Entering ever-expanding worlds: Constructions of place and time in contemporary Japanese children's cinema

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Abstract

This thesis explores the constructions of place in contemporary Japanese children's cinema. Based on a wide survey of Japanese children's media, I focus on an in-depth examination of three case-study films released in 2008 and 2009: *Eiga Fresh Purikyua!: Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!?*, *Gake no Ue no Ponyo*, and *Eiga Doraemon: Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden.* The 'media mix' marketing strategy that characterises much of contemporary Japanese children's media results in endlessly expansive works; their inherent multiplicity cannot be ignored when conducting textual analysis on such works. Consequently, I situate the films as single elements of the broader 'media mixes' of *Purikyua* and *Doraemon,* and, in the case of *Gake no Ue no Ponyo*, the Studio Ghibli brand image.

While numerous analyses of Japanese popular culture highlight a widespread embrace of 'newness', I argue that in the case of children's media, such analyses overlook an equally strong focus on the past. Looking at the intersections of the portrayals of place, time and change in the case studies and other contemporary Japanese children's works, I find a pervasive tendency to emphasise transformation positioned alongside a concurrent emphasis on changelessness. Frequently, the ambivalent portrayal of transformation is connected to simultaneous celebrations of what connotes the past and the future; in these past/future worlds, the present is conspicuously absent, or rejected outright. This tendency is echoed in the related media mixes, which often focus on creating a world set apart from contemporary urban Japan.

Ultimately, I argue that by idealising places/times explicitly positioned in opposition to contemporary urban Japan, Japanese children's media treats removal from contemporary urban Japan as a value. The merchandising and marketing of the texts merges with their narrative content to construct the possibility of (what is formulated as) removal from contemporary Japan.

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Author's declaration

Chapter six, 'Moving the future with robots of the past: *Doraemon* and the media mixtures of time', contains material that was presented at the Mixed Cinema Network workshop 'Landscape in Japanese and Chinese Cinema' at the University of Sheffield in May 2012, and at the Association of Adaptation Studies conference 'Visible and Invisible Authorships' at the University of York in September 2012. Chapters four, five, six, and seven contain material that was presented at the Department of Theatre, Film and Television postgraduate symposium at the University of York in May 2013.

A note on Japanese names and resources

Japanese names are written with the surname first and given name second, except in those instances in which the person's name is well-known in English-speaking countries in the order of given name first and surname second (e.g., Hayao Miyazaki), or when citing from a work written in or translated into English.

Japanese films that have been released in the UK or the USA are referred to by their English titles. When first cited, the films' Japanese titles are also provided for the reader's reference. Japanese films that have not been released in the UK or USA are referred to by their Japanese titles.

All discussions of Japanese films and related media (for example, manga, television programmes, and video games) are based on the Japanese-language versions, and all quotes from such media are my translations. When quotations from Japanese-language scholarly or journalistic works are my own translations, they are noted as such.

Introduction

This thesis begins beside a lake deep within the Gegege Forest, in a wooden cottage inhabited by spirits both frightening and charming. While the series *Gegege no Kitarō* will make only the most minor reappearances throughout this work, the Gegege Forest's vast expanses of trees and never-ending array of mysterious residents provides a vivid representation of the forms of portrayal pervasive throughout contemporary Japanese children's media. This peculiar forest of ghosts and ghouls can serve as an introduction to the mixtures of place, time, change and changelessness that are discussed throughout this thesis.

To bring ourselves to the wooden cottage in the Gegege Forest, we must first choose an entrance point. There are multiple possible entrance points from which to choose; *Gegege no Kitarō* has long been a staple of Japanese children's media, its origins stretching back as far as the *kamishibai* (paper puppet shows) of the pre-war period. A legend that has accompanied Japanese children through decades of the nation's recent history, *Kitarō* has been re-imagined for every new available medium, from paper puppets to the pages of comics (*manga*) and the screens of films and video games. Once every decade since the 1960s, *Kitarō* has been released as an animated television programme (*anime*), seeing the beloved character of Kitarō take on radical image changes in accordance with trends in animation styles and children's media content. Due to the continuous transformations of the franchise, it is hard to even locate an 'original' *Gegege no Kitarō* text (although most would point to Mizuki Shigeru's manga). While the narrative world of *Gegege no Kitarō* could be entered in many ways, for the sake of this introduction I will focus on the 2007 film *Kitaro* ('*Gegege no Kitarō*').[1]

Kitarō is a half-yōkai boy who lives with his yōkai companions in the forest.[2] The atmosphere of the Gegege Forest is both lively and eerie; a host of Japanese folkloric creatures alternate between haunting humans and lounging in shady bars, discussing yōkai politics, or snacking on grotesque food. In the 2007 film, Kitarō's home takes the form of a rickety cottage propped up in the branches

[1] The title *Kitaro* is used for the UK release of the film. In keeping with the romanisation style used throughout this thesis, I have written the main character's name, 鬼太郎, as 'Kitarō'.
[2] 'Yōkai' is a word describing supernatural creatures, translated variously as spectres, ghouls, demons, or spirits.

of a spindly tree on the shores of a perfectly still forest lake. As the film repeatedly shows, Kitarō treats the cottage as a place of peace and respite; he can be seen chatting with his friends and family, sitting idly on the dock, or staring pensively across the lake. Whatever troubles face him, Kitarō invariably returns home at the end, and always seems calmer when he does so.

His need for respite is certainly warranted; Kitarō has many troubles indeed. The forest operates according to laws, goals, and interests inherently at odds with human society; it is Kitarō who is singularly responsible for making the yōkai's actions comprehensible to bewildered humans. As a mediator who traverses the boundaries between human and yōkai societies, Kitarō can be seen as a liminal figure – but his liminality is less relevant here than his clear preference for yōkai society. Kitarō relates to and understands the yōkai, even when they take the role of antagonist, and this results in an unbridgeable gap between Kitarō and the humans he meets. Humans in *Gegege no Kitarō* tend to come across as oblivious and uncaring; while Kitarō's adventures generally involve protecting humans from yōkai, the yōkai are presented in a sympathetic light, their violence usually provoked by justifiable anger, fear, or a desire to protect their endangered way of life. At times, Kitarō expresses outright disgust at humankind, and his help comes with great reluctance. The humans are too wrapped up in their own concerns to care for the mysteries of the forest, too focused on the present to reach out to the past world inhabited by Japan's supernatural beings – but as Kitarō understands, the past still wraps itself around them, refusing to be forgotten. Kitarō may mediate between two worlds, but he remains a member of the Gegege Forest, of a loving (if strange) set of family and friends with whom he identifies. In the narrative, Kitarō must repeatedly remind the youth of contemporary Japan of a past they have lost, and he does so in part because of the sympathies developed in that rickety treehouse, deep within a mysterious world defined by its separation from contemporary Japan.

Gegege no Kitarō is a changed and changing work, re-invented for every decade, every medium. Yet it is also a work about that which will not change: a forest of ancient spirits who refuse to stay out of contemporary life, shaping our world while we remain oblivious to their presence. It is a world of incomprehensible, frightening creatures explicitly positioned in opposition to the workings of Japanese society. Humans are ignorant of this world, but Kitarō, precisely because of his

geographical and emotional separation from human society, can save them from the terrifying consequences of their ignorance.

Gegege no Kitarō envisions another world, constructed alongside and mixed profoundly with the conditions of our own; such visions permeate the landscape of contemporary Japanese children's media. In this and numerous other works, a world apart from this one is explicitly contrasted to the social ills of contemporary urban Japan. Beautiful, moving depictions of that (usually threatened) world form the basis of the story, and it is through the other world that we are shown the faults of our own. The position of that which is contrasted to contemporary urban Japan is privileged. The key is removal: as Kitarō passes his days in a world apart from urban Japan, many other children's media characters leave a problematic urban Japan to explore and learn from another world.

This form of portrayal is of course not universal across Japanese children's media. It is, however, most often joined by a defined set of representations held together by a common theme: constructions of place that express the rejection, negation, and/or utopian transformation of contemporary Japan. Contemporary urban Japan may be represented as a 'home', but as an imposter, eventually to be replaced by the character's 'true' home in the mountains or a rural village. It may be the location of values/attitudes/social norms that must be denied in order for the character to thrive. It may be a source of alienation and depression. Alternatively, contemporary urban Japan may not be represented at all, replaced instead by a spectacular, romanticised, 'natural' fantasy world – or by scenic views of contemporary rural Japan, usually constructed as an ideal community intimately connected to the past. Often these two representations combine, as a world with some 'contemporary' markings is imbued with anachronistic qualities; nevertheless, a more ancient world is shown to exist beside or within it, and the past-present world must ultimately give way to this deep and uncontainable past. Again, the key to this set of representations is removal. Regardless of the exact portrayal, that which is associated with contemporary urban Japan is to be rejected, while that which is associated with another world – usually a world of forests, fields, and a communal village lifestyle – is preferred (even if still problematised).

While I have thus far been addressing the narrative content of children's media texts, this thesis considers the merchandising and marketing of texts alongside their narrative content, and a

sense of removal is constructed on that level as well. While operating firmly within the context of Japanese and/or transnational media cultures today, the expansive 'media mixes' that characterise Japanese children's media emphasise the creation of a textual world that regularly shifts through the boundaries of 'fiction' and participation in our everyday lives. Due to the prevalence of character merchandise, consumers are joined in their daily routines by characters that clutch the sides of mobile phones or cover items of clothing. Through increasingly reality-blurring merchandise focused on the possibility of 'becoming' characters, audiences are encouraged to see themselves as part of the textual world. Tourism initiatives highlight the mystique of locations associated with the texts, showing them not as representatives of 'ordinary' Japanese life (even when they are used as such within the narratives), but as representatives of what has been forgotten.

These strategies are driven by ever more immersive world-creation, and such world-creation effectively develops the potential for removal from contemporary Japan. This should not be mistaken for simple 'escapism', and neither is it a statement of some radical potential for social change. Depending on the exact implementation, the works may or may not do either of these things, but the focus is on the immediate accessibility of another world: the possibility of living within this world while holding in one's possession the tools of removal. Another world is always at our fingertips, accessible through superhero costumes, the graphic power of the latest new video game, or day trips to a mountain resort. As the narrative content positions removal from contemporary Japan as desirable, the media mix encourages children to lead lives infused with reminders of a different world, thereby constructing the possibility of removal without physically leaving Japan.

This thesis explores these constructions of place in contemporary Japanese children's cinema, treating individual films as single elements of wide intertextual networks that encompass their related franchises or studios, and that ultimately extend to contemporary Japanese children's media cultures more broadly. Based on a wide survey of children's media, my research focuses on an in-depth examination of three case-study films released in 2008 and 2009. Each case study exemplifies differing iterations of the currents pervasive throughout contemporary Japanese children's media. *Eiga Fresh Purikyua!: Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!?* ('*Fresh Purikyua! The Movie: The Land of Toys is Full of Secrets!?*', 2009), is the seventh film of the *Purikyua* series. *Ponyo* ('*Gake no*

Ue no Ponyo', 2008) is a work from the world-renowned animation studio, Studio Ghibli. *Eiga Doraemon: Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden* ('*Doraemon the Movie: Nobita and the Legend of the Green Giant*', 2008) is the 28th film based on the adventures of the popular robot character Doraemon. While other films are considered in the survey, the case study films all forge a relationship between 'this world' – a setting explicitly marked as contemporary Japan – and 'another world', a fantasy world that is contrasted to contemporary Japan in the narrative.

This project is primarily concerned with the workings of place, but place is never separate from time, and in these works that connection is made exceedingly clear. Even the most fantastical of settings is coded with markings of different times – almost always times past, as the works lovingly display visions of a lost idyll. Many works that purport to show 'contemporary Japan' mix anachronistic elements into its streets and homes, slotting other times awkwardly into this one. Consequently, this thesis discusses settings as they correspond to conceptions of the past and future. As the places shown are often transformed, or possess transformative powers, the concept of change is also addressed – and yet, change as a theme is often met by an equally powerful focus on changelessness, and this too cannot be ignored. We are left, then, with three intersecting subjects of analysis: place, time, and change, as they are imagined in films for children that depict some version of contemporary Japan.

The thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter one describes the media mix style of franchising that characterises Japanese children's media today, providing background information that guides the remainder of the thesis. Media mix franchising operates through the creation of never-ending worlds that are increasingly integrated into the lives of audiences. Complicating the already complicated notions of 'authorship' and the 'original', media mix texts work according to a premise of endless expansion and transformation.

Chapter two wrestles with the implications of the media mix for research about Japanese children's media, and in light of that challenge, lays out the methodology, limitations, and scope of this study. As media mix texts are never singular, they resist standard forms of textual analysis. When a text is inherently multiple, inhabiting innumerable forms that rely on intertextuality and continue to

change throughout every stage of the research process, it cannot be approached by simply analysing a single narrative or visual representation. For this reason, I have not studied children's films in isolation, but rather view them always alongside their media mixes; by this method, I hope to address both the general concept of the franchise and the specificity of individual texts that may alter, contradict, or add complexity to it.

Chapter three situates my research in the context of recent scholarship on both children's media and Japanese cultural studies. Looking first at the field of children's media studies, I explore the tension between scholarship centring children's 'agency' and the challenges of textual analysis, and suggest that some of the undeniable problems presented by the analysis of children's media texts could be mitigated by seeking more thorough immersion in children's media. In considering Japanese cultural studies, I particularly focus on the emerging field of English-language anime studies. This field is marred by portrayals of Japanese culture as a homogenous entity reducible to easily understandable concepts, or alternatively, by the use of a small number of media texts to make demonstrably inaccurate generalisations about broad historical or sociocultural trends. These oversights have fed into the prevalence of scholarship that aligns anime with postmodernism, post-identitarianism, cyborgian identities, and a focus on fluidity. Anime is repeatedly positioned alongside change and 'newness' – sometimes, that connection is even interpreted as intrinsic to the medium. In light of this scholarly preoccupation, the nostalgic or less fluid elements of anime are usually brushed over or ignored entirely. While there are many studies on nostalgia in Japanese culture, they tend to be relegated to particular subjects such as domestic tourism and folklore – yet it is the blending of nostalgia for the past and yearning for the future that characterises many contemporary Japanese children's texts, and the concurrent interplay between these forces has not been adequately explored.

The subsequent chapters focus on the three case studies, looking first at portrayals of place, time, and change in the related franchise/studio, and then considering the same issues as represented in the case study films. Chapter four looks at *Purikyua*, a franchise that celebrates constant change while glorifying all that is unchanging. *Purikyua* at first glance seems to rejoice in transformation, from the surface level transformations of girls into superheroes or ordinary objects into monsters to the all-encompassing personality changes that drive the narrative. As a constantly transforming media

mix, *Purikyua* echoes that love of change in its narrative, celebrating the potential of the changeable future. At the same time, the franchise positions identity as unchanging, with even the most intense transformations figured as realisations or corruptions of an innate inner identity. This tension is replicated in the film, which moves *Purikyua*'s always-transforming world to a land of lost childhood, and directly implores children to not move on from their personal past.

Chapter five discusses Studio Ghibli, an animation studio that constructs a brand image predicated on difference from contemporary Japan. Through distinctive merchandise and a carefully constructed 'high quality' image, Ghibli markets opposition to the 'norms' of contemporary Japanese children's media, even as it has become their main representative on the global stage. Whether in the films' narratives or in non-narrative elements of the Ghibli name, Ghibli trades in spectacular other worlds that connote the past and refuse to engage with the present. *Ponyo* exemplifies Ghibli's usage of setting by reaching ever further into multiple, nebulous pasts, transporting the viewer from the gentle nostalgia of an anachronistic fishing town to the all-consuming power of the ancient sea.

The case studies conclude with *Doraemon*, a long-standing children's media icon that marvels at all the potential of the future while romanticising idyllic communities associated with the past. Often seen as representing a past era's glorification of the future, Doraemon is a friendly robot who displays the positive power of technology through an infinite array of futuristic gadgets – yet he does so in the context of an unchanging world, an idealised vision of suburban Japan that has remained unmoving through time. In a dramatic reiteration of these representations, the 2008 film, known as 'Doraemon the Future', remakes Tokyo into a field of flowers, devoid of any technology and entwined in the ancient power of the universe itself.

These three disparate but related portrayals of places here and elsewhere are brought together in chapter seven, which places the case study works in the context of other contemporary children's films in Japan and abroad. The themes of change and changelessness that flit through all of the case studies, and many other recent films, are not in fact in opposition, but two sides of the same coin: they construct idealised worlds that are based on removal from contemporary urban Japan. Ultimately, I argue that the narrative content of the works often treats removal from (what are formulated as) the 'norms' of contemporary urban Japan as ideal; this emphasis merges with the world-creating

tendencies of the media mix, which construct the potential for removal from contemporary urban Japan while remaining within its boundaries. Immersion in a world separate from this one is both envisioned in fictional narrative content and made possible through the merchandising and marketing of the texts. This is not to posit some intrinsic convergence of purpose between the form and content of children's media, or to claim that there are no inherent contradictions within the material (which often, for example, stresses anti-consumerist attitudes through shameless consumerism). Rather, I aim to reflect on the interactions between the many varying worlds – narrative and otherwise – that comprise contemporary Japanese children's media. These worlds typically emphasise removal from that which is constructed as characteristic of contemporary urban Japan, while simultaneously constructing an accessible other world transposed over contemporary urban Japan.

Chapter 1

The political uses of pocket monsters: The multiplicity of contemporary Japanese children's media cultures

'Let's lose our way, together.'

– 'Ghibli Museum, Mitaka' pamphlet

Losing our way

Visitors to the website of the Ghibli Museum, Mitaka are met with a homepage featuring a black-and-white sketch of a girl in a dress and straw hat, wearing a wide, frog-like grin ('Mitaka no Mori', 2012). The illustration would be instantly recognisable to most viewers familiar with the Ghibli name: Mei, the five-year-old child protagonist of the iconic film *My Neighbour Totoro* ('*Tonari no Totoro*', 1988), is a tenacious explorer who first discovers the mystical being known as Totoro. Mei spends much of the film becoming lost; but each time she loses her way, she is ultimately found unharmed, safe and sound in her welcoming rural community. The writing beside the website's illustration, then, suits the image of Mei's determined stride: '*Maigo ni narō yo. Issho ni*.' In English: 'Let's lose our way, together.'[3]

The phrase is the Ghibli Museum's slogan, and can also be found on other materials related to the museum.[4] It has a specific contextual meaning: the Ghibli Museum has no set path through the facility for visitors to follow, instead operating as an open ground for visitors to explore at their leisure in their own way. Children and adult visitors are encouraged to wander through the twists and turns of the museum, discovering its secrets on their own terms. The pamphlet informs us: 'You are the one to discover your own way. Those who can lose their way and fully enjoy this space are welcome at the museum' ('Ghibli Museum, Mitaka', n.d.). The museum is a danger-free realm built

[3] The translation used is taken from the English-language museum pamphlet ('Ghibli Museum, Mitaka', n.d.).
[4] For example, see: *Mitaka no Mori Jiburi Bijutsukan fan bukku* (2011) and 'Mitaka no Mori Jiburi Bijutsukan: riyō no goannai' (n.d.).

for exploration, defined by the many routes we can take to access it, our experience beginning at a number of possible entrance points and ending anywhere we choose (although the design noticeably guides visitors toward an ending at the shop or attached restaurant).

The Ghibli Museum's appeal to the experiential learning of 'becoming lost' echoes some of the broader themes discussed in this chapter. In the media mixes that characterise Japanese children's media today, we may begin at any of the innumerable entrance points, and end at even more (but with strong guidance toward spending more money). We are introduced to a world of constant variation, and encouraged to explore the twists and turns of a media environment extending across multiple forms, taking routes of our own design to a destination that is never fixed. It is an experience that inundates us from every angle, never reaching us as image alone but in countless forms that pierce through the neat boundaries we make between everyday life and media entertainment. We are, however, encouraged to explore 'together': with fellow fans in the many venues catering to fan communities, through comforting replicas of familiar characters that accompany us to schools and workplaces, with friends and family in tourist sites and promotional events.

In the following chapter, I will outline some key components of the current state of Japanese children's media, an industry that is increasingly recognised as both an unusually successful element of a floundering national economy, and an influential force in the context of transnational media cultures (Allison A., 2009a, p.182). I will begin by detailing the characteristics of Japan's unique 'media mix' system, a form of franchising that gave rise to most popular children's media texts in Japan today, and is therefore an important context for the works analysed in this thesis. I will then discuss the transnational scope of Japanese children's media today, focusing on what is known as the 'Cool Japan' phenomenon, and conclude with a consideration of the significance of fan participation. Through these discussions, this chapter depicts contemporary Japanese children's media as a world of multiplicity in form, audience, and context; a world of endless expanses that amount to something of far-reaching political and cultural significance.

Media mixes

In order to better understand the forms and contexts through which Japanese children's media are released into the world, it is important to clarify the structure of the industry today. A characteristic element of the industry, one that shapes the great majority of Japanese children's media today, is what is known as the 'media mix' system. The term 'media mix' first entered English-language scholarship from the work of cultural anthropologist Mizuko Ito. As Ito describes the term:

> Japan-origin manga, anime, and game content are heterogeneous, spanning multiple media types and genres, yet still recognized as a cluster of linked cultural forms. Because of the absence of a single overarching media type or genre, I use the native industry term media mix to describe the linked character-based media types of games, anime, and manga. (2006a, p.52.)

There are three key things to note within Ito's definition. First of all, these multiple forms of media are, as Ito describes, 'a cluster of linked cultural forms'. While manga (comic books), anime (animated television programmes and films), and game content – and, in many cases, toys, figurines, and trading cards as well – are different forms of media, all are strongly associated with one another. Overlap exists on multiple levels: amongst the preferences of individual fans, as those who enjoy anime are generally expected to also enjoy manga and video games; within the marketing, as advertisements for video games are aired during anime television shows; through broader cultural associations, as each of the forms are considered part of the '*otaku*' ('geek') culture, or alternatively (or in some cases, simultaneously) as part of children's culture; and within the content itself, which repositions characters and narratives across multiple forms.

A second phrase to note is 'character-based'. As Azuma Hiroki (2009, pp.25–95) suggests, drawing on the work of Ōtsuka Eiji (1989), the overriding world or message of '*otaku*' media has become increasingly less important to consumers, replaced by a focus on characters and the accumulation of elements that comprise them. As content spreads across platforms, its carried emphasis is not settings, narratives, or moral concerns, but rather characters. Characters emerge as

stars in drama CDs featuring different voice actors than the anime, in video games set in different locations than the manga, in merchandise such as figurines in which the character alone occupies whatever space the owner wishes to put her, or mobile phone charms bearing a single character who has left his narrative to participate in the user's everyday life. As Marc Steinberg describes in his recent work, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*, 'it is the immaterial entity of the character as an abstract, circulating element that maintains the consistency of the various worlds or narratives and holds them together' (2012, p.188). The exact role of characters in maintaining the media mix, however, varies greatly depending on the text, and for this reason, the emphasis on setting within this thesis opens the door for further interrogation of the relationship between the character and the media mix.

Finally, I would like to highlight the 'absence of a single overarching media type or genre' mentioned by Ito. These are works that, by their very nature, are not meant to be reduced to a single form or isolated from one another. As another critic describes, 'unlike in the American model, here central characters or a theme or world are created, then gradually filled in by various media products, none of which may take center stage' (Consalvo, 2009, p.137). While some forms may become more prominent than others, media mix content is spread across multiple platforms and not necessarily concentrated in one. In a typical media mix, this might mean that a story is started in a manga, retold with a wildly divergent narrative in a television anime, supplemented with additional stories in a series of films, and condensed through trivia and summaries of the narrative in fan guidebooks. Some merchandise will bring the characters of the series to consumers' notebooks, towels, pencils, and mobile phones, while others will allow consumers to re-enact the lifestyles, clothing, and adventures of the characters. A base of devout fans may continue the story through *dōjinshi* (unofficial fan-created manga), fanfictions, and fanart, while displaying their admiration through 'AMV' ('anime music videos'), cosplay (dressing up as the characters in a narrative), participation in events and tournaments, and online fan communities that dissect, share, and mock the latest instalments of the series.

Steinberg defines anime through the media mix, claiming that 'the circulation of commodities and the transmedia relationships that characterize the anime media mix are at the heart of anime itself'

(2012, p.36). Through a historical account of the development of the media mix, which he traces from the anime show *Astro Boy* (‘*Tetsuwan Atomu*’) in 1963, Steinberg clearly delineates two different meanings of the term ‘media mix’: ‘The anime media mix within popular discourse refers to two intersecting phenomena: the translation or deployment of a single work, character, or narrative world across numerous mediums or platforms (also known as repurposing) and the synergetic use of multiple media works to sell other such works within the same franchise or group’ (ibid., p.142). In both meanings, the themes of multiplicity and convergence define the media mix, and so it is these themes that will guide my discussion of the media mix in the remainder of this chapter. I will begin by detailing the collaboration that defines media mix franchising today, and then reflect on the multiplicity of form that characterises the media mix text.

Collaboration in contemporary Japanese children’s media mixes

The basis of the media mix, the unique aspect of its structure that sets a ‘media mix’ apart from standard franchising, is the synergy between its elements. As Ito elaborates: ‘Although each media platform has particular emphases, Japan has a more integrated and synergistic relationship between different media types than you tend to see in the case of US children’s culture. Popular series will make their way to all of the different platforms of the media mix and each plays off the strengths of the other’ (2006b, p.2). Today, media mixes are even more extensive and synergistic than Ito (whose research on the topic is primarily based on fieldwork conducted from 1998–2002 [ibid., p.9]) describes. As Kelts reports, the toy company Bandai has established a system whereby toys can reach the shelves in record speed: ‘Within three months from the moment a manga appears on the shelves, or a new anime or film hits screens big and small, Bandai can have the toys in the stores, with more detail than ever before. Never in the history of the toy industry has toy making kept in such close step with the pace of the human imagination’ (2007, p.99). In some cases, the collaboration between production companies results in toys reaching stores immediately after or even before a work’s release.

The children's franchise *Purikyua* (2004–ongoing) reveals the extent of this system.[5] While its system of collaboration is more comprehensive than most, and thus does not represent the norm at this time, *Purikyua* exhibits the extensive collaboration made possible by the media mix system. Noguchi Tomoo's analysis, published in the journal *President* in 2010, suggests that the phenomenal success of the *Purikyua* franchise was due in part to the significant collaboration between 'the toy makers, magazine companies, and music companies related to *Purikyua*' (my translation). Noguchi goes on to explain:

> It is said that they moved towards a type of 'programme production committee' system. 'Production committees' are the ordinary method used in high-cost film productions, but they are not used in television programmes. In this new experiment, the above-mentioned companies met together and contributed their opinions. In the beginning, they met to report numerical data such as 'this product sold this many units', but the collaboration gradually progressed to something more substantial, with the atmosphere becoming more along the lines of, 'oh, okay, I'll go ahead with that strategy. In return, will you put this in for me?' (Ibid.; my translation.)

According to Noguchi, Bandai in particular played an enormous role in the creation of *Purikyua*:

> Bandai held meetings with Toei Animation as frequently as once a week. There, Bandai would make proposals such as, 'we want the theme to feel like this', and on Toei Animation's side, they would give advice such as, 'how about making the "tool" a bit more like this?' They have worked together for seven years, and

[5] *Purikyua* is discussed at length in chapter four. The multiplicity of the media mix complicates the citation process. Throughout this chapter, I have chosen to cite 'media mixes' by the Japanese publication dates of their first known and most recently released official manga, television, or film content (if no further media content is publicly known to be 'in the works'). This system is not perfect; for example, a manga may no longer be serialised in Japan, but continue to be serialised in another country, meaning that it did not 'end' at the specified date. Furthermore, fan-created content usually continues long after a series may have 'ended'. Most obviously, the focus on the forms of manga, television, and film neglects to consider music, merchandise, and other elements of the media mix. I have not specified authors, as the many forms of media content typically involve multiple 'authors'.

> according to Katano Ryōta, subleader of the girl's toy division, 'they have begun to seem more like our company members than our actual company members'.
>
> In the first stage of Bandai's internal merchandise development process, eight staff members study trends such as fashion and popular items, and then think how they could be pieced together like a puzzle to form a hit product. For example, they decided to propose this year's theme of 'heart seeds' when their discussions kept circling back to certain ideas: 'when we were children, we collected small, shiny things', or 'jewel-like items are popular with girls today'.
>
> Then, Bandai bounces their ideas off of Toei Animation to refine their conception of the themes and 'tools' (merchandise images). As the merchandise concepts solidify, the work is divided up by appointing this person to work on the dolls, or that one to work on the perfume, and each division develops the product details. (Ibid.; my translation.)

This elaborate collaboration process results in toys and other merchandise appearing on shelves almost immediately after an episode's release. While in Tokyo, I was surprised to notice that a new character introduced in an episode of *Suite Purikyua* was already featured in Gashapon (vending machines holding toys in spherical plastic containers) in stores the following day. Merchandise of the character was advertised during the same episode, in the commercial break immediately following her dramatic introduction, and children's magazines discussing the character followed later that week.

The media mix's collaborative system has significance to this study as more than simply a clever marketing choice. The media mix system creates content that was never meant to be consumed in a singular form, content that has always been associated with and defined by expansive textual worlds that extend beyond any individual text. *Purikyua* is not a television programme for which one can buy supporting merchandise; it is a television show made in conjunction with its merchandising, consequently allowing the merchandise to assume a role much greater than 'supporting'. It has always

been inseparable from the many other texts that comprise the textual world it inhabits. Indeed, studios would not be able to produce anime without its attendant merchandise: as Kataoka Yoshirō explains in an article about the anime market, 'ever since the birth of Japanese television anime with *Tetsuwan Atomu*, the cost of creating long-running anime has been recouped by character goods such as toys and stationery' (2011, p.163; my translation). The merchandising, then, is crucial to the very creation of anime, thus intimately tying the two together.

Each part of the media mix is produced in collaboration with the others, embedding multiplicity of form and content in the very creation of the works. The word 'spin-off' does not do these elements of the franchise justice, for it implies something secondary and subsequent: additional texts seeking to capitalise on the popularity of a clearly identifiable original. In the case of *Purikyua*, the 'spin-offs' are not obviously distinguishable from the 'original'; the collaboration between Toei Animation, TV Asahi,[6] and Bandai results in television programmes and films defined by their related merchandise – a world of media and merchandise so tightly intertwined that one form cannot be extracted from another.

Purikyua may not yet be representative, for the marketing strategies and collaboration processes used by *Purikyua* are more comprehensive than those used by similar shows. It is not, however, fundamentally different from the other works on offer; it is simply an extreme example of the processes and strategies commonly used in children's media franchises in Japan. A more representative media mix, *One Piece* ('*Wan Pīsu*', 1997–ongoing), was based on a manga, and currently includes a television anime, numerous anime films, music albums, video games, and a wide variety of merchandise (including food, clothing, action figures, household items, toys, and more). These multiple forms, all owned by publishing company Shueisha, can varyingly retell the manga's narrative, build on the manga's story with additional narratives, or bring the world of *One Piece* into the everyday lives of audiences.

[6] Toei Animation and TV Asahi have long had a close relationship, although they are technically separate. In a statement explaining their purchase of a large number of Toei stocks in 2006, TV Asahi president Kimiwada Masao notes: 'Toei has been a shareholder of TV Asahi since its founding, and has a crucial business relationship with TV Asahi in several business areas such as television content production, investment in motion pictures, rights business, special events, etc.' (2006).

The mixtures of children's media: inside and outside Japan

While there are unique aspects of the Japanese media mix system, it is important to note that it bears many similarities to the trends that characterise children's media elsewhere. Disney stores exist to sell products related to their films and television programmes, and it would be naïve to assume that merchandising potential did not, at least to some degree, influence the content of their films. *Harry Potter* (1997–2011) content spans across books, a series of eight films, numerous video games, soundtracks, board games, toys, collectible items, and more. *Doctor Who* (1963–ongoing) continues to flood stores with merchandise (including regular new replicas of the Doctor's famous Sonic Screwdriver, a choice reminiscent of the reality-blurring merchandise of shows like *Purikyua* and *Kamen Rider* [*'Kamen Raidā'*, 1971–ongoing]), new television series, books, comics, and more.

The widespread cultural distaste for the merchandising of children's media texts is an important backdrop here, as the same texts that can be seen as compelling experiments in the multiplicity and intertextuality of media can just as easily be seen as exploitative uses of media to sell toys to children. The connection between children's television and the aggressive, innovative, and collaborative marketing of toys is not a new trend. Cross and Smits trace such marketing to the 1955 decision by Mattel to buy ad space during Disney's *Mickey Mouse Club* television show, which represented a new stage in the marketing of toys by marketing directly to children, all throughout the year (2005, p.877).

The connection between merchandising and children's media is critiqued throughout Stephen Kline's influential book on children's cultures, *Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing* (1993). Noting the need for children's television to cater to merchandising interests, Kline states:

> Programmes such as *He-Man* and *Care Bears* are not scripted as moral parables or even innocent amusements. Character fiction must serve the marketing functions of introducing a new range of personalities into children's culture, orientating children to this product line, creating a sense of excitement about

> these characters, and ultimately leading children to want to use those characters in play. Most of the new children's television animations have been created explicitly for selling a new line of licensed goods. It is simply not sufficient for a programme to be popular with kids. The programme must instill in them the promise of an imaginary world that can be entered not just by watching television but also by owning and playing with a specific toy line. Children must want to have the characters and props, to own and to play with them to re-create their imaginary universes within their own play spaces. (Ibid., p.280.)

Kline uses the reliance on marketing goods in conjunction with children's television as a springboard to offer a harsh critique of children's television: 'The problem,' he claims, 'lies in the fact that producing good fiction and effective marketing are not always harmonious goals' (ibid., p.279). He proceeds to review the 'quality' of children's television produced in these conditions, and his assessment is none too flattering:

> The social interplay between characters is staged as a series of abbreviated poses. The action, chase and battle scenes are merely contrived and jerky visual techniques. There is reduced expressiveness, beauty of movement, versatility and complexity in these new tales… If we compare the stilted and repetitive stunts and poses of Paw-Paws, He-Man or Ninja Turtles with the masterfully fluid and precisely timed movements or the moody scenes of *Fantasia*, the price of hyper-economy in animation quality becomes clear… Although the pretext of these stories is purely fantastical, the stories do not broadly explore the spectrum of human experience. The overriding impression they generate is that of predictability. Compared with children's books, it is easy to conclude that children's television fiction has lost much of its charm, freshness, humour and individuality in favour of formula plots and plodding one-dimensional characters. (Ibid., pp.283–284.)

Interestingly, Kline specifically mentions Japanese anime as a counterpoint to his argument (ibid., p.284), but critiques similar to his are alive and well in Japan today. A newspaper article about *Purikyua* cites an interview with Hori Takahiro, author of a book about the current commercialisation of Japanese toys and anime: 'Anime is nothing more than a promotional video for toys… In Germany, they develop long-lasting toys that promote creativity, and match the development of children. I have misgivings about the way Japan is overflowing with toys that rely on the power of the character' (qtd. in Yamamoto, 2010; my translation). If we look at the 'media mix' as simply a particularly efficient way of selling toys to children, it might seem to be nothing new in the marketing of children's media, and certainly nothing unique to Japan.

It is true that in Japan and elsewhere, children's media has long been associated with aggressively marketed merchandise, and marketing campaigns for child- and adult-oriented media are always becoming more elaborate and innovative. However, the particular situation of children's media in Japan bears differences to the examples of programmes such as *Doctor Who* and *Care Bears* in three significant ways: scope, collaboration, and historical background. Franchises are able to draw on the closely affiliated media industries in Japan today, explained in detail in Davis and Yeh's illuminating work *East Asian Screen Industries* (2008, pp.65–81):

> Japanese companies are *keiretsu* (interlocking) structures, with firms tightly conglomerated through cognate businesses, and through shared board members across different, affiliated companies. The screen industry is a gigantic enterprise with complex links between film, video, television, telecommunication, animation, publishing, advertising and game design… Without much segregation or autonomy in Japanese media structure, each branch is expected to support the whole. Thus, these media giants are vertically and horizontally integrated corporations with direct control of their production, distribution and sales. (Ibid., pp.64–65.)

Furthermore, the companies that release the content do so in a market fully prepared and expecting to host such media mixes. The same company that releases popular television shows may publish a children's magazine that features new television content; children and their parents know to expect the full range of media mix content accompanying any show; the music industry can rely on television show theme songs to make a name for rising stars (Stevens, 2008). It is, in other words, the norm, rather than a possible outcome of a particularly successful franchise.

Compare, for example, the multimedia enterprise of *Harry Potter* with that of *Yugioh* ('*Yu★gi★ō*', 1997–ongoing). *Harry Potter* originated, quite unequivocally, with the series of books written by J.K. Rowling. After the release of the Warner Bros. films, toy stores were swamped with an influx of *Harry Potter* toys and video games, all with one noticeable feature: they were obviously based upon the films. Action figures resembled actors in the films and came packaged with images from the films behind them. The Lego collection let children build Lego characters and buildings resembling those depicted in the films. In Japan, Bandai released a number of its famed Gashapon featuring *Harry Potter* mobile phone charms designed to look like magical items from the films. There were thus two origins to which one could reasonably trace most *Harry Potter* merchandise: the books, in which the characters, narratives, and settings were established, and the films, in which the visual representations of those characters and settings were fixed.

Yugioh, on the other hand, originated with a manga first serialised in manga anthology *Shūkan Shōnen Janpu*. Shortly thereafter, the manga was published in *tankōbon* (or book) format, and following that, an anime series retelling the manga's story was released. A few years later, a trading card game based on the manga/anime – a replica of the game played by the characters in the narrative – swept the nation. None of the story's characters were included in this game, which essentially involves players utilising a collection of cards featuring monsters that may be used to battle other players. It was the entrance of the audience into the world of *Yugioh*, rather than attachment to specific characters or narratives, which characterised this form of the series – a form that was, according to Mizuko Ito's research on the topic, phenomenally successful (2004, p.5). Following these releases, audiences were further treated to a film, which retold the same story as the television show, video games that were more closely related to the trading card game, and countless other forms

of media and merchandise. In a particularly interesting development, recent *Yugioh* anime series feature different characters entirely, the character of Yugi finally lost in the endless flow of the media mix (despite the retention of the name *Yugioh*). Merchandise varies in its focus, sometimes featuring Yugi and other characters from the anime or manga, and sometimes featuring popular monsters.

No one or even two individual texts contains the full world of *Yugioh*; few can be simply traced as the clear origin to another text, and all assume a level of involvement in a world that spans multiple forms. In other words, the world of *Yugioh* does not constitute a series of supplements to a world already set in another form, as one might view the *Harry Potter* video games and merchandise. The many forms of *Yugioh* comprise its world, each addition allowing a new form of engagement with new content, providing yet another entry into an always-expanding universe.

The narrative has not been set, and will never become set. The characters may change in different ways across different platforms, find new friends and enemies throughout their various adventures, or even be replaced entirely. Settings may be expanded endlessly, explored in new ways, or in some cases, give way to new settings. Narratives will change, often significantly, in each form. To bring us back to the *Harry Potter* example, the closest approximation to the media mix strategy would be if Warner Bros. had developed multiple new sets of young wizards undertaking riveting adventures to save Hogwarts in each of a never-ending line of video games, followed by a set of films released every year displaying those wizards' adventures in exciting locations across the world, and accompanied by comic books re-imagining some of their most memorable narratives.

Poaching Pikachu

The connection between 'media mix' and 'convergence' is explicitly formed in Henry Jenkins' book on the subject of what he labels 'convergence culture'. Jenkins' broad definition of 'convergence' would certainly include media mixes – indeed, he cites Ito's work (2006a, p.110), and includes 'media mix' in the glossary (ibid., p.289) – but with the addition of a further element of media mix texts that I have yet to discuss: fan practices. Jenkins defines 'convergence' as '…the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the

migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want' (ibid., p.2). He elaborates on the effect this has on consumer behaviour, noting: '… convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content' (ibid., p.3). In the following section, I would like to explore the idea of fan participation as an additional element of the media mix text, an unofficial extension of the official media mix franchising that is nevertheless characterised by similar emphases on multiplicity and challenges to the concept of the 'original' text.

It is in fan communities that we may find some of the most complex examples of the same sense of endlessness that characterises the media mix. Like many other fan communities, such as those discussed in Jenkins' *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), the anime fan, or *otaku*, community in America thrives on not just the consumption but also the active creation of content.[7] Brent Allison describes the popularity of 'poaching' within the community thus:

> Rather than statically receiving media messages from *animé*, fans, including (perhaps especially) young ones, feel free to "poach" the material and use it in ways that are suitable to their local needs and social context (Jenkins 1992). This could be expressed in obscure jokes known only to those in a close social circle as a way of affirming a group identity, sexual innuendo to playfully challenge middle-class strictures on youthful female sexual expression, and references to Disney, the most powerful standard-bearer of U.S. animation and widely suspected by *animé* fans as a plagiarizer of *animé* works, in pseudo-deferential tones meant more as resistance than homage. Fans usually, unless they watch explicitly to heckle because an *animé*'s quality is so laughably low, genuinely enjoy the *animé* they are watching. However, fans rarely (with some exceptions) consider any *animé* a "sacred text" of high cultural significance;

[7] I use America as a basis for comparison due to the great quantity of scholarship available regarding American anime fans, especially when viewed in comparison to the scholarship on fans from other countries. Furthermore, my own personal experience with American anime fan communities allows me to speak of them with more confidence than I would British or other anime fan communities across the world. For scholarship on non-American fans of Japanese pop culture texts, I recommend Ching, 2001 and 2006; Lee, 2004; Lemish, 2004; Kino, 2008; Nakano, 2008.

> rather they see it as a fluid text wherein viewers are free to borrow, make connections, and otherwise alter for their purposes the meanings of the original. (2009, p.134.)

Further examples of the 'poaching' of anime texts by fans abound throughout literature on American *otaku*: Chandler-Olcott and Mahar discuss young fanfiction writers who use information 'from multiple media, including Japanese manga, cartoons on network television, videotapes, and fan-constructed websites' in order to write fanfiction in the face of minimal information on the series (2003, p.562); Ito describes the 'plays between multiple marginalities' which figure into the actions of cosplayers and fans who exchange trading cards (2003, p.11); and Yamamura discusses the ways in which fan interest in towns related to beloved anime texts has led to their active involvement in and activism for the town (2009, p.3).

Fan involvement is, in fact, the force usually credited with bringing anime texts to the West. McKevitt argues that, unlike the top-down direction most media globalisation is assumed to take, anime was driven by a bottom-up demand; it was fan interest in anime texts, despite the geographical and technological limitations to their access, that generated the anime boom in America (2010). 'The important actors in anime's story,' claims McKevitt, 'were postal clerks, computer technicians, college students, and anonymous middle-class women and men with no professional training in the arts of international relations and communication. Multinational corporations may play a central role in the history of globalization in the postwar era, but with anime's global boom cultural globalization was a process driven from below' (ibid., p.919). In Japan, a similar narrative of devout anime fans driving demand is told: Okada Toshio, self-described 'Otaking' of Japanese *otaku*, begins his classic work *Otakugaku Nyūmon* ('*Introduction to Otakuology*', 1996) by describing the lengths early *otaku* took to access anime texts, providing entertaining accounts of fans taping microphones to the television to capture dialogue, or the instant popularity enjoyed by those *otaku* who owned a Sony Betamax and could thus record episodes (ibid., pp.19–27). It remains true to this day that fans go to great lengths (even illegal ones) to access anime texts, and will go further still to participate in the worlds of anime. That one of the most well-attended and well-known of anime-related events is

Comiket, a convention dedicated to the selling of *dōjinshi*, indicates the central position of fan-created content in anime fandom (Thorn, 2004). Media-driven consumption is always met head-on by participation; it is supported, challenged by, transformed, adapted, and expanded through participation.

The many forms of the media mix may open anime texts to the possibility of fan participation. The focus on multiple texts, the move away from an identifiable original, and the creation of endlessly expansive worlds are all characteristics of Japanese media today that leave space for fan-created works to proliferate. After all, what is one more *dōjinshi* to the hundreds of manga chapters in which we already read *One Piece*? When the story is already positioned as something still ongoing, expanding, with new characters and narratives introduced regularly, fan-created works hardly seem out of place. When the world is not something limited, but something designed from the outset for regular new additions and changes, fan participation becomes yet another extension of the text. Roland Kelts hints at this when he suggests that the media mix is a crucial element of Japanese media's appeal abroad:

> ...Anime and manga provide an increasingly content-hungry world with something that Hollywood, for all its inventiveness, has not yet found a way to approximate: the chance to deeply, relentlessly, and endlessly immerse yourself in a world driven by prodigious imagination. It is a world with no ceiling limiting the number of times you may visit and explore – because the flow of its content is so steady.
>
> The Japanese entertainment industry, perhaps unwittingly, has realized something fundamental about what contemporary audiences want from fantasy, whether it is science fiction, sports, or romantic fantasy. They want the action to take place in environments that they can know in detail, and repeatedly visit. Consider the successes of *Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series, whose offshoots include video games, novelizations, playing cards, and so on. Yet their

> various manifestations pale next to the myriad variations of the Pokemon media empire, or the variety of tie-ins currently available to the Japanese anime/manga fan that its industry hopes to export successfully to America.
>
> The modern younger viewer, in particular, is no longer satisfied with a few brief glimpses of a new world, or the idea of an invisible book describing every nook and cranny and explaining why things are so. They want to see it all for themselves – and they want to be a part of it. (2007, p.116)

In the above quote, Kelts suggests a connection between the media mix and fan participation. There is no clear way to prove this connection; I do not know of any studies comparing anime fans to, for example, fans of *Star Wars* (1977–ongoing), another ceaselessly multiplying text defined by its expansive universe. The point that I would like to make, however, is the thematic connection between the media mix and fan participation: the media mix is defined by its multiplicity, and it is those very qualities that allow it to create worlds that grow continuously, becoming ever more accessible to audiences with the addition of each new entrance point, narrative focus, set of characters, or merchandising innovation. It relies on the creation of new media content, de-emphasising the authenticity of the original in favour of a perpetually expanding world ripe for further additions. The same multiplicity of form that I have been discussing throughout this chapter is simply continued in the worlds of fandom.

As Kelts describes, audiences lap up the neverending worlds of Japanese popular culture, and those audiences are not limited to Japan. The 'trendy' image Japanese media has garnered in part through anime has become a definitive element of perceptions of Japan abroad, and in recent years, the Japanese government has embraced such perceptions. In the following sections, I will detail the ways in which Japanese media is increasingly defined by its transnational audiences, and the implications of that context for media analysis.

Reinventing superpower

> 'Yet Japan is reinventing superpower again. Instead of collapsing beneath its political and economic misfortunes, Japan's global cultural influence has only grown. In fact, from pop music to consumer electronics, architecture to fashion, and food to art, Japan has far greater cultural influence now than it did in the 1980s, when it was an economic superpower.'
>
> – Douglas McGray (2002, p.47)

'We should have known at Pokémon,' American news commentator Rachel Maddow stated gleefully (*The Rachel Maddow Show*, 2011). Maddow was referring to her theory about the then Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain. Cain, she argued, was not a serious presidential candidate but an elaborate prank or 'art project'; his gaffes were, as she put it, 'too perfect... A string of supposed gaffes like that is not found in nature.' The first notable gaffe referenced, the one that forms the basis of Maddow's argument, was formed from the depths of Japanese children's media mixes: during a debate, Cain quoted a generic inspirational line, that, as internet critics quickly discovered, was in fact from the ending theme song to a *Pokémon* ('*Poketto monsutā*', 1996–ongoing) film.

Maddow never once clarifies what *Pokémon* is – a children's franchise that originated in Japan and became a popular fad in the late 1990s. For his part, when bowing out of the presidential race, Cain admitted that 'I believe these words come from the Pokémon movie' (Tulis, 2011); again, never mentioning what, in fact, *Pokémon* might be. *Pokémon*, it would seem, has now reached such a level of cultural prominence in America that it is unremarkable for politicians and political pundits – people not affiliated in any way with children's media – to express some familiarity with the franchise, and to assume that their audiences will also have some level of familiarity. It has even gained enough familiarity that it can be seen as a joke, a reference to what we all know ought to be a childhood passion, quite unbecoming to a presidential candidate. It is, in short, something we are expected to know enough about to laugh at.

How did we reach this point where Rachel Maddow can so casually reference *Pokémon* with no further clarification, where audiences can be assumed to need no explanation as to why an

American presidential candidate's use of a quote from *Pokémon* should be considered funny? This casual familiarity with *Pokémon* is entwined in a far-reaching trend that has seen Japanese pop culture gain incredible popularity throughout America, resulting in an 'anime boom' in the 1990s. Its origins are directly tied to anime fan communities; McKevitt traces the popularity of Japanese anime in America to the very specific setting of Los Angeles in May of 1977, when the first anime fan club was founded (2010, p.906). According to Horibuchi's book on the spread of anime throughout America, the phenomenon emerged in connection to the general interest in 'Eastern culture' found in the New Age movement in the 1970s (2006, p.22). Regardless of its origins in and continued association with distinct subcultures, however, we have now reached a point where Japanese media is a commonplace, integrated part of the daily lives of many youths across the globe – a fact of which the Japanese government is well aware.

There are few works on Japan's current influence overseas that do not include at least a casual reference to Douglas McGray's 2002 *Foreign Policy* article entitled 'Gross National Cool'. In eleven pages, McGray managed to establish a conceptual framework with which to understand the popularity of Japanese popular culture abroad – the phrase 'gross national cool', or GNC – and ultimately change the way Japan's global power was understood. Inspiring a flurry of commentary, critiques, citations and even a set of Japanese governmental policies spread across multiple ministries, McGray's article marks a turning point in the changing perception of the importance of Japanese popular culture overseas. What was at first simply a booming industry became something that is widely understood to be an important political and economic force.[8]

It was not that the topic had never been discussed before; indeed, even the very specific concept of Japanese pop culture products becoming a form of 'soft power' abroad had been analysed

[8] There is evidence that the 'anime boom' is currently in a period of decline (particularly in the West), and further evidence that the anime industry is in a state of crisis that may not be sustainable in the long run. The reasons given for this vary: for example, Kelts' survey of anime's transnational popularity (2007) describes numerous factors leading to anime's decline, focusing on a lack of 'know-how'; Kataoka's analysis of the anime industry (2011) highlights the problem of online piracy; and an Asahi Shimbun article ('Anime gaisha', 2010) blames declining birth rates. Even the English-language manga company Tokyopop, often held up as a great success story, stopped publishing in 2011 – although it has recently reopened its website, and claims to have 'a slate of projects currently in development' (Green, 2013; 'Tokyopop: about us', 2013). Anime's future as a transnational media phenomenon remains uncertain. In the time period of 2008–2009 on which this thesis is primarily focused, however, the discourse positioning anime as a thriving cultural and economic force was still predominant.

in Saya S. Shiraishi's article 'Japan's soft power: Doraemon goes overseas' (1997). McGray's article differs from others in two key ways: the use of the catchy phrase 'GNC', a quick and cute encapsulation of a complex phenomenon (in a way, one could think of it as the *pokéball* of Japanese studies), and the myriad ways it has since been used both inside and outside of academic circles.

In McGray's formulation, 'GNC' emerges through the increasing association of Japanese goods/ideas with non-Japanese consumers' conceptions of 'coolness'. This 'coolness' is not limited to one form, but encompasses numerous categories, including fashion, media, food, design, and more. It is the pervasive (yet difficult to quantify) way in which youth around the world see Japanese goods – and Japan itself – as 'cool'. At the core of McGray's analysis is the suggestion that this 'cool' image may have the potential to translate into economic and political power for Japan.

While some suggest that McGray's assertions are rather overzealous (see, for example, Leheny, 2006, p.220; Tobin, 2004, p.268), the concept of GNC has nevertheless had an enormous influence. Known in Japan as 'Cool Japan' or 'Japan Cool' (written either in English or in the Japanese rendering of the English words, ジャパン・クール), Japan's GNC has attracted a great deal of discussion in popular discourse. Matsui Takeshi notes that the concept of 'Cool Japan' was received almost like a ray of hope in the gloom of post-bubble Japan: 'In this dark atmosphere, the news of *Pocket Monsters* (*Pokémon*) decorating the cover of TIME Magazine, Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* receiving an Academy Award, or Takashi Murakami's pop art fetching high prices at auction houses were showered with attention in Japan, referencing the phrase "Cool Japan"' (2010, p.88; my translation). According to Matsui, whose article on the 'Cool Japan' boom details the history and potential of the phenomenon, the government's efforts to make the most of 'Cool Japan' represent a collaborative effort across multiple government ministries to rebrand the nation. 'This buzzword and packaged discourse,' Matsui claims, 'was used as the "foundation" for certain goals, and constructed a new reality' (ibid.; my translation). Two of the steps taken involved the establishment of a National Centre of Media and Arts, and the formation of a Japan Brand Working Group to research the phenomenon. In a remarkably blunt statement of their intentions, a METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) agency issued a report in 2007 entitled 'Towards becoming the world's foremost

contents empire', in which 'methods were proposed by which Japan could, in order to become a "contents empire", promote development overseas, transform the legislative system and contracts, train employees, promote technological development, and acquire financial support for policies' (ibid., p.91; my translation).

The efforts discussed in Matsui's article continue today; in fact, the August/September 2011 issue of the METI Journal was titled 'Cool Japan', and includes an optimistic survey of a wide variety of ongoing initiatives to increase the power and earning potential of the 'Cool Japan' trend. The journal highlights several events, including the Tokyo Creative Forum, Tokyo Designer's Week 2011, and the Traditional Craft Month Nationwide Convention, as examples of their successful initiatives. In a simple graph depicted below, the journal concisely describes the 'Cool Japan Strategy'. The bubble labeled '1' reads 'Elevate Japan's appeal', bringing us to '2. Send Japan to the world', which will lead to '3. The world will call for Japan', thus cycling neatly back to 1 (METI, 2011; my translation). The description of the chart summarises:

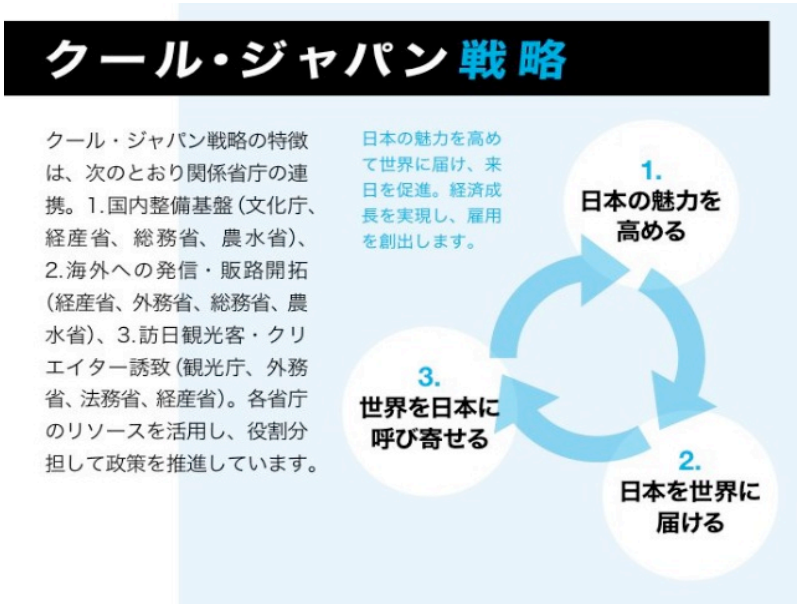

Figure 1: Outline of the 'Cool Japan Strategy'. Image from the METI Journal (2011, p.12).

> A characteristic feature of the Cool Japan Strategy is the cooperation between the relevant ministries and agencies as described below. 1. The foundational domestic preparatory measures (Agency for Cultural Affairs, METI, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries [MAFF]), 2. Overseas transmission and market cultivation (METI, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications,

> MAFF), 3. Attracting tourists and creators to visit Japan (Tourism Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, METI). The policies are promoted through each ministry and agency using their resources and distributing roles. (Ibid., p.12; my translation.)

METI has high hopes for this approach. As reported in *The Economist*, 'The aim [of METI's "Cool Japan Promotion Strategy Programme"] is to spur a nearly fivefold increase in cultural exports by 2020, to ¥11 trillion ($140 billion) – almost as much as Japan earns from car exports' ('Branding Japan', 2011). Drawing on Japan's 'GNC' to rebrand the country, however, requires an understanding of 'authentic' Japaneseness that can be as problematic to those implementing the policies as it seems to outside researchers. In an interview with Matsuoka Seigō, creative editor of the Cool Japan Strategy Promotion Project, he notes: 'What is "Japanese style" and "Japanese mode"? I think it is important that our first step is to gain a basic self-awareness of what these mean' (METI, 2011, p.7). In the following section, I will look at the emphasis on authenticity in the spread of Japanese media abroad, illustrating that what is being promoted is not only Japanese content but conceptions of Japaneseness.

Onigiri and sandwiches

The following graphic was posted in 2011 on 'Pokémemes', a site which combines widespread internet memes with *Pokémon*-specific graphics and contexts. As with many graphic memes on the Internet, this image assumes specific cultural knowledge: in this case, the tendency of 4Kids (the company which brought *Pokémon* to America) to edit out Japanese cultural references in their work. Mocked here as an element of 4kids' stupidity, it was in fact part of a carefully-planned sweeping localisation strategy meant to give *Pokémon* widespread appeal (Katsuno and Maret, 2004;

Figure 2: Making fun of localisation. Image from 'Pokémemes' (2011).

Allison, 2006a); in this case, the localisation involved editing out *onigiri*, a popular Japanese snack, and replacing it with images of a sandwich. In the view of many, this careful localisation was anything but stupid, and in fact was a key factor in *Pokémon*'s success (Allison, 2006a, p.247; Iwabuchi, 2004, p.69). Fans, however, do not always share these views, instead mocking and despising the supposedly successful localisation strategies. In the graphic shown, the implication that American viewers might be unfamiliar with one specific aspect of everyday Japanese life, or might not want to learn about everyday Japanese life through a kids' TV show, is treated as a sign that 4Kids is 'taking stupidity to a whole new level'. As referenced in Brent Allison's article on anime fans (2009), Park's discussion of the religious side of anime fandom (2005), Horibuchi's historical study of anime in America (2006), and Goldberg's examination of the spread of manga throughout America (2010), anime fandom abroad has largely been characterised by a need for 'authenticity' that celebrates the Japanese elements of the material and rejects localisation as an 'inauthentic' form of the text.

Koichi Iwabuchi describes the success of Japanese products abroad as a result of *mukokuseki*, or 'stateless', media content and localisation processes; in Iwabuchi's view, Japanese products succeed through their absence of any Japanese 'cultural odour', whether by virtue of the items themselves (for example, the lack of cultural characteristics attached to a Sony Walkman, or the racially ambiguous characters common within anime), or by conscious removal of that 'cultural odour' in the localisation process (2002, p.33). He applies this theory to *Pokémon* itself:

> … To interpret the global success of Pokémon and other Japanese cultural products as the mirror image of the global process of "Americanization" is fallacious. Looking beneath these celebratory views of Western perceptions of the coolness of Japanese culture, we find a basic contradiction: the international spread of mukokuseki popular culture from Japan simultaneously articulates the universal appeal of Japanese cultural products and the disappearance of any

> perceptible "Japaneseness," which… is subtly incorporated into the "localization" strategies of the media industries. (Ibid.)[9]

As McKevitt answers, however, 'cultural odor is relative to the nose of the smeller, and what seemed denationalized to a prominent anime director could smell a lot like Japan to a young person in California' (2010, p.900). In McKevitt's opinion, many supposedly *mukokuseki* products were known and even sought out for their Japanese characteristics by viewers (ibid., p.909). This view is echoed in a review of Iwabuchi: 'Those of us brought up with Tezuka's Japanese animation – Astro Boy, Kimba the White Lion, and so on – would argue that although the characters may have been rendered "international," in practice they are immediately identifiable as "Japanese." Indeed, the Tezuka-penned characters, which were widely imitated within Japan, have arguably become symbolic of Japan' (Allen, 2004, p.511). These critiques, coupled with many fans' disdain for such localisation (as epitomised by figure 2), suggest that the national identity of Japan-origin media has long been a complicated arena.

Today, however, it is clear that the strategies have changed drastically. Citing an interview with an executive at localisation company Saban, Anne Allison notes:

> Japanese television shows today are broadcast in the United States with overt signs of their Japanese origins in place. Rather than temples, chopsticks, or Japanese scripts being rotoscoped out (or rice balls being altered to appear as doughnuts – devices still used in the U.S. broadcast of Pokémon cartoons, nonetheless), they are highlighted as the very hook to reel kids in. (2006b, p.15.)

[9] This idea is clarified in Iwabuchi's article 'How "Japanese" is Pokémon?' (2004). In both works, Iwabuchi elaborates on the relationship between Japan's perceived 'coolness' and the *mukokuseki* nature of anime, asking: 'If the Japaneseness of Japanese animation is derived, consciously or unconsciously, from its erasure of physical signs of Japaneseness from the visual imagery, is not the Japan that Western audiences are at long last coming to appreciate and even yearn for a de-ethnicized and cultureless, virtual version of Japan?' (ibid., p.61). While recognising that notions of Japaneseness are related to the consumption of anime in the West, Iwabuchi suggests that what is longed for is a cultureless nation, removed of all identifying characteristics. It is notable, however, that Western audiences who enjoy Japanese cultural products often seek out knowledge of Japan from multiple arenas, including traveling to Japan, participating in Japan-related cultural events, and studying Japanese language (Fukunaga, 2006; Swenson, 2007).

A similar trend can be seen in translated manga: when manga first hit American bookshelves, they did so with each image 'flipped', or rotated in order for the book to read left-to-right rather than right-to-left, which resulted in a number of unusual images (for example, depictions of people driving on the wrong side of the road). In 2002, Tokyopop launched a new set of manga releases entitled '100% authentic manga', with the original right-to-left format kept in place, smaller volumes, and cheaper prices. These manga came complete with an instruction page at the end for less savvy readers, explaining the proper order by which to read the panels.

At the time, Tokyopop's '100% authentic manga' line was deemed an ingenious move, as the company was able to save a great deal of money on the cost of 'flipping' and producing high-quality larger volumes, thus charging lower prices that would attract more attention from the younger audiences at which the works were aimed (Goldberg, 2010, p.287). What is particularly fascinating about Tokyopop's line, however, is the choice of the word 'authentic'. One may argue that consumers were simply happy for access to cheaper translated manga, and any marketing of such a coveted item would produce the same result, but Tokyopop clearly believed that 'authenticity' was such a desired element to their readers that the new manga forms' increased similarity to Japanese manga (which are also small, light, and cheap, as well as read from right to left) would be their best selling point. Indeed, Tokyopop made an explicit connection between appreciation of 'original', non-localised content and being a 'true fan' in an open letter to an anime fan website after criticism of their choice to change the Japanese names in a popular manga. Nostalgically recalling their own personal discovery of Japanese anime shows, Tokyopop's staff describes how they first were interested in the narrative and visual style alone, and:

> …Only later did we begin to obsess about where they came from, and then take the further step of comparing our initial innocent appreciations with the original Japanese source material – the birth of the otaku, ne?[10] … Some of those kids [who will get hooked on new anime and manga with localised elements] WILL

[10] 'Ne' is a Japanese sentence ending usually translated as 'isn't it?' or 'right?' Its use here indicates that Tokyopop is positioning itself as 'in the know' concerning normal lingo in fan communities, speaking to an audience of anime fans who are presumed to have some level of Japanese.

> go on to become true fans and go through all the evolutions of appreciation that we all know and love so well… eventually seeking out subtitled DVDs, collector's editions of the manga, cosplaying Tak at AX, and learning to speak and read Japanese themselves so that they don't even have to deal with our choices. (Tokyopop Staff, 2002.)

In this open letter, Tokyopop uses the act of seeking out non-localised materials as a standard indicating identity as a 'true fan'. In a move that might seem counter to its own interests, Tokyopop is defining 'true fans' as those who do not read Tokyopop manga, those who have enough devotion to the 'authentic' Japanese content that they learn Japanese in order to access it in its original form. Accessing localised content is described as the first stage on a set course of 'evolutions of appreciation', a gateway into a foreign world that will ultimately end with close attachment not only to anime texts but to Japanese culture and language in general.

The use of anime as a gateway to Japanese culture for non-Japanese audiences highlights a key element of its political significance: a particular variety of Japanese media content – one that often includes children's media content – plays a crucial role in shaping contemporary understandings of 'Japaneseness'. As will be discussed further in chapter three, fans of Japanese media content abroad enjoy not only the adventures of wide-eyed heroes and tragically beautiful villains, but a specific image of Japan itself – a vision of Japanese society, history, ethics, and aesthetics that is becoming ever more fundamental to dominant understandings of Japan abroad. METI's efforts to promote the 'Cool Japan' brand further reify an 'anime-ified' vision of Japan, encouraging the flow of anime from the depths of dark, overflowing Akihabara stores to featured positions in newspapers, magazines, and tourist guides. The transnational popularity of certain Japanese media content is therefore a politically, economically, and culturally significant phenomenon.

Conclusion

Contemporary Japanese children's media is characterised by its multiplicity, from the ceaseless spread of content across forms to the interest of transnational (and inter-generational) audiences and the usage of texts in varying cultural contexts. This mixed media culture has attracted politicians, entrepreneurs, and cultural theorists alike, making Japanese children's media the subject of considerable national and international attention. It is important to note that Japanese children's media today assumes many forms, including fan-created manga existing outside commercial structures, elegant, gentle films with minimal tie-in products, and powerful, engaging works of children's literature. Despite the wishes of many parents and cultural critics, however, one of the most pervasive forms of children's media in Japan today is that of the media mix – the blending of content across unending new platforms, changing in each new episode, volume, production or medium. Media mixes often have no end, and arguably, no clear beginning, as it can become almost impossible to discern an 'original' work within such an incredible volume of works that draw on one another in ever more creative, unusual ways.

These are not simply television programmes, films, books, or comics. They are worlds, complex and multifaceted worlds that are not confined to the works in which they appear. If the franchise's official endless proliferation proves not enough for enthusiastic audiences, they are expanded further by the imaginations of fans and other participants, who make not only the characters but the worlds those characters inhabit take forms unimaginable to the original creators. If we conceptually broaden our understanding of the media mix to include not only the official media franchises but also all official and unofficial merchandise, fan participation across the globe, and the multiple releases of media in different countries, what lies before us is a vast expanse of imagination that could never be fully analysed by any researcher.

The history of 'Cool Japan' provides an important context to keep in mind for the remainder of this thesis. Japan-origin children's media content, as one particularly well-known element of 'Cool Japan', is not simply significant to parents and children within Japan, but also plays a role in the current branding of the nation. Contemporary Japanese children's media has far-reaching

implications: the films discussed in the following chapters are films that will be disseminated to numerous countries, heralded domestically and abroad as an emblem of Japan's position in the world today. Of course, children's media always carries with it flurries of discussion about the potential of the future generation, or the loss of the values of the older generation, and Japanese children's media is no different. In the case of contemporary Japanese children's films, however, there is an additional cultural weight brought to the realm of children's media. It is often seen as a potential source of economic and cultural power for Japan, a challenge to Western dominance of global media systems, and a key source of changing global images of Japan.

As I will explore further in chapter three, anime is, in an ever-increasing number of ways, considered a thing of the future; and yet, in the depths of its fantastic worlds, we find a persistent longing for the past. Like Mei in *Totoro*, we wander through paths of our own creation, facing boundless potential and multiplicity; we become lost in worlds without end, but also like the grinning five-year-old explorer, the worlds through which we travel are forests and fields of tall grasses, occupied by distant memories and a tenacious sense of loss.

Chapter 2

The challenge of limitless texts: Approaching film analysis in the ever-expanding worlds of the media mix

> 'In today's market for otaku culture… it is quite ambiguous what the original is or who the original author is, and the consumers rarely become aware of the author or the original. For them, the distinction between the original and the spin-off products (as copies) does not exist… Here, even the idea that the original functions as an entry point into the settings or the worldview is becoming inappropriate.'
>
> – Hiroki Azuma (2009, p.39)

Scope and focus of the research

In the limitless texts of the media mix, the boundaries between works become irreparably tangled. The decline of the identifiable 'original' and 'copy', described by Azuma in the above quote as a characteristic of *otaku* culture, is increasingly applicable to Japanese children's cultures as well. While scholars might wish to identify a single text for analysis, the media mix makes such an impulse almost laughable: where does that text begin and end? Can the words 'beginning' and 'ending' even be applied to the elements of a media mix? When any new iteration of a media mix may re-focus, complicate, or even oppose the texts that came before, how can we conduct meaningful analysis?

In the face of these methodological challenges, scholarship has remained surprisingly unchanged. Studies largely address the challenges presented by simply refusing to engage with them: media texts are analysed as if they exist in isolation, treating the media mix as a largely irrelevant extension of what is usually constructed as the 'original', or at least more significant, text chosen for analysis.[11] Alternatively, the multiplicity of the media mix is condensed into a form easier for us to swallow, becoming represented not by any individual elements but through its general concept as

[11] For example, see: Ruh, 2006; Ortega, 2007; Brown, 2008; Thouny, 2009.

conveyed through a variety of texts. Here, the specificity has gone, and whatever lies within the depths of a particular film or manga chapter – including common recurring themes that pervade the franchise – are deemed unimportant in comparison to the surface idea on which the franchise (or media culture in general) is based.[12] In my research, I examine texts in a way that fully recognises and integrates the multiplicity of the media mix while also addressing the specificity of individual elements (for example, a film or piece of merchandise). This chapter aims to clarify my methodology, and in so doing highlight the challenges to conventional media analysis represented by the media mix.

Defining 'contemporary Japanese children's cinema'

Before delving further, it is necessary to define the term on which the thesis is premised: 'contemporary Japanese children's cinema'. As my research was conducted from 2009 through 2012, 'contemporary' refers to films released immediately prior to and during the research period. Of the three case-study films used, two were released in 2008, and one in 2009. All three are associated with franchises (or, in the case of *Ponyo*, a well-known studio) that are ongoing at the time of writing. 'Japanese' is fairly easy to determine in this context; while many films that are considered examples of 'Japanese cinema' may involve directors or stars from other countries, be released simultaneously in more than one country, or involve more than one spoken language, these ambiguities rarely surface in children's media. All of the films chosen were produced in Japan-based studios and first released in Japan, in Japanese. Notably, however, all of the films were later released in other countries, and dubbed into other languages.

The definition of 'children's cinema' presents more obvious issues in this instance. Regardless of 'target demographic', Japanese franchises will typically gain adult and/or teen fans, and particularly in the age of the Internet, children may enjoy media intended for older audiences. Scholars have long struggled to identify criteria by which to define the term 'children's films', with

[12] For example, see: Ito, 2005b; Tobin J. 2004; Azuma, 2009; Allison A., 2009a. Further discussion of this type of analysis can be found in the following chapter.

any possible definition raising numerous complications. In the introduction to a book on the topic of children's film, Wocjik-Andrews claims:

> There are films aimed at children, films about childhood, and films children see regardless of whether or not they are children's films. There are "children's films," but there is no such thing as a "children's film"… Indeed, any attempt to universalize children's cinema, a children's film, or the nature of the child viewer, only reveals more closely the contradictions in which children's cinema finds itself situated. (2000, p.19.)

This study focuses on films targeted primarily to child audiences, as well as 'family films', or those works targeted to child and adult audiences simultaneously. My method of determining which films are 'targeted' to children has been to seek out explicit statements of the work's target audience in promotional materials for the film and widely-circulated newspapers and magazines. Each of the three films or franchises studied, as well as the main supplementary films discussed, have been labeled as films for children in such sources, implying that children are the films' intended audiences (or at least, the audience with which the creators would prefer their film to be associated).[13] When first seeking out children's films through which to conduct a wide survey of Japanese children's media cultures, I relied heavily on the classifications used by the video rental store Tsutaya (http://www.tsutaya.co.jp/index.html) and the Japanese version of the website Amazon (http://www.amazon.co.jp), both of which are widely used throughout Japan. I considered films classified in the 'Kids and Family' sections of Tsutaya and Amazon to be applicable to this study. There are clearly limitations to this approach. A work's 'target audience' may be debatable, adults may watch and enjoy any of these films, and any specified 'target audience' may differ in non-Japanese contexts. Each of the works studied have garnered interest from adult audiences: *Doraemon* (1969–ongoing) is often said to have nostalgic appeal for adults (see chapter six), *Ponyo* has been watched by teens and adults worldwide who are drawn to the Studio Ghibli name, and *Purikyua* has

[13] For example, for *Purikyua* and *Doraemon*, see: 'Shōhin jōhō', 2011; for *Ponyo*, see '"Gake no ue no Ponyo" seisakuchū', 2008.

attracted a following amongst *otaku* fans. Nevertheless, the method used ensures that the films studied have been classified as children's films from within a Japanese context.

Magical warriors, fish girls and robots from the future

The selection of primary case study films was guided primarily by my desire to select diverse works that illuminated common tendencies throughout children's media cultures. The questions of how many films to study, how to choose those films, and which films to choose are ones that I have struggled with throughout the research period. Every work offered its own convincing case for inclusion: there are films that present intriguing ideals or stunning representations of worlds here and elsewhere, films that perfectly exemplify an exciting concept, or films that just somehow seem too important to leave unmentioned. My desire to work from a varied collection of films was a primary focus in the selection process; too often, Japanese popular culture is analysed according to narrow representations that do not begin to convey the variety of the media industries at play.

Of course, it is not possible to generalise to the entire state of Japanese children's media based solely on three media mix texts. It is important to note that these three case studies are not in themselves the crux of my analysis, but instead concrete examples illustrating the tendencies found throughout children's media today. My analysis is based on a broad survey of contemporary Japanese children's films, focusing primarily on works from 2006 to 2011. The observations gained from those works centre my analysis – both explicitly (through the inclusion of works other than the three case studies in chapters four through seven) and implicitly (as the content of the many works studied guides my analysis). The chosen case studies represent a diverse sample of common conventions in contemporary Japanese children's media. The works studied each exhibit markedly different representations of place and time, and each of these representations in turn exemplifies conventions that pervade Japanese children's media. The three case studies, then, are used to provide grounded examples of three differing representations that will undoubtedly be familiar to those immersed in the worlds of Japanese children's media: the always-transforming girls of 'magical girl' anime who remain nonetheless immersed in childhood nostalgia; the seamless integration of an idyllic town

community with powerful, majestic natural beauty; and the use of awe-inspiring futuristic technology to navigate imperilled but beautiful fantastic worlds. None of these representations are unique to the films chosen; rather, they appear scattered throughout the scenery of the children's media mix. Readers could (and hopefully will) apply the observations in the following chapters to numerous other Japanese children's films, video games, TV shows, manga, and books.

With this in mind, I will lay out the criteria that guided my choice of the three films. These criteria are provided to illustrate the scope of my research; I hope they will clarify the types of the films I am focusing on, and highlight the types of films available that I am not addressing. The criteria are as follows:

1. I have sought out a wide variety of children's films; I did not want to approach a topic as broad as 'children's films' and only discuss a specific genre or 'type' of film. Close analysis of only three films necessarily limits the possible variety, but I have included three undeniably different films. *Purikyua* is one of thirteen films of a popular girls' franchise, and makes only the slightest effort to appeal to parents as well as children. It is loud, bright, unequivocally 'girly', and heavily commercialised. A conventional example of the 'magical girl' genre, *Purikyua* draws upon the themes of perpetual transformation that are often seen as the hallmark of that genre.[14] In contrast, *Ponyo* is a critically acclaimed addition to the canon of the beloved and world-renowned Studio Ghibli, its striking visuals and unconventional narrative style producing a film that would be as at home in the independent art cinema as in the shopping mall multiplex. *Ponyo* reaches out to audiences across the lines of gender, nationality, and age to tell a story that revels in transformation as a vehicle to bring us back to a prehistoric past. *Doraemon,* like *Purikyua*, is part of a popular franchise, but one that speaks to adults as well as children through its age and status as a national icon. The *Doraemon* franchise can be seen as both the epitome of rampant consumerism and a nostalgic remembrance of a childhood 'before' commercial mediation, two conflicting ideals that serve as an introduction to the many unresolved conflicts that characterise *Doraemon* texts. These

[14] For further information about the 'magical girl' genre and *Purikyua*'s relationship to it, see: Grigsby, 1999a; Allison, 2001; Masuda, 2009; Yamamoto, 2010. There is also a more extended discussion on this subject in chapter four.

works are different in their positions in Japanese society, the ways in which they address adult and child audiences, the types of other works and merchandise with which they are associated,[15] the types of works on which they are based,[16] and the types of stories they tell. In both form and content, they are highly dissimilar works.

2. I only considered films that were widely released in cinemas across Japan. Furthermore, I only considered films that generated a significant amount of discussion or were frequently referenced in national media outlets, such as national newspapers *Asahi Shimbun* and *The Daily Yomiuri*. This excludes a number of fascinating and powerful films that did not hold a strong presence on the national stage, and limits my discussion only to those that reached a large audience and contributed to popular media discourse. This decision was made to focus my project on the widespread norms of the contemporary media environment, thus addressing texts that embody, rather than challenge, common media conventions. In practice, such distinctions are never neat or uncomplicated, and each of the case studies may be seen as both a challenge to and reification of the conventions of Japanese children's media. Nevertheless, the films studied are elements of easily accessible and well-known franchises, and as such both represent and comprise significant components of the children's media cultures of contemporary Japan.
3. Of the three films I am focusing on, two were released in 2008, and one in 2009. This creates a narrow time frame, looking only at contemporary works and not seeking to chart the historical development of the themes discussed. Of course, many of the observations I will make come from earlier and later films, and the films are all associated with franchises or other works that include earlier and later works.

[15] There are numerous commonalities in the merchandise available for each work (for example, hand towels, key chains, and notebooks), but there are also distinctions. For example, *Doraemon* is the only one of the three with a film-inspired video game, *Purikyua* is the only one to release a novel based on the film's narrative, and only *Ponyo* offers a book compilation of its original storyboards.

[16] *Purikyua* is an element of a franchise that originated with a television show. *Ponyo* is essentially an original work, but is loosely based on a fairy tale. *Doraemon* is heir to both the manga in which the premise of *Doraemon* was established, and the long tradition of *Doraemon* feature films that dictated the narrative structure of the film.

4. I have avoided studying films or franchises that have already been extensively studied by other scholars outside Japan (such as *Pokémon* [1996–ongoing], *Yugioh* [1997–ongoing], and *Sailor Moon* ['*Sērā Mūn*', 1991–2004]). This allows me to highlight works that have thus far escaped English-language academic critique, potentially addressing those themes and characteristics that have not previously been addressed, or suggesting the continued prevalence of themes and characteristics that echo those previously discussed by scholars. *Pokémon* and *Yugioh* are ongoing series, and therefore were used in my survey and subsequent analysis, if not in any key case studies.[17]
5. Currently, there seems to be disproportionate attention paid to films and franchises primarily geared towards boys. While some scholarship has highlighted *shōjo* (girls') manga and anime, it remains largely neglected in favour of boy-oriented works.[18] While *shōjo* characters are frequently discussed (Newitz, 1995; Napier, 1998; Kotani, 2006; Azuma, 2007), such discussions are often centred on specific characters within male-oriented texts, a trend epitomised by Saitō Tamaki's book *Beautiful Fighting Girl* (2011), which analyses the figure of the 'fighting beauty' as it relates to male sexuality. Discussions of girl-oriented media remain rare, and on the occasions when such texts are addressed, it is almost exclusively through the lens of gender rather than as a crucial element of Japanese media in general. I have sought out films and franchises oriented towards girls and women (although, in accordance with norms in Japan today, they are produced and directed by men). This is reflected in the choice of *Purikyua*, as well as several of the supplementary texts that guided my analysis (*Nishi no Majo ga Shinda* [2008], *Hottarake no Shima* [2009], *Shugo Chara* ['*Shugo Kyara*', 2006–2010]*, Puritī Rizumu* [2010–ongoing]*, Juerupetto* [2008–ongoing], and *Gokujō!! Mecha Mote Iinchō* [2006–ongoing]). I have not dealt with any of the major

[17] It is common to analyse works according only to their premise at the time of their original inception (for example, see: Tobin J. 2004; Ito, 2005b; Allison, 2006a), thus effectively implying that the premise contains a sort of 'essence' of the work that is never fully subverted or altered in subsequent texts (or that any alteration occurring is of lesser importance). I believe that the specificity and extensiveness of the media mix complicates this form of analysis; works like *Pokémon*, *Doraemon*, and *Gegege no Kitarō* (1959–ongoing) may have been first conceived many years ago, but their ongoing presence situates them not only in the time of their creation, but simultaneously in the times of each recurring work's creation.

[18] For some particularly insightful works on *shōjo* media, see: Aoyama, 2005; Shamoon, 2007 and 2008; Takahashi, 2008; Prough, 2011.

shōnen (boys') franchises, such as *Yugioh*, *Kamen Rider* ('*Kamen Raidā*', 1971–ongoing), *One Piece*, and *Super Sentai* (1975–ongoing), although I have familiarised myself with them and incorporate that knowledge into my work.

6. As mentioned earlier, the analysis in this thesis is based on a broad survey of contemporary Japanese children's films, as well as television programming, toys, and manga. Children's literature and video games were also included, although to a lesser extent. The case study films exemplify the norms of contemporary Japanese children's media as ascertained by this survey, and the analysis of the texts focuses on those elements of the texts that represent common tropes, themes, or portrayals. Other works of contemporary children's media will be brought in to the analysis when necessary, but it is important to keep in mind that even when they are not explicitly mentioned, they maintain a presence through the chosen areas of analysis.

Analysing the media mix text

As discussed in chapter one, simply selecting films and analysing their content would not be a method appropriate to the children's media industries in Japan today. Of course, multiplicity is a feature of all media: a text assumes different meanings as it is used in different social contexts, is given differing interpretations when read by individual participants, and arises from and in complex intertextual networks. A film (or, indeed, anything else) is never singular or isolated. In the particular situation of Japanese children's cinema, however, this fact is impossible to ignore. Due to the media mix system of franchising, intertextuality is so integral to the text that it would be difficult to study film texts in isolation. Take, for example, the films of the series *One Piece*, a *shōnen* series that has gained phenomenal popularity in recent years, reaching a record-breaking one hundred million sales ('"Oricon" "One Piece" rankingu', 2012). I first viewed a *One Piece* film with almost no prior knowledge of the series. Without the prerequisite background knowledge, the following hour was a rush of nonsensical humour and sentimentality. It was, speaking bluntly, completely incomprehensible. The narrative was so deeply intertextual that it *could only make sense* with prior

knowledge of the series. The scope of the media mix often makes even locating an original text a mystifying task, and texts rely so deeply on one another that they become essentially inextricable. *One Piece* is not unique in this matter: the same phenomenon could occur when watching the movies of *Pokémon, Purikyua* (2004–ongoing)*, Digimon* (‘*Dejimon*’, 1998–ongoing)*, Doraemon, Anpanman* (1973–ongoing)*,* or any number of other long-running franchises.[19]

The dazzling scope of intertextuality that characterises Japanese children’s media may be epitomised by the 2006 Nintendo DS video game *Nobita no Kyōryū* (‘*Nobita’s Dinosaur*’). The game was released alongside the film of the same name, one of several Nintendo DS video games based on *Doraemon* films. The film *Nobita no Kyōryū*, however, was itself an adaptation of the 1980 film bearing the same title. As the first *Doraemon* film made, the 1980 version of *Nobita no Kyōryū* was an extension of the animated television series – which itself was adapted from Fujiko F. Fujio’s manga. Given these nesting doll layers of adaptation, how could we say which text the game was based on? Was it the 2006 film, as the marketing suggests? Or was it the 1980 film in which that specific narrative first appeared? What about the television show, in which audiences first saw the characters animated, and depicted in the characteristic art style still used today? Should we look all the way back to the manga, which introduced us to the characters and premise?

I believe that attempting to answer these questions would be both unhelpful and irrelevant: the texts of ongoing Japanese children’s media franchises are multiple and endlessly increasing, and rather than choosing an arbitrary origin to study – or simply ignoring their multiplicity to look at the texts in isolation – it is necessary to treat such texts in a way that embraces their multiplicity. These films are not simply films or even simply film adaptations, but single elements of vast textual worlds that spread out far beyond any one work. ‘Media mix’ texts defy easy understandings of ‘original work’ and ‘adaptation’, blur the boundaries between the text and its merchandise, and create narratives that dart beyond and around any given individual text.

[19] Prior knowledge of the series is the most immediately noticeable prerequisite to watching the films, but it is not the only relevant form of intertextuality. While Japanese children’s media tends to rely much less heavily on pop-culture references than its American counterparts, such references are at times used in Japanese children’s media, and it is common to see popular actors or television personalities starring in children’s films. Furthermore, generic conventions are often cited and mocked (or otherwise played with) throughout films, requiring some familiarity with Japanese children’s media more broadly.

While the media mix undoubtedly complicates textual analysis, it is important to remember that textual analysis has already been complicated in contexts not limited to Japan. As Henry Jenkins observes in *Convergence Culture*:

> Convergence doesn't just involve commercially produced materials and services travelling along well-regulated and predictable circuits. It doesn't just involve the mobile companies getting together with the film companies to decide when and where we watch a newly released film. It also occurs when people take media in their own hands. Entertainment content isn't the only thing that flows across multiple media platforms. Our lives, relationships, memories, fantasies, desires also flow across media channels. Being a lover or a mommy or a teacher occurs on multiple platforms. Sometimes we tuck our kids into bed at night and other times we Instant Message them from the other side of the globe. (2006a, p.17.)

The existence of fan-created media and 'convergence culture' more broadly has already added layers of complexity to the way we interact with and participate in media. While it is tempting to view this as an emerging phenomenon, the creation of fan texts, use of multiple media platforms throughout our daily lives, and audience's active participation in the life of a text are hardly new phenomena, and the multiplicity of texts within the media mix can be seen as simply an extension of these realities.

The existence of fandoms is particularly important to analyses of Japanese popular culture, as anime and manga in Japan is often associated with fandoms (Okada, 1996; Ito, 2005a; Tagawa, 2009). Outside of Japan, the popularity of Japanese media has largely been driven by the demand of devout fan bases (Horibuchi, 2006; Kino, 2008; McKevitt, 2010). If we mentally amalgamate fandoms, media mixes, and the 'convergence culture' that characterises the way audiences interact with media today, we are presented with an image of unending texts and uses for those texts, of media both official and unofficial and everything in between. Fan participation can be seen as just another part of the endless worlds developed and inhabited by each media text.

When discussing convergence culture and new media, scholars primarily focus on the intricacies of what current media cultures involve, and how they function in the lives of audiences.[20] Textual analysis has largely been forgotten, pushed aside by the mind-boggling frontiers of new media. Meanwhile, those who do engage in textual analysis either ignore the growing predicament of the singular text, or (as we will see in the following chapter) analyse texts in a way that situates them neatly in the 'postmodern' framework generally associated with observations of our changing world. Texts appear as celebratory commentary on the state of media today, embodying a philosophy that revels in all that is fluid, ambiguous, and multiple – but how they are analysed remains as static and singular as ever. In other words, we have yet to ask the crucial question of how we can engage in textual analysis in an age of textual multiplicity.

Throughout this thesis, I have approached films by highlighting both the multiplicity and specificity of the text, taking into account numerous elements of media mixes while also looking deeply at the particular representations of individual works. My goal has been to piece together a comprehensive map of each media mix formed from a wide variety of texts, while simultaneously focusing on individual elements in a way that recognises the myriad ways any part of a franchise may support, complicate, or challenge the texts that came before and after. In my analysis, the related media texts are not meant to be supplementary materials through which to better understand the films, but sit alongside the films as essential elements of broader intertextual worlds. In order to accomplish this, I have focused on three types of resources in my analysis of each 'film':

1. 'Official' related media, including the media mix texts, official merchandise, and promotional materials. This typically includes a selection of the following: manga, television shows, or books on which the film is based; other films or television series in the franchise; soundtracks or 'image albums' (albums released in association with the films and composed of tracks not heard in the film, but inspired by it); books, magazines, or 'mooks' (large, magazine-style books) designed to provide information about the film; manga or video games based on the film; merchandise, which typically includes cell phone straps, key chains, dolls, stationery,

[20] For example, see the articles in Sefton-Green, 1998; Marsh, 2005; Buckingham and Willett, 2006; Buckingham, 2008; McPherson, 2008.

bags, etc.; official websites, trailers, posters and other promotional materials; and other supplementary materials. I have attempted to access as many of these materials as possible, although in some situations availability, cost, or quantity of the products has made materials inaccessible.[21]

2. Fan works and discussions amongst fans, such as fanfictions, fanart, and conversations about the films on blogs and Twitter. For *Purikyua*, I maintained involvement with an international fan community through observation of and some participation in the active 'Precure' livejournal group (http://precure.livejournal.com) over a period of two years. These resources provide some examples of the films' use by fan audiences, and often reveal what fan audiences consider to be significant and/or powerful elements of the films. Most of the fan works I accessed are written in English, although some are in Japanese.
3. Media discourse about the films in newspapers, magazines, websites, and television broadcasts, most of which were accessed online.[22] These resources usually take the form of interviews with actors and directors, statements by actors and directors to promote the film, magazine or newspaper reviews or analyses of the films, and newspaper articles on such topics as awards won by the films or promotional events related to the films' release. These texts provide a wealth of information about common perceptions of the film, such as which themes are seen as predominant or the film's position in Japanese society. They also provide basic facts about the film (such as information about promotional events or box office statistics). Most of the resources I accessed are in Japanese, but some are in English.

While most of the resources cited above were either purchased or accessed via the Internet, a crucial element of this research involved a two-month visit to Japan in the summer of 2011. During this time, I increased my knowledge of the films, particularly with regard to their social contexts, by exploring

[21] 'Quantity' here refers primarily to *Doraemon* and *Purikyua*, both of which are massive series including several hundred television episodes.

[22] For example, the websites for the Japanese newspapers *The Asahi Shimbun* (http://www.asahi.com/), *The Daily Yomiuri* (http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/), *Mainichi Shimbun* (http://mainichi.jp/), and *Nikkei Shimbun* (http://www.nikkei.com/); the American news outlets *CNN* (http://www.cnn.com/), *The New York Times* (http://www.nytimes.com/), and *NPR* (http://www.npr.org/); and the British newspapers *The Guardian* (http://www.guardian.co.uk/) and *The Telegraph* (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/). Further resources include the entertainment database sites *Terebi Dogacchi* (http://dogatch.jp/) and *Oricon Style* (http://www.oricon.co.jp/). This is not a complete list, and other resources were used when relevant.

their presence in Tokyo today. This included visiting a variety of locations and participating in events related to children's media, as well as observing the presence of children's media texts in everyday contexts such as stores, advertisements, and television programming. Furthermore, in order to better understand the use of place in the base films, I was able to visit a town intimately associated with one of the films: Tomo no Ura, which served as the inspiration for *Ponyo*.[23] I centred my fieldwork on gaining awareness of the social positions, pervasiveness, and current uses of the *Doraemon* and *Purikyua* franchises, the Studio Ghibli brand, and other popular children's franchises and shows.

Drawing on both my survey of contemporary Japanese children's works and my in-depth research on *Purikyua*, *Doraemon*, and Studio Ghibli, my research focuses on the textual analysis of three films and a selection of related texts (including merchandise, tourism pamphlets, websites, television episodes, and manga). Each body chapter looks first at the general premise of the franchise or studio, outlining its content, image, and position in contemporary Japanese culture. That summary is then supplemented by close textual analysis of the settings of the individual films. I examine the type of settings shown (for example, urban/rural or Japan/fantasy world), the visual style in which they are depicted, the role of the settings in the narrative, and the relationship between the settings and the overriding morals or messages of the films. In discussions of 'morals' or 'messages', I have relied on explicit and clearly-stated ideals guiding the film, and will demonstrate in the relevant chapters how each 'message' of the films or related works was determined. The main subject of this analysis is the overlapping and divergent spaces between the broader premise of the franchise/studio and the specificity of individual texts.

Conclusion

I have approached this thesis as an experiment in conducting research that seeks to fully integrate the complexities of the media mix. I have attempted to recognise the extensive media worlds that form each franchise, while also avoiding the urge to compress the ambiguities of the media mix texts into a

[23] The details of the connections between the town and the film with which it is associated will be discussed further in chapter five.

simple premise that supersedes the specificity of its individual elements. In order to do this, I used as primary case studies three films selected from a wide survey of contemporary Japanese children's films, and treated those films' related franchises (or studios) as integral elements of the text. The research conducted on each film's accompanying media included official related texts, fan works, and general media discourse about the works. Through this structure, I hope to paint a comprehensive picture of each film as a single element in a world much broader than its boundaries. By choosing three differing films, all of which occupy diverging positions in Japanese children's media, and analysing representations within each that are prominent throughout Japanese children's media texts, this thesis highlights the varied and complex state of contemporary children's media in Japan. The limited time frame on which this thesis focuses precludes extensive historical analysis, instead situating the analysis as an examination of the current state of Japanese children's media cultures.

Chapter 3

Navigating children's media studies and Japanese media studies

Introduction

Japanese children's media scholarship in English is currently confined to a handful of works. Among the few works available, the most notable include Anne Allison's extensive study of Japanese toys, *Millenial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (2006a) and a variety of articles based on the same research (Allison, 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2004; 2006b; 2006c; 2009a; 2009b), the collection of articles on *Pokémon* (1996–ongoing) entitled *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, edited by Joseph Jay Tobin (2004), Mizuko Ito's work on media mixes (2003; 2004; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c), and Marc Steinberg's historical account of the development of the media mix, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (2012). While several other works have been based on research about Japanese children's cultural items, few have explicitly approached the topic as such.[24] This is a small and hardly unified field; while both Ito's works and Tobin's book adeptly combine the fields of children's media studies and Japanese cultural studies, Allison remains strictly within the field of Japanese cultural anthropology, and Steinberg's recent contribution uses historical analysis combined with media theory.

In Japanese, there is a large and ever-growing body of literature on children's media texts, but again, these works come from a variety of disciplines. As in English, most works on children's media as such remain focused on sociological studies of either the effects of media on children or the ways in which children use/participate in media, or alternatively, approach the topic from the field of

[24] For example, Napier's research on *Sailor Moon* and Hayao Miyazaki's films, in which she approaches the works primarily as examples of 'anime' rather than 'children's media' (2001; 2005; see also Denison, 2008; Lightburn, 2008; Yoshioka, 2008) or Vasquez's research on *Pokémon*, which treats the subject as a children's cultural phenomenon in general rather than as a Japanese cultural item in particular (2005; see also Kinder, 1999; Balmford, 2002; Sefton-Green, 2004).

children's literature studies.[25] Academic discussions approach children's visual media content from a wide variety of disciplines and perspectives, as I will discuss later in this chapter. Considering the lack of a unified field of Japanese children's media studies, I believe it is more appropriate to look at both the fields of children's media studies and Japanese cultural studies in general, rather than concentrating solely on the small amount of research available on Japanese children's media. This survey draws on English- and Japanese-language scholarship; however, it is primarily focused on English-language works, as the trends in scholarship in each language remain distinct and therefore difficult to speak of as a single entity. No works published in languages other than Japanese or English were used, and the English-language focus constitutes an obvious limitation that must be kept in mind throughout this chapter.[26]

I have divided this chapter into two main parts, the first exploring the field of children's media studies and the second discussing Japanese cultural studies. I have chosen to focus primarily on research from approximately the last twenty years that deals with popular culture in Japan and/or for children. While my primary interest is in film, surveying solely those books and articles written about film would overlook the highly intertextual media environment in which most Japanese children's films are watched. As discussed in the previous chapters, children's media in Japan is characterised by the 'media mix', a franchising method that challenges the study of any singular incarnation of that mix. Children's films, especially in Japan, are usually viewed by children along with a variety of other media and merchandise, and exist in a broader media environment that provides context for individual films. 'Watching a film' is likely to include not simply going to the cinema and viewing a film, but discussing the film before and after with others (online and/or in person), purchasing, renting, and/or downloading the film or related media, visiting websites related to the film, viewing

[25] The study of children's literature (*jidō bungaku*) is an extensive discipline in Japan. See, for example, Yoshida, 1996; Fujimoto, 2005; Takada, 2005; Uchikawa, 2005; Sawazaki, 2009. Each of these articles analyses textual representations in Nashiki Kaho's 1994 novel *Nishi no Majo ga Shinda*.

[26] This limitation affects both my survey of Japanese cultural studies and children's media studies. Within the children's media studies works I have used, most studies concern the United States, Australia, or the United Kingdom, although several works are intentionally 'global' in scope and thus include information about other nations (for example: Marsh, 2005; Buckingham, 2006; Lemish, 2007). Despite such conscious attempts at representing a global perspective, however, the studies remain vastly dominated by research about American, British, and Australian children. This is to be expected, given the language in which the works were written; nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that this survey does not adequately represent research being done in relation to other contexts.

trailers or advertisements for the film, reading the story or playing the game on which the film was based, buying merchandise, and/or reading reviews or discussions about the film. Additionally, a viewer's interaction with a film is informed by their own media literacy, which is often based on engagement with other media and influences (for example, their understanding of genre and specific types of humour). Arjun Appadurai's theory of 'mediascapes' is relevant here; Appadurai defines mediascapes as referring 'both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media' (1996, p.35). He notes

> What is most important about these mediascapes is that they provide… large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed. What this means is that many audiences around the world experience the media themselves as a complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens, and billboards. (Ibid.)

Given this reality, examining children's cinema alone cannot encompass how children's cinema is actually produced and consumed; therefore, this survey examines 'mediascapes', rather than limiting my understanding to a single medium. In both sections of this survey, I have concentrated whenever possible on the aforementioned works on Japanese children's media.

Children's media

Children's relationship to media is a popular topic of study, evoking impassioned dialogue from scholars (regardless of discipline or specialty) to pundits, politicians, parents, and even children themselves. Despite such wide interest, however, the discourse often falls into predictable patterns. We are all familiar with widespread worries regarding the effects of media violence on children,

assertions that television will diminish a child's creativity, or anxieties about a new socially inept internet generation. Following decades of discussion about the concerning effects of children consuming media, the idea that such concerning effects do exist is now taken almost unquestionably as truth, even by the subjects of worry themselves (Sheldon, 1998, pp.80–85). It is interesting that the same theories fuelled (in part) by scholars are now often denounced by scholars; recent academic discourse on the subject of children's media provides us with numerous thoughtful reflections that not only challenge the common notion of media as a corrupting force, but also question our preconceptions about childhood, adulthood, and media itself.

I have not restricted my survey to a specific discipline, in part because many scholars in this field are consciously interdisciplinary in their approach (for example, see: Marsh, 2005; Howard, 1998; Holloway and Valentine, 2003; Roe, 2000). I have, however, decided to concentrate on the growing body of literature that challenges traditional 'effects' research – research that explores the (negative) effects of media on children – and at least acknowledges the problems of overly optimistic alternatives to 'effects' research. My focus is on the many rigorous studies that try to avoid any form of technological determinism, positive or negative, and provide eloquent challenges not to 'media' in general but our conceptions of what media is, what impact it can have in our lives, and what our relationship with media is or can be.

I will begin by presenting a short summary of the current state of the field; the aim of this summary is not to fully represent the entirety of the relevant works available, but rather to produce a model that illustrates the general trends dominating today's discussions on children's media. This model will then serve as a starting point for a more thorough examination and analysis of those trends. I will conclude the children's media section of the chapter by presenting a critique of some predominant trends, including the need for researchers to engage in more complete immersion in children's media, and the undeniably difficult issue of discussing texts with regard to 'agency' or 'autonomy'.

Overview of the field

Soon after I began researching the prevalent issues in children's media studies, I found myself watching the atheist Richard Dawkins decry the country's faith schools on a show unambiguously titled 'Faith School Menace?' (18 August 2010). After teaching a clapping game to a young child, Dawkins notes how quickly the game spreads over the playground: 'Within minutes, others pick up the game, pass it on to friends, make connections and adapt it with variations. Children love to imitate, they love to join in. There's something compelling about ideas, the way they spread through minds that are a bit like sponges. What children absorb at a young age can last a life-time.' Dawkins' voiceover is accompanied by images of children on the playground, depicting many trying to learn the game, some using the same rhythm with drastically different clapping motions, and some adapting the originally two-person game into a three-person game.

Dawkins' comments, probably unwittingly, illustrate a fundamental tension in research on children and youth. He uses words and phrases – 'imitate', 'absorb', 'a bit like sponges' – that indicate a belief in children's essential passivity. Children do not create or participate in their culture; they *absorb* the culture given to them by adults. Nevertheless, some of the behaviour filmed, and indeed one of Dawkins' own comments, tells quite a different story: the children are not simply absorbing the game shown to them, but *adapting* it to their own context. The children make the two-person game appropriate for their three-person group, and change the hand actions to something more appealing or interesting to them. In other words, while Dawkins chooses to analyse this situation as an example of children's sponge-like absorption of ideas, one could alternatively look at the same situation as an example of children's active participation in their cultures, a simple illustration of the way all humans create and redefine elements of their world to suit their own lives.

These two interpretations illustrate the ongoing tension between the concepts of structure and agency that has informed much of the research on children's media to this day. There are two very much overstated but nonetheless useful ways to categorise the research, with heavy moral implications on either side. On one hand, researchers may study the psychological 'effects' of media on children (most typically, the effects of viewing representations of violence in the media) or

develop theories about media based on the assumption that such effects exist (such as Neil Postman's 1982 work, *The Disappearance of Childhood*). The moral prescription is clear: we must protect children from the dangerous effects of media consumption. On the other hand, however, many scholars look at children's creative uses of media technologies and participation in media texts. These scholars often question the overprotective, paternalistic sentiments that inspire so-called 'effects' research. Stephanie Donald explains these two interpretations in a particularly informative way: 'In one version of reception,' Donald claims, '[children] are characterised as wards of the adult symbolic world, always vulnerable to manipulation and victimisation by their elders, and always, by implication, subject to the norms prescribed by those who measure the "effects" of media influence' (2005, p.5). Alternatively, 'there is a version of children as creative agents in a world organised through consumption and mediated communications. This account allows that children are part of society and that they must therefore have rights, subjective meaning, and effects of their own' (ibid.).[27]

Both of these trends do continue to dominate the field of research on children's media, but such a simplistic overview cannot begin to convey the depth and significance of the research done by many scholars in this field, much of which engages powerfully with challenging theories and issues from a wide range of disciplines, and explicitly reflects on the difficulties of researching children's media. David Buckingham in particular has repeatedly noted the importance of going beyond the simple structure/agency dichotomy, pointing out that both the moral panics about media's effects and the celebratory portrayals of children's active engagement with media are rooted in condescending ideologies about childhood (for example, see a summary of his critiques in *After the Death of Childhood: Growing up in the Age of Electronic Media* [2000a, p.119]).

Much of the current research in this field questions the relationships between individual, text, and institution – and moves away from the simplistic understandings of these relationships that were

[27] Throughout her 2005 book *Little Friends: Children's Film and Media Culture in China*, Donald forms a thoughtful and eloquent critique of the latter idea, while not playing into the problematic conceptions of childhood common in the former. As she states immediately after the quoted sentences: 'This argument may also, however, play into the notion that a closed circle of consumption is not only necessarily desirable but is also the only form of "creative" meaning-making available to young people in a globalizing mediated economy' (ibid., p.5). She later questions the relevance of researchers' focus on children's agency to Chinese cultural contexts (ibid., pp.59–61).

all too common in the past. Many articles seem to reflect scholars' ardent desire to disassociate themselves from problematic claims about effect and interpretation; there are times that the fixation on ambiguities appears almost obsessive, as researchers prove again and again the ultimate unattainability of clear answers about texts or individuals.[28] This fixation has at least one unfortunate consequence: however far away we may have moved from 'effects' research, it is that research that continues to define the field, if only by contrast.

Perhaps in order to reinforce the contrast to earlier ideas, much current research focuses on issues of autonomy and children's rights. Indeed, some articles on children's media are included among collections of articles on children's rights in contemporary cultures (for example: Buckingham, 1994 and Leonard, 1998). Through careful cultural critique, many researchers have challenged the notion that children are in constant need of protection from dangerous social or cultural elements, or at least note that the desire to protect children (and associated panic when it appears that children are not being properly protected) is a symptom of specific, contentious ideas about childhood (for example: Bazalgette and Buckingham, 1995; Sefton-Green, 1998; Kinder, 1999; Ito, 2005b). There has even been discussion about the ultimate impossibility of talking about children as individuals or children's media as a cultural institution without talking about the notion of childhood itself. As Buckingham has described (2000, p.10), childhood is such a wildly over-determined category that any discussion of children invariably relies on some of the many dominant ideologies surrounding childhood in our society.

Given this extensive cultural baggage, recognising the full humanity of children in research on children's media will necessarily require some critical awareness about our constructions of childhood and the problematic nature of those constructions, and it is such recognition of children's rights that appears to be the goal of many researchers. The spectre of children's rights is never ignored

[28] A notable alternative to this dominant trend may be found in the numerous books that comprise the Routledge Children's Literature and Culture series (series edited by Jack Zipes; books include, amongst others, Stephens, 2002; Wannamaker, 2008; Yenika-Agbaw, 2008; Keeling and Pollard, 2009; Maddy and MacCann, 2009). These books focus exclusively on themes and representations within the texts of children's literature and other media, generally avoiding discussion about the relationship between children and the studied texts. While there are many fascinating studies in this series, these books may actually benefit from a more serious conversation about the issues of audience. Children's engagement with media texts – the subject that dominates most other studies of children's media, to the exclusion of almost anything else – is an issue practically absent from most studies in the Routledge series. A balance between the two would perhaps form fascinating insights into children's media cultures.

or dismissed; issues not only of how to do research with children (such as questions of consent and privacy), but also broad cultural critiques that question parents' power over children, the lack of perceived autonomy in children, and the structures that continue to marginalise children are addressed directly.[29] This explicit human rights emphasis is certainly one of the fields' greatest strengths: researchers engage rigorously with the ethics of the discipline, with articles often carrying detailed prescriptions for educators and human rights issues predominantly brought to the fore. There are, however, some nuances that have been ignored or underdeveloped even in the self-conscious scholarship that defines this field, most notably regarding analyses of texts and institutions.

Toward a more comprehensive approach to children's media studies

Despite conscious critiques of studies that focus on children's creative usages of media – often implicitly or explicitly suggesting that children are 'naturally' brilliant users of media technologies (Buckingham, 2000a, pp.103–120) – many recent studies continue to fall into this pattern. While carefully avoiding essentialism or overly optimistic celebratory attitudes, researchers prove endlessly that children use media in unexpected, critical, and highly diverse ways. From an enormous number of studies interviewing, interacting with, and observing children, scholars have gained a variety of insights into the areas to which researchers must pay close attention: for example, studies have shown that shows are not always watched by the demographic to which they are marketed, that children's usage of and engagement with texts is strongly related to the environment in which they are read/watched/listened to, and that children question texts and offer 'oppositional readings' of them from a young age (for example: Buckingham, 1993; Laidler, 1998; Oswell, 1998; Qvarsell, 2000; Chandler-Olcott and Mahar, 2003; Ito, 2006a; Olsson, 2006).

These studies raise difficult and important questions. They ask us to interrogate our understandings of children's relationship to media, the role of media texts in the lives of individuals, and the way our social environment relates to our participation with media texts. These are undeniably

[29] See, for example: Kinder, 1999; Montgomery and Gottlieb-Robles, 2006; Herring, 2008.

crucial issues that scholars must not ignore, but there is a limitation to this approach: studies of very small numbers of people (usually under a dozen, sometimes only one or two) simply cannot do anything more than raise such questions. These studies could not be expected to reveal information beyond whatever relates to the particular individuals who are being studied. Analysis of broad cultural trends, information about the institutions in which the media are produced, or any in-depth discussion of the textual worlds that comprise 'children's media' remains beyond the scope of such studies.

This limitation prevents scholars from making unsubstantiated grand claims about such a vast and often deeply personal topic as our relationship with media. Small ethnographies allow researchers to look at the complex realities of people's lives with a level of depth and care that would probably not be possible through any other form of research. While one may argue that such research loses the forest for the trees, one could just as easily argue that analysing the forest as a whole will invariably sacrifice detail and depth to over-simplified summaries and underdeveloped presuppositions.

This type of research is often framed as a discussion about children's agency, usually contrasted to the structures that are seen to constrain or reduce their creativity (for example: Howard, 1998; Kinder, 1999; Vasquez, 2005). Putting aside the simplicity of that structure/agency dichotomy, and the problems inherent in viewing agency as necessarily aligned with creativity and structure with constraint, this focus does little to discuss the media institutions that are a part of children's lives. Most toys and media with which children engage were not made by children, and are contained within structures that are beyond any individual child's direct control. The corporations that produce most of the media consumed by children 'still exert greater power than any individual consumer or even the aggregate of consumers' (Jenkins, 2006a, p.3). Young children, particularly those who are not yet literate, have a limited ability to participate in social and online media. For many children, the media and toys that are available to them are further subject to the choices of parents, teachers, or other adults in their lives, adding an additional layer of complexity to the relationship between children and media.

An issue we might consider here is the difficulty of negotiating the cultural gap between children and adults.[30] Because children are usually not equal participants in academic discussions about children's cultures, researchers on this topic invariably fall into the difficult situation of having to 'speak for' children, or 'speak about' children. In other words, children's own voices will be mediated through scholars, who largely inhabit different cultural spaces than those children. Scholars who mention this issue rarely go further than simply acknowledging their limitations.

While the gap between children's and adult's cultures will of course always be there, it does seem that in many of the available studies it is exasperated more than is strictly necessary. The variety of related media, such as tie-ins, similar media often enjoyed along with the text studied, and (in Japan or in relation to Japanese media) the text's media mix are not frequently discussed. When they are discussed, it is as background information: listing the 'other' forms in which a text has been released (often with the unspoken implication that a specific text is the 'authentic' one), or noting the popularity of specific types of merchandise, rather than integrating the multiple forms of the text into the analysis. Any given text is still seen as essentially singular, even when the concept of multiplicity is inherent to the scholarship in other regards (for example, when the topic of analysis is diverse forms of audience participation).

I would suggest that the limitations discussed above might be addressed by a more inclusive approach to research on children's media. We should of course keep in mind the areas of caution suggested by recent scholarship: the problems inherent in discussing the meaning of texts, awareness of children's participation in their media cultures, and the importance of not overestimating the potential effects of a certain media technology, text, or set of texts. The focus of many recent studies allows researchers to gain contextual information about the ways media are used by various individuals; this research could become a powerful resource with which to inform media analysis. Rather than concluding with a sense of the impossibility of broader analysis, the information about audiences gained from small ethnographies could be used as a basis for further research that expands

[30] Two particularly thought-provoking articles that address this topic are Buckingham's 'On the impossibility of children's television: the case of Timmy Mallett' (1995) and Herring's 'Questioning the generational divide: technological exoticism and adult constructions of online youth identity' (2008).

beyond the limits of those studies, integrating discussions of media institutions, social structures, and textual analysis.

In part due to children's media scholars' lack of detailed consideration of the texts, the ultimate 'foreignness' of children's cultures often shines through their carefully reflexive analysis, sometimes reminiscent of a tourist's gaze. The child's culture is noticeably unfamiliar, as specific children's engagement with texts is described with little discussion of production, cultural or social positionality, intertextuality, or (if it is a series or franchise) common themes and tropes within the text itself. At times, the research conveys a hint of surprise at what strange occurrences the researcher has discovered (for example: Tobin, 1998; Alvermann and Heron, 2001; Chandler-Olcott and Mahar, 2003). The scholarship suggests that the researchers are looking at an alien thing rather than a text that they know intimately. In some situations, this may well be the case; understanding how children relate to the text is the primary goal of the research, making the researcher's own knowledge of the text essentially irrelevant.

Children's cultures are highly complex, and often gleefully made incomprehensible to adults, or sometimes even to peers of a different community or group. Understanding texts' usages and meanings within a group is not an easy task, and misconceptions will always occur. Nevertheless, I believe that researchers could minimise the gap in understanding by more extensive immersion in the children's media they are studying – an undertaking now made considerably easier via the Internet. What seems to be lacking in most accounts of children's media thus far is a comprehensive account of cultural elements that demonstrates awareness not only of children's rights and 'agency', but also the massive intertextual environment in which children participate. A more thorough immersion in children's media texts, encompassing not only the exact texts studied but the wide variety of related texts (including the other platforms to which the narrative has been transported, other works in the same franchise, and works of a similar genre or marketed to a similar demographic), could help to minimise the pervasive sense of exoticism surrounding academic work on children's cultures. As we will see later in this chapter, such immersion is (perhaps surprisingly) more common in works by English-language scholars on Japan, and has been used particularly effectively by Anne Allison in her work on Japanese children's media; such work ultimately provides the opportunity for a more

comprehensive discussion of texts in their media environments than is usually seen in works on children's media.[31] There has been only minimal exploration of the textual worlds of children's media, especially when considered in contrast to the large amount of research available discussing how children interact with or participate in those textual worlds. This is a gap between adult and child participant that could potentially be reduced, allowing for a more comprehensive and thorough analysis of the issues addressed in children's media today.

The possible and impossible in children's media studies

Overall, current English-language scholarship on children's media comprises an impressive field that utilises careful observation of and respect for children themselves alongside rigorous theoretical engagement. There is, however, one further, and deeply contentious, issue that I would like to explore. I mentioned above the consistent ethical framework that characterises this field; one element of this framework is a specific desire to influence the work of educators and media producers (indeed, many scholars in this field also do work with educators and produce media themselves [Buckingham, 1993; Sefton-Green, 1998; Kinder, 1999]). In an effort to assert children's right to choose their own media, researchers are quick to point out the pleasure and skills that children can gain from media – pleasure and skills that may not be comprehensible to adult onlookers, but have their own purpose in a child's development.

In the overlapping field of children's media literacy studies, this focus becomes even more intense. In one article about girls' creation of anime fanfictions,[32] the writer states her research questions clearly in bulleted form. The first question is: 'What sort of 21st-century skills are youths developing through participation in online fan-related contexts?' (Black, 2009, p.690). Black's answers to this question are compelling, detailing the forms of print literacy, digital literacy and information literacy gained through participation in online fan communities, communities that would

[31] Works on children's media that are noticeably effective at demonstrating a comprehensive awareness of texts in their broader socio-cultural contexts include Cross, 2004; Ito, 2004; Knobel and Lankshear, 2008; boyd, 2008.

[32] The term 'fanfiction' refers to fictional stories using the characters and/or settings from television programmes, movies, books, or other fictional works.

usually be regarded with contempt by educators. The question itself, however, is telling. Black, like many scholars in this field, assumes that youths are developing 21st-century skills, and orients her research toward discovering what those skills are. If they are learning harmful things (or, for that matter, if they are developing skills that are not useful for 21st-century life), those elements are beyond the scope of the research. This is not in itself a problem; one study can only address so many things, and certainly discovering the skills people are learning, especially in usually dismissed activities such as writing fanfiction, is an important topic for researchers to address. At the same time, there is little research today that addresses the problematic elements of media and media-related activities; the tone is, perhaps, too optimistic, noting primarily the valuable skills learned and opportunities for personal development, while refraining from in-depth discussion of the numerous other topics related to children's media – for example, media institutions, or a thorough exploration of the negative relationships children sometimes have with the media in their lives.

Underlying this focus is a broader issue. In choosing to focus on a 'children's rights' angle, researchers must also subscribe to a particular model of individualism that contains problems in and of itself. The concept of 'protecting' children is associated exclusively with the most condescending paternalism, excluding the possibility that someone could attempt to care for their community without feeling a paternalistic need to protect members of that community from themselves. As it is tied to specific (and contentious) philosophical principles such as self-sovereignty, the rigid form of individualism applied here may not make sense in every context, and in many contexts limits our ability to look deeply at the cultural and social environments that inform our lives. One can discuss social norms represented in mainstream texts without implying that people who engage with that text are unaware of the problems themselves, or unthinkingly absorbing those social norms presented to them. The question is how to go about making such analyses, and that is a question that has been insufficiently theorised throughout the field.

The current scholarship on children's media reveals a strong move away from research that claims that 'the media' (usually vaguely defined, and only inclusive of certain media institutions) is the cause of violence, sexism, racism, apathy, or any number of other social ills. This move away from that undeniably naïve outlook, however, seems to be too often replaced by an equally naïve

perspective that media is essentially unrelated to social issues, or that its relationship to social issues is too complex to address. Certainly, this is not a simple issue; the relationship between media and society is a question that many have pondered from innumerable angles. Nevertheless, the complexities and ambiguities should not keep us from questioning and dissecting textual representations, as well as media institutions and trends more broadly. For example, while it may be wrong to assume that media directly and unambiguously causes oppression and violence, certain media texts might reinforce already dominant harmful ideologies, aid in legitimising certain harmful behaviours or ideas, or at the very least not challenge norms that ought to be challenged.

A pertinent example here can be found in Buckingham's article regarding the impossibility of children's media (1995). After expressing very reasonable disgust at the conservative values of a show that included the main British lead visiting foreign countries and not-so-subtly mocking the citizens he meets and hitting them over the head with a foam mallet, Buckingham (1995, p.57) notes that a young child would be unlikely to pick up on the show's politics:

> The point here, however, is not simply that Timmy Mallett is right-wing, or patronising towards other cultures, or even that he trivialises important political issues. While I personally find this offensive, I don't believe it makes very much difference to the children who watch the programme. I suspect the decontextualised, strangely metaphorical commentary I have quoted would simply be meaningless to most ten-year-olds, let alone my own six-year-old. It seems absurd even to entertain the idea that Timmy Mallett is a kind of political Svengali, mesmerising innocent children into ideological torpor.[33]

In this statement, Buckingham challenges the idea that a child absorbs political messages that she or he does not explicitly recognise. This is a powerful statement against ideologies that understand children to be mysteriously soaking up ideologies they do not even comprehend – 'minds that are a bit

[33] The 'decontextualised, strangely metaphorical commentary' to which he is referring involves narrow-minded and dismissive statements about the politics of the foreign countries he visits.

like sponges', in Dawkins' words – and thus in need of protection from the insidious powers of the media.

Children are, however, learning from the media they engage with, as are adults, and a child does not need to be passively consuming hidden ideologies to learn something problematic from viewing such inappropriate behaviour. A child watching this show has seen yet another representation of a person treating those from a different country from themselves as less worthy of respect – in a culture where these are already dominant ways of thinking, and a child is likely to come across this ideology regularly in numerous different forms. Maybe nobody will ever be able to prove exactly what that means or what influence it will have, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the show may constitute an additional element of racist and nationalistic sentiments in our society, and can be critiqued in that light.[34]

Any individual text is unlikely to have the power to change the world, and even the most elegant treatment of social justice issues may be entirely lost on a child (or adult). However, to let the uncertainty of effects allow us to simply refrain from analysing (and encouraging others to analyse) media that forms a crucial element of so many lives is not an acceptable answer. We must ultimately be prepared to work within uncertainty and ambiguity, and let those realities inform our research.

Japanese cultural studies

I will now turn to the second part of this chapter: an analysis of Japanese cultural studies, with a particular focus on anime and manga studies. In recent years, the field of Japanese popular cultural

[34] It is easy to forget, amidst researchers' careful theoretical consideration, that many young audiences themselves readily participate in media criticism. It is not uncommon for individuals to speak personally of the damaging effects that oppressive media representations have had on their own personal health and development, or the hope and sense of empowerment that they felt when exposed to a positive representation. While researchers in this field are very attuned to the oppressed status of children in our society, and show an earnest desire to treat that oppression with the utmost care in part by showing only appreciation towards the media loved by children, this approach at times ignores the vast amount of work done by people from other marginalised groups, and the experiences of many that attest to the importance of sensible critiques of popular media. It also sidesteps the fact that appreciation is certainly not the only emotion that individuals feel towards media geared toward their own demographic. While many young people may be devout fans of Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* saga (2005–2012), there are also many who reject the series due to its glorification of abusive relationships; unfortunately, it seems that most research looks at fans rather than those who critique specific media texts.

and media studies has grown from an almost nonexistent discipline to one of the most commonly explored areas of Japanese studies. Classes on anime are becoming increasingly prevalent in universities, and published works about Japanese popular culture are being produced in impressive quantities. These works cover a wide range of topics and materials – not only anime and manga, but also merchandise of many kinds, video games, pop music, mobile phones, films, 'cute' goods of all sorts, and electronic gadgets – and researchers have approached these areas from a diverse variety of perspectives. This research has profoundly expanded knowledge about Japanese cultural products, and brought forth a wide range of fascinating theories. At the same time, there are a number of areas that have been insufficiently explored or primarily explored in problematic ways. For this survey, I have explored works of two major types: textual analyses of Japanese popular cultural works, and ethnographic studies that discuss the relationship between individuals and Japanese popular cultural products.[35]

Some of the most informative research is produced through the comprehensive approaches used by many researchers in this field. Anne Allison's *Millenial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (2006a) is one particularly impressive example of detailed ethnographic work that is strengthened by its comprehensive nature. Allison's work exhibits extensive knowledge of a wide range of texts in the many forms in which they come (for example, video games, manga, anime, films, merchandise, and strategy books), familiarity with fan works, historical background, and detailed information about how the franchises she examines were produced and later localised for foreign audiences. This research is further supplemented by information gleaned from numerous interviews with fans and people involved with the creating and marketing of the products. Allison's work provides an excellent blueprint of how to do effective ethnographic research of Japanese popular cultural texts in a transnational context.[36] In fact, I would argue that Allison's research resolves many

[35] While some works are clearly textual analyses alone (for example, Yomota, 2003; Kuge, 2007; Iikura, 2009), and others are clearly ethnographic works alone (for example, Allen, 2003; Swenson, 2007; Kino, 2008) the distinction between the two categories is somewhat artificial. Several of the works studied combine the two approaches, using interviews or other interaction with fans alongside textual analysis (for example, Nakamura and Matsuo, 2003; Aoyama, 2005; Ito's works on *Yugioh* [2003; 2004; 2005b; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2008a]; and Allison's works on *Pokémon* and related Japanese 'character goods' [2000a; 2001; 2004; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2009a; 2009b]).

[36] This strength has been noted in reviews of Allison's book (Farrer, 2006, p.252; Martinez, 2007, p.467).

of the aforementioned problems that burden the field of children's media studies; by approaching the text from multiple angles, and demonstrating deep familiarity with numerous aspects of the text, Allison avoids the sense of distance often demonstrated by researchers of children's media. Similarly, the collection of articles edited by Iwabuchi (2004) on the popularity of Japanese TV dramas across Asia exhibits the insights that may be gained through a multi-faceted exploration of the complex transnational usage and contexts of media texts. Joseph D. Tobin's edited collection *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (2004) draws from a variety of disciplines, calling on researchers specialising in children's media as well as those specialising in Japanese media.

In those works that deal more with textual analysis, one can often find a wide range of ideas discussed through the lens of popular media. Works on Japanese popular culture do not remain confined to the strict examination of Japanese sociocultural context, but rather touch on such broad philosophical issues as the nature of identity, our understandings of technology, the limits of culture, and the meaning of social change. In other words, Japanese media is often used as a stepping-stone to discuss issues close to scholars' own experiences and ideas, opening room for new debates and new ways of thinking about the issues faced by people living in Japan and other societies.

Nevertheless, there are also a number of oversights that continue to compromise the important and insightful research in this field. Scholarship often relies on over-simplified analyses of Japanese society and/or the media texts that they are considering, and in so doing encourages a form of cultural essentialism. Other works attempt to glean information about the whole of Japanese society from individual media texts, without addressing the presence of other contradictory texts (or the contradictory elements of those same texts). At its worst, this combination of problems has devolved into dehumanising statements about large groups of individuals. I will discuss these issues in depth in the following sections, before elaborating on the single element that is most relevant to my research: the abundance of analyses within anime and manga studies associated with the future or 'newness',[37] and the relationship between such analyses and research on nostalgia in Japanese popular culture.

[37] 'Newness' is an awkward and vague term, and comes laden with our own cultural, generational, and social conceptions of what is 'new' and what is not. For lack of a better term, I use it in this thesis to describe the cluster of ideas, trends, or items that are culturally aligned with the emerging, and (correctly or not) seen in opposition to the past or 'the way things were'. The cluster as it will be used in this thesis primarily includes

Before beginning my analysis, it is worth noting that the division between 'academic' and 'non-academic' sources can be difficult to discern in the emerging field of English-language anime studies. The field has grown rapidly and unevenly in recent years, fuelled by growing interest from fans. The field originally arose from the works of Frederik Schodt (1983) and Fred Patten (2004),[38] who approached anime and manga as fans writing for other fans; their fan-based approach has left its mark on many of the works available today (for example, Napier, 2005; Lunning, 2006; Toku, 2007; MacWilliams, 2008). Mihara Ryōtarō (2010) notes that what he refers to as the North American 'anime community' ('*anime komyuniti*', ibid., p.70), composed of both scholars and fans, has developed certain norms that only make sense within that community – for example, there is a widely-understood 'history of anime' that is in fact only relevant to anime as it is viewed in America (ibid., p.80). Mihara acknowledges a difference between anime scholarship and fandom, but also demonstrates that there are ambiguous areas between the two; for example, as he discusses, it is not unusual for leading 'anime studies' scholars to speak at fan conventions (ibid., p.79). While I have made an effort to focus my analysis on rigorously academic works, I also include in my review works that are of a less academic bent, as they remain used in, referenced in, and otherwise a part of the field as it stands today. This blurring of what is an academic resource and what is not (and the similar approaches used in both) can be considered part of my critique of the field overall: it is one example of how the standards that define academic work on anime remain under-clarified and vague.

The difficult role of culture

Exploring the role of culture – how it is defined, what it means in Japan today, and how it can be understood in the context of particular subjects of study – is one of the most crucial and potentially

technological innovation, non-hierarchical social structures, and fluid geopolitical alignments. While there are of course differing cultural iterations of these themes, in my research I have found that Japanese conceptions of 'newness' are quite similar to British conceptions – for example, in both cultures, cyborgs, transnational media flows over the Internet, and women's equality in the workplace are broadly associated with 'newness', while rural life, children playing outdoors, and patriarchal authority are not. For more analysis of the formation of these conceptions in Japan and their construction today, see: Gluck, 1985; Morris-Suzuki, 1995; Tamanoi, 1998a; Vlastos, 1998; Figal, 1999; Yano, 2002; Tatsumi, 2006a.

[38] The late date of Patten's work refers not to the original release of his articles, but a collection of his essays on manga and anime over twenty-five years that was recently published in book form.

productive topics for the work of scholars of Japanese 'culture' today (see, for example, the insightful work of Morris-Suzuki on Japanese 'culture' [1995; 1998]). While of course such concerns are not every scholar's subject, too often, the complications of 'culture' are not only not explored; they are outright denied, as academic work remains attached to static, essentialist conceptions of Japanese culture. It is not uncommon to see claims about Japanese culture that are tenuous at best, and frequently included in works without detailed discussion or references – most commonly, through claims that elements of media texts are directly drawn from longstanding Japanese traditions or a unique Japanese psychology.

For example, in Lunning's article about the mecha, she describes the figure of the mecha as an image related to boys' visions of the samurai:

> For a Japanese boy, stories and images of samurai warriors, whose primary goals were to protect the world against bandits and warring nobles, begin to form an ideal image of the protective masculine ideal that has always figured prominently in Japanese anime and manga through the similar representations of the mecha… Through the machinations of the older men of this story, the mecha and pilot become the samurai warriors for this world. (2007, p.274.)

While there is a case to be made for the samurai figure as representative of a general 'protective masculine ideal' in contemporary Japanese culture, Lunning does not make such a case (or cite others who do); this is the only point in the article that mentions samurai, and the relationship between the samurai figure and the identity of Japanese boys today is constructed as self-evident and therefore unnecessary to prove. Similarly, Grigsby claims when talking about *Sailor Moon* (1991–2004): 'The dual characteristics of Usagi and Sailormoon fit the Japanese cultural norm of being sensitive to outward (*tatemae*) social reality and inner (*honne*) social reality (Condon 25). The Japanese accept and act in a social world in which it is understood that there are multiple realities' (1999a, p.197; this claim is repeated on page 204). Grigsby's statement about Japanese society is conveyed as a simplistic stereotype with only the briefest suggestion of the connection between that stereotype and

the text, and cites as evidence one problematic book written over a decade earlier (Condon, 1984).[39] There is also no obvious reason to attribute the dual personalities of Usagi/Sailor Moon to Japanese culture, especially considering that similar situations appear in works produced outside of Japan.[40]

Another such problematic analysis is included in Joseph Tobin's discussion of the 'Japanese elements' of *Pokémon*: 'The Pokémon computer game, television show, and movies have many distinctively Japanese elements and concerns', Tobin states (2004, p.262), including:

> …The *sensei-deishi* (master-disciple) relationship between Satoshi (Ash) and Professor Okido (Professor Oak) and Satoshi's quest, in the Japanese martial arts tradition, to climb the Pokémon trainer ranks until he reaches the level of Pokémon Master.
>
> Elements in Pokémon that are more subtly Japanese include the themes of miniaturization (Lee 1982; du Gay et al 1997); encapsulation (once captured, Pokémon are trained to live in "Pokéballs"); metamorphosis (in the "change-robot," "power-up" tradition of Voltron, the Transformers, and the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers); and heroes having "special" attacking moves (in the tradition of both anime and computer fighting games). (Ibid.)

It must be noted that this list of Japanese qualities is mentioned in the context of questioning how *Pokémon* does or does not maintain some sense of Japaneseness; these observations are meant to add

[39] Condon's book, *With Respect to the Japanese: A Guide for Americans*, is explicitly configured as a guide to Japanese behaviour to aid Americans in conducting business transactions, as its preface indicates. To that end, it is largely made up of generalised descriptions of Japanese behaviour, stressing, for example, Japanese interest in maintaining group harmony, the need to publicly display loyalty to particular groups, and the importance of rigid social hierarchies. As a guide to help conduct business across cultural divides, it is not a careful academic study of Japanese culture.

[40] The most obvious example of characters with 'dual characteristics' similar to Sailor Moon/Usagi's would be American superheroes, although the recent trend of supernatural fiction, with its frequent use of characters who transform between a 'human' and a 'supernatural' form (such as werewolves) could also qualify. While one might argue that werewolves, who usually act as an animalistic side of the character, fall into a different category than one character with two different human sides, Grigsby does not specify the exact form of 'duality' that distinguishes Sailor Moon's character, leaving her difference from any character with two forms unclear.

to an ongoing debate about *Pokémon*'s 'cultural odour'.[41] Nevertheless, Tobin's breakdown of the Japanese qualities of *Pokémon* seems strained, as every one of the stated 'Japanese elements and concerns' could be refuted. While some *pokémon* are very small, some are considerably larger than humans, making the concept of miniaturisation irrelevant.[42] Young boys going on quests in fantasy works are most certainly not unique to Japan; if Satoshi's quest is illustrative of the Japanese martial arts tradition, so must be every character on a quest that involves overcoming progressively more difficult tasks before reaching a final goal. 'Metamorphosis' is hard to consider a specifically Japanese theme considering the identity changes common to American superheroes such as the Hulk and Superman.

Many scholars interpret elements of Japanese media as directly reflective of aspects of 'Japanese culture', even when there are alternative explanations that are equally (or even more) plausible.[43] There are many problems with this approach, including its reliance on (and perpetuation of) the understanding of Japanese culture as composed of incontestable, easily understandable, and static traditions. All of the varied and perpetually changing elements of 'Japanese culture' cannot possibly be known to any individual, meaning that the scholar who takes this approach must limit their analysis to whatever aspects of Japan with which they happen to be personally familiar. In practice, this form of analysis sometimes utilises problematic cultural stereotypes without questioning their origin or accuracy.

This form of analysis is essentially reductive, ignoring the many varied social contexts that inform a text to focus instead on a single national context. Most obviously, such thinking ignores the transnational appeal of texts, and excludes the possibility of more political interpretations; for example, a text may include elements perceived as traditionally 'Japanese' in order to critique or

[41] 'Cultural odour' is a concept used by Iwabuchi to discuss the transnational popularity of Japanese cultural products (Iwabuchi, 2002, pp.27–35).
[42] Tobin may alternatively mean by this statement that the *pokémon* become miniature when they enter *pokéballs*, which may be true but is not necessarily; the visual representation within both the anime and the video games is that the *pokémon* turn into a form of light/energy as they enter the *pokéball*. As the *pokémon* are shown changing state rather than size, it seems strange to claim that this represents miniaturisation.
[43] For further examples, see: Craig, 2000, p.12; Gill, 1998, p.37; Izawa, 2000, p.152; Shiokawa, 1999, p.121; Cavallaro, 2009, pp.5–7.

support a specific conception of national identity. Thomas Lamarre summarises this issue through the example of analyses of Hayao Miyazaki's works:

> A common way of looking at the relation between Miyazaki and his animation, for instance, is to situate both within Japan and to stress the cultural or sociohistorical determination of animation. Miyazaki then appears as a product of Japanese culture, as an expression of Japaneseness. Such an approach easily slides into cultural determinism or culturalism, inviting a view in which animation produced in Japan directly and inevitably reproduces Japanese values… The result is a simple reproduction of unitary, self-identical, and monolithic Japaneseness. (2009, p.89; see also p.xxxi.)

While no one would deny that social contexts give rise to media representations, we cannot trust that they always do so in the direct and obvious way assumed by many cultural studies scholars. While our social conditions do create or construct us, they do so through an endless and complex process; that complexity is often lost in these analyses, and reduced instead to simple, often ahistorical, assumptions about Japanese culture.

Knowing Japan through the media text

Above, I discussed the many problems that arise when scholars attribute elements of media texts to Japanese cultural or societal traditions. I now turn to the reverse problem: when scholars make statements about the condition of Japanese society directly based on the messages they glean from media texts. Instead of forming explicit connections between individual texts and Japanese society (for example, by demonstrating that text's use as a national symbol amongst a particular group, or by showing how the text is positioned as an icon of 'Japaneseness'), many analyses of Japanese popular culture use a single or small group of media texts as representative of the culture as a whole. This

method is illustrated in the following quote from Napier (1998, p.104), discussing the representations of *shōjo* characters in four anime:

> The combination of dolls with fantasy technology returns us to the image of the "cyborg woman" which has risen to such prominence in the 1990s. These aggressive, violent, often quite dominating women (including the young girls of *Sailor Moon*) are an impressive contrast to the stereotypical image of passive Japanese womanhood that has existed for so long. And yet it must be said that they are far less interesting as characters than the heroines of the eighties discussed in the first part of this chapter. Although this undoubtably suggests that Japanese women in reality are becoming increasingly outwardly active and assertive, it also suggests that this change is accompanied by a loss of interior complexity, a change which some might lament.

Napier makes a number of claims in this section: a) 'cyborg women' in anime are typically violent and aggressive; b) the dolls made of *Sailor Moon* characters are related to cyborgian characters in other shows; c) there is only one stereotypical image of Japanese womanhood, and that stereotype needs no justification, contextualisation or explanation; d) heroines in 1990s anime are 'less interesting' than heroines in 1980s anime; and e) the representations of women in anime directly and unambiguously correspond to the thoughts and behaviour of real Japanese women. None of these claims are developed in the article.[44] While I believe that all five claims are highly contentious, the final one is most directly related to the lives of real human beings, and thus needs to be approached with particular caution. Even if we accept that heroines in 1990s anime were in fact more aggressive and less complex than heroines in 1980s anime, why should this be a reflection of real Japanese women? Might it not be more related to Japanese men's perception of Japanese women,[45] Japanese

[44] Napier bases her analysis on a statement made by manga critic Ōtsuka Eiji that *shōjo* manga has lost 'interiority' (Ōtsuka qtd. in Napier, 1998, p.103). Ōtsuka's claim, however, is used without further analysis or justification; furthermore, Ōtsuka refers to the narrative content of *shōjo* manga, not to the psychological state of Japanese women.

[45] The vast majority of anime series released in the 1990s were directed by men and based on source material written by men. Even *Sailor Moon*, which was based on a manga written by a woman, was directed by a man. In

men or women's conception of how women desire to act, Japanese men or women's conception of what types of women are most admired, a change in what qualities Japanese men admire in women, a broader change in Japanese identity that is represented through *shōjo* characters but influences both sexes, or transnational trends toward changing gender roles that extend beyond Japan?

If Napier sought to prove her claim, it would make an interesting thesis, but this is not her goal; the article is essentially about the subversive and conservative elements of four anime with *shōjo* characters, with the above claims made without justification or support. Even if she were to prove her claim, however, Napier's goal is similarly fraught with issues, as she never clearly defines what she means by 'conservative' or 'subversive'; she judges the anime she analyses through ambiguous standards of progressivism based on how close or far they seem to 'traditional' understandings of womanhood. What constitutes subversion or liberation, and what exact understandings of womanhood do we consider 'traditional'? Is motherhood, for example, always 'conservative', or does it depend on the specific way motherhood is practised? Is violence enacted by women always 'subversive', or do certain forms of violence fit into established fears of women? How do we determine what forms of violence fall into each category?

Many Asian feminists have detailed conceptions of liberation quite different from the understandings that have historically concerned Western feminists (for example, the individualism, lack of cultural specificity, lack of engagement with ecology, and disregard for families and motherhood that is often found in forms of Western feminism), or have critiqued the imperialist elements of Western feminism (for example: Matsui, 1996; Ueno, 1997; Kwok, 2000); when Napier discusses the subversive or conservative elements of these shows' portrayals of women, what (and whose) standards is she using? I would not want to suggest that we can only use the theories of 'Japanese feminists' to talk about anime from a feminist perspective, as that would imply a monolithic form of 'Japanese feminism' that does not exist. It would also confine the series to one specific national context, which obviously ignores the realities of their transnational consumption (all four anime Napier discusses are readily available in the USA and other countries). The issue is that Napier

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light of this situation, if 1990s anime reveal anything about Japanese womanhood, it would most likely be related to the perceptions of Japanese men.

neither specifies her definitions of 'subversive' and 'conservative', nor engages with the limitations of whatever those definitions may be. Yet even if Napier were to address the issue of how she defines 'conservative' and 'subversive', the underlying issue in Napier's article would remain, and it is an issue that echoes throughout the field. The goal to understand Japanese women through anime television shows is based on the problematic assumption that any singular Japanese media text – not only those which are commonly positioned in public discourse as representative of Japanese society, or even the most widely-consumed or frequently discussed, although those criteria would also have their own problems – but *any* Japanese text whatsoever can provide direct and unambiguous knowledge about the state of Japanese society at its time of release.

Similarly, in Allison's book *Millenial Monsters*, individual texts are interpreted as a source of generalised knowledge about the situation facing Japan in the time of that text's original production. For example, Allison interprets *Pokémon* and *Doraemon* as allegories of the Japanese nation:

> These two models of fantasy attachments [in *Pokémon* and *Doraemon*] can be read as allegories of a Japan that had significantly changed in the nearly thirty years between the release of *Doraemon* and that of *Pokémon*. In the 1970s, Japan, like Nobita, was still viewed by its citizens as riddled with "lacks." The country accordingly pinned its financial viability on mechanical inventions and electronic contraptions, and its cultural identity on markers rooted to the grounded locale and family traditions of "Japan." The story *Doraemon* tells is thus modernistic and teleological; Doraemon fills in Nobita's gaps within the context of a place whose cultural logic is fairly specific (one of the main reasons *Doraemon* has never been exported to the United States, it is said). *Pokémon*, however, allegorizes the world quite differently. Satoshi is a far less flawed protagonist than Nobita and one more actively involved in acquiring the powers he needs to be competent. This posture reflects a far more confident Japan at the millennial moment – one whose goals, more ambitious now, have moved from the domestic (tromping the local bully, pleasing his mother) to the global

> (becoming the "world's greatest *pokémon* trainer"). Identity has become shifting and mobile in/for Japan, tied less to the geographic boundaries of place (and the customs and bloodlines attached to it) than to the production and circulation of virtual landscapes. The organizing trope here is travel; unlike Nobita, who sticks close to neighborhood and home, the junior *pokémon* trainers are constantly in motion. The tale of *Pokémon* is postmodernist, featuring multiple subjects with flexible attachments who never stay in one place and have goals that, while clear-cut, are open ended and take them in many directions. (2006a, p.196.)

This explication fails to note elements of the series that would contradict Allison's theory.[46] It also does not acknowledge the muddling of time and place that characterises the media mix: while *Pokémon* may have been conceived in the late-1990s and *Doraemon* in the late-1960s, both remain popular franchises to this day, with new works produced regularly (a new *Pokémon* and a new *Doraemon* movie are released each year). Allison's analysis confines the works she analyses to their moment of original conception, not taking into consideration that these are ongoing works that are re-imagined in each new manifestation.

More thorough engagement with the issues raised by the ambiguities of text and context may not resolve the problems described above, but I believe it would help us rethink the approaches commonly used in the field thus far. As Rey Chow describes:

[46] While the claims made about *Doraemon* in this analysis are often true for the television series, the *Doraemon* films are premised largely on the characters' exploration of the wondrous places that Doraemon takes Nobita and his friends. The characters regularly journey to every imaginable place, time, and even alternate universes, frequently having to save their own or other planets from environmental destruction, alien takeovers, and more. In fact, Doraemon's three most popular tools are the '*takekoputā*' ('bamboo-copter'), '*dokodemo doa*' ('anywhere door'), and the 'time machine' (Shiraishi, 1997, p.239), the first being an instrument that allows wearers to fly, the second a door that can take the user anywhere in the world, and the third allowing characters to visit any time and place they so desire. All three tools are strongly related to travel, and illustrate the series' consistent engagement with the world beyond Nobita's neighbourhood. While Nobita does indeed always return to his home, and the sense of living in one stable, unchanging home is conveyed, travel is a crucial aspect of the narrative – perhaps even more crucial than in *Pokémon*. While characters in *Pokémon* are always on the move, they move within one world with its own internal logic, and only sometimes become involved with political or societal issues in their world. In contrast, *Doraemon* characters live in stable family settings in the Japanese suburbs, but (particularly in the filmic versions of *Doraemon*) they interact with characters from multiple countries, planets, historical times, and species through the use of an always expanding set of logic-defying tools.

> Pursued in a morally complacent, anti-theoretical mode, "culture" now functions as a shield that hides the positivism, essentialism, and nativism – and with them the continual acts of hierarchization, subordination, and marginalization – that have persistently accompanied the pedagogical practices of area studies; "cultural studies" now becomes a mean of legitimizing continual conceptual and methodological irresponsibility in the name of cultural otherness. (2002, p.111.)

Chow's words present a challenge to the norms of the field, asking scholars to practice cultural studies in a way that acknowledges and works against oppressive tendencies. She later notes the importance of 'theoretical intervention that continues to critique the legitimating structures inherent in the production of knowledge' (ibid., p.114). Such theoretical intervention remains lacking in the current scholarship on Japanese cultural studies. How can we approach texts and their cultural contexts in a way that recognises the multiplicity and changing natures of both? What assumptions underlie our analyses, and how do those assumptions relate to the cultural worlds we both study and live within?

The reduction of Japanese society

Finally, I would like to address some of the most disturbing examples of the problems discussed above. In a number of texts, although by no means all or even most, the lack of attention paid to what a scholar can legitimately claim culminates in simplistic stereotypes that directly further the oppression of certain groups, or treats a community in a marginalising way. Sharalyn Orbaugh's article 'Sex and the single cyborg: Japanese popular cultural experiments in subjectivity' contains examples of this tendency, most notably through her fundamental theory about Japan's 'Frankenstein syndrome':

> Like the monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, rejected first by his creator and eventually by all the other humans with whom he tried to establish contact, the people of modernizing Japan were forced time and again to recognize that even the complete acquisition of the "godlike science" of language – in the form of the discourses of industrial, post-enlightenment modernism – was not enough to save them from the curse of monstrosity in the eyes of the West. All modern Japanese literature and art has been (and continues to be) produced under the shadow of this recognition, leading to an unusual concern with monstrous or anomalous bodies/subjectivities and various attendant issues. (2002b, p.438.)

This theory, elaborated upon throughout the article and in others by Orbaugh (2005; 2006), essentially suggests that a form of internalised uncertainty about their own identity leads Japanese people to see themselves as monstrous, and thus create works that are preoccupied with the limits of identity. This ignores the fact that many Japanese works do not question identity at all (an issue discussed further in chapter four), but more importantly, we must challenge the very act of imposing a questionable psychoanalytic theory onto an entire nation of people.

Allison reveals a similar tendency in her discussion of *hikikomori*.[47] In a chapter already utilising an over-simplified depiction of the current state of Japanese society,[48] Allison claims: 'In some real sense, *hikikomori* lead lives of non-existence and are themselves not really "alive."' (2006a, p.84). Her justification for this assertion is a statement by one Japanese fiction writer. 'What a commentary this is on the tensions and fractures in millennial Japan,' Allison elaborates, 'and on how youth today not only are turning to violence but are being "rent asunder" by the violent undertow of the national platform put in place to remake the country after the war' (ibid.). We might easily dispute

[47] *Hikikomori* is a term referring to people who remain in their rooms or homes, refusing to leave or engage with the outside world, sometimes for years on end. It has garnered much attention in recent years as a social problem in Japan.

[48] In the chapter *Millenial Japan* in which this quote is included, Allison describes in elaborate detail a number of violent crimes committed by youth, suggesting those crimes are connected to a lack of stability in the lives of children (2006a, p.75) and that 'children are no longer learning how to read each other nonverbally, develop empathy for others, or express their "true" feelings' (ibid., p.81). Recognition of the possibility that this discourse may be influenced not entirely by actual emerging trends, but also by the common spectre of moral panics about contemporary youth, is absent from this chapter; however, that potential is referred to briefly in a later article (Allison A., 2009b, p.91).

Allison's readiness to believe media discourse about youth violence, and to automatically interpret that violence as a consequence of national politics. Even setting aside such critiques, however, we cannot overlook the intensely dehumanising assertion that a group of real people – possibly suffering from a type of mental illness – are *not truly alive*.

Perhaps the most eyebrow-raising of assertions can be found in Annalee Newitz's article about magical girl anime. Newitz is not a Japanese cultural studies scholar, and currently works as a journalist. Her article on anime, however, is cited by such prominent scholars as Iwabuchi (2002, pp.33 and 216) and David Desser (2003, pp.191–193).[49] Newitz concludes her article by claiming: 'When Americans are *anime otaku*, they are, in a sense, being colonized by Japanese pop culture. Even if they are from Asian racial backgrounds, they are still Americans, and they are rejecting their national culture in favor of another national culture' (1995, p.12).

In this article, Newitz constructs 'colonisation' as a generalised sense of cultural impurity irrelevant to global power structures. That oversight is exhibited alongside her dictating of how Asian Americans ought to express and understand their own cultural identity – with the underlying implication that those who do not fulfil Newitz's expectations are somehow betraying their nation. This quote demonstrates a particularly paranoid form of nationalist sentiment, but beyond that, it also makes unconscionable claims that Asian Americans must reject any sense of Asian cultural heritage in favour of 'American' ways (described in opposition to Asian culture, thereby further implying that Asian cultural heritages are not authentically American).

While obviously the field of Japanese cultural studies cannot be judged by a few select statements (there are many other examples of this phenomenon, but it is by no means universal to the field), these statements are not simply obscure, careless mistakes. Rather, they reveal the logical conclusion of the more general problems discussed above. It seems reasonable to expect that when researchers conduct analyses lacking in careful consideration of multiple possibilities and alternative approaches, the research will at times also convey a lack of careful consideration towards human

[49] Iwabuchi uses Newitz uncritically to explain elements of American anime fandom. Desser deals with Newitz's article at length, and ultimately critiques her overriding thesis, but does so on the basis of her lack of acknowledgement of non-American Western anime fans and oversight of the importance of age in the narratives, not on the construction of cultural identity in Newitz's article. The article has also recently been reproduced in the book *The Cult Film Reader* (Mathijs and Mendik, 2008).

communities. These examples do not just show a thoughtlessly written sentence or two by individual scholars; they are rather an illustration of what we risk when we deny or erase the ambiguities and intricacies of culture, identity, and interpretation. They are also tacitly supported by the broader academic community, as such claims often do not face wide critique or provoke further discussion about the assumptions they make; in stark contrast to the field of children's media studies described earlier in this chapter, the field of Japanese cultural studies as it stands today requires only minimal self-reflexivity when engaging in the difficult act of analysing human communities.

Techno-animism

At this point, I would like to move from a discussion of the field as a whole to instead consider one particular theory that exemplifies some of the trends discussed above. Anne Allison's theory of 'techno-animism' is used as an example in this section because it illustrates how some of the more problematic tendencies of Japanese cultural studies play out even in careful, self-reflexive scholarship, and also because it is a theory that holds particular significance for this work. As a key element of Allison's analysis, addressing how Japanese children's media creates fantastic worlds that speak to transnational audiences, techno-animism could be used to analyse many of the trends examined in this thesis. 'Techno-animism' is the term Allison coins to talk about the portrayal of technological 'spirits' in many popular Japanese children's media texts, and particularly their related merchandise. Allison defines this as 'an aesthetic proclivity, a tendency to see the world as animated by a variety of beings, both worldly and otherworldly, that are complex, (inter)changeable, and not graspable by so-called rational (or visible) means alone' (2006a, p.12). She then discusses the origins of such an aesthetic:

> Drawn, in part, from religious tendencies in Japan, these include Shintoism (an animist religion imparting spirits to everything from rivers and rocks to snakes and the wind) and Buddhism (a religion routed from India through China adhering to notions of reincarnation and transubstantiation). To be clear, I have

> no interest here in facile generalizations that pose animism as an essential, timeless component of Japanese culture as if the latter itself is stable, coherent, and homogenously shared by all Japanese (which it is not). Diverse orientations and behaviors certainly exist in Japan today (as in the past), and social trends have also changed, sometimes radically, over time. Yet it is also accurate to say that, fed in part by folkloric and religious traditions, an animist sensibility percolates the postmodern landscape of Japan today in ways that do not occur in the United States. (Ibid.)

Allison is very careful here to distance her analysis from the essentialising forms of analysis mentioned earlier; nevertheless, while she explicitly claims to not be 'pos[ing] animism as an essential, timeless component of Japanese culture', she does not indicate how that problematic notion differs from her actual position. The claim that techno-animism was 'drawn, in part' from those religious traditions connects the two tendencies, positing a relationship between them. That relationship is presented as a mere suggestion, as the book does not interrogate how such a relationship might have arisen, or whether there could be other interpretations of the phenomenon that do not rely on Japanese religious traditions. Even the extent and nature of the relationship is left vague; nowhere is it detailed how the animistic characteristics of Japanese children's media are similar to the animistic characteristics of Shintoism and Buddhism, what form of connection the two tendencies might have, or even what exactly 'animism' means in the context of those traditions. The definition of 'animism' in general is a contentious topic that has been debated amongst Religious Studies scholars for decades (Masaki, 2010, p.47), but here is reduced to the bracketed descriptions in the first sentence quoted above.

Allison's underlying connection between Japanese religious traditions and techno-animism is further revealed by a later discussion of the concept:

> In both…the game space of *Pokémon* and a cultural milieu that accommodates *yōkai* [Japanese monsters or ghosts]…an animist logic prevails in which the

> borders between human and nonhuman, this-worldly and otherworldly, are far more permeable than fixed.
>
> Different, in this sense, from the common Euro-American worldview – where humans center existence and the distinction between life and death is more definitively conceived. (2006a, p.21.)

Allison then relates this animistic tendency to the art of *bonsai* (ibid.). As the connection between 'animism' and the trend she has identified in Japanese children's media is not explored in depth, the relevance of 'animism' to the trend is unclear. Ultimately, by employing the term 'animism', Allison is positing some form of relationship between what is commonly constructed as an 'essential' element of Japanese culture and contemporary media trends, while assuming that the relevance of one to the other needs no further explanation. By doing so, Allison calls on the same 'essentialist' notions she decries, as any relation between 'animism' and 'techno-animism' must be inferred according to the reader's own preconceived notions of what such a connection might be.

The theory of techno-animism, however, begs to be considered in other ways, for the simple reason that the use of technologically-based life forms is not a trait peculiar to Japanese popular media. Just considering children's media alone, the television shows *Thomas & Friends* (1984–ongoing) and *Bob the Builder* (1998–ongoing) exhibit exactly the same tendency, as do the films *WALL•E* (2008), *Cars* (2006), and earlier, *The Brave Little Toaster* (1987). If we are to extend the discussion to any kind of otherworldly 'spirits' that appear to be animating or enchanting the world, we may also include the recent film adaptations of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2005–2010), *Harry Potter* (2001–2011), and *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009). Some of these media texts include merchandise that blends the intimate and the technological in exactly the way Allison describes – and these are only a fraction of the available examples. More analysis of how Japanese techno-animism differs from similar constructions in other countries would bolster Allison's analysis, and further clarify the contours of the phenomenon as it manifests in contemporary Japan.

Interestingly, when Napier discusses techno-animism in her book *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (2007), she is careful to state that this trend is not exclusive to Japan: 'This is not a concept unique to Japan, as anyone who has tried to separate a child from her beloved blanket knows well, but Allison makes an excellent case for certain aspects of traditional Japanese religion and customs as being particularly conducive to this practice' (p.131). Napier later reiterates this claim: 'Again, it is important to acknowledge that animistic qualities imbue to goods in Western culture as well, but it appears safe to say that the Pokemon and other Japanese toys and goods were particularly effective in creating an interactive fantasyscape that effortlessly transcended material reality' (ibid.).

Allison's theory as it is detailed in *Millenial Monsters*, however, relies on the explicitly Japanese quality of the trend, as demonstrated by the quotes above. The construction of 'techno-animism' as a Japanese trend is reinforced by Allison's assertion that not only is techno-animism a defining characteristic of Japanese media, it is the main reason that helps 'explain [Japanese play goods'] cachet as the cutting edge of trendy "cool" on the marketplace of kids' entertainment today' (2006a, p.91; see also p.279). If we accept Napier's interpretation, there are still unanswered questions: was *Pokémon* actually 'particularly effective' when considered alongside international successes such as the *Harry Potter* series and popular fantasy movies made by Disney and Pixar? If so, how is 'effectiveness' measured? Could representations of techno-animism be explained in ways other than Japanese religious sensibilities? Assuming that there is a connection between Japanese religion and 'techno-animism', what exact form does this connection assume? These questions are not answered in Allison's work or Napier's review. The term relies on the reader's acceptance of the idea that a trend with similarities to common Western understandings of Japanese religion probably has some actual relationship to Japanese religion – in short, 'techno-animism' becomes another example of the reductive methods of theorising Japan seen in the previous sections, despite Allison's recognition of the problems inherent in those methods. Allison identifies and thoroughly details an intriguing trend, but leaves numerous gaps in the explanation of how that trend is related to Japanese children's media environments, national culture, and transnational appeal.

The anime canon

In the field of anime and manga studies in particular, the issues discussed above that can be seen throughout Japanese cultural studies come with an extra addition: the establishment and perpetuation of what we might think of as a 'canon' of works that scholars persistently analyse.[50] Despite the enormous number of manga and anime available – estimated at approximately 20,000 manga titles published and 160 new anime titles broadcast per year (Choo, 2008, p.277; Kataoka, 2011, p.160) – textual analysis is often confined to a few key works, and almost always to particular genres or 'types' of anime and manga. In practice, this means that the frequent analyses that situate any individual work as representative of Japan as a whole are often formed from that small selection of key works.

By far the most popular texts for Japanese anime critics remain Mamoru Oshii's 1995 film *Ghost in the Shell* ('*Kōkaku kidōtai*'; see, for example: Silvio, 1999; Yuen, 2000; Schaub, 2001; Bolton, 2002a; Orbaugh, 2002b; Napier, 2000; Brown, 2008; Endo, 2009) and Hideaki Anno's 1995 anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* ('*Shinseiki Evangelion*'; see, for example: Napier, 2000 and 2002; Ortega, 2007; Redmond, 2007; Lamarre, 2009; Thouny, 2009). The works share much in common: they are sophisticated, complex science-fiction works set in a future Japan. Both works explore questions of identity in a world increasingly defined by technology, include sexual themes and are clearly addressing a mature audience, were marketed primarily to adolescent men, and have been released in America. Other frequently analysed texts follow a similar pattern, including *AKIRA* (1988), *Gundam* (1979), and *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998).[51] Other common works, slightly different in nature, include the works of Satoshi Kon, CLAMP, and Hayao Miyazaki. Explorations of *Sailor Moon* and *Pokémon* are also becoming common,[52] although these studies usually include less discussion of their textual content and more concentration on marketing and merchandising.

[50] This is, notably, only a problem within anime and manga studies; research about popular music, magazines, TV dramas, and non-animated films regularly explores a wide variety of works.
[51] Dates indicate the date of the Japanese release of the first film or television incarnation of the franchise; in each of the above works, this date does not encompass the entirety of the franchise, which may have earlier, later, and even ongoing elements. It is notable, however, that most of the franchises discussed originated prior to the 2000s; there seems to be a dearth of analysis about more recent anime and manga texts.
[52] This phenomenon is mentioned by Choo (2008, p.279).

Considering the incredible quantity of new manga and anime released every year in Japan, we must question the conflation of manga and anime as a whole with a small group of similar texts.[53]

While of course there is nothing wrong with scholars exploring the intricacies of *Ghost in the Shell* and *Evangelion*, the fact that it is done almost to the exclusion of other types of works – and with the concurrent generalisations about Japanese society discussed above – raises several issues. Most obvious is the erasure of manga and anime produced for women. With the exception of *Sailor Moon*, which is a girl-oriented text written by a woman, and the works of CLAMP, which are written by women and aimed either at girls or young people of both genders, analyses seem to be heavily biased towards works written by men and for adolescent boys, ignoring the fact that the manga industry in particular includes a substantial number of girl- or women-oriented texts.

The reason for this oversight may lie in the supposed 'quality' of texts studied; as researchers remain eager to prove the validity of anime and manga studies as an academic field, they may tend to seek out exemplary texts that fit long-standing norms of 'art' deemed worthy of study. Of course, the decision of what constitutes 'high-quality' or 'low-quality' texts will always be subjective, and is often influenced by notions of class in our society, but the texts frequently chosen for analysis do seem to replicate traditional notions of 'high-quality' texts. The anime canon is filled with media defined by the presence of compelling philosophical themes, unique visual and narrative styles, and provocative ideas that are clearly relevant to contemporary life. Indeed, many of the mentioned works are written, directed, or otherwise created in part by individuals who are well-versed in academic theory and philosophy. Another reason may lie in the cultural prominence of these texts: considered anime classics by *otaku* in Japan and around the world, these works are arguably more representative of *otaku* culture than other anime texts, or could be perceived as particularly worthy of study due to their prominent status.

The choice of works that make up this canon also echoes problematic notions of Japan as the 'other', defined by things strange, mystical, and separated from 'ordinary' life. To put it bluntly, these

[53] Even Thomas Lamarre's theoretically rigorous study of anime (2009) fits into this canon; Lamarre chooses to analyse Miyazaki's works, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, CLAMP's popular anime *Chobits*, and the more unusual choice *Nadia* – the latter which, although not nearly so common, fits the pattern of a complex, male-oriented science fiction story, and was directed by Hideaki Anno of *Evangelion* fame.

are all fairly 'exotic' texts. All would be classified as either science fiction or fantasy, depicting bizarre happenings or fascinating other worlds; none show mundane everyday life and activities, although anime depicting non-fantastic school or family dramas are quite common. Napier even goes so far as to justify this focus by claiming that manga depicting everyday life are simply not as good:

> It is interesting that the non-fantastic *manga* aimed at older female readers seem to be far less inventive and imaginative than the *shōjo* fantasies… Obviously, these career women *manga* perform a useful function in exploring some of the real-life problems of the contemporary Japanese woman, but they are less narratively exciting than the fantastic *manga*, since they do not really take advantage of any of the possibilities of the *manga* format. (Napier, 1998, p.105; a similar claim is made about anime narratives in Napier, 2002, p.422.)

I have not found it to be true that non-fantastic manga are less 'narratively exciting', but this is a personal opinion; what is concerning here, however, is the possibility that the supposedly less 'narratively exciting' manga are ignored by researchers in favour of fantastical, 'wacky', and/or futuristic texts that, whatever the researcher's intention, ultimately serve to fuel already-common Western perceptions of Japan as an exotic place obsessed with technology and full of odd occurrences. Mescallado offers a particularly scathing critique of the choice of anime used in earlier works on the medium, including Frederik Schodt's pioneering books:

> The *otaku* nation wants their power fantasies dished up with hot Asian babes and gleaming giant robots and deadly samurai swords; treatises on the mundanity of the real world aren't considered exotic enough, aren't as relevant to the imaginative space they've molded for themselves. Clearly, a wide cultural gap still exists between the Japanese perspective on comics and the American perspective, and while the current *otaku* are intent on proselytizing for what they like, what they like is still a limited slice of a very large pie. (2000, p.141.)

Mihara Ryōtarō (2010), writing about anime scholarship in North America through the lens of Orientalism, identifies what he calls the 'Ouroboros loop': an 'insular, self-perpetuating theory feedback loop' (ibid., p.71, my translation) of information about Japan disseminated through scholarly works, presentations, and college classes. 'The theories about anime produced by anime scholars, regardless of their applicability to the actual state of present-day Japan, and which are actually overflowing with terrible misunderstandings and biases, are generally constructed as "trustworthy", and suspend subsequent discussions about anime in a "pin flux"' (ibid., my translation). He notes that much of the information about Japan '... would immediately be recognised as experientially false by Japanese people, and would be immediately acknowledged to be odd by any human with any intellectual honesty, even if they were not Japanese' (ibid., p.78, my translation). However, as anime scholars are seen as having the 'authority' to speak both about anime and Japan in general, even the strangest of statements about Japan are taken at face value, and later cited, quoted, and drawn upon as the basis of new theories. While the main problem identified by Mihara is the lack of engagement with Japanese scholars, and the exclusion of Japanese scholars from academic spaces, he also lists the fixation on certain anime texts – namely, those with cyberpunk qualities, such as *AKIRA* and *Ghost in the Shell* – as a problematic element that reinforces the 'techno-Orientalism' of anime scholarship: '…As anime is composed of an abundance of genres, such that every possible theme is addressed, why do Americans view Japan(ese people) through anime of the cyberpunk genre? I want to problematise the mechanisms of anime "selection", as those mechanisms are themselves the "Ouroboros loop"' (ibid., p.74, my translation).

By not engaging with a wide variety of anime and manga texts, by limiting analysis almost exclusively to intense science fiction and fantasy texts – and usually only those science fiction and fantasy texts intended for a primarily male audience – scholars perpetuate amongst their readers (particularly those who are not themselves especially familiar with Japanese culture and society) a notion of Japan as an 'exotic' place where issues such as the relationship between humans and technology, the threat of apocalypse, and the ambiguities of time are explored more persistently and

seriously than elsewhere,[54] although such themes are common in sci-fi narratives across the globe. At times, the 'anime canon' couples with the aforementioned tendency to overgeneralise about Japanese society, with distressing results; researchers may suggest that the way these texts address certain issues is reflective of Japan's history and/or position in the world today, ignoring the possibility that this is less a reflection of Japanese society than of the specific media texts chosen to analyse.

Anime and manga, however, are not confined to a handful of 'masterful' works, or to works used by *otaku* cultures. They include works of all levels of sophistication (however one might choose to interpret the term), made for every age, gender, and interest group. They consist not only of male-oriented, adult-themed sci-fi stories, but also cutesy children's shows about a friendly *kappa* and his folkloric friends, straight-to-video releases detailing Hello Kitty's latest adventures, long-running serials about friendship between young women in contemporary Japan, feature-length films about the life of the Buddha, or shocking exposés regarding homelessness in Tokyo. Scholars are not unaware of this; indeed, the broadness of anime and manga genres is often directly mentioned.[55] Nevertheless, the stories that are not either part of the anime canon, or at least fit its norms, remain largely outside of the existing scholarship. While it may seem that much has been written about anime, the vast volume of works outside the canon represent a world of ideas that has been either insufficiently

[54] This problem is evidenced in the volumes of *Mechademia*. While containing many insightful articles, and studying a number of texts outside the usual canon (although paying much attention to those inside the canon), *Mechademia* only rarely strays from the types of works typical of anime and manga analysis. It is predictable, then, that the volumes bear titles such as 'The Limits of the Human' or 'War/Time'. While the articles are often careful to steer clear from essentialising statements about Japanese society, they instead utilise a mix of generalisations about human society as a whole ('Everyone', declares the introduction to Volume 3, 'regardless of his or her position in culture or location on the earth, is aware of a distinct shift in the idea of what is human' [Lunning, 2008, p.ix]) with one particular notion of what anime and manga have to offer. This latter point is perhaps best shown in the 'Anifesto' introduction to Volume 1, which is composed of nine pages of anime-style illustrations, coupled with poetic text, declaring the purpose and origin of *Mechademia* in phrases that resemble anime clichés (Lunning and Bolton, 2006). The nine illustrated pages contain different scenes and characters, each combining futuristic technology with scenes of natural beauty or romantic love – except for the first, which depicts a schoolgirl staring wistfully at distant mountains and windmills in a tiny village. Anime is clearly conceived here as one particular type of anime text, but the journal's claim is to study anime and manga in general. 'Anime' has, it seems, become to English-language scholars basically synonymous with the particular types of anime most often associated with (and accessible to) Western anime fans, not the vast and diverse medium pervasive throughout Japan and other parts of Asia.

[55] For example, see Kelts, 2007, pp.53 and 116; Ito, 2006b, p.2. Anime scholar Tsugata Nobuyuki takes this analysis a step further, describing anime's variety as a key element of its appeal to American audiences (2008, p.236). Tsugata's theory would be supported by Fukunaga's survey of American anime fan college students, which presents a table listing the differences between American animation and anime as described by the students, with the variety of anime's subject matter listed as a key distinction (2006, p.213).

theorized or outright ignored. What might they tell us, were we to shift the focus? What might we see that we did not see before, and how might the conclusions of the previous research be challenged?

'Unfathomable, futuristic madness'

> 'If the Orient was invented by the West, then the Techno-Orient also was invented by the world of information capitalism. In "Techno-Orientalism", Japan not only is located geographically, but also is projected chronologically. Jean Baudrillard once called Japan a satellite in orbit. Now Japan has been located in the future of technology.'
>
> – Toshiya Ueno (1996)

The title of this section does not come from a scholarly work on Japanese anime; rather, it is from a sentence in a newspaper article detailing one comedian's journey to Japan. According to Charlie Brooker, writing in *The Guardian* about a trip to Tokyo: 'Mario and Sonic made sense to western players, but lurking just beyond these palatable mascots was a world of entertainment too strange to ever secure an official European release: fascinating, crazy games full of talking octopuses and jaunty tunes. American games were fun but bland. Japanese games oozed a demented spirit. Unfathomable, futuristic madness: that's what made me want to visit Japan' (2012).

Regardless of Brooker's seriousness in making this claim, 'unfathomable, futuristic madness' represents the epitome of the current Western perception of Japan. In the eyes of many (particularly young) Western observers, Japan is no longer a land of ancient traditions and conservative social structures. The stereotypes that located Japan temporally in the past have been replaced by their opposite: Japan as the land of the future. Japan is seen as the home of robots and cyborgs, skyscrapers and urban alienation, where emerging technology-enhanced identities mingle with new geographies of world power. It is the land of virtual pop idols, mobile phones, and bizarre entertainment media. According to Swenson, who conducted an ethnographic study of young Americans with an interest in Japanese pop culture, '[t]he exotic continues to appeal, but a more recent image of postmodern Japan seems to have been added to those of traditional and modern. That is the image of celluloid cyborgs. Initial interest in Japan for these young Americans was primarily found in the appeal of the

cybernetic, futuristic culture of popular anime and manga' (2007, p.117). Later, she summarises her findings thus: 'At the various venues where I observed Americans interactions with Japanese culture, and with the college students I interviewed, the popular cultural image of Japan, the Japan of celluloid cyborgs and futuristic visions associated with postmodernity, dominated' (ibid., p.119). Kelts mentions the same phenomenon:

> But what is unique about the current wave [of Japanophilia] is the very modern, even futuristic, nature of the Japanese culture being sought. There are always some Americans interested in iconic totems of Japanese culture, like the *bushido* samurai tradition that emphasizes honor and discipline, *ikebana* flower arrangements, tea ceremonies, and Zen.
>
> Now, however, it is the eccentricities, spastic zaniness, and libertarian fearlessness of Japan's creators of popular culture – and of the mind-bendingly acquisitive Japanese consumers of that culture – that are attracting the attention of Americans. (2007, p.6.)

On the other hand, Brent Allison uses interviews with anime fans to suggest: 'Older perceptions of Japan as an "unspoiled land" of "beautiful people" with "cultural purity" that exists for the West's enjoyment may be filtering in as a contrast to an assumed, nearly hopeless, and corrupted U.S. media and culture' (2009, p.145). Allison's conclusions are, arguably, in opposition to Kelts' and Swenson's: one views Japan as a postmodern land represented by the radically hybrid form of the cyborg, while the other views Japan as a pure, 'unspoiled' place. Whether drawing on visions of idyllic cultural authenticity or the perpetual transformations of postmodernity, however, these representations are similar in their exoticising tendencies. In these visions, Japan becomes a mysterious, fanciful other, a place of fantasy removed from current times and everyday concerns. Japan becomes a symbol rather than a nation, notable for its removal from mundane reality, less a place where people live than a series of philosophical statements and longed-for sentiments embedded in the very ground of its many islands.

When Morley and Robins coined the term 'techno-Orientalism' (1995), they were referring to the cold, emotionless, robotic quality often ascribed to Japanese people at that time:

> Japan has become synonymous with the technologies of the future – with screens, networks, cybernetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, simulation. What are these Japanese technologies doing to us? The techno-mythology is centred around the idea of some kind of postmodern mutation of human experience…. If the future is technological, and if technology has become "Japanised", then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese too. (Morley and Robins, 1995, p.168.)

When Toshiya Ueno (1996), quoted in the beginning of this section, first applied the term to anime, he used the undeniably cyborgian *Ghost in the Shell* as a case study, and suggested an intrinsic connection between anime content and visions of the future: 'Japanimation is defined by the stereotype of Japan as such an image of the future'. While the robotic image of Japan may have now expanded to incorporate the cute sentimentality and/or passionate drama of many anime, the fundamental underlying association of Japan with the future has only grown more embedded in Western societies – a trend epitomised by the 2011 film *Cars 2*, in which animated cars travel around a world of cultural stereotypes, in which, for example, the Italians are defined by food and the British by the Queen and James Bond. Tokyo is represented through endless roads of neon lights, sleek modern architecture, cute images, and the occasional appearance of a familiar Japanese cliché (geisha, sushi, and sumo wrestlers, for example).

Anime scholarship replicates these already pervasive understandings of Japan in the West. By endlessly focusing research on works that centre cyborgs, robots, and 'exotic' sci-fi worlds, researchers are validating and perpetuating the same forms of exoticisation of Japan that are already common within our culture, putting an academic, peer-reviewed stamp on the most recent incarnation of stereotypes of Japan. The words of a comedian citing Japan's supposed 'unfathomable, futuristic madness' should be easily refuted by the existing scholarship; if Charlie Brooker were, however, to

delve more deeply into contemporary academic literature on Japanese pop culture, he would likely find a substantial body of research that supported rather than challenged his assumptions. The works analysed would be those that most perfectly replicated dominant visions of Japan as a futuristic, unfathomable world, and the analyses themselves would focus on the most futuristic elements of the works being discussed.

For it is not only the works chosen that replicate existing stereotypes of Japan as a futuristic nation, but also the ways in which those works are analysed – what scholars see in them, how they interpret their content, what content they choose to address and what passes without comment. It has become common within Japanese media analysis today to concentrate on the postmodern fluidity of identities expressed within texts, or similarly, the 'cyborgian' nature of identities.[56] In Orbaugh's iteration of this theme, Japan's use of cyborgs demonstrates a cultural acknowledgement of our posthuman condition:

> In Japanese popular narrative, in contrast [to North American narratives], the possibility or desirability of rejecting cyborgization is rarely raised. The emphasis is not on the cyborg as a threatening presence antithetical to humans but rather on the *nature* of the cyborg (or android) subjectivity, experienced from the inside, and the ramifications to society of our impending (or already accomplished) posthuman condition. (2005, p.63.)

In an article published only one year after Orbaugh's, Carl Silvio (2006) comes to a similar conclusion about *The Animatrix*, a collection of anime shorts designed to accompany the film *The Matrix*. While Silvio does not formulate an explicit contrast to 'North American' narratives as Orbaugh does, he considers the relationship of *The Animatrix*'s themes to the 'genre' of anime (ibid.,

[56] While there are several possible meanings of the word 'postmodern' as it relates to interpretations of visual media, some of which use notions of the past and nostalgia or are at least not in opposition to such portrayals, the concept of the 'postmodern' usually referred to in discussions of anime is its use of unstable or fluctuating identities, or comfort with ambiguity, and is positioned as a result of emerging trends in society (whether they be modernisation, urbanisation, transnational media flows, the unseating of American cultural dominance, or new media technologies).

p.127) and later to the medium (as discussed below); both analyses suggest that its themes are a unique characteristic of anime. In Silvio's summary of his argument, he states:

> *The Animatrix*, however, tends to explore rather than resist the liberatory possibilities and positive consequences of posthuman life, cyborg politics, and the transgression of the boundaries of the human form. At times, in spite of *The Animatrix*'s overarching theme of man versus machine, this collection of anime shorts seems to celebrate the idea of posthuman linkages between the human and the nonhuman and to revel in the placing of the "human" within quotation marks. (Ibid., p.114.)

Similar theories can be seen in the writings of Schaub (2001); Monett (2004); Ruh (2006); Tatsumi (2006a); Long (2007); and many of the chapters in Bolton, Csicsery-Ronay, and Tatsumi (2007), as well as innumerable other works. It is perhaps best exemplified by the 2008 issue of *Mechademia*, which is tellingly titled 'Limits of the Human', and is comprised almost entirely of articles that in some way explore the theory that anime is particularly interested in or effective at portraying the 'posthuman' (for example, see: Brown, 2008; Orbaugh, 2008; Napier, 2008).

In the book released for Takashi Murakami's exhibition *My Reality*, the futuristic nature of anime is stated so clearly that it becomes crucial to the very definition of anime. In Fleming's definition of anime, he explains:

> *Anime* is a dominant force in Japanese popular culture. Derived from *manga*, it is enjoyed by broad audiences and targeted to all age groups. Anime has attained almost cult status among young people around the world through commercial entities, animated series, and organized followers. It is technology-friendly, presenting technology as a positive social force. Much *anime* consequently has a futuristic or science fiction flavor. (2001, p.16.)

In this quote, the 'futuristic or science fiction flavor' of anime is represented as a *consequence of* the already existing 'technology-friendly' attitude of anime; anime is not considered 'technology-friendly' because of its common use of futuristic or science fiction themes, but is in fact characterised by its apparently innate pro-technology attitude, which then (we are led to assume) naturally gives rise to such preoccupations. In Talbott's article in the same work, he claims: 'If superheroes are commonplace in conventional comics, a predominant theme in *anime* is their replacement by cyborgs in the posthuman future. The *anime* movement questions traditional moral reasoning in the face of a new technology that blurs distinctions between humans and machines' (2001, p.46). He later elaborates on this statement, connecting it to the work of the artists in the exhibition: 'Inspired by *anime*, artists embrace the future and provide visual guideposts for envisioning it' (ibid., p.54). Anime, then, not only embraces the future, but inspires others across the world to do the same; the pro-technology attitude is again positioned as an essential characteristic of anime.

The pervasiveness of these interpretations of anime has led researchers to question whether the very medium of anime itself may be peculiarly suited to postmodern philosophy. In Silvio's article cited above, after contrasting the film *The Matrix* to *The Animatrix*, he goes on to question: 'Why…does the anime version of the *Matrix* story have such a different attitude toward posthumanity than the original? While the individual artists and creators who worked on *The Animatrix* undoubtedly could provide us different explanations based on their own individual attitudes about the subject, it is worth speculating that there may be something about the medium of anime itself that may lend itself to such a treatment' (2006, p.127). Silvio is not alone in such speculation; it can also be found in articles by Murakami (2005), Napier (2000; 2005), Lamarre (2006b; 2009), and Tatsumi (2006b), as well as others. In other words, anime is seen as so clearly and unequivocally representative of postmodernity, post-humanism, or fluid identities that some have suggested that the medium (or alternatively, the methods or sociohistorical context of anime production) may be particularly conducive to the exploration of such ideas.

The narrative of postmodern sensibilities taking hold of Japan's popular imagination is an intriguing interpretation of anime texts, and provides a compelling analysis of a prominent current in those texts. This focus, however, ignores the alternative currents that exist in many anime texts. There

are endless examples of anime and manga that represent a solid or fixed notion of the self, including numerous examples of texts where the main quest involves the characters finding their 'true self'; anime such as *Ghost in the Shell* are by no means representative. Indeed, the form of characterisation most frequently associated with anime, wherein a collection of 'quirky' characters band together, each with clearly identifiable and heavily stereotyped personality traits (such as the energetic, easily-angered girl or the reticent, mysteriously beautiful man) and reinforced by individualised catchphrases, attack moves, or even associated colours, would seem to uphold notions of unified selfhood.[57]

Even amongst the texts scholars do analyse, a simple conception of fluidity or fragmentation ignores important elements of these narratives. While many display transformations or fusions with other life forms, they often do so with great trepidation, angst, or longing for the 'real' self.[58] In other texts, while the characters certainly do transform, it is usually presented as part of a journey towards self-realisation and personal growth, or simply as another aspect of their character.[59] The dialogue generally reinforces either the notion that these characters are still the same person but with added powers and different clothing, or alternatively, that they are entirely different people, with two different but largely static identities. In many cases, the narratives do not display any crisis of identity; rather, we hear persistent emotional declarations about learning to love people as they are and the importance of being true to one's self.

This is not to say that scholars' emphasis on postmodernity is not applicable to many anime or manga texts; one might easily argue that the rhetoric of selfhood used actually displays the increasing fear over an inevitable loss of selfhood, that Shinji's angst about his selfhood in *Evangelion* proves it is compromised. Similarly, one could argue that the classical 'magical girl' phenomenon, in which a character contains another character inside of herself, does represent the

[57] This argument will be elaborated upon further in chapter four in the context of the series *Purikyua*.
[58] *Ghost in the Shell* is especially interesting here; as scholars often choose to focus on the innovative potential of the cyborgian identities explored in the film, the film's overwhelming sense of nostalgia and longing for the 'authentic', non-cyborgian self is often brushed over or hardly mentioned at all.
[59] For example, see the television anime *Shugo Chara* (2007–2008) or the 2011 *Kamen Rider* series *Kamen Raidā Fōze*, both of which involve a full physical transformation of the character into a super-powered version of their ordinary selves. Both shows, however, use the realisation of one's innate inner power, and protecting the authentic self against corruption (that never has the power to fully corrupt, as it represents an 'inauthentic' form of the self), as major narrative themes.

absence of a singular, unified identity – but that argument must include the recognition that it is in fact explicitly compromised by many elements of the text. If these shows do encourage Western audiences to rethink identity, it is also worth noting that many of them contain strong themes centred around the unchanging identity of one's own self and one's friends, believing in the innate goodness of humanity, and/or saving the 'true' self from inauthentic corrupting forces. These tendencies may exist alongside more ambiguous or fluid notions of selfhood, but they nevertheless present a challenge to that interpretation.[60] Scholars must consider the conventionality of the texts they are analysing, as well as the more potentially radical elements.

The use of a particular subset of anime texts as representative of Japanese society more broadly takes on additional layers of meaning when coincident with the discussion of children's media. Children are often associated with technology (Sefton-Green, 1998, p.2), and the current influx of fears and hopes related to new technologies has only furthered that conception. Often viewed as uniquely capable of using available technologies that adults simply cannot understand, children have become representatives of the future in multiple ways in the minds of many adults. Of course, children are associated with the future through the indisputable fact that the people who are currently children will eventually grow up and comprise our society in the coming decades, but the associations run deeper than that simple observation. Perceived as intimately connected to new technologies and emerging ways of interacting with digital worlds, children are the ones who live the digitised lifestyles that appear in our fears and hopes for the future; in adult minds, children embrace the forms of communication that will be our future, whether it be Facebook and Twitter now or telephones and television in previous decades. As Herring describes: 'Thus at the same time that youth are represented as powerful – more even than "most kids dare imagine" – they are also shaped by technology, dependent on it *by definition* for their identity as a generation. Such constructions effectively represent contemporary youth as cyborgs, a merging of human and machine – exotic and "other."' (2008, p.76). In Herring's analysis, we can hear echoes of a different group of people:

[60] The most common examples used to talk about the breakdown of identity are visual spectacles such as women becoming cyborgs or men transforming into robots; the more subtle themes of change and renewal that pervade many works, as well as the anti-government and anti-establishment attitudes of many works, could also be used to prove a similar point, but are usually not mentioned in this light. A particular focus on visual spectacle is the most common method through which these arguments are made.

citizens of Japan, who are also constructed by the perspective of outsiders as 'exotic', 'other', and 'cyborgs'.

The similarities between the two sets of stereotypes are exemplified by some of the works on Japanese children's media, or even in works on Japanese media that happen to mention children. In the following quote from Napier, 'Japanese culture' and 'American youth' are described as similar in mentality and philosophy:

> …[W]hile Westerners might want to make a clear distinction between boundaries of reality and dream, the East Asian tradition allows for more fluid boundaries.
>
> Among young Americans, however, this attitude may be changing. I find that my students who, after all, have been raised on computers and animated video games, sometimes enjoy animation more than live action film and, in general, seem very comfortable with concepts such as virtual reality. Their comfort level with the non-representational stands in marked contrast with that of many of my over-forty colleagues and friends, leading me to believe that we may be encountering a genuine paradigm shift between the generations. (2005, p.74.)

Napier is clearly describing only her own observations, but nevertheless draws parallels between 'young Americans' and 'the East Asian tradition', seeing both as accepting of virtual reality and its ambiguities in a way that older Americans are not. Japanese people, due to their 'East Asian tradition', are constructed as uniquely capable of accepting ambiguous boundaries – explicitly framed through new media – as are American youth, due to their connection to digital media.

Similarly, Joseph Tobin's discussion of the term '*otaku*' (1998) connects the behaviour of his own son, described as something strange and foreign to adult generations, to a Japanese term describing a particular, overdetermined Japanese subcultural group. Throughout the article, the '*otaku*-tribe' (Tobin's translation of the Japanese '*otakuzoku*') is discussed in a removed, ponderous

tone, as he attempts to understand and describe the subculture to the reader (who the article seems to assume will find the phenomenon as perplexing as Tobin does): 'Unlike most school settings… *otaku* tend to be lavish in their praise of work they admire, direct in giving constructive criticism, willing to admit their ignorance when they need advice, and generous about helping each other' (ibid., p.117), or, '[*o*]*taku* life is about relating to others while seeming to care only about one's obsession' (ibid., p.125). The article is explicitly formulated as a way of answering the question of how a nation of people who are educated without many computers and other forms of media used in the classroom could have become 'at the vanguard of visualizing twenty-first century life' (ibid., p.106). Tobin frames this issue as simultaneously cultural and generational, and ultimately concludes that this phenomenon is caused by the out-of-classroom technology-based activities of *otaku* – a conclusion that explains his celebratory tone, as in this article, the *otaku*-tribe are seen as holding the keys to our technological future.[61] Children's fandom is constructed as all the more exotic due to the use of a foreign, unfamiliar term to describe it, while Japanese *otaku* fandom is constructed as exotic through its connection to the behaviour of youth portrayed within the article as odd and unexpected. In these examples and more, the 'cyborgian' understanding of Japan merges with the 'cyborgian' understanding of children, culminating in a sense of removal and alienation from both cultures. Both remain defined by 'unfathomable, futuristic madness', heralding a bright but ultimately incomprehensible future.

In James Farrer's review of Allison's *Millenial Monsters*, he puts forth what I believe is a deeply important observation not only regarding Allison's work, but for much of anime and manga scholarship. For that reason, I have chosen to quote a lengthy section of the review:

> Throughout the book, Allison argues that Japanese character products conform to a postmodern sensibility of bodily transformations and identify with flux or "endless transformations." Products such as Pokemon depict a virtual universe removed from the real-world social relationships of ordinary Japanese life. At times this argument seems overdrawn. This may be a result of the book's focus

[61] This is a remarkably similar argument to the one made by Okada Toshio (1996), the self-appointed 'Otaking', as described later in this section.

> on products that made the leap to global markets; in a sense Allison is "sampling on the dependent variable" by choosing cases that fit the globalizing scenario and thus have little real-world content. If Allison had looked instead, for example, at the immensely popular "Anpanman" (Bean-paste-bun Man) cartoon series, she might have presented a somewhat less post-modern vision of Japanese character goods. In this program the hero (who has the disturbing habit of dirtying his bun-shaped face and thus requiring frequent freshly baked replacements) serves mainly to restore order in a stable community of characters who represent the activities and food-stuffs an ordinary preschool Japanese child would see everyday: Toast Man, Cream-puff Girl, etc. Though quite a number of the foods and objects might be familiar to children in many countries, the program would be impossible to export to foreign countries without a great deal of explanation of local Japanese foods and customs. The social logic is also clear. The villainous "Bacteria Man" (Baikinman) and his sidekick "Virus Girl" (Dokinchan) are always trying to smash things up, and Anpanman must fight them off. Many of Allison's descriptions of Japanese narrative logic are helpful for me in understanding the Anpanman series, including the likable and not-so-villainous villains, and the animistic bringing to life of items in the everyday world. However, the sense that this represents any kind of postmodern social order is entirely absent. Like Pooh's "Hundred Acre Wood," this is a world that children identify with precisely because it is an idyllic picture of familiar (and quite traditionally Japanese) social relationships. (2006, pp.254–255.)

Farrer's description of *Anpanman* is applicable not only to the popular series itself, but to many Japanese children's shows and other media. More important to this chapter, however, is Farrer's broader argument that fantastical works that have been successfully exported abroad may say less about anime as a whole, and particularly Japanese children's media cultures as a whole, than about the

unique set of conditions that permit Japanese works to be exported. Similarly, anime works such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and other *otaku* classics may say less about anime as a whole than about the specific *otaku* subculture with which they are associated. If anime is overwhelmingly understood through a small selection of texts – most of which involve cyborgs, robots, or other common sci-fi tropes – it is difficult to discern whether it is anime itself that is pro-technology, or simply the specific texts analysed. After all, if one repeatedly and exclusively analysed live-action Hollywood films through a small subsection of cyberpunk works, one might come to a similar conclusion about live-action Hollywood films.

Indeed, Japanese scholars studying anime and manga have often done so from the particular angle of *otaku* studies, or, in Okada Toshio's famous phrasing, *Otakugaku* ('Otaku-ology', 1996). When works by scholars like Okada or Azuma Hiroki, who is known for his study on '*otaku*' as representative of the postmodern state (2007), are exported to the English-language scholarship, the particularity of *otaku* studies is often lost, becoming conflated with anime and manga more generally. *Otaku* are simply members of one Japanese subculture often associated with anime and manga texts; they by no means represent the entirety of anime and manga consumers in Japan or abroad. *Otaku* studies overlaps with the field of manga studies in Japan, which often looks at the forms of narrative expression that characterise the medium of manga (see, for example, Ōtsuka, 1987; Natsume, 1999; Takeuchi, 2005). The two overlapping fields of *otaku* and manga studies do not, however, represent the entire extent of anime and manga scholarship in Japan; much of the work done approaches anime/manga texts as individual works, and therefore does not comprise a unified field. Scholarly work on *Doraemon* or Hayao Miyazaki, for example, come from a variety of disciplines, including such diverse fields as literary criticism (Yamada, 1999; Mori, 2009), religious studies (Masaki, 2010), disability studies (Hatanaka, 2009), environmental studies (Asai, 2010), folklore studies (Iikura, 2009) and robotics (Sugihara, 2004). Due to the tendency in English-language scholarship to conflate studies of anime and manga texts in general with studies of *otaku* subcultures in particular, much of the variety of anime and manga – namely, works that are not commonly used by *otaku* – has been neglected.

Nevertheless, the Japanese-language field of *otaku* studies exhibits the same tendencies seen in English-language anime studies.[62] In the works of prominent scholars such as Okada Toshio (1996), Tatsumi Takayuki (2006a), Azuma Hiroki (2007; 2009) and Saitō Tamaki (2011), the connection between the future, the postmodern, the cyborgian, and anime is repeatedly highlighted. Throughout Okada's *Otakugaku nyūmon* ('*Introduction to Otakuology*', 1996), *otaku* are positioned as the harbingers of Japan's social future; Okada claims that *otaku* culture is 'perfectly fitted' (1996, p.230; my translation) to, for example, promote the ability to act in an information-based society and cultivate the respect for multiple perspectives that is necessary in today's world: 'Only from within the otaku, who have achieved a uniquely evolved perspective, will the creators that possess true international competitiveness be born' (ibid., p.27; my translation). Azuma bases his seminal work *Otaku: Japan's database animals* (in Japanese, the work is entitled *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan*, or '*The animalized postmodern*') on the theory that *otaku* represent a 'postmodern database model' of culture (2009, p.32), in which '[t]here is no longer any connection between small narratives and grand nonnarrative; the world drifts about materially, without giving meaning to lives' (ibid., p.95). The trend toward seeing anime as connected to 'newness' in Japanese-language anime studies is summarised eloquently by Thomas Lamarre: 'Typically, anime is aligned with the emergence of something new… A host of commentators in Japan have likewise situated anime in relation to the emergence of something new – the postmodern, the post-human, the post-national, non-identitarian politics and, more recently, the digital and new media' (2002a, p.185). This quote encapsulates the trends of the field, and does so with an important observation. Anime is 'aligned with the emergence of something new'; while the exact forms of analysis may oscillate between such diverse topics as new media and the nature of humanity itself, they share in common a sense of 'newness'. Anime is not a medium of the past or even the present, but of the future.

[62] This is not a coincidence; much of the English-language scholarship on anime and manga today self-consciously aligns itself with the scholars cited in this paragraph. Many English-language scholars explicitly draw on the theories put forward in Japanese-language *otaku* studies sources, and citations of *otaku* studies works can be found far more frequently than citations of manga studies works (see, for example: Thouny, 2009; Lamarre, 2009; Steinberg, 2012). This trend is also demonstrated by the recent publication of English translations of prominent *otaku* studies works (Azuma, 2009 and Saitō, 2011).

Along with challenging the specific works chosen as representative of anime, as suggested in the previous section, I believe that the postmodern sensibilities tied now so firmly to anime in the minds of scholars and the general public should remain in question. Even in the most cyborg-littered shows – sometimes, especially in such shows – anime is often imbued with a sense of dissatisfaction with the present and a yearning for the past. Depending on one's perspective, *Ghost in the Shell* could be viewed as desperate mourning for the potential loss of our humanity rather than a celebration of our post-human state. The transforming girls of *Sailor Moon* may represent a loss of singular identity, or they may present a sense of identity so firmly entrenched that no physical transformation can change it. This sense of loss and resolute belief in the unchanging is rarely discussed; it occupies a brief chapter in Napier's wide-ranging primer on anime, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (2000, pp.219–234), and is sometimes mentioned in non-scholarly works, usually with references to supposedly eternal Japanese aesthetic principles.[63] In general, however, anime is interpreted through things that are seen as new, and those elements that may compromise a sense of newness and celebration of the future are passed over, perhaps considered too obvious and unremarkable to warrant extended research.

Nostalgia

The nostalgic sensibilities that permeate many aspects of Japanese culture have received a great deal of scholarly attention, but the scholarship usually only explores the topic in a small number of ways, and often operates through the construction of clearly delineated subjects of nostalgic sentiment. One of the most common discussions of nostalgia centres around the concept of the *furusato*, or

[63] There is also a growing body of work on anime and 'memory'. These works tend to examine the connections between a particular text with a historical setting and predominant constructions of Japanese cultural memory of the particular event or era the setting depicts – most commonly, World War II (see, for example: Goldberg, 2009; Stahl, 2010; Rosenbaum, 2013). Similarly, a number of works look at anime texts in conjunction with historical discourses, analysing how anime imagines a national history (for example, Napier, 2001; Ivy, 2006; Lamarre, 2008). These studies are invaluable additions to the collection of knowledge of how history is understood in Japan today, but they are dealing with a different topic from that of this thesis: they approach how a work is related to cultural understandings of a particular time and place, rather than exploring widespread narrative constructions of loss and change. One work that does approach the topic of memory as a theme is Dani Cavallaro's 2009 book *Anime and memory: aesthetic, cultural, and thematic perspectives*, but this is a pseudo-academic work that relies heavily on broad cultural stereotypes.

hometown; these highly illuminating and useful works describe the pervasive longing for a romanticised notion of the countryside or community village life that remains a powerful force in Japan today (see, for example, Creighton, 1997; Robertson, 1988, 1991, and 1998; Tamanoi, 1998b; Ivy, 1995; Yano, 2000 and 2002). As Robertson describes, 'as a landscape, the quintessential features of *furusato* include forested mountains, fields cut by a meandering river, and a cluster of thatch-roof farmhouses. *Furusato* also connotes a desirable lifestyle aesthetic summed up by the term *soboku*, or artlessness and simplicity' (Robertson, 1988, p.494). The ways this conceptualisation of *furusato* continues to foster a sense of national and regional identity throughout Japan is well documented by these and other scholars.

There are also a number of scholars who explore the concept of the *shōjo* – a word that literally means 'girl' but in present-day Japan includes a connotation of a youth between childhood and adulthood, defined in part by participation in a unique and clearly demarcated girls' culture – and have examined nostalgia in a different way. J.W. Treat's article on nostalgia and the *shōjo* (1996) is a seminal work on this subject, along with Sharon Kinsella's study of cute culture in general (1995). Treat labels the *shōjo* a 'nostalgic subject', a term he defines as an 'ideological subject produced in and by contemporary Japanese socio-cultural discourses. It is recognized by its equivocal accommodation with everyday life through a retreat into the past *and* by its resistance to that same life through its longing for another sort of life, one that never actually "was" because no such life ever "is"' (1996, p.303). Studies of *shōjo* culture are now numerous, and address the themes of disenchantment, longing, and nostalgia in a variety of compelling ways.[64] It is important to note that the *shōjo* form of nostalgia is often seen as unconnected to or even in opposition to the state. It is a 'free-floating' form of personal longing that wraps the *shōjo* in a sort of cocoon of consumerism and personal attachments, what McVeigh describes as a '"space" in which a unique self dwells that expresses its own "individuality" by pursuing consumerist desires' (McVeigh, 2003, p.19).

Both the explorations of *shōjo* culture and *furusato* are important discussions that remain relevant and useful to researchers today. These two forms of nostalgia, however, are largely analysed

[64] See, for example: Napier, 1998; Hjorth, 2003; Aoyama, 2005; Matsui, 2005; Shamoon, 2008; Takahashi, 2008; Prough, 2011; Treat's earlier article on the subject, 1995.

separately from one another. They might almost be seen in opposition to one another: *furusato* nostalgia reaches in part for the sense of national community and 'traditional' Japanese lifestyles connoted by the *furusato* image, while *shōjo* nostalgia fixates on one's individual childhood as remembered through material goods, an apolitical form of personal longing. The existing English-language scholarship does not address how these two forms of nostalgia interact or feed off of one another; it would seem they exist in an entirely separate world, divided by cultural spheres. As I will argue in later chapters, however, media marketed towards young children often appear to combine both the individualistic, consumerist nostalgia commonly associated with the *shōjo* with a sense of longing for the countryside and more 'traditional' lifestyles; in other words, these two areas of discussion overlap much more frequently and profoundly than the current research would seem to suggest. How are we to theorise the connections between a longing for the countryside and a longing for one's own personal past? Is there a way in which a sense of national identity can mix or even blur with an apolitical sense of personal friendship, and if so, how and why?

Marilyn Ivy's seminal work on nostalgia in Japanese culture, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (1995), remains one of the most in-depth discussions of this topic in English-language literature today. Throughout the book, Ivy argues that Japan's vision of modernity is intimately tied to loss, resulting in a cultural preoccupation with complicated interplays between presence and absence (what she refers to as 'the vanishing'). Frequently, these interplays manifest as sites that have become symbols of the vanishing, and through marketing of those sites, Japanese are encouraged to form a personal connection to the vanishing. Ivy's analysis often addresses connections between personal and national nostalgia, summarising the relationship between the two thus: 'Located in the ever-receding countryside (*inaka*) or on the edges of advanced capitalist prosperity – that is, distanced in some fashion from central, metropolitan sites of representation – these practices compel as recalcitrant spectacles of the elegiac, as allegories of cultural loss that Japanese often link, viscerally, with personal loss' (ibid., p.12).

In this work, Ivy lays an excellent framework for the discussion of personal and national longing, posing fascinating questions for further exploration. Over a decade after the publication of Ivy's work, what connections persist between the imaginings of personal and national loss?

Furthermore, what are the iterations of such loss in a non-locatable, even transnational context? Ivy's work is always located firmly in the context of Japan; the case studies that she uses are geographically bounded in Japan,[65] established for the consumption of Japanese individuals, and have as their subject Japanese national history. It is unsurprising, then, that her analysis forges strong links between the project of modernity in Japan and the way Japanese cultural discourses 'thematize loss' (Ivy, 1995, p.13). As this study discusses similar themes in contemporary popular culture, we must ask: how do the themes identified by Ivy transport to the ever-expanding worlds of the media mix – forms that resist placement in a single location, as they spread endlessly across the world through both official and non-official channels? Many contemporary media works reach beyond the borders of Japan in their forms and narratives alike, explicitly discussing and forming themselves in relationship to a transnational context. What are the articulations of national/personal loss in popular media, particularly that which involves connections to places beyond the nation of Japan?

A particularly illuminating contribution to the study of nostalgia in Japanese culture is Margaret Hillenbrand's 2010 article 'Nostalgia, place, and making peace with modernity in East Asia'. In this work, Hillenbrand foregrounds the connection between nostalgia and place:

> … [T]he nostalgia boom is almost always interpreted in context-specific ways, and usually along the following lines: national trauma or transformation… generates the desire to beat a retreat from the present as socio-political anguish or disorientation. "Armchair nostalgia" then steps in to transport the consumer back to a time scrubbed clean of Jameson's "genuine historicity", to a pseudo-epoch in which remembrance is so far removed from pain that it actually becomes analgesic, if not outright amnesiac. That it sells well is further grist to the mill. This reading is all well and good as far as it goes, and it certainly sheds light on part of the process; but it obscures the fact that nostalgia is never simply about time alone. Indeed, if we theorize these nostalgias in a comparative frame

[65] With the exception of the 'Discover Japan' and 'Exotic Japan' campaigns she discusses in chapter two (Ivy, 1995, pp.29–65), all of the case studies are located in a particular, easily-identifiable place in Japan; for example, Mount Osore (ibid., pp.141–191) or the town of Tōno (ibid., pp.98–140).

> – as a set of emotional-cum-economic responses that share the same rough co-odinates, and thus might be strung together in a different chain of meaning – then it is repetitive anxieties of place that are thrown into high relief. (2010, p.388.)

Hillenbrand argues that in East Asia today, the city is constructed as something other than 'place'; the concept of place itself, only understood to mean the soil of the countryside, forms the object of nostalgia. As what she terms the '"really remembered" city' (ibid., p.384), or the 'city of lived memory' (ibid.), is incompatible with 'place', it cannot be an object of nostalgia. Instead, the 'city of lived memory' either appears as 'the badlands, conceived in metaphors of debris, squalor and social dislocation' (ibid., p.388), or simply does not appear at all. Hillenbrand's analysis is limited by length and scope; in less than twenty pages, she describes a trend that 'persists across East Asia, and most especially in its literature and cinema' (ibid., p.384). Such a broad topic cannot be developed fully in such a small space, especially given that half of the article is spent examining two films that challenge the trend identified. The particular form of cute, colourful, future-oriented nostalgia that dominates much children's media is only hinted at in the following observation: '… so much recent nostalgia treats the city of lived memory as a sort of flyover zone, a space skipped past with eyes averted on the journey from a chintzy past to a glossy, high-spec future' (ibid., p.391). In this thesis, I hope to expand on Hillenbrand's analysis, examining the nostalgic places that pervade Japanese children's media and their explicit distinction from the 'city of lived memory'.

Strangely, in many more recent studies of popular media – except, of course, those marketed toward the *shōjo* – it seems that explorations of loss and nostalgia have become absent. The nostalgic elements of *anime* and *manga* texts seem to be generally overlooked by scholars, with such great attention paid to the association of anime with something 'new' that there is little consideration of its continuing relationship to things 'old' (with the exception of studies of specific anime texts in relation to national memory). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the foreword to *Millenial Monsters* by David Cross: 'Japanese have captured the frustrations and longings of a world now beyond nostalgia and dreams of magical places through an ever-changing fantasy of polymorphous perversity and

techno-animism: a world of millennial monsters' (2006, p.xviii). The discussion of how Japanese media reflects 'a world now beyond nostalgia' is, however, essentially absent from Allison's book; the existence of nostalgia is hinted at in three short (and rather dismissive) passages (2006a, pp.14, 201 and 229), but it appears that in general, Allison prefers, as do most scholars of anime texts, to discuss the progressive nature of the texts she analyses.

We have, then, roughly three types of studies related to nostalgia in contemporary Japan; those that detail the *furusato*-based longing for rural life, those that theorise the *shōjo*'s longing for nothingness, consumerism, and a personal past, and those that celebrate the world of contemporary popular media that is seen as 'beyond nostalgia'. I believe these are all useful observations, but they remain too rigidly defined, too carefully disconnected from one another – despite the fact that a good number of specific texts could fit easily into all three categories. In order to make sense of some of the media that is popular today, particularly those texts marketed to children, we must be open to further exploration of the overlaps and connections amongst the forms of nostalgia pervasive in Japan today, as well as their relationship to the 'futuristic' tendencies that appear alongside, and sometimes even intertwined with, nostalgic sentiments.

Conclusion

In the above chapter, I have outlined some of the main strengths of the fields that inform my research, as well as some of the issues that continue to mark the scholarship. In the field of children's media studies, we have seen a thorough examination of theoretical issues from innumerable angles. The centring of children's rights, most obviously represented through scholars' careful awareness of children's active participation in media texts, has culminated in a wide body of research that challenges previous 'effects' research and addresses the many interesting and unexpected ways in which children interact with media. The focus on children's own interpretations and uses of media texts, as well as the positive ways in which children use media to make sense of their world and gain needed and/or desired skills, has provided future researchers with a wealth of knowledge about the

complexities of human interaction with media at all ages. This research illustrates the need to avoid simplistic interpretations of media texts, including their numerous social contexts, their uses and applications amongst diverse audiences, and the biases that might separate our understandings of texts as adult researchers from the understandings held by young participants.

These observations are crucial to researchers studying children's media, and it is with these concepts in mind that I write the following chapters of this thesis. Nevertheless, I believe that these observations do not preclude detailed, careful analysis of children's media texts. Certainly, we must avoid easy assumptions and monolithic, simplistic interpretations, but the ample research proving that children interact with texts in multiple and complex ways does not mean that the texts with which they are interacting do not deserve deeper consideration. While their understandings may or may not be challenged by a given individual participant, texts continue to exhibit certain understandings of values, relationships, and lifestyles, and those understandings are related to cultures that extend beyond the text. In short, I believe it is possible to conduct textual analysis while also assuming children's active participation in those texts, and this belief will guide the remainder of the thesis. Furthermore, there is insufficient attention paid to the broader media environments of children's media today; children do not usually read Japan-origin children's media texts in the form of a unified individual work, but instead as elements of vast intertextual systems. Studying audience reception or a single text alone does not reflect the intertextual environments that define much of children's media today – environments that, for all their multiplicity and variation, do contain identifiable tendencies, including (but not limited to) common narrative devices, themes, and merchandising strategies. The field has, in its current state, largely avoided discussion of the exact contours of contemporary children's 'mediascapes'.

The field of Japanese cultural studies has addressed many of the concepts and ideas that will guide my research on Japanese children's media. Throughout this thesis, I will draw on the scholarship in this field as it pertains to information about contemporary Japanese media institutions, understandings of dominant societal contexts, and interpretations of the texts I am studying or texts similar to the ones I am studying. The wealth of information within this field, however, remains

inhibited by the persistence of monolithic portrayals of a Japanese 'national character', despite scholars' awareness of the problematic nature of such portrayals.

Perhaps it is that tendency that leads researchers to so often interpret Japan as a symbol of beloved academic theories; to see in Japan not a country of complex historical and cultural multitudes, but rather a symbol of postmodernity, post- or trans-humanism, or cyborgian identities. Regardless of their origin, however, these ideas have become prominent in studies of anime and manga – so prominent, in fact, that other elements of the texts have been neglected. A preoccupation with the past, particularly the past as something solid and definable rather than fluid and fluctuating, has been relegated to the heart-wrenching notes of *enka* music or the thatched cottages of *furusato* tourism. On the rare occasions that these elements are mentioned in the context of anime or manga, it is with the most careless tones: a symptom of Japan's rapid modernisation (with the barely-veiled implication that the people of Japan remain not quite capable of handling such a society), or as a timeless relic of Japan's long-standing aesthetic principles (with an equally problematic implication that contemporary Japanese pop culture has fully and unquestioningly carried on the traditions of other Japanese art, or alternatively, that the Japanese people hold such principles themselves so deeply that all art made by them will naturally be endowed with those principles). The presence of yearnings for the past in anime have not yet been interrogated by researchers, while the presence of yearnings for the future are catalogued repetitively. If the screens of anime are filled with remembrance, we try ever more determinedly to forget.

In my research, I have found that the screens are indeed filled with remembrance, and that remembrance is deeply political in nature. While the yearnings of anime have typically been represented as yearnings for the ambiguous future, or as yearnings for the past that arise as simple symptoms of a monolithic Japanese psyche, in many examples of children's media in Japan today, they are yearnings for other worlds have become accepted (and expected) political statements against what is represented as a toxic, alienating present. The worlds that are portrayed do not simply celebrate the cyborgian future, but rather multiple times and places that have in common their explicitly formulated differences from contemporary urban Japan. These works stress that the values children ought to cultivate are not found in contemporary urban Japan, and thus promote the child's

removal from that world – a removal constructed further by the merchandising, promotional events, and sites created alongside the works.

Chapter 4

Loss in the Land of Toys: Change and the unchanging in *Purikyua*

> 'Please! If you love your toys, everyone please, give your hearts!'
>
> – Rabu in *Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!?*

Entering another world

One moment, a group of four girls stand together in a bedroom. The bedroom is impeccably clean and tidy, futon folded neatly on the bed, no toys in sight. The girls stand next to the bed, their various fashionable outfits vibrant against the dull green of the tatami floor.

The next moment, the room is gone. The bed and floor are replaced by swirling pastel colours, waves and bubbles of pale blue, pink, and yellow. The girls fly through this bizarre background until they arrive at a single door. It is coloured a dignified white, decorated with stars, suns, and moons, and rises in a surprisingly elegant mixture of patterns and colours from a small swirl of green that might be interpreted as grass.

Lacking in sound or context, this set of images is similar to scenes in innumerable examples of anime for children and older audiences. A child or group of children leaves their world – in this case, as in many others, represented as a neat, structured place – and find themselves flying through a surreal blend of shapes and colours unlike any known environment. In a short while, they find a different reality presented to them: a door to another world. Anime, of course, does not hold a monopoly on such storylines; they can be found throughout children's media across the world, although often with different visual representations – a journey through a wardrobe, perhaps, or holding hands with a flying snowman. The portrayal of children leaving behind the reality they know, and replacing it with an entirely different world inhabited by mystery and magic is a popular formula for children's media both within and beyond Japan.

In Japanese media, this theme is present in a number of recent films, including *Hottarake no Shima* (2009), *Brave Story* (‘*Bureibu Sutōrī*’, 2006), *Yona Yona Pengin* (2009), and almost all *Purikyua* and *Doraemon* films, as well as older anime adventures such as *Magic Knight Rayearth* (‘*Majikku naito Reiāsu*’, 1993–1997), *Fushigi Yūgi: The Mysterious Play* (‘*Fushigi Yūgi*’, 1995–2003), and *The Vision of Escaflowne* (‘*Tenkū no Esukafurōne*’, 1994–1997). Strangely enough, such fantasy narratives are rarely explored in research on Japanese media. This type of fantasy, frequently called ‘portal fantasy’, is an illuminating subject for research due to its parallel depictions of both our world and a fantastic alternative. Such narratives often utilise their unique potential to highlight contrasts between the two worlds; to exhibit clearly the failings of each world based on the strengths of the other. Needless to say, many such stories do not rely on such contrast, simply keeping the ‘real world’ as a basis for identification with the story’s intended audiences. In many recent Japanese children’s films of this type, however, strong social critiques are inherent in the portrayals of both worlds. The celebrated *Spirited Away* (‘*Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*’, 2001) is a prime example, perhaps even a trendsetter in this regard: the selflessness required to survive life in a mystical bathhouse of the spirits is shown in stark contrast to the main character’s self-absorbed personality in the everyday world, and her parents’ normally acceptable greed is shown to have terrifying consequences in the other world. Human society’s growing disrespect for and destruction of the gods of nature is highlighted throughout the story, ultimately creating a parable against the corrupting selfishness and greed of modern society. Our world is not simply a starting point for an adventure in another, but an implicit point of comparison throughout. Of course, any fantasy can be interpreted as commentary on our own world, but the way these films are able to represent the two worlds in conjunction can provide direct and obvious comparisons that invite further consideration.

In this chapter, I will look at a popular girls’ series called *Purikyua* (2004–ongoing), a media mix created by Toei Animation, Asahi Broadcasting Corporation, and the toy company Bandai. I will place special emphasis on the season *Fresh Purikyua!* (2009–2010) and particularly the 2009 film *Fresh Purikyua! Eiga: Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!?*, as an example of another world

explicitly contrasted with our own,[66] a media mix of incredible size, and a multilayered representation of ideals marked by tension.

At first glance, the series may seem to celebrate all that is associated with contemporary life, from current fashions to mobile phones to a bright, forward-thinking attitude that rejoices in the future. Indeed, the series' emphasis on constant transformation could be seen as a visual representation of identities always in flux, and in similar series, almost identical representations have been interpreted in this way. At the same time, longings for the past and fears for the future are at play throughout the series, alongside a determined rejection of anything that might imply inner change or uncertain identities. These values play off one another in ever more inexplicable ways throughout the television series, film, books and supporting merchandise that comprise *Purikyua*'s distinctive media mix.

This chapter will begin by describing the extensive media mix of *Purikyua*, providing contextual information that illustrates a crucial element of this analysis: *Purikyua*'s creation of ceaselessly transforming worlds, worlds that welcome (and depend upon) constant change. I will then discuss the thematic focus on transformation throughout the series, a preoccupation that neatly reflects the actual changes adopted in its media mix format. The chapter then shifts to an in-depth analysis of the 2009 television season *Fresh Purikyua!*, which represents a counterpoint to the previously mentioned focus on transformation, highlighting instead the persistence of themes that embrace changelessness. I then approach the 2009 film *Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!?* as a second subject of analysis, a single element of the *Purikyua* media mix that exemplifies its concurrent celebrations of the changing and changelessness.

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[66] While there are some indications that this world of *Fresh Purikyua!* is not meant to be 'Japan' – for example, the fact that the town is called 'Clover Town' in English – I am considering it as 'contemporary Japan' because the main characters attend school in ways that clearly parallel ordinary Japanese school life (for example, putting on cultural festivals and wearing school uniforms), allude to soba shops, visit tatami stores, and otherwise participate in a society that bears a Japanese 'cultural odour' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p.27). In one episode, they go on a class field trip to Okinawa, and in the first *All Stars DX* film, they ride a train to Yokohama. The characters also use cell phones, watch programmes on big-screen televisions, do research using laptops, and have furniture, cars, and clothing that align with current trends, suggesting that they are not living in the too distant past or future. In short, the lives of the characters (when they are not fighting monsters) are obviously meant to seem similar to the lives of typical schoolchildren in Japan today. Nevertheless, Clover Town is an enchanted version of 'contemporary Japan': brighter, greener, more colourful, involving multiple appearances by fairies from other dimensions, mystical monsters and legendary transforming girl warriors – none of which seems to elicit much comment or concern on behalf of the general populace of Clover Town.

The many mixes of *Purikyua*

Figure 3: A collection of twenty-three Cures, from the website for the twelfth *Purikyua* movie, *Purikyua All Stars New Stage ~ Mirai no Tomodachi ~*. Five additional Cures were added in the 2012 season, to be later accompanied by a further four in the 2013 series.

In 2011, Bandai issued a survey asking the parents of 2,000 children to indicate their children's favourite characters (Bandai Namco Group, 2011).[67] The results included many of the now standard classics of children's media in Japan; *Anpanman* (1973–ongoing) led by far, as he has done for the past ten years (ibid., p.1). Following by a large margin is the long-running global phenomenon *Pokémon* (1996–ongoing; ibid., p.3). Third in place, however, is a series that might not be recognisable to those who have not recently been following the Japanese children's media industry: something known as *Purikyua shirīzu* (translated variously as the *Pretty Cure* or *Precure* series), a newcomer that has enjoyed phenomenal success in Japan (ibid.).

'Phenomenal' is the only word to use, for *Purikyua* has made an almost unimaginable mark on the children's market in the relatively short time for which it has been around. Wedged between the characters that have dominated Japanese children's media for decades – such as *Kamen Rider, Super Sentai, Anpanman, Doraemon,* and *Hello Kitty* – is a series that began in 2004, and unlike most of the other highly popular series with which it contends, is explicitly targeted at girls.

The gendered nature of the show is stated bluntly on the Bandai website, which goes so far as to list popular characters based on their target gender, placing the current *Purikyua* season under the 'for girls' label ('Shōhin jōhō: kyarakutā betsu', 2011). In one study of elementary students, an impressive 90 percent of the girls interviewed said they liked *Purikyua* – a noticeable contrast to the

[67] The survey results were released on June 2011 and were based on the reports of parents of 1,000 girls and 1,000 boys between the ages of 0 and 12. 'Character' (*kyarakutā*) in this sense refers not to individual characters in media narratives, but to individual or groups of characters that can be printed onto merchandise (what are known as '*kyarakutā guzzu*', or 'character goods'). Thus, images from the franchise *Pokémon* are counted as a single 'character'.

57.1 percent of boys who claimed to dislike the series (Fujita, 2009, p.82). The above-mentioned Bandai survey also makes clear the gender segregation in interest: while *Purikyua* is the favourite character amongst girls aged 3–5 and 6–8, and reached fifth place for girls aged 9–12, it never once reached the top ten within any age group amongst boys. In fact, the number of respondents who chose *Purikyua* as their children's favourite character amongst both genders combined is almost identical to the number of parents of girls who chose *Purikyua*, suggesting that girl audiences account for almost all of the show's popularity.[68] This is significant for two reasons: first of all, there can be no doubt that *Purikyua* is both intended and received as a series for girls, at least amongst children under the age of 13. Second, its popularity amongst girls is so considerable that it has become one of the main contenders in the contemporary children's market in Japan even without the support of boys. The show is targeted at girls aged 4–6 ('"Purikyua" 5nenme ni', 2008; 'Eiga HeartCatch Purikyua!', 2010), although a press release for a recent *Purikyua* attraction invites participation from girls aged 2–8 ('Namco, kyarakutā', 2011).

One interesting feature of the *Purikyua* series is its division into multiple sub-series; for the sake of clarity, I will refer to these as 'seasons', although the term is highly misleading. 'Season' usually implies some degree of continuity; namely, a series that has an ongoing plot but is split into multiple units. *Purikyua*, however, is essentially released as a wholly different series approximately each year, with only the general concept remaining the same.[69] When a new season begins, the previous season's merchandise is effectively eliminated: stores quickly replace the entire stock of *Purikyua* merchandise to reflect the latest set of characters, Bandai ceases to make or sell merchandise from the previous season, and apart from DVDs, books, and merchandise that features previous *Purikyua* characters alongside the latest ones, it can be hard to find any evidence of the newest characters' predecessors. As of February 2013, there have been ten different *Purikyua* seasons within

[68] It is possible that boys enjoy *Purikyua* but do not inform their parents of this, or that parents of boys are reluctant to report their boys' love for *Purikyua* in a survey. Either of these scenarios, however, would suggest that there is considerable social pressure placed on boys to deny their enjoyment of *Purikyua*, and thus, that the series is heavily gendered as a girls' series. Based on the numbers given, it would seem that only one of the 1,000 boys consider *Purikyua* their favourite character.

[69] As the entirety of *Purikyua* is referred to in Japan as 'the *Purikyua* series' (*'Purikyua shirīzu*'), to use a word other than 'series' seems inappropriate. I believe that 'season', while misleading, is the best word to use to differentiate between the broader *Purikyua* series and the multiple sub-series that comprise it.

the *Purikyua* series, with a new one released every year, and it has undergone complete changes eight times.

While the seasons contain many differences, they follow a distinctive narrative: at least two first-year junior high school student girls[70] are approached by magical fairies from another world, who somehow occupy their mobile phones and transform the phones into a magical accessory. The girls use their phones to transform into 'Cures', which involves a change in clothing and hairstyle, as well as the acquisition of magical powers and combat skills. They employ their new powers to fight monsters sent to Earth by the servants of an evil villain from another realm. The plot follows a 'monster of the week'[71] structure for most of the 50–episode series, sometimes introducing more Cures as it goes on, and culminates in the defeat of the evil villain. The plot alternates between the girls' everyday lives and their battles as Cures. Within this framework, most elements of the show change depending on the season: the characters themselves and the relationships between them, the fairies and their relationships with the characters, the types of monsters they fight, the goals of the evil villains, the other realms from which the fairies and villains come, the number of Cures, the thematic emphases of the series, and even the graphic style.

There are currently thirty-two Cures, who feature not only in the television series but also in thirteen movies, a number of video games, various manga in the magazine *Nakayoshi*, endless merchandise, live-action shows, and more. Each season correlates with one film, in which the characters enter another world (or, in the case of *HeartCatch Purikyua*, Paris – albeit a magical version of the city, inhabited by werewolves). The films are typically released in the middle of the television season, but exist outside the plot of the season, representing 'extra' content that is not later referenced or used within the television show. Recently, the films associated with each season have been joined by a series of *All Stars DX* films, in which the current set of Cures meets and joins forces with the Cures from the previous seasons. There are few commonalities between the various films, except for the 'miracle light': a small plastic battery-operated light, usually pink with a heart at the

[70] In the Japanese school system, first-year junior high school students are usually 12 or 13 years old.
[71] 'Monster of the week' is a common term amongst sci-fi/fantasy fans to describe television shows in which the appearance of a new monster or other villain – and its subsequent defeat – structures every (or at least most) episodes.

end, that is given to children attending the film at the cinema. This light eventually features in the film's narrative and requires the children to 'lend their support to Purikyua' by lighting up the 'miracle light' at the film's climax, creating a degree of audience participation.

Purikyua began as a television series in February 2004 with the season *Futari wa Purikyua* ('*The Two of Us are Purikyua*'). The series was extremely successful, and was followed by an equally successful sequel which contained the same characters and setting used in the first series. The success of the first two series might have encouraged the creators to carry on as normal, but instead they made an unusual decision: they decided to completely revamp the series, introducing a new narrative with new characters. The result, *Futari wa Purikyua Splash Star*, was poorly received, and the series almost ended at that point. However, the series was renewed for a further season after making substantial changes, and the next incarnation of *Purikyua* was both quite different from the 2004 *Futari wa Purikyua*, and very successful. While *Splash Star* featured two Cures almost identical to those in *Futari wa Purikyua* in appearance and personality, *Yes! Purikyua 5* includes not two but five Cures, focusing on a single main character and her relationship with the other four Cures – as well as her romantic relationship with one of the fairies who can, unlike in other seasons, transform into an attractive human man.

Yes! Purikyua 5 featured many changes that might make adults (particularly those of a feminist bent) cringe: it was done in far closer association with toy giant Bandai, to the point that practically every element of the series was conceived with Bandai's input (Noguchi, 2010). It was considerably 'girlier' than before; for example, in its use of pink as the main character's primary colour. Masuda sees this colour choice as a symbol of the series' growing conservative tendencies, noting that the main character's theme colour in *Futari wa Purikyua* (season one), black, is associated with evil and masculinity, while *Yes! Purikyua*'s main character, Nozomi, uses pink, a colour associated with gentle femininity (Masuda, 2010, pp.107 and 114). *Yes! Purikyua* also adds a romantic element absent from the first three seasons, changing the focus from friendship amongst girls to heterosexual romance, and vigorously reinforcing gender norms. Even the character Rin, a tomboy, is not allowed to stray from a strict gender binary: the official website for the *Yes! Purikyua 5* film shows her in a flowing red dress with the caption 'She is the opposite of Nozomi, and boyish

(but of course she has a girly side, too!)' ('Eiga Yes! Purikyua 5', 2007; my translation). After a second season featuring the characters of *Yes! Purikyua 5*, the series changed completely once again, to *Fresh Purikyua!*. *Fresh* began with three Cures, coloured in pastel pink, blue, and yellow, and featuring the same glitter, sparkles, and excess of pink that became standard in *Yes! Purikyua 5*. It did noticeably back away from heterosexual romance, a gentle heterosexual crush relegated to a minor sub-plot against the backdrop of an intense, powerful friendship between two of the main female characters.

Magical girls and superhero squads

In many ways, *Purikyua* is simply yet another iteration of tropes that have long pervaded Japanese children's media franchises. The 'monster of the week' structure is used amply throughout children's television shows, and 'magical girl' stories have been common throughout the history of girls' manga and anime. 'Magical girl' stories typically include a young girl who meets a cute, magical creature. The creature grants her the power to transform (*henshin*) into a magical warrior, who is able to battle evil with her newfound powers. Obviously, *Purikyua* is an example of a 'magical girl' story; in fact, its rigid adherence to all the usual tropes of the genre allows us to see it as not only an example, but as exemplary.

The best-known example of the 'magical girl' genre, and the one to which *Purikyua* is most frequently compared, is *Sailor Moon* (1991–2004). *Sailor Moon* tells the tale of a clumsy, blonde-haired girl who has the ability to transform into the magical warrior Sailor Moon, alternating between her everyday school life, battles against the evil Negaverse, friendships with her companion magical warriors, and romance with the alluring Tuxedo Mask. Like *Purikyua*, *Sailor Moon* reached a phenomenal level of popularity; as Frederick Schodt (1996, p.95) reports:

> At the end of 1995, thirteen paperback volumes compiled from the *Sailor Moon* series had sold nearly 1 million copies each, twenty volumes compiled from the animation series of *Sailor Moon* had sold around 300,000 each, and there were

> over ten types of video games on the market, each having sold between 200,000 and 300,000. In five years, total revenues from character merchandising exceeded ¥300 billion. By the end of 1995 the *Sailor Moon* manga books and the animation series had been exported to over twenty-three countries, including China, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, most of Europe, and North America. A truly global market had been opened up.

Purikyua may be understood as a sort of recent incarnation of *Sailor Moon*, which also included a Toei Animation television show broadcast on TV Asahi, toys released by Bandai and a manga released by Kodansha's *Nakayoshi*.

Purikyua's similarities to *Sailor Moon* are less fascinating than its myriad differences: *Sailor Moon* was less obviously consumerist, with marketable elements not nearly so strongly emphasised as in *Purikyua*. While *Purikyua* was first developed by a team of Toei Animation staff with the purpose of creating a media mix work, *Sailor Moon* began as a manga that is almost always looked to as the definitive, or 'original', work (by an individual manga artist who is seen as the work's 'author'). The plot and characters continued throughout its five television seasons, and it was more highly sexualised – all aspects that, according to Noguchi's 2010 article on *Purikyua*'s success, can be considered mistakes from which the makers of *Purikyua* learned. Ideologically, there are other points of difference: whereas magical girls have historically not been shown actually fighting, but rather defeat villains through magic spells, the Cures primarily fight through punching, kicking, and other physical combat (although they finish off the job with magical spells). Furthermore, *Purikyua* is less overtly focused on romance, and chooses instead to emphasise familial relationships and female friendship.

While *Purikyua* is usually compared to *Sailor Moon*, it may be more accurate to compare it to Asahi's long-running *Super Sentai* series.[72] Like the *Super Sentai* series, *Purikyua* a) is an Asahi series, shown directly after their Sunday morning 'superhero time', b) changes the characters and scenarios approximately every year, c) involves transformation sequences based on elaborate technological magical accessories ('*henshin* items') that can easily be reproduced and sold to

[72] The *Super Sentai* series (*Sūpā Sentai shirīzu*) has been released in the USA and numerous other countries as *Power Rangers*, using a heavy localisation process that involved re-filming segments of each episodes.

children,[73] d) stresses friendship, not romance, as the key thematic emphasis, and e) involves copious amounts of hand-to-hand combat. While the *Super Sentai* series are live action, and geared towards boys, the similarities between the two series are striking.[74] In fact, toys are marketed explicitly using the idea that the two franchises are different gendered sides of the same coin, exemplified in an ad shown on TV Asahi in May 2011 for plastic dishes decorated with images of Asahi's superheroes: the ad showed a girl saying 'I'm *Purikyua*!', followed by a boy saying 'I'm *Go Kaiger* [the 2011 *Super Sentai* season]!' (my translation). The ad then showed the entire collection of dishware, which consisted of two essentially identical sets distinguished by colour and character – the *Go Kaiger* version represented by the boy was blue, whereas the *Purikyua* version represented by the girl was pink. A 'superhero' show at the 2011 Tokyo Toy Show featured characters from *Kamen Rider*, *Go Kaiger*, and *Suite Purikyua* fighting together as allies, and a pull-out comic in Kodansha's magazine for children aged 2–4, *Otomodachi*, features the characters of *Go Kaiger* and *Suite Purikyua* engaging in everyday activities together as friends (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Cure Rhythm asks Go Kai Red for fashion advice (*Otomodachi*, 2011, 6).

As its commonalities with *Sailor Moon* and *Super Sentai* suggest, *Purikyua* is in many ways very similar to what has come before. In other ways, however, it can be seen as more extreme than its predecessors: as discussed in chapter one, *Purikyua* employs the use of more all-encompassing collaborative marketing than has been seen before, perfecting the system of replacing characters and scenarios usually associated with much older shows, and creating content that is heavily gendered, while also remaining surprisingly gender-bending. *Purikyua* seems at times to be like every popular

[73] The trend to use mobile phones to transform actually began with the 1997 *Super Sentai* season *Denji Sentai Megaranger*; before that season, characters usually used wristwatches.
[74] In most classifications (for example, on the websites of television channels, on labels used in video rental stores, and in some academic literature) *tokusatsu*, or 'special effects', series such as *Super Sentai* or *Kamen Rider* are included in the same category as anime. *Tokusatsu* can be considered one of the 'cluster of linked cultural forms' (Ito, 2006c, p.52) that comprises the media mix, as discussed in chapter one.

trend within Japanese children's media franchises, only made bigger, shinier, and marketed more cleverly.

While its unique characteristics should not be overlooked, *Purikyua*'s similarity to *Sailor Moon* and *Super Sentai/Power Rangers* makes scholarship on these works particularly significant for this chapter. Anne Allison's work is especially relevant here, as she has carried out extensive research on both series, as well as *Tamagocchi*, one of *Purikyua*'s biggest rivals for the girl's market. Highlighting the emphasis on transformation in these works, Allison's conclusions echo the 'cyborgian' focus of Japanese media scholarship discussed in the previous chapter. In an early article on the subject, Allison (2001, p.257) makes the following observation:

> Playing with cyborgs encourages not only an attitude of flexibility towards an increasingly heterogenous and fluctuating world, but also a willingness to conceive the world and one's place in it as blended rather than anchored to singular and hegemonic essences. In my research on character trends – Power Rangers, Sailor Moon, Tamagotchi, and Pokémon – children both in the United States and Japan say they love the various iterations, changes, and hosts of characters in these play-worlds. In *Sailor Moon*, for example, the main character alternates between being a strong, courageous, transhuman superhero and a whiny, lazy, food-crazy 14–year-old girl. It is this transformative, multisided nature of Sailor Moon that delights fans and constructs her identity as something more than, and non-reducible to, either "superhero" or "girl" – an excess that cannot be definitively pinned to a singular essence.

This point is reiterated in the conclusion to her later book on the subject, *Millenial Monsters*:

> Such a logic of assemblage and disassemblage is what I have been tracing throughout this book: a cyborgian aesthetic that, given impetus by the national disruptures and reconstruction following the war, has marked Japanese mass fantasies since the 1950s starting with nuclear beasts (Gojira) and atomic

> superheroes (Tetsuwan Atomu). Characters with bodies and powers that are endlessly remapped, recharged, and replaced have been a commonplace [*sic*] throughout the postwar period as in the three properties discussed in previous chapters – *Power Rangers*, *Sailor Moon*, and *tamagotchi*. And, over time, what could be called a principle of identity as mutable, modular, and mixed has extended from heroes on the screen or page to the interface between player and screen advanced in the more game-based fantasies of recent years. (Allison 2006a, p.264.)

In both of these works, Allison highlights the focus on change and transformation as it relates to identity: 'a principle of identity as mutable, modular, and mixed', or an identity that 'cannot be definitively pinned to a singular essence'. My conclusions suggest that while *Purikyua* can be seen as an even more vivid illustration of the themes Allison identifies, it also contradicts them in numerous ways. In the following sections, I will explore *Purikyua*'s use of transformation and changelessness in depth, using Allison's interpretation of Japanese children's media as a basis to guide the analysis.

'Looking is fun, collecting is even more fun!'

A glance at the girls' aisle in any of the massive toy stores dotting Tokyo immediately indicates the vast merchandising empire that is *Purikyua*. Shelves laden with pink plastic and glittering sequins suggest a simple, even quaint merchandising style: colouring books, school supplies covered with the characters' images, dolls, and candy packaged with the smiling faces of the latest Cures show nothing more than any parent might expect from a popular children's show. There is another side to *Purikyua* merchandise, however: a comprehensive, high-tech realm that combines the innovations of *tamagotchi* with those of *Sailor Moon*, *Kamen Rider*, *Super Sentai* and *Astro Boy*, reflecting and drawing upon the world-creating tendencies that pervade contemporary Japanese children's media. *Purikyua* merchandise is inseparable from the rest of *Purikyua*, and I would now like to delve into the depths of Bandai's latest phenomenon. In this section, I will discuss the ways in which much of the

available merchandise for *Purikyua* emphasises the formation of close personal relationships between the product and the individual, using innovative merchandise to highlight the ambiguous ground between purchasing *Purikyua* merchandise and participating in the ever-changing, ever-expanding world of *Purikyua* content.

The epitome of *Purikyua*'s commercialism can be found in the words adorning the pages of a *Fresh Purikyua!* book. Rather than a storybook, the book is a collection of information and details about the characters, story, and, of course, merchandise of *Fresh Purikyua!*. Written in bright yellow bubbly letters on the first page of the book's catalogue-esque collection of photos and descriptions of *Fresh Purikyua!* merchandise is the caption, 'Looking is fun, collecting is even more fun!' ('*mite tanoshii, atsumete motto tanoshii*') (Matsumoto, 2009a, p.15). The use of this phrase shamelessly moves the catalogue beyond simply tempting children with photographs of *Purikyua* merchandise to directly entreating them to purchase (or ask their parents to purchase) those products. Similar to Allison's discussion of what she terms '*Pokémon* capitalism' (2006a, p.197), accumulation is the key. 'The logic of *Pokémon*,' Allison states, 'is not confrontation but accumulation: the never-ending quest to "get" more *pokémon* that, though starting out as opponents, are assimilated into (rather than exterminated by) the self' (ibid., p.255). In a more explicit formulation, she claims: 'Addiction to the rush of acquisition is part of the pleasure in *Pokémon*' (2009a, p.187). Cultivating an 'addiction to acquisition' is, of course, a crucial goal for the makers of *Purikyua*. As explained in chapter one, animation studios rely on merchandise licensing fees: Toei, like other anime studios, produces animation at a loss that must later be recouped through licensing fees (Kataoka, 2011, p.163). Bandai facilitates the creation of a *Purikyua*-infused childhood, making the development of an all-encompassing *Purikyua* world ever more possible in each subsequent season.

Figure 5: A clip of a *Smile Purikyua!* poster (Frumix, 2011).

As discussed in chapter one, *Purikyua* is a collaboration between Toei Animation, TV Asahi Broadcasting Corporation, and Bandai. The three companies work together closely to decide on the series' content, particularly making use of Bandai's knowledge about the children's market to ensure that the content suits current trends and fashions amongst the target demographic (Noguchi, 2010). Bandai's expertise also comes into play when ensuring that the accessories used by the Cures to transform are easily marketable; in fact, one might see the increasing influence of merchandising concerns in the gradual change of visual representations of the accessories over time. While the accessories in *Purikyua*'s first season were subtly integrated into the narrative, they have featured ever more prominently in each subsequent season. In 2012's *Smile Purikyua!*, posters promoting the season show an accessory practically jumping out of the poster: it is featured at the forefront position, larger than the faces of any of the Cures, and appears to be a photograph of the actual plastic toy (see figure 5).

Merchandising is also a key consideration in the use of *Purikyua*'s strategy of yearly renewal. While not an innovative idea – the *Super Sentai* and *Kamen Rider* series have been using this strategy since their origins in the 1970s – it is the first application of such a comprehensive and innovative scheme to a show targeted towards girls, and is the most recent iteration of this scheme. *Purikyua* was formed from all that was learned from *Kamen Rider* and *Super Sentai*, as well as all that was learned from previous 'magical girl' series, and benefits from the adept combination of those ideas. Changing a series completely on such a regular basis provides a number of advantages: extensive further merchandising possibilities is the most obvious advantage, but such a strategy also solves the problem of the plot becoming ever more complicated and difficult to follow for new audiences (a problem *Sailor Moon* faced as it approached its eventual 200 episodes), ensures that the characters are always able to keep up with the latest trends in fashions and accessories, and essentially grants the creators endless opportunities to form ever more perfect products by refining the characters and scenarios based on what was and was not successful.

There are a host of benefits to *Purikyua*'s renewal system for Bandai, Toei, and TV Asahi, but for the purposes of this thesis, the system results in one outcome of overriding importance: the creation of a constantly reimagined world that is constructed without end in always new ways. The

identification of an original becomes harder now than ever; for example, would the video game based on the *Purikyua* season *Suite Purikyua* call its 'original' the television programme of *Suite Purikyua*, or the first season of *Purikyua*? After all, the latter featured an entirely different set of characters, setting, and narrative; but the former is hard to consider an 'original', based as it was on a media enterprise that was already well-established at its inception, having been carefully refined over years. Each item of the *Purikyua* 'media mix' is part of a vast realm that is constructed to allow its own continuation and expansion; any limitations or conclusions to *Purikyua* would be a negative thing for the franchise, which operates according to the logic of perpetual development and proliferation.

Figure 6: Advertisement for *Fresh Purikyua!* merchandise (Matsumoto, 2009a).

If the merchandising potential of the *Purikyua* series seems impressive, it pales in comparison to the cleverness of the actual merchandise. Along with standard merchandise items such as washcloths and pencil cases (which are almost infinite in number, and replaced completely in every store at the beginning of each new season), the *henshin* items[75] on sale involve significant convergence between products, obviously designed to ensure that children want to own all of them – and that each child's desire for more merchandise develops along with the season's narrative. As illustrated in the advertisement shown in figure 6, three of the main pieces of *Fresh Purikyua!* merchandise are designed to be used together.

[75] *Henshin aitemu* (or 'transformation items') are replicas of the magical accessories that allow characters in the show to transform, such as mobile phones, perfume bottles, and jewellery. The term is also used for other similar series, such as *Sailor Moon* or *Super Sentai*.

The Pickrun (the key-like object shown on the top right-hand box) are sold individually in four colours, and display emotions as well as items such as food on the small screen. Each Pickrun displays different items depending on the powers of its respective Cure. In order to make use of the items shown on the Pickrun's screen, one must also purchase the Linkrun, the mobile phone-like object pictured in the top left-hand box. When opened, the Linkrun's screen displays a pixilated figure of the bear-like fairy Chiffon. Inside the Linkrun, Chiffon essentially acts as a portable electronic pet, similar to the *tamagotchi* that were popular in the 1990s. When the Pickrun is inserted into the top of the Linkrun, the young *Purikyua* fan can act out the Cure's transformations, and also take care of Chiffon's needs by giving her items from the Pickrun.

The neat loop does not end there, however. A plush version of Chiffon is also available for purchase (see the box on the bottom of the image). This plush Chiffon can indicate her needs by a colour-changing light on her forehead. The proud owner of the whole *Fresh Purikyua!* set can then send the items shown on the screens of the various Pickrun through the Linkrun to the plush Chiffon; the plush Chiffon, having acquired her desired food or change of clothing, begins to 'grow' and learns to speak new words. The three toys together, then, form a comprehensive system that utilises both the television series' narrative and available technology to make parents spend a good deal of money.[76]

Bandai's merchandising draws on the reality-blurring potential of the media mix system to bring the Cures into the everyday life of child participants. Through complex systems of *Purikyua* merchandise, children are taken beyond the figurines that encourage re-enacting given narratives (however individual children actually play with the figurines, which often does not follow such principles), to immersive world-forming items that emphasise participating in and creating *Purikyua* narratives. In some ways, it bears little difference from a child running around in a Superman outfit, but through the world-forming emphasis, children do not simply become Cures (although that too is possible, as seen by the popularity of *Purikyua* costumes for sale) but bring the world of the Cures into their own lives. In the *Purikyua*-mediated childhood, specific narratives and even characters are

[76] Purchasing one each of the three toys would amount to a total of ¥11,550 (approximately £87, given the exchange rate on 5 December 2012). These are, of course, only a fraction of the *Purikyua* merchandise available.

less important than the expansive *Purikyua*-ised world that is formed through the combination of media, merchandise, and audience participation.

The systems of *Purikyua* merchandise remade for every season are joined by a variety of other merchandise and events designed to bring the world of the child consumer and that of *Purikyua* closer. The MP3 player used by the main character of *Fresh Purikyua!*, Rabu, has a real-world companion that plays the *Fresh Purikyua!* theme song; advertisements encourage children to practice dancing like Rabu and her friends. A sentimental episode involving a sick child who shows her affection for the Cures by giving them jewellery made with a machine that joins together multicolored plastic hearts is aired with an advertisement for the same machine. The Cures themselves appear in numerous events, represented by actresses in full-body outfits. While most of these events involve simple appearances, some are more interactive: in one event related to the film's release, Rabu gave dancing lessons to the children in attendance ('Eiga Fresh Purikyua!… eigakan de dansu', 2009). In the live-action shows involving the Cures, it is common for them to speak directly to the audience, or indirectly involve the children in the narrative (for example, claiming that the Cures must defeat the evil villain to protect all the children in the audience).

These simple tricks to promote specific merchandise and general engagement with the narrative serve another purpose as well: they blur the boundaries between the fantastic world of the narrative and the everyday life of the child participant. Stepping beyond the impulse to have every ordinary object emblazoned with the images of *Purikyua* (although that certainly occurs as well), it is possible to have a lifestyle that essentially mimics that shown within *Purikyua*. A child can listen to music as Rabu does, blend perfumes using the same bottles and scents used by Miki (another character in *Fresh Purikyua!*), or bake cupcakes identical to the ones made by the characters in *Suite Purikyua*. The more fantastical elements are equally replicable: one can care for the needs of a demanding teddy bear-like fairy, act out the transformation sequences with complete Cure outfits and fully-functional accessories, and even participate in the Cures' battles against evil as an audience member or 'miracle light'-wielding 'supporter'.[77] In fact, one can play the role of a Purikyua in

[77] While the functions of the character's mobile phones are the most elaborate, other accessories also act out their roles in a real-life context; for example, the 'Cure Sticks' used by the characters in *Fresh Purikyua!* take

multiple arenas of everyday life: along with the Cure costumes on sale, pyjamas and swimsuits designed to look like the Cure's outfits are also on offer. For those who want to get closer still to the world of *Purikyua*, the *Purikyua Narikiri Studio*, which opened recently in three separate locations, is a cross between a store and a theme park that promises: 'You can become a Purikyua! You can play!' ('Namco kyarakutā shisetsu saito', 2012; my translation).[78] Costumes are available for dress-up, as well as backgrounds against which the new Cures can have their photos taken. Other activities replicate both the everyday and the magical events of the lives of the Cures. Bandai's marketing emphasises the changeability of the Cures by making their transformations replicable by child audiences.

The renewal system of *Purikyua*, and indeed its entire extensive merchandising system, can be seen as the epitome of the multiplicity that the media mix represents. In *Purikyua*, we have a perpetually expanding world, a world created through regular and total transformation that marks every element of its form and presence in Japan today. It rejects the limits of a single story, a single set of characters, or even a single universe. Instead, the characters, stories, universes, and merchandise multiply endlessly, never designed to reach an end. *Purikyua* is defined through its transformative potential and unbounded forms. It does not simply reproduce narratives in multiple adaptations, or even use the more common media mix strategies of expanding on the adventures of a set of characters or exploring the boundaries of a particular world, but goes further still: it is driven by idea alone. With each of its forms adhered together only by the malleable boundaries of an abstract idea, *Purikyua* becomes a media mix that can persistently adapt to the latest trends, revise itself to fix less successful elements, hold the attention of even the most distracted audiences, and most importantly, expand its boundaries endlessly into the lives of children and their parents.

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the form of instruments that light up and play music when casting spells to defeat the enemy, actions imitated by their toy replicas.

[78] At the time of writing, Bandai Namco had similar theme parks for four other series (*Super Sentai*, *Tamagotchi*, *Ultraman*, and *Kamen Rider*). Of these, the sites for *Ultraman* and *Kamen Rider* use the same tagline of 'You can become a Purikyua! You can play!' (substituting the names of the other characters for 'Purikyua'), implying that the focus on 'becoming' the characters is not isolated to the example of *Purikyua*, or to series for girls, but is a pervasive element of the Bandai Namco merchandising strategy ('Namco kyarakutā shisetsu saito', 2012).

The transforming world of *Purikyua*

Echoing the scholarship cited above on similar series, *Purikyua* is a world of constant, innovative transformation, and it enacts such transformation with delight in all of its potential possibilities. Reflecting the multiplicity of its media mix, and the changeability inherent in its renewal system, the narrative content of *Purikyua* depicts change with a celebratory attitude. The celebration of change in *Purikyua*'s narrative takes four key forms: 1) the physical transformations of the characters (as well as the fairies, accessories, etcetera), 2) the embrace of forward-thinking, optimistic attitudes that talk explicitly about moving toward the future's potential, 3) the relatively progressive gender values embodied by the show, which convey appreciation for social change, and 4) a thematic emphasis on change in the narrative, which sees the emotional and physical metamorphosis of key characters dominating the plots of many *Purikyua* seasons. Although these themes are largely applicable to all *Purikyua* seasons,[79] I will use the example of the 2009 film and television season of *Fresh Purikyua!* to illustrate these four focuses on transformation.

Fresh Purikyua! centres around Momozono Rabu, a cheerful, kind-hearted girl who is defined equally by her positive attitude and her ceaseless devotion to her friends. Rabu's transformed form is the pink-themed Cure Peach, while her friends Aono Miki and Yamabuki Inori ('Bukki') transform into other fruit-themed Cures: Berry and Pine, respectively.[80] The monsters in *Fresh Purikyua!* are created by servants of the evil lord Moebius from the planet Labyrinth, by attaching a gem to ordinary objects such as vending machines, wigs, or blackboards to make often silly-looking monsters with properties related to the original object (for example, a vending machine monster shoots juice and coffee onto innocent bystanders). The three Cures must fight these monsters by returning them to their previous state, and ultimately, must defeat Moebius himself, who is revealed to be a supercomputer seeking to take over all of the universe's memory.

[79] There are certain exceptions; for example, *Yes! Purikyua 5* and *Yes! Purikyua 5GoGo* are less progressive in their gender roles than the other seasons, and *Suite Purikyua* has less of an emphasis on the future (based as it is on rekindling a long-lost friendship). The four criteria listed above are the general rules of the *Purikyua* formula, although exceptions do exist.

[80] 'Pine' may seem out of place in the fruits theme, but character merchandise indicates that it refers to a pineapple.

The most visually outstanding forms of transformation that mark *Purikyua* are the vigorously highlighted and exhaustively repeated transformation sequences. In brightly-coloured, elaborately-animated *henshin* sequences, marked by unique music, Rabu becomes Cure Peach, Bukki becomes Cure Pine, and Miki becomes Cure Berry; their costumes, hair, and abilities 'morph' fluidly and regularly. These transformation sequences are, according to Anne Allison, what most compels young audiences (2001, p.243), and are the 'key' to the Japanese superhero show (2000b, p.74). It is notable that when the characters turn into their Cure forms, they are effectively different people: Cure Peach is addressed as Cure Peach, and on associated official books and websites, the characters are usually referred to by both of their forms (e.g., 'Momozono Rabu/Cure Peach' ['ABC: *Fresh Purikyua!*', 2009]). The main characters of all *Purikyua* seasons, then, are first and foremost defined by their lack of singularity; from episode one of each season, which sees the lead character gain their Cure form, to the TV Asahi *Purikyua* websites that show each character both as a girl and as a superhero, to the transformation sequences that indicate the main action of each episode or film, the defining element of *Purikyua*'s leading characters is their possession of two forms. Furthermore, the show is based on a variety of other transformations: fairies that turn into keys and ordinary objects that turn into monsters, for example, or the villains, who have their own transformations that parallel the Cures'.

This thematic emphasis on transformation takes place in the context of a series that is deeply oriented toward the positive power of the future. The season of *Fresh Purikyua!* in particular reinforces the focus on change with its exaggerated optimism and future-oriented outlook. Rabu's catchphrase, 'I'm going to get happiness!' ('*shiawase getto da yo*'), epitomises the attitude of the season: looking forward with the belief that the future can be shaped in a positive way. In keeping with this attitude, the last episode is tellingly titled: 'Full of smiles! Everyone is going to get happiness!' (my translation). This focus on 'getting', as with Allison's discussion of *Pokémon* cited above (2006a, p.255), ties into modern capitalist notions of ownership – and what is owned is our personal future, our happiness to come. Happiness is not something that one simply experiences, but something that can be actively attained; both happiness and unhappiness remain a temporary state that can be fought or acquired, like the monsters the characters fight (which, almost certainly not coincidentally, are designed by the villains to inspire unhappiness) or the *henshin* items Bandai

encourages audiences to collect. *Purikyua*'s particular brand of optimism is based on the concept of potential, as the individual's emotional wellbeing can be shaped – transformed – by their actions. In the final episode, the proactive Rabu's unwavering belief in a better future, and tireless work to make that future occur, ultimately results in a world that has been drastically transformed: everyone 'gets' happiness, in what can be seen as a celebration of humanity's potential to alter their own circumstance.

For all its pink, cuteness, and fixation on fashion, *Purikyua*'s depiction of gender roles is surprisingly wide and at times, even subversive. The gender politics of *Purikyua* are analysed extensively in Masuda Nozomi's 2009 article '"Onna no ko muke terebi anime" wo tou: *Purikyua* shirīzu no chōsen' ('Questioning "girls' television anime": the challenge of the *Purikyua* series'). Masuda discusses the relatively unconstrained gender roles that mark the first *Purikyua* season, noting, for example, the unusual choice of black for the main character's theme colour (2009, p.107). The form of fighting depicted is also unusual: Cures battle not with the spells common to 'magical girl' warriors, but by kicking and punching their attackers – when the sight of young girls physically attacking anything is essentially absent from mainstream Japanese children's media, this can be seen as a subversion of usual gender roles (ibid., p.109). As discussed above, there is also little emphasis on romance in most *Purikyua* seasons, which distinguishes the series from the passionate romance that guides *Sailor Moon* (ibid., p.111). While Masuda is less encouraged by what can be seen as a reversal of some of *Purikyua*'s more subversive elements in the later season *Yes! Purikyua 5*, some of the series' unique gender portrayals remain – and in *Fresh Purikyua!*, which was released after Masuda's article was written, some of the changed elements of *Yes! Purikyua 5* (such as the emphasis on heterosexual romance) are reversed yet again. In a newspaper article, Suzuki Mishio, a Nikkei columnist, writes about the progressive elements of *Purikyua* in contrast to the 'magical girl' stories of her youth:

> There is neither a king to protect them to the last, nor a prince to come and save them. Their girlish shapes, with ribbons on their torsos and earrings in their ears, are covered in mud as they grapple with enemies who wish to devour the

> world, or villains who crush the weak. They do not yield to any power, no matter how strong, and they certainly never give up. Relying on no one and sticking to their own convictions, they are independent heroines. (2010; my translation.)

Purikyua's use of 'independent heroines' suggests another form of transformation: a belief in social transformation, particularly that which moves along the predetermined path of modern 'progress' that sees physically strong, autonomous women as the model to be emulated. *Purikyua* is not content to transform only its characters; it positively reflects and encourages the transformation of the society in which those characters live, breaking from the common trends of the genre to welcome a new type of girl heroine.

Echoing the physical transformations that so dominate *Purikyua*, and drawing on the optimistic, forward-thinking attitude embraced by the show, the emotional transformations of the characters are a key element of *Fresh Purikyua!*'s narrative. The fifty-episode season roughly follows two twenty-five episode narrative arcs, both of which revolve around the transformation of a main character. These are not the surface-level transformations of Rabu into Cure Peach, but deep changes that reflect on the very identity of the characters involved. In the first arc, the villain's servant Eas manages to infiltrate the Cure's friendship group disguised as a young girl named Setsuna. However, in a powerful sequence of episodes, Rabu's unceasing blind faith and devotion to her 'friend' Setsuna slowly makes Eas break down with guilt and grief. Eas is killed by the villain she serves, and reborn as Cure Passion. Leaving her identity as Eas behind and living as Setsuna, she becomes best friends with Rabu. In the second arc, the infant fairy Chiffon is revealed to be the 'universe's memory', Infinity, and is co-opted by the villain in his quest for world domination; this story is focused on the four Cures' efforts to reverse Chiffon's transformation. Both arcs are centred on a character who changes – complete, all-encompassing transformations that are visually reinforced by changes in the characters' appearance (for example, Eas and Setsuna have not only different costumes but different character designs). These narrative arcs reveal a focus on transformation that reaches beyond the

premise of the series – *Fresh Purikyua!* shows change as a persistent thematic preoccupation, encompassing multiple levels of form and narrative.

Obstructed by an evil power: *Fresh Purikyua!* and innate goodness

Despite the celebration of change that pervades *Purikyua*, a close look at particular *Purikyua* narratives shows a different focus: on the power of the ultimately unchangeable individual. The characters of Rabu, Miki, and Bukki differ greatly in personality. Rabu's outgoing, lively, but somewhat dim-witted character is offset by the studious, polite, and self-doubting Bukki, as well as the fashionable, somewhat hard-hearted, and always confident Miki. Each of the three are represented by theme colours in accordance with their associated fruit, as well as catchphrases and poses that are repeated regularly throughout the show. Portraying characters with simple, stereotyped personalities – matched with associated colours, catchphrases, and poses – is an extremely common form of characterisation in Japanese superhero shows, and serves a clear purpose: to make the characters clearly defined, easy to remember, and easy to understand. Of significance to this thesis is the way in which the characters are established completely through this pervasive form of characterisation; none of the three grow or develop beyond the simple descriptions mentioned above, and indeed, the descriptions offered encompass almost everything that is known about their characters.

The clearly defined nature of *Purikyua*'s characterisation is best illustrated through the many *Purikyua* books, websites, and manga that include short descriptions of the characters. These descriptions, which take the form of a two- or three-sentence paragraph, are repeated word-for-word across numerous forms of media (sometimes with very slight variations, such as a shortened version for those situations where there is a shortage of space). All Cures in the *Purikyua* franchise have such a description, and the only changes made to them throughout the series occur when an important plot point is revealed related to the character (for example, when *Yes! Purikyua 5GoGo*'s Cure Rouge/Rin decided to follow her secret dream to become a jewellery maker). In other words, all that is important to know about *Purikyua*'s characters can fit comfortably into what is usually an unchanging short paragraph. While the lack of character complexity is to be expected in a show for young children, the

characters are crucially defined by the same attributes from the beginning of the series that continue to define them at the end. Whatever spectacular changes see them transform from ordinary girls to Cures, it is a surface change, a change of outfit and ability – they remain defined by the same personalities, the same values and preoccupations, even the same colours and catchphrases that marked their ordinary forms. The characters of *Purikyua* are not only unchanging but so completely unchanging that all there is to know about them can fit into a little bubble of text, represented through one colour and one catchphrase, constant throughout their many iterations. We are presented with an almost claustrophobic sense of selfhood, defined so rigidly it can be boiled down to a sentence and a colour, and remaining perfectly intact whatever physical form the character assumes.

A related emphasis can be found in the season's focus on individual happiness, posited as the logical alternative to the 'controlled state' (*kanrikokka*) of Labyrinth. Setsuna's transformation is presented as the beginning of a quest to find individual happiness, which she had never experienced in Labyrinth. She becomes the Cure of Happiness, and is shown throughout the episodes following her transformation learning what it is to feel happiness through everyday experiences (such as eating dinner with Rabu's family, decorating her room in her favourite colour, and making friends at school). Happiness in *Fresh Purikyua!* is given a physical location: Clover Town, the setting of the series and Setsuna's quest for happiness, is a brightly coloured town, characterised by green parks and fields of clovers surrounding a friendly high street. As described in a *Purikyua* book, it is 'fashionable and up-to-the-minute, but it is also a town where the traditional values of human kindness remain' (Matsumoto, 2009a, p.13; my translation). The goal of Labyrinth is to create situations that will cause people to be unhappy in order to fill an enormous 'Unhappiness Gauge', and the unhappiness that defines the land is shown through a consistent rejection of individualism. Labyrinth is a bleak land, depicted entirely in black and grey. All its denizens wear identical clothing, sit down to identical, bland-looking food at a set time, and do everything according to the orders of the villain Moebius. They are shown walking in long lines, each person indistinguishable from each other. While the word '*kanrikokka*' is not commonly used for any specific country, the images connote the portrayals of capitalism and communism common in American media, and carry strong echoes of fears about North Korea. A bright, colourful world of fashion, sweets, and individual happiness is positioned against a

drab, rigidly structured world where no one is differentiated from any other – all move together, at the same pace, keeping the same schedule, wearing the same clothes, and eating the same food.

The people of Labyrinth, however, are not themselves fully corrupted by this influence: their loyalty to Moebius is swiftly abandoned when they taste doughnuts brought by the Cures from Earth, and realise how much they have been missing. They then cheer the Cures on to victory, immediately preferring the capacity for choice and individual happiness to the life they have known thus far. Notably, the superiority of the capitalistic system is never questioned: the people of Labyrinth eat their doughnuts as if coming out of a reverie, presumably brainwashed by Moebius (or at least never made aware of other options). As soon as they become aware of the possibility of a different life, they choose that life without hesitation. In other words, the Cures' world is presented as so inherently superior that the only reason the people of Labyrinth have not chosen it is because they did not know of its existence. Perhaps the Cures can almost be seen as a representation of the colonial ideal, bringing a superior lifestyle (as it is constructed within the series) to the ignorant masses of a foreign land, who prove eager to adopt that lifestyle and welcome their liberators with open arms.

In the construction of Labyrinth, we see the perfect confluence of individualism (shown in the quest for 'happiness' defined as a quest for individualisation) and *Fresh Purikyua!*'s overriding emphasis on inner goodness. 'Happiness' is shown to be the individual's assertion of their own will against corrupting forces. The unique individual inside Setsuna is both what allows her to overcome Labyrinth's influence, and what drives her quest for happiness. The Labyrinthian's love for doughnuts is resistance to the state *because* it is an affirmation of the individual – and that individual naturally resists corruption, because they are naturally good. In a Disney-like construction that seems quite at odds with most accounts of anime texts (and indeed, accounts of Japanese society in general), *Fresh Purikyua!* uses a formula that equates individualism (particularly of the consumerist variety) with happiness, and happiness with belief in innate goodness. In an un-Disney-like way, innate goodness is shown not in contrast to innate evil, but to those whose goodness has been corrupted by external forces – but those forces are never quite strong enough to permanently erase the 'good' heart beneath.

The focus on the innate goodness of all the characters is reinforced by the types of school dramas that are shown. Always based on misunderstandings or honest mistakes – such as a boy too

shy to confess his feelings to the girl he loves, or a group of friends forgetting to invite a member of their group to participate in dance classes with them – the emphasis is on better communication and keeping consideration of others in one's mind at all times. Representing an impulse that spreads across the *Purikyua* series, no schoolyard bullies or oppressive adults appear in these stories, only kindhearted individuals who sometimes get things wrong.[81]

Of course, villains do exist, even in *Fresh Purikyua!* – namely, Eas' other two companions. These two, however, are used as comic relief throughout the series. In the end, both are, like Setsuna, reborn as good characters, with vague indications that they may become romantic interests for Setsuna and Miki. In fact, throughout *Fresh Purikyua!*, living beings are almost never portrayed as truly evil; they are somehow misunderstood, misguided, or, in the case of the season's evil villain Moebius himself, not a living being at all. The monsters created by the servants of Moebius are transformed beings – but they are transformed through corruption of their innate being, something that must be 'cured' by Purikyua's power. The day is saved when they are returned to their original form. Even their monstrous forms bear similarities to the object on which they are based, as a monstrous wig burdens everyone with strange hairstyles, and a monstrous camera traps Cure Peach in her memories. The monsters' original form defines the type of monster they become, and their return to it forms the triumphant conclusion; the qualities of the original object thus remain a key element of the transformed being.

While the series' two major story arcs revolve around transformation, both are depicted not as transformation between two equally authentic identities, but quite the opposite: they are tales of a character's true inner goodness overcoming evil influences. The story of Setsuna being reborn from a villain into a Cure might have been a story of deep, soul-altering transformation – if it were not explicitly constructed as Setsuna's true self emerging. Setsuna's transformation comes at the end of

[81] This trend is perhaps best illustrated by *HeartCatch Purikyua!* (2010–2011), the series following *Fresh Purikyua!*. In *HeartCatch*, the monsters are formed by villains who take advantage of characters whose 'heart seeds' (their soul in the form of a small seed) have withered, usually from negative feelings such as jealousy, bitterness, or hopelessness. The resulting monster screams out the hidden feelings of its victim: 'I want to be more like my sister!' 'I want to play football, too!' In each episode's resolution, the Cure's knowledge of their friend's true feelings allows them to help find solutions to the problems that originally made their heart seed wither. An almost identical structure is employed in the similar show *Shugo Chara* (2007–2008). Featuring 'heart eggs' rather than seeds, the show shows children whose 'heart eggs' turn into '*batsu* eggs' ('X eggs') when overcome by despair or anger.

the first three Cure's quest to find the fourth member of the team: they have known for several episodes such a member exists, and will have red as their theme colour. Each Cure is discovered by a key-shaped fairy who fits into their transformation-enabling mobile phones, and while the yellow, pink, and blue fairies easily found their respective Cures, the red fairy ('Akarun') struggled to locate its Cure. When Setsuna is reborn, Akarun appears to her, smiling and saying: 'I have wanted to meet you. But up until now, an evil power was obstructing you, and I could not get close.' This is accompanied by a series of flashbacks depicting Akarun looking for the red Cure, always in the same room as Eas, but with a confused or sad expression, presumably suggesting that Akarun knew the one it was looking for was there, but could not be approached.

Akarun's words are further reinforced by Rabu's faith in Setsuna. Upon discovering Setsuna's alternate identity as Eas, Rabu fights to save her friend: 'I knew you weren't Eas,' she says as their final battle ends. 'I knew you were Setsuna.' According to Rabu, then, Setsuna is not simply another form of Eas, but her 'true' form. In these instances, Setsuna's transformation is represented not as that of an evil person reborn as a good person, but as a good person led astray by the toxic world of Labyrinth, and ultimately reborn as the person she was always meant to be. The existence of a fourth Cure, represented by Akarun and the colour red (the '*aka*' in 'Akarun' means 'red'), was established long before Setsuna transformed, and it was Setsuna in particular that Akarun sought. Even as she was creating monsters to attack the Purikyua, she was the object of Akarun's search; her identity as Cure Passion was always a part of Eas, only obscured by her evil ways. The same concept is reworked in the second half of the series, through the baby fairy Chiffon's 'corruption' represented by her true form as the universe's memory – a corruption ultimately to be turned back by the Cures' devotion to the 'real' Chiffon. As with Setsuna, this is positioned not through the recognition of Chiffon's ability to transform, or her possession of multiple (even infinite) states of being. It is, rather, a more simple construction: the 'real' Chiffon is the one who played with them, who cried for her bottle and used her magical powers to cause chaos. Infinity is a 'corruption' of Chiffon, which must be overcome to bring Chiffon back to her true state.

At the end of the season, the Cures, encouraged by the people of Labyrinth, defeat Moebius, and all is well. It is interesting to note that the ending implies a technophobia that would seem to be

directly in opposition to the rest of the series. The characters transform with mobile phones; obviously, new technology is at the heart of their identities as Cures. Unlike most offerings for children in Japan today, the *Purikyua* series does not shy away from showing the forms of technology that are used by many actual middle-class Japanese children. Along with mobile phones, we see handheld video game consoles, laptops, airplanes, and more, used frequently – and often to positive effect, such as when television newscasts alert the girls to the presence of a new monster. The idea of science 'going too far', however, forms the basis of the conclusion. While Cure Peach tries her best to appeal to Moebius' inherent goodness as a person, her pleas are forgotten when it is revealed that he is not a person at all, but a supercomputer. The season finale positions the power of human love and connection – the Cures' teamwork and faith in one another, their family members cheering them on from Earth, the citizens of Labyrinth encouraging them, and the Cures' desire to protect their beloved Chiffon – against the heartless power of a supercomputer. That which is 'evil', then, is associated with new technologies, while 'good' lies in the loving hearts of fundamentally unchanging individuals.

The vengeance of the abandoned

Keeping the focus on unchanging selfhood in the television series in mind, let us now turn to the film. *Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!?* begins with the four girls excited to have a pyjama party together, but their fun is soon interrupted when they find out that children's toys have begun to disappear all around town. Usapyon, a well-loved stuffed bunny of Rabu's who has been relegated to her closet for many years, emerges from Rabu's closet and informs them that the toys are being transported to the Land of Toys by the Toy Majin ('Toy Demon'). The characters travel to the Land of Toys and fight the Toy Majin, who they learn is in fact not a single entity but a massive conglomeration of abandoned toys planning to take over Earth as vengeance for the children's betrayal of their beloved playthings. This is a dramatic variation on a well-known theme in Japan, in

which abandoned objects return to seek vengeance on their owners;[82] it is a simple folktale writ large, expanded to all children, and intensified by the creation of a world existing entirely for the abandoned toys.

Rabu is devastated to learn that Usapyon has joined the Toy Majin. After a long battle, Rabu makes up her mind to find Usapyon amidst the mass of toys, and when she does, her tears wake up the now forgiving bunny. One person's tears, however, are not enough to cure the bitterness of thousands of abandoned toys; Usapyon claims that they need to gather the hearts of all children who love their toys. Rabu then implores children in the audience to use the miracle lights they were given upon entrance to the cinema to express their true love for their toys, and when the toys see how many miracle lights are shining, they realise they were never forgotten. Ultimately, the toys remember the love they felt for the children, and cleansed of their bitterness, the Toy Majin dissolves as all its composite toys return to Earth. The only one left was the original Toy Majin, a neglected bear. The Purikyua vow to find a loving home for him, and the story ends with the characters giving him to an adoring young girl.

The theme of transformation is as pervasive in this film as in the rest of the *Purikyua* franchise. Of course, there is the obvious transformation of girls into Cures (and in this film, a second level of such transformation, as Cure Peach gains a new power and becomes Cure Angel), but the transformations do not take only these surface-level forms. There is also the transformation of the toys, objects that undergo an unsettling transition from lovable companions to vengeful spirits; the Toy Majin, a being composed of thousands of toys, who from that already altered and fluid form is finally transformed to a single teddy bear; the Land of Toys, formed from a re-positioning of toys as inanimate objects owned by humans to living creatures inhabiting a world of their own making; the final form of the Land of Toys, which at the end is transformed from a deserted, deadened plane to a green, flower-studded field; and Rabu's own emotional transformation, as she learns to value her stuffed bunny. We might also mention the theme of travel, which sees the four Cures leaving the comfort of their home country to enter another world.

[82] This theme is presumably based on spirits in Japanese folklore called *tsukumogami*, usually translated as 'artifact spirits'. *Tsukumogami* are spirits of objects who sometimes seek vengeance on those who wronged or abandoned them.

Nevertheless, even in the travel shown in the film, the expanding of a child's boundaries to encompass something beyond what is known to them, there is a certain tension that privileges the familiar and unchanging. In many fantasy narratives involving a character's entrance to another world, the intricacies of that other world form a significant element of the story. We might expect to see elaborate details of the lifestyles of those residing within this world, of their homes and food and mannerisms, or extended views of majestic scenery unfamiliar to the character's eyes. In *Omocha no Kuni*, such exploration of the Land of Toys is minimal at best. The vast majority of the film is spent fighting, and showing the girls' pyjama party before they enter the Land of Toys. The time in which they admire and explore the Land of Toys is essentially contained within one five-minute section of the film. The world itself is not an expansive land of wonder, ripe for exploration by the character's eager minds. This is easily explained by practical considerations: *Purikyua* films rarely contain elaborate plots, considering that they are typically one hour in length, and dedicate almost half of that hour to the character's transformations and subsequent battles. Nevertheless, it suggests that exploration of another world is not the most crucial emphasis of the film, reflecting the idea that the story is less about expanding one's sense of identity to encompass previously unknown communities than about poignantly representing an individual's re-discovery of something that was already known to them – in this case, something once known but forgotten: the character's own personal past.

Figure 7: The Land of Toys. Image from *Fresh Purikyua! Eiga: Omocha no Kuni wa Himitsu ga Ippai!?*

The Land of Toys is not a world of unique communities, places, or individuals for which the characters are shown to care. It is formed rather of a curious mixture of childhood and loss. It is a bright, playful world, featuring buildings made of multicoloured blocks, a fountain topped by a smiling pink whale, and streets filled with toy trains and wind-up figurines. At the same time, it is inhabited by toys rejected by their owners, abandoned – and filled with bitterness and a desire for vengeance due to that abandonment. Loss is a key element of this story: loss of one's childhood toys

by one's own negligence, a loss that leads the same toys to intense action against their prior owners. The narrative is not the only element of the film that is based on loss; the Land of Toys itself, by virtue of being formed of abandoned toys, is essentially a world created through loss. The association with folklore further places this story as one of the past; children can be saved from the corruption of progress not only by remembering their toys, but also by remembering the stories that instructed them to remember their toys. In this construction, wisdom lies in connection to the past.

Figure 8: The island shown in *Hottarake no Shima: Haruka to Mahō no Kagami*.

As an interesting point of comparison, there was another film released only two months before *Omocha no Kuni* that employs similar themes to create a world very much like the Land of Toys. *Hottarake no Shima: Haruka to Mahō no Kagami* (2009) is a CGI film produced by Production I.G.[83] *Hottarake no Shima* shows a young girl, the isolated Haruka, entering a world made entirely of items abandoned by humans (the titular Hottarake no Shima). Like Rabu, Haruka is poignantly reunited with her bitter, abandoned stuffed toy, and again like Rabu, Haruka's tear-filled embrace of her toy earns her both forgiveness and a powerful ally. The world of *Hottarake no Shima* is far more elaborately developed than its *Purikyua* equivalent, but it also seems to exist primarily to form a connection between a young girl and her personal past; the most powerful form of magic on Hottarake no Shima is, in the end, a mirror which contains Haruka's memories of her childhood.

Such worlds that help a child understand their own family or past – stories in which elements of the child's life before they reach the new world remain a constant presence and even drive most of the story in the other world – are not uncommon within contemporary Japanese children's films and other media. The 2006 film *Brave Story* (based on a video game by the same title) depicts two boys who have entered another world, but the story repeatedly draws us back to their difficult suburban

[83] Production I.G. is a studio famous for work such as the anime classic *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and the animated sequence used in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003); it is known for dramatic, high-quality work that reflects quintessential anime content.

Tokyo lives; ultimately, both boys use the new world to understand their family problems and tragedies. In Studio Ghibli's video game for the Nintendo DS and PlayStation 3, *Ni no Kuni* (2010; 2011), a boy enters another world that contains spiritual doubles of the members of the ordinary world; as it turns out, all relevant spiritual doubles conveniently come from the specific small town in which the boy lives. Thus, the story involves regular travel between the two dimensions as the characters aim to solve the problems of the fantasy world through its 'real world' counterparts, and the boy's heroic journey also acts as a means of better understanding and participating in the life of his hometown. In both these stories and in others, the alternate worlds entered by the characters involve explicit and powerful connections to the character's past life in the 'real' world, allowing them to better understand themselves, their family, and/or the community in which they live. Coming to terms with their past, and creating a future based on enduring ties to that past, is a recurring theme. This is in strong contrast to the more common structure for portal fantasies, which use the other world to allow the main character to grow stronger and more independent in a context that places them outside any explicit connection to their previous life.

In *Hottarake* and *Purikyua*, however, memories of the non-fantastical world are not simply present, but the all-encompassing basis of the other's world creation. The past becomes a tangible presence, creating the very ground they walk on, the buildings they pass, and the characters with whom they interact. The alternate world is the past, brought to life in a new way. Visually, both films set a similar scene: a patchwork creation of many colours and shapes. In *Hottarake*, the sense of loss and abandonment can be seen even in the shapes of the world; the island appears slightly run down, paint peeling and buildings appearing somewhat haphazard (see figure 8). In *Omocha no Kuni*, the clean, bright, tidy sight of the world seems to mask the vengeful sentiments that hide underneath. In both films, however, the past is a key formative element of the world.

In these lands formed of memories and loss, growth and development occurs not through independence from the past but by deepening connections to the past. Only one form of personal emotional growth is presented: that which strengthens the character's ties to the events, objects, and people of their past. In Rabu's case, she must learn to care for Usapyon once again; for the children in the audience, Rabu's plea asks that they reaffirm their own love for their toys. In the other above-

mentioned works, the characters must remember their early childhood (*Hottarake no Shima*), learn to better understand the actions of their parents in such a way that allows them to reconcile with their family (*Brave Story*), or become a more actively participating citizen in their hometown (*Ni no Kuni*). These past worlds, then, shape the future; they fortify young children's ties to the world they knew and the objects they loved, showing characters who develop into more mature individuals not through forming new connections in an unfamiliar world but through understanding their past relationships in deeper, more meaningful ways.

One significant element of this portrayal lies in the personal nature of the past shown: any indication of even the smallest community (outside the group of four friends that makes up their unit of Cures) remains absent from *Omocha no Kuni*. In the other works cited, small communities make an appearance: both *Hottarake* and *Brave Story* are focused on the family, while *Ni no Kuni* develops through a small town. All of these, however, exhibit no engagement with or even recognition of the nation, the world, or any community beyond a single town. In *Purikyua* in particular, even the immediate family is strangely absent, and the group of Cure friends plays an unusually minimal role in the narrative. It is a very small, very personal experience, focused on Rabu and her most beloved toy. She is not required to exhibit her appreciation for her family's, town's, region's, or nation's history – only her own. Echoing the individualistic focus of *Purikyua* as described above, it is our personal past that defines us.

The world of *Omocha no Kuni* is one in which the past has pervaded every building block. It is the past of children who have begun to grow, but not in the way they ought to have grown. They rejected their old toys – the things they had once loved, and a crucial connection to their childhood memories – and moved on to new toys; they grew in a way that involved a rejection of what they had once been and what they had once treasured. Children are encouraged to form powerful emotional connections to their own past and childhood, in direct contrast to attempts to move forward, reject the items that tie them to their childhood, and develop a changing sense of identity. We are left with a strong adherence to those things that defined our childhood; a sense of self tied always to our past, any movement forward always based on looking backwards.

A Cure for progress

> '[T]o speak from recent trends in children's toys, the logic of transformation consists of a delight taken in things being constantly in flux, transforming from one state to another. Within these chains of body shifting, there is no one, real, or authentic self.'
>
> – Anne Allison (2006a, p.185)

This focus on the unchanging and the importance of the past seems at first glance to be in opposition to the values set forth within the television show. *Purikyua* in general, and *Fresh Purikyua!* in particular, provides the viewer with a world of constant, ever more creative transformations in form and content. We have girls who become magical warriors, mobile phones that become vessels of powerful magic, rivals who become allies, everyday objects that become monsters, and infant-like fairies who become the world's memory. In the *Purikyua* series, we have a system of yearly renewal, resulting in total transformations of plot, setting, and characters, and taking place within an already perpetually changing stream of content created and re-created for every new medium to which this massive media mix extends. The film's rigid attachment to the past may seem out of place here.

At the same time, however, the television series, in its own roundabout way, develops a world that celebrates changelessness. Eas does not truly transform into Setsuna; she was Setsuna all along, only corrupted. The objects may become monsters, but this, too, is presented as a sort of corruption of their nature; the transformation is temporary and never absolute, always creating monsters that retain basic characteristics of the original objects. The Cure's attacks, with names such as 'Healing Prayer', are positioned as essentially purifying the monsters, bringing them back to their true forms.

Furthermore, a strong sense of unchanging identity pervades, exhibited in the pre-established, shallow and stereotyped personalities given to each character, marked by each character's theme colour and catchphrase. The characters do not change throughout the series in any noticeable way; certain lessons are learned in individual episodes, but they do not seem to result in lasting changes in the characters. Even when transformed into Cures, they maintain their trademark theme colours, personal values, and established relationships with others. Despite such dramatic visual

transformations as those that turn the girls into Cures, or that turns Eas into Setsuna, true personal transformation is repeatedly rejected in favour of a simple, static sense of identity.

The ending of the television series reiterates this mentality; it is the movement into the future, building more powerful computers, that becomes our downfall. As in the film, it is knowledge of past worlds – our personal past and our society's non-digitalised past – which saves us. In this series that seems so preoccupied with perpetual transformation on every level, it is that which resists transformation, that which refuses to give way to change, which is ultimately valued. In one sense, the continual transformations could even be interpreted as an assertion of the power of the unchanging self: Setsuna's true inner goodness is so strong it can resist the corruption of Labyrinth, the people of Labyrinth's innate desire for freedom and individuality is so great it overcomes a lifetime of brainwashing in a single moment, and the personalities of the Cures remain so steady they can be maintained whatever form their bodies assume, or whatever powers they may acquire. Transformation thus becomes not a form of identity subversion but a fierce reinforcement of the unchanging nature of the individual; no matter how radical the transformation, it can never bring about lasting and significant change.

Similarly, the emphasis on valuing one's toys may seem to exist as a counterpoint to *Purikyua*'s ever-changing merchandising system, a system in which toys are designed to become outdated the very next year. The message of the film is one that values the one stuffed bunny rabbit a child treasured throughout their childhood; it is almost nostalgic in its portrayal of childhood characterised not by the endless flow of new toys alongside new media, but by a single stuffed animal, reminiscent of the call for 'creativity-developing German toys' referenced by a *Purikyua* critic in chapter one (Hori qtd. in Yamamoto, 2010). In a sense, Usapyon's character challenges the very project of *Purikyua*: Rabu's own lovingly-remembered childhood is not a multimedia world supplemented by a constant influx of new merchandise, but a time of playing in the nearby field, sitting in her grandfather's tatami store, or cooking dinner with her mother, accompanied by a stuffed bunny who does not form an entrance point to participate in a new world, but rather joins Rabu's adventures through this one. The Land of Toys forms a rejection of the renewal system that

characterises *Purikyua*, adding yet another counterpoint to the emphasis on change that at first seems to define the franchise.

In *Omocha no Kuni*, the past comes back with a vengeance – quite literally. The world they enter has become a physical embodiment of the past, memories, and loss. The toys are what we once treasured, and now abandoned; they remain toys, of the sort that the *Purikyua* series relies on, but also links to an intimate personal past. One might be tempted to see in the toys of *Omocha no Kuni* the fears of a nation facing loss, and reminding its youth to hold tightly to a national memory. Such an analysis, however, would miss one of the key elements of this portrayal of the past: its intense, almost stifling personal nature. The past to which Rabu is connected is not a national, local, or even familial heritage. It does not connect Rabu to the history of a particular area, the globe, or the universe (as, for example, we will see in the film *Midori no Kyojinden*). Rabu reinforces ties only to her own internal world, her own childhood and memories.

The narrative is predicated on an unrelenting focus on Rabu's past as the key to knowledge about the future she must create. It is based on sentiments intrinsically attached to Rabu's childhood (as shown by a flashback to her as a child, refusing to allow her mother to throw Usapyon away), to the person she once was. Moving forward, to the bright, optimistic, and happiness-filled future promised by the *Purikyua* series, requires an embrace of one's own past – the things one once knew (to love one's toys), the things one once had (the toys themselves), and ultimately, the person one once was. A person that still remains, as evidenced by the unchanging sense of identity that pervades *Fresh Purikyua!*. After all, it makes sense to assume that, if people are essentially unchanging, a deeper understanding of and connection to that unchanging self would be necessary to form a positive future. In *Fresh Purikyua!*, this is repeatedly emphasised, as the characters one by one become more deeply connected to that which they always were. From Rabu with her beloved bunny to Setsuna's dramatic transformation, to every citizen of Labyrinth who was only waiting for the liberating ideology they needed to embrace their true desires, to every Cure in the *Purikyua* series who remains fundamentally the same person even after regular, rapid, and total transformation of their physical form, the problems presented in *Purikyua* are ultimately not solved through transformation, but by appeal to an assumption of the unchanging (and essentially good) nature of the human heart.

What is most significant about this appeal as it is expressed within *Omocha no Kuni* is the explicit connection that is wrought between the actual child audience and the sentiments expressed in the film. Through the 'miracle light' that is called upon at the climax of the film, the Purikyua are meant to succeed not through their fighting abilities alone, but through the many hearts of toy-loving children. Even more significantly, the children in the audience are explicitly asked to express their love for their toys; the film at this point moves from a general theme of treasuring one's toys to an explicit, clearly stated appeal for children to show their true feelings of love for their toys to help the Cures.

In one of the more intriguing events related to the *Fresh Purikyua!* film, the film's focus on caring for one's toys was made explicit. The application form for an invitation to an October 25, 2009 screening of the film advertised the presence of a 'toy doctor' who would fix children's broken toys free of charge. This event made clear the connection between the film's message – treasuring and caring for one's toys – and the real lives of the child audience: the press release for the event states that 'this film… features the bonds between the hearts of toys and the children who treasure their toys as its theme' ('Eiga Fresh Purikyua!... kansei hirō shishakai ni', 2009; my translation). It then explains the toy-fixing event as being 'in conjunction with this theme,' and finishes on an imperative note: 'Precious toys are precious friends. Always take care of them!' (ibid.; my translation).

The explicit appeal to children represented by the 'miracle light' is further reinforced by the toy-fixing event. In both instances, children are not simply presented with a vague moral about treasuring toys; they are plainly instructed to treasure their toys. As the information for the toy-fixing event stated, 'Precious toys are precious friends. Always take care of them!' This is a direct statement to child audiences, clear and unequivocal, explicitly connecting the theme of the film to the real lives of the children and, through the toy-fixing event itself, demonstrating a way in which the values presented in the film can actively be applied to the lives of the children.

It may seem odd that a series with such an obvious planned obsolescence would become so fixated on the past, but then again, the *All Stars DX* franchise shows a great awareness of the franchise's own past. While the characters may disappear from the stores altogether once the year is up, every piece of merchandise painstakingly replaced by the newest characters, books, movies, and

comics, there is simultaneously another impulse at play. By periodically joining the characters together, creating comics, merchandise, and films in which they appear as friends, *Purikyua* diligently reminds us of its own past, asking us not to forget its origins, and to form close relationships with the characters that extend past the life of the show. As with many of the specific narratives shown within *Purikyua*, the march forward comes always with a constant emphasis on looking back on the past.

The world of *Omocha no Kuni* is a haunted world, in which the past refuses to be abandoned, always returning to enact revenge on those who neglected that which they once loved. It is not, however, haunted as the worlds of ghost films such as *Ringu* (1998) or *Juon* (2003) – it is a bright, pleasant haunting, friendly and even cute. It is also a haunting that does not only happen to fictional characters placed in everyday situations, but one that is connected directly to the lives of every viewer of the film. As with many elements of the *Purikyua* series, the haunting of vengeful toys does not sit calmly in the contained spaces of its medium, but seeps into the lives of real children. The story recreates itself in multiple media forms, and blurs the boundaries between presenting values as they relate to fictional characters and the child audiences themselves.

Behind this all lies a severe moral demand. We must make amends. We must tearfully correct our neglect of our cherished toys. We must show where our 'true hearts' lie – and that is with our childhood, our past, our memories. We should never leave our past behind, but always seek to form deeper, more meaningful connections to the lives we once lived. We should reject any move forward that is not based on love for the past.

The resilient self in a transforming world

The world of *Purikyua* is a world of both the past and the future, and exists not only in fiction. It is a world replicated in myriad toy stores, homes, and events – places transformed, if only temporarily, into locations of an ongoing, ever-changing set of *Purikyua*-infused narratives. As *Purikyua* extends across multiple media platforms, years, and nations, it also refuses easy containment in another world. The *Purikyua* media mix asks us to ignore what is fantasy and what is reality; to create fantasy within

reality, and seek the reality within fantasy. Become a Cure, take care of Chiffon, dance with Rabu, and use your miracle light to help Rabu save the day – these are all clever ways of engaging children, and particularly of engaging them in a way that sells merchandise, but they are also ways of bringing the narrative into our everyday lives. The most fascinating travel shown within *Fresh Purikyua!*, then, may be less Rabu, Miki, Bukki, and Setsuna's entrance into another world, and more their entrance into our own.

What sort of entrance has that been? First and foremost, one that sells products: a life filled with toys, and the appreciation of those toys magically transformed into an ethical value. *Omocha no Kuni* is nothing if not a celebration of consumerism; loving toys is conflated with loving one's friends, and most significantly, with loving the past. In the logic of *Purikyua*, toys define our past, and they must define our present and future as well.

Beyond the blatant commercialism, however, the Cures' entrance to our world brings with it a colourful selection of mismatched ideologies. It is marked by unresolved tensions: the themes of continual change, expressed through a resolute clinging to an unchanging past. *Purikyua* is a series that is always moving forward, periodically re-creating itself in such a way that the past becomes irrelevant, creating an endless stream of new content, asking children to transform their world and themselves to fit always changing desires. *Purikyua* relies on constant innovation of form, and it does this while decrying the concept of innovation.

The haunting of the past depicted in *Omocha no Kuni*, and the unchanging identities in *Fresh Purikyua!* more generally, stand in opposition to most interpretations of Japanese anime, particularly those created for children. In the previous chapter, I traced in detail the emphasis on cyborgian and fluid identities within research on anime. Earlier in this chapter, I reflected on the specific ways in which that prominent concern manifests in analyses of magical girl anime. As this chapter has shown, the scholarly preoccupation with fluidity and transformation essentially shows only half of the world of *Purikyua*. The many thematic emphases on transformation, and the multiple ways in which transformation occurs in the series' media mix, echoes the scholarship discussed in the beginning of the chapter. The insistence on an unchanging self, one that resists all transformations or reinterprets them as becoming closer to an intrinsic identity, and on forming deep sentimental ties to the past that

are necessary to overcome the conflicts presented – this is in direct conflict with most interpretations of anime and Japanese children's media.

Despite Allison's claims cited earlier in this chapter, Rabu's identity, regardless of her alternate form of Cure Peach, is very much defined by a 'singular essence' (2001, p.257); namely, her pink, happy, loving nature that is present even in her name (Rabu is the Japanese pronunciation of the English word 'love'). Any representations of a mutable identity – Setsuna's transformation would be the most obvious example – are carefully positioned as a realisation of one's true inner nature. The entrance of an explicit demand to treasure the relics of our personal past hardly seems out of place in this world. The presence of merchandise that seeks to connect children's lives to that of the Cures can be seen not as an attempt to appeal to a child's fluctuating identity in a postmodern world, but as constructing a childhood past that is heavily infused with, or reliant upon, *Purikyua* merchandise. Creating memories that will then become a part of their treasured personal past, always part of their own essence, but always branded with the Bandai logo; this is the world created by *Purikyua.* A haunting past, come to us in the brightest, cheeriest form imaginable, embodying potentially progressive gender ideals (Masuda, 2010; Suzuki, 2010) alongside unreserved optimism for the future. The themes of singular identity that pervade *Purikyua* are not unusual in similar series; like the Cures, the Sailor Scouts of *Sailor Moon* also have simple, stereotyped personalities that change little over the series, an emphasis on becoming closer to one's true self, and even the addition of predetermination in relation to Sailor Moon's own identity. The *Super Sentai* squads also have defined theme colours, battle poses, and a fear of the corruption of innately good hearts. In each of these works, there is a focus on transformation, one that plays out in multiple ways in both form and content, but it is expressed through an emphasis on changelessness.

In *Fresh Purikyua!*, the characters transform in multiple ways, mentally and physically. Girls transform into warriors, villains transform into heroes, toys transform into demons, and children transform their hearts to become more connected to their toys. All of these transformations, however, are primarily used to gain greater awareness of a static, unchanging self, or to form deeper relationships with elements of our past. We are left, then, with a contradiction that I have been detailing throughout this chapter. On one hand, we are presented with multiple, powerful, and visually

stunning transformations that occur within a bright, future-oriented world that at first glance appears disconnected from any notion of the past, coupled with a thematic focus on change; all of this implies an attitude that rejoices in fluidity. Against this backdrop, the nature of the transformations centres that which does not change – a sense of self, childhood, or community that does not grow or shift over time – and admonishes children to do the same.

Chapter 5

'Mysterious turbulences': *Ponyo* and Studio Ghibli's animation of the past

Figure 9: The Ghibli Museum.

Transforming the present

> 'It's a simple tale, less freighted by foreboding than Miyazaki's recent output. In any case, storytelling is less important to him than mood or texture. His films are dream waltzes, all liquid motion and mysterious turbulences. Their pastel colour schemes recall the faded but compelling Edwardian children's books you might find in a grandparent's attic.'
>
> – Sukhdev Sandhu (2010)

The above description is taken from *The Telegraph*'s review of the 2008 film *Ponyo*, released originally in Japan as *Gake no Ue no Ponyo*. Like so many of the reviews of the film, in Japan and abroad, it is overwhelmingly positive, but there are several other interesting points about this excerpt I have quoted. Most obvious is the focus on Miyazaki himself: it is not simply a film, but 'Miyazaki's

recent output'. Storytelling is less important 'to him', and the film is one of 'his films'. In this review, so far from the film's native Japan, we see clear evidence of a pattern that will inform the rest of this chapter: Hayao Miyazaki is seen as an auteur, creating films that reflect his personal vision.

There is more in this quote as well. A description of movement: 'liquid motion and mysterious turbulences'. A description of time: 'Edwardian children's books' found 'in a grandparent's attic'. And, subtly interjected into a single sentence, a description of mood: it is 'less freighted by foreboding'. The three qualities of continual motion, reminiscence of times past, and a sense of hope might remind us of the previous chapter, but in this case, the context could not be more different.

The concept of an alien force entering and disrupting our world is certainly not unknown in the history of Japanese film. Indeed, Japanese film across the rest of the world is often known through *Godzilla* ('*Gojira*', 1954) and similar monster films that employ this exact theme; for younger generations, the well-loved *Power Rangers* (1993–ongoing), the US remake of the *Super Sentai* series, contains similar storylines. It is a familiar plot, with infinite variations: a monster enters Earth from another dimension, wreaks havoc, and is eventually defeated. It is also a fairly conservative plot, presenting the possibility of change as a dangerous force that must be quelled to preserve the current social order. *Purikyua* itself is an example of such a story, at least in the television shows, manga chapters, and *All Stars DX* films. Such monster films have been studied thoroughly and often, but they have for many years existed alongside a variation that is less commonly discussed. Particularly in recent years, these stories are often told in such a way that our sympathies lie with the alien being, and their presence is a force for good rather than something that needs to be defeated. These films show the transformation of our world through external forces as fundamentally positive, often creating implicit critiques of current-day life. We must then ask: which external forces bring about what type of transformation, and for what purpose?

This chapter will focus on the film *Ponyo*, in which a force from elsewhere comes into contemporary Japanese life in a charming, loveable fashion. In discussing *Ponyo*, it would be difficult to avoid talking about the name of Hayao Miyazaki, the film's director whose name is so strongly attached to the work in the minds of many, and the name of Studio Ghibli, the animation studio that

produced the film. I will begin by discussing Studio Ghibli itself, considering its recent transnational popularity and the carefully-constructed 'natural' image that pervades the Ghibli brand. I will consider at length the case of the Ghibli Museum, a manifestation of the Ghibli image in the form of a tangible structure. I will then go on to discuss *Ponyo*, examining its construction of 'traditional' Japan through the town portrayed, while simultaneously constructing an 'ancient', non-national past through the magical undersea world. I will relate these contrasting portrayals to a non-fictional location: Tomo no Ura, the town that has embraced its connection to *Ponyo* alongside a wider town preservation effort. As the Ghibli Musum reconstructs contemporary Japan in accordance with Ghibli's vision, Tomo no Ura reflects Ghibli's vision for contemporary Japan. Taken together, these many fictional and non-fictional elements of the Ghibli world represent alternatives to contemporary Japanese life, and are ultimately used to form a multifaceted critique of Japanese society.

A studio set apart

> 'Ghibli comes to signal something like a high-minded, high-art brand of animation amenable to general mass audiences across the world.'
>
> – Thomas Lamarre (2009, p.98)

Studio Ghibli is a Japanese animation studio that is known throughout the world, and has reached a phenomenal level of popularity in recent years. Of the five highest-grossing domestic films in Japanese history, four were produced by Studio Ghibli and directed by Hayao Miyazaki (Motion Pictures Producers Association of Japan, Inc., 2013). *Spirited Away* ('*Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi*', 2001), the most successful to date, ultimately sold over 20 million tickets in Japan – roughly equivalent to one-sixth of the total population of the country ('"Spirited Away" bags Academy Award', 2003). In any year that a Studio Ghibli film is released, it invariably becomes the highest-grossing domestic film of that year by a significant margin, with those directed by Hayao Miyazaki typically generating two to four times as much revenue as the next highest-grossing film. Davis and Yeh claim that *Princess Mononoke* ('*Mononokehime*', 1997), Miyazaki's first major global release,

single-handedly brought a high market share to the Japanese film industry in 1997 (Davis and Yeh, 2008, p.79), and later state that the very noticeable 'spikes in the Japanese box office in 1997, 2001 and 2004… are due to the respective Ghibli features, *Princess Mononoke*, *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle*' (ibid., p.80). They conclude: 'The Ghibli brand looms over all others, and does so within an anime-rich environment' (ibid.). In a survey by Nikkei BP Consulting, Ghibli was determined to be Japan's most loved brand in 2006 – outranking in public opinion such well-known brands as Sony and Toyota (Nikkei BP Consulting, 2006).

Ghibli may not be nearly so well known outside of Japan, but it has nevertheless reached an unprecedented level of popularity for Japanese animation. *Spirited Away* solidified its transnational acclaim by winning the Academy Award for best animated feature film in 2003. In 2005, TIME Magazine listed Hayao Miyazaki as one of its 100 most influential people (Lee, 2005). Due to a deal between Tokuma Shoten (Ghibli's publisher) and the Walt Disney Company, Ghibli films are widely released in dubbed form throughout American cinemas. The popularity of Ghibli was originally connected to the much-vaunted friendship between John Lasseter, former head of Pixar Animation and current head of Walt Disney Animation, and Hayao Miyazaki; John Lasseter's admiration of Miyazaki seems to know no bounds, as he repeatedly lavishes praise on Miyazaki's work in interviews, introductions to the American DVDs of Ghibli films, and in public appearances with Miyazaki. He is outspoken about the inspiration Pixar receives from Ghibli, and Ghibli's gratitude is similarly unreserved: Ghibli released a short documentary about a trip by Ghibli employees to America entitled '*Thank you, Mr. Lasseter!*' ('*Rasetā-san, Arigatō*', 2003), and when Miyazaki recently decided to travel to America for a convention (he has long refused to make such a visit, supposedly snubbing the 2003 Academy Awards due to America's involvement in the war in Iraq), he claimed the visit was 'a favour' to Lasseter, despite his continued distaste for America (Pham, 2009).

The popularity of Studio Ghibli comes with extraordinary critical acclaim and praise from all perspectives. While feminist blogs celebrate *Ponyo* as an embodiment of Miyazaki's progressive values (Ethecofem, 2010), a rightwing Christian media watch blog praises the film by labelling it 'innocence personified' (Price, 2010). John Lasseter labels Miyazaki 'one of the most original' filmmakers ever' (Cielpy, 2009), and in the 2005 TIME piece mentioned above, Stan Lee has nothing

but the highest praise for the director: 'Miyazaki has taken the art of anime and brought it to new heights through an inimitable vision and sense of storytelling' (Lee, 2005). Following an interview with Miyazaki, Robert Whiting, a documentary filmmaker, explicitly describes Miyazaki's works in opposition to American films, stating that they are 'imbued with imagination, vision and a moral intelligence unseen in American cinema' (qtd. in Shida and Tamura, 2008, p.137). In Japan, Miyazaki's popularity is so firmly established that such appraisals are hardly needed; as I will elaborate on below, he may be considered more of a national icon than a simple film director. An important element of the Studio Ghibli phenomenon is the unique and surprisingly coherent image that characterises Ghibli products. 'Ghibli films' are not simply those films produced by Studio Ghibli; 'Miyazaki films' (*Miyazaki anime*, as they are referred to in Japan) are not simply a set of films directed by Hayao Miyazaki. They are films that comprise and are created within a carefully-constructed system of images, themes, and ideas: the 'Ghibli brand'.

While the 'Ghibli brand' (*Jiburi burando*) is frequently mentioned and discussed in Japan, it is rarely with the sort of corporate, vaguely negative connotation the word 'brand' retains in English. Instead, it is generally used as a label for the collective range of Ghibli products. In English, the 'Ghibli brand' is rarely mentioned at all; the previously cited chapter in Davis and Yeh's book remains the most detailed and comprehensive analysis of the Ghibli brand, and is a rare find within a field mostly dominated by critical interpretations of specific Ghibli works.[84] Miyazaki's vision and philosophy are the primary areas of analysis both within and outside of Japan, and those eager to dissect his individual genius have caused the nuances of the Ghibli brand to be largely overshadowed.

A particularly unique aspect of Studio Ghibli is the peculiar position it inhabits in Japanese culture. As mentioned above, Miyazaki and Ghibli's popularity has at this point become so widely acknowledged that the Americans' adoring statements cited above are unnecessary. In Japan, Ghibli inhabits a place unlike that of any other popular cultural phenomenon. In Shibuya's hallmark Tsutaya video store, Ghibli films inhabit their own section, an exclusive Ghibli shelf wedged between children's films and domestic films. Bookstores occasionally have a 'Ghibli ga Ippai' ('Full of

[84] A similar point is made in Thomas Lamarre's 2009 study of anime, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, in the chapter 'Giving up the gun' (pp.86–100). Lamarre also provides a short but insightful summary of Ghibli's brand image in this chapter (ibid., pp.97–100).

Ghibli') section, containing Ghibli-related books (generally a combination of storyboards of the films, manga of the films, fan guidebooks, and academic analyses of Ghibli works).

Ghibli's unique position is perhaps indicated most clearly in its merchandising, which is carefully and determinedly made distinct from that of other Japanese children's media. It is common for toy stores to have separate Ghibli sections; the famous Ginza toy store Hakuhinkan Toy Park even places Ghibli merchandise on a different floor from other character merchandise. Its physical removal from other 'character goods' seems a logical step when one sees the products available – Ghibli merchandise is quite noticeably different from more typical character merchandise. While *Purikyua* and its equivalents flood stores with brightly-coloured plastic dishes, the Ghibli section of a store will stock elegantly patterned, earth-tone china. While paper fans of *Doraemon*, *Purikyua*, or *Anpanman* can be found at any local convenience store, the select retailers of Ghibli merchandise stock fabric fans in delicate wooden cases. The merchandise that is of the same variety as other character merchandise (for example, cell phone straps or hand towels) usually costs approximately twice that of its *Doraemon* or *Purikyua* counterparts. The 2010 Studio Ghibli Nintendo DS video game, *Ni no Kuni: Shikkoku no Madōshi*, is immediately eye-catching on any shelf of DS games due to its significantly larger size and elongated shape; shunning the standard DS game box (which typically contains a small paper instruction booklet), *Ni no Kuni* comes packaged with a large, heavy hardbound book, covered in shining golden runes and filled with ivory-coloured pages. The game cannot be played without this 'wizard's spellbook' on hand at all times, a decision that alters the very way games are played on the DS console – a console designed to be as portable as possible.

Ghibli merchandise is primarily retailed in Donguri Garden stores. Donguri Garden stocks Ghibli items alongside a select collection of other character merchandise – notably those from foreign, hand-drawn series or characters, such as *Gaspard et Lisa* or *Peter Rabbit* (the website for the Tokyo Station branch of Donguri Garden claims that it stocks goods from Studio Ghibli works along with 'high-quality picture books and picture book character goods' ['Tokyo Character Street', 2007; my translation]). The shops are decorated with a garden-like overflowing of plants; plants hang from the ceilings and line the tops of shelves, and the store's logo, itself designed to look like tree branches, is often displayed surrounded by plants. The colours within the stores are subdued browns, beiges and

pastels, reflective of most of the Ghibli merchandise sold within them and the colour schemes used in most Ghibli movies.

Ghibli merchandise rarely depicts its characters alone (although in some cases, such as plush toys and many cell phone straps, it does). Characters shown amongst an abundance of plants are far more common, helping the merchandise fit comfortably in the Donguri Garden stores in which they are sold. Notebooks depict small *totoro* amongst a tangled mass of vines; plates are decorated with ivy leaves and acorns; resin figurines depict the natural scenery of the films. The Ghibli logo is designed to look like a series of twigs and branches, enhanced by the occasional leaf. In keeping with this theme, the Ghibli Museum, set within Mitaka's Inokashira Park, rises from a wild, overgrown garden of high grasses and shrubs, and the roof of the building boasts a similar garden. Even the cafe attached to the Ghibli Museum serves a collection of wholesome meals (warm vegetable soups with hearty breads, for example), and only uses organic ingredients, which was unusual in Tokyo at the time of its opening in 2001.

Through its unique merchandise, Ghibli's position as something separate and distinct from other popular Japanese works is reinforced. In one article, the writer even claims that all Japanese people long to eat food from Miyazaki's movies (Tanaka E., 2010, p.145); obviously, the statement is hyperbolic, but the fact that such a statement is made at all illustrates the way that Ghibli is seen to inhabit a position of near universal appeal across Japan, existing outside the realm of ordinary commercialised media for children. It is important to note that the difference from 'normal' children's media constructed by Ghibli is of a very particular variety; Ghibli has established an image of itself as almost synonymous with the 'natural', 'innocent', 'whimsical', and, crucially, 'past'.

In seeming contrast to Ghibli's 'natural', garden-like image is its fixation on technology, often mentioned with regard to the elaborately designed airplanes, gliders, and other flying contraptions that feature prominently in Miyazaki's films. Accordingly, the prevailing emphasis of the Ghibli Museum is in depicting the act of creating animation, making it a transparent process rather

than unexplained 'magic'.[85] While this embrace of animation technology may complicate a simplistic understanding of Ghibli's anti-modernity messaging, it only reinforces its broader sense of separation from contemporary Japan. The explained 'magic' of the Ghibli Museum, like the steampunk creations of Miyazaki's films, shun any references to digital technology, or even currently used forms of non-digital animation. One room, situated near the entrance to the museum, details the history of animation and explains the process of animation. The displays include quickly spinning clay figures of *Totoro* characters against a strobe light, a zoetrope, and dioramas that show how perspective is created in animation. These displays are, in keeping with the atmosphere of the rest of the museum, a knot of gears, clay figurines and hand-painted pictures, set against wooden displays on wooden walls. A large display shows a set of drawings animated and projected onto a screen; this is part of a wall-sized, fully visible machine, culminating in a tiny, fuzzy screen. While this has the obvious benefit of

Figure 10: The entrance to the Ghibli Muesum.

[85] This is such a contrast to the ethos of Disneyland – where every wonder must be carefully disguised to appear to be 'magical' (Wickstrom, 2005, pp.104–109) – that we might ask if the Ghibli Museum's emphasis on the animation process is a direct critique of Disney.

allowing children to see the processes clearly, it also obscures the presence of any more recent technology used by Ghibli. No mention is made of computer animation. Animation's mysteries may be partially unravelled in this exhibition, but it stops long before the advent of the computer. A photo of Studio Ghibli's actual server room (Numata et al., 2005, p.546) is remarkable in its total contrast to the image of Ghibli projected in the Ghibli Museum.

Similarly, another display shows what is supposedly a reconstruction of Miyazaki's drawing rooms. The set of three rooms is piled high with books and various other items, and their walls are plastered with original artwork from the films. These rooms are filled with documents and photos showing the process of creating a Ghibli film, including a photo album of locations visited by Ghibli employees for research, and artwork of the characters in various stages of animation. The majority of the studio's work is not done in elegantly-furnished studies littered with books of all varieties, but in the ordinary-looking Ghibli headquarters in Mitaka;[86] replicating Miyazaki's own study, however, both feeds into the Miyazaki-as-Ghibli mythos and cultivates a gentle, relaxed atmosphere. While highlighting the work involved, this exhibition also conceals it, portraying the creation of a Ghibli film as a purely artistic pursuit involving a single individual's devotion and creativity in the warmth of a study. There is no mention made of Ghibli's other employees, or the fairly ordinary workaday environment of the Ghibli headquarters, and certainly nothing about business or finances. Furthermore, echoing the exhibition discussed previously, computers remain absent from this imagined workplace. The processes of animation are emphasised; however, any hint that Ghibli is a contemporary studio operating at the forefront of the world's current animation standards is curiously absent, and even explicitly obscured by the museum. The animation is not 'magical', perhaps, but it is taking place in a different world from ours. It is a world of mahogany desks in sunlit rooms rather than bleak white offices, a world of watercolour paintings rather than digital technology.

In his discussion of anime in Japan and abroad, Roland Kelts makes a revealing and common mistake. He claims that Ghibli operates in contrast to the extensive merchandising that characterises most anime:

[86] The Ghibli headquarters are described in detail in the article *Eizō genba hōmonki: Sutajio Jiburi* (Numata et al., 2005).

> Through all of its many guises and spin-offs, *Star Wars* provided multiple, detailed points of access to a fantasy world, and held out the constant promise of more to come. Anime offers a similar promise. Its titles often deliberately leave endings hanging because its maker plans on delivering more to come – even if it issues from a slightly different source.
>
> Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli is the major anime exception. Largely because of Miyazaki's abhorrence of merchandizing schemes (he doesn't even like home video, says [Steven] Alpert; he prefers that you watch his films once through, with no pauses, in a movie theater). [*sic*] Ghibli has adopted the Hollywood approach to the content business: You can adore the womblike embrace of *Totoro*'s tree cave, but only for a few minutes, unless you rewind the VHS or DVD source. Your only way back to that world – or to the rowdy saloon of a spaghetti western, or to the dark menace of Don Corleone's study – is through rewatching the few seconds that appeared in the original film. Ghibli adheres to a paradigm we associate with western nations: the cult of originality. (Kelts, 2007, p.119.)

However much Miyazaki may abhor merchandising schemes, Studio Ghibli does in fact employ them, and often. Miyazaki may personally prefer that one does not watch his films on home video, but that does not explain the extraordinary sales of his films on DVD, and the extensive marketing of said DVDs. There are many options for those who want to revisit the world of *My Neighbour Totoro*: film manga, picture books, books celebrating the 'art of *Totoro*' (Miyazaki, 2005) or a house that recalls that shown in *Totoro* (Miyazaki, 2011), a host of Totoro plush toys, gorgeous figurines that bring the landscape of *Totoro* into your own home, a room in the Ghibli Museum painted with the scenery of *Totoro* made life-size for better immersion, and even a life-size model of the famous Cat Bus, allowing visitors to the Ghibli Museum to sit on its plush seats and stare at the film's scenery painted on its windows. For those wanting a more authentic experience still, there are further options. In

Sayama Hills, which served as the basis for the film, the 'Totoro Furusato Fund' has renamed a forest 'Totoro no Mori' ('Totoro's Forest'). In Totoro no Mori, visitors can enjoy the scenery that inspired the film, complete with Totoro-themed signposts along the path. Nearby, one can visit 'Kurosuke no Ie' ('Soot-sprite House'), a preserved Meiji-era house now named for the fuzzy creatures that inhabit old buildings in *Totoro*'s mythology ('Kōeki Zaidanhōjin Totoro no Furusato Kikin', 2012; 'Kurosuke no Ie', 2012). Although the house that inspired *Totoro* was burnt down, a public park based on Miyazaki's own designs has been erected around the ruins (Koyama, 2010).

Ghibli sets itself apart from contemporary Japanese media systems, and in their place constructs an alternative 'Ghibli world'. With merchandise that focuses on bringing an overgrown garden into your home, sold in stores that form gardens in the malls of Tokyo, the 'Ghibli world' extends beyond the film screen. It manifests most clearly in the Ghibli Museum, which is imbued with a sense of times past, but also extends to a host of areas associated with Ghibli's films. Ghibli latches onto places that are known for their association with some form of the past. *Ponyo* brings audiences to the Edo-period fishing town of Tomo no Ura; *Totoro* shows the friendly communities of rural Japan residing in the green woods of Totoro no Mori; *Mononoke* features the ancient beauty of Yakushima's primeval forest; and *Spirited Away* dwells in the melancholy nostalgia of an abandoned theme park modelled on the Edo-Tokyo Open Air Architectural Museum. Whether these are accurate depictions of their real-world counterparts is another matter; Ghibli embraces the image of them that exists, reinforces that image in the mind of the public, and even explicitly works for the continued preservation of the locations (Koyama, 2010). The Ghibli brand is characterised by its self-conscious differentiation from the norms of contemporary Japan, representing the possibility of access to an alternative world through Ghibli's works, merchandise, museum, and the sites that embody its vision.

The Ghibli world on screen

> 'Ghibli's multiculturalism opposes Japan's insular, hidebound commercialism, with its attendant conformity and calculated rationalisation… Running at cross-purposes to most Japanese audiovisual entertainment, Ghibli promotes environmentalism (not apocalypse), gender empowerment (not stereotypical sex roles),

> mysticism (instead of materialism), with a tendency to laugh at authority. These themes and motifs clash with the baggage carried by majority Japanese pop culture, with its array of hard-sell tricks.'
>
> – Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (2008, pp.81–82)

I will now turn my attention to the content of Ghibli films, although it is important to remember that the image of Studio Ghibli is not wholly constructed through – or even necessarily dependent on – the content of its films. Ghibli's image may fit well with the frequent environmentalist themes in Ghibli works, and with their near constant emphasis on 'nature', but it is more than that: it is a part of a defined Ghibli brand that is becoming ever more clearly constructed as time goes on, even when individual films may not support the brand image. It may be surprising, given the above descriptions, that the popular Ghibli work *Whisper of the Heart* ('*Mimi wo Sumaseba*', 1995) is a heartfelt celebration of Tokyo life, with a theme song that declares cheerfully that 'my *furusato* is Tokyo'. The recent *From up on Poppy Hill* ('*Kokurikozaka Kara*', 2011) is a similarly loving portrayal of adolescence in Yokohama. In fact, those Studio Ghibli films with explicit environmentalist themes may be the most well known of Ghibli works (such as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* ['*Kaze no Tani no Naushika*', 1984], *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away*), but they are a minority of the films released to date. More common is the subtler method of conveying a melancholy mood combined with visceral displays of the destruction of the environment, or nostalgic portrayals of spectacular natural beauty – a sort of quiet sense of longing rather than a clearly-stated environmentalist message.

The image of Studio Ghibli is elaborately constructed, involving everything from philosophical themes to aesthetic choices, and contains a variety of elements that are not present in all Studio Ghibli films. Taken together, the various hallmark traits of a Ghibli film provide a certain overriding image: one of a world set apart from both the geographical setting and media industries of contemporary Japan, defined by high-quality animation, visual and narrative complexity, and nostalgic imagery that emphasises the 'natural' and eschews digital technology. Despite their diverse settings, Studio Ghibli films exist in a single world, and that world is defined by its distance from contemporary Japan – whether in terms of the fantastic possibilities, social structures, or technologies

of the films' settings, or in terms of the animation style and thematic focuses of the films. To summarise these characteristics, when one goes to see a Ghibli film, one might expect to see:

1. Brave, emotionally complex young girls as leading characters.
2. Elaborate flying machines, typically utilising a steampunk aesthetic.
3. Detailed and whimsical other-worldly settings, often involving some romanticised image of Europe: as one critic describes, 'the depiction of childhood is often supported by an emphasis on sensually rich environments that function as playgrounds to explore. The alien forest in Nausicaä and wartime landscapes in Grave [of the Fireflies] are just two in a line of carefully mapped and built 'worlds'…. [T]he watchword is exploration, with much screen time devoted to characters wandering through their drawn worlds' (Osmond 2001, p.25).
4. De-sexualised, understated romances, often between children or young teenagers.
5. A variety of trademark Ghibli types of movements and items, such as blob-like creatures or substances, animals or people who visibly shiver all over when angry, or girls wearing long dresses or skirts with frilly pantaloons.
6. A unique graphic style, which is less exaggerated than most anime art styles; for example, characters have realistic hair colours, and smaller eyes than in a show such as *Purikyua*.
7. The use of hand-drawn animation; while some CGI was used in *Princess Mononoke, Spirited Away,* and *Howl's Moving Castle* ('*Hauru no Ugoku Shiro*', 2004), there has not yet been a Ghibli film fully created through CGI. *Ponyo* is particularly notable in its total rejection of CG animation; the entire film was animated by hand, and that fact is mentioned in almost every discussion of the film, from the short product description of the DVD on Amazon to magazine reviews. The Guardian's review of *Ponyo* frames the use of hand-drawn animation as part of the Ghibli image: 'The distinctive, hand-drawn animations may be a tougher sell to children or, indeed, adults who have got used to glitzier digital work and snappier scripts, but I think [Miyazaki] will always have a place in the heart of everyone who appreciates his distinctive allure' (Bradshaw, 2010).
8. The depiction of impressive natural settings drawn in extensive detail.

9. The emotive, peaceful music of Joe Hisaishi, who composes the score for almost all of Miyazaki's movies (although not for those made by other directors), usually performed with a full orchestra.
10. High-quality animation, produced with a budget unlike any other in the Japanese animation industry.
11. The lack of obvious evil villains in the narratives, or alternatively, the portrayal of evil villains who turn good by the end. As Guardian writer Xan Brooks describes, 'Most children's storytellers install their characters as fixed symbols of good and evil. Miyazaki makes them bounce around like pinballs' (Brooks, 2005). Richard Corliss highlights the connection between this theme and the theme of transformation discussed throughout this thesis: 'In Miyazaki's fantasy realm, people, even his putative villains, are less likely to be destroyed than transformed' (Corliss, 2008).

These are some of the most frequently discussed characteristics of Ghibli films, and they form a remarkably comprehensive image. The aforementioned qualities are, of course, not universal across the films; for example, *My Neighbours the Yamadas* ('*Hōhokekyo Tonari no Yamada-kun*', 1999) employs a completely different art style, and *Castle in the Sky* ('*Tenkū no Shiro Rapyuta*', 1986) has an unambiguous evil villain. Nevertheless, there are numerous, highly specific qualities that distinguish Studio Ghibli works from other works – qualities that show the audience that yes, this is by Studio Ghibli, and it could not be by any other studio. Ranging from unusual gender portrayals and impressive hand-drawn animation to understated colours and orchestral music, these qualities can almost all be read as oppositional to the systems that pervade Japanese children's media today, and/or to the features of contemporary Japanese life.

There are some other elements, however, that are less frequently discussed, but are perhaps even more consistent throughout Ghibli films, and more relevant to this argument. Ghibli films are stand-alone, without sequels or spin-off films.[87] Films are devoid of the pop-culture references and

[87] *The Cat Returns* ('*Neko no Ongaeshi*', 2002) is technically a sequel to *Whisper of the Heart*, but it is hard to consider it as such. The only commonality between the films is a figurine of a cat, whose exquisite construction provides inspiration to the main character in *Whisper of the Heart*, and returns in the aptly named *The Cat*

overt links to our contemporary society that are common today in American films, making them what some might call 'timeless' – but maybe more accurately, we could say that they resist connection to specific real-world times and places. They are rarely 'lighthearted' in tone; the more child-oriented ones such as *Ponyo* and *Totoro* may be sweet and fun, but they do not tend to go out of their way to be humorous, and usually involve rather dark or emotionally distressing themes.[88]

The image of Studio Ghibli rests heavily on a single individual: Miyazaki himself. While few anime directors are known beyond *otaku* circles, Miyazaki is known to people across age, gender, national culture, and personal interest groups or subcultures. Studio Ghibli's popularity is essentially synonymous with Hayao Miyazaki, as if he himself were Studio Ghibli. This is not an idea completely without merit: Miyazaki personally founded Studio Ghibli following the success of *Nausicaä*, and is known for having extensive input into all of its works. His careful overseeing of the animation is well-known throughout the animation industry (ibid., p.545); his storyboards are detailed, often full-colour depictions of exactly what becomes the final work, and he notoriously insists on personally approving every frame. Most of the works known as 'Miyazaki anime' are not simply directed by him, but also original stories written by him and with character designs by him. Nevertheless, Studio Ghibli has 150 employees (Numata et al., 2005, p.542), and as of March 2013, half of the studio's feature-length films are directed by people other than Hayao Miyazaki. At least to some extent, the equation of Miyazaki with Studio Ghibli is part of Ghibli's myth-making.

The understanding of Miyazaki as the genius behind Studio Ghibli, as well as a beloved public figure, is evidenced by the clamour for any and all insights into his mind. Miyazaki is known for rarely giving interviews; consequently, the interviews he does give are highly sought, published in best-selling books such as *Jiburi no Mori to Ponyo no Umi* (Shida and Tamura, 2008, pp.27–95) or *Kaze no Furu Basho: Naushika kara Chihiro made no kiseki* (Miyazaki, 2002). Miyazaki himself has written two autobiographies to date, the first of which has been released in English (Miyazaki, 2009).

Returns as a living, breathing anthropomorphic cat. The characters, settings, and even genre of the films (*Cat Returns* is a fantasy, *Whisper* is not) are different.

[88] This trend is taken to the extreme in *Grave of the Fireflies* ('*Hotaru no Haka*', 1988), released alongside *Totoro* as a double feature. While *Totoro* may be charming and cute, if vaguely mournful in tone, *Grave of the Fireflies* is deeply tragic, following the story of two children who die of starvation after their parents are killed in World War II.

Beyond his actual words, there are reams of documents attempting to understand the unique vision and mind of Miyazaki, from essay compilations such as *Jiburi no Mori e* (ed. Yonemura, 2008) to books by a single author such as *Naze Ponyo wa Hamu ga Suki na no ka?* (Ogihara, 2009), *Miyazaki Hayao wo Yomu: Bosei to Kaosu no Fantajī* (Shimizu, 2001), or Ōtsuka Eiji's *Monogatari-ron de Yomu Murakami Haruki to Miyazaki Hayao: Kōzō Shikanai Nippon* (2009). In the feature on *Ponyo* in the magazine *Moe*, this tendency is brought to the fore in the conclusion to a section about the many works that influenced *Ponyo*: the reader is asked to seek out the works for themselves, in order to 'uncover the hidden depths of Miyazaki's mind' (2008, p.26; my translation). In this description, not only is the work attributed entirely to the 'mind' of Miyazaki personally, but one's endeavour to become closer to that mind is seen as a worthy pursuit. With such an attitude becoming increasingly common in non-academic works, it should come as no surprise that in academia, scholarship that treats Miyazaki as an auteur comprises the vast majority of the literature on Studio Ghibli. As Lamarre (2009, p.87) suggests:

> Miyazaki Hayao is an auteur in the sense that he puts his stamp on every aspect of production (writing, directing, animating); he is notorious for retouching or redoing images that do not meet his standard. As a result, there really is a Miyazaki style, a Miyazaki look and feel and treatment, and we recognize his films as Miyazaki films, we see in them his vision. Since the foundation of Studio Ghibli in 1985, with Takahata Isao, Miyazaki has also contributed to establishing a recognizable Ghibli style or brand. Ghibli films, too, are designed to have a Ghibli look and feel, and they address viewers in a certain way and present the world in a certain way. They thus imply a worldview that contributes to the constitution of a Ghibli world.
>
> The dynamics of the Miyazaki auteur effect and the Ghibli-brand world have thus far made it easy for me to evoke Miyazaki's name as if he alone were responsible for a distinctive mode of animation and manner of thinking

> technology, when in fact the Miyazaki effect – Miyazaki as *auteur* – emerges within a theater of operations known as Studio Ghibli, as it strives to secure a perimeter for staging its animated worlds and worldview.

In short, Ghibli has a very particular and carefully constructed image, and that image is associated with the individual of Hayao Miyazaki. Ghibli works are known as 'high-quality', 'natural' children's media, existing outside the *Pokémon*/*Purikyua*/*Kamen Rider* systems that prevail in Japan today, and outside the Disney/DreamWorks/Nickelodeon systems that prevail in America. We are looking at something different, and Studio Ghibli desperately wants to make that clear to us.

Studio Ghibli is frequently analysed with regard to its characters (particularly, the values those characters embody, their roles as saviours, and the role of girls in his films [Napier, 2000; Lamarre, 2009; Ogihara, 2009; Ishigami, 2010]) or the environmentalist, religious, or folkloric themes of the films (Hori, 2008; Iikura, 2009; Asai, 2010; Koyama, 2010). While the distinctive 'Ghibli worlds' of the films are frequently referenced, they are rarely discussed in and of themselves, with the exception of how they fit into the films' broader themes. Ishigami Fumimasa's 2010 work is a particularly illuminating example of this trend; while examining the structures of the two distinct worlds that appear in most of Miyazaki's works, the article ultimately focuses not on the contours of those worlds but on the characters that bridge the gap between them. For example, his description of *Princess Mononoke* centres on the role of the main character, Ashitaka: 'Coming from a remote region of the east, and having crossed over a vast area to arrive, Ashitaka's existence transgresses borders. He can be placed with Sheeta [from *Castle in the Sky*], and Fio and Gina [from *Porco Rosso* (*Kurenai no Buta*, 1992)] in the genealogy of arbitrator/mediator' (2010, p.7; my translation). Although Ishigami dissects the relationships between the two worlds, and their relationship to the 'real' world, little is said about their exact portrayal.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to focus on the settings depicted in *Ponyo*. I will begin by discussing the portrayals of the sea and town, drawing on the film's connection to the town of Tomo no Ura in Hiroshima Prefecture. The analysis focuses particularly on the relationship between *Ponyo*'s settings and contemporary Japan, sketching an outline of the mixed markers of past and

present that characterise the film. I conclude by considering *Ponyo*'s apocalyptic ending as an erasure of Japan, a depiction echoing the treatment of contemporary Japan in both *Ponyo* and the 'Ghibli world' more broadly.

The evolution of Ponyo

> 'Miyazaki Hayao created this most recent work by returning to the origin: hand-drawn animation. But this is not a 'return to origins'. A bold representation of the sea. Intense creativity. Animation director Miyazaki Hayao has certainly evolved.'
>
> – Shida and Tamura (2008, p.30; my translation)

Ponyo exists within systems far larger than itself; not only is it part of multiple social contexts, as with all texts, but it is also associated strongly with a particular studio, a particular director, and a particular position in society that would to some extent have existed regardless of the quality of the film itself.[89] *Ponyo* is more than a film: it is Miyazaki's latest work, a retelling of a classic fairy tale, the most recent addition to the Ghibli canon, a loving filmic representation of an endangered seaside town, and the narrative basis of innumerable stocks of bright pink, green and blue merchandise. Keeping this context in mind, I would like to now turn to the settings depicted in the film itself, and discuss some of the representations that comprise the lively nostalgia of *Ponyo*'s screen.

Ponyo follows a young boy named Sōsuke who lives in a small Japanese fishing village with his casual, energetic mother Lisa. Sōsuke rescues a small fish-girl named Ponyo, who is attempting to escape from her overbearing father, Fujimoto. Through a combination of human blood (which she tasted when healing a cut on Sōsuke's finger by licking it), a hearty helping of the Water of Life collected by Fujimoto, and sheer force of will, Ponyo turns into a human girl and escapes from Fujimoto's grip – while at the same time releasing Fujimoto's Water of Life into the ocean.

[89] *Tales from Earthsea* ('*Gedo Senki*,', 2006), the first work directed by Miyazaki's son Gorō, was widely considered a failure by fans and critics. This did not stop it from becoming the highest grossing film of the year in Japan and winning multiple awards.

The release of the Water of Life causes a storm of epic proportions. Over the night, the storm surges to incredible heights, and in the morning, the entire town is flooded. Sōsuke's house on the top of the hill is the only thing left standing, and the water laps even at their front steps. In the water swims all manner of prehistoric sea life. Determined to find Lisa, who left in the night to care for the women at the centre for the elderly where she works, Sōsuke and Ponyo ride into town on Sōsuke's toy boat, made larger by Ponyo's magic. They find Lisa, and all the other residents of the home, safely underwater in a jellyfish-shaped air bubble created by Fujimoto. After Sōsuke proves his love for Ponyo, the fish-girl is permanently turned into a human.

As mentioned earlier, the film was made entirely with hand-drawn 2D animation, shunning the now commonplace CGI. The film earned a total of $187 million worldwide, and was Ghibli's most successful US release to date (Young, 2009). It won the 2008 Japan Academy award for Animation of the Year, and earned 15.5 billion yen at the Japanese box office ('Nihon Akademīshō', 2009; Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan, Inc., 2009). In a survey by Dentsu, Japanese people voted *Ponyo* Japan's second best product in 2008 ('Kotoshi no chūmoku shōhin', 2008).[90] These numbers convey the success and popularity of the film; but again, as a Studio Ghibli product, such a level of success is to be expected.

The story is loosely based on Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy tale *The Little Mermaid*, although it bears little resemblance to the fairy tale. There are numerous other works that are known to have inspired it – for example, John Everett Millais' painting *Ophelia*, Wagner's opera *The Valkyrie*, Natsume Soseki's novel *Mon*, and the Japanese legend of Ebisu – making it a veritable patchwork of references across multiple media formats ('*Sutajio Jiburi Miyazaki Hayao kantoku saishinsaku*', 2008, p.26; Iikura, 2009). This array of references reflects the patchwork narrative and dream-like aesthetic that pervades the film, a celebration of art and history that recalls a multitude of times and places. There is one conspicuous absence, however: of all the times and places it portrays, the film is largely devoid of references to contemporary Japan.

[90] The highest rated product was Nintendo's internationally successful console, the Wii.

'Distorted, moving, and transforming with intensity'

Two main locations are featured in *Ponyo*: the town in which Sōsuke lives, and the sea from whence Ponyo came. The sea is obviously the more spectacular of these locations; it is a mystical and artistically intriguing world teeming with brightly coloured creatures of the past and present. Many discussions of the film stress its portrayal of the sea as alive, a character in its own right. A full-page spread in the magazine *Moe* examines the life-like portrayal of *Ponyo*'s sea ('*Sutajio Jiburi Miyazaki Hayao kantoku saishinsaku*',

Figure 11: Sōsuke's school. Image from *Ponyo*.

2008, p.18), while a member of *Ponyo*'s animation staff claims in an interview that 'the sea was not simply a setting, but one of the characters. From the outset, our slogan was to represent the scenery as a character' (Kondō qtd. in Shida and Tamura, 2008, p.149; my translation), a section in the *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea Roman Album* (a guidebook to the film published by Tokuma Shoten, Ghibli's parent company) is entitled 'Sea as a character' (Tokugi et al., 2008, p.85), and even the 'keyword' section of Ghibli's *Ponyo* website claims: 'In this work, director Hayao Miyazaki strived to present waves as "like living beings"' ('Gake no Ue no Ponyo: kīwādo', 2007; my translation). Analysis of this key concept has even found its way into academic discussions of the film (for example: Mori, 2009, p.64; Asai, 2010, p.81). Sōsuke's town receives decidedly less attention than the sea. It is less eye-grabbing, to be sure, and less fantastical. Its portrayal is neither artistically innovative nor particularly unusual, yet the majority of the film takes place in the town, not the sea, and most of the significant locations in the film are part of the town.

While I will be considering the town and sea in contrast to one another for most of this section, it is significant that they receive the same aesthetic treatment. Both are depicted in bright pastel colours, with slightly bulging shapes reminiscent of a child's drawing. While many films

involving two worlds portray them in noticeably different ways – for example, one in bleak, dull colours and the other bright and vibrant – the town and the sea in *Ponyo* are visually similar, making them appear more like extensions of one another than as contrasted worlds. Tanaka Shūichi describes *Ponyo*'s scenery as 'distorted, moving and transforming with intensity… The dynamic scenery, and even the still scenery, is created with simple lines and colours' (2010, p.116; my translation). Both the town and the sea are worlds of bright colours, rounded shapes and movement, and in that sense, they are more alike than they are different. The sea is a character itself; this is a point reiterated endlessly in discussions of the film. The town, too, is a place with such personality that it seems at times like a character in its own right. Both are 'distorted, moving and transforming with intensity.' But how do they move, and into what do they transform?

To understand the transformations of the town and the sea, we must first understand the construction of each. These constructions are related to a place outside the narrative, a popular tourist location made all the more popular due to its central position in *Ponyo*. In the following section, I will look at the town of Tomo no Ura, the well-known inspiration for *Ponyo*, and explore the image of this town to better understand the portrayal of its fictional counterpart.

Ponyo and Tomo no Ura: animating traditional Japan

The town in which Sōsuke lives is based on the town of Tomo no Ura in Hiroshima Prefecture. Tomo no Ura is known as an Edo-period fishing village, and associated strongly with 'traditional' Japan. While Tomo no Ura remains famous for its preserved Edo-style architecture, association with famous historical events, and traditional methods of fishing, these attractions are now accompanied by shops and cafes selling traditional Japanese sweets, drinks, and food (what one tourism magazine describes as its 'cute, retro renovated old merchants' houses' ['Tomo no Ura', 2011, p.74; my translation]). Numerous tourist magazines and brochures guide visitors to the local folklore museum, and provide maps of established routes through the town's many shrines and temples. The tourism magazine cited above captions the headline of its Tomo no Ura section with the description: 'A port town where the feeling of the Edo period hangs in the air' (ibid., p.71; my translation). On the following page, it

claims that Tomo no Ura has an abundance of 'nostalgic scenery' (*nosutarujikku na fūkei* [ibid., p.72]). The English-language pamphlet for the town's folklore museum stresses the historical legacy remaining in Tomo no Ura today:

> Tomo-no-ura, beautiful with its shining sea and beautiful surrounding islands, is a town which fostered a rich history and tradition. The town still has many historical remains from ancient times and the middle ages, and traditional sights of the streets with port facilities, stores, and storehouses from the Edo period. Tomo-no-ura still shows us what it was like as the most flourishing trading port in the Seto Inland Sea area. Folk culture and traditional events passed down through the ages continue into the present. ('Museum waiting for the turn of the tide', n.d.)

As the pamphlet suggests, Tomo no Ura is not simply a place of the past; it is also a place of natural beauty. The Japanese-language pamphlet describes the town as a 'treasure-trove [*chikuseki*] of history and beautiful nature' ('Shiomachi no kan', n.d.). Tomo no Ura is a place where one goes to see both 'beautiful nature' and the sights of a previous era. Tomo no Ura can be seen as a sort of refuge from contemporary urban life, defined by the sea, mountains, and 'traditional' lifestyles, and this association with Japan's past has presented both threats and opportunities for the town.

The television documentary *Ghibli no Fūkei: Miyazaki Sakuhin ga Egaita Nippon* (2008) dicusses the relationship between *Ponyo* and Tomo no Ura, stressing what is presented as the endangered status of the town. *Ghibli no Fūkei* describes a 'wave of development' facing a town defined by its connection to the past; according to the documentary, since the Meiji Period, Tomo no Ura 'has remained undeveloped, in this same form, like a time capsule' (ibid.; my translation). Most of the section on Tomo no Ura focuses on the construction of a new highway, which would have destroyed its beautiful scenery and brought to its residents an unwanted connection to the modern world. This was, however, not the first threat faced by Tomo no Ura from the more contemporary elements of society. As Koyama Masahiro explains:

> *Ponyo*'s Tomo no Ura, in Hiroshima Prefecture, has recently been exposed to a wave of 'development' similar to Sayama mentioned earlier. The citizens of Tomo no Ura, harbouring a sense of danger, established a non-profit organisation called 'Tomo City-Building Workshop', dealing with the building of bridges and highways, the preservation of the stores and houses lining the streets of Tomo no Ura, presenting their doubts about the methods of the administration, proposing new city-building efforts aimed at preserving the traditional scenery of the town, and bringing lawsuits against the unilateral development decisions of the administration. (2010, p.60; my translation.)

Tomo no Ura's non-profit organisation was, however, not exclusively for residents of the town: Miyazaki was personally involved with the workshop, along with a number of other town preservation initiatives (ibid.).

The connection between the film and Tomo no Ura is not a little-known fact; Miyazaki's month-long visit to the town is mentioned in many writings about the film (see, for example: Hioki, 2009, p.227; Yonemura, 2010, p.70; Koyama, 2010, p.60). *Ghibli no Fūkei* emphasises the connection between Ghibli films and specific locations on which the films' settings are based, suggesting throughout the programme that one can essentially become closer to the films and understand them on a deeper level by visiting the locations depicted, including Tomo no Ura.

For its part, Tomo no Ura thrives on the recognition: the town is described on the publisher's website of a recent guidebook as 'a land connected with the movie *Gake no Ue no Ponyo*' ('Tomo no Ura no Tabi e', 2010; my translation). The same guidebook includes a map that depicts, along with 'View Points' and 'Sakura Points', 'Ponyo Points'. 'Ponyo Points' include the place Miyazaki stayed while visiting the town, the shrine he frequented daily, and the beach that the writer believes may be the inspiration for Ponyo and Sōsuke's meeting place (Fujii, 2010, pp.2–3). The tourism centre in Tomo no Ura is overflowing with *Ponyo*-related items: toys, figurines, drawings, and a map detailing how various places in the town correspond to scenes from the film (see figure 12). *Ponyo* merchandise, much of it handmade by local artists, abounds in the gift shops that fill Tomo no Ura,

and a wooden cut-out of Sōsuke and Ponyo greets visitors to the town. A cafe in the town even released a 'Ponyo drink', a combination of carbonated water, peach-flavoured syrup and multicoloured jelly balls that reflect the colour scheme of the film ('"Ponyo dorinku" moderu', 2008).

Towns using connections to popular anime works to promote tourism is a well-documented (if quite recent) phenomenon, and is most certainly not unique to *Ponyo* (see, for example, the discussion of tourism to the town Washimiya following the anime *Lucky Star* [Yamamura, 2009, p.5]). Tomo no Ura is an interesting case not because it is a town that capitalises on its association with a popular movie, but because of the image of Tomo no Ura itself: a place of the past, in tune with the natural world and under threat from a destructive modernity. Before we delve into the question of the town's role in the film, then, we can note that Sōsuke's hometown is based on a place that evokes images of times past, a place that could be seen as distant from but threatened by the features of contemporary Japan.

Figure 12: Map of *Ponyo*-related locations in Tomo no Ura's tourism centre.

The presence and absence of contemporary Japan

> 'Nostalgia is often a mask for rage. The intensity with which we yearn for a lost world is frequently proportionate to the discomfort we feel in our own... It is impossible not to sense the anger in Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, however exquisite its tableaux.'
>
> – Roland Kelts (2007, p.58)

In the context of the film, Sōsuke's town is an idyllic portrayal of a lifestyle not necessarily corresponding to most children's lifestyles in Japan today. There are few identifying factors that indicate the time in which the film is set; we can assume it is set in a fairly recent time due to a laptop shown on Lisa's desk in one shot, but it is a brief shot, easy to miss, and she is never shown using it. Sōsuke uses none of the electronic devices common in Japanese life today (for example, mobile phones, or the portable video game consoles popular with young children). Instead, he treasures his toy pop-pop boat – a boat which received considerable media attention prior to the film's release, mostly of the sort that involved explaining its mechanics and marveling at its ingenuity (predictably, replicas of Sōsuke's toy are also available for purchase). Miyazaki explains in interviews that such boats were common when he was a child, but as public reaction to the toy displays clearly, they are no longer common today (Shida and Tamura, 2008, p.40). The clothing worn by Sōsuke and others in the film is rather anachronistic; although Lisa dresses as a young Japanese mother might, other women in the film tend to wear frilly dresses in pastel colours. In other words, there are few markers that suggest that the story is set now instead of an earlier time in Japan's history.[91]

In contrast to the 'traditional Japan' of Sōsuke's town, Ponyo's sea is portrayed as a place of mystery and wonder. A host of living beings, some contemporary, some ancient, and some imagined, fill a fantastical, colourful world primarily represented through Fujimoto's mysterious potions and whimsical submarine. Notably, the sea in *Ponyo* is not only more fantastical than the town; it is also

Figure 13: Fujimoto in his study. Image from *Ponyo*.

[91] Interestingly, almost all markers that do set the scene to the 2000s are associated with Lisa's character. This observation could be significant for future analyses of gender in *Ponyo*, although further discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of the current chapter.

more intimately associated with past times.

Fujimoto's submarine and home in a coral reef are the two undersea locations shown frequently throughout the film. Fujimoto's submarine is a typical Ghibli contraption that combines the appearance of a blue-and-white boat (not dissimilar to Sōsuke's toy) with languidly moving flippers and a wooden deck. His coral home includes a study decorated with the furniture and decor of a non-specific older time; an old-fashioned microscope sits on a wooden writing desk, and the shelves are piled high with thick, hardbound books. In the main room, the walls are lined with great glass containers filled with potions, and the walls themselves are made of fossils. Even Fujimoto's eclectic outfit, a striped suit and cape, seems anachronistic. This is a world steeped in time; many times, from the ancient past represented in the fossils to the blossoming scientific world of the brass microscope, but one time is missing. The present day is far removed from Fujimoto's world.

The ambiguous past represented by the sea is most obviously shown in the prehistoric creatures that fill the ocean when it floods the land. The sea literally reverts to a previous time, an ancient time, lauded by Ponyo's mother as reminiscent of the Devonian era. In a plot summary in the book *Ghibli no Mori to Ponyo no Umi*, this plot development is described thus: 'A huge storm sweeps through the land, and the sea gradually grows closer to a primeval state.' (Shida and Tamura, 2008, p.20; my translation). Ōtsuka Eiji states that '... the bottom of the sea in *Ponyo*, like the bottom of the toxic forest in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* or the depths of the Shishigami's forest in *Princess Mononoke*, is an image of a primordial place' (2009, p.190; my translation). Ōtsuka's statement recalls other Miyazaki films, positioning the sea in *Ponyo* as a part of a 'Miyazaki world' rather than exclusive to a specific film. To those familiar with the films cited, the comparison reveals something else: the bottom of the toxic forest in *Nausicaä* is the epitome of purity, a clean, sparkling, still land that exists to cleanse the Earth of the pollution caused by humans, and the depths of the Shishigami's forest in *Mononoke* is an ancient land of mythical gods, great natural beauty, and again, purity – a place that will cleanse the world of the devastating consequences of humanity's greed, and bring about rebirth. To compare *Ponyo* to these worlds is to situate it as a location of purity, nature, and rebirth.

Despite this connection to a primordial past, the character of Ponyo makes it hard to view the sea as fully 'ancient'. While she can be seen as the embodiment of the 'ancient' sea entering the 'modern' world, from another perspective, she can also be seen as a young girl determined to be free from a patriarchal authority associated explicitly with the 'past'. Ponyo rejects that 'past' in favour of a coveted (not quite) 'present', thus challenging the world she has been given, consciously and resolutely breaking from things as they 'have been'. For that reason, it is hard to consider her purely as representative of the past. More generally, we might also point out that the story focuses on Ponyo wanting to become human, and ultimately achieving that goal; in other words, the representative of the ancient ocean becoming happily assimilated into life in the less-ancient town.

Sōsuke's town, too, is not simply associated with traditional Japan, but blends multiple times; as mentioned above, Lisa is a contemporary young mother, with most markers of contemporary life in some way associated with her character. As Karasawa Shunichi explains: 'In a huge departure from the image commonly found in drama of mothers that are depicted 100% as mothers, Lisa is a contemporary mother; that is, while she is a mother, she is also a young woman, a wife, and a modern person. The film accurately depicts the collision of these characteristics' (2008, p.156; my translation). Despite at times exhibiting reckless or even irresponsible behaviour (such as extremely careless driving, or leaving two five-year-old children alone at night during a life-threatening storm), Lisa is presented as a loving, sensible, and generous woman, who adores and is adored by her son.

There is not, then, a clear correlation between that which is associated with the past and that which is presented as good; this is not a world of dichotomies, but of mixtures. There is a town of the past, and a sea of a more ancient past, both of which echo the pervasive nostalgia for past worlds that define the Ghibli brand; these worlds are populated simultaneously by young mothers who act in tune with their times and those who seem anachronistic, by children who reject traditional gender roles and those who entertain themselves by playing with toys from the pre-war era – all of which comes to the world as a part of the 'Cool Japan' trend even as the films challenge the bright, plastic, high-tech world of contemporary Japanese media.

The strange temporalities of the sea and the town have been noted by scholars. Asai Chiaki looks at the unique boundary land of the seashore, connecting that spatial boundary to the temporality

of the film: 'The ambiguity of the spatial boundary of the seashore is connected to the ambiguity of the film's temporal boundaries. This seaside town is a space where the ancient past and present are mixed together, where rustic shops and large supermarkets coexist, where young mothers wear old-fashioned flower-patterned dresses' (Asai, 2010, p.81; my translation). Karasawa argues that Sōsuke's character is in fact more fantastical than Ponyo's, given his simple honesty and childlike innocence, which Karasawa sees as unusual in today's world (2008, pp.157–159). He sees this reversal of norms as part of a pattern throughout the film:

> This composition of reversal can be seen in many parts of *Gake no Ue no Ponyo*: the relationship between children and the elderly, the situation of the couple Fujimoto and Granmamare, and yes, the relationship between child and parent, as shown by a child calling a parent by their first name. I cannot help but see these things as born from the concept of the substitution of sea for land. (Karasawa, 2008, p.159; my translation.)

Karasawa's reference to Sōsuke's habit of calling his mother by her first name is a particularly interesting point, given the way it stands out to viewers in Japan as well as in Britain or America. Many of the non-Japanese people I have spoken to about the film mention this as one of their first observations: why does Sōsuke call his mother Lisa? Is this common in Japan?

In Japan, the reaction is similar. It is not common in Japan for children to call their parents by their first names, although it does occasionally happen (as it does in Britain and America), and many viewers express their confusion at this element of the film. Writings and interviews about the film, however, suggest that this was a decision made for a particular purpose: to reflect the realities of contemporary life. Miyazaki himself states this, as does the film's producer Suzuki Toshio (Shida and Tamura, 2008, pp.44 and 117). Sōsuke's use of his mother's first name is a major point of discussion in Tanaka Shūichi's 2010 article on *Ponyo*, along with a number of other jarring elements in the film, such as Lisa's choice to feed instant ramen to her child and the visiting Ponyo, and a scene showing litter in the ocean presenting danger to Ponyo and other fish. Tanaka concludes:

> In the end, Miyazaki is not affirming or rejecting the things he portrays. I believe he is attempting to show contemporary life as it is, without mixing in any of his own conceit. He paints a vibrant picture of now, today, portraying without affirmation or rejection the world in which 5-year-olds spend their days. "This is the world we live in. Therefore, living in this world has value." *Ponyo* is saying this. This is the film's value. (Tanaka S., 2010, p.122; my translation.)

Regardless of one's interpretation of these scenes, there is an intriguing element to the reactions they have caused. Instant ramen and littered oceans are common things across the globe – why is it that the portrayals reflective of everyday life today garner so much attention, and not the anachronistic portrayals of a time removed from our own? *Ponyo* is, after all, supposedly set in the present day; it would be reasonable to expect that those aspects of the film that are in line with contemporary life might provoke less – rather than more – comment than aspects reminiscent of times past.

The reason that the contemporary elements of *Ponyo* are notable is because while they may reflect current realities, they do not reflect the world of Ghibli through which the film is generally understood. Ghibli does not create contemporary worlds; it creates past worlds, worlds more natural, more innocent than our own. Seeing an ocean strewn with litter is remarkable not because viewers have never before seen litter in an ocean, but because oceans in Ghibli movies are pure, clear blue waters, untainted by any human mark. Instant ramen seems unusual not because no one has known a mother to give their child instant ramen before, but because Ghibli food is usually of a different ilk: thick slabs of bread with cheese and red onion in *Tales from Earthsea* ('*Gedo Senki*', 2006), fresh corn from a neighbour's garden in *Totoro*, or freshly baked bread in *Kiki's Delivery Service* ('*Majo no Takkyūbin*', 1989). Wholesome, home-grown fare is what we associate with Studio Ghibli, not instant ramen (Tanaka E., 2010). This is similar to the marketing of Tomo no Ura: when tourists visit Tomo no Ura, it is not to glimpse 'modern life' as it is, but the exact opposite – to escape contemporary Japan, to go back to something from an earlier time. Whether in visions of pristine oceans or villages that have remained 'like a time capsule' since the Meiji period (*Ghibli no Fūkei*, 2008; my translation), Studio Ghibli brings audiences to worlds formed from multiple visions of the past.

A gentle apocalypse

In Asai's ecological analysis of *Ponyo*, the ambiguous boundaries between sea and land epitomised by the seashore setting are made all the more confused by the flood that submerges the town:

> When this town is assaulted by a great tsunami, and almost entirely submerged, the boundaries of land and water are transformed, and the boundaries of time become ambiguous. When a new morning arrives after the storm Ponyo caused, Sōsuke's house is surrounded by the sea, essentially having become an isolated island. As the sea level rose, only one house on top of a cliff remained. From the garden – now the beach – Sōsuke and Ponyo look into the ocean and see a variety of living things, including prehistoric fish that should not exist swimming around calmly. But Sōsuke and Ponyo, departing in their toy boat, simply say "Oh, prehistoric fish! That one's from the Devonian era," "Oh wow, it's a Bothriolepis!" without batting an eyelid, carelessly breaking down the walls between ancient and contemporary times. (Asai, 2010, p.81; my translation.)

A place in which time and space are already mixed and uncertain is made all the more ambiguous by the disaster that displaces both time and place. While I have discussed the sea and the town as two different settings, the film's ending challenges that easy divide. As the flood submerges the town, the ancient sea merges with the traditional land, and they no longer remain distinct.

A particularly noticeable aspect of the flood is its harmless, even gentle nature. There are no people screaming or dying, no injuries are shown, and the people of the town row boats to the local hotel in an orderly fashion. The fish themselves pose no threats to the humans; however large or intimidating they might first appear, they move peacefully through the water, making no move to harm the children or townspeople. Ponyo and Sōsuke do not show fear towards these majestic creatures, but comment cheerfully on their presence. It is a most peculiar conclusion to a film: the

benevolent destruction of Japan, rendered as more of a pastel wonderland than a terrifying apocalypse. In some ways, the film almost seems to celebrate the disaster; it is not solely a negative thing, or even a negative thing that holds a strange fascination. It is not clearly 'negative' at all. With no one actually hurt, and no mention of the incredible property damage that must have resulted from the flooding, the ending is an unambiguously happy one: the world is at peace again, Ponyo is human, Sōsuke has proven his love, Fujimoto apologises and lets Ponyo go, everyone is safe and happy, and the cheerful theme song plays. If not actively 'good', the disaster is at least morally neutral, and it is somewhat glamourised, as evidenced by the peaceful shot of the children riding their boat through the reclaimed sea.

The prehistoric sea gently overcoming the town is a reversion not to 'traditional Japan' but to a time before Japan – when Japan was not even an island, much less a nation. It is less a nationalistic call for Japan to be 'restored' as a portrayal of Japan negated entirely. It is as if someone simply turned back the clock to a time when Japan never existed, effectively erasing the nation. The reversion to a 'traditional' lifestyle could easily have been suggested by the narrative of *Ponyo*,[92] but it is met with a problem: the town that is transformed was 'traditional' to begin with. *Ponyo* is not a story of the past overcoming the present, but of the ancient past overcoming the 'traditional' past. The film's removal from contemporary Japan becomes crucial in this representation of apocalypse; such wholesale destruction is able to be warm-hearted by the easily overlooked detail that the location erased is not contemporary Japan. It is a place and time that is already erased, in a fantastical narrative that does not engage with contemporary Japan.

In the destruction of even traditional Japan in favour of a peaceful ancient sea, *Ponyo* promotes nostalgia not for a golden age of Japan, but for a time removed from the concept of the national. There is a fundamental rejection of contemporary Japan inherent in this portrayal, seeking to

[92] The theme of reverting to the past is one that Ghibli has already addressed quite thoroughly in the film *Pom Poko* ('*Heisei Tanuki Gassen Ponpoko*', 1994). *Pom Poko* concludes with a heart-wrenching segment in which a band of tanuki, having exhausted all their magical powers and tricks to preserve their lifestyle in the face of urbanisation, make one last push to combine all their powers together and temporarily remake the town as it was before the city encroached upon it. Roads are transformed into fields, buildings of flats into thatched cottages, and the alienated humans see a loving communal existence, happily waving to their grandparents and playing in bamboo thickets. Unable to maintain the image for long, the vision soon vanishes, replaced once again by apartments, roads, and unhappy humans.

re-create a 'purified' ancient time divorced from the nation, a time that has literally washed away all the corruptions of the present.[93] It is not surprising, then, that the nation is noticeably absent from the film; the town seems to exist in isolation, cut off from any broader world. When the storm comes, the town is threatened – but how far does it reach? How do neighbouring towns fare? We do not know, because Japan is in this film contained in one town that is positioned as distinct from present-day life, denying contemporary and ultimately, even traditional Japan. It is the transnational empire of Ghibli contained in a staunchly insular local context.

As this chapter has demonstrated, Ghibli trades in idyllic past worlds. They can be found in the gentle pastoral childhood of *Totoro*, the decaying and ultimately destroyed garden of *Laputa*, the lush gardens of *Arrietty* ('*Karigurashi no Arietti*', 2010), the moss-covered primeval forest of *Mononoke*, or the pastel memories of 1960s Yokohama that comprise *From Up on Poppy Hill* – the specific time that is remembered does not remain fixed, the forms of romanticisation change, but the portrayal of past worlds, particularly those that are threatened or soon to disappear, pervades the works of Ghibli (including those not directed by Miyazaki). In *Ponyo*, as in the works cited above and almost all Ghibli films, a distinction is not made between a corrupt present and an idyllic past but between an idyllic past and a somewhat-less-idyllic somewhat-less-past. *Laputa* shows us a Victorian mining town depicted as a 'present' in contrast to the 'past' of the ancient, overgrown garden land of Laputa; in *Mononoke*, a Muromachi ironworks is contrasted to the mythical ancient Forest of the

[93] This is not the first time Miyazaki has shown a phenomenon like this; in *Panda! Go Panda!: Rainy Day Circus* ('*Panda Kopanda: Amefuri no Sākasu no Maki*', 1973), a pre-Ghibli movie written by Miyazaki, a young girl awakes after a heavy rainstorm to find her entire town flooded up to the roof of her home. Rather than a disaster worthy of panic, the girl takes her panda friends and happily rows over to the town, where she saves zoo animals that were in danger. While the possible threat of this situation is implied (as it is in *Ponyo*, as Sōsuke and Ponyo worry about Lisa's safety after she drives off into the storm), no actual damage occurs. In the end, everyone is fine, and together they peacefully admire the beautiful flooded lands. A similar situation occurs in *The Castle of Cagliostro* ('*Rupan Sansei: Kariosutoro no Shiro*', 1979), a pre-Ghibli film directed by Miyazaki. This theme is often seen as related to the preoccupations of Miyazaki's own mind. Such an idea would be supported by Mamoru Oshii, another pre-eminent anime director who is also friends with Miyazaki, who claims that his friend secretly dreams of Japan's destruction (Gordon, 2005, p.62). Miyazaki himself does little to counter this idea; when interviewed by CNN anchor Anna Coren after the 3/11 tsunami, he responds to her query, 'How did you feel when you heard the news about the earthquake and the tsunami and then saw the pictures?' with the simple reply: 'Well, I thought, "why didn't it happen to Tokyo?"' ('Hayao Miyazaki's tsunami', 2011). Nevertheless, I believe that viewing this trend as a result of Miyazaki's personal preoccupation with apocalypse overlooks the crucial role played by Studio Ghibli in Japanese children's media cultures today – a role that far overshadows the interests of one individual – as well as the way those same tendencies echo throughout even very different non-Ghibli children's works, as this thesis aims to demonstrate. For this reason, I am looking less at the presence of similar apocalyptic scenarios throughout Ghibli films, and instead analysing the role of apocalypse in *Ponyo* as it fits into the broader Ghibli image.

Gods; *Totoro* shows the clash of cultures between human children in a 'traditional' town and the ancient forest. As with *Ponyo*, there is no modern to clash with the traditional, but only the traditional to clash with something more ancient. In stories such as *Arrietty* or *From Up on Poppy Hill*, places reminiscent of the past occupy most of the film, with brief terrified glimpses of more contemporary worlds (a short but frightening trip to Tokyo in *Poppy Hill*, or occasional shots of the suburbs surrounding the garden home in *Arrietty* used primarily to remind us of the encroaching human threat to the Borrowers). While the relationship between two worlds is key to many Ghibli narratives – and conclusions that affirm the potential goodness of both are common – the two worlds are formed from shades of the past. Whether sea or land, fictional or non-fictional, *Ponyo* is constructed through representations of opposition to contemporary urban Japan: a town that fights against modernisation, the all-consuming alien power of a prehistoric ocean, or a carefully cultivated image of Studio Ghibli as something apart from the society and media culture in which it exists.

Breathing life into a picture

> 'Particularly in this generation, where the vibrant sensation of being alive has grown meagre, animation is indispensable: *Ponyo* is the sort of work that can make you strongly believe this. By creating pictures drawn by hand, a human hand, a hand of a living being, is directly breathing life into a 'picture'. By the act of returning to the origins of animation, *Ponyo* is a work that teaches us what it is to regain the things we have lost in this generation.'
>
> – Tanaka Shūichi (2010, p.118; my translation)

In the above quote, Tanaka lays out much of the thinking that guides the Ghibli brand: life, living, returning, loss. It is about life, but life is viewed as something that exists in contrast to the realities of contemporary lifestyles. Life itself is a thing of the past.

The past does take over the present in *Ponyo*, but the potent drama of that scenario is never fully displayed, because 'contemporary Japan' is never actually shown. Contemporary life exists on a

plane too inelegant to cross the Ghibli screen. Ghibli creates work from life, and as in the above quote, 'life' is defined as something separate from technology, separate from 'this generation'.

When asked about the younger generation, Miyazaki has revealed a similar sentiment: 'Children are growing up only with virtual things. Basically, animation is a work made from remembering that which one's own body has learned. When one creates animation, one draws pictures based on the lived experiences of the body... Animation is the act of releasing into the outside world the memories that enter one's body unawares throughout the process of ordinary development' (Miyazaki qtd. in Shida and Tamura, 2008, p.80; my translation). He goes on to clarify: 'They just play games, and learn information from the Internet, and people like that essentially cannot draw animation on paper. I doubt they even have interest in animation in the first place' (ibid., p.81; my translation). Interest in Miyazaki's work amongst people of all generations would seem to contradict that claim, but what is remarkable about this quote is not only Miyazaki's disregard for his fan base, but the similarities to Tanaka's statement above. If Tanaka is basing his analysis on Miyazaki's words, he does not say so; more likely, I believe, is that this is part of a series of ideas that viewers have come to expect from a Ghibli film. The ideas include a focus on life, expressed through the centring of experiential learning and nature, but always in unspoken opposition to the supposed lack of life in urban environments, in video games, or on the Internet – despite the fact that Ghibli designed a video game, has become popular through loyal fans on the Internet, and primarily exists as animation that one watches in front of a television or cinema screen.

There is still a sense that contemporary life is too corrupt, too ugly, too lacking in innocence to be shown on the Ghibli screen. Ghibli films, however, do not simply bemoan the loss of better times: they actively establish those times within the context of contemporary Japan. They seek out those corners of Japan that they view as untouched by, or bravely resisting, modernisation. The new world of the Ghibli Museum brings the aesthetic of an overgrown country garden to the outskirts of Tokyo. Even the merchandise steers us away from the bright plastic character goods of *Purikyua* or *Anpanman* to fairy-tale garden lands of flowers, vines, and soft colours decorating resin figurines and china teacups. In its own way, Ghibli has carved out spaces within that same contemporary world their films express such loathing towards. We may inhabit the past once again; all it takes is a trip to

the local cinema, a day trip to the Ghibli Museum, a couple of hours to watch a DVD, or a few thousand yen to bring Ghibli's garden-like merchandise into your own home.

Ghibli builds an alternative world that blends images of the past and future while avidly rejecting the present. Ghibli is known for its compelling portrayal of past worlds, even when those worlds are explicitly 'present' in the context of the narrative. In the nostalgic world of Ghibli, the present is not decried, but rather not represented. We are asked to look back even beyond the traditional to something more ancient, more primeval. The traditional is contrasted to the modern, but the structures of time in Ghibli do not end there; we must always look further, to a time far enough away to complicate our understanding of the nation itself.

Chapter 6

Moving the future with robots of the past: *Doraemon* and the media mixtures of time

‘Our hope moves the future.’

– tagline for *Eiga Doraemon: Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden*

This is what happiness is

In *Memories of a Dead End*, a short story by the popular author Banana Yoshimoto, the main character is asked by her friend what she thinks of when she thinks of happiness.

‘I remember Doraemon and Nobita,’ she answers.

Her friend teases her for using an example from a manga, but she explains her answer thus:

> I have a small clock with their picture on it. The two of them are reading manga in front of the sliding screen in Nobita’s room. They’re smiling. Manga is scattered everywhere, Nobita is lying face down on a cushion folded in two, propping himself up on his elbows, and Doraemon is sitting cross-legged, reading manga while eating dorayaki. It’s the relationship between the two of them, or maybe it’s their middle-class Japanese household, along with Doraemon being a freeloader in their home – I always think, this is what happiness is. (Yoshimoto, 2006, pp.186–187; my translation.)

This short passage displays many of the characteristics of Doraemon’s unique social position that will inform this chapter: the association of Doraemon primarily with a piece of merchandise rather than any particular narrative, the use of Doraemon as emblematic of a certain type of Japanese lifestyle, and the way Yoshimoto’s character appears to have integrated Doraemon and Nobita into

her personal life and memories. Perhaps the most striking element of Yoshimoto's passage, however, is the familiar way that Doraemon is discussed: at no point does this piece explain who Doraemon and Nobita are. We are not told that they are characters from a famous manga, television programme, and film series, or that they originated from the imagination of the manga duo Fujiko Fujio in 1969. We are spoken to as if we already know Doraemon and Nobita intimately, implying that Yoshimoto assumes that the characters are so widely known that they can be mentioned without any explanation.

Basic information about the characters is not the only significant omission in Yoshimoto's passage. The Doraemon represented in this passage is a fully integrated member of the Japanese household in which he resides, the very epitome of a peaceful sense of belonging. Nowhere does this passage suggest that Doraemon is in fact something far removed from ordinary middle-class Japanese life: a nuclear-powered robot cat who traveled back in time from the 22nd century, and who not only possesses but regularly utilises the power to drastically change the nature of our world, our bodies, and our abilities. The scene Yoshimoto describes is one of familiarity, marked by the close relationship between Nobita and Doraemon. Any sense of exoticism that we might expect a robot from the future to evoke is wholly erased. In a deeply nostalgic story by a writer known as the ultimate purveyor of *shōjo* childhood nostalgia (Treat, 1996), Doraemon is described only in terms that convey his association with the lost happiness of childhood.

It is these connotations and assumptions, illustrated by Yoshimoto's passage, that I would like to explore further in this chapter. The theme of that which connotes the future becoming a symbol of past memories and gentle nostalgia is one I have touched on throughout this thesis, exhibited in a series of works that involve representatives of the future living in, creating, and/or discovering a romanticised past. Like *Purikyua* and Studio Ghibli, *Doraemon* brings us these past/future worlds through innumerable multimedia platforms, platforms that embrace the limits of what technology enables even as the texts shun technological progress. At times, the media mix constructs these worlds in places beyond our television or computer screens.

Like a reflection of the bold lines and exaggerated comic-book style of the *Doraemon* manga, *Doraemon* shows us a bold and exaggerated example of these tendencies, displayed more plainly than any work so far discussed. It lays bare the workings of this construction, its cynicism and optimism,

its power and intensity that sits alongside its contradictory, even mystifying nature. Furthermore, *Doraemon* adds to these trends the weight of its own extensive history, a history that has seen a simple character become a staple of children's cultures in numerous countries. *Doraemon* does not simply represent history in its narratives but simultaneously recalls a different type of history to many of its viewers, a personal history from their own childhood, their parents', or their friends'.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will look at the representations of the future and the past that pervade both the franchise in general, and the 2008 film *Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden* in particular. While *Doraemon* is often understood as a friendly, loveable ambassador of the utopian future to come, the franchise rests on contradictions to that interpretation: a narrative that displays a *Groundhog Day*-like endless repetition of a romanticised suburban childhood, and a narrative structure that always returns to that romanticised childhood, accompanied by a visual style that reinforces the narrative's sense of calm and stability. In a drastic magnification of the franchise's simultaneous idealisation of the past and the future, the 2008 film shows us a world where power lies in a technologically-advanced interplanetary council of plants, but virtue lies in something much more ancient and mysterious. The ideal of modernity, so often seen as the core of *Doraemon*, is both subverted in the franchise more broadly and vehemently rejected in the recent feature film. I will begin this chapter by providing background information on *Doraemon*, and then proceed to discuss the conflicting interpretations of *Doraemon* as a franchise that thematically embraces the future while structurally and visually remaining unmoving in the past. I will then discuss the 2008 *Doraemon* film in depth, looking first at its portrayals of societies that connote the 'modern' and the 'pre-modern', and then concluding with an examination of its use of apocalypse as a method of romanticising the past.

An introduction to *Doraemon*

The narrative of *Doraemon* shows us a robot (the titular Doraemon) who is sent from the 22nd century to care for a young boy named Nobi Nobita. In the 22nd century, robots are commonplace, as are a host of other futuristic items, many of which Doraemon has managed to bring with him in his

infinitely spacious 'Fourth Dimension' pocket. This pocket holds an untold number of tools that perform a variety of amazing functions: there is a time machine and an invisibility cloak, an umbrella that catches falling stars, a tablecloth that makes any food one asks for instantly appear, and even a spaceship that can take its passengers to any planet in the universe.[94]

As the first chapter of the manga establishes, Doraemon was sent by Nobita's great-great-grandson to prevent the lazy fourth-grader from leading an irresponsible life that would eventually bring his family to ruin. Doraemon soon begins to live with the Nobi family, and becomes a friend to Nobita. In a typical manga chapter or television episode, Nobita encounters some everyday problem – such as having to study for a test at school, or becoming jealous of a friend's new toy – and enlists Doraemon's help. Doraemon then produces some fabulous tool with which to resolve the problem, and both characters appear highly satisfied with their clever solution. Invariably, the tool does not resolve the problem as neatly as they had imagined, or Nobita appropriates the tool for his own trouble-making, causing some further predicament that the characters must desperately (and often unsuccessfully) try to rectify. Nobita and Doraemon are the main characters of this series, but three of Nobita's classmates usually join them on their adventures: Jaian, the dim-witted but ultimately kind-hearted school bully; Suneo, a wealthy boy who is preoccupied with material goods; and Shizuka, a gentle, considerate girl who Nobita desperately wants to impress. There are a number of other recurring characters, including the family members of all the characters mentioned above.[95]

Figure 14: From left to right: Jaian, Suneo, Shizuka, Nobita, Kībō, and Doraemon. Image from '2008nen "Eiga Doraemon Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden" kōshiki saito'.

The first *Doraemon* manga chapter was serialised in 1969, and it

[94] The number of tools (*himitsu dōgu*) in Doraemon's pocket is truly extraordinary, and new tools continue to be revealed in new films and television episodes. While I could not find any sources that state the exact number of tools revealed to this date, a quiz on TV Asahi (the television network which airs *Doraemon*) on October 27, 2006 put the number of tools shown on television at 2,332 ('Doraemon to regyurā Dorabia kuizu', 2006). Presumably, the number has increased considerably since that date. Many tools appear only once, but some are used regularly.

[95] Most commonly shown are Nobita's strict mother Tamako and laid-back father Nobisuke, along with Doraemon's cheerful and resourceful younger sister Dorami.

began to be published in *tankōbon* (comic book) form in 1974. It was published by Shogakukan (which still owns the rights to *Doraemon* works) and written by Fujiko Fujio, actually a penname for the duo Fujimoto Hiroshi and Abiko Motō, who have since become immensely famous for their work. In 1973, *Doraemon* began to be shown as a television anime, and continues to be shown today.[96] In 1980, a feature-length *Doraemon* film entitled *Nobita no Kyōryū* ('*Nobita's Dinosaur*') was released, and new *Doraemon* feature-length films have followed every year since (with the single exception of 2005). According to Frederik Schodt, writing in the mid-1990s, 'watching [the annual *Doraemon* feature film] has become a national ritual for children and parents' (1996, p.216). To this day, Doraemon maintains incredible popularity not only in Japan but throughout East and Southeast Asia, and the series has also been released in some areas of Europe, the Middle East, and South America.[97]

Although *Doraemon* was originally created by both Fujimoto Hiroshi, known by the penname Fujiko F. Fujio, and Abiko Motō (Fujiko A. Fujio), Fujimoto Hiroshi eventually took over the work himself, and is often considered to be the sole creator of *Doraemon*. Many sources credit Fujiko F. Fujio with the work, and it is his name that is most strongly attached to the *Doraemon* phenomenon. Fujiko F. Fujio created many famous manga, including such classics as *Obake no Qtaro* and *Pāman*, but it is *Doraemon* that secured his position as a veritable icon of manga history. In many bookstores across Japan, Fujiko F. Fujio's work is displayed in a separate section, apart from other manga; often, this section is located adjacent to the section dedicated to the only other manga artist famous enough to warrant their own section – the 'grandfather of manga', Osamu Tezuka himself.[98] Fujiko's works are regularly compiled into elaborate collections, and dissected by cultural critics and manga scholars. Collections of his personal essays have become best-selling works. Recently, a Fujiko F. Fujio

[96] *Doraemon* has not been shown continuously since it began; the 1973 series only ran for a year, and *Doraemon* disappeared from the television until 1979. It was then shown continuously until March of 2005, when it took a one-month break before beginning again with a new cast and theme song.

[97] Strangely, the UK and the USA remain notable exceptions to *Doraemon*'s worldwide renown, despite the flourishing anime/manga industries in these countries. Doraemon remains largely unknown in these countries, except to those individuals who have some connection to places where he is more popular. Furthermore, while it has been released in many countries across the world, it is only in East and Southeast Asia that *Doraemon* has enjoyed phenomenal popularity. Iwabuchi explains Doraemon's relative lack of success in non-Asian countries by its ever-present Japanese 'cultural odour': '[*Doraemon*] has been popular only in Asian regions due to its "Japanese" landscape and the presence of tatami mats and other Japanese housing features' (2004, p.68). While Iwabuchi accounts for *Doraemon*'s lack of mainstream success, this theory does not explain the lack of fan attention from those anime fans who not only do not mind works with a Japanese 'cultural odour', but often even seek out such works.

[98] Fujiko is known to have been heavily influenced by Tezuka.

museum opened in Kawasaki, promising to 'continue sending his message to the future generations' ('Fujiko F. Fujio Museum: welcome to our museum', 2011). The attention paid to Fujiko is not due only to his role as the creator of *Doraemon*, but *Doraemon* is undeniably his most famous work, and the attention surrounding the figure of Fujiko F. Fujio personally provides some indication of the important role played by *Doraemon* in the history of manga.

Doraemon's popularity throughout Asia is a phenomenon detailed extensively in Saya S. Shiraishi's groundbreaking article 'Japan's Soft Power: Doraemon Goes Overseas' (1997). More than a decade after its publication, Shiraishi's article continues to be an excellent resource not only on the subject of *Doraemon* in particular, but also on the general topic of Japan's 'soft power'. Using *Doraemon* as a case study, Shiraishi contends that Japan's popular culture is influencing the spread of Japanese ideals to other Asian countries. Exploring the history of manga alongside *Doraemon*'s spread throughout Asia, Shiraishi argues that *Doraemon* encapsulates ideologies regarding childhood, technology, and consumerism that are common in Japan today, but not necessarily common in the other nations that enjoy *Doraemon.* Through the export of its manga volumes and television episodes, it is simultaneously exporting those ideologies. In so doing, *Doraemon* indicates the potential awaiting Japanese manga and television:

> As Hollywood films have been immensely important for disseminating the idea of the American way of life in Asia as well as elsewhere, Japanese comics and television animations are spreading Japanese ideas about childhood, war and peace, science and technology, and the future world as well as the accessible new media for entertainment often without revealing their Japanese origin. (Shiraishi, 1997, p.272.)

As Shiraishi demonstrates, while *Doraemon* had, by the 1980s, 'become a part of the daily family life of the postwar generation in Japan' (ibid., p.240), the series' popularity also spread rapidly overseas. In Indonesia, Doraemon was 'a highly popular and intimately familiar figure' (ibid., p.264), and he enjoyed similar popularity in China and Taiwan (ibid., pp.268–270). The extent of the franchise's

popularity in Asia is further indicated in a quote from Mark Schilling's (1993, p.406) article on the topic:

> The "Doraemon" TV program is currently broadcast in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the People's Republic of China, and Taiwan. The manga, including pirate editions, are widely popular throughout the region. In China, where a printing of 20,000 copies is considered average for a comic book, *Doraemon* manga have sold 900,000 copies in the past three years… The manga has also had explosive success in Taiwan; a Doraemon magazine that started as a 32–page monthly in 1976 now publishes 16 issues a year, each 200 pages long. Because, at this pace, the magazine quickly runs out of material from Japan, it has since 1983 been commissioning local artists to draw made-in-Taiwan *Doraemon* manga. In the process, Doraemon, whose Chinese name is Xiaodingdang, has become a thoroughly domesticated and universally familiar hero.[99]

While these examples of *Doraemon*'s popularity are somewhat dated, the series has not faded from the popular imagination in the intervening years. If anything, his position as a Japanese cultural icon with broad transnational appeal has solidified with the progression of time. This is represented most clearly in the character being appointed Japan's 'anime ambassador' by the government in 2008, with the claim that he would promote understanding of Japanese culture and lifestyles abroad (Yamaguchi, 2008; this issue will be explored further below). Today, Doraemon's face can be found on almost anything. Anime scholar Brian Ruh cites estimates that 'between 100 and 150 different items bearing Doraemon's image are sold each year' (2006, p.145). The amiable robot adorns notebooks, tissue boxes, computer cases, bed linen, sweets of all descriptions, and toys and books of every imaginable type. Doraemon can be found in McDonald's Happy Meals or on watches costing well over a hundred pounds. A series of sixteen *Doraemon*-themed iPhone apps can create an image

[99] For other discussions of *Doraemon*'s popularity in Asia see Funabashi, 1993, p.79; Ching, 2001, p.298; Wong, 2006, pp.31–32.

of Doraemon on your phone, and many bakeries sell bread shaped like Doraemon's face. There are museum exhibitions, fairs and musicals dedicated to *Doraemon*. *Doraemon* is more than simply a popular children's work: it is a longstanding institution of postwar Japanese children's cultures. As Iwamoto describes:

> ... The original *Doraemon* generation is now approaching their 30s or 40s, and now they are leading their children by the hand as they make their way to the theatre to see *Doraemon*. Not only has the work managed to avoid having its sales lazily booming for a short time and then fizzling out; on the contrary, it would not be an exaggeration to say that its band of readers have carefully followed it as it further expands and continues to utilise the work's built-in "perpetual motion", elevating *Doraemon* to its current position as a "nation-character". (2004, p.62; my translation.)

The phrase 'nation-character' (*kokumin kyarakutā*)[100] is one often applied to Doraemon. As his role of 'anime ambassador' would imply, there is a degree of national politics at play in this character's popularity; more than simply a beloved character, Doraemon is a character associated with the nation itself, one who is understood as presenting a desirable vision of Japanese life. As an element of the 'Japan Cool' initiative described in chapter one, the 'anime ambassador' is designed to utilise the soft power Shiraishi ascribed to Doraemon: he is the cheerful face of an increasingly crucial form of Japanese national power. In his speech accepting his new ambassador role, Doraemon told then Foreign Minister Masahiko Kōmura: 'Through my cartoons, I hope to convey to people abroad what ordinary Japanese people think, our lifestyles and what kind of future we want to build' (qtd. in Yamaguchi, 2008).

What kind of future does this 'nation-character' want to build? It is, after all, a future that has been explicitly politicised, used in a political context as representative of the desires of 'ordinary

[100] 'National character' or 'character of the Japanese people' would be a more appropriate translation for this phrase, but given the common use of 'national character' to mean the collective traits of people within a nation, I have chosen the more awkward translation of 'nation-character' to distinguish the phrase.

Japanese people', and thus calls for deeper consideration. In the remainder of this chapter, I will look at the vision of the future in the 2008 *Doraemon* film, released in Japan only a few days prior to the naming of Doraemon as anime ambassador, and given the secondary title *Doraemon The Future 2008*.[101]

The future, living with Doraemon

> 'We could call the way of thinking amongst those that have been assured that a peaceful and richer future will visit them the "Doraemon worldview." Young people who grew up reading Doraemon share this worldview.'
>
> – Shimada Hiromi (1992, p.93; my translation)

In Shimada's article on popular ideologies in Japan today, *Doraemon* is not only seen as an exhibition of forward-thinking, optimistic attitudes towards the future, but as the very epitome of those beliefs, so much so that he refers to such ideas as the 'Doraemon worldview'. The so-called 'Doraemon worldview' is contrasted explicitly to a negative, apocalyptic view of the future (what he dubs the 'Nostradamus worldview'), a brighter view of what is to come that has influenced a generation of young people who have grown up following the exploits of an endearing robot from the 22nd century. Shimada is far from alone in his interpretation of the series, and in this section, I will examine the pervasive interpretation of *Doraemon* as a symbol of positive relationships between robots (or technology more broadly) and humans.

In Japanese and in English, *Doraemon* is commonly interpreted as the ultimate example of pro-technology popular culture. Shiraishi states unequivocally that 'Doraemon represents the optimistic view of the relationship between technology and humanity' (1997, p.239). In the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, Sharalyn Orbaugh writes of Doraemon: 'he represents the innocent, whimsical aspects of technological innovation rather than their darker side'

[101] Recent *Doraemon* films have all included an alternate title following this pattern; for example, the 2009 film was known not only as *Shin Nobita no Uchū Kaitakushi* but also as *Doraemon The Hero 2009*, and the 2012 film is both *Nobita to Kiseki no Shima: Animaru Adobenchā* and *Doraemon The Dream 2012*.

(2002a, p.113). Gilson describes Doraemon as 'a cute bearer of the technological wonders of the future' (1998, p.368), whereas Funabashi describes the series as 'an optimistic, amusing portrayal of unassuming, middle-class children entranced and befuddled by futuristic technology.' (1993, p.79). Anne Allison uses Doraemon as a prime example of the Japanese tendency toward 'the fetishization of the mechanical', one of a number of 'imaginary characters with techno-powers that are excessively examined, spectacularized, and praised' (2006a, p.59). This interpretation is so pervasive, it has even found its way into TIME Magazine: 'While Godzilla and Gamera, for example, were nuclear age mutants who showed how science could turn on us, Doraemon (like Astro Boy) offers a more hopeful and benign version of technology' (Iyer, 2006).

In a similar vein, it is often claimed that Doraemon and his predecessor Astro Boy instil positive attitudes towards robots in children. *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*), created in 1952 by Osamu Tezuka, is a manga and anime classic that 'stands at the crossroads of high technology and its popular perception in Japan' (Shiraishi, 1997, p.259). Like *Doraemon*, *Astro Boy* shows us a friendly, loveable robot who uses his many superhuman abilities to save troublesome humans. The two series are often compared, particularly with regard to their portrayal of robots: for example, Motohiro (2003, p.6) states:

> Japan has advanced further than any other country in the development of personal or "partner" robots, and it would seem that at least part of the reason is that the Japanese look favorably on the idea of robots interacting with human beings. This attitude was manifested early on in two classic characters from the realm of Japanese *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animation): Astro Boy and Doraemon.

This theory has also been voiced by the well-known manga artist Shirō Masamune, creator of the cyborg classic *Ghost in the Shell* (Orbaugh, 2002b, p.437). It has even been mentioned by former Prime Minister Taro Aso while serving as Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs in 2006:

> The word "robot" is said to have come to us from the Czech word robota, which means "labor" or sometimes even "drudgery," and thus is a word that originally carried a negative connotation.
>
> But through Japan's Astro Boy or the cat-like robot Doraemon, the meaning of the word "robot" shifted, instead becoming a benevolent friend who helps human beings. In Asia and elsewhere around the globe, robots came to be understood as the "white hats" – the good guys.
>
> The impact of this situation is that countries with an affinity for Doraemon do not have workers who reject industrial robots, and thus in those countries, industrial productivity rises. In addition, you find that Japanese-made industrial robots sell well. (Aso, 2006.)

The logic behind this interpretation can be found in the friendly appearance and comic character of Doraemon himself. Far from the threatening robots that have long been a staple in science fiction, Doraemon is loveable, cheerful, amusing, and cares deeply for his human friends. Drawn in bright primary colours, usually with an impossibly wide smile, even the most technophobic amongst us would have trouble resisting Doraemon's charm. Furthermore, Doraemon is a fully assimilated member of the Nobi family, sharing their schedule, eating their food, and completing household chores. In the films released today, the fact that Doraemon is not from this society is hardly recognisable; *Nobita no Ningyo Daikaisen* (2010) depicts Doraemon flying off to the store to buy groceries just like any ordinary household member might.[102] According to Sugihara Tomomichi, his assimilation is so perfect that most people do not even perceive Doraemon as a robot; they may know that he is a robot, but that knowledge 'never surpasses a simple consciousness'; they view him instead as a human character (2004, p.21; my translation). Interestingly, in the elaborate sections revealing the

[102] Doraemon does still maintain close ties with the 22nd century (particularly his younger sister Dorami, who is a recurring character in the series), despite his 20th century life. He regularly moves between the two times. However, any inner turmoil or feelings of being out of place that this might cause are ignored in the narratives, and Doraemon is treated as an accepted member of his 20th century community.

'secrets' behind each character in the *Doraemon Daijiten* ('*The Doraemon Encyclopedia*', Isoho, 2001), several of those about Doraemon are explanations of why his robotic body does human-like things; we are taught, for example, why Doraemon, despite being a robot ('*robotto na no ni*' or '*robotto dakedo*'), sweats, catches colds, and sleeps (ibid., pp.54, 46, and 52). The *Doraemon Daijiten* thus reveals an uncomfortable tension between Doraemon's robotic and human identities, as his remarkable humanity is dissected and explained away piece-by-piece. Doraemon is a robot who is not a robot. He is an alien presence defined in the *Doraemon* 'encyclopedia' by his careful imitation (but never actual possession) of human traits. At the same time, he remains a well-known and beloved part of the human community.

Outside the narrative, his otherness is erased, and Doraemon becomes an uncontroversial member of numerous communities. Given Doraemon's pervasiveness in many areas of the world, it is clear that this robot's influence extends far beyond the fictional Nobi family. He has entered our own homes, featured on our television screens, mobile phones, the toys in our rooms, the books we give our children, even the sweets we snack on. Children may eat Doraemon and Dorami bento lunches from the bento chain Hotto Motto, play with *Doraemon*-ised versions of every children's toy new and old, or learn to count with the aid of a *Doraemon* counting book. Recently, Shogakukan, TV Asahi, and the Fujiko F. Fujio foundation launched the 'Doragenki' ('Dora-happy') project, which uses *Doraemon* to aid victims of the Tōhoku earthquake ('Doragenki', 2011). An actor dressed as Doraemon visited a number of shelters to bring some cheer to those most affected by the disaster, and some early episodes of the anime series are available to stream online under the title 'Tsunagarō! Nippon' ('Let's be connected! Japan'; ibid.). TV Asahi's fund for the victims of the earthquake is represented through Doraemon's character, and is called simply 'Doraemon Fund' ('Terebi Asahi Doraemon Bokin', 2011). This is a character, then, who is so intimately associated with caring and goodness that one of Japan's largest corporations deemed it appropriate to use his name and image on a fund to help those in need. Doraemon is assimilated not only into the Nobi home, but into many real homes across the globe; he is futuristic technology made familiar, an alien figure integrated seamlessly into our lives and our hearts.

One can take this analysis further still. Typical storylines in *Doraemon* episodes or manga chapters involve the characters facing some predicament that is then solved with the help of Doraemon's tools, and Doraemon himself was ostensibly sent from the future to help Nobita grow into a mature adult. This is a story where futuristic gadgets are presented as solutions to our problems; they help us complete difficult homework or tedious chores, get revenge on school bullies, pacify angry mothers, and impress our friends. As one critic claims, *Doraemon* illustrates the concept of technology as saviour (Gilson, 1998, p.368). Technology, presented in the bright smiling face of a thoroughly benevolent robot, is there to enhance our lives, to make everything easier – and perhaps most important for a child audience, to provide endless possibilities for fun and adventure. In Shiraishi's words: 'The intimate relationship between Nobita and Doraemon is converted into trust in the unfamiliar high-tech products. Doraemon selects the gadget for Nobita and frees him from the burden of searching for and updating information and from selecting suitable and affordable items. He is handier and more effective than a Sears catalogue' (1997, p.261).

If we reach even further into the narrative, we can see a belief in the positive power of technology manifest more deeply still: *Doraemon* consistently glorifies the potential for unconstrained access to all aspects of our world. While *Purikyua* might show technology going too far, and Ghibli may repeatedly warn us against meddling with sacred realms or beings, there is no such risk in the world of *Doraemon* – it is an unfettered celebration of curiosity, a world where all things can be known, done, explored, or created. It is commonly assumed that the main appeal of *Doraemon* is its wish-fulfilment elements, an idea which has been stated by Fujiko F. Fujio himself (Schodt, 1996, p.216; see also Schilling, 1993). One of the main ways this wish-fulfilment is manifested is through *Doraemon*'s creation of a world where almost every restriction and boundary is made irrelevant. Every place, every time, every creature real or imagined can be reached by Nobita and his friends – and not merely reached. They can be understood and spoken to regardless of language differences, their bodies or abilities can be altered, and they can even be controlled.[103] Even

[103] There is one tool that can make a creature the unquestioning servant of the tool's bearer, and another that makes individuals want to do the exact opposite of what they actually want to do. Many other tools have similar mind- or body-controlling abilities. While used in innocent, humorous ways within the narratives (for example, allowing the characters to ride on the back of an otherwise vicious Tyrannosaurus Rex, or making Nobita eager

the very nature of our world can be changed by the Moshimo Box ('What If Box'), a telephone booth that allows the user to turn any hypothetical situation into reality.

Given *Doraemon*'s establishment of a world where children can do anything and go anywhere, it should come as no surprise that many plotlines revolve around traveling to an unfamiliar or fantastical land. Doraemon's three most common and well-known tools are the Dokodemo Door ('Anywhere Door'), which can instantly transport the characters anywhere they wish to go, the Time Machine, and the Takecopter ('Bamboocopter'), a small bamboo propeller that enables the characters to fly (Shiraishi, 1997, p.239); these tools are all forms of transportation. While the Takecopter is often used to make simple trips around Nobita's neighborhood, the Dokodemo Door and Time Machine bring the children to places that would otherwise be closed to them. Once in another land, Doraemon's tools allow the children to have access to every creature comfort of modern Japan. Even in a journey to prehistoric times, each character sleeps in an individual 'tent' that appears to be more like a luxury apartment, including electric lights, comfortable beds, showers with hot water, and working toilets – all perched far above the ground to keep the children safe from danger. Not only can any time and place be reached, the characters need not even sacrifice their comfort to enjoy this accessible world.[104] *Doraemon* dissolves the limitations of our bodies, our world, and our knowledge. The restrictions and uncertainties that mark our world are replaced by extraordinary gadgets, the tools of a future where all is clear, all is understood, all is reachable.

Outside the text of *Doraemon* works, the character of Doraemon is further positioned as a friendly companion to children's education. Doraemon's figure can be seen on innumerable educational books and videos, from supplementary textbooks helping schoolchildren learn multiplication to books for toddlers learning colours. There is also an ever-growing range of books that use Doraemon and Nobita to provide information on particular subjects, including such diverse

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to clean his room), such tools could have terrifying potential in a darker narrative. Stories rarely include overt morals clarifying that the use of such tools would be wrong, although the tendency for all of Doraemon's tools to backfire could be interpreted as a warning against such technology.

[104] Of course, the characters do often find themselves in dangerous or unpleasant situations, despite Doraemon's best efforts. There are, however, a number of tools that basically exist to minimise the potential difficulties of being in another world, including entertainment items, cooking supplies, and a tool to keep the characters warm in cold environments. Even in the worst of scenarios, the existence of the Dokodemo Door means that home is only ever a step away.

topics as trains, earthquakes, Japanese history, dinosaurs, and light ('Dora-world: BOOKS', 2012). A set of DVDs for young children entitled 'Together with Doraemon' ('*Doraemon to issho*') aims to teach children skills such as manners, counting, and the English alphabet ('Hajimete no chiiku DVD', 2011). This appears to be a carefully fostered image, as the official website for *Doraemon* hosts various educational games, and the great majority of the merchandise advertised on the official website consists of school supplies such as pencil cases, flashcards, and calculators, rather than the games, stationery, and stuffed toys that fill the toy stores ('Doraguzzu no shōkai', 2011). According to one source, Doraemon's image can even be seen on school buses (Moeran, 2005, p.192). Through these uses of Doraemon's character, the series' themes of accessible knowledge and curiosity about the world are made clear, and explicitly connected to the lives of child audiences. The *Doraemon* image is one inextricably linked to children's love of knowledge, and these products represent an attempt to cultivate that love in their everyday lives – a real-world implementation of *Doraemon*'s vision, much like the toy-fixing *Purikyua* event discussed in chapter four, or the Ghibli Museum examined in chapter five.

Highlighting the connections between the content and merchandising of *Doraemon*, the general association of Doraemon with learning sits alongside a particular emphasis on the robot as a vehicle to promote scientific education. A recent series, entitled 'Doraemon's Science World' ('*Doraemon kagaku wārudo*'), has so far included books on outer space, plants and animals, the body, light and sound, and evolution ('Dora-world: BOOKS', 2012). Another series, 'Doraemon's Mysterious Science' ('*Doraemon fushigi no saiensu*'), explores questions on topics such as robotics, energy, and the sun (ibid.). A 2002 book, tellingly titled *Robots are Friends!* ('*Robotto wa tomodachi!*'), contains a manga celebrating the creation of Honda's ASIMO robot, as well as detailed information about the capabilities of ASIMO and other robots (Wada, 2002). The beginning of the book features a simple equation in bubbly pastel letters over the smiling images of Doraemon, Nobita, and Shizuka: 'Doraemon = Robot. Doraemon = Friend. → Robot = Friend!' (ibid., p.23; my translation). Apart from its bold, unapologetic message, a notable thing about this equation is that Doraemon is positioned as one particularly able to teach about robotics due to his being a robot; he is not simply a cute character whose image can make learning more fun, but a robot who should make

us feel positively towards robots more generally, who will (or at least ought to) influence our opinion on real robots. In other words, the pro-technology attitudes within the *Doraemon* texts are explicitly utilised by this book, and presented in the form of an unambiguous equation intended for child audiences.

The attempt to foster a positive attitude towards science through Doraemon can perhaps be seen most clearly in the recent *Doraemon* exhibition at Miraikan, 'Doraemon's Scientific Future' ('*Doraemon no Kagaku Miraiten*').[105] While I was unfortunately not able to visit the exhibition personally, online accounts suggest that it displayed real scientific innovations similar to those shown in *Doraemon* ('Doraemon no kagaku miraiten', 2010; García, 2010). For example, the world's smallest helicopter was exhibited with explicit comparisons to Doraemon's Takecopter, and the latest in robot technology was shown with the implication that we are progressing towards the point where a robot like Doraemon could be created. Other exhibitions included an invisibility cloak similar to Doraemon's, the latest in instant translation tools to replicate Doraemon's Honyaku Konnyaku ('Translation Jelly'), and an exploration of the possibilities (and difficulties) of developing time travel technology. The official website for the exhibition introduces us to 'the future, living with Doraemon' ('Doraemon no kagaku miraiten', 2010; my translation), complete with a photograph of a robot cradling a young child in its arms. Underneath, the exhibition's description informs us: 'Living with robots could enrich our lives and make them more enjoyable. This exhibition introduces research aiming to create such a future' (ibid.; my translation). The message is clear: Doraemon's world is not some unattainable fantasy universe, but something that might one day be reality. With science, we can make possible those impossible things shown in *Doraemon*.

The timeless world of *Doraemon*

> 'Nobita is, on his side, an ideal consumer. He accepts the way the world is, despite his daily misery, and is content with his children's

[105] Miraikan is a museum in Tokyo that specialises in showing and explaining new scientific inventions. Its official English name is the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation. Miraikan has regular demonstrations of the Honda ASIMO robot, and has permanent exhibitions on topics such as space exploration and the Internet. The *Doraemon* exhibition was held from 12 June to 27 September, 2010.

> domain. Since nothing fundamental changes, he continues to feel miserable, which keeps him in need of Doraemon's gadgets.'
>
> – Saya S. Shiraishi (1997, p.261)

The optimism for the future encapsulated in the works of Osamu Tezuka and Fujiko F. Fujio has been often commented upon, but there are other currents within the works – some that might seem to be the opposite of the pro-technology attitudes that so many associate with Doraemon and other friendly robots of his time. Given the descriptions of Tezuka's work in the previous section, the ending of his manga *Metropolis* might come as a surprise: 'Michi's life is over,' writes Tezuka of the manga's robot protagonist. 'The creation of life made possible by the consummation of modern technology has only resulted in disturbing our society. Technology may get out of control and be used against mankind someday' (qtd. in Szasz and Takechi, 2007, p.737). Tezuka's message is written as unambiguously as the 'Robot = Friend!' message cited above, but this darker warning echoes eerily around the warm images of adorable saviour robots of both Tezuka and Fujiko's works. It is an ideal that is as relevant to *Doraemon* today as it was to *Metropolis* then, and as striking in its contrast to the supposed pro-technology ethics of the works.

Even as the textual content of *Doraemon* focuses on, even fetishises (Allison, 2006a, p.59) the potential wonders of the future, the texts themselves remain profoundly resistant to change. The characters and settings that appear in *Doraemon* have changed little since their first appearance in 1969, and their narratives employ a circular structure that essentially creates a world frozen in forever-repeating moments in time.

The characters of *Doraemon* are simple, predictable, and lacking in personal growth or development. While this may be expected in American or British cartoons, it is hardly the norm in Japan; many American fans, for example, cite the complex character development common in anime as a reason for their interest in the medium (Napier, 2007, pp.178–179). Even in children's manga and anime, intense emotional trauma, growth, and personal reinvention is the norm – see, for example, *Purikyua* (2004–ongoing), *Shugo Chara* (2006–2010), *One Piece* (1997–ongoing), *Naruto* (1999–ongoing) or *Kamen Rider* (1971–ongoing), all of which have developed moving, emotional story arcs based on life-altering events that permanently change one or more of the characters involved. Apart

from *Doraemon*, long-running manga and anime series that continue to depict such simple, unchanging characters are highly unusual; perhaps such portrayals can only be found in the round smiling faces of *Anpanman* (1973–ongoing), which to this day continues to entertain children with the gallant efforts of Anpanman and his host of food-themed friends fending off the threatening Baikinman.

While the voice actors who originally voiced the *Doraemon* characters have grown old and eventually been replaced, the characters themselves have neither aged physically, nor grown more emotionally mature. This lack of development is not a shortcoming of the narrative, but instead a crucial part of the characters' endearing familiarity; as Charlie Brown will forever fail to kick a football, Nobita will forever fail to pass a test. After forty years, Jaian still threatens to beat up anyone he thinks might be insulting him, Nobita regularly begs Doraemon to produce goods that rival Suneo's latest expensive acquisition, and Doraemon remains unsuccessful in his original goal of turning Nobita into a responsible adult. There are a number of running gags that originated in early manga chapters, and continue to this day: for example, Jaian's horrifically bad singing, Doraemon's inexplicable fear of mice, and Nobita's tendency to walk in on Shizuka while she is taking a bath (the latter has attracted much criticism from feminists within Japan, and is used in a critical examination of nudity in Japanese cartoons in Anne Allison's book *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan* [1996; 19–43]). One might expect that in the course of the intervening forty years, Jaian might have grown aware of his lack of singing talent, Doraemon might have begun to overcome his phobia, or Nobita might have learned to respect his friend's privacy, but in the unchanging world of *Doraemon*, there is no such personal development. Characters remain as they always have been, simple caricatures that can be easily understood by first-time readers.

This lack of character development might seem out of place in a different story. If, for example, Nobita had become an adult, and was trying to assume the responsibilities of a job, parenting, and/or marriage, we might expect him to change in accordance with his circumstances. Nobita, however, never does become an adult. While the characters do not change over time, it must be noted that, within the context of the *Doraemon* universe, no passage of time actually occurs. However many years go by in the outside world, Nobita always remains a fourth-grader, as do his

friends. *Doraemon*'s child and adult characters remain the same apparent age as in their first appearance. The story takes place within an eternally repeating time; 'countless times,' writes Iwamoto, 'Nobita has welcomed the summer break or New Year's' (2004, p.62; my translation). Seasonal changes are marked with no reluctance – in fact, they are often met with an hour-long seasonal special of the television programme – but there is no progression of time.

This lack of change is particularly interesting given that the future in general, and indeed even Nobita's own personal future, make frequent appearances in the various forms of *Doraemon*. The premise of the series, after all, involves Nobita's descendant Sewashi (himself a frequently recurring character) sending Doraemon back in time to prevent a particular future from occurring. In one manga chapter, high school and university versions of Nobita come back in time to force their younger selves to do more schoolwork (Fujiko, 1985, pp.158–166); in a popular *Doraemon* short film, *Nobita no Kekkon Zenya* (1999), a younger Nobita and Doraemon travel to the future to learn the hopes and fears of Nobita and Shizuka on the night before their wedding. Nobita's future existence sits strangely with his role in the series; he is at once a boy who sees and knows his own future, and a boy who will never have a future, caught always in the endless repetition of the narrative.

This is a series that has continued unmoving through time, and its resistance to development shows even more distinctly when we notice that the version of Japan it portrays is in fact more reminiscent of the 1960s – or even 1950s – than it is of Japan today. The features of the Nobi family home and suburban neighbourhood in which they live remain unchanged since their first depiction, despite the fact that this setting would have already appeared anachronistic in 1970 (Schilling, 1993, pp.410–415). The furniture in Nobita's room remains identical, and the children continue to meet in the same empty lot.[106] Despite numerous threats to the forested hill on which the children play, no development has torn down its trees. Indeed, the characters continue to wear the same types of

[106] Bryce briefly mentions the nostalgic atmosphere of this empty lot in her analysis of *Doraemon*'s portrayal of school life: 'The main arena for the children's activities in *Doraemon* is a small vacant patch of land with a few concrete pipes. This is evocative of a nostalgic, past [*sic*] representing a "timeless utopia" (Natsume, 1993). It may however represent a mix of the children's imagination and their reality, or represent a liminal or transitional space that combines elements of the urban past with those that are contemporary' (2005, p.12; the citation refers to an earlier version of Natsume Fusanosuke's *Manga no chikara: seijuku suru sengo manga* [1999], discussed below).

clothing as they did at the beginning of the series, despite the fact that Nobita's collared shirt and Shizuka's pink dress look rather out of place today.[107]

The unchanging nature of the *Doraemon* world is especially marked in its representation of consumer technology. Apart from Doraemon's tools, the characters rarely use any technology that would not have existed in the early 1970s, leading to some peculiar situations: for example, while Doraemon's futuristic tools allow Nobita to travel through time and pilot giant robots, he does not have access to a mobile phone or the Internet. Even Doraemon's tools (including those introduced in recent television episodes) look strangely old-fashioned: they have large dials and clunky designs, far more similar to the computers and telephones of the 1970s than the sleek, minimalistic smartphones and laptops on which some access *Doraemon* media today. The most recent television series has introduced some features unique to today's world – for example, one episode involves Suneo purchasing a 3D television – but such examples remain uncommon, and are not present in the films.

As the characters and setting have remained the same over time, the visual style, too, has changed little. While the animation quality has improved dramatically over the course of *Doraemon*'s history, the characters look almost identical to their original forms. Unlike the ever-changing versions of the American icon Mickey Mouse, or Kitarō of *Gegege no Kitarō* (another Japanese children's institution; 1959–ongoing), images of Doraemon today are quite similar to those of Doraemon decades ago. Simple lines and minimal facial features continue to mark *Doraemon* characters long after such traits went out of fashion in Japanese anime. In Natsume Fusanosuke's analysis of the visual style of the *Doraemon* manga (1999, pp.235–252), he argues that by employing a style that recalls pre-war manga (ibid., p.242), and relying primarily on unbroken lines and round shapes, *Doraemon* is visually based on a sense of stability that reflects the unchanging nature of its narrative. In contrast to the sharp diagonal frames, pictures that expand beyond the frames, and whole-page spreads that usually characterise Japanese manga, *Doraemon* rarely portrays characters that leave the

[107] The characters do wear a variety of different clothes, but they often continue to appear in the outfits in which they were first shown. The new television series (which began in 2005) has made some efforts to update the characters: Suneo regularly wears a hoody, Nobita sometimes wears a hoody like Suneo's, and on rare occasions, Shizuka even appears in shorts. This is not a complete transformation, however, as all the characters also often wear their traditional outfits. The films seem unwilling to enact even the subtle modifications of the 2005 series, and the characters appear exactly as they were in the earliest films, manga, and anime episodes.

easy-to-read, obvious linear progression of their square or rectangular frames (ibid., pp.247–249). 'The frame composition,' argues Natsume, 'reflects a sense of security; in the *Doraemon* world, while unusual occurrences occur time and time again, the confusion they bring is confined within our realm of comprehension (and spatially, within the town)' (ibid., p.248; my translation). The series' timelessness, then, is reinforced visually in one of its most important forms.

While there have been few changes to the series in *Doraemon*'s extensive history, there have been two attempts to renew the television programme; once in 2002, and again in 2005. In the new versions, the characters gained some access to contemporary technology, their clothing changed (at least part of the time), the set of voice actors were replaced by an entirely new cast, and even the well-known theme song was replaced by something supposedly more in line with contemporary tastes. Audiences, however, did not meet this update kindly. As explained in a newspaper article entitled 'Children across the country weep at the renewal of *Doraemon*', the new theme song and more contemporary feel of the show had a discomforting feel (*iwakan*) to children and their parents; everything from the thematic content to the brighter colours is cited as a dissatisfying change ('"Doraemon" rinyūaru', 2002, p.44). The article ends by suggesting that if the audiences had their own Moshimo Box, they might wish for Fujiko F. Fujio to be alive once again (ibid.). This ending is of particular interest; in the context of the article, change is viewed not as an inevitable process but as a deviation from Fujiko's vision, a sort of corruption of *Doraemon*'s authentic form that would have been stopped by Fujiko had he been alive. The lack of change within the *Doraemon* universe, in other words, is seen as integral to Fujiko's personal vision of that universe.

Ōtsuka Eiji refers to the timeless world of Doraemon as 'the utopian-like confined sphere of *Doraemon* in which time only circulates endlessly' (qtd. in Bryce, 2005, p.16). This 'confined sphere' encompasses even the narrative structure, in which stories always begin and end in the same happy suburban setting. Disruptions to the status quo do occur – in the case of *Midori no Kyojinden*, epic disruptions that transform the face of the planet – but no disruption is able to permanently alter the world or characters. Time after time, the characters repeat the same actions in the same settings, only

to return to the beginning and repeat them once again.[108] Yet it is not an unpleasant repetition: the children are happy, their lives are calm, and the stresses faced by Nobita are presented as minor comedic problems easily overcome (Bryce, 2005, p.11). It is, as Schilling notes, 'a vision of a suburban childhood as it is supposed to be, not as it is… where nothing much ever changes and the temptations and disruptions of modern life are kept largely at bay' (1993, p.415).

We might not expect a robot who comes laden with every glorious invention of a future without limitations to represent a world without 'the temptations and disruptions of modern life', but this is a contradiction that resides in the heart of *Doraemon*. In a world where the characters and setting have not changed in forty years, where the narrative cycles through endless iterations of the same basic structures, a sense of timelessness begins to seep through. Even the films themselves circle to their beginning: starting in 2006 with the remake of the first *Doraemon* film, most of the annual films have been remakes of those from the early 1980s. The story remains trapped in a carefree 1960s suburban childhood.

Nobita and the Legend of the Green Giant

In 2008, *Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden* ('*Nobita and the Legend of the Green Giant*') became the second highest-grossing *Doraemon* film to date.[109] As with most individual texts formed as part of a

[108] One early writer on the topic contends that even the standard plotlines of *Doraemon* stories are inherently resistant to change:

> Each week Doraemon is barely able to extricate its young friend from some potentially disastrous situation – and so, each week, the young adults of Japan are advised that they are better off without such intriguing but alien things, that they should stick to the tried and true ways… The program reflects the true Japanese fascination with foreign things, but also their strong sense of the danger implicit in straying from the national tradition. (Siegel, 1985, pp.260–261.)

Siegel's interpretation of *Doraemon* is fascinating in its divergence from the norm described above; his is one of the only analyses of *Doraemon* I have found that focus on its resistance to rather than idealisation of the future. In this analysis, he captures the delightfulness of Doraemon's tools, but also highlights the simple fact that they never work exactly as planned – and often lead Nobita to danger because of that. Unfortunately, in this quote and the rest of the article in which it was written, Siegel relies heavily on simplistic conceptions of the Japanese national character to approach issues more complex than such conceptions make room for.

[109] The 2007 film was a higher earner, but both were considerable successes. Earning 3.37 billion yen, *Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden* was the eighth highest-grossing domestic film of 2008 (Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan, Inc., 2009). The box-office earnings of Japanese children's films in Japan tend to follow a

media mix, *Midori no Kyojinden* is in many ways a typical example of *Doraemon* texts (particularly feature-length films) more generally, but in other ways represents a departure from the norms of its franchise. In the following sections, I will focus on the elements of the film that replicate the same tensions present in much of *Doraemon* today, while also keeping in mind its differences from other forms of *Doraemon* media.

Midori no Kyojinden tells the story of a small sapling whom Nobita and Doraemon transform into a speaking, moving young boy with Doraemon's 'Plant Animating Liquid' tool. Nobita names him Kībō ('tree boy', a pun on the word '*kibō*', which means 'hope'). Nobita becomes a sort of big brother to Kībō, and he is soon accepted into the Nobi family. Nobita, Kībō, Doraemon, and their friends eventually find themselves on a distant planet inhabited exclusively by plants, most of whom can speak and move as humans do on Earth. The children learn that the plants have been researching Earth for many years, and have now decided that the cruelty of humans towards Earth's plants is impossible to ignore. Once captured and held captive in the plant's palace, the children watch as the plant princess addresses the Universal Congress of Plants and persuades them to use a weapon known as the Green Giant to make their anger known to the humans.

As the children attempt to make their way home, they come across a welcoming community of plants known as the Mori no Tami ('Forest People'), who live deep within the jungle and eschew the laws of the plant government. Amidst a peaceful holiday celebration with the Mori no Tami, Kībō and the rebellious princess Rīre are abducted by the plant government and used to resurrect the Green Giant. The humans and Doraemon manage to return to Earth, but upon their return they are met with a transformed world. The plants have already attacked the planet, and the world as they knew it has entirely disappeared under a green slime-like substance. All that remains of Tokyo are the tops of skyscrapers and Tokyo Tower, now covered in vines and flowers. After a long series of attacks on Earth by the plants, both the plant world and Earth are destroyed. They are soon revived, however, by the mystical power of the planet itself, embodied in the character Jii. Through Jii's power, the Earth is

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pattern: on years in which a Studio Ghibli film is released, it becomes the highest-earning domestic film of that year. Somewhere in the first five will be the latest *Pokémon* film, and the next highest-grossing children's film after *Pokémon* will invariably be the latest *Doraemon* film (information from the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan, Inc.).

covered in flowers, everyone celebrates, and the characters find they can now understand Kībō's language. Kībō gives a powerful speech to the Congress thanking them for giving humans another chance, and claims that humans have recently begun to realise the error of their ways.

The confusing and convoluted nature of this plot summary reflects the confusing and convoluted nature of the actual plot. A surprising number of events occur within the 112 minutes of the film, with new plot elements revealed rapidly and often with little explanation. This is par for the course with *Doraemon* films; while manga chapters and television episodes usually feature a single problem and its solution, the films involve elaborate plots that often bring in a variety of new characters from multiple planets and time periods. One critic describes the difference between the television programme and films as a crucial point of division between Doraemon fans, claiming that 'there are basically two types of Doraemon fans: those who like the movie series, and those who prefer the television programme. Both essentially provide for different demands' (Kabat, 2003, p.63; my translation). He goes on to explain the difference between Doraemon in the two mediums:

> Doraemon in the movies is made completely into a fantasy hero. Set in fantasy worlds, adventures unfold on an incredible scale. In contrast, Doraemon on television exists in the small framework of everyday modern Japan. By the act of lending his gadgets to Nobita, Doraemon transforms the everyday into something a bit more mysterious, but it is precisely because it is constantly compared to reality that it can feel mysterious to audiences. (Ibid., p.64; my translation.)

As Kabat claims, *Doraemon* film narratives are grand, even epic in scale, and they are typically premised around the characters entering another realm, time period, or planet. Once in this other world, something occurs that prevents them from leaving. Either before or during their entrance to this other world, they become close to one or two 'guest' characters exclusive to that film, and form a connection to some broader community represented by those characters (for example, a wizard girl and the wizards connected to her in *Nobita no Shinmakai Daibōken ~ 7nin no Mahōtsukai ~* [2007],

or the mermaid princess and her mermaid community in *Nobita no Ningyo Daikaisen*). With the use of Doraemon's tools, they escape from numerous unpleasant situations and solve some greater problem in the community (often with the help of a police force or other similar institution). Upon solving the problem, they tearfully part with the guest character(s), and all characters return to their worlds. The heavy-handed environmental theme is also not unusual for *Doraemon*, as environmental issues have featured in many of the films.

Midori no Kyojinden echoes previous *Doraemon* films in more overt ways as well, including the use of an already established guest character. Kībō made his first appearance in a feature-length film not in 2008, but in 1992, in the film *Nobita to Kumo no Ōkoku*. *Kumo no Ōkoku* shows a Kībō grown to be a wizened old tree, beyond the recognition of Doraemon and Nobita. Captured by extinct animal species, Doraemon and Nobita are held as representatives of all of humanity's crimes against nature – and Kībō saves them, noting their kindness and love towards other creatures.

Audiences who follow each new *Doraemon* film, then, would already know Kībō's future, as it has already come. While Doraemon and Nobita remained in their endlessly-repeating fourth grade world, Kībō grew to adulthood, achieved his dreams, and saved their lives yet again. Or was it for the first time? Time has become hopelessly confused in this time-traveling media mix; a robot from the future stays tied to an unmoving 1960s childhood, even as he brings the timeless children to the future, the past, and the future that has already happened over a decade ago in another product of this infinite franchise.

As the 1992 film suggests, *Midori no Kyojinden* inhabits a position amongst not only the *Doraemon* franchise as a whole, but also a specific subset of *Doraemon* media that has some particular connection to the characters or narrative of this film. These numerous texts further reflect the film's complex spatial and temporal context – for example, by posing the question of whether or not the film is an adaptation. While many reviews and promotional materials claim that *Midori no Kyojinden* is unique amongst *Doraemon* films in that it is an 'original' narrative (in other words, not based on a work by Fujiko F. Fujio), many also claim that it is an adaptation of a chapter in volume 33 of Fujiko F. Fujio's *Doraemon* manga, 'Saraba Kībō', which was published in *tankōbon* form in 1985 – indeed, the fan book for the film reprints the entirety of the chapter, citing it as the 'original

comic' ('*gensaku komikku*'; Sugimoto, 2008, pp.9–33). The confusing status of the film's position as both an 'original' and an 'adaptation' can be explained in that it has only the vaguest connection to the 'original comic'. There are similarities between the two: the character of Kībō does exist in both versions, and in both versions, he saves Earth from destruction by angry plants before becoming an ambassador for Earth's plants. This basic concept is, however, the only similarity. The manga chapter is 24 pages long, while the film comprises almost two hours of bewildering, fast-paced action. In the manga, the characters never go to a Green Planet, never face a Green Giant, and never meet the host of new characters introduced in the film. The film shows an apocalyptic scenario that is never presented in the manga, and wrestles with ethical issues that are not addressed in the manga. Notably, even the character of Kībō, who is essentially the only link between the two texts, undergoes a major image change in the film, becoming remarkably more anthropomorphised (Fujiko, 1985, pp.167–191).

Of the books, video games, toys, and CDs related to the film, perhaps the most interesting is the 'film comic' version of the narrative (Okada, 2008). Released immediately prior to the film, this manga tells what is essentially a completely different story, adhering to the same basic plot outline but with all events, characterisations, explanations or motivations, and even character designs completely changed. When viewed in light of the 'film comic', the film itself appears sombre, abstract, and even impressionistic. The manga replicates Fujiko's cartoonish visual style rather than the more elaborate style of the film, and while the film employs a serious, reflective tone, the manga utilises slapstick comedy and wish-fulfilment storylines reminiscent of Fujiko's work. Furthermore, the comic explains every event in almost scientific detail, a jarring contrast to the film's portrayal of a series of bizarre, unexplained, almost mystical occurrences.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the representations of setting in the film *Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden*, understanding the film as one element of both the broad media mix of *Doraemon* and the array of media connected more directly to this particular film, with similarities to and differences from other elements of each. The film's tagline, 'our hope moves the future' ('*bokura no kibō ga mirai wo ugokasu*'), conveys the same sense of change and movement that has informed the previous two chapters. It is different, however, in that the past seems erased from this tagline:

there is hope, movement, and the future. It suggests only the optimism and positive, future-oriented mentality that is so often associated with *Doraemon*. But what form of hope is shown in the film, and in what way does it move the future? When one begins to explore these questions, a deep sense of loss and glorification of changelessness can be discerned within this optimistic tagline. I begin with the film's portrayal of the 'modern' plant government and the 'pre-modern' Mori no Tami, and then analyse its apocalyptic portrayal of Tokyo overrun by plants.

Modernity in the land of plants

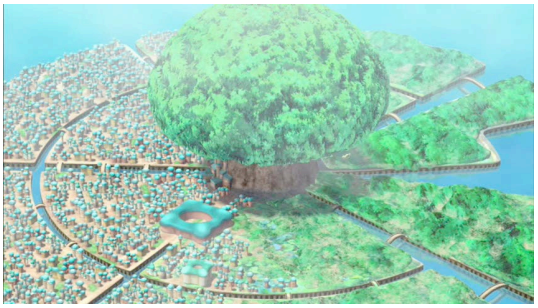

Figure 15: The city in the planet of the plants. Image from *Eiga Doraemon: Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden*.

In the extensive collection of *Doraemon* media, *Midori no Kyojinden* is just one example, a single film part of an ever-expanding franchise. The representations of the past and future shown throughout the film, however, serve as a dramatic exaggeration of the tendencies outlined above that have dominated the *Doraemon* franchise over the years. The simultaneous portrayals of an idealised past and an idealised future are taken to apocalyptic extremes in the 2008 feature film. While I have highlighted the sense of timelessness pervading the *Doraemon* franchise, *Midori* transforms that gentle suburban nostalgia to something much more extreme: a reverence of village life in the depths of a jungle-like forest, associated with legends and values presented as universal and ancient, and pitted directly against a ruthless, war-mongering vision of modernity. The franchise's friendly flow of timeless media here becomes urgent and desperate; the past is not something simply maintained in the familiar pages of a manga, but something that must be regained in order to save the planet. In the following sections, I will discuss the contrasting elements of the human and plant worlds shown in *Midori*, focusing first on the futuristic world of the plant government, turning then to the village life of the Mori no Tami, and concluding with an extended analysis of the film's apocalyptic ending.

The plants depicted in *Midori* inhabit a planet of dense forests and sparkling water, a sort of natural idyll of undeveloped land. When the main characters first arrive in the plant planet, the

bewildered group looks out over what appears to be a never-ending forest, unbroken by any man-made structures. Soon after, they are surrounded by tufts of green, which soon reveal themselves to be earth-coloured figures that circle the group and threaten them with spears – reminiscent of the stereotypes of 'exotic', 'primitive' tribes that remain pervasive in children's fiction even today. We might at this point have begun to think of the world as a wilderness, a land that is lacking in 'progress' – but just as that association has been made, the characters are confronted with a large, sleek, white glider descending from the air; the glider closely resembles the spaceships used by the plants throughout the film, and is far closer to usual science fiction imagery than what we might expect to see in a jungle untouched by humans. Already, we are introduced to the uneasy mixture of spatial and temporal markers that characterises the plant world.

The plant planet is not simply a green utopia; it is shown to have access to impressive technology, as well as an elaborate and orderly government structure. The scenes that follow inform us that the government operates in a structured space, one that employs a wide variety of futuristic technology to maintain its position as an interplanetary hub for plant life of all forms. The government is based in a tree at the centre of a clean, neatly structured city, in which we see cheerful plants enjoying the day at a marketplace. The hierarchical government is ruled by the princess Rīre, followed by her advisor, Shirā. Their decisions are influenced by Universal Congress of Plants, which consists of plant representatives from numerous planets. While the exact inner workings of the government are never shown, in one scene, the Congress is urged to support a specific policy measure, suggesting that the Universal Congress of Plants works according to some sort of voting system. There are implications that the government works effectively in a complicated environment: for example, Shirā and an officer discuss the fact that an area over the forest has been declared a no-fly zone, implying that the government has established regulations that determine their use of the land. The large auditorium in which the Congress meets amplifies the voices of speakers and projects their image onto a large screen, which indicates the use of technology much like our own. Early in the film, Shirā explains that the plants have been conducting an extensive survey of Earth for several decades, displaying an awareness of other planets and ability to conduct space travel that goes far beyond the knowledge possessed by humans today. The plants, then, have access to more advanced

technological developments and utilise government structures similar to those that guide our world today.

The efficient plant government does not, however, simply rely on its laws and technology to function. It is supported by an extensive military, and it is the military more than anything that defines the plant government. Almost every scene involving the plant government shows soldiers; in the first half hour of the movie, soldiers lock Doraemon and friends in a heavily guarded cage, chase after them when they escape, and try to prevent Jii from entering the Congress. They do not succeed in these situations, but later they do succeed: they take Rīre and Kībō from the Mori no Tami, and launch an attack on Earth. Despite their frequent failures, the vast majority of screen time given to the plant government nevertheless involves the military in some form. The military is so often shown as representative of the plant government that it becomes easy to conflate the two; the plants are so deeply militaristic, they seem indistinguishable from their military.

The introduction of their weapon of mass destruction, the Green Giant, shows the full extent of the plant government's power. The Green Giant is an enormous tree, but it is far more than that. Arm-like branches stretch out from the tree in all directions, and they crackle with green energy that is brought to the tree through an enormous root running like a wire between the Green Giant and the plant world. From its branches, balls of fire form that turn into gigantic explosions.[110] Like the plant government with which it is associated, the Green Giant reaches beyond the peaceful, voiceless representation of plants typical in American and many Japanese children's films to create an image of plants that are loud, active, aggressive, and militaristic – plants who not only speak but express their views through invasion and violent action. These are not plants whom we ought to treat kindly out of the goodness of our hearts; these are plants whom we must treat kindly, lest they destroy our planet for revenge. *Midori no Kyojinden* begins with the voices of plants, voices that shout over and over again, 'the anger of the plants! The anger of the plants!' The Green Giant is the anger of the plants embodied, and its embodiment is powerful, brutal, and intrinsically associated with military strength.

[110] The image of explosions similar to those caused by atomic bombs is quite common in anime narratives, and because of this I am reluctant to ascribe some historical significance to the use of this image in this particular film; I do not believe it is possible to analyse the use of the imagery in one anime film without treating it as one of many anime narratives that have used such imagery.

The plant government is, then, represented through a militaristic, technologically-advanced society, ruled by strict laws in a complex government system that is based in the city. While it is not much of a city – it consists of several tree-like buildings, waterways, and a marketplace, all of which surrounds one giant tree – it is the central area of the plant world, the seat of government and hub of activity. It is a noticeable contrast to the surrounding lakes and forests that comprise the rest of the plant planet.

Thanks to decades of ideologies that have positioned Tokyo as the symbol of Japanese modern life (Smith, 1978, p.69; Figal, 1999, p.24) – especially in contrast to the remote areas of the countryside and mountains, which are viewed as pre-modern – and conflated the centre of government with an ideal of modernity, with something that looks forward to an industrialised future rather than back to a pre-industrialised past, the centre/city/modernity web of associations is as established in Japanese society as it is in British or American societies (Harootunian, 2000b, p.9). The film is drawing on existing conceptions of times and places, constructing a version of a plant society that is essentially parallel to long-standing conceptions of Japanese modernity: a city that is associated with all the technological and military strength that the industrialised future could have in store, which serves as the centre not only of government but of a multicultural cosmopolitan society. This 'centre' expands to other worlds through an almost imperialistic agenda, while (as we will see in the following section) refusing to recognise the needs of the villages on its margins.

It is notable that this modernistic vision of other planets is common in *Doraemon* media, and has made many appearances before the release this film. The 22nd century is itself a version of this ideal: it is a multicultural world, in which technological advances have combined with values of tolerance and respect to make a land where all people live easy, happy lives in ways that do not harm the environment. A similar portrayal was shown in the popular 1990 film *Nobita to Dōbutsu no Wakusei*, in which animals rule a planet that uses a form of perfectly clean and renewable energy to operate flying cars offered free to all its citizens, as well as to create endless supplies of food with no environmental consequences. The respect the animals have for one another results in a peaceful world in which the police officer's major role is to sort out good-natured misunderstandings between

neighbours. In both of these examples, and numerous others from the franchise, technological advances have resulted in a better world; technology becomes saviour, as discussed above.

In the plant world, technological advances have resulted in a situation visually reminiscent of the 22nd century society that Doraemon calls home, with access to similar futuristic technology. The plant world bears certain social similarities to the 22nd century world as well; for example, placing great emphasis on multicultural, interplanetary exchanges. Like Doraemon's future, the plant government holds more power than contemporary humans. Its power, however, is of a remarkably different type: it is not peaceful but war-mongering, not gentle but aggressive, not truly respectful of all its members but ignoring the needs of a minority in favour of the majority. It is, in simple terms, home to the villains rather than the heroes. As we will see in the following sections, that this is a less than ideal form of modernity is expressed unabashedly throughout the film.

The ancient jungle

While our introduction to the Green Planet would lead us to believe that the militaristic plant government is representative of all its inhabitants, we are soon shown that there is an added layer of complexity to that simple construction. Deep within the forest, beyond the reach of the long tendrils of the plant government's power, a different society has developed. This society challenges the plant government's authority, and represents the force that will ultimately save the planet from the government's own miscalculations.

The Mori no Tami are a small community of human-like plants who live under an enormous tree in tents made of leaves. We see them only briefly, when the main characters, accompanied by Princess Rīre, meet the Mori no Tami children Yama and Roku while traveling through the forest. Yama and Roku help the humans acquire water to revive the wilting Kībō, and invite the group to their village for the night. Throughout the time our main characters spend within the village, we receive a flurry of never fully developed hints about their lifestyle. The Mori no Tami seem relaxed and happy. Children run around and play throughout the village, while the adults work together to prepare for their holiday celebrations. They do not appear to be rushed or frantic; they tell stories and

jokes, and take the time to repair their guests' ripped clothing. They are welcoming and friendly, treating the newcomers – even the princess herself, despite learning of her royal status – with warmth and trust. Yama declares proudly that they only eat fruit that has already fallen to the ground, and we learn that the Mori no Tami draw water every day from an enormous gorge that runs from one end of the planet right through to the other.

The representation of this happy communal lifestyle is broken abruptly in the middle of their festival evening. With no explanation, the animation style changes from the elaborate but still cartoon-ish style typical to *Doraemon* films to abstract, pastel-coloured dots on a white background. Children's voices intone the following narrative, which we can only assume is meant to be a Mori no Tami legend:

> Once upon a time, many people lived in a big town. One day, an arrogant person appeared and proclaimed, "this world is mine". And then many arrogant people appeared in other towns, and they began to struggle for the world. The struggle became more and more intense, and finally the world began to burn, and balls of fire that fell from the sky burned everything to cinders. And then a big tree appeared from inside the earth, and it protected the people remaining in the world. The power of the big tree restored the earth to life once again.

This legend is striking in its separation from the rest of the film. No explanation is given for its purpose; we are not shown any individuals beginning to tell the story, or the reactions of any characters to having heard the story. In the manga version of the film, the story is in fact completely different, a legend about a battle between plants and animals that is resolved by the Green Giant's physical separation of the two groups (Okada, 2008, pp.132–134). In the film, the legend is never mentioned again, and indeed, it is not even clear if it is meant to be a story heard by the characters within the film. While I suggested that it was meant to be a Mori no Tami legend, it could just as easily be a legend of our own world, interjected into the world of the Mori no Tami to highlight the contrast between their world and the arrogance of our own.

One thing that can be said about this legend, however, is that it effectively foreshadows the rest of the film. Two societies who want to lay claim over others – the plant government and the humans – struggle, and that struggle results in fire falling from the sky and incinerating the planet. A big tree (the Green Giant) saves the day, 'restor[ing] the Earth to life once again.' Through this legend, the Mori no Tami give us the context by which to understand the rest of the film; they are presented as wiser than the plant government, containing in their legend (or at least, a legend connected to them) the knowledge that will predict both the coming apocalypse and the better world it will ultimately bring.

This legend does more, however, than simply tell us what to expect in the remainder of the film. It also positions that ending within the past; the story is told entirely in the past tense, and in a carefully recited tone, as if it were a legend that the children had memorised word-for-word from a young age. The apocalyptic future that will comprise the film's ending, then, is not a history-making event but a simple case of history repeating itself, or perhaps an endlessly recurring cycle. Given the strange space-time workings of the *Doraemon* universe, we could even suggest that the legend may be describing the ending of the film before it happens, positioning the future that has not yet arrived as the legend it will eventually become. Regardless of one's specific interpretation, this legend is imagining the future as the past – an ancient, mythical past, at once shameful and hopeful, that is understood by the children's voices that describe it but not by all the power and scientific progress of the plant government or contemporary Japanese society.

The Mori no Tami may possess great wisdom of the intergalactic conflict to come, but they themselves remain tied to one specific place: the forest for which they are named. Characters or communities with deep ties to only one place are minimal throughout this film. Nobita and his friends traverse the universe with Doraemon, who himself exists simultaneously as a member of the 20th and the 22nd century, while the plant government is shown in connection to the city, outer space, and even Earth. The Mori no Tami, however, are represented exclusively through their connection to the forest. We are shown that they eat fruit from nearby trees, take water from a gorge, make their homes from tree leaves, and celebrate their holiday in conjunction with the hatching of a certain species of beetle. Their lifestyles, in other words, are entirely dependent on the forest in which they live. The contrast

between the Mori no Tami's connection to a particular space and the plant government's lack of connection is even represented visually in the film. Members of the plant government are usually seen in transit, on spaceships, airplanes or boats in locations across their planet and Earth, while the Mori no Tami are seen walking or standing in the area closely surrounding their village.

The forest on which the Mori no Tami so rely is a vast area that covers most of the plant planet. More jungle than forest, it is characterised by massive, oversized plants – most species appear similar to plants on Earth, but on such a scale that a single leaf can hold all the human characters at once. Despite the fact that characters in the film explicitly state that plants on this planet can speak and move, the plants in the jungle remain silent, still, and, in direct opposition to the military discussed above, they are always shown as benign. The characters never become trapped in a vine or have to escape from some malicious man-eating plant (both of which do occur in the 1998 *Doraemon* film *Nobita no Nankai Daibōken*, although it is later revealed that those vicious plants were actually created by a scientist from the 22nd century). When Doraemon and his friends first crash their boat in the jungle, the boat is wedged in at the top of a large tree. They scream and flail about as they are enclosed in red petals – but the flower drifts slowly down to the ground, depositing the characters safely at the bottom. The plants in the jungle sometimes leave the humans alone and sometimes help them, but never threaten them. This impressive but unthreatening forest covers most of the plant planet, broken only by a large lake and the island city that rises from it.

In its vastness and wildness, we might assume that this jungle would be difficult to fully regulate and control, and indeed, that is exactly what the film suggests. The first time we are introduced to Princess Rīre, we see her frustrated, chasing Kībō through the jungle but evaded at every turn. While this is obviously meant to be a humorous scene, it questions Rīre's authority from the moment we meet her; she is made a fool of in the jungle she is meant to own. Rīre's lack of control within the forest is reiterated later in the film, when Yama and Roku are shown to be unaware of Rīre's royal status, and nonchalantly display their lack of interest in government regulations. When Roku suggests that they all eat fruit from a nearby tree, Rīre becomes visibly angry. 'This is my forest, you can't just take whatever you like!' she berates them. Roku looks momentarily confused, and then muses innocently: 'Well, my father said that ever since a long, long time ago, this forest

belonged to everyone. So I guess that means it belongs to you too!' Apparently satisfied with this explanation, Roku proceeds to divide up the fruit. This treatment marks Yama and Roku – and the Mori no Tami more generally, as Yama and Roku are the Mori no Tami characters featured most often – as people living outside of the government's reach, in a forest where the strict laws of the plant government have no meaning. In one scene, members of the plant military themselves essentially state that they have no control over the forest: the mention of the no-fly zone described earlier happened after Doraemon and friends had landed deep within the forest, implying that the forest is not only effectively out of the jurisdiction of the plant government, but in fact actually out of its jurisdiction.

It is impossible to talk about the Mori no Tami's representation without talking about Jii – the character who is the embodiment of the planet itself, and who is also closely aligned with the forest-dwellers. Jii is represented as a type of mushroom, faceless except for wide circular eyes, and carrying a twisted wooden cane. Jii is strongly connected to the Mori no Tami; not only is he also shown residing primarily within the forest, but in one scene he actually enters the village of the Mori no Tami. Obviously a familiar, grandfather-type figure ('Jii' is not actually a name, but an endearing term for a grandfather or old man), he is immediately met upon his entrance with delighted hugs from the Mori no Tami children. He remarks that they have grown since the last time he saw them. In a later scene, when he reveals his status as the embodiment of the planet, he describes the Mori no Tami's village as being 'right around my navel', positioning the village as central to the planet itself.

While the Mori no Tami live outside the laws of the plant government, Jii actively resists them. He enters the film first as a stranger who helps Kībō hide from the princess. 'Anyone hiding him will be punished severely,' she warns, but Jii does not look the slightest bit concerned – the first of many moments in which Jii is shown treating the government and royalty with indifference or contempt. In the most dramatic example, he attempts to undermine the government by invading their Congress. After surreptitiously entering the Congress with Kībō, Jii seizes hold of their broadcasting system to amplify his voice throughout the meeting hall. His image is projected on the orb-like screen at the top of the hall. Evading all attempts at capture, he demands that the government 'give back

what you stole' (we later learn that he is referring to the Green Giant), and cautions them against the use of force to achieve their goals. He then introduces Kībō to the Congress and promptly disappears.

In this scene, Jii is issuing a direct challenge to the plant's government. He interrupts their Congress, demands to be recognised and have his requests acknowledged, disrupts any illusion the other members of the Congress (or the audience) might have that this was a contented, unified state, and mocks the state's military power by the simple fact that one unarmed old man is able to evade capture by several armed soldiers. Through this scene, we learn that this planet is not simply defined by the conflict of plants versus humans, but of the plant government versus humans versus those resisting the plant government. Jii continues to subvert the government's authority throughout the film, as he later tries to convince Rīre not to use the Green Giant: 'They [the leaders of the plant government and military] have twisted the teachings of a very important lesson into something that is convenient for them. Daughter, the crisis of the plants is our own internal crisis. If you use that weapon, calamity will befall this planet'.

The connection between the Mori no Tami and Jii provides interesting information about both. The planet of the plants itself, through its mushroom-like embodiment, is associated with a loving, communitarian village inhabited by forest-dwellers, and acts in direct opposition to the high-tech, militaristic plant government. The Mori no Tami, for their part, are not simply a group of plants that live in the forest but a representation of the planet's own alliances. Both reject the authority of the plant government, and shun its militarism. Both are aligned with the forest, and avoid the city – except when Jii enters it with the express purpose of undermining the government. Both are aligned with things ancient: ancient legends, ancient festivals, and even the ancient body of a planet.

The concept of a peaceful, communitarian village life has long served an important role in Japanese cultural thought. As Creighton describes:

> ... [T]he modern sense of estrangement and lost community in Japan is strongly associated with accelerating trends toward urbanization. Historically, the Japanese understanding of belongingness developed in a context of rural, community-based social life exemplified by rice-farming hamlets and fishing

> villages where subsistence was based on co-operative work efforts. Images of a symbolically mediated past agrarian existence have come to represent not just the ideal of community but also the good life, wholesomeness, and the moral values of Japan. (Creighton, 1997, p.242; see also Gluck, 1985, p.265; Ivy, 1995; Robertson, 1998; Vlastos, 1998.)

Given the unfamiliar – literally alien – world of the Mori no Tami, it would be a stretch to consider them representations of rural Japanese culture in particular. The portrayal of a small village, however, where inhabitants live on the margins of society far away from the modern industrialised centre, and are characterised by their warm sense of community, local customs and festivals, and peaceful nature, suggests a pre-modern cultural ideal. The Mori no Tami, then, come laden with temporal as well as spatial associations, forming the more wholesome, righteous side of a plant world that replicates established city/forest, centre/margin, civilisation/nature, and modern/pre-modern dichotomies.

The anger of the plants

The first hour and a half of the film establishes the unexpectedly complex communities that inhabit the plant planet, while drawing on the audience's assumed familiarity with the *Doraemon* franchise's human/robot community. In the final twenty minutes of the film, these communities clash in a three-sided battle between humans (plus Doraemon), the plant government, and the forces of nature represented by Jii. To understand the film's use of the contrasting worlds of the plant city, the human city, and the plant forest, it is necessary to look more closely at the ending to the film. In the following section, I will detail the world-altering events of the film's ending, considering particularly the ways in which the two conceptions of the power of the plants are represented. This battle is an extended, spectacular attack on Tokyo that involves roughly eleven different stages, and sees the city completely transformed five times. The dizzying speed with which one transformation turns to another, and the drastic, fantastical nature of many of these transformations leads me to believe that they are not meant to be fully understood, but rather to convey a more general sense of awe. I will

Figure 16: Tokyo transformed. Image from *Eiga Doraemon: Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden.*

speak of the events in the context of the explanations given in the film, but ask that the reader keep in mind the visual impressiveness of the scenes combined with their rapid pace and briefly mentioned (or sometimes not mentioned) explanations of their narrative purpose.[111]

When the main characters first arrive on Earth, they see the city covered in green slime. Buried under the green, all that remains of the vast swarming city is a handful of skyscrapers, some distant mountains, and airplanes that had been flying across the sky. These are covered in thick vines and flowers that seem to have formed a blanket over all the city's surfaces. As if to emphasise the national character of this threat, we see the icons of Tokyo transformed: Tokyo Tower is the first sight we see covered in green, then the skyscrapers of Shinjuku. In separate shots, we see the Imperial Palace and Mount Fuji, all overtaken by the plants.

Doraemon and friends eventually realise that time has been stopped by Doraemon's Time Out Watch. After the plants launch a further attack, Kībō's energy is used to resurrect the Green Giant, a small black leaf that becomes an enormous tree and engulfs everything in the area. Arm-like branches sprout from the tree on all sides, and we see some sort of energy being fed to the tree through giant

[111] Several of these occurrences are explained further in the film comic (Okada, 2008); however, given the significant differences between the narrative of the comic and the film, the comic is difficult to use as a supplement to the lack of information in the film.

roots connected to the Green Planet through the portal used by the children to travel between the two planets. From the Green Giant's branches come enormous explosions that destroy the green monsters and everything else in the city.

With the help of Rīre, Nobita helps release Kībō, and Jii generates a cluster of plants and flowers covering the roots of the Green Giant. A ghost-like blue and purple version of the Green Giant then appears behind the real one. The plant city appears in the distance; it seems that the portal has disappeared, and the two worlds have become one. Shirā explains how the Green Giant will sap all healing energy from the plant planet, as the Green Giant dissolves into a lake of mud. We are then diverted from all the action on Earth as Jii gives a speech about the power of love superseding all, spoken to a backdrop of galaxies and stars interspersed with scenes from Nobita's birth and early childhood:

> All things weave together to form life, including Nobita and Kībō – in your bodies, I can see your many selves from long ago, forming themselves one by one, bit by bit. That was the origin of this planet: hearts that love each other. Everyone has forgotten that human beings reflect and create the compassion that protects and connects all life. With the last of my power, I will now convey that truth. The universe is formed from all living beings mutually supporting one another. That is the essence of true love, which cannot be changed! Yes. The universe is full of love. I believe in this love – that you, the bearers of our future, will raise it to be strong.

At the end of Jii's speech, the world is transformed once again: both the plant planet and Earth become covered in colourful flowers, and the characters rejoice.

What is fascinating about the plants' attack is that it essentially was successful. The humans were saved by Doraemon's Time Out Watch, which had dropped accidentally as they left Earth. Had it not been for that happy accident, made possible by a robot from the 22nd century, Earth would have been destroyed long before the humans even reached it to attempt to save their friends and family.

Humanity is threatened, destroyed, and then ultimately saved by the power of the plants; at every point throughout the film, the plants are the most powerful force. Even at the narrative's end, we learn that the plants have not completely given up on their plans to destroy Earth – they have simply granted us more time. We now live only because the plants have faith that we will begin to have greater compassion for the natural world. In the end, it is Nobita's personal devotion to a non-human being that empowers him to save the Earth, his willingness to reach beyond his previous understanding of the world to form close personal connections with communities other than his own.

When Tokyo is shown destroyed, covered in a layer of green, that impressive image displays the victory of plants over humans. We might be tempted to read this as the victory of the natural or the pre-modern over modern human life, but the portrayal of the plant government would complicate that reading. The plant government may centre the concerns of plants, and by so doing highlight humans' lack of concern, but with their spaceships and weapons of mass destruction they are far removed from typical representations of the 'natural' or 'pre-modern' – as discussed above, the plant government is more similar to a version of the modern than of the pre-modern.

The destruction of Tokyo by the plant government, however, is not the end of the story. The plant government remain the villains of the story, however sympathetic their position might be, and their actions result in the destruction of their own planet. In the end, it is a different morality that wins out, a power that creates both the basis for the notion of love on which the ending is based, and revives both Earth and the Green Planet. This is, of course, the power of the peaceful Mori no Tami and their beloved Jii, the former who foretold the apocalypse long before it occurred, and the latter who maintained the power to bring both planets back to life after the nutrients had been sucked from the soil. In the end, the force that is ascribed both power and righteousness is not either of the sides with cities, elaborate governments, militaries, and spaceships, but the side that dwells in the forest and lives off the food and water produced within that forest, the warmly welcoming communitarian village that accesses the ancient power of the planet itself – the community that falls into established cultural representations of pre-modern life. In the shadow of that great goodness, two equally misguided forces play out their destructive games: the plant government, with the strength of modernity on its side, fails to predict the unwanted consequences of its militaristic ways, while Tokyo

– the symbol of modern Japanese life itself – is conquered, defeated, and only given a second chance through the benevolence of its conquerors. By this portrayal, *Midori no Kyojinden* challenges the peaceful, harmonious portrayal of modernity often commented upon in *Doraemon* media. Instead, peace is associated with the forest, the village, and the pre-modern, while modernity and its accompanying technological advances bring the peril of apocalypse.

Making a green paradise

I have discussed at length the conflict between the 'unnatural' plant government and the 'natural' Mori no Tami, but we must not forget that the fundamental story being told is of plants conquering humans. If one were to just read the back cover of the DVD box, or a review in a newspaper, rather than watching the film, one might automatically interpret the film as a story of the power of nature over the modern world. In accordance with this theme, *Midori no Kyojinden* was marketed as a 'green' film. Cinema audiences received an 'eco-bag', a cloth shopping bag depicting a green Doraemon, with their ticket.[112] The film's website utilised a rather elaborate system whereby visitors were assigned points for each section of the site they viewed, and as the number of visitors who had gained the maximum number of points grew, the site's background gradually changed from a dirt ground to a green meadow. Despite its complete lack of any real-world implications, the site describes this system in terms of creating a new world through our joint efforts: 'With everyone's power combined, let's transform the film's website into a green paradise!' ('2008nen "Eiga Doraemon"', 2008). This motto, with its emphasis on human collaboration, echoes the moralising at the end of the film, wherein Kībō urges the plant Congress to reconsider its views on humanity:

> Currently, upon deep reflection, the people of Earth have begun to realise that they cannot maintain their present state. The humans have started to wrestle

[112] This 'eco-bag', which one can assume is meant to reduce the user's accumulation of plastic shopping bags, is the only piece of *Midori no Kyojinden* merchandise that directly attempts to contribute to environmentalist causes. It is telling that this one piece of 'green' merchandise is still implicitly associated with consumption by the simple fact that it is a shopping bag; obviously, however much *Doraemon* is concerned with protecting the environment, this protection does not include encouraging people to reduce their consumption.

> with problems they had until now not even thought to look at. The modest actions they engage in, one by one, will become something greater and in the future, I know, I know Earth will assume the form it ought to have. We will reclaim beautiful nature!

These are only two examples of the many that illustrate how *Midori no Kyojinden* was promoted as a 'green' film. There was also, for example, an event corresponding to the film's opening called 'Adventure in the Green Plaza' ('Dora-News 2112', 2011). The fan book to the film begins with a two-page spread entitled 'Doraeco History', relating *Doraemon* to a variety of environmentally friendly initiatives such as hybrid cars and recycling (Sugimoto, 2008, pp.7–8). The book also included a reprint of a 1991 essay by Fujiko F. Fujio discussing our responsibility to protect Earth, printed over a full-page photograph of a lush forest (ibid., p.42). Encouraged by this marketing, one can view *Midori no Kyojinden*, at its most basic level, as a story about the plants' anger at humanity – anger that leads them to destroy the human world. It is, after all, our lifestyles and ideologies that create the tension between the plants and the humans that forms the basis for this film. *Midori no Kyojinden* assumes the audience's knowledge about environmental degradation for its premise to make sense, and it suggests that audiences ought to feel both guilt at humanity's past actions and a desire to change their actions in the future. Given this basis for the film's conflict, the forces that destroy Tokyo are directly connected to our own lives; they are not obscure fantastical powers, but overt metaphors for the environment that audiences are asked to relate to their own actions and ideals.

Figure 17: The 'green paradise' of the official website. Image from '2008nen "Eiga Doraemon Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden" kōshiki saito'.

Doraemon The Future

On the front cover of the official fan book to *Midori no Kyojinden* there is a picture of Doraemon, peeking out of a flowerpot with a small plant sprouting from the top of his head. The flowerpot bears the (English) words 'DORAEMON THE FUTURE' (Sugimoto, 2008). This image makes use of the film's alternate title, *Doraemon The Future 2008*, and is used in many promotional materials. The image gives no indication of Doraemon's frequent use as a symbol of childhood nostalgia, the franchise's timeless narratives and settings, or the film's idealisation of the ancient. Instead, it is the 'vision of *Doraemon*'s friendly future' referred to by Nakano (2008, p.114) that we see, a vision further suggested by the film's tagline, 'our hope moves the future'.

When a main character in the film is named for the Japanese word for 'hope', it is hard to avoid discussing the concept of hope. Immediately after Jii claims that the 'bearers of our future' will raise love as they would a child, we are shown flashbacks from Nobita's life: we see his parents giving birth to him, caring for him, and expressing the desire that he grow healthy and strong. Nobita here is a stand-in for all the 'bearers of the future', a symbol of the future's potential. Kībō also represents a kind of hope; he is described as a 'baby' tree, and several characters remark that he will one day grow into a large, beautiful tree – suggesting a kind of innocent childhood that must be protected for the benefit of the future. Most obviously, the ending of the film relies on a notion of hope through the revival of the Earth, illustrated vividly by the image of bright flowers spreading across the lifeless mud (see figure 18). The hope that will move the future is the hope of renewal, a dream of life and change expressed in the heavy-handed symbolism of creating a field of flowers from a lake of mud.

Figure 18: The final transformation. Image from *Eiga Doraemon: Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden*.

The multiple forms of hope shown throughout the film, however, all share one important attribute in common: their notion of renewal, their vision of the future, is one based on a nostalgic

image of the past. The final transformation of Tokyo, the cheerful moment when all is finally good again, involves the city not turning back into its current form but into a flower-covered field. Is this the 'beautiful nature' that we should reclaim? It is a world without any of the supplies necessary to begin creating robots like Doraemon himself – a world without even any indication of human existence except the peaks of skyscrapers now covered in flowers.

At the end of the film, Kībō departs and the humans go back to their lives. With no explanation, the flowers and plants have vanished from the Earth, leaving behind no trace of their extended attack on the planet. As for Nobita and his friends, they remain in the same neighbourhood, with the same homes, the same personalities, the same troubles and weaknesses. Nothing has changed. In subsequent films, the franchise returned to remakes of the 1980s films. If our hope is moving the future, it is moving it toward the past – the past inherent not only in Jii's speech, but also in the nostalgic icons of Doraemon and Nobita.

As in the passage from Banana Yoshimoto quoted at the beginning of this chapter, *Doraemon* as a franchise is often associated with a happy, gentle vision of childhood. What Yoshimoto describes as a typical Japanese middle-class lifestyle, Natsume describes as a sense of stability harking back to pre-war manga (1999, p.252), and Shibata Rie sees as the memories of nursery school (2004, p.10). Despite their differences, each of these descriptions relies on a sense of peace, stability, and childhood nostalgia, all of which is epitomised in Nobita's unchanging personality and timeless world. Nobita and Doraemon, icons of the unchanging past, are used to convey hope for the future. Like the field that Tokyo becomes, both Nobita and Doraemon are representations of a future intrinsically tied to the past.

Doraemon is in one way always defined by its past, by the 'nation-character' that is Doraemon, by the associations of *Doraemon* with childhood itself, and by its insistent use of the ancient past as a blueprint for morality. On the other hand, *Doraemon* is stuck eternally in the future, an icon of friendly robots; the character represents all the wonders of technology's potential, as the film shows us a future free from some of humanity's most destructive mistakes. A world where all is possible and bright – but only when it reflects a past so ancient it claims to encompass the origins of the universe itself. Doraemon is a figure of timelessness, displaying the power of popular franchises

to constantly recreate themselves in always new, always old forms that refuse to break from their origins.

Doraemon is usually interpreted as a representation of the future from the past. According to this analysis, the franchise speaks of Japan's optimistic attitudes towards the future, but like those attitudes, *Doraemon* itself is a relic of another time. It is studied based on its premise, or according to its earliest incarnations. What these analyses often miss are the myriad ways in which *Doraemon* is also a representation of the past that remains deeply embedded in our present and future. The happy blue robot inhabits a world that has much less to do with the distant future than with the recent, recognisable past; while the future is referenced regularly, much of the action takes place in locations that connote past times in a loving, sentimental way. Nobita's unchanging home and neighbourhood are the focus of many manga and television storylines, while his traditional family structure and schoolyard rivalries and romances dominate the narrative. *Doraemon* is not simply from the past, it is *about* the past. It is about an innocent, unchanging childhood, and it utilises narratives that glorify the concept of the ancient or the timeless. With all of time and space accessible to him, Nobita remains fundamentally confined to one time, one place, one world that can never be altered. However far into the future *Doraemon* might take us, however dramatic or apocalyptic that future might be, we will always be delving into the past. It may be our own childhood, our family heritage, Nobita's family heritage, distant national histories, postwar manga histories or the history of the planet itself, but we are somehow always brought into what came before.

Yet this is also a story of robots, of spectacular gadgets from the future, of science making wonderful things possible. It is a franchise built on countless toys and endless media incarnations, ceaselessly re-imagining itself to suit every new game platform and film innovation. An actual companion robot modeled on Doraemon debuted at the 2009 Tokyo Toy Show, becoming one of a multitude of high-tech Doraemon-themed toys available. To some, even these toys may become a nostalgic relic like the clock in Banana Yoshimoto's story, reminiscent not of high-tech innovations but a peaceful middle-class lifestyle. *Doraemon* both is and is not trapped in the past; it lauds those nostalgic ideologies it challenges by its very premise, and warns against the high-tech world it celebrates and exists within. The franchise confronts us with an alien presence that has become the

epitome of friendly familiarity, and through this character, *Midori no Kyojinden* mourns the loss of an ancient past while celebrating all the limitless potential of the future.

Chapter 7

In lands of moss-covered robots: Japanese children's cinema and the creation of ever-expanding worlds of loss

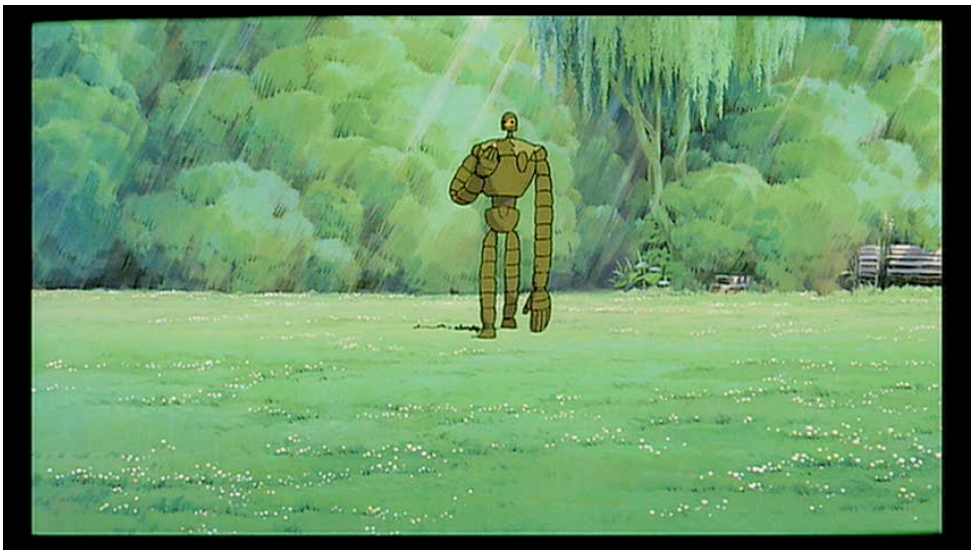

Figure 19: A robot from *Castle in the Sky*.

The gardens and robots of Japanese children's media

One of Studio Ghibli's earliest movies, *Castle in the Sky* (1986), depicts the kingdom of Laputa as a visually stunning island of once-grand ruins hanging forgotten in the sky. Overgrown gardens are tended by a single remaining moss-covered robot, who watches over the graves of his robot companions while caring for the birds and flowers that adorn Laputa's surface. Amidst the action and humour that comprises most of the film, the sight of Laputa is a sombre, haunting vision of a world trembling on the edge of oblivion.

There is something that has been overlooked in most scholarship on Japanese anime, and that something faces us with all the melancholy power of the forgotten ruins of Laputa. It floats hidden in the sky, concealed by clouds we dare not penetrate, and if found at last, might lead us to question the assumptions we have accepted thus far. These are ruins covered in vines and ornamented with

tenacious flowers, cared for by quiet robots who reach out to us as relics of a past we are implored to remember. These are the gardens of the past, of all that has been lost. If we are to explore these forgotten gardens, the untended worlds that lie sodden with loss at the centre of so many children's media texts, we will find something wholly different from the celebrations of flux that so many have discussed. These images of loss come to us not only as gardens but transform again into ancient forests, prehistoric oceans, rural villages, or the sunlit playgrounds of our childhood. They do not assume or adhere to only one form, but like all the intricate profusions of the media mix, they arrive in multitudes.

Despite the persistent focus on change, transformation, and fluctuation in anime scholarship, it is rarely asked what purpose these themes serve: what is being transformed, and into what is it transformed? Why does change occur? When the dust of transformation eventually settles (and it does usually settle), what, ultimately, has it brought? These questions have not received the attention they deserve – a result, I believe, of the way in which anime scholarship is usually conducted. When looking at an individual text divorced from its relationship to an ongoing franchise, it may be more possible to establish a relationship between the text and themes that align with current scholarly trends – although those themes are often challenged by other elements of the franchise. When focusing on a franchise's concept, without sustained analysis of individual texts, the awe of continual fluctuation seems overwhelming. Ordinary schoolgirls transform into magical warriors, friendly pets collapse into handheld balls, and worlds become something dissimilar to any known reality. Particularly when viewed against the choppy, decidedly un-fluid movements of most anime, the very fluidity of the works' content is striking. We see not only the most obvious transformations, those from evil villains into supernatural demons or high school boys into legendary warriors, but also those that seem mundane, even unnoticeable by seasoned anime viewers: characters turning into miniature, cute versions of themselves or growing to the size of a building with rage, the radical shifts in appearance that can occur when a new art style is suddenly employed, or injuries that appear and disappear in the space of seconds.

Anime employs endless transformations both radical and unremarkable. It is this freedom of form and style that has led anime scholar Susan Napier to claim:

> The animated space, with its potential for free form creation, is in many ways a realm that exists in counterpoint to the world of modern Japan. Indeed, perhaps the most fundamental reason for animation's popularity in Japan is not just economic constraints and aesthetic traditions but the very flexibility, creativity, and freedom in the medium itself, a site of resistance to the conformity of Japanese society. (2000, p.26.)

The liberty with which most anime uses that freedom of form has by no means lessened in recent years; if anything, it has grown more obvious and intense, as abstract, otherworldly works such as those by Hayao Miyazaki and Makoto Shinkai have begun to replace the still otherworldly, but more grounded classic works such as *AKIRA* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) as the faces of transnational anime. At the least, the trend has remained the same, a crucial part of anime's language that may, as theorists such as Allison and Kelts suggest, be a key element of its transnational appeal (Allison, 2001, p.245; Kelts, 2007, p.127).

However, when one examines multiple aspects of the language of transformation in children's anime – not only its visual representation but also its role, subject, and outcome in the narrative – another story shines through. In fact, with regard to representations of settings, the characters' relationships to those settings, and the role of the settings in the narrative, differences between anime children's films and live-action children's films are minimal. A child, distressed or even corrupted by a problematic present, is transformed by their connection to a less problematic past; or alternatively, another world, explicitly differentiated from present-day urban Japan, is portrayed with extraordinary detail and a sense of longing. The style may be less subtle, but the stories are similar to those that pervade live-action Japanese children's cinema, potentially forming a challenge to the accepted wisdom that anime/manga/video games represent something distinct and separate from other forms of Japanese media.

This thesis has used the case studies of three films and their related media texts to highlight the complex mixtures of settings connoting the past, present, and future exhibited within children's media. The films themselves exist as parts of vast media mixes that are entering contemporary

cultures in ever more innovative and contradictory ways. In *Purikyua*, the power of the solid, unchanging self persists amongst a world of multiple changes; the characters' physical forms change as fantastical worlds are threatened, destroyed and ultimately transformed into something more beautiful than they were before. Throughout these perpetual changes, viewers are encouraged to value the unchanging: material objects which tie us to our past, as well as a solid, immutable sense of selfhood, represented through characters' fixed personalities coupled with a thematic emphasis on the essential inner goodness of all people. In *Purikyua*, we find an urge to cling to an always disappearing sense of selfhood and personal memory – a recognition of something becoming lost, and a firm rejection of that loss.

In *Ponyo*, loss pervades the screen. In accordance with the tendencies of Studio Ghibli films, the world it portrays is not contemporary Japan; unlike most Ghibli films, however, it purports to show us contemporary Japan, and some interpretations focus on its non-judgmental acceptance of life in our world today. The anachronism of the film's setting, then, can be read less as an entrance into the past than as a more pure, less corrupt version of contemporary life – and significantly, the model for a child-friendly present is one based on the past, associating Japan's past with a sense of innocence. In the film's narrative, even this past world is not enough; it must become something more deeply entrenched in the unknown, an ancient power that overtakes every modern and not-modern element of the human world. Rather than simply recalling Japan's history, *Ponyo* shows the very nation itself obliterated by a past that dissolves its borders.

Doraemon leaves us with a more intensely contradictory structure. Even as the work celebrates the awe-inspiring wonders of the future, it romanticises the past in multiple ways. From the unchanging suburbs of 1960s Japan to the antiquity of idyllic forest villages, the past is constructed as something happier, simpler, and ultimately more appropriate for children than the realities of contemporary urban Japan. Yet despite this emphasis on the past, the future too is a place of wonder and peace – it is exciting, entertaining, and most importantly, home to technology that has the power to resolve the problems that plague our lives today.

I will begin this chapter by outlining three key tendencies I see as central to the constructions of place in Japanese children's media. Taken together, these tendencies form a sense of removal from

contemporary urban Japan, first by the simple idealisation of other worlds, and on a deeper level, by highlighting the value of that which is portrayed as distinct from present-day Japanese life. The simultaneous focuses on change and changelessness, while seemingly contradictory, work together in this environment to reinforce that prevailing pattern of removal. Any narrative themes, however, are formulated as elements of the constantly transforming textual worlds of the media mix; these worlds do not exist apart from our world, but seek ever more complete integration into audiences' lives. By creating an alternative world transposed over this one, a final level of removal is constructed – one in which distance from contemporary urban Japan becomes a viable option in the everyday lives of children.

The non- or trans-national nature of the other worlds shown complicates any nationalistic implications of these themes, and because of this, I find it more useful to read the themes in general terms: as a valuing of perspectives that cannot be found in present-day Japan, which may be used for conservative or progressive purposes (or both). While the negative portrayals of Japanese life in these works could be partially explained away as 'natural' expressions of discontentment with – or a desire to be 'healed' from – the conditions of Japanese society, I argue that such analyses obscure the potentially political implications of this portrayal. I clarify the contours of this tendency through comparison with American children's films, and conclude with a discussion of future directions for research on this topic.

Themes of place

The pervasive themes I have been outlining throughout this work may be summarised in three broad trends, the precise nature and implications of which I will discuss throughout the remainder of this chapter. Before exploring each in more depth, I will briefly state what I see as the core of these trends: first, the importance of place within Japanese children's media; second, the prevalence of romanticised visions of the past, and occasionally of the future; and finally, the absence of positive depictions of contemporary urban Japan.

The first trend is a general observation, one which forms the basis of this project's analyses. Place is not an insignificant background to a narrative that is fundamentally about characters or concepts, but a crucial element of the film. The story of *Hottarake no Shima* (2009) could not be told without the island known as Hottarake no Shima; *Nobita to Midori no Kyojinden* relies on the characters' visit to the Green Planet for much of the narrative's interest and action; and the family film *Mari to Koinu no Monogatari* (2007), in which a devastating earthquake separates a loyal dog from her owner, is as much a story of the mountain village of Yamakoshi as it is a story of a girl and her beloved pet. In these examples, and many others that have been mentioned previously, specific settings provide a structuring focus to the narrative, possessing such a presence that it often equals or even supersedes that of the characters.

The anime media mix is often theorised as a form of franchising that centres the character. This theory is based on Ōtsuka Eiji's 1989 book entitled *Monogatari Shōhiron: Bikkuriman no Shinwagaku*, which illustrates how the character acts as a medium to an always incomplete world, allowing that elusive world to be gradually seen and understood. The relationship between character and world that comprises Ōtsuka's analysis has since been mostly replaced by a focus on character alone, most notably in the work of Azuma Hiroki, who claims that postmodern Japanese culture is represented in the 'shift from the supremacy of narratives to the supremacy of characters' (2007, p.181). More recently, Marc Steinberg has drawn on both theorists to claim that the character has a 'gravitational pull' that holds together the media mix: 'The pull of the character transforms surrounding media into its image and enables the further diffusion of the character image; the diffusion of these new character media and commodities in turn strengthens the character's power of attraction, leading more media and commodities to be transformed into its image' (2012, p.44). He emphasises this point throughout his work, later stating that the character acts as 'the glue between divergent series: it is both a series of material embodiments and the immaterial entity that traverses these and binds them' (ibid., p.195).

The 'glue' that holds together many children's series, however, is not characters, but rather a concept (for example, the *super sentai* squad) or an expansive setting (for example, the many regions of the *Pokémon* [1996–ongoing] world). While anime scholarship often discusses the phenomenon of

characters becoming transposed onto multiple settings and contexts, there are several examples of children's media in which characters are replaced regularly, while the world or the premise remains the same. Works like *Yugioh* (1997–ongoing), *Purikyua*, and *Kamen Rider* (1971–ongoing) focus on the expansion of a world or concept, alternating characters as their stories become exhausted. Steinberg touches on this possibility briefly in the section of his book entitled 'From character to world' (2012, p.198–200), noting the character's position as a point of entry into its world: 'Consumers purchase character goods not only to possess the character in a particular material incarnation but also to better access the world in which the character exists' (ibid., p.199). Nevertheless, he concludes this section with a further suggestion of the character's importance, stating that the 'very participation in the fictional world of the anime or novel is predicated on entering the world *through* the character incarnation… The abstract entity of the character in its transductive, transmedial, and transmaterial unity ties together these goods and these divergent views and allows the world to hang together despite the divergences that may – and in the more recent media mixes, do – develop' (ibid., p.200; emphasis in original).

It is important to note that character merchandise is undeniably a driving force of any media mix, with iPhone covers or the ubiquitous cell phone straps removing characters completely from any given setting.[113] There is, after all, a reason that the industry is known as the '*kyarakutā bijinesu*', or 'character business' (Iwamoto, 2004). Despite this fact, the merchandise of many currently popular children's series is based less on character alone than on joining the character's world (e.g. accessories that allow children to 'become' Cures) or bringing parts of that world into children's everyday lives (e.g. figurines of the monsters that appear within *Kamen Rider*). In children's media, then, anime's usual focus on characters is sometimes replaced by a focus on a new world with perpetually changing and expanding potential. In these situations, setting takes centre stage; a

[113] Merchandise that displays parts of a setting without identifiable characters does exist; Studio Ghibli sells resin figurines of memorable locations, as well as notecards featuring background illustrations – some of which do not even appear in any Ghibli films, but are simply reminiscent of a Ghibli aesthetic. In non-Ghibli works, concepts or settings do sometimes feature on the merchandise in lieu of characters; the popular pirate-themed *shōnen* work *One Piece* (1997–ongoing) has released abundant merchandise featuring its iconic skull and crossbones symbol, and the evocative apartment setting that has symbolic importance to the *shōjo* work *NANA* (2000–2007) features on notebooks and posters. Nevertheless, character-based merchandise remains the most prominent and common form of merchandise for anime works.

character may act as a medium, facilitating access to a fantastical world, but it is the charming details of that world that dominate the merchandise and narrative alike. Furthermore, as this thesis has traced, there is also an attendant emphasis on the use of merchandising and marketing strategies that create world-based sites, events, or toys that allow the child participant to directly experience the narrative's vision of the world. These places, such as the Purikyua Narikiri Studio, the Miraikan Doraemon exhibition, or the Ghibli Museum, go beyond the possibilities of character goods, stressing the need for children to form a personal experiential relationship with the narrative's setting, ideas, or themes.

The second trend I would like to highlight regards the nature of the places shown: the worlds of the narrative are usually formed from romanticised visions of elsewhere, and most often, of the past. The exact forms of the past shown vary immensely; we may find ourselves viewing nostalgic reminiscences of recent childhood experiences, a folksy depiction of European life, ancient mountains shrouded in mist, or fanciful portrayals of the very origins of the universe. The diversity of past worlds forces us to reconsider any simplistic assumptions of the national or nationalistic implications of these nostalgic images. While Japanese village life is certainly one of the visions of the past at play – and a common one – it is only one of many versions of the past, and not necessarily the most prominent. 'Traditional' Japan sits together with 'traditional' England, Italy, or China; furthermore, these historically-based settings exist alongside fantasy worlds that may be inspired by a medieval European aesthetic, feature awe-inspiring natural beauty that does not correlate to any particular real-world location, or showcase elaborate and unexplained ancient ruins. Significantly, these romanticised visions of another world do not exclusively connote the past, but sometimes come to us as grand visions of the future – helpful robots, flying cars, and other futuristic devices can play the same narrative role (or, as seen in *Midori no Kyojinden*, exist alongside) romanticised village lifestyles.

The third trend may be considered an obvious corollary to the second: while romanticised visions of other worlds are prevalent, present-day Japan – particularly urban or suburban Japan – is either demonised or simply denied.[114] Contemporary urban Japan is peculiarly absent from children's

[114] For the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to 'urban or suburban Japan' simply as 'urban Japan'. While there are distinct differences in the representations of urban and suburban life in the media of Japan, the primary dichotomy formulated in Japanese children's films is between a peaceful rural existence and an alienating urban/suburban existence. In the context of children's media, there is little difference between the portrayals of

narratives, despite its obvious relevance to the lives of most of the texts' intended audiences. Even in texts that explicitly purport to depict contemporary Japan, its markings still often manage to remain absent. For example, in the method exemplified by *Ponyo*, any evidence of the story's contemporary setting is curiously twisted and altered in the film, resulting in an anachronistic depiction of a contemporary town. Series such as *Purikyua* and *Puritī Rizumu* (2010–ongoing) portray contemporary Japan with a fantastical, otherworldly sheen, focusing on sparkling green parks, glamorous cafes, and idyllic neighbourhood communities. In other works, such as *Kappa no Kū to Natsuyasumi* (2007) or *Nishi no Majo ga Shinda* (2008), contemporary urban Japan is shown, but it remains a negative force; it is portrayed as an alienating, deadening place, separating characters from their familial heritage and inner strength, and is usually contrasted to a life-giving, beautiful other world. Significantly, in those texts that do contain (even vaguely) realistic and positive depictions of contemporary life, such as *Ike-chan to Boku* (2009) or *Mari to Koinu no Monogatari*, the worlds shown are usually limited to rural Japan. Such rural settings have long connoted the past within the public imagination (see, for example: Gluck, 1985; Ivy, 1995; Figal, 1999); that connotation is usually supported by the films, which tend to show a romanticised rural lifestyle, devoid of technology such as mobile phones or video games, and often overtly associated with the past.[115] Sometimes, the connection between lack of technology and rural life is made explicit: in the anime television film *Miyori no Mori* (2007), the young girl Miyori marks the beginning of her new life in a mountain village by throwing her mobile phone into a river in the nearby forest. In short, while the worlds portrayed in contemporary Japanese children's media exhibit a diverse variety of relationships to their society, one particular portrayal is far more rare than one might expect: positive representations of contemporary urban life.

The settings of Japanese children's media texts are often deeply significant elements of the narrative, and they overwhelmingly convey longing for an idyllic past (or sometimes a cosmopolitan

urban and suburban life, and characters regularly move between homes in suburban locations and work/school/outings in urban locations with little to no comment or distinction. Due to these largely undifferentiated representations, I have chosen to save space by including representations of suburban settings in the word 'urban' throughout this chapter.

[115] For example, in *Nishi no Majo ga Shinda*, the main character's grandmother lives in a house in the mountains of Japan; *Ururu no Mori no Monogatari* (2009) represents Hokkaido as a land of ancient Ainu legends; and *Maimai Shinko to Sennen no Mahō* (2009) alternates between the characters' lives in a rural 1950s town and their imagined stories of those who inhabited the land a thousand years ago, creating a double layer of the past in one rural location. This trend sits alongside the pervasive societal association of rural Japan with the past, simultaneously drawing on and reinforcing that notion.

future); that longing merges with portrayals of contemporary urban Japan as a problematic place. The past and future, this world and others, blend together in these works, creating mystical worlds that are not defined by one particular representation but held together rather by their overriding sense of distance from contemporary urban Japan. This sense of distance is created first through the settings of the film, the mystical pasts and glorious futures that serve to transport characters (and viewers) away from present-day Japan and into (what is presented as) a preferable alternative. In many cases, this transportation into the past occurs more than once, by depicting a place similar to contemporary Japan but subtly nostalgic and anachronistic, and then again through the characters' descent into a more ancient world that threatens the quiet nostalgia of the pseudo-contemporary space (as seen in each of the case studies, but most clearly in *Ponyo*). This first level of distance is based on the relative lack of depictions of contemporary urban Japan, and the prevalence of spectacular worlds contrasted to contemporary urban Japan.

The sense of distance is then reinforced through a second layer: that of morality, perspective, or values. Depictions of geographical and temporal difference from contemporary Japan often operate figuratively, creating contexts free from 'negative' traits – traits that are configured as elements of urban life. Removal from contemporary urban Japan is thus encouraged on an emotional level, as traits located in contemporary Japan (such as greed or selfishness in *Spirited Away* [2001], or shallowness and lack of empathy in *Kappa no Kū to Natsuyasumi*) are discouraged in favour of the 'better' traits of another world. The other worlds are forgotten lands, portrayed as distant from the lives of contemporary audiences – but they can be entered, and their wisdom regained, through acts of remembrance. Remembrance of some form of the past is treated as a value in and of itself – for example, when *Hottarake no Shima* dramatically shows personal memory becoming the greatest power of a fantasy world, ultimately saving the main character from her own listless attitude. Remembrance also becomes the only way to access other values – values that might soon be lost through a child's development (as in *Omocha no Kuni*) or have already been lost in broader society (as in *Gegege no Kitarō* [1959–ongoing]).

The three films chosen as case studies in this thesis vividly re-imagine the past and the future to create distance from contemporary urban Japan, and in this sense, they exhibit varied

representations of a tendency that pervades Japanese children's media. It may take the form of live-action films such as *Ururu no Mori no Monogatari* (2009) and *Kogitsune Heren* (2006) that depict beautiful rural lands inhabited by warm family and village communities. It can be seen in the films of long-running franchises that relocate the characters to the ruins of an ancient world – and subsequently resurrect that world – such as *Digimon Frontier: Island of Lost Digimon* (*Dejimon Furontia: Kodai Dejimon Fukkatsu!!*, 2002), *Professor Layton and the Eternal Diva* (*Eiga Reiton Kyōju to Eien no Utahime*, 2009), or *Pokémon Ranger and the Temple of the Sea* (*Gekijōban Poketto Monsutā: Adobansu Jenerēshon: Pokemon Renjā to Umi no Ōji Manafi,* 2006). It is there in the spectacular natural paradise devoid of human life shown in *Arashi no Yoru ni* (2005), in the pastel-coloured rural lands and desperate ancient fantasies of *Maimai Shinko to Sennen no Mahō* (2009), or in an innocent child's total detachment from her impossibly bright world in *Pako to Mahō no Ehon* (2008). Regardless of the exact portrayal, another world is presented as both a spectacle to be admired and the location of perspectives from which we must learn.

Throughout contemporary Japanese children's media, persistent themes of loss intertwine with settings that are both visually awe-inspiring and crucial to the narrative development. That loss is contrasted to the present-day world of contemporary urban Japan, which maintains a stubborn absence from the bright and cheerful lands of children's media, or is shown only as a tragic and alienating society. What we have lost can be regained in transformed worlds where the past awaits us once again, but in mixtures – stunning hybrids of past and future, mingling together in innovative ways. These worlds highlight uncertainty, question expectations and revel in mystery, but they rarely defy one persistent norm: they are what society today is not, and they fill the role of a positive alternative to (what is constructed as) that reality. In the words of *Nishi no Majo*'s main character, who remembers her bleak school days while looking out upon lush mountain scenery: 'escape.'

Change, considered throughout this thesis alongside time and place, is deeply entwined in the creation of these past/future worlds. A focus on change exists, but it is change for a purpose, to become something in particular, and that something is notable for both the romanticised vision of the past/future as well as the decided rejection of contemporary Japan that it represents. To focus only on change neglects the question of how this change serves a political purpose: to express dissatisfaction

with contemporary society, often in a way that directly ties into oft-discussed social problems (for example, alienation, *tōko kyohi*, bullying, or environmental degradation). Change exists not as a state of perpetual fluidity, but as a means to an end, to fix what is represented as a broken society. In this light, the texts' focus on change appears less as an expression of postmodern or post-identitarian philosophy, and more as social commentary, albeit of a dramatic and intensely emotional variety.

The accompanying focus on changelessness illustrates this point. The changed or changing place/time/self/community in which the perceived problems of contemporary urban Japan are 'fixed' exists in children's media alongside the unchanging place/time/self/community. These forms of the unchanging either maintain a past world through which contemporary Japan remains always unreachable (as seen in *Doraemon*), or encourage the child to value that which is constructed as distant from contemporary Japan (as seen in *Purikyua*, in which a solid sense of selfhood detaches the subject from their world, and in *Omocha no Kuni*, where a focus on the individual's childhood confines them to their personal past). Change and changelessness as crucial elements of the text may seem to be opposed, but in contemporary Japanese children's media, they operate in similar ways: both elements create distance from contemporary urban Japan, constructing settings in which that society is reimagined, problematised, negated, or rejected.

Creating ever-expanding worlds

In this chapter thus far, I have focused primarily on the narrative content of the texts, but such textual analysis inevitably raises difficult questions. Throughout this project, I have considered the individual texts not in isolation, but as part of the media mixes in which they exist. When dissecting whatever trends may exist in the narrative content, we must ask how (or if) they remain relevant through the persistent media expansion that subsumes any individual text. The moral of one story may be contradicted by the next; the themes that seem so crucial in one film may be absent in its sequel. The varying constructions of place and time in these films must be considered alongside the media mixes through which they are formed and read.

The films discussed above simultaneously celebrate the creation of multiple possibilities through the power of transformation, and mourn the loss of an idealised past through a focus on changelessness. While these tendencies both convey dissatisfaction with contemporary urban Japan, they do so in differing ways, and at first glance the theoretical implications of the media mix would seem to reinforce the notion of perpetual fluidity while disregarding the unchanging past. Media mixes are sites of continuous transformation, including the transformation of a series that develops new plots, adds characters, and changes themes over time, as well as the transformations that occur to any narrative content as it spreads across multiple platforms. This must be considered alongside the inevitable transformations that occur in any media form as it is brought to new audiences through multiple venues (cinema, DVD, Internet) seen in varying contexts in countries across the globe – a particularly salient point for Japanese children's media, given its current transnational popularity. The extensive fan cultures that accompany many of these media mixes add yet another element of transformation, as characters and settings are re-imagined in fan-created content. Fanfictions may add new cities and villages to the franchises' existing fantastical worlds, fanart can depict characters in radically different visual styles, and *dōjinshi* often bring the characters into situations quite antithetical to those that they may have experienced in the official content.

At the heart of these sometimes mind-boggling mixes lies a simple observation: the sacred original has vanished from the world of media mixes. This does not mean that it does not remain an important conceptual category – for example, it is common for fans to value fan creations based on their perceived similarity to an imagined authorial intent or 'original' text (Hahn-Aquila, 2007, p.43) – but the numerous 'originals' that form any media mix, often created by changing teams of individuals rather than an identifiable 'author', defy our desire to identify and cling to a single original. After all, many media mixes today are designed from the outset to become media mixes; in other words, they are created to be multiple.

Multiplicity in the media mix is not simply a confusing side effect of the complex world in which we live, but an integral part of its existence, writ into its texts and inseparable from the way we understand them. A media mix is not a text that has multiplied (as we might consider a book or manga that has been adapted to other forms) but a text that is intrinsically multiple, a concept formed from

bits and pieces of many things. When media mixes are held together at all, it is not by the long-lasting glue of a single text, but by catalogues of its accumulated parts – fan-created databases or wikis, for example, or official guidebooks. For less devout fans (and particularly those consuming texts first published in a language they do not speak), knowledge of the series will always be incomplete, cobbled together from the chapters they have read or episodes they have seen. There will always be more out there, more we do not know, more of a world that maybe someday we could explore. It has not ended, and will not end in the foreseeable future; it is a world that can seem almost as extensive as the one we live in, its boundaries shifting and expanding with every new creation. While readers of this thesis may be used to stories with identifiable beginnings, middles, and ends, the media mix text often has none of these. Any beginning is obscured by perpetual re-imaginings, middles become regularly expanded, and (no doubt to the chagrin of many a parent) there is no ending in sight. In other words, the media mix is characterised by its tendency toward the creation of increasingly extensive and immersive worlds that replicate the boundless, ever-changing nature of more conventional 'worlds'. These worlds do not simply exist on screen or paper but merge with our everyday lives, achieving ever more complete integration between the created world and this one.

Particularly potent examples of this integration between the created worlds and everyday life can be found in real-world sites related to the text – sites where the visions of the media mix are transposed onto actual places in contemporary Japan. Whether in individual shops, often set within tiny corners of vast malls, on the stages of amusement parks, in toy shops or conventions, museum exhibitions, or even real towns remapped according to their relationship to a media text, children's media texts occupy the space of contemporary Japan. These are often temporary sites, and all exist firmly inside a world outside the franchise's control. Unlike Disneyland or Walt Disney World, which seek to create a place apart from contemporary America in theme parks where one can eat, play, buy, and wander around for hours – even stay overnight – in a place meant to replicate the Disney vision of life, the smaller scale of these sites requires them to work within the realities of the world that is rejected by their related narrative content.

Even the Ghibli Museum, perhaps the closest thing Japan-origin media has to Disney's theme parks, is essentially what its name implies – a museum, a single structure set in an ordinary park in the

outskirts of Tokyo. In fact, rather than emphasising its distance from everyday life, the website at which one can buy tickets for the Ghibli Museum states that the museum is 'buried in the green of Musashino' ('Mitaka no Mori Jiburi Bijutsukan', 2012; my translation).[116] In other words, its connection to the world outside its walls is positioned as a feature of its appeal. The highlighting of the Ghibli Museum's location represents a marked contrast to the phrases used on the Disney website, which, for example, describe Disneyland Park as 'the place where imagination is the destination' ('*Disneyland*® Park', 2012), effectively positioning the park as an abstract imaginative realm existing apart from any broader environment. The same tendency is shown again in a video on a page encouraging visitors to stay at a Walt Disney World hotel: the cheery voiceover emphasises the convenience of having your luggage brought directly from the airport to your room, allowing you more time to 'get to the magic' ('Why stay at a Disney Resort hotel?', 2012). This phrase constructs Walt Disney World as a place inherently separate from its geographical position – it is, rather, 'the magic', a manifestation of a concept that cannot be mapped and is removed from any singular physical location.

Walt Disney World outwardly attempts to disassociate itself from contemporary America, creating an alternative world based on complete disconnection from its surroundings. That Japanese children's media seeks to place itself within the context of contemporary Japan may seem to contradict claims of its world-creating qualities, but is in fact a crucial characteristic of these qualities; the worlds are integrated into our reality, reshaping the contours of this world through visions of another. Small tokens depicting ancient spirits or temporary experiences of a rural idyll allow audiences to engage in removal from this society while functioning as a part of it. Rather than geographically separated, the removal operates as an emotional, mental, or moral remoteness from urban Japan. As the lack of positive depictions of present-day Japan forms one layer of removal from that world, and the construction of moral frameworks inspired by (what is positioned as) other than contemporary Japan forms the second, the integration of media texts into everyday life can be seen as a third layer of distance from contemporary urban Japan. This third layer operates by establishing

[116] The equivalent English page renders this sentence in a way that even more strongly suggests the museum's correspondence to the natural world: 'The museum may look as if it is a part of the nature [*sic*] surrounded by the green of INOKASHIRA-ONSHI PARK' ('Ghibli Museum, Mitaka', 2012).

accessible sites/tokens of difference that blur the boundaries between everyday life and fictional text. Removal from contemporary Japan is made possible, without having to resort to time-travel or even international travel.

Replicating the usual imagination of tourism, the towns and locations important to children's media are positioned as relics of another time, beautiful sights that can remove us from the mundane realities of our life, and/or spectacles unlike that which we can ordinarily experience. As the films, video games, and manga allow us to imagine alternative worlds at a distance, real-world locations encourage us to experience and play with these possibilities in the context of contemporary Japan. Some of these locations are small: the dangling vines of Donguri Garden stores, or the pink plastic confines of a Purikyua Narikiri Studio, are simple stores within large shopping complexes, and it is that very position embedded in everyday consumer environments that provides a platform for their particular visions of the past and future, of personal and national identities. Some, such as the towns of Tomo no Ura, *Mari to Koinu*'s Yamakoshi, and *Hottarake no Shima*'s Iruma, take the form of already existing locations, and make maps available in their tourist centres featuring the sites in the town related to the film. Through this common tourism strategy, the towns are effectively re-imagined according to narratives of national erasure and social alienation. In each of these examples, separation from what are positioned as the norms of contemporary Japan – while never in fact leaving contemporary Japan – is made possible.

Media mix texts reach out beyond the usual purveyors of media entertainment, unwilling to confine themselves to the safe distance of pages or screens. Positioning themselves inside the parameters of contemporary life, they re-create that world according to the imaginings of the text. Shops are transformed into whimsical gardens, the spectacular potential of *Doraemon*'s imagined future is exhibited within museum walls, and tourism is encouraged to towns that represent Ghibli's image of what the world ought to be. These elements of the media mix text not only exist within the contextual framework of contemporary Japanese media cultures, but also as literal geographical locations in contemporary Japan. By creating spaces that are simultaneously parts of contemporary Japan and interwoven with imaginings of distance from it, such locations facilitate removal in the context of everyday life.

These strategies effectively create an alternative world transposed over contemporary urban Japan, carving out sites of difference to the world they inhabit. It is a world of merchandise, events, and sites that connote another life – an always accessible, always present other world operating in the context of this one, but characterised by its distance from it. These sites of difference do not (as in the Disney World model) reject their social context entirely, but instead allow participants to keep items that connote removal at their fingertips, take just a short drive or train ride to enter locations that represent another life, or participate in events that bring a different world to a local convention hall or theme park. These strategies create the potential to operate as a member of contemporary society, while possessing values, hopes, and, of course, merchandise that are constructed as opposed to it.

Nostalgia for a borderless world

A particularly noticeable element of the alternative worlds that pervade Japanese children's media is their diverse nature. Rather than focusing on a specifically Japanese romanticised past, many of the pasts involve recognition of a transnational world. Along with the pasts of non-Japanese nations, stories also often feature a non-specific universalised past that rejects the nation in favour of an all-encompassing single world history, or a Japanese past that focuses on ethnic minority groups such as the Okinawans or Ainu.[117] The formation of deep, emotional connections to communities outside the main character's own is a common theme. It is important to approach this observation with a degree of caution; as discussed by Iwabuchi (2006, p.22), themes of national hybridism have been used for nationalistic purposes in recent Japanese sociopolitical discourse. The transnational worlds celebrated by some of these films, then, could be interpreted as (and used to reinforce) a form of nationalism that positions Japan as more liberal, more globalised than its others. These themes can be read as an

[117] See, for example, *Kappa no Kū to Natsuyasumi*, which ends with the kappa Coo moving to Okinawa to enjoy a natural wonderland he cannot find in other areas of Japan, or *Ururu no Mori no Monogatari*, in which young children follow an ancient Ainu map to make their dreams come true – the map ultimately leads them to a mystical location through which they are guided by a mysterious Ainu man. The Ainu and Okinawans have for many decades been constructed as denizens of the past (Morris-Suzuki, 1998; 28–34); to represent them in this light is not a revolutionary portrayal of these groups, but rather a stereotypical one. Nevertheless, their inclusion emphasises the diversity of Japanese society in contrast to the perception (regrettably still common today) that Japan is an ethnically homogeneous country.

extension of Japan's 'internationalisation' project of the 1990s, a surface form of international awareness that ultimately promotes a nationalist agenda.[118]

It would be naïve to see the transnational focus of these media as a form of progressive multicultural awareness, comprised as it is of ethnic and national stereotypes set alongside a rather self-congratulatory liberalism, but we are nevertheless presented with a desire to reach beyond clear national boundaries. These are works that complicate concepts of the nation's homogeneity, admire the exoticised beauty of other nations, acknowledge the impact of transnational cultural flows in the lives of young people today, and/or self-consciously address their messages to multiple communities both within and outside of Japan. These achievements may serve a variety of political and economic purposes, depending on their exact implementation; they do, however, envision many differing communities, geographical locations, histories, and nations as being of potentially great consequence to the lives of individual Japanese children.

In these transnational worlds, the past is not forgotten; on the contrary, the past may form the point of transnational awareness (for example, in stories that use a non-Japanese foundation for their vision of the past, as in Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* [2004] or the recent film adaptation of Osamu Tezuka's *Buddha* [2011]), or it may be implicitly recognised in a universalising rhetoric of origins (as in Jii's speech in *Midori no Kyojinden* or, less explicitly, the prehistoric sea of *Ponyo*). This trend may be best exemplified by the twenty-eighth episode of *Fresh Purikyua!*, 'Precious memories! Memories of Grandpa!!', in which Rabu finds out the origin of her name from her late grandfather during a time-traveling trip to her childhood. Rabu's grandfather, a tatami maker, claims that he is determined to create each tatami 'with love', and therefore rejects machine-made tatami. He uses this goal to explain his choice to name her Rabu ('Love') – the name represents his hope that she will create something with love – and when asked why he chose the English word, he answers: '"*Ai*" is a good word, but the word "love" is used more across the wider world'. At the end of the episode, Rabu summarises the inspiration she takes from this memory: 'Someday, I want to be a person who

[118] For an in-depth discussion of the nationalistic elements of Japan's *kokusaika*, or 'internationalisation', project, see Befu and Mannari's *The Challenge of Japan's Internationalization: Organization and Culture* (1983). A short summary of this idea can also be found in Ivy's book *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (1995, p.3).

can fill the hearts of people across the world with love'. In other words, her name connects her to a transnational community, and inspires her to understand her aspirations in a global, rather than exclusively national, context. The connections formed to transnational communities in these narratives are not positioned in opposition to an unchanging national past, but as the very marker of past wisdom to be remembered. The transnational is constructed as yet another form of past memory threatened by a more problematic present. In Jii's phrasing in *Midori no Kyojinden*, 'everyone has forgotten' that the origins of the universe are love; his sacrifice that saves the day is ultimately a form of remembering, a universalised remembering that becomes the planet's only hope. The deepest form of 'change' or 'fluidity' celebrated within these texts – that which glorifies the potential for reaching out beyond national, geographical, familial, or personal boundaries – still strongly implicates notions of loss, memory, and changelessness.

In Hillenbrand's analysis of nostalgia in East Asian film and literature, she notes a common 'penchant for what might be called "transnational nostalgia", which is both a spatial and a temporal flight from the city of recent recall' (2010, p.390). While she gives the examples of 'Japan's yearning for the pristine rural idylls of South East Asia which came to the fore in the 1980s', along with 'postcolonial East Asia's longing for the 1960s campus world of Murakami Haruki' (ibid.), this same penchant pervades the screens of Japanese children's cinema, albeit often in more fantastical forms. The past shown in children's films may not be Japan's past, but in such cases, Japan's absence only reinforces a sense of removal from contemporary Japan, making the settings further detached from what Hillenbrand terms 'the city of recent recall'. The multicultural and transnational is acknowledged through sentimental portrayals of connection to the other – an other that is impossible, or at least very difficult, to reach in the context of contemporary urban Japan. These texts reinforce the sense that geographical, temporal, and emotional distance from contemporary Japan is desirable, and that learning from perspectives other than those found in Japanese urban society may be crucial to the child and/or their world. The positive potential of another world lies in its very difference from contemporary urban Japan.

Questioning the inherent alienation of Japanese society

Children's media primarily conceives of contemporary urban Japan as an alienating place correlated to negative sentiments; this conception is continually and powerfully reiterated throughout the media regularly consumed by children across the country. Claims of Japanese society's fundamentally alienating nature have become so thoroughly ingrained in mainstream discourse that even careful scholarship rarely questions their truth, but perhaps the time has come to look more closely at these claims. Napier describes the concept of the doll in *otaku* culture as 'a defense against the emptiness (*kyomu*) that seems to swirl around much of modern Japanese life' (2008, p.260). Allison claims: 'Increasingly Japan has become an "abstract society" where everything is done by pushing buttons. For kids socialized into this environment, video games are an appropriate form of play. No wonder they constitute not only a popular pastime but, for more and more children, their "biggest friend"' (2006a, p.81). A common variation on this theme is the notion that media or merchandise with nostalgic elements serves to help individuals 'heal from' or 'cope with' modern Japanese society, as if such media arises from – and is appealing to audiences because of – a natural and universally-held well of negative sentiments towards Japanese urban life. Hiroshi Yamanaka, discussing nostalgia in Hayao Miyazaki's films, uses claims about the state of Japanese society to analyse the appeal of Miyazaki's works; he suggests that they provide a '"secular religious" myth that provides psychological healing to those Japanese people suffering from an ongoing identity crisis' in which '[f]eelings of uncertainty and anxiety about the future prevail' (2008, p.255). Yamanaka concludes that Japanese people 'empathize with' *Spirited Away*, 'which is filled with nostalgia for a holistic rather than fragmented community, one which values cooperation over competition, and promises renewal through the mobilization of familiar and thus comforting Japanese cultural resources' (ibid.). Christine Yano (2002, p.183) concludes her book on Japanese enka music on a similar note:

> The rapid change, the very ephemerality of contemporary Japan is often bewildering, especially in the eyes of older Japanese men and women, who have lived through prewar, wartime, and postwar difficulties and disappointments. It

> is this bewilderment, in part, that drives audiences to enka performances. Here, change is managed through nostalgia.

These analyses frame Japanese society as inherently alienating, and draw on that assumption when conducting research on Japanese media. The content of the films analysed in this thesis, however, should lead us to question the assumption of Japan's inherent alienation. Contemporary urban society is persistently, dramatically, and rigorously constructed as the location of things lost, deadened, and corrupt – particularly in films designed to impart morals and a sense of the world's structure onto young children. In light of this construction, scholarship addressing the relationship between media and social problems could benefit from exploring the possibility that this is not only a natural reaction to the experiences of individuals, but part of a pervasive moral framework that accepts only one particular type of relationship between the individual and society as appropriate.

Assuming the inherently alienating state of Japanese society – while either not mentioning or remaining unaware of its widespread construction in children's media – can weaken scholarly work on children's media, as illustrated by Timothy Iles' work on Ghibli's 'ideal self' (2008, pp.185–212). Iles argues that Ghibli's works portray worlds in which an individual's 'ideal self' can be cultivated, suggesting the possibility of positive change: '… Studio Ghibli's films offer with veracity and validity an especially durable hope. By proposing a constructive, redemptive, and possible community within its films, and by informing that community with a sincere altruism, Studio Ghibli… offers an alternative vision of the world, a vision capable of inspiration' (ibid., p.201). Iles' analysis focuses on Ghibli's narratives and characters; by not considering the nature of its 'ideal' worlds more deeply, he misses an important corollary to his thesis. The very act of having to create through animation a world capable of fostering an ideal self implies that this world *cannot* foster an ideal self. The ideal self can grow in another world precisely because it is another world – because it is removed from the problems that plague this world. As Iles himself notes: '*Majo no takkyūbin* [*Kiki's Delivery Service*] is set in a world infused with European "charm" and fantasy. In fact it is possible to say that this coming of age story has been *displaced* from Japan to a site of obviously idealised fantasy the better to highlight its creation of a "perfect space" in which its characters will grow and develop' (ibid.,

p.193; emphasis in original). Kiki's 'perfect space' cannot exist in Japan, and thus in order to foster positive growth, Kiki must be moved to a romanticised dream of Europe. The possibility for change exists, but only elsewhere. Furthermore, while the ideal self may be able to develop in an ideal space, the reverse is also true: corrupt spaces cause a corrupt self to develop, as shown vividly in *Tales from Earthsea* (2006), *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Pom Poko* (1994), and *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), all of which show deep corruption in individuals living in societies defined by greed, disrespect for life, and/or war. Iles undoubtedly sees this as natural, given his feelings about the alienating nature of Japan: '… [U]rban crowding, the commodifying influences of consumer culture, and the scheduled, almost regimented, predictability of the career day… alienate modern urban dwellers from not only the natural world but more significantly from the community around them and ultimately from their own sense of individuated self-identity, as well' (ibid., 138). If we question Iles' views about the fundamentally alienating nature of contemporary urban Japan, however, or his strict division between the 'natural' and urban world, his conclusion about Ghibli's films may also be called into question.

It is worth questioning the predominant analysis that Japanese urban society is so innately alienating that dissatisfaction naturally seeps into media (or alternatively, that the alienation of contemporary life spurs dissatisfied individuals to seek out other worlds where they can find a sense of healing and community). While this may be the case in some instances, the naturalisation of these widespread media portrayals obscures their political implications. The findings of this thesis suggest that contemporary life is so frequently portrayed as a negative force that this has become an accepted, even expected media representation. This representation permeates contemporary Japanese children's media, and through it, children from a very young age onwards are familiarised with a wide array of perceived social ills and asked to value personal differentiation from them – especially by developing a sense of connection to a romanticised past devoid of those ills. This is not to say that this message will be read and accepted by all children, or that it does not sometimes speak profoundly to children's experiences. Rather, I simply wish to point out that scholars' own positioning of Japanese society as alienating, with its attendant conclusions that media/merchandise help audiences 'cope with' or 'heal from' that inherent alienation, is not a helpful way of approaching the issue. We should also examine

how contemporary urban Japan is represented as too flawed to support positive growth, and how asking children to value that which is based on another (past) world is represented as a solution to this problem. That children are repeatedly implored to relate to contemporary urban Japan in one particular set of ways is an observation that could be incorporated into scholarship on how Japanese media addresses social problems.

It is not my intention to debate the 'true' nature of Japanese society, as if such a thing exists; one might assume that the experience of living in urban Japan depends a great deal on the situation in which one is living, and that at least some of Tokyo's approximately twelve million residents enjoy living in the city. What is interesting, however, is that the latter construction is missing from available media for children. When contemporary urban life is presented, it is almost always as something corrupting, psychologically damaging, or distressing to the children living within it. More frequently, contemporary urban life is not presented at all, which brings us to the crux of the issue: the widespread media construction that positions society as too corrupt even to be shown to children, and the positioning of a gentle, communitarian rural past, a peaceful, cosmopolitan future, the mysterious beauty of an ancient civilisation or even an apocalyptic disaster as more child-appropriate than the realities of most child viewers' lives.

The absence of contemporary Japan in children's media texts, and the creation of other worlds in its stead, indicates an ideal of removal – figured as geographical, temporal, and emotional – from what are constructed as the 'norms' of urban life. As illustrated by the example of *Gegege no Kitarō* used in the introduction to this thesis, it is knowledge of another (past) world that can save us from the faults of this one. The lack of portrayal of Japanese life not located in mountain villages or made sparkling pink and glamorous can be seen on one hand as a fun, whimsical, and playfully childlike take on life: the world becomes something enchanted, more colourful and exciting than one can expect from everyday reality, full of beautiful visions and strange creatures that are bound to inspire the imaginations of their child audiences. On the other hand, this peaceful enchantment conceals a less happy, and more overtly political, impulse. It represents the concept that contemporary urban life is not the world that children will want to (or ought to) view, and not the location of attitudes/behaviour/morals that children should seek to emulate – that children, in order to improve

their world or their selves (or both), must cultivate distance from the known realities of contemporary urban Japan, and foster connection to alternative worlds.

Place in American children's cinema

At this late point in my project, I would like to attempt some reflection on the way the themes and issues I have observed in contemporary Japanese children's cinema relate to those dealt with in American children's cinema. Comparative cultural studies is often a difficult pursuit: it is easy to fall into the trap of exaggerating differences or, on the other end of the spectrum, of oversimplifying differences to make them appear to be similarities. Nevertheless, viewing the tendencies discussed throughout this thesis alongside a different model allows us to consider their characteristics in a new light. American children's films by major studios such as Disney and DreamWorks are in general the most pervasive and well known of national children's cinemas worldwide, making them particularly relevant subjects for study. Many have noted that discussions of America's cultural hegemony are overly simplistic and conceal the importance of other national cinemas and transnational cinema, as well as the transnational nature of much of American cinema.[119] For the sake of choosing a single national cinema as a point of comparison, however, America's continued prominence on the transnational cultural stage, particularly with regard to its children's film industry, makes it a particularly useful example of children's cinema in a non-Japanese context. It is also important to recognise that the complex media flows between Japan and America have resulted in an environment wherein the children's media cultures of either country encompass media content from both countries; the children's media industries of both Japan and America take strategies, inspiration, and even content from the other, and concrete collaborations are increasingly common.

In the mixed environments of Japanese and American children's media cultures, marked by the well-known and longstanding popularity of American media in Japan, as well as the more recent but explosive trend towards Japanese media in America, some identifiable thematic distinctions still

[119] See, for example: Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996; Shohat and Stam, 2003; Iwabuchi, 2004; Ezra and Rowden, 2006; Hunt and Wing-Fai, 2008.

remain. There are the obvious distinctions in content; for example, the almost obsessive preoccupation with stories about learning to believe in oneself or follow one's heart in American children's cinema, which is not emphasised to such an extent in Japanese children's cinema.[120] Similar differences exist in topics with clear significance to this thesis: for example, stories that ask us to treasure and remember our past are uncommon in American cinema, and when nostalgia exists (as many have interpreted the version of America shown in Disney films)[121] it is a subtle nostalgia, present in lovingly-portrayed backdrops of small town Americana or conservative gender roles. The longing that drives many Japanese children's films is rarely present in their American equivalents; apocalyptic tales of the vengeance of a forgotten past probably do exist in American children's films, but they are rare, and certainly do not pervade the industry in the way they do in Japan.

More common in recent years are brightly-coloured, cheerful portrayals of contemporary American life such as *High School Musical* (2006) or the TV series *Hannah Montana* (2006–2011). These stories not only show contemporary American life, but dwell on and exaggerate its recognisable elements (the popular cheerleader, the cool basketball player) to such an absurd degree that it must be seen as either a high camp mockery of that life or an almost fetishistic glamorisation of it. Regardless of one's interpretation, these works place us firmly within the context of contemporary American life, and even engage in a prolonged fixation on the norms and standards of that world.

That same fixation can be seen in the recent flurry of children's films utilising pop-culture references and clever jabs at the norms of today's world; for example, those seen in *Shrek* (2001), *Madagascar* (2005), and *Monsters vs. Aliens* (2009). By creating clear connections between the world of the narrative and the world in which the child audience lives, even in stories such as *Shrek* that would unquestionably be classified as fantasy, these films both emphasise their ability to relate to children's experiences and encourage children to regularly obtain up-to-date knowledge about the

[120] 'Follow your heart' morals are by no means uncommon in Japanese children's cinema, and it would be erroneous to claim that they reflect some element of American culture that is not present in Japanese culture. In Japanese children's cinema, however, these morals exist alongside a variety of others, including many that focus on the value of friendship, caring for the environment, or treasuring life. In American children's cinema, the emphasis on 'following your heart' is found with such frequency that other potential messages are essentially excluded. When alternatives do appear, they are often represented through the construction of personal fulfilment by achieving one's goals (for example, *How to Train Your Dragon* [2010] uses a boy's sense of not belonging in the aggressive culture of his community to tell a story that encourages treating the other with respect and compassion).

[121] For example, see Cross, 2004, pp.114–116; Budd, 2005, p.2; Giroux and Pollock, 2010.

cultural world in which they live. In so doing, the films become preoccupied with the shape of that world, including its celebrities, products, trends, and values. While I have outlined the regular calls in Japanese children's media to more deeply connect to the past, one might say that many American films entreat children to more deeply connect to the present.[122]

Nowhere is this more obvious than the recent spate of films that are formed from an extended joke based on their repurposing of pop-culture trends, dramatically subverting a common trope or genre. For example, *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) may be seen as a devoted homage to (or a crass appropriation of) Chinese martial arts films, with the comical addition of making its kung fu hero an overweight panda. The most recent Disney offering, *Wreck-it Ralph* (2012), is formed from the world of arcade video games, using appearances by video game staples such as Sonic the Hedgehog and Super Mario as a source of humour and appeal, while subverting the norms of such video games by making the villain (the titular Wreck-it Ralph) the hero. Similarly, *Megamind* (2010) and *Despicable Me* (2010) draw heavily on superhero genres, but tell the story from the side of the villain, who is made into an endearingly comical character. While all these films fall into fantasy genres, they intimately weave themselves into the cultural fabric of contemporary America, making awareness of that cultural context a prerequisite to enjoying the films (and thus encouraging children to closely follow cultural trends). Any nostalgia portrayed – for kung fu movies or arcade games, for example – is nostalgia based on the recent lived memories of children themselves, or at least their parents. Contemporary American cinema is not reluctant to show contemporary America, and even when a fantasy world is portrayed, it is fantasy based strongly on the defined context of contemporary American culture.

One particularly clear example of this phenomenon is the 2007 Disney film *Enchanted*, which follows the story of Giselle, the soon-to-be princess of a fairy tale animated in a style reminiscent of

[122] The thoughtful, reflective tone used by many of the Japanese children's films I have discussed thus far is one that, in the context of American children's media, would be more closely associated with what are thought of as 'high quality' children's films. Those that do adopt a more thoughtful tone, such as *Harry Potter* (2001–2011) or *Wall•E* (2008), are also often the ones that contain a more ambivalent relationship to contemporary life. It is important to note, however, that even in those Japanese films which are generally considered 'low quality' (such as the *Purikyua* or *Pokémon* films), the glamorisation of contemporary life is rarely seen; they often display similar relationships towards the past and the future as the 'high quality' fare of Japan (such as the works of Studio Ghibli).

early Disney works such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Cursed by an evil witch, Giselle falls down a well into present-day New York City, where she must learn to cope with the harsh realities of a live-action world utterly unlike her fairy tale land. The film's humour is primarily based on the gap between the romantic, problem-free world of Disney fairy tales, and the harsh, unpleasant world of New York City. In order to understand that humour, then, the viewer would require at least two forms of cultural knowledge: knowing the tropes of 'classic' Disney works, and understanding the norms of life in present-day New York City. Viewers are asked to draw on their knowledge of contemporary America, and thus immerse themselves further in that world. Far from an 'escape' from contemporary life, we are asked to centre our thoughts on its norms, explore cultural tropes (including remembering 'classic' Disney animation and solidifying its role in our conceptualisation of American culture – allowing Disney to reify its own brand image), and relate those tropes to our lived experiences; in short, to ever more deeply position ourself in our world.

Enchanted concludes in part with the real-world adoption of what has been positioned as a fantastical worldview: Giselle brings out the romantic side of the cynical New Yorker, Robert. However, the reverse occurs as well, as Giselle gains a more full range of emotions, and even the hints of a developing cynical attitude of her own. The escape from the fantastic that marks the film is tempered somewhat by the implication that Giselle's romanticism has brought something good to contemporary New York, but it also takes its place alongside a more wholesale celebration of New York life, suggested not only by the film's fixation on that life, but through the sense that it has something worthwhile to offer to Giselle. Even as the worst elements of New York life are referenced (or even explicitly highlighted – in one scene, Giselle calls the local animals to help her clean Robert's flat, and her perpetual smile falters at the collection of pigeons, rats, and cockroaches), the city itself is still positioned as a positive force, a place which Giselle comes to love and which helps her understand herself more fully. As demonstrated by *Enchanted*, the profound connection to the present exhibited in many recent American children's films can (and usually does) assume a critical, parodic tone; it is not to be mistaken for contentment with that society. At the same time, the value of

American society is essentially affirmed in the narrative, as it is shown to have the potential to inspire positive growth.

Abandoned toys

In the previous section, I discussed the relatively positive presence of portrayals of contemporary urban America in American children's films. This differs from the Japanese children's films analysed throughout this thesis, which largely avoid representing contemporary urban Japan, instead replacing its boundaries with boundless romanticised worlds both fantastical and mundane. An interesting point of comparison for these competing visions of place can be found in three films with remarkably similar plots: *Hottarake no Shima* and *Omocha no Kuni* share their focus on abandoned toys with the conclusion of the *Toy Story* franchise, *Toy Story 3* (2010). In each of these three films, toys struggle to come to terms with the abandonment they experienced as their owners grew older. Despite this similar premise, however, there are marked differences between the films, the most notable of which can be found in their conclusions. While *Toy Story 3* sees the toys accept their owner's change in sentiments, and ultimately find a new child who will treasure them, *Hottarake no Shima* and *Omocha no Kuni* have drastically different resolutions. Chastened by the toys' feelings of neglect, their original owners tearfully beg forgiveness and ultimately reintegrate their beloved childhood toys into their current lives. In the former, the toys' anger at their abandonment is deemed an unproductive response to a child's inevitable development; in the latter, the toys' sentiments are affirmed, while the child's neglect of that which they used to treasure is positioned as wrong, even cruel.

Toy Story 3 shows contemporary American suburban life in an obviously recognisable form. However, it is not the world known to American audiences; shown through the perspective of toys, and frequently displaying their misunderstandings of the human world in which they live, the ordinary world is made strange and exciting. In a sense, we may see *Toy Story* as a representation of contemporary American life made exotic, the ordinary objects and habits that form the life of an American human boy made all the more striking as they are seen through the confused, sometimes

terrified eyes of the toys, who inhabit a subordinate role in that world. Rather than using that exoticised perspective to critique American life, however, it does the opposite: reifying the toys' subordinate status, the story affirms the growth and development of the child regardless of its impact on the toys. American society, then, becomes a wondrous, magical playground for human children, while the growth of the child away from the past according to 'ordinary' lines (in this case, going away to college, which is considered a common rite of passage in many American communities) is encouraged. Relics of the past do not form this world, but must quietly assimilate into it; the child's personal growth in accordance with the norms of contemporary American society is seen as unproblematic and even takes precedence over the confirmed perspectives of another world.

In *Hottarake no Shima* and *Omocha no Kuni*, however, the characters' dramas are only able to play out due to specific fantastical worlds that bring to light things that could not have been brought to light in our own world. While both films are arguably set in contemporary Japan, they are fanciful, re-imagined versions of contemporary Japan. Both films also involve the entrance to another world – whimsical, patchwork lands, pieced together from a multitude of brightly coloured items. The childlike cheeriness found in these colourful worlds is overshadowed by the fact that they are built from and populated by things humans abandoned; they are new worlds, whose creative construction is highlighted by their visual appearance, but they are also past worlds, formed from that which was relegated to oblivion. In the narratives, the human characters must learn from the perspectives of the forgotten. While the toys in *Toy Story 3* move through a human's world, having to contend with structures they do not understand and have no power in, this situation is reversed in *Hottarake no Shima* and *Omocha no Kuni*: humans move through the toys' world, having to confront the anger of those they abandoned, marvelling at another reality they did not know and ultimately humbled by the experience. *Toy Story 3* affirms the capricious desires of contemporary youth, treating children's growth away from their personal past as natural and inevitable, while *Hottarake no Shima* and *Omocha no Kuni* essentially scold children for neglecting their past, as the pain of that neglect pervades every ripped teddy bear and re-appropriated building block of the worlds they depict.

Having not done a more extensive comparative analysis, it is not possible to say whether the 'Japanese' model of place is more widely utilised within children's media than the 'American' model.

The affirmation of contemporary life in American media does show us, however, that a focus on redesigning the world according to nostalgic blueprints is not essential to children's media. The centring of past places is not a universally predominant narrative style, a somehow globally agreed-upon source of appeal for children (as one could potentially argue for, say, tales of children rejecting adult authority). It is, rather, a particular narrative theme that has become standard in Japanese media. This theme is predicated on a recognition that place matters to the way we live, our quality of life, and our sense of morality. The importance of particular places to the development of individuals is overwhelmingly related to children's lives through one construction: that which critiques present-day urban Japan for its supposedly negative effect on children's moral potential, and stresses the value of removal from contemporary Japanese life.

This sense of removal operates on multiple levels. On the most obvious level, the child is not shown contemporary urban Japan. *Omocha no Kuni* depicts its version of the 'real' world in a highly stylised way, and even though *Hottarake no Shima* might be said to present a fairly 'realistic' version of Iruma in Saitama Prefecture (the town in which it is set), the film-related tourist marketing of Iruma highlights the 'traditional' shrines and forests of the town, essentially positioning it as both representative of and connected to an 'other world'.[123] Nevertheless, this 'other' Japan operates in the films as the site of all the negative traits of contemporary Japan. Both films are then removed from Japan further by the fact that the majority of the film takes place in another world entirely.

On a thematic level, both films emphasise children treasuring toys, while positioning that ethic as something 'other' from the social norm. Haruka is the sole human seeking out her lost treasure on Oblivion Island, while Rabu goes against not only what is shown to be children's standard behaviour (as evidenced by the incredible number of rejected toys in the Land of Toys) but even the protestations of her friends to seek reconciliation with Usapyon. The values promoted in the film are

[123] There were numerous events related to the film in Iruma, including the appointment of a character, the fox-creature Teo, as the town's tourism ambassador ('*Hottarake no Shima* x Irumashi', 2010). Many of these stress the town's connection to another world, utilising the tag line '*Iruma kara fushigi na shima e*' ('From Iruma to a mysterious island' [for example, see: ibid.; 'Shiyakusho ikkai robī', 2010]). The pamphlet of that title, which showcases the shrines, fields, and rivers of the town, asks visitors: 'Won't you look for your lost [*hottarake shita*] treasures in Iruma?' ('Iruma kara fushigi', 2010; my translation). A television documentary about the connection between Iruma and *Hottarake* describes on its website that the documentary 'visits the traditional settings of Izumonoiwai Shrine and Hataya no Inari' with the film's producer ('8gatsu no midokoro!', 2009; my translation).

shown to be abnormal in the main character's broader cultural context; to be the heroes in the end, the girls must reject the 'normal' behaviour of young people in their culture.

The valuing of what is constructed as not part of contemporary urban Japan is then taken a step further: it is explicitly related to the child's own life by the film's marketing and merchandising. For example, the toy-fixing event for *Omocha*, and the tourism to Iruma for *Hottarake*, effectively ask the viewer to align their own preferences with that of the 'other' world, to proclaim their appreciation of the values or aesthetics of a world different from this one. The viewer is encouraged to remove themselves from the world as it is, and associate with a different world. That removal may take many forms, including a moral position, travel to a place that represents something 'missing' in contemporary urban Japan (even as it comprises part of that context), or simply personal attachment to merchandise that brings an element of the other world into contemporary Japan. These sites/mementos of difference create the possibility of engaging in removal from contemporary Japan while remaining geographically and temporally inside its boundaries; the emphasis becomes on possessing or experiencing reminders of a different world, thereby creating an individualised form of removal that allows the participant to function more effectively in their society through their understanding of a 'better' alternative.

Conclusion: creating worlds of loss

Each of the three case-study films analysed in this thesis represents mixtures of past and future, of change and its absence. *Purikyua* sees multiple expressions of change used to promote the value of what is left unchanging. *Ponyo* submerges an idyllic town into a sea so ancient as to even challenge the concept of the nation itself. *Doraemon* uses the wonders of the future to highlight the faults of the present, ultimately rejoicing in a world free from the very technology upon which the franchise is predicated. Entwined in these complex mixtures are two seemingly opposing stories. One is the story that has been told many times before: that of anime as something new, something of the future, an emerging medium that celebrates change, difference, and the power of technology. The second story is one that is often neglected: that which highlights overwhelming longings for the past, representing

change as either dangerous or irrelevant to the 'authentic' self or society. In this other world, loss reigns supreme, and contemporary life is rejected or even denied in favour of glorified worlds defined primarily by their distance from contemporary urban Japan.

Throughout this thesis, I have examined the idealised images of the past and future that can be found across the landscape of Japanese children's media, and the corresponding absence of positive depictions of contemporary Japan. Contemporary Japan is usually represented through rural Japan, or is not depicted at all, replaced by a fantasy world notable for its 'natural' scenery and connection to the past. When contemporary urban Japan is shown, it is either altered – made oddly anachronistic or 'whimsical' – or it remains a negative force, a site of corruption from which the child must escape. These varying portrayals are similar in their emphasis on children's geographical, temporal, and/or emotional removal from contemporary urban Japan. As Japan today is positioned as alienating, deadening, or simply not child-appropriate, children are encouraged to admire, sympathise with, and ultimately develop moral frameworks based on other worlds – primarily those of the idyllic past and/or cosmopolitan future.

Whether in the green fields of *Purikyua*'s Clover Town, *Doraemon*'s relaxed middle-class suburbia, or *Ponyo*'s seaside village standing resilient against modernity, the three works discussed in this thesis transport us from a site of childhood portrayed through gently nostalgic places of the not-so-distant past to something grander and more dramatic – but not closer to the present day. Through this majestic other world, we are taken into a past more striking, more emotionally poignant, and more ancient. *Purikyua* introduces us to a land formed of our personal loss, *Doraemon* to forgotten communities hidden in the unknowable wilderness, and *Ponyo* to the benevolent power of the prehistoric ocean. The 'contemporary' childhood town (itself already a nostalgic fantasy) is challenged by recollection of times lost to oblivion. In other words, a location characterised by quiet, subtle nostalgia is threatened by a location characterised by wild, untameable loss. This construction represents one form of the distance from contemporary urban Japan so often positioned as ideal in children's media texts. In this model, the child character must form a personal connection to a past deeper and more ancient than the one within which they already resided. For the audience, connection to one or both of the other worlds is made possible by immersion in the narrative, ownership of

related merchandise, and/or the act of visiting sites that embody the image of the other world(s). In these works, distance comes first through the town, which is set apart from the realities of contemporary urban Japan, and then again through the spectacle of an uncontrollable past that refuses to be forgotten. Each location leads audiences further away from contemporary life, pulling them into something more ancient and unknown.

The intersecting powers of transformation and place guide the narrative, as radically transformative scenarios alter the settings, or characters are transformed through their new-found relationship to a setting. Examining transformation through its relationship to place highlights a political underpinning to these common representations: in contrast to the popular interpretation that Japanese media displays a preoccupation with change for its own sake, these transformations serve a particular purpose, and that purpose is to 'fix' a society defined by its faults. Similarly, the simultaneous emphasis on what does not change, while initially appearing to be a contradiction to the focus on change, is another variation on the same theme. An unchanging world is kept always distant from contemporary Japan, while an unchanging notion of selfhood insulates the individual from society's corruption. Both present 'solutions' to what is constructed as an alienating, broken, and corrupting society. Through these 'solutions', children are asked to recognise, identify, and seek to differentiate themselves from an assortment of perceived social problems. Children's media portrays beautiful, powerful, and often threatened alternatives to everyday urban life, and understanding or empathising with these worlds is presented as crucial to children's personal development and/or the fate of their world.

Into the transformed worlds of Japanese children's media, the media mix ushers a set of franchising strategies defined by constant, irrepressible transformation. Through its immersive world-creation, expanding to all areas of a child's life, the media mix effectively creates another world transposed onto the spaces of contemporary Japan. Other worlds are not confined to narrative content, but become accessible throughout everyday life, as the media franchising and merchandising stresses the possibility of operating within the boundaries of contemporary Japan while remaining removed from what are constructed as its distinguishing characteristics. As the narrative content demonstrates the value of perspectives that can only be formed through distance from contemporary urban Japan,

the media mix ensures that children are given opportunities to immerse themselves ever more fully in alternative worlds that both exist within – and remain constructed as fundamentally separate from – Japan.

Directions for future research

Due to the constraints of time and length, there are some key issues that I have been unable to fully address in this thesis. The relationship between live action and animated children's films deserves further attention; as discussed earlier in this chapter, many of the themes seen as unique to anime are in fact echoed in live action films. The perception of anime as something 'new', which has been questioned throughout this thesis, rests partially on its position as something distinct from other Japanese media forms – a medium that is inherently related to cyberpunk sensibilities, rather than a medium that, for a variety of sociocultural reasons, includes cyberpunk works alongside those from numerous other genres. The findings of my research suggest the need for more in-depth exploration of the connections between anime and live-action cinema or television.

Furthermore, the analysis of American children's films in this chapter could clearly be expanded, and supplemented by analysis of children's cinema in other cultural contexts. A careful cross-cultural examination of children's media could also pave the way for understanding how such portrayals relate to the transnational popularity of Japanese children's media. There seems to be a disconnect between the fantasy 'not-Japan' created in the works, and the fantasy 'Japan' consumed by transnational audiences through the works. What version of Japan is consumed through children's media? If the works present a pristine, 'uncorrupted' world, is that portrayal reinforced by stereotypes of Japan as a 'pure' land, or is it subsumed by the futuristic image ascribed to Japan?

A final question that I would like to highlight is that of how the thread I have observed in contemporary children's media relates to other discourses in Japan. This thesis aimed to construct an in-depth portrait of the current state of the children's media industry in Japan; due to this focus, I was not able to closely examine how the tendencies identified have developed over time. In films released before the 2000s, there seems to be less reluctance to show contemporary urban Japan, and it often

plays a neutral (or even positive) role in the narrative when it appears. There is no indication that the phenomenon identified in this thesis is a longstanding tradition in children's media, but the exact conditions of its emergence are unclear. It is also notable that many of the 'social ills' seen as comprising contemporary urban Japan, such as the breakdown of the family, disconnection to the past, or greed, are similar or identical to those that feature in adult-oriented discourses about youth. It could prove illuminating to further explore the relationship between the constructions of place in children's media and the other existing social discourses (particularly those oriented to adult audiences) upon which it draws.

Select Filmography

Note: This filmography also contains television programmes and video games. It includes those sources that are cited within the thesis and/or had a direct impact on my thinking on the topic. It does not include every source watched in the process of conducting research for this project.

Japanese titles are written as they were originally released in Japanese. Translated titles are provided in brackets following the date; if an English-language title exists for the work, it is given here, even if it is not a direct translation of the Japanese. Where no English-language title exists, I have used my own translations.

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