Discipline and Post: Foucault and "Weeaboo Horror Stories" on the Internet
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Introduction

They are "the worst people you can encounter ever," according to the Tumblr blog Weeaboo Stories, which specializes in people relating their traumatizing encounters with weeaboos, while others confess the sins of their weeboo past and beg for forgiveness and absolution. Threads on the popular anonymous discussion site 4chan have been titled "Worst IRL [In Real Life] Weeaboos," "Weeaboo Horror Stories," and "Psychotic Weeaboo Stories." What exactly is a weeaboo, and why do they evoke such high levels of repulsion and disgust in certain segments of Western society? The answer reveals a great deal about argumentation, social rules, and culture.

Put simply, a weeaboo is a Westerner (especially a Caucasian) who is an overly-enthusiastic fan of Japanese culture. The web page Know Your Meme cites some of the most common markers of a weeaboo as being "excessive use of Japanese words in replacement of English" (the most common offenders being "kawaiii" and adding "desu" to the ends of English sentences), "hanging out in the international aisle of the supermarket" (Pocky especially, as a Japanese snack food not available in Western supermarkets, is quite popular), and "crowding the manga section of your local book store" ("manga" refers in English only to comic books originally in Japanese). In short, a weeaboo is a specific type of overzealous fan, one who values Japanese media over Western media in ways that are considered excessive by other fans. That final clause is essential to understanding the argumentative strategies being used in the labeling of people as "weeaboos."

The word "weeaboo" itself has a strange etymological history. The original term used to refer to such a fan was "Wapanese," which is a portmanteau of "Japanese" with (accounts differ) either "white" or "wannabe." The derogatory term was offensive enough that the moderators of 4chan decided to use a word filter to replace it with a nonsense word that sounded similar. The word they chose was "weeaboo" ("Weeaboo"). Inevitably, of course, weeaboo has come to be a heavily negative term as well, with highly acrimonious discussions accusing and defending people of being weeaboos.
Why should a love of Pocky and a fondness for *Naruto* elicit such repulsion from groups of people online? To understand that, this paper turns to Michel Foucault’s discussion of *discipline*, examining the societal purposes of disciplining and punishing groups of people in the modern technological world. After an explanation of the concept of disciplining, specific weeaboo stories are examined to find what drives the rejection of weeaboo behavior. It might be tempting to assume that the stigmatization of weeaboos stems from a dislike of Japanese culture, but in fact the pressure against weeaboo behavior comes largely from within the community of Western fans of Japanese culture. This policing and disciplining is fuelled by a fear of stigma that arises from the structure of Internet communication as the postmodern Panopticon.

**Michel Foucault: Discipline and the Panopticon**

Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) is nominally about the history of the prison system in Europe. However, the concepts in the book range much further and wider, to encompass the shifts in the Western mindset that were reflected by changes in the prison system. Foucault details the change from a system in which transgressors were condemned to the dungeon and the *oubliette*, cast into darkness and forgotten (an *oubliette* was a pit with a hatch in the ceiling, and came from the French word for "to forget"), to a system in which transgressors were segmented, divided and carefully observed, ideally to internalize their own punishment and learn to "discipline" themselves.

Foucault argues that the shift in the prison system took place at roughly the same time as a shift in the medical system, moving from leprosy as the dominant metaphor for dealing with "tainted" people to the plague. Whereas leprosy was handled by isolating the unclean persons, cutting them off from society and casting them away to be forgotten, the plague was managed by instituting divisions, hierarchies of cleanliness, rules and routines to be followed and internalized: "If it is true that the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement, then the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects. Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power" (198). Plague required "hierarchy, surveillance, observation," the control of human behavior to prevent the spread of contagion from one group to the next (198).

Foucault goes on to imply that plague (and thus all forms of social "contagion"
such as insanity, criminality, and perversion) is ultimately dealt with by discipline, or creating a system in which the members of the system internalize the divisions and structures and police both their own behavior and the behavior of others.

The ultimate expression of discipline in the modern world is the Panopticon—originally a literal, physical prison building designed by Jeremy Bentham in which a centralized jailer was able to observe all the cells of the prisoners simultaneously. Foucault uses the Panopticon as the organizing metaphor of modern society: the increasing sense that one is being monitored, and that one must modify one's behavior voluntarily and pre-emptively. Power in the modern world relies on disciplining citizens, not in punishing them; in arranging society so that the members of society behave themselves properly of their own free will, aware that they are being observed. Foucault points out that the Panopticon society functions perfectly well when the people in power are not actually watching:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action: that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (201)

Thus the presence of a principal or teacher is not necessary in a school system if there are hall monitors and other students who will observe their fellow-students, or in today's modern world cameras in the halls—and the cameras need not even be checked to be effective. Their mere presence is a constant reminder that behavior is being watched and that discipline is necessary. The Panopticon society is one in which all members are aware that they are under observation, that they are being classified, categorized, and ranked in a hierarchy of control.

*Discipline and Punish* was written in 1977, and the architecture of the Panopticon was created in the eighteenth century. However, the possible apotheosis of the Panopticon has arisen lately in the form of the Internet, the vast public space where all are observed and observers. That users of the Internet have relative freedom to be observers as well as observed does complicate the simple unidirectional Panopticon concept (cf. Wall 2006; Winokur 2008), but for the purposes of discipline it is sufficient to know that one's behavior could be observed at any time in order for segmentation and
hierarchy to arise in a community. And indeed, when looking at the concept of "weeaboo," it can be seen how powerful the need to discipline oneself and others and the urge to rank and categorize can be even in the chaotic and ephemeral world of the Internet.

**Fandom and Hierarchy**

The word "fan," used to refer to a person who is very enthusiastic about something, comes originally from the word "fanatic," and has always retained some of that word's negative connotation of excess and insanity. "Fandom," a word created from "fan" and the suffix "-dom" meaning "world" (like "kingdom") has been in existence since 1903 as a way of grouping and labeling people who go further than the average person in their enjoyment of a certain activity or media product. In recent decades, "fandom" has come to refer particularly to media fandom: enthusiastic consumers of movies, television, music or books whose interest often extends to dressing as their favorite characters, writing stories about their favorites, or other forms of "excessive" interest.

Membership in "fandom" has always carried some level of social stigma and pollution, like Foucault's lepers, plague victims, and criminals in miniature. Before the Internet made it easy for fans to connect from the privacy of their own homes, fannish behavior was generally limited to enclaves of activity (like conventions), or to isolated behavior. The Internet, however, has made it increasingly simple to find like-minded people who share fannish interests of any sort. As a result, behavior that was previously mostly isolated or contained has begun to spill out: first into the non-fannish areas of the Internet, and then into physical locations like schools. The stigma associated with fannish behaviors remains, however, and as a result the pressure to impose and maintain some level of discipline has become increasingly intense. It is not surprising, then, that categorizing and condemning groups is nearly as much a part of fannish life as actually being a fan of something. Organizing fan groups into hierarchies is so endemic that a comedy website called the Brunching Shuttlecocks created a detailed flowchart explaining how various different groups rank and judge each other. The original has disappeared, but copies remain flung across the Internet: the one referred to in this essay was drawn from the Tumblr blog *On the Fly*.

The top of the hierarchy is "published science fiction/fantasy authors and artists." From then on, each group has a group below it that it considers inferior, creating a complicated and structured web of status and power relations that make clear who is a "better" fan than whom. For example, "Science Fiction Fans" consider themselves less
geeky than "Star Trek Fans," who consider themselves less geeky than "Star Trek fans who study Klingon" (a language in the show). The chart was created in 2002, before "weeaboo" came into common use. However, the behaviors usually marked as "weeaboo" would tend to put such behavior in the "anime fans" branch, probably near the bottom with the "Pokemon fans over the age of six" and well below "anime fans who insist on subtitles." Analyzing the implied reasons behind the complicated rankings would make for a fascinating essay on its own: for now suffice to say that the hierarchy makes explicit and concrete Foucault's image of a plague-ridden world in which each group is always warily watching the others around it for signs of contamination and uncleanliness.

The Weeaboo and Undisciplined Behavior

The examples used in this paper of behavior labeled and stigmatized as "weeaboo" come from two different sources. The first are the August 2011 posts on the Tumblr blog titled "Weeaboo Stories," where people could submit stories and have them posted. The second is two different open threads on the popular message board 4chan, titled "Worst IRL Weeaboos" and "Psychotic Weeaboo Stories," posted in 2009 and 2011 respectively. These threads proved extremely popular, flourishing over the course of about five days each on a forum so fast-moving that thread life is often measured in minutes (Agger) and garnering thousands of comments. Both threads were later voted by the users of 4chan as worthy to be archived and saved, an unusual measure as most conversations on 4chan are not archived and remain ephemeral. From examining these stories the image of the ur-weeaboo begins to emerge, as does the weeaboo's purpose in the internet fandom community as a marker of the boundaries of proper, disciplined behavior. The weeaboo is described in a variety of ways in these threads, but the common theme is that they do not respect boundaries. This can take a myriad of different forms, ranging from the physical to the social.

At the physical level, the weeaboo is almost invariably described as violating physical boundaries. Most simply, weeaboos are often described as fat, dirty, and smelly (all of which breach social boundaries in some way). A typical description is "Heinously fat, always wearing dirty looking t-shirts and jeans, crispy bleached hair that had faded out a sickening color of yellow, and greasy roots." (Weeaboo Stories). Generally poor

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1 This account has since been deleted by Tumblr, but has been replaced by other Tumblr accounts with the same theme.
hygiene and body odor are usually attributed to the weeaboo: one poster on *Weeaboo Stories* remembers meeting a weeaboo who left such an impression: "After he had turned back around, my friend gave me a disgusted look and then whispered to me 'He smells soooooo bad'."

The most disgusted responses, however, are reserved for the stereotypically overweight weeaboo. The most common term for an overweight weeaboo is "hambeast," a word used with some gleeful abandon (it appears 24 times in the "Psychotic Weeaboos" thread), and in general it is assumed that the people described are overweight. Fatness is a common source of disgust and repulsion in Western society because it symbolizes both a lack of control and a violation of simple physical boundaries. As Kathleen LeBesco puts it in *Revolting Bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*, "The fat individual extends beyond 'normal' physical space while still existing within his or her own body" (26). Thus, the "fat" weeaboo that haunts the horror stories of such pages breaks all cherished boundaries with their very presence, from their scent to their body.

In fact, the qualities given to the spectre of the weeaboo match up perfectly with Julia Kristeva's image of "the abject," the object of horror and uncleanliness that "beckons to us and ends up engulfing us...It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Interestingly, this is stated explicitly near the end of the "Psychotic Weeaboos" thread, when an anonymous poster noted that it didn't seem possible that *evezyweeaboo* was "a hambeast." The answer another poster gave reveals a great deal about the use of fat and dirt as a symbol in the fandom community: "Hambeasts aren't just about looks, it's about personality...Seeing that these stories are more about ugly people through and through, it's just natural for the people to call them hambeasts since they know it fits the criteria while re·telling the experience. Being overweight/obese is secondary. It just adds to the horror of the exterior matching the interior." The physical fatness of the weeaboo is merely an external signifier of the disgusting sloppiness of the internal soul, the way in which they swell and overpower one psychologically.

Moving to socially transgressive behavior, weeaboos are uniformly loud, their voices shattering polite convention and piercing the listeners. Descriptions of the way

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2 However, note that after the original *Weeaboo Stories* was deleted by Tumblr, one of the replacement blogs specifically stated that posters were discouraged from using "hambeast" in their stories and that it was considered a slur that had no bearing on weeaboo behavior. ("Update")
in which weeaboos impinge on the ear abound: "The screams were honestly so loud, so ear piercing, that I had to take a step back and quickly put one hand to my ear," says one poster at *Weeaboo Stories*. Phrases written in all-capital letters to express volume are often used, as one storyteller remembers a weeaboo yelling "OH MY GOD YUKI-CHAN YOU ARE SOOO KAWAI DESU!!" and starts grabbing my chest. I reacted in the normal way anyone would, by forcing her hands off of me. My surprise when everyone stared at her, when she asked me 'WHATS THE PROBLEM, YUKI-CHYAN?" *(ibid.)* Another person relates a weeaboo’s reaction to a Japanese exchange student: "As soon as she came into class, the weeaboo screamed 'KAWAIII!!'") A great deal of screaming, squealing, and shrieking takes place in these stories, an endless aural assault.

In the most dramatic stories, the assault becomes an actual physical one, when the weeaboo is carried away by enthusiasm, shows no respect for physical boundaries, and violates the teller’s personal space in distressing ways. These "glomping attacks" ("to glomp" is an internet term meaning "to hug fiercely and enthusiastically") are at the bare minimum upsetting and are sometimes related as causing severe physical harm. A Japanese-American on *Weeaboo Stories* describes a weeaboo so overcome by meeting someone Japanese that "she throws her arms around me so tightly that I nearly start to choke... By the time I finally communicate to her that she needs to GET OFF ME, she unwraps her arms from around me, holding my hand." Another describes a woman who "began randomly glomping me at school. While she’s no hambeast she has a kind of sturdy build, and SHIT SHE IS STRONG. She almost knocked me over most of the time" *(ibid.)* From these minimum embarrassments stories build to more intimate violations of personal space: "C had absolutely no concept of personal space and would come up to me while in the middle of a conversation with other cosplayers and begin grinding against me with her creepy ‘oh hon hon’ laugh and kept trying to slide her hands up my waist to my chest," remembers one poster. Another young woman remembers being accosted at a convention:

I hear them whisper something to each other about the ‘adorabaru kawaii sekushi loli’ next to them. I get nervous and slowly inch down the aisle in the opposite direction of them. They come closer and then get up in my face and one of them says "Konichiwa loli-chan... You’re so kawaii and sekushi with such pretty hair ‘strokes my head’" by this point, I’m shivering and I’m pretty sure I looked terrified. I try to be polite and quickly get away when he and his friends then try to invite me to go with them somewhere. I politely decline saying I have to go somewhere else. One of them tries picking me up, and by then I’m beginning to
yell at them and get seriously afraid.

At the outer extreme are people who claim to have been seriously hurt by over-eager weeaboos, like the poster who had ribs broken by an assaulting hug: "I was crying because I was on the ground, dazed as fuck, in pain, and under someone that made up like four of me, and she decides it's TOTALLY okay to lick my tears off my face when it's her fault I'm crying in the first place, causing me to scream hysterically [sic] and hyperventilate because my ribs hurt when I screamed and cried." Another person ended up in the hospital after a similar "friendly" attack: "Suddenly, I felt all of the air in my lungs disappear, a lot of weight on my body, and heard my girlfriend screaming 'Get off!' As the world around me turned black, I felt sharp pain explode through my head and entire body."

In these stories, the boundary violation of the weeaboo becomes literal and their enthusiasm embarrasses and harms other people. Whether these stories are true or not (and there is reason to doubt their veracity, if not to dismiss them outright) they serve an important narrative purpose in the community, which is to warn against over-enthusiastic behavior or expression. Weeaboo horror stories establish what behavior is acceptable and what actions put fannish behavior "beyond the pale," violating polite social standards and thus putting the entire fannish community at risk from the larger world. This kind of cautionary storytelling is particularly important because the horrific weeaboo serves not just as an object of mockery, but as a warning and guide to others in danger of falling into the same behavior.

"Forgive me, Goddess, For I Have Sinned": Weeaboo Confessional

From the disgust for the weeaboo that permeates the pages of Weeaboo Stories and 4chan, one would be forgiven for assuming that the storytellers mock the weeaboo because they have no interests in common with them. However, exactly the opposite is true. Weeaboo horror stories are most often told by people who share many of the same traits as the weeaboo—people who, in fact, are probably labeled as "weeaboos" by other people. The purpose of the horror stories is not so much to mock the hated outsider, but to draw boundaries and distinguish one's own (respectful Japanophile) behavior from the grotesque and laughable behavior of the weeaboo.

Within the horror stories that people recount, there is very often a careful rhetorical attempt by the teller to position themselves as a "real fan," a person who really gets Japanese culture and isn't a fan for the wrong reasons and in the wrong ways. For example, a storyteller on Weeaboo Stories who meets a weeaboo while shopping at an
Asian food store is careful to note that he personally hates Pocky (a box of Pocky is a badge of the weeaboo). The weeaboo was there shopping for Pocky, and he confused her by picking up items she was not expecting, items that are "true" Japanese food: "I've grabbed items that she obviously wasn't expecting from me. Yam threads, red miso, bonito flakes, toasted seaweed, nappa cabbage, mirin and kombu." Another person goes to a meeting of the anime club in full cosplay regalia, but notes carefully that unlike weeaboos, she does not use the Japanese slang that marks them: "I walk into the club room discreetly, since most of the people in the club annoy me and I didn't want to be noticed and maybe have to have a conversation with one of them (they're all huge weeaboos, who use Japanese slang in everyday vocab. They do it seriously though, whenever I do it usually to make fun of weeaboos, just to get that across so I don't look like a huge hypocrite)." Or rather, she does use Japanese slang, but only ironically, to make fun of weeaboos. A person who reads manga is upset that a weeaboo assumes this means they're similar: "He steals my backpack in the classroom, and goes through it without my permission, and usually steals the manga i have, and shouts out that im a Weeaboo because i keep manga in my backpack. Well, sure, i like to read it, that dosent make me one, but im also an artist and its good to look at for anatomy help. he dosent understand that..." One can see the careful drawing of lines and boundaries, the extremely precise haggling over the definition of proper behavior and attitude: my actions are different, or if my actions are similar, then my mindset is different. I am not in this category, they are not connected to me, they are below me in the hierarchy and I am untainted in comparison. "My entire school was obsessed with Pokemon at that time," remembers a poster in Weeaboo Stories after recounting a fan's excessive behavior. "We went around acting like we were Pokemon ourselves and stuff, cause we loved it so much. But noone liked that kid. He was too extreme." The weeaboo is the measure by which one's own behavior is marked as acceptable and sane: he was too extreme, therefore I was not.

Attempts to discipline other fans abound: In the "Worst IRL Weeaboos" thread, the former president of an anime club is careful to note that one of their major tasks was "to talk the rest of the club out of stalking the Japanese exchange students." Another in Weeaboo Stories recounts with horror the ultimate indiscretion on the part of a weeaboo—not being ashamed of being a weeaboo. "At one point we were all walking out of school and she put her arms around our necks or something friends do and said 'Lets go my WEEABOO buddies' I and S greatly offended had to calmly explain that Weeboo was NOT a positive term to call somebody and it was actually looked down 'apon."
maintenance of proper boundaries involves a great deal of energy and education.

Yet the most striking weeaboo stories reveal that one of the key functions of such tale-telling is self-discipline. Many posters talk about their own shameful past as a weeaboo, before they learned proper restraint and control. Interestingly, these types of stories have an explicitly confessional—and indeed religious—tone. The woman who ran Weeaboo Stories came to be called "the Goddess," and many of the people who posted stories framed them as confession and penance, using traditionally religious language. "Forgive me Goddess, for I have sinned" was the opening of most of these stories. For example, one story begins "Forgive me, goddess, for I have sinned so greatly I feel as though I will have no redemption for my horrid sin." After recounting their embarrassing emails roleplaying anime characters, the poster concludes "I showed one of my close friends the emails, and she told me I should send in my story to the weaboo goddess to receive redemption" before begging "PLEASE HAVE MERCY ON MY SOUL." The confessional posts have a proud air of penance, of showing proper and seemly shame. One poster says plaintively yet proudly, comparing themselves to weeaboo fans, "I'm an ordinary college student, I don't consider myself a weaboo at all, I spent most of my childhood hiding my anime fandom, feeling ashamed of it...." People consume these stories filled with a combination of fascination and repulsion, an almost unholy dread: "Goddess, I have powered through 1000+ pages of weeaboostories in a week as penance, my jaw to the floor at these weeaboos, for all our weeaboo sins," claims one poster. "Thanks to these stories i realise just how close i came to becoming a weeaboo... may god have mercy on me" says someone on the "Worst IRL Weeaboos" thread. Salvation for tainted behavior can be achieved through storytelling, penance, and self-discipline.

In fact, the production and consumption of such stories can be a communal event, rather like telling horror stories around a campfire. Nowhere is this function clearer than in the 4chan threads on the topic. Like the stories of people who pick up a handsome stranger and wake up in a bathtub of ice with their kidney missing or couples having sex in the woods attacked by a hook-handed man, some of the more lurid stories shared on 4chan moved into the realm of the cautionary tale. Cautionary tales are stories and urban legends that capture and play on a common social anxiety in a way that usually combines "humor, horror, embarrassment, morality or appeal to empathy" (Harris). On 4chan, this took the form of a few different lurid stories of men being sexually assaulted by over-enthusiastic "hambeast weeaboos." The stories were posted anonymously in short installments as the thread unfolded, each installment finishing on something of a cliffhanger and filled with increasingly stomach-turning descriptions of
violation, bodily fluids and humiliation for the storyteller. As the stories unfolded in more-or-less real time on the board, other posters responded with exclamations of horror as well as exhortations for the story to continue: "What a creepy fucking person. MORE" demanded one comment. "omfg this girl is nuts. Why didn't you change the locks?! Or install a security bar... or actually install a camera!? MORE PLEASE" said another. There was a sense of communal storytelling, as many posters commented about how they were hitting the F5 button (which refreshes the web page and shows new comments): "F5ing at the speed of light here," for example, or often just a string of "F5F5F5F5 oh my god." This web equivalent of "What happened next? Tell us!" added to the feeling a story being spieled out for a spellbound group.

In fact, as the discussion on 4chan developed, this aspect of the stories eventually became explicit. People started to announce that surely these stories were not true, pointing out internal inconsistencies and unlikelihoods. Rather than asserting the truth of the stories, people mostly responded that they knew the stories weren't real but they enjoyed the process of listening to them. Eventually, one of the storytellers posted that they'd been "exaggerating," but wanted to come clean: "Have been feeling a little guilty about it... but I just love seeing people freak out over the stories and want to hear more even though people do comment saying there's no way they can be real." The same poster added a little defensively, "Maybe just me but I've always viewed weeaboo horror stories posted here more like campfire stories." Indeed, this is almost precisely what they are: stories about the danger of the transgressive, aggressive weeaboo, and stories about the danger of getting too close to those boundaries yourself. Most of the stories of assault or humiliation begin with the storyteller taking part in some aspect of weeaboo behavior themselves: shopping for imported food, reading manga, doing cosplay. This behavior leads to a weeaboo being attracted to them, and inevitably to embarrassment or worse for the storyteller. The monstrous weeaboo is presented as a sort of karmic punishment for behaviors that are frowned upon by "polite" fans. Even worse, the looming form of the grotesque weeaboo haunts these stories with a grim warning: this is what you yourself could become if you don't control your enthusiasm and discipline yourself.

Not surprisingly, therefore, any discussion of weeaboo behavior shows a tendency to break down into categorizing and labeling other participants as weeaboos, or fiercely defending yourself from charges of weeabooism. For example, the "Worst IRL Weeaboos" thread on 4chan slowly devolved into discussions about whether sake is correctly served hot or cold, and whether subs or dubs were better when watching anime,
and which preference made one a weeaboo. Inevitably, this led to comments like the following: "Weeaboo stories? This one time there was this really awesome thread... Well everyone was posting some really awesome stories and having lulz. There were a lot of requests for it to be archived. But then all these weeaboos showed up and wouldn't shut the fuck up about if subbed anime was better than dubbed anime. It totally ruined the whole thread." Another commenter put it more bluntly: "You're only sixteen, you talk like an idiot, and complain about 'weeaboos'. You're still one of them." You're still one of them is the stark accusation that tellers of weeaboo horror stories dread to hear.

Conclusion: The Fannish Panopticon

Threads like the "Worst IRL Weeaboos" thread on 4chan or blogs dedicated to weeaboo horror stories like Weeaboo Stories serve as a constant reminder to fans on the Internet that their behavior is being monitored, observed, and judged. They operate as a sort of bulletin for the Panopticon, a spur to better behavior and more self-discipline among fans. If you don't behave properly, runs the implicit threat, your actions will be posted on the Internet to be mocked and taunted by other fans. That most submissions are by anonymous storytellers greatly exacerbates the sense of being watched. As Foucault says, "The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed" (202). It is difficult to imagine anything more numerous, more anonymous, and more temporary than 4chan or the secret submissions to Tumblr. That the "inmate" in this case can take a turn at being the "warden" and posting lurid stories doesn't alleviate the fear of being observed and judged, or lessen the need for self-discipline. In fact, knowing that your fellow fans at conventions or anime club meetings may well be posting about you later can be more worrisome than the fear of some top-down authority. Foucault's vision of modern life as an exercise in nervous self-discipline, "a state of conscious and permanent visibility," is exemplified well by the effects of anonymous message boards on the exercise of fannish behavior. Lepers, plague victims, and prisoners all sound remote and even medieval, but Foucault's theories of discipline apply just as well to people who like to eat Pocky and talk about manga.

References


