

**ANIME IN THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXT:
(POST)MODERN CULTURAL TRANSMISSION, CONTENT, AND MEANINGS**

by

**DARREN THOMAS
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Department of ANTHROPOLOGY & SOCIOLOGY

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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Abstract

Anime (Japanese Animation) is an example of transmission of a postmodern popular culture artefact. As such, it is subject to a number of influences that shape what is transmitted, how it is transmitted, and to whom it is transmitted. These influences are both specific to anime and the result of more general cultural trends and preferences.

By developing a system of ideal types based on the characteristics of anime transmission, it becomes possible to examine the phenomenon of transmission in some detail. Through analysis of anime titles, anime fan websites and magazines, and interviews, transmission and reception can be gauged.

This in-depth examination of the contents and themes of anime provides insight into the needs and desires of the North American audiences for anime. By examining the imagery and narratives that have developed around gender, technology, and other thematic and cultural indicators, the audience's preferences may become understandable.

By understanding the role that anime plays for these audiences, it is possible to identify the rationales that drive this form of cultural transmission. Once this is done, it is possible to extrapolate from anime to other cultural artefacts in order to gain a better understanding of postmodern cultural transmission in general.

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Introduction.

Conflicts and Contradictions in Anime.

When most people learn that the topic of this thesis is 'anime,' the first question that most have asked is "What is anime?" When I answer, the response has almost universally been "Why bother? Where is the value in that?" In answering these questions, I shall attempt to provide insight into why I believe anime is not simply an aspect of popular culture, but an excellent indicator of the trends of cultural transmission that are increasingly shaping our culture. To accomplish this, I will not simply examine anime, but show how anime is reflective of changes occurring in popular culture.

I. What is Anime? Why Bother?

The answer to the first question is easy, but hardly simple. *Anime* is Japanese for "animation." But this answer must be clarified if it is to be meaningful. In North America, the term anime is used not for all forms of animation, or even of Japanese animation, but rather a collection of specific animation styles. These styles share narrative, visual, and cultural elements that allow their North American audience to locate them within a single category.

In Japan, anime is an integral part of popular culture and is highly varied and consumed by a much wider range of audiences than traditional North American animation. Anime is also tied into a web of commodification and consumption that results in significant product cross-over between different entertainment mediums. In North America, this often results in a general perception of the medium as either obnoxiously commodified, or as the domain of consumers with slightly unhealthy preferences.

But North American anime is more than a tool for children's marketing or a site of titillation for adolescent males. Certainly, it is easy to identify titles that fall into these two categories, but other titles challenge not simply these easy categorisations, but North American perceptions of animation, and in many cases, North American popular culture itself. As a long time fan of anime who has watched many of the titles available in North America and some that are not, it is my belief that not only should fans of this medium exercise a more critical approach, but that anime holds value for sociologists interested in popular culture.

Yet for all the confusion that surrounds anime as a medium of popular culture, it cannot be forgotten that it is a visual field rich with imagery and narratives that are very different from those found in other North American and many of the Japanese cultural artefacts available. As acclaimed Japanese director Itami stated, "When a Japanese wants to dream, they watch American movies or animation." (Bruns 1998: 93) In anime, North American audiences have found an alternative to the dominant culture, and can dream through Japanese animation.

The answer to the second question is more complex. Anime seems an obscure, even trivial, topic of study. Yet anime is not simply a cultural import, but one which resonates with the trends and technologies of postmodern popular culture. Thus, as cultural imports become more easily available through advances in communications technology, anime provides an excellent example of the trends identified by past examinations of postmodern popular culture (Crook 1992; Fiske 1989) and a view of how cultural transmission will occur in the future.

I shall demonstrate that anime is a site of both cultural containment and cultural resistance and a powerful visual and symbolic medium closely linked to the conflicts that are the defining features of the emerging global postculture. Moreover, while anime titles like *Pokemon* have become part of mainstream North American popular culture,

others have provided the basis for now well-established subcultures of transmission and interpretation.

One of the central reasons to examine anime is that, unlike the ubiquity of mainstream North American pop culture, the majority of its audience must actively seek it out in order to consume it. This willingness to spend time and money indicates that anime provides, for these individuals at least, something that they cannot find more easily and affordably in mainstream pop culture.

A *sociological* understanding of anime is important not simply because it is relatively new pop cultural artefact, but because “sociology endeavours to establish the conditions in which the consumers of cultural goods, and their taste for them, are produced.” (Bourdieu 1984: 1) The audiences consume anime in search of images and meanings that are not present in mainstream popular culture, and the strategies used to interpret this anime are inevitably based in part on the dominant culture, even if anime is used as an alternative to that culture.

As Ray Mescallado states, “Americans who cannot identify with most American comics are theoretically more likely (and even more willing) to find something that appeals to them in translated manga (Japanese comics) or anime.” (Mescallado 2000: 133) However, this does not expand the argument far enough, and the diverse nature of anime and forms of transmission would seem to indicate that it is not simply those dissatisfied with North American comics that turn to anime, but those who find their cultural needs unmet by mainstream popular culture.

Of course, this means that the audience for anime actively participates in the production of meanings, not simply by consuming, but by affecting the course of cultural transmission. This recognition of meaning as central to a sociological understanding of anime, and more generally, cultural transmission, reflects trends in the social sciences.

What has come to be called the 'cultural turn' in the social and human sciences, especially in cultural studies and the sociology of culture, has tended to emphasise the importance of *meaning* to the definition of culture. Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, as a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the 'giving and taking of meaning' – between the members of a society or group. (Hall 1997: 2)

Understanding the meanings anime is imbued with by a North American audience makes it possible to understand the need for, and inevitably of, cultural transmission. As Berger argues, "cultural objects accumulate (and lose) meaning over time through changing contextual influences on the interpretations that get attached to and loosened from them by the actions of potentially identifiable persons and groups." (Berger 1995: 125) Studying anime with not one, but several identifiable forms and audiences, creates a window into the practices and mechanisms of cultural transmission.

By examining the postmodern cultural transmission that occurs around anime, I hope to gain a better understanding of both the mechanisms of transmission that affect cultural artefacts like anime and the reasons why North Americans may be drawn to a "foreign" popular culture. A complex network of meanings, values, and preferences surround any pop culture medium or artefact. Since Weber qualified his understanding of meaning by stating that "in no case does it refer to an objectively "correct" meaning or one which is true in some metaphysical sense" (Weber 1946: 86), sociologists have faced the challenges inherent in defining both the cultural object to be examined and in interpreting what it means to its audience.

The reception of anime is a challenging study because of this, as "meaning is most comfortably discussed in an ambiguous register. The data that are to be made sense of are of course empirical, but are abstracted from so as to expose their inner connections and then integrated into historical patterns or cultural surrounds. These latter are fictions of relation which bind the abstractions together into intelligible wholes."

(Schneider 1993: 76) The fictions Schneider speaks of reflect Weber's recognition of the subjective and constructed nature of culture, and it must be stressed that though it may be possible to catalogue images or quantify consumption, the importance of a cultural artefact lies in the meanings attributed to it. These meanings can in turn best be understood by examining the images and narratives the audience makes use of to create meaning.

Moreover, a "scientific" attempt to distance oneself is especially problematic in the case of film theory, whose 'object' is not just particular films, but the very process of film viewing itself." (Shaviro 1993: 10) Thus, an examination of the reception of anime

does not speculate about the relation between interpretation and behaviour. What a viewer does about the images, information, values, and ideas she or he takes to be the import of a film or television show is certainly significant. Yet even if you assume significant effect by the images on the viewer's subsequent assessment of and activities in the world, reception studies does not claim to cover the domain of knowledge that might consider this. (Staiger 1992: 10)

Given this, the purpose of this thesis is not to understand the impact of anime in North America, but rather to understand the interpretations and meanings that the audience for anime draws from the medium, and how these processes may impact the transmission of anime. By examining the audiences, images, narratives and meanings that have accreted to anime, I hope to gain insight into how anime has come to fill a particular niche in North American popular culture.

For a pop culture import, anime has a relatively long history in North America, which is one of the reasons it can be studied with an eye to the evolution and development of cultural transmission. Anime also stands out, both literally and figuratively, as a cultural import. Unlike British music or European movies, anime is not only recognisably foreign in nature, but is often explicitly sought out because of that fact. Unlike Hong Kong action films, anime has not had hit releases that have exposed the public to a specific title or hero

and then languished until another sudden rise in popularity. Instead, anime has slowly, but continuously, expanded its reach and audiences in North America.

Beginning with children's titles like *Astroboy* and *Speed Racer* in the 1970s, an ever increasing number of anime titles have been released. And as communications technology has advanced, the dissemination of information about anime has become ever easier. The result has been an increase in the number of titles available to each of the varying audiences that consumes anime, though the images available are not significantly increased or differentiated.

Anime titles that are transmitted to North America can be identified as belonging to one of three identifiable categories, based on the processes of transmission and audience of reception. The categories I have developed: integrated, imported, and infiltrated, and processes that define them, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, but they should be quickly defined here.

Integrated anime is comprised of titles that reach a mainstream audience in North America as part of regular television programming or through mainstream movie release. *Imported anime* includes titles that are released commercially in North America by a small number of specialised anime distributors, generally do not appear on television, and can be difficult to find outside of specialty stores. *Infiltrated anime* titles are not commercially released in North America, but are instead translated and released by fans over the internet or through videos ordered online. Each of these categories has an audience that has had a significant impact in specific ways through the technologies and processes of transmission and through the specific contents transmitted. In turn, because of the structures of audience and distribution that

have evolved around the transmission of anime to and in North America, anime can be examined in ways that other cultural imports cannot yet be.

Perhaps most importantly for a study of this kind, anime is a medium of its own, with defined boundaries, clichés, stereotypes, and imagery. With links between imagery, meaning, and subcultural preferences and the carefully targeted release of titles for specific audiences, anime is an example of how an audience can shape the imagery, narratives, and meanings it absorbs. Yet it also demonstrates how the processes of cultural transmission restrict the availability of imagery, narrative, and meaning to that audience.

The audiences for anime can play a role in determining what is available to them, but past consumption and preferences limit the commercial releases that will be available. Similarly, for anime that is transmitted by fans, past exposure will limit the titles they choose to distribute to other North Americans.

It is this complex web of meanings, audiences, content, and transmission that make anime a worthy subject of sociological inquiry. What does a North American audience look for in "foreign" pop culture artefacts like anime that would facilitate, encourage, or result in their transmission and reception here? Moreover, are there different patterns of transmission, and different sets of values at work in the way in which foreign pop culture artefacts like anime are interpreted?

The first question that must be answered in any cultural study, is how to approach the subject. Should I use a purely semiotic approach and focus on the 'how' of representation, develop a purely discursive approach and examine the results of representation, or attempt to meld the two? The difference between the two, as Stuart Hall explains, is that semiotics is the study of signs "and their general role as vehicles of meaning in culture..." while discourses "...are ways of referring to or constructing

knowledge about a particular topic of practice.” (Hall 1997: 6) In other words, semiotics examines the structure of meaning that underlies a cultural artefact, while discourse analysis examines the way in which people know and relate to that artefact.

The transmission of anime may be closely linked to the symbols and narratives of the medium, but there can be no doubt that they play an important role for their audience not merely as symbols, but as cultural referents. Thus, an examination of the discourses of anime is a necessary step towards understanding the role it plays in North America. But a close examination of anime reveals that the audiences for, and consumption of, anime titles are closely linked to the way in which imagery and narratives are re-interpreted and re-constructed by North Americans, regardless of the original, Japanese, meaning. My approach will also use semiotics in order to examine particular imagery and symbols as they are used by the postmodern subculture that is forming around anime.

Methodologically, my work is based on an examination of a range of anime titles, fan websites and magazines, and interviews with individuals involved in the distribution of anime. By examining the varying imagery, content, and themes that run through these sources and the meanings and communities that have formed around them, I hope to provide insight into what I believe is the postmodern nature of both anime and the larger popular culture it is a part of. Of course, if anime is postmodern, then a number of questions must be answered about what this means for this thesis.

To summarise, any examination of popular culture raises a number of questions around key theoretical issues and conflicts: for example, semiotics vs. discourse, the modern vs. the postmodern, mass vs. pop culture, inherent vs. socially constructed meanings. Moreover, anime is a highly differentiated medium rife with contradiction, which means that, since they cannot be ignored, such conflicts and contradictions must be addressed.

II. The Postmodern Quandary

Throughout this thesis, I argue that anime is a postmodern cultural artefact that is an example of the complexities that surround the formation of contemporary popular culture. In this view, postmodernism is a concept that “is not merely contested, it is also internally conflicted and contradictory.” (Jameson 1991: xxii) Still, any meaningful discussion of popular culture must address the elements of, and conflicts between, the modern and postmodern. Indeed, a postmodern culture cannot escape modernism, as “it reaches back to the past and forward to the future trying to synthesize these two ‘imaginary places’ in narrative fashion.” (Degli-Esposti 1998: 4)

There can be no doubt that postmodernism, and its inherent modernist elements, exists within the texts and imagery of anime and the community that receives it. Modernist themes and meta-narratives around technological progress, nature, gender boundaries, and identity are pervasive within anime. Yet the highly differentiated nature of the medium, the powerful stimulus of consumption, and the contradictory attitudes and themes within it raise questions about the same issues of technology, nature, gender, and identity and are indicative of the ascendancy of the postmodern.

Theorists such as Bauman believe that postmodernism “has come to replace the ‘classical’ modern capitalist society and thus needs to be theorised according to its own terms.” (Bauman 1988: 811) In contrast, Huyssen argues that “postmodernism is far from making modernism obsolete” (Huyssen 1990: 267), and as I shall argue, this attitude seems better suited to an analysis of the often striking modernist and capitalist elements present in anime titles and the mechanisms of transmission.

Postmodern trends, particularly in areas of culture, are often “understood as an extension-cum-reversal of cultural modernity.” (Crook et al. 1992: 47) Anime is a prime example, for the whole medium is rife with hyper-differentiation, hyper-commodification, and the hyper-real, and the texts and imagery of the medium are strongly rooted in

modern meta-narratives of technology and gender. Of course, just as “the crisis of modernism is more than just a crisis of those trends within it which tie it to the ideology of modernisation” (Huyssen 1990: 269), modernism provides more than narratives of crisis to the postmodern cultural artefact that is anime.

The postmodern concept of hyper-reality is important to the examination of anime. Baudrillard defined the hyper-real as an image, illusion, or simulation “of a real without origin or reality.” (Baudrillard 1983: 2) The imagery of anime, though inherently unreal, reflects (or simulates) the concerns and issues of “reality.” Moreover, this content exists in a field of transmission in which “there is no longer any medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffuse, and diffracted in the real, and it can no longer be said that the latter (content) is distorted by it.” (Baudrillard 1983: 54) Given the varied and fragmentary mechanisms of transmission, anime illustrates Baudrillard’s argument. The medium of anime is split by conflicting categories and mechanisms of transmission by differences between audiences, and by cultural and language divisions.

Though anime has a recognisable origin in Japan to those familiar with the genre, the imagery and texts produced often seem to be sundered from their real world beginnings. Indeed, most anime transmitted to North America not only includes, but is centred around elements of the unreal, whether from fantasy or science fiction. This combines with the visual impact of anime, so that

film viewing offers an immediacy and violence of sensation that powerfully engages the eye and body of the spectator; at the same time, however, it is predicated on a radical dematerialisation of appearances. (Shaviro 1993: 26)

The result is a medium that epitomizes a culture in which “signs get their meanings from their relations with each other, rather than by reference to some independent reality or standard. There is a multiplicity of constantly shifting cultural codes, with no fixed metacode to which they all relate.” (Hall 1996: 583) Within anime, this state of affairs is

easily identifiable. While individual titles may contain modern referents, within the medium generally even seemingly indispensable divides like race, gender, and technology are often blurred by a blending of the Asian and Western, male and female, and the biological and mechanical. So, while modernist narratives and imagery may be part of the appeal of anime in a postmodern cultural environment, these narratives are not always central to the role of anime as a cultural artefact, as will be demonstrated in later chapters.

The recognition that any pop culture artefact is subject to multiple interpretations, meanings, and even forms must be central to any examination of anime. But, just as modernist elements persist and conflict with the postmodern, examinations of popular culture, and cultural theory itself have, in the words of Stuart Hall, “tended to oscillate wildly between the two alternative poles of that dialectic – containment/resistance.” (Hall 1998: 443) An examination of anime shows how, even within a fragmented, postmodern medium, both of these poles exert their influence.

The result is that, as Fiske argues, “the study of popular culture requires the study not only of the cultural commodities out of which it is made, but also of the ways that people use them.” (Fiske 1989: 15) Anime is both a product of global capitalism, and a form of resistance to the mainstream North American popular culture most often envisioned as the future of postmodern culture. But examining the transmission and content of anime, and the audience(s) that receive it, is only part of understanding how culturally subjective constructions help shape reception.

Of course, content and imagery, while key to understanding the meanings attached to pop culture, represent only one aspect of the phenomenon. Beyond content lies form, the consumption and commodification which are at the heart of the industry that generates, but cannot ultimately define, popular culture. Indeed, it can be argued that pop culture exists as “an assertion of one’s right to make one’s own culture out of

the resources provided by the commodity system.” (Fiske 1989: 15) Yet to accept this view of pop culture, one must have a definition that recognises the dually constructed nature of pop culture: as commodity and as cultural artefact. This is a definition that recognises that the artefacts of pop culture are another realm in which the “relations of dominance and subordination are articulated.” (Hall 1998: 449) Anime, imported from Japan, is an excellent example of how dominant imagery, existing cultural norms, and prevailing consumption patterns can unite to shape the way in which a cultural artefact is received in North America.

John Fiske notes that “all commodities have cultural as well as functional values. To model this we need to extend the idea of an economy to include a cultural economy where the circulation is not one of money, but of meanings and pleasures.” (Fiske 1989: 27) While Fiske recognises the importance of functional capitalist values that centre around entertainment and profit in the production and distribution of pop culture commodities, he argues that the cultural use-values are more varied and important for the audience. In this thesis, the profit driven economy of production is considered to be accompanied by a cultural economy of consumption and meaning construction. The result is an approach to popular culture that “assumes that human beings are ‘socially produced’ and that roles and practices are also ‘socially produced.’ But it also assumes a dialectic relationship in which human beings are also actors in creating social reality.” (Grigsby 1997: 61)

The anime that is marketed and consumed in North America is representative of the preferences of its audiences in so far as particular genres, specific stereotypes, and certain imagery are persistently present. These preferences must be considered central to understanding the perceived values of anime for consumers. The appetite for particular genres and themes, and thus, for particular imagery, drives the transmission and consumption of anime in North America.

III. Commodification and Consumption

As noted above, the differing success of anime at a number of cultural levels can be considered indicative of the important role of commodification and consumption in its transmission. A close examination of anime indicates that while highly commodified anime may have the highest levels of recognition, they have the least cultural value for fans who are seeking an alternative to mainstream popular culture.

Critiques of the commodification of cultural artefacts often focus on the modernist concept of mass culture. Theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the commodification that both precedes and results from consumption through the marketplace reduces the role of culture by limiting the ability of consumers to reflect critically upon their society. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979) For these theorists, the commodification and impermanent boundaries that surround a cultural artefact like anime reduce differences between cultural products to issues related solely to image and style. (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 123) Recognising this, Crook, Pakulski, and Waters maintain that "there is nothing specifically postmodernising about the commodification of meaning as such." (Crook et al. 1992: 60)

Most theorists of popular culture would agree that commodification is not post-modernising in itself, but that hyper-commodification expands the range of individual choice, thereby encouraging the differentiation and boundary transgressions that aid in the development of postmodern cultural identity. For these theorists, "a homogenous, externally produced culture cannot be sold ready-made to the masses" (Fiske 1989: 23) because while the functional values of a cultural artefact may emphasise consumption and entertainment, the cultural values the consumer imbues the artefact with are central to understanding both consumption and transmission.

Thus, for theorists like Fiske and Hall, popular culture presents a conflict between the forces of production and consumption. The result of this conflict is the transformation of "the cultural commodity into a cultural resource." (Fiske 1989: 28) This transformation is also at the heart of the process by which "style follows the erosion of the institutionalised cultural authority... Style has become a critical factor in definitions of self." (Crook et al. 1992: 60) Commodities like anime can become part of "style" and "can be used by the consumer to construct meanings of self, of social identity, and social relations." (Fiske 1989: 11) For these theorists, pop culture artefacts are central to how consumers relate to and reflect upon their society.

With anime, commodification plays a role that is directly linked to the development of identity. The integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime categories are subject to differing patterns and levels of both commodification and consumption, and are at the heart of the construction of identity groups. The medium in which a title is transmitted, whether it is aired on television, found on video, or only available on the Internet, is central to determining the audiences that it reaches, and closely related to content and imagery. An anime title aired on television reaches an audience quickly and easily as compared to a title released on video. However, titles aired on television must be more easily understood by a North American audience in contrast to titles released on video, which often contain elements that presume a level of familiarity with Japanese imagery and standards.

In particular, a situation of "disinterested production" characterises how anime is transmitted over the Internet. (Bourdieu 1993) While the commercial transmission of anime is driven by the profit motive, there is an active underground that relies on access to computers and advanced communications technology to transmit anime. These distributors, though not primary producers, reflect the peculiar inversion of economic

interests that can occur in the field of culture, wherein the desire for income from their output is overcome by the symbolic value to be gained with fellow consumers of anime.

Commodification is also central to the "continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganise and reorganise popular culture, to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms." (Hall 1998: 447) Of course, both the dominant popular culture and resistance to the dominant are mediated to varying degrees through the processes of commodification. And by exercising control over the commercial distribution of anime, distributors are capable of controlling the titles released, as well as the narratives and imagery contained therein. Through control of commercially distributed narratives and imagery, it is possible for distributors to influence the development of public perceptions of, and the audience for, anime. Of course, the word control is misleading, as alternative interpretations of the narratives and imagery available are not only possible, but inevitable, particularly given the diverse means in which anime is transmitted to North America.

Cross-medium commodification also plays a role in the development of anime audiences. In Japan, anime is often only one part of an interconnected, mass market, multi-media product line. Successful video games, live-action movies, or comic books can spawn anime series, and successful anime releases can result in model kits, soundtracks, and clothing. A successful title like *Sailor Moon* can be accompanied by a product line that includes "a musical and a film, and best-selling videos, laser disks, CDs and game versions... curry sauce, sheets, note paper... athletic footwear, canvas sandals, slippers, slipper socks, weather boots, and beachwear." (Grigsby 1997: 59-60)

However, though cross-medium commodification occurs extensively across genre and category boundaries in Japan, anime has more limited prospects in North America. Anime is often tied to other social/commercial/cultural trends specific to the

form it takes when it reaches North America. *Pokemon* is linked to mainstream children's consumer culture. Imported anime is often linked to underground cultural artefacts like raves and to the Internet, while infiltrated anime can be considered a part of Internet "geek" culture.

Certain anime titles and series have a North American presence that reflects the hyper-commodification of their nation of origin. However, most North American anime releases lack many of the attendant products, and if related products are released, they are often released as a related but unique product, rather than as a part of an organised advertising or sales campaign. Typically in North America, cross-medium commodification has occurred only with integrated anime titles, and only after a particular title has been successfully released. *Pokemon*, *Digimon*, and *Sailor Moon* are all examples, with their initial television releases pre-dating the wide release of other products (except the *Pokemon* video game), by anywhere from several months, to nearly a year in the case of *Digimon*. However, beyond the posters and imported model kits that can be ordered from distribution companies or purchased in specialty stores, even the most successful imported and infiltrated anime titles are usually unaccompanied by cross-medium commodification.

In part, these trends can be attributed to the fact that the companies that import anime are different from the companies that import Japanese manga, music, and other cultural products. However, it is also possible that some of the North American anime audience would not support the sort of cross-medium commodification that prevails in Japan, because as such commodification occurs, the shared meanings that have formed around anime tend to be weakened by the expansion of the audience.

These struggles over meaning, whether the result of a single factor or a combination of factors, all relate to the development of a popular culture in which

cultural flows and global consumerism between nations create the possibilities of 'shared' identities' – as 'customers' for the same goods, 'clients' for the same services, 'audiences' for the same messages and images – between people who are far removed from one another in time and space. (Hall 1996: 621)

Of course, Hall is assuming that the audiences will share more than simple consumption, and that they will draw similar meanings from that product based on their common culture. Indeed, with the audiences for anime, there are obvious elements of shared identity, including the adoption of Japanese words like *otaku* (loosely translated as “nerd” or “fanboy”) as a term of self-reference by anime fans.

But shared identities based on consumption of a single medium or title can only be ephemeral in nature and are perhaps demonstrative of the fragile, style driven character of identity in contemporary culture. Popular culture has achieved a level of differentiation that results in “not simply the replacement of a few fully integrated cultural unities by many, but the erosion of the fully integrated cultural unity as such,” (Crook et al. 1992: 72) processes that primarily occur through consumption.

IV. Consumer Audiences as Interpretive Subcultures

There are social and cultural forces at work that counteract the effects of the differentiation that accompany the postmodernisation of pop culture. Once it has been recognised that anime does not have a single, coherent audience or text, and that different groups may find their own meanings in the same text, it becomes necessary to notice and address how these groups develop fairly coherent interpretations of the symbols and images of anime that will be examined.

For this purpose, Stanley Fish's work around the concept of “interpretive communities” can provide a foundation for understanding the processes that influence the transmission and reception of anime. For Fish, interpretive strategies derive not from the interpreter,

but from the interpretive community of which he is a member; they are, in effect, community property, and in so far as they at once enable and limit the operations of his consciousness, he is too... it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading, but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. (Fish 1980: 14)

Though Fish's theory is restricted to the interpretive ability of the individual and collective readers, it provides a useful starting point. Fish emphasises that the audience is active in writing meanings into the verbal text, or, in this case, the imagery and narratives of the auditory and visual text of anime. However, for Fish, the interpretive community (the entirety of the audience) is responsible for the interpretation and construction of meaning.

To apply the concept of the interpretive community to anime, I feel it is necessary to relax Fish's conceptual definition. Anime has an interpretive subculture with formal features such as fan magazines and specialty stores that play a central role in the development of the interpretive strategies used by members. But unlike Fish, I believe these strategies provide guidelines for individuals in the transformative writing, or active viewing, of meaning, rather than providing a single set of meanings for the entire community. Internally developed interpretive strategies are only part of the context in which meaning will be created by audience members. Other factors and communities, which can provide competing, though less relevant, interpretive strategies can also play an important role in the reception of anime.

This approach is most useful if one recognises that "no two texts are ever alike, and no two readings of the same text are ever identical." (Rosenau 1992: 35) By accepting the importance of context and community, my approach challenges the precepts of cultural deconstructionism (Rosenau 1992: 111) which assume that context

has no role the interpretation of meaning and that the identification of patterns and generalisations is ultimately futile. Interpretive subcultures as I develop them are not understood to impose meanings, but to shape the context and strategies through which meanings are developed. Like any pop culture artefact, anime is subject to these processes. The subcultures that have formed around the anime available in North America shape member perceptions by providing the basis for common interpretive strategies that are used to *re-write* and *re-construct* meanings around the images and narratives. In effect, the interpretive subcultures provide the tools for audience members to produce meanings and interpretations that may not match the original intent of the Japanese producers, Japanese audience, or North American distributors.

Anime is a "foreign" cultural artefact, and may not lend itself to easy interpretations, unlike popular culture produced specifically for a North American audience. This fact leads to two important conclusions: communities must form to provide interpretive boundaries for North American anime fans, and the imported nature of anime can allow these interpretive boundaries and meanings to differ strongly from those of both mainstream North American popular culture and of the original Japanese meanings. The result is that knowledge of and participation in the subculture gives members cultural capital that provides "prestige, the sense of belonging to an elite minority that is sharply distinguished from those who lack it." (Fiske 1991: 112) Within this interpretive subculture, status is linked not simply to participation in, but to knowledge of, and exposure to the texts of that community. Within anime, the interpretive subculture provides both strategies of interpretation, and the community necessary for the development of the sense of belonging referred to by Fiske. As Annalee Newitz states in an article on anime in the US, "fans enjoy anime partly because it allows them to feel as if they have specialised knowledge ordinary Americans do not." (Newitz 1995: 3)

Fans form the heart of the interpretive subcultures of anime, as they “may differ from less excessive popular readers in degree, but not in kind. Fandom is characterised by two main activities: discrimination and productivity.” (Fiske 1989: 147) Anime fans have erected boundaries around and within their medium, discriminating on the basis of imagery, content, mechanisms of transmission, and even language. They are also highly productive, creating artwork, stories, and websites based on their favourite titles and series, as can be found by examining any of the hundreds of websites found on a link site like the Anime Turnpike.

The varied nature of anime means it is possible to identify several interpretive subcultures that not only attempt to limit the interpretations possible for new anime titles, but limit the anime provided to these subcultures by encouraging or limiting demand with regard to genres, styles, and imagery. As Fiske observes, “links between social allegiance and cultural taste are active and explicit in fandom, and the discrimination involved follows criteria of social relevance rather than of aesthetic quality.” (Fiske 1989: 147) Integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime can all be considered to be the interpretive objects of several groups. However, it should be noted that the impact of interpretive groups as they have been formulated above is strongest on the culture that has formed around imported anime. This is due to the fact that imported anime is the subject of the majority of “fan” activity through university fan clubs, web sites, and specialty magazines. The development of an anime “canon” through the identification of anime “classics” such as *Akira* or *Ghost in the Shell* occurs through these venues. As well, the popularising of new series like *Cowboy Bebop* is accomplished through this subcultural “word of mouth.”

In contrast, integrated anime can be interpreted using strategies for a number of cultural products: as children’s entertainment, as anime, as a pop cultural trend, and the result is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a specific interpretive subculture of

integrated anime. While infiltrated anime has an interpretive subculture, the instability of the mechanisms and transmissions that occur in this category limits the development of community strategies of interpretation. It is important to recognise these differences in interpretive subcultures and their impact on both the transmission of anime and the meanings attached to it. As Fish states, "since the thoughts an individual can think and the mental operations he can perform have their source in some or other interpretive community, he is as much a product of that community (acting as an extension of it) as [are] the meanings it enables him to produce." (Fish 1980: 14) Due to the influence of these interpretive subcultures, it can be argued that the transmission of integrated anime is not simply a matter of commodification and profit, but is also of containment, limiting the audience and interpretations of the fans of anime. Wolfe states that "one way to approach differences among boundaries is to ask whether such boundaries are permanent or a temporary response to a particular condition." (Wolfe 1992: 313)

Anime, and popular culture more generally, are postmodern, highly differentiated and hyper-commodified, are dominated by temporary boundaries, and defined in response to popularity, imagery, and commodification. Even within anime, boundaries shift between categories and around mechanisms of transmission. Imported anime, with a history of transmission that has brought titles with similar themes and imagery to North America for more than a decade, indicates that if these boundaries are not permanent, they at least have a certain longevity. In contrast, integrated anime with a looser interpretive community that is primarily concerned with the most recently released titles, has only temporary boundaries and communities. The limited and temporary boundaries and communities of integrated anime mean that its audience must rely primarily on interpretive strategies borrowed from mainstream popular culture.

Thus, efforts to understand the transmission of anime are linked to the construction of meaning and must consider the interpretive strategies of the audience.

As Hall argues, these strategies can be considered to fall into two opposing but related categories: strategies of containment and strategies of resistance. Strategies of containment are present in both the distribution of integrated anime, and within the boundaries created by the subcultural community of imported anime. Strategies of resistance are central to the transmission of both imported and infiltrated anime, and reflect both a rejection of the mainstream popular culture and a search for imagery and narratives that are not available in mainstream popular culture.

Integrated anime can be considered to be defined primarily by containment because animation is almost exclusively a medium of children's entertainment in North America; most animated television series and all major animated movies target a children's audience. Imported and infiltrated anime, with adult themes that range from excessive violence to deeper questions about what "progress" is, threaten not simply the bounded nature of animation in North America, but offer alternative texts and imagery to the mainstream popular culture available to older audiences.

In the varied audience of and consumption of anime one can identify a number of coherent threads, which are linked together. The first is "the Western search for the experience of otherness." As Friedman notes, "Ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends of global reality." (Friedman 1994: 103) Though anime has many elements that have arguably been Westernised, including but not limited to representations of race, gender, and even language, these western elements are presented through the lens of a Japanese cultural matrix, so that they are not automatically recognisable as either Western or "foreign" to a North American audience.

The result is that most anime, with its source in Japanese culture and an increasingly global "pop culture," is similar enough that North Americans can recognise

the majority of the images and symbols but different enough that they can still impose their own interpretations. These interpretations are filtered through a North American cultural sensibility and cannot help but be different than the intended interpretations on the part the Japanese producers and the original Japanese audience. While it may be a medium of fantasy for the Japanese, it still possesses the aura of "otherness," as is evidenced by the importance placed upon preserving and understanding the Japanese elements in the medium by the imported and infiltrated subcultures. Moreover, titles that become part of the "canon" of imported anime are inevitably those that have achieved success in Japan, even if their distribution in North America is limited.

The second coherent thread is the linking of interpretive communities to the concept of resistance. In *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, Hebdige described subcultures "as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder, a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation." (Hebdige 1979: 90) And while the concept of the subculture is less important in a highly differentiated popular culture, Hebdige's definition can be used to understand the important place resistance plays in cultural differentiation. The interpretive communities of anime, with their shared imagery and values, can be considered the progeny of this subculture's cultural role.

To be sure, the "contests between resistance and conformity do not conform to a single line between the hegemonic and the subordinate." (Crook et al. 1992: 72) As a medium with ties to both mainstream and cutting edge popular culture, anime is at once a site of resistance and of conformity. Within anime, the result is not simply a difference between integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime, but a recognisable split within the interpretive community of imported anime, if not in the other types as well. Resistance to mainstream popular culture can be found centred around narratives and imagery of gender, technology, sexuality, and race, as I argue in Chapters Two and Three.

However, the imagery, rationale, and boundaries of resistance are not uniform within anime or the subcultures that have formed around it.

V. Sites of Resistance

Clarifying the impact of postmodernist trends, commodification, and interpretive groups does not automatically clarify the role of anime in North American popular culture. The themes, imagery, form, and transmission of anime titles are intertwined as they shape and influence the meanings and interpretations generated by the audience. Viewers must recognise that "none of these elements or new cultural signs or logos exists in isolation: the videotext itself is at virtually all moments a process of ceaseless, apparently random, interaction between them." (Jameson 1991: 86) The signs and symbols of anime, whether of image or narrative, work together to produce meaning.

Yet there can be no question that these interactions produce meanings that are anything but random. The meanings generated by the imagery and texts of anime must be examined as the products of the interpretive strategies used by the audience and the cultural context, primarily the interpretive subculture, that provides the tools for the creation of meaning. These meanings drive, and are in turn driven, by the patterns of consumption and distribution that result in "a proliferation of new identity-positions together with a degree of polarization among and between them." (Hall 1996: 627) The subcultures, their consumption, and the system of transmission provide content through a system that "ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production." (Jameson 1991: 96) The reshuffling aids in the development of interpretive subcultures for anime as it provides images and symbols that are shared between titles, allowing the creation of identifiable interpretive strategies by a community.

At their heart, the identity positions and interpretive subcultures that are based upon anime audiences are based on forces of resistance. This can be attributed to the fact that these positions and cultures are related to imported and infiltrated anime, while integrated anime, which is tied most closely to the dominant culture, is subject to a variety of interpretive strategies from different communities. The result is a medium in which the interpretive strategies developed specifically to deal with anime are those that undermine the boundaries and images that dominate similarly themed North American popular culture artefacts.

Of course, while all anime is subject to these forces and strategies, their influence on individual titles is not uniform. The audiences for anime, particularly fans, “have cultural forms and interests that differ from, and often conflict with, those of the producers of [other] cultural commodities.” (Fiske 1987: 310) With anime, the producers of the cultural values and commodities with whom the audiences clash are those of both mainstream popular culture and of integrated anime.

Anime remains a pop culture artefact, and the titles transmitted, while reinterpreted, are still subject to the forces that *shape* popular conceptions of taste and style. The processes of popular culture insure that “only some violent films, books, and television programs are popular (many violent texts are rejected), and the violence in them is tightly organised so that, for instance, there are no popular texts, however violent, in which an ugly, middle-aged Hispanic heroine kills a succession of young, white, good-looking male villains.” (Fiske 1989: 134) Likewise, the subcultures that have developed around North American anime involve processes that ensure that certain images and narratives have been successful, and the distributors of anime provide material that is likely to be accepted by the subcultural communities.

The engineered nature of anime is even more pronounced, as successful titles go through winnowing processes twice, first in Japan, and then again in North America.

While a successful release in Japan is almost a necessity in order for a title to reach North America, it does not guarantee a positive reception from the public or with anime fans. The result is a climate in which the processes of popular culture, particularly commodification, ensure that specific, accepted narratives and imagery are preferred by distributors.

The forces of containment, particularly those related to the distribution of integrated anime, can be considered "expressions of a modernist 'nostalgia' based on a notion of the production of culture rather than its consumption in which knowledge can be centrally organised and controlled by producers." (Crook et al. 1992: 31) Mainstream commercial distributors tend to release similarly themed material: *Pokemon* is followed by *Digimon*, *Sailor Moon* by *Cardcaptors*. Mainstream anime distribution limits the imagery and titles available to North American audiences, as if alternative mechanisms of transmission did not provide those audiences with other sources of imagery and meaning.

However, the lack of true control over the development of the anime subculture can be found in high acclaim in which titles with unique styles, imagery, and narratives are held by the imported and infiltrated subcultures. *Ghost in the Shell* and *Cowboy Bebop* are titles that have been critically and commercially successful with the imported subculture. They depict recreational drug use, cybernetics, violence, and sexuality in ways that mainstream popular culture does not, and indeed, cannot, thanks to the inherent unreality of the medium, which is no doubt part of the appeal. The influence and control that North American anime fans exercise over their medium of choice is emblematic of its postmodern nature and indicative of the limits and boundaries of production and control.

Whether challenging traditional commercial distribution methods by downloading anime over the Internet or influencing smaller distributors through the development of

interpretive communities, the transmission of anime is the site of a number of powerful centres of resistance, which often transcend issues of meaning and interpretation.

When the workings of interpretive communities, and the meanings they shape, are introduced into the cultural equation of anime, the necessity of a dual focus becomes clear. Both a semiotic and a discursive approach to this phenomenon are needed, as

On the one hand we need to focus upon the deep structure of the text in the ways that ideological, psychoanalytic analyses and structural or semiotic analyses have proved so effective... The complementary focus is upon how people cope with the system, how they read its texts... to analyse texts in order to expose their contradictions, their meanings that escape control. (Fiske 1989: 105)

Understanding the role played by commodification, the structures that underlie the development of an audience, and how boundaries imposed upon and by interpretive subcultures, is necessary to the study of anime, and more generally, popular culture.

Exploring issues of meaning and the influence of interpretive subcultures on the individual and the reception of the varied categories and types of imagery, narratives and audiences, ensures that anime is not lost in the bland, pessimistic concept of "mass culture."

Chapter 1. The Mechanisms and Indicators of Cultural Transmission: Integrated, Imported, and Infiltrated Anime

Anime is a complex, diverse medium, and this makes a close examination of the “deep structures” of its transmission and consumption necessary. I have developed categories, based on the mechanisms of transmission, audience demographics and interpretive control, and degrees of commodification, that provide insight into the structures of anime transmission. These categories are central to understanding not simply the cultural values attached to anime titles, but the different audiences and uses for anime.

While understanding the impact that the narratives, imagery, and functional values of anime have on both its transmission and on North American preferences is both essential and central, the importance of the mechanisms of the market, technology, and audience to cultural transmission cannot be ignored. As Jameson states, “the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is clear that culture itself is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but inescapable.” (Jameson 1991: 67)

Anime is a cultural object that is strongly related to material form and consumption. The anime categories identified in this thesis are tied to the form and technologies of transmission rather than simple content or genre concerns. The availability of a particular anime title partly determines its potential audience and impact. Of course, the forces and processes behind the distribution of a title have a considerable impact on content. In order to examine the content and meaning of anime more effectively, I have identified three separate categories of anime transmission: integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime.

I have chosen to identify and define integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime by elements of language, audience, editing, and technology. In this, each of the categories can be considered a form of “ideal type.” As developed by Weber, ideal types are a methodological tool for examining “the configuration into which ‘factors’ are arranged to form a cultural phenomena.” (Weber 1949: 75) In this thesis, anime is the cultural phenomenon to be examined, and three categories of transmission are the configuration into which factors such as commodification, consumption, language, and editing must be included.

The construction of the ideal types under consideration was undertaken to allow comparisons of anime titles and audiences. By “being unreal, the ideal type has the merit of offering us a conceptual device with which we can measure real development and clarify the most important elements of empirical reality.” (Coser 1977: 224) Thus, while the anime audience may not itself use the integrated, imported, and infiltrated categories, they allow for the identification of, and comparison between, the audiences and titles of anime.

The defining characteristics of each category of transmission form the basis for an ideal type, creating an artificial construction that allows titles to be compared for similarities and differences in content and transmission, both within and between categories. The titles chosen, and described in detail later in this chapter, were chosen for their representative nature and importance to anime audiences, as determined by examining audience produced material and consumption. They stand as ‘ideal types’ within each of the categories of transmission.

The characteristics are, admittedly, imprecise and open to interpretation, but the very impermanence of the boundaries of popular culture makes the use of ideal types a necessity in clarifying the patterns of anime transmission. Table 1 summarizes the main points of differentiation around commodification, distribution, and language. Other

influences on transmission, like audience and technology, are discussed indepth later in this Chapter.

Table 1: The Three Categories of Transmission

	Commodification	Distribution	Language
Integrated Anime	High (Titles are often part of a comprehensive marketing campaign)	Mainstream (Television, movie theatres)	Dubbed into English
Imported Anime	Low (Titles are distributed on their own, though related products are sometimes imported from Japan)	Specialty (Hobby shops, fan clubs)	Can be dubbed or subtitled (Fans prefer subtitled)
Infiltrated Anime	Minimal (Titles are generally distributed freely over the Internet or at cost by VHS)	Underground (Internet distribution only)	Subtitled only

I. Integrated Anime

Integrated anime titles share a number of features: they air as part of regularly scheduled programming on TV or open in mainstream theatres; they are always dubbed into English; they are edited for content and length to better meet audience expectations; and they are subject to significant cross-medium commodification.

Integrated anime are examples of Japanese animation that, to the uninitiated, are often unrecognisable as such. Of course, while integrated anime may not be recognisably Japanese to their target audience, these titles are recognisably differentiated from North American animation aimed at the same audience, and can be identified as part of a single genre due to artistic and narrative similarities.

Through the processes of dubbing, editing, marketing, and distribution, these titles are separated from their Japanese origins and re-produced for consumption by a North American audience. Central to this category is the fact that they need not be sought out, and unlike imported and infiltrated anime, are shown on commerical cable television, and have major openings in theatres.

Additionally, a range of products will accompany or follow the successful broadcast or release of an integrated anime title. Action figures, dolls, books, trading cards, posters, Halloween costumes, children's clothing, and a wide range of other commodities will be linked to a title like *Sailor Moon* or *Dragon Ball Z*. The Pokemon franchise alone has "spawned more than 1,000 kinds of merchandise."

This process is linked to the rationale behind the release of integrated anime, as these titles are not released primarily to meet audience demand, as with imported and infiltrated anime, but to *create* audience demand for the secondary materials in the target audience. If cross-medium commodification is present, it is an indication of the integrated nature of a particular anime title.

Integrated Titles

Showing on television in North America, the *Dragon Ball* series follows the growth, adventure, and many battles of Goku, an alien boy abandoned on Earth and raised by a kindly monk. Over the course of more than 200 English language television episodes, Goku becomes a powerful martial artist and defends the planet from a myriad of alien foes, marries a human girl, has a son, and prevents the destruction of the planet a number of times.

Because of the length of the series, it is hard to detail a single plot line, but it is possible to define the way in which it works. A powerful alien being appears who threatens Goku, his friends, or his home. Goku and his friends face this foe, are initially defeated, and while the others delay the foe, one trains to a new level of power, and eventually defeats the enemy. In Japan, the *Dragon Ball* series has spawned more than 500 episodes, 13 movies, and a wide range of products that includes video games, action figures, clothing, and posters, many of which have arrived in North America.

Vision of Escaflowne is a single season television series consisting of 28 episodes centred on the adventures of high school student Hitomi. Transported to the fantastic world of Gaia, Hitomi becomes a key figure in the battle against the Zaibach Empire, and part of a romantic triangle involving the other members of the opposition to Zaibach, King Van Fanel and Allen Schezar. With a mystical world, dragons, magical mechanised suits of armour, and floating castles, *Escaflowne* is firmly set in the tradition of romantic fantasy.

Unlike the other integrated titles discussed here, the release of *Escaflowne* has not been accompanied by the release of associated products. However, it has been released in more forms than the other integrated titles. In addition to its television airing, *Escaflowne* is available in two different editions, differing length and language, one of which is based on the television release, the other produced in response to condemnation from the imported anime community of how the television release was edited.

Pokemon, though not the first anime series to reach mainstream television and theatres, has certainly become the most successful and recognisable. Based on a video game of the same name, the *Pokemon* television series follows Ash Ketchum, a ten year old pocket monster (pokemon) trainer. Along with fellow trainer Misty and his faithful pokemon companion Pikachu, Ash travels the world in his quest to become a PokeMaster by defeating other pokemon trainers.

Pokemon is perhaps the most heavily commodified anime found in North America, with a product line including video games, stuffed toys, two movies, trading cards, comic books, and more than 150 television episodes. The commercial success of this franchise is undeniable. *Pokemon: The Movie* brought in \$31 million US on its opening weekend on the way to accumulating earnings of \$100 million US.

The *Sailor Moon* television series centres around the conflict between the Sailor Scouts, lead by Sailor Moon, and Queen Beryl of the Negaverse and her twisted minions, who feed on the life force of humans. Of course, in reality Sailor Moon is Serena, a teenaged girl who, like Hitomi of *Escaflowne*, has no desire to be a hero. The series is episodic, and individual episodes often focus on one or another of the Sailor Scouts as they attempt to deal with adolescence, boys, school, and of course, the newest creature from the Negaverse. The airing of *Sailor Moon* on North American television was accompanied by the release of *Sailor Moon* dolls, play jewelry, posters, and other products.

II. Imported Anime

Imported anime titles are characterised as follows: they are available either solely or primarily on video or DVD (popular or high status titles may occasionally be special presentations in theatres or on TV specialty channels); they are available both dubbed into English and in English subtitled Japanese; they are rarely subject to significant censorship or major editing; and, while products like models and soundtracks may be available as imports in specialty stores, they are not subject to extensive cross-medium commodification in North America.

The titles of imported anime are, for many fans and most of the public, anime itself. The non-threatening nature of integrated anime and the underground nature of infiltrated anime mean that imports gain the majority of the attention when anime is systematically examined. As a category, imported anime is both less commercially available, and less culturally available, than integrated anime. With narratives that lack the familiar images and texts of mainstream popular culture, imported anime is portrayed as “the racy, bastard cousin of Disney-style animation, Japanese anime has a hard time finding a place at the family table.” (Monk 2000: C9)

Imported anime refers to titles that are imported to North America to meet a specific demand, and though consumed as a commodity, they are not edited significantly

to meet North American tastes. This is not to say that editing does not occur, nor that it does not alter the meanings available through the imagery or texts, particularly with regards to language, but rather that the imagery and narratives often run counter to mainstream expectations for animation. Imported anime also lacks the cross-medium commodification that accompanies integrated anime. Generally, the related products available to a North American audience are items like manga (Japanese comics) and soundtracks, with a cultural and entertainment value and audience of their own, not action figures or clothes meant to ride the success of a titles release.

Imported Titles

Burn Up W! is the unrelated sequel to *Burn Up*, a title released to little critical acclaim, but with some commercial success, likely because of the high levels of action and well proportioned female characters. Like its predecessor, *Burn Up W!* is OAV (original animation video) that revolves around an all female police SWAT team and their exploits as they pursue terrorists and drug dealers. *Burn Up W!* is a remarkably mundane title, and the only products available in North America that relate to this series are those that have been created and are distributed by fans, like computer screen savers.

Though a science fiction release like *Burn Up W!*, *Cowboy Bebop* is a very different product. *Cowboy Bebop* aired on television in Japan and has been released on VHS and DVD in North America. This 26 episode series follows bounty hunters Spike, Jet, and their captive and eventual compatriot Faye, as they navigate the solar system of the 26th century. Part comedy, part adventure, and part action, key aspects of *Cowboy Bebop* include inside jokes about anime, references to Japanese, Hong Kong, and North American popular culture, and depictions of drug use and sexuality.

Ghost in the Shell is generally acknowledged to be one of the best and most important anime titles released in North America. More realistic than most other anime in both artistic style and treatment of its subject, *Ghost in the Shell* is set in the near future. The narrative centres around the pursuit of the Puppet Master, a hacker who has penetrated the most heavily protected government secrets, by Major Motoko Kusanagi. Kusanagi, a cyborg, eventually merges her mind with the programming of the Puppet Master, an Artificial Intelligence developed by the government.

Though directed by the same individual as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Patlabor 2* focuses on the Japanese politics of pacificism rather than questions of what it means to be human. The story follows the members of the Tokyo Police Department's Special Vehicle Division (SVD) as they use their mechanised armoured suits to stop a terrorist and revolutionary intent on bringing about a change in Japanese governmental systems. This movie is tied to a popular television series, but while Japanese consumers have access to a number of products, including models, action figures, and soundtracks, these products are difficult, if not impossible, to find in North America.

Rayearth is based on a popular Japanese girls *manga* (comic book) series, and has been made into both a television series, and a shorter, three volume OAV series that has been well received in North America. Though very different in many ways than either the *manga* (comics) or the television series, *Rayearth* shares the same basic storyline. In all three works, a trio of high school girls from Tokyo become central to the battle to save both the Earth and the fantastic world of Cephire. Through a mystical link with a god, each of the girls becomes capable of battling the evil sorcerers to prevent the impending cataclysm.

From the same creative team as *Rayearth*, *X* shares the artistic style and dark fantastical nature, but tells a far different story. *X* was one of the most popular movies released in Japan in 1998, but though released to critical acclaim in North America in

2000, commercial success did not follow. The story told is one of psychics battling over the landmarks of Tokyo to determine the fate of humanity. *X* is one of the few imported anime titles to be released to theatres in North America, though to little success and with no associated products.

III. Infiltrated Anime

Infiltrated anime titles share the following characteristics: they are available over the Internet for download or via bootleg video cassette distributors; they are available only in English subtitled Japanese; they are touted as unedited and uncensored by fans; and they are subject to commodification primarily in indirect forms; finally, and perhaps most importantly, as infiltrated distributor Animeman states, "Fansubs [fan subtitled anime] are anime that people loved and wished to show to the public." (Animeman, Interview)

Of course, the public referred to by Animeman is a limited one. Only those with the requisite technological and cultural knowledge have access to fansubs. Infiltrated anime is most easily categorised by distribution, as infiltrated titles are available in several specific, unofficial ways. The primary means of distribution is now linked to movie format downloads from the Internet, while a smaller, more formal audience is linked through the internet sites of the fansubbers (fan subtitlers), who provide VHS copies of infiltrated titles.

Tapes are provided by two different types of distributors, identified by price: either at cost (the cost of the tape and the fansubbers time) or for a more substantial cost, generally a few dollars cheaper than a standard movie VHS tape. Interestingly, the traditional fansub community (comprised of individuals who both produce and consume fansubs) tends to look down upon the second form of distribution, holding distributors who attempt to make a profit from fansubs in disregard. The result is that the selection of infiltrated anime titles available is directly influenced by the audience for infiltrated anime.

Moreover, the distributors of integrated and imported anime tolerate the activities of the infiltrated community. Representatives of the Japanese Animation Industry Legal Enforcement Division, organised and funded by commercial distributors to combat piracy, have stated that they said they would not be targeting fan activities that do not infringe on North American copyrights and do not seek to make a profit. (Protoculture Addicts 35: 3)

Infiltrated Titles

Mysterious Thief Saint Tail is one of the more popular infiltrated titles available for both download and purchase from fansub distributors. This television series centres on Meimi, a school girl who moonlights as a sort of Robin Hood, using magic and the power of the divine to help those who have been the victims of theft or fraud. Pursuing the Mysterious Thief is Asuka, Meimi's classmate and a junior detective, who somehow always ends up a step behind his target.

Like the other infiltrated titles examined, and many of those available, the *Vampire Miyu* television series revolves around a school girl, but tells much darker tales. The school girl in question, Miyu, is actually a vampire, who, with her slave/servant Larva, battles renegade evil spirits that have chosen to defy supernatural law. Unlike the central characters of so many other titles, Miyu does not protect humanity. The *Vampire Miyu* television was in very high demand as an infiltrated title due to the earlier release of an OAV series and a manga collection based on the same character.

In contrast to shadows of *Vampire Miyu*, *Wedding Peach* is the sunlight and pastel story of Mamoko, a seemingly normal high school girl who, along with her two best friends, discovers she is a love angel, destined to protect the world from the evil Reine Devila. Reine, who desires to end love, sends her minions to kill those about to be married, only to be foiled time and again by *Wedding Peach* (Mamoko) and her

friends. Though similar to *Sailor Moon*, *Wedding Peach* provides imagery that is both more traditional and more risqué, emphasising both the femininity and sexuality of its lead characters.

IV. Audience

Though integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime have distinct audiences, there is, almost inevitably, some audience crossover between the categories as I have developed them. Those who first watch integrated anime may begin watching other titles, just as those who prefer imported anime may follow integrated anime series or download infiltrated anime. However, the importance and meanings granted to these titles depend upon the category they fall into. In the words of one anime fan "It's good that Pokemon is here, because it introduces all the little kids to anime," said Campbell. "But from an adult perspective, that friggin' yellow rat is irritating as hell." (Kennedy 2000: A2)

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this instability on the part of the audience is that, for some anime fans, content "is no longer a meanings delivery system that evokes meanings as a cognitive reflex, rather, content is a resource for the production of texts in the audience." (Anderson 1996: 85) Further evidence of this can be found in the production and distribution of material that occurs within both the imported and infiltrated communities around favourite characters and series. With the expansion of the Internet, fan websites have proliferated and the majority of the oldest and most elaborate of such sites are dedicated to imported or infiltrated titles.

Other audience theorists, like Kubey, hold that audiences are effected by the power of the imagery and narratives of anime in similar ways at similar times. For these theorists, though audience members

come to the same film or television program with different backgrounds, needs, and expectations, these media are often powerful enough that once involved in an effectively produced drama, say, a suspense plot, most viewers will care at exactly the same time whether the hero survives. (Kubey 1996: 197)

Kubey's argument is compelling since shared reactions to imagery of are the basis of any interpretive subculture. But the meanings drawn from those shared reactions are based in part on the interpretive strategies of the audience, and on individual taste. Thus, Anderson's approach is more useful to cultural theorists, as it allows us to address a wider range of emotional and cognitive reactions to movies by allowing alternative interpretations and considerations to play a part.

Another aspect of Anderson's approaches to audience theory is that each of the categories of anime can be considered to have a specific audience type. This does not refer to individuals in the audience, but rather to how an audience develops and how it is defined. For example, the audience for integrated anime best resembles the *aggregate audience*, Anderson's term for a target audience based on market demographics. Aggregate audiences are most often identified through sampling, and they are not self-defined, but categorised by the researcher. (Anderson 1996: 82) This audience best defines integrated anime because the distributors have a specific target audience in mind (children) for their titles and the audience does not identify itself as an "anime" audience.

This argument implies that "there is some unified core (hence, the functional equivalence of the elements) of that category that is attracted by the content and explains why elements of the category are found in greater number when that content is present." (Anderson 1996: 82) Integrated anime, focused as it is on children's entertainment is broadcast in television time-slots aimed at the children's market, is rife with cross-medium commodification, and has a target audience that easily makes the transfer to specific categories, such as "girls age 8 – 12."

By contrast, imported and infiltrated anime audiences are “bounded by a set of interpretive strategies” (Anderson 1996: 87) and as such, can be categorised as *strategic audiences*. As Anderson shows in his examination of audiences, the strategic audience is one in which community supervision and ties play a role, but “are less sophisticated – the fan magazine type,” linked together by shared consumption patterns rather than formal organisations. (Anderson 1996: 88) This describes the heart of the interpretive subculture that has formed around North American anime. The audience is linked together by magazines with features like “Best of the Best” (Animerica 8, 12: 12-20) and “Anime under Fire” (Protoculture Addicts 52: 46) that provide readers with common touchpoints and strategies to interpret and defend their chosen medium.

Using this definition, the audience for integrated anime is not considered a strategic audience because the interpretive strategies used by the audience are not specific or bounded to anime. Integrated anime like *Pokemon* and *Sailor Moon* are often subject to the attentions of the mainstream media, but are presented in the same manner as other mass and popular culture artefacts. In contrast, the fan magazines and websites dedicated to imported and infiltrated anime titles are specific to their medium. As such, these audiences form the basis for the development and evolution of the interpretive subculture(s) of anime.

Of course, audiences cannot be so easily compartmentalized and boundaried, and an individual can be a member of each of the audiences for anime, or move between them. Likewise, the boundaries developed by both theorists and the audiences themselves with regard to shifts and overlays in audience are often problematic, as it is not expected that audiences will be mutually exclusive.

Studies of anime audiences in North America and Japan have revealed that while integrated anime like *Sailor Moon* has an aggregate audience, some viewers may use it in a strategic manner. (Grigsby 1997) Newitz studied the audience for imported

and infiltrated anime and found that the majority of these fans are tied, at least loosely, to the anime community. Her research also found that more than 80% of these anime fans were male, and tended to be of either Caucasian or Asian heritage. (Newitz 1995)

Interviews with anime retailers, distributors, and examination of fan magazines are revealing with regards to the nature of the audience for imported and infiltrated audiences, and the crossover that can occur with integrated anime. As the proprietor of Phoenix Comics in Calgary observed, "teenage girls buy Sailor Moon, Cardcaptors, Lain, teenage boys buy Dragon Ball Z, Gundam, Bubble Gum Crisis, adult women buy Ranma, Tenchi, Rayearth, adult men cross over the most, buying everything from adult titles to Dragon Ball Z to Sailor Moon." (Phoenix Comics, Email Interview)

However, it is important to note that it is the fan subculture that surrounds imported anime that has been examined by academics. Little attention has been paid to the audience for integrated anime, except as it is perceived by members of the "fan" subculture. Even studies of integrated anime titles like Sailor Moon have generally examined the meanings attributed to it by members of fan clubs or university students, rather than looking at its success with its target audience or in pop culture in general. (Yoshida 1998; Grigsby 1997)

V. Editing

The editing that integrated anime undergoes helps to explain why many of these titles are looked down upon or criticised by fans of imported and infiltrated anime, as evidenced by the market for unedited, subtitled releases of the original Japanese series or movies. *Cardcaptors*, airing on the Teletoon Network, and released in North America by Nelvana, is an excellent example of this. Based on the series *Card Captor Sakura*, *Cardcaptors* was edited to skip the first seven episodes of *Card Captor Sakura* to shorten the length of episodes and change character relationships and the storyline.

Though these changes are not mentioned in materials released by Nelvana, and the majority of the audience for *Cardcaptors* is undoubtedly unaware of them, knowledgeable fans of the series noticed. In response to these significant changes, a demand arose within the imported anime community for access to unedited episodes, which were soon released under the original title (*Card Captor Sakura*) by Pioneer. As one online reviewer put it, "I just wanted to make it clear that this is the unedited sub I'm watching, and NOT the dub!" (IGN Entertainment: anime/6249.html)

Other complaints about editing are directed at efforts made by the distributors of integrated anime to make titles more acceptable to parents by removing blood, eliminating particularly violent scenes, and censoring the nudity that is commonplace even in children's animation in Japan. This editing is the result of different cultural norms, as anime with a target audience as young as eleven and thirteen can be rife with graphic violence, nudity, and scenes of lovers in bed. (Schodt 1984; Newitz 1995)

The integrated anime series *Dragon Ball Z* was subject to such editing, with English versions that "water down the provocative content of the original with digital cover-ups of nudity, excisions of violence, and rewriting of dialogue to soften Master Roshi's sexual proclivities." (Kennedy, 2000: A1) The result is a product that is acceptable for the young target audience it reaches after school on YTV, but isn't "the real thing" (Kennedy 2000: A1) for older fans of anime.

Though editing is both more common, and more obvious with integrated anime, it does occur in imported and infiltrated anime. However, imported and infiltrated titles are edited to a lesser degree, and for different reasons. Some imported titles are edited to remove the "pixellisation" that sometimes covers genitalia in the Japanese version of a title. (Schodt 1996) Other editing choices are made to lessen the impact of a violent and sexualised scenes or to alter a translated script to match English dialogue to the mouth

movements of a character. But the most obvious, and most controversial area of editing surrounds language, which deserves its own discussion.

VI. Language

Though the importance of language has been mentioned previously, the impact it has on the audience and categories of transmission should not be underestimated. Whether a title is dubbed, subtitled, or only available in Japanese plays a role in determining which audience it appeals to, and the status granted that title, particularly within the interpretive communities of imported and infiltrated anime.

Beyond format lie issues of translation, which have a significant impact on the way in which material is presented. Integrated anime is significantly affected by translation problems due to the thorough editing process it undergoes. Integrated titles are edited for mass consumption and language is just another step in this process. But imported and infiltrated anime titles are not immune to criticism from anime audiences for poor translation. Websites dedicated to an anime title sometimes detail how and where a mistranslation has taken place as a result of dubbing or subtitling or they provide alternate translations of the Japanese script.

The science fiction anime *Ghost in the Shell* provides an example of the importance of language to interpretation and meanings. Differences in the interpretation of the original Japanese, or a complete change in the voice script, will inevitably alter the way in which the audience interprets a title. In the English subtitled Japanese dialogue version of *Ghost in the Shell*, when the main character is asked whether she is paying attention while staring at the cityscape during an assassination mission, she replies that "It's that time of month," while in the English dub, the character replies "There's a lot of background noise." A shift in meaning occurs in the subtitled version, with the implication that despite her cyborg body, she has a "time of the month," linking her

pause to her ambiguous humanity and femininity. In the dubbed version, no such questions are asked about the boundaries between characters' dual biological and technological natures.

The role and place that language has for anime audiences differ between the categories however. Integrated anime, meant as it is for a general, mass audience, is always provided in English. Imported anime is available in dubbed or subtitled formats, but dedicated fans show a definite preference for subtitles. Meanwhile, infiltrated anime is only available in subtitled format, and is translated by fans with a proficiency in Japanese. Indeed, observers have noted that "a mastery of the Japanese language – and implicitly, a 'mastery' of Japanese culture – is highly valued." (Mescallado 2000: 138)

The mastery, or simple knowledge of, Japanese allows audience members to translate and subtitle anime themselves, and to identify and publicise mis-translations. Indeed, this is the basis of the infiltrated anime subculture. When these titles are translated and distributed, there is an attempt to keep the material as close to the original narrative as possible. Fan produced translations often include original Japanese terms that lack a clear English translation and notes are attached to provide viewers with the context needed to understand the original Japanese. The preferences of the communities and fans of imported and infiltrated anime for language are bound to, and indicative of, the interpretive strategies of resistance this audience employs. Furthermore, anime fans are aware of "the fact that when it goes from Japanese to English, something gets lost in the translation and sometimes that means the storyline gets screwed up." (Ultimateanime: viewtopic.php?topic=2&forum=2) As a result, fans seek to identify the original meanings and emotions to a translated title, but the resulting interpretations are not guaranteed to actually mirror Japanese understandings of the title.

VII. Technologies of Transfer

As early as the 1970s, Hans Enzensberger had recognised that the increasing availability and power of technologies of communication made monopolised control of cultural values and meanings impossible. (Enzensberger 1976: 23-5) Since his observation, the differentiation of popular culture and advances in information technologies, particularly with regards to computers and the Internet, have made this conclusion self-evident. Culture becomes "mediated by the global marketing of styles, places, and images, by international travel, and by globally networked media images and communications systems." (Hall 1996: 622)

In this technologically distributed (but not determined) culture, anime is an example of the importance of technology to popular culture and to the movement of cultural artefacts between cultures. It is also an example of the barriers that exist for those with limited access to technology, particularly with respect to those with limited financial resources. While integrated anime may be available via television, both imported and infiltrated anime require a significant investment of time and money with regard to consumption and access.

Imported anime titles range from \$15 to \$50 in price and access to the magazines and websites that form the backbone of the subculture adds to the financial needs of the audience. Vancouver provides an excellent example of how the majority of large anime clubs are closely associated with either secondary education institutions, like the UBC Anime Club, or with a specialised store that sells anime, like the Vancouver Japanese Animation Society. Likewise, access to infiltrated anime, particularly those titles available for download, requires both computer skills and knowledge and a high-speed Internet connection to download such materials.

Thus, transmission occurs as a result of commodification and technology.

Integrated anime, be it *Sailor Moon* or *Hello Kitty*¹, is a part of the global marketing of styles and images, while infiltrated anime owes its existence to global networks of image and communication. Determining the category into which a title falls gives some indication of the mechanisms and rationale for transmission.

Perhaps the easiest way to determine how a title can be categorised is to determine the forms and formats in which it is available. The languages, or forms of language, in which a title is distributed, as discussed above, play an important role in determining the category that a title falls into. Beyond language lies the physical form of distribution. Whether a title is broadcast for television, available on DVD, VHS tape, or downloaded from the Internet is important in determining the interpretive community that will receive it, the interpretive strategies that will be brought to bear, and ultimately, the meanings that will be attributed to it in North America.

Technology has provided the audience and interpretive community of infiltrated anime with a way to build a community without concern for distance. This can be linked to the questionable, if not illegal, nature of infiltrated anime, and the gap that currently exists between communication technologies and technologies of control. The result is that even infiltrated anime titles which are not available for download will be advertised exclusively over the Internet.

In the end, advances in communications technology have been most important to the infiltrated anime interpretive community, as fans may subtitle and distribute titles immediately after their Japanese release in a manner that was not possible even a decade ago. In part, this is because technology facilitates the production and distribution of infiltrated anime, but it is also due to increased levels of communication

¹ Hello Kitty is the mascot of Sanrio, and appears as part of a product line that ranges from anime to the Hello Kitty Car. Sanrio operates stores in 20 countries, and exports to more than 60

with and access to Japanese culture and to fans elsewhere. The interpretive community of imported anime has benefited to a lesser degree, primarily because advances in communications technology has only acted to strengthen previously developed ties and strategies.

Technology becomes central to resistance to a mainstream popular culture in which, as Berger argues, choice is regulated and framed as consumer choice. (Berger 1995: 149 – 151) Anime fans may have a choice of titles, but this choice is limited by the titles available, and to the formats provided. While integrated anime titles make full use of available technology with advanced websites that incorporate games, movie clips, and character biographies, extensive DVD extras, and the careful, seamless editing that computers allow, these changes are cosmetic, only slightly shifting the narrow boundaries of “consumer choice.”

Technological advances have been more important to the development of the alternative forms and categories of imported and infiltrated anime, as they have facilitated the formation, and functions, of the alternative interpretive community. Technology has left the producers of mainstream popular culture and integrated anime, and even distributors of imported anime, unable to control their cultural projects. To limit, if not control, the impact of infiltrated anime, companies turn to “the ‘damage control’ of the unforeseen consequences of the project.” (Crook et al. 1992: 211)

In response to such challenges to the meta-narratives of popular culture, distributors seek to incorporate the new material. The producers of mainstream popular culture introduce integrated anime into broadcast and theatre schedules as a “damage control” measure to limit anime’s role as a site of resistance to the dominant, more profitable titles. Imported anime distributors respond to the challenge of infiltrated anime in a similar fashion, realising that, in the words of infiltrated distributor Animeman, “if they

others, and has annual sales of more than US \$1.2 billion. (Candido 2000: D1)

take the titles that the public [fansub community] likes they are more likely to buy it [upon commercial release]." (Animeman: Email Interview) This response is both shaped by, and shapes, the transmission and reception of anime that reach North American audiences.

The end result of combining factors such as commodification, language, editing, and audience is the construction of the categories of transmission, my ideal types. With the development of these categories, it becomes possible to compare and contrast the content of, and audiences for, anime. The first aspects of anime that should be examined in order to understand how, and why, anime has become a site of resistance, are the images, themes, and genres that dominate the anime that reaches North America.

Chapter 2. Genres and Themes:

High Technology, The Alien, and the Apocalypse

While the integrated, imported, and infiltrated categories of anime are useful in linking a title to mechanisms of transmission, to an audience, and to specific interpretive strategies, they are, by design and by necessity, ideal types, and very broadly conceived. With respect to North American anime titles, these broad categories are less than perfect predictors of significance or reception. In addition, more traditional understandings of "genre" and "theme" must also be taken into consideration.

In Japan, anime exists across the genres of science fiction, fantasy, drama, crime, romance, and comedy, just as they explore themes of teenage angst, the pathos of war, possible apocalypse, technological progress, and childish wonder. However, successful transmission to North America does not guarantee a positive reception. Every anime title examined in this thesis, and the vast majority of titles available in North America, include elements of fantasy or science fiction, even if their core narrative is one of romance, comedy, and so on. This obvious preference on the part of North American audiences for science fiction and fantasy can be explained by examining the themes that run throughout anime, regardless of genre.

The imagery of successful North American anime releases, like other Western "representations of the Japanese..." are dominated by three themes: high technology, the alien, and the apocalypse." (La Bare 2000: 23) Not every anime title includes elements from these three thematic threads, but those titles that become popular, particularly within the imported audience and subculture, invariably do.

Of these, high technology is perhaps the most varied, representing both physical manifestations of technology and the attitudes of technological modernity that

accompany it. In Marcuse's words, much of the anime embraced by North American audiences represents a reality in which "technics becomes the universal form of material production, it circumscribes an entire culture; it projects a historical totality – a 'world.'" (Marcuse 1964: 154) Because of its origins in Japan, anime is interpreted not simply for its contents, but for what North Americans imagine Japan to be. Though different anime titles address seemingly different worlds, the similarities between titles with regard to technology are often striking, and the special place of technology in anime will be discussed in depth later.

Armoured body suits and their larger counterparts, the giant "mecha" that are found in anime like *Patlabor 2* and *Escaflowne*, powerful space ships, cybernetic implants, and other high technology themes are found not only in titles of the same genres, but across genres. The armoured suits of *Vision of Escaflowne* (hereafter *Escaflowne*) and *Patlabor 2* appear to have rolled off the same assembly line, despite the fact that one title is fantasy and the other is science fiction. *Cowboy Bebop* and *Ghost in the Shell* share images of a future (though separated by hundreds of years) in which the cyborg is a central aspect of life and the narrative of technology.

"The alien" can be found in the strange and fantastic nature of many anime titles, as well as the different cultural norms and symbols that are included in these Japanese products. Indeed, titles often contain a combination of the two, with Japanese cultural expectations appearing and dominating depictions of characters and locations that are not only non-Japanese, but completely fantastic in nature.

Finally, the apocalypse looms large over the medium of anime. Many titles are concerned with events or villains that seem to threaten entire planets, peoples, or ways of life. Even the imagery of titles that are not apocalyptic in nature often rely on images of the apocalypse for impact, explosions that resemble nuclear detonations are perhaps the most common example. Of the titles examined in this thesis, *Sailor Moon*,

Escaflowne, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Patlabor 2*, *X*, and *Rayearth* all address issues of the apocalypse.

Perhaps, at the heart of these representations is a reversal or extension Itami's observation that "When a Japanese wants to dream, they watch American movies or animation." (Bruns 1998: 93) Just as the Japanese dream through animation, North American consumers dream through Japanese animation. It would seem that North American audiences find in the themes of high technology, the alien, and the apocalypse, imagery that they desire. As will be developed in detail, the dominant themes show conflicting desires for positive images of a technological future, of powerful, but limited femininity, and for easily transgressed boundaries.

Whatever the genre and content transmitted and whatever the reception, the majority of anime titles incorporated into the imported anime "canon" contain imagery and narratives that are dominated by the above thematic elements. This is not to say that these themes are found in every title, but that their centrality is an important indicator of the site of resistance that anime occupies in North America. The genres and themes that dominate anime represent the conflict that is occurring both within mainstream popular culture and around the transmission of anime to North America. As one would expect, the ways in which a title addresses the above themes can be linked to the audience and interpretations that it is linked to in North America.

Those titles that offer imagery and themes that are the least recognisably Japanese and the least threatening are most likely to become integrated anime. Those that offer disturbingly ambiguous imagery of technology, gender, culture, or the apocalypse will reach a North American audience through imported or infiltrated anime, if at all. The result is not simply that the anime audiences that receive it are very different, but that the interpretation of the anime titles is very different. However, as powerful as these themes of high technology, the alien, and the apocalypse are, other patterns of

image and theme can be found in anime, offering insight the interpretations of resistance that anime audiences are constructing.

I. The Heroic and the Everyday

Indeed, resistance to specific trends in mainstream culture can be found in anime. One of the more recognisable themes can be considered a reaction to the increasing cultural and social differentiation and a postmodern shift in which “popular cultures are celebrated and the ordinary person’s mundane life, the life of ‘the man without qualities’ heroicised.” (Featherstone 1992: 163) Unlike the mainstream culture that Featherstone is discussing, anime does not celebrate the everyday, and indeed, creates “heroes” that challenge the heroes of mainstream popular culture and even the “celebrities...[and] idols of consumption” that dominate North American imagery.

For Featherstone, heroes are “characterised not by what they do, but what they are – the qualities are within the person and hence genuine personality is a matter of fate.” (Featherstone 1992: 176) Like the heroes of literature Featherstone addresses, anime heroes are heroes because they have no choice but to act the way they do, not because of circumstances, but because of who they are. Sailor Moon, Wedding Peach, Vampire Miyu, Goku, Kamui, Hikaru, Van Fanel, and even Ash are all representative of how anime characters are born to be who they are. None of these characters truly seek their heroic status; instead, they react to events in the only way the narrative will let them. Loyalty, duty, friendship, pride, blood, or heritage form the basis of the heroic character in anime. Sailor Moon has no desire to be a hero, it is thrust upon her, and her complaints cannot change her predestined role to protect people. Van Fanel earns his kingdom and the right to pilot Escaflowne (his armoured suit) by slaying a dragon.

The modern hero also embodies other characteristics: “courage, consistency, and unity of purpose... and in a quality frequently associated with the heroic life:

sacrifice. Without seeking immediate death this type of person 'lived as though they were dead.' (Featherstone 1992: 169) This characteristic is common in anime, as the heroes can risk death and escape it, using the events as a narrative tool to emphasise their self-sacrificing nature. Van does so in *Escaflowne*, Spike in *Cowboy Bebop*, Vampire Miyu sacrificed her humanity and human life in order to act as a guardian, Hikaru is willing to sacrifice herself to save her friends in *Rayearth*.

There are few anime titles that have reach North America without a central heroic figure. Even the integrated titles available in North America centre on a hero, but it is often a heroism that is contained and consumable. Sailor Moon is reduced to an often annoying "everygirl" through careful editing, and becomes a commonplace figure through the production and sale of action figures and Halloween costumes, undermining the potential interpretations of resistance around anime. If Featherstone is correct and North American popular culture is focused on the everyday, it would seem the consumption of imported and infiltrated anime mounts a resistance to this trend. The audience for anime is part of that resistance, as is demonstrated by the transmission of titles with an emphasis "on the courage to struggle and achieve extraordinary goals, the quest for virtue, glory, and fame, which contrasts with the lesser everyday pursuit of wealth, property, and earthly love. The everyday world is the one which the hero departs from." (Featherstone 1992: 165)

By departing from the everyday world, anime takes its audience along for the ride, allowing escape, for however short a period, from the mundane. In this, the construction of anime as a site of resistance is clear. But this resistance is a contradictory struggle, based on the modern desire for the heroic, but using the transmission of a differentiated, postmodern medium like anime to challenge the dominant culture. The subcultures that consume anime actively use the postmodern differentiation of culture and tools of late capitalism to seek out titles that will best allow

them to resist the postmodern deconstruction of the heroic and the triumph of the “everyday.”

II. Westernisation, Ethnic Imagery, and Otherness

Depending on the anime title chosen, there is a good likelihood that a viewer unfamiliar with the medium will have little idea it was originally a product of Japan. Many anime titles “depict characters that are supposed to be Japanese with western idealised physical characteristics: round eyes, blonde, red, or brown hair, long legs, and thin bodies.” (Grigsby 1997: 69) The imagery of anime is often a mixture of the exotic and familiar, in both Japan and North America.

The same can be said for the heroic archetype of anime, though in a less recognisable way. The heroes of anime generally fall into what can be considered the male Japanese model of anime. But as can be seen in Figure 1, this Japanese model has few characteristics that might be considered Japanese beyond uniformly black hair and a slim build. With pale, Caucasian skin tones and strange or Non-Japanese names, these heroes show a marked degree of Westernisation, particularly when compared with the images of other Asian nationalities in anime. Images of Chinese, Vietnamese, or even the elderly lack these characteristics, instead including jutting teeth, squinting eyes, and darker skin tones.

Figure 1: The Heroic Archetype in Anime



Ash of Pokemon



Van Fanel of Escaflowne



Goku of Dragonball Z



Kamui of X

Newitz remarks that “the gendered and racial implications of these anime might elicit the approval of an American audience unhappy with contemporary progressive changes in representations.” (Newitz 1995: 10) Yet it is in integrated anime, the most mainstream of categories of transmission, that representations of racially ambiguous heroes and heroines are most prevalent. Moreover, integrated anime titles present the fewest images and narratives that are recognisably of Japanese origin.

Interestingly, while integrated anime titles are always heavily westernised, the same cannot be said of either imported or infiltrated anime. While many imported titles are westernised, many of the titles that are part of the imported “canon,” like *Ghost in the Shell* or *Patlabor 2*, are drawn in a more realistic, less westernised, artistic style. Likewise, infiltrated titles like *Vampire Miyu* often provide imagery that is unmistakably Japanese, both culturally and visually, even if the characters are racially unrecognisable.

Westernisation may be present in both the imagery and narratives of anime, but this does not necessarily characterise anime as a whole. Integrated titles rarely have an

easily recognisable geographic location and characters rarely act in a jarringly Japanese way, with the odd bow being the perhaps the most obvious example of Japanese norms. Beyond this, even integrated anime does not present characters who act in obviously North American ways, unless of course, they are supposed to be North American, in which case they will be little more than a stereotype themselves.

Imported and infiltrated are even less westernised with regard to cultural expectations. They often have Japanese or Asian settings and include important, if not always recognisable landmarks like Mount Fuji or the Tokyo Tower. *Ghost in the Shell* was consciously based on the Hong Kong cityscape because the director believed that "it will become a center of world development and the model for cities in Asia." (Yuen 2000: 13) These titles do not attempt to create a global, or unrecognisable setting, but instead, are inherently and identifiably Asian. Indeed, as in *Patlabor 2*, the texts of imported anime can be "decisively local, concerned mainly with the nation of Japan" (Fisch 2000: 53) and still be successful.

So, if anime presents gender and racial imagery that conflicts with progressive changes, as Newitz suggests, it represents a modernist resistance to the influences of postmodern changes occurring around gender and race. *Wedding Peach* provides an excellent example of this modernist resistance, with its presentation of pink, blue, and green haired female characters who can only exercise power while dressed in bridal gowns or mini-skirts.

While imagery of gender and race may be westernised, narratives and cultural imagery are much less affected. Sailor Moon may be blonde and blue eyed, but she is also portrayed wearing a school uniform and is punished at school by being forced to hold a pair of buckets full of water, something no North American student would be subjected to.

Transmission is also westernised to the extent that the audience receiving a title is an important indicator of the level of westernisation that is both accepted and even desired. Imported anime, with a canon comprised of titles that can be unrepentantly Japanese in imagery, narrative, or cultural affectations, demonstrates that the imported subculture may not desire the westernisation of imagery. This subcultural preference will thus determine the titles made available by the distributors that cater to it, just as mainstream distributors provide integrated anime that is westernised, or at least, difficult to recognise as Japanese, in both imagery and narrative, to the general public. And if this holds true with western imagery, it will also hold true for other images and themes, like sexuality.

III. Sexuality, Transmission, and Genre Definitions

Sexuality is an inevitable part of almost any cultural postmodern medium, and in a visual medium like anime, it will inevitably become a defining characteristic. The imagery of sexuality can be linked to the transmission of anime, both in the ways in which artistic and narrative preferences appear, and the way in which preferences limit transmission. Moreover, it is a central aspect of how audiences of reception can be defined and identified.

The impact of sexuality appears to center around the boundaries that interpretive subcultures develop, thereby limiting what images and narratives are acceptable and desirable to the audience. While this process exists around other themes and imagery, including technology, gender, and race, it is most obvious with sexuality. Certain stereotypes and images of sexuality are acceptable in successful anime. But, as with popular culture in both Japan and North America, questionable sexual imagery is allowed only for comic relief or to emphasise otherness. (Robertson 1998)

One of the central divides in anime, and one that can be identified in successful North American anime, is the distinction between *shojo* (girl's anime) and *shonen* (boys anime), and these definitions mark an important boundary. In Japan, these terms are laden with additional meanings, as evidenced by the dense history and meaning that surround them.

Shojo is the term coined in the Meiji period for unmarried girls and women and means, literally, a "not quite female" female. Its usages and modifications reveal much about the vicissitudes of the discourse of gender and sexuality since the Meiji period... *Shojo* now tends to be used in reference to teenage girls, and gyaru (gals), to unmarried women in their early twenties. *Shojo* denotes females between puberty and marriage, as well as that period of time itself in a female's life. *Shojo* also implies heterosexual inexperience and homosexual experience. (Robertson 1998: 65)

In North America, many of these associated meanings are lost, but the imagery and narratives that are developed based on this divide are recognisably different from those of shonen anime. At the same time, the similarities between titles have allowed the North American audience to develop their own interpretations of what shojo and shonen imagery mean and represent. Of course, I am not suggesting that North American audiences have failed to recognise that there are underlying sexual and gender expectations, but that they lack the cultural understandings that would allow them to interpret the imagery and narratives in the same way that a Japanese audience would. Instead, they interpret these images through the lens of North American sexuality and adapt Japanese sexual imagery to a North American cultural context.

In seeking out sexual imagery, fans have embraced an image that has become central to many of the anime transmitted to North America, the "lolicom" girl. Short for "lolita complex," lolicom anime usually features "a young girlish heroine with large eyes and a childish but voluptuous figure, neatly clad in a revealing outfit or set of armour." (Kinsella 2000: 122) *Burn Up W!* is an excellent example of this style of anime, as can be seen in the Figure 2.

Figure 2: “Lolicom”



Female characters from Burn-Up W!
(The teams engineer is on the right)

These “little girl heroines reflect an awareness of the increasing power and centrality of young women in society,” (Kinsella 2000: 122) but do so in such a way that their power can be easily dismissed as fictional or fantastic. The characters of *Burn Up W!* follow this trend, and though they are police officers and experts in their fields, the images presented would be more at home in a harem than in an office.

Titles like *Burn Up W!* may share little more than their sexualised female heroines, but still comprise a recognisable portion of anime consumption in North America. The sexual nature of “Lolicom” explains why the audiences for titles like *Sailor Moon* were comprised of not only their target market of young girls, but of a significant number of young men, who might otherwise reject such a title as integrated anime. (Yoshida 1998; Grigsby 1997)

Images and narratives of alternative sexuality can also be a limiting factor for anime titles. In Japan, “the homosexual bishonen (beautiful boy) image is not

uncommon.” (Tsurumi 2000: 179) Indeed, in Japan, the Yaoi genre centres around bishonen imagery, catering to female viewers who consume shojo stories of homosexual relationships. Yet, while shojo titles in general are easily transmitted, and lesbian narratives are central to successful anime titles like *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *El-Hazard*, the bishonen genre has had almost no impact in North America.

Only the Yaoi OVA *Kizuna*, which follows the relationship between two male college students, has been released commercially, and then by a relatively unknown distributor and to little fanfare or attention. Indeed, not only is the title difficult to find, the majority of North American fans are unaware of the existence of the entire Yaoi genre. The few reviews of *Kizuna* that are available have not simply noted the subject matter, but made it clear that “If you do not like homosexuality or are bothered by any suggestion of it, this is not a title for you.” (Anime Colony: anime/anime.cgi?25135)

Beyond Yaoi anime lies Hentai (erotic and pornographic) anime, which has been excluded from consideration for the categories developed for this thesis despite the fact that it represents a highly successful example of transmission. I have chosen to exclude this anime genre because, while there may be audience overlap, it cannot be considered a widespread part of popular culture in Japan or North America. Moreover, though these titles share some characteristics, and indeed, mechanisms of transmission, with imported or infiltrated anime, no interpretive subculture has formed around the reception of the genre, and given the nature of the genre, it is unlikely that one will. Nevertheless, certain elements from Hentai sometimes find their way into other forms of anime, and vice versa. *Burn Up W!* has numerous highly sexualised situations and *Sailor Moon* is often the subject of “pirate editions of videos in which the sailor girls are raped by men or are involved in lesbian sex among themselves.” (Grigsby, 72) Despite this, Hentai remains a peripheral force, easily dismissed by, and with an audience that is differentiated from, anime fans. As a review of a hentai title in one anime fan magazine

notes, "Fans of this type of stuff will buy this tape and probably be quite happy with it."
(Protoculture Addicts 47: 56)

Ultimately, sexuality plays a decisive factor in the transmission of anime, acting as a boundary that North American distributors and audiences respect. Anime transmitted to North America has definite boundaries that limit what is acceptable and what is not. Moreover, the different categories of transmission have different boundaries concerning what is considered acceptable with regards to sexuality. Integrated anime is limited to the fantastic and harmless, while imported and infiltrated anime present images that transgress mainstream boundaries, but are in turn limited by their own sets of expectations.

IV. Overwhelming Technology

Technology is a central aspect in most anime, even when it is not directly explored or presented. "Mecha" anime, cyborg anime, war anime, and even fantasy anime are rife with technology that reflects several specific threads of meaning that are familiar to social theorists. The first is the conflict centred around the issues of domination and subordination, as discussed by Herbert Marcuse in his seminal work *One Dimensional Man* (1964). The second thread is the often gendered nature of technology in anime. The imagery and narratives of technology are not limited to mechanical contrivances or high tech gadgets, they often depict human interaction with technology. There are certain themes that shine through with regards to gender and to the way in which gender affects human relations with technology which will be addressed in the next chapter.

While the conflicts that arise around gender roles share the values of what Donna Haraway calls "comfortable dominations," the relations that exist around technology in anime better reflect her concept of the "informatics of domination."

(Haraway 1984: 99) Cyborg citizenship, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and the other informatics reflect the fragmented attitudes and images that are found in the anime transmitted to North America. Technology is often lovingly presented, and while there are many anime titles that address issues of technology, there are many more that include it as a necessary, even ubiquitous, element without addressing it. Moreover, technology is central to the development of the audience and category of transmission, both in imagery and in the material forms of transmission.

Integrated anime does not usually address technology directly; instead, it is a tool that is present when needed, but never explored. The boundaries between technology and nature, gender and technology, are defined, as is the dominant place of technology, but no effort is made to address how this domination came to be. In contrast, imported anime often deals directly with issues of technology, and the imagery that surrounds it can be lovingly, even excessively, detailed and explored. Imported anime often blurs the lines between the organic and mechanical, often to represent gendered technology, as the following chapter will show. Finally, infiltrated anime titles recognise the importance of technology in a way that integrated anime titles do not, but like integrated anime, infiltrated titles tend to revolve around narratives that are not driven by technological issues and insecurities.

V. Technology and Nature

While other aspects of anime, and even other representations of technology in anime, are imbued with elements of the postmodern, attitudes towards technological progress are almost unilaterally modern. The anime that is transmitted to North America almost uniformly accepts that "the rationality of pure science is value-free and does not stipulate any practical ends, it is 'neutral' to any extraneous values that may be imposed upon it." (Marcuse 1964: 156) Unlike North American popular culture, which often

questions the idea of technological progress (Fuchs 1993; Levi 1996), these anime titles reflect Levi's conclusion that "because of different assumptions and cultural mores, the Japanese sometimes have somewhat different fears about the future." (Levi 1996: 95) Anime does not raise the same questions around technology for Japanese as it does for North American audiences. Characters may be dependent on technology, but in the end, technology and nature serve humanity. "Nature, scientifically comprehended and mastered, reappears in the technical apparatus of production and destruction which sustains and improves the life of the individuals." (Marcuse 1964: 166) In anime, such mastery is not always represented as inherently leading to the domination of the human individual. Instead, further technological progress leads to the path by which individuals may escape the "logos of continued servitude." (Marcuse 1964: 159)

In *Cowboy Bebop*, the control over technology by the crew of the spaceship Bebop allows them to act freely. While the characters are dependent on technology, and indeed, their labour is often directed towards maintaining their technological apparatus, anime leaves no doubts that they exercise control over that technology. In anime, the advance of the logos of technology does not lead to the "ever-more-effective domination of man by man through the domination of nature" (Marcuse 1964: 158) envisioned by Marcuse as the inevitable result of modernist scientific and technological progress. In *Cowboy Bebop*, as human control over nature increases (the characters include a genetically engineered, highly intelligent data-dog named Ein), the resulting domination of humans by humans is offset by technological advances that offer expanded, if technologically dependent, freedom. This attitude to technology better reflects Haraway's thesis of a technological milieu that "might better enable us to contest for meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies." (Haraway 1964: 90)

Thus, anime sometimes questions the concept of technological progress, as in *Patlabor 2*, *Ghost in the Shell*, or *X*, but the underlying themes reinforce a positive approach to technological advance, rather than a critical examination of technological domination. Anime transmitted to North America embrace the concept of “the liberating force of technology – the instrumentalisation of things” and reject a world view in which technology can become “a fetter of liberation; the instrumentalisation of man.” (Marcuse 1964: 159) In *X*, the technological achievements of humanity, in the form of the great landmarks and buildings of Tokyo, protect the human race from destruction, and the forces which seek to destroy these works are defeated. In *Ghost in the Shell*, the challenge is not to technology itself, but the use of technology as a control mechanism by humans. The presentation of technology is progressive with the merger of Kusanagi (a human mind in a cyborg body) and the Puppetmaster (an Artificial Intelligence without a body) leading to the creation of a new, biological/digital being who transgresses boundaries and who is presented in an ambiguous, if not positive, light.

In these anime, the best way to resist the *technological a priori* that Marcuse identifies at the heart of modern culture is not found in a rejection of technology, but rather in the form of other technologies. In anime, technological advance does not necessarily indicate a continuation of the modern, but rather presents “dreams of transcendence, as are all optimistic dreams of technology. Technology gives us the possibility to go beyond the present, beyond our limits, beyond our world itself.” (La Bare 2000: 23) In the anime genre, the modern idea of progress no longer dominates, nor has it been overthrown; rather, it has been embraced and extended to allow for multiple, contradictory, narratives of technological advance that address different forms of domination and subordination.

Technological imagery and narratives allow human characters of anime to change their relationships with technology, and to struggle for new meanings, but the

modern program remains dominant with regards to other images of nature. Anime represents humans as separate from nature. Or perhaps more accurately, the imagery of technology found in anime stresses that "the transformation of nature involves that of man, and inasmuch as the 'man-made creations' issue from and enter a societal ensemble." (Marcuse 1964: 154)

Yet this is in itself an indication of the impact the modern program has on anime. As Bruno Latour argues in *We Have Never Been Modern*, two practices dominate the modern program, "the first set of practices, by 'translation,' creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by 'purification,' creates two distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on one hand, that of nonhumans on the other." (Latour 1993: 10) However, it is here that the modern program breaks down, for, in anime, characters are often barely human themselves, even if they may appear to be. Goku is an alien, Kusanagi a cyborg, Miyu a spirit creature. The modern mechanisms and processes maintain boundaries that weaken and fade in the anime preferred by North Americans, even in integrated titles like *Pokemon* that have become part of mainstream popular culture. The result is imagery that allows multiple themes to exist in the same technological space. Between titles, or even within a single title, one finds imagery "which projects nature as a potential instrumentality, stuff of control and organisation" (Marcuse 1964: 153) and imagery which recognises the "connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture." (Haraway 1984: 85)

Even children's titles like *Pokemon*, with its strange creatures and unthreatening world which centers around the ability of its human characters to capture and control the pokemon that inhabit their world, are full of contradictions. Ash, Misty, Jesse, and James all use scanners to measure and catalogue pokemon power, then use their pokeballs to capture and control the pokemon they want to use. *Pokemon*, though found

naturally, and often seemingly intelligent, are not simply controlled by technological means, but become tools themselves. The difference, of course, lies in the intentions of the characters and in their relations with their controlled pokemon. Ash and Misty control their pokemon to advance their goals and pursue the title of Pokemaster. Jesse and James seek to collect the rarest pokemon in the world, and have no other goals. Ash and Misty are successful not because they distance or separate themselves from nature, even if they control it, but because they foster a connection with their pokemon companions. Jesse and James, who see their pokemon as assets, rather than beings, or even tools, are often unsuccessful because of their lack of connection to the natural world around them.

Anime viewers must also answer the question of whether a technology is mechanical or organic, or some amalgamation of the two. Kusanagi of *Ghost in the Shell* and Jet of *Cowboy Bebop* are cyborgs, intrinsically linked to technology. Their original organic form has been fused with, and replaced by, technology. The imagery surrounding the Beast of X raises the question of whether it has a "life" of its own, as it eventually kills its maker in a jealous rage. Then there is the Puppetmaster, the Artificial Intelligence that escapes its creators and seeks some way to emerge into the real world. The technologies of anime "are disturbingly lively" (Haraway, 86) and those who interact with them often fade into the background when they are present.

Watching the fluid movements of the giant mecha Escaflowne or the Labor robots of *Patlabor 2*, one cannot fail to see the fluidity and grace of movement they possess, just as one cannot see the human factor which is behind or integrated into, the technology. The line between technology and nature is blurred even further in *Ghost in the Shell*, *X*, and *Cowboy Bebop*. While the imagery that dominates North American pop culture is of "an aggressively violent cyborg that embodies a fantasy of destructive force

combined with invincibility" (Springer 1993: 88), of clearly mechanical and clearly organic components, the cyborgs of anime are far more transgressive.

When Van achieves a merger with mechanical Escaflowne, he does not become invincible; instead, he begins to share in the pain his machine body suffers. From his enclosed cockpit within Escaflowne, he "becomes one with the machine" and becomes a more effective warrior; the result is that when Escaflowne's arm is harmed, Van's arm is injured, when Escaflowne takes serious damage, Van is nearly killed. The boundary between the organic and mechanical is lost, the separation between the human and the construction vanishes. However, as an integrated title, little time is spent considering the ramifications of such narrative elements, and after his battle, Van is returned to health, unharmed and unchanged.

In the imported title *Ghost in the Shell*, Kusanagi, already a cyborg, merges with the artificial intelligence known as Puppet Master to create a new, merged being. The blurring of the boundaries between the organic and mechanical is complete. Once human, Kusanagi becomes a cyborg with a dual nature, and then as the movie ends is transformed again to a being at once organic, digital, and mechanical. The resulting image is one of "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities." (Haraway 1984: 89)

In anime, technology is a site of conflict and contradiction, not least because of the contested selection of titles available in North America. While integrated and infiltrated anime titles have the potential to raise questions regarding their imagery of technology, the audience for imported anime has shown particular preferences for more classically modern representations of technology. Technology is linked to concepts of control over nature, power, gender, and humanity. Technology can either be used to control, or is presented as a threat to control, threatening humanity not because of what it is, but because of how it is used. North American anime is also rife with images that

blur the boundaries between technology and nature, and titles that can be considered part of the canon often center on this theme; *Ghost in the Shell*, *Akira*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* are only a few of many such titles.

VI. Transmission and Technological Imagery

Images of technology in anime, like Haraway's cyborgs, are "everywhere and they are invisible." (Haraway 1984: 88) On the one hand, many titles embrace elements of the modern program in their images of nature and technology, on the other, many reject the boundaries and processes of that program. However, this is not to say that the processes of transmission and audiences of reception do not result in further boundaries, as the following chapter shows with respect to gender and technology.

The audience for imported anime seems to be drawn towards particular approaches to technology, and the titles that successfully address these topics are those that achieve the highest level of success. Titles like *Ghost in the Shell* and *Cowboy Bebop*, with imagery and narratives that center on technological change and progress without imposing the clear boundaries of the modern program stand tall.

In contrast, integrated and infiltrated anime may contain technological imagery, but are much less likely to address this imagery or its impact. The difference between these two categories of transfer is that in infiltrated anime technology is often acknowledged and depicted, but is rarely central to the narrative, and even more rarely explored in any depth. In contrast, Integrated titles assume the presence of technological artefacts but do not acknowledge or develop these images, even if doing so would strengthen the story. *Dragon Ball Z* depicts space travel and androids, but beyond providing a way to move the story forward, these images have little importance to the story. Likewise in *Escaflowne*, where the combination of magic and technology of Gaia is depicted in some detail, but is never explained or examined.

Images of technology obviously play an important role in the transmission of imported anime, but are less important to the audiences of integrated and infiltrated audiences. Indeed, if integrated anime audiences can be said to be the result of commodification and consumption, imported audiences are shaped by technological imagery and infiltrated audiences by gendered imagery. The centrality of this imagery and narratives to transmission and audience preferences cannot be ignored, which makes this examination of technology a necessity. Ultimately, the genre and thematic elements discussed in this chapter are important to the examination of anime transmission due to their ever-present nature. Science fiction, fantasy, the alien, the apocalypse, westernisation, sexuality, and technology are not simply minor linkages, but rather are central to the development of the narratives and imagery that drive the medium. In the following chapter, I will examine a single aspect of anime in depth in order to better understand how thematic, genre, and cultural elements can play a role in the transmission of a cultural artefact. In this exploration of gender, I will address a number of key points that draw on understandings developed in this chapter around Westernisation, sexuality, and technology.

Chapter 3. Technologies of Gender: Traditional, Destructive, and Fantastic Power

As I will show, the imagery and issues concerning gender are central to anime transmission and consumption. However, traditional, progressive, confused, or strange, these themes and the imagery and narratives that accompany them are inescapably intertwined with the preferences of North American anime audiences.

Because of this, the two adjectives that best describe gender and technology imagery in anime are contradictory and complex. A careful examination of the anime available in North America makes it clear that there are identifiable patterns and styles of representation within the individual genres and styles of anime. These patterns can be linked to consumption, categories of transmission, and the expectations of the audience, as was discussed in Chapter One. Indeed, gender imagery in anime is characterised by the ways in which modern *and* postmodern imagery and narratives relate to larger cultural demands in both North America and Japan.

Integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime all contain imagery and narratives that can be related back to the mechanisms of transmission or to particular interpretive subcultures. By discussing particular gender images and themes, this chapter will link the categories of transmission to specific imagery, and through that, to forms of cultural resistance and containment, in order to understand the driving forces behind the cultural transmission of anime. Moreover, the influence of interpretive subcultures can be found in the prevalent standards and preferences that surround depictions and narratives of gender.

I. Gender and Anime

Since the terms “gender,” “masculinity,” and “femininity” denote sites of conflict, they must be defined in any consideration of anime. For the purposes of this thesis, they are all linked to two concepts: identity and role. For this, Judith Butler’s definition of gender will be used. As she writes, gender is not

a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylised repetition of acts*... this requires a conception of gender as a constituted social temporality. (Butler 1990: 140)

For Butler, gender is porous, and because of its temporal nature, can be understood differently in different times and spaces. Actions that are masculine in one time and place may become feminine or ambiguous in a different cultural space.

Thus, gender identity must be understood in terms of whether a person is currently considered to be masculine or feminine, while gender role is the culturally defined set of behaviours that are considered appropriate to a given culture, at a given time. Masculinity and femininity can be regarded as the representations of gender which are expected from, acted out, and re-interpreted by, male and female anime characters.

Magical girls, tomboys, stalwart princes, evil queens, and reluctant heroes all have expected roles in anime, all exercise specific forms of power, and all are shaped by the standards and narratives common to the medium. In part, this is because the roles and stereotypes, both male and female, “are not limited to narrow models of masculinity or femininity.” (Tsurumi 2000: 185) Though the majority of anime characters may fall into an expected role, these roles are sometimes unique to anime. Scantly clad female engineers and gender bending martial artists may be acceptable, and even expected, in anime, but not elsewhere. Perhaps in part this wider range of gender roles may be the result of the animated nature of the medium and its inherent unreality.

This is linked to the original Japanese standards of *shojo* (girls) or *shonen* (boys) art and narratives, but it can also be related back to North American consumption patterns. The North American distributors of integrated anime and the subcultures of imported and infiltrated anime have developed specific, and often contradictory, expectations of the roles and identities of anime characters. This can be traced to the demands on the audience and of the narrative. A lolicom (lolita complex) anime title like *Burn Up W!* must present particular images of its female characters, but at the same time, the narrative being told requires a degree of combat or technical expertise from each character, thereby challenging gendered stereotypes with regard to how image and abilities are linked in anime.

II. Gender Imagery and Expectations

While gender is not defined solely by imagery, the importance of artistic style to the gender representations of anime cannot be exaggerated. A visual medium like anime is driven by visual aesthetics and is rife with visual cues. With anime, two distinct artistic styles dominate the medium, linked directly to gender expectation. Whether a title has been drawn in shojo or shonen artistic styles will provide a knowledgeable viewer with expectations regarding imagery and narrative and the subsequent representations of gender.

Shonen anime is dominated by "male characters have thick, arched Kabuki-style eyebrows and glaring eyes," a sharp contrast from shojo anime, where characters are "drawn with pencil-thin eyebrows, long, full eyelashes, and eyes the size of window panes... lithe and lanky." (Schodt 1984: 91-92) *Dragon Ball Z*, with its thick lines, primary colours, squat characters, emphasis on action, and relatively undeveloped backgrounds exemplifies shonen anime. *Sailor Moon*, with attractive, thin, large-eyed

characters, cute animal companions, romance, and pastels, stands out as an excellent example of shojo anime.

Interestingly, shonen anime has a much broader range of acceptable artistic styles for both characters and backgrounds. Character designs for shonen anime titles vary widely, from the stylistically crude and undeveloped imagery of *Dragon Ball Z* to the more realistic artistic styles and character designs of *Patlabor 2* and *Ghost in the Shell* (Figure 3). The worlds the characters exist in exhibit similar variation, from unadorned green plains and blue oceans to high detailed cityscapes, complete with dripping pipes. In contrast, the imagery of shojo anime titles is more restricted, particularly with regards to character depictions. Shojo characters, male and female alike, share a number of physical characteristics including, but not limited to, eye shape and long legs.

Figure 3: Shonen Artistic Styles



Image from Dragon Ball



Image from Ghost in the Shell

As Schodt notes, characters that lack the “orb-like” eyes of shojo anime are usually portrayed (and perceived by the audience) as more experienced, and less innocent. (Schodt 1984) Faye of *Cowboy Bebop* has eyes that are noticeably smaller than those of a school girl like Serena of *Sailor Moon* (Figure 4). Thus, it comes as no surprise that Faye uses deceit and charm to achieve her often self-serving goals, while

Serena battles the forces of evil and pursues true love. This imagery, though not always a determining feature, generally holds true across gender lines in shojo titles, but is limited to female characters in shonen anime.

Figure 4: Windows to Innocence/Experience



Faye from Cowboy Bebop



Serena from Sailor Moon

The artistic style of a given title plays a role in determining the expected narrative style as well, with an understandable impact on gender imagery. Shonen anime are often more direct, more action oriented, and cruder in their story-telling. The stereotypical shojo anime is romantic, more complex, and involves more character development. These expectations draw upon the perceived tastes of the original audience for each style (boys vs. girls), but have since become somewhat blurred. A shojo title like *X* may be rife with the visual symbols of shojo, like floating cherry blossoms and large eyes, but the accompanying narrative can no longer be assumed to be more complex than that of a shonen title like *Ghost in the Shell*.

Moreover, the imagery of gender is a signifying factor in how characters are expected to develop, and the reception they will receive. Characters like Allen Schezar of *Escaflowne* and Kusanagi of *X* are depicted with specific traits that are identifiable as signifiers to the interpretive communities of anime. Allen's slim build and flowing hair are

an indicator of his excellent swordsmanship and heroic nature, just as Kusanagi's powerful build and leather jacket indicate his "bad guy" status.

III. Gender Roles and Power

Though the first impression of a character is based on imagery and is an indication of how she or he will develop, gender imagery is also key to understanding the way in which power will be exercised by a character. Power in anime tends to fall into three specific, interrelated types: traditional power, destructive power, fantastic power. Gender imagery determines how power demonstrates itself and the success of a title at meeting gender expectations.

In anime, gender imagery is often related to traditional expressions and expectations of behaviour and power. To define these traditional, modern sites of power, one need only examine "the comfortable old hierarchical dominations" (Haraway 1984: 99-100) that are counter to what Haraway calls the informatics of domination. Male anime characters possess traditional power through strength, position, experience, or nature. Van Phenil of *Escaflowne* is a hero and king because he is the male heir, just as Goku of *Dragon Ball Z* is the son of great hero of the Saiyan people.

Female characters generally exercise traditional power through sexual appeal, by acting maternally, or through deception, though there are occasional exceptions in imported and infiltrated anime. In *X*, Kamui's mother and Kotori literally carry power inside them, and die when it is released. Faye of *Cowboy Bebop* demonstrates another form of traditional power through the use of her beauty and devious nature, a key factor in her appeal with the audience. As a fan states, "I just love it when Faye turns on that sultry voice to charm." (Anime Colony: anime.cgi?11146)

Destructive power is concerned with the ability of characters to cause, or bring about, the destruction of the places or people they encounter. Destructive power can be

fantastic in nature or linked to technological or natural phenomena. *X* is an excellent example of this, as the characters exercise fantastic power while destroying vast areas of Tokyo. In contrast, in *Burn Up W!*, female police officers bring about mass property destruction with the aid of high powered weaponry and armoured suits. When it comes to the exercise of destructive power, few differences can be identified between the genders, though it should be noted that males are more likely to wield it.

Fantastic power can be characterised as powers that are quite obviously outside the boundaries of the everyday, making the character something beyond (or less than) human. Magical powers, strange mental abilities, or a cyborg body are all examples of fantastic power. Fantastic power is not, by itself, a good indicator of gender roles or imagery, because the exercise of fantastic power is conflicted. It is often destructive and can be limited by traditional gender roles or conflict with them. Miyu of *Vampire Miyu* possesses immense fantastic power, but her use of this power is limited. Instead, she often relies on her mysterious servant, a tall cloaked masculine figure, to defeat the creatures she faces.

In *Sailor Moon*, the heroines draw on fantastic power that can only affect creatures of the Negaverse. Indeed, the Sailor Scouts cannot affect the “normal” world they inhabit. Their power is not simply fantastic in nature, but limited to affecting the fantastic. Similarly, Hikaru of *Rayearth* gains access to her fantastic power only after the “real” world and its people disappear. Moreover, the fantastic nature of a heroine’s power is often linked to traditional stereotypes. Wedding Peach defends love and the newly-wed dressed as a Bride, Saint Tail pursues justice with the powers of deception, Sailor Moon fights for love with her jewelry.

The way in which fantastic power is exercised by the genders also differs with respect to where they are willing to use their power. Of the titles examined in this thesis, no female characters openly use their fantastic powers, while male characters, including

Goku of *Dragon Ball Z* and Kamui of *X*, are usually more than willing to. Female characters limit the use of fantastic power to the private sphere, unless they are disguised or unknown, while males exercise their powers freely throughout.

A character can have one form of power, or multiple forms of interrelated power. Gender imagery, particularly around power, enters into this relation by determining how this power will manifest itself, and how it will be exercised. The importance of gender imagery, and the power that imagery represents, are then linked to the stereotypes and genre preferences that dominate anime transmission.

IV. The “Magical Girl”

Perhaps the most recognisable of these gender images, and the one that appears most uniformly and consistently across the categories of integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime, is that of the “magical girl.” While Buffy the Vampie Slayer or Xena the Warrior Princess could be considered today’s North American equivalents of the anime “magical girl,” significant differences can be identified.

Titles containing this character type account for a substantial portion of the anime titles released in Canada, and of the thirteen titles chosen for this study, seven can be considered a part of this genre: *Vision of Escaflowne*, *Sailor Moon*, *Rayearth*, *X*, *Vampire Miyu*, *Wedding Peach*, and *Saint Tail*. It is also the focus of the majority of academic work around anime and anime transmission. (Newitz 1995; Grigsby 1997; Yoshida 1998; Tsurumi 2000; Allison 2000)

Of course, the term “magical girl” is itself somewhat vague and of questionable value. However, it is possible to develop an “ideal type” that can be used to determine whether a female character can be considered to be a “magical girl.” A “magical girl” has supernatural or superhuman powers, but her use of them is externalised, and as Newitz observes, is “based upon the idea that women should conceal their power.” (Newitz

1995: 5) It is only by concealing her powers during her normal activities, or disguising herself when using them, that a magical girl can prosper. When a magical girl exercises her power openly, disaster usually follows, either for the magical girl or her friends.

Newitz further argues that audiences here recognise that “female public authority is an undeniable – if contested – social reality; hence, I believe, Americans consume magical girl anime as a form of nostalgia for the kind of social situations made possible by traditional gender roles.” (Newitz 1995: 5) Anime consumption demonstrates this preference, though variations exist between integrated, imported, and infiltrated anime. The magical girls of integrated anime disguise the exercise of or mistrust their powers and themselves, while those of imported anime exercise power in obviously fantastic, and often destructive, ways.

North American popular culture itself is full of representations of powerful, often aggressive women and of sexually available, submissive women, so this desire for powerful females that occupy, at least occasionally, traditional gender roles, must be examined. Indeed, it would appear that this preference for the magical girl can be considered part of the “nostalgia for the present” that accompanies the development of the postmodern. This nostalgia can explain in part why a specific segment of the North American audience for anime, namely young men, seems to have a preference for the imagery of magical girl anime. (Newitz 1995; Grigsby 1997; Yoshida 1998)

Anime consumption reflects this phenomenon, the “creation of a life space reminiscent of a nostalgic vision or some pastiche of eras.” (Friedman 1994: 191) These young men may recognise the power or authority exercised by a magical girl, reflecting the increased public role of women, but the context and narrative of these titles allow them to separate the feminine and the powerful. This separation of power from femininity reduces the magical girl to cute impotence outside of the fantastic sphere, providing non-threatening feminine gender imagery.

However, the exact way in which the power exercised by a magical girl is external to her often varies. Serena of *Sailor Moon* can only exercise her supernatural powers when she is transformed into her fantastic alter-ego through magic that is “derived externally from jewelry, makeup, and prism power.” (Grigsby 1997: 74) In her normal form she is “a little clumsy, lazy, carefree, and definitely more interested in games, and dreaming about boys (like the dashing Tuxedo Mask), than fighting evil.” (YTV) It is only when she becomes Sailor Moon that Serena is capable of fighting, and defeating evil, and even then, her “female” characteristics often interfere.

Likewise, Meimi of *Mysterious Thief Saint Tail* is a normal girl who gains her magical powers through an unexplained connection to God. In order to help others, Meimi transforms into Saint Tail, an elusive thief and magician. However, unlike Serena, Meimi is portrayed as the Japanese version of “the girl next door,” indicating the role that gender representation plays in transmission. In *Rayearth*, Hikaru’s ability to exercise power comes about only through the intervention of the fantastic, and the results are disastrous. Furthermore, her ability to save her world and friends is based upon her association with an obviously masculine entity.

Figure 5: Magical Girls

As would be expected, and as is obvious from the images provided in Figure 5, magical girl titles are, unsurprisingly, drawn almost exclusively in shojo artistic styles, with heroines whose “orb like eyes... emote gentleness and femininity.” (Schodt 1984: 91) These characteristics are central to the romantic styles of the genre, and magical girls live in a world wherein “relationships are not clearly defined, there are questions about whether certain male characters are friend or foe, and there is a juvenile romantic tension... [She is] clearly not sexually involved, though she is extremely sexually provocative.” (Grigsby 1997: 72)

According to Allison, the magical girl is “a sex icon as well as a superhero.” (Allison 2000: 269) However, while works that address the magical girl genre inevitably highlight the sexuality of the magical girl (Newitz 1995; Grigsby 1997; Allison 2000; Tsurumi 2000), they also recognise the romantic bent of the genre. Even if the imagery of the magical girl is depicted as a sex symbol, the narrative is romantic or fantastic. The magical girl remains in the realm of the fantastic, including her sexuality.

While *Sailor Moon* is the best known of the titles available in North America to demonstrate this trait, it is not the best example of this theme. Instead, *Wedding Peach*, with its Love Angel heroine, can be seen as perhaps the archetypal magical girl anime. To defend those who are in love and about to be married from servants of the evil Reine, Wedding Peach and her compatriots can change from school girls to brides to bridal warriors. And if there are sexual overtones that accompany the image of the school girl in a uniform, the standard uniform of the magical girl, they are minor compared to the symbolic meanings that surround representations of a bride.

Ultimately, the magical girl genre seems to fulfill several audience needs, presenting a romantic, attractive, but not sexually available female. This character will exercise a degree of power in order to further the story, but this power is both fantastic (thus unbelievable) and limited in nature, its female user unable or unwilling to use her power openly and freely.

The uniformity of narrative and imagery within this genre are a good indicator of a key consideration in the transmission of anime. This is the argument that transmission occurs because there is an audience in North America that is not finding narratives and imagery that meet its needs in North American popular culture. This search for the "magical girl" and the alternatives to North American gender roles and behaviour she represents is evidenced by the fact that the "magical girl" is strongly represented in each of the categories of transmission.

Indeed, the presence of the magical girl is strongest in the infiltrated subculture, which is the category in which the audience has a direct role, rather than an indirect role in anime transmission, distribution, and reception. A quick visit to an infiltrated anime distribution site like Luna Arts Anime reveals that more than half of the available titles can be considered to be part of the magical girl genre.

V. The “Mecha Girl”

Mecha, Japanese for “machine,” is used by anime fans to describe titles that revolve around technology, particularly armoured combat suits and giant robots. The “mecha girl,” unlike the magical girl, exists in a world that draws far more heavily upon shonen artistic and narrative styles. Both action and female sexuality have a more prominent place in this genre, destructive power is exercised directly, and the female body is more obviously on display. If magical girls are the dominant form of female heroine, mecha girls come a close second.

The mecha girl differs from the magical girl in several key respects. Mecha girls do not possess the fantastic powers of the magical girl, but they exercise a great deal of destructive power through the technological trappings that they possess. Moreover, mecha girls exercise power far more openly than their fantastic counterparts. Mecha girls may be rendered unrecognisable by their armoured suits, but they operate openly, and usually with some form of official approval.

Three of the titles examined include mecha girls among their characters: *Patlabor 2*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Burn Up W!*. These female characters use their technologically granted power destructively, and in every case, are part of the official hierarchy of power as members of the police or government, and are answerable to a male dominated power structure.

However, while the mecha girl's use of power may be structured, the expectations around gender roles and the imagery that accompanies them are less structured than those of the magical girl genre. While all three titles are arguably shonen anime, the broader range of artistic styles that shonen allows means that there are few shared visual images between the three beyond the most basic representations of the female body and of technologically based power. Thus, it is necessary to examine the

narratives of this genre in order to better understand the gender expectations that affect how the mecha girl is represented.

One of the narrative themes that accompanies the use of the mecha girl's technological power is the presence of a technological enabler. While the mecha girl may exercise power, she is not truly responsible for creating or maintaining it. Other figures, generally male, provide the technological knowledge that provides the mecha girl with her power. Perhaps the best example of this can be found at the end of *Ghost in the Shell*. After rescuing and merging with the Puppetmaster, Kusanagi awakes in a new cybernetic body procured for her by her male partner, a body that is feminine, fragile, and de-emphasises the technologically granted power she possessed before she disobeyed the orders given to her.

Femininity and traditional gender expectations plays less obvious role for mecha girls. While they may be presented as sex objects, this is not always the case. *Burn Up W!* includes gratuitous levels of nudity and what are aptly known as fan service shots, included only to titillate male members of the audience. In *Burn Up W!* these include a nude bungee jump, numerous changing room scenes, and characters stripped out of their already skin tight combat armour.

In contrast, *Patlabor 2* contains no nudity and the story contains little, if any, sexual or romantic concerns, and though Kusanagi of *Ghost in the Shell* often, seemingly unnecessarily, appears naked, the fact that her body is entirely cybernetic would seem to present an ironic counter to claims of fan service. Unlike the equally artificial and unreal bodies of the female characters of *Burn Up W!*, the artificial nature of Kusanagi's body is stressed from the opening credits, which show the construction, or formation, of her cybernetic body.

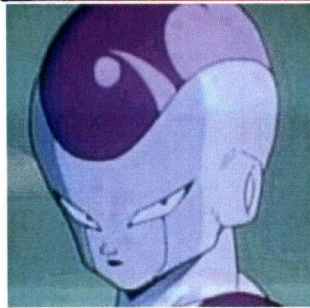
Finally, the mecha girl is open to far greater levels of conflict between modern and postmodern imagery than the magical girl due to the merging of the technological

and biological. While Kusanagi of *Ghost in the Shell* uses her cybernetic (though still obviously female) body to become invisible and to perform superhuman feats of strength, the story has her “ultimately fulfilling her reproductive role” (Dr. Sharalyn Orbaugh, UBC: Email correspondence) by bringing forth a new, if non-human, life. Her cybernetic nature brings some of the conflicts around gender between the modern and postmodern into the light. Though she fulfills her role, it is clear that for her technologically advanced body, “ideologies of sexual reproduction can no longer reasonably call on notions of sex and sex role as organic aspects in natural objects like organisms and families.” (Haraway 1984: 100) Reproduction becomes a process of creating unnatural objects. Even if Kusanagi plays out a reproductive role, questions are raised about modern boundaries and standards around gender, while emphasising the fact that her technological nature did not subordinate her human nature.

VI. Villains

Most anime villains do not simply act out nefarious plots to defeat their heroic opponents; they are a source of “gender trouble” and challenge the gender norms and expectations of the audience. Their eventual defeat is a victory not simply for good, but for the status quo as it relates to gender. Villains must be distinguished from mere bad guys, in that a villain actually challenges the heroes and threaten the lives or livelihoods of the heroes, their family, or their friends, or the planet. A jewel thief from *Saint Tail* may be a bad guy, but he is not a villain.

Figure 6: Ambiguous Villains



Above: James and
Jesse of *Pokemon*
(Crossdressed)

Below: Frieza of
Dragonball Z

Be they major or minor, true villains do not simply oppose the forces of good, they almost always challenge gender norms. Whether their gender itself is unclear, like Frieza of *Dragon Ball Z*, or if they act in ways contrary to gender norms, like James of *Pokemon* or Reine of *Wedding Peach*, villains challenge gender norms (Figure 6). For villains, gender becomes yet another area in which their threat can be either limited or intensified, depending on whether their transgression is humorous or dangerous, and a way in which gender norms can eventually be reinforced.

Frieza's immense power threatens not simply the heroic Goku and his companions, but the entire planet. Unlike Goku's previous hyper-masculine foes, replete with bulging muscles and booming voices, Frieza initially appears as a small, strangely proportioned creature with a voice that is not easily identified as male or female. However, Frieza does eventually transform to better use his/her power, growing larger and becoming more masculine, though his/her voice does not change. Even the most

devoted fans are not sure what Frieza is. While most websites refer to Frieza by using masculine terms, the largest website devoted to the character is dedicated to "Lady Frieza."

The villains of shojo anime, and particularly male villains, offer a different take on ambiguity. With feminine features, frail appearances, striking garments and flowing hair, these villains offer a different challenge to gender norms. Within shojo narratives, these villains pursue traditional male goals around power and domination, creating a masculinity that is all the more disturbing because of their attractive appearance. The disjunction between imagery and narrative provides shojo villains with much of their characteristically dark, ominous charisma.

Dilandau of *Escaflowne* is a perfect example. With his sneering, feminine features and ambiguously gendered soldiers, Dilandau is the villain the audience is meant to love to hate. When cut across the face by Van during a duel, he cries out "You cut my face, my beautiful face." However, Dilandau is eventually revealed to be not simply psychotic, but deeply psychologically scarred because he was the victim of a terrible experiment. The revelation that Dilandau was initially Allen Schezars' younger sister, twisted by powerful fate-altering magic, is used to explain his/her madness. When forced to play the role of a man, Allen's sister became a vicious, hateful, selfish villain.

James of *Pokemon* is representative of how gender transgressions are used for comic effect and to lessen the threat posed by a villain. James comes across as ineffective, effeminate, given to screaming, and subordinate to his female teammate Jesse. Much of the humour in any given *Pokemon* episode derives from this inept duo's attempts to steal pokemon from Ash and his friends and James's eventual humiliation. *Pokemon* often presents Jesse's and James' failure as the result of James' lack of masculine virtues and Jesse's overbearing nature. It is these character flaws that allow

Ash and his friends to defeat the evildoers time and again, reinforcing gender norms and expectations.

But not all villains are ambiguously gendered. Some villains challenge gender norms not by blurring the lines, through the imagery of hyper-masculinity or hyper-femininity. In *X*, the primary female villain is not simply female, but aggressively so. Her attitude, clothing, and character all challenge gender norms by exaggerating her feminine appeal, sexuality, and deviousness. In *Dragon Ball Z*, the opposite occurs, and the male villains that challenge the heroes are hyper-masculine. Their muscles bulge far out of proportion to their bodies, they are instinctively and irredeemably aggressive, and their bravado and callousness are a powerful counterpoint to the more controlled, more traditionally masculine heroes that eventually overcome them.

Perhaps the most interesting villains are those that do not challenge gender norms. Folken Phenil of *Escaflowne* is a good example, as he aids the Zaibach Empire when it destroys his homeland and then hunts for his brother. However, for a shojo anime character, he is quite masculine, and is strong, controlled, and intelligent. He challenges no gender norms, and indeed, for much of the series, appears to be more capable and skilled than Van or Allen. However, his true nature is eventually revealed, and he turns against the Zaibach Empire, joining the heroes. In the end Folken is not a villain, but misguided, and he eventually sees the error of his ways, ending the threat he posed to the seemingly less capable, less masculine heroes of the series. Lacking the gender trouble or ambiguity of a true villain, Folken is capable of escaping the role of the villain.

VII. Gendered Ambiguity

As noted above, gender ambiguity and androgyny are not uncommon themes in anime, or in Japanese popular culture (Buruma 1984; Robertson 1998), and the

transmission of anime to North America has ensured that a good selection of titles that address these themes are available. However, the nature of the gender ambiguity that a title addresses plays an important role in determining its success.

In part, this is because the category an anime title belongs to plays an important role in how ambiguity is portrayed. As discussed above, villains may come to represent ambiguity and exaggerated sexuality, but this is particularly true of integrated anime. Imported and infiltrated anime offer images and narratives of ambiguity and hyper-sexuality that can include protagonists as well as villains. The result is the excessive femininity of *Wedding Peach* or the uncertain sexuality and gender of the characters of *X*.

Even the Japanese names that accompany the characters of imported and infiltrated anime can be highly ambiguous. In *Ghost in the Shell*, Kusanagi is the name of the female protagonist. In *X*, Kusanagi is the name of a male villain who seeks the end of mankind. While this is perhaps the most extreme example, Japanese names offer further separation for fans of imported and infiltrated anime. In contrast, the characters of integrated anime are generally for their North American release. Usagi of *Sailor Moon* becomes Serena, Satoshi of *Pokemon* becomes Ash.

Ambiguousness is also linked to artistic style, particularly in shojo anime. In Japan, these titles reflect "an ambiguous preoccupation with, and a deep uncertainty about, masculine gender stereotypes" (Kinsella 2000: 121) on the part of their female Japanese audience. This is true for both males and females:

Androgyny has been used in Japan since the turn of this century to name three basic, but overlapping, types of androgynous females: [1] those whose bodies approximate the prevailing masculine stereotypes; [2] those who are charismatic, unconventional, and therefore not feminine females; [3] and those who have been assigned to do "male" gender or who have appropriated it on their own initiative. (Robertson 1998: 87)

All three types of androgynous females exist in anime, though the roles they play, and the frequency of appearance are very different. The first type of androgynous female is the rarest, and generally appears as comic relief. The second type is the most common, and can be found in roles that vary from mother to warrior to villain across the three categories of transmission. The third type is uncommon, but is generally associated with either young girls who are pursuing adventures not allowed females and who are eventually found out, or those who are forced into it, who often fill the role of the villain, like Dilandau of *Escaflowne* whose transformation from girl to boy drives him mad. All three types of female androgyny have male equivalents in anime, though these equivalents are much rarer than their female counterparts. Moreover, shojo titles are more likely to engage in the various forms of androgyny, particularly with regards to male androgyny.

That shojo anime titles equal, if not surpass, the number of shonen titles transmitted to North America raises questions about what meanings the audience is seeking in anime, and how they are interpreting these titles. However, while shojo titles are common, the majority of titles that are placed in the "canon" of the imported and infiltrated subcultures are shonen anime, so that, while audiences may consume shojo titles, they are not necessarily granting them any other significance or status.

Ghost in the Shell, *Akira*, and *Cowboy Bebop* all enjoyed critical and commercial success, while shojo titles like *X* are denied such recognition. Similarly, while integrated shonen titles like *Pokemon* and *Dragon Ball Z* are both commercially successful and have long television runs, integrated shojo titles like *Sailor Moon* and *Escaflowne* have failed in the US, though admittedly not in Canada, and lack the name recognition of their shonen counterparts. Ultimately, it would appear that anime titles that limit images and narratives of gender ambiguity are most likely to succeed as integrated anime. But through patterns of consumption and reception, the audience for imported and infiltrated

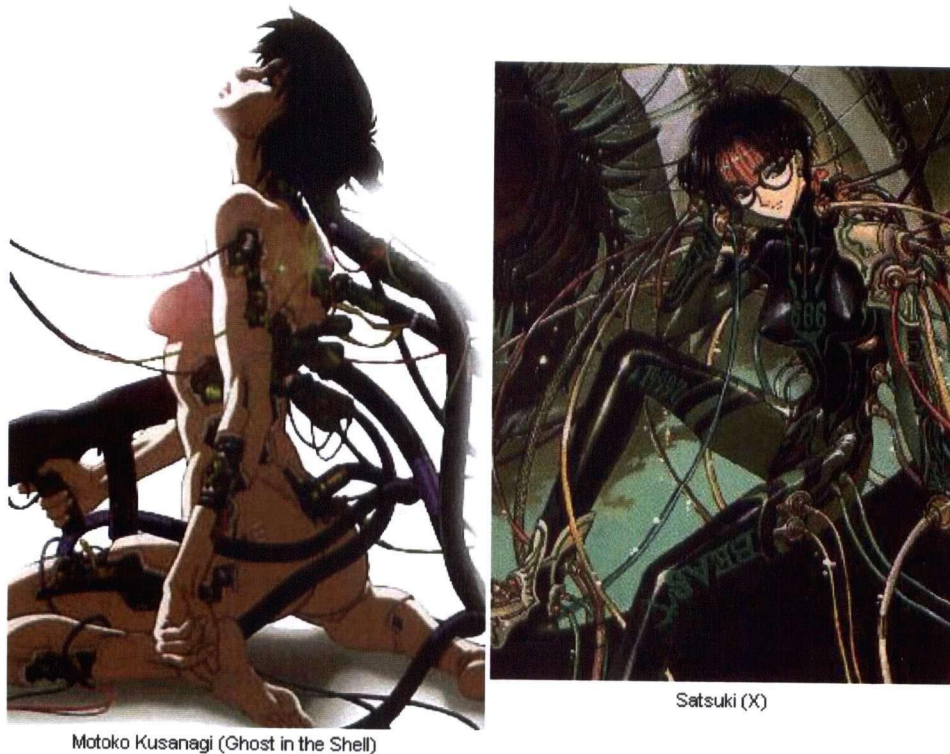
titles has demonstrated a less hostile attitude towards anime that do not limit the complexities of gender imagery.

VIII. Gendered Technology

If these audiences are willing to accept gender complexity, they still show definite preferences in the way in which gender and technology boundaries are challenged. Japanese female cyborgs are more likely to be more fully “human” or to appear that way than male cyborgs. “Childbearing is equated specifically with the merging of technology and biology. Female bodies and sexuality are therefore “best suited” to mecha – and male bodies and sexuality are disfigured by it.” (Newitz 1984: 9) A comparison of Kusanagi from *Ghost in the Shell* with Jet of *Cowboy Bebop* contrasts the hidden nature of Kusanagi’s cyborg attributes with Jet’s obvious cybernetic attachments.

Not only is the female body less obviously affected by technology, the imagery often suggests that the merger with technology may even be pleasurable for females. The connections between Kusanagi and the Puppet Master and Satsuki and the Beast of X (Figure 7) are set in sharp contrast with Van’s life threatening, painful merger with Escaflowne, or the disfigured nature of male cyborgs like Jet or Batou of *Ghost in the Shell*. Moreover, the imagery that accompanies the joining of female and technology often seems to stress both the increased power of the female, the disappearance of traditional gender roles, and the new reliance, almost subordination to, technology on the part of the female, even as she escapes traditional dominations.

Figure 7: Female/Technology Mergers



However, if the imagery of anime suggests that women have an easier time adapting to a technological world, technology itself is presented in a masculine fashion. The Puppetmaster of *Ghost in the Shell* is referred to in the movie as a “he” despite its digital nature. Moreover, the Puppetmaster seeks to merge with Kusanagi to become a “unified life form ‘on a higher consciousness.’” (Yuen 2000: 12) She is allowed to overcome her cyborg body, which seemingly prevents her from bearing children, in order to bring into being new life.

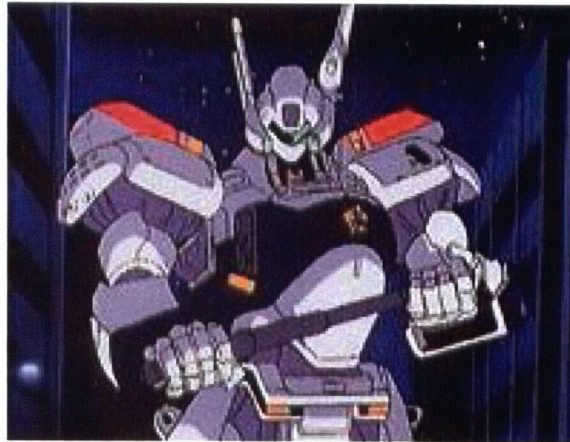
Other examples are easily found: the armoured suits Escaflowne and Alphonse (from *Patlabor 2*) are presented both in narrative and imagery as masculine in form and nature. Indeed, the female pilot of Alphonse is the one who named “him,” demonstrating the internal recognition of the masculinity of technology within anime (Figure 8). Of course, there are exceptions, and Spike of *Cowboy Bebop* refers to his plane as “baby,”

but male pride of possession in an automobile (or in this case, plane) is hardly a new phenomena.

Figure 8: Male Mecha



Escaflowne



Alphonse

Indeed, masculine imagery around technology may explain why there is a greater level of comfort with female “interfaces” with machines. Male characters may create, maintain, and control technology, but through this, representations of technology take on some of the gender expectations of the creator, with a dual construction taking place, with the anime character that develops the technology, and the audience that interprets it. Thus, Escaflowne appears as an exaggerated suit of medieval armour and the suits of *Burn Up W!* emphasise the proportions of the female figure.

In *X*, the Beast is a powerful computer that links itself to Satsuki (penetrating her with cables) and does whatever she asks it, because, as another character observes, it loves her. However, in the end, the Beast kills Satsuki in a fit of jealousy when she demonstrates greater feelings for a human being, betraying her relationship with her technological creation. Her relationship with the technology shares much with a human

relationship, and the boundaries that can be identified and meanings that can be drawn from the imagery are confused and conflicting.

Even *Dragon Ball Z*, with its obvious, but rarely examined, technological elements, depicts technology as distinctly gendered. When a mad scientist dispatches powerful androids to Earth to challenge Goku and his friends, the "male" androids are straightforwardly destructive. But the "female" android becomes a target of affection for one of the heroes, and eventually the heroes attempt to protect "her" from the attacks of a monstrous genetically engineered male super-villain intent on absorbing her power.

Technology and gender have, particularly in anime, become closely tied. As Haraway observes, "sex, sexuality, and reproduction are central actors in high-tech myth systems structuring our imaginations of personal and social possibility." (Haraway 1984: 110) The anime transmitted to North America are among those that require the exercise of the imagination, particularly with regards to technology. The audience must interpret the titles transmitted and exercise its imagination to understand the meanings and imagery from a North American cultural context.

Gender and Transmission

Ultimately, gender seems to play an important role in determining what anime titles will be transmitted. Whether gender representations reflect traditional images of power and behaviour or challenge them, the impact of audience preferences on anime transmission "hints of not only a new social order, but also the kind of moral struggles, alliances, and identities that may create and accompany it." (Allison 2000: 276) The fact that so many of these struggles focus on gender is unsurprising, given the uncertainty that surrounds it in contemporary culture. The confusion arising from postmodernism has resulted in gender confusion in North American popular culture. For those that are uncomfortable with this state of affairs, there are anime titles that reinforce modern

gender norms with the femininity of the "magical" girl and the punishments meted out to the villains of anime. But anime also offers imagery for those who are seeking new gender norms, providing alternatives to both the meta-codes of modern gender and the confusion of postmodern gender.

Because of this, gender imagery is an important aspect in the transmission and success of an anime title. The uniformity of transmission within the magical girl genre and the imagery that surrounds villains both point to an audience that places a high priority on particular forms of gender representation and imagery. Driven by this consumption, most anime transmission becomes limited to specific genres and narratives that meet the demands of the audience and that will mesh with the interpretive strategies of the audience that receives it.

Conclusion.

Postmodern Cultural Transmission

As I have argued in my discussions on the imagery and nature of anime, the transmission of anime is a worthy, complex topic of sociological study. Shaviro states that "the ambivalent cinematic body is not an object of representation, but a zone of affective intensity, an anchoring point for the articulation of passions and desires, a site of continual political struggle." (Shaviro, 267) This argument is a fair one to use with regard to anime, which is at the center of so many contrasting and conflicting influences.

Indeed, while the imagery of anime is inevitably central to the meanings that North American audiences produce, it is only one factor in determining how anime titles are received. Commodification and consumption play a key role and are central to determining whether a title can be considered to be a site of resistance or containment. An integrated title like *Sailor Moon* and an infiltrated title like *Wedding Peach* may share a genre, imagery, and narrative devices, but audiences obviously believe there are significant differences between them. *Sailor Moon* successfully reaches a wide audience and has achieved a high level of recognition and consumption, while *Wedding Peach* is an infiltrated title with a small but loyal subcultural following.

Identifying the differences, and the varied uses and meanings that North American fans have found for those differences, is at the heart of understanding the how and why of transmission. Indeed, with *Sailor Moon* so easily available, *Wedding Peach* seems a poor trade for fans of anime, as similar imagery is available without the need for translation, subtitling, distribution, or download. That the infiltrated community chooses to distribute *Wedding Peach* is an indication that the title is, for them, a viable alternative to mainstream popular culture, perhaps because its transmission rejects the "mainstreaming" that *Sailor Moon* underwent in becoming an integrated title.

"Mainstreaming" in this sense does not necessarily refer to the processes like editing and dubbing that make anime titles more palatable to a mainstream North American audience, but rather to the exposure integrated titles have to a large public through television or movies. By avoiding this mass consumption, it is likely that *Wedding Peach* "proves" itself a worthy site of resistance to specific values embraced by mainstream popular culture in a way in which *Sailor Moon* cannot. Since the possible meanings that can be interpreted into *Sailor Moon* and *Wedding Peach* are so similar in imagery and narrative, factors like consumption and resistance must be considered in order to explain the kinds of impact that audience perceptions of the nature, rather than imagery, of anime, have on transmission.

Of course, while all anime titles are impacted by consumption and commodification, for every title like *Wedding Peach*, there is an imported title like *Ghost in the Shell*, where successful transmission and reception is driven by imagery and narrative. Indeed, not surprisingly, while integrated anime offers a view of how the transmission of cultural artefacts can be part of the processes of containment and infiltrated anime offers a view into how transmission can occur almost solely as a form of resistance to mainstream popular culture, imported anime is far more the product of its audience. By this, I mean that while the imagery of integrated and infiltrated anime is important to the success or failure of the title, the audience consumes them as much for their mechanisms of transmission, be they public broadcast or Internet download, as they are for any attachment to the product itself. In contrast, imported anime titles are subject to much closer scrutiny by the subculture that has formed around their transmission.

North American attitudes towards and expectations of anime are affected by transmission, but in turn, the audience shapes the way in which titles are received and the way in which further transmission will proceed. Imagery, narrative, audience, and

commodification all play an important role in how a title will be received upon transmission. Moreover, anime is only one example of why transmission between cultures must be recognised as a phenomenon that will have a growing impact on the way individuals relate to products of their own culture.

I. The Future of (Post)Modern Cultural Transmission

Imported and infiltrated anime seem, in many ways, to embody what Barthes predicts will help us to “imagine an aesthetic (if the word has not become too deprecated) based entirely (completely, radically, in every sense of the word) on the pleasure of the consumer, whoever he [or she] may be, to whatever class, whatever group he [or she] may belong, without respect to cultures or languages.” (Bruns 1998: 102) As technology advances, it is possible that the ethic of infiltrated anime may spread to other mediums, and the translation and distribution of other “foreign” cultural artefacts, from music to comedy, may also be subject to similar transmission.

Of course, it is just as likely that commodification will continue to play a determining role in how most titles are transmitted. But though integrated products like *Sailor Moon* or *Pokemon* may theoretically be open to meanings and interpretations that resist mainstream popular culture (Yoshida 1998), the commodified, consumed nature of these products reduces their value as a site of resistance, fueling the need for other forms of cultural transmission.

Referring to the previous discussion around *Sailor Moon* and *Wedding Peach*, North American anime fans can find many of the same meanings in *Sailor Moon* that they do in *Wedding Peach* without the need to translate, subtitle, and distribute the material themselves. That they choose to re-produce *Wedding Peach*, despite the extensive commitment of resources and time, is an indication of the need for a cultural artefact like *Wedding Peach* to appear as a viable alternative to mainstream culture, if

only because the very mechanisms of its transmission reject the “mainstreaming” that Sailor Moon underwent in becoming an integrated title. Mainstreaming in this sense does not refer solely to the processes that make anime titles more palatable to a general North America audience (editing, dubbing, etc.) but also to the introduction of integrated artefacts like *Sailor Moon* to the “public” through mass release or broadcast. With a form of transmission that avoids this, *Wedding Peach* provides a site of resistance to specific values embraced by the larger popular culture, even if the subculture has to re-interpret the work significantly in order to gain those meanings.

Japanese commentators have “identified otaku [fanboy] as the keyword of postmodern society, in which cultural experience dominates over social experience.” (Kinsella 2000: 129) The adoption of the word *otaku* by anime fans to refer to their subcultures would seem to indicate that this observation is not far off. The increasing ability of a “foreign” cultural product like anime to serve as a site of resistance thanks to increasing technological and social linkages between cultures, the development of a subculture around that site, and eventual furtherance and expansion of cultural transmission and reception, all point towards a need to examine how and why audiences for products like anime are created.

II. Options for Further Study of Anime and Cultural Transmission

I chose this thesis not simply to examine anime, but to develop a way in which to understand cultural transmission. Because of this, further work could attempt to apply the categories of transmission developed herein to other forms of cultural transmission. Examination of other artefacts could determine whether this is a viable method to examine cultural transmission in a postmodern era, and whether postmodern popular culture itself has themes that can be examined.

While some of the data and many of the ideas in this thesis, are, to my knowledge, purely my own, I owe much to other works on anime and the data they gathered. (Newitz, 1995: Yoshida 1998) However, a great deal of study could be directed towards concretely identifying the audiences for anime. Such studies could provide evidence to support or disprove my choices regarding the constituent aspects of the ideal types and categories of transmission. As well, a more extensive examination of the totality of anime available in North America would likely provide greater insight into the preferences and needs of the anime audience, as compared to the rather limited examination of 13 titles in this thesis.

There are many themes and images in anime that were not examined in this thesis that are worthy of further study, just as some of the imagery and narratives addressed in Chapters Two and Three could be subject to far more in depth study and analysis. Relating to the categories of transmission, it would be interesting to examine the processes that determine the commercial selection and release of integrated and imported anime. I defend my choices regarding the imagery and titles examined, despite their admitted limitations, as my study of the medium would indicate that they are central to the transmission and reception of anime in North America.

III. In Conclusion

As has been stated previously, once the needs and desires of the audience are understood to influence cultural transmission, meaning and interpretation take a central role in the transmission of culture. Examinations of technology, gender, sexuality, and race reveal the universal impact of the conflicts between the dominant culture and subcultures, cultural resistance and cultural containment, and modern boundaries and postmodern ambiguity. How anime is consumed and who consumes it will determine the meanings and uses of individual titles.

Integrated anime, with its ties to mainstream popular culture, reflects the interests of the producers and dominant cultural norms. The subcultures that have formed around imported and infiltrated anime pursue and receive titles that can be rewritten and reinterpreted so that they form the basis for resistance to a dominant cultural trend, or to mainstream popular culture itself. The titles I examined in this thesis, and many of those that I did not, contain sites of that can be used in the processes of resistance to modernism, postmodernism, capitalist consumption, changes in gender norms, and concerns of technological domination. This is not to say that these sites are automatically used in those ways, but rather, that the opportunity exists if the audience or subculture is able or interested in producing these meanings.

The subcultures in turn create boundaries that affected the transmission of further titles, policing and containing the interpretations and meanings that are created around the titles of choice. This means that ultimately, the ability of the anime audience to interpret meanings, to rewrite texts for the North American cultural context, will determine the mechanisms of transmission and the success of reception with a particular audience. In turn, the transmission of anime is, I believe, an excellent example of the processes that will dominate cultural transmission as culture becomes increasingly global and audiences become increasingly fragmented by the forces of postmodernism and social change.

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