Academic Collaboration JAMS-boree!

JAMS, Anime Expo, and Fan Connections

Billy Tringali

Volume 4

When JAMS first began as a single thought in the Kyoto International Museum of Manga in 2017, I never could have imagined the incredible reach this journal would grow to have, nor the hundreds of people I would get to meet who were just as passionate about anime scholarship as I was. And when our inaugural issue came out in 2020 with only six papers and fewer than 600 views, I could never have predicted that, only a few years later, just one of JAMS' scholarly articles would be able to get 25 times that number of readers.

And so, it is with incredible enthusiasm that I welcome you to the fourth volume of the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*. In addition to an amazing slate of papers this year, I'm also excited to share with you the other news from 2023, including our very first academic symposium and a massive spike in readership for the journal.

JAMS @ Anime Expo

This year, JAMS partnered with Anime Expo and *Mechademia* to run the first-ever MechaJAMS symposium in July. Held at the Los Angeles Convention Center in tandem with Anime Expo 2023, this symposium consisted of nine panels, with topics ranging from the study of isekai anime to anime's use in supporting information literacy education, to the use of anime in protest art. This partnership was a massive undertaking, but one I feel was remarkably worthwhile. This was JAMS' first

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Billy Tringali is the Founder and Editor of the Journal of Anime and Manga Studies, the only open-access journal dedicated to anime and manga!

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representation at the scholarly side of an anime convention, and my first time being a featured speaker at such an event! As the symposium's keynote speaker, I was able to talk to a crowded room of attendees about JAMS' founding, as well as answer their questions about publishing academic research and scholarship on anime.

Panels at the symposium were incredibly well-attended: in fact, three panels filled the room with so many excited attendees that many had to be turned away! These stellar panels were:

- **Second Impact: The Music of Evangelion II** by John Marr, David F. Lopez, and Elliott Jones.
- **The Physics of Anime** by Roman Gomez
- **Marx, Foucault, and Ouran High School Host Club** by Emilie Waggoner

*Marx, Foucault, and Ouran High School Host Club*

Second Impact: The Music of Evangelion

There are currently plans to move forward with collaborations between JAMS and Anime Expo to continue to host a yearly JAMS Symposium at Anime Expo, so I am incredibly thrilled to see what next year will bring! My heartfelt thanks go out to **Alex Romero**, Anime Expo's incredible Entertainment Coordinator, alongside *Mechademia*'s **Frenchy Lunning** and **Ed Hoff**, who extended the opportunity to collaborate on this symposium to JAMS, and proceeded to pass the torch to JAMS to run this symposium (hopefully!) for many years to come. I truly believe that working with fannish intermediaries, like anime conventions, is one of the best ways for scholars to engage directly with fans interested in popular culture scholarship.[i] See Appendix A for the complete list of all presentations at the MechaJAMS symposium.

JAMS' Readership
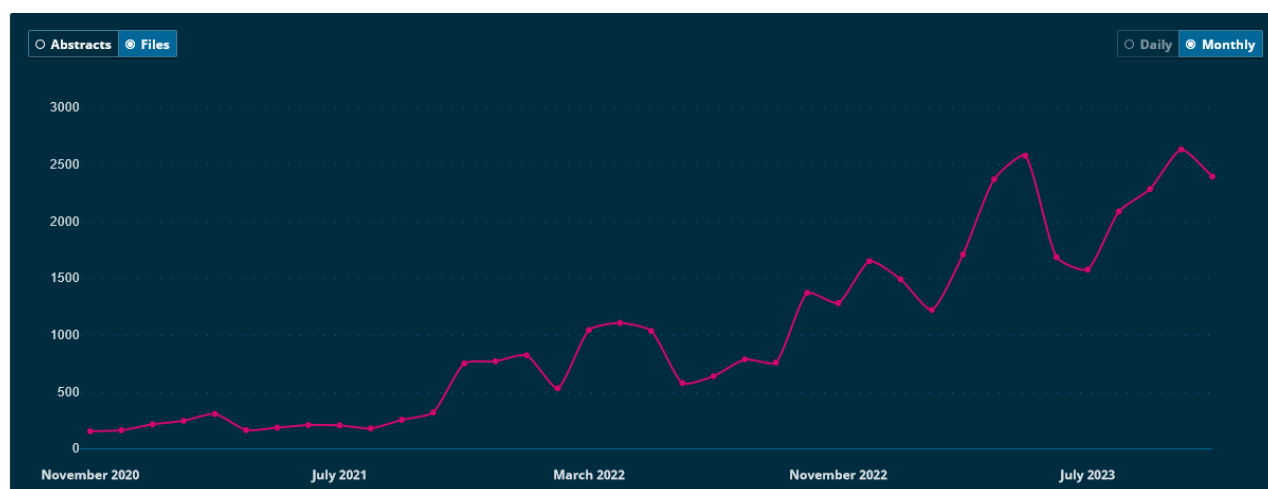
As anime continues its rise to prominence in academic scholarship, JAMS' readership continues to increase as well. Last year, our most-viewed article had a little over five thousand views. This year, our most-viewed article has triple that number.

Our most read articles include:

- *A Survey of the Story Elements of Isekai Manga* by Paul Price, with 15,155 total views as of November 30th, 2023.

    o DOI: https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.808

- *The Spectacular Mundane in the Films of Studio Ghibli* by Zoe Crombie, with 8,116 total views as of November 30th, 2023.

    o DOI: https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.507

- *Embedded Niche Overlap: A Media Industry History of Yaoi Anime's American Distribution from 1996 to 2009* by Finley Freibert, with 6,026 total views as of November 30th, 2023.

    o DOI: https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v1.234

- *Boy with Machine: A Deleuzoguattarian Critique of Neon Genesis Evangelion* by Betty Stojnic, with 4,654 total views as of November 30th, 2023.

    o DOI: https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.822

- *Japanese Anime Fandoms in the UAE: An Exploratory Study on Media Accessibility, Habits and Cultural Perceptions* by Urwa Tariq and Sarah Laura Nesti Willard, with 3,967 total views as of November 30th, 2023.

    o DOI: https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.774

Special Thanks

Very special gratitude must be given to JAMS' incredible copyeditors:

Jaclyn Koshofer and *Peggy Wood*

Thank you for you time and expertise in the over 200 pages JAMS is publishing this year. And a massive must also go to our incredible peer reviewers, whose diverse backgrounds and scholarly insight has fostered an incredible crop of papers that I hope you, our wonderful readers, will find engaging, informative, and inspiring.

My thanks also go out to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for continuing to publish this journal, as well as to Indiana University Indianapolis, who are allowing JAMS to be, for the very first time, something I can officially work on as part of my day job.

JAMS is a labor of love that is free to submit to, free to be published in, and free to read. This is a journal created by and supported by people who give their time and knowledge because we love anime and find it so, so worthy of serious academic discussion.

I hope the papers within this volume with inspire you to love anime just as much.

Thank you for your readership.

With warmth,

Billy Tringali

Editor-in-Chief

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Notes:

[i] Alberto, Maria, and Billy Tringali. 2022. "Working with Fannish Intermediaries."
Transformative Works and Cultures 38 (September). https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2022.2227.

Bibliography:

Alberto, Maria, and Billy Tringali. 2022. "Working with Fannish Intermediaries."
Transformative Works and Cultures 38 (September).
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Inclusive Media Mix:

Shaping Communication through *A Silent Voice*

Yuta Kaminishi

Abstract: *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, dir. Yamada Naoko, 2016) is an anime film based on the critically acclaimed manga of the same name by Ôima Yoshitoki. *A Silent Voice* follows the experiences of a deaf character, Nishimiya Shôko, and her classmates, particularly as they deal with school bullying and rebuilding friendships afterwards. *A Silent Voice* not only won various awards such as Best Animated Feature Film at the Japanese Movie Critics Award, but also collaborated with actors across the public sector such as schools, local governments, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), to enhance inclusive education in Japan. This article shifts the typical focus on media mix as a marketing strategy to consider media mix strategies as potential tools for civic and educational causes. Specifically, it explores *A Silent Voice*'s media mix in relation to improving inclusivity in Japanese education and society. To that end, this project begins with a brief elucidation of the three versions of the original manga, which serve as starting points of this inclusivity-focused media mix. The project then moves to analysis of how the anime problematizes school bullying as systemic exclusion and explores how sign language is presented as one key to forming an inclusive society. Finally, by introducing cases in which collaboration with the public sector distributes this anime's characters, induces various audience desires, and mobilizes audiences to participate in social change, I argue that *A Silent Voice* provides an example of inclusive media mix.

Keywords: *A Silent Voice*, Disability, Inclusivity, Media Mix, Sign Language

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Introduction¹

The anime film *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*, 2016) presents both the difficulties and the necessity of mutual participation in interpersonal communication. Specifically, *A Silent Voice* depicts the process of reconstructing communication after school bullying by zeroing in on two main characters, Ishida Shôya and Nishimiya Shôko, and their changing friendship. The anime follows Shôko, a girl with a hearing disability, as she transfers to Shôya's class in elementary school. Shôya and his classmates bully her, which results in her transferring away, and then classmates begin bullying Shôya for his previous behavior. After this experience Shôya, now a high school student, shuts down all communication with others and decides to commit suicide after repaying money to his mother, who paid Shôko's mother for hearing aids that Shôya broke. Before carrying out his suicide plan, though, Shôya visits Shôko to apologize for what he did in elementary school. During this meeting with Shôko, Shôya uses sign language and the two are able to really communicate for the first time, which leads Shôya to abandon his suicide plan. Instead, this communication through sign language leads him and Shôko to build a new friendship, overcome their traumatic experiences, and reconcile with old classmates.

By having a deaf girl as one of its main characters, *A Silent Voice* contributes to the much-needed representation of people with disabilities in anime, and more

generally in Japanese popular culture.[2] Shôko's school life, as represented in this work,

exposes various forms of systemic exclusion in today's ableist society. As the following

textual analysis will detail, this story revolves around the lack of resources and support

for Shôko's everyday life, particularly in educational systems. By enforcing ableist norms

in the classroom, Japanese school systems marginalize Shôko and create unfair power

dynamics between classmates, which result in cruel bullying. Later reconciliations with

old classmates, as experienced by characters learning sign language, are offered as one

means of overcoming the exclusion that these dynamics create. In fact, when discussing

in an interview why she decided to direct this anime, director Yamada Naoko has said,

"This work depicts a very clumsy but important spirit of trying to know and connect

with others, such as the desire to know the other person and to reach out to something

that is not understood."[3] The relationship between Shôko and Shôya emphasizes the

importance of communication that seeks to "connect with others" by overcoming

ableism.

Like a majority of contemporary anime works, *A Silent Voice* participates in the

media mix system, which has been defined as "the cross-media serialization and

circulation of entertainment franchises."[4] According to Marc Steinberg, anime's survival

has depended profoundly upon the strategy of media mix, such as character

merchandising. Steinberg locates the beginnings of this strategy with the anime TV

series *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*, 1963-6). As Steinberg explains, when author Tezuka

Osamu sold the series to a Japanese TV company at a reduced price, his studio Mushi

Production had to recover from that loss by earning royalties from licensed characters.[5]

This synergy between characters across transmedia appearances was essential for Mushi

Production to continue the low budget and tight schedule anime for TV production. In

the mid-1970s Kadokawa Books, led by Kadokawa Haruki, further expanded media mix

from being an anime studio's survival strategy to also becoming a media corporation's

marketing strategy, covering broader transmedia fields such as literature, music, and

film.[6] From these beginnings, the current discourse on media mix tends to emphasize

the creation of new markets as a business strategy controlled primarily by animation

studios, media corporations, and large merchandising companies.

From an audience perspective, media mix signifies a force that drives the desire

to consume character-centered products, such as *Astro Boy* stickers, to build on the

previous example. Steinberg's research on *Yo-kai Watch* (*Yôkai wocchi*) convincingly

demonstrates that media mix can accomplish "total social mobilization" toward

consumption by invoking strong desire in target audiences such as children, their

parents, and their grandparents, encouraging them to collect character merchandising

materials such as Yo-kai medals.[7] In this form of media mix, concludes Steinberg, "In

recessionary Japan, as production decamps to other parts of Asia and the declining

birthrate puts even greater pressure on children to take up the slack in consumption,

Yo-kai Watch appears as the perfect storm and training grounds, mobilizing children

into the rhythms of consumption that govern the techno-capitalist world."[8] In other

words, like the critiques of culture industry that have scrutinized how media controls

people's desires in Fordist models of mass production and consumption, to think about

media mix is also to criticize how media industries expand modes of consumption in

post-Fordist consumer societies.[9]

Though we typically understand media mix as large corporations' marketing

strategies that induce audiences' desire to consume character merchandising, I am more

interested in the ways that media mix expands beyond market-oriented logics, such as

when contributing to inclusive education. Given that historically anime's media mix has

been a condition of financial survival for studios and intellectual properties, the goals of

typical media mix do not necessarily match the goals of media mix that exists for non-

capitalist purposes. Instead, to understand this second type of media mix we must take

into consideration diverse agents and actors, such as the public sector. Put differently,

this article seeks to contribute to our understanding of the multiplicity of media mix

systems, which Alexander Zahlten has highlighted in his research on the historical

condition of emergent media mixes starting in the 1920s.[10] Focusing on a more

contemporary example, I examine how public institutions can also participate in this

kind of media mix. Here I investigate how such actors may distribute characters from anime and manga, induce audience desires, and mobilize audiences to participate in social change for a more inclusive society.

While criticizing systemic exclusion in ableist society and presenting the importance of communication to overcome ableism on the textual level, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix encourages audiences to participate in communication that makes a difference beyond the diegetic world of the anime. By focusing on *A Silent Voice*'s media mix and the message it conveys, I shed light on the functions of a form of media mix beyond the more visible market-driven counterpart. Taking into consideration public institutions such as schools, local government, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as key participants, this article explores an example of inclusive media mix, a changing force for an inclusive society in contemporary Japan. *A Silent Voice*'s media mix provides a case in which characters move across media forms to introduce sign language to fans and provide resources to children who see or experience school bullying. By delineating the development of *A Silent Voice*'s media mix, I argue that media mix can hold social and political possibility, namely, a means of creating a more inclusive society, rather than just a marketing strategy.

1. Origins of *A Silent Voice*'s Media Mix

In order to trace the development of the inclusive media mix of *A Silent Voice,* it is first necessary to examine the origins of the franchise, that is, manga by Ôima Yoshitoki. How did *A Silent Voice* start as a manga? What kind of agencies participated in its production? And how did the emphasis in its narrative change according to media formats, as it shifted from a short story in a monthly manga magazine to a serialized story in a weekly manga magazine? Exploring these questions gives a context with which the media mix set out.

There are three versions of the manga *A Silent Voice,* which began as boys' manga (shônen manga) where the main target audience was teenage boys. This initial version, which was a short story of just one episode, won the 80th Weekly Shônen Magazine's Newcomer Award (Shûkan shônen magajin shinjin manga shô) in 2008 and was then published in a monthly teen magazine, *Bessatsu Shônen Magazine* (*Bessatsu shônen magajin*), in February 2011.[11] The time lag between the award and actual publication was due to the "difficult" issue the manga depicts, namely, bullying an individual with a disability.[12] The publisher Kôdansha consulted with the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD), the national organization for deaf individuals, and had them as a supervisor of the manga's publication.[13] This original version is composed of a long flashback to the protagonists' time in elementary school since Shôko's transfer, sandwiched by short

scenes of Shôya now as a high school student. In this version of the manga, the narrative

focuses on the bullying first of Shôko and then of Shôya after a class meeting in which

his classmates blame each other for bullying Shôko. This first version does not include

the reconciliation process with friends that later versions of the manga and the anime

contain. With Shôya's line, "For the first time today, I felt like I had a conversation with

Nishimiya," the last scene of the original *A Silent Voice* emphasizes communication with

Shôko as the main theme, which only becomes possible by Shôya learning sign language.

Two years after the publication of that original version, Ôima was preparing for

the manga's serialization, but the editor of the magazine decided to just publish a non-

serialized version for *Weekly Shônen Magazine* (*Shûkan shônen magajin*) in February

2013. Here the main story about bullying in elementary school and the reunion of Shôya

and Shôko later in high school remained generally the same as the original version.

However, since this revised version was originally prepared as the first episode of the

serialized version, some important items that play major roles in the serialized version

are more pronounced. These include Shôko's notebook, which is introduced in the

opening, and Shôko's hearing aids, which Shôya violently takes from her. This revised

version caused a sensation, and this issue of the magazine sold 60,000 more copies than

the previous week's.[14]

The success of both the original and the revised versions of *A Silent Voice* resulted in a third version, this time serialized in *Weekly Shônen Magazine* from 2013 to 2014. This version was also published later as a seven-volume comic series. The serialized version spends more time on the reconciliation among various characters and their individual development beyond the school bullying. In fact, Ôima uses only the first four episodes (out of a total 62) to depict the protagonists' elementary school days, and then the rest is about how Shôya finds his purpose in life after reuniting and communicating with Shôko. As its focus shifts from the bullying in elementary school more to rebuilding relationships after that traumatic experience, the serialized version also introduces additional characters, such as Shôya and Shôko's family members, elementary school classmate Sahara Miyoko who is also a target of bullying, and Shôya's high school friend Nagatsuka Tomohiro. In this version, the reconciliation of characters happens through the process of filmmaking led by Nagatsuka, which serves as an opportunity of reuniting the characters and then rebuilding their relationships. By following the characters' internal conflicts in detail, this serialized version of the manga also shows the characters' growth toward an open future. This point is represented in the ending scene of a coming-of-age ceremony (seijin-shiki) in which Shôya and Shôko are about to open the door to their class reunion party, and thus to another opportunity to rebuild further relationships with other former classmates.

This brief exploration of the three versions of *A Silent Voice* – the original in 2011, the slightly expanded in 2013, and the serialized in 2013-2014 – demonstrates how the work's emphasis shifts from the traumatic experience in elementary school to the rebuilding of relationships in adolescence. It also introduces the participation of JDF, which plays an important role in connecting the media mix to sign language. The anime version of *A Silent Voice* was based on the third, serialized version of the manga but with the limited length of a feature film.

2. Shaping Communication against Systemic Exclusion

When audiences consume anime, they appreciate not only the characters themselves but also the settings and narratives that these characters inhabit. Accordingly, media mix systems often capitalize on settings and narratives as part of a franchise.[15] In this specific example, the representation of Shôko, the ableist norms surrounding her, and the process of overcoming traumatic past experience are all vital parts of the narrative, and inclusive media mix utilizes this narrative to create opportunities for more inclusive education. Thus, examining how *A Silent Voice* presents Shôko's life with her classmates in an ableist society helps us understand the relationship between inclusive media mix and this particular anime text.

It can be painful to watch *A Silent Voice* because of its topic of bullying in school.[16] The first 25 minutes of the anime film, which comprise about one fourth of the total runtime, take place in a suffocating circumstance in the elementary school. Here Shôko transfers to Shôya's class and tells the class that she cannot hear by writing this in her notebook. At first, her classmates are cooperative in communicating through her notebook, but gradually they start ignoring her, insulting Shôko behind her back, and bullying another classmate, Sahara, who is willing to learn sign language to communicate with Shôko better. After Shôya throws her hearing aids out of their classroom window for the first time, his violence against Shôko escalates. A montage shows violent acts such as screaming at her from behind during class, trying to trip her with a broom, and scribbling in her notebook. After breaking her hearing aids multiple times, which results in a class meeting with the school principal, their classmates start targeting Shôya in a mirror of what he had initially done to Shôko. He loses his friends, who now actively bully him, and he decides to keep to himself after overhearing his friend at the middle school entrance ceremony say "Stay away from Ishida Shôya. He is a bully." This sequence of bullying and being bullied in turn sets the hurtful tone of the characters' elementary school days as the starting point of the anime.

Watching this elementary school sequence is not just painful but also horrifying because the bullying depicted in *A Silent Voice* is based in the social system. First and

foremost, the school obviously lacks access to the resources necessary to support Shôko

and her classmates, which is represented most by the learning environment in the

classroom. Since the school and their teachers do not provide any support, Shôko is

forced to depend on her classmates for vital things in school life, such as learning

information about upcoming quizzes and group singing in music class. This unequal

relationship causes a similarly unbalanced and dysfunctional power dynamic between

Shôko and her classmates. Moreover, the teacher Takeuchi, whom Shôko is supposed to

be able to consult with, shows no interests in organizing his class to solve conflicts and

stop the bullying.[17] In fact, until the meeting with the principal, Takeuchi does not

actively interfere with his own students to stop the bullying. Then even in the meeting,

he only blames Shôya for his violent actions and does not take any responsibility for his

atrocious classroom management. In other words, the bullying of Shôko is systemic in

terms of the lack of available resources and the lack of responsibility that should be

taken by authority figures such as the children's teacher.

Consequently, the traumatic experiences caused by and within the school system

in this anime also work as an exclusionary force. The trauma these characters have

undergone from the systemic structure prevents their relationships from being rebuilt

easily. For example, in a later effort to connect Shôko with her classmates, Shôya's old

friends and new friends from high school get together at a theme park. His old friend

Ueno wants to talk to Shôko alone, so she invites Shôko to ride a Ferris wheel. Starting from "I hate you," the uncomfortable and awkward conversation between Ueno and Shôko exposes that they had no clue how to communicate with each other. While stopping Shôko from apologizing about their broken friendship in elementary school, Ueno narrates her days in the elementary school from her point of view and says, "We were doing everything we could back then, and looking back, I feel like it was inevitable how things turned out." Ueno becomes frustrated by Shôko, who responds to Ueno's story by saying "I hate myself," and she criticizes Shôko for not trying to talk to her. As in Ueno's line, this scene underlines how clueless they were in school and how the traumatic experience made Shôko hate herself. Through Ueno's attempted justification of her childhood actions, and the two girls' responses to each other, we can see that Ueno and Shôko both harbor self-loathing and guilt from their experience that was caused and exacerbated by the systemic structures of elementary school. Their spiral of self-loathing makes communication impossible, and the relationship becomes one of mutual exclusion.

The anime presents sign language as the key to overcoming systemic exclusion, which is in turn emphasized in its media mix. Shôya had already learned sign language to apologize to Shôko, but another unexpected character starts using sign language in the scene at the school cultural festival. In this scene, first Ueno understands that Shôko

is saying sorry in sign language, then she says, "Well, that's just who you are" and jokingly responds "stupid (baka)" in sign language to Shôko's apology. Shôko is surprised by Ueno's use of sign language and fixes Ueno's mistake that she signed "haka" instead of "baka." Given the impossibility of communication between Ueno and Shôko in their earlier attempt at conversation on the Ferris wheel, this communication has high stakes now. At that earlier point, Ueno tried to communicate with Shôko, but her attempt did not work because Ueno did not try to understand Shôko's way of communication, that is, why Shôko said sorry. Now, though, studying sign language has become a representative step for Ueno in trying to understand Shôko better. Although Ueno points out that Shôko saying sorry again is a repetition from their conversation in the Ferris wheel, Ueno can understand now that this is just how Shôko communicates. In other words, the repetition of communication between Shôko and Ueno underlines the necessity of mutual engagement in communication. The sign language that Ueno learns further shows that the kernel of understanding is not found in forcefully having conversations with others to convey self-opinion, but instead, through mutual participation in listening to others. This use of sign language to encourage mutual participation is the key element that *A Silent Voice*'s media mix promotes.

3. Inclusive Media Mix

Presenting mutual participation in conversation as a critical means of overcoming the traumatic experiences of systemic exclusion, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix with the public sector invites the anime's audience into the communication model it presents. It is worth noting here that forms of media mix intersecting with the public sector have drawn scholarly attention in anime studies recently. For example, anime series' collaboration with local communities and governments are well known as "contents tourism," or tourism induced by contents such as the narratives, settings, and locations of popular culture.[18] One of the most notable examples is *Lucky Star*'s (*Rakisuta*) collaboration with Washimiya, Saitama Prefecture, which is the location where that anime is set. In this case, the local community and copyright holders pulled together to create character goods and hold events that invited fans' participation.[19] With contents tourism, emphasis is placed on the ways that anime's media mix contributes to regional promotion by mobilizing a franchise's fans. In a similar vein, *A Silent Voice* is also used in promoting its location of Ôgaki, Gifu Prefecture.[20] Unlike many earlier examples, though, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix not only invites fans to the location, but also mobilizes them for the purposes of inclusive education such as sign language learning.

The first example of *A Silent Voice*'s inclusive media mix is a 30-minute live action educational drama (dôtoku kyôzai dorama), which was supervised by JFD in 2015 and intended for use in middle school classes to promote disability awareness. Although this educational drama was produced by film studio Toei, its distribution network is comprised primarily of schools and thus differs significantly from that of commercial films.[21] Since educational works like this are intended for non-profit purposes such as free screening at schools, libraries, and local governments, this film was distributed to the public sector at a one-time price that included copyright compensation.[22] Put differently, the educational drama entails a system focused on educational goals without pursuing more traditional objectives such as strong box office performance. Besides the different distribution system, another aspect of the drama that draws our attention as an educational text are the comments from JFD as its supervisor, which state:

> We think that the DVD of *A Silent Voice* honestly depicts the reality of school life surrounding Shôko, who is deaf. One way to bring everyone's voices to students who cannot hear and convey their own messages is through sign language. Sign language is a language that is communicated with the eyes, hands, and facial expressions. Nowadays, efforts to promote understanding of the deaf and sign language are spreading in elementary and junior high schools. We hope that everyone will learn sign language and that our society will become one in which students who cannot hear can communicate with others in a lively manner.[23]

In other words, JFD uses this media mix to promote inclusive education in middle schools, such as the promotion of sign language and an introduction to communication with students who have hearing disabilities.

In addition to the classroom distribution of a studio-produced educational drama, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix also engaged with the politics surrounding sign language activism in Japan. For example, Kanagawa Prefecture collaborated with *A Silent Voice* to promote the Kanagawa Prefecture Sign Language Regulations (Kanagawa-ken shuwa gengo jôrei, effective April 1, 2015). According to the JFD webpage, after the United Nations General Assembly drafted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on December 13, 2006 (effective May 3, 2008), The Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities was amended on July 29, 2011 in Japan. But the declaration of the right to sign language is not sufficient in itself, so JFD advocated creating an environment that would protect five rights of sign language: acquiring sign language, learning by sign language, learning sign language, using sign language, and protecting the use of sign language.[24] From here each prefecture began making Sign Language Regulations, with the first example being Tottori on October 8, 2013. Kanagawa Prefecture used the characters from *A Silent Voice* to promote the Regulations, distributed a brochure about the Regulations, and ran a free screening of the anime with a sign language workshop in which participants learned sign language used in the anime. The brochure features scenes from the serialized manga version in which Shôko and Shôya communicate by sign language and emphasizes the friendships that sign language can create with the message from the original title, "The voice can

take a shape (koe wa katachi ni dekiru)."[25] This is an example in which *A Silent Voice*'s

media mix served as the introduction to the Regulations – and more generally, to sign

language itself – through collaborations with the Japanese public sector on the

prefectural level.

When the anime version was released in Japanese theaters in 2016, the Ministry

of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) collaborated with *A

Silent Voice* on two projects. First, MEXT distributed copies of a poster of Shôya and

Shôko to elementary, middle, high, and special needs schools throughout Japan. The

poster draws viewers' attention to Shôya trying to speak to Shôko using a blank speech

balloon for his line, with the question "What would you say?" written next to that visual.

This blank space aims to encourage students to say something to someone with

disabilities who might be being bullied at their school. Second, MEXT created a website

for *A Silent Voice* where visitors can find various support information and resources on

school bullying and disabilities.[26] Along with the interview with director Yamada Naoko

and the report of the film screening event, there are two special pages, titled "What if

there is a child with a disability in school?" and "What if there is someone being bullied

and needs help at school?" respectively. Each page shows a short virtual conversation

with a section chief from MEXT about available resources, such as "Child SOS Hotline"

and "On Special Needs Education." Using the characters and setting of *A Silent Voice*,

this website navigates students toward possible support and resources, with the objective of achieving more inclusive education systems.

These three cases present media mixes in which public sector actors such as schools, the Kanagawa Prefectural Government, and MEXT played major roles in distributing the characters of *A Silent Voice* as part of a larger message promoting inclusive education. To be sure, in the strictest sense *A Silent Voice* was actually distributed by film studio Shôchiku and exhibited in movie theaters nationwide. However, in terms of the transmedia use of characters, *A Silent Voice* diffused into the physical space of schools, Kanagawa Prefecture's policy campaign, and MEXT's advocation of inclusive education and bullying prevention. Moreover, this form of media mix has a different purpose from media mix as the survival strategy of anime production; unlike that capitalist counterpart, this media mix's goals are to discuss school bullying in the classroom, to inform the citizens of Kanagawa Prefecture about the Regulations, to introduce sign language to the audience, and to let students know the resources available when they or their peers need help.

Conclusion

The educational features of the inclusive media mix of *A Silent Voice* hold political possibility for developing more inclusive societies. As the various cases of *A*

Silent Voice's media mix demonstrate, inclusive media mix requires the synergy between not only franchising companies, but also among public sector actors ranging from schools to MEXT. As shown with Shôko's lack of access to educational and even social resources in *A Silent Voice*, ableist mainstream society has marginalized people with hearing disabilities. However, with the help of public institutions, an inclusive media mix can challenge the real-world versions of the ableist society and its norms that Shôko confronts. In other words, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix is used to create alternative networks and meet different goals. As opposed to media mix as a survival strategy in anime and manga marketing, inclusive media mix is an experiment that goes beyond the typical capitalist, market-oriented logics of the anime industry.

To make a difference in ableist society, what inclusive media mix needs most is effective mobilization of the audience. In fact, participatory reception tends to be emphasized in its media mix, as we see first and foremost in the case of the *Silent Voice*'s poster that MEXT distributed with a blank in the speech balloon. Moreover, inclusive media mix of *A Silent Voice* aims to achieve a specific end as fans' participation, namely, learning sign language, which the anime itself also attempts by inviting the audience into sign language. For example, in the climactic scene on the bridge, Shôko and Shôya communicate in sign language, but there is no explanation of what they are saying for the audience, either by voiceover or through written words.

Thus, the audience has to look for the meanings of the characters' communication, which can be an introduction to sign language. Put differently, by not explaining the communication, the anime normalizes communication through sign and encourages the audience to learn sign language through their watching experience. In fact, there are blogs in which fans passionately state that they started learning sign language because of *A Silent Voice*.[27] Furthermore, the character of Shôko appears in print media to promote sign language such as the advertisement for a sign language textbook published by JFD.[28] As such, by taking advantage of the excessive character merchandising in the media ecology of Japan, *A Silent Voice*'s media mix prepared wide entry points to sign language for the audience.

Especially when considering inclusive media mix with the public sector, we should scrutinize its power relationship with authorities and its ultimate goal. For example, in his examination of propaganda manga series *Imperial Rule Assisting Family*'s (*Yokusan ikka*) media mix as led by The Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Taisei yokusan kai) in 1940, Ôtsuka Eiji accurately points out that for this specific media mix, financial success did not matter. Instead, as a piece of propaganda, its ultimate goal was contributing to total mobilization for the second World War.[29] For studies on any media mixes where the goal is not limited to financial success, Ôtsuka's argument reminds us of the necessity of critical inquiry into what authorities such as

governments and related ministries might seek to accomplish through that

collaboration. This is true for inclusive media mix as well, and we must always question

the goal of collaborations with the public sector and to what particular end media mix

attempts to mobilize the populace. In this sense too, then, inclusive media mix should be

considered and examined as a constant process of political negotiation toward specific

ends, whether or not these may be a more inclusive education and society as in the goal

of *A Silent Voice*'s media mix.

Notes

¹ All translations from Japanese to English are mine. Japanese names appear in Japanese order, with the family name followed by the given name, except Japanese names of authors who published their works in English.

² On the representation of people with disabilities in Japanese popular culture, James Valentine critically examines the "disability boom" in TV drama in the 1990s. Arran Stibbe also criticizes TV dramas featuring people with disabilities as being based in the medical model and conservative gender representation. And Shinichi Saito and Reiko Ishiyama problematize underrepresentation of people with disabilities, especially elderly people with disabilities. In manga studies, Yoshiko Okuyama provides us with an introduction to significant manga works about people with disabilities. See Valentine, "Disabled Discourse: Hearing Accounts of Deafness Constructed through Japanese Television and Film," *Disability & Society* 16, no. 5 (2001): 707–27, Stibbe, "Disability, Gender and Power in Japanese Television Drama," *Japan Forum* (Oxford, England) 16, no. 1 (2004): 21–36, Shinichi and Ishiyama, "The Invisible Minority: Under-Representation of People with Disabilities in Prime-Time TV Dramas in Japan," *Disability & Society* 20, no. 4 (2005): 437–5, and Okuyama, *Reframing Disability in Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021).

³ "Yamada Naoko Interview," (https://web.archive.org/web/20161002112955/http://www.mext.go.jp/koenokatachi/interview.htm) (accessed October 26, 2022). Yamada directed anime series from Kyoto Animation studio including TV series such as *K-on!* (*Keion!*, 2009), *K-on!!* (*Keion!!*, 2010), and *Tamako Market* (*Tamako mâketto*, 2013), and feature-films such as *Movie K-on!* (*Eiga keion!*, 2011), *Tamako Love Story* (*Tamako rabu sutôrî*, 2014) and *Liz and the Blue Bird* (*Rizu to aoi tori*, 2018). As for an analysis of her work beyond *A Silent Voice*, see, for example, Paul Ocone, "Dis/joint: Unification of Sound, Music, Narrative, and Animation in *Liz and the Blue Bird*," *Mechademia* 13, no. 2 (2021): 26–46.

⁴ Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), viii. As for an example of media mix, Ian Condry's research introduces the collaborative creativity between an anime studio and a toy company in the case of *Mobile Suit Gundam* (*Kidô senshi gandamu*) and Gunpla. See Condry, *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 112-34.

⁵ Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 37-85. Steinberg argues that the "dynamically immobile image" of characters from limited animation is the key to character franchising in Japan. In terms of the relationship between the stillness of limited animation and anime-specific movements from cel layers, see Thomas Lamarre, *The*

Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

[6] In the context of Japanese film history, Alexander Zahlten analyzes the Kadokawa film, blockbuster films produced by Kadokawa, as an industrial genre. See Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema: Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[7] Marc Steinberg, "Media mix mobilization: Social mobilization and *Yo-Kai Watch*," *Animation* 12, no. 3 (2017): 244-258.

[8] Steinberg, "Media mix mobilization," 255. As he states here, Steinberg's argument stands in contrast to Mizuko Ito's argument, which recognizes the use of imagination of children in participating in active, socialized consumption of *Yu-Gi-Oh!* (*Yûgiô*) and *Hamtaro* (*Tottoko hamutarô*). See Mizuko Ito, "Mobilizing the imagination in everyday play: The case of Japanese media mixes," *International handbook of children, media, and culture* (2008): 397-412. On bringing a new perspective such as the female gaze in dôjinshi and female pedestrians in urban spaces to media mix, see also Kathryn Hemmann, "Queering the Media Mix: The Female Gaze in Japanese Fancomics," *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 77-101 and Edmond Ernest Dit Alban, "Pedestrian Media Mix: The Birth of Otaku Sanctuaries in Tokyo," *Mechademia* 12, no. 2 (2020): 140-163.

[9] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136.

[10] Alexander Zahlten, "Before Media Mix: The Electric Ecology," in *A Companion to Japanese Cinema*, ed. David Desser (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 474-7. As an example of multiple media mixes, Zahten introduces Michael Raine's research on popular song films during high economic growth, see Raine, "Kayô eiga to media mikkusu," *New Vistas: Japanese Studies for the Next Generation* (2014): 23-33.

[11] The official fan book, published in October 2016, is composed of the original version, the revised version, and comments and interview of the author Ôima Yoshitoki. My analysis of the original and the revised version is based on the official fan book. Ôima, *Koe no katachi kôshiki handobukku* (Tokyo: Kôdansha. 2016).

[12] "Chôkaku shôgai wa hitotsu no kosei," *Yomiuri shinbun*, January 26, 2015.

[13] On JFD, Karen Nakamura provides us with an explanation of the historical development of this political organization and its role in deaf communities in Japan. See Nakamura, *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[14] "Kono manga ga sugoi 2015 otoko hen: 1. *Koe no katachi*" (http://comic-sp.kodansha.co.jp/topics/koe/) (accessed October 26, 2022).

[15] On the various relationships the fans can have in consuming franchises and their narratives see, for example, Ôtsuka Eiji, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative." *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 99–116.

[16] Agnieszka Kiejziewicz situates bullying in *A Silent Voice* within the broader context of film depicting children from Japan. See Kiejziewicz, "Bullying, death and traumatic identity: the taboo of school violence in new Japanese cinema," *Maska* 3 (39) (2018): 75-88.

[17] Teacher Takeuchi's responsibility for the bullying is more pronounced in the original, revised, and serialized versions of manga. In fact, he joins in bullying Shôko and Shôya. For example, in the original version, Takeuchi told Shôko "You're annoying" in a meeting. In the revised version, Takeuchi whispers "Who the hell sent this baggage" after Shôko presents her will to join the chorus contests. In the serialized version, when he found that Shôya took Shôko's hearing aids, he told Shôya "Well, I know how you feel." As seen in this series of comments and his irresponsibility as teacher, Takeuchi actively bullies his students.

[18] Regarding the translation of kontentsu tsûrizumu, Philip Seaton and Takayoshi Yamamura use "contents tourism" to capture "the plurality of contents (narratives, characters, locations, music, and so on) that may drive touristic behaviour." I use "contents tourism" in this article following this convention. See Seaton and Yamamura, "Japanese Popular Culture and Contents Tourism – Introduction," *Japan forum* 27, no. 1 (2015): 9.

[19] For more information about the relationship between *Lucky Star* fan activities and contents tourism in Washimiya, see Okamoto Takeshi, "Otaku tourism and the anime pilgrimage phenomenon in Japan," *Japan Forum* 27, no. 1 (2015): 12-36, and Yamamura Takayoshi, "Contents tourism and local community response: *Lucky Star* and collaborative anime-induced tourism in Washimiya," *Japan Forum* 27, no. 1 (2015): 59-81.

[20] A newspaper article reports that a local office made a location guide and a file folder with characters. "*Koe no katachi* Ôgaki kankô PR," *Yomiuri shinbun*, November 19, 2015.

[21] The educational film business of Toei started from its predecessor film studio Tôyoko Eiga which aimed at providing entertainment and education to rural villages in the late 1940s. For more information about the relationship between Toei, educational film, and animation studio Toei Doga, see Watanabe Daisuke, "Shoki tôei dôga ni okeru kyôiku eiga no ichi: Omoni kokusai ka rosen to no kakawari kara," *Engeki kenkyû: Engeki hakubutsukan kiyô* 37 (2014): 97-114. Also, for the beginning of educational film production in the history of Toei, see Tôei kabushikigaisha ed., *Tôei no kiseki* (Tokyo: Tôei, 2016), 54-5.

²² Tôei, "Shôhin no kônyû hôhô to otoiawase,"
(https://www.toei.co.jp/edu/information.html) (accessed October 26, 2022).

²³ "Dôtoku kyôzai dorama: *Koe no katachi*" flyer which is available at Toei, "*Koe no katachi*," (https://www.toei.co.jp/edu/lineup/school/1205821_2442.html) (accessed October 26, 2022).

²⁴ See the JFD's "Opinion on enacting a sign language law" which is available at the JFD's "Project to Promote the Establishment of a Sign Language Law" website (https://www.jfd.or.jp/sgh) (accessed October 26, 2022).

²⁵ Kanagawa Prefectural Government. "Shuwa o motto shitte hoshii," (https://www.pref.kanagawa.jp/documents/60180/799579.pdf) (accessed October 26, 2022).

²⁶ See MEXT, "Eiga *koe no katachi* x monbu kagaku shô," (https://web.archive.org/web/20161002112910/http://www.mext.go.jp/koenokatachi/index.htm) (accessed October 26, 2022).

²⁷ See, for example, Kakuhôlog, "*Koe no katachi* ni kanka sarete shuwa o hajimeta yatsu wa zettai ni ore dake ja nai," (https://04kphenix.hatenablog.com/entry/2017/11/03) (accessed October 26, 2022).

²⁸ See the flyer of the sign language textbook, *Chô-san to manabô*, by JFD available at http://www.jfd.or.jp/books/cp/cp-chosantomanabou.pdf (accessed November 14, 2022).

²⁹ Ôtsuka Eiji, "Senjika no media mikkusu: *Yokusan ikka* to tonarigumi," in *Dôin no media mikkusu: Seisaku suru taishû no senjika sengo*, ed. Eiji Ôtsuka (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 2017), 29-53.

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The Horror of Serenity:

The Romantic Sublime within *PSYCHO-PASS*

Cassandra Holcombe

Abstract: The sublime is a common subject in European literary studies, particularly in Victorian and Romantic period literary scholarship. The Greek writer Longinus proposed the concept in the 1st century in *On the Sublime* (first printed in 1554), and Edward Burke later popularized it in his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The sublime is less discussed in anime studies due to its European origins, but it has a robust history in Japanese literature and philosophy. Recently, scholars have begun discussing its presence in anime. This paper examines European and Japanese definitions of the sublime and then applies the European Romantic definition to *Psycho-Pass*. *Psycho-Pass*'s focus on horror, self-knowledge, and European philosophy makes it an ideal subject for examining the sublime in anime. Rikako Oryo is a schoolgirl who murders her classmates and is hunted by the protagonists in one of the show's side arcs. Her art emphasizes how the sublime's "horror" element can stimulate critical thought and concurs with the Kierkegaardian theory of the sublime. The primary antagonist, Shogo Makishima, represents the more transcendent aspects of the sublime and its role in self-knowledge and identity. After examining Rikako and Makishima, the paper takes a step back and apply the principles of the sublime to anime as a medium and *Psycho-Pass* as a whole. *Psycho-Pass* reminds viewers that violent media like horror anime and crime stories can use the sublime as a catalyst for critical thinking without endorsing violence.

Keywords: the sublime, Romanticism, horror, art, *Psycho-Pass*

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Introduction

This epidemic leads innocent and well-meaning people to their deaths. But it is a pathogen that will never be wiped out because we are the ones who create it. The disease is serenity, the slow death we've wished upon ourselves.

– Rikako Oryo, *Psycho-Pass*

Despite its Japanese setting and origins, *Psycho-Pass* constantly references European philosophers and has a strong connection to one European concept in particular: the sublime. The European concept of "sublime" features horrifying truths usually learned through nature or imagery. The essay will show that *Psycho-Pass* discusses the use of the sublime in artistic mediums like paintings and literature. The series proposes that horrific, sublime images wake us up from a state of passivity and cause us to reflect more on our choices and our society. To support this argument, the paper will first give a brief history of the sublime and discuss both European and Japanese concepts of the sublime. This essay then argues for a more European interpretation of the sublime in *Psycho-Pass* and centers on the Romantic concept of the sublime. After that, the essay examines *Psycho-Pass*, starting with Rikako Oryo and her art, showing how they emphasize the role of horror in the sublime. Next, the essay discusses Shogo Makishima's character and habit of setting up deadly plays to witness the struggle for survival. Following that, it takes a step back and shows how anime as an art form is uniquely suited to interrogating the use of the sublime and how *Psycho-Pass*'s specific animation style leans into the characteristics that make anime suited for it. Finally, the essay will connect my arguments to explain how *Psycho-Pass* both uses the sublime and interrogates the use of the sublime in horrific anime and other types of

violent media. *Psycho-Pass* argues that the sublime's ability to stimulate critical thinking and reveal transcendent truths is crucial to art. However, some ways of producing the sublime, such as literal violence, cross a moral line.

History of the Sublime

The European Sublime

Before *Psycho-Pass* can be examined in terms of the sublime, the term "the sublime" must be defined. To do this, a short history of the sublime in both European and Japanese culture is necessary to provide a solid foundation.

The Greek author Longinus proposed the concept that became the European sublime. At first, the sublime was a part of rhetoric, a feeling the rhetor introduced when he entranced an audience completely. The general feeling Longinus described was one of horror, awe, and an almost transcendent experience. According to Anime scholars Elif Elçi and Engin Yurt, the sublime in early Greek texts was defined as "a sense of alienation and exaltation."[1] As time went on, the human mind's inability to define the sublime became a core concept. In his 1790 work *The Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant added the human imagination to the concept. He theorized that the sublime represented the limit of human knowledge and rationality because of its amorphous existence. Other famous philosophers like Hegel and Nietzsche agreed with Kant about the sublime being irrational but thought the irrational should be embraced rather than suppressed.

While *Psycho-Pass* touches on Longinus's and Kant's definition of the European sublime, the version most present in the anime is Edward Burke's Romantic European

sublime, foundational to both Romanticism and later versions of the sublime like Kant's and Hegel's. When Burke popularized the sublime in the 18th century in his landmark work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), the emotions behind the concept remained the same. However, it became more rooted in horror and transcendence and less in persuasion. He proposes that the sublime is affected by individual perceptions and experiences in the mind and heart rather than externally. The concept of the sublime became more psychological and less philosophical due to Burke's writings. Burke also argued that the concept of beauty and that of the sublime were opposites because beauty could produce only positive emotions while the sublime usually produced negative ones. Burke wrote, "They [the sublime and beauty] are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure."[2] Despite setting the sublime and beauty as opposing concepts, Burke agreed they could simultaneously be present in the same objects. He did not appear to think they were any less opposite because they could exist in the same objects. The theory of the beautiful and the sublime as opposites is discussed among Romantic scholars, but Burke's fellow Romantic period authors seemed to disagree with the notion that beauty and the sublime were opposites. In the Romantic era, the sublime became intimately linked to nature. Descriptions of the awe-inspiring beauty of nature and the near-religious experiences it caused filled the poetry of Wordsworth, Keats, and Emerson. Gothic-style novels dramatized the entrancing and terrifying knowledge brought to humankind by the mysterious power of nature, but Gothic literature embellished nature's power and often utilized the supernatural. By contrast, Romanticism focused on portraying the unfathomable already present within nature. Through both genres, the natural world took on an eerie life of its own.

Of all the European viewpoints, the Romantic era view of the sublime is the most enduring. Anime scholars Brendan C. Walsh and Samragngi Roy[3] have previously utilized the Romantic sublime, so the essay will refer to this when discussing the European concept of the sublime.

The Japanese Sublime

While the sublime began in Europe, the idea also has a long history in Japan. In "A Modern-Day Romantic: The Romantic Sublime in Hayao Miyazaki's Creative Philosophy," Walsh notes that Japan experienced a Romantic literary movement following the end of the Bakumatsu period[4]. Alan Tansman further specifies that Mori Ôgai was instrumental in introducing the concept to Japan[5]. When the sublime first entered Japan in 1890, it was demonstrated in texts rather than discussed theoretically and kept most of its European aspects. The concept they used was so similar that Kevin Doak notes that Japanese writers complained that those who used the sublime were unpatriotic[6]. The criticism of the sublime eventually led to changes in its use in the 1900s. Natsume Sôseki was instrumental in reforming Romanticist concepts like the sublime to fit Japanese culture better. While the European Romantic period focused on the individual's emotional connection to nature, Sôseki advocated for showing the emotions of the individuals using the landscape or nature itself. According to Daniel Poch, he connected the sublime in prose writing to more traditional forms of Japanese poetry, such as the haiku, by doing so[7].

The indirect connection to Japanese culture remained insufficient for some writers, and the definition changed again, becoming more political. Tansman states that during this period, the word for sublime changed to "yûgen" and focused more on seeing

greater, transcendent power inside objects[8]. Individuals would merge their minds with that greater power to experience the sublime. A few recent articles, such as the one by Elçi and Yurt, return to the word "yûgen" as a synonym for the sublime and connect it to melding the mind with transcendent, powerful forces in nature[9]. Both definitions rely on a combination of Taoism and Shinto. In doing so, they connect with an earlier article by James Boyd which explained how kami, Shinto divine spirits, were thought to possess power over nature, even though they were not visible.[10] The kami remained a part of nature regardless of their invisibility. Elçi and Yurt further theorize that the immanent power of nature and yet transcendent existence is "the source of the natural awe, numinous feelings and ephemeral sacredness."[11]

The most relevant version of the Japanese sublime to *Psycho-Pass*, however, is the one that emerged following the bombing of Hiroshima. The horrific destruction left behind by the atomic bomb significantly altered the concept of the sublime. Tansman argues that the sublime was represented through the horrifying corpses of the victims in the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima. By doing so, the sublime politically served the "anti nuclear left."[12] The concept also became irrevocably linked to grotesque violence.

An overall look at the Japanese concept of the sublime reveals that it has a history distinct from the European concept as well as a different meaning. The Japanese sublime focuses more on transcendent, overwhelming awe. The European sublime is more focused on the individual experience and how horror leads to a confrontation with individual identity. Examining the histories and definitions of the sublime according to the culture has created a chance for a more narrow, culturally appropriate definition of

the sublime to apply to *Psycho-Pass*. Now, which version or versions of the sublime are present in *Psycho-Pass* better must be considered.

***Psycho-Pass*'s Sublime: European Romantic**

The conversation on whether *Psycho-Pass* uses the European or Japanese sublime is ongoing. Scholars who prefer the Japanese interpretation, like Mark A. Wood, argue that while European philosophy is evident in the show's numerous references to European philosophers and scholars, the show was still created by a Japanese author and produced in Japan, so the Japanese influence supersedes the European influence. Wood states, "Whilst *Psycho-Pass* draws heavy inspiration from Western writers and theorists, interpreting *Psycho-Pass* through Western theory risks ignoring some of the show's cultural specificities."[13] Anna Felicia C. Sanchez disagrees, protesting that the show's reliance on European philosophy is too significant to ignore; the show should be examined according to European philosophy. She writes, "Despite its familiar crime-show format, *Psycho-Pass*'s heavy usage of mostly European philosophical texts tackling governance and ethics allows the narrative to be examined in this light."[14] Walsh gives respect to the Japanese tradition when examining the sublime in the works of Hayao Miyazaki, but he ultimately sides with Sanchez by using the Kantian concept of the sublime.[15] In short, there is no overall consensus on how to approach philosophical concepts in anime, particularly when the concepts have European roots as the sublime does.

The essay mostly uses the European concept of the sublime because of its origins; the references to Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and other European philosophers; and what we see in the anime. Elçi and Yurt[16] and Walsh[17] agree that the sublime was

imported into Japan when globalization began. Beyond a doubt, Japanese writers and artists re-shaped the sublime according to Japanese culture, but the root of the idea remains European. As Sanchez noted, *Psycho-Pass* quotes and relies on European philosophers and writers[18]. *Psycho-Pass*'s focus on horror and its use of religious motifs strongly implies it aligns better with the European sublime.

Nevertheless, Wood's arguments about a culture affecting a work are worth consideration, and a few pieces that belong strictly to the Japanese sublime, like a focus on the horror of what is, are visible. So the current examination of "the sublime" will mainly be using the Romantic European concept but will also keep in mind the influence of Japanese culture. The elements of the sublime focused on the most will be the horror, transcendent truth, and self-knowledge aspects.

Rikako Oryo and the Art of Horror

Psycho-Pass addresses the connection between art and the sublime during the Oso Academy arc in the character of Rikako Oryo and the art she created using the bodies of her victims. The horrific nature of Rikako's art appears to represent crime stories—such as brutal murders—and other forms of art that rely on horror. Rikako's goal of sparking critical thought about society and the world further shows the potential of the sublime within art as a catalyst for critical thinking. Due to Rikako's experiences with the world she lived in, she became disgusted with the peaceful, sanitized existence created by The Sybil System (the automated system that judges people's mental states and the likelihood of them committing a crime). She wanted her art to shock people out of their complacency and start contemplating harsh realities like death. With the help of

the show's main antagonist, Shogo Makishima, Rikako set out to accomplish her goals in an unforgettable and nightmarish way that the show ultimately does not condone.

Rikako's Inspiration

Rikako's message springs from her father Roichi Oryo's artistic career and how the current society, created by the Sibyl system, caused his decline. Roichi worked as an artist before The Sybil System was created. His paintings focused on broken female bodies and were considered both beautiful and disturbing. As Makishima notes, some might have assumed that someone had to be cruel and twisted to create such art, but Roichi's goals were to help humankind control their cruelty by making them aware of how it lay in their natures. Makishima states, "[Roichi] believed his artistic duty was to enlighten humanity and challenge us to grow."[19] When The Sybil System began to manage everyone's psychological health for them, and self-examination became unnecessary, Roichi embraced the change and stopped creating his art. However, part of him became unsettled by the lack of personal responsibility in The Sybil System's solution to human evil. He started using stress care methods to quiet his anxieties, leading him to overuse them and become ill. The disease he developed is known as Eustress Deficiency in the anime, but it is similar to what one could expect from the overuse of opioids. In the end, Roichi's attempt to become a peaceful man in the new peaceful society led to his brain deteriorating from lack of stimulation and the stopping of his heart.

Rikako knew about her father's career and intentions and then observed what The Sybil System—with its enforced happiness—had done to him. As a result, she began to view a lack of self-examination and critical thought as a type of living death. To honor

her father's legacy, Rikako became an artist with the same goal of enlightening humanity her father once had; however, her medium differed considerably from her father's.

Old Art in a New Medium

Rikako's artwork can be viewed as unoriginal. Rather than find her own way to shock people with her art, she uses her father's motif of dismembered female corpses combined with natural imagery. The first of her artworks matches one of her father's paintings seen in her dorm room. The second art installation Rikako creates, a girl holding her severed head in both hands with a rose underneath the head and both legs framing the picture, mimics almost the same pose made by a skeletal female body in one of her father's paintings. The most significant change between the father's artwork and the daughter's is in the choice of medium. From what the anime depicts, Roichi's work consisted solely of paintings. Rikako ups the violence and horror level by using real dismembered female bodies and creating installations that more closely resembled sculptures. Apart from the dismemberment and lack of clothing, Rikako does not appear to alter the bodies, which suggests she wants them to remain recognizable as real human beings. Roichi was willing to create fictional nightmares to terrify his viewers into self-reflection. Rikako consciously amplified the sublime characteristics in the art by making the nightmares real.

A major component of Rikako's medium was where she acquired the bodies, her components. Much like an artist's choice of subject impacts the meaning of the work, Rikako's decision to use her classmates at Oso Academy implies something. *Psycho-Pass* emphasizes that Rikako was particular about her choice of victims. They had to be

students attending Oso Academy. Choosing to only take victims from among her schoolmates has consequences: the inspectors and enforcers close in on her much more quickly because she kills within her social sphere. Makishima notes that as an issue and asks Rikako why she insists on murdering her classmates. Her reply is revealing.

First, Rikako points out that Oso Academy is an all-girls boarding school and then asks Makishima's thoughts on the curriculum. Makishima says it is traditional and the only place to get a conservative education. Rikako then states that Oso Academy focuses on "chastity and gracefulness, classic virtues that are nearly extinct, except for Oso Academy where they are still taught and celebrated."[20] She argues that the values are meaningless for boys but that they could still be used on girls to turn them into "antiques" for wealthy older men to "purchase" and marry. Rikako corrects herself after using the term "antiques" and instead uses the word "components," which compares them to her art installations. The switch to "components" implies Rikako believes Oso Academy's goal is not to create a critically thinking woman who can go out into the world on her own and succeed. Instead, she believes the school aims to create a movable doll: a serene and empty shell that can be manipulated in whichever way their husbands wish. With such a goal, Oso Academy symbolizes everything Rikako hated about a serene and unthinking world. By taking the classmates in the process of being shaped into those dolls and transforming them into horrifying, sublime artwork, Rikako makes a mockery of everything Oso Academy is trying to do. She creates a comparison between her murdering and using girls' bodies in her artwork and what Oso Academy wants its students to become.

Her love of *Titus Andronicus* hints at her focus on the concept of girls as pure dolls because *Titus Andronicus* features a girl, Lavinia, who is killed after being raped because she is no longer chaste and her presence shames her father. Similarly, both Oso Academy and The Sybil System valued purity in girls and punished the impure, even when a loss of purity was not the girl's fault. One of Rikako Oryo's final victims, Yoshika Okubo, faces a similar situation due to sexual harassment from her stepfather. While Yoshika tried to bear it, her purity of mind—in the form of her hue—was slowly tainted by the situation. If her hue, the marker of her psychological state, grew too dark, she would be treated as a criminal and locked away. Rikako knew about Yoshika's situation and discussed *Titus Andronicus* multiple times with her, even quoting it shortly before murdering her. Rikako may have seen Yoshika as another Lavinia whom society would destroy for being a helpless victim. Murdering Yoshika saved her from such a fate. Another aspect of *Titus Andronicus* that might have interested Rikako is that Lavinia's tongue is cut out so she cannot reveal the crimes against her. The cutting out of the tongue and its symbolic removal of the feminine voice may have been meaningful for Rikako, who saw society and Oso Academy as guilty of the same act. Perhaps she also hoped that seeing their friends physically placed in a doll-like state would wake the girls at Oso Academy up. There is have no confirmation of that last idea, so it remains mere speculation. What is known that Rikako wanted her artwork to be composed of her fellow students and would not compromise on that point, even to keep herself safe.

The choice of medium and victim reflects Rikako's desire to expose both The Sybil System's forced serenity and Oso Academy's true goals. The bodies are turned into sculptures through a particular type of resin that turns living tissue into plastic. As a

result, the body parts Rikako used were clean, bloodless, and perfect when she placed them in her artwork. Her installations should be dripping blood; instead, they are eerily sanitized like the body parts do not belong to living beings. Taking away the gore dehumanizes the girls, turning them into dolls to be taken apart instead of people with lives of their own. By taking away the blood and the stench, some of the most distressing elements of death, Rikako recreates how The Sybil System takes the stress out of profound events in life that should cause it. Doing so removes the messy parts that make a human being and leaves a soulless human doll behind. The strange contrast between the brutal reality of the human corpse and the flawless perfection of the plastic sends the message that death still exists in the world. It has simply been cleaned up and made to look like something else.

Rikako's Sublime

Beyond the bodies, Rikako's choice of medium also involves natural features, which are influenced by her view of the sublime. Rikako's artwork fits within the Romantic concept of the sublime because it uses natural places like parks and natural elements like roses, vines, and trees. More specifically, it fits with Kierkegaard's view of the sublime and art itself. In one episode, Rikako references Kierkegaard's philosophy that humankind despairs because they must relate the finite to the infinite. She says, "If you can't know despair, you can't know hope."[21] The concept of needing despair to understand hope fits well with Kierkegaard's philosophy that natural disasters like earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are needed to bring people back to Christianity. He claimed that if these horrifying events created by natural forces did not bring people to the Church, no amount of theology could change their minds.[22] Kierkegaard also

advocated that children have the crucifixion of Jesus Christ described to them in as much detail as possible so that the terrifying images of Christ's suffering and pain could give them a sublime understanding of all Christ had sacrificed. Rikako lacks the Christian focus of Kierkegaard; however, she agrees that spectacular horrifying events are necessary to bring people back to the higher truths in life.

Another area where Rikako agrees with Kierkegaard is in his overall view of art. Joakim Garff stated that Kierkegaard thought of art as an empty shell, though curiously enough, Kierkegaard was an avid enjoyer of art.[23] Kierkegaard believed that art, especially modern art, could be redeemed if it used the sublime and brought its viewers to a state of transcendence. Rikako echoes this idea because she admires works like *Titus Andronicus* and her father's that utilize violence to invoke the sublime but dislikes Shakespeare's comedies and other works that do not contain the sublime. She also relies on the medium of her work to relay most of her message, which fits with Kierkegaard's theory that works of art could reflect on their own forms rather than serve only as an interpretation.

Rikako Oryo and her art create a dialogue about the role of horror in the sublime. The focus is on the bloodless yet nightmarish nature in which she displays the bodies of her schoolmates and on her calm, philosophical reflections amid her violence and personal trauma. Adding her father, Roichi, into the mix adds an element of contrast. Because while he remained pure as an artist and committed no crimes, Rikako committed physical violence. The difference in the ultimate fates of Roichi and her father implies that Rikako should be condemned for that violence. While Rikako accomplishes her mission of making viewers think about death and the nature of

society, she ultimately is defeated by her own methods. One of the protagonists, Shinya Kogami, recognizes the similarity between Rikako's art and her father's work. Since she only killed girls from Oso Academy, finding her at the school all but guaranteed she would be a suspect. Soon, Kogami shows up and points a Dominator at her. Dominators are the firearms carried by Inspection and Enforcement officers of the Ministry of Welfare's Public Safety Bureau (MWPSB), which require permission from The Sybil System to fire. The gun immediately transforms into Lethal Eliminator mode, revealing Rikako as the killer and forcing her to flee. In her flight, she is betrayed by Makishima and killed. Ironically, her own body is later turned into artwork: her bones are made into carved tobacco pipes for a rich man, bringing the horror of Rikako Oryo full circle.

Makishima and Transcendent Truths

Rikako Oryo's mentor, Shogo Makishima, also demonstrates the use of the sublime in *Psycho-Pass*. As the show's main antagonist, he drives the action forward by sponsoring killers like Rikako and manipulating events behind the scenes.

Makishima did not create physical works of art like Rikako, but he did sculpt stories meant to connect with the sublime. In his appearance and philosophy, Makishima invokes the more transcendent aspects of the sublime. By creating life-and-death situations, Makishima stripped people down to their essential natures and learned more about what people were. He also attempted to teach society that life was about a struggle to survive and maintain one's identity. Instead of an artist, Makishima is closer to an author or playwright, using real people to act out his stories.

Makishima, the One Above it All

The pure white of Makishima's clothes and skin and his golden eyes invoke the concept of angels. The uneven feathery white hair reminds the viewer of a pair of wings. When examining a memory that Akane Tsunemori experiences during the memory dive she takes to uncover Makishima's face, Sanchez comments that "in this constructed memory, Makishima is a magnificent picture of contradiction: white as a seraph, the heavens blue and bright behind him, he descends the stairs to the singing of an angelic choir, preaching the gospel of free will, making the same declarations as he did while murdering Yuki."[24] The mentions of a "seraph" and "an angelic choir" reflect Makishima's connection to the angels. His expression is usually serene and distant. He often reflects on high, philosophical matters and expresses his desire to see the soul. The soul is closely linked to religion, and through it, to transcendence. Makishima can be inferred to represent a deity or transcendence.

Makishima is also immune from the judgments of The Sybil System as an asymptomatic criminal., a person whose psychological data does not match their malicious intentions. To demonstrate this to Tsunemori, he murders her best friend, Yuki Funehara, while she stands before him with a Dominator pointed at him. The Sybil System can render three judgments when a Dominator is aimed at someone. If The Sybil System deems a person a threat but capable of reformation, the gun will only stun. Criminals marked as incapable of repentance turn the gun into a lethal blaster. If the person is deemed innocent, the gun will not fire. When Tsunemori points it at Makishima right before he murders Yuki, the gun refuses to fire—The Sybil System does not consider Makishima a criminal. Tsunemori knows at that moment that her faith in The Sybil System is wrong because it has rendered an obviously immoral judgment.

Most of the characters in the series are tied down by The Sybil System. Many, like Nobuchika Ginoza, struggle daily to achieve the system's requirements. Makishima, however, is as immune to that struggle as he is to the danger faced by the killers he sponsors. Makishima transcends all other human beings in the story, like an angel or a god. The Sybil System confirms this with its final judgment of Makishima. Because of his asymptomatic status, Makishima is offered the chance to join The Sybil System's network of brains and become one of the "gods" judging humanity. Makishima refuses the offer and kills one of The Sybil System's brains in his escape, but the point remains that The Sybil System recognized Makishima as an equal even though it considers itself a god.

Exposing the Soul, Revealing the Identity

The bloody scenarios Makishima sets up, pitting killers like Rikako against Inspectors and Enforcers, also represent his connection to the transcendent. In each case, Makishima provides aid and sometimes counsel. He interacts intellectually with the killers he thinks have more potential. When the time comes for the killers to commit a crime, though, Makishima does not personally help them. He will send subordinates or advice but remains above the dirt and the blood, watching what transpires. Some killers—like Toyohisa Senguji, the cyborg billionaire with a taste for hunting people— invite him to participate, but Makishima refuses. At times, as he does in the case of Senguji, Makishima sets the killers up so that they are in real deadly peril themselves. For Senguji, Makishima left parts for a radio for the trapped human prey, Kogami, to call his fellow Enforcers for help. Doing so allowed Kogami to obtain a Dominator, fire back, and eventually kill Senguji. Before his death, Senguji notices that Makishima has

altered the plans to make it possible for Kogami to kill Senguji, his hunter. When

Senguji asked Makishima about this betrayal, Makishima's response shows the

philosophy behind his habit of sponsoring serial killers.

Makishima says:

> "When a man is confronted with fear, his very soul is tested. Everything that he was born to seek, everything he was born to achieve, his true nature will be revealed quite clearly…an unforeseen situation, an unexpected turn of events; in the wake of such moments, you too will be forced to face your true self."[25]

By encouraging the serial killers he saw as promising, Makishima could learn the

sublime truth about what humankind was at its core and what they could do with that

knowledge.

Makishima's concept of the sublime fits best with that of Edward Burke.

According to Simon Morley, the horror Burke discussed when writing about the sublime

was existential. He stated that Burke thought "the sublime experience, on the other

hand, had the power to transform the self, and Burke, like Longinus, saw something

ennobling in this terror-tinged thrill, as if the challenge posed by some threat served to

strengthen the self."[26] Since Burke's concept of the sublime focused on the

psychological, it can be assumed he likely did not mean physical threats but those that

have the power to break or destabilize the image we have of our identity. Makishima

creates physical threats to survival via the Enforcers or himself but continues to follow

Burke's concepts. The violent situations are means for his killers to gain knowledge

about themselves and for Makishima to learn more about the human soul. Before most

of the killers he sponsors are killed by the Enforcers, Makishima contacts them and says

that he wanted to learn something from them. He wanted to learn how the killers would

react to the sublime truth of humanity and their own identity. This argument is

supported by the end of two different killers he interacted with, Matasake Midou and

Toyohisa Senguji.

In the cases where Makishima expresses disappointment, the killers failed to

cope with their revealed identities. Matasake Midou, the killer who murdered popular

holo-net personalities and stole their avatars, had put his entire identity into copying

others, so his own identity was blank. Makishima admitted that he was only interested

in Midou because he wanted to see what would happen when Midou learned this

sublime truth. Midou's horrified cries and sobs disgust Makishima, who mocks Midou

before leaving him to be killed by the newly arrived enforcers.

When Senguji is forced to confront his nature, a man who lives by facing the thrill

of death repeatedly, through his fight with Kogami, his reaction meets with Makishima's

approval. Unlike the comparatively weak Midou, Senguji embraces the new revelations

about his identity and thanks Makishima for setting up the opportunity. Makishima's

promise to Senguji as the enforcers close in is: "I will witness the splendor of your life,

all the way until you draw your last breath."[27] The description of Senguji's life as

"splendor" and the tone of the promise show the respect Makishima has for Senguji. By

coming in person to watch Senguji's hunt and staying until the enforcers have finished

closing in, Makishima also takes a risk that he never did with any of the killers. His

promise and actions suggest Makishima found what he was looking for in Senguji; a

man who could know the sublime truth of his own nature and accept it.

Makishima, the Author

The sublime is at work in Makishima's character in the "art" he produces and the manipulations made to create it. By helping the killers commit their crimes and putting them in life-or-death situations, Makishima makes living stories reflecting life's nature as a constant struggle between ourselves, other people, and the world. He is not too different from the writer who places the characters in the scenarios or the audience who watches the gory happenings with horrified fascination. His quest to show life as a struggle even The Sybil System cannot end comes to a climax as he stands in front of Tsunemori with a razor to her friend's throat. He tosses Tsunemori the shotgun and challenges her to shoot him with it rather than trying to use the useless Dominator. The action leaves Tsunemori with a choice: believe in The Sybil System even when it seems wrong, or discard it and take matters into her own hands. This is the one moment where Makishima puts himself on the line, where he loses some of his transcendence to make himself vulnerable. Tsunemori is paralyzed, unable to decide to throw her Dominator and her faith away, as Makishima slits Yuki's throat in front of her. The horror of the experience brings Tsunemori the knowledge of transcendent truth, that life is about struggles choices. Makishima goes on to attack the MWPSB directly and later dies at Kogami's hands. Yet, the moment with Tsunemori still stands out as the climactic moment where Makishima revealed the terrifying truth of The Sybil System.

Before the discussion of Makishima can be considered complete, however, there is a component of the European Romantic sublime which has yet to be mentioned and seems to be missing from Makishima's actions at first: nature. Unlike Rikako, who puts her art in natural settings and uses natural imagery, Makishima's scenarios do not

appear to include nature. In his manipulations, though, nature is the return of humans to a natural state rather than using natural wonders. He reduces people to their cores by creating primal struggles, the struggle to fight off others and to survive. Senguji particularly invokes this idea because he is a hunter, though he is more akin to an English nobleman hunting than an ancient primeval man.

Makishima and his actions are grotesque and violent. However, imbuing Makishima with angelic characteristics and the distance of a deity emphasizes the transcendent, religious aspects of the sublime. He shows viewers the value of life while dramatically taking several lives. Much like Rikako, however, his ending is painful and ignominious. Makishima is a fascinating character, but his death implies that he should not be seen as admirable due to the violence he created and committed.

Psycho-Pass, Anime, and the Sublime

By examining specific characters like Rikako Oryo and Shogo Makishima and the different ways they represent the sublime, examples of two specific ways the sublime is portrayed within *Psycho-Pass* emerge. Before making an overall statement about how the series' use of the sublime can be interpreted, a step back is necessary so that the sublime in *Psycho-Pass* as a whole can be examined. As an anime, *Psycho-Pass* possesses several characteristics commonly shared by TV shows of that medium, such as deliberate exaggeration and beautiful, horrific portrayals of violence. The animation style *Psycho-Pass* uses is also more conducive to depicting the sublime.

Beautiful, Gory Violence

Anime as a medium portrays the sublime well because it often exaggerates expressions, especially in moments of horror. One reason for this, as Satoshi Cho and Hisashi Sato note, is that animating features is easier when they are exaggerated.[28] Jaqueline Berndt also noted that exaggerated forms in anime, like chibi, can be used during moments where characters feel deep emotion to provide comic relief or create an extra layer or meaning. Berndt argues, "midget versions of one and the same character visualize affective states – uncontrollable temper, immense exertion, or physical pain."[29] Chibi-fication is less grounded in horror than other types of exaggeration in anime, but it displays the potential to manipulate features to change the impact of a scene. This is especially felt in moments of horror. The moment a person realizes they will die is often portrayed with wide eyes and shocked expressions. Zeqing Liu states, "Because of the unique artistic tension of anime, the consequences of such technological distortions are often expressed in horrific and exaggerated painting forms, adding to its horror and sense of shock."[30] Since animation lends itself to exaggeration, as Cho and Sato suggest, and exaggerated facial expressions can make the characters' emotions more impactful, as Berndt and Liu note, animation proves itself to be is a suitable vehicle for the sublime. The sublime involves using graphic images to communicate transcendent truths and provoke critical thought, and the exaggeration in anime makes it uniquely qualified to portray the sublime.

According to Liu, *Psycho-Pass*'s style is typical of dystopian anime and focuses more on the characters' expressions. The detailed expressions allow us to see the pain and terror the characters experience, creating sympathy for them and a corresponding

sense of horror in the viewer. The ability to understand emotions better also communicates other concepts to the viewer. Rikako's serene expressions make the viewer feel revolted because she commits murder without any sign of being bothered by the act. Makishima's distant expressions connect his role as a symbol of transcendence. Creating detailed, exaggerated expressions allows for a more sublime viewing experience.

Psycho-Pass also relies on anime's exaggerated portrayal of violence. Christopher Bolton compared anime's portrayal of violence to how puppet theaters portray violence[31]. He stated that, in both cases, the medium allows for special effects which exaggerate violence in a way that makes it deeply moving. Despite the gratuitous gore, the violence in *Psycho-Pass* can sometimes seem graceful, even beautiful. Hand-to-hand fights, like those between Kogami and Makishima, become intimate dances, with each fighter playing their part. The Dominators in *Psycho-Pass* are a more significant example of exaggeration. Instead of a small burst of blood and a hole, Dominators in Lethal Eliminator mode make people bubble and explode into showers of gore. People near the target of a Dominator become covered in the target's blood. The iconic Dominators are also examples of violence turned into beauty. Liu states that the Dominators look beautiful when they transform into Lethal Eliminator mode. Sanchez agrees, writing that "The gorgeous animation of the Dominator's modes as it transitions from Non-lethal Paralyzer to Lethal Eliminator to its highest setting intended for inorganic targets, Destroy Decomposer, are in deliberate contrast to the gross violence to which anyone who falls outside the norm is subjected."[32] The significance of the weapon being beautiful while the victims become horrifying is telling. It makes the

weapons seem less monstrous, yet the horror provides pity for the victims. Liu argues that "directors deliberately use violent and gory scenes or scenarios to create an exciting and unpleasant effect."[33] He refers to this portrayal of violence as the "aesthetics of violence" and states that it is common in anime such as *Psycho-Pass*. This essay argues that the aesthetics of violence in *Psycho-Pass* are meant to remind the viewer of what they are witnessing and provide them with a sublime experience of their own. The visceral and unpleasant gore may also be to discourage real violence.

Conclusion

By applying the European Romantic concept of the sublime, viewers can see how *Psycho-Pass* both comments on and utilizes the sublime. Rikako Oryo and Shogo Makishima deliberately utilize the sublime in their art. While Rikako shares her father's belief that humankind can awaken critical self-thought through experiencing the sublime, Makishima believes the sublime can clarify a person's identity. The contrast between Rikako's end and her father Roichi's end suggests the show asks what price artists are willing to pay to portray the sublime. While Rikako, who went too far by committing to portray the sublime in her art, died violently and was regarded as a heinous serial killer, Roichi, who used violent symbols but committed no physical violence, was admired as an artist and died a somewhat peaceful death through Eustress Deficiency. Like Rikako, Makishima is known only as a criminal mastermind. His end was painful as he had to endure bullet wounds and a prolonged chase before finally being shot in the head. Examining each character's ultimate fate and how far they went to portray the sublime supports the theory that while *Psycho-Pass* advocates for the value of using the sublime in art and fiction, it condemns actual violence as a method for

the sublime. The distinction is important because some scholars, such as Bolton, believe violent media like anime can encourage violence by glorifying it. *Psycho-Pass*'s argument against real violence suggests that it utilizes violence without making it seem admirable.

The view of fictional violence versus actual violence appears to match the usage of the sublime in *Psycho-Pass*. Several horrific images, like the dismembered bodies of high school girls and the gory explosion of criminals hit by Dominators, are used; a few even appear beautiful. Nevertheless, the exaggerated expressions and violence enhance the feeling of unreality, reminding the readers that what they see is ultimately fictional even as they take in the horror of it all.

Psycho-Pass demonstrates that fiction can utilize the sublime without endorsing violent or immoral acts. If this view is accurate, the argument that violent TV shows are harmful can be called into question. *Psycho-Pass* shows that a little terror and gore might be healthy for the minds of critical thinkers.

Notes

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Black Butler: The Child Detective Hunts Jack the Ripper

Joti Bilkhu

Abstract: In Toboso Yana's anime *Black Butler*, she pairs the figures of the child detective with Jack the Ripper to arrive at a complex array of meanings. The Ripper figure continues to have one of the most popular afterlives following its original context of Victorian Britain, with numerous contemporary iterations and adaptations of the 1888 murders visible across contemporary popular culture. This article examines the characteristics that *Black Butler*'s child detective Ciel Phantomhive has in common with the Ripper (tragic histories, violent behavior, and the strategic use of knowledge). I begin by contextualizing *Black Butler* in regards to Japanese literature, a world literature framework, and the neo-Victorian genre alike. I then turn to analyzing how Ciel deploys the knowledge he gains from the Ripper case to legitimize himself; he both unravels the mystery of this figure and allows it to persist. In essence, the Ripper phenomenon garners such interest precisely because it is a mystery, and Ciel capitalizes on the same uncertainties and (lack of) knowledge as a form of power.

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Black Butler: The Child Detective Hunts Jack the Ripper

Set in Victorian London, Toboso Yana's manga-turned-anime *Black Butler*[1] is about a twelve-year-old aristocratic boy named Ciel Phantomhive who makes a Faustian contract with a demon after his family is murdered, and Ciel himself is sold and nearly sacrificed in a cult ritual.[2] The demon—Sebastian Michaelis—lends Ciel his power and unwavering loyalty until Ciel can find and avenge his family's murderers, at which point their contract will presumably end in Sebastian's consumption of Ciel's soul. Until then, however, Ciel follows in his father's footsteps by solving crimes and policing the underworld for Queen Victoria. The first significant case Ciel takes on for Her Majesty is the Jack the Ripper murders. Arguably, it is no coincidence that Toboso chose the Ripper; in the context of English popular culture, the Ripper has had a "mini-industry" devoted to him ever since the first newspaper reports of the killings in 1888.[3]

This article begins by exploring the conditions of emergence and continued endurance of the figure of Jack the Ripper in *Black Butler,* considered in light of Japanese, world literature, and (neo)-Victorian contexts. I then analyze how knowledge and uncertainty simultaneously characterize the Ripper sensation, and argue that Ciel manipulates such (un)certainties to access agency, demonstrating certain similarities between the two figures. Specifically, I focus on how Ciel oscillates between performing childhood and adulthood as means of power and agency.[4]

Japanese Origins

According to Kawana Sari, detective fiction has captivated the Japanese reading public since the late-nineteenth century, but the genre has also resisted rigid definitions.[5] Not only were the Japanese unconcerned about upholding generic formats,

early writers were also willing to forfeit any claims to originality when detective fiction first began spreading in specific regions of Japan.[6] Kawana explains that mentioning names and plots from existing works was not viewed as creative piracy in Japan at this point, but rather, it was seen as a way to demonstrate one's mastery of the genre's conventions and existing literature.[7] Therefore, we can understand and position Toboso's adaptation of the Ripper figure and murders in the spirit of this tradition, and for her part, she contributes to the phenomenon of the Ripper by threading together several popular cultural figures, plotlines, and character archetypes.[8]

As a character, Jack the Ripper is by no means new to Japan; instead, he has already carved a space for himself in contemporary Japanese literature and popular culture.[9] Several other anime (and their manga counterparts) that have employed the Ripper include *Soul Eater, Detective Conan Movie 6: The Phantom of Baker Street, Black Clover,* and *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure Part 1: Phantom Blood.*[10] John Paul Green, observing that hundreds of books and fictions have been written about the Ripper, remarks that he is essentially a "cultural commodity to be packaged and sold," traditionally identified by his top hat, cape, and Gladstone bag.[11] As such, Toboso's iteration repurposes the Ripper as a symbol of ambiguity with which the figure of the child detective can engage to produce diverse meanings.

World Literature and Neo-Victorian Adaptations

The cultural iconography of and obsession with Jack the Ripper as a character constitutes what David Damrosch describes as an exemplar of world literature, since this figure "circulate[s] beyond [his] culture of origin, either in translation or in [his] original language."[12] Damrosch goes on to posit that world literature is both

multicultural and multi-temporal,[13] and we might consider how *Black Butler* fits these criteria. In regard to the multi-temporal aspect that Damrosch identifies as distinctive of world literature, *Black Butler* is a contemporary work set in Victorian London, so it engages with the Victorian era and nineteenth-century English culture through the lens of neo-Victorianism. Aside from the Ripper, *Black Butler* also re-imagines Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) across two OVA episodes; Carroll's *Alice* books are perhaps one of the most revisited texts in the neo-Victorian genre. Many Japanese anime have created 'Alice' episodes, oftentimes by having the main character become an Alice substitute and setting off on a journey through Wonderland, in which they meet the other characters playing different roles in Carroll's world. In *Black Butler*'s case, Ciel is Alice, Sebastian the White Rabbit, Grell the Cheshire Cat, and Madame Red the Queen of Hearts.

Another significant aspect of the work's multi-temporality is its anachronism; Waiyee Loh demonstrates that although the narrative takes place in the late 1880s, Toboso employs "anachronistic design elements and accessories," including "lace cravats from the Restoration period (1660–80), and crinoline silhouettes from the mid-Victorian period (1844–68)."[14] Anachronism also reoccurs with a character named Grell Sutcliff, a grim reaper who uses a reaper's scythe that is disguised as a motorized chainsaw. It is worth noting that while the first chainsaw was invented as early as 1830, this initial version would have been turned manually.[15] Otherwise, a modern motorized version like that used by Grell was only created in the late 1920s.[16] Therefore, Toboso's use of anachronism in *Black Butler* allows audiences to engage with the anime as a "'palimpsestuous work,'"[17] and one that is, I suggest, an accumulation of various popular literary tropes and cultural artifacts.

Notably, *Black Butler* changes the chronology and details of some of the Ripper's murders to adapt the material for a neo-Victorian lens. For some, Mary Ann Nichols was the Ripper's first known victim; in Toboso's iteration though, she is, according to Ciel, not the first, but "[a]nother prostitute [. . .] found gruesomely murdered in Whitechapel."[18] But in keeping with historicity, Toboso does leave Mary Jane Kelly as the last victim.[19] Toboso also changes and emphasizes certain details of the murders to make the events fit her plot—namely that the victims are all missing their wombs. Further, the climax that *Black Butler* offers is the revelation that the Ripper is a male *and* female duo working together. The female of the pair is none other than Ciel's aunt, Madame Red. Given that the Victorian pseudo-sciences linked criminality to the "lesser" races and to women's transgressive sexualities, it is unsurprising that Kawana identifies a similar trend in Japanese criminology pre-World War I.[20] There may be a vestige of this tradition in the character of Madame Red, who represents failed female sexuality with her inability to conceive children after an accident that causes the loss of her uterus.[21] Accordingly, she is furious at the prostitutes who come to the hospital (where she works as a doctor) in need of abortions, and her response is punitive; she kills the prostitutes brutally, penalizing them for an unavoidable risk of their work.

According to Stephen Snyder, contemporary Japanese writers "increasingly ignor[e] the boundaries between serious and popular fiction, often [. . .] combining elements of various genres in a single fiction."[22] Jonathan Clements' earlier work lends credence to this idea by demonstrating that in the late 1990s, the content of anime could be grouped into three main strands; the child-strand, adult-strand, and significantly, the hybrid-strand.[23] Clements' classification is significant because Loh also suggests that *Black Butler* "celebrates contemporary Japan's ability to hybridize different cultures and

to disseminate its hybrid cultural commodities around the world as a cultural superpower in the age of postmodern globalization."[24] Arguably, this notion of hybridization, or of intricately weaving together disparate elements, partly explains the anime's enduring success.[25] Toboso has, quite skillfully, capitalized on a trend that characterizes Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptations, which she describes as "obsessions [. . . that] rarely disappear, even if they do mutate."[26] And *Black Butler* is a compelling collection of cultural obsessions, including formulations of detective fiction, Jack the Ripper, and neo-Victorian literature.

But obsessions or adaptations must also undergo refashioning to remain prevalent in popular culture with contemporary audiences. Hutcheon maintains that adaptations are "repetition with variation," and that they combine the comfort of ritual with the novelty of change.[27] Damrosch essentially makes the same claim about audiences' responses to foreign texts, where "sharp" differences are enjoyed for their "sheer novelty," similarities are "gratifying," and the "middle range" of recognizing what is "*like-but-unlike*" has the most potential to produce changes in audiences' perceptions and/or practices.[28] For its part, *Black Butler* retains enough historically accurate details of the Ripper murders so that the figure is recognizable, but it changes a few key elements so that viewers' expectations are subverted—and perhaps even surpassed. Further, Hutcheon suggests that transcultural adaptations often result in changes in racial and gender politics, the latter of which is evident with Madame Red given that *most* neo-Victorian fictions and iterations of the Ripper—especially those written during the first half of the twentieth century—have revealed the figure to be a man.[29] In effect, imagining the Ripper as a man locates the character in a continuum of violent masculine behavior.[30] Before Madame Red meets the grim reaper Grell—who joins her serial

killing[31]—the anime positions the Ripper in a locus of violent feminine behavior, simultaneously conventional and original, and evoking both multiple and contradictory meanings.

The Faustian contract is another cultural obsession that *Black Butler* reworks and relocates: in this case, between a child and a demon. Damrosch determines that the story of Faust—Goethe's iteration, at least—is a staple of many world literature courses.[32] He argues that these "major canonical masterpieces are worthy of sustained attention both for aesthetic and for cultural reasons, but they persist [. . .] because they adapt so effectively to the changing needs of different times and places."[33] The essence of the Faust tale is that a human sells their soul to a demon in exchange for knowledge, but this basic premise can easily be adapted to almost any time period and culture. Şeyda Sivrioğlu illustrates that between 1850–1900, the Faust myth was particularly popular in English novels,[34] which can be ascribed to the fact that knowledge itself was expanding into new, uncharted domains, both scientific and otherwise. Therefore, knowledge becomes a marketable cultural commodity.

Further, Sivrioğlu explains that Faust is feminized in some rewritings of the myth because the magic and sorcery he uses are traditionally linked to feminine modes of knowledge and agency.[35] As a child who is physically weak, Ciel fits into said feminized tradition because he depends on Sebastian's supernatural strength and their contract not only to attain more knowledge, but also to ensure that his will is carried out. As a child, he lacks the ability to physically fend off criminals on his own, so he depends on Sebastian's demonic powers to develop his own legitimacy with adults. By contrast, Madame Red kills the prostitutes, illustrating how her physical violence draws on more conventionally masculine forms of power. Thus, similar to the Ripper, the Faust tale is

another popular cultural phenomenon with a rich history, and Toboso's decision to locate these figures in Victorian London acquires a profusion of meanings.

Considering that the Victorian era is one that developed many competing definitions of children, it is noteworthy that Ciel makes a contract with Sebastian at the age of ten. In the nineteenth century, children were beginning to be understood in a legal context, rendering them sociological subjects in their own right. Legislative examples of this shift included the changing labor laws, the Forster Education Act of 1870,[36] and the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which "raised the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen," but children were still exploited—for a fictionalized version of this, one need only look at Ciel's exploitation at the hands of the cult and Viscount Druitt's attempts to sell him.[37] Therefore, the Faustian contract made between a child and a demon allows Toboso to draw on this evolving history of children's increasing agency alongside their continued dependency. That a demon is the only being Ciel can trust with *almost* complete confidence also offers a nuanced reading of the complicated facets of children's mobility.

The Child Detective and the Ripper: Anti-heroes, Villains, and Bad Beginnings

In the twenty-first century, there is a trend toward villains and anti-heroes who have begun to displace heroes in popular literature and entertainment.[38] Anime also participates in this tradition and has often been credited for its creation of "superior" characters who are distinguished for their moral complexity,[39] an element of which *Black Butler* takes full advantage.[40] Ciel, Madame Red, and Grell all have tragic past experiences that motivate their journeys, which effectively illustrate how the child

detective and the Ripper are not stark opposites, as one might imagine—rather, a shared history of violence, pain, and grief links this trio. For instance, when the anime reveals that Madame Red is one member of the Ripper duo, it also reveals her tragic backstory (the death of her husband and unborn child) through the "Cinematic Record" (the record of her life) while she dies, inviting viewers to feel sympathy for her.[41] Such moral complexity also explains Anna Maria Jones' characterization of Ciel as an "anti-hero."[42] In a later OVA episode, audiences even see Grell as a trainee at the Grim Reaper Association, which is interesting because humans who commit suicide become grim reapers as punishment. Thus, audiences might also consider how Grell, who is one member of the Ripper duo, was once victimized too.

Black Butler's characters cannot be classified according to a simplistic good/evil binary; instead, they are multifaceted. As Poore argues, "[t]here is no evil like an unnameable evil," and Grell embodies such unnameability.[43] Ciel cannot name Grell (a nonhuman entity) to Queen Victoria, but he chooses not to name Madame Red—he merely puts a stop to the murders as per Her Majesty's orders. Grell is a complicated character; he is transgender,[44] he is called a "divine being," he is half of the Ripper, he is a grim reaper who is "an intermediary between man and god," and as the anime progresses, he disintegrates into a figure of homosexual comic relief, his inadequacy constantly contrasted with Sebastian's high level of competency.[45] Sebastian, though, is no different in terms of complexity. Dressed in more black than white, he is "sinister predator, powerful protector, and abject servant" all at once.[46] He is not merely a demon who wishes to consume Ciel's soul, but also a figure who serves him, comforts him, and even plays a paternal role of sorts.[47] Even Ciel is simultaneously a defenseless child and a killer for the Queen. Furthermore, he uses the knowledge he obtains from the Ripper

case to cement his position in Victorian society and showcase his abilities. For Ciel to manage the Ripper case successfully—a case that has produced and remains rife with uncertainties—helps to establish his agency. Therefore, the complexity and multiplicity of *Black Butler*'s characters, particularly its most central cast, render them persistently popular to twenty-first century audiences.

Co-opting the (Un)known: Knowledge as Power

To recapitulate thus far, I have endeavored to illustrate how and why Jack the Ripper has emerged and endured not only globally, but also in Japan specifically. I have also discussed how *Black Butler* employs the figure of the Ripper through a world literature and neo-Victorian lens. Now I will analyze Ciel's role as a child detective who produces, circulates, and employs knowledge in order to validate himself and access agency in society. His relationship to knowledge is one of liminality; when he performs childhood, he feigns a lack of knowledge, but when he behaves like an adult, he displays what he knows as a form of power. Fundamentally, Ciel co-opts the Ripper for his own agency. The mystery surrounding the Ripper both persists and unravels, and as a child detective, Ciel's persona is similarly shrouded in questions and unknowns, mixed with half-truths. The main overlap between the two figures is how they use knowledge as a commodity to access power.

One of the first forms of knowledge Ciel manipulates is his awareness of childhood as a concept and adults' expectations of children's behaviors. For example, in the first episode, Ciel invites a businessman named Damiano to his manor for dinner and insists on playing a board game. Ciel focuses on the board game so much that Damiano cannot get in a word edgewise about the expansion of Ciel's factory in India.

Under his breath, he remarks, "How childish."[48] Ciel overhears this and looks at the man, who hastily corrects himself. In this scene, Ciel oscillates between performing the behaviors expected of children and acting like an upper-class earl who owns a very successful confection and toymaking company, leaving Damiano uncertain as to how to approach him. After dinner, Damiano tries to discuss the company again, but Ciel says, while grinning, "Children can be very demanding about their games. Surely you wouldn't want me to get upset," illustrating how he performs stereotypically childish behavior even though it is clear Damiano no longer wants to play this game and is running out of patience.[49] Christopher Routledge argues that the child detective "operates in a space between childhood and adulthood," which is precisely what Ciel's behavior indicates.[50] His method is to act childish to discover knowledge. Damiano continues to underestimate Ciel when he remarks to his accomplices on the phone, "Please, he's only a child," failing to realize that the young earl has tricked him with his earlier antics.[51] But Ciel knows that Damiano is one of the "pawns who [has] betray[ed]"[52] and exacts his revenge by making the man believe that the board game they played is coming to life in the Phantomhive manor. In a later episode, Sebastian sums it up quite nicely to Ciel: "You look like a helpless little child all bound up like that, but then I guess that's appropriate."[53] Helplessness is only a façade that Ciel performs. Sebastian's comment further indicates that the image Ciel portrays is only appropriate because that is what adults want to see and what he wants to convey: vulnerability. Ciel's portrayal of vulnerability is, in part, tied to his physical appearance. Besides the clothes he wears, which I discuss later, the one consistent accessory he wears is his eyepatch. The eyepatch conceals the mark of his contract with Sebastian—a star over his eye—but

it can easily be misread as a marker of physical disability, which is another iteration of vulnerability, especially in a child.

The board game Ciel plays with Damiano reveals that games can function as a form of knowledge for child detectives and require a mastery that adults may lack. Ciel describes Damiano as a traitorous "paw[n]," he plays a game of chess with Madame Red prior to his discovery that she is part of the Ripper duo, and the ending of games is something that the young earl remarks upon quite often.[54] Later, at a pool table with various guests, Ciel says, "It's time to put an end to this worthless game."[55] The phrase is ambiguous; in one sense, Ciel refers to the pool table game proper, but in another, he also refers to the game of catching rats—the Italian mafia. As a child detective, this ambiguity gives Ciel an upper hand because it allows him to exist in a liminal space, one in which he undermines the adult world's rules and expectations by treating their world as a game. In fact, Ciel remarks that the "game" with Azzurro Vanel, a member of the Italian mafia, "wasn't as much fun this time," and then, to Azzurro: "Unfortunately for you, this game is over."[56] Games allow Ciel to discover how the adult world operates and to use this information to his advantage. Sebastian also advises Ciel to use all his pawns even if their bodies pile up at foot of Ciel's throne because "if the king falls, this game is over."[57] He refers to both Ciel's search for his parents' murderers and the game that he and Ciel are playing over his soul. Earlier, when Damiano and Ciel played the board game, Ciel reminds the man that since his player on the board lost a leg on the previous turn, he cannot move forward six spaces on the board, but only three.[58] The adults do not always know how to play games, or they forget the rules, demonstrating that they cannot operate in a child's world. A child like Ciel, however, called "Phantomhive, lord of games"[59] can operate in both worlds, and at their threshold.

Children's detective fiction must effectively eliminate childhood for the child to act like an adult or a detective.[60] Since Ciel lost his parents and was sold to a cult, there is no real childhood left for him—at least, not as the Victorians imagined it. For an upper-class child such as Ciel, the Victorians would have at least imagined childhood to consist of a lack of exploitation in regard to sexuality and labor.[61] When he operates in the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, he only performs childhood to uncover schemes in the adult world. For instance, while he and Sebastian investigate Viscount Druitt, Ciel crossdresses as a girl and tells the Viscount she is looking for "other amusements," to which Druitt responds, "You might be a bit young yet."[62] Ciel counters with, "I'm a lady, not a little girl," and the sexual innuendos are clear.[63] Physically, Ciel is costumed as a young girl, but he performs adulthood by indicating he has sexual knowledge. Jones offers an insightful analysis about Ciel as the "paradoxically knowing-innocent child," where the innocent child is presented as a victim, but simultaneously, the knowing child is presented as an agent.[64] Ciel embodies this paradox through his explicit orders to Sebastian to kill people, but he is also portrayed as a victim on numerous occasions: when Azzurro beats him, when Sebastian tries to shield his eyes from Mary Kelly's butchered, bloody body, and when Madame Red attacks him with a knife.[65] The Phantomhive servants Mey-Rin and Finny comment that Ciel looks like a "baby" when Sebastian carries him, a sharp contrast to Sir Randall calling him a "vulture."[66] This is precisely the dichotomy Jones emphasizes; the helpless and dependent 'baby' coexists with the bird of prey that ensnares people.

As with the Ripper's multiplicity, this recognition of Ciel as a child, yet also undeniably adult-like, is part of his hybrid identity that allows him to access the child, adult, and underworlds all at once. He is not the only one who exemplifies such

hybridity, though: similarly, Grell traverses both the human world and the afterlife, and Madame Red saves people as a doctor but also ends some lives as the Ripper. The trio's multiplicity exemplifies not only how they each exploit knowledge as a cultural commodity to gain power, but it also emphasizes Smith's argument that, "[a]n important element of the portrayal of the detective is the attributes that he has in common with the Ripper."[67] Aside from this trio's tragic histories, their capability for extreme violence links them and, interestingly, Ciel and Grell's positions as keepers of order. The Ripper duo's murders make a violent spectacle of female bodies, and likewise, Ciel is always willing to commit acts of violence to stop criminals. As a keeper of order, Ciel controls the public's knowledge about the Ripper and its circulation in society. Philippa Gates explains that even when Jack the Ripper's identity is uncovered, justice—in the legal sense—is never achieved, illustrating how the character eludes the detective fiction genre's convention of providing closure.[68] Grell eludes justice and, like Ciel, he exists in a liminal space.

The knowledge Ciel attains through his investigation of the Ripper murders captures the notion that "contemporary postmodernist children's mysteries [. . .] are not predictable [. . .] and do not conclude in knowingness."[69] When Grell is first revealed as one member of the Ripper duo, audiences do not expect Madame Red's revelation two entire minutes later.[70] According to Karen Coats, postmodern knowledge tends toward undecidability.[71] Ciel knows the identities of the Ripper, and as mentioned previously, while Grell is an "unnameable evil,"[72] Madame Red is not. Ciel could have revealed that his aunt was the Ripper, but he chooses to hide this fact because this revelation might have discredited his carefully crafted persona as "[t]he Queens's guard dog."[73] Therefore, in Toboso's iteration, Ciel's silence and refusal to circulate this information at

the end of the case enhances his power by allowing him to construct and shape the public's reality and knowledge of the Ripper as an unknowable and undefined entity. Moreover, there is an element of uncertainty to Ciel's actions; does he remain silent about Madame Red's gruesome nightlife to spare her, or to prevent the Phantomhive name from being stained for its connection with her? The anime seems to suggest both with the exposition of Madame Red's tragic past, her murder at Grell's hands, and the sentimentalized funeral scene where Ciel brings a red dress to cover his aunt's body adorned in white—because red was her favorite color.[74]

Another mode of legitimization that Ciel deploys is his position and its link to knowledge. He is referred to as "the policeman of England's underworld [. . .] the Queen's guard dog," indicating that his profession is about maintaining order and finding knowledge or truths.[75] Flanders argues that, "Detection – in fiction, at any rate – made the world safe."[76] In relation to the Ripper murders, Madame Red comments that, "[t]he Queen's guard dog has a new scent to follow."[77] In effect, Ciel legitimizes himself through other agents of power—in this case, Queen Victoria is the highest agent of power. He fashions himself as an extension of her power by highlighting his connection to her; he is *her* guard dog, and not any guard dog, as it were. In light of the discovery that his aunt is part of the Ripper duo, he states that he was searching for a murderer and that "degree of relation to me did not matter."[78] Ciel demonstrates his impartiality when dealing with tasks from the Queen, which effectively validates and reaffirms his capabilities to be the guard dog in the first place. He will not be led astray by sentimentality. Further, this moniker of 'the Queen's guard dog' is repeated throughout the anime. If naming is an act of recognition and of knowing oneself, then Ciel's repeated naming—whether by himself or others—can be seen as reiterations of his

identity and self-knowledge. His position as the Queen's guard dog is decidedly different from when he remarks that Azzurro's men are "lapdogs" who "better [. . .] know how to fetch."[79] In effect, Ciel reasserts his superiority by establishing a hierarchy of power through dog types, in which lapdogs rank lower than the guard dog. Yet this is not without its own downsides. The Undertaker, one of Ciel's tentative allies, warns, "Lord Phantomhive, you should be wary of the path down which duty will take you—that collar may choke you yet."[80] Dogs wear collars, and the Undertaker's warning suggests Ciel could either become trapped in this guard dog identity—in other words, this child detective identity—or strangled by it. As much as naming is an act of power, it can also become a snare.

Clothing and accessories help Ciel to cement his performance as an adult. The sapphire Phantomhive ring he wears as the head of his household highlights his position as an earl in Victorian society, even if the ring only fits his thumb. As a result, when his fiancée Elizabeth destroys the ring, a symbol of legitimacy, he nearly strikes her.[81] With Sebastian's timely interference, however, Ciel controls his anger and hides how troubled he is to convey an air of maturity. This performance of adulthood is reiterated with the walking stick Ciel and Sebastian pick up at a shop. The shopkeeper's comment about the "short" walking stick has Ciel frowning because the man undermines his authority by implying that Ciel is only a child and that an adult—or a man—would use a longer stick.[82] The same point can be made about the heeled shoes Ciel wears. In effect, these are the props of legitimacy, of a child performing adulthood.

On the subject of neo-Victorian works in the twenty-first century, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn suggest that the "domestic location of the family home [. . .] serves as an important link to the generational past of the protagonists."[83] Alongside the ring,

the domestic space aids Ciel in defining and knowing himself. For instance, when Ciel orders the servants to remove the painting of his deceased parents, he literally places them into 'the generational past' while situating himself as his genealogy's present.[84] In so doing, he claims a sort of ownership of the Phantomhive manor, demonstrating that he controls this domestic space as an adult should. Additionally, the Phantomhive manor marks the place where Ciel was both victimized (his parents died in the house, making him an orphan), but it is also the place that represents his agency now. The domestic space embodies Ciel's power in the form of Sebastian, a demon butler, and extraordinary servants: Mey-Rin is a former sniper, Bardroy a war veteran, and Finny is an experimental test subject who has superhuman strength. Therefore, in the present moment, the domestic space functions as a site in which Ciel consolidates his power.

Conclusion

As a child, Ciel operates within a unique breadth of both child and adult performance, and manipulates knowledge in order to validate his authority in Victorian society at large. When he states, "[t]he rats will soon come looking for their forbidden cheese, and I hold the keys to the storehouse," it demonstrates Ciel's constant awareness of his position of power; he is the cat that plays with the rats.[85] To function in the adult world, however, he performs childhood and its associated behaviors so that he, too, can pass undetected. One can argue that *Black Butler* has remained popular over the years because Toboso has effectively used a collection of popular cultural and literary figures, namely Jack the Ripper, framed through the distinct genre of neo-Victorianism, and by establishing a personal relationship between the child detective and the Ripper. Toboso is certainly not the first nor the last author to use the Ripper, but her Ripper is more

complicated than some of her Japanese contemporaries.' *Black Butler* demonstrates interesting overlaps between the child detective and the Ripper, including tragic histories, a capacity for violence, and most importantly, both characters use knowledge to develop their own agency. Toboso presents the Ripper in conjunction with the child detective, and Ciel employs the knowledge he gleans from the case as a way to legitimize himself by simultaneously demystifying and leaving the mystery of such a pervasive cultural icon intact.

Notes:

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[1] The Japanese name of the work is *Kuroshitsuji* but I will use the English name in this article.

[2] *Black Butler* was serialized in the magazine *Monthly GFantasy* starting in 2006. The Japanese publisher Square Enix printed the manga in paperback form starting in 2007, and the anime's first season was released in 2008, the second season following in 2010. Special episodes called original video animation (OVA) followed as well as a live-action film in 2014. Further, *Black Butler*'s *Book of Circus* arc was animated in 2014, the *Book of Murder* arc following in 2015, and the *Book of the Atlantic* arc was animated as a feature-length film that released in 2017. The series also inspired a videogame that released in 2009, a musical, and merchandise for fans, including cosplay, clothing, postcards, and stickers. At the time of writing, the manga is still on-going, and the anime has been renewed for a fourth season slated for release in 2024.

[3] John Paul Green, "Ripping Yards: Capturing (not catching) and constructing the myth of Jack the Ripper in nineteenth-century London," in *Making* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 213.

[4] Considering that my focus is the Jack the Ripper arc, my analysis of *Black Butler* spans season 1, episodes 1–6, but I make references beyond this scope when needed.

[5] Kawana Sari, *Murder Most Modern: Detective Fiction and Japanese Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1.

[6] Kawana, 10, 24.

[7] Kawana, 25.

[8] For instance, Anna Maria Jones and a part of *Black Butler*'s fandom argue that Toboso was inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story, "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (1892) for the plot of *Black Butler: Book of Murder* (Jones, "The Victorian" 4). One blog even points out that in *Book of Murder*, the writer who is invited to the Phantomhive manor goes by the name of 'Arthur,' arguing that he is the detective fiction writer Arthur Conan Doyle. The blog identifies several connections to Doyle's canon, including, "The Hound of the Baskervilles" (1902)—which is the case Ciel takes on following the Ripper—, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), and other detective fiction references peppered throughout the anime; Elise Stella Noire. "Sherlock Black Butler?" Amino. Published July 18, 2018. Accessed December 14, 2019. https://aminoapps.com/c/black-butler/page/blog/sherlockblackbutler/n5km_oM1FLuaGE0LqgawXmvnxrZpwQnJPJ.

[9] Japan has a history of borrowing from English culture; for instance, the British magazine *Punch* (1841–2002) had a Japanese version called *Japan Punch,* established in 1862 by Charles Wirgman in Yokohama; Robert Shail, "'For the benefit of old boys, young boys, odd boys generally, and even girls': The irresistible rise of the British comic, 1884–1900," in *Making* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 157; Katharine Buljan, and Carole M. Cusack, *Anime, Religion and Spirituality: Profane and Sacred Worlds in Contemporary Japan* (Bristol: Equinox Publishing, 2015), 21. Later in the anime, Ciel is also seen reading *Punch*.

[10] *Soul Eater*'s Jack the Ripper is a minor antagonist who is half-man, half-machine and is killed off very quickly. *Black Clover*'s Jack the Ripper only seems to employ the epithet and does not characterize him the way much of popular culture has done so.

Similarly, *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure*'s Jack seems to be a minor antagonist. "Jack the Ripper." MyAnimeList. Accessed November 6, 2019. https://myanimelist.net/search/all?q=jack%20the%20ripper.

[11] Green, 214–5; Clare Smith, *Jack the Ripper in Film and Culture: Top Hat, Gladstone Bag and Fog* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 57; Mark Jones, "Jack the Representation: The Ripper in Culture," in *Neo-Victorian Villains* (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017), 162.

[12] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 4.

[13] Damrosch, 16.

[14] Waiyee Loh, "Superflat and the Postmodern Gothic: Images of Western Modernity in *Kuroshitsuji*," *Mechademia* 7 (2012): 116.

[15] "When Were Chainsaws Invented?" Chainsaw Library. Accessed December 14, 2019. https://chainsawlarry.com/when-were-chainsaws-invented/.

[16] There were new chainsaw inventions in the 1860s and 1880s, but they still required human labor to function; "When Were."

[17] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

[18] "Casebook: Jack the Ripper – Victims." Casebook. Accessed December 23, 2019. www.casebook.org/.; *Black Butler*, episode 4, "His Butler, Capricious," directed by Shinohara Toshiya, aired October 23, 2008.

[19] "Casebook"; *Black Butler*, episode 5, "His Butler, Chance Encounter," directed by Shinohara Toshiya, aired October 31, 2008.

[20] Kawana, 16–7.

[21] "His Butler, Chance Encounter."

[22] Stephen Snyder, "Contemporary Japanese fiction," in *The Cambridge History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 762.

[23] Jonathan Clements, *Anime: A History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 189.

[24] Loh, 112.

[25] Another way to measure *Black Butler*'s success is by looking at which English networks have picked it up; Netflix is a major one, and the website shows that *Black Butler* was available in 2016 for about nine months, taken down at the end of 2016, and then picked up again by the distributor on December 2nd, 2018 ("Info Page: Black Butler"). As of January 2023, Netflix is still carrying *Black Butler*'s second season along with its OVA episodes; "Kuroshitsuji (anime)." Fandom. Accessed December 14, 2019. https://kuroshitsuji.fandom. com/wiki/Kuroshitsuji_(anime).

[26] Hutcheon, xii.

[27] Hutcheon, 4.

[28] Damrosch, 11–2.

[29] Hutcheon, 147; Benjamin Poore, "The Villain-Effect: Distance and Ubiquity in Neo-Victorian Popular Culture," in *Neo-Victorian Villains* (Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2017), 6; Jones, "Jack," 165.

[30] Poore, 6; Jones, "Jack," 165.

[31] "His Butler, Chance Encounter."

[32] Damrosch, 134.

[33] Damrosch, 135.

[34] Şeyda Sivrioğlu, *The Faustus Myth in the English Novel* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 10.

35 Sivrioğlu, 2, 21–2.

36 "Synopsis of the Forster Education Act 1870." British Library. Accessed December 20, 2019. www.bl.uk/collection-items/synopsis-of-the-forster-education-act-1870.

37 Anna Maria Jones, "The Victorian Childhood of Manga: Toward a Queer Theory of the Child in Toboso Yana's *Kuroshitsuji*," *Criticism* 55, no. 1 (2013): 16; "His Butler, Capricious."

38 Poore, 10, 12. For instance, *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*'s homunculi and Father/the dwarf in the flask, *Attack on Titan*'s Eren Yeager is arguably both villain and anti-hero at once, and *Demon Slayer*'s upper-moon demons are villainous characters with tragic histories.

39 Susan J. Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 172–3, 176.

40 Anime was never sanitized or censored for Japanese audiences but when America began airing anime on television (especially in the 1990s), much was done in the way of sanitization, editing out violence and other disagreeable elements for American children and audiences, which is why viewers of anime have been known to call Japanese characters/villains superior; Fred Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2004), 63.

41 "His Butler, Chance Encounter."

42 Anna Maria Jones, "Transnational Neo-Victorian Studies: Notes on the Possibilities and Limitations of a Discipline," *Literature Compass* 15, no. 7 (2018): 9.

43 Poore, 40.

44 Grell uses she/her pronouns to self-identify, but the other characters persist in gendering Grell as male. Thus far, the manga also indicates that there are no "female" grim reapers, and it is unclear whether Toboso's representation of Grell as transgender is genuine. To my knowledge, there is no scholarship about Grell being a transgender character in the context of Japanese culture and/or literature in the 2000s.

45 "His Butler, Chance Encounter."; After the Ripper arc, Grell makes repeated appearances throughout the anime, oftentimes to reap souls when people are dying around Ciel and Sebastian, but also because of his persisting sexual interest in Sebastian, which is first expressed through intertextual allusions to *Romeo and Juliet*.

46 Jones, "The Victorian," 8–9.

47 Audiences have pointed out that Sebastian resembles Ciel's deceased father Vincent.

48 *Black Butler*, episode 1, "His Butler, Able," directed by Shinohara Toshiya, aired October 2, 2008.

49 "His Butler, Able."

50 Christopher Routledge, "Children's Detective Fiction and the 'Perfect Crime' of Adulthood," in *Mystery* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 70.

51 "His Butler, Able."

52 "His Butler, Chance Encounter."

53 *Black Butler*, episode 2, "His Butler, Strongest," directed by Shinohara Toshiya, aired October 9, 2008.

54 "His Butler, Chance Encounter."

55 "His Butler, Strongest."

56 "His Butler, Strongest."

[57] *Black Butler*, episode 6, "His Butler, at the Funeral," directed by Shinohara Toshiya, aired November 6, 2008.

[58] "His Butler, Able."

[59] "His Butler, Strongest."

[60] Routledge, 66.

[61] Death would not have been an experience excluded from childhood given that it was part and parcel of nineteenth-century life. For example, people died from everyday causes such as disease and pregnancy, as well as during war and colonial activities.

[62] "His Butler, Capricious."

[63] There is also an undeniably suggestive sexual quality to Ciel and Sebastian's relationship that allows the manga/anime to be classified in the genre of 'boys' love' (Jones, "The Victorian," 4). The multi-genre appeal of *Black Butler* (detective fiction, neo-Victorian, thriller, revenge, boys' love) demonstrates how the work's hybrid quality invites various audiences, which also explains its continued success.

[64] Jones, "The Victorian," 12, 8.

[65] "His Butler, Strongest."; "His Butler, Chance Encounter."; Jones, "The Victorian," 14.

[66] "His Butler, Strongest."

[67] Smith, 121.

[68] Smith, 119.

[69] Adrienne E. Gavin and Christopher Routledge, "Mystery in Children's Literature from the Rational to the Supernatural: an Introduction," in *Mystery* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 12.

[70] "His Butler, Chance Encounter."

[71] Karen Coats, "The Mysteries of Postmodern Epistemology: Stratemeyer, Stine, and Contemporary Mystery for Children," in *Mystery* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 188.

[72] Poore, 40.

[73] "His Butler, at the Funeral."; "His Butler, Capricious."

[74] "His Butler, at the Funeral."

[75] "His Butler, Strongest."

[76] Judith Flanders, *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime* (London: HarperPress, 2011), 466.

[77] "His Butler, Capricious."

[78] "His Butler, Chance Encounter."

[79] "His Butler, Strongest."

[80] "His Butler, at the Funeral."

[81] *Black Butler*, episode 3, "His Butler, Omnipotent," directed by Shinohara Toshiya, aired October 16, 2008.

[82] "His Butler, Omnipotent."

[83] Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 28.

[84] "His Butler, Able."

[85] "His Butler, Strongest."

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Understanding the Backer Motivations for Japanese Anime

Crowdfunding Campaigns

Miyuki Morikawa, Masahito Mizoguchi, and Meimi Moriya

Abstract: In the Japanese animation industry, TV stations and film companies generally take the lead in setting up joint ventures called production committees to raise funds. Although there are cases where an animation studio takes the lead in starting a project, it is often difficult for the studio to form a production committee depending on the content of the project and the career of the director. In recent years, crowdfunding has attracted attention as a way of raising funds for production from general consumers. While some projects can raise more than their goals through crowdfunding, many others do not. This study, therefore, attempts to identify what anime crowdfunding backers value in pledging their support. A total of 6,596 comments from backers of three Japanese anime projects funded on the U.S. crowdfunding website Kickstarter were analyzed using a text-mining method. The results showed that most crowdfunding backers placed importance on the rewards and that crowdfunding success is likely to be related to past achievements of the work and its creators, as well as the credibility of the studio. Compared to overseas backers, Japanese backers were found to express their support for the creators more than for the rewards.

Keywords: Kickstarter, fundraising, production, anime studio, fandom

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Introduction

The animation industry in Japan is currently booming. According to the

Association of Japanese Animations, the animation market has continued to expand

year after year since the 2010s.[1] Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a 3.5%

decline in the market size in 2020, it still exceeded 2.4 trillion yen.[2] In particular,

the overseas market has expanded rapidly since 2015, reaching a market size

overseas that exceeded Japan's domestic market by 2020.[3] Although the animation

industry in Japan is thriving, this is not the case when it comes to the freedom of

animation studios, directors, and other creators to produce their work. Due to the

huge production costs involved in producing anime, a risk-averse system known as

the "production committee" was established in Japan in the 1990s.[4] A production

committee is an organization in which media companies jointly invest in production

and conduct business.[5] Particularly in the case of animations, where a media

franchise is a business premise, a production committee system is commonly

adopted.[6] Participants in production committees include film and television

companies, toy companies, game companies, and publishers, while animation

studios with limited financial resources are unable to participate and instead work as

subcontractors, receiving production fees from the production committee.[7] As a

result, many studios do not generate income even when their works are successful,

forcing them into difficult business situations.[8] In order for animation studios to generate a stable income, They need to hold copyrights to their works. Toei Animation, for example, owns the copyrights to *Dragon Ball* and other works, which serve as a major source of income.[9] However, to own the copyrights, the animation studio needs to provide capital to participate in the production committee. It is not easy for animation studios, which rely on subcontracting work, to prepare capital for such an investment.

Amid this situation, crowdfunding has emerged as a new method of fundraising. Crowdfunding is a system for raising funds from an unspecified number of people via the Internet.[10] In entertainment productions, crowdfunding has become an increasingly popular form of fundraising, drawing in support from fans from all over the world who want to participate in the production process of the work.[11] Crowdfunding was first utilized in Japanese anime production in 2012, with successful examples including the film *In this Corner of the World* (*Kono Sekai no Katasumi ni*) and the TV animation *Dropkick on My Devil!* (*Jashin-chan Dropkick*). In 2015, *In this Corner of the World* was crowdfunded on the Japanese crowdfunding website Makuake and raised nearly 40 million yen against a target amount of 21.6 million yen.[12] The TV animation series *Dropkick on My Devil!* was a project on the Japanese crowdfunding website MotionGallery in 2020 that raised 36

million yen against a 20-million-yen target.[13] The film was further crowdfunded for

a fourth season on the same site from 30 November 2022 to 13 January 2023, raising

over 110 million yen in 45 days against a target of 30 million yen.[14] This achievement

was submitted for a Guinness World Record for the most funded anime production

project in crowdfunding.[15] Thus, crowd-sourced fundraising can raise more money

than expected. However, some projects do not reach their target amounts. For

example, the Ukishiro-chan Project, which aimed to introduce the attractions of

Gyoda City, Saitama Prefecture, was crowdfunded on the Japanese crowdfunding

website CAMPFIRE in 2021 but only raised 180,000 yen against a target amount of

500,000 yen.[16] What are the characteristics of animation projects that succeed in

crowdfunding? This study attempts to identify the success factors of crowdfunding

for animation projects in order to contribute to the success of animation studios that

are struggling to raise funds. Academically, it aims to provide a new perspective on

the success factors of crowdfunding that have been identified in previous studies.

Literature Review

Various studies have been conducted on the success factors of crowdfunding.

For example, Mollick identified four success factors for crowdfunding: project

quality, use of social networks, geographical spread, and a proper execution plan to

deliver on promises.[17] Mollick also suggested that in today's world where it is

possible to connect with the rest of the world through the internet, crowdfunding

enables funding from all over the world, but the importance of online social networks

and communities will increase instead rather than the importance of traditional

geographical constraints decreasing.[18] This result is likely to hold true for the

crowdfunding of Japanese anime. Anime, in particular, is a popular global

commodity, and fans will actively use social networking to support projects if they

are deemed to be of high quality. Anime fans are strongly connected and are known

to actively form communities, especially in online spaces.[19]

It is also important to set a realistic target amount when crowdfunding.[20][21]

As mentioned previously, *In This Corner of the World*, which raised funds on

Makuake, is a typical example of a successful crowdfunding project, but the target

amount reached was 21.6 million yen. It is unlikely that a feature-length animation

could be produced with this amount of money, and it is thought that this

crowdfunding only served as gap financing to cover part of the production costs.

Almeer, on the other hand, focused on the user side of the investment and

found that the strongest motivation for investment was "seeking rewards," followed

by "supporting creators and causes," "being part of something," "something

creative," and "social good."[22] Duvall, who surveyed 128 crowdfunding participants,

also found that the number one reason for supporting a project was the reward, with

a close second being the participants' belief in the project.[23] In contrast to these results, Dowthwaite argues that fandom is the strongest motivation for investors to support webcomic crowdfunding and that rewards are not as important.[24] Rather, fans desire to actively help the campaign and support the surrounding community is a stronger motivator for backing.[25] Unlike product projects in the design, fashion, and technology categories, animation is a project that also aims to produce a work of art, like webcomics. It is not the rewards that potential backers find valuable, and fandom may be a major motivation for backing. However, given the particularities of anime fans described by Ranalan—namely, the strong connections between anime fans and their deep attachment to anime[26]––it is possible that a different motivation from those for webcomics may be revealed. This study examines the conditions for the success of anime crowdfunding by identifying the motivations and objectives of backers in anime crowdfunding campaigns. The research question for this study is as follows:

RQ: What do backers of Japanese anime crowdfunding campaigns value?

Method

To determine what backers of anime crowdfunding value in their backings, this study focused on the comments section of crowdfunding project pages. The platform used in the analysis was Kickstarter, an American crowdfunding platform.

Kickstarter is one of the most popular crowdfunding sites where creative projects can receive support, and it is often synonymous with crowdfunding.[27] There were 3,678 animation projects on Kickstarter by 2022, 62 of which were Japanese anime projects. As mentioned previously, crowdfunding for Japanese anime is also available on Japanese sites, such as Makuake and MotionGallery. However, Japanese crowdfunding sites are typically only available in Japanese, and the supporters on these platforms are limited to those who can understand Japanese. In addition, in many cases, products are shipped only within Japan, which makes it difficult for these sites to serve as fundraising tools targeting the international consumers. Considering the future of the Japanese animation industry, it would be beneficial to use international cloud funding site such as Kickstarter, which would allow for global fundraising.

Table 1 shows the top 10 Japanese anime projects on Kickstarter in terms of the amount achieved. This study focuses on the top three projects (*NEKOPARA Anime OVA*, *Under the Dog,* and *Little Witch Academia 2*) in terms of the amount achieved and the number of comments. The comments received from backers on each project will be analyzed using a text-mining method to examine the motivations for funding and objectives of the backers concerning these three anime projects. The number of comments for *NEKOPARA Anime OVA*, *Under the Dog*, and *Little Witch

Academia 2 were 2,537, 3,189, and 1,899, respectively.

Only comments in English were included in the analysis. Comments in languages other than English and replies from the creators were excluded. Only English comments were analyzed as we aimed to clarify the intentions of international backers expressed in English, which is a lingua franca. Of 7,625 comments between the three projects, 6,596 (86.5%) were in English, and the majority of the remaining comments were in Japanese. R and KHCoder were used for comment analysis, and word clouds and co-occurrence networks were created. The word cloud was based on the top 30 most frequent noun words. For the co-occurrence network, the minimum number of word occurrences was adjusted so that the number of words used was less than 300, and the top 100 co-occurrence relations of words, excluding adverbs, were set to be illustrated.

Table 1. Top 10 Japanese anime projects with the highest number of pledges on

Kickstarter.

Projects	Final amount	Target amount	Number of backers	Number of comments
NEKOPARA Anime OVA	$963,376	$100,000	9122	2537
Under the Dog	$878,028	$580,000	12157	3189
Little Witch Academia 2	$625,518	$150,000	7938	1899
The VR Animation Spice and Wolf VR Production Project.	¥30978009 ($285,590)	¥8000000 ($73,753)	1629	244
Kenichi Sonoda's Bean Bandit New Anime Project	¥23343872 ($211,123)	¥15000000 ($135,660)	1928	512
The Girl from the Other Side feature-length animation	¥22670343 ($207,699)	¥3000000 ($27,485)	1418	304
Red Ash -Magicicada- by STUDIO4℃	$162,882	$150,000	1869	985
Be A Part Of The Grisaia: Phantom Trigger Anime Launch!	$109,754	$100,000	720	302
Enomoto - The Animated Film	¥9286475 ($86,442)	¥2500000 ($23,270)	981	4
2020 New Anime Making System Project	¥8773403 ($84,457)	¥5000000 ($48,132)	1197	33

Note: Campaigns conducted in Japanese yen were converted to US dollars using the

yen-dollar exchange rate on the crowdfunding end date and are shown in

parentheses for comparison purposes.

Results

A text-mining analysis of backer comments for *NEKOPARA Anime OVA*, *Under

the Dog*, and *Little Witch Academia 2* shows the following results:

1）NEKOPARA Anime OVA[28]

*NEKOPARA*is a visual novel series by Japan-based illustrator Sayori. It is a

heart-warming comedy work between the main character and humanoid cats.

Crowdfunding ran for 44 days from 29 December 2016 to 11 February 2017, raising

963,376 USD from 9,122 backers. Rewards ranged from 1 USD to 10,000 USD, with

12 pledge options, which included T-shirts, badges, and plush toys, as well as rewards related to the main film, such as Blu-ray discs and a digital art book. The full-length anime can be viewed via Steam, a platform where games and streaming videos can be downloaded and sold. Additionally, if backers give more than 15 USD, they will receive a license code called a Steam Key. Rewards become more lavish as the number of backings increases, and the amount of pledges above 800 USD is restricted to a limited number of people. The most expensive 10,000 USD pledge option grants the backer the right to appear in the film as a feline character of themselves, with a limited number of one slot (which has been filled). Over 40% of the 9,122 backers are from the United States. Japan is next with about 9%, followed by Canada with about 6%.

Of the 2,537 comments, 2,456 eligible comments were selected for analysis. The top 30 most frequently occurring nouns are listed in Table 2. A word cloud of them is shown in Figure 1. The most frequent word was "shipping," indicating a strong interest in shipping rewards. The words "pledge" and "tier" are in second and third place, respectively. Both words were used when commenting on how much the reward options were and which reward option they had backed. The word "reward" itself is used a lot, but words related to rewards, such as "box," "package," "book," and "game," indicate a high level of interest in rewards. "Thanks" and "confirmation"

were common in comments made after the campaign ended. They commented on

their appreciation for the rewards and the confirmation of the shipping of rewards.

In the co-occurrence network, as in the word cloud, there was a high level of

interest in rewards and a number of subgraphs related to rewards, such as "steam",

"available," "artbook," and "backerkit" (see Figure 2). As some of the original content

of the project was age-restricted, "18," "age," and "scene" were linked to "project,"

and people seemed to be concerned about whether there were age restrictions on the

anime. The word "shipping" was associated with the words "price" and "cost." This is

because many topics related to raised shipping costs. The words "goal" and "stretch,"

which were also in the word cloud, were linked to the word "reach," indicating that

people were interested in the growth of the amount of money in relation to the target

amount.

Table 2. Word frequencies of backer comments for the *NEKOPARA Anime OVA*

campaign.

Rank	Word (Noun)	Frequency
1	shipping	207
2	pledge	195
3	tier	183
4	people	165
5	time	152
6	goal	151
6	project	151
8	anime	137
9	backer	134
10	day	121
11	thing	101
12	reward	96
13	way	91
14	money	89
14	something	89
14	stuff	89
17	campaign	80
17	email	80
19	hour	75
20	backerkit	74
20	box	74
20	game	74
23	everyone	73
24	package	66
25	guy	62
25	thanks	62
27	minute	61
27	stretch	61
29	book	59
29	name	59
29	steam	59
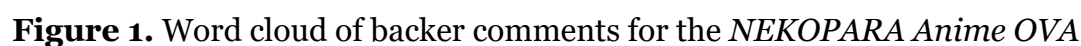
Figure 1. Word cloud of backer comments for the *NEKOPARA Anime OVA* campaign.

Figure 2. Co-occurrence network of backer comments for the *NEKOPARA Anime*

OVA campaign.

2）   Under the Dog[29]

   Under the Dog is an independent anime based on the original story by Jiro

Ishii. It is an animated sci-fi action thriller about what it means to live and die.

Crowdfunding ran for 30 days from 9 August 2014 to 8 September 2014, raising

878,028 USD from 2,157 backers. There were 18 different pledge levels, ranging from

5 USD to 10,000 USD. The rewards also varied, similar to the crowdfunding for the

NEKOPARA Anime OVA. Backers were given access to full-length episodes if they

backed 25 USD or more, while those who backed 500 USD or more were provided a

figure of a major character. A unique feature of the campaign was the pledge that

allowed backers to interact with the developers, voice their ideas, and participate in

the creative process. The number of supporters exceeded 12,000, more than half of

whom were from the United States, with 687 (5.6%) coming from Japan, fourth after

Canada and the UK.

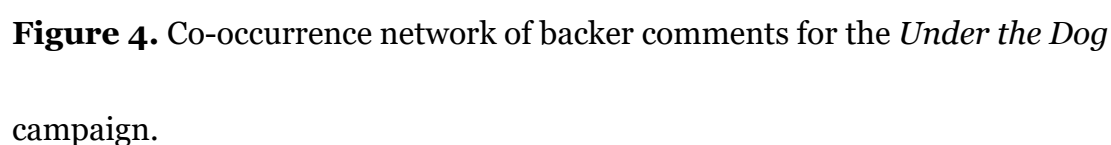   In this project, 2,500 of the 3,189 comments that were displayed were

retrieved and analyzed. As shown in Table 3, the word "reward" itself and words

related to it, such as "episode" and "figure," appeared among the top words. In

addition, words related to a backing, such as "pledge," "backer," "tier," "money,"

"stretch," and "funding" appeared frequently. Furthermore, the words "goal" and

"stretch" indicate interest in the amount of money reached. The top 30 words are visualized in a word cloud in Fig. 3.

In the co-occurrence network, it can be seen that the words "reward" and "tier" are linked, and "tier" and "figure" are connected (Fig. 4). The word "figure" is also linked to the words "color" and "design," indicating an interest in the details of the product of the reward. It is noteworthy that the word "refund" appears in the co-occurrence network. This was due to delays in the dispatch of some rewards, which led to calls for refunds. Although not in the top 30 words, this confirms that backers do not simply support a cause out of a sense of support: many projects on Kickstarter suffer delays,[30] and when backers do not get the products they backed on time, they post complaints about it.

Table 3. Word frequencies of backer comments for the *Under the Dog* campaign.

Rank	Word (Noun)	Frequency
1	project	413
2	pledge	300
3	backer	221
4	people	203
5	goal	190
6	anime	181
7	time	177
8	guy	173
9	episode	146
10	figure	140
11	reward	137
12	tier	136
13	money	130
14	thing	129
15	day	124
15	kickstarter	124
17	thanks	112
18	way	110
19	everyone	102
20	animation	101
20	something	101
22	end	98
23	question	80
24	stretch	73
25	lot	70
26	update	69
27	team	65
28	hour	63
29	work	62
30	funding	57

Figure 3. Word cloud of backer comments for the *Under the Dog* campaign.

Figure 4. Co-occurrence network of backer comments for the *Under the Dog*

campaign.

3) *Little Witch Academia 2*[31]

     Little Witch Academia 2 is the sequel to the animated film *Little Witch Academia.* It is a school fantasy story about a girl who wants to become a witch and struggles to enter a witch academy. The crowdfunding ran for 30 days from 9 July 2013 to 8 August 2013 and raised $625,518 from 7,938 backers. The crowdfunding for the film offered nine different reward tiers, ranging from $1 to $10,000. The standard rewards include having your name in the credits and an art book. In addition, those who signed up for the 10,000 USD tier received a studio visit, meals with staff, two nights' accommodation, and a visit to an affiliated company. In terms of the breakdown of where backers lived, over 55% of backers were from the United States with 4,390 people, followed by Japan with 583 people or 7.3%.
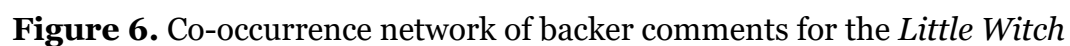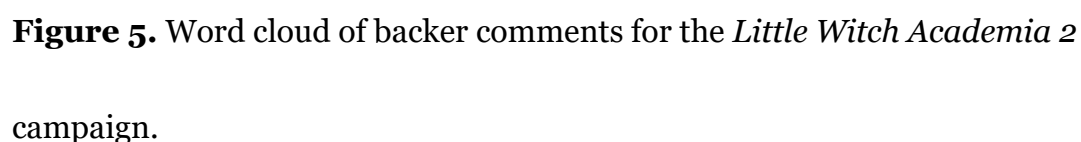
     The 1,640 comments displayed out of 1,899 were retrieved and analyzed. The top 30 most frequently occurring nouns are listed in Table 4, and a word cloud visualization of them is shown in Figure 5. Similar to the two anime projects previously analyzed in this research, words related to interest in rewards, support, and the amount of money reached were the top-ranking words. Unique to this project is that the most frequently used word is "dub." This shows a high level of interest in the dubbed language of the works being rewarded. The name of the production studio, Studio Trigger, is also used in many cases. Studio Trigger has

produced a number of popular productions, which may have made it more likely to

attract the attention of backers. The appearance of the word "voice" also indicates an

interest in voice-over as well as dubbing. In the co-occurrence network, as before, a

variety of rewards are linked (Figure 6). In terms of the dubbing of works, the co-

occurrence network shows that there is interest in both Japanese and English voice

actors.

Table 4. Word frequencies of backer comments for the *Little Witch Academia 2*

campaign.

Rank	Word (Noun)	Frequency
1	dub	345
2	goal	270
3	people	266
4	episode	255
5	project	246
6	money	223
7	stretch	177
8	anime	175
9	thing	158
10	animation	157
10	time	157
12	backer	149
13	way	137
14	day	134
15	pledge	130
16	trigger	128
17	something	124
18	reward	123
19	guy	112
20	language	103
20	tier	103
22	artbook	102
23	blu-ray	98
23	work	98
25	fan	97
26	art	95
27	book	88
27	release	88
29	film	84
30	everyone	82

Figure 5. Word cloud of backer comments for the *Little Witch Academia 2* campaign.

Figure 6. Co-occurrence network of backer comments for the *Little Witch*

Academia 2 campaign.

Additional Analysis 1

The previous section presented an analysis of Japanese anime campaigns on Kickstarter. It was found that backers, mainly from overseas, were highly interested in rewards, which was common across the three analyzed anime projects. What, then, do backers who backed anime projects on crowdfunding websites in Japan, most of whom appear to be Japanese, focus on? For comparison purposes, this study additionally analyzed backer comments from the third stage project of the successful *Dropkick on My Devil!*, which was crowdfunded on the domestic crowdfunding site MotionGallery.[32]

In total, 1675 backer comments were received on the campaign page for *Dropkick on My Devil!*. The top 33 most frequently used words, not the top 30, were included in the analysis, because eight words lined up in the 26th rank of frequent words, as shown in Table 5. It shows that the words "support," "excited," and "expectation" were used frequently. In particular, the word "support" was used 997 times, far ahead of the words below it in second place. Overall, the trend differs from those of the three Kickstarter films, showing that there is no talk about rewards at all and that people are genuinely excited about the project and want to support the production. Looking at the co-occurrence network shown in Fig. 7, the terms "the

third season," "excited," "expectation," "wait," "enjoy," and "watch" are linked and

frequent, showing the high expectations for the work. In addition, words of

appreciation for the labor of the original author and the production staff are linked.

Furthermore, character names are linked to the words "activity" and "move," which

conveys attachment to the characters in the work and expectations that their favorite

characters will be animated and move. In Japan, it is often pointed out that in recent

years, supportive consumption, known as "*Oshikatsu*," a Japanese word that refers to

the act of enthusiastically supporting someone or something that one feels particular

devotion to,[33] has stimulated youth consumption.[34,35] Given the large number of

young people among anime fans, it is safe to assume that this is deeply related to

these commentary trends in crowdfunding.

Table 5. Word frequencies of backer comments for the *Dropkick on My Devil! The Third Season* campaign.

| Rank	Word（Noun）	In English	Frequency
1	応援	support	997
2	楽しみ	excited	257
3	期待	expectation	110
4	アニメ	anime	103
5	作品	work	36
6	制作	production	25
7	実現	realization	22
8	決定	decision	20
8	支援	back	20
10	お願い	request	19
11	参加	participation	18
11	放送	broadcast	18
13	原作	original work	17
14	達成	achievement	16
15	イベント	event	15
16	活躍	activity	13
16	企画	plan	13
16	成功	success	13
16	最高	best	13
20	ファン	fan	12
20	皆様	everyone	12
22	目標	goal	11
23	プロジェクト	project	10
24	スタッフ	staff	8
24	開催	host	8
26	クズ	trash	7
26	コース	course	7
26	最後	last	7
26	邪神	Jashin	7
26	新曲	new song	7
26	人生	life	7
26	先生	sensei（Sir.）	7
26	漫画	manga	7
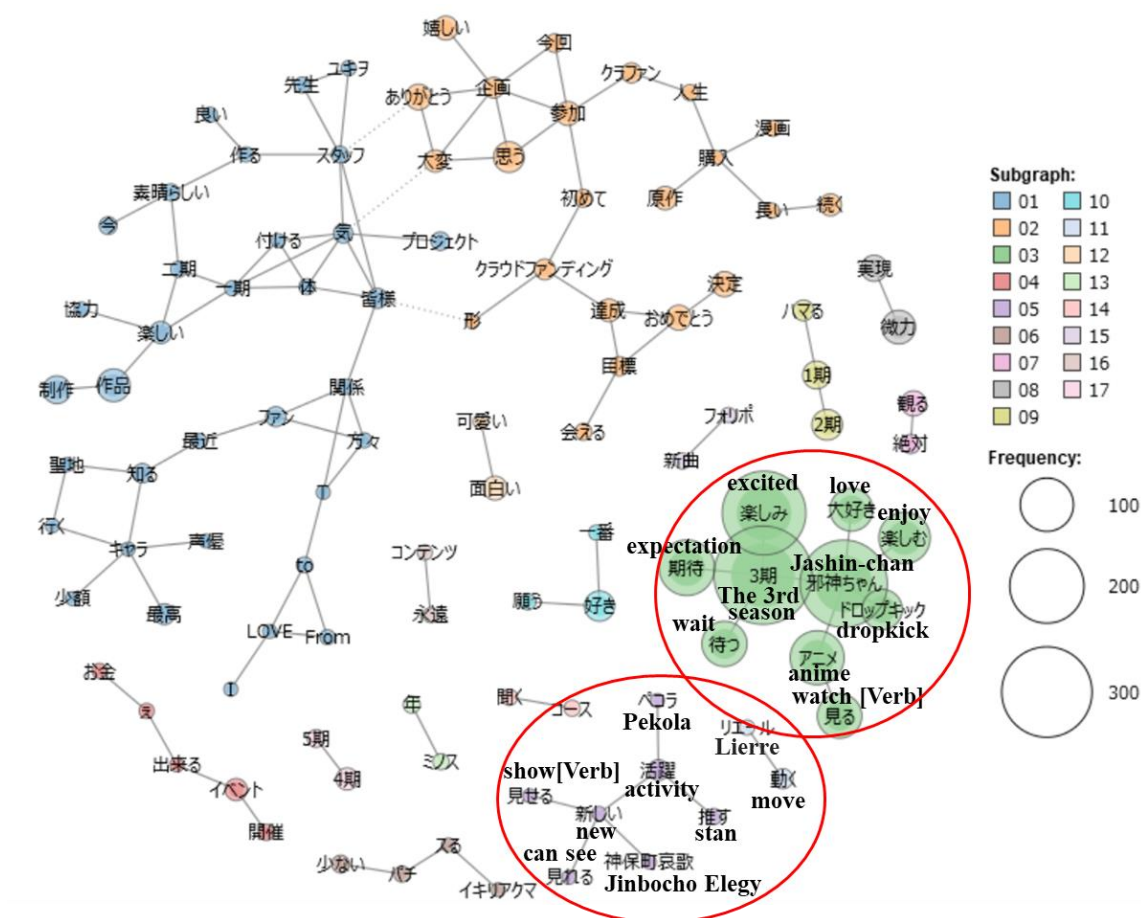
Figure 7. Co-occurrence network of backer comments for the *Dropkick on My Devil! The Third Season* campaign.

Additional analysis 2

The analyses described above examined the comments of backers of campaigns for animated films on US and Japanese crowdfunding sites. To attract more support from consumers in the future, negative opinions of potential backers regarding crowdfunding campaigns should be considered. However, crowdfunding sites only present comments from individuals who supported the campaign. Therefore, this study investigated online forums for anime fans. Forum threads

regarding *Little Witch Academia 2* were extracted from three sites: 4chan[36][37][38],

Myanimelist[39][40][41], and BGForum[42]. We obtained 629 comments from seven threads.

We conducted a sentiment analysis using the NVivo qualitative data analysis

software. The comments were classified into four categories: positive, negative,

mixed, and neutral. Negative comments were reviewed, and comments that deviated

from the aims of the current study or indicated support for the Kickstarter campaign

were deleted. Subsequently, 250 comments remained. Table 6 shows the 30 most

frequently occurring nouns extracted from these comments, and Figure 8 presents a

word cloud visualization.

A comparison with the results presented in Tables 4 and 6 revealed that only

five of the frequently occurring words (Anime, trigger, people, something, and

project) overlapped. The remaining words exhibited no similarities.

We retrieved many negative comments regarding Japanese people's taste in

anime, such as "Do [Japanese] ever not have shit taste??" As shown in Figure 9, the

co-occurrence network diagram indicated that "shit" was associated with "taste," and

"taste" was associated with "Japan." Some comments praised Studio Trigger's

decision to use Kickstarter to crowdfund the film with an international audience, as

Japanese anime fans were not aware of the greatness of *Little Witch Academia*.

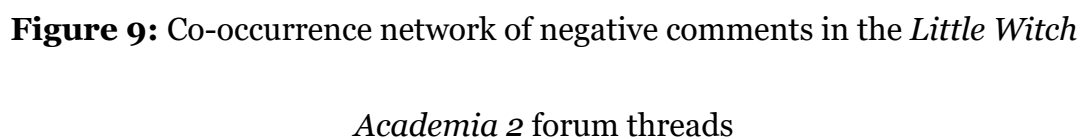Conversely, some comments argued that Japanese anime studios have a poor

understanding of international anime fans and that even if Trigger was successful in

raising funds on Kickstarter, they may not consider the opinions of international

anime fans. Unlike American animation studios, such as Pixar and Disney, which

have always targeted fans worldwide, Japanese anime studios have generally focused

on fans in Japan.[43] An analysis of forum comments revealed that many international

anime fans are dissatisfied with this. If studios communicate with overseas fans and

incorporate their preferences into productions, the number of new participants in

crowdfunding may increase.

In addition, many negative comments referred to the Kickstarter campaign,

as the word "Kickstarter" was the eighth most frequently used. Reasons for not

supporting the campaign included financial concerns, such as "I would like to order

one if I have the money for it," and preferences, such as "Nice but [I] don't really care

about this anime." Moreover, some complaints were found, including those

regarding the length of the production process (e.g., "Two years is a long time to wait

for a 40[-]minute OVA"), poor quality of the English translation, and the studio's

marketing efforts (e.g., "Hundreds of irrelevant spam-ads from Trigger about their

shit shows each season"). There may be many other fans who do not back the

campaign for these reasons.

Table 6: Word frequencies of negative comments in the *Little Witch Academia 2*

forum threads

Rank	Word (Noun)	Frequency
1	anime	72
2	shit	47
3	industry	32
4	little	28
5	witch	24
6	japan	23
7	show	22
8	kickstarter	20
9	idea	19
9	one	19
9	trigger	19
12	japanese	18
13	academia	17
13	people	17
15	lwa	16
15	western	16
17	interest	15
17	something	15
19	fan	14
19	otaku	14
21	producers	13
21	support	13
23	end	12
23	akko	12
23	impact	12
23	taste	12
23	thing	12
28	project	11
28	sama	11
30	backing	10

Figure 8: Word cloud of negative comments in the *Little Witch Academia 2* forum

Figure 9: Co-occurrence network of negative comments in the *Little Witch*

Academia 2 forum threads

Discussion and Conclusion

The comment analysis revealed that crowdfunding on Kickstarter is often

mentioned in relation to three topics: rewards, pledges, and the target amount. It was

speculated that in the case of funding for creative activities, such as animation, the

emphasis tended to be on fandom rather than rewards, as noted by Dowthwaite.[44]

However, in the present study, the emphasis was on "rewards," similar to that found

in Almeer's study.[45] Unlike in the case of webcomics, for anime, it seems that

backers are only interested in ensuring that they get rewards commensurate with

their investment, without delay.

On the other hand, comments using the words "pledge" and "tier" are not

direct expressions of "support" but are often used to express how much support they

have given, which can be seen as an intention of support. Words relating to the target

amount, the amount of money reached, and even stretch goals were often used,

which can be taken as evidence that fans actively extended their circle of support

even after the target was reached.

Comments on differences from the original work and the name of the

animation studio were also identified as frequent words. This indicates that fans

were originally attracted by some elements of the project, such as the original work

or creators. It was because they were fans that they supported the crowdfunding

project. However, when rewards were delayed, they asked for refunds, indicating that they were not supporting the project purely out of a sense of support. Kickstarter backers are concerned about rewards; this may be because many backers are suspicious of Kickstarter's credibility. While Kickstarter explicitly states that creators are legally responsible for completing their projects, they do not say that they guarantee projects or have refund obligations.[46] Even after successful fundraising, the implementation of projects is sometimes significantly delayed, and even rewards are not provided.[47,48] Some cases have even resulted in court cases.[49] Crowdfunding is essentially a service that, unlike online shopping, should be supported at risk. Nevertheless, it is natural to desire a reward in exchange for money. The anime backers know that those behind the Kickstarter campaigns do not guarantee the completion of the project in any way, which is why they repeatedly asked in their comments to ensure that the creators will distribute rewards. If there were greater trust in Kickstarter or its creators, supportive comments would be more likely. In short, successful crowdfunding on Kickstarter requires backers to be comfortable. The more secure they feel, the more they will be on the creators' side and the stronger their support will be. If creators have a track record of delivering their crowdfunded creations to backers as promised, this will provide reassurance to backers.

Even in the absence of a successful crowdfunding track record, the studio's

size and past production experience may be attractive to backers. *Little Witch*

Academia 2, the only film analyzed in this study for which the word "pledge" was not

high on the list, is produced by Studio Trigger. Trigger's parent company is a holding

company called Ultra Pictures Inc. with a capital of 386 million JPY.[50] Its

subsidiaries include Sanzigen, a well-known three-dimensional computer graphics

animation production company, and Lidenfilms. FelixFilm, which produced the

NEKOPARA Anime OVA, and KINEMA CITRUS, which produced *Under the Dog*,

did not have such a parent company and were merely small to medium-sized

animation studios. Studio Trigger has higher brand trust, which represents

consumers' trust that the brand can perform its stated function,[51] than FelixFilm and

KINEMA CITRUS. Brand trust reduces uncertainty and risk concerns and positively

influences people's purchasing decisions.[52] Due to high brand trust in Studio

Trigger, supporters may have used more words related to production, such as dub

and episode, without worrying about receiving rewards. *Little Witch Academia 2* is a

sequel; therefore, fans of the first film supported the crowdfunding campaign. *Little*

Witch Academia 2 likely had credibility regarding the quality of the production.

However, some potential backers did not support the campaign for reasons such as

the time between the campaign and project completion or annoyance with the

promotion of other works by Studio Trigger. Customer satisfaction with the product,

brand, and relationship with the company affects brand trust.[53] Potential backers

who did not support the product, brand, or company may have been distrustful or

dissatisfied. To attract potential backers, studios need to be more aware of their

needs.

It is essential for animation studios to have an appealing track record,

frequent communication, and information disclosure. By doing so, the studio will

win the trust of its supporters and increase their sense of co-creation. To this end, it

is essential to have staff who can speak English. However, studios may find it

extremely difficult to hire a person who is fluent in English for crowdfunding within

their company. According to a 2018 survey conducted by Teikoku Databank, of the

255 animation studios in Japan, a total of 86 (33.7% of the total) have "five or fewer"

employees. This means that approximately one-third of all companies are small. This

is followed by 83 companies with "6–20 employees or less" (32.5%) and 51

companies with "21-50 employees" (20.0%), with 94.5% of all companies having 100

employees or less.[54] It is difficult for SMEs with limited financial resources to hire

non-production staff. They are required to somehow secure a supportive

communication presence, for example, by establishing cooperative relationships with

external companies.

On the other hand, on the Japanese crowdfunding sites, the majority of comments were found to be on the topic of support. Although there was some talk about the amount of money, there was no mention of rewards, indicating that support for the work itself was very strong. Several names of characters from the work appeared in the co-occurrence network. This indicates that fans of the work already existed, which was to be expected, given that *Dropkick on My Devil!* was in its third season. The creators of the show had a track record of creating interesting works in the first and second seasons, so supporters were able to support the film with confidence. It is thought that many of the comments were in full support of the creators because they believed that there was almost no risk of not receiving the rewards. In Japan, there are numerous problems faced with crowdfunding rewards, such as backers not receiving the rewards, but some crowdfunding services offer automatic insurance in case the rewards are not received.[55] The fact that the campaign is run by an anime studio within Japan and that the language is understood is probably significant, given that most Kickstarter backers are anime fans from outside Japan and that there is a significant difference in risk aversion awareness. Even if rewards are not received, it is extremely hard to sue a studio from abroad. That is why Kickstarter backers may be extra concerned about whether they are sure to receive a reward.

To summarize the above considerations, the following three points can be identified as important for supporters of Japanese animation crowdfunding:

- Past achievements of the work and its creators

- Credibility of the studio

- The certainty of getting rewards for their support

To be successful on international crowdfunding sites, Japanese anime crowdfunding must include certain elements to attract passionate international anime fans. For example, the anime should be based on a popular original story, the production team should include a highly regarded creator, or the plan should be a sequel to a popular anime. The more elements that tickle the fancy of animation fans, the likelier they are to back the project. Backers are also more likely to engage in word-of-mouth activities and play a role in boosting the campaign. These backers will be more supportive than "shipping" or "rewards." The studio's career and credibility as a company are also likely to influence whether anime fans feel comfortable backing them.

Results show that backers want something as a reward for their support. This is more evident on international crowdfunding sites than on Japanese crowdfunding sites. This is why words about support and rewards appear more frequently in the comments of the former. Animation studios may need to fine-tune pledge levels to

match the risk aversion level of each supporter. Above all, however, the production of

the work must be carried out without delay. Anime fans want to support their

favorite studios and creators, of course, but above all, they want to see new anime.

Studios should be aware that their supporters are supporting the work, not the

creators personally. Crowdfunding backers are not unconditional supporters of

studios or creators, regardless of whether or not a new work can be produced.

Moreover, user comments on crowdfunding and forum sites can provide

information for individuals in the community and have both positive and negative

effects on brand trust.[56] Negative comments negatively impact other members of the

community[57] and may reduce willingness to support crowdfunding. Conversely,

positive comments encourage other members of the community to contribute to

crowdfunding. Studios may need to pay more attention to communities for anime

fans, such as forum sites.

This study focused on three Japanese anime crowdfunding projects on

Kickstarter to explore ways in which Japanese anime studios can raise funds on a

global basis. More projects need to be investigated to increase the validity of the

results of this study. Although the study focused on the top three projects that raised

a large amount of support, it would also be important to address failed projects and

explore the factors that prevented them from gaining sufficient support. On the other

hand, Kickstarter also has many crowdfunding campaigns for animated films by overseas creators. As some projects have been more successful than Japanese animation, identifying these success factors may be useful for Japanese animation projects. A deeper exploration of the mindset and orientation of animation fans is also essential. As crowdfunding is a fundraising method that collects funds from individuals, it should familiarize itself with those who could become influential funders. Anime fandom research could play a role not only in the success of crowdfunding but also in promoting consumption and boosting the industry.

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Societal Structures from Anime-Cyberpunk to Post-cyberpunk:

City Imagery in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Psycho-Pass*

Malte Frey

Abstract: This paper analyzes the imagery of cities as depicted in the cyberpunk anime *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and the post-cyberpunk anime series *Psycho-Pass* (2012). In these works, the filmic city is employed as a signifier for societal structures, and changes in these visual signifiers thus depict the shift from cyberpunk, which focuses the autonomous subject, to post-cyberpunk, which focuses on technological societies. Different depictions of society and the role of the individual subject within it are made apparent. The predominant bottom-up direction of view in *Ghost in the Shell* suggests a technological dystopia that the protagonist seeks to elude, while an upper-lower dichotomy in *Psycho-Pass* offers subjects a means of remaining within society. Certain concepts of Japanese architecture, urbanity, and postmodernity are employed to conceptualize and visualize these key differences. This project concludes that *Ghost in the Shell* depicts a dystopian society whose postmodern superficiality prohibits the protagonist from becoming autonomous, while *Psycho-Pass* acknowledges that postmodern signification does not equal material existence. Postmodern globality is evident in *Ghost in the Shell,* while *Psycho-Pass* takes a more nationalist and autocratic approach to society.

Keywords: post-cyberpunk, cyberpunk, society, city, *Ghost in the Shell, Psycho-Pass*

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Introduction

The beginning sequence of Mamoru Oshii's cyberpunk classic *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, *Kōkaku Kidōtai*, henceforth *GitS*) shows the protagonist, secret security Section 9's Major Motoko Kusanagi, jumping off of a rooftop after having successfully assassinated her target.[1] She then escapes the authorities seeking her by activating her thermo-optical camouflage. Consequently, in the viewers' eyes, Kusanagi's shape merges with the nightly scenery of Newport City while she falls into the netlike structure of the metropolis, leaving audiences with the images of a near-future science fiction city. Right from the start, then, city imagery marks its immense presence which it continues throughout the entire movie.

City imagery, like that of the opening of *GitS,* can serve as an access point for examinations of filmic societies. How is it structured? Who has access to which parts? Which restrictions are implemented? The "city," broadly speaking, has been the focus of many and various sociological studies and has been labeled the "specific space of modern society"[2] in film as well.[3] For example, sociologists Alexa M. Kunz and Bernhard Schäfers consider how spatial-urban elements signify societal structures of the city, such as how differentiating between an upper and lower part of the city can refer to a class system,[4] while access or lack thereof to certain (public) spaces can demonstrate the individual's freedom to act.[5]

Another anime that features city imagery in a central role is the post-cyberpunk series *Psycho-Pass* (first season, 2012, henceforth *PP*).[6] Produced by Production I.G., the same production studio that released *GitS, PP* can arguably be considered a successor to the ideological complexities of *GitS,* due to similarities in visual style, setting, and thematic concerns. However, the outlook on society that we encounter in

PP is markedly different from what had been introduced with *GitS* roughly two decades earlier. While *GitS* focuses on the individual subject and its struggles in a society permeated by technology, *PP* places more emphasis on how technology structures society itself.

This shift between the two anime, I argue, resembles the shift from the cyberpunk genre to post-cyberpunk as initially theorized by Lawrence Person.[7] In the following work, I will examine the city imagery we encounter in *GitS* and *PP* as exemplifying how each anime constructs a particular form of society, particularly regarding structural hierarchies and the autonomy of its subjects. Because film itself as a medium is spatially structured,[8] this inquiry is based on filmic spatial notions as well, and this lens will offer further insight into how the outlook on society has changed from cyberpunk's dystopian take in *GitS* to post-cyberpunk's also bleak but now more pragmatic counterpart in *PP*.

(Post-)Cyberpunk and Japan: A First Encounter

To better understand the background and stakes of this analysis, I turn first to considering cyberpunk, post-cyberpunk, and some key connections between the two, as well as how they depict cities. In cyberpunk narratives, media scholar Jiré Emine Gözen notes, urban space functions as the predominant setting.[9] We may remember Ridley Scott's famous movie *Blade Runner* (1982) or William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984), both primary texts of 1980s cyberpunk, and both of which unfold their stories almost entirely in urban spaces. Cyberpunk narratives often feature a dystopian near-future world, controlled rather by hyper-capitalist mega-corporations than public government structures. Interaction with everyday technology leads to body alterations, typically becoming cyborgs, and questioning the idea of

human nature.[10] In 1991, Fredric Jameson argued that cyberpunk fiction could be seen as a representation of what was then a technologically-changed present.[11] Likewise, anime scholar Susan J. Napier has contended that cyberpunk may be well suited to describe present times too, as they are also shaped by technology.[12]

Despite the continuing concerns with technology, though, the genre itself has changed since the 1980s and 1990s. New narratives in this tradition have been labeled post-cyberpunk by sci-fi-author and critic Lawrence Person, who coined the term in 1999.[13] Whereas early cyberpunk deals with the *conditio humana* that is influenced by everyday technological interventions, post-cyberpunk primarily focuses on society structured by and even consisting of technology. Person, who focuses on novels like Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* (1995) and Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (1988) among others, argues that technological conditions for writing fiction have changed since the late 1980s, and that society comes to be conceived differently too. As he puts it, "In cyberpunk, technology facilitates alienation from society. In post-cyberpunk, technology *is* society." Unlike cyberpunk, which tends to feature outsider protagonists going against the system, characters in post-cyberpunk are anchored within society and strive to make it better.[14]

Although Person focuses on literature rather than visual media like film or anime, the elements that he identifies in his definition are also evident in works such as *PP*, making it logical to consider such visual texts as post-cyberpunk too. (Even so, it is also worth noting that Person himself in 1999 concedes that his conception of post-cyberpunk "will probably look misguided in a decade or so hence."[15])

Though the series *PP* and the movie *GitS* share thematic similarities, and the former is rooted in the latter through their production, we might reasonably assume

that they depict society in complementary, but not completely similar, ways. Moreover, one means of understanding this would be to simply compare the two, focusing on how *PP* draws from post-cyberpunk interests and *GitS* is more classic cyberpunk, and then to examine what picture of society each one offers accordingly. However, , I assume not a divide between post-cyberpunk and cyberpunk, but instead an ongoing evolution and transition of established themes. This is both exemplified by my analysis, and also demonstrates an actualization of Person's account of post-cyberpunk as an evolving genre.

Further, the fact that both texts examined here are Japanese productions must be highlighted. Imagery of Japan–or supposedly derived thereof–has played a central role in the development of cyberpunk and its genre iconography. Kumiko Sato argues that images derived from the Japanese cultural environment and used in American cyberpunk "enabled Japan to find itself in the future of the West, which suggested that it [Japan] had already outpaced the West in Westernization thanks to its rapid technological progress."[16] In Sato's view, the growing Japanese cyberpunk functions as a discursive platform to re-inscribe premodern Japan in a modern–i.e., technological–context, therein fulfilling Japan's continued striving for Westernization.[17] However, as Japanese cyberpunk involves an entanglement of premodern Japan and modern technology, Sato therein sees the danger of the construction of nationalist concepts of "Japanese uniqueness" through Japanese cyberpunk.[18] In particular, the notion of a "cyborg identity" has been claimed as specifically Japanese, foremost by scholar Takayuki Tatsumi.[19] The cyborg, constructed of organic and inorganic parts, has been conceptualized in Western posthuman studies as a fluid and relational identity-concept in contrast to fixed and static binary forms. In cyberpunk, characters are altered by technological

enhancement, and thus, transcend fixed identity structures as they consist of numerous and changeable parts. Scholars such as Tatsumi maintain that this particular form of technological incorporation of technology is a distinctly Japanese feature, one that is linked to the country's economic success because of technology, and thus, one that may come with nationalist undertones.

In this project, though, it is my premise that concerning oneself with (Japanese) cyberpunk from a Western perspective allows for going beyond a simplistic divide between Eastern and Western concepts by instead reading both through one another, thus avoiding any nationalist essentialism. The Western concept of a cyborg identity offers a useful tool to describe patterns within the Japanese cultural environment. Likewise, such patterns provide a rich pool of thoughts on concepts that relate to that of a cyborg identity. As we will see, this entanglement can enrich our readings of texts such as *GitS* and *PP*.

Dystopian Capitalistic Urbanity in Cyberpunk: The Case of *Ghost in the Shell*

Oshii's cyberpunk-classic *Ghost in the Shell* (alternately, *GitS*) takes place in the fictive futuristic metropolis of Newport City, which is the locus of the film's entire narrative. The protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi, is a cyborg who serves as head of the elite police unit Section 9. Because she is unsure as to which parts of her are human, Kusanagi questions the foundation of her existence because she feels that her persona might as well be technologically constructed from altered or even false memories. A solution to this problem–and perhaps even salvation from it–is offered to Kusanagi by the artificial life-form Puppetmaster, which was originally designed to be a hacker program and has since become self-aware in the data realms of the net.

Longing to merge with Kusanagi for reproductive purposes, Puppetmaster offers unlimited access to the data world. Therein lies the dual promise both of freeing Kusanagi from her bodily restrictions and also of eluding the uncertainty regarding her human status, as she would move to a higher or at least different ontological level. The film ends with Kusanagi-Puppetmaster, now merged in a childish-looking cyborg body, looking over Newport City from an elevated point of view.

Given its popularity, *GitS* has been the subject of much scholarship. Prominent analysis, such as those by Susan J. Napier, Christopher Bolton or Sharilyn Orbaugh among others, often focus on topics that regard Kusanagi as a protagonist, the narratives she participates in, and the ontological issues she raises, thus further delving into questions about gender and the construction of identity. With such interests though, most scholars tend to focus on the narrative and depiction of the character Kusanagi for their analyses, and in doing so, focus on her rather than the displayed environment visible around her.[20]

By contrast, I will draw here from two approaches that examine the city depicted in *GitS*. One of the most substantial inquiries of *GitS*'s city imagery has been provided by Wong Kin Yuen who points out Hong Kong as a substantial model for the movie.[21] He leans on statements made by Oshii himself, who held Asian cities in general and Hong Kong in particular as an image for future cities, and also by Oshii's art designer Takeuchi Atsushi claiming that, in Hong Kong, "on the streets there flows an excess or a flood of information."[22] Oshii has also stated that the atmosphere of Los Angeles as portrayed in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) influenced his movie and that he views Hong Kong as an equivalent to Scott's Los Angeles.[23] Following those statements, Yuen emphasizes the "profusion of signs and icons"[24] in Hong Kong in connection to the "sea of data"[25] in *GitS*.

In a similar manner, regarding this final sequence of the film, Japan scholar William O. Gardner identifies *GitS*'s city in general with the data realm to which Kusanagi gains unlimited access by merging with Puppetmaster.[26] This "Net" is made visible by the weblike structures of the city Kusanagi finally looks down upon.[27] Additionally, according to Gardner, the data realm is constantly made visible by the massively detailed city sceneries deployed by Oshii to hint "at the even richer and vaster realm of digital information on the Net."[28] In this sense, the city is linked to the technological data realm deeply implemented in the society of *GitS*.

While I draw from both of these place-oriented lenses, I am in particular agreement with Gardner's reading in terms of what I call the "upper sphere" of the city in *GitS*. By this I mean the high-rising skyscrapers that mostly appear in the distance, far away, and even fading. This sphere is strongly separated from the "lower sphere" of the city, which appears close, dirty, and tangible. The significance of the former can be illuminated by an early sequence that shows Kusanagi sitting on her bed in a blacked-out room, gazing contemplatively at the futuristic architecture that reaches into a pale but nonetheless bright sky in the upper part of the frame. The high-rising structures seem to be the object of her longing here.

This longing is tied to a religiously-connoted hope for salvation. Napier observes that Kusanagi's merger with Puppetmaster, which ultimately liberates her from socio-economic restrictions, is accompanied by numerous references not only to Christian theology, but also to Buddhism and Shinto as well. According to Napier, Oshii himself equates the 'Net' with Shinto deities, the *kami*, thereby linking the data realm to a religious transcendence.[29] In *GitS*, therefore, the longed-for metaphysic is the 'Net' itself, promising to elude said restrictions. This data realm is hinted at by the upper sphere of the city's skyscrapers.

However, the lower city-sphere provides another perspective. In another of the most striking sequences of Kusanagi, she is taking a stroll through the city, moving along at ground level. Notably, the focus of the sequence lies upon the city itself. Emerging from the starting point of a blank white screen, the silhouette of an airplane overshadows the scenery in sharp contrast to the sky whose bright white is also contrasted by the ground-level buildings and figures, which are painted in rusty and dark colors. Instead of futuristic skyscrapers, the city here consists of dirty buildings and advertisements closely resembling contemporary Asian sceneries of Hong Kong, Shanghai, or Kuala Lumpur. Everything seems inhabited and in use by people walking in the streets or upon boats floating on the water. The artists of *GitS* made sketches in Hong Kong in order to grasp particular sites, as Yuen points out.[30] This verisimilitude or "realness" of the lower level exists in opposition to the metaphysics invoked by the upper city-sphere. Such contrasts are further highlighted by other artistic elements of the film. For example, predominant in this sequence, as well as in the entire movie, is a bottom-up direction of view. Kusanagi, like the viewer, finds herself on the bottom of the lower city sphere, looking up at the high-rising buildings that jut into the sky. As the sequence continues, the view is distorted as the sky becomes visible only in reflections of dirty water or in the glassy facades of the buildings, leaving only depthless surfaces.

This resonates with both architectural and theoretical concepts of postmodernism. Since the late 1960s, Japanese architects have envisioned an increasingly fluid city based on information and simulation.[31] Likewise, *GitS* designer Takeuchi, when talking about Hong Kong, mentions "a flood of information" and "a whirlpool of information".[32] Further, as Gardner points out, "by the 1980s and 1990s, the interpretation of the Japanese city by Japanese as well as foreign architects, critics,

and novelists both influenced and was influenced by postmodern theoretical ideas, including Fredric Jameson's idea of 'depthlessness' as a defining feature of postmodernism [...]." [33] For Jameson, in postmodernist capitalism everything becomes a commodity, and therefore, merely superficial without substance: in a word, depthless.[34] Accordingly, in 1991, Japanese architect Hajime Yatsuka saw architecture rather as signs than substance. He stated that Japanese cities were "imbued with an 'visible and multi-layered network of information flow.'" [35] Taking Oshii's and Takeuchi's statements into consideration, Yatsuka's claim seems valid not only regarding Japanese examples, but also, both Asian cities and postmodernist cities in general. Postmodernist cities, according to Jameson, abandon the concept of insight and outside, which could certainly fit as another way to describe a "multi-layered network of information flow." And, fittingly, Jameson saw that idea realized in parts of Tokyo.[36]

Oshii appears to be strongly influenced by such ideas, given his prominent use of layering and the resulting shallowness of the architectural surfaces in the sequence described above. Nearly every shot consists of a foreground (e.g., figures and boats), a middle-ground (e.g., buildings) and the background (e.g., sky or skyscrapers), often overlapping one another. The predominant bottom-up view to the omnipresent sky, which in the final sequence is subverted by Kusanagi finally looking down, is constantly blocked by advertisements, bridges, or traffic lights. As described by media scholar Thomas Lamarre, the aspect of layering is significant to animation because, aside from the visual vanishing point perspective, layering is most often how the effect of spatial depth is achieved. By stacking multiple layers of images on celluloid over one another and varying the space from one layer to another, effects of movement, sharpness and spatial depth can be evoked.[37]

Both in the sequence described above, and in *GitS* more generally, Oshii obviously not only makes use of this specific animation-element, but also emphasizes layering as an aspect of the narrative which can be illustrated by an exemplary shot (fig. 1):

here a group of what appears to be detailed figures, maybe students, run from right to left in the lower third of the frame (foreground). Behind them (middle ground) dirty dark buildings line up. The background, however, consists of skyscrapers bursting the frame's top border and thereby resembling the shot of Kusanagi's flat discussed previously. Whereas the dirty buildings of the middle ground seem to be connected to the figures walking in front of them, the skyscrapers appear far away and in a distant blue, over-towering the scenery while simultaneously almost fading away from it.

This distinction between fore-, middle- and background can be identified with different ontological levels. Both foreground and middle ground belong to the sphere of the *known,* which in this sequence is represented by anonymous people walking by and by the omnipresent advertisements that signify commerce. All of this seems somewhat dirty, and thus, tangible. By contrast, the skyscrapers belong to another

layer, one that is altogether different. These futuristic buildings are closely entangled with the image of the sky they seem to be reaching for, as suggested by a building under construction. Then behind the bridges and structures, the white sky juxtaposes with the tangible shabbiness of the lower sphere, thus functioning as an object of longing which, in the context of the film, is not really capitalist success, but actually, access to the data realm. The *known*, however, can be seen as a restriction from the sphere of the longed-for, since from the bottom-up direction of view, the way to the bright and seemingly endless sky and skyscrapers is always blocked by darker bridges, advertisements, and other structures that appear to be only depthless surfaces too. In this way, *GitS* invokes is a sense of emptiness and loneliness contradicting the optimistic intention for society's development into a "information society."[38]

This further resonates with Yatsuka's assertion that in the "sea of signs,"[39] as he terms the structures of Japanese cities, everything becomes relative because nothing stands out. Rather, in the "sea of signs," all floating (architectural) works therein are not unique since they lack a purpose other than being an object for and the location of consumption. Accordingly, the city cannot provide distinct individual experiences outside the shallowness of consumption, leading to Kusanagi feeling uncertain and empty. This concept dovetails handily with the "confusion" caused by the multitude of signs described by Yuen regarding Hong Kong.[40] In this sense, Yatsuka's examination of the Japanese cities provides a critical frame by which the superficial and postmodernist city-scape of *GitS* can be understood as a rather dystopian and hyper-capitalistic scenery–a perspective that also offers a critical view on contemporary capitalistic society and urban structures. In this way, *GitS* suggests that a longed-for deeper connection cannot be found in the depthless structures of the "sea of signs." Accordingly, the city stroll sequence finalizes by fading to black, a stark contrast to the

white in the beginning, and one that further stresses the importance of the white sky that has been blocked by the middle-level bridges and signs.

Of course, Kusanagi is eventually able to overcome those restrictions and reach the longed-for upper sphere, though only through her merger with Puppetmaster. Eluding those restrictions appears to be something she cannot do on her own. Consequently, her falling down and disappearing in the city at the movie's beginning and her being within the lower sphere of the city is contrasted by Kusanagi/Puppetmaster looking down on the city from an elevated point of view. Her position within the societal structure changes both literally and metaphorically. However, her way out of her confinement to the lower sphere of the depthless information society, which can also be regarded as a longing for self-fulfillment, depends on her being a cyborg and also on the actions taken by Puppetmaster. The first aspect hints at economic factors that benefit Kusanagi, while the second reminds of rescue or even salvation. On her own, the longed-for would remain high up in the clouds for Kusanagi in this cyberpunk city of *GitS*.

Concealing Reconstruction: The Post-cyberpunk City in *Psycho-Pass*

The post-cyberpunk anime *Psycho-Pass* (henceforth, *PP)* paints an altogether different picture of its society. In the first season, young inspector of the Ministry of Welfare's Public Safety Bureau Akane Tsunemori hunts antagonist Shogo Makishima. The narrative derives from and revolves around the Sybil System, a technological government system that seems to flawlessly control a Japan of the near future based on empirical data about its citizens. Here crime is anticipated by screening of so-called psycho-passes, which are biometrically-generated statuses created through constant

surveillance of citizens' brains and bodies. Every citizen holds such a pass, which includes a Crime Coefficient (index signifying potential for criminal activity) and Hue (color that communicates coefficient), and may become "clouded" or "clear" (closer to or further from possibly committing criminal activity) depending on factors such as the individual's stress level, trauma, and exposure to crime. Psycho-passes and their constituent parts often determine one's place in society. Moreover, criminal intent is equated with actions against the system and labeled a problem of mental health, caused by stress. Once a pass reaches a certain stress-level, societal bodies–such as the Ministry where Tsunemori works–implement measures from therapy to confinement and even liquidation, in order to prevent crime from even happening. In this and other ways, the Sybil System seems to work to provide a secure, peaceful, and even happy society. Tsunemori is successful in this society, and she harbors a strong wish to keep the peaceful and seemingly just order. Makishima, though, seeks to disrupt, driven by a humanist sense of autonomy. As the anime progresses, audiences learn along with Tsunemori that the Sybil System itself aims to evolve by incorporating unknown factors, such as "criminal brains," into itself; we also learn that, far from an infallible machine, the Sybil System consists of a network of brains of people, unbeknownst to society's citizens, who think of it as an entirely technological structure. The season ends with Makishima's death and Tsunemori's learning of the Sybil System's true nature. While disapproving of its methods and intentions, Tsunemori simultaneously deems the System and its deeds necessary for upholding societal order.

Both visually and thematically, the series is rooted within the cyberpunk tradition. As much as *GitS* owes to *Blade Runner* (1982), *PP* leans on Oshii's earlier masterpiece, which is evident from the series' opening shot depicting the skyline of a huge nightly city as seen from above the neighboring sea, which strongly resembles Newport City

of *GitS*. The neon lights, advertisements, and highways shown afterwards relate to those of *Blade Runner* and *GitS*. However, *PP* also develops the cyberpunk thematics further by focusing its narrative on the government system and society rather than on the individual subject.

In this regard, the city in *PP* has a twofold appearance. First, it is linked to the series' governing system, which is heralded as early as episode 1, where we see police-drones patrolling the city in a clear representation of the system's influential presence in the urban sphere. In a bird's-eye shot, the drones appear as blinking red lights within the traffic on the city highway. One might associate the streaming lines of the streets, and especially the blinking dots of the drones, in the computer-grid-like city with common visualizations of digital data flows, e.g. download bars. Thereby, like in *GitS*, a technological 'Net' gains visibility but is rendered as the governmental presence of control in the urban sphere. Later in episode 14, the city itself is visually linked to the governmental core: here the core of the Sibyl System, visually similar to the tomb of Akira who in the eponymous movie (1988) brings apocalypse, is slowly overlaid by the netlike city imagery. Here, then, the city appears to be founded on the system.

This entanglement of the governing system and the city is also apparent in the way that everything being constantly monitored by the system's scanners. Permanent surveillance is a mechanism to achieve security and thereby control, as Maki Nakamura has argued. She links *PP*'s social system to Foucault's concept of "governmentality."[41] Instead of executing disciplinary actions, governmentality is exercised by "structuring the possible field of their [the subjects'] actions"[42] and thereby "shape[s] human conduct by calculated means."[43] By constant management of people's behavior, the system is able to "secure people's wellbeing."[44]

The second appearance of the city notable in *PP* is notable for the way city imagery is linked to the narrative's society via montage. In episode 17, this functions as a context for conversations about societal structures. Likewise, the apparent equation of city and society is underlined by Professor Saiga, the series' ingenious profiler, who in episode 19 explains that the rural areas of *PP*'s Japan are completely uninhabited: the agricultural sector has been entirely automatized, leaving the urban sphere the only place of society. This concept has historical roots in Japanese urbanity, which has a higher density compared to most American and European counterparts, due to the lack of land and the "megalopolis project," which promoted the idea of a "city Japan" driven by industrial consumer society after the end of World War II.[45] Furthermore, certain economic and industrializing factors during the US occupation after 1945, which sought to undermine structures beneficial to a militarist Japan such as large-scale landownership and family-held cooperations (*zaibatsu*), led to a drastic advance in automation in the agricultural sector, laying the grounds for Japan to eventually become an industrialized country.[46] Interestingly, where the city of *GitS* offers a multinational postmodern take, *PP* thereby explicitly seems to focus on Japan in a nationalist manner.[47] Keeping this in mind, it seems fair to equate the one city we encounter in *PP* with *PP*'s (Japanese) society itself.

The governmental presence within this society is far from absolute, though. As the streaming line of drones elucidates, the system's 'Net' is present, but also moving and porous. Instead of being omnipresent, the system thus leaves areas out of control. This separation is visualized by three major factors: light-dark-contrasts, the architectural difference between worn-out structures and the glossy skylines of clean and possibly official buildings, and finally an embedded aspect of layering in the city's architecture.

All of these are further accompanied by an upper-lower-dichotomy which, in contrast to *GitS*, is supported by a predominantly top-down perspective.

Throughout *PP*, it is in the dark where the crime takes place. Where the upper sphere of the city tends to appear open and in warm-bright colors, the crime scenes are mostly dark closed rooms, back alleys, and uninhabited areas during the night. By contrast, the daytime appears sunny with bright glossy facades in a city without garbage or anything remotely displeasing. The light-dark-separation is most evident in episode 14, where enforcers Kogami and Masaoka pursue a culprit who has beaten a woman to death. Driven by the two policemen and the system's drones away from the city lights and towards a seemingly remote industrial area, the culprit is finally confronted inside an abandoned warehouse. The blue light of the city's skyscrapers shines through the upper windows, but the culprit and those in pursuit of him are not touched by it. The entire setting of the crime and all parties involved thus remain in the dark, separate from both the public and officially-controlled society.

Further, the explicit architectural differences of worn-down and even slum-like areas, which lay the groundwork for crimes, are mostly situated at the bottom of the frames, while the high-rising buildings, which can be associated with the controlling system and safe society in the upper sphere, highlight the contrast between areas where the systems exerts control and those where it does not. On the one hand, an implicit upper-lower hierarchy is enforced throughout the series by institutional architecture, such as two repeatedly-shown buildings, the Public Security Bureau of the Ministry of Welfare and the Nona Tower that holds the core of the Sibyl-System in its basement. Both tower over their surroundings, evoking a social hierarchy.[48] However, there is also an upper-lower hierarchy between the old and the new, shown most prominently in the establishing shots of Tsunemori's talks with her friends (fig.

2). While the girls speak, we see a functioning traffic infrastructure of the street and high-rising concrete-glass buildings on top of partly submerged ruins.

Tatsumi has pointed out the logic of "deconstruction of war and the construction of the city" that was predominant in postwar Japan, when cities had to be rebuilt out of the destruction.[49] This logic can be found in *PP* as well, where it is also connected to the aspect of layering since the system's architecture is built upon the older structures. This layering often is accompanied by water signifying the presence of overbuilt structures of older times. For example, a flooded area marks the entrance to the hunting area of one of Makishima's disciples. In episode 9, this man is introduced along as a hunter in early 20th century clothing with trophies from foreign countries in his house, thereby appealing to a stereotypical image of colonialist power. Making this connection even more overt, this character's prey is people. As episode 9 progresses, we see that water proves to be the barrier that separates the seemingly healthy and safe world provided by the system's care, from the dark and forgotten

places of crime lying underneath its opaque surface. It is thereby suggested that the controlling society overlays the seemingly chaotic and thus dangerous structures of the past. However, as the system has not yet managed to completely penetrate the older structures, so its order remains superficial, even running the risk of forgetting what may lie underneath. In these ways *PP* depicts a layered structure of society, still in the process of gaining control of something that was before. In this sense, the construction of the new on top of the old can be understood as both a development and a burial, negating the old by overlay.[50]

This poses a different approach to depth than that which is described by Jameson, who claims that in hyper-capitalist societies there is no depth but merely surfaces without anything beneath them. Water as a surface in *PP,* though, acts as a barrier to the old, suggesting that there is something beneath the modern veneer and thus counter the postmodern depthlessness evoked in *GitS*. In *PP* something very real is actually lingering in the deep. In Jameson's postmodernism, depthlessness is also tied to a loss of the past as everything becomes present through signification, the past becomes style and text.[51] Arguably, this too is the case in cyberpunk fiction like Charles Paulk argues regarding Gibson's *Neuromancer*.[52] The past in *PP,* however, withstands its complete annihilation and older structures offer places of antagonistic resistance. Thus, instead of merely superficially covering them, *PP*'s society aims to fully reach the underlying structures and impose order there; or, if that is impossible, then to annihilate them.

A way to do so seems to shift attention, thereby rendering the old outside of society. In this sense, in addition to the notion of governmentality, Foucault's analysis on order through visibility in *Surveiller et punir* (Strafen und Überwachen)[53] proves insightful. Order through visibility denotes structures that steer attention. Building upon this,

sociologist Andreas Reckwitz notes that disciplinary vision is exercised by institutions aiming to control or even standardize human conduct through disciplinary action.[54] Contrary, the "quantified self" that is constantly monitored by devices such as smartwatches leads to a self-surveillance aiming for self-optimization. In what Reckwitz calls 'post-disciplinary' visibility orders, being visible is fundamental to participate in society. While he probably has social media in mind, this concept is visible in *PP* as well; in this fictionalized society, it is necessary to be 'seen' by the Sybil System in order to partake in this dystopian society. The use of burial-like layering thus suggests a negligence conspired by the ruling system to willfully 'not-see' the unwanted. This is visually depicted by the light-dark-contrast, the upper-lower hierarchy, and the aspect of layering in the city imagery.

However, all of this is still an ongoing process in *PP* because the unwanted has a way of crawling back into the upper order. For example, the antagonist Makishima provides criminals with helmets that mirror the lowest crime coefficient of people nearby. Consequently, it is possible for the wearer of a helmet to commit a crime in public without being detected by street scanners or even judged and perhaps executed by the system. This particular story arc peaks in episode 14 with the disturbing sequence of a culprit beating a woman to death one night while bystanders just watch, unable to see this as a crime because his psycho-pass is not displaying the Crime Coefficient or Hue expected to accompany a crime. The idyllic Christmassy atmosphere of the pedestrian area provides a high-contrast background, enhancing the unsettling violence. In the sequence, the conflict between the buried but now re-emerging layer of (past) violence and the layer of the order built atop it is sharpened. Hence, the system's over-layering and progress is not a one-way street. Rather, forgotten things arise out of the dark.

Ultimately, the city imagery in *PP* counters the postmodernist depthlessness of an information society, as depicted in *GitS;* moreover, *PP* does this using an order through visibility which is attempting to pervade deeper structures that offer resistance. Whereas the system attempts to establish its new (visibility-)order by top-down layering, older things–such as colonial structures and, of course, crime–reappear on the surface, often re-emerging from water or the depths. In this process of burying and re-emerging, the city functions as a template for the ongoing structural changes in society. Certainly, there can be little doubt that the Sybil System in *PP* will be successful in its approach to alter the surface of its surrounding society. However, it remains doubtful whether a complete alteration of society can ever be achieved here, since it does not seem to suffice to address all the many elements and even people who remain unwished-for and presently outside of society. Not to be seen does not mean not to exist, though. Thus, *PP* offers a different take on reality that does not allow the postmodern depthlessness of signification to determine what is and what is not.

Conclusion

The societies displayed by means of city imagery in the cyberpunk movie *GitS* and the post-cyberpunk series *PP* clearly offer different approaches. While *GitS* employs its city imagery to invoke a depthless information society in a postmodern sense, with an implicit socio-economic hierarchy restricting the individual's freedom, *PP*'s city buries the unwanted and violent past of individualism under lighter structures of a technocratic governing structure. Most notable here is the change in the predominant direction of view: *GitS* favors a bottom-up direction, focusing the upper city sphere that functions as a metaphor for techno-metaphysical salvation or a 'cyber transcendence'[55] as restrictions on the ground level confine the protagonist, while in *PP,* there is a top-down direction of view that underlines the superficial covering of

older deeper structures by the ruling governing system. Places of resistance are thus found down below.

I have argued here that the invoked depthlessness in *GitS* stresses a postmodern loss of the past much like Jameson suggests, which arguably is a feature of cyberpunk fiction in general. Contrarily, in *PP*, the re-emerging past opposes the system's effort to establish a Foucauldian order of visibility, i.e.. willfully 'unseeing' the unwished-for. Such order, however, appears unable to completely annihilate the past and its remaining material existence. This marks a shift from a postmodern point of view, which mainly regards information and representation, towards an approach that recognizes that representation is not necessarily equivalent with existence. I maintain that Person did not think of this as a feature of post-cyberpunk in 1999, though that very lacuna is in keeping with his warning that post-cyberpunk would continue to develop well after he offered a preliminary definition.

Nevertheless, there are problematic notions that arise from these considerations. For example, *PP* seems to favor a more nationalist take on society than *GitS*. Whereas the latter displays a multinational postmodern city, *PP* explicitly focuses on Japan. Japanese cyberpunk functions as a discursive platform for Japan's relationship to the West. Therein lies the danger of constructing explicitly nationalist narratives, themes, and even texts. It seems that *PP*, contrary to *GitS*, favors nationalism over a postmodernist global hybridity. For another matter, the Sybil System's violence in *PP* is portrayed as justified by the violence of old underlying structures. In this case, one must wonder how autocratic systems generally relate to the processors upon which they establish themselves—is this dependence, inspiration, reaction, apathy, or something else entirely? Whatever the consensus may be, *PP* deals with it by portraying a collective well-being and peace achieved through oppression of the

individual via a surveillance state; one might even notice similarities to contemporary China as an example of a comparably autocratic governing system. Whether those are aspects of post-cyberpunk fiction in general, or of Japanese post-cyberpunk more specifically, should be subject to further inquiries.

Notes:

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[1] *Kōkaku Kidōtai: Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Oshii Mamoru (1995); translated as *Ghost in the Shell (*Panini Video 1995).

[2] Jörn Ahrens, "Das Selbst Im Apartment. Gesellschaftsanalyse als Spielfilm", in *Die Herausforderungen Des Films. Soziologische Antworten*, ed. by Alexander Geimer, Carsten Heinze, and Rainer Winter, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018), 170.

[3] Alexa M. Kunz and Bernhard Schäfers, "Architektur und Stadt im Film", in *Gesellschaft Im Film*, ed. by Markus Schroer (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2008), 14-15, 18.

[4] Kunz and Schäfers, 19.

[5] Ibid., 26

[6] *Psycho*-Pass, dir. Shiotani Naoyoshi (2012); (Kaze Anime 2014).

[7] Lawrence Person, "Notes Toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto", *Slashdot.Org*, 1999 <https://slashdot.org/story/99/10/08/2123255/notes-toward-a-postc> [accessed 19 January 2019].

[8] Alice Bienk, *Filmsprache. Einführung in die Interaktive Filmanalyse*, 5th edn (Marburg: Schüren Verlag GmbH, 2019), 38-47; Hans Jürgen Wulff, "Filmraum", ed. by Hans Jürgen Wulff, *Lexikon Der Filmbegriffe*, 2019 <https://filmlexikon.uni-kiel.de/index.php?action=lexikon&tag=det&id=170> [accessed 17 February 2020].

[9] Jiré Emine Gözen, *Cyberpunk Science Fiction. Literarische Fiktion und Medientheorie* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), 123-130, 205.

[10] Ibid., 123-130, 205.

[11] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 286.

[12] Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle. Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11.

[13] Person.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Kumiko Sato, "How Information Technology Has (Not) Changed Feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese Context", *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41, 3 (2004), 340-341.

[17] Ibid., 340-341.

[18] Ibid., 353.

[19] Sato 2004, 346. Sato refers to Tatsumi's 1993 *A Manifesto for Japanoid* which is not evadable in English translation. In his book *Full Metal Apache,* Tatsumi however offers a multitude of Japanese cyborgian identity also in relation to U.S.-cyberpunk: Takayuki Tatsumi, *Full Metal Apache. Transactions Between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham / London: Duke University Press, 2006), 29, 43-59, 105-111, 137-170.

[20] Christopher Bolton, *Interpreting Anime* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 95-136; Napier, 103-116; Sharalyn Orbaugh, "Sex and the Single Cyborg. Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in Subjectivity", in *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams. Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime*, ed. by Christopher Bolton / Takayuki Tatsumi / Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 172-192.

[21] Yuen, Wong Kin," On the Edge of Spaces. 'Blade Runner', 'Ghost in the Shell', and Hong Kong's Cityscape." Science Fiction Studies 27, 1 (2008), 1–21.

[22] Ibid., 13. Yuen here quotes: Nozaki, Tohru et. al. *The Analysis of GHOST IN THE SHELL* (Tokyo: Kodansha Young

Magazine, 1995). This book, unfortunately, is not paginated.

[23] Napier, 310, note 2.

[24] Ibid. 14.

[25] Ibid., 13.

[26] William O. Gardner, "The Cyber Sublime and the Virtual Mirror. Information and Media in the Works of Oshii Mamoru and Kon Satoshi", *Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 18, 1 (2009), 48.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Napier, 113.

[30] Yuen, 14.

[31] William O. Gardner, *The Metabolist Imagination. Visions of the City in Postwar Japanese Architecture and Science Fiction* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 11-16.

[32] Yuen, 13, 14. Yuen again quotes Nozaki.

[33] Ibid., 112.

[34] Jameson, 12.

[35] Gardner "Metabolist Imagination", 112; Yatsuka Hajime, "Eine Architektur Im Meer Der Zeichen", in *Die Neue Japanische Architektur*, ed. by Botond Bognar (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1991), 40.

[36] Jameson, 98.

[37] Thomas Lamarre, *Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 6-11.

[38] Gardner, "Metabolist Imagination", 113.

[39] Yatsuka, 40.

[40] Yuen, 14.

[41] Mari Nakamura, "Emancipation in Postmodernity: Political Thought in Japanese Science Fiction Animation" (Dissertation in Humanities, Leiden University, 2017), 120-36.

42 Nakamura, 121-22.

43 Tania Murray Li, "Governmentality", *Anthropologica*, 49, 2 (2007), 275.

44 Ibid., 133.

45 Botond Bognar, *Die Neue Japanische Architektur* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer GmbH, 1991), 12; Gardner, "Metabolist Imagination", 37-9.

46 Harry T. Oshima, "Reinterpreing Japan's Postwar Growth", *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, October 1982, 10-11, 38-40.

47 In episode 19, it is stated that borders are closed and that there is no international communication, which reminds audiences of Japan being a closed state under the Tokugawa Shogunate until 1853. Further, the Sybil Sytem seems to be the only way to provide order in this fictional world, as *Psycho-Pass: The Movie* (2015) denotes by showing the system exported to another country because Japan is depicted as the only orderly country while the rest of world has sunken into chaos.

48 Kunz and Schäfers, 19.

As a further note, the Nona Tower presumably takes its name from a sister of the Morai in Greek (Klotho) and Roman (Nona) mythology, who weaves the thread of fate whose length is to be determined and then cut by the other two sisters. Accordingly, the Sibyl System controls its subject 'slives like Nona weaves the thread of life.

49 Tatsumi, 155-56.

For a starting point to further inquiries into posthuman studies I strongly recommend the *Posthuman Studies Reader* edited by Evi D. Sampanikou and Jan Stasieńko which holds key texts and arguments.

50 A specific aspect of layering certainly is the recurrent display of holography in the anime, used for home-decoration, clothes, or to cover hideous crime scenes from the public eye. Nakamura finds this technology a signifier of the system's control, assuming that the architecture is also visually enhanced. There is, however, no evidence in to support that claim. Whereas the lack of the system's control is clearly visible in the decayed structures, those remain evidently present next to the glossy buildings (fig. 2).

Nakamura, 130.

51 Jameson, 18, 286, 309.

52 Paulk, Charles, 'Post-National Cool: William Gibson's Japan', *Science Fiction Studies*, 38, no. 3 (2011), 478–500, 487.

53 Michel Foucault, *Überwachen Und Strafen. Die Geburt Des Gefängnisses* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977).

54 Andreas Reckwitz, "Die Transformation der Sichtbarkeitsordnungen. Vom Disziplinären Blick zu den Kompetitiven Singularitäten", in *Vierzig Jahre 'Überwachen und Strafen'. Zur Aktualität der Foucault'schen Matchanalyse*, ed. by Roberto Nigro and Marc Rölli (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2017), 204-6.

55 Gözen, 208.

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Defying Fate, Demanding Futurity: Nostalgia, Queerness, and Family in

Ikuhara Kunihiko's *Mawaru Penguindrum*

Cynthia Zhang

Abstract: In discussions of anime director Ikuhara Kunihiko, much emphasis has been placed on the prominence of queerness in his works. *Mawaru Penguindrum* (2011), with its focus on familial belonging and relatively low incidence of explicitly LGBTQ+ characters, is consequently often framed as the most heteronormative of Ikuhara's works. Drawing on the ways in which queerness has deployed in queer theory as a force that pushes against normativity, this paper argues that *Penguindrum* can nonetheless be read as a queer text insofar as it queers the concepts of family and nostalgia. If "family" is at the heart of *Penguindrum*, it is not the heteronormative nuclear family that Lee Edelman critiques as a force of reproductive futurity but families of choice formed in response to exclusion from normative society. Additionally, working with Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia as well as work in memory studies, I read nostalgia in *Penguindrum* as an affect that is queer insofar as it does not seek to replicate or hold onto the past but rather uses past attachment as a generative force for forming new connections. Ultimately, queer nostalgia serves as a crucial link between *Penguindrum*'s two main themes: the idealization of the nuclear family and forms of societal belonging in the wake of the 1995 Tokyo sarin gas attacks.

Keywords: nostalgia, queer studies, memory studies, Aum Shinrikyo, kinship, *Mawaru Penguindrum*

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Placed within director Ikuhara Kunihiko's larger body of work, the 2011 anime series *Mawaru Penguindrum* is both a defining text in his corpus and an outlier to his other work. A family drama exploring the impact of the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attacks in Tokyo, *Penguindrum's* stylistic flourishes—its layered symbolism, magical girl (mahô shôjo) trappings, and complicated, quasi-incestuous familial relationships—are all elements associated with Ikuhara's distinct brand of directing. While such qualities were present in Ikuhara's work as a showrunner on *Sailor Moon*, his reputation for dense, often esoteric work was cemented by *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (*Shôjo Kakumei Utena*). Originally airing from 1997 to 1998, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is ostensibly a magical girl anime, but it uses the conventions of the genre to raise questions of gender normativity, unhealthy attachment, and cycles of abuse. As a result of the series' dense themes and metafictional sensibility, *Utena* has emerged as a key text in studies of Ikuhara's work.[1] *Penguindrum*, which marked Ikuhara's return to directorial work post-*Utena,* is similarly ambitious in its scope and cryptic in its messages; as such, it is often seen as a text that is quintessentially 'Ikuhara.'[2][3]

At the same time, *Penguindrum* stands out from Ikuhara's larger body of work in one major respect: its representation (or lack thereof) of LGBT+ characters. As a director on *Sailor Moon,* Ikuhara oversaw the introduction of Sailor Neptune and Sailor Uranus, two characters whose recognizability as an archetypal femme/butch couple have made them lesbian icons beloved by both Japanese and international fans of girls' love (yuri) manga and anime.[4] Tenjô Utena, as a character who presents herself as a self-styled cross-dressing prince who aims to save princesses, further cemented Ikuhara's cult status among queer anime fans, especially given *Revolutionary Girl Utena's* focus on Utena's romantic relationship with another girl, Himemiya Anthy

(implicitly romantic in the TV series, explicitly so in the post-series film *Adolescence of Utena*). Similarly, Ikuhara's post-*Penguindrum* series, *Yurikuma Arashi* (2015) and *Sarazanmai* (2019), explored questions of queer desire and societal belonging through characters respectively identified as lesbians and gay men. By contrast, *Mawaru Penguindrum* is sometimes jokingly referred to among fans as "the most 'heterosexual' series of Ikuhara's works."[5] Queer characters and relationships are present in *Mawaru Penguindrum* but are secondary elements. The plot is driven by the efforts of the Takakura brothers, Shôma and Kanba, to discover the magical Penguindrum and thus save their terminally ill sister, Himari. *Penguindrum's* handling of its main queer character, Tokikage Yuri, has been criticized by fans, many of whom see "the jarring invocation of a predatory lesbian trope" in Yuri's morally ambiguous actions.[6] Though Yuri does have a female lover, her primary relationship is with the male character Tabuki Keijo, her childhood friend and current fiancé. Yuri ultimately chooses to stay with Tabuki. Given the basis of Yuri and Tabuki's relationship in shared grief over the loss of a childhood friend for whom both shared romantic feelings, their bond can be viewed as more platonic than romantic or sexual. However, the fact that Yuri remains one of *Penguindrum's* few explicitly queer characters means that her affirmation of Tabuki's 'love' carries uncomfortable implications about the relative value of domestic heterosexuality. Taken alongside the series' larger celebration of familial bonds, *Penguindrum's* resolution of Yuri's storyline can make the series appear startlingly conservative compared to Ikuhara's other work.

Without dismissing criticisms of *Penguindrum's* handling of particular characters and sexual politics, this paper argues that queerness is central to *Penguindrum's* thematic concerns. Working from a definition of queer in which

queerness encompasses not just non-normative gender and sexual identities but also a resistance to normativity at large, *Penguindrum* operates as a text that queers the concepts of family and relationality. Given the frequency with which the sanctity of the nuclear family is invoked to justify queerphobic legislation, it can seem counterintuitive, if not inherently misguided, to think of queerness and family together. At the same time, the popularity of terms such as "found family" and "chosen family" among queer communities speaks to a continued desire for the support provided by kinship structures. Given the increased hardships that come with falling outside the bounds of heteronormativity, the support provided by alternative forms of kinship is arguably all the more vital for queer survival. Following José Esteban Muñoz's engagement with Lee Edelman's theory of reproductivity futurity, this paper reads *Penguindrum's* depiction of multiple familial structures as critiquing the idealization of the nuclear family without dismissing the concept of family altogether. In *Penguindrum*, the nuclear family acts as a mechanism of social exclusion. By contrast, alternative family formations—which can be considered "queer" as they are non-normative—provide vital support systems for those subjects excluded by normativity.

Crucially, *Penguindrum's* investigation of family cannot be separated from the series' commentary on Japanese society. On a narrative level, the two themes are connected through the figures of the now-dead Takakura parents, Kenzan and Chiemi, and the complicated legacy they leave their children. Takakura Kenzan and Chiemi were loving parents, but they were also deeply involved with the Kiga Group, a fictional terrorist organization responsible for a series of train attacks sixteen years before *Penguindrum* began. Though the Kiga Group employs bombs and is technically not a religious organization, it is nonetheless analogous to Aum Shinrikyo, the apocalyptic

cult responsible for a coordinated series of sarin gas attacks on Tokyo trains in 1995. Much like the real-life families of Aum members, the Takakura siblings in *Penguindrum* are judged guilty by association for their parents' crimes, with Himari's illness presented as a cosmic punishment for their family's sins. Though the 1995 attacks are not directly referenced until midway through the series, the specter of Aum haunts *Penguindrum* from its beginning, with the series' opening monologue on the unfairness of fate echoing the words of a former Aum member interviewed by Murakami Haruki.[7] Similarly, one cannot divorce *Penguindrum*'s exploration of family from its reflection on both the Aum incident and subsequent reactions to the attacks. Public and private spheres, often considered separate, are inexorably linked through the common factor of trauma.

In examining trauma as a common link between *Penguindrum's* thematic exploration of familial and societal belonging, Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia serves as a useful framework. Though Freud would later go on to rethink melancholia as a precondition for mourning in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), his original definitions of the terms in "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) define melancholia as an unhealthy attachment to a lost object while mourning is a healthy process that works to let go of the object. In *Penguindrum,* Freudian melancholia is portrayed as a precarious position for both remembrance and community formation. However, *Penguindrum*'s status as a deeply nostalgic text complicates Freud's pathologizing distinction between mourning as a healthy detachment and melancholia as an unhealthy attachment. Formally, this nostalgic tendency is reflected in *Penguindrum's* frequent reference to texts such as Miyazawa Kenji's 1927 *Night on the Galactic Railroad,* 1980s Japanese rock band ARB, and Ikuhara's work on *Sailor Moon*; visually, nostalgia renders the Takakura household a collection of knickknacks, lovingly

framed photos, and childhood mementos. Instead of a complete "detachment of the libido" that leaves the ego "free and uninhibited," *Penguindrum's* characters and *Penguindrum* as a series remain deeply attached to and affected by the past.[8] Accordingly, instead of a strict Freudian language of mourning and melancholia, this essay seeks to deploy more recent work on nostalgia and memory studies. Specifically, Marianne Hirsch's notions of rememory and postmemory as well as Svetlana Boym's concepts of restorative versus recuperative nostalgia serve as alternative frameworks for examining remembrance beyond a rigid Freudian distinction between melancholia and mourning. Ultimately, this paper argues that *Penguindrum* advocates a queer relationship towards the past, in which the past is not a static ideal but a source of affective currents that can be channeled into new forms.

Queerness, Queer Identity, and Family

In speaking of queerness, one must contend with the divide in how the term is used among academics versus the general public. In popular usage, 'queer' refers to members of the LGBT+ community, particularly those who exceed or fall outside the boundaries of accepted identity labels. Yet while this definition describes fluidity, it also acts as an individual attribute and an identity category: one speaks of the queer community, queer rights, and queer representation. By contrast, while queer studies continue to foreground resistance to cis-heteronormativity, "queer" as academics have deployed it expands beyond queer identity by challenging the processes by which identity is "normalized and sustained."[9] Rather than acting as an identitarian marker, queerness in this sense destabilizes boundaries and definitions; it is a counter-normative force, one which affects other terms without claiming a stable location for itself.

In using queer theory as a theoretical lens, it is necessary to be attentive to the distance between 'queer' as a verb and as a subject position. Positioning oneself against norms does not necessarily prevent one from adopting homophobic and reactionary attitudes, as so many neoconservative movements readily demonstrate, and scholarly uses of queer as a term should be attendant to structural power dynamics at play. Lisa Duggan's work on homonormativity cautions us to regard how institutional systems can envelop queer subjects without necessarily "contest[ing] dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions."[10] Gay marriage, for example, can be read as queering the concept of marriage, but it can also be read as affirming marriage as an institution. Against the force of queer liberalism and its investment in a neoliberal project of multiculturalism, queer theorists and activists must be necessarily wary of how their work may inadvertently reproduce dominant ideologies and institutions. In analyzing *Penguindrum* through the lens of queer theory, my goal is not to foreclose criticisms of its portrayal of queer characters but rather to extend the concept of queerness beyond romantic relationships. Insofar as the romantic pairings within the show are predominately male/female, *Penguindrum* does invest a certain amount of energy in heteronormativity and can be criticized on those grounds. However, the concept of queerness extends beyond romantic relationships so that scholars can speak of queering temporality or queering knowledge. It is this sense of queerness as destabilization that enables an alternative reading of the series, one in which queerness can be located in *Penguindrum's* depiction of the nuclear family unit.

Like queerness, "family" is another highly contested term, particularly when it intersects with queer studies. Given the long history of homophobic rhetoric that relies on appeals to an idealized nuclear family—such as "family values" and "protecting the

children" from the moral corruption of queerness—many queer theorists are rightfully wary of accounts that celebrate familial intimacy. Chief among these theorists is Lee Edelman, whose work in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* explicitly places queerness in opposition to what Edelman terms reproductive futurism, a vision of futurity centered on and produced for the figure of the Child as an emblem of "the biological fact of heterosexual procreation."[11] However, in positioning the Child as the "perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics," Edelman makes a number of assumptions about who this Child is.[12] While Edelman takes care to separate the figure of the Child from "the lived experiences of any historical children," these lived experiences nonetheless place significant pressure on Edelman's observations of the abstract Child.[13] The abstract Child, as José Esteban Muñoz notes, is an inherently privileged subject; for children who are Black, disabled, queer, or otherwise disavowed by society, the future cannot be taken for granted.[14] To children for whom futurity is never promised, imagining a future continues to be a radical act.

Within *Mawaru Penguindrum,* the Takakura siblings are the characters who most clearly occupy the space of disavowed subjects. As the children of known terrorists, the Takakuras are ostracized in the same way individuals with even tangential relationships to Aum Shinrikyo came to be outsiders to "normal" society in the wake of the sarin attacks. In the post-Aum polarization of society into "'good' versus 'evil,' 'sanity' versus 'madness,' 'health' versus 'disease,'" Japanese media's placement of Aum members, their families, and even victims of the attacks on the side of disease meant that individuals marked by Aum faced significant discrimination in both their professional and personal lives.[15] To be associated with Aum was to be a social nonentity, with potential employers and neighbors often making significant efforts to

avoid contagion with Aum-adjacent individuals. Left orphaned and socially outcast by

their parents' actions, the Takakura siblings feel their exclusion bitterly, Shôma

declaring in *Penguindrum's* opening monologue that "ever since that day, none of us

had a future and the only certain thing was that we wouldn't amount to anything."[16] As

children condemned by "fate" to social nonexistence, the Takakuras are the historical

children who undergird Edelman's abstract Child. Consequently, the siblings' kinship is

less a matter of reproductive futurity than survival, an attempt to create the familial

structures that fate and circumstance have denied them.

Further, while the form of the Takakuras' makeshift family may outwardly model

a nuclear family with the role of father played by the playboy Kanba, mother by house

husband Shôma, and beloved child by cheerful Himari, theirs is a volatile imitation of

conventional domesticity. Kanba and Shôma may act as quasi-parents to Himari, but

Himari's terminal illness precludes them from fulfilling the chief imperative of

reproductive futurism: the survival of the child and, through her, the reproduction of the

extant social order.[17] Moreover, while the siblings provisionally occupy the categories of

mother, father, and child, these roles are not neatly separated but often blurred and in

flux. Himari, for example, may be particularly suited for the role of a vulnerable child,

but she also takes on a more parental role when attempting to keep her brothers in line.

Here, family roles are porous and continent rather than immutable, and nuclear family

structures are performed instead of being inhabited. Though this can be seen as

valorizing normative familial structures through the desire to recuperate them, the fact

that the Takakuras must perform conventional family also works to problematize the a

priori naturalness of the nuclear family. The gaps and slippages between the ideal

nuclear family and the reality of the Takakura family show the 'natural' family unit of

mother, father, and child to be not an innate structure but a constructed ideal, what Judith Butler would call a "regulatory fiction" that conditions normativity.[18]

The performative nature of the Takakura family is further underscored by the bonds that tie the siblings together. Though *Penguindrum* initially presents the Takakuras as siblings raised by the same parents, in the series' last few episodes, it is revealed that Kanba and Himari were adopted into the Takakura family after being mistreated by their biological families. Instead of being tied together by blood as the members of the paradigmatic nuclear family are, the Takakura siblings are a family of choice. To outsiders, the lack of blood relation between the Takakura siblings further invalidates their status as a true family, with a passing journalist describing them as "make-believe siblings."[19] The regulatory fiction of the nuclear family here acts as a regulatory ideal, or "an ideal according to which certain forms of love become possible and others, impossible."[20] The nuclear family is simply one kinship formation among others. However, when elevated as a regulatory ideal, it presents itself as the only viable option, delegitimizing other forms of kinship as 'make-believe' families rather than actual ones. Within *Penguindrum,* the fact that the Takakura siblings come together as a family only after Himari and Kanba's biological families fail to provide for them problematizes the privileged position of the nuclear family. Far from being a site of respite from the world, the nuclear family in *Penguindrum* is a source of trauma—not just for Himari and Kanba, but for nearly all of *Penguindrum's* characters. For example, Yuri is physically abused as a child by her father,[21] and Tabuki is driven to self-harm because of his mother's emotional neglect. Notably, Yuri's father justifies his abuse as an act of love by drawing on the rhetoric of familial love: "Only blood-related family members can be trusted. Family never lies. Pure and beautiful love exist only among

family."[22] Even as her father leaves her with injuries and broken bones, Yuri's conviction that only family can truly love her compels her to remain with him. While *Penguindrum* does not quite deliver a wholesale condemnation of the nuclear family—as a child, Shôma appears to have a healthy relationship with his parents even as their work outside the home leads them to commit acts of terrorism—the series does challenge the elevation of the heteronormative family above other kinship structures. Through depicting birth families that decidedly fail their children, *Penguindrum* asks how investments in the nuclear family can elide or even justify harm.

The tyranny of heteronormative familial structures is further dramatized through the Child Broiler, a quasi-purgatorial space in *Penguindrum* where "unneeded children are gathered" and turned into "invisible entities" that "eventually vanish and cease to exist in the world."[23] Both a metaphor for a psychosocial state of being as well as a physical location, the Child Broiler visually resembles a warehouse with conveyor belts delivering children to the sharp teeth of a machine that tears them into indistinguishable pieces (Fig. 1). In depicting the Child Broiler thus, Ikuhara implies that the cruelty it represents is not an anomaly, but rather a vital feature of society: just as warehouses and factories are infrastructures that allow the smooth functioning of consumer society, so too the mechanisms of exclusion and isolation that the Child Broiler represents are structures undergirding the creation of normative society. Regulatory ideals never recognize the Child Broiler's unneeded children as subjects in the first place, a fact emphasized by their depiction as literal nameless and faceless pictograms, and so they lead lives "sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost."[24] In this way, the nuclear family is haunted by its outliers: the children it fails and those it refuses to accommodate. In *Penguindrum,* Himari and Tabuki are

transported to the Child Broiler as children after their parents abandon them. Rather than resisting, both characters are resigned to their fate, welcoming annihilation as an escape from a world where they are not wanted, and it is only through the intervention of non-family members that they are able to regain a sense of self-worth and leave the Child Broiler. For the unchosen children in *Penguindrum*, alternative kinship formations—adopted siblings, families of choice, affinity with individuals not related by blood—ultimately allow survival in the face of a hostile society. Given the importance of kinship structures to material survival, rather than discounting the concept of family altogether, it is perhaps more useful to argue for an expanded definition of family, one in which there is "no one law of kinship, no one structure of kinship, no one language of kinship, and no one prospect of kinship" but rather multiple forms of belonging over a single heteronormative model.[25] In its criticism of a singular model of belonging, *Penguindrum* can be read as working in the vein of what José Esteban Muñoz terms queer utopianism, a sensibility which Muñoz describes as "one in which multiple forms of belonging in difference adhere to a belonging in collectivity."[26] Instead of an insular unit defined by blood ties, *Penguindrum* offers a vision of family as a contingent and expansive structure, open to change and the expansion of who is allowed within its bounds.
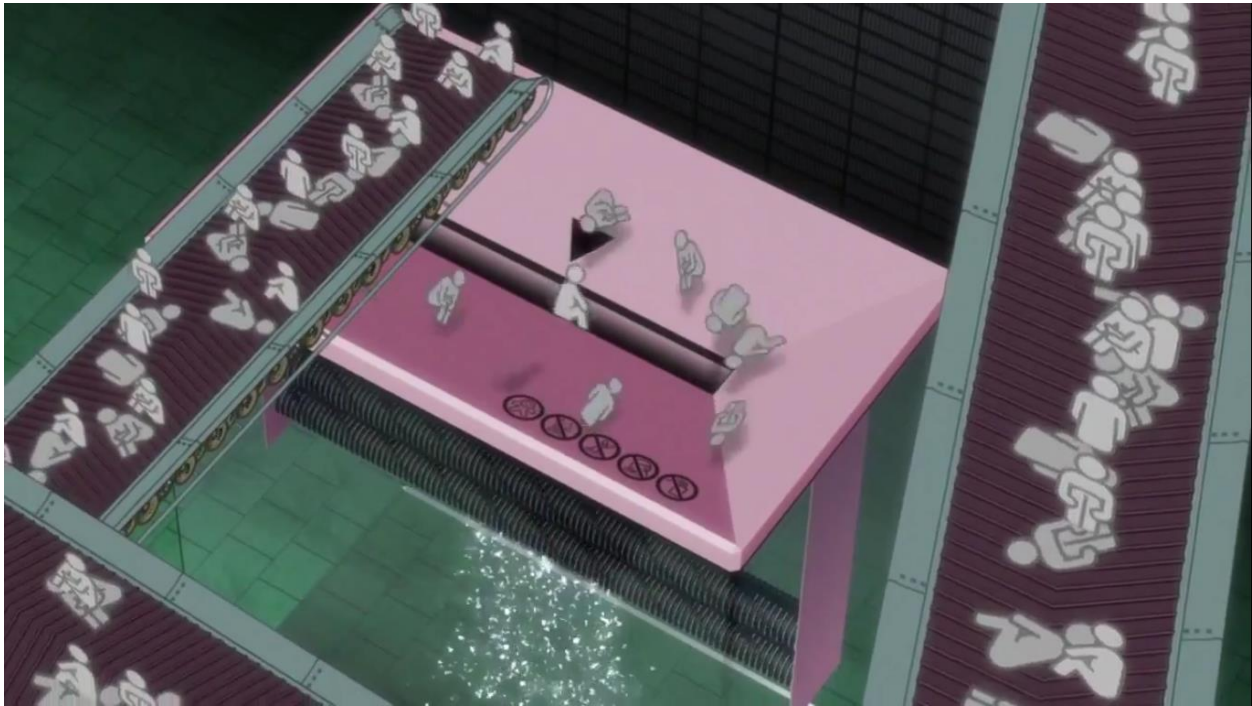
Fig. 1: The Child Broiler turns children (represented, as nearly all background characters in *Penguindrum* are, as faceless pictograms) into glass-like shards.

Community and Collective Memory

As previously mentioned, *Penguindrum's* commentary on family cannot be separated from its commentary on Japanese society. Through characters whose personal lives are extensively impacted by the train attacks, *Penguindrum* explores themes of belonging and exclusion that echo the questions raised by Japanese intellectuals in response to the sarin attacks. In the wake of the attacks, Japanese media, by and large, casts Aum followers as deviant individuals brainwashed by guru Asahara Shoko; in doing so, however, they also recreated the isolating social dynamic that led many of Aum's followers to join the cult in the first place. Before joining Aum, most members were not social outcasts but well-educated young people drawn to Aum because they were dissatisfied with postwar Japanese society and "the 'economy-first'

ethos of postwar Japanese life."[27] Though not necessarily societal rejects, these

individuals rejected the values of postwar Japanese society and located themselves

outside it. However, post-war Japanese society significantly lacked an "effective,

normal, subsocial system that can absorb people who cannot function in mainstream

society."[28] While not all dissatisfied youths turned to religion, the atmosphere of

unaddressed unease helps explain the heightened appeal of Aum's teachings, especially

its denouncement of "Japanese society as an oppressive and evil force."[29]

At the same time, Asahara's vision of an Armageddon dividing humanity into

saved Aum members and unsaved others recreated the same "them-and-us" dichotomy

that Aum's followers found so intolerable in Japanese society.[30] One of the quiet motifs

of the Aum affair and its aftermath is the cyclicality of ingroup/outgroup dynamics:

Japanese society's inability to accept certain misfits led them to gravitate to Aum, which

inverted normative Us/Them dynamics by positioning Aum members as enlightened

survivors to the unworthy masses. In the aftermath of the gas attacks, Japanese media

once again framed Aum's relation to society in terms of "'good' versus 'evil,' 'sanity'

versus 'madness,' 'health' versus 'disease,'" with the members of "normal" society falling

on the side of health and sanity and Aum members placed firmly on that of disease and

madness.[31] Though a genuine sense of social malaise drove Aum's popularity, neither

Asahara's attempt to bring about an apocalypse nor the wholesale rejection of Aum

members truly resolved the alienating dynamics of Us and Them. Within *Penguindrum,*

the unresolved tensions of the Aum affair resurface in Kanba's decision to join the Kiga

Group to pay for Himari's medical treatments. As Himari's condition worsens, Kanba's

actions become more extreme until he is manipulated into planning another train attack

in the hopes of saving his sister. Here, the Takakuras' punishment for their parents'

crimes—Himari's illness as well as the social exclusion that makes it difficult for her brothers to pay for her treatment—acts not to prevent future tragedy but to further the divide between "Us" and "Them," leading to a deadly return and repetition of the past. Like Murakami, Ikuhara critiques the collective response to the Aum affair and calls for different forms of remembrance.

In *Penguindrum,* Oginome Ringo serves as a central node for examining different forms of attachment to the past. Like the Takakura siblings, Ringo is born on the date of the train attacks and is directly related to a major player in the attacks: her older sister, Momoka, who possessed the ambiguously defined power to transfer fate and who died using that power to protect others. A childhood friend of Yuri and Tabuki, Momoka looms large in their lives even after her death as the girl who used her powers to save them from their abusive situations; as such, Yuri and Tabuki's relationship is one founded less on mutual romantic interest than on shared grief for Momoka, who serves as a lost love object for both. Though she has no real memories of her sister, Ringo views Momoka in a similarly idealized light. In particular, because Momoka's death put considerable stress on her parents' marriage, Ringo associates her older sister with the possibility of an idyllic family life; consequently, to prevent her parents from finalizing their divorce, Ringo attempts to 'become' Momoka by carrying out the events laid out in her sister's diary. Believing that Momoka's diary details a fated connection between her and Tabuki, Ringo relentlessly pursues Tabuki as part of what she calls "Project M," a plan that will culminate in an act of ultimate connection: Tabuki impregnating Ringo. Fully confirmed as Tabuki's "fated person" through sex, Ringo will then be able to fully become Momoka, the rift between Ringo's divorced parents will heal, and Ringo will "marry Tabuki-san, live in a little house, and become a happy family with a puppy and a

baby."[32] Heteronormative marriage, complete with a puppy and baby, becomes a panacea for grief and interpersonal conflict in Ringo's mind.

Beyond illustrating the lengths to which heteronormativity structures ideals of happiness, Ringo's storyline can be read in terms of Freud's paradigmatic account of mourning and melancholia. While both respond to loss, Freud describes melancholia as a state characterized by "an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object."[33] Instead of transferring their attachments to another object, the melancholic takes the lost object inward, thereby preserving it and their attachments to it: "by taking flight into the ego love escapes extinction."[34] In Ringo's case, the introjection of her lost sister quite literally translates into an attempt to become Momoka. Further, following Freud's observation, melancholia often involves "a loss of a more ideal kind" with the melancholic perhaps able to "know *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in [them]," Ringo's extreme attachment to Momoka is less tied to who her sister actually was than to the fact that Momoka represents a lost ideal of family.[35] Unable to understand the true nature of her loss, Ringo fervently clings to the figure of her sister in the hopes of being able to restore her family. For Freud, such attachment is characteristic of melancholia, which he defines as a fundamentally pathological state: while mourning involves the gradual detachment of libidinal energies from the lost object, eventually rendering the ego "free and uninhibited" to transfer those energies onto a new object, the melancholic is unable to let go of the lost object.[36] If mourning works towards an end goal, melancholia is a persistent and indefinite state that entraps the afflicted in a static vision of the past.

Stuck in the past, Ringo suffers from a reduced sense of self due to her self-appointed status as Momoka's replacement and significant blocks in her relationships

with others. In holding onto past relationships, Ringo curtails her ability to make future connections: reviving her parents' marriage means excluding the possibility of forming relationships with her father's new girlfriend and her child. In contrast, Ringo's pursuit of Tabuki excludes the possibility of connecting with Yuri, whose memories of Momoka could help Ringo better connect to her sister. Instead of seeing Yuri as a potential ally in grief, Ringo's obsession with restoring the past means that Yuri can only be viewed as an obstacle to be eliminated. A prime example of such exclusionary logic is demonstrated in episode three, in which Ringo breaks into Tabuki's house with a pot of homemade curry to ensure he participates in Curry Day, a monthly Ogninome family tradition that commemorates Momoka's favorite food. However, Yuri has already cooked for the occasion, so Ringo's only course of action is to steal Yuri's curry off the stove—burning herself in the process—and replace it with her own. "Curry eaten with people you love tastes like happiness," Ringo tells us. But happiness is a zero-sum game here: it is either Ringo's curry or Yuri's, Ringo or Yuri and never both.[37] While such animosity is a typical element of love triangles, *Penguindrum's* evocation of Aum casts Ringo's attitude in a darker light. The stakes of Ringo's situation may be less dramatic than those of Aum, but her unsettling behavior towards Tabuki, stalking and eventually attempting to coerce him into sex, highlights another demonstration of the harm produced by Ringo's melancholic attachment to the past.

Ultimately, Project M fails, and Ringo escapes her obsession with Tabuki as she relinquishes her attachment to an idealized, heteronormative family. Yet while Freud proclaims that the work of mourning is complete when the ego is detached from the lost object, Ringo continues to hold a lingering affection for her sister even as she builds new relationships with others. Given Momoka's continual relevance to Ringo, Freud's

pathologizing division between mourning and melancholia begins to feel inadequate in describing *Penguindrum's* vision of remembrance. Rather than a strict delineation between melancholia and mourning, Marianne Hirsh offers an alternative framework for imagining forms of mourning that do not fully abandon the lost object. As part of her work on how trauma is transmitted between Holocaust survivors and their children as second-generation survivors, Hirsch develops the categories of rememory and postmemory by extending Freudian concepts to the realm of cultural memory. Like how melancholia leads to an introjection of the lost object, rememory operates through identification with inherited trauma: a second-generation survivor hears her mother's stories of life in the camps and tries to imagine herself in her mother's place. This act of imagining, moreover, is a particularly bodily one, with many second-generation survivors feeling compelled to receive "the parents' bodily experience of trauma," often by unconsciously wounding themselves in the same way their parents were wounded during their time in the camps.[38] Given the physical dangers rememory poses, Hirsch considers it dangerous for much the same reasons that Freud considers melancholia unhealthy. There is a sense of endless repetition in both, with memories "transmitted to be repeated and reenacted, [and] not to be worked through."[39]

In contrast to the repetitive "self-wounding and retraumatization" that characterizes rememory, postmemory is proposed by Hirsch as a less self-destructive form of cultural remembrance.[40] Using Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's terms, Hirsch identifies postmemory with "'allo-identification' or 'identification with'" as opposed to the "auto-identification" or "identification as" that characterizes rememory.[41] Following auto-identification's emphasis on connection based on sameness, rememory attempts to collapse the distance between past and present, self and other. The second-generation

survivor transforms her body to resemble that of her mother; Ringo becomes her sister so that she can restore the past. By contrast, postmemory, following allo-identification's emphasis on connection across constitutive differences, attempts to bridge the gap between individuals while acknowledging that this distance can never be fully conquered. The past can neither be retrieved nor can the distance between self and other be fully conquered, but one can still sympathize with another's experiences even if one cannot fully empathize with them. In this way, postmemory's power lies in its ability to be affiliative, to forge alliances while acknowledging "the irreducibility of the other."[42] As a form of remembrance that honors the past without being beholden to it, postmemory allows Ringo to work through trauma instead of repetitively circling it. She can create new connections instead of desperately clinging to old, fraying ones. The past cannot be retrieved, but even if Ringo's parents never remarry, her affection for her father does not have to disappear. Instead of clinging to the childhood ideal of a nuclear family, she can now forge a new, healthier connection with her father while creating her own new, non-biological family.

In championing the general spirit of the past over its direct restoration, *Penguindrum* can further be viewed as working in the mode of what Svetlana Boym terms reflective nostalgia. In *The Future of Nostalgia,* Boym notes that while collective memories of a shared past can serve as a powerful catalyst for empathy towards others, nostalgia that seeks to return to a lost and idealized homeland has often catalyzed highly exclusionary forms of community building. In "put[ting] emphasis on nostos," or the notion of a lost home, restorative nostalgia can serve as a justification for harming or expelling those who do not properly belong to this vision of home.[43] In *Penguindrum*, Ringo's attempts to preserve her parents' marriage as well as Kanba's determination to

save Himari can be read as efforts born of restorative nostalgia, with both characters resorting to desperate measures in an attempt to forestall loss. While the two characters may operate on different scales—Ringo's actions primarily affect Tabuki while Kanba's involvement with the Kiga Group leads him to commit acts of terrorism—both characters are motivated by a desire for stability: whether the threat is divorce or illness, both seek to protect an idealized familial formation from external dangers. As such, their actions speak to the dangers of restorative nostalgia and the narrowly defined communities it creates.

In contrast to the often-reactionary impulses of restorative nostalgia, Boym proposes reflective nostalgia as another paradigm for remembrance. Rather than seeking a return to an idealized origin, reflective nostalgia "dwells in algia, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance"; as such, it emphasizes "new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis."[44] Described as containing "elements of both mourning and melancholia," reflective nostalgia thus recognizes the irretrievability of the past without necessarily disavowing or completely detaching from the past.[45] While restorative nostalgia characterizes harmful attachments to the past in *Penguindrum,* reflective nostalgia is positioned as a healthier form of cultural remembrance. The distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is perhaps most clearly shown in Ringo's character arc, which can also be read as a transition from restorative to reflective nostalgia. Though Ringo learns to let go of the desire to become Momoka and restore her family to a past perfection, her fondness for her sister does not disappear completely. Instead, Ringo is able to channel her love for Momoka into creating new forms of intimacy: Curry Day now occurs with the Takakuras, who serve as a new family for Ringo (Fig. 2). While it would be understandable for Ringo to resent the Takakuras

for their parents' role in Momoka's death, she instead chooses to embody her sister's

spirit of kindness by aiding in the brothers' journey to cure Himari and defending her

new friends against judgmental reporters. Momoka is remembered, but rather than

fueling anger and resentment, her memory serves to open new forms of connection.

Fig. 2: Though Ringo is adamant Tabuki eats her curry, she ends up sharing dinner with the Takakuras instead. If, as Ringo states, curry is meant to be eaten with people you love, it is chosen family and not heteronormative romance that provides her with community and kinship.

Similarly, *Penguindrum's* ending can be seen as affirming the power of reflective

modes of remembrance over restorative ones. Through the combination of Momoka's

powers, self-sacrifice on the part of Kanba and Shôma, and the intervention of the

mysterious Penguindrum, the Takakura brothers are able to save their beloved sister.

However, they do so not through curing Himari's illness but through rewriting reality so

that Himari was never ill in the first place. Given that Himari's illness is framed as a

supernatural punishment for the Takakura parents' sins, the newly created reality is one in which she has no relationship with the Takakuras; as such, it is also a world in which the familial bonds between Himari, Kanba, and Shôma never existed. At a glance, one could view this new world as the product of successful mourning: libidinal energies have been thoroughly transferred from a lost object to a new one, with characters no longer conscious of the old world they have lost. Yet traces of the previous world linger—in half-remembered dreams of another world, physical scars left from the process of altering fate, a note from "your brothers" that Himari finds in an old stuffed animal. An only child in this iteration of the universe, Himari is confused but touched by the note's proclamation of love, and without understanding who it is from or why it would be addressed to her, she begins to cry. As tears drip onto the paper, the scene cuts to two boys discussing Miyazawa Kenji's *The Galactic Railroad* as they pass outside the Takakura house. Visually, this scene mirrors a sequence from *Penguindrum's* first episode, except for the boys' hair colors and voices, which mark them as versions of Kanba and Shôma (Figs. 3 and 4).

Fig. 3: In one of the opening scenes of episode 1, two unnamed children pass by the Takakura house while discussing Miyazawa Kenji's *Night on the Galactic Railroad.*

Fig. 4: In the closing scenes of the series, two boys once again walk by the same house while discussing *Night on the Galactic Railroad*, their hair colors identifying them as Kanba and Shôma.

Formally and narratively, a return to origins thus occurs. However, it is a repetition with difference—not a restoration of the past and its relations, but an affectively charged reimaging of the past that aligns with reflective nostalgia's mode of remembrance. Even as the world and memories are rewritten, the force of love remains, and *Penguindrum* ends with Himari declaring: "I will never forget you. Forever and ever."[46] What is restored is not an idealized past, but the possibility of a future—one full of the potential for change and unhappiness, but a future nonetheless—for children who were never meant to survive.

Notes

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[1] Kirstian Lezubski, "The Power to Revolutionize the World, or Absolute Gender Apocalypse?" in *Channeling Wonder: Fairy Tales on Television*, ed. Pauline Greenhill and Jill Terry Rudy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014), 164-165.

[2] Claire Pak, "A Retrospective on Kunihiko Ikuhara: Revolution, One Kiss at a Time." *Scene + Heard*, November 4, 2019, https://www.sceneandheardnu.com/content/2019/11/4/a-retrospective-on-kunihiro-ikuhara-revolution-one-kiss-at-a-time.

[3] In both fandom and academic spaces, there is a tendency to treat Ikuhara as an anime auteur, a singular creative genius responsible for the achievements of the series he directed. However, it is important to recognize that Ikuhara's successes have often been a result of collaboration with others. *Sailor Moon,* for example, was adapted into an anime by Toei Animation from Takeuchi Naoko's original manga, with Ikuhara, Satô Jun'ichi, and Igarashi Takuya serving as directors for different seasons of the show's 1992-1997 run, while *Revolutionary Girl Utena* was produced by the creative collective Be-Papas, a group which also included famed scriptwriter Enikido Yôji and mangaka Saitô Chiho.

[4] Erica Friedman, "Yuri Anime/Manga: Sailor Moon," Okazu (blog), January 29, 2004, https://okazu.yuricon.com/2004/01/29/yuri-animemanga-sailor-moon/.

[5] Taylor Leong, "Mawaru Penguindrum: Survival Strategy in the Wake of 2020," *The Spirit of the Tomato Box* (blog), January 3, 2023, https://thetomatobox.wordpress.com/2021/01/03/mawaru-penguindrum-survival-strategy-in-the-wake-of-2020/.

[6] Pak, "A Retrospective on Kunihiko Ikuhara."

⁷ Murakami Haruki, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel, (New York: Vintage, 2001), 320. In episode one's opening monologue, Shôma declares:

> I hate the word 'fate'. Birth, encounters, partings, success and failure, fortune and misfortune in life. If everything is already set in stone by birth, why are we even born? There are those who are born wealthy, those born of beautiful mothers, and those born into war or poverty. If everything is caused by fate, then God must be incredibly unfair and cruel. Because, ever since that day, none of us had a future and the only certain thing was that we wouldn't amount to anything.

These words echo one of Murakami's exchanges in *Underground* with an ex-Aum member:

> MURAKAMI: You say the world is unfair, but in what way?
> Well, things like inborn talent, family background. No matter what the situation, bright people are bright, people who can run fast can run fast. And people who are weak never see the light of day. There's an element of fate that I thought was too unfair.

⁸ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works*, trans. James Stratchey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1957), 245.

⁹ David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" in *Social Text* 84-85, vol. 23, nos. 3–4 (2005): 1.

¹⁰ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

¹¹ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 11.

¹² Edelman, "No Future," 3.

¹³ Edelman, "No Future," 11.

[14] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 94.

[15] Murakami, *Underground,* 225.

[16] *Mawaru Penguindum,* episode 1, "The Bell of Fate Shall Ring." Directed by Ikuhara Kunihiko, aired July 2, 2011, DVD, 00:00:43-00:00:51.

[17] Shôma, Kanba, and Himari's attempt at forming a nuclear unit is further complicated because Kanba's feelings for his sister are implied to be at least partially romantic. While the revelation that the siblings are not blood-related technically prevents this relationship from crossing into incest, Ikuhara frequently explores the fine lines between familial and romantic love, especially as both blood ties and heteronormative romance promise unbreakable connections.

[18] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 180.

[19] *Penguindrum,* episode 21, 00:00:30.

[20] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 25.

[21] Because Penguindrum depicts Yuri's abuse through the metaphor of a sculptor chiseling marble into art, the exact nature of her abuse is unclear, though there are hints that it may be sexual in nature. Further, given that her father's goal is to transform Yuri from a child rendered unlovable by association with her "ugly and stupid" mother into a beautiful and thus loveable child, his abuse can be read as not just violence perpetuated under the aegis of normativity, but also violence that is perpetuated in normativity's name. Beauty, acting as an

attribute and standard of normativity, here acts as a violently repressive force, forcibly chiseling

tainted children into idealized subjects.

[22] *Penguindrum,* episode 15, 0:11:59-00:12:05.

[23] *Penguindrum,* episode 18, 00:05:50-00:06:04.

[24] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso Books,

2009), 15.

[25] David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of

Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 198.

[26] Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia,* 20.

[27] Daniel A. Metraux, *Aum Shinrikyo and Japanese Youth* (Lanham, MD: University

Press of America, 1999), 52.

[28] Murakami Haruki, "Taking on the Forces of Black Magic," *Yomiuri Shimbun,* May 17,

1998. Quotations are taken from Metraux's citations of Murakami on page 1 of *Aum Shinrikyo

and Japanese Youth*.

[29] Metraux, 20.

[30] Murakami, *Underground,* 225.

[31] Murakami, *Underground,* 225.

[32] *Penguindrum,* episode 11, 00:17:29-00:17:33.

[33] Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 249.

[34] Freud, 257.

[35] Freud, 245.

[36] Freud, 245.

[37] *Penguindrum,* episode 3, 00:00:51.

[38] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 81.

[39] Hirsch, 84.

[40] Hirsch, 86.

[41] Hirsch, 85.

[42] Hirsch, 99.

[43] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

[44] Boym, 41–49.

[45] Boym, 55.

[46] *Penguindrum,* episode 24, 00:23:35-00:23:40.

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The Dynamism of Anime Images: the Case of the "Kanada-style"

Movement

Matteo Watzky

Volume 4, Pages 190-218

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

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" animation[4]. 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 animation[5]. 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 *composited* 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 composited 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 Gunning[16]. 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.

<u>"Kanada Movement" as Animation</u>

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 modulation[26], 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.
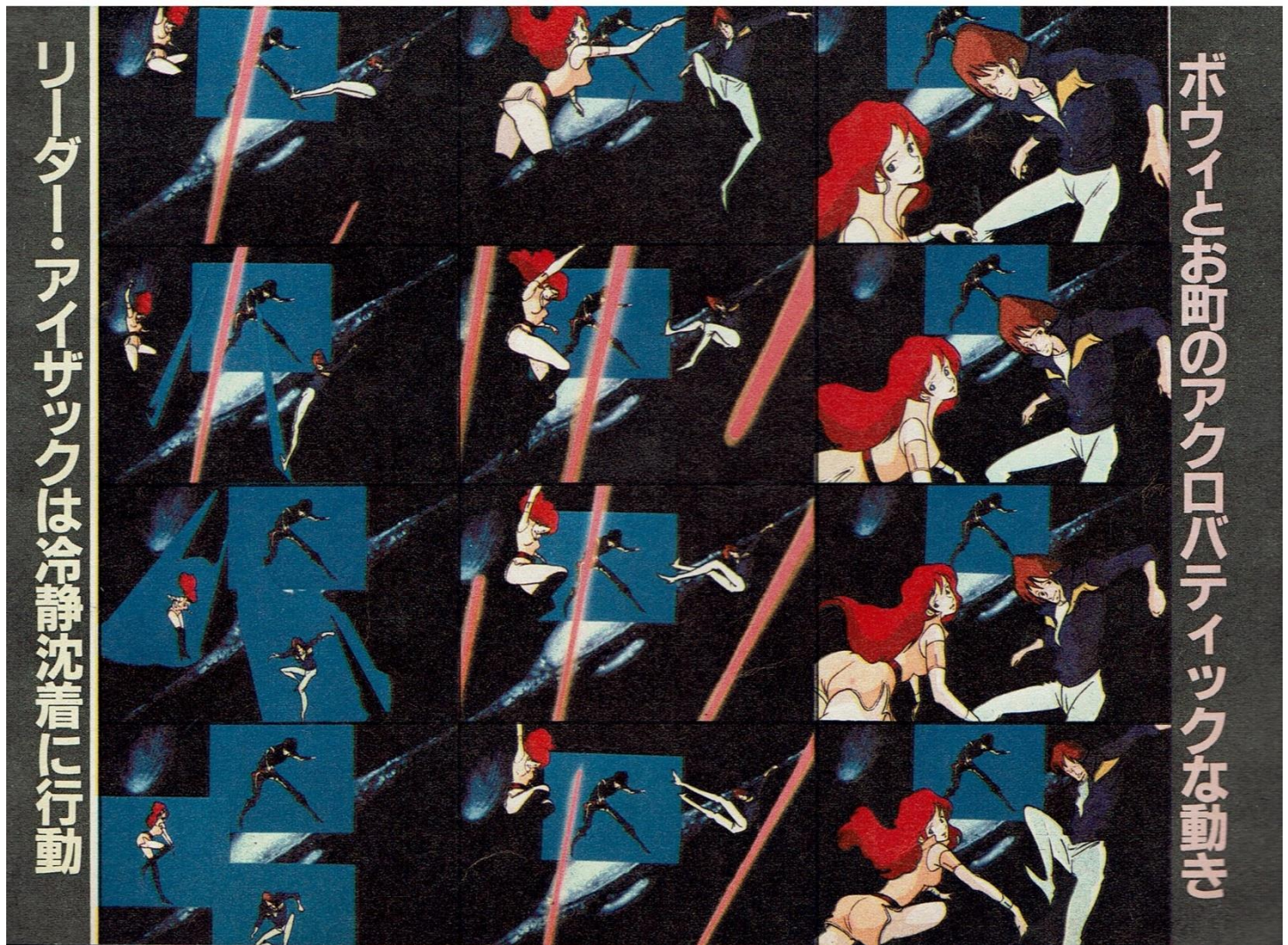
Figure 1 A frame-by-frame breakdown of Kanada's opening for Galaxy Cyclone Braiger*, from a booklet included in the January 1982 issue of* Animage

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 time[30]. 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 Ryûsuke 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 difficulties[40]: 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 (Chôsen Suru 'Anime Dai-San Sedai' no Kishu Kanada Yoshinori)," *Animage* (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, November 1980), 75-82. Honkannen, "The Revolution of Animation."; Ryûsuke Hikawa, *20 Years of Zambot 3* (*20-nen no Zambot 3*), Otakugaku Sôsho 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: Madora 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 Kôichi 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.

[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/AXhr0FzaqtILYXF?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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Newtypes, Angels, and Human Instrumentality

The Mecha Genre and its Apocalyptic Bodies

River Seager

Abstract: This article argues that the mecha genre is fixated on surrealistic and abstract imagery of supernatural human bodies, the destruction or transcendence of which often bring about new political and social epochs. In making this argument, it builds on the writings of Azuma Hiroki, and his understanding of classical mecha texts functioning as 'substitutes' for political grand narratives. Two major mecha texts are analyzed: *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995). It is suggested that *Gundam*'s occult 'Newtypes' bridge the series' grand narrative space opera storyline with themes of New-Age mysticism, itself reminiscent of Azuma's writings on the role of spiritualism in postmodernity. In the section on *Evangelion*, it is argued that its imagery of bodily reorganization mirrors its fixation on reimagining its world and characters. The fixation on transcendent bodies in these texts is termed the "apocalyptic body", and it is suggested that this motif is used to express an uneasy and shifting relationship to political revolution.

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As one of the medium's most ubiquitous genres, it is unsurprising that several works within anime and manga studies have explored the social and cultural space occupied by mecha. Japanese cultural theorists such as Ôtsuka Eiji and Azuma Hiroki have been interested in the macro of these stories, making a case for the ways their operatic plot lines function as substitutes for lost grand narratives within postmodern Japanese society.[1] Anglophone writings on the subject have been more interested in the imagery of the mecha themselves, exploring how images of outsized mechanical forms function as metaphors for the human body and the masculine nature of these embodiments. For instance, *Mechademia* editor Frenchy Lunning argues that "mecha anime are generally narratives of male identity formation […] that are secured through the relationship and eventual unifying transcendence of the boy-child pilot with the mature image of masculine power and agency of the mecha."[2] Similarly, Susan Napier writes that "the mecha body clearly plays to a wish-fulfilling fantasy of power, authority, and technological competence," creating a design sensibility that "almost parodies the male ideal."[3] However, an underexplored aspect of mecha is the genre's tradition of supernatural and occult themes. This subject bridges both Japanese and Anglophone strands of thought. These occult elements involve themes of bodily transcendence and psychic joining, which reflects the points made by theorists like Lunning regarding the desire for unity in a genre that involves piloting massive mechanical bodies. In these works, images of outsized psychic bodies becoming nebulous and breaking down often signal a shift in their grand narratives. For instance, in the *Mobile Suit Gundam* franchise, psychic pilots known as "Newtypes" can temporarily join consciousness with others and experience a cosmic transcendence, often leading to political results. In the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* franchise, the narrative hinges on a plot to combine all of

humanity into a single, unified consciousness, visualized through the mass breakdown of human bodies. It would seem then that running alongside the imagery of solid, mechanical robots are images of the human body becoming unstable, fluid, and giving way.

This article terms this concept **"the apocalyptic body"** and suggests it is often a signifier of revolution, apocalypse, or other changes in the series' cultural or societal frameworks. The apocalyptic body describes a fixation on supernatural, diffuse bodies often paired with a sense of metaphysical transcendence. This motif can be found in *Gundam's* space-psychics who go beyond their physical forms, or *Evangelion's* mutating angelic forms. They are often not easily merchandisable elements and stand in marked contrast to the genre's fetishistic interest in mechanical embodiments. Nevertheless, it is often through this imagery that these texts communicate their core themes around grand narratives. In early *Gundam* entries, this is an uneasy but mostly hopeful attitude towards youth mass movements. In *Evangelion*'s original works, there is a sense of oppressive social atomization and dislocation from society.

To explore this notion, this essay will look at these two major mecha texts, focusing on how they deploy imagery of the human body. It will start with *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979), exploring its depiction of Newtypes. In 1981, *Gundam* creator Tomino Yoshiyuki framed Newtypes as key to the series' themes: "This is a drama about questioning what it means to live. If we are to accept this question, we have no choice but to, with a deep hope and determination, seek out our own spiritual world (our New Type)."[4] This paper analyses the role and descriptions of Newtypes in Tomino's original *Gundam* series and his novelization of that series, arguing that they reflect a complex

relationship to political revolution, one that is often visualized through the supernatural, diffuse Newtype form.

It then looks at *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995). In Azuma's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (2001), he famously contrasted *Gundam* and *Evangelion*, seeing *Gundam* as an attempt to replicate grand narratives and *Evangelion* as a series totally uninterested in them, fixated instead on "database-like" character elements. *Evangelion* is also a series that directly places itself in relation to *Gundam* fandom. Its Japanese title, *Shin Seiki Evangelion* (lit. *New Century Evangelion*), is a reference to the 1981 public event that announced the release of the *Mobile Suit Gundam* compilation movies: the "Anime Shinseiki Sengen" (Declaration for a New Anime Century). This event has been mythologized as a pivotal moment in the birth of 80s otaku culture. By titling their mecha series with this prefix, the creators at *Gainax* (itself often seen as a "fan-run" studio) implicitly suggested their work functioned as the manifestation and culmination of the otaku movement ushered in by said event. However, its parallel imagery of apocalyptic, occult bodies communicated a decidedly different political outlook.

Gundam and the "Newtype" Body

Released in 1979, the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* TV anime was directed by Tomino Yoshiyuki and produced by the studio *Sunrise*. It tells the story of a war in a future period called the "Universal Century." In this fictional setting, much of humanity has been expelled from Earth due to overpopulation and now lives in Space Colonies called "Sides." The series begins in the middle of a conflict, a war between a fascistic nation of breakaway Space Colonies, "The Principality of Zeon," and the "Earth Federation," a declining World Government. The series follows Amuro Ray and other

members of the Earth Federation spaceship "White Base" as they fight in this war using giant mechanical exoskeletons called "Mobile Suits."

Several academic papers on *Gundam*—and on mecha in general—have explored how these Mobile Suits become interlinked with and representative of the human form. Anthony Dominguez writes that "the fragility of the real robot mirrors the fragility of the human body," arguing that this imagery of the body comes to be "linked to the nation of Japan, and so the body's own mutilation signals the metaphorical collapse of the Japanese border."[5] Frenchy Lunning argues that the image of a mecha is a visual metaphor, illustrating "a gap: a symbol of a yawning sense of lack suffused with a complex of narratives that lie between the child-pilot subject and his or her mecha-ideal image of power."[6] Similarly, Tatsumi Takayuki understands the appeal of *Gundam,* and other anime mecha works, through the lens of Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," coining the term "Japanoid" to describe what he sees as a uniquely Japanese interest in robotic embodiments resulting from post-occupation cultural bifurcation.[7]

However, less attention has been paid to another central theme and concept of the original *Gundam* TV series—Newtype ideology. Just as many have argued for the importance of mechanical body imagery to *Gundam's* themes, through the concept of Newtypes, the series also explores the imagery of human bodies becoming transcendent, losing their initial forms. This imagery is heavily tied to the series articulating its fictional ideologies. Within the fiction of the series, Newtype ideology was a belief progressed by Zeon Zum Deikun, a political thinker and founder of the Zeon state. Newtypism is a vague concept, but the core of it is the belief that once living in space, humanity will undergo a societal and psychic transformation. Newtypism is not a term used in the series itself (which instead consistently refers to "Newtype ideology") but is

being coined here for brevity. The *Mobile Suit Gundam* novelizations (published from

1979-1981 and written by series creator Tomino Yoshiyuki) feature a speech from Zeon

Zum Deikun that more fully describes Newtypism as a concept. In his speech, Deikun

states:

> If the first stage in mankind's evolution was his evolution from an ape to a
> human, and the second stage was his breakthrough from feudalism to the
> rational science of the Renaissance, then the third will be his transformation
> into a new type of human, a man with profound sensitivity and insight and a
> far greater awareness of the vastness of time and space.[8]

Still, this is a vague manifesto, and within the setting, it is interpreted in several

different ways. Some characters see Newtypism as both a political and spiritual model.

As one character puts it, a Newtype is someone intended to "symbolize mankind's

potential for a universal 'renaissance.'"[9] Others see it as a justification for a racial

hierarchy, signaling the supposed superiority of those living in space. As Zeon dictator

Gihren Zabi says, when Deikun coined the term Newtype, "surely he must have been

talking about us [the nation of Zeon], we're a superior race."[10]

It is well established that the original *Gundam* series was highly influenced by

World War II. Scholar William Ashbaugh argues that "Tomino uses his science fiction

movie *Gundam* to counter nationalistic, pro-war representations of the War in Japanese

comics and animation."[11] In this vein, Newtypism seems to parallel several ideologies

dominant during the war years. Its spiritual elements parallel multiple occult strands of

thought popular in the inter-war periods. In particular, the fixation on extrasensory

abilities can be seen as reminiscent of the widespread interest in theosophy in the

United States before World War II. The way Newtypism becomes consolidated into

Zeon's propaganda is also somewhat analogous to Nazi Germany's occult strands, such

as the Thule Society. Also, its fascistic racial reading can be read as an allegory both for the Nazi's Aryan propaganda and Imperial Japan's version of said propaganda in the form of the "Yamato people" concept.[12] And, as Patrick Drazen notes in his discussion of the *Gundam* novels, "the notion of humans moving to higher [...] stages of evolution is found in Darwin, in Nietzsche, in most world religions (metaphorically at least), and in the trans-humanist movement."[13] Cultural anthropologist Azuma Hiroki argues that *Gundam*—and other science fiction anime from the period—fulfilled "the grand role of substituting for the real grand narrative (namely, political ideology)." [14] He suggests that at a time when the dominance of institutions like religion and political ideology were in retreat, science fiction anime like *Gundam* and *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974) allowed otaku communities to "compensate for the decline of grand narrative[s]," playing out simulations of political struggle in space opera settings.[15] Azuma was writing within the context of poststructuralist thinkers like Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze, arguing that:

> In postmodernity grand narratives are dysfunctional; "god" and "society," too, must be fabricated from junk subculture. [...] In modernity, god and society secured humanity; the realization of this was borne by religious and educational institutions, but after the loss of the dominance of these institutions, what becomes of the humanity of human beings?[16]

Notably, Azuma points out that the term Newtype became adopted within anime fandoms to describe otaku communities. He brings up the example of cultural critic Okada Toshio, who "presented a redefinition of otaku as 'those who possessed an evolved vision'—a 'new type' of person responsive to the cultural conditions of a highly consumerist society,"[17] an act of discourse which Azuma describes as an "almost megalomaniacal claim" that "paradoxically reveals the extent to which otaku feared being typecast."[18] Regardless, Azuma's view of *Gundam* as a fictional grand narrative—a

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"supplement" for political ideology—mirrors well the role of Newtypes within the *Gundam* story. Newtypes function as a catch-all grand narrative, a Rorschach test of an ideology, fulfilling whatever role the speaker desires.

In the series itself, Newtypism becomes complicated by the emergence of Mobile Suit pilots with psychic powers, whom some see as manifestations of the concept. As the original *Gundam* anime reaches its final episodes, there is an escalation of surrealistic imagery brought on by these characters' abilities. This reaches its visual zenith in the character of Zeon pilot Lalah Sune. Lalah is presented as the most powerful Newtype in the series. Her powers allow her to remotely pilot drones called "Bits," making her an extremely deadly combatant. In episode 34, "A Fateful Encounter," Lalah and the main character, Amuro, briefly meet, and though they are on opposite sides of the conflict, they experience an instantaneous connection.

Then, in episode 41, "A Cosmic Glow," Amuro and Lalah experience a series of psychic connections during the heat of battle. In attempting to strike a killing blow on another enemy combatant, Amuro hits Lalah, eviscerating her instantly. At this moment, however, Amuro and Lalah's minds merge. The following sequence is surrealistic, with clear inspiration taken from the finale of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). A kind of non-linear space is presented in which Lalah and Amuro's bodies appear to dissolve. Within this space, Lalah and Amuro come to know and understand each other perfectly, without misconception. While experiencing a dramatic reverie— and appearing to reach metaphysical heights even more intense than Amuro's—Lalah says that she can see "even time itself." The accompanying scene of the mecha pilots' bodies dissolving into a series of formless, abstract imagery suggests that this transcendence comes at the cost of the body, or perhaps the body is a cage that prevents

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it. Either way, the destruction of Lalah's mecha armor and then her physical form allows entry into this state.

Thematically, the apocalyptic body of Lalah Sune is a fascinating counterpoint to the series' other central image: mechanical mecha. Whereas the mecha form is solid, powerfully demarcated, and metallic, Lalah Sune's Newtype form is nebulous, liquid-like, and transcendent. The visual collapse of her form in this Newtype state could easily appear ominous; instead, the effect is one of possibility and political change, her apocalyptic form pointing the way to potential new ontologies of humankind. As such, it seems important to consider the political conclusion of this original Gundam series and how it relates to this bodily imagery.

Figure 1. An example of fluid imagery during Lalah and Amuro's Newtype joining.

In the anime, two episodes remain after this Newtype awakening, wrapping up the main conflict between Zeon and the Federation. The novels are structured slightly differently. While Amuro lives through the series, he dies at the end of the third novel. His death lets forth a massive psychic shockwave, allowing other characters to briefly connect as he and Lalah did. Just as in the case of Lalah, the dissolution of Amuro's apocalyptic body creates a psychic reverie brimming with revolutionary possibility. In this case, however, it has concrete political effects.

Within the novel, Amuro's death causes Char Aznable (a Zeon soldier and the son of Zeon Zum Deikun) and the remaining main characters to join forces and end the war. While the anime ends with the Zeon state defeated, the novels go further. The forces of White Base and Char establish a new Zeon state, still independent from the Earth Federation but liberated from fascist control. This new Zeon state is presented as only having been possible through the Newtype reverie caused by Amuro's passing. In a particularly charged scene from pilot Kai Shiden's perspective, Tomino writes:

> "Damn you, Amuro!" Kai sobbed bitterly. "Why'd you go off and get killed? And leave us?" […] He continued raging, but he knew that the things Amuro and the other MS pilots had speculated about were more than a dream. They were gradually coming true. The world they knew was changing. Amuro's exploding consciousness had affected everyone in the immediate area with [Newtype] potential, subtly creating a common thread of awareness even among sworn enemies. Intuitively, Kai knew that he was now linked by a new consciousness with [Char]. The universe, which for the last few seconds seemed to have frozen, was about to change.[19]

In the above excerpt, the spiritual concept of Newtypism is utilized to bring about political result. Azuma's writing has a similar fixation on the ways in which the occult and the political have overlapped. Azuma sees the "interest in occult thought and New Age science that grew in America during the 1970s" as the result of the baby boomer

generation being "driven to forge the grand narrative that had been lost."[20] In his view, 1970s occultism and New Age science were both attempts to recreate the structure of a central guiding ideology in much the same way otaku culture was: "The rise of otaku culture in Japan, too, of course shares the same social background."[21] Newtypism, then, is the perfect embodiment of this welding of the occult and New Age science into a political ideology. Tonally, the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* functions in this way, using the supernatural-political concept of Newtypes to didactically ask the viewer to imagine new ways of envisaging human society. As John D Moore points out, "famously, the final words of the *Gundam* compilation films are a direct challenge to the young audience to form the course of our real world 'And now, in anticipation of your insight into the future.'"[22] Subsequent *Gundam* series would take on a much more pessimistic tone regarding Newtypes. In the direct sequel, *Zeta Gundam* (1985), Newtypes have been consolidated into the military and are experimented on to maximize their fighting capability. That said, no sequels were planned when the original *Gundam* was produced, which is why this essay opts to understand the original on its own terms, attempting to appreciate its scenes of ecstatic Newtype reverie within the confines only of that original narrative and its parallel novelization.

The original ending still has an element of cynicism, particularly in the novelization. Throughout the novels, Kai Shiden is the White Base character most critical of the Federation government; he even suggests a coup once the war is over. However, after overthrowing the previous Zeon government, Kai watches Char Aznable (the previously mentioned son of Zeon Deikun) give a speech. In watching the speech, he realizes that Char is positioning himself as the head of the new Zeon state. In a sequence from Kai's perspective, Tomino writes: "*Amuro*, he thought. *This is the way it*

turned out. Suddenly he realized he hated [Char] Aznable."[23] We then learn in a brief epilogue that of all the major White Base characters, only Kai chose to remain in the Federation rather than joining Char's new Zeon. In this conclusion, Tomino depicts the spiritual enlightenment of Newtypism lovingly while leaving some room for cynicism towards its political outputs.

In discussing this note of cynicism, it seems pertinent to bring in the writings of theorist Ôtsuka Eiji. In looking at the formation of otaku culture, Ôtsuka argues that more emphasis should be put on the cultural fallout following the failure of several high-profile leftist student movements. He suggests that those who felt this ideological defeat went on to pour their energy into media and art seen as low by the culture at large. He writes:

> we should consider a little more the fact that the people coming up during and in the fallout of the two failed student movements that occurred in postwar Japan – the conflict over the US–Japan Security Treaty (anpo tôsô), or the Anpo movement, in the 1960s, and the All-Campus Joint Struggle League (zenkyôtô undô), or the Zenkyôtô movement, before and after 1970 – are not only the ideological defenders of the subculture that was established before 'otaku' culture, but also those who created the genres and set the stage for the first generation of 'otaku'. These defeated members of the student movement acquired nourishment to live from the lowest levels of the Japanese industry and media hierarchy, children's culture, or from TV, which was still of low status, or from underground media such as pornography magazines and 'pink films'.[24]

Notably, the key work Ôtsuka uses in this analysis of otaku culture is *Gundam*. He points out that director Tomino was an underclassman of leftist filmmaker Adachi Masao and that character designer Yasuhiko Yoshikazu was a New Left activist. In Ôtsuka's reading, *Gundam* is a cultural byproduct of a generation actively involved in revolutionary struggle, arguing that *Gundam* should be understood as "converted leftist culture (tenkô sayoku no bunka)."[25] Notice the historical weight this reading provides to

the previously mentioned "Declaration for a New Anime Century." Said speech,

performed to youthful college students in a public space, visually would appear similar

to a leftist Anpo demonstration around 15 years earlier. But in this case, the students

were gathered to hear a speech filled with references to a fictional "Newtype" ideology, a

massive collection of allusions to historical grand narratives. More than anything, the

conclusion of the *Gundam* novel trilogy seems to evoke this complex relationship to

leftist thought that Ôtsuka identifies.

Lalah Sune and Amuro Ray's apocalyptic bodies are the clearest visual metaphor

for this revolution. They are young, idealistic figures literally going beyond their physical

forms to bring about political change. The imagery of a bodily breakdown becomes one

of revolutionary possibility: a physical transcendence that represents, in microcosm, a

potential revolution among the entire body politic. However, sequels to the original

Gundam would go on to voice disappointment in revolution far more clearly than this

youthful hope for change. In such cases, the imagery of the Newtype body, stretching

out and becoming diffuse, takes on a far more sinister, pessimistic aura. This more

foreboding relationship to transcendent bodily imagery would find particular expression

in the mecha texts of the 1990s.

Evangelion as a Post-Newtype, "Grand Nonnarrative"

Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995) is a core anime text, often seen as the defining

TV work of otaku subculture produced in the 1990s. Directed by Anno Hideaki, it

concerns biomechanical weapons named Evangelions, piloted by teenagers who fight

mysterious "Angels" against a backdrop of apocalypticism and teenage angst. Its

imagery is often extreme, particularly due to its mecha not being mechanical objects but

giant beings of flesh and blood (albeit internally piloted by our young mecha

protagonists). Anthony Dominguez has noted that within the *Gundam* franchise, the "suturing, decapitation, and destruction of […] real robots reflect the breakdown of the human body."[26] *Evangelion* actualizes this notion: it is a series fixated on imagery of its biomechanical giants being impaled, mutilated, and otherwise experiencing grievous bodily harm. The result is eerie and gothic, often blurring the line between the genres of mecha and horror.

Commentaries on *Evangelion* often note its intertextual nature, characterized by its dialogue with biblical terminology, mecha anime, Japanese war cinema, and tokusatsu television. This sense of intertextuality is compounded by its metafictional qualities in which "the narration frequently breaks down, revealing that both the background/world and figure/story depend on a volatile set of narrative and imaginary choices, vague references, and simulations" (Ballús, Torrents).[27] Similarly, Mariana Ortega notes that the series is "a rumination and critique on its own nature as cultural and ideological product, art and artifice."[28] *Evangelion's* meta-textual nature is compounded by its unique depiction of apocalypse. Surrealistic images of humankind's transformation are contrasted with the highly interior psychodrama of the "Human Instrumentality Project" (referred to from here on as Instrumentality): an arcane ritual designed to combine all human life into a single being. However, this rendition of an apocalypse, which is uniquely articulated through images of the destruction of massive humanoid bodies, is part of a lineage of mecha imagery that stretches back to the original *Gundam* and Tomino's concept of Newtypism. The difference is in their political character. *Mobile Suit Gundam's* Newtypes act as sacrificial figures, their deaths bringing about large-scale political changes: the dissolution of the Principality of Zeon in the anime and the founding of a new Zeon-state headed by Char in the novels.

In *Evangelion*, the creation of Lilith's body functions to combine all humankind into one being, and Shinji's rejection of that body also functions to reject this process, returning humankind to its previous embodiment. *Gundam*, then, is a work sometimes distrustful of linear historical development, whereas *Evangelion* seems to suggest that such linear historical development no longer exists.

Evangelion's apocalyptic imagery is layered in several references. For instance, *End of Evangelion's* (1997) final scene is reminiscent of the climax of *Space Firebird 2772* (1980), in which the hero and heroine find themselves on an empty beach after the world has been engulfed in flames. The depiction of Instrumentality as a nebulous subjective space in which characters experience a psychodrama, rendered in Dutch angles and fish-eye lenses, recalls the more expressionistic episodes of the series *Ultraman* (1966), particularly those directed by Jissoji Akio (a member of the often psychedelic "Japanese New Wave").[29] Furthermore, the violent nature of its finale, and its use of live-action footage, recall the conclusion to Tomino's follow-up to *Mobile Suit Gundam*, *Space Runaway Ideon* (1980).

Figure 2. An example of End of Evangelion's towering angelic imagery

However, Instrumentality's connection to *Gundam's* Newtype concept seems particularly strong. As previously explored, the scenes of psychic connection between Lalah and Amuro in *Mobile Suit Gundam* portray two characters letting go of their physical form to explore a dream-like, surrealistic landscape in which the standard rules of time and space do not apply. Like this process, Instrumentality is predicated on erasing the gaps between human forms. This is justified in the text as the breaking down of "AT Fields," which are responsible for separating the souls of individual beings. While the mechanics of Instrumentality only become apparent towards the end of the series, it is highlighted as a theme early on through an invocation of Arthur Schopenhauer's parable of the "hedgehog's dilemma." One character says hedgehogs desire to be with one another, but painful quills keep them apart—a fable for humanity's desire for intimacy conflicting with its fear of rejection. As the series goes on, Anno seems to direct this critique towards the otaku community, the audience most likely to consume *Evangelion* and who, in the philosophical framework of the series, would be seen as retreating into fantasy. Instrumentality violently resolves the hedgehog's dilemma: all of humanity becoming, as the series puts it, "one body, one soul." This is paralleled at several points with sexual intercourse, making an aspect that was implicit in Lalah and Amuro's joining overt. In *Gundam*, Newtypism was an act of spiritual awakening that occurred somewhat randomly through the chaos of war; in *Evangelion*, Instrumentality is a process put into place by powerful superstructures plotting behind the scenes. It is, as Betty Stojnic puts it, "'a conspiracy to rid humanity of its embodied and isolated form."[30] This is a considerably more cynical and pessimistic depiction of human evolution than *Gundam's*. This pessimism seems indicative of their respective political moments. *Gundam*, as Ôtsuka notes, came from a generation who had experienced

failed leftist student movements but also maintained some of the optimism of those collective struggles. *Evangelion*, on the other hand, is a firmly "lost decade"' work: not only is there a distrust towards political grand narratives, but there is also an antipathy and disinterest toward any attempt at political change.

For instance, compare the respective series' depiction of bodily transcendence. In *Gundam*, the scene in which Lalah and Amuro go beyond their physical form is presented as a pleasurable awakening into a true reality. *Evangelion* similarly involves all of humanity collapsing into formlessness: an orange/red liquid that spreads over the earth, but it is considerably more ominous in tone. During the ritual of Instrumentality, Ayanami Rei grows to enormous heights, collecting human souls above the Earth. During said ritual, a third eye violently splits on her forehead and is then stabbed by a crucifix – a strange inversion of transcendent imagery. When Shinji rejects Instrumentality and grants humanity the ability to choose whether or not to accept the process, Ayanami's body splits apart and crumbles over the now-red landscape of Earth. As established in the previous section, the apocalyptic bodies of the original Gundam series were used to construct a sense of youthful revolution, the nebulous forms of the Newtypes mirroring the ideological struggles of that series. In contrast, this apocalyptic body—the mutilated, massive form of Ayanami Rei—seems to have a much more uneasy relationship to mass struggle.

As previously mentioned, Azuma saw *Gundam* as an archetypical otaku "grand narrative". In contrast, he viewed *Evangelion* and its success as representative of the moment in which otaku became disinterested in those kinds of stories. This is an easy enough claim to understand: whereas *Gundam* tells a story of warring factions with discrete ideologies, technological weapons, and motivations, *Evangelion's* world is

shrouded in an intentional mystery. For instance, the true origins of the Angels, the series' primary antagonists, is unclear from the anime alone. By the end of the series, vital plot elements are obscured, and the framework between reality and fiction is shrouded. As Azuma writes, "numerous fans of *Gundam* desired the completion and close examination of a singular *Gundam* world […] they preserved the current passion for a fictitious grand narrative."[31] On the other hand, "even during the peak of the craze, the fans of *Evangelion* who appeared in the mid-1990s—especially those of the younger generation (the third generation of otaku)—did not really have a concern for the entire world of *Evangelion*."[32]

Azuma goes on to juxtapose the fandom's disinterest in the macro world of *Evangelion* with its granular interest in characters like Ayanami Rei. Azuma understands the fandom of *Evangelion* as oriented around the desire to create databases of "moe" character elements. Azuma explains that whereas *Gundam's* fictitious space history was built upon by several sequels, *Evangelion* was not designed to facilitate this further linear story progression. Instead, its parent company, *Gainax*, focused on developing merchandise for specific characters. Azuma states: "for instance, there are mahjong games, erotic telephone card designs […] and even simulation games in which players nurture the heroine Ayanami Rei."[33] He describes this approach as a grand *nonnarrative* and focuses in particular on how it imagined alternate versions of Ayanami Rei. Azuma points out that Ayanami set a template for characters to be "broken into *moe*-elements and recorded by consumers."[34] He describes this moe-database process not as a series of linear influences ("[i]t does not seem wise to attribute this expanse to the "influence" of *Evangelion*"),[35] but instead as an act of constant

reshuffling "sustained by the movements back and forth between the characters (the simulacra) and the *moe*-elements (the database)."[36]

This "quite postmodern consumer behavior"[37] is reflected in the imagery of *End of Evangelion*. Ayanami, in the form of Lilith, grows to enormous heights, outsizing even the Evangelions themselves. Then, in an arcane ritual, her externalized, gigantic body is reshuffled and reorganized by the structures of SEELE. It is through this reorganization and reimagining of her apocalyptic body that Instrumentality can occur. It is not that *Evangelion* lacks a grand narrative—the forming of all humanity's consciousness into one being is a transcendental awakening far beyond even Lalah and Amuro's joining. Nevertheless, it is a text that ultimately rejects this structure, with Shinji choosing to reverse the process of Instrumentality. Notably, the choice to halt this process is illustrated through the imagery of Ayanami crumbling apart and dissolving, her gigantic form disassembled above an apocalyptic vision of the earth. Ayanami's apocalyptic body is destroyed in an act that undoes a radical reconfiguration of humankind, an inversion of the ways in which Newtype imagery was used to accelerate political change.

In *Mobile Suit Gundam*, the sacrifice of individual Newtype bodies (Lalah, Amuro), leads the way to a revolutionary output. In *End of Evangelion,* an attempt to shift the nature of humankind on a mass level is rejected, but no revolutionary alternative is proposed. This is conducive to Azuma's understanding that *Gundam* occurs at the tail-end of belief in transformative grand narratives, whereas *Evangelion* emerged when such narratives had become firmly dispersed and individual database choices filled the void left. In both cases, however, it is through the reorganization of the body that their respective relationships to revolution are made clear.

Conclusion: The Apocalyptic Body

The mecha genre is fixated on images of unstable, diffuse, human bodies—a fixation this article has termed the apocalyptic body. It is often through these apocalyptic bodies that the genre communicates its relationship to political revolution, with the destruction or transcendence of these forms bringing about new political, societal, and cultural frameworks. The original *Mobile Suit Gundam* uses its concepts of Newtypes to explore this bodily imagery. The Newtype's ability to sense the space around themselves accelerates into imagery of their bodies becoming nebulous, and through the death of Lalah, the series presents surrealistic imagery. In the novels, this is compounded even further by the death of Amuro and the resulting psychic shockwave, which leads to a coup within the Zeon Government. The dissolution of the apocalyptic body leads to a new political framework in the Earth Sphere.

In *Evangelion*, we have the apocalyptic body at its most overt. Not only are the mecha themselves now bio-organic, but the series fixates on images of their mutilation, impaling, and general physical destruction. The effects of this outsized body horror could not be more dramatic. *End of Evangelion's* climactic apocalypse has the effect of shifting the ontology of all humankind. This apocalypse is presented as a kind of ritual for which the key is reconfiguring the form of Ayanami Rei. Ayanami is the key apocalyptic body of the 1990s, rearranged and reformed in various reimaginings of the series (both official and unofficial). At the climax of the work, she is reformed through the ritualistic act of Human Instrumentality. However, the climatic destruction of her form leads to a rejection of an imposed grand narrative, and a return to stasis.

In her discussion of the mecha genre, Susan Napier contrasts the masculine-coded world of mecha and the feminine-coded world of the occult. She writes:

> In contrast to the abjected feminine worlds of the gothic and the occult, which privileged women's bodies and their terrifying potential to engulf the male inside dark, organic spaces, the worlds of mecha might be seen as stereotypically masculine in their emphasis on hard-edged, thrusting, outward-orientated power, privileging what scholar Claudia Springer calls "the violently masculinist figure"[38]

However, as Newtypism and Instrumentality illustrate, the mecha genre has its own flirtation with the "dark, organic worlds" of the occult. In mecha, the unstable, shifting nature of the supernatural body provides a pointed contrast to a world of mechanical force and solidified empowerment. Still, the genre's relationship to these fluid, occult bodies is ambiguous: at times, in awe of their ability to birth new frameworks, and at times, in fear of it.

Notes:

1 See: Ôtsuka Eiji and Marc Steinberg, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative," *Mechademia* 5 (November 2010): 99-116, and Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animal* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

2 Frenchy Lunning, "Between the Child and the Mecha," *Mechademia*, 2 (December 2007): 281.

3 Susan Napier, *Anime From Akira to Howl s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 86.

4 Tomino, Yoshiyuki, translated by Sean Chapman, Jonathan Lack "The Shinjuku Declaration," Twitter, April 25, 2023., https://twitter.com/JonathanLack/status/1647056838683398144 (accessed April 20th, 2023).

5 Anthony Dominguez, "Mechapocalypse: Tracing Gundam s Global Appeal and Fandom," *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*, 3 (December 2022): 256.

6 Lunning, "Between the Child and the Mecha," 269.

7 Takayuki Tatsumi and Christopher Bolton, *Gundam* and the Future of Japanoid Art," *Mechademia*, 3 (November 2008): 191–198.

8 Yoshiyuki Tomino (trans. Frederik Schodt), *Mobile Suit Gundam: Escalation* (Houston: Del Ray, 1990), 9.

9 Tomino, *Escalation*, 7.

10 Tomino Yoshiyuki (trans. Frederik Schodt), *Mobile Suit Gundam: Awakening* (Houston: Del Ray, 1990), 49.

11 William Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives: *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*" in David Stahl and Mark Wiliams, eds., *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film Film* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 346.

12 For more on this topic, see: Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Ethnic Engineering: Scientific Racism and Public Opinion Surveys in Midcentury Japan," *Position: Asia Critique,* 8 (Fall, 2000): 499–529.

13 Patrick Drazen, "Review: The Shock of the Newtype: The 'Mobile Suit Gundam' Novels of Tomino Yoshiyuki," *Mechademia,* 1 (December 2006): 177.

14 Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan s Database Animal* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 34.

15 Ibid., 35.

16 Ibid., 29.

17 Ibid., 5.

18 Ibid.

[19] Tomino Yoshiyuki (trans. Frederik Schodt), *Mobile Suit Gundam: Confrontation* (Houston: Del Ray, 1991), 77.

[20] Azuma, *Otaku: Japan s Database Animal,* 35.

[21] Ibid.

[22] John D. Moore, "*Turn A Gundam* and the Problems of (Dark) History," *Mechademia* conference, September 25, 2016.

[23] Tomino, *Confrontation,* 95.

[24] Ôtsuka Eiji, "Foreword: Otaku Culture as 'Conversion Literature,'" in Patrick W. Galbraith, Thiam Huat Kam and Björn-Ole Kamm, eds., *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan: Historical Perspectives and New Horizons* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), xvii.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Dominguez, "Mechapocalypse: Tracing Gundam s Global Appeal and Fandom": 248.

[27] Andreu Ballús and Alba G. Torrents, "Evangelion as Second Impact: Forever Changing That Which Never Was," *Mechademia*, 9 (November 2014): 286.

[28] 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): 217.

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Book Review: *Manga: A Critical Guide*

Anastasia Michalak

Volume 4, Pages 244-247

Suzuki, Shige (CJ), and Ronald Stewart. *Manga: A Critical Guide*. London, UK:

Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Paperback, $29.95.

Keywords: Manga, History, Popular Culture, Japanese Comic Studies, fan-participation, book review

Author Bio: Anastasia Michalak is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Art History at Bowling Green State University. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Asian Studies along with a minor in Japanese from the University of Toledo in 2018. Her research primarily focuses on the interplay and overlap between Japanese contemporary art and popular culture, including Anime and Manga.

In Shige (CJ) Suzuki and Ronald Stewart's book, *Manga: A Critical Guide,* they set out to provide an analytical overview of manga with particular attention to social, historical, cultural, and aesthetic matters surrounding the medium. This publication modernizes previous frameworks and research to introduce an updated survey of the amazingly diverse and ever-evolving field of manga and Japanese comics studies. In this compendium, the authors introduce the study of manga and its socio-cultural impact. They provide insights for discussing the medium and its contexts without over-generalizing and essentializing the vast field of Japanese comic studies. Additionally, this refreshed overview includes recent trends and occurrences regarding manga culture and mentions current evolving forms of manga. Further, this publication traces key issues and proposes methodological approaches that would be helpful and practical tools to utilize in the pedagogical instruction of manga.

Manga: A Critical Guide is organized into four chapters: Historical Overview, Social and Cultural Impact, Critical Uses, and Key Texts. Each section is mainly organized chronologically and highlights critical issues that influenced the medium and its transformation within cultural contexts. Suzuki and Stewart demonstrate their knowledge of Japanese comics in the Historical Overview chapter through their analyses of the major historical claims related to the origins of manga. The authors reconsider these claims by reviewing, debunking, and further analyzing previous arguments that manga is a "long tradition" that goes back centuries. They also reconsider the argument that it is a post-war product attributed to the creative innovations of a singular mangaka. Instead, Suzuki and Stewart conclude that manga is a modern medium that gradually emerged in the late 19th century, influenced by Western comic art and the growth of the modern print media industry. They recount the history of Japanese

comics, from some of its important and notable events to the present. Throughout this section–and the rest of the publication–they reference other scholars and their works in manga and related Japanese cultural studies, beefing up their historical claims and further updating previous survey work by scholars such as Frederik Schodt in his publication *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics,* published in 1983.

The next chapter, titled Social and Cultural Impacts, examines current and prior controversies concerning Japanese comics and the culture attached to them. It addresses censorship, gender and sexuality in manga, historical representation as depicted in manga, and the cultural status of the medium. The third chapter looks at the critical uses of manga. It presents essential pedagogical information that scholars will find useful when teaching about Japanese comics as a literary medium and an art form. It introduces tools, analytic perspectives, and focused concerns of various scholarly approaches to studying manga. The final chapter, Key Texts, is a compiled list of manga for any English-speaking fan, scholar, or student looking to dive deep into the world of manga. This list includes an assortment of manga with different topic matters, genres, and socio-cultural significance.

Though this publication may be out of reach for the general reader due to its information-rich nature, this work certainly offers many opportunities for scholars looking to engage with manga on a critical and analytic level. It can also be used as an essential text in media studies, popular culture, and Japanese studies classrooms due to its vast inclusion of social, historical, and cultural matters related to the medium. Further, the incorporation of illustrations throughout the publication was phenomenal. These images were taken from a wide variety of sources to back up and emphasize assertions made by the authors and highlight that manga is a highly visual storytelling

medium. Scholars will be pleasantly surprised with the Appendix, which includes a wonderfully curated list of resources for individuals looking for museums and websites that would be useful for accessing archived manga and deriving information about exhibitions and manga-related experiences.

Although this overview presented a wide array of topics and lenses to look at manga and its key issues, Suzuki and Stewart recognize that the scope of this publication is such that it would be impossible to do justice to the diverse and ever-evolving world of manga. Instead, this book offers entry points for discussing and analyzing the medium using critically informed approaches and methods. Furthermore, due to the nature of the "manga-verse," Suzuki and Stewart recognize that current processes are evolving the way that we produce, distribute, and consume these comics. However, due to the novelty and recentness of these developments, it would be impossible to include an in-depth, critically derived theory, history, and guide to these processes. With this knowledge, the book ends on an open note, touching on the digital age and its inevitable impact on the future of manga while calling attention to the fact that manga was—and still is—a dynamic medium characterized by evolution and change. It calls on scholars to pay attention to the transformations of the medium while leaving room for future research.

Through their introduction and explanations of the nuances and critical issues encompassed in the world of manga, Suzuki and Stewart successfully invite scholars, researchers, and students to join in on the current conversations regarding manga, Japanese comic studies, and fan participatory culture. I would certainly recommend this text to anyone looking for a comprehensive guide to the manga-verse or any scholar looking for additional supplementary texts related to Japanese comics in the classroom.

Book Review: *The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales:*

Monster Comics from Edo Japan

J.T. Aris

The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales: Monster Comics from Edo

Japan. Translated by Adam Kabat. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023.

Paperback, $35.00.

Author Bio: J.T. Aris is a Danish immigrant, who now lives in Indianapolis, IN. Aris has found that the long incubation periods offered by life as a molecular biologist are perfect for thinking about stories. Sometimes they get written down on the backs of plate sealers. Aris's fiction has previously been featured in *The Fatal Flaw* Magazine, *Peculiar* Magazine and *Tint Journal*.

The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales: Monster Comics from Edo Japan is a collection of kibyōshi, or monster comics, collected and translated by Adam Kabat. The book is filled with full pages of artwork and reproductions of kibyōshi with the original text still present. Translations and notes are included alongside including a generous number of footnotes that correspond to further information located in the back of the book. There are five main chapters, the first three dealing with multiple stories under the same theme (A Monster Catalogue, Monsters to the Rescue, and The Monster Takes a bride) while the last two offer deeper reading into two particular stories, The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel, as named in the title of the book, and The Demon Girl Comes to Edo.

The introduction of the book itself is an engaging overview of the chapters to come as well as offering a few insightful sections on the intended social commentary of monsters, the eventual commercialization of monsters, and notes on the translations of each of the stories. "A Monster Catalogue" serves as a brief overview of various types of mythological monsters and brief snippets of the kibyoshi they inhabit. "Monsters to the Rescue" features works by Jippensha Ikku where in the monsters are the protagonists forever running in fear from the famed monster slayer Sakata no Kinpira as they attempt to go about their normal monster lives. "The Monster Takes a Bride" takes a deeper look into the topsy-turvy world of daily monster life, where ugliness is beauty and the lowly monsters attempt to embody the customs of the high-class humans. "The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel" tells the story of a farmer's son with such beautiful buttocks that he attracts the attention of both a medieval lord and a much less desirable kappa set upon making away with the young man's 'stinky jewel'. Originally intended as

a souvenir or accompaniment to a traveling side show attraction, "The Demon Girl Comes to Edo" follows a young demon girl as she encounters everything from heroes to festivals as she travels through several notable locations. The notes section at the end of the book contains the enumeration of each footnote marked in the text. For this reason, the book is best enjoyed with an extra book mark tucked into the back to ensure nothing is missed.

The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales is an excellent and engaging introduction to the world of kibyōshi. Many of the topics touched upon in the book could easily serve as inspiration for future discussions, publications, or research projects regarding the comics themselves or the roles of monsters in Japanese art and culture, making this book perfect for scholars, researchers, and students looking into kibyōshi. Packed with commentary, and eye-catching, beautiful, and sometimes grotesque illustrations, *The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales* would serve as an excellent point of reference or introduction for a reader interested in studying Japanese art, culture, or story-telling. Those reading for pleasure might find the first two sections of the book, which are more of an overview of various pieces of stories, a little disjointed, but the final two sections will fully satisfy the desire for a complete retelling of the tales. The earlier sections could serve as a great jumping off point for those searching for a particular type of story or monster to further explore in other sources, perhaps listed in this book's extensive bibliography.

Overall, *The River Imp and the Stinky Jewel and Other Tales* is filled with evocative art and intriguing insight into the stories it contains. It would be as at home on a coffee table, where its evocative art would be a terrific conversation piece, and as it

would be in a classroom or library, where it would stand as a fantastic reference to

scholars wishing to study monster comics in greater depth.