

Innovación pedagógica.

Otaku Culture and a Clock That Runs Fast.

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Otaku Culture and a Clock That Runs Fast

The erotics of resistance anti-neoliberal, and beyond!

1.

A cluster of meaning dissipates. During the 2019 protests in the center of Santiago de Chile and around Plaza Dignidad, there are many diverse components involved: flags, posters and slogans, activism and militancy, communities, nations, societies, cosmopolitics, and other ontological furnishings,^[1] shapes with defined and stable outlines, others imperceptible and porous, all kinds of signs. Speakers sing refrains by Víctor Jara, Los Prisoneros, "Bella Ciao," Quilapayún, Inti-Illimani, or the people united will never be defeated. The political traditions of the left, their performances, and their deep-rooted erotic-sexual norms. The ways of protesting, of territorializing public space and the cultural codes implicit in this legacy: a certain expansive, white masculinization of the streets, of marches and rallies. This leftist culture, its cultural codes, normative stereotypes, and erotic genealogy is overtaken by an overflowing agitation, a molecular dance: choreographies and many dance steps, an otaku hairstyle and Cosplay character drag, manga paraphernalia, pins, fluorescent dyed hair, and a lot of anime references.



Marcos Arias, *El poder nuestro es*, 2018. Installation of paintings made by the artist, light boxes

2.

Limpid teenagers in sailor-style school uniforms (seifuku). An oil painting, many pictures, more paintings, graphite drawings on translucent tracing paper with plain, flat colors in grayish and black tones. They are fair-skinned Japanese women representing feminized bodies. The work is *Triángulo de amor bizarro* [Bizarre Love Triangle] by the Chilean artist Wladimir Bernechea (2017).



Wladimir Bernechea, *Triángulo de amor bizarro*, 2017

A sense of self is legitimized. The canonization of high culture, the hegemony of modern art and the aesthetic establishment, or its more experimental alternative versions (in some last bastion of the exquisite and the isolated niches of kitsch). Or within this tradition, the complicity of the vernacular leftist culture that discredits these practices for their lack of political commitment to reality. But here the gesture is different. As we see in Wladimir Bernechea's oils, Marco Arias' paintings, or the Mapuche-queer performance Millaray Calfuqueo Aliste: *Nombre para un posible nacimiento*, [Millaray Calfuqueo Aliste: *Name for a Possible Birth*] by Sebastián Calfuqueo Aliste. A minor, minimal gesture, or almost gesture (note Marie Bardet and

Elian Chali). Iconoclasts of the inherited culture, of the world of spectacle, the massive and the degraded, a devalued and minoritized art; there is no opposable investment but the shared memories that dwell somewhere in the cultural undercurrent. Conversely, the gesture is to amplify and enlarge pop (or rather, its recursive return, post-pop), to exaggerate it, to use it perversely or paranoidly. This is a way to escape submission, to look over the shoulder of the legitimized culture that was the problem throughout recent history: a whole subterranean micro-politics of art that confronts the neoliberal sensorium and the emotional grammar of the prevailing neocolonialism. In the streets and barricades, a laboratory, in the wide avenues,

squares, and slogans, exits, submissiveness, and blasphemies in the open air. Opening up a dead end, that climate of stylistic exhaustion and erotic fatigue, unblocking it. But in order to do that it was necessary to amplify pop anime to the point of absurdity, to the point of comedy, to turn it into a slogan, a chant, and an outfit, to later turn it into popular art and therefore pop.

Post-pop anime is not just reflection, theatricalization, or representation; it creates something, vital, libidinal movements that become common sense are formed out of collectivity or plebeian deviance, and become a kind of grouping.



Wladimir Bernechea,
Triángulo de amor
bizarro, 2017

Another erotic agency emerges from the regional media imaginary of Abya Yala and the peripheral south, from Chile and brown bodies, as multicolored as it is massive (a possible name: post-pop otaku), an Indigenous eroticism. Mapuche and Rapa Nui, decolonized gender, they are the hueye, machi healers, and weye or weyun shamans (relatives of Claudia Ancapán Quilape and Sebastián Calfuqueo Aliste). One tradition overlapping with the other, post-dictatorship Chile, the spectators of the 1990s and 2000s. A generational aesthetic anachronism, although the temporal lines rub up against each other in

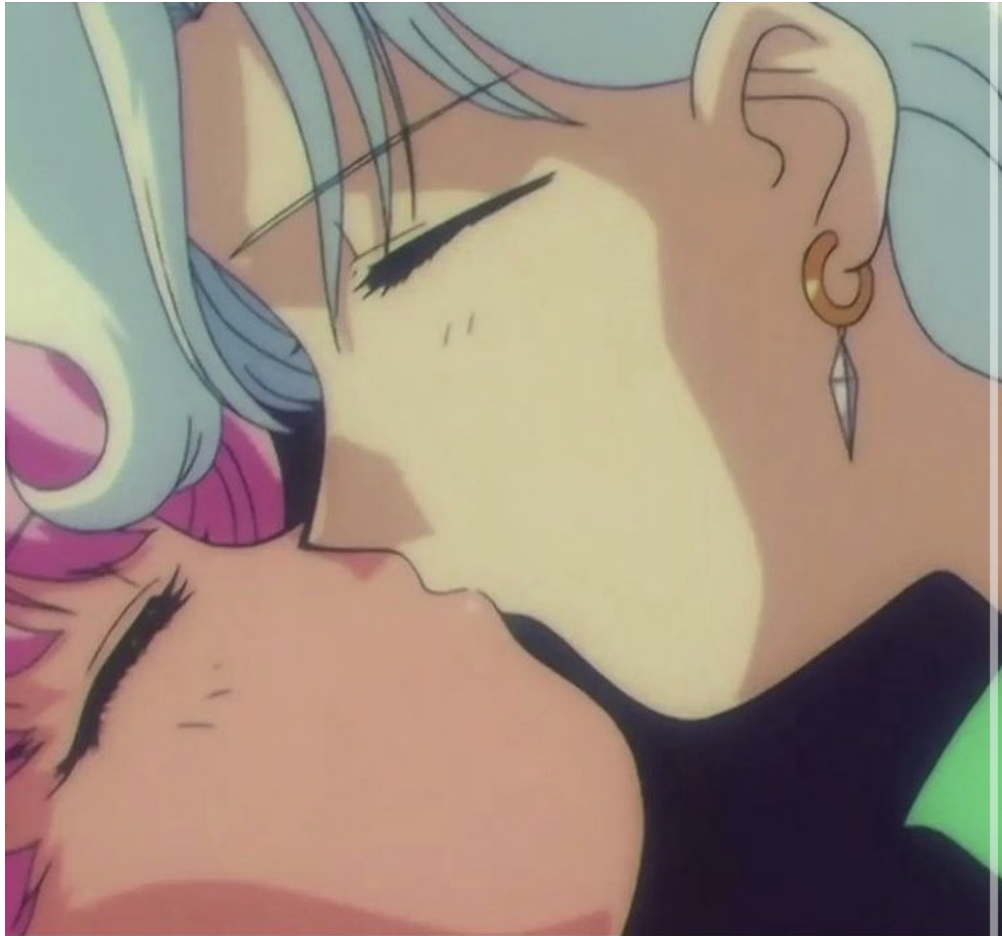
a repository of images and intertwine in unsuspected coalitions. The urban Pokémon tribes of the 2000s, the Penguin Revolution of students who took to Fotolog in 2006, Sailor Moon jumping the turnstiles in the subway during the 2011 student movements, and the resurgence of these deterritorialized adolescent codes as a popular banner of the October 2019 protests.

3.

A medium, thematic-expressive content, and a set of formal procedures. Sailor Moon, Neon Genesis Evangelion, Naruto, One Piece, Dragon Ball, and Aunt Pikachu (who, as Giovanna Grandón, was later elected to the assembly). A repository of images, signs and niche markets, video games, series, movies, cards, role-playing games, and all kinds of merchandising. Giant robots piloted by humans, technophilic science fiction fantasies, dystopian futures, and radioactive monsters. The genres are multiple and malleable; inseparable from commercial appropriation and cultural traffic, otaku fanaticism recognizes linked conjugations such as shōnen, shōjo, seinen, josei, ecchi, yuri, and yaoi. Subjects and objects can vary, from the feisty young adolescent male to the feminine girl who gets involved in some kind of romance, comedy, or action, to the adult or older male who engages in extreme violence, sexual scenes, nudity, and gore, including kinky narratives, sexual subterfuge, and comic gags.

There is a historical antecedent in the ukiyo-e woodblock prints of the Edo period (with explicit sex scenes known as shunga) or the possible sexual-emotional relationships between two or more characters, be they

humans, animals, non-humans, aliens, robots, tentacled beings, and gods, anomalous and liminal beings. It is about Japanese animated production, the comic strips and manga that were a whole generation's passcode to sex-gender difference and an anti-normative world, long before the massification of the internet (and queer theory and post-porn), sniffing around among malleable identities (as in the *Ranma ½* series or *Cardcaptor Sakura*) and acceptable sexual exposure, VHS tapes played on televisions bought on credit as a result of social indebtedness.^[2]



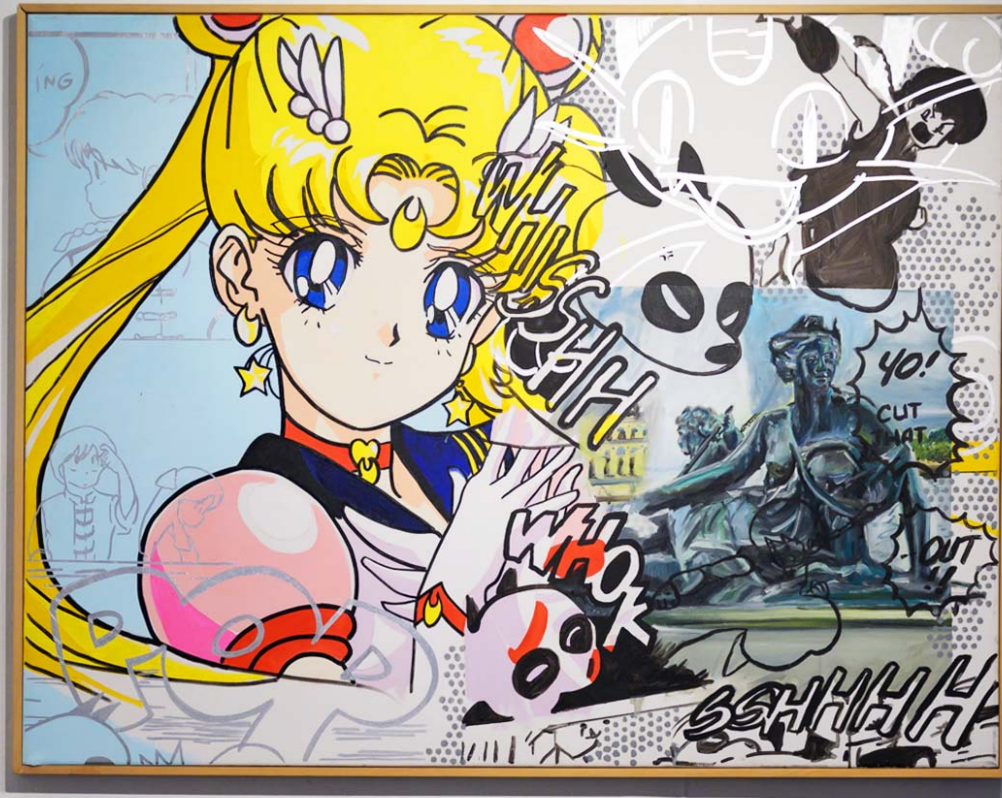
Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon (Bishojo Senshi Sera Mun)*: Helios & Chibusa kissing scene, 1991

4.

Post-pop anime is not just reflection, theatricalization, or representation; it creates something, vital, libidinal movements that become common sense are formed out of collectivity or plebeian deviance, and become a kind of grouping. Anime culture becomes a democratizing tool during the protests of 2019 throughout Chile; something emerges and quickly becomes (like a contagious epidermal effect that moves through bodies) an erotic of resistance.

A change in the political imaginary took place, at the level of sensitivity and visual traditions (the capacity to impact and vibrate bodies), of sexual-affective erotic, and of slogans and articulated discourses (other values in play that contrast with the dominant neoliberal diet).

Anime culture becomes a democratizing tool during the protests of 2019 throughout Chile



Marcos Arias, *Sailor Moon y una de mis estatuas que dejé en Francia*, 2017. Oil on canvas

From televisions to wide avenues, a cultural policy that moves through the screen from the living room to the museum, or a technology of the body 54 erotic that travels from screens, museums, and streets to any territory. The collectivex Otaku Feminista Antifascista and Otakus Antifascistas L7 Ñuñoa are formed out of the heat of popular upheaval (“Fight like Sailor” or “Femininjas together—let’s fight the forces of evil”). With multi-layered interpretations, Pikachu, the Neon Genesis Evangelion epic, and Tsunade Senju (the deputy Pamela Jiles who transforms into grandmother Hokage in reference to the universe of Naruto) are staged in the protests, using jutsu to create the largest Genki Dama in history; each has accelerated its series, its part of the castle or the process. Exhibitions and group shows follow one after another, first *Depresión post-pop* [Post-Pop Depression] curated by artist and journalist Marco Arias at Casa Parque Villaseca in August 2017, followed by *Genkidama*, on the imaginary of the Dragon Ball Z series, in April 2018 at the Centro Cultural España. Also in April 2018 was the exhibition *El prisma lunar* [The Lunar Prism] on the imaginary of the Sailor Moon series, by the same Arias and curated by Diego Maureira at Galería de Arte Posada del Corregidor, followed by *ADIOSPIKACHU* also by Arias, at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in December 2019, and at the same time, *Hijos del bullying*. *Arte chileno otaku en postransición* [Children of Bullying: Post-Transition Chilean Otaku Art] (December 2019–January 2020) curated by Aliwen, which brought together a group of artists including Wladimir Bernechea, Leonora Pardo, Pablo Suazo, Enrique Flores, Marcos Arias, Paulina Kim Joo, and Sebastián Calfuqueo Aliste.

5.

Anime, otaku, hentai, and manga, tools for the collective escape, an artistic sensibility that expresses a mechanism of resistance, the power of naivety and tenderness (*kawaii*, the Japanese adjective for cute or tender) which unfolds as a corrosive flow. Immediately, at an intensive pace and in an accelerated vertigo rhythm, the available traditions become outdated and demobilizing. Legitimized leftists, gay-friendly activism, and progressive cultural resources hit a wall. Their aesthetics are as smooth as polychrome and above all, de-eroticizing; they no longer warm and stir bodies. Here the queer and its post-porn experimentation (and even the pornoterroristic drift) is also a catalog of colonial whiteness because the revolutionary conditions are

other. A thermostatic other. For that: find its own point, its jargon, its third world, its promise of monsters. Assemblage and detour, Chilean post-pop anime is loaded with chakra/ki/nen. An alternative trace that makes holes, a Nipponese oriental trace, a kind of orientalist exoticism that bursts in but without previous history or long genealogies or a continuous narrative other than the available sentimental education (TV series, manga, movies, and stuffed animals that refer to the mass cultural industry but also to fan, gamer, geek, and nerd culture).

**Anime, otaku, hentai, and
manga, tools for the collective
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resistance**



Marcos Arias, *The Forbes Club* (o "Lo estamos pasando muy bien"), 2016. Oil and acrylic on canvas

6.

We see an oil painting of a confessed monochromatism, of gray and black colors with the exception of brick red. The procedural technique is of a pictorial neatness. In the center, with a fearful expression of boldness and attack, the face of Seiya of Pegasus from the series *The Knights of the Zodiac*; to his right, cut out in the middle of the face, is located Finn the Human from the animated series *Adventure Time*. Below these, in overlapping layers and accumulating folds, we find the figure of Condorito from the comic strip by René Ríos Boettiger, frustrated, and with a gesture that denotes listlessness or apathy. The work is *Resurrección de Lázaro* [Resurrection of Lazarus] by Chilean artist Marco Arias (2017).

"To see clearly, the best thing to do is to lock yourself in a dark room," says sculptor Leonora Pardo. And we add: "To see clearly, the best thing to do is to lock yourself in a dark room and look at manga." Post-pop ninjas are, as Naruto preaches, those who perceive in the darkest night through disappointment. Thus, the impact of anime across the sentimental education of artists (and in general, as an available cultural pedagogy) entails a precise way of collectivizing discontent.



Marcos Arias, *La resurrección de Lázaro*, 2017. Oil and acrylic on canvas, six light boxes. 100 x 750 cm

Back to other surfaces. The texture of the otaku becomes a public language. Manga and anime will function like a dismantling, an analysis, and a prognosis of forces and social currents. Prosperity and openness, consumerism fueled by credit and debt—the formula for neoliberal acceleration in Chile at the end of the century—precedes and drags along the ongoing colonial genocide.

A short-circuit within the shared neoliberal sensorium, post-pop otaku constituted itself as a mode of deviation from Western Caucasian subjectivity. Rather than reflecting a mood of the society of its time, it presents a reality within a dissipating cluster of meaning. There are no good intentions, just the creation of flows, dispersion of strata, and the vitality of strength; it is about increasing power by facing disillusionment—reclaiming failure and depression.

Manga and anime will function like a dismantling, an analysis, and a prognosis of forces and social currents.

The roughness of failure opens cracks in a plain. Failing, losing, becoming depressed, not becoming, and not participating. Beyond what is understood by success and desire for the future, the effort to try and achieve prosperous lives, among us an erotic has planted itself in the bodies, as episodic as it is fleeting; whims and fantasies, scattered and fragmentary political allegories, a way to inhabit the dark in a more creative and cooperative way.

Notes

- [1] Duen Sacchi (ed.), *Terremoto: Radiant*, (Mexico City, February–May 2022), <https://terremoto.mx/edicion/resplandeciente/>.
- [2] See the work of Sasha Hilas, especially the articles: "El anime como refugio: un archivo disidente" (March 2021) and "Entre la complicidad que nos une: animé y culturas queer" (November 2021), in *Nadie es cool*, <https://nadiescool.com/ensayos/generos/>.

Comments

There are no comments available.