



The Sound of an Android's Soul

Music, Muzak and MIDI in *Time of Eve*

Philip Brophy

On this occasion, though, Kon is not concerned with the irrationality or obsession of the individual psyche, but rather the everyday irrationality and arbitrariness of the social world. It is this very arbitrariness, however, which allows Kon to deploy the kind of 'magic realism' in which divine intervention, in the shape of a gust of wind, saves Hana as she plunges from a roof, clinging to a street banner, holding the abandoned baby. The fall occurs at the night's last moment of darkness, and the day's first moment of sunshine as the banner slowly descends to earth; a miracle witnessed by the dumbfounded onlookers. The film enjoys these magic realist moments, consolidating the Christian themes of forgiveness, redemption and salvation in two further incidents of good fortune and coincidence: when Gin picks up a winning lottery ticket and also the hint that Miyuki may be reconciled with her father. Kon uses his animation to authenticate his shifts of register and 'magic realist' transcendence, not in this instance to reveal the conflicted mind or the social body, but instead to privilege an essential soul and a defining spirit in humanity in response to hopelessness and disillusion at the heart of the more apocalyptic agendas of the Japanese post-war sensibility.

These apocalyptic scenarios present in much (sci-fi) anime, at one level, demonstrate a deep ambivalence about the advances in post-war technology, and Japan's place at the forefront of such innovation. Typically, Kon embraces this in what will sadly be his last film, *Paprika*. Drawing together themes from his previous films, and the work of author Yasutaka Tsutsui, Kon sets a scene in which the heroine, Dr Atsuko Chiba is equipped with a device – the DC mini – by which she can enter others' dream-states as her alter-ego, Paprika. As in all scenarios dealing with advanced technologies, there is always the underpinning idea that the positive or negative outcomes of their use is fundamentally related to the hands in which they are held. When some DC minis are stolen, this sets in train a thriller plot by which Chiba seeks their return, but this is but secondary to the opportunity such a narrative conceit affords in enabling the free play of visual invention in the representation of dreams (and other kinds of visual narratives), and more

significantly, in the use of animation as a form of creative expression.

The carnival of objects, figures, machines, statues and phenomena that marches throughout the film is essentially a symbol for the freedoms of consciousness, and the language of animation that apprehends and records them. Kon's 'magic realism' on this occasion rests with the idea that consciousness is imbued with the possibility of creative invention and psychological wholeness. While this is not without threat or anxiety, nor sexual and aggressive nuances, it once more suggests a transcendent model of moving beyond the limits of reality and into the realms of the magical. In consequence, Kon plays with dates and times to shift dimensions and space in acts of creative daring that re-invent anime *and* animation. Crucially, though, Kon's films freely interrogate the contradictory yet progressive sensibility of modern Japan, reconciling past and present, and recover the place 'where art pours out of daily life, where everything exists in a dream of endless beautiful flow.'

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At a crucial reveal halfway through Yasuhiro Yoshiura's *Time of Eve* (*Eve no jikan*, 6-part OVA, 2008-9, compiled into a feature film in 2010), teen Rikuo remembers a past conversation with his best friend, Masaki. Unbeknownst to them at the time, they innocently stand at crossroads. Masaki will continue his studies in law; Rikuo is uncertain, having given up his aspirations to be a concert pianist. Masaki ridicules his decision, for Rikuo has rejected his aspirations after seeing a robot perfectly perform a piece of music on the piano. Rikuo doesn't mention to Masaki what was most disturbing about the performance: only at this point in *Eve's* back-story do we realise that Rikuo was truly 'moved' by the robot's performance. This is not your usual existential dilemma – a field in which teen-oriented anime excels, more than most Western photo-cine attempts at the same. Here in this near future (sardonically tagged as "probably Japan" in a pre-title card), the teen Rikuo has his world inverted because a robot achieved not a technically perfect actualisation of a piece of classical pianoforte music, but because to Rikuo's advanced listening sensibilities (dedicated to encountering and hopefully generating such moments of actualised perfection) this robot's performance emotionally 'moved' him. Japanese cinema and anime has consistently told stories in manifold genres that evidence this inversion, wherein everyday life is accepted to be 'existential' until one day a 'humanist' moment occurs and transforms things. Anime's preponderance of 'androids with souls' is thus less likely to be formally motivated by generic machinations of science fiction, and more likely to be culturally determined by philosophical enquiries of dramatic fiction.

In *Eve*, we never get to hear that robot's performance, yet it weighs heavily in Rikuo's head, softly ringing with

emotional gravitas. With acumen and sensitivity, sound and music in *Eve* – an acute meld of sound effects design, spatial environment mixing, musical arrangement, phonographic reproduction and compositional performance – function like a 'meta-score' moulded by concave and convex undulations of the inner surface of Rikuo's head. Belying an aptly Japanese sense of how dramaturgy and psychology are represented in and expressed by narrative moments, arcs and formations, *Eve's* conduction of sound and music precisely maps the story's key themes of consciousness (a boy realising androids have feelings, while a 'girl' android realises her feelings to her 'master' boy) and in the process gives rise to a bounty for musicological signification.

While sound and music are easily foregrounded in *Eve* due to Rikuo's character, the aural issues it raises are particularly well presented by the anime world, wherein considerations of the minutiae of post-human behaviour (as both social interaction and internal motivation) have been a staple meme ever since Osamu Tezuka's ground-breaking manga, *Tetsuwan Atomu* (*Astro Boy*, serialised between 1947 and 1963, then made as an animated TV series in 1963, 1980 and 2007). Atomu is the definitive 'android with a soul', questioning not only his own existence, but also interrogating Isaac Asimov's famous "Three Laws of Robotics" from a robot's point-of-view. (Not by coincidence is Asimov's logic similarly interrogated throughout *Eve*). More so, just as the anime form gives rise to considering how appearance and simulation constitute a self-reflexive given (i.e., a realm where graphically rendered images of humans include identically rendered androids who within the fictional world are perceived as being indistinguishable from actual humans – but which to us watching anime appear equally 'unreal' due to their shared status as drawings), so too does its sound-

track give rise to how we perceive differences between ‘real’ and ‘artificial’ renderings and performances of music.

Emblematic of contemporary futurist speculative anime, *Eve* defines a world within which characters are populated in situations designed to illustrate the formation of that world. Here, we have a time when androids have become so ‘visibly realistic’ that whenever in the presence of humans, they are required by law to activate a spinning holographic data-band which rotates above their head like a horizontal halo. The seamless and fanciful technology which enables this vision of a well-designed world is undercut by its terse anthropological decline, as we witness the prejudices these ‘near-perfect’ human machines endure once they have been thoroughly integrated into the indus-

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try and exchange of everyday life. A nebulous Orwellian organization – the wonderfully monikered Ethics Committee – is a ubiquitous media presence with messages like “Would you eat a tomato created by machines?” while tabloid TV features confessional exposés on ‘android-holics’ (in Japanese, *dorikei*, suggesting something slightly sexual) – people who harbour affections for their ‘houseroid’ robots.

An oasis in this troubled world is the Time of Eve café, which stipulates only one rule: “...there is to be no discrimination between humans and robots. Customers, please cooperate. Obey the rule and have a fun time...” Specifically, this covert café sends a cryptic Japlish message (“Are you enjoying your Time of Eve?”) to androids who make their way to the café in order to – of their own volition – experience an absence of prejudice. In a way, the café is a stage within a stage of the story’s drama; a space for its characters – android and human alike – to query, reflect upon and ultimately come to terms with how they as individuals relate to the social complexion of their emotional contracts with each other. As such, the café space is also a figurative auditorium which symbolically and materially audits and ‘auralizes’ those same relationships. While *Eve*’s speculative themes and visual design deservedly invite sophisticated analysis, its soundtrack warrants special attention as it is directed, organised and realised in ways profoundly different

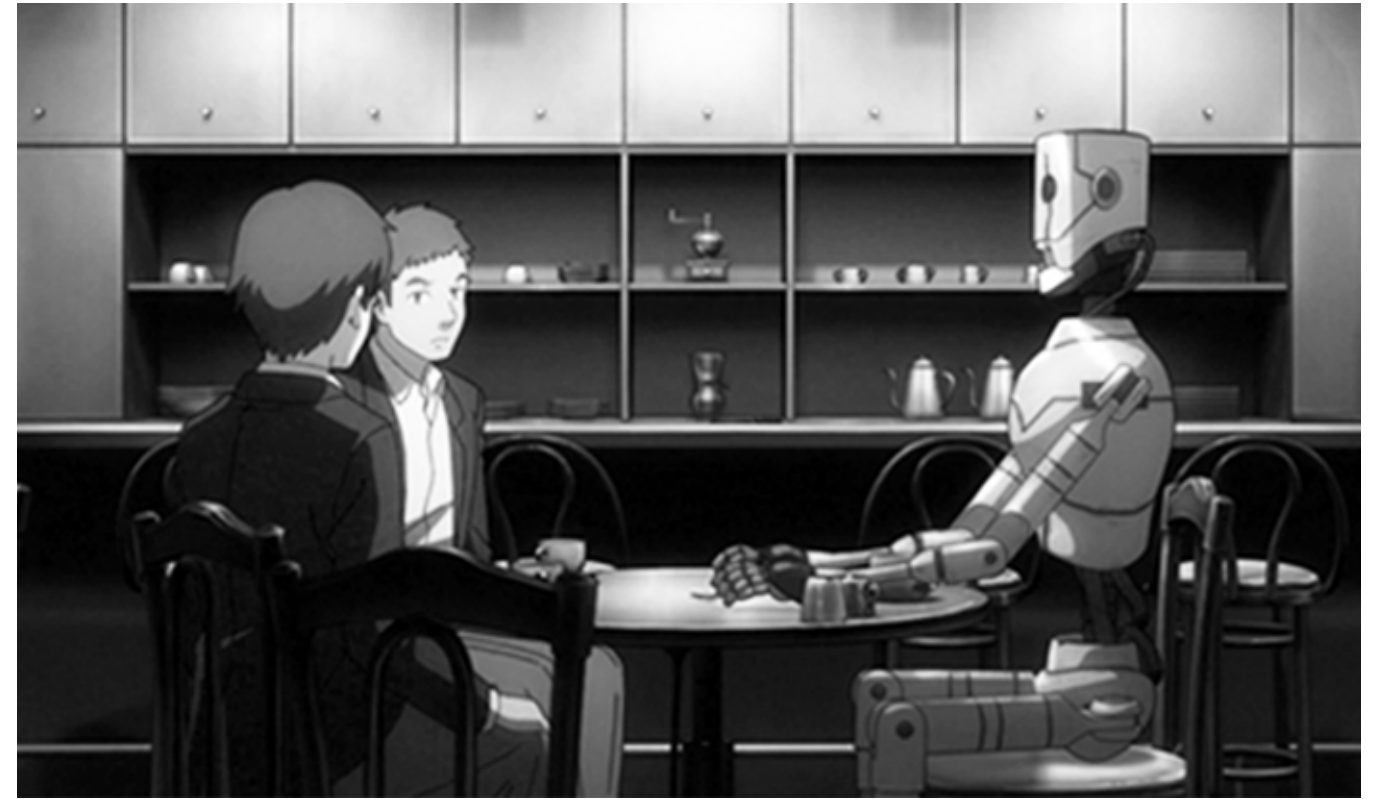
from photo-cine films oppositely concerned with reductivist emoting and human-centric motivation.

As a giant screen simulates the tracing of an illegal data transmission from an unknown source to a random network of androids in the opening of *Eve*, background music plays – or to use the Japanese acronym, BGM. It sounds electronic, computerised, current (glitched ambient techno of a Japanese melodic bent, to be more precise). To musicologists who proffer rationalist qualitative views of how ‘great’ film scores operate, this would likely appear to be ‘non-signifying’ music: something simply

‘playing in the background’, devoid of dramatic purpose or thematic function, lacking in the craft of composition. How sad a reading that would be here in anime. How perfect a place to demonstrate why music in any audiovisual form is inescapably ‘signifying’: there will always be effects generated from the production, rendering and placement of music regardless of any qualitative criteria forced upon it.

The music in question here is born of a techno ethos, wherein MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) sequencing and multi-tracking, analogue/digital synthesis, timbral simulation, and anacoustic post-production effecting and mixing, all combine to confer a deliberately alienating computerised patina. Within a Japanese cultural context, the hi-tech veneer of *Eve*’s music here is a given: a non-divisive, non-polemic application of music as it contemporaneously exists in the broader social world (from nightclub immersion to CM broadcast to download consumption). *Eve*’s introductory proposition of how music exists now serves to orient a forthcoming series of more real or less real forms of music composition, production and performance in the film’s story.

The ‘glitched ambient techno’ also figures music can be an entirely non-human enterprise – birthing itself from an ‘anacoustic realm’ where melodic occurrences are inherited not from actual instruments, human playing and real-



time recording, but from MIDI’s ability to position temporal events and harmonic nodes on a neural grid, *matrixing* music rather than composing it. While this is a standard reading of the pleasure drive of techno since Kraftwerk’s pioneering work in the late 1970s, such a *matrixing* of events here is synchronised to the large screen’s display of a network of androids separately attaining a moment of consciousness (activated by receiving the mysterious Eve message). Profoundly, this entirely ‘non-human’ and ‘non-signifying’ BGM represents not how humans bellow their humanism, but how androids attain consciousness. Diverging from Kraftwerk’s (and in a sense, Asimov’s) celebration of programmed mechanics and automated robotics, this music is not ‘machine-like’ (an oft-banded criticism of techno in general) but suggestive of how machines can innately and animistically ‘self-generate’ their own musical language.

One might interpret this reading as disproportionate to its effect and purpose in the film. But Japanese cinema has long employed a type of ‘interior/exterior inversion’ to govern where, how and why its musical moments occur.¹ *Eve*’s opening music requires scrutiny precisely because it seems inconsequential, offhand, insubstantial. Just as emotional tenor in anime is transmitted through the most subtle of line work in the characters’ faces (a central aspect of characterization inherited from traditional

theatre forms like *Kabuki* and *Noh*), so too is psychological symbolism conveyed within the music’s minutiae, operating not at a nominal linguistic level, but at the threshold of micro-material occurrences. The act of listening to the music of *Eve* is predicated on a contemplative awareness of this operational threshold – one decidedly more complex and subtle than the faux-European orchestral scores which have assailed the listener in CGI animated movies over the last decade.

Eve’s next musical moment occurs when we are introduced to Rikuo and his ‘houseroid’ Sammy. They sit side-by-side in the lounge room, a haze of afternoon sunlight bleaching their quiet space. Both are motionless; Sammy has her abdominal cavity exposed, showing us cables connected to Rikuo’s *keitai* as he reads a log of her neural activity in the preceding month. We see the scrolling data on the *keitai* screen: it’s all computer code except for an English line “Are you enjoying your Time of Eve?”. At this moment the music – initially a sparkling web of sweet marimba – surges into a chordal progression laden with rich keyboard textures and a soaring female wordless aria. Simultaneously, another chordal passage sweeps across this, inducing a multiplied polyphony from the passages’ conflicting keys. It totals only about 20 seconds, but its combination of brevity and compaction follows Japanese hierarchical distribution, wherein the most important points are delivered with the silent slicing of a precision blade rather than the explosive

boom of a cannon blast. As we hear this musical moment and register its euphoric, uplifting, transcending tone, we see Rikuo's eyes widen slightly. But it remains unclear what he is thinking or feeling, despite the clarity of its impact. This musical refrain is repeated twice more in *Eve*, and only at those later moments can we deduce the aggregated implications and syncretized effect of the music.

One of these moments involves Akiko – a girl Rikuo meets at the café whom he later discovers to be an android, but who like all the undisclosed androids there behave devoid of their difference to humans. Rikuo is thinking of what she said once at the café: that no matter how similar humans and androids appear, they remain completely different on the inside. Rikuo now replays that thought as voiced *from an android*, not a human, and thus realises that androids are capable of feeling difference between themselves and humans – in contradistinction to Asimov's robots who could not achieve this sort of consciousness. The music's 'multiplied polyphony' then represents the bilateral consequences of human-android co-existence. Furthermore, its formidably irresolvable harmony is itself a symbol of accord and 'harmony'. We as humans would presume the concept of harmony to be unilateral, when android logic – as it functions post-Asimov in *Eve* – would more likely render it a comforting noise of contrasting voices and tones. The root of *Eve's* radicalism lies in its subversion of musical language as it has developed along Eurocentric thematicism.

The world depicted in *Eve* – that is, the ways in which private/public, personal/communal, domestic/official spaces are rendered – is one common to anime irrespective of where and when its story occurs. Everything looks clean, refined, distilled, essentialised. While anime can make both the urban hub or the suburban domicile look like how their architects imagine their ideal designs (photo-cinema would necessitate 'cleaning-up' reality to be so pristine), this 'buffed sheen' of interior and exterior design is typical of Japan in reality. Those who visit Japan are sometimes uncomfortable with the way things can appear clinical and sterile, especially if their 'home turf' looks 'used and abused' in comparison. But this near-perfection in the Japanese appearance of public spaces is an aesthetic based on affording the individual the feeling of being in a space *by themselves* rather than *with others*. Like the Japanese body cleansed in pure hot water only after 'soaping up' and washing down the skin, the Japanese citizen moves through public space in a similarly isolated and ionized way. The reason for outlining this aspect of inhabiting 'cleansed space' is to qualify the importance and relevance of 'muzak' in Japan.

Again, we encounter another topic which in the West is treated with derision. Few musicologists would bother with the signifying wealth of muzak, and when it appears to be happening in a film score, there is the assumption that the score is vapid, empty, pale, thin, 'soulless'. Muzak of all sorts plays in many public spaces in contemporary Japan (as it has ever since the post-war period) and especially so in spaces designed for rest, respite and relaxation. *Eve's* choice of a café for the 'stage' of its themes is a pointed choice, as cafés – or the *kissaten* as it developed in Japan in the '70s – is a place where one can feel especially relaxed by enjoying a momentary yet complete detachment from society. The *kissaten* is an infamous site for muzak: to many a Westerner it's like a nightmarishly numbing internment straight out of a Kurt Vonnegut novel. Much of the score in *Eve* deftly assumes a muzak guise in varying degrees of diegetic presence, never straying far from the type of 'light instrumental music which one might hear at a *kissaten*, café or *koubii* chain like Doutor or Excelsior.

When Rikuo and Masaki make their way down the secluded stairwell to the café, the music mimes their excitement as they nervously approach the place for the first time. It starts with vamped chords played on simulated mellotron (i.e., a digital version of an archaic analogue tape instrument designed to emulate the sounds of strings, flutes and/or voices). Once they open the door to the café and see the sign of its 'rule', the music blossoms into a bouquet of wordless female voice, electronic keyboards, bongos, shakers and acoustic guitars. This arrangement is typical of the 'retro-bossa-nova' high-style pop of Omote-sando and its hip designer cafés, so its musicological referencing is quite precise within the Japanese context. If one were to 'read' or evaluate the music here outside of its context, one would miss how it deliberates muzak as a vernacular mode of music tied to the environs depicted in *Eve*. But most importantly, the 'soulless' aspects of muzak – its wilful emptying of human presence in stark contrast to the highly emotional human presence encoded within Japanese *enka* ballads and tunes – reflect not only how androids might find pleasure in listening to music which absents humanism, but also how humans – Rikuo especially, but also Masaki as we discover later – can become capable of registering emotional depth in such music precisely *because* it displays no human presence.

The anacoustic realm of MIDI production – its absence of actual audible spatial occurrence (such as a piano playing in a room) – would seem a perfect *modus operandi* for the matrixed simulacra of anime. Just as nothing pre-exists in anime due to its world being engineered and actualised rather than photographed and captured, MIDI generates music that in a sense never happened. Most of *Eve's*

score is MIDI generated, yet this is so because the 'spaces' in *Eve* constitute a topography of non-existing zones: from the Ethics Committee's insistent regulations about how androids co-inhabit human space, to the de-sanctioning of those rules within the walls of the Eve café, to the piano practice room which Rikuo no longer frequents, to his own interior head space wherein he harbours unmentionable feelings toward the houseroid Sammy. *Eve* is a dense cartography of no-go zones, and the unactual nature of MIDI aptly reflects *Eve's* dramaturgy.

Postmodern theoretical precepts would hold simulated and virtual instrumentation in line with the notion of the simulacrum, presuming that the instruments' affected sound and audible mimicry (such as the sampled marimba or bongos in *Eve's* score previously mentioned) are meant to reference, replace or replicate their originating instruments. But that would presume that there is neither depth, density nor congestion between the original and its simulation, as if the dynamic flux of history, technology, musicology and culture somehow freezes between two binary states of musical occurrence and existence (the oft used 'real' and 'fake' dichotomy). The MIDI construction of music (a notion unaddressed by the scopic and linguistic parameters of postmodern theory) has for half a century not been concerned with naturalist or realist binaries. When the sampled marimba sounds sampled, *that* is its identity. When the bongos are stridently quantized and devoid of pressure-modulated tone, they are accepted as *not* being played by a human. The dramaturgical device of androids attaining consciousness in *Eve* defines a non-binary arena for considering new and alternative ways of considering human pleasure principles. Put bluntly, people like techno because it sounds nothing like The Neville Brothers; it is not as if techno artists are trying to sound like The Neville Brothers and failing, in place delivering a 'soulless' sound. *Eve's* androids and humans – plus its composer and its audience – momentarily inhabit the unactual space of its musical drama, to vicariously experience how androids hear music.

End Note

1. See my discussion of Toru Takemitsu's score in "Anashi ga oka – The Sound of the World Turned Inside-Out", in Japanese Horror Cinema, ed. Jay McRoy, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2005

Production Credits

Director: Yasuhiro Yoshiura
 Script: Yasuhiro Yoshiura
 Character Design: Ryuusuke Chayama
 Key Animation Supervisor: Ryuusuke Chayama
 Animation Studio: Studio Rikka
 Sound Effects: Kazumi Ohkubo
 Sound Mixing: Masashi Furuya
 Music Composer: Tohru Okada
 Music Producer: Tom Nagae
 Insert Song Performance: Rie Tanaka ("Time of Tenderness")
 End Theme Song Arrangement: Yuki Kajiura
 End Theme Song Composition: Yuki Kajiura
 End Theme Song Lyrics: Yuki Kajiura
 End Theme Song Performance: Kalafina

Note: This article is excerpted from a longer piece in-development, analysing the complete score and sound design of the film.

