is sometimes on their very invisibility. For the latter, however, it is their visibility (through logos, images and so on) that makes them media forms.

2. The 'contents industry' is a term widely used in Japan to describe the film, video game, music, publishing and other media industries – the industries that create media 'contents'.

3. While I have some reservations about how this term has been used – I will discuss some of these reservations in this article around the problem of im/materiality – I will use the term here to foreground the importance of intellectual properties like the character for thinking about the nature of capitalism and media ubiquity today. The emphasis on the role of the media and communication in the work on cognitive capitalism makes it particularly appropriate for the discussion here, though the alternative (though not altogether synonymous) terms of 'late capitalism', 'postmodernism' or 'post-Fordism' could have also been used.

4. The term cognitive capitalism has been developed by a number of writers, particularly in their contributions to the journal *Multitudes*. An edited volume of contributions to this journal, *Politiques des multitudes* (2007b), collected by Yann Moulier Boutang, offers a number of relevant articles.

5. The typical pattern of the media mix is being challenged by the rise of the video game and the 'light novel', both of which are growing in importance as the basis for the media mix process.

6. These are two of the major texts that consider the phenomenon of the media mix. However, the tendency to focus on the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s is common to most of the work on the media mix. In part this is determined by the fact that the term only began to be used to describe media synergy in the mid-1980s. The term itself pre-exists this application, however, and comes from the realm of marketing. Similarly, the phenomenon of media connectivity also predates the 1980s, as I will show in this article.

7. Ôtsuka Eiji and Ôsawa Nobuaki (2005: 24) describe this period as 'the first real "character boom" in modern history'.

8. *Akadô* led to an epochal change in children's culture at the time, as Kan (1968: 93) asserts, because 'it was made into radio, TV and film versions, and actualized the representative form of the three-dimensionalization of mass communication, thereby deciding the trend of children's mass culture thereafter'. What Kan here calls the 'three-dimensionalization of mass communication' is what will later be termed the media mix.

9. I wish to thank Aaron Gerow for suggesting I consider the importance of early TV commercial animation for the survival of the animation industry during the 1950s and for the eventual development of television animation programs in the 1960s.

10. Toei also produced one of the most renowned contemporary animation directors of Japan, Miyazaki Hayao, who began his career at Toei and has gone on to direct internationally acclaimed works such as *Princess Mononoke*.

11. Tezuka initially sold each episode for 750,000 yen, even though the estimated actual cost of each episode was 2,500,000 yen. After the success of *Atomu*, Tezuka was able to negotiate a slightly better price (Yamamoto, 1989: 94).

12. One of the earliest writers to emphasize the importance of anime and the anime character for the marketing of goods is Yamakawa Hiroji, an employee of the massive advertising firm Dentsû. In a series of articles published in *Senden Kaigi* (Advertising Meeting), a monthly advertising magazine, Yamakawa (1964a, 1964b, 1964c) provided some of the earliest and at the time the most incisive analyses of anime as a commercial phenomenon.

13. Reproductions of these stickers are available in Tsunashima's (1998) indispensable account of the Meji-Atomu sticker campaign and the later, badge-based Glico-Tetsujin 28-gô campaign. Tsunashima (1999) also provides additional materials and reproductions.

14. The ratings for the weekly *Atomu* TV series are given in their entirety in the highly informative booklets (Mushi Production, 2002) accompanying the *Tetsuwan Atomu* DVD sets as released in Japan.

15. This series was aired on the Fuji TV network from 3 March 1959 to 28 May 1960, running a total of 65 episodes. The famous prewar animator Murata Yasuji's animation studio was responsible for the brief opening animation for the otherwise live-action series. For one of the few extended discussions of this live-action version of *Atomu* series, see Hatakeyama and Matsuyama (2000).

16. See Lamarre (2002) for an excellent treatment of limited animation in the context of Japanese anime. I also discuss the stylistic aspects of *Tetsuwan Atomu* at greater length in my 'Immobile Sections and Trans-series Movement: Astroboy and the Emergence of *Anime*' (2006).

17. Sakamoto Yûsaku comments on the use of *kamishibai* as a conceptual/aesthetic framework for their anime (Mushi Production, 2002: 44). *Kamishibai* was a media form that had its first heyday in the 1930s, and its second in the late 1940s to 1950s, and arguably paved the way for the introduction of the apparatus of television. Literally translated as 'paper theatre', *kamishibai* was a type of one-person theatre based on the sequential alternation of picture cards which had accompanying narratives that the *kamishibai* performer read as he or she displayed the images in a square frame. There was no movement in the image besides the sliding movement of the card. It was the emphasis on the stillness of the image and the importance of the narrator's voice as the carrier of narrative movement – which in the case of anime has its extension in the voice actor – that led Tezuka to use *kamishibai* as a conceptual framework for the style of animation he was developing.

18. Comments made in 'Tetsuwan Atomu, Tetsujin 28-gô to otonatachi' (1964), and my own research into the history of the character-based 'mass media toy' through an examination of the toy trade journals *Gangu Shôhô* (Toy Business Bulletin) and *Tokyo Gangu Shôhô* (Tokyo Toy Business Bulletin) signal that there was an explosion of Atomu-based toys in late 1963 and into 1964. For useful suggestions of the possibility for re-imagining narrative that toys present to the child, albeit in two different contexts, see Fleming (1996: 102) and Allison (2006: especially Ch. 7).

19. Yamakawa is discussing not only stickers but also, as the title of this article indicates, 'badges'. As a challenge to Meiji's success with Atomu stickers, another rival candy maker launched a badge-based premium campaign. These badges were also adhesive and, as Yamakawa (1964b: 48) notes, 'could stick to anything including clothes, refrigerators, leather goods and glass'. Many of these badges were also character-based – using the image of Atomu's main rival, the robot Tetsujin 28-gô – and many of the points made in this present article about the circulation of

the Atomu image could equally be made about the later badge-based images as well.

20. Ardvisson's work (2006) builds on that of Autonomist Marxism in general and the work of Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri in particular in his formulation of the relation between communication, consumption and production. Negri has developed important analyses of the expansion of the site of production from the factory to the social realm on the whole in his suggestive analyses of the 'social worker' (see in particular Negri, 2005). My analyses of the environmentalization of consumption in this article mesh with Negri's (2005: 93) discussion of the shift from the factory to the '*environment, or the ecological Umwelt*' as the site of the accumulation of capital. Ardvisson similarly emphasizes the environmentalization of media in the process of real subsumption of social life by media culture (2006: 30).

21. Jonathan Beller's discussion of 'looking' itself in terms of the production of value in what he terms the 'attention economy' (2006: 5 and throughout) offers another important reference point in this conceptualization of consumption as itself productive of economic value within the visual culture of cognitive capitalism.

22. Anne Allison notes the importance of communication and/as community in her important analysis of the Pokémon phenomenon. 'The ideal', Allison (2006: 203) writes, 'is a community of friendship built on communicating through *Pokémon*'. The Pokémon media mix, with its emphasis on data exchange between users, took this link between communication and community to a higher level by formalizing this process. However, as I point out here, the formation of communities of exchange was already present in the communities (and communications) of consumption around the Atomu stickers.

23. The reverse side of one of the 1963 sticker sheets displays a page of instructions showing children how to cut out and place the stickers on one's school bag, pencil case, shoes, desk drawers, baseball, and even one's own cheek. For a reproduction of this instruction sheet, see Tsunashima (1999: 57).

24. The shift away from the manga or television into the daily world of the child can be paralleled with the similar shift away from the computer console into daily objects that we observed at the beginning of this article in the phenomenon of ubiquitous computing.

25. The classic work on televisual flow remains Raymond Williams' *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (2003). Here Williams (2003: 88–9) differentiates previous media forms which, like film, were organized according to the logic of a 'discrete event or a series of discrete events', from television's developed form which is characterized by a 'series of timed units' organized according to the principle of flow. John Ellis (1982) further develops the concept of segment as a companion concept to that of flow. Mimi White (2003) and Richard Dienst (1994) offer useful critical overviews of the debates surrounding the concepts of segmentation and flow.

26. John T. Caldwell (2003: 136–7) has suggested a similar re-thinking of televisual flow to account for the trans-media migrations undertaken in what he calls 'second-shift aesthetics' – television's response to the post-internet media ecology. Celia Lury (2004: 11–13; 93–4) points to the importance of re-thinking the concept of flow in her discussion of brands.

27. I borrow the concept of 'supertext' from a suggestive essay by Nick Browne (1984) where he defines the supertext as the text 'that consists of the particular program and all the introductory and interstitial materials – chiefly announcements

and ads – considered in its specific position in the schedule' (1984: 588). The supertext offers a way to consider not just the 'text' of Atomu – the *Tetsuwan Atomu* TV series – but all the other trans-media Atomu materials (manga, chocolate ads, toy figurines, etc.) that constitute the larger, 'super' text of Atomu.

28. Adam Ardvisson (2006: 126) terms the brand a 'relational nexus'. It is in a similar sense of a nexus or more precisely a connecting agent that I understand the character.

29. Itô has emphasized this mobile aspect of the character, and has argued that this mobile substrate of the character – what he calls the *kyara*, using the contemporary Japanese abbreviation of the longer term *kyarakutâ* – is the basis for the development of all *characters* (*kyarakutâ*), including the more psychologically deep characters that he suggests developed in the postwar period with Tezuka Osamu's manga. In this article, however, it is the mobile substrate or what Itô calls the *kyara* that interests me most.

30. According to the legal scholar Ushiki Ri'ichi (2000: 23, 43), name and visual design are the minimal, and principal, requirements of the legal definition of a character. However, Azuma Hiroki (2001) has pointed out that a character's specificity also extends to its sonic attributes such as favorite phrases or expressions, as well as particular speech patterns. A famous example of the latter can be found in the character Lum from Takahashi Rumiko's *Urusei Yatsura* who, drawing from a regional expression, adds 'dattcha' to the end of her sentences.

31. This new mode of having *manga*/*anime* characters in place of the human 'I' at the center of the Japanese 'I-novel' (a first person style of writing that is thought to reside in the naturalistic tradition) has led critic Ôtsuka Eiji (2003) to describe its transformation of the I-novel as the invention of 'manga/anime realism'.

32. This is not to say that there is no longer any medium specificity; each manifestation of the character takes on different properties of the medium in which it appears: movement, for anime; sequential narrative for manga; interiority and narrative realism for light novels; weight and dimensionality and plasticity for toys; manipulability and interface for video games – to describe but the most basic aspects of each medium in which we find the character.

33. Here I disagree with Henry Jenkins' (2006: 3) recent claim: 'Convergence does not occur through media appliances, however sophisticated they may become. Convergence occurs within the brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others'. Jenkins' schematization of a world in which there are merely media appliances and brains fails to capture the essential role played by media technologies of connection that are not merely hardware, nor merely figments of users' creative imaginations – technologies such as the character or the brand.

34. My understanding of the brand – and the character itself – has been informed by discussions with Ôyama Shinji and by the important work of Celia Lury (2004) and Adam Ardvisson (2006).

35. There is a growing sub-industry – or art – of singular characters: characters designed as art pieces, or as limited-edition figurines known as 'designer toys'. These characters develop a different economy of circulation, one that is limited rather than extended (see Martin Roberts' [2003] discussion of this). While not part of the economy of character merchandizing – insofar as they are counterpoised to the ubiquitous circulation described here – they nonetheless offer another site to think about the current proliferation of characters.

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