Open-Access Anime: The Magnificent Continuation of *JAMS*' Magical Girl Transformation

Billy Tringali

The goal of the first volume of the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies* was, through intense work and collaboration, to plant a seed that would grow into the first sprouts of this highly interdisciplinary, academic endeavor. The goal of our second volume was to anchor our roots, demonstrating to all that the effort of our first publication was valuable and that our work would continue. Now, in the third volume of the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*, I am so proud to present not just a thriving academic publication, but also the magnificent work it is able to publish this year.

This volume of *JAMS* has nine papers that take approaches ranging from queer studies to science fiction studies and to military studies, alongside a conference report and two book reviews. With this publication, the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies* will now have published 27 articles, book reviews, and conference reports by scholars at 25 different universities, for a combined 734 pages of anime scholarship -- all available completely for free, to any scholar anywhere in the world.

In the following introduction to this volume, I'd love to share with you more about *JAMS*' growth, both as a journal and with some of our most-read articles, before closing with some warm words regarding the heart of this journal.

Open-Access Anime

When we first began publishing in 2020, JAMS only received 322 file views; this changed in 2021, when we more than doubled this number with 774 file views (Figure 1).

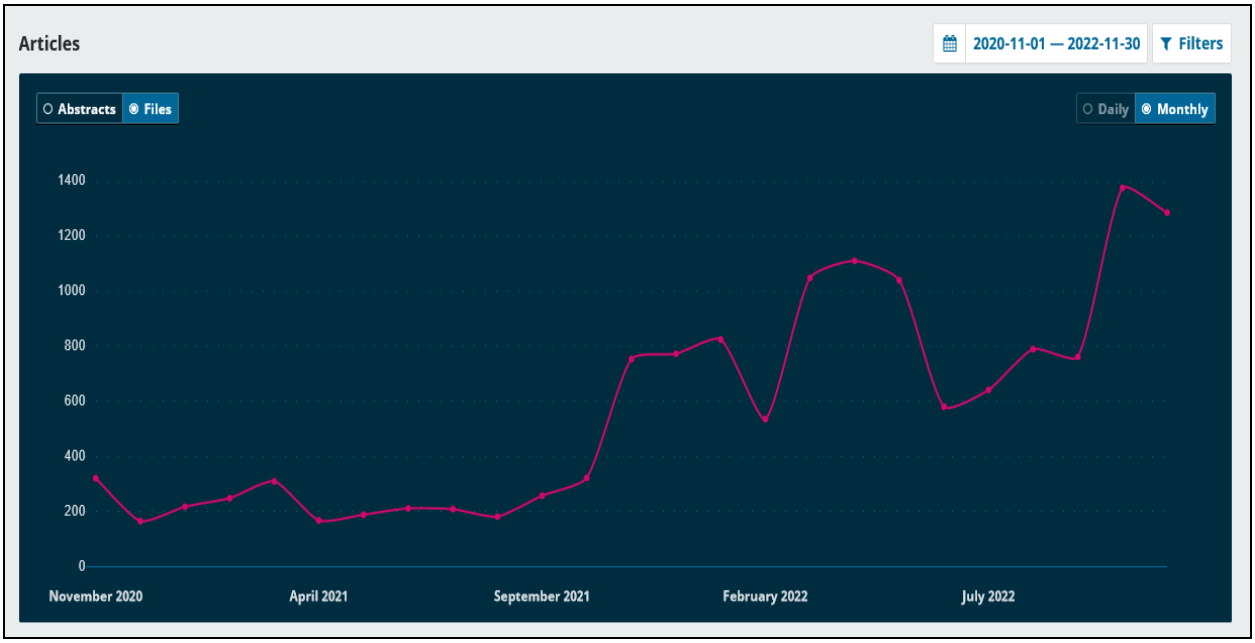

Figure 1 – Article File Views for the Journal of Anime and Manga Studies, 11/2020-11/2022

After a brief dip in February of 2022, our average views skyrocketed, going from an average of 537 file views per month to an entire 1049 in March of 2022 (Figure 1).

Here's another way to look at the same numbers: in November of 2020, JAMS got 322 file views. In November of 2021, this increased to 755 files views. And in November of 2022, this increased again to 1286 file views.

In my mind, this is due to the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies'* acceptance into the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) this year (Figure 2). *JAMS* was added into the DOAJ on February 28th, 2022,[1] and it is my opinion that this achievement, itself the result of much hard work, lent an extreme amount of credibility

and visibility to a still somewhat small, niche journal. Likewise, this visibility was undoubtedly boosted by a news brief from the *Anime News Network*, who featured a blurb about *JAMS*' acceptance into DOAJ on their site.[2]

Since *JAMS*' acceptance into DOAJ, our combined monthly file views have always remained above 580 combined views per month, and our abstract views have remained above 860. From March through November of 2022, *JAMS* had an average of over 960 file views per month. I hope that, with the publication of this third volume, *JAMS*' readership will only continue to grow, and *JAMS*' will continue to serve the growing field of anime and manga studies in kind.

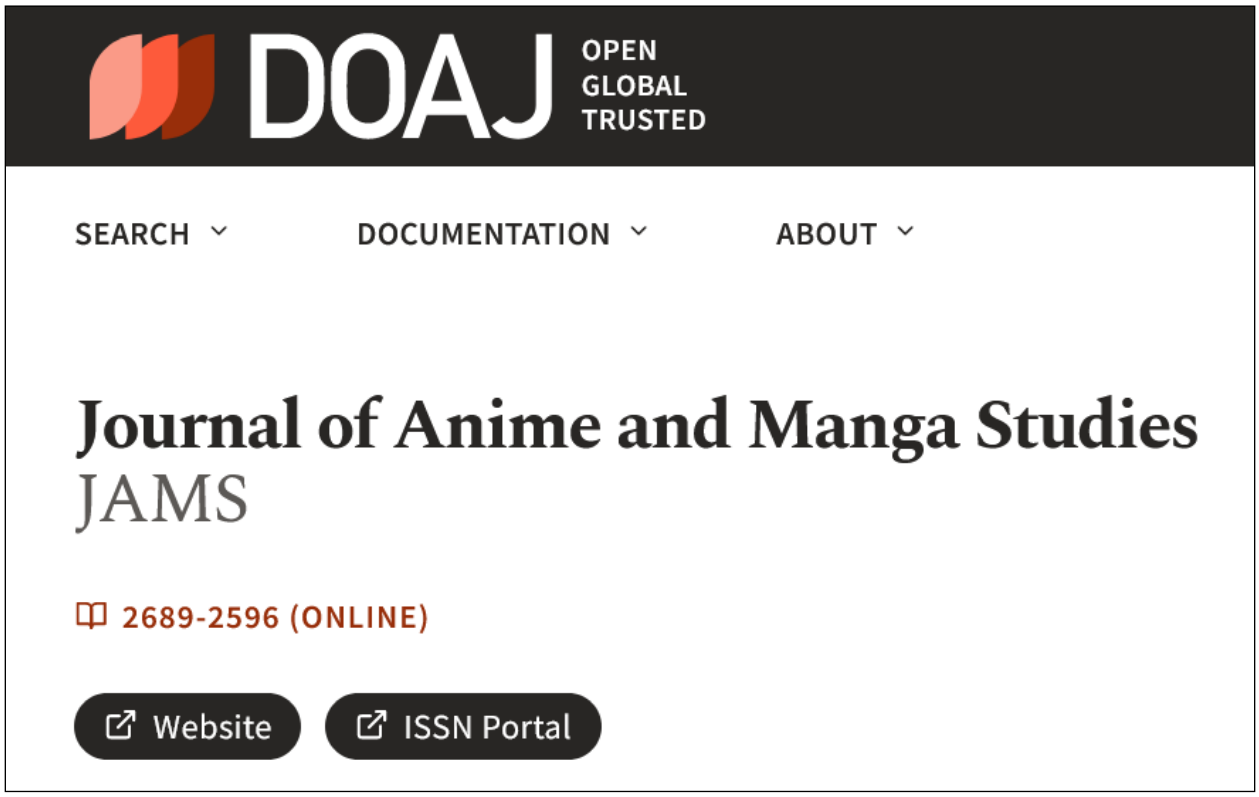

Figure 2 – DOAJ Page for the Journal of Anime and Manga Studies

Since our initial launch, several of our papers have racked up thousands of views from interested readers. As these numbers show, this is such an exciting time for anime and manga studies, and I am very excited that *JAMS* has been able to offer so much already!

Our most read articles include:

- *Embedded Niche Overlap: A Media Industry History of Yaoi Anime's American Distribution from 1996 to 2009* by Finley Freibert with combined abstract and file views of 5242 as of November 30th, 2022
    - ***DOI:*** *https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v1.234*
- *A Survey of the Story Elements of Isekai Manga* by Paul Price with combined abstract and file views of 4483 as of November 30th, 2022
    - ***DOI:*** *https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.808*
- *The Spectacular Mundane in the Films of Studio Ghibli* by Zoe Crombie with combined abstract and file views of 3476 as of November 30th, 2022
    - ***DOI:*** *https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.507*
- *Boy with Machine: A Deleuzoguattarian Critique of Neon Genesis Evangelion* by Betty Stojnic with combined abstract and file views of 2278 as of November 30th, 2022
    - ***DOI:*** *https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.822*
- *Haunted Psychologies: The Specter of Postmodern Trauma in Bakemonogatari* by Barbara Greene with combined abstract and file views of 2013 as of November 30th, 2022
    - ***DOI****: https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.869*

I hope linking these popular (and unpopular) works will spark your interest in reviewing past volumes of *JAMS*, and demonstrate again just how highly read so many of these works are.

The Heart of *JAMS*

Having just hit publish on this third volume, I can so vividly remember where it all began - sitting at the hotel bar of the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C. I was coming hot off a host of listening to incredible panels on anime studies and frantically handing out *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies* business cards to anyone who would take them. Earlier that day, I'd been fortunate enough to meet Frenchy Lunning, the Founder of *Mechademia*, who told me:

"*JAMS* is a heart. You will need a left and a right ventricle – two people who will ensure the heart's survival."

I did not realize it then, but I would be fortunate enough to find these people from our very first publication. I would like to dedicate the third volume of the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies* to *JAMS*' own left and right ventricle:

Jessica Parent and *Maria Alberto*

Beyond their incredible work as *JAMS*' copyeditors, Jessica and Maria have evolved into my most trusted and dedicated collaborators as this volume of the journal came into fruition. Thank you both, from the bottom of my heart, for being such brilliant colleagues, confident advisors, and most importantly, dear friends. This volume would not exist without you.

Closing

JAMS has been, and continues to be, a labor of love by myself as the Founder and Editor, alongside *JAMS'* countless peer reviewers, authors, board members, and copy editors. We are all people who love anime and are happy to give our time and expertise to see this art form, this connection builder, this fandom space, this industry, and every possible other thing this umbrella of 'anime' represents to millions of people around the world – all examined with a critical eye, and then shared with you.

It is with much sincerity and gratitude that I thank you for reading the third volume of the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*. I hope you find much to learn and enjoy here.

With warmth,

Billy Tringali

Editor-in-Chief

[1] DOAJ, "Journal of Anime and Manga Studies"
[2] Hazra, "Journal of Anime and Manga Studies Joins Directory of Open Access Journals"

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30 Years Later, Re-Examining the "Pretty Soldier": A Gender Study Analysis of *Sailor Moon*

Cassandra Yatron

Volume 3, Pages 1-33

Abstract

December 2021 marked the 30th anniversary of Naoko Takeuchi's *Bishojo Senshi Sailor Moon* (*Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*) manga (1991-1997), and March 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of Toei Animation's *Bishojo Senshi Sailor Moon* anime (1992-1997). While there seems to be controversy over whether *Sailor Moon* can be read as a feminist text, *Sailor Moon* still maintains its status as a feminist and queer magical girl series. Although there has been some scholarship on the magical girl genre and gender roles in manga and anime, there has not been much written about *Sailor Moon* in recent years that examines feminism and queerness in the series as a whole. As an influential series that is relevant in pop culture and enjoyed by girls, further analysis of the manga and anime is necessary to identify its feminist and queer nature due to changes in how American society views gender and sexuality. Despite being three decades old, *Sailor Moon* maintains its status as a feminist and queer magical girl series. My argument, then, is that on the surface, the *Sailor Moon* franchise appears to be a heteronormative and an (arguably) antifeminist series with traditional heterosexual relationships and gender stereotypes, but upon closer examination, the manga and anime series subvert patriarchal and gender stereotypes in both obvious and discrete ways.

Keywords: Sailor Moon, gender, queer, feminism, magical girl

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Introduction

Manga and anime have been criticized extensively for not only how female characters are portrayed and objectified by artists but also for how those characters are objectified by viewers. Saito Tamaki's *Beautiful Fighting Girl*[1] and Sharalyn Orbaugh's "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture"[2] dissect the relationship between the female hero and the viewer in shojo[3] series, which both scholars conclude is misogynistic. However, in *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, Kathryn Hemmenn addresses how critics tend to focus on male consumers and determine that the female consumer can only view texts through the male gaze. Thus, her analysis looks at familiar girls' series, like *Sailor Moon*, through the female gaze, finding empowering, feminist messages for female consumers. My analysis in this paper will continue Hemmenn's work.

In her introduction, Hemmenn shares anecdotes about herself and other women who watched *Sailor Moon* as children and were thus influenced to pursue careers in art, comics, or, like herself, academia.[4] She notes how the female characters in *Sailor Moon* are not simply "sex objects or empty symbols or vanguards of consumer culture or escapist fantasies" but complex girls, like her, who had dreams, trivial problems at school, and silly fights with their friends.[5] The complexity of the characters and their viewers has developed over many years. Despite the age of the series, fans are still dedicated and "explicitly associat[e] the franchise with feminist ideologies and queer rights activism." [6] With the recent 30th anniversary of Takeuchi Naoko's *Bishojo Senshi, Sailor Moon* (*Pretty Soldier, Sailor Moon*) manga (1991-1997) and the 30th anniversary of Tōei Animation's *Bishojo Senshi, Sailor Moon* anime (1992-1997), *Sailor Moon*

deserves a feminist reevaluation as an influential manga and anime for female readers and viewers.

Contemporary magical girl anime series, such as *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* or even *Kill La Kill*, have ushered in a new feminist, queer phase of the magical girl genre that may cause *Sailor Moon* to appear outdated and anti-feminist due to the female lead's frequent sacrifices, the heterosexual romances, and the sexual objectification of the Sailor Scouts compared to newer series.[7] However, I argue that *Sailor Moon* still maintains its status as a feminist and queer magical girl series. Although there has been some scholarship on the magical girl genre and gender roles in manga and anime, there has not been much written about *Sailor Moon* in recent years that examines feminism and queerness in the series as a whole since a great deal of the scholarship focus mostly on Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune's queerness.[8]

Critics believe that shojo anime and manga reinforce gender and sexual norms, but at the same time, they also give space for girls to explore their gender and sexuality.[9] *Sailor Moon* embodies this, with fans that span across ages, races, sexualities, and genders who use the series to enjoy and explore aspects of gender and queerness. In 2014, Viz Media released a new English dubbing of the anime on Hulu that followed the original Japanese script more closely than the 1990's DiC dubbing that censored content. Since Hulu is a widely available streaming app, *Sailor Moon* is now more accessible to young female viewers. As an influential series that is relevant in pop culture and enjoyed by girls, further analysis of the manga and anime is necessary to identify its feminist and queer nature due to changes in how American society views gender and sexuality. My argument, then, is that on the surface, the *Sailor Moon* franchise appears to be a heteronormative and an (arguably) antifeminist series with

traditional heterosexual relationships and gender stereotypes, but upon closer examination, the manga and anime series subvert patriarchal and gender stereotypes in both obvious and discrete ways. Sailor Moon, the character, defies patriarchal expectations of teenage girls by being an average, silly schoolgirl who can take charge and save the universe. Furthermore, *Sailor Moon*, the manga and anime series, resists norms by blending tropes of boys' and girls' stories, placing the series in a liminal space. As a series for girls, Sailor Moon's strength comes from her homosocial relationships, instead of through a romance with a man. Finally, as a visual medium, *Sailor Moon* takes a traditionally fetishized sailor school uniform and turns it into an empowering garment for girls. Sailor Moon demonstrates a way for girls to celebrate their bodies and sexuality as a self-declared "pretty soldier" who saves the world.

Before beginning this analysis, it is important to note that the original manga series was written and drawn by Takeuchi Naoko, a woman, but the anime adaptation, while based on the manga, was adapted and drawn by mostly male production teams at Toei Animation. To expand the 60-chapter manga series, Toei Animation added approximately 200 anime episodes and movies with staff- created plotlines. This adds layers of the male gaze to a series written for girls by a woman; however, not all the changes made by the male team were sexist or misogynistic. Some of their changes, such as their changing of season one's finale, I will argue were empowering to the Sailor Scouts.

Usagi/Sailor Moon

Sailor Moon tells the story of Usagi Tsukino, a 14-year-old reincarnated moon princess, who fights evil aliens in Tokyo under the disguise of Sailor Moon. Accompanying her are her closest friends—the Sailor Scouts: Sailor Mercury, Sailor Mars, Sailor Jupiter, and Sailor Venus—who are also reincarnated princesses of their titular planets. Usagi's love interest, Tuxedo Kamen, occasionally helps her save the universe, but mostly, he is the person she has to rescue from danger, bring back to life, or heal from brainwashing. As the seasons progress, Sailor Scouts from further planets, galaxies, and stars join the team, including Usagi's daughter from the future.

Sailor Moon is part of the shojo genre, which are stories for girls. According to Grace En-Yi Ting, the shojo genre is considered a lower art form than the shonen genre, stories directed towards boys, due to feminine elements, such as a focus on emotions, romance, and friendship.[10] In Japanese media, the shojo, or girl, is traditionally characterized as a carefree young girl who is obsessed with everything cute, or kawaii, and loves to shop. Behind the stereotype are an ambivalence towards the shojo for her consumerism and her, assumed, desire to avoid being a "productive member of Japanese society."[11] In light of this, Gunhild Borggreen incorporates ideas from anthropologist Sharon Kinsella who notes that the shojo's obsession with kawaii and consumer culture is a form of resistance to growing up and becoming the ideal domestic housewife that Japan was promoting during the 1990s.[12] The shojo is both the consumer of the media as well as the main character of the media, and Usagi embodies the idea of the typical shojo, as stated in the work of anthropologist, Anne Allison.[13] The series begins with Usagi yelling that she is late for school. Since she arrives late, she has to stand in the hallway where she tries to sneak some of her lunch, but her teacher berates

her for failing her English test instead. The panels show Usagi as a cute, carefree girl, complete with adorable facial expressions, bunnies, and hearts (Figures 1 & 2).

Figure 1. Usagi's introduction, demonstrating her shojo nature. She is a regular teenager who is usually late to school. Drawing by Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2011).

Figure 2. Usagi's personality shows through the page as a girl who enjoys "the little things" in life, such as a food. She is carefree, despite being in trouble with her teacher. Drawing by Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2011).

In her work, Allison cites Japanese feminist commentator, Minomiya Kazuko, who in 1994, offered an optimistic view of shojo manga and anime, stating that it reflected "girls' fantasies today" and also represented "a positive shift in gender reality."[14] In the shojo genre, girls are able to have romance, a career, and opportunity, and this is seen in reality as well. However, some critics argue that the way gender is portrayed in the shojo genre is detrimental for young viewers. Popular culture scholar, Sharalyn Orbaugh, argues that the girl hero potentially has power but "ultimately

reinscribe[s] hegemonic and hetero-centric sex/gender/sexuality ideologies, obviating much of the promise of resistance or social transformation."[15] Although there are some scenarios where the series may falter, I would argue that *Sailor Moon* subverts "hegemonic and hetero-centric sex/gender/sexuality ideologies" through its depictions of how the characters act in relation to sexual and gender stereotypes. For example, Usagi subverts the stereotype of the shojo by being a carefree schoolgirl in her daily life; however, when duty calls, she uses those shojo qualities to defeat her enemies.

In the manga and the anime, Usagi uses the "Disguise Pen," a pen that can give her a new outfit and skills (Figure 4). For example, in Act III of the manga, Usagi is chasing a bus and turns into a stewardess (Figure 5) "[b]ecause it is the duty of a stewardess to ensure that all passengers have a safe trip!!" [16] She changes into a mini pencil skirt, a jacket with a huge bow in the front, a cute flight attendant's hat, and high

Figure 3. Using the Disguise Pen. Drawing by Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2011).

Figure 4. The result of using the pen. Drawing by Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2011).

heels. Changing into a flight attendant's uniform does not cause Usagi to run faster or gain a skill in this case, but wearing the uniform and knowing the stewardess' responsibility to protect the passengers helps her find the inner strength to face her fears of the "demon bus" by "playing pretend." She wants to protect innocent people, and she does whatever is necessary to do that. The shojo cares about material goods like clothes and being cute, but wearing the cute uniform gives Usagi power. Overall, then, she is a shojo, but she has great depth of character underneath that shallow veneer.

Usagi's shojo characterization and "very ordinariness" is what Minomiya argues makes her a positive role model for both female and male fans.[17] Usagi is the heart of the series and the reason for its popularity. Even though the Sailor Scouts save the world on a regular basis, they also attend cram school, worry about academics, date boys, and enjoy shopping.[18] An average girl can become a hero, too. Orbaugh counters this idea by noting that magical girls are not often human (Sailor Moon is technically an alien princess from the moon), so "there is no possibility that a real-world girl could realistically aspire to emulate characters who are android or alien." [19] While her point is valid and none of us can ever become a Moon princess, many viewers can relate to being an average person who is called to take on responsibilities they may not feel ready for. Japanese author, Saito Minako, states that "male heroes" are generally "focused and flawless from the beginning" and are "both willing and expected to sacrifice everything to the job of superhero," just like the stereotype of the Japanese businessman.[20] Usagi, however, is reluctant to take on the role of superhero because she just wants to be a normal girl, but, like Saito's male hero, she frequently sacrifices herself in order to save the universe, which will be explored more in a future section.[21]

For example, in Act I of *Pretty Guardian, Sailor Moon*, [22] Usagi transforms into Sailor Moon to save her best friend, Naru, from a monster, but when the monster poses a threat, Sailor Moon literally cries, "Why do I have to suffer like this?! I can't take this! I'm going home!"[23] In Act II, she introduces herself by saying, "I'm Usagi Tsukino. 14-years-old, in the 2nd year of middle school. My hobbies are eating, sleeping, and taking the easy way out. I'm a normal, cute, bit of a crybaby young girl…Or, I **should** be, but…I went and became a Guardian of Justice, and it's all the fault of this talking cat, Luna. **Honestly**! I just can't believe it!" [emphasis in original][24] Usagi begrudgingly takes on the role of Sailor Moon, even though she just wants to be a "normal, cute" girl. Eventually, she grows up and becomes the queen of the Crystal Tokyo, but she still maintains her shojo aesthetic. Future Usagi writes a letter to herself in the past, which includes little hearts and a kawaii self-portrait, showing that even as the omnipotent queen of the galaxy, she is still herself (Figure 5). Hemmann sums up Usagi's character well by saying, "Despite being young and naïve, she is physically strong, emotionally competent, and a compelling leader. She sacrifices herself for her team and always achieves strategic insight into the motivations of her enemies. Her magical power and her ability to win every battle stem from her innocent spirit and her purity of heart." [25] Throughout the years, Usagi learns, grows, and becomes more powerful with every series, and as a relatable character, her growth presents a positive role model for fans as they grow and mature.

Figure 5. A letter from future Sailor Moon to herself in the past, complete with the shojo aesthetic of cute hearts and drawings. Drawing by Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 5*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2012).

Between Boys' and Girl's Country

When the *Sailor Moon* manga was initially released in Japan, the series was praised by Japanese critics due to the complexity of the storyline and of the characters. The series, however, was not a guaranteed success in the U.S. due to the fact that it was for girls. In 1994, after the success of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* in the U.S., Bandai America wanted to bring over additional animations for Saturday morning cartoons with *Kamen Rider* (*Masked Rider)*, *Dragonball Z*, and *Sailor Moon*. Of the three, *Sailor Moon* was considered the riskiest because not only was it marketed solely towards a female fanbase, but because it was an action show where the female protagonists fight and look pretty while doing it. At the time, action cartoons were marketed towards boys and "fashion/romance/friendship" cartoons were marketed towards girls.[26] *Sailor Moon* effortlessly incorporates all these elements of fashion,

romance, friendship, and action, which blurs the lines of where it falls as a series for girls or for boys; thus, it was treated with hesitation.

The series' blurring of gender norms is important because, as Japanese author Saito Minako notes in *Kōittenron*, or *The One Red Flower Theory*, Japanese texts label content in terms of whether it is "girl's country" or "boy's country," and those labeled texts are similar to how boys' and girls' stories are distinguished in Western literature. Translated into English by Anne Allison, Saito elaborates that "boy's country" stories feature a boy who trains to become a hero in order to fight monsters and enemies, while "girl's country" stories are the typical "rags-to-riches" tale, where a girl meets a royal prince or king who marries her. *Sailor Moon* blurs the dichotomy between these genres and does not fit in either box. Usagi is the princess who trains to become a hero and slay monsters. Saito, however, insists that *Sailor Moon* is still in "girls' country" because of the tropes presented in the series. Boys' stories focus around "science, technology, and nationalism," while girls' stories focus on "magic, dreams, and interpersonal relations."[27] Orbaugh cites "high technology" as a "male-associated element" that is blended with female narratives in order to help male viewers connect to the female characters.[28] While this may be the case in male- written texts, Takeuchi's text normalizes girls being skilled in technology, math, and science. For example, Sailor Mercury uses magic to fight, but she also has a small computer built into her tiara that allows her to research and analyze to fight the aliens (Figure 6). Many of the female characters are also in traditionally male roles, such as Sailor Mercury as a science and math prodigy, Sailor Mercury's mother as a doctor, and a side character as an archaeologist, showing women working and thriving in the sciences. *Sailor Moon* normalizes girls' proficiency in technology and science, which Hemmenn notes

influenced many women in North America to pursue careers in traditionally male fields.[29]

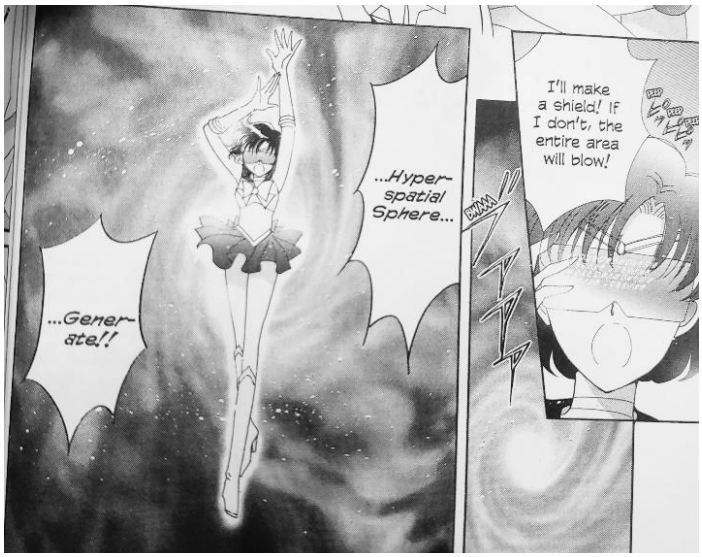

Figure 6. Sailor Mercury's computer goggles blending "boy's" and "girl's" tropes. Drawing by Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 4*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2012).

Saito Minako also notes that the gendered genres have opposite tropes and ideological messages, which puts *Sailor Moon* strictly in "girl's country." Male heroes save the world by "working hard and utilizing one's powers to a collective, social end for which a warrior is willing to sacrifice even his life," and female heroes save the world to protect "treasured things," which is usually a veiled metaphor for virginity or sexuality.[30] While Saito's analysis does apply to an aspect of season one, not every storyline involves a "treasured thing." In season one, the villains, Queen Beryl and Queen Metalia, are trying to find the Silver Crystal, which is one of the most powerful artifacts in the universe that can restore destroyed planets, defend against evil, and bring people back from the dead. Sailor Moon's mother from a past life, Queen Serenity, used the Silver Crystal as the source of her power, and when Usagi was reincarnated, it

became her source of power. Since the villains are looking for the Silver Crystal, Saito claims that this is the "treasured thing" that Usagi is protecting. However, the search for the Silver Crystal is only part of the plotline for the series since Sailor Moon has to stop Queen Metalia from conquering Earth.

In Allison's analysis of *Sailor Moon* using Saito Minako's theory, she does not address the complexity of storylines in the series either. She does, however, note how *Sailor Moon* includes the male ideological message of "utilizing one's powers to a collective, social end," but she does not explore the concept enough. Allison cites the film, *Sailor Moon R*, as an example of where Sailor Moon demonstrates characteristics similar to that of a male hero and rescues, her love, Tuxedo Kamen, "who spends most of the plot limp and unconscious," while focusing on friendship and interpersonal connectedness, unlike the "boys' country" stories.[31] Allison neglects to note that this accurately summarizes the plot of every *Sailor Moon* series, film, or musical. In fact, the other Sailor Scouts as well as Sailor Moon sacrifice themselves for each other and to save the world. In Act XIII and XIV of the manga *Pretty Guardian, Sailor Moon*, Sailor Moon kills Tuxedo Kamen with a sword for the second time because he was brainwashed by Queen Beryl, the antagonist of this season. After she kills him, she turns the sword on herself and kills herself because she believes that she must repeat the actions of their past lives. Her tears reveal the Silver Crystal that was hidden within her all along. The Sailor Scouts, die after they pull together all their power to bring her and Tuxedo Kamen back from the dead,[32] which is an idea found in boys' stories where the hero "work[s] hard and utilize[es] one's powers to a collective, social end for which a warrior is willing to sacrifice even his life."[33] Once she is reborn, Sailor Moon has her power from the Silver Crystal and the power of the Sailor Scouts and destroys Queen

Beryl with the help of Tuxedo Kamen, which takes all their power, and she dies again.[34] Sailor Moon is not fighting for "love" or "treasured things"; she is fighting to save the universe, which seems like a "collective social end." Additionally, the anime writers use the Silver Crystal to collectively empower the Sailor Scouts. When Usagi finds the Silver Crystal, she gains infinite power, which spreads to the other Sailor Scouts providing them with stronger attacks and weapons. In every season, Sailor Moon "powers up" and gains stronger attacks, and that power always spreads to the Sailor Scouts. Instead of the hero being overpowered as some male heroes are, like in *Dragonball* and *Dragonball Z*, Sailor Moon's power spreads to her friends making the group stronger for a collective end. Interestingly, Tuxedo Kamen never gains power from Sailor Moon or "powers up" in the series; he is a static character, which identifies girls as the ones who change and gain power from each other. Thus, the plotline of the manga and anime series blends the tropes and ideologies of both girls' country and boy's country with the elements of action, sacrifice, and friendship, rewriting gender stereotypes.

Furthermore, Sailor Moon's title, *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, alone blends gendered ideology. By titling the series *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, Takeuchi is playing with stereotypes and expectations by blending male and female ideas together. While "soldier" does not exclusively refer to males, the word connotes war, battles, fighters, and violence, which are traditionally entertainment genres marketed to men and boys. For example, in the 1980s and 1990s, the G.I. Joe was a popular toy and TV show directed at boys, making G.I. Joe the iconic American soldier at the time of *Sailor Moon*. In the 1990s DiC dubbing of *Sailor Moon*, the girls were called the "Sailor Scouts," instead of Sailor Soldiers, and in Kodansha Comics 2011 translation of the manga and in Viz Media's 2014 subtitling and dubbing of the anime for Hulu, they exchanged the

word “soldier” for the term “guardian” instead. In America, “soldier,” “scout,” and “guardian” are not synonymous. This deserves more research involving translation studies, but it seems a way to minimize the strength or power of the girls by calling them “scouts,” like the Girl Scouts, instead of “soldiers.” Scouts are observers and those who do reconnaissance, not the soldiers who are the warriors or fighters. Similarly, changing “soldier” to “guardian” has a similar effect, as “guardian” connotes a protector, not necessarily a fighter. By changing the word “soldier” to a less active/violent position like a scout or a guardian, the writers or adapters are arguably diminishing the impact and the non-heteronormativity of the pretty soldiers saving Tokyo on a weekly basis. To further make this point, Takeuchi calls them “pretty soldiers”, which combines traditional male and female tropes. They are soldiers, but they are also girls who look “pretty” while killing aliens and saving the universe. Calling the girls “pretty sailor soldiers” is a purposeful choice to blend stereotypical ideology for boys and girls, causing the boundaries of gender to be blurred as well.

Gender is not set in clear boundaries, and Usagi happily inhabits a space between feminine and masculine. Just as Saito Minako states that boys’ stories focus on justice, while girls’ stories focus on love, Sailor Moon’s tagline shows the blend of girls’ and boys’ countries. Using Lacanian psychoanalysis, Saito Tamaki theorizes that for the male viewer, the “beautiful fighting girl” represents a phallus.[35] The girl is beautiful but unaware of her own beauty, can fight the villains, and is completely unattainable. Takeuchi subverts this stereotype by having Sailor Moon know that she is attractive. When Sailor Moon transforms, she says, “I am the pretty guardian in a sailor suit! Guardian of love and justice! Sailor Moon.”[36] She is not looking for a man to call her beautiful, and she is controlling the narrative. By declaring herself a “pretty soldier” who

fights for love and justice, she is claiming herself an attractive soldier. “Pretty” and “soldier” seems to be a blending of male and female, and according to Saito, “love” is a female value, while “justice” is a male value. In declaring herself a “pretty soldier” and a “guardian of love and justice,” she is not allowing herself to be restricted by traditional gender expectations, showing that the shojo is more complex than assumed. Girls can be soldiers, fight for justice, use technology, and push the boundaries of what a shojo is. Sailor Moon celebrates her femininity and her masculine qualities as well, inhabiting an interstitial space between genders, which is one of the reasons why she is a positive role model for girls.

Homosocial Relationships

Sailor Moon defied shojo tropes in the 1990s by being, as Hemmann describes, “a rare oasis of female characters not defined by their attachment to men or involvement in romance.” [37] While *Sailor Moon* effectively blends and blurs female and male cultural ideology, interpersonal relationships and friendship, both homosocial and heterosocial, are highlights of the series. Ting and Borggreen both cite Japanese critics, artist Hagio Moto and art critic Matsui Midori respectively, who note that the shojo genre creates an ideal world for girls that is “subversively feminine”[38] and the source of “all female power hidden and untold.”[39] *Sailor Moon* does not hide where female power comes from, though; the source is homosocial relationships.

The shojo magical girl genre is appealing to both girls and boys due to the shonen-style action and the “transformativity” of the shojo. Orbaugh compares female action heroes, or as she calls them “battlin’ babes,” from 1990’s anime to Carol Clover’s “final girl” from 1970s and 1980s slasher films.[40] Her “busty battlin’ babes” are similar to the final girls who survive horror films with their typically gender-neutral names,

their sexual inactivity, their androgynous wardrobe and haircuts, and their level-headedness, which she claims helps male viewers associate with the lead character. However, there are battlin' babes, such as *Sailor Moon* and *Cutey Honey*, who are "extravagantly feminine"[41] and arguably celebrate their femininity.[42] Since the shojo is in between childhood and adulthood, Orbaugh argues that the shojo is "associated with liminality, transformativity, and irresponsibility," resulting in young male viewers identifying with the characters.[43] The magical girl in particular "can exemplify male and female characteristics" by being a fighter but also still a girl.[44] As a form of escapism, boys may find shojo characters appealing as they approach adulthood and social responsibility, and male viewers who feel trapped in their lives or social roles can live in a fantasy world of transformation in magical girl series like *Sailor Moon*. Allison expands on Orbaugh's argument, claiming that postindustrial Japan is characterized by feelings of isolation, and *Sailor Moon* presents a vision of Tokyo where friendships are in abundance. She argues that with the rise of capitalism, Japanese culture has become competitive and isolated, but *Sailor Moon* creates a space where capitalism and consumerism are highlighted with the image of the shojo; ultimately, however, friendship and interconnectedness win over competition and consumerism.[45]

Usagi is not the smartest, the bravest, the most agile, nor the most talented Sailor Scout; Usagi's superpower is kindness. She can befriend anyone, and often turns villains into her friends, such as with the Spectre Sisters in *Sailor Moon R*, who help her save the universe.[46] Furthermore, Sailor Mercury, Sailor Mars, Sailor Jupiter, and Sailor Venus only became friends with each other because of Usagi. Each girl is isolated from society for a different reason (Mercury because of her intelligence, Mars because she is a Shinto priestess with foresight abilities, Jupiter because she is tall and strong, Venus

because she is an international spy), but Usagi sees them for who they are inside and befriends them.[47] This offers an enticing story for any lonely readers and viewers, who might lack close, quality friends. And according to the critics above, culture is rampant with audiences who might feel disconnected. Therefore, in regards to significance, friendship surpasses all other values in the series since the Sailor Scouts cannot defeat their enemies alone and their strength comes from the love between each other.

Values, such as friendship and love, are crucial to the genre of shojo. While shojo manga began as a mostly male industry, the field is now dominated by female artists writing for girls with "a commitment to acknowledging the desires and agency of girls and women as well as theorizing a unique homosocial space for community and expression."[48] During the 1970s, shojo writers began altering manga conventions by incorporating extensive inner dialogue and focusing on emotion. The artists also started drawing montage-like, full- page layouts as well as flowery motifs on the panels. Male shojo writers mainly featured heteronormative romances, where the lead character did not have meaningful relationships with other girls.[49] As women started writing more, the shojo became celebrated as the "ideal girl" with virtues, such as innocence, purity, romantic longing, and the S relationship, which are brief romances between girls based on "spiritual" connections.[50] Ting states that shojo manga "shies away from depicting female sexual desire" and that it is "situated somewhere between performing in transgressive ways and reinforcing heteronormative standards," but this is where Sailor Moon deviates from the stereotypes of shojo.[51] The third season of *Sailor Moon* is called *Sailor Moon S*, which possibly means "super", as this is when Sailor Moon transforms into a more powerful version of herself with the Holy Grail, but this is also the season where Chibiusa, Sailor Moon's daughter from the future, begins her deep friendship

with Sailor Saturn, which fans theorize is romantic. Perhaps this could be an S relationship, and the title is referencing that. This is also the season that introduces Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune who are an openly queer couple deeply in love.[52] Within the fanbase, there are many "ships"[53] within the Sailor Scouts, such as Sailor Mercury x Sailor Jupiter and Sailor Mars x Sailor Venus, where fans believe that the girls have S relationships based on the intensity of feeling between them. *Sailor Moon* provides a queer space where fans can explore their own sexuality, which deserves more in-depth research.

As for the platonic friendships between the Sailor Scouts, episodes 45 to 46 of the anime, which were adapted by a male team, have a more feminist message than that of the original manga. The anime culminates with Sailor Moon confronting Queen Beryl in a final battle alone because Sailor Mercury, Sailor Mars, Sailor Venus, and Sailor Jupiter have all died in previous battles so Sailor Moon can get to this point. To call upon their help to defeat Queen Beryl, Sailor Moon thinks about her friendship with the Sailor Scouts and their beliefs in love, in order to find the power within herself to save the universe. Here, Sailor Moon calls upon the spirits of her dead friends, which is distinctly different from the male hero who often works alone. For example, there is a moving moment where she is scared because she is alone, but she imagines her friends' hands grabbing her own and she knows that they are spiritually with her. Conversely, in the manga, Tuxedo Kamen is standing behind her to support her, which is powerful in its own right because he is not acting for her but standing with her. Unlike the stereotypical princess story where the prince saves the princess, Tuxedo Kamen cannot defeat Queen Metalia, only Sailor Moon can with her Silver Crystal. He does not question how she is

fighting or try to take control of the situation; he stands beside her to lend her his power and supports her as much as he can.

However, the power of the female friendship in this scene is more moving and striking in the anime to viewers struggling with loneliness, isolation, and social pressures.[54] Sailor Moon then kills Queen Beryl, sacrificing her life as well, which, again, is the common trope of the male hero.[55] Since the anime is over 200 episodes long and the manga is only 60 chapters, the anime has time to explore the relationships and personalities of all the girls. In almost every episode in every season, the Sailor Scouts are only able to win against their enemies by working together, and the gender of their enemies does not matter. For example, in the first season, Queen Metalia and Queen Beryl are the main villains, but in *Sailor Moon R*, Wiseman and Prince Diamond are the villains. This is not a sign of weakness, though. The series celebrates female friendships and the strength that women can gain from each other. Unlike the lone hero common in boys' manga and anime, Sailor Moon gains strength and support from her female friendships instead of solely from her romantic partner.

The Sailor Suits

As a visual medium, how gender and sexuality are represented in both the *Sailor Moon* manga and anime is significant. Within feminist, gender, and pop culture studies, the importance of varied and nuanced representation has been reiterated repeatedly. According to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, the body appears to be a "passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as 'external' to that body," but in fact, "gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real."[56] Ideology shows men and women how to perform their gender. Furthermore, Susan Bordo states in "Unbearable Weight" that people are shown "what clothes, body

shape, facial expression, movements, and behaviors are required" to embody a particular gender, and media is one of the places where that ideology is diffused.[57] Sally McLaren agrees, noting that "[g]endered media messages, which include stereotypical and highly stylised normative images of femininities and masculinities, are ingrained in daily life,"[58] and Borggreen similarly argues that visual culture, which includes manga and anime, has real effects on viewers and consumers.[59] Thus, how gender and sexuality are portrayed in media and visual culture have real-life implications. They show people how to act in a culturally appropriate way according to their assigned gender. *Sailor Moon* is significant, here, then, because it is a prominent cultural artifact; thus, it is a conduit through which ideology is shared and shaped. McLaren argues that the way "characteristics of media-saturated Japan" interact with culture is damaging in ways that negatively affect women and those who identify as gender and sexually queer.[60] Within media, "patterns of marginalization, trivialization, and stereotyping" of women perpetuates gender inequality within.[61] *Sailor Moon*, then, could either support or undermine those negative patterns. I argue that it subverts those patterns through its nuanced representation of gender and gender norms.

Since much cultural ideology deals with gender and clothing, the uniforms in the series are important in this conversation. Thus, Sailor Moon's sailor suit is one of the most difficult aspects of the series to dissect, particularly because sailor school uniforms have a place within otaku culture as an object of fetishization. Heterosexual male anime and manga fans, called otaku, are stereotypically portrayed as obsessed men who sexually fetishize women and girls.[62] Otaku are assumed to be characterized by moe, a term used to describe "affection and possibly sexual arousal felt for fictional characters."[63] Moe aspects can be how the character is designed, but it can also be found

in the settings, the sounds of the characters, plot elements, or even the "curves of a figurine."[64] Anime and manga are filled with popular tropes that could support moe, such as maid costumes, glasses, Lolita fashion, animal hybrids, and, most importantly, the schoolgirl uniform. While some believe sexual attraction to a cartoon is perverted and deviant, Ting argues anime and manga create a space for this queer sexuality.[65] For the otaku though, moe can take on aspects of misogyny to subjugate female characters. The Sailor Scouts mostly wear their sailor suits and their sailor school uniforms throughout the series, which places the characters in a position to be objectified by readers/viewers.

Most critics tend to focus on the male gaze of male viewers and male creators.[66] As previously noted, Saito Tamaki theorizes that for the otaku, the "beautiful fighting girl" represents a phallus, who is the unobtainable object of his desire [67] She only exists as his fantasy and as his escape from everyday life. As referenced earlier, Orbaugh briefly notes that female viewers also perceive the beautiful fighting girl as an unobtainable goal for girls.[68] For male creators, Ting claims that strong female characters do not exist to serve their own agendas but to enhance the gratification of their (mostly) male creators. Thus, when written by men, the shojo is both the object of male desire and the Other that will disrupt family life and, in a more melodramatic perspective, the entire country of Japan.[69] Neither she nor Orbaugh, however, examine how the beautiful fighting girl exists to the female creator, but Ting does claim that the space exists for female authors to explore desires and agency.[70] It seems, then, that since *Sailor Moon* was written by a woman, the beautiful fighting girl has a different position in the narrative, but as the anime was adapted by men, there are layers of complications to the anime.

Before analyzing *Sailor Moon*'s sailor suits, I want to note Hemmann's argument about the importance of the female gaze in manga and anime. As a young girl who devoured the *Sailor Moon* anime, I was watching the show through a female gaze. This is important because, as Hemmann argues, consuming media created by women for women/girls that celebrates teenaged lives and sexuality can subvert patriarchal, misogynistic stereotypes. The shojo genre is appealing for its fantasy escapism and for its "self-reflexive enjoyment of being young, beautiful, magical, and sexually aware." [71] The Laura Mulvey-defined "male gaze" loses some of its power when women are drawing for women/girls.[72] The female gaze, Hemmann argues, "directly challenges the hegemony of the male otaku fan as a model of narrative production and consumption in contemporary Japan," which she thoroughly explains as the way companies produce media.[73] Hemmann is saying that feminist critics are giving the male gaze more power than it deserves when we assume that the female gaze is just women's way of internalizing the male gaze and identifying with male characters and viewers when objectifying female characters.[74] Since Sailor Moon was created by a woman for girls/women, Hemmann suggests that the male gaze is not as important when evaluating the series. Instead, she is suggesting that the female gaze is a way for female creators and viewers to celebrate teenaged bodies and "sexuality that lies outside of misogynistic stereotypes regarding femininity." [75] Male and female viewers will always objectify male and female characters, but I am arguing, as a female consumer of the series, the uniforms and sailor suits do not have to be a patriarchal tool to objectify the girls.

The male creators for the anime did add one aspect that has been criticized for objectifying the Sailor Scouts that should be discussed. As part of the bishojo hiro

(beautiful girl heroes) sub-genre, the girls use magic to transform into their sailor suits. The manga does not include transformation sequences, but in the anime, the transformations show the girls temporarily naked before gaining a new uniform. When nude, only their silhouettes are visible until they are fully clothed in the uniform, gloves, and shoes, but Allison cites Fujimoto Yukari, editor and shojo manga scholar, who criticizes the Sailor Scouts' transformations as "exciting" and "obscene" (inbi).[76] The transformation sequence is one of the changes made by male artists that is arguably not empowering and supports Ting's and Allison's critiques about shojo manga and anime created by male authors. While it may be a way for them to gratify their own sexual pleasure, the transformation sequences possibly served a second purpose. The anime was hand drawn, so by recycling the transformation sequence for each scout every episode, the artists could produce episodes quicker. Either way, the transformation sequences may be viewed as the male gaze exploiting their bodies.

However, the sailor suits that the Sailor Scouts transform into have also received some critique. Male heroes, like Kamen Rider, transform into a uniform with helmets and technology to fight villains. Unlike male heroes, Allison argues that "girl heroes tend to strip down in the course of empowerment, becoming more, rather than less, identified by their flesh."[77] In "Busty Battlin' Babes," Orbaugh analyzes magical girl series, such as the popular male-created *Cutey Honey*[78] and Takeuchi's *Sailor Moon*, and comments on how the magical girls are sexualized for the pleasure of the male gaze. She neglects to address the gender of Takeuchi and its influence the content and the (fe)male gaze.

For example on the Blu-Ray cover of the 2004 season of *Re:Cutie Honey* (Figure 7), Cutey Honey is posing with much of her breasts, midriff, and hips exposed, and her

curvy body shape looks more like an adult woman than a teenager. To the right of her naked body is her in her human disguise with blond hair, a low-cut white cropped top, and a miniskirt. Behind her is her post-transformation uniform, which is a revealing bodysuit with cut-outs and straps. *Cutey Honey* seems to align with Ting, Allison, Orbaugh's assertions that shojo characters drawn by men are not empowering for female viewers.

Conversely, on the cover of the 2011 *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon* manga (Figure 8), Sailor Moon is standing in her signature pose after her transformation. Her body is thinner and more like young girl's than Cutey Honey's body. In her miniskirt, her legs are exposed, but her breasts and torso are covered by her sailor suit. Allison argues that Sailor Moon is a sex icon with her short skirt, "cleavage," and long blond hair "that feeds and is fed by a general trend in Japan toward the infantilization of female sex objects."[79]

Figure 7. The cover of the 2004 season of *Cutie Honey*. Photo by asushinmisakaji. https://www.themoviedb.org/tv/95736-re?language=en-US

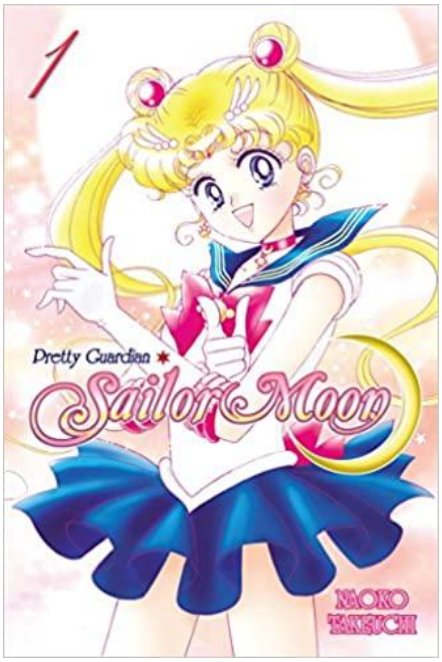

Figure 8. Cover of the 2011 *Sailor Moon* manga. Art by Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2011).

Sailor Moon may be a sex icon, but it is clear that Sailor Moon's teenaged body is not presented the same way as a magical girl drawn by the male artists of *Cutey Honey*. Hemmann makes the strong argument that "[s]hallow characterization and short skirts alone, however, do not make a work inherently sexist." [80] I argue that the female artist, Takeuchi, created a series where the female gaze empowers female artists and viewers by celebrating the female body in cute uniforms. Clothing and fashion become an empowering artifact for female readers/viewers.

Fashion is a major aspect of the *Sailor Moon* series, and the Sailor Scouts appreciate cute fashion and female beauty. When Usagi meets Sailor Jupiter, she notices her delicate rose earrings, and when she meets Sailor Mars, she comments on her striking beauty. Usagi uses the Disguise Pen to play pretend with fashion and different careers. Fashion and aesthetics extend to their sailor suits, which are stylized versions of a Japanese sailor school uniform. The sailor school uniform can be problematic and fetishized in manga and anime. Allison argues that the sailor uniform identifies the Sailor Scouts as sex objects for male and female viewers to lust after, as the uniform is used in society to project a "nymphet effect" in pornography and sex culture, where schoolgirls are engaging in "assisted dating" with businessmen.[81] However, Sailor Moon uses the sailor suit to be an object of female empowerment.

In *Manga Culture and the Female Gaze*, Hemmann cites fans who have found the sailor suits as an "empowering symbol of youthful femininity." [82] If manga and anime are a place of fantasy, by placing Sailor Moon's power in everyday object, fans are able to bring the fantasy closer to reality. It is important to remember that Usagi is a girl who wears a sailor uniform to school, and the series is aimed at girls who most likely wear a sailor uniform to school. Usagi's sailor suit is a version of her school uniform

with a similar color scheme (Figure 9). Like Usagi using the Disguise Pen to "play pretend" and gain courage from an outfit, female viewers are able to imagine that their school uniform can become a superhero costume, thereby the sailor school uniform becomes an object of power.

Figure 9. Comparison of Usagi's school uniform to her sailor suit. The image is from *Sailor Moon Crystal*, but the art is based on the manga. Note the similar color scheme, the bow, and the sailor collar. Image by DuchessDream, *SMC Sailor Moon Usagi Tsukino S1-2.Png*, (*Sailor Moon Wiki*, 2021). https://sailormoon.fandom.com/wiki/Usagi_Tsukino_/_Sailor_Moon_(Crystal) .

Conclusion

As previously stated, we are currently in the 4th wave of magical girls' series, and *Sailor Moon* has been accused of being outdated. Since the early 1990s, *Sailor Moon* has remained a popular manga and anime and is still relevant as a feminist, queer text. Usagi subverts the stereotype of the shojo by being a superhero who is still a clumsy teenaged girl; furthermore, she does not allow herself to be defined by societal expectations for girls. *Sailor Moon*, the series and the character, are not confined by gender, inhabiting the liminal space between male and female. Sailor Moon claims the narrative as the "pretty soldier" who fights for love and justice. The series similarly

blends male and female tropes, specifically science and technology, expanding the definition of what a shojo series is. Even though there is romance in the series, Usagi's romance and boyfriend are not the sources of her strength; her homosocial friendships take prominence, especially in the anime. Finally, the visual representation of the teenaged body and sexuality through the wearing of the sailor suit is not inherently sexist or fetishized due to the female gaze. Girls can celebrate their sexuality and bodies as Sailor Moon does when she decides to change into her sailor uniform. And just as Usagi's ordinariness is what makes her an admirable main character, the ordinariness of using a sailor school uniform as a model for the sailor suit allows female viewers to imagine that their school uniform can become a superhero's suit. Just as Sailor Moon controls the narrative by calling herself "pretty" and a "soldier," girls reading the manga and watching the show can find their strength through a girl just like them to reclaim their own narrative and declare who they are or who they want to be.

Notes

[1] Saito Tamaki, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, trans. J. Keith Vincent and Dawn Lawson (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 170-172.

[2] Sharalyn Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, edited by Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 227. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvvn1gr.15.

[3] Shojo can refer to a girl, typically in her teens, or it refers to texts that are marketed for girls.

[4] Kathryn Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 1st ed., (Cham: Springer International Publishing), 2020.

[5] Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 6.

[6] Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 6.

[7] Alexis Ada Rangell-Onwuegbuzia, "'Breakable Human Bodies': A Fourth Wave of the Mahō Shōjo" (presentation, Southwest Popular/American Culture Association 43rd Annual Conference, Albuquerque, NM, February 23-16, 2022).

[8] Most of the scholarship about *Sailor Moon* focuses on the lesbian relationship between Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune. Their relationship and Sailor Uranus' gender identity are important, but it was outside of the scope of this paper as I wanted to focus on other aspects of *Sailor Moon* that might have not been written about. For more about Sailor Uranus or Sailor Neptune see Diana Burgos "The Queer Glow up of Hero-Sword Legacies in She-Ra, Korra, and Sailor Moon" in *Open Cultural Studies* and Catherine E. Bailey "Prince Charming by Day, Superheroine by Night? Subversive Sexualities and Gender Fluidity in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Sailor Moon*" in *Colloquy: Text, Theory, Critique*.

[9] Grace En-Yi Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, edited by Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 317. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.4324/9781315179582

[10] Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 311.

[11] Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 311-12.

[12] Gunhild Borggreen, "Gender and Visual Culture," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, edited by Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 333. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/10.4324/9781315179582

[13] Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 2006.

[14] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 135.

[15] Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 227.

[16] Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2011), 110.

[17] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 135.

[18] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 131.

[19] Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 226.

[20] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 135.

[21] Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 3,* (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2012), 116.

[22] I am using Kodansha Comics' 2011 translation of *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, where the translation may differ from previous translations of the manga and translations in the anime. Typically, the sentiment is consistent across translations and subtitles, excluding the Canadian DiC Entertainment dubbing of *Sailor Moon*.

[23] Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, 37-38.
[24] Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, 49-50.
[25] Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 27.
[26] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 128.
[27] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 137.
[28] Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 216.
[29] Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 6.
[30] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 137.
[31] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 142.
[32] Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 3*, 52-116.
[33] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 137.
[34] Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 3*, 52-116.
[35] Tamaki, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, 170-172.
[36] Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*, 35.
[37] Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 28.
[38] Borggreen, "Gender and Visual Culture," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 337.
[39] Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 315.
[40] Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 219.
[41] Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, 219.
[42] Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 18.
[43] Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," 225.
[44] Orbaugh, "Busty Battlin' Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture," 225.
[45] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 142.
[46] Toei Animation, *Bishōjo Senshi, Sailor Moon R*, TV Asahi, 1993.
[47] Takeuchi, *Pretty Guardian: Sailor Moon 1*.
[48] Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 314.
[49] Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 30.
[50] Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 314.
[51] Ting, "Gender, Manga, and Anime," *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, 315.
[52] The relationship between Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune was whitewashed into cousins in the DiC anime dubbing of *Sailor Moon* in the 1990s.
[53] "Ships" is internet term for "relationships," where fans pair up couples in media that may not be cannon. Fans express ships by placing an "x" in between the names of the two characters who they ship, such as Chibiusa x Sailor Saturn. Often ships are explored in fan art and fan fiction.
[54] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 142; Hemmann, *Manga Cultures and the Female Gaze*, 225.
[55] Toei Animation, *Bishōjo Senshi, Sailor Moon*, TV Asahi, 1992. 2378, 2376
[56] Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch, William E. Cain, Laurie A. Finke, John McGowan, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Jeffrey J. Williams, 3rd ed., (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2018), 2378, 2376.
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[67] Tamaki, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, 170-172.
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[76] Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, 135.
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Plot Patterns in Manga Based on Propp's Narratological Elements

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Abstract: This article considers how Vladimir Propp's structuralist approach to narratological elements can also be applied to the narrative strategies of manga. Through a generalization of Propp's scheme, an in-depth explanation of how these elements interact with one another, and the addition of new functions where needed, this work demonstrates that these categories are functional for the study of plot patterns found in manga. Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* has been chosen as a basis for this study not only because of the particular versatility and adaptability that it possesses, but also because as Propp himself states, his work may also be applied to genres beyond folk tales: manga proves a particularly apt demonstration because most such works are similarly addressed to a younger demographic. For the purpose of this project, most of the examples provided derive from *shônen* manga, in order to provide for a clearer and singular point of analysis, rather than comparing manga subgenres too. In undertaking this analysis, the work also strives to emphasize that there is room for critical analysis in manga, not purely as a visual medium, but also as a literary one. An analytical approach, such as Propp's framework makes possible, thus becomes a valuable means of discussing this rich body of work.

Keywords: Comparative analysis, formalism, manga, narrative arcs, narratological elements, Vladimir Propp

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Introduction

The purpose of this work is to analyze the narratological aspects of Japanese manga, particularly focusing on their use of certain comparable plot points. To do so, this work uses Vladimir Propp's elements and his work on folk tales as a basis for comparison and primarily focuses on examples of *shônen* manga for this preliminary discussion. For the purpose of this research, said term will be used mainly – and admittedly, technically improperly – to indicate a genre, one that may be also called "battle manga"; to clarify, *shônen* in its most proper translation does not actually refer to a type of manga but rather to the demographic of readers (i.e., young teen males between 12 and 18), even if it is often used this way.

The expected result of this analysis is that a generalization of Propp's indicated elements will provide a scheme that will encompass most, if not all, narratological elements in *shônen* manga. The final objective is hence to delineate a new type of scheme, using Propp's work as a basis and either modifying certain elements or creating others *ad hoc* when needed; with this newly revised scheme, it will be possible to better and more formally analyze the development of manga plots. Various examples from manga will be provided to exemplify the narratological aspects being named and expounded on. Future work may also consider how the criteria of the narratological scheme could also be applied to the study of more purely visual forms, especially when considering that in recent decades most anime based on manga follow a more step-by-step serialization of the original source material.

The inspiration for this type of approach, combining a scholar such as Propp and cross-referencing his work on the Russian folktale with Japanese manga, derives from Marcello Ghilardi's argument that:

> The comic strip (manga in this case), is to be interpreted as a point of encounter, a terrain that has to be discovered, a place of intertwined

> dialogue. It represents a cultural crossover, of stylistic and integrative exercise, and a usage of points of view that complete one another because isolated would not be able to render the object in its entirety. Japan, as any other cultural reality, is never an object that may be observed neutrally or dissected with scientific method.[1]

Despite other points of difference, the cultural crossover and the point of encounter of an intertwined dialogue that Ghilardi mentions here can also serve as a reminder regarding the nature of this work. That is, this project will strive to bridge two different cultures and branches of knowledge and strive to demonstrate that, although divided by geographical and temporal boundaries, they in fact share many productive similarities. A certain validation of such an approach is also provided by Alan Dundes' statement when utilizing Propp's elements to analyze yet another genre:

> clearly, the game of "Old Witch" contains a number of Propp's functions and, in one sense, the game appears to be a dramatized folktale. Moreover the "Old Witch" game bears a superficial resemblance to the Aarne-Thompson tale type 123, "The Wolf and the Kids." But what is important here is that the morphological analysis of folktales appears to apply equally well to another genre of folklore —traditional games, thereby providing further confirmation of the validity of Propp's analysis.[2]

A final encouragement for the ambitious work undertaken here derives directly from Propp's own words, as he states upfront that "non-fairy tales may also be constructed according to the scheme cited. Quite a large number of legends, individual tales about animals, and isolated novellas display the same structure."[3] While Propp's statement here encompasses only a small portion of other narrative genres, this research will attempt to go beyond said boundaries and demonstrate the continued versatility of Propp's work.

Brief annotations on Vladimir Propp

Before beginning, it should also be noted that Propp's work is not an isolated case; indeed, it draws heavily from Russian Formalism and this movement's particular interest. Russian Formalists, such as Propp and his peers, attempted to demonstrate the presence of a common scheme throughout a vast majority of novels and written works in literature, despite some of these works being considered groundbreaking. By doing so, Russian Formalists partly undermined the importance of the author, since they shifted their attention from the novelist to the text itself. By analyzing literary works through a more scientific method, less importance was given to the significance of who wrote the texts; more importantly, even a masterpiece was seen as an elaborate scheme of motifs and elements. The importance of Formalists derives from the desire to break a traditional and established method used by other literary critics and to approach literature form a different perspective, basing their analysis on categorization and on the denial of everything else except the form. From this particular perspective, the implication is that every literary work may be placed in a certain category, and by extension, that perhaps it should be.

Building from this precedent, the present work focuses on locating and discussing the formal connections among various manga and the iterations of certain narratological patterns therein. While manga are more frequently considered closer to a form of visual representation rather than literature, this may be a mere preconception; for instance, we might consider Italian Futurism, where written words were intertwined with graphical art even outside of regular sentence patterns. Examples such as this demonstrate that a truly clear-cut distinction can be difficult to be made. Thus, by focusing on manga, the present work highlights how different forms of art – which also contain written text – may be considered part of literature

or studied accordingly, despite differing purpose(s) or varying 'quality,' as this nebulous term is thrown around. Following this reasoning, this research considers whether and how manga can be considered a form of literature, and therefore Propp's Russian Formalist scheme may be applied to several indicative texts.

Also worth noting is how, upon preparing his research, Propp begins with something like a literature review: noticing a severe lack of logical order in the contemporaneous study of folk tales, he opens his *Morphology* by quoting various studies and pointing out why they are not satisfactory. For instance, Wilhelm Wundt (*Völkerpsychologie*) subdivided the folk tale into seven classes; however, Propp poses objections to this approach given the way Wundt employed semantics and the fact that categories and themes were tangled together. Likewise, Vólkov's studies indicated fifteen themes but to Propp these were not scientific and functioned more like an index; on a similar note, he considers Antti Aarne's analysis as meant to be merely a geo-ethnographically index. Overall, Propp notes the common issue that themes are often intertwined with one another, and also that even the simple definition of "theme" is perceived both in a broad sense and as an indefinite concept. To Propp, this is a foundational issue, since "if a division into categories is unsuccessful, the division according to theme leads to total chaos."[4] Veselóvskij's work on the *motif* as the "simplest narrative unit" and Bédier's analysis of the folk tale constants (or elements) he considers more useful to his research. In the first case, though, Propp's main objection is that the motif could have been reduced to a mere sentence, and for the second, he maintains that it was hard to separate the elements and pinpoint what they were. Despite their other shortcomings, though, Propp still names these two scholars as historians of the folk tale and acknowledges that they helped lay the foundation for his own work.

Still, in the absence of a truly satisfactory approach, Propp emphasizes the need for an accurate and rigorous classification of the folk tale. He notices how up until that moment, classification constituted the beginning of the research and that it was subsequently forced on existing material; his solution is to reverse what he saw as a problematic process, instead starting with the study of source material and then establishing a classification schema from there. His main difficulty then becomes the choice of said material; for instance, in their *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, Bolte and Polívka indicate a list of more than a thousand variants of folk tales known in the world[5]. Given this challenge, Propp chooses to confine his study to one hundred Russian folk tales out of the four hundred texts that Aleksandr Afanás'ev had gathered and published in his *Rússkie naródnye skázki* between 1855 and 1864: specifically, he chooses the range from tale 50 to tale 151. In making this selection, Propp reports, he was not interested in the quantity of the material so much as in the quality of the analysis made possible by it.

If for Propp a larger quantity of folk tales became problematic, then for a research regarding manga this difficulty increases tenfold, especially considering that this is a medium in constant evolution and new works are published continuously. To give an estimate and a limited sense of scope: in 2013 manga in Japan held a market share of one third of the printed publications, with 276 manga magazines[6]; these magazines are the serialization on a weekly or monthly basis of graphic narratives, many of which also have their own individual *tankôbon* (volume) editions. As of 2020, there are 172 manga series that span for more than 40 *tankôbons;* each one of these volumes is on average two hundred pages long. In addition to these, there is also an overwhelming quantity of manga only serialized for several volumes, manga that are meant to be *one-shots* (works published as stand-alone stories) and manga

that have ended by this point but that have historically defined manga as a genre (i.e., authors such as Osamu Tezuka and Go Nagai).

For the purpose of this work, then – and similarly to Propp's approach – the research will employ several major manga titles of the specific genre previously mentioned as examples. The main difference between this project and Propp's will be constituted by the fact that instead of creating a narratological scheme *ex novo*, this article will use Propp's research as a basis and focus more on adjusting functions or even suggesting new ones when needed.

Propp's elements applied to manga

One preliminary observation to be made when cross-referencing the vast quantity of manga with Propp's studies is to define what the narratological whole consist of – and hence, what the object of the analysis will be. While in the case of folk tales it may seem that the story itself comprises the nucleus that will be studied, Propp actually has a minor reservation on the topic. In his own words,

> many tales are composed of two series of functions which may be labelled "moves". A new villainous act creates a new "move," and in this manner, sometimes a whole series of tales combine into a single tale. Nevertheless, the process of development which will be described below does constitute the continuation of a given tale, although it also creates a new move. In connection with this, one must eventually ask how to distinguish the number of tales in each text.[7]

In other words, Propp indicates that a complete narrative may be divided into smaller whole stories and those will be subsequently analyzed in a separate manner. A similar difficulty arises when dealing with manga, where it is possible to find stories that evolve for many volumes, have different subplots, feature flashbacks and flash-forwards, and follow different characters. Nevertheless, many such manga – and especially *shônen* – also follow a certain pattern wherein the series is divided into sagas or narrative arcs. Due to these characteristics of manga, the narrative arc

will hence serve as the constituent narrative unit considered in this analytical approach.

A further important clarification to be made here relies upon the fact that folk tales are usually centered around a single protagonist, thus enabling Propp to analyze the tale's hero as an individual. While this may also occur in manga, though, it is more frequent that such texts feature a larger cast of protagonists. In these cases, the collective group acts similar to how an individual fairy-tale protagonist would, such as following a set adventure or storyline; even in the cases where the main characters are separated, in the majority of scenarios they will then regroup for the next phase of the story. With this in mind, we may note that Propp's elements follow the same principle and thus they can still be applied to such a group rather than just to an individual; this creates an overlapping effect where the same function is applied to all of the main characters rather than just the individual, as shall be explained subsequently.

One feature that Propp did not include in his study, but that is recurrent both in fables and also in literature in general, is the uniqueness of the main character; while subtler in folklore, this could be represented by the hero's strength or determination, and as such, does not have a direct impact in Propp's elements. In manga, however, this feature is much more easily recognizable. The manga's main character has either a willpower that is greater than that of the other protagonists or else the strength of determination to surpass the obstacles they have to face; such is the case of Goku's power level in *Dragon Ball*[8], Ichigo's spiritual pressure in *Bleach*[9], and Naruto's charisma in the homonymous series[10], to quote but a few. These traits usually have an appealing effect not only on the secondary characters, but also on the antagonists in certain cases, and to some extent, even on the reader. Considering

their recursivity for the purpose of this article, this intrinsic characteristic will create a new element; this ad hoc added function will be referred to as "untapped potential." It is a quality that the main character possesses and either learns how to use or "taps into it" only under particular circumstances, and this project will expound upon it in further detail later, alongside several other elements. It should be also noted that these changes and addendums were made with the intent of adjusting to the modernizing context in which manga take place, thus serving to separate it from the different historical and cultural environment in which the Russian Formalist movement originated.

The following section of this work will focus on each of the elements that Propp indicated, providing examples taken from particularly recognizable *shônen* manga; a summary of these elements is provided at the end of the article (see *Appendix 1*)[11]. The designation of the functions that Propp originally provided shall be maintained for clarity and immediacy except in instances where alterations are needed; for the purpose of immediacy, an apex letter shall be used associated with the modified function (i.e. **A** becomes $\mathbf{A^M}$) in order to highlight the elements that have needed adjustments. The following paragraphs will hence begin with the designation of the element, followed by its description and further explanations and examples. The name of the series will be mentioned in parentheses and a list of the manga mentioned will be provided in an appendix at the end.

Elements in manga

Designation α – this represents the initial situation and for Propp at least, it does not constitute an element.

While it is less common for folk tales, it is useful to underline that manga may start *in medias res* and this may impact the resulting scheme. There are, however, examples where that *in medias res* beginning is functional only to introduce the character and the subsequent flashback constitutes the beginning of the first narrative arc on its own[12].

Designation β – a member of the family or known to the protagonist absents themselves.

Propp also notes that the loss of a family member is also counted as a particular type of departure. This element may constitute a motivation for the hero of the folktale, whereas in manga this is not necessarily the case. For instance, the departure of the father in *Fullmetal Alchemist*[13] is an important plot point mentioned in the beginning of the story, whereas the death of Naruto's parents is explained later on[14].

Designation γ – an interdiction is addressed to the protagonist.

Unmistakable examples of this element include Naruto being told not to read the Scroll of Seals[15], Luffy being told not to eat the Devil Fruit[16] and the taboo of Human Transmutation in alchemy[17]; these instances also represent an important plot point for the development of the character. The interdiction may also be given in form of an admonition.

Designation δ – the interdiction is violated.

In every one of the examples mentioned in the previous element, the interdiction or warning was not regarded, resulting in a drastic change for the protagonist; this function is vastly recursive.

Designation ε – the antagonist makes an attempt at reconnaissance.

One example of this is Raditz who arrives on Earth before Vegeta and investigates on the threats of the planet before preparing the invasion[18]. In another instance, Itachi Uchiha and Kisame Hoshigaki, on behalf of the Akatsuki, go on a reconnaissance mission in the Hidden Leaf Village long before trying to capture Naruto[19].

Designation ζ – the antagonist receives information about his victim.

This element is connected with the previous one as well as the two that follow. Since they are closely intertwined, they usually work as a group of functions rather than isolated ones.

Designation η – the antagonist attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings.

Likewise, this element is closely connected with those before and after it.

Designation θ – the victim submits to deception and unwittingly helps his enemy.

A helpful example of the three previous elements derives from the first volume of *Naruto*: Mizuki knows about Naruto's need of approval (designation ζ), and he then tricks Naruto into thinking that the Sacred Scrolls contain useful and important techniques (designation η). Naruto end up believing Mizuki, who only wanted them for himself all along (designation θ).

Designation A^M – the antagonist causes harm to a member of the family or someone who is intertwined with the protagonist.

An example may be Raditz forcefully kidnaping Gohan[20]. In a broader sense, the family may also be considered as the people the protagonist holds dear; a clear application of this amplified meaning can be seen in *Naruto* when Orochimaru attacks Hidden Leaf Village[21].

Designation B^{M} – misfortune, lack, or personal ambition is made known.

In *shônen* this lack may also be of a physical nature. In *Dragon Ball,* Goku frequently faces antagonists that overpower him; in other words, he lacks the strength to defeat them. The solution to overcome such a difference in power level becomes training. In these cases, the solution is personal training, as it will be explained with designation D.

Propp also suggests that in this function, a solution for the lack is also provided; in manga, this solution coincides better with designation D, the test or training. However, it is important to divide this from a task that is given to the protagonist, which in fact will be interpreted as a lack, or something he has not done yet. Propp also distinguishes the heroes as one of two types. This categorization has been eliminated, given the generalizing nature of this work; as such, Propp's designation C has been also removed given that it refers to "seeker-heroes" and is superfluous.

The words "personal ambition" have been added to Propp's design because this concept represents a goal that the main character sets for themselves, and as such, it may also be interpreted as a lack. It marks the passage from the internal dimension of the character to the external one of the story, and as such it has a central importance. For example, in the cases of Luffy and Naruto, they want to become respectively the king of the pirates and the Hokage, whereas Goku simply wants to become stronger.

Designation ↑ – the protagonist departs.

While this is more common in folk tales given their nature, in manga this is not always the case. However, the departure can be also be interpreted in a metaphorical way, hence the beginning of any type of journey.

Designation D^M – the protagonist is put to the test or undergoes training.

This constitutes the preparation for acquiring the power-up. In manga, this type of test is frequently used to verify the capabilities or determination of the main character; sometimes this results in acquiring a physical object, but more often it results in training or a type of aid. For instance, to inherit All Might's power Izuku Midoriya must clean a large amount of garbage in an allotted period of time and by doing so, All Might decides to become his mentor[22]. Similarly, Kakashi Hatake decides to become the leader of Squad 7 only after putting the combined abilities of three members of the group to the test[23]; here the element of trial is still present, although the function of magical agent or power-up is lacking. For the purpose of generalization, this scheme assumes that if the trial function is accomplished, even if the second part may be lacking, it could also translate to a more symbolical dimension: in *Naruto,* for instance, this would mean that forming Team 7 is sufficient.

Other examples of personal training or preparation for acquiring a power-up include Goku training on King Kai's planet or in the hyperbolic time chamber[24], Ichigo Kurosaki regaining his powers before entering the Soul Society[25], and Luffy training for two years with Rayleigh[26].

Designation F^M – the protagonist acquires the power-up.

As previously mentioned, the power-up may in fact be an object – much like in the folk tales Propp analyzed – but more frequent than not in manga, it stems either

from training or directly through a fight with the antagonist. Examples of this include Goku ending his training in the hyperbolic time chamber[27] or Luffy learning to use *haki* after two years[28]. Acquiring the power-up is not necessarily subordinated to the previous designation, as it may be the result of the untapped potential of the main character, such as when Luffy uses the Second or Third Gear[29].

Designation Up^{M} – the protagonists' untapped potential.

As previously explained, the protagonist may have a personal feat that is translated into physical strength, charisma, intelligence, or any other outstanding quality that surpasses those of the other characters. In certain situations, this element will function as a turning point, either to face an antagonist or surmount an obstacle. This feat has subtle differences from its counterpart, the acquiring of a power-up (F). Although in many cases they function together, one important point of divergence might be considered the fact that where the power-up is a consequence, either of a donor or of personal training, the untapped potential is intrinsic to the character. In certain cases, it is through the untapped potential that the power-up stems from within the main character.

Designation Con^{M} – the consequences of the untapped potential.

As its superscript indicates, this is another element that has been added to Propp's scheme and that does not appear in folk tales. Frequently in manga, the untapped potential or the use of an ability that the protagonist possesses also take a physical or mental toll. This may be seen, for instance, in the case of Izuku Midoriya, where the usage of his ability hinders parts of his body[30], or in the case of in the case of Naruto, who may be possessed by the Nine-Tails if he uses too much of its chakra. It is also recurrent that the consequence is known by the protagonist, who usually is reluctant to use said technique or ability because of it. Due to these characters, this

element also leads to further development of the plot and gives a deeper insight into the protagonist's mindset.

Designation G^{M} – the protagonist is transferred, delivered, or led elsewhere.

It could be argued that the element of journey is more important in manga than in folk tales; whether or not that is taken, though, it is still important to underline that in this case the transferal derives from an external force or character. The distinction here is that in most cases this element occurs in the middle of the action, whereas the departure element (designation ↑) is easier to find in the first or final stages of the narrative arc of a folk tale. In *shônen* the object of search may also coincide with the location of the antagonist.

There are examples where this relocation serves the plot and is not correlated with the object of search, as Propp had pointed out. One such instance may be considered when Bartholomew Kuma protects the *One Piece*[31] protagonists by sending them all off in different directions.

Designation H – the protagonist and the antagonist join in direct combat.

This element is central in all battle manga, although it may be also found in other genres in a more metaphorical form.

Designation Hp^{M} – one of the protagonists has a fight with the main character.

This added element is more unique than simple combat between the two opposing parts of the story, since it features a fight between two or more protagonists who were previously on the same side. Usually it represents an instance that serves to enrich the plot and show the dynamic of the cast of main characters. It rarely divides the group of protagonists, such as when Usopp fights Luffy because of their unrepairable ship[32], but it may also create a breaking point where a new antagonist is

created; a partial example of the latter could be considered Sasuke's departure from the Hidden Leaf Village[33].

Designation J – the protagonist is branded.

The brand or mark may be in fact physical, as in the case of Guts being marked with the Brand of Sacrifice[34] or Naruto having the Eight Trigram Seal placed on him at birth[35]. It may also be less visible, as for instance in the case of Edward Elric who sees The Gate of Truth upon attempting forbidden alchemy[36]; his brand will manifest as the ability to perform alchemy without using a transmutation circle.

A more metaphorical branding can be extrapolated from the consequences of a certain action on behalf of the main character; in many cases this is a consequence of violating the interdiction element previously explained (δ). For example, this becomes clear upon considering Luffy eating the Devil Fruit[37]; his "brand" as such becomes not being able to swim.

Designation I – the antagonist is defeated.

This is a counterpart of function H. However, it is also important to reiterate that this confrontation is not represented exclusively by battles. The defeat of the antagonist may not always happen, and in fact it may provide a forking path in the analysis of the narrative structure of the manga. This may result in a repetition of the element of lack (B), for instance if the main protagonist not being strong enough to face the antagonist, and in turn this could lead to a cyclicality of the previous elements of training and power-up (D - F). In some cases, this might also coincide with the ending of a narrative arc and the beginning of a new one. One such example may be found in the Golden Age arc in *Berserk*[38], where the protagonist is defeated by Griffith.

Designation K – the initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.

In *shônen* manga, this element coincides with the defeat of the antagonist because of the fact that the initial lack was represented by the inadequacy of the main character to face him. However, it is also important to underline that this liquidation differs slightly from Propp's designation W, or the ascension of the hero, that in this article has been renamed as "the protagonist receives a new status". For example, if in *Naruto* the initial lack of the protagonist is considered his alienation from the rest of the village and his ambition translates into Naruto wanting to become Hokage, then it stands to reason to consider the moment he gains such a title as a new status and not a liquidation of a lack. In other words, the liquidation is more frequently associated with intermediate points in narrative arcs.

Designation ↓ – the protagonist returns.

Similarly to what has been said about the protagonist departing from home, this element also may be interpreted in a metaphorical way and symbolize the end of the journey. A further clarification consists in the fact that this ending does not necessarily coincide with the ending of the manga, but rather with the ending of the narrative arc.

Designation ReP^{M} / ReA^{M} – the protagonist/antagonist retreats.

Propp combines this element with the following one, considering that a pursuit also implies a retreat. In manga, though, there are several cases where either the protagonist retreats and there is no pursuit or where the antagonist retreats and this in turn leads to other turning points in the plot. Because of this, the present project proposes to divide the retreat into two instances, one for the protagonist (ReP^{M}) and one for the antagonist (ReA^{M}). Examples include when Zabusa is helped to retreat by Haku[39] or Goku's retreat after his fight with captain Ginyu[40].

Designation Pr – the protagonist is pursued.

This element is typical in *shônen*, especially when the protagonist is losing against a powerful antagonist and must retreat, which is usually connected with the following element. The function of this element is mostly to create suspense where the main character may hypothetically, in peril, suffer defeat.

Designation Rs – the protagonist is rescued or rescues himself from pursuit.

This is also a frequent element in battle manga; examples include Naruto being protected by his teacher Iruka Umino[41], Izuku Midoriya being saved by All Might[42] and so forth. There are instances where this element might coincide with designation G, the transferal of the protagonists, as previously explained for Bartholomew Kuma in *One Piece*.

Designation L^M – a false protagonist presents unfounded claims.

In manga this element acts as a deconstruction of a trope and, when present, is usually placed at the beginning of the manga or of the narrative arc either to introduce the real protagonist or for comical relief. For example, consider the case of Lucy Heartfilia searching for Natsu Dragneel[43] or Luffy's return to Sabaody after two years and encountering his counterfeit[44].

Designation Ex – the false protagonist is exposed.

This is directly connected with element L, and because of its comical nature in manga, the protagonist is usually immediately exposed.

Designation T – the protagonist is given a new appearance.

Cross-dressing in many cases is also used for comic relief, for instance when Luffy returns to Sabaody and simply wears a fake mustache. However, this may also be used by the protagonist to escape from the antagonist or from a threat.

Designation U – the antagonist is punished.

While this element may be present in manga, there are different possible outcomes. In many cases, by being defeated, the antagonists are eliminated from the story and their punishment becomes the defeat itself.

Designation W^M – the protagonist receives a new status.

Similarly to what has been explained when considering designation K, this element will more frequently coincide with the final point of a narrative arc or of the manga itself. Propp described this element as "ascension to the throne and marriage" given the nature of folk tales; here, it has been decided to simply refer to this element as the "protagonist receiving a new status," because such a wording generalizes the concept and provides a simpler classification.

For instance, a new status may be found in examples such as Luffy gaining a higher bounty[45] or by Naruto becoming Hokage[46].

Designation Z^M – the antagonist helps the protagonist or becomes part of his team.

This element has been added to Propp's scheme, as in manga, it frequently occurs to constitute a bridge between various narrative arcs or sagas. There are many examples that can be analyzed: both Piccolo and Vegeta were first and foremost antagonists who ultimately join Goku after fighting him[47], while both Nico Robin[48] and Itachi Uchiha[49] both act as antagonists until it is revealed that they were not villains in the typical sense to begin with.

Conclusions

In regards to Propp's original scheme, for this study it has been chosen to modify and add several new functions as they generalize the whole concept as it has been previously explained. In other cases, additional elements have been removed. For instance, designations M and N from Propp's scheme have been

eliminated as they involve a task facing the protagonist and its eventual resolution; this decision has been made due to the fact that frequently the task coincides with the trial of the protagonist or his training. This will further simplify the generalized elements. Similarly, designations O and Q – which involve the protagonist arriving unrecognized in another country and subsequently being found out – have also been removed, given their circumstantiality; while they could be correlated with designation T, the protagonist being given a new appearance, O and Q remain less frequent in manga and ultimately unimportant for the development of the plot. Designation E has also removed because it only implies a reaction and is not functional for the plot.

With these revised elements it is possible to build a scheme of the different narrative arcs in the manga that have been used as examples as well as others, similarly to what Propp had done. This analytical approach that would visually represent though a list or string of functions the plot of the manga will not be expanded upon in this work, tough, because it would entail explaining the entire story of the examined narrative arcs and at this early stage, would uselessly weigh down on the overall project. A more in-depth study following this schematic explanation of the narratological elements, however, would help visualize how different *shônen* manga actually use a similar basis for their plot; this would equally emphasize the cyclicality of several functions within the same manga. Another possible point of study, then, could be to analyze how these narrative arcs taken from *shônen* actually differ from the folk tales that Propp had analyzed and examine if there are similarities.

As briefly mentioned earlier, it may be added that the elements analyzed in this article are equally applicable to anime. The manga that have been referenced

here have all been adapted and animated; however, for the purposes of this work, manga were treated as source for the subsequent animation. Analyzing the manga version is somewhat similar to analyzing its animated counterpart; there are, however, exceptions if considering original animations or anime that divert from the original content.

As this project also demonstrates, there is room for critical analysis in manga that it is more directly correlated with literature. This medium combines elements of both literature and art, other than having its own history, has evolved along the decades and adapted. As Itô Gô[50] points out in an analysis of *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto*, the former did not present the "inner voice" (or *naigo*) while the latter did. For him, this symbolized an evolution in manga and an important repercussion on the ability of the reader to empathize with the main character. This in turn may even lead to the analysis of the interior monologue found in literary works.

Itô Gô's critical approach to manga is based on the perception it has on the readers: as he puts it, "I am interested in capturing the genre of manga as a higher-level "environment" (*kankyô*) that includes various works and authors, and I treat panel construction and stories as lower-level subsystems specific to particular authors and works."[51] Applying a generalized version of Propp's scheme to manga, this article has aimed to be a complementary study to that higher-level "environment" that Gô emphasizes. By understanding how the narratological elements function in manga and how they develop in similar patterns, this work has attempted to demonstrate that manga, at their core, behave and are produced comparably to other literary works, such as folk tales, even if here the written word is also accompanied by visual representations of the story.

Appendix 1 - Propp's Scheme

α represents the initial situation and does not constitute one of the elements.

1. ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF A FAMILY ABSENTS HIMSELF FROM HOME (Definition: absentation. Designation: β) – the absentee may be of an older or younger generation and accepts even the loss of a family member as an exception.
2. AN INTERDICTION IS ADDRESSED TO THE HERO. (Definition: interdiction. Designation: γ) it can even be an order or a suggestion
3. THE INTERDICTION IS VIOLATED (Definition: violation. Designation: δ.) works as a pair with the second function γ, but sometimes the second half can exist without the first.
4. THE VILLAIN MAKES AN ATTEMPT AT RECONNAISSANCE. (Definition: reconnaissance. Designation: ε.) the reconnaissance may be also accomplished by a third party.
5. THE VILLAIN RECEIVES INFORMATION ABOUT HIS VICTIM. (Definition: delivery. Designation: (ζ.) the information may be received directly or from a third party.
6. THE VILLAIN ATTEMPTS TO DECEIVE HIS VICTIM IN ORDER TO TAKE POSSESSION OF HIM OR OF HIS BELONGINGS. (Definition: trickery. Designation: η.) in folktales the villain usually achieves this through disguise or metamorphosis, but he may also persuade, lie, coerce or take by force or magic what he wants.
7. THE VICTIM SUBMITS TO DECEPTION AND THEREBY UNWITTINGLY HELPS HIS ENEMY. (Definition: complicity. Designation: θ) deceitful proposals are always accepted and fulfilled. – plot-based compliancy 7.5 preliminary misfortune. (Designation: λ, differentiating between this and other forms of deception.)
8. THE VILLAIN CAUSES HARM OR INJURY TO A MEMBER OF A FAMILY. (Definition: villainy. Designation: A.) The above functions prepare the territory for this primary function and therefore act as the preparatory part of the tale. Here Propp expands on all the possibilities in the material he has on which he did his research and enumerates nineteen cases, from the kidnapping of a person to other transgressions. He also says that other cases may be added given different folktales and will not be taken into account one by one.
9. MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS MADE KNOWN; THE HERO IS APPROACHED WITH A REQUEST OR COMMAND; HE IS ALLOWED TO GO OR HE IS DISPATCHED. (Definition: mediation, the connective incident. Designation: B.) Function that brings the hero into the tale and the hero may be either a seeker-hero if he is sent on a quest or a victimized hero if the structure of the tale demands that the hero leave home at any cost.
10. THE SEEKER AGREES TO OR DECIDES UPON COUNTERACTION. (Definition: beginning counteraction. Designation: C.) – only in the case of seeker-heroes
11. THE HERO LEAVES HOME. (Definition: departure. Designation: ↑.) //thus enters donor or provider
12. THE HERO IS TESTED, INTERROGATED, ATTACKED, ETC., WHICH PREPARES THE WAY FOR HIS RECEIVING EITHER A MAGICAL AGENT

OR HELPER. (Definition: the first function of the donor. Designation: D.) – the test of the donor
13. THE HERO REACTS TO THE ACTIONS OF THE FUTURE DONOR. (Definition: the hero's reaction. Designation: E.) In the majority of instances, the reaction is either positive or negative. – coupled with the previous function
14. THE HERO ACQUIRES THE USE OF A MAGICAL AGENT. (Definition: provision or receipt of a magical agent. Designation: F.) – may be of different natures
15. THE HERO IS TRANSFERRED, DELIVERED, OR LED TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF AN OBJECT OF SEARCH. (Definition: spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance. Designation: G.)
16. THE HERO AND THE VILLAIN JOIN IN DIRECT COMBAT. (Definition: struggle. Designation: H.) – not to be confused with function D where the hero receives a magical agent and not the object of his research
17. THE HERO IS BRANDED. (Definition: branding, marking. Designation: J.) – Propp speaks of a physical branding, as a wound.
18. THE VILLAIN IS DEFEATED. (Definition: victory. Designation: I.) – not necessarily in combat, Propp proposes also cards, but others may be the possibilities.
19. THE INITIAL MISFORTUNE OR LACK IS LIQUIDATED. (Designation: K.) This function, together with villainy (A), constitutes a pair. The narrative reaches its peak in this function.
20. THE HERO RETURNS. (Definition: return. Designation: ↓)
21. THE HERO IS PURSUED. (Definition: pursuit, chase. Designation: Pr.)
22. RESCUE OF THE HERO FROM PURSUIT. (Definition: rescue. Designation: Rs.) – the hero may rescue himself or may be rescued by others.
23. THE HERO, UNRECOGNIZED, ARRIVES HOME OR IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. (Definition: unrecognized arrival. Designation: o.)
24. A FALSE HERO PRESENTS UNFOUNDED CLAIMS. (Definition: unfounded claims. Designation: L.)
25. A DIFFICULT TASK IS PROPOSED TO THE HERO. (Definition: difficult task. Designation: M.)
26. THE TASK IS RESOLVED. (Definition: solution. Designation: N.)
27. THE HERO IS RECOGNIZED. (Definition: recognition. Designation: Q.) – recognized by a mark, a brand or an object that had been given him or by his performance on a task.
28. THE FALSE HERO OR VILLAIN IS EXPOSED. (Definition: exposure. Designation: Ex.)
29. THE HERO IS GIVEN A NEW APPEARANCE. (Definition: transfiguration. Designation: T.) – magical means, garments, constructs a palace
30. THE VILLAIN IS PUNISHED. (Definition: punishment. Designation. U.)
31. THE HERO IS MARRIED AND ASCENDS THE THRONE. (Definition: wedding. Designation: W.) – sometimes only marriage, sometimes only ascension.

Notes

[1] Ghilardi Marcello, *Filosofia nei manga* (Milano: Mimesis edizioni, 2010), pp. 62-63. Translated from the original text in Italian.

[2] Alan Dundes, "On Game Morphology: A Study of the Structure of Non-Verbal Folklore" in *The meaning of folklore* (Utah: Utah university press), p. 160.

[3] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 99.

[4] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 7.

[5] J. Bolte and G. Polívka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, I (1913), II (1915), III (1918).

[6] Based on AJPEA Reaserch Institute for Publications – 2013 as reported by Jaqueline Berndt in *Manga: Medium, Art, and Material* (2015).

[7] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), p. 59.

[8] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru* (Dragon Ball).

[9] Tite Kubo, *Bleach*, 74 vols.

[10] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, 72 vols.

[11] The Appendix represents a summary of the elements taken directly from *Morphology of the Folktale* (pp. 25-65); the list however does not include all the variations as explained by Propp himself and should be used primarily as a basis to cross-reference with the revised version.

[12] Kentarô Miura, *Beruseruku* (Berserk), vol. 1.

[13] Hiromu Arakawa, *Hagane no Renkinjutsushi* (Fullmetal Alchemist), vol. 01.

[14] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 53.

[15] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[16] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 01.

[17] Full metal 01

[18] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 01.

[19] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 16.

[20] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 01.

[21] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 13-16.

[22] Kôhei Horikoshi, *Boku no hiirô akademia* (My Hero Academia), vol. 01.

[23] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[24] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 02, 15.

[25] Tite Kubo, *Bleach*, vol. 07-08.

[26] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 61.

[27] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 15.

[28] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 61.

[29] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 40, 44.

[30] Kôhei Horikoshi, *Boku no hiirô akademia* (My Hero Academia), vol. 01-02.

[31] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 53.

[32] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 35.

[33] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 20.

[34] Kentarô Miura, *Beruseruku* (Berserk), vol. 12-13.

[35] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[36] Hiromu Arakawa, *Hagane no Renkinjutsushi* (Fullmetal Alchemist), vol. 01.

[37] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 01.

[38] Kentarô Miura, *Beruseruku* (Berserk), vol. 13-14.

[39] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 02-03.

[40] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 08.

[41] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 01.

[42] Kôhei Horikoshi, *Boku no hiirô akademia* (My Hero Academia), vol. 01.

[43] Hiro Mashima, *Fearii Teiru* (Fairy Tail), vol. 01.

[44] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 61.

[45] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 25, 46.

[46] Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, vol. 72.

[47] Akira Toriyama, *Daragon Bôru Z* (Dragon Ball Z), vol. 01, 05.

[48] Eiichirô Oda, *Wan Piisu* (One Piece), vol. 24.

[49] Nar 43

[50] Itô Gô, 2018, *Particularities of Boys' Manga in the Early Twenty-First Century: How Naruto Differs from Dragon Ball.*

[51] Itô Gô, 2011, *Tezuka is Dead.*

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Masashi Kishimoto, *Naruto*, 72 vols. (Tokyo: Shûeisha, 1999-2014).

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Prefiguring the Otokonoko Genre:

A Comparative Trans Analysis of *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* and *No Bra*

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Abstract: This article examines two manga, *Stop!! Hibari-Kun*! and *No Bra,* which prefigure the increasingly popular anime and manga genre of *otokonoko* from a queer studies perspective. *Otokonoko*, also known as *otoko no musume*, is a genre of manga in which persons assigned male at birth (AMAB) wear women's clothing and are perceived as attractive women. The term otokonoko (男の娘) is pronounced identically to the term 男の子, meaning boy-child; however, due to a pun in the kanji which replaces "child" (子) with "daughter"/"girl" (娘), it translates to "boy-girl", "boy-daughter", or sometimes "boy-princess". It is often translated into English as "cross-dresser". The genre emerged in the early 2000s and has since become a popular point of reference and conversation both within and outside of anime and manga communities. Both the genre, and its titular characters have become iconic within both Japanese and Western online culture. As with most genres, the otokonoko genre is trope heavy, so I decided to look at works that prefigure the genre to better understand the appeal without the weight of the traditions of the genre weighing too heavily on the content. Both *Stop!! Hibari-Kun*! and *No Bra* follow the story of a boy who becomes increasingly attracted to a gender ambiguous character assigned male at birth, but who appears female to most. Both manga are centrally about this conflict between the love interests' perceived maleness and the protagonists perceived heterosexuality. The article analyses the appeal of each work to both male and trans feminine readers, because what would later become the otokonoko genre is popular with both male and trans feminine readers. It also argues that these manga offer something unique from Western depictions of transgender lives, based on the popularity of manga and anime among Western trans feminine readers.

Keywords: *Otokonoko*, queer studies, *Stop!! Hibari-Kun*!, *No Bra,* manga

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Introduction:

Otokonoko, also known as *otoko no musume* is a genre of manga in which persons assigned male at birth (AMAB) wear women's clothing and are perceived as attractive women. The genre crystallized in the mid 2000s, with 2004 being a commonly accepted foundational date.[1] However, manga works involving AMAB persons wearing women's clothes, and being taken as women pre-exist the genre by at least 23 years. The term otokonoko itself sounds identical to the term boy-child; however, due to a pun in the kanji which replaces "child" (子) with "daughter"/"girl" (娘), it translates to "boy-girl", "boy-daughter", or sometimes "boy-princess", but is often translated into English as "cross-dresser". As the genre crystalized, tropes emerged, such as the commonality of maid outfits and characters with cat ears. It often includes the hyper-sexualization of gender-transient characters, including high amounts of 'fan service', the term used among English readers of manga to describe panels and actions that accentuate a gratuitous and sexual male gaze. The genre is unique among sexualized narrative depictions of gender variance in that its target audience is both fetishists of otokonoko and people who identify as otokonoko, an occurrence which itself spawned a small subgenre of self-identified otokonoko authors writing about their real-life experiences, most notably *Otokonoko Doushi Renai Chuu*.[2] Many otokonoko authors are AMAB and appear in official photos in women's clothes.

Most writing on the otokonoko genre in English identifies it as a genre concerned with "crossdressers". However, this is an oversimplification, and likely the result of a translational issue. Until the recent adoption of the term *toransujendā* from the English loanword transgender, the nomenclature around transgender persons was unclear.

Previously, the preferred term would have been *seidōitsusei shōgai*, a term which translates to "gender identity disorder". Yoshiko Okuyama notes that this pathologizing term was previously the most politically correct, but also fairly rare, with a "low recognition rate" by the general Japanese public as late as 2006, and that "onabe (woman acting male), and nyu-hahu (shemale) are still incorrectly applied to trans people by the media, as well as in regular conversation."[3] Further, it may be that, as indicated by the emergence of the loanword, Japanese transgender people are distancing themselves from the pathological language of *seidōitsusei shōgai*, with *shōgai* translating roughly to disability.[4] Another term which is applied to transgender persons is *okama*, which translates directly as "kettle" or "pot", and took its current meaning because a pot is "considered to be shaped like a bottom", and can be applied to gay men, effeminate men, gay sex workers, transgender sex workers, cross dressers, and trans women.[5] It is considered derogatory. Lastly, there is the word for which our titular genre is named, otokonoko. When spelled with the kanji (娘) it generally refers to a man cross dressing as a woman.[6] As such, until the recent adoption of the English loanword, otokonoko existed in manga as one of the most specific, non-pathologizing terms for a AMAB person wearing women's clothes.

Further, otokonoko may represent to transgender audiences, both in Japan and internationally, a source of transgender representation. While understudied, it is clear to those within Western trans-feminine online spaces that anime and manga are exceptionally popular in these spaces compared to the general population. The use of otokonoko characters as Twitter profile pictures, and the proliferation of these characters in trans-feminine meme spaces, as well as a general presumed familiarity

with anime and manga within the written discourse of these spaces, suggests a strong community attachment. This has a long history, transgender video game design professor Naomi Clark has been producing games professionally since 1999. She cites having lived in Japan at age 11 and emersed herself in "local nerd subcultures" as allowing her to see anime that "featured outrageous and extravagant gender transitions."[7] The Instagram based anime-trans-philosophy meme account @autogyniphiles_anonymous write in one such meme that:

> "I suspect that a lot of the appeal of trans-anime porn To TRANS WOMEN is two-fold. First and most obviously, we get a girl distant enough from a real human that we're not comparing ourselves to her. She neither induces dysphoria nor accentuates our insecurities. Second, we get to engage in a fantasy of passing, and passing so well that only our genitals reveal what we are. Perhaps, third, when these genitals are revealed they are reveled in, not named freakish but a beautiful rarity. It allows us to imagine a world in which the differences we are so often insecure about are the source of our greatest beauty."[8]

While it is unclear what constitutes "trans-anime porn", it would seem that the more explicit of the otokonoko genre are included in this category. In an interview with critical theorist McKenzie Wark, one of the administrators of the meme account elaborates on why western trans women are so drawn to anime:

> "Very few [historical depictions of trans women in manga and anime] would pass Western respectability standards or get called 'good representation', but that doesn't really matter when Western alternatives during the same time period of say 1950 to 2000 were almost all villainously insane, with the odd 'trans pityporn' narrative like Boys Don't Cry or The Crying Game thrown in. And we haven't progressed much in Western depictions, trans women are almost always shown as miserable, and any beauty or eroticism they might have a tool to only further their tragedy. Trans girls want an escapist narrative, that is fun and exciting, or at very least not tense. We don't really have a Western equivalent of the "slice of life" genre anime has. We have nowhere to turn to for low stake narratives that are simply pleasurable to watch."[9]

Thus, it would appear that not only the otokonoko genre, but manga works which prefigure the genre, have played an outsized impact on the lives trans women in the western world. Therefore, both from an anime/manga studies, and a trans studies lens, it may prove fruitful to examine the works which preceded and informed the otokonoko genre to better understand why the genre emerged and solidified as it did, and why it became so popular among western transgender fans. In the remainder of this paper, two works which predate the solidification of the otokonoko genre around 2004, with titles like *Ai no Shintairiku*, *Maria†Holic*, and *Happiness!* among others, but are often considered to prefigure the genre will be examined. Both works will have trans-coded characters, instead of characters who might be said to be cross-dressing for other textual reasons. Specifically, this paper examines how characters relate to the world as otokonoko and as trans women, as well as how they express their identity. It will also suggest as to why trans women readers might be drawn to these depictions. The two works which will be examined are *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!,* an early 1980s manga published in a boys humour magazine, and *No Bra*, a shōnen manga published between 2002 and 2004. As such, we have two works for comparison which prefigure and predate the otokonoko genre.

Stop!! Hibari-Kun!,

Let us begin chronologically. *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* is not only the earliest example of the two chosen, but often cited as the first occurrence of "a male characters wearing 'female' clothes" in manga.[10] The plot revolves around an audience surrogate character with whom readers, in particular teenage boys, will be able to identify, Sakamoto Kōsaku. Kōsaku is a teenage boy who upon his mother's death has been sent to live with

the family of a yakuza boss who once courted her.[11] Upon arriving, he quickly discovers that the only "male" child and yakuza heir to the aforementioned patriarch is Hibari. Hibari is considered a male crossdresser by her family but passes herself off as a cis woman to the rest of the world.[12] Kōsaku quickly develops sexual and romantic feelings for Hibari and spends the remainder of the manga slowly coming to terms with this attraction.

Stop!! Hibari-Kun! appeared between 1981 and 1983 in *Weekly Shōnen Jump* and was written and illustrated by Eguchi Hisashi. Eguchi would go on to become one of Japan's most noted illustrators of female characters, notable for their uniqueness and fashion sense. While this paper will primarily avoid biographical examination, it may be worth noting that in a 2017 interview with *Archipel*, Eguchi stated, "The ideal girl for me is the one I would have wanted to become if I was born a girl, it is not the girl I would dream to date, it is really the frustration of not being born a girl that fuels my drawings. But women are just so attractive that I will never be able to catch up."[13] This then, perhaps, raises the question of just who is Hibari?[14]

In the article "Transgender: Female Hermaphrodites and Male Androgynes" Hibari is characterized thus: "Hibari, who enjoys his successful impersonation of a girl, excels at his studies and in sports— and, as the son of a gang leader, he is more powerful than yakuza gangsters."[15] The article goes on to argue that the reason for Hibari's skillset relies on respectability, writing that "for readers to readily accept (or even to admire) a male character who dresses in women's clothing or who uses female speech, it is necessary that he also fulfill certain conditions befitting an ideal man: a good family background, talent, good looks, and skill at fighting. Only then can the excessively

feminine man be allowed to become the lover of the heroine".[16] We will challenge this later with *No Bra*, however, for now let us simply propose a secondary reading of Hibari's apparently masculine skills.

Instead of asserting Hibari's strength and athleticism as a redeeming quality, perhaps instead, they represent a transgender fantasy of appearance. When faced with the realization that one wants to transition into womanhood, it is adjoined by a realization that one will be restricted. On feminizing hormone therapy muscles weaken and the possibility of being unable to protect oneself from transphobic assault becomes more real, but perhaps even more importantly, it no longer 'looks good' to be strong or athletic. I am here making a phenomenological claim, that the category of trans woman, and the pose one must assume to best ensure it is placed on oneself, requires not displaying masculine traits and behaviors even cis women are allowed. Thus, trans femme transition is one marked by the giving up of strength and of certain activities one might have once loved. Novelist Torrey Peters describes this as such:

> "The girl down at the water's edge throws the football in a beautiful spiral, so smooth and steady you could use it for a drill bit. I want to catch that football. I haven't caught a football in three years. And normally, I'd be embarrassed—I'm self conscious about the way displays of athleticism curl my body into the old shape: arms lank, shoulder loose, hips solid and straight; shrugging off the balancing-a-book-on-my-head pose that I've cast my body into. But today is Trans Beach Pride [...] so who cares? No one here is going to think I'm manly".[17]

Trans women then often feel restrained from physical activity by the need to display themselves as femininely as possible to be taken seriously as women. One potential appeal to the transgender reader, is then very likely that Hibari not only has retained the agency to compete in sports, and the muscle to fight off assaulters, but that while doing so she not only looks feminine, she looks "as cute as possible".[18] Whether you see her

with her boxing gloves ready to fight, spraying a machine gun wildly, pole jumping, fighting yakuza, or merely taking a bath, at no time does Hibari look anything less than cute. She is never shown with throbbing muscles, or a tense masculinized face. Instead, she retains a pose of feminine ease. Thus, one probable aspect of Hibari's appeal is that trans women can imagine a fantasy existence in which they are free to perform whatever athletic interests they once had, without risking the loss of their status as women in the eyes of others. Thus, in this aspect, Hibari truly is the "ideal girl" that "I would have wanted to become".[19]

This ideal girl, however, is not perfectly passable.[20] As previously mentioned Eguchi Hisashi is renowned for his sense of women's fashion, and he puts it to full effect to help Hibari. Not only is she fashionable, but all her outfits are ones that would naturally complement a skinny transgender woman's body. Tops both hint at a feminine shape, while being loose enough to not draw attention to a lack of cleavage, and bottoms are loose and often flair to give the impression of larger hips. Throughout the series Hibari is shown using inventive ways of feminizing her features, from stuffing her bra, to most notably, her swimsuit incident. In volume 2, chapter 23 of *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* Hibari finds a clever way around outing herself during school swim class. The common female school swimsuit depicted in manga is a simple and conservative black one-piece swimsuit which would require a masterclass in tucking (the act of placing one's genitals back and firmly against the body to diminish their appearance) to not be outed by. We learn that last year Hibari avoided swim class by claiming to be on her period. As such, pulling the same stunt two years in a row might be suspicious. Kōsaku appears visibly nervous as the class waits for Hibari to arrive (she is late), and he wonders if she will be

okay. When she does arrive, it is not in the regulation swimsuit. Instead, she wears a red bikini top with matching dolphin shorts. In doing so she manages to give the impression of flaunting school dress code by scandalously showing too much, when in actuality she has chosen an outfit loose enough to hide what she needs to hide. Hibari is also shown throughout the series applying makeup and brushing her hair, and other acts of sustaining a feminine appearance. We can see these panels as indications of the lengths Hibari goes to so that she passes.

So far, we have established Hibari as a transition-fantasy, a trans girl who has retained her ability to physically protect herself, to take part in sports without appearing masculine, and with a creative and firm enough grasp of fashion and makeup to pass herself off as a cis woman. Thus, she already clearly appeals to the trans feminine reader, not as a fantasy other to sexualize or desire, but as a fantasy that one would wish to live. However, Hibari is not explicitly the audience surrogate. Indeed, her yakuza upbringing and fleshed-out family life provide her a depth of character that would prevent a depiction of her as such. Instead, Kōsaku is technically the audience surrogate (which makes sense as *Weekly Shōnen Jump* is a boys' magazine), and also Hibari's main love interest.

Let us look at Hibari and Kōsaku's relationship. Hiromi Tanaka refers to their relationship as a "pseudo-heterosexual romance between the cross-dresser and a main male character", where Hibari's "cross-dressing" symbolizes a "transgression beyond the existing gender binary, which manga rarely depict when it comes to a heterosexual relationship."[21] It is true that Hibari and Kōsaku's relationship allows for a significant degree of flaunting of gender roles. Kōsaku rarely saves Hibari. Nearly all problems that

arise in the manga are solved by Hibari's cunning. This includes Kōsaku's problems, not just Hibari's. As such, Hibari coming to Kōsaku's rescue could easily be construed as a transgression of the gender binary. However, in terms of plot function, Hibari saving Kōsaku is rarely positioned as resulting from any form of latent masculinity. As mentioned earlier, she does everything while maintaining a clear femininity. Instead, these saving acts can usually be attributed to her yakuza upbringing or simply her wit. More often than not, Kōsaku provides Hibari problems to be solved, rather than save her, or her him. Instead, this saving appears primarily to function to further Kōsaku's awe of Hibari. Her saving him does not render her a man, or masculine, but a superhero. Indeed, the unofficial English translation (by Hachimitsu Scans) titles Volume 1, Chapter 5, as "She's!? Superman".

What of Kōsaku's feelings towards Hibari? Hiromi Tanaka called it "pseudo-heterosexual romance", and while this might not be how Hibari views it, as she at every opportunity refers to herself and insists that she is a woman, a daughter, and potential girlfriend, this descriptor is probably apt for how Kōsaku interprets his emotions. His feelings change throughout the series, however, the trajectory can largely be described as a change from amazement that Hibari is AMAB to acceptance of himself as *hentai*, or in translation, as "a pervert", rather than an acceptance of her as female. Thus, while it is a story of acceptance, it is not a story of Kōsaku accepting Hibari's womanhood so much as a story of him accepting his attraction to someone he does not logically recognize as a woman. In some fantasies he imagines marriage to her, or her becoming pregnant, which is to say, he imagines her as a woman. Likewise, he witnesses the rest of the world, and many male characters in it, sexualize and romanticize her as a woman.

Despite this, he remains insistent that she is male, and he is therefore a deviant. He goes as far as to horrify himself by imagining getting too close and discovering a hidden hyper-masculinity in her, or himself also becoming interested in wearing women's clothes due to his attraction to her. Thus, his plot is about overcoming these fears rather than accepting that he is not a pervert. In terms of his actual interactions with Hibari, both characters become more openly flirtatious as the story progresses. He begins to be more comfortable sexualizing and romanticizing her, and even accepts that he enjoys kissing her. She, on the other hand, is flirtatious from the beginning, and treats it as a matter of course that they will end up together, frequently claiming that he belongs to her. Further, she goes from only flirting with him at home to flirting with him publicly.

We can thus view this as providing a sexual power fantasy on behalf of the female trans reader. While it does not provide gender validation insofar as Kōsaku never acknowledges Hibari's womanhood, ultimately her trans-status no longer matters to Kōsaku. As such, the fantasy provided to the trans female reader is one of being so sexually alluring that gender and genitalia are rendered invalid. It is the power to make a man question his sexuality because he wants you badly. On the other hand, for cis male readers, the sexual fantasy provided is one of loss of control. It is about being rendered powerless, unable to not desire, not pursue a girl no matter what logic tells you. It is a fantasy of being unable to stop, of a girl (or maybe not a girl) sexually controlling you and making you question the most basic facts you thought you knew about yourself. It may even be a fantasy of being unapologetically "hentai" and yet accepted for it.

Thus, in summary, *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* offers trans femme readers four central fantasies, and male readers one. Trans femme readers are offered fantasies of self-protection, athletic freedom, control over one's own appearance, and sexual power that defies gender perception. Male readers are provided a fantasy of helplessness in the face of taboo and the transgression of that taboo as morally acceptable. At no point in this early depiction of a girl, who Eguchi himself refers to as an otokonoko, is Kōsaku in a position of power, nor does he sexually assert his masculine dominance over the feminized Hibari. Thus, the story manages to break from heteronormativity while still displaying what today in the west would be increasingly considered a heterosexual relationship. Notably, however, while it does provide a character who self conceives as a woman, and is widely perceived as a woman, it does not provide a character who can convince people who know her secret that she is a woman.

No Bra

No Bra represents the less famous of our manga, as well as the manga with the least scholarship written on it. At time of publication, I have been unable to find an academic article discussing the work. There may be good reason for this, as a review posted on the website, www.manga-news.com describes *No Bra* as full of "all kinds of more or less clichés", a "manga without any real surprises", and "Very far from revolutionizing the genre".[22] However, despite the this review being from 2012, thus after the founding of the otokonoko genre, the manga is referred to as "a classic *ecchi* manga" (*ecchi* here meaning sexually suggestive but not explicit), placing it not with other otokonoko works, but alongside titles like *Dominated By A Monster Boy*, *Dark Star Emperor* and *My Girlfriend Is A Zombie*. Whether this is because the review is

western, and by 2012 there still was not a familiarity among the foreign manga community with otokonoko as a genre, or because when *No Bra* was originally written, it pre-existed the genre and would likely have been considered an *ecchi* BL (Boys' Love) manga rather than more specifically an otokonoko manga, is unclear.

Despite its lack of scholarship and its admittedly cliché-ridden plot, *No Bra* deserves scholarship in regards both to the otokonoko genre it would prefigure and to trans identity within the genre. First, despite being clichéd, *No Bra* remains well read by English consumers, with 301,036 readers on the website manganelo alone (one of many western websites for free manga reading), and a detailed Wikipedia page. It received five volumes, between 2002 and 2004, and ended itself on its own terms, unlike *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* which received three volumes and ended abruptly and unplanned. Second, the work received an unofficial English translation, indicating a sufficiently devoted English fandom wishing to render *No Bra* more accessible.[23] Third, *No Bra* is often featured prominently in online discussions and lists of precursors to the otokonoko genre.[24]

Written and illustrated by Kawatsu Kenjiro, and published in *Weekly Shōnen Champion*, *No Bra* is the story of a love triangle. Kataoka Masato is a rather dumb and selfish student, with his own apartment, a charming best friend, and a crush on a girl named Ōzora Kaoru. All of this is thrown into disarray when his father sends Nomura Yūki (supposedly a childhood friend) to live with him. Masato has no recollection of being friends with Yūki, but supposes it was so long ago that he simply cannot remember, after all, he did move often as a child. When Yūki arrives, Masato finds Yūki is not the boy he imagined. Instead, Yūki dropped out of her last school because she

could not stand to attend it in a boy's uniform. She has thus been sent far from her home, where her secret is not known, and enrolled herself as a girl at Masato's school. Thus, much like *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*, in *No Bra* we see an emerging trope where the male audience's perspective character is one of the few persons who knows the otokonoko's secret. However, this time Yūki has arrived in Masato's world, not the other way around.

The male love interest knowing the secret functions in several important ways. First, it removes the possibility of the otokonoko being perceived as cruel or a trickster. She may be keeping a secret from the rest of the world, but her love interests know exactly what she is. Their attraction to her is then under no false pretenses. Second, both Kōsaku in *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*, and Masato in *No Bra* begin to worry about the otokonoko's secret coming out. Both boys are concerned what ramifications it would have for them should it ever come out, as both become increasingly perceived as the otokonoko's romantic partner. However, both boys also become increasingly concerned for their love interest's own sake. In fact, this desire to ensure that Yūki allowed to live her life as a woman becomes the driving force behind the last few chapters of *No Bra*.

As *No Bra* unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear to Masato that he is not the boy Yūki fondly remembers as "Maa-kun". Afraid that the love he has now accepted is based on false pretense, not on Yūki's side but on his own as a result of this case of mistaken identity, Kataoka goes to extreme lengths, including traveling to find kindergarten records to discover the truth. The truth he discovers is that the other girl he has been making sexual headway with, Kaoru, dressed as a boy for much of her childhood. She also changed her name upon her mother remarrying and moved from the town where all

three of them went to kindergarten to where they now all go to high school. It is Kaoru that Yūki remembers as "Maa-kun". This revelation leaves Masato in emotional distress, as he has now confirmed that the romance he and Yūki have built was based on a memory of a person who was not him. He also comes to the idea that Yūki and Kaoru could not date, as both appear to be interested in men.[25] Eventually, it is revealed publicly that Yūki and Masato are cohabitating, and they are threatened with expulsion for this impropriety. To save Masato, Yūki reveals that she is AMAB, assuming punishment for this instead, and proceeds to force herself to live as a boy. The majority of Volume 5 Chapter 29 depicts how despite Yūki's determination to live as a boy for Masato's sake, she clearly is not one. Whether looking feminine while playing basketball, using a urinal, or merely walking around the school, students take note and express varying degrees of discomfort and confusion with her living as a man. Notably, after exiting the boy's washroom Yūki is stopped by several of her female classmates, who ask "Are you okay?", and offer "If you need to go to the toilet, you can go with us and use the girl's toilet".[26] After this, one of the girls clarifies "We don't think of Nomura-san as a boy. Although your body might be of a man's. Even if you wear a boy's school uniform, we see you as a girl. Your heart is that of a girls' ne?"[27] This parallels a moment in an early chapter of Vol 1. where Masato insists Yūki wear his clothes to help him overcome his gender confusion, however, the ugly Hawaiian shirt she dons does little to hide Yūki's womanly appearance, and Masato quickly gives up. Just like in the earlier chapter, in this late chapter, Yūki wears boy's clothes for Masato's sake, rebuffing the girls who attempt to save Yūki from the boy's washroom.

Finally, the guilt becomes too much for Masato, as he remembers how Yūki had dropped out of her last school rather than wear boy's clothes. He realizes that she is suffering, and she is suffering for "Maa-kun". He decides "I want to give Yūki the chance to wear a girl's school uniform once again".[28] First he attempts a petition signing campaign, but Yūki's own insistence that she is fine as a boy thwarts this. Eventually, he decides that the only way he can allow Yūki to live as a girl is by releasing her from her belief that he is "Maa-kun". He comes clean and explains that the boy she loved was actually Kaoru. Yūki is broken by the news, but by the next chapter is back to wearing women's clothes. She then, somewhat inexplicably, sets Masato up with Kaoru, who begin dating. Yūki returns to school once again as a girl, and is met not only with widespread acceptance, but a horde of boys asking her out.

Thus, in *No Bra* we are again provided a fantasy of perfect passing. Indeed, *No Bra* goes even farther than *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* as Hibari was shown relying on fashion and makeup to feminize herself. Yūki appears as a woman even in men's clothes and without makeup. Her womanhood is simply undeniable to everyone but her. Further, once again we see trans feminine readers provided a fantasy of sexual appeal that defies gender perception and male readers provided a fantasy of helplessness in the face of taboo. Masato accepts that he cannot control his attraction to Yūki, despite believing she is a man, and in fact gets over it with less panic than Kōsaku in *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!*.

There are some notable differences between the two. For instance, in Hibari's case her sex-assigned-at-birth is positioned as a most-keep secret, a position that is never challenged. However, in *No Bra* Yūki's secret is found out, indeed revealed by her, and her capacity to be allowed to live as a girl is challenged by society, but ultimately

overcome. This may be due to progression in trans rights in Japan between 1981 and 2002, however, the relative ease with which Yūki accomplishes it suggests it is another fantasy, a fantasy of acceptance provided to trans femme readers. Hibari may be eventually accepted by Kōsaku, but societal acceptance is never provided to the reader.

A second distinction is in Yūki's interests and athleticism. While she is shown in the last few chapters playing basketball as a boy, and is drawn femininely doing so, there is no indication that she is good at basketball, and as long as her secret was still safe, she was not shown as athletic. Thus, we see that Yūki goes against the claim mentioned earlier that "for readers to readily accept (or even to admire) a male character who dresses in women's clothing or who uses female speech, it is necessary that he also fulfill certain conditions befitting an ideal man: a good family background, talent, good looks, and skill at fighting."[29] Yūki's family background is unclear, and she has no apparent skill at fighting or athletics. As for her talents, Yūki is a perfect housewife. She loves to cook and cleans diligently. There is no fantasy of self-protection or athleticism here. Kaoru is the one provided those traits. Thus, if Yūki is respected by the reader, she is not respected due to her masculine skills, but her femininity.

As such, while we can see a through line between Hibari and Yūki in the sexual fantasies they provide both male and female readers, as well as a shared non-sexualized fantasy of perfect passing, we see a divergence in their personalities, with one being a hyper feminine tomboy, and the other housewife material. Further, while *No Bra* does not provide a fantasy of trans feminine athletic agency or self-protection, it does provide one of radical acceptance by one's peers, and of living up to traditional feminine ideals.

Conclusion

This paper has examined two manga which predate and prefigure the 2004 founding of the otokonoko manga genre. It has asked what the appeal of each work was to both male and trans feminine readers, because what would later become the otokonoko genre is written and read by both male and trans feminine readers. It has also assumed that these manga offer something unique from Western depictions of transgender lives, based on the popularity of manga and anime among Western trans feminine readers. As with most genres, the otokonoko genre is full of tropes, so it was decided to look at works that prefigure the genre to better understand the appeal without the weight of the traditions of the genre weighing too heavily on the content.

This paper found that both *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* and *No Bra* offered trans feminine readers fantasies of flawless passing, and of sexual desirability. It also found that the two offered male readers a fantasy of being powerless against their attraction to a person socially labeled as taboo or hentai. Additionally *Stop!! Hibari-Kun!* offered trans feminine readers a fantasy of maintaining the appearance of femininity in both combat and sport, as well as enough proficiency in combat to not be at risk of assault. Oppositely, in *No Bra* found Yūki representing a fantasy of attaining a perfect traditional femininity, including both a desire and skill at cooking and cleaning. This latter quality may help explain a phenomenon untouched by this paper's analysis, the popularity of *otokonoko* figures among right-wing American cis men, who have played a role in their popularity in English language online spaces and contributed both to their valorization and their degradation. For instance, the emergence of the term "trap" to identify an *otokonoko* character, and the increasing use of "trap trad wife" or "waifu" within these young, male, right wing online communities as an aspirational term of

"relationship goals".[30] Further research remains to be done on both the intricacies of the genre itself, and its appeal to its audiences and sub-audiences, male and female, cis and trans. It is hoped that this paper contributed to this ongoing need for understanding a niche yet impactful anime and manga genre.

Notes

[1] Kinsella, Sharon. 2020. "Otoko No Ko Manga and New Wave Crossdressing in the 2000s: A Two-Dimensional to Three-Dimensional Male Subculture." *Mechademia*: Second Arc 13 (1): 40.
[2] Ōshima Kaoru and Fumi Fumiko. Otokonoko Doushi Renai Chuu. Tokyo: Takarajimasha, 2017.
[3] Yoshiko Okuyama, *Reframing Disability in Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 132.
[4] Okuyama, *Reframing Disability,* 134.
[5] James Valentine, "Pots and Pans: Identification of Queer Japanese in terms of discrimination," in *Queerly Phrased: Language, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 101-102.
[6] It is often incorrectly translated by western fans as "trap" a derogatory term which has emerged among western fans and critics alike of gender-transient characters in manga and anime. Trap has no linguistic ties to otokonoko and instead derives from the Star Wars character Admiral Ackbar loudly proclaiming "it's a trap", which became applied to characters who appeared attractive and female, but were considered male by the western consumer. The central idea behind the term is that the female presentation functioned as a trap or trick to get the male consumer aroused by a male character. The term is deeply homophobic and transphobic and has since been harshly applied to living transgender women. Whether the term trap derived from otokonoko fans seems dubious, as the trickery and sense of betrayal it implies seems an unlikely reaction from men who seek out the genre. Instead, it would seem more likely to have appeared due to the prevalence of otokonoko like characters outside of the otokonoko genre.
[7] Michelle O'Brien, "Trans Work: Employment Trajectories, Labour Discipline and Gender Freedom," in *Transgender Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), 51.
[8] @autogyniphiles_anonymous. Accessed May 4, 2021. https://www.instagram.com/p/B8essDMle5E/?igshid=1dh060wilossu
[9] Wark, McKenzie. "A Conversation with McKenzie Wark & Autogyniphiles_Anonymous" *Content Journal* 1, no (2021): 81-95.
[10] Verena Maser, "Beautiful and Innocent: Female Same-Sex Intimacy in the Japanese Yuri Genre" (PhD diss, Universität Trier, 2015), https://doi.org/10.25595/1250 (accessed May 4, 2021).
[11] Since Hibari and the other characters we will be discussing are trans coded, and often go by different pronouns depending on the situation, this paper will use the ones most likely to confirm to the character's desired gender.
[12] In modern, western trans terminology, this would be called being "stealth".
[13] Eguchi Hisashi, "Hisashi Eguchi, Mangaka (Stop!! Hibari-kun!) - toco toco," Archipel, April 1, 2017, YouTube video, 12:10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2a6Wqq4zifw.
[14] The above statements are included to provide context to the creation of one of the earliest "cross-dressing" manga, and is not intended as speculation as to the author's private life or gender identity.
[15] Fujimoto Yukari, "Transgender: Female Hermaphrodites and Male Androgynes," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 27 (2004): 82.
[16] Fujimoto, "Transgender," 82.
[17] Torrey Peters, *Infect Your Friends and Loved Ones*, https://www.torreypeters.com/book/infect-your-friends-and-loved-ones/ (accessed May 4, 2021).
[18] Eguchi, "Hisashi Eguchi," at 7:52.
[19] Eguchi, "Hisashi Eguchi," at 8:22-8:44.
[20] Passable and passing are terms used in both disability and trans communities to refer to the ability to not appear disabled or trans.
[21] Hiromi Tanaka, "Japanese Manga" *The International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2020): 4-5.
[22] Kiraa7, "No Bra Vol. 1, Manga volume review," https://www.manga-news.com/index.php/manga/critique/No-bra/vol-1 (accessed May 4, 2021).
[23] Many manga do not receive translation of any sort.
[24] NaomiOni, "Manga about Transgender people? (Mtf)" Reddit, 2016. https://www.reddit.com/r/asktransgender/comments/4v956b/manga_about_transgender_people_mtf/ ; Phantomskyler, "If "No Bra" Came Out Today, Would it Have Been More Popular?" Reddit, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/manga/comments/88q6tm/if_no_bra_came_out_today_would_it_have_been_more/; "Otokonoko Genre," TvTropes, https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/OtokonokoGenre
[25] This seems to imply that Kataoka now views Yūki as a woman, although this is not made explicit.

[26] Kawatsu Kenjiro, *Nō Bura* (No Bra), Volume 5 Chapter 29 (Tokyo: *Weekly Shōnen Champion,* 2004): 109.
[27] Kawatsu, *No Bra,* Volume 5 Chapter 29: 109.
[28] Kawatsu, *No Bra*, Volume 5 Chapter 29: 124.
[29] Fujimoto, "Transgender," 82.
[30] The Pedantic Romantic, ""Traps" Don't Exist And Here's Why" *The Pedantic Romantic,* November 26, 2018, YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxeB2AXIG3E; Natalie Wynn, "Are Traps Gay?" Contrapoints, January 16, 2019, YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbBzhqJK3bg&t=99s.

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Affective Transformation:

Other-power and the Community of Peers in Works by Kyoto Animation

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Abstract: Kyoto Animation can rightly be called one of the leading studios of Japanese animation, and its works have been at the forefront of anime production in terms of both techniques and aesthetics. However, no significant studies have been conducted on the works of Kyoto Animation from the perspective of the studio as a whole, or even identified consistent themes and patterns across them. This paper aims to rectify that gap by studying four works by the most prolific directors of Kyoto Animation, namelythe *Haruhi Suzumiya* series (2006-2010), *Beyond the Boundary* (2013-15), *A Silent Voice* (2016), and *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon* (2017). This works also argues that the Japanese Buddhist conception of *tariki* (Other-power, redefined here as affective transformation) and the presence of a community of peers to nurture it offers powerful interpretive frameworks through which to understand these four major works by Kyoto Animation, as well as many others by the studio.

Keywords*:* anime, Kyoto Animation, Japanese Buddhism, character development, *nô*

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Introduction

Before the devastating fire that broke out on the morning of July 18, 2019, Kyoto Animation was widely known as one of the most prolific and well-loved animation studios in Japan. Even though their productivity has declined after the 2019 fire, KyoAni, as it is lovingly called by fans, continues to produce works that have earned the studio multiple awards, and are often ranked among the best anime of all time by fans and critics alike.[1] It is therefore natural that works by the studio have come under academic scrutiny as well, though there remain gaps in such study.

The present paper works to analyze Kyoto Animation productions through concepts drawn from Japanese Buddhism. This lens offers critical insights in that, although perhaps not directly associated with anime in the minds of fans or critics, Buddhist tropes run through many of the studio's productions. This paper will argue that *tariki* (other-power), an important concept for Pure Land Buddhism, is the most relevant undercurrent linking several of Kyoto Animation's productions.

The term and concept of *tariki* has a long history within Buddhism. Though the historical Buddha is known to have preached primarily the importance of self-introspection and self-abnegation (translated into Japanese as *jiriki*, self-power) in order to escape the cycle of death and rebirth, several canonical Buddhist texts show that he also may have intended to propose a different way for the masses of people, who had neither the time nor the mental capacity for such practices, to embrace the Eightfold Path.[2] In later texts, the Buddha is said to have remarked positively on the

ecumenical nature of nirvana, where even the 'indolent' would be granted access to enlightenment just by the act of hearing his teachings.[3]

The formation of a schism among the followers of Buddha after the fourth Grand Sangha, coupled with the acceleration of the geographical spread of his gospel, induced changes in worship and doctrine, where the worship of the historical Buddha was supplanted in some cases by the worship of a pantheon of his historical reincarnations as depicted in the central texts of Buddhism. The most prominent among these reincarnations was Amitâbha (*Amida* in Japanese), the Buddha of the Pure Land (i.e., the Buddhist paradise), whose 48 vows to his followers were interpreted as ensuring nirvana to those who would only hear his words.[4] This brand of Buddhism, which promised democratic access to salvation without the rigor required by other Buddhist sub-disciplines, became the most popular form of teaching in China (and later Korea and Japan as well), and the first Chinese interpreters of Mâhayâna Buddhism grasped early on the importance of this ecumenical message for the propagation of this religion. Heian-era devotees such as Genshin (942-1017) and Yôkan (1033-1111) introduced the tenets of Amitâbha (henceforward called Amida) to Japan, and they spread the teachings widely among the elite classes of the late Heian and early Kamakura eras.[5]

However, it was not until the two extraordinary figures of Hônen (1133-1212) and Shinran (1173-1263) entered the stage during the early Kamakura period, that the concept of *tariki* became the normative standard for popular Japanese Buddhism as not only a valid, but also as the most desirable, form of religious practice for lay Buddhists. Hônen believed that the chanting of the mantra *Namu Amida Butsu* (the *nenbutsu*) by a devotee was enough to ensure

their rebirth in paradise, while Shinran took this discourse further by completely rejecting any other forms of collecting merit for salvation in favor of chanting the *nenbutsu*, as "radical and absolute faith in Amida's vow was essential for rebirth and this precluded any notion of self-effort".[67] In this formulation, then, only by the intercession of Amida could the devotee attain the paradise of the Pure Land; as later expressed pithily by Daisetz T. Suzuki, "it is all in the working of Amida, and we ordinary people living relative existences are powerless to bring about our birth in the Pure Land, or, in another word, bring about our enlightenment".[8]

While the Buddhist doctrine of *tariki* had a great impact on Japanese religious life, it also influenced the evolution of new cultural forms. Of these, the most relevant is the medieval Japanese dramatic art form known as *nô*, which scholars such as Stevie Suan have shown is a direct precursor to – and primary influence on – anime.[9] Founded in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries CE, the *nô* theatre was "ultimately destined to supersede the earlier…song-dances" of Japanese high art by presenting a dance-drama of long duration that maintained excellent production values, a high degree of aesthetic quality in its scripts, and an extremely systematized set of actions and movements by on-stage actors that lent itself to predictability and standardization.[10] According to James H. Foard, "the…emphasis on Pure Land Buddhism in the plays themselves is beyond dispute," and there is clear indication that the teachings of Hônen and Shinran influenced the scriptwriting directly.[11] One such piece of evidence can be found in what is now understood as a standardized trope of *nô* theatre: the interaction between a spirit and a wandering monk (or Shintô priest, usually played by the primary lead actors), and the pivotal role played by the latter in helping the former achieve freedom from the cycle

of death and rebirth.

Though an extended discussion of them is beyond the scope of this paper, two examples from the classical repertoire of *nô* plays can be discussed briefly. Take, for example, the popular play *Atsumori*, based on a story found in the *Tale of the Heike* (*Heike Monogatari*, c.1330, author unknown).[12] The play revolves around the story of a wandering monk named Rensei (or Rensho), who in a past life was a warrior named Kumagai no Jirô Atsutane, as well as a young man later revealed as the spirit of Taira no Atsumori, cut down by Kumagai when they both fought on opposite sides in the Heike conflict (also called the Genpei war, 1180-1185). After their introduction, Kumagai, now Rensei (or Rensho), realizes that he has yet to atone for the killing of his young opponent, and promises the spirit that he would pray for the latter's soul. In the play's climax, Atsumori enters heaven thanks to the monk's intercession, leaving behind a narration of his deeds until his death at the hands of his old enemy, now his friend and savior. After Atsumori disappears, the monk returns to his wandering, resolved anew in his desire for the salvation of all beings.

In *Sanemori,* also derived from the *Tale of the Heike*, the eponymous old warrior wanders his former battlefield through the ages, his spirit unable to pass away completely.[13] Into this milieu steps the monk Yûgyô Shônin, whose sermons the spirit of Sanemori attends in disguise. As the priest calls on him to speak, Sanemori sheds his disguise and attains his true form, speaking of his actions in the final battle he fought as a commander of the armies of the Heike clan, and his vain attempt to engage the rival commander in hand-to-hand combat, only to be decapitated by a lesser enemy. Upon hearing the story, the monk is moved to compassion, and in line with his vows to help ensure the salvation of all

beings, decides to pray for the soul of Sanemori. In the final act, as the monk's prayers take effect, the ghost of Sanemori slowly fades away, his rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha assured after a short narration of the manner of his death.

In the context of the *nô* stage, these two chief characters of the monk and the spirit can be interpreted as two halves of a dyadic pair, neither of which can fulfil their mission without the other's power. For example, the spirits of Atsumori and Sanemori are condemned to wander the earth forever, as they cannot let go of their egotistical desires for either revenge (Atsumori) or injustice (Sanemori), while the monks Rensei (Rensho) and Yûgyô Shônin are bound to pray for the repose of their counterparts, either out of a desire to repent and atone for a deed done in a past life (Rensei) or from a duty to fulfil the Buddhist vow of compassion for all beings (Yûgyô Shônin). Only the intervention of the monks enables Atsumori and Sanemori to finally pass away, while the successful salvation of the spirits enables the monks to achieve their respective aims of repentance (Rensei) and of propagating the teachings of Buddhism (Yûgyô Shônin), thus earning merit for themselves in the afterlife. Both halves of the dyad are transformed by the affective impact of the other half, both literally and metaphorically; that is, they achieve *affective transformation*.

This paper seeks to show that this trope of affective transformation, albeit modified, is a key theme running through the works of Kyoto Animation, where it is presented as an antidote to the anomie and alienation often experienced by individuals, especially youth, in postmodern societies.

Methodology, Scope, and Definitions

This paper will focus on four works: the *Haruhi Suzumiya* series (two seasons of a TV series and one film) by director Ishihara Tatsuya, *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon* (one season as of June 2021) by director Takemoto Yasuhiro, *A Silent Voice* (feature film) by director Yamada Naoko, and *Beyond the Boundary* (one season of the TV series, followed by a prequel and sequel film) by director Ishidate Taichi. These works have been selected because their directors represent the four most prolific members on the Kyoto Animation roster (see Table 1, in bold). Thus these works, it is expected, would serve as a representative cross-section of the studio's oeuvre by controlling for the possibility that the theme of affective transformation might be the product of any single director's worldview or belief.

The works themselves, as tabulated in Table 2, have been chosen according to the following criteria:

- popularity among fans of Kyoto Animation, evidenced by their ratings on the site MyAnimeList (MAL);
- temporal distribution (a period between 2006 to 2017 is represented);
- diversity of directors (three men and one woman);
- variety of formats (three TV series and three feature films);
- generic characteristics (high-school adventure, slice of life comedy, social-commentary-driven romance, and action romance, respectively).

This paper is divided into four parts. The introduction has identified the central lens through which the rest of this paper looks at the works in Table 2. The current section lists the specific works to be discussed, as well as the criteria for their selection and some aspects that will not be covered. The following section, divided into two parts, will discuss in more detail the concepts of affective transformation and the community of peers as portrayed in these selected texts. Finally, the conclusion will offer some concluding commentary on the place that these concepts enjoy in Kyoto Animation's oeuvre, as well as to highlight the relevance of these works as tools not only to understand the ubiquity of popular Japanese Buddhist ideas in Japanese discourse, but also for potential social-scientific purposes.

The analysis of these works taken up for discussion will be done on a whole-story basis, such that only arcs or stories apposite to the central argument will be discussed in depth. This approach has been adopted due to the variety of works under discussion, each of which may contain several story arcs.

Table 1. The Directors of Kyoto Animation

Director	Number of credits	Total run-time of credited works (in minutes)
Ishihara Tatsuya[14]	20 (13 TV series, 6 films, 1 OVA)	5208
Takemoto Yasuhiro[15]	13 (7 TV series, 2 films, 2 OVA, 1 ONA)	2610
Yamada Naoko[16]	7 (3 TV series, 4 films)	1625
Kawanami Eisaku[17]	6 (1 TV series, 5 films)	676

Ishidate Taichi[18]	5 (2 TV series, 3 films)	1060
Kigami Yoshiji[19]	4 (1 TV series, 1 film, 2 OVA)	420
Utsumi Hiroko[20]	2 (TV series)	600
Yamamoto Yutaka[21]	1 (TV series)	96

Yamamura Takuya[22]	1 (TV series)	312
Fujita Haruka[23]	1 (film)	91
Ogawa Taichi[24]	1 (film)	110

Table 2. Works cited in this paper

Name of the Work	Year of broadcast	Run-time (combined, in minutes)	Source format	Director	MAL Rating (number of users)	Source of media
The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya (*Haruhi Suzumiya no Yûutsu*)[25]	2006 (Season 1), 2009 (Season 2)	658	Light novel	Ishihara Tatsuya	7.86 (407,851) (Season 1), 7.23 (255,508) (Season 2)	Netflix[26]
The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya (*Haruhi Suzumiya no Shôshitsu*)[27]	2010	162	Light novel	Ishihara Tatsuya (chief), Takemoto Yasuhiro	8.64 (260,485)	Netflix[28]
Beyond the Boundary (*Kyôkai no Kanata*)[29]	2013	288	Light novel	Ishidate Taichi	7.76 (434,857)	Amazon Prime Video[30]
Beyond the Boundary –I'll Be Here- Future (*Gekijôban Kyôkai no Kanata: I'll Be Here Mirai-hen*)[31]	2015	90	Light novel	Ishidate Taichi	8.19 (103,910)	DVD[32]

A Silent Voice (*Koe no Katachi*)[33]	2016	130	Manga	Yamada Naoko	8.98 (1,061,767)	Netflix[34]
Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid (*Kobayashi-san chi no Meido Doragon*)[35] *Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid Episode 14: Valentine's, and Then Hot Springs! -Please Don't Get Your Hopes Up* (*Kobayashi-san chi no Meido Doragon: Barentain, soshite Onsen! Amari Kitai Shinai de Kudasai*) (Special episode)[36]	2017	312 23 (Special episode)	Manga	Takemoto Yasuhiro	8.00 (497,540) 7.76 (79,382) (Special episode)	Crunchyroll[37]

Run-times are author's own calculations.

Discussion of works

In the present sections, two key motifs will be discussed thematically. The first sub-section will discuss the concept of affective transformation, after which the discussion will pivot to the community of peers and its modalities. For reasons of space, this section exclusively discusses scenes that illustrate the themes under discussion.

Affective transformation in the works of Kyoto Animation

The first thematic characteristic discernible in Kyoto Animation's works, similar to the discussion of the *nô* plays above, is the presence of a pair of lead characters whose dynamic can best be called dyadic. Most commonly, this dyadic lead pair is comprised of individuals of opposite genders, though this is not always the case: in some cases, most notably *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, the chief protagonists are of the same gender.

What is more, the lead pair is almost invariably also romantically linked, though there are significant variations within this frame too: in *Beyond the Boundary* and *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, there is a clear power imbalance, while in *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, the protagonists are of different species.

More significant, from this paper's perspective, is the method by which these dyads achieve affective transformation. Just as the pairs described above in the discussion of the plays *Sanemori* and *Atsumori*, members of the dyads in each of these Kyoto Animation works discussed below are locked in certain ways of being and belonging, which they find unnecessary or difficult to change. It is only by coming into

contact with the other half of the dyad that the necessary impetus for change is first received and later put into practice. In other words, both sides undergo *affective transformation* in order to achieve stable relationships with their significant other. Therefore, affective transformation in this context may be defined as a renegotiation, and eventually a radical transformation, of the self: motivated not by self-reflection (self-power, or *jiriki*), but by interaction with, and the affective influence of, an external agent, primarily presented as an object of affection, who is both the source of radical change as well as its ultimate destination.

To achieve this, however, the characters must first fall into a crisis where their identity is destabilized in a critical way, and then find themselves in a liminal space where they are completely alienated from themselves and others; from here they must begin, with the help of their dyadic other half, to reconstitute themselves.

This theme will be referred to henceforth as "a descent into Purgatory,", in deference to the importance that the concept of Purgatory holds in eschatological terms, especially in Buddhism and its predecessor Hinduism, as an intermediate stage from which the souls of the deceased achieve either heaven (*moksha* or *nirvana*, freedom from the cycle of rebirth) or hell (punishment for sins committed in life, followed by a return to the transmigratory cycle of death and rebirth). Though this is not always the case (i.e., it shows up in three of the four cases discussed below, not all four), it will be seen that the dialectic relationship of an (ostensibly) stable self plunging into crisis due to an encounter with the Other, only to re-emerge as a fully-fledged and radically-transformed self as part of the dyad, is a core narrative characteristic of Kyoto Animation's oeuvre.

In *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, though Haruhi – as pointed out by the other members of the SOS Brigade – attains affective transformation when Kyon first interacts with her, her dogged insistence on dictating the actions of fellow members in her quest to escape the eponymous melancholy of the title is countered by his determination to instinctively reject her, which is rooted in his fear of her godlike powers activating seemingly at random. This is vividly conveyed to viewers during the famous *Endless Eight* arc of the series, where Kyon and the group realize to their horror that they are living in an eternal summer-vacation time loop created by Haruhi's desire to spend more time with them. Over eight episodes, the characters repeat the same activities over and over again, with only minor differences noticeable only to the viewer thanks to the animators' clear intention to make them so; what is more, according to Nagato, they have been doing so for millions of iterations. This, for all intents and purposes, represents Kyon's descent into Purgatory, as he is trapped in an endless cycle of time during which he must reflect on his actions, and ultimately, attain the "enlightenment" of surrendering to Haruhi's Other-power: by inviting her and the gang over to his house to help him with his homework, Kyon finally fulfills Haruhi's wish, triggering the end of the time loop.

The theme of purgatory returns in the film *The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya,* as Kyon is inserted into an alternate timeline where the Brigade does not exist and Haruhi does not know him. In his alienated and defamiliarized state, he desperately tries to find a way back home. In a climactic scene that occurs at the moment of his escape from the altered timeline, he finally awakens to the realization that his life with the Brigade is an important element of his self-identity. In this

moment of realization, he finally opens himself to Haruhi's Other-power, and decides to reset the timeline back to normal so that he can be with her again. However, he suffers grievous wounds in the process, and wakes up days later in a hospital, where he is greeted by Koizumi. The latter informs him of his situation, and points to his bedside, where he finds Haruhi sleeping; apparently, she has been watching over him throughout his convalescence.

It is instructive to observe Kyon in this scene: in a deeply reverent yet profoundly intimate manner reminiscent of the Renaissance-era motif of the Adoration of the Magi, he gently caresses her mouth and eyes, and brushes the hair from her face until she wakes up.[38] Later, on the roof of the hospital, as Nagato approaches him to confess that she is the culprit behind the altered timeline, the full extent of Kyon's evolution is evident; not only does he assure Nagato that he and Haruhi will protect her from any consequences, but in his internal monologue, he also repeatedly confirms his faith in Haruhi's powers, and the power of both of them together to protect everyone close to them. As he meditates, the perspective shifts to a bird's-eye view, encompassing the hospital roof and the city beyond, drawing the eye upwards until the night sky fills the screen; the entire universe, it seems to say, is now part of the dyad's purview**.** Kyon's affective transformation is thus completed, as he willingly accepts Haruhi's power over him, even as he grows more confident of his own power to affect her.

The principal dyad of *Beyond the Boundary*, Kuriyama Mirai and Kanbara Akihito, initially come together because of their shared identity as ostracized entities within their respective communities; Kuriyama is an exorcist who can manipulate her own "cursed" blood into weapons, while Akihito is an immortal hybrid with a human

mother and a Shade (as the entities hunted by exorcists are called) father. As the intimacy between them deepens, Kuriyama is enabled, by her induction into the community of peers by Akihito, to overcome the trauma of her childhood, and thereby form new social connections. Akihito, on the other hand, undergoes a more difficult trial, that of learning to re-evaluate the hitherto dichotomized parts of himself. Initially, he fears for Kuriyama's safety and attempts to completely suppress his Shade self. However, as the series approaches its climax with the Shade known as Beyond the Boundary (*Kyôkai no Kanata*) appearing on the horizon, Akihito is compelled to recognize that only when his human and Shade selves are completely integrated can he hope to save Kuriyama and others; in the final episodes, he uses his Shade self to enter the surrealistic world of Beyond the Boundary (which is incidentally revealed to be his father) and provide aid to Kuriyama, who has hitherto been battling the threat alone, by manipulating the space created by the Shade. Eventually they defeat the threat together, but in the final moments, Akihito realizes that Kuriyama has lost her memory of him and everyone else as a cost of overexerting her powers.

The film *I'll Be Here - Future* (a pun derived from Kuriyama's given name Mirai, which also means "the future") takes up the story a year after the events of the series, and vividly demonstrates that narrative's impact on a member of the central dyad of deprivation of their partner's Other-power and the community of peers. An amnesiac Kuriyama is being shut out by Akihito and the other members of her community of peers at his urging, led by his wishes to protect her from the constant pain and fear she experienced as a wielder of "cursed blood." However, his actions have the unintended effect of weakening Kuriyama's emotional state, which attracts the attention of the true

villain of the film, the rogue exorcist Miroku. In an ambush at her apartment, the latter manages to corrupt her with his power, causing her to essentially give in to the worst aspects of her isolation and blame Akihito as the source of it. Kuriyama's descent into Purgatory is complete when she finds herself thrust into a pit of blackness where she is tormented by twisted visions of Akihito and the Nase siblings, who she is made to believe hate and despise her for her "curse." At the end of her nightmare, Kuriyama undergoes a physical transformation, her eyes turning red and her powers unleashed to the maximum. In order to stop her, a repentant Akihito uses Kuriyama's attack to literally penetrate her psyche; among her memories, he recovers a long-forgotten fragment on a sunlit beach, where both of their mothers speak of their hopes for their children and promise to watch over each other's children in case of tragedy. This memory, visually reminiscent of traditional Japanese imaginaries of the Pure Land, forces loose the lost memories of Kuriyama's time with him and the group.[39] In doing so, he makes her whole by helping her reconnect to both her former self and the group. The film ends on an optimistic note, with Kuriyama and Akihito in a romantic relationship.

The protagonists of the film *A Silent Voice*, however, do not attain affective transformation until they are provided catharsis. Ishida Shôya, as a former bully and later victim of bullying, suffers from deep social anxiety and suicidal tendencies; this is his Purgatory, expressed movingly in scenes where everyone around him has a big black X marked over their face, indicating not only that he feels alienated from them, but also that they have shut him out in turn. Nishimiya Shôko, a former victim of Shôya's, expresses suicidal ideation in her youth (expressed in a moving flashback where she signs to her sister Yuzuru that she wants to kill herself) and generalized passivity later on. Though the two reconnect and grow closer to each other, their past

relation as victim and victimizer continues to deny them a meaningful relationship. Shôya's breakdown in the midpoint climax of the film, followed by Shôko's suicide attempt from the balcony of her family apartment, moves matters to a resolution. In attempting to save Shôko, Shôya sacrifices his footing, and in a scene pregnant with meaning, tumbles down into the river below while pulling her back over the parapet to safety, mirroring exactly an initial scene where he attempts to jump into the same river in order to kill himself. By contrast to the selfish desire for self-extinction in that earlier scene, Shôya displays true selflessness by his act of sacrifice here, even at the cost of his own annihilation.

For Shôko, this moment marks a turning point, as she realizes the self-centered nature of her passivity; in the aftermath, as Shôya lies in a coma, we see her desperately attempt to make amends, to the point of being physically attacked by Naoka, who takes issue with that self-same passivity. Later, however, a just-awakened Shôya tells Shôko that he does not hold her responsible, and that he wants her to "help him live," essentially – and powerfully – expressing an implicit trust in Shôko's Other-power to help him overcome his failings. Shôko is awakened by Shôya's admission to the power of being needed by him, of needing to care for him, and thus discovers her own *raison d'être*. In the final moments of the film, we see a newly confident Shôko helping Shôya overcome his perceived inadequacies, and thereby reaffirm his intrinsic value to the people around him; the Xs on people's faces drop away, and he is moved to tears by his rehabilitation.

In *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, affective transformation occurs on an inter-species level, and creates a relationship for its co-gendered central dyad that verges on

the erotic. Kobayashi, initially depicted as a straitlaced but somewhat idiosyncratic *salaryman*, is enabled by her cohabitation with Tohru – and Kanna – to create for herself an ideal nuclear family unit, where she takes on the role of "husband," with Tohru as a (hopelessly infatuated and eagerly subservient) "wife" and Kanna as a (deeply attached) "child," thereby alleviating both her loneliness as well as societal expectations. Tohru, the maid dragon of the title, in turn is able to shed her anthropophobia as she begins to reside with Kobayashi, even to the point of having a wide range of human acquaintances among neighbors, local residents, business owners, and even fans of fantasy roleplay, in a particularly hilarious episode set in the Comic Market (*Comiket*) convention held biannually in Tokyo. As the story progresses, we see the effects of this transformation unfold: Tohru defends humankind – and Kobayashi – against her father, the chief of a group of warring dragons, while Kobayashi is gradually socialized by Tohru and Kanna into balancing work and life more adroitly as a "spouse" and "parent," such as maintaining a better balance between home and work and attending school events.

The community of peers in the works of Kyoto Animation

In order to accomplish affective transformation, these works by Kyoto Animation consistently emphasize the value of a safe and understanding environment. This environment is provided by the other thematic characteristic discussed in this paper, particularly the presence of a community of peers, in which the central dyad is ensconced and that provides the necessary social and emotional support to alleviate the traumatic aspects of radical change.

This community of peers finds many expressions, from school clubs such as the

SOS Brigade of *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* to the lovingly-nicknamed "Chorogons" of *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*. What is common to these communities, however, is their composition: non-consanguineous colleagues/friends/compatriots who willingly associate with the central characters because of affective ties with them. These ties motivate them to assist the central characters in achieving the affective transformation that the narrative demands of them, even though not many of these supporting characters achieve such transformation themselves.

In the *Haruhi Suzumiya* series, the SOS Brigade – composed of the time traveler Asahina Mikuru, the alien android Nagato Yuki, and the empath Koizumi Itsuki – forms the community of peers for Kyon and Haruhi. Initially intended to observe Haruhi's powers at the behest of larger entities, the group gradually coheres into a supportive role, helping Kyon and Haruhi form a tighter dyad. Each contributes to this mission in their own way: the bumbling Asahina not only serves (unwillingly) as Haruhi's plaything, but also helps Kyon when the crisis of the day requires him to time-travel; meanwhile Koizumi serves as an interpreter of Haruhi's moods and intentions, as well as the mediator in their conflicts. Arguably the most important role, however, is played by Nagato, who not only manipulates space-time to help Kyon and the others out of major crises, but also serves as the record-keeper of the group, a role played to great effect during the *Endless Eight* arc. Even more significantly, it is she who triggers the events of the film by rewriting reality around Kyon, causing him to attain the final realization that leads him to embrace Haruhi's Other-power entirely.

The community of peers in *Beyond the Boundary* is comprised of the members

of the Literary Club, the Nase siblings Hiroomi and Mitsuki, who are also scions of a pre-eminent family of exorcists, along with their associates within the exorcist community. Primarily tasked with protecting (and minding) Akihito, the siblings eventually come to view themselves as Kuriyama's protectors as well. They perform the characteristic functions of the community of peers: Mitsuki is pivotal in accepting Kuriyama into the group and helps her understand the roots of Akihito's behavior; later on, she helps Akihito realize that in order to protect Kuriyama, he has to accept himself completely, including the Shade part. In the film, she and Hiroomi (unwillingly) comply with Akihito's wishes and keep their distance from Kuriyama, but also urge him to rethink his stance. As Kuriyama is turned by Miroku, the siblings help Akihito contain her, so that he can enter her psyche and remove Miroku's corrupting influence.

The community of peers in *A Silent Voice* is *sui generis* in this enumeration, as they actually initially perform a negative role in the central dyad's affective transformation. Several of them are compromised figures: as we note in the film's initial part, Sahara and Kawai abandon their attempts to help Shôko when they are targeted for bullying, while Naoka actively aids Shôya and friends in harassing her. This is why we see, later on, that in Shôya's mindscape all three have crossed-out faces when he encounters them again, and their refusal for most of the film to accept their role in that formative incident traps Shôya in Purgatory and prevents his rehabilitation, leading to Shôya's breakdown and Shôko's suicide attempt. Mashiba enters the group with a rigidity in his attitude toward bullies that leads him to make a sweeping judgment of Shôya, which also contributes to Shôya's self-loathing. Yuzuru, Shôko's sister, initially judges Shôya harshly too, though she learns to re-evaluate him as he undergoes his

transformation.

It is Nagatsuka alone who is presented in the film as a clean slate, and it is his acceptance of Shôya's past and present that points the way to a transformation in the whole group. This is evident in his presence by Shôko's side as she attempts to mend the rupture caused by Shôya's breakdown, as well as in his later monologue to Shôya, where he states that he values Shôya's present, not his past. He thus performs the critical role of a catalyst in simultaneously breaking through Shôya's negative attitude toward himself as well as supporting Shôko in her struggle to shed her passivity and finally take charge of her life.

The episodic nature of *Miss Kobayashi's Maid Dragon*, not to mention the demands of its genre, implies that membership of the community of peers is the primary function of the peripheral characters, but also, since they mainly exist as comedic subjects, they are less crucial to the story in terms of development. The dragons in the group (Alma, Lucoa, and Fafnir) serve primarily as sources of information throughout the show, enabling Kobayashi to understand the mindset of dragons (as well as means of transport when the situation requires it), while the humans (Takiya, Saikawa and Shôta) serve to acclimatize the dragons to the human world, usually to hilarious effect. Yet only Fafnir can be said to attain a radical transformation of the self through his co-residence with Takiya and his indulgence in the joys of internet games, though this transformation seems to be comically unstable, and perpetually threatens to go off the rails given the slightest opportunity, lending the whole thing a parodic aura.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed four works by Kyoto Animation in order to trace how the Buddhist concept of *tariki* is relevant to their narratives in the form of affective transformation. Though the number of works discussed here was limited due to space constraints, in reality a much wider part of the studio's oeuvre also partakes of the themes of affective transformation and the community of peers: enough to offer strong proof of the hypothesis that Kyoto Animation does indeed have a specific penchant for producing such works.

A more germane question concerns the motive behind Kyoto Animation's strong emphasis on producing works so similar in thematic terms. A definitive answer cannot be offered here, but it can be argued, in line with Jolyon Baraka Thomas' conceptualization of anime as a "representational technique designed to trigger visceral responses, elicit emotional reactions, and prompt intellectual reorientations," that they seem to be pointing towards the possibility of radical behavioral change in response to human connection, as well as the importance of a permissive social environment for such change to occur.[40] Since many of the works discussed in this paper concern young people of school-going age, especially those on the cusp of adulthood, this interpretation attains greater significance, as it conforms to the general understanding of this period of human development as crucial for identity formation and stabilization.[41][41]

The championing of connection and community has a secondary importance. The works presented here universally privilege "real" (i.e., physical) connections between the central dyad, as well as the physical proximity of the community of peers, as integral components of the story, thus valorizing a non-mediated form of

connection as key to achieving the radical transformation necessary for an adolescent's metamorphosis into an adult. Treated as such, these texts can be said to propose an antidote to the age of social media-induced alienation, where people are prone to interact with their peers more via tools of digital communication, and are often influenced by trends and statements posted by strangers half a world away. These texts thus have value not only as artistic output, but also as didactic vehicles depicting an alternative to post-modern societal malaise such as social isolation and anomie. As a result, they offer rich spaces not only to scholars wishing to trace the permeation of popular Buddhist ideology into popular culture, but also potentially as therapeutic tools, an ancillary use to which they may be gainfully applied.

Notes

[1] See, for example, Yusuke-s. '30 Best Anime of All Time (2021).' Accessed 23 May 2021. https://jw-webmagazine.com/best-anime/.
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Faith in Buddhism, 129.
[3] Inoue, 'A Genealogy of Other-Power Faith', 130.
[4] For the 48 vows, see Humanistic Buddhism Centre. "The Forty-Eight Vows of Amitabha Buddha." Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.fgsitc.org/the-forty-eight-vows-of-amitabha-buddha/.
[5] James L. Ford, "Jôkei and the Rhetoric of "Other-Power" and "Easy-Practice" in Medieval Japanese Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29, nos. 1-2 (2002): 71.
[6] Ford, "Jôkei and "Other-Power"", 73.
[7] Ford, "Jôkei and "Other-Power"", 75.
[8] Daisetz T. Suzuki, "Shin Buddhism: Part III," *The Eastern Buddhist*, *New Series* 23, no. 1 (1990): 1
[9] Stevie Suan, *The Anime Paradox: Patterns and Practices Through the Lens of Traditional Japanese Theater* (Leiden and Boston: Global Oriental, 2013).
[10] Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkôkai, *The Noh Drama: Ten Plays from the Japanese* (Tokyo and Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1955 [1985]), 14.
[11] James H. Foard, "*Seiganji*: The Buddhist Orientation of a Noh Play," *Monumenta Nipponica* 35, no. 4 (1980): 437. However, cf. Royall Tyler, "Buddhism in Noh," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, no. 1 (1987), where he argues that Pure Land Buddhism was only one strain of inspiration for Zeami's plays.
[12] The-NOH.com, "Noh Plays Database: Atsumori: Synopsis and Highlight", Accessed 31 May 2021. https://www.the-noh.com/en/plays/data/program_008.html.
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[17] AniDB. 'Person: Kawanami Eisaku.' Accessed 24 May 2021. https://anidb.net/creator/2530.
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[19] AniDB. 'Person: Kigami Yoshiji.' Accessed 24 May 2021. https://anidb.net/creator/1672

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[21] AniDB. 'Person: Yamamoto Yutaka.' Accessed 24 May 2021. https://anidb.net/creator/121.
[22] AniDB. 'Person: Yamamura Takuya.' Accessed 24 May 2021. https://anidb.net/creator/2656
[23] AniDB. 'Person: Fujita Haruka.' Accessed 24 May 2021. https://anidb.net/creator/32382.
[24] AniDB. 'Person: Ogawa Taichi.' Accessed 24 May 2021. https://anidb.net/creator/15009.
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[27] MyAnimeList. 'Suzumiya Haruhi no Shoushitsu.' Accessed 26 May 2021. https://myanimelist.net/anime/7311/Suzumiya_Haruhi_no_Shoushitsu.
[28] *The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya*, dir. Ishihara Tatsuya (2010); available on Netflix. Accessed 28 April 2021. https://www.netflix.com/in/title/70223722.
[28] *The Disappearance of Haruhi Suzumiya*, dir. Ishihara Tatsuya (2010); available on Netflix. Accessed 28 April 2021. https://www.netflix.com/in/title/70223722.
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[33] MyAnimeList. 'Koe no Katachi (A Silent Voice).' Accessed 26 May 2021. https://myanimelist.net/anime/28851/Koe_no_Katachi.
[34] *A Silent Voice*, dir. Yamada Naoko (2016); available on Netflix. Accessed 30 December 2020. https://www.netflix.com/in/title/80223226.
[35] MyAnimeList. 'Kobayashi-san Chi no Maid Dragon (Miss Kobayashi's Dragon Maid).' Accessed 26 May 2021. https://myanimelist.net/anime/33206/Kobayashi-san_Chi_no_Maid_Dragon.

[36] MyAnimeList. 'Kobayashi-san Chi no Maid Dragon: Valentine, soshite Onsen! – Amari Kitai Shinai de Kudasai.' Accessed 26 May 2021. https://myanimelist.net/anime/35363/Kobayashi-san_Chi_no_Maid_Dragon_Valentine_Soshite_Onsen_-_Amari_Kitai_Shinaide_Kudasai.
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[38] Le Gallerie degle Uffizi. "Adoration of the Magi by Albrecht Dürer". Accessed 17 February 2022. https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/adoration-of-the-magi-durer.
[39] One example is the aptly-named Jodogahama Beach in Iwate Prefecture, which was dubbed by many as the 'Pure Land on earth'; see Japan-guide.com, 'Sanriku Coast Travel: Jodogahama Beach.' Accessed 10 March 2022. https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e5029.html.
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[41] For example, see Theo A. Klimstra, William W. Hale III, Quinten A.W. Raaijmakers, Susan J.T. Branje and Wim H.J. Meeus, "Identity Formation in Adolescence: Change or Stability?" *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 39, no. 2 (2010); Lotte van Doeselaar, Kate C. McLean, Wim Meeus, Jaap J.A. Denissen and Theo A. Klimstra, "Adolescents' Identity Formation: Linking the Narrative and the Dual-Cycle Approach," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 49, no. 4 (2020).

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"Why must fireflies die so young?"

The Picturesque as an Instrument of Caution in the Works of Studio Ghibli.

Samragngi Roy

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Abstract: As opposed to most contemporary usage of the word "picturesque" – which is generally taken to mean visually attractive in a quaint or charming way, or else something that resembles a picture – William Gilpin introduced this term to the English cultural debate in 1792. Gilpin used "picturesque" to typify an aesthetic ideal wherein roughness, raggedness, and ruins would be privileged over smoothness, symmetry and perfection. Over time, his conceptualization of "the picturesque" led to a celebration of disorder, decay, and ruin, a kind of glorification of violence also familiar to the Gothic romances of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, following the unimaginable havoc and mass destruction caused by the two world wars, ruins and images of ruins started to be viewed very differently. This paper seeks to explore how the picturesque mode has been used as an instrument of caution in the works of Studio Ghibli, spearheaded by two creative artists and directors, Hayao Miyazaki and Takahata Isao, who have experienced the horrors of WWII firsthand in their own childhoods. This paper specifically looks at two famous anime feature films produced by Studio Ghibli – *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) – that deal with the impacts of war and convey strong anti-war messages by uniquely employing the picturesque mode of representation.

Keywords: picturesque, William Gilpin, Studio Ghibli, anime, war ruins

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Introduction:

Today the word “picturesque” is often associated with ideas of roughness, raggedness, and ruins. Defined by William Gilpin in his 1972 essay "On Picturesque Beauty," it is an aesthetic of effect that does not really exist independently in nature but only in nature’s perception by the viewer. This phenomenon is created primarily by painters but also by trained viewers and observers. According to Gilpin, when nature is captured at its wildest and most untamed form, one might recognize the quality of picturesque beauty in that kind of a frame instead of in a depiction of a perfectly manicured and well-maintained garden space oozing a kind of an orderly, controlled, symmetrical beauty that is almost saccharine. Eminent painters, especially in the Romantic era, had a deep preoccupation with and intense fascination for ruins. The feeling of “guilt” that the ruins evoked commingled with the destruction of the Roman Catholic past, the tyranny of empire, and the institutions of control dominated by reason. The rebellion against such structures was something that they preferred to idealize. These ruins were the constant reminder of what once was and now no longer remained, and hence, they were channelized into art and seen as sources of artistic inspiration. While some painters like Gilpin glorified the picturesque as an aesthetic ideal, others like John Thelwall saw the need for a kind of political intervention that would help alleviate the suffering stemming from the romanticized disorder that constituted the locus of picturesque art.

However, in the course of time and especially after the two world wars, ruins came to acquire very different connotations, and the purpose behind the depiction of ruins in art underwent radical transformations. This paper seeks to identify the aesthetic of the

picturesque in the works of Studio Ghibli, founded by Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata, and explore what makes these founders employ the picturesque in such remarkable profusion in most of their works. Their obsession with ruins, disorder, asymmetry, and ragged topography – which tend to be overtly conspicuous in some of their animated feature films – constitute the crux of this paper. The films considered here are *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), which each use the aesthetic of the picturesque at crucial plot junctures. While *Grave of the Fireflies* largely deals with the effects of the American air raids on Japan during the WWII, *Howl's Moving Castle* revolves around a fictional war declared by a whimsical character armed with supernatural powers. Later interviews of the director, Miyazaki, have proven instrumental in unearthing the fact that the fictional war in the movie was actually influenced by the ongoing war in Iran while Miyazaki was working on the film.

I shall first provide a close reading of certain sections of the two chosen films, highlighting how the aesthetic ideal of the picturesque and the motif of ruins are being employed in those sections, before then placing the films within their historical contexts and the specific epochs they aspire to bring to life. I then turn to analyzing how the aesthetic of the picturesque becomes necessary within the realm of these depictions, and how it has evolved after the two world wars.

The concept of 'picturesque' and its association with ruins

William Gilpin, the founding father of the aesthetic ideal of the picturesque, introduced it into the English cultural debate through his groundbreaking work, *Essay on Prints* (1768) and *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc.*

Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770 (1792). The latter work instructed England's travelers to examine the surface of a country according to the rules of picturesque beauty.[1] Picturesque soon became a part of the emerging romantic sensibility of the eighteenth century alongside the emergence and proliferation of the aesthetic and cultural strands of Gothicism and Celticism. In the 1740s, William Gilpin visited the famous gardens at Stowe and soon after he wrote a book *A Dialogue upon the gardens of the Right Honourable the lord Viscount Cobham at Stowe* (1748). In this book, he distinguished between the moral and the aesthetic beauty to be found in natural scenery and ruined buildings, and this work is understood to have laid the foundations for his later writings on the picturesque. Following this, Gilpin took a series of summer tours between 1768 and 1776 in several areas of Britain, traveling, writing, and sketching widely. His travel narratives were not in the form of guidebooks and did not feature itineraries, mileage, or directions. Instead, they contained his examination of different regions in accordance with the picturesque eye and imagination. Thus, he was able to offer aesthetic guidance to amateur artists and travelers. Overall, Gilpin argued that the sublime and the beautiful – as theorized by a near-contemporary, Edmund Burke – were not the only appropriate standards of taste in art criticism and added a third category between the two. This category was what he termed the picturesque. Many critics have said that this was originally a term of judgment applied specifically to the landscape paintings of Claude and Poussin, but Gilpin later used it to figure out if a natural landscape was fine enough to be painted.

According to Gilpin, the picturesque was that peculiar kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture.[2] Gilpin went on to suggest that in order to qualify as picturesque,

an object must have a rough surface, not a smooth one: to his mind, smoothness can be considered beautiful but roughness is what constitutes the picturesque. Gilpin challenged Edmund Burke's ideas, which privileged smoothness as the most considerable source of beauty. In his famous work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke proposes that beauty, which is characterized by smoothness, proportion, symmetry, and uniformity, evokes feelings of love, and it relaxes and soothes the mind. Sublimity, on the other hand, gives rise to feelings of anxiety and fear, and it is triggered by extremes like extreme height, darkness, vastness, or excessive light.[3] However, Gilpin's idea of the picturesque belonged to neither category: the beautiful nor the sublime. According to Gilpin, in the case of picturesque representation, smoothness seemed somewhat odd. He believed "the reverse of this is the case; and that the ideas of *neat* and *smooth,* instead of being picturesque, in fact disqualify the object, in which they reside, from any pretensions to *picturesque beauty*".[4] Gilpin says that roughness forms the most essential point of difference between the beautiful and the picturesque. Besides, the picturesque does not necessarily excite feelings of horror or awe. He uses the general term 'roughness' but the roughness that he talks about "relates only to the surfaces of bodies: when we speak of their delineation, we use the word *ruggedness*... both are observable in the smaller, as well as in the larger parts of nature—in the outline, and bark of a tree, as in the rude summit, and craggy sides of a mountain".[5]

Referring to gardens, Gilpin writes that an elegant piece of garden-ground makes no figure on canvas even though its shape is pleasing, the combination of the objects within it are harmonious, and the winding of the walk is very beautiful. To him, this is because "the smoothness of the whole, tho right, and as it should be in nature, offends in

picture".[6] He suggests that the lawn should be turned into a piece of broken ground, rugged oaks should planted on said lawn instead of flowering shrubs, the edges of the walk should be broken, and it should be given the rudeness of a road, marked with wheel-tracks and scattered with stones and brush-wood.

Following the same line of thought, in the late eighteenth century, Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price, two of the founding theoreticians of the picturesque, challenged the fashionable style of landscape gardening and accused Capability Brown of creating only eternal smoothness and sameness instead of roughness, which means that features such as moss-grown terraces and other such intricate details to break up vistas which might otherwise seem smooth.[7] John Thelwall – a radical British orator, political reformer, auto-didact, writer, and journalist, as well as a speech therapist – held very different view of the picturesque, though. According to E. P. Thomson, Thelwall's love of the romantic and the picturesque is incompatible with his political activism because the latter demanded interaction and cooperation whereas the former was more concerned with detached contemplation. However, Mary Fairclough has argued that Thelwall's engagement with the picturesque "should be read not as a retreat from political engagement but as an attempt to rethink and recalibrate such engagement".[8] That is, when Thelwal was talking about the suffering of the people in the English countryside, he did not want it to end up looking like Gilpin's picturesque. Gilpin was looking at the suffering as an object of aesthetic contemplation, while Thelwal in a way was writing in order to prevent this picturesque tourism. He talked about the actual problems of the people but in the language of the picturesque. Therefore, Thelwall gives us a kind of

picturesque that is not disengaged from reality, a kind of picturesque that is replete with political implications.

Studio Ghibli and the picturesque

I now turn to the particular subject of this inquiry. Studio Ghibli Inc. is a Japanese animation film studio with its headquarters in Tokyo. Founded in 1985 by directors Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata and producer Toshio Suzuki, Studio Ghibli is best known for its animated feature films like *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), *Spirited Away* (2001), *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), *Ponyo* (2008) and so on. As well as producing animated feature films, television commercials, and a few television films, the studio has also collaborated with several video game studios on the visual development of numerous games. Notably, most of the animated feature films made by Studio Ghibli address at least one prominent social issue or another. Though these movies mostly cater to kids and young adults, adults can watch and connect with these movies for this reason.

Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata and Toshio Suzuki are the founders of Studio Ghibli, all of whom "manage to create colorful sceneries with adventurous atmospheres while also, during several occasions, engaging in realistic contemporary and historical elements",[9] and Miyazaki's stories in particular "manage to move both children and adults, as they are thrown into fictional, but still credible worlds".[10] This is something that sets this production house apart from other competitors, and much of it has to do with the founders of Studio Ghibli who have gone through several traumatic episodes in their lives mostly due to war, particularly the death and destruction of WWII. This is one of the

primary reasons why most of these feature films have a 'picturesque' quality to them and feature wars in some way or another. They are replete with images of ruins and disorder, of a kind of beauty that is sprinkled with decay and decrepitude and a palpable intermingling of life and death in both their thematic and aesthetic depictions.

For Miyazaki in particular, he has reported that some of his earliest memories are those of bombed-out cities.[11] In 1944 when Miyazaki was three years old, his family evacuated to Utsunomiya.[12] The bombing of Utsunomiya in 1945, led to the family's evacuation once again and this time they moved to Kanuma.[13] Moreover, Miyazaki repeatedly suffered from digestive problems as a child, and he was even told that he would not live beyond the age of twenty, which made him feel like an outcast.[14][15] For almost ten years, from 1947 to 1955, Hayao Miyazaki's mother Yoshiko suffered from spinal tuberculosis. She spent the first few years in hospital and was then nursed at home.[16] Yoshiko has been described as a strict, intellectual woman who regularly questioned conventions and socially accepted norms[17] and she shared a very close relationship with her son. It is said that she had a very strong influence on him, especially on his later works.[18] Unlike his co-founder Takahata, Miyazaki is involved in almost all steps of production of his movies: ideating, writing, drawing, storyboarding, and animation alike.[19]

In Isao Takahata's case, he is said to have had firsthand experience of the horrors of war, having survived an extremely devastating U.S. air raid on his hometown during the World War II.[20] One can clearly see how this particular experience later went on to inspire *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988), a path-breaking creation in the genre of Japanese animated feature films. As a part of Takahata's obituary, Jasper Sharp writes "*Grave of*

the Fireflies presented an emotionally harrowing account of a young brother and sister left to fend for themselves at the tail end of the war after their mother is killed in an allied bombing raid".[21]

War Ruins in *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988):

Grave of the Fireflies is a novel published by Akiyuki Nosaka in 1967, which was later adapted into a film by Isao Takahata, who had a very similar experience in his childhood as described in the novel. Masami Ito's article on Isao Takahata in *The Japan Times* also states that Takahata was just nine years old when the United States of America bombed his hometown on the twenty-ninth of June, 1945. From here: "Takahata fled his home in terror during the air raid, running away barefoot in his pajamas with one of his sisters. The incendiary bombs started a firestorm that tore through the city. 'We were lucky to make it out alive,' he says. Takahata recalls seeing piles of dead bodies on the streets as the pair made their way back home".[22] This harrowing experience is what later led him to conceptualize *Grave of the Fireflies* in 1988. *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) is a film that revolves around the efforts of a young boy, Seita, as he tries to protect himself and his little sister Setsuko from the horrors of the American air raids on Japan. This film is replete with picturesque imagery, which includes graphic albeit animated images of rotting corpses infested by maggots, tumbledown buildings, bombed-out localities, heaps of dead bodies, dust and debris, and haggard survivors scavenging to survive.

The movie provides a very stark exposure to wartime violence, brutality, and the heartrending suffering of Seita and Setsuko, who have been rendered homeless and motherless by the bombing raid. We see the idea of the picturesque changing in these

movies. While in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ruins were the subject of artistic and aesthetic delight – something that would be glorified and romanticized – here, having witnessed the unimaginable havoc wreaked by the two world wars in the twentieth century, comparable ruins and images of ruins were viewed very differently, especially in the countries that were directly involved in and affected by those wars. For Japan in particular, then-American president Truman ordered the bombing of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which wiped out hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians in truly horrific ways that continued for years after the bombs were actually dropped. Takahata's film does not spare viewers these realities, as even beyond its imagery, it culminates in the death of its two child protagonists, who succumb to starvation and malnutrition. Now, rather than being used as an aesthetic ideal, ruins started to be used to depict the horrors of the war and to send cautionary messages that war is an institution that must be condemned and averted at all costs through peaceful negotiations.

Figure 1: Ruined cityscapes in Kobe

Figure 2: Ruined buildings

Figure 1 and 2 are scenes from the movie *Grave of the Fireflies* that depict the ruined cityscapes and buildings of Kobe right after the bombing raids. In his essay "On

Picturesque Beauty" (1792), Gilpin famously writes that a piece of Palladian architecture with the perfect proportion of its parts, the symmetry of the whole structure, and so on will be highly pleasing, but "if we introduce it in a picture, it immediately becomes a formal object, and ceases to please".[23] He further opines that if a painter wished to give that piece of architecture a picturesque beauty, then they ought to use the mallet instead of the chisel: that is, they ought to beat down one half of the structure, deface the other, and throw the mutilated parts of the architecture around in heaps: "In short, from a *smooth* building we must turn it into a *rough* ruin".[24] That is exactly what we find in the movie *Grave of the Fireflies*. Almost all the buildings in Kobe are in a state of ruin. Even the schools and other public institutions that the survivors seek out for shelter are mostly destroyed. The stark contrasts between the perfect idyllic state of nature and the war-ravaged towns with their bombed-out buildings are intensified with the help of a series of juxtapositions.

As Dani Cavallaro writes in his monograph *The Art of Hayao Miyazaki* (2006), *Grave of the Fireflies* indeed evokes an undiluted, inconsolable, and consummate kind of woe, "which no vague promises of otherworldly rewards could ever sublimate, and which the bucolic beauty of nature amplifies with harrowing irony".[25] Cavallaro also states that this effect is achieved chiefly by means of visual contrasts, which are stark and effective uses of juxtapositions. *Grave of the Fireflies* earnestly foregrounds the assaults on civilian areas, depicting some of the most destructive military operations in the history of the world "and the attendant deluge of black rain caused by ash-bloated clouds, unsentimentally exposing images of charred, disfigured and fly-infested corpses, of crawling maggots, of appalling injuries".[26] What one must keep in mind while watching

Grave of the Fireflies is that Isao Takahata does not glorify or romanticize the war ruins in this movie. He takes no artistic pleasure in the ruins. The message he wants to put out there through the depiction of these ruins is extremely political in nature, akin to the project of John Thelwall. That is, through these ruins, Takahata emphasizes the unimaginable suffering of ordinary civilians and innocent children, all in order to criticize and condemn the institution of war. This is not done from a position of detachment or aesthetic contemplation, then, but instead to foster anti-war consciousness and sentiments among his audience.

Figure 3: The corpse of the mother

Figure 4: Charred bodies

Cavallaro further writes that the movie also "persistently celebrates the glorious resilience of the natural environment in the face of the most abominable manifestations of human folly".[27] This is done by lavishly throwing in images of blissful tranquility like lush fields and calm ponds, the ocean and its majestic serenity, the vast and kaleidoscopic sky, and the beauty of myriad creatures like seagulls, crabs, dragonflies, and the eponymous fireflies themselves. All these images, according to Cavallaro, have been "rendered with achingly luscious painterliness",[28] which further heightens the effect of

the picturesque in the film. The constant juxtaposition of images of tranquility includes the two motherless children playing in the laps of Mother Nature, chasing fireflies, hoping that their father will return from the war soon and solve most of their troubles, against the images of death, decay, and devastation, trees with gnarled branches standing naked against barren, war-ravaged backdrops, blasted-out buildings with broken windows, and shattering edifices.

Figure 5: Tranquil nature

Figure 6: Peaceful townscapes

Especially relevant in this context of the images of ruins and devastation so heavily employed by Studio Ghibli films is Jonathan Jones' account of important historical shifts perceived in the light of ruination. Jones writes that in the eighteenth century, ruins were chiefly objects of contemplation, reverie, sober enjoyment, and an opportunity to reflect on the passing of empires, and the vanity of human effort, but at the same time, "in an age abandoning its religion, they were also reassuring images of what survives, what remains of us".[29] He writes that artists back in the 1700s took delight in ruins and drugged on decay, they were acutely drawn by "the broken sensuality of the past".[30] He observes that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, however, ruins carry drastically different

connotations due to the very means by which they seem to materialize. Jones writes, "there's a difference between a ruin that is the product of slow centuries, the richly rotting fruit of time, and a building whose ruin takes place in a moment: the difference between dying of old age and murder".[31] Jones' account becomes important here because what Isao Takahata focuses on in *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) are ruins of the latter kind: that is, the ruins that take place in a moment rather than over time, and that are caused by death, violence, and sudden devastation as opposed to old age. As this demonstrates, the meaning and use of the "picturesque" mode has evolved over time from a celebratory, ruminatory aesthetic in the romantic period to an admonitory and cautionary one in the postmodern period.

Interestingly, in *Grave of the Fireflies* we find an additional kind of ruin: the ruin of the bodies of innocent civilians, especially children. In various places this includes images of dead bodies with severed limbs, charred from head to toe and thrown carelessly in ditches, or of children visiting their parents in makeshift hospitals only to discover that their bodies have been so drastically transformed that they are barely recognizable. Perhaps more starkly still, viewers cannot avoid the mangled, diseased bodies of Seita and Setsuko. At the very beginning of the movie, we find Seita's drooping body reclined against a pillar; he is covered with cuts and bruises and the janitor remarks that he won't be alive for too long. In one of the later scenes, which is essentially a flashback, we also get to see Setsuko's infected body, her tiny back covered with rashes and red bumps, her hair is infested with lice; she is also suffering from a stomach infection and eventually dies of malnutrition. As critics have noted, "The tragedy of this realistic depiction is compounded by the fact it is partly autobiographical. The author, Nosaka Akiyuki, was

separated from his family during a bombing raid and was the only caretaker of his sixteen-month-old stepsister, who eventually perished from malnutrition under his care".[32] The death of the beautiful fireflies seems to symbolize the fates of Seita and Setsuko themselves, who were once so full of life and vitality but are now almost on the verge of eternal ruin.

Though director Isao Takahata as well as writer Akiyuki Nosaka have both declared that this story was not strictly an anti-war tale but instead attempted to hand down the memory of war to the subsequent generations,[33] several critics and scholars like Daisuke Akimoto, Toshio Suzuki, Roger Ebert, Ernest Rister, who have all written extensively on this particular Studio Ghibli production, have recognized it as one of the best war films conveying a strong anti-war message. As Akimoto puts it, "The negative image of the war as 'violence' causes an 'anti-war' sentiment inside the hearts of audience, and therefore, it is fair to assume that this film can be categorized as an 'anti-war film'".[34]

Akimoto also identifies violence on three different levels in the movie- physical violence in the form of the war, psychological violence experienced by the two siblings due to the war and the abusive behaviour of their aunt, and structural violence for which the government, police and the society at large were equally responsible.[35] In addition to these, "looking contextually at *Grave*, the film raises questions about how Japanese should talk about their history—one full of terrible suffering and yet also one of atrocities enacted against other Asian countries in the name of nationalism".[36] These are all complex forms of violence and suffering that can also take shape in the mute forms of picturesque ruins.

The Picturesque in *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004)

In Gilpin's words, "Picturesque composition consists in uniting in one whole a variety of parts".[37] The picturesque stands for a diversity of experiences since it combines the beautiful – associated with smoothness, regularity, and order – and the sublime – associated with vastness, magnitude, and intimations of power. A picturesque landscape must definitely possess textured or variegated surfaces because Gilpin wrote that "roughness forms the most essential point of difference between the beautiful and picturesque".[38] Irregular and intricate patterns also constitute the picturesque. In the context of Studio Ghibli, this description will likely bring to mind the picturesque moving castle inhabited by Howl, his apprentice Markl, the fire demon Calcifer, and later by Sophie, because even a cursory glimpse of the moving castle is enough to permanently etch in viewers' minds the peculiar image of the eponymous castle constituting as its exterior, an explosion of diverse spare parts, metallic and non-metallic, all lumped together into a picturesque structure resembling some kind of a humongous demon. According to Gilpin, there was never a greater ornament of landscape than the ruins of a castle: "What painter rejects it, because it is artificial?—What beautiful effects does Vandervelt produce from shipping? In the hands of such a master it furnishes almost as beautiful forms, as any in the whole circle of picturesque objects?".[39] The ruins of a castle as well as banquets, rich furniture, drapery, picturesque objects, pleasing shapes – all of these are found abundantly in Hayao's Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), so much so that this movie becomes quite the epitome of picturesque mode of art. Like the previous example, this movie – inspired by Dianne Wynne Jones' novel *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) – also has a raging war that serves as its backdrop. However, the film is picturesque

for various reasons other than the incorporation of war ruins in its art. Here we not only have picturesque landscapes but also picturesque objects and picturesque people: "What Miyazaki's movies emphasize is not only the enlightening potential of the confrontation with disintegrating structures but also the iconic value of ruins as reminders of the human penchant for destructiveness, be it entirely mindless or ideologically motivated".[40] An important aspect of the castle's architectural dimension is that it is built out of an assemblage of diverse mechanical spare parts – "uniting in one whole a variety of parts"[41] - which is what makes the castle look strikingly picturesque at the very first glance. The landscapes that this castle trudges through are also extremely picturesque too, as they include the craggy sides of the mountains jutting out in the background, uneven lands strewn with rocks and stones, rough and rugged cliffs. Sabrina Ferri, in an essay titled "Time in Ruins: Melancholy and Modernity in the Pre-Romantic Natural Picturesque" states that the late eighteenth-century Picturesque writer Carlo Castone della Torre di Rezzonico often lingers on "the steep cliffs, the bubbling brooks, and the old ruined towers, and castles that are so characteristic of the Picturesque repertoire" in his works.[42] We see a similar kind of indulgence in *Howl's Moving Castle* as well.

Figure 7: The moving castle

Figure 8: Picturesque landscape

Even the interior of the castle stands out chiefly due to its chaotic disarray. Things are just strewn all over the space, the bathroom looks like it hasn't been cleaned in decades, and everything is submerged under a sickly green layer of moss and dirt. There is a wild profusion of cobwebs and insects crawling out of random nooks and corners of the castle. Howl's room specifically looks like an exploding wilderness full of wildflowers, strange plants, and the most intricately designed filigree objects. In a way the chaotic exterior mirrors inward as well. Just as strangely-shaped items and furniture abound in the castle, Markl too can shapeshift and take on the appearance of an old man when he goes out of the castle. Young Sophie has been turned into an old woman by the Witch of the Waste, her body all bent and misshapen, while the Witch of the Waste is not as young as she looks either, but rather, is under a spell that keeps her youthful. It becomes apparent that Miyazaki's version of *Howl's Moving Castle* focuses on four important themes and motifs, namely war death, metamorphosis, flying and european influences.[43] Each of these, I argue, comes with its own versions of the picturesque to exemplify and amplify it, though I focus here primarily on metamorphosis, in keeping with the way Gilpin suggests a partial metamorphosis of Burke's two concepts.

The theme of metamorphosis can be seen at its best when it comes to the transformation of Sophie. It seems like Sophie's physical age floats through the film mirroring her psychological age, her self-esteem, the way she sees herself and wants to portray herself.[44] It seems like there is a deliberate complexity introduced in the realm of time which creates a huge gap between appearance and reality, especially when it comes to characters like Sophie and the Witch of the Waste. The ruins here constitute living proof of the fact that a lot of time has elapsed whether or not it might be apparent. The

presence of ruins in *Howl's Moving Castle* "defines more the historical identity of a place than its intrinsic beauty".[45] The decay calls to mind the incessant flow of time that affects human and non-human things alike because similar divergences are found in the canine characters as well as in the Scarecrow. In the initial novel, the dog that followed the Witch of the Waste was actually a young man known as Percival, but in Miyazaki's film, the same dog is named Heen, an unreliable spy who ran errands for the Witch but later became Sophie's sidekick. Similarly, Turnip Head was actually a blonde and handsome man whose real name was Prince Justin and wo had been placed under a spell that transformed him to a scarecrow. Both the dog and the scarecrow are picturesque in their depiction, with the former being flabby and unkempt while the latter is dressed in patched and shabby clothes.

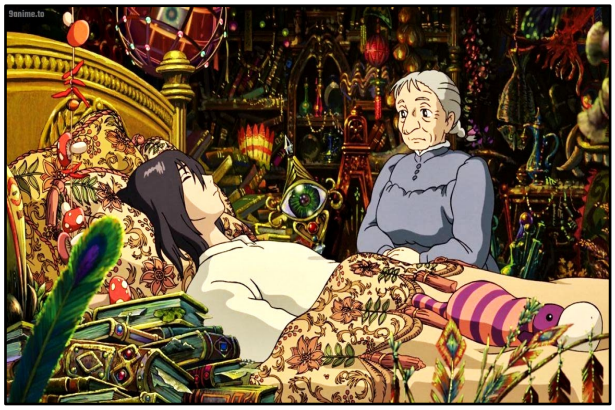

Figure 9: Chaotic room interiors

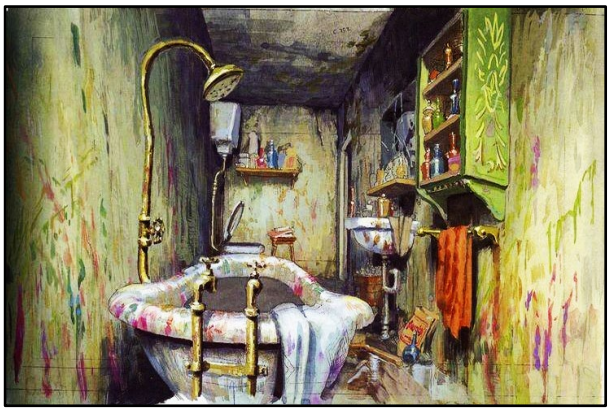

Figure: Shabby bathroom

Many more picturesque characters, often in the form of creatures with blob-like heads and wiggling bodies, tentacular limbs which can leak through gaps and crevices, feature in this movie. Likewise, Howl projects himself as both an angel and a demon. He can turn into "a grim bird of prey, vampirically fanged, covered with metallic plumage,

and equipped with intimidating talons".[46] He turns into this creature only when he has to fight, dismantle war weapons, and defend himself from his enemy. Otherwise, "Howl is portrayed quite Iight-heartedly as an amusingly vain and moody young man, but his transformations into what looks like a gigantic bird of prey and his one-man mission to defuse the weapons of war that fill the skies around him suggest a more intense and dark form of masculinity".[47] The picturesque is thus employed when Howl reacts out of desperation and self-preservation, either to attack or to defend.

Then in the case of Sophie, the Witch of Waste has morphed her into a very old woman, thus violating her body against her will. Interestingly though, Sophie embraces her emaciated body, and not for a single moment do we see her regretting what happened to her. Instead, she takes the change in stride and keeps making herself useful around the castle so that she can break the spell with the help of Calcifer, the fire demon. In one of the later scenes. Madame Sulliman lures the Witch of the Waste to drain her powers and restores her to her actual appearance, once again we find an emaciated mass of wrinkles replacing the proud stature of the witch. She is transformed to a helpless old woman who needs to be taken care of. All of these picturesque transformations are inherently linked with violence and violation in some way.

Figure 11: An emaciated Sophie

Figure: The Witch of the Waste

According to Cavallaro, even though the film strongly conveys a pacifist message, it does not pander to utopianism because the war issue actually remains open-ended in the film. Or instance, "Madam Suliman puts an end to the war for the most cogent, if also the most disarmingly plain, reason: namely, the fact that war is idiotic".[48] As Cavallaro continues, the ruler's "eventual decision to terminate the conflict is indubitably felicitous and makes it possible for the film to end under the canopy of a joyfully fair sky, yet it is made to appear quite sudden and arbitrary. This is a way of suggesting that the very opposite choice—the decision to start a war—could just as simply be made at any point in time, no less unexpectedly and no less capriciously".[49] Therefore, what can be inferred from the film and its use of the picturesque in association with violence, violation, and the futility of war, is a loud and clear anti-war message, much like *Grave of the Fireflies*. Even though both Jones, the writer of the original novel, and Miyazaki himself were very young during World War II, their reactions to the war have gone in quite opposite directions.[50] Vieira and Kunz further maintain write that while Jones tends to leave the actual war out of her books, Miyazaki never misses a chance to represent both the horrors of war and the effects that the bombing raids can bring into an anime feature film.[51] In fact, Miyazaki

himself declared in a June 2005 interview with the US magazine *Newsweek* that *Howl's Moving Castle* was influenced and profoundly affected by the then-ongoing war in Iraq.[52] I argue that one primary difference between the two movies is that whereas the *Grave of the Fireflies* is an overtly graphic representation of the brutality of war which ends on a solemn note of tragedy, *Howl's Moving Castle* is more covert attempt at debunking the myths of glory and honor associated with war and it has a happy ending.

However, in neither of the two movies is the picturesque used purely for aesthetic delight governed by a kind of detached, artistic contemplation. Instead, both Miyazaki and Takahata have used it consciously and powerfully to get their message across. While the message appears to be clear and direct in *Grave of the Fireflies*, it is more subtle in *Howl's Moving Castle* and that is just a trait that distinguishes Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli's work. Just like Cavallaro explains, "Miyazaki's films bear witness to a keen understanding of animation as the most unfettered and potentially the most creative cinematic form thanks to its knack of transcending the laws of physics and biology, as well as flouting the expectations of logic and mimesis with carnivalesque gusto".[53] Cavallaro further states that in keeping with animation's irreverent and feasibly anarchic spirit, Miyazaki's films have always consistently celebrated ambiguity and irony over dogmatism, and diversity over uniformity, especially in the recognition that human virtues and flaws are always inextricably intertwined with rach other and that constitutes the true spirit of the picturesque which resisted all kinds of institutionalized order and celebrated flaws and ambiguity over the stringent dicta of rationality. However, even though the carnivalesque plot of *Howl's Moving Castle* is primarily centered around the character development of Sophie, as several critics have pointed out, it is still arguably

the war that has the greatest impact on the viewers. The viewer is taken on a practically-political ride that critiques the contemporary and international politics surrounding the Iraq war and the film is replete with battle scenes and fires. The impact of the war scenes and war ruins is so tremendous that it is practically impossible to dismiss and disregard the war, even in order to focus solely on Sophie's journey.[54]

Conclusion:

Ruins, dilapidated buildings, and derelict imagery feature regularly in Studio Ghibli movies, especially the later Miyazaki movies: a savvy viewer might be strongly reminded of the solitary gardens of Laputa and the theme park of Spirited Away. Other critics have also noted as much: "Reflecting on the metaphorical connotations of such locations, it could be argued that cinematic images of dilapidated dwellings and even entire cities evoke a "Gothic" fascination with ruins".[55] The attitudes to decay and devastation evoked by Studio Ghibli films, however, is not a passive one governed by contemplation, reverie, aesthetic delight, and sober enjoyment. Instead, as Jonathan Jones states of a different artistic tradition, they can serve an opportunity to reflect on "the passing of empires and the vanity of human effort. Yet in an age abandoning its religion, they were also reassuring images of what survives, what remains of us".[56]

From such examples, it becomes quite clear that the predominant definition of the "picturesque" has evolved over the years, gaining more depth and complexity as the world continues to be ravaged by mindless wars. Artists from the mid-1900s onward could no longer take delight in ruins and be drunk on decay. They were horrified by the war and its aftermath, and as a result, they could no longer look at ruins the same way as their

predecessors had. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, ruins started to carry substantially different connotations, and this was reflected in art in major ways.

Spearheaded by Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata, Studio Ghibli was literally born out of such complicated, conflicted feelings associated with war. Both of these co-founders had experienced war-related trauma, and they found an outlet in their art, which is one reason why most of their creations have themes and motifs depicting war, and their stance has always been cautionary. In fact, all the Ghibli films seem to have been very consciously created, always carrying a message, a moral, a warning, and so on. Thus, we have come a long way from William Gilpin and his idea of the picturesque as a purely aesthetic ideal to a kind of picturesque which is politically charged, has repercussions, and demands accountability.

Here is another place to reiterate Jonathan Jones' contention that "there's a difference between a ruin that is the product of slow centuries, the richly rotting fruit of time, and a building whose ruin takes place in a moment: the difference between dying of old age and murder".[57] Studio Ghibli mostly treats the latter as its subject matter and presents to us a kind of picturesque which if viewed from a position of detachment or merely as an object of contemplation might result in the repetition of a very infamous history.

Notes

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[2] Ibid.
[3] Edmund Burke and Abraham Mills. A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful; With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste. New York, Harper, 1844.
[4] William Gilpin. *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: to which is Added a Poem, On Landscape Painting*, London, 1792, pp 6.
[5] Ibid, 7
[6] Ibid, 8
[7] Jeffrey Auerbach. "The picturesque and the homogenisation of Empire", *The British Art Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 47-54.
[8] Mary Caroline Louisa Fairclough. John Thelwall and the Politics of the Picturesque. Romantic Circles Praxis Series, 9, pp. 1.
[9] Einar Schipperges Tjus. "A Voice Against War Pacifism in the animated films of Miyazaki Hayao", Stockholm University Stockholm, Sweden: 2018, pp: 4.
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[22] Masami Ito. "Isao's Takahata's stark world of reality" *The Japan Times*. September 12, 2015.
[23] William Gilpin. *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: to which is Added a Poem, On Landscape Painting*, London, 1792, pp 7.
[24] Ibid, 7-8
[25] Dani Cavallaro. *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki*, McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: 2006, pp 3.
[26] Ibid, 78
[27] Ibid, 78
[28] Ibid, 78
[29] Jonathan Jones. "Things Fall Apart." *The Guardian*, 11 October, 2001, 2.
[30] Ibid, 3

[31] Ibid, 13
[32] Wendy Goldberg. "Transcending the Victim's History: Takahata Isao's Grave of the Fireflies", University of Minnesota Press, *Mechademia*, Volume 4, 2009, pp 40.
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Nation Building and the Role of Leadership

A Case Study of Tensei Shitara Slime Datta Ken

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Abstract:

In this paper, I consider the isekai anime *Tenseishitara slime datta ken* (English translation: *That Time I Got Reincarnated As A Slime*), examining its potential messages in a new light. As this anime spotlights the main character's semi-diplomatic attempts to build a nation out of the blue, I will argue that critically analyzing the strategic ends and means used by the main character can give insight into the mindset of an archetypical understanding of how and under which circumstances leadership and politically-oriented social interaction are presented in a Japanese context. For a better understanding of this specialized topic – leadership as portrayed in isekai anime – I will begin by presenting the current state of research regarding isekai anime. After a synopsis of the series of interests, specific aspects and actions of the main character will be highlighted to contribute to a better and critical understanding of the general messages *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* is sending: the promotion of autocratic and anti-democratic leadership based on fear and strength.

Keywords: Nation-building, militarization, isekai, representation, Anime

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Introduction

Although Japanese popular culture is highly researched, specialized research in anime has gained particular momentum over the last decade. One of the most frequently cited texts is Bolton's[1] *Interpreting Anime*, whose methodological argumentation on how to "read" anime is very closely linked to qualitative descripton as used in sociological research and Ethnomethodology. The "reading" that Bolton suggests "means coming to a greater understanding of the text and its particular features through interpretation and critical consideration."[2] His understanding of "reading" visualized material is aligned with several analytical questions in terms of the presented material and rearrange it in a more tangible way. As anime are multimodal narratives (i.e. sound, vision, emotion, and social actions appear simultaneously), Williams[3] calls for a "critical framing" approach. In analyzing anime, she uses the thematic approach by Coiro et al.,[4] who argued that a deep analysis "involves contextualizing and critically interrogating ideas from multiple perspectives."[5]

Tensei shitara slime datta ken falls into a particalur subgenre of anime called "isekai"(meaning located in another/different world), and this particular isekai anime spends much of its run time following the main protagonist as he builds his own new nation from scratch. Because of this focus, I will consider the series with regard to five aspects: First, I will examine how the series shapes and presents the image of a "nation" and the way such a nation should be organized. Second, I will consider how this nation is represented, by whom, and in which organization or by which means. Third, I will deal with the aspect of naming – a specialty of this particular isekai anime, as here only powerful beings are capable of assigning names

to less powerful or "lower" order creatures. Fourth, I examine the aspect of incorporating or assimilating, which is a special ability of the main character,who repeatedly uses this ability to kill or copy his opponents. Finally, I analyze the series's treatment of leadership, and specifically, how leaders here present themselves and are perceived by others.

As *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* has grown in popularity, reaching a wider audience than most isekai once did, it thus becomes worthwhile to take a closer look at the repeating structures and messages central to this series. By doing so, I hope to highlight and interrogate the ways this anime depicts certain expectations of nationhood, leadership, and a leader, while also opening up more specialized avenues of research regarding isekai in general.

Isekai Anime

Isekai generally refers to anime or manga productions whose settings are located in a different world from our own, which is limited to neither a special time or particular place. At present, though, this subgenre is not covered much in English-language scholarship. For example, while Bolton's important study has great merits, the word 'isekai' does not appear there; there is no reference to this particular subgenre of anime at all, and even beyond Bolton, research on this topic is scarce. Thus, scholarship on *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* or other anime of this specific subgenre have few frameworks and findings to rely on, in terms of analysis by standard references such as Bolton's. For *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* in particular, there is only one article focused on it as of this writing[6], and even then, that work is more focused on narrative structure, dealing with differences between the original web novel and the adapted animated series.

While some research on isekai anime and manga has been conducted, the aims, research interests, and methods of such work vary widely. For instance, Price has found out that the term isekai was only sporadically used before 2013 before its use drastically increased.[7] In his opinion, 2013 marked the year where isekai really became established as its own category of anime and manga, finally separating itself from high fantasy or other genres that it had been previously summarized as. In his broad analysis of several hundred isekai stories, Price reports that the majority "are highly influenced by role-playing games and show patterns of responses that appear to reflect the views and concerns of different demographics of readers."[8] Likewise, Mendlesohn has developed a general framework to further divide the different settings of isekai stories according to their temporal aspects.[9] Out of her four archetypes (portal, immersive, intrusion, liminal),[10] I would classify the subject of this analysis as an immersive one, as those types of stories take place only in the fictional world and have no connection to the "real" world of the present-day reader.

Despite still being a relatively smaller subcategory of anime, isekai has gathered great attention in recent years, with several well-known productions such as *Sword Art Online* or *Re:Zero*. Muhamed[11] has theorized their popularity – especially in Japan – in terms of the function they serve in Japanese society: "Although *isekai* take place in fantastical worlds that are at first glance highly unrealistic, they serve to emphasize the feeling of despair both its protagonists and young readers feel toward the worlds they do live in."[12] Even if the specific settings and plotlines of isekai anime differ,[13] they tend to share certain premises in common: the main protagonist is transported to another world (fictional, pseudo-medieval, or fantastic), and often gains special powers through the process of transformation, which mean that they are free to do as they please in this new world. Even if the main characters often

praise Japanese values and traditions, which they import very quickly into their new surroundings (especially Japanese bathing culture), they can, as a matter of their unrestrained powers, shape the world as they like.

Tensei shitara slime datta ken was chosen for this analysis due to its popularity in combination with the sensitive topic of its main narrative. As the analysis section later in this paper demonstrates, nation-building is central to the protagonist's daily life, but it is presented in a matter that can make it seem very harmless, childish, or even unrelated to the story and narrative content.

Because there is no research on the visual presentation of nation-building in isekai, a brief overview of relevant literature should suffice to make the reader familiar with the few existing pieces that are currently present. I further argue that valuable insight can be gained from analyzing such fictional work, as when of Ramadah[14] analyzed the main character of the isekai *Re:Zero – Starting Life in Another World* according to the psychoanalytic theory of Carl Gustav Jung.

This is because to simply take isekai anime as a current hype restricted to Japanese popular culture would be a severe misunderstanding of both its impact and influence. Lu has found that from 2012 to 2018 around 6 isekai anime were airing per year, but starting with 2019, a peak of 14 new series per year were released – an upward trend that would continue in recent years, with even more series worth discussing.[15] Recent research in this area has brought up the complexity and intertwined nature of this specific style of anime, as seen with the highly popular anime *Goblin Slayer*. As Gottesman has shown, the anime *Goblin Slayer* – although not an isekai per se - serves not simply as an entertainment tool, but rather, also encompasses a wide array of topics and concerns.[16] First, this anime "demands a high

amount of media literacy from its audience, not only on the presumption that one is familiar with the character references across games and anime but [also] that one is literate in the 'deconstruction, parody and pastiche' required to participate in internet meme culture."[17] Second, and even more noteworthy, *Goblin Slayer* functions as a mediation tool to justify Japanese colonialism, presenting and relativizing racism as well as sexual aggression.[18] If such broad and powerful topics are inherited by just one sample of anime (and presented to a vast audience through that medium), then the question arise why shows that are supposedly just entertainment act as messengers for such topics or even try to reframe historical aspects of Japan's past.

To return to our primary focus: the enormous success that *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* has enjoyed – which of course also re-emphasizes the rising popularity of the isekai genre – can also be traced to its sales in the light novel branch. According to BookWalker (one of Japan's biggest online stores for purchasing mangas and other light novels), *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* was amongst the Top Ten in 2018 (with 7th place in the overall ranking),[19], 5th in 2019 (where in the first half of the year it placed 1st),[20] and 4th in 2020.[21] This pattern repeated itself in 2021, where out of the Top 20 most popular manga, 11 were from the isekai genre, and *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* advanced up to 3rd place.[22]

Thus, given the evergrowing audience and reach that isekai anime and manga enjoy – and *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* in particular – it immediately becomes beneficial to have a closer, and more critical, look into the content that such media are promoting and the patterns by which they do so.

Methodology and Approach

My methodological approachhere stems from Schütz,[23] who in his paper "Der Fremde" has written about the sociological problemthat results when someone unfamiliar with a social setup attempts to understand it. He articulates such an issue using this logic: "Der Soziologe [...] ist der uninteressierte wissenschaftliche Betrachter der sozialen Welt."[124] That is, to such an observer, due to his disinterest in the new (to him) social world surrounding him, he is not limited to an already existing hierarchy and order of norms, values, motives, and the like in his observations. On the one hand, those already inside that social world (Schütz calls these people"the acting ones" or "actors") are bound to these limitations and order all their social experiences accordingly – not necessarily in a formal scientific way, but in such a way that is suitable for bypassing everyday struggles and interacting with little to less friction with other such "actors." Conversely, the observer can remove himself from this web of meanings, though that network may help members of the already constituted group to orient themselves in a manifold of social interactions, but at the same time makes them blind to their deeper meaning: that is, their abstract relevance as well as their 'constructed' essence.[25] In taking on the role of a disinterested observer, then, the researcher is a "foreigner" to these daily ceremonies, symbols, and socially meaningful interactions and can therefore question them more ably: "Und gerade der Fremde [...] teilt die oben erwähnten Grundannahmen nicht. Er ist wesentlich der Mensch, der fast alles, das den Mitgliedern der Gruppe, der er sich nähert, unfraglich erscheint, in Frage stellt."[226]

[1]Translation: *"The sociologist [...] is the disinterested scientific observer of the social world."*
[2] Translation: *"And it is precisely the stranger [...] who does not share the basic assumptions mentioned above. He is essentially the person who questions almost everything that seems unquestionable to the members of the group he approaches."*

While the theoretical approach of Schützis over 50 years old, his thoughts have shaped the work of many successors and taken into account into standard works of ethnomethodological resesearch. Ethnomethodology refers to the study of how social interactions shape, change, or construct social order. It represents one of the more practical branches of sociology and is used in a mainfold of different social situations and settings, ranging from the observation of 'doing waiting' in front of an elevator to the creation of racial connotations and social inequality. Also worth noting, though, is this method is applicable not only to observations made by the researcher on the spot, but also to visual material created by various groups and communities – such as, here, isekai anime. Hence the ideas of Schütz, even if not so prominently discussed in the English-speaking world, are still the basis for recent research about the Life-World.[27] Garfinkel, for example, had vivid contact with Schütz and modified some of his ideas after discussing them with him[28]. More importantly, two of Schütz's students who later became just as renowned, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, developed his ideas even further, making his philosophical work applicable to encountering and analyzing everyday social actions.[29]

One of Schütz's most important insights related to this study is the correlation between fantasy and the real world. Schütz argues that people often fantasize about something that has never happened or about things that they have never seen. Yu has summarized the Schützian relation between human fantasies and the real world thus: "However, the contents of fantasies are shaped by their experiences or stocks of knowledge. Fantasy, therefore, originates in everyday life. In Schutzian terms, agents enter into utopian relations with their fellow people according to their experiences."[30] Following this insight, then, we might say that there can be a limited

but certainly direct correlation between ficitional work, the everyday-experiences or imaginations of the producer, and the people helping him to create his ficitional work. To put this another way, we might argue that fiction can develop out of the intrinsic or previous experiences (Schütz calls them "sediments of experience") of the agent fantasizing them.

Working from this insight into socially constructed realities, I utilize this as my approach to the constructed realities of *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* without going into the deep cultural context that has borne them. I do so for two reasons: first, this constraint is required in order to apply the Schützian view of a stranger, otherwise it would not be applicable. Second, I am already well-placed to take this approach, as I do not have the deep academic background about all aspects of Japanese culture and history, which is letting me benefit from being a real stranger to those practices and thus capable of remodeling the 'web of meaning' from an outside viewpoint. Additionally, Bolton's suggested way of "reading" anime also fits into Schütz's model regarding methodological sensitivity with questions such as: "This kind of reading has several steps, but it begins by looking carefully at the formal qualities of specific works: what is shown and how is it shown? […] How is each scene composed and edited, and how is the narrative structured? How does a given anime look – meaning what does it look like, but also how does it see the world?"[31] His last question in particular – how the anime perceive the world – can offer fruitful insight when, as is the case with *Tensei shitara slime datta ken*, the main story is centered around concerns such as nation-building. What Bolton describes during his steps in the quote above is very closely correlated to ethnomethodological observation, as Francis & Hester have shown in their work.[32]

From an ethnomethodological point of view, two aspect of *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* are of particular interest to this analysis: the "conversational objects"and the "membership-categorization." The first item here deals with "structures that were oriented to and used interactionally by participants to conversations,"[33] making it possible to dive into the underlying meaning of conversations that readers encounter across the anime. The second "is concerned with the organization of common-sense knowledge in terms of the categories members employ in accomplishing their activities in and through talk,"[34] which will be of interest when analyzing protagonist Rimuru's social stratification and order of his self-made society. Despite the fact that the show is a work of fiction, it is embedded in the social order of real people and must perform its notion of social order in ways that are comprehensible to its audience – all characterstics that can be analyzed and understood according to Schutzian logics.[35]

Synopsis

A normal day in the life of Japanese citizen Satoru Mikami is the starting point of the series. During a meeting with two of his friends, an assailant stabs him and due to his severe wounds, he dies on the spot. During his transfer to the afterlife, Satoru remembers several points in his life, things he regrets, and even makes comments on his current situation. What he is not aware of is that a mysterious voice is transforming all of his past regrets and comments together and shaping a new body with 'skills' (special abilities not

Figure 1: Official Announcement of the series[XXi]

available to everyone), before Satoru is eventually reincarnated as a slime. In this new world where he finds himself, slimes are being perceived as the weakest creatures, but due to the mysterious voice who has translated Satoru's regrets and wishes into 'skills,' he instantly becomes one of the most powerful beings.

In the beginning, Satoru is not aware of how to move; he cannot speak or see and randomly wanders around at the bottom of a cave with no other living creatures to encounter. As time passes, Satoru learns that he can incorporate everything he wishes, and so he starts harvesting magical ore and plants out of boredom. Only by chance does he encounter another voice who offers to teach him how to see, and so Satoru befriends the Storm Dragon Veldora, who was sealed away in this cave 400 years ago by a mighty hero with a barrier even he cannot break through. During their conversation, Veldora offers Satoru his friendship and changes his name to Rimuru, which the character uses from this point onward.

As Rimuru sees that his friend desperately wants to break through the barrier, he offers to engulf him with his unique skill 'Predator' (the ability to gulp everything) and promises to analyze the barrier with his second unique skill 'Great Sage' (the voice of a woman he can ask everything he wants to know): together, he will use these two skills to unleash the dragon as soon as possible. When Veldora agrees, Rimuru gains his powers, encounters various monsters that he easily defeats, and escapes the cave to venture on untamed paths in this new world. Right at the beginning of his journey, he stumbles upon a tribe of Goblins, begging him to protect them against a rival pack of Direwolves. Rimuru easily decapitates the leader of the direwolves and subjugates them; then, after casually naming the whole Goblin tribe and Direwolf pack, they all evolve into stronger versions of themselves. Rimuru

subsequently encounters all species living in the great forest he slowly urbanizes, ultimately leading to problems correlated with organizing the lives of his subjugates, providing enough shelter, creating a whole new economy, and finally declaring his territory an independent nation, which then leads to diplomatic talks with other state-like entities. At the end of the first season, Rimuru has befriended the most powerful beings in this isekai world, which are demon-lords, and is attempting to become a demon-lord himself.

A case for *Tensei shitara slime datta ken*

Tensei shitara slime datta ken is build around an unique feature that is not omnipresent in other currently airing anime, even other isekai: this is the way that the show presents the desired social order of a nation, and as a result,the skills and behavior its ruler should have are central to the narrative. According to the methodology described above, then, this analysis will deal primarily with these two objects of interest.

An autocratic leadership style and a functionalistic-mechanical political body that is called a 'nation' are perceived as desirable. As audiences see, no one in Rimuru's new nation is jobless, bored, or has any trouble making a decent life. But in order to have access to basic securities and commodities, these inhabitants of the region must all subjugate themselves under the absolute rule of a semi-aristocratic system that follows a strict hierarchy. Detached from representing numbers, political will is first and foremost built by the power that separate tribes and/or species inherit. A fact often neglected even in casual discussions of the show is that the main character often talks to himself to repeat his goal to build a nation where everyone is free and equal; but the series offers counterexamples for that sole goal, as when

Benimaru, one of his generals, put it bluntly: "Well, there is one undisputable rule in this world, all monsters follow: Survival of the fittest. This is the way things have always worked for our kind" (Episode 15, 03:16). In reality, despite his higher musings, Rimuru only accepts this given reality and transfers it into his domain, making himself the fittest and forcing others to cooperate with, instead of killing, one another. During the first season, the series creates the impression that social norms, rules, and restrictions cannot simply be shackled off, but rather must be acknowledged as given and made the best use of . Even though the main character relinquished to let only the fittest serve him, he links inherited and referred values of each tribe and species he encounters, then makes them visible in political participation, even over characteristics such as longevity, political interests, or numbers. Orcs, for example, have no say in Rimuru's nation, despite being the most numerous race, while the most powerful monsters, the Kijins, can participate in full despite having lesser numbers.

Furthermore, not all individuals are viewed as equal when facing Rimuru. As my analysis of the social interaction of the main character will show, only six persons are viewed as equal, whereas the rest of his subordinates are either willingly subjugated under his presence or else forced to do so. Killing a resisting opponent is not the method of choice, but the last resort to exert absolute autocratic power and authority. Even if the bulk of Rimuru's allegiances are acquired through negotiations and peaceful interactions, all of them fall under a distinct rule that perpetuates control over the peoples thus controlled. In exerting the power to give names to his underlings, the main character can transform whoever he wants into a higher being and secure their everlasting loyalty without ever fearing political opposition.

Besides the power of naming persons and therefore transcending them into a new form, Rimuru possesses another crucial ability that further bends the boundaries of social reality. Integrated into his unique skill "Predator" he has the option to mimic everything he has ever defeated or incorporated. For example, his main appearance as a young human was obtained by dissolving the body of another character in this isekai world, a girl named Shizu, as her last request. Not only can Rimuru then appear as the person or monster he has just dissolved, but he can also use their skills and techniques, accelerating his ascent towards power. This fits with how Baudrillard discusses the impact of copies on our everyday life and the problems that occur with them.[36] For one thing, the better the copy, the harder it is to find out whether or not it is a fraud. Due to his power and its origins, Rimuru could certainly be understood as what Baudrillard calls a 'simulacra.' He simulates even people, and as a simulation of them, "threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false', the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'"[37] In becoming a simulacra, the main character of the show is detached from reality, rendering himself a fictional character who detaches himself from fiction (here, in appearing human even still being a monster). Morris has argued that such simulacra, even if fictional, can create their own world and exist parallel to reality,[38] which would make Rimuru a simulacra par excellence, as he contains his own meaning, which makes him even more superior compared to other beings of the show. Even though it can be seen as a social fact that the individual is confronted with copies in everyday interaction,[39] they contribute to bending social reality. Rimuru uses these two options in a way to strengthen his position as a leader despite the potentially adverse effects his actions may have.

Analysis

As Rimuru has left the cave where he finds himself at the beginning of the show, he has unrivaled powers and comes to view the new world as akin to an empty slate. His ambitions to build a community, and later on a nation, are already visible in Episode 3, where, after defeating the Direwolves, their pack was integrated into the Goblin village. Immediately after the battle, he orders the village elder to look for food, shelter, and clothing (Episode 3, 09:46),[40] aiming to secure a base for his subordinates and strengthen their position. After gradually accumulating crafters, travelers, and merchants, the former Goblin village has been transformed into a thriving town.

The process of building a nation in *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* is arranged along similar lines, as represented in the directional lines below. Figure 2 shows Rimuru's nation-building impact across the timeline of the series, with blue representing those who are befriended, green representing persons or groups that are incorporated, and red representing those he killed or won a battle to subjugate.

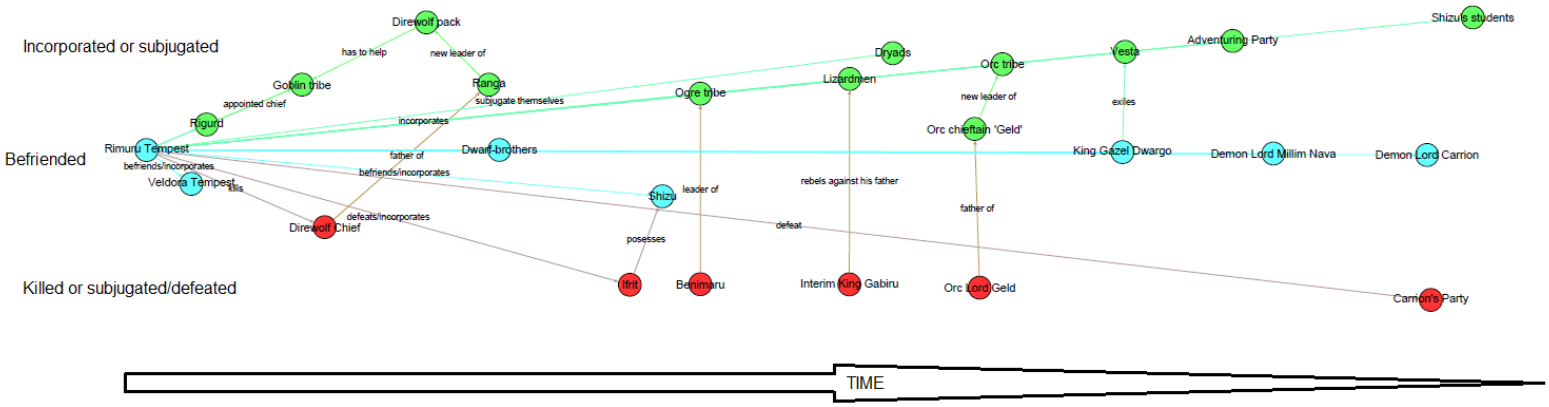

Figure 2: Social network analysis of the main character through time (Source: author)

During the whole first season, only six individuals can be counted as evenly perceived by the main character, even if the tone of the anime suggests thatRimuru is

everyone's friend. However, it seems sensible to argue that rather the opposite is the case. Only those who could offer political power (such as the King of the nearby Dwarfen Kingdom), military strength (such as Demon Lord Milim), or groups that hold critical abilities for the success of his own nation (such as the Dwarfen brothers) could be viewed as equal. The rest of the characters either willingly subjugate themselves or their group, or have been defeated by Rimuru.

Episode 3 offers a good example of this forceful subjugation. As briefly referenced above, in this episode Rimuru has just joined the Goblin village and offers them his protection against a nearby pack of Direwolves, which plans to take over the forest. As the attackers ignore his initial offer to retreat, Rimuru beheads the leader of the pack and shouts to the survivors: (06:42) "Listen up, Direwolves. Your Boss has been slain. I'll give you two choices: You can submit, or you can die!"(06:49). Of course, out of fear of the sheer power Rimuru possesses, the Direwolves submit themselves and swear allegiance to their new master. Similar patterns are found throughout the whole series, as for example,when the race of Orcs is incorporated into his nation only after they face defeat in battle and the death of their king at the hands of Rimuru himself (Episode 14)[41]. Even his closest allies, the Ogres (later called Kijins) only joined Rimuru after their leader, Benimaru, faced defeat in a battle with him and agreed to acknowledge him as a new master. The bulk of Rimuru's subordinates have been accumulated by dint of lesser force or because they willingly subjugated themselves when facing the power and magic Rimuru could wield. As this pattern continues throughout the series, the nation that Rimuru builds is a hierarchical one, with him as the ultimate leader who brought different tribes and warring factions together under one flag. Thus "nation" in this sense is presented as the extension of the presence of the ruler, a personal project which sprang to life

only because a powerful and charismatic individual invested in it – a concept far away from a democratic approach, and much closer to what Weber has labeled autocratic leadership.[42]

Further, it must be mentioned that the nation Rimuru envisioned is not only autocratic, as he remains in control over all important decisions (even if he introduces later on 'meetings'), but also, it is a functionalistic one as well. In Episode 15[43], Rimuru explains to his new allies how they mutually rely on each other (04:10): "The Lizardmen will share their clean water source and fish from the lake. The Goblins can offer housing and our town can provide them with processed goods. And in return for those things, the Orcs will agree to contribute their labor" (04:25). Hence each tribe has a special task that must be fulfilled to keep the nation alive. When it comes to the visual representation of the different races, the political body formed by Rimuru – called the 'Jura Forest Alliance' – mirrors the different values that the leader connects with them. Figure 3 shows a typical form of a meeting between all factions, bound together by Rimuru, in his meeting room. Rimuru, as the distinguished leader, always occupies the middle of the image and is flanked by his female bodyguard Shion on the leftand the military trainer of the Goblins, Hakurou (a Kijin, as the Goblins are not able to evolve by themselves), and his two military advisers on the right, Benimaru (who he bestowed the title of "Samurai General") and Souei (who he tasked with infiltration and intelligence, e.g. his "Spy"). They form his inner circle of trust, not only in terms of visual representation but when it comes to decision-making, these are the people he relies on the most and who he entrusts first with important tasks. The further a participant is sitting from Rimuru, the less importance and representation they have in this meeting. On the right side of the table another Kijin named Shuna is seated, immediately followed by the two most

important Goblins, Rigurd and Rigur, the two characters he had encountered immediately after escaping the cave. At the end of the right side are the two representatives of the Lizardmen, a species Rimuru values only for their contribution to society; compared to their size, their voice is hardly present. On the left sits Demon Lord Milim, who can be counted as a sort of peer toward Rimuru, even if he does not fully trust her. Despite her power and influence, she is a guest in Rimuru's territory and due to their friendship, he could strengthen his position in taking over diplomatic talks with other kingdoms. Next to her sits Guild Master Fuze, a human who helped Rimuru gain access to the human kingdoms, followed by Kaijin, the oldest of the Dwarfen brothers who befriended Rimuru during an encounter in the Dwarven capital. Finally, another Kijin (Kurobe) sits at the table followed by Gobta, a Goblin and leader of the city guard. With their back to the audience, Trainee (a Dryad; woman in green) and Vesta, an outcast of the Dwarfen Kingdom, have their own places at the table. In the left-back of the picture, the wandering Adventuring party is present as a backseater.[44]

Figure 3: Typical formation of a meeting with Rimuru (Episode 18, 16:51)

Here what may sound like a simple formation of fictional species randomly thrown together,actually follows a logic that goes far beyond the pure visual picture, but instead is a perfect example of social stratification. This stratification is best described as hierarchically organized social inequality within a given society and the accepted nature of this unevenly distributed access to parts or only distinguished activities[45]. Although the mentioned five Kijin (Benimaru, Souei, Shion, Hakurou, and Kurobe) are the only ones left from their species, they were each assigned special tasks due to their powerful abilities and fierce character. Additionally, they have a direct link to Rimuru and can suggest further steps in negotiations or issues relating to war and espionage; an option the other races do not have throughout the whole series. On the contrary, by this point Rimuru has incorporated 150,000 Orcs into his new nation as of three episodes before (Episode 15,03:59), none of which has even had a voice or seat in his strategic meetings; moreover, this is a fact that will only change at the end of the first and beginning of the second season, and even then there is only a single Orc called Geld who will be allowed to attend those meetings. Stichweh[46] has argued that exclusion or "functional differentiation," as in this example, must always deal with such discontinua and is in its specific sense multidimensional. When comparing those numbers who comprise Rimuru's strategic meeting, we find five last remaining survivors who all have a distinct voice in his decision-making process, compared to 150, 000 who have no one to speak for them – this we might say that the Kijin represent a social stratum that can be compared to Aristocrats. Zajak and Sorg have traced this behavior in human history when analyzing the historical change of capitalism from a mere accumulation of capital to a transitional movement that accumulated political-economic power and therefore reproduces social inequality.[47] Here even though the Kijins represent the margin of

Rimuru's society, their word counts exponentially more than that of the "labor force", a term used by Rimuru himself (Episode 15, 04:26). Due to their defeat in the Great Battle of the Jura Forest, Rimuru charges the Orcs no harsh penalties and offers them a living in his territory, in exchange for their sheer labor.

Another interesting aspect is the fact that almost all monsters in the world exist without having a name. Only special and powerful individuals have a name that they can refer to and increase their power and abilities with. To put it simply, having a name is quite uncommon in this world. Thus, in possessing the ability to bestow names to his subordinates, Rimuru can exercise control over them in two ways: First, he can bind them even closer to him, as the name-giver has the right to obtain control over the one he has granted a name. Second, he can choose which of his subordinates "evolve" into higher beings: a process often presented during the series. The Ogres, for example, all evolve into Kijins, which are even more powerful beings, and they swear eternal allegiance to Rimuru after accepting his gift. The idea of creating new objects or evolving already existing ones into a new form is closely linked to what Wallerstein has discussed in the role of shaping reality through naming.[48] His thesis, which is that the possibility of naming things is one of the greatest powers ever held by humankind, is presented throughout the series. In giving his underlings names within a setting where such names hold actual power, Rimuru further strengthens the ties between himself and his subordinates, making them eternally grateful and effectively suppressing most disloyalty, opposition, or conspiracies against him. Here it should also be mentioned that once a tribe or species is incorporated into Rimuru's territory, they are not able to leave it (or at least no examples of this are presented in the series). This exclusive inside-outside

dichotomy is formative for the perception of belonging in the system that Rimuru aims to create.

Summary

All things considered, I do not intend to argue that *Tensei shitara slime datta ken* is a propagandistic series or one that aims to deprave the high value of democracy. However, critical engagement has shown that despite the often-repeated argument from the main character that he seeks to build an all-equal nation – a utopia where everyone is free – in reality, an autocratic and anti-democratic nation has been the result of his actions. One has to question why, despite the infinite possibility of all courses of action exactly such a nation, which unmistakably reminds profound historians of pre-World War II Japanese society, is praised so much by its native and international audience alike. I further argue that the lack of recent research in anime, especially isekai, is noteworthy, given their growing interest and popularity among ever wider audiences every year. New shows with similar content worth exploring (examples include *Mushoku Tensei: Isekai Ittara Honki Dasu* eng: *Jobless Reincarnation: I Will Seriously Try If I Go to Another World* or *Suraimu Taoshite Sanbyaku-nen, Shiranai Uchini Reberu Makkusuni Nattemashita*; eng: *I've Been Killing Slimes for 300 Years and Maxed Out My Level*; and especially *Genjitsu shugi Yūsha no Ōkoku Saikenki*; eng: *How a Realist Hero Rebuilt the Kingdom*) begin airing and drawing in new audiences almost every month. I maintain that it is worth questioning whether such isekai series are contributing to a slow shift in the perception of democratic values amongst their audience or if they are just – worthy of research – entertainment. This paper aims to contribute to this

discussion by providing early insights into a little-researched, but highly influential, topic.

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Attachment to Manga (Japanese Comics): Conceptualizing the Behavioral Components of Manga Attachment and Exploring Attachment Differences Between Avid, Moderate, and Occasional Manga Readers

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to conceptualize attachment to manga (Japanese comics) by extrapolating the behavioral markers of attachment theory to manga readership. Second, it compares manga attachment markers as seen in avid, moderate, and occasional readers in order to find differences in the strength of these attachments. The study predicted (a) that attachment theory's common behavioral markers (i.e., proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress) map onto manga readership and (b) that avid readers display stronger attachment behaviors towards manga than moderate and occasional readers. Participants (N = 279) answered a questionnaire identifying a set of 24 manga attachment markers. Analyses revealed a four-component solution that mirrors the markers of attachment theory, supporting the premise that manga attachment mirrors interpersonal attachment. The results also revealed statistically significant differences in the strength of attachment behaviors to manga among avid, moderate, and occasional readers regarding three behavioral markers (i.e., proximity maintenance, safe haven, and separation distress), thus confirming that avid manga readers display stronger attachment behaviors towards manga. These findings contribute to the increasing literature and understanding on the role of media texts in individuals' wellbeing.

Keywords: Manga, comics, attachment, media, popular culture

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Manga is ubiquitous in Japan, where its extensive historical, economical, and cultural background makes this form of entertainment a staple of contemporary Japanese society and the heart of Japanese popular culture. Contrary to popular belief in some circles though, it is not only children who read it, but people of all ages. Moreover, manga in Japan is a mainstream mass media market instead of the niche market that is associated with comics in other countries such as the US and the UK. Manga reading, manga characters, and the manga visual aesthetic constitute an integral part of everyday life in Japan.

Because of manga's visibility in the socio-cultural landscape of Japan, increasing research from the field of cultural studies has described manga's importance for readers. However, little is known about the psychological phenomena that occurs in connection with manga readership. Two potential reasons for this include the way English-language research on Japanese popular culture focuses on treating it as a subcultural phenomenon, but also, the lack of studies that explore the normative psychological aspects of Japanese popular culture consumption. Given that other fields such as sports or television studies have managed to research psychological phenomena in relation to media consumption, one way of solving this obstacle is to continue developing the field of manga psychology in order to explore why manga matters so much to people. Existing research in this direction suggests

that through reading manga, individuals not only entertain themselves, but also obtain informational and emotional support that is used for self-development.[1] Still, much more could be done in this area.

Consequently, this study explores how readers become attached to manga through two main goals. First, it seeks to conceptualize attachment to manga by identifying a set of behavioral markers that potentially reflect readers' attachment. Second, the study compares these markers among avid, moderate, and occasional manga readers in order to point out differences in the strength of their respective attachments to this media form, especially because not all manga readership implies attachment. By exploring these goals, this study seeks to both expand and contribute to the increasing body of literature that aims to understand the role of manga in individuals' everyday lives.

Attachment Theory as a Lens for Conceptualizing Manga Attachment Behaviors

During a 9-month participant observation period conducted in manga fan clubs at a university in Japan, I asked participants in several open discussion sessions "Why do you read manga?" The most common answer was a variant of the idea that participants read manga because it is fun, exciting, and entertaining. The second most common reason was that they read manga because it makes them feel

safe. Other cited reasons include reading manga for relaxing when feeling tired or stressed, for cheering up when feeling sad, and/or for having common topics to discuss with friends and peers. Furthermore, participants often stated that their favorite manga characters might be important role models in their lives and that they could not imagine living without manga.

The presence of behaviors such as feeling safe when reading manga, and being distressed at the possibility of not being able to read manga, both mirror behaviors that are commonly associated with interpersonal attachment such as using other individuals as a safe haven and experiencing separation distress. Because these behaviors signal the activation of the attachment behavioral system as described by Bowlby[2] and Ainsworth et al.,[3] and because attachment theory is arguably the most influential relational theory in social psychology, this paper uses attachment theory as a lens for extrapolating attachment behaviors that potentially mirror readers' attachment to manga.

Attachment Theory and Attachment Figures Other than People

According to attachment theory, human beings are equipped with an attachment behavioral system that enables individuals to form and maintain affectional bonds with others (attachment figures), beginning in infancy, for the biological purpose of gaining protection.[4] In general terms, attachment can be

defined as an innate, strongly emotional, target-specific bond. The outcome is the eliciting of behaviors that seek proximity with attachment figures.[5] [6] Although attachment theory originally described the bond between an infant and a caregiver, later developments would propose that attachment figures are many and varied. For example, Hazan and Shaver argue that romantic love is an attachment process, suggesting that around adolescence, individuals change the primary attachment figure from parents to social peers, and later in adult life for romantic partners.[7] Elsewhere, Mikulincer and Shaver's adult attachment model postulates that when attachment behavior is activated, anxiety can be reduced by simulating interactions with mental representations of attachment figures such as deities, religious figures, deceased loved ones, or media heroes.[8] Other examples of non-interpersonal attachment behavior include teenagers' romantic crushes with celebrities,[9] pets as companions,[10] [11] attachment to special places or to the place of residence,[12] [13] and/or emotional bonding with gifts, collectibles or favorite objects.[14]

Attachment Behaviors in Manga Readership

Research on the attachment system identifies recurrent behavioral markers of attachment bonds. These include proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress.[15] [16] I briefly turn to definitions for each of these four behaviors because they will prove significant. To begin with, proximity maintenance

refers to seeking and keeping physical or psychological proximity with the attachment figure. Safe haven is described as using the attachment figure as a buffer or solace in response to negative external or internal stimulus. Secure base refers to the possibility of engaging with exploratory cognitive behavior given that the person feels sufficiently secure on the availability of their attachment figure. Separation distress implies manifesting negative feelings due to the actual or perceived unavailability of the attachment figure. The following subsections document evidence of attachment behaviors in readers' relationship with manga.

Proximity maintenance. Akashi's study on manga reading habits in elementary and junior high school students reported that while 9.5% of the participants have no interest in manga, 71.9% are moderate manga readers and 18.6% are manga enthusiasts, which comes to around 90% of young Japanese individuals reading manga with some sort of frequency.[17] Such numbers are due to manga being readily available, as well as its low price, and its extensive distribution network. That is, this is a low-cost form of entertainment, which makes it easier to produce and consume compared with other media.[18] Ogino argues that manga's weekly magazines publishing system enabled a form of entertainment based on the anticipation of serialized content, offering the reader a sense of reliability, familiarity, and confidence in the future.[19] Likewise, reading manga in places other

than home (e.g., classrooms, trains, standing in convenience stores, restaurants, manga cafés, etc.) enables spaces where the reader feels calmed. Murase, for instance, argues that manga cafés – places that are part internet café and part hotel – are an extension of private living rooms where readers can relax and get a sense of intimacy, security, and anonymity.[20] Additionally, manga readers usually belong to communities of readers (e.g., family, friends, classmates, etc.) that collectively use manga as a common base for developing social skills.[21] The significance of proximity maintenance behavior does not rely solely on how readers engage with manga but also on the motivations for doing so.

Another study of manga reading habits of college students in Japan reported that reasons for reading manga can be classified in 4 categories: For passing the time (e.g., reading it while commuting in the train), for pleasure (e.g., because it gives dreams and happiness), for learning something new in a pleasant manner (e.g., readers can be exposed to different worldviews), and for ease of access (e.g., no matter the content, is attractive and easy to read).[22] Overall, reading manga has a predominant position in Japanese entertainment, offering ample opportunity for readers to engage and to maintain proximity with manga not only because it is ubiquitous, but because it enables rewarding and meaningful experiences that are easily accessible and socially significant. [23] [24] [25]

Safe haven. Akashi reports that reading manga relieves children's stress.[26] Similarly, Takeuchi reports that in high school, when Japanese students are preparing for demanding university entrance exams, reading manga becomes a means of reducing stress.[27] According to Allen and Ingulsrud, one reason for Japanese university students to read manga, especially manga depicting school life, is to learn how to cope with personal problems.[28] Another example is the use of manga for regulating affect. For example, a manga sub-genre called healing manga (癒し系マンガ *Iyashikei Manga*), which often depicts alternative realities with little conflict, idyllic natural settings, cute characters, and heartwarming moments, is produced for the specific purpose of soothing readers by either lowering states of mind heightened by stress, or else offering positive emotional experiences.

Further evidence for manga's applicability may be found in the increasing number of studies in clinical psychology that report the use of manga in psychotherapy.[29] [30] For instance, Sasakura[31] argues that manga is helpful for establishing a relationship with patients, while Shimoyama[32] advocates for researching ways in which manga therapy can be established as a viable form of treatment. In general, research suggests that readers use manga as a safe haven both for finding solace when distressed and also for regulating affect.

Secure base. Evidence suggests that the presence of an emotional bond with

manga promotes learning. Research on educational manga (学習マンガ *Gakushū Manga*), a genre of manga that is made for using as teaching material in the classroom, points out the benefits of using educational manga for learning. For example, Kōgo has compared the effects on memory of reading educational manga and text-based materials in university students, and reported that participants had higher memorization rates as measured by their familiarity with the story portrayed in particular manga.[33] In another study, Murata found that using educational manga in conjunction with text-based material promotes the understanding of learning contents,[34] while elsewhere Satō found that between learning with educational manga and text-based materials, manga leads to higher rates of content retention.[35] Moreover, Nakazawa suggests that from a young age, Japanese children develop "manga reading literacy," or the ability and skill to comprehend a story told in both visual and textual format as manga does, and finds this skill to be significantly correlated with Japanese language academic ability (i.e., reading and writing the Japanese language).[36] In summary, evidence suggests that manga is useful for acquiring broader reading comprehension, enabling efficient learning, and promoting a higher retention of content.

Another approach to studying cognition in relation to media consumption is to focus on the persuasive power of narrative media. In general, individuals tend to

adjust their attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors regarding certain topics after exposure to narrative media. For example, a manga genre in Japan titled functional manga (機能マンガ *Kinō Manga*) is designed to convey practical information in an easy-to-understand manner.[37] It is circulated by both private companies and public institutions, and it has proved successful not only for its instructional value but also for raising awareness on topics such as suicide prevention,[38] and labor safety and health.[39]

Also relevant is the approach derived from the use of cognitive psychology in literary studies that proposes fiction as a tool for self-development. There are various studies discussing the positive role manga can play in supporting readers' self-development.[40] [41] [42] [43] More specifically, in a study on people who greatly influence personality development in young Japanese individuals, Ieshima found that outside familiar individuals, TV personalities and manga heroes had the greatest influence.[44] From an analysis of over 10000 responses found in a web community titled "I learned important stuff in life from manga" (大切なことはマンガから教わった *Taisetsunakoto wa manga kara osowatta*), research concluded that the increasing evidence of manga's positive influence on young individuals' emotional and cognitive aspects make it highly suitable for supporting the self-development of young people in Japan. [45] [46] To summarize, research suggests that from a young age, manga

readership supports cognitive development, and that the emotional bond established with manga has a positive effect on the development of personality.

Separation distress. While the appearance of negative emotions after the ending or cancellation of a serialized manga has not received academic attention, separation distress behaviors have been documented in narrative media such as film, screen products, and anime. Kottasz, Bennett, and Randell created and validated a scale for measuring "post-series depression" (PSD), a phenomenon that describes feelings of loss, emptiness, and melancholia after a loved screen product ends.[47] Similarly, online English language communities coined and popularized the term "Post Anime Depression Syndrome" (PADS), describing feelings of loss after finishing an anime series.[48] In Japan, the popular online video sharing service website Niconico (ニコニコ), refers to the same phenomenon as "Anime Burnout Syndrome" (アニメ燃え尽き症候群 A*nime moetsuki shōkōgun*) or "Anime Loss" (アニメロス A*nime rosu*).[49] Additional examples of separation distress behavior in anime fans include the popular phenomenon known as "Refugee" (難民 *Nanmin*), referring to anime fans who feel distressed when an anime series is not renewed for a new season, therefore seeking comfort in watching a similar anime series as substitute.[50] These behaviors are also observed in manga readership, even though they are informally documented in online forums or social media. For example, manga

readers tend to describe feelings of extreme sadness when manga ceases serialization without concluding the story or when they finish reading all the volumes in a completed manga. In general, separation distress behaviors are observed and documented as being an integral part of the experience of engaging with narrative media.

Study

In order to explore the possibility of the attachment behavioral system activating with avid readership of manga, the present study tested two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that attachment theory's common behavioral markers map onto manga readership. The study expected to find that manga readers' most frequent behaviors mirror attachment behaviors in four ways. First, readers maintain close proximity with their favored manga. Second, manga readers read it more often when they are feeling particularly vulnerable. Third, readers use manga as motivation to engage in activities that they do not often engage with. Fourth, readers feel distressed at the possibility, or actual event, that a manga they like ends or ceases to be published.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that avid manga readers display stronger attachment behavioral markers towards manga than moderate and occasional readers of manga would. The study expected to find that the presence of attachment behaviors towards

manga is not random since it requires avid readership, and that there are significant differences in the strength of the behavioral markers between different groups of readers.

Method

Survey Development

I devised a series of steps in an effort to test the attachment theory approach to manga attachment. The first step was to identify a set of items that tap the construct of emotional attachment. To achieve this objective, Japanese university students (N = 58) who were members of manga clubs were invited to participate in guided brainstorming sessions. Attendants were notified that the purpose of the meetings was to collect information on manga reading habits as part of an ongoing research on manga readership. The participants totaled 58 manga club members whose participation was divided into three one-hour sessions that took place a week apart from each other. For these meetings, participants were asked open-ended questions that extrapolated behaviors from markers in attachment theory that would express their attachment to manga.

From the participants' answers and discussion, a total of 32 situations were identified as potentially relevant to the purpose of the study. To further reduce the pool of items, items that three independent judges unaware of the objectives of the

study deemed to be repetitive were discarded. As a result, a total of 24 items were retained. Following parameters for scale translation in cross-cultural research, the 24 items collected in these meetings were translated into English, adapted into 7-point Likert scale statements, and translated back into Japanese.[51]

Materials and Procedure

The questionnaire titled "Questionnaire about Japanese Manga Reading Habits" was administered using the traditional pen-and-paper technique. A team of collaborators approached students outside a cafeteria during lunch time at a Japanese national university located in Japan's central region, explained the nature of the survey, and asked participants if they would be willing to complete it. Those who completed the questionnaire were offered the chance to enter a lottery of two 3000 JPY gift cards (approximately 30 USD each) from a popular online e-commerce website. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: The first section displayed a brief explanation of the purpose of the survey, an ethical disclaimer, a statement of the length (4 pages) and time required to answer (12 minutes), offered an example on how to properly mark the answers, and asked the participants to accept or decline participation in the study. This part also asked for some demographic information (age, gender, and nationality). The second section asked the participants to answer the question "How often do you read Japanese manga?"

by choosing between one of three possible answers: I am an occasional manga reader (i.e., I never read manga, I hardly ever read manga, or I read manga once or twice a year); I am a moderate manga reader (i.e., I read manga a couple of times a month or I read manga once or twice a week); I am an avid manga reader (i.e., I read manga several times in a week, I read manga once a day, or I read manga several times in a day). The third section asked the participants to rate the 24 Likert scale items indicating their agreement from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) with each one by circling the number that best described "the extent to which the following statements describe the way you feel about the manga you like and/or that you usually read." Participants completed one of two versions of the questionnaire, each of which presented the items in a different order. The sample consisted of 279 participants, 190 males (68.10%) and 89 females (31.90%), ranging in age from 18 to 22 (M = 18.69, SD = 0.90).

Results

Hypothesis 1 predicted that attachment theory's common behavioral markers (i.e., proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress) map onto manga readership. A principal components analysis (PCA) was run on the 24 items. The suitability of PCA was assessed prior to analysis. Inspection of the correlation matrix showed that all variables had at least one correlation coefficient

greater than 0.3. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.93 with individual KMO measures all greater than 0.8, with classifications of 'meritorious' to 'marvelous' according to Kaiser (1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .001$). The communalities were all above 0.3, further confirming that each item shared some common variance with other items. Overall, this assessment indicated that the data was likely factorizable.

PCA revealed four components that had eigenvalues greater than one and which explained 40.2%, 8.9%, 5.7%, and 4.7% of the total variance, respectively. Visual inspection of the scree plot indicated that four components should be retained (Figure 1). In addition, a four-component solution met the interpretability criterion. As such, four components were retained, explaining 59.5% of the total variance. A Varimax orthogonal rotation was employed to aid interpretability. The interpretation of the data was consistent with the attachment behavioral markers the survey was designed to measure, with strong loadings of proximity maintenance items on Component 1, secure base items on Component 2, safe haven items on Component 3, and separation distress items on Component 4. Internal consistency for each of the components was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which were acceptable without substantial increases in alpha achieved by eliminating more items. Component loadings and Cronbach's alpha of the rotated solution are presented in Table 1.

Overall, these analyses indicated that four distinct components were underlying participants' responses to the "Questionnaire about Japanese Manga Reading Habits," that these components reflected the attachment behavioral markers, and that the components were internally consistent (Figure 2).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that avid manga readers display stronger attachment behavioral markers towards manga than moderate and occasional readers. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if the behavioral markers that indicate attachment were different for groups with different manga reading frequency. Participants were classified into three groups: occasional readers (n = 35), moderate readers (n = 159), and avid readers (n = 85).

For the behavioral marker proximity maintenance, homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance (p = .022), and thus a one-way Welch ANOVA was conducted to determine if this behavioral marker was different for groups with different manga reading frequencies. The proximity maintenance score was statistically significantly different between groups of manga reading frequencies, Welch's $F(2, 91.483) = 100.628$, $p < .001$. Proximity maintenance score increased from the occasional group (M = -1.35, SD = 0.82), to the moderate group (M = -0.09, SD = 0.85), and avid group (M = 0.72, SD = 0.62), in that order. Games-Howell post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from

the occasional group to the moderate group (1.26, 95% CI [-1.64, -0.89]) was statistically significant (p = .001), as well as the increases from the occasional group to the avid group (2.08, 95% CI [-2.45, -1.70], p = .001), and the moderate group to the avid group (0.81, 95% CI [-1.04, -0.59], p = .001) (Figure 3).

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if each of the remaining three behavioral markers were different for groups with different manga reading frequencies. There was homogeneity of variances as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances in the secure base (p = .900), safe haven (p = .209), and separation distress (p = .142) behavioral markers. The behavioral marker safe haven was statistically significantly different for different frequencies of manga reading groups, $F(2, 276) = 7.567$, $p < .001$. The safe haven score increased from the occasional group (M = -0.52, SD = 1.04), to the moderate group (M = -0.02, SD = 0.90), and the avid group (M = 0.24, SD = 1.08), in that order. Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from the occasional group to the moderate group (0.50, 95% CI [-0.93, -0.07]) was statistically significant (p = .017), as well as the increases from the occasional group to the avid group (0.76, 95% CI [-1.22, -0.30], p = .001) (Figure 4). The behavioral marker separation distress was statistically significantly different for different frequencies of manga reading groups, $F(2, 276) = 6.583$, $p < .05$. The separation distress score increased from the

occasional group (M = -0.36, SD = 1.00), to the moderate group (M = -0.08, SD = 1.03), and avid group (M = 0.29, SD = 0.88), in that order. Tukey post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from the occasional group to the avid group (0.65, 95% CI [-1.11, -0.19]) was statistically significant (p = .003), as well as the increases from the moderate group to the avid group (0.37, 95% CI [-0.68, -0.06], p = .015) (Figure 5). There were no statistically significant differences in the secure base behavioral marker score between groups with different frequencies of manga reading, F(2, 276) = 0.124, p = .884 (Figure 6).

Discussion

Hypothesis 1 predicted that attachment theory's common behavioral markers map onto manga readership. In order to test this hypothesis, a set of behavioral items thought to potentially indicate manga attachment were identified. The finalized 24-item survey extrapolated attachment theory's behavioral markers to manga attachment. The results of the PCA revealed a multidimensional construct consisting of four empirically distinguishable behavioral markers that mirror attachment behavior underlie attachment to manga. The four components included strong loadings of items that mirror attachment theory's markers (i.e., proximity maintenance, secure base, safe haven, and separation distress). The four components structure supported expectations and was consistent with research that found that a

complex mechanism involving emotions, cognitions, and behaviors mediates audiences' relationships with media,[52] and that attachment bonds to media are analogous to interpersonal attachment bonds.[53] [54] These findings reinforce the hypothesis that manga attachment maps onto attachment behavior, and ultimately suggests that the attachment behavioral system plays a part in regulating attachment to media such as manga. This in itself is significant because it offers researchers an entry point for understanding the psychological mechanisms involved in media consumption. By presenting this four-component structure, the present study succeeds in conceptualizing manga attachment in a way that reflects the behaviors of both participants and interpersonal attachment.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that avid manga readers display stronger attachment behaviors towards manga than do moderate and occasional readers. The results of the one-way ANOVA for each behavioral marker partly corroborated this hypothesis. There are statistically significant differences between avid, moderate, and occasional manga readers in three of the four behavioral components (i.e., proximity maintenance, safe haven, and separation distress). For these markers, occasional manga readers reported the lowest means of the sample, while avid manga readers reported the highest means. In each of the three markers, occasional readers' and avid readers' responses were statistically significantly different. These results suggest

that the more frequently a participant reads manga, the stronger these three attachment behaviors are, thus implying that avid manga readers constantly seek to maintain proximity with manga, find in manga a safe haven for when feeling distressed, and experience separation distress at the real or perceived possibility of the manga not being available. The results also suggest that occasional manga readers are not likely to experience proximity maintenance, safe haven, and separation distress (Figure 7). This result supports expectations as it is consistent with previous work that found that the intensity of attachment behavior mirrors the degree of romantic love,[55] attachment to pets,[56] [57] places,[58] [59] objects,[60] celebrities,[61] and religious figures.[62]

On the other hand, there were no statistically significant differences between groups of manga reading frequency in the secure base behavioral marker. This could mean that participants in the three groups do not use manga as a secure base, or else that participants in the three groups use manga as a secure base. A third and more parsimonious interpretation could be that in the three groups there are both participants who use and those who do not use manga as a secure base. To summarize, comparisons in the four manga attachment behavioral markers succeed in identifying the behaviors that clearly differentiate avid readers from occasional readers (i.e., proximity maintenance, safe haven, and separation distress).

Overall, the results offered here provide encouraging support for an attachment-theoretical perspective on attachment to manga. Such an approach is valuable because it offers researchers a tool for explaining why and how individuals establish strong emotional bonds with manga, while also offering greater understanding of the significance of manga to avid readers. It also offers theoretical insight on how a psychological mechanism like the attachment system enables individuals to use manga as a source of wellbeing. For these reasons, the attachment theory approach to manga readership expands and contributes to the increasing literature and understanding on the role of media in people's everyday lives.

Limitations

The results presented here must be tempered by some caveats. First, researchers might find the use of attachment theory, which in its original conception addresses the development of two-sided, interpersonal bonds, unsuitable for describing an individual's emotional bonds with media such as manga. Seemingly, the main problem is the one-sided direction of the bond readers establish with manga, given there is no reciprocity. Therefore, it might be argued that manga reading, which is a one-sided rather than a reciprocated activity, cannot be conceptualized using attachment theory. To answer this concern, increasing literature on attachment theory suggests the activation of the attachment system in

the relationship individuals establish with attachment figures that range from responsive to unresponsive, such as pets, celebrities, religious figures, places of dwelling, special objects, and so on. Moreover, according to attachment theory, an attachment figure does not need to be responsive for the attachment system to activate, as exemplified by relationships with absent, unresponsive, and abusive caregivers in childhood and/or romantic partners in adulthood. This implies that strong emotional bonds, independent of their quality and direction, can result from the interaction with unresponsive attachment figures, a premise that resonates with avid manga readers developing unilateral emotional bonds with manga.

Second, it could be argued that using attachment theory would better fit the analysis of emotional bonds to a fictional character (e.g., readers' favorite manga character) or the analysis of bonds with one specific work of manga (e.g., readers' favorite manga), instead of using it for conceptualizing attachment to the act of reading manga in general as it is presented in this study. However, previous tests discouraged using attachment theory on only one character or one work of manga. During the brainstorming sessions, participants were asked to think about only one of their favorite works of manga and to answer if they experienced attachment behaviors to it. Participants reported that it was difficult to answer based only on one work of manga, given that they might display attachment behaviors to many different

works. For example, a participant stated that their favorite manga is very violent, so they do not read it when feeling sad. On the other hand, they do read other works of manga when feeling sad in order to cheer up. A parallel can be established with other media to further understand this situation. For example, individuals who watch television shows regularly might have a couple of all-time favorite shows, but at the same time they might be emotionally attached to the act of watching television shows in general. Similarly, sports fans might be supporters of their favorite team or athlete, or they might be more emotionally connected to the sport in question. That is to say, this does not negate the possibility of manga readers developing specific attachments to a character, a manga artist, a work of manga, and so on, an idea that could be explored further in the future. The study presented here asked about the act of reading "the manga that you like or usually read," in order not to limit the respondents. Responses yielded scores high enough to examine the presence of strong attachments efficiently.

Conversely, it might be argued that instead of using attachment theory, other theories closer to media consumption would be more suitable for conceptualizing manga attachment. One possible theoretical lens could be the Uses and Gratifications theory approach, according to which people can use media for different objectives depending on the gratifications they seek to achieve. Research in the field identifies

many taxologies concerning uses and gratifications depending on media users' personal and social motivations. For example, media can be used as a substitute when interpersonal communication fails.[63] However, the downside of employing the uses and gratifications approach is that it mainly focuses on typologies with little explanation as to what might be the psychological mechanisms underlying said uses and gratifications. Attachment theory, on the other hand, offers a theoretical framework for conceptualizing behavioral markers while explaining the process of forming bonds and their psychological purpose.

Another limitation is that this study does not explore the reasons why a biological mechanism such as the attachment system activates when individuals avidly consume manga. One explanation for this might be that media triggers the same strong emotional responses found in interpersonal relationships. Another possible explanation is that evolutionary biological mechanisms like the attachment system are not exclusively activated by interpersonal relationships. In this case, it is also possible that a wide range of mediated social experiences set off the attachment behavioral system.

It is also important to note that items in scales used in attachment studies are often similar to those used in the study of concepts such as identification, affinity, similarity, parasocial relationships, or liking.[64] This is not to say that these

instruments lack validity, but instead that items like the one devised here might measure not only attachment to manga but also similar phenomena as well. Another interpretation is that concepts such as identification, affinity, parasocial relationships, and liking are so close to each other that the same psychological mechanisms could underlie all of them. In this case, the attachment theory approach to media attachment is useful for the possibility it offers in explaining a greater range of socio-cultural phenomena related to avid consumption of media.

Another limitation is that this paper is not set to explore the effect of interpersonal attachment styles on the establishment of emotional bonds with media. Attachment styles as described by Ainsworth et al. (i.e., securely attached, anxiously attached, and avoidant) are the result of the availability and the quality of the response of attachment figures in infancy (e.g., avoidant or anxiously attached styles result from unresponsive caregivers).[65] Traditionally, research relating attachment theory to media consumption has focused on hypotheses that see strong attachments to media as the result of lacking social skills for developing interpersonal relationships (e.g., individuals with lacking social skills have stronger attachments to media as a way of replacing social interaction). These studies have yielded partial or little evidence on how avoidant and anxiously attached styles predict strong media attachments. This is not to say that there is no relationship between avid

consumption of media in the face of adversity, like watching more television shows when feeling stressed, yet there is no clear conclusion on the predictive effect of attachment styles on media consumption.

Future Directions

Future research could expand the attachment theory approach used here to other forms of media. On the basis of cultural significance and manga's presence in the Japanese cultural landscape, manga readership can be equated to mainstream media such as sports, film, and television. Due to manga's multimedia features, readers are likely to be attached to other related media such as animation, video games, books, movies, sports, music and so on. Using a multidisciplinary design that includes fan studies, social psychology, and attachment theory, research would benefit from analyzing the role of individuals' media attachments matrix on personal and social development. A starting point would be to answer how this media attachment matrix contributes to attaining the biological goal of protection, and how it complements the matrix of interpersonal attachments. In order to do so, the next step in research using the attachment approach to manga attachment should be to validate the manga attachment scale.

Conclusion

Research has found parallels between interpersonal attachment and the bonds established with media. The attachment behavioral system, which enables infants to form attachment bonds with caregivers continues to activate throughout individuals' life span and enables bonds not only with other individuals but with places, objects, mental representations of people, and media. This investigation offered a theoretical framework for further understanding the influence of popular culture media such as manga on individuals' behaviors. It also presented theoretical and empirical similarities between interpersonal attachment and attachment to manga, suggesting that the same psychological processes that regulate social bonding are activated when consuming media such as manga. These similarities are significant because they suggest that the function of media goes beyond entertainment and escapism as it also contributes to attaining specific biological goals like protection. Such connection further requires hypotheses that explore novel ways to become operational by including biological, sociological, and psychological perspectives on media consumption. This is a matter that calls for additional cross-cultural, cross-media, multidisciplinary research that challenges conceptions that see entertainment media as merely entertainment by broadening the understanding of

how media can be an intrinsic part of individuals' wellbeing and why it matters so much to people.

Notes

[1] Akihiko Ieshima 家島 明彦, "Manga Wo Kaishita Seinen No Jiko Keisei Shien Puroguramu Sakusei Ni Mukete マンガを介した青年の自己形成支援プログラム作成に向けて [Using Manga in Self-Development Support for Youth]," *Kyōtodaigaku Daigakuin Kyōikugakukenkyūka Kiyō* 54 (2008): 98–111.

[2] John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, vol. 1 (New York: Basic Books, 1969).

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Table 1

Principal Component Analysis Results

	Component			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Items	Proximity Maintenance	Secure Base	Safe Haven	Separation Distress
1. One of my favorite hobbies is reading manga.	**.807**	.145	.307	.219
2. I always read the manga that I like as soon as it comes out.	**.719**	.109	.238	.209
6. I usually collect some of the manga that I like (magazines, compilation volumes, etc.).	**.714**	.191	.132	.058
3. I usually read the manga that I like more than once.	**.704**	.010	.159	.105
4. I usually spend my free time reading manga.	**.701**	.100	.379	.263
5. The manga that I like is very important to me.	**.681**	.284	.337	.273
15. When I read the manga that I like, I feel encouraged to participate in special activities (for example, if the manga is about music, sports, arts, etc., I feel encouraged to learn how to play a musical instrument, start practicing a sport, take art lessons or enter a circle, study group, etc.).	.088	**.723**	.121	.120
18. I feel happier when I share my experience of reading the manga that I like with other people.	.020	**.684**	.200	.180
16. I think it is possible that reading some of the manga that I like might have helped me in becoming a better person.	.075	**.673**	.166	.250
19. When the ending of the manga that I like is announced, I read it more frequently.	.170	**.651**	.029	-.034
20. When the manga that I like resumes publication after it stopped for some time (for example, when it starts again after vacation breaks, or when a new season/story starts, etc.) I read it more frequently.	.185	**.634**	.145	.277
17. I think that I want to be like some of the characters that appear in the manga that I like.	.075	**.595**	.196	.205
14. When I read the manga that I like, I feel encouraged to travel to new places, meet new people or try new things in general.	.523	**.571**	.164	.029
11. When I have personal problems (for example, problems with friends, family, romantic partners, financial difficulties, social-pressures, etc.) I like to read some of the manga that I like in order to calm down or distract myself.	.175	.193	**.846**	.050
8. When I am sad or feeling down, I like to read manga that I like for cheering up.	.293	.185	**.730**	.180
10. When I am feeling stressed (for example, after a stressful day at work or school, or when there is a lot of pressure at work or school, etc.), I like to read some of the manga that I like in order to calm down.	.250	.094	**.710**	.083
7. When I am ill, I have a cold or I lack good health, I like to read the manga that I like in order to feel better.	.309	.205	**.650**	.115
9. When I am feeling happy, I like to read some of the manga that I like.	.414	.321	**.539**	.252
23. I think it is possible that some of the manga that I like is as important to me as some people in my life (some relatives, some friends, some acquaintances, etc.).	.179	.369	**.381**	.196
22. When the manga that I like ends, I will feel lonely (if the manga that I like already ended I felt lonely).	.240	.181	.039	**.811**
21. When the manga that I like ends, I will be sad (if the manga that I like already ended I felt sad).	.129	.224	.140	**.801**

24. I feel that even if a manga that I like ends, it will always be important for me.	.319	.389	.206	**.498**
12. I usually discuss what happens in the manga that I like with other people (friends, family, romantic partners, classmates, etc.).	.236	.243	.393	**.472**
13. I think that talking about the manga that I like to important people in my life (friends, family, romantic partners, classmates, etc.) has strengthened our relationship.	.411	.222	.265	**.429**
Cronbach's alpha (All items = .932)	.893	.826	.852	.799

Figures

Figure 1

Scree Plot of the Four Components of Manga Attachment

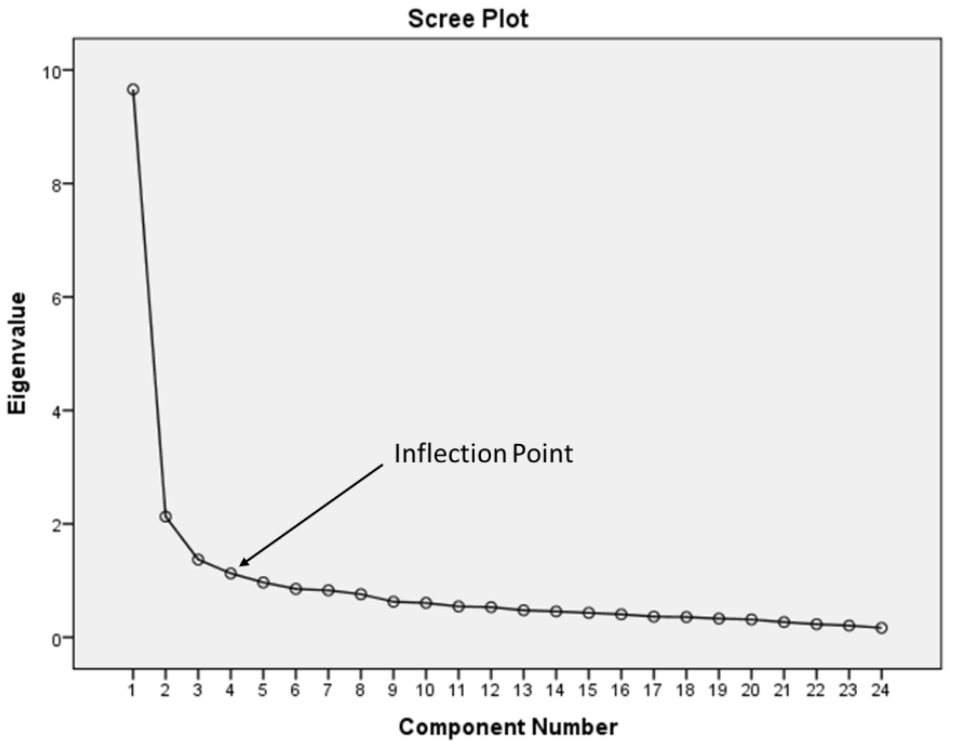


Figure 2

Components of Manga Attachment and their Explanation

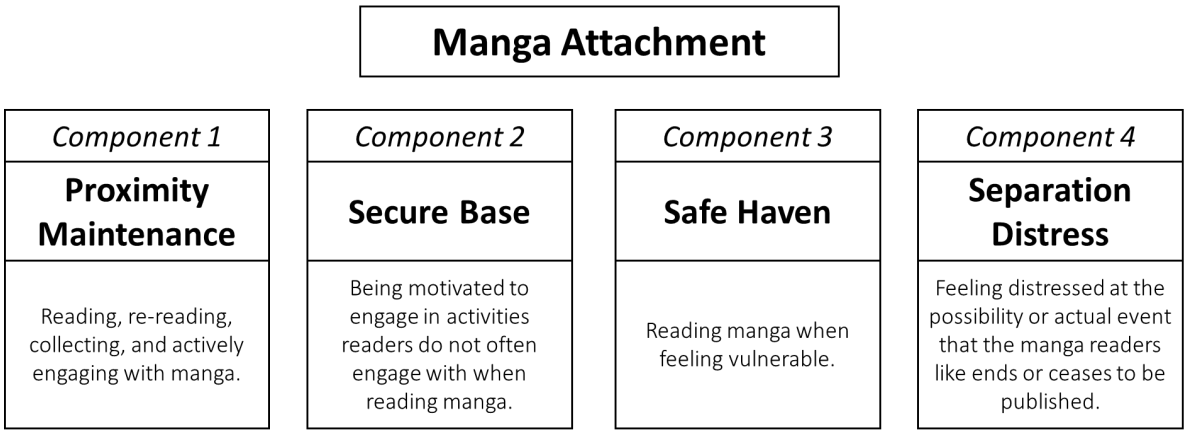


Figure 3

ANOVA Bar Chart for the Proximity Maintenance Component

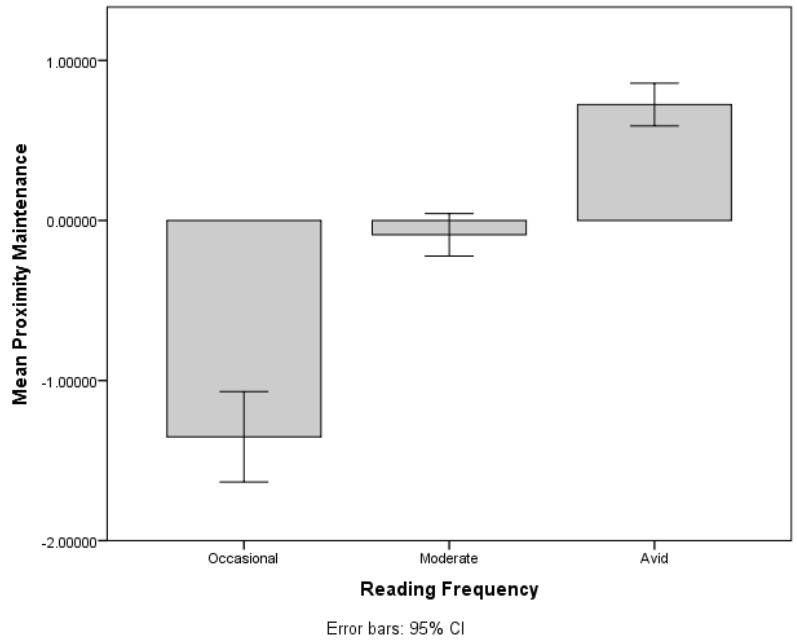


Figure 4

ANOVA Bar Chart for the Safe Haven Component

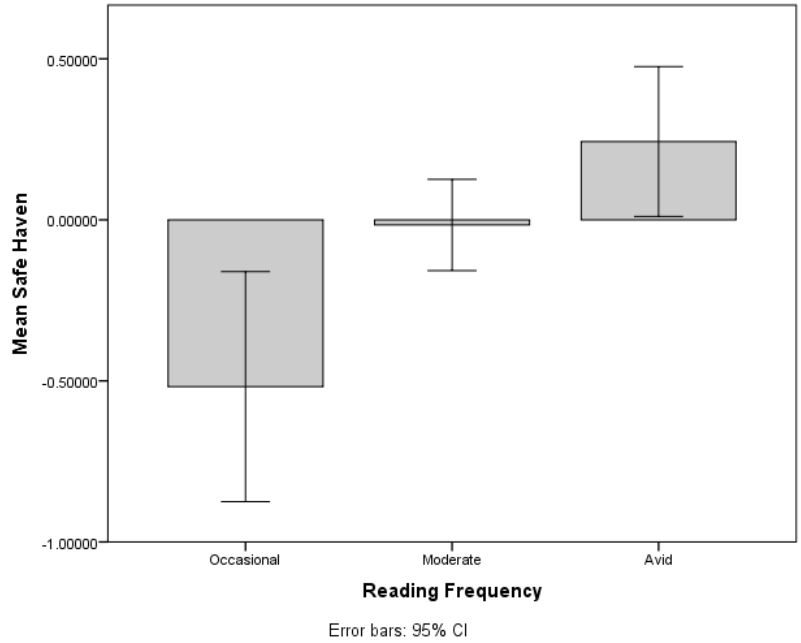


Figure 5

ANOVA Bar Chart for the Separation Distress Component

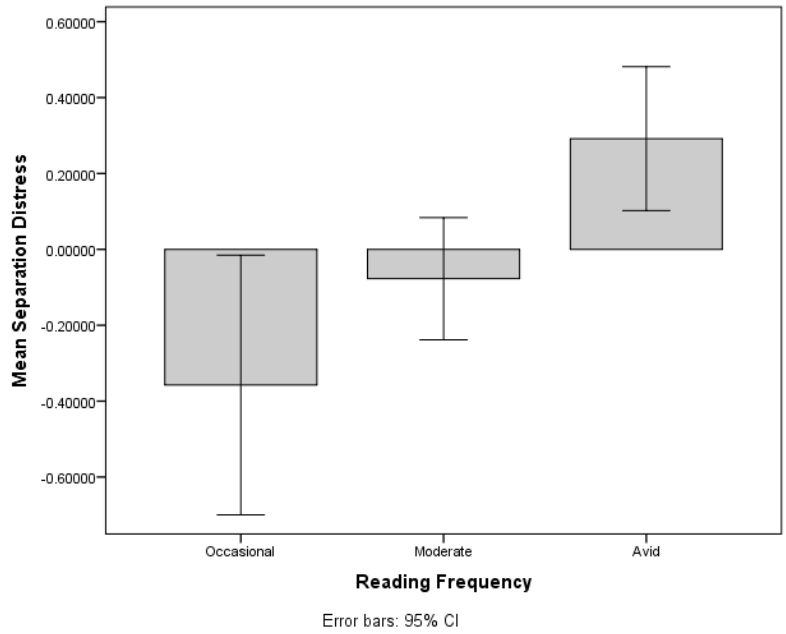


Figure 6

ANOVA Bar Chart for the Secure Base Component

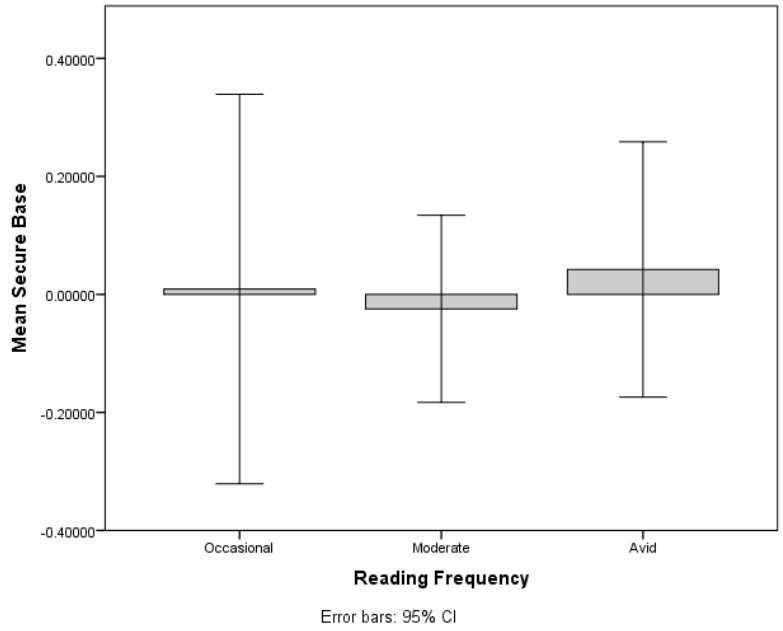
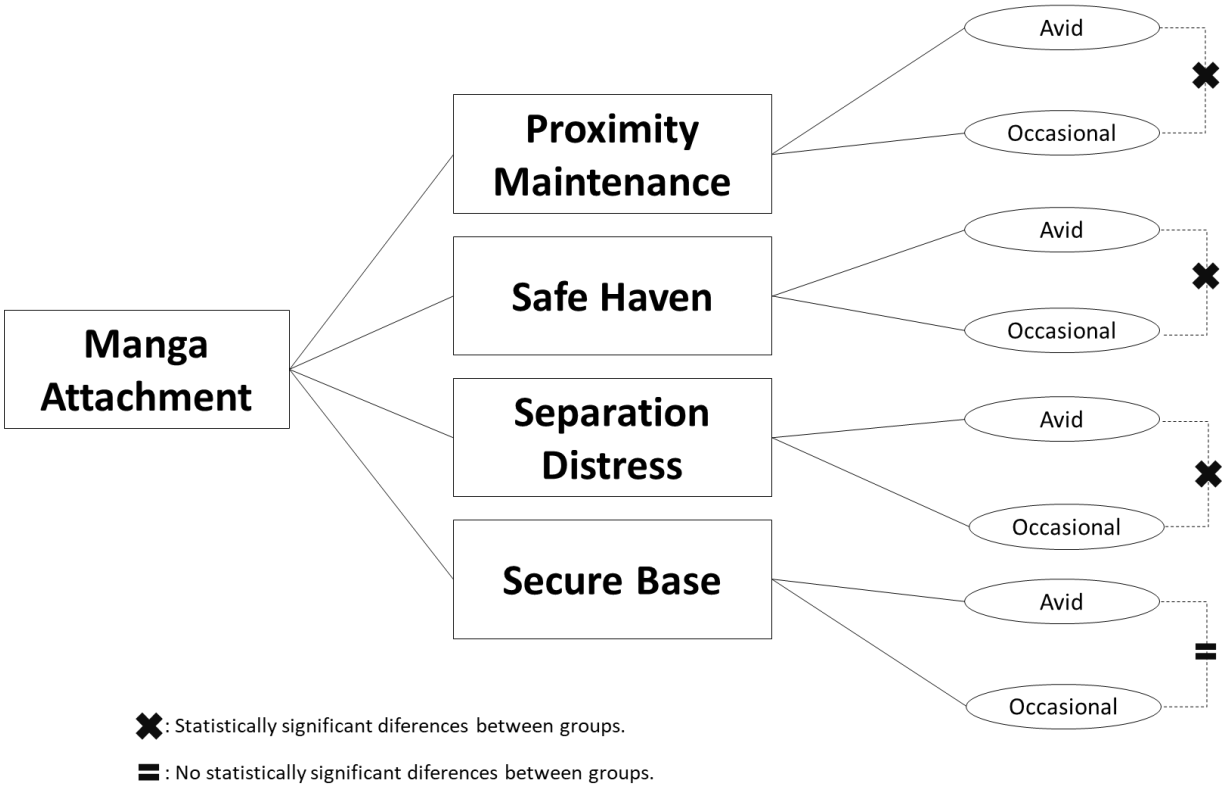


Figure 7

Differences Between Avid and Occasional Manga Readers in the Four Manga Attachment Components



Appendix A: Original 24 Items Survey (English)

1. One of my favorite hobbies is reading manga. 2. I always read the manga that I like as soon as it comes out. 3. I usually read the manga that I like more than once. 4. I usually spend my free time reading manga. 5. The manga that I like is very important to me. 6. I usually collect some of the manga that I like (magazines, compilation volumes, etc.).	**Proximity Maintenance**
7. When I am ill, I have a cold or I lack good health, I like to read the manga that I like in order to feel better. 8. When I am sad or feeling down, I like to read manga that I like for cheering up. 9. When I am feeling happy, I like to read some of the manga that I like. 10. When I am feeling stressed (for example, after a stressful day at work or school, or when there is a lot of pressure at work or school, etc.), I like to read some of the manga that I like in order to calm down. 11. When I have personal problems (for example, problems with friends, family, romantic partners, financial difficulties, social-pressures, etc.) I like to read some of the manga that I like in order to calm down or distract myself.	**Safe haven**
12. I usually discuss what happens in the manga that I like with other people (friends, family, romantic partners, classmates, etc.). 13. I think that talking about the manga that I like to important people in my life (friends, family, romantic partners, classmates, etc.) has strengthened our relationship. 14. When I read the manga that I like, I feel encouraged to travel to new places, meet new people or try new things in general. 15. When I read the manga that I like, I feel encouraged to participate in special activities (for example, if the manga is about music, sports, arts, etc., I feel encouraged to learn how to play a musical instrument, start practicing a sport, take art lessons or enter a circle, study group, etc.). 16. I think it is possible that reading some of the manga that I like might have helped me in becoming a better person. 17. I think that I want to be like some of the characters that appear in the manga that I like. 18. I feel happier when I share my experience of reading the manga that I like with other people.	**Secure base**
19. When the ending of the manga that I like is announced, I read it more frequently. 20. When the manga that I like resumes publication after it stopped for some time (for example, when it starts again after vacation breaks, or when a new season/story starts, etc.) I read it more frequently. 21. When the manga that I like ends, I will be sad (if the manga that I like already ended I felt sad). 22. When the manga that I like ends, I will feel lonely (if the manga that I like already ended I felt lonely). 23. I think it is possible that some of the manga that I like is as important to me as some people in my life (some relatives, some friends, some acquaintances, etc.). 24. I feel that even if a manga that I like ends, it will always be important for me.	**Separation distress**

Appendix B: Original 24 Items Survey (Japanese)

1. マンガを読む事が大切な趣味の一つである 2. 好きなマンガが出ると直ぐに読む。 3. 好きなマンガは繰り返して読む。 4. 自由時間をマンガを読む事に費やす。 5. マンガは私にとってとても大切なものである。 6. 好きなマンガを何冊か持っている。（雑誌、 単行本など）
7. 病気だったり、風邪の時や具合の悪い時、気分を良くするために好きなマンガを読む。 8. 気分の優れない時や落ち込んだ時、気持ちを高めるために好きなマンガを読む 9. 幸せな気分のとき、好きなマンガを読むがちである。 10.ストレスを抱えている時（仕事や学校などのストレス）気持ちを落ち着かせるために好きなマンガを読む。 11. 個人的な問題を抱えた時（友達、家族、恋人とのトラブルあるいは金銭問題・社会的プレッシャーなど）好きなマンガを読んだりして気分を変えたり、落ち着かせたりする。
12. 好きなマンガの内容について他の人（友達、家族、恋人、クラスメートなど）とよく会話をする。 13. 好きなマンガについて大切な人（友達、恋人、クラスメートなど）に話す事は、その人との関係を強くすると思う。 14. 好きなマンガを読むと、新天地に旅したい、新しい人と出逢いたい、あるいは新たな事にチャレンジしたい気持ちになったりする。 15. 好きなマンガを読むと、特別な活動（例えば、そのマンガに関係する音楽の楽器演奏、スポーツを実際にやる、アートのレッスンを受講するなど）に参加したくなる意欲が湧いてくることがある 16. 好きなマンガを読むことは、より良い人に成れるかもしれないと思う事がある。 17. 自分自身、好きなマンガの登場人物になりたいと思うことがある。 18. 好きなマンガを読む経験を他の人と共有することに幸せを感じることがある
19. 好きなマンガがもう直ぐ終わると知らされたら、それを普段にも増して読む傾向にある。 20. 好きなマンガが暫く中断され、それが再開される（例えば、シリーズが中断し新しいシーズンとして再スタートする）と一層読む傾向にある。 21. 好きなマンガが終わると悲しいと感じることがある。（あるいは、好きなマンガが終わってしまったので悲しく感じる。） 22. 好きなマンガが終わると淋しさを感じることがある。（あるいは、好きなマンガが終わってしまったので淋しく感じる。） 23. 人生において、好きなマンガは他の誰（親戚、友達、知人など）より大切な存在であるかもしれない。 24. たとえ好きなマンガが終了しても、将来にわたって、常に重要な存在であり続けるかもしれない。

Anime Convention Attendance in Response to Covid-19

Maria Alberto and Billy Tringali

Volume 3, Pages 227-239

Abstract:

The following report is meant to be paired with the dataset collected through the "Anime Conventions and COVID-19" survey. Designed by Maria K. Alberto and Billy Tringali, this survey collected participants' thoughts about their involvement in and perception of anime conventions before, during, and after the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. Both the dataset and associated survey questions can be found in the supplemental files paired with this report, or downloaded through the Hive, the University of Utah's Research Data Repository. See: "Dataset for: Survey of Anime Convention Attendance in Response to Covid-19" at https://hive.utah.edu/concern/datasets/qj72p722r

Keywords: Survey, Anime conventions, Anime cons, Conventions, Fan studies, Data

Author Bio:

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Billy Tringali is the Editor-in-Chief and Founder of the *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*. He holds an MSLIS from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He currently works as an academic librarian at Babson College. His research interests include vampire studies, queer studies, transformative fanworks, cosplay, and anime and manga studies.

Introduction

The first few months of 2020 were a period of confusion and turmoil in the US, as health officials and the public alike scrambled to understand the scope of the emerging Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the earliest signs visible to most people, even those not yet keeping up with the medical side of the news, were mass event cancellations and stay-at-home orders. These two factors coincided particularly prominently with the cancellation of entertainment and popular culture events, such as concerts and fan conventions. However, the way that these cancellations were being covered by media outlets – even smaller community ones – also differed significantly from how fans and con attendees themselves were talking about them.

As fans and con-goers ourselves, the authors of this work observed these conversations happening among our own networks. Among anime fans in particular, we observed confusion, trepidation, and a range of other reactions as people expressed their beliefs about whether their favorite cons would be canceled and whether this seemed warranted in the moment of spring 2020. We also thought we might be noticing disjoints between the conversations that fans themselves were having, and then the more fragmented reporting available in larger media outlets, which only cited a handful of fan voices at most. Another important consideration here was that Spring 2020 was the first time in their history that many cons had been cancelled, [1] [2] leading to new expenses and uncertainties about whether cons could continue in the future.[3] And while other mixed-methods research projects implemented during the early months of Covid-19 documented travelers' motivations for cancelling destination trips[4] or how academic

conferences could be moved to virtual modes,[5] fewer focused on popular culture artifacts and experiences, such as comic cons.[6]

While our dataset is freely available to anyone interested,[7] and we have already begun drawing from our findings in it,[8] we also offer the present report as an overview of the work completed and some preliminary conclusions.

The Survey

The "Anime Conventions and COVID-19" survey was created to collect attendees' thoughts about their involvement in and perception of anime conventions, particularly during and after Covid-19. In order to capture these perceptions as they were occurring, we completed survey design, IRB approval, and survey launch in early spring 2021. The survey was then opened in March 2021 and closed in September 2021, after 5.5 months of data collection. It yielded over 1,100 valid responses on a variety of topics, including why attendees enjoyed cons, what safety measures they felt would be necessary to reopen cons, and how important cons were in their lives.

Ideally, we hope this dataset will provide a snapshot of a significant moment in con history and also that it can be useful to con attendees and organizers as the world moves forward with COVID-19 still very much present. While this survey provides valuable data on con attendees' feelings concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, it also stands as a useful tool for understanding how anime fans interact with and participate at anime cons more generally. Additionally, based on the data gathered, we argue that the con experience is one that strongly effects the social lives of anime con attendees, and also that it is one that cannot be fully replicated online.

Core Information - Who Answered the Survey

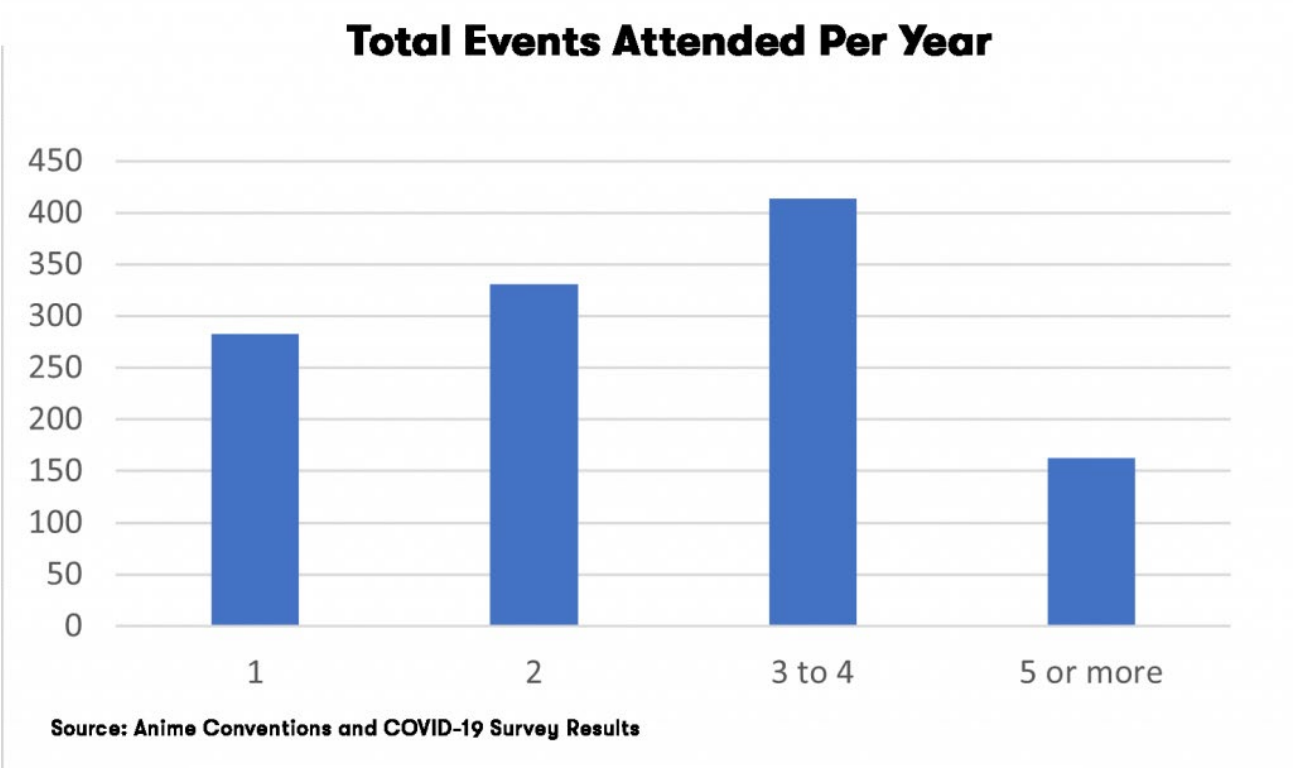

Figure 1

Attending at least 1 con and being 18 years of age or old were the only prerequisites for taking the survey. In terms of attendance, 23% of respondents (*n* 283) reported that they usually attended 1 con per year, while 28% (*n* 331) reported usually attending 2 cons per year, 34% (*n* 414) reported attending 3 or 4 cons a year, and 13% (*n* 13) reported attending 5 or more cons a year (Figure 1).

This survey collected 1,191 valid responses from respondents in the US (n 1112) and beyond (*n* 79). The majority of respondents, 53% (*n* 636), reported being 25-34 years of age, while 30% (*n* 361) reported being 18-24 years of age, 13% (*n* 149) reported being 35-44 years of age, 2% (*n* 25) reported being 45-54 years of age, 1.4% (*n* 17) reported being 55-64, and >0.3% (*n* 3) reported being 65 or above. These respondents

reported attending 359 individual cons in 29 countries (primarily the US, Canada, Japan, Ireland, the Philippines, and the UK) and 49 of the 50 US states (all except Wyoming). The greatest representation of respondents came from the United States (*n* 1141), with the top ten states represented being: California (*n* 511), Texas (*n* 221), New York (*n* 151), Minnesota (*n* 96), Illinois (*n* 91), Florida (*n* 84), Maryland (*n* 79), Massachusetts (*n* 79), Wisconsin (*n* 76), New Jersey (*n* 65). The top ten conventions most represented were Anime Expo (*n* 462), San Japan (*n* 159), Anime Los Angeles (*n* 90), Anime Detour (*n* 82), Anime Central (*n* 81), Otakon (*n* 73), Anime Boston (*n* 63), KatsuCon (*n* 61), Fanime (*n* 54), and Anime Milwaukee (*n* 51).

Convention Attendance

When asked about their outlook on returning to cons, most respondents were positive and excited:

- 62% (*n* 738) reported that "I'm looking forward to attending conventions again"
- 34% (*n* 413) reported that "I'm conflicted – I am both looking forward to and worried about attending conventions again after COVID-19"
- Just 2% (*n* 26) reported that "I'm not sure how I feel about attending conventions again after COVID-19"

Findings also suggest that, for the most part, con-goers felt as if virtual cons did not fill the space left open by a lack of in-person cons. 63% of respondents (*n* 756) reported that they did not attend virtual cons during Covid-19, while fully 87% (*n* 1032) reported they did not attend in-person cons at this time either. Meanwhile, only 23% (*n*

233) of respondents reported trying to recreate the anime con experience through cosplaying outside of cons or attending virtual gatherings that weren't either cons or con-organized. In addition, 77% (*n* 958) indicated that they did not attempt to recreate the con experience in other ways.

Given these responses as well as those we cover more below, we suggest that it seems essentially impossible to recreate the complete con experience virtually, given how con attendees participate at these events.

Participating At Conventions

In an attempt to gauge an understanding of how attendees engaged with in-person con experiences, we asked: "How do you usually participate at the anime cons you normally attend in person?"

Response options included:

"Observing con events and/or attendees and cosplays", "Attending panels", "Competing in cosplay events", "Participating in cosplay games/cosplay gameshows", "Participating in the masquerade", "Participating in photoshoots", "Presenting talks on panels", "Running own booth or event", "Volunteering as staff", "Browsing the 'Artists Alley'", "Browsing the dealers room", and "Other" (Figure 2).

This question enabled the selection of as many choices as respondents liked. While many respondents selected options that could easily be replicated in a virtual environment, such as the 75% (*n* 904) who selected "Attending Panels", the three most

selected options were activities that couldn't be replicated alone in front of one's computer.

- 87.5% (*n* 1042) of respondents selected "Observing con events and/or attendees and cosplays", more colloquially known as 'people watching'
- Nearly 86% (*n* 1020) selected "Browsing the 'Artists Alley'"
- And nearly 82% (*n* 971) selected "Browsing the dealers room"

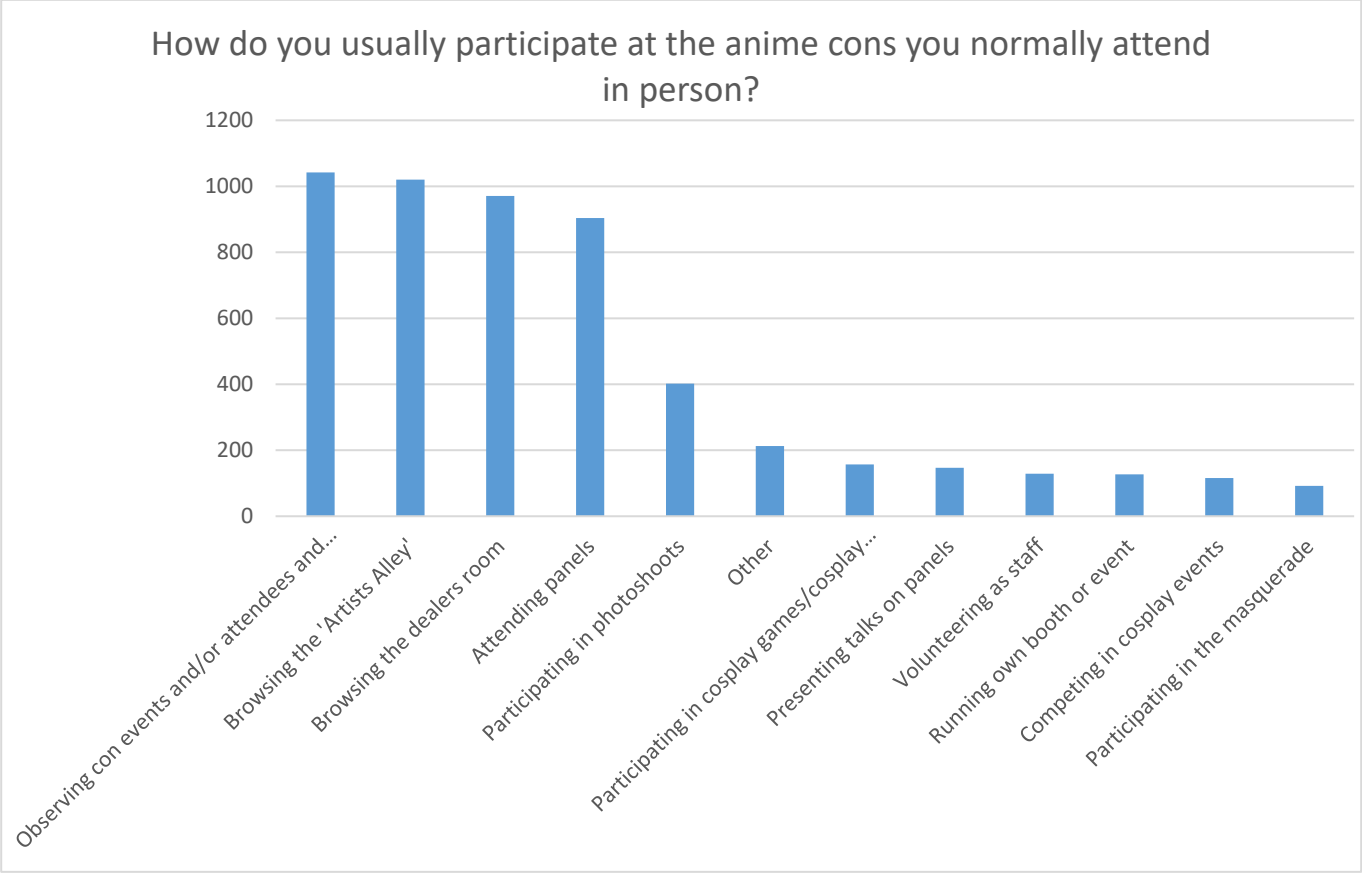

Figure 2

Combined with these questions, we also asked respondents if they cosplayed. 72% answered that they did, either frequently or infrequently. Of those who identified themselves as cosplayers, however, only about 37% stated that they were still cosplaying during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, 69% of overall respondents reported that the lack of cons in 2020-early 2021 affected their social lives to some degree:

- 34% of respondents (*n* 408) reported that the absence affected them "somewhat"
- 35% of respondents (*n* 418) said that this affected them "noticeably"

Feedback on Event Safety Measures in the Future

As cons reopen, respondents also had the opportunity to provide their thoughts on this reopening process. The survey offered an option for no concerns, a selection of 3 specific safety measures (sanitation requirements, limited attendance, mask requirements), and "Other," a free space in which respondents had the option to describe any additional safety measures they hoped to see. This question enabled the selection of as many choices as respondents liked.

Following these options, 81% of respondents (*n* 969) reported their support for some form of safety measures, and 62% (*n* 748) indicated interest in a combination of two or more safety measures. More specifically:

- 70% (*n* 842) indicated interest in accessible sanitation measures and sanitation requirements
- 53% (*n* 631) indicated interest in mask requirements
- 43% (*n* 511) indicated interest in limited attendance, i.e. smaller crowds
- 19% (*n* 237) selected "Other" and used this space to describe a range of preferences, including control/reduction of lines, face masks coming with

badges/passes, enforcement of mask mandates, and vaccination requirements, among others

On this portion of the survey, only 18% (*n* 222) of respondents selected the option indicating that they preferred no safety measures. Then among this number, an even smaller but sometimes very vocal group used the "Other" space and other freeform answers across the survey to voice concerns and even outright anger about vaccine requirements.

Having seen this, we recommend awareness that, while pushback against safety precautions may be vocal, it seems to constitute a fairly small percentage of the total number of those seeking to attend cons as they reopen.

Conclusion

While virtual conventions can replicate some aspects of how anime convention attendees engage with and participate in these events, they ultimately fail to fully recreate the experience of in-person conventions. From observing attendees to browsing the dealers' room and artists alley, the most selected pieces of convention participation were those that couldn't be recreated virtually. Overall, attendees are eager to return with in-person convention experiences, but overwhelmingly support conventions enacting safety measures as COVID continues to be a problem for large group gatherings.

We hope that this brief report, and the dataset that pairs with it, will allow convention staff to feel more confident in implementing safety requirements for future conventions, and that implementing such requirements will not keep people from

coming back, as the experiences that anime fans get at anime conventions cannot be fully replicated elsewhere.

Acknowledgment

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Mechapocalypse: Tracing Gundam's Global Appeal and Fandom

Anthony Dominguez

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

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

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Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

Cool Japan and the History of Gundam

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In establishing the popularity of *Gundam* in East Asia, Alex S.L. Tsang traces the development of *Gundam*'s model kit culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. By 1980, *Gundam* had attracted a fervent fanbase in Hong Kong, culminating in the creation of *Model Kit World* – a specialty magazine dedicated to gunplas – in 1990.[13] As Tsang points out, the 1980s were the golden age for the model kit market, reflecting Japan's economic boom.[14] Although this meant that the model kit market would also experience its own recession during the 1990s, the hobby's enduring popularity stemming from its relationship to *Gundam* demonstrates the strength of C ool Japan. In the case of gunplas, however, their production also signaled *Gundam*'s participation in the overall global market. As Condry mentions in his own field trip report to Bandai's headquarters in Tokyo, Japan's economic collapse during the 1990s would force the manufacturing process for gunplas to shift from Tokyo to "China, Thailand, and other low-wage countries in Asia."[15] If these elements of global trade within *Gundam*'s production and distribution make it a part of Cool Japan, then *Gundam* also demonstrates the metaphorical disappearance of Japan's border through the convergence and globalization of Japanese anime and pop-culture.[16]

Robots and Borders

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Defining Real Robots

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

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

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

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

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

Allegorizing *Gundam*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gundam's Legacy

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

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

Perhaps the most famous of these examples that also demonstrates *Gundam*'s enduring popularity beyond Japan is the RX-78-2's inclusion[35] in Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One* (2018). Set in the virtual reality video game known as the "Oasis," where players are given the freedom to create whatever they want, Spielberg's film culminates in a final between an evil corporation seeking to take over the Oasis and players who seek to defend the Oasis as a countercultural haven. During the final battle, the villains summon Mecha-Godzilla, and the heroes counter by summoning the RX-78-2. The two engage in battle with the RX-78-2 utilizing its iconic beam saber and boost thrusters to maneuver. In these elements, Spielberg offers an authentic representation of the RX-78-2 by mimicking the manuals that accompany gunpla models. Simultaneously, *Ready Player One* is an American produced film directed by one of the most famous American directors. Yet, in depicting Mecha Godzilla fighting RX-78-2—two major icons of Japanese pop-culture—*Ready Player One* demonstrates a culture of

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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Conference Report:

VI Foro Internacional de Creación en la Frontera: "Manga in a postdigital environment"

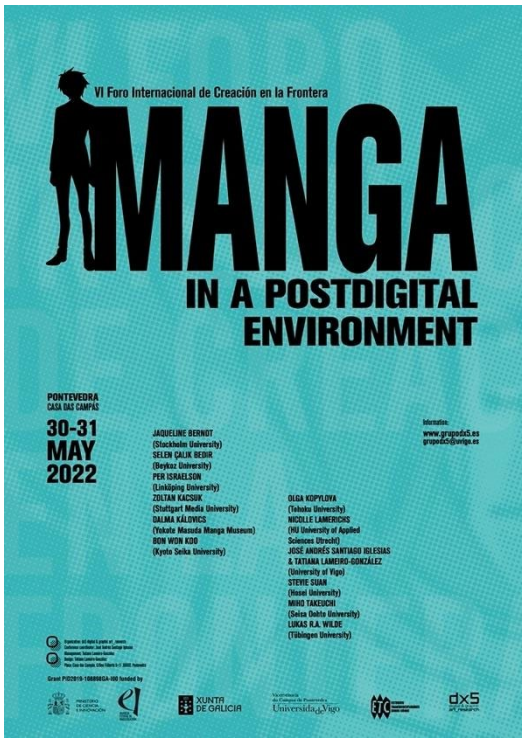
José Andrés Santiago Iglesias

Volume 3, 264-271

Keywords: Conference Report, Manga, Art, Digital art, graphic art

Author Bio: Dr. José Andrés Santiago is a visual artist and Assistant Professor at the University of Vigo (Spain) focused on expanded-field Comics, Manga and Anime Studies. He graduated with honours degree (valedictorian award) in 2004 (University of Vigo), and got his PhD in Fine Arts (Universidade de Vigo,) in 2010, with a dissertation on manga from a contemporary art perspective. Since 2005 he is part of the *dx5 - digital & graphic art research* group, focused in expanded-field contemporary graphic. Former fellow of the Japan Foundation's Japanese Studies Program (2012), invited postdoctoral researcher at the Graduate School of Manga (Kyoto Seika University, Japan, 2014-2016), member of the ACDCómic (Asociación de Críticos y Divulgadores de Cómic de España) since its foundation in 2012 and the AEJE (Spanish Association of Japanese Studies). He is the author of the books *Manga. Del cuadro Flotante a la Viñeta Japonesa* (Comanegra, 2010), *A Ding in Japan* (Comanegra, 2008) —both in Spanish— and editor of *Japón para Otakus* (Diábolo Ediciones, 2018) and *Anime Studies: media-specific approaches to 'Neon Genesis Evangelion'*, an open-access volume published by Stockholm University Press (2021). He also holds more than 70 group and solo exhibitions in galleries, museums and art contests, in both Spain and the international art scene.
www.jsantiago.es

On May 30th and 31st of 2022 the dx5 - the digital & graphic art research group from the University of Vigo organized the *VI Foro Internacional de Creación en la Frontera*, an academic symposium entitled "Manga in a Postdigital Environment". Held in Pontevedra (Spain), this symposium was part of a research project funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation (ref. PID2019-108898GA-I00), and meant to be a truly transdisciplinary event, involving a dozen manga experts from all over the world from a wide variety of scholarly backgrounds, brought together to engage in open discussions about this media form. Chaired by José Andrés Santiago (University of Vigo), this symposium took place in the historic building of "Casa das Campás" —headquarters of the Vice-Rectorate of the Pontevedra Campus and located at the heart of the town— following a hybrid format, with both onsite and online presentations. This increasingly popular format was not only the result of the exceptional health circumstances, but an informed choice to encourage attendees from Spain and abroad. We chose a simple structure organized in three sessions over two days with multiple, 25-minute presentations followed by long, open discussions. The aim of this event was not a collection of isolated presentations, but rather a push towards truly engaging discussions, the raising of new questions, a seeking of advances in Manga Studies in a broad sense, and the expansion of future possibilities for research and mutual collaboration. In 2019, we already held a twin symposium, "Anime: A Transdisciplinary Perspective", which provided an ideal framework to work together towards a shared project, which finally took shape as a book entitled *Anime Studies: media-specific approaches to* Neon Genesis Evangelion (Stockholm University Press, 2021).



As suggested by the title, this 2022 symposium revolved around the notion of postdigital manga, with a major take from a media ecology focus. Media ecology explores how different artistic, social and cultural media change over time. In this symposium, we discussed contemporary manga, the gamification of the reading experience, the use of virtual reality (VR) for the recreation of different scenarios, and even the arrival of digitally generated images by means of machine learning technology. In this symposium, we understood "postdigital" after the technological and cultural changes brought about by the digital age—involving new production, cultural and aesthetic practices—, and therefore postdigital manga works are postdigital in the sense that “the digital” has already become a seamless natural part of our daily lives.

In the opening presentation, *From Cover to Page. From Title to the Speech Balloon: An Analysis of Typographic Applications in Naruto and Bleach,* José Andrés Santiago Iglesias and Tatiana Lameiro-González (University of Vigo) addressed how fonts and lettering are used in manga, an aspect that is often overlooked in formal analysis. Choosing *Naruto* and *Bleach* as case-studies, they compared the original Japanese *tankōbon* volumes with international editions, focusing on cover design in Tite Kubo’s manga work, and the changing in-story speech fonts in Masashi Kishimoto’s epic ninja tale. When analyzing *Bleach* covers design, the presenters highlighted the noticeable influences by the Swiss

International Style, and other European design schools, and how such a style has been adapted and often lost in the different design choices by international publishers. Moreover, when addressing *Naruto* the presenters also pointed out how the emotional state of the characters conveyed by fonts in the original manga is usually lost in international editions due to the choice of consistent typefaces for speech dialogues.

The following paper, entitled *Kyara and the "Other Sides of Narrative": A Map of Discourses*, was delivered by Lukas R.A. Wilde (Tübingen University), addressing the different ways to use *kyara* to conceptualize characters in manga. Taking the internationally acclaimed manga series *Demon Slayer* (*Kimetsu no Yaiba*) as a point of departure, Lukas R.A. Wilde revised multiple overlapping theories and highlighted how manga protagonists are not narrative-contained entities but are rather defined by media and participatory practices.

Next, in her insightful presentation *Manga Meets VR: Technological Challenges for the Mangaesqu*e, Selen Çalık Bedir (Beykoz University) explained how the growing digitalization process followed by comics has ultimately led to hybrid forms in which VR has taken an interesting role, especially with regards to gaze, the readers' perspective and other spatial aspects. Through some eye-catching videos of the actual playing process she illustrated how VR works handle the element of the spatial positioning, and explained how the first examples of VR comics didn't experiment with panel layout, but rather relied on the spectacular immersive experience of facing the reader with huge pages in close proximity. In her presentation, Selen Çalık Bedir compares *Tales of Wedding Rings* by Square Enix with other works, most notably including the VR adaptation of Richard McGuire's seminal graphic novel *Here*. Through this meticulous process, she highlights how VR

manga works prioritize the characters rather than the environment, despite the spatial possibilities provided by the VR headset.

The last presenter of the morning was Olga Kopylova (Tohoku University). In *Work-in-Progress: Textual Variance of Serialized Manga,* she addresses the different stages of completion that manga works undergo, since they are serialized in the *mangashi* magazine until the publication of the tankōbon (or even in subsequent releases and special editions), and how these modification might affect readers and reading practices. Providing an overwhelmingly abundant visual comparison of pages from *Golden Kamuy, Ajin* and *Requiem of the Rose King*, she stressed how many authors redraw, arrange or perfect their previous pages after being first serialized with the tankōbon volume in mind, subtle sometimes —almost indistinguishable except to the keen eye— while other times involve radical departures from the original drawing and page layout. Not only from a fan perspective but an academic one, Olga Kopylova raised interesting questions about the cohabitation of these printed different versions (as well as the digital editions), including a frame of reference to define the edition to be used in the formal analysis of a given work.

The four speakers in the afternoon session articulated an exceptionally fluid panel, in which the questions raised by each of them seemed to be designed to pave the way for the next presentation. In her presentation, *Manga as Participatory Media: The Hand Drawing Perspective. From the 1960s' Dojinshi to SNS Manga in Japan*, Miho Takeuchi (Seisa Dohto University) focused on amateur manga artists sharing their work through participatory platforms and social networks, who do not necessarily participate in many of the established manga conventions widely spread among professional and semi-professional artists. In fact, her presentation dealt with

formal aspects such as the physicality, the materiality and the line-work of the manga, as she paid special attention the role of the "hand-drawn" line, highlighting the distinctiveness of the drawing, tracing back to the *dōjinshi* artists from 1960's up to the amateur artists in the last decade. Miho Takeuchi's presentation was followed by Dalma Kálovics (Yokote Masuda Manga Museum) paper *Panel Layout in Story Manga between Medium-Specificity and Standardization*. Through a thorough and comprehensive analysis, illustrated with a impressive array of archival material, she explained how the page layout changed in the 1970's to fit the dominant standard and therefore ended the previous practice of rearranging pages from the original medium of publication to other formats, also paving the way for the consolidation of the *tankōbon* format. However, as Kálovics pointed out, despite the shift in the manga industry in the shape of digital works and distribution via digital platforms, the *mangashi* magazine remains as a standard reluctant to change.

In her presentation, *Revisiting Manga's "Progenitors" from a Postdigital Perspective: Visual Flow in Graphic Narratives*, Jaqueline Berndt addressed contemporary manga from both a historical and a material perspective. Analyzing a series of pages from picture stories through manga tools, she visually traced the similarities and substantial differences within contemporary graphic narratives, but also between manga panel layout of contemporary webtoons. Formally, Berndt urged the audience to consider how images work to guide the reader towards an empathic connection with those given images or the developed narrative contained within a given work.

As a closure for the day, presentations were followed by a masterclass by Bon Won Koo (Kyoto Seika University), entitled *The Differences between Manga and Webtoon based on the Change of Medium: The Making of the Webtoon Version of*

"Tanuki vs. Zodiac 12". Involved in the adaptation of the "Tanuki vs. Zodiac 12" manga into a webtoon, as part of the international exhibition held at the Rietberg museum, Bon Won Koo thoroughly explained the specificity of the webtoon reading experience in terms of rhythm and flow, and therefore how it is curated by the author to provide the reading a seamlessly yet engaging reading experience. In her presentation, she explained how she personally adapted, broke down and modified the original manga panel layout to fit the webtoon experience, considering the gaze of the reader and the scrolling speed on both axes.

The following morning, the third session began with *Art of Recursion: the Technical Transindividuation of (Postdigital) Comics* by Per Israelson (Linköping University). In his presentation, he provided a profound conceptual review of two comic book projects by artist Ilan Manouach: *The Cubicle Island* (2020) and *Fastwalkers* (2022). On one hand, *The Cubicle Island* is a collage of hundreds of appropriated cartoons of desert islands, with the original captions removed and replaced by those suggested by microworkers. On the other hand, *Fastwalkers* is a manga scripted and drawn by an artificial neural network. As Israelson explained, "the postdigital aesthetic put into play by Manouach's work can be framed as an articulation of a neocybernetic and posthumanist conceptuality".

Next, Stevie Suan (Hosei University) took the stage with *Masking Anime's Transnationality: On Media-Form and Cultural Production in this Era of Globalization*. In a comprehensive and thorough presentation, he discussed how addressing anime as a media-form —with three modes of globality operating as a whole— provides a broader perspective of the transnational network behind most contemporary anime productions. Nicolle Lamerichs (HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht) followed with a presentation entitled *The New Media Mix:*

Materiality, Affect and Participatory Cultures in Manga, addressing the future of manga, manga fandom, and a myriad of new ways of fan-consumption, from webtoons to NFTs, due to their potential to engage new audiences. Ultimately, Lamerichs highlighted the transcultural potential behind these new platforms based on collaboration and participatory practices. Finally, the last presenter was Zoltan Kacsuk (Stuttgart Media University). In his presentation, *Utilizing Metadata Analytics for Research on Manga, Anime and Video Games: Introducing the Japanese Visual Media Graph,* Kacsuk provided a thought-provoking introduction of the JVMG project in which he is currently involved, and explained how metadata analytics can be used to address some topics (sometimes) extensively discussed by manga researchers from a shocking new perspective. At the end, he showed with pinpoint accuracy the potential—and the limitations—of online databases developed by fan communities.

As organizer of this event, I can only thank the speakers for their outstanding performance and everyone among the attendees for their vibrant engagement and willingness to participate in an enriching scholarly exchange. A truly transdisciplinary symposium which nevertheless left me hungry for more. Looking forward to 2024!

Book Review: *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*

Lindsey Stirek

Volume 3, Pages 272-275

Welker, James, editor. *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. $28.00

Keywords*: Boys Love, fan studies, manga, anime, LGBTQ+ media, queer studies, globalization, Asian media, transcultural media, gender and sexuality, political activism*

Author Bio: Lindsey Stirek is the Assistant Director of Academic Programming at Japan House and Teaching Assistant Professor in the School of Art and Design at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She specializes in premodern Japanese literature and manga and has particular interest in how fandom and queer studies intersect with these fields. Her present research focuses on manga iterations of the classical Japanese poetic collection *Ogura Hyakunin isshu*. Currently, she teaches courses on manga, anime, and Japanese tea ceremony, and her latest publication on manga is featured in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sexuality in Comic Book Studies*.

In *Queer Transfigurations: Boys Love Media in Asia*, James Welker has brought together a variety of essays to provide a multifaceted view into the continuing (r)evolution of the BL genre and how its fans interact with it. In compiling this volume, Welker aimed to introduce four major themes of BL and its fandoms in Asia:

1. "BL is a transnational and transcultural media phenomenon."
2. "BL is a useful tool for unsettling gender and sexual norms."
3. "BL cannot be separated from LGBT(Q) issues, including politics."
4. "BL is political." (Welker 2022, 4)

He argues that BL in its transcultural, transnational, and transformed manifestations in Asia has ultimately led to increased support and visibility for LGBTQ+ people and causes, challenges to gender norms, and ultimately, that BL plays "a positive role in the lives of fans and others." (Welker 2022, 272)

Queer Transfigurations reads as a much-needed expansion upon the ideas set forth in the critical BL text, *Boys' Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan*, co-edited by Welker along with Mark McLelland, Kazumi Nagaike, and Katsuhiko Suganuma. Not only does *Queer Transfigurations* extend the borders of BL beyond Japan, but it also significantly updates our understanding of BL from a fan studies perspective and the social, cultural, and political effects of BL in Asia. Many of the authors in this volume build upon fundamental ideas from fan studies scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith while also contextualizing them within their unique areas of focus, specifically China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, India, and Malaysia, which brings

important new perspectives to the fields of manga studies and fan studies, among many others.

Though Welker's book is organized by region and country, he acknowledges in the introduction the drawbacks of this structure. The primary shortcoming of dividing by region is the unbalanced number of chapters in each region, with India receiving one chapter, China four, and Vietnam none. However, Welker fully addresses this issue in the introduction, suggesting that this imbalance reflects the relative youth of the field and the limited number of scholars in the region able and willing to write on the topic in English. Although Welker suggests that such a structure may also "give a false impression of clear-cut borders between countries and regions that are not so clear in the lives of fans and the texts they share and celebrate," (Welker 2022, 13) the excellent selection of topics and the way the scholars in each chapter refer back to and tie into each other's chapters thoroughly re-establishes the porous nature of the borders of BL and its fandoms.

Chapter 3, Xi Lin's "Breaking the Structural Silence: The Sociological Function of *Danmei* Novels in Contemporary China," is particularly groundbreaking in that it presents an adaptation of anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard's existing concept of structural amnesia as a base for a new term, structural silence, which is silencing that is structured through social pressure and by which certain voices are crowded out by dominant social views and concerns and subsequently forgotten. This new framework provides an important lens for understanding the importance of BL to its fans, the LGBTQ+ community, and society at large. In chapter 6, "'Send Them to Mars!' Boys Love Erotica and Civil Rights in Hong Kong," Katrien Jacobs and Hau Hau Lai challenge

Azuma Hiroki's theory in *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (2001) that anime fans have become "animalistic" and unconcerned with relating to a given work beyond surface attachment to the characters with evidence that the BL fans of today are seeking "deeper ethical and activist approaches" (Jacobs and Lai 2022, 69) to consumption on the internet as well as on the cultural and political stage.

While there are some chapters that seem less integrated with the others and there is the occasional questionable application of outdated theories, overall, *Queer Transfigurations* is a well-edited, novel, and interesting collection of chapters well-suited for academic readers. The extensive use of jargon in many of the chapters may make it less approachable to readers outside the field, but it is a crucial volume for manga and fan studies scholars, as well as for anyone interested in Boys Love and LGBTQ+ media. Though many of the conclusions may seem upbeat or even idealistic, the positive, forward-looking tone of this volume mirrors Welker's final argument that the BL genre has been "positively reshaping the imaginary and real worlds of its fans and others in Asia and beyond" (Welker 2022, 275) and leaves readers feeling refreshed and optimistic for the future.

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Book Review: *Cosplay: The Fictional Mode of Existence*

PS Berge

Volume 3, Pages 276-280

Lunning, F. (2022). *Cosplay: The Fictional Mode of Existence*. U of Minnesota Press.

Keywords*:* Cosplay, Fandom, Costume, Fan Practice, Identity.

Author Bio: PS Berge (they/she) is a doctoral candidate at the University of Central Florida. Their research falls at the intersection of queer and trans game studies (especially tabletop roleplaying games, gaming fandoms, and power fantasies) and toxic technocultures (including cross-platform dynamics and white supremacist recruitment). Her work has appeared in *Game Studies*, *New Media & Society*, and elsewhere. Website: http://psberge.com/

Frenchy Lunning's *Cosplay: The Fictional Mode of Existence* is a thorough explication of cosplay in the context of performance. Over the course of the 181-page book (excluding notes), Lunning maps the relationship between cosplay and adjacent genres of costumed theatrical performance, maintaining a clear focus on fan practices, cultural evolutions of the hobby, and identity. Newly published by Minnesota Press in 2022, *Cosplay* is likely to be an important text for scholars interested in discussing cosplay in the context of its subcultural movements and fan identity.

Overall, *Cosplay* is less a primer on the practices or communities of cosplay than it is a new materialist examination of cosplay as fandom. Lunning draws heavily from Latour, extending her focus across the entire "assemblage of these multiple modes of existence" (p. 83) through an analysis that spans discussions of cosplay conventions, websites, costumes, masks, anime, gaming, photography, influencer culture, national events, history, skits, rules, and more. Lunning attends to both the Western popularization of cosplay and to Japanese cosplay events and practices, often oscillating between the two diverging scenes to show how they have shaped one another.

Lunning's account is largely ethnographic, drawing from her own direct observations and conversations with hobbyists. She frequently discusses her own positionality as a researcher and describes her experiences attending conventions and observing cosplayers. Lunning's focus, again, remains fundamentally on identity and the experience of the cosplayer. As she writes: "The cosplayer emerges from this maelstrom of *moe* desire. Through the desire to inhabit, embody, and through masking become the characters they desire, in the process, they become actors" (p. 139). In other words, Lunning argues that the cosplayer experiences a kind of becoming through the performance of character. This is the heart of Lunning's project here: noting the ways in

which cosplayers themselves contend with social "masking" and expression (Chapter 2), abjection (Chapter 3), and performance (Chapter 4). While the Introduction and Chapter 1: "A Social History of Mass Culture and Identity" do provide some background on the standard fare of cosplay—including a brief history that addresses LARPs, *Trek* events, conventions, and the emergence of otaku fandoms—much of the book is oriented theoretically as a reflection on identity and performance rather than as an explanatory guide.

Where *Cosplay* is most effective is in the places it links cosplay to adjacent and historical practices of costumed performance. Over the course of the book, Lunning connects cosplay to the traditions of Japanese Noh Theatre (p. 78), costumes inspired by early pulp novels (p. 37), and costumed reenactments in classical Rome (p. 98). Several chapters also explicate the relationship between cosplay and other genres of identity-based performances, especially "sonas" (short for personas) such as furries, 'pottersonas,' and 'gemsonas' (p. 56). Each of these adjacent cultures is differentiated and put in conversation with cosplay for a richer understanding of fan practice. In this way, Lunning links modern cosplay practice to both longstanding traditions in costume theatre and identity-performance, as well as to other fandom spaces.

Notably, *Cosplay* does approach its subject with what can feel like, at times, a dismissive positivity. At one point, Lunning argues that in U.S. cosplaying communities "no matter your body type, race, gender, sexuality, or age, once you enter a cosplay convention hotel, you are no longer that identity but something other, and thus excused from that troubling mainstream identity and its associated problems" (p. 141). While Lunning does walk this back in the final chapter, checking the danger of slipping into utopianism and "vault[ing] cosplay and fandom to the level of the sublime, creating a

perfect society" (p. 179), the book generally ignores ongoing experiences of racism, misogyny, and queerphobia in cosplay communities. For example, *Cosplay* does begin to contend with the gendered context of costumed performance; there are various points where the book begins to discuss "crossplaying" (when cosplayers perform characters of another gender than their own) but fails to address these in significant detail or critically unpack them. Similarly, in Chapter 3, Lunning notes the connection between queer and feminist politics and cosplay, but provides a troubled account of gender and cosplay, even at one point asserting that "androgynous characters can be played by anyone" (p. 100). I was particularly frustrated to note that Lunning's one dedicated section on queerness and cosplay in Chapter 3 awkwardly juxtaposes queer identities and fetishes in such a way that problematically reinscribes queerness as deviant, taboo, or hypersexual. I also struggled with the organizational elements of the book—especially the way new terminology is introduced. Much of the cosplay-specific vocabulary those unfamiliar with the hobby will need is scattered throughout the text—whether specific Japanese cosplay terms (such as *animegao kigurumi* [a masked cosplay tradition]) or common fan practices (such as hall contests or "cospa" [stores dedicated to cosplay]). More frustratingly, there are a handful of important theoretical terms that are used for entire chapters before they are defined. For example, the term "transversality" is used extensively in Chapter 4 but is not actually defined until Chapter 5. Readers who are less familiar with cosplay or theory around assemblages may find themselves having to play catch-up, while others may find themselves wishing for a more critically-oriented consideration.

Ultimately, *Cosplay* is a wide portrait of fan practices meant to bridge disparate disciplinary approaches. Despite some organizational complexity and slippage into

utopianism, Lunning's work is a good reminder that "cosplay as a cultural practice fits into no clear academic discipline" (p. 160). Lunning rightly points out that cosplay is a vast "constellation of existences" in which cosplayers can be found "exploring identities known and unknown, constructed, and imagined, memorized and improvised" (p. 178). Scholars interested in contending with such a complex portrait of identity and theatre will find *Cosplay* a useful mapping of the assemblages of people, culture, and technology at work in fan culture.

Work Cited

Lunning, F. (2022). *Cosplay: The Fictional Mode of Existence*. U of Minnesota Press.