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Series: Nico Nico Douga Texts[1], Nr. 2

Basics 2: Our research – started with a party

12 hours after I, Goetz, have arrived from London, I find myself in a
Karaoke bar in the entertainment district Shinjuku in the middle of 70
crazy "Nico chuus" (="Nico junkies", devoted Nico Nico Douga fans).
These fans are here to spend a whole night of Karaoke. But this is not
any Karaoke: They spend the night to sing along self-made music
videos that have emerged on Nico Nico Douga. So imagine this: A
group of around 50 boys and 25 girls, some of them cross-dressing
Cosplayers, but most of them not, sing along the Nico Nico Douga
tunes, and dance with their favorite avatars. They were mostly dancing
synchronously and directly towards the screen, indeed with the screen.
Everyone was singing and clapping until the next morning. It was 11 o
clock on the next morning, when I finally stumbled home.

A lot of music was based on anime, sometimes combined with new
words, and often produced with Vocaloid Software. Many videos
showed dancing vocaloids, game characters or anime icons. But there
were also all sorts of other visuals: from Ascii art to reedited McDonald
ads, from footage of Adolf Hitler to a funny Tennis musical, made after
a famous tennis manga and anime. All this is sometimes produced and
most of the times reedited and remixed by the fans, and then
uploaded on Nico Nico Douga. I meet some great people: Computer
engineers, nuclear physicists, nurses, print designers, fashion school
students, waitresses. The majority are in their early 20ties, and there
were quite a few university students around. Most of them never met
each other, and they know each other only by their Mixi names (Mixi is

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[1] In this series of short and preliminary (!!) texts we publish first results of the
Metadata Project's ethnographic research on Nico Nico Douga. You can find more
under "output" on http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/media-research-
centre/project2.php and on our research blog: http://d.hatena.ne.jp/metagold/.

the Japanese facebook). During the course of this long night and in the early morning hours I started to learn some of the complicated quotes and jokes: from the notorious "Ran ran Ruu" to "Nice boat", from "Juyou nanode 2kai Iimashitayo" (="It´s important, so I say it twice") to "Koumei no wana" (="trap of Koumei"), from "sweet" to "Ie, Kefir desu" (="No, it is Kefir").

One story might serve as an example: Some months ago, Niwango (the company behind Nico Nico Douga) deleted the much anticipated last episode of the violent anime series "School Days", due to copyright infringement. Instead they put up an image of a cruise ship. Someone – probably a gaijin – wrote on the video in English "nice boat". This was taken up by the community, and soon ´nice boat´ was written on videos all over the place. Such stories create the highly complex web of internal references of Nico Nico Douga. And they also generate a whole lot of fun.

In the following six weeks in May and June 2008 we conducted ethnographic–ish research for 6 weeks in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka and talked about Nico Nico Douga with as much people as possible: How is it used? What does it mean? What is popular and why? We were of course particularly interested in Nico Nico Douga's function that enables users to write comments directly on the video. But soon we learned about many other interesting functions: Its unique tag system and its interesting use form of ranking, for example.

Therefore, we talked to its users: People who watch, comment, tag and upload videos. We also talked with film critics, bloggers, programmers, academics and anyone else, who helped us to understand Nico Nico Douga better. In the end we had organised 7 "research events" (I hesitate to call them focus groups, because they usually lasted more then 7 hours, and were something between a party, a expert meeting, a focus group). We also conducted more then 20 "conversations"

(again, I hesitate to call them interviews, as they were open, lasted often for many hours and often were more about discussing ideas then about a classical interviews).

We found many of the Nico Chuu through two online communities: On the one hand on the sub-community of Nico Chuu on Mixi, Japan's most popular social networking site, On the other hand through the much smaller community of Nico Nico Bu on Hatena, a community of bloggers, who write about Nico Nico Douga. We also put up a blog on Hatena ourselves, to report back our results directly. Many *Nico Nico Douga Texts* (Of which this text is number 2) started off on this blog.

For us, Nico Nico Douga was a new thing. There is nothing comparable in the United Kingdom. We were eager to learn more about it, but we had to learn it from scratch. The fact that I, Götz Bachmann, do not speak Japanese, did not make this easier. I could *only* understand Nico Nico Douga through explanation. This, of course, was a great limitation, but sometimes also a chance, and I will mention this from time to time in the following texts. Madoka Takashiro, the second researcher, is Japanese, but had been living in Europe since several years and had to learn about Nico Nico Douga from scratch as well. Without the help of Graham Carpenter, our fantastic translator, and the patient explanations of the Nico Chuu themselves, especially in the beginning, we would have never managed.

Madoka Takashiro writes a media theoretical PhD about anime, which is partly about Nico Nico Douga. Her contribution in this research has been absolutely crucial.