game environments

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Mapping Methods Visualizing Visual Novels' Cultural Production in Japan

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Abstract

This research report presents mapping methods visualizing Visual Novels' cultural production in Japan. Three mapping of the East section of Ikebukuro city in Tokyo are presented in order to unravel the urban environment surrounding the production of Visual Novels for "girls" (Otome and Boy's Love games). The imbrications of a typology of Visual Novel and their paraphernalia, with cartographies of the urban infrastructures and events sustaining Visual Novel's paraphernalia circulation therefore invites to question of the definition of a "game environment" as the emergence of a urban cultural network emerging from the circulation of game paraphernalia.

Keywords: Otaku, Alteration, Visual Novels, Paraphernalia, Media Circulation

Introduction: Visual Novels as an Object of Academic Study

East Ikebukuro (Tokyo), in August. Flows of pedestrians walk across shops, cafés, and game centers, are attracted by the release of anime and video games related paraphernalia. Visual Novel fans, and especially Otome games and Boy's Love games fans, attend promotional event in Animate, cosplay and talent contests in Parks, or even seasonal fairs and fanzine conventions tend in the Sunshine City and the JR station. This research report gives mapping techniques of the material and pedestrian game environment in Ikebukuro to unravel the urban experiences surrounding video games in Japan through the visualization of game related paraphernalia circulation.

Fig. 1: Character goods shop Animate on a summer evening

In the last two decades hybrid forms of "reading" video games have become global hits. From the early *Phoenix Wright* series (2001) to fan-made games as *Higurashi no naku koro ni* (2002), "reading games" (Azuma 2007) also called Sound Novels, Adventure games or Visual Novel represent a common genre in Japan since the early 2000s. If Visual Novels "classics" are often subjects to remakes and translations[i], the genre is nevertheless considered as a minor one overseas. Visual Novels moreover remain rather understudied both in Media and Game Studies. As far as I know, the definition of the "genre" has never been carefully discussed, leaving the question of how Visual Novels are different from other video games opened to a relative commonsensical approbation of its specificities[ii] in terms of game play and content (Azuma 2003). Visual Novel's invisible presence in various local gaming industries is however pressing scholars to investigate this media in different fields: how comes underground dating simulations, horror and mystery reading games have become so pedestrian in Japan? Why is there so many of them on the Chinese Playstore? How

can we address the European production of Visual Novels? As a Film and Media Study PhD candidate, I unfortunately can't answer the questions surrounding the definition of Visual Novels specificity as a Game Studies scholar would. This research report will therefore avoid an analysis of Visual Novels as a game as it used to be done in some East Asian Studies by dissecting its visual elements, storytelling techniques and technical programming (Azuma 2003). Further research may need these features and especially an analysis of the digital tools allowing people to create Visual Novels[iii] worldwide. I will however leave this task to more competent scholars and focus on the local urban history of Visual Novels in Ikebukuro (Tokyo).

By focusing on two specific genres of Visual Novels, *Otome games* and *Boy's Love games,* I propose to understand the specificity of Visual Novels' cultural production in Japan as the emergence of an urban environment of game paraphernalia circulation. My research question is therefore to formulate the tremendous success of these games not from a gaming experience but from an environmental one. Cities as Akihabara and Ikebukuro have been known in the past decade as the "sanctuaries" of otaku culture. The "sanctuarification" of these cities have blossom through the recycling of anime and game paraphernalia transported by consumers from their original distribution sites to second-hand shops. Promotional events, official releases and other "cultural events" surrounding otaku culture have tended to be "localized" in very limited time and places polarized by the creation of limited editions of character goods. Visual Novels for "girls", mainly represented by dating simulations known as Otome games (young girls' game) and Boy's Love games (slash games representing male homosexual love stories) also tend to create such media traffic in cities.

Therefore, I mapped Otome Games and Boy's Love games paraphernalia circulation

in Ikebukuro during multiple fieldworks from 2009 to 2016 as the city was affirming its position as an "anime" sanctuary. If recent Northern American studies on otaku culture led by Thomas Lamarre (2009) and Marc Steinberg (2012) have stressed the determinant role of Japanese animation as a set of techniques of image mobility inside the industrial production of paraphernalia and fanzine, they often tend to forget about the urban environment created by the material space occupied by such image-based commodities. Media mobility can indeed be approached in different ways; I subsequently chose three mapping methods following the travels of Visual Novel paraphernalia in Ikebukuro to delimit media commodities, places and events structuring local commodity flow. The junction of these mapping methods draws the urban map of a recycling media environment: game paraphernalia circulation is characterized by visible infrastructures such as second-hand shops and less visible places of consumer to consumer exchanges and auctions. The territories occupied by anime, games, drama CD (audio stories) and other otaku media therefore sets another look at the hybridization and co-penetration of heterogeneous media entities as their circulate inside the same material space of cities.

In other words, the (re)cycling logics demonstrated by the industrial production of Visual Novels for girls (reusing images from the game to create more character goods), meets in Ikebukuro the pedestrian second-hand circulation performed by consumer in fanzine, cosplay and media commodity exchange. The urban environment occupied by Visual Novels furthermore meets other official and amateur media production as it circulates inside common urban infrastructures with their own specific rituals. More than a transmedia storytelling logic (Jenkins 2008), the urban environment of places across Japan that are labeled as "sanctuaries" reveals how both fans and editors' relationship to media commodities such as video games have become "localized" in specific urban infrastructures and festive events. Although I will

not present a precise mapping of girl targeted Visual Novel editor's workplaces, most of their offices are situated in Ikebukuro. The specific case of Ikebukuro therefore demonstrates the meditative role of cities as a milieu in between editors and amateur, a physical place where video games, paraphernalia and events celebrating their release creates a cyclic logic of local intimacy with playful interactions. If considering cities as games interfaces might be a far stretch, reminding of Derek Johnson's *Media Franchising, Creative license and Collaboration in the Culture Industry* (2013) argument about how cultural production becomes a sense making practice distributing roles and labor conditions is important to explain how media commodity circulation in Ikebukuro becomes the center of ultra-specific social interactions delimited in small places of distribution and exchange. In other words, the movements of Otome and Boy's Love games paraphernalia inside Ikebukuro have become a logic of interaction, organizing a specific cultural milieu. Johnson evokes the concept of gamification to understand how TV franchises ordinates reception as labor (200). I would nuance this idea by assuming that the "game" as a logic of entertainment and organization of urban space through cultural production that disseminates fragments of media commodities to collect is indeed present in both the material inscription of Visual Novels cultural production in cities and its storytelling practices. As such, I want to consider the "game experience" of Otome and Boy's Love as a form or urban life occurring when "playing" is a motion in between spaces.

Mapping Method: Typology of the Portative Commodities of Otome and Boy's Love Games

What is an Otome or a Boy's Love game? In terms of hardware Otome and Boy's Love games are often separated between erotic version designed for computers and "soft"

versions mostly for Sony's Playstation. On the content level, these games can be affiliated with dating simulations: in Otome games the player incarnates a female character and can date different boys depending on the choices of dialogues she made. Boy's Love games propose the same logic with the multiple endings of homosexual love stories. The key to success in these games is therefore to grasp the boy characters personality to choose wisely dialogues and hit high scores in mini-games in order to complete the different scenarios divided in good and bad ends affiliated with one specific character. Completing the game is furthermore highly linked to the relationship of players to boy characters: achieving all endings (also called "routes") gives access to CG images, voice tests and other elements linked to the characters. Although my research on Ikebukuro is not stressing at its maximum the relationship between the content of the game and the storytelling techniques of Visual Novels in general, it is nevertheless relevant to highlight how Otome and Boy's Love games internalize logics of "collection". Moreover, the "reading" aspect of these games is mostly constituted of spoken or inner dialogues performed by voice actors. The collection of visual and audio content inside the game is therefore an important feature exposed in the main menu as "collection" or "image box". Not surprisingly, Otome Game and Boy's Love paraphernalia resembles the collection of images and voice samples that can be found in the game. The following graph presents all media forms that can be related to game paraphernalia in general.

Media	Format	Distribution Area	Recycle Area	Connected Events
"Tokuten" limited reservation gifts proposed by distributors to attract clients	Any	Official Distributor Cafés	K books Lashinbang	Fares Official Release Musicals Exhibits
Drama CD Situation CD	Audio plus some images	Stella Worth Animate	K books Lashinbang	Rejet Fest Animate Girls Festival
Books	Manga Magazine Novels	Animate Stella Worth K books Toranoana	K books Mandarake Fromage	Fanzine Events Summer book fares
DVD	Anime Live Events Musicals	Animate Stella Worth	K books Lashinbang	TV release
Accessories Poaches Bracelets Clear files Rubber Straps Acrylic Straps Metallic badges	Plastic Metal	Official Distributors Hand Made shops Game Centers Cafés	K books Lashinbang Caramel Cube Mandarake	Animate Girls Festival Fares Fanzine Events Musical Live and Concerts Lotteries
Dolls Towels	Fabric	Game Centers	K books Lashinbang	Lotteries Crane Games

Fig. 2: A Topology of Media Commodities in Ikebukuro

If the distribution and recycling of Otome and Boy's Love games are located in the same places as their paraphernalia, the uses of special reservation gifts (*Tokuten*) artificially recreates a certain differentiation between identical products. The majority of game paraphernalia circulating in Ikebukuro is represented by small rubber or acrylic accessories such as straps, key holders and clear files representing the boy characters from the games. Can badges, bracelets and other decorations are also common transportable commodities. In most of the cases each character is individualized as one object; full collections of paraphernalia therefore recreate the full cast of boy characters either reusing the images of the game or proposing a new collectible design. As an example, Broccoli's Otome game *Uta no Prince-sama* (Singing Princes, 2010) focuses on multiple male singers with their own models of

paraphernalia and audio media. Official goods are moreover distributed in blind packages, lotteries and other random modes of distribution. Because the time and places of these restricted distributions are moreover limited by specific events tend in shops, theaters, cafés and public halls, the chance to complete a collection or find a specific model is low[iv]. Informal places of exchanges and second hand shop emerges as infrastructures redistributing Otome and Boy's Love paraphernalia in Ikebukuro. Monthly events provide new collections of paraphernalia that nourishes the cycles of commodity circulation in between places of official distribution and recycling.

Fig. 3: Uta no Prince-Sama merchandise and their original reservation gifts from Animate

On the other hand, amateur paraphernalia distribution is also present in Ikebukuro and represents other forms of Otome and Boy's Love merchandising: if Japanese

fanzine (Dôjin) is mostly know as manga parodies (Kinsella 1998), we tend to forget that the big conventions as the Comic Market are also populated with designers and other circles of amateurs producing game related accessories. If Ikebukuro's fanzine event do not have a large scale, its connection to the International Convention Hall of Odaiba by Anitentokkyû bus, makes of Ikebukuro one of the main places to sell and recycle amateur paraphernalia. This amateur production is nevertheless not completely different from the official paraphernalia as it consists on creating handmade models of popular character goods (mostly straps and badges) with original designs. Paraphernalia circulation in Ikebukuro usually follows the release calendars of official and amateur product and tends to disappear from second hand shops every six month. The private collections of one character's paraphernalia gathered by fans also testifies of these short yet cyclic periods of distribution: *Itabag*s, shopping handbags decorated with one character merchandizing until it is completely recovered, points at the accumulation of similar collectible items (picture 3). Fan practices however also sustain the ecosystem of Ikebukuro's recycling infrastructures with "non productive" performances as cosplay and dances.

Fig. 4: Itabag

In conclusion of this first mapping, most Otome and Boy's Love games paraphernalia is crystallized around the notions of recycling, alteration and collecting. On the one hand, official production recycles images from the game to transform them into collections of commodities representing boy characters. These commodities are then recycled by fans in second-hand shops if they don't represent their favorite characters. On the other hand, the alteration of the image of boy characters allows new media production in both fanzine and mediamix practices: altering character design is a strategy to create new media commodities. If the practices of character design alteration have different stakes for professional and amateurs[v], they however induce an interaction between different places and institutions: the transportability of Visual Novels paraphernalia unifies a network of urban infrastructures connected by

commodity traffic. The transportable aspect of this heavily segmented paraphernalia can also be approached with the oral features of the game's characters: if specific audio media commodities such as character songs and drama CD also take part in the local media circulation, the organization or live events featuring voice actors enlarges the presence of Visual Novel series in cities cultural landscapes. Therefore, we need to stress how the alteration of audio and visual elements of Otome and Boy's Love games creates an urban game environment connecting various infrastructures of media circulation. The transportability of such commodities is furthermore heavily depending on fan's mobility, walking across the city. The recent boom of Otome applications for smart phones also highlights the exacerbation of theses strategy to follow the pedestrian movements of fans.

Mapping Method: Places of Circulation

If the notion of transportability is reframed as "walking with media commodities" when observing Ikebukuro's cultural life, what are the places that constitute the urban environment of Visual Novel for girls? As mentioned above, non productive forms of performances also sustain the emergence of a solid infrastructural network of cultural production. As map 1 suggests, the inscription of cosplay event Acosta inside East Ikebukuro sustained the legalization of walking in cosplay during monthly events, resulting in the enlargement of accessible leisure spots when wearing a costume. I therefore propose a mixed mapping, presenting both the infrastructures of media circulation and the less visible cultural practices consolidating its territory. As such I want to make sense of the local dynamics in Ikebukuro as navigation techniques in between the infrastructures of paraphernalia circulation and cultural performances.
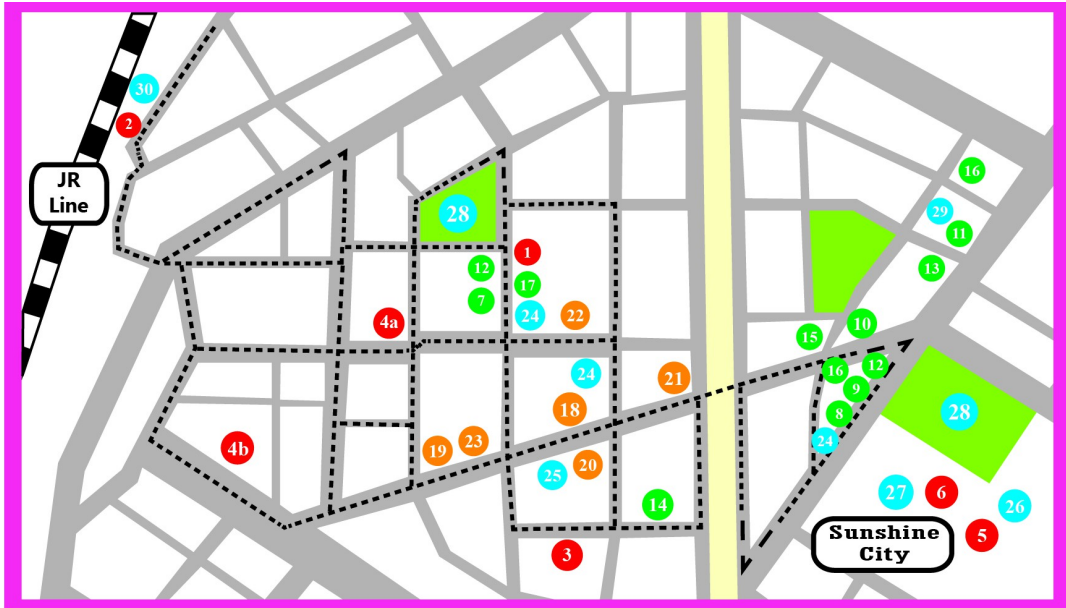
Official distributors :
1. Animate
2. P. Parco
3. Stella Worth
4a. Toranoana (fanzine)
4b. Toranoana (girls' shop)
5. Pokémon Center
6. Jump Store

Recycle shops :
7. Lashinbang Jump
8. Lashinbang Audio
9. Lashinbang Character Goods
10. Mandarake (fanzine)
11. K books (fanzine)
12. K books Characters goods
13. K books Games, CD, DVD
14. K books Musical
15. K books Anime Idols
16. Caramel Cubes (handmade items)
17. Fromage (fanzine)

Leisure spots :
18. Taito Station
19. Adores
20. Adores Girls
21. St. Tropez
22. Karaoke no Tetsujin
23. Sunshine Cinema

Coffee shops, event halls :
24. Animate Cafes
25. Anime Plaza
26. Namjatown
27. Sunshine City
28. Parks (official cosplay spots)
29. Swallow Tail
30. Nico Nico Douga

------ Cosplay walking area

Map 1: Infrastructures of media commodity circulation in Otome-Road.

The typology of media commodities circulating in Ikebukuro described how limited edition of collectibles was present only in specific locations. As most shops are individualized by this distribution of limited goods, an evident logic of movement in between distribution sites can be framed in between the JR station and the Sunshine

City. The center of East Ikebukuro is occupied by official distributors promoting their unique lines of character goods and reservation bonuses (*Tokuten*). The East section in front of the Sunshine city reassembles the recycle and fanzine shops and absorbs the inflation of character based commodities produced in the city. Most leisure spots of the area have become subject to media commodity circulation or fan performances: cafés use monthly events focused on series for "girls" by distributing limited editions of coasters. Game centers have specific floors for Otome game prices and Karaoke boxes sell special cocktails inspired by boy characters. Public spaces of transit or rest officiate as photo spots for cosplayers, meeting points for paraphernalia exchanges between strangers who met on Twitter or performance space during seasonal fairs. In other words, the progressive penetration of practices of recycling and alteration of popular media commodities inside the city has layered a path from the deeper area of recycle shops near the Sunshine City Mall to official leisure spots (progressively distributing more paraphernalia), continuing to the JR train Station.

Ikebukuro's history as an otaku city started in the early 1980s with the construction of anime paraphernalia distributor Animate and Anipolis. As second hand shops targeting male otaku started to open in the 1990's on the street in front of the Sunshine city, Ikebukuro emerged as a spot for fanzine events. The pre-development of current infrastructure started from the juxtaposition of Animate, and second-hand shops K books and Lashinbang on the same street. The coexistence of fanzine commodities and official paraphernalia recycle in K books shelves during the late 1990's testifies of the premises of the actual interdependence of official and amateur media production in the city. Second-hand shops gathered the production flowing from various fanzine events hosted side to side with anime exhibitions in the Sunshine City. However, since 2004 Ikebukuro has transformed into a city for "girl"

otaku: the street in front of the Sunshine City is now referred to as Otome-Road (the girl's road). Otome-Road's development has emerged with the multiplication of second-hand shops proposing Boy's Love manga (and fanzine) and anime accessories for "girls". The introduction of Otome and Boy's Love game to Ikebukuro converged with this expansion of recycling practices: as the number of female otaku oriented "only" fanzine events in Tokyo increased, Ikebukuro's second-hand shop absorbed the flows of (mainly Boy's Love) media. The relocation of second-hand "girl's" media inside Ikebukuro's second-hand shop progressively funded a cyclic logic of walking inside the city to collect various media fragments: the creation of further infrastructures consolidating the presence of female otaku inside leisure spots around the Sunshine City (mostly fancy patisseries) was soon followed by the distribution of limited collections of media commodities representing boy characters. The expansion of "girl's" leisure spots reproduced locally the recycling ecosystem that attracted female otaku in the first place: altering visual novel or anime elements featuring male characters have become a way to enter and sustain an urban network of cultural and social production.

As such, Otome and Boy's Love games production flourished in between 2005 and 2010 during the 'sanctuarification" of Ikebukuro as Otome-Road. As an underground market, the distribution and production of these games was converging in few shops (such as StellaWorth) producing reservation gifts (*Tokuten*). As the limited media commodity production of Otome and Boy's Love paraphernalia was concentrated mostly on the production of these few shops, their ecology inside Ikebukuro was heavily restricted at first. Boy's Love and girl oriented media however became noticeable as it gained a visible space inside urban life, attracting the eye of several manga publishers as Kadokawa and Broccoli. The early 2010 therefore demonstrated the achieved reconnaissance of "girl" otaku as a tangible market. If Otome and Boy's

Love games remained in general in the hands of small game developing companies, their mediamix (transmedia production) interested many different publishers ready to invest in the production of anime series, drama CDs and other media formats: Kadokawa in particular created several magazines to cover (and eventually find new publishable hits) the release of such game production. On the other hand, the presence of fanzine recycle shops orchestrated the meeting of the amateur production of fan made media commodity inspired by Otome and Boys' Love games in the urban same space as their official counterparts, augmenting the volume and diversity of commodities circulating in Ikebukuro.

In conclusion, recycling and altering the cultural production surrounding Visual Novels for "girls" created different levels of local recursivity and interdependence in Ikebukuro, connecting social, material and industrial movements inside its infrastructures. These layers of cyclic interactions in between production and reception, recycle and alteration, intimate and corporate created navigation routes inside Ikebukuro. The game environment emerging from Ikebukuro is therefore polarized by the movements of various cultural actors inside[vi] the city creating a network of delimited and individualized infrastructures.

Mapping Method: Festivities of Cyclic Events

How can we represent the temporal aspect of Otome and Boy's Love games paraphernalia circulation? The terms event (*ibento*), fair, and sometime *matsuri* (festival) are often used by game publishers and fan associations to describe various events surrounding the distribution and alteration of Otome and Boy's Love games into character goods. The temporality induced by such delimitations of localized interaction with media commodities often depends on specific infrastructures and

institutions presented during the previous mapping. For game centers, cafés or official distributors the temporality of events is reduced to media distribution as a part of industrial schedules of cultural production, accompanying or preceding of Visual Novels for girls and their eventual transformation into TV series. The amateur festivities organized by fan associations of fanzine circles tend to form an ambivalent in and out of Ikebukuro's space: most Otome game amateur production is distributed during events tend outside of Ikebukuro. On Tokyo's scale, their second-hand re-localization in Kbooks is nevertheless mostly done in the neighborhood. "Cultural event" of Visual Novels are moreover occupying a wide range of layers of a ritualistic everyday life in an out of "otaku sanctuaries": from the couch in front of the TV to the train, the environment dressed up by the cycles of production, diffusion and alteration sustains the emergence of a synergic occupation of cities. The meeting of the conjoint movements of editors and fans in localized urban infrastructures installs a progressive common intimacy with a same material environment of transportable yet alterable media commodities. If techniques of alteration are important to visualize the territories of niche cultures as Otome and Boy's Love games, they also allow the mapping of various temporal processes making sense of local urban infrastructures in terms of cultural production. The repeated movements of fan pedestrians coming back to static infrastructures to nourish the flows of transportable media commodities moreover give sight and grounding to consumer communities.

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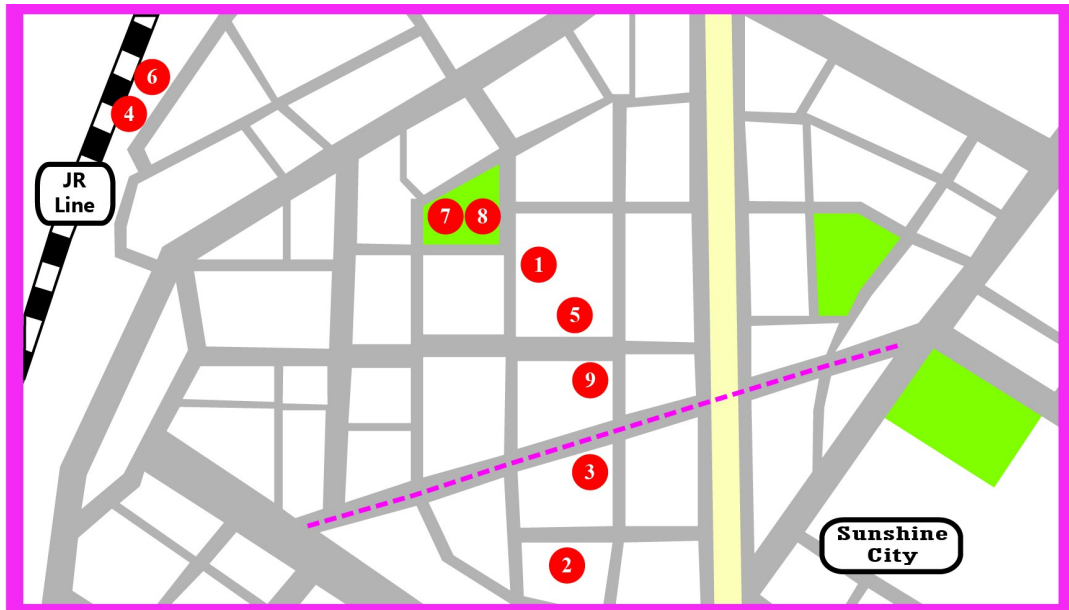
Rejet Collaboration 2015 in Ikebukuro :
1. Animate: Rejet tokuten distribution Aug. 11th - Sept. 1st
2. Stella Worth: Rejet bromides (small photos) distribution Aug.
3. Adores: Rejet badges in crane games Aug.
4. Rejet Shop (in P.Parco department store): fan letter distribution, limited collection of badges Aug. 15th-31st
5. Karaoke no Tetsujin: Original Rejet drinks with premium coasters Aug. 8th - Sept. 30th
6. Rejet Cafe in Nico Cafe: Original Rejet food with premium coasters Aug. 20th - Sept. 30th
7. Live Stage: Rejet live performance Aug. 15th-16th
8. "Traditional" Japanese Festival: Limited premium accesories booth Aug. 15th-16th
9. Bus Tour Anitentokkyu: Roundtrip bus service to the Comic Market with Rejet music and design Aug. 14th-16th
------ Rejet Decorations

Map 2: Mapping the infrastructures of Rejet Fest 2015.

Map 2 is a simplified mapping of Ikebukuro's local institutions invested in the Rejet Fest 2015. Rejet is a record company producing Situation CDs and Drama CDs for "girls" mostly know for its series Marginal 4. The coexistence of visual and audio media for "girls" inside official distributors and second-hand shops' shelves is corroborated by the local alliance of Toshima's prefecture shops association who helped the synchronization of local shops, cafés, bus companies and broadcasting channels. The visibility given by the repeated traffic of people and media commodities has created a cyclic exception state inside Ikebukuro: festivities

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represent punctuate yet repeated cyclic flows of new energy. This socio-economical organization of Ikebukuro's localized cultural production represents an evident network of stable infrastructures rapidly changing of event (and therefore of collectibles), that the local authorities of the Toshima prefecture tend to legalize and support. Moreover the local alterations of otaku media represented by map 2 highlight the actual navigation logics in Ikebukuro: on one hand Otome and Boy's Love games represent only one niche market present in the neighborhood celebrated occasionally by the dissemination of collectibles provided in specific places. On the other hand the local dynamics of "sanctuarisation" of otaku cultural practices are unified and normalized through the monopolization of local infrastructures by specific festive times of distribution. The presence of the Japanese Youtube, Niconico dôga next to the JR station also embodies this urban convergence material and immaterial flows of content during daily live performances. If Visual Novel is a reduced production of media commodities, it is the socio-economical synergies of the local circulation and alteration of its paraphernalia that inscribes its existence into a larger urban environment. The "sanctuarisation" of a large group or practices surrounding media production releases through events nonetheless allowed fans of niche games to become an active part of cities and gain a certain local agency but also sustained the hybridization of modes of popular cultural production by reassembling them in a same physical space.

In conclusion, the pedestrian mobility of otaku paraphernalia sustains the normalization of certain consumption and cultural tendencies through the occupation of local infrastructures. The transportable aspect of media commodities circulating in Ikebukuro therefore allows the emergence of a certain socio-economical recursivity directly connected to the cyclic circulation of paraphernalia and media commodities. As Ikebukuro attracts more flows of pedestrians, the local

aspect of this circulation highlights the delimitation of transparent yet visible communities, moving in between the planification of events and the chaotic movement of random modes of distribution. This ephemeral yet repeated everyday life of otaku fan culture is therefore illustrated by the abundance of Otome and Boy's Love games events in the city which influences can be mapped through the visualization of paraphernalia circulation. The ambivalence and ubiquity of such fan identities are moreover suggested by the navigation logics connecting various points in urban space: the niche cultures of Visual Novels and other subcultures in Japan can be understood as localization processes of cultural production inside delimited urban infrastructures. The "sanctuarisation" of such cities asks for the legal regulation of a perpetual state of exception: the political semi-visibility of fan agency as walker in moving between places is justified by the ephemeral and therefore limited occupation of public space. The case of Otome and Boy's Love games eventually translates this history of progressive occupation of specifically marketed media commodities into a normalized everyday media environment.

Conclusion

This report's results are eventually not far from most à la Henry Jenkins Fan Studies or Game Studies on gamification published during the past two decades. The observation of Ikebukuro's cultural life does not escape from the recurrent themes of the evident co-penetration of producing and receiving populations, the immanent grow of immaterial labor and the emergence of hybrid forms of stories that long last mostly because of a consumption model based on paraphernalia more than stories themselves. However it is rather the interconnected socio-economical investment of local urban infrastructures through the alteration and recycling of media commodities that is singular here. If gaming technologies represent an evident

experience for most global populations, how can we frame different relations between gaming and its surrounding material, social and economic environment? Ikebukuro's case pictures an advanced cultural system relying on the connections created by the circulation of paraphernalia accompanying "pure" gaming experiences. The interconnectivity of urban infrastructures orchestrated by festive cultural events points at an economic model where the production of niche cultures as Otome and Boy's Love games draws relations between local and global scales through the individualization of a network of local infrastructures. Tokyo is indeed only one urban agglomeration touched by this phenomenon of technological individuation through anime and game alteration. As the extended map of urban infrastructures of public and private space occupied by the materiality of paraphernalia grows, the individual localities become an interdependent network of differentiation. This evolution recalls of the recent Nintendo adventure of Amiibo and the implantation of official Nintendo shops in Japan and New York, using toys and branding local spaces to produce specific content and penetrate new layers of the material everyday life. This symptom might be an emerging chapter in the history of industrial Japanese entertainment but mostly points at different ways to think about the inscription of specific gaming technologies inside our everyday life.

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[i] NIS America localized Spike Chunsoft's *Danganrompa* series in 2014 and 07th expansion's *HIgurashi no naku koro ni* and *Umineko no naku koro ni* are undergoing new localization on Steam.

[ii] According to Miyamoto, from a historical point of view, the term *"Visual Novel"* refers to a specific brand of pornographic games edited by Key, a small developing company in the 1990s. For a long time dating simulations were therefore calls Visual Novels, referring to the content (visual pornography) (2013, 29-30). Nintendo's Famikon also had reading games called Sound Novels (as Chunsoft's *Kamaitachi no Yoru* 1994). For a few years, the term Visual Novel therefore referred to a specific genre of pornographic games when Sound Novels had the connotation of mystery and murder stories. As the reading game format evolved from a subcultural genre connoted with pornographic references to a more "mainstream" game format, the term "Adventure game" started to appear in the mid 2000's. I eventually chose to use Visual Novel as a generic term because English speaking audiences refer to the format of reading games as such. I however wonder how relevant the term is in my research as it is more the contents and the segmentation of the local audiences that makes sense in Japan where the term Visual Novel is underused.

[iii] In Japan the main program used in dôjin (fan-made) games is the N Scripter. However, there is still no study on how this program changed the industrial and amateur production of Visual Novels.

[iv] There are multiple strategies from hunting a specific item in second-hand shops to buy boxes containing virtually the full collection. The random modes of distribution therefore accentuate the ambivalent rarity of certain models in official distribution sites while promoting its recycling and second-hand movement across the city.

[v] According to Marc Steinberg, when it comes to character design, the infringement of copyrights is judged depending on the reproduction of official designs (2012, 38): amateur drawings therefore escape from this jurisdiction. As it is suggested in the third mapping method of this report, the use of "official" design is however a way to be connected to a specific network of paraphernalia distribution. Ikebukuro's case reassembles both of these amateur and official media commodity production demonstrating their interdependence.

[vi] Comparing Ikebukuro to other otaku cities is however crucial to complexify the localization processes of sanctuaries as individualized territories: the example of Akihabara as the distribution site of Visual Novels "for male otaku" tells a similar story of segmentation of urban territories into small sanctuaries targeting specific consumers and inducing a repeated relationship coupling consumption with ultra specific places. Ikebukuro alone does not have a specific cultural meaning unless other otaku cities also exist: the colonization of Ikebukuro as a "girls' city" mostly occurred because of the Boy's' Love fanzine production flowing from the outside of the city, slowly stabilizing its material presence in second hand shops. The interdependence of otaku territories does not work only on the local level of Ikebukuro's shops; it is also playing at different regional, national and global levels.