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After decades in which American popular culture dominated global media and markets, Japanese popular culture—primarily manga and anime, but also toys, card and video games, and fashion—has exploded into a worldwide phenomenon. From Pokémon and the Power Rangers to Paranoia Agent and Princess Mononoke, Japanese popular culture is consumed by an eager and exponentially increasing audience of youths, teenagers, and adults. Mechademia, a new annual edited by Frenchy Lunning, begins an innovative and fresh conversation among scholars, critics, and fans about the complexity of art forms like Superflat, manga, and anime. The inaugural volume, Mechademia 1 engages the rise of Japanese popular culture through game design, fashion, graphic design, commercial packaging, character creation, and fan culture. Promoting dynamic ways of thinking, along with state-of-the-art graphic design and a wealth of images, this cutting-edge work opens new doors between academia and fandom. The premiere issue features the interactive worlds that anime and manga have created, including the origins of cosplay (the manga and anime costume subculture), Superflat, forgotten images from a founding manga artist, video game interactivity, the nature of anime fandom in America, and the globalization of manga. Contributors: Anne Allison, Duke U; William L. Benzon; Christopher Bolton, Williams College; Vern L. Bullough, California State U, Northridge; Martha Cornog; Patrick Drazen; Marc Hairston; Mari Kotani; Thomas LaMarre; Antonia Levi, Portland State U; Thomas Looser, NYU; Susan Napier, U of Texas, Austin; Michelle Ollie; Timothy Perper; Sara Pocock; Brian Ruh; Takayuki Tatsumi, Keio U, Tokyo; Toshiya Ueno, Wako U, Tokyo; Theresa Winge, U of Northern Iowa; Mark J. P. Wolf, Concordia U; Wendy Siuyi Wong, York U. Frenchy Lunning is professor of liberal arts at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

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by Ueno Toshiya, translated by Michael Arnold

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reviewed by Marc Hairston; "Manga: 60 Years of Japanese Comics," by Paul Gravett and "Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews," by Fred Patten, reviewed By Brian Ruh; "Revolutionary Girl Utena: The Adolescence of Utena," by Saito Chiho, reviewed by Timothy Perper and Martha Cornog.

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Very Competent Opening Salvo

By K. Klimt

Though considerably slimmer than subsequent volumes of the series, the first Mechademia is still an extremely stimulating foray into the badlands of postindustrial Japanese-American culture and media. It signals its originality early on, with an "Anifesto" which illuminates the central purpose of the series through the use of illustration and sparse, abstracted commentary which configures 'Mechademia' as a sort of textual cyborg, a metallic anime babe who sprouts leaves and sheets of paper (likely a reference to Japanese word for language, kotoba, which literally means something like 'spoken leaves'), representing the assorted articles and commentary which follow. The contents of the volume likewise diverge from what one typically expects of dry academic works: the articles run the gamut from the origins of cosplay to the technical aspects of anime perspective. The collection boasts some definite heavyweights in the arena of Japanese studies, including Anne Allison, Thomas Lamarre, Takayuki Tatsumi, and Susan Napier.

Every article here is of value, although some are more enjoyable reads than others: my personal favorites were Allison's discussion of the increasing popularity of Japanese products in the United States, Wendy Siuyi Wong's treatment of the history of Japanese manga in other regions of Asia and its future in the United States, and Thomas Looser's exploration of the Japanese aesthetic of 'superflat,' one of my favorite areas of aesthetic inquiry. None of the pieces veer into the territory of the unreadable or the excessively dry (always a pitfall of academic writing) and are uniformly interesting. Though occasionally articles may be excessively short (such as Tatsumi's piece), overall I highly recommend this, and the other Mechademia volumes, for their consistently enjoyable writing and unexpected insights into our self-consciously postmodern condition.

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