

# The Politics of Popular Culture

June 5, 2010 Temple University, Japan Campus

Frederik Schodt

Keynote Address

12:30 - 1:30pm

"Manga as 20th-Century Ukiyo-e:  
The Past, Present, and Future of the J-pop Engine"

Frederik L. Schodt is a writer, translator, and conference interpreter, based in the San Francisco Bay area. He has written widely on Japanese history, popular culture, and technology. Among his better known works on popular culture are *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Kodansha International, 1983), and *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Stone Bridge Press, 1996). His writings on manga, and his translations of them, helped trigger the current popularity of Japanese comics in the English-speaking world, and in 2000 resulted in his being awarded the Special Category of the Asahi Shimbun's prestigious Osamu Tezuka Culture Award. In the same year, his translation of Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama's 1931 pioneering graphic novel, *The Four Immigrants Manga* was selected as a finalist in Pen West USA translation award. His latest book, *The Astro Boy Essays: Osamu Tezuka, Mighty Atom, and the Manga/Anime Revolution* was published by Stone Bridge Press in 2007. In 2009, Fred was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, for his work in helping to promote Japan's popular culture overseas. Also, in the same year he was awarded the "Special" category of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 3rd International Manga Award.

Manga are sometimes said to be a modern version of ukiyo-e, the woodblock prints so popular long ago. In a wide-ranging talk, Frederik L. Schodt looks at modern manga as a profoundly 20th century phenomenon, examining their roots, their de-politicization, some reasons for their current success as an international soft-power medium, and their problematic-yet-possibly-bright future in the new 21st century."

Website: [www.jai2.com](http://www.jai2.com)

10am - 11:30am Panel 1: Gaming Reality: The Politics of Digital Appropriation

John G. Russell "Don't (It) Make My Brown Face Blue: Racial Avatars and the  
Gifu University Embodiment of Alien Others in Contemporary Science Fiction"

This paper examines the ways in which popular culture, particularly American and Japanese cinema of the fantastic and the graphic arts, reinscribes conventional notions of racial alterity and projects them onto imaginary Others and into imagined futures. All Others – cinematic and otherwise – are, of course, imaginary, but in science fiction and fantasy, we are dealing with imaginary Others at once removed from the quotidian but that nonetheless reproduce its basic assumptions, preoccupations, and obsessions: giant gorillas extraterrestrials, robot, and replicants that serve as convenient proxies, allegorical avatars, of and for more mundane racial-ethnic others. In addition to displacement, such representations are also marked by absence, substitution, and absence – transformational whiteness – by means of which nonwhite others are strategically whitened and the future is imagined as white by default, a virtually monochromatic landscape from which traces of racial and ethnic identity have largely been erased.

Peter Mantello  
Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University

"Pixel Counts versus Death Counts: The  
Aesthetics and Politics of Networked First  
Person Shooter Video Games"

This presentation looks at the binaural relationship of the massive online first person shooter game, as a site of contestation between the real and the imaginary worlds, clear cut political agendas and vague ideological platforms that blur the demarcation between player and hero, modern and pre-modern, good and evil, civilian and soldier, the Pentagon and Hollywood, the West and the Rest. The discussion then moves to the increasingly homogenous relationship between the martial art of the tactical and the tactile sensation of the virtual, computer simulated game play and actual digitized warfare, the tension between overt realistic narratives and covert hidden subtext which conflate the authenticity of combat with the legitimacy of political agendas.

Rebecca Suter "Creative Misreadings of Christianity in the  
University of Sydney Samurai Shodown Videogame Series"

The creative appropriation of Christian images and themes has played a significant role in postwar Japanese popular culture. A recurring figure is that of Amakusa Shiro, the fifteen year-old leader of the Shimabara rebellion, the last Christian revolt after the definitive ban on foreign religion of the Tokugawa period. Since Yamada Futaro's famous recreation of Shiro as a bloodthirsty demon in his *Makai Tensho* (Demon resurrection) in 1967, the character has appeared in a number of different media and genres and has undergone a number of intriguing transformations, from sex-obsessed sadistic samurai to gender-ambiguous gentle Messiah. In this paper, I will look at the evolution of Shiro from absolute Other/pure villain (what in gaming is called a "boss") to playable character in the videogame series *Samurai Shodown*, in order to reflect more broadly on the political significance of the creative appropriation of Christianity in contemporary Japan.

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