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# Bodies of future memories: the Japanese body in science fiction anime

**Abstract**: This paper analyzes the role of the fighting women in Japanese anime near the end of the twentieth century. It argues that these female heroes are not just *shōjo* ('young girls') who represent Japan the nation, nor are they mere projections of *otaku* desire, or token women included to attract female fans. Rather than that, I maintain that these female heroes are what could be described as "cyborg goddesses," who offer an escape from the present's dilemmas. An analysis of whom and what they are saving reveals a desire to return to an idealized Japanese past, while representing contemporary predicaments and concerns about the future. These heroes embody a form of "honorific individualism" (Ikegami 1995), based on a strong sense of individuality, and they have the potential to generate change by challenging the conformist status quo.

**Keywords:** anime, science fiction, *shōjo*, individualism, lost generation

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# 1 Introduction

The past is not only in the present, it haunts our visionary representations of the future. Thus while science fiction representations appear prophetic, they act as fantastical social imaginaries about modernity (Braidotti 2002: 185), while also being rooted in a society's fantasies about their past. The genre's triple function underpins the argument of this paper, which is that the fighting women who appeared in several Japanese anime (animated feature length films) near the end of the twentieth century have a more multifaceted meaning than that of *shōjo* ('young girls') who are identified with the Japanese nation (Orbaugh 2003: 206). Nor are they simply projections of *otaku* desire, indicating new modalities of sexuality (Saitō 2006); neither are they that "drop of crimson," the token woman who will attract female fans (Saitō 1998). In short, I argue here that these new female heroes are "cyborg goddesses" (Caputi 2004: 387–402) who offer an imagined salvation from the present's dilemmas, and that an analysis of whom

and what they are saving represents a desire to return to an idealized Japanese past, while also revealing contemporary crises and fears about the future.

There exists a literature that identifies Japanese cultural specificities in its science fiction. Godzilla is seen to represent a fear of nuclear power and earthquakes (Sontag 1979 [1965]; Tsutsui 2004); *Power Rangers*, *Dragonball Z,* or *PowerPuff Girls* portray children's/adolescents' fears of being powerless in a complex world (Gill 1998); and there are endless replays of catastrophes referring to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, etc. In contrast to these established tropes, this paper will focus on how the Japanese body is represented and what this means in a distinctive group of anime produced from the mid-1980s onward that were often created/directed by a new wave of politically engaged and independent artists: Mamoru Oshii, Hideaki Anno, and Satoshi Kon in the main. The anime to be discussed include *Patlabor* (Oshii 1989; Yoshinaga 1989–1992), *Ghost in the Shell* (Oshii 1995, 2004), *Neon Genesis Evangeleon* (Anno 1995–1996; Tsurumaki and Anno 1997), *Appleseed* (Aramaki 2004), and *Paprika* (Kon 2006). The bodies of the Japanese in the future as imagined in these anime fantasies, which have had cross-cultural appeal, are not necessarily the same as those we encounter in US-based science fiction. To unpack some interesting aspects of these productions' symbolism, I will give a short comparison with their Hollywood counterparts.

I paraphrase the historian Igarashi: bodies of memories can be abstract, embodied and expressed within the physical and/or embedded within larger institutions such as that of the nation-state. They can be traced through mass culture's iterations, disclosing how the past has been re-membered in the present by "surturing" over the traumas of history (Igarashi 2000: 101). Building on this point, I posit science fiction media as narratives in which the past and the present are re-membered in the imaginary future, revealing how imperfect the repression of both past and contemporary anxieties can be. The "bodies" of these female heroes symbolically represent idealized fantasies about the past, fears about the present and, to a smaller extent, hopes for the future.[1] They embody a form of "honorific individualism" based on a strong sense of individuality "that has the potential to generate change by risking the violation of conformist norms" (Ikegami 1995: 11).

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**1**  I use *hero* as a gender-neutral term and reject the noun *heroine* in line with contemporary usage such as *author* rather than *authoress* and *actor* rather than *actress* That is: the heroic actions in these stories do not spring from the fact of the main character's biological sex: they are brave human beings period. That being said, there is an aspect of their being female that does matter, as I will discuss in relation to the concept of "cyborg goddess."

Anime are generally designed to appeal to children, male youths, as well as some young single women, so their characters could be said to reflect their target audiences. The narratives I examine below, however, appealed to audiences beyond that of a youthful demographic, often becoming hugely successful both in Japan and outside. Notwithstanding the international acclaim for these works, the social context of a Japan suffering from a recession that has continued for two decades must be taken into account; as is a more than century-long relationship between the Japanese state and the bodies of its subjects.

From the Meiji Restoration (1868) onwards, the Japanese empire and post-war nation-state promulgated various laws and discourses aimed at "improving" both the lives and physical welfare of its citizens. Underpinning both individual and socially endorsed endeavors to work on one's physique is the idea that the self and the body do not exist in a Cartesian dualism: the sense of self is firmly embedded within the body. The discipline required to be healthy, strong, and attractive reflects the self-control needed to craft a moral self in Japan (Kondo 1990). The ability to make/create oneself and the resilience necessary to allow oneself to be made into a social being are important qualities that Japanese society tries to instill in its subjects (Martinez 2004: 167–197). One contemporary concern is that modern Japanese have lost their ability to "make" or shape themselves as ethical beings.

That working with others and learning how to co-exist with different sorts of groups are not easy skills to master is a fact well reflected in the representation of the emotional dilemmas and sense of powerlessness felt by the child protagonists in the short cartoons shown on television (and these often inspire feature-length anime). Citing various examples, Gill (1998) argues that these potentially powerful loners learning to be part of the group all represent the social imperative that a Japanese person may be an individual, but should not be an individualist who is too selfish to cooperate with others. Honorific individualism, in contrast, is the ethical code of the hero willing to sacrifice herself to fight alone for the greater good.

While it is accurate to see such narratives as a replaying of childhood experiences as well as supporting social norms, it is also important that the threat within these narratives is not just to the individuals, but to Japan itself. Thus working with others is the best way to help avoid the destruction of all that is Japanese. Yet no genre – and children's cartoons are no exception to this rule – is ever completely unchanging. From the 1980s onward, cartoons aimed at girls began to appear, featuring entirely female groups of superheroes. Napier (1998) sees these programs as empowering for their female audiences. A more cynical view would be that the new cartoons were an obvious diversification for a business that had developed extensive, successful, and profitable franchises.

However, money is part of the symbolic order; to spend it on desirable objects does not mean that the yearning has been created wholesale; rather, it has been generated from a pool of shared meanings. In this case the desire is that of being able to imagine a future: the need to believe that there will still be a world to save, that it can be saved despite the uncertainties of the present, and that it is human beings who will do the saving. This desire generates a contemporary science fiction that repeatedly imagines catastrophe (Sontag 1979 [1965]). It also engenders imaginings about the bodies of the future – the heroes who endlessly avert imminent disasters.

## 2 Anime and the Japanese body politic

Like many nation-states, Japan is both motherland and fatherland. It is identified with the feminine in two ways: First, its founding ancestor is the goddess Amaterasu and the original realm apparently was a matrilineal Queendom (Kidder 2007). These myths have left their traces in folkloric tales about magically powerful women (Napier 2005) and form part of Japan's national identity. Second, as Orbaugh (2002: 438) argues, its long-standing position as the West's Other has been a form of feminization, a fact of which the Japanese are well aware (Orbaugh 2003). The symbolic violence of being othered uneasily coexists with this feminine identification and provides fertile ground for imagining the lone women who "save the world."

However, Japan is not just the motherland with a founding goddess as its main deity; it also is a nation in which, like any modern society, women bear the burden of maintaining the traditional, including all of its complex tropes: women are idealized and demonized in almost equal measure. The contemporary concern with the decrease in marriages and low birth rate focuses primarily on women (Ueno 2009), critiquing their decision to marry later or not at all: as if the responsibility for biological reproduction rested entirely in their hands. In short, the female body in Japan is hyper-symbolic: it can signify modernity, tradition, social and biological reproduction, and magical or demonic powers, while holding the potential for the sorts of highly sexualized, subversive, and dangerous representations often found throughout patriarchal societies.

Rather than agreeing with Orbaugh (2002), who sees the futuristic depictions of the feminine as hybrid, Frankenstein-like, and largely for male identification, I want to consider the gendered bodies in these narratives as those of female heroes who have sovereignty (Caputi 2004: 392). This does not mean that they are entirely free and independent from a duty to their society, but that they strive to

be entirely self-governed and self-directed. Given the non-dualistic relationship between mind and body in Japanese discourse, I will also touch on subjectivity, but not to argue for a male identification with hybrid female bodies of the future. Rather, I will make the case that it is the qualities of the self that they embody which make them objects of admiration, since these women are not paralyzed by crisis and are unafraid to act. They may be a return to the samurai ideal of the lone hero, but it also matters that they are women.

These female heroes originate in cartoon representations of magical girls (*mahō shōjo*), and were influenced by Miyazaki's (1984) post-apocalyptic fantasy *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Miyazaki's tough and tender hero, as Napier (2013) notes, is a reflection of his own utopian and humanistic beliefs. While the slightly later blockbuster anime *Akira* (Otomo 1988) broke no new ground in the representation of women – the female characters are either girlfriends or psychic children – a television series that started in the same year certainly did. Shogakukan's *Mobile Police Patlabor*, based on the manga series (Masami 1988–1994), and a 1988 film, depicted the adventures of Nao Izumi, a young woman who joins the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Labor Patrol to tackle the new crimes generated by the use of "labors": manual labor robots with human pilots.

Building on the mecha superhero tradition of humans piloting giant robotic machines, this series depicts a Japan increasingly come to depend on technology in order to remain a top economic power. The films had a clear political agenda, as discussed by Bolton (2002), but unlike the television series do not feature Nao as the main protagonist. This red-haired young woman from Hokkaido is an energetic, tomboyish hero of the sort appearing in Western media in this era; she is better at piloting the police labors than any of her colleagues. The television series features Nao's adventures as she struggles to fit into Police Special Vehicle Section 2, Division 2. In this she is helped by the ability to drink her male co-workers under the table, a talent she has because her family owns a liquor store. Although Nao is partnered with a young man, Asuma Shinohara, there is never a hint of romance between the two, much to the dismay of many fans. The female as sexual fantasy, of sorts, comes in the shape of Clancy Kanuka, a Japanese-American on assignment from the NYPD – who interestingly looks more Japanese than Nao.

As well as being a superb pilot, Nao is very much an ideal Japanese female: upbeat, sympathetic, kind and affectionate toward even inanimate objects like the labors. Her strength is her aptitude for "understanding" the technology of the future. An interesting lead character, particularly in her ability to handle a machine better than the men, very little else seems unusual about her representation except for her red hair, to which I will return. Nao's skills are technical, her feats of heroism possible because she pilots a huge machine that

affords her the same physical strength as any male-piloted labor. She is cute, but not so cute, sexualized, in need of protection, or subject to such melancholy as to inspire intense feelings of *moe* in male viewers.[2]

Much the same could be said of Major Motoko Kusanagi, except for the attribute cute. Major Kusanagi is another female police officer patrolling a futuristic Tokyo in the ground-breaking film *Ghost in the Shell* or *GiS* of 1995. The Major, however, is not human, save for a tiny portion of her brain, but a cyborg who polices cybercrime. In contrast to *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982), which was an inspiration for the anime, we know from the start that our hero is not human. All her philosophical musings on what it means to be cyborg reflect the director's familiarity with the work of Donna Haraway (1991), who argues that the mastery of technology holds the potential to erase socially constructed notions of gender difference. In contrast to *Patlabor*'s Nao, who is a good example of Haraway's cyborg manifesto, Motoko spends time musing on the problem of reproduction. She critiques the technological replication that constantly remakes her and produces sameness. "A system in which all the parts react in the same way is fatally flawed. It's the same for people as organisations, overspecialise and you have slow death," she explains to her subordinate, the almost completely human officer Togusa.

*Ghost in the Shell* is clearly an anime for the slightly older, more philosophical *otaku* and appealed far beyond its expected fan-base. It also catered to the former, though, in the frequent nude scenes that focus the male gaze on Major Kusanagi who, although a cyborg, is a fully formed adult female. Her pursuit of the AI known as the Puppet Master ends with a solution to the problem of replication: her consciousness, or ghost, is joined with "his" and moves to a new shell, that of a little girl cyborg that her colleague Bateau supplies. This shell, in contrast to her old body, has been bought on the black market and is not subject to the biopower of the state, a point Motoko has made in discussion with the partially cyborg Bateau (Silvio 1999: 59). They could leave their jobs in service of the state, she points out, if they were willing to give up all their cyborg components. In Motoko's case, this would be everything and thus she would no longer exist – or, at the very least, her ghost would no longer have a shell. Thus Bateau has bought some freedom for his now hybrid (and therefore more monstrous) colleague, who disappears only to return as a *deus ex machine* in *GiS II,* which reverts to male leads. The popularity of the films, however, has led to a television series prequel,

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**2** The meaning of *moe* has changed over time and there are various theories as to its origins. Galbraith (2009) defines it as "a euphoric response to fantasy characters" and outlines how it has evolved as a term.

*Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (Kamiyama 2002–2005), in which Motoko, as one might expect of a cyborg with no need to biologically reproduce, is much more androgynous.

The *Patlabor* and *GiS* narratives reveal a complex relationship with the nation-state which constrains their heroes to some extent. In both anime the main character is in the service of the state; yet in both, more in the *Patlabor* films than the television programs, we also see a concern with the echelons of power that result from secret collusions between state and business interests. This is particularly marked in the Oshii (1995) film, in which Motoko is forced to pursue an "enemy" hacker, who is in reality a new species, a sentience that has become self-aware in cyberspace and has not been created by humans. Their storylines reflect a generational critique that has gathered strength throughout the years of recession (Fletcher and Von Staden 2012): that the economic bubble and its bursting are the fault of a greedy post-war generation more focused on personal success than on ethical and humanistic concerns. As best seen in *Akira*, the Japanese military, state, and scientific apparatuses are depicted as being overseen by older, sometimes very aged, men who are generally represented as completely masculine in appearance and, oftentimes, mad with power. These older masculine characters contrast with many of the young men, who often seem juvenile despite being adults, certainly are "softer," and sometimes even androgynous, in appearance. Nao's colleague, Shinshi Mikiyasu, who is a devoted husband; her partner Asuma, who has broken with his CEO father and been disinherited; and Togusa, with whom Motoko has chosen to work precisely because he is an honest cop and a family man, are examples of these "new" men.

The other ground-breaking 1995 anime was a television series, eventually made into several films, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* or *NGE* (*Shin Seiki Evangerion*, lit. 'Gospel of a new century'), which also features a conspiracy by an older generation of scientists, the military, and government, and a not immediately apparent concern with reproduction. *NGE* takes place fifteen years after Japan has been nearly destroyed by what is called the Second Impact, in a society that is preparing itself for the Third Impact. Dr. Gendo Ikari has developed the huge mecha robots known as EVA, which can only be piloted by 14-year-old children, to fight this battle against the supposedly alien monsters called Angels. One of the pilots is Ikari's own miserable, estranged son Shinji. Beginning like the cartoons that depict the anxieties and dilemmas of junior high school students, the series introduces us to life in post-apocalyptic Japan as Shinji experiences it. High school continues, even as the reduced population of the country and the rest of the world, represented by a UN Peacekeeping force, prepare themselves for war.

Shinji is brought to the EVA research facility to become the second fighter in this war, initially replacing the injured first pilot Rei Ayanami and later fighting by her side. They are soon joined by a third fighter, the German-Japanese-American Asuka Langley Soryu, who like Nao in *Patlabor*, is a redhead and an excellent pilot of her EVA. In contrast to Nao, Asuka is neither a team player nor a tomboy. Much of her spare time is spent in sexually teasing poor adolescent Shinji. Asuka differs from blue haired, quiet, passive Rei, who is resolute in the performance of her duties. Captain Misato Katsunagi, despite being an unmaternal hard-drinking slob, takes Shinji and Asuka into her home while keeping all three pilots safe through the smart and nerve-wracking decisions she makes while they are in battle. She, like Asuka, is the subject of adolescent lust on the part of Shinji's male schoolmates, but beneath her sexy attire, Misato bears the scars from her time as a fighter in the Second Impact. She is thus a woman of a certain age, and with a romantic past that includes Ryoji Kaji, the character whose introduction begins to reveal the intricate plots within plots that form the narrative complexity of the series.

*NGE* is so complex that fans, left confused by the television series' ending, were offered an alternate ending in the film *The End of Evangelion* (Tsurumaki and Anno 1997). The psychological, religious, and personal readings of the series have been well discussed (Ortega 2007; Li et al. 2013) as mirroring the *hikikomori* ('acute social withdrawal') mentality of Japan's lost generation. However, what of the bodies of the women in this franchise?

Unlike the cyborg of the other 1995 hit, *GiS*, the girls in *NGE* are powerful through their augmentation vis-à-vis the EVA they pilot. The adult women in the series, Misato and her friend, the project's head scientist Reiko Akagi, have attributes that we expect to find in male heroes: they are smart, even brilliant, quick to act – Misato certainly knows how to win a fight – and both command others. Both are single and unlikely to be married. Reiko, despite her Japanese name, is blond, while Misato is pure Japanese as, despite her blue hair, Rei also seems to be. It is this phenotypical confusion that merits attention as it reoccurs throughout Japanese anime depictions of female heroes.

Generally, the male characters with Japanese names look Japanese – dark haired and dark eyed – while the Japanese heroines of the future often look like idealized Western dolls. The rationale for this is never discussed, but given the science fiction framework of these anime, this coloring should be an indicator of genetic change. These female characters might be chimera (a single organism composed of genetically distinct cells), which occur as natural mutations, but can also be artificially produced. Given that Japanese men rarely are represented as having these foreign phenotypes, there are various likely explanations. One is that in the future a mutation on the x-chromosome will make some Japanese

females look Western. Another is that mixed marriages in Japan will produce a few proactive heroic Western-looking daughters, but not sons. Or, do these anime imply that Japanese women should take their quest for aesthetic refashioning into the realm of genetic modification in order to fulfill a male desire for Western-looking Japanese women?

We also could posit that these are obvious fantasy images, catering to the male gaze: Japanese men prefer to identify with characters that look like them, and fantasize about idealized women. The fact that Rei was voted the tenth most popular anime character of all times, one who changed the very meaning of *moe*, becomes interesting here: she is plainer than Asuka, is bitterly unhappy, very enigmatic, reserved, and ultimately – like the mysterious Akira of the 1988 anime – the most potent and dangerous character of the group, but she is Japanese. By the series' end we learn that Rei is a clone of Shinji's mother, whose DNA has been mixed with the DNA of the biblical Adam's first wife, Lilith (chimera indeed). She is the catalyst for the final impact that returns humankind to a primordial amorphous state.

The genetic complexity of these futuristic female bodies is certainly fascinating: are these representations really about the subjectivities produced by an engagement with the novum of technology, which prefigure future forms of selfhood as Orbaugh (2002) and Napier (2002) argue? Or is something else going on here? I will examine two more anime before answering that last question: *Appleseed* and *Paprika*.

# 3  Adding flavor to life

The blond, green-eyed hero of the film *Appleseed*, Deunan Knute, is a warrior taken into safety by a second-generation Bioroid (think replicants in *Blade Runner*) called Hitomi and the cyborg Briareos Hecatonchires, Deunan's former lover. Taken to the utopian city Olympus, Deunan joins the paramilitary unit ES.W.A.T., who keep the peace using piloted mecha bodies. Deunan is the daughter of the scientist Dr. Gilliam Knute and the soldier Karl Knute, who has trained her to be a great warrior. Gilliam created the second generation of Bioroids using Karl's DNA, resulting in a gentle race of Japanese-looking beings who dwell in Olympus and who all are siblings to Deunan. Thus the scene is set for Deunan's heroic efforts to battle against the conspiring Elders and the vicious military leaders who rule the city in a triumvirate with the first-generation Bioroid Athena, the Prime Minister. Athena is another redhead character, Dr. Gilliam is blond, and the Elders look like gray Yodas, while the Bioroids vary in their Japanese characteristics – as do

the military – but tend to have Japanese names. At the core of the struggle for power are two issues: whether the Bioroids should be given full reproductive and emotional abilities while the human race is sterilized and allowed to die out, as the Elders plan; or if the Bioroids should be destroyed instead, as the Military want. There is a third way, coexistence, but it is up to Deunan, aided by Briareos, to avert the destruction of all humanity and/or Bioroid kind first.

This tale (which differs from the manga and an original video animation [OVA] in which Deunan is a brunet) is an allegory about political and military relationships worldwide (symbolized by the use of Greek names). It is entangled with the dilemmas of a generation of Japanese who are hampered in their capacity for love and child-bearing by the weight of the past. Deunan is apparently a Western warrior (the wiki page notes her French, Scandinavian, and Sudanese descent),[3] caught up in a global war, who is kin to the Bioroids through the DNA of her father. Again, how the phenotypes of hair and eye color have been worked out in the story in clear contradistinction to all laws of genetics is less important than the fact that we have another kick-ass female hero, Western in appearance, who fights to save the day for all future humankind, but especially for the Japanese.

Of this group of heroes, only the cyborg Motoko from *Ghost in the Shell* seems purely Japanese or even completely adult, but as the film opens with the scenes of her construction, we know that she could as well have any other type of physical appearance. It is interesting that almost all of these female heroes look like very young adults, even if, as Deunan is meant to be, they are women in their thirties. How could the predominantly male audiences of these anime identify with these women? Orbaugh (2002: 437–438) argues that identification does occur because the Japanese already feel both feminized and hybrid, so they share the subjectivities of these female heroes with augmented hybrid bodies, but I am not convinced. My explanation for these future females' bodies being nubile and foreign is that Japanese men cannot imagine how they themselves would solve the contemporary dilemmas of political and corporate corruption, social inertia, a continuing recession, and a rupture in gender relations because they are part of that very system themselves. Thus they need a hero who is honor bound to act in order to solve the dilemma of how to break the various stases of modern Japan. Their difference from the Japanese characters is symbolized by their individualized foreign appearance.

Paprika, the eponymous hero of Kon's 2006 film, hints at an added explanation. Paprika is the auburn-haired, feisty alter ego of the clearly Japanese and very serious Dr. Atsuko Chiba. Using the DC (dream console) mini device,

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**3** See http://appleseed.wikia.com/wiki/Deunan_Knute (accessed 11 September 2014).

developed by the hugely fat, child-like genius, Dr. Kosaku Tokita, Dr. Chiba enters the dreams of her patients. This dream therapy is aided by her Paprika persona who flits through the patients' reveries, helping them to achieve some self-knowledge. In the midst of her therapy with Detective Toshimi Konakawa, things begin to go awry with the clinic's staff, including Chiba's immediate head, Dr. Shima, and the patients. Dr. Tokita hasn't set access controls on the new models of the DC mini; someone has stolen three prototypes and broken into patients' dreamworlds, creating a riotous nightmare parade that breaks into and threatens to destroy the real world (Perper and Cornog 2009). Paprika and various characters in the story, including Konakawa, a man tortured by the loss of his youthful idealism, eventually destroy the villain, who once more is older, again male, and clearly Japanese.

How is the villain defeated? Dr. Tokita, the inventor of the device that has caused all the chaos, is sucked into the dreamworld and begins rampaging around the city as a robot. Dr. Chiba confronts him, saves Tokita in a dream sequence, finally admitting her love for him. She ends by disappearing into Tokita-robot in the "real" world. Tokita-robot lies unconscious, while the evil Chairman, grown to a monstrous size, threatens to take over the world by breaking the boundaries between dreams and reality everywhere. Calling him Lord of Darkness, Paprika tells Konakawa and Dr. Shima of the basic dichotomies that make up lived experience: "Dark and light, dreams and reality, and man and woman. And with all of these you need to add a bit of spice" – in short, Paprika – to hold the tensions together in a dynamic relationship. This last is only implied, but is then given reality when Paprika leaps into the robot containing Tokita and Chiba and is reborn, becoming a giant Paprika baby who eats the Chairman and ends the chaos. Normalcy is restored: Chiba decides to marry Tokita, Konakawa makes his peace with the past, and Paprika remains out there – perhaps existing a bit more solidly since her incorporation of all that darkness – adding spice to life.

Before returning to the question of what all these bright spirited, energetic, and powerful female heroes might mean within the broader context of Japanese late modernity, we should consider what happens to these narratives in a non-Japanese context. Not what happens when they are dubbed or subtitled, but what occurs when the Western, particularly Hollywood, variations of these anime are made. These variations are live action movies, the preferred medium for Western science fiction films, but their relationship to the Japanese originals is obvious. Already mentioned have been the links between *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell*, the intertextual connections resulting in a cyborg female detective in the Rick Deckard role. Moreover, anime fans are generally aware that the *Matrix* (Wachowski Brothers 1999, Wachowski Brothers 2003) films borrow images and ideas from *Ghost in the Shell*, adding the Christ-like Neo. Neo might have her

roots in *Robocop* (Verhoeven 1987), but the *Patlabor* series and films have seen no Western version. *New Genesis Evangelion* is far too psychologically confusing and complex to become a mainstream film, but no one (of the admittedly very tiny number of people) who has seen *Pacific Rim* (Del Toro 2013) could deny the similarities between the two films. Alien beings from another dimension keep attacking the Earth and it is up to a handful of weary, muscular, predominantly male warriors to don huge mecha forms and battle the monsters. *Appleseed* has no Western version, although rumor has it that Wolfgang Petersen has bought the rights. *Inception* (Nolan 2010) was clearly inspired by *Paprika*, referring within a tense sequence of dreams within dreams to Konakawa's recurring nightmare set in a wavering hotel hallway. What is obvious from this brief list is that kick-ass female heroes in the Japanese films become less important female sidekicks and that the hero remains unequivocally male in the Western variants. Yet it is important that these heroes are female in the Japanese anime. We now have to explore why there exists a fundamental difference between Japanese and Western versions. Paprika's character is the key.

# 4  Bodies of the future

The female bodies in these anime are augmented by machinery in a variety of ways and their resulting physical strength engenders and reflects a strong sense of self that affords them the ability to fight against the greatest of odds. The very conflicted Rei in *NGE* is the exception that proves the rule: a chimerical being, she is aware that she has the potential to destroy as well as to save the world. As Shinji's mother, she wants to keep him and Japan safe; as Lilith she also wants to safeguard her descendants, the human race; but as Dr. Ikari's creation, like Frankenstein's monster before her, she also is capable of destroying all life. As a mother twice over, however, she is also the primal chaos and the goddess to which Shinji returns and from which he chooses to be reborn. It is this male character's rebirth that is significant. The series' creator, Hideaki Anno, admits that Shinji is his alter ego suffering the angst he feels, indicating the sorts of crises being endured by others like him: feeling awkward, lost, inadequate, unable to communicate or interact with others, and having no real sense of purpose (Montero Plata 2014), and thus his rebirth symbolizes hope for this lost generation of young Japanese men.

The physical properties of the male characters in these series also offer a partial answer to the question of *why* the bodies of these futuristic heroes are so very different. As I have noted, the men in these anime are clearly Japanese.

While the young men might seem "softer" than the older harder men who hold all the power and authority, they are all dark haired and dark eyed, with Japanese names. Moreover, the relationships of these men are predominantly to Japanese women: in *Patlabor* it is Clancy Kanuke who is the unrequited object of desire, as is Captain Shinobu Nagumo. Officer Shinshi we assume has a Japanese wife, as we suppose Togusa does in *GiS*. In *NGE,* Rei, the clone of Ikari's beloved wife, is Japanese save for her blue hair, and it is Major Katsunagi who, despite being poor marriage material, gets to have an affair. Interestingly, in the "real" world, it is Rei who was a hugely popular anime character, not the more nubile Asuka. Hitomi is loved by Yoshitsune in *Appleseed,* and Dr. Chiba ends by marrying Dr. Tokita in *Paprika*. In contrast, Nao seems to have no romantic attachments; Motoko "merges" with the Puppet Master; Asuka ends in a coma; Denuan's lover has been so injured that he has been made a cyborg and, it is implied, can no longer be a lover; while Paprika goes her own way. These futuristic female heroes do not settle into "ordinary" lives with Japanese men.

The ordinary is only hinted at, but it appears to be the heteronormative life course that is under threat in contemporary Japan: men and women marrying and having children (Coulmas 2007); the men working while women act as moral support. Despite an imagined future in which it is possible for women, with the aid of technology to which all have access, to have careers like men, it is only the most unusual of females who take up these roles. The rationale in these imagined futures is that a national or global crisis created by cabals of older corrupt men will lead to a slow death for the Japanese in particular and all of humanity in general.

These narratives should be read, then, not only as imaginations of disasters that replay and conquer older fears of nuclear and other disasters, but as being about the contemporary crises in Japanese society. Repeated in these tales is the depiction of the split between older and younger male generations: the elders have been corrupted by power and exert their authority in both political and militaristic ways, with terrible consequences for younger Japanese men, who are locked into inaction by their very similarity to the "enemy." More important than the subjectivities created by the engagement with new technologies is the detail that this machinery, as depicted in *Patlabor, GiS, NGE, Appleseed*, and *Paprika*, is administered by an older generation who abuse its potential, twisting it to meet their own tyrannical ends. In short, these narratives reveal a repressed anger at the fact that the elites who led "ordinary" Japanese into World War II, and later into national crisis, are still in power. Moreover, there is a critique of the post-war generation, who could have refashioned the Japanese nation-state in new ways, but instead replicated the structures and goals of the pre-war generation with only minor cosmetic adjustments. Implicit in this is the fear that the currently

disempowered generation will continue to do the same: that all the media hype about new masculinities is just that – hype. *GiS*'s point about too much similarity leading to slow death for humans and organizations seems apt in this context.

Jameson (2005) has argued that science fiction utopian possibilities have given way to post-modern imaginations of disaster: contemporary science fiction is thus politically sterile. In this he is building on Sontag's argument that imagining disaster is about accepting the status quo, a more pessimistic version of Napier's (2002) and Orbaugh's (2002) points about how these films help us adjust to new technologies and subjectivities. Is this all that is happening in these anime? I would argue not, but that we must look once more to the bodies of their female heroes to take another moral from these representations.

Again, I refer to Igarashi (2000: 131–162), in this case to his discussion of how the sequence of the Women's Volleyball Team winning the gold medal in the 1964 Olympics was hugely popular among the viewers of Ichikawa's *Tokyo Olympiad* (1965) because it felt like winning the war. While historians have recently taken to examining Japanese women's support of the war itself (Wilson 2007), in general women are rarely implicated in Japan's "bad" nationalism. Their idealized bodies are seen to have helped create Japan's modernity and are needed to make Japan's future. However, Japanese women seem not to be cooperating with this vision – they've been "on strike" since sometime in the 1980s, not doing their part in the nation's biological and social reproduction. And one of their grievances is that Japanese men are not desirable partners in this process of reproduction. We are thus in an era of crisis for masculinity in which the securities of the post-war era are gone: a good education does not guarantee a good job, a wife, and children (Roberson and Suzuki 2003). Who will save the future? It would seem to be the women, but not just any ordinary Japanese women.

In life, as Paprika said, there are always twos: light and dark, dreams and reality, men and women. And to add a touch of spice you need Paprika. I noted that within the film, Paprika acts as the glue that holds dichotomies together in meaningful dynamic tensions, but that the spice is also meant to add flavor to life. This is at the core of the narrative: that the relentless pursuit of power through technology ends in the loss of a life worth living. A good life has flavor. This is what the post-war generation who rebuilt Japan seem to have misplaced. This is what the lost generation of the 1990s lack: a zest for life. The bright-haired, enthusiastic, energetic, strong female heroes with impossible young bodies and their mastery of technology are not just saving the future; they are a passionate antidote to contemporary life.

These heroes also have their roots in the nostalgia for an imaginary lost Japan: a pre-Meiji or early Meiji Japan where people were content, festivals were orgiastic, and even ordinary objects might be filled with playful spirits creating

pandemonium and going on parade (Foster 2009). It was also the Japan of the individualistic samurai. This is an example of science fiction looking back as well as forward. In these anime, the past is that of a "traditional" Japan where the fantastical, talking animals, animated objects, and magical women (reimagined by Hayao Miyazaki in his anime) exist; where riotous chaos always leads to the restoration of the norm, but in which everyone is left infused with a joyous life force. In short, these films reflect a desire for a return to that wondrous Japan only ever found in modern narratives about the past. These narratives are a form of utopian imagining where the values and the spirits (or *kami*, 'deities') of the past help to destroy stultifying modernity and set the stage for something new to take place. Furthermore, it is no accident that Shinji is reborn from the chaotic morass to which she reduces the world – this is the unspoken desire of many a Japanese: another chance to remake the nation-state after the war is won.

The bodies of future memories, then, remain the bodies of the past: Japanese and mostly male. It is their salvation, their greater good, that is the point of these anime and it is their reinvention through encountering a different sort of female that is seen as hope for the future. As sovereign others, these women are not corrupted by the technology of modernity, in fact they are its mistresses; they are not afraid to fight against the corruption of late capitalism or to defy conventional norms. Yet they afford a return to Japanese values. While revolutionary in their characterization, through their actions they help maintain the supposed status quo of traditional ideas: the family, cooperation, and the group who works toward peaceful co-existence. In this they resemble the wandering strangers, the *kami* of Japanese folklore: arriving from somewhere else, here today and gone tomorrow. As in the image of Paprika, who leaps into the robot form that contains both Tokita and Chiba, they are just a little spice that needs to be added to the humdrum. Whether or not this addition will end in deeper and more lasting transformations is something that is never imagined – the battle against the forces of evil, the powerful configurations of late capitalism, go on and on. Is this as sterile a vision as Jameson (2005) would have it, born of a general global inability to imagine radical social change? Perhaps not.

The heroic bodies of future memories are fighting the battles we, not just the Japanese, face daily, and their imagined victories are hopeful narratives about processes that are already in train. In the West, our heroes hark back to our imagined collective roots; they recall the Greek demi-gods: think of, for example, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone as our ageing Hercules; Tom Cruise and Matt Damon as our conflicted Achilles; and Bruce Willis, invariably, as our Odysseus. In contrast, these Japanese female heroes hark back to the modern genealogy which placed Amaterasu at the center of the nation-state; to the magical women of folklore and the wandering *kami* who take masculine

form in some samurai dramas. They are modern goddesses: fighting for a better Japan, but always fiercely independent in spirit. Not for nothing do Nao, Motoko, Deunan, and Paprika remain at large to do battle at the end of the story – watching them conquer evil feels like winning the battles of Japan's present.

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