

Mechanized Bodies of Adolescence: Weaponized Children, National Allegory and Japanese Anime

by Amanda Landa

Akira (1988) by writer/director Katsuhiro Otomo, astonished viewers with its grotesque imagery; not only of the main character's bodily transformation, but also by presenting a grim post-WWIII Japan, which has suffered another nuclear attack. Neo-Tokyo is the background as Tetsuo, a mid-teen youth, struggles with the breakdown of his organic body due to morphing with mechanical and inorganic elements; a physical side effect to his newfound psychic abilities that come with terrible destructive power. He is also fundamental in what I will track as the contemporary repetition of mechanized children in Japanese anime. The number of possible examples is too many to discuss exhaustively, so instead I focus on characters, within a dystopian setting, whose existence articulates both a nuclear anxiety of “future or near-future worlds” alongside the physical and psychological pain of adolescence. Drawing out aspects of youth and nationhood, mechanized children, and nuclear anxieties and the body, I argue that the lineage of atomic images in anime is almost completely divorced from its historical context, as produced by those born post-atomic bombings, and can be argued as existing as its own (self-sustaining?) visual genre. All world-war-three-futures feature a post-nuclear apocalypse where mechanized children are trying to negotiate a violent world and an (unnaturally) changing body. Clearly this extends the allegory of adolescent sexuality but I assert that the violent transformation on the site of the child's body—the future of the nation—also expresses a post-war generational anxiety of the ongoing possibility of nuclear fallout as well as more general expressions of insecurity of one's own future. The following anime series and films illustrate a rupture of the structure of the Lacanian Symbolic realm, the body, into one that can transcend into an imaginary. According to Lacan, the Imaginary order is structured by language and still contains a self but functions at a level beyond the physical body. *Akira*, *Saishu Heiki Kanojo (She, the Ultimate Weapon)* (2002), *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex 2nd Gig* (2004), and the series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1997), all signify a larger national consciousness through manipulating, metamorphosing, or mutating the bodies of their main characters, first combining them with mechanical properties then freeing them into a conscious non-bodily existence.

The cultural figure that I term otaku-as-producer is a fundamental component in the creation of this lineage of mechanized children. An otaku is a Japanese term referring to someone who is “abnormally” invested in Japanese fandom subcultures (e.g. manga, anime, video games, and collectible/constructible models). The “otaku as producer” transitions the fan-consumer to aspiring manga and anime artists. Born in 1954, Otomo and many other writers and directors, represent the new generation of anime and manga

artists who set the standard for a post-WWII generation affected by a nuclear imagination, consistently reusing images and tropes of post-WWIII dystopian science fiction in visual representations of future Japan. *Akira* is a landmark text into this manga/anime genre, and furthers the allegory by placing youth protagonists at the center of the narrative. Takashi Murakami's collaborative publishing on his exhibit of the same name, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (2005), is an artistic and theoretical work that examines "otaku" subculture by interweaving various kinds of texts—art, poetry, and essays—by multiple authors. The first section of *Little Boy* is made up of images from the art exhibit, including the repetition of the image of the mushroom cloud. Thomas Lamarre refers to the visual style of directors and illustrators who began as fans—as "Otaku Imaging," as one that is seduced by the imagery of war: "Flattened ballistics contribute to this effect, because with their relative depth and relative movement, they produce the sense of a 'personalizable' world... War becomes as much an occasion for world-generation as world-destruction" (147). The allure of rendering the mushroom cloud, the signifier of a nuclear bomb, is one that consistently manifests over and over again in the works of the "otaku-as-producer." *Akira*'s debut marks the rise of a new generation of anime auteur, those who began as fan or manga artists, and whose works is dominated by images of atomic blasts, "exploded" views, machines and weaponry, and which gain popular and critical acclaim at home and abroad. The complex and disturbing imagery of *Akira* made Otomo an important figure in animation.

Not coincidentally, the otaku-as-producer also tends to place adolescent protagonists at the center of these dystopian narratives. Joel Best writes on the rhetoric around child-victims in the U.S., in his book, *Threatened Children*: "Children can represent both the future and vulnerability....[and]... It seems no accident that this concern emerged in a period when Americans began to have considerable doubts about the future" (172). Famous anime director and fellow otaku-as-producer, Hideaki Anno, states in a recent interview: "Japan lost the war to the Americans. Since that time, the education we received is not one that creates adults...there's no reasonable model of what an adult should look like...I don't see any adults here in Japan... We are a country of children" (Samuels, 5). He points to the tension between his generation—a lost generation—and the older generation that comes before him, the World War II generation. The placement of adolescent characters in these volatile worlds serves to both allegorize anxiety for an unsure future and illustrates the projected vulnerability of the post-war generation.

Akira debuted at a time when Japan was nearing the end of an era of rampant consumerism and production booms in major industries, from automobile manufacturing to electronics and which, most importantly, positioned Japan amongst the world's economic superpowers. The dominant ideology in Japan before and during the Greater East Asian War was one of immense power and solidarity, only to suffer a debilitating fall. Here, at the end of the 1980s, Japan is nearing the end of a time of great affluence,

the Economic Miracle of postwar Japan. By 1988, the economic bubble was on the verge of bursting and the Japanese government was already in talks as to how to prevent a crash, choosing instead to deflate the bloated credit bubble themselves in 1989. This is the economic climate of the film's release, and I would argue that the dystopian decadence in *Akira* comments on a contemporary Japan revealed in its own success without due concern for the future. Japanese anime, while also having many youth-oriented programs, often utilizes complex themes of significant psychological weight. The postwar generation otaku-as-producer places a child at the center of the story to illustrate the sense of infantilization they feel as Japanese adults. None of these titles are geared to children, but rather to young adults. Hence, the adolescent child who moves within these narratives is constructed as an interiority of a post-war generation, whose parents' legacy was to make a defeated Japan prosper, but whose own future is uncertain.

Akira's narrative begins on July 16th, 1988, the same year of its release. As the camera pans a cityscape, the viewer witnesses a flash of light grow and encompass the screen. It is totally silent as the light spreads but, as the viewer anticipates a thunderous noise, the screen silently turns white. Otomo's name appears and then back to the fiery post-boom scene of a bomb engulfing everything in fire. Roland Kelts writes in his book, *Japanamerica* that "an event that decimates entire cities and their population in a single instant . . . is harder to get your head around" (39). Otomo interrupts the trauma even further. He cuts the bomb in half, giving the viewer a moment to recognize what's happened. By now, the apocalyptic image has entered Japan's cultural consciousness, and by whiting out the screen, Otomo is bringing his contemporary and possibly global audience into the same moment. This is a deliberate move, as an attempt to process the moment of trauma, the moment of the bomb dropping—instead of bewilderment that Kelts discusses—Otomo is, in effect, waiting until everyone is able to process what they're seeing.

The consistency of depictions of post-nuclear futures rings true throughout many other kinds of Japanese texts, from the *Godzilla* film series to beloved Studio Ghibli film *My Neighbor Totoro*. Robert Jay Lifton writes about the change in world-consciousness after the use of nuclear weapons in his work *Indefensible Weapons: The Political and Psychological Case against Nuclearism*. He writes:

We have been talking about the most vicious of vicious circles--that of nuclear entrapment. By impairing our imagination of the future, the bomb enters into all crevices of our existence. And at every point they diminish us, thereby making it still more difficult for us to confront the extraordinary threat that they pose. . . . Moreover, the bomb-induced futurelessness becomes a psychological breeding ground for further nuclear illusion, which in turn perpetuates and expands current arrangements, including bomb-induced futurelessness and so on. We sense that the cycle cannot continue indefinitely. Either we will do something to

interrupt it, or we are likely to exterminate ourselves. For *everything* is at stake. (80)

The threat of nuclear fallout has seeped into Japanese national consciousness even more so than in other nations. Recently there are growing numbers of protests about the use of nuclear power in Japan after the 3/11 tragedy and the concerns around Fukushima. Indeed, many anxieties about radiation-affected food are often chronicled in ingredient catalogues, typically marketed to young mothers who worry about what to feed their children, and in local radiation-testing stations started by civic minded farmers and consumers (Bestor). Even before the 3/11 disaster, many anime texts exhibited this nuclear imagination, not as a safe source of power but as a constant threat to the future. Many manga and anime artists have openly tackled the feelings and responses to the possibility of another psychic wound; have used their visual mediums to literally illustrate possible future nuclear disasters. Just as *Akira's* main title covers a huge crater in blood red letters, many anime artists and writers are attempting to narrativise and write over national historical trauma. The former ideology of an invincible nation has been lost, and the next step is to attempt to rise above the psychic wounds within the body politic in order to anticipate another possible traumatic event; because to anticipate it is to therefore conquer trauma itself. Just as Lifton writes, the projected future will always touch again on the illusory threat of another atomic bomb and the psychological breadth of many characters within anime are drawn to represent a collective Japanese identity. The metamorphosis of the body represents the power and malleability of the national psyche, fulfilling the hope that one can transcend a scarred past in order to enter into a new kind of future.

Akira follows a group of motorcycle gang members (*boso-zoku*) who live a violent existence, warring with other gangs and racing across the immense highways of Neo-Tokyo. Kaneda, the group's leader, is protective of his smaller and weaker childhood friend, Tetsuo. Tetsuo resents his low status within the group and throws childish tantrums as he clearly resents and envies his more charismatic friend. During a biker fight Tetsuo comes into contact with a psychic child, causing Tetsuo to become the next in line for experiments in telekinetic powers. There are three psychic children who, like the titular *Akira*, have undergone medical and scientific experiments to develop and control their psychic powers for military and governmental uses. Along with psychic abilities such as flying and immense strength, Tetsuo believes he is impervious to harm. He enjoys his newfound strength and acts out in increasingly violent ways. As his power becomes more and more unwieldy, he not only becomes a threat to himself but to the nation.

Tetsuo makes his last stand in the Tokyo Olympiad, a giant empty stadium, an arena built as a monument to Japan's international status. He demands to meet *Akira*, though Tetsuo only knows *Akira* as a pure force of energy that rings in his mind with increasing frequency. The character known as the Colonel tells him that after *Akira's* display of immense telekinetic power during the third World War, the child psychic was

dissected in order for medical examiners to understand his abilities. Tetsuo is devastated. He had hoped to meet Akira as a living boy, as he represents the possibility of a kindred soul in a manipulative world. Akira could have been a possible ally in psychic transformation, another disenfranchised child who was also oppressed; instead he is faced with Akira's dismembered body preserved in jars. The dissected body threatens Tetsuo at a symbolic level, foreshadowing his own fate if he is caught or subdued by the government. Throughout the film, Tetsuo seeks acceptance from those around him, only to feel misunderstood and abused. Adults offer no safety as they are predominantly limited to the Colonel and an old scientist, who collaborate in the experimentation on children. Similarly, the other three test subjects have an otherworldly appearance that frightens Tetsuo. They have the voices and bodies of children but the wrinkled and aged skin of the elderly. They are completely paralyzed in a childish mindset, and the Colonel protects them as children. Here is the manifestation of Anno's quotation, a nation of children, infantilized by the military-industrial complex. Feeling abandoned by his friends and persecuted by the government, Tetsuo had hoped for answers from Akira—only to find that Akira has already suffered a tragic defeat at the hands of the same powers that seek to subdue him.

At the Tokyo Olympiad, Tetsuo reverts to a childish adolescent who cannot control his anger. He wants to be an almighty ruler of Japan and he exploits his new powers to bully those that have bullied him. He loses his arm in a sneak attack by a government satellite. This is significant because it represents the attempt to castrate him, a symbolic injury meant to decrease his power and threat. The ability to get hurt causes a psychic wound in Tetsuo. Like a young child the pain frightens him. However, once he realizes that he can reconstruct a new arm out of metals and other materials in the abandoned Tokyo Olympiad he feels empowered again. (Figure 1) This marks the moment of Tetsuo's transformation from organic body to mechanical properties, but also of his downfall and bodily deterioration. Once Tetsuo takes mechanical and inorganic properties into his body, his abilities surpass his control and he begins to grow grotesquely out of proportion. His arms, first fully mechanical, begins to grow flesh and veins, intermixing with metal. As he sits on a concrete throne his arm begins wrapping itself into it, the strands of metal and vein looking like the fine wires of electronics. His friend Kaori and the Colonel try to help him but he knows that want to control/stop him. He resists as he doesn't want to give up his newfound powers. As his arm becomes grotesquely long, expanding far beyond his anatomical reach, pieces of metal and wire intertwined with skin and blood reach out to attack the Colonel. (Figure 2)

Kaneda appears, pleading to his friend to submit. Tetsuo feels betrayed and his emotional turmoil expedites his already changing body. In agony, he transforms into a giant fleshy baby, oozing body parts. His voice is distorted and he cries to Kaneda that he cannot control his body. The distinctively feminine imagery of birth strikes fear in the onlookers, undermining the masculine power that has dominated the film so far. Tetsuo's

frightful metamorphosis is an unbound excess and also represents an emotional regression, pointing to his powerlessness in this dark apocalyptic world with powers that are foreign to him. He is overwhelmed with fear because the excess represents a symbolic disintegration of his identity.

Tetsuo's story can also be viewed from the facet of national allegory. During the 1980's, Japan was experiencing a spike in the economy, especially in the fields of electronics and automobiles. Japan's amazing post-war economic recovery was made a model for other nations, and with assistance from the U.S., they became a major economic threat to other larger and longer developed Western nations. Japan has been oft-likened to an adolescent, a period which also represents physical change and deep-seated emotions. Again Napier writes:

While Tetsuo's marginal status in *Akira* may at first seem far from the conventional view of Japan as a largely homogenous nation, his character actually evokes a less obvious but deeply significant side of Japanese national self-representation, that of the lonely outcast. *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. (Napier 40)

Tetsuo's desire for strength is symptomatic of his desire to overcome his newbie status in his biker gang, but also to conquer the fear and loneliness he's felt since his early childhood. Japan, post WWII, suffered the same castrating loss of power by the U.S. imposition of democracy and the de-militarization of the country. 1980s Japan had reclaimed a realm of economic power. The burst of the bubble economy in 1989 and the subsequent onset of an economic recession to be termed "The Lost Years," are anticipated by these dystopian narratives. *Akira* likens Tetsuo's bodily metamorphosis and eventual self-destruction to the rupture of Japan's economic inflation. In fact, the unbound excess of Tetsuo's physical growth, alongside the mechanical pieces and multi-colored wiring can be read as an allegory of the bloated success of the Japanese electronics industry; a cautionary tale for those who desire too much power but cannot control it. Carolyn Steedman writes about "the child" and childhood as a site of adult interiority. Although she is addressing a specific moment in Western modernity, I argue that it can be useful within these visibly postmodern texts. She states:

If one believes that societies are analogous to linguistic systems, or are structured in the way that languages are structured, then there is no place for human bodies except as signs, endowed with meanings by the larger structure... and that those countless acts of recognition and embodiment [of the child are] ... the act of [societies] making children's bodies the living emblems of their self and its history. (170)

The otaku-as-producer centers their narratives around a child as a sign and further the

meanings written upon their bodies by emphasizing the *transformation* of the child's body as an symbol of a generational anxiety of vulnerability. Thus, what is even more interesting is that these films and series end in bodilessness. Here, in *Akira*, the final scene is both climactic and ambiguous, as Tetsuo is released from his physically tortured body, but still remains a conscious entity. This is a persistent trend in anime, but what are the implications? Is becoming a consciousness without a body the only way to survive the rupture of the self? In Freudian psychoanalysis, the adolescent must successfully negotiate the oedipal complex in order to emerge as a psycho-sexually mature adult. As Steedman argues, post-structuralist thought, which also coincides with Lacanian psychoanalysis, structures society at the linguistic level and the body of the child is imbued with societal anxieties/hopes/meanings. However, here, Tetsuo does not enter society corporeally, but instead is sacrificed to live an existence of "no-body"; no sexual maturity, no adulthood, no society. Therefore the vulnerability of the body-in-transformation is eventually overcome with resistance—the forsaking of the body—and transcendence of a consciousness without a body, successfully evading fear, control, and death.

The government sees Tetsuo as an asset to party politics and war, while Tetsuo is searching for respite from a life that, up until now, has been full of violence and humiliation. This film clearly criticizes both desires, ending with the sublimation of Tetsuo into a "new universe" of Akira's energy, and although there is massive destruction of Neo-Tokyo, the sun comes out and several of the main characters survive. Kaneda and Kei have emerged unscathed and they and another biker gang member ride down the highway, celebrating life. Kei asks Kaneda what has happened to Tetsuo, and Kaneda answers, "He's gone. But he might be back." Tetsuo's fate is ambiguous, but as the film cuts to a series of flashing lights, the viewer is reminded of a scene near the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), another science fiction epic with themes of rebirth and psychic evolution. After a few moments of abstract lights, the words "I am Tetsuo" echo through. Images of bricks are shown hurtling through the center of the void, toward the viewer. The film ends here, hinting at a material world, either being escaped to or being developed, but either way, it is a place where the audience cannot follow. Tetsuo cannot have entered the Lacanian realm of the real because of his identity is still centralized on his use of language. He has transcended the body and has also emerged on the other end of a nuclear-type event with an intact consciousness. It is an ending that shows the anxiety of a nation that knows that they're nearing the end of an economic boom, echoing the affluence before WWII, which ended with a traumatic event. Napier writes, "Tetsuo's monstrousness 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" [sic] (40). Here, in 1988, the narrative of *Akira* is attempting to conceive of a survival-through-transcendence, a

national anxiety that is looking for a solution for a future (unforeseen) catastrophe. Tetsuo began as organic, merged with mechanic, and emerged as bodiless consciousness. The ending is strangely optimistic, and can be read as a wish-fulfillment of a possible future that is safe from harm. Without a body to rupture then the fears of nuclear fallout or massive economic recession could be elided. A fantasy best illustrated through these kinds of animated texts.

Another important series that involves the transformation of the body is *Saishu Heiki Kanojo* (*She, The Ultimate Weapon, Saikano* for short). In *Saikano*, the world is entering a new world war and Shuji, a normal high school student, has a girlfriend, Chise, who has volunteered to help a medical army experiment where she literally becomes a weapon, a bomb that annihilates everything. She is called the "Angel of Death" and is called in when a battle becomes unwinnable. She destroys civilians, friends, and enemies alike. This series is reminiscent of *Akira*. Chise is also a weaponized adolescent who eventually transcends the body, but a key difference is that the body that is changing is female and decidedly feminine. The series follows Shuji and Chise and their friends through wartime and ends post-WWIII. *Saikano's* work on the body manifests at two levels: First, at an individual level of Chise's body. Chise is an adolescent girl, with a boyfriend who she loves. Her sexual and pubescent awakening parallels the weapon technology growing inside of her. Second at a level of historical trauma as Chise's bomb-infected female gendered body can be written onto the experience of the female *hibakusha* after the atomic bombs.

The escalation of her physical and emotional relationship with Shuji parallels her development as a weapon. In one important scene early in the series, they attempt to escape the government and when they think they are safe they begin to make love in the grass. As Shuji undoes her shirt he is horrified to see the core of her machinery, a metallic heart that is spreading spider-like over her chest. (Figure 3) Her labored breathing indicates both her sexual excitement and the shame of the grotesque morphing of her body, likening her sexuality to a lethal time bomb. Chise had decided to undergo medical experimentation in order to "become stronger", (her words)—a quality that she finds she lacks and wants in order to be a better girlfriend and person—but in actuality she is unable to control the "weapon" part of her. Even though they have decided to run away together, she realizes that she, as a weapon, must kill.

Thomas Lamarre discusses the gendered aspects of female cyborgs and "gynoids" in his book, *The Anime Machine*. Most interested in the mechanical process of animation at the level of the planar and cel animation, he does touch on some cultural contexts as well. Working through Donna Haraway, Lamarre says the series *Saikano* empowers the female cyborg with "'mecha-ification' of the woman rather than the 'gynefication' or shojo-ification of mecha." (218). Thus, since Chise began as a human who has taken on mechanic bodily properties, she should thus have the power to invert gender hierarchies that oppress her base biological properties. However, it can also be argued that Chise

embodies the *shojo*-ification as well. *Shojo* is a term used for a young girl in-between childhood and adulthood, a term that can also imply sexual purity on the verge of sexual awakening. Chise is, in every way, a cute Japanese schoolgirl, and certain fetishization follows: her school uniform, small stature, blushing cheeks and cutely placed band-aids are all clearly intended for the gaze of a male audience. Chise's transformation into a weapon is seen at the end of the first episode. She stands in rubble with a tattered school uniform, metal wasp-like wings coming out her back, with a right arm that is now a giant gun. (Figure 4) At the beginning of the series, Chise is clearly an adorable *shojo*, from her shy affection towards her boyfriend to the depiction of her transformation. Her weaponized status empowers her social and physical status, supplementing her gendered inequities, but because her romantic and sexual journey are also integral to the narrative of a girl-becoming-woman, as well as girl-becoming-machine, then *shojo*-ifying does not distract from her empowerment, but instead humanizes the machine.

Chise and Shuji, separated by war, embark on sexual and emotional journeys with other people. At the end of the series, Japan loses the war and the reunited young lovers decide to marry. Chise wants to have a child but cannot because of her weaponized body. It is revealed that Chise's transformation can be temporarily maintained with special medication, but that medication is limited in a war-torn Japan with depleted resources. The number of capsules equates the number of days that Chise has left to live as a partially human girl. She is able to finish off her last days married to Shuji but in extreme physical pain. After the atomic bombs were dropped in 1945, young people of marriageable age in the vicinities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki not only had to worry about physical repercussions but were further affected by social stigmas as well. Those who were near the sites were called *hibakusha*, meaning "explosion-infected people." *Hibakusha* were ostracized and many young people underwent social and medical scrutiny before being allowed to enter into marriage. Those who were "infected" were not allowed to marry those who were not since the effects of the bombs were still unknown and could potentially be passed on to unborn children. Masuji Ibuse's major groundbreaking "documentary novel," *Black Rain*, chronicles the trials a man goes through to convince another family that his niece is not infected and therefore marriageable. Eventually his niece, Yasuko, who was caught in the black rain after the bombing, begins showing signs of radiation sickness. Even though Chise and Shuji are married, they are unable to have children because of the severity of Chise's illness and the unknown effects of her transformation. This reading is predicated on the gender of the body-transformed, and is especially relevant due to the desire, and inability, to bear children.

The end of the series is a seemingly inevitable apocalypse. The medication wears out and Chise is reduced to a massive and repulsive weapon, with barely a sense of self left. Shuji calls to her and searches for her, but he comes to find that Japan is the only part of the physical world left—Chise has destroyed everything. As he awaits his fate he

encounters a consciousness speaking to him; it is Chise and she wants to save him. The end of the series is the dissolution not only of Chise's body, but that of the entire world, but their consciousnesses remain. As her body crumbles away, Shuji is left alone in a completely devastated world of white. Chise's body has been destroyed but her consciousness lives on inside Shuji, and his memories of her help her to reconstruct a body inside Shuji's mind. Chise has finally transcended her pained body, evolving from a sexually innocent shojo, to a mechanized weapon, to adult woman/weapon, to a bodiless existence of pure love.

This continues the theme of bodilessness as previously discussed in *Akira*. Both of these series involve adolescents and war machinery that stunt their sexual and psychological maturity by devastating violence and trauma. In both *Akira* and *Saikano*, the horrors of war inhibit the maturation of the adolescents who have witnessed destruction and are racked with guilt for their participation in it. The lack of physical property is not the end of the self, but in fact the only manner of escape. Chise and Tetsuo's bodies, originally normal adolescents, eventually come to represent desire for a sense of control over their own lives. Ultimately the protagonists seeing their compliance in the monstrous nature of war and violence, transcend to a better place, taking their powers with them so as they cannot be used against anyone anymore. Lamarre argues that disconnection of soul and body is inherent to the practice of animation. He writes, "The production of an autonomous time-image nonetheless remains one of the dreams of animation—a brain or soul or consciousness that is somehow free of the body or flesh, and there is a long line of efforts to think in animation the disembodied mind—a ghost that can move from shell to shell" (200). Lamarre uses the Deleuzian term "time-image" to refer to cinema that tends to have protagonists driven by interiority more so than action: "reflection, recollection, memory, and other emotional and affective tendencies" (199). Without doubt, these anime series have extraordinary action sequences, but their main characters are motivated by their emotional complexity and reflexivity.

In this next section of the paper I will discuss one particular episode from the television series original animation, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex 2nd Gig*. The world of *Ghost in the Shell* is also post -WWIII, just like *Akira* and *Saikano*, and follows a group of specialists in elite government entity Section Nine, an anti-terrorism group in an advanced information age where ninety percent of the Japanese population has augmented their bodies with prosthetics or cyberbrains. Their major cases deal with terrorism and they often fight corrupt officials, not only in the foreign superpowers "Russia-America," "The American Empire," and "The European Union", but also in Japan. Japan is the only country that maintains national independence, and yet still refers to their military forces as the "Self-defense Army," a term which harkens to post-WWII Japan. After the end of the Second World War, Japan was occupied by the United States, shifting a previously severely antagonistic and racist wartime relationship, from both parties, to one of forced cooperation and co-existence. One of the major changes that the

U.S. imposed on the Japanese nation was to dismantle the Emperor system, instill democracy and disband their military. *Ghost in the Shell*, although a futuristic projection of Japan in a highly advanced information age, consistently touches on political contexts and events leading up to and during the Second World War.

Mamoru Oshii wrote the manga (1989-1991) and directed the feature length film *Ghost in the Shell* (1997), but two original-animation television series were written and directed by Kenji Kamiyama for animation studio, Production I.G. These television series chronologically take place before the events of the 1997 film. At the end of *Ghost in the Shell*, Major Kusanagi has chosen to merge with an online consciousness known as the “Puppet Master” (Puppeteer in later renditions). Therefore, the television series emphasizes Kusanagi’s relationship to her physical body, and leads up to why she will eventually decide to abandon it. At the end of the first *Stand Alone Complex* series, Section Nine is under attack for uncovering an intricate political plot involving the DEA. They are forced into hiding and Batou notices that the Major isn't wearing a watch that he's never seen her without. When asked, she tells him this day of all days she forgot it at home. There is a sentimental attachment to the watch, a pension gift from her police career. It is revealed that this object ties her to a sense of self and the past, but is also a cause for her to be continuously replacing her cybernetic body with the same female model, in order for the watch to always fit. At the level of prosthetics that she is at, gender is a superficial identity, and being sexually equipped is simply an option. Her desire to maintain the same body, to fit the watch, to tie her to a past, is the only factor that can keep her connected to a symbolic order, to a corporeal space.

Kusanagi’s prosthetic body is of an adult female, but her emotional growth often comes into question. She is an exceptional character in that she is highly philosophical and deeply psychological when attempting to understand her own existence but, as Philip Brophy writes, “beneath her surface is a consciousness of emptiness, frozen still yet emotionally restless” (106). The first series tells the viewer that Kusanagi was in a near lethal accident and her brain was switched to a full cyborg body. The second series devotes an entire episode to showing Kusanagi, as a child, learning to use her first full prosthetic body. The second season story arc follows Section 9’s investigation into a terrorist organization called the Individual Eleven, who are fighting for refugee rights in Japan. The fictional organization takes their name from the real May 15 Incident of 1932, where a group of naval officers assassinated Prime Minister Tsuyoshi in an attempted coup d’état. Because of popular support from Japanese citizens, the eleven officers were given extremely light sentences. It is understood that this marks a time of an upswing in military force in Japan—an ideological imperative leading up to the Greater East Asian War and eventually, World War II.

The eventual leader of this terrorist group is a man named Kuze, a person from Kusanagi’s past. In episode eleven, “Affection: Kusanagi’s Labyrinth,” she and her crew, Batou and Togusa, are training new Section Nine recruits. The assignment is to track the

major as she travels around Tokyo for a day. Unknown even to her, she enters into a “hack” where she goes off the grid. In a deserted alleyway, she is faced with a storefront that says, “Memory Shop.” She enters and an elderly woman explains that she stores external memories for people. On the second floor, Kusanagi discovers a pair of adolescent cyborg bodies, seated in an early 20th century car. (Figure 5) The children are from the “early days of full prosthetic bodies,” though we are not given an actual date. The shopkeeper continues to say that she is closing early and asks Kusanagi to come back the next day.

Even before encountering the “Memory Shop,” this episode begins by repeating the need for external tangible objects to situate one’s identity. There are three separate occasions in which Kusanagi looks at her watch—the same one from the previous season. At the introduction of Batou and Togusa, Batou is drinking a beer early in the morning, to which Togusa remarks that it must be nice for a cyborg body to immediately equalize alcohol so as to not get drunk. The shopkeeper also explains that the objects she keeps for their owner contain a “psychic imprint” and that sometimes she feels suffocated being surrounded by them. As Kusanagi leaves the shop and exits the “hack,” she realizes that the odd feeling she had in the shop was nostalgia. The next day, the shopkeeper’s voice narrates over images from the children’s past. She explains that the boy, now a grown man, had preserved the bodies. When he was six, the boy had been terrible plane crash. He was left completely paralyzed except for his left hand. The only other survivor was a little girl who was in a coma. The girl’s condition worsens and the doctors rush her out. For the next two years the boy lives in complete solitude, never speaking, endlessly folding paper cranes with his left hand for the little girl he believes has died. The doctors try to convince him to try a new medical breakthrough, a fully prosthetic body, but he isn’t interested. The doctors then bring a little girl who, through extensive rehabilitation, successfully uses a fully prosthetic body, hoping she can befriend the boy and to help convince him to transfer to a new body. (Figure 6) The boy asks if she can fold paper cranes, and although she tries persistently, the fine motions are too difficult for her early model prosthetics.

At the end the girl runs away from the hospital, saying that she’ll never stop trying to fold paper cranes and when she does, she’ll do it for him. The boy realizes that she is the same little girl who was in a coma and immediately decides to try a fully prosthetic body. The shopkeeper explains that he looked for the girl but couldn’t find her, instead finding her outdated child’s body in a laboratory at college. Kusanagi asks where the boy is now and the shopkeeper answers that in the “closing days of the war, he was shipped out overseas and never returned.” Kusanagi unwraps a sugar cube as she listens to the story. Standing up to leave she says, “I bet that even now, the girl is still searching for the first boy she ever loved,” and places a miniature paper crane on the dash of the car. (Figure 7) She has folded the crane with her left hand; the same side which bears her precious watch. The boy and girl of the story are Kuze and Kusanagi, but the inexact

timeline, the 20th century automobile, and the vague references to the “war overseas,” easily situate this scenario onto the end of World War II.

Mark Anderson’s article, “The Child Victim as Witness to the Holocaust,” stresses the image of the child-victim in the memorialization of the Holocaust, through literary works *The Diary of Ann Frank* and *Night*, Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* and the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. He writes, “For many Americans with little knowledge of European history...the figure of the persecuted child turns the Holocaust into a moving and accessible story with religious and mythic associations” (3). The same can be argued for child-victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Internationally circulated non-fiction book, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, is a clear inspiration for this episode. Sadako, a young Japanese girl growing up in Hiroshima begins to exhibit symptoms of radiation sickness from the nuclear fallout after the atomic bombing. Her friend tells her that if she can fold one thousand paper cranes then she can get one wish. Sadako wishes to live, and while in the hospital folds endlessly from any scrap of paper she can find. When she dies she has folded 644 cranes, but her friends and schoolmates fold the rest for her. There is a memorial statue of Sadako in Hiroshima Peace Park where people still leave paper cranes to this day. (Coerr). Sadako’s radiation infected body is paralleled with the paralyzed and dying bodies of the boy and girl of Kusanagi’s past. Each child wants to fold one thousand paper cranes to save the other, but in the end, their connection gets lost. The child is the innocent witness to the tragedies of war, the ultimate victim. Kusanagi’s nostalgia is also a national nostalgia. In the shop we see still images of pictures of 20th century planes in frames, record players, and video cassettes, delineating that these are not recent memories but memories of a deep past. (Figure 8) This is not historical realism, this is nostalgia wrenched to the highest emotional degree. Kusanagi, as fictional character—and thus fictional child—is a false nostalgia, one that writes a national allegory utilizing “real” nostalgia. Though at the end Kusanagi is not a child per se, she is a personification of the empty vessel over which history is written, as Steedman discusses earlier. As owners of full prosthetic bodies Kusanagi and Kuze could virtually live on forever, constantly updating their bodies for new versions, but in the same sense they could also forever be the children that sit in the antiquated shop (much like the statue of Sadako), their emotional growth ending with the end of their physical bodies. (Figure 9)

The television series narrative ends with its preceding film, *Ghost in the Shell*, where Kusanagi joins in a “marriage” with the Puppet Master, a powerful entity that lives on the net. She abandons her body in order to exist an immortal-like existence. Her choice takes her beyond politics and Section Nine, allowing her a Big Brother-like power that can watch and orchestrate instead of being hindered by the physical world. Not only does Section 9 represent a faction that can uncover top secret government cases, but their cyberized bodies also give them an advantage to transcend into another bodiless existence, one that can still communicate through the internet but cannot be tracked or traced. This

next level of consciousness is not possible, however, without a "Ghost", because otherwise it is simply a computer program and is subject to others' control. Again Brophy writes about how Kusanagi's philosophical musings indicate how she takes "her place in the great lineage of Japanese robots and cyborgs [that] starts to ponder her own existence. Again, this is Japan pondering its own existence--its role in the world and in shaping its own homeland" (106). This narrative has common ground with those of *Akira* and *Saikano*. There has to be a way to transcend violence and corruption, but it isn't a peaceful death, it is the continuance of a knowing consciousness, and a fully formed identity.

In "Affection" Kusanagi rediscovers her memories of the first boy she ever loved. Throughout the television series she mentions that her prosthetic body is "sexually equipped" though we never see her engage in any sexual activity. This episode enables the viewer to see pre-sexual-body Kusanagi, or "shojo-ifies" her cyborg body. After reuniting with Kuze—in a religiously fraught moment where they are trapped under rubble and she offers him an apple, signifying the first and last man and woman on Earth—she tries to protect him from an assassination plot and fails. The series ends with her choice to leave Section Nine. The translation of her "merger" with the Puppet Master insists that it is a "marriage," but moves beyond the romantic love of her childhood or sexual capabilities of adulthood. Again, a bodiless consciousness is the only way for true autonomy and freedom from repressive systems of society or sexuality.

The last series to be discussed does not have mechanized bodies, but connects to the others by representing bodilessness with conscious existence through language. Highly popular and critically acclaimed *Neon Genesis Evangelion* calls attention to the experimental construction of anime narratives, what Lamarre calls "anime-ic." As opposed to "cinematic," "anime-ic" encompasses abilities that are innate to anime as a medium. Fellow anime scholar Napier writes: The very "imaginary" quality of animation allows it to explore . . . issues in different and perhaps far more creative forms than would be possible in live-action cinema . . . [and] that as an art form it presents 'the seductive view of the self as fantasy, able to be shaped and reshaped, defined and redefined at our will'" (Napier 35). I place *Neon Genesis* at the end of this article to illustrate a further evolution of the representation of the child's body at the anime-c level. Anno's groundbreaking series ends ambiguously and experiments with narrative text by utilizing animation techniques that further break down image indexicality with question of identity and consciousness.

In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, main character Shinji is brought to yet another Neo-Tokyo, Tokyo-3, in 2015—15 years after a worldwide catastrophe has killed "half the world's population." The world is afflicted by a series of "Mecha," called "Angels" in the English translation, but more similar to "Apostle" in the Japanese (Napier). Instead of Shinji's physical body transforming like Tetsuo's, he must enter a giant mechanized fighter in order to protect the remaining population of Neo-Tokyo. The connection

between this and the other series are that they involve "Mecha": robotic armor or body parts as a source of empowerment, and the use of adolescents complicit in war.

In *Evangelion*, Shinji enters into a giant battle robot where he is submerged in amniotic-like fluid. This theoretical "return to the womb" is important because the capsule inside the EVA is a safe space protected within a very dangerous entity. Even the name "Eva" implies Eve, the first mother. Like Lamarre's shojo-ification of the mecha, this is a shojo-ification of the boy-pilot. Mecha are giant mechanical apparatuses and weapons, typically piloted by young boy-heroes. In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, he is the only male pilot and the weakest of the three. *Evangelion* is a complex text, especially in regards to gender and psychology. Shinji's mother is deceased and his father has abandoned his only son. The "Mecha" or "Eva" cradles Shinji and protects him from outer threats, representing the phallic mother. In his first battle the Eva takes over after Shinji faints and uses a large piece of metal as a giant knife, stabbing the first "Angel" to death. This is a primal scene, one that is likened to a mother protecting her child and strays from the usual depictions of sophisticated weaponry in "mecha" anime.

Tokyo-3 is severely damaged by the traumatic appearances of the Angels, as everyone around him dies and/or transcends into a larger new unknown consciousness. Shinji's insurmountable feeling of abandonment and stasis leads him to attempt to escape from his own being-ness, to suture up any emotions or desire. Instead he must break out of the symbolic structure of family and society and decide for himself what his reality is and can be. Shinji's metamorphosis from organic to mechanic differs from the other texts in that his movement manifests as the level of animation itself. The body remains intact, but the physical relationship between Shinji and his Eva lead to deep psychological rifts, ones that cause the entirety of his reality to come into question. Anno experiments with the drawn image to depict Shinji's interior struggles as "a series of questions flashed across the screen...Continually being asked the question 'What am I?' Shinji finally sees himself as utterly alone in a blank white world, a lonely cartoon figure floating in a perimeterless space. (Napier 100-101). (Figure 10) Shinji and his Eva have the physical power to overcome the Angels, but Shinji is so emotionally stalled that the end of the series is highly ambiguous, as it is unclear whether the world has been destroyed or saved. However, the ultimate message of the series is to animate the inner world of Shinji, illustrating how his consciousness lives even if he does not use his body to act. The sparse imagery and bursts of crude animation "gives us an exploded view of [Shinji's] psyche" (Lamarre, 182). Ultimately, Shinji's body becomes divorced from his mind, and he is seen floating alone in a "blank white world," which in animation terms means a background-less cel animation pane or perhaps a blank sheet of paper. The absence of layered animation cels furthers to symbolize the stripping away of the body to expose the machinations of the creation (animation) of the self.

Again, Brophy writes: "It's obviously post-apocalyptic. It's noticeably post-human. And it's possibly 'post-anime'" (160) His use of the term post-anime calls to the

experimental visuals Anno interlaces into standard animation techniques as a to connote a break from Shinji's exterior and interior worlds, fragmenting the image to express inner turmoil. I argue that the separation of body and conscious self, depicted as the negotiation of identity through language, is innate to the medium of animation due to the industrial standard of voice acting over illustrated/rendered bodies. Japanese anime's aesthetic lineage is not as compelled to the same indexical realism as other national animations, and are often created on a budget that dictates fewer frames per second, contributing to the perception of limited animation as jerky or jumpy. Therefore, the role of the *seiyuu* (voice actor) is crucial in humanizing the animated body. Combined with transcendent psychological themes and the spectacular imagery of morphing bodies, one can argue that anime has always sought to define the place of identity between body and voice.

I liken the conclusion of *Neon Genesis* to dream-work, as the narrative structure and fractured visual representation shows a world of shape and language, but without cohesion at the symbolic level. Shinji's ultimate desire is to exist as a self divorced from traumatic ties, which is to separate himself from an external body. The original ending to the television series shows Shinji existing within himself, alone, as everyone else struggles with the meaning of life as their souls are joined into one supreme consciousness. In the final episode, Shinji creates a new world to exist within. In a scene that resembles a typical anime comedy series, Shinji is congratulated and welcomed by the revived cast of characters. Again, the child is shown as leaving his body and choosing to exist within a self-world where he can finally be free from war and violence. Like *Saikano*, the television series' finale has the youth protagonists sacrificing the world to exist in a realm of wish fulfillment. However, Anno wasn't satisfied with this ending, and supplemented it with two 45-minute alternate "episodes" titled *The End of Evangelion* (1997) as a more detailed account of what happens in outside of Shinji's mind. The writing and re-writing of the series' ending adds to Anno's experimental narrative and textual strategies, and situates the world of *Evangelion* as an open discourse with varied ideological interpretations.

Many directors and animators emerging in the late eighties and nineties strove to resuscitate the anime industry by pushing the boundaries of animation but also by developing narratives with deeply personal and radical politics. Roland Kelts, in an interview with the artist Takashi Murakami, relays Murakami's theories on Japanese manga and anime artists:

The dropping of the atomic bombs created a trauma in Japanese culture for which there was no precedent in world history . . . Established artists . . . largely chose not to address their society's post-traumatic stress disorder . . . only manga and anime artists and their otaku brethren could do so, and they did. They were working on a lower cultural frequency . . . and so they were free to express what they (and others) actually felt. They were not only free to do so, they were expected to. (26).

Animation, and especially anime, excels in teasing out existential themes such as these because of the “lower cultural frequency” which is to say, the low cultural capital of animation as a medium and the marginalization of anime subcultures as deviant. The otaku-as-producer’s choice to situate both personal and larger national tensions onto the site of the child’s body is commonly seen over many different time periods and national contexts. However anime, as a medium, expresses the unique in-between-ness of human and machine—voice acting and drawn/rendered animation—chooses to use the platform to complicate questions of identity. Furthermore, animating the body already challenges the fixity of identity on corporeality, and anime pushes the boundaries of bodily transformation as an expression of psychological distress in groundbreaking and innovative ways. The drive towards metamorphosis, from organic to mechanic and finally to bodiless, does not signify a death drive, but the fantasy of a world where one can physically reshape oneself. Either out of fear, anxiety, or desire for strength and power, the ever-evolving bodies of anime heroes and anti-heroes offers a unique pleasure for creators and consumers alike.

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