

University of Western Sydney

The Cross-Cultural Appropriation of *Manga* and *Anime* in Australia

by

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SUMMARY

This thesis is an investigation into the cross-cultural appropriation of manga and anime by fans in Australia. I investigate the ways in which fans embark on ‘identity projects’ through manga and anime to construct a space where issues of gender politics, identity, and culture are explored. I argue that a key reason why many Western fans and scholars perceive manga and anime as “different” is its “Japaneseness”. The two key problems I address throughout this thesis are: how can we analyse the significance of the Japanese origins and context of manga and anime, and would the ‘identity projects’ that fans construct be possible without an appreciation of manga and anime’s Japaneseness? I explore these questions in terms of a number of key forms within manga and anime including cyberpunk, *bishōnen* (beautiful boys), *otaku* (fans), and anime forms that have had their “Japaneseness” softened. I discuss the way in which these manga and anime forms offer different spaces for fans, scholars, and cultural industries to contest, rework, and reiterate the cultural value of manga and anime.

To understand the transnational opportunities and consequences being fostered within the Western appropriation of manga and anime forms, I combine an interdisciplinary approach drawing principally upon a political economy perspective (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Miyoshi, 1996) and cultural/fan readings (Gillespie, 2000; Jenkins, 1992, 2002). I use these approaches with my field research in Japan and Australia to consider the global/local flow of manga and anime, and the construction of national and transnational identifications by fans and scholars through these forms.

PREFACE

I began my first academic conference paper (Norris, 1996) on anime with a declaration of what I saw, at the time, as an almost urgent necessity to reproduce myself within anime. I used phrases and imagery drawn from popular cyberpunk anime to evoke a private, yet globally recognised, imagined anime world assessed from my perspective in Australia:

I was imagined into the 21st century by Japanese animation and manga. It provided me with a language that assaulted the banality of contemporary existence; it opened a doorway through which global blueprints for the destruction of the world were revealed to me. The millennium never seemed so tangibly close or terrifyingly real. A colonising American voice spoke through the animated body of the Japanese babe, the Brooklyn accent thick against the ocular excess of the eyes. Finally, the Japanese flesh was made global in an illicit marriage between translatable anime forms and the economic quest for markets and opportunities. However, this bastard child of an American voice and Japanese “cels” owes no allegiance to its masters. It is open to active, resistant counter-narratives, new imaginings by a wild and active viewing/reading audience. Imaginings that offer flights of fantasy which are far advanced from the lumbering political and national responses to the broadening global flows of culture, finance, media, and people. (Norris, 1996, p. 1)

My “imagined world” (Appadurai, 1996) touched upon many of the qualities of anime that were central to my experience at the time—a cultural yearning (and fear) of a future imagined through science fiction anime like *Akira* (1988). Moreover, the global distribution of anime by United States and Japanese cultural industries created novel discontinuities between anime bodies speaking in strong United States accents and the exotic landscapes of the story’s techno-orient, contexts that suggested the mysteriousness of my future. My cyberpunk reading of anime drew upon fantasies, debates, and ‘identity projects’ that I had experimented with academically—in cultural and media studies responses to technologies and identities (Anderson, 1983; Haraway, 1991; Jenkins, 1992)—and as an active member of several Australian fan communities, where I helped organise screenings, produced fan art and fan fiction, and participated in discussions of anime on the clubs’ online forums.

Most participants in my field research were from a number of anime clubs I had been involved with. These clubs included AJAS (Adelaide Japanese Anime Society), AnimeUNSW (Anime University of New South Wales), SAS (Sydney Anime Society), SUanime (Sydney University anime), and the anime club I initiated JAUWS (Japanese Animation University of Western Sydney). The total number of fans who participated in my field research was 64; of this, 10 were in-depth interviews with club executives and established members of the fan community, 40 were questionnaire responses, and the remaining 14 participants were part of three small group discussions (ranging from four to six people). The in-depth interviews explored fan readings and texts derived from manga and anime forms that were used in Chapters 1 and 7 to investigate the spaces fans construct to explore issues of identity and culture. The three group interviews were with new members of anime clubs and were incorporated into my discussion in Chapter 1 on the discovery of anime's difference. The questionnaire responses covered a range of issues relating to the experience of manga and anime in Australia—beyond the Sydney focus of my interviews—and also informed the general direction of the group interviews through discussing the results of the questionnaire.

I began my PhD research with my fan affiliations and cultural/media studies knowledge, but with no Japanese language skills and no knowledge or experience of Japan—except for the dominant images of Japan that circulated within Australia: Japan as a hi-tech economic superpower that still maintained its traditional and particularistic culture. A central theme of my thesis, then, is the discovery of “Japan” through manga and anime and the importance of recognising this journey for the new landscapes of the imagination it offers both fans and scholars in negotiating and contesting dominant fantasies operating in other environments such as Australia.

During my PhD candidature, I studied Japanese language and culture at the University of Western Sydney, and after I completed my field research in Australia, I travelled to Japan twice between 1999 and 2002 to conduct research. The first trip used field research funding from the University of Western Sydney, and the second used funding from a Japanese Ministry of Education and Culture (*Monbushō*) research scholarship. I studied at Tokyo University for two years as a foreign research student, further developing my language skills and understanding of Japanese culture and history. My time in Japan offered a unique opportunity to reflect on my own youthful yearnings and the experiences recounted by the fans that took part in my research in Australia.

My ideas on manga, anime, and Japan changed considerably because of my experiences in Japan. When I first arrived, I still had a particularly “Western” idea of manga and anime. Anime titles such as *Akira*, *Ghost in the shell*, and *Evangelion* dominated my interests with their science fiction themes, dangerous sexualities, and “Eastern” spirituality. In Japan I had the opportunity to perform a style of “manga experience”, dressing up as an anime character to attend themed night clubs, exchanging ideas with manga artists (professional and amateur), going to cafes and night clubs to discuss the pressing issues of the moment such as the “Americanisation” of manga, and networking with other foreign and Japanese research students who were investigating elements of manga and anime culture. I explored the spaces within Japan that my Tokyo University and *otaku* (fan) identities allowed me to enter, and in my most feverish moments imagined setting up a type of *manga kisa* (a coffee-shop that is also a manga library) research centre back in Australia¹. However, the more time I spent in Tokyo, the more difficult it became to talk about “manga and anime” as I used to, until finally manga and anime, as I had known them in Australia, ceased to exist for

¹ Within Australia, the Japanese Study Centre at Monash University opened a Manga Library in 2002, becoming the site for discussing, appreciating, and expanding the understanding of manga culture in Australia, suggesting the very ideal I imagined in Japan.

me. They were replaced by a complicated network of technologies, friends, and experiences that were connected to other interests and humbler everyday experiences. I had lost the “manga-mania” that had sent me on this quest to the heartland of the techno-orient, a *Blade Runner*, and *Akira* world, a world of dangerous sexualities, a culture fully equipped with all the latest gizmo’s and gadgets—a cyborg lifestyle with cute bodies. It was a style that was different from the dominant culture of home, offering me an escape from the things I disliked about Australia. My fantasies and images of “manga Japan” withered under the siege of familiarity and incongruity. I began to engage with Japan on its terms, to see the contradictions, diversity and people that made up my everyday life there.

Manga and anime began as a safety rope I used as a foreigner travelling in an unknown land for the first time. They were a way of guiding my attention and deciphering the information, competing brands, and general confusion of too much information, with the ever-present threat of going into complete sensory overload. Manga and anime were a “way of choice” that expanded the possibilities I saw in Japan; they were a current within my time in Japan.

With the cross-cultural appropriation of manga and anime as my thesis research topic in Australia, I was able to steer a course through the currents of life in Japan. I came to see manga and anime as more than simply big eyes and cute bodies; as a more general style—a playfulness with identity and form that could appear in computer games, advertisements, movies, music, fashion, television, and conversations—between anything and anyone I met in Japan. My time in Japan, and reflection on the imagined landscapes of Japaneseness I had constructed in Australia, made me sensitive to the concerns expressed by Japanese scholars (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Ueno, 1999) regarding the one dimensional, incomplete understandings of Japan that are offered in manga and anime. Imaginings that are incapable of doing justice to the complexity of contemporary Japan; that foster the same stereotypical engagement with

Japan that is popular in the tourist literature of tea-ceremony and sumo. However, my completion of this project in Australia has motivated my reiteration of the cultural value and importance of the use of manga and anime outside of Japan.

This thesis therefore is an interdisciplinary exploration of cultural industry and fan appropriations of anime and manga that considers global economy (Appadurai, 1996; Iwabuchi, 2002c; Miyoshi, 1996) and cultural/fan-oriented (Gillespie, 2000; Jenkins, 1992, 2002) approaches towards transnational flows of technology, people, media, and culture. My consideration of manga and anime as forms that travel through global and local spaces reflects my own transnational experience since beginning this research. The order of the thesis chapters suggests this journey from locally produced meanings by Australian fans and Western scholars (Chapters 1 and 2) to some of the common manga and anime forms that are appropriated by fans and scholars to construct a space where culture and identity are explored (Chapters 3, 4, and 5), to the critical interpretation of these ‘identity projects’ and their limitations (Chapter 6) to conclude with a reaffirmation of the positive and creative spaces Western fans and cultural industries are opening up through the manga and anime form.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the problems of framing manga and anime around ideas of Japan. I analyse the possibilities and limitations of Appadurai’s (1996) political economy approach to global flows of cultural material and contrast this to the accounts of Australian fans and their negotiation of “Japaneseness” through the shape shifting forms of sexual transformation and cyborg machine/human fusions. I argue that the appropriation of these forms by fans in Australia enables them to find an identity defined in a global space to escape the difficulties they experience at a domestic (national) level. The transnational identifications made by fans are further explored in Chapter 2 through my analysis of the Western academic analysis of manga and anime. I investigate how Western academics see manga and anime as “different”, and how they attribute this “difference” to its Japaneseness.

However, I also caution that this interest in tracing the distinctive Japanese qualities of manga and anime can engender orientalist and self-orientalist (Iwabuchi, 1994) *nihonjinron* (discourses of Japaneseness) arguments that result in a hardening of cultural boundaries and construction of exclusivist identities (Gillespie, 2000). While tracing manga and anime's distinctive Japanese heritage can degenerate into essentialism, its meaning and its Japaneseness can also become a space where new kinds of transnational identifications and hybrid forms are constructed.

In the next three chapters, I discuss how artists, scholars, critics, and fans engage in an ongoing negotiation and reinvention of manga and anime as they experiment with new identities and forms of resistance and pleasure within these forms. In Chapter 3 I explore the resistance to a Western (United States) cultural imperialism expressed by the “improbable subjects” (Schodt, 1983, p. 16) of manga and anime, such as the fart. I discuss how the humble fart has been used within three texts to create a space of power and resistance to larger, oppressive forces. In Chapter 4, I analyse how the anime *Akira* (1988) became a central text for many anime fans in the West to proclaim a specificity of the manga/anime experience that they could directly attribute to its Japaneseness. In Chapter 5 the negative images of fans in popular culture is considered through a critical analysis of the anime *Perfect Blue* (1997). My reading of *Perfect Blue* concentrates on the local Japanese fan audience and cultural production context within which the violent and destructive consequences of fan over-identifications in popular culture are played out. I end by showing that fans in Australia do not recognise themselves in *Perfect Blue*'s negative representation of fans—instead they actively seek ‘different ways of being’ through manga and anime. The criticism of the Western appropriation of manga and anime by Japanese critics (Iwabuchi, 1998; Ueno, 1999), that I investigate in Chapter 6, repeats *Perfect Blue*'s fear of the appropriation and loss of ownership rights over cultural material to fans or transnational

cultural industries. Chapter 7 reconsiders the significance of manga and anime from a fans perspective by looking at the *bishōnen* character and the issue of gender politics fans express in their appropriation of this form. In this chapter, I analyse a fan's half-finished *bishōnen* sketch as a hybrid object that becomes a space where issues of global (not national, or regional) culture is explored and diasporic networks maintained. The thesis finishes by pointing towards fusions between Western fans and cultural industries that suggest the future direction of manga and anime.

CHAPTER 1

The Imagined Worlds of Australian Anime Fans

The lines between the realistic and fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if addressed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world.
(Appadurai, 1996, p. 35)

As a result of the analysis of global and local flows of culture, debate about the reception of global media commodities has complicated our idea of the relationship between audiences, national identity, and cultural power. This debate can be seen in the transnational movement of manga and anime—as mediated by Western distributors, Japanese anime industries, and fan appropriations—which have problematised how to appreciate and analyse manga and anime’s Japaneseness. Here, I will discuss two approaches towards the problem of framing manga and anime around ideas and images of Japan. The first approach interrogates the assumptions and essentialist discourse that underlies “imagined worlds” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35) that are constructed by global audiences from a distortion of “realistic and fictional landscapes” (ibid., p. 35). This section includes an analysis of the flows and uncertainties that Appadurai (ibid.) argues is central to the global movement of information and images in today’s world. The second approach I investigate is the Australian fans’ discovery of “Japan” in manga and anime. I suggest that the actual processes and experiences of a variety of fans with manga and anime reveals that their construction of “Japaneseness” is a vehicle through which they can pursue and satisfy their own ‘identity projects’. In order to illustrate the types of issues and identities fans explore I analyse two popular “shape shifting” forms within manga and anime: the male/female transformations of Ranma’s character in *Ranma 1/2* (1989), and the human/machine fusions of popular cyberpunk anime such as *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). In the fan appropriations of these shape-shifting forms, I show how

their identification of “Japaneseness” becomes a space where issues of transnational culture and identity are explored.

Flows and Uncertainties

Appadurai’s (1996) analysis of global cultural flows provides a way to recognise the relationship between small domestic groups, such as families or local fan communities, and “the world as one large, interactive system, composed of many complex subsystems” (ibid., p. 41). Audiences around the world, asserts Appadurai (1996), experience interconnected networks of images and information through print, audio, and electronic channels. For Appadurai, it is within the creation and distribution of images and information that he began to isolate “the central problematic of cultural processes in today’s world” (ibid., p. 29). The problem of contemporary cultural processes for Appadurai is that they do not exist within a perfect world of “Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities” (ibid., p. 46) as models such as the centre-periphery ideal of cultural imperialism assume. Instead, all cultural forms are part of global cultural flows. Focusing on the reception of global media by multiple and spatially dislocated audiences, he contrasts two theoretical approaches: First, Marshall McLuhan’s “overestimation” (ibid., p. 29) of the ease with which images and information can cross national boundaries in the theory of the “global village” (McLuhan & Powers, 1989). Second, he examines the work of scholars, such as Meyrowitz, who cautions that media create communities with “no sense of place” (Meyrowitz, 1985), and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of the rhizome. Appadurai (1996) argues that the analysis of the past century’s expansion of technologies from the printing press to the computer has fostered both “fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity” (p. 29) on one hand, and concerns of “rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups” (p. 29) on the other. Appadurai (ibid.) sees the various explanations for the global flow of information and images as part of the disjunctive cultural flows of “the new global cultural

economy” (p. 32). Appadurai’s central problem with today’s cultural processes lies within this analysis of flows and uncertainties. Appadurai rejects the assumption that the world is ordered and stable, instead contending that the world is fractured and volatile and all cultural processes are complex, overlapping, and disjunctive (ibid., p. 32). Appadurai (ibid.) proposes a “tentative formulation about the conditions under which global flows occur: they occur in and through the growing disjunctures among ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, mediascaples, and ideoscaples.” (p. 37). These five landscapes each “stress different streams or flows along which cultural material may be seen to be moving across national boundaries” (ibid., pp. 45-46). Through the investigation of the flows and the disjuncture between people, technologies, finance, information and ideology, Appadurai offers a “technical vocabulary and a rudimentary model of disjunctive flows, from which something like a decent global analysis might emerge” (ibid., p. 47).

Appadurai’s use of landscapes to describe the different paths along which cultural material moves is significant as it emphasises his fundamental claim that “the configuration of cultural forms in today’s world [is] fundamentally fractal” (ibid., p. 46). Today’s world, argues Appadurai (ibid., p. 32), cannot be understood in terms of existing models, such as centre-periphery, the push and pull theory of migration, the surplus and deficits argument of balance and trade, or the consumers and producers of neo-Marxism. These approaches rely on stable boundaries, and fail to recognise that “the complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics” (ibid., p. 41). Thus, these five landscapes are “fluid, irregular shapes” that are “deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors” (ibid., p. 33). For Appadurai, the dynamics of today’s global cultural flow is driven by the disjunctures among ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples. Appadurai perceives the relationship between these flows as

“disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable because each of these landscapes is subject to its own constraints and incentives (some political, some informational, and some technoenvironmental), at the same time as each acts as a constraint and a parameter for movements in the others” (ibid., p. 35).

Appadurai suggests the global economy as an example of the disjunctive relationship between human movement, technological flow, and financial transfers. While the World Bank continues to describe economies in terms of traditional indicators of balance and trade, the complicated technologies and the shifting migrant labour that underlie these indicators, must also be considered. As Appadurai (ibid., p. 34) points out:

How is one to make a meaningful comparison of wages in Japan and the United States or of real-estate costs in New York and Tokyo, without taking sophisticated account of the very complex fiscal and investment flows that link the two economies through a global grid of currency speculation and capital transfer?

The argument, which I explore in Chapter 6, that manga and anime characters have a softened or erased Japaneseness to assist their domestication into any local market (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Ueno, 1999) suggests that manga and anime are transnational cultural material. Globally recognised manga and anime icons, such as *Astro Boy* and *Pokemon*, can easily move within Appadurai’s disjunctive and unpredictable landscapes because their Japanese bodily presence has been softened, erased, and replaced to create a form which is not restricted by negative cultural associations (Iwabuchi, 1998). In this way, manga and anime have become the perfect cultural product to take advantage of the fluid and variable global economy that Appadurai has mapped. However, as I investigate in Chapter 6, 7, and in the Afterthought Chapter, there is a concern that at the same time Japanese cultural industries are establishing this cultural softening of manga and anime, Western distributors and fans are reinserting a “Japaneseness” that appeals to the “West” but offers only an illusion of Japan that perpetuates orientalist and essentialist notions of an exotic and mysterious other,

incapable of revealing the complexity of contemporary “Japan” (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Ueno, 1999). The worry these critics express is that at the same time manga and anime are becoming globally recognised and successful, ownership of the form is slipping away from Japan and into various transnational corporations and globally dispersed fan communities. An anxiety expressed here by the Western scholar Antonio Levi (2001)—a Western scholar who has written a book and a number of articles and on the Japaneseness of manga and anime (Levi, 1996, 1997, 2001):

Much of the distribution of *anime* is in the hands of non-Japanese companies, and other animation industries are learning fast. If Japan does not make the most of its opportunities now, it may find it has been overtaken and beaten at its own game. (pp. 48-49)

Levi’s solution, that Japanese cultural industries must assert a stronger cultural ownership and control of the form—while still distributing the type of anime that appeals to the West, is perceived as part of the problem for some Japanese media commentators. Here, Toshiya Ueno (1999) expresses his concern regarding the cultural essentialism that has threatened the relevance of anime to understanding contemporary Japan:

Antonio Levi ... implies that *anime* is more interesting for ‘western’ people than for Japanese because of its cultural specificity. The orientalism reappears when she insists that in Japanese animation, traditional or ancient mythology is very significant, so that *anime* is assumed to be closely connected to cultural identity in Japan. (p. 98)

Ueno (ibid.) complains that the connection Western scholars have constructed between anime and the Japaneseness of “Zen Buddhism, spiritual endurance (*gaman*) and group mind in Japanese society” (p. 98) alienates his own experience and identity as a Japanese scholar and participant within this media culture, as he later declares of the problem of tracing anime back to Japanese aesthetic traditions: “I do not believe there is any such connection” (p. 98). The denial of an essential “Japaneseness” of manga and anime Ueno expresses is part of a more complex, transnational uncertainty of manga and anime’s representations of identity, and cultural value. I will return to the criticism of the Western

appropriation of manga and anime by Japanese scholars in the final chapters of the thesis. Briefly, in these chapters I suggest that without an appreciation of this “Japaneseness”, many of the identity projects fans embark upon through manga and anime would be greatly reduced and culturally impotent. This is because, as I will explore throughout the thesis, cultural industries (Chapter 6), Anglo and Asian-diaspora anime fans in Australia (Chapter 1 and 7), and Western scholars (Chapter 2), construct “Japaneseness” within a variety of manga and anime forms (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and Afterthought) to explore gender politics, reconstruct identity, and reiterate the cultural value of the forms.

Ueno’s criticism of Levi’s orientalisering of anime returns us to Appadurai’s quote that began this chapter, where he suggested that one way people process the “deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 35) global cultural flows is through the appropriation of textual elements and the creation of “imagined worlds” (ibid., p. 35). Drawing upon Benedict Anderson’s (1983) idea that imagined communities were generated by “print capitalism”, Appadurai developed the idea of “imagined worlds” that are generated by globally dispersed audiences who appropriate media depictions of realistic and fictional landscapes created by other cultures and peoples. “*Imagined worlds*,” argues Appadurai (1996), are “the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (p. 33). The production and distribution of information and images through newspapers, magazines, film studios, and radio and television stations provides characters, plots, and other textual elements that can be experienced and transformed by the audience into “image-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality” (ibid., p. 35). These “strips of reality” and fiction are the building blocks out of which audiences create “scripts [of] ... imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places” (ibid., p. 35). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that the significance of these “scripts” is that they provide complex sets of metaphors by which we

live. For Appadurai, these scripts also form narratives of the other and fantasies of possible lives expressed through “the desire for acquisition and movement” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 36).

The creation of scripts about the Other and fantasies of possible lives, is a useful tool in analysing the imagined worlds created by fans from realistic and fictional landscapes derived from manga and anime. It is possible to argue that many fans create and “live in” such imagined worlds. Melanie, a 21-year-old student I interviewed, described her desire to travel to Japan and the image of “the real people of Japan” she had constructed:

I was all set to see Japan for myself; I have this strong curiosity to see Sakura rain and wear a kimono, and stuff. But I’m also drooling to go there and spend my money on an anime and manga shopping spree, buying all the latest manga, attending author signings, and anime cinema screenings. I know that the real Japan is not the same as its image in anime and manga; for example, aliens are not constantly bombarding Tokyo, no giant robots are fighting in the streets. But the interesting thing is I think the relaxed characters portrayed in anime and manga are closer to the truth of the real people of Japan than the stiff, formal image presented in the foreign movies. (Melanie, 21, Anglo-Australian, student)

Melanie expresses some of the qualities that Appadurai identifies as ‘imagined worlds,’ such as “the desire for acquisition and movement” (ibid., p. 36); she is “drooling to go there and spend [her] money” on a “shopping spree” of all her favourite popular culture commodities in Japan. However, she contests the blurring of “fictional and realistic landscapes” (ibid., p. 35) generated by manga and anime. Melanie expresses a simultaneous recognition of the differences between reality and fiction, and her conviction that she has found something “real” about the Japanese people through manga and anime—that she wishes to confirm through a pilgrimage to Japan. This desire to journey to Japan suggests a more complex process than simply a virtual, imagined construction of fantastic objects. The desire for travel is also seen in the flow of anime fans who journey over national boundaries to visit Japan (and the United States) to attend large conventions, industry events, anime theme parks, and go shopping. To use the example of the experience of anime in Australia, the traversing between Australian markets/fan communities and an international anime

culture represented by Japan and the United States, reveals the confidence of fans at being able to embark upon international journeys by drawing upon their enthusiasm for anime. The desire to travel and the use of transnational networks of media and communication to sustain overseas connections by fans also expresses a variety of their ‘identity projects’. These identifications include the desire of Asian-Australian fans to maintain diasporic ties with the region (Chapter 7), and Anglo-Australian fans escaping from an alienating local that I discuss later in this chapter.

As I argue throughout this thesis, the appropriation of the Japanese form of manga and anime is part of a complex ‘identity project’ for fans that encourages identification with transnational consumption practices. Examples include the cultural resistance of the “stinking fart” (Chapter 3), the fusion of dance culture and cyberpunk anime (Chapter 4), the alternative identifications possible within popular culture suggested in readings of *Perfect Blue* (Chapter 5) and the *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) form (Chapter 7). The use of manga and anime as hybrid texts within these various contexts reveals that the positioning of a “Japaneseness” in manga and anime by fans and scholars (Chapter 2 and 6) to explore transnational issues of the cultural value and identity. As audience scholars such as Henry Jenkins (1995) have argued in defence of fan knowledge:

For fans, information about the programme, its characters, its production, etc., is information which fits within a very precise context and is used to make sense of an even more complex narrative audience. Similarly, fan politics is often concerned with the local rather than the global. (p. 18)

As Jenkins points out, it is important to consider the actual ways fans are using information and images from popular culture before explaining the fan identities and politics. Fan cultures, argues Jenkins (1992), are not simply copied from mass culture, but are carefully selected and shaped through the “social norms, aesthetic conventions, interpretive protocols, technological resources, and technical competence of the larger fan community” (Jenkins, 1997, p. 522). Jenkins goes on to argue: “Fans possess not simply borrowed

remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own culture built from the ... raw materials the media provides” (ibid., p. 522). Contrasting Jenkins’ (1992) “textual poaching” with Appadurai’s (1996) “imagined worlds” reveals the necessity to incorporate an appreciation of the knowledge cultures and creative identifications that fans construct (Jenkins, 2002). Melanie’s complex desire to accumulate manga and anime elements, “buying all the latest manga, attending author signings, and anime cinema screenings”, as well as her desire to transcend the popular imagined worlds of manga by travelling there, “the real Japan is not the same as its image in anime and manga”, suggests that fan appropriations of anime and manga are more complex than basic or naïve acts of orientalism. As I show in the next section, they are complex actions engaged with domestic concerns that create a global space (through the Japaneseness of manga and anime) to explore choices and alternatives they are not offered at a national level.

The Discovery of Difference

A critical stage in the ‘identity project’ of fans in Australia is the discovery of *difference*. Many fans I interviewed mentioned a shift in their perception of anime from initially accepting it as an integral part of mass media entertainment, to seeing it as “different,” and then recognising that difference as coming from its Japaneseness. Fans often articulate this difference to the language, art style, characters, and story lines of manga and anime, and can express it in two significantly different ways. First, fans can appropriate anime as an ideal object, as suggested by the experience of Neil:

My first experience was at school about three years ago, a friend bought a *Super Nintendo* magazine to school that had a section called anime world, and I was looking through it thinking “Oh My God!” It was like a revelation, “I’d seen the light”. I thought that looks so cool but where would I be able to find it? So, I began looking through the *Yellow Pages* for comic book stores and I found *Phantom Zone* in Parramatta and that’s where I started. (Neil, 20, Anglo-Australian, student)

Neil's describes his experience of the distinctive character of anime as an epiphany, a "revelation" in which he had "seen the light". In other words, anime became an idealised object to be appropriated and identified with. While Neil's story is about the appropriation of anime as a perfect object, Brian relates a different type of relationship towards anime:

The original anime I saw was *Ranma 1/2*. After spending a couple of days in that video room I had received whole new story concepts and ideas, a different and exciting cultural slant on reality, and the concept of an ongoing story that progressed logically and was not bound by individual episodes. (Brian, 22, Anglo-Australian, student)

Brian describes emerging from the video room with a "different and exciting cultural slant on reality"; he claims this life-changing experience caused him to reflect on how he understands certain textual processes: "an ongoing story that progressed logically". Furthermore, he believes he has gained new approaches to "story concepts and ideas". Brian identifies textual codes and symbols that hint at a recognition in manga and anime of cultural otherness and difference experienced at a cultural and social level, while Neil's idealisation of anime and desire to accumulate more—"where would I be able to find it?"—suggests the psychological dynamics of identification and appropriation (see Chapter 5).

Shape Shifting

Here I will focus on the appropriation of two manga and anime forms by Australian fans that further reveal the process of identification and experience of anime that Neil and Brian articulate. First, the gender transformation offered by the character of Ranma from *Ranma 1/2* and his shape shifting into a female in cold water or a male in hot water. Second, the union of humans and machines into cyborgs or pilots cocooned within giant robots. Ranma's sexual transformation offers an exploration of gender politics, while the depiction of cyborgs, particularly Asian female cyborgs, offers gender and identity politics merged with new technologies. Water and machines are symbols of physical metamorphosis that transform

those who engage with them; they offer power to change one's identity and body, to become someone or something different.

Ranma 1/2

Ranma 1/2 is a martial arts comedy by the popular female manga artist Rumiko Takahashi. The series blends slapstick comedy and melodrama, a rich cast of supporting characters, and a contemporary setting in a Japanese town and school to create a long running and popular television and manga series. *Ranma 1/2* is the story of young martial artist Ranma Saotome. While training with his father in China they both fall into a cursed spring causing Ranma and his father to transform into whatever had perished there. The water of the spring transforms Ranma into a buxom female version of himself (see Figure 1), and he is cursed to become his female alter identity whenever cold water is thrown over him. He can be changed back into a male only when doused with hot water Ranma's father, Mr. Saotome, becomes a giant panda cursed to continue his transformation by cold and hot water like Ranma. However, Ranma's gender transformations are the central comedy dynamics of the



Figure 1. Shape shifting characters: A cursed spring transforms Ranma into his female alter ego in *Ranma 1/2*.

series.

I Wish I had a Japanese Bath

Sarah, a 19-year-old University student I interviewed during my field research, described herself as a big fan of *Ranma 1/2* and other similar comedy/action anime such as *Fushigi Yugi* and *Project A-KO*. During our interview, she frequently mentioned the escapism and creative freedom that these favourite anime offered her. As we discussed what was innovative and different about manga and anime, we narrowed our attention to the “Japaneseness” of anime and the unusual characters, settings and themes within *Ranma 1/2*. I asked her how she felt this “Japaneseness” was expressed in anime:

Initially when one first watches something like *Ranma* with the bath sequence, one can be very conscious of it, I wish we had baths like that! Less so with things picked up by the Americans for dubbing for early morning children’s shows like *Tekkaman*. I became less aware of any “Japaneseness” as I watched more of it and it became normal for schoolgirls to have huge eyes, cute voices, and *seira fuku*². Now it’s a question of how to define a person’s normal cultural perception as opposed to a *Japanesed* one. Perhaps mine is a little skewed in the direction of Japaneseness as normal. (Sarah, 19, Anglo-Australia, student)

The bath scene Sarah describes is an example of the outrageous comic world of *Ranma 1/2*. During the first episode, Ranma, in female form, is taking a hot bath to change back into a male (see Figure 2), when Akane, the woman to whom Ranma is betrothed, walks in expecting to find a woman in the bath. Akane’s confusion and Ranma’s embarrassment when his masculinity is discovered helps establish the reluctant love-hate romance between Ranma and Akane that is the centrepiece of the *Ranma 1/2* world.

For Sarah, however, it is the act of bathing, and the transformation it offers, that fascinates her. The bath is the site where a magical transformation is possible. In a way, Sarah seems to recognise that immersion in the text itself is a valuable source of

² *Seira fuku* is literally “sailor clothes,” the term refers to a type of Japanese school uniform worn by many girls that resembles a Sailor outfit – such as that depicted in *Sailor Moon*.



Figure 2. The bath as the site of magical transformation in *Ranma 1/2*: Ranma, in female guise, bathes to return to a masculine identity.

appropriation and borrowing. It has changed her, predisposing her to consider “Japaneseness as normal”. In her interpretation of the scene, Sarah transforms the bath from an everyday object into an object of transformation and an opportunity to take on a new identity. Ranma’s bath is a Japanese object for the Western fan, unremarkable in itself for many Japanese but different from a Western bath (Clark, 1992). The bath is a sign of difference and foreignness that can be understood and employed by the Western fan, as an element with which to construct an imagined life for oneself (with “Japaneseness as normal”), and the other of a different land (“I wish we had baths like that”). The bath and Ranma’s contact with water to alter gender, is an appealing metaphor for gender and identity change, as well as suggesting a desire for knowledge of a hidden, perhaps forbidden, self. The metaphysics of a “bath like that” offers an imaginary bi-sexuality through the humble act of bathing.

Napier's (2001) critical analysis of *Ranma 1/2* points to the conservative agenda within the story's gender transgressions and amusing sexual content. Napier argues that Ranma's transformations, unlike that of the more explosive character of Tetsuo in *Akira*—as I will also discuss in Chapter 3—are always contained within the “normal” world. As Napier (ibid.) explains:

While boundaries are crossed and re-crossed to often riotous effect, the inevitably more conservative format of a weekly television series ultimately leads to a conservative resolution in which, at the end of each episode, the boundaries are reinscribed into the conventions of heterosexual hierarchical society. (p. 50)

While she acknowledges that *Ranma 1/2* draws upon the tension between the construction of gender identity at the individual level and society's enforcement of gender norms at a public level, most of the comic situations generated by Ranma's transformations “never actually unsettles society's basic assumptions about the gender” (ibid., p. 50). As Napier points out, *Ranma 1/2* is set within a relatively normal, everyday world, compared to the hi-tech dystopia of cyberpunk anime such as *Akira*. Stripped of its fantasy elements, argues Napier, Ranma's story offers a view of the difficulties of adolescence, body development, loneliness, and maturity:

Neither boy nor girl, Ranma occupies a liminal space that, although played for comedy, is actually a forlorn and isolated one. Unlike the typical narcissistic adolescent who simply *feels* “different,” Ranma *knows* he is different, and therefore isolated. Or as he puts it at the end of the episode, “Friends, she says, so much for being friends when she found out that I'm a boy” (ibid., p. 54)

Ranma's transformation from a male into a female is also the source of significant loss in power. He is shorter and weaker, causing his skills—such as his martial arts abilities—to diminish (see Figure 3). Becoming female is a humiliating and shocking experience that is coded entirely negatively (Napier, 2001; Newitz, 1995). His father is deeply disappointed in his girlish transformations; at one point, he throws Ranma into a pool shouting: “I am so ashamed of you”. Napier draws upon Eve Sedgwick's term, *homosexual panic*, to suggest



Figure 3. The two Ranma's depicted side by side: the strong masculinity and weaker femininity of *Ranma 1/2*.

that Ranma-as-girl represents “the fear of the heterosexual male that he is really homosexual” (Napier, 2001, p. 54). Within *Ranma 1/2*, this reading is established by the character of Kuno, a master kendo swordsman, becoming infatuated with Ranma, who he believes to be a woman. Newitz (1994; 1995) furthers the idea of a “homosexual panic” within male readings of *Ranma 1/2*, arguing that the male anime audience in the United States is emasculated by watching romantic anime. “Quite simply,” claims Newitz (1995), “*Ranma 1/2* demonstrates to the young man who enjoys romantic comedy *anime* that he is constantly in danger of

becoming a girl” (p. 6). Newitz argues that because the romance genre of anime consistently portrays women as passive, the loss of power that Ranma's female form suggests, is transferred onto the male fan population, with an equivalent loss of their ‘power’. “Like Ranma,” points out Newitz (ibid.), “the male *anime* fan has a ‘feminine half’ who enjoys passively consuming animated fantasies about love. His attachment to non-sexual romance might be said to feminize him” (p. 6). Newitz implies that any ambiguous feminisation, bisexuality, or homosexuality suggested by ambiguously gendered characters, is, at the very least, a source of discomfort for male fans, and at the worst, some form of gender victimisation of fans in the United States:

Especially for the heterosexual male fan who watches *anime* in an American context, this fear would be particularly acute, since American romantic comedies are aimed at a largely female audience (ibid., p. 6)

Newitz's identification of a "homosexual panic" within the male reception of anime appears to be generated by a broader fear of Japanese cultural imperialism, in the wider United States culture. Newitz reads anime as endorsing, in this case, gender conservatism by reinforcing stereotypical sex roles.

Sarah's privileging of the bath as a site of pleasure is centred on the appeal of transforming into the different and exotic. She sees the transformation into "masculinity" as appealing, and her dissatisfaction with the "feminine" form confirms Napier's reading of the conservative subtext within *Ranma 1/2*. In addition, while Newitz may have focused on *Ranma 1/2*'s male fans and their emasculation, Sarah demonstrates the other side, the benefits of being male for women.

Cyberpunk

Within the cyberpunk genre of anime, gender also plays an important role in portraying difference. The central female characters of two of the most well known cyberpunk anime: *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*, are deeply introspective and associated with an exploration of spiritualism and existential contemplation. Kei, in *Akira*, develops her telekinetic powers during the story to help restore the chaos unleashed by Tetsuo, while *Ghost in the Shell*'s Major Kusanagi questions her identity and sense of self as a human/machine hybrid. Many male anime fans I interviewed described how appealing they found these strong female characters. The female cyborg's (and female psychic's) combination of masculine and feminine qualities provided a different image from the sports heroes or outback explorers that dominate Australian male stereotypes, such as Paul Hogan's *Crocodile Dundee* character or Steve Irwin's *Crocodile Hunter* figure. In Chapter 7, I explore the similar appropriation of *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) characters by female anime fans to explore alternative gender politics. However, the male fan's appropriation of strong female characters in anime, as an icon of resistance and difference, raises significant issues regarding

how the image of Asian femininity is contained within existing notions of exotic and sexually available stereotypes.

As will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3, the term “techno-orientalism” (Morley & Robins, 1995) is an extension of the concept of orientalism which, put simply, is the idea that the West invented the concept of “the Orient” to define and legitimise its own cultural identity. Within the appropriation of anime in Australia, techno-orientalism seems an appropriate description of the hi-tech fantasies some fans create from the cyberpunk imagery offered in anime like *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira*, and the image of a futuristic, technologically superior Japan. Tom, a 19-year-old student, spoke of the similar cyberpunk representation of Japan he constructed through the imagery of anime and manga:

There’s gangs of juvenile bikers clashing with police, if you’re lucky you get experimented on genetically and get telekinesis, huge demons lurk in the shadows, all women are there for is to have sex, want sex, and get raped by the demons, and in the middle of Osaka there is a huge monster called ‘the Chojin’ constantly destroying the city with a ray of light from his mouth. Tokyo is the same, except the monster is called Godzilla. (Tom, 19, Anglo-Australian, student)

The fantasy of gendered violence that dominates Tom’s image of the techno-orient is one imagined world of the cyberpunk, which is drawn from titles such as *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*, or the soft-porn occult stories such as the *Legend of the Overfiend*. In these stories, women play central roles, whether it is as the strong, independent character of Major Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell*, or as the passive and submissive women in the ‘tentacle rape’ scenes of *Legend of the Overfiend*. These images evoke both new and old fears and desires of a techno-orient. During my interview with John, he described his admiration of the assertive and independent femininity Japanese animators had been able to depict in cyberpunk anime:

Craig: I’m interested in the cultural differences you pinpoint between Japanese animation and the cultures it enters. I’m wondering if you can define the ‘Japaneseness’ of anime or manga. Is there any ‘Japaneseness’ in there?

John: When you talk about who Japanese animators choose for lead roles and how their lead roles are defined, women in Japanese manga always play a

prominent role. Such as in the cases of a recent manga that I've seen, *Ghost in the Shell*. The main character is a female cyborg who is strong, assertive, very intelligent, and the leader of the police team she's in. Often in Hollywood films, you'll see the woman falling into that role, becoming that role, but not starting off in that role, not being the leader to start with. (25, Anglo-Australian, student)

In the Australian male's fantasies of the techno-orient, the exotic woman may perpetuate or challenge dominant notions of femininity. For John, Major Kusanagi, the female cyborg of *Ghost in the Shell*, is a symbol of a new alternative power of Asian femininity. Compared to Tom's "all women are there for is to have sex" imagining of the exotic Asian woman as a sex object, available and submissive, John's perception of exotic Asian femininity is associated with a symbol of new Asia, an Asia that is cosmopolitan, rich, modern, and technological; populated by women modelled on a "female cyborg who is strong, assertive, very intelligent, and the leader". The new exoticism of Asian femininity indicates the possibility for a new politics of transgressive pleasure and resistance that may reformulate the concept of the exotic.

Fans contextualise the transformations into the hard bodies of machines or the softer bodies of another gender within inwardly focused stories that ask: how could my life here in Australia be different? The desire for transformation, or the experience of some different identity, is a central concern expressed in the appropriation of anime by Western fans. Part of this desire for difference is because many fan's feel some level of alienation from the dominant culture. Scott, for example, complained of the lack of alternative identity choice offered within Australian culture, and the cultural hostility towards all things Japanese:

Some people mock me about the eyes of manga characters, but that just means they haven't seen any real manga. Most people are interested, and once exposed to the real thing, want to see more. Some of the more closed-minded "redneck" type Australians who are just plain racist, hate anything that's not a Holden Ute, and just tend to despise anything that they don't know about sometimes give me flack. But who cares anyway? Their lives suck. Maybe manga would be too cool for them. Probably. (Scott, 17, Anglo-Australian, student)

The resistance and frustration Scott expresses towards what he perceives as the dominant “redneck” culture of Australia, reveals both a motivation for finding an alternative identity in anime, as well as suggesting a certain level of shame at not living up to the image of Australian masculinity. Karl, a 23-year-old Information Technology student, sees a parallel between the illusions of a Japan defined by manga and a masculine Australia defined through popular movies:

Hmm the good thing is that I don't get my views of Japan from anime. It'd be like getting your views of Australia from *Crocodile Dundee* or *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*. It's a form of entertainment, it's a part of the culture. It's not “the” culture. I get my ideas and images of Japan from Japanese friends and Australian friends who have lived there. (Karl, 23, Anglo-Australia, student)

Karl and Scott take refuge in the hybridity and diversity of identities offered in anime and in the way these identities connect with the life experiences of friends and acquaintances. It indicates the difficulties many Australian male anime fans find themselves in as they attempt to assume identities or interests that may stray from dominant stereotypes of male behaviour. It also shows that the appropriation of anime elements, that can then be transformed into imagined lives or other worlds, are only ever partial escapes from the pressures to conform to sexual identity and broader societal expectations of “normal” behaviour.

Alternative Identifications

The potential new identifications that Karl and Scott perceive in anime offer an alternative from the culturally exclusivist identities offered in Australia—the racist redneck, the bushman, the outback worker, or gay city dweller. The enjoyment of the manga and anime forms, and the freedom they allow to explore spaces that are not restricted to a national or regional level, reveals the global scale many of these fan ‘identity projects’ operate on. Karl describes how he doesn't rely on manga and anime forms to frame nationalist images of Japan—“It's not ‘the’ culture,”—suggests that his enjoyment of manga and anime lies

outside national or inter-national spaces and within other ‘identity projects’. The racism, prejudice, and nationalism associated with essentialist identities of Australianness create feelings of disaffection that generate a desire for new kinds of identifications.

The consequences of these new kinds of identifications fans explore through manga and anime can be seen most clearly at the domestic level of the family. Most of the fans I interviewed during my research were aged between 15 and 23 years old and still living at home with their parents. Because of this, their use of anime was often initially appraised by both siblings and parents. Conflicts would sometimes arise over the time allowed to watch videos on the family television and VCR, or parental concern over the amount of money their son/daughter was spending on anime and manga. Often the problems would be over issues of enforcing time management and better consideration for other members of the household. In some cases, however, anime became central to wider tensions and difficulties within the family. Some fans described sudden and unpredictable strains on the family group that occurred as anime and other entertainments provoked disagreements over identity, control, and family unity. Greg described the suspicion and criticism he received from his parents upon their discovery of his enjoyment of anime:

Well, I have a real problem at the moment, because my parents are English and my grandparents are English and they all grew up during the war, and you mention anything Japanese and you’re out the door basically. ... My parents just talk about the war, they would always talk about the war when I was over at my grandparents place. So, I’ve got to watch what I say. I can’t watch anime when they’re home, I have to wait until everyone’s gone before I can watch anything. ... I’ve never spoken to them about my interest in manga and anime. I know that they don’t want to talk about it. I mean they know that I watch it, but they strictly say, “No, you don’t watch it while we’re home”. So I have to watch what I do. It’s not so much the stuff that they hate; it’s the being Japanese that they hate. They just basically don’t want to know anything Japanese. They don’t watch much TV. (Greg, 23, Anglo-Australian, sales clerk)

Greg’s story is significant for a number of reasons. First, we can see how anime—as a new commodity—is negotiated within existing structures and beliefs of the family, which are

enforced by the parents. At a larger, political level, one can see how, as Appadurai puts it: “larger politics sometimes penetrate and ignite domestic politics” (ibid., p. 44). Greg has split from his parents and grandparents on a key matter of “political identification in a transnational setting” (ibid., p. 44). His parents and grandparents remain strongly committed to the image of Japan as their wartime enemy of World War II, while Greg has become a fan of manga and anime, a popular culture that both he and his parents see as distinctly Japanese. Thus, Greg must hide these interests so that he can still get along with his parents: “I have to wait until everyone’s gone before I can watch anything”. Greg realises that it is not the animation itself that is the problem but its “Japaneseness”. The dilemma of Greg’s attraction to anime hints at the almost illicit fantasy of imagining and even identifying with this taboo other. Greg’s story suggests that he is torn between the independence that watching anime gives him from his parents and grandparents, and the dominance of his English family heritage.

Greg’s dilemma also reveals the important role that the media plays in providing images and information offering the potential of cross-cultural affiliations and construction of imagined worlds. Significantly, Greg concludes his story by mentioning that his parents do not watch much television. The television, then, becomes a symbol of the changes in attitudes towards Japan since World War II. First, it is a literal example of the type of hardware that Japan exported since World War II to establish its rise as an economic superpower and foster its image as a hi-tech economic superpower. This image now dominates the image of modern Japan for the youth generation Greg is part of. Second, television is a medium used to distribute content such as anime so that fans, such as Greg, can imagine different identities and worlds through the political and cultural formations he perceives within these images.

Conclusion

One issue that these shape-shifting bodies provoke is the problem of how to analyse the significance of the Japanese origins and content of manga and anime. Anime bodies appear to have no clear ethnicity; their hair and eye colour, comic-book features and proportions can divorce them from any realistic representation of ethnicity (Iwabuchi, 2002c). As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 6, the softening of the “Japaneseness” of these anime bodies means they can be easily domesticated into any local market (Iwabuchi, 1998). However, as I argue in Chapter 2, for others, these anime bodies are strongly bound to the aesthetic traditions and cultural peculiarities of Japan (Levi, 1996; Schodt, 1983, 1996). The various readings of anime as global commodities, culturally removed of a Japanese presence, or as an extension of a uniquely Japanese approach to image and narrative, are, of course, dependent on context. While some bodies may look very Western, with blonde hair, blue eyes, and so on, often their actions are “Japanese”. This is evident in the case of *Sailor Moon*, a character who may have blue eyes and blonde hair, but nevertheless reveals her “Japaneseness” through banal disclosures, such as using chopsticks and eating Japanese food, visiting Shinto shrines, wearing a Japanese school uniform, and so on.

Napier (2001) locates anime’s appeal in its ability to be both distinctively Japanese and universally appealing:

[Anime] is both different in a way that is appealing to a Western audience satiated on the predictabilities of American popular culture and also remarkably approachable in its universal themes and images. The distinctive aspects of anime—ranging from narrative and characterisation to genre and visual styles—are the elements that initially capture Western viewers’ attentions (and for some viewers these may be the main keys of attractions), but for others it is the engrossing stories that keep them coming back for more. (pp. 9-10)

Thus, a central feature of anime today is its dual identity as both familiar and different for fans. In this way, anime can be considered as part of the transnational flow of cultural material; it is both “triumphantly universal” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 43) in its capacity to be

exported globally and domesticated to suit many different local environments, while also being “resiliently particular” (ibid., p. 43) in the differences that can be found between Western and Japanese visual aesthetics (see Chapter 2). In this chapter, I have shown how the familiar and different forms of manga and anime have been used by fans to explore the possibility of shape shifting into different sexual identities and global cultures as a way to resist and negotiate the exclusivist national identities they perceive in Australia. I will further develop this theme of fans escaping from an alienating domestic/national space into a global manga and anime culture through the hybrid texts that fans construct from manga and anime forms (Chapters 4 and 7). As Napier (2001) suggests:

Anime’s immense range enforces that there is no single anime style and that the “difference” it presents is far more than a simple division between Japan and not-Japan. Anime thus both celebrates difference and transcends it. Creating a new kind of artistic space that remains informed and enriched by modes of representation that are both culturally traditional and representative of the universal properties of the human imagination. (pp. 33-34)

As Napier suggests, the denial (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Ueno, 1999) or celebration (Levi, 1996; Schodt, 1983, 1996) of an essential “Japaneseness” within manga and anime, is part of a more complex, transnational uncertainty of manga and anime’s representations of identity, and cultural value. My project in this thesis is to show that the appreciation of manga and anime’s “Japaneseness” by some fans and scholars creates a space where new and different aesthetics and experiences are explored. As I will show throughout the thesis, many different communities, from cultural industries (Chapter 6), Anglo and Asian-diaspora anime fans in Australia (Chapter 1 and 7), to Western scholars (Chapter 2), use a variety of manga and anime forms (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and Afterthought) to explore gender politics, reconstruct identity, and reiterate the cultural value of these forms.

CHAPTER 2

Eyesight Culture: Framing Japan

The subject of late-twentieth-century Japan confounds the simplicities of world order, whether new or old. Crossing boundaries of race and region, of temporalities and territories established at the foundation of the modern world system, installed everywhere with its enormous reserves of capital, ‘Japan’ appears ubiquitous, nomadic, transnational. Yet at the same time Japan seems to reinscribe the distinction ever more sharply between the ‘West’ and itself. (Ivy, 1995, p. 1)

In this chapter, I argue that it has principally been western scholars who have promoted the importance and significance of manga and anime’s Japaneseness to an international audience. I point out that a key achievement of the academic analysis of manga and anime has been the creation of a space where an appreciation of the forms Japaneseness can be reworked and reiterated. As I show in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 7, the western academic contribution to global manga and anime culture has been adopted and reinvented by the “knowledge communities” of fans (Jenkins, 2002), movie critics (Chapter 4), and cultural industries (Chapter 6 and Afterthought). However, I also warn that this Western perception of a unique and different Japaneseness within manga and anime unwittingly feeds *nihonjinron* (discourse of Japaneseness) arguments within Japan that construct an exclusivist identity around essentialist definitions of “being Japanese”. An example of this is claim that *only* Japanese are able to create and understand the intended meaning of manga and anime forms. The *nihonjinron* expression, and the complicity of some Western scholars in uncritically maintaining it, results in a “hardening” (Gillespie, 2000, p. 166) of cultural boundaries rather than their opening up. It also ignores and reduces the impact Western culture has had on the aesthetics, ideals, and values that define the manga and anime form. Moreover, the limited sense of belonging to a particular nation or culture that the *nihonjinron* approach represents is the very antithesis of the transnational and diasporic affiliations that fans foster and create



Figure 4. Images from the anime series *Oh My Goddess!* spray painted onto a van display this Japanese fan's enthusiasm for manga characters (Ikebukuro, Japan).

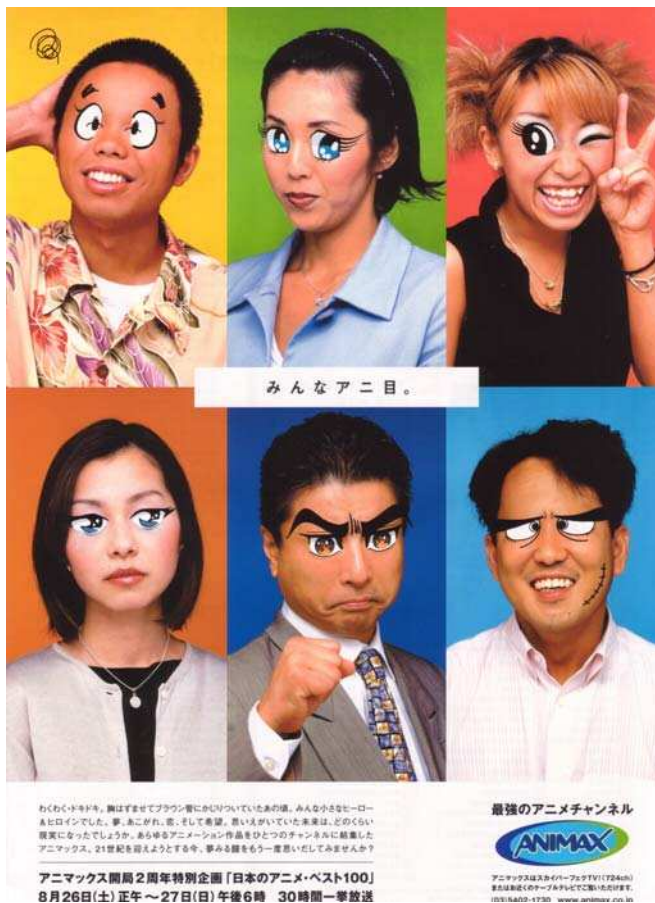


Figure 5. An advertisement for an anime marathon on the *Animax* channel, Sky Perfect TV, Japan (August, 2000).

suggests “everyone’s anime eyes” (literally represented here by the manga eyes grafted onto the Japanese face). These figures spectacularly display the Japanese fans’ enthusiasm for anime’s characters. They have even been used to convey information, such as instructions

(see Chapter 7), and the desire to use anime to escape from the racist and restrictive national identity some fans experienced in Australia (see Chapter 1).

The “Vitality” of Manga

Manga and anime have become Japan’s domestic and international success story. In Japan, they are available from newsagents to department stores, and can be anything from fictional romances, to “how-to” guides. The distinctive big eyes and dramatic expressions appear on surfaces as unusual as car-bodies (see Figure 4) and Japanese-bodies, such as Figure 5’s advertisement for an anime marathon on the Animax channel, Sky Perfect TV, Japan (August, 2000). The slogan reads “みんなアニメ目”—everyone’s anime—while the use of the kanji 目 (eye) in anime (アニメ)



Figure 6. A manga teaching road safety and driving skills.

that teach people how to drive (see Figure 6).

Anime appears to have become a significant part of Japan's cultural life. A recent Japanese Government report (Media and Content Industry Division, 2003) into the animation industry, revealed that by 2001, its annual market worth had increased seven fold since 1985, to a current total of 1,860 hundred million yen (over 1.5 billion dollars U.S.) (2001年における市場規模は1860億円). The report also claimed that sixty percent of all

animation broadcast in the world is made in Japan (

世界で放送されるアニメーションの6割は日

本製). Internationally, anime, such as *Astro Boy*, have spread across the world to become popular with children and fondly remembered by adults. Furthermore, popular titles such as *Pokemon*, have been broadcast in 68 countries (ibid.) to become commercially lucrative global franchises. The Japanese media critic, Satō Kenji (1997), argues that the international success of anime "auteurs", such as Hayao Miyazaki (*Princess Mononoke*, 1997, *Spirited Away*, 2001) and Hideaki Anno (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 1995-1996) during the 1990s helped position "Japan as the world's undisputed 'anime superpower'" (p. 50). In fact, by 2002, Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* has become the highest-earning film of all time in Japan, and in 2003 won the Academy Award in the United States for Best Animated Feature Film of the Year.

The terms "manga" and "anime" are now part of global popular culture. They appear in dictionaries (*Macquarie essential dictionary*, 1999), where *manga* is defined as "the Japanese form of comic book, which has a wide variety of subject areas, catering for both

children and adults” (p. 482); and the term *manga movie* described as “a Japanese animated movie, made in the style of the Japanese comic book” (p. 482) has been included. These definitions introduce two important elements of manga and anime’s translation into the West. Firstly, the emphasis on manga’s “variety of subject areas” and broad appeal, reveals manga’s key difference to Western (United States) comic books, which are often marginalised as children’s material. As Napier (2001) points out, “unlike cartoons in the West, anime in Japan is truly a mainstream pop cultural phenomenon” (p. 7). “Essentially”, Napier (2001) argues, “anime works include everything that Western audiences are accustomed to seeing in live-action films—romance, comedy, tragedy, adventure, even psychological probing of a kind seldom attempted in recent mass-culture Western film or television” (pp. 6-7). Furthermore, the Macquarie dictionary’s choice of manga as the umbrella term for both comic books and animation (which are often dealt with separately in Japan) reveals the dominance of “manga” in the Western classification of both Japanese comic books and animation. While anime is the preferred term within the Australian (and Western) fan community, the word “manga” is more familiar to the wider public because of its use in the early 1990s by distributors and popular press to refer to the influx of Japanese animation at the time (see Chapter 4). To avoid confusion, I use manga to refer to Japanese comic books and anime to Japanese animation.

Scholars and artists also see manga as the source from which anime developed. Schodt (1996) refers to anime as being “derived from manga culture and often based on original manga works, and as such it is often a watered-down version of the original” (p. 14). The anime director and manga artist Hayao Miyazaki (1988) believes that manga has a strong influence on the anime industry: “Japanese anime make manga into anime, use character designs of manga, absorb the vitality of manga, and are made by staff members who wanted to be manga writers” (ibid., Excessive expressionism in anime section, para. 9). The “vitality

of manga” Miyazaki refers to, is clearly expressed in his later claim that the sequential dynamics of manga panels were a way of solving the time and budget restraints on television anime. These practical and financial restraints restricted the number of cells used in any anime, and as a result, reduced its overall sense of motion. Thus, many early television anime, such as *Speed Racer*, relied on often-used still shots of characters with dramatic expressions to generate their impact. As Miyazaki (*ibid.*) points out, this stilted, slowing down of motion was overcome through incorporating manga techniques:

Japanese animation started when we gave up moving. That was made possible by introducing the methods of manga, including *gekiga*. The technique of cel anime was suited to obvious impacts, and it was designed so that the viewers would see nothing but powerfulness, coolness, and cuteness. Instead of putting life into a character with gestures or facial expressions, character design was required to express all the charm of the character with just one picture. (*ibid.*, Excessive expressionism in anime section, para. 11)

Miyazaki’s reference to manga’s *gekiga* style—dramatic manga stories for an adult male readership—is also relevant. Loveday and Chiba (1986) cite the development of the *gekiga* and *shōjo* (manga for girls) genres during the mid-1960s as establishing manga’s appeal to a truly mass audience of men and women: “The big take-off in the medium really came after the mid-sixties with the arrival of *gekiga* (dramatic pictures) as a genre of Japanese comic with an intense, often sordid realism frequently focussing on lust and violence” (p. 163).

Framing Japan

There are two dominant approaches to framing Japan within the analysis of manga and anime. The first emphasises manga and anime’s globally recognised qualities, and the ease of their absorption into any domestic market. This approach highlights manga and anime’s transnational virtues. As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 6, scholars (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Kenji, 1997; Ueno, 1999) have argued that anime’s popularity overseas is caused by its softened Japanese presence, making it easy to domesticate locally. In a discussion (“Anime hall of fame 100,” 2000) of the global popularity of the anime television

and movie series, *Lupan the Third*, (TV series 1971-1972) *Brutus*, a Japanese lifestyle magazine, refers to anime's "nationless" (無国籍) and "timeless" (無時代) qualities as being central to its international appeal (ibid., p. 73). The article points out that the two main characters, Lupan and Jigen, are international, cosmopolitan types, whose behaviour is difficult to associate with any specific culture. Furthermore, their story is set in a broadly conceptualised "present world" that shifts to various overseas locations, the characters and plots of which remain largely unchanged over the years. Similar "nationless" and "timeless" qualities can be found in other popular anime, like *Astro Boy*, *Dragon Ball Z*, and *Pokémon*. While these elements provide an explanation of anime's marketability, they marginalise anime's Japanese origins and context.

The second approach, which I investigate in this chapter, is an argument that manga and anime represent a significantly different "Japanese" approach to popular culture, animation, and comic-books. Internationally, it has been Western scholars who appear to be most interested in tracing this "traditional" Japanese heritage of manga and anime (Hong, 1998; Lent, 1989, 1995; Levi, 1996; Loveday & Chiba, 1986; McCarter & Kime, 1996; Napier, 2001; Schodt, 1983, 1996; Wells, 1997). Western academics and critics have connected manga and anime to various aspects of Japan, including architecture (Nitschke, 1994), motherhood (Allison, 1996), social life and customs (Gill, 1998; Kinsella, 2000; Poitras, 1999), homosexuality (Allison, 2000b; McLelland, 2000c), gender (Buckley, 1991; A. E. Imamura, 1996), history (McCarter & Kime, 1996; Schodt, 1983), popular culture (Standish, 1998), and religion (Levi, 1997). Here, I argue that Western scholars link the Japaneseness of manga and anime to its "difference", and that this approach is an affirmation of the "Japanese" cultural value of manga and anime texts.

Japanese “Nation” and “Identity”

As suggested by Ivy’s quote, (which begins this chapter), Japan “confounds the simplicities of world order” (1995, p. 1), because it is able to assimilate foreign influences, export large numbers of goods, and expand its economy, while appearing nationally introspective, disavowing internal differences, and being notoriously closed to immigration. “Japan”, to return to Ivy’s (1995) quote, “appears ubiquitous, nomadic, trans-national. Yet at the same time Japan seems to reinscribe the distinction ever more sharply between the ‘West’ and itself” (p. 1). Ivy analyses the operation of *nihonjinron* within a number of striking national advertising campaigns, which are co-opted by advertisers and commentators as evidence of the uniqueness and superiority of Japanese advertising. The original United States adverts they are based on, however, are conveniently forgotten. This tension between asserting a resiliently particular image of Japan, at the expense of acknowledging the significance of foreign influence, is a key problem that informs my survey of the Western and Japanese framing of manga’s “difference”. Here, I will look specifically at explanations that explain the importance of manga and anime through the rhetoric of *nihonjinron* and its framing of exclusivist identities of race and nation.

It should be noted that this is not a history of anime or manga; this has been covered by various Japanese (S. Atsushi, 2000; Yaguchi, Ouga, Otoha, Dehara, & Okamoto, 1999) and Western scholars (Kinsella, 2000; Schodt, 1983, 1996). It is, rather, an analysis of the cultural associations between Japan and manga/anime that these scholars have fostered, and an observation of how these choices indicate a development of ideas and values, as they shape themselves in different national and hybrid contexts. That is, how certain images and information dominate the translation of manga and anime into a national (Japan) and hybrid (Western appropriation) environment.

Investigating Manga

While, for many, *Akira* announced the entrance of anime (and to a lesser degree, manga) onto the world stage in 1990 (see Chapter 4), anime's impact on the West was foreshadowed at least ten years earlier by the small, but influential, literature on Japanese comic books that detailed the experiences of mainly foreigners in Japan with popular culture, such as manga (Buruma, 1985; Kato, Powers, & Stronach, 1989; Loveday & Chiba, 1986; Schodt, 1983). These articles and books written during the 1980s define a Japanese visual culture that was different and confronting for the West, particularly in its depiction of sex and violence towards women (Darling, 1987; Hadfield, 1988; Ledden & Fejes, 1987). These articles describe manga as being violent and aggressive, and were written well before the current interest in anime.

The focus on manga in the 1980s and on anime in the 1990s, shared a number of similar discoveries and problems. Both defined manga or anime as having a distinctive Japanese aesthetic, and both engaged with the debate over the sensationalist reporting of manga or anime as being shocking sites of violence and titillation. Within this chapter, I concentrate mainly on manga, as it established the basic styles and genres from which anime developed, and it is through manga that the scholars I will discuss, (Lent, 1989; Loveday & Chiba, 1986; Schodt, 1983, 1996; Yaguchi et al., 1999) have articulated a distinct Japanese aesthetic¹.

Principal amongst these writers was Fredrick Schodt (1983; 1996). His books helped establish the idea of a diverse Japanese comic book environment that appealed to a broad audience of children and adults. Napier (2001), in her recent investigation of anime as both a recognisably Japanese art form and as a universally appealing commodity, refers to Frederick Schodt as “the dean of writers on manga in the West” (p. 20). Schodt's (1996) research was

¹ Napier (2001) and Levi (1996), while acknowledging the significant influence of manga on anime, offer cultural and textual analyses of anime that also consider its “Japaneseness”.

particularly useful to establish the image of Japan as “the first nation on earth where comics have become a full fledged medium of expression” (p. 20).

Schodt (1983) wrote one of the earliest books in English about the Japanese history and culture of manga. It remains an excellent introduction to manga because of Schodt’s long experience in Japan, knowledge of the manga industry, and use of Japanese source material.

The key concern that Schodt (ibid.) addresses is nicely expressed in his prediction that:

In the years to come, the sheer size and momentum of Japanese comics culture may make itself felt around the world indirectly, through the commercial spin-offs of toys, animation, picture books, video-games, and even locally scripted and redrawn comics. And this watered-down, internationalized format will be only a shadow of what in Japan is actually the visual generation’s new visual culture. (p. 158)

The global popularity of anime such as *Pokemon* (TV series 1997-continuing), and *Dragonball Z* (TV series 1989-1996), as well as video games series, such as *The Final Fantasy*, have all been influenced by, or derive their story and characters directly from manga. Schodt’s prediction, then, was quite accurate. What Schodt (ibid.) constructs in his books, is a recuperation of the “watered-down, internationalised format” (p. 158) of the manga style that most foreigners know, into Japan’s “new visual culture” (p. 158). In interviews (McCarter & Kime, 1996; O’Connell, 1997), Schodt has explained that his motivation for writing about manga was a determination to show people the distinctiveness and variety of manga as it is understood in Japan. Part of Schodt’s interest in providing an introduction to manga (Schodt, 1983), as well as an investigation of key artists, trends and aspects of the manga industry (Schodt, 1996), was to broaden, what he regarded as, the limited understanding of manga in the West:

I think that even the fans here in America are generally unaware of how unrepresentative what they are reading is. The manga that come to America are skewed to the American market, which is inevitable (and not necessarily bad). But it does skew people’s perceptions of the material. (in McCarter & Kime, 1996, para. 7)

Specifically, Schodt (in O'Connell, 1997) wants to show Westerners that “Japanese comics offer more than science fiction, giant robots and young girls with big eyes” (p. 41). The something more that manga offers, argues Schodt, is an opportunity to discover a different world through the study of Japanese language and culture. As he says: “It really helped me learn Japanese. ... Manga *are* a written introduction to the living language, and much closer to what people actually speak” (in McCarter & Kime, 1996, para. 2). The project of using manga to educate people on Japanese culture, language and history can also be seen in the now defunct *Mangajin* magazine and books, Gilles Poitras’ (1999) encyclopaedic *The Anime Companion*, and the Japanese culture and language features that regularly appear in anime and manga magazines such as *Protoculture Addicts* and *Newtype USA*.

John Lent (1989) continues Schodt’s agenda to broaden and challenge the limited and negative image of manga held by many Western commentators. Lent notes that many critics believe manga contains only vulgar and erotic themes. His history of manga makes three broad points in defence of manga and anime’s cultural legitimacy. First, manga’s vulgar and erotic themes provide a link to Japan’s past. Second, manga deal with many other important themes and images apart from these, such as the political use of manga and newspaper caricatures in Japan. Third, while the technologies and styles used to produce manga were initially appropriated from the West, the Japanese comic book industry has now exceeded the size, popularity, and scope of any other comic book market in the world.

Although manga may be confronting, Lent (*ibid.*) argues that it has become the most innovative and diverse form of comic art anywhere:

It is true that Japanese comic books are oftentimes brutal, vulgar, and in poor taste ... but they are more innovative, pioneering and gigantic in format and profits. It was in Japan that the first inexpensive, mass-produced, regularly scheduled comic books appeared in the 1920s, a decade before their advent in the United States; that the first professional association of cartoonists, Manga Kourakukai, was created in 1918, and that the first comic art museum was opened in 1966 - the City Museum of Cartoon Art in Omiya. Japan has, in Kawasaki City, the only temple devoted to cartoons. (p. 221)

Lent (ibid.) also regards the Japanese manga industry as unique and highly developed: “The hugeness of the Japanese comic art industry has no parallel in the world. A number of magazines top 1 million circulation, and cartoonists are among the highest-paid individuals in the nation” (p. 230).

Lent’s three arguments in defence of manga’s notorious reputation in the West and Schodt’s (1996) claim that “manga are also a window on another world” (p. 15), suggests manga’s Japanese origins and context are central to its meaning.

Japanese Origins and Context

Osamu Tezuka—creator of *Astro Boy* and an important figure in the history of Japanese manga and anime—traces a similar passage to Schodt’s (1983) “watered-down, internationalised” (p. 158) anime to the discovery of manga as “a window on another world” (Schodt, 1996, p. 15) of Japan. In his forward to Schodt, Tezuka (1983) argues that anime is the first experience of Japanese visual culture for many foreigners:

Having solved the problem of language, animation, with its broad appeal, has in fact become Japan’s supreme goodwill ambassador, not just in the West but in the Middle East and Africa, in South America, in Southeast Asia, and even in China. The entry port is almost always TV. In France the children love watching *Goldorak*. *Doraemon* is a huge hit in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. Chinese youngsters all sing the theme to *Astro Boy*. (p. 10)

Tezuka (ibid.) claims that anime is able to achieve this global influence for two reasons. Firstly, it is because it has “solved the language problem” (p. 10), by replacing the original Japanese vocal track with the national language of the country it is being domesticated into. Secondly, being broadcast on television exposes it to a large and spatially dispersed audience. Tezuka (ibid.) refers to anime as “Japan’s supreme goodwill ambassador” (p. 10) because it introduces people to a visual culture that overseas distributors have tailored to domestic tastes. This domesticated anime does not contain an assertive

Japanese cultural presence, but a subtle one that fans (see Chapter 1) or researchers like Schodt may discover. As Tezuka (*ibid.*) points out:

Thanks to animation, people in other countries have begun to learn what Japanese comics are like. Fans go off in search of comics based on their favorite feature-length animation films and in doing so come across other kinds of Japanese comics. (pp. 10-11)

Tezuka locates in manga an essential “Japaneseness” that cannot be softened, unlike that which the dubbing and editing of anime does. For Tezuka, manga intended for Japanese readers is bound to two distinctive Japanese communication practices. Firstly, the Japanese writing system used for captions and onomatopoeia “is totally indecipherable to foreign readers” (p. 10), and secondly, the reading protocols for manga, “like other Japanese publications, open and are read from right to left, making them hard to follow visually for people used to reading in the opposite direction” (p. 10). Thus, Tezuka argues, “simply as an object to be read, then, a Japanese comic in its raw form is not easily accepted in the West” (p. 10). Additionally, as Tezuka also (*ibid.*) points out, manga contain numerous Japanese cultural references that are difficult for foreigners to appreciate:

There is also the matter of cultural distance. The Japanese comic is designed for Japanese readers who share particular attitudes and customs, many of which are unknown outside of Japan. There are, therefore, going to be lots of Japanese comics that simply cannot be understood unless the reader is Japanese. (p. 10)

Tezuka (*ibid.*) employs a strong *nihonjinron* discourse to express the distinctive Japanese qualities of manga, with comments such as: “Japanese writing is totally indecipherable to foreign readers” (p. 10) and the difference of Japanese culture means that “lots of Japanese comics ... simply cannot be understood unless the reader is Japanese” (p. 10). Such remarks echo the *nihonjinron* myth of an innate cultural sensibility that only Japanese can practice.

Tezuka’s *nihonjinron* framing of manga also tempers his enthusiasm for its ability to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries. Tezuka acknowledges that manga’s depictions of

human bodies, objects, and basic dramatic or comic situations can be universally understood. “Comics,” argues Tezuka (ibid.), “regardless of what language they are printed in, are an important form of expression that crosses all national and cultural boundaries” (p. 11). As long as someone can read the sequential motion of the image, manga’s aesthetics can be enjoyed regardless of differences in language. As the well-known United States artist, Frank Miller (in Schodt, 1983 p. 35), said of his delight in reading domestic Japanese manga:

I was able to ‘read’ a hundred pages of a Japanese comic the other day without ever becoming confused. And it was written in Japanese! They rely totally on the visuals. They approach comics as a pure form more than American comic artists do.

However, Tezuka sees the globally recognised elements of manga and anime as only an introduction to a complex *nihonjinron* construction of “Japan”. The implication is that without an understanding of the deeper cultural and historical elements of Japan that operate within manga, any reading will only be superficial. Fans, in their quest for more information about their favourite anime series, are enticed to discover the manga intended for a Japanese reader, and through this journey back to the original, they become increasingly aware of the richness of Japanese culture and references to the distinctive Japanese aesthetics that it contains. Miller (in Schodt, 1983) follows this pattern, as he described later, manga led him to consider the significance of 18th century Japanese woodblock prints as inspirations for manga art:

Lately, I’ve been immersing myself in Japanese prints. . . . They closely resemble comic book drawing, which in many ways is emblematic. People have come to recognize a certain configuration of lines as being a nose, for example. . . . They deal with a series of images that, like comics, have to convey information. (p. 35)

The repatriation of manga and anime as Japanese can be seen in the use of Tezuka’s creations in the 1999 poster for the Japanese Ministry of Education and Culture (*Monbushō*) scholarships for Australian University students who were to study in Japan. This poster includes a prominent picture of Tezuka surrounded by his manga icons, such as *Astro Boy*



Figure 7. Japan's ambassadors: Tezuka and his most famous manga characters.

and *Kimba the White Lion* (see Figure 7). The photo of Tezuka and his manga/anime creations as new cultural commodities from Japan counterbalances the photograph of “traditional Japan” in the form of the *Kiyomizu* temple in Kyōto. While most Australian students would be unaware who Tezuka was, and some may not even realise that *Astro Boy* and *Kimba* are Japanese products, the use of this image is a significant attempt by the Japanese government to connect Japan with new and appealing images of its culture. Tezuka's image—as the

creator of these well-known manga icons, and more simply as a “Japanese body”—fixes the origins of *Astro Boy* and *Kimba* to Japan. In this context, Tezuka and his manga/anime icons have become “Japan's supreme goodwill ambassador” (Tezuka, 1983, p. 10), recruiting foreign students to Japan, the home of manga and anime.

For Tezuka, foreigners in Japan may come to enjoy manga after gaining sufficient command of its language and cultural nuances. However, he believes that for most foreigners, raw manga presents a distinctly Japanese experience, and because of this difference, much manga will never be exported outside of Japan. Thus, to understand and define manga and anime, one must acknowledge Japan's language, culture, history, literature, and mythology. It is on these terms that Tezuka (ibid.) praises Schodt's work as a “true picture of comics

culture in Japan” (p. 11), because Schodt has attempted to “seek out the Japanese character and identify the wellspring of Japanese vitality” (p. 11) that powers manga.

Applying This Pattern to Fans

The discovery and privileging of “Japan” in manga and anime did occur for the fans I interviewed and conducted focus groups with. Experiences included an enjoyment at decoding manga’s imagery, despite lacking adequate Japanese language skills, as one participant, Rick recounted:

I get my manga in the original format, even though I can’t read a word of it. The reason is ... I really don’t have a satisfactory answer for it, except to say I can basically understand the general flow of the story just from looking at the pictures. Even then, just from that, I find the stories in them much more satisfactory than that of any U.S. comic.

For Rick, the manga image has helped him traverse linguistic boundaries to be able to “understand the general flow of the story”. Importantly, Rick does not see his reliance on pictures as a superficial process but as a way to gain a “much more satisfactory” experience than that of reading American comics. As Tezuka (1983) suggested, part of the satisfaction of manga is in recognising its cultural and stylistic specificity to Japan, or in this case, its difference from American comics. For many fans, this active process of discovering manga (and anime’s) rich Japanese cultural references, and distinctive aesthetic conventions, is a central part of its enjoyment. This is clearly expressed in the different types of curiosity and enjoyment Joseph found in subtitled, compared to dubbed anime:

I like to know what things mean, and if there are any hidden meanings, or jokes, or cultural things that can make my viewing more enjoyable, I want to know! I like dubs that I can trust to be as accurate as possible in their translation, as I can spend more time watching the beautiful Japanese anime art and seeing the character’s faces and expressions. However, subtitles are cool, because I love the Japanese language and the voices. Also, it means that explanations and jokes can be put in brackets so I know what’s going on. And, I know that I’m getting the most literal translation of what is being said.

Joseph's determination to "know what things mean" extends to both aesthetic ("the beautiful anime art") and cultural ("hidden meaning, or jokes, or ... the Japanese language") elements that are firmly located within an appreciation of anime's Japanese origins and context.

Furthermore, it is important to Joseph that the translations are as "accurate" and "literal" as possible so that he can come as close as possible to the original version. Interestingly, many fans I interviewed were very concerned about any alterations that had been made to anime in order to domesticate it. While Schodt (1983) labelled many anime as "watered-down, internationalised" (p. 158) versions of their manga originals that provide "a window on another world" (1996, p. 15), Australian fans distinguished between anime that were "watered-down" and anime that provided a "window on another world"—that of Japan. As

Gino commented:

The shows were made and directed by Japanese and aimed at Japanese. Trying to change them to fit another culture is, to me, wrong. I'd rather do a little research so I can understand the "whys" and "hows", and enjoy the show the way it was intended to be enjoyed.

These sentiments were also shared by Alistair:

I appreciate the fact that anime is Japanese, and that there are many cultural facets to it, and enjoy learning about the culture of Japan while simultaneously being entertained. Thus, I am disappointed when the cultural aspects are removed to make it more "reachable" to Western audiences. An excellent example of this is in the manga *Mason Ikkoku* by Rumiko Takahashi. Viz, the American translator and distributor, completely removed the first story arc from the comic, on the grounds that American readers would not be able to understand the storyline.

Alistair and Gino—like Schodt—research and construct "another world" (Schodt, 1996, p. 15) of "Japan", through carefully selected anime and manga texts that are significantly different from the domesticated versions that have been "changed to fit another culture" (Gino). Jenkins (1997) describes a similar process in fans' production of stories, novels, art and songs based on their favourite television show, such as *Star Trek*: "Fandom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of media consumption

into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community” (Jenkins, 1997p. 520). While these fans do not discuss producing their own fan texts, they have transformed the experience of manga and anime from a domesticated version where “cultural aspects [of Japan] are removed” (Alistair), to a new and different experience of its Japanese origins and context where they learn “while simultaneously being entertained” (Alistair).

Approaches to Japan’s Visual Culture

There are two different approaches to framing manga and anime in terms of a distinctive Japanese visual culture. The first is to establish general attitudes towards the iconography that exists in contemporary Japan, such as its writing system and shared codes and practices seen in manga. The second is to evoke the spirit of Japan’s heritage of aesthetic styles that inspire today’s manga. Schodt (1983), Lent (1989), and other academics (Levi, 1996; Loveday & Chiba, 1986; McCarter & Kime, 1996) have linked the stylised and simplified images of manga and anime, to the distinctive Japanese aesthetics of Zen pictures and *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints that are able to capture a mood, an essence, and an impression of their subject.

Eyesight Culture

The “wellspring of Japanese vitality” (Tezuka in Schodt, 1983, p. 11) according to Schodt, lies in the unique visual culture he perceives in Japan. For Schodt, the manga page is an aesthetic, fantastic object that requires the particular “reading skills that new generations of Japanese have developed” (Schodt, 1983). Schodt (*ibid.*) points out that the length of many manga magazines—an average weekly is about 320 pages long—gives artists the space to make “extensive use of purely visual effects” (p. 18). The variety of angles used over several pages, that depict a samurai fighter attacking his opponent, or the “silence” of a tragic death

scene containing no dialogue, so “the picture alone carries the story” (ibid., p. 21), display an art that can be symbolic and iconographic. As Schodt (1983) points out:

Room to experiment has made Japanese artists experts at page layout. They have learned to make the page flow; to build tension and to invoke moods by varying the number of frames used to depict a sequence; to use the cinematic techniques of fade-out, fade-in, montage, and even superimposition. (p. 20)

The expertise of manga artists to create complex manga layouts and narratives is located, for Schodt, within the visual culture and reading skills of the Japanese. Japanese people, Schodt suggests, are able to decode and use symbols because of their daily use of the complex Japanese writing system that allows vertical and horizontal layout of its four writing scripts: *hiragana*, *kanji*, *katakana*, and *romaji*. *Kanji* are the pictographic characters adopted from the Chinese language and are used to represent physical objects, abstract notions and names (Rowley, 1992). The *kana* scripts were developed in Japan: *hiragana* carries a sense of Japaneseness, as it is used mostly for native words, while *katakana* and *romaji* convey a sense of the foreign, as they are used for foreign words or to add impact to a Japanese word. Schodt (ibid.) suggests, “it is possible that to an extent the Japanese are predisposed to more visual forms of communication owing to their writing system” (p. 25). Calligraphy in Japan is an example of a visual form that merges drawing and writing. Individual *kanji* can convey pictographic and symbolic representations of objects, as well as abstract concepts, emotions, or actions. The *kanji* for “tree” for instance, 木, suggests the shape and form of a tree, as well as often indicating something made of wood or relating to trees, when used as an element within other *kanji* compounds, such as timber: 材. Sound effects are also a good example of the flexibility the Japanese language gives to the manga page. These onomatopoeia words not only convey the sounds of noodles being slurped or a match being struck, but also form part of the overall aesthetic effect of the manga page.

Manga—like the Japanese writing system—is a complex form with many symbols and conventions. Reading manga relies upon the ability of the reader to rapidly decode and

interpret symbols that convey the essence of a mood or situation. This, argues Schodt (1983, p. 23), is in contrast to Western (United States) comics that often require excessive dialogue to explain similar situations. Yaguchi et al. (1999), argue that it is difficult to translate manga overseas because they have their own internal grammar rules and structures that are developed in Japan and are central to understanding their meaning (日本のマンガを外国語に翻訳する場合、単に言葉の違いだけでなく、画面の故造そのものが持っている、ある種の「文法」をどのように理解させるかということが問題になってくる) (p. 308).

Loveday & Chiba (1986) further develop the argument that distinctive aesthetic and cultural conventions in Japan play a central role in fostering and developing manga. Specifically, they argue that Japan is a culture that promotes the iconographic and visual, and because of this nurturing visual environment, manga has proliferated throughout all corners of Japan, to become a dominant communication/entertainment tool. Loveday and Chiba analyse how manga is everywhere and available to everyone: businessmen unashamedly read manga in trains, University courses teach the art of manga, companies use manga in company prospectuses, and manga artists have become celebrities.

Loveday and Chiba (ibid.) argue that manga's success in Japan is due to Japan's unique visual culture. They refer to Japan as *shikaku-bunka* (視覚文化), which they translate as “eyesight-culture” (p. 167)—an expression coined during the early 1980s to convey the Japanese aesthetic preference for “iconism”. Eyesight culture, they explain, refers to Japan's “traditionally cultivated sense of aestheticism in daily life” (ibid., p. 168), that extends not only into manga and anime, but is central to the flow of information within Japan's complex writing system, as well as appearing in everyday objects such as fashion, food, and décor. Loveday and Chiba argue that Japan's eyesight culture has been cultivated over a millennium and fostered manga's distinctive aesthetics long before Western conventions of caricature and captioning were introduced during the Meiji period (1868-1912):

It is very important to realize that the Japanese comic is not a mere Western importation but belongs to a century-old tradition of pictorial narration that can be traced back to the picture scrolls of the 9th century. (p. 162)

For Loveday and Chiba, manga cannot be reduced to another example of Japan imitating the West². Instead, they argue that manga is essentially different to the Western comics because it is bound to Japan's unique eyesight-culture:

It is essential to realize that visual communication has not been brought as something new to the Japanese scene by modern technological innovations. It is a deep-rooted cultural process that has existed for centuries. (p. 168)

To prove that manga's origins are Japanese, Loveday and Chiba retrospectively link manga to recognisably Japanese aesthetics. The most evocative connection they make is to that of a shared "dynamic effect" (p. 162) in the sequential motion of manga and anime, and unrolling narrative picture scrolls (*emaki-mono*) from the 9th century:

A century-old tradition of pictorial narration that can be traced back to the picture scrolls of the 9th century. These scrolls (*emaki-mono*) depicted epics, novels, folk tales and religious themes, employing techniques ranging from line compositions to colourful scenes inlaid with gold flakes. These were drawn on one continuous piece of paper that was rolled on one side and so, when rolled along, had a dynamic effect not so different from an animated cartoon. (p. 162)

A sense of motion enlivens narrative pictures like anime and manga. The images in a scroll flow into each other and its physical unrolling provides a direction to the motion. Animation, by the very nature of the medium, literally "animates" an object by camera movement or sequential cells. The reader of manga is implicated in the perception of motion occurring between each of the frames that depicts key steps in movements, organising them

² See, for instance, Peter Hadfeld's comment in *More Strip than Comic* from Punch August 5, 1988, pp. 36-37, where he writes 'Comics are yet another borrowed idea that the Japanese have managed to adapt and refine to their own idiosyncratic tastes.' (p36-37) He goes on to compare the 'combination of lesbian sex, sado-masochism, rape, bondage, blood and violence.' (p37) in Japanese comics to the classic 'archetypes' of British comics *Dan Dare* and *Eagle* with the wholesome, youthful, clean approach to action and adventure.

to create a sense of dynamic sequential motion. As Robin Pen (1996) argues of the comic's dynamics:

The action (in the popular action comic) is not created *within* the frames but *between* the frames. The immediate experience of the comic is the moving image the reader creates between one frame and the next; from the arm raised in a tight fist, about to strike, to the victim of the blow flying backwards through the window. (p. 34)

Manga and anime's inheritance of Japan's centuries-long, deep-rooted and aesthetic culture, is one of the chief reasons Loveday and Chiba give for the "incredible penetration and proliferation" (p. 158) of manga and anime within Japan's eyesight-culture. Of course, there are some important differences between the media of scroll, manga, and animation. As Schodt (1983) points out, scrolls have none of modern manga's separate pages, no division of frames, onomatopoeia or speech-bubbles³. Instead, scrolls rely on scenery and buildings dissolving into one another, or the use of symbols, such as cherry blossoms, to show the passage of time and space. However, Loveday and Chiba's analysis does take us to the second approach to framing manga and anime within Japan's visual culture, which is to argue that the spirit of Japan's heritage of aesthetic styles inspires today's manga.

The Content and Style of Manga

Schodt (1983) suggests that one of the continuities within almost all Japanese art is the "economy of line" (p. 32) established by the impressionistic style of Zen pictures:

In their simplicity, Zen pictures exemplified a trait common to almost all Japanese art, including today's comics—an economy of line. Josiah Conder, an Englishman who studied art under a Japanese woodblock artist/cartoonist at the turn of this century, noted: "The limits imposed on the technique of his art, and the constant practice of defining form by means of lines drawn with a flexible brush, have enabled the Japanese painter to express in line even the most intangible and elusive shapes, without the aid of shading or color." (Schodt, 1983, p. 32)

³ Western artists introduced word balloons and sequential narrative patterns into Japan during the late 19th century.



Figure 8. The Zen picture's economy of line, here displayed by Sengai's *Hotei* picture. The poem reads: "How old are you, dear moon? Thirteen-seven?"



Figure 9. *Crayon Shin chan's heta-uma* (unskilful-skill) style of manga.

Figure 8 is an example of Gibbon Sengai (1750-1837)—one of the most renowned masters of Zen pictures—depicting Hotei: “a sort of patron saint of all young ones” (Suzuki, 1971, p. 181), singing a melody about the moon to soothe to sleep the baby nearby him. The fluidity of Sengai's brush strokes delivers a swiftness of wit and humour that “expresses his deepest purpose, which is not so much to amuse us, as to enlighten us by means of amusement” (Read, 1971, p. xvii). Within manga, the genre of *heta-uma* (へたうま) (Yaguchi et al., 1999, p. 225)—which literally means “unskilful-skill”—refers to the very popular and simplistic style of manga that resemble children's drawings. While not designed to offer the transcendental humour of Zen pictures, the best examples of *heta-uma*, such as *Crayon Shin chan* (see Figure 9) or *Chibi Marako chan*, offer an amusing and sometimes unconventional portrayal of the everyday that celebrates, as Zen pictures also do, “the simple magic of life”, (Read, 1971, p. xviii) in a direct and simplified caricature.

The key relation between Zen pictures' simplicity and economy of line, and manga, is their mutual ability to capture an essence without labouring over the more naturalistic depictions of the ideal body that are to be found in Western super-hero comics:

Like so much of old Japanese art, *ukiyo-e* projected a spare reality: without dwelling on anatomy and perspective, they tried to capture a mood, an

essence, and an impression—something also vital to caricature and cartooning. (Schodt, p. 34)

For Schodt (1983) and Lent (1989), the strongest thematic link between manga and a distinctive Japanese aesthetic, is to be found in *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. *Ukiyo-e* are 17th century illustrations of “the floating world” that depict prostitute’s quarters, fashions, popular sight-seeing locations, kabuki actors, and folk tales. Hibbett (1975) best captures the youthful enthusiasm of this time:

Above all, *ukiyo* meant the life of pleasure, accepted without thinking what might lie ahead. In Asai Ryōi’s *Tales of the Floating World* (c. 1661) it is defined as living for the moment, gazing at the moon, snow, blossoms, and autumn leaves, enjoying wine, women, and song, and, in general, drifting with the current of life ‘like a gourd floating downstream’⁴. (p. 11)

The link between manga and *ukiyo-e* especially *shunga*, a popular sub-genre of *ukiyo-e* is used by Schodt (1983) and Lent (1989) to show there is a long history of erotic and explicit imagery in Japan. This is especially true of *shunga*, a popular sub-genre of *ukiyo-e*, the prints of which depict often explicit sex scenes. Moreover, the stories told in these prints often ridicule those in power with stories about commoners creeping into bed to have sex with the nobleman’s wife (Lent, 1989, p. 224). These prints, initially appreciated by art connoisseurs, soon became popular amongst tradesmen and commoners. As Schodt (1983) points out: “Like the comics of today, *ukiyo-e* were part of the popular culture of their time: they were lively, topical, cheap, entertaining, and playful” (pp. 34-35). Lent (1989) points out that the format and style of many of these woodblock prints is similar to comic books today:

The woodblock pictures, combined into twenty or more pages with or without text and bound with thread or opened in corrugated fashion, may have been the world’s first comic books. (Lent, p. 223)

Within woodblock prints, Schodt (1983) offers four pairs of cross-pollination between past and present narrative comic art centring on the fantastic, macabre, and erotic. The first of these is the 12th century “Hungry Ghost Scrolls” (*Gaki Zoshi*) and their inclusion in Jōji

⁴ *Tokugawa bungei ruijū* (12 vols., Tokyo, 1914-15), vol. 2, p. 335

Akiyama's manga *Ashura*. Two other examples are the 15th century "Night walk of one hundred Demons" (*Hyakki Yakō*) and the pantheon of spirits and ghouls used by manga artist Shigeru Mizuki, particularly within his *Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro* series. The "Fart Contest scroll" (*Hōhigassen*) and contemporary gag manga (see Chapter 3) are further examples. Finally, the "blood splatter" used in woodblock prints of battles and kabuki scenes, by artists such as Yoshitoshi Tsukioka (1839-92), and the similar depiction of violence in much of today's action manga, are also good examples.

The fantastic, macabre, and erotic genres that Schodt identifies surfaced during my interviews and correspondence with fans. Joe, a respondent to an e-mail survey I conducted, in his answer to my question regarding the availability of anime in Australia, evoked the image of the "blood splatter" genre in his deliberately over-the-top answer:

Not very. There is a lot more manga now on the video shelves, however in the main it only represents very narrow genres of the style. It tends to be only action and gory violence, with BLOOD, and BLOOD, and more BLOOD BLOOD BLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOODDD!!!! Muuhaahaahaaha!!! (Joe, 19, Anglo-Australian, student)

There are certainly examples that can be found to support the dominance of the "blood splatter" genre of manga and anime in Australia, which additionally evoke a macabre Japanese graphic style. Figure 10 is the poster used for the Japanese animation film festival that toured Australia in 1996. It uses an image of a monster from *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend* (1993), to promote an image of the fantastic, macabre and grotesque. Within *Urotsukidoji*'s depiction of monsters eating, raping, possessing and killing humans, there is an evocation of earlier themes and images that can be dated back as far as woodblock prints from the 17th and 18th century depicting hell, ghosts, ghouls and monsters from Japan's past such as Figure 11. This woodblock print by the famous woodblock artist, Hokusai

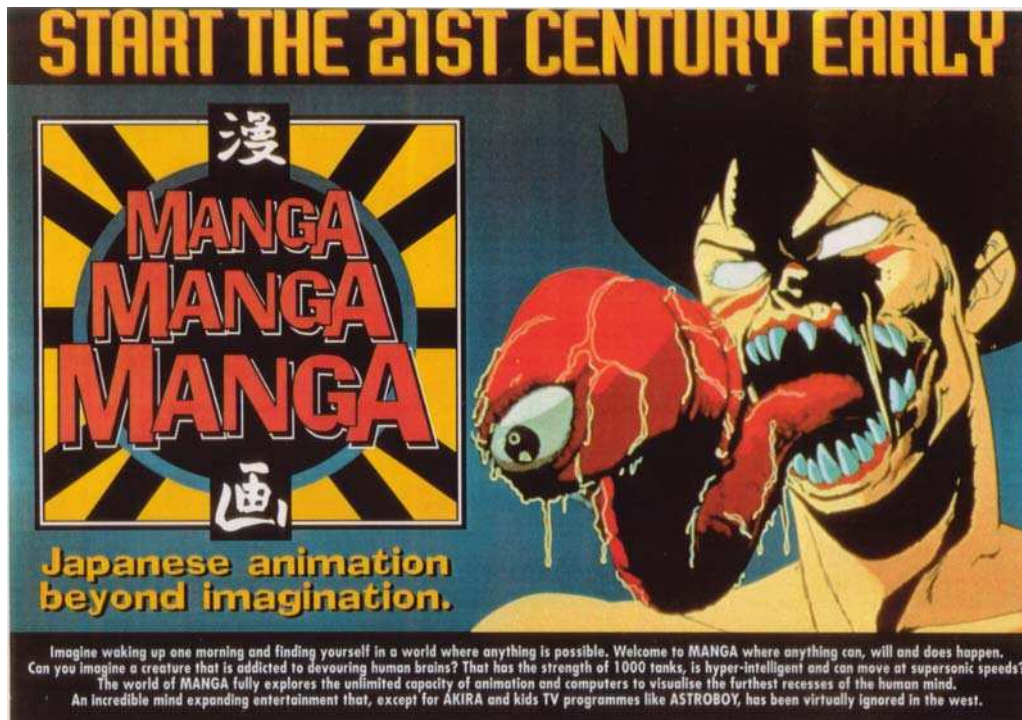


Figure 10. The fantastic, macabre, and grotesque transforming monster of *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend* (1993) promotes the 1996 anime film festival in Australia.

Katsushika⁵ (1760-1849), depicts a female monster that transforms to eat children. Much like the monster depicted in *Legend of the Overfiend*, it transforms to wreak vengeance and destruction on the human world. This process of transformation is central to the meaning of ghosts, ghouls and monsters within Japanese folklore, as Tim Screech (1994) shows in his definition of ghosts (*obake*):

Obake, the Japanese “ghost,” is exactly what its name suggests: *o* is an honorific prefix, while *bake* is a noun from *bakeru* (化ける), the verb meaning “undergo change,” Japanese ghosts, then, are essentially transformations. They are one sort of thing that mutates into another, one phenomenon that experiences shift and alteration, one meaning that becomes unstuck and twisted into something else. *Obake* undermine the certainties of life as we usually understand it. (p. 14)

⁵ The term ‘manga’ was first coined in the 19th C by Hokusai Katsushika (1760-1849) to describe his prints that dealt with the fantastic, macabre, and erotic. Loveday and Chiba (1986) claim that Hokusai’s sketch books and illustrations for novels still “exerts a great influence on line drawing technique and style and this is evident in much modern comic material” (p. 162). Schodt (1983) also praises the importance of the work of these *ukiyo-e* masters for their innovative and creative works that were infused with “humor, experimented with deformation of line, and dabbled in the fantastic, the macabre, and the erotic” (p. 35).



Figure 11. Hokusai's *Warahihanniya* (Laughing Mask) woodblock print from his *Hyaku Monogatari* (1630) series.

The subjects of Japan and manga I have surveyed here reveal a number of ghostly mutations as both Japan and manga/anime cross boundaries of language and region to shift and alter their forms, which shape themselves in different national and transnational contexts. Scholars such as Schodt (1983, 1996), Loveday and Chiba (1986), Lent (1989), for example, look inwards to trace the faint lines of manga and anime's Japanese origins, forever turning to a lost Japan that can never be fully recovered within manga. Their discovery of manga's origins, tradition, and

authenticity, give rise to manga and anime that are haunted by spectral traces of images, stories, and styles from the past. Marilyn Ivy (1995) evokes a similar "haunted" association between the past and present in her analysis of a vanishing, nostalgic Japanese past that is evoked in travel campaigns and the study of folk tales and folk practices in Japan. Ivy focuses on the "phantasmatic objects" of doubles, ghosts, death, and memory that evoke a vanishing traditional Japan.

The result of framing these recognisably Japanese aesthetics in terms of a lineage of graphic comic book art, is a desire to establish a resiliently particular Japanese context to today's manga and anime. As Schodt (1983) argues:

By the middle of the 19th century, the Japanese had a rich tradition of entertaining, sometimes irreverent, and often narrative art. The old art forms

would vanish in the years to come, but their spirit would continue to inspire cartoonists and would influence the way Japan was to embrace comic magazines and books in the 20th century. (p. 37)

Schodt's acknowledgement that these art forms have vanished today but that their spirit continues to inspire manga, addresses the core problem in the repatriation of manga and anime as distinctive Japanese forms. Japan's phantasmatic objects that haunt manga and anime reveal the sense of loss Japan experienced from Westernisation and its occupation by Allied troops after World War II. The modernisation of Japan and the consequential replacement of "tradition" by "modernity" are reconstructed within manga as aspects of its "Japaneseness". Manga as a modern commodity that is mass-produced and influenced by foreign styles and practices from Disney to Hollywood is marginalised in favour of asserting manga as a distinctive Japanese form. As Nightingale (1997a) points out in her analysis of the cross-cultural readings of Japanese and Australian television advertisements in Australia and of the influence of *nihonjinron* on her research participants:

Nihonjinron envelopes the unacknowledged loss that has accompanied modernisation and wraps the changes of accelerating capitalism in a language which naturalises the strangeness of the new capitalist era, and claims for the new ... character of tradition. (p. 128)

Finding manga and anime's double in the past is to retroactively pair the contemporary with the traditional. Both elements: the contemporary manga/anime image and the traditional image, such as a woodblock print, are matched for use together. The contemporary manga image attracts an aura of the "uniquely Japanese", because it is paired with a recognisably Japanese object such as *ukiyo-e* or the Japanese writing system. This process of plaiting the present and past together extends to manga and anime, yet these forms are produced within quite discontinuous tradition. There is no single manga "bloodline" that reveals the foreign influence and broad borrowings from diverse national and international styles and images. The hybrid history of manga and anime complicates any essentialist *nihonjinron* framing of them as *only* Japanese associations.

Napier (2001) expresses they various aesthetic ideals that define manga and anime in her terminology of the “signature style” of anime which updates the discussion of a distinctive Japanese aesthetic to acknowledge the hybridity of anime:

The historical dramas of the kabuki theatre (as well as classic live-action films like *Ugetsu* or *Rashomon*) often contain supernatural plot elements such as wizards, magical protagonists, and ghosts from the historical past and famous legends. However, anime adds its signature style of fast-paced narrative movement, marvellous, sometimes stomach-churning metamorphosis sequences, and powerful images of wide-scale destruction, such as the finale in *Ninja Scroll*, in which the evil ninja lord’s boat is burned in an arresting sequence. (P. 159)

Napier’s “signature style” of anime incorporates both the narrative and representational creativity of modern animation and the supernatural plot elements from Japan’s historical past, famous legends, and kabuki dramas. Wells (1997) furthers Napier’s emphasis on manga and anime’s hybridity by arguing that anime is the fusion of Japanese aesthetic and cultural forms with foreign (American) forms, such as Disney’s anthropomorphic style, or other Western icons and symbols. Wells’ (1997) draws upon the work of Japanese cinema scholar Noel Burch (1979) to argue that contemporary Japanese texts must be understood as the product of the twin influence of Japanese tradition and Western modernity. Wells claims that the process of historical and cultural change in Japan has produced hybrid cultural products, such as anime, that fuse aesthetic and cultural forms from Japan and the West. As Wells (1997) points out, anime is an example of Japan cultural industries and artists to develop “indigenous cultural artefacts and systems [that] mix freely with *adapted* forms” (p. 22). Wells (*ibid.*) explains that, within anime, distinctive Japanese aesthetics exist harmoniously alongside modern influence because “both cultural forms and artistic styles do not usurp or replace that which has gone before, but co-exist simultaneously, redefining meaning and affect accordingly” (p. 22). Wells discusses the work of the anime director Hayao Miyazaki, arguing that his work is an example of anime’s ability to mix traditional forms equally alongside modern forms to maintain their “spiritual and philosophic

memory” (p. 23) for Japanese while also appealing to Western interests and tastes. The value of manga and anime as a complex scholarly texts is due to the *accumulation* of various aesthetic/cultural forms and the *articulation* of its “difference” by a variety of scholars and critics who share an interest in appreciating manga and anime’s Japaneseness. The tracing of manga and anime’s distinctive Japanese heritage can essentialise its meaning through the construction of exclusivist *nihonjinron* readings, however, as I have suggested here—and will further develop over the following chapters—manga and anime’s Japaneseness can also generate new kinds of transnational identifications and hybrid forms.

CHAPTER 3

Japanese Aesthetics in Manga and Anime: Forms of Resistance

Following on the heels of the overpowering presence of Disney, there will be a worldwide advance in animation, with each country developing in its own way and each ideally using its own artistic techniques and narrative themes. ... In this respect, Japan has a big advantage and our art history should be the foundation for new Japanese animation. Philosophers like Eisenstein have pointed out that pre-modern Japanese art has qualities closely connected to contemporary animation. In tests, American students themselves have also pointed to the closeness between animation and Japanese picture scrolls. Therefore, the Japanese picture scroll is seen by many as a distant precedent of animation and considered by some to have been the first attempt to tell a story with a time element in pictures. (Imamura, 1948, pp. 124-125, in Driscoll, 2002, p. 287)

The appropriation of a distinctive Japanese aesthetic to empower Japanese animation that Taihei Imamura outlines above, relies on a recognisable Japanese style of art that is defined in terms of the other (in this case, the United States and Disney). The Japanese media philosopher, Taihei Imamura (1948), argued that Japan's recognisable art history gave the Japanese animation industry a "foundation for new Japanese animation" (pp. 124-128) that would advance animation beyond "the overpowering presence of Disney" (pp. 124-128). During the late 1930s and 1940s, Imamura had analysed the significance of animation and its difference from film, and offered one of the earliest visions of a distinctly Japanese style of animation. Mark Driscoll (2002), who translated Imamura's work, draws upon Imamura's two major works: *Theory of Animation (1948)* and *Theory of Documentary Film (1940)*, to develop a critical theory of today's digital technology and visual media. According to Driscoll (2002), Imamura outlined two significant approaches to animation. Firstly, he analysed animation as a product of capitalism, which he defined along a Taylorist "assembly-line" model of mass production best exemplified by Walt Disney Studios. Secondly, he provides "critical maps and escape routes from these capitalist techniques" (Driscoll, 2002, p. 269) that offer "utopian possibilities" (ibid., p. 269) for expressing a Japanese national

identity. Imamura argued that Japanese animation could become a distinctly national form, through appropriating Japanese artistic techniques that he believed resist Western capitalist influence. This vision continues to inform contemporary writing about manga and anime among scholars throughout the world.

Importantly, since Imamura wrote his analysis of the Japanese animation industry manga and anime have become internationally recognised entertainment commodities, yet, ironically this international success has produced conflicting views and ongoing debate about the nature and quality of their “Japaneseness”.

My aim in this chapter is not to argue that anime has become Imamura’s alternative system of visual communication, for I see this as inherently essentialist and fraught with difficulties in defining “Japan”, amongst numerous competing and contradictory positions. Instead, I will analyse a more subtle difference in manga and anime that Schodt (1983) regards as one of manga’s “greatest accomplishments”(p. 16): that is the capacity “to render visually fascinating the most improbable of subject” (p. 16) such as the acts of chopping vegetables, taking exams, performing bodily functions, and other banal, domestic activities. I will look specifically at the use of emotions and humour within the “improbable subject” of the fart as it is portrayed in an Edo period (1603-1867) scroll, and in contemporary manga and anime. Furthermore, I will consider how the iconography of the fart suggests two elements of Imamura’s ideal of Japanese animation. Firstly, the fart symbolises a humble—but no less significant—form of resistance to the dominance of modernity, expressed through the United States’ cultural influence on Japan. Secondly, its use in a variety of past and current texts suggests that a distinctive Japanese aesthetic persists in elements of manga and anime, and are consequently a source of appeal to its global audience.

Imamura’s research on animation was published shortly after Japan’s defeat in World War II. It offers an intellectual negotiation between Japan’s failed Imperialist agenda and its

dramatic post-war change under United States and Allied occupation. As suggested by his quote that began this chapter, Imamura's defence of Japan's aesthetic traditions and criticism of the impact of United States culture, evokes the ultra-nationalist ideologies of the 1930s. Imamura's continuance of *nihonjinron* (discourses of "Japaneseness") during the early post-war period stands in sharp contrast to the better-known work of younger fiction writers of the time, such as Sakaguchi Ango, Tamura Taijirō, and Dazai Osamu. These writers savagely criticised Japan's wartime culture and politics and threw themselves into the "dislocation, degeneracy, and unstoppable romanticism of the early post war years" (Dower, 1999, p. 159). However, Imamura's work has been reappraised recently by scholars such as Driscoll (2002), who "re-animate the forgotten Japanese philosopher of media" (p. 269). Driscoll (ibid.) sees Imamura as an innovative and perceptive scholar who offered one of the first attempts to "conceptualise the difference between film and animation" (p. 169) and who also interrogated the shifts in global capitalism that were driving the emergence of animation.

Driscoll (2002) sees Imamura's analysis of animation as an attempt to "understand how material reality was being organized in US capitalism in ways that enabled new functions and relations between humans, machines and images" (p. 289). Central to Imamura's analysis of animation and United States capitalism, was his critique of Walt Disney Studios. Imamura's concern with Disney's big budget animation was "the logic of capitalism" (Driscoll, 2002, p. 279) he saw embedded within its production and distribution. Imamura saw Disney as exemplifying a new mode of production based on the mutual alliance of animation and capitalism. For Imamura, the relationship between animation and capitalism is based on their mutual fusion of the forms around them. For instance, animation is a synthesis of all art forms: from painting and drawing, to modern technologies of photography and motion picture production. Capitalism, argued Imamura, operated on a similar logic of

synthesising raw materials and human labour in the service of a machine-like process to produce commodities.

Imamura argues that Disney has been able to achieve its status as the world-leader in animation through its synthesis of three key elements: animism (to animate inanimate things—to make a table dance, or stones speak); photographic and cinematic technologies; and the assembly-line production philosophy of Fordism. In an interesting observation, Imamura points out that the segmentation and analysis of human labour achieved in Taylorism and Fordism, is similar to animation’s division of each second into 24 movements of the camera, which are then placed in sequential motion to animate a sequence:

Therefore, the production of animation is very much on a continuum with the simultaneous unification *and* division of human labor in capitalist manufacturing. In both, each divided element is unified technologically. Because of this, several hundred creative artists are needed to make the various backgrounds and enhancements of Mickey Mouse. (Imamura, 1948, p. 19, in Driscoll, 2002, p. 285)

For Imamura, Disney’s animation is made possible through the development of capitalism. Dorfman and Mattelart (1975) would later criticise the stories used by Disney as a form of cultural imperialism promoting capitalism and United States democracy to the third world.

Driscoll (*ibid.*) praises Imamura’s ability to perceive the scale and size of Disney’s power as an “industrial capitalist machine” (p. 248). Imamura’s analysis of Disney’s use of technology, animation, and capitalism “brilliantly captures the power that Disney’s animation in particular and US imperial Fordist capitalism in general possessed to de-code and de-territorialize” (*ibid.*, p. 284). The key concern for Imamura was that the victory of the Allied forces in World War II had enabled the dominance of the United States/Disney approach to animation, which he saw as an inherently capitalist and colonial enterprise. Driscoll (2002) interprets Imamura’s complex argument as recognition of the neo-imperialist objectives of United States post war interests, which Imamura then reads into the production and distribution of Disney animation:

As capital expands the material infrastructure, it also requires the colonization and expansion of human imagination; the developments in animation perform this function perfectly. Imamura argues provocatively that the process of capitalism itself is animation, dialectically synthesizing the pre-historical mode of animism with the hyper-modern mode of animating. (p. 287)

Imamura's analysis of Disney's imperialising and globalising tendencies, which Driscoll refers to as "the colonization and expansion of human imagination" (p. 287), also suggests concern for the future of Japanese animation and how it could develop its own national artistic techniques and narrative themes in the face of United States/Disney global hegemony. Importantly for Imamura, the anti-Americanism that emerges from his criticism of Disney becomes a motivation to find alternatives to image-production within Japan's artistic history.

Imamura offers a number of recommendations for Japan's animation industry that are centred on defining and asserting a recognisably Japanese aesthetic within animation, as an alternative to the dominance of Western animation such as Disney. "These recommendations", points out Driscoll (2002), "focus on displacing the global hegemony of Disney and resisting the insidious form of capitalism it brings with it through a recovery of Japanese aesthetic forms" (p. 279). The types of distinctive Japanese arts Imamura urges Japanese animators to recover include many of those forms (discussed in Chapter 2) defined as central to the idea of Japanese aesthetics. Such examples are scroll paintings (*emaki*), woodblock prints (particularly *ukiyo-e*), and the theatrical traditions of *kabuki*. Imamura claims that these forms had already influenced the development of animation in the United States and Europe, as the quote that began this chapter suggested. Here, well-known Western theorists such as Eisenstein referred to their significance, and even United States students were supposedly familiar with the importance of Japanese prints to the aesthetics of modern animation. Imamura urges the Japanese animation industry to re-appropriate these distinctly Japanese aesthetics, in order to express Japan's national sovereignty through a unique visual culture. Imamura hoped the repatriation of these Japanese aesthetics would consolidate a

national identity against the influence of Disney and United States' cultural hegemony.

Driscoll (2002) argues that for Imamura “this Japanese re-appropriation would also ideally help to halt the Taylorist, assembly-line mode of Disney production and democratize it” (p. 279). Driscoll points out that Imamura's idea of democratisation was based on his leftist notion of a “non-reified, collectivist dictatorship of the cameraperson” (p. 279). Imamura hoped that the incorporation of these Japanese aesthetic genres would defend the local Japanese animation industry from the imperialising power of Disney.

Driscoll (2002) points out that today's Japanese artists share some of Imamura's essentialist use of a traditional Japanese aesthetics, such as Takashi Murakami's concept of the *Superflat*. *Superflat* theory relates to objects composed of several distinct and different media, images, and styles are merged to create multiple layers coexisting on the same plane. Importantly these multiple layers do not combine to produce a unified whole, instead the *superflat* is about maintaining a dispersed, de-centered experience (Looser, 2002). In this theory of new aesthetic practice, Murakami calls for the use of “indigenous” Japanese art forms to counter the influence of Americanisation on global visual culture (Azuma, 2001). As I discussed in Chapter 2, Western and Japanese manga and anime critics also emphasised essentially Japanese qualities, and mapped out previous Japanese aesthetics merge into modern manga and anime. While these *nihonjinron* positions need to be investigated, the key problem I will focus on here is Imamura's suggestion that the difference of a uniquely Japanese aesthetics offers a form of resistance against dominant cultural forces, such as Disney, or the broader United States cultural hegemony.

An Australian Fan's Perspective

Fans I interviewed made a significant distinction between Disney and Japanese animation. For many fans, this distinction was brought into sharp focus because of Disney's acquisition of Hayao Miyazaki's anime and the theatrical releases of *Princess Mononoke* and

Spirited Away. Disney's global distribution network is so vast, that it presents a significant increase in anime's visibility and has become a powerful domesticating agent, easing particular anime into Western markets. However, fans I interviewed expressed concern and distress at the process of alteration that anime may go through, particularly if this resulted in alteration to these anime:

It is something of a worry to me that Disney has Miyazaki's films and intends to change the music and voices - as a bit of a purist, I prefer the original. I would be most upset if these wonderful films were cut, and I think many people would feel the same. However, for people new to anime, this first taste may be what they need to get "into it" and thus create a broader population of anime fans to make obtaining anime more simple. For my own personal opinion, however, I rather wish Disney had not gotten hold of distribution rights. I have had major problems with Disney ever since they ruined one of my favourite childhood stories, it will be upsetting if they ruin one of my favourite adulthood stories, *Tonari no Totoro*. (Denise, 19, Anglo-Australian, student)

While Denise acknowledges that Disney's extensive distribution will assist the accessibility of anime, she is concerned that removing or altering the original ("music and voices"), will "ruin" her favourite anime.

For Imamura, it was important that the Japanese animation industry develop and maintain its distinctive aesthetics in order to assert its own cultural and political identity to resist the colonisation of United States' global image culture and the capitalist techniques of production he perceived within Disney. Both Imamura and—to a lesser degree—Denise, see Disney as a globalising force that threatens to appropriate anime's difference and colonise it as part of its global distribution and production of images. However, it is crucial to recognise that Imamura was writing at a time when Japan was actually under the occupation of United States and the Allied Forces, while Denise and other Western fans—who fear that Disney's distribution of anime from the late 1990s is a removal of anime's distinctive Japaneseness—are engaged in an entirely different cultural and national debate over the contemporary globalisation of anime. For these Australian fans, the desire is to express an alternative

identity through anime, a desire for difference that indicates the lack of choice of popular or appealing cultural products within Australia. Often this desire is linked to the influence “American culture” has on Australia. American culture here is the norm. It is standardised and homogenised cultural product, mass-produced and mass-marketed to the rest of the world, and so pervasive it offers little room for Australian alternatives. This is exemplified in the opinion of one fan, anything his resentment towards the influence of American culture on Australia and his desire for the potential difference offered by anime and manga:

Yes, [anime] is different from the American perspective, which tends to dominate most other things, irrespective of where you live. It’s like, oh what’s Australian culture? Sort of a shadow of American culture or the macho-naive idiot mode. So, given the other alternatives many other things seem more preferable. (Simon, 21, male, Anglo-Australian, employee in Information Technology firm.)

At one level, Australian fans’ preference for anime may be explained by its potential for departure from the perceived limitations of a United States influenced Australian culture. Most fans cite anime’s attractiveness as its difference from the banality of Western, especially United States, entertainment. This is especially true of those interested in subtitled anime, which maintains much of its Japanese appeal through the retention of the original Japanese soundtrack. Anime is seen as a new medium, where genre conventions are altered and where character identification can privilege unusual characters such as androgynous men. The art of animation itself is reinvigorated as a new and mature form of entertainment, and the saccharine sweet cuteness of some anime and the transformations of male/female and human/machine offer diversity not apparent in most United States entertainment.

While Imamura is operating on an occidentalising framework of essentialising the West as capitalism, modernity, and colonial interests, Western fans orientalise anime as an essentially exotic cultural and aesthetic experience. It is within this tension between the occidentalising Japanese critic and the orientalising Western anime fan that the contemporary debate of anime is being most significantly contested—especially around ideas of cultural

ownership (see Chapter 6). Sarah and Imamura's resistance of Disney are entirely different expressions of a similar phenomenon of negotiating the larger cultural and technological power of United States' cultural hegemony.

In the following section, I conduct my own analysis of manga and anime aesthetics traced from scrolls to manga and anime. I investigate the tension between the orientalisising and occidentalising forces at operation within framing manga and anime aesthetics that gently criticise powerful cultural influences from the past (China) and the present (the United States), that have acted upon manga and anime's development.

Human and Sentimental Themes

Schodt (1983) argues there is a different emotional energy in manga compared with Western comics. Schodt—as a foreigner—discerns manga's difference because of its jarring unfamiliarity, which he then contextualises around a sense of Japaneseness. Here, Schodt (*ibid.*) claims that a significant achievement of the Japanese approach to comic books is their ability to transform banal, everyday objects and moments into fantastic and aesthetic objects:

But surely one of their greatest accomplishments is to render visually fascinating the most improbable subjects - such as mah jongg, chopping vegetables, and even school examinations. This is done by exaggerating actions and emotions to the point of melodrama, and by paying loving attention to the minute details of everyday life. As the Japanese describe them, their comics are very "wet," as opposed to "dry": that is, they are unashamedly human and sentimental. (p. 16)

Loveday and Chiba (1986) also argue that manga and anime convey heartfelt emotions unlike emotionally detached Western texts. As an example, Loveday and Chiba (*ibid.*) claim that the depiction of heroes in manga is more believable because characters are grounded in the normal and everyday rather than the greater-than-human superheroes of the West:

Generally, however, it can be said that Japanese heroes and heroines are never supermen in the western tradition. Neither are they drawn from the elite. Just as in the special Japanese art of telling humorous stories, *rakugo*, the central figures are usually warm-hearted, sensitive, sometimes gauche and even

unsuccessful but, all in all, extremely likeable for their human weaknesses and strengths. (p. 167)

Yaguchi et al. (1999, p. 227) refer to the idea of the *chōjinteki hero* (超人的ヒーロー), “super human hero”, as one of manga’s distinctive features. They define these super human heroes as normal people who have developed their intellect or physical ability through training, discipline and determination. Examples include the brilliant “child” detective of *Detective Conan*—an adult transformed into a child after an accident—the sporting prowess of the juvenile delinquent, Joe, in *Ashita no Joe*, who works hard against great odds to become a successful boxer, and the revenge-driven crime fighter *Kamen Rider*.

While there are various types of emotion portrayed in manga and anime, one emotion that has continued throughout Japanese narrative art is a brash, irreverent humour often expressed towards authority figures and social taboos. This satirical humour produces one of the more improbable modes for the expression of cultural difference and social criticism within Japanese aesthetics: the fart.

The Animal Scrolls

One of the earliest uses of humour in Japanese narrative art is the 12th century *Chōjūjinbutsugiga* (鳥獣人物戯画), or the *Animal Scrolls*, drawn by the artist/priest, Bishop Toba Sojo. The *Animal Scrolls* are from the genre of the narrative picture scroll (絵巻物, *emaki-mono*), which developed in China and flourished in Japan, during and after the Kamakura period (1192-1333). They were horizontal picture scrolls that illustrated a variety of subjects, including myth, history, and religion, that were told in a chronological narrative order. These narrative picture scrolls would also tell humorous stories similar to today’s gag manga. “When not constrained by religious themes, many of the old scrolls ran positively wild, with a robust, uninhibited sense of humor much like that of today’s comics” (Schodt, 1983, p. 29).



Figure 12. The anthropomorphised animals of Bishop Toba's *Animal Scrolls* (12th Century).

The *Animal Scroll* has become a central historical reference point for contemporary manga and anime; both Western and Japanese sources refer to it in their survey of Japan's distinctive visual culture. Schodt (1983) and

Lent (1989) refer to it as a significant early example of distinctly Japanese satire and humour that remains in today's manga, and the Manga Library in Hiroshima features it as one of the earliest "manga" images in their timeline of Japanese manga culture (Hiroshima City Manga Library, 2000).

The *Animal Scrolls* used satirical humour to mock the priesthood. In Figure 12, frogs and rabbits engage in human-like activities as they embrace and roll around in laughter. Later scenes depict monkeys in Buddhist robes that smoke, read and perform other human activities. The use of particular animals is significant to local Japanese folk stories where the frog, rabbit, and monkey were seen as magical and humorous figures. As Terence Barrow (1973) points out in his analysis of Japanese mythology: "the hare, like the monkey and the toad, is treated as a comical creature who engages in human acts and frolicking" (p. 23).

The humour of these anthropomorphised animals also points to a subversive and satirical edge—in this case, aimed at the clergy and feudal state. For Schodt (op.cit.), the portrayal of animals dressed as courtiers and priests involved in spurious rituals and ceremonies offered a criticism of the established priesthood's arrogance. The combination of humour and satire became a distinctive image of the Japaneseness of these scrolls compared to their Chinese originals that were much more formal and conservative. Schodt (1983, pp. 28-29) and Lent (1989) argue that the Japanese added their own distinctive humour to narrative picture scrolls, using satirical humour to lampoon those in power, as in the *Animal Scrolls*.

Schodt (1983) and Lent (1989) also frame Japan's distinctive humour and satire within visual culture, around vulgar and crude subject matter like farting, excrement, and genitalia. For example, Schodt (1983) and Lent (1989) refer to the genre of "stinking fart pictures" and the *Hōhigassen* (Farting Contests) scrolls of the Kamakura period (1185-1333), as excellent examples of the brash and irreverent humour used in Japanese art. As Lent (1989) mentions: "scrolls, when they were not religious in nature, often went to the extreme of depicting farting and phallic contests. . . . Japanese television and comic magazines today carry on that tradition with *unko manga* (shit comics)." (p. 222). Contemporary manga and anime also continue this tradition of satirical and irreverent humour, such as in the domestic chaos and misadventure of children in *Crayon Shin-can* and *Dr Slump*, as well as more risqué genres such as *unko manga* (literally, "shit manga"). For Schodt (1983) and Lent (1989), the use of irreverent humour in Japanese visual art distinguishes its display of emotions from that of other cultures. Irreverent humour, especially that of the vulgar and excessive *Farting Contest* scrolls, and *unko manga*, share a comical mockery of social taboos and offer a gentle parody of the arrogance of those in power.

The Stinking Fart

The *Shukyuzu* (Stinking Fart picture) (Lent, 1989, p. 222) motif is an important example of a recognisable Japanese aesthetic for Schodt (1983) and Lent (1989). It has been used across the spectrum of Japanese visual mediums, from narrative picture scrolls, to contemporary manga and anime. The fart—as a humorous and subversive icon against those in positions of power—was a popular comic tool in woodblock print and literature of feudal Japan. The Japanese scholar, Howard Hibbett (2001), mentions the role farts played in Japanese humour, particularly in Gennai Hiraga's 18th century essay: *Discourse on Flatulence*, which Hibbett describes as "expressing contempt for modern society and

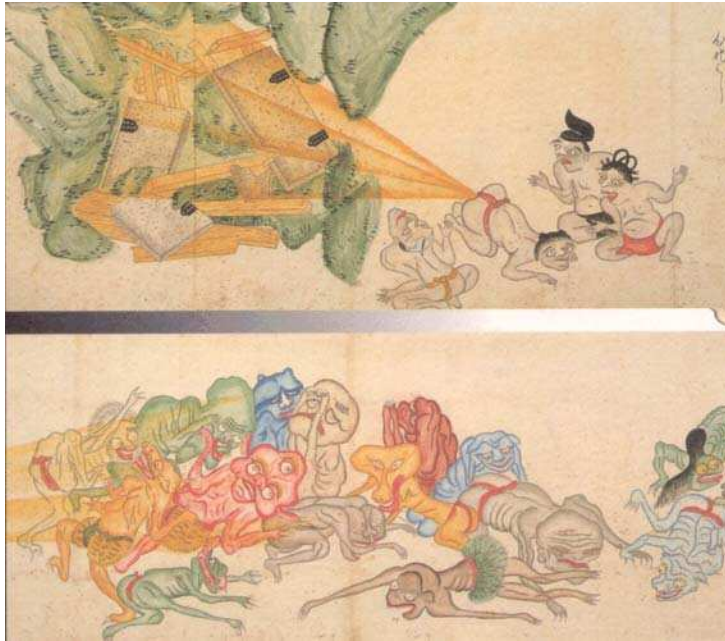


Figure 13. The Edo period (1603-1912) *Shinnō scroll* depicts the humble, yet powerful, fart.

commenting upon the part played by the haphazard and the irrational in human affairs” (p. 48).

Tsunehiko Segawa and Keita Fujimoto (2000), in their comprehensive catalogue of Japanese ghosts, ghouls, and monsters, describe the story of Shinnō. Figure 13 shows two

sections from the narrative picture scroll *Shinnō* (神農絵巻), created

during the Edo period (1603-1867). The *Shinnō* scroll is a parody of the well-known Japanese legend, *Peach Boy* (桃太郎). *Peach Boy* tells the story of Momotaro, a boy born from a peach who travels to an island of ogres to save his village from their attack. On his journey to fight the ogres, he befriends three animals: a dog, a monkey and a pheasant, by sharing his dumplings with them. On arriving at the ogre’s island, they each use their individual strengths and virtues to defeat the ogres and seize the treasure. In the *Shinnō* scroll’s retelling of this story, the hero is of an entirely different disposition to Momotaro’s strength and heroism; instead, Shinnō, as the main character, is weak, lazy, and a misfit in his town. While Momotaro and his friends draw energy from dumplings and slay the ogres with swords, claws, and other weapons, Shinnō, and his three human friends, eat a potent combination of sweet potatoes, persimmon, and chestnuts to create pungent farts, which they release on the bewildered monsters. In Figure 13, one can see the toxic yellow gas expelled from the crouched over Shinnō as he explodes their dwellings. Rather than depicting a savage battle

between the companions and ogres, the *Shinnō* parody resolves the battle with a humble yet magnificent fart.

The fart emphasises how absurd and unexpected life's struggle can be. The subversive power of the fart satirises the serious and violent nature of the original *Peach Boy* fable.

Today's manga continues the satirical image of the fart as an alternative to excessive violence, but it is a substitute “weapon” with the potential to get out of control.

The manga *Enomoto* (えの素) (1997) uses the fart to debase the symbol of the Japanese business world: the salary man. *Enomoto* concerns the misadventures of a crude and lazy father, Gōsuke (郷介), and his son, Michirō (みちろう). In 1997, it was first serialised in the manga-magazine, *Weekly Morning* (週刊モーニング). In one particular episode (Figure 14), Gōsuke's work colleague, Ōmajime (大真面目), arrives at his house to inform him that their boss has reconsidered his decision to fire Gōsuke. However, before Gōsuke receives the good news, he has rushed into his son's room, farted and then breathed in his son's own fart. He has then returned to Ōmajime, farted on him, causing him to fart and kill a mouse (all this is depicted in “the current of a fart” diagram within Figure 14). The dead

mouse's wife and child then take revenge on Ōmajime by biting his feet. Ōmajime—whose name literally means “super-serious”—is the symbol of the work-aholic Japanese salary-man. In this example, we can see the systematic humiliation and derision of Ōmajime, as Gōsuke and his son fart on him and later proceed to “make him a man” (男にな



Figure 14. Gōsuke's fart debases the symbol of the Japanese business world: the salary man, in *Enomoto* (1997).



Figure 15. Nobuo's stinking fart and noxious body odour are the “ultimate and stinkiest weapon” in the *Stink Bomb* episode of *Memories* (1995).

るんだ大真面目!!) by getting him drunk, stripping him semi-naked, and tying him to a pole to impress a fellow female employee.

Tensai Okamoto’s anime, *Stink Bomb* (1995) repeats the social critique encoded within the “out of control fart”. *Stink Bomb* is Okamoto’s contribution to Katsuhiro Otomo’s anime anthology movie: *Memories* (1995).

The Japanese title for *Stink Bomb*—*Saishū Heiki* (最臭兵器)—involves an amusing play with kanji’s multiple interpretations. *Saishū* is usually written as 最終 and translates as “the ultimate”; however, in this case, the kanji 最臭 can be translated as “the stinkiest,” suggesting that the title is both *the ultimate* and the *stinkiest weapon*. This title indicates the crude black humour of the story and the unexpected outcome of foul body odour as a weapon of mass destruction.

Stink Bomb is about Nobuo—an employee at a chemical factory—who accidentally takes an experimental pill thinking it is an anti-flu tablet. The pill produces a chemical reaction inside his body causing him to emit a deadly poisonous fog of odours to make him a walking bacteria weapon (see Figure 15). As Nobuo wanders around Tokyo looking for help, his “stink bomb” quickly spreads to threaten all human and animal life in Japan. Unable to smell the odour himself, he is baffled as to why humans and animals are dying around him. He escalates his problem to a national catastrophe when he hops on his scooter determined to meet a deadline to deliver documents to a government agency. The dark humour of *Stink Bomb* centres on Nobuo, the bumbling but well-meaning victim, as he attempts to carry out his daily duties in the face of great adversity. The ludicrous over-kill strategy of the United States and Japanese military, as they use the latest “smart weapons” in an attempt to kill

Nobuo at any cost, is shown as futile violence and destruction that fails to stop him. The Japanese and United States' military and government hopelessly squabble between one other as they attempt to contain the mounting crisis from revealing the military and political ineptitude at the centre of power.

In *Stink Bomb*, the motif of the subversive stinking fart and noxious body odour provides a satire on humanity's own propensity for self-destruction. Nobuo inadvertently spreads the disaster by simply trying to do his job under the most trying of conditions using—as the Japanese would say—*gaman* (grit and determination). The government and military are shown as inept and gung-ho in their tenacity to “de-odorise” Nobuo. The story's doomsday theme is even more powerful when one considers the destructive power and death unleashed on Japan by the atomic bomb in 1945, and the nerve gas attack in Tokyo subways that caused several deaths and the hospitalisation of hundreds in 1995. These ghosts haunt the scenes of human death and military weaponry of *Stink Bomb*. However, there is an undercurrent of black comedy in the story, as animals and humans die, yet plants and flowers bloom and prosper as a result of Nobuo's odour. Furthermore, the chaos and confusion of the narrative is set to an upbeat jazz score that works against the seriousness and terror of gas attacks and widespread human death.

Transitional Moments

These examples of the fart becoming a weapon, or going out of control, are an inversion of the fart as a futile and powerless force, as expressed in the Japanese saying: “*こんなのへでもない*” (as ineffectual as a fart) (Sato, 1988). Instead of this ineffectual fart, the “stinking fart” (Lent, 1989, p. 222) of Shinnō, Gōsuke and Nobuo becomes an absurdly dangerous weapon to be used by weak and unassuming individuals against the might of ogres, the discipline of the salary-man, and the power of the United States' and Japanese military.

The fact that the three main characters who possess the fart's power, are unassuming, ordinary, struggling individuals, confirms the claim of Loveday and Chiba (1986) and Yaguchi et al., (1999) that a chief difference of manga—when compared to other genres—is its portrayal of ordinary people who have worked hard to develop their own powers or have accidentally acquired them in a dramatic, and often distressing manner. There are many other examples of the *chōjinteki hero* (super-human hero) (Yaguchi et al., 1999, p. 227) in manga and anime, such as Ranma, from *Ranma 1/2* who, as discussed in Chapter 2, is a typical Japanese school student until he is accidentally cursed, resulting in his transformation into a female version of himself when saturated with cold water.

Particularly “Japanese”, are the emotions evoked by the iconography surrounding the fart in *Stink Bomb*. The renewal of nature by Nobuo's odour is expressed through the cascading *sakura* (cherry blossom) that evoke a distinctly Japanese aesthetics, reminiscent of Japanese springtime landscapes depicted in woodblock prints. The power of the sakura image in Japan causes the sakura to fall at the height of their glory—hence their association with warriors who die at the height of their power. They are a symbol of the Buddhist idea of impermanence and vulnerability, as they bloom at a time of sudden rain and spring winds. Within *Stink Bomb*, the sakura suggests humanity's fall at the height of its technological achievements, showing that for all our military might, we are defenceless against our own destructive tendencies. The destructive civilization of humanity is replaced by the image of a wholly organic world of “nature” that endures beyond humanity. Donald Richie (1990) explains that Japanese artists articulate meaning to their audience through the use of commonly understood and nostalgic Japanese icons and concepts. Richie (ibid.) calls these scenes “transitional moments” and considers them a key technique of Japanese cinema. He (ibid.) defines a transitional moment as follows:

Separate scenes can be devoted to separate events: the flight of lovers, the soliloquy, the recognition scene, and so on. These might halt the narrative, but

they also contain, for the Japanese audience, moments of beauty, contemplation, familiarity, which it finds appropriate and satisfying. (1990, p.8)

Wells (1997) argues that Richie's transitional moments are an important part of anime; however animators use the representational flexibility of anime to transcend these iconic images into a fantasy space, punctuated by "transitional moments" that "speak to Japanese aesthetic traditions yet at the same time become benchmarks for distinctive authorial operation within the animated form" (pp. 23-24). For example, in *Stink Bomb*, the sakura refer to Japanese aesthetic traditions of impermanence, but at the same time becoming part of a satirical message evoking the horror of a gas/atomic attack and the self-destructive impulses of humanity.

Imaginative Social Solidarity

Iwabuchi (1994) deconstructs the notion of a unique Japaneseness by looking at how "Japan" can be considered an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). Iwabuchi argues that what is important in the vision of a unique Japan, is not the relation these images have to the lived reality *within* Japan, but how they are used to define Japan in terms of the other (the United States). He goes on to detail Japan's self-orientalism and its complicit relationship in perpetuating a Western orientalist view of Japan, managed to some degree by Japan itself. Ivy (1995) explores the ethnocentrism of Japanese folklore studies and their use of the "native" as the site of a unique Japan:

Much of Tokugawa nativist scholarship was equally concerned to define the native as unique. Western intrusion however exacerbated this tendency. What must be studied are the actual ways in which the dominant position of the western powers was introjected and the complex sorts of claims to cultural uniqueness that emerged in Japanese self-descriptions. (p. 51)

The process of locating a distinctive Japanese aesthetic in manga and anime, constructs a "Japaneseness" able to negotiate "the dominant position of western powers" (ibid., p. 51).

Imamura's anti-Disney stance and its intrusion into Japan motivate his claims of a Japanese

aesthetic heritage that can be appropriated within Japanese animation. The fact that some Western scholars and fans have also identified the uniqueness of anime with an essentialist idea of Japan further complicates the “complex sorts of claims to cultural uniqueness” (ibid., p. 51) that emerge in manga and anime’s definitions. This Western locating of the distinctly Japanese motifs within manga and anime is principally an orientalisng strategy, establishing the boundaries of difference and otherness onto the manga form, so that understanding manga can be a valuable insight into the foreign and different.

Manga and anime’s difference from other comic book and animation styles relies on a discourse of Japanese tradition, identity and memory that Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1997) refer to as “imaginative social solidarity” (, p. 222). As an example, they discuss the strong religious networks used by Shiism that selectively used tradition to frame a collective identity and memory to challenge the United States-backed state government during the Iranian Revolution in the 1970s. The construction and consolidation of an oppositional public and political sphere, based on shared elements (such as culture and history), is suggested in Imamura’s re-appropriation of Japanese aesthetics and the challenge to the dominance of Disney in the quote that began this chapter. The *nihonjinron* argument that manga and anime are part of a long continuous heritage of Japanese caricature and cartooning, offers a discourse of “imaginative social solidarity” for both Japanese and Westerners. In this argument, manga and anime were developed and produced in Japan by Japanese. Manga and anime are claimed to be different from United States comic books and animation through their framing within a distinctive Japanese art traditions. The articulation of a Japanese cultural heritage of manga and anime is also part of the wonder and interest felt by many Westerners towards manga.

With reference to the three part texts I investigated, their placement together suggests a manifold aesthetics that contains multiple references to other texts and styles, but also

retroactively joins manga and anime to an idea of “Japan”. This plaiting of pairs into a single strand of historical and cultural continuity can be seen as the fan’s process of discovery discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. This process involves establishing origins and tracing the accumulated texts and traditions at work within manga and anime. In this case, the brashness and vulgarity found in today’s manga and anime—symbolised by the fart—can also be found in scroll pictures from Japan’s past. While the three fart examples show that vestiges of the past remain in contemporary manga and anime, there are many significant differences from all the aesthetics discussed here. As analysed in Chapter 2, modern manga do differ from pre-Meiji (1868-1912) aesthetics and narrative conventions. The fart images I have discussed suggest similar themes and content; however, they do not envelope one other. The *Enomoto* manga is not a clone of the *Shinnō* scroll. Graphically they are different; the scroll is in colour, with blocks of narrative text, and a continuous flow of images moving in one direction, while the manga is in black and white with captions and motion operating between the sequential frames of each manga panel.

As well as a discovery and a complication of difference and origins, these three fart examples also suggest a subtle political resistance. While an overt political and cultural opposition to an imperialising United States culture has not become a significant element in manga and anime, one can detect a subtle form of resistance in the fart imagery I have discussed. There is a sense that the iconography of “improbable subjects” (Schodt, 1983, p. 16)—such as farts—that have been rendered “visually fascinating” (*ibid.*, p. 16) in manga and anime, offer forms of cultural resistance, as well as a more conventional social satire. While farts are rarely central in Western popular culture texts, their use in these Japanese texts opens an avenue for subtle resistance and negotiation among fans of the influence of other foreign cultures. The narrative scroll as a Chinese form becomes Japanese through its inclusion of narratives and imagery that ridicule the establishment. Comic books and

animation are framed as distinctly Japanese through their exotic narrative themes and imagery that are not part of contemporary Western entertainment. Such is the example of the “stinking fart”, which, as it is portrayed in *Enomoto* and *Stink Bomb*, also suggests a more direct resistance to Western modernity. *Stink Bomb*’s depiction of the intrusive and arrogant United States’ military commanders—who arrive to solve the Japanese problem of Nobuo’s poisonous odour—suggests a criticism of the United States military presence in Japan. The fart as out of control, such as Nobuo’s fart odour in *Stink Bomb*—which kills human and animal life—or as a weapon for the weak and powerless that defeats the powerful or feared (such as that used by Shinnō or Gōsuke), suggests there are spaces within manga and anime where a type of alternative politics and radical culture can be imagined. In this way, it is possible to consider the stinking fart as a resistant form—in a very gentle way—that destabilises the capitalist/military system (in the form of *Enomoto*’s Ōmajime as the “salary man”, symbol of Japanese capitalism, and *Stink Bomb*’s portrayal of the United States’ military presence in Japan) through the Japanese satirical conventions of “farting contest” scrolls, and *uniko manga*.

CHAPTER 4

Akira and Fan Constructions of Japan and Japaneseness

Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings which make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of 'Western' identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind. (Haraway, 1991, p. 176)

One video company single handedly popularised a new genre. Experience now, the *manga effect*. (Manga Entertainment, 1997)

The *manga effect* was part of Manga Entertainment's¹ marketing campaign during the 1990s. The promotional blurb quoted above was used on a video commercial that ran at the beginning of their videos to promote their catalogue of anime. The commercial included scenes of karate violence, demon sex, and girls firing guns, all set to loud heavy-metal music. The manga effect's emphasis on sex and violence summarised the dominant public image of anime in the West during the 1990s. Manga Entertainment was one of the leading Western anime distributors during the 1990s, having a strong presence in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia². As such, its manga effect campaign had a strong impact on Western anime culture. The manga effect strategy expressed the industry hype and affirmed the popular media vilification of anime as only sex and violence. Anthony Haden-Guest (1995) summarised the development of anime as: "What began as a cultural blend of doe-eyed Disney rip-offs and all things American, has developed into an animation preoccupied with cultural catharsis involving nuclear holocausts, sexual perversion and graphic violence"

¹ Manga Entertainment is a distributor of anime based in the United States.

² Helen McCarthy (2001) provides a brief overview of Manga Entertainments growth from a United Kingdom based anime distributor into Europe and the United States. Manga Entertainment is now based in the United States.

(p. 43). However, it was within this space of “cultural catharsis”, that fans considered and experimented with new identities and combinations of identities. As Donna Haraway’s “cyborg subjectivity” (1991, p. 176) suggests, many of the most interesting identities and politics fans expressed, centred on the fusion of animal and machine, and man and woman. In Chapter 1, I discussed how the reversing between animal and machine, and the switching between male and female identities were part of the Australian fan’s experience of anime during the 1990s. In this chapter, I turn my attention to how the interest in shape shifting by fans was a reaction to the industry and popular media’s “sex and violence” definition of the manga and anime. I argue that fans developed their own counter-discourse of *manga effect* imagery that opened up new possibilities for experiencing anime in Australia. After outlining the popular image of anime as sex and violence, I will focus on the framing of *Akira* as a landmark anime that fans and critics used to broaden anime’s public image. I will then consider the appropriation of anime’s cyberpunk imagery by dance and nightclub culture.

The Popular Image of the Manga Effect

During the 1990s, anime became associated with sex and violence through the promotion of a limited range of anime by distributors and popular press articles. John O’Donnell, managing director of the United States anime distributor, Central Park Media, commented during his interview with Peter Nichols (1998) that “we say anime is all violence and sex ... and so far that’s right, because the other 95 percent hasn’t been released here yet” (p. 37). Nichols (ibid.) agreed, “these days, anime refers strictly to ‘adult’ Japanese animation, aimed primarily at young men. But those films make up only a small fraction of the enormous body of work turned out every year by Japanese animators” (p. 37). Nichols remained hopeful that Disney’s recent acquisition of Hayao Miyazaki’s more family-oriented anime—such as *Kiki’s Delivery Service*—would broaden the definition of anime in the West. However, in my opinion it was not until the success of Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* in 2003,

that anime's image in the West would significantly change to include broader fantasy associations. During the 1990s, violent and sexual associations steadfastly dominated the image of anime in the West.

In 1994, a specialty store in Sydney that sold animation cells and “how-to draw cartoon” guides was amongst the first to supply a growing anime community that had developed since *Akira* (1988). The store sold the popular anime of the time, *Crying Freeman* (the violent assassin-for-hire story), *Doomed Megalopolis* and *Wicked City* (occult thrillers), and *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend* (the sexually explicit action/horror anime). These anime represented such a significant shift from the store's typical Disney and Warner Brothers cartoons that the store-owner issued a warning to customers regarding anime's difference:

A word of caution: most of these films are very graphic and can be quite a shock to people weaned on “Snow White” and “Bambi”! The Japanese are not at all coy about showing violent and sexual scenes, as anyone who has seen their comicbooks will understand. We have included a rating system with each video on the following list. If you are still unsure about any film, we will be happy to discuss it with you. (Heins, 1994)

The rating system that the store instituted converted the ratings used in imported anime—which made up the bulk of the store's initial anime collection—into Australia's film and video classifications. The store's rating system was also needed because many parents assumed that all animation was suitable for children and may have purchased an unsuitable anime for their children. As Richard, the storeowner, told me during our interview:

I had to be careful, especially at the beginning, because some people would just see cute animals or robots on the cover and remember *Astro Boy* from their youth. They wouldn't realise that it was a mature animation from Japan, and might buy it for their children. So, I always made sure the customer knew what they were getting and in the early days would always explain the difference between Disney and manga animation. (Richard, 40, Anglo-Australian, retailer)

Japornimation

One of the slogans for this new, notoriously adult anime was “Japornimation” (Marin, 1995). Japornimation emphasised the peculiar combination of anime’s three ingredients, according to some reporters: Japan, pornography, and animation. Japornimation evoked the exotic stereotype of “Japan,” the foreign and unknowable other, as a country that illicitly combined pornography and animation to produce the unexpected and bizarre product of anime that challenged and affronted the “West”. This coverage of anime concentrated principally on the “naughty tentacles” and “non-stop murder-and-rape fantasy” (ibid., p. 68) of anime, such as *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend*, with its graphic scenes showing teenagers transforming into multi-tentacled demons who raped women. Some retailers supported this adults-only image of anime as a way to appeal to a mature youth audience interested in something new, different, and cutting edge: “You can only take so much of Disney’s cute, fuzzy animals,” declared the store owner of the United States’ *Anime Crash* store, “this is about death, sex, love and war” (ibid., p. 170).

During the 1990s, the “death, sex, love and war” (ibid., p. 168) image of anime came to Australia in a concerted way. The “Manga Film Festival” in 1994, in particular, firmly established the sex and violence image of anime when *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend* was banned by the Attorney Generals in a number of states for being too sexually explicit.

The Manga Film Festival

The 1994 Manga Film Festival was the first of two festivals that travelled to most capital cities and regional centres in Australia. The line up for the 1994 Manga Festival included the futuristic dystopias of *Venus Wars*, *Fist of the Northstar*, and *Wicked City*, along with the crime-thriller, *The Professional*, and an amusing robot solution to Japan’s aging population, in *Roujin Z* (1991). The line up was originally to have included *Urotsukidoji*, but the attorney general in states such as Adelaide banned it for explicit sexual imagery, further

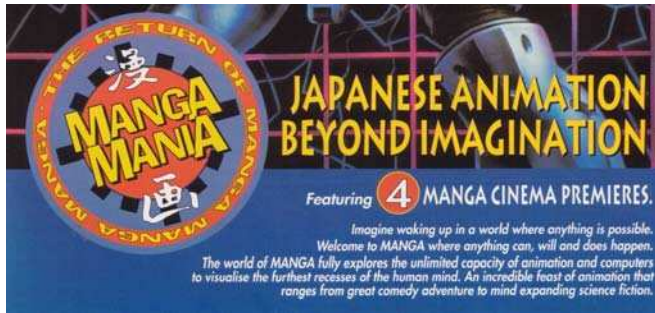


Figure 16. The logo and “manga mania” emblem for the 1996 anime film festival in Australia proudly assert the exotic Japaneseness on offer.

reinforcing anime’s image as “Japornimation”. However, this decision was later reversed and *Urotsukidoji* was screened, exemplifying the attention and notoriety the festival attained during its run.

The Manga Film Festival was important in establishing the sex/violence image of anime, as well as that of its Japaneseness with the Australian public. Anime’s Japanese origins were emphasised in the tag line for the festival posters: “Japanese animation beyond imagination”, as well as the use of the word, kanji 漫画 (manga) within the “manga mania” festival emblem (see Figure 16). Newspaper articles on the festival also emphasised the Japaneseness of anime. Interestingly, many of these articles relied on the same discourse of a distinct Japanese heritage of visual culture that had been used in the 1980s by Western scholars (Lent, 1989; Loveday & Chiba, 1986; Schodt, 1983) to describe manga (see Chapter 2). As the following example from the Australian newspaper *the Sunday Age* reveals:

‘MANGA’ is a term introduced in Japan early in the 19th Century to describe a particular strand of comics or ‘graphic novels’. It also means ‘irresponsible pictures’ and has more recently been appropriated by a particular strand of Japanese animation” (“Graphic pictures drawn from day-to-day Japan,” 1994)

In Australia during the 1990s, the term manga became a key term in defining Japanese animation. Manga, rather than being narrowly defined as comic books, was linked to Japan’s unique visual culture, particularly its “irresponsible images” from the past that have been re-appropriated in anime. The reference to “irresponsible images” in *The Sunday Age* article (ibid.) is a poetic translation of the kanji for “manga” (漫画) that relies on a rarely used meaning for the first kanji 漫 *man* as “morally corrupt”, to suggest the “irresponsibility”

of the pictures. Schodt (1983) claims the origin of the word manga began in 1814 as a reference to the master woodblock-print artist Hokusai's "whimsical sketches" (p. 18). After its high-profile use in the Manga Film Festival, "manga" became the brand name for all Japanese animation and comic books in Australia, and its definition as "irresponsible pictures" neatly evoked the sex and violence that had come to dominate its meaning.

The period of the *Manga Film Festivals* (1994-1996) also included the *Kaboom! Explosive Animation from America and Japan* exhibition (1994-1995) curated by Philip Brophy (Museum of Contemporary Art: Sydney, 1994), which heavily profiled the works of contemporary Japanese animators, including Katsuhiro Otomo (*Akira*), Hayao Miyazaki (*Tonari no Totoro*), Masamune Shirow (*Appleseed*), and Osamu Tezuka (*Astro Boy*), and brought a number of these animators to Australia to attend the exhibition's opening. From 1994, two Australian distributors of anime- Manga Entertainment and Kiseki Films began providing an ever-increasing range of anime titles to a small, but expanding, Australian market. During this period one can see the initial sustained effort by industry, journalists, and fans to define Japanese animation as a specific and different genre. Anime was seen as an innovative style of animation portraying an exciting, yet confronting world of exotic, futuristic, and action-orientated images and stories that appealed to an audience of mainly teenage boys and young men. In Australia, this sensationalist definition of anime would be best expressed through Manga Entertainment's *manga effect* promotional strategy, which had been so successful in the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States³. The exoticised and thrilling "first contact" with a heavily promoted image of *Japanese* animation during the early 1990s—symbolised by the *manga effect*—is of major importance in explaining the appeal and expansion of manga and anime in Australia. While the *manga effect* defined

³ Helen McCarthy (2001) outlines the negative impact of Manga Entertainment's concentration on Adult anime during the United Kingdom's "video nasty" panic of the effect of video violence on children and teenagers, which also rippled into the European anime scene.

anime as confronting imagery and rhetoric, fans would renegotiate the definition of anime as merely sex and violence, in favour of a more inclusive and empowering definition that reflected their appropriation of different anime genres, such as *shōjo* (manga and anime for girls) (see Chapter 7).

The Fan's Counter-Discourse

In the following sections I will explore how fans, movie critics, and scholars took up the stylistic conventions of difference and innovation that had informed the “sex and violence” marketing campaign of the *manga effect*, to reposition manga and anime and consequently reiterate their appeal. *Akira* came to represent three important characteristics of the fan's counter-discourse on the manga effect. Firstly, *Akira* was seen as a landmark anime that established anime's technical quality and offered intelligent and emotive themes that could appeal to a mature and sophisticated audience. In this way, *Akira* was a flagship for high quality Japanese animation that presented innovative artistic techniques and thought provoking narrative themes of identity and human/machine hybridity. Furthermore, *Akira* contained cyberpunk themes and imagery that evoked contemporary concerns of alienation, class conflict, and the potential for new experiences offered by combinations between humans, machines, and technologies. *Akira*'s cyberpunk elements became emblematic of Western fans' exciting, yet threatening discourse of a “techno-orient” (Morley & Robins, 1995). Finally, scholars and fans read a distinct “Japaneseness” within *Akira*'s associations with contemporary history (the destruction caused by powerful weapons, and the trauma and optimism of post-war recovery). The use of the three elements by fans, scholars and movie critics reinterpreted the dominant image of anime as “sex and violence”, offering a positive image of the anime experience in Australia.

Akira

Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* was one of Japan's most expensive animated features, costing over one billion yen to make (approx. \$7 million U.S.). Its 2,200 shots and 160,000 animation cells constituted more than twice the number used in most feature-length animation at the time, making it a significant technical achievement (Harrington, 1989; Hicks, 1990). As a result of its incredible technological quality, the two-hour epic portrayed a fluid sense of kinetic energy and motion. For the anime version of *Akira*, Otomo compressed his sprawling 1,800-page serialised manga (1982-1990) into a concentrated dose of violent action interrupted by brief cerebral contemplations of identity and power.

Akira is set in Neo-Tokyo, 2019, 31 years after World War III⁴. Tetsuo, a motorcycle gang member (*bōsōzoku*), has telekinetic powers awakened after an encounter with a mutant child, and is subjected to secret government experiments designed to possess the vast powers hidden inside his mind for the purposes of science. These powers are unleashed in Tetsuo, but unable to control them, he embarks on a rampage in neo-Tokyo. The military, Tetsuo's old gang friends, a revolutionary group, and three mysterious psychokinetic "children" attempt to control or destroy him.

Comprehensive textual readings of *Akira* have already been provided by academics such as Napier (1996; 2001). Napier outlines the significance of metamorphosis to *Akira*'s theme of an alienated youth's search for identity and its cyberpunk meditations on the apocalypse (2001, p. 43). She argues that the destructiveness of Tetsuo's transformations reveals the story's complex negotiation of the tensions that develop between power and control. Napier frames the importance of these elements in terms of understanding Japan:

⁴ For each new version of *Akira* the date of the explosion that triggered World War III has been changed to coincide with the release date of that version. For example, in the original Japanese manga the date given is the 6th December, 1982 (The same year and month the manga began its serialisation), it was changed to 16th July 1988 for the Japanese theatrical anime release, and to 6th of December, 1992 for the English language manga release. (Rehrl, 1995)

Akira appeared in 1988, a time when Japan had reached what has perhaps been its postwar peak of international influence and (mis)recognition, a period when many nations felt threatened by what they saw as Japan's emerging superpower status. Tetsuo's monstrosity can thus be coded in ideological terms as a reflection of Japan's own deep-seated ambivalence at this time, partly glorying in its new identity but also partly fearing it. In certain ways *Akira* opens up a space for the marginal and the different, suggesting in its ending a new form of identity (p. 40)

My use of *Akira* moves in a different direction from Napier's textual analysis; in the following sections, I will discuss how *Akira*'s cyberpunk themes are utilised by film critics, scholars, and Australian anime fans and night clubbers, to negotiate specific problems such as gender politics. However, my analysis does confirm Napier's suggestion that an important quality of *Akira* is its ability to create a space for the exploration of identities.

While *Akira* received a good response in Japan—becoming number one at the box office upon its release (Napier, 2001, pp. 40-41)—it would play an even more important and long-term role in the West. For many fans, *Akira* introduced and defined the new anime style of violent cyberpunk imagery and complex narrative. It began its cult ascension outside of Japan after its positive reception during the Cannes Film Festival in 1988, and its momentum grew as its English, French, Italian, and Spanish versions received similar interest and support. The combination of intellectual themes and cyberpunk imagery appealed to both art-house and science fiction fan audiences; The Washington Post reviewer Harrington (1989) described *Akira* as an “intellectually provocative and emotionally engaging” experience (Harrington, 1989). *Akira* was an anime that was recognised as mature, intelligent, provocative, and very different from Disney animation by a small, but influential cinema community. After its 1990 release in Australia, it became a fixture in a number of art-house cinemas, providing many people with their first opportunity to see a theatrical Japanese animation movie at the cinema. During its first release, art house theatre operators found their cinemas filling up with an audience curious to see this spectacular and different Japanese animation. As one theatre operator reminisced of *Akira*'s cult popularity in his cinema: “we

seat 616 ... and the second time we showed ‘*Akira*,’ we came as close as we ever have to selling out” (Kannapell, 1997). The praise *Akira* received at Film Festivals and in art-house cinemas played an important role in defining its significance to the broader fan community in the early 1990s. *The Complete Anime Guide* (1995), for example, referred to *Akira* as one of the first, and most significant anime to introduce the potential of Japanese animation to “mature, sophisticated filmgoers” (Ledoux, Ranney, & Patten, 1997, p. 43).

For many fans (and those who were soon-to-become anime fans), *Akira* was a first taste of the amazing, heretofore unseen potential of Japanese animation to not only capture, but *keep* the interest of the mature, sophisticated filmgoers who patronised the film festivals and art theatres where *Akira* was primarily screened ... It was dark; it was unsettling; it was unlike any science fiction story – animated or otherwise – anyone had ever seen before. It wasn’t the first Japanese-animated film to be released theatrically in the U.S., but for many, *Akira* was the film which would make that crucial break into the American pop culture mainstream. (Ledoux et al., 1997, p. 43)

Akira as a “Landmark” Anime

Before *Akira*, the idea of a unique Japanese style of animation simply had no public profile in Australia. The small audience that was interested in mature manga and anime before *Akira* often encountered difficulties in explaining their interest to friends without being associated with juvenile interests or offensive Japanese comic books. As one fan described to me: “at least after *Akira* people knew what I was talking about and didn’t just think of *Astro Boy* or children’s comic books” (Todd, 27, male, Anglo-Australian, student). The praise for *Akira* in the West by this small, but influential, fan/movie-critic audience marked the first significant attempt in Australia to express a distinctly different and positive experience of anime.

Many fans I interviewed described *Akira* as a “landmark” film in their experience of anime. As one fan said: “I thought *Akira* would be the perfect place to start. I’d always heard that it was a landmark, and a model for many *Japanimation* movies to come” (Alan, 34, male, Anglo-Australian, IT industry). Because of the relatively wide release of *Akira* in Australia—

1990 Australian theatrical release, 1992 video rental release, 1998 television debut—it kept introducing people to anime right up to its digitally remastered DVD re-release in 2001. This allowed *Akira* to provide a recurring encounter with cyberpunk anime for Western audiences. A group of friends renting a pile of videos to watch over the weekend could access *Akira* from the local video store, or come across it on television or at the cinema during its re-screenings. For some, this encounter would become a significant moment that would develop into a consuming interest in anime, as its commercial and fan networks expanded during the 1990s. Richard (store owner) described to me his sense of responsibility as a retailer of anime to help new fans with their discovery of anime:

Maybe they are going to watch *Akira* accidentally one day and they're going to say: "Shit that's good." Then they'll find out it's some of this weird Japanese stuff and maybe in that way they'll come into a shop like this and say: "I saw a bit of something called *Akira* or *Ghost in the Shell*, or *Wings of Honneamise* or *Patlabor*," or something like that. "I really liked it, it was really unusual. I liked the story line, the character, the quality of the animation, the sound effects, the music. Do you have something else that is like that?" And, I get that quite a lot. Then I have to ask: "What do you like? What do you think is good?" And gradually we kind of nut it out, so I know that 'good' for them means sexually explicit, or it means really nice mechanical robot designs, or a really good adventure story, or romance, or really good something-or-other. Then I can zero-in on it and give them more. (40, male, Anglo-Australian, retailer)

Cyberpunk: The Tokyo landscape

One of *Akira*'s key characteristics for Western fans was its association in the West with the science fiction sub genre of cyberpunk. Cyberpunk had developed in the mid 1980s, with the work of writers such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and John Shirley's *Vacuum Flowers* (1987). By the 1990s, it had become increasingly popular, through novels such as Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1993). Cyberpunk dealt with new fantasies of science, technology, and humanity in an often near-future, dystopic setting. It was common for *Akira* to be placed within this cyberpunk genre. For Australian artist and scholar, Philip Brophy (1994), "Katsuhiro Otomo's **Akira** (1987) was the flagship heralding 1990s

cyberpunk animation. It drew directly upon an image of Japan refracted through Western eyes, Ridley Scott's **Bladerunner** (1982)" (p. 135).

Akira's inter-textual richness is an important part of its long-lasting appeal. Otomo drew upon the familiar cyberpunk themes of alienation and the post-industrial cityscape of *Bladerunner*, combining it with anime's flexibility, in order to depict transforming bodies that mutated out of control and specific references to Tokyo's futuristic ambiance:

I was influenced by **Bladerunner**. There's a hotel in Shibuya and the view from the restaurant on the top floor on a rainy night looks exactly like **Bladerunner**. That sort of image—in **Bladerunner**, in **Akira**—seems to be a very popular image of the future: dark, brooding, and so on. Perhaps because I drew **Akira** at that time, it contributed to its success. (Ideta, Iwamura, & Otomo, 1994, p. 139)

Akira introduced animated cyberpunk images to the Australian audience for anime, and would later become an established and essential part of the Australian manga experience. Cyberpunk images included the post-apocalyptic shell of old Tokyo, the neon streets of the newly rebuilt Neo-Tokyo, the roaming motorcycle punks (*bōsōzoku*), a corrupt government and oppressive military force that desperately clings to power. These images and themes resonated strongly with the Western cyberpunk genre. One fan I interviewed identified the thrill of cyberpunk as the reason that anime was so appealing for him:

High-level sex scenes. Frequent high-level violence. Adult themes. High-level coarse language. It's hard to put my finger on it though, perhaps I just love the word "cyberpunk". (Tom, 19, Anglo-Australian, student)

Realism

An important characteristic of *Akira*'s depiction of the cyberpunk is its realistic and graphic depiction of a possible near future. Bodies are temporarily monitored, analysed, and contained within scientific machines, until characters, such as Tetsuo, fuse with machinery to transform into something greater, a possible "new universe" (Napier, 2001, p. 42).

Simultaneously, other characters are paralysed by the death and destruction around them and are unable to control or stop this transforming environment. Many fans found the detail of

Akira's severe post-apocalyptic environment a significant break from the view of the future offered in Western animation. As one fan pointed out:

I found that it had a much higher level of detail to the animation and drawing, it had violence, swearing, and so on. This was VERY different to the usual Disney cartoons that I was used to. (Alex, 18, male, Anglo-Australia)

Alex also went on to compare the level of realism in *Akira*, to other futuristic Western cartoons like *The Jetsons* or the super-hero cartoon, *X-Men*. When I asked him to be more specific about the realism he felt *Akira* was portraying—which was absent in the United States cartoons—he pointed to the attention to small details in anime, such as the characters wearing different clothing at different times of the day and at different stages of the story. He stated: “Unlike *The Jetsons* or Mickey Mouse people actually change their uniforms, they don’t wear the same thing, year after year after year. And they just have more of a life, more reality, than the American cartoons” (ibid.). Alex suggests that in anime the characters were

fleshed out to become “real”, rather than trapped in the undeveloped and under characterised cartoon characters of the West.

Marketing Akira's "Japaneseness"

Another characteristic of *Akira* was the importance its Japaneseness played in defining and distinguishing it from Western culture. One example of this can be seen in the branding of its name by Western distributors, where, for the Western release of the *Akira* graphic novel, the Japanese katakana lettering for *Akira* (アキラ) was superimposed over the original English

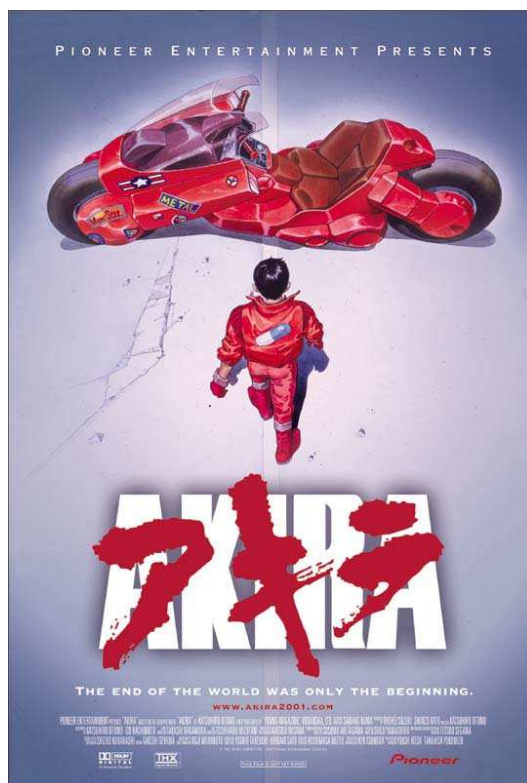


Figure 17. The *Akira* (1988) logo section for the western theatrical posters shows the powerful juxtaposition of English and Japanese text.

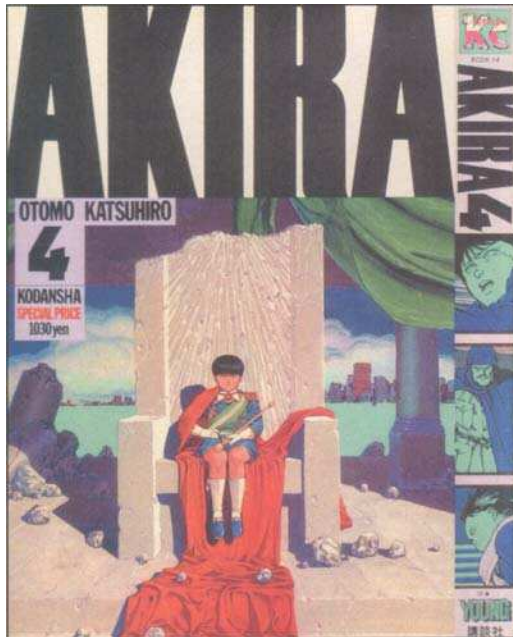


Figure 18. The Japanese cover for the *Akira* manga reveals the use of English text to create an appealing Western association for a Japanese audience.

design to create an exotic effect and raise its Japanese profile. This juxtaposition of Japanese and English lettering was later used with even greater impact, for the cover art and publicity of the *Akira* film (see Figure 17). Interestingly, in the original Japanese version of the *Akira* manga, the title and name of the author, Katsuhiro Otomo, were written boldly in English to draw upon an occidental exoticism in Japan (see Figure 18) Otomo is claimed to have done this to show the influence Western comic books had on his style, as well as to draw upon the graphic impact of English lettering

in Japan to distinguish it from other manga (Hollings, 1999). The occidentalising of *Akira* for a Japanese audience, and its orientalising for a Western audience, led Ken Hollings (1999) to declare that: “the Western version actually looks more Japanese than the original” (p. 13).

McCarthy (McCarthy, 2001) claims that the framing of *Akira* as distinctly Japanese represented a significant difference to the previous promotion and broadcast of anime in the United Kingdom:

Akira was the first Japanese animated production to have a major impact on British public consciousness on the grounds of its national origin. A number of other Japanese animated titles had been screened on British TV since the late 1960s and available on video since at least the mid-1980s. The difference was that they were usually not recognised as Japanese by the British audience. (p. 74)

The Japaneseness of *Akira* was significant in terms of fostering its distinct brand identity, which would continue in later anime such as *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). For Western anime distributors, this idea of Japaneseness was carefully chosen to appeal to the audience they were targeting—predominantly young males—as well as to differentiate it from

dominant Western animation such as Disney, which were targeted at children and families. *Akira*'s Japaneseness helped establish anime as a new animation genre that was for adults only. In effect, Japaneseness became another dimension of the manga effect. However, fans and scholars perceived a more complex Japaneseness in *Akira*'s appropriation of Japan's history and culture within its cyberpunk narrative.

The Apocalyptic Vision and the Manga Effect

While the cyberpunk style is international, *Akira* offers some distinctly Japanese examples of it. An important element of *Akira*'s distinctive "Japanese" cyberpunk quality is its representation of an apocalyptic Japan. As the only nation ever to suffer a nuclear attack, Japan has a unique perspective on the perils of technology and science. Scholars such as Morris Low (1993) have linked the representation of the atomic bombing of Japan and its successful post-war recovery to popular movies like *Godzilla*, arguing that they express a genuine concern with the ever present possibility of destruction, mixed with a faith in technology to solve these problems and rebuild society. The destruction of Tokyo and its rebuilding in *Akira* certainly express the theme of an ever present risk of destruction. It does, however, present a more problematic "faith" in technology. For the director, Otomo (Ideta et al., 1994), the spirit of *Akira* is based on the progressive atmosphere of 1960s Japan. Otomo explains that he drew upon memories of his early childhood in post-war Japan and the principles of a progressive technology, the occupation forces, and the post-war recovery to create *Akira*:

The setting of *Akira* is in the future but a lot of it is based around the Tokyo I'd seen during the Showa (post war) period. It's filled with images from my childhood, the army, progressive technology, the Olympics, and so forth. *Akira* is set on the eve of an Olympics; I grew up around the lead-up to the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Neo-Tokyo is intended to have the same atmosphere as the progressive atmosphere of 1960s Japan. (Ideta et al., 1994, p. 138)

Isolde Standish (1998) argues that the destruction of Tokyo at the beginning and end of *Akira* suggests the motif of purification through destruction. In this reading, technology—rather than helping humanity—has become one of the elements that has corrupted it and brought about the social divisions of techno-fascist scientists and youth delinquents who become guinea pigs for experimentation. Such victims are Tetsuo and the mutated children.

In *Akira*, the despoiled cityscape of old-Tokyo's slums, compared to the wealth and prosperity of Neo-Tokyo, is a strong image that symbolises the economic gap between rich and poor that is central to the cyberpunk genre. Standish (ibid.) shows how the *bōsōzoku* (biker gang) theme of Kaneda and his gang of delinquents living on the margins of Neo-Tokyo's prosperity, is used to “reflect a youth culture of resistance which exists alongside mainstream contemporary Japanese society” (p. 57). Standish traces the representation of conflict, power, and identity in *Akira* in terms of Japanese social and cultural references: from the optimism of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, to the 1970s riots of the anti-United States AMPO movement. His research on the Japaneseness of *Akira* represents an intellectual legitimisation of manga and anime as useful tools in the analysis of Japan, through their engagement with issues of identity, stereotypes, and aesthetic traditions in Japan and how they can enrich the Western appreciation of Japan.

Akira appeals to fans and critics because it offers a space where Japaneseness can be explored, and where ideas about destruction and how it is possible to recover can be pondered. In his analysis of the anime, Looser (2002) identifies the themes of dispersed identity and lack of fixed origins as a key to the experience of anime. As an example of this, Looser points to the frequency of the post-apocalyptic setting in *anime*, and argues that the post-apocalyptic city shell represents a new, de-centred, post-urban experience. “More simply put,” clarifies Looser (2002) “the trope of the apocalyptic city at the outset of an *anime* film in effect insists on the destruction of the classically modern fixed origin, or anchor, of

identity” (p. 310). Looser takes the setting of Miyazaki Hayao’s *Nausicaa* (1984), as a prime example of the many representations of the post-apocalyptic city: “Like many other *anime*, *Nausicaa* is set in a post-apocalyptic world, in which the city is only a dead image of some lost centre” (Looser, 2002, p. 315). *Akira* begins with the destruction of modern Japan’s centre, Tokyo, spectacularly engulfed in a sphere of white energy (see Figure 19). Phillip Brophy (1994) describes this as a distinctively Japanese approach to the destruction of origins and centres:

Akira opens with a sequence that condenses many primary elements that qualify a peculiar Japanese fix on the apocalypse. After a flash appears on the horizon’s edge, a huge ball of black energy grows and expands its circumference in sheets of white fallout, gravitating silently toward our location and engulfing the screen in silent white. We are made—by virtue of our point-of-view—to experience that blast. In a perverse ‘you-are-there’ effect, we are made not to witness destruction, but to be symbolically destroyed. American movies tend to allow us the privileged position of seeing & hearing destruction; rarely do they figuratively ‘destroy us’. (p. 136)

In *Akira*, there is an empty centre—the destroyed heart of old Tokyo—being redeveloped as the site of the new Olympic stadium. The destruction of the blast suggests Japan’s loss caused by the atomic bomb and its occupation by United States’ troops after World War II, while for Western readers, it may be an encounter with the realities of destructive warfare and its aftermath. For Looser (2002), Brophy (1994), and Standish (1998), the potential destruction of the city, and ourselves, is the opportunity to be reborn, purified, or empowered.



Figure 19. Apocalyptic imagery in *Akira*’s destruction of Tokyo.

Dance Culture and Cyberpunk Imagery

Japanese media academic, Toshiya Ueno (Ueno, 1999) argued that while globalisation has allowed people to overcome the barriers of geographical distance through communication technologies and forms of travel, there are still divisions in today's world. Ueno (ibid.) identifies two types of contemporary "tribalism" (p. 95) that display the possibilities and restrictions acting on identity today. Firstly, there are "urban tribes" (ibid., 95), which he defines as subcultures such as football hooligans and punks who appropriate signs of resistance and upset the established order. Secondly, he identifies "media tribes" (ibid., p. 96), which are communities that consume largely pre-packaged identities and life styles distributed and reinforced by the media. Ueno argues that Western anime fandom and psychedelic trance culture share elements of "media tribalism", through their perpetuation of a techno-orientalist discourse of Japan and Asia that relies on pre-packaged images of an exotic and hi-tech Asia.

The articulation and constitution of a pre-packaged subculture through various types

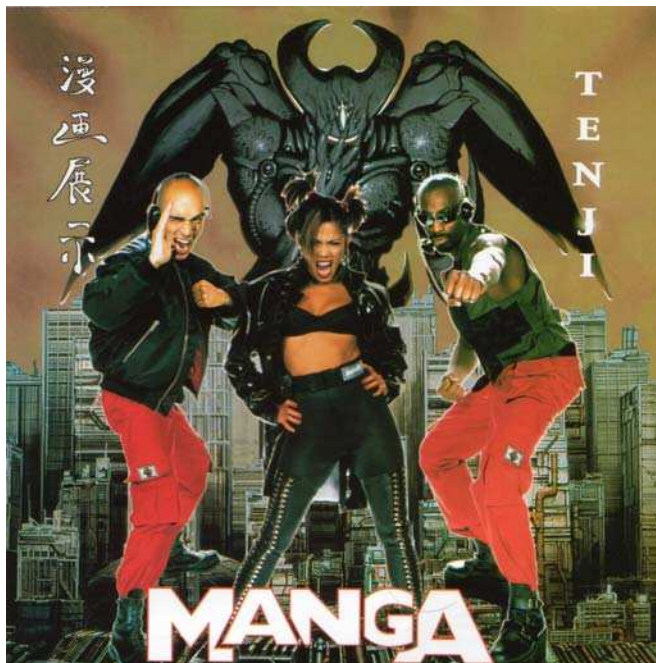


Figure 20. Manga Entertainment launched their line of manga-inspired fashion and club wear in 1996.

of media can be seen in Manga Entertainment's marketing for its fashion range of manga nightclub wear targeted at anime fans and night clubbers. Manga Entertainment's fashion incorporates familiar urban street wear such as military style pants, large boots, and bold colours, especially red and silver (see Figure 20). The promotion of manga-inspired club wear



Figure 21. The anime influence on fashion: A Western clubber modelling “manga fashion” is grafted onto Kaneda’s motorbike from *Akira*.



Figure 22. A multicultural view of the future: clubbers wearing manga-inspired fashion are reflected in the visor of the Armitage character from *Armitage III* (1994-1995).

is heavily contextualised within the cyberpunk anime space, where the manga fashion models of Figure 20 are set against a future-city scape, while the mutating cyber-demon from the anime, *Genocyber* (1993) looms over them. The fashion models are also substituted into well-known anime scenes such as the use of Kaneda’s motorbike from *Akira* with Neo-Tokyo in the background and a “live” Western model substituted for Kaneda (Figure 21). Other images that Manga Entertainment have used to promote their fashion line include Figure 22,



Figure 23. “Manga” clubbers fused with transparent helmets from *Bubblegum Crisis* (1987-1991).

which depicts the multi-racial manga clubbers reflected in the visor of the Armitage character from *Armitage III*, and Figure 23 that merges the hard bodied mobile-armour of the Night Sabres from *Bubblegum Crisis* with the bright silver fashion design of Manga Fashion’s night clubbers in a futuristic neon environment.

Within nightclub culture, one can see a similar appropriation of manga iconography and dance fashion. Ueno (1999) argues that

media tribes are deeply “syncretic” (p. 102) or increasingly hybrid cultural movements that appropriate images and information from various local and global media sources. These syncretic acts are both “cut’n’mix” (ibid., p. 102) bricolages and carefully planned “tactical” (ibid., p. 102) appropriations. For example, Ueno (ibid.) perceives a number of appropriations between trance culture and anime, including their similar futuristic ambiance, as well as a connection between the drug culture of rave parties and anime’s depiction of chemically or medically altered pilots in giant robot anime:

Some of my students involved in rave culture have told me that Japanimation’s design and colour sense reminds them of psychedelics. Likewise, I have often heard the impression that the tribal atmosphere of open air rave parties resembles scenes in Japanimation SF. In fact, with other genres of club music, Japanimation has often been used as VJ [Video Jockey] effects in parties. Even at the narrative level, in many Japanimations featuring robots or powersuits, the pilots are doped with injected drugs either for aggression or to provide altered states of mind encouraging adaptation to the machines. (p. 102)

Since the popularity of *Akira* in the 1990’s, club and dance cultures in Sydney have utilised a manga style in their promotion of events and activities. These acts of appropriation display elements of Ueno’s (1999) “cut’n’mix” bricolage and “tactical” appropriations that shift anime’s cyberpunk imagery into new associations. A recent example of this was the *2019* dance/music festival held in Sydney during November 2002. *2019* adopted a manga-style character, created by an Australian graphic artist, as its mascot for posters and flyers (see Figure 24). The *2019* manga character provided the female face for the event’s hi-tech image. The promotional text for *2019* (Tiger Lilly Marketing, 2002) highlights the “galactic lasers” used to create a complex laser and lighting production, the “super sonic sounds” provided by the international and local dance musicians, and the “cosmic environment” themed around manga iconography. As the leaflet proclaimed:

Taking you to the next level, the entire event will be themed with giant 3D cut-outs, 10m long banners, massive oversize Manga characters and moving live performers. (Tiger Lilly Marketing, 2002)



Figure 24. The female manga face for the hi-tech rave event: The manga character designed for the Sydney dance festival 2019 (2002).

The choice of a female warrior/cyborg as the 2019 mascot also represents a strong link to anime. Ueno (1999) argues that women are very significant to both cyberpunk anime and psychedelic trance culture “and one frequently encounters the merging of women into the machine and technology” (p. 104). In cyberpunk anime, the power of female characters is often enhanced through technology and they develop important relationships with machines. Such is the bond that forms between the female cyborg, Major Kusanagi, and the

artificial intelligence of the Puppeteer, which creates a heightened female/machine consciousness in *Ghost in the Shell*. In the psychedelic trance culture, Ueno (ibid.) argues that women play an increasingly independent and confident role:

Unlike previous disco cultures, women are no longer treated as the target of sexual pick-ups. ... Men also are encouraged to abandon overtly masculine behaviour. From time to time, ravers in the trance scene talk about the unification of the self with nature, the universe and others. (p. 104)

Central to the position of women in rave culture is their positive engagement with technology. Drawing upon the work of researchers and scholars in club-cultures (Gore, 1997; Miklitsch, 1998; Pini, 1997a, 1997b), Ueno argues that a central experience in rave cultures is a “cyborg subjectivity” (Haraway, 1991, p. 176) where women, not men, are able to attain a unity of “self with nature” (Ueno, 1999, p. 104) through “various technologies—sound

system, rhythm machines, decoration, videos and computer graphics, drugs and dance” (ibid., p. 104). Importantly, Ueno (ibid.) claims female rave dancers are “quite aware that the ‘nature’ with which they feel unified is thoroughly artificial and technological.” (p. 104). It is through this hybridisation of body and technology in dance culture and anime that Ueno raises the issues of cyber feminism and cyborg politics, as outlined by Haraway (1991) and Rey Chow (1993). Drawing upon these “cyborg feminists” (p. 105), Ueno argues that the transgression of female ravers into a state of unity with technology and nature represents the possibility for new interventions in the “mind/body/spirit/technology assemblage for alternative politics of the self and community” (p. 105). For Ueno, it is in this space of the cyborg—half machine, half human—that “Japanimation is providing the arena of such politics and interventions” (Ueno, 1999, p. 105).

The 2019 manga mascot is a composition of assertive, yet feminine characteristics, common to anime heroines. Her blue hair is tied into two ponytails in a variation of the *osage* (a ‘cute’ braid associated with Japanese school girls), and she holds a staff with a blue orb on its end, resembling *Sailor Moon* and *Card Captor Sakura*’s magical wand. Her clothing combines both battle armour and the elegant formal attire of elbow length gloves. Her gaze is directed towards us in a fixed and determined manner. She is a strong and feminine image similar to the all-female vigilante Night Sabres of the cyberpunk anime series, *Bubblegum Crisis*, which was broadcast on Australian television around this time. Anime retailers also appropriated the use of the female character in anime as an appealing emblem of anime culture that extends beyond anime fandom. The United States’ anime retailer, Anime Crash, uses a female character as the store’s logo, as Chris Parente, part-owner of Anime Crash, explained: “The female character in Japanese animation is quite pronounced. ... We wanted to capture that element as opposed to robots, which are another big element in the books and videos. We’re trying to be a little hipper, to attract the nonanime fan.” (Bessman, 1995, p. 75)



Figure 25. An advert for the U.S. music magazine *BPM* shows the fusion of Japanese femininity, the techno-orient, club culture, and anime in the west.

Ueno (1999) also claims that another significant characteristic of female characters in cyberpunk anime, is that they “are often ethnically coded” (p. 104) as Japanese. While the 2019 manga character lacks any overt Japanese ethnicity, a recent advert for the electronic culture magazine, *BPM*, which concentrates on dance music and anime, offers a strikingly similar image of the 2019 manga character—as a “live” Japanese clubber (see figure 25).

This suggests some nexus between female manga characters, clubbers, and cyberpunk imagery. The *BPM*

Japanese clubber evokes a manga connection in a number of ways. Firstly, she appeared in the anime magazine, *Newtype USA*—which was obviously targeted at an anime-literate audience—and secondly, the clubber’s blue hair is typical of the use of different hair colours in manga and anime (such as Rei Ayanami’s distinctive blue hair in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*). Furthermore, both the 2019 manga character and the *BPM* Japanese clubber are young women who have blue hair tied into ponytails, and who wear outfits of a blue and pink design. Both girls hold spheres of “power”—the 2019 girl holds a staff with a blue orb and the *BPM* girl embraces a hi-tech disco ball—and they also both directly engage the viewer with an assertive “in-control” glance. These two figures offer an image of the techno-oriental woman: exotic, strong, and feminine.

Olivia Khoo (2000) argues that an assertive Asian femininity has emerged as the symbol of a new Asia, an Asia which is cosmopolitan, rich, modern and technological. Khoo's new Asian femininity can be seen in these two dance texts and their use of a "manga" girl. The United States-based music magazine, *BPM*, and the Sydney outdoor rave party, *2019*, reveal not only an Anglo-Australian techno-orientalist fantasy of an exotic other, but also that the anime fandom culture in Australia (and the United States) has a significant Asian population that find these images appealing. This was declared by one Asian anime fan during our interview on his curiosity about the crossover between anime culture and night-clubbing in Sydney:

I've been amused to notice some flyers along Oxford Street that use manga characters. Most of the pictures I think look pretty cool, and they certainly caught my attention. I'm tempted to go along and check them out, but usually I just go to karaoke with my friends instead of clubbing. It's difficult to find things I like doing in Sydney, not many of the things I used to do back in Korea are here. Sydney is pretty boring. (Dean, 25, male, Korean, student)

Fantasies of the techno-orient, like the exotic woman—whether the dance party clubber or the female cyborg anti-hero of Major Kusanagi—suggest an alternative vision of Asian femininity from the "old" image of an exotic and passive Asian woman (Broinowski, 1992) that appeals most to an Anglo and Asian Australian anime/clubber community. The techno-oriental exoticism of Asian femininity indicates the possibility for a new politics of transgressive pleasure and resistance that may reformulate the concept of the exotic as no longer submissive to the colonial or masculine.

Of course, different communities prefer manga and anime that suit their individual patterns of consumption. For the *2019* clubber the animated female face of high technology and futurism reflects their desire for hybrid human/machine fusions that represent the exotic, strong, and feminine techno-orient. For anime fans, the use of manga within dance culture intersects with the broadening of anime's appeal, since the adoption of *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* by art-house audiences during the early-1990s, as sophisticated and mature works of

animation. Fan and dance communities' appropriate anime as a relevant and fashionable object that offers a kind of social orientation, a sense of one's place in terms of the desires the anime form represents. This use of anime is not an isolated experience. Similar observations have been made about the indigenisation of Asian cuisines in Sydney (Hage, 1997), Asian popular culture in Australia (Thomas, 2000), and the differences between reading Japanese and Australian advertising in Australia (Nightingale, 1997a).

The appropriation of *Akira*'s three characteristics (its landmark presence on Western anime culture, Japaneseness, and cyberpunk themes) by fans, cinema critics, and scholars, as well as the use of anime-inspired cyberpunk imagery in dance culture, displays the multiple readings of anime in Australia. As shown at the beginning of this chapter, fans negotiate the industry's image of anime according to their own interests and experiences. Many fans trace their interest in anime to the high profile success of dystopic, post-apocalyptic anime, such as *Akira*, and to the blurring of cyborg and human consciousness as in *Ghost in the Shell*, as well as the "sex and violence" themed Manga Film Festivals. The popularity of these anime, and that of the success of the *manga effect* campaign of Manga Entertainment, led to wider cultural appropriations, such as the crossover between female manga characters and dance culture. These anime experiences traversed different communities and industries to provide images and narratives of potential futures, transgressions, and fantastic objects for Australian anime fans, commercial interests, and nightclub culture. As we have seen, fans proclaim a specificity for the manga-experiment that they attribute directly to its "Japaneseness".

CHAPTER 5

Perfect Blue: Identification and Popular Culture

Identification, in other words, invokes phantoms. By incorporating the spectral remains of the dearly departed love-object, the subject vampiristically comes to life. To be open to an identification is to be open to a death encounter, open to the very possibility of communing with the dead. (Fuss, 1995, p. 1)

The problem of identification within popular culture is expressed in the popular press's negative portrayal of anime fans as being obsessed with their favourite characters or series. In this chapter, I discuss the anime *Perfect Blue* (1997) as a text that directly engages with the negative portrayal of fans by depicting a deranged stalker and his obsession with a young female singer-turned-actress. *Perfect Blue* is an anime that is concerned with the violent fantasies that underlie both fan identifications with media products and the manufacture of these products by an exploitative entertainment industry. Central to *Perfect Blue*'s criticism of fandom and popular culture is its use of the thriller genre to problematise the issue of identification. Here, I use *Perfect Blue*'s criticism of fandom and the construction of media commodities to focus on the problem of identification as a central issue in the construction of an ideal anime text by fans.

In her investigation of identification, as it works across a range of discourses and a plurality of cultural differences, Diana Fuss (1995) draws upon the writings of Freud and feminist scholars such as Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler. She recognises three key components of identification. First, identification is a way we deal with loss—a process of compensation for the loss of our “love-objects” (Fuss, 1995, p. 1). As Freud (1940) writes: “if one has lost a love-object, the most obvious reaction is to identify oneself with it, to replace it from within, as it were, by identification” (p. 193). The process of taking a copy of the lost love-object inside oneself triggers the process of identification, a process in which we habitually find objects to “fill the void where we imagine the love-object to have been” (Fuss,

1995, p. 1). Fuss (ibid.) describes this internalised likeness of the love-object as a “revenant of the unconscious” (p. 1), in that identifications resurrect the likeness of the lost love-object in ways that may surprise and unsettle us.

As well as a compensation for loss, Fuss outlines a second process at work within identification: the formation of identity. Identity, for Jean-Luc Nancy (1993), is “the Self that identifies itself” (p. 10). Identification, argues Fuss (1995), promotes a sense of identity by setting in motion “the complicated dynamic of recognition and misrecognition” (p. 2). Identification then, is a process that fosters identity through self-recognition. However, because identification involves the subject adopting a likeness of the “other” (the love-object), it also immediately calls the subject’s own identity into question. Identification can strengthen or weaken the integrity of one’s identity through the paradox that “I” am myself through identifying with others—that I arrive at a sense of self through the other. Fuss (ibid.) refers to this act of self-recognition with the formula: “identification is the detour through the other that defines a self” (p. 2). Identification is a constantly changing and unpredictable process that brings into question any fixed notion of identity, self, and other. Identity is not immediate, secure, and complete; instead “the astonishing capacity of identifications to reverse and disguise themselves, to multiply and contravene one another, to disappear and reappear years later renders identity profoundly unstable and perpetually open to radical change” (ibid., p. 2). Identifications can align and affirm identity, or they can dislocate and destabilise our sense of self. Thus, identity itself becomes problematic through the process of identification.

Fuss (1995, p. 6) draws upon Judith Butler (1990) to define a third process: identification as a “vehicle” for other identifications. That is, one identification leads to other identifications that multiply and contravene each other. For example, “cross-identifications” (Fuss, 1995, p. 8) offer the possibility of identifications across identities. Douglas Crimp

(1993) shows how political and social movements are formed and shaped by prior and existing identifications with other political groups. For instance, *Queer Nation* is linked to *Black Power*, *Third World Liberation*, and the *Gay Liberation Front*. Identifications, too, can be vehicles for other roles and processes. Here Fuss (1995, p. 10) outlines a number of different approaches to identification within psychoanalysis¹. These approaches can be divided between those that see identification as a form of regressive nostalgia, and others that view it as a means of real psychological change. Additionally, there are those that argue that identification is a form of play that can be easily engaged in, while others see it as a terrifying process with a violent and sudden impact. However, my purpose here is not to debate how best to use identification, but to acknowledge that identification is a vehicle for multiple processes. Fuss (ibid.) accepts the contradictory theoretical approaches to identification as an inevitable outcome of identification's complexity:

Such pervasive contradictions are telling, for the very notion of identification (a process of substitution and displacement) puts these divisions into question. Identification is both voluntary and involuntary, necessary and difficult, dangerous and effectual, naturalizing and denaturalizing. Identification is the point where the psychological/social distinction becomes impossibly confused and finally untenable. (p. 10)

Identification, as Fuss demonstrated, with its effect on identity, is a vehicle that complicates any fixed division, such as the self and the other.

The fluidity of identification and its conflicting use within psychoanalysis makes it a multifaceted tool to use in my analysis of anime audiences and texts. Fuss' three processes of identification foregrounds my reading of the problematic relationship between anime fans and their favourite anime, as well as linking this relationship to the multiple identifications possible within popular culture.

¹ The problem of identification also has a long history within philosophy, particularly contemporary French intellectual thought from Alexandre Kojève to Jacques Derrida, who tackle the complex question of alterity and the paradox of approximating identity through the retreat from identity. As Fuss explains, "how is it that only through the other I can be myself, only in the place of the other I can arrive at myself?" (Fuss, 1995, p. 4).

In Chapter 6, I explore how anime commodities are vehicles that shift between the global and local, and how this process complicates the fixed notions of cultural presence and national character. In this chapter, I will apply Fuss' three processes of identification to analyse how the anime *Perfect Blue* problematises the relationship between fans, industry, and media objects. *Perfect Blue* engages directly with the problem of identification in its critique of obsessed fans and the media industry. First, it constructs an image of fans as either accumulating an endless supply of surrogate love objects, or as psychotic loners appropriating the identity of their idol for their own fantasies. These representations of fan activities warn of the dangers in identifications across identities. Second, it depicts the media industry's exploitation of the main character, Mima, as an object they can reinvent for their own agendas. This manipulation reveals the media industry's attempt to control the fluid relationship between audiences and media products. *Perfect Blue* also uses psychoanalysis to explain character motives², and employs a confusing narrative structure and imagery to convey the identity crisis of the three main characters (Mima, Rumi, and Me-mania).

Perfect Blue

Satoshi Kon's *Perfect Blue* (1997) is about the emotional deterioration and harassment of Mima Kirigoe by a delusional stalker. Mima begins the film as the lead singer of the all-girl pop group *Cham* (see Figure 26). Following the advice of Tadokoro, her agent, she decides to leave the pink stockings and ballet dress of *Cham*, to forge a new career as an actress. "The pop idol image is suffocating me," she tells her mother after her last performance. Hoping to be taken more seriously as an actress, Mima submits to a drastic change of image. The *buriko* (cute female) *idol singer* (pop singer) is transformed into a mature actress playing a psychotic killer in a sordid television thriller called *Double Bind*.

² The character of Dr. Toko Asamiya, a psychiatrist in *Double Bind* the fictional thriller within *Perfect Blue*, investigates a series of murders that parallel those committed within *Perfect Blue*.



Figure 26. The idol group Cham, in *Perfect Blue* (1997).

The role requires her to be “raped” in a strip club by a group of men, a dramatic reversal from the virginal image of her previous pop singer career. This shift in Mima’s persona, from a *kawaii* (cute and innocent), “girl-next-door” idol singer to a *yogorechatta* (filthy) actress³, is the key narrative catalyst in *Perfect Blue*. It brings to the fore Mima’s identity crisis (Who am I—an idol singer, actress, or serial killer?), the conflict between her two agents (Tadokoro and Rumi), and the alienation of her fans. These crises, and the manner of their resolution, provide a rich area to investigate anime’s representation of fans, popular culture, and media industries.

Perfect Blue is centred on the relationship between three characters: Mima—a pop singer turned actress, Rumi, her agent, and Me-mania, a fan obsessed with Mima. The key emotional contest is over the command of Mima’s identity, where each character attempts to exert their power and influence to control and exploit her. Rumi and Me-mania invest greater degrees of violence to maintain their fantasy of Mima the pop idol, while Tadokoro and Shibuya (the scriptwriter for *Double Bind*) further reinvent Mima’s identity as an adult

³ Mima’s idol singer alter-identity accuses her of being *yogorechatta* after she is “raped” in *Double Bind* and subsequently appears in a nude-photo spread for a men’s magazine.

actress. As a consequence, Mima begins to lose her own sense of identity, becoming reduced to her first, often repeated, line of dialogue in *Double Bind*: “excuse me ... who are you?” (あなたは誰なの?). The significance of this line: “excuse me ... who are you?”, can be seen by its use as a key phrase for the English-language release of *Perfect Blue*, where it was used as the movie’s tag-line, and appeared on posters and in theatrical/video trailers. Mima visits the web page Me-mania has created of her life and becomes obsessed with this fictional retelling. She imagines ghostly visitations by her idol singer persona that further fracture her identity and damage her grasp on reality. Mima’s paranoia escalates following the violent murder of the people responsible for her change in identity: Shibuya, Murano—the photographer of her nude-photo shoot, and Tadokoro. In her fragile state of mind, she begins to believe that she may have committed these murders. As the production of *Double Bind* ends, she is thrown into a number of repeated versions of the television drama’s conclusion that spirals into a confused blur of past and present, reality and fiction.

Finally, Me-mania and Rumi attempt to kill Mima in order to “save” her reputation as an idol singer. However, Mima kills Me-mania, and, after a dramatic and violent chase through the streets of Tokyo, Rumi is injured and committed to a mental asylum. Mima re-asserts her new identity as a mature actress and moves on to re-establish her life. “It’s really me,” (私は本物だよ) she declares at the end of the movie. Mima realises that she has become the person she is through her experience with Rumi, “she made me what I am now” (あの人のおかげで今の私があるんですから). Interestingly, both Rumi and Mima identify with one another, perceiving qualities within the other that are appropriated into their own identity. Thus, as Fuss (1995) suggests, identification is often a “detour through the other that defines the self” (p. 2). In *Perfect Blue*, Mima stabilises her identity, overcomes her doubts, and matures beyond her idol singer image. *Perfect Blue* is a story that takes us from identities

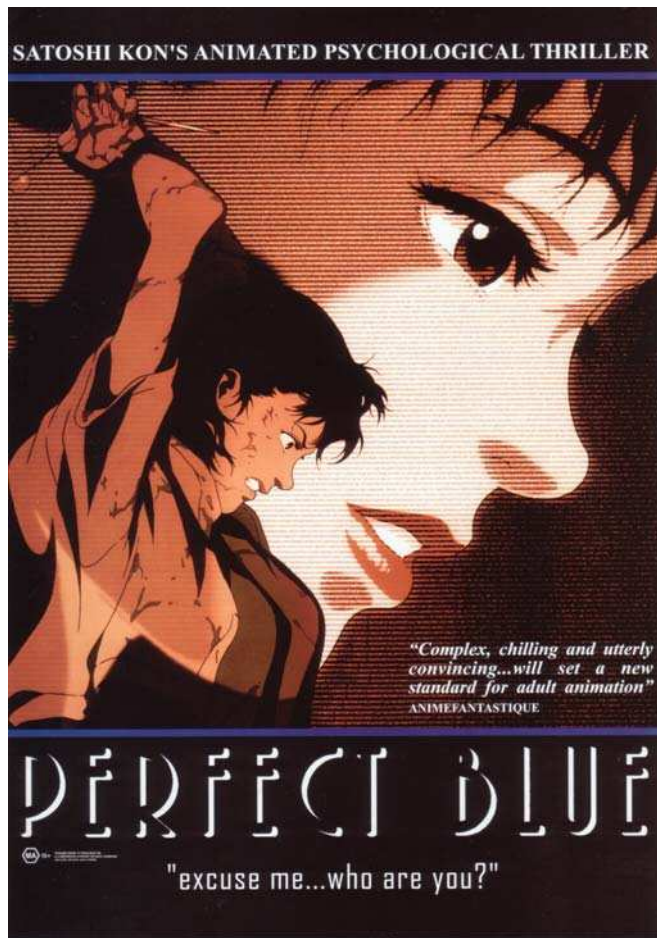


Figure 27. The enlarged face of Mima looks on as “Mima” murders the photographer. The double images of Mima suggest the transferred and appropriated identities central to *Perfect Blue*, here included in a theatrical poster.

that have been dislocated and destabilised, to Mima’s violent victory over those who desired to usurp her place.

Narrative Confusion

The effectiveness of *Perfect Blue* as a psychological thriller is largely due to its narrative style. For instance, scenes are often repeated to multiply and confound audience expectations. In one repeated scene, Mima becomes a psychiatric patient, analysed for the murders “she” committed in the real world and *Double Bind*’s fictional world. “There is no way illusions can come to life,” (幻想が実体化するなん

てあり得ない) the fictional psychologist comforts an increasingly disorientated Mima.

Visual clues, such as masks, hint at transferred and appropriated identities, such as the nude photographs and enlarged face of Mima that are projected on a wall as Rumi (depicted as Mima) kills Murano in the foreground (see Figure 27) Likewise, the murder of the photographer Murano includes a number of cuts to a mask.

Computer screens, mirrors, and windows become surfaces onto which characters project their alter egos or reveal their “true” face (see Figure 28). Characters also disguise and suddenly reveal themselves. For example, in the film’s climatic chase scene through Tokyo, Rumi is simultaneously represented as a “supernatural” Mima who gracefully floats and skips



Figure 28. The three Mimas: Mima gazes at her reflection(s)--the idol singer and actress persona, in *Perfect Blue*.

towards her prey, the real Mima, and a fat, clumsy, and frenzied Rumi, reflected in mirrors. The narrative twists and character transformations are sudden and violent, creating a psychological thriller that unnerves and fascinates. Kon (Manga Entertainment, 1998), as the director, was very conscious of the effect he wanted to create by confusing the narrative flow:

We ... used many jump cuts to link separate episodes and as an expression of mental confusion. We'd cut fast from one thing to another as if it were a fight scene, even if there wasn't any action involved – it helped emphasise Mima's sense of confusion, such as when we jump from her opening concert scene to the very different shots of her everyday life. It's a scene that shows her with both her idol-mask and her normal-mask on. (para. 32)

The mobile, elastic, and volatile readings offered within *Perfect Blue* replicate the process of identification itself. As Fuss (1995) points out, the experience of identification can be an intellectual and unsettling experience, for it “structurally aids and abets identity” (p. 2), but also immediately questions that identity through multiple and contravening identifications. The problem of identification is central to the multiplying associations offered within *Perfect Blue* and within a larger network of popular culture.

In *Perfect Blue*, a group of fans refer to Mima's change of identity as metamorphosis (脱皮, *dappi*). This process of metamorphosis is evident in the change of identity that Mima and Rumi undergo. By the end of the film, Mima has become a mature actress, while Rumi has “become” Mima's idol-singer persona. The image of metamorphosis also suggests the popular thriller, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and the use of metamorphosis to describe the serial killer's psychosis. Another reference to *The Silence of the Lambs* in *Perfect Blue* includes the murder of Rika (Mima plays her sister) in the television drama *Double Bind*. Here, the murder investigation reveals that she has had her skin peeled off, setting into



Figure 29. The obsessed fan, Me-mania, gazes appreciatively at Mima during her performance in Cham, *Perfect Blue*.

motion another reference to identification, misrecognition, and the desire to be an idealised other. The director, Kon, consciously drew upon the conventions of the thriller genre:

In psychological horror stories, there are stereotypical offenders; a perverted man desiring to be a woman, or a paranoid-schizophrenic, for example. So, I settled on a central motif of a main character who is being destroyed

by a strange stalker, and I focused on her psyche. ("Perfect Blue," 1999, p. 13)

Kon's focus on an idol singer struggling to change her identity also appears to be a well-established stereotype. In searching for a definition of *dappi*, I came across the following example: "She is trying to cast off (*dappi*) her image as an idol and become a mature singer"⁴. The reference to an idol singer and *dappi*—the process of change and metamorphosis—suggests that this theme has become a recognised media event in Japan, and a familiar setting within which to tell a psychological horror story of the trauma and terror this shift in identity could entail. The theme of pop singers and metamorphosis is not unique to Japan; an interesting cross-identification is provided by Madonna's use of excerpts from *Perfect Blue* as background imagery for her live TV concert: *Madonna Live: Drowned World Tour 2001*. The use of *Perfect Blue* by Madonna—a media celebrity who has reinvented herself many times—is a good example of the multiple identifications and associations that can occur within popular culture and the globally recognised process of manufacturing media identities.

The character of Me-mania (see Figure 29) also undergoes a change of "identity", but in his case it is done to suit the conventions of the thriller genre. Kon shifts Me-mania from

⁴ Canon Wordtank IDF-3000 electronic dictionary.

an essentially passive fan to a figure more closely resembling the killer of a slasher movie like Jason in *Friday the 13th*, or Michael from *Halloween*:

In the original script, Uchida was a major character, but he hardly did anything, and we couldn't expect the audience to get interested in a character who merely 'acted' suspicious. So, we actually changed him into a character that committed murders. (Manga Entertainment, 1998, para. 25)

Me-mania, as a symbol of consumer culture (passive and voyeuristic), becomes an “active” killer to conform to the conventions of the thriller genre. Kon frames his decision to make Me-mania a murderer, around the importance to maintain audience interest. Kon needs Me-mania to more closely resemble a typical killer within the thriller genre, and so he discards a more passive fan/voyeur image of Me-mania, in favour of a slasher/monster type character.

Perfect Blue offers a clever use of identification issues within a thriller narrative.

However, more than being a well-executed thriller and an interesting intellectual puzzle to solve, *Perfect Blue* offers a critique of the very anime audience that is attracted to debating, analysing, and claiming mastery over media products.

The Audience

Perfect Blue constructs two representations of Mima's audience: a narrow fan audience, and a broader mass audience. The depiction of the audience as either obsessed fans or ratings' figures is a caricature of the way media industries have developed the idea of audience (Ross & Nightingale, 2003). I shall first look at *Perfect Blue*'s portrayal of the mass audience.

The Mass Audience

Mima's change from an idol singer to an actress also marks a shift from an active, live audience to a passive, abstract mass audience. As a pop singer, Mima performed in front of a live audience that gave her an immediate indication of the effect of her act. However, when she became an actress she lost this direct feedback, instead relying on audience rating figures

and sales graphs to receive an impression of her popularity and appeal. Mima's mass audience is portrayed as faceless and abstract; an audience comprised of industry measurement data such as CD unit sales and television "people-meters". The reliance on this data reveals the difficulty of representing the mass audience. It describes the audience only in terms of an approximation of the number of people who bought products or watched particular programs on television. These ratings dominate the way in which media industries—such as television networks—define the success of programs. The significance of ratings' measurements is that media industries use them to construct an "audience commodity" (Meehan, 1990; Nightingale, 1997b) that can be sold to advertisers and generate revenue for television networks. Through ratings, producers claim to create programs that reflect audiences' tastes and interests.

The mass audience, as represented by ratings and sales figures, exerts significant pressure on the decisions made within the media industry. This mass audience becomes a relentless background pressure in *Perfect Blue*, providing the rationale for narrative twists and character developments. The scriptwriter, Shibuya, reinvents Mima's character as the "villain/victim", in the rape scene of the TV drama *Double Bind* to improve its flagging ratings. Tadokoro explains the necessity for Mima to become an actress in terms of the importance of appealing to a broader audience. "There's no more market for pop idols," exclaims Tadokoro to Rumi, "the only way she can last is as an actress!" Here, Tadokoro has defined success in terms of the industry concept of securing high ratings and broad public appeal. As Nightingale (1997b) argues: "The ratings measurement is co-opted within the production process to provide the reasons needed to change or to defend plots, scripts, and actors; to demonstrate who is doing a good job and who is not" (p. 361).

The division between the industry assessments of value driven by ratings, and the alternative (but powerless) voices of value represented by fans, is also depicted in *Perfect*

Blue's gendering of power within the entertainment industry. For example, the two main female characters, Rumi and Mima, are shown to have little control over Mima's career, compared to the power wielded by the male dominated television staff: the photographer Murano, and Tadokoro. Within this framework, Mima becomes a malleable body that can be reinvented as an actress. She is changed from an idol singer in a dead end pop group with a small fan base, to a television actress with mass appeal.

The mass audience is also represented through the character of Me-mania. Me-mania symbolises the mass audience, in terms of passively consuming all the information he can acquire of Mima, and relentlessly demanding this unchanging, idealised image. However, Me-mania is also a clear reference to the image of the dangerously obsessed fan.

The Fan Audience

Henry Jenkins (1992; 1997) identifies a number of negative characteristics that the media have associated with fans. This includes the stereotype of *Star Trek* 'Trekkies' "as brainless consumers, trivia buffs, social misfits, desexualised and infantilised geeks and nerds, and people confused about the line between fantasy and reality" (Jenkins, 1997, p. 506). Fans are also depicted as neurotic individuals⁵: "news reports frequently characterize fans as psychopaths whose frustrated fantasies of intimate relationships with stars or unsatisfied desires to achieve their own stardom take violent and antisocial forms" (ibid., p. 507). *Perfect Blue*'s depiction of a fan community and the solitary psychopath offers a further division of fans as part of a broader community of common interests, and as isolated individuals who are "possessed" by, or obsessed with, their favourite program or idol.

⁵ Jenkin's (1997, p. 507) traces the depiction of fans as psychologically disturbed individuals to "fan's" traditional roots in madness and demonic possession.



Figure 30. A character from *Perfect Blue* selling a magazine featuring Mima's nude photos.

At the beginning of *Perfect Blue*, *Cham*'s audience, assembled for Mima's final performance, provides an image of the fan community. These fans are all young men, who are bespectacled, too fat, or too thin, selling their *fan-zines*⁶, waiting nervously, cameras in hand, for the concert to begin. The conversations we overhear provide a summary of the negative characteristics often associated with fans, including the mindless consumption of anything to do with their favourite band, such as accumulating trivial information, gossip, and bootlegged recordings of their previous performances (see Figure 30) The overall image of the fan community is of a group of male nerds committed to the fantasy image of cute, young, and *genki* (high spirited) girl singers. However, these fans are represented somewhat sympathetically in terms of being able to articulate a clear sense of the pleasure and value they see in the pop group *Cham*. Three nameless fans in particular make a number of appearances throughout the film to criticise and debate the industry's manipulation and exploitation of Mima. The network of fan communities represented in *Perfect Blue* by these three fans—and their membership in a larger *Cham* fan community—expresses an inclusive cultural community of fandom similar to that defined by fan audience scholars of popular television series such as *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* (Jenkins, 1992; Tulloch & Jenkins, 1995). While the fan audience is peripheral to *Perfect Blue*'s central thriller narrative, as shown previously with the mass audience, fans exert a consistent background pressure, forcing Mima, her agents, and other members of the media industry, to provide a consistent and appealing product. The fan presence also suggests an active image of fans as producers and manipulators of meaning, particularly in terms of fans being able to decide for themselves the value of media products.

⁶ *Fan-zines* are fan produced newsletters or magazines focused on a particular interest.

Perfect Blue's depiction of the appreciation *and* frustration of fans with the media industry, suggests Jenkins's (1992; 1997) point that the motivation for fan's active engagement with the media is due to a combination of fascination and antagonism. As Jenkins (1997) argues, "because popular narratives often fail to satisfy, fans must struggle with them, to try to articulate to themselves and others unrealised possibilities within the original works" (p. 508). The analysis and acceptance of Mima's departure from *Cham* by these three fans suggests "that these fans can speak back, can defend their own taste and reconceptualize their own identities" (ibid., p. 507). Their enjoyment of and identification with Mima is a vehicle that allows them to express their appreciation and frustration with media products. The fans articulate both an enjoyment of Mima as the cute "girl next door" idol singer, and a criticism of her and the media industry when she is reinvented as an actress in a sleazy drama. In one scene, the three fans are discussing the public reaction to Mima's new career as an actress. One fan points out that the ratings have gone up in *Double Bind* as a result of Mima's rape scene, but the other two fans criticise the voyeuristic audience this material is aimed at. "As always, the public at large are idiots," (相変わらず馬鹿だねパンピーは) exclaims one fan, while the other asserts a sense of betrayal among her previous fan audience, "they're probably whining, 'that's not my Mima'" (あんなのミマリンじゃないとか言っていたりしてな). The theme of Mima's change of image and career as a betrayal to her fan audience is established early on when she receives an anonymous fax with the letters "Traitor!" (*Uragiri*) pasted on it. Fans place Mima within a broader popular culture context, so that even if she disappears, their identification with her has taken them to other identifications that maintain their interest in the qualities they first saw in Mima and *Cham*'s cute and *genki* performances. Even with Mima gone fans can shift their attention to other members of *Cham*: "It's ok, because Rei's the one I like," (あれはレイちゃん一押しだったからいいけどね) declares one fan after a friend criticises Mima.



Figure 31. The web page “Mima’s room” created by Me-mania, *Perfect Blue*.

Within *Perfect Blue*’s representation of a broader fan culture, any identification with Mima is part of a more complex and fluid network of related interests and identifications. The fans’ discussion of Mima within a broader discourse of popular culture suggests Fuss’ point that identification can be a vehicle for other identifications. Mima was only one link in an ever-expanding chain of multiple identifications within popular culture that support and conflict with each other. The placement of Mima within a broader media environment, where she is only one of many icons discussed by and debated between fans, represents an important difference from the second type of fan portrayed in *Perfect Blue*. This second representation is of the solitary fan who operates in isolation and is trapped within an obsessional identification. This negative image of the introverted fan is crystallised in the character of Me-mania.

Me-mania is an obsessed fan who stalks Mima. He was a security guard for *Cham*’s performances, and remains a shadowy figure watching Mima on the set of *Double Bind*. He creates a fantasy web diary written in the first person as though he is Mima (see Figure 31) and describes both banal and significant moments of Mima’s life such as which foot she favours when stepping off a train. He also manufactures entries about her growing frustration with working on *Double Bind*. In this way, Me-mania “becomes” Mima; his fantasy idealisation of Mima enacts an imaginary usurpation where he has mastery over and possession of Mima and can rewrite her life, according to his fantasies.

The choice of the name “Me-mania” for the obsessed fan is particularly telling. While his real name is Uchida, Me-mania is the name he uses on the Internet and the name other characters refer to him with. Read literally, “Me-mania” represents the introspective isolation stereotypical of the fan—he is a “me” maniac. Me-mania also presents an example of the

Japanese creativity with incorporating English words into Japanese to create evocative “loan words”. One can also see a play with the sound of Mima within Me-mania. This possession of Mima’s name within Me-mania gives a clue to an identification that has become an act of appropriation. Me-mania neatly incorporates the three elements of the dangerous fan: *me* (self-obsession), *Mima* (the idealised other), and *maniac* (the abnormal and pathological actions of the fan).

Me-mania is only one of Mima’s doppelgangers. Rumi represents a much more dangerous cross-identification with Mima. Here, as Mima’s frustrated agent, whose previous career as an idol singer underlies a nostalgic identification with Mima, she has appropriated Mima’s identity as her own. By the end of *Perfect Blue*, Rumi has been absorbed into her identification with Mima, becoming a second “Mima”⁷, who kills those who threaten her fantasy of Mima the idol singer. Here she manipulates Me-mania in an attempt to realise her fantasy to become Mima. “That’s not me. It’s an impostor!” declares Rumi (in her Mima persona) to Me-mania, “Believe in me Me-mania. I won’t change a bit. I’ll always be with you. But the fake gets in the way. What can I do?”

Perfect Blue’s representation of fans may include a somewhat sympathetic depiction of an articulate fan community, but never fully escapes what Jenkins (1997) refers to as fans’ “earlier connotations of religious and political zealotry, false beliefs, orgiastic excess, possession, and madness, connotations that seem to be at the heart of many of the representations of fans in contemporary discourse” (p. 507). The origin of “fan” in the word “fanatic”, and further back to the Latin word “fanaticus”, suggests a long association with excessive religious belief, possession by a deity or demon, or a criticism of those holding unpopular political values (ibid., p. 507). While the depiction of Me-mania and Rumi’s

⁷ Rumi’s transformation into Mima is represented by her depiction as a facsimile of Mima, the illusion only broken when we see Rumi’s real body reflected in a mirror, or when Mima injures her, momentarily breaking the spell.

relationship to Mima is not one of religious “fanaticism” or demonic possession, it is bound to a similar fear that, as Fuss (1995) would argue, identifications can emerge suddenly with a powerful and violent impact that unsettles and unmoors our identities.

Both Me-mania and Rumi represent a relationship with popular culture and idols, which expresses the dangers posed by identification. Rey Chow’s (1993) analysis of cross-cultural identifications warns of the violent fantasies that underlie many identifications with cultural others. She (ibid.) argues that these identifications represent “a desire to hold onto an unchanging certainty somewhere outside our own ‘fake’ experience. It is a desire for being ‘non-duped,’ which is a not-too-innocent desire to seize control” (p. 53). Fuss (1995) declares that:

Every identification involves a degree of symbolic violence, a measure of temporary mastery and possession. ... Identification operates on one level as an endless process of violent negation, a process of killing off the other in fantasy in order to usurp the other’s place, the place where the subject desires to be.” (p. 9)

Within *Perfect Blue*, this process of identification is literally expressed by Rumi and Me-mania’s attachment to Mima, a type of identification that Doris Sommer (1994) would refer to as “the ultimate violence ... appropriation in the guise of an embrace” (p. 543).

To depart slightly from this analysis of *Perfect Blue*, and towards the broader issue of anime’s adoption by the West, Fuss (1995) suggests that “a certain element of colonialization is structurally indispensable to every act of interiorization” (p. 9) and then asks “how the power of identification might be utilized in the service of non-violent, progressive-thinking politics” (p. 9). Some Japanese scholars (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Ueno, 1999) have questioned the idea that the popularity of anime in the West is an indication of a new, progressive relationship developing between Japan and the world. Instead, they suggest that the appropriation of anime, particularly by the West, could be considered as a type of colonial identification that threatens to marginalise Japan’s ownership of anime. Iwabuchi (2002c, p.

217) mentions Japanese commentators who have become concerned that the global enthusiasm for anime—like the Western art communities’ appropriation of *ukiyo-e* (a woodblock print genre) in the 19th and 20th century—is an act of appropriation where the importance of anime has been recognised, copied, studied, and indigenised, outside of Japan. This concern also extends to a criticism of Western scholars who have assumed the right to explain and judge anime at the expense of Japanese opinions and experiences with anime. The fear is that Japan will lose the creative and economic rewards of anime’s popularity to foreign (particularly United States) interests. Iwabuchi (2002c) gives the example of Hollywood developing a new “global anime genre” (p. 217) through recruiting Japanese animators and purchasing the rights to various anime titles to turn into live-action movies. The concern that Japan will be disenfranchised of the cultural and economic rewards of anime has received increasing media attention in Japan. The September 1st issue of the popular lifestyle magazine, *Brutus* (2000), featured a number of articles directly targeted at rallying public and government support for a greater recognition of anime’s importance to Japan ("Anime wa, mada anata no soba ni imasu. [Anime is still beside you]," 2000; Brutus & Animax, 2000; Hirota, 2000; Nishikawa, 2000; Samukawae, Yamashita, & Fukuzaki, 2000). One interesting article (Transmedia & Tajima, 2000) was written as an open letter to then Prime Minister Mori about how anime can make money for Japan (森首相に提言します。日本のアニメはお金になるのです). This article referred to the need for greater government protection of the anime industry against the growing threat of Korean and other regional animation industries.

The Otaku

Rumi and Me-mania represent fan identity as a neurotic sickness; this representation of the dangerous and deviant fan typically evokes moral panic in the wider community and popular press. This stereotype of the isolated fan that is driven to kill, has a basis in the media

coverage of deranged fans and stalkers who have murdered famous people. Examples include the shooting of John Lennon by a mentally ill fan, and the murder of the television actress, Rebecca Schaffer, by a “celebrity stalker”. In Japan, the image of the *otaku* (fan) as an antisocial and deviant individual is tied strongly to manga and anime culture. Schodt (1996, pp. 45-46) and Kinsella (2000, pp. 126-138) refer to the harmful impact the Tsutomu Miyazaki incident had on manga and anime fandom in Japan. Tsutomu Miyazaki was a disturbed man who had kidnapped and killed three young girls between 1988 and 1989. After his arrest, police found a large amount of manga and anime in his apartment, most of which contained images of paedophilia. The “moral panic” (Kinsella, 2000, p. 126) regarding the link between Miyazaki’s crimes and his obsession with manga and anime, quickly filtered into the general manga and anime fan community. The term *otaku*, which had been used to refer to anyone with an excessive interest or curiosity in a hobby or activity, became a derogatory label for manga and anime fans. As Schodt (1996) comments, “it is hard to imagine any single Japanese word that has been so discussed and so mutilated in such a short period of time” (p. 46). Manga and anime fan groups were perceived within the wider community as harbouring socially deranged and violent deviants. Schodt (ibid.) summarises the consequence of this campaign against manga and anime fandom as follows:

Otaku soon came to represent mostly young males who could no longer effectively relate to real world people (especially women) and thus bury themselves in pornographic manga and animation and masturbatory fantasies, and harbor dangerous sexual proclivities and fetishes; in short, people who might be mentally ill and perhaps even a threat to society. (p. 46)

The term *otaku* has since been appropriated by some foreign fans as a positive reference to their consumption of a different popular culture, and it no longer triggers the same moral panic it once did in Japan. However, the depiction of Me-mania and Rumi as obsessed fans of a young female performer is certainly located in the continuing ripples of fear and loathing of the *otaku* generated by the Miyazaki incident.

The impact of Me-mania and Rumi as “villains” lies in their ability to evoke a complicated set of associations with “fan” identity, without necessarily alienating the fan audience that will watch *Perfect Blue*. Satoshi Kon has a clear image of the anime audience his movie is targeted at:

In contemporary Japanese animation, the basic concern is how much profit you could get through videos, films and television, because it's not a private work but a commercial work. Therefore, appealing to a certain type of fans—anime fans—is what matters. The more elements which would appeal to them, the bigger the budget you get. (“Perfect Blue,” 1999, p. 16)

While *Perfect Blue* contains marketable anime qualities in terms of “fan service”⁸—such as nude shots of Mima and a number of brutal and bloody murders—the film works to deny the “pleasure” of these scenes by contextualising them as part of the entertainment industry’s exploitation of Mima, and *Perfect Blue*’s overall negative portrayal of fans.

The representation of fans in *Perfect Blue* is an example of the media-fostered stereotype of fans as social misfits, accumulators of trivia, and slavish consumers. Me-mania and Rumi represent the extreme image of the neurotic fan whose violent identification with their idol drives them to usurp that identity. Given this negative depiction of the fan, one would think that *Perfect Blue* would be an unpleasant experience for many anime fans. However, fans I spoke to during my field research listed it as a favourite anime because of its intelligent and provocative story. Most fans placed *Perfect Blue* within a wider network of popular culture texts, comparing it to the style of Alfred Hitchcock, or, as one fan did, the Italian horror/occult director Dario Argento:

I think that *Perfect Blue* is closer to Dario Argento’s films, especially *Profondo Rosso*, *Tenebre*, and *Suspira*. The way Argento uses music, colour themes in sets, and of course the gory murders in his films is very similar to what Satoshi Kon did in *Perfect Blue*. (John, 23, male, Anglo-Australian, student)

⁸ An example of the anime industry’s view of audience tastes is the use of the expression “fan service” to describe scenes of cheap titillation, often depicting female nudity, that are perceived to appeal to a young male consumers that comprise the bulk of anime’s audience.

Another fan enjoyed *Perfect Blue*'s murder-mystery structure and "fan service":

Perfect Blue was heaps good, a little weird but good. I thought it was her agent doing it when she ran from the room crying when there was the rape scene. All in all the best anime I've seen since *Evangelion*. The nude photo scene was ok, as was trying to work out who the killer was. (Jim, 19, male, Anglo-Australian, student)

Interestingly, these "real" fans ignored the negative depiction of fans in *Perfect Blue*, preferring to discuss the structure of the film and its intertextual references. They place *Perfect Blue* within a broader, more inclusive context of other cult directors, Hitchcock and Argento, rather than fracturing it into idol singer fandom, or the struggle of characters to organise dislocated identities. In doing so, these fans create a unity out of the diversity of elements within *Perfect Blue*, drawing upon references familiar to these fans and their interests. Jenkins (1997) describes the relationship between media products and the meanings that fans produce:

Fans have chosen these media products from the total range of available texts precisely because they seem to hold special potential as vehicles for expressing the fans' pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests; there is already some degree of compatibility between the ideological construction of the text and the ideological commitments of the fans and therefore, some degree of affinity will exist between the meanings fans produce and those which might be located through a critical analysis of the original story. (p. 152)

The "real" fans I spoke to constructed a positive meaning of *Perfect Blue* that drew upon elements that were compatible with their "pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests" (ibid., p. 152). Jim's enjoyment of anticipating that "it was her agent doing [the murders]" positions *Perfect Blue* as a clever and rewarding experience that affirms his deductive abilities. While John's placement of *Perfect Blue* alongside the work of Argento attempts to canonise the film within a hierarchy of his favourite cult directors that displays his discriminating tastes. The fans' experience also overlaps with industry and scholarly opinions on *Perfect Blue*. Jim's enjoyment of the "nude photo scene" reminds us of Kon's ("Perfect Blue," 1999, p. 16) disclosure that the financing of anime requires the inclusion of

marketable elements that would appeal to anime fans . As Jenkins (1997) suggests, there is an affinity between “the meanings fans produce” (p. 152) and “a critical analysis of the story” (p. 152). Jim’s praise for *Perfect Blue* as “the best anime I’ve seen since *Evangelion*” because of the challenge in solving the riddle of “who the killer was” is also reflected in my own critical analysis of *Perfect Blue*’s significance. Here, I “solve” the murders in terms of interrogating the film’s criticism of popular culture and the dangerous over-identification by fans towards their “love objects” (Fuss, 1995, p. 1). However, it is also possible to see the fan’s creation of an appealing anime text as an exclusion of any criticism of fan activities. They avoid the problem of the negative stereotype of the obsessive fan and the broader media representation of fandom within popular culture. This process suggests a “misrecognition” (Lacan, 1980) of *Perfect Blue*, in that these fans emphasise an idealised anime text that ignores the criticism of fandom and the problem of identification within popular culture.

However, *Perfect Blue* portrays a local Japanese fan audience and deals with local cultural production. This, also, is a reason why Australian fans do not recognise themselves in *Perfect Blue*’s images—either as the fan audience for *Cham* or as the mass audience. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, and will further develop in Chapter 7, Australian fans pursue identity projects through manga and anime; they actively seek confirmation of a ‘different way of being’ in manga and anime as ‘global products’ that reference a previously unknown range of cultural options for them.

CHAPTER 6

Transnationalism and Anime

Are the intellectuals of the world willing to participate in transnational corporatism and be its apologists? How to situate oneself in this neo-Daniel Bell configuration of transnational power and culture without being trapped by a dead-end nativism seems to be the most important question that faces every critic and theorist the world over at the moment. (Miyoshi, 1996, p. 91)

How to position oneself towards transnational flows of power and culture is—as Miyoshi (1996) points out—a critical question to consider. In this chapter, I will outline scholars (Allison, 2000a; Iwabuchi, 1998, 2002c; Kenji, 1997; Ueno, 1999, n.d.) who have analysed the transnational movement of Japanese popular culture, and discuss the political and economic understanding this brings to manga and anime. The first section analyses Miyoshi's (1996) suggestion that there needs to be a more critical approach to the commercial and national forces that are attempting to assert their transnational hegemony. I will then discuss how Iwabuchi's analysis of the export agenda of Japanese cultural industries translates Miyoshi's agenda of critical transnationalism into a debate regarding the tension between the devaluation of Japanese national identity and the ascension of a culturally 'powerless' Japan. Finally, I will consider how a cultural industry-based approach provides useful insights into the transnationalism and commodification of manga and anime, and the inability of these commodities to convey the complexity of contemporary Japan. However, I suggest that this approach also limits our understanding of the point of contact where people actively engage, appropriate, and interpret transnational media such as manga and anime.

Miyoshi expands the meaning of transnationalism beyond its oversimplified definition as "Americanisation". He rebukes the belief that transnationalism is simply the process of homogenous commodities, like Coca-Cola and McDonalds, overwhelming native cultures, arguing that any criticism of transnationalism along these lines inevitably retreats to the position of cultural essentialism—a defence of local culture—that traps research within a

naïve “dead-end nativism” (ibid., p. 91). Miyoshi’s (ibid.) concern is that approaches which concentrate on the domestic rejection, empowerment, or appropriation of the global, risk “sanitising” (p. 97) the detrimental political and ideological impact of transnational power and culture. He (ibid.) criticises post-colonial and multicultural approaches as being too preoccupied with the “attraction of global exchange” (p. 96), to scrutinise the “actuality of global politics” (p. 74). In his view, post-colonialism wrongly assumes the end of colonialism through the post war process of de-colonialisation and the rise of newly independent nation-states. As a result, post-colonialism ignores the continuation of colonialism by Transnational Corporations (TNCs), and their eager host nations. Furthermore, multiculturalism overemphasises the positive influence of migrant populations on the adopted culture, at the risk of overlooking their exploitation by TNCs. Here, “Multiculturalism looks suspiciously like a disguise of transnational corporatism that causes, of necessity, havoc with a huge mass of displaced workers helplessly seeking jobs and sustenance” (ibid., p. 98). For Miyoshi (ibid.), the main issue is not the “progress of humanity” (p. 93) that is implied in the postcolonial and multicultural approach, but the analysis of the neo-colonial ideologies at work within TNC power.

Miyoshi (ibid.) advocates a more critical examination of the “actuality of global politics” (p. 74). This involves a close analysis of the political and economic forces driving the post war shift from nation-states to transnationalism, and how these forces maintain the exploitative ideology of colonialism. His (ibid.) investigation profiles the exploitation of developing nations and migrant labour by TNCs, as well as the creation of new class divisions through the rise of a “transnational class” (p. 94) comprised of TNC white-collar employees. Miyoshi’s (ibid.) scrutiny of the commercial and national forces that sought to impose their “economic hegemony” (p. 86) on the world is directed towards proposing ways to overcome the political and economic inequalities of TNC hegemony. He (ibid.) urged

academics to further his “rigorous political and economic scrutiny” (p. 98) of TNCs to include other transnational developments. Miyoshi hoped that a rigorous approach to transnationalism would avoid the oversights made by postcolonial and multicultural research to offer a better explanation of today’s global flow of power and culture.

Miyoshi’s (ibid.) contrast between appropriate and inappropriate methods of analysing transnationalism is also part of the attempt by Japanese scholars to broaden the debate of manga and anime’s significance beyond essentialist notions of “Japaneseness” (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Ueno, 1999). Iwabuchi (2002c), for example, uses transnationalism to frame his criticism of approaches that appropriate anime as a means to “promote [Japan’s] cultural diplomacy”, while ignoring Japanese imperialism. For Iwabuchi (2002b), these approaches fail to recognise the way in which popular cultural elements, like anime, “are always-already interwoven with the power relations and geopolitics embedded in the history of imperialism and colonialism” (p. 5).

Transnational Approaches to Anime

Miyoshi (1996) investigates transnationalism as a process of moving across national borders, where, for example, TNCs “travel, communicate, and transfer people and plants, information and technology, money and resources globally” (p. 96). Companies become transnational once they move from a domestic organisation of production and distribution to “a highly complex web” (ibid., p. 93) of industrial production and distribution across national borders. Miyoshi (ibid.) sees the difference between multinational and transnational corporations to be the “degrees of alienation from the [companies’] countries of origin” (p. 86). In his comparison of multinational and transnational corporations, Miyoshi points out that multinational corporations still have their headquarters in their home nation, the corporation’s top positions are held by nationals of its country of origin, and corporate loyalty is tied to the home nation. In contrast, TNCs are separated from their nation of origin and are

consequently “adrift and mobile, ready to settle anywhere and exploit any state including its own, as long as the affiliation serves its own interests” (ibid., p. 87).

Recent events within the Japanese anime industry suggest that Miyoshi’s (ibid.) process of “*denationalisation* and *transnationalization*” (p. 87) may be occurring at both a corporate and textual level. At the level of production and distribution, many Japanese anime studios have utilised cheap Asian labour to produce elements of anime (such as in-betweening cells¹), and some studios have shifted their entire production offshore to take advantage of Asian tax havens (Ueno, 1999). As I will discuss in more depth later, Western companies—such as Disney—are playing an increasing role in financing, producing, and distributing anime. At a textual level, many popular cyberpunk anime are set in the near-future, where powerful TNCs control the political, economic, and welfare functions of the nation-state, while disenfranchised youth (*Akira*), terrorists (*Ghost in the Shell*), and vigilantes (*Bubblegum Crisis*), attempt to assert and defend an alternative outlook.

There are two principle advantages resulting from the transnational model. Firstly, it conveys a more nuanced approach to the global/local flow of information and images into the local. Compared to the universal and large-scale implications of the term, “global”, the word, “transnational” suggests a flow of images and information across national, cultural, and geographic boundaries—as well as the continued importance of these boundaries to understand and organise these flows. Hannerz (1996) refers to transnationalism as a “more humble, and often a more adequate label for phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distinction” (p. 6). The second advantage is pointed out by Iwabuchi (2002c), who uses transnationalism to emphasise how Japanese audio-visual exports—such as anime—are locally contextualised. He argues that Japanese cultural industries are transnational, because the goods they export are designed to be adopted into the local, rather than being a central-

¹ These are cells that depict slight changes in background, movement of objects, colour, and so on that, when combined with other cells, create an overall effect of motion.

peripheral export of the values and life style of the country of origin, as with “Americanisation”. Transnationalism helps to explain the significance of the Japanese culture industries’ approach to exporting their commodities, because it draws attention to the “interconnections and asymmetries that are promoted by the multidirectional flow of information and images, and by the ongoing cultural mixing and infiltration of these messages” (Iwabuchi, 2002c, pp. 16-17).

The Japanese media scholar, Toshiya Ueno (1999; n.d.), also refers to the importance of recognising both the local context and the global flow of images and information. In his (1999) analysis of the significance of anime, he uses the expression “translocal” (p. 103) to draw greater attention to the regional exchange of Japanese popular culture within Asia. His focus also avoids the essentialism of “West” and “East” centre-periphery relations. Instead of this West-East binary, Ueno (ibid.) investigates the “multiplied, hybridised and divergent” (p. 103) positions available in a translocal region, such as the “Inter-East” (p. 103). Anime is adopted in unexpected ways within this regional flow of popular culture. Here Ueno (ibid.) refers to Goa trance members using anime imagery—such as the hybridisation of body and technology represented in anime by cyborgs (*Ghost in the Shell*)—to articulate a “future alternative politics” (p. 104) of resistance and feminine empowerment. What is central to Ueno’s (ibid.) analysis is the possibility of “alternative public spheres” (p. 105) being established within local culture, by translocal communities, such as female anime fans and ravers in Asia.

The Three Transnational Processes of Japan’s Cultural Industries

While some Japanese cultural products—such as popular music and television dramas—have only achieved popularity in Japan and Asia, anime has become a global success. Anime has been able to shift between the local and the global in a way that even manga has been unable to achieve. Iwabuchi (1998; 2002c) argues that a key reason for the

smooth transnational flow of Japanese cultural goods, like anime, is because they avoid representing an idea of Japanese life styles or values. That is, the lack of an entrenched cultural presence in anime, helps it to be easily domesticated into any local market. Unlike the noticeable association between the United States and cultural goods, such as Coca Cola or McDonalds—which are linked to mutual values such as freedom, capitalism and youthfulness—Iwabuchi (2002d) argues that Japanese exports possess a “soft” cultural presence that is focused on subtly integrating products into overseas markets. Iwabuchi (1998; 2002c; 2002d) developed this comparison through his research on the export strategies of Japanese audio-visual companies during the 1990s. He (1998) argues that his investigation into the transnationalism of Japanese cultural products reveals “how Japanese companies *imagine* Japan’s position in the global cultural flow when they develop strategies of globalisation” (p. 168) and how these strategies represent “the emerging currents of transnational cultural flow brought about by the globalisation processes” (p. 165).

Iwabuchi (1998) examines the type of cultural presence Japan’s audio-visual exports signify by asking: “What kind of hegemony (if any) does the popularity of Japanese animations [sic] and computer games overseas signify? What power status does the popularity of animations [sic] and computer games overseas confer on Japan?” (p. 177). He answers these questions by defining three methods that Japanese cultural industries use to export cultural goods. Firstly, Sony’s *globalisation* of the Walkman demonstrates the process of creating standardised global products that appeal to different domestic markets. Aksoy and Robins (1992) refer to this process as Sony’s *globalisation* strategy that “transcends vestigial national differences ... to create standardised global markets, whilst remaining sensitive to the peculiarities of local markets and differentiated consumer segments” (p. 18).

The second process is demonstrated by the Japanese music industry’s export of the “indigenisation” (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 165) of popular music into the Asian region, revealing

how the domestic culture assimilates foreign cultural forms. Iwabuchi (Iwabuchi, 2002c) argues that rather than exporting Japanese goods directly to the Asian market, the Japanese music industry exports the process of successfully indigenising foreign popular culture to create appealing local versions. For example, the Japanese television and music industry assimilated foreign (mostly United States) cultural forms during the post-war period, in order to create more successful domestic versions of the imported originals. This process is referred to by the term *indigenisation* and can be seen in many other countries, where the format of a television show like *Big Brother* is *indigenised* around the world by using local contestants. The third process, referred to by the Japanese term, *mu-kokuseki*—literally meaning a lack of nationality—is used by Iwabuchi (1998; 2002c) and Ueno (1999) to indicate the process of removing the Japanese cultural presence from anime and computer game characters. These three processes: *globalisation*, *indigenisation*, and *mu-kokuseki*, are distinctive qualities of the cultural commodities that characterise the transnational flow of images and information.

Iwabuchi (1998) contextualised anime within a larger transnational network of Japanese cultural products, services, and technologies that share a common marketing strategy of “the ‘culturally odourless’ three Cs: consumer technologies, such as VCRs, karaoke and the Walkman; comics/cartoons (animation); and computer/video games” (p. 166). These “three C’s” became globally successful, due to their excellence in fulfilling the three processes of transnationalism. Iwabuchi suggests that these three processes dominated the Japanese cultural industry’s export philosophy, sparking a preference to export products that could have their Japaneseness softened, erased, or replaced, in the belief that they would be more popular in the global market than distinctively Japanese products.

Globalisation

Du Gay et al. (1997) used the Walkman as a vehicle to explain the cultural studies’ approach to commodification and globalisation. In their analysis, they claimed that the

Walkman represented Japaneseness in terms of miniaturisation, technical sophistication, and high quality. While the Walkman's Japaneseness was useful for their analysis, Iwabuchi (1998) argues that "Japaneseness" did not explain the Walkman's commercial appeal. Instead, he argues that the Walkman's global success is because it has become a standardised global product, indigenised by local marketing campaigns to appeal to different domestic markets. Sony's "global localisation" or "glocalisation" (ibid., p. 168) strategy avoided the Walkman's "Japaneseness" and any cultural othering or exoticising that would entail. Iwabuchi (1998) maintained that the use of the Walkman in du Guy et al.'s (1997) analysis "does not evoke images or ideas of a Japanese lifestyle, even if consumers know it is made in Japan and appreciate 'Japanese-ness' in terms of its sophisticated technology" (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 167). In other words, du Guy et al.'s (1997) hi-tech image of Japan was a surface level association with the Walkman that did *not* convey a deeper Japanese lifestyle or cultural presence. Instead, Iwabuchi (1998) argues that the suggestion that the Walkman was a symbol of hi-tech Japan was a return to a clichéd image of a "Japan", constructed by a Western Orientalist discourse.

Iwabuchi (1998) points out that Western orientalism has constructed two images of Japan—the dominant image being a traditional and particularistic one, where "the culture of Japan that is considered worth appreciating is most usually something traditional which is to be put on exhibit to show its irreducible uniqueness" (p. 165). A second, more contemporary, image is of Japan as a faceless economic superpower of hi-tech sophistication. However, Iwabuchi points out that these associations do not offer the type of engagement and appropriation presented by the freedom, beauty and youthfulness of "American" goods. Images of Japaneseness do not invite identification for foreigners. One cannot *become* Japanese through imitating traditional Japanese cultural forms, such as the tea ceremony, Zen Buddhism, and kabuki, or through becoming skilled in karate. They are surrounded by the

cultural protection of *nihonjinron*, or the belief that these art forms and values are part of a uniquely Japanese culture, that can only be understood and fully realised by the Japanese.

To explain the reluctance of Japanese cultural industries to export distinctively Japanese products, Iwabuchi (1998, p. 169) draws upon Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus' (1988) concept of "cultural discount". Cultural discount explains how particular foreign products are considered unappealing to the domestic audience, due to cultural differences based on style, values, or belief. In the case of Japanese products, the memory of Japanese colonialism within Asia, and Western cultural hegemony—expressed through the dominance of the English language and the United States' cultural industries—have made it difficult to export distinctively "Japanese" popular culture. This explains why products possessing a strong Japanese cultural presence are rarely exported. This is certainly applicable to television dramas and popular music that are "inescapably represented through living Japanese bodies" (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 169). As Iwabuchi (*ibid.*) points out, this is a view that has come to dominate the Japanese cultural industries: "Japanese TV industries themselves seem to believe that their products would suffer a high cultural discount overseas" (p. 169). Iwabuchi (*ibid.*) acknowledges that Japanese television programs and popular music have become favourites in Asia, but points out that the initiative to promote and distribute these comes from local Asian companies, not from Japan. Japanese cultural industries still prefer to export well-recognised products that conform to the West's view of a traditional or hi-tech Japan, or "the process of indigenisation of the foreign (West)" (*ibid.*, p. 171) to Asia.

Indigenisation

The second important characteristic of the export strategy of Japanese cultural industries, is the belief that other Asian countries can learn from Japan's knowledge of indigenising foreign popular culture (Iwabuchi, 2002c). The hybridity of manga and anime I discuss at the end of Chapter 2—where distinctive Japanese aesthetics and Western cultural

forms and values coexist and are appreciated by Japanese and Western audiences—is here recuperated as part of the Japanese approach to indigenising of foreign culture. Disney comics and animation were widely distributed and screened in Japan during and after its post-war occupation by the United States (Ono, 1983) and consequently heavily influenced many elements of the manga style, such as the large eyes and cute features of characters like *Astro Boy*. Tezuka Osamu, one of the earliest and most famous pioneers of manga, openly acknowledged the strong influence that United States’ animators- such as Walt Disney and Max Fleisher- had on his work (Schodt, 1983, p. 63). In his forward to Schodt’s book, Tezuka wrote (1983): “The Japanese comics industry first began to show signs of heating up ... after World War II. Western comics were imported by the bushelful, and had a tremendous impact” (p. 11). By the mid-1960s, manga and anime had become one of the most successful forms of domestic entertainment in Japan, so that popular titles, such as *Doraemon* and *Sazae san* challenged the appeal of Disney and other United States’ animation. The eclipsing of imported products by locally produced versions, encouraged Japanese cultural industries to feel confident that it would be through exporting “the process of indigenisation of the foreign (West) rather than the export of the product *per se* that Japan [could] capture the attention of people in Asia” (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 171).

As an example, Iwabuchi (*ibid.*, pp. 170-173) points to the talent quests Sony Entertainment Music, and other Japanese music industries conducted in Asia during the early 1990s. The strategy for developing a pop idol system in Asia did not involve Japanese cultural industries exporting Japanese musicians or pop music, but involved the distributing of “...the process whereby local contestants and audiences can appropriate and consume products of foreign origin” (*ibid.*, p. 171). For Iwabuchi (1998), this is the ingenuity of Japanese *globalisation*. It appreciates the dynamic process of indigenisation within Asian media centres—because of Japan’s own experience with indigenising foreign cultures—and

tries to create a local zone in countries throughout Asia where foreign influences can be indigenised.

The Japan Foundation Asia Centre's exhibition: *Asia in Comics "Where are we going?"* (2001, Tokyo), suggests the export of the Japanese domestication of comic books to Asia. The exhibition—which featured the original artwork of 11 comic artists in East Asia (including Japan)—strove to raise awareness in Japan of the continuities and differences in comic art in the region. Hosogaya Atsushi (2001)—in his exhibition catalogue essay—praised the importance of Japan's manga industry in influencing Asian artists:

The young comic artists of Asia's various countries continue to have a strong interest in Japanese comics, coming to study at professional schools for Japanese comics or animation as well as frequently conducting information exchanges among schools. (p. 51)

Significantly, Atsushi sees the importance of Japan's manga industry to lie in its ability to provide schools to teach the process of appropriating products of foreign origin—like manga and anime—not in the export and consumption of manga per se. However, Atsushi (2001) acknowledges that there is a risk of Japan being marginalised by other Asian comic book industries, because of its failure to realise the independence and modernity of these regional industries. Atsushi discussion of the Manga Summits—that have been held in Japanese and overseas locations since 1996 and bring together artists and industries from around the world—is a space to see the possibilities and difficulties facing the Japanese cultural industries export of cultural goods. Atsushi (ibid.) points out that an important element of these summits is the discussion of specific issues facing countries in the Asian region: “in Seoul, the problem of restrictions on expression ...; in Taipei, the problem of public comic artist education system; and in Hong Kong, the question of how to integrate new media” (p. 51). “Japan, however,” warns Atsushi (ibid), “has yet to address such issues as how little knowledge its general public has of the global developments in comics” (p. 51). The Japanese public's ignorance of Asian comics, and the industry's assumption that Japan's

domestication of United States' comic book influences, will be followed by other Asian countries, suggests a number of problems. Iwabuchi (1988, p. 172) warns that the Japanese cultural industries' attempt to interpret the West for Asia, assumes that the Japanese experience of indigenisation is superior to other countries, and cautions that other Asian countries may bypass Japan and assimilate global influences directly.

Mu-kokuseki Anime

Animation has been an important export for Japan, since Tezuka Osamu's *Astro Boy* in the early 1960s, and has continued to grow in significance to become Japan's main television export. The Japanese animation industry has taken an increasing interest in the global market as a source of revenue; from 1980-1981, animated films comprised 56% of all television exports from Japan; by 1992-1993, anime exports had increased to 58%². As I discuss in Chapter 2 A recent Japanese government report (Media and Content Industry Division, 2003) revealed that 60% of the animation broadcasted in the world is made in Japan and that the popular anime series, *Pokemon*, has been broadcast in 68 countries, with the movie version screening in 46 countries and earning approximately \$280 million dollars (U.S.).

One of the more interesting arguments that has attempted to explain the phenomenal international success of anime, is that it is a hybrid form that can be domesticated into any local market. Because of this transnationalism, anime can be appropriated by the imagination of global audience, specifically through using their particular perspectives and fantasies.

There are two key characteristics of anime's transnationalism: firstly, a textual malleability

² Kawatake Kazuo and Hara Yumiko, (1994, November) 'Nihon o chūshin to suru terebi bangumi no ryūtsū jōkyō' ['The International Flow of TV Programmes From and Into Japan'], *Hōsō Kenkyū to Chōsa*, in Iwabuchi (1998, p. 168).

that has assisted its domestication, and secondly, anime's financing, production, and distribution by national, multinational, and transnational cultural industries.

To expand on the first characteristic, anime such as *Astro Boy* and *Pokemon* “speak” in the different national languages of the markets they are dubbed into. Nearly all exported anime are dubbed into a foreign language, with only about 1% of anime retaining their original Japanese dialogue (with foreign subtitles) (Stronach, 1989, p. 144). One reason anime characters are able to “speak” different languages, without the jarring incongruity of live-action cinema, is because of the malleability of anime characters' bodies. Their “cartoon” features (big eyes and exaggerated body proportions) give many anime characters racially indeterminate or hybrid features, thereby mixing a number of racial, cultural, and gender characteristics.

An example of this malleability is the apparent lack of Japaneseness in anime characters. Because racial and bodily images are a key marker of cultural presence (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 167), animators can easily soften, erase, or replace a character's Japaneseness with another cultural association. For instance, the successful anime director, Mamoru Oshii, suggests that animators—like himself—unconsciously prefer to model attractive characters on ideal Western bodies rather than “realistic” Japanese ones (Oshii, Ito, & Ueno, 1996). Consequently, many characters in anime may look non-Japanese with their blonde hair (*Sailor Moon*), large eyes (*Pokemon*), and fantasy uniforms (*Dragon Ball Z*). This lack of Japanese bodily presence can be seen in computer games developed in Japan, such as with the character of Mario, in the popular computer game: *Super Mario Brothers*. Mario has an Italian name and appearance, not Japanese. Iwabuchi (2002c) uses the term *mu-kokuseki* to describe such non-Japaneseness in anime and computer games. A *Mu-kokuseki* style softens or replaces Japanese characteristics with other cultural associations, erasing anything that could indicate the Japaneseness of a character. For Iwabuchi (1998), the cultural erasure that

lies at the heart of manga and anime, explains its international success. Its dominance within the Japanese anime industry's export philosophy is also a central example for his (ibid.) argument that the significance of "Japanese cultural products and of Japanese cultural hegemony ... has much to do with Japanese originality in developing glocalisation" (p. 169).

The success of domesticated anime was first demonstrated in the West, with *Astro Boy* (1963), whose image is still well recognised and featured on t-shirt designs and various accessories; the latest animated version of *Astro Boy* has just begun screening in Japan (2003) and will soon be broadcast in the United States and other countries. *Astro Boy* was followed by a string of well-known anime, including *Kimba the White Lion* (1966), *Speed Racer* (1967), *Star Blazers* (1979), and *Robotech* (1985). It is significant that during the 1960s, United States' television stations broadcast many of these anime in the same year as Japan, suggesting a strong relationship between the Japanese producers and United States distributors.

Western companies and markets have become increasingly important in assisting the globalisation of anime. During the 1980s, French and Japanese animation companies co-produced a number of successful television animation series, including *Ulysses 31* (Ulyssé 31 / *Uchu Densetsu Ulyssés XXXI*) (1981) and *The Mysterious Cities of Gold* (*Les Mystérieuses Cités d'Or* / *Taiyo No Ko Esteban*) (1982). From the 1990s, Western (principally United States based) companies increased their financing and worldwide distribution of anime. The anime, *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), was partially financed by the United States based anime distributor, Manga Entertainment, and was screened simultaneously in Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In 1996, Buena Vista International (Disney's worldwide distribution company) undertook the worldwide distribution of Hayao Miyazaki's theatrical anime, *Princess Mononoke* and gained the worldwide rights to distribute other anime from the Tokuma Shoten media group (parent company of Studio Ghibli, which produces

Miyazaki's anime) (Pollack, 1996). In November 1999, Warner Brothers released *Pokemon the Movie: Mewtwo Strikes Back* to 3,043 theatres in the United States, making it the highest grossing anime in the United States, and generating a total box office taking of \$85,744,662 (U.S.) (Box Office Mojo, 2003). Hollywood movie companies have acquired the rights to a number of anime; 20th Century Fox has the rights to a live action version of *Dragon Ball*, Warner Brothers has the rights to *Akira*, and Sony Pictures Entertainment plans to make a computer-graphic movie of *Astro Boy* in 2004 (Media and Content Industry Division, 2003).

The increasing co-financing of anime from transnational and multi-national companies—such as Beuna Vista International or Manga Entertainment—reveals a tightly woven network of multinational investment in anime. The sale of anime's licensing and distribution rights to foreign distributors, plays an increasingly significant role in Japan's anime industry. In an interview I conducted with Masayuki Nakano from the anime company, TMS, we spoke about his work in the international marketing division and the importance of recuperating revenue from the international licensing of their anime:

For example, one of the titles we've got great hopes for is *ARMS*, we're thinking it will be very successful. It's a high tech action style anime that should be well received in the United States and it doesn't have any of the occult or demon themes that we've had problems with for other titles like *Devilman Lady*. We really want to secure TV broadcast sales if we can, and anything with satanic or occult themes just doesn't get a look in. I mean, we still offer it, and hope that it will be picked up. But something like *Devilman Lady* will usually get rejected, which is what happened to that title when we offered it to some of U.S. TV corporations. (Masayuki Nakano, 2001, March; Shinjuku, Tokyo.)

Nakano was educated in Australia and returned to Japan, after graduating from the University of New South Wales. His job at TMS takes him to animation industry conventions in France where he promotes TMS's anime catalogue to distributors and broadcasters of animation from around the world. Nakano's comparison of the failure of *Devilman Lady*, and the potential success of *ARMS*, suggests his knowledge of foreign (United States) tastes, possibly acquired during his Australian education. His knowledge of what anime attract

recognition and appreciation in a global market, and the best way to position these anime for global consumption confirms Iwabuchi's (2002c) argument that Japanese cultural industries prefer exporting cultural goods that will appeal to Western audiences ("a high tech action style anime") rather than those that may have negative cultural associations ("satanic and occult themes"). Importantly, Nakano does not link any negative cultural content of anime with its Japaneseness, but instead refers to religious themes that may offend a mainstream United States market, indicating the variety of cultural barrier that can restrict the export of anime to overseas markets. Miyoshi (1996) would define Nakano's role as part of the "transnational class" (p. 94), a group of highly educated corporate employees who can easily communicate with one another through a standardised language and international working environment. In this way, the *mu-kokuseki* anime form has become a standardised global commodity, where cultural differences that do occur (*Devilman Lady*), are defined as merely variants of one "universal" manga style that can be domesticated (*ARMS*).

The domestication and transnationalism of anime reveal the commercial forces that finance and distribute anime. One result of the influence of these commercial forces is a preference for *mu-kokuseki* anime that can become standardised global icons, like *Astro Boy* or *Pokemon*. These anime can be promoted by marketing campaigns and easily appropriated by audiences to become an appealing product in any domestic market. Through this process, anime is placed within the familiar, everyday television environment and becomes another globally recognised brand claiming its market share.

Iwabuchi (1998) acknowledges that this *mu-kokuseki* strategy is not unique to Japan, where "cultural borrowing, appropriation, hybridisation and indigenisation are ... common practices in the global cultural flow" (p. 168). However, what is significant is that the *mu-kokuseki* approach dominates the export strategy of Japanese cultural industries, and reveals

how Japan *portrays* a powerless position of “soft” cultural influence, in order to avoid being perceived as a cultural threat to Western cultural hegemony and cultural industries.

Anne Allison (2000a) concludes similarly of the way the Japanese TV shows, *Pokemon* and *Power Rangers*, were appropriated and remade in the United States:

The trend of virtual, digital, ‘monster’ characters makes smart marketing sense by allowing Japanese goods to circulate in a form that de-couples characters and stories from manifest signs of geographic place and identity. It will be through such creations and in the media of games, *anime*, and character merchandising that Japan’s powers in the soft marketplace of the US (and the world) are sure to intensify in the millennial decade. (p. 88)

As an example of the success of Japanese culture industries to “de-couple” (ibid., p. 88) characters and stories from Japan, Allison refers to the marketing strategy used by the Japanese company, Bandai, and local United States’ distributors to translate the Japanese television series *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* into the United States’ culture. Allison (2000a) points out that Bandai refers to their effacement of national and cultural identity from the original Japanese version as part of “their corporate strategy of ‘globalization’ (in—their term—‘going beyond national boundaries’)” (p. 68)³.

The two expressions of anime’s transnationalism I have outlined—it’s malleable *mu-kokuseki*-ness, and its financing, production, and distribution within TNC structures—have a number of consequences for how scholars have framed the experience of anime, particularly in terms of its appropriation in the West. Here, I shall consider two of the main consequences suggested by the Japanese scholar, Iwabuchi (2002c). Firstly, as discussed above, the increasingly international production of anime and the partially formed, or competing, racial features of *mu-kokuseki* anime characters have significantly weakened the significance of a Japanese cultural presence in anime (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Kenji, 1997; Ueno, 1999). For example, once *mu-kokuseki* anime characters have been domesticated by being given the

³ Bandai’s definition of their corporate strategy of globalisation is taken from the following source: Bandai Kabushiki Kaisha, *We Are Banda: Coporate Guide* (Tokyo: Bandai Kōhōbu, 1998), p. 5

“voices” of the local language, many consumers are unaware of their Japanese origins. Thus, the most successful mainstream anime, such as *Pokemon*, *Astro Boy*, and *Digimon*, have become transnational brands that compete for attention with other globally distributed products. Secondly, readings that deny the lack of Japaneseness, or attempt to assert the centrality of “Japan” as the appeal of anime, ignore the dominant industry framing of anime as *mu-kokuseki*, as well as being complicit in a fictional, orientalist engagement with Japan.

A Weakened Cultural Presence

Iwabuchi (1998) claims anime’s lack of Japanese bodily presence significantly weakens the idea and image of Japan that anime portrays. As a result, “consumers and audiences of Japanese animation and games may be aware of the Japanese origin of these commodities, but they perceive little ‘Japanese bodily odour’” (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 168). For Iwabuchi (ibid.), the consequence of this lack of “Japanese bodily odour” (p. 168), is that anime presents a partial and distorted image of “Japan”. As he (ibid.) argues: “if the ‘Japaneseness’ of Japanese animations is derived from [the animators] active erasure of bodily Japaneseness from the visual imagery, the object of yearning is an animated virtual ‘Japan’” (p. 178).

Iwabuchi (ibid.) points out that some Westerners have constructed a “cultural threat” (p. 177) and a “cultural yearning” (p. 178) of Japan through anime. The sense of “cultural threat” emerges from the fear of the “new, dehumanised hi-tech images of Japan” (ibid., p. 178) as a faceless, sophisticated, and hi-tech economic superpower. In the science-fiction anime, *Akira*, and *Ghost in the Shell*, for example, giant corporate and government powers struggle to control society in a near-future dystopic setting. Iwabuchi suggests this type of threatening dystopic Japan evokes the “techno-orient”, a term first coined by Morley and Robins (1995) to refer to the new economic and technological presence of Asian powers, and the threat they posed to Western global dominance.

The “cultural yearning” for Japan (p. 178) some Westerners attempt to relieve through anime, is expressed by fans who identify themselves as “*otaku*, obsessively devoted fans of Japanese animations [sic] whose mania makes them wish they were born in Japan” (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 178). Young fans have a positive image of Japan as an exciting and creative place, because it can develop anime like *Pokemon* (Iwabuchi, 2002c, p. 30), while other fans imagine a hi-tech Japan that “looks more ‘cool’ than the United States” (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 178).

Some Japanese critics have suggested that the Western audience is either ignorant of anime’s origins, or only aware of a fictional “Japan”, that is portrayed in anime. Iwabuchi (1998) refers to the work of the Japanese manga critic, Toshio Okada (1995), who argues that the Western experience of anime is naïve because these fans perceive “Japan” through the filter of the *mu-kokuseki* body. In Iwabuchi’s (1998, p. 178) reading of Okada’s argument, “Western audiences appreciate a Japanese way of life, which is embodied in the *mu-kokuseki* (racially, ethnically and culturally unembedded) imagery.” Therefore, for Iwabuchi (ibid., p. 178), the *mu-kokuseki* experience offers Western fans only an “animated virtual ‘Japan’” as their object of yearning, locking the fan into an “inevitable ... monological illusion since it is little concerned with the complexity of ‘real’ culture”. In other words, Western fans based their ideas of Japan on anime characters that have had their Japanese bodily presence erased or softened, or replaced by other cultural associations that the animator found more appealing (such as Oshii’s preference for Caucasian looking characters) or those which the industry believed were better suited to a global market.

For Iwabuchi, the significance of anime is the commercial and cultural forces that have standardised it into a global style, with an indistinct cultural presence. Any framing of anime as a “cultural threat” or a “cultural yearning” ignores the fact that Japanese cultural industries are trying to minimise any “threat” to Western hegemony, or a “yearning” for

Japan, through softening anime's Japanese cultural presence. The softening of any ideal or menacing association with Japan in its cultural commodities is central to Iwabuchi's analysis of Sony's *globalisation* of the Walkman, the music industry's export of the *indiginisation* process, and anime's *mu-kokuseki* bodies. For Iwabuchi, the originality of Japan's three transnational strategies is that they represent a shift away from the centre-periphery flow of culture characterised by "Americanisation". Iwabuchi perceives "Americanisation" as the opposite expression of Japan's soft cultural presence. He (1998; 2002c) argues that "Americanisation" is the best known example of "discursively constructed images of the country of origin, which are widely disseminated in the world" (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 166). The export of the lifestyle and ideas of a dominant country through commercial icons, can be seen in Featherstone's (1996) suggestion that the United States represented itself as a dominant global centre. Those on the periphery, however, consume American products as an act of identification with this powerful image and the psychological benefits it brings:

Along with the Marlboro Man, Coca-Cola, Hollywood, Sesame Street, rock music and American football insignia, McDonald's is one of a series of icons of the American way of life. They have become associated with transposable themes which are central to consumer culture, such as youth, fitness, beauty, luxury, romance, freedom. (Featherstone, 1996, p. 8)

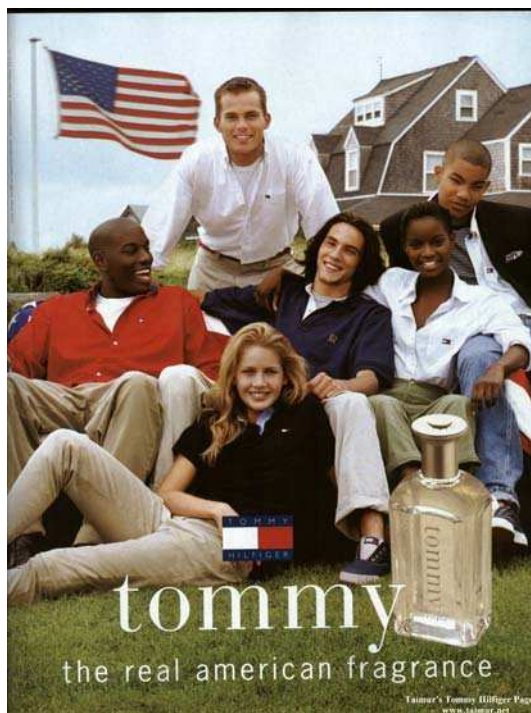


Figure 32. Scott Barnhill (1997) *Tommy Fragrance*, Print Advertisement.

The United States' clothing and accessories brand, *Tommy*, uses a marketing campaign that clearly articulates the link between cultural commodities and icons of the American way of life. These adverts (see Figure 32) use American icons such as the United States flag, and images of ethnic diversity, youthfulness,

luxury, beauty, and other qualities identified by Featherstone, in order to express an appealing portrayal of American values to its target market. However, these images are extremely stereotypical and inaccurate depictions of everyday life in the USA, and are just as limited in their capacity to convey a sense of “American-ness”, as are manga and anime in their portrayal of a sense of Japaneseness.

Iwabuchi’s use of “Americanisation” becomes an example of the devaluation and simplification of national identity that occurs at a transnational level. For critics such as Iwabuchi, the Western engagement with anime needs to reflect on the unrepresentative and stereotypical images of Japan used to understand anime. If one must frame anime within Japanese culture, then it should “serve to displace the particularistic view of ‘Japaneseness’ and diversify our views of Japanese culture and society” (Iwabuchi, 2002a, p. 1), not “become another example of [Japan as] the exotic object of inquiry” (p. 2). Iwabuchi (ibid.) demands that an effort must be made to challenge “the essentialised and (self-) Orientalist notion of Japanese culture, national identity, or Japaneseness” (p. 2). Iwabuchi (ibid.) is most critical of the view that popular culture—like anime—can be used to “improve Japan’s reputation and image overseas by introducing the ‘real’ and ‘human’ Japan” (p. 2). Here, Iwabuchi sees obvious problems in claiming to express a “real” picture of Japan through anime, because any representation of “human” Japan will always be a selective process that will marginalise “minority groups, diasporic culture or alternative subcultures” (p. 2). Furthermore, it may suppress “the bitter memory of Japanese imperialism” (Iwabuchi, 2002b, p. 5). As Iwabuchi argues (ibid.): “approving consumption of Japanese popular culture in Asian regions does not erase the history of Japanese imperial violence, and the issue of Japan’s war responsibility” (p. 5). What is central for Iwabuchi is that the analysis of Japanese popular culture recognises the political agendas that frame any expression of a Japanese national identity.

The argument regarding anime's lack of Japaneseness opens up a space to consider what fans are actually doing with manga and anime. One reading of the removal of Japaneseness seems to declare that because anime characters don't look Japanese, any cultural or life style association is suspected because it is conveyed through a body that has a softened Japanese cultural presence (it looks more Caucasian than Japanese). However, I question whether it is helpful to reduce the issue of cultural influence to such superficial signs as this. The critiques tend to minimise the significance of the fan experience of anime, and overlook the examples of foreigners, such as Fredrick Schodt (1983; 1996), who have developed a sophisticated understanding of manga's place within Japan, while avoiding the heavily stereotyped image of Japan that can dominate some Western discourse on manga and anime. For instance, Schodt (1996, p. 59-62) places the contested "Caucasian" or "Japanese" interpretation of manga bodies within specific historical and cultural contexts. He (ibid.) is definitely aware of the problems associated with the positioning of the "Japaneseness" of manga, while also acknowledging its lack of Japaneseness in its domesticated form:

There is an element of risk in promoting manga, as there is no guarantee foreigners will get a better impression of Japan from reading them. The material foreigners prefer, moreover, may not be what is preferred in Japan, and it may be interpreted differently. ... however, manga will give a far truer picture of Japan, warts and all, than "highbrow" tea ceremony or Zen ever could. As a form of popular culture, comics of all nations tend to be tightly woven with local culture and thought. In translation, manga—especially—can be both a medium of entertainment and a Rosetta stone for mutual understanding. (p. 340)

Conclusion

As suggested by Miyoshi's quote that began this chapter, Iwabuchi's (2002c) concern has been to develop alternative approaches to transnationalism that avoid "being trapped by a dead-end nativism" (Miyoshi, 1996, p. 91). His ideas addressed the difficult task of explaining the Japanese cultural industries' perception of the ways particular popular Japanese entertainment—such as anime—enter into a local context where they can be

domesticated. In this sense, anime's transnational power and culture is represented as a structural force that has clear commercial meanings expressed through marketing and export statistics. In this way, his hope was to extend the cultural criticism of anime beyond a preoccupation with an essentialised Japaneseness, and into the world of industrial capital, commercial culture, and national and international politics.

This is a useful and important contribution to the analysis of transnational consumer culture. Iwabuchi's emphasis on the three transnational processes used by Japanese cultural industries to export cultural products, displays how there is an industry agenda to soften and erase Japaneseness. However, it is equally plausible that these evacuated images may invite a desire to trace what has been erased.

Manga and anime, as hybrid popular culture in *translation*, rather than fixed forms that lack or promote a specific cultural presence, allows us to see the shifting global contexts and local identifications that generate the meaning(s) of anime. As I have shown, the non-Japanese fan and scholar's desire to discover and construct "Japan"—which I discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3—and the many hybrid variations within this space: the dangerous fart (Chapter 4), the cyborg body (Chapter 4), the bishōnen body (Chapter 7), and other new identifications within Japanese popular culture (Chapter 5)—show the potential, not the limitation, of a transnational "Japan".

CHAPTER 7

Global Identity Projects

Reflecting on the TNC Approach

In the last chapter, I focused on the view—proposed by Iwabuchi (2002c), and to a lesser extent, Miyoshi (1996)—that as mainstream products of transnational economic entrepreneurialism, manga and anime offer an understanding of Japan that is one dimensional. They are incapable of doing justice to the complexity of contemporary Japan, being as essentialist in popular culture terms as the Japan of the tea ceremony and the *ryokan* (Japanese style inn) so popular in tourist literature. However, the account of manga and anime fandom as a sort of audio-visual ficto-tourism, which is implied by this transnational perspective, makes less sense when considered alongside the actual practices and experiences of fans. In earlier chapters, I have demonstrated that, however faint the traces of Japaneseness inherent in manga and anime, fans not only recognise these traces, but also pursue them in order to satisfy their own ‘identity projects’. In the transnational argument, fan experiences are marginalised as repeating the ignorant and stereotypical mistakes of orientalism. The contribution fans make to the creation and perpetuation of these stereotypes is overlooked, and fans are portrayed as little more than automata, mechanically repeating and naturalising the dominant order of the West. The discourse of a dangerous and revolutionary hybridity of the *bishōnen* (Buckley, 1991; Iwamura, 1994) or the cyborg (Brophy, 1994; Napier, 2001; Standish, 1998) vanishes into a whimper of compliance at a dilution of ‘national’ authenticity. The political and economic scrutiny of the transnational approach cannot explain how the dance/anime fan fuses multiple styles together to create unexpected results (see Chapter 4), or how the individual acts of identification reveal and negotiate the personal politics of identity and power. Such is the case of Emily’s experience of *bishōnen*, which is

discussed below. Ultimately many of the political economy/transnational approaches judge and dismiss fans' experiences—particularly Western fans—as naïve and outdated in their understanding of “Japan” (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Ueno, 1999). These Western fans are criticised for appreciating “Japan” by constructing orientalist concepts of a traditional and particularistic nation, or a nation of techno-orientalism—an economic super-power. However, the cultural nationalist criticism of fans can help us to more clearly understand the determinedly global agenda of the fan.

Iwabuchi (2002a) warns of the limitations of using manga and anime as teaching aids: “If Japanese popular culture is taught and studied without one being critically and theoretically informed about how ‘culture’ is entangled with power relations, popular culture all too easily becomes another example of the exotic object of inquiry” (p. 2). He asserts that one must be “critically and theoretically informed” (ibid., p. 2) to avoid naturalising dominant ideologies and fantasies of Japan. Superficially, my own experiences in Japan, in addition to my recognition that I had fostered a fantasy of Japan while in Australia, confirmed Iwabuchi’s criticism (see Preface). His approach produces a fundamentally different recognition of the power and significance of anime from that developed by fans with little knowledge of Japan other than that represented through anime and manga. However, while Iwabuchi’s argument pursues the transnational characteristics of Japanese cultural presence, I have asserted the importance of recognising that the non-indigenous fan’s discovery of Japan through manga and anime may constitute a useful journey in itself. The remnant traces of Japaneseness in manga and anime, offer a lifeline to the non-indigenous fan, because they offer new landscapes of the imagination where the dominant ideologies and fantasies operating in Australia can be negotiated or resisted. Just such a process is evident in Emily’s story of her appropriation of *bishōnen* manga and anime characters to give shape to an ideal

object of desire that confounds her friends and challenges the norms of the fan communities she knows.

Emily's Dilemma

In her interview, Emily showed me her drawing of her ideal *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) character from her favourite *shōjo* (girls') anime and manga series, *Fushigi Yūgi* (Mysterious Play). Her drawing is characteristic of an identity project performed by many fans—not only of manga and anime—but those of all fan communities that seek to appropriate media texts. I have placed a section of Emily's story below; this story was drawn from her interview, and has been rewritten with her help and consent. The story displays her desires, identifications, and struggles with anime. It also reveals the way Emily's hybrid text—the redrawn *bishōnen*—becomes a space where issues of global culture (gender politics and fan identity) are explored.

Name:	Emily
Age:	21
Nationality:	Filipino
Occupation:	Student

Anime has captivated me from an early age. In the Philippines, I remember being engrossed in epic anime like *Voltes 5*, *Voltron*, and *Daimos* when I was around five years old. I was completely fascinated by their art style and long stories. But, I really got into anime about three years ago with *shōjo*. *Shōjo* manga and anime usually have a lot of really cute guys, with action, fantasy or history ... anything with a costume, and the guys have special powers. That's the kind of manga and anime I like the best, fantasy stories with a hot guy in it, like *Fushigi Yūgi*, *Escaflowne* or *Record of the Lodoss Wars*.

But, the people who like *shōjo* are a small community. I guess it's kind of special and unique. This type of manga and anime is difficult to find in Australia, you have to order them from overseas through a comic-book store or over the Internet. I usually buy fan-sub through the Internet, or through the anime club, or friends. And manga are *really* tough to find. If you want translated manga, there's not much variety, just popular comedies and sci-fi or

action stories. They're very expensive and they are released really slowly. You have to go to a Chinese or Japanese store to order most good manga, but these stores are in the city and really hard to find. It's not easy being a fan of manga and anime. And I suppose that's the difference about being a fan of anime in Australia, or even America, compared to being a fan in Japan. Here anime and manga is so scarce that you jump at the chance to get *anything!* You are so desperate here. Whereas in Japan you'd be more selective in what series you're going to follow because they don't have any restrictions or limitations on what's available. I have this fantasy that I'm wealthy and I can understand Japanese, I go to Japan and buy *everything*, I get *all* the stuff I want.

However, some anime I really don't like, for example anime that are only about sex and violence. These shows give anime a bad name. *Crying Freeman* is a violent anime all about sex. I couldn't finish this series because it was *so* bad. The main character is a sex addict and the dialogue is dreadful, the girl he is meant to kill says, "I've never had sex before. Before I die could you ...". To which he says something like, "Is it my dark eyes?". Awful! *Golgo 13* is another bad one; there was no plot only violence and sex. Both these anime were about men that girls just *want* to have sex with. Sheesh, what a stupid male fantasy! These anime are just sex and violence. The bad thing is this type of anime tends to dominate what other people think anime is.

This distortion is why most people think anime are only sex and violence. That's why I don't think *shōjo* and *yaoi* would become popular in Australia, because of the homosexual characters, especially in *yaoi*, would make some religious group come out and say: "This is not right!" Even though they're gay I think it's just a guy liking a beautiful being. That's all it is. It's like *Interview with a Vampire*, there's nothing wrong with it.

It can be really difficult to change people's ideas of anime. Some of my friends think that anime are only violent R-rated stuff, so I don't tell these friends that I like it. But everyone has anime they fondly remember from when they were a kid, like *Astro Boy*, but they don't realise it's also from Japan. If my friends say anime's violent I show them *Fushigi Yūgi*, which is a very good fantasy series with some comedy and action, and really cutes guys. And guess what, they all liked it and asked for more! But a lot of people don't understand why I like *shōjo* manga and anime. My Dad keeps saying "I'm not giving you any money if you're just going to buy those videos". I remember at school I showed my friends a folder I had with pictures of beautiful-boys from a *shōjo* manga on it. I said, "Isn't he hot, isn't he hot!", and they just said, "Oh my gosh, why are you into that? Why don't you put real guys on that?" They couldn't understand why I liked these 2-Dimensional guys.

Some people might think I'm obsessed with anime and manga. But I'm not! My life doesn't revolve around this. I only like certain stuff and don't buy everything there is just because it's anime and manga. I like anime that makes me feel good when I watch it, like *I can hear the Sea*, which has life-like characters with real personalities as well as problems and experiences. I also enjoy more fantasy anime like *Escaflowne* with its good graphics, plot, music, and characters that you care about.

Anime and manga are really creative and imaginative; the artist's imagination and talent are the only limits. I think that's why these guys in *shōjo* manga are so good-looking. It's really the ideal man if you think about it. You can redraw his image again if you're not happy. You can make whatever you want of it. That's why I like both manga and anime because with anime you can hear and see the character, and with the manga you don't have to worry about constantly rewinding and pausing the tape to look at those really good images, you can just turn to the page and look at it for as long as you want.

Emily negotiates her friends' negative assessment that "anime are only violent R-rated stuff", by asserting that anime can also be the romantic fantasies offered by the *shōjo* genre. Emily's comparison between "violent R-rated" anime, and the "really cute guys" of *shōjo*, is similar to the division some scholars (Allison, 1996; Buckley, 1991; Iwamura, 1994) see between the aggressive and the gentle depiction of masculinity that dominates manga and anime. These scholars contrast the depiction of aggressive men in men's adult manga to the androgynous *bishōnen* lovers portrayed in some *shōjo* and ladies manga (manga intended for adult female readers).

Shōjo and Gender Politics

It is useful here to consider some of the academic work (Allison, 1996; Buckley, 1991; Iwamura, 1994) that has been written on gender representation within *shōjo* manga and anime. While their feminist discourse is firmly grounded in Japan's strict gender divisions, the issue they deal with—negotiating and contesting gendered identities—is a global one that has been appropriated by fans in Australia. As I will show later, Emily, and other *shōjo* fans in Australia, privilege certain gender narratives within manga and anime culture. Here, I will establish how the *bishōnen* character in *shōjo* manga and anime, 'domesticates' a male desire that would otherwise be unknowable for female readers and artists in Japan. I will then consider how fans I interviewed in Australia interwove *Shōjo* manga's *bishōnen* characters with discourses of a global space framed around Japaneseness that offered an alternative to the restrictive identity choices available here.

Buckley (1991) argues that the depiction of masculinity and femininity in manga is bound to Japan's strict gender division. Her analysis of *shōjo* manga focuses on the sub genre of *bishōnen*. She (ibid.) argues that *bishōnen* manga destabilise gender divisions through artistic techniques that rely on “fluid, often unframed images” (p. 181) and stories centred around relationships between androgenous and openly gay lovers offering “gentleness and equality that are free of domination and exploitation” (p. 175). In comparison, adult pornographic manga for men reinforces the dominant patriarchal structure of Japanese society through its phallogentric imagery and fantasies of men's power over women. Buckley (ibid.) summarises this difference as: “Where the comics-for-girls are potential sites for the exploration of difference, the comics-for-men act as mechanisms of sameness” (p. 192).

Anne Allison (1996)—in her analysis of sexuality in manga—describes the hyper-masculine figures in men's manga, as characters that “look and act like brutes” (p. 64), and are highly competitive and aggressive. Allison (1996) claims that the image of masculinity in men's manga is one obsessed with sex aggression and brutality:

Male behaviour is brutish and narcissistic, driven by extreme emotions that find expression in acts of violence ... almost everything about males is jagged. Their faces are chiselled and nasty; their bodies are laden (and infused with) machinery and object parts; their language is sparse and incomplete. And most important, they attack, expressing their desires through aggression. (p. 73)

Women, Allison (ibid.) points out, are portrayed as submissive to the man's sexual demands, and so sex is not an expression of romance or love, but “typically, is something that is done to them” (p. 62).

Iwamura (1994)—like Buckley and Allison—compares the representation of masculinity and that of femininity in Japanese popular culture. Iwamura focuses on three media: Japanese cinema, *shōjo* manga, and the all-female *Takarazuka* theatre review. She argues that representations of women in Japanese cinema draw upon negative stereotypes of vengeful female spirits from Japanese folktales, or the rape and punishment of women,

common in adult manga and pornography¹. For Iwamura, these negative representations of women express male insecurities and phobias, while their rape and punishment is men's attempt to reassert a dominant patriarchal order. Iwamura's (ibid) analysis of *shōjo* manga, and the Takarazuka theatre's portrayal of gentle and romantic *bishōnen* characters, arrives at a similar conclusion to that of Buckley (1991), which is that the *bishōnen*'s alternative sexuality offers women an escape from Japan's conservative customs and social pressures. The implication here is that *bishōnen* characters represent assertiveness and independence—characteristics some women may feel they have lost, after conforming to an image of “concentrated femininity and childlike affectations” (p. 119). The power of this identification is made even stronger because of the effeminate bodies and emotions of *bishōnen* characters:

Effeminate male characters appeal to young girls because they seem closer to them than other boys or men. The girls can relate to the effeminate male and his gentle ways, while more masculine men may seem mysterious to them. (ibid., pp. 119-120)

Mark McLelland's (2000c) critical analysis of the *bishōnen*'s queer credentials, reveals that these homosexual and androgynous male bodies articulate the imagined possibilities of alternative sexualities for women, not gays. McLelland (2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2001) points out that the recent “gay boom” in Japanese media—which included *bishōnen*-type characters in TV dramas, talk-shows, music groups, and *shōjo* and ladies manga, is principally intended for a heterosexual female audience, not a homosexual male one. Because of this, suggests McLelland (2000c), these stories express the problems and fantasies of a female audience, not the concerns of the gay community:

The love between boys in Japanese women's comics ... has more to say about the limitations of heterosexual relations and the negative constraints on female sexuality in contemporary Japanese society than about the real situation of same-sex desiring men. (p. 88)

¹ These negative representations of women are portrayed in the anime *Perfect Blue* (1997). As I discuss in Chapter 5 Mima's character in the television drama *Double Bind* is raped which transforms her into vengeful serial murderer.

McLelland's scepticism as to whether *bishōnen* characters have anything to do with "real" gay men and their lives in Japan is an important contrast to Buckley (1991) and Iwamura's (1994) focus on *bishōnen* as the site of gender resistance for women.

Bishōnen Fans in Australia

Fantasies of "the effeminate male and his gentle ways" (Iwamura, 1994, p. 120) have been adopted by a small, mainly female audience within Australia. *Shōjo* fans I spoke to mentioned three common experiences of the *shōjo* form. The first was a feeling of marginalisation within the local anime fan community because some fans, and certainly the wider public, are ignorant of *shōjo*, especially of the sub genres of *bishōnen* and *yaoi* (a post-modern parody style developed by fans that draws upon *shōjo* and *bishōnen* elements). This experience has led many fans to foster strong international connections with overseas fans through the utilisation of the Internet. Second, some fans appropriate the distinctive imagery and narrative themes of *shōjo*, *bishōnen*, and *yaoi* as an act of distinction in Australian anime fandom. Third, female fans explicitly state their enjoyment of *shōjo*'s alternative image of masculinity, suggesting a 'domestication' of male desire that allows these fans to imagine the nature of an otherwise unknowable masculinity. These three characteristics of fans' appropriation of *shōjo* in Australia reveal how a variety of manga and anime is available to them through transnational channels, and how *shōjo* forms not only play a role in their domestic experience, but also gives them a language to "compare and contrast, judge and evaluate the culturally different social worlds" (Gillespie, 2000, p. 164) that appear in Japanese popular culture and Australian mainstream culture.

A Unique Fandom

Most fans I interviewed who identified themselves as *shōjo* fans were young women and comprise a small group within the male-dominated anime clubs where I conducted my

field research. As I described in Chapter 4, the Australian commercial anime market is dominated by action and cyberpunk anime targeted at a male audience (who make up the bulk of the fan population), material that appeals to girls and women, such as *shōjo* and *bishōnen*, comprise only a small percentage of the anime available in Australia. The rarity of *shōjo* in Australia forced fans to develop national and international connections with networks of fan and commercial distributors to acquire the material they need. As Emily's story expressed, she felt her membership in the *shōjo* community "special and unique" because the difficulty in obtaining material—"this type of manga and anime is pretty difficult to find in Australia"—had required her to establish a transnational network of friends and commercial contacts supportive of *shōjo*.

Importantly, Emily's experience of feeling part of a small *shōjo* fan group reveals the divisions operating within anime/manga fan communities and the gender politics that can distinguish female anime fans. Emily's preference for *shōjo* is not only different from the dominant "sex and violence" anime that prejudice the public's opinion of manga and anime, but she also considers herself part of a small sub-community within anime and manga fandom. Consequently, many *shōjo* fans regard themselves as further alienated from an ignorant and unreceptive mainstream environment, as Emily declared: "a lot of people still don't understand why I like *shōjo* manga and anime". One reason for the low public profile of *shōjo* manga and anime in Australia is that its complex artistic techniques have little precedence in the West. As Frederick Schodt (1983) points out:

Girls' comic magazines are characterized by a page layout that has become increasingly abstract. It depends greatly on the use of montage. Pictures flow from one to another rather than progress with logical consistency from frame to frame. They may fuse into a medley of facial close-ups, free-floating prose attached to no particular character, rays of light, and abstract flowers and leaves that waft slowly across pages with no seeming relationship to the story. To the uninitiated this makes for confusing reading. (p. 89)

The second characteristic of the *shōjo* fan community in Australia is the specialised knowledge and skills they have learnt to interpret artistic techniques and narrative themes of this genre. While fans may express frustration at the lack of awareness of the *shōjo* genre in Australia, this experience also fosters a certain amount of pride amongst fans at being able to translate and appropriate such a distinctive, yet different genre into the Australian fan club scene.

As one of the *shōjo* fans I spoke to asserted: “Compared to most Western cartoon shows, and even most anime shown in clubs or sold in Australia, *shōjo* are generally better made, the graphics are beautiful, there’s more depth to the story and characters, and the music is nicer” (Denise, 18, female, Asian-Australian, student). Many fans have learnt the particular



Figure 33. The bishonen character as mascot: a group of Sydney fan artists use promote their bishonen manga and the National Young Writers Festival in Newcastle, 2000.

skill of drawing *bishōnen* bodies through popular books that teach the techniques of drawing in particular manga styles such as the *shōjo* style. A *bishōnen* character was adopted as the mascot for a group of Sydney fan artists who launched their *shōjo* inspired *dojinshi* (amateur manga) at the National Young Writers Festival in Newcastle, 2000 (see Figure 33).

Andrea, a 20-year-old Anglo-Australian student I interview had constructed a web page dedicated to the *bishōnen* and *bishōjo* (beautiful girls) characters of anime, included on her web page were

galleries of pictures, episode guides, theme song lyrics and music files she had collected and set up to be downloaded. She explained the type of creative freedom *shōjo* represented for her:

As far as I'm concerned, *shōjo* anime is usually a lot more liberated in its storylines and plot ideas than a lot of Western fiction. There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with combining magic and science into the same series, or depicting men who look androgynous, and that kind of freedom really appeals to me. I like the art style as well, particularly in comparison to things like Disney. (Andrea, 20, Anglo-Australian, student)

Yaoi, a more extreme and post-modern variation on *bishōnen* themes has also been appropriated by some *shōjo* fans in Australia. At the 2001 *Comicfest!* (popular culture convention) held in Sydney Andrea displayed her new specialised knowledge and cultural competence of *yaoi*, which had become one of the more extreme and underground manga styles to find its way into Australia. Andrea had designed and printed a T-shirt she wore to

the convention with the definition of *yaoi* written on it (see Figure 34).



Figure 34. Andrea displays her enthusiasm for the *yaoi* approach to manga with the *yaoi*-definition T-shirt she designed and wore to the popular culture convention: *Comicfest* 2001.

Jenkins (2001) argues that the intellectual depth and professional job credentials of many fans reveals a new generation of “aca-fans”, that is, people who display both academic and fan characteristics. This hybrid identity is able to combine fan experiences and scholarly knowledge without the need to defend popular culture or fan culture. Within the *anime* community, these fan-scholars are able to achieve a level of sophistication through their cross-cultural analysis of the Japanese and English versions of manga and anime, as well

as translate these forms into the domestic context. Jenkins (Jenkins, 2002) also draws upon Pierre Levy's (1997) concept of "collective intelligence" to explain the production and exchange of knowledge across multiple communities that occur within fan cultures, particularly on-line fan communities. Jenkins points out that these groups contest, distribute, interpret, and produce collective and individual knowledge based on affinities with contemporary popular culture. The *Anime and Manga Research Circle*, which includes a mailing list for "professionals, students, and fans", is an example of such an on-line "collective intelligence" operating within manga and anime fandom. The process of incorporating and circulating knowledge through affinities, rather than localities, can be seen in the appropriation of *yaoi* in Australian fandom. As described below *yaoi* is a complex manga form in Japan that is distinctly post-modern and fan-oriented.

Yaoi

Sharon Kinsella (2000, pp. 113-117) explains how, in Japan, female *dōjinshi* (amateur) manga artists during the 1980s appropriated elements from the *bishōnen* genre in their development of the radical *yaoi* style of manga. The manifesto of the *yaoi* style is explained in the breakdown of its meaning. *Yaoi* is derived from three phrases: *yama nashi* (no build up), *oshi nashi* (no foreclosure), and *imi nashi* (no meaning), and it reveals a post-modern agenda - to break down narrative order and expectations, fracture the fixed identity of characters, and so on. While many *yaoi* manga were nonsensical, artists often appropriated the *bishōnen-ai* love stories of beautiful young men to create parodies of popular "straight" manga and anime titles. This act of appropriation is rather like the slash fiction found in the Kirk and Spock sex-fantasies of *Star Trek* fans (Jenkins, 1992). As Kinsella (2000) argues, *Yaoi*, its beautiful boys, and the parody of established manga, became a dominant aesthetic trend in amateur manga circles of Japan from the 1980s. Now, as Andrea's *yaoi* t-shirt suggests, some fans in Australia have appropriated its manifesto into their local fan

communities. Andrea's use of *yaoi* also reveals the common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments of fans.

The third characteristic of fan appropriation of bishōnen and yaoi manga and anime is the way fans explore gender politics. The image of masculinity offered by the beautiful young male *bishōnen* characters who have androgynous features, long hair, slight builds, and are involved in passionate and romantic love, is the direct opposite of the aggressive masculinity depicted in many popular male anime in Australia. Emily criticises the type of anime that depict violent and sexually obsessed men who treat women as sex objects. The anime Emily criticises, *Crying Freeman* and *Golgo 13*, feature a main male character that is an assassin-for-hire, he is aggressive, sexual, and enigmatic and is portrayed as being irresistible to all women. As Emily says, these anime depict “men that girls just *want* to have sex with”. However, for Emily the seduction scene in *Crying Freeman* where the woman falls in love with her assassin is a “stupid male fantasy” that objectifies women as sex objects. These are not the type of anime, or men, Emily likes. Like Buckley (1991), Iwamura (1994), and Allison's (1996) analyses of the representation of male and female bodies in Japanese popular media, Emily draws a distinction between the “stupid male fantasies” in violent “R-rated” anime and the “really cute guys” she enjoys in *shōjo* anime.

The different artistic techniques, narrative themes, and gender constructions in *shōjo* manga and anime encourages cross-cultural, comparative analyses of media representations. The comparison fans make between “Western cartoon shows” (Denise) such as Disney or the popularity of “sex and violence” (Emily) anime in Australia, and the liberation and freedom fans find in *shōjo* manga and anime suggests the formation of, what Gillespie (2000) refers to as, “culture consciousness” (p. 165). Gillespie (ibid.) in her research on the reception of two TV versions of the Mahabharata by Hindu women in London, describes the sophistication and dexterity of this diasporic Hindu community who “translate with ease across and between

distinctive social worlds, languages and cultural spheres” (p. 165), as well as the way their choice of identities are shaped by the “multi-ethnic and diaspora contexts in which they live, and the culturally diverse media they consume” (p. 165). While the *shōjo* fans I discuss here are not part of the nationalist “culture consciousness” Gillespie refers to—the Hindu families in London and the (trans)national community they construct through watching Mahabharata and feeling a close connection to relatives back home—they do identify with the Japaneseness (here expressed as not “Western cartoon”, and alternative representation of masculinity) of *shōjo* manga and anime. The appropriation of manga and anime’s distinctive artistic techniques and narrative themes by fans in Australia reveals the way in which Japan’s visually-orientated “eyesight culture” (Loveday & Chiba, 1986) that I outlined in Chapter 2 can be reworked and reinvented as a source for ‘identity projects’. The “consciousness” these fans experience is a recognition of the potential spaces that are opened up within hybrid forms, such as the *shōjo* genre and its *bishōnen* characters, that allow them to explore alternative gender representations and identities that are not offered at a national level of “being Australian”.

Emily’s experience of manga and anime also articulates a “diaspora perspective” (Gillespie, 2000, p. 168) on manga and anime. Emily, as a Filipina, is part of the Asian diaspora that plays a significant role in the Australian fan clubs where I conducted my field research. Approximately half of the members of these clubs were Asian, or of an Asian background. Diaspora identifications and connections with manga and anime are part of a complex network of experiences and contacts in Asia. Gillespie (ibid.) emphasises how diverse and different the experiences of diaspora cultures are, and the importance not to conflate the experiences of immigrants, guest workers, ethnic minorities, refugees, expatriates, and travellers into a reified and essentialised category of ethnic difference. The manga and anime fan community in Australia is comprised of a similar mixture with links to

diverse diaspora movement, all of which articulate different ‘identity projects’ and cultural connection with manga and anime forms. While it is important to bear in mind the over-use of diaspora, the “diaspora perspective” (ibid.) is useful in showing the variety of fan experiences of manga and anime in Australia. The globalisation of media and technologies has played an important role in creating and maintaining specific ties between Australia and Asia, and within the Asian region. Shiraishi (2000) points to the similar ‘image alliance’ structure of print media, television, movies, and character merchandise in Asia and Japan that has helped foster and expand the manga-based merchandising of particular cultural commodities such as the manga/anime-icon *Doraemon* throughout Asia. The cultural affinity Shiraishi (ibid.) sees in the Asian experience of *Doraemon* is based on the uniquely Japanese approach to the “empowerment of children” and to the “technological optimism” that resonates with the interests and concerns of children throughout Asia. The Asian diaspora’s experience in Australia continues the process of identification with Japan as the source of distinctly different cultural forms contained within manga and anime that dissolve distances and offer an alternative to the cultural and entertainment choices most usually offered to them in Australia. In Emily’s story she mentions that she doubts *shōjo* or *yaoi* would become popular in Australia because the homosexuality of the *bishōnen* characters would offend religious communities. In the next section I discuss how her act of sketching *bishōnen* characters and the resulting hybrid manga text is an example of the cultural affinities towards Japan that are maintained and created by fans in Australia to become spaces where global issues (in this case, gender identity) can be negotiated.

Emily’s Drawing

At the time of our interview, Emily had been drawing *bishōnen* characters, including Tamahome, from her favourite anime, *Fushigi Yūgi*. *Fushigi Yūgi* tells the story of two 15-year-old schoolgirls, Miaka and Yui, who are transported to a fantasy world resembling

feudal China after reading an ancient book, *The Universe of the Four Gods*. In the fantasy world Miaka is recognised as the prophesised one who will save the world from destruction and bring peace and unity to the land. To help her on her quest seven powerful Celestial Warriors join her. Tamahome is one of Miaka's Celestial Warriors, and the principal sub-plot of the story is the romance that develops between Miaka and Tamahome.

Emily had watched the TV series of *Fushigi Yūgi* (1995) at her local anime club, and since then had collected the original manga by Yū Watase. *Fushigi Yūgi* also played an important role in helping her broaden the sex and violence view her friends had of anime, as she mentioned in her story: "If my friends say anime's violent I show them *Fushigi Yūgi*".

Emily was fascinated with the image of Tamahome, collected numerous pictures of him, and had included him as one of the figures she began to draw in her sketchbook. Emily described this sketch to me during her recounting of an incident that had occurred while she was studying at the library. A group of Anglo-Australian friends had noticed that her folder had manga characters pasted over it. These characters were beautiful-boys from *shōjo* manga and anime, and included her sketch of the dashing young hero Tamahome. When her friends expressed surprise and curiosity at these manga figures Emily replied that they were her favourite characters and:

I said, "Isn't he hot, isn't he hot!", and they just said, "Oh my gosh, why are you into that? Why don't you put real guys on that?" They couldn't understand why I liked these 2-Dimensional guys.

Her friends rejected the unfamiliar aesthetics of the *bishōnen* character, "why don't you put real guys on that?", reaffirming the marginalisation many *shōjo* fans feel in Australia. However, Emily's folder was also a bold and proud declaration of her enjoyment of an alternative preference in gender relations.



Figure 35. Emily's sketch of Tamahome.



Figure 36. The original image of Tamahome Emily based her sketch on, from *Fushigi Yugi*.

Here, I will take a closer look at her pencil sketch of Tamahome (see Figure 35), consider the expression of a romantic *bishōnen* hero it signifies, and the way Emily's sketch traces many of the original's features (see Figure 36) but varies in small yet telling ways.

The pencil sketch is a common fan activity, particularly in manga fandom where the principal text is a comic book, lending itself easily to replication and appropriation of images through fans directly tracing or parodying the original pictures. Emily's sketch is one of many similar examples that can be found right across any fandom, and even among viewers with only a casual interest in media texts, from Star Trek images, such as the fan's artwork depicting characters from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* which adorns the cover of Jenkins 1992 book on fan audiences, *Textual Poachers*. To the many other examples of fan created media texts such as fan-fiction, fan-art, and scratch videos (composing video clips using images of favourite television series and popular music). It is because Emily's picture is so typical that it offers such a good example of the everyday activities of anime fandom. This not the spectacular print of a semi-professional graphic artist, but a private sketch, half-

complete, that has been worked on during Emily's spare time. Sketches like this fill the notebooks of anime and manga fans around the world.

When one first considers the original Tamahome picture and Emily's sketch of it one notices the characteristic features of the *bishōnen* body: a tall and lithe figure with angular cheeks ending in an almost pointed chin, almond shaped eyes, long hair (Tamahome's is tied into a ponytail). The image of Tamahome Emily copied invites engagement and even seduction of the viewer. The red roses Tamahome holds suggest a date, an invitation, or promise to the viewer. His bare torso under the jacket hints at sexuality, but not a violent or overtly masculine type. Tamahome offers anticipation and hope for a romantic, loving and caring relationship. The white jacket offers a trendy cosmopolitan style, if appearing somewhat dated from the 1980s with its up-turned collar, it does evoke a European, "new-romantic" appeal. The pants suggest an oriental fashion—cloth pants held up by a sash or thin rope. The hair and ponytail are wild and unkempt evoking a free and restless spirit. In addition, we could consider Emily's inclusion of this image on her folder as an invitation to her friends to join her interest in anime.

In Emily's sketch, further refinement is obvious – an exaggeration of the already effeminate and androgynous male body. The contrast of the lead pencil on white paper has made the face lighter, more youthful, and innocent in appearance. The eyes and cheeks have been widened to create a softer, less intense face. Overall, the face appears more boyish, with a healthy roundedness about it. Emily has removed the suggestion of a predatory sexual agenda in the original; gone are the flowers and dark shadowy tones of Tamahome's features. Emily has redrawn him as cuter to bring the image closer to the ideal that she prefers in *bishōnen*.

Buckley (1991) claims the key appeal of *bishōnen* stories is that they "open up a fantasy landscape onto which each reader is free to map his or her own topography of

pleasure” (p. 181). Emily claims that the experience of copying and borrowing from the *shōjo* style has enriched her understanding and enthusiasm for the manga and anime art form:

Anime and manga are really creative and imaginative; the artist’s imagination and talent are the only limits. I think that’s why these guys in *shōjo* manga are so good-looking. It’s really the ideal man if you think about it. You can redraw his image again if you’re not happy. You can make whatever you want of it. That’s why I like both manga and anime because with anime you can hear and see the character, and with the manga you don’t have to worry about constantly rewinding and pausing the tape to look at those really good images, you can just turn to the page and look at it for as long as you want.

Emily’s drawing, as a hybrid text that creates a space where issues of gender identity and fan politics can be explored, and the three characteristics of *shōjo*’s appropriation by fans in Australia, express the ability of fans to explore various types of ‘global identity projects’. These ‘identity projects’ show how, even though the *shōjo*, *bishōnen*, and *yaoi* genres are intricately bound to Japan’s conservative gender divisions (Allison, 1996; Buckley, 1991; Iwamura, 1994), Australian fans identify with a global discourse on feminism, and through this they are able to create alternatives to dominant representations of sexuality in Australia. As I have shown throughout this thesis, manga and anime presents forms that are continually transformed through identification (Chapter 5), cross-cultural interaction (Chapter 1), and conflict (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I analyse the use of the anime *Akira* to locate the Japaneseness of cyberpunk imagery through textual resonances with Japan’s experience of destruction, occupation, and rebirth following World War II, and the appropriation of this discourse by movie critics and fans to position a sophisticated anime culture - an act that resembles Emily’s determination to reframe her experience of manga and anime to contest the sensationalism in the commercial and media fostered “sex and violence” image. As Gillespie (2000) points out of her case study into the reception of the TV version of the *Mahabharata*, Hindu women in London “selectively appropriate and contest key narratives for their own purposes, and in doing so subvert patriarchal and nationalist discourses in the construction of their own world-views and identities” (p. 164).

The use of manga and anime forms outside of Japan to negotiate specific problems within the local culture, such as fans searching for alternatives to the (for them) unappealing identity choices offered within Australia, suggests a strategic identification with elements within manga and anime. It is possible to see, in Emily's story, evidence of the three processes of identification (Fuss, 1995) discussed in the Chapter 5. First, identification as a way of dealing with the loss of a "love object" (ibid., p. 1), that leads us to identify with objects that fill the void, with copies that resemble a lost ideal. Second, identification offers an experience that can either strengthen or weaken the integrity of one's own identity. The act of defining oneself through identification with others produces intimate engagement with something essentially outside of ourselves that can have unpredictable and long-lasting repercussions on one's identity. Third, identification offers itself as a vehicle for tracking down additional engagements that create a fluid network of related interests and commitments.

From Emily's account, it appears that Emily's experience of anime strengthened her identity and fostered a stronger sense of self. Her engagement with anime was, at times, a form of play where she expressed her interests and fantasies, as well as an opportunity to experiment with alternative representations of sexuality. Her enthusiasm for anime and use of its difference demonstrates how it can be experienced as both empowering and freeing.

Such everyday appropriations of manga and anime express a world-view that contrasts the domestic and global. At the level of everyday culture, Emily's experience at home, where her father refuses to give her money to spend on manga and anime, and at University, where her friends do not understand the appeal of *bishōnen*, is alienating and unsympathetic. This contrasts with the broader affiliations Emily is able to make with a transnational *shōjo* anime fan community which extends into both the local and global space and resembles Jenkins' (2002) use of "collective intelligence" to describe the ability of fan

communities to develop and circulate the ideals, values, and experience of various popular cultures.

Conclusion

Global identifications are an important source of new cultural materials for fans. The enjoyment of *bishōnen*, with their portrayal of alternative masculinity, appeals to a community of female fans in Japan, Australia, and elsewhere. Its difference from the ‘sex and violence’ genres gives a sense of belonging to a shared manga and anime culture. The Japaneseness of manga and anime is an important component of the global culture space. It allows not only *shōjo* genre fans but also many other fans of manga and anime, a cultural space outside their everyday worlds where issues of difference can be explored in imagination. The effectiveness of this global identification is that it offers an escape from the sexism or racism some fans perceive in the wider Australian society and within their own families. Gillespie (2000, p. 166) talks about the “hardening” of cultural boundaries while other spaces are opened up within transnational networks of media and communication. For many fans in Australia, there is an exclusivity to Australian identity that centres on notions of a masculine Anglo-Australianness (see Chapter 1). The frustration fans express with the limitations they perceive in the racism, and sexism they find attached to a particular Australian nation or culture, motivates them to explore new kinds of ‘global identity projects’ offered within manga and anime. The appreciation of Japan that fans and scholars express within their framing of manga and anime’s appeal (see Chapter 1 and 2) is part of the ongoing process of negotiation and reinvention of identities in the global arena, where manga and anime become a space to explore the potential of shape shifting, such as Ranma’s boy to girl transformations in *Ranma 1/2* (see Chapter 1), cyborg fusions between human and machine (see Chapter 4), to the very act of drawing itself as the creation of hybrid (Chapter 7) and culturally distinct (Chapter 2) texts. The Japaneseness of manga and anime is an

important component of the space within which fans can construct necessary alternative identities to those they would otherwise have to conform to at a regional Australian level. I believe that these 'identity projects' and creative appropriations of manga and anime's forms by fans point the way forward to an interconnected global and domestic space, where the limitations of gender, ethnicity, and national identity can be explored and contested.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

This chapter is a consideration of new directions suggested by the ways in which Western anime distributors are capitalising on fan interests, and how the increasing commercial value of the international fan audience may eclipse the Japanese anime market and audience. I reflect on the way in which creative hybrid texts, produced by fans—such as Emily’s half-finished *bishōnen* sketch (see Chapter 7)—are being taken seriously within a commercial discourse aimed at fans. Here, I will analyse the marketing of the United States produced anime magazine—*Newtype USA*—as an example of the commercial appropriation and shaping of the ‘global identity projects’ on which fans embark. Commercial anime culture in the West—dominated by the influence of the United States’ distribution and production networks (see Chapter 6)—has appropriated the anime fans’ self-perception of themselves as global consumers of hybrid texts, in order to mobilise specific transnational identifications around consumption practices. Jenkins (2001) refers to the increasing responsiveness of the commercial economy to fan activities as indicating the adjustments cultural industries are making to negotiate a space for an audience they want to hold on to, to avoid losing it altogether into the audience produced text. *Newtype USA* provides an example of a Western commercial enterprise that is—in many ways—continuing Emily’s project of creating a hybrid space, where choices of gender, nationalism, culture, and identity are offered. I argue that while *Newtype USA*’s reinsertion of “Japaneseness” within anime confirms Iwabuchi’s criticism of the Western exoticism of “Japan”—and threatens the Japanese ownership of the form—it also indicates the important reworkings of manga and anime’s cultural value by Western fans and cultural industries who define the ideals and values of manga and anime.

Newtype USA

In 2002, the United States based anime producer/distributor, A.D Vision, acquired the rights to “localize, publish and distribute” (2002a, para. 1) an English language version of Kadokawa Shoten’s *Newtype* anime magazine “throughout America and the English speaking world” (op.cit.). Originally a Japanese publication, *Newtype* is now distributed world wide in Chinese and English language versions. *Newtype USA* began publication in November 2002, and has since established itself as an important source of images and information for the English-speaking anime audience. In the United States, the first issue of *Newtype USA* sold out within weeks and print runs for following issues have been repeatedly doubled to cope with demand (Newtype USA, 2002b, 2003). The Australian distributor, *Madman Entertainment*, has increased orders for the magazine, as its distribution points have expanded beyond specialty stores, to national franchises such as *Electronic Boutique* (Madman Entertainment, 2003).

Newtype USA provides more than just images of, and information on anime. It also provides a context within which to understand anime, in addition to a variety of related products and events—from industry expos to fan conventions. Its inclusion of different anime related commodities, including manga stories, anime samples on DVD, interviews with animators and voice actors, as well as glossy full paged pictures of anime-including posters and postcards-places anime within “supersystems of entertainment”, or “total cultural packages” of various media products grouped under a single media conglomerate (Iwabuchi, 2002c, p. 37).

Central to *Newtype USA*’s success is its ability to take seriously the potential Western anime fans see in manga and anime as ‘global identity projects’. Here, I will conduct a critical analysis of the subscription advertisements used by *Newtype USA* (A.D.Vision, 2002) in its first issue: November 2002. The subscription advertisements are targeted at two types

of anime audience: what the press releases refer to as the “established fan” and the “new initiate” into anime (Newtype USA, 2002a). The “established fan” is active in the anime fan community and appreciates the Japaneseness of manga and anime. The “new initiate”, however, is someone who has limited knowledge and experience of the variety and complexity of anime forms. The use of “initiate” and “established” fan by *Newtype USA* suggests a knowledge hierarchy that recognises the fans’ intellectual investments in manga and anime (Jenkins, 2002). These two audience positions are different from Iwabuchi’s (1998) bipolarisation of the Western fan experience of anime into those who project a virtual animated “Japan” onto anime, and those for whom anime is a domesticated text, erased of any reference to Japan. The circulation of meanings, interpretations and fantasies is valued in *Newtype USA* rather than seen as evidence of fans naturalising dominant stereotypes or simply consuming pre-packaged lifestyles and commodities. These subscription advertisements offer a simplified transnational journey, as they shift from the “Japan-nothing” (Iwabuchi, 1998, p. 172) of domesticated anime, to the Japan-fantasy of hybrid anime. The advertisements reveal both the softening of Japan (Iwabuchi, 2002c) by commercial forces to frame anime’s appeal, as well as a global space where exotic images of Japaneseness are explored. What is also striking about *Newtype USA*’s subscription drive and branding campaign is how it employs a clear gender division within its domestication of anime imagery. Here, I will explore how six of the advertisements—through the vehicle of anime—offer a journey from a masculinized global, to a feminised local.

Firstly, the *Happy Place* advertisement (see Figure 37) offers an image of a masculine global that male fans can escape to. The script describes a day in the life of a male subscriber to *Newtype USA* that ends in his getaway to *Newtype*’s happy masculinized global:

You woke up late from your first class.
 Got a speeding ticket on the way there.
 Had a 5000-word essay for being late.
 Your girlfriend says, “We need to talk.”



Figure 37. A Happy Place to be: the masculine global that male fans can escape to, in *Newtype USA* (2002, November). Print Advertisement.

But then you saw your new issue of *Newtype USA* waiting for you at home. Suddenly, your world was a much happier place to be. Haven't subscribed yet? Subscribe to *Newtype USA* today and Make sure your world is a happy place to be.

The story begins in an alienating local, a stressful place that is unconcerned with one's needs and problems. The subscriber portrayed here clearly wants to escape from his mundane frustrations at school. Importantly, the local is clearly the United States: driving to school, getting speeding tickets, and the hassles of

schoolwork and his assertive girlfriend. This image does not evoke "Japan". This will become significant later in contrast to the adverts that develop the image of the global as Japan. Here, however, the global is the "happy place" offered by *Newtype USA*. This place is clearly a masculine one; the shadowy form to the right of the script is a male anime character in battle costume. In his right hand is a gun, resting casually against his leg. A certain uneasy conflation of happiness and power is created by the juxtaposition of the silhouetted figure and his gun placed between the fading text that declares: "Make sure your world is a happy place to be" and "Subscribe today!" This advertisement portrays the experience of anime as an escape from any alienating local, into global freedom—appropriating the weapons needed for global engagement, a space where you can release your pent up frustrations and do battle in.



Figure 38. The image of the giant robot body of a Mobile Suit Gundam in *Newtype USA*.

The weaponry and battle armour of the male figure in this advert is suggested earlier on by the image of the giant robot body of a *Mobile Suit Gundam* (see Figure 38) featured on the cover of *Newtype USA*¹. The empty mobile suit, Gundam—into which the young boy pilot enters to face the outside world—is a fusion of human bodies and technology, an image common in anime (see Chapter 4). Such are the cyborg characters offered in anime such as *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. The giant robot anime series, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, depicts youthful pilots battling to protect humanity

from the destructive power of the Angels. It focuses on the psychological stress that these pilots experience, as they struggle to maintain their sanity in a corrupt and uncertain world. Throughout these anime, the characters escape from an unhappy, alienating “local” through cyborg bodies, or within the shells of powerful giant robots or hi-tech motorbikes to do battle with criminals, a corrupt military-state, and aliens.

The *Being There* (see Figure 39) advertisement continues the global masculine motif. Within the red sun emerging from the map of Japan is the young pilot surrounded by the giant robots of Go Nagai’s manga and anime, *Mazinger Z*. The text declares that *Newtype USA* offers “the next best thing to being there”, that is, being in Japan. Japan is represented in a variety of ways. The map of Japan in the centre of the advertisement evokes the image of cultural tourism and suggests that “Japan” itself has become a type of brand onto which new and old images of “Japaneseness” can be projected. Manga’s giant robot and human pilot—

¹ The title of the magazine, *Newtype*, is itself a word first coined in *Gundam* to refer to a new generation of pilots with high psychic abilities who can operate the Mobile Suit Gundam giant robots.



Figure 39. Being there: Giant Robots and manga, the new face of Japanese industrial power and might, in *Newtype USA*.

suggesting the new face of Japanese industrial power and might— represent contemporary “Japan”. This image has replaced the images of “old Japan”, represented by the temple and lanterns that are positioned on the margins of the advertisement. It is an unapologetically Western view of Japan, which uses exotic and popular images of Japaneseness, to create a positive representation of today’s “global Japan”.

The *Comfort Food* (see Figure 40) advertisement uses globally recognised food commodities (take-away pizza; sushi) to represent the localisation of anime.

Newtype USA has domesticated anime as a “comfort food”, along with ice cream, potato chips, and chocolate; but unlike these commodities, *Newtype USA* is made up of the “healthy ingredients” of anime. The script reads: “Who needs the saturated fat found in a pepperoni pizza when you could have all the healthy ingredients found in the hottest new anime magazine around?” (A.D. Vision, 2002, p. 54), and then declares in bold white print: “No fat. All Flavour” (ibid., p. 54). The metaphor of comfort food conveys the type of anime culture *Newtype USA* has introduced to the United States—a new choice within the local entertainment network. However, unlike the aggressive “Americanisation” of United States’ consumer icons—such as Coca-Cola, Marlboro, and McDonalds—

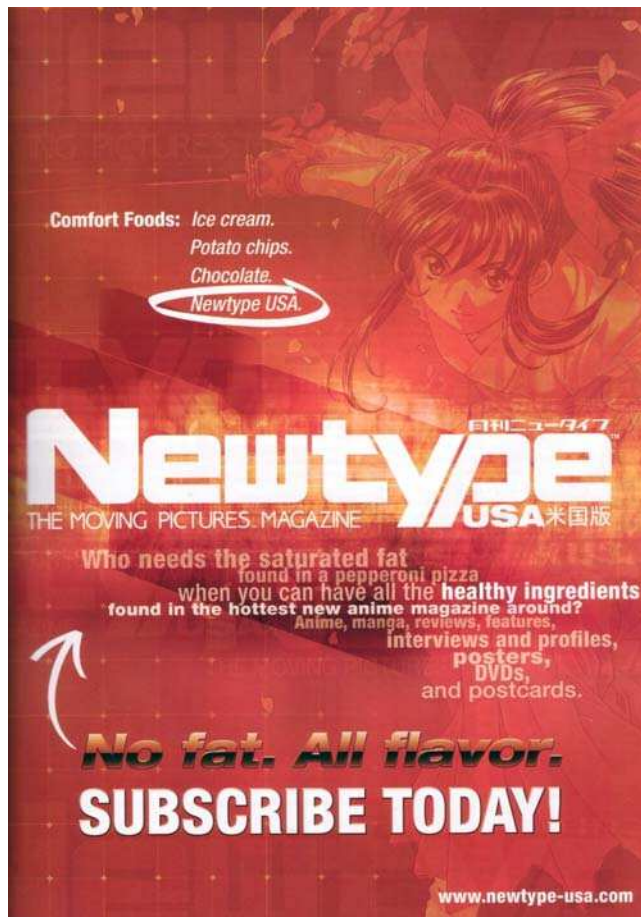


Figure 40. “Comfort Food”: anime culture as pre-digested for you in *Newtype USA*. Print Advertisement.

anime culture is not being sold through the image of Japan, instead there is a softer cultural presence that exploits the female fan audience’s concern for healthy food; this is demonstrated in the promotion of avoiding “saturated fat”. This advertisement draws directly on the health industry rhetoric aimed at young girls and other body-conscious people. It is important to watch your figure and avoid foods that may cause you to put on unwanted weight. This feminine image is reinforced by the background image of Shinguji Sakura—the main female character from *Sakura Wars*—dressed in

her pink combat dress and holding her katana sword. A pink/red wash saturates the entire advertisement, and a number of small cherry blossom petals can be seen drifting to the ground. In this *Comfort Food* advertisement, anime is made digestible, becoming part of the nurturing local that is giving you exactly what your mind and body need: anime culture as pre-digested for you in *Newtype USA*. The indistinctive, *mu-kokuseki* anime form has been given a localised, feminine, and domestic face, through the girlish manga body of Shinguji Sakura, and the health-conscious rhetoric of the script. Anime is thus represented as a source of comfort and nourishment.

Inside the comfort zone of this localised anime experience, we have the sushi of the *Fresh from Japan* advertisement (see Figure 41). Sushi—the perfect low fat food—refers to

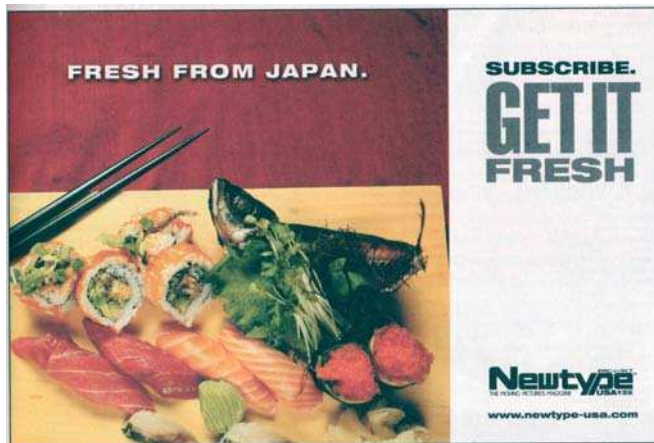


Figure 41. The “freshness” of the information and images provided by *Newtype USA*. Print Advertisement.

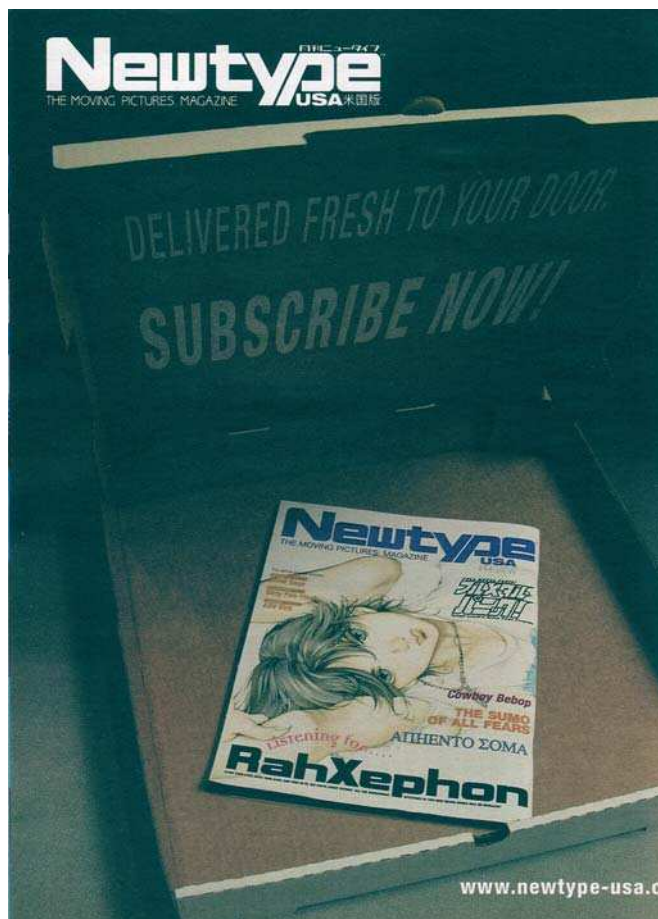


Figure 42. *Newtype USA*: the *mu-kokuseki* vehicle for global anime culture. Print Advertisement.

the ideal of healthy food established in the *Comfort Food* advertisement. Sushi also offers a clichéd image of Japan around the world, an image of healthy Japanese food popularly held in the West, as is made evident by the ever-increasing number of sushi restaurants opening in Western cities and suburbs. The combination of sushi and smoked fish—rarely served together on the same dish in Japan—demonstrates a positioning of “Japanese” food icons for a non-Japanese audience. In this advertisement, sushi is equated with freshness (“fresh from Japan”), and it is the “freshness” of the information and images provided by *Newtype USA* directly from Japan that expresses “Japaneseness”.

The final advertisement I will look at establishes the importance of *mu-kokuseki* as the packaging used by *Newtype*’s marketing campaign to travel between the local and global.

Here, I move beyond Iwabuchi's interpretation of *mu-kokuseki* as the commodity itself—a softening of Japaneseness within the racially indistinct characteristics of the anime body. I argue that it is also possible to see the “lack” of a nationality or a cultural association suggested by the term *mu-kokuseki* as anime's packaging that helps to contain and structure its form. The *Delivered Fresh to Your Door* advertisement (see Figure 42) depicts an opened pizza box with an issue of *Newtype USA* magazine² inside, where the pizza would normally be. The pizza box, empty of its pizza suggests the *mu-kokuseki* form; the pizza box is the packaging within which the pizza (the content) is delivered. In a similar way, *Newtype USA* itself is *mu-kokuseki*—an empty space within which anime content can be organised so that particular readings and identifications can occur. *Newtype USA*—and the *mu-kokuseki* vehicle in general—are forms used to organise cultural information; they are thus a mediating form like the pizza box itself. The *mu-kokuseki* form—as the packaging of *Newtype Magazine*, the pizza box, or even Japan itself, is a vehicle used to shift between the local and the global³. To provide instant access to these spaces, David Harvey (1989) refers to the “time-space” compression brought about by globalisation, where the distance between one place and another shrinks, and markets become integrated and interrelated. In this case, the ease of global communication technologies allow for the simultaneous exchange of information and

² This issue of *Newtype USA* was the preview issue distributed to anime and comic conventions during the summer of 2002 to generate feedback for the publication of the first issue in November 2002. It is interesting to note that on the cover of the preview issue the Japanese kanji for USA (米国) and Monthly Newtype (月刊ニュータイプ) have not yet been added, suggesting that one outcome of this feedback was to establish a stronger “Japanese” presence to the magazine's image.

³ The importance of United States distributors to the global success of anime cannot be ignored. The involvement of United States cultural industries with worldwide distribution power such as Beauna Vista (the international distribution arm of Disney) is significant. *Newtype USA* is distributed through a variety of retailers in the United States including Suncoast, Sam Goody, Barnes & Noble, Borders, Media Play, Waldenbooks, Fry's, Tower Records and Gordon & Gotch Canada (Chapters/Coles Books), as well as independent bookstores, comic stores and specialty shops. In Australia *Newtype USA* is imported by the anime distributor *Madman Entertainment* and is available through comic book stores, speciality stores, and the Australia-wide retailer Electronics Boutique.

images across geographical and national boundaries, while the *mu-kokuseki* packaging allows content to be easily appropriated by and remade in any local market.

Japanese cultural industries have been able to develop and export a particularly successful type of *mu-kokuseki* package in the form of manga and anime. *Newtype USA* offers a Western view of anime and Japan; however, the increasing visibility of “Japan” as a source of authority in anime culture is a significant achievement of the “soft” cultural export strategy by Japanese cultural industries. This *mu-kokuseki* body can accompany any number of different flights of the imagination.

For me, the key concept is how the *mu-kokuseki* form can be a vehicle to shift between the global and any local. It is in this relationship between Japanese, and now Western, cultural industries wanting to penetrate globally dispersed markets, that the *mu-kokuseki* commodity is revealed as an excellent vehicle to achieve this. The anime magazine, *Newtype USA*, is an example of the contemporary marketing and distribution of anime culture to the English-speaking world. Its subscription and branding campaign provides a current context in which to place the three processes of transnationalism identified in Chapter 6: globalisation, localisation, and the vehicle of the *mu-kokuseki*. *Newtype USA* also reveals the way in which media companies see the international fan audience as a lucrative market that can be capitalised on through the co-option of their interests. However, *Newtype-USA* also provides a forum for the latest information, news, events, fan activities, as well as an appreciation of anime’s Japaneseness, within which fans can discover and enjoy many of the things that appeal to them about manga and anime. It can also be a forum within which fans can further ‘identity projects’, drawing upon and contesting the spaces mapped out in the magazine. To understand the transnational opportunities and consequences being fostered within this Western appropriation of manga and anime forms, it is necessary to combine both a political economy perspective (Iwabuchi, 2002c; Miyoshi, 1996) and a cultural approach, as

outlined in this thesis. This combination, as I have shown throughout this thesis, must engage the increasingly hybrid, transnational, and cross-cultural appropriations of manga and anime by globally dispersed fans and cultural industries.

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APPENDICES

Japanese Word List

bishōnen	美少年	Beautiful boy
buriko	ブリッ子	A cute female. (Often used to refer to a girl or woman who behaves in an overtly “cute” way.)
dappi	脱皮	Metamorphosis
gaman	我慢	grit and determination
genki	元気	high spirited
Kawaii	可愛い	cute and innocent
kibidango	黍団子	millet dumplings (in Momotaro story)
Kiyomizudera	清水寺	Kiyomiza temple
Konnano hedemonai	こんなの屁でもない	as ineffectual as a fart
Ladies manga	レディースマンガ	Manga intended for adult female readers
manga kisa	漫画喫茶	A coffee-shop that is also a manga library
Momotaro	桃太郎	<i>Peach Boy</i>
Monbushō	文部省	Japanese Ministry of Education and Culture
Mu-jidai	無時代	timeless
Mu-kokuseki	無国籍	Nationless
Nihonjinron	日本人論	The discourse of “Japanese-ness”
onnagata	女形	Term used to refer to male actors who play female roles

otaku	オタク	Fan, (mania?)
otokoyaku	男役	Term used in to refer to female actors who play male roles
Sakura	桜	cherry blossom
seira fuku	セーラー服	literally “sailor clothes,” the term refers to the school uniforms worn by many girls that resemble a Sailor outfit – such as that depicted in <i>Sailor Moon</i>
Shinnō emaki	神農絵巻	Shinnō scroll. [Edo period (1603-1912)]
Shōjo manga	少女漫画	comics targeted at young female readers
ukiyoe	浮世絵	Literally a picture of the floating world. A genre of woodblock print during the Edo period (1603-1867)
Uragiri	裏切り	“Traitor!”
Yaoi	ヤイ	A post-modern parody style of manga developed by fans that draws upon <i>shōjo</i> and <i>bishōnen</i> elements
Yogorechatta	汚れちゃった	Filthy

Example Interview Transcript

Name: John
Age: 25
Gender: Male
Nationality: Australia
Occupation: Education Student, University of Western Sydney
Location: Swamp Bar, Kingswood, UWS

Craig: What do you do here?

John: At the moment I'm completing a diploma of Education and I'm fairly heavily involved with the student organisation, I'm a councillor for the Postgraduate Association and I'll probably be an executive on that soon.

Craig: That sounds like a highly bureaucratic yet highly informed background. So how do you explain your interest in, what many people would consider to be highly pornographic. Japanese Animation?

John: That's actually a myth. Japanese animation is not always highly pornographic. When you look at the comparison between a pseudo-Christian background to a culture which has developed, generally, outside of the pseudo-Christian world ... if you look at the way you constitute what is sin in Western society it is not always looked upon as the same in other societies. Japanese culture is becoming wide-spread on the grounds that it is an economic power and that plays a major role in affairs.

Craig: So, if we're talking about Japanese animation, we're really talking about two different things. Japanese animation you can get in the store and Japanese animation that exists in Japan. What do you think this difference would be, between what you can get in your local video store to what actually is in Japan?

John: Well, much of what you will get in your video store will be fairly similar to what you will get in Japan. Although, the restriction, the censorship laws that we have are not the same. And this is basically the code of our morals which again relates back to we're a pseudo-Christian society compared to the generally ancestral-worship culture of the Shinto religion of Japan. Japan, in short, is not a Christian society and should not be expected to have the same moralistic view that we have.

Craig: Well, we're talking about rather broad, macro- moral structures. How do you think that actually translates to your average person watching it. Do you think that an average, audience participant in Australia would have a Christian mentality that they'd place on top of Japanese animation?

John: That's a good question. A very good question. What I see there is that we're not actually talking about the individual in this sense. The individual can watch what he likes, I like Japanese manga, that's me, other people like Football and TV, I can't stand it. But the thing is our censorship laws are based around those who govern and those who govern are

generally of an elite who is brought up, so far in our history, to a moral code that has been established along a pseudo-Christian line. Therefore, West means the Government.

Craig: But, certainly there's ways to get around the rather large infrastructures of censorship and bureaucracy?

John: Yes there is. Just to diverge a little, we have, unlike a lot of countries in the world a fairly censorship-free broadcasting avenue in the form of ABC and SBS. When you look at the commercial channels, and this is something I noted, can I mention TV shows?

Craig: Yes

John: I noted watching "The Panel" the other night, that they actually had the reporter from the recently sponsored Channel 10 *mardi-gra* and she admitted that there are things on that which are not suitable for public broadcast. Now, when the ABC did the broadcast there was no editing and no concern of sponsorship. This is the problem of showing manga in Australia. It will disturb the sponsors. Because it is violent, it does have erotic overtones, it can be highly sexual depending on what genre of manga we're talking about. This is not just Manga is cartoon as we know it, manga is a genre as Science Fiction is a genre. It has a multiple layer.

Craig: Do you think that the violent and sexual manga and anime that we get in Australia is only one element of Japanese animation. It seems to me that there is a kind of contradiction happening here that the very thing that is making Japanese animation popular in Australia, its violence and its pornography, is also making it disreputable. Forcing it into a corner where it can be highly awkward to watch sometimes, or people say that's the pornographic stuff.

John: To reply to that, we must look at how do we sell things. To look at how a big name film is made is generally by its popularity. We recently have the greatest grossing film, Titanic, but it is not the most seen film. There's something of a contradiction in those terms. It is generally what will sell best to the masses, to the lowest common denominator. And unfortunately that's what it is, violence, sex and if you make a cartoon it's an oddity, it's bizarre, it's strange, it's not the normal run of the mill for a Western based society. So, it does seem strange to us, even though this form of film and art, I would say, has been around for near on a thousand years of Japanese civilisation. It is not something new but how it is merchandised is undermining it itself.

Craig: Do you think many Japanese if they came to Australia would be amused or impressed at the Japanese animation ...

John: Basically, you would have fans of Japanese manga in Japan, of course, and there would be a greater proportion of them. What they would see probably in Australian theatres, or what Australian theatres tend to show whenever they ... I can only think of the Valhalla that ever shows manga in Sydney itself, and that's what is usually what is the biggest box office in Japan. So, we're not actually seeing the art films of manga, we're not seeing the moral stories of manga, we're not seeing the genre of manga, we're just seeing the box office hits.

Craig: Do you think that that will change? Do you think there's a growing interest in Japanese anime, that we'll start seeing some of the more obscure stuff from Japan?

John: That's a double barrel question. You have the major access to information and the major access to the film themselves basically via the net. The net has opened itself up to all sorts of fantastic ... But outside of that you also have the idea that in the idea of film, manga is still not looked on, within Australia, as a genuine form of film. We still look upon film as being the actor and not the creator and we ignore the story line and the morals and whatever. But, there will always be a cult for it in Australia, shit there's a cult for every sort of film in Australia. Australia's a very eclectic society. I think it will be maybe not a mass form but it will be popular.

Craig: By that do you mean stuff like *Sailor Moon* on kids TV? Is that the mass form that we're talking about?

John: But then again we're talking about genres so we can talk about *Sailor Moon* which is a very tidy, neat, little cute-ish thing and it's entertaining but it's not aimed to an adult market and that's another draw back of the Australian industry in film presentation it doesn't look at manga as an adult market it either looks at it as a cult film or something for children. There is not recognition that this is actually a major film style throughout Asia.

Craig: It looks like they're missing quite a large audience here, if they only started marketing it correctly ...

John: Let's put it into perspective. Kyoto, I think is like 20 million people you could market a Japanese film and do quite well just out of Kyoto. Then you look at Australia and you have to mass market a film, not just a regional advertisement, to get that kind of attraction and you won't even get a tenth of that attendance that you would for Kyoto. It's just a question of demographics.

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APPENDICES

Japanese Word List

bishōnen	美少年	Beautiful boy
buriko	ブリッ子	A cute female. (Often used to refer to a girl or woman who behaves in an overtly “cute” way.)
dappi	脱皮	Metamorphosis
gaman	我慢	grit and determination
genki	元気	high spirited
Kawaii	可愛い	cute and innocent
kibidango	黍団子	millet dumplings (in Momotaro story)
Kiyomizudera	清水寺	Kiyomiza temple
Konnano hedemonai	こんなの屁でもない	as ineffectual as a fart
Ladies manga	レディースマンガ	Manga intended for adult female readers
manga kisa	漫画喫茶	A coffee-shop that is also a manga library
Momotaro	桃太郎	<i>Peach Boy</i>
Monbushō	文部省	Japanese Ministry of Education and Culture
Mu-jidai	無時代	timeless
Mu-kokuseki	無国籍	Nationless
Nihonjinron	日本人論	The discourse of “Japanese-ness”
onnagata	女形	Term used to refer to male actors who play female roles

otaku	オタク	Fan, (mania?)
otokoyaku	男役	Term used in to refer to female actors who play male roles
Sakura	桜	cherry blossom
seira fuku	セーラー服	literally “sailor clothes,” the term refers to the school uniforms worn by many girls that resemble a Sailor outfit – such as that depicted in <i>Sailor Moon</i>
Shinnō emaki	神農絵巻	Shinnō scroll. [Edo period (1603-1912)]
Shōjo manga	少女漫画	comics targeted at young female readers
ukiyoe	浮世絵	Literally a picture of the floating world. A genre of woodblock print during the Edo period (1603-1867)
Uragiri	裏切り	“Traitor!”
Yaoi	ヤイ	A post-modern parody style of manga developed by fans that draws upon <i>shōjo</i> and <i>bishōnen</i> elements
Yogorechatta	汚れちゃった	Filthy

Example Interview Transcript

Name: John
Age: 25
Gender: Male
Nationality: Australia
Occupation: Education Student, University of Western Sydney
Location: Swamp Bar, Kingswood, UWS

Craig: What do you do here?

John: At the moment I'm completing a diploma of Education and I'm fairly heavily involved with the student organisation, I'm a councillor for the Postgraduate Association and I'll probably be an executive on that soon.

Craig: That sounds like a highly bureaucratic yet highly informed background. So how do you explain your interest in, what many people would consider to be highly pornographic. Japanese Animation?

John: That's actually a myth. Japanese animation is not always highly pornographic. When you look at the comparison between a pseudo-Christian background to a culture which has developed, generally, outside of the pseudo-Christian world ... if you look at the way you constitute what is sin in Western society it is not always looked upon as the same in other societies. Japanese culture is becoming wide-spread on the grounds that it is an economic power and that plays a major role in affairs.

Craig: So, if we're talking about Japanese animation, we're really talking about two different things. Japanese animation you can get in the store and Japanese animation that exists in Japan. What do you think this difference would be, between what you can get in your local video store to what actually is in Japan?

John: Well, much of what you will get in your video store will be fairly similar to what you will get in Japan. Although, the restriction, the censorship laws that we have are not the same. And this is basically the code of our morals which again relates back to we're a pseudo-Christian society compared to the generally ancestral-worship culture of the Shinto religion of Japan. Japan, in short, is not a Christian society and should not be expected to have the same moralistic view that we have.

Craig: Well, we're talking about rather broad, macro- moral structures. How do you think that actually translates to your average person watching it. Do you think that an average, audience participant in Australia would have a Christian mentality that they'd place on top of Japanese animation?

John: That's a good question. A very good question. What I see there is that we're not actually talking about the individual in this sense. The individual can watch what he likes, I like Japanese manga, that's me, other people like Football and TV, I can't stand it. But the thing is our censorship laws are based around those who govern and those who govern are

generally of an elite who is brought up, so far in our history, to a moral code that has been established along a pseudo-Christian line. Therefore, West means the Government.

Craig: But, certainly there's ways to get around the rather large infrastructures of censorship and bureaucracy?

John: Yes there is. Just to diverge a little, we have, unlike a lot of countries in the world a fairly censorship-free broadcasting avenue in the form of ABC and SBS. When you look at the commercial channels, and this is something I noted, can I mention TV shows?

Craig: Yes

John: I noted watching "The Panel" the other night, that they actually had the reporter from the recently sponsored Channel 10 *mardi-gra* and she admitted that there are things on that which are not suitable for public broadcast. Now, when the ABC did the broadcast there was no editing and no concern of sponsorship. This is the problem of showing manga in Australia. It will disturb the sponsors. Because it is violent, it does have erotic overtones, it can be highly sexual depending on what genre of manga we're talking about. This is not just Manga is cartoon as we know it, manga is a genre as Science Fiction is a genre. It has a multiple layer.

Craig: Do you think that the violent and sexual manga and anime that we get in Australia is only one element of Japanese animation. It seems to me that there is a kind of contradiction happening here that the very thing that is making Japanese animation popular in Australia, its violence and its pornography, is also making it disreputable. Forcing it into a corner where it can be highly awkward to watch sometimes, or people say that's the pornographic stuff.

John: To reply to that, we must look at how do we sell things. To look at how a big name film is made is generally by its popularity. We recently have the greatest grossing film, Titanic, but it is not the most seen film. There's something of a contradiction in those terms. It is generally what will sell best to the masses, to the lowest common denominator. And unfortunately that's what it is, violence, sex and if you make a cartoon it's an oddity, it's bizarre, it's strange, it's not the normal run of the mill for a Western based society. So, it does seem strange to us, even though this form of film and art, I would say, has been around for near on a thousand years of Japanese civilisation. It is not something new but how it is merchandised is undermining it itself.

Craig: Do you think many Japanese if they came to Australia would be amused or impressed at the Japanese animation ...

John: Basically, you would have fans of Japanese manga in Japan, of course, and there would be a greater proportion of them. What they would see probably in Australian theatres, or what Australian theatres tend to show whenever they ... I can only think of the Valhalla that ever shows manga in Sydney itself, and that's what is usually what is the biggest box office in Japan. So, we're not actually seeing the art films of manga, we're not seeing the moral stories of manga, we're not seeing the genre of manga, we're just seeing the box office hits.

Craig: Do you think that that will change? Do you think there's a growing interest in Japanese anime, that we'll start seeing some of the more obscure stuff from Japan?

John: That's a double barrel question. You have the major access to information and the major access to the film themselves basically via the net. The net has opened itself up to all sorts of fantastic ... But outside of that you also have the idea that in the idea of film, manga is still not looked on, within Australia, as a genuine form of film. We still look upon film as being the actor and not the creator and we ignore the story line and the morals and whatever. But, there will always be a cult for it in Australia, shit there's a cult for every sort of film in Australia. Australia's a very eclectic society. I think it will be maybe not a mass form but it will be popular.

Craig: By that do you mean stuff like *Sailor Moon* on kids TV? Is that the mass form that we're talking about?

John: But then again we're talking about genres so we can talk about *Sailor Moon* which is a very tidy, neat, little cute-ish thing and it's entertaining but it's not aimed to an adult market and that's another draw back of the Australian industry in film presentation it doesn't look at manga as an adult market it either looks at it as a cult film or something for children. There is not recognition that this is actually a major film style throughout Asia.

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