

Vol. 7 No. 1 : Reassessing Anime

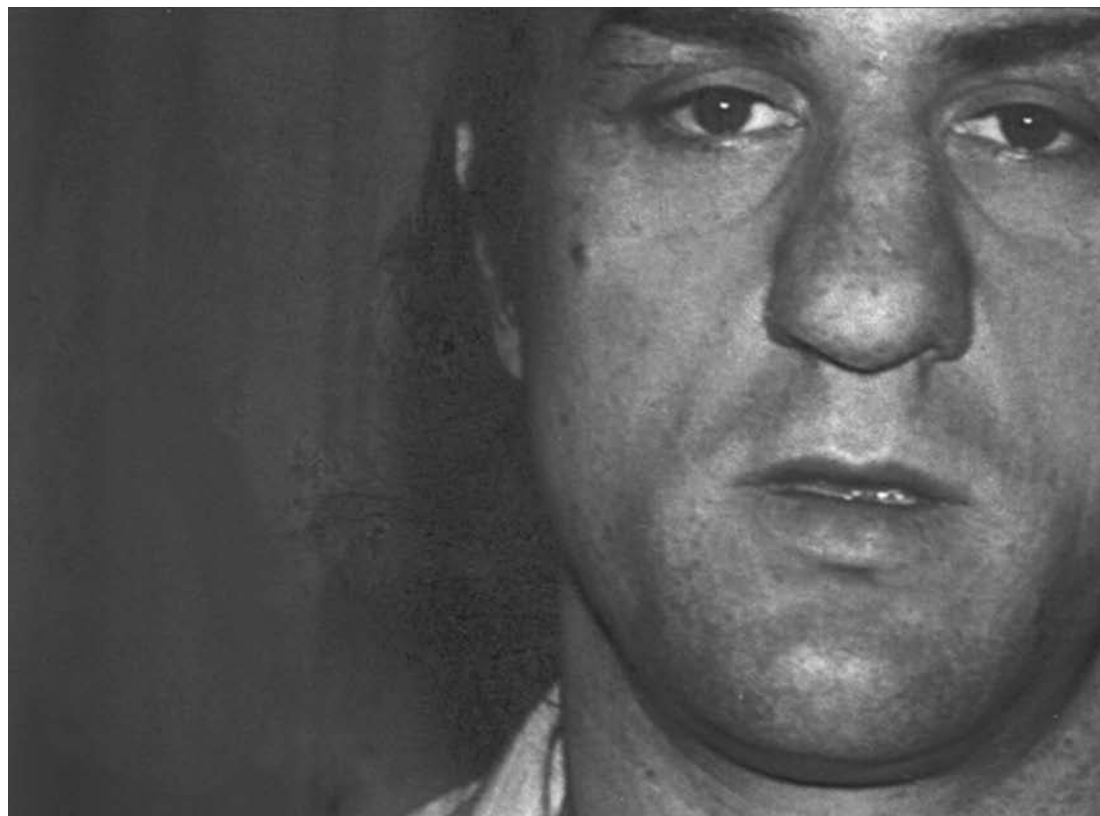
Spring 2011

CINEPHILE

The University of British Columbia's Film Journal



Paul Wells on Satoshi Kon Philip Brophy on The Sound of an Android's Soul



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Editor's Note

Anime is a visual enigma. Its otherworldly allure and burgeoning popularity across the globe highlights its unique ability to be more than *just* another type of animation. Originally a novelty export from post-war Japan, anime has now become a subtle yet important part of Western popular culture. Furthermore, it remains a key area of audience and fan research that crosses all generations – children, teenagers, and adults. From Osamu Tezuka to Hayao Miyazaki, *Akira* (Katsuhiro Ôtomo, 1988) to *Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995), anime's extraordinary characters and oneiric content still enable it to be regarded as one of the most awe-inspiring visual spectacles going into and during the twenty-first century.

Keenly aware of anime's rich history, cultural and global context, and increasing presence and influence on Western art, literature and film, the theme of this issue of *Cinephile* is 'Reassessing Anime.' The six articles included herein aim to address and tackle some of the overlooked aspects of anime. Such a reassessment by each author hopes to encourage future academic scholarship into the evolution and value of anime and, moreover, its impact not only on film but also on TV, comic books, video games, music videos, and corporate marketing strategies.

To begin this issue, Paul Wells explores authorship, 'magic realism,' and postmodernism in the films of the late Satoshi Kon, reassessing the Japanese film director's oeuvre via a range of theoretical and philosophical perspectives on anime and animation. Next, Philip Brophy discusses the importance of sound in *Time of Eve* and how music, muzak, and MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) work on multiple levels to create a singular soundscape within this very recent anime product. Focusing on a rather uncharted area of anime studies, Michael R. Bowman then unpacks and elaborates upon the issue of *moe* and, in turn, explains how this misunderstood type of anime continues to be a growing Japanese phenomenon in contemporary popular culture. Paying close attention to fan spectatorship and genre theory in relation to anime, Jane Leong's article seeks to challenge the notion of 'Japaneseness' on Japanese anime through various interpretations of film theory and audience research. Mindful of the relationship between anime, video games, and popular entertainment, John Wheeler then takes a critical look at 07th Expansion's *Higurashi When They Cry* (*Higurashi no Naku Koro ni*) and especially *dôjin* video games. Finally, Frédéric Clément's article concludes this issue of *Cinephile* through a careful study of Mamoru

Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004), exploring how theories pertaining to science fiction, femininity and the 'possessed body' can recast this complex sequel in new and refreshing lights.

Since nomenclature plays a chief factor in trying to comprehend the jargon and idiosyncrasies of anime, I would like to briefly draw your attention to several key Japanese terms that are mentioned in many of the articles ahead. Two of the most common Japanese terms in anime studies are *manga* (i.e. comic books) and *otaku* (i.e. highly enthusiastic, 'obsessive' anime fans). While these two terms may or may not receive full explanations in the included articles, please be aware that efforts have been made by each contributor to translate *and* also explain other Japanese terms and their English equivalent(s).

Unwavering dedication, remarkable creativity, and strong teamwork all enabled this issue of *Cinephile* to be brought to fruition. First, I wish to thank my advisor Ernest Mathijs for monitoring the progress of this issue and for all of his advice and insight along the way. Second, I want to extend my thanks to the entire editorial board for their hard work and assistance throughout each step of this scholarly endeavor. Together, we worked hard to create and promote this issue on anime and I am extremely fortunate to have worked with each and every one of you. Thank you, in particular, to Andrew deWaard and Shaun Inouye for each providing extra assistance with some of the more technical and computational aspects of the journal. On a final note, I'd also like to express my gratitude to Chloe Chan for sharing her incredible artistic talent with *Cinephile* and for producing such exquisite artwork to enhance this publication.

Whether you're a cinephile, bibliophile, technophile or *even* a proud Japanophile, this issue hopes to attract and unite an eclectic array of individuals and bring the topic of anime to the forefront of academic inquiry. So what are you waiting for? Read on! Enjoy! And get 'animated' about anime!

- Jonathan A. Cannon

Contributors

Michael R. Bowman received his M.A. in History of Art from the Ohio State University in 2011 and his B.A. in Archaeology and Classical Civilization from Cornell University in 2009. Currently, he is a Ph.D. student at the Ohio State University continuing his studies of the art and archaeology of the ancient world. His fieldwork has included archaeological excavations in Greece at the site of Halai, working under the Cornell Halai and East Lokris Project, and at the Ohio State University excavations at the sanctuary of Isthmia. An avid anime enthusiast, his interests also include the development of the *otaku* community, especially outside of Japan, and the creation of *otaku* identity.

Philip Brophy is an internationally renowned author, musician, filmmaker and educator based in Australia. He has edited three books from the *Cinesonic Conferences* and has written series and occasional columns for *Real Time* (Sydney), *The Wire* (London), *Film Comment* (New York) and *Empire* (Sydney). His book *100 Modern Soundtracks* (BFI, London) has been translated into Japanese and published by Film Art, Tokyo. His most recent books are *100 Anime* (BFI, London) and *Priscilla* for the Australian Film Classics series (Currency Press). As a writer and speaker on art, Philip has contributed numerous essays and articles for journals and catalogues. Additionally, he has also edited books to accompany two major exhibitions he curated: *Kaboom! Explosive Animation From America and Japan* (MCA, Sydney) and *Tezuka: The Marvel of Manga* (NGV, Melbourne).

Frédéric Clément is a Ph.D. candidate in Cinema Studies at the Université de Montréal in Québec, Canada. His current research focuses on the legacy of animated cinema in video games, as well as the depiction of women in films, animation and graphic novels. His first book, *Machines désirées: La représentation du féminin dans les films d'animation Ghost in the Shell de Mamoru Oshii*, was published by Éditions L'Harmattan in 2011.

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Paul Wells is Professor and Director of the Animation Academy at Loughborough University in the UK. He has published widely in the field of Animation Studies, including *Understanding Animation* (Routledge), *Re-Imagining Animation: The Changing Face of the Moving Image* (AVA Academia), and *The Animated Bestiary* (Rutgers), and is an established writer and director for radio, TV and film. He conducts workshops worldwide based on his book, *Scriptwriting* (AVA Academia), and is currently making a film with the Oil Museum in Stavanger, Norway. He is also the Chair of the Association of British Animation Collections.

John Wheeler is an M.A. student in modern Japanese literature with a focus in Japanese cinema at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He also moonlights as a closeted *otaku*. Before entering graduate school he worked sporadically as an entertainment journalist in Los Angeles, California covering Asian popular culture for publications such as *LA Weekly* and *Asia Pacific Arts*. His greatest professional (and personal) moment came in 2009: an exclusive interview with legendary Japanese animator and film director Hayao Miyazaki. John would like to thank his academic adviser Robert Tierney and fellow colleague Colin Raymond for reading drafts of the article included in this issue of *Cinephile*, as well as Makiko Ishizawa for correcting a Japanese translation.

Playing the Kon Trick

Between Dates, Dimensions and Daring in the films of Satoshi Kon

Paul Wells

When Satoshi Kon tragically passed away in the Summer of 2010, anime lost one of its true auteurs, and animation, one of the most playful exponents of the way the animated form can re-define space, time and sensibility, both through its characters and environments, and its audiences. Kon's films, *Perfect Blue* (1998), *Millennium Actress* (2001), *Tokyo Godfathers* (2003) and *Paprika* (2006), as well as his screenplay for *Memories* (1995) all signal a preoccupation with how identity is bound up with the perception of temporal order, spatial laws and configurations, and how any one person might 'evidence' their presence and influence in the material world.

Kon is in some senses best known for this formal playfulness, and the satirical insights which emerge from his operational flux of perspectives, but often less acknowledged is what might be termed the 'emotional intelligence' of his films, and the ways in which his interests in the fundamental aspects of the human condition are revealed through his use of a 'magic realist' register. It is also the case that Kon is probably viewed as a quintessentially post-modern filmmaker, given the attention to visual surfaces and fragmented narratives in his work, but again, this neglects to take into account how Kon has privileged the use of the properties and specificities of animation in lending veracity to his understanding of an intrinsically Japanese sensibility. It is the preoccupation of this discussion, therefore, to evidence and evaluate Kon's emotional intelligence in the service of Japanese identity.

Edmund de Waal, in his quasi-biographical, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, discusses two phases of the impact of *Japonisme* on Western art, first at the end of the late nine-

teenth century, and second, at the end of the Second World War. The first represents the impact of art free from any determining connoisseurship or pre-judgement; a blank canvas upon which the West drew its conclusions. "Japanese things – lacquers, *netsuke*, prints – conjure a picture of a place where the sensations are always new," argues de Waal, "where art pours out of daily life, where everything exists in a dream of endless beautiful flow" (de Waal 53). There is much here to draw upon, not least the idea of a sensual, creative continuum in the dream-like expression of an inherently rich, everyday experience – life somehow imbued with feeling and aesthetics.

De Waal then engages with Japanese culture as it was mediated in the post-war period, when numerous books were written seemingly trying to 'explain' the otherness of the Japanese: "Japan – my, what an odd country! A country in transition. Vanishing traditions. Enduring traditions. Essential verities. Seasons in. Myopia of the Japanese. Love of detail of. Dexterity. Self-sufficiency of. Childishness of. Inscrutability of" (de Waal 321). This then, may be viewed as the moment of a 'final' authenticity of the Japanese sensibility before the impact and assimilation of the United States and Western culture. I wish to argue that Kon is constantly preoccupied with validating an idea of Japanese identity by representing a more authentic Japanese spirit, characterised by sensual apprehension of a past embodied in aesthetic evidence of experience. It is also an identity resistant to, while absorbing, the veneer of post-war Americanisation and post-modern pastiche. This essentially localises my view of Kon as someone dealing with the deep contradiction of a Japan sustaining the limits of past restraints in religious,

social, sexual and economic conduct, with the permissive excesses of the contemporary era.

From the outset then, it is worthwhile noting that I do not see the shifting parameters of Kon's narratives and images as evidence of post-modern fragmentation and cultural malaise, but as a different model of 'flow'. This is predicated more on what Scott McCloud has noted in Osama Tezuka's graphic story-telling, namely the more extensive presence of subject-to-subject transitions and non-sequitur juxtapositions in extended narratives (McCloud 76-83). The relationship between images in *manga* and animation, then, are not, therefore, based on classical editing, or ideologically charged agencies of montage or counterpoint, but the accumulation of aestheticised vignettes or 'micro-narratives' (see Wells, 89-105), which in turn, preserve some aspects of the specificity of the Japanese sensibility unadorned with Western traits and tropes. Hayao Miyazaki, of course, has been noted for the ways, for example, he reminds Japanese audiences in films like *Princess Mononoke* (1997) and *Spirited Away* (2001) about a more spiritual engagement with the primary epiphanies of Shinto, before its tenets were mobilised ideologically in the support of militarist ends (see Callis, 93-103). Kon has a similar but more socially grounded vision in which he addresses the themes that have their conditions rooted in the past, but which emerge problematically in the contemporary world.

One need only immediately address the issues of sex, sexuality and sexual representation to evaluate this in Kon's breakthrough film, *Perfect Blue*. Japan had imposed a ban on sexual imagery in graphic form up to 1985, rendering sex education texts useless in regard to their illustration, but somewhat ironically, Japan had sustained a rich tradition of erotic art since the early nineteenth century, the first 'tentacle' porn, arguably Hokasai's *Diver and Two Octopi* in 1814. Changes in the law in the mid-1980s allowed for the exponential growth of graphic and animated pornography; contemporary *hentai*, a cornucopia of often extremely brutal, misogynistic, fetishistic, male fantasies. On the one hand, this might be viewed as the inevitability of responding to long-held socially determined repression; the cathartic liberation of perverse masculine desire; or an engagement with the aesthetic and conceptual 'graphic' freedom the animated form allows. On the other, it could be understood as a moment in the implicit creation and cultivation of a modern Japan in which the repressed, marginalised, domestic identity of women, is taken to its logical extreme, privileging patriarchal power at the expense of female identity, or indeed, any individual identity which seeks to move beyond what are arguably new conformities and oppres-

sions. It is this theme that is at the heart of *Perfect Blue*, and indeed, much of Kon's oeuvre.

Kon's breakthrough success with *Perfect Blue*, and its marketing to the West as a Hitchcock style thriller, to some extent misrepresents his work and its specific achievements both in animation and as a Japanese film. Although Kon uses genre carefully, the preoccupation here is not with the Hitchcockian idea of being directed or misdirected to see in a certain way, but to explore the ways of seeing that both lead to seemingly challenging conclusions about how and why humans think or act, or signify psychological chaos and confusion. This is not then mere playfulness with film form, or only the mixing of different registers of reality, but the use of narrative vignettes pointing to the contradictions and tensions in the cultural thematics Kon has identified. In *Perfect Blue*, ingenue Mimie Kirigoe, seeks to develop her career by leaving the teen pop group CHAM, and becoming an actress. What this entails is essentially the shift from the platonic sexuality of a 'girl group' to the adult realm of mainstream eroticism and exploitation; a shift which prompts psychological and emotional uncertainty in Mimie herself, but also those around her, who act upon their *assumed* knowledge about her, and the ways in which they wish to manipulate her for their own ends. It also moves Mimie through different registers of social and theatrical performance, as well as through her own engagement with changing aspects of her personality. Kon effectively documents these processes – through a mode of 'magic realism' – thereby revealing the underpinning emotional terrain of Japanese culture.

Fredric Jameson, intrigued by the illusiveness in defining 'magic realism' in film, traced it back to its Latinate roots, but ultimately found it most notably in Eastern European cinema, concluding that:

In spite of...stylistic differences, however, I retain a sense of shared features, of which I will here isolate three: these are all *historical* films; the very different *color* of each constitutes a unique supplement, and the source of a particular pleasure, or fascination, or *jouissance* in its own right; in each finally, the dynamic of *narrative* has somehow been reduced, concentrated and simplified, by the attention to violence (and to a lesser extent sexuality)...All of them in different ways, enjoin a visual spell, an enthrallment to the image in its present of time, which is quite distinct... (Jameson 130)

Jameson's refinement of the 'magic realist' principle could arguably be recognised in a great deal of cinema, and certainly much animation, but it is clear that the historical preoccupation, conceptual colour use, and concentrated



narrative vignettes in the service of heightening the 'present of time,' is a clear feature of Kon's work, especially in the ways in which he heightens both physical and emotional 'violence.' In *Perfect Blue's* now notorious 'rape' scene in which Mimie endures a simulated, though seemingly 'real' rape, when playing a night-club stripper in an episodic drama, "Double Bind," Kon localises a moment of transition in which violation, manipulation and performance are entwined, and the restraint and repression of the past is replaced by an acceptance of a seemingly lax, immoral, corrupt, code of existence. Kon, having already over-extended the rape scene with interruptions that signal the indifference about what is happening, and to heighten unease, uses Mimie's resistant yet resigned confusion amidst a swirl of ever darkening violet and blue lights and faces to create an emotionally charged moment when the celebratory cheers of the crowd of men watching her rape remind her of the crowds who once adored her as a pop idol in CHAM. Her innocence is lost, beginning a psychological fragmentation in which Mimie is constantly confronted by her former identity in the girl group; the voice of Me-Mania, her psychotic stalker, who mimics, indeed, replaces her in 'Mimie's Room', her on-line blog; and ultimately, a mentally unstable 'double', Rumi, her erstwhile agency manager, but former pop idol, now jealous of her charge's success.

The multiple layers of Kon's universe – dreams and nightmares; memories; fantasies; solipsistic scenarios; theatrical performances; social role-playing; mediated constructions, references to other visual sources, etc – are readily facilitated by the ontological equivalence of the animated image. All animated imagery, however imitative, mimetic or quasi-realist, foregrounds its constructed-ness

and illusionism. Kon takes this to its next level in creating 'magic realist' epiphanies like Mimie's state of consciousness at the height of her rape, where aesthetics work in the service of a transcendence that points at one level to the emotional/ emotive outcomes of the scene, but also bigger concerns, ones here related to a 'slippage' in the Japanese sensibility from a sense of balance and order, to an emotional and sensual capitulation, resulting in a chaotic and sometimes contradictory *existentialism*. This is also historically specific, in that it represents the emergence of a modern Japanese identity, no longer bound by its religious or insular culture, or the post-war impact of American occupation and Western intervention. Kon is the fundamental chronicler of this emergence, dealing with these topics and themes much more playfully in *Millennium Actress*.

Millennium Actress takes the 'magic realist' principle further still as Kon bases the narrative on the making of a documentary film, in which a former studio runner, Genya Tachibana, now in his late career, seeks to make a film about a reclusive actress, Chiyoko Fujiwara, a woman who he has loved and admired from afar throughout her glittering film career. Kon recognises that in essence it is the act of image-making in itself, which is at stake in prompting what defines and interrogates reality/identity/history, and how far this reveals the sensibilities of those who make the images and those who are depicted in them. Consequently, Chiyoko's reported memories of her life actually see Tachibana and his sceptical cameraman, Kyoji, feature in the imagery she is describing; imagery which moves seamlessly between her recollections of the life she led, and scenes from her films – most notably a samurai movie referencing Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) and a science-fiction film recalling the work of Karel Zeman.

As is usual in Kon's work, one register is as 'real' as the other, and here, the conventions of the romance genre seem to inform Chiyoko's everyday life as she constantly pursues the ideal of once again meeting, and being with, a dissident artist, who she briefly met in her youth, and from whom she attained a key. As Andrew Osmond has pointed out, the film's premise emerged from the conceptual idea of a *trompe l'oeil*, a painted illusion that seems so real, it effectively temporarily 'replaces' reality to those perceiving it, until the illusion itself becomes apparent under closer observation. Consequently, this points to the notion

codes that explicitly signify their status as interpretive acts, within a historical context.

In *Tokyo Godfathers*, Kon chooses to refine this 'existential coding' in a more conventional approach to storytelling, but one in which he deploys what Susan Napier has called his 'bi-sexual gaze'; one which she argues "offers the audience a world of fluidity and ambiguity in which the male and female gaze are both powerful and capable of uniting with other gazes, such as the nostalgic or the romantic, to offer alternatives to a hard-edged worldview" (Napier 41). Three homeless vagrants, Hana, a gay cross-dresser,

In Kon's worlds, it is better to believe in something that heightens and elevates experience than to merely accept its fundamental mundaneness...

that all images, illusions and issues, are only matters related to how we perceive them, so as Osmond notes, "the artist's key (to 'the most important thing there is') seems [sic] to be a bit of junk once owned by a man who is finally revealed to have been dead for most of the film. But it *might* [sic] just be the key that unlocks Chiyoko's door to eternity" (Osmond 58). In the film's possibly surprising ending, in which Chiyoko admits that it is actually the thrill of the chase that she enjoys rather than the possibility of the attainment of her dream, Kon reveals his own imperative, and implicitly, that of documentarian Tachibana, in wanting to know and retain the emotional flux of experience, rather than the 'finality' of fulfilment. In Kon's worlds, it is better to believe in something that heightens and elevates experience than to merely accept its fundamental mundaneness, and it is this that both underpins his interest in depicting shifting registers of reality/perception, and his desire to create moments of 'magic realist' transcendence. This serves to show not merely the fluidities of existence but reveals complex personal, social and cultural perspectives. Chiyoko's 'magic realist' life is thus effectively based on the motif of running, and moving through, the contours of Japanese social history since the 1930s. This engaging aesthetic flux can thus also be understood as a range of competing ideological and ethical perspectives, that once more show the re-invention of Japan in vignettes of 'presentness' – at once 'magical' and 'real'. I wish to finally term this, *existential coding*, since it seeks to record modes of perceived reality and experience in

Miyuki, a teenage runaway, and Gin, a deluded alcoholic, find a newborn baby girl in the midst of discarded rubbish, and begin a bizarre journey across a snowbound Tokyo to try and find the infant's mother. Crucially, Kon turns his 'magic realist' gaze on the tension between the 'magic' suggested in the Christian conception of Christmas, when the film is set, and the 'realism' of homelessness in contemporary Japan. Hana, in particular, mediates the idea that contemporary Japan has lost some of the moral and social sense bound up in past practices, and that those consigned to the margins might offer a reminder of the kind of compassion and dignity now forgotten in the wake of self-serving, indifferent and indulgent cultures.

The trio encounter criminals, drug addicts, and violent street thugs; broken marriages and attempted suicide; each addressing their own reasons for their homeless condition – Miyuki's stabbing of her father in a petty argument, Gin's addictions to gambling and alcohol, which resulted in the loss of his family, and Hana, reconciling the contradictions he perceives in himself as 'a mistake made by God'. Importantly, though, if *Perfect Blue* and *Millennium Actress* are concerned with imagined or desired relationships, *Tokyo Godfathers* is grounded in the relationship between the trio, who arbitrate a new morality amidst the degradation which they confront, in a spirit of reconciliation and acceptance. The 'existential code' here is the recovery of an emotional reality beneath the circumstances that create the kinds of alienation and emotional dissatisfaction experienced by Mimie in *Perfect Blue* and Chiyoko in *Millennium Actress*.



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-

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.

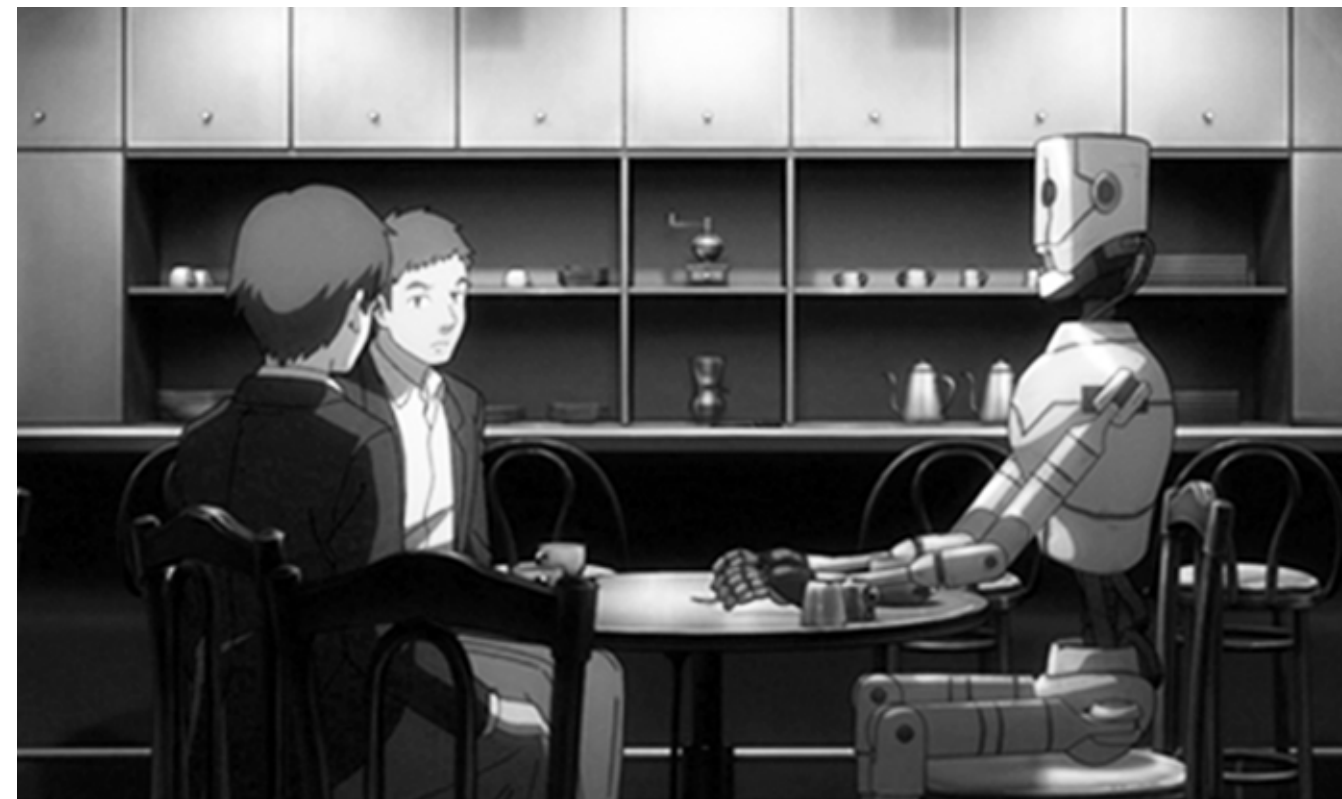
* * *

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.

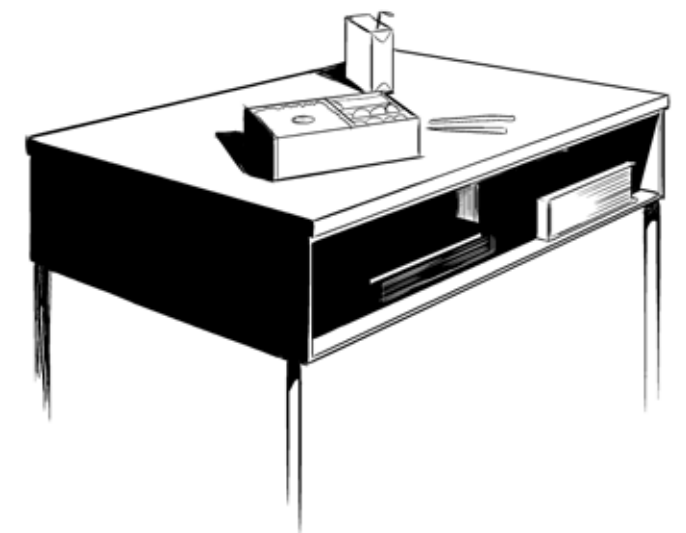
End Note

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.



Beyond Maids and *Meganekko*

Examining the Moe Phenomenon

Michael R. Bowman

The phenomenon of *moe* is perhaps the most significant and controversial phenomenon in Japanese popular culture to have gained prominence in the last decade. However, despite its increasing pervasiveness within the zeitgeist of the anime fan (*otaku*) community, it is a phenomenon that has been almost entirely ignored by those scholars studying Japanese popular culture. *Moe* (pronounced mo-eh, with two morae), is a rather nebulous concept that at the most basic level can be thought of as an almost fetishized ‘appeal’ of a character (overwhelmingly female) in anime or *manga* (comic books). This emphasis toward ‘appeal’ exploded in prominence after the turn of the new millennium to dominate an ever larger percentage of anime output; in 2003 *moe*-related programming and merchandise accounted for \$810 million in sales in Japan (Hirano 42). However, despite its importance, a more precise definition of *moe* is hard to come by. There has yet to be a truly satisfactory definition developed in any academic source, and even the definitions one finds in common use in the *otaku* community are often vague or contradictory.

The origins of the term *moe* itself are also debated. *Moe* in Japanese literally means “budding,” as a plant, in this context taken to mean perhaps a “budding affection” (Bolton, Csicsery-Rony and Tatsumi 230). The term is also postulated to have come from the verb *moeru*, meaning “to burn,” in this context “to burn with passion” (Dela Pena 9). It has even been suggested that the term originated from the names of early ‘cute’ female anime characters Hotaru Tomoe from *Sailor Moon* (Junichi Sato, 1992-3) and Moe Sagisawa from *Dinosaur Planet* (Masami Furukawa, 1993-4) (Oplinger).

In any case, *moe* has come to be commonly defined in the anime and manga fan communities less by a gen-

eral overarching concept but rather by a set of identifiable character traits. In this particular schema, *moe* can be divided, in the broadest sense, into two categories: one called “narrative *moe*” and another referred to as “non-narrative *moe*.” Narrative *moe* is that which is derived from a character’s actions, personality, or back-story; that is, those things which are only identifiable within the context of the story narrative and therefore cannot easily be reproduced in a single still image. Characters exhibiting such traits would include Mio Akiyama or Yui Hirasawa from the anime series *K-On!* (Naoko Yamada, 2009) whose *moe* appeal is based on personality quirks (in this case Mio’s fearfulness or Yui’s clumsiness and scatterbrained nature). Archetypal personality traits such as *tsundere* (alternatingly hostile and loving) would also fall under this category.

Non-narrative *moe* is that which is created by a set of specific visual characteristics that are not dependent upon a story to be understood and interpreted, and would include such things as physical appearance, clothing and costume as well as ‘fetish objects’ such as glasses (*meganekko*) or cat ears (*nekomimi*). Exemplary of this category are Rei Ayanami from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Hideaki Anno, 1995-6) seen wrapped in bandages, Sakura Kinomoto from *Card Captor Sakura* (Morio Asaka, 1998-2000) in her elaborate, frilly costume, and Azusa Nakano, again from *K-On!*, wearing the aforesaid *nekomimi*.

Additionally, overarching qualities exist for all types of *moe* that govern those more specific traits outlined in our two categories above. First, the *moe* character, whether expressed narratively or non-narratively, must often exhibit a sense of vulnerability, which induces a feeling of protectiveness towards the character. This vulnerability can be either physical or mental (e.g. a child-like appearance or person-

ality) or situational (e.g. the vulnerability associated with the subservience of a maid, or as a result of uncontrollable circumstances such as a life-threatening illness). Finally, the appeal of a character and one’s attraction to the character must be nonsexual. Famous *mangaka* (comic book author) Ken Akamatsu – who is well accustomed to utilizing *moe* tropes in his own work – has defined *moe* as “being calmed/soothed by watching from afar. It is not an object of sexual action... Looking at a bishoujo [beautiful girl] and thinking ‘I want to do her’ is a normal sexual desire for a man; looking at a *biyoujo* (a girl younger than a *bishoujo*, synonymous with ‘loli’)... and thinking ‘I want to be calmed/soothed’ is

traits that are cataloged and recombined ad infinitum in a succession of derivative simulacra. In this way, Azuma characterizes *moe* as “not a simple fetish object, but a sign that emerged through market principles” (42). To him, the development of *moe* characteristics are intimately linked with the consumer/producer dynamic by which “characters emerging in *otaku* works were... immediately broken into *moe*-elements and recorded by consumers, and then the elements reemerged later as material for creating new characters” (52). Thus, *moe* characteristics themselves remain detached from viewers’ emotional responses and, in a sense, from the artwork itself.

Because of its nebulous nature, some have shoved sexuality into their definition of *moe*, but such definitions miss the point of what *moe* actually is.

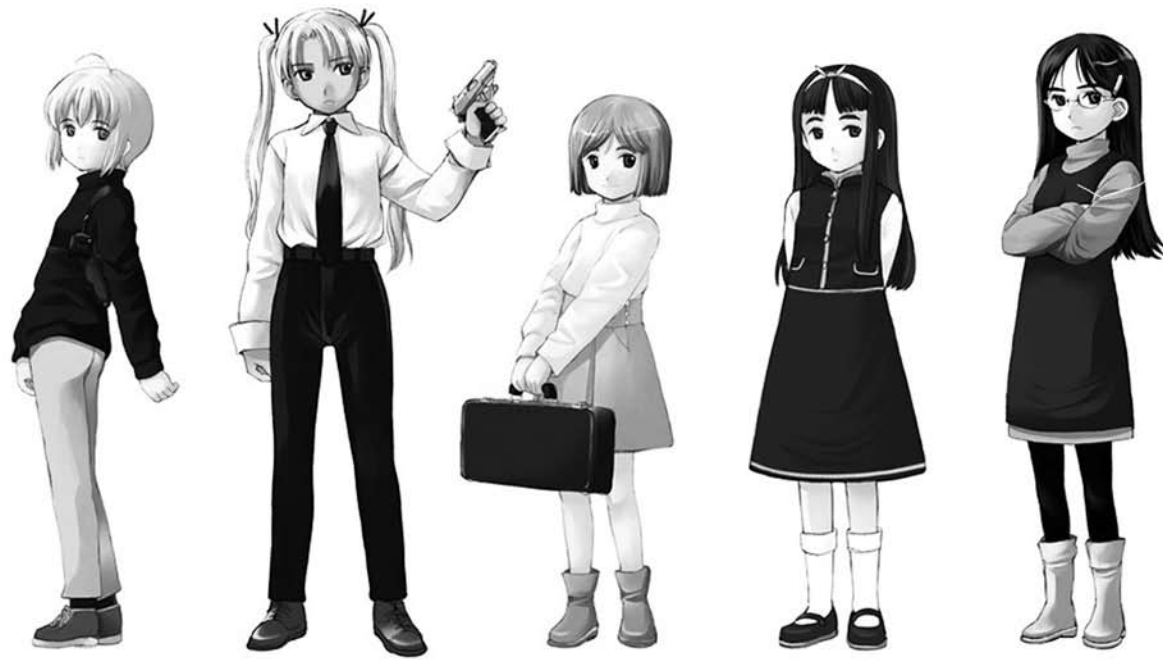
‘*moe*’ (Akamatsu). Now, it has been argued that this perception of *moe* as nonsexual is incorrect, that the erotic and sexual images are in fact very common, and that there exists a significant pedophilic overtone to much of the *moe* output (the so-called ‘Lolita-complex’ or ‘lolicon’), exemplified by such series as *Kodomo no Jikan* (Eiji Suganuma, 2007). *Otaku* scholar Lawrence Eng counters this assertion, claiming that “[the] argument against *moe* on the basis that it is ‘pedophilic’ suffers when one considers that a) not all *moe* characters look like children, b) *moe* characters are not always portrayed in a sexualized manner and c) those who appreciate ‘young’ characters do not necessarily view them in a sexual way” (Eng 2006: *Lainspotting*). However, even Eng cannot completely shake off the idea that at least some *moe* is sexual. Nevertheless, this notion, while certainly a widespread one, is simply a confusion of terms. Because of its nebulous nature, some have shoved sexuality into their definition of *moe*, but such definitions miss the point of what *moe* actually is. Sexual feelings should be seen only as a secondary response that sometimes is coupled with, but is still separate from, the more authentic *moe* response, which shall be examined shortly.

The notion that *moe* is defined and driven by specific character traits has been most extensively expounded by noted Japanese scholar Hiroki Azuma who contends that modern *otaku* consume animation as a “database,” in which the most important element of consumption is not the narrative per se, but rather the various tropes and character

In summary, Azuma claims, “[T]he chara-*moe* [a character’s *moe*], which represents *otaku* culture of the 1990s, is not the simple act of empathy (as the *otaku* themselves wish to believe). It is a quite postmodern consumer behavior, sustained by the movements back and forth between the characters... and the *moe*-elements” (53). This postmodernist bent has been taken up in more recent scholarship on anime by Thomas LaMarre, who again focuses on this forced repetition of character traits as the driving force of *moe*:

In effect, *moe* refers to an affective response to images...*Moe* might be thought of in terms of the excitement you feel for an image, which leads you on to more images. This onward movement might become organized as repetition compulsion, for instance. You may become obsessed with certain details, and repeat them automatically – as, for instance, with the *otaku* tendency to repeat images of women with specific kinds of skirts, breasts, hair, weapons, and so forth. What powers such repetition is an élan for the image that allows attention to, and interest in, new images—that is, *moe* (380)

However, these definitions are unsatisfactory for two primary reasons. First, viewing *moe* only through the lens of its commonly accepted traits and markers is inadequate. Such characteristics should be seen as a necessary, but not suffi-



cient, condition for the explanation of the *moe* phenomenon. Thus, they should not be singularly seen as definitions of *moe*, but rather as merely triggers of the phenomenon (Bolton, Csicsery-Rony and Tatsumi 230). What is properly *moe* is the response these characteristics evoke in the viewer, enhanced by these triggers being concentrated to such an extent within the *moe* image. Therefore, the real focus should not be on superficial external traits, but on the nature of the viewer's specific response. In this regard, Akamatsu has posited that the principal nature of the *moe* feeling is one of a nurturing affection. He claims, "[*m*]oe is a 'maternal affection' which a part of males have been left with that has undergone a change and shown itself and, originally, is an irregular feeling a male should not have; however, it is a pure love which does not include any sexual action and is an exceedingly peaceful desire." While Akamatsu's identification of the psychology of the male viewer may be unsatisfactory, nevertheless his identification of the 'true' nature of *moe* as the response created in the viewer towards the image is valid.

In this same male-focused vein, Scott Von Schilling sees *moe* as a "longing for fatherhood." Certainly, a significant portion of the consumers in the *moe*-targeted market are unmarried males in their 30s. Von Schilling believes that these men are beginning to see a lack of purpose in their lives and the "window of fatherhood slowly closing" and, in response, are creating an emotional state in which the longing for fatherhood becomes all the more pressing and mentally all-consuming. In this state, then, they turn to *moe* products to fill this gap in their emotional being. A perfect example of this 'fatherly nurturing' sentiment explicitly

expressed in anime can be seen in the character of Henrietta from the series *Gunslinger Girl* (Morio Asaka, 2003-4). Henrietta is a young girl who has been turned into a cyborg to act as an assassin for the Italian government. Over the course of the series she develops a strong affection for her handler, who in turn develops strong paternal and protective feelings towards her.

Now, this is not to say that *moe* is necessarily only a phenomenon experienced by males – female parallels can be seen in *yaoi* (homosexual male romance) products targeting women, among others. However, since *moe* products in Japan are overwhelmingly targeting a male audience (intending, therefore, a male response), and since this male-focused manifestation is that to which the *otaku* community is normally referring to when discussing the topic, it will remain our main focus here. Regardless, the *moe* appeal might be conceived of being external to the image itself, or, at the very least, the emotional state of the viewer might be seen as the reason why the quintessentially *moe* characteristics have the concentrated appeal that they do.

Second, Azuma and LaMarre seem to be suggesting that *moe* is essentially a direct product of the *otaku* 'movement' and of the repetition indicative of the 'database' viewing structure of animation and, therefore, is necessarily a new construct inexorably linked with the modern *otaku* subculture. This, however, is simply not true. While the modern *otaku* subculture may have helped to accelerate the proliferation of the phenomenon, *moe* can be seen even in the earliest Japanese animation and comics. If we look for tell-

ing *moe* character traits (again not embodying *moe* itself, but rather only as signifiers for the presence of the *moe* response), we can find them in such early characters as Ayame from Osamu Tezuka's 1948 work *The Lost World*. Ayame is a 'cute' genetically engineered girl who is created in order to be exploited for labor (her subservient position giving her the necessary vulnerability) and who, when molested by another character, is saved by the heroic teenage scientist Kenichi Shikishima. They then live together as brother and

sister in a completely platonic relationship (the Akamatsuan "nurture" here explicitly presented to the viewer) – a truly quintessential *moe* scenario (McCarthy 2009).

Therefore, if the traits that are normally used to describe *moe* are not seen as the fundamental nature of the phenomenon, then they should be seen as representative of a peculiarly Japanese expression of it, one derived from the unique culture and society of Japan. In particular, we might see these stylistic attributes as an outgrowth of the so-called 'cult of *kawaii*' (aka: *kawaisa*) – that is, the seeming obsession of the Japanese people with the 'cute' and child-like. Sharon Kinsella explains that this aesthetic, which "celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behavior and physical appearances...saturated the multimedia and consumer goods and services whilst they were expanding rapidly between 1970 and 1990 and reached a peak of saccharine intensity in the early 1980's" (220). Indeed, one need not look very hard at all to see this predisposition to 'the cute' in Japan's culture. Outside of their natural home in video games, comics, and animation, cute *moe* mascot characters are used in all manner of commercial promotions, from food and household items to Microsoft products and even military and political advertisements.

However, while the outward stylistic elements of the Japanese cute aesthetic can clearly be seen in many *moe* characters, the "cult of *kawaii*" is perhaps more important in being symptomatic of a cultural mindset that allowed the expression of Japanese *moe* to develop. Tomoyuki Sugiyama, author of *Cool Japan*, believes

the Japanese fondness for the cute and innocent is rooted in Japan's harmony-loving culture, stating, "[the] Japanese are seeking a spiritual peace and an escape from brutal reality through cute things" (Kageyama 2006: *Washington Post*). In this same vein, Miki Kato claims that *kawaii* and the child-like behavior associated with it are "inherent in the Japanese character" and a consequence of the social and psychological pressures of modern Japanese society. She writes, "[*k*]awaii gives people a way to hang onto child-

hood and thereby postpone the pressures of adulthood" (Avella 214). Additionally, a love of the child-like and innocent could be seen as evidence of the "infantilized" Japanese mindset, which some have claimed developed after World War II (Fujitani, White and Yoneyama 137-8). Prominent Japanese artist Takashi Murakami, founder of the Superflat postmodern art movement, ascribes to this last notion and places the cause of the ascendance of *kawaii* squarely on the mindset created by the forced dependency of Japan on the United States after the war (246).

Indeed, we might view the post-millennial *moe* saturation of anime as a result of social issues, especially regarding male identity, caused by these societal pressures in post-war Japan becoming more forceful and overpowering. Eminent anime scholar Susan Napier has noted how traditional conceptions and expressions of masculinity are being eroded in modern Japan. She writes, "Japanese men today are being forced out of traditional notions of masculine performance and presented with a wide range of possible identities" (121). The turmoil that results from these "disturbances in the social fabric" is further displayed and emphasized in the media, in which "[e]xpressions of male anxiety, anger, loneliness, and depression pervade contemporary Japanese cultural productions" (121). That said, the *moe* phenomenon can then be seen as another aspect of this expression. It is possible that because of the above-mentioned issues and problems that Japanese males are now increasingly looking toward the fantasy world to supplement and correct their perceived inadequacy, using the "cute," as Sugiyama stated above, to "escape" (Kageyama 2006: *Washington Post*). Thus, it is little wonder that the increased proliferation of

...one need not look very hard at all to see this predisposition to 'the cute' in Japan's culture.

moe has occurred during a time when these issues are reaching a crescendo. In any case, it becomes quite clear that *moe* is very much admixed with the Japanese psyche, character, and modern culture.

If, then, the tropes most commonly associated with *moe* are seen as merely culturally dependent trappings, the general concept of *moe* – as the simple response to the ‘concentrated appeal’ – should alternatively be seen as universally valid. Indeed, this concentration of the appeal is clearly displayed in *all forms* of popular art, not only anime and manga, and not only in Japanese art. For example, a possible comparison might be the ‘appeal’ of such films’ ever-increasing levels of explicit violence and gore in American horror movies, such as the *Saw* franchise (2004–2010), originally created by James Wan and Leigh Whannell. Of course, in this case the nature of the viewer response is to the increasing concentration of this ‘appeal’ and, as such, is very different from the nurturing response engendered by the Japanese expression. It is, nevertheless, a product of the same broad phenomenon found in contemporary popular culture. Indeed, the backlash that developed against the *Saw* franchise and other examples of ‘extreme’ horror cinema might also parallel a growing backlash against the oversaturation of *moe* in the *otaku* market.

However, if we are to talk about *moe* as a response to concentrated appeal in this universal way, it would be best not to refer to these other incarnations as ‘*moe*,’ and instead leave that term to refer specifically to the Japanese manifestation. A more suitable term for this other more general occurrence of the phenomenon in popular art is the “M-phase” (that is, the “*Moe*-phase”). In the end, then, is the true significance of the *moe* phenomenon that has been completely overlooked by anime and manga scholars: *moe* is symptomatic of an occurrence of a much more universal, and possibly necessary, trajectory of popular art, with its Japanese manifestation merely the most obvious form. It is also a trajectory in which a viewer’s response to the *moe* or M-phase image, whatever it is intended to be (whether the ‘nurture’ of Japanese *moe* or the ‘thrill’ of the explicit violence and/or gore in contemporary horror cinema), is maximized by the ‘appeal’ that triggers it becoming increasingly saturated and focused in *moe* products. In this way, *moe* has relevance not only to scholars of modern Japanese culture and art in addition to those *otaku* who consume *moe* images, but also to all who are concerned with modern popular art and who inhabit any region of the world. If *moe* is finally to be understood as a path that all popular art can take, the question really then becomes – what is the next step? Only time will tell.

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Reviewing the ‘Japaneseness’ of Japanese Animation Genre Theory and Fan Spectatorship



Jane Leong

Since the 1990s, anime has been gaining considerable recognition outside of Japan. This popularity has, and continues to be, bolstered by both our current climate of intense globalisation and the dynamic practices of cultural production which anime fans engage in. It is this intersection between globalisation, popular culture and fandom, which makes anime a fascinating subject of cultural analysis.

In particular, anime poses a unique counterpoint to the traditional discourse of globalisation as presented by scholars such as George Ritzer (1993), who had suggested the inception of a homogenised global industry moulded on American popular culture. Such a traditional model has been challenged by the way anime as a non-Western cultural product has been enthusiastically received across the globe, due in a very large part to the dedicated involvement of fans who created more exposure for anime by translating and circulating it to audiences worldwide. Furthermore, this global appeal has been attributed to anime’s hybrid nature, which refers to the mixing of Japanese and non-Japanese elements that at the same time signifies neither one culture nor another.

However, I argue that anime cannot be completely dissociated from the ‘Japaneseness’ which typically frames its creation. The challenge here, of course, is to then ar-

ticulate a discourse of ‘Japaneseness’ for an era of global or transcultural influences and flows. This article suggests that one way to do this is to address Japaneseness as a process of genre formation. More significantly, it emphasises the cultural studies approach to genre, which aims “not to posit the inherent value of value, nor to ascribe positive value to any particular entity ... but rather to vindicate the *activity of evaluation*” (Burgass 347) which underlies the way non-Japanese fans engage with anime.

Hybridity and the *Mukokuseki* Factor

Some scholars have attributed anime’s ability to appeal to so many diverse audiences worldwide to its perceived hybridity, whereby “distinctive Japanese aesthetics and Western cultural forms and values coexist,” and can therefore be “appreciated by Japanese and Western audiences alike” (Bainbridge and Norris 243). While anime undoubtedly draws on Japanese traditions of art, the first Japanese animators in the 1910s were also inspired by early American and European animation (Patten 278). For example, acclaimed Japanese animator Tezuka Osamu, hailed as the pioneer of anime, acknowledged the influence which Western animators like Walt Disney had on his work (Schodt 63). This hybridity is likewise reflected in the story

narratives of the anime themselves, from the retro series *Samurai Champloo* (2004-05), characterised by a fusion of hip-hop and samurai/*chambara* culture, to *Tenkuu Tenshou Nazca* (1998), which revolves around a group of modern-day Japanese individuals who discover that they are the reincarnations of ancient Incan warriors. Some of these narratives, furthermore, appear devoid of Japanese cues altogether, like the pseudo-European setting premised on the medieval art of alchemy in the series *Hagane no Renkinjutsushi (Fullmetal Alchemist)*, 2002-04), or the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Trigun* (1998), with its eclectic blend of science fiction and cowboy/Wild West motifs.

Anime as a hybrid form thus might be seen to represent “the mixing of elements of multiple cultural origins” (Iwabuchi 71). At the same time, its mixed nature enables anime to occupy a space that signifies neither one nor another culture, but is instead ‘stateless’. It exists “at a nexus point in global culture; this position allows it to inhabit an amorphous new media territory that crosses and even intermingles national boundaries” (Napier 2005: 23). To that end, some commentators have argued that anime owes its appeal to what has been described as its *mukokuseki* quality.

The Japanese term *mukokuseki* literally means “something or someone lacking any nationality,” but also implies “the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context, which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features” (Iwabuchi 28). In analyses of anime, this concept is most obviously addressed through the discussion of human characters that are decidedly non-Japanese in appearance. Usagi Tsukino, the main protagonist of the series *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn (Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon)*, 1992-93), for example, is a regular Japanese schoolgirl who nevertheless has blonde hair and blue eyes. This *mukokuseki* quality becomes further pronounced in anime series that adapt their narratives from non-Japanese texts, such as *Watashi no Ashinaga Ojisan (My Daddy-Long-Legs)*, 1990), which is based on the American novel *Daddy-Long-Legs* (Webster, 1912), and *Akage no An (Red-haired Anne)*, 1979), which is an adaptation of the 1908 novel *Anne of Green Gables* by classic Canadian writer L. M. Montgomery.

Acclaimed Japanese animator Mamoru Oshii (*Ghost in the Shell*, 1995 and *The Sky Crawlers*, 2008) has been oft quoted for his suggestion that Japanese artists view Western bodies as the ideal over ‘realistic’ Japanese characters in their works (Iwabuchi 2002; Napier 2005). Furthermore, non-Japanese viewers unfamiliar with anime’s visual designs have been known to “cast such representations as possessing putatively Caucasian features” (Bryce, Davis and Bar-

ber). Susan Napier argues, however, that a more accurate description of these *mukokuseki* characters is not that they look Japanese or Western, but rather that they have been created in a “nonculturally specific anime style” (Napier 2005: 24). Napier also notes that there are some “virtually standard aspects” of this “anime style” (Napier 2007: 175), which include examples such as large, sparkling eyes



and hair of every colour imaginable, and comic or cute ‘super deformed’ characters with small torsos and oversized heads. The appeal of this ‘anime style’ for both Japanese and non-Japanese fans might thus be that it provides a ‘stateless’ space, neither distinctly Japanese nor distinctly Western, for exploring what Napier describes as fluid, “postethnic” identities (Napier 2005: 26) against the background of a postmodern world. This argument is supported by the way fans identify with values or themes that, while embodied in an anime character or setting, are universal in the way they relate to the human condition: like the determination to never give up, the empowerment of women, nostalgia for childhood or the uncertainties of adolescence (Napier 2007: 179-85).

Anime’s *mukokuseki* status, as informed by its hybrid nature, thus serves to demonstrate the understanding that “the ‘Japan’ in ‘Japanese popular culture’ is always already dislocated, contaminated, cross-pollinated and criss-crossed” (Allen and Sakamoto 3). Indeed, in his study of cultural globalisation against the backdrop of Japan’s progressive rise as a cultural power in Asia, Koichi Iwabuchi observes that Japaneseness as a nationalist discourse has

historically been addressed through Japan’s perceived “sophisticated capacity to culturally indigenize the foreign, in which terms the putative Japanese national essence is imagined” (18). Iwabuchi further argues that, in response to Western domination, the capacity to assimilate the foreign became defined “as a unique Japanese characteristic” and was moreover considered “evidence of Japanese superiority

to the West” (55). In the 1990s, the surge in and consumption of Japanese popular culture worldwide prompted Japanese commentators to confer a distinctive Japaneseness on cultural products like anime, by claiming that such worldwide “appeal of Japanese popular culture lies in its subtle indigenization of American popular culture” (Iwabuchi 19). The *mukokuseki* quality which informs the hybrid nature of anime hence becomes articulated as a key feature of Japaneseness itself; the Japanese ‘essence’ of anime is thus ironically derived from the blending of cultures to create a ‘stateless’ space that might be viewed to be absent of any ostensibly Japanese markers, or indeed, racial or ethnic markers of any kind.

Yet I would argue that the concept of *mukokuseki* is challenged even in the very utterance of the term ‘anime’. While ‘anime’ simply means ‘animation’ in the Japanese language, the processes of globalisation have absorbed and translated the word for an emerging global lexicon; as such, it is used in Anglophone discourse, by fans and in academia, to refer specifically to *Japanese animation*. Such an understanding indirectly distinguishes anime from other analogous visual media as ‘different’. At the most obvious level,

the reasons for this difference are naturally linked back to anime being ‘Japanese’. In this respect, its *mukokuseki* nature notwithstanding, the ongoing use of the term ‘anime’ confers a Japanese ‘cultural odor’ on these products, which Iwabuchi defines as “the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process” (27). Iwabuchi goes on to cite anime as a key example of a Japanese commodity, which is “culturally odorless” in that it does not “evoke images, or ideas of a Japanese lifestyle” (28). But this is a very broad generalisation to make, which can be disproved by considering specific examples of anime series as well as audience responses toward anime. Just as some series take place in markedly non-Japanese settings, like the ‘pirate fantasy’ adventure *One Piece* (1999-present), others still are grounded in the Japanese landscape, such as the portrayal of contemporary suburban Tokyo life in *Sazae-san* (1969-present). Furthermore, Napier’s empirical study shows how an interest in anime has led to an interest in Japanese culture for some fans, such as learning the history and language of Japan, cultivating knowledge of contemporary Japanese politics or even cooking dishes depicted in some anime series (Napier 2007: 185).

Thus, despite the view of anime as a *mukokuseki* product, it cannot be completely dissociated from ideas of Japaneseness. Attempting to locate this Japaneseness in anime is a complex task, given that it has to take into account its global distribution, the Japanese national or cultural backdrop against which it was created, and translation of anime for non-Japanese sociocultural contexts. Significantly, the difficulty in articulating Japaneseness itself is evocative of the wider contemporary discourse of globalisation as it is understood by Arjun Appadurai (1996), in terms of fluid, interconnected flows in a postmodern world. While a fixed definition of Japaneseness cannot be determined, it is safe to say that an awareness of the concept exists nonetheless, and this “notion of Japaneseness simultaneously influences, and is altered by, cross-cultural communication” (Bryce, Davis, and Barber). One way in which we might articulate a discourse of Japaneseness within the complexities of cross-cultural communication is to frame it within the cultural studies approach to genre formation.

Japaneseness as Genre

Traditional genre theory has typically offered formalist and generalised definitions of genre that are primarily interested in “identifying the abstract theoretical ‘essence’ of a genre in an idealized form” (Mittell 4). Such approaches have attempted to delimit genres as formal

categories that are characterised by specific core elements, or to interpret the textual meanings of genres within historical or sociocultural contexts (Neale and Krutnik 1990; Tulloch 1990). My consideration of Japaneseness, however, draws primarily on Jason Mittell's cultural studies approach to genre theory, which is more concerned with how genre is actually defined and conceived in everyday use or cultural

The crux of Mittell's study is his proposal that genre be re-envisioned as "discursive practices": "by regarding genre as a property and function of discourse, we can examine the ways in which various forms of communication work to constitute generic definitions, meanings, and values within particular historical contexts" (12). Mittell argues that it is more fruitful to view genre as a textual category rather

Cartoons in Japan cater to every conceivable viewer demographic, and thus express a vast range of subjects to accommodate these various audiences...

circulation. More specifically, I refer to how non-Japanese fans might understand and articulate ideas of Japaneseness through their engagement with anime.

For his study, Mittell (2004) draws on Rick Altman's *Film/Genre* (1999), arguably one of the most significant works in contemporary genre discourse. In *Film/Genre*, Altman makes a compelling argument for an analysis of film genres not as textual properties, but as cultural categories, which emerge through cultural processes. While Mittell has adapted this process-based approach for his own work, he is critical of the way "textual structure still remains the centerpiece of [Altman's] approach, making it difficult to provide an account of how genre categories operate outside the bounds of the text" (15). Additionally, given his focus on television studies, Mittell is careful to emphasise how film and television are "distinct medium[s] with vitally different industrial structures and audience practices", which would necessitate "carefully adapt[ing] the theoretical advances offered within film studies to the particularities of television genres" (16). Mittell argues that the existing theoretical tools for genre analysis, which have been developed primarily in literary and cinema studies, are inadequate for a consideration of television, one reason for which being that television "rarely has pretensions toward high aesthetic value," unlike literature and film; to apply the same analytical tools to television hence "dooms television to evaluative failure and misrepresents the way the majority of television viewers and producers engage with the medium" (xiii). This argument holds true for anime, which like television circulates in contemporary culture as a popular cultural artefact which fans engage with first and foremost as a product of entertainment.

than in terms of textual components – that is, genres do not emerge from intrinsic textual features of texts, but instead "work to categorize texts and link them into clusters of cultural assumptions" (xiv). This is achieved through the processes of definition, interpretation, and evaluation, which Mittell describes as "the three primary ways genres circulate and become culturally manifest" (16). Accordingly, considerations of genre in this framework should be less preoccupied with "interpretive readings or deep structural analysis" than with the "surface manifestations and common articulations" (Mittell 13) of genre. In other words, cultural genre analysis should examine the way discursive utterances of genre are articulated across a breadth of generic discourses in order to discern larger patterns of definitions, meanings and hierarchies that in turn constitute the larger understanding of genre as a cultural operation.

The global circulation of anime poses interesting complexities for its articulation in genre discourse. While the narratives that have taken this form would in Japan simply be viewed as the representation of the cartoon genre, elsewhere in the world anime has become a genre unto itself within a cartoons discourse. Some of the various ways in which this distinction has been addressed in Western understanding are encapsulated in the definition which a simple search of the *Oxford Dictionaries Online* website gives for the term 'anime': "Japanese film and television animation, typically having a science-fiction theme and sometimes including violent or explicitly sexual material" (*Oxford Dictionaries Online* 2011). Such a definition ignores the scope of subject material that is represented in anime: following the conventions of traditional genre analysis, anime as a genre is thus reduced to the textual components of 'science-fiction' and 'violent or explicitly sexual material'.

Western criticism of the uncompromising portrayal of violence and sex in anime in particular lends weight to Mittell's assertion that genres are culturally practiced categories. Cartoons in Japan cater to every conceivable viewer demographic, and thus express a vast range of subjects to accommodate these various audiences, violence and sex being just two of the many facets of this subject matter. On the other hand, cartoons elsewhere are "culturally defined as a genre whose primary audience [is] children, and [are] not legitimate entertainment for adults as part of a mass audience" (Mittell 62). Anime has thus been viewed unfavourably by some Western commentators because the medium does not adhere to their generic expectations for cartoons – the condemnation of violence and sex in anime is based on the assumption that anime is targeted primarily at a child demographic in the same way that Western cartoons are.

Returning to the above-mentioned dictionary definition, a second way that anime in global circulation has been differentiated from other cartoon forms is in its description as 'Japanese.' The very utterance of the word 'anime,' whether by worldwide audiences and fan groups, in industrial practices and academic literature – to use Mittell's terms, as "surface manifestations and common articulations" (13) across cultural discourses – acts to confer a putative 'Japaneseness' on anime. In the same way that the claim to a national Japanese 'essence' has been constantly redefined and reinterpreted to accommodate the changing historical and political landscape of Japan (Iwabuchi 2002), Japaneseness in anime is often less a textual essence than it is a manifestation of the cultural practices of definition, interpretation and evaluation which non-Japanese audiences, industrialists and social and academic commentators bring to bear on this cultural artefact.

Iwabuchi's demonstration of the ongoing reinterpretation of Japaneseness to accommodate the historical transformation of Japanese nationalist discourse is also a reflection of another important understanding of genres: they are not "ahistorical and static" but "shift and evolve in relation to their cultural contexts" (Mittell 5). At the same time, Mittell argues that "although genres are constantly in flux and under definitional negotiation, generic terms are still sufficiently salient that most people would agree on a similar working definition for any genre" (17). To accommodate this understanding of Japaneseness as a 'stable' category in flux, Mittell stresses that genre analysis must shift from simply "asking what a genre means" to "what a genre means for specific groups in a particular instance" (5). These ideas form the basis for my research focus on non-Japanese anime fans as a specific cultural group, and for the argument that Japaneseness as a 'generic term' can and does constitute a categorical frame of reference for these fans. I tested this

premise by asking a sample group of non-Japanese anime fans to identify elements in anime which they felt were specific to Japanese culture (Leong 46-53), extrapolating from Mittell's assertion that though "genres are not defined by textual elements, cultural practices constituting generic categories through definitional discourses typically focus on textual features" (108).

Japaneseness in (Fan) Perspective

Mittell uses the term 'discursive cluster' to describe the way genres exist as 'stable' categories in flux – that is to say, "a generic cluster functions as a stable cultural convenience, a shorthand label for a set of linked assumptions and categorized texts, yet these discourses (and associated texts) are bound to shift meanings and definitions as a genre's history transpires" (17). This notion is exemplified in my analysis of non-Japanese anime fans, which demonstrates a conceptualisation of Japaneseness that is characterised not by 'essentialist' textual components, but by the discursive and fluid practices of definition, interpretation and evaluation with which fans engage (Leong 46-53). These processes are reflected in the way the anime fans in my academic audience study define Japaneseness on multiple levels of discourse.

Some examples of Japaneseness given in my study were straightforward enough, such as *sushi*, Japan's *Shinto* religion and even Tokyo Tower. Fans also defined Japaneseness as "spirituality," "rituals" and "festivals," with their traditional connotations, alongside more contemporary phenomena like "technology," and the gambling game "pachinko" (Leong 46). Others still demonstrated a view of Japaneseness as continually evolving alongside Japan's historical and social landscape, for example in tracing the use of swords in anime series like *X* (2001-02) and *Bleach* (2004-present), which take place in contemporary Japan, back to Japanese "samurai tradition" (Leong 47).

Most fans in my research also cited the prevalence of Japanese language conventions in anime as a significant indicator of Japaneseness. At the same time, however, some fans were able to point out that while such Japanese phrases and honorifics are specific to the cultural contexts in which they are used, the *concepts they communicate* are not (Leong 48). In a similar fashion, while some fans defined certain story tropes used in anime, such as "the importance of friendship" and "the importance of protecting others as the key to being strong", as features of Japaneseness, this is differentiated from the notion that they are *specific* to Japanese culture – for fans, these tropes are Japanese simply because they recur prominently in anime (Leong 51). Conversely, the use of specific visual techniques in anime, like a sweat-

drop on a character's head to symbolise embarrassment or bemusement, are defined as Japanese because they accrue their meanings in a Japanese context – to put it another way, it is the way these visual cues are coded as symbols and propagated in Japanese culture which enable them to produce meaning (Leong 50).

The disinclination by some fans to specify examples of Japaneseness in itself was revealing. One fan felt that the “scope is just too big” and it would be “like trying to list the elements of American culture that appear in Hollywood films” (Leong 51). Yet even in articulating the difficulty of defining Japaneseness, such a comment draws attention back to the observation that anime is first and foremost an “original product of the concatenation of circumstances that have created the culture of modern Japan” (Napier 2005: 27), thereby reaffirming the link between anime and Japanese culture.

My scholarly study of non-Japanese anime fans, therefore, demonstrates a conceptualisation of Japaneseness that is diverse in its scope, whether as textual features or as an evolving concept, according to their frequency or prominence in anime narratives, in comparison to Western cultural paradigms, and even in explications of the difficulties of delimiting a discourse of Japaneseness (Leong 46-53). In Mittell's terms, Japaneseness here can be constituted as a genre through the way these individual fan interpretations are linked into “clusters of cultural assumptions” (16) in anime fandom. Hence, rather than downplay the Japaneseness of anime to account for its global popularity, its formulation as genre within a cultural studies framework allows for a more sophisticated negotiation of the complex mix and also an exchange of transcultural values and flows which characterise today's global climate.

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The *Higurashi* Code

Algorithm and Adaptation in the *Otaku* Industry and Beyond

John Wheeler

How do you kill the player and resurrect them as a spectator? This question haunts those charged with adapting video games from their interactive form to one that puts an insurmountable barrier between media and the individual – an impossible translation taking place on the most basic structural level. The dilemma surrounding the adaptation of interactivity is visible within the Japanese *otaku* industry, where media forms must be constructed to survive fluid translation from one media form to another.

An adaptation between forms tends to function within a hierarchy of mediums: a book is usually awarded more artistic significance than its film adaptation, the film more than its licensed video game form (Hutcheon 4). Yet, in some ways, the Japanese *otaku* industry works outside of this paradigm, with narratives easily and repeatedly crossing the seemingly impermeable barriers between print, film and digital forms without much respectability lost or gained – manga, for instance, carries little more or less cultural significance than anime or the ‘light’ novel. But as the medium specificity that defines how a form functions and is received cannot be smoothly overcome, one of the innovations of the Japanese *otaku* industry is the way creators either consciously or unconsciously anticipate the inevitable adaptation of their properties on levels of structure, narrative and aesthetic. 07th Expansion's *Higurashi When They Cry* (*Higurashi no naku koro ni*, hereafter *Higurashi*), a major multimedia franchise in the Japanese industry, exemplifies this trend and also reveals ways in which the creators

driving the *otaku* popular culture industry manipulate narrative and structural elements to ease adaptation.

Higurashi began its commercial life as a “visual novel” in 2002 at the Comiket (Comic Market), a large biannual convention in Tokyo that showcases *dōjin* – self-published print comics and video games that are either derivative versions of popular *otaku* properties or, as in the case of *Higurashi*, completely original works.¹ According to the creator of the 07th Expansion's website, from its humble origins as a serialized PC visual novel sold in limited quantities at consecutive Comikets, *Higurashi* expanded wildly over the following eight years, crossing mediums through adaptations into an anime television series, manga, novels, a live-action film and finally returning across the barrier of interactivity as a first-person shooting game for the Nintendo DS video game console.

Each of the *Higurashi* PC games is a self-contained story about the rural, isolated world of Hinamizawa and the encounters of its residents with entrenched familial politics and a murderous Shinto cult. The beginning of each story is always the same: teenager Keiichi Maebara moves with his family from Tokyo to the fictional, rural town of Hinamizawa. He adapts to life away from the city and befriends many of the other students, building an idyllic, contained world far from the madness of the city. The narrative turns on a local festival where the same two adults

1. *Dōjin* producers range from single artists/writers working alone and publishing comics (analogous to American underground “zines”) to small independent companies such as 07th Expansion. For an analysis of how Comiket functions within the *otaku* industry, see Azuma 25-26.



are always murdered – the mystery of the murderer and the motive changing in each game, something which alters the progression of the stories so much that the games become shockingly different in tone and narrative. Each story wraps up by the end of the disc, with the murder either solved or left unsolved. The original releases of *Higurashi* were called “question arcs,” offering clues but not solutions to the mysteries raised by each story. These were followed by “answer arc” counterparts that explained – though not always neatly – the murders, taking a different perspective from the complementing question arc. When *Higurashi* was adapted into an anime series in 2007, the PC games were similarly divided into loosely connected story arcs running from four to nine episodes.

To understand *Higurashi* as a multimedia property, we must first understand the nature of its original medium: the “visual novel.” The visual novel is a hybridized genre of video game that draws on the tradition of text-based adventure games. The player interacts with the game by clicking to scroll text and progress the narrative. Although we will see that *Higurashi* is a unique exception, the traditional visual novel contains a narrative with branching paths that lead to different endings based on the player’s input. Hiroki Azuma describes the origins of the visual novel – “novel game” in the translation of his monograph – as a sub-genre of “girl games,” which are PC games where the player reads a story and chooses from a series of simple, plot-based questions with pornographic pictures of the female characters as the endgame reward for correct answers (75). “Reading” in the visual novel is supplemented by two-dimensional char-

acters superimposed on a static background. In the case of *Higurashi*, the narrator of each game tells the story from the first-person perspective and is unseen by the player – the view of the other characters in the story, in addition to the background, appearing behind scrolling text, taking on the visual qualities of a first-person camera shot. The text is also supplemented by repetitive sound effects and music which build up atmosphere and trigger shock moments in the narrative.

Higurashi is a unique visual novel from the inside-out: from its deep structuring algorithms to its narrative, it is in critical dialogue with the visual novel genre, exposing its inner workings and toying with them. *Higurashi* as a *dōjin* visual novel series operates as a median between interactive and non-interactive media, and therefore raises questions about how adaptation occurs between two fundamentally different types of cultural products. While *Higurashi* begs to be approached from different positions, this article will focus on how the games function as visual novels and, moreover, how the algorithm underlying the games was translated into animation and other mediums.

Playing the Visual Novel

To understand how *Higurashi* functions as a video game, it is important to first understand how video games themselves function as interactive media. The underlying structural element of a video game is the algorithm – in other words, the code that establishes the rules of the game and binds it totally. The algorithm is the

‘alpha and omega’ of the game and cannot be transcended by a player within the game-space itself. Some titles, such as those by Will Wright (*The Sims*, *Spore*) or the *Grand Theft Auto* series (1997-2009), attempt to create the illusion of an open and malleable game-space by complicating the algorithm to make the experience seem freer compared to traditionally constrained games. In playing a video game, the gamer learns the limits and functions of the algorithm – in *Super Mario Brothers*, for instance, pressing the ‘A’ button to jump, moving along the side-scrolling screen to the end of the level, touching the axe beyond the boss to defeat

and therefore receive the best ending (i.e. the one where ‘the girl of your dreams’ gets naked) (Azuma 2009).

If visual novels as a hybrid genre generally employ self-reflexive algorithms that reward the player for obsessively solving them, *Higurashi* instead works differently by removing the ability of the player to interact with the game on anything more than a rudimentary level, thus becoming more novelistic in the process. The game reduces the actual algorithm to an infinitesimally simple code: click the mouse to scroll the text (the embodied interaction becomes very similar to turning pages in a book). No choices arise in

The most important function of the algorithm in *Higurashi* is the lack of freedom it affords the player within the game-space.

him, *et cetera*, are all essential pieces of the algorithm that must be learned in order to ultimately ‘bear’ the game. Part of the joy of playing a video game is the sheer satisfaction that arises from unconsciously mastering the algorithm. As Alex Galloway writes: “To play the game means to play the code of the game. To win means to know the system. And thus to interpret a game means to interpret its algorithm (to discover its parallel algorithm)” (91).²

The player of a traditional visual novel teaches themselves what types of conventional narrative questions yield correct or incorrect answers, and therefore is able to ‘fill in the blanks’ regardless of the specific narrative in order to achieve the ending he or she desires. The algorithm creates a simulation of human interaction, whereby the ‘real world’ action of building relationships with desired women is reduced to a quiz that tests the player’s knowledge of common *otaku* character types and conventions. The popularity of the visual novel is a major factor in the development of what Hiroki Azuma refers to as the “database animal” – that is, a new kind of human that has internalized the postmodern insistence on specialized, self-contained narratives, and also compartmentalizes traditional anime and manga story elements in order to solve the algorithms of visual novels

the game asking the player to answer plot-based questions in order to proceed. Although, unlike a print or ‘digital’ novel, the player is given an “auto” option allowing them to forego even the most rudimentary level of interaction and simply watch the text scroll by. This option even gives the player the ability to ‘multitask’ at the expense of missing pieces of the story – a ‘true’ sign of this contemporary age of technology-induced attention deficit disorder.

The most important function of the algorithm in *Higurashi* is the lack of freedom it affords the player within the game-space. In this way, *Higurashi* is nothing like a print or digital novel, which offers the reader freedom to peruse the text and search within it either via an index or by using a digital search function – although *Higurashi* does offer an option to review completed passages (Mitchell 207-9). The interaction with the narrative in *Higurashi* is far more restrictive than an actual novel, ultimately making it more akin to a film or television series. However, even a DVD offers the option to ‘skip’ chapters on the disc menu or fast-forward; the algorithm of *Higurashi*, in contrast, restricts the narrative to a totally linear path. As we shall soon see, the algorithm of the typical visual novel becomes absorbed into the narrative of *Higurashi* itself, leaving only a skeleton of a structural code behind.

2. McKenzie Wark writes about the “algorithm,” the combination of the algorithm and the ‘real world’ action it represents in *Gamer Theory* (2007). See also Paul Dourish’s theories of “embodied interaction,” which explains how computer interface systems are embodied with active meaning because they replicate actions and tools from the ‘real world’.

The simplification of the code in *Higurashi* is linked to narrative and genre experimentations by its creators, particularly in the individual story arcs “Massacre Chapter” (*Minagoroshi-hen*, 2005) and “Festival Ac-

companying Chapter” (*Matsuribayashi-hen*, 2006). The convoluted yet endlessly repetitive stories about murder in a small town are revealed to exist on the same dimensional plane, with one of the characters (the young girl Rika) aware that she is trapped in a cyclic, ever-repeating yet always altered narrative, and seemingly unable to alter the storyline toward a ‘happy ending’. The burden of narrative action is shifted for the first time in the series onto Rika – who moves from a spectator’s position in the background to transcend the self-contained world of Hinamizawa – as she attempts to change the outcome of the story so that she and her friends can be saved from their inevitable tragic fate. Although the player can identify with Rika – who is aware of how the ‘world’ works and of the algorithm that would define it in a normal visual novel – he or she is, however, unable to apply the unbending, flat code in any meaningful way.

The game version of *Higurashi* externalizes the typical visual novel algorithm in its narrative: Rika ‘becomes’ the player, keenly aware of her presence within a narrative and attempting to ‘free herself’ of the algorithm by getting the best ending possible. The player on the ‘real side’ of the computer screen has no power to solve the mystery *within* the ‘world’ of the game – thus saving each character from their respective fates – so he or she must be content to solve it *outside* of the game-space and click through as each “answer arc” confirms or denies the solution the player has crafted. In fact, according to a frequently asked question listed on the 07th Expansion website about *Higurashi*, there is even a choice presented in the “Massacre Chapter” that seems to be asking for player interaction, but on second glance it is merely a form of dramatic presentation: i.e. that the player should treat the choice presented as one that can only be selected by the protagonist him or herself. The language of the question about this false choice suggests the player’s frustration at being unable to interact with a seemingly available choice, “no matter what I do.” This irritation is perhaps a result of the way *Higurashi* alters typical visual novel conventions.³

The gaming ‘pleasure’ of *Higurashi* comes from the same place as a mystery novel, and the inability to affect any change within the game-space, coupled with the serialized nature of the story, puts the burden of solving each mystery into a different part of the mind of the gamer than the space that deciphers solutions to the algorithm of a traditional visual novel. The creators attach a “difficulty” rating to each

chapter that carries far different connotations from the typical choice from ‘easy’ to ‘hard’ that comes with starting a brand new game. When Azuma describes visual novel players as “passive,” he seems to forget that while he or she are passive gamers in their interaction with the algorithm, they become far more *active* readers than typical video game players – a trait perhaps best exemplified in the gamer-text relationship found in *Higurashi* (76). In its original form as a PC *dōjin*, *Higurashi* was already a strange multimedia amalgam, with both novelistic *and* cinematic interactions grafted onto a rudimentary gaming algorithm.

Adapting the Algorithm

The major problems inherent in adapting an interactive text into a film or novel are potentially unsolvable because translating the player’s living, reciprocal relationship with an algorithm into that of a passive reader or viewer creates a fundamental sense of loss and constraint in someone familiar with the adapted game. As Linda Hutcheon writes: “Transposition to another medium, or even moving within the same one, always means change, or in the language of the new media, ‘reformatting’” (16). As was discussed in the previous section, *Higurashi* occupies a middle ground between interactive and non-interactive mediums. With the clearly demarcated “arcs” of the *Higurashi* television series, which on a strictly narrative level stray little from the original visual novel series, the appeal of ‘watching’ becomes linked to the ‘pleasure’ of attaining the ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ending in a video game. Other adaptations of visual novels where the action occurs within a single narrative with branching paths based around the choice between a ‘harem of girlfriends’, tend instead to remove all traces of interactivity by establishing a single, canonical female character for the male protagonist to ‘attain’. The ‘pleasure’ of choosing and solving the algorithm to ‘win’ each individual character becomes merely *the pleasure of watching the characters*, the interactive choice between female anime character archetypes internalized in the viewer’s mind. When the original *Higurashi* question arc, “Spirited Away by a Demon Chapter” (*Onikakushi-hen*, 2002), was adapted into a live-action film by Ataru Oikawa in 2008, it opened up the world of Hinamizawa to a new audience yet also left these individuals without a solution to the mystery that the question arc posed. As few of the background story elements and characters change fundamentally from iteration to iteration, part of the appeal of *Higurashi* as a property becomes the medium-to-medium translation itself, seeing changes in the perspective and style used to essentially tell the same stories.

There is an unbreakable link between the algorithm that defines a game and the narrative, and often the algorithm also manifests itself in the visual aesthetic chosen by the developers to represent their game-space. If the flatness and simplicity of the algorithm underpinning the *dōjin Higurashi* manifests in the visual two-dimensionality of text running over non-animated, two-dimensional characters superimposed on immobile backgrounds, then naturally the adaptation from the static world of the visual novel to an animated world structurally defined by ‘cels’ rather than ‘codes’ would change the visual aesthetic of the product fundamentally.

The shift from the aesthetic of a visual novel to an anime series is, therefore, a transition that occurs both on a level of animation and of perspective: the novelistic first-person perspective of the *dōjin* becomes a third-person perspective in the anime, and all characters are visible in front of the camera’s lens. Yet remnants of the visual novel’s static two-dimensionality remain, particularly in the quasi-deformed character styles and the use of ‘shock cuts’ instead of camera zooms to move toward characters within the frame. The *Higurashi* anime, therefore, retains some of the static qualities of the visual novel, and a degree of continuity of visual aesthetic is established across adaptations. One of the obvious contradictions between style and substance within *Higurashi*, both as a visual novel *and* as an anime, is the uneasy relationship between the bright color palette and ‘cutesy’ characters, in addition to the shocking, usually gynocentric violence of the narrative. Interestingly, however, it is in the translation into a manga series – with its transition to ‘black and white’, and the return to fully static images – that *Higurashi* gains a true visual depth that reflects both the psychological states of its characters and the striking horror of its storyline. Its artists – a different one for each arc adapted – use shadows to greater psychological effect than the anime or the visual novel, thereby conquering some of the ‘flatness’ defined by the underlying structure and aesthetic of the previous forms.

The transition from visual novel to anime is also abetted by the similarity in sound design between the two forms: both game and series use ‘shock strands’ on the soundtrack and music to emotionally signal the player/viewer. In the case of the visual novel, this is another departure from the format of the novel – the creators even refer to their series as a ‘sound novel’, a small and rather vaguely defined sub-genre of visual novels. Nevertheless, this categorization partially works to fundamentally distinguish their work from other visual novels. As *Higurashi* is more about player affect than gamer input, the use of sound, especially the ubiquitous and maddening cry of

the *higurashi* cicadas themselves, is a major means of conveying emotion. The music and effects in the visual novels are simple and oft-repeated in the same way the character animations and backgrounds are, owing much to the limited budget of a *dōjin* game and having the effect of reducing emotional cues to an extremely simple level. As with many elements of the game, we see in the sound design a fundamentally cinematic technique used in the service of the game’s more novelistic elements: the conveyance of an unbendable narrative through ‘scrolling’ text.

Higurashi has proven conducive to fan production, with a *dōjin* released at Comiket composed entirely of fan-submitted narratives turned into games by 07th Expansion. As Hiroki Azuma writes, the small, self-contained narratives that have become the storytelling norm in the *otaku* industry beg for fan input, and in the case of *Higurashi*, the draw of inserting one’s own story into the established world and characters of Hinamizawa was a natural byproduct (Azuma 2009). In many ways, the original visual novels created by 07th Expansion were themselves a form of fan production in their independent origins and reliance on *otaku* character tropes. While my research and this article have drawn from a specific example from within the Japanese *otaku* industry, the line between interactivity and spectatorship continues to be blurred by major producers of entertainment around the world. For this type of malleability of medium to succeed, the nature of the gamer and their interaction with the game-space must be reformatted by the algorithm itself. In other words, the gamer becomes the viewer/reader and the viewer/reader becomes the gamer.

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3. Text from the *Higurashi no naku koro ni* website, translated from Japanese into English. Q: During the latter half of the “Massacre Chapter,” there is a choice I can’t choose no matter what I do. A: The appearance of the choice is just for dramatic effect, in reality you cannot choose. Please consider it as that character deciding on the choice for him or herself.

Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*

Thinking Before the Act

Frédéric Clément

Since the enactment of the revised Bill 156 of Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Youths,¹ creators of *manga* and anime have had to reconsider the representations of sexuality in each of their respective works. A shrewd observer of his medium and society, Japanese anime director Mamoru Oshii, had already been reflecting on the increased sexualization of fictional characters. In 2004, several years before Bill 156, Oshii directed the anime film *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, a futuristic police story in which 'sex dolls' – modelled after little girls – become sentient and murder their owners. Oshii's preoccupation in this film seems to be with the remnants of desire and sexuality in 'the age of their mechanical reproduction' and the consequent discomfort in such a civilization. In this article, I will first discuss a few points on the depiction of 'little girls' (*shôjo* literally meaning "little female") brought up in the two essential writings by renowned anime and manga scholars: Susan J. Napier and Frederik L. Schodt. Following this, I will then analyse *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, mainly through the inversion of what Napier calls the "disappearing *shôjo*," as well as a reflection on the doll's body within the motion picture as a kind of sexual 'no man's land', both metaphorically and literally. Subsequently, I will analyse the anime film through the prism of horror – that is, focusing my attention on how,

paradoxically, these 'dolls' become 'monsters' in order to combat abjection and, in turn, reclaim their 'innocence.'

On Disappearance, Cuteness and the 'Lolita Complex'

In 2005, Susan J. Napier, a pioneer in academic studies of Japanese anime in the West, released a revised and augmented edition of her 2001 ground-breaking 'anime-exclusive' book, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. In one of her added chapters, "Now You See Her, Now You Don't: The Disappearing *Shôjo*," Napier discusses the evanescent figure of 'the little girl' in recent anime series and movies, and demonstrates the existence of a character type in anime that goes against historical and etymological links between feminine characteristics and their corporeal materiality. Rather than being associated with her corporeality,

Napier's *shôjo* is better associated with a process of evanescence and 'vanishing.' In contemporary anime, the stability of corporeality seems to be a major issue for the 'little girls' studied by Napier: one gradually becomes transparent when she is transported to a 'fantastic world' and must even forgo the use of her name, thus falling into a kind of linguistic invisibility (*Spirited Away*, Hayao Miyazaki, 2001); another, wandering in a 'surreal world', seemingly ends up being impaled by thousands of flying swords and physically disappears, but also 'vanishes' from her friends' memories (*Shôjo Kakumei Utena*, Kunihiko Ikuhara, 1997); a group of them, unknowingly imprisoned in a kind of purgatory (most likely to expiate their suicides), eventually 'leave'

their bodies, thus disappearing twice rather than just once (*Haibane Renmei*, Yoshitashi ABe, 1998); and Lain, the protagonist of *Serial Experiments Lain* (Ryutaro Nakamura, 1998), assumes the form of an all-powerful, immaterial entity by becoming a 'cyber-goddess' and then 'removing' herself from the memories of everyone who has ever met her, therefore bringing about a kind of psychic 'disappearance'. Napier also identifies the protagonist of the first *Ghost in the Shell* film (Mamoru Oshii, 1995), a cyborg police officer named Motoko Kusanagi who inhabits a little girl's body at the very end of the film, as "the most prominent progenitor of the disappearing *shôjo*" (Napier 170).

The 'cutifying' – indeed, almost 'fetishising' – aesthetic that permeates representations of the 'little girl' in anime and *manga* is a prominent visual and thematic characteristic of these art forms. This sexualization of the little girl is known in Japan as 'lolicon' (aka: 'rorikon'), which is a portmanteau of the term "Lolita complex."² The word 'lolicon' is used both as an adjective (e.g. a lolicon work) and a noun, in which case it refers to an enthusiast of lolicon material (e.g. to be a lolicon). In one chapter of his book, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, Frederik L. Schodt, chronicles the evolution of the representation of sexuality in general – and particularly of lolicon – during the late 1980s in Japan (1996). Up until that time, manga creators adhered to the guidelines set forth by the relatively vague Article 175 of the Japanese Penal Code, otherwise known as 'the obscenity law', as well as tacit rules concerning what belonged to 'good taste' and what did not. Compliance with those guidelines gradually receded to a resurgence of sexual imagery. This resurgence brought, among other things, a progressively more violent sexuality, including depictions of underage characters not exclusive to adult-oriented manga, but also in publications targeting the general public. Schodt sums up this change of disposition in the following way, underlining the difference between the female sexual 'ideal' in the West and in Japan:

The specific prohibition against showing pubic hair, however, may have indirectly encouraged some clever erotic manga artists to draw prepubescent girls as sex objects, with ridiculously inflated breasts. Whatever the original motivation, in the 1980s traditional erotic manga for adult men...gradually gave way to erotic manga with a rorikon flavor. Instead of adult males doing very adult things to mature women (neighbours' wives, waitresses, office workers, buxom foreigners, that sort of thing), the sex objects became increasingly 'cute' – and younger. If in the West it was

a Madonna-whore (but nonetheless adult woman) image that fired men's sexual fantasies, in Japan the equivalent was a smiling junior high school virgin, clad in her 'sailor suit' school uniform and holding a stuffed animal toy. (Schodt 54-5)

Although commercial anime targeted at the lolicon market has been mostly phased out, *manga* and video games of this type are nevertheless thriving on account of their low production costs and ease of distribution (only time will tell how the relatively recent passing of Bill 156 affects digital distribution of lolicon material). The 'little girl' is represented ambiguously in Japanese visual culture: 'innocence' and 'sexuality' exist side by side in the same 'undeveloped' body, a problematic combination that will be magnified in my next section below, the anime feature film *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*.

Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence: Material Girls

The first *Ghost in the Shell* film ends with protagonist Motoko Kusanagi's 'ghost' being transferred, after recently merging with that of an artificial intelligence (AI) born from the 'flow' of information on the network, into an artificial body shaped like a little girl's.³ The sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, takes place three years after the complete disappearance of the entity that Motoko and the Puppet Master merged into, as cyborg policeman Batô and his human partner Togusa are still part of the counter-terrorist unit Public Security Section 9. While investigating sex gynoids (female androids) that kill their owners, Batô discovers criminal groups are being hired by the maker of the gynoids to kidnap little girls. This 'maker', a company named Locus Solus, is trying to copy little girls' 'ghosts' into the bodies of 'sex dolls' in order to make them 'more real.' By progressively partitioning the process of revealing the *shôjo* – first through the voice, then through images – before unveiling her in a 'state' of voice/image synchronicity at the very end of the film, Oshii seems to think of the 'little girl' from the other end of Napier's above-mentioned spectrum.

In *Innocence*'s very first scene, Batô fights one of the gynoids infused with the 'ghost' of a kidnapped girl. The girl, whose ghost is imprisoned within the 'shell' (i.e. the body) of a gynoid dressed as a *geisha*, beseeches Batô: "Tasukéte" ("Please help us..." in the English subtitles). At this point, the 'real,' living little girl exists only on the audio track, since the body seen on-screen is only a borrowed form which she 'haunts' against her own will. Batô shoots the gynoid, 'de-

1. Bill 156, which concerned the sexualized representations of so-called 'fictional youths' in Japan, was submitted in November 2010 and then later approved in December 2010. It officially took effect in July 2011.

2. The term originates from the title and eponymous character of the 1955 novel *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, in which a teacher in his 40s falls in love with a girl at the dawn of adolescence nicknamed 'Lolita' (1989).

3. The 'ghost' is the 'spirit' and/or 'consciousness' of an individual (this is never made explicit in any of the movies), while the 'shell' is its 'physical body'.

stroys' it, and the rest of the movie is spent trying to solve the mystery of the 'killer' gynoids. The second appearance of the little girl takes place in the police forensics laboratory run by Coroner Haraway, as Batô and Togusa are investigating the murderous behaviour of the 'sex dolls'.⁴ Haraway plays back the gynoid's last words to the two partners: "Tasukété," they hear in a continuous loop. In this scene, Oshii adds visuals to the little girl's voice: the forensic scientist's computer terminal projects a three-dimensional depiction of the voice as a cascade of pixels, which allows the little girl, through a representation of her word, into the realm of the visible.

The little girl's 'voice' is featured in seven shots, as if it were a physical object around which one is able to move to better examine it. In this manner, the voice,

...the way the dolls reveal their
interior mechanism seems like a protest
against the cult of beauty and youth
conveyed by the Nazi regime.

bodiless though it may be, is nevertheless endowed with a 'physical presence' without ever becoming tangible (since light exhibits both particle and wave properties and is never quite material or immaterial). The third manifestation of the little girl occurs when Batô finds a hologram between the pages of *The Doll*, a 1934 book by German artist Hans Bellmer, whose importance in the movie soon becomes apparent. This time, we do not hear any sound whatsoever; the little girl is motionless and completely silent in this hologram, still at the border between materiality and immateriality. Lastly, her fourth manifestation happens when she is rescued by Batô at the very end of the film, and her voice and body are, for the first time, perfectly synchronized. Even though Oshii could not have conceptualized his film in response to Napier's writings (her book's expanded edition, which features the chapter "The Disappearing *Shôjo*," was published after the movie's release), I nonetheless contend that the director, as a careful observer of his field, knowingly focused his reflection on the subject of little girls' corporeality in anime.

4. This character is a real-life reference to philosopher and cyborg theorist Donna J. Haraway, who wrote the influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (Haraway 1991).

Bellmer's Dolls: A Sexual "No Man's Land"

It is revealed during a meeting between Batô, his colleague Togusa and their superior that the 'sex dolls' are called "Hadaly" by their manufacturer. This name is a reference to the novel *L'Ève Future* by French author Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, published in 1886, from which the film takes its opening quote: "Since our gods and our aspirations are no longer anything but scientific, why should our loves not be so, as well?"⁵ As for the gynoids' physical appearance, it is directly borrowed from the works of German surrealist artist Hans Bellmer who, in the 1930s, published a photo album titled *The Doll*. In his particularly thorough essay on the thematic and visual links between this film and the works of Bellmer, Steven T. Brown correlates the uncanny

subjects seen in the movie and the pertinent elements borrowed from Bellmer (2008): the cruciform silhouette of a doll seen in the opening credits, the book *The Doll* shown from Batô's point of view (long enough for the spectator to read the title and the author's name), and the *geisha*/gynoid tearing her own torso open to reveal her mechanical 'bowels' which evokes Bellmer's drawing *Rose Ouverte la Nuit* (1935). As Brown points out, the two little girls are indifferent to the display of their insides, of their intimacy (Brown 239-40). Brown notes that Bellmer's work was partly made in reaction to the ambient fascism of the time; the way the dolls reveal their interior mechanism seems like a protest against the cult of beauty and youth conveyed by the Nazi regime. In the gynoid's self-destruction, Brown sees "an act of resistance against the ideal of beauty to which the kidnapped adolescent girls are being held captive" (Brown 241).

Such exhibition of intimacy does not occur only in that scene, but rather seems to permeate the whole film. Already, in the first *Ghost in the Shell* film, the visual representation of anatomical gender was problematic: despite numerous shots depicting Motoko's bare crotch, no genitals

5. For more information on the importance of *L'Ève Future* in this movie, see Sharalyn Orbaugh's article titled "Emotional Infectivity: Cyborg Affect and the Limits of the Human" (Orbaugh 2008).



were visible. While it was diegetically possible that Motoko had no anatomical gender (she is, after all, a cyborg whose only remaining organic part is a piece of her brain), the gynoids of *Innocence* are a different matter altogether. During the investigation, the forensic scientist Haraway tells Batô and Togusa that these gynoids have ‘extra’ organs unneeded by normal service androids. The gynoids are actually ‘sex-roids’ (‘sexbots’ in the English subtitles): dolls that feature functional genitalia. However, the anatomical gender of these gynoids remains unseen, despite the plethora of shots showing their pubic areas, especially during the final battle and the opening credits, just as in the previous *Ghost in the Shell*.⁶ The gynoids seem to occupy an anatomical gender of “no man’s land”: they are artificial beings, unable to reproduce through sexual activity and are powered by the spirits of little girls who are too young to procreate. As automata, the gynoids exist at the threshold of reproduction: they reproduce gestures and words (“Tasukété”), but can never reproduce themselves, in spite of the intrinsic link between their existence and sexuality. Destined for eternal unfulfillment, they instead opt for self-destruction, making this their own ‘act of resistance.’

Feminine as Possessed Monster

In her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993), Barbara Creed identifies seven “faces” of the monstrous-feminine found in horror movies: the archaic mother, the woman as possessed monster, the woman as monstrous womb, the woman as vampire, the woman as witch, the woman as monstrous mother and the castrator. Of these seven types, *Innocence*’s gynoids are closest to women as possessed monsters. Creed describes this archetype by analyzing the movie *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973).

In this movie, a female teenager on the threshold of puberty named Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair) is possessed by an ‘evil spirit.’ Many parallels can be traced between *The Exorcist* and *Innocence*, notably that the murderous gynoids seem to relate to the archetype of the possessed monster in the same way: the ‘sex dolls’ are the hosts of a copied ‘ghost’ that comes from little girls, just as Regan is the host of a ‘foreign spirit.’ Just like the little girls that ‘possess’ the body of the gynoids, Regan, too, has a brief moment

6. In the (mostly Lacanian) psychoanalytic doxa, the woman is defined by what she lacks – the phallus – placing her in a state of ‘incompleteness’. In anime, where instead of sexual organs, secondary gender characteristics are depicted, the gender which is defined by the ‘lack’ is male: They neither have breasts (a prominent feature in most anime) nor eyelashes. Except in the case of men whose ‘hairiness’ is emphatically depicted, in anime, it is the masculine that is (physically) ‘incomplete’.

of lucidity in *The Exorcist*. When the girl is asleep, there is a sign on her belly that indicates that the ‘real’ Regan is lucid and also is prisoner of that ‘body’: as if coming from beneath the surface of the skin, the words “Help me” are inscribed in her flesh. In *Innocence*, the girl cries for help in the same way when she is trapped in the gynoid’s body: “Tasukété”. Creed mentions that, for a long time, analyses of *The Exorcist* linked the evil entity possessing the girl’s body to the male gender (Creed 39). But the voice we hear in *The Exorcist* is that of a woman, Mercedes McCambridge, to which animal ‘screams’ were added to complete the sound mix, a fact that lessens the strength of previous analyses. On the other hand, the demon Pazuzu, to which the ‘evil entity’ is associated in the movie, is of male gender in Mesopotamian mythology, making the gendered categorization of this entity quite hard. This dilemma is not without parallels to the difficulties of assigning a specific gender to the character of the Puppet Master in the first *Ghost in the Shell* movie.

The analogy between *Innocence* and *The Exorcist* is not incidental. In both movies, particular attention is given to the feminine voice separated from the body. In a pivotal scene of *The Exorcist* which seems to take place in a school’s language laboratory, a priest, Father Karras (Jason Miller), is analysing the ‘demonic voice’ that issues from inside Regan in the hopes of learning more about its origin and, in turn, finding ‘traces’ of the girl. Above the listening stations hangs a large white banner, on which is written, in bold red letters, the word “TASUKETE” (which, as previously mentioned, means “Help me”). The message Regan wants to get through, her cry for help, cannot be part of the audible world (the ‘demonic voices’ were instead saying “Let her die” and “Fear the priest”), but is nonetheless part of the visual spectrum, on the strip of paper hung above the listening stations. In *Innocence*, where the repeated voice communicated through electrons and photons, the audio tape is obsolete: what remains is the message itself, which the director manages to insert into the visible realm. The recurrent use of the word *tasukété* in *Innocence* is absolutely justified in the script: the girls whose ‘ghosts’ are copied truly desire to have their cry for help heard. Still, I pose the hypothesis that Mamoru Oshii, an avid cinephile, was aware of the presence of the paper strip in *The Exorcist*, a movie that, just like *Innocence*, features the body of a young girl being ‘possessed.’

In the second half of her book, Barbara Creed then tackles the Freudian concept of the castrated woman. Creed demonstrates, in her reading of the psychoanalysis of Little Hans in “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy” (2001), that the phobia afflicting the child does not

stem from fear of the apparent castration of his mother, but rather comes from the fear of the *femme castratrice* (in French in Creed’s text). Apparently, Freud, along with Hans’s father, analyzed the child’s dreams and behaviour in such a way as to make them fit Freud’s own psychoanalytic theories such as the Oedipus complex and the castration complex, which was sure to bias any interpretation. Freud

Powerful and agile enough to ‘take down’ the guards bare-handed...their artificial and feminine bodies are more than adequate as murderous weapons.

posits that women are terrifying because they are castrated. Creed, instead, says that women are terrifying because men give them the imaginary power of castration (Creed 87). So, in Little Hans’s phobia, “the mother ultimately represents castration, suffocation, death, the void – themes also common to the representation of the monstrous-feminine in the horror film” (Creed 102). Using the image of the *vagina dentata* – a woman’s genitalia containing ‘cutting teeth’ – Creed defies sexual representations associated to the views of Freud and Lacan, where sex as a woman’s “lack” occupies a central part (Creed 110).

Rejecting Abjection: A Fight for Innocence

Following Barbara Creed’s categorization (Creed 123), *Innocence* can be classified within the rape-revenge sub-genre in which a woman, characteristically associated with feminine traits like beauty, kindness and passivity, suffers a rape and then becomes an ‘emasculating’ murderer who violently punishes men (her abuser or other rapists) for their sexual crimes, ensuring that those who live by the sword also die by the sword, so to speak.⁷ In *Innocence*, both the ‘rapes’ and the ‘acts of revenge’ are not shown, since the gynoids have already eliminated their owners at the beginning of the movie. However, those murderous ‘acts’ are the starting point of the plot, and the investigations into the murders takes up most of the narrative. Furthermore, during the final confrontation, dozens of gynoids ‘come to life’ and almost effortlessly dispose of several male Locus Solus

7. Creed identifies a few films that belong to this sub-genre, including *Ms. 45* (Abel Ferrara, 1981), *Violated* [aka: *Victimized*] (Richard Cannistraro, 1984) and *I Spit on Your Grave* [aka: *Day of the Woman*] (Meir Zarchi, 1978).

security guards. Powerful and agile enough to ‘take down’ the guards bare-handed, they do not even bother picking up their guns once they fall; their artificial and feminine bodies are more than adequate as murderous weapons. This is in stark contrast with ‘typical’ rape-revenge movies, in which women often use phallic weapons such as knives to penetrate men’s bodies – and often to ‘emasculate’ them.

The monstrous-feminine, as Creed shows, is often associated with abjection from the body. In her *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (1982), psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva makes a distinction between abjection and the uncanny: “Essentially different from ‘uncanniness’, more violent, too, abjection is elaborated through a failure to recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory” (Kristeva 14). More so than male characters in horror movies, the female’s ‘monstrous’ embodiments are associated with bodily fluids and other viscous elements: menstrual blood, placenta, vomit, etc. In this context of abjection, *Innocence*’s gynoids seem to break the mold. Their artificial bodies are immaculately white and, in a way, their monstrosity is contained: their spilled entrails are cables that do not float in any kind of fluid or viscous element, unlike androids such as the one from *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) out of which a whitish ‘blood’ sprays when it is damaged. The gynoids’ shattered faces display a skull on which no blood flows: the associated monstrous quality of the feminine in *Innocence* is sleek, dry and sterile. When the monstrous is displayed in a male character, such as Togusa’s wounded torso or the ripped-out organs of Volkerson (a Locus Solus employee found dismembered in his villa), blood drips, spurts and leaves marks, which is the case in Volkerson’s bloody handprint in the mirror.

This ‘dry’ femininity within the monstrosity of the gynoids contrasts with Motoko’s character in the first *Ghost in the Shell* movie, where her female corporeality was much more linked with ‘liquid’ elements: her genesis in fluid vats, the pouring rain during the scene when she wandered around the city as well as her underwater diving all establish that fact. Furthermore, about halfway through the film, during her battles against a ‘hacker,’ and in the end against

a tank, she becomes invisible and the only sign of her presence is the water she displaces with her steps. The cyborg policewoman evokes the monstrous only once in *Ghost in the Shell*, but her evocation is not of the dry and contained kind like the gynoids'. As she strains to open the tank hatch, her limbs break apart and pieces and debris from her 'body' are scattered around her. Destabilized, she falls to the damp ground and is lifted by the tank's pincers, her body dripping. In *Innocence*, the gynoids are also manufactured in a liquid environment, but even when emerging from the water in Locus Solus' factory, they never look 'wet,' except from their victims' blood. The monstrous they represent is as sleek and cold as the porcelain their immaculate white bodies seem to be made from. This 'whiteness' may be viewed as a symbol of their purity...and innocence.

Beyond Innocence: The Anti-Body

In the closing words of Frederik Schodt's 1996 book, *Dreamland Japan*, the author warns the reader of the downsides of manga's 'booming' popularity outside of Japan, and the skewed reception of some of its content, stating that "[i]n a worst-case scenario, the 'Lolita complex virus' might even be inadvertently exported" (Schodt 340). While Japan's "virus" might not disappear completely even after Bill 156's recent approval, its strength might be seriously dampened. Whatever happens, let us not forget that six years before Bill 156 was passed, Mamoru Oshii had already made public his own version of the antibodies for that particular virus: fabricated instruments of 'pleasure' in the shape of innocent-looking 'dolls' that rebelled against those who abused their souls – unaware that they even had one.

*Note: This article is a revised and abridged version of the third chapter of the author's book, *Machines Désirées: La Représentation du Féminin dans les Films d'Animation 'Ghost in the Shell' du Réalisateur Mamoru Oshii* (© L'Harmattan 2011). It was also translated from French to English by Guillaume Desgagné.*

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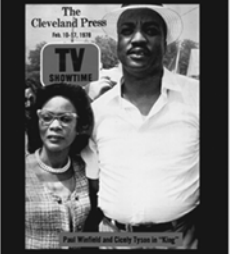
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