

Boy with Machine:

A Deleuzo-Guattarian Critique of *Neon Genesis Evangelion***Betty Stojnic**

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Abstract: In this paper, I provide an analysis of the anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and the feature film *The End of Evangelion* through the theory of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as outlined in their seminal work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. I tackle the authors' concepts of the oedipal and of absolute deterritorialization in order to provide a philosophical consideration of the series' central plot points and developments. My aim is to employ Charles J. Stivale's concept of academic "animation" to critique *Evangelion's* emphasis on the nuclear family structure and its influence on subject-formation, as well as to demonstrate that a Deleuzo-Guattarian framework is uniquely suited for this task. I conclude that *Evangelion*, through its experimental use of animation as a medium, produces a compelling depiction of absolute deterritorialization in the form of the Human Instrumentality Project. However, the series ultimately remains loyal to its prioritisation of the family unit (rooted in psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex), with the protagonist Ikari Shinji rejecting Instrumentality and preferring, instead, to live as a unified subject defined by familial relations.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, deterritorialization, oedipal, philosophy, *Evangelion*

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Introduction

The science-fiction anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*¹ (1995-1996, *Shinseiki Evangerion*) and its feature-length finale *The End of Evangelion*² (1997, *Shinseiki Evangerion gekijô-ban*), hereafter jointly referred to as *Evangelion*, are set in Japan between two apocalyptic events of extraterrestrial contact – the Second and Third Impact. They depict the lives and efforts of the child members of NERV, a paramilitary organization dedicated to protecting Tokyo and the world from outer space attacks by alien invaders (Angels), which they thwart with giant, semi-organic mechs. In the last two episodes of the series and in the film, however, the routine clashes with Angels take a back seat to *Evangelion*'s more philosophically charged narrative invention – the Human Instrumentality Project – through which the show explores more abstract themes of identity and subject formation. The objective of this paper is to present a viable philosophical analysis of *Evangelion* and the Human Instrumentality Project by employing the terminology of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, their most far-reaching collaboration, consists of two volumes: *Anti-Oedipus*³ (first published in 1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus*⁴ (1980), the idiosyncratic jargon of which enables the authors to rethink and reshape conventional theoretical, political, and metaphysical principles. Following the lead of scholars such as Charles J. Stivale, I engage in what has been referred to as the *animation* of Deleuze and Guattari's intellectual legacy. In this context, the term “animation” is used to describe the process of enlivening and recontextualizing Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts as a productive methodology of cultural criticism. With this essay, I offer a continuation of such a mode of discourse by applying it to anime, exploring the medium's philosophical potential, and examining *animation* across the word's web of connections and connotations.

The two concepts on which I will focus while discussing *Evangelion* will be *the oedipal* and *absolute deterritorialization*, the former receiving the most consideration from Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* and the latter in *A Thousand Plateaus*. I describe what I believe to be *Evangelion*'s endorsement of an oedipal prescription criticized heavily by the authors, namely in the show's insistence on the familial determination of its central characters. I also argue that the series creates an analogue to absolute deterritorialization with the Human Instrumentality Project, a conspiracy to rid humanity of its embodied and isolated form. Aside from narrativizing the concept through characters and dialogue, *Evangelion* also takes advantage of the visual versatility of animation to produce a poignant artistic contemplation of absolute deterritorialization. In spite of this, the ultimate failure of Instrumentality and the way it is conceived in the series, I argue, is the result of *Evangelion*'s commitment to the oedipal triangle and its extensive philosophical implications with respect to the indispensability of the nuclear family. Beyond simply inserting this terminology into a study of the series, I hope to, as a corollary, demonstrate the utility of examining *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in relation to its relevance to visual media and storytelling. As a critique, the approach I take in this paper is to question some of the assumptions *Evangelion* appears to make and to, in turn, advance a convincing case for the importance of animation (as an art form and as an academic method) for the discussion and production of philosophical concepts.

Animations

In the edited volume *Animations (of Deleuze and Guattari)* (2003), Lawrence Grossberg defines the animation of the authors' thought as "a way of bending their work to one's own project, even as one allows one's project to be reoriented by their work."⁵ This interactive "taking up" of their philosophy, first proposed by Charles J.

Stivale in *The Two-Fold Thought of Deleuze and Guattari* (1998),⁶ is intended to encourage a creative and diverse engagement with their theory. The ambiguous nature of the term, as Grossberg points out, enables one to imagine that both Deleuze and Guattari's ideas and the phenomena to which they are applied are being brought to life in this process.⁷ Science fiction cultural products, in particular, seem to have inspired Deleuzo-Guattarian animations of many kinds, such as Stivale's reflections on the genre in his article "Mille/Punks/Cyber/Plateaus" (1991),⁸ Jennifer D. Slack's reading of *The Matrix* (2003),⁹ and Ronald Bogue's 2011 analysis of the novels of Octavia Butler with respect to Deleuze and Guattari's final joint project, *What Is Philosophy?* (1991).¹⁰

In spite of this, science fiction manga and anime remain comparatively neglected as a subject of academic animation. Steven T. Brown's discussion of Ôtomo Katsuhiro's manga *Akira* (1984-1993) perhaps resembles most closely Stivale and Grossberg's method. Brown examines *Akira* as an example of a rhizome, a term used by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* to denote non-hierarchical heterogeneities (as opposed to linear and fixed structures), thus calling attention to the manga's multiple interweaving narratives.¹¹ In a similar fashion, he touches upon Nakamura Ryûtarô's *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998) and its particular ability to depict the philosophers' notion of the abstract machine, a concept to which I will return later.¹² What follows is an attempt to demonstrate similar resonances between *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and *Evangelion*, particularly as the ambivalence and complexity with which the two works interact may inspire questions about the series' relationship to psychoanalytic orthodoxy.

***Evangelion* and the Oedipal**

In *Evangelion*, special attention is paid to character psychology and how the perilous circumstances of the series' diegesis affect it. Ikari Shinji (voiced by Ogata Megumi in Japanese), the show's protagonist and the son of NERV's commander Ikari Gendô (Tachiki Fumihiko), particularly faces a number of personal challenges (of, nonetheless, cosmic significance) as the pilot of the organization's most powerful mech, the Eva Unit-01. As the series approaches its close, Shinji and other lower-ranking NERV members discover that Gendô intends to initiate the Third Impact in collaboration with SEELE (who run NERV's operations as a kind of shadow government). The Third Impact, also referred to by SEELE as the Human Instrumentality Project, would, if successful, reduce all life on Earth to a primordial liquid state, merging human beings into a uniform substance (referred to as LCL) with no physical or psychological barriers.

In spite of the series' eschatological premise, most of the relevant conflict in *Evangelion* occurs on the relatively smaller scale of the characters' internal musings and strained interpersonal relationships. In her analysis of the show, Susan J. Napier notes:

[D]espite the requisite and truly chilling scenes of combat with the Angels, the series also contains a greater number of scenes in which the characters bicker and insult each other or else engage in intense brooding about their angst-ridden childhoods and their equally dysfunctional and disappointing parents.¹³

As Napier observes, the figure of the absent, disinterested, or mentally unstable parent is one of the most prominent character archetypes in *Evangelion*, epitomized by Gendô, who is consistently dismissive and cruel towards Shinji. Yui (Hayashibara Megumi), Shinji's (thought to be) dead mother, represents the maternal, nurturing foil

to this characterization. In her essay on the series, Mariana Ortega cites the motherly, feminine presence in *Evangelion* as one of its most crucial aspects, remarking on the “immutable psychic hold” the mother characters have on the child pilots.¹⁴ This is apparent in the portrayal of the supporting characters as well, such as in the case of Sôryû Asuka Langley (Miyamura Yûko), a mech pilot who appears to be motivated primarily by the repressed memories of her mother, whom she had lost to suicide. That being said, Shinji’s plotline explores this psychic hold especially literally with the revelation that, during an early experimental run of the mech, Yui’s soul had forever been absorbed into the Unit-01, an event to which Ortega refers as her transformation into the “all-mother,” thus emphasizing the nigh godly nature of the maternal role in *Evangelion*.¹⁵

With its marked focus on family strife and the manner in which parent-child conflict determines the psychological constitution of its characters, *Evangelion* evokes an eclectic array of psychoanalytic themes and concepts. The association is sometimes merely superficial, as in the case of certain technobabble parameters like “libido” and “destrudo,” measurements through which NERV monitor the physical condition of its pilots and Eva Units and which the series borrows from psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud¹⁶ and Edoardo Weiss¹⁷ respectively. In a more pertinent example, Ortega suggests a reading of *Evangelion* from the perspective of the “psychic struggles between ego and unconscious,” an interpretative model she likens to psychoanalyst Carl Jung’s idea of the shadow, the irrational and unknowable undertow of the human psyche.¹⁸ Ortega hints at the clearest expression of *Evangelion*’s psychoanalytic foundation further in her paper, where she describes Shinji’s relationship with Yui as symbolic of “oedipal desire.”¹⁹ Freud explores the notion of the Oedipus complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (first published in 1899), submitting it as a typical

experience of the unconscious drive (surfacing in dreams) to have sexual intercourse with one's mother and to kill one's father.²⁰ He prefaces this investigation of incestuous dreams by highlighting the part one's parents usually play in the development of psychological instability, particularly as it pertains to the "falling in love with one member of the parental couple and hatred of the other."²¹ In the same paragraph, Freud warns that this oedipal desire manifests itself only in an exaggerated form amongst neurotics and is otherwise present in a more controlled manner in the minds of most children.²² This is given further attention in "The Ego and the Id" (1923), where Freud asserts that "the effects of the first identifications made in earliest childhood will be general and lasting" to one's character, with the most important identification being with one's father.²³

It is this prioritization of the family relation that *Evangelion* mirrors in its psychologically driven narrative, making it a most fitting text with which to animate Deleuze and Guattari's critical commentary on the presuppositions of Freudian psychoanalysis. In *Anti-Oedipus*, the authors seek to contest what they refer to as the "familialism" of the discipline and the oedipal triangle as its core dogma.²⁴ In Brent Adkins' reading of *Anti-Oedipus*, he summarizes Deleuze and Guattari's main criticism of psychoanalysis as follows:

What Deleuze and Guattari object to in psychoanalysis is its attempt to apply both good sense and common sense to the unconscious. The common sense that they see being applied to the unconscious is the Oedipal drama whereby every component of both psychic and social life is refracted through the Oedipal triangle of 'mommy-daddy-me'.²⁵

As Deleuze and Guattari put it, the oedipal triangle represents "the familial constellation in person," suggesting that the nuclear family serves as the central unit that psychoanalysis assumes to govern each individual's subjectivity.²⁶ They go on to address the generalized, structural interpretation of the oedipal, articulated in the

Lacanian notions of the Imaginary and Symbolic, that they believe turns the familial triangle “into a kind of universal Catholic symbol,” functioning as a referent for all manner of social and ideological phenomena beyond just the unconscious psychosexual development of children.²⁷ Thus, “Oedipus” as a term in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* refers not only to the Oedipus complex as conceptualized by Freud but also to the broader totalizing effect of the reduction of human psychological activity to a mere representation of the family structure and its various permutations.

In accordance with this oedipal dogma, supporting *Evangelion*’s science fiction mythos is the inextricable connection between the characters and their parents, and, furthermore, the connection between these familial relations and the fate of the whole world, as Shinji must confront his position in the triangle head-on to reverse the effects of the Third Impact. Visually, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* reproduces the daddy-mommy-me formation in suggestive compositions, such as in one shot from the very first episode of the series (Fig. 1).

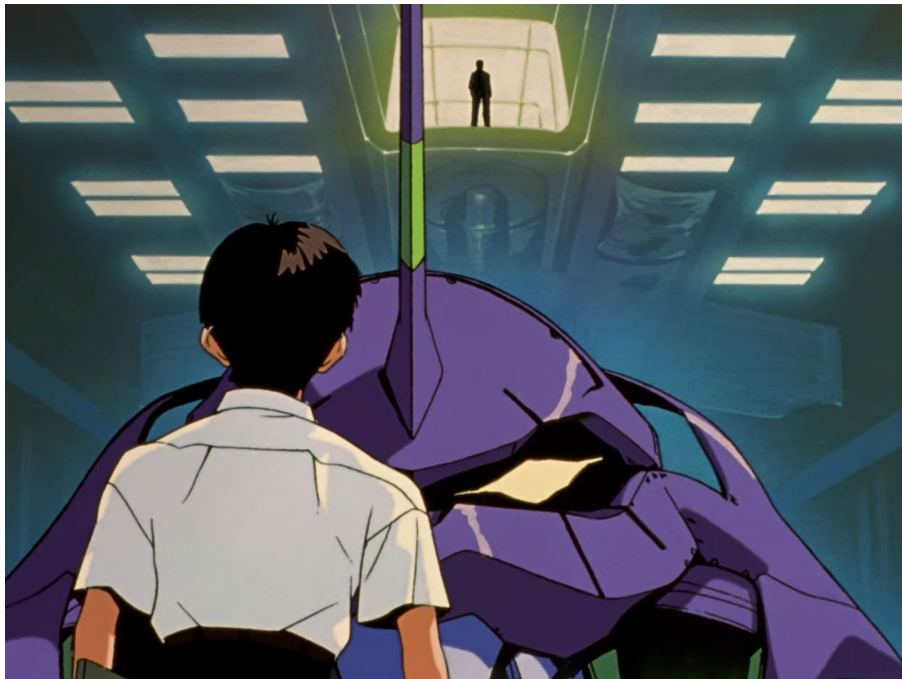


Fig. 1

In this scene, Shinji is brought to NERV's headquarters, where his heretofore estranged father demands of him to pilot the Unit-01, the head of which stands between them. Though Shinji and the viewer are oblivious to Yui's tie to the mech at this point, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* all but opens with a family portrait where the child can only look on impotently at the distant, authoritative silhouette of his father and the larger-than-life representation of his mother. On the level of dialogue, Gendô may be forcing Shinji inside his mother instead of acting as a figure of prohibition for the incestuous drive, as would be the case in most Freudian interpretations of the father-son relation.²⁸ However, the visual deification of motherhood and the parallel depiction of the father as an image of male dominance makes clear that Shinji's relationship to Yui may only proceed under Gendô's terms, as well as his supervision.

Moreover, Gendô's proactive role in oedipalizing his relationship to his son (by treating Shinji with disproportionate contempt and by knowingly psychologically binding him to Yui) calls to mind Deleuze and Guattari's observations about the father as initiator of the Oedipus complex. Faced with the "chicken or the egg" dilemma of whether Oedipus first arises in the child or the parents, they state that "the fact cannot be hidden that everything begins in the mind of the father: isn't that what you want, to kill me, to sleep with your mother?"²⁹ In opposition to the notion that an adversarial attitude towards the father emerges internally and spontaneously within the child, Deleuze and Guattari theorize that "Oedipus is first the idea of an adult paranoiac, before it is the childhood feeling of a neurotic."³⁰ The significance of this is in viewing the oedipal not as an innate manifestation of the structure of the child's unconscious, but as the result of a contingent social circumstance into which the father and child are both immersed and which the father (perhaps unwittingly) recreates.³¹ It is through Gendô's own machinations that he becomes alienated from Shinji and the

oedipal drama that plays out thereafter comes to resemble a self-fulfilling prophecy. While this is an interesting vantage point from which to interpret Gendô and Shinji's relationship, after considering the Human Instrumentality Project in more detail, I find that *Evangelion* eventually naturalizes the oedipal triangle and the parent-child dynamic as an essential and primary part of an individual's subject formation, contrary to Deleuze and Guattari's conclusions.

The Human Instrumentality Project as Absolute Deterritorialization

The commencement of the Third Impact and the Human Instrumentality Project represents the culmination of the last two episodes of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *The End of Evangelion*. SEELE conspires with Gendô to use the Eva Unit-01 in an apocalyptic ritual which would bring about the dissolution of the force field separating human beings from each other on a material and spiritual level, referred to in the series as a person's A.T. field. Once the field disappears, human beings no longer bear the burden of loneliness or social struggle, as they now complement each other entirely as a fully assimilated, formless unity (Fig. 2). Inspired by science fiction author Cordwainer Smith's concept of the Instrumentality of Mankind,³² the Human Instrumentality Project translates many of the prevailing concerns that the series has with human relationships into more abstract questions about the nature of existence and identity. Alongside the oedipal triangle, Instrumentality may help animate another important term from *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* – deterritorialization – in a demonstration of the anime medium's philosophical value.

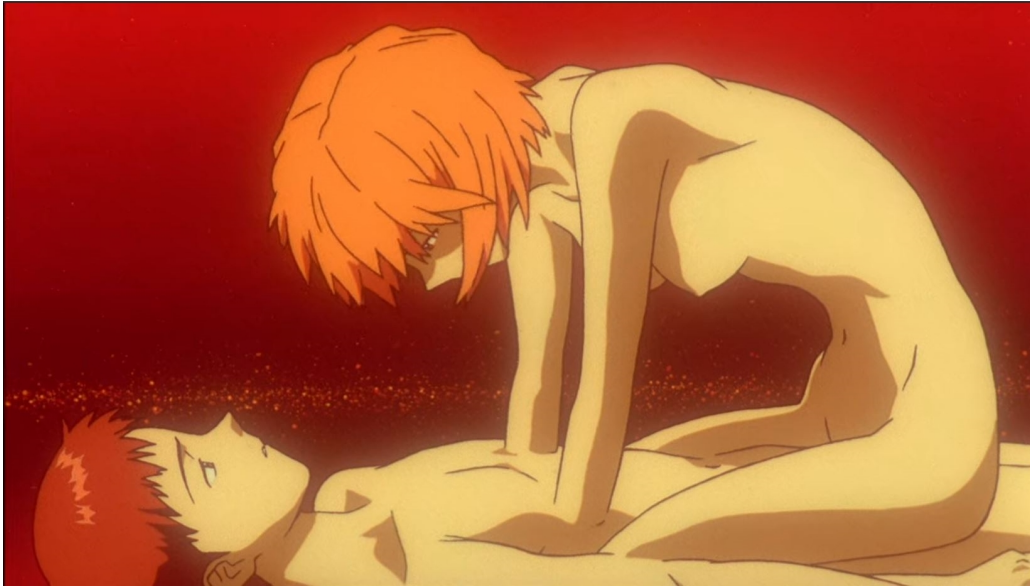


Fig. 2

The End of Evangelion: Shinji and Ayanami Rei (Hayashibara Megumi), another child pilot, melded to each other during Instrumentality

For Deleuze and Guattari, a territory forms when life, by way of self-organization, creates a more or less stable and distinct assortment (or assemblage) of connections. In her primer on Deleuze, Claire Colebrook defines this process in biological terms:

Light connects with plants to allow photosynthesis. Everything, from bodies to societies, is a form of territorialisation, or the connection of forces to produce distinct wholes. But alongside every territorialisation there is also the power of *detrterritorialisation*. The light that connects with the plant to allow it to grow also allows for the plant to become other than itself: too much sun will kill the plant, or perhaps transform it into something else [...] ³³

In other words, connections between interlinking entities assemble themselves into temporarily consistent formations up until the point they begin to change into a new, different territory. Deterritorialization denotes this process of disassembly and transformation. Mark Bonta and John Protevi explain that “[i]n plain language, deterritorialization is the process of leaving home, of altering your habits, of learning new tricks,” pointing to, in this definition, the applicability of the term to any instance of temporary destabilization and change.³⁴ Just as a stable assemblage of connections

is inevitably deterritorialized, however, so must its arrangement reterritorialize into a new stability. In the introductory chapter to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari provide an example, once again from nature:

How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image.³⁵

The orchid becomes deterritorialized because the presence of a wasp alters the connections it had previously established; it must now adapt to a new set of connections with the wasp. Simultaneously, however, these new connections are stabilizing the wasp as a discrete whole that lands on the orchid, reterritorializing it in the process. Colebrook cites a sociological example, as when a tribe dethrones a ruler, deterritorializing their social formation, but returns to the concept of “ruling” itself in the form of self-governance and leadership, reterritorializing the formation into modern individualism.³⁶ In clinical psychoanalysis, as understood by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, the creation and dismantling of territories occur in different ways for different disorders, such as in neurosis:

The neurotic is trapped within the residual or artificial territorialities of our society, and reduces all of them to Oedipus as the ultimate territoriality – as reconstructed in the analyst’s office and projected upon the full body of the psychoanalyst (yes, my boss is my father, and so is the Chief of State, and so are you, Doctor).³⁷

Here, Deleuze and Guattari appear to suggest that psychoanalysis establishes a territoriality of its own in the oedipal, offering it as a readymade framework into which a troubled subject may reterritorialize themselves as a child in disharmony with their parent. Just as the adult paranoiac, already immersed in this ultimate territoriality, apprehends their relationship to the child in oedipal terms, so does the analysand

come to understand and reconstruct the social world around them as a familialist assemblage.

The only state which could theoretically escape reterritorialization is one of absolute deterritorialization, a phrase Deleuze and Guattari reserve for “a liberation of all connection or organisation,” that is, for the hypothetical transition of life into a condition devoid of separated entities constantly de- and reforming in order to connect with each other.³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari speak of absolute deterritorialization as “the creation of a new earth,”³⁹ as well as an abstract state of deindividuation:

I no longer have any secrets, having lost my face, form, and matter [...] One has been saved by and for love, by abandoning love and self. Now one is no more than an abstract line, like an arrow crossing the void. Absolute deterritorialization. One has become like everybody/the whole world (*tout le monde*), but in a way that can become like everybody/the whole world.⁴⁰

In this excerpt from *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the essay “The Crack-Up” (1936) by F. Scott Fitzgerald, commenting on the author’s description of a deterritorializing “clean break” with a current state of affairs from which one can never return.⁴¹ In Fitzgerald’s case, this clean break entailed a complete reinvention of himself and his attitude toward his life after an extended period of depression and ennui.⁴² By likening it to the author’s account of breaking away from a previous (and now irretrievable) state of mind, Deleuze and Guattari imply that absolute deterritorialization cannot be reversed. Elsewhere in *A Thousand Plateaus*, absolute deterritorialization, as the liberation of connections, involves the relativizing of distinctions between entities and a new emphasis on fluidity, the “dissolution of forms,” and the acceptance of continuity, such as the changeability of language and communication.⁴³

Following this explanation of absolute deterritorialization, I propose that the concept bears a noteworthy resemblance to *Evangelion's* Human Instrumentality Project. In episode 25 of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Shinji experiences Instrumentality for the first time as the outline of his body begins to blur. We hear his inner monologue: “What’s this sensation? I think I’ve felt it before. Like the lines of my body are melting away. It feels nice. It’s like I’m getting bigger, spreading out.” Shinji feels himself becoming deterritorialized, the assemblage of his body loosening as he becomes “like everybody/the whole world.” As Brown points out, the Human Instrumentality Project appears to fulfil a desire for disembodiment “in order to create room for the next step up the evolutionary (and spiritual) ladder.”⁴⁴ As with absolute deterritorialization, the Human Instrumentality Project creates a new earth. With the eradication of the A.T. field, human beings become coextensive with the planet’s surface, existing not as disparate subjects attempting to connect with each other, but as a self-sufficient flow of consciousnesses. It is important to note that, while Shinji’s cognitive and sensorial experience of Instrumentality is described very vaguely, it appears that he does retain some capacity to think, feel, and reflect, indicating that the sea of LCL may be fluid, but not necessarily entirely homogenous. While commenting on movements towards the absolute deterritorialization of language, Deleuze and Guattari clarify that “[a]bsolute, however, does not mean undifferentiated: differences, now ‘infinitely small’, are constituted in a single matter [...]”⁴⁵ While mankind is liquefied into a single matter (LCL), the conceit of the Human Instrumentality Project (of achieving total complementarity among the human species) seems to imply that there must exist forces (or “intensities,” in Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology⁴⁶) to complement other forces or flows. More so than via dialogue, *The End of Evangelion* suggests this visually, as silhouettes of human bodies spiral as a single, but infinitesimally differentiated substance (Fig. 3).

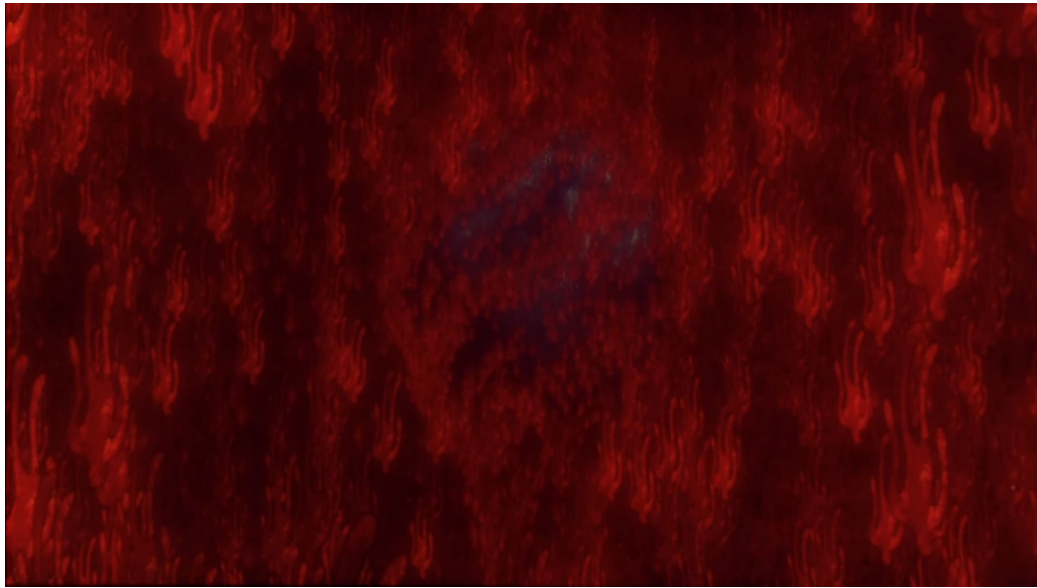


Fig. 3

Boy with Machine

As opposed to relative deterritorialization and reterritorialization (with specific examples ranging from plant growth and decay to political revolutions), absolute deterritorialization functions more as a thought experiment than anything Deleuze and Guattari seem to observe in the physical world. Colebrook's reading of absolute deterritorialization maintains that it "does not exist in fact, but can only be thought,"⁴⁷ while Bonta and Protevi conclude that its success simply "can never be guaranteed."⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari do not conceive of absolute deterritorialization as a transcendent phenomenon possible only on a different plane of existence and concede that it must necessarily coexist with relative deterritorialization (which is inherently entangled with reterritorialization), thus baking a paradox into the concept.⁴⁹ To compare the Human Instrumentality Project to absolute deterritorialization is, therefore, to presuppose its impossibility outside of philosophical or fictional ideation. That said, the importance of animating absolute deterritorialization lies not in its translation into actuality, but in its capacity to help us embrace change and flux. Colebrook, for

instance, thinks of it as less of “a philosophical theory than [...] as a challenge to think the return of the new, over and over again.”⁵⁰ Absolute deterritorialization, as a concept, is a crucial part of an affirming philosophy of the transformative properties of life. *Evangelion* utilizes the singular creative capability of animation as a medium to produce movement, connection, and differentiation simultaneously in order to forward this philosophical challenge.

I have already touched upon how the series emphasizes certain narrative developments through visual intervention, such as in the oedipal composition that introduces us to the Ikari family or the complex formation of the ocean of LCL. However, it is the last two episodes of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* that underline the series’ dedication to animation as a philosophically expressive art form. In the final episode, the supporting characters present Shinji and the viewer with the Human Instrumentality Project in a highly abstract style, using conspicuous animation techniques and formal experimentation to visualize the metaphysical repercussions of the sinister plot. Shinji is thrown into a blank space where he floats without direction (Fig. 4) and is told in voice-over by Asuka and Rei that he is in a free, unrestrained, but empty world. Gendô, also appearing in voice-over, tells his son that he will “give [him] a constraint” before a line appears on screen, providing Shinji with a floor on which to stand (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4

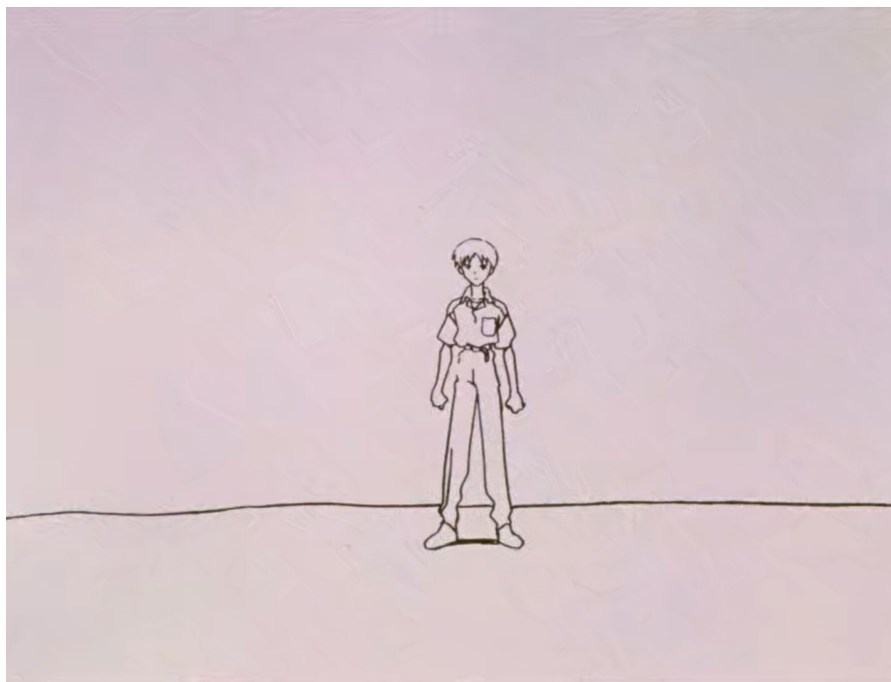


Fig. 5

During this episode, Shinji loses his bodily form several times as the outline of his figure transforms into basic shapes that shift and expand. He feels as though he is

becoming indistinct, stating that “the being that is *me* is fading away.” Asuka and Rei, still off-screen, continue to guide him through the experience, stating that what he believes to be himself is a subject that is determined by the existence of others; it is only by imagining others as individual subjects that one can, in turn, live as an individual subject. Rei adds that “the first ‘other’ is your mother,” suggesting that one’s contact with one’s mother is the first instance of this identity formation. Shinji is rendered as minimalistic line art that cannot stop metamorphosing in order to communicate this very idea – that without a rigid metaphysical division between subjects (which is precisely what Instrumentality deterritorializes), identification becomes impossible and the self is plunged into meaningless chaos.

Napier approaches the topic of animetic metamorphosis and flux as she traces the history of eschatological iconography in Japanese visual media (such as in the *Akira* film), noting how the apocalypse is often depicted as simultaneously fearsome and appealing:

[In anime] the “visual excesses of catastrophe” becomes a kind of aesthetic end in itself. The protean quality of the animation medium, with its emphasis on image, speed, and fluctuation is perfect for depicting this. [...] Freed from the restraints of language and live-action cinema, the abstract visual medium of animation works brilliantly to “convey the unconveyable”.⁵¹

According to Napier, animation is uniquely adept at producing fictional cataclysmic events, especially when they approach the limit of what the viewer is capable of absorbing through language. While the characters in *Evangelion* do verbally describe what Instrumentality is and how it feels, it is the image of Shinji’s warping body and of the outlining of his world (as though an animator were drawing it in real time) that supplies the events of the Third Impact with their philosophical weight. Napier’s use of the word “protean” is particularly fitting here, as it is important to continually stress

the mutable state of absolute deterritorialization. Similarly, in his discussion of the final episode of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in *The Anime Machine* (2009), Thomas Lamarre analyses Shinji's fluctuating self-conception as a kind of psychological diagram achievable principally through animation:

The last episode [...], in order to put us inside Ikari Shinji's thoughts and feelings, puts us inside animation. Existential crisis is technical crisis, and vice versa. The animation reminds us that this crisis is not just about a subjective point of view. Rather the animation gives us an exploded view of the psyche.⁵²

In an exploded projection of a structure or mechanism, its individual components are arrayed in order of assembly, floating next to each other in a way that enables one to see clearly and systematically how they are to be put back together. Simply put, Shinji's deterritorialization is reduced to its bare visual essentials, and his experience of Instrumentality is explained in a way that necessitates an animetic approach.

Lamarre also emphasizes the flatness of Anno Hideaki's limited animation method, which relies heavily on manipulating and sliding layers of celluloid to create movement, as opposed to creating fluid character motion through increasing the number of character cels displayed per second. This creates the effect of "[pushing] depth and movement to the surface of the image,"⁵³ as the different planes of the image (e.g. character and background) become destratified and contribute equally in generating motion. Furthermore, the movement thus produced in the last episode of *Evangelion* becomes "inoperative" – that is, the manner in which characters leap between cuts emphasizes states of contemplation or inner crisis. The rapid editing between close-ups, intertitles, and recut scenes from previous episodes in the series, as well as Shinji's transformations, are not techniques that signify purposeful character action, as much as they convey disorientation and disembodiment. Lamarre likens this to the time-image, a concept Deleuze explores in his two-volume work on

film (*Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* [first published in 1983 and 1985 respectively]).⁵⁴ This simultaneous flattening effect of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s limited animation and the protean nature of its minimalist rendition of the characters may also be comparable with the plane of consistency, as described in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

Continuum of intensities, combined emission of particles or signs-particles, conjunction of deterritorialized flows: these are the three factors proper to the plane of consistency; they are brought about by the abstract machine and are constitutive of destratification.⁵⁵

The plane of consistency is the fundamental metaphysical concept grounding Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, as a non-hierarchical, immanent plane towards which absolute deterritorialization ultimately aspires. Its otherwise most counter-intuitive, yet foundational qualities – the simultaneity of destratification and differentiation – are animated by *Evangelion* on both a technical (as Lamarre demonstrates) and thematic level.

While it is the ending of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* that represents the most formally interesting articulation of absolute deterritorialization in the series, it is also the point at which the setup for Shinji's inevitable rejection of it is established. Through Shinji's consternated exchange with the off-screen characters, *Evangelion* returns to its oedipal determinism, proposing to the viewer that subjectivation, the fabrication of a unified, static subject, begins at the familial level. It is, after all, Gendô who draws the line upon which Shinji walks and on which he bases his sense of direction in the world, to say nothing of the mother being the prototypal other according to Rei. In *The End of Evangelion*, the soul of Shinji's mother speaks to him during the Third Impact, bestowing upon him the ability to reverse the effects of the Human Instrumentality Project. In line with the philosophy of identity *Evangelion* seems to adopt, Shinji decides to do so, reasoning that he wants to stay on the Earth

he knew and where he could see his loved ones once more as individual people. In the final scene of the film, he and Asuka return to their embodied form on a post-apocalyptic shore surrounded by residual LCL. In effect, Shinji reterritorializes the world, returning it not to a state identical to pre-Instrumentality, but to a different territoriality comprised, still, of assemblages and connections. Shinji's distress at the Human Instrumentality Project appears to come from his vision of himself and others as fixed subjects, a vision of which he is robbed as the separating agent of the A.T. field vanishes.

Deleuze and Guattari take significant issue with this view of subjectivation, stating that “there is no fixed subject unless there is repression,” thus implying that any efforts to stabilize or define a subject are innately artificial and restrictive.⁵⁶ Instead of as subjects or structures, Deleuze and Guattari prefer to think of the active and self-organizing forces in the world as machines. In *Molecular Revolution* (first published in 1977), Guattari offers “machine” as a term meant to aid us in envisioning a system of interactions that bypasses the subject, operating beside, but independently of it, not unlike how a literal machine performs its function automatically, without any input from the worker who mans it.⁵⁷ Brown's analysis of *Serial Experiments Lain* addresses this directly:

At its most provocative, cyberpunk anime such as *Serial Experiments Lain* demystify the workings of abstract machines – such as the family, the school, the city, the media, and the Internet – foregrounding their operations so that they are no longer simply taken for granted.⁵⁸

In this reading, *Serial Experiments Lain* and its focus on digital communication exposes the machinic nature of the social world as it is always dominated by dynamic and often uncontrollable webs of technologically-mediated connections.

Though machines, in this sense, do not necessarily relate to technological automata, Deleuze and Guattari themselves also welcome this association in their analysis of a painting and the frontispiece of *Anti-Oedipus*: Richard Lindner's *Boy with Machine* (Fig. 6): "[T]he turgid little boy has already plugged a desiring-machine into a social machine, short-circuiting the parents, who can only intervene as agents of production and antiproduction in one case as in the other."⁵⁹

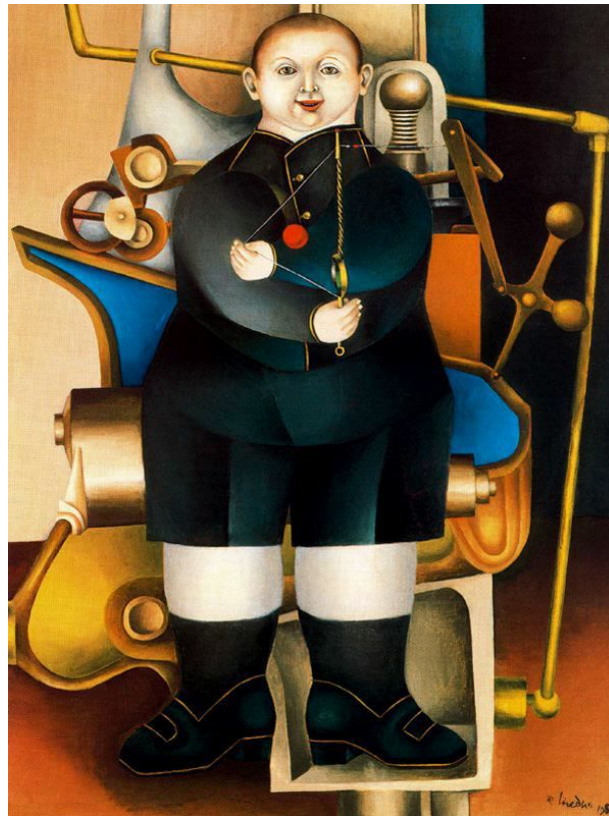


Fig. 6

The authors use *Boy with Machine* to prompt the reader to imagine a child with a technical apparatus (representing his desire to create connections) which he joins to a larger machine (representing the complexities of social life) with no parental mediator. The mother and father may enter the picture only after the fact, not as invariable determinants, but as producers of connections in their own right. By contrast, *Evangelion's* "boy with machine" is permitted to exist solely as a subject delimited at

all sides by his parents. Shinji's machine is not a contraption he handles as a direct link to the world around him and through which he channels his productive desire. Instead, Shinji resides inside of his mother-machine, the Eva Unit-01, and it is only within her, as her pilot, that he is able to do anything of consequence and defend the human race (Fig. 7). As Ortega writes, "[j]ust as the Evas [...] have absorbed the women, they in turn absorb their children back into these mechanical hybrid bodies."⁶⁰ When Shinji enters his mech, he re-establishes himself as interminably connected to his mother; he reverts to the ultimate territoriality of the oedipal triangle. Because of the dependence of his (and every other character's) identity on the daddy-mommy-me formation, *Evangelion* denies the possibility of absolute deterritorialization, finding its antinomies not in the inevitability of reterritorialization, but in the Human Instrumentality Project's obliteration of oedipal subjects.



Fig. 7

The End of Evangelion: Shinji screaming inside the cockpit of the Unit-01

Conclusion

Capitalism and Schizophrenia introduces a rich and widely practicable philosophical lexicon, as well as an essential critical appraisal of the basic tenets of

psychoanalysis. In an effort to animate this lexicon, as Deleuze and Guattari scholars have done previously with other science fiction media, I have attempted to unite the challenges to familialism from *Anti-Oedipus* and the theory of absolute deterritorialization from *A Thousand Plateaus* to produce a philosophical analysis of *Evangelion*. The series conforms to the oedipal in its construction of characters who rely on their parents and parent figures to make sense of themselves as subjects. Shinji is entirely driven by the anxious relationship he has with his father and by the absence of his mother; he cannot escape his place in the oedipal triangle even while fulfilling his role as a child soldier fending for himself, as the mech that is supposed to be under his command actually houses the psyche of his mother. Like in psychoanalytic theory, this canonization of the oedipal has a deep effect on subjectivation in the series and film, where individuality and separation are preferred to flux, assimilation, and continuity, as represented by Instrumentality.

The intention of correlating the Human Instrumentality Project to the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of absolute deterritorialization is to expand upon the notion of the oedipal as the ultimate territoriality in *Evangelion*. In other words, I proffer that Shinji (and, by extension, *Evangelion* as such) rejects Instrumentality due to its potential to deterritorialize the idea of the fixed subject, without which the series' broader philosophy of identity formation via the oedipal triangle cannot endure. In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, this happens on the level of animation itself, as Shinji is stripped of the visual landmarks that usually define his character (such as his color palette, the background, or, indeed, the full outline of his figure). In *The End of Evangelion*, the specifics of the Human Instrumentality Project are fleshed out in more detail than in the concluding episodes of the show, but the reasons Shinji renounces it are the same: he wishes to exist in a world with defined, territorialized subjects. In sum,

Evangelion's position on familialist subjectivation manifests itself as Shinji's incapability to picture himself as anything but an individual amongst other individuals, all of whom exist as the product of the mother as the first differentiating other. As a result, *Evangelion* provides the viewer with a singular, medium-specific image of absolute deterritorialization, only to eventually eject it from the realm of the thinkable.

As Napier acknowledges, the medium of animation may be able to convey otherwise “unconveyable” scenarios of destruction and apocalyptic spectacle, as well as narrative occurrences irreducible to language. If, however, *Evangelion* is to be judged based on its treatment of the concept of a Deleuzo-Guattarian new earth, the series appears to regard any aspiration towards deterritorialization as tantamount to complete personal annihilation. *Evangelion* chooses to stop at the point at which it is most philosophically and visually challenging, revealing a reluctance to think a truly radically different and deterritorialized future of humankind. Shinji's decision, celebrated in the show as a moment of personal growth, in reality signifies a reconciliation with the oedipal, as well as its cyclical perpetuation, with Shinji and Asuka as the new primeval father and mother. Nonetheless, the series' value in terms of offering a depiction of these sophisticated philosophical ideas persists regardless of whether they are ultimately dismissed. Thus, the role of *Evangelion* in animating the theory of Deleuze and Guattari remains somewhat ambivalent – as simultaneously successful in communicating a radically new conception of humanity, while lacking in any recognition of the merits of such a universe.

Notes

¹ *Shinseiki Evangerion*, dir. Anno Hideaki (1995-1996); translated as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*; available on Netflix. Accessed 22 April 2020.

² *Shinseiki Evangerion gekijô-ban: Air/Magokoro o, kimi ni*, dir. Anno Hideaki and Tsurumaki Kazuya (1997); translated as *The End of Evangelion*; available on Netflix. Accessed 19 June 2020.

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: The Athlone Press, 1983).

⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁵ Lawrence Grossberg, "Animations, Articulations, and Becomings: An Introduction," in *Animations (of Deleuze and Guattari)*, ed. Jennifer D. Slack (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 3.

⁶ Charles J. Stivale, *The Two-Fold Thought of Deleuze and Guattari: Intersections and Animations* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1998).

⁷ Grossberg, "Animations, Articulations, and Becomings," 3.

⁸ Charles J. Stivale, "Mille/Punks/Cyber/Plateaus: Science Fiction and Deleuzo-Guattarian 'Becomings,'" *SubStance* 20, no. 3 (1991): 66-84.

⁹ Jennifer D. Slack, "Everyday Matrix: Becoming Adolescence," in *Animations (of Deleuze and Guattari)*, ed. Jennifer D. Slack (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 9-29.

¹⁰ Ronald Bogue, "Deleuze and Guattari and the Future of Politics: Science Fiction, Protocols and the People to Come," *Deleuze Studies* 5, supplement (2011): 83-84.

¹¹ Steven T. Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk: Posthumanism in Japanese Visual Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 8-10.

¹² Steven T. Brown, "Screening Anime," in *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*, ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-19.

¹³ Susan J. Napier, *Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 211.

¹⁴ Mariana Ortega, "My Father, He Killed Me; My Mother, She Ate Me: Self, Desire, Engendering, and the Mother in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*," *Mechademia* 2 (December 2007): 224.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 1.

¹⁷ Eric Berne, *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), 90.

¹⁸ Ortega, "My Father," 222.

¹⁹ Ibid., 227.

²⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 224.

²¹ Ibid., 221.

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- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960), 26.
- ²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 51.
- ²⁵ Brent Adkins, *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 9.
- ²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 51.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 52.
- ²⁸ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 27.
- ²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 273.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 274.
- ³¹ Ibid., 275.
- ³² Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 226.
- ³³ Claire Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002), xxii.
- ³⁴ Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 78.
- ³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 10.
- ³⁶ Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, xxiii.
- ³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 35.
- ³⁸ Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, xxiii.
- ³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 510.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 199-200.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up," in *The Crack-Up*, ed. Edmund Wilson (New York: New Directions Books, 1945), 81-82.
- ⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 109.
- ⁴⁴ Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 226.
- ⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 109.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.
- ⁴⁷ Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 164.
- ⁴⁸ Bonta and Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy*, 78-79.
- ⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 510.

⁵⁰ Colebrook, *Understanding Deleuze*, 184.

⁵¹ Napier, *Anime*, 198.

⁵² Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 182.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 70.

⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 26.

⁵⁷ Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 112.

⁵⁸ Brown, "Screening Anime," 5.

⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 358.

⁶⁰ Ortega, "My Father," 224.

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