

Mechapocalypse: Tracing Gundam's Global Appeal and Fandom

Anthony Dominguez

Volume 3, 240-263

Abstract: In 1988, Tomino Yoshiyuki released *Char's Counterattack*, the filmic conclusion to the nine year saga he had begun with the original anime series, *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979). Set in a distant and alternate future where war is fought in giant humanoid robots known as "mobile suits," *Char's Counterattack* centers on the final battle between the Democratic Earth Federation and the fascist Neo Zeon Empire. This essay examines *Char's Counterattack* as its own watershed moment for the *Gundam* franchise wherein *Gundam* would begin to spin-off into multiple media and other franchises, including more anime and films, but also manga, toys, novels, and later video games, all of which would be exported throughout the world, giving rise to *Gundam's* global popularity. In reading the explosion of the *Gundam* franchise alongside its roots in the genre of "real robot" anime, this essay postulates that the destruction of real robots in *Char's Counterattack* allegorizes the concept of Cool Japan. In doing so, this essay traces the production and exportation of *Gundam's* media to both East Asia in the 1980s and North America in the early aughts, thereby repositioning the pivotal role *Char's Counterattack* plays in the growth of otaku culture alongside other works in the anime canon, such as *Akira* (1988) and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995).

Keywords: Science-Fiction, Japan, Anime, Robot, Fandom

Author Bio: Anthony Dominguez is a PhD candidate in Cinema Studies at NYU Tisch. He holds an MA in Film Studies from The Graduate Center City University of New York, and a BA in English and Film from the University at Albany. His research includes urban screens; Japanese media; Black nerd culture; and the late-cinema of Jean-Luc Godard.

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Generic License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Glossary

Cool Japan: A period roughly set between 1980 and 2011 wherein Japan became a cultural superpower through the exportation of its pop-culture, including anime, manga, toys, and videogames.

Gunpla: A portmanteau of the words “Gundam” and “Plastic” used in reference towards *Gundam* model kits.

Izubuchi Yutaka: A mechanical designer of real robots. Izubuchi Yutaka worked on both the *Patlabor* and *Gundam* franchise.

Mobile Suit: The diegetic term used in the *Gundam* franchise to refer to giant-robots.

Mobile Suit Gundam: The original *Gundam* show released in 1979. *Mobile Suit Gundam* centers on Amuro Ray and the efforts of the joint military-civilian ship White Base to flee the Zeonic empire and arrive to the safety of planet Earth. Along the way, Amuro establishes a rivalry with fellow pilot and enemy, Char Aznable.

Mobile Suit Gundam: Char’s Counterattack: The filmic conclusion to the Amuro Ray and Char Aznable saga. Once again, the story centers on the war and final battle between the forces of the Earth Federation and the Zeonic Empire.

Model Kit: A plastic model that needs to be assembled from smaller individual pieces. Common model kits include military weaponry, civilian vehicles, and anime robots.

Newtype: A special being in the *Gundam* franchise who has awakened to a sixth-sense. Newtypes have been shown to be capable of telepathy and precognition .

Real Robot: A sub-genre of anime focusing on the realistic depiction of robots. Real robots follow the laws of science whether those laws are real or fictional.

Super Robot: A sub-genre of anime focusing on the fantastical depiction of robots. Super robots don't follow the laws of science but rather operate by magic.

Tomino Yoshiyuki: The creator, director, and author of the early *Gundam* franchise and its multimedia.

Universal Century: The primary setting for *Gundam*'s larger metanarrative. The early *Gundam* shows, including *Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Zeta Gundam*, and *Char's Counterattack*, are all set within the Universal Century.

Introduction

When scholars and critics trace the popularity of contemporary anime, Otomo Katsuhiro's *Akira* (1988) and Anno Hideaki's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) are often chosen as the starting points. For instance, Christopher Bolton reads the nuclear explosion that begins *Akira* as a metaphor of a concurrent “watershed moment in the history of anime.”¹ Similarly, Andreu Ballus and Alba G. Torrents view *Evangelion* as an “absent point of origin,” one whose repeating and unstable narrative make it a first of its kind.² Ballus and Torrents, however, also admit that their positioning of *Evangelion* as a point of origin threatens to disrupt a chronological history of anime.³ With my work here, I intervene to establish Tomino Yoshiyuki's *Mobile Suit Gundam: Char's Counterattack* (1988) as a different point of origin.

Despite being released only four months before *Akira*, *Char's Counterattack* functions as the conclusion to the nine-year narrative that Tomino Yoshiyuki had been developing since the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979) anime, rather than being its own stand-alone film. Although sequels and spin-offs to *Char's Counterattack* continue to be released, I wish to demonstrate that, much like Bolton views *Akira*, *Char's Counterattack* represents its own critical point in anime history. I argue that in its production as a multimedia franchise and its roots as a “real-robot” anime, *Char's Counterattack* reflects the transformation of Japanese otaku culture into a global phenomenon, allegorizing the emergence of Cool Japan.

Cool Japan and the History of Gundam

During the 1980s, Japan saw its economy greatly expand and flourish. Manufacturing corporations like Honda, Toyota, and Nissan had grown to be the largest producers of automobiles with forty percent of their vehicles being exported to America

and Europe,⁴ and it was during this same time that Japan would also be dubbed the “Robot Kingdom,” as a celebration for Japan’s leading role in developing industrial robotics.⁵ Although Japan’s economic bubble would burst in 1991, Douglas McGray demonstrates that by 2001, Japan would still remain a cultural superpower through the exportation of pop-culture, such as *Pokémon*, *Hello Kitty*, and *Gundam*, otherwise known as Cool Japan.⁶

As a part of the Cool Japan phenomenon, *Gundam* builds a global fandom through its multimedia production and inclusion of otaku protagonists. Like *Evangelion* after it, *Gundam* has long eschewed a singular narrative and instead emphasizes a rhizomatic storyline told through a mix of media including anime, films, novels, manga, video games, and toys. These narratives and their respective mediums either retell the same story, or shed new light on plot details. For instance, *Char’s Counterattack* itself is a filmic adaptation of Yoshiyuki’s novel *High-Streamers* (1987), and Yoshiyuki would later transform his rejected script for *Char’s Counterattack* into another novel titled *Beltorchika’s Children* (1988). Then that same year, *Beltorchika’s Children* would be adapted into an audio drama, and in 2014, the *Beltorchika’s Children* novel would be adapted into a manga of the same name. Consequently, *Gundam*’s focus on using multimedia to both tell a more expansive story while also inviting fans to participate within the narrative then long precipitates the similar production process of other canonized anime such as *Akira*, *Evangelion*, and *Ghost in the Shell*.

Gundam’s production thereby caters to a particular type of otaku: the devoted fan who consumes *Gundam*’s narrative through these products.⁷ These same otaku may find themselves able to relate to the protagonists of *Gundam*, such as Amuro Ray, who unlike many previous heroes in sci-fi anime, is a young teenager who begins as an

introverted engineer before becoming a soldier and war hero: characteristics that make Amuro relatable and aspirational.⁸

In his analysis of the *Star Trek* (1966) fanbase, Henry Jenkins argues for a new way of understanding fans wherein fans “actively shape the flow of media as insiders.”⁹ Jenkins locates this process of convergence within early blogging culture, which allowed users the right to participate within media while also dictating how they consume media.¹⁰ Though their chosen medium differs, fans of gunpla (a portmanteau of the words “Gundam” and “plastic” used in reference towards *Gundam* model kits) or other *Gundam* merchandise, still function as one such type of transmedia storyteller. By restaging their own version of *Gundam* events through gunpla figures, discussing *Gundam* in specialty magazines or online forums, or even being given the agency to participate in *Gundam* narratives through video games, like Yoshiyuki rewriting the narrative of *Char’s Counterattack* across various media, otaku too are also given the opportunity to create their own new stories that overlap with official material.

In an interview with scholar Ian Condry, Masao Ueda—a producer who worked on the original *Gundam*—stated that encouraging otaku to be transmedia storytellers has always been integral to the success of *Gundam* as a multimedia franchise. Condry himself argues that this in turn transforms *Gundam* from a platform of consumption into one of participation.¹¹ While Condry acknowledges that *Gundam*’s darker and more complex storyline worked in attracting older audiences and making *Gundam* a success, he ultimately avoids examining the narrative elements of *Gundam* in order to analyze how fandoms in the “outside world” influence the franchise’s development.¹² Yet, by examining *Gundam*’s narrative *alongside* the production of its multimedia, we can understand how *Gundam* inspires fans to create their own narratives. Consequently,

Gundam's multimedia invites transmedia storytellers to participate within the international *Gundam* community, thus shifting Japan's popularity beyond the borders of just Japan. As I'll demonstrate later on, fan participation within *Gundam*'s narrative becomes key to its popularity outside of Japan, including the West.

In establishing the popularity of *Gundam* in East Asia, Alex S.L. Tsang traces the development of *Gundam*'s model kit culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. By 1980, *Gundam* had attracted a fervent fanbase in Hong Kong, culminating in the creation of *Model Kit World* – a specialty magazine dedicated to gunplas – in 1990.¹³ As Tsang points out, the 1980s were the golden age for the model kit market, reflecting Japan's economic boom.¹⁴ Although this meant that the model kit market would also experience its own recession during the 1990s, the hobby's enduring popularity stemming from its relationship to *Gundam* demonstrates the strength of Cool Japan. In the case of gunplas, however, their production also signaled *Gundam*'s participation in the overall global market. As Condry mentions in his own field trip report to Bandai's headquarters in Tokyo, Japan's economic collapse during the 1990s would force the manufacturing process for gunplas to shift from Tokyo to "China, Thailand, and other low-wage countries in Asia."¹⁵ If these elements of global trade within *Gundam*'s production and distribution make it a part of Cool Japan, then *Gundam* also demonstrates the metaphorical disappearance of Japan's border through the convergence and globalization of Japanese anime and pop-culture.¹⁶

Robots and Borders

Eric Cazdyn argues that Tsukamoto Shinya's *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989) and Oshii Mamoru's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) are two science-fiction films concerning the body and subjectivity that ultimately portray "the problem of a globalized system in which

nations are steadily losing their sovereignty.¹⁷” Cazdyn also illustrates how *Tetsuo* and *Ghost* allegorize the destabilizing of Japan through the erasure of subjectivity. In both these films, characters experience the mutation of their bodies into a technologized other, wherein flesh becomes infused with metal in the case of *Tetsuo*, or the flesh has become entirely absent in the case of *Ghost*. For Cazdyn, these depictions of cyborgs “stress how individual and biological events are simultaneously social and political events.¹⁸” Consequently, he contends, the breakdown of the body in *Tetsuo* and *Ghost* cannot be divorced from national events, such as the Japanese economic crisis, or censorship and secrecy surrounding Emperor Hirohito’s cancer by the late 1980s—the time period when both these films were being produced.¹⁹

Although Cazdyn’s argument roots itself within discourses regarding cyborgs, it also fits within a framework regarding the “real-robot” genre. For instance, Susan Napier contends that although imagery in mecha anime focuses on machinery, narratives are given tension by their own focus on the human inside the machinery. The tension between the opposing elements of the armored machine body and the more fragile human body thus establishes the vulnerability of the latter.²⁰ Thus in mecha anime, despite their differing characteristics, humans within machines are not two separate entities but rather one conjoined body.

Building upon Cazdyn’s argument, Mika Ko sees the body as a symbol for the Japanese border. Analyzing the films of Miike Takashi, Ko puts forth that the lack of bodily integrity in Takashi’s films demonstrates a criticism of Japanese homogeneity. Often centered on characters of multiple ethnicities, including half-Japanese or half-Chinese characters. Takashi’s films frequently highlight the collapse of the body’s boundaries through violence inflicted upon it, thereby demonstrating the fragmentation

of Japanese identity.²¹ While the *Gundam* franchise does not aim to critique Japanese identity as other contemporaries did, the basis for Ko's argument can be reworked to demonstrate how the *Gundam* franchise does indeed demonstrate the link between the body and the border.

In particular, like *Tetsuo* and *Ghost*, the *Gundam* franchise also concerns itself with the loss of subjectivity in the face of technological advancement and the vulnerability of the human body. A key element of the *Gundam* narrative involves the birth of "Newtypes," humans who develop a sixth sense as a result of being born in space and living through the pressures of war.²² Newtypes serve as the main characters of the franchise and participate at the forefront of war. The abilities of a Newtype (which itself remains purposely vague), however, often leads to characters experiencing guilt and shame from piloting their mobile suits and killing other human beings. The subjectivity of pilots becomes deeply connected to the physicality of their mobile suits. In this regard, the characters of *Gundam* embody the cyborg figure, while the suturing, decapitation, and destruction of these real robots reflect the breakdown of the human body, and thus, Japan's border, much like this figure does in *Tetsuo* and *Ghost*.

By defining the real-robot genre of anime wherein the bodies of robots break down, thereby reflecting the breakdown of pilots' subjectivity, the *Gundam* franchise serves as an allegory for the "disappearance" of Japan during the advent of globalization at the turn of the 1990s. This disappearance presents itself in both the narrative of *Char's Counterattack* and in the multimedia production of the *Gundam* franchise, including gunplas, video games, and other side material, a point I'll be returning to later.

Defining Real Robots

The real robot sub-genre contrasts its sibling counterpart “super-robot.” One notable primary difference between the two genres is that the real robot is grounded in realistic plots, while the super robot has more of a penchant for the fantastical.²³ In “super robot” anime, for instance, pilots shout the name of their attacks, robots combine to form bigger robots, and narrative stakes are always exponentially higher. Super robots also tend to run on mystical sources of energy, their maintenance never becomes a narrative focal point, and their inner-workings remain a mystery.²⁴ While early “super robot” anime also demonstrated narrative allegories by re-staging WWII, positing the allied forces as aliens and Japan as giant robots defending their homeland,²⁵ the genre ultimately lacks the more complex storylines and realistic designs that would go on to define “real robot” anime like *Gundam*.

Despite being credited for its innovative depiction of robots, *Gundam*’s influence hearkens back to American science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein’s novel *Starship Troopers*, and also to Tezuka Osamu’s *Astro Boy* (1963), an anime which Yoshiyuki previously worked on as a writer. *Starship Troopers* introduced the concept of the “powered suit,” mechanical armor weighing in at 2,000 pounds that allowed for a single soldier to have the power equivalent to a single tank division.²⁶ In 1977, *Starship Troopers* would receive a paperback edition in Japan with a cover drawn by Studio Nue of *Space Battleship Yamato* fame. The Japanese cover for *Starship Troopers* would depict Heinlein’s giant power-suit crouched on all fours, cannon at the ready, and this depiction of a realistic giant robot would go on to influence the design of *Gundam*.²⁷

The original mobile suits for *Gundam* would be designed by Okawara Kunio, who drew influence for his designs from both *Starship Troopers* as well as real-life industrial machinery. Following his work on *Gundam*, Kunio would go on to design the robots for

another real robot anime, *Armored Trooper VOTOMS* (1983), where he sought to create machines that seemed like they were made in a factory.²⁸ Although Kunio would serve as the mechanical designer for the majority of the *Gundam* franchise, Izubuchi Yutaka would briefly take over the role for *Char's Counterattack* alongside production studio Gainax and its members, such as Anno Hideaki who would go on to create *Evangelion*. Like Kunio, Yutaka drew influence for his mobile suit designs from both industrial machinery—Yutaka's father worked as a shipwright designer for Kawasaki Heavy Industries—and from watching Yoshiyuki's original *Gundam* series as it aired.²⁹ Yutaka's influence from industrial machinery hearkens back to *VOTOMS* for which he had also provided mechanical designs.

While *Starship Troopers* influenced the design of *Gundam*, *Astro Boy* established the rules for real robots. Astro Boy himself runs on a depleting energy source based on hydraulics and electromagnetics and must be frequently repaired. The realism of Astro Boy's workings establishes his character as having a weakness, thereby transforming Astro Boy into a real robot rather than more "super robot"-like counterpart.³⁰ Both Kunio and Yutaka's conjuring of the factory through industrial design recalls the mass assembly of weapons during WWII but also Japan's focus on the assembly of consumer electronics during the 1980s, ranging from gunplas to cars, drawing further attention towards the overlap between robotics and Japanese pop-culture.³¹ For the mobile suits in *Gundam* to then serve as reflections of their pilots, and thus, work as a wider allegory for the break-up of Japan, they must be designed with realism in mind. Like the character of Astro Boy then, the fragility of the real robot mirrors the fragility of the human body.

Allegorizing *Gundam*

Part of *Gundam*'s long-lasting appeal centers on its relatively more realistic depiction of robots. Unlike previous robot anime that aired before *Gundam*, such as *Mazinger Z* and *Brave Raideen*, the antagonists of *Gundam* were other humans also piloting robots rather than aliens or demons. Furthermore, while the protagonist of *Gundam* was still a teenager – as had become popular in other robot anime – the titular *Gundam* mobile suit did not possess superpowers. Instead, *Gundam* portrays its mobile suits as complex machines that can only be piloted by soldiers with deep mechanical expertise. When Amuro first stumbles into the RX-78-2, he pilots the mobile suit while also reading its engineering manual. These elements in both *Gundam*'s narrative and production led it to being a pioneer of the real robot anime genre.



Figure 1: Char's ruined Hyaku Shiki floats through space at the end of *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam* (1985). The dismembered Hyaku Shiki demonstrates both the cybernetic relationship between pilots to their mobile suits, but also how this destruction allows *Gundam* to branch off into other media. Screenshot by author.

Char's Counterattack remixes the franchise's previous mobile suits. Amuro now pilots the then-final iteration of the RX-78-2, the RX-93 nu Gundam. Having reclaimed the throne of Zeon as its rightful ruler, Char's own MSN-04 Sazabi differs from the alternate *Beltorchka's Children* spin-off novel where he instead pilots the MSN-04 II Nightingale. These new mobile suits are more than just new paint jobs to existing machinery, but instead function as devices in which Yoshiyuki makes the cybernetic connection between pilots and their mobile suits more explicit. A sub-plot of *Char's Counterattack* involves the engineering and development of the "psychoframe," which is a control system for drone-like weapons called "funnels" that are controlled by the pilot's thoughts. Although the funnel system was previously seen in the television series *Mobile Suit ZZ Gundam* (1986) set before *Char's Counterattack*, here was the first time that Yoshiyuki had gone into the explanation of their development, once again reinforcing the series' roots in the real robot genre by providing a scientific background for how the mobile suits operate.

In *Char's Counterattack*, it isn't until Amuro reengineers the RX-93 with the psychoframe system that he is able to battle Char on equal footing. Tomino himself has previously compared the cybernetic relationship in the original *Gundam* between pilots and their mobile suits to that of Formula 1 drivers and their own race cars,³² a connection that still holds true for *Char's Counterattack*. Like Formula 1 works in our own world, the macro-action of *Char's Counterattack* briefly pauses whenever pilots are forced to dock mid-battle in order to attend to repairs and refueling.

Such specific attention to the details of the mobile suits in *Char's Counterattack* would simultaneously be re-created in the model kits that would be released after the film's debut. Now it would be possible for fans to re-stage both the narrative of *Char's*

Counterattack and also the whole engineering and robotic history of *Gundam*, which would include all the RX models or Char's suite of red mobile suits throughout the franchise. Unlike *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Zeta*, *Char's Counterattack* doesn't end with the decapitation of real robots, but rather, their total destruction in an explosion. As the conclusion to the original *Gundam* saga, then, we might note that *Char's Counterattack* thus becomes the point in which the *Gundam* franchise itself begins to explode and spin-off into other franchises and media. The creation of these multimedia allows fans new modes of expression, and with the release of model kits from *Char's Counterattack*, this meant staging crossovers that would only be possible later with the release of video games, such as the fighting-game *Gundam Battle Assault* (1998) whose exact appeal was in crossover possibilities not seen in the anime.

Gundam's Legacy

Nearly two decades after *Char's Counterattack*, *Gundam* continued to evolve and expand as a multimedia and global franchise, finally breaking out into the West at the turn of the new millennium. In 1997, Bandai would collaborate with Western video-game developer Presto Studios to release *Gundam 0079: The War for Earth*, a vehicle simulation game that heavily featured FMV cutscenes with English actors playing the role of *Gundam's* characters, including Michael Hickay as Char and Sean O' Hara as the White Base commander, Bright Noa. Amuro, the original protagonist, does not exist in this particular installment, and instead, where Amuro would exist in the anime, here players take on the role of a nameless hero and play out the story. This allows fans to reimagine themselves as the hero of the *Gundam* narrative in a manner that differed significantly from previous options, such as simply playing with and modeling gunplas. Here, we might say, fans directly participate in the official narrative of *Gundam*.

Three years later, *Mobile Suit Gundam Wing* (1995) would premiere in the United States on the Cartoon Network channel, thus becoming the first piece of *Gundam* media to ever air in the US as well as Cartoon Network's highest-rated program that year.³³ In tandem with the airing of *Gundam Wing*, Bandai Namco would also begin to heavily market gunplas in the west for the first time through highly stylized commercials on Cartoon Network. In one such promotion, the camera cuts between CGI footage of the actual Gundams, battle scenes from *Gundam Wing*, and static shots of *Gundam Wing* gunplas being built.³⁴ In its implication that gunpla fans can recreate battle scenes from *Gundam Wing* or from the commercial itself, the commercial stipulates that building a gunpla becomes just one way to partake in the narrative of *Gundam* similar to consuming *Gundam*'s myriad of other spin-off material.

Perhaps the most famous of these examples that also demonstrates *Gundam*'s enduring popularity beyond Japan is the RX-78-2's inclusion³⁵ in Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One* (2018). Set in the virtual reality video game known as the "Oasis," where players are given the freedom to create whatever they want, Spielberg's film culminates in a final between an evil corporation seeking to take over the Oasis and players who seek to defend the Oasis as a countercultural haven. During the final battle, the villains summon Mecha-Godzilla, and the heroes counter by summoning the RX-78-2. The two engage in battle with the RX-78-2 utilizing its iconic beam saber and boost thrusters to maneuver. In these elements, Spielberg offers an authentic representation of the RX-78-2 by mimicking the manuals that accompany gunpla models. Simultaneously, *Ready Player One* is an American produced film directed by one of the most famous American directors. Yet, in depicting Mecha Godzilla fighting RX-78-2—two major icons of Japanese pop-culture—*Ready Player One* demonstrates a culture of

globalization,³⁶ one which like gunplas also serves to re-enact a fan narrative outside of official *Gundam* storylines.

Like the appearance of the RX-78-2 in *Ready Player One*, *Gundam*'s production has also moved beyond just Japan. In April 2021, Netflix and Hollywood film production company, Legendary Pictures,³⁷ announced that a live-action *Gundam* film had now entered production. A live-action *Gundam* film produced by Netflix and Legendary Pictures would be a significant culmination for how *Gundam* has become a popular global presence but has also done so through its roots in the real robot genre. For one thing, Netflix has a global presence that means when they produce anime, they also blur the lines of anime's Japanese production by turning it transnational.³⁸ Netflix's production of anime and *Gundam* media thereby recalls *Gundam*'s own earlier productional shift outside of Japan which includes both officially licensed and fan products, such as the aforementioned *Model Kit* magazine, *The War for Earth* video game, and the *Gundam Wing* commercials airing on Toonami, and of course, the RX-78-2's cameo in *Ready Player One*. Like the appearance of the RX-78-2 in Spielberg's *Ready Player One*, fans anticipate with excitement as to how Netflix will re-imagine their own version of RX-78-2, such as the details on its sound design, movement, and color. Furthermore, in being distributed by Netflix, the live-action *Gundam* films serve to reintroduce the classic *Gundam* series to a new generation of otaku who have never experienced *Gundam*, similar to Legendary Pictures' previous *Godzilla* (2014) film. It would be incorrect, however, to say that *Gundam* is no longer Japanese. Rather, we can now understand *Gundam* as being a hybrid production of both Japan and the West. If Cool Japan initially signaled the emergence, popularization, and convergence of Japanese pop-culture beyond Japan and into the West, then through its globalized production,

the enduring popularity of *Gundam* demonstrates that rather than become outdated, the concept of cool Japan has also mutated to stay relevant.

Conclusion

If the mechanical armored bodies of mobile suits reflect the vulnerable human counterpart inside, their destruction throughout the early *Gundam* franchise including *Char's Counterattack*, allegorizes the dismantling of the human body. Simultaneously, the body becomes linked to the nation of Japan, and so the body's own mutilation signals the metaphorical collapse of the Japanese border. These converging elements—the destruction of the machine/man and body/border binaries—precipitate the explosion of *Gundam*'s multimedia and its subsequent exportation into the global market at the turn of the 1990s, the era of Cool Japan. In turn, *Gundam* also invites its fans to use these same mediums, and more, to create their own narratives in the *Gundam* universe and as I've shown throughout my work here, has been doing so for the past forty years. While not the sole reason for *Gundam*'s popularity, the role of the fanbase within *Gundam*'s production has remained a key element in its continuing popularity, visibility, and relevance.

Notes

-
- ¹ Christopher Bolton, "From Ground Zero to Degree Zero: Akira from Origin to Oblivion," *Mechademia*, Vol. 9, Origins (2014): 296.
- ² Andreu Ballus and Alba G. Torrents, "Evangelion as Second Impact: Forever Changing That Which Never Was," *Mechademia*, Vol. 9, Origins (2014): 283.
- ³ Andreu Ballus and Alba G Torrents: 283.
- ⁴ Nancy K. Stalker, *Japan: History and Culture from Classical to Cool* (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 2018): 362.
- ⁵ Frederik L. Schodt, *Inside the Robot Kingdom: Japan, Mechatronics, and the Coming Robotopia* (New York, NY: Kodansha International, 1988): 16.
- ⁶ Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy*, No. 130 (2002): 47.
- ⁷ Morikawa Kaichiro and Dennis Washburn, "Otaku/Geek," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, Vol. 25, Working Words: New Approaches to Japanese Studies: 59.
- ⁸ Morikawa Kaichiro and Dennis Washburn: 59.
- ⁹ Henry Jenkins, "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7 (2004): 36.
- ¹⁰ Henry Jenkins: 37.
- ¹¹ Ian Condry, *The Soul of Anime* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013): 125.
- ¹² Ian Condry: 126.
- ¹³ Alex S.L. Tsang, "Model Kit World," *Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2007): 231.
- ¹⁴ Alex S.L. Tsang: 232.
- ¹⁵ Ian Condry: 114.

¹⁶ Mia Consalvo, "Convergence and Globalization in the Japanese Videogame Industry," *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Spring, 2009) :136

¹⁷ Eric Cazdyn, *The Flash of Capital: Film and Geopolitics in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 243.

¹⁸ Eric Cazdyn: 252.

¹⁹ Eric Cazdyn: 253.

²⁰ Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*: 88

²¹ Mika Ko: "The Break-up of the National Body: Cosmetic Multiculturalism and the Films of Miike Takashi." In *Theorising National Cinema*, edited by Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 2006): 137

²² Patrick Drazen, "The Shock of the Newtype: The Mobile Suit Gundam Novels of Tomino Yoshiyuki," *Mechademia*, Vol. 1, Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga (2006): 176

²³ Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Century of Japanese Animation* (Berkely, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2006): 567-568.

²⁴ Timothy N. Hornyak, *Loving the Machine: The Art and Science of Japanese Robots* (New York, NY: Kodansha International, 2006): 60.

²⁵ Marco Pellitteri, "Nippon ex Machina: Japanese Postwar Identity in Robot Anime and the Case of *UFO Robo Grendizer*," *Mechademia: Second Arc*, Vol. 4 War/Time (2009): 275.

²⁶ Takayuki Tatsumi and Christopher Bolton, "Gundam and the Future of Japanoid Art," *Mechademia*, Vol. 3 (2008): 192.

²⁷ Takayuki Tatsumi and Christopher Bolton: 193.

²⁸ Jonathan Clements and Helen, McCarthy: 713.

²⁹ Ollie Barder, “Yutaka Izubuchi On Designing the Most Popular Gundam Ever and His Love of Kaiju,” *Forbes*.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/olliebarder/2018/11/05/yutaka-izubuchi-on-designing-the-most-popular-gundam-ever-and-his-love-of-kaiju/#7e110e94b476> (accessed 19 April 2020)

³⁰ Mark Gilson, “A Brief History of Japanese Robophilia,” *Leonardo*, Vol. 31, No. 5, Sixth Annual New York Digital Salon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1998): 367-368.

³¹ In 2015, Toyota would even collaborate with Bandai Namco to release the model “Zeonic Toyota Auris”, a car designed in the appearance of a mobile suit.

³² Timothy N. Hornyak, *Loving the Machine: The Art and Science of Japanese Robots* (Kodansha International, 2006): 60.

³³ “Gundam Wing Ratings,” *Anime News Network*, Mar. 15, 2000, Accessed Mar. 9, 2022. <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2000-03-15/gundam-wing-ratings>

³⁴ SlimD716, “Gundam Wing Model Kit Commercial (1080p HD),” *YouTube*, Nov. 8, 2012, Accessed Nov. 12, 202. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3XQ3tqojZk>

³⁵ In the original novel, the RX-78-2 has a cameo as an award whereas the film adaptation significantly expands its role by having it battle Mecha-Godzilla.

³⁶ Koichi Iwabuchi, “In the Name of National Interest: Globalization and Media Culture in 21st

Century Japan.” *The Routledge Handbook of Digital Media and Globalization*. Edited by Dal Yong Jin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021): 89.

³⁷ It should also be no surprise that Legendary Pictures decided to co-produce a live-action *Gundam* film. In 2011, the company produced Guillermo Del Toro’s *Gundam* and kaiju inspired live-action mecha film, *Pacific Rim*. Three years later, Legendary Pictures would be responsible for rebooting Toho’s *Godzilla* franchise in the west with *Godzilla*.

(2014) which would go on to spawn two more sequels, *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019) and *Godzilla vs Kong* (2021).

³⁸ Cecilia D’Anastasio, “There’s Something Super Weird About Netflix Anime,” *Wired*, Nov. 12, 2020, Accessed Jan. 22, 2022. <https://www.wired.com/story/theres-something-super-weird-about-netflix-anime/>

Bibliography

Agyeiwaah, Wantanee Elizabeth Suntikul, and Li Yee Shan Carmen, “‘Cool Japan’: Anime, soft power and Hong Kong generation Y travel to Japan,” *Journal of China Tourism Research*, Vol. 15, No. 2: 127 – 148.

Ballus, Andreu, and Alba G. Torrents, “Evangelion as Second Impact: Forever Changing That Which Never Was,” *Mechademia*, Vol. 9, Origins (2014): 283.

Barder, Ollie. “Yutaka Izubuchi On Designing the Most Popular Gundam Ever and His Love of Kaiju.” *Forbes*, November 5, 2018.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/olliebarder/2018/11/05/yutaka-izubuchi-on-designing-the-most-popular-gundam-ever-and-his-love-of-kaiju/#7e110e94b476>

Bolton, Christopher. “From Ground Zero to Degree Zero: Akira from Origin to Oblivion,” *Mechademia*, Vol. 9, Origins (2014): 295 – 315.

Cazdyn, Eric. *The Flash of Capital: Film and Geopolitics in Japan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

Clements, Jonathan, and Helen McCarthy. *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Century of Japanese Animation*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2015.

Condry, Ian. *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan’s Media Success Story* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013.

Consalvo, Mia. “Convergence and Globalization in the Japanese Video game Industry,” *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (Spring, 2009): 135 – 141.

D’Anastasio, Cecilia. “There’s Something Super Weird About Netflix Anime.” *Wired*, November 12, 2020. <https://www.wired.com/story/theres-something-super-weird-about-netflix-anime/>

Drazen, Patrick. "The Shock of the Newtype: The Mobile Suit Gundam Novels of Tomino Yoshiyuki," *Mechademia*, Vol. 1, *Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga* (2006): 174 – 177 (Review).

Gilson, Mark. "A Brief History of Japanese Robophilia." *Leonardo*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (October 1998): 367 – 369.

Hornyak, Timothy N. *Loving the Machine: The Art and Science of Japanese Robots*. New York, NY: Kodansha International, 2006.

Iwabuchi, Koichi. "In the Name of National Interest: Globalization and Media Culture in 21st

Century Japan." *The Routledge Handbook of Digital Media and Globalization*. Edited by Dal Yong Jin. New York, NY: Routledge, 2021: 89-99.

Jenkins, Henry. "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2004): 33 – 43.

Morikawa Kaichiro, and Dennis Washburn. "おたく Otaku/Geek." *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, Vol. 25, *Working Words: New Approaches to Japanese Studies* (December 2013): 56 – 66.

Ko, Mika. "The Break-up of the National Body: Cosmetic Multiculturalism and the Films of Miike Takashi." In *Theorising National Cinema*, edited by Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen: 129–137. London: British Film Institute, 2006.

McGray, Douglas. "Japan's Gross National Cool." *Foreign Policy*, no. 130 (2002): 44–54.

McKevitt, Andrew C. *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Napier, Susan. *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.

Pellitteri, Marco. "Nippon ex Machina: Japanese Postwar Identity in Robot Anime and the Case of "UFO Robo Grendizer." *Mechademia: Second Arc*, Vol. 4, War/Time (2009): 275 -288.

Schodt, Frederik L. *Inside the Robot Kingdom: Japan, Mechatronics, and the Coming Robotopia*. New York, NY: Kodansha International, 1988.

Stalker, Nancy K. *Japan: History and Culture from Classical to Cool*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018.

Tsang, Alex S. L. "Model Kit World," *Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2007): 231 – 235.