

The Dynamism of Anime Images: the Case of the “Kanada-style”

Movement

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Abstract: Kanada Yoshinori is considered one of the most important animators in anime history. He turned the constraints imposed by anime’s “limited animation” techniques on their head thanks to his unique approach to drawing and timing on works such as *Invincible Super Man Zambot 3* (*Muteki Chôjin Zambot 3*, 1977) or *Galaxy Express 999* (*Ginga Tetsudô 999*, 1979). This paper aims to consider Kanada’s place and importance in anime history by reevaluating the role of animated movement in aesthetic and media analysis. Tom Gunning’s concept of “potential movement” serves as a basis to understand how animation works—how it is created and how it functions—and two of its central parameters, “rhythm” and “tension.” These are then used to explain the appeal of Kanada’s animation in aesthetic terms and its transmedia success in the environment of the “anime boom” of the 1970s and 1980s. Aesthetic and technical parameters can then become tools to explain the success and spreadability of certain trends and styles over anime history.

Keywords: Kanada Yoshinori, anime history, potential movement, anime boom, otaku

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Animator Kanada Yoshinori is among the many figures credited for contributing to anime's distinct visual style. While it might seem that an individual animator is less important than more prestigious directors or designers, Kanada was a regular collaborator of other major animation creators in Japan, such as directors Rintarô, Tomino Yoshiyuki, or Miyazaki Hayao. He also contributed to key franchises in anime history, such as *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchû Senkan Yamato*, 1974) or *Galaxy Express 999* (*Ginga Tetsudô 999*, 1979). As the chronology of these works might indicate, Kanada's innovations are associated with the so-called "anime boom"¹ of the late 1970s and early 1980s, which saw many new narrative and visual trends emerge in rapid succession. More precisely, Kanada is credited for being one of the first "star animators" in Japan, acknowledged for the individuality of his contributions in what is usually perceived as collective work, as well as his unique, expressive style that makes full use of the possibilities of "limited animation"². It might be tempting to separate these two dimensions of Kanada's legacy and consider that his body of work speaks for itself. However, the thesis of this paper is that they are closely linked and that the aesthetic dimension and appeal of Kanada's animation cannot be distinguished from its inscription into a broader media and cultural context, the one generally referred to as the anime boom.

In this regard, this paper will build on the work of prominent anime scholars such as Thomas Lamarre and Marc Steinberg, who have demonstrated the inextricable links between anime's visual style and its wider media and business context: anime's "motion-stillness economy"³ is indistinguishable from the economic structure that underlies it. Hopefully, more empirical nuance can be brought to their account by focusing on a different period and discussing the work and influence of a single individual within the wider anime industry. Indeed, concepts such as "limited

animation,” “animetism,” “dynamic stillness,” or even “anime” itself function as tools for general analysis, but they are, in the end, just that—general. As such, they risk flattening differences, subsuming all of anime history and its evolution as a confrontation between, for instance, traditions of “full” and “limited” animation⁴. It is necessary to acknowledge that anime’s visual conventions, media configurations, and how we consider them are *historical objects* that have changed over time. These evolutions can be attributed to multiple factors, such as human, technological, economic, social, etc. Here, some of these factors will be grasped simultaneously by approaching anime not as a media and its corresponding ecology but as *animation*, a technique that produces movement frame-by-frame. Although the starting point is an aesthetic one, the aim is not to establish aesthetics as a separate domain; it is instead to show how formal innovation and appreciation depend on a wider mediatic and social context. To that end, Kanada’s case and the background of the anime boom appear particularly adapted. Beyond the surface-level characteristics of Kanada’s animation, a core element of its specificity was a particular kind of *spreadability*, which encouraged imitators to multiply in and beyond animation. In other words, rather than studying anime as a general media environment, I suggest we begin from individual images—or rather, animated series of images—and study how they were made to move and circulate. Such an approach requires a thorough understanding of how animation *works*: how it is made and its internal workings. Laying aside such general characterizations as limited animation, the analysis will be based on Tom Gunning’s concept of “potential movement,” which provides a compelling account of both the production and reception of animation⁵. It also applies to multiple media at once—in Gunning’s case, animation and photography— and therefore appears particularly useful to understand the transmedia nature and spreadability of certain kinds of animated images.

First, a summary of previous accounts of the specificity of anime's movement and form and why they might need more historical and technical precision is necessary. It is only then that an alternative will be provided through a general explanation of animated movement and a characterization of anime as harnessing a certain kind of potential movement built around rhythm and tension. These two ideas will inform the presentation of Kanada's animation and its spread in the context of the anime boom. Following a description of the main characteristics of Kanada's work, the focus will first be on the way Kanada was received by fellow animators and animation fans. Then, other media, specifically manga, will be discussed to see how the potential movement inherent to Kanada's art led it to challenge established borders between mediums and techniques, making it representative of anime's style and of otaku aesthetics in general.

Anime's Form, Motion, and Potential Movement

To produce an account of how anime's visual elements function, appear and spread, it appears natural to turn toward the work of Stevie Suan, most notably *Anime's Identity*. Approaching anime as a media-form, Suan refuses to provide a closed definition, opting instead to consider it as a loose set of constantly evolving conventions. It is through their reproduction that the "anime-esque", that is the "elements that make anime recognizable"⁶, emerges. Through repetition, certain tropes become recognizable and come to be intrinsically associated to what makes anime "anime" at a given point in time. But these elements remain constantly open to evolution and interpretation by anime's diverse producers and consumers. Suan's model is particularly attractive for three reasons. First, it is pragmatic in that it does not presuppose any normative definitions and allows for great flexibility in approaches and scopes. As Suan demonstrates, understanding anime as a series of "anime-esque performances"⁷ allows for a formal approach to individual anime scenes, series, and

entire franchises, as well as a study of their transnational production and reception. Second, it is descriptive: although Suan does not provide a complete list of anime-esque elements—a vain task—his framework rests on their identification, description, and analysis. In other words, it requires sustained attention to anime itself and allows theory to closely match the formal reality of media and the material reality of production. Finally, Suan's model is evolutive: not only does it acknowledge multiplicity and a variety of possible interpretations, but it also integrates *time* and *historical change*. In that sense, Suan's writing is essential to understanding the aesthetic dimension of anime, whether it implies a focus on visuals, narrative, cinematography, sound, or any other elements, as well as its evolution through time.

However, while Suan encourages further aesthetic and historical investigation, he does not conduct it himself, at least in *Anime's Identity*. Even as Suan's model integrates time and change, it takes them for granted. They are considered as necessary variables, but their nature and role are not investigated in detail. This is justified within the system, as “change” is inscribed into the very definition of “form” as Suan understands it: “Forms *have an iterative capacity* that provides an opportunity to replicate the form, to work with it, and to act through and/or upon it.”⁸ Or, even more clearly, “change through time *is built into* the performance.”⁹ Consequently, as Suan insists on “the enactment of this form in that moment, place, and material.”¹⁰ he rarely details any of these factors. For instance, when discussing the evolution of visual styles in anime, Suan argues that “certain character design styles gain momentum over time through their repetition and become structural models for further (re)performances; others fall out of favor.”¹¹ Not only does this make sense conceptually, but it is also common sense: anime has visibly changed over time. However, Suan does not explain how new styles appear, why or how they gain or

lose momentum. This would happen through citation, but what makes something citable? What are the formal properties that make something apt to be cited, and what are the material properties that encourage others to cite it? These factors are historically, not conceptually, determined. In sum, while Suan provides a compelling theory of formal evolution, he rarely delves into the material process of how evolution happens. He builds a *model* of change but does not provide actual *accounts* of change. As Suan acknowledges, “the” anime-esque does not exist; only anime-esque performances do. Therefore, following up on his work entails concretely describing those and how they constantly define and are defined by previous and following performances.

Although it is not fundamentally historical, it may be tempting to turn to the other dominant account of anime’s movement and technology. In *The Anime Machine*, Thomas Lamarre provides a powerful account of how anime is made and how it influences its visual presentation and philosophical implications. Most interesting here is Lamarre’s claim to approach animation as “*moving images*.”¹² But the question is, *what images*? Lamarre’s framework rests on a fundamental distinction between two kinds of images and movements: what will be called here *animated* movement, the product of “the art of the hand,”¹³ and *composed* movement, the mechanical sliding of layers. Both are folded back together in the broader animetic/cinematic apparatus that captures and projects the images. Lamarre’s “anime machine” exists both below and beyond that level. Below, because it touches on how images are *made* before they are captured on film, and beyond, because it has implications on how images *exist* once they are viewed on screen. Moreover, inside the machine, there is a clear bias towards composed movement, which follows from the concept of limited animation: “Limited animation [...] dramatically decreases the number of drawings

used for character movements, relying on *other effects* to impart a sense of movement.”¹⁴ With such a definition, Lamarre can be conceptually consistent in dismissing animated movement, most notably character animation. Instead, he focuses on “other effects,” notably those created by compositing or design. For instance: “Limited animation tends towards the production of ‘soulful bodies’ [...] This is where character design becomes all important, taking precedence over character animation.”¹⁵ It may be necessary to interrogate this fundamental assumption: is it true that character animation, and animated movement in general, is of lesser importance in anime? Is it not a way to shift priorities and move the focus away from animation *work*—the way animation is made and how it functions internally? In any case, it appears necessary to come back to the concept of limited animation and discuss anime’s animation *on its own terms*. Focusing on animators and how they produce movement may be a first step in that direction.

Moving away from anime studies, many scholars seem more interested in the ontology of animated images than in how they work. Nevertheless, one may still find technically accurate and theoretically compelling accounts of animation movement, such as the one offered by Tom Gunning¹⁶. It should first be noted that Gunning does not simply oppose “the art of the hand” against the mechanical operations of compositing in a man/machine or art/technology duality. In fact, Gunning’s starting point is the common ground between (hand-made) animation and (mechanical) photography: “By photographing onto the filmstrip, the continuous gestures of the hand employed in drawing [...] are translated into the discontinuous rhythm of the machine.”¹⁷ This dialectic between continuity and discontinuity can be reformulated through animation techniques. First comes a distinction between the “time of the machine” (24 frames per second) and the “time of the drawings.” This is commonly

referred to as “timing,” that is, how many frames each drawing occupies within mechanical time. For instance, when each new drawn frame corresponds to a photographed frame, the animation is “on the ones;” when each drawn frame is photographed twice, it is “on the twos,” and so on. Time is also dynamic: each drawing is followed by others, and this succession creates movement. If timing measures how much time each drawing takes, the distance or interval between each phase of the motion must also be considered: it is called “spacing.” Thanks to spacing, each frame is not just an indifferent cut but an “instant” revealing “the brief incremental of time, through the *possibility* of motion.”¹⁸ As such, every single frame contains *potential movement*: it produces movement and contains it within itself. The instant—or frame—can therefore be characterized in two ways. On one hand, it takes a certain place in the flow of time, which varies according to the parameter of *rhythm* (timing). On the other hand, each instant does not exist in itself but always refers to those that precede and follow it in a more-or-less intense movement according to the parameter of *tension* (spacing). Thanks to this dual nature, the instant “embodies the potential to move between the regimes of stillness and motion.”¹⁹

The potential movement Gunning conceptualized differs from the one Lamarre discussed. Indeed, the latter evokes such an idea when touching on specific categories of images, anime characters and character designs. As “soulful bodies,” they “embody the potentiality of the moving image and thus to make the leap from field to field.”²⁰ However, this potentiality first exists *outside* of the images, as it comes from the technological and economic determinations of the anime machine. On the other hand, Gunning’s potential movement comes from *within* the images and follows from their natures as drawn frames, which are a part of animation as art, technique, and technology. In that sense, Gunning’s account touches on how animation works: its

starting point is the production of animated movement. However, it remains general enough not to be a closed model fit for just one type of animation. This will be shown in the next section, through an application of the notions of rhythm and tension to anime's animation, particularly to its expression by Kanada Yoshinori.

"Kanada Movement" as Animation

Kanada Yoshinori started his career as an animator in the early 1970s in studio Tôei Animation and progressively became a prominent figure working on the projects of studios Tôei and Sunrise, such as the TV series *Invincible Super Man Zambot 3* (*Muteki Chôjin Zambot 3*, 1977) and the movie *Galaxy Express 999* (*Ginga Tetsudô 999*, 1979). From this point onwards, he became an industry icon and fan favorite and has remained influential to this day. While this may be a slight exaggeration, Kanada is sometimes considered "as the first modern Japanese animator, because his stylistic features evolved in the framework of scheduling and budgetary limitations of TV anime."²¹ First, it may be necessary to provide an overview of these features and the way they relate to the concept of potential movement. Many catalogs of Kanada's most distinguishing techniques exist,²² and reproducing them here is not necessary. However, it is important to provide a quick summary of why Kanada stood out in the landscape of late 1970s TV animation.

First, we can note a series of techniques that fall within the traditional understanding of limited animation. They did not make the movement more complex or use more frames, but simply elaborated on still images. In that sense, they created a sense of "dynamic immobility."²³ These include shot compositions with stark angles and exaggerated perspectives or ornamental details like light flares and shading on metallic surfaces. Furthermore, whether the characters moved or stayed still, Kanada systematically drew "off-model," disregarding the guidelines left by the character

designer. This made the sequences he oversaw recognizable, as they all shared similar features that stood out from the rest of a given work. This did not only apply to characters but also to special effects such as beams and explosions. For a long time, these were produced via stock animation through the “cel bank” system.²⁴ However, Kanada and other animators from his generation deviated from those templates and started developing their own shapes and movements. In Kanada’s case, the most famous example is the finale of the movie *Harmagedon* (*Genma Taisen*, 1984), in which erupting lava takes the shape of dragons and birds flying.²⁵ Finally, one of Kanada’s most distinctive features was the movement of his animation. Instead of constantly moving on 3s or 4s, as was still frequent and is characteristic of so-called limited animation, characters and effects moved at irregular framerates, going from 3s to 1s in the space of a few frames. While Kanada did not invent this technique known as framerate modulation²⁶, he certainly contributed to popularizing it. Thanks to modulation and posing, Kanada’s animation was entirely dedicated to expressing the potential movement of animation. Still images started moving at unexpected moments and in unexpected ways, illustrating not only that animated images have the possibility to move but also that their potential range of movements is infinite. Just as Kanada harnessed a potential that had always been dormant in animation as a technique, his relationship with anime-esque trends and modes of production is dialectical. Rather than reinventing anime from the ground up, he exploited potentialities, leaning into certain trends over others. As the previous mention of dynamic immobility might illustrate, Kanada’s work may, in general terms, strengthen the definition of anime as limited or at least as non-full animation. But in more specific terms, by looking at individual performances, we understand that the animator’s work is not just a variation on general concepts but also involves taking certain positions in an aesthetically and technically charged ground.

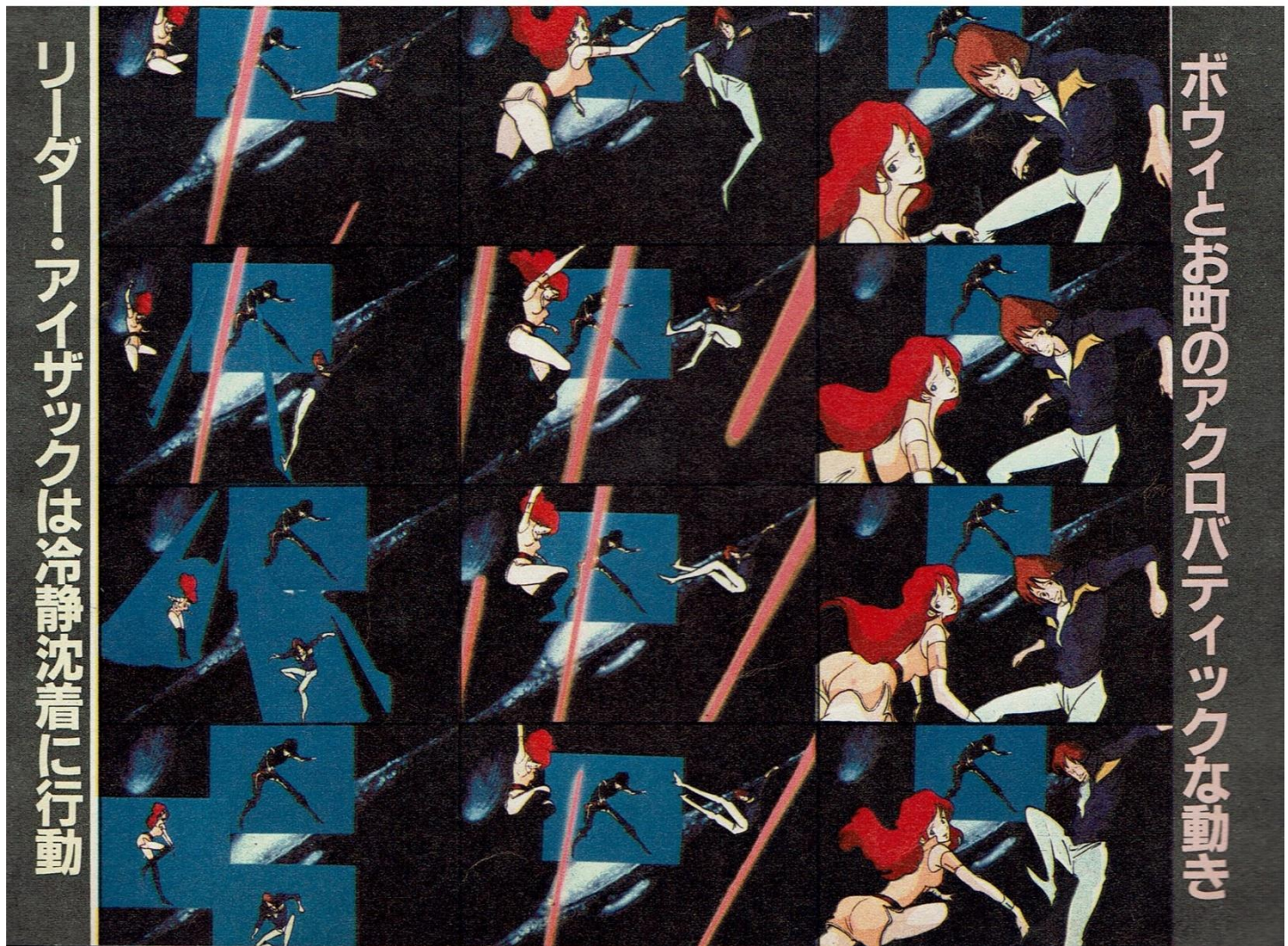


Figure 1 A frame-by-frame breakdown of Kanada's opening for *Galaxy Cyclone Braiger*, from a booklet included in the January 1982 issue of *Animage*

According to Honkannen, what links all of Kanada's techniques is an aesthetic of "simplicity, feeling, and exaggeration."²⁷ More concretely, Kanada also encouraged disruptions in the animation production pipeline to make it more centered around the individual animator. Following Lamarre's understanding of limited animation, the focus would be not on animated movement but on "other effects". Kanada reversed that balance by increasing the animator's control over the shot composition, rhythm and appearance of the movement, and appearance of the characters. As such, independently from their purely aesthetic dimension, Kanada's innovations must have

felt *liberating* for animators: they all encouraged individual artists to take control of their scenes, express their sensibilities, and develop their own “styles.” Kanada spurred a new kind of discourse about individual artistic creativity. It emerged in anime magazines and is still visible in Takashi Murakami’s work, which portrays Kanada as someone who “rebelled against [the anime production] system, allowing each animator to assert his or her individuality.”²⁸ This disruption of the anime pipeline is also a disruption of theoretical models. First, it invites us to take the definition of forms as performances more seriously: performances are *enacted* by actors—there is both an aesthetics and a sociology of the anime-esque. More generally, authors such as Thomas Lamarre and Marc Steinberg have insisted on the centrality of characters within anime’s media environment and the ability of character images to move from one medium to another. However, a precondition for this is characters’ consistency. While each medium instantiation is different, a character must remain the same—the character must retain a “soul” and common set of elements. Off-model drawings point to another possibility: characters are images to be modeled and deformed, and their potential movement lies in *deformation* rather than consistent design or form. In many cases, deforming the character for just a few frames makes the overall movement more dynamic.

Beyond this dialectic between form and deformation, or design and off-model, exists another between the composition and decomposition of movement. It is also based on Gunning’s understanding of animation, and the relationship he establishes between the “continuity” of the hand and the “discontinuity” of the machine. As powerful and innovative as Kanada’s animation might have been, it did not become popular on its own: change does not simply happen but is caused and motivated. Behind each aesthetic is a history, a sociology and a technology. One of the key factors

in the case considered here was anime magazines. Emerging in the late 1970s and playing a prominent role during the so-called anime boom, they “provided the language for categorizing, organizing, and researching animation [...]. This in turn contributed greatly to the recognition of anime series and films as distinctive artistic works created by specific creators.”²⁹ Not only did they make anime staff (e.g., directors, writers, and animators) more visible to the audience by providing regular reports and insider information on anime studios or productions, they also provided significant insight into the *zeitgeist* of both the anime industry and fandom of the time³⁰. Kanada was a constant presence in these magazines and was therefore impossible to forget. He was mainly promoted by *Animage*, penning multiple cover illustrations for it and being the regular focus of articles or columns. For instance, the booklet included in the November 1980 issue of *Animage* breaks down the distinctive traits of Kanada’s animation such as “character close-ups and poses,” “special angles,” or “single frames that you can’t see with the naked eye.”³¹ Especially interesting is that this column was lavishly illustrated with many screenshots from sequences animated by Kanada. If Kanada, as an animator, composed movement by the addition of multiple still drawings, magazines decomposed it by freezing the movement and providing screencaps. Here is another example of the continuity/discontinuity dialectic evoked by Gunning. However, it goes further than that between the drawing and the camera: it is at play between two different media, animation and print. As animation frames are not indifferent cuts in the movement but significant instants, the freeze frames shown in magazines were probably thoroughly selected for their illustrative and iconic value. Put more clearly, we can assume that drawings that possessed the most tension—the greatest amount of potential movement—were chosen. Drawings characterized by unbalance, difference, and individuality came to be valued, and the continuity of movement was broken down into a series of dynamic,

unpredictable poses—not because of the constraints of limited animation but because the social and mediatic context encouraged animators to exploit potential movement as much as possible. This tendency, which Hikawa Ryūsuke terms “playing with animation”³² was further encouraged by another factor of mechanical discontinuity: the popularization of VCRs and their “frame stepping” function.

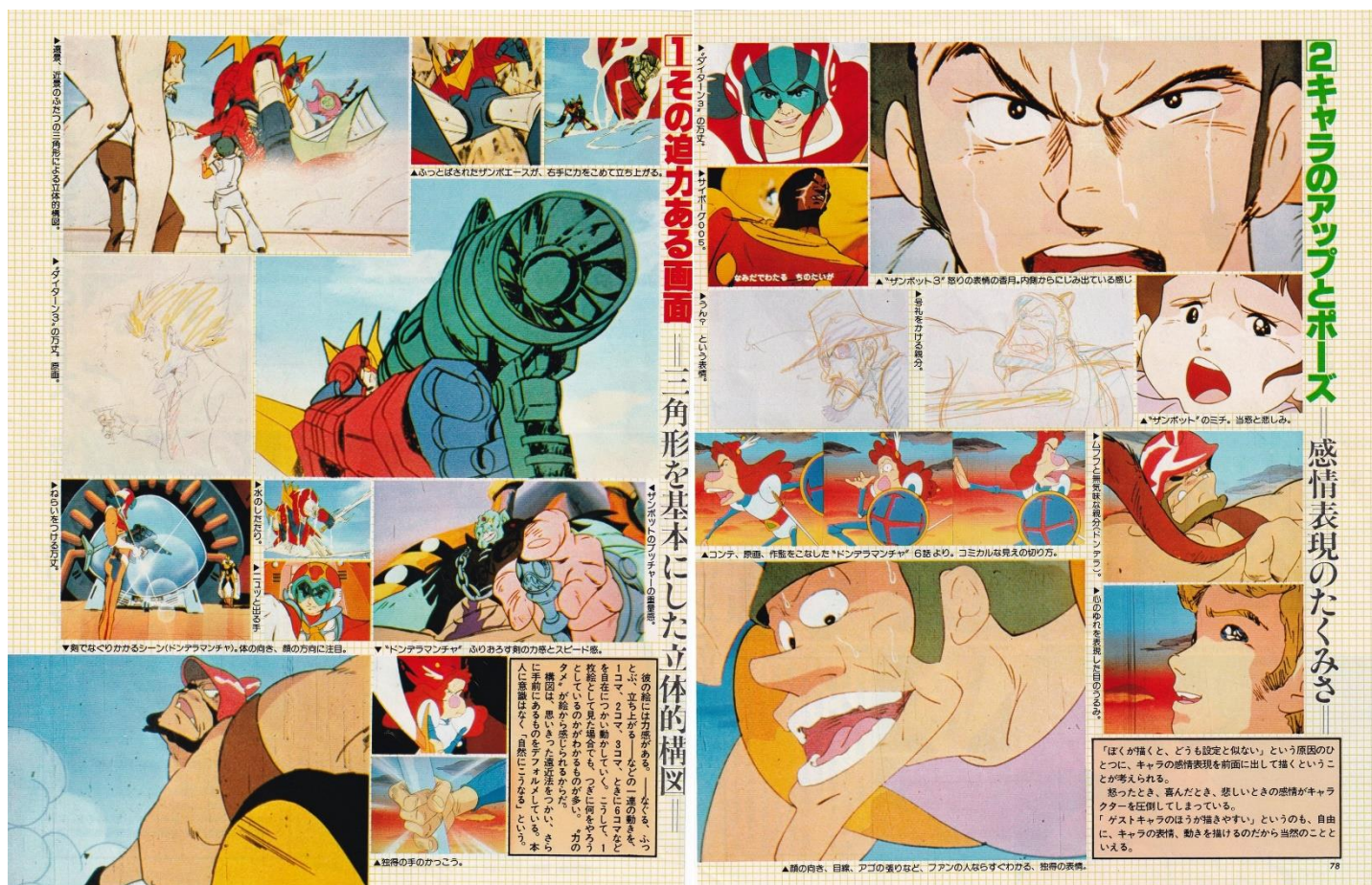


Figure 2 Two pages from *Animage*'s special issue on Kanada, highlighting "the intensity of the images" (left) and "character close-ups and poses" (right) [*"The Fighting Standard Bearer of 'Anime's Third Generation', Yoshinori Kanada"*, 77-78.]

Okada Toshio probably insisted the most on VCR's influence on the viewing practices of anime fans. He also points to another dimension: for animators, frame stepping became a tool for study, as it was now possible to analyze the movement in detail without having to look for the rare original drawings. For instance, Okada

attributes animator Itano Ichirô's dynamic style to both innate talent and "a systematic use of the possibilities of the VCR during his training."³³

To sum up, Kanada's animation was particularly prone to spread because of two categories of factors. One was his animation and its exploitation of potential movement through timing, spacing, and posing. The other was the context, which was particularly apt to receive such innovations thanks to the specific media environment of the anime boom. Nevertheless, as discussed above, change is not a fluid, linear process; however spreadable and popular Kanada's work might have been, its success had its critics and opponents. For instance, Kanada drew with rulers and stencils, which made the lines and curves of his drawings distinct. It also made his work more efficient, which might have encouraged other animators to imitate him. However, the use of such tools was rare among animators at the time, and it appears that Kanada was encouraged to give it up multiple times, probably for no other reason than it not being the usual way of doing things.³⁴ In another instance, in a later interview from the 1990s, Kanada explained that many young artists who wanted to imitate him were rejected in other studios and quit animation because of bullying from their elders.³⁵ Although anime magazines sang the praises of the new, promising generation of animators, behind the scenes they were called by less flattering names such as "Kanada copycats" or "Perspective Kids" (taken from Kanada's special use of perspective in his works). For example, in the manga dedicated to his company Studio Live, which he published in *The Motion Comic*, veteran animator Ashida Toyô drew "Kana*** style animators" by using exaggerated perspectives and portraying them as loud anime fans barging into the studio. Perhaps Ashida had in mind Watanabe Hiroshi, a member of his studio who made waves on the series *Mahô no Princess Minky Momo* (1982-1983) thanks to his Kanada-inspired style.³⁶ On the other hand, Ashida's example illustrates

another way animation's movement would be stopped and decomposed: not by individual viewers or in anime magazines, but in manga. Although the intent is parodic, Ashida shows that the characteristics of Kanada's animation—here, exaggerated poses and perspectives—could be translated to still drawings.



Figure 3 Ashida's representation of "Kanada-style animators" in his manga. The last speech bubble reads, "Hmm... I'm worried about what kind of movement they'll put out" [Toyô Ashida, "Hochupputen Studio (Hochupputen Sutajio)," *The Motion Comic* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, January 1985), 203.]

“Kanada Movement” Beyond Animation

Animators’ coverage by anime magazines and the decomposition of movement they provided created a back-and-forth between moving and immobile images. By freezing the frames, magazines revealed their inner dynamism and encouraged the viewers to see them in motion; on the other hand, the motion, consisting of unpredictable poses and containing details invisible at normal speed, encouraged viewers to pause and decompose it. This circle encouraged the spread of certain kinds of animation over others. It triggered a wave of citations between artists in a seemingly perfect instantiation of Suan’s model of the anime-esque. However, the relationship was not entirely circular and centered around animation: in the early 1980s, many animators, starting with Kanada himself, were encouraged to try their luck in manga. Editor Tokuma Shoten, who published *Animage*, led this movement, publishing manga by animators Miyazaki Hayao (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*), Yasuhiko Yoshikazu (*Arion*), and Kanada (*Birth*). Kanada’s work is of particular interest here for two reasons: one is aesthetic because the *Birth* manga largely made use of the rhythm and posing characteristic of animation; the other can be found in its presentation and reception. Kanada’s *Birth* was published for two years, between September 1982 and November 1984, in both *Ryû* and *The Motion Comic* magazines. The latter is particularly arresting because all who published in it were animators or animation designers, and also because of its title, which referenced both mediums of comic and animation. Just before *Birth* started publication, *Ryû* chief editor had introduced the term as follows: “Just as *gekiga* artists such as Saitô Takao or Kawasaki Noboru have taken their place in *shônen* manga, so-called ‘motion comics,’ which make full use of animation techniques, are about to arrive in the world of manga. A

new star has been born in these motion comics: Kanada Yoshinori's *Birth* is a work closer to animation in its use of dynamic deformations."³⁷

This quote is, of course, promotional, but the rhetoric is striking. As the name implies, "motion comics" exist between manga and anime: the format is print, but they are made with "animation techniques," implying a greater sense of dynamism. The emergence of motion comics is presented as a historical turn, the nature of which is made clear by the reference to *gekiga*: the implication is that new ways of expression are about to be integrated in the wider form of manga. This naturally raises the following question: did this change happen? Is it enough for something to be new and to challenge the limits of both the "manga-esque" and "anime-esque" for these limits to move? In wider historical terms, *Birth* must be acknowledged as a failure: the manga was interrupted mid-publication, and its OVA adaptation was a fiasco criticized by Kanada himself.³⁸ As a result, it apparently failed to trigger any important follow-ups (although similar animator-centered OVAs, such as Kogawa Tomonori's *Greed*, closely followed it). But locally, that is within the scope of early 1980s manga and otaku circles, *Birth* was certainly innovative. Its relationship with Kanada's animation is also more complex than meets the eye. If the latter revolved around "simplicity, feeling, and exaggeration,"³⁹ the manga took an opposite direction. Each drawing is filled to the brim with detail, often collapsing the difference between background, foreground, and gutter. The page compositions, while undoubtedly dynamic, are often too complex for the reader to follow easily. Kanada revealed himself to be both a master illustrator and master *mangaka*, and the result was visually extremely dense. The author's background as an animator is evident: the action scenes, in particular, split the movement in many panels in a way very similar to how an animator creates movement frame by frame. The dialectic between composition and decomposition is visible once

again between media. Moreover, even during quieter dialogue scenes, characters adopted the same strange, unbalanced poses they did in animation: they retained the same sense of tension and, therefore, just as much potential movement. From Kanada's testimony, this was not without difficulties⁴⁰: one does not go from one format to another this easily. It also encouraged others, whether that is later Kanada admirer Imaishi Hiroyuki—who discovered his work through manga—or his own contemporaries.



Figure 4 Two pages from Kanada's manga version of *Birth* showcasing the decomposition of movement, dynamic posing, and collapse of the border between panels and gutter [Yoshinori Kanada, "Birth 1 (Bâsu 1)", (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, Motion Books,) 1983]

Kanada was not the only one to bring his animation to print. While they rarely came out in mainstream manga publications, many Kanada-inspired works appeared in the *dôjinshi* scene in the first half of the 1980s. The most notable is undoubtedly the series of publications made by the Kanada Yoshinori Fanclub, one of the most prominent animation-related circles at the Comic Market at the time.⁴¹ Led by future animator and director Kobayashi Osamu, the Fanclub's publications contained reproductions of Kanada's original art, essays, fanart and manga, all emulating Kanada's style to various degrees. For many contributors, this was not just a way to express their appreciation, but also an entry into animation: Kobayashi Osamu and his brother Makoto seem to have entered Kanada's close circle as they both participated in the OVA adaptation of *Birth*. Another notable example is Kobayashi Hirokazu (unrelated to the two others), a middle-schooler aspiring to become an animator at the time.⁴² He debuted as a *dôjinshi* artist inspired by Kanada and Hideo Azuma's young girl (*bishôjo*) characters. He also referenced the most popular manga or anime of the day, such as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Kobayashi was pulling from a wide-ranging visual vocabulary shared by most otaku, and his manga are quintessentially anime-esque. Although his career would be brief, by 1984, Kobayashi started publishing short manga and illustrations in the magazine *Lemon People*—one of the most important publications behind the lolicon boom, one of the driving forces behind the definition of otaku culture in the early 1980s.⁴³ In Kobayashi's case, we may attribute Kanada's influence to at least two factors. The first is the intrinsic dynamism and replicability of Kanada's art, as discussed above. The second is the nature of the works Kanada contributed to - SF series such as *Invincible Super Man Zambot 3* or *Galaxy Cyclone Braiger* (*Ginga Senpû Braigâ*, 1981), popular with the otaku audience. Kanada, famous for the way he drew girl characters, epitomized the "cute girl and robot" aesthetic partly associated with the lolicon boom, leading multiple portrayals

of him at the time to present him as a lolicon,⁴⁴ telling more about the general trends of otaku culture than his personality. Kanada was, therefore, fully integrated within the otaku sphere.



Figure 5 One of Kobayashi's 1983 manga. The dynamic poses, speed lines, and machines are visibly inspired by Kanada, while the character looks similar to Miyazaki Hayao's Nausicaä [from the author's [X \(formerly Twitter\) account](#)]

Because Kanada was so closely associated with otakus, it is necessary to discuss a third artist who received his influence outside of animation and whose reading seems like it integrates but actually sidesteps that context: Murakami Takashi. Murakami does not totally dissociate Kanada, and anime in general, from otakus. On the contrary,

he makes them the most representative figure of postwar Japan and claims major inspiration from otaku-esque aesthetics. However, when discussing Kanada in particular, Murakami situates him in a different lineage: that of “eccentric” Japanese art.⁴⁵ Regardless of the historical validity of this claim, Murakami’s reading fundamentally differs from that of other Kanada imitators. Indeed, Murakami does not discuss Kanada’s work *as animation*, that is as drawings imbued with internal tension, dynamism, and potential movement. Rather than movement, Murakami focuses on compositions: when he freezes the movement, it is to consider the still frame as a unity—like a painting—rather than just one step in a given motion. This follows from his consideration of images in relation to an outside factor: the viewer. The focus of Murakami’s analysis is primarily on the relationship between image and viewer and how the image guides the viewer’s attention:

I thought that perhaps the way that a picture controls the speed of its observer’s gaze, the course of that gaze’s scan, and the subsequent control of the information flow might match well with the artists’ concepts that Tsuji described in his book. [...] All the “eccentric” artists shared a certain structural methodology, in which they created surface images that erased interstices and thus made the observer aware of the images’ extreme planarity.⁴⁶

In this framework, the image itself has no motion—it has some control over the rhythm of the viewer’s gaze but does not create it. As shown with Gunning, animation works in the opposite way: rhythm is an essential, internal quality of animation because it pertains to how it is made—to timing and spacing, principles which relate to both drawing and photography. There is no doubt some truth about Murakami’s commentary on Kanada—especially relating to depth and perspective—but it should be acknowledged that it ignores one of the most important elements of Kanada’s animation: its movement.

Comparing the three cases discussed here – Kanada’s, Kobayashi’s, and Murakami’s – it is possible to discern multiple approaches to animation, animated movement, and its transfers across media. Kanada translated animation techniques onto manga pages, relying on rhythm and tension in what may be a sign of a consistent artistic vision. Kobayashi, on the other hand, reveals the contextual appeal of Kanada’s work through constant collage and citation which fully integrates it into otaku aesthetics. Despite his claims to the contrary, Murakami does the opposite and tends to isolate Kanada from this background, inserting his work in a separate aesthetic domain, which leads him to fundamentally reinterpret Kanada’s work and miss its key characteristic: that is its nature as animation.

Conclusion: Tension, Dynamism, and “Dynamic Immobility”

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to provide more detailed accounts of how and why anime-esque images and styles spread; second, to initiate new ways of discussing movement in anime beyond the overly simplistic concept of limited animation. To that end, the focus was put on animator Kanada Yoshinori, one of the artists credited for having exploited limited animation to push the expressive bounds of anime. My conclusion is that Kanada did more than use the specific limitations of anime’s system to his advantage. He made use of the possibilities of the animated medium and distinguished himself as a master of its three key components: drawing, timing and spacing. Through their use, Kanada’s animation stood out within anime but also resonated with other artists and fans thanks to the specific context of its emergence. In that, Kanada’s case functions as a good illustration of the potential of Stevie Suan’s work as a foundation for historical study of anime. Not only does it invite a renewed attention to aesthetic and formal considerations, it also calls for a sociological and historiographical reading of existing categories of analysis. The

takeaway from this paper should not be to consider Kanada as an individual genius who revolutionized anime and animation as a whole. In fact, the focus on the core characteristics of animated movement, the historical and social context of Kanada's emergence, and the dynamics of the spread of his influence were all chosen to counter such an interpretation. In a final illustration of how formal, historical and historiographical categories interact, I would like to return to animated movement itself and the question of dynamism.

Indeed, all the points made relating to Kanada may seem to lead naturally towards Marc Steinberg's previously cited concept of dynamic immobility, which understands limited animation as "a way of making still images seem like they were moving, [and] a way of making moving images seem like they were still."⁴⁷ The relationship that Steinberg establishes between anime, manga, and other media seems to correspond quite well to the one between Kanada's work in animation, magazines, and manga. However, I would like to argue that they are distinct for two reasons. The first is that, just like Lamarre, Steinberg's starting point is the concept of limited animation—it assumes fundamental outside limitations on anime's movement rather than a plurality of ways to exploit the potential movement of animation. As a result, when discussing dynamic immobility in anime, Steinberg does not focus on the movement or drawings but on "other effects"—notably cinematography, dialogue and sound effects—all of which add a temporal dimension to the image and "animate it" *in place of animation itself*. The other difference is that, in Steinberg's own words, "the manga-anime relationship is primary [...], with the manga acting as a preparatory framework - [...] - for the moving images to come."⁴⁸ The basis of this paper was instead the primacy of animation: it is characterized by movement, then frozen in other mediums, without losing its dynamism in the process. Rather than dynamically

immobile images, we may then speak of “moving stills” coming from animation itself and still, in a way, moving. In other words, Steinberg’s dynamic immobility and moving stills are conceptually similar but used to describe different historical and aesthetic situations. Such concepts are valuable, but their generality should not hide the specificity of each context and case study. In brief, this paper can also be understood as a defense of history and of the necessity to reconsider our conceptual categories for each new case study so that they can better match empirical findings. To that end, a multidisciplinary approach—such as the one attempted here, between aesthetics and media history—is essential.

Notes:

- ¹ Jonathan Clements, *Anime: A History*; Zoltan Kacsuk, "The Making of an Epoch-Making Anime: Understanding the Landmark Status of Neon Genesis Evangelion in Otaku Culture," in *Anime Studies: Media-Specific Approaches to Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Stockholm Studies in Media Arts Japan (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2021), 215–46.
- ² Toshio Okada, *Otakugaku Nyūmon (Introduction to Otakuology)* (Tokyo: Ōta Publishing, 1996); Ville Honkannen, "The Revolution of Animation: Yoshinori Kanada's Creative and Everlasting Effect on the Identity of Japanese Animation" (Bachelor's Thesis, Stockholm, Stockholm University, 2017).
- ³ Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.), 17.
- ⁴ See, for instance, Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 64–66 or 189–190
- ⁵ Tom Gunning, "Animating the Instant: The Secret Symmetry Between Animation and Photography," in *Animating Film Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 37–53.
- ⁶ Stevie Suan, *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form Beyond Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 17.
- ⁷ Suan, *Anime's Identity*, 156.
- ⁸ Suan, *Anime's Identity* 22, my emphasis.
- ⁹ Suan, *Anime's Identity* 161, my emphasis.
- ¹⁰ Suan, *Anime's Identity* 22.
- ¹¹ Suan, *Anime's Identity* 165.
- ¹² Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, ix.
- ¹³ Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 130.
- ¹⁴ Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 19, my emphasis.
- ¹⁵ Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 201.
- ¹⁶ Gunning, "Animating the Instant."
- ¹⁷ Gunning, "Animating the Instant.", 38.
- ¹⁸ Gunning, "Animating the Instant.", 41.
- ¹⁹ Gunning, "Animating the Instant.", 51.
- ²⁰ Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 202.
- ²¹ Honkannen, "The Revolution of Animation.", 10
- ²² "The Fighting Standard Bearer of 'Anime's Third Generation,'" Yoshinori Kanada (Chōsen Suru 'Anime Dai-San Sedai' no Kishu Kanada Yoshinori), *Animage* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, November 1980), 75–82. Honkannen, "The Revolution of Animation."; Ryūsuke Hikawa, *20 Years of Zambot 3 (20-nen no Zambot 3)*, Otakugaku Sōsho 1 (Tokyo: Ōta Publishing, 1997).
- ²³ Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*.
- ²⁴ Clements, *Anime: A History*; Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*; Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*.
- ²⁵ Oguro, "More on Genma Taisen," *WEB Animestyle* (blog), 21.05.2009.
http://www.style.fm/as/05_column/365/365_129.shtml
- ²⁶ ibcf, "An Introduction to Framerate Modulation," *Wave Motion Cannon* (blog), 31.12.2016,
<https://wavemotioncannon.com/2016/12/31/an-introduction-to-framerate-modulation/>.
- ²⁷ Honkannen, "The Revolution of Animation.", 11.
- ²⁸ Murakami Takashi, *Superflat* (Tokyo: Madara Publishing, 2000), 13.
- ²⁹ Hikawa, *20-nen no Zambot 3*, 24.
- ³⁰ Rivera Rusca, Renato. "The Changing Roles of Anime and Manga Magazines in the Japanese Animation Industry." In *Manga Vision: Cultural and Communicative Perspectives*, 52–69. Monash: Monash University Publishing, 2016. Daisuke Nagata, "The Invention of the OVA," in *Sociology of Anime* (Tokyo: Nakanisha Publishing, 2020), 160–74.
- ³¹ "The Fighting Standard Bearer of 'Anime's Third Generation', Yoshinori Kanada", 77–79.
- ³² Hikawa, *20-nen no Zambot 3*, 162.
- ³³ Okada, *Otakugaku Nyūmon*, 24–25.
- ³⁴ Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), *The Revolutionary of Anime, Yoshinori Kanada (Anime no Kakumeiji Kanada Yoshinori)*, 2010.
- ³⁵ Ochi Kazuhiro, Hirotoshi Sano, and Kōichi Yazawa, eds., *Kanada Yoshinori GREAT*, 1998, 74.
- ³⁶ Oguro, "Magical Princess Minky Momo," *WEB Animestyle* (blog), 12.05.2009.
http://www.style.fm/as/05_column/365/365_122.shtml
- ³⁷ In Kanada Yoshinori, *Yoshinori Kanada Special* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1982), 101.

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- ³⁸ Matteo Watzky, "Birth: A Complete Chronology," *Animétudes* (blog), July 21, 2022, <https://animetudes.com/2022/07/21/birth-a-complete-chronology/>.
- ³⁹ Honkannen, "The Revolution of Animation.", 11.
- ⁴⁰ Yoshinori Kanada, "Motion Comic's Flagbearer: Yoshinori Kanada (Môshion Comikku no Kishu Kanada Yoshinori)," *The Motion Comic*, January 1984, 238.
- ⁴¹ Comic Market Committee, "Comic Market 30 Years File (Komikku Mâketto 30's Fairu)" (The Official Comic Market Site, 2005), <https://www2.comiket.co.jp/archives/30th/>.
- ⁴² This biographical information is taken from Kobayashi's Twitter account, available here: <https://twitter.com/AXhroFzaqtILYXF?s=20>
- ⁴³ On *Lemon People* and the *lolicon* boom and aesthetics, see Patrick Galbraith, *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
- ⁴⁴ In Kanada Yoshinori, *Yoshinori Kanada Special* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1982), 96-97.
- ⁴⁵ Murakami, *Superflat*.
- ⁴⁶ Murakami, *Superflat*, 9.
- ⁴⁷ Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 34.
- ⁴⁸ Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 18.

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