The front of Japanese pop literature and criticism
"light novels", games and otaku imagination

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Who am I?

- born in Tokyo, 1971. Ph.D from Tokyo University.
- backgrounds: postmodernism, philosophy
- writing career as a literary critic since 1993
- first paper on anime in 1996
- received Suntory Prize for the first book on Derrida
- published 2 books on otaku or pop culture
  - 動物化するポストモダン　講談社　2001
  - (Animalizing Postmodernity : under translation)
  - 網状言論F改　青土社　2003（編）
- recent issues around otaku: bishojo games and light novels
  - 美少女ゲームの臨界点 2004 自費出版
- recently studying on philosophical problems of information society
  - 情報自由論 http://www.hajou.org/infoliberalism

Who am I?
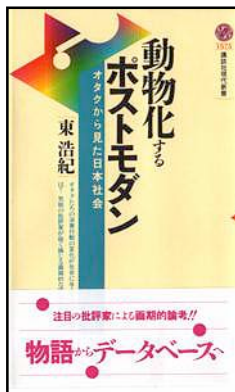
from left:
「動物化するポストモダン」「網状言論F改」
「美少女ゲームの臨界点」

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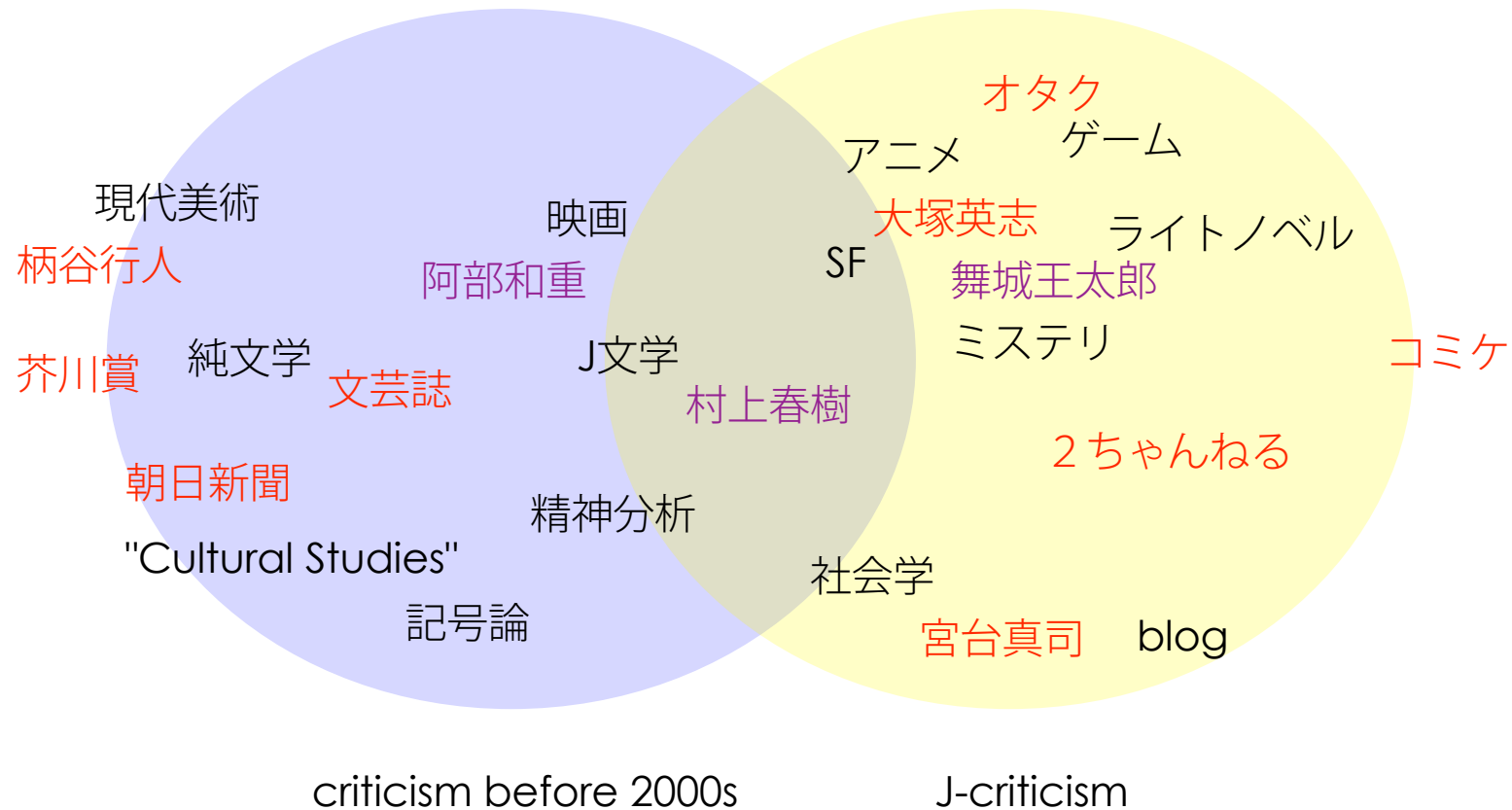
「ファウスト」
light novel magazine
「動物化するポストモダン2」
is now on progress in ファウスト

Lecture's points

- The landscape of Japanese literary or cultural criticism had radically changed in early 2000s. New frameworks and readership is now rising.

- New critical tide (J-criticism ?) has three features.
  - Theoretical background : close to sociology, not literary theory.
  - Object : Japanese pop culture in general. Literature is one among pop products like anime, game or music. Prefer genre fictions to traditional literature.
  - Place : mainly on blogs. Some by individual publishing. some written critics over 30s appear in commercial magazines（宮台真司、大塚英志、東浩紀、斎藤環、森川嘉一郎、北田暁大、伊藤剛、ササキバラ・ゴウ…）.

Change of context

現代美術
柄谷行人
芥川賞　　純文学　　文芸誌
朝日新聞
"Cultural Studies"
記号論

映画
阿部和重
J文学
村上春樹
精神分析
社会学

SF

オタク
アニメ　　ゲーム
大塚英志　　ライトノベル
舞城王太郎
ミステリ　　　　　コミケ
２ちゃんねる
宮台真司　　blog

criticism before 2000s　　　　　J-criticism

Why change?

- Because otaku and pop products are showing contemporary postmodern problems more severely than traditional literary imagination.

- collapse of Grand Narrative, prevailing simulacra, negation of maturity, disappearance of reality…

Key concepts

- change of sense toward narratives in 1990s.
  - from Narrative consumption 物語消費 to Database consumption
  - from irony to animalized consumption 動物化
  - from Grand Narrative to small module stories
  - rise of multi-ending novel games and character-based consumption (moe 萌え)
  - 大塚英志『物語消費論』(1989)>東浩紀『動物化するポストモダン』(2001)

- de-socialization 脱社会化

- connection-oriented communication 繋がりの社会性
  - 宮台真司(around 2000)>北田暁大『嗤う日本の「ナショナリズム」』(2005)

- naturalism vs manga-based reality まんが・アニメ的リアリズム

- game-based reality as a response to postmodernity ゲーム的リアリズム
  - 大塚英志『キャラクター小説の作り方』(2003)＞東浩紀「動物化するポストモダン2」(2003-)
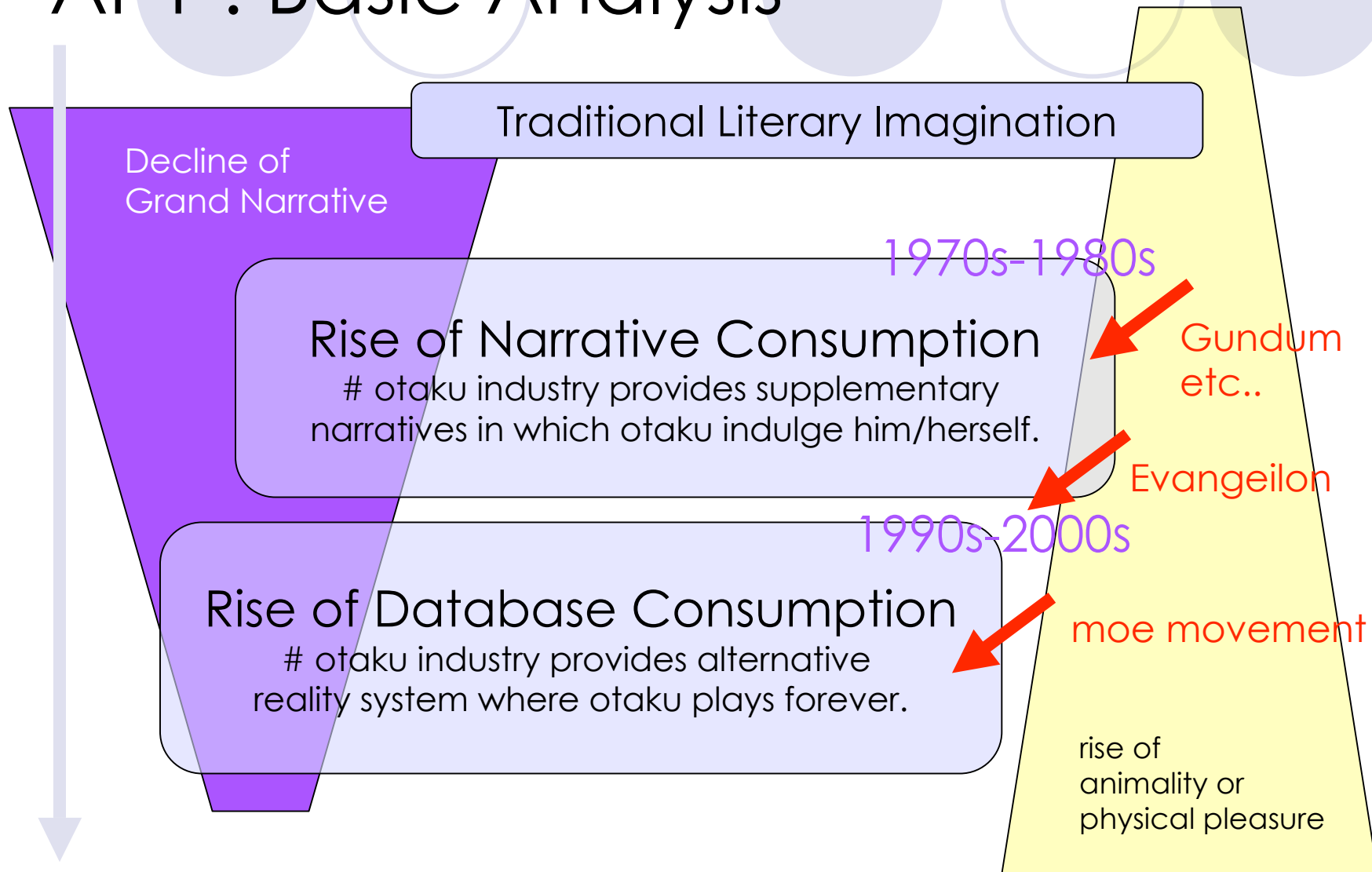
Animalizing Postmodernity

- problematics of *Animalizing Postmodernity 1,* 2001
  - Sociological observation.
  - Question : How do the cultural imagination survive after the collapse of Grand Narrative ?
  - Answer : Otaku in 2000s divides the consumption of their products into two ways. One is the private, animal-like reception of the databased works（萌え）. The other is the public use of products as a tool of connection-oriented communication（ネタ）.They are no longer interested in narratives themselves.

- problematics of *Animalizing Postmodernity 2, 2003-2005*
  - Literary criticism.
  - Question : Some authors and game writers are challenging to reconstruct a narrative in this situation of impossibility of narratives. How ?

AP1 : Basic Facts

- **Japanese Social Change in late 1990s**
  - economical depression
  - lost of national self-confidence
  - negation and destruction of "showa" way of life
  - from ironical vanity to physical pleasure

- **Otaku change in late 1990s**
  - from story-orientation to character-orientation ("moe")
  - from anime to bishojo games or light novels
  - rise of web community and alternative circulation
  - rise of individual productions

AP1 : Basic Analysis

Traditional Literary Imagination

Decline of
Grand Narrative

1970s-1980s

Rise of Narrative Consumption
otaku industry provides supplementary narratives in which otaku indulge him/herself.

Gundum etc..

Evangeilon

1990s-2000s

Rise of Database Consumption
otaku industry provides alternative reality system where otaku plays forever.

moe movement

rise of animality or physical pleasure
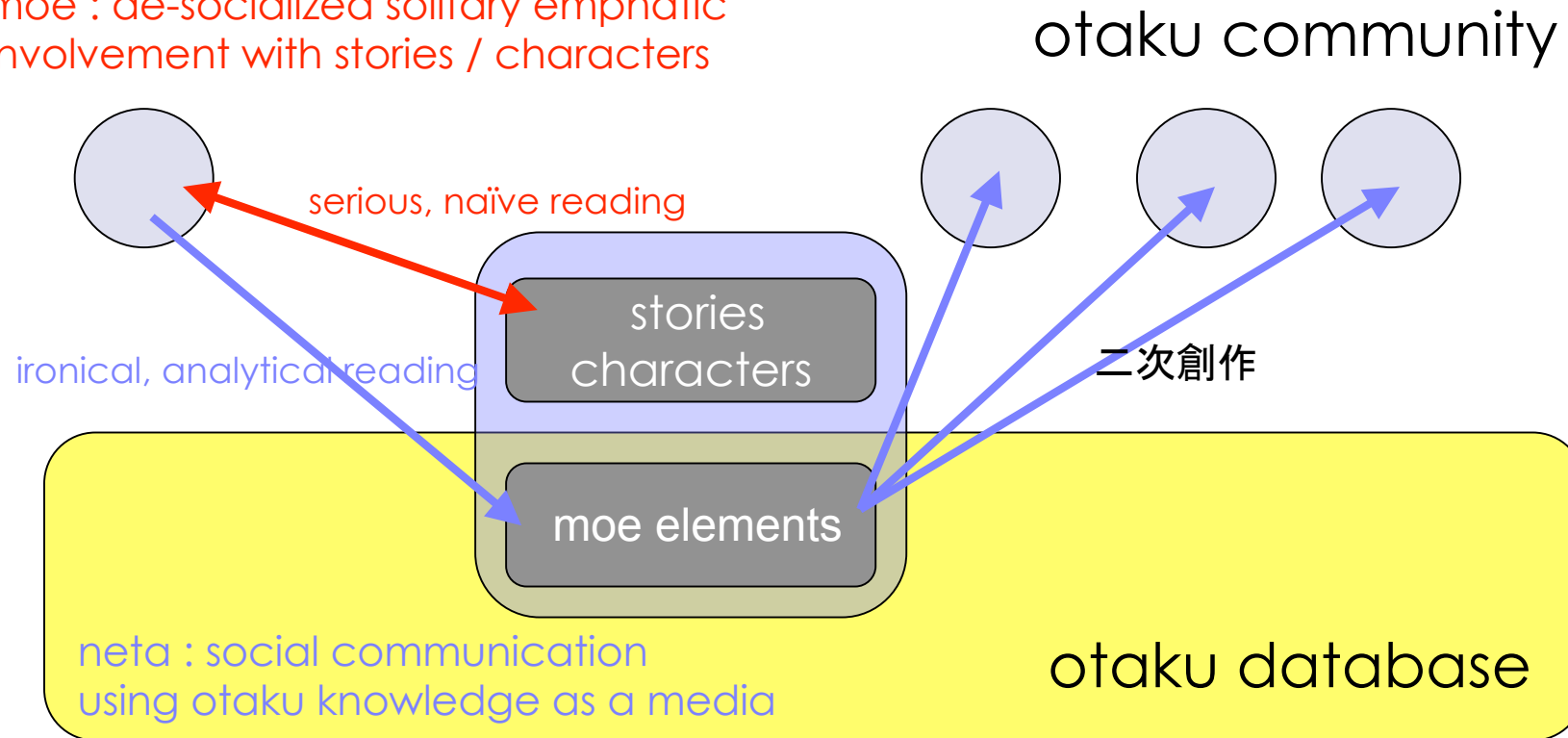
AP2 : Examples as of 2001

- Di Gi Charat デ・ジ・キャラット 1998
  - moe elements
- Seiryoin Ryusui 清涼院流水 1996
  - light novel imagination
  - manga-based reality
- TINAMI 1996
  - character database on web
  - rise of moe design
- Kizuato (A scar) 痕 1997
  - rise of novel games
  - double structure of consumption
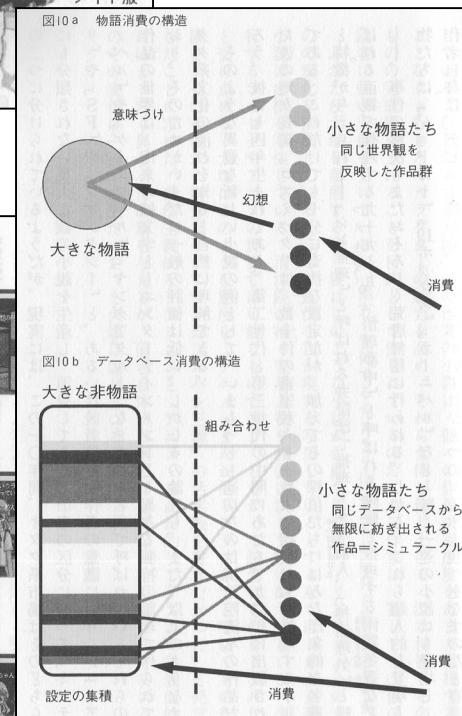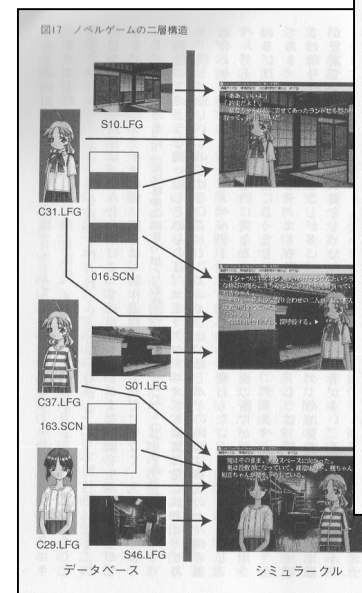
AP1 : further analysis

double structure of contemporary otaku mentality

moe : de-socialized solitary emphatic
involvement with stories / characters

otaku community

serious, naïve reading

ironical, analytical reading

stories
characters

二次創作

moe elements

neta : social communication
using otaku knowledge as a media

otaku database

AP2 : Analysis & Conclusion

- Postmodern condition requires *metafictional* imagination
  - "neta" communication and fan fiction are inevitable
  - A work which includes possible meta-readings in advance
  - A story which includes possible alternative stories in advance

- Such imagination has a close relationship with the system of computer games.
  - doubleness of player-level and character-level
  - doubleness of death in RPG : "reset"
  - "true-end" in multi-ending novel games

AP2 : Examples

- Key / 麻枝准『AIR』 Visual Art's, 2000
  - Adopts a metafictional structure (repeated time) to deprive a player of his/her omnipotence in the multi-ending novel game.

- 舞城王太郎『九十九十九』 講談社, 2003
  - Deconstructs Seiyoin's world dominated by manga-based reality.
  - Adopts a metafictional structure to reveal readers' communication spaces surrounding it which are continually dismantling Seiryoin's narratives into a crowd of characters.

- 桜坂洋『All you need is kill』 集英社, 2004
  - Adopts a metafictional structure (repeated time) to introduce the one-time death in a game-like resettable reality.