

Motifs, textures and folds:
Japanese popular visual culture as transcultural and phenomenological flow

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ABSTRACT

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Since the 1980s, Japanese popular visual culture has known great popularity in Western Europe and North America, most strikingly in the form of manga, anime and Japanese video games. However, one is struck by how fragmented this cultural flow is: not only is it composed of three different media, but it also contains works that are wildly different from one another. Can something be said to connect these works together, other than their Japanese provenance? This dissertation proposes two avenues for answering this question and establishing a certain cohesiveness within the fabric of Japanese popular visual culture as it has been exported: on the one hand, this thesis explores recurrent content and themes (motifs) within a purposefully varied corpus of manga, anime and games; on the other, it establishes phenomenological consistencies (textures and folds) across the corpus, demonstrating that these works provide medium-based experiences that are similar in significant respects. Parallel to this demonstration, this dissertation examines the effects of this cohesion on the Western reception of these works. The author argues that, while cultural motifs evoking “Japaneseness” play an initial part in gathering these works into a perceived flow, it is their common phenomenology that cements their perceived cohesion and facilitates their integration into non-Japanese imaginaries. By analysing the transcultural travels of Japanese popular visual culture, this thesis examines a case where differentiated imaginaries meet and merge, and thereby develops a theory of the imaginary as phenomenological and processual space, as a fabric that surrounds us and which we collectively and continually weave and unravel. Ultimately, the author determines that this particular imaginary is regulated by two key notions: on the one hand, a dynamic of flux and stasis, and on the other, a series of interconnected and intermingled folds.

*To all the uprooted little geeks
who had to rely more than most on their unseen surroundings.*

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Introduction

Something was happening to francophone television in the late 1980s, and it was apparent even to my six-year-old self. Having recently moved with my parents to the United States, I spent the summers visiting relatives in my native Belgium. I was already aware, at an intuitive, unarticulated level, of the cultural differences existing between both regions, albeit only at the level of my own limited preoccupations. I was not tuned in to the specificities of American mentality when it came to things like team sports, health care, tipping, communism, or buying things in bulk; I was, however, very aware of the differences in children's television programming between both countries. In our New York apartment, I would watch short, funny Looney Tunes and Hanna-Barbera cartoons (and learned most of my English from them), whereas in Brussels, where we had previously lived, I had watched whimsical cartoons that told long-running, serial tales, such as *Belle et Sébastien* (*Belle and Sebastian*), and *Rémi Sans Famille* (*Nobody's Boy: Remi*). Although I would not have been able to articulate the differences in terms of content and aesthetics, they were nevertheless obvious to me, as they probably were to anyone: aesthetics, format and genre were clearly nothing alike.

But something else was happening on the French television channels, which were what my slightly older cousins and I primarily watched in Belgium during the summer of 1989, and the following few years. Alongside French dubs of American cartoons such as *The Care Bears*, and internationally produced series such as *Inspector Gadget* and *M.A.S.K.*, a new kind of animation was appearing: *Dragon Ball*, *Sailor Moon*, *Olive et Tom* (known in English as *Flash Kicker*)... They were strange to me, these new cartoons. The characters frequently had bizarre reactions when wrestling with strong emotions, usually embarrassment or discomfort, reactions which distorted their bodies and faces. Of course, Bugs Bunny and his cohorts, with their rubber-like bodies, often had equally grotesque responses, but there was something about these new cartoons that was particularly unsettling to me, and thereby very funny. My cousins and I would laugh at the characters and mimic them, without giving it much thought, and it was only around twenty years later that I was able to really articulate the difference between *City Hunter* (*Nicky Larson*, as I knew it then) and Looney Tunes: the latter was a world where

madness reigned perpetually, whereas the *City Hunter* universe at least partly consisted of realistic bloody violence and tearful drama, which contrasted sharply with the outright silliness of the humorous distortions. It was the contrast that made us laugh. Of course, there were many other things that separated these new cartoons from the rest: graphic violence, drawn-out action sequences, changing visual perspectives, characters with big eyes, spiky or colourful hairstyles, and odd magical creatures the likes of which I had never seen. Again, none of these things quite registered with me consciously, but they did contribute to setting these animations apart in my mind, on an unaware level.

But it was only a year or two later, when my aunt would walk by as we were watching *Dragon Ball*, glance at the screen, and groan: “These new Japanese cartoons are so badly drawn! And so violent!” (usually followed by an injunction to go play outside), that I learnt I had been watching Japanese animation. However, I was mistaken (and so was my aunt) in believing that *Les Chevaliers du Zodiaque (Saint-Seya: Knights of the Zodiac)* and *Le Collège Fou Fou Fou (High School! Kimengumi)* were the first foray of anime, as Japanese animation was later to be known, into Europe. In reality, the process had begun more than a decade before, in a more discreet way, with Euro-Japanese collaborations such as *Maya l’Abeille (Maya the Bee)*, which aired in the 1970s. The process had continued in the 1980s with the very same cartoons I had been watching before moving to New York, i.e. with such ostentatiously “Western” tales as *Rémi Sans Famille* (which is based on the novel by French author Hector Malot), *Belle et Sébastien* (based on the novel by Malot's compatriot Cécile Aubry), *Tom Sawyer* (based on Mark Twain’s American novel), and *Le merveilleux voyage de Nils Holgersson (The Wonderful Adventures of Nils)*, based on novels by Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf). But why indeed would anyone, short of paying close attention to television production credits (which only an adult would have done, and they were not the ones watching), have spontaneously thought that these adaptations of European and American classics had been produced and created in Japan? Indeed, the cultural settings in which these narratives took place remained the same, and although these settings could occasionally appear stereotyped, that could easily be attributed to their cartoon nature. Not only that, but these animations were quite different from the “strange cartoons” I had recently discovered, lacking the grotesque distortions and angular characters that I associated with the latter. Around the

turn of the 1970s-early 1980s, science-fiction anime such as *Albator (Captain Harlock)* and *Goldorak (UFO Robo Grendizer)* also aired in France, along with the romantic, nostalgic, set-in-Michigan shōjo¹ series *Candy, Candy* (McCarthy 2001, 80), which further illustrates the diversity and ostentatiously non-Japanese character (in that Japanese settings were either non-existent or not highlighted by the transcultural adaptation process) of anime as it was first being discovered in France and Belgium at the time. Although rather different in aesthetics than the wave of anime which marked my personal childhood, the above series also made their mark on the imaginations of the youths who grew up with them (Pellitteri 2010, 296-300). However, no one among the adults really noticed the trend until the more unsettling, contrast-laden series began to seemingly take over children's programming. It is only in hindsight, and with a more well-rounded knowledge of anime, that one can now draw parallels between these different aesthetics. But what, specifically, was so striking about this “second wave” (or was it, rather, the result of a build-up?) of anime in Europe that it caused such a reaction? For it was not just our parents who soon began to criticize anime (specifically this more recent form of anime), but also cultural commentators and even politicians². There is no doubt that the violence and mature themes, until then virtually absent from children's animation in Western Europe, played a key role in giving rise to these protests. But perhaps the adults were equally unsettled by the very things we loved about anime: their apparent schizophrenia, the way they seemed to cover a whole spectrum of atmospheres and emotions in the blink of an eye. But also, what did it mean that *Sailor Moon*, *Fist of the North Star* and their fellow series were consistently referred to as “those Japanese cartoons,” in such a derogatory tone? I cannot recall ever hearing *The Care Bears* being referred to as “those American cartoons.” Had I been older, I might have picked up on the distinction. As things were, I merely assimilated that my favourite shows were “Japanese cartoons,” and happily continued to watch.

¹ Shōjo, literally “girl” in Japanese, refers to a wide genre of manga and anime, aimed at young girls. Similarly, shōnen is aimed at pre-teen-to-teenaged boys, while jōsei is directed at young adult women, and seinen, with its more mature themes and approaches, at adults. These categories tend to imply aesthetic and content-related characteristics (e.g., shōjo tend toward more romantic themes, while shōnen are more action-oriented), rather than their actual reading audience.

² Then French *députée* Ségolène Royal famously deplored the widespread broadcasting of anime on French airwaves in her book *Le ras-le-bol des bébés-zappeurs* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989)

In a strange development, by the time we moved to Tokyo for a year in 1994, I had stopped watching Japanese cartoons, or any other sort, for that matter. Nor did I express particular interest in Japanese popular culture, so preoccupied was I with merely finding my place in a new school, in a new country. I did still play video games, however, a practice I had picked up in the United States: I owned a Sega Game Gear, two generations of Nintendo consoles, and a portable Game Boy which I carried along on every trip we went on (much to the dismay of that same anime-hating aunt in Belgium). But I confess it was quite some time before I was made aware that many of the games I played (*Kirby's Dreamland*, the *Super Mario* series) were made in Japan. After all, no one, not even my aunt, had ever told me to "stop playing those Japanese games"; in this case, it was the principle of gaming that was objected to, not specifically the games in themselves. Eventually, however, the consoles were stored away in the closet.

It was many years later that I picked up my first manga while on a visit in Brussels, in late 2002. Like most Belgians, I had been raised on bande dessinée as a child (particularly Hergé, Peyo, and Goscinny's classics), but did not consider myself a connoisseur in any way, and was only mildly interested in bande dessinée, even less so in American comics; I had briefly been confronted with (very adult) manga during our short sojourn in Tokyo, but had no idea that manga were even published outside of Japan. Therefore, when a translated volume of Toriyama Akira's³ *Dragon Ball* caught my eye, it was only curiosity mixed with nostalgia that drove me to pick it up and purchase it. It was volume 36 of the series, and I had only vague memories of the characters and plot, but I read it nonetheless. Upon returning to Canada, where I now lived, I discovered that my usual bookstores all had a manga section – which had previously escaped my attention, as these sections were often located in the youth department, and were then nowhere near as large and visually invasive as they eventually grew to be. Over the following few weeks, I purchased and read all 42 volumes of the *Dragon Ball* series. Something about the way they were made, the way the emotions were highlighted and contrasted much as they had been in the anime of my youth, the way the story was delivered in a steady drip over hundreds of pages, the way the pages themselves were laid out, led me to compulsively devour these tomes. I then found myself eager to read something else. So I returned to the

³ Japanese names will be written in the Japanese order, with the patronym in first position.

bookstore and, without hesitation, headed straight for the section that was labelled not “Japanese comics,” but “Manga.” My hopes of finding something equally engaging were rewarded, time and time again, even though my selections wildly varied from stories about supernatural ninjas to romantic, tortured narratives about punk musicians in love.

I could go on, and explain how insomnia led to me rediscover anime, which was re-broadcast on a children's channel at four in the morning (*Dragon Ball* again, as fate would have it). How my combined renewed interest in both manga and anime drove me to grow curious about another component of Japanese popular culture, Japanese video games, and subsequently buy a PlayStation 2 and my first *Final Fantasy* role-playing game (RPG), and then my first *Legend of Zelda* game before reconnecting with the *Super Mario* franchise, all of which further encroached on my spare time and somehow resulted in a thesis. But as this is, precisely, a thesis, it is perhaps time to leave memory lane and enter the heart of the matter.

It is perhaps unorthodox for me to begin this thesis with the above personal account of how I discovered Japanese popular culture. But while this may appear to be sentimental self-indulgence in nostalgia, it is also a methodological choice. This thesis will revolve around analyzing what I perceive to be a shift in the imaginaries stemming from the two regions where I happen to have spent most of my life: Western francophone Europe and North America. This shift consists in the process through which Japanese popular visual culture, in the form of manga, anime, and video games, trickled into the visual cultures of these regions and then established itself within them so as to become a steadfast presence and partial influence within the imaginary constituted by these visual cultures. This specific instance will ultimately serve as a case study and example of how the imaginary in general operates and influences us. But although my intention is to elaborate a general, decontextualized theory of the imaginary (although, in effect, context always plays a part), my reflection will nonetheless be based on the distinctive case of Japanese popular visual culture. Additionally, while I will be characterizing this particular exchange as a transcultural flow, I will also argue that this flow is characterized by aspects that transcend national or regional culture: indeed, I will be examining this imaginary shift partly from the perspective of phenomenology, which implies putting

focus on the manner in which this shift is intimately experienced, both mentally and physically. From this perspective, an intimate dimension can hardly be avoided, which is why I chose to open with such a personal narrative. Finally, the fact remains that my interest in this particular transcultural flow stems at least partly from the fact that I experienced it personally. While I will of course not base my entire research on self-examination, I recognize that my own experience influences my thought process – as I am sure it does most students and scholars. Thus, allowing myself to indulge in personal memories, even in this most academic of contexts, is my way of directly acknowledging this fact, this possible bias. I do not claim, of course, that my personal history is a perfectly representative example of how this transcultural flow was experienced by others of my generation; some were completely unimpressed with manga and anime and barely have any recollection of it, while others have never picked up a gamepad, and others still experienced all those things but definitively grew out of them. But all of these experiences have contributed to the concretization and identification of this flow, this transfer of works from one cultural region to another: whether or not it was embraced or not, all that is necessary was that it was influential enough to be identified as such a flow. Not only was this the case with Japanese popular visual culture, but I would argue the process of integration of the latter into new, non-Japanese territories enabled a certain form of lasting cultural interpenetration – although not necessarily involving strictly national-cultural content.

I wondered earlier why, back in the late 1980s, everyone made a point of specifying that *City Hunter* and its peers were Japanese, while no one seemed to care that *My Little Pony* and *The Popples* were American. One reason was likely that people were used to encountering American cultural products in Europe, from movies to music. Japanese cultural products, however, particularly ones clearly issued from mainstream pop culture, had not in recent memory been this massively imported. It was thus a new form of cultural interpenetration, and the combination of its novelty and its weight (keep in mind, anime was broadcast practically every morning in the summer) made it noticeable.

Today, cultural interpenetration is so common, it often hardly seems necessary to point it out anymore. Some would even argue that the very notion of culture has

consequently become irrelevant, given the speed and ease with which cultural elements now merge, blend, and influence each other. The appropriation of cultural elements from one country by another arguably began with international travel and trade, as foreign goods and images fuelled the European imagination. One has only to examine the different movements of Orientalism to see how European culture (mis)appropriated elements of other culture by (mis)representing them over the centuries. *Turqueries*, or fascination with the Ottoman Empire, are evident in plays such as Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670), operas such as W.A. Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782), and paintings such as J-A-D Ingres' *Odalisque with a Slave* (1839). During the second half of the nineteenth century, world fairs also contributed to the discovery of foreign cultures by the Western public. Closer to this dissertation's topic, Japonisme constituted a major cultural and artistic movement in the nineteenth century in Western Europe, as Susan J. Napier elaborates in her book *From Impressionism to Anime*, and was catalyzed on a mass level by the arrival of Japanese artefacts (namely *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints) in European countries, which prompted collectors to seek them out, and inspired painters such as Monet and Van Gogh (Napier 2007, 21-49).

As international travel increased and became a leisure in addition to being an economic activity, European and, eventually, North American familiarity with non-Western countries and cultures increased, as did, inevitably, familiarity with and, in some cases, subsequent appropriation of cultural aspects. Today, the transmission of cultures towards other select regions is perpetuated by at least two forces. On one, corporate level, economic globalization has led to the implementation of multinational media franchises, which ensure the international diffusion of certain forms of entertainment; as a result, in addition to a nearly omnipresent and still dominant American culture, one finds that films, books, and music from numerous countries are now translated (when necessary) and exported to regions on the other side of the world. On another, more grassroots level, digital communication over the Internet has enabled individuals to broadcast and receive texts, images, film, and music from different cultures; this means that works which might have been deemed less likely to succeed abroad and therefore ignored on the corporate level are sometimes viewed by tens of thousands, allowing a proliferation of new insights

into other cultures, and enabling perspectives which differ from the more hegemonic one offered by media conglomerates.

In such a context, where cultural elements from countries not one's own always have the potential to become meme-like, and can be easily discovered and adopted on a massive level, one can have the impression that the very notion of national cultures has become irrelevant, and continues to survive only as a construct, maintained in order to provide the illusion of national stability and homogeneity. I do not mean by this that all cultures are borrowing elements from one another to the point of becoming perfectly indistinguishable or melding into one homogenous mega-culture. Indeed, history has and continues to apply its force, guiding cultural expression in infinitely specific ways. But when many foreign cultures are as accessible as they are today, not only does the potential exist for the blurring of boundaries through assimilation of elements (and indeed, such assimilation has been occurring throughout the centuries), but the validity of said boundaries becomes questionable. One can feel inclined to believe that national cultures are artificial and unnecessary, because so many cultures other than one's own are open to appropriation. Of course, this openness does not result in one automatically appropriating everything one comes across; however, the potential for appropriation on an individual level is there, and that is all that is necessary for the boundaries to appear superficial. We can read books and watch films from another country, adopt another country's fashion trends, learn to cook its food, visit it, and even move there. Granted, few people will go that far, and such measures are not within everyone's reach: as often, financial means remain a factor. Furthermore, I do remain aware that this relativist opinion is characteristic of a certain privileged position, and is by no means unanimous, or even constitutes a majority: one cannot ignore the many inter-national conflicts and cultural tensions still raging worldwide, just as prejudice, pejorative perception of difference and (not always ill-intended) barriers continue to manifest themselves on an everyday scale. However, the objective of identity theory, whether it is focused on gender, ethnicity, or culture, is not to give an account of the manner in which identity is treated and perceived, but rather to provide the means to potentially transcend this reality. The proliferation of writings on cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Maalouf 1998; Simon 1999) are evidence that there is a sense, today, that one can choose one's cultural identity,

that one is not inevitably limited by the context of one's birth. Cultural blending is sometimes random, cultures weave unpredictable and irregular patterns, and we follow their threads in sometimes equally unpredictable ways.

As a person born from Belgian and Vietnamese parents, who was raised in both Europe and North America and became an avid fan of Japanese visual culture, it is of little surprise that I somewhat adhere to the view that culture is not given at birth – another bias that will inevitably tint my perspective throughout this thesis. I have picked and chosen cultural elements my entire life: I have rejected some of the ones I was born into, picked up others which I happened to come across, and embraced some to which circumstances did not appear to predispose me. Cultural relativism has defined my personal cultural fabric since practically the beginning. But at the same time, my situation is precisely what drives me to cling to cultural nuances: I have felt firsthand how fragile and sensitive cultural identity is, each time I am asked, like Amin Maalouf, that undoubtedly well-meaning but dreaded question “Where do you feel you belong?”, every time I go “home” to Belgium only to feel like a foreign misfit, despite my claims that my childhood abroad was great, thank you very much. Picking and choosing is all well and good, but part of the value of this selection process lies in choosing from a list of actually existing entities, which can connect you to something real, recognized and acknowledged by others. Culture may be a construct to some degree, and it is forever in motion, but that does not mean it is entirely imaginary or without foundations. Stephen Greenblatt writes: “The apparent fixity and stability of cultures is, in Montaigne’s words, ‘nothing more than a languid motion’” (Greenblatt 2010, 5); yet, he concedes that “cultures are experienced again and again – in the face of overwhelmingly contrary evidence – [...] as fixed, inevitable, and strangely enduring” (*Ibid.*, 16). Perhaps this is because the effect of stability yielded by this “languid motion” is all that is necessary for actual stability to be presumed. But this perceived stasis is not without effects of its own.

Indeed, even constructs have value and influence on daily, artistic, and intellectual life, although it is necessary for one to be always aware of their partly artificial status; in that regard, the notion of “culture” remains a useful tool for reflection. Additionally, while I would agree that the notion of nation can be said to have lost some of its importance in certain regions (even as it continues to provoke tensions, conflicts, and

wars in others), I feel that the notion of culture becomes even more relevant precisely in today's context of quickened transcultural exchanges of images and texts, even as the notion becomes more problematic and thorny. Indeed, although elements from one culture can be absorbed by people belonging to another, sometimes to the point of becoming a part of the target culture in every sense (in fact, manga, anime, and Japanese video games are perfect examples of this process in becoming), there is nevertheless a time during which these elements are perceived as Other. This Otherness (another complicated notion which requires delicate exploration, and which always runs the risk of being invalidated by its own complexity) can arguably be considered a part of these elements' appeal. Indeed, discovering a new form of beauty is what prompts us to investigate further, to become better acquainted with a new culture: the pleasure is in the difference and in crossing the distance. How this difference is explored, negotiated, and appropriated (or, on the contrary, rejected), and by whom, determines how a specific culture shifts and evolves. The manner in which "foreign" elements are absorbed and influence one's pre-existing culture constitutes a phenomenon which informs one regarding how one's culture, and by extension, one's collective imaginary, function.

Japanese popular culture constitutes a prime example of cultural pollination. My relationship, as a Westerner, with manga, anime, and video games is far from unique. Japan has been an object of fascination for Western European and North American travellers and amateurs of exoticism since at least the nineteenth century, but the spike of interest in Japanese popular culture toward the end of the 20th century was especially striking. One of the more unusual things about this particular wave of interest was that it stemmed not from the traditional arts for which Japan was most widely known throughout the centuries (e.g. calligraphy, woodblock prints, or kabuki), but from contemporary popular culture. Another striking, and related, facet of this attention which Japanese culture garnered abroad, was the sheer scope of the phenomenon: no longer restricted to art connoisseurs or Asian studies scholars, these pop culture works were initially unselfconsciously picked up by Western youths, before garnering the attention of critics, scholars and students (many of whom, including myself, started out as one of the afore-mentioned youths).

It is important to stress, at this point, that I will primarily be concerned with this current massive appeal of contemporary Japanese popular visual culture, where “popular” is here meant to imply “mainstream,” as opposed to more “highbrow” (if such a term has any remaining value) interests in Japanese classic arts, literature, or cinema. This popular interest in Japanese culture is not necessarily something new: as Susan Napier demonstrates, there has been an international interest in Japan at various moments throughout history (Napier 2007). In her study of the place of Japan in the Western imagination, Napier examines cases such as that of Lafcadio Hearn, the Goncourt brothers, Vincent Van Gogh, Jack Kerouac, and William Gibson (among others) to illustrate how Japanese culture has been perceived by Western artists and their audiences, often as an object of fascination or inspiration, in cultural phenomena as varied as 19th century Japonisme, the Beat movement in the 1960s, and end-of-the-century science-fiction. Such “Japan booms” took place on very diverse levels: while Japonisme manifested itself in the presence of Japanese elements in French fashion, decoration and painting, the Beat movement was partly characterized by a fascination with haiku and Zen Buddhism, and several works of science-fiction, particularly cyberpunk novels, tend to associated Japanese places or characters, or other traces of Japan, to their focus on high technology. For Napier, Japonisme and subsequent waves of interest in Japan were popular phenomena, not exclusively reserved for elites or intellectuals. She does concede that manga and anime are somewhat set apart by the degree of appropriation demonstrated by Western fans, by the level of engagement these fans display in their passion for this culture (*Ibid.*, 208). I would also add that the scope of the phenomenon certainly contributed to setting this particular transcultural flow apart: it is partly its mass, in addition to the cohesiveness which I set out to demonstrate, which enabled it to become a part of the Western imaginary.

Although this thesis will be examining Japanese popular visual culture from a different perspective than Napier’s, it does share the latter’s choice to focus on the experience of anime, manga, and games (although Napier does not include the latter in her study) as mass, popular phenomena. Indeed, it is one thing for a British film critic to publish an article dissecting the works of Kurosawa Akira; it is another for a mainstream American filmmaker to pastiche or remake Takeyama Michio’s *The Burmese Harp*,

thereby turning a film which has been much praised, but perhaps not quite as widely watched (as is the case of so many criterion films) into a pop culture reference; and it is yet another thing for thousands of readers and viewers to spontaneously turn to a new form of entertainment born overseas. The first case has restricted consequences, affecting primarily those who have a prior strong interest in and knowledge of Kurosawa's oeuvre; the second may well lead to Takeyama's film entering the collective popular consciousness in its distorted form, but possibly without the audience being truly aware of the transcultural process at hand, apart from a handful of connoisseurs⁴; the third, however, thrives on the conscious appropriation by the masses of works which do not directly adhere to the dominating canon of their cultural area. Indeed, far from merely being an underground sub-culture, Japanese visual pop culture eventually grew to become a staple of Western mainstream culture, and a stable presence within the cultural landscape of the countries we typically identify as "Western": as we will see, its aesthetic is capable of being recognized and identified, even by those who do not actively consume it. This degree of popularity is all the more unusual when one considers how different manga are from American comics and Franco-belgian *bande dessinée*, and anime from other cartoons (the case and evolution of video games being somewhat different); then again, perhaps this very distinctiveness is the reason behind this recognition.

I am aware that by using the term "Western" and by setting up a context for discussion that appears to oppose Japan and the rest of the technologically and economically privileged world, I am potentially perpetuating an artificial dichotomy. In reality, however, I have heeded Thomas Lamarre's words:

I deliberately avoid the sort of history that takes a geo-political divide between Japan and the West as the ground for analysis, which sets up a story of influence and reaction [...]. This manner [...] invariably presumes and reinforces the unity of the West, and of national culture and geopolitical identities." (Lamarre 2009, xxxiv).

I do realize the perils of using the term "West" as convenient shorthand to designate Western francophone Europe and North America, as though they were one homogeneous

⁴ I am not aware of any American film referencing *The Burmese Harp* (unfortunately!), but a similar example would be what Quentin Tarantino did with Hong Kong martial arts films in his movie *Kill Bill: Volume 2*. These films certainly already had a cult following abroad, but Tarantino's references made people more aware of the genre.

mass. I am equally aware that by speaking of “Japanese popular visual culture” I risk presenting as uniform an entity that is, on the contrary, plural, diverse and changing. Furthermore, I know that by referring to my corpus as “Japanese,” I risk implying that it possesses traits that are somehow inherently “Japanese.” However, my aim is precisely to navigate so as to avoid these pitfalls. I will attempt to further clarify my approach in chapter 1, but a few words on the subject are necessary at this point.

While I am postulating the existence of differentiated cultures, I am not setting them up as inherently different from one another, nor as static entities. I am merely recognizing that separate regions have evolved in distinctive manners, and that a snapshot taken at a specific time reveals a state of differentiation, resulting from an ongoing process. This differentiation often takes the form of collective constructs, which are often the product of distortion and stereotype and still thrive today: although it has become reprehensible to speak of “the Orient,” there still exist collective constructs known as “the West,” “Asia,” and “Japan.” While these constructs may be skewed, and even detrimental and alienating, they nevertheless continue to operate as perceptions, which in turn affect comprehension and behaviour.

One of my objectives with this thesis is to examine how these constructs operate in the case of this specific case of cultural cross-pollination. Indeed, it will soon become apparent that “Japan” initially plays a part in the perception and reception of these manga, anime, and games (although much less in the case of the latter) in different cultural spheres, namely the ones I will be focusing on: indeed, my corpus contains cultural tropes that initially reinforce this construct. However, I will argue that the process of integration of this Japanese visual culture into the imaginaries of Western regions eventually moves away from this construct. This happens in two ways. The first is through the presence, in the corpus, of tropes that create distance from the “Japanese” construct by not being ostensibly connected to it, by not directly denoting Japanese culture; although one could object that they thereby create a new type of construct, they nevertheless contribute to a process of change, of becoming, that contributes to the

relative blurring of the original construct⁵. The second way is through the propagation of a distinctive medium-based phenomenology. As I will elaborate on later, one of my main hypotheses is that the works constituting my corpus yield a common phenomenology, create an experience that binds them together. This experience lies namely in the unsettling contrasts that had so struck me when I first discovered anime, and in the medium-based factors that made manga such an addictive read. In this manner, the corpus can be said to be bound by more than “Japan.”

With this in mind, I will be characterizing this particular flow of works from one region to another first as a transcultural flow. Iwabuchi Koichi defines transculturation as “[the] process of globalization, in which the asymmetrical encounter of various cultures results in the transformation of an existing cultural artefact and the creation of a new style” (Iwabuchi 2002, 40). In other words, the travel of manga, anime and Japanese video games toward Western regions is originally a cultural exchange, one from which a pollination arises. But I will also be characterizing this exchange as a phenomenological flow, as an experience generated by medium-based elements which transcend regional culture. It is these contours, this tension between culture and phenomenology, which I will attempt to define and explore over the course of the following chapters.

I dedicated my master’s thesis to answering the question: how can manga, which are so radically different from bande dessinée on a visual, aesthetic, and thematic level, be so appreciated by Western Europeans, to the extent that manga have constituted over a third of new comics releases and sales in France at their peak in 2006, and have maintained steady, slightly reduced numbers since⁶? My approach at the time was to examine how manga use the comic apparatus (panels, word balloons, layout, information distribution, etc.) in a unique manner, thereby providing a distinctive reading experience, or phenomenology, which I tied in with the general contemporary media ethos, arguing that there were similarities between the phenomenology of printed manga and digital technology. As often happens with previous work, I look back on my master’s thesis with

⁵ As Brian Massumi writes, “becoming must keep on becoming” (Massumi 1992, 102: most entities are not rigid, but instead are caught in a neverending process between flux and stasis – a tension that will be essential to this thesis.

⁶ http://www.actuabd.com/IMG/pdf/Marche_BD_GFK_2006.pdf ; http://www.total-manga.com/dossier-manga-bilan-manga-2010-ca-se-corse-!/publication-le-rythme-de-croisiere...-84-4-1650.html#start_read

the impression that there was more to tell, and particularly that the media-related perspective still offered much to be explored.

However, my ambitions for this present dissertation go beyond merely continuing in the direction paved by previous findings and theories. Indeed, I have been reminded that visual works, and the experiences they provide, do not exist within a vacuum, but take place in a layered context of historical, cultural, political, and economical relations. While readers or viewers may not be consciously aware of this context, it nevertheless comes into play in that it influences (sometimes even brings about) the encounters between people and visual works. Addressing this exterior process at work was, I found, sorely lacking in my first analysis of manga phenomenology. Although a single PhD thesis can hardly hope to address every aspect of the complex network within which visual experiences occur, it is necessary to broaden the scope and take in at least some other elements beyond the reader and her manga, although it remains my intent to keep the main focus on the intimate experience of visual encounters.

As mentioned, this dissertation will look into the manners in which cultural considerations, on the one hand, and phenomenological effects, on the other, influence and mold the process of transculturation of Japanese popular visual culture towards francophone Europe and North America. But the other, arguably vaster aim to this thesis is to explore the functionings of the imaginary. The latter, which will be more extensively defined in chapter 2, consists of the images, tropes, notions, and concepts which populate collective consciousness, and enable communication between individuals on a level going beyond their immediate concrete surroundings: the imaginary is what we could call our “unseen surroundings,” the impalpable world which nevertheless acts as a frame of reference for many of our interactions. Dependent on numerous other factors including, yes, culture (to the point that sometimes casual language will consider the terms “culture” and “imaginary” as interchangeable), but also politics and technology, it is an inherently changing entity: indeed, far from being composed of timeless, stable images and events (from primal myths to fairy tales), the imaginary is forever absorbing new elements, discarding older ones (sometimes only temporarily), and patching hybrid images in their place. How and why this process takes place, or rather, can take place, is what I am setting out to ultimately explore.

In past years, Japanese popular visual culture has forged itself a place in the imaginaries of North America and francophone Europe, through the sheer scope of its transfer toward those regions, as I will show in chapter 1. Regardless of whether it will retain this place for decades to come, or will turn out to have been merely a fad (one that has lasted considerably longer than most others, but still ultimately a fad in the sense that it will have been mostly forgotten, at least consciously), it has nevertheless created a noticeable shift in the imaginary, and that is sufficient for this case to be taken as an example, as a concrete situation from which we can extract further knowledge regarding the imaginary. By “shift,” I mean that part of the tropes and effects of Japanese popular visual culture have inserted itself into other imaginaries, have become a part of popular consciousness in these regions, of the unseen surroundings that envelop us day-to-day.

My hypothesis is that Japanese popular visual culture was able to create such a significant (if possibly temporary) shift in the imaginary because it was identified, consciously or not, as a cohesive flow. A cultural bias is likely at the root of it all: these works were initially identified as “Japanese” and hence sought after by aficionados, by people who had enjoyed one aspect of this cultural construct and set out looking for more, in a modern manifestation of Japonisme, as Susan Napier argues. Indeed, part of the first half of my approach will consist in outlining these cultural vectors within my corpus, in the form of cultural tropes, i.e. tropes that denote or connote Japanese culture. But the second part of my argument is that there exists a cohesion beyond this purely cultural denomination, a cohesion that lies at both the narrative and the phenomenological level, in the form of non culturally denotative or connotative content tropes for the former, and of medium-based, or medial effects for the latter. It is important to specify that I do not consider this cohesion of this portion of Japanese popular visual culture as a symptom of any supposed homogeneity of Japanese culture. In fact, I will not strive to seek historical reasons for this cohesion I perceive in my corpus; I will merely aim to demonstrate that it is perceivable, and plays an active role in the transcultural imaginary shift that has taken place.

This dissertation will be guided by two main threads. The first is the metaphor of fabric. I will propose a conception of the imaginary as a fabric, as something that we collectively weave, wear and undo, in a neverending process of reciprocal influence.

More specifically, by the end of the analysis, it will become apparent that the imaginary generated by Japanese popular visual culture functions as a patchwork quilt, as a cohesive, coherent, yet fragmented entity, one that is guided by visual-narrative motifs, on the one hand, and phenomenological textures and folds, on the other. The second guiding thread is the dynamic of flux and stasis, which operates at multiple levels within these works and the experience they provide. This dynamic is present in the recurring narrative motifs that loop throughout the corpus, as a kind of enveloping meta-motif; it also regulates the phenomenology of these works, which is defined by effects of movement and pause, of flow and suspension.

At first glance, my choice of methodology may appear self-defeating, as it will quickly become apparent that my corpus for this research is hugely diversified, not only because it is constituted of three different media, but because it covers wildly different genres, from action to romance, from platformer to role-playing. But there are two related reasons behind this choice. First of all, the section of Japanese popular visual culture that has been exported to Western countries is, precisely, ostensibly diverse, and it was necessary to choose a corpus that reflected this essential trait, and to show why, in spite of these differences, it remains relevant to study these works as being part of the same far-reaching phenomenon. Secondly, part of the sought after value of this thesis lies precisely in its aim to demonstrate cohesiveness *in spite* of diversity: in addition to enabling me to better explore the functionings of the imaginary, this specific corpus will also allow me to gain greater insight regarding the three media involved (comics, animation, and video games), and how their phenomenological effects can, to a point, transcend content and even their own inherent specificities in order to lead to a certain form of convergence.

Outline

Because of the multidisciplinary and multimedial nature of this thesis, I feel compelled to include a certain amount of justification. Therefore, my first chapter will consist in an attempt to preventively pre-empt any objections which may be raised against my chosen approach, and will simultaneously constitute an introduction to the corpus, its history, and the manners in which it has previously been examined. After summing up the history

of Japanese video games, manga, and anime, I will address two sensitive points in particular: my decision to include video games in this study – an aspect which sets my approach somewhat apart and goes against some precepts of game studies – and the ever-delicate question of culture.

The second chapter will attempt to establish the bases for a theory of the imaginary, which I deem necessary for both the reader and myself to consider the following analyses in the appropriate frame of mind. I will go over various pre-existing theories of the imaginary, and will propose my own, “patchworked” version, using the metaphor of fabric: the imaginary, in my view, constitutes an environment within which we evolve and which evolves with us, a fabric which envelops us and which we can weave, tear, and reassemble throughout our daily lives. It features different motifs and textures which imperceptibly affect our affect, our position and our direction.

The following three chapters will be dedicated to establishing the cohesiveness of the corpus. Chapter 3 will examine the content-related motifs, or tropes, which pervade the corpus, including cultural motifs which contribute to establishing the beginnings of a network of content nodes throughout the corpus, and identifying it, albeit in a potentially distorted manner, as belonging to a distinct culture. Chapter 4 will continue to demonstrate that there exists a continuity, if not a homogeneity, between these different works, in the form of what I have called structuring mechanisms, which are content motifs that are so present and so recurring that they can be said to guide the works within which they exist. Chapter 5 will go beyond content and focus on the phenomenological experience provided by these works, and aim to show that, despite the fact that each medium possesses different specificities, and therefore provide distinct experiences, the manner in which these three media are exploited in this specific case leads to experiences, or phenomenologies, which overlap in some respects. In other words, manga, anime, and Japanese video games seem to create a cohesive fabric, a coherent environment, both narrative and aesthetic (in the sense that aesthetics appeal to the physical senses). Finally, chapter 6 will examine the manners in which this particular parcel of imaginary merges with others, ultimately reaching the conclusion that medial effects constitute the most lasting path through which imaginaries merge, supporting the need for a theory of the imaginary that is rooted in phenomenological experience.

I will conclude by focusing on the effects and consequences of this cohesiveness on the imaginary. I will first summarise the manner in which Japanese popular visual culture establishes itself as a cohesive flow, first through content, then through phenomenology. I will then outline how this cohesion is apprehended, navigated and experienced by the individual subject. This will enable me to underline the importance of two key notions within this particular imaginary: the dynamic of flux and stasis, and the concept of the fold. These notions will enable us to clarify the relationship between content and phenomenology, as well as provide clues as to how to further explore the functionings of the imaginary in general.

Chapter One

Preliminary clarifications: Tying up the first loose threads

A– Manga and anime: A history of “strange Japanese pictures” and their travels

In the introduction, I recalled the manner in which I personally discovered anime, video games, and manga (in that order). This has allowed us to already glimpse, albeit with limited scope, the history of Japanese popular culture’s introduction into the West. However, in order to better understand the transcultural process at hand, it is necessary to go further back, and examine how these forms, as we know them today, came to be. Indeed, this will allow us to see that transculturality is not something which begins at a definite point, but is rather an unending, layered process.

The general history of manga is well documented, but not always unanimously agreed upon, particularly regarding its prehistory. Some consider that *emaki* painted scrolls dating back to the 12th century are the ancestor of manga, in the same manner that it is often suggested that the 11th century French Bayeux tapestry, or even Trajan’s column, built in Italy during the second century, constitute the first examples of comics-like mechanisms, as they are works of sequential images telling a story (Koyama-Richard 2007; McCloud 1993, 12). Others prefer to refer to the origin of the term *manga*, which is believed to have been coined by the painter Katshushika Hōkusai (1760-1849), referring to the caricatures he would sketch on the fly. It is said that Hōkusai’s *manga*, a term which means “strange (or whimsical) pictures,” launched the tradition of simple, yet very expressive drawings which characterize manga as we know it today (Gravett 2004, 9, 18); others draw more general analogies with the expressivity of woodblock prints of the Edo era (1603-1867) in general (Bouissou 2010, 26). Still others, namely Ōtsuka Eiji, outright reject this effort to create historical continuity within Japanese visual culture, and instead argue that manga is a modern aesthetic, born partially of foreign influence such as Walt Disney and Eisenstein (Ōtsuka 2012). In spite of these differences, there is one figure the importance of whom nearly all manga specialists agree regarding the later chronology of manga: Tezuka Osamu.

Born in 1928, Tezuka is to this day referred to as the God of Manga. After World War II, a time when Japan was recovering from destruction and defeat, the population inevitably turned to affordable forms of entertainment, such as *kamishibai*⁷ and, later, comic strips. The art of caricature was already present in Japan, namely thanks to Hōkusai. Western-style single-panel cartoons had been introduced by foreigners who had settled in the country, such as Charles Wirgman, who founded the satirical magazine *Japan Punch* in 1862, while American and European multi-panel comics were discovered and recreated by Japanese artist Kitazawa Rakuten at the turn of the 20th century (Gravett 2004, 21). But Tezuka's influence is notable in that he introduced cinematic dynamics into manga: whereas previous strips used the same perspective and angle from panel to panel, Tezuka's manga included dramatic close-ups and visual effects (Gravett 2007, 26-27). While it has been pointed out that *kamishibai* also employed images which were inspired by cinema (Lamarre 2011, 114), Tezuka remains associated with the proliferation of these techniques within the specific format of manga, although the historical and medial affinities between *kamishibai* and manga must be given their due importance. To this day, pages that shift perspective from panel to panel, thereby conveying movement within the images, or that mimic the movement of a camera close-up, are considered one of manga's essential traits, a practice that existed in pre-war American comics (Gravett 2004, 28) but which has been arguably been pushed to a degree less frequent in other forms of comics (Cools 2011, 74); we can, however, see how these very traits are the result of a different, adapted use of imported technology and codes of representation, which demonstrates that the very birth of manga is partially transcultural, the result of the transposition of certain elements from one culture towards another, with transformation occurring in the process. Similarly, Tezuka is also notable for making large-eyed characters a staple of manga aesthetics. This practice of enlarging characters' eyes is also a result of Western influence, albeit not in the manner most typically believe: while many people, when first discovering manga, assume that this practice is directly intended to make characters appear Western Caucasian, as opposed to

⁷ *Kamishibai*, or paper theatres, are a form of public entertainment, in which a storyteller narrates a tale with the help of a set of successively displayed illustrations. They were popular in Japan from the 1930s onward, and have also been listed as one of manga's precursors, due to their visual and sequential nature (see Nash 2009).

Japanese, and therefore more easily marketable overseas, the fact of the matter is that selling manga outside of Japan was not envisaged as a strategy until long after manga had become popular in Western countries, much to the surprise of Japanese publishers (Bouissou 2010, 126). The truth is that Tezuka was influenced by Disney cartoons, whose characters also feature disproportionately large eyes, an aesthetic choice which is intended to highlight emotion and therefore better convey it to the reader or spectator (Schodt 1983, 92; Schodt 1996, 61; Davis, Barber, and Bryce 2010, 284). This once again highlights how manga are partially the result of transcultural movement – although even this instance of cross-cultural influence may need to be taken with a grain of salt, as it has been suggested that large eyes were present in Japanese art prior to Tezuka (Pellitteri 2010, 101). Tezuka is also credited with launching expressive, dynamic page layouts, particularly in the realm of shōjo manga, a practice which also continues to characterize manga today. Another trait which can be said to continue to characterize manga since Tezuka’s time (although this particular trait cannot be attributed to his influence) is its distinctive format. Post-World-War-Two manga series were published in chapter format in periodical magazines, a practice which continues to this day in Japan. Since the early 1960s, the most popular series have routinely had their chapters collected and republished in volumes known as *tankōbon*, black-and-white paperbacks of roughly 180 pages each (Bouissou 2010, 85). This particular format is maintained in translations and adaptations, and thus distinguishes manga from other forms of comics outside of Japan.

Occasionally, outside of Japan, someone in casual conversation will use the word “manga” to refer to Japanese animation, and heaven protect the poor soul if a self-proclaimed otaku⁸ should be within earshot: the unfortunate speaker will be subjected to a stern lecture on the difference between manga and anime. Manga are strictly comic strips, whereas the term for Japanese animation, as mentioned, is anime. However, the confusion, while technically incorrect, is not always entirely unfounded: manga and

⁸ Now relatively well-known in the English language, the Japanese term *otaku* first and foremost refers to extreme fans of manga, anime, and video games. Coined in the 1980s, it was and somewhat remains a negative qualifier in Japan, as Japanese otaku are often perceived as immature and lacking in social skills. However, Western fans of Japanese popular culture have taken to referring to themselves as otaku, even when not as submerged in their passion as their Japanese counterparts, and the term has taken on a positive value for them, as a marker of adherence to this particular subculture, akin to the current use of the term “geek.”

anime have much in common historically, formally, and content-wise. This is not to say that there aren't very clear differences between them: the presence or absence of movement, the creative process, the means and context of reception, are only a few of the obvious factors which distinguish these two creative forms. Nevertheless, these forms also overlap in several respects. Content is the one which perhaps most readily springs to mind: many anime series or feature length films⁹ are relatively faithful adaptations of manga, and the reverse is also true. While similar content does not equal identical works, due to the ever pervasive power of each medium, the continuity nevertheless makes itself felt, even as it prompts a comparative approach on even the casual level¹⁰. Historically, manga and anime are related because of Tezuka's apparently omnipresent influence, as well as their common ancestor, kamishibai (Steinberg 2012, 19-20). We have seen that Tezuka was influenced by American movies and cartoons when he established the enduring canons of manga, and his fascination with moving images lasted throughout his lifetime: he eventually went on to found his own animation studio, Mushi Production, and produced numerous anime, namely adaptations from his own manga, such as *Tetsuwan Atomu (Astro Boy)* and *Ribon no Kishi (Princess Knight)*. Tezuka, prior to making anime, established what became the conventions of manga, by infusing cinematism¹¹ into static panel layouts; therefore, it stands to reason that manga and anime, both stemming from the same motivation, share certain formal affinities (Lamarre 2011, 115). These formal affinities are an important part of this thesis, and they will be addressed. At the moment, I am merely sketching out the related birth of both media, a relation which to this day continues to bind them together, as we will see in Chapter 5.

⁹ It has occurred to me that anime created expressly for television (primarily series) and anime created for movie theatres (full length animations) ought not to be put in the exact same category. Indeed, film and television are different media, despite both involving filmed images and despite the fact that series can theoretically be projected on a film screen and film is regularly aired on television (McLuhan 1964, 160): even when the content is the same, the medium and its related context will always affect the experience. Thus, contents created for different media will always be specific in one way or another. This does not preclude comparative, or even syncretic analysis, which I will indulge in throughout this thesis, but, as always, the underlying difference bears reminding.

¹⁰ As is the case for most works resulting from adaptation, fans of a particular original series will often focus on the way the original material is treated throughout the various adaptations.

¹¹ I use the term "cinematism" for now, for the sake of clarity. However, it is a term which is disputed by Thomas Lamarre, who replaces it with "animetism." This is an important notion which will be dealt with later, but exploring it now would take this chapter on too long a tangent.

Additionally, anime can be considered a separate medium within that of animation. As Tezuka could not claim to reproduce the same type of lavish animation as Disney, given the limited resources available in postwar Japan, he and his team chose to reduce the number of frames per second, as well as to a set of other cost- and time-saving measures, resulting in a distinctively choppy, lower resolution animation (Steinberg 2012), another element I will return to in Chapter 5. While this technique is not exclusive to Japanese animation, it nevertheless contributed to making anime what it is today; it also contributed to making it more affordable for exportation, which is how anime initially made its debut in Europe.

Which brings us to anime and manga's transcultural voyage. It appears that my own discovery of these works, namely the fact that I discovered manga through anime, was fairly typical. In all of Europe, surveys show that anime played a role in getting people interested in manga, as did a pre-existing interest in comics, or at least familiarity with them (Bouissou, Pellitteri, and Dolle-Weinkauff 2010, 258), and it can be safely claimed that in North America as well, manga initially rode on anime's coattails. I have already generally gone over the manner in which anime was introduced to Western Europe: in the 1970s, European television channels began licensing Japanese series, which, as mentioned, were less expensively produced than their European counterparts, and also had the advantage of being much longer in terms of episode count, thereby providing more material for audiences (Bouissou 2010, 125). The European importation of anime series continued exponentially throughout the 1980s, and into the 1990s. As mentioned in the introduction, some of these series were not immediately identified as Japanese, in part because they were inspired from Western (or ostentatiously Western) source material, but perhaps also because they were, all things considered, perceived as "appropriate for children:" I am thinking here of series such as *Nobody's Boy Remi*, or *Tom Sawyer*, timeless tales for children and featuring children. It was really only when series such as *UFO Robo Grendizer*, *Dragon Ball*, and *Captain Tsubasa* appeared that parents (and journalists, and eventually government officials) began to take notice and alarm. As I suggested in the introduction, this was likely because these series did not appear to be made for children: they were either too violent, too dramatic (too epic, or "too

serious”¹²), too sexualized or too scatological. On top of that, as mentioned, they were also more aesthetically striking than their tamer predecessors, with the contrasts that characterized them, and with their typical character designs. All of this contributed to helping (adult) audiences identify these new cartoons and place them under the label of “Japanese animation.” In the case of France, the anime trend was eventually stifled by the imposition of strict broadcasting quotas to ensure that French cartoons prevailed over the airways (Ferrand and Langevin 2006, 9), and the demise of the show *Club Dorothée*, which, with its defunct predecessor *Récré A2* (featuring the same host and format but on a different channel), had been the principal vehicle for anime in that country.

In English-speaking countries in the 1970s, the process was similar: audiences first watched anime without being aware of its Japanese origins. Series such as *Astro Boy* and *Battle of the Planets* aired in the United Kingdom in the 1970s and were perceived as “just another cheap import for the children’s TV market,” meaning that their foreign origin (although not necessarily their Japaneseness) was acknowledged, but by no means exceptional (McCarthy 2001, 74). In the United States, *Speed Racer* and *Kimba the White Lion*, among others, aired during the 1960s, and were widely “indistinguishable from most American TV animation,” or, if they were recognized as foreign, were not identified as specifically Japanese (Patten 2001, 56). Again, it was only later, when science fiction anime’s more mature themes and more explicit violence came to be noticed and attracted an older audience, thereby breaking the Western assumption that cartoons were inherently childish, that a small anime fandom began to develop in the United States. This fandom primarily developed through the exchange and public screening of VHS tapes of untranslated Japanese series, namely at science fiction conventions, where fans were predisposed to enjoy space operas such as *Robotech* and *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Ibid.*, 58-59; Napier 2007, 134). Although the international release of Ōtomo Katsuhiro’s feature animation *Akira* in 1991 is generally considered to be the moment when anime gained worldwide attention and even critical praise, the truth is that anime’s insertion into both French- and English-speaking areas in Europe and North America began with an

¹² Not that *Nobody’s Boy Remi* wasn’t dramatic. Instead, it has consistently ranked, in my personal memory and many others’, as one of the most tear-jerking stories ever handed to us, replete with physical suffering and tragedy (even animal tragedy, which to this day strikes me as particularly upsetting). But as far as sob-stories went, it was of a typically 19th century France sort, still considered acceptable escapism for children.

imperceptible, gradual process. Later on, around the mid-1990s, series such as *Dragon Ball* and *Sailor Moon*, reflective of a more noticeably different aesthetic, began to air on child-oriented channels, such as the Canadian YTV, and the American Cartoon Network, as well as the more mature alternative cable network Adult Swim. It was then that anime became a truly visible and identifiable “trend” in North America.

Anime grew to be a continuing presence in North America, not just through television broadcasting, but as home entertainment, with the eventual birth of companies exclusively focused on licensing, translating, and distributing anime in the United States and Canada, such as Funimation, Geneon Entertainment, ADV Films, and Manga Entertainment, along with the creation of North American branches of Japanese companies, such as Viz Media and Bandai Entertainment. Eventually, annual anime conventions, massive events where fans, artists and distributors gathered, were organized all over North America, particularly in the United States, with the largest conventions attracting up to twenty thousand people (*Ibid.*, 2). In France, despite the fact that broadcasting anime was now a limited practice due to the imposed quotas, anime distribution companies did appear, such as Dybex, Kazé, and Déclic Images. Meanwhile, manga were beginning to appear on bookshelves.

Manga’s first foray into francophone Europe was by way of a short-lived Swiss underground comics magazine, *Le Cri qui Tue* (1978-1982), which failed to garner sufficient interest (Tillon 2006, 126; Ferrand and Langevin 2006, 8). In the early 1990s, French comics publishing house Glénat began publishing two manga series, Toriyama Akira’s *Dragon Ball*, and Ōtomo Katsuhiro’s *Akira*, both of which were familiar to French viewers thanks to their anime adaptations; other publishers followed suit, but due to lack of public and critical response, more than half of the thirteen companies involved abandoned the manga project by 1998 (*Ibid.*, 13), although major publishers such as Glénat and Kana remained in the game (Malone 2010, 324). It was only at the beginning of the 21st century that manga truly gained success in France, to the point that they constituted more than a third of the national comics market in 2005, and more than half of the European market (Bouissou 2006, 149; Bouissou, Pellitteri and Dolle-Weinkauff 2010, 254). In North America, first attempts at distributing manga in the 1980s and 1990s failed as well, arguably due to the perception that comics (implied meaning: superhero

comics) were solely directed at teenage boys (Goldberg 2010, 281) – an obstacle not present in France and Belgium, where comics are perceived as constituting a rich artistic tradition, and could thus be more conceivably appreciated as a valid form of expression¹³. However, the American publication of Takeuchi Naoko's shōjo series *Sailor Moon* in 1999, following the broadcast of the anime adaptation, introduced the possibility that comics could in fact garner a female audience (*Ibid.*, 283; Allison 2006, 154). As in Europe, new and pre-existing publishers began to publish very diverse manga series, leading to over 1700 new titles being released in the United States (and exported to Canada) in 2008 (Goldberg 2010, 290).

It must be noted that the anime and manga market is currently in economic decline, particularly in North America. The American anime market has been declining since 2003¹⁴, and the closing of American division of the anime distribution company Geneon Entertainment in 2007¹⁵, and in 2012 of Bandai Entertainment (the American branch of the Japanese anime distributor Namco Bandai), are clear symptoms of this downward trend. Regarding manga, pioneering American manga publisher Tokyopop, which had released extremely popular titles such as *Fruits Basket* and *Chobits*, closed its doors in 2011 (albeit maintaining its German branch alive), and the market has decreased by a third between 2007 and 2009, despite the fact that manga still account for over a third of graphic novel sales in the United States¹⁶. In France, manga sales have been decreasing since 2009, but seem to have stabilized as of 2011¹⁷ at 36% of the comics market. There are several possible reasons behind this general decline, among them the availability of free fansubbed and fan-translated manga online (both legal and illegal), and the recent economic crisis in the West. Another possible reason is simply that the

¹³ The situation has since changed in the world of English-language comics, where the coinage of the term “graphic novel,” for better or for worse, has helped comics to be perceived as not limited to superhero fantasies. Art Spiegelman's groundbreaking graphic novel *Maus* (1986), famous for dealing with the Holocaust through a medium which has hitherto been considered exclusively childish, greatly contributed to this shift in perception. But the notion of comics as art (the ninth art, to be precise) has always had stronger, older roots in France and Belgium.

¹⁴ [http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2011-04-15/america-2009-anime-market-pegged-at-us\\$2.741-billion](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2011-04-15/america-2009-anime-market-pegged-at-us$2.741-billion)

¹⁵ <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2007-09-26/geneon-usa-to-cancel-dvd-sales-distribution-by-friday>

¹⁶ <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2010-04-16/icv2/u.s-manga-sales-down-20-percent-in-2009>

¹⁷ http://www.gfkrt.com/imperia/md/content/rt-france/cp_gfk_march__de_la_bd_-_39eme__dition_de_la_fibd.pdf

novelty of the phenomenon has worn off. Regardless, manga and anime have been around for sufficiently long, and in sufficient numbers, for them to have plausibly made their mark on the Western imaginary.

B – Video Games

One may well wonder why I have not addressed the history of Japanese video games in the previous section, at the same time as I went over the journey of anime and manga. This is because, as we have just seen, manga and anime have a partially shared history, and are also linked economically and creatively. Video games, however, evolved on a separate track for a long time, and continue in many sectors to do so. Furthermore, for reasons which will be made clear later in this section, they are rarely analyzed in conjunction with anime and manga. This means, in straightforward terms, that I will have some explaining to do as to why I insist on considering them as an integral part of transcultural Japanese popular visual culture. While it may seem counterproductive on my part, in this perspective, to examine video games separately in this chapter, which runs the risk of widening the perceived gulf between the different media, I have chosen to do so in order to properly address the elements which have led to this gulf – and then, hopefully, demonstrate why my decision to include games in my research stands in the face of these elements.

a) A brief history of console video games

Going through the complete history of video games and all its implications would take much time, as it ties in with the advent of computers, artificial intelligence, and the digital in general: indeed, games and the digital appear to always have been connected. Therefore, I will limit myself to the broad stages of the evolution of console games (briefly addressing their direct ancestor, arcade games), putting computer games aside. This will also clarify the different types of consoles and companies involved in the video game industry. Indeed, branding is more relevant on the video game market than within the manga or anime industries: while certain fans may be more drawn to a certain

publisher's manga¹⁸, and may even more conceivably be partial to the aesthetic of a specific animation studio, the type of console on which a game is playable and the company which created the game were for a long time likely to have more impact on how a game was perceived and whether or not one chose to purchase it¹⁹.

Following Alan Turing's groundbreaking work on computers in the late 1940s, British and American researchers worked on rudimentary game programs throughout the 1950s (starting with programs which could play games, rather than programs through which one could play), with the belief that a machine sophisticated enough to play games would certainly be able to handle other tasks (Donovan 2010, 5). In 1962, MIT students created the first device corresponding to what we define today as video games: *Spacewar!*, a basic shooting game, which was eventually adapted into various arcade versions throughout the 1970s, thereby making the game accessible to crowds of people. The best known subsequent arcade video game is undoubtedly *Pong*, launched by the American company Atari in 1972, which recreated the dynamics of table tennis, and became a runaway global success and spawned several adaptations, including in Japan (*Ibid.*, 24-25), and launched a strong interest in arcade games. In 1975, Atari put on the market a console version of *Pong* which could be played at home, inspired by a pre-existing game console; again, other companies followed. Then microprocessors were introduced to games, enabling games to be created as software, not as unique circuits (*Ibid.*, 41), and therefore easier to manufacture and sell.

The interest in video games was not limited to North America. In Western Europe, console makers tried their hand at the new industry toward the end of the decade. Japan entered the international market fairly early: in 1978, the Japanese, Taito-produced arcade shooter game *Space Invaders* garnered great success, and was soon licensed by Atari for the US; in 1980, the Japanese game *Pac-Man* was similarly licensed by

¹⁸ In Japan, where manga chapters are first published in specialized magazines before being printed in book form, readers are more likely to favour one magazine, or type of magazine, over another. This is because these periodicals are ostensibly aimed at specific audiences (schoolchildren, housewives, middle-aged salarymen), and therefore prone to publish only one genre (shōnen, shōjo, professional manga, etc.), while promoting themselves in a manner which reinforces their desired image. Western publishers, however, tend to diversify the series they choose to license.

¹⁹ This is somewhat less true now, when many games are available over multiple platforms. Nevertheless, the "console wars" continue to be more prominent and publicized than any rivalry between Western manga publishers or anime distributors.

Midway. In 1983, however, the video game industry slowed down, then crashed, in part due to saturation of the arcade market, as well as loss of players' interest. The American console game market suffered a similar fate, while computer games took flight in multiple parts of the world toward the end of the decade.

But by then, Nintendo, a former Japanese toy company which had shifted its focus to video games, had developed the Famicom, or what would eventually be known in the West as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). Nintendo's then unique strategy was to ask external companies to create games for the console in exchange for a percentage of the profits, reserving the right to veto any game (*Ibid.*, 158). This ensured the Famicom's enduring popularity in Japan, not only with Nintendo's own games, such as *Donkey Kong* and *Jump Man* (known in English as *Super Mario Bros.*), but games from other producers, such as Enix's *Dragon Quest* (1986) and Square's *Final Fantasy* (1987). In 1985, the NES was successfully exported toward the United States, and revived the American video game industry in less than two years, establishing Japan as the new leader in console video games, although the NES' success was considerably more limited in Europe. In 1989, the Game Boy handheld console was released, and the Super NES in 1991, consolidating Nintendo's position²⁰. Throughout the 1990s, the company maintained a healthy competition with the Japan-based, internationally branched Sega, which came out with its own consoles, the Genesis and the handheld Game Gear, along with its own iconic characters, such as Sonic the Hedgehog.

In 1994, another Japanese player entered the game: Sony, with its PlayStation console, which combined 3D graphics with CD storage technology, as opposed to the side-scrolling, cartridge-based games which had constituted the norm so far; the console soon took the lead in sales. However, it must be noted that the PlayStation soon became a platform for American games as well as Japanese ones, such as the very successful *Tomb Raider* franchise. One of the PlayStation's most well-known and capitalized-upon franchises, however, was the series of Japanese role-playing games *Final Fantasy*, which switched platforms in order to take advantage of the PlayStation's better graphics and technology. Nintendo, for its part, revived its own sales with the series of *Pokémon* games for handheld devices (Game Boy, and later Game Boy Advance and Nintendo

²⁰ Albeit in part thanks to the iconic Russian-created game *Tetris*.

DS), which was launched in Japan in 1998 and became a big success in North America in 1998, spawning a bevy of manga, anime, and toy products.

In 2001, Microsoft launched its Xbox console, which outsold Nintendo's latest console, the Gamecube, worldwide, demonstrating a beginning decline of the Japanese supremacy in gaming. Nintendo, however, managed to remain popular throughout the 2000's by launching innovative products, such as the handheld Nintendo DS in 2004, the first to feature a touchscreen, and the motion-detecting Wii console in 2006, also the first of its kind, which outsold the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 (PS3) by a near two-to-one ration during the first three years following all of their releases (*Ibid.*, 341). Nevertheless, today, there is a sense that the outright domination of the video game market by Japan, at least where North America and Europe are concerned, is much more mitigated, as Xbox 360 games dominated sales in the United States in 2011 (although PS3 games came out on top in Europe)²¹. While well-known franchises such as *The Legend of Zelda*, or *Super Mario*, continue to be very successful, Japanese video games now face much more serious competition than during the beginning of their journey toward non-Asian countries. The playing field is levelled.

Nevertheless, Japanese games have been a big part of video games for a long time, and have created an imaginary of their own. In fact, they were one of the first cultural products to be massively exported from Japan to the West. Indeed, prior to that, Japan had primarily been considered an exporter of non cultural manufactured goods, and video games were among the first exports to change that perception:

[Japan's] cultural influence had lagged far behind its growing economic power. For North Americans and Europeans, Japanese cinema meant Godzilla, which despite a cult following was regarded as something of a joke. And while the work of director Akira Kurosawa had directly inspired the Hollywood films *Star Wars* and *The Magnificent Seven*, few people knew about his influence. **Manga comics and anime, meanwhile, were rarely – if ever – seen outside Asia.** (*Ibid.*, 154, my emphasis)

It is also relevant to point out, at this juncture, that, just as manga and anime were inspired from European comics and American cartoons and cinema, certain Japanese video games were derived from American games. *Pong*, it has been mentioned, was

²¹ <http://www.vgchartz.com/yearly/2011/USA/> ; <http://www.vgchartz.com/yearly/2011/Europe/>

copied by game companies from multiple countries. But the most striking example is that of the Japanese role-playing game (RPG), a genre of games that consists in the player choosing and customizing a character or group of characters inhabiting a role (warrior, mage, etc.). Although this genre is currently one of the most popular ones, if not the most popular among Japanese games, it was not amongst the first genres to catch on in the country, whereas RPGs inspired from paper-and-pen tabletop games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* were always very popular in North America and in Europe, particularly on the computer. It has been suggested that the concept of crafting your own character and exploring seemingly endless worlds constituted an obstacle, rather than an appeal, for the Japanese public (*Ibid.*, 159-160). Such freedom of gameplay never did catch on in Japan, but the RPG was eventually adopted with *Dragon Quest* (designed by famed manga artist Toriyama Akira), and reinvented in such a way as to make it very different, in terms of gameplay, rhythm, and style, from its American inspiration: today, Japanese RPGs such as *Final Fantasy* are usually characterized by pre-given characters, which the player then evolves as permitted, as opposed to American RPGs, which are founded on greater freedom of choice. Other distinctions will be examined in chapters 3, 4 and particularly 5.

b) The question of cultural odour

The last quote in the previous section suggested that video games were Japanese culture's first insertion into Western popular culture (emphasis on "popular"), even preceding anime and manga. In light of this, why is it that video games are so rarely included in discussions featuring manga and anime? There are several answers to that question. I have already mentioned the first, which is that manga and anime share a close common history, whereas video games evolved on such a separate plane that even I felt compelled to address them on their own in this chapter. While manga and anime evolved together and the latter paved the way for the former's integration into Western Europe and North America, video games followed their own path, through different channels. One could object that several manga and anime series go on to be adapted into video games; this is especially true of shōnen²² action manga, which are made into fighter games. However,

²² Shōnen is a genre of manga aimed at young boys. It is divided into many sub-genres, one of which will be extensively analysed in Chapter 4.

these are not necessarily the games which carry the Japanese gaming industry. They are purchased by people who are already fans of the original series, and can thus be considered by-product merchandise, in somewhat the same way as figurines or t-shirts are. One apparently similar, yet fundamentally different case of dialogue between manga, anime, and video games is the *Pokémon* phenomenon, in which case the game predated the manga, anime, and playing cards, and thus spawned a media-mix universe where playfulness and ludism are the primary mode of engagement (Ito 2008). However, *Pokémon* and its media-mix successors (*Yu-Gi-Oh!*, *Digimon*, and others) constitute something of a special case, and while I would agree that they constitute an important section of the transcultural flow of Japanese popular visual culture, especially in its most recent evolution, it does not ensue that they are representative of the whole. The so-called “classic” game franchises, the ones that built the Japanese game industry and introduced it to countries outside of Asia, appear to have little to do, content-wise, with the progression of manga and anime outside of Japan (although we will see that the three do share less obvious thematic recurrences).

Another reason that prompts scholars to set video games apart from the other two cultural forms is precisely that games, despite what was written above, are not automatically recognized as cultural forms. This is in part due to their manufactured, electronic nature, and to the fact that Japanese consoles do not exclusively run Japanese games. As mentioned, there exist many American- or European-made games for Sony’s PlayStation consoles, as well as for Nintendo’s Game and Wii consoles. Only the hardware itself is “made in Japan,” and, as Iwabuchi Koichi points out, electronics are “culturally odourless.” The author defines cultural odour as follows:

I use the term *cultural odor* [sic] to focus on the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated *positively* with a particular product in the consumption process. [...] **I am interested in the moment when the image of the contemporary lifestyle of the country is strongly and affirmatively called to mind as the very appeal of the product**, when the “cultural odor” of cultural commodities is evolved. The way in which the cultural odor of a particular product becomes a “fragrance” – a socially and culturally acceptable smell – is not determined simply by the consumer’s perception that something is “made in Japan.” Neither is it necessarily related to the material influence or quality of the product. **It has more to do with widely disseminated**

symbolic images of the country of origin. (Iwabuchi 2002, 27, my emphasis)

Iwabuchi's precise characterization of cultural odour and fragrance will be very useful for the analysis to follow in later chapters, particularly chapter 3, which will deal with cultural specificities of Japanese popular visual culture; but for now, this notion helps us understand why video games are not automatically considered to be a part of the latter. Indeed, as Iwabuchi goes on to elaborate, although Japanese brands of electronics may evoke certain properties (such as "cutting-edge," or "miniaturization"), these properties pertain more to the technology itself, not to a perceived Japanese lifestyle, and even less, I would add, to the content (video, audio, etc.) played on these devices: electronic platforms are neutral canvases, as far as culture is concerned.

But what about the games themselves? Can they not be said to potentially possess a cultural odour, just as the contents of a music CD, or the images on a DVD are clearly cultural forms? This is true in general, but the problem in this case is that the content of the Japanese games itself is, in its majority, not especially culturally specific. When we consider that the hero of the *Super Mario* series is ostensibly Italian (right down to his accent in more recent games), or that the *Final Fantasy* RPGs unfold in fantasy universes in which characters' ethnicities, while not necessarily without referent in reality, are fictional and predominantly not ostensibly Asian (with the exception of *Final Fantasy X* and *X-2*), we can see that Japanese culture itself is not front and center even in games produced in Japan. Iwabuchi argues that this is the case even for manga and anime characters: with their round eyes and frequently colourful hair, he writes, they are crafted to appear to be *mukokuseki*, or nationless (*Ibid.*, 28). While this claim is open to debate (and I will address it down the road, in chapter 3), I can already counter-argue that manga and anime do feature many elements of Japanese culture beyond their characters' appearance, such as food, clothing, customs, etiquette, and so forth – and that, over time, these cultural elements do grow to constitute part of the appeal of these works. Thus, there is a clear content-related difference between video games on the one hand, and anime and manga on the other.

I have just conceded that the content of Japanese video games is not especially culturally specific. However, this does not mean that the games themselves are not

identifiable as Japanese. It is true that, when it comes to cultural forms, we still often tend to associate the content and setting with the provenance, because of the enduring notion of national literatures or artistic currents: we expect the Great American Novel to unfold in the United States, or novels filed under “Chinese Literature” to at least partly unfold in China. Similarly, we do not automatically classify Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* under “Russian Literature,” because it does not feature tundras (and because Nabokov was largely a nomad). I am not condoning this perspective, merely stating an enduring reality: despite the lessening importance of cultural boundaries, in day-to-day life we continue to use national entities as points of reference when navigating culture (after all, am I not writing a thesis on *Japanese* visual culture?). However, it can also happen that specificities which initially appear to be non-cultural, are recurrent within a cultural flow. For example, there are thematics which one would not readily associate with Japan, at least not in the way one associates kimonos and chopsticks with it, and yet which are present not only within several Japanese video games, but also within manga and anime. The questioning of reality, we will see, is one such thematic; the conflict between tradition and modernity constitutes another. There are also aesthetics and character designs which can be demonstrated to run through the entire corpus. The lack of obvious and direct cultural references in Japanese video games does perhaps lead to cultural odourlessness, in that these games do not draw overt attention to their Japaneseness, nor attempt to capitalize on the latter by “disseminating symbolic images” of Japan; but Japanese games can be bound together and identified by other elements than direct cultural references. Once a theme or an aesthetic has been recognized as being typical of Japan-produced games (and the origin of a video game is as simple to discover as watching the opening credits), coherence is consequently perceived.

c) Addressing the exceptionalist argument

Another, final reason why video games are often separated from manga and anime is that the latter are essentially narrative media (often sharing the same storyline, in cases when one is an adaptation of the other), whereas video games, it has often been pointed out and argued, can do without any form of narrative, and arguably even benefit from the absence of a story or plot (Consalvo 2003, 324; Aarseth 2004, 51; Juul 1998). Many scholars

insist on the fundamentally unique experience associated with video games, an experience which relies on the presence of such elements as interactivity, emergent situations, and physical response. In fact, video game studies have been characterized by a long-running debate between those who choose to analyse narrative within games on the one hand, and those who expressly choose to focus on those properties of games which are not only non-narrative, but appear incompatible with the very concept of storytelling. The latter group argues that video games are a unique medium, and should be analyzed with new tools, not the old narratological ones:

The experience of playing games can never be simply reduced to the experience of a story. Many other factors that have little or nothing to do with storytelling per se contribute to the development of great games and we need to significantly broaden our critical vocabulary for talking about games to deal more fully with those other topics. (Jenkins 2004, 120)

This perspective is sometimes described as an “exceptionalist” stance, in the sense that its proponents insist on the exceptional nature of video games. From the viewpoint of these so-called ludologists (their “opponents” being usually labelled as narratologists), my decision to analyse video games alongside narrative media would appear highly reprehensible. However, although games are not ultimately defined by narrative, they can and do include narrative elements, as evidenced by one of the most prominent genres of the medium: role-playing games. Such games, epitomized by Japanese franchises such as *Final Fantasy* and, to a certain extent, *Pokémon*, revolve around the strategic formation and customization of a team of playable characters, via which the player discovers the game’s universe, or more precisely what Michael Nitsche refers to as the game’s story map, “a cognitive map that has been heavily influenced by evocative narrative elements as the player experienced them in the game space” (Nitsche 2008, 227). The player, through the customized playable characters (the “roles” she takes on), explores the game space and interacts with elements within it; these elements are the just-mentioned “evocative narrative elements,” which trigger the narrative process and aid the player in making sense of the game space (*Ibid.*, 3). These elements are often highlighted in the form of “attractors” which visually attract the attention of the player and encourage the latter to interact with them (*Ibid.*, 152). Through these interactions, the player discovers what short- and long-term objectives she must accomplish within the narrative context of

the game in order to win; for example, in *Final Fantasy X*, the initial main objective for the team of characters is to complete a pilgrimage in order to prevent the destruction of the world, and the road to accomplishing this main objective is sectioned into smaller, short-term objectives. This is the traditional structure of story RPGs, and it prompts Espen Aarseth to argue that such story-games are inherently repetitive from one game to the next, writing: “Perhaps we could say that this genre is really only one and the same game, the same rule system repeated over and over with variable cultural conventions and increasingly better technology” (Aarseth 2004, 51). However, Jesper Juul writes that story elements, while not essential, can contribute to the game as an experience: “Since an attractive feature of games is the way they challenge their players, games do not *need* an interesting fictional world or *any* fictional world to be considered interesting, but this does not mean that fiction is irrelevant for player experience or game quality” (Juul 2005, 189). Indeed, Juul’s main point in his book *Half-Real* is that “the interaction between game rules and game fiction is one of the most important features of video games” (*Ibid.*, 1), as their variable balance influences each specific game and ultimately defines it as an experience for the player.

Other types of games, such as platform games, feature story elements, although the latter are arguably much less essential to the game experience than in the case of RPGs. Platform games can be defined as games in which the gameplay (the concrete manner in which the game is played) is mostly based on the act of making the playable character jump onto and from platforms (Egenfeldt, Smith, and Tosca 2008, 65). It is a type of game which relies much more upon motor skills, such as quick reflexes and precise use of the controller, rather than on intellectual skills such as solving puzzles, or putting together clues in order to figure out the next course of action. Such games of skill could conceivably be entirely devoid of a story, and yet this is frequently not the case. If we take the example of the *Super Mario* series²³, we find that nearly all the games begin with a story, usually one where the Princess of the Mushroom Kingdom is kidnapped by the evil turtle-dragon hybrid Bowser. The entirety of the rest of the game consists in getting the playable character Mario through the numerous levels, looking for the elusive

²³ There are a few games within this predominantly platformer franchise which belong to the RPG category, such as the *Mario & Luigi* series and *Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars*. However, they constitute exceptions.

Bowser and his captive, until the Princess is finally saved. Basically, the gameplay could be said to merely consist in keeping the character alive and getting him from point A to point Z. Nevertheless, the story elements' presence is telling, and one cannot completely separate them from the gameplay. Most importantly, they are indissociable from the aesthetic of the game: a *Mario* game without a Princess, without Bowser, and without any of the many iconic characters and fiends found throughout the franchise, would be unrecognizable. These elements constitute the *Mario* universe, and they contribute to making the game identifiable.

Juul makes a compelling argument for the role of fiction within games. He minimally defines games as consisting of three essential elements: “(1) the system set up by the rules of a game, (2) the relation between the game and the player of the game, and (3) the relation between the playing of the game and the rest of the world” (Juul 2005, 28). In the case of *Mario* games, the rules (the first element) are, among others, that Mario will weaken or die if he comes into contact with an enemy (except when he jumps on them) or falls off the screen, and will become stronger if he grabs a power-up item. But the player's understanding of these rules, which is a crucial part of his relation with the game (the second element), is largely dependent on the third element, the relation between playing the game and existing in the real world. As Juul explains: “Even though fiction and rules are formally separable, the player's experience of the game is shaped by both. The fictional world of a game can cue the player into making assumptions about the game rules [...]” (*Ibid.*, 177). Identifying enemies and power-up items, or recognizing visual cues and drawing conclusions from them (e.g., a door most likely signals a passage to another area, ladders are probably meant to be climbed), are actions which are tied in with the player's knowledge of the real world and the manner in which the game reflects the latter. In fact, merely understanding the rule “Mario will die if he falls off the screen” requires one to infer that Mario is meant to represent a live person, and that the laws of gravity are active in his world – all elements which are understood through analogy with the real world. Nitsche, although less focused on the narrative/gameplay dichotomy in his work, examines precisely this type of cue, previously referred to as “evocative narrative elements:”

Such elements can be anything and any situation encountered in a game world that is structured to support and possibly guide the player's comprehension. The elements' task is to improve a player's experience and understanding of the game world. Players encounter and read these elements, comprehend the information in the context of a fictional world, and learn from them as they build contextual connections between elements. Much the same can be said about other interfaces, but unlike a help function or the task bar in a word processing program, **the interface in video games is dramatic.** (Nitsche 2008, 37, my emphasis)

This passage highlights the difference between mere utility and dramatic function, and underlines the dual function of evocative narrative elements, which is to move the game forward while providing a rational explanation for this moving forward. The consistency of such cues within the game, and also their recurrence throughout different games belonging to a same franchise or series (the above-mentioned characters in *Super Mario*, chocobo mounts in *Final Fantasy*, pokéballs in *Pokémon*) contribute to creating not just narrative, but entire complex fictional worlds. Although these worlds can be considered optional to the core game mechanics- in that the player can “refuse the invitation” to pretend to inhabit the gameworld (Juul 2005, 139), they still contribute to the player's emotional involvement in the game, and influence her motivations to win (*Ibid.*, 161). I certainly do not mean to imply that RPGs and platformers are both equally narrative genres: the former clearly depend more on storytelling for their appeal. However, both genres offer cohesive (if not always coherent²⁴) fictional worlds, which influence the experience provided by the different games. When players continue to buy the latest *Final Fantasy* or *Pokémon* game, they do so to reconnect with these games' universes. While not all games rely entirely on narrative, most video games do offer complex worlds, and this is one thing that games have in common with narrative media, such as anime and manga. And this common bond, this capacity to spawn complex universes, is one of the things which I will be focusing on, and thus constitutes a first step in justifying my decision to include games in an otherwise narrative corpus. It is possible, in other words, to focus on the world-building aspect of games, especially in the case of games

²⁴ Juul points out that video games' universes can be incoherent, in that they contradict our own real-world logic – for example, games where the playable character has three lives, or games based on a save file system allowing the player to indefinitely pick up where he left off before “dying” (Juul 2005, 123). Nevertheless, such inconsistencies with reality, when consistently present in several games, can help one view these games as a cohesive ensemble.

which were clearly conceived through world-building, without negating the importance of gameplay and other aspects unique to gaming: the latter are only being temporarily moved aside (and we will see that I do plan to give them their due down the road).

To sum up, there are two levels on which video games can be tied in with other more purely narrative media. The first concerns mostly RPGs, and their storyline structure and themes, in other words this specific genre's narrative content: I will attempt to tie in the latter with that of different manga and anime series, and establish networks of recurring elements, themes, and narrative mechanisms. The second level lies in games' capacities to create worlds, recognizable spaces in which players can navigate, as they would other types of visual worlds, through recurring, analyzable aesthetic and stylistic traits, which readers and viewers inhabit and experience ultimately as one cohesive flow.

d) Games as part of a media ecology

There is another point on which I must insist, regarding my decision to include games into the corpus, and that is the fact that I will be considering the corpus itself as medium-based, or medial, experience. The term "medial" is used by Hans Belting to distinguish any properties of a work which are inherently pertaining to the medium, as opposed to the content (Belting 2001, 7). The use of this term, as I understand it, is linked to Marshall McLuhan's oft-quoted claim that content, when represented through different media, is inevitably altered in the process (McLuhan 1964): if we restrain ourselves to the realm of the visual, this means that the same image content will have a different effect on the spectator, depending on whether it is represented through comics, television, film, painting, or a computer tablet. Each specific effect constitutes the phenomenology of the medium in question. Phenomenology, the philosophical study of human experiences (phenomena) and conscience, is an approach which allows one to concentrate on media as experience: "In using phenomenology to examine visual media, we focus on the specific capacities of each medium that distinguish its properties, and the effect of these properties on our experience the images produced in each" (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 135). At first glance, this approach appears to encourage a classic (some might say banal) separation of form and content, with strong focus on the former. However, it is important to recognize that, when it comes to the phenomenology of the visual, form and content

can never be entirely separated, as viewer experience and response arises from the specific manner in which both form and content combine. The experience that results from their combination is thus one which is both cognitive, or intellectual, and physical: indeed, medial effects are registered with physical consequences (through framing, movement, or colour, for example), while content is understood intellectually, but the actual experience does not separate both levels (although I will try to, for the sake of analysis).

Thus, the phenomenological approach which I plan to use in the analysis of my corpus will focus more on *format* than on form: it will consider media as aesthetic experiences (with the physical dimension the term “aesthetic” classically entails), and deconstruct said experiences based on how the media platform showcases the content. I will analyze specific manga, anime, and Japanese video games not just as examples of their respective media, but as examples of a specific application of their media’s properties and abilities to convey content. The particular results (meaning: particular when compared to other types of comics, animations, and games) will be studied in regards to their projected effects on their audiences, and these effects will then be shown to have elements in common. In other words, the different constituents of the corpus will be shown to offer partly similar aesthetic experiences. This choice of perspective appears especially relevant when we consider that many of the scholars arguing against the application of narratology to games choose to think of games precisely as player experiences, through concepts such as “immersion,” “interactivity,” or “simulation” (Eskkelinen 2004, 52), all of which imply a strong highlighting of the player’s role in the equation; to quote Alexander Galloway, “if photographs are images, and films are moving images, then *video games are actions*” (Galloway 2006, 2). These actions, taken by the player within the gaming situation, imply a strong involvement, an immersive experience. It is through this notion of experience, by examining the phenomenology of each medium, that I can justify choosing to study such a vast, disparate corpus: I will show that their phenomenologies overlap, and form an identifiable landscape of experience, a fabric composed of recurring textures.

C – Culture and the transcultural

Throughout part of this study, as mentioned, I will examine Japanese popular visual culture as a transcultural flow, one that emanates from Japan and travels toward other countries, with the result that both the perception of traveling works and the imaginaries that receive these works are modified in the process. As announced, in order to be able to provide more precise insight, I will restrict my analysis to francophone Europe and North America. I have selected these areas namely because I personally experienced this flow within these contexts, by way of both the French and English languages. But also, as suggested by Napier's previously mentioned work, these areas are representative of a "Western" fascination with Japan that goes back several decades. As specified in the introduction, I am not attempting to enhance or condone the oft-presumed dichotomy between "Japan" and the "West," nor am I seeking to establish them as stable, homogeneous entities. However, their histories, both independent and with one another, have been documented in such a way as to demonstrate, on the one hand, a fascination with Japan that is indeed found within these particular "Western" regions (albeit spread out differentially over the decades), and on the other, a certain historical continuity (as opposed to homogeneity) of Japanese culture.

Regarding the latter, it is relevant to recall that Japan, until the middle of the 19th century, had been ruled by isolationist politics, which "outlawed the Christian religion, expelled most foreigners and all priests, and [forbade] Japanese to go abroad" (Buruma 2003, 11). Although there were commercial ties between Japan and other Asian countries, and some foreigners had made contact with Japan before, namely Spanish and Portuguese priests and Dutch merchants (*Ibid.*, 15), national borders remained mostly sealed for centuries, aided by Japan's natural isolation as an island nation. Thus, although the Japanese nation and culture are far from being as homogeneous as claimed by public discourse following the opening up of the borders (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 9-10), it is also reasonable to claim the existence of a Japanese culture which has remained comparatively continuous and distinct throughout the centuries preceding the end of isolationist policies²⁵. Tessa Morris-Suzuki reconciles the notions of culture and difference as follows:

²⁵ One would be correct in counter-arguing that Japan did receive cultural influence from other countries, particularly China, and also in pointing out that Japan's self-perception as a "pure" nation is a construct

Although I do not think that it is meaningful to talk about a single thing called ‘Japanese culture,’ I do think we can define a multitude of traditions that form the intellectual repertoire of large groups of people in Japan, although they may be interpreted in very different ways by different individuals. These traditions include not only ideas which are readily recognized as ‘Japanese’ – Shinto mythology or the techniques of haiku poetry, for example – but also others whose roots may be traced to societies more recently incorporated into the Japanese state (to Ainu or Okinawan society, for instance) or to China, Europe, North America, or elsewhere. (*Ibid.*, 6)

From this perspective, change is rooted in pre-existing tradition, and thus can be tied to former stability (or the appearance thereof) without negating itself: it is, as mentioned, a “languid motion” that has all the appearance of stability.

Western Europe and North America, for their part, while linked by multiple traditions which travelled from the former to the latter through emigration, each have distinct histories and furthermore constitute culturally and economically heterogeneous areas. However, their relations with and perceptions of Japan can be said to have been similar (albeit not identical) in many regards, particularly where popular visual culture is concerned. The above historical retracing of anime, manga and video games’ trajectory in these regions has revealed many regional nuances, to be sure: for example, manga first gained popularity in francophone Europe by way of shōnen, while shōjo played a stronger role in getting manga to break through in North America. But the chronological portrait has also revealed similarities, namely where the level of acceptance is concerned: a transcultural connection occurred as much in France as in the United States, and following roughly the same timeline. Furthermore, these regions have in common that they currently belong to the most economically developed areas of the world. This seems to encourage my decision to use the term “West as shorthand for economically developed regions which have had economic or cultural exchanges with Japan since the latter country’s opening during the second half of the 19th century; similarly, francophone Europe and North America will be used as examples of such areas, albeit each with their

which was created in reaction to increased contact with foreigners (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 10). However, this caveat does not negate Japanese culture’s distinctiveness: long-running traditions colliding with foreign modernity, combined with a political will to maintain Japanese culture’s “purity” have yielded a resulting culture which, while not nearly as unmixed as nationalist discourse claims, remains as unique as the process that led to its current state.

own contextual specificities, as neither experienced the transcultural flow in exactly the same manner.

What does not follow, however, is that these areas share an identical “Western” imaginary. As Terry Eagleton wryly remarks, postulating the “West” as standard staple that is stable, enduring, unified, and homogeneous, is merely a throwback to the comforts of hegemony:

In one sense, the West does not have a distinctive identity of its own, because it does not need one. The beauty of being a ruler is that one does not need to worry about who one is, since one deludedly believes that one already knows. It is other cultures which are different, while one’s own form of life is the norm, and so scarcely a ‘culture’ at all. It is rather the standard by which other ways of life show up precisely as cultures, in all their charming or alarming uniqueness. (Eagleton 2000, 46)

Eagleton outlines the stakes clearly. Indeed, on some level, all the precautions in the world cannot completely erase the unease one feels when writing of the “Western imaginary” as though it were a given, an entity that needs no introduction, while the focus is on those vectors of “Japanese culture” that stitch themselves onto the canvas of the “Western imaginary” and proceed to modifying it. Just as “Japan” is a construct, so is the “West.” But in the face of these constructs, I decided to continue to rely on the existence of differentiated cultures, because these constructs continue to have effects and consequences on everyday exchanges and perceptions – including my own. Returning to the personal perspective I adopted in the introduction, I have spent most of my life in countries that qualify as part of the “Western” construct. If I, and so many others, experienced anime and manga as “different,” or “new,” it is because they were: there was nothing quite like them in our collective imaginary at the time. If I have to define the “Western imaginary,” let it be not according to what it contains, but by what it didn’t contain then, and arguably contains now. Belgium and Canada are not the same place, nor are they the same culture, nor do they share identical imaginaries. What they do share are plausibly comparable visions of “Japan,” and similar relationships with manga, anime and Japanese video games, not least the novelty that these works carried with them into these regions. Those are the elements I am factoring to gather these areas into a same set. One may well ask why I did not choose to focus on a smaller cultural area of reception, rather than make a sweeping selection that forces me to navigate the risks of equally

sweeping generalizations. I made this choice because the scope of this particular transcultural flow is precisely what makes it so striking, so interesting to analyze, in spite of all the shorthand, caveats, glossing over and compromises such an analysis requires.

To elaborate on the question of transcultural flow, the latter consists in the travel of a cultural, artistic or entertainment object (in this case, manga, anime, and Japanese video games) from one distinct cultural area to another; in the process, a double transformation occurs. On the one hand, the cultural object is modified, as several collective filters are superimposed upon it. The modification is both concrete and perceptual: concrete because the object undergoes translation and adaptation, and perceptual because it is not received by the “new” audience in the same manner as it was by the original one (the one the object was initially intended for), and is the subject of a different appropriation. On the other hand, both the “new” audience and the culture and imaginary it inhabits are modified in this process of transculturation, albeit possibly in a partial or even minor way: as this “foreign object” inserts itself into the cultural scene, it changes the latter’s map, alters the imaginary landscape, as pre-existing, more traditional artefacts (from this particular audience’s viewpoint) become perceived in a slightly different manner, in relation to the new object. The pattern of the fabric of the imaginary is changed to make room for the new inclusion, and a new pattern is created by the new totality.

The choice of the term “transcultural” to describe this process allows us to differentiate cultures from nations. Indeed, Iwabuchi ends up focusing more on what he calls “transnational” cultural flows, and justifies his wording as follows:

Transnational has a merit over *international* in that actors are not confined to the nation-state or to nationally institutionalized organizations; they may range from individuals to various (non)profitable, transnationally connected organizations and groups, and the conception of culture implied is not limited to a “national” framework. (*Ibid.*, 16)

The term “transnational” indeed allows more flexibility than “international,” as it suggests more complex, volatile relations between nations, highlighting the latter as entities which can be superimposed and interpenetrate one another through the movement of free actors and cultural artefacts, whereas “international” suggests that (large) dots are merely being connected. Nevertheless, I feel that “transnational” continues to put the

focus of the issue on the nation, maintaining it as a reference. In some cases, as in the one this thesis will revolve around, cultural phenomena go significantly beyond a single nation: for example, the Canadian province of Quebec receives its English manga from American publishers, and its French manga from Franco-Belgian publishers. While reception of these works differs from region to region (particularly in the case of French manga in Quebec, as these books can contain idioms which are not the norm in the province), these manga end up forming a cultural flow which concerns all these nations, thereby uniting them on at least this level, creating an amalgam-like entity which trumps the nation from the viewpoint of restricted cultural analysis, and which is thus better expressed by the term “transcultural.”²⁶

But why have I not simply opted for the term “culturally hybrid” to describe this flow? Indeed, Sherry Simon makes exactly the same trans-/inter- distinction I have just made: “The hybrid signals the advent of an era where the dominant prefix within the description of relations between cultures is no longer ‘inter’ but ‘trans.’ The dealings between cultures no longer relate to exchange, but rather to interpenetration and contamination” (Simon 1999, 30, my translation). This reflects exactly the distinction I was attempting to clarify. It is true that the term “cultural hybridity,” while popularized by Homi Bhabha (1994), has been criticized for being overly static and binary: the term “hybrid” somehow implies that, in contrast to it, purity exists. A hybrid being is implicitly the result of two “pure” entities joining. But Simon contests that idea: “The hybrid [...] is not synonymous with fusion. The hybrid indicates an instable moment in the lives of cultures, a situation of tension and discomfort in the face of existing categories” (*Ibid.*, 32, my translation). Hybridity, she writes, is by definition temporary, transitory, it is a step which leads to something else. Certainly, I do not disagree with this: transcultural flows are also processes by definition, the changes they create are sometimes long-lasting, but never entirely stable. But if hybridity really is synonymous with tension and discomfort, then I feel it is perhaps not the right word for what I am

²⁶ Additionally, it should be mentioned that the province of Quebec contains a vocal separatist movement that campaigns for the province’s right to become a country separate from Canada. As such, Quebec constitutes an eloquent example of the need for a more flexible term than “transnational” – given that, even though it is not officially a country (although it has been recognized as a nation), part of its population wishes for it to be one, which at least implies that it constitutes a distinct culture within the Canadian nation.

attempting to study here. Certainly, manga, anime, and Japanese video games caused tensions when they inserted themselves into the Western imaginary: they unsettled some, they shocked and repulsed others, they redefined boundaries, which is never completely painless, no matter how fluid we've become. But was the experience of this transcultural flow really uncomfortable for those who were not watching it from the sidelines but experiencing it wholeheartedly? Was it not, rather, characterized by fascination, pleasure, and playfulness? I am not suggesting that there has never been anything truly dark throughout Japanese popular culture's travels abroad: on the contrary, hybridity as defined by Simon, as an uncomfortable union, is rampant in my corpus, albeit not at the cultural level, but rather at the level of narrative content. Conflicts between man and machine, East and West, tradition and modernity, responsibility and pleasure abound; not only that, but they are rarely resolved. But it does not ensue that the experience of discovering them was an uncomfortably hybrid one. What I believe was taken from this transcultural process, as I will continue to call it, was the pleasure of weaving something new, something possibly ephemeral, but that would nevertheless leave a trace behind.

D – Corpus description

Selecting the corpus for this thesis has been a challenge. The phenomenon I am analyzing is broad, and the variety of works which constitute it is equally broad. Focusing on a very restricted corpus (say, one manga, one anime, and one game) would not, in my opinion, have been particularly convincing. On the other hand, I am aware that choosing an overly broad corpus ran the risk of being even less convincing: if you choose a wide enough array of different works, you are bound to find something that connects some of them. Not only that, but it is difficult to run a methodologically valid and thorough analysis of too large a number of works. In light of this, I have attempted to reach a compromise and try to put together a sample which reflects the diversity of Japanese popular visual culture, yet remains manageable in size. Overall, I have attempted to select works that span the chronology of the transcultural flow, from its noticeable beginning to recent years. Indeed, the integration of Japanese popular visual culture into the imaginary of francophone Europe and North America has occurred over time, and thus it seems logical to work from creations which reflect this process. Also, I have refrained from including

works that are the result of direct adaptations (except for a few notable cases, in which the original work was only a loose inspiration), as this would require to take into account all the factors which adaptation entails, and all the tangents this implies. Although it is true many people's first anime was in fact an adaptation, they were for the vast majority very faithful adaptations from manga, and thus their content overlaps nearly perfectly with the original's. I will on occasion mention the adaptations, but they will not be the focus of the thesis. I also will reserve the right to make footnote references to works not within the corpus, when necessary for further illustration. Finally, it will soon be apparent that some works will be cited more frequently than others, or explored more in depth. This may perhaps be considered an unbalance in my approach, but this choice stems from the impossibility to distribute equal attention to all works and end up with a readable, convincing dissertation. All the works I have selected contribute something to the picture of the imaginary I wish to draw; but some provide stronger illustrations more frequently than others.

Within manga, I have chosen series which reflect the different genres. Toriyama Akira's *Dragon Ball* (1984-1995) has defined the parameters of shōnen manga, as shown by its more recent spiritual successors, Watsuki Nobuhiro's *Kenshin* (1994-1999) Kishimoto Masashi's *Naruto* (1997-present) and Tite Kubo's *Bleach* (2001-present), all of which present connecting patterns of their own with other genres. The "romantic shōnen" subgenre (also known as harem shōnen) will be represented by Akamatsu Ken's *Love Hina* (1998-2001). Concerning shōjo, I have selected Ikeda Riyoko's *Rose of Versailles* (1972-1973), one of the first shōjo to be exported, and a fascinating case of transculturality by itself. Also included are Takaya Natsuki's *Fruits Basket* (1999-2006) and Mori Kaoru's *Emma* (2002-2006), while Yazawa Ai's *Nana* (2000 – hiatus) represents the jōsei²⁷ genre.

I was faced with another dilemma when choosing my selection of anime, a dilemma linked to the question of "auteur" versus "mainstream." The decision was easier regarding manga. Auteur manga exist and are well appreciated in the West, particularly by Francophones: Taniguchi Jirō's work, for example, has received multiple awards at

²⁷ Jōsei is a genre directed at young women. It deals more explicitly with sexuality and adult concerns than shōjo.

the French Angoulême Festival. At the same time, Taniguchi is often described as the mangaka²⁸ for people who claim not to like manga; in other words, while his works are technically manga (given that they are comics created by a Japanese artist), they are usually described as fundamentally different from mainstream shōnen, shōjo, or even seinen²⁹, which is what most people have in mind when using the word “manga.” But Taniguchi’s oeuvre, although it is critically acclaimed now, is clearly not the fuel behind manga’s Western success: it rode on the coattails of shōnen and shōjo, when French publishers were looking for manga which would appeal to a more mature audience. Similarly, works self-labelled as *gekiga*, a genre of dark-themed manga which was created in response to Tezuka’s mainstream, whimsical aesthetic³⁰, were translated much later. Keeping in mind that my objective is to examine Japanese popular visual culture as a mass phenomenon, it was clear I needed to look at mainstream, popular manga with massive appeal. The distinction between auteur and mainstream, or between lowbrow and highbrow, is frequently put into question today, as some will argue that it is artificial. But I believe the distinction lies in both intent and perception. In the case of manga, the intent is usually fairly simple to decipher: mainstream manga adhere to the pre-established canon of their genre, while auteur manga willingly stray from it.

The case of anime, however, is different: indeed, several series or feature animations which contributed to anime being discovered by vast Western audiences are routinely referred to as auteur, works such as Ōtomo Katsuhiro’s *Akira* (1989), Oshii Mamoru’s film *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), or Anno Hideaki’s series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996). The mere fact that these directors’ names are instantly recognized by fans sets them apart from mainstream series (I doubt anyone could name the director of the first *Dragon Ball* anime off the top of their head). Somehow, the notion of auteur anime was very easily adopted by the West. Was this because animation, despite its long-running “childish” reputation, got a head start in being considered a

²⁸ A creator of manga, a manga artist.

²⁹ A somewhat more nebulous category than shōnen and shōjo, seinen is a genre of manga aimed at a more mature audience.

³⁰ Although it is clear from several of Tezuka’s works, such as *Buddha*, *Ayako*, or *Adolf*, that he used manga to address dark topics, he did often straddle the line between humour and drama, using his iconic, Disney-like aesthetic in nearly all his works. *Gekiga*’s objective was to stray from this now-mainstream style and diversify style and aesthetic within manga.

“valid” art form due to the possibility of applying film theory to it, while comics, despite their respected status in Europe, had to struggle for longer to find their theoretical and critical apparatus? Regardless, anime with arguably non-mainstream intent ended up garnering mainstream attention. In light of this, I decided to include *Ghost in the Shell* and *Evangelion*, given that it would be difficult to deny their impact not only on the Western imaginary, but also on anime perception and creation in general. I will also be dealing with two series directed by Watanabe Shinichirō: *Cowboy Bebop* (1998) and *Samurai Champloo* (2004-2005), which are telling in their genre-mixing, intertextual style. Also included are the science-fiction series *Noein* (2005-2006) and *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (2006). I will also examine the magical girl shōjo *Princess Tutu* (2006). Finally, I will discuss Satoshi Kon’s films *Perfect Blue* (1997) and *Paprika* (2006), as well as his series *Paranoia Agent* (2004). Due to my decision to not include any anime directly adapted from a manga, this selection appears to offer a distinctly different landscape from the manga selection. On the other hand, establishing connections between a manga and its adaptation would not have represented much of a challenge. On the contrary, diversity would reinforce my point.

Finally, regarding video games, I have chosen to mostly limit myself to four fundamental franchises: *Super Mario*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Final Fantasy*, and *Pokémon*. Even so, analyzing every game within each franchise would be impossible, and therefore I will focus on the following games: *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), *Super Mario Bros. 3* (1988), *Mario 64* (1996), *Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga* (2003), and *Super Mario Galaxy* (2007); *A Link to the Past* (1991), *Ocarina of Time* (1998), and *Twilight Princess* (2006); *Final Fantasy VII* (1997), *X* (2001), and *X-2* (2003); *Pokémon Diamond* (2006). Additionally, I will include *The World Ends With You* (2007), as well as two games from the puzzle-based Professor Layton series: *The Curious Village* (2007) and *The Diabolical Box* (2007 Japan, 2009 worldwide). These games are used over different platforms, some portable, some motion-controlled, which some would argue will complicate any comparative approach: each console possesses its own particular parameters, which inevitably influences the player’s experience. But given that this purports to be a transmedial analysis, such phenomenological considerations are precisely part of the interest: indeed, I will be focusing on the experiences provided by each medium, and this

means identifying both the differences and the overlapping similarities that exist in spite of these differences. The challenge will precisely lie in establishing a common phenomenology in spite of each console's specificities. This does not negate the differences, only underlines a parallel continuity.

By the end of this dissertation, this seemingly disparate array of works will hopefully have been assembled into a coherent, if never homogeneous, flow, one that has, because of this cohesiveness, been able to integrate itself into the fabric of the Western imaginary. But now is the time to address more precisely what this notion of the cultural imaginary entails.

Chapter Two

The Imaginary³¹

The term “imaginary” appears to give rise to a certain scepticism, and I myself hesitated in using it as a notion to designate the reality (and I weigh my words) which I now set out to analyse and explain. It seems too vague and too fanciful to be taken seriously. And yet, no other word seems to fit quite as well. The word, when used as an adjective, is quite straightforward: it means something which does not concretely exist, a fiction of the mind in the purest sense. But intuitively, one knows it is both more whimsical and more personal than what is merely “fictitious” or “untrue.” Things that are imaginary are often those which we wish were true (an imaginary friend, an imaginary place), but they can also be things which we wish we could keep outside of our minds, but which creep in nevertheless. As graphic novel artist and visual essayist Lynda Barry reminds us, we do not always have control over the things we imagine: “The thing I call ‘my mind’ seems to be some sort of landlord that doesn’t really know its tenants” (Barry 2008, 5). Only in this case, landlord and tenant are also irrevocably and permanently connected to one another. Imaginary things are sometimes out of our control, but they seem to always touch us personally, they are a part of our intimacy.

Now, what of the noun form of the word? “The imaginary” sounds more ethereal than “imaginary things,” and yet, paradoxically, it is also more concrete. To the individual, it appears more abstract, because it is a collective notion, as opposed to the private “reality” that is made up of our personal imaginary things. Imaginary things belong to us personally, they are our very own hidden fears and desires, things which we like to believe we do not share with anyone else; in this manner, they feel quite real to each individual, paradoxically enough, because they concern each of us intimately. The imaginary, on the other hand, can be thought of as the sum of everyone’s imaginary things (although we will see that this is an incomplete characterisation), a collective entity which is consequently more general and abstract in the individual’s eyes and mind, a vague amalgam which appears to exist on some invisible plane. And yet, the imaginary

³¹ Some of the ideas in this chapter have been expressed, in abbreviated form and with a different focus, in a published printed article. See Cools 2013.

as collective entity can be found in very concrete objects: in books, in images, in film, in art, in any creative work which is addressed to a collective audience. In this manner, the imaginary surrounds us all in a very physical sense, and we can also interact with it individually despite its collective nature. This coexistence and interaction is what I will ultimately be focusing on throughout this thesis. But for us to reach that specific point of view, the imaginary first needs to be defined, and this is what this chapter will accomplish.

I will start from the most traditionally straightforward conception of the imaginary, according to which the imaginary is defined as a depository of mythological tradition. Of course, this will require exploration of what myth is, or rather of how it is conceived. By going over the literature and exploring this first definition of the imaginary and pinpointing exactly what it entails, namely from the problematic perspectives of universality, timelessness, and sacredness, I will be able to move on to another conception, made possible by the field of visual culture, which will allow me to further explore the question of culturally distinct imaginaries, and wonder how and to what degree they interact: how, for example, can one outline the importance of Japanese popular culture within contemporary non-Japanese imaginaries? Ultimately, this will help me arrive at a conception of the imaginary which will allow me to put the full focus on how we interact with this imaginary in a reciprocal manner: the imaginary as processual phenomenological space. In short, my conception of the imaginary is ultimately that of an ethos, an environment with which we are in perpetual, often unassuming interaction: a multi-patterned, multi-textured fabric that guides us as we continuously wear it, unravel it, and re-weave it.

A – The imaginary and myth

a) Myth as universal

The imaginary has been defined and theorized in different ways, but I choose to start off from Hans Belting's definition of the term as a reservoir of primal images, which stems from tradition and which is shared by a same culture. Belting also makes it a point to distinguish the imaginary from imagination, on the one hand, and its own manifestations (both imaginary things and the means of expressing them) on the other:

Whereas imagination remained associated to a faculty of the subject, the imaginary was connected to consciousness and consequently to society and the images through which a collective history of myths perpetuates itself. Thus the imaginary distinguishes itself from the products through which it manifests itself: it is in a way the common visual stock and image reservoir of a cultural tradition. The images of fiction are drawn from the imaginary and they are arranged through it. (Belting 2004, 102, my translation)

The imaginary is thus defined as inherently collective. This conception of the imaginary brings up several questions. Many of them have to do with the definition of myth, both in Belting's case and in other authors' writings which explore the question. Indeed, given that myth and the imaginary appear to be closely related in this conception, where the former acts as the foundation of the latter, it ensues that characteristics of myth will influence the imaginary.

The first question I would like to address is that of the often implied universality of myth. Indeed, myth, for reasons I will be going over shortly, is often defined as primal, as hailing from the dawn of human culture, and hence as dealing with universal concerns. The imaginary, if it truly is a depository of primal myth, would then be characterized by that same universal quality, it would be grounded in myth's necessity to explain our surroundings and the foundations of our human condition, and therefore would be universally relatable at least to some extent. This universality appears to be at odds with the idea of cultural difference and nuance: if myth essentially repeats itself the world over, fulfilling the same function, then the role of differential culture appears significantly decreased. Given that I will ultimately be examining the transcultural meeting of two imaginaries associated to specific cultures which are the result of distinctive traditions and histories, and are consequently perceived as distinct, the question of the universality of myth must therefore be dealt with before any further characterization of the imaginary can take place.

Myth is said to be universal because it is considered to consist of traditional narratives passed on through generations, primal tales that touch upon timeless human concerns such as birth, love, sexuality, strife, and death. Myth, as Mircea Eliade writes, is what we construct to explain and make sense of the world around us: it is a sacred story which relates events taking place on the separate plane of primordial times, or *illud*

tempore, and which explains how the world, or aspects of the world, came to be (Eliade 1963, 16-17). Thus, myth transports us back to *illud tempore* whenever it is told and heard, back to a coherent, linear time where events lead to one another and ultimately to ourselves in the present time. Or, to put it differently, the order of things is recreated every time we retell the myth: myth creates coherence through utterance, it is the linear alignment of chaotic events, which are thus made intelligible to us. Myth's function is precisely what makes it essential: we are compelled to make sense of the world surrounding us, of the phenomena which we witness from birth to death. Thus, myth is omnipresent, in some form or other: we are forever weaving narratives into our surroundings, the folds of our reality are intertwined with tales. Myth is our way of making sense of our environment, and by doing so we tame the latter and begin to appropriate it.

If one chooses to adopt this definition, this implies that myth, at its core, touches upon universal (non culturally specific) concerns, and that therefore myths from different regions will have at least a few content-based similarities. This in turn opens the door for the theory that all myths are essentially variations of just a few core myths, or even a single monomyth, as Joseph Campbell famously argues in *Hero With a Thousand Faces*: for Campbell, all myths, and indeed all narratives, can be broken down into a limited number of events (a maximum of seventeen, to be exact), and therefore possess a common structure (Campbell 1949). Claude Lévi-Strauss also offers a similar theory, from the perspective of structural anthropology, although he goes significantly further than Campbell: in the structuralist tradition, Lévi-Strauss argues that all aspects of society, any society, are systematic and limited.

The body of a people's customs is always marked by a style; they form a system. I am convinced that these systems are not unlimited in number, and that human societies, like individuals – in their games, their dreams, or their deliriums – never create in an absolute manner, but are restricted to choosing certain combinations from an ideal repertoire which one could potentially reconstitute. By taking stock of all the observed customs, those imagined in myth as well as evoked in the games of children and adults, the dreams of healthy or ill individuals and psycho-pathological behaviours, **one could draw up a kind of periodic table like that of chemical elements, where all real or merely possible customs would be grouped in families [...]** (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 205, my translation, my emphasis)

In the specific case of myth, Lévi-Strauss similarly writes that the latter can be reduced to a limited set of elementary functions (*Ibid.*, 233-234), and he dubs these constitutive units “mythemes,” additionally arguing that they are in fact “packets of relations,” rather than mere narrative elements (*Ibid.*, 241-242). He thus proposes a manner of putting together a grid which would allow one to juggle the multiple reference relational systems (thematic, social, symbolic, etc.) which constitute myth; in doing so, he refers to archetypes which evoke those developed by C.G. Jung, such as the archetype of the trickster (*Ibid.*, 257 and following).

However, while there is relevance in the attempt to outline a model of the mythical imaginary which could be applied universally, I feel that this does not have to negate the value in examining the nuances brought about by cultural specificity. It is fascinating to know, for example, that the legend of the Moon Rabbit exists in both Japanese and Aztec folklore (no doubt because the shadows on the moon can be perceived as representing the shape of a rabbit, although this does not explain why these narratives are so uncannily similar to one another³²), but it is equally interesting to examine and research the many variations of this tale (e.g., in some versions, other animals are involved, whereas in others, the rabbit is alone). Joseph Campbell compares his own monomythical approach to that of pure sciences such as anatomy, “where the physiological variations of race are disregarded in the interest of a basic general understanding of the human physique” (Campbell 1949, x). This quote admittedly makes an unfortunate parallel between cultural specificity and “physiological variations of race,” which in turn suggests an equivalence between cultural specificity and cultural essentialism, the very thing I was seeking to avoid. Therefore I feel compelled to (re)state the importance of separating cultural specificity from cultural essentialism. The latter postulates a never-changing, stable core identity: in this view, cultures simply “are” and always will “be” as they are. Cultural specificity or difference, however, is the result of accumulated specific and contingent historical processes leading up to a state that may be distinctive at a given time, but is neither inherent nor stable.

³² In both legends, a rabbit offers himself as food to a starving man. Moved by the rabbit’s sacrifice, the man, who is revealed to be a divinity, immortalizes the creature in the moon.

Notwithstanding the awkwardness of Campbell's analogy, his meaning still stands: he means to establish a universal portrait of how narratives are structured. But whatever the value of such an approach, it does not invalidate research which seeks to focus on local differences, if only to connect them with other factors. To recognize variation does not mean negating the original model: on the contrary, the very concept of variation implies fundamental similarity between versions. Regarding the imaginary, my approach in this thesis actually borrows from both extremes: on the one hand, I want to delve into specificities, see how both similarities and differences mingle through movements within the imaginary, by examining the specific example of Japanese visual popular culture and its integration into other imaginaries; on the other hand, I intend to use this case as a wider-reaching illustration of how the imaginary shifts and evolves.

b) Myth, timelessness, and process

Although the question of universality must be put aside for now, there is another, somewhat related question, with which the study of the imaginary is very much concerned: the question of timelessness. Myth, we have seen, is considered to be linked with primal human concerns, themes that are irrevocably connected to human nature and in which we, as humans, always have a stake. This seems to imply that myth, at its core, remains essentially the same throughout the ages, given that our primal concerns (survival, reproduction, death) have remained the same throughout the ages. Returning briefly to Lévi-Strauss' theory, the idea that the imaginary is both finite and universal appears to imply that the imaginary is a static entity. But Lévi-Strauss does acknowledge that myths are adaptable: he reasons that myths evolve over time, changing ever so slightly, until they have fulfilled their primary function, which, in accordance with what has been established so far about myth in this chapter, is to explain a natural or social contradiction or mystery (Lévi-Strauss 1955, 264). Nevertheless, it remains that this theory places little emphasis on myth and the imaginary as processes with far-reaching potential, and instead views them as limited anthropological structures: the possible worlds of the imaginary are presented as restricted. This approach is problematic for the same reasons that the conception of cultures as unchanging and inherent poses a problem: it presents these entities as separate from the beings that inhabit them, and precludes any

possibility for the subject's meaningful interaction with and participation to them. In other words, it precludes the possibility for these entities to exist as processes. This goes against our intuitive experience of the imaginary: if we continue to define it as a collective reservoir of primal images and tropes, should this definition not also allow for societal changes of perspectives and priorities? Even if primal human concerns remain the same throughout time, does the imaginary not reflect our other, changing concerns? Take, for example, the trope of artificial life. It is present in certain forms throughout the history of the imaginary, for instance in the myth of the Golem, or the myth of Pygmalion, right up to the tale of Frankenstein; but we can fairly claim that, in today's technological ethos involving both hardware (artificial intelligence) and bio-engineering (cloning), this trope occupies a space in our collective concerns that is greater than it has been in the past. Should a conception of the imaginary not reflect that?

Michel Maffesoli offers a relatively more process-centric conception of the imaginary in *La contemplation du monde*. Although he focuses on images, rather than on classical myth, he considers images to possess a primarily mythological function. For this author, as for Belting, images are symptoms of the imaginary. Furthermore, he considers that they do not represent the world, but rather act as filters enabling us to perceive the world in a certain manner; ultimately, they recreate the order of myth and thus act as a renewed common structure of reference (Maffesoli 1992, 30). The author makes his meaning clear in the following:

The imaginary, from a holistic perspective, restores a lost balance by reinvesting archaic structures which had been believed outdated, and by recreating mythologies that will act as a social binder. The explosion of images is proof of this. Thanks to images, societies dream and thereby recover a part of themselves of which a rationalist modernity had robbed them. (*Ibid.*, 35, my translation)

Images, in this conception as in Belting's, are imbued with mythical power, and thus are the manifestation of a collective, primal imaginary; in this sense, images directly perpetuate myth, and thereby enable the eternal return of primal tropes. But these assertions, thus summarized, can appear overly general and straightforward: indeed, they ignore the fact that images, particularly public ones, do not always spring from the imaginations of creative or aspiring artists, but are often used (consciously or not) as

tools of social, economic and political power. To give a simple but hopefully convincing example, can we really consider that an advertising poster for lingerie featuring a scantily clad woman of unrealistic proportions in a provocative pose is a mythological archaic revival with the function of bringing individuals together? While an argument can be made that such images hark back to primal sexual instincts and the cult of feminine beauty, feminists will rather tend to point out that the image is “archaic” in a different sense; rather, the main (arguably inadvertent) function of such an image is to promote a certain gendered discourse, as well as to (consciously) reinforce a specific economic power (that of whoever is selling the advertised lingerie). It is likely that Maffesoli did not have these images in mind when he wrote *La contemplation du monde*, but rather intended to focus on artistically creative images. On the other hand, while it is easy to assume that most people can instinctively tell the difference between artistic images and commercial images, movements which blend the limit between both worlds, such as Pop art and the more recent superflat (which will be examined more in depth in Chapter 5), undeniably illustrate that the border has not been clear for a long time, and perhaps never has been. In fact, pop culture scholarship (to which this dissertation belongs, for better or for worse) is widely based on the idea that not only is the highbrow/lowbrow distinction permeable, but that popular culture, as a pervasive and omnipresent ethos, has direct and important effects on our perception of the world. In our daily lives, we interact with all kinds of images, and all of them impact us one way or another; regardless of their “quality,” they are symptomatic of aspects of the imaginary, albeit not always pleasant ones. One needs to keep in mind that images can be wielded for many different purposes, some of which are quite far removed from mythical structure.

Notwithstanding, it remains valid that what Maffesoli describes is *a* function of *some* public images, which purposefully draw from the mythical imaginary: they act as a kind of social glue, by harking back to references which nearly all of us can recognize, mythical tropes with which we are all familiar. In fact, the author’s words tie in with what Eliade writes regarding the way myth has of taking us outside our time and almost literally putting us back into *illud tempore*: “When reciting myth one returns to that fabled time and one consequently becomes, in a way, ‘contemporary’ of the recalled events” (Eliade 1963, 31, my translation). Eliade also writes that myth constitutes a tool

for us to refuse the irreversibility of time (or go against modernity, Maffesoli would say), precisely because it enables us to go back in time by allowing us to commune with universal questions and the stories which attempt to answer them (*Ibid.*, 175). In either case, both authors seem to agree on a conception of the imaginary as mythical, and consequently timeless. It is this timelessness, and the sacredness associated to it, which appears to suggest that the imaginary is eternally unchanging. And yet, can we really say that physical images, which crystallise the imaginary according to both Belting and Maffesoli, have remained the same over the centuries? Notwithstanding evolutions with regards to technique, available media, and freedom of expression, it is certainly possible to demonstrate that many archaic tropes remain well alive today: for example, the biblical notion of the forbidden fruit has survived the millennia, still present today sometimes even in the form of an apple (see, for example, DKNY's advertisement campaign for their Be Delicious fragrance, launched during the 2000's). However, it is equally true that images have covered new ground and evolved in new directions: what was once taboo can now be shown (the reverse is also true), new media have yielded images which impact us and allow themselves to be manipulated and shared in unprecedented ways, new codes have arisen. Thus, it is possible, in my view, to argue both points, to highlight continuity and to point out innovation (or choose one or the other, depending on one's goal). The question remaining is: how do new images fit in with the notion of a timeless imaginary?

Maffesoli offers a solution to this problem by proposing that, although the mythical imaginary is eternal, its manifestations, its incursions into our lives, vary over time. Contemporary myths, he writes, are the cumulative result of consecutive sedimentations, where some myths fade from consciousness while remaining available, buried within the imaginary for future use, while others resurface and combine with the other myths still present:

[T]here are mythical fragments "on hold," unused in the context of the social consensus, which represent the unusual, the marginal, the exception. Then thinkers take hold of these myths and the latter become the consensus of the times, blending with the surviving myths of the ending era, relics which one can draw from on various occasions. This describes **the emergence of a new style**, how it is composed of various ingredients the presence of which one can empirically observe and which best express

themselves in the many situations and contradictory attitudes that make up everyday life. (Maffesoli 1992, 38, my translation, my emphasis)

This appears to reconcile eternal myth with the ephemeral manifestations of the imaginary as far as rationality is concerned. However, I feel that to pre-suppose timelessness as underlying the imaginary continues to pose a problem of principle, in that it can lead to circular thinking: with timeless myth at its core, the imaginary is limited to repeating the same. But what if this were not necessarily the case; what if it was in fact possible for the imaginary to break with myth? After all, myth, just like any representation, can be hijacked, misunderstood, distorted, and willingly cast away. Maffesoli's theory does not appear to allow us to explore such territory.

Although I raise this issue now, I find it best not to address it and resolve it immediately. Indeed, before I can do so, I must deal with a third defining characteristic of myth, which is that of sacredness. I have saved this trait for last because it is closely related to the first two, universality and timelessness. Indeed, the sacred is both unchanging and unconcerned with specific human circumstances: it exists on a separate plane, untouched and unaffected by process. And, as it happens, Maffesoli's words allow us precisely to delve into the question of the sacred with regards to myth, the imaginary, and, ultimately, culture.

c) Myth, sacredness, and culture

The word "style" is used in the previous quote, and comes up frequently in Maffesoli's book. His definition of it is somewhat particular: he views it as a collective aesthetic which binds contemporary individuals together by acting as a common language between them. Style is expressed through images, which in turn, as previously mentioned, act as a filter and lead us to see the world in a certain manner rather than another. But this conception of style and its implied relationship to the imaginary leads us to an important distinction. Indeed, at this point, I need to address a slippage that has been occurring over the last few pages, during this brief heuristic examination of select writings on myth and the imaginary. We started out with Belting's conception of the imaginary as reservoir of mythical images, then turned to Eliade to establish just what a myth is. Armed with the knowledge that myths are sacred, universal narratives, we explored how thinkers have

dealt with the implication that myth is a) universal (and ultimately deciding that universality and difference can be reconciled), and b) inherently unchanging and timeless. This led us to Maffesoli, who attempts to reconcile the timelessness of myth and the imaginary with the obvious fact that the images reflecting it do evolve over time; his solution is to say that each epoch chooses particular myth fragments to suit its needs, and that the images reflecting these myths make up the style of that period. It appears that, somehow, from theory to theory, we have ended up in a very different place than we started. This needs to be addressed before we can proceed: how did we get from sacred myths to style?

Admittedly, Eliade and Maffesoli seem to be discussing the same thing and generally agreeing with one another, but going from the former to the latter leaves the door open for a much more sizeable leap of logic: going from myth to style is one thing (provided we are specifically talking about Maffesoli's myth-infused definition of style, and not a more contemporary, fashion-centric definition), but it is very easy to subsequently go from style to culture. The potential problem with such a transition is that, while culture includes myth, culture is also many, many other things: grounded, decidedly non-sacred things such as food, clothes, sex, technology, craft, trade, work, and what sometimes simply needs to be referred to as plain old entertainment (Eagleton 2000, 32-33). To see myth in dirty jokes or late-night talk shows would probably be feasible (after all, *The Daily Show and Philosophy* was published in 2007, which leads me to speculate that *The Daily Show and Mythology* is entirely conceivable), but would it really be the best way to examine these things, from a cultural point of view?

I am not implying that all the authors quoted and analysed in this chapter up to now are wrong to link the imaginary and myth, for the link is real and almost self-evident: myth continues to influence our images, even when the latter evolve to take away its sacred aura. In this manner, the timelessness of myth continues to act, at least partially. The monomyth exists, not necessarily as a rigid grid, but at least as a guideline. Nor am I likening my corpus to late-night talk shows, or claiming it contains no traditional myth at all (in fact, analysis of the corpus will show that it contains quite a bit). But let us keep in mind the phenomenon that is being analysed: the transcultural flow of Japanese popular visual culture toward Western regions. The aim of this thesis is

to see how such a flow grows to be conceived as such, how motifs stream throughout different, varied works and thus spin them into an identifiable, overarching motif that is perceived as unified, how a phenomenology arises from the way the different media are used and thus gives rise to a common texture of experience. The aim is then to see how this shift in reception affects a pre-existing imaginary, what happens when a slippage of the imaginary occurs, when new tropes and experiences are integrated into a pre-existing fabric. In light of these aims, the question is: is myth necessary to accomplish this thesis' goal? Or, rather, why does it feel necessary?

The allure of the concept of myth is that, as repeatedly mentioned previously, it projects an aura of universality and eternity, it appears to touch upon the very heart of the human condition; to connect an aspect of life to myth is to increase this aspect's apparent significance, is to implicitly suggest that it is essential on some level. Myth is a means of legitimization. But sometimes, it can also be a cop out, an easy solution to a problem which researchers in the humanities are often faced with: the problem of relevance. People (by which I mean my distant relatives, rather than my fellow academics) may question the importance of studying a transcultural flow, particularly one that is so squarely focused on pop culture, which is by definition ephemeral; but mention myth, and they will see a transcendental value to your research, and nod acceptingly. Who wouldn't be tempted by that kind of reaction, and the opportunity to eschew justifying why we study what we study? Furthermore, myth has an additional appeal in the specific context of a transcultural study such as mine. Indeed, what better, more straightforward way of connecting the pieces of my corpus together and, as an added bonus, explaining its appeal to non-Japanese audiences than by establishing myth as the all-around common denominator? I could easily (and convincingly) argue that potentially mythical tropes abound in my corpus, and that these tropes hark back to the same sacredness as Western myths. Myth appears necessary in this study because it has the power to act as a fundamental guarantor of both relevance and transcultural affinity. It makes things much easier.

But an approach based on myth would not, ultimately, lead to the kind of analysis which I truly want to attempt, one which would allow us to understand our relationship with the imaginary as a process, rather than a mere transmission of information. But why,

then, mention myth in the first place, and dedicate the previous pages to understanding it? Because myth is not irrelevant, far from it, and because it will be referred to during the actual corpus analysis, more precisely in chapter 3, on cultural tropes. Also, myth is so often written as connected to the imaginary that I would have been remiss not to address this perspective and attempt to understand it, even if only to come to the realization, which I now potentially face, at least part of the findings must be cast away. And finally, addressing myth was necessary because some of the knowledge imparted by the mythocentric perspective will prove useful, namely Eliade's notion that the imaginary transports us (although I will significantly reinterpret this notion), and, more to the immediate point, the idea that the imaginary is a depository – although not necessarily solely of myths.

The problem, it seems, lies in the sacredness which is seemingly inherent to myth as it is primarily defined, and yet which appears to be lost when one attempts the transfer from myth to culture. And yet, myth and culture are undeniably related. Culture, at its core, springs partly from myth, with many of the first known texts and images revolving around mythological themes and religious figures and events. Thus, it is important to establish precisely what separates myth, the imaginary, and culture from one another, particularly as culture will also be a focus throughout this thesis. However, the term “culture” is notorious for being vague and overall problematic when used as a theoretical pillar. So let us now examine it more closely.

To my mind, there are two main restricted sets of meaning for culture, which will both be present within this thesis and which must not be confused or used indiscriminately. On the one hand, we have “culture as art,” or culture as the sum of creative and artistic production (popular culture should be considered to be a part of this entity). On the other hand, we have “culture as a way of life,” the sum of every habit, usage, tradition, and pattern which sets one regional lifestyle apart from another. This is the type of culture which is examined by authors such as Morris-Suzuki, and which the latter, as we have seen, characterizes as being brought about by tradition, enduring but by no means static or unchanging. The distinction is basically equivalent to that which Terry Eagleton makes between Culture (art) and culture (lifestyle) (Eagleton 2000, 37-38). Of course, culture-as-art and culture-as-lifestyle frequently overlap and influence one

another (a case could even be made that culture-as-lifestyle encompasses culture-as-art, or that culture-as-art is partly symptomatic of culture-as-lifestyle), which makes their grouping under the same term “culture” even more problematic. For the moment, however, I am dealing with culture-as-art, as it appears to be the one most directly connected to myth and the imaginary.

Culture-as-art, then, is partly born of myth, by way of the depositary that is the imaginary, from which culture-as-art draws its images and tropes. But over time, culture strayed from myth, or rather, it became a desacralized version of myth. This very transition is practically suggested (albeit perhaps inadvertently) by the fact that Maffesoli links the mythical imaginary to style, which he then goes on to define not just as a collectively binding aesthetic, but as specifically living through the eyes of the Other (Maffesoli 1992, 31). Myth, in this perspective, gains another function: in addition to making linear sense of the world, it acts as the common referent enabling individuals to navigate according to one another. Myth is presented as the shared background which we implicitly acknowledge as we interact. But is myth exclusive in playing this role? Maffesoli’s concept of style suggests that people observe each other, see themselves being observed by others, and behave accordingly, whether by copying others or distinguishing themselves from them. This appears to be an accurate, if broad, account of how collectivities function, but people have other common languages besides myth, some of which are encompassed by the imaginary. Culture-as-art and culture-as-lifestyle are among these common languages (for lack of a better word), and while they can be related to myth, they also contain a great portion of profane, non-sacred narratives, images, and practices.

This last idea, that myth is not the only force in our imaginary, is suggested by Mircea Eliade himself, who briefly addresses the idea of what one could call non-sacred myths, despite the fact that, according to his own definition, the notion appears oxymoronic. He concedes that prose novels appear to have replaced myth in contemporary society, although he maintains that mythical structures and elements survive in modern writings (Eliade 1963, 233). He also draws a parallel between the way myth pulls us out of our time, and the way traditionally narrative literature takes us out of reality and into a “profane” imaginary:

The way reading – particularly novels – enables one to “step out of Time” is what brings the function of literature closest to that of mythologies. The time one “lives in” while reading a novel is probably not the one one re-enters when listening to a myth in a traditional society. But in both cases one “exits” historical and personal time and becomes immersed in a fabulous, trans-historical time. (*Ibid.*, 234, my translation)

What this appears to imply is that, over time, culture-as-art has taken the place of myth, both as common referent and as a tool for rearranging and explaining our surroundings. Thus culture-as-art, in this perspective, is essentially equivalent to Maffesoli’s style: it is the reality which puts us in relation to one another. At the same time, culture-as-art perpetuates the tradition of myth, in that it offers a commentary, if not an explanation, on the human condition.

In a similar line of thought, I earlier examined Lévi-Strauss’ methodology, which conceives of myth as composed of a limited number of combinations of mythemes. Although it has been pointed out that this type of structuralist theory can be criticized for promoting a deterministic perspective which does not take into account the fact that myths and the imaginary are processes in progress, it can also be argued that one can focus on structure without being a structuralist: one can determine that motifs are recurrent and hence can be considered at least significant and potentially important within a specific imaginary, without proclaiming that such motifs are irrevocably restricted to forming a limited number of structures. This type of approach is exemplified by media archaeologist Erkki Huhtamo’s recent work on *topoi*, or topics, as he occasionally refers to them. The term *topos*, he explains, was initially a rhetorical term indicating specific sets of ideas, markers which mapped out the orator’s discourse (Huhtamo 2010, 29).

Topics can be considered formulas, ranging from stylistic to allegorical, that make up the ‘building blocks’ of cultural tradition; they are activated and deactivated in turn; new *topoi* are created along the way and old ones (at least seemingly) vanish. In a sense, topics provide ‘prefabricated’ molds for experience. (Huhtamo 1997, 222).

In other words, *topoi* are recurring images or tropes, which simultaneously populate culture and structure it. Using a media archeological approach, the author gives concrete, historically documented examples, such as the *topos* of the cyborg, which he finds emerged much earlier than cybernetics, if one considers that images of humans with

electric apparatuses (monitors, radios, telephones) instead of heads appeared as early as the 1900s (Huhtamo 2008, n.p.). However, Huhtamo is careful to differentiate topoi from Jungian archetypes of the collective unconscious specifying that topoi are cultural constructs, not psychological notions (*Ibid.*). This distinction is important, as Jungian archetypes lay claim to a similar type of universality as myth, whereas the concept of culture allows for change; in fact, it is a prerequisite of cultural studies that one should take change into account, as denying the latter often results in essentialism (as in the case of culture-as-lifestyle). In the above quote, the author explicitly allows for the fact that topoi are not established once and for all, and can in fact vanish from culture for lengths of time, while new ones can arise. This appears very similar to Maffesoli's theory on how myths are adopted and discarded, yet always present in the imaginary, except that, in Huhtamo's perspective, we do not have to contend with notions of timelessness or transcendence.

This type of theory provides significant encouragement for one to feel authorized in using mythographical notions to study the imaginary from a non-sacred perspective, as it introduces the idea that motifs can arise and recur without there necessarily being a primal (translated as sacred) or psychological reason behind them. Therefore, instead of viewing the imaginary as a reservoir of myths, I propose to focus on the imaginary as a reservoir of cultural tradition, which manifests itself in the various forms of culture-as-art, including popular culture. The crucial difference which this conceptual shift enables, I will restate before moving on, is that it allows the imaginary to truly change over time, thus dealing with the problem addressed in the previous sub-section, that of the incompatibility of myth's timelessness and the imaginary's dynamic nature. One could point out, in response to this, that Maffesoli's conception of the imaginary appears to allow for the same thing, by effectuating a compromise between myth's timelessness and the evolution of the imaginary over time: myth itself remains eternal, but only fragments of it manifest themselves at different times. But, as I mentioned, even though Maffesoli's theory recognizes the existence of change and process, it nevertheless presupposes sacredness, timelessness, and, most importantly in my eyes, pre-existence, at the root of the phenomenon; in other words, in this conception, there is always a pre-given entity at the source of the imaginary. I admittedly have been repeating multiple times that cultures

(both culture-as-art and culture-as-lifestyle, I can specify at this point) do not arise from a vacuum, and obviously this entails taking into account some form of “pre-givenness.” But this does not have to amount to presupposing an underlying stability, or direct, unbreakable connections to a stable core, mythical or otherwise. It is possible that freeing the imaginary from myth will not have visible, concrete effects on the observable imaginary, nor does it invalidate Maffesoli’s theory: I am not claiming that myth no longer plays any role. But using culture-as-art as a prism, instead of myth, offers at least the possibility of new arisings. When one starts off from myth, one already knows what one is looking for, and one inevitably comes back to myth; with culture, one gains a larger scope, and one can potentially, albeit not obligatorily, uncover something unexpected. Hence, the choice of prism has far-reaching consequences, not just where results are concerned, but at the level of the very conception of this entity we call the imaginary: is it based on the “eternal return” of the same, or is it rather founded on possible worlds which arise out of (often seemingly serendipitous) meetings and contacts? I believe the second interpretation allows one to conserve the role of myth, which comes across as tradition, while enabling one to explore the possibility not just of apparent change (myth which comes and goes, but ultimately always remains), but of actual, potentially radical (albeit always gradual) change.

Furthermore, setting up culture-as-art as the foundation of the imaginary puts more focus on the role of human collectivities within the shifts of the imaginary, although it must be pointed out that this focus is not incompatible with myth. Indeed, we recall that Maffesoli accounts for the comings and goings of mythical fragments within the imaginary by attributing them to collective currents: “thinkers” (or public figures and artists in general, one supposes) take hold of them in order to express themselves, and these fragments thus come to embody the consensus of their epoch, in other words its style (Maffesoli 1992, 38). Style appears to be closely connected with the everyday, as Maffesoli perceives style in the very manner we lead our lives, including the way we address and relate to others and our surroundings (*Ibid.*, 56-63). One must, however, remain aware that Maffesoli’s work largely revolves around defending the idea of contemporary tribalism, a notion dear to the author’s heart. Hence, even as style is tied to the everyday (which I hold to be a fundamentally intimate experience), and even as the

latter is described as dominated today by Foucault's *souci de soi*, style is here primarily conceptualized as both a symptom of and a means towards collectivism: "one could say that everyday life is a good indicator of an era's style, as it highlights how existence is determined by the sense of the collective" (*Ibid.*, 56, my translation), "everyday style can [...] lend form and face to society as a whole" (*Ibid.*, 62, my translation).

What this brings to light is that my aim ultimately differs from Maffesoli's: although I do not deny that the link between the intimate and the collective exists, it is the former on which I wish to focus first and foremost. As mentioned, I hold the imaginary to be a collective entity which is experienced personally. As we will see, it can be altered collectively, but, from a phenomenological point of view, the experience itself always remains intimate, even as it takes others into account and implies being aware that others can also experience these texts and images. What I wish to focus on are our intimate interactions with the imaginary, which then blossom out into collective phenomena, but in a manner which I perceive as quite distinct from the tribalist perspective. Indeed, tribalism is defined as the will to belong to a larger group, and Maffesoli perceives tribalism even in the most individualistic practices:

Be it through isolation tanks, very trendy in contemporary megalopolises, various forms of "body-building," in addition to jogging and, of course, all the methods inspired from the far-East, we are in the presence of a body that we strive to "epiphanise," to highlight. It is, however, worth noting that even in these most "private" of aspects, such a body is only "constructed" in order to be seen, in a highly theatrical fashion. [...] (Maffesoli, n.d., n.p.³³, my translation)

Even personal, individual hobbies are thus perceived as a form of tribalism. And, indeed, the awareness of others often plays a constant role in our activities and behaviour, even those which we practice in solitude. But the intimate dimension of such experiences, I would argue, plays an equally constant role. Indeed, it is the intimate aspect that, by definition, strikes us first and foremost, and makes the most lasting impression on us; it is what remains with us longest, and what we return to. Of course, collectivity must still be taken into account. From the perspective of a study of the imaginary and its outlet culture-as-art (as opposed to a more anthropological approach), the collective element

³³ <http://www.michelmaffesoli.org/textes/du-tribalisme.html>, consulted on April 4th, 2012

emerges not from the sheer mass of people who partake in a cultural phenomenon (although this distinction plays a key role in defining popular culture), but from the recurrence of motifs within segments of culture-as-art; in other words, the imaginary is collective to begin with, and thus draws collective reactions, not the other way around.

One last point, before moving on to the next section: Maffesoli here appears to be concerned with culture-as-lifestyle in general, more than with culture-as-art. Nevertheless, culture-as-art and the imaginary remain a concern of his: in a manner reminiscent of Arjun Appadurai, he points out that the imaginary increasingly plays a social role, and that we live in an “imaginal” world (Maffesoli 1992, 79). I have earlier mentioned that culture-as-lifestyle and culture-as-art are closely connected: lifestyle influences art, and vice-versa, and in some cases it is difficult even to differentiate the two (think, for example, of street art, which is both a lifestyle and a means of expression, and also affects culture-as-lifestyle in general by altering the urban landscape in a distinctive manner). In fact the field of visual culture, the theories of which I will be making use of and exploring in the next section, is based on this very closeness. But this raises the issue of the implications of the shifts in the imaginary which I am attempting to demonstrate regarding culture-as-lifestyle: indeed, although I will be mostly concerned with culture-as-art, a connection with culture-as-lifestyle appears unavoidable. This question is important, and I will likely not be in a position to properly answer it until the end of this demonstration, but preferred to mention it now. One way of beginning to approach this question, however, is through the field of visual culture.

B – The imaginary, motifs, and visual culture

Before tackling the field of visual culture and how it can help this research, let us return to the very first author who was quoted in this chapter, Hans Belting. Since it appears the most relevant course of action would be to temporarily set aside the mythical aspect of the imaginary, or rather to treat it as one aspect among many other possible ones, what remains of Belting’s definition of the latter? By replacing myth with tradition, instead of a depository of myths and mythical images we now have a reservoir of images and narrative scenes, of various sorts. As expected, without the beacon of myth to pull these elements together, we are faced with considerable difficulty in analysing this reservoir.

How does one access this imaginary? How does one study it, characterize it, determine what it is composed of?

Again, we return to Tessa Morris-Suzuki's previously mentioned comments on culture (as lifestyle), which she considers as being constructed and maintained/finetuned through tradition. Thus, in the same manner, one can postulate that a culture's imaginary, its depository of images and tropes, is maintained through tradition, through works (which may or may not be mythically infused) that survive over time and become collective references, tropes which are recognized by many. This is basically a more grounded (and admittedly less ambitious, as my ultimate objective lies elsewhere) conception of Huhtamo's topoi: whereas the latter author seeks to establish topoi which may have gone unnoticed by those not engaged in media archaeology, I will merely be looking at tropes which are recognizable by fan of Japanese manga, video games, and anime who have been exposed to a reasonable amount of material pertaining to the latter.

Of course, the question of how to determine what is and isn't worthy of being identified as a trope remains, and I suspect I will never be able to answer it to complete satisfaction, short of conducting endless surveys (which is not the methodology I wish to adopt, not hailing from the field of sociology). A similar question would be: when can we say that an image (or a song, or a movie) has officially entered popular culture? Is it when a sufficient number of people are aware of it and recognize it? Is it when it gets mentioned in a late-night monologue? When it gets mentioned on the evening news (or is this rather a sign that it has been a part of popular culture for so long that it's on its way out)? Some may dismiss these lowbrow examples as overly informal given the academic nature of this text, but in fact they seem appropriate alongside my corpus, as some of the questions in this thesis are similar, albeit focusing on different phenomena. What would enable us to say that manga, anime, and Japanese video games have become a part of Western popular culture and, by extension, of the Western imaginary which encompasses the latter? Is it the fact that over one third of new comics sold in France and the United States are manga? Is it the fact that there are anime conventions in several Western countries? Is it the fact that, if someone yells "Kamehameha!" in a crowded room, a good portion of people my age and younger will get the reference (*Dragon Ball*)? All of these phenomena are signs which point in that direction, to be sure, but what, exactly, is

sufficient proof? And what about people who have never picked up a manga or a gamepad in their lives? Are they excluded from their own culture's imaginary? Of course not. What this does mean, however, is that, just as the imaginary is not the same for every culture-as-lifestyle, it is not exactly the same for every person belonging to that culture. But, in that case, how can it be said to be a collective reservoir?

The answer which I propose to this problem is to turn to the works themselves, those which offer insight into the imaginary. Certainly, their notoriety matters, whether they have been discussed on public platforms, taught in school, or aggressively promoted through various media outlets matters, and constitutes a fairly decent, if intuitive rather than scholarly, guide as to which works it may be interesting to look at (and, in all fairness, many scholars, even those of us working on "classic" authors and corpuses, initially and intuitively chose our objects of research because we had heard of them and knew others had as well). But what matters are also the content motifs and tropes which they comprise: for it is the latter which offer us true insight into a specific imaginary. I believe an image, scene, or narrative can be said to be a motif within an imaginary when it is referenced in other visual or fictional works also present in the culture in question, or when it is itself present in these works. Although I will be analyzing my corpus in much more concrete detail in the following chapters, I can already give an example from it, for the sake of theoretical clarity: the narrative of Wu Cheng'en's *Journey to the West*.

This 16th century Chinese novel tells the tale of a Buddhist monk, Xuanzang (Genjō Sanzō in Japanese), who is sent on a mission to India to retrieve sacred sutras. On the way, he encounters and recruits three supernatural creatures: the Monkey King Son Wukong (Son Gokū), the pig Zhu Bajie (Cho Hakkai), and the sand river ogre Sha Wujing (Sha Gojyō). This narrative was the model for the first part of Toriyama Akira's renowned manga *Dragon Ball* (1984-1995). The latter's protagonist, Son Gokū, is a boy with the tail of a monkey and the power to transform into a giant ape; like his Chinese counterpart, he fights with a magic staff which can grow to an infinite length and travels atop a flying cloud. He is recruited by a young girl who is on a quest to collect seven wish-granting orbs; on the way, they run into and team up with a turtle hermit, a talking pig and a desert bandit. The parallels are obvious, although Toriyama eventually strays completely from the original legend in later volumes. *Dragon Ball* was one of the first

manga to be translated into French and English, and the anime was also broadcast in many countries. You could say that the series paved much of the way for the ensuing transcultural flow of Japanese popular visual culture. However, it is safe to assume that most Western readers and viewers were completely unfamiliar with *Journey to the West* when they were first exposed to *Dragon Ball* (I know I certainly was), and remained unaware of the reference for quite some time, as the latter was not mentioned directly in the translated manga. But Cheng'en's novel is referenced in other manga, as well: namely, Minekura Kazuya's manga *Saiyuki* (1997-2002) is also based on it. The characters are on a similar mission to retrieve scriptures, and they all retain their original names; despite the fact that Sanzō, while still a monk, is shown to possess a violent streak and wields a gun, the fact that his companions do not appear as animals or monsters, but rather as attractive young men, and the fact that the series' aesthetic is strongly suggestive of homoeroticism, all of which undoubtedly steer the manga away from the work it is based on, it is equally clear that the initial inspiration is meant to be acknowledged by the reader.

Journey to the West is also referenced in passing in several manga and anime: in Akamatsu Ken's shōnen harem³⁴ manga *Love Hina* (1998-2001), characters perform a stage version of the novel³⁵; in Kon Satoshi's feature animation *Paprika* (2006), the protagonist transforms into several well-known figures of the imaginary during a chase scene, such as Pinocchio or the Sphinx, and also into Son Gokū, recognizable thanks to his staff, golden headband, and flying cloud. One also comes across less obvious references, such as the brief appearance in Kishimoto Masashi's manga *Naruto* (1999 – ongoing) of an ape-like creature referred to as Enma the Monkey King, who transforms into a staff which can elongate. Here, elements of the original legend have been modified and blended: in *Journey to the West*, as in Buddhist mythology, Enma is actually the god of death, and the Monkey King fights with his staff, rather than morphing into it. But the

³⁴ *Harem* is a genre of romantic comedy where the male protagonist finds himself surrounded by a bevy of attractive girls, each one representing a distinctive female archetype.

³⁵ Interestingly, translators for the French version of *Love Hina* must not have been familiar with *Journey to the West* either, as they misspelled one of the characters' names. Indeed, Cho Hakkai's name is written as "Cho Hatsukai," which suggests that the translator mistook the small "tsu" character, which is silent and indicates that the following consonant sound must be emphasized, for a full-sized "tsu," which is pronounced.

reference is accessible to anyone vaguely familiar with the legend; and my point here is that one eventually does become familiar with it. Indeed, even if one is unfamiliar with Cheng'en's novel when coming across any one of these works, they cumulatively begin to cross-reference one another in one's mind as one discovers them, and one is bound to draw connexions between them eventually. For example, someone reading *Saiyuki* after having read *Dragon Ball* will inevitably notice that characters named Son Goku appear in both works; likewise, they will infer that their common attributes (the magic staff and their monkey-like characteristics) imply that the fact that they share a name is not a coincidence, but instead suggests either a common origin, or the influence of one work upon the other. Provided the reader is curious or engaged enough, this will lead her to seek out what the link is. This process occurs even more easily today, when finding information is made so easy: a quick online search on both series will almost inevitably lead one to find out that both are based on *Journey to the West*. Even in pre-internet days, this kind of information was eventually made available to fans, either in fan books and guides regarding a series, or, even more straightforwardly, in footnotes or annexes within the manga themselves; however, it must be reminded that manga and anime's popularity in Western regions went from subcultural to mainstream around the beginning of the 21st century, which is when the internet was becoming more accessible (and Napier reminds us that this technology played an important part in making anime and manga popular outside of Japan (Napier 2007, 136)).

The processes through which motifs within Japanese popular visual culture can become apparent to a non-Japanese audience will be examined more thoroughly in the following chapters. But the example of *Journey to the West* allows us to already glimpse how an Asian classic epic, which was initially obscure or completely unknown to the average European or North American, eventually became a part of some of the latter's own private imaginary. Through repetition and reference, elements of *Journey to the West* become a recognizable motif that flows across the fabric of the imaginary constituted by Japanese popular visual culture. Indeed, the presence of elements of the novel in several works enable readers and viewers to identify the novel as a reference which is clearly well-known in Japan, as popular media such as manga and anime would most likely not mention an obscure work on such a frequent basis. Indeed, one of the

most prominent characteristics of postmodern popular culture is precisely its intertextuality, the manner in which creators wink to their audience by ostensibly borrowing an element from another work, knowing that a large part of the audience will understand the reference. This creates a more intimate connexion between work and audience, where the latter are comforted by the idea that they belong to the same culture as the creator of the work as well as multitudes of others. Intertextuality lends cohesion to any culture, including the one we are born into. But what makes transcultural movements such as this one particularly interesting to study is the fact that they allow us to analyze how audiences navigate an imaginary which is initially very “new” to them, and how they gradually find markers within it. The presence of motifs is one of the factors which allow one to track an individual’s progression throughout this imaginary.

However, merely identifying narrative elements or isolated references is only a start for analyzing our relationship and interactions with a new imaginary. Indeed, it is necessary to examine not just what the corpus shows us or tells us, but exactly in what manner and through what channels it does so. This is where visual culture can help more specifically. The term “visual culture,” it bears reminding at this point, has a dual meaning: it encompasses all the different images that are encountered by subjects, and it is also an academic field which deals with the study of these images and encounters, a field which casts a critical eye not only on images but on how they are produced, circulate, are presented and seen, and create meanings and discourses. Often, the two definitions overlap, as they will in this thesis: I will be adopting the theoretical perspective of visual culture as an academic field, while studying the role which images, as visual culture, play in our lives. One reason why the visual culture approach is particularly well-suited to this study is that it is concerned with multimediality and transmediality, as it deals with images pertaining to different platforms: painting, photography, film, animation, advertising, and so forth. As a field, it is also inherently transdisciplinary, as it deals not just with the images themselves, but with their contexts of production and reception, particularly the tensions which arise at different levels, the problematics which these tensions uncover, and the meanings which arise from them. Irit Rogoff expresses the objective and process of visual culture as follows:

[...] we need to understand how we actively interact with images from all arenas to remake the world in the shape of our fantasies and desires or to narrate the stories which we carry within us. In the arena of visual culture the scrap of an image connects with a sequence of a film and with the corner of a billboard or the window of a shop we have passed by, to produce a new narrative formed out of both our experienced journey and our subconscious. (Rogoff 2002, 26)

This quote nicely crystallizes the perspective from which I want to approach the imaginary. I aim to view our relationship with it as a set of contextualized encounters, which form into a continual, shifting process. This process is grounded in reality and influenced by different sets of discourses and powers. At the same time, it is a process which takes place on an intimate level: when we interact with images and with the imaginary, we do so privately, even when the encounter takes place in public. When we glance at a poster in the street, when we read a manga in the subway, when we watch a movie in a theatre, we perceive these events as a private exchange between the images and ourselves. This does not solely apply to images, as books and music can have the same effect, and can even arguably be said to be even more immersive, once the required concentration is directed toward them. But the power of images is distinctive in that they act upon us almost surreptitiously: as Rogoff's quote suggests, we often find ourselves in situations where we glimpse images without being fully aware of them or paying real attention to them³⁶. This is what we can call the everyday level of our relationship with the imaginary: even when we see without truly seeing, or without paying attention, the images we encounter on an everyday basis affect our perception and interpretation of the world, not on an abstract level or in a conscious, carefully considered manner, but on a non-reflexive, or spontaneous level, one on which the imaginary operates as ambient environment, rather than as object of study. Just as we do not have full control over which imaginary things our mind allows into our thoughts, we do not have full control over which images capture us and affect us, particularly in an everyday context, within which we are perhaps most vulnerable. As Paul Duncum writes:

[T]he everyday, including everyday imagery, is especially important in creating our attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs. It is an axiom of cultural

³⁶ Admittedly, the same statement most likely applies to music, which can influence things like how pleasant we judge an environment, or the speed of our gait (a fact retail store designers are well aware of).

studies that beliefs and values are successfully transmitted mostly because they are taken over unconsciously. (Duncum 2002, 5).

The same author also writes that everyday life is based on the mundane, the common, and that as such it is also a collective process, it “involves a shared sense of sensuality, of participating with others in often frivolous and playful social behaviour. With everyday life knowledge is gleaned from many sources but especially from peers rather than authoritative sources” (*Ibid.*, 4). This allows us to make the transition from the act of looking as a private act, to one which takes others and context into account. Indeed, although I stand by the idea that looking is first and foremost an exchange which the spectator perceives as intimate, it would be overly simplistic to consider that the latter is completely unaware of the context in which this exchange is taking place. Looking remains an intimate act in the spectator’s mind, because she can rightfully believe that no one else is looking at this image in the exact same way that she is: her background, her circumstances, her state of mind, all are uniquely hers. But at the same time, she cannot be unaware that other people have seen this billboard, sat through this film, flipped through this comic, played this video game, nor can she be unaware that this image was created by someone with a purpose in mind. Since this knowledge exists within the non-reflexive context of the everyday, the spectator is a priori not in a position to actually dissect this purpose: this requires a conscious decision to deconstruct the image with a critical eye (which is the point of visual culture, as I will elaborate on soon). But even in an everyday mindset, as Duncum points out, one is aware of the proximity of other spectators, as well as the fact that they belong to the same audience one is a part of. Thus, one intuits that the message diffused by the image is also perceived by others, even though none of them perceive it in exactly the same manner. In this manner, the importance of context does make itself felt, even at this ambient level.

Visual culture allows us to deal with the multiple levels of the act of viewing. It allows us to start from the intimate level while still taking context into account, and then go beyond it by reaching for the critical level. Indeed, at its full potential, visual culture necessitates a (sometimes overwhelmingly) wide-reaching perspective, in order to take into account all the ramifications of the act of viewing:

At one level we certainly focus on the centrality of vision and the visual world in producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes and power relations within culture. At another level we recognize that opening up the field of vision as an arena in which cultural meanings get constituted, also simultaneously anchors it to an entire range of analyses and interpretations of the audio, the spatial, and of the psychic dynamics of spectatorship. Thus visual culture opens up an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds, and spatial delineations are read on and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and subjective responses to each encounter we might have with film, TV, advertising, art works, buildings or urban environments. (Rogoff 2002 [1998], 24).

Thus, to do research in visual culture means dealing with not only the imaginary, but with the *expression* and *experience* of this imaginary, which means examining its manifestations (images) and breaking down their many layers: how they came to be, how they relate to one another, and what discourses go through them. One can enumerate the advantages of the visual culture approach as follows. By focusing on the single act of looking, by recognizing that it takes place on multiple levels, and by going through these levels one at a time, it allows us to see that our interactions with the imaginary are not mere unilateral or even bilateral exchanges, but are actually constituents of a complex process. But more specifically, it is the perspective of visual culture combined with another conceptualization which allows us to study this process: this other conceptualization consists in viewing the imaginary as a phenomenological space. To sum up one last time before continuing: firstly, because visual culture asks for an in-context perspective and considers the act of looking as an event, and also because it takes root in an ambient context, it encourages us to think of the imaginary as an actual space, which is what I will be doing in the upcoming section; secondly, because visual culture is by definition critical, it requires one to be always wary of assumptions and anything which appears self-evident; thirdly and finally, because visual culture demands allowance for shifting meanings and patterns, it enables us to look at the imaginary as not just an exchange, but as a process.

C – The imaginary as processual phenomenological space

a) Space and (visual) culture

If we go back to the first quote from Rogoff, as well as to the one just given, we recall that she refers to visual culture as an “arena.” This suggests that the images which we encounter on a day-to-day basis form a physical surrounding environment within which we evolve and out of which we extract meaning. Of course, the mythographical perspective also considers the imaginary as a space. Although one would be correct in pointing out that this is widely an abstract reservoir of ideas and Platonic images, I feel the need to point out that this abstraction is only part of the concept: indeed, the mythical imaginary, even stripped of its sacredness (or perhaps even especially when no longer sacred) is considered to be a world which can be accessed by the audience, if only in mind. We recall that Eliade considers that myth transports us to *illud tempore* and, implicitly, to the space which accompanies it, and that he concedes that contemporary, non sacred narratives can achieve a similar transposition, as they set up an imaginary world which we willingly enter and explore.

While this seems to set up the imaginary as refuge against reality, or as escapist fantasy, one could also adopt Lynda Barry’s take on the matter. While the artist recognizes that being immersed in a story or image is like activating another world within which we move (Barry 2008, 104), she also writes that the imaginary does not help us escape from real life, it just makes it more palatable: “[Stories] can’t transform your actual situation, but they can transform your experience of it. We don’t create a fantasy world to escape reality, we create it to be able to stay. I believe we have always done this, used images to stand and understand what otherwise would be intolerable” (*Ibid.*, 40). This suggests that the imaginary is not solely a separate plane which we access at isolated moments; instead, it is something which continues to affect us even after we have closed our book or turned off the television³⁷. In the introduction, I referred to the imaginary as our “unseen surroundings,” because I feel that the imaginary is not solely a mental place where one inadvertently goes when one is too bored to focus on the reality at hand, or a fantasy hideout where one willingly projects oneself when real life becomes too unpleasant. Instead, I plan to argue that we never quite check out of the imaginary, that even the most grounded among us have one foot in both spaces. The imaginary thus acts

³⁷ My apologies to Lynda Barry, who has explicitly expressed her dislike of television, which she views as debilitating (Barry 2008, 53). But I would argue the imaginary can be found in many places; after all, it was a cartoon show that led me to take on this research in the first place.

as a layer draped over our physical surroundings; it is a fabric that is both collective and public. We share it with our peers, but at the same time, each of us is wrapped in a personal cocoon.

One of my arguments supporting this idea has actually already been mentioned in this chapter, albeit in fragments: firstly, that the imaginary makes itself physically available to us in the form of actual images and narratives, and secondly, that the latter physically surround us on an everyday basis. The idea of considering visual culture as a space surrounding the subject is by no means unique to Rogoff, nor, for that matter, is applied spatiality unique to visual culture. For example, Arjun Appadurai chooses to think of culture (specifically culture in the time of global modernity) as a set of distinct spaces, or more precisely “scapes”; he establishes and analyzes ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes, and ideoscapescapes, all “deeply perspectival constructs” which we inhabit and which structure the social imagination (Appadurai 1996, 33). Additionally, one of Appadurai’s main arguments in *Modernity at Large* is that the imagination is playing an increasing role in our lives, a hypothesis which seems to imply that the imaginary is increasingly grounded in reality. Susan Napier, focusing on Japanese popular culture and on anime in particular, proposes another category: fantasyscapescapes, liminal spaces of entertainment where the act of play can unfold freely (Napier 2005, 293). Thinking of culture, visual culture, or the imaginary, in terms of space, has merits which go beyond mere metaphor: indeed, it allows us to think of the subject as literally inhabiting culture, and thus facilitates thinking the influence which culture can have on one. It enables us to conceive of culture as directly and physically shaping our experience and our outlook.

Spatiality appears to apply even more strongly to the visual imaginary in particular, for reasons that have already been mentioned: if visual culture is a space, it is so not just in an abstract sense, but in the very real sense that images physically surround us, whether printed or on screens. But how can one theorize on how we navigate this space? One solution I have found is to turn to phenomenology, which deals with consciousness, its situated place within the world, and the manner in which it experiences this world. Given its mission, phenomenology cannot avoid dealing with spatial notions. It also, in my view, constitutes a rich perspective for studying visual culture and the

imaginary. Indeed, we have seen that one of visual culture's prime focuses is the interaction between the individual and the image. Examining these encounters from a phenomenology-infused perspective can help us gain insight on what exactly takes place at the level of consciousness. Of course, reception and response studies have been applied to images for a long time now (David Freedberg's 1989 work *The Power of Images* comes to mind), and although many do not openly proclaim themselves as pertaining to phenomenology, they nevertheless accomplish a similar task: focusing directly on the manner in which the image is experienced. However, using a distinctly phenomenological vocabulary can lead to new findings.

This is what Ben Dorfman argues in a proposal for applying phenomenology to cultural studies, in which he argues that culture as a space can be likened to the phenomenological notion of *Umwelt*, or environment. As the author reminds us, for the founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl, *Umwelt* is the world as most directly experienced, unmediated by the presumptions and prejudices that are brought about by the pre-established systems of history and tradition (one's "natural attitude," or ambiently skewed perspective); *Lebenswelt* (life-world), on the other hand, is precisely the world as perceived through the above-mentioned filters (Dorfman 2007, 114). Thus, thinking of culture as *Umwelt* allows us to highlight "culture's ultimate power [, which is] that it represents a world in which we indubitably find ourselves and to which we relate all levels of experience" (*Ibid.*, 106). Dorfman describes the transition from phenomenology to cultural studies as follows, drawing attention to the fact that the everyday constitutes the link between the two, and ultimately becomes the focus of analysis:

The *Umwelt* – as indeed was *Lebenswelt* in its own way – was the world as known by 'the Ego.' It was that experienced by consciousness and registered as one's own. To this extent – and recognising that it was not Husserl's own argument – a large swath of crucial Husserlian concepts become cultural. They explain, or are at least intended to account for, a domain of experience that constitutes the human 'everyday'. Moreover, the 'everyday' domain is taken to be the full world of experience and ideas, or both sensuous and intellectual life, available to us in the spaces which we find ourselves to inhabit. (*Ibid.*, 115)

Dorfman also zeroes in on cultural studies' mandate to address Foucauldian issues of knowledge/power (a mission which visual culture also takes up, as we have seen), which

can be likened to deconstructing the *Lebenswelt* by breaking apart hegemonic discourses. With this in mind, one is actually tempted to favour the idea of visual culture as *Lebenswelt*: indeed, visual culture as a field requires a critical perspective on images and hidden ideologies, as well as on the historical processes which lead up to the specific moment of production and reception. This means acknowledging the role which these filters play within our experience of images: visual culture's object of study is not "images as they are," but "images as we perceive them here and now, and alternatively as we ought to perceive them." Hence, visual culture requires us to take mediation into account, and thus it appears to need to be thought of not as *Umwelt*, but as *Lebenswelt*, which is the filtered experience of the world.

Nevertheless, in our previous dealings with the context of the everyday, it is clear that historical mediation is typically not consciously registered or perceived by one in the midst of the visual experience, as the everyday is an experience which by definition, in its purest form, focuses on the present, rather than the past (Duncum 2002, 5). And indeed, Dorfman's theory heads in that same direction, when he points out that, ultimately, *Lebenswelt* itself is part of the *Umwelt* and is confronted within the latter, which is in fact culture (or, in our case, visual culture): "the world of history appears within the world *qua* world – the world where we are and in which we have being" (Dorfman 2007, 114). In other words, (visual) culture as *Umwelt*, as the environment where we find ourselves, constitutes a kind of hegemonic discourse of its own, one which cannot but influence every aspect of our perception, in the same manner as space and our specific position within it determines what we can and cannot see, and what we see alongside of it. We can, however, say that history is experienced directly even in the context of the everyday – or rather, history's result (our specific place within the *Umwelt* at a specific time) is experienced directly. The nuance lies in the fact that it is being experienced spontaneously within the everyday, and it is visual culture's role precisely to deconstruct this experience by allowing us to glimpse the difference between *Umwelt* and *Lebenswelt*. Or, to put it in jargon-free terms, the difference between what we think an image is telling us, and what it is really telling us – even though, ultimately, we know it is all still happening in our head.

If we continue to borrow from phenomenology and turn to Heidegger, we note that the latter writes that he considers signs and images to be “equipment,” in that they were created for a purpose, and it is with this purpose in mind that we behold it; thus, equipment exists in a state which Heidegger calls *ready-to-hand*, ready to be used for the purpose which is its essence (Heidegger 1962, 98-114). The world, for its part, is “that in terms of which the ready-to-hand is ready-to-hand” (*Ibid.*, 114). The notion of a spatial visual culture thus helps us determine in what way the pieces of equipment within it (images and their means of production) are disposed so as to be ready-to-hand for the subject for a distinct purpose, and how they shape one’s Being-in-the-World by modulating both the world and our perception of it in terms of their purpose. In other words, if we view images as equipment, we can try to establish their original purpose (for example, encourage us to root for the hero in a film), and then see how this purpose and its *mise en place* are meant to guide our behaviour.

Of course, using spatial notions comes with caveats. Space is a concept which comes naturally to us because we inhabit it perpetually, to the point that it comes to be felt as a second skin, an extension of ourselves. This familiarity can lead to theoretical vagueness, particularly through the equally familiar lens of phenomenology. Thus, a clear theoretical framework is required. One of the most oft-quoted authors on the topic of space is Henri Lefebvre, who has outlined a structure of space which is both precise, in that it uses a specific and strongly differentiated terminology, and versatile, in that his theory can potentially be extracted from the sociological Marxist perspective privileged by the author and applied to different fields (albeit not without precautions, as we will see).

To sum up very briefly, Lefebvre considers three types of spaces within social spaces: spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation. They correspond to three basic registers of human experience, and are hence also respectively referred to as perceived space, conceived space, and lived space (Lefebvre 2000, 48-49). Spatial practice, as its link with perception suggests, is the navigation and negotiation of one’s physical surroundings, leading to the dialectic between society and the space it produces and appropriates. Representations of space are space as conceived by architects, urban planners, strategists, and so forth. And finally, spaces of representation constitute

space as it is lived through images and symbols, “the space of ‘inhabitants,’ of ‘users,’ but also of certain artists and perhaps of those who *describe* and think they only describe: writers, philosophers. [...] It covers physical space by symbolically using its objects” (*Ibid.*, 49, my translation). Clearly, since I am focusing on the imaginary as depositary of tradition crystallized by culture-as-art, i.e. by representation, it is this third type of space which most interests me in this case. It must, however, be stressed that Lefebvre’s theory is emphatically unitary: all three spaces are superimposed, and are experienced simultaneously within the body (*Ibid.*, 50). Lefebvre also warns against the risks of fetishizing spaces of representation, for fear of losing track of true meaning:

The world of images and signs fascinates, it circumvents and submerges problems, it diverts from the real, which is to say from the possible. It occupies space by signifying it: by substituting a mental, and therefore abstract space to spatial practice [...]. Differences are replaced by differential signs, and consequently produced differences are replaced in advance by induced differences and reduced to mere signs. (*Ibid.*, 448, my translation).

What is being warned against here, in the Marxist tradition, is the illusory power of signs, their ability to enable the status quo (conveyed by induced difference, defined as difference which pre-dates the situation) to triumph over change (enabled by produced difference, or difference which arises from the system in place and grows to evade it) (*Ibid.*, 440). At the same time, in the quote before the last, Lefebvre recognizes representation’s physical presence in the world, along with its active role in the human experience, as all three types of spaces overlap and influence one another (*Ibid.*, 51, 57). For better or for worse, we continuously spend a part of our lives and our selves in the space of representation that is the imaginary.

Another warning of Lefebvre is against the temptation to see systems everywhere:

Society is gradually decomposed into endless systems and sub-systems, any social object appears as a cohesion, as a system. One [...] believes to observe and one builds by isolating such or such parameter, such or such group of variables. One postulates the logical coherence and practical cohesion of such or such system, without any further analysis [...]. (*Ibid.*, 359, my translation)

Spaces of representation appear to be especially concerned by this warning, as the author writes that they do not submit to coherence or cohesion (*Ibid.*, 52). Just as Lefebvre

cautions against basing a study on induced or presupposed difference, as opposed to difference which is actually produced (*Ibid.*, 289), he is also wary of any theory which postulates families, or sets, based on likeness. But how is one to ascertain that difference or likeness is produced or induced? This question is particularly difficult when dealing with spaces of representation, which are prone to reproducing preconceived images and ideas. But from a phenomenological point of view, it seems to me that even induced difference or likeness are worthy of attention (which is not the same thing as saying that one should uncritically accept them). Motifs within the imaginary, as I conceive them, are not self-sustaining: if they continue to show up frequently throughout a significant period of time, it is because people are invested in them, for one reason or another, perhaps because they are effective at something in particular (just as myth exists to fulfill a function). Uncovering possible reasons is one of the tasks this thesis seeks to accomplish. In other words, even if the “family” I focus on is an artificial construct, it remains a valid object of study. However, Lefebvre’s warning regarding the risk of tautology must be taken to heart: one must avoid postulating what one is precisely setting out to demonstrate. This applies to many elements in this venture: culture, motifs, and even our interactions with the imaginary, as the phenomenological perspective always runs the risk of erroneously attributing actions to one’s “natural attitude.” But only through careful proceeding and analysis can one hope to eschew such traps. In order to do so, I propose once again to undertake an analysis based on findings present within the corpus itself, their presence demonstrated through accumulation of examples. There is a risk of incurring Lefebvre’s objection that systems (recurrences, in this case) can be demonstrated and still be meaningless, but my reasoning is that, if these systems are perceivable, they can be “meaningless” and still have an effect (although one can question whether anything that has an effect can truly be said to be meaningless). This effect on perception is my ultimate focus.

Moving along, two characteristics of Lefebvre’s conception of space of representation strike me as especially significant: its immersive quality, and the role affect plays within it. Both characteristics are effectively related:

The space of representation is lived and spoken; it has an affective core or centre [...]. It contains places of passion and action, of lived situations [...]. In this manner it can be described by many words: the directional, the

situational, the relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid, made dynamic [...]. (*Ibid.*, 52, my translation).

Thus, affect enables immersion, by personalizing spaces of representation. But the immersive quality of this space, this imaginary, also lies in its very nature, in the very manner through which it makes itself known to us. This, Lefebvre tells us, is due to the ultimate inseparability of form and content, not just concerning representation, but space itself. This idea comes up repeatedly in his writings:

Space, for the “lived,” is neither a mere “frame” comparable to the frame of a picture, nor a quasi-indifferent shape or container meant only to receive what is injected inside it. Space is social morphology; it is to the “lived” what a living organism’s shape is to this organism, intimately connected to functions and structures. (*Ibid.*, 112, my translation)

Thus, the space of representation is experienced in a holistic manner. Lefebvre illustrates this experience by providing the very metaphor on which I have ultimately based my conception of the imaginary, that of fabric and textiles. More precisely, he speaks of textures: rather than a text there to be deciphered, space is a series of textures:

The analogy between the theory of (the production of) space and that of (the production of) language can only be conceived within certain limits. The theory of space describes and analyses *textures*. [...] **Where there is texture there is also meaning, but for whom? For some “reader”? No. For someone who lives and acts in the space in question,** a “subject” with a body, sometimes a “collective subject.” (*Ibid.*, 155, my translation, my emphasis)

Space is not read, it is inhabited and felt. And this statement, I feel, applies not just to social practice, but to space of representation, that is, the imaginary, in spite of its partially abstract character. The imaginary is a plane which we inhabit and navigate intuitively, but, in spite of being a distinctive space, it is by no means homogeneous. As I hope to demonstrate, it is composed of textures which we experience, rather than merely deciphering them. Certainly, reading and decoding have their place in the experience – after all, even if space is not a text, representation is a text by definition. But it is this physical, almost tactile dimension which I wish to highlight, even during the more abstract parts of the corpus analysis to come. A texture is not read, it is felt, and in the case of the imaginary it can be unravelled and rewoven into something new. But before we can properly explore this dialectical, reciprocal dimension, we need to return to the

role of the body within space, already suggested by Lefebvre. Indeed, phenomenology has physical, as well as psychological concerns. One way to explore these concerns is by focusing on the phenomenology of media.

b) The phenomenology of media

We have seen how images can act upon us in the context of the everyday, thus imparting ideologies, impressions, and affects upon us, often without our truly being conscious of it. I have explored the possibilities which traditional phenomenology offers in terms of understanding how we are naturally predisposed to react to our environment – in this case, the imaginary. But now, I suggest we focus on the more specific nature of this environment: the fact that it is composed of images. How do images, in particular, affect us? The sheer content of the images is of course essential, but just as essential is the manner in which the content is presented: as we have just seen with Lefebvre, form and content can coincide into function in space, and I believe this applies to images as well. On a first level, this statement can simply refer to basic visual language, of the type that is used namely in comics and in film: for example, showing a character from a certain angle in order to suggest domination, vulnerability, introspection, and so forth. But I would like to look further than the mere framing of the content. Instead, I would like to focus more on the medium itself.

Once more, I turn to Hans Belting's work, and even back to the very first quote I gave of his, part of which I will reiterate here, as it is of some importance at this point of the reflection:

Thus the imaginary distinguishes itself from the products through which it manifests itself: it is in a way the common visual stock and image reservoir of a cultural tradition. The images of fiction are drawn from the imaginary and they are arranged through it. (Belting 2004, 102, my translation)

Belting here insists on a distinction between the imaginary and its "products," by which he means the reservoir of images (or representations, in my broader definition) on the one hand, and the physical presence of these images as printed, painted, drawn, etc. on a physical support. This distinction is more easily understood when one is aware that Belting offers a very specific definition of the image: arguing that we tend to confuse the image with its medium (e.g., when we speak of "a painting," "a photograph," or "a

movie”), he insists on the need to think the image as an entity which remains abstract (i.e., part of the imaginary) until it is crystallised upon a medium. Or, to put it in very straightforward terms: “[An image] may live in a work of art, but it does not coincide with it” (Belting 2005, 42). In the following passage, he defines his personal media theory, as opposed to those developed by Marshall McLuhan on the one hand, and art historians in general on the other:

By considering mediums³⁸ as prostheses used by the body to conquer space and time, McLuhan spoke of mediums of the body. In art history, however, mediums are considered to be the genres and materials through which the artist expresses himself. I, on the contrary, define mediums as the carriers, or hosts, which images need in order to become visible. One should be able to distinguish them from actual bodies, which explains why mediums originated recurring debates around shape and matter. **The world is experienced through the experience of images. But images, in turn, are experienced through that of their mediums.** (Belting 2004, 39-40, my translation, my emphasis)

To further elaborate, one of the pillars of Belting’s theory is that he eschews the traditional conception of the viewing act as an exchange merely between the subject and the image, and instead establishes it as a triangle between body, image, and medium, a tri-lateral relationship which he deems too often unbalanced (*Ibid.*, 42). Rather than considering that the medium stands between the subject and the pre-determined image, as is the most widely spread conception of the medial apparatus (due no doubt to the general definition of “medium” as a transmitter or go-between), Belting thinks of images themselves as nomadic, and moving from medium to medium (*Ibid.*, 15). At the same time, as suggested by the two highlighted sentences above, it appears to be difficult for subjective consciousness to separate medium and image, as the former profoundly influences the appearance and perception of the latter. This goes precisely against the necessity, insisted upon by Belting, of maintaining the abstract, quasi-Platonic nature of the image as concept. To further complicate the situation, the author recognizes that each

³⁸ Belting explains earlier that, taking his cue from Régis Debray, he chooses to use the term “mediums” as opposed to “media” when referring to several different forms of support, in order to avoid confusion with mass media (namely press and television), which are often referred to as “the media.” At the same time, as previously mentioned, he creates the adjective “medial,” in order to designate “anything which displays any properties of an iconic medium, even if temporarily” (Belting 2004, 7, my translation). I have been using the adjective form, but will use the traditional plural form of “medium,” i.e. “media,” as I feel the confusion is less likely to occur in this context.

medium is, in a significant way, shaped and defined by its time, its culture, and the latter's history (*Ibid.*, 40, 69): think, for example, of silent film versus CGI special effects, or oil canvas paintings versus Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. It is certain that each of these media not only uses a distinctive and limited array of techniques, which restrict the possibilities for representing the image, but each medium also unavoidably connotes a specific time and place in history. Even when a medium is used outside of its historical context and purposefully used in a manner which strays from its original use (for example, using *ukiyo-e* technique to depict 20th century pop-art-like subject matter), the point of this kind of artistic choice is precisely that there will be a discrepancy between the medium and its application: *ukiyo-e* will continue to be reminiscent of 17th-to-19th century Japan, unless history leads it to be used in a manner which will be widely adopted by an entire significant movement (and, as we have seen in the previous chapter, this somewhat occurred with Western comics when Japanese artists embraced the medium – although my thesis is largely based on the idea that they did so in an entirely new and distinctive manner). Thus, the medium inevitably affects our perception of the (abstract) image, to the point that we would not readily recognize the same image were it presented to us in another medium. As Belting concludes and deplors, we regularly fuse and confuse image and medium, and often the image is lost. However, from my perspective, this is not necessarily a situation to be deplored; instead, I see it as an opportunity. Since I am setting out to examine how we experience images, and since it appears difficult to separate this experience from the medium, then why not embrace the latter?

The field of mediology, a term coined by Régis Debray, is precisely concerned with the unique experience a specific medium can provide, regardless of the content. In other words, it is concerned with the phenomenology of media, defined in the previous chapter as a perspective focusing on the distinctive properties of a medium and the impact of these properties regarding one's experience of using this medium – and, in the case of visual media, one's experience of the images presented through them (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 135). Debray, for his part, adds a collective dimension to this perspective, writing that “the conjunctive tissue of human societies is not the same whether their [...] memorabilia is entrusted to collective memory, a rare or abundant

vegetal support, magnetic tape, or electronic chips” (Debray 1992, 150, my translation). In other words, media orient us, they provoke a reaction within us, which taints our perception of the images they transmit, but also our perception of the world, as media increasingly pervade our interaction with reality and with each other. It is thus fair to speak of a mediological ethos which is a part of visual culture, and which, just like the latter, evolves over time and as we (often mindlessly, ambiently) interact with it.

The phenomenology of media is not just linked to cognitive perception, but is also very much concerned with the body – in fact, it is rooted in it. Thus, the images which we encounter through distinct media can and do have a physical effect on us. This is something which I first became interested in while working on my master’s thesis, as I attempted to understand how manga differed from other comics. One of my conclusions, which I will elaborate on more in chapter 5, was that manga are conceived to encourage a faster reading experience, namely by being composed of panels which contain comparatively little information, so as to be seized at a glance. The sheer momentum attained by the reader, along with the wild wanderings of the eye encouraged by the haphazard page layouts (another specificity I concluded to) appeared to be one of the major appeals of manga. In this manner, reading manga was, truthfully, an embodied experience. However, I now find that *bande dessinée* has its own physicality, albeit a slower, more reflexive one. Different types of animation, which have the advantage of possessing actual movement, as opposed to suggested movement, also clearly have a physical effect, as does film (the example which readily comes to my mind at this point is the complaint people often make during movies filmed with handheld or shoulder cameras: that the technique gives them *motion* sickness). As for video games, the point barely needs to be argued: the pressing of buttons, the swinging of limbs (in the case of motion-detecting consoles such as the Wii and the Kinect), the fact that the player projects herself into a virtual *moving* body which she controls (Lahti 2003) – all of these elements are based on embodiment.

This physical dimension of medial phenomenology is reflected in the imaginary which the images projected by these different media create: the imaginary itself is experienced physically. This adds an aspect to our metaphor of the imaginary as fabric: if content recurrences are motifs within the fabric, then the different physical experiences

generated by each medium are textures of the fabric. Thus the fabric of the imaginary is not just projected in multitudes of ways through the proliferation of different patterns, it is felt, physically experienced in multitudes of ways through the many phenomenologies that are present within it. Both aspects are active in shaping the imaginary and our intimate interactions with it.

To finish this chapter, let's address these interactions, both physical and cognitive. What happens when we look at an image? Not necessarily study it critically, but simply look at it? Does it affect our body and our perception, transmit its message to us, and then leave us in our newly altered state? Are we that passive? Sometimes, we are. And sometimes, we get the better of the images (albeit not always consciously), and by doing so we alter the imaginary. We have seen that the imaginary, when stripped of sacredness, can change; what we have not yet seen is what makes it change. The most likely answer is, quite simply, that we shape it through our interactions with it. We do not accomplish this on our own: there are too many economical and social interests invested in images for things to be quite so straightforward. But images can be appropriated in ways which were not planned by the forces (individual or collective) that generated them. We recall that equipment according to Heidegger is created for a purpose. Whether or not we use it for that purpose, however, is another matter: to give an extremely prosaic example, we can choose to use a newspaper to swat a fly, rather than read it, which was its original intended purpose. In the same manner, we can hijack images and not only appropriate them in an unintended manner, but re-use them, twist them and even "betray" them. Indeed, although economic interests do have a major influence in shaping contemporary visual culture according to potential or existing commercial profit (not only in the form of advertising and forms of popular culture such as blockbuster films, but even at the level of less mainstream sub-cultures), there is always the possibility of subverting the image, particularly now that digital media have greatly facilitated the circulation and manipulation of images – and the fact a great deal of this image manipulation can be considered quite frivolous (see most visual memes which travel over the Net) does not negate this truth.

Thus, the imaginary is not just something which influences us, but something which we also shape in return. It is, from the perspective of visual culture, a reciprocal

process. We come across images, and these images structure our experience, not necessarily immediately, but rather imperceptibly, through accumulation and time. But it is precisely by becoming a part of the everyday that some images inevitably become a collectively identified aesthetic cliché, and thus people react against them, and new images arise. As Paul Ricœur writes, imagination and creation thrive on recognized codes, traditions: innovation and deviance are only possible when they are opposed to a dominant tradition. In other words, creation does not exist in a vacuum, and texts and images need to be examined in relation to something, the existence of which we can all agree *on*, even if some do not agree *with* it (Ricœur 1986, 19). Thus, the imaginary is comprehensible to us because it contains tropes, which tradition in a way imposes upon us by the mere fact that we are born into a specific culture. But we then have the possibility to subvert these tropes, to either turn them into something else or to understand them in a completely unforeseen manner. We mould the imaginary collectively, shape it during our everyday interactions with it: some of us generate new images in response to pre-existing ones, while some of us merely react to these images. But even reaction is sufficient to generate an effect, provided it becomes a part of a collective movement. In this manner, the fabric of the imaginary is one that is not just seen and felt, but collectively woven and patched together. It is, in this sense, a quilt created by a collectivity, continuously assembled and undone, in an always ongoing process.

In this light, how has Japanese popular visual culture been woven into the imaginaries of francophone Europe and North America? Have its tropes been hijacked, in the sense of being re-used and transformed, or merely reappropriated, integrated as they are within the imaginary fabric? These questions will be addressed in the conclusion. Indeed, before we can answer them, we need to examine what kind of fabric Japanese popular visual culture generates. In order to do this, we need to establish what kinds of motifs and textures characterize it, see how the fabric is assembled, what dynamic regulates its flows and folds. The following three chapters will be devoted to this task.

Chapter Three

Content motifs, part one: Thematic mechanisms

Although the previous chapter ended with a focus on medium phenomenology, which is arguably the area in which this thesis' contribution will be the most significant, we should not completely set aside the more content-based motifs which can be observed within the corpus. Indeed, where reception is concerned, content, particularly narrative, remains essential to the experience that is discovering a work of fiction. Summing up what a work "is about" remains the most spontaneously direct way (albeit a very incomplete one) of describing a work, of giving someone an idea of what genre it pertains to, of what type of audience it is aimed at. Even when a reader, viewer, or player decides to push analysis further, as fans are wont to do, themes and ideologies are often the first focus. Therefore, I would have been remiss in not examining the content-related motifs, particularly as they are quite apparent.

I will attempt to demonstrate that there is a content-based coherence existing in the corpus. This demonstration will take place over two chapters. In the present chapter, I will begin by outlining different recurring themes that are present throughout the works, whether manga, anime, or video games. Through accumulation and repetition, these recurrences form traceable motifs across the fabric of the imaginary created by this portion of Japanese popular visual culture. The first section of this chapter will examine themes that do not carry obvious cultural baggage, that are not a part of Japan's "cultural odour." The second section will focus on precisely these cultural motifs, and see that they contribute to a pre-existing construct of "Japaneseness." The resulting motifs guide and orient the audience throughout the corpus. They operate as what I would call "thematic mechanisms" which regulate the narrative experience of these collected works. Additionally, I will demonstrate the existence of a dynamic which is present at multiple levels within these works, and which can operate as a heuristic, operational pattern throughout this thesis: the tension between flux and stasis, between movement and pause, between change and status quo. This simple dynamic, which I would qualify as a relation rather than a mere opposition, is perhaps the most unifying mechanism regulating the entire corpus.

A – Various thematic motifs

Unsurprisingly, series pertaining to the same genre, or games belonging to the same series, have obvious thematic resonances with each other. Shōjo manga such as *Fruits Basket* and *Rose of Versailles* may not appear to have much in common when it comes to setting or plot: the former revolves around a cursed twentieth-century Japanese family whose members transform into animals whenever they are hugged by someone of the opposite sex, while the latter is a historical romance loosely based on the life of Marie-Antoinette. Nevertheless, they have in common a tendency towards melodrama, through the importance and focus they give to their characters' emotional and affective states and to romantic revelations. Similarly, a science-fiction anime like *Ghost in the Shell*, while pertaining to a different sub-genre of sci-fi than a series like *Noein*, nevertheless shares certain themes with the latter, such as, by definition, the profound impact of technology on the human condition – the former regarding the body, the latter regarding the implications of interdimensional travel on the definition of existence. The importance of genre is not to be downplayed, and Japanese visual popular culture highlights this importance in a very distinctive way (although some portions of the corpus do so more than others), as will be shown in the next chapter. In the present section, however, I will concentrate on themes which transcend genres, and can be demonstrably found in several works of the corpus, across all the media platforms. Such themes, I would argue, act as shared, overlapping areas which encourage the audience to draw links between these diverse works. As such, they act as thematic mechanisms, in that they set into motion a process of cohesion.

In order to avoid an overly lengthy text, I have limited my selection of descriptive examples in this section. A more complete and detailed list of examples can be found in Appendix A, which will help demonstrate how present these mechanisms are.

a) Questioning of reality

One of the most striking thematic elements which revealed themselves during analysis of the diverse body of assemble works is the conception and representation of reality and its inhabitants as fundamentally fluid and changing. This occurred on a consistent basis

throughout most of the corpus, and thus operates as a significant thematic motif, particularly as it impacts the perception of these works' content at a very primal level: indeed, if reality is portrayed as infinitely malleable, this impacts the reader, viewer or gamer's expectations in a fundamental manner, as anything appears possible – although we will see that, in fact, anything does not necessarily happen.

Reality is put into question in several ways throughout these works. One way is to insert the possibility of illusion or hallucination. In some manga, such as the supernatural shōnen *Naruto* and *Bleach*, characters are endowed with the power to create a total illusion, a form of spell under which the other characters all fall; often, the reader is “tricked” along with the characters, and is surprised when the illusion is revealed as such. In the same manner, the *Professor Layton* video game series frequently uses illusion as a crucial narrative device: *The Diabolical Box* reveals at its very end that the main characters' were under a collective hallucination, and that most of the characters the player interacted with were in fact not real, while *The Curious Village's* big revelation is that most of the characters were in fact automatons. This type of trope operates at a very literal, fundamental level, but is nevertheless effective in making the audience doubt the veracity of what is represented on the page or the screen.

Several other works revolve around the premise that reality is metaphysically malleable. The science-fiction anime *Noein*, for instance, is based on quantum physics and the theory of the existence of multiple alternate dimensions. Characters can jump from one possible present or future to another, with no specific dimension being the definitive one: the role of the observer(s) is determining in establishing anything and anyone as real. Reality is thus portrayed as essentially reconfigurable and unstable. A similar process occurs in *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, in which a sixteen-year-old girl is, unbeknownst to herself, responsible for the creation and maintenance of the universe, which shifts according to her mood. At other times, reality is simply portrayed as unstable and changing by nature, without any rational reason given for this state of affairs. For example, Kon Satoshi's anime series *Paranoia Agent* portrays the concretisation of collective fears in various forms (namely a mysterious juvenile aggressor and a giant plush toy); these fears eventually wreak very real destruction onto Tokyo, but there is never any explanation offered regarding how reality came to shift in

the first place. In such works, reality's porosity is simply one of its given and accepted traits.

Certain video games flirt with the idea of a malleable reality at the level of gameplay experience, rather than from a narrative perspective. The experience of a video game, as Jesper Juul writes, is shaped by both fiction and rules: the player navigates them together, often finding justification for the rules within the fiction, and vice-versa (see also Nitsche 2008, 44).

[T]he player facing evil-looking monsters is likely to assume that the monsters are to be avoided or possibly destroyed. [...] It is not just the graphical representation, but also the rules of the game that project the fictional world. The way a given object or character behaves will characterize it *as a fictional object*; the rules that the player deduces from the fiction and from the experience of the playing of the game will also cue him or her into imagining a fictional world. (Juul 2005, 177).

Sometimes, however, the rules are temporarily changed, and this affects the reality that is conveyed by the game's fictional world. Thus, in *Super Mario Galaxy*, for example, we encounter levels where the physics of the game, the rules according to which the player has by then learnt to control the playable character, are altered. For instance, in some levels, the playable character Mario will fall to his death should the player lead him off a ledge; in some others, however, such as "Battlerock Barrage," he finds himself in outer space, navigating small spherical celestial bodies which he can never fall from, adhering to their surface even when he is, from the player's perspective, standing upside-down (in much the same manner that we do not fall off the face of the Earth). Different physics regulate different level environments and require different manoeuvring on behalf of the player. In this manner, it is not so much the intra-diegetic reality of the game that is altered, but the player's real experience of the game. But this phenomenon also leads toward the notion that reality in this corpus is an open concept of potentialities: what is true in one level may not be true in the next one. Michael Nitsche writes that video games in general offer us "possibility spaces:" "a possibility space describes the options made available to the player through spatial conditions at a given moment in the game experience" (Nitsche 2008, 188). What makes *Super Mario Galaxy* stand out is that some levels offer radically different possibilities, and thus constitute radically different spaces, and hence different realities from the player's perspective.

On a significantly different, more subject-centric paradigm, several works choose to portray reality as inherently subjective, and allow this choice to seep into their representation of reality. The anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is perhaps the most flagrant example of this position. Ostensibly a mecha³⁹-derived sci-fi series, it spends much of its airtime delving into the psychological depths of its protagonists, most notably its (anti)hero Shinji, a teenaged military pilot whose conflicted relationship with his father, difficulty in connecting with others, and general inferiority complex make him the subject and author of many introspective musings. In the final episode of the series, which appears to take place primarily inside Shinji's psyche, he is confronted to what a reality without any constraints would be, in the most literal way possible: he is represented as a minimalist, pencil-drawn figure, free-falling against a blank background. Realising that this empty world lacks orientation, he gradually fills this world with markers and relatable entities. He then suddenly ends up inhabiting a world that could be said to be either an alternate dimension to his own, or a "what if?"-type scenario. This new reality has the character structure and overall feel of a typical high school romantic comedy, and his friends and family are present, but are all very different than in his old reality. Shinji then realises that such a reality, one where he does not have to suffer the angst and pressure of being a pilot, is possible, and this leads him to reaffirm his will to live. While this concept of multiple possible worlds depending on the observer appears similar to what is offered in *Noein*, the "parallel universe" in *Evangelion* is quite clearly meant to be interpreted as an illustration to a point, rather than a literal parallel dimension. The point, in this case, is that reality is ultimately subjective. As *Evangelion* repeatedly states in its psyche-delving scenes, different versions of each of us exist within the minds of every other person we encounter, and this seems to also apply to reality as a whole. The anime chooses to express this through the power of animation, by radically undermining everything we thought had been established previously. As Napier writes, the freedom discovered by Shinji at the end of the series mirrors the "essential unreality" of animation (Napier 2007b, 115), which in anime especially yields "a world of simulacra [that] makes no pretense of participating in the 'real' except for what its viewers bring to

³⁹ *Mecha* refers to a genre of manga and anime featuring giant robots that can be piloted from the inside.

it” (Napier 2005, 294). What *Evangelion* highlights is the flimsiness of the real latent in every anime, but the series pushes this element to its limit.

Evangelion chooses to explore the subject-dependency of reality in a radical manner. But subjectivity seeps into several works’ portrayal of reality, often in less explicit, but nevertheless very present ways. This is the case, for instance, of many shōjo manga. Indeed shōjo’s signature visual style partly consists in incorporating subjectively expressive backgrounds into panels (and often entire pages), substituting them for a more realistic background, and thus, one might say, for reality itself. For instance, in *Fruits Basket*, the scene in Fig. 1, even though it takes place indoors, features branches of holly in the background, apparently to highlight the character’s sincerity and kindness. This process of inserting non realistic backgrounds is quite common in shōjo.



Fig. 1: *Fruits Basket*, vol. 1, p. 75

Obviously, this representation is meant to be understood as the way the character is perceived, not how she truly appears. Thus, in shōjo, there is an intermittent filter that enables us to periodically view the storyworld through a character-subject’s eyes. Or, in other cases, such visual effects can be used to enhance a specific affect or effect within a scene, such as tragedy or anger, thereby highlighting the mood which the author wishes to shine through and dominate. Backgrounds, rather than being a realistic representation of the characters’ surroundings, are instead a canvas for their emotions or mood: “Symbolic blossoms unseen by the characters themselves identified the story’s heroine, reflected a scene’s mood or conveyed a character’s feelings [...] It was as if these women

artists were photographing their characters' psychic auras" (Gravett 2004, 79). While this trait is meant to be understood from an impressionist perspective, it nevertheless has a profound effect on how the portrayal of reality is ultimately perceived: not as something set in stone, but as something that, in a way, exists only to be perceived and coloured by perception. In fact, time itself appears to fluctuate during such scenes, affecting the sequence of the panels: "[G]irls' comic magazines are characterized by a page layout that has become increasingly abstract. [...] Pictures flow from one to another rather than progress with logical consistency from frame to frame" (Schodt 1983, 89). Throughout this process, the portrayal of physical reality is constantly subjected to the fluctuations of characters's emotions. Alternately, in shōnen manga, the existence of speed lines or stylized, very prominent sound effects yields a comparable effect, centering the composition of the panel around the actions of the represented character(s). Scott McCloud dubs this procedure "subjective motion," characterising it as having the reader's perspective moving along with the moving subject, while the background becomes a blur (McCloud 1994, 113-114). Like the visual effects in shōjo, this effect does not mean that reality literally changes, but the fact that its representation does change has an inevitable effect on the reader's perception of this reality. The reader comes to understand that the worlds of manga are forever shifting, blurring and morphing.

But in truth, the very media of comics, animation and video games inherently hold the potential for such portrayals. As visual media that are a priori unrestrained by realistic concerns or physical considerations (unlike film, for example, which, despite special effects and the inclusion of CGI still relies in part on what a human actor is physically capable of doing), they contain the possibility of representing the impossible. This is true of all comics, cartoons and video games. But, arguably, manga and anime (less so Japanese video games) seem to take more frequent advantage of this medial trait, even in their most mainstream productions. For instance, one very prominent trait of manga that sets it apart is its propensity to represent characters very differently from one panel to another; to be precise, characters can be portrayed according to entirely different criteria, in what Thierry Groensteen has called changes in visual register. However, I will abstain from overly examining this particular trait of manga at this point, as this analysis

will prove more fruitful and relevant in chapter 5, where I will give in-depth examples of it. For now, I will merely state that characters in manga are regularly and repeatedly represented, often for the duration of a single panel, in a visual style that is strikingly different from how they are usually represented, usually much more schematic, simplified and exaggerated, often for the purpose of highlighting emotion.

Although these variations constitute a formal process, and one which is meant to be taken conceptually, not literally, it nevertheless has an effect at the level of content perception. Indeed, even though the reader knows that such deformations are symbolic, and are not meant to signify literal metamorphosis, this process nevertheless contributes to the notion that reality in manga and anime is not stable. In these works, characters are plastic, malleable, adaptable to circumstances, situations and effects. They are expressive entities, canvases for intensities that take over them, “their inconsistencies stretched so taut as to snap” (Lamarre 2009, 177). As such, their existence is more subtle, more fluid, their physicality less concrete, than that of characters in other works of comics or animation. Manga and anime thus explore possibilities that are inherent in their respective media, but which they push to another level: as Susan Napier writes regarding anime, a statement I would argue applies to manga as well, this is “a medium not bound by a perceived obligation to represent the real” (Napier 2007b, 106), and thus a medium which can opt to push back the limits of the possible by embracing the unreal. As such, in both media, albeit through different means, reality loses concreteness through a refusal of realism.

This fluidity of reality in these works appears almost boundless; however, it is important to note that it does have its limits. As such, the portrayal of reality is regulated by the dynamic of flux and stasis. On the one hand, we have movement, change, instability, evident in the portrayal of reality as malleable and porous. On the other hand, however, we have a lingering presence of the concept of reality as something which is, in the end, recognisable and enduring. For instance, let us take another look at *Noein*, in which the idea of reality as multiple and containing infinite possibles is essential, and where it is accepted that reality can be an illusion, and vice-versa. What we find is that this flimsiness of reality ultimately does not interfere with human activity or interaction.

Rather, what defines reality is people's ability to recognise one another – that is all it takes to avert chaos. Thus, the proximity of reality and illusion does not pose a true existential problem, as the integrity of the subject and her free will are not put into question. Similarly, *Evangelion*, despite stripping reality down to its bare essentials in its final episode, stops short of erasing the subject, just as it stops short of truly destroying and rebuilding the world. Indeed, while Shinji does reach the conclusion that a world where he does not have to pilot can exist, the alternate reality he creates for himself (or which is created for him, the fact remains unclear) does not radically differ from the previous one: he is still surrounded by the same people, no matter how different their personalities are from the ones we best know them for, he is still a human inhabiting planet Earth, he still attends school, and so forth. Shinji's new world is an alternate reality, but it remains a plausible, realistic one, the kind of life he might have had if his father's own life had taken a different turn, and he hadn't become a scientist determined to change the world. Thus, the malleability of reality, while an important element of the *Evangelion* narrative, is not pushed to its full potential: the result remains recognisable and inhabitable. Even in Kon Satoshi's film *Paprika*, in which dreams have the possibility to invade, overtake and overturn the rules of reality, the structure and traditional figures of the latter retain their status and their power. In one of the last scenes of the film, as the heroine Paprika prepares to face off against the madman who has unleashed dreams into the real world, she re-establishes the traditional Manichean order which she realises continues to operate: "Light and dark. Reality and dreams. Life and death. Man and...?" She then merges with the man she loves to re-emerge as a female child, the antithesis of the old man attempting to take over the world. When she defeats him, order is re-established because, in a way, it was never truly subverted. As for the fluctuating physics of *Super Mario Galaxy*, they are safely contained within levels, cleanly delimited as temporary pleasure, rather than drawn-out uncertainty. And finally, even though these three media have the possibility of representing anything, they choose to represent worlds which are close enough to reality for us to situate ourselves within them; even at their most deformed, characters are still recognizable, inhabiting the same reality, and they return to themselves soon enough.

If the malleability of reality in these works constitutes fluidity, process, flow, then these boundaries constitute ballasts against this flow. In this manner, flux is countered by stasis: reality is only malleable to a point, and its stability is ultimately reconfirmed every time. What we have here is a form of variation within limitations, of controlled drift.

b) Metamorphosis and plasticity

To return to a more strictly thematic motif, albeit one that is strongly related to the medial plasticity just mentioned, what is apparent in the corpus as a whole is the presence of metamorphosis – literal, this time. Characters are often imbued with the power to physically transform repeatedly, and this is true of characters in manga, anime, and video games.

The transforming superhero is a fairly common trope in Western storytelling. Yet, in the case of American comics, for example, often the transformation is superficial, limited to a change of clothing: Superman, Batman, Spider-man, all change into their superhero persona by changing into their costume. Even when their superpowers result from a modification of their being, such as Peter Parker getting bitten by a radioactive arachnid to become Spider-man, or the future Fantastic Four being exposed to cosmic rays, the transformation is single and permanent. In manga, anime and Japanese games, however, metamorphosis exists primarily as a frequent, repeatable, most often reversible phenomenon. In *Bleach*, for example, the protagonist Ichigo transforms countless times into a soul reaper and back again into a human; additionally, his metamorphosis evolves throughout the series, his powers changing with each new physical appearance. Likewise, in *Fruits Basket*, thirteen characters can temporarily morph into animals. In these manga examples, metamorphosis occurs within the physical being of the character, and is both repeatable and reversible.

Metamorphosis also abounds in anime. *Princess Tutu* contains a kind of metamorphosis that is typical of its genre, magical girl anime: the protagonist's transformation from Duck, an ordinary girl, into the magical heroine Princess Tutu. This phenomenon occurs at least once per episode, with the exception of the final episodes. Each transformation is, as is often the case in this genre, ritualized, with the girl performing the same gestures, with the same framing and audiovisual effects. A different

kind of metamorphosis lies at the heart of *Ghost in the Shell*, although admittedly initially in a more progressive, non-reversible form: the protagonist, Kusanagi Motoko, has been remade as a cyborg, possessing an entirely cybernetic body, including her brain, all of which remains the property of the government agency she works for. At the end of the film, she leaves her body behind to meld with an artificial intelligence and be reborn as a new entity, temporarily occupying a child-like cyber-body as she ponders the innumerable possibilities before her. This ultimate metamorphosis, unlike Motoko's first transformation into a cyborg, which rendered her dependent on the cybernetic equipment loaned to her by the government, frees her and opens her up to a world of potentiality; as a result, it can be viewed as the first of many metamorphoses to come. *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, while not ostentatiously highlighting metamorphosis, nevertheless presents another form of transformation, which Sharalyn Orbaugh calls intercorporation, or “mutual incorporation of the other” (Orbaugh 2007, 179). As Orbaugh demonstrates, Shinji’s interactions with his Eva consist in escalating instances of intercorporation, where pilot and vessel merge to the point that both are terrifyingly transformed into a hybrid being in episode 19. In this manner, *Evangelion* deeply explores the possibilities and limits of body boundaries through repeated and gradual metamorphosis (*Ibid.*, 177-183).

Finally, video games display no small amount of transformations. Even the earliest *Mario* game, *Super Mario Bros*, features gameplay that is heavily dependent on metamorphosis and accompanying changes in abilities. When the character grabs a mushroom, he grows larger in size, rendering him more resistant to enemy attacks; similarly, a flower changes his clothes from red to white, while granting him the power to shoot fireballs from his hands, while a star makes him sparkle and renders him temporarily invincible to anything except a deadly fall. These metamorphoses are typically temporary and repeatable, as the character reverts to his original form whenever he takes damage. *Pokémon*’s little monsters, for their part, have the ability to evolve into a more powerful version of themselves; however, this evolution, while enabling them to learn select new skills, prevents them from learning others. In *Final Fantasy* games, a combination of tools and transformation is present. In some games, as in *Final Fantasy VII*, the multiple playable characters can change and upgrade their weapons during battle,

and evolve their abilities through combat, but without the use of metamorphosis. In *Final Fantasy X-2*, however, the characters can inhabit different roles, and change outfits and demeanour accordingly. While this does not amount to metamorphosis per se, in that the characters' bodies do not change, only their clothes, each change of role is accompanied by a morphing sequence that is very reminiscent of magical girl transformations in anime: in a ritualized sequence, each girl (in this instance, all three playable characters are young females) is lifted into the air and her initial clothes magically fade away leaving behind a trail of sparkles, with a twinkling sound in the background, as the new clothes replace them. The girl then lands and strikes a pose appropriate for her new role, whether healer, black mage or thief. This ritual transformation ensures that the role changes in this game are experienced as something very close to metamorphosis as discussed so far.

Perhaps some will argue that the distinction between switching weapons and transforming into someone with new abilities is a trifling one in the context of a video game. The practical point of both processes, after all, is to allow the player to access a new ability or set of abilities, to give him a range of options throughout the game. Does it really make a difference whether these options are made available to him by means of an arsenal or through a physical change within the character? Would *Super Mario Bros* really offer a different gaming experience if, instead of coming into contact with a flower and gaining the ability to shoot fireballs from his hands, Mario merely grabbed a flamethrower that happened to be at his disposal? The question is fair. I would answer it by first of all reminding us that games can be perceived through different prisms: they can be considered as stories, as algorithms, as rules, or as media, among other things, because they are, in fact, all those things. While, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it has been argued by many that the narrative perspective have been given more than its fair share of attention while not constituting the most interesting aspect of games (a position I subscribe to), it nevertheless remains a valid angle. It is obvious that, from the perspective of the storyworld within the game, the presence of metamorphosis over the use of weapons makes a significant difference: it denotes the presence of fantasy, whether whimsical or dark, within the gameworld, thus contributing to the game's atmosphere in a way that is ultimately essential to the game's aesthetic dimension. In other words, Mario

with a flamethrower would be able to accomplish the same things as Mario shooting fireballs, but the atmosphere of the game would be quite different. On that level alone, the distinction between metamorphosis and tool selection matters, no matter how little it appears to affect gameplay itself.

Furthermore, the effect of metamorphosis in these games is not limited to aesthetics, but extends to perception of content. Indeed, the metamorphoses present in these games pertain to different degrees: some concern just one attribute and are temporary and repeatable, others are irreversible and concern sets of attributes, others still are repeatable and concern sets of attributes. What this classification highlights is that there are differing degrees of significance related to metamorphosis within the corpus of games, dependent on two factors: reversibility and affected possibilities. Depending on whether the transformation is reversible or not, and on whether it affects merely one aspect of the character or changes his entire disposition, metamorphosis, as opposed to a mere change of tools or weapons, can be said to have more or less impact on the gaming experience. An irreversible transformation creates more of a rupture between pre- and post-metamorphosis states, as does the difference in possibilities offered by each state. This affects perception of character. Indeed, a game character can be perceived as a more or less stable entity. The more different transformations it undergoes, the more distinct sets of possibilities it can offer, the more it can be perceived as an open entity; additionally, the more the same metamorphosis is repeatable, the more often a character is allowed to change, the less stable it is. Thus, although a pokémon can by this logic be perceived as relatively stable from one perspective, in that it can only undergo two irreversible transformations, it is also a fundamentally open entity, as its possible actions are defined by ever-changing sets of options. *Final Fantasy* characters, for their part, are in a constant flux of change, as they have the option to switch between very differentiated states at will.

This brings us to an important point, which is that metamorphosis often has a catch, so to speak, a limiting factor. For instance, the changes in Mario are only reversible if the character takes damage; in that sense, they are more definitive than merely selecting a weapon or picking one up: once you absorb an item, you are stuck with its ability until you find another one, or take damage. Similarly, although *Final*

Fantasy characters can switch between roles at will, each role is inherently restrictive, opening up select skills only to render others inaccessible. My point here is that metamorphosis in Japanese games is ultimately defined by a tension between fluidity and stability. Characters can become any number of different entities, but the player must make choices throughout this process of becoming, choices which affect not only what characters can do, but most importantly what they cannot. Metamorphosis in Japanese games thus both liberates characters and grounds them in limitations, in another manifestation of the dynamic between flux and stasis. By doing so, it makes characters both more ethereal and yet more tangible: characters can soar through multiple possibilities, yet it is the player's ultimate selection for them that gives them new life and defines them – at least, until the next transformation.

This tension which metamorphosis brings to Japanese games is also to be found in manga and anime. Everywhere, it has been repeatedly mentioned in this section, metamorphosis is synonymous with freedom and possibilities. But it is a process which, rather than perpetually taking place, but is instead one which makes characters leap from state to state. It is a punctual phenomenon, even as its influence and effects permeate the entire works. The tension between flow and stasis remains present in all instances of metamorphosis. Characters in shōnen manga, for instance, such as *Naruto* and *Bleach*'s Ichigo, have within them the potential for transformation, but in effect this potential manifests itself in codified, stable forms. Each transformation comes with a list of abilities, and a limited increase in power. Like most of the power systems in shōnen (which will be shown in the next chapter), metamorphosis is regulated and rationalized, rather than free-flowing and chaotic. This is even clearer in *Dragon Ball*, where those characters that can morph, the Saiyans, display clear delimitation between their two (sometimes three) states. Similarly, on the anime side of the spectrum, Duck's ritualized transformations into Princess Tutu, so similar to the role-changing sequences in *Final Fantasy X-2*, serve not only as a way to highlight metamorphosis, but also as a demarcation between the two states. Even Kusanagi Motoko's ultimate metamorphosis in *Ghost in the Shell*, which is arguably one in the corpus which grants the imagination the most freedom and the most possibilities, still lands her in a concrete cyborg body – and, as Carl Silvio points out, the fact that her “rebirth” results in her reappearing, albeit

temporarily, in the body of a child is a actually throwback to traditional reproduction that seems to go against the film's promotion of cyber-based freedom and possibilities (Silvio 1999). The limitations of metamorphosis' possibilities are everywhere to be seen. In this manner, we can see a parallel between Motoko's rebirth and Paprika's triumph: although the latter's victory is obtained through a spectacular metamorphosis, traditional roles and binary oppositions continue to operate. In other words, although there is the potential for everything to dissolve into chaos, it does not happen.

To sum up, the tension between flux and stasis continues to pervade the corpus from the perspective of metamorphosis. While flux is undoubtedly more spectacular and more unsettling, and therefore more spontaneously noticeable, its limits must be taken into account. And indeed, metamorphosis in these examples, being always coded or bracketed, can only ever be a partial process.

c) Status quo and progress, Humans and Others

The tension between movement and immobility manifests itself in a theme which is both complex and seemingly ubiquitous: the problematic opposing tradition on the one hand, and modernity on the other. This theme takes on several aspects, and is a particularly eloquent example of the type of thematic mechanism I have attempted to highlight. Primarily, I will focus on the attachment to and rejection of societal tradition, and later on turn to the fear and fascination related to technological advancement. Both of these sub-themes are very rich and could constitute separate thesis topics – in fact, both have been extensively treated, particularly within anime and manga studies. I will not attempt to do full justice to their implications here, but will merely establish their presence in the corpus and the manner in which they contribute to the structuring mechanism of flux versus stasis.

The present section originally did not aim to deal with the culturally tainted motifs of the corpus, a task initially reserved for the following section, but I find that I must broach the topic prematurely. Indeed, the relation to tradition as portrayed in part of the corpus is connected to the portrayal of a specifically traditional Japan. I also need to include a few words about the perception of Japan at this point, as the current theme is in fact related to how Japan is understood from the Western perspective. It has become

practically a cliché within East Asian studies to remind readers that Japan is a country that has had a complicated relationship with modernisation. A centuries-long period of isolationism was followed by a rapid opening of the country to Western modernity, a process that was initially accelerated by the arrival of Americans in mid-nineteenth century (although Buruma nuances this interpretation by demonstrating that Japan's relationship with Western civilisation goes back considerably further), then embraced by the Shogunate of the time and fuelled by the desire to equal the West (Buruma 2004, 11-25, 35-50; Gravett 2004, 10). The end of World War Two was, as all know, catastrophic for Japan, with the atomic strikes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki leaving a collective trauma and further complicating Japan's relation with technology and modernity, with further complications arising from recent events such as the economic crisis of the end of the century and the sarin gas attacks by the Aum Shinrikyō cult (Napier 2005, 28-29; 2007b, 103). More recently, the 2011 tsunami and ensuing meltdown of the Fukushima nuclear plant has led to further ambivalence toward technology, nuclear power in particular. Today, the typical image of Japan projected in North America and Western Europe continues to be divided between two perspectives: on the one hand, the image of a traditional, spiritual, exotic Japan, the Japan of Van Gogh, Monet and, later Kerouac; on the other, Japan as a hyper-modern country on the cutting edge of technology (Napier 2007 45, 83, 97-98). Both images are of course over-simplified and stereotypical: the first runs close to exoticism and a conception of Japan as a haven stuck in the simplicity of the past, while the second connects to what has been dubbed "techno-orientalism," a form of orientalism which Ueno Toshiya attributes to Japan's spectacular economic rise in the late twentieth century (see also Napier 2007, 92):

If the Orient was invented by the West, then the Techno-Orient was invented by the world of information capitalism. [...] As is well known, Japanese capitalism is highly developed and has become very powerful in areas such as the US, the EU and Asia, Techno-Orientalism works there as a manipulator of the complex about Japan, in which Japan is the object of transference of the envy and contempt from other cultures and nations (Ueno, n.d.).

Despite any reservations one might consequently have regarding this too strongly demarcated perception of Japan as either pre-modern or hypermodern, there is an undeniable presence in the corpus of the dilemma involved in balancing tradition and

progress, and of the problematising of how far technology can take us (for better or for worse), both of which contribute to reinforcing this dual perception. While they do not validate essentialism in any form, they do operate as traces of this tension within one aspect of Japanese culture.

Rurouni Kenshin deals with precisely the period during which Japan began to modernise: the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Its protagonist, Kenshin, was a hidden but instrumental player in the civil war that opposed followers of the Tokugawa shogunate against those who sought to restore the Emperor to power. The manga unfolds ten years after these facts. While the major part of the series is mostly concerned with Kenshin's personal story as he struggles to atone for past crimes, there are direct references to the consequences of progress. Although Kenshin as a character is mostly in favour of the modernisation of Japan, there are nostalgic overtones in the manner in which this process is depicted, particularly where the figure of the samurai is concerned. It is typically believed that the Meiji era was the death knoll for the samurai class in Japan, but the fact is that this stratum of society had been diminishing in both presence and influence for quite some time, namely due to the peacefulness of the Edo period (Köhn 2006, 136-139). *Rurouni Kenshin* reflects this gradual downfall in several ways, namely by opposing modern warfare machinery with traditional martial arts (vol. 4, ch. 28).

Occasionally, the theme of the dialectic of tradition and progress is treated more discreetly, as a sub-text. The manga *Fruits Basket*, for instance, is set in modern day Japan, and, as mentioned previously, revolves around the ostensibly lighthearted premise of a high school girl, Tohru, who stumbles upon a distinguished family's secret, that thirteen of its members transform into Zodiac animals when hugged by a person of the opposite sex. The plot eventually takes a much darker turn, as it is revealed that the cursed members are forever connected to the family chief, a tortured, insecure young woman who is haunted by the fear of losing her power over them, and reacts by lashing out at them and abusing them both physically and psychologically. What follows is an often anguished fable portraying, on several levels, the battle between tradition and progress, between change and status quo. It is eventually revealed that Tohru herself is trapped in her past, unable to let go of the memory of her deceased parents. The end of the manga conveys the idea that change, while difficult, is nevertheless necessary: the

course is lifted, having grown brittle over time, and Tohru moves on with, of all people, the boy indirectly responsible for her mother's death. We have here an example of a reflection on change and discarding of tradition that is partly steeped in Japanese culture: indeed, *Fruits Basket* is a series which greatly emphasises its Japanese context, a fact that is even acknowledged by the series' French translators (I will return to that later), and the cursed Sohma family is presented as a traditional Japanese family. Yet this reflection manifests itself in a manner that extends past this nation-centric perspective and certainly ought not to be viewed solely as such. It prolongs the motif present in *Rurouni Kenshin*, but from a less historical, more subject-centric perspective, albeit one which is nevertheless considered as constituting a thematic node within Japanese popular visual culture.

A similar phenomenon arguably occurs in the manga *Love Hina*. This harem shōnen unfolds in late twentieth-century Tokyo. A high school student named Keitarō moves into his grandmother's old property, which has been converted into a boarding house for girls. Despite being a sub-par student, Keitarō is determined to get accepted into Tōdai (Tōkyō Daigaku, or Tokyo University), to fulfill a promise he made to a childhood friend, a little girl whose name he has forgotten. After many volumes and many failures, he is finally accepted into the university, and it is ultimately revealed, after several red herrings, that his "promise girl" is Naru, a young woman who lives in the boarding house, and with whom he has been building a relationship. Under the guise of a love story, *Love Hina* offers a discourse on tradition and change. In spite of countless complications, not least the fact that every other female tenant (and a couple of outsider girls) ends up falling for Keitarō at some point, as is the norm in harem manga, Keitarō ends up with his "promise girl," the one he was clearly supposed to be with, the one thanks to whom his life is able to form a clear, linear progression. This is a fairly banal premise in the world of romantic comedy, as countless novels and films, from all over the world, have been based on this concept of fated love. But a dimension is added to this concept within *Love Hina*, through the consistent inclusion of traditional Japanese elements. The boarding house, for instance, is an architecturally traditional establishment, complete with an *onsen* hot spring; characters regularly engage in culturally Japanese activities, such as visiting a Shinto temple on New Year's Day, putting on a play based

on *Journey to the West*, and visiting cities such as Nara and Hokkaido. It is also telling that Keitarō is given the opportunity to study archaeology in the United States and leaves for six months, only to return to Japan and to Naru. Thus, by ending up with Naru, he remains consistent not only with the traditional structure of this particular manga (that which commands that the hero end up with his childhood love), but also with the traditional culture in which he has grown up. While there is no openly cultural-national agenda in *Love Hina*, the sub-text is quite clear, and the value is squarely placed on the side of tradition.

The same equivalence between traditional culture and love is present in the manga *Ai Yori Aoshi*. Also a harem shōnen, its young male protagonist, Kaoru, is issued from a wealthy, traditional Japanese family, but has cut off all ties with them and fled from his oppressive and abusive grandfather. However, he is tracked down by Aoi, a young woman to whom he was betrothed when they were children, and who is still intent on marrying him, despite her equally old-fashioned family's current disapproval. The two are eventually permitted to move in together in Aoi's family summer house, under the supervision of a chaperone, Aoi's longtime caretaker. When several of Kaoru's female friends also move into the house, the couple pose as landlord and tenant to maintain proper appearances. The manga culminates with Aoi offering to break ties with her own family in order to marry Kaoru, only to have everything work out in the end: Kaoru inherits his family's business (although he immediately gives it to his half-brother), Aoi's relationship with her parents is salvaged, and the two finally marry. Here again, the tension between tradition and modernity is ever in the background. Although the harem lives in an ostensibly Western house, both protagonists are issued from traditional Japanese families. Kaoru may have distanced himself from his relatives and lives as a modern student, but Aoi herself is the epitome of the traditional Japanese woman and has been raised to be a proper Japanese wife. Always dressed in a kimono, she excels at cooking typical Japanese dishes, and is devoted to her fiancé to the point of subservience. The couple defy their families at several points in the story, and flirt with modernity by living together before marriage, but it must be pointed out that they do not consummate their relationship until the last volume, after their marriage has finally been decided. For all his rebellion, Kaoru, like *Love Hina*'s Keitarō, ends up with the girl he was supposed

to be with all along. The couple's ultimate conservatism is in fact defined from the beginning by their living situation: they inhabit a modern, Western house, but the latter remains the property of Aoi's parents.

The equation between Japan and tradition on the one hand, and the West and modernity on the other, is also clearer than in *Love Hina*. Aoi's quintessential Japaneseness is often pointed out, no less during a group trip to an *onsen* hot spring (another Japanese trope no harem manga would be complete without). As two other girls of the household appear dressed in their yukata (a light summer kimono), the boys admire them, one for her shapely figure, the other, an American, for her exoticism ("Wow, *gaijin* [foreigners] in yukatas look really..."); but it is Aoi, with her discretion and elegance, who draws the biggest praise ("And that's a 'wow' of a different kind...") (vol. 2, ch. 14, 84-85). Throughout the story, Aoi's biggest competition in the harem is without a doubt Tina, Kaoru's American classmate, who comes closest to seducing him. The cultural divide is made quite clear when Aoi, in volume 11, admits she envies Tina's freedom, while Tina, in volume 3, wishes she could be a *yamato nadeshiko*, a pure, traditional Japanese woman like Aoi, instead of a transcultured American. Kaoru's unwavering choosing of Aoi notwithstanding, this tension between two different worlds, one of conservatism, the other of change, pervades the series.

While the manga section of the corpus appears to mostly portray this tension from an everyday, cultural perspective, the selected anime and video games appear to focus more on the technological aspect. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that these medial forms themselves rely more ostensibly on advanced technology, or perhaps it is merely a glitch resulting from my selection (I realise I did not include any science-fiction manga, feeling that the sci-fi genre was sufficiently represented by more relevant anime and video games). However, this does not negate the fact that the motif of flux versus stasis continues to be present throughout. Indeed, technology, as an agent of radical change, is often, implicitly or not, pitted against what are perceived to be natural boundaries and norms. Nowhere is this clearer than with *Ghost in the Shell* and its soul-searching cyborg protagonist, Motoko. With her entirely cybernetic body, Motoko ponders whether she has retained her soul, or her "ghost," or whether she is in fact an entirely artificial being. At the same time, the emergence of the autonomous and sentient

artificial intelligence known as the Puppet Master appears to render the distinction almost moot, as the Puppet Master proves himself to be not only more intellectually capable than most natural humans, but also capable of desires⁴⁰. When he and Motoko merge to create a new form of consciousness, they choose to break boundaries and transcend both human and technological limitations. I have argued above, in agreement with Carl Silvio, that this outcome is not quite as radically transgressive as it may portray itself, in that Motoko's physicality remains necessary, and the merge seems to reproduce traditional gendered roles. Nevertheless, the tension between status quo and change, more specifically here between nature and technology, is clearly presented and explored.

Of course, such posthuman considerations are far from unique to Japanese anime, having been previously explored in depth by many Western works, such as Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982) and William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984), which respectively feature sentient androids and AIs. But the possibilities of technology are present in quite a different manner in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Here as well, the limits of the human are pushed against, but the process does not involve recreating the human through hardware, but rather through bioware. Traditionally, in the mecha anime genre, protagonists pilot robot ships which happen to be human-shaped, as in Nagai Go's classic *Mazinger* series; over time, the role of the robot evolved somewhat to be referred to as a "suit" rather than a ship. As Marco Pellitteri points out, this entails a set of semiotic changes, where the robot must be read as "identity-related armour plate," while the second suggests a "metallic uterus," which suggests an evolution leaning toward greater symbiosis between robot and pilot, a fusion which arguably culminates with *Evangelion*, as shown by my earlier mention of Orbaugh's analysis of intercorporation withing this series (Pellitteri 2010, 149-150). But in most mecha, the robot remains undeniably mechanical. In the first episode of *Evangelion*, however, as Shinji emerges from his first battle, he catches a glimpse of his Eva, his robot, in the mirrored façade of a building.

⁴⁰ A similar point is made in the cyberpunk manga *Gunnm*. Its heroine is an amnesiac cyborg named Gally (Alita in the English language version). Awakened in a dystopian, heavily divided world, in which an elite lives above the plebe, the latter of which often has to resort to cybernetics in order to survive, Gally undergoes soul searching similar to Motoko's regarding her artificial body and human brain. She ultimately discovers that the elite people have all, unbeknownst to themselves, undergone a procedure that has removed their brains and replaced them with electronic chips, in order to keep them docile. In other words, while Gally has a biological brain and an artificial body, these people possess an artificial brain inside a biological body. Gally, however, brushes the distinction aside.

The Eva's armour has been shattered in places and its headgear falls off, revealing a very much organic eyeball and face. Shinji's chilling scream of terror ends the episode.

Thus, the tension (and the accompanying uneasiness) in *Evangelion* arises not from the fact that the human body, and potentially human intelligence and soul, are reproducible through artificial and technological means, but rather from the fact that something other than human can be created. In other words, it is not, as in *Ghost in the Shell*, the definition of the human that is being put into question, it is instead the limits of the posthuman that are being explored. Another chilling moment occurs in episode 19 when Shinji's Eva goes berserk, displays a strange, almost ape-like behaviour, and eats the "heart" (actually an engine) of the Angel it has just killed. Notwithstanding the gore, the reason this scene is so disturbing, both to onlooking characters and to the viewer, is that the Eva spontaneously displays such viscerally "natural," or biological behaviour. Beyond the uncanniness of the life-like robot, or even that of the humanoid cyborg, a creature which we know is artificial but looks natural, the Eva displays the shock of that which ought to be artificial, but is revealed to be much more biological than we would like. The tension here is between the well-defined limits of biological life as we know it, and the complete unknown that lies beyond. The Eva is necessary, as it is the only weapon known to be capable of defeating the Angels. At the same time, characters ceaselessly wonder what exactly the Eva is, and the underlying question appears to be, in my view, what does it mean for humanity to have to rely on it? What does it mean when humanity cannot survive on its own?

One answer to this question is given by Shinji's father, whose plan all along was to launch the Human Instrumentality Project, a process that will combine all human subjectivities into one entity, thereby ensuring that no one will ever feel the pain of loneliness or miscommunication again, as all will be connected. In short, the human subject is to be obliterated. *Evangelion*, as we have seen, ends on an ambiguous note, where the viewer is left to decide for himself whether the Human Instrumentality Project succeeded or not, and whether it was a beneficial cause or not. Thus, the tension between status quo and change is maintained until the very end of the series, as is the question of whether technology, in this case bio-technology, was humanity's doom or salvation.

In certain games of the *Final Fantasy* franchise, technology is often initially portrayed as something negative in the eyes of a given faction. Thus, in *Final Fantasy VII*, the main playable character, Cloud, starts off as part of an eco-terrorist group intent on attacking the Shinra Electric Power Company, a corporation that extracts the Earth's life energy to fuel reactors, thus draining the planet's resources. Likewise, in *Final Fantasy X*, the use of machines (called "machina") is prohibited by the dominant religion; in fact, the overuse of technology and its accompanying hubris is deemed to be the reason behind a recurring cycle of cataclysms. In both games, however, the focus on technology eventually dims as new, more mystical concerns arise. However, the fact that the initial premise presents technology as the enemy reinforces the trope of opposition between tradition and progress. The tension does not occupy center stage, but it is a fixture in the expository background.

As we have seen, the opposition of tradition and change takes several forms throughout the corpus. From the implicit and explicit portrayal of Japanese cultural tradition to the outlining of the responsibilities and possibilities of science and technology, these works are connected by a thematic thread which opposes, in distinctive forms, the currents of change and status quo. Even when appearing as a sub-text, this theme manifests itself in forms which are easily apparent to the audience, even though the connection between the forms from work to work is not always automatic. The theme nonetheless operates as a visible, recognisable motif which helps bind the corpus together.

d) Fetish objects⁴¹

In this final segment of the section on a priori non-cultural recurring themes built around the node of the opposition between flux and stasis, I wish to address a subject which at first glance appears to be solely contained within the works, but actually has a significant effect not only on the reception of the latter, but also on the economics surrounding this process of reception. I wish to discuss what I have dubbed iconic, or fetish objects. After

⁴¹ Some of the manga examples in this section have been mentioned in a previously published article. See Cools 2010.

explaining the concept and giving several examples, I will explore how the portrayal of these objects, in addition to forming markers within the corpus, leads to their being marketed to fans as real objects. This in turn gives the imaginary landscape a concrete form, through this network of objects, each of which can be argued to form a static node which assists one's orientation within the flux of ever-proliferating works.

One striking element which truly pervades the corpus is the noticeable proliferation of iconic objects within the various narratives. By "iconic objects," I mean physical objects within the story that play an important, defining role, to the extent that they can come to stand as an icon for the work itself. An out-of-corpus example would be Excalibur, the sword from Arthurian legend. Such objects are easily found within the corpus, so much so that establishing a complete list would be a tedious, drawn-out exercise. A clear example would be the dragon balls from *Dragon Ball*: these magical orbs have the power to grant wishes when all seven are gathered, and they are the main focus of most of the manga's first story arcs (although they are admittedly relegated to the status of minor plot devices as the series draws to a close). Another example from the same series would be the dragon radar, a pocket watch-like object which helps detect the dragon balls, and is very often featured in the series, and so often used that its loss or damage is considered a catastrophic occurrence. Often, iconic objects have a symbolic value. Ichigo's sword and mask in *Bleach*, for instance, each stand for a different side of the character: the sword represents his soul reaper identity, while the mask represents the Hollow within him. Additionally, such objects are not limited to fantasy-imbued series, nor do they have to possess magical powers to be imbued with an iconic aura. In *Fruits Basket*, for example, Tohru keeps a baseball cap as a souvenir of a time when she was lost as a child, and a boy wearing this cap helped her find her way and then gave it to her. Although Tohru herself does not remember the boy's identity, two characters' reactions upon seeing the cap suggest that they are connected to this memory, a mystery which is only solved several volumes later. Thus, whenever the cap is shown, it stands as a reminder of this entire incident and of the possible relations between the characters. It operates as an essential narrative element in that it crystallizes a key plot point. While it arguably lacks the visually striking appeal of the more outlandish objects in more fantasy-oriented manga, attention is drawn upon it through framing and close-ups.

Iconic objects proliferate in Japanese video games. They are the items, or even in some cases characters which consistently recur from game to game within a franchise, thereby effectively branding each game as belonging to the franchise. Mushrooms and stars, along with the enemy goombas and turtles in *Mario* games are a prime example, as are pokéballs (the devices used to capture pokémon) in the *Pokémon* series, or certain tools in *Zelda* games, such as the grappling hook or the boomerang. Although *Final Fantasy* arguably makes the most radical content changes from game to game, this franchise too features recurring content elements, such as chocobos (large birds used for transportation) and moogles (cute, stuffed-animal-like creatures that perform various tasks). I realise I am using the term “objects” loosely here, but the fact is that these creatures serve object-like purposes within the narrative, in that they are function-based, as opposed to character-based. In all cases, their recurring status has rendered them inseparable from their respective franchises.

While iconic objects are present in anime (for example, Princess Tutu’s magic pendant, which enables her transformation), there is a specific type of object which deserves further attention, and which is present in manga and video games as well: clothing and accessories. Also present within manga, clothes serve to make character designs iconic. It is often pointed out that manga and anime characters have similar physiognomies within a series, and often from one series to another, particularly when the same creator is involved. This is in part due to the graphic tradition, mentioned in chapter 1, of drawing these characters with oversized eyes, which helps grant them greater expressivity (Schodt 1996, 61), and also of giving them youthful traits (or traits pertaining to neoteny, defined by Thomas Lamarre as the attribution of youthful or childish traits to adults, in this case an undersized nose and mouth and a prominent forehead (Lamarre 2011, 124-125)). Thus, clothing and accessories are often used to render characters more visually striking and unique. For example, the yellow ribbon Haruhi Suzumiya wears in her hair on quasi-permanent basis has, in a way, become her signature item, the one that differentiates her from other similar-looking heroines – such items being particularly necessary with regards to high school series, in which characters are often portrayed in uniform. Or, accessories can have the function of better defining a series as a whole, such as the characteristic body suits and hair plugs worn by the young

pilots in *Evangelion*, or the headbands all ninjas wear in *Naruto*. In the latter case, the accessory has a sentimental and symbolic function as well: when Naruto officially becomes an apprentice ninja, he wears his village's headband with great pride, and he later refers to it as a symbol of loyalty to his peers (vol. 18, p. 73-74).

There is one phenomenon through which we can see just how essential clothing and accessories have become in the mapping process of the imaginary of Japanese popular visual culture: the practice of *cosplay*. A contraction of "costume play," the term refers to the practice of dressing up, most often as a favourite anime, manga, or video game character, and gathering in a public place, most often at annual Japanese popular culture conventions, of which there are now many in North America (the phenomenon is more restricted in Europe). Through clothing and accessories, a person is able not just to become a character, but, perhaps most importantly, to be recognized as masquerading as that particular character (Winge 2006). The practice yields an iconic result, with the term "iconic" operating on two levels, using two distinct definitions. The first is the more general definition, the one I have been implicitly using so far, meaning "easily recognisable by a collectivity"; the second is the one used by Hariman and Lucaites, which incorporates to the latter definition the potential for the object (images in their case) to be appropriated, and thus potentially modified, by audiences (Hariman and Lucaites 2007, 29). In the phenomenon of cosplay, both meanings come together, as the activity both helps the person appropriate the character by becoming it (and, to a degree, modifying it, as such a transformation can never be complete, as per the non-realistic nature of the media involved), and helps the person make a statement about her specific interests, in this case which series and character within this series she particularly relates to. By dressing as a recognisable character, the person broadcasts a message about where she stands within the imaginary related to the event where she is appearing, which is most often, as has been mentioned, Japanese popular culture conventions.

My intent in this thesis is to focus on the content and phenomenology of the corpus itself, and not on the many and diverse fan practices it spawns (not least because cosplay, under other names, is a common practice at other types of conventions, most commonly Western sci-fi events, and therefore not unique to Japanese pop culture). The reason I mention cosplay at this point is that I feel it illustrates how fictional objects,

more specifically clothing and accessories but also other categories such as the ones mentioned prior (magical objects, weapons, etc.), are able to act as markers within the imaginary of Japanese popular visual culture. They act as beacons which enable audiences to quickly identify which series or franchise is being represented or referred to. In this manner, they perform as barriers against the stream of ever-proliferating works that are continuously being created and marketed. In an industry where new series and new games keep coming out, such iconic objects serve as mapping elements, which create a semblance of temporary stasis, in that they enable the formation of a mental map. They are nodes within the current, synecdoche-like landmarks that help orient the audience. In this process, the objects become fetishized, as they come to stand for more than merely themselves, for the entire series. Such fetishism is an integral part of the appropriation of the corpus and the imaginary it yields. We can thus see how flux and stasis regulate even the process of appropriation of Japanese popular visual culture.

In this section, I have attempted to demonstrate the presence of recurring themes throughout the corpus. Through accumulation and repetition, these recurrences assemble into the motifs of the fabric that is this particular imaginary of Japanese popular visual culture. These motifs, which become identifiable by the audience through repeated exposure across otherwise very different works, come to act as agents of cohesion that operate beyond these works' Japanese origin. Indeed, these themes, while occasionally connoting "Japan," are not ostensibly tied to one culture in particular. Furthermore, these binding themes are themselves connected together by the dynamic they share of flux and stasis, which pervades the corpus through different aspects.

B – Traces of "Japaneseness"

Up to this point, I have been focusing on thematic recurrences that are not explicitly expressive of Japanese culture – although the previous pages have revealed that, at times, a connection with Japan is nonetheless made, either through the presence of a pre-existing construction of Japan, or through recurrences that are connected to a conception of Japan (such as the tension between tradition and modernity). However, there are moments when Japan is explicitly referenced. These occurrences, while obvious and

uncomplicated for the most part, should be mentioned within this thesis, as they have the effect of clearly tying the corpus with its culture of origin, and create a real point of reference for the audience – a non negligible trait within the imaginary map that has been created. The process of transculturation is one which plays a strong role in the Western audience's relationship with these works, for better or for worse, and although it is my belief that there are dimensions beyond mere Orientalism in this relationship, Japanese culture is still present and active throughout this imaginary. It is therefore necessary to address its presence in the corpus.

Video games will be conspicuously mostly absent from this most of this section, as they have in fact revealed themselves to be essentially deterritorialized. The fantasy spaces in which they unfold are at times essentially acultural, as in *Pokémon* or *The Legend of Zelda* games, which take place in a succession of fictional lands that alternate between green forests and deserts, as well as tropical islands, and at times denotative of cultures that are not necessarily Japanese, such as *Professor Layton*, which unfolds in Great Britain. Exceptions to this general acknowledgement would be *The World Ends With You*, *FFX* and *FFX-2*, which will be examined as the occasion presents itself. This general absence of Japanese cultural content within games only makes the other, non-cultural motifs more important, as their role in tying the games to the imaginary at play is thereby increased.

a) Cultural everyday

In addition to the majority of video games, certain manga and anime refrain from directly or frequently directly referencing Japanese culture. Merely having the plot unfold in Japan, although it does remind the audience of the work's origin, (provided the audience is aware of it in the first place), does not equate explicitly drawing attention to that fact. *Ghost in the Shell*, for instance, while featuring characters with Japanese names, does not particularly emphasise the country it takes place in. *Naruto*, for its part, unfolds in a fictional country. My argument is that it is through brief but direct references to Japanese culture that these works create a network of recurrences that ultimately accumulates to make “Japan” into a significant motif within this transcultural imaginary (Pellitteri 2010, 120).

Often, these references consist in details of everyday life, ordinary elements which are not necessarily brought forward, but are presented in an understated, matter-of-fact manner, as part of the usual way of things. We may call them ambient signs. Taken as isolated elements, these signs are not especially effective, but their accumulation leads to “Japan” occupying a significant place in the audience's awareness. These elements include, for example, Japanese names and architecture, which the majority of the manga and anime corpus feature (with the exception of *The Rose of Versailles* and *Emma*, which take place in France and England, respectively). Additionally *The World Ends With You* features neighbourhoods of Tokyo, including the very recognizable Shibuya square, while *Final Fantasy X* and *X-2*, according to Dean Chan, incorporate architecture and dress inspired from aesthetics of Okinawa (Chan 2004, 4). Dress and attire are of course another way in which Japaneseness is present, particularly through the attire of girls and young women: school uniforms, with their immediately recognizable sailor collars, are prominent in *Fruits Basket*, *The Melancholy of Haruhi* and *Bleach*, while kimonos or yukatas are worn by certain characters or on given occasions (e.g. on New Year's Day or at the onsen) in *Love Hina*, *Fruits Basket*, *Nana*, *Ai Yori Aoshi*, and of course *Rurouni Kenshin* and *Bleach*. Most of the time, attention is not drawn to these clothes, except when they are worn for a special occasion, but their presence signals Japaneseness for the non-Japanese reader.

Another category of ambient cultural signs consists of specific activities which the characters engage in, be they everyday activities or special outings or events. Anything surrounding the preparation and consumption of food is included in this category, as food is essentially cultural. Thus, when characters prepare traditional Japanese dishes, as in *Fruits Basket*, *Nana* or *Ai Yori Aoshi*, or when Japanese cuisine is consumed and explicitly referenced, as in *Samurai Champloo*, *Dragon Ball* or *Naruto* (where ramen are recurrently mentioned, being the hero's favourite food), or even when food is merely eaten with chopsticks, the setting of the narrative is brought to mind. Additionally, there are many activities, several of which are recurring from one work to another, which end up becoming a marker of Japanese culture through sheer accumulation. Visits to the *onsen* hot springs constitute one such activity; indeed, they are featured in *Ai Yori Aoshi*, *Fruits Basket*, *Naruto*, *Evangelion*, *Samurai Champloo*,

Bleach, and *Love Hina*, and are thereby portrayed as a frequent activity in Japan; through sheer repetition, the onsen becomes a trope of Japanese popular culture. The same goes for school festivals, prominent in most series involving students, namely *Haruhi*, *Fruits Basket*, *Ai Yori Aoshi* and *Love Hina*. Other cultural phenomena include the specific treatment of holidays, particularly New Year's Day, which is marked by a visit to the Shinto temple in several series. Also present is the trope of the Japanese idol singer, featured in *Perfect Blue* as the protagonist's initial occupation, and in *FFX-2*, as Chan points out: the main playable character, Yuna, is sporadically transformed into a singer, wearing an outfit that combines innocence and sexiness, and performs in front of delirious fans toward the end of the game, referencing a cultural phenomenon that is common in Eastern Asia (Chan 2004, 5).

One phenomenon which is indicative of the growing presence of Japanese culture within this transnational imaginary is the increasingly frequent inclusion of endnotes in recent translations. This especially applies to French translations, particularly those by the editor Delcourt, which are sold namely in France, Belgium and Quebec, and include *Fruits Basket* and *Nana*. Japanese idiosyncrasies, such as suffixes and appellations, customs, untranslated terms, and even visual puns are thus explained to the reader. For instance, in one panel of *Nana*, a scale literally falls out of s character's eye, in a visual rendition of a Japanese expression which is roughly equivalent to “losing one's blinders,” i.e. seeing things as they are (vol. 1, p. 27). An endnote helpfully explains this. Similarly, the first time a character calls out “Otsukaresama”, an endnote explains that Japanese set phrase is what one tells someone who had just finished working or has just performed an arduous task (vol. 7, p. 100); this is done for other Japanese set phrases such as “Ohayō” (“good morning”) and “Okaerinasai” (“welcome home”). In the same vein, the most recent translation of *Dragon Ball* is noticeably more faithful to the Japanese original than the first one, which tended to be quite liberal if comparison between the two is anything to go by. The new translation, for instance, maintains one character's (Chichi) strange oral expressions and explains, this time in a footnote, that she originally speaks a dialect from Osaka, which is meant to contrast against other characters' speech (vol. 1. p. 15). These notes not only increase the reader's knowledge of Japan, but also draw attention to

the presence of Japan in these works, thereby leading to a construction of “Japan” in the reader's mind.

I am aware that the mere presence of such signs indicating where a narrative unfolds does not necessarily point to the work's origin. For instance, there are many signs to remind us that *The Rose of Versailles* unfolds in France, yet this does not mean readers end up mistaking it for a French bande dessinée. What permits the creation of a “Japan” motif within the imaginary landscape transferred by these works is the sheer repetition and accumulation of these signs, which, combined with other, non-cultural motifs, contributes to the corpus' cohesiveness.

b) Myth and history: Tropes of Japanese traditional culture

In this section, I will examine the manner in which tropes of traditional Japanese culture are transferred and, in some cases, perpetuated in the Western mind through the corpus. Examples of this are numerous. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, I will focus primarily on two tropes: the recurring presence of the Chinese legend *Journey to the West*, which I have previously mentioned in chapter two, but which I will quickly recap here, and the figure of the samurai.

Some of the works within the corpus incorporate Japanese culture into their narrative in ways that go beyond merely portraying everyday Japanese culture through the inclusion of ambient signs. Indeed, some works explicitly explore Japanese history. Such is the case, for example, of *Rurouni Kenshin*: set ten years into the Meiji Era, it makes a point of exploring the lingering tensions following the end of the shogunate and the beginning of the modernisation of Japan. Equally historical, albeit less straightforward is *Samurai Champloo*: set in the Edo era, it makes frequent historical references, citing elements such as the existence of an underground Christian community (episode 19), or featuring the artist Hishikawa Moronobu (episode 5). At the same time, the anime complicates its own historic dimension, as it frequently lapses into anachronism and satire: indeed, the series regularly resorts to a collage of sorts by borrowing elements from hip-hop culture, such as beat-boxing, break-dancing and graffiti (not to mention its hip-hop opening soundtrack). In some cases, being able to differentiate fact from anachronism or invention requires a fairly in-depth knowledge of

Japanese culture; for instance, many non-Japanese viewers have probably had to look up Hishikawa online in order to find out whether he had really existed.

The current ease with which we can inform ourselves plays, I believe, a part in how Japanese culture is not only perceived but also recognized in the corpus. For instance, it is now widely known by *Dragon Ball* fans that the series is based on the Chinese legend *Journey to the West*. I have already examined in detail, in Chapter 2, the elements which make this connection obvious to anyone familiar with the legend. It is extremely likely that most Japanese readers of the original run of *Dragon Ball* were well aware of the manga's inspiration, as the legend is well known in Japan (proof of that being its recurring presence in the corpus, as previously demonstrated). But what of non-Asian readers? New readers of the series today can uncover the fact quite easily, as a quick internet search will reveal it immediately; but the process was not as automatic when the manga was first translated. Although I first read *Dragon Ball* around 2002, at a time when regular internet access was already fairly common in urban areas, it took at least a year for me to learn that a legend was the source of the manga – not necessarily because the information was not available, but because people at the time did not automatically google everything as they do today.

But even after having learnt of the legend behind *Dragon Ball*, it was not until later that I became aware of how widely known *Journey to the West* is in Japan, when I came across a reference to it in *Love Hina*. As I mentioned, in volume 5, the characters put on a play based on the legend, which would have struck a chord with any reader of *Dragon Ball*. Around that time, I began reading *Naruto*, and was struck when a character, aptly named Sarutobi (“saru” means “monkey”) summons Enma the Monkey King, whose name is obviously a contraction between Son Goku, the Monkey King, and the Buddhist divinity Enma (who is also featured in *Dragon Ball*), and who appears in the shape of a monkey wielding a pole similar to Goku's. A few years later, I happened upon *Saiyuki*, a manga not included in the corpus but which I have mentioned in passing, as it is openly based on *Journey to the West*, albeit, you will recall, with guns and homoerotic undertones. A few years later still, I dragged my future husband to a screening of Satoshi Kon's *Paprika*, where we witnessed a sequence in which the main character morphs into several mythological or popular figures, including a mermaid, a Sphinx and... Son Goku,

recognizable thanks to his pole, his cloud and, as I knew by then, his tiger-striped suit and golden headband, accessories which *Dragon Ball*'s Goku does not wear, but which his counterparts in *Love Hina* and *Saiyuki* do, and which I had by then seen in a plethora of other visual allusions to *Journey to the West*, on paper, celluloid and film. This personal discovery of the ubiquity of *Journey to the West* is, I feel, quite illustrative of the way many tropes of Japanese historical or mythological culture are discovered and absorbed by non-Japanese audiences. I am aware, of course, that *Journey to the West* is a Chinese work; yet its presence in so many works of Japanese popular visual culture makes it a trope within the latter. This trope makes itself manifest in enough works that over time it becomes identified as a motif, even in pre-internet days or by those with only a mild interest in Japanese culture. Different allusions sharpen the main traits of the recurrences (e.g., Son Goku the monkey is usually the main figure within the reference), even as they offer different versions of them (Son Goku's appearance changes from version to version, as he is shown sometimes wearing a crown, sometimes a tiger-striped garment, and sometimes neither), thereby increasing the figure's presence and influence. Thus the trope is constituted.

I have used *Journey to the West* as the example which was most obviously present within my corpus. However, I could also have chosen the legend of Urashima Taro, which is referenced in both *Love Hina* and *Cowboy Bebop*, albeit more indirectly. My aim was to illustrate the way in which recurrences make traditional tropes within Japanese popular culture emerge, without any particular effort on behalf of the audience. These tropes then form a network between the different series, and connect them into a relational whole, even when the series have very little in common, content-wise (and one would be hard-pressed to find more dissimilar works than *Love Hina* and *Cowboy Bebop*). Thus a motif is born than transcends the individual works and becomes a ballast in and of itself. But this particular type of trope, because it is a traditional legend, continually connotes its culture of origin (in this case, it connotes Asianness, given its Chinese origin and the fact that it has been so widely adopted as part of Japan's

traditional imaginary), in the same way that the myth of Sisyphus is forever tied to Greek antiquity, even as it has been reappropriated for new purposes⁴².

I would now like to explore another way in which conventionally traditional Japanese culture is present within the corpus: the figure of the samurai.

In the next chapter, I will examine a content motif very present in combat shōnen manga: *shugyō*, or the process of training and preparation for battle. I will partially address this motif now because it has cultural implications. The term “shugyō” is borrowed from the lexicon surrounding the samurai (Murphy 2006), and as such it implicitly alludes to this figure. Indeed, the samurai aura appears to be a common underlying trope within combat shōnen. In series such as *Rurouni Kenshin*, which is set in the Meiji period historically associated with the gradual decline of the samurai class (although in fact, this decline began much earlier, as we shall see), and *Bleach*, where shinigami (soul reapers) are outfitted with kimonos and fight with blades, the allusions are either explicit or bordering on the latter. But even in the case of *Dragon Ball*, where aliens in a fictive universe prefer hand-to-hand combat to swords, and in *Naruto*, which unfolds in an equally fictive setting populated by ninjas whose powers border on the magical, an argument can be made to demonstrate the underlying presence of at least the “samurai spirit,” in the absence of the historical samurai, namely because of the presence of ritualized shugyō. But what does shugyō, in its essence, truly seek to accomplish in this context?

Within these four shōnen series, shugyō’s primary aim is of course to make the character stronger, but it appears to seek to accomplish this through inner harmony and control over one’s spiritual energy: training is geared not exclusively toward toughening the body, but also, even primarily, in sharpening the senses and strengthening inner resolve and concentration. In this manner, asceticism, or severe self-discipline, does not

⁴² Admittedly, it can happen that such traditional stories and legends evolve beyond their culture of origin, when they become so deeply braided into other cultural imaginaries that their origin slips out of collective consciousness. Such is the case, for example, of *Little Red Riding Hood*, which, despite having been originally published in France, is no longer spontaneously associated with this particular culture, so rampant is it in Europe and North America. Such is also arguably the case of *Journey to the West* in Japan, where the legend appears to have been so widely disseminated and retold that I am tempted to speculate that its Chinese origin is occasionally forgotten, especially since the characters have been given Japanese names in the Japanese version.

solely concern physical hardships, but also inner psychological and spiritual balance. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, there is a strong psychological dimension to battle in shōnen manga, and a fighter's state of mind is often determining in the outcome of a fight.

Such inner balance is rather reminiscent of the Zen-Buddhism-inspired aspect of the samurai doctrine as it is historically known. Indeed, the most telling evocation, in *Naruto*, of Zen-Buddhism as practiced by samurai, is to be found at the beginning of the Pain story arc, when protagonist Naruto attempts to master *senjustu* by becoming one with nature: he is made to sit in the traditional position of meditation, striving to attain total immobility and clarity of mind (vol. 44, ch. 410; vol. 45, ch. 500). As Aude Fieschi explains, while Zen meditation appears at first glance to be at odds with the battling lifestyle of the samurai, Zen-Buddhism was in fact quickly picked up by this warrior class⁴³, due to meditation's potential for clearing the mind and thus granting greater fluidity to one's combat technique (Fieschi 2006, 106-107). Such mental clarity is visually and conceptually illustrated in the glimpses we are given of *Bleach*'s Ichigo's inner world, an imaginary, abstract space where he comes face-to-face with a personalization of his own sword, and must learn to tame it and know it as he knows himself (vol. 8, ch. 66; vol. 13, ch. 110-111). In a later encounter with his sword and his own dark side, Ichigo learns to rely on his combative instinct, rather than on strategy or on mere strength (vol. 25, ch. 218-221): in *Bleach*, clarity of mind to the point of emptiness gives a fighter the ultimate edge. This conceptualisation goes beyond analysis and rationality, and instead appears to dip into the quasi-mystical, granting the combatant abilities which border on the divine. This is reminiscent of the (fictionalised) figure of Miyamoto Musashi, the seventeenth-century samurai whose role in turning swordsmanship into an art have turned into a fictional trope, through novels (most notably Yoshikawa Eiji's 1935 *Musashi*), films, television series, and of course manga (such as Inoue Takahiko's 1998 *Vagabond*). Indeed, Yoshikawa's novel, for one, highlights the spiritual dimension of Musashi's journey as a swordsman.

⁴³ There appears to be some disagreement regarding the relationship between Buddhism and bushidō: indeed, as Köhn points out, the *Hagakure*, an 18th century collection of primary samurai precepts, disapproves of Buddhist practice (Köhn 2006, 137). Nevertheless, the practice was apparently adopted by a significant number of swordsmen, enough for the association to become a trope of the imaginary – which, is ultimately what I wish to highlight here.

To be sure, the transposition of represented samurai values onto popular culture is far from direct and transparent. It could be argued, in fact, that certain facets of shōnen manga and anime appear to go against the samurai emphasis on self-control. For instance, although Naruto, as a ninja, is initially bound to follow a code of self-restraint and self-denial, through which emotions and personal concerns must take a back seat to one's duty, he rejects this code early on, and instead overtly bases his *nindō*, his "way of the ninja," on passionate determination and the refusal to admit defeat in any form (vol. 4, ch. 88, p. 117-118). Rather than being analytical and level-headed in battle, he triumphs over his adversaries through raw power and sheer will: it is passion, one would argue, not self-control, that moves him. Similarly, in *Dragon Ball*, it is only by experiencing extreme anger (provoked by intense despair or by witnessing the death of a loved one) and losing control over one's emotions that Saiyan⁴⁴ warriors are able to transcend their level and morph into a Super Saiyan (vol. 27, p. 63-73; vol. 34, p. 120-172). Such examples appear to go against the Zen-Buddhist principles of the samurai, as victory in such cases is attained by giving into what appear to be primal urges, or passions in the Stoic sense. Then again, without getting into a lengthy argument regarding Buddhist doctrine and philosophy, one could counter-argue that this is a matter of transcending passions, rather than submitting to them: the above example of Ichigo clearing his mind and finding his "combative instinct" certainly seems to lend itself to such an interpretation. Furthermore, as we have seen, even the volatile Naruto is eventually forced to practice literal meditation, while the Saiyans eventually learn to transform into Super Saiyans and remain in that state without being angry or agitated (vol. 33, p. 69). Thus, even for the most enflamed characters, there is an obligatory process of discipline and emotional asceticism.

Perhaps some will accuse me of being too quick to link this type of discipline to the figure of the samurai, and will argue that, by doing so, I am perpetuating a form of stereotyping of Japanese culture. Indeed, don't all groups of individuals taking part in a physical activity, be it combat or sport, submit to some form of rigorous training? Why bring up the samurai figure, simply because I am dealing with a Japanese corpus? Surely

⁴⁴ *Dragon Ball*'s protagonist Goku is eventually revealed to be a Saiyan, an alien who was sent to Earth as a baby – a revelation that takes the series away from *Journey to the West* and brings it closer to *Superman*.

self-control and reflection are not forms of conditioning unique to Japan, nor to Zen-Buddhism? However, the figure of the samurai is suggested not just by shugyō and the spiritual energy it seeks to harness, but by a myriad of other connotative elements. As mentioned, samurai are explicitly present in *Kenshin*, and *Bleach*'s warriors clearly visually evoke samurai through their garb and choice of weapons. Furthermore, while ninja are to be distinguished from samurai, as they are in *Naruto* (where samurai are also present), both figures remain tropes of “Japaneseness” within the European and North American imaginaries, and cross-contamination between the two is not surprising. It is on the level of these imaginaries that the figure of the samurai is connected with the representations of shugyō as ascetics and meditation: such practices are not unique to the samurai way, yet it is my argument that they remain strongly associated to it through representation. An article by Stephen Köhn on Koike Kazuo and Kojima Gōseki's celebrated manga *Lone Wolf and Cub* (1970-1976) is helpful in explaining why this is.

I will not elaborate too long on *Lone Wolf and Cub*, given that I chose to omit it from my corpus, due to its *gekiga* status, despite the fact that it is a long-standing influential manga (indeed, it was my intent to focus on story manga). Set in 17th century Japan, during the Edo period (1603-1868), it follows the travels of Ogami Ittō, former executioner for the Shogun, a disgraced samurai who seeks vengeance against those who framed him and murdered his family. As Köhn writes, the manga perpetuates certain ideals surrounding samurai: shugyō and meditation, a disciplined iron will, total control of emotions to the point of cold-heartedness, a sixth sense for battle, and, in the case of Ittō's son Daigorō, unfailing loyalty (Köhn 2006, 131-133); Ittō is also clearly driven by a strong sense of honour, as the manga relates his quest for revenge. Such values coincide with those outlined by Fieschi in her analysis of bushidō, as explained by Nitobe Inazo in his 1905 English-language book *Bushido, the Soul of Japan*, itself inspired from the *Hagakure*, a collection of precepts compiled by the samurai Yamamoto Tsunetomo and his student in the eighteenth century: the primary samurai values are said to be, in decreasing order of importance, rectitude, courage (particularly in the face of death), honour, courtesy, sincerity, and loyalty (Fieschi 2006, 25-47). The importance of rectitude and courage in particular is stressed, and both require the self-discipline that has come to be associated with the samurai.

However, I am not particularly interested here in establishing whether the portrait of the samurai or samurai-like figure in shōnen manga is accurate or not. Indeed, it is uncertain whether the very values prescribed in the *Hagakure* and explained to “Westerners” by authors such as Nitobe and Fieschi (and many others) were themselves accurately applied. Indeed, as Köhn demonstrates in his article, although *Lone Wolf and Cub* has been praised by fans for its authenticity, the portrait it paints of the 17th century samurai is far from exact: in reality, Köhn writes, samurai tradition began its decline in the 15th century, as bushidō was abandoned in favour of a more idle, merchant lifestyle (Köhn 2006). The *Hagakure* was thus written in reaction to this decline, as a means of preserving samurai values; this prescriptive ambition of the *Hagakure* acts as a first filter of distortion, as it establishes the work’s aim to, at best, hold on to a fleeting era or, in a more critical interpretation, recreate something that has already passed. In works such as Nitobe’s, which aims to explain bushidō to “Westerners,” another potential distortion arises, as the author draws parallels between bushidō and Japanese thought: this type of national generalization, regardless of whether it is in any way overtly accurate, almost inevitably leads to schematization, which is then understood in an overly literal manner – thus leading to the formation of cultural tropes and, when taken further, cultural clichés. Also, it must be noted that the figure of samurai, and bushidō as a whole, have been put forward by Japanese cultural and political forces themselves, in what has alternately and sometimes simultaneously been a form of self-Orientalism (a manner of presenting oneself to the Other) (Napier 2007, 84) and a manner of imposing a national self-definition as early as the late 1880s (Buruma 2004, 55). Thus we can see how the figure of the samurai exists in a distorted form which long predates our corpus. Indeed, I use the term “figure” here in the sense suggested by Bertrand Gervais, as an entity which exists in the imaginary almost independently of the works from which it stems, as it is the result of one’s intimate (and yet cumulatively collective) capture and appropriation of the latter, as well as the result, I would add, of its multiple and partially overlapping incarnations (Gervais 2007, 34, 58).

In other words, culture and its tropes, for better or for worse, function as a cyclical, self-feeding process. We see it clearly at work in the case of the samurai figure in combat shōnen. At this point, I must add that this figure is present not just in shōnen

manga, but also in other parts of the corpus. It is, for instance, alluded to in *Love Hina*, in the guise of the character Motoko, a young girl who trains in kendo and whose family owns a dojo. Always dressed in traditional hakama pants and often wielding a wooden shinai, Motoko is portrayed as an archetypically proud, cold girl, obsessed with honour, and quick to avenge any perceived slight with a blow from her weapon. But the samurai figure is most present, unsurprisingly, in *Samurai Champloo*, as both male leads are expert swordsmen, one a self-taught ruffian, the other a disgraced member of a dojo. In these respects they go against some traditional samurai values, such as loyalty; furthermore, Mugen, the ruffian, exerts consistently poor control over his emotions. His acolyte, Jin, however, does display the lack of emotion expected from samurai, and is eventually revealed to have left his dojo for honourable reasons; additionally, both men appear to possess a sixth sense in battle, and Mugen undergoes shugyō in episode ten, training his chi in order to defeat a particularly skilled foe. Notions of rigour, austerity and coldness are thus maintained, and thus the figure of the samurai is perpetuated by its presence in Japanese popular visual culture, which reinforces pre-existing (mis)conceptions. Indeed, there is already a prior, and perhaps unavoidable bias on behalf of Western audiences, which is strengthened as they consume these works which contain a samurai figure that has existed and been propagated independently of the works themselves. However, *Samurai Champloo* presents these tropes alongside other elements, which we will see can potentially subvert these tropes.

Through the examples of *Journey to the West* and the figure of the samurai, we have seen how Japanese historico-cultural tropes can either be discovered or reinforced through their presence in the corpus. Whereas *Journey to the West* was relatively little known to the general Western public, readers of manga and viewers of anime can now easily recognize allusions to it; the figure of the samurai, on the other hand, was already present in a distorted form and continues to operate as a subtext within certain parts of the corpus. Such tropes contribute to adding to a pre-existing notion of “Japan,” with the always existing possibility that they may alter it, while this proves not to be the case where the samurai is concerned. However, the previously noted self-feeding cycle of distortion is neither endless nor inevitable, as *Samurai Champloo* shows. Indeed, the

latter series is very much self-aware, in that it does not mindlessly recycle preconceptions of Japan, but instead plays upon them. This is evident, for example, in the plethora of anachronisms and false information sprinkled throughout the anime, which I mentioned at the beginning of this section, and to which we now return. The result is that the series willingly plays on the construct of “Japan,” but blurs the lines so that, oftentimes, the viewer less familiar with Japanese historical culture will not be quite certain as to where the truth lies. This is particularly clear in episode 12: consisting mostly of a recap of the first half of the series, it is interspersed with sometimes non sequitur footnotes about Japanese culture and history, namely the fate of artist Hishikawa, the sexual mores of Edo, and the adoption of Zen by the Beat Generation. Through these offbeat footnotes, the series pokes fun at itself, and playfully acknowledges that it constitutes a commentary on Japanese history by precisely providing commentary that is so explicit that it manages to feel incongruous: these informative segments break with the narrative format we expect from an anime series, and thereby constitute, in a way, a commentary on commentary. In this manner, the series reminds its viewers not to take its historical scope too seriously, or with a grain of salt. Thus, *Samurai Champloo* encourages a relativisation of one’s conception of Japanese historical tropes, even as it perpetuates the trope of the samurai – indeed, for all the series’ self-directed irony, it is clear that Jin and Mugen’s raw skill with the sword and samurai-like persona are intended to be part of the anime’s appeal. We thus once again find ourselves facing a dynamic of flux and stasis, between pre-existing, presumed stable tropes, and those forces that would attempt to question and modify them. The stasis provides markers allowing one to navigate the “Japanese” cultural space, while the flux of self-reference and potential deviation allows for the possibility of continued interest and deeper knowledge of Japanese culture.

c) Depictions of foreigners and East/West dichotomy

One final manner in which the corpus established itself as pertaining to a distinct, identifiable cultural space is through the portrayal of non-Japanese characters. One’s first instinct, in dealing with this question, would be to turn toward works which take place in a different country than Japan, such as *The Rose of Versailles*, which unfolds in France, or *Emma*, which is set in England. However, although these works do indulge in

exoticism, such as lovingly drawn historical outfits and explained customs, the fact that they are also historically-oriented manga, i.e. works that are set within a past era, tends to make this a historical exoticism, rather than a national-cultural one. There is a form of fetishism, but it is one which is more linked to the historical distance, rather than the geographical distance. In other words, these works are no more nation-culturally fetishistic than historical manga set in Japan, such as *Rurouni Kenshin* or *Samurai Champloo*, or a French film set in Louis XIV's Versailles; the difference is that they focus on a different time *and* place. Although there are moments of complete inaccuracy, such as, in *Emma*, a recurrent Indian character who arrives in London with his suite of elephants and dancing girls, it is quite clear that this is all done for the fanciful pleasure of drawing these things, rather than solely a caricatural rendering of foreignness (which must be relativized to begin with, as all the other characters in *Emma*, being English, are "foreign" to the Japanese reader in the first place).

More interesting is the portrayal of foreign characters in series which primarily feature an overtly Japanese cast. Indeed, such characters are fairly frequently featured, but what is most striking is the ways in which they are represented as different from Japanese characters. Before examining the various examples of this, I need to briefly address the issue of ethnicity, cultural odour, and *mukokuseki*, concepts which were briefly touched upon in chapter one. It is often pointed out that characters in manga or anime "don't look Japanese," with their round eyes, pointed nose, and often non-black hair colour. This had led some, including Iwabuchi Koichi, to proclaim that these works arrive to minimise their Japanese "cultural odour," and to instead pass for *mukokuseki*, or nationless, in the same way as Japan has been most renowned in the postwar era for exporting electronic goods, which are *mukokuseki* by excellence (Iwabuchi 2002, 28). This claim, however, is open to criticism. For one thing, the above sections have, I believe, amply demonstrated that there are in fact many Japanese cultural markers present within Japanese popular visual culture, ranging from names to customs and cultural references. Furthermore, as Marco Pellitteri points out, Iwabuchi appears to implicitly equate nationlessness with Caucasianness and an ensuing international appeal of works featuring this particular supposedly "neutral flavour" (Pellitteri 2010, 117-118). Such a conflation is ultimately contradictory, and problematically sets up Caucasianness as the

standard, in much the same way that the “West” tends to be established as the neutral norm within many cultural analyses. Not only that, but this alleged Caucasian appearance is itself a relative aspect: indeed, it has been pointed out that characters from bande dessinée or American comics are not necessarily realistic, ethnically speaking or otherwise: see for example characters' enormous noses in *Asterix*, or tiny dot eyes in some of Craig Thompson's work. The rendition of characters in manga and anime can thus be understood as a similar stylisation, an iconic choice (Davis, Barber, and Bryce 2010, 286-287). In this fictional world, a character can be Japanese and have naturally blonde hair, just as a Belgian can have tiny eyes and a strange, upturned hairstyle (*Tintin*): the question of ethnicity does not present itself to the Japanese reader. Nevertheless, to the non-Japanese reader, this specific rendition of characters had come to signify Japaneseness, in that it has become associated with manga and anime: it has become, in the eyes of Western manga readers, their signature style. In this way, far from being mukokuseki, these characters' appearance constitute a clear visual motif within the corpus, one so striking and omnipresent that it hardly requires much further analysis.

The physical portrayal of foreigners is usually not visually differentiated from that of Japanese characters, but *Samurai Champloo* constitutes a major exception (for some out-of-corpus exceptions, see *Ibid.*, 286). Episode 6 introduces a Dutchman, a Japanophile before his time, who initially pretends to be Japanese. However, his very tall stature, red hair, blue eyes, prominent nose and strange accent, which is detectable even for non-Japanese speakers, immediately invalidate this claim. This character is both a reference to the Japonisme that would later emerge in Western Europe, and quite possibly a jab at self-proclaimed Western otaku. In episode 19, a man who claims to be the grandson of Francis Xavier, the Spanish Catholic missionary who introduced Christianity to Japan. However, he is revealed to be a fraud, a Japanese wearing a fake nose and speaking in a fake accent in order to appear foreign. In both these examples, foreigners are clearly physically differentiated from Japanese characters, often in a caricatural manner.

However, as stated above, *Samurai Champloo* is an exception in the corpus. Most of the time, foreigners are not physically different from others. *Ai Yori Aoshi's* American Tina may be blonde, but we have seen that this is not necessarily proof of non-

Japaneseness in this universe. *Fruits Basket*'s Momiji, who is half-Japanese and half-German, is also blonde, but most of his Japanese cousins have unusual hair colour, ranging from red to silver (although this trait is addressed and explained as a by-product of the Zodiac curse). *Evangelion*'s Asuka is also half-German, but her red hair is not necessarily less Japanese than Rei's silver-blue locks (although it is later revealed that Rei is not entirely human, but only towards the end of the series; prior to that, no one makes any remarks regarding her appearance, and her Japanese name raises no questions as to her presumed origins). In all of these examples, nothing in the characters' physiognomy seems to set them apart from Japanese characters. Instead, the difference is sometimes portrayed in their speech and behaviour. Momiji's first appearance, for instance, has him speaking in German and kissing Tohru, the female protagonist, on the cheek on their first meeting, which greatly flusters her and has her marvelling at foreign mores. Asuka is shown speaking (very approximate) German in two scenes, as well as expressing her dislike of certain Japanese customs, such as sharing bathwater. Tina, for her part, is given the rather strange habit of sneaking up behind other girls and grabbing their breasts in jest (a trait which never fails to raise eyebrows among Western readers) and, as previously mentioned, is portrayed as more brazen and liberated in contrast with the demure, traditionally Japanese female protagonist, Aoi.

Most of the time, however, the difference is discussed more than it is shown. In spite of awkward characterisations such as Tina's breast-grabbing⁴⁵, cultural difference is often treated more delicately in the corpus than one might expect based on the former example. Indeed, Tina is eventually allowed to express the pain of being an American who has spent most of her life in Japan: she is not considered a real American in the United States, but neither is she treated as a Japanese in Japan. Her love for Kaoru leads her to wish she had been born Japanese, which she believes might have made their relationship easier (vol. 3, ch. 23, p. 86-87). Similarly, the character Reira in *Nana*, who is half-American and moved to Japan as a child, is shown dealing with childhood bullies, who made fun of her speech (vol. 18, p. 179-183). As an adult, now the lead singer of a popular Japanese rock band, she hides her American origins from the public, but for

⁴⁵ Kamio Yoko's *Hana Yori Dango* is not part of my corpus. However, if it were, I would mention at this point the character Thomas, a handsome German who initially charms the female protagonist with his exoticism, until he displays his utter lack of table manners.

different reasons: she fears that if people knew, they would think it was normal for her to be beautiful and talented, implying that they would praise her less because of this apparent “unfair advantage,” and outwardly stating that they will admire her more if they believe she is purely Japanese (vol. 6, ch. 19, p. 97). Foreignness is thus viewed alternatively as a burden and as something to be envied, but always present is the notion of being somewhat out-of-place. At other times, characters merely mention in passing the specificities of foreign culture: still in *Nana*, when two girls discuss the idea of moving in together, one of them excitedly points out that they would be doing “just like foreigners do,” and a footnote elaborates on this comment (vol. 2, ch. 2, p. 73). Or sometimes, it is Japanese cultural specificity that is singled out: in *Love Hina*, when Keitarō is told by his crush “I might love you...maybe,” he complains that “only a Japanese girl would say something like that” (vol. 10, ch. 79, n.p.).

I will not attempt to entirely disentangle the ambivalent manner in which foreignness is portrayed through these different examples. While Tina's pain as a “third culture child” is framed so as to elicit sympathy from the reader, she ultimately loses in love to the traditionally Japanese Aoi; indeed, we have seen that the latter is consistently presented as the most desirable, a feminine ideal. Reira's bullied past is also meant to elicit sympathy, but at the same time, she fears her foreignness will be perceived as an unfair advantage, which implies an inferiority complex vis-à-vis Westerners on behalf of her Japanese fans and, by extension, of the Japanese in general. We can see that the portrayal of foreignness in these works is indeed complex in places, while it can be merely humorously caricatural in other. But what interests me most here, as elsewhere, is how this is perceived by non-Japanese readers and viewers.

The main consequence of the representation of foreignness in these works is that it highlights their cultural specificity, in the same way as Keitarō's comment about Japanese women reminds readers that this story is taking place in a culture different from their own. Indeed, Western readers find themselves in the position of reading or viewing works in which they are perceived as foreign or different, sometimes in skewed ways, such as in the case of *Samurai Champloo*'s Dutchman or *Ai Yori Aoshi*'s Tina. The effect is akin to looking at oneself in a distorting mirror, keeping in mind that there are at least two deforming factors at work here: the transcultural space, which, as mentioned in a

previous section, is never transparent and yields to both skewed representation and perception, and the media of manga and anime themselves, which lend themselves more easily than others to caricature and distortion. What stands out is how foreignness is highlighted within the corpus, thereby crystallizing both the cultural distance and the transcultural dimension of the act of reading or viewing these works in the West, and potentially leading to a reflection on the intricacies of such a process. Thus, the portrayal of foreignness in these works both highlights the limitations of transculturality (as the portrayal appears manifestly distorted) and its potential for opening up new avenues of exchange. Foreignness becomes a motif in itself, one that is indicative of the transcultural process at hand, of the constructs inevitably present in such a process and of the manner in which these constructs can be negotiated: flux and stasis operate at this level of cultural difference and cultural dialogue.

To conclude on this sub-section on culturally tinted content, I would like to perform a variation on Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Foucault begins by distinguishing internal (or phenomenological) space, which is constituted by a subject's intimate feelings, impressions and reactions to his environment, and external space, which is the ever-changing, ever-heterogeneous environment in which our existence unfolds – the “real outside world,” if you will. Heterotopias, which are part of the external space, are spaces where “all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (Foucault 1984, 231). Heterotopias are thus a paradoxical space, a counter-space, a liminal space of distortion, where the link with other, dominant, “regular” spaces is not quite severed, but definitely skewed and twisted. Examples of heterotopias for Foucault would be cemeteries and brothels, but also more socially benign places like ships and gardens: these are spaces which are like distorting mirrors, in that they reflect other existing places, yet are undeniably of a different nature. Another key characteristic of heterotopias is that they contain and reunite contradictory elements: Foucault's most evocative example here is that of the mirror image, in which the subject is both undeniably there, and undeniably not there. Foucault's heterotopias are always real, physical places, but I find that the concept can quite easily be transferred over to internal phenomenological space. Indeed, Foucault points out that internal space,

which is made of our perceptions and impressions, is forever changing and shifting (in spite of the fact that it is regulated by a single entity, the subject). (Trans)cultural space, as I conceive of it, pertains to both external space, because it is created by external factors and actions, and internal space, because it is, at the same time, a construct, something that is pieced together by subjective perception and considered through a filter. Having postulated this, I would argue that the transcultural space generated by manga, anime and Japanese video games represents an internal heterotopia from the perspective of the non-Japanese reader. Indeed, the multiple traces of Japaneseness, as well as the portrayal of foreignness, both of which are distorted in their own ways, wind up creating a transcultural space which at its core represents cultural realities, yet removes their portrayal from reality, while still claiming some connections with the latter. It is not, in short, a space where cultural limits are irresponsibly played with: it is a heterotopia not because the norms do not apply anymore, but because the norms are still around, yet are not quite the same. In other words, the “Japan” present in the corpus, although it is a distorted portrayal of Japan, is nevertheless not entirely without relation to the latter: the Japanese elements presented in these works are real, it is the focus placed on them that can potentially exaggerate their importance or place within Japanese culture in the eyes of the audience.

In this manner, one can liken the relationship between the non-Japanese reader/viewer/gamer and Japanese popular culture to that which Wendy Chun perceives between users and cyberspace as characterized in cyberpunk, and which she names “high tech Orientalism.” Chun points out that cyberpunk novels frequently fetishize Far Eastern Asia, and Japan in particular, by gleefully portraying these regions as technologically dominant in the not-so-distant future – and, in a genre based on the celebration of cyber-technologies, such domination has inevitably positive connotations. As Chun writes: “High tech Orientalism is pleasurable – it offers the pleasure of exploring, the pleasure of ‘learning,’ and the pleasure of being somewhat overwhelmed, but ultimately ‘jacked in.’” (Chun 2002, 250). The heterotopia that is cyberspace is thus represented as a “navigable space,” “pockmarked by racial and cultural differences, which may be vaguely terrifying, but are ultimately readable and negotiable” (*Ibid.*, 249). The non-Japanese consumer of Japanese popular visual, I argue, considers the object of her leisure in much the same

manner: as something which is fraught with potentially destabilizing cultural differences which are nonetheless ultimately perceived as existing only to be decrypted and understood. Chun distinguishes high tech Orientalism from the Orientalism famously analysed by Edward Said, as high tech Orientalism lacks the colonial, hegemonic Western stance present in the latter: instead, high tech Orientalism considers the “Oriental” cyber-future as something which the subject needs to understand (rather than conquer) in order to remain relevant. In the same manner, Japanese popular visual culture is not perceived as territory to be conquered, but rather incorporated into the fabric of the subject’s daily cocoon: it becomes a part of the latter’s imaginary, at the same time as it draws one into a difference cultural sphere, in a bilateral transcultural movement. But because “Japaneseness” is put forward as a trait, there remains a seemingly indelible sediment of Japonisme. This process once again incorporates flux and stasis, this time at the level of the entity we call culture. Indeed, the reader/viewer/gamer seeks out disorientation (flux) through exposure to a new culture, yet ultimately strives for familiarity (stasis) with this new object of knowledge. Culture is thus a habitable territory that is constantly shifting and restabilising.

Chapter Four

Content motifs, part two: Structuring mechanisms

This chapter, like the previous one, will be focused on content motifs, but will turn away from narrative tropes and focus more on narratological motifs, by focusing on structure and how the content is organised and transmitted. By doing this, I will demonstrate the existence of what I have opted to call “structuring mechanisms,” in opposition with the thematic mechanisms of the previous chapter. These are content-based, structure-related motifs that are not merely recurrent throughout the corpus or across sections of it, but in addition significantly influence one's experience of these works by weighing them down on multiple levels (macro-structure, micro-structure, gameplay and generic mode). These mechanisms are identifiable through the content they convey, which may give the impression that I am confusing structure and theme; however, the two are closely related, as structure, in this case, has to do with the manner and place (the moment in the narrative) at which the thematic content is delivered. In other words, structuring mechanisms are identifiable through recurrences in the structure of certain sections of the corpus, through the fact that certain types of content are transmitted at similar structural points within different works. These structuring mechanisms thereby clearly establish these works as pertaining to a subset defined by identifiable traits. This very “definability” in turn becomes a structuring mechanism for exported Japanese visual popular culture as a whole, enabling it to be identified.

This section will be divided into two parts. The first will use combat shōnen manga as a case study in order to demonstrate the existence of structuring mechanisms, and will then summarily examine the presence of similar mechanisms within anime and, more in-depth, video games. The next segment will demonstrate the existence a separate mechanism in the form of contrasting effects, with a stronger focus on the cases of anime and video games.

A – Genre as structuring mechanism: The case of combat shōnen and its implications

Instead of methodically going over every aspect of the corpus, I have chosen to perform an in-depth examination of one manga genre in particular, one with which I am especially

familiar: combat shōnen, a genre aimed at young boys and revolving around some form of physical conflict or contest. I will focus on four series, chronologically spread out: Toriyama Akira's *Dragon Ball* (1984-1995), Watsuki Nobuhiro's *Rurouni Kenshin* (1994-1999), Kishimoto Masashi's *Naruto* (1999-present), and Kubo Tite's *Bleach* (2001-present). The study of this genre will serve as a case study to represent the structuring power of genre throughout the remainder of the corpus. Indeed, I have found it to be more constructive and relevant to undertake this type of demonstration, rather than engage in a more systematic and exhaustive, but ultimately overly drawn-out and thus less effective study of a more comprehensive sample of the corpus.

a.) *Overall structure in combat shōnen*

It is unsurprising that works belonging to the same genre explore similar themes. To create within a genre means adhering to certain criteria, certain rules regarding content and structure. This fact is accentuated in the case of manga, where pre-publication magazines select series based on specific criteria. In the case of *Weekly Shōnen Jump* (Weekly Boys' Jump), these criteria have traditionally consisted in the values which were deemed to be most important in the eyes of the targeted readership, i.e. young boys. As Frederik Schodt explains, unearthing these values was accomplished in the most straightforward of manners, through a survey:

[...] *Weekly Boys' Jump* established a firm editorial policy that continues to this day. First, it conducted a survey of young readers, asking them to name (1) the words that warmed their hearts most, (2) the thing they felt was most important, and (3) the thing that made them the happiest. The answers were *yūjō* (friendship), *doryoku* (effort, or perseverance), and *shōri* (winning, or victory). These three words became the criteria for selecting the stories, whether adventures or gags. (Schodt 1996, 89-90)

These three themes, friendship, perseverance, and victory, are thus present in most of the series published in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*, many of which pertain to the subgenre nekketsu shōnen, which characteristically focuses on enthusiastic youths as they tackle escalating adversity and seek to better themselves, often in the context of some form of physical combat – although nekketsu shōnen have also been known to explore other potentially competitive domains such as sports, games, and even more mundane activities such as

cooking⁴⁶. In this manner, the nekketsu structure is comparable to that of the *roman d'apprentissage*, with a more narrow focus on learning the secrets of a specific domain: a youth embarks on a journey and discovers a discipline within which he goes on to excel through hard work and training, eventually becoming “the best in the world” at what he does (Schodt 1983, 106-111). We can see here how genre thematics eventually produce a generic structure. This process is active in other genres, as the same prepublication system is in place regarding the latter: expectations generate genre.

In light of the strong structuring role which genre appears to play within mainstream manga, delving into the similarities between four manga series pertaining to the combat shōnen genre, may seem like pointing out the obvious. Furthermore, these series are connected through history and inspiration. Indeed, as mentioned in chapter one, Toriyama Akira’s *Dragon Ball* set the standard for many of its successors, a fact which is acknowledged by subsequent authors: *Naruto* author Kishimoto Masashi, for instance, has mentioned that *Dragon Ball* was an inspiration to him (*Naruto*, vol. 8, 66; vol. 10, 157). But it is worthwhile to begin this section by exploring in greater detail the thematic nodes which run across this specific sub-genre, as well as the codes which govern its structure, if only to highlight just how heavily genre acts as a structuring mechanism in ways that influence the experience of these works not just fundamentally, but quasi-systematically. I have chosen combat shōnen for the purpose of illustrating this structure, but could just as easily have selected romantic harem shōnen, or magical girl shōjo; as mentioned, combat shōnen here serves as a transposable example, for the sake of (relative) brevity. There are certainly elements which are common to manga belonging to different genres, but I have found that they either extend to the other two media included in this study of Japanese popular culture, or tend to pertain more to aesthetics or use of medial properties, rather than thematic content (cultural motifs being an exception addressed in the next section); therefore, such elements will be addressed further along.

I have already touched upon the common structure which these series share, that of the *roman d'apprentissage*. It is tempting to write that the hero inevitably starts off as an underdog, but such is not always the case: indeed, while *Naruto* of the eponymous series does begin his adventure as a seemingly hopelessly talentless ninja, and Ichigo of

⁴⁶ See Hashiguchi Takashi’s *Yakitate!! Ja-Pan*, which revolves around competitive bread-baking.

Bleach is first shown to be a complete novice when he gains the power to be a soul reaper (a spiritual entity who guided the deceased toward the spirit world and battles evil souls), Goku of *Dragon Ball* is from the start represented as a martial artist of great talent, who, despite being only twelve, can easily defeat most adults. *Rurouni Kenshin*'s Kenshin, for his part, is already a grown man of twenty-eight when we meet him (an old man in a genre where the hero is typically between twelve and fifteen), as well as a seasoned swordsman and former assassin who has fought in the Meiji revolution. However, *Kenshin* author Watsuki Nobuhiro has in fact noted the difficulties which this presented in the context of a shōnen series: he recognizes that shōnen usually revolve around the hero's progress and enthusiasm, and that this element was problematically lacking in a story where the hero was already accomplished. Watsuki's solution to this conundrum was to enable Kenshin to mature and progress further by introducing the character of his former master (Watsuki 1999, 48); additionally, he introduced the character of Yahiko, a ten-year-old boy who becomes Kenshin's apprentice and infuses the series with the necessary dose of youthful energy, before becoming an accomplished swordsman himself by the end of the series, in true shōnen fashion (*Ibid.*, 88). *Dragon Ball*'s Goku, for his part, despite being initially gifted, does make considerable progress throughout the series, and his child-like enthusiasm is a significant part of his personality – so much so, in fact, that it could be speculated that author Toriyama Akira gave the adult Goku children who grow up to be gifted fighters themselves so as to prolong this aspect of the tale. Thus, it appears that the elements of youthful energy and progress, are in fact a trope of shōnen and, more importantly, they have a significant influence on how the narrative progresses.

Another striking characteristic of the shōnen structure is the fact that series pertaining to this genre are often divided into very clear story arcs. Such arcs are not explicitly named as such, but are so clearly delineated that fans often spontaneously refer to segments of the story as “the Namek Saga,” “the Rescue Sasuke Arc,” or “the Soul Society Arc.” An arc is determined as soon as a long-term objective is set, be it the search for a specific person or object, or the rise of a new adversary who must be defeated. These arcs will often entail various forms of preparations, such as training (the shugyō mentioned in the previous chapter, and which I will return to later), or the gathering of allies. Ultimately, each arc is dedicated to a single main goal or character, as the charts

below demonstrate. It must however be noted that there are arguably different manners of sectioning and regrouping the arcs, depending on how general or detailed one wishes to be. In the classification below, I have opted to regroup the arcs into sagas when such a regrouping appeared narratologically or thematically justified⁴⁷.

Dragon Ball

First quest for the Dragon Ball (Emperor Pilaf Saga): vol. 1-2
21st World Martial Arts Tournament: vol. 2-5

Red Ribbon Army Saga / Second Dragon Ball Quest

Red Ribbon Army Arc: vol 5-8
Fortuneteller Baba Arc: vol. 9-10

Piccolo Saga

22nd World Martial Arts Tournament Arc: vol. 10-12
Piccolo Daimaō Arc: vol. 12-14
23rd World Martial Arts Tournament Arc / Piccolo Jr. Arc: vol. 14-17

Saiyan Saga

Raditz Arc: vol. 17
Nappa Arc: vol. 17-19
Vegeta Arc: vol. 19-21

Frieza Saga

Namek Arc: vol. 21-23
Ginyu Force Arc: vol. 23-25
Frieza Arc: vol. 25-28

Cell Saga

Trunks Arc: vol. 28
Dr. Gero Arc: vol. 28-29
Androids 16,17, and 18 Arc: vol. 30
Imperfect Cell Arc: vol. 30-32
Perfect Cell Arc: vol. 32-33
Cell Games Arc: vol. 33-35
Future Trunks Arc: vol. 35

Majin Buu Saga

Great Saiyaman Arc: vol. 36

⁴⁷ The terminology I have opted for is not universally agreed upon within respective fandoms and popular lexicon. For instance, the Dragon Ball Wiki (dragonball.wikia.com) uses “saga” where I have used “arc,” and assembles the latter into “groups” when necessary. Regardless, classification itself remains largely the same as mine.

25th World Martial Arts Tournament Arc: vol. 36-37
Babidi Arc: vol. 37-40
Fusion Arc: vol. 40-41
Vegito Arc: vol. 42
Kid Buu Arc: vol. 42
28th World Martial Arts Tournament Arc: vol. 42

Rurouni Kenshin:

Introduction: vol. 1-2
Kanryu and Megumi Arc: vol. 2-4
Raijuta Arc: vol. 5-6

Shishio Makoto Saga

Road to Kyoto Arc: vol. 7-8
Training and First Encounters Arc: vol. 9-12
Ten Swords and Final Battle Arc: vol. 13-18

Yukishiro Enishi Saga

Introductory and Flashback Arc: vol. 18-21
Six Comrades Arc: vol. 21-24
Grief and Interlude Arc: vol. 24-26
Sū-shin and Final Battle Arc: vol. 27-28

Naruto:

Introduction / Genin (junior ninja) Exam Arc: vol. 1-2
Wave Country Arc: vol. 2-4

Chūnin (intermediate ninja) Exam Saga

Exam part 1 (written test): vol. 4-5
Exam part 2 (Forest of Death): vol. 5-7
Exam part 3 (qualifying tournament): vol. 8-10
Exam part 4 (final tournament): vol. 10-13
Invasion of Konoha Arc: vol. 13-16
Itachi Uchiha Arc: vol. 16-17
Find Tsunade Arc: vol. 17-20
Sasuke Rescue Arc: vol. 20-27
Kakashi Gaiden Arc: vol. 27

Rescue Gaara Arc: vol. 28-31
Sai Arc: vol. 32-35
Hidan and Kakuzu Arc: vol. 35-38
Team Sasuke Arc: vol. 38-40
Pain Identity Arc: vol. 40-42
Uchiha Siblings Arc: vol. 42-43

Pain Attack on Konoha Arc: vol. 44-48
Danzō and Kage Council Arc: vol. 48-51
Hachibi Arc: vol. 52-current

Bleach:

Introduction : vol. 1-4
Quincy Arc: vol. 4-6

Rescue Rukia / Soul Society Saga

Preparations Arc: vol. 7-8
Rukongai Arc: vol. 9-10
Seireitei Arc: vol. 10-14
Sōkyoku Execution Arc: vol. 15-21

Aizen Saga

Invasion of the Arrancar Arc: vol. 21-24
Protect Karakura Preparations Arc: vol. 24-27
Rescue Orihime / Hueco Mundo Arc, part 1: vol. 27-35
Visored Backstory Arc: vol. 36-37
Attack on Karakura Arc, part 1: vol. 37-39
Rescue Orihime / Hueco Mundo Arc, part 2: vol. 39-41
Attack on Karakura Arc, part 2: vol. 41-45
Perfect Aizen Arc: vol. 46-48

Compiling these charts has made it apparent that this exercise in classification can be more or less relevant depending on the series, as each work lends itself more or less smoothly to a systematic division. The older works, *Dragon Ball* and *Rurouni Kenshin*, appear to be most suited to the exercise: indeed, closer inspection shows that the arcs are for the most part clearly delineated, beginning with the arrival of a new villain, and ending with the latter's defeat, with room for tying up any loose ends and returning the characters to their normal, pre-crisis setting. An exception can be made for the first volumes of each series, which are typically devoted to setting up the context and introducing the main characters, and therefore either constitute shorter arcs, or cannot really be said to constitute an arc, but rather an episode (this is even more flagrant in *Bleach*, where the first four volumes can be said to operate almost on a "monster-of-the-week" format, where each opponent is promptly disposed of, as opposed to the more drawn-out challenges that occur later in the series). As each series progresses, the arcs within these older works find themselves quite easily arranged into sagas: the main

adversary remains present as the ultimate objective, but intermediary obstacles must first be overcome, and this process can often last long enough to warrant being labelled a separate arc.

With the more recent series *Bleach* and *Naruto*, the division into arcs and sagas is somewhat less natural. For example, in *Bleach*, within the Aizen Saga, we find that the author switches between arcs, going from one objective (protecting the Tokyo neighbourhood of Karakura) to another (rescuing the character Orihime from the Hueco Mundo underworld), although both objectives remain ultimately connected to the saga's main goal (defeating Aizen and his forces): in this manner, the plot unfolds in a less linear way than in previous series. The author even indulges in a volume-long flashback (vol. 36), strategically placed in order to provide some much-awaited information on a set of characters⁴⁸. In *Naruto*, the arcs clearly resist being arranged into sagas, lending an apparently more fragmented structure to the series. This can be attributed to the fact that, ultimately, the entire *Naruto* series arguably revolves around two main themes: Naruto's quest to master the demon within himself and become the strongest ninja, and his complicated friendship with his team mate Sasuke, whom Naruto vows to find and redeem after Sasuke deserts their village. Hence, every arc or saga can be said to contribute, in some way, to the progress of the two core themes: every quest Naruto embarks on is related to his own progress, or to his quest of bringing back Sasuke. In addition, both these main themes are themselves connected, as Naruto and Sasuke's relationship involves a significant amount of rivalry.

The presence of such overarching quests, quests that transcend arcs and sagas, is not unique to *Naruto*. Always in the background of *Rurouni Kenshin* lurks the protagonist's unresolved dilemma of how to atone for his murderous past, although this is framed less as a quest than as an open-ended thematic question. Similarly, *Bleach*'s structure is eventually shown to be more than a short-sighted series of arcs when it is revealed in volume 48 that all of the events having befallen Ichigo since the beginning of the series were orchestrated by the villain Aizen, which hints at the existence of the overarching theme of the true meaning of Ichigo's power – a theme most likely

⁴⁸ Shorter flashbacks, however, are common in most series, and have not been included as separate arcs here, particularly as they are typically related to the arc in progress during their occurrence.

connected to the death of his mother prior to the beginning of the series, and to the fact that his father, unbeknownst to all, is a soul reaper as well. These larger thematics somewhat temper the shorter-term-goal-oriented quality that initially appears so characteristic of shōnen manga, and this trend appears more prominent in recent series. Such twists on the traditional linear structure are also indicated in how, in recent series, arcs can shift, or even be left incomplete and, instead of falling into closure, rebound into another arc: for example, the Chūnin Exam Saga in *Naruto* is never actually concluded, as the final matches are interrupted by the invasion of the village in which the exam is unfolding. In the same manner, measures to protect *Bleach*'s Karakura from a predicted invasion do not quite lead to the expected all-out battle, as the invasion turns out to be a red herring in a ploy for the foes to reach Orihime and blackmail her into joining the underworld, which leads into a new arc: Orihime's rescue. Such twists arguably constitute a narrative strategy to avoid complete predictability, a strategy which is particularly necessary in more recent shōnen series, which are received within a pre-established, relatively long-running tradition: over time, readers come to expect the more typical structure found in older series, and thus new authors find themselves in a position to play with such expectations.

However, even when taking this recent apparent trend into account, the presence of straightforward, short-range arcs still remains striking (although "short-range" is a relative qualifier in this case, given that these arcs are still drawn out over several volumes). Even if the macrostructure of series like *Naruto* remains comparatively nebulous, the presence of shorter arcs continues to propel the reader and maintain the momentum of the series. Thus, the goal-oriented quality of these series remains an important characteristic of the shōnen genre, and continues to structure the reader's horizon of expectations in a very clear way (Jauss 1972): even when there is a twist, such as those mentioned above, readers can continue to situate themselves according to a structural canon. The variation, in other words, is only effective inasmuch as it is identified by the reader as a variation, as a deviation from the norm. This norm, constituted by the still ubiquitous short-range story arc, thus continues to operate as narrative motif. This being established, let us now examine more closely how arcs (and

expectations) are typically structured through the presence of select motifs, namely that of training, or shugyō.

b) The motif of shugyō

Within the structure of the typical shōnen story arc, one particularly significant segment is what could be dubbed the preliminary segment, the part during which the hero and his⁴⁹ allies make preparations for the trial to come. In the case of combat shōnen, these preparations often consist in training. As mentioned in chapter 3, characters putting themselves through intense physical training in order to improve their strength and abilities has attained an almost ritual-like status, and has been likened to shugyō, a term which traditionally refers to samurai ascetics (Murphy 2006). Another look at the presence of shugyō within the shōnen series of the corpus will lead, as we shall see, to the emergence of several motifs, which will illustrate the structuring and thematic powers at play within the shōnen genre. Furthermore, the suggested motifs also expand beyond shugyō, and into other aspects of the series. But I will begin by giving an overview of what shugyō consists of within each series, to complete the more restrictive set of examples previously given in chapter 3.

Examples of this type of training are numerous in combat shōnen, not least in *Dragon Ball*, where the appearance of ever more powerful enemies requires the heroes to resort to ever more drastic measures in order to increase their strength and abilities. For example, in an early volume of the series, twelve-year-old Son Goku is ordered by his master to constantly wear a weighted shell on his back while performing everyday chores, with the result that his physical speed and strength are multiplied when he removes the shell just before the 21st World Martial Arts Tournament. Later, at the beginning of the Namek Arc, when he has to train in a spaceship travelling through outer space, Goku replicates this effect by sparring in a chamber with heightened gravity. During this process, he realises that he, as a Saiyan (a humanoid alien species), grows exponentially stronger each time he recovers from a serious injury – the more serious the injury, the greater the gain in power. This leads him to bring himself to the brink of death

⁴⁹ The masculine is quite appropriate in this case: as is to be expected, shōnen heroes are overwhelmingly male.

several times during training, healing himself with medicine in the nick of time in order to benefit from greater strength. Later processes of training consist in Goku and the other Saiyans learning to master the Super Saiyan state, a transformation which pushes their limits back; they eventually transcend even this state. This is accomplished through controlled metamorphosis, although the details of the process remain largely unmentioned.

Naruto's hero also undergoes several forms of training as he progresses, but these primarily focus on his learning to control and properly use his chakra, the subtle energy within his body. Thus, during the Tsunade Arc, the aspiring ninja learns to guide the flow and directions of his chakra in order to mould it into a particular shape so as to obtain a specific technique. Later, during the Hidan and Kakuzu Arc, he learns to add an elemental dimension to this technique, incorporating the element of wind into the process, making his attack more lethal. Still further on, in preparation for Pain's attack on Konoha Village, he goes on to learn the art of *senjutsu*, which consists in communing with nature's energy so as to channel its power (incidentally, *Dragon Ball*'s Goku also learns a similar technique, the Genki Dama, or Spirit Bomb, which is instrumental in several sagas); this latter technique, however, comes with the risk of being overtaken by nature's forces and turning into a frog forever. Finally, during the arc in progress in late 2011 (in the French translation publication), *Naruto* must come face-to-face with the fox demon sealed within him (a curse that had plagued him since birth), in a bid to either control it completely and be able to fully use the demon's power, or be overwhelmed by the latter, thereby releasing the demon onto the world.

A crucial stage of *Bleach*'s Ichigo's training consists in learning to fully unleash his inner soul reaper powers, and then eventually learning to control the spiritual energy within him, a process which carries the risk of turning him into a Hollow, a monster born from a corrupted soul. After this preliminary stage, Ichigo must learn to locate, harness, and unleash the powers of his *zanpakutō*, a sword consisting of materialized spiritual energy which all soul reapers possess and which can take many different forms. These stages of training are represented inside a visual representation of Ichigo's inner world, a changing landscape of buildings where he "meets" a personification of his sword. Having learned his sword's name, Zangetsu, and pledged to fight alongside him, Ichigo gradually

learns to unleash his sword's powers, unlocking different stages over the course of several other encounters within his inner world scattered throughout the series, each encounter making him stronger. This involves facing in combat a materialization of Zangetsu, and later a Hollow-like version of Ichigo himself, who turns out to be a manifestation of his own pure combat instincts. Later, when Ichigo's soul reaper powers are revealed to be insufficient to defeat anticipated foes, he trains to master "Hollowfication," a process through which a soul reaper can transform into a Hollow-hybrid creature at will and thus gain additional power, all the while retaining the ability to return to normal; this, however, entails the risk of Ichigo being absorbed by his inner Hollow. Finally, against Aizen, the ultimate enemy, Ichigo learns to transform himself into an attack, thereby pouring all his powers into a single blow, and sacrificing his soul reaper abilities in the process.

Rurouni Kenshin's hero, despite already being a master swordsman, returns to his master Hiko Seijuro during the Shishio Makoto Saga, in order to learn the ultimate technique of his school, which requires the swordsman to put his own life at risk in order to discover within himself the will to live. Overall, Kenshin appears to spend considerably less time physically training than his protagonist counterparts in other series, but faces psychological battles instead: as an assassin-turned-pacifist, he perpetually seeks the answer which will allow him to atone for his past crimes. Thus, the most crucial part of his training with Hiko lies not in the clashing of swords, but in affirming his will to live, through his desire to protect those close to him: only then can he strike with sufficient decisiveness. Similarly, during the Yukishiro Enishi Saga, Kenshin's shugyō is meditative rather than physical: overcome with grief after the presumed death of his beloved, he becomes convinced that his path is useless, and falls into a quasi-catatonic state for days, resurfacing only when he realises that striving to protect others even with the possibility of failure is the only answer. This realization is sufficient to upgrade Kenshin's strength to the next level and enable him to defeat the seemingly invincible Enishi.

Several motifs emerge from this brief overview of shugyō in shōnen. The first is the prominence of inner and spiritual energy and the systemic dimension it brings to the genre: whether it is called *kai*, as in *Dragon Ball*, or *chakra*, as in *Naruto*, inner energy is

the foundation of the system which structures the universe of a particular shōnen. Indeed, power and strength are never abstract or arbitrary in this genre, but instead are written to form a detailed system, where the dominance of one character over another is never merely shown, but instead is always explained and justified. Natural ability usually does factor in, as most shōnen protagonists seem to inherently possess either very large amounts of spiritual energy or innate skill, but honing one's ability to use that energy is a process which is often painstakingly explained to the reader. In other words, the system has to make sense. Not all shōnen are created equal in this respect. For example, some of *Dragon Ball's* methods of "levelling up," such as Goku indulging in systematic self-mutilation and self-healing, or the convenient existence of a transdimensional chamber within which one can train for a year while only a single day passes outside the chamber, appear somewhat facile (a "cheap trick," in fandom terms) compared to the complexity of *Naruto's* chakra system. Indeed, the latter system is gradually unveiled over the course of the entire series: the nature of chakra is first explained, along with its capacity for being concentrated in specific areas of the body so as to maximize its impact. Later on, different ways of augmenting and unleashing chakra are explained. Still later, the existence of different types of elemental chakra (wind, fire, etc.) is revealed, also forming a logical system (e.g., water trumps fire, but fire trumps wind). All these aspects are factored into combats as they are revealed, thereby rendering the latter ever more complex. In *Bleach*, soul reapers have the natural ability to hone their spiritual energy into a sword; each individual sword possesses a preliminary form, but also a more evolved power known as *bankai*, a distinctive ability which, depending on the sword, can range from striking with perfect accuracy to creating a total illusion to conjuring a monstrous creature. Though less rigorously systematic than in *Naruto*, powers (and weaknesses) are always explained, as is the triumph of one power over another, usually because of the existence of a loophole or built-in weakness. *Rurouni Kenshin*, being a historical manga, is much more grounded in reality than the other shōnen series in the corpus, but spiritual energy nevertheless exists, and can even be felt physically by onlookers, as is shown in volume 18, when Kenshin is witnessed releasing his ki, which has physical effects on his environment. However, such energy appears to be essentially dependent on the combatant's emotions and psychological state of mind, and as such

lends itself less to classification than the types of energy present in other series. Nevertheless, a systemic element still exists even in *Kenshin*: the difference is that, in this case, it lies in swordplay and the mastery of various weapons, where every exchange and stroke is minutely analysed, and the victory of one over another rationally explained. To give an example that takes us somewhat away from shugyō but should make my meaning clear, in the brief fight between Saitō Hajime and Seiryū (vol. 27), Seiryū quickly finds a flaw in Saitō's signature technique, the *gatotsu*, a left-handed thrust of the sword which leaves the right side vulnerable, particularly in this case, when Seiryū is holding the longer weapon of the two; Saitō simply overcomes this difficulty by surprising his opponent and attacking with his bare right hand, while onlookers comment on his resourcefulness and tenacity. Rarely is the victor merely described as simply "stronger" or "more skilled" than his opponent: victory belongs to the one who is best prepared, who can better analyse the other and come up with an appropriate strategy. In short, in a genre where the basic story arc can often be summed up as "hero runs into an opponent initially stronger than himself, hero undergoes shugyō, hero triumphs (sometimes bittersweetly)," there is much emphasis on making the shugyō process, and the ensuing battles, as rational and interesting as possible.

Another motif which is highlighted in this overview of shugyō is the association of power and danger. Often, the hero's power is depicted as something which constantly threatens to overwhelm him. For example, part of Naruto's combative advantage lies in the fact that his body is a vessel for Kyūbi, the nine-tailed fox demon who destroyed Konoha Village when Naruto was born. Several stages of Naruto's shugyō entail learning to use the demon's powers while simultaneously containing the beast: indeed, not only does the fox's presence initially perturb Naruto's own chakra, thereby making it initially more difficult for the boy to function in battle, but the fox constantly threatens to break the seal imprisoning him and take over Naruto. This not only carries risks for anyone who happens to be in proximity (for example, in volume 33, an enraged Naruto allows Kyūbi to take over and inadvertently wounds his own team mate), but Naruto's own body is damaged in the process, as the demon's chakra destroys it and heals it constantly during these outbursts (vol. 33). In addition, Naruto's use of his own chakra can also come at a price, as he discovers when he finally perfects his ultimate technique: while immensely

destructive to his foes, the technique also degrades Naruto's body (vol. 38). In *Bleach*, Ichigo's true transformation into a soul reaper consists in a race against time, during which his soul is detached from his body and must achieve the metamorphosis before time runs out and he turns into a Hollow (vol. 8). Later on, when his ability to improve appears to have reached a plateau, he chooses to explore the darker side of his power, as previously mentioned, by learning how to willingly and temporarily turn into a Hollow during battle: this, we have seen, entails the risk of Ichigo being overtaken by the Hollow within himself. Once mastered, Hollowfication appears to be effective, yet at the same time this technique is far from ideal: Ichigo's soul appears in peril each time he transforms, as he realises when a friend of his is frightened by the look in his eyes during his transformation (vol. 32). Finally, it is revealed that Ichigo's ultimate technique can only be used once, after which he loses his soul reaper powers forever, as well as all contact with the spirit world (vol. 48). In short, there is a sense that, the more powerful Ichigo becomes, the more danger he puts himself in, and the more he has to lose. In a more prosaic manner, danger is present in shugyō in *Dragon Ball* in the case of Saiyans, as power increases proportionally the closer one comes to death. Finally, we have seen how Kenshin must face his own master in a fight to the death in order to learn his school's ultimate technique. Additionally, toward the end of the series, we are informed that Kenshin's samurai life has taken its toll on his body: the strain of the techniques he uses are too much for his small-framed body to bear, and he has been wearing himself out with every battle (vol. 28). In short, not only is power obtained at the price of rigorous training, but it appears that the hero often continuously pays a price for his supremacy, in three series out of the four within the corpus. Thus, there is a sacrificial dimension which is inherent in the notion of shugyō, but which ultimately extends beyond the latter, as sacrifice is present not only in the obtaining of power, but in its use as well.

Systemic power and the price it entails are two motifs which are highlighted in relation to the trope of shugyō as it is represented throughout the shōnen genre. I have isolated a third motif, which is the meditative aspect of shugyō. Indeed, it becomes apparent throughout our four shōnen series that shugyō is not merely physical, but intensely psychological, and even spiritual at times. This aspect of shugyō has been explored in chapter 3, in relation with the figure of the samurai, therefore I will avoid the

redundant exercise of demonstrating it again here, but will merely reiterate its existence. Having highlighted that shugyō explores a common theme (power as risk) through similar means (power as system and as spirituality) within the majority of the corpus, I will now explore the structure of combat itself within combat shōnen.

c) Combat structure

Although shugyō is an important element of combat shōnen, it is combat itself which constitutes the heart of the genre: it is during the fights themselves that it is revealed whether all the preparation was sufficient, and all the anticipation of the reader is geared toward the outcome of the confrontation. Given the very high number of such confrontations throughout the corpus, I have selected one fight per series, one which I have felt to be particularly representative of the series as a whole. In order to avoid lengthy explanations and an overabundance of characters, I have willingly chosen only one-on-one battles (although other characters sometimes come into play in different ways, but I have tried to keep these interventions to a minimum). The selected fights are as follows: Goku vs. Piccolo (*Dragon Ball*, vol. 16-17), Kenshin vs. Sōjirō (*Rurouni Kenshin*, vol. 15-16), Ichigo vs. Kenpachi (*Bleach*, vol. 12-13) and Naruto vs. Gaara (*Naruto*, vol. 15-16). Detailed summaries of each fight can be found in Appendix B.

I have detected three motifs in analysing these four scenes, the simplest of which (in that it is most easily explained) is probably the perpetual shifting of power from one opponent to another throughout the fights, which goes hand in hand with the build-up which characterizes these confrontations. This narrative trait is quite evident in all four series. There are repeated moments in every fight when victory for one side appears certain: for example, when Piccolo is nearly counted out, when Kenpachi removes his eye patch and releases unsuspected hidden power, when Kenshin declares that he is incapable of reading Sōjirō's intentions and therefore of anticipating his movements, or when Gaara achieves full transformation as a seemingly unstoppable demon. Then, the balance of power suddenly shifts: Piccolo wakes up and seriously wounds Goku, Ichigo succeeds in channelling his sword's full power, Sōjirō's emotional wall begins to crack, and Naruto gathers his remaining chakra to summon a creature capable of facing Gaara. The purpose of such twists is quite straightforward: to maintain the suspense and keep the

reader's interest over these often lengthy battles. Such unexpected reverses of fortune are of course not unique to manga, but their frequency within the combat shōnen genre is striking: indeed, only *Rurouni Kenshin* employs the technique comparatively sparsely (at least within this specific fight), while the other series' combats largely thrive on it.

The second motif, related to the first, is the presence of spectators during fights: although this fact is perhaps less apparent in the summaries provided in the appendix, every selected battle, apart from the one in *Bleach*, is observed and commented upon by onlookers, allies of both opponents or of one of them. In part, their role is to aid the first motif, by highlighting it: indeed, while it is sometimes obvious who has the advantage at a given time (e.g., when Piccolo shatters Goku's limbs towards the end of their fight), often the information is highlighted or outright transmitted through the presence of onlookers, who comment on battle as it unfolds. These onlookers often clarify what has just happened, or act as a sounding board enabling the protagonist to explain it himself. In this manner, the balance of power between the two opponents is made more clear, as spectators show their admiration or dismay as the events unfold, thus insisting on one side's precarious or dominant position. Thus, for example, when Naruto succeeds his multi-cloning technique, no fewer than four separate onlookers, on both sides, in addition to Gaara himself, express their astonishment, thereby implying that Naruto's unexpected display of strength may well turn the tables (vol. 15, 146).

However, the function of onlookers is not solely to highlight (dis)advantage, but also to provide explanation whenever necessary. Thus, whenever additional information is deemed necessary in order for the reader to fully grasp the situation, often the onlookers will provide it. Occasionally one of the two opponents themselves will provide the commentary, in the form of an inner monologue or reflection (both Ichigo and Kenshin do this), but often the information will come from an outsider: for example, it is Kenshin's ally Sanosuke who explains to the reader how Kenshin is able to match Sōjirō's speed during their final exchange (vol. 16, p. 94), while Goku's cohort reminds the reader which technique enables him to fly (vol. 17, p. 17). The outsider in question does not even have to be an onlooker per se, but can be someone removed from the scene. There are instances of this in both *Kenshin* and *Bleach*: in the former, two characters in a different setting comment on the fight taking place at that moment,

namely on what Sōjirō's key strengths are (vol. 15, p. 150-172), while in the latter series, two of Kenpachi's subordinates, also removed from the fight taking place, comment on the two opponents' respective strengths, revealing that Kenpachi has an ace up his sleeve (which turns out to be the power unleashed by the removal of his eye patch) (vol. 13, p. 105).

Regarding the reason why authors choose to transmit information through onlookers or third parties, rather than simply relating the protagonists' impressions, I would argue, to begin with, that it adds to the spectacular (in the spectacle-related sense) and choreographed aspects of combat scenes. The onlookers act as both stand-ins and prompters for the reader: by observing the scene, they provide the reader with a relatable point-of-view, and by reacting to the scene, they provide the reader with a clue as to how the latter should react, whether it is by making plain the balance of power at a specific moment, or merely by displaying an emotion. Indeed, in addition to the few more detailed examples which I have given in this section, there are also innumerable cases where onlookers are shown wordlessly observing key moments, such as a decisive attack, or a turnaround. In this manner, even without uttering a single word, the onlookers continue to fulfill their function of highlighting certain points and guiding the reader's reactions and expectations. Showing and commenting the scene through the eyes of a third party, rather than those of the battling opponents, has the advantage of providing the appearance of increased credibility to the reactions shown. Of course, onlookers are rarely impartial or infallible: they understandably root for their own ally, and sometimes express unfounded concern or confidence and are ultimately proven wrong. Nevertheless, their perspective provides more distance from the battle than does the point of view of the combatants, particularly when they happen to observe something which may have escaped the latter (even though they may turn out to be wrong). In short, onlookers help the reader sort out the situation.⁵⁰

But the motif which perhaps most stands out within this sample of shōnen battles is the importance of emotion and personal stakes. Indeed, in three out of our four examples, the hero is fighting for something that is more fundamental than simple victory: he is fighting for something that is important to him personally. The exception,

⁵⁰ Onlookers also play a role in the phenomenology of manga, which I will explore in the next chapter.

once again, is *Dragon Ball*, where the stakes, while huge, are quite straightforward: Piccolo wants to establish a reign of terror once he has disposed of Goku, and Goku understandably wants to stop him, in a classic “save-the-world” scenario. However, in each of the other three examples, there is an additional level. As previously mentioned, the hero needs to win in order to proceed with his larger quest, the one guiding the saga in progress (rescuing Rukia, stopping Shishio’s continued efforts to overturn the government, preventing the Sand Village from successfully invading Konoha), but another, more personal issue also lies at the heart of the battle: often, these battles are not solely physical confrontations, but a confrontation of values. The battle between Gaara and Naruto is not just about who turns out to be the strongest, but about the way each of them has chosen to deal with their common condition of living with a demon inside them: rejected by all, Gaara has chosen to reject them in return and feels alive only when causing pain, while Naruto, who was fortunate enough to find a handful of people who could accept him, draws his strength from their friendship. Their battle ultimately becomes a clash of ideologies. The situation in *Bleach* is quite similar: it is quickly understood that Kenpachi lives only for the thrill and challenge of combat, as evidenced by his glee throughout the altercation, even when he is wounded. In contrast, Ichigo is driven first by his desire to protect his comrades, at the thought of whom he rallies. Subsequently, in the second part of the fight, he draws strength from his sword, Zangetsu, putting his faith in the latter: their teamwork trumps Kenpachi’s individualism. Finally, Kenshin’s self-imposed doctrine of pacifism and compassion clashes with Sōjirō’s inherited belief that only the strongest survive, and this unnerves the latter to the point that he loses the battle. While this seems to suggest that Sōjirō knows in his heart that Kenshin’s ideology is the better one (otherwise, he would not be so troubled in the first place), it is interesting to note that *Rurouni Kenshin* is the only series of the selection which maintains that winning the battle does not necessarily mean that the winner was “right.” Indeed, Kenshin refuses to give any easy answers to Sōjirō, insisting that if finding enlightenment were simply a matter of battling it out, it would be within anyone’s reach; but life, he claims, is not quite so simple. This is a rare statement in the shōnen genre, in which physical violence is deeply embedded and, as we can see here, often portrayed as the path for resolving not just physical, but also ideological and even

psychological conflict. Indeed, in *Naruto* and *Bleach*, it is very heavily implied that the hero wins because his motivations, specifically protecting others and fighting alongside them, are purer and truer: so much so, in fact, that the antagonist's defeat is enough to shake the latter's convictions to their core. Thus, Gaara leaves vowing that he too will experience love and friendship someday, while the defeated Kenpachi asks his sword's name for the first time, somewhat setting aside his trademark egotism.

Much more could be written about the implications of such an equivalence between physical and ideological victory: namely, it is connected to a certain glorification of violence which is both inherent and problematic to the combat shōnen genre as a whole. Indeed, when a genre is based on physical altercation, how does it avoid setting up violence as the main mode of behaviour of all characters, including the hero, thereby framing violence as a desirable *modus operandi*? It is likely that the “personalization of conflict” evident in the three more recent series (*Kenshin*, *Naruto*, and *Bleach*) is the genre's way of dealing with this thorny question; indeed, the progression from *Dragon Ball* to the other series seems to indicate a generic change in this direction. The fact that contemporary mangaka of the combat shōnen genre appear to favour adding a psychological dimension to their battles can thus be read as an attempt to frame violence as not being showcased merely for its own sake, but rather as the expression of a deeper conflict between the two opponents. This has the advantage of potentially making the battle more interesting to the reader, because there is more at stake than merely advancing the plot, and it also humanizes the antagonist: rather than being portrayed as a mere “villain” (such as Piccolo in that specific *Dragon Ball* arc⁵¹) the hero's opponent is, on the contrary, revealed to be an often much more relatable figure, whose journey down the wrong path can be explained by misfortune and suffering. But most importantly, this added dimension also allows the hero's victory to carry more weight: he wins, not just because he is the best, but because he has the “best reasons,” or the “best beliefs.” The paradox here is that this type of narrative device, while plausibly aiming to avoid glorifying violence, in fact ends up doing precisely that: ultimately, the conflict is resolved through elaborate fisticuffs, and the character with the “correct” outlook on life

⁵¹ It should be noted that Piccolo goes on, over the following instalments, to become one of Goku's most steadfast allies. In fact, most of Goku's friends start off as his antagonists, a tendency which is present in other manga and which certainly could have been analysed as a motif and structuring mechanism.

comes out on top – with *Kenshin* being the uncompromising exception, although, as mentioned previously, the fact that Kenshin does triumph over his misguided antagonist continues to implicitly put the hero in the right.

As interesting as the question of the glorification of violence is, I must put it aside, as it strays from the main objective of this section, which has been to demonstrate the presence of different content-related motifs within the combat shōnen genre. And indeed, the similarities from one series to the next are undeniable, even as they allow for variations and diachronic evolution. But what do they mean for the reader of combat shōnen? How are they perceived, and what effect do they have on the reader and on his experience of the genre?

d) Implications for shōnen and the rest of the corpus: structuring mechanisms

Other motifs could have been singled out and analysed within the combat shōnen genre: the redemption of villains (see previous footnote), the borderline martyrdom of shōnen protagonists (another way in which I believe authors attempt to deal with the problem of glorifying violence), or the specific path toward the obligatory happy ending⁵². But my objective has never been, neither in this section nor in this thesis, to provide an exhaustive catalogue of similarities, and so I chose to limit the examples. By focusing on macro-structure (sagas and story arcs) and micro-structure (specific combats), as well as on the specific motif of shugyō, which also reveals structural similarities that revolve around the thematic of power in these series, I have been able to encounter motifs that are not merely sporadically thematic, but also narratively structural, and seemingly ingrained in the very nature of the genre. My argument, after this lengthy, yet only partial dissection of the shōnen works of the corpus, is as follows: these motifs are not solely

⁵² As *Rurouni Kenshin* author Watsuki Nobuhiro points out in an interview, shōnen must have a “happy end”: “Entertainment by definition should leave us happy and smiling, and shōnen manga are entertainment” (Watsuki 1999, 87). Having said that, there is often room for bittersweetness: for example, Kenshin’s group of allies disbands as most of its members go their separate ways, and we learn that Kenshin will eventually grow physically unable to wield the sword the way he currently does. While the *Bleach* series is still in progress at this time, the conclusion of the latest saga also ends on a bittersweet note: Ichigo wins the battle by sacrificing his soul reaper powers, and thereby becomes unable to interact with the spirit world anymore. *Naruto*’s narrative has yet to reach a point akin to such a resolution, but its hero already possesses a self-sacrificial nature which hints that his happy ending will entail some form of loss as well. Shimoku Kio’s shōnen manga *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2001-2010), although it was not included in the corpus, has a similar conclusion, in which its hero loses his ability to practice alchemy. Of course, these repeated blends of sacrifice and triumph could have been another motif to be analysed.

isolated similarities (not that the latter are irrelevant, as they can, when sufficiently recurrent, form thematic mechanisms such as those analysed in chapter 3), but mechanisms that ultimately regulate and structure one's experience of the genre. Thus, a reader of combat shōnen enters a universe held together by very consistent, identifiable narrative structures; this means that this reader does not merely "connect the dots" between similar themes, but is guided through the genre as she follows the carefully structured tale. While it is normal for genres, particularly mainstream ones, to contain tropes or formulas, the cohesiveness of shōnen goes beyond even that instigated by the latter: the structures of the shōnen genre are rigorously and repeatedly respected from series to series, in a manner that comes to stand for the genre itself. Although the shōnen genre is by no means entirely static, as demonstrated by the relative evolution from *Dragon Ball* on to later series, there is an enduring stability at work here which commands our attention, through sheer repetition and frequency. Ultimately, this creates a familiarity from work to work which is essential to the forming of a generic imaginary: characteristics of each separate work grow to be rightfully perceived as characteristics of the genre. Structural repetitions generate expectations: when one opens a combat shōnen series, one does so expecting this network of structures, one already knows what type of fictional world one is about to enter, and part of the pleasure, I believe, lies in this very familiarity. The remainder of the reader's pleasure derives from what nuanced variations are tolerated within this structured world: what type of power system is in place, or how exactly the balance of power will inevitably shift back and forth during combat, or how the hero will plausibly defeat his foe, both physically and ideologically. If I had to sum up the experience generated by the type of structured works we have examined in one expression, it would be: variation within expectations. If, indeed, "a structure is defined by what escapes it" (Massumi 1992, 57), these structuring mechanisms are rather defined by what lines they cannot cross. Through this dynamic, a tension between flux and stasis once again arises. On the one hand, we have a fairly rigid set of structures which operate consistently; on the other, we have variations allowed within those structures, room for change and even surprise. The dynamic between these two forces, between fixture and change, is one of the dimensions which I believe is one of the main features of the combat shōnen experience. Furthermore, this dynamic extends to other manga forms.

Indeed, when we consider that similar structuring mechanisms (similar in principle, not in content) are at work in other mainstream manga genres, we can easily see how a wider “manga” imaginary can form over time for Western readers. Although combat shōnen is arguably the most clear-cut example of how manga genre shapes expectations, it is by no means the only one: harem shōnen, magical girl shōjo, mecha, and even more obscure genres such as food manga, each constitute, among others, cases where genre dictates format following very specific guidelines. It is through deciphering and mapping out these structures that the reader uncovers and explores the world of manga. I use this latter expression purposefully, as it is my argument that mainstream manga, in spite of all the different genres it contains, does ultimately grow to constitute a territory within the reader’s mind, or personal parcel of imaginary. This is not to say that the territory in question is homogeneous: indeed, although each genre is structured by mechanisms, these mechanisms are obviously not the same from genre to genre (although an argument could be made in certain specific cases, such as the psycho-ideological value of victory, which seems to be present in many genres – and we have seen in chapter 3 that there are thematic nodes which are present in different genres). But I would argue that the very presence of this type of structure acts as an overarching mechanism in itself, one which unites many mainstream genres within manga. This “map-able” character of manga is one of the things which, over time, through exposure to different works, enables the reader to engage with mainstream manga as a whole, and not just with isolated genres.

The question remains whether such mechanisms are present in the non-manga sections of the corpus. These mechanisms are de facto carried over to the anime adaptations of manga, along with the rest of the manga’s original content⁵³. I have examined the question of whether original anime series have similar structuring mechanisms, but the latter’s power appears to be diluted in the case of anime. This does not mean that anime is less structured than manga: in fact, it actually appears to require a tighter micro-structure (as opposed to a series’ overall structure). Indeed, the comparatively temporally restrictive format of conventional anime series – half-hour

⁵³ Although it must be reminded that the process of adaptation, like all adaptations, is not direct, but is instead deflected by considerations such as medium and format.

episodes (with commercials), as opposed to a given number of manga pages per chapter – also lends a more formulaic character to this medium. Manga chapters do comprise certain implicit diegetic obligations: enough has to take place narratively to justify and maintain the reader’s interest, and cliffhangers are favoured when possible. However, it is rarely the episodic nature of manga which is put forward⁵⁴, but rather the overarching story arcs and sagas which have been outlined previously: the flow of the story is what prevails. The overarching story matters in anime as well, of course, yet I would argue that there is more of a tendency for anime episodes to strive for a standalone status even as these episodes continue to be a part of the series. This phenomenon is much clearer in original anime creations than in anime adapted from manga (for a specific example, see Appendix C). One could say that this episodic structure of anime structures our expectations of the anime’s unfolding, just as the structuring mechanisms demonstrated in manga structure our expectations regarding the latter. But there is a difference between both phenomena. Indeed, because this tendency is dictated by format, rather than narrative (as is the case for the structuring mechanisms demonstrated within manga so far), I would argue that it operates more as a formal convention than a structuring mechanism: while it does have an impact on the narrative content and its distribution, it is perceived as a conventionally imposed constraint rather than a narratological motif purposefully retained⁵⁵. As a result, it is more difficult to locate in anime a recurring mechanism at the level of structure (although we will see that there are mechanisms that structure anime in different ways).

Structure plays a much stronger role within Japanese video games, particularly within each distinct franchise. Indeed, the core structure is practically identical from game to game within a franchise. In *The Legend of Zelda* games, the hero Link is tasked

⁵⁴ *Yonkoma* manga, or four-panel manga, such as Azuma Kiyohiko’s *Azumanga Daioh* and Kakifly’s *K-On!* are exceptions to this. Comparable to American comic strips published in daily newspapers, they rely on episodic gags, but are of an altogether different nature than the type of story manga this thesis is concerned with.

⁵⁵ Of course, one could argue that structuring mechanisms are in a way conventionally imposed as well: does a shōnen artist working for a particular magazine really have a choice as to whether to include shugyō in his or her script? But these are conventions imposed by the genre, not the format. This, in my view, makes a difference from the reader’s perspective: genre conventions, however strict they grow to become, initially arise organically from the collectivity of works, whereas format conventions are considered to be an inevitability, and therefore tend to be more easily made abstraction of. This is particularly true of the episodic nature of television series, animated or live, because it is so widespread.

with aiding the princess Zelda against an evil force. This requires him to travel to different regions to collect certain sets of items. While the player is free to roam the gameworld, certain regions are only made available to her after she has accomplished certain requisite tasks. She ultimately has to work his way through a different dungeon in each region, a closed, maze-like area where she must solve various puzzles to advance, with the help of tools and weapons she has picked up along the way, and vanquish an intermediate enemy. Once she has collected all the items, she is ready to face the final enemy. Thus, the player grows to expect a specific path to unfold before her when she starts a *Zelda* game, in spite of variations in content from game to game (for example, in one game, Zelda is a distant princess, whereas in another, she is Link's childhood friend; or Link can be a woodland fairy in one game and a pirate in another). The *Mario* game franchise is also characterized by a structure which repeats itself throughout most games: the game is divided into thematic worlds, themselves divided into short levels, the objective being to make it to the end of each level alive, before tackling the final boss. Admittedly, there are sub-series within the *Mario* franchise which stray from that structure, namely the *Mario & Luigi* series, which includes a radically different gameplay: whereas most *Mario* games rely on reflex-based gameplay and the player's ability to avoid dangers, *Mario & Luigi* games offer a role-playing gameplay, based on turn-based, menu-selected actions and the levelling up of characters. Nevertheless, the majority of *Mario* games stick to the original structure of short, platformer-type levels. *Final Fantasy* role-playing games, for their part, offer an even clearer example of homogeneous narrative and gameplay structure within a franchise. These games invariably involve a team of characters, each fulfilling a particular role (e.g. warrior, healer, thief, or mage), whom the player strategically levels up as she progresses. The player is free to explore the gameworld as she chooses, although there is a minimum "skeleton" structure of tasks which must be accomplished in order for the game's story to progress. While there are variations in the number of playable characters, the different roles available, and the performable actions, the basic turn-, menu-, role-based gameplay remains constant throughout the franchise. Finally, games from the *Pokémon* franchise also revolve around a core gameplay structure: the player is sent on a quest to collect information on as many pokémon creatures as possible, by battling and capturing them.

The gameplay thus alternates between the (often linear) exploration of the gameworld and turn- and menu-based pokémon battles. This process enables the player to strategically level up her pokémon and thereby build a powerful team.

The above-described mechanisms are the heart of each game franchise and play a crucial role in the latter's cohesiveness, in the same manner as the structuring mechanisms in shōnen manga ensure the genre's cohesiveness. Just as the structuring mechanisms differ from one manga genre to another, they are different from one game franchise to another. We will eventually see that there are structuring mechanisms that transcend franchises and join together most of the games within the corpus; but the connections within each franchise, while perhaps more obvious and easier to explain (being arguably attributable to a desire on the designers' and distributors' part to capture an audience and keep its loyalty through continuity and giving it more of what it enjoyed in the first games), are nevertheless important to highlight and demonstrate, if I am to make a case for multi-tiered cohesion.

One may object that any franchise must by definition contain recurrent elements, and that such findings are not limited to Japanese video games: many North American franchises also feature similar gameplay or content elements from game to game. However, Japanese games seem to differ from others in that their franchises, despite consisting mostly of story games (*Mario* games being the exception) do not revolve around a linear narrative. Whether we look at youth-oriented North American game franchises, such as *Sly Cooper* or *Ratchet and Clank*, or more adult-themed series such as *Assassin's Creed* or *Mass Effect*, we find that each game constitutes a narrative sequel to its predecessors: not only are the characters recurring, but the games tell a chronological tale, in which references are made to past events in each new instalment. Some North American games, such as the *Elder Scrolls* series, may allow the sequel to occur decades, or even centuries after the previous game, while unfolding in the same fictional gameworld; this precludes the return of specific characters, and enables variations in the gameworld that are attributable to the passage of time but nevertheless maintains a temporal continuity between events in both games. In short, the games are all part of one overarching narrative. Games within a Japanese franchise, on the other hand, although they do contain recurring elements, some of which we have looked at above, are not

temporally related. *Final Fantasy* and *Pokémon* games feature different characters in differentiated (yet similar) universes. *Zelda* games may feature characters with the same names, but their situations and relationships vary from game to game. In *Phantom Hourglass*, Link is a pirate and crewmate of Zelda, who is a princess unbeknownst to all, whereas in *Ocarina of Time*, Link is a boy raised among wood sprites while Zelda is a traditional princess living in her castle. It is implied, through the diversity of settings and character roles, that these are alternative versions of the characters and not different stages in their lives⁵⁶. *Super Mario* games appear to feature the same characters, as well as similar content elements, but temporal continuity between games is rarely mentioned: there are no allusions, for example, to the fact that the Princess was already kidnapped by Bowser in the previous instalment – but neither is there any mention to the contrary. Mario is presented as an established hero in the Mushroom Kingdom (particularly in *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*), presumably because he has saved the day and defeated Bowser in the past, but details are not given. Events from previous games are implied, but not referred to specifically, and are not an essential part of the game's experience. *Mario* games thus appear to unfold on a quasi-atemporal plane of eternal return, where the same narrative unfolds inevitably, with variations in the process.

Thus, while Japanese games belonging to the same franchise contain recurring gameplay and content elements, they are not connected together by narrative in the most rigid sense of the term. This characteristic appears to be dominantly specific to Japanese games. In this manner, one could say that each game within a franchise constitutes a variation on the first, original game, rather than a sequel. This is in accordance with what Marc Steinberg writes regarding the specificity of the Japanese media mix model. A media mix, it bears reminding, is the spreading of a franchise across different media platforms. Steinberg reminds us that the North American media mix, as theorized by Henry Jenkins, is “one of additive synergy[; f]rom part to part, we slowly approach the

⁵⁶ There are a few exceptions to this generalization. For example, *Phantom Hourglass* is a direct sequel to *The Wind Waker*, with characters resuming the same activities and relationships. Similarly, *Final Fantasy X* and *XIII* each have their own sequel, where characters and events are in direct continuity with those in their prequel. Additionally, an official *Zelda* timeline, to which the games' main creator Miyamoto Shigeru contributed, was published in Japan in 2011, and reportedly includes a timeline incorporating the different games, explaining their disparity by stating that characters are repeatedly reincarnated throughout the ages. But it is likely this chronology was put together after the fact.

vision of the whole” (Steinberg 2012, 75). In Jenkins' now famous example of the *Matrix* franchise, the video game and animated shorts contain information which complements the narrative of the films, while in no way contradicting the latter. Each narrative fragment forms a whole with the others, amounting to a coherent main narrative, in the same manner that the North American games mentioned above form a single narrative thread at the level of the franchise. The Japanese media mix, on the other hand, is more character-centric than narrative-centric: the main character remains the same across the different media platforms, but discrepancies, or outright contradictions, between the different narratives are tolerated, and can be considered to constitute “multiple possible worlds” (*Ibid.*, 76), which are not incompatible so much as they are separate, joined only by the character(s) at their heart. This is similar to the manner in which a Japanese game franchise comes together, with the difference that, in their case, it is not just the characters or character types that are recurring, but also, and perhaps most importantly, the game structure and gameplay mechanics. Each game franchise thus constitutes a multi-plane imaginary, where each gameworld operates as a distinct set overlapping with other game-sets by way of a few core nodules, most notably character types, and a recurring game and gameplay structure. Recurring characters are perhaps more obvious, but it is my belief that game and gameplay structure is the area of recurrence which most strongly shapes the player's experience and expectations regarding the franchise. Indeed, game structure is present and influential throughout the entire experience of the game, as are gameplay mechanics, and together they form the core of the gaming experience. Each game within a franchise offers its own world, albeit one which remains connected with previous instalments through certain content elements; but most striking is the fact that the “physics” of the world are consistent with that of previous games. These worlds are bound together by a logic of functioning which acts as a crucial structuring mechanism.

Again, as in the case of combat shōnen manga, these structures of game and gameplay allow for variations. For instance, some *Final Fantasy* games feature a time-based combat system, whereas others do not factor time as a consideration (in other words, in the latter systems, one can take as much time as one wishes to make one's move, whereas in the former, one can receive damage if one dallies for too long). Or to give a simpler example, the power-up items in *Mario* games change from one version to

the next, allowing the player to try out different skills. Again, we find here a dynamic of flux and stasis, of variation within expectation.

To summarise this section: I have identified various levels of recurrence within shōnen manga, and have attempted to show that, in many cases, their reach extends further than merely constituting common themes or figures across the genre. Ultimately, it all appears to come back to structure, even when it comes to apparently strictly thematic elements, such as shugyō: these elements reveal themselves to be structuring mechanisms that shape our experience of the genre and what we expect to find when we turn toward it. While shōnen manga arguably makes for the most eloquent example of the role structuring mechanisms, Japanese video game franchises also offer compelling illustrations of the manner in which the latter operate.

B – Contrasting effects: from one intensity to another

In addition to the structuring mechanisms demonstrated in the previous section, there is another type of mechanism at work throughout the corpus, and that is the incorporation of contrasting effects of various forms. We could dub these contrasting mechanisms. I will explore this particular aspect in this section, and show that it applies to the corpus as a whole. In order to balance my analysis, I will focus more on anime and video games as illustrations of this trait, and be more brief regarding manga (although the latter is also concerned), given that manga was more of a focus in the first half of this chapter. I will begin by addressing anime.

Just as manga incorporates wildly different genres and subgenres, anime is also extremely varied when it comes to content. Consequently, several thinkers have judiciously chosen to consider anime as a type of animation, a distinct medium, rather than a genre (Lamarre 2009, x-xi, xiv; Steinberg 2012, 15-16). This is a position to which I adhere, and will make full use of in the next chapter. But anime has also been analysed solely with regards to its thematic content, and the latter certainly plays a party in the imaginary created by Japanese popular visual culture. This aspect will be analysed presently.

One of the first and arguably broadest attempts by a Western scholar at analyzing anime as a thematic whole is Susan Napier's *Anime: From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* (2005). Napier examines a broad range of anime works, from romantic comedies to pornography, through trademark postmodern perspectives such as the role of the body, gender representation, and historicity. But throughout the analysis, she consistently returns to what she calls the “three major expressive modes” of anime: the apocalyptic, the festival and the elegiac (Napier 2005, 12). The apocalyptic is defined not solely in terms of the end of the world (although this specific scenario is certainly prominent in anime), but also in terms of a more intimate breakdown of personal structures, psyche, and points of reference. The festival is characterized in the Bakhtinian carnivalesque sense, in which values are temporarily skewed or even turned upside-down, traditional roles are inverted, and logic is made relative, in a joyful, chaotic, liberated celebration that constitutes a commentary on the normal order of things. The elegiac, finally, is described as a form of nostalgia, both sadness for and celebration of the ephemerality of life, a feeling best captured in the Japanese concept of “*mono no aware*,” or the sadness of things (*Ibid.*, 12-13, 28-33).

Napier's analysis is convincing as it demonstrates the ubiquity of these modes within a variety of anime, and it can certainly serve as a starting point for outlining recurring themes in my own corpus. Indeed, at a glance, Napier's three modes appear to be quite present in the anime I have chosen to analyse (see Appendix D). But the bulk of my approach in this section will not be to attempt to merely identify and analyse Napier's three modes within the corpus. Rather, I am interested in what their copresence in the same series signifies. What does it mean when the elegiac, the apocalyptic, and the festival, or even just two out of these three modes, can be said to guide a series? While clearly not incompatible, given their apparently frequent coexistence, these modes are nevertheless very differentiated. Let us take *Cowboy Bebop* as a more in-depth example. As a whole, the series incorporates the apocalyptic on several levels. On the global scale, it takes place in a literally post-apocalyptic era, after a hyperspace gate incident ravaged the Earth and forced its inhabitants to either leave for other planets already colonized by mankind, or live underground. But the main characters, all bounty hunters and crew members of the *Bebop* spaceship, seem to have undergone private apocalypses of their

own, some personal trauma that leads them, as Napier points out, to live out their lives as if in a vacuum removed from time (Napier 2005, 135-136). Cool, laid-back Spike was nearly killed by the criminal gang he used to belong to, apparently betrayed by the woman he loved; Faye, a confident femme fatale, was cryogenically frozen over fifty years prior to the events of the series and has no memory of her previous life; eccentric teen Edward was abandoned by her father and lives in a perpetual state of silliness, often at odds with and oblivious to her environment; and disillusioned Jet, having lost an arm during his service as a police officer, leads a life without attachments. Time seems to have stopped for all of these characters, they are disconnected from reality, a fact that is hinted at throughout the series: Spike's statement that he is "watching from a dream he never woke from" (episode 5, "Ballad of Fallen Angels"), Faye's condition as anachronistic amnesiac, Ed's state of perpetual childishness, all point to this disconnect. Jet, as the responsible fatherly figure of the crew, is perhaps the one who least suffers from this condition, although episode 10, "Ganymede Elegy," strongly hints, through its focus on Jet's return to his hometown and his coming to terms with an old flame, along with the recurrent symbol of a broken watch, that he does in fact have a tendency towards temporal detachment. For most of the series, the crew of the Bebop appear to be in a state of perpetual aimlessness, going from job to job with no other goal than making money to survive (which they frequently fail to accomplish). This floating, aimless yet pleasantly carefree existence creates an elegiac dimension, in that we know it inevitably has to come to an end, which it does: the crew disbands, tragically in one instance. Ed goes in search of her father, Faye discovers where she came from and returns there, only to find her old house in ruins, and Spike, having learnt his former lover is in danger, rushes to her aid, ultimately meeting his demise after she dies as well. The crew's time spent together, in spite of their bickering and their cynical posturing, becomes something ephemerally precious for both the characters and the viewer, as the crew is forced out of its drifting state in the final episodes, and the fun times are lost, never to return⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ The elegiac dimension is created in the exact same manner, even more clearly, in *Samurai Champloo*, also directed by Shinichiro Watanabe. It also features a group of loners brought together by chance, but who have an overarching common goal, and whose time together is thus clearly dated to come to an end. In episode 20, Fuu states that, although she is determined to accomplish her goal, part of her wishes their journey would continue forever.

Finally, the festival is perhaps the least present mode in *Cowboy Bebop*, but it nonetheless appears sporadically. It exists, most clearly, in the character Edward, whose status as a girl bearing a boy's name is a hint as to her unconventionality. Edward, as mentioned, is constantly out of synch with the people she interacts with – or, put more simply, she is just plain weird. She seems to operate following her own logic, which often no one else, not even the viewer, can really understand. Through her reactions and often nonsensical babbling, she creates a sense of the festival by being consistently off-beat and creating a discrepancy between her mode of functioning and others'. I would also argue that the festival pops up in certain episodes that operate on a different stylistic or atmospheric register than the others. For example, episode 11, “Toys in the Attic,” clearly consists primarily in a parody of the movie *Alien*: the basic premise is that an unknown life form is loose on the Bebop, and is biting and infecting the crew members one by one. The creature is eventually revealed to be a lobster that was forgotten in the refrigerator for over a year, and the episode ends in what is arguably a pastiche of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, with the unconscious characters floating in zero gravity, as the contaminated refrigerator is ejected into outer space and spins around, releasing sparkly toxic material into space as Tchaikovsky's “Waltz of the Flowers” plays on. Although *Cowboy Bebop* can have its isolated moments of silliness, having an entire episode operate on the mode of parody constitutes, in my view, a foray into the festival mode, where the main logic of the series is temporarily set aside. The same can be said of episode 22, “Cowboy Funk,” which is unilaterally lighthearted and silly, featuring a terrorist bomber whose reasons everyone is too busy to listen to, and a caricatural cowboy (complete with gallon hat and steed) whom Spike feels irrationally jealous of. These prolonged incursions into the territory of humour have a different effect than the isolated gags and sarcastic interactions that punctuate other episodes (such as whenever the Bebop members start to bicker), in that these two episodes operate on an entirely different register than the others throughout their duration. This may not exactly coincide with Napier's use of the term “festival,” in which subversion tends to occur more on the level of content than form (or intra-diagetically rather than extra-diagetically), but the festival mechanism nevertheless operates.

Cowboy Bebop is often referenced as pertaining to the noir genre; however, the coexistence of modes within this series puts this very allegiance into question. Ultimately, what the presence of Napier's three modes within a single anime series appears to suggest is that anime is fundamentally heterogeneous and contrasted: within the same work, sadness, humour and catastrophe coexist. I expect that some will object that this can be said of many other types of works, including Hollywood films. Take, for example, any film from the *James Bond* franchise. The fact that they contain action is easy enough to demonstrate; they also contain romance, as a Bond girl is invariably cast; they often contain tragedy, as at least one character dies; and they contain humour, in the form of a comic secondary character or a wry one-liner from Bond himself. But there is a difference between this type of amalgam and the heterogeneity of anime, and it is one of sincerity and of degree. The difference is that Bond films, for all their non-action elements, remain primarily action films. People do not go to see a Bond film to be moved by romance, or to weep over tragedy, or to laugh; they go to see secret service intrigue, picturesque villains, high tech gadgets, elaborate fights, and pretty girls – which, it hardly needs to be said, are not the same thing as romance. People lust over the Bond girl, but nobody worries about whether she and Bond are right for each other, or wonders how they will make their relationship work, or sheds a tear should she meet her demise. Bond films operate along one dominant mode; the same cannot be said for *Cowboy Bebop*. As stated above, the series is most often classified as noir, with a touch of science fiction, but it is much harder to deduce from the series itself why people watch it. It could be for the shady underworld and characters associated with noir, and which *Cowboy Bebop* does indeed explore, as well as for the cynical coolness which pervades this universe; but it could also be for the comedy, present in the festival instances mentioned above, but also, as mentioned, in the love-hate interactions between the characters, as well as in their constant failure in bringing home the bounty. One can also watch *Cowboy Bebop* for the sheer emotion of watching the characters overcome their past trauma, or in Spike's case, rush towards their personal and final apocalypse. The difference between death in a Bond film and death in *Cowboy Bebop* is that, in the latter, grief is often present.

Some may object that death can be equally formulaic in *Bebop*, and indeed, there are cases where we encounter not so much grief as an attempt at depicting grief. Take for

example the first episode, which culminates in Spike chasing down a renegade drug dealer and his lover, a seemingly pregnant woman whom Spike briefly befriends earlier in the episode. As they near a police barrage, the woman realises that their situation is hopeless, so she shoots her lover in the head before steering straight for the police, who gun her down. In Spike's last glimpse of her, she is smiling fatalistically, surrounded by floating vials of drug escaping from the fake pregnant belly she had been wearing the whole time, as she bids Spike "Adios, cowboy." The next and final scene of the episode shows the crew of the Bebop much as we saw them at the beginning: comically broke but fairly nonchalant about it. While it may be possible to argue that the woman's demise evokes the elegiac mode (her encounter with Spike is brief and doomed), it also strongly denotes the cynical noir genre, through the constellation of drug vials, strangely beautiful yet ultimately reminiscent of the dark criminal underworld in which the series unfolds, through the cool, faux-blasé manner in which the woman bids Spike farewell, and through the fact that life on the Bebop cynically remains the same after this tragedy, which is ultimately "all in a day's work." But as the series progresses, the elegiac (which is arguably the antithesis of noir, with its melancholy poignancy and vulnerability) insinuates itself, not only regarding the main characters' respective storylines, but even where minor characters are concerned. For example, in episode 8, "Waltz for Venus," Spike gets involved with Roco, a friendly petty criminal who has stolen a rare plant in order to restore his blind sister's vision. Like many of the minor characters encountered in *Cowboy Bebop*, Roco is killed at the end of the episode. In itself, his death is a fairly banal event, yet its treatment gives it more melancholy weight than a straightforward noir series would: the episode's closing shot is of dandelion-seed-like pollen floating down upon the city. Although this is a small detail, and one which can rightfully be argued to be a cliché in its own right, it is an elegiac cliché, rather than a noir one, a melancholy reminder of the frailty of life, visually akin to the ephemeral beauty of falling cherry blossoms.

In other words, I am arguing that *Cowboy Bebop* contains differentiated networks of intensities that manifest themselves at different times throughout the series and question the genre predominance. This trait is not in itself unique to anime: I can think of several American sitcoms, for example, that are primarily comedies, yet also contain

scenes that are meant to move the viewer – and I have no difficulty believing that such scenes are part of the reason why people tune in to watch. The difference in anime, I would suggest, is that the differentiated intensities are far more irregularly dispersed throughout the series: they can arise during a mere moment during an episode, or during an entire episode (such as the *Alien* parody mentioned above), or be the result of a progression that takes the series into a completely different direction than it seemed to be headed when it began. The final episodes of *Cowboy Bebop*, in particular, are infinitely sadder and more heart-wrenching than the series' emotionally muted, cool beginning would have allowed one to predict⁵⁸. This seems to set the series apart from my above example of American comedies with an emotional dimension, in which the intensities appear to be more evenly spread out over each individual episode.

This phenomenon repeats itself consistently throughout the anime corpus. That this same trait, this uneven pervasion of differentiated intensities, is also found in *Samurai Champloo* should come as no surprise: it is directed by Shinichiro Watanabe, who also directed *Cowboy Bebop*. Again, this series not only incorporates all three of Napier's modes, it evolves so as to change radically from beginning to end: it starts off as a light, historical comedy about three unlikely travel partners, and ends with a set of three tense, violent episodes entirely devoid of humour, and a bittersweet separation. As in *Cowboy Bebop*, there are entire episodes dedicated solely to silliness, such as episode 23, “Baseball Blues,” which features the trio taking part in a baseball match against Americans who would invade Japan – never mind that baseball had not yet been invented, and that the United States did not yet exist under that name. The fact that this absurdly anachronistic, slapstick episode takes place immediately before the series' somber three-part finale is a very clear example of the type of contrast of intensities I am attempting to demonstrate. *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* also features moments that cut away from the series' more dominant fast-paced, humorous mode. For example,

⁵⁸ Although it is not in my corpus (due to its being an adaptation of a manga), I would be remiss if I did not mention the anime *Trigun* as a series which undergoes possibly one of the most radical transformations over its course (a much more clear-cut transformation than in the original manga). It starts out as a zany comedy, with a goofy, ostentatiously catastrophe-prone main character and an absurd premise (the character has been legally classified as a human disaster and is thus followed everywhere by two insurance agents, who must ensure he does not cause too much damage), and ends with multiple tragedies and an impossible dilemma with radical moral implications.

the final episode⁵⁹, “Someday in the Rain,” revolves around very little, merely ordinary scenes from a normal afternoon at school, whereas many of the other episodes feature at least one form of imminent danger or supernatural phenomenon. In this manner, the series reminds its viewers that it is not just a sci-fi anime, or a comedy, it is also a high school slice-of-life series. *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, for its part, alternates between at least three identities: a post-apocalyptic mecha featuring giant combat “robots” (even though the Eva are actually organic creatures, they are often mistaken for robotic ships), a teen drama, and a psychoanalytical reflection. Even *Princess Tutu*, which operates primarily as a magical girl anime, contrasts moments of slapstick humour and others of naïve sentimentality against scenes of genuine violence towards its conclusion. It is these contrasts of intensities that define anime as a narrative experience. As is often the case with generalisations, however, there are exceptions: *Ghost in the Shell*, for instance, appears to be firmly established in the cyberpunk genre and strays little from it. Similarly, *Perfect Blue* is essentially a thriller. But the recurrence of contrasts throughout a large part of the anime corpus makes this phenomenon difficult to dismiss.

The same can be said of manga. The irony is not wasted on me regarding the fact that I have spent a long portion of this chapter demonstrating the importance and influence of genre regarding manga, and yet find myself now arguing that these same works are full of generic contrasts. But for all its paradox, this is in fact an accurate assessment. The key nuance here is that the structuring genres I have previously analysed (shōnen, shōjo, etc.) themselves incorporate these differing intensities. In other words, combat shōnen, while admittedly operating primarily along the mode of action and violence, by its nature also includes slapstick comedy, elegy, and extensive soul-searching. In my analysis above of single combats in the corpus, I noted the strong psychological dimension of most fights, often evident in the form of a flashback that explores the enemy's painful past, or the hero's intimate motivations. That such sentimentalism should be superimposed with the brute violence and fast-paced action of the combat scenes is a strong illustration of the contrasts of intensities inherent in this

⁵⁹ Regarding *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, I refer to the broadcast order, not the chronological series order. Indeed, this series has the particularity that its episodes were broadcast in non-chronological order, thereby requiring viewers to piece the story together. This process was an integral part of the experience of watching *Haruhi*.

genre. To take a non-shōnen example, for a change, let us consider the telling case of *Fruits Basket* and its French translation. As summarized in chapter 3, this manga starts out fairly innocently, with a cute, fantasy premise and the promise of many funny, fluffy scenes: a young orphaned girl is taken in by a family whose members transform into cuddly Zodiac animals whenever hugged by a member of the opposite sex. Although this is referred to as a curse, it initially appears to be a fairly innocuous one, as the most harm it seems to cause is that the characters usually transform at inopportune times, with cuteness and hilarity ensuing. After a few volumes, however, the series takes an entirely darker tone, as psychological and physical abuse is revealed to have taken place, and the curse turns out to have more implications than initially presumed, namely that the affected members are under the yoke of the family leader, a histrionic, abusive young woman. Not only that, but a reflection on the place of Japanese tradition within modernity eventually emerges, to the extent that this prompted the series' French translators to alter their protocol: whereas the first translated volumes feature characters speaking in natural, casual French, volumes 13 and following a much more source-conservative style, with Japanese terms, suffixes, and formulations preserved. In an explanatory note unusual for manga, the translators explain that they had made the error of underestimating “the progress of Japanese culture in France,” as well as the importance of Takaya Natsuki, the author's, reflection on this theme. We can see in this anecdote an illustration of how different generic currents can coexist within a series: what was initially taken for a straightforwardly light tale ultimately revealed itself to also be a tortured representation of the contemporary tension between tradition and modernity (a tension which I explored in chapter 3).

A very clear manifestation of the contrasting intensities encountered within a single work can be found in the representation of characters, specifically main characters. One striking aspect of manga and anime is that even the most dignified, “coolest” character can be made to look completely ridiculous at times. Kenshin, for instance, literally has two sides to him: the mild-mannered, soft-spoken, easygoing, often klutzy man who is perpetually scolded by his friends in his everyday life, and the cold, poised, determined, enormously skilled samurai who emerges during combat. But even a mostly humourless, serious, impeccably poised character such as Oscar, the lead character of *The*

Rose of Versailles and head of the French Royal Guard, is at times represented as befuddled, or laughably angry, or, more rarely, on the receiving end of a gag. In such instances, the visual representation of the character changes, which effectively makes her lose some of her dignity. Fig. 2 displays Oscar as her usual dashing self, while Fig. 3 shows her in a slight state of bewilderment. One notes how the details of her hair, mouth, and usually sparkling eyes have been omitted in the second image, lending her a simplified temporary appearance that literally denotes that the character has lost some of her poise at that moment.

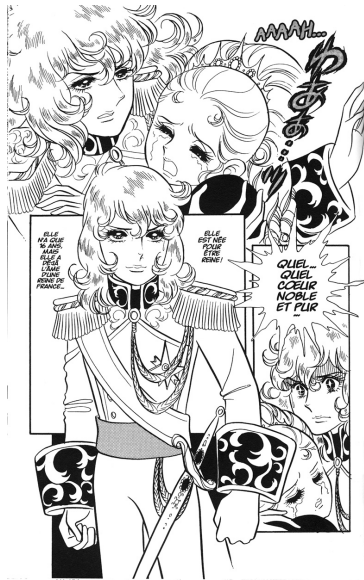


Fig. 2.:
The Rose of Versailles, vol. 1, p. 155

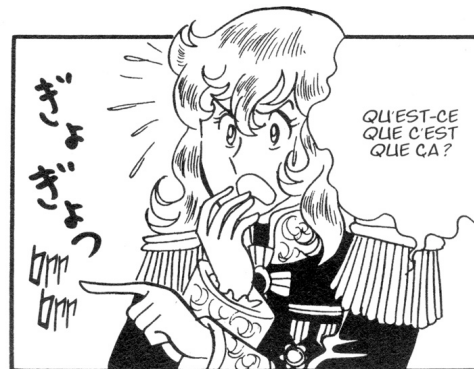


Fig. 3:
The Rose of Versailles, vol. 1, p.285

Such proceedings are very common in mainstream manga. This visual process has immense repercussions on the phenomenological level, which I will address in the next chapter. But for now, I merely wish to point out this process as an illustration of how different intensities are made evident within manga. The process is often transferred into anime adaptations of manga, but appears less present in original anime, at least as far as my corpus is concerned. There are, however, instances of it, namely within *Evangelion*, when, for example, the usually cool, sexy Misato loses all her composure at the sight of her former boyfriend in episode 8, “Asuka Strikes.” Similarly, in *Princess Tutu*, the protagonist, Duck, exists in various opposing states, from a graceful dancer to a spastic klutz, at which points her representation is appropriately altered. It is the quick passage

from one intense state to another that seems to characterize many of these works. In this manner, the viewer, and reader in the case of manga, experiences a flux from one state to the next, as characters are subjected to a perpetual change that halts only as long as one intensity lasts.

In video games, the contrast of intensities exists in a rather different guise. Rather than a passage from one state to the next, we witness in these games a constant friction between opposing narrative currents, one of them nearly always being what can only be referred to as “cuteness” and “whimsy.” Bringing up cuteness in this context inevitably brings to mind the term *kawaii*, which has been widely documented and studied in Japan studies scholarship, particularly by Sharon Kinsella, who traces the origins of its current use back to the 1970s (Kinsella 1995). *Kawaii* can be roughly translated as “cute,” or even “cloying.” It is an aesthetic represented most famously by the iconic Hello Kitty character, but also by any childish, innocuous, consumer-market-driven object, the appearance of which is meant to be gentle and reassuring⁶⁰. It is doubtless that the appeal of *Pokémon* has to do with the little monsters’ initial rounded, *kawaii* appearance (Allison 2006, 224, 226) (although, as David Surman rightly points out, they evolve and eventually obtain an appearance that is more fierce than cute (Surman 2009)). However, I hesitate to use the term to describe the phenomenon I have noticed in Japanese games: *kawaii* is certainly a part of it, but it is too historically specific for my purposes. What I am referring to is a tendency, in Japanese games, to allow a strain of content-based cuteness and whimsy to coexist with other narrative currents, such as epic fantasy or science-fiction.

Take *Pokémon*, for instance. Although the series is most widely acknowledged for its cute little monsters, it is, narratively speaking, a universe tainted with science-fiction. *Pokémon*, or pocket monsters, while they initially appear to be magical creatures, are in fact considered to be fauna within the gameworld. The main human playable character is tasked by a lab coat-clad professor with the mission of collecting as much data as possible on these creatures. Pokéballs, used to capture pokémon, are scientifically created

⁶⁰ *Paranoia Agent* offers a critique of *kawaii* in the form of Maromi, a wide-eyed, long-lashed, squishy, pink puppy mascot, which in the first episode is portrayed as widely popular, purchased even by adults who claim it reassures them (much as a transitional object reassures an infant). In the end, Maromi is directly criticized as a symbol of shirked responsibility and contemporary lack of maturity.

devices, not magical spheres, although their inner workings are never explained. It would be easy to imagine a straight-laced sci-fi narrative based on such a premise. And yet, the games remain inherently whimsical and childish, in their graphic design (which is simple and coloured with kawaii), in their villainous antagonists (who are often melodramatic, but rarely threatening and often ridiculous), in the friendly competition that regulates pokémon battles (rarely are opponents mean or nasty), and in the optional games and activities one can take part in throughout the game. The latter include activities such as dressing up one's pokémon and entering them in beauty contests, or collecting ingredients to cook food for one's pokémon. Pokémons are simultaneously objects of research, combatants and pets (Allison 2006, 195). There is a strong current of nurturing sweetness alongside the ostensibly sci-fi premise. (Consult appendix E for more examples.)

In short, although Japanese video games are not, from a narrative perspective, endowed with the same changes of intensities as manga and anime are⁶¹, they nevertheless contain elements from conflicting narrative genres; this dynamic typically opposes whimsy, or playfulness, and a usually more heavy genre, such as science fiction or epic fantasy. Thus, the entire corpus is characterized by a generic tension that cumulatively operates as a structuring mechanism. Their narratives, however different from one another, are characterized by a sense of patchworked affective peaks that ultimately define them as a narrative experience. It is this sense of being pulled in different affective directions, of going from one peak to another, which I believe characterizes the narrative consumption of manga, anime, and Japanese video games. This passage from one peak to another returns us to the previously demonstrated dynamic of flux and stasis, albeit at a different level. Whereas the previous section identified this dynamic as a tension between canon and variation, the present analysis demonstrates its presence in the passage from intensity to intensity, a narrative amalgam which is characterized by the momentary standstill caused by a peak, and the flux that takes us to the next one. Each intensity constitutes a sharp narrative crease in the otherwise flowing fabric of the work.

⁶¹ These games do, however, contain changes of intensities from a gameplay, or phenomenological, perspective, but that is the subject of the next chapter.

A recap is necessary at this point. These last two chapters (3 and 4) have been devoted to demonstrating the existence of various recurring motifs, both thematic and narratological. The latter have been referred to as structuring mechanisms, because of the manner in which their recurrence, beyond providing markers for the audience to link to one another across the corpus, shape the experience which they provide, by following a dynamic of alternating flux and stasis. Thematic motifs, for their part, also follow this dynamic on various levels, and constitute nodes which reinforce the cohesion of the corpus. But it is arguably the culturally tinted content motifs that start off the cohesion process, by providing the audience with a real, and presumed stable referent, that of Japanese culture – although this cultural stability is in fact only apparent, a fact which emerges as works evolve and become more self-referential, offering the possibility of reflection and increasingly deep exchanges. From these multiple levels of emerges an imaginary which is open not only to exploration, but also to play. This is because the fabric of this imaginary presents itself as a patchwork.

The concept of patchwork, as I intend it here, is similar to Azuma Hiroki's concept of the database. Azuma, in his study of otaku culture, confirms Lyotard's pronouncement of the decline of grand narratives, and proclaims that characters are the new point of reference and attraction (Azuma 2008, 49-70). But these characters are themselves of a particular type, as Azuma explains when he delves into the concept of *moé*, a trend within otaku culture. *Moé*, without going into details (see Galbraith 2009 for a thorough analysis) is strongly linked to fetishism, and caters to the idea that one trait, or attractor (cat ears, glasses, clumsiness) will appeal to a significant stratum of fans. Thus, Azuma likens otaku culture to a database consisting of character trait-elements, which are interchangeable and ever-evolving according to changing tastes (Azuma 2008, 70-85). The pleasure of the otaku, he concludes, lies in manipulating this database and achieving intimate knowledge of it. It has been written that Azuma's claim can be nuanced, in that narratives continue to prosper within Japanese popular visual culture (Steinberg 2012, 89), and I would also point out that, unlike Azuma, it is not my intent to study otaku culture specifically. However, I do believe the database exists as a guiding structure, albeit as one mechanism among others. The basic mechanism of the database remains a working concept in the case of this thesis, as I have argued that the pleasure of

discovering Japanese popular visual culture lies in part in familiarising oneself with the recurring motifs, which seem to operate in a manner similar to Azuma's trait-elements. There is, however, a crucial difference, in that the motifs I have attempted to demonstrate amount to something larger than the sum of their parts, which cannot be said for the database (this is precisely what Azuma criticizes in otaku culture: the database does not move beyond itself, and leads only to animal, repetitive, compulsive interaction). The motifs, engaging with one another through the dynamic of flux and stasis, intertwine to create a patchwork, a complex whole formed of connected myriad fragments. What brings them together is precisely the dynamic of flux and stasis, this tension which seems to characterize the content of these works, no matter how unlike one another they may be. But more than that, it is the transcultural dimension which brings them together, that layer which stems from a conception of cultural identity, misguided though it may be, and which evolves into a playful exploration of the various structuring mechanisms. The database, for its part, has no real structure. In the case of the patchwork, it is the structure, ironically, which enables the play. Because it is the stasis that enables us to notice the flux.

And, as we will now see, the tension between movement and stillness, between peaks and other peaks, is to be found at the phenomenological level as well.

Chapter Five

Phenomenological textures

Having examined the motifs existing throughout the corpus at the level of content, I now come to the phenomenological, experience-based portion of my analysis. In this section, I will attempt to highlight recurrences where manga, anime and Japanese video games each utilise distinct specificities of their respective media (comics, animation and video games) in ways that allow for the production of effects upon the audience that reveal themselves to be partly similar and thus overlap in places across the corpus and the different media. As mentioned previously, this does not negate the uniqueness of each separate medium, but merely highlights phenomenological areas that overlap in places, and which together form a mediological ethos that encompasses the corpus as a whole. Thus the audience participates in similar medial experiences when engaging with these different works, and it is this experience, I argue, that ends up being sought after in the consumption of Japanese visual popular culture.

At the heart of my analysis lies Deleuze's theory of the fold. This theory is elaborated in *Le pli*, the work Deleuze dedicates to the study of Leibniz and the baroque, and in which he extracts a complex thought apparatus relating to perspectivism, compossible worlds, seriality, difference and perception. The fold, here, is considered not solely as an architectural or aesthetic morsel, but rather as relation, namely between the multiple and the One: "the multiple is not that which contains many parts, but that which is folded in many ways" (Deleuze 1988, 5, my translation). The fold is thus a mechanism that differentiates without separating. On the contrary, the fold reunites even as it differentiates: "the duplicity of the fold is that it distinguishes both sides while bringing them closer together" (*Ibid.*, 42, my translation). In this manner, it acts as both border and suture, as both intensity and continuity. As a relation, I believe that the concept of the fold can be transposed to the domain of phenomenology, that medial effects can give rise to phenomenological folds, an experience that is characterized by the convergence of contrasting or colliding medial effects within a work. Throughout this chapter, I will demonstrate the presence of recurring phenomenological folds, which structure the experience created by my corpus. The notion of folds may initially appear incompatible

with that of structure, as Deleuze writes that the baroque, from which his conception of the fold initially arises, is an art not of structures, but of textures (*Ibid.*, 165). However, he also writes:

The Baroque is the informal art par excellence [...]. But the informal is not the negation of form: it establishes form as folded, as existing only as “mental landscape,” high up within the soul or the mind; it also includes immaterial folds. Matter is the content, but folded forms are manners. One goes from matter to manner. (*Ibid.*, 49-50, my translation)

In this passage, Deleuze simultaneously establishes the fold as something both real and abstract that can be experienced intimately (“within the soul or the mind”), and as a mechanism that shapes matter, and therefore structures it. This is a structure in a fluid, changing sense, not a rigid grid that is imposed upon matter, but rather a general orientation that arises from the way matter arranges itself and settles according to where it falls and how it is grasped.

In keeping with my metaphor of fabric, I argue that what is structured through the folds are textures. If the content recurrences outlined in the previous chapters are motifs that are traced and followed perceptually and cognitively, then the phenomenological recurrences I will outline in the present chapter are textures, properties that are felt and experienced physically. Here again, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari for a clue as to how to characterize these textures. In *Mille plateaux*, these authors distinguish two kinds of spaces: smooth and striated. Striated space is defined as sedentary, coded and recoded, a space within which movement is limited. In contrast to it stands smooth space, defined as nomadic, open, continuously territorialized and deterritorialized (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 592, 436-437; Massumi 1992, 6). Both spaces coexist and merge within every aspect of our reality, containing each other, bleeding and shifting into one another (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 593, 624-625). Both are said to coexist within video games, (Nitsche 2008, 181), but they are also undeniably present within manga and anime, as I will demonstrate; each type of space constitutes a distinct texture within the fabric of the imaginary of Japanese popular visual culture.

The dynamic between flux and stasis continues to operate at this phenomenological level, and operates as regulating principle for the interactions between the different textural spaces. Indeed, flux and stasis are implicit in the idea of the

phenomenological fold. A fold, after all, can be defined as the meeting area between two (or more) flows in the fabric, the spot where separate movements collide and culminate in a peak wherein the distinctions between them are still present (otherwise there would be nothing to form and support the fold), but impossible to pinpoint with precision. The fold is where fluxes turn into stasis.

I will focus on two traits which I believe encompass the levels of phenomenological overlap within the corpus: fragmentation and layered tabularity. We will see that the former naturally yields phenomenological folds, while the latter leads to a superflat effect within the works of the corpus, which in turn I will demonstrate as being a generator of folds.

A – Fragmentation

Initially, the notion I planned to use to name the process to be demonstrated in this section was “rupture.” It was to designate a sharp contrast between two elements, a contrast sharp enough to bring about an impression of discrepancy, of separation. But the separation in question is precisely only an impression: there is no actual break between the spaces. Consequently, the term “fragmentation” is ultimately a better fit, as it reconciles the notions of contrast and unity: indeed, a fragment is only a fragment in relation to the whole it belongs to. In this manner, the particular multiplicity created by the fold (division within unity, differentiation within gathering) is conveyed.

It may seem odd that an element of discontinuity should breed continuity throughout a series of works, yet this is not the first time we have encountered such a situation. Indeed, contrast was an important element of the previous chapter, where a certain number of content-related contrasts were revealed throughout the corpus. Some of these contrasts have a phenomenological dimension as well, and will be mentioned in the present section from a different perspective. Over the course of the following pages, I will outline several forms of fragmentation which operate at the level of medial functioning, and thus have an effect on how the images which compose these works, and thus by extension these works themselves, are felt and experienced. Along the way, the similarities between the different experiences will be brought to light. I choose to speak of fragmentation, rather than contrast, because I will argue that these effects are felt as

more than mere fluctuations, but rather as repeated shocks within the flow of each work, which ultimately form lines or folds of division within it.

a) Manga

One element of contrast which is present in manga has already been mentioned: changes of stylistic registry. It has been touched upon in previous chapters that there are instances in manga where characters are represented in a style which dramatically contrasts with the way they are usually drawn, in what Thierry Groensteen calls changes in visual register. In his *Système de la bande dessinée*, Groensteen writes that, while comic artists can choose from a wide spectrum of realism for both their characters and settings, usually opting for a combination of realism and iconicity, it is the consistency of their ultimate choice that characterizes each distinct comic work. In other words, a comic will typically be identified by a homogenous style, or stylistic register, whether extremely realistic or abstract. However, Groensteen is careful to point out that manga constitute an exception to this rule, as the stylistic register can vary immensely within the same work – even from one panel to the next (Groensteen 1999, 52-53).

What Groensteen is referring to here, and which is indeed obvious to any person familiar with manga (and, by extension, anime, where the same phenomenon occurs), is that representations of characters, especially, vary wildly within a work depending on the effect desired by the mangaka. In chapter 4, I gave a brief example from *Rose of Versailles*, in which we saw the main character, Oscar, lose her composure to such a degree as to be somewhat visually altered. This example is particularly striking to readers of the series because the character is otherwise represented as dignified and romantic; however, the process is of course also applied to characters whose personality lends itself more to ridicule, such as Naruto. As mentioned, the boy ninja is represented from the start as an underdog, a failing student who lacks a solid grasp of the finer points of ninjutsu. Although he makes up for his failings through his determination and innate raw power, and eventually gains his peers' admiration, he is also often the butt of jokes, and his visual representations reflect this, showing him in various exaggerated states. Fig. 4 shows Naruto in a dignified state. He has just finished a speech on how he has suffered as

a demon-vessel, and reaffirmed his desire to save his friend Gaara⁶². Fig. 5, consisting in two consecutive pages, take place shortly after Naruto has returned to his village after a three-year absence. He chastises a young ninja for using ninjutsu to play perverted games. Upon hearing this, his team mate, Sakura, reflects on how much he has matured. Then Naruto effectively ruins the effect by claiming he has succeeded in developing even more perverted techniques, at which point Sakura, realising that he has in fact remained as childish as ever, hits him. The contrast between the dignified, determined Naruto and the laughably immature Naruto is striking, as the latter is drawn with simplified, grotesque facial features (as is the infuriated Sakura in the panel where she hits him).



Fig. 4: *Naruto*, vol. 28, p. 158



Fig. 5: *Naruto*, vol. 28, p. 23-24⁶³

⁶² This is indeed the same Gaara whom Naruto battled in the in-depth combat example I gave in the previous chapter. Although portrayed as a homicidal sociopath during that particular fight, he has, like many shōnen villains, been redeemed at this point.

⁶³ Unless otherwise indicated, manga pages must be read right-to-left.

To give another example, in Fig. 6, an excerpt from Takaya Natsuki's *Fruits Basket*, the main character Tohru is represented first in the “normal” register, which is relatively classic, with trademark oversized eyes and detailed pupils, undersized nose and mouth, and an otherwise relatively realistically proportioned, albeit petite, body. In the second panel, she is represented in a completely different, highly abstract register: her eyes are now mere hollow shapes, her body is disproportioned and represented with simplified lines, with stick-straight hair. This change in representation corresponds to a moment of panic for the character, as she is flailing about in reaction to a joke her interlocutor has made. The change in visual register can be understood as an attempt to highlight the character's flustered nature in a humorous light, by deforming her physically. This technique implies that she is so agitated in that moment that her very being is transformed – or, rather, the entire atmosphere is altered by her agitation. Similarly, in the final panel, she is shown drawn in a style known as *chibi*, with slits in place of eyes, to denote that she is smiling, and an overall simplified morphology, particularly her hands. Unlike the visual example just given from *Naruto*, where the stark contrast in style was played for big laughs, these changes in visual register, although clearly meant to lighten the work, are to be taken almost in stride, as simply a part of how reality is represented in this manga.



Fig. 6: *Fruits Basket*, vol. 23, p. 44-45

This style, sometimes referred to as super deformed, or SD, is typically very simplified, the characters being reduced to a few distinctive physical traits. Often, as in the above examples, it is used to highlight the character's emotion of the moment, usually in a comical way, be it anger, joy, fear, or freedom from care. Although Groensteen states that this sets manga apart from other comics, this is not to say that graphic contrasts do not exist in comics other than manga: for instance, Scott McCloud points out what he calls the "masking effect," which is the fairly common practice, in comics, of setting characters drawn in a fairly simplified, iconic style, against a realistic, detailed background (a practice used in such series as Hergé's *Tintin* or Jacobs' *Blake et Mortimer*) (McCloud 1994, 42-43). Nor are extreme representations of emotions unique to manga: alternative French cartoonist Reiser, for example, is known for portraying his characters' intense reactions in an almost grotesque style, distorting their features as required. The difference is that Reiser's characters are malleable to begin with: their features are inherently underdetermined, as Reiser's style is fundamentally expressionist, so that his characters are forever changing under his pen. Manga characters, on the other hand, oscillate between their habitual state and their intense, distorted state: the two are clearly differentiated. In fact, they can be said to exist on different planes: while the "normal" state is meant to be taken literally, the distorted state is meant to be understood as an exaggeration, a symbolic representation rather than a literal one. There is thus a fundamental crease that occurs not just at the level of aesthetics, but at that of representation.

This shock is thus felt at both levels. Indeed, reading comics, like any medial experience, is not solely a mental activity, but a phenomenological one, which means it has a physical dimension. The interaction between the reader and the panels creates a rhythm, a flow according to which the reader decrypts and absorbs the visual and textual information. Reading comics comprises a physical, material aspect, and constitutes a process which involves not just the mind, but also the body. The punctual stylistic hyperboles present in manga certainly operate on one's mental perception of these works: the reader registers and assimilates the fact that manga characters can be represented on at least two different paradigms, one literal and one hyperbolic. This results in a mental adjustment that must be made whenever such a paradigmatic shift occurs: the reader must

readjust and always keep in mind that, despite the strong graphic differences, this is indeed the same character that is being represented. The physical dimension of the reading process is also affected: whenever the style lapses into the hyperbolic, the gaze must adapt to an entirely different set of lines, which convey an intensity that creates a visual shock, a tiny destabilisation that requires a different gaze. The visual flow is thus punctuated with these expressive peaks that affect the manner and speed at which the information is perceived and registered. What happens, in fact, is that each hyperbole opens up a new textural space within the manga page: this space operates on a different principle than the rest of the page, provides a different experience than the other representations, and as such constitutes a different phenomenological space. To be more specific, the space generated by the hyperboles is, to me, a clearly striated space: although it appears to be defined by its liberation from the norm, it actually departs from the ordinary in very coded ways, through transformations that obey certain laws, a consistent aesthetic from peak to peak, in conditions where the hyperbole is not a liberation, but an imposed state. Indeed, the SD aesthetic is clearly regulated by certain rules, the hyperbole is represented according to certain criteria (blank eyes, minimal detail). It is a texture that requires decoding on behalf of the reader, and that in turn imposes its intensity upon the latter. Every switch from one space, or texture, to the other thus forms a fold, a crease that defines an aspect of the manga reading experience; each change constitutes a peak within a flow, a snag within a flux.

Another phenomenological rupture specific to manga consists in the fragmentation of visual content. This fragmentation occurs on two levels, the first being that of the represented content. Indeed, I have found that manga often contain a significant amount of panels containing “body fragments,” i.e. panels which, rather than showing a character in his or her entirety, represent fragments of the latter. In order to attain these findings, I examined volumes from different mainstream manga series, including *Fruits Basket* and *Bleach*, and looked for panels which did not represent characters traditionally, either with a focus on their face or by framing them from the waist or knees up, but instead focus on a portion of the body: a foot, a hand, a torso, etc. This trait is apparent in Fig. 7.



Fig. 7: *Fruits Basket*, vol. 10, p.52-53

We can see that the third panel focuses on the girl's feet, for no purely narrative reason, meaning that there is nothing in the dialogue or story that explicitly requires this attention on that part of the character's anatomy. The fifth panel focuses on a section of the boy's face, while the final panel of the first page features a segmented portion of the girl's head. Doubtless that these segmentations serve atmospheric and even arguably (visual) narrative purposes: by not showing the characters' eyes, for instance, the images manage to suggest the characters' emotional distress precisely by not depicting it. But the presence, whatever the reasons behind it, of these fragments remains striking and creates a separate phenomenological effect.

I found an average of 150 such panels per volume, which is equivalent to an average of one fragment per double page, a significant trait (Cools 2011, 74). Characters' bodies are thus frequently segmented, shown in bits and pieces, left for the reader to connect them together or fill out the blank they suggest. This constitutes a fragmentation in a very literal sense, one that cuts into the very content of manga. At the same time, as we have seen, when it comes to the visual, content and effect are irremediably connected; thus, this rupture of content has a phenomenological effect as well. Comics are a fragmented medium by definition, requiring the reader to perform closure between distinct panels, as McCloud has shown (McCloud 1994, 66-69): thus, the phenomenology of comics is one which at heart relies on the reader to be aware of the different levels of

meaning, of the isolated panel as well as the page the panels which add up to constitute the page. But this specific form of fragmentation existing in manga is particularly conducive to what Thierry Groensteen calls *tressage*, another fundamental mechanism of comics that consists in the existing connections between not just consecutive panels, but panels that are spread out across a page, or even separated by several pages: *tressage*, in other words, is closure in a wider sense, closure as continuous process rather than as a set of distinct operations between contiguous panels (Groensteen 1999, 173-174). Thus, in manga containing body fragments, the reader must execute multi-tiered closure, connecting together not just panels across all the pages of each work (an operation which of course continues, as in all comics), but also pictorial fragments. The fragmentation of the content thus prolongs itself into a series of phenomenological folds, in that the reader experiences the work as teeming with fragments that are distinct yet related: the work continues to constitute a whole, but it is one that is folded, and therefore multiple, run through with segmentations. These visual segmentations inevitably affect the experience of the work, just as a comic consisting of nothing but scenic panels (panels depicting an entire scene, rather than an isolated character or action) would provide a very different experience than one composed exclusively of depicted actions. The manga experience is characterized by a constant dynamic between the fragments and the whole they constitute: the reading process perpetually navigates the relation between these two levels. This relation forms a fold, as characters' bodies are simultaneously broken apart by representation and reassembled by the reader's gaze, differentiated from within and put back together from without.

This fragmentation of content has a corollary phenomenon which also contributes to the folded experience generated by manga, and which consists in significant changes in content framing. Indeed, the presence of these fragments signifies that the focus and perspective vary enormously from one panel to the next: one will show, for example, a medium level shot of a character, the next will show a close-up of his hand, while the next might show a general overhead shot of the scene. In other words, there is a great contrast between the content of consecutive panels. Scott McCloud has indirectly suggested this when he found, albeit coming from a different perspective, in his seminal *Understanding Comics*, that manga contain more subject-to-subject transitions than

American and European comics: this means that manga contain a larger proportion of panel sequences in which one panel depicts one character and the next portrays a different character or object (McCloud 1994, 67-82). This finding logically entails a contrast between consecutive panels. My own finding regarding the presence of fragments consolidates this idea, as it heightens the probability of changes of content between panels. Additionally, it entails that there are significant changes not just of content but of framing: indeed, the fragmentation of a character's body necessarily entails a close-up on the body part in question, which inevitably contrasts against the other general or medium shots which are most of the time essential to making a comic intelligible. This idea appears additionally confirmed by examples such as Fig. 8:



Fig. 8: *Bleach*, vol. 40, p. 30-31

We see how the viewing angle indeed varies wildly from one panel to the next. The first panel features a wide shot with one character in the foreground and a girl in the far background. The second shows a close-up of the girl's face, which is accomplished by means of a very sharp transition between both panels. The second page is even more representative of this technique: the transitions between the second, third and fourth panels, for example, not only change subject, but involve a striking extreme close-up of

the demon's eye, followed by a medium close-up of the girl. This is immediately followed by a high shot of the girl's feet (note, in passing, the presence of a fragment here), then by a medium shot of the demon, and then another extreme close-up of his eye, but, it is important to note, from the opposite direction than the previous extreme close-up. This is quite illustrative of how perspectives shift quite sharply from one panel to the next in manga. Fig. 9 is also quite evocative:

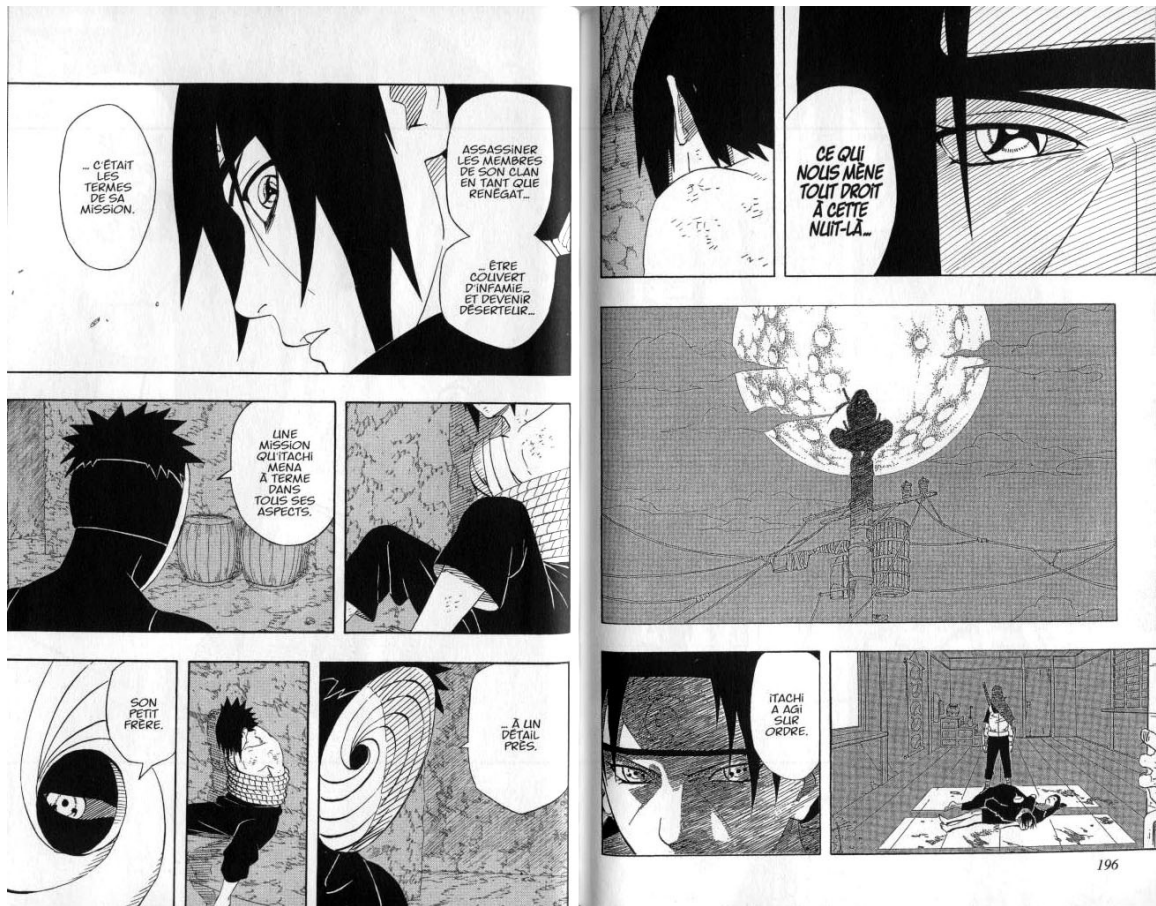


Fig. 9: *Naruto*, vol. 43, p. 196-195

Without analysing every panel transition, we can clearly see similar passages between close-ups and wide shots, as well as strong differences in angles (and we note, once again, the presence of fragments). Such variations of both content and framing strongly affect the experience of manga. Indeed, rather than following a steady flow of visuals consisting of smooth perspectival transitions, the reader is taken on a visual roller-coaster, having to repeatedly adapt her perspective according to the constantly changing framing. This conduces to a nervous, jagged reading experience that follows

unpredictable patterns and ruptures between panels. Indeed, these brutal changes in focus can only be likened to systematic creases, tending toward the limit of rupture: they go beyond mere contrast, through sheer repetition. An isolated incident or two could be said to constitute a contrast; but this oft repeated process of switching from one viewpoint to another very different one results in a series of jags that amounts to a continuous rupture, oxymoronic though the term may appear. Folds stem from this constant tension, from this meeting of perspectives so different as to be nearly opposite, and yet brought together physically on the page. The reader's place on the page, the place from which she views the scene, is constantly shifting, taking her from one peak to the next. What we have here is not a contrast of textures, but rather a contrasted texture, one that is simply defined by its unevenness, as granite is defined by its roughness or silk by its glossiness. This is a space that manages to be both smooth and striated in different ways: smooth because the perspectives each panel adopts are infinitely varied, because the reader's eye wanders incessantly across the page from one vantage point to another; striated because these vantage points are imposed upon the reader, because she is embarked on this rollercoaster with no option to step off. This jagged reading experience is admittedly not constant: there are pages where the framing process flows more easily, where the extreme close up is brought about gradually, or the perspective alternates more traditionally from one character to another. But the recurrence of these jagged folds is great enough to inevitably influence and shape the reading experience of manga.

One final element is conducive to phenomenological folding, one which is actually unique to most translations of manga, as opposed to the original Japanese editions. This element consists in the opposition between the order in which the panels are read and the direction in which the text is read. Indeed, in nearly all recent translated editions, the original panel layout of the panels has been preserved, with the panels being read from right to left and from top to bottom, and speech bubbles meant to be read in the same order. In the original Japanese edition, the text inside the bubbles is to be read similarly: it is most often laid out in columns, to be read from top to bottom, and right to

left, in keeping with Japanese reading standards⁶⁴. In translations using Roman characters, the text is of course laid out in horizontal lines, to be read left to right. Therefore there is a discrepancy between the text's direction and the ordinal organisation of the page layout. This generates a constantly recurring snag in the reading process, where the reader must break with the direction of the panel images in order to read the text laid out in the opposite direction. This added snag perfectly illustrates the physical, body-based dimension of the reading experience: in this case, the gaze itself is forced to go back and forth, going in one direction to go from one panel to the contiguous one, then heading in the opposite direction to read the text inside the panel, constantly altering its course and resulting in a choppy, nervous trajectory and flow. The reader's gaze literally coils upon itself in a continual folding motion: the fold has become physical. As in other forms of comics, the gaze navigates between differentiated striated spaces (visual images on the one hand, and text on the other), but with an additional crease caused by this phenomenological side-effect of translation.

Thus the manga reading experience is one that is qualified by a continual succession of creases that puncture the flow of reading and require a broken rhythm and jagged trajectory. It is an experience of sharp folds, with the peaks and valleys implied by this reality. Between the folds lie sets of striated textures, spaces that are for the most part coded, limited and directional. These are bound together to form an ultimately smooth experience, if not a smooth space, through the sheer repetition of striates: these form a rhythm that generates a smooth movement of the gaze, smooth in the sense of flow, of constantly regenerated flux from stasis.

b) Anime

Because anime and manga are so closely related historically and aesthetically, the super deformed, hyperbolically simplified incursions are also present in anime, and constitute similarly striated spaces delimited by similar phenomenological fold. In the same manner as in manga, anime characters' physical traits and graphic rendering can be altered according to the needs of the plot. Here as well, this technique is usually used for

⁶⁴ Japanese text can in fact be written and read in horizontal lines that proceed from left to right, the same as text written in Roman characters. However, in manga, dialogue is most often written in columns, as described.

humorous purposes. It should also be mentioned that anime characters showcase a “schizophrenia” that is not always graphically rendered, but rather shown at the behavioural level: instead of being physically deformed, characters switch from “symptom to symptom,” from reaction to reaction (Lamarre 2009, 177). Although their graphic rendering does not necessarily change, their behaviour is instantly altered from one moment to the next, which shows in their movements and even more so in the voice acting that brings them to life. To give one example among others, there is a comical scene in episode 3 of *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* where the title character blackmails the computer club into giving her a computer by unexpectedly staging photographs of their president appearing to sexual harass a female student. The ensuing mayhem, with the computer club up in arms, Haruhi gleefully triumphant, and the poor photographed girl near tears, is quite representative of the intensities that characterize anime: the atmosphere switches very quickly from relative calm to multi-faceted chaos, in a break that is clearly meant to be abrupt. Another, more low key example can be found in the first episode of *Samurai Champloo*, in a scene where Fuu is serving customers at a restaurant. One of the customers rudely berates her for being slow, and her expression and demeanour instantaneously turn to annoyance, although she tries to hide it: she shudders and a symbolic cross appears on her temple as her appearance is altered in a clear hyperbolic effect similar to those encountered in previous manga examples. Here again, the change is abrupt and clearly demarcated. This is a small change, to be sure, but it nevertheless shows the form anime intensities can take. Although such changes appear to primarily concern the content of anime, the paradigmatic shift is felt at the phenomenological level as well, particularly as it is often highlighted by sound effects: in the *Haruhi* example, a clashing sound is heard when the scene switches from normalcy to mayhem, and upbeat music underlines the chaos. The viewer experiences a change in representation that requires a mental adjustment, a change in gaze, a becoming conscious that the characters (and the viewer with them) have slipped over a fold and into a new space. This space is one of behavioural caricature, one within which the characters become ephemerally defined by an intensity in particular, before switching to the next. Anime is thus a succession of differentiated striated states/spaces that regulate its content but are experienced as phenomenological fragmentation.

The chaotic space generated in the Haruhi example can be likened to an attenuated version of Napier's festival mode, analysed in chapter 4. In fact, I would argue that the variations in modes mentioned in the previous chapter, the cohabitation of different genres within the same work, can also, in the case of anime, be experienced phenomenologically, not just cognitively. Indeed, while manga and anime both provide physical experiences, they do so through different means, which operate through different senses. Manga's phenomenology, as we have seen, namely involves movement generated by the sweep of the gaze across the page, a movement which is influenced by factors such as framing, density of content, page layout and graphic style. Anime, for its part, conveys an experience which incorporates movement not of the gaze, which is restrained within the confines of the screen, but of the images themselves, through animation, framing and cuts; additionally, anime has sound at its disposal. Thus, although both manga and anime can feature contrasting genres within the same series (even though I focused almost exclusively on anime, in order to give each section of the corpus due attention), the nature of anime is such that the generic contrast makes itself felt at the phenomenological level in arguably more obvious ways than in manga.

Cowboy Bebop is quite illustrative of this phenomenon. We have seen how different genres coexist within this series at the level of content, but I did not, in the previous chapter, give due attention to more medial considerations. Now is the time to address this aspect. Let us begin by examining the opening sequence of the series, which quite explicitly pertains to the arguably dominant noir genre. It depicts what we later learn are flashbacks of Spike's last face-off against his former crime gang before the events of the series. The sequence is replete with images denoting the noir genre, not just in their content but mainly in the way they are transmitted. Shown in tones of dark blue and grey, it begins with a descending, askew travelling shot of a narrow, anonymous street, before cutting to an eye-level close-up of Spike's mouth as he smokes a cigarette, followed by a low angle, askew shot of his back as he walks away, wearing a raincoat (because it is, of course, raining) and carrying a bouquet of roses. One rose falls into a puddle of rain, and a high angle close-up of it is shown in alternation with shots of Spike and his former employers shooting at each other, including several extreme close-ups of guns detonating, as the rose gradually grows blood red. Spike is wounded, and the

sequence ends with a close-up of his bloody grin (which, I might add, is one amongst several shots in this sequence featuring body fragments similar to those the existence of which I demonstrated within manga). Throughout the entire sequence, the only soundtrack is of a slow, melancholy, cool jazz tune played on the xylophone. The noir genre is expressed through visual clichés (the cigarette, the guns, the rose, the rain), but also through the atmosphere conveyed by the many close-ups (which give the viewer the impression of being trapped in a closed, tight space along with the portrayed action), the dark colour tones and the smooth, incongruously subdued music that is iconic of the cool, blasé attitude of noir. By contrast, the *Alien* parodying episode, which I analyzed in the previous chapter, uses an entirely different repertoire of techniques, the most noticeable one arguably being the recurring use of visuals taken from the point of view of the “alien” itself as it scurries through the spaceship’s ducts: we see what the creature sees, through its jerky head movements, a red filter altering our vision. Similarly, we also experience the world through Spike’s eyes when he dons a heat-vision camera to search for the intruder. There are also techniques borrowed from horror or thriller films, such as a low angle zooming shot of Faye from the back to suggest that something is lurking behind her. Tense, strident music punctuates those moments when the creature is poised to attack. Although this episode is a parody, it nevertheless utilizes medial techniques that are distinctive and generate a different experience than those that are iconic of the noir genre. What we often refer to as atmosphere is also a phenomenological effect, the physical experience pressed upon us by the way the medium, in this case animation, is utilised. The phenomenology of *Cowboy Bebop* is thus heterogeneous and multiple, rife with ruptures as the experience switches between modes. The same applies to other genre-mixing anime series such as *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* and *Noein*. In the latter, for example, the phenomenology changes depending on whether the scene pertains to the slice-of-life aspect of the series, or instead consists in a sci-fi battle. The medial contrasts between two such scenes is obvious enough: the first is calm, with little motion, typically set in a well-lit, sunny setting, while the second is typically dark, with fast, violent attacks streaking across the screen. We can clearly see in these examples how contrast of content can go hand in hand with phenomenological break, as the conveyors of content contrast are inevitably experienced phenomenologically.

Again, I find that such sharp heterogeneity is equivalent to the presence of contrasting striated textures. It is important to note that Deleuze and Guattari are careful to point out that smooth spaces are not necessarily homogeneous, nor are contrasted spaces necessarily striated (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 594-595). Indeed, I will be arguing later, after some additional demonstrations, that not only anime, but also manga and video games, ultimately constitute smooth spaces in many ways. But smooth spaces can be composed of striated textures, and this is the case here. The different genres present in anime are indeed striated spaces, regulated by codes and conventions, and each delimited within the segment of anime allotted to it. They create within the anime neat folds that appear whenever there is a generic switch, whenever the viewer finds herself experiencing a new texture and becoming aware of the one she was previously surrounded by.

Anime also incorporates folds through its use of limited animation. As Marc Steinberg, among others, explains, anime was historically shaped by the limited, constraining means available to its pioneers, most notably Tezuka Osamu. Rather than strive for full, Disney-esque animation, Tezuka opted for a limited animation that was both cheaper and faster to produce (Steinberg 2012, 9-13). This namely involved using fewer frames per second, resulting in choppier movement. Additionally, early anime featured various techniques the objective of which was to create the impression of dynamic movement without having to actually draw movement; this included panning the camera across a still drawing, showing repeated limited movement (such as drawing a still head with only the mouth opening and closing to simulate speech, or representing walking as a loop of the same minimal repeated motions), frequently cutting from one image to another (resulting in a succession of short shots), and creating movement through closure between comparatively still frames, in a process similar to that present in manga (*Ibid.*, 15-16, 29-35). Such traits continue to be defining characteristics of much contemporary anime. I would specify that the latter appears to set itself apart by a combination of short shots and variations in framing (and in some cases, perspective). Indeed, the breaking down of a short scene from episode 4 of *Noein*, “Friends,” reveals 31 shots in under two minutes, with no single shot lasting longer than seven seconds (see Appendix F). Furthermore, although some framings are occasionally repeated, one still

counts twenty-three different framings, from wide shots to extreme close ups. The perspective also varies from shot to shot, although it does so in a fairly traditional manner: indeed, the scene in question is a dialogue, and the perspective switches from one character to another in a conventional way. Because I purposefully selected a quotidian scene (an argument between two friends), rather than one of the many action scenes featured in *Noein*, the perspective does not dramatically change: the majority of the shots are eye-level. Nevertheless, the variations in framing are sufficient to convey a dynamism that sets anime apart. Indeed, if we look at older classic American cartoons, be they full animation (Looney Tunes) or limited animation (Hanna Barbera), we find that they have a tendency to use longer shots and fewer levels of framing. A more recent cartoon such as *The Powerpuff Girls* appears to rely on more short shots (and therefore more frequent shot changes), but still resort more often on drawn-out pans and, more significantly, on more static framing relying more on wide shots. These are mere tendencies, and not rules, but anime appears to be set apart by its formal tendency to be broken into a greater multiplicity of shots and variety of framing.

Thus anime is characterized by a distinctively choppy aesthetic, as opposed to a smooth one. Indeed, the medial effects enumerated above, being related to anime's historical birth through limited animation, continue to tend toward a phenomenology that is characterized by relative fragmentation. It is a folded aesthetic of flux and stasis, defined by the movement that is instilled or illusioned between two stills. This is, of course, the mechanism that supports all animation, and even analog cinema, but anime is particular in that it highlights this relation of pause and flow between its images, through the above mentioned effects. As Steinberg writes, anime is defined by the peculiar balance between stillness and movement, in a facet of what he calls the dynamically immobile image (*Ibid.*, 6)⁶⁵: the anime image is not quite static, yet not quite flowing. Anime is not a flow, it is a set of connected points, of joined folds formed by the interchange between motion and stillness. In this manner, anime constitutes a set of connected striated points, striated because each image or shot is constricted by its own

⁶⁵ Steinberg's characterization of the dynamically immobile image is actually more complex, in that it involves the manner in which a character is able to travel across different media canvases within the specific context of the Japanese media mix. The relative immobility of the anime (and manga) image is but an aspect of this concept.

stillness. However, this does not preclude a certain smoothness from also being present: indeed, the passage from one point to another winds up constituting a form of controlled momentum, a sense of journey, if not of outright nomadism. The viewer is propelled, which is not quite the same as exploring, but which nevertheless implies some movement, some form of liberation, however temporary.

c) Video games

Fragmentation is present in Japanese video games in a very concrete manner: space and, occasionally, time are broken into very distinct sections. In *Mario* games, these sections consist in levels: each level constitutes a closed-off space which the player must get the playable character through alive. These levels are usually grouped into “worlds,” and bound together by similarities of landscape or gameplay. For example, in *Super Mario Bros*, levels in World 3 and 6 are characterized by a dark sky (excluding the final castle levels); this is a fairly minimal, even superficial form of recurrence, but it does set these levels apart as grouped entities, and thus differentiates them from the rest of the gameworld. Galaxies, equivalent to groups of levels, in *Super Mario Galaxy* are also characterized by similar landscapes: the Honeyhive Galaxy, for example, offers several variations of the same bee-populated landscape, while the Space Junk Galaxy offers levels that unfold across small celestial bodies floating in outer space. In this manner, levels or groups of levels are differentiated from one another and form distinct, separate spaces that are first and foremost distinguished by their represented landscape. We will see later that this differentiation implies very distinct phenomenologies proper to each level; but even the presence of clearly differentiated landscapes can have a phenomenological effect on the player, as the game unfolds as fragmented topographical entity.

Similarly, *Pokémon* games are typically divided into distinct areas, which contain different towns and villages, and are characterized by homogeneous and characteristic vegetation, landscape and fauna. It should be mentioned that there is an additional fragmentation in *Pokémon*, consisting in the physical limitations of each area: when the playable character enters a separate area, there is a visual transition and the screen goes black (in what is known as a “loading screen”) before the new area is loaded and

revealed. This transition will occur again when the character leaves the area to enter a new one. Algorithmically, this is necessary to allow the new area to load and be accessible; phenomenologically, it creates a very clear fold in the transition between one space and the next. The same phenomenon is present in *The World Ends With You* and *Professor Layton*, where new areas load whenever the playable characters exit a scene. These games thus represent instances when the space of the game is clearly and literally scattered with fissures. These breaks are experienced very physically as pauses in the exploration of the gamespace; furthermore, they require the player to take an additional pause once the new area is loaded, in order to situate herself within the new space. Admittedly, most video games feature some form of fragmentation of space, typically in the form of separate levels or areas; *Mario* games are thus not particularly unique in this respect. But games such as *Pokémon*, *The World Ends With You* and *Professor Layton* comprise additional fragmentation within these areas through the presence of loading screens, that perform like folds within a fold. The gamespace is thus experienced as folded on multiple levels, resulting in a creased texture that yields a specific experience proper to these games.

In some cases, the gamespace is fragmented in a manner which involves phenomenology at an even deeper level: each distinct space requires a different behaviour from the player, a specific strategy, gameplay or dynamic. For example, in *The Legend of Zelda* games, the playable character, Link, typically explores at least four different types of spaces. The first consists of towns (or similar residential areas), which are devoid of enemies and contain various types of non-playable characters one can interact with in order to obtain information or purchase items; the second consists of open spaces, which connect the towns and other spaces, and are populated with enemies; the third consists of dungeons, which are closed spaces containing enemies, but which additionally require the player to solve various puzzles in order to advance and ultimately reach the fourth space; the latter consists in what we could call “boss space,” the distinct space within which the player faces off against the usually monstrous boss of the area, in a final effort to be done with said area once and for all. Each space demands a different behaviour from the player. Towns and the like are safe havens where one does not have to worry about

staying alive⁶⁶, places to stock up on healing items and weapons, or even play a mini-games. These mini-games, which are optional, can be said to constitute a fifth space, given that they require yet another form of gameplay, such as correctly aiming during a game of bowling or an archery contest, or herding chickens in a limited amount of time. Open spaces, which we could rename “explorable space,” are, as mentioned, usually hostile, and require the player to be on her guard and to manage her resources in order to survive. Dungeons are equally hostile, but additionally require the player to use intellectual skills to solve puzzles – in fact, one could say that it is these puzzles that constitute a distinct space. Indeed, whereas the open area of the dungeons often constitute a space where reflexes and speed are necessary, due to the presence of enemies, puzzles are space where time is of no import: the player can take as much time as necessary to solve the puzzle, free from the surrounding danger (this, in passing, constitutes a clear breach of logic, of the type Juul points out (Juul 2004, 123)) – in short, puzzles require an entirely different strategy than the rest of the dungeons. It should, however, be mentioned that there are “intermediate” spaces within dungeons, spaces that require one to be on the lookout for enemies while attempting to solve a puzzle-like problem, such as how to reach the next floor of the edifice by activating a sequence of platforms. We can see here how the space in *Zelda* games is divided into sections that require different plans of actions. Additionally, these spaces are often separated by transitional loading screens or another form of sudden transition, which further demarcate them.

In *Professor Layton*, there is also a contrast between “explorable” space and puzzle space. The difference is that the playable character does not physically move around in explorable space: rather, the player taps the space with the Nintendo DS stylus and attempts to uncover puzzles. Once a puzzle has been located, the player is transported to puzzle space to resolve it. Additionally, these games feature a third type of space, which could be called “movie space:” this space consists of cut-scenes, animations which the player must watch passively, and which serve the purpose of advancing the story. Although I felt it necessary to mention this latter type of space, I must also specify that it is not unique to Japanese video games, and is in fact found in most story games.

⁶⁶ *Ocarina of Time* constitutes somewhat of an exception to this, as packs of hostile dogs roam the streets of Hyrule Castle Town at night. However, the player is able to conjure daylight at will, which renders the danger less dauntingly inescapable (although some nocturnal exploration of the town is recommended).

In *Final Fantasy*, gamespace is fragmented in a different manner. Like in *Professor Layton*, there is a strong reliance on movie-like cut-scenes in the more recent instalments of the franchise (in earlier instalments, exposition and plot advancement were executed through dialogue). The same phenomenon as in *The Legend of Zelda* also exists, in that the player can move from safe spaces such as towns or airships to hostile outdoor “explorable” spaces (Huber 2009, 378, 382). But space in *Final Fantasy* is fragmented in an additional, less predictable and controllable manner. Indeed, when the player is exploring hostile space, rather than physically and voluntarily confronting enemies, she will randomly and unexpectedly enter a new space, one that could be called “combat space,” or “battle space” as Huber calls it. This is a defining characteristic of RPGs and is what sets them apart from action adventure games such as *Assassin’s Creed* or *Prince of Persia* (or, indeed, a game such as *Super Mario Bros.*), where enemies are confronted within the same explorable space. Within combat space, the player is confronted to a single or multiple enemies and must act in a completely different manner than in explorable space, as her actions are restricted in certain ways and opened up in others. The playable character can no longer move around freely; instead, these battles are based on a turn-based system, within which the player and the computer-controlled enemy each alternately take a turn at striking (or another type of action, such as healing). Furthermore, the player, who only controls the main playable character in most *Final Fantasy* spaces, including outdoor hostile space, now controls a team of usually three characters, each allowed to take a turn during battle. There are also fundamental differences in the manner in which the player is expected to interact with the environment. In other, explorable spaces, interaction is intuitive: the joystick enables one to move the character in various directions, the push of a button allows one to interact with an object, start a conversation with a non-playable character, or make a purchase. In games where combat takes place within explorable space, combat is equally intuitive: one button allows one to punch, another button enables blocking or dodging, and so forth. In *Final Fantasy*’s combat space, however, actions are determined not through specific button presses, but through menu-based choices: a menu appears listing the different actions available to the player (physical attack, magical attack, healing, and so forth), as well as various information concerning these options (e.g., how many resources a specific

magic attack will consume). The player must thus choose from this menu for the playable character to act. This is a fundamentally different interface than the intuitive one constituted by explorable space: characters have now become “categories of character functions” (*Ibid.*, 378). Additionally, time flows differently in combat space. In earlier *Final Fantasy* games, the turn-based dynamic rendered the passage of time unimportant: the player could take as much time as desired to choose which action to perform. Starting from *Final Fantasy IV*, combat space grew to include what is called the Active Time Battle system, in which the timing of attacks can have an effect on their effectiveness, and characters continue to take damage while the player takes the time to navigate the menu. However, despite this introduction of speed-based action into combat space, this space still does not require the type of immediate, reflex-based action which is required in explorable space. Explorable space and combat space thus require entirely different considerations and choices from the player, thus effectively fragmenting the gaming experience.

The same phenomenon operates in *Pokémon* games: the player is randomly thrown into combat space through encounters with rival non-playable characters or with invisible wild pokémon lurking in explorable space. Combat space in *Pokémon* is essentially the same as in *Final Fantasy*, with the distinction that time is of no consequence in *Pokémon* combat space, and that the player only controls one character at a time, but has the option to repeatedly choose a new one mid-combat. But in essence, the fragmentation of gamespace, and the phenomenological rupture that occurs whenever the player is thrown from one space into another, is evident in both games. *The World Ends With You* offers a similar division of space, with an additional twist. Indeed, while in explorable space, the player has the option to scan her surroundings and reveal hidden elements, namely the inner thoughts of nearby non-playable characters and enemies that are otherwise invisible, and need to be thus seen to be fought against, which triggers the appearance of combat space. This “scanned” space thus constitutes an intermediate, transitory space between explorable space and combat space. Additionally, combat space in *The World Ends With You* is characterized by a need for fast action, unlike the turn-based battles in *Final Fantasy* and *Pokémon*: explorable space, by contrast, is slower-paced. But regardless of these differences, we can see here again how gamespace, in

these games, is far from homogeneous and triggers different behaviours, and thus different experiences, in the player.

Although the *Super Mario* franchise appears to be somewhat less concerned overall by these particular fragmentations of space, and generally offers a more homogeneous gamespace, broken-up spaces are nevertheless present in *Super Mario Galaxy*. In this particular game, the player explores different galaxies and planets, which in itself fragments the gamespace, in that planets can offer very distinctive experiences. For example, in the Beehive Galaxy, the playable character Mario must explore the landscape by periodically turning into a bee and flying, something he cannot do elsewhere; in the Loopdeeloop Galaxy, however, he is required to surf across a waterway in a race against time. Such contrasts on their own ensure a rupture of experience. But fragmentation is present even within a single level. Indeed, in this game, Mario is often propelled from one distinct space to another, by way of a “mechanism called a “launch star.” A quick run-through of the level “Pull Star Path” will make my meaning clear. Mario begins the level, which takes place in outer space, by having to navigate through emptiness by latching onto a path of items called pull stars, which leads him to a group of small spheres. Having landed on these spheres, he must collect the five points necessary to build a launch star, while avoiding dangerous electric orbs. The launch star propels him onto the outside of a drifting rocket ship, from which he must follow another path of pull stars, slightly different from the previous one. He then lands on a metallic structure, where he must defeat a few enemies. He can then free some of his friends, and is subsequently sent via launch star to yet another floating structure. In this final space (in which the music suddenly changes), the player discovers that, when Mario steps toward the edge of a platform, a path will magically materialize when he faces certain directions, then self-deconstructs when he turns away. Through trial and error, Mario must thus reach and collect five silver stars floating in outer space, which then unite to form the golden star Mario must collect in order to finish the level. What this brief description of the level shows are the differences in behaviour which each separate space within the level require from the player: from drifting from one pull star to the next, to battling enemies, to collecting fragments, to figuring out the mini-puzzle that is the self-constructing, self-deconstructing path, each space requires different skills. Every time the

player uses a launch star (and there are many in this game), she is tossed into a new, unknown space where she must quickly adapt her outlook and behaviour in order for Mario to stay alive. While this fragmentation is much less regular and systematic than what is found in RPG such a *Pokémon*, it is nevertheless striking, and yields a similar effect of phenomenological snag. Additionally, both *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Mario 64* feature a transitional, safe space from which the player can choose which level to tackle next, and wherein she can perform optional tasks, such as talk to non-playable characters or restock on health items. This constitutes a separate space that extracts yet another type of behaviour from the player. Fragmentation thus acts as a medial constant in most of the games in the corpus.

What I can conclude from this analysis of the fragmentation of space in Japanese video games is that the player experiences these spaces as so many different textures, alternating between smooth and striated space. Battle space in *Pokémon*, *The World Ends With You* and *Final Fantasy* is quite clearly striated: movements within these spaces are strictly regulated and coded, while information conveyed through gauges and menus must be decoded. Dungeons in *Zelda* are striated in a similar manner: although the player can technically move in any direction she pleases, there is only one way out of the dungeon, and the only manner of figuring this out is to decode the puzzles scattered throughout the space. The space in *Professor Layton* is also clearly coded: confined to one *tableau* at a time, the player must weed out the hidden puzzles by decoding potential hiding spots. In contrast, explorable space within these games (excepting *Professor Layton*, where puzzle space and explorable space are so connected as to somewhat overlap) is free-roaming, a nomadic smooth space within which the player can change positions and directions and make choices; at the same time, it is a space of transition, one which in a way exists only to connect the striated spaces, similar to the “safe havens” in *Super Mario Galaxy* and *Mario 64* (minus the safety). These transitional spaces are clearly smooth; and although they feature elements which do require decoding, these primarily include maps, which are a means of deterritorialization and subsequent reterritorialization. Levels in *Mario* games, for their part, each include their own constraints, as we have seen, and impose their own direction for the player to reach the exit: in this manner, they function as the dungeons do in *Zelda*, by requiring the player to explore with a goal in mind, and thus to decode the

space, not explore it nomadically. This is particularly true of *Super Mario Galaxy*: as we have seen, many levels consist in a set of distinct spaces that require a different behaviour, and which compel the player to read them in order to figure out which actions to take in order for the playable character to make it out alive. In this manner, the player comes across multiple codes within the same striated space. Finally, the movie cut-scenes present within some of the games constitute spaces that are both smooth and striated: smooth because they deterritorialize the characters and place them in a new space where they can do anything, are no longer limited by the game algorithms and possibilities offered by the game controls; striated because the player no longer has any control and must passively watch the cut-scene, which thus becomes a constrictive experience.

In short, the games within the corpus are characterized by a constant passage from smooth to striated space, where smooth space regularly acts as a transition between striated spaces. These games offer a fundamentally folded experience, one that is composed of constant shifts, between deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In this manner, paradoxically, the striated and smooth textures amount to an enveloping smooth space, one which the player experiences as a constant flow between defined areas – in other words, as flux between nodules.

B – Layered tabularity: Superflatness

The notion of tabularity is one which is essential when studying a visual corpus. Often opposed to linearity, its presence within an image has important effects on one's experience of the latter. A tabular image will encourage a tendency in the viewer to take the image as a whole which offers itself simultaneously, its elements coexisting on the same level. In this section, I will demonstrate how each separate medium within the corpus generates an impression of tabularity, one which is closely connected to the concept and effect of flatness and superflatness.

Let me open with an overview of superflat. The term was coined by artist Murakami Takashi at the beginning of the 21st century, and is meant to designate a contemporary artistic movement which, at the formal level, consists of voluntarily flat artwork, images ostensibly lacking visual depth. Depth, however, is not entirely absent: rather, it is as if the layers of the image have been flattened and all brought to the surface,

thereby coexisting on the same level – hence the term *superflat*, which denotes flatness taken to the extreme, and even beyond itself. Murakami explains it in these terms, in a manner which appropriately highlights the physical effects of this aesthetic:

One way to imagine super flatness is to think of the moment when, in creating a desktop graphic for your computer, you merge a number of distinct layers into one. Though this is not a terribly clear example, **the feeling I get is a sense of reality that is very nearly a physical sensation.** (Murakami 2000, n. p., my emphasis)

Superflat, of course, also operates at the conceptual level. The dehierarchisation inherent to its key visual process is also active concerning culture: indeed, Murakami has stated his desire, in creating superflat, to create a movement that would be quintessentially Japanese, a throwback, however ironic, to traditional Japanese visual arts, which are indeed said to be characterized by visual flatness. But Murakami, at the same time as he supposedly strives to recreate a traditional Japanese iconicity (which in itself opens a set of complex questions regarding national identity and nationalism (Lamarre 2006, 389)), extensively borrows from contemporary Japanese otaku culture. This is evident, for example, in the fact that Murakami chooses to center much of his superflat art around anime-like mascot characters, such as the Mickey Mouse-like DOB, and more recently the pastel characters Kaikai and Kiki, not to mention more sexually tainted anime-like human characters in works such as *Hiropon* and *My Lonesome Cowboy*. The dehierarchisation of superflat thus also conflates so-called traditional and contemporary popular cultures of Japan. Murakami takes this process further by seemingly shamelessly commercialising his own artwork, through very active merchandising, choosing to go along with the Baudrillardian idea that the only way for art to survive in contemporary culture is to “be more commercial than commerce itself” (Cruz 1999, 17).

We can see, from this brief portrait of superflat, that it is a quintessentially postmodern movement, incorporating the multiple relativisms implicit in the term. Indeed, Murakami traces his inspiration for superflatness back to his interest in artists of the Edo era, in whose work he detected a certain “eccentricity” (as in the absence of a clear centre), as well as an effect of planarity yielded through interstices (Murakami 2000b, n.p.). Thomas Looser convincingly identifies a typical zigzagging movement and coexistence of objectively incompatible perspectives in paintings of that era, suggesting

that superflat tabularity is in fact historically present in Edo (Looser 2006, 101-106); however, Looser also suggests that this contemporary return to Edo does not signify historico-cultural continuity, but rather expresses a postmodern desire for origin and limits (*Ibid.*, 107-108). These ideas are all relevant to medial phenomenology as epistemology – indeed, there is a link between these two latter notions, as mass media and their phenomenology ideology have been critically linked to ideology by cultural critics (Benjamin 1969, Horkheimer and Adorno 1994, Postman 1993). Throughout this section, however, I will remain focused on the purely physical aspect of phenomenology, and will attempt to demonstrate that, not only is the superflat connected to Japanese popular visual culture on the stylistic and content levels, but also at that of phenomenology. Tabularity, we will now see, constitutes an important factor in this connection between the corpus and the superflat as experiences.

a) Manga

As a form of comics, manga remains, of course, a sequential art, as Will Eisner names it. However much I may argue the presence of tabularity over the following pages, linearity remains an essential mechanism underlying the way manga function: the majority of panels are meant to be read in a specific order, and meaning arises from their sequence. But a comic page does not have to be fully linear or fully tabular: there are usually intermediate degrees within both extremes. Manga plays on these degrees in different manners. Given the physical nature of manga, as a book, tabularity can only concern the page as unit, or the double page, which is the largest unit which is capable of being absorbed at a glance and thus capable of a tabular dimension.

One of the most striking ways in which manga leans toward tabularity lies in the relative flexibility of panel layout, and the ensuing dynamism. It has been pointed out by several authors that manga sets itself apart from other comics in that regard. Traditional European and American comics have a tendency to stick to a fairly regular page layout, although this regularity is sometimes exaggerated in this comparison. One often associates European *bande dessinée* with the classic *gaufrier*, or “waffle iron,” a completely regular, symmetrical formation of panels. However, Benoît Peeters has shown that a perfect waffle iron is in fact quite rare even in *bande dessinée*, and that, although

conventional layouts that do not draw attention to themselves remain common, one also comes across what he calls the “rhetorical layout,” which adapts itself to the narrative (Peeters 1998. 78). Peeters shows that even so-called classic artists such as Hergé will often make use of the rhetorical layout, using panels to highlight an element of content, or alter the reader’s impression of the duration or scope of an action (*Ibid.*, 62-65). However, bande dessinée typically maintains a stable hyperframe, as Thierry Groensteen dubs the outer contour of the totality of panels on a page, which separates them from the margins of the page (Groensteen 1999, 38). In other words, it is comparatively rare for bande dessinée panels to “bleed” into the margins and right up to the edge of the page. Manga, on the other hand, makes frequent use of the technique: the hyperframe is very flexible and varies from page to page (McCloud 1994, 103). Furthermore, bande dessinée usually features panels with edges that are parallel to the sides of the page – in other words, parallelepipeds. Manga, for its part, frequently features panels with vertical or horizontal sides that are angled, as in Fig. 10.



Fig. 10: *Rurouni Kenshin*, vol. 27, p. 124-125

Additionally, manga panels often overlap one another, resulting in a sometimes confusing hierarchy, leaving one to wonder whether there is any actual meaning behind such effects. For example, in Fig. 11, what does it mean that the top two rows of panels on the first page appear to be stacked above the bottom panel? Does it indicate a temporal rupture, a pause between the first series of panels and this last panel (although necessarily a brief pause, as we are still clearly within the same scene, with the same characters)? And what about the overlap of the second and third panels on the second page (the ones representing the airplane and the cheering crowd) with the following panel featuring the cast of main characters saying goodbye? Are we meant to understand that the first panels are meant to be conceived as taking place during the one located “under” them, acting as a kind of backdrop to it? If so, then this overlap serves a function that is the very opposite of the previous overlap’s. This demonstrates that often only content can help make sense of panel effects, and it also highlights some of the ways in which the representation of time, in comics in general and in manga in particular, is flexible and oft uncertain.



Fig. 11: *Love Hina*, vol. 14, p. 13

This flexibility of both hyperframe and multiframe (this term refers to the totality of frames on a page, including the gutters separating the panels (Groensteen 1999, 31, 38-39)) leads to greater possibilities for highlighting the visual narrative content, greater possibilities for expressivity. But at the phenomenological level, it leads to an increased tabularity of the page. Indeed, this potential for expressivity is conducive to the different panels working more according to one another: when one panel is angled for effect, the other panels must be reconfigured in order to accommodate this choice. Thus, there is an increase in cohesion between the panels, leading to a more holistic effect. Tabularity stems from this, as the page is taken more as a whole, and thus visualized more as one entity rather than a linear sequence. As Thomas Lamarre writes, the true “frame” of manga is in fact the page, not the panel; he refers to this page as a dehierarchised, distributive field, one where battles and moments of great emotion, in particular, break the original, expected frames (Lamarre 2009, 288). Lamarre thus implicitly describes such moments as instances where the reader is taken into a space which operates differently than comics typically do, or the way manga does the rest of the time. Here we again run into the notion of differentiated spaces, but also (and more importantly in this section) into the notion of tabularity as a force of dehierarchisation, and of accompanying flat distribution. I will return to this essential notion in a moment.

Another element in manga which encourages tabularity is the accelerated reading rhythm present in many of these works. I demonstrated this phenomenon in my master’s thesis, as well as in my above-mentioned article, in which I quoted examples from *Bleach* and *Fruits Basket*, among others (Cools 2011, 68-69). I have found that manga encourage readers to skim over the panels and pages more quickly, by having each panel convey comparatively little information. To begin with, I found that there is a fairly significant percentage, in mainstream manga, of panels that are either silent or contain only one word of onomatopoeia (between 14% and 31%), and that other panels typically rarely contained more than two sentences; this inevitably accelerates the reading rhythm, as text requires a more conscious decoding effort than solely looking at an image and understanding it, even from the most seasoned of readers (Baetens and Lefèvre 1993, 18). Secondly, I found that manga often contain sequences of several panels that convey

information which could have been transmitted in one or two panels. I illustrated this with examples from *Bleach* and *Fruits Basket*, but can provide fresh examples from both here, in Fig. 12 and 13.

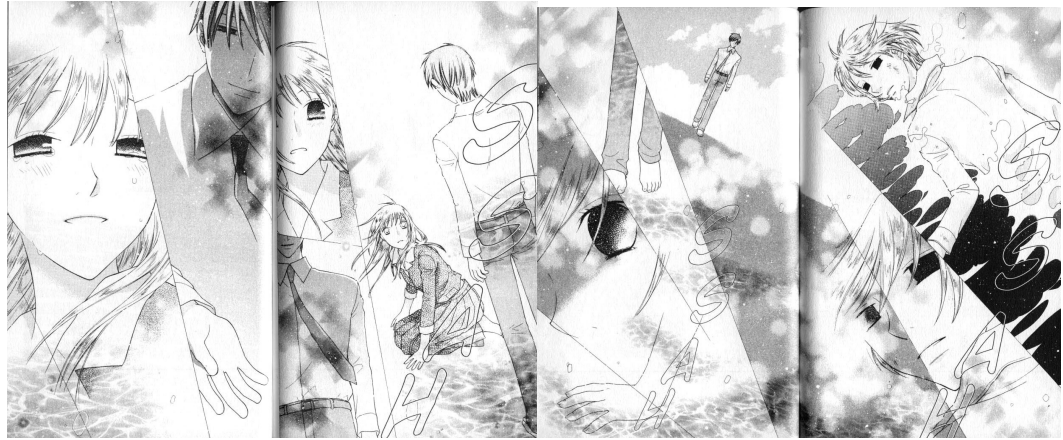


Fig. 12: *Fruits Basket*, vol. 23, p. 120-124

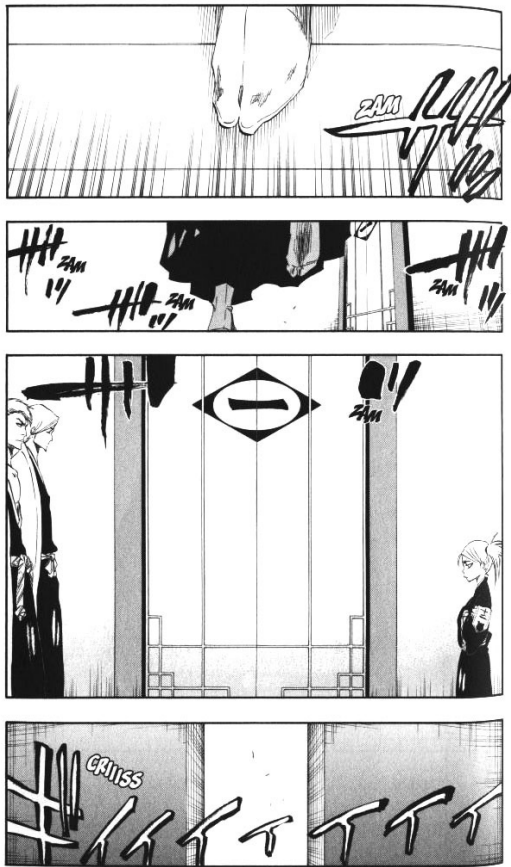


Fig. 13: *Bleach*, vol. 36, p. 23

We can see here that each individual panel conveys very little information. The first example from *Fruits Basket* uses four entire pages to depict the posthumous reunion of two lovers (note, in passing, the fluid panel layout and presence of body fragments). The example from *Bleach*, while less spectacular, nevertheless uses three panels and an entire page to show a character (again represented in fragmented form) running toward a door. Paradoxically, such sequences appear to be included in an effort on the mangaka's behalf to slow down the diegetic time, to slowly unveil a moment in order to draw attention to it. But this slowing down of diegetic time does not correspond to a similar slowing down of the reading rhythm. On the contrary, the scarcity of information means that the reader has less visual material to decode, and thus will glide over the panels more quickly. This is conducive to considering the page, rather than the panel, as unit of reference, as the speed at which the panels are assimilated leads to their being considered more as one cohesive entity. Again, I must specify that linearity continues to operate as an essential mechanism: it is sequence that leads to meaning. However, this linearity is tempered, in this case by the seeming simultaneity of the panels, which convey such little information that they could almost (but not quite) be taken for different facets of the same moment in time.

In fact, this very phenomenon occurs frequently in manga. To return to an example I gave in chapter 4, I have mentioned that battles in combat shōnen often prominently feature onlookers who comment on the battle taking place. These spectators are additionally often shown reacting to something which is taking place. Regularly, this display of reactions is laid out in ways which appear to truly subvert traditional linearity, as we can see here in Fig. 14:



Fig. 14: *Rurouni Kenshin*, vol. 15, p. 120-121

We can see how the event (in this case a giant shedding his armour) and the reactions appear to be taking place at the same time. Even if one can logically presume the action in the center takes place slightly before the reactions, they are shown in a non-linear configuration. Thus we again come across the dehierarchising power of the layout in manga, which presents an event and its consequences on one single plane, taking power away from traditional linearity.

Another element which contributes to tabularity in manga is the previously mentioned fragmentation of content. The fragmentation of physical bodies, we have seen, forces the reader to always keep the whole body in the back of her mind, in order to keep track of the movements and goings on within the scene. This results in the reader forever attempting to connect the fragments to the whole, a process which we have seen takes place at the level of the manga book as a whole, but also, of course, at the level of the page. Thus panels are mentally connected to one another not just in linear fashion, but as scattered pieces.

In the same line of thought, we have seen that manga tend to contain more subject-to-subject panel transitions than other types of comics. This results in an

increased tabularity of the page through the very fragmentation it creates. Indeed, the constant switching of perspective requires the reader to take the whole page into account in order to make sense of the scene. This can be contrasted with a comic page with a perspective that remains relatively stable from panel to panel: in this case, the scene is given, the linearity between panels obvious and simple to understand. The change of perspective from one character to another in manga, on the contrary, while not necessarily difficult to make sense of, nevertheless requires one to keep in mind that this is an exchange, that the point of view in one individual panel is only an incomplete perspective, one which the perspectives in other panels come to complete. Thus tabularity is again enhanced through fragmentation.

How, then, is tabularity related to superflat? In a way, one could say that tabularity is precisely one of the mechanisms at work within the superflat image. Indeed, superflat's absence of depth goes hand-in-hand with a spreading out of the image's components, resulting in an effect which is akin to tabularity. Phenomenologically, this results in an experience which I believe is defined by movement. Indeed, Murakami describes the visual movement created by superflat art as follows:

That extreme planarity and distribution of power allowed the viewer to assemble an image in their minds from the fragments they gathered scanning the image. This movement of the gaze over an image is a key concept in my theory of the 'super flat.' (Murakami, 2000b, 15)

This quote closely mirrors the connection between fragmentation and tabularity which I have been attempting to demonstrate: scattered pieces are gathered to form a whole, assembled and connected as the gaze picks them up, which entails keeping the whole in one's mind throughout the process. Additionally, these words from Murakami introduce the notion of scanning. It is this scanning movement which I wish to highlight as an essential part of the manga reading experience. Indeed, manga constitutes a space where, like in the superflat image, differentiated frames and layers continue to exist: although, as we have seen, panels may bleed outside the page, or overlap one another, and characters may burst from the panels, the panel as entity ultimately remains a fundamental reality, a pillar of the medium. Even when shōjo artists choose to break down the traditional page layout by erasing panel boundaries, the latter still exist as a ghost presence and help guide the reader's eye. At the same time, we have seen that linearity cannot help but be affected

by this process: linearity is diluted, tampered with, compromised. Furthermore, the presence of overlapping panels suggests an effect similar to that described by Murakami, the flattening of layers against the readable surface: overlapping panels suggest the possibility of depth by existing on different levels, yet they simultaneously take away this possibility of depth by being read on a flat paper surface. One sees the intervals between the panel layers, yet these layers are spread out on the same surface, which leads the reader to consider the surface as a whole – in other words, as tabular entity. The combination of tabularity and compression of layers leads to the manga page becoming a superflat space, one where differentiated layers (the panels) are still visible and active, but all exist on the same, tabular surface. This, just as in superflat, leads to a scanning, lateral, sweeping gaze. It is this movement which I believe most strongly characterizes the manga reading experience.

As we will now see, this lateral movement has been even more strongly linked to the anime viewing experience.

b) Anime

Thomas Lamarre has written quite definitively on the connection between superflat and anime. In *The Anime Machine*, he introduces the notion of *animetism*, which he opposes to cinematism. Both constitute tendencies that can exist within the moving image (Lamarre 2009, 9); but while cinematism is associated with ballistic, penetrating movement, animetism is instead linked to lateral, surface movement, “the eyes remain intent on looking at the effects of speed laterally, sideways or crossways, rather than racing along the trajectory of motion” (*Ibid.*, 6). Lamarre identifies this as a fundamental tendency of the anime image, and traces its existence back to the technological nature of anime, which stems from the multiplanar machine. Via this device, he explains, layers of images are stacked in order to yield the anime image, and often layers are slid laterally according to one another in order to produce the impression of movement. Such technology yields a fundamentally different medial phenomenology than, for example, computer-generated animation does; it is this phenomenology which Lamarre dubs animetism, and which is described as consisting in open composition, and a sense of

layers sliding against each other and apart (*Ibid.*, 37). This produces an effect that is both physical and cognitive:

Even in panoramic views in anime, we do not have a sense of penetrating the world; we do not plunder the space, it remains open to us, yet apart from us; the sense of wonder remains, we are decentered both physically and cognitively (*Ibid.*, 38-39).

Lamarre demonstrates many effects and possibilities of animetism, including its potential for opening up a productive reflection on the nature and uses of technology (*Ibid.*, 50-54), but I remain primarily concerned, as always, with the physical facet of animetism. Even so, although it is quite clear that animetism and the superflat are quite closely connected at the phenomenological level, it is important to be aware that the philosophies behind both theoretical apparatuses, for their part, differ significantly from one another⁶⁷. Additionally, animetism appears to be irretrievably connected to the notion of relativism, which can ultimately be linked to tabularity, as I will now demonstrate. The movement of the sliding layers is written as analog to one being on a travelling train, yet feeling that it is the world itself that is moving. This relativism, Lamarre concedes, can make it difficult for one element in particular to stand out (*Ibid.*, 62, 107). This appears to connect animetism with the postmodern condition of perpetual relativism; however, rather than succumb to the temptation to believe that such relativism inevitably leads to apathy, Lamarre argues that “[t]he loss or refusal of an absolute frame of reference, or an inability to locate one, does not necessarily spell an end to values, or the end of any engagement or commitment with the world ‘outside’” (*Ibid.*, 107), but that rather “[a]mid flattened, dehierarchized, and relativized flows of images, we are summoned to make a personal selection, to personalize our relative movement, to find our focal concerns” (*Ibid.*, 108). Additionally, he draws a connection between this postmodern conflation of planes of reference and contemporary hyperdensity of information: “any element in the image may serve to direct a line of sight; any element may generate a field of potential

⁶⁷ Murakami and the superflat are very concerned with Japaneseness, while Lamarre argues for a theory of technology that strives to transcend the cultural (Lamarre 2009, xxxiv). I find myself in agreement with the necessity for such a theory, but am finding that the cultural plays a role in the actual consumption of Japanese popular visual theory. This struggle between culture and technology/mediology has been ongoing throughout this thesis.

depth” (*Ibid.*, 132), resulting in a multi-referential, rhizomatic field that yields multiple frames of reference (and therefore no fixed frame) (*Ibid.* 165).

In other words, the relativism inherent to animetism forces one to consider the image in its entirety. This is due not just to the movement of the layers (limited animation) but also to the schematized style of anime (limited artwork, so to speak): “When backgrounds are more schematic than painterly, attention is less drawn to the fluidity of movement and more to the structural interplay of elements in the image; we become more attentive to how elements are distributed” (*Ibid.*, 110). Such effects are quite present within the corpus, and they indeed have the effect of creating the impression that the screen is a space of interplay, a space where distinct layers are made to interact with one another. The notion of distributive field, which was also present in the section regarding manga, is key to characterizing the anime image as phenomenologically superflat: indeed, the stacked layers and their interplay have the effect of bringing all the sensory elements to the surface. What makes the anime experience so distinctive is not the absence of depth, but rather the attempt at representing depth along a surface. If we look at layered compositions in scenes from *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumuiya*, for example, we find that the intervals between the layers are quite visible, with the result that the illusion of depth is present, all the while giving itself away as illusion: indeed, the layers are often made evident, either through overall limited animation, or through one layer being significantly more detailed than the others, which are then relegated to the role of (“painterly”) backdrop and thus differentiated from the focused layer. Throughout, the layers remain identifiable as stacked surfaces that move along and against one another. Thus the mechanisms of limited animation are shown, and the surface quality of the whole remains dominant.

In other words, the anime image is tabular in a manner similar to the tabularity of the manga page, but through different means. In the case of manga, tabularity was brought about by elements such as fragmentation and unstable panel layout that led to stacked tabularity and the superflat distributive field. In the case of anime, tabularity is generated by the multiplanar image and its sliding layers, which produce a relative, shifting viewpoint that glides across the distributive field and picks out its constitutive elements. The physical phenomenology, however, remains similar: the gaze slides across

the image, zigzagging over its surface without settling on a point of perspective or depth (because depth and perspective are constantly shifting from shot to shot), ever nervous and moving. Again, flux and stasis dominate the experience, a stop-and-go darting movement that defines anime as phenomenology as it did manga.

c) *Video games*

Tabularity and distributiveness are brought about by still different means in Japanese video games. One is quite straightforward, and consists simply in graphic flatness, or two-dimensionality. Games allowing the playable character to move in a three-dimensional space have existed for quite some time; in these games, the landscape spreads out in front of the playable character, who is free to move left, right, backwards or forward, in a manner that mimics the way we move in reality. In fact, games in my corpus such as *Zelda* and recent *Final Fantasy* games make use of this space configuration. But *Mario* games, for their part, have remained for the most part traditionally two-dimensional. *Super Mario Bros* is a side-scroller game, which means that space is represented from an eye-level perspective, while the character is represented from the side and can only move forward and backward (or left and right from the player's perspective). Several later games of the franchise, including *Super Mario World*, have preserved this spatial configuration (although *Super Mario 64* and *Super Mario Galaxy*, among a few others, do feature a three-dimensional space). In recent *Pokémon* games, space is configured in a manner that can be said to combine two- and three-dimensionality. The viewpoint still allows space to be seen from the side, but manages to also partially adopt a bird's eye perspective. The playable character can thus move in four directions, but the representation of space remains flat, comparable to the effect produced by artwork which does not follow the rules of perspective. Thus, although the character can move in four directions, it actually looks like it is moving up and down instead of forward and backward into space. The configuration of space in *The World Ends With You* is similarly flat, as it is in early *Final Fantasy* games such as *Final Fantasy VII*. Both types of flatness (the total flatness in *Mario* and the partial flatness just mentioned) lead to a form of perceived tabularity, as the represented space is perceived as physically flat, confined to the surface of the screen, and therefore spread out and open to the viewer in

the manner of a drawing or a painting. I would even venture to suggest that partial flatness is in fact akin to superflatness: indeed, the presence of surface movement across illusory depth is conducive to a flattening effect that is quite similar to the effect generated by superflat. Ultimately, the player is faced with a space that spreads out laterally, that asks to be scanned. As such, the gaze must execute movements similar to those required by manga and anime.

In a similar vein, another element that contributes to tabularity in these games is the superimposition of flat elements over even three-dimensional spaces. By this I mean the presence of elements such as health gauges and maps in a video game screen. These elements are certainly not unique to Japanese video games, yet they undeniably contribute to flattening the gamespace. Often, even three-dimensional spaces such as explorable space in recent *Final Fantasy* games, such as *X* and *X-2*, and also in several *Zelda* games, including *Ocarina of Time*, feature elements that do not truly belong to this explorable space, but function as informational layers placed over it, between this space and the surface of the screen. These elements have a purely practical function, which is to transmit information to the player, such as the character's geographic location (maps), their physical state (health gauges), what weapons they can equip (icon menus), how much money they have, and so forth. As Alexander Galloway remarks, this type of informational layer inevitably feels "uncomfortable in its two-dimensionality," at odds with the three-dimensional space it is superimposed with (Galloway 2006, 35). This is because they conjure an impression of flatness by reminding us that we are looking at a screen, a surface that remains essentially flat in spite of the strong impressions of depth it can convey through certain types of content, including 3D video gamespaces. Thus these elements create an effect that is akin to superflat in its superimposition of layers. Again, this is far from unique to Japanese video games, but it remains a factor in the tabularity present in these games. Indeed, tabularity arises here in that it is opposed to the depth effect sought after three-dimensional gamespaces.

In fact, it appears that many of the striated game spaces established in the previous section tend toward tabularity, in that they favour a scanning approach. This is because these spaces require to be decoded, or read. Thus, explorable spaces in *Professor Layton* demand that the player scan them not just visually but physically, by tapping

across them, in order to uncover hidden puzzles. Battle space in *The World Ends With You*, *Pokémon* and *Final Fantasy* also demands a lateral, scanning gaze: in the case of the two latter, the textual menus require literal reading, while in the case of *TWEWY*, characters are trapped within the confines of a flat space, able to only move laterally, while the player must move her stylus across the touchscreen in order to defeat the enemy. Battle space is thus a closed space where all the significant action takes place on the surface. While these spaces are not necessarily superflat in the strict sense of the word, they nevertheless provoke superflat-like effects, in that they are characterized by the necessity of a scanning movement identical to that which has been demonstrated in superflat, manga and anime.

Even in games where three-dimensionality is prominent, I believe this scanning motion remains present and creates an effect of partial superflatness. I would argue that the afore-mentioned switches from space to space that create an effect of tabularity and flattening in Japanese video games. In the previous section, I demonstrated that these switches create phenomenological folds within these games, through the fragmentation of the gamespace into smooth and striated spaces. However, they do not necessarily consist in a rupture within the gameworld. What I mean by this is that these different spaces, however unlike each other they may be, are still a part of the same world; not only that, but the player is obligated to experience them, which makes each space a fundamental pillar of the game's phenomenology. I make this distinction because it is not always the case. In *Assassin's Creed II*, for example, there is a series of puzzles to solve, which requires very different gameplay from the rest of this action-oriented game; these puzzles, however, are entirely optional, and thus constitute a side-quest in the fullest sense of the word. While some of the different spaces within the game corpus are optional, such as the mini-games in *Zelda*, most of them are mandatory. This means that a *Zelda* game experience consists equally of puzzles and battle: both types of gameplay are equally important in the phenomenology of the games. Similarly, *Final Fantasy* games offer an experience that consists of both turn-based battle and free-roaming exploration of landscapes: neither can be said to constitute optional or dismissible content. In this manner, Japanese video games are defined by the folds that run through them: in the same way that, in superflat, layers are brought to the surface so as to form a visual and

phenomenological work that is somehow both uniform and run through with differences, these games offer a space that is both differentiated and yet undeniably one.

While this constitutes a significant conceptual distinction, one may well ask how it constitutes a phenomenological one. The answer lies in the resulting perception of spaces by the player, a perception which affects her experience of the game. Consider for example *Final Fantasy X-2*. We have seen that the constant passages from explorable space to battle space lead to the former being considered almost primarily as a space of transition between combats: one goes into explorable space to get from point A to point B, but also to encounter enemies and become stronger by going into battle space. Due to this particular perception, I argue that explorable space in this game, while objectively constituting a three-dimensional space, is consistently perceived by the player as a partially flat space, because it acts as a liaison between other flat spaces. Because one is constantly switching from one space to another, one remains aware of the other spaces even when one is immersed in one of them, just as one gathers fragments and layers when faced with a superflat image, manga, or anime; this is in part because the player is conscious that these spaces all belong to the same gameworld, in spite of their obvious phenomenological differences. This is, in short, a world where flat and less flat spaces somehow coexist: in other words, a world yielding superflat effects. This superflatness can be said to be experienced phenomenologically because it affects the player's cognitive and, most important, perceptual approach of the gameworld and its gameplay: one is aware that there are different spaces requiring different behaviours, one is aware that the gamespace is not homogeneous, and therefore one does not experience even deep spaces as deep, but as merely one layer among others. This constitutes a significant difference between a game like *FFX-2* and game like *Assassin's Creed 2* or *Batman: Arkham City*, where depth is ever present because that is all there is: even when Batman scans the space around him looking for clues and other attractor elements, he remains in the same space, and this space is thus experienced in a completely different manner than in a spatially fragmented game. In the latter, the folds modify the perception of the whole; the gamespace spreads out across the screen, rather than in-depth, open for lateral exploration rather than in-depth plunder, in the manner an anime landscape opens up.

Thus, it appears that the majority of the games in the corpus, even when not visually flat or consistently tabular, are characterized by superflat effects, namely because of the coexistence of smooth and striated spaces. As such, in spite of any obvious medial differences between the multiple sections of the corpus, these works, whether manga, anime or video games, are joined together by a set of similar phenomenological effects. The first, demonstrated in the first half of this chapter, is the presence of folds connecting striated spaces into an overall smooth space. The second, which we just explored, is the presence of superflat effects. But ultimately both aspects go hand in hand, as I would argue that the superflat entails folds. Indeed, if the superflat is defined by stacked layers coexisting on a surface but separated by visible intervals, these intervals can in turn be likened to folds, especially in the sense I have been using the term: a relation between separate but related elements that is experienced phenomenologically. The different layers in the works, be they spaces, panels, or cels, thus form folds that define the medial effects created by these works, and thus their common phenomenology.

While the different textures in the game are guided by folds that draw attention to the fragmentation of the works in the corpus and to the contrasts between smooth and striated spaces, the superflat effects regulate the coexistence of these different textures into an ultimately smooth experience, defined by the scanning motion demonstrated above. The experience is thus one of flux, even as it is one of flux between folds, and thus a phenomenological form of interplay between flow and stasis, a constantly redirected flow, guided by the textures and folds, by the fluid structure that arises from the coexistence of spaces. Ultimately, I believe it is this controlled flow that truly defines the phenomenological experience of Japanese popular visual culture: it is this experience of restricted visual abandon that binds these works together, that amounts to a mediological ethos within which the subject can reconnect with a familiar feeling across media platforms. Flow through fragmentation, flux between textures: the naturally ambiguous role of the fold is at the heart of this experience.

Chapter Six

The merging of the fabrics: Stitching versus weaving⁶⁸

Now that the cohesion of exported Japanese popular visual culture has been established on multiple levels, it remains to be seen what takes place at the level of the imaginaries. How does this parcel of Japanese imaginary merge with the imaginaries of the regions it has migrated to? How does this particular layer of fabric connect with the imaginaries generated by the non-Japanese regions concerned by this thesis? What happens at the level of the movements of these initially distinct imaginaries? How do the latter operate? In this section, I will examine several instances where there is evidence of a pollination of Japanese popular visual culture into the imaginaries of North America and francophone Europe. It will soon become apparent that certain elements lend themselves to a more fruitful pollination. This analysis will necessarily be incomplete, as the topic would require a thesis of its own to be properly addressed; instead, I aim here to provide a set of possibilities, epitomized by the more specific examples I will be giving.

One manner in which this particular parcel of the Japanese imaginary can integrate into the imaginaries of francophone Europe and North America is by becoming a physical presence, through sheer volume, so as to qualify as a reference. One example of this would be a 1999 episode from the American animated series *South Park* that revolves around the *Pokémon* craze in the United States. Anne Allison provides an analysis of this episode, which transparently disguises Pokémon as “Chinpokomon,” and shows the befuddled parents of the enthused children winding up in a panic at their offspring’s new passion (Allison 2006. 249-251) Less significant in scope but equally telling, the American animated series *The Simpsons* also provides a fleeting reference to anime in the 2001 episode “HOMR” (season 12, episode 9): while attending an animation festival, the Simpson family comes across a screening of what appears to be a robot fighting anime. Because the anime comically features Meganaut, a robotic wolf who shoots a web in order to capture Princess Tempura, a robotic shrimp, the characters express confusion (why, indeed, would a wolf shoot a web?), before putting the anime’s

⁶⁸ The expression is borrowed, in altered form, from Austin Kleon’s *Steal Like An Artist* (originally “Quilting vs Weaving”) (Kleon 2012, 148).

strangeness down to it being Japanese. Although these examples may seem light and unassuming, one must keep in mind that these are two very popular, mainstream American animation series, that largely base their humour on current events which their audience would be familiar with; thus, the fact that they choose to make jokes about anime is representative of the latter's presence within the Western imaginary. In the world of comics, a reference to manga of similar scope can be found in the 2005 *Asterix* bande dessinée album *Le ciel lui tombe sur la tête* (*Asterix and the Falling Sky*) by Uderzo, the next-to-latest instalment of one of the most widely read French language comics series in history. In this uncharacteristically sci-fi-tainted adventure of the clever little Gaul and his strongman sidekick Obelix in 50 BC, their village is invaded by various aliens: the Tadsylwien, cute roundish, Disneyesque creatures (their name is in fact an anagram for Walt Disney), accompanied by their Superman-like minion clones, and the evil Nagma (another anagram, of course), strange aliens who are, somewhat disturbingly, yellow-skinned under their bug-like chrome armour, and who fly in aboard their shiny Grendizer-like spaceship. The Tadsylwien and the Gauls join forces to defeat the Nagma, who eventually return to their home planet. This *Asterix* album is clearly meant to constitute a commentary on other forms of comics and animation from the perspective of bande dessinée. Indeed, as both the Tadsylwien and the Nagma seek to obtain the Gauls' magic potion (their secret weapon), it is easy to see an analogy between the invasion of the Gaul village by these aliens and the "invasion" by Disney animation and manga/anime into France and Belgium, where bande dessinée is considered both an art and a national tradition, of which *Asterix* remains one of the most beloved beacons. Tellingly, during an altercation where both alien superpowers duke it out for supremacy, Obelix dismisses both of them with a shrug as "*beaucoup de bruit pour rien*" (much ado about nothing), a tongue-in-cheek reference to the enormous onomatopoeia that surround the alien characters, as well as a suggestion that the European success of manga is merely a temporary fad. However derogatory, the fact that an entire *Asterix* album revolves around manga is a testament to the latter's referential status in francophone Europe.

Another phenomenon that can help us gauge not only the presence, but also the integration of the Japanese popular visual imaginary in the West is the fact that popular or mainstream works not only refer to elements of it, but borrow content elements from

it. Examples of Western popular works drawing inspiration from the Japanese popular imaginary would include Quentin Tarantino's previously mentioned *Kill Bill vol. 1*, which, in addition to taking place partly in Japan (although this is distinct from the type of imaginary merge I am attempting to explore here – not every presence of Japan within a work has to do with my purpose), has the uniqueness of being a live-action film featuring a lengthy anime sequence. Similarly, the creators of the *Matrix* film trilogy chose to release *The Animatrix*, a compilation of anime taking place within the storyworld of the trilogy. Outside the world of animation, on an arguably more superficial, yet nonetheless pervasive level, I could also mention the release, in 2008, of two mascot characters by the jeweller Swarovski, Erika and Eliot (originally Elvis): with their oversized head and eyes and spherical, simple design, these characters inevitably evoke the kawaii aesthetic. More directly, Murakami Takashi, whose work we have seen is intricately tied to otaku culture, has lent his trademark palette to the fashion brand Louis Vuitton.

It is important to note, at this point, that there are varying degrees of “Japaneseness” involved in the above phenomena. In some cases, such as the direct references in *South Park* and *The Simpsons*, the Japanese origin of the works in question is mentioned explicitly. In other cases, such as *The Animatrix*, Japaneseness is perhaps implied, but not necessarily put forward. Instead, what is borrowed are stylistic elements, or animation techniques, or quite simply an aesthetic. This is particularly relevant because it signifies the beginning of a de-culturalisation of this specific imaginary transfer. It is in this manner that the melding between the two imaginaries really begins to take place. Certainly, the anime aesthetic of Eliot and Erika will continue to be associated, in the minds of those familiar with anime, to “Japan”: as I have stated before, the anime and manga aesthetics are not *mukokuseki* or nationless, but are instead consistently associated with the Japanese origin of these works – or at least, they have primarily been so up until now. But perhaps that is precisely what is beginning to change, through instances such as these, when the animanga style is being utilized outside of a Japanese context. The association between Japan and this style could grow less automatic, if the use of the latter becomes more generalized.

But let's put style aside and return to content – specifically, to non-cultural content. Can we find, in the current imaginaries of francophone Europe and North America, traces of the non-cultural motifs I identified in the corpus? The problem here is that it is impossible to capture these imaginaries in one shot, or draw a complete portrait of them in a readable, manageable format. Indeed, whereas isolating content recurrences within this justifiable corpus was feasible and relatively straightforward, the imaginary functions in such a way that it does not necessarily follow that these recurrences will be transferred to similar forms of expression. In other words, a content motif within manga, if it transfers at all, will not automatically show up in an American comic; rather, it could just as well show up in a movie, a novel, or a painting. This is all the more true that, while manga constitute a mainstream medium in Japan, comics are aimed toward a proportionally much more limited audience in North America and Western Europe. Manga in the West have thus been touted by Western publishers as comics for people who do not typically read comics (particularly where *shōjo* is concerned), and are thus read by people who, if artistically inclined, may turn to a different medium.

Although a methodical analysis seems out of the question at this point, I can nevertheless make an educated interpretation. The medium of film can be said to be mainstream in a manner comparable to manga, specifically film that has either been critically acclaimed or massively released (or both). And indeed, there do seem to be an increasing number of Western films that deal with some of the central non-cultural motifs identified in my corpus, namely the relativisation of reality and the exploration of what it means to be human. Recent American films such as the Wachowski Brothers' *The Matrix* (1999) and Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) revolve around the questioning of reality: in the first, reality as we know it is an illusion, pure and simple; in the second, no one, including the audience, is ever certain whether the events taking place are reality or an elaborate dream⁶⁹. As for the question of what it means to be human, it has admittedly been present in Western works for quite some time, particularly in relation to the android,

⁶⁹ One could also mention Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1998), in which the main character gets several "do-overs" until she gets it right and is able to save the day: reality is not questioned directly here, but is clearly portrayed as open-ended and undefined (this narrative device also effectively makes this a very video game-like film (Brooker 2009, 124)). However, since this is a German film and therefore technically outside the area I am examining, I am mentioning it on an anecdotal basis, keeping in mind that Japanese popular visual culture, particularly manga, are very popular in Germany.

cyborg, and AI. *Blade Runner* is certainly a prime example of the exploration of this thematic; in fact, one could say that the entire cyberpunk genre revolves around this question. Although *Blade Runner* and the father of cyberpunk, William Gibson, are both connected to Japan (one takes place in Tokyo and the other has chosen Japan as the setting for several of his novels), it would be abrupt to automatically deduce a direct influence.

It is true that there is a tendency to associate the post- or quasi-human with “Japan,” as Ueno writes in his previously mentioned text on techno-Orientalism, just as there is a tendency to fetishize the Japanese connection with technology and virtuality, and thus with the ensuing relativisation of reality⁷⁰. Yet when we consider that the trope of the blurred lines between robots and humans has been present in the West at the very least since Isaac Asimov’s writings in the 1950s⁷¹, it is difficult to argue that Japanese popular culture, particularly the kind I have been analysing, has made a determining impact in bringing such tropes to the surface of Western imaginaries. Rather, I would qualify this correspondence, in the terms of Stephen Greenblatt, as *contingentia*, or “the sense that the world as we know it is not necessary” (Greenblatt 2010, 16). Indeed, Greenblatt’s introduction to cultural mobility studies is strongly based on the idea that cultures and cultural exchanges are never predetermined or inevitable: most of the time, they just happen. Similarly, the current surge, in mainstream Western film, of relative reality does not necessarily ensue from the influence of Japanese popular visual culture; instead, it could simply ensue from the fact that the Western imaginary is faced with similar questions as the Japanese imaginary. Indeed, in our digital era where information moves and shifts constantly, where long distance communication is commonplace, and where virtual worlds are a touchscreen away, it is not surprising that the most developed regions’ imaginaries are concerned with questions such as the materiality and inevitability of physical reality and the evolution of the nature of being human. Nor is it surprising that many of the imaginary worlds generated through recent fiction feature fetish objects such as those identified in the corpus (their Western correspondents would

⁷⁰ In a 2001 essay, Gibson explains that he frequently selects Japan as the setting for his novels “because Japan is the global imagination’s default setting for the future” (Gibson 2012, n. pag.), which confirms this tendency.

⁷¹ In fact, the trope was present before that, as Asimov’s three laws of robotics served the purpose of attempting to establish some order within these human-robot relations.

include the many important magical objects in *Harry Potter*, the ring in the *Lord of the Ring* films, or even the totems in *Inception*). Indeed, in a world where immateriality is gaining ground in so many aspects of our lives, physical objects become reassuring, offering a stasis to balance out the flux, as I wrote in chapter 3.

Therefore, although we can say that the Japanese and “Western” imaginaries do tend to merge when it comes to certain non-cultural content motifs, I would not venture to say that this melding is the result of one imaginary transplanting onto the other. Instead, I would say the motifs were present, in various states of latency, in both imaginaries to begin with (in accordance with Maffesoli’s theory that some imaginary tropes are more prominent in some epochs than in others, but are nevertheless always part of the imaginary in question). In doing so, they offer a potentially familiar thread for the Western read, viewer, or gamer to follow in her discovery of the corpus: not only do these content motifs provide patterns of cohesion throughout the diversity of works, they can also build upon previous knowledge, the better to guide the audience. Cultural contingency, in this case, enables the superimposition of similar portions of distinct imaginaries, fabric motifs that happened to be similar to begin with.

In the end, I believe the area where one can truly witness an influence of the Japanese imaginary upon the Western imaginaries is that of medial phenomenology. It is possible to determine several instances and degrees where Western works feature medial elements such as those I have determined above, but the degrees are uneven depending on the medium. An influence is not registered on a massive scale where animation is concerned: mainstream giants such as Disney and Pixar continue to produce animation in their own manner.⁷² However, if we look more closely at recent television cartoons, we can find some traces of anime phenomenological influence. This influence appears to

⁷² One could argue that Disney films have been having a tendency to diversify their intensities, a trait which, we have seen, can both content and phenomenology: indeed, if one compares *The Lion King* to *Sleeping Beauty*, or even *101 Dalmatians*, one finds in the former a much greater contrast between moments of tragedy and moments of humour. However, the timeline does not allow us to deduce an influence: *The Lion King* was released in 1994, before the anime boom really took off in the United States. Therefore it could be that we are once again facing a case of cultural contingency, where it could be speculated that Disney was trying to broaden the reach of its animated features by including material that could appeal to teenagers and even parents. (In passing, *The Lion King* was surrounded by controversy when it was speculated that its creators had plagiarized Tezuka’s anime *Kimba the White Lion*. However, I am not citing this specific Disney film because of this alleged anime connection, but only because it appears to me to be one of the most flagrant example of contrasting intensities in a Disney animation.)

most clearly consist in the inclusion of hyperboles. If we look at two series, the French- and Japanese-produced *Martin Mystery* (2003-2006) and the American-created DC Comics-inspired *Teen Titans* (2003-2006), we find many instances where characters display hyperbolic reactions, particularly when angry: these reactions can take the form of the classic Japanese cross on the forehead, or, in a more Western rendering, of an enlarged head and mouth, or flames burning over the character's body. Both series also features abstract and expressive backgrounds, such as speed lines that highlight moments of action. It is quite clear that these practices are directly inspired from anime.

However, where the animation process itself is concerned, it is more difficult to establish the existence of an influence. Animation in these works is necessarily less detailed than in full Disney animation, but nevertheless fuller than in even recent anime, as evidenced for example by the movements of characters' lips: while the mouths of characters in even *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, which has been praised for the quality of its animation, show limited movement during speech, those of characters in *Teen Titans* and *Martin Mystery* display more realistic movement, more in coordination with the words spoken (although, in the latter series, the fact that it was originally released in several languages sometimes compromises the concordance). However, an influence is plausible where camera angles are concerned: they are much more varied and dynamic in these recent Western works than in their predecessors, and thus much closer to anime in that regard. On the other hand, it is more difficult to establish in these works the presence of superflat tabularity. For example, a fight scene in the first episode of *Teen Titans* displays the presence of separate layers in a manner that may at first glance seem similar to that present in anime. However, there are recurring moments where the focus is on one layer, after which the camera pans out to focus on a more frontal layer, with the former focus being recycled into a background. This somewhat precludes superflatness, as it gives clear depth to this animated world. What we have in *Teen Titans* is layered depth, not layered flatness. A greater expertise in the techniques of animation would be necessary for a full analysis of the technical differences between these Western and Japanese series, but the phenomenological effects observed remain rather different. To sum up: similarities exist at the level of hyperbole and contrasts of perspectives, but not quite at that of tabularity. In other words, fragmentation is present, but not superflatness.

It is even more difficult to establish a phenomenological influence of Japanese games over North American games. A few North American games have clearly borrowed certain mechanisms, among them the Montreal-produced RPG *Black Sigil: Blade of the Exiled* (2009). This game operates on a gameplay system that is essentially the same as that of *Final Fantasy*, and by extension similar to *Pokémon*: the team of playable characters makes progress through hostile explorable space which connects safe havens, and enter combat space whenever they encounter a foe. The turn-based, menu-based battle system, complete with the possibilities of magic attacks and healing spells, as well as customizable equipment, is also quasi-identical to that of *Final Fantasy*. However, *Black Sigil* remains an exception, and not a particularly popular one. Mainstream North American games, such as the ones I have mentioned throughout this thesis, are in fact strikingly different from the games in my corpus, particularly in their tendency to offer a homogeneous gamespace and experience: even when the playable character travels from one geographical location to another, the gameplay experience remains much the same⁷³.

However, this lack of cross-pollination within the video games sector does not mean that Japanese video games do not constitute a significant portion of the Western imaginary. Indeed, we have seen that the flux of Japanese games towards the West has historically helped shape the video game industry as we know it today, and that Japanese games continue to constitute a very significant portion of the games being played in Western countries. This means that their phenomenology is very present in these regions. And this is perhaps the reason why Western games continue to offer their own, distinct phenomenology: rather than borrowing elements, creators of Western games have chosen to differentiate themselves from the Japanese branch, by targeting a separate audience (albeit one that may unquestionably overlap with the Western players of Japanese games). To sum up, although a phenomenological influence of Japanese games does not appear evident, it is perhaps not necessary: the fragmented, phenomenologically superflat

⁷³ The only mainstream Western game which comes to my mind currently and which arguably offers a truly fragmented experience would be the Ubisoft-produced *Raving Rabbids* franchise. Indeed, it consists in short levels, which require the player to perform a wide variety of actions. However, unlike the corpus games, *Raving Rabbids* is a party game, a game meant to be played casually in groups; this arguably puts its dynamic in a completely different category, and additionally gives a reason for its fragmented nature that is clearly unrelated to my corpus: its nature as a game played collectively requires it to be quick to master, and thus it requires from the player a series of simple tasks.

experience created by these games is already a part of our imaginary, because it has been there since video games became a portion of that imaginary.

In the end, it would appear that the most obvious phenomenological influence of Japanese popular visual culture upon the Western imaginary is to be found within the sector of comics. There are several possible reasons for this, but I would venture that it is the medium's comparatively low-tech, low-means nature that is primarily responsible. Indeed, while it takes significant equipment and staff to create animation, and even more so to create a video game, comics can be created by a single person, or a relatively small group, with minimal equipment, and still become a mainstream success. This arguably grants comics greater flexibility and responsiveness to potential influence. *Paris Sous-Seine*, a 2004 album from the very widely read Franco-Belgian series *Spirou et Fantasio* constitutes an example of a deeper influence of manga onto bande dessinée. Occasionally, for instance, perpendicularity of page layout is abandoned in favour of oblique panel sides, and wider, scenic panels encourage tabularity of the page. But it is mostly in the presence of body fragments and the inclusion of scenes where time seems to slow down (or, as I characterized them, scenes where each individual panel conveys very little action or information) that gives this album a manga-like phenomenology. Fig. 15 is quite representative of this influence.

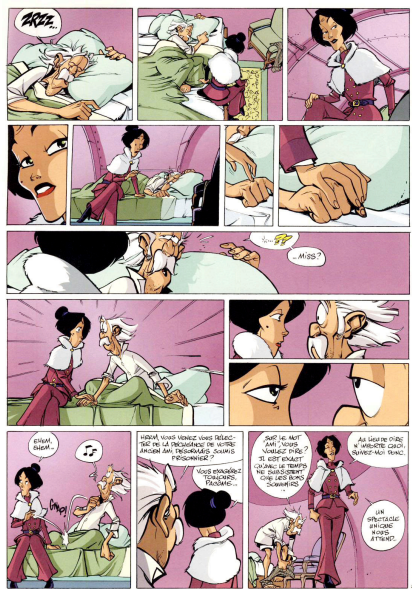


Fig. 15: *Paris Sous-Seine*, p. 26

Additionally, during action sequences, one encounters drastic shifts in perspective which clearly convey a page dynamic that certainly appears to be inspired from manga, as seen in Fig. 16.

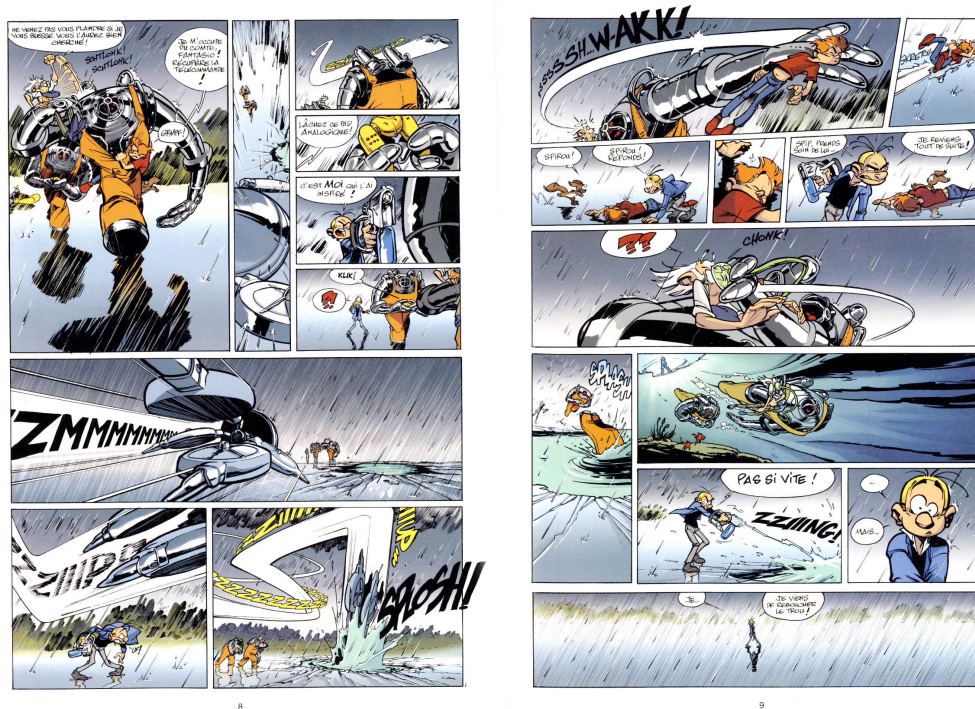


Fig. 16 : *Paris Sous-Seine*, p. 8-9

Thus, *Paris Sous-Seine* constitutes a clear example of phenomenological influence of manga upon the Western European imaginary: it is not the character design or the storylines of manga that are borrowed, but the visual, medial techniques. Of course, there is no definitive way to prove that this medial borrowing is not the result of contingencia. But the dynamic between the panels is so different from what readers of the series were used to, and so demonstrably similar to what is found in manga, that an influence is highly likely. However, the artist-scriptwriter team who took over the series in 2004 and chose to incorporate these manga techniques, Morvan and Munuera, only held on to the series until 2007, after which a new team was introduced. This hints at the limits of manga phenomenological influence upon bande dessinée, as the result was not necessarily embraced by the mainstream audience.

Within the North American space, one example of pollination of manga would be the creation of Original English Language manga, or OEL manga. This term refers to manga originally written and published in English, and usually created by artists who are not culturally Japanese. This type of work typically seeks to emulate both the phenomenology and the themes of Japanese manga, and thus constitute a strong example of influence of the latter, but for one caveat: I would argue that they are typically aimed at an audience who is already reading manga, and thus they confine manga and its phenomenology to its pre-existing space within the Western imaginary. They are admittedly enabling people who have already experienced manga phenomenology to continue doing so within conditions that take transculturality to another level: the meeting of two imaginaries has yielded a third space that does not merely arise from the readers being altered through contact with these works, but from the production of new works stemming from the receiving imaginary. However, this particular process does not necessarily enable the reading experience of manga to spread: by labelling itself as manga, OEL manga caters to those who have already opened themselves up to the experience. By doing so, it reinforces the pre-existing place of manga within the Western imaginary, but does not enable it to spread by having others discover it. In contrast, the manga-tinted stint of *Spirou & Fantasio*, while ultimately short-lived, did expose potential new readers to this phenomenology, by including manga medial effects in a long-running series that already had a very large following.

More interesting with regards to the spread of the manga experience in North America is the case of Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim* series (2004-2010). Although this Canadian-published series does appear, at first glance, to borrow formal characteristics of manga, such as a paperback, black-and-white format, it is not labelled as manga, and features a chunky line and character design more reminiscent of American Sunday newspaper comics than of manga: for example, although most of the characters have big eyes, their pupils lack the detail and reflections typical of manga eyes. Furthermore, the series fully embraces its Canadian identity, taking place in Toronto and making frequent references to Canadian cultural markers (Berninger 2013, 250). Thus, *Scott Pilgrim* is a graphic novel which at first glance does not claim to belong to the

manga sphere. At the same time, the series openly borrows medial effects from manga⁷⁴. Fig. 17, for example, displays a tabular page layout, as well as the type of “reaction shots” so popular in shōnen manga, and even a form of stylistic hyperbole in the next-to-last frame of the first page:



Fig. 17: *Scott Pilgrim & the Infinite Sadness*, chapter 18, n. pag.

The difference between this type of hybrid work and *Paris Sous-Seine* is that *Scott Pilgrim* does not attempt to tack on medial effects on a pre-existing form. Indeed, perhaps one of the reasons Morvan and Munuera did not succeed in popularizing their manga-tinted version of *Spirou & Fantasio* is precisely because they attempted to alter a form of comics, bande dessinée, that is steeped in tradition (not to mention that this particular bande dessinée series is itself steeped in tradition, having originated in 1938).

⁷⁴ It also borrows thematically from manga. For instance, the series’ narrative structure, which revolves around the hero having to defeat his girlfriend’s seven evil exes in order to have a real relationship with her, is as reminiscent of video games (which constitute a very strong theme of the series) as it is of shōnen manga.

Additionally, it may well be that these medial effects simply are not suited to the standard bande dessinée format of hardcover, coloured, detailed, 48-page albums, but instead require the less highly defined black-and-white format and the comfort of nearly 200 pages to spread content over. O'Malley, on the other hand, created *Scott Pilgrim* in the context of the arguably much looser North American graphic novel format, which has less strict, less consistent standards. As such, he effectively created a truly hybrid form of comics, one in which the manga phenomenology is present in an altered state, blending organically with other techniques not found in mainstream manga. The result appears to have had significantly great appeal: indeed, *Scott Pilgrim* became a success not just among manga readers, but among readers of comics in general, a significant enough success to be adapted into a fairly popular feature film (*Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, released in 2010).

One manner in which O'Malley operates is that he is able to adapt manga techniques to suit his needs. For example, he often plays upon these manga techniques, distorting them in the name of humour (not humour directed at manga, as in *Asterix*, but humour that serves the story), as in Fig. 18:

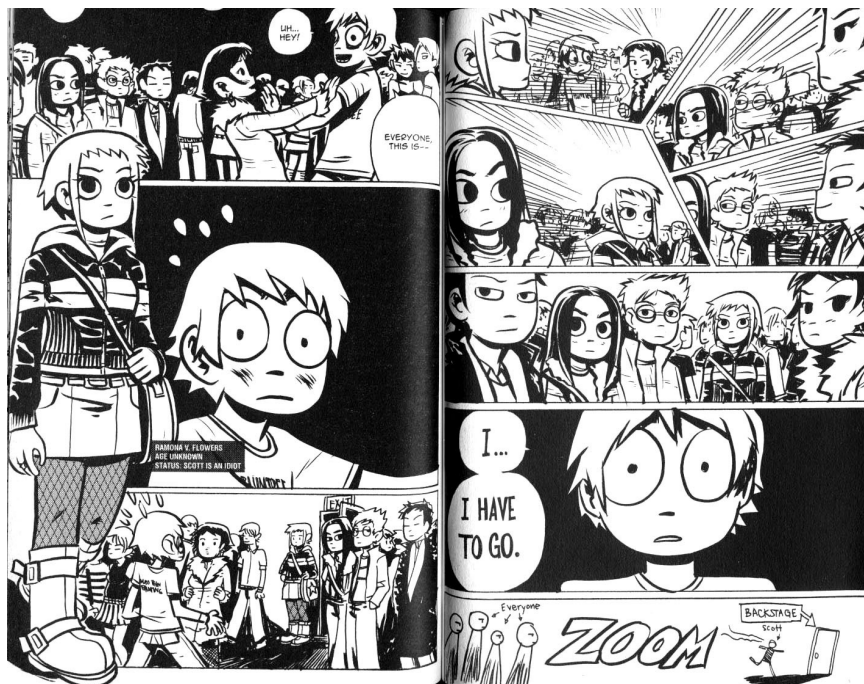


Fig. 18: *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life*, chapter 5, n. pag.

During this scene, Scott's love interest, Ramona, shows up at a party where Scott is accompanied by his current girlfriend. The top panels of the second page show the various glance exchanges, as both girls and Scott's sister look at each other as they try to figure out the situation. This set of panels, with its non-linear layout, mimics the reaction shots found in manga and in the previous example, but with a twist: indeed, the fourth panel shows Wallace, Scott's gay roommate, appreciatively looking over a boy he just met. By including in this sequence of glances an exchange that has nothing to do with the situation (and which also comically highlights Wallace's tendency toward self-centeredness), O'Malley distorts a classic manga technique and turns it into a different effect.

Regarding the hybridity of the series, Mark Berninger mentions the pages reproduced in Fig. 19 as an example.





Fig. 19: *Scott Pilgrim vs The World*, chapter 10, n. pag.

My analysis of these pages differs somewhat from Berninger's. The latter considers that all of them constitute a break from the fast-paced manga effects adopted by O'Malley during most of the book, and instead return us to the mood and effects of graphic novels (*Ibid.*, 249). I somewhat disagree, in that I believe the second, third and fourth pages (one page and a double-page spread, to be precise) precisely correspond to the slowing down of time which is to be found in manga, and of which I have given previous examples. It takes Scott an entire page to answer the phone, which builds suspense, while the double-page spread constitutes a rupture with the previous layout and creates a shock in the reader, one which echoes the shock displayed by Scott when he hears his estranged ex-girlfriend's voice on the phone. The following pages then indeed constitute a return to the sometimes more complex, more intricate layout of North American graphic novels, as they require slower decryption, given that some of the panels merge to form a larger picture, while photos of Scott and his ex are inserted sporadically. At the same time, these pages, although they do break with the manga phenomenology, do so by pushing to the extreme two elements which are precisely fundamental to the latter: fragmentation and tabularity. Indeed, panels on the first page divide Scott's body into disorderly fragments, while the panels on the second page reassemble fragments in order to form a whole that transcends panels and lends a new cohesion to the page. This is a different tabularity than the kind I have analysed in manga, yet it leans into a similar direction, even as it evokes a complexity more typical of graphic novels. In this manner, these pages from *Scott Pilgrim* perfectly illustrate what can happen once the medial effects of Japanese popular visual culture not only become a section of the fabric that is our imaginary, but weave themselves in with pre-existing threads of the latter to create an entirely new pattern. Sometimes, as with *Paris Sous-Seine*, the effect can feel forced, artificial, as though one were attempting to sew leather onto gauze; sometimes, such as in the case of *Scott Pilgrim*, a new fabric, full of possibilities, is woven.

These examples seem to confirm that medial phenomenology is indeed both the most effective and the most pervasive channel through which Japanese popular visual culture is able to create a space for itself within the fabric of "Western" imaginaries. Indeed, open references to content motifs, such as the *South Park* episode, maintain the distance between the receiving imaginary and the new flow that enters it: the

demarcations between the pre-existing patterns and the new motifs remain visible at that point, as Otherness is directly pointed to. Shared motifs, on the contrary, such as the questioning of reality, cannot clearly be said to constitute a form of transcultural influence, as we have not been able to establish a clear correlation between the presence of these motifs in Western imaginaries and the transfer of Japanese popular visual culture, instead resorting to the notion of contingencia to explain this overlap of motifs.

When it comes to phenomenological influence, however, the entire spectrum of possibilities appears to be covered. Some borrowings are obvious, such as the hyperboles and expressive backgrounds in *Martin Mystery* and *Teen Titans*, to the point that they can appear to point to difference rather than attempt to bridge it through merging: these textures are borrowed so blatantly and directly that their origin is immediately prominent. These particular instances may well serve as stepping stones toward a stage when these textures will indeed become a seamless part of the Western imaginaries concerned; but at the time of these series' creation, and I would argue even today, such medial borrowings remain conspicuous points of suture, stitches that join clearly differentiated pieces of fabric. However, in the case of *Paris-Sous-Seine* and, to a higher degree, in *Scott Pilgrim*, the presence of phenomenological elements borrowed from manga is simultaneously clearer and more seamless. There is little doubt that an influence took place, particularly from the perspective of in-depth analysis; at the same time, the textures are blended into the works in such a way as to form relatively smooth spaces; in other words, they have not been sporadically injected, but instead have been woven in with the other textures of the works.

What this highlights, ultimately, is the flexibility of phenomenological textures, not just in this particular case study, but within the workings of the imaginary, particularly where transcultural movements and exchanges are concerned. Motifs can be integrated from one imaginary to another, but ultimately they need to remain whole in order to be recognizable – if they are no longer recognizable, then the merging is complete but no longer noticeable, and therefore without effect. Phenomenological textures, on the contrary, will always remain perceptible, for that is their nature: if they are no longer felt, it means they no longer exist. But they have the ability to be unravelled and re woven into the textures of the receiving imaginary, in manners that can ultimately

be seamless, because serving the content perfectly: the folds merely become part of the work as a whole, without disturbing the pre-existing motifs and textures. This enables a deeper, more thorough blending of the imaginaries. In other words, whereas motifs are stitched into the fabric of the receiving imaginary, textures are woven into it. This enables us to conclude that phenomenological textures constitute our true “unseen surroundings:” while motifs and images continue to surround us and influence us throughout our everyday, they are still conspicuous to those who keep their eyes open. Phenomenological textures, however, although they can be very striking, are more malleable and adaptable, capable of integrating more seamlessly with other textures, of hiding under motifs not typically associated with them. In short, this confirms the hypothesis that the imaginary is an entity that operates at the physical level, and that future studies would gain from considering it from this perspective, in addition to that of a repository of images or tradition.

Conclusion

Wrapping it up: Folding into flow

Over the course of the previous chapters, I set out to demonstrate the presence within my corpus of, on the one hand, recurring content-based motifs and, on the other, recurring phenomenological textures, held together by multi-tiered folds and forming a cohesive fabric. I have also outlined how these different elements can be transferred, in varying degrees, onto non-Japanese imaginaries. But the question still remains: what does this tell us about the nature of the imaginary? What type of imaginary do these combined elements form? I hope to provide some answers in this conclusion. In keeping with our metaphor of fabric as it has been developed throughout this thesis, I would begin by identifying this particular parcel of the Japanese imaginary as a patchwork quilt.

Indeed, although a patchwork quilt is by definition assembled from disparate pieces of fabric and therefore contrasting textures, the quilt as a whole is nevertheless guided by a certain coherence and regularity, as the pieces form isolated symmetrical motifs. At the same time, a quilt, particularly one that is collectively sewn by a group, can also be largely improvised, as patterned squares are added along as they are created. A patchwork quilt is thus characterized by an openness of possibilities, as each new square modifies the perception of the whole, by creating a new contrast with pre-existing colours or patterns, or by prolonging or modifying a pre-existing pattern. Furthermore, as Deleuze and Guattari write, a patchwork quilt is ultimately a smooth space arising from striated components (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 595), which not only fits with the specific phenomenology explored in chapter 5, but also allows us to connect with the transcultural aspect of this case study. Indeed, the art of patchwork lies in making due with what is available (or ready-to-hand, in Heideggerian terms), in building something cohesive and beautiful out of random scraps: in this manner, the patchwork quilt is a smooth space of nomadism and contingency, which appropriately reflects the transcultural processes at play in both the birth and the travel of this visual culture. But I would also argue that the metaphor of the quilt is applicable to the notion of imaginary in general, not just to Japanese popular visual culture in particular, as the presence of other forms of motifs and textures are to be found in other imaginary territories. In this manner,

this particular case study has birthed new possibilities for the conception and analysis of the imaginary.

What I have tried to demonstrate is that this particular quilt, this portion of Japanese popular culture that has been transferred to francophone Europe and North America, while it is a patchwork and therefore an assemblage of different pieces, is not a random, haphazard accumulation. It consists of visual motifs that are identifiable as recurrent over time: those would be the content-based motifs I pointed out in chapters 3 and 4. The metaphor operates on multiple levels: a piece of bright red cotton that pops up at frequent intervals within a motif is akin to an isolated theme, such as the questioning of reality; a recurring assemblage of pieces forming a recognizable pattern can be likened to larger structures such as the mechanisms regulating the *shōnen* genre. But the recurrences, we have seen, go beyond the “visual,” or narrative: they also concern the phenomenology, or textures of the fabric. We have seen, in chapter 2, how Henri Lefebvre characterizes space, including spaces of representation (which I, in turn, have linked to the imaginary), as something that is lived and experienced without a filter, something that is not read, but felt. This does not mean that reading the imaginary is never possible; rather, it means that, even when being read, the imaginary is always also felt and experienced. Throughout my attempt at analyzing this complex reality that is the imaginary, I have characterized it as something which, particularly in its visual form, surrounds us as part of our everyday landscape, orients us and guides us often without our being necessarily fully aware of the influence. This process occurs, I argued, in great part by way of the phenomenology of each distinct medium. Thus, the fabric of the imaginary, including that of Japanese popular visual culture in particular, for those who choose to interact with it and explore it, operates as a haptic entity that wraps itself around us and accompanies us, alongside a multitude of other forms of fabric, throughout our day.

Having examined in chapter 6 how motifs and, especially, textures can transfer from this layer of Japanese popular visual culture onto the imaginary fabrics generated by francophone Europe and North America, I wish to now conclude by returning to the more intimate dimension of the imaginary process. How is our patchwork quilt approached and experienced by the individual subject? How, in other words, does the connection begin?

My main objective, you will recall, has been to seek out whether there is something within the portion of Japanese popular visual culture transferred to the West, other than its Japanese origin, that would explain its appeal to a wide Western audience, in spite of the many internal differences in medium and genre that were evident in the corpus. What I have tried to argue is that the merging of the imaginaries begins when Japanese popular visual culture is identified by individuals as a flow, as an entity that holds together, as a space that can be navigated, discussed and analysed. This can happen quite naturally at the level of each separate medium. Indeed, as briefly mentioned in chapter 1, manga, despite the enormous diversity of genres that have been exported, is characterized by a *tankōbon* format that renders it fairly easily identifiable at a glance: black-and-white, paperback, roughly 180 pages. Similarly, anime is characterized by recognizable limited animation, and striking character designs. This admittedly applies less to Japanese video games, which do not appear to be bound together by such ostentatious factors. Manga and anime are additionally bound together by their common history, outlined in chapter 1, and by the fact that often a series originally created for one medium will be adapted for another. The cultural motifs outlined in chapter 3, for their part, play a key role in perpetuating the process of perception of cohesion of both manga and anime. In fact, I believe the identification of a different cultural space is one of the first stages of this process: motifs that denote “Japaneseness,” which abound in manga and anime, contribute to binding these works together. Indeed, when the corpus is composed of such extremely varied works, it seems unavoidable that their common “exotic” origin plays a part in enticing people to experience them. It seems unlikely that a person who has enjoyed reading the action-packed *Bleach*, for example, would spontaneously decide to give the cutesy, romantic *Fruits Basket* a try – unless they were aware that both are manga, i.e. Japanese comics. In the same way, *Mario* and *Zelda* games provide very different gameplay experiences, yet one would be plausibly more inclined to try one after having played the other if one were aware that both were created by Miyamoto Shigeru; *Final Fantasy* provides yet another different experience (and a completely different aesthetic), yet one may feel encouraged to try it having played other Japanese games, particularly since, as we have seen, Japanese video games have been a part of Western gaming landscape since practically the beginning. Not everyone who

enjoys comics will automatically be drawn to video games, or vice-versa; but someone who has been sufficiently enthused by both manga and anime's "Japaneseness" (and my argument here is that "Japaneseness" does play a key role in the beginning) would be more disposed to making the transition toward games, or to favour Japanese games if one is already a gamer. On this level, we can say that cohesion of this fabric is rooted in a modern form of Japonisme, albeit one that is arguably not imperialistic, but rather a form of curiosity and escape, as suggested in chapter 3 through Chun's notion of high tech Orientalism.

Thus contemporary Japonisme is a catalyst in how Japanese popular visual culture begins to be integrated into the fabrics of the "Western" imaginaries, its perceived "Japaneseness" acting not necessarily as an initial draw, but as a force of cohesion that leads to one considering these works as an ensemble. But past this initial gathering of these diverse works, the non-cultural content motifs come into play. The thematic mechanisms and, to an arguably higher degree, the structuring mechanisms come into play and increase the perceived cohesion. The motifs of the quilt become apparent, and thus contribute to it being perceived as one coherent assemblage – as a quilt, rather than a random scattering. However, this can only occur once the works have been experienced; this is why the common "Japanese" aura plays a gateway role in facilitating the corpus in its entirety to be experienced. The term "assemblage" is perhaps somewhat misleading in this case, as it might suggest that these motifs are the result of conscious creation or manipulation, that they have been purposefully injected into these works. Of course, some conscious decision-making is likely behind some of these motifs within exported Japanese popular visual culture: the success of *Dragon Ball*, for instance, doubtlessly led to countries purchasing other shōnen, such as *Naruto* and *Bleach*, which contain similar structuring mechanisms by way of their generic allegiance. And yet, one has difficulty imagining that the themes of malleable reality, or of fetish objects, for example, were deliberately singled out as appealing, and therefore marketable, elements. Instead, it seems more plausible that these recurring themes are present in contemporary Japanese popular visual culture as symptoms of the Japanese imaginary in its contemporary state. Indeed, we saw in chapter 2 that different images or tropes are more prominent than others within the reservoir of the imaginary at a given time; one can therefore suppose

that the motifs outlined in the corpus are in fact prominent motifs of the general Japanese imaginary at the time of the corpus' creation, at least within this segment of popular visual culture. Additionally, I am not claiming that Western fans of Japanese popular visual culture necessarily consciously identify these networks of motifs (although fans who engage in more in-depth analysis certainly do); but these motifs nevertheless make themselves felt whenever these series or games are enjoyed, acting as ambient elements that contribute to the narrative experience of these works and act as markers and guidelines. Just as I was initially unaware that the shocking contrasts, or the intense emotions, among other things, were what made the anime of my childhood so enjoyable to me, so these motifs can operate as agents of cohesion without this fact being consciously registered. The imaginary, we have seen, can work that way as ambient influence: the motifs surround us and influence our perception even when we do not stop to look at them. Because these particular motifs are less culturally charged, they allow us to move somewhat away from Japonisme, by forming a cohesion based on elements that do not explicitly denote "Japan." While a new "Japanese" construct may well arise from this new cohesion, and while this new construct may itself be skewed and distorting, the fact that it enables one's perception of "Japan" to shift away from the more traditional, more deeply engrained perception is at worst not damaging, and at best constructive, enabling the beginnings of a reflection or a change of perspective on cultural perceptions.

Chapter 5 has shown, however, that the phenomenological textures of the fabric of Japanese popular visual culture appear to be what binds these works most tightly together: from the perspective of textures, manga, anime and video games appear to be equally concerned. Additionally, we have seen that textures are arguably more pervasive, because they affect us at a physical level, in a manner of which we are less consciously aware. If indeed the imaginary operates as a physical, ambient environment, then it follows that the textures of this specific portion of the imaginary, as inherently physical forces, make themselves felt all the more within such an imaginary; they are thus particularly effective in their influence upon the subject, as this influence is exerted almost subliminally, and thereby more pervasively. The caveat of textures, however, is that they need to be experienced in the first place: the manga, anime and Japanese video games in question need to be read, viewed and played in order for their common

phenomenology to be experienced, registered and recognized (consciously or not). Thus, although phenomenology appears to be the strongest agent of cohesion of the corpus, it is dependent first on cultural motifs, which act as initial force of cohesion, and second on content motifs and mechanisms, which act as threads enabling the further recognition of the corpus as a coherent imaginary and thus encouraging further exploration of the latter.

One could justifiably object that this importance of phenomenological textures within the experience of Japanese popular visual culture by non-Japanese audiences returns us to an old binary opposition between the “West” as Cartesian and intellectual, and the “East” as sensual and intuitive (or in other words, base and irrational). But in actuality, I believe that this very prominence of phenomenology helps us gain distance from Japonisme and the initial culture-based appeal of these works. First of all, although I have understandably focused on the phenomenology of my corpus, this does not mean that textures are less prominent in, say, Golden Age superhero comics: such works have their own phenomenology, one that is equally important to the experience they provide as manga’s textures are to their own experience, but one that this thesis could not set out to explore. Physicality is as much a characteristic of “Western” visual works as of “Eastern” ones.

Secondly, the prominence of this common phenomenology that binds the corpus together actually enables us to move away from cultural territory and considerations. Indeed, although we have seen that culture and phenomenology can be very tightly connected (Dorfman 2007), it does not ensue that a certain type of medial phenomenology has to be linked to a specific culture or cultural construct, such as “Japan.” In other words, I am in no way arguing that the phenomenology of the corpus, characterized by fragmentation and tabularity resulting in superflatness, is somehow characteristic of or intrinsic to Japan, or even automatically associated to “Japan.” Medial phenomenology is, we have seen, a direct, unfiltered effect; as such, it is among the closest we can come to a non-cultural phenomenon. This is what makes it the most convincing argument against the idea that the Western adoption of Japanese popular visual culture is strictly a new form of Japonisme. You will recall that I defined my role as a researcher, if I was to follow the principles of visual culture, as examining culture as *Lebenswelt*, as filtered experience, and as attempting to deconstruct these filters. I did this

to a point in chapter 3, particularly when I examined cultural content motifs. But medial phenomenology (as opposed to the type of cultural phenomenology Dorfman writes of) is precisely concerned with *Umwelt*, or unfiltered experience. This is not to say that media themselves are not cultural: we have seen that they are, that a wood-block painting will create a very different phenomenology than a Betamax tape, not just medially but also culturally, because media arise in a historical and cultural context. But the medial aspect of this phenomenology can be isolated within analysis, just as we have seen in chapter 6 that it can be transferred onto forms of expression hailing from other cultures; therefore this medial aspect is culturally non-odourous, in Iwabuchi's sense, in that it does not put forward elements of Japanese culture as its main appeal. Thus, although a trace of "Japaneseness" may be initially attributed to this phenomenology, the latter has the potential to move beyond this trace, as we have seen in the case of *Scott Pilgrim*. In this manner, the sensual, physical textures that have been demonstrated to be part of the appeal of Japanese popular visual culture do not return us to an East/West qualitative opposition, but instead enable us to transcend it.

It should be clear by now that I believe phenomenology plays a very important role in the process of transfer of Japanese popular visual culture toward Western regions, not just at the level of creation, as shown in chapter 6, but at the level of the individual. It should be equally clear that textures could not have accomplished this alone: the motifs are necessary to achieve preliminary contact and cohesion. But there is an additional level at which motifs and textures are intertwined and dependent on one another: within and throughout the corpus itself, they do not remain separate, but are joined by very clear affinities. For reasons of clarity and logic, I have examined motifs and textures separately throughout this thesis; but now is the time to bring them together. Indeed, there are several apparent points of contact and correspondence between content and phenomenology. Take, for example, the thematic motifs of the questioning of reality and of metamorphosis. They appear to lean in the same direction as the hyperbolic peaks in manga, the genre collage in anime, and the contrasts and changes of space in video games: indeed, all these phenomena lead toward a strong effect of relativism, be it of reality, characters' appearances, narrative rules, or gameplay rules. This relativism, we

have seen, is also characteristic of the superflat aesthetic, as present in the relative movement that regulates manga and anime. I am certainly not the first to point out the plastic freedom that seems to characterize Japanese popular visual culture: several authors, from Napier to Allison to Kelts, have written that anime, in particular, exploits the fluid possibilities of animation by creating fantasy worlds and creatures that have only a tenuous connection with reality (Kelts 2006, 17, 46). But what the in-depth analysis of the corpus has shown is that the relativism that accompanies this visual freedom exists on multiple levels, not just where representation is concerned, but within narrative and phenomenology as well: motifs and textures are both immersed in shifting, changing relations. Relativism thus stands out as, paradoxically enough, a stable presence throughout this section of Japanese popular visual culture.

Fragmentation constitutes another mechanism that combines motifs and textures into a same dynamic. This is suggested by Anne Allison, who focuses on the toy aspect of the Japanese media mix, but whose words regarding the process of assembly and disassembly underlying these toys can very well apply to my corpus, echoing Azuma's concept of attractor elements forming a database:

There is an array of separate and endlessly proliferating parts (swords, skirts, eyeglasses, tulips, pots, big lips) into which entities are disassembled but also reassembled in a plethora of ways. And it is by mastering these codes and also personalizing them [...] that children gain a sense of deep attachment to, and control of, this imaginary space. For even though this is a world of boundless fragmentation, kids continually make connections – both between particles [...] and between themselves and different parts or entities in the playscape. (Allison 2006, 26)

These words put fragmentation and the re-assembling process that emerges from it at the heart of the child's interaction with the media mix. I have demonstrated the presence of fragmentation at various levels of my corpus, and consider it to be a fundamental pillar of the phenomenology of Japanese popular visual culture as represented by my corpus. The different recurring forms of medial fragmentation which I have demonstrated in chapter 5 show just how deeply and consistently this trait is put forward within this imaginary, within the very structures, the very folds of the experience provided by these works. But I would argue that fragmentation is additionally and equally present through the generic contrasts identified in anime and manga and the aesthetic contrasts present in video

games: these elements point to a general fragmentation that returns us to the metaphor of the patchwork, of an ensemble generated from contrasting pieces, not just at the general level of the corpus, but at the level of individual works.

Thus, through the ubiquity of the presence of dynamics such as relativism and fragmentation at the level of both motifs and textures, we find that both latter, while inherently different in nature, nevertheless work together to generate similar effects, and thus form what we could call über-mechanisms that structure the entire fabric, not just parcels of it.

Additionally, throughout my demonstration of the existence of motifs and textures, I have consistently returned to the dynamic of flux and stasis, establishing it as a constant within this imaginary. This dynamic continues to exist in the über-mechanisms constituted by relativism and fragmentation. Indeed, relativism signifies movement, a shifting position amongst shifting markers; fragmentation, for its part, signifies the breaking up of the flow into manageable pieces, the establishing of new, temporarily stable markers within the flux. And this dynamic, I now argue, also regulates our relationship with this imaginary. Indeed, a flow can be defined as a massive movement of smaller particles, just as a patchwork is composed of many pieces forming a pattern, just as a fabric is composed of innumerable threads. The sheer number of anime, manga and games that are exported toward the West (or at least were being exported at the peak of this cultural movement, several years ago) generates flux, creates an impression of swarming multitude which one feels one has to navigate, much as one does a current. This flux, however, is broken up by at least two factors. The first is the diversity which composes it. Indeed, the division of the flow into genres, such as shōnen, high school drama, or RPG, aids the navigation by providing guidelines, by tracing smaller, more manageable territories to be explored. The second consists in the very recurrences I have demonstrated throughout this thesis. Indeed, they provide structures and markers, elements that weigh down the flow, slow it down in order to allow the reader, viewer or gamer to situate herself, to follow a thread, motif or texture across the fabric as a whole and thereby make sense of it. At the same time, however, these motifs create between themselves a new flux on a smaller scale, as the subject is able to trace the link between each thematic node, between each recurring phenomenological layer. Thus, the dynamic

of flux and stasis operates as the ultimate agent of cohesion within this transcultural movement. But I would now argue that in doing so, this dynamic generates folds that exist not only at the level of phenomenology, such as those examined in chapter 5, but also at the level of content.

We have seen how the individual establishes the cohesion of the fabric first through the recognition of motifs, then through the experience of textures. Throughout this process, she is guided at all levels by the dynamic of flux and stasis. Flux propels her between the thematic nodes which she encounters repeatedly from one work to another, as she traces the motifs that come alive as she discovers them. Stasis stalls her when she runs into a contrast of genres, of aesthetics, of intensities. Flux lifts her up as she re-assembles the fragmented scraps of the images and worlds that she is phenomenologically experiencing, as she gives herself away to the relative movement of the superflat world; and at the same time she continually runs into stasis, as each fragmentation interrupts her flight, each layer dents the flow, each new space gives her pause. What this constantly stalled and restarted movement amounts to is, ultimately, a fold. Indeed, I wrote in chapter 5 that a fold is where flux(es) turns into stasis. But the reverse is also true: the dynamic of flux and stasis yields folds. Although I chose to introduce the fold first as a purely phenomenological notion for reasons of clarity, it is a notion which can exist on multiple levels: indeed, the dynamic of flow and snags that is present within content can also be said to generate folds. Such folds remain distinct from the phenomenological folds I examined: the latter are experienced physically, whereas “content folds,” if that is what we are to call them, operate strictly at the level of narrative, and therefore at the level of intellect and affect. The difference between narrative and phenomenology remains akin to the difference between content and the manner in which this content is framed and conveyed, which is how I have conceived of these different levels throughout this thesis. But the conceptual rapprochement between the two enabled by using the same notion of fold reminds us that both levels remain connected at all times: there cannot be content without phenomenology, just as phenomenology cannot exist if there is no content to convey. This is true for most forms of expression, but the double use of the fold as both narrative and phenomenological relation in this particular imaginary fabric crystallizes just how deep the cohesion of the

latter runs. This fabric is both read *and* experienced as a folded one, as a series of shifts both cognitive and physical.

How, then do flux and stasis concretely regulate the recognition and reception process of Japanese popular visual culture as a cohesive, continuous fabric? We have seen that the process begins through the identification of motifs, but it would be more accurate to say that these motifs are first identified within a single work, series, or game: it is by identifying separate motifs within a work that one first understands it. Similarly, one experiences textures and phenomenological folds first within a single work. I maintain that motifs arguably play a stronger role in this preliminary stage of discovery, as they are more easily identifiable and traceable: if one has enjoyed a Japanese RPG for its story, or if one has enjoyed a harem shōnen, one will start looking for another game or series hailing from this genre, in order to seek out similar tropes. There is an effect of flow as one works one's way through an entire series or game, and then on to a genre as a whole. There is an accompanying stasis whenever one pauses between series or genres, to seek out the next work. But what I would like to highlight here is how flow is ultimately aided by the momentum gathered as one discovers more of this fabric. While the initial discovery is marked by the uncertainty of novelty, the process becomes smoother the more familiar one becomes with this imaginary, the more one becomes able to expect the recurring motifs and textures. Indeed, the more one is familiar with the fabric, the better one knows where to look for specific motifs and textures; thus uncertain discovery turns into active quest. The dynamic of flux and stasis continues to operate at the smaller-scale levels, such as isolated motifs and folds contained within a single series or game; but as this dynamic becomes evident on the larger scale, encompassing increasingly numerous and diverse works, flow arguably becomes more dominant, fuelled not just by momentum, but by the fact that folds (both narrative and phenomenological) have appeared that span the entire fabric and enable one to navigate it in leaps and bounds rather than tentatively. Folds, although constituted by the interaction between flux and stasis, ultimately becomes an agent of cross-fabric flux. Smaller folds thus merge into larger ones, creating a supple structure that runs across the entire fabric. This structure can then itself be both followed and experienced by the knowing audience, enabling ever expanding knowledge and familiarity, and therefore aiding the further spinning and

spreading of the quilt. Thus the quilt folds (rather than unfolds) into flow, itself gaining momentum the more it is interacted with.

What remains to be seen is whether a similar form of folding can be said to regulate other types of imaginaries. I have been able to demonstrate that the dynamic of flux and stasis is very strongly present in this specific portion of the Japanese popular visual imaginary; could one effectively and usefully demonstrate a similarly encompassing mechanism at work in other forms of imaginaries? In other words, are all imaginaries similarly cohesive?

Ultimately, this thesis has reached its goal: to study the transcultural flow of Japanese popular visual culture towards Western regions in order to better understand the ways in which imaginaries function, shift, and blend. For this, it was necessary to establish the cohesion of the fabric of this particular visual culture, and in doing so demonstrate how the motifs and textures constituting this fabric manifest themselves as recognizable entities. By better understanding the differences between motifs and textures, and how they operate and integrate, it was possible to build a prism through which one can view the functionings of the imaginary from a new perspective, thereby not only gaining deeper understanding of these functionings, but also opening up possibilities for further analysis. This prism consists in two main facets: on the one hand, the increased place of phenomenology and medial concerns, which would enable one to consider the imaginary as physically ambient environment; on the other, the presence of multi-level folds that potentially regulate imaginaries in general. Together, these two perspectives can enable a more lucid and potent understanding of the imaginary as our “unseen surroundings.”

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Illustrating thematic mechanisms (Chapter 3, section A)

a). Questioning of reality

The most straightforward manner in which reality is put into question in the corpus is by introducing the possibility of illusion within the story. For instance, in the manga *Naruto*, characters can practice the art of *genjutsu*, which provokes full-body hallucinations in their opponent. The latter not only see what the practitioner of *genjutsu* wants them to see, but can also be convinced that they are physically interacting with their hallucination, even when they remain motionless in reality. As a result, there are multiple scenes in which the reader himself is tricked by these hallucinations, as they are initially presented as plausible reality (e.g., vol. 42, ch. 384-385). Similarly, in *Bleach*, one character possesses the power to create a total illusion at will, and among other things leads everyone, including the reader, to believe he is dead for several volumes (with irrefutable supporting evidence), and additionally misleads everyone as to the outcome of a fight (vol. 12, ch. 100-101; vol. 20, ch. 169-171; vol. 45, ch. 391-392). At the most pragmatic level, these possibilities of illusion enable the mangaka to doubly surprise the reader, to mislead the latter into believing the story has taken a shocking turn, only to be surprised again when this reveals to be an illusion. The anime feature film *Perfect Blue*, while it does not feature supernatural powers of illusion, uses a similar narrative device when it regularly presents the viewer with “fake” outcomes which turn out to be hallucinations or dreams existing only in the mind of its increasingly troubled protagonist. Finally, several games within the *Professor Layton* franchise heavily rely on betraying the player's assumptions regarding the game's storyworld's reality. In *The Curious Village*, for instance, it is revealed that all the inhabitants of the village where the game unfolds, with whom the player has interacted throughout the game, are in fact automatons. An even more to the point example is the final revelation in *The Diabolical Box*, which is that all characters, including the playable ones, were under a collective hallucination, and that nothing is as it had appeared. While operating mainly on an obvious, ludic, albeit essential narrative level, these examples constitute a first manner in which reality is represented in the corpus as somewhat less than straightforward. Through

this repeated process, the reader, viewer, or gamer learns that, within these works, assumptions regarding what is unfolding before her very eyes can always be countered.

Other works also literally question reality, but rather than doing so for the sole purpose of an isolated plot point, or even a narratively crucial plot twist, instead revolve entirely around the concept that reality is malleable, not through illusion, but as metaphysical entity. This is the case of the anime series *Noein*, which is largely based on quantum physics and the theory of the existence of multiple alternate dimensions. The protagonist, a twelve-year-old girl named Haruka, is hunted by adults from a future dimension (who turn out to be alternate future versions of her friends), who believe she is the key to stopping the erosion of their dimension by another. The anime thrives on questions such as whether alternate dimensions really exist or are merely potential or possible computations, what it means to observe or recognise another's existence, and what could happen should dimensions become permeable to one another (specifically, what does it mean to exist in another dimension when you are theoretically an illusion therein?). Reality is thus portrayed as inherently contingent and fluctuating, heavily dependent on the observing subject (for example, the downfall of the villain orchestrating the dimensional merger is that no one agrees to acknowledge his existence), and infinitely open. Another anime, *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, revolves around a similar conception of reality as dependent on the observer – in this case, an ultimate observer in the form of Haruhi, a sixteen-year-old girl. In a literal application of the anthropic principle, Haruhi, unbeknownst to herself, has the power to make her deepest desires come true; it is even believed that she unwittingly recreated the entire universe three years prior to the beginning of the series. Any irritation or frustration on her part threatens to destroy the world as we know it, and so her friends spend most of the series trying to keep her entertained and satisfied with reality as it stands, while being unable to prevent minor fluctuations and events. As in *Noein*, reality is portrayed as infinitely malleable, but in a more fundamental, irrevocable manner, as Haruhi appears to be powerful enough to trump even the laws of quantum physics.

In most of the examples given so far, the malleability of reality is explained rationally, at times even scientifically. Both *Noein* and *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* make references to actual scientific or philosophical theories, such as

Schrödinger's work and the anthropic principle. The collective hallucination in *Professor Layton and the Diabolical Box* is implausible, but is at least rationally explained as the product of gas emanations from a local mine. The rules explaining how the collective illusion is generated in *Bleach* are pure fantasy, pertaining to supernatural powers, but they are coherent rules nevertheless, complete with a plausible loophole. But some works go even further, in a manner of speaking, in their blurring of reality, as they choose to simply postulate that reality is unstable, without ever really explaining why. This is the case, for example, of the anime *Princess Tutu*, where it is revealed from the beginning that fairy tales have seeped into reality, without anyone being capable of telling the difference between the two: whenever something out of the ordinary happens (such as a dancing anteater, or two children having a bear for a mother), characters are briefly confused, but then assume it was always so. This invasion of fiction into reality occurred when a storyteller whose stories came true succeeded in spinning tales from beyond the grave. But how or why he operates is never entirely explained, other than by the fact that *Princess Tutu* is itself a work of fantasy fiction. Similarly, Satoshi Kon's full-length animation film *Paprika* portrays the incursion of dreams into the real world. While there is initially a scientific basis for the interaction between both worlds (a technological device enables therapists to enter their patients' dreams in order to better treat them), all scientific pretence has vanished by the time the dream world invades reality and nearly destroys Tokyo because of a single megalomaniac. In the same manner, the anime series *Paranoia Agent*, also directed by Satoshi Kon, revolves around the idea that one young woman's lie can take physical form and wreak havoc on Tokyo. The woman, Tsukiko, lies about being attacked by a mysterious delinquent, in order to escape from unbearable pressure at work. Soon, more and more people report being attacked by the same assailant, with all victims having in common the fact that they are trying to escape from some unpleasant aspect of their lives. Described as a roller-blading youth armed with a baseball bat, the assailant becomes an urban legend dubbed Shōnen Batto, or Bat Boy. Although he is eventually revealed to not exist, all the victims having faked their attacks, Tsukiko's lie eventually becomes so big that it comes to stand for humanity's refusal to face reality, and threatens to (also) destroy Tokyo, causing ironically real damage. How Tsukiko's lie came to obtain such power is not explained other than through its allegorical

force. Magical realism of this type is, of course, not unique to anime, but its presence in the corpus does further demonstrate the flexibility of reality within the latter, a flexibility which need not even be explained, but is instead meant to be accepted at face-value. In the video game *Final Fantasy X*, even the reality of the fantasy-imbued world in which the game unfolds is portrayed as porous, as the main playable character, Tidus, is eventually revealed to be a dream entity, materialized by spirits' desire to break the cycle of destruction and rebirth that regulates their world. In a game where magical spiritual entities can be summoned and potions have immediate healing power, perhaps one should not attribute too much importance to this symptom of the relativity of reality: after all, this game's portrayal of reality is quite different from what we typically define as “realistic” to begin with. Yet I would argue that the revelation that Tidus, the character we have been following and playing as over the course of the entire game, “isn't real” has repercussions on a different scale than the discovery that giant insects exist in this world. The latter simply requires a slight adjustment of one's representation of the game's world, a world which one already knew at this point harboured various sorts of strange species; the knowledge that Tidus is an illusion, on the other hand, requires one to entirely review one's story map of the game. The story map, as Nitsche defines it, is “a cognitive map that has been heavily influenced by evocative narrative elements as the player experienced them in the game” and which he likens to David Herman's concept of the storyworld, a map of the relations and histories between characters in events in a narrative fiction (Nitsche 2008, 227-230). When the story map must be altered so suddenly and sharply, it forces the player to consider the game's reality in a whole new light. In this manner, the repositioning of reality as porous and, in a way, untrustworthy affects one's experience of the work in question on a deeper level than the mere inclusion of fantasy.

On a significantly different paradigm, several works choose to portray reality as inherently subjective, and allow this choice to seep into their representation of reality. The anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is perhaps the most flagrant example of this position. Ostensibly a mecha-derived sci-fi series, it spends much of its airtime delving into the psychological depths of its protagonists, most notably its (anti)hero Shinji, a teenaged military pilot whose conflicted relationship with his father, difficulty in

connecting with others, and general inferiority complex make him the subject and author of many introspective musings. In the final episode of the series, which appears to take place primarily inside Shinji's psyche, he is confronted to what a reality without any constraints would be, in the most literal way possible: he is represented as a minimalist, pencil-drawn figure, free-falling against a blank background. Realising that this empty world lacks orientation, he gradually fills this world with markers and relatable entities. He then suddenly ends up inhabiting a world that could be said to be either an alternate dimension to his own, or a "what if?"-type scenario. Instead of being a pilot, he is a normal, average student; his father is no longer a cold megalomaniac, but instead appears to be an absent-minded, placid man, and his mother is alive, rather than killed in a scientific experiment. Figures from his old reality are still present, but slightly different: Misato, his sexy, playful mentor, is now his sexy, playful schoolteacher, Asuka, his fellow pilot, is now his childhood friend (and potential love interest), and Rei, the previously closed-off, almost emotionless third pilot, is now a comically fiery exchange student. This new reality has the character structure and overall feel of a typical high school romantic comedy. Shinji then realises that such a reality, one where he does not have to suffer the angst and pressure of being a pilot, is possible, and this leads him to reaffirm his will to live.

b) Metamorphosis and plasticity

The transforming superhero is a fairly common trope in Western storytelling. Yet, in the case of American comics, for example, often the transformation is superficial, limited to a change of clothing: Superman, Batman, Spider-man, all change into their superhero persona by changing into their costume. Even when their superpowers result from a modification of their being, such as Peter Parker getting bitten by a radioactive arachnid to become Spider-man, or the future Fantastic Four being exposed to cosmic rays, the transformation is single and permanent. In manga, anime and Japanese games, however, metamorphosis exists primarily as a frequent, repeatable, most often reversible phenomenon. In *Bleach*, for example, the protagonist Ichigo transforms countless times into a soul reaper and back again into a human; additionally, his metamorphosis evolves throughout the series, his powers changing with each new physical appearance.

Furthermore, most supernatural characters in *Bleach* (in other words, the majority of characters in this series) have the ability to transform either their body or their sword into at least one other form (often two) in order to gain further power. In *Naruto*, the protagonist's body is a permanent host to a fox demon, but the latter can also bring the boy to different degrees of metamorphosis, each rendering him stronger, but more feral and out of control. In *Dragon Ball*, one of the turning points of the series occurs when the hero, Goku, is able to transcend his limits by temporarily turning into a Super Saiyan, which alters his hair and eyes and takes his strength to unprecedented levels. *Rurouni Kenshin's* protagonist, being devoid of supernatural powers per se, is incapable of such drastic metamorphosis, yet he also undergoes a regular change of sorts: when provoked, he abandons his usual good-natured, smiling persona, and adopts his former personality as a deadly assassin. The transformation is rendered visually clear, as Kenshin's entire physiognomy changes, and he expresses himself differently as well; thus, even though this is not as fundamental a metamorphosis as those present in other works, a transformation is clearly highlighted. It may seem as though only shōnen manga showcase metamorphosis, but the latter is also present in other genres: in the shōjo *Fruits Basket*, for instance, thirteen characters can temporarily morph into animals. In all of these manga examples, metamorphosis occurs within the physical being of the character, and is both repeatable and reversible.

Metamorphosis also abounds in anime. In *Noein*, although literal metamorphosis, i.e. transformation from one physical shape into another, is relatively limited and solely concerns characters who have mastered transdimensional travel, metamorphosis is conceptually present due to the afore-mentioned malleability of reality. Indeed, this malleability extends to existence itself, and the latter is thus rendered uncertain by the very possibilities that are open to it. The characters become aware that they can become an infinite number of versions of themselves; likewise, their existence can also fail to stabilise, causing them to vanish, as almost happens to one of them. Thus, you could say that metamorphosis in *Noein* is a constant threat to the cohesiveness of being. In *Paprika*, metamorphosis is constant in the dreamworld that unfolds; in fact, it is its trademark. Not only bodies, but also objects and environments are forever morphing, as best illustrated in a scene where Paprika investigates a malignant dream that has been driving people. In

this sequence, Paprika successively morphs into various figures of the collective imaginary, from pop culture (Disney's Pinocchio) to traditional Chinese myth (Son Goku from *Journey to the West*), as her pursuer does the same, and the setting around her transforms and ultimately ensnares her. It is metamorphosis that enables us to tell the dreamworld apart from reality: the dreamworld is defined by its offering of possibilities, which threatens the stability of reality. Finally, *Princess Tutu* contains a kind of metamorphosis that is typical of its genre, magical girl anime: the protagonist's transformation from ordinary girl to magic heroine. This phenomenon occurs at least once per episode, with the exception of the final episodes. Each transformation is, as is often the case in this genre, ritualized, with the girl performing the same gestures, with the same framing and audiovisual effects. And although the girl, Duck, should be recognizable despite her change of costume (much as Clark Kent ought to be recognizable as Superman), she has clearly become somebody else: graceful when she was once clumsy, poised when she was once flustered, even her speech is altered. Additionally, Duck undergoes another regular transformation whenever she reverts to her true form: that of an actual duck. The character thus switches between these three forms, wondering who she truly is at heart, only to realise in the end that, ultimately, she has remained herself throughout all these transformations. At the same time, metamorphosis enables her to accomplish things she otherwise could not have had she remained a mere duck: as a girl, she learns how to dance ballet, albeit clumsily; as Princess Tutu, her dancing has the power to enchant and convince others. The nature of her interactions with others also varies according to which form she assumes: for obvious reasons, she is treated differently when she is a duck than when she manifests herself as a magical heroine. Thus, even though she fights her ultimate battle as a duck, having been stripped of her powers, here again metamorphosis is synonymous with multiple possibilities.

Finally, video games display no small amount of transformations. Even the earliest *Mario* game, *Super Mario Bros*, features gameplay that is heavily dependent on metamorphosis and accompanying changes in abilities. When the character grabs a mushroom, he grows larger in size, rendering him more resistant to enemy attacks; similarly, a flower changes his clothes from red to white, while granting him the power to shoot fireballs from his hands, while a star makes him sparkle and renders him

temporarily invincible to anything except a deadly fall. These metamorphoses are typically temporary and repeatable, as the character reverts to his original form whenever he takes damage. Throughout the *Mario* franchise, these gameplay elements are recurring to the point of becoming iconic, along with a few additions in more recent games (e.g. a leaf that turns Mario into a tanuki, or raccoon, with a tail that enables him to fly and glide, in *Super Mario Bros 3* and a few subsequent games). *Pokémon* games, for their part, feature metamorphosis more sparsely, but in a manner no less fundamental to the mechanics of the game. Players spend the game capturing and training pokémon in order to help them learn skills and grow stronger. Throughout most of the game, skills, or battle techniques, are learnt without any changes being made to the pokémon's appearance. However, eventually the pokémon reaches a point of evolution, at which its appearance is altered (and is matured, as it transitions from kawaii to cool (Surman 2009)). This metamorphosis is partly aesthetic, but also functional, operating as a point of no return: after evolving, the pokémon will have new skills available for learning, but others will become forever unavailable. Transformation is here more definitive, but is linked, as in *Mario*, to ability. Metamorphosis is less prevalent in *Zelda* games. Indeed, while the playable character, Link, often activates different abilities at different times, these are most often connected to weapons or tools, not changes within the character himself. Link picks up different tools throughout the games, many of which are recurring from game to game – a sword, a slingshot, a grappling hook – and he switches between them in order to accomplish his immediate goal, be it slaying an enemy or reaching a distant point in space. This means of activating an ability is quite widespread in games of North American origin, from the youth-oriented *Ratchet and Clank* franchise to the more mature *Mass Effect* series, and also in *The World Ends With You*, in which the player can equip pins which enable her to use different powers. However, in *Ocarina of Time*, Link does undergo a form of repeated metamorphosis, as he switches between his present and his future self, thus alternating between being a child and an adult, with different possibilities open to him depending on his status. Additionally, in *Twilight Princess*, Link undergoes literal metamorphosis, as he is transformed into a wolf, his abilities consequently restrained (e.g. he cannot manipulate tools) and enhanced (e.g. he can track by scent). Eventually, he is able to switch at will between his human and wolf forms.

Finally, a similar combination of tools and transformation is present in *Final Fantasy* games. In some games, as in *Final Fantasy VII*, the multiple playable characters can change and upgrade their weapons during battle, and evolve their abilities through combat, but without the use of metamorphosis. In *Final Fantasy X-2*, however, the characters can inhabit different roles, and change outfits and demeanour accordingly. While this does not amount to metamorphosis per se, in that the characters' bodies do not change, only their clothes, each change of role is accompanied by a morphing sequence that is very reminiscent of magical girl transformations in anime: in a ritualized sequence, each girl (in this instance, all three playable characters are young females) is lifted into the air and her initial clothes magically fade away leaving behind a trail of sparkles, with a twinkling sound in the background, as the new clothes replace them. The girl then lands and strikes a pose appropriate for her new role, whether healer, black mage or thief. This ritual transformation ensures that the role changes in this game are experienced as something very close to metamorphosis as discussed so far.

c) Status quo and progress, Humans and Others

Rurouni Kenshin portrays the downfall of the samurai figure as an inevitability, but with a touch of nostalgia. For one thing, it accurately portrays that samurai at the time were prohibited from carrying their swords. But mostly, it dwells on the loss of interest in the martial arts, specifically kenjutsu, or the art of the sword. In volume 5, an aging dojo master worries that kenjutsu is destined to disappear (ch. 34, p. 84). In the same arc, a cruel martial artist named Raijūta deplores the state of kenjutsu, and argues that the only way to restore it to its former glory is to restore it as an art of deathly battle, and not mere sport (ch. 35., 104-105, 139-143). Kenshin admits to sharing his concern, but his pacifist doctrine leads him to accept the downfall of kenjutsu as a necessity; despite Kenshin's ultimate choice, it is clear that there is a certain nostalgia at play here, given the series' strong focus on the samurai world and values. In earlier and equally telling scene, Kenshin and his cohort face off against an enemy whose wealth has enabled him to purchase a gatling gun, a clear product of modernisation if there ever was one (volume 4, ch.28). The villain brags about how money (read: capitalism) has enabled him to instantly surpass Kenshin's hard-earned strength. Several of Kenshin's allies are shot dead

protecting their leader, but their sacrifice enables their side's victory despite the enemy's technological superiority, and their old-fashioned, traditional sense of honour they displayed is praised. The march of progress is thus not openly demonized, but there is nevertheless a sense of grieving for the loss of a culture – a culture which is nonetheless kept alive, albeit in a romanticized, distorted form, by the series.

However, although it is tempting to consistently attribute such nostalgia to the above-mentioned modernisation process and resulting frame of conceptualisation in Japan, one must be careful to avoid generalizing the process. By doing so, one finds that this motif appears less strong (though still present) than one could have initially believed. For starters, works featuring historical nostalgia and targeting the theme of societal advancement, including manga and anime, do not necessarily deal strictly with Japanese history: for instance, the shōjo manga *The Rose of Versailles* takes place before and during the French Revolution, while *Emma*, a more recent shōjo, unfolds in Victorian England. This is not a total objection against the existence of the motif concerned, but it does mitigate its relation to Japanese history specifically, even as the theme is being treated within Japanese works. What this diversity of settings reminds us is that most Western countries have been concerned, at one time or another, with the march of progress and its consequences, and have also produced works of fiction exploring this theme. Furthermore, the presence of nostalgia does not always signify a tension between progress and tradition. The plot in *Emma*, for instance, revolves around a house maid and the son of a wealthy merchant family who fall in love and marry in spite of his family's objections. While the manner in which the costumes and settings are lovingly drawn, and the manner in which certain customs are depicted, demonstrate a clear, albeit selective, affection for many aspects of this historical period, this series is nevertheless clearly not opposed to the progressive views, at least when it comes to class segregation. The passage of time is felt and dwelt upon, but not in an especially conflicted manner. Similarly, *The Rose of Versailles*, loosely based on a biography of Marie Antoinette, contains a certain celebration of the joyous decadence of Versailles at the time, through the mostly sympathetic portrayal of the beautiful, charming, proud, but flawed French queen. At the same time, the manga clearly sides with the people in the conflict of the French Revolution: its other, fictional protagonist, Oscar, is a French noblewoman who

serves the queen, but ultimately decides that noble privilege and social injustice must be done away with, as Marie Antoinette is inevitably led to her tragic fate. In both these cases, as in *Rurouni Kenshin*, there are traces of historical fetishism, when a specific historical incident is referenced, or a particularly quaint custom is portrayed (for example, the male protagonist in *Emma* is only able to approach the maid he fancies by purposefully forgetting his handkerchief, thereby giving her a reason to run after him as he leaves), which implies affectionate interest in the traditions of those eras on behalf of the works' creators; however, one would argue that this attitude is to be found in most works of historical fiction. Even an anime as playful as *Samurai Champloo*, set in the Edo period but featuring a plethora of anachronisms, features historical references that demonstrate such an attitude, as evidenced by the many kernels of actual history inserted into different episodes, such as the tense relations between the Japanese and the Ainu (ep. 16-17), or the place of Christianity in Edo Japan (ep. 19). But this interest, even when it borders on clear nostalgia, is not to be automatically conflated with a reflection on the potential dangers of abandoning tradition: as shown, historical change is sometimes, on the contrary, portrayed as necessary and generally positive. Thus, we must differentiate between works such as *Rurouni Kenshin*, which clearly delves into the samurai culture (again, in a not especially accurate or objective manner) and features distinct moments of reflection on its death at the oncoming of modernisation, and works such as *Emma*, which feature historical content and even nostalgia, but without putting actual historical outcome into question. This does not invalidate the presence of the motif of the opposition of tradition and progress, but it was necessary to add this existing nuance to this analysis.

The manga *Fruits Basket* deals with the tensions between movement and stasis in a less historical manner, as a sub-text. It features a young girl, Tohru, who stumbles upon the secret curse of an old-fashioned Japanese family: thirteen of its members transform into animals of the Zodiac. What follows is a clear struggle between change and tradition, as Tohru takes it upon herself to break the curse. Akito, the family chief, is terrified of losing her hold over her subjects, and hence her identity, and has gone as far as to pretend to be a man, in order to present a more traditional form of authority. The Zodiac Thirteen, for their part, are torn between their desire to take their distance from their family and

lead their own lives, and the visceral bond they feel between themselves and Akito, a connection which renders them unable to go against her desires. Tohru, as an outsider, decides to break the curse and free the Thirteen, but it is eventually revealed that she herself is trapped in the past. An orphan, she holds onto the memory of her parents by mimicking her father's polite speech patterns (even though she only knew him as a toddler) and by incessantly quoting her mother. In this we see another example of how the series starts off as ostensibly light, before revealing its darker underbelly: Tohru's politeness is initially presented as merely cute, while her constant references to her mother appear to be meant to highlight the latter's inspirational character; it is only in the later stages of the series that the more sombre reasons behind these traits are revealed, along with the trauma Tohru keeps hidden behind her constant cheerfulness and optimism. The end of *Fruits Basket* conveys the idea that change is difficult, that moving on means to lose something as well as to gain something new. The curse is mysteriously lifted, either because it has grown brittle over time and could no longer withstand the forces of change, or because all parties involved (both the Thirteen and Akito) wished for its end, secretly or not. The moment of release for the Thirteen is, unexpectedly, one of deep sadness as each feels the loss of their bond and sheds tears. As for Tohru, she grapples with the fact that she must let go of her mother's memory in order to move forward, as she finally accepts that she is in love of one of the Thirteen, none other than the boy who was indirectly responsible for her mother's death. Together, they move to another city, further driving home the message that change is loss, as this means saying goodbye to the other twelve formerly cursed members, as well as several other characters close to them. There is no doubt the reader feels this loss as well, as this slice-of-life manga greatly puts the emphasis on the closeness between these characters, generating a familiar cosiness within this universe.

In certain games of the *Final Fantasy* franchise, technology is often initially portrayed as something negative in the eyes of a given faction. Thus, in *Final Fantasy VII*, the main playable character, Cloud, starts off as part of an eco-terrorist group intent on attacking the Shinra Electric Power Company, a corporation that extracts the Earth's life energy to fuel reactors, thus draining the planet's resources. Likewise, in *Final Fantasy X*, the use of machines (called "machina") is prohibited by the dominant religion;

in fact, the overuse of technology and its accompanying hubris is deemed to be the reason a cataclysmic creature called Sin routinely rises up and attacks cities. In reality, however, the position of technology within the game universe is not quite as clear-cut as initially presented. In *FFVII*, for instance, the focus soon shifts from environmental concerns to a more mystical plane. The enemy ceases to be the Shinra Company as a more pressing foe makes his appearance: Sephiroth, a man who seeks to unleash all of the Earth's energy in order to merge with it and be reborn as all-powerful. Science and fantasy thus meld in this story, and the stakes become more linked to one man's insane quest for power and revenge, rather than a reflection on the responsibilities of science versus the possibilities it offers. As for *FFX*, the religious ban on machines is eventually revealed to be little more than a decoy. The truth is that the creature known as Sin was created by the religion's founder a thousand years prior to the events of the game, as a deterrent to any who would attempt to explore the sea and thus risk discovering a secret city. The reason Sin targets technologically advanced areas specifically is precisely to prevent people from developing the means to travel far. After Sin is defeated, machines become socially accepted once again. Thus, although these games begin with the apparent premise of a reflection on technology – its role, its responsibilities, the consequences of its unrestricted use – both games eventually veer from this premise to explore other avenues. Nevertheless, the fact that the premise is present in the beginning of both games is not without relevance. Indeed, this reinforces the trope of the opposition between tradition and progress, with the latter here uncomplicatedly associated with damage in *FFVII*, and with hubris in *FFX*. We can interpret this as a sign that the trope has become so common that the games eventually move away from it to maintain the player's interest in the story. The tension does not occupy center stage, but it is a fixture in the expository background.

Appendix B: Summaries of selected battles (Chapter 4, section A, sub-section c)

Dragon Ball: Goku vs. Piccolo (vol. 16-17)

The fight occurs at the very end of the 23rd World Martial Arts Tournament, and begins with a melee. Both opponents in turn pretend to take hits, but it is ultimately revealed that they were both in fact merely warming up and hiding their true strength. After some more hand-to-hand combat, Piccolo launches a strong kai attack, which Goku counters with an attack of his own, which barely wounds his opponent. Piccolo then transforms into a giant, but Goku is unfazed. He tricks Piccolo into growing even larger, and seizes this opportunity to enter Piccolo's body through his mouth and retrieve a precious object which Piccolo had previously swallowed. The latter shrinks back to normal and the fight continues in the air, with Piccolo flying and Goku propelling himself with kai-based attacks. Goku eventually takes a hit, and one of his allies comes to his aid, only to be refused by Goku, who wishes to win on his own. Piccolo launches a missile-like attack which follows Goku wherever he goes, but Goku uses this to his advantage and Piccolo is struck by his own attack and loses an arm, which he immediately regenerates, to everyone's surprise. Now furious, Piccolo unleashes a powerful kai attack; Goku has time to put his allies behind a protective barricade, and braces himself successfully against the attack, to Piccolo's astonishment. He then charges Piccolo with a series of hits, and the latter apparently passes out and is believed to have lost the fight; however, Piccolo revives just before the end of the countdown, and shoots an attack which incapacitates Goku's right arm. Now both wounded, the adversaries resort back to hand-to-hand melee, and Piccolo breaks both of Goku's legs and his left arm, leaving him apparently powerless. Piccolo shoots a final attack, and Goku is briefly believed to have been vaporized; however, he is revealed to have taken flight in extremis (a technique displayed by other characters in the series, but which Goku himself had hitherto not been known to master), and he finishes off the exhausted Piccolo with a headbutt.

Rurouni Kenshin: Kenshin vs. Sōjirō (vol. 15-16)

The fight takes place in Shishio Makoto's lair, with witnesses on both sides, with Sōjirō fighting on behalf of Shishio. After a quick exchange, Sōjirō's blade is slightly cracked.

Unperturbed, he uses his legendary speed to charge Kenshin, but misses him. He charges again, with even greater speed, and Kenshin attempts to parry, but is unable to do so, in part because his perpetually smiling opponent is so even-tempered that it is impossible to guess his intentions. Sōjirō manages to parry one of Kenshin's hitherto unbeatable techniques, and wounds him.

At this point, the fight is interrupted by a flashback, during which Sōjirō's past is revealed: an illegitimate child, he was abused by his father's family, but always smiled and meekly accepted their ill treatment of him. He met Shishio, a fugitive assassin, whom he secretly sheltered for a few days, after which Shishio rewarded him with his first sword and the wisdom that only the strong survive. When Sōjirō's family discovered that he had aided a criminal, they attempted to kill the boy, until he finally reacted and slaughtered them all with his sword, before joining Shishio and becoming his disciple.

Back in the present time, Sōjirō admits to being flustered by Kenshin's pacifist principles, which contradict Shishio's survival-of-the-fittest doctrine. He accuses Kenshin of being a failure: the latter claims to protect the weak, yet it was Shishio who saved Sōjirō from his abusers. He attacks Kenshin with even greater speed than before, but his emotions appear to have dulled his accuracy: Kenshin blocks him and attempts to reason with him, asking for another chance to protect him in the future. Sōjirō decides that their next and final confrontation will settle the matter, and attacks with his ultimate speed, while Kenshin performs the ultimate technique which he has just learnt, and has hitherto never used in combat. Sōjirō's blade is shattered and he concedes defeat, taking it as a sign that he must be wrong, and Kenshin right. Kenshin, however, rejects this assumption and maintains that the answer to Sojiro's ideological crisis is not to be found in fighting.

Naruto: Naruto vs. Gaara (vol. 15-16)

The fight takes place in the forest near Konoha Village, home of Naruto, which has just been invaded by the Sand Country, from which Gaara hails. Naruto arrives late to the scene and intervenes in a fight between his comrade Sasuke and Gaara, at which point Gaara's backstory is revealed by means of a flashback. The son of the village chief, his body is a vessel for a sand demon, who protects him but inspires fear in everyone around him. Rejected by most of his peers, and even by his own father, Gaara found comfort as a

child in his maternal uncle, Yashamaru, who claimed to love the boy in memory of the latter's mother, who died in childbirth. Gaara, however, continued to resent his peers' ostracism, often accidentally killing them with his power. An attempt was eventually made on his life, and he discovered that the assassination had been ordered by his father, to be carried out by Yashamaru. The latter admitted to resenting his nephew for having taken his sister from him, and revealed that Gaara's mother had never loved him either: in carrying him and his demon, she had in fact been sacrificed by the village, and thus died full of hatred. From this incident sprang Gaara's hatred of mankind, and his doctrine of only believing in himself.

After the flashback, Gaara progressively transforms into his demon form. Naruto, whose own body harbours a fox demon, is unsettled and draws parallels between Gaara's life and his own: he too has been rejected and left alone, save for a few people who reached out to him. He reflects that, without them, he might very well have ended up choosing Gaara's path as well. This empathy he feels for Gaara dulls his reflexes, and Naruto appears to be on the losing end of the battle, as Gaara strikes him several times. However, Naruto eventually regains his determination and launches a multi-sided attack which succeeds in slightly wounding Gaara. Naruto then realises that his own strength comes from his desire to protect his friends, and that this can be enough to give him an advantage over Gaara. He then succeeds in performing a multi-cloning technique and pummels Gaara; however, the latter manages to finish his transformation and now appears in the form of a gigantic demon. Being low on chakra, Naruto is forced to invoke a mythical creature of his own: Gamabunta, a giant frog.

Both creatures exchange blows, and Gaara willingly surrenders himself to his demon, allowing him full range and freedom to destroy. Naruto and Gamabunta then agree on a strategy which enables Naruto to reach Gaara and force him to reign in the sand demon. With all combatants now on their last leg, Naruto draws from the fox demon chakra within himself, and delivers a final blow to Gaara (a headbutt), thus winning the fight. Naruto then expresses his empathy and understanding of Gaara, and imprints on him the power of friendship before letting him flee the scene.

Bleach: Ichigo vs Kenpachi (vol. 12-13)

The battle takes place in Soul Society, the otherworldly realm of the soul reapers, where Ichigo and his friends have infiltrated themselves in order to rescue Rukia. Ichigo is followed and intercepted by Kenpachi, a Captain of the soul reapers, from whose mere presence emanates a frighteningly immense spiritual power. Kenpachi, who lives for combat, expresses interest in the strength he detects in Ichigo, and looks forward to their fight. He lets Ichigo take a “free shot” at him, and Ichigo is shocked when he is unable to even make a scratch on his opponent’s body, as the difference of power between them is too great⁷⁵.

Panicked, Ichigo runs away and dodges Kenpachi’s blows, all the while trying to calm himself and think of a solution. At that moment, he feels the spiritual energy of one of his friends, engaged in battle elsewhere, and his courage returns with this reminder that he needs to stay alive to help his friends. He confronts Kenpachi and manages to hold his own, learning in the process that Kenpachi is incapable of fully liberating his sword’s power, because he has never bothered to learn its name. However, Kenpachi’s power remains largely superior, as he easily wounds Ichigo, who collapses.

We are then taken into Ichigo’s psyche, where he meets his sword, Zangetsu, as he has done before. This time, however, he also meets his inner Hollow, and has to battle him for control of Zangetsu. The Hollow is largely dominant, and criticizes Ichigo for taking Zangetsu for granted, and for using his sword instead of fighting alongside it: merely knowing Zangetsu’s name is not enough. Ichigo recognizes his failings, and begs Zangetsu for another chance, which is granted to him.

Back in the real world, Ichigo regains his strength and rises, his wound healed. He manages to wound Kenpachi repeatedly, but the latter is unfazed, and surprises his opponent by removing his eye patch, which is revealed to have been suppressing Kenpachi’s power all along. Ichigo calls out to Zangetsu, who agrees to entrust him with all of his power. After one final exchange of blows, Ichigo collapses first, but it is then revealed that Kenpachi is even more severely wounded, and he admits defeat before being dragged away by his subordinate. Once alone, he asks his sword for its name, but receives no answer.

⁷⁵ At this point, the manga switches points of view and deals with another ongoing battle for a few chapters before returning to the confrontation between Ichigo and Kenpachi.

Appendix C: Illustrating the episodic nature of anime (Chapter 4, section A, sub-section d))

The anime *Samurai Champloo* (2004-2005) provides us with an example of the episodic structure of anime when compared to manga. After its three protagonists meet in the first episode, they embark on a quest together to find a specific man. This remains their sole objective throughout the series: in fact, at the end of the last episode, their goal fulfilled, the trio disbands. However, each episode is, for the most part, self-contained, revolving around an isolated event or meeting, and ending with the resolution of the event in question. While this is reminiscent of the smaller arcs present within manga sagas, these episodes do not cover a comparable scope, due to their limited timeframe: while manga arcs go on for chapters at a time, the anime episodes of *Samurai Champloo* are just that, episodes at the end of which the protagonists find largely themselves in the same situation as they were in at the beginning (with a few exceptions where the event is stretched out over two episodes, the first often ending in a cliffhanger). Of course, this does not prevent a certain evolution over the course of the series as a whole, particularly where character development is concerned: the viewer learns new things about the characters with each passing episode, and the relationships between the characters do gain in complexity over time. Nevertheless, the episodic format tends to systematize certain aspects of anime, rendering the medium's underlying structure even more apparent and powerful than that of manga, because it reveals itself to the viewer in such short instalments. Not all anime are as strongly episodic as *Samurai Champloo* (which, it bears reminding, does feature an overarching objective which is present throughout the series), but the tendency appears to keep up throughout the corpus anime selection. The need to structure each episode according to format-appropriate narrative criteria and a fixed timeframe continues to shape both anime and our expectations of it: we begin each episode with the expectation that we will be rewarded with significant new information. Each episode constitutes a fragment within a whole, but also needs to be “worthwhile” on its own, narratologically speaking.

Appendix D: Illustrating the presence of Napier’s three modes (Chapter 4, section B)

Susan Napier identifies three dominant modes within anime in general: the apocalyptic, the festival and the elegiac. All three are present within the anime of the corpus. *Samurai Champloo*, for instance, is connected to the festival through such elements as its joyful use of anachronisms, namely the incorporation of breakdancing moves and beat-boxing in the Edo period, and tongue-in-cheek references to the historical genre it belongs to. The festival also comes through in the use of conspicuously absurd techniques, such as the use of irrelevant, extreme flash-forwards and non sequitur allusions. At the same time, the series' somewhat bittersweet ending, at which point the protagonists go their separate ways, corresponds to the elegiac mode, with its allusion to the fleetingness of relationships. The same can be said for some of the episodes, such as episode 11, “Gambling and Gallantry,” in which one of the protagonists, Jin, falls in love with a woman he meets on a bridge, in a rare show of emotion for the stoic samurai. The bridge is shown in the opening and closing shots of the episode, establishing the elegiac mood of the episode through its connotations of passage and transience: indeed, Jin is eventually forced to part with his lover. *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya*, with its premise that the world as we know it was born out of and is maintained solely by the subconscious desires of a teenaged girl – and therefore could be destroyed by the latter – has clear apocalyptic overtones, as do *Paranoia Agent* and *Paprika*, in which fears and dreams, respectively, overtake reality and threaten to literally destroy it. At the same time, because of this interweaving of reality and the imaginary, all three of these works are strongly marked by the festival mode, through scenes where normality is temporarily subverted; in *Paprika*, the invasion of dreams into reality even takes the form of a literal parade, a joyous procession of objects and toys come to life that manages to be both beautiful and utterly creepy. Both the elegiac and the apocalyptic are quite present in *Noein*. Indeed, the series operates with the premise that the universe is on the verge of imminent collapse, which obviously denotes the apocalyptic; at the same time, the plot, which is based on the possibility of time travel and dimension-hopping, features a striking discrepancy between the almost idyllic world the prepubescent main characters

inhabit and the dystopic parallel dimensions which their older counterparts inhabit, which conveys a poignancy associated with the fragility of childhood innocence. This is perhaps most evident in episode 22, “To the Future,” where possible futures for the characters are explored, every one of them dark and bleak: cheerful, eccentric Miho is bullied in school and becomes quasi-catatonic, athletic Ai loses a leg to cancer and contemplates suicide, and buoyant Isami is orphaned, falls in with a bad crowd, abandoning his former friends, and appears on the verge of becoming a full-fledged criminal. Although these dark futures are eventually revealed to be mere possibilities, not inevitabilities, and are ultimately avoided, the episode clearly denotes how precious and fleeting the characters' carefree state of innocence is.

Appendix E: Illustrating the copresence of seemingly incompatible genres in Japanese video games (Chapter 4, section B)

Professor Layton games are puzzle games where gameplay is concerned: the player's main activity throughout these games is to solve riddles and various forms of short puzzles. However, on the narrative level, they belong to the detective genre. Indeed, their premise always consists of a set of mysteries to be resolved, with puzzles presenting themselves along the way while being most often completely unrelated to the mysteries at hand. Hershel Layton, an archeologist with a keen sense of reasoning, occupies a Sherlock Holmes-like position, often assisting Scotland Yard in investigations. At the beginning of each game, a catalyst sends him on an investigation, and the plot thickens along the way. However, despite all the mystery and the often appropriately picturesque settings (often a small village populated with characters who all seem to be hiding something), there is a current of gentleness underlying the entire series. The outcome is rarely sinister, or even criminal (although there generally are villains to be blamed), but instead consists in a twist on the player's most basic assumptions: in *The Curious Village*, the key to the mystery lies in the fact that all the villagers were in fact automatons, while in *The Diabolical Box*, the characters are revealed to have been operating under the effects of a collective hallucination. There is a whimsical note to these games, not least supported by the childish graphic design of the characters and by the fact that Layton is usually accompanied on his investigations by young children.

The Legend of Zelda provides another clear example of this superimposition of narrative currents. On paper, the franchise has all the elements of epic fantasy: a princess in distress, a shield-bearing, sword-wielding hero, an underlying mythology and appropriately monstrous foes. Although this epic dimension does exist, it is tempered by elements of lighthearted whimsy, particularly in the form of optional mini-games, such as bowling, fishing and racing in *Ocarina of Time*, or locating cats in *Twilight Princess*. While optional, these games contribute to lightening the atmosphere of the games. There are also humorous secondary characters throughout the games, such as a recurring eccentric postman, or the good-natured members of the Goron tribe, who are present from game to game within the franchise. Thus, epic fantasy and whimsy coexist within

the game, each pulling the game into a different direction while still forming a coherent whole⁷⁶.

The demarcation is probably most vivid in *Final Fantasy* games. At heart, these games squarely belong to the epic fantasy genre, with more somber material than *Zelda* games ever include. Thus, in *Final Fantasy VII*, Aerys, one of the main playable characters, is shockingly killed towards the middle of the game, while in *Final Fantasy X*, main character Yuna is slated to be sacrificed for the good of the planet, and although she ultimately survives, it is her lover, Tidus, who sacrifices his existence to save her; similarly, two main playable characters in *Final Fantasy XIII* sacrifice themselves as well. Yet, even these primarily heavy games feature moments of lightness, and even cuteness in the guise, for instance, of Moogles (a plush toy-like animated artifact) and chocobos (a rooster-like bird the size of an ostrich, used for transportation), recurring cuddly creatures within this multi-gameworld. Additionally, *FFX*, *FFX-2* and *FFXIII* all feature young, cute, upbeat, playful, childish females who are the embodiment of human kawaii, Rikku and Vanille. While these characters are as deadly in battle as any others, they nevertheless convey a lighter side to the franchise. The fact that they appear in more recent installments of the franchise suggests that this is a recent choice of direction for *Final Fantasy*. Finally, *The World Ends With You* features two arguably kawaii characters, Shiki and Rhyme, one a sweetly naïve teenaged girl, the other a child-like, soft-featured girl in oversized clothes.

⁷⁶ It almost seems like the same could be said about *Mario* games, which do contain some tropes of epic fantasy, namely a princess in distress and a dragon. However, the fact that the games' hero is a plumber and that many of the fiends he fends off are turtles and rather clumsy-looking chestnut-like critters known as Goombas, it is hard to argue for any real presence of the epic within this franchise. I would instead argue that the games are tongue-in-cheek from the start, a parody of epic fantasy that never intends to be taken as seriously as some sections of the other games in the corpus can.

Appendix F: Illustrating the variations of framing in anime (Chapter 5, section A, sub-section b))

Scene from Noein, episode 4 “*Friends.*” Unless otherwise specified, all shots are taken at an eye-level angle and are devoid of camera movement. Identical framings are identified as such, all other framings are new in this scene.

Context: The scene is set outside and features an argument between Ai and Haruka, two tween girls who are best friends. Ai is upset because Haruka has been spending so much time with their friend Isami, whom Ai has romantic feelings for. Haruka, oblivious to the situation, explains that it was all innocent, and offers to call Isami to confirm. As Haruka pulls out her cell phone, Ai realizes Haruka has the same strap charm she does – one which Isami gave Ai. When Haruka confirms Isami also gave her a charm, Ai slaps her. Haruka reciprocates and the girls repeatedly hit each other, until Ai rips the charm off her own cell phone, throws it away, and runs off in tears.

1. Wide shot, top-to-bottom pan towards Ai (5s)
2. Medium shot of Ai turning around (3s)
3. Over-the-shoulder shot of Ai from the back (foreground), Haruka arriving in the background (1s)
4. Wide shot of Ai from the side, with Haruka entering the shot (5s)
5. Over-the-shoulder shot of Haruka talking (4s)
6. Medium shot of Ai facing camera (3s)
7. Same as 4 (3s)
8. Same as 5 (6s)
9. Same as 6 (4s)
10. Same as 5 (4s)
11. Cut-in close up of Haruka’s phone (1s)
12. Close up of Ai’s face (1s)
13. Medium shot of both girls from the side (6s)
14. Extreme close up of Ai’s gritted teeth (1s)
15. Close up of Haruka’s face (1s)
16. Over-the-shoulder shot of Ai as she slaps Haruka, slight right pan (2s)
17. Medium close up of Haruka (2s)
18. Same as 16 (4s)
19. Same as 17 (1s)
20. American shot of both girls as they slap each other repeatedly (7s)
21. Same as 5 (3s)
22. Close up of Ai (3s)

23. Same as 20 (7s)
24. Cut-away to a wide shot of two cats observing the scene, slight pan left (6s)
25. Wide shot of both girls from behind Ai, pan left (6s)
26. Over-the-shoulder shot of Haruka, slight pan left (2s)
27. Over-the-shoulder shot of Ai, slight pan left (3s)
28. Cut-in to Ai's phone as she rips off the charm, slight pan up as she holds it up (1s)
29. Close up of Haruka, slight zoom out as the charm hits her (3s)
30. Wide low angle shot of both girls from behind Haruka, focus on the charm as it falls into the grass, pan left to Ai as she takes off (5s)
31. Wide shot of both girls as Ai runs toward the camera and offscreen, pan left as Haruka calls after her (7s)

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