

**Producing Transnational Cult Media: *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Ghost in the Shell* in Circulation**

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Comics and animation have often had a hard time containing themselves; that is to say, by their very natures they push against the constraining boundaries of their media. This is particularly true in the case of Japanese comics (manga) and animation (anime). As Thomas Lamarre writes, '[W]hat happens between anime and its viewers is so dynamic that *viewers* seems a somewhat outdated and passive term' since the culture around anime involves a multitude of activities centered around multiple associated media products (Lamarre 2009: xiii-xiv). Lamarre goes on to assert that anime might 'be thought of as the nodal point in a transmedial network that entails proliferating series of narrative and nonnarrative forms across media interfaces and platforms' (Lamarre 2009: xiv). As we shall see, conceptualizing contemporary media flows in terms of the movement inherent in comics and animation has certain advantages.

In the case of anime and manga, fan response has been a critical factor to how various texts have been adapted and received, and fan activities have been necessary to their transnational flow (see Allison 2000, Pellitteri 2010, and Eng 2012). I would argue that the degree to which some texts are popularized outside of their original markets depends on whether such texts are (or are perceived as) cult texts. Matt Hills, although reluctant to provide a 'definition' of the cult text, characterizes such texts as needing to demonstrate an endurance of fan enthusiasm 'in the absence of "new" or official material in the originating medium' (2002: x) as well as sharing three main 'family resemblances': auteurism, endlessly deferred narrative, and hyperdiegesis (2002: 131). In short, cult texts are the work of a singular creative individual (or are perceived as being so), there are overriding questions presented to the characters in the text that are

never fully resolved across multiple iterations, and the events take place in a rich environment ‘only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text’ (Hills 2002: 137). Often within contemporary anime media, a particular title does not designate a singular product (film, television program, video game, etc.), but rather a wide-ranging franchise, part of which can be seen as an example of transmedia storytelling. Marc Steinberg (2012) suggests that because of anime’s form as ‘limited animation’ (as opposed to the smooth movements of Disney’s full animation) it develops ‘both affective investment and circuits of return’ by ‘bringing other media into the mix’ (5). These aspects tie in to Hills’s cult media resemblances, since deferred narrative opens avenues for telling related stories in different media, as does hyperdiegesis, which might prompt the creation of additional texts (both official and fan-produced) that further explore the characters and narrative world. As Sara Gwenllian-Jones (2004) puts it, the interaction of the reader and the text “‘deterritorializes” the fiction in the process of actualizing it in the reader’s imagination’ which then ‘allows us to consider the myriad ways in which cult fictions extend themselves beyond the bounds of their primary texts, migrating across other media, morphing into countless versions, both official and unofficial, material and immaterial, that together constitute vast and incomplete metatexts’ (84-5). Jonathan Gray (2010) discusses these additional materials as ‘paratexts’ and argues ‘that a film or program is never the entire sum of a text’ and that it is important to focus ‘on paratexts’ constitutive role in creating textuality’ (7).

Since, according to Japanese theorist Hiroki Azuma, contemporary anime texts encourage an emphasis on character attributes rather than story and narrative, this can often more easily enable cult text formations, as tropes and images are able to cross boundaries more easily than can entire programs that may have complicated back stories. Indeed, Azuma claims that one of the key ‘postmodern characteristics of otaku [Japanese fan] culture’ is the prevalence of ‘derivative works’ within the culture (2009: 25). The application of the idea of “cult” to anime texts may also help them to travel transnationally within established fan circles due to the fact that they can then be viewed as accessible and adaptable within various cultural and media contexts.

Identifying and discussing cult texts becomes additionally complicated when one thinks about how media increasingly flow across national and cultural boundaries. Tracking such cultural products transnationally can be rather difficult as they travel outside of their countries of origin. Some previous theories of the global movement of texts have postulated that transnational products may seem to carry with them a 'cultural odour' (Iwabuchi 2002) of their origins while others may be more easily assimilated into the target culture due to their 'multiple proximities' (La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005). However, such models of transnational movement seem to imagine texts as discrete, unitary objects that can be transported from place to place. I would argue, instead, that texts are inherently 'fractured' and do not travel neatly and easily. It is the psychological operation of wanting to see patterns within chaos that gives rise to the perception that these texts have a unitary integrity.

Also of particular use when discussing the development and transnational migration of cult texts is the concept of the database, which informs how we can think about the structure and transmission of contemporary media products, especially those like anime and manga that many have multiple forms. The translators of Azuma's *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* summarize his ideas that "'animalized" otaku are satiated by classifying the characters from such stories [lacking in grand narratives] according to their traits and anonymously creating databases that catalog, store, and display the results' (Azuma 2009: xv-xvi).<sup>1</sup> In *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich (2001) also theorizes the relationship of database to narrative, although, as far as I can tell, he and Azuma developed their ideas in parallel with one another. (Azuma's book originally came out in Japanese the same year as Manovich's). Manovich writes, 'Many new media objects do not tell stories; they do not have a beginning or end; in fact, they do not have any development, thematically, formally, or otherwise that would organize their elements into a sequence. Instead they are a collection of individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other' (218). Because of this, 'database

and narrative are natural enemies' (Manovich 2001: 225), yet they need one another, meaning that there is an inherent tension within any franchise.

In this article, I discuss the nature of adaptation in contemporary Japanese manga and anime, focusing on the examples of the franchises *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Ghost in the Shell*. Both are texts that take part in constructing large fictional worlds and extend across multiple forms of media. As Steinberg demonstrates, using many forms of media to promote anime has been around for as long as there has been domestic animation on Japanese television. By analyzing *Ghost in the Shell* and *Evangelion* we are better able to see the ways in which cult media and paratexts function contemporarily. Originally a manga, the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise has been adapted and spun out into feature-length animated films, novels, and video games. The world of *Ghost in the Shell* actually encompasses multiple narrative universes—that is, it is not possible to reconcile all of the events across all of the media without significant contradictions. Therefore, tracing the different media in the *Ghost in the Shell* universe is illustrative not only of how contemporary transnational media undergo multiple degrees of adaptation from an 'original' source, but also how these adaptations become enmeshed in storytelling that cuts across multiple media. However, I will first begin with an analysis of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, another wide-ranging science fiction media franchise that Azuma identifies as a key historical text for how fans interact with and understand the circuits of anime and manga.

### **Cult Media and the Database Form in *Neon Genesis Evangelion***

*Neon Genesis Evangelion* was originally conceptualized as a television series that aired in Japan in 1995-96 and has since spawned six theatrical movies (five of which have, at time of writing, been released), a planned (yet perpetually-delayed) English-language live-action adaptation, multiple video games and manga series, and hundreds of ancillary products. The series combines many standard anime tropes (such as the giant robot with a young boy as a pilot) with references to Christianity and Jewish mysticism. The story of *Evangelion* focuses on a teenage boy named Shinji who is summoned by

his estranged father, the head of a mysterious government organization called NERV, in order to pilot a giant robot in order to save mankind from a series of invading aliens that are called 'angels' (the Japanese word used is *shito*, which literally means 'apostle'). The earth in *Evangelion* has been ravaged by the Second Impact, a failed experiment on a creature called Adam, which melted the polar ice caps and threw the entire world into a period of war and turmoil. This event, which took place fifteen years prior to those depicted in the series, is somehow connected to the ongoing angel invasion, and through the course of 26 episodes the viewer begins to see how everything is connected.

One of the interesting things about *Evangelion* is that the show's structure demonstrated a keen awareness of how its component elements flow in an environment of fandom and what this means for the show itself. In particular, Azuma picks up on the events that took place in the final two episodes when he writes that the images onscreen broke down the previous images we had seen so far in the series and recontextualized them in new ways, saying 'In other words, its creators made a parody of the parody in advance. And, in their rather wonderful way, they pieced together an autocritique of their impasse' (2009: 182). The fact that the creators of *Evangelion* should be very aware of fandom and possible responses to the show is indicative of the background of Gainax, the animation studio that created the franchise. The studio has its roots in anime fandom, with one of its earliest and most distinctive works being the opening animation sequences for a Japanese science fiction convention called Daicon. These videos incorporate homages and parodies of many different fantasy and science fiction elements from around the world.<sup>2</sup>

So what is it exactly that happens in the last two episodes of *Evangelion*? After 24 episodes of a science fiction narrative that is engaging yet convoluted, involving secret government agencies, conspiracies, Jewish mysticism, Biblical prophecies, giant fighting robots, and a young protagonist with a severe crisis of confidence in himself, the final two episodes of the television show dispense with any pretense of trying to wrap up

the narrative and begin to more fully explore the fractured psychology of the main character. Nothing in the series is ever firmly resolved (Hills's 'endlessly deferred narrative' at work), which both caters to the fan, since an open narrative with many questions provides ample opportunities for additional fan creation and intervention, and works against the fan by distancing the viewer from the characters by sometimes removing them from the screen entirely. For example, in one episode, dialogue is exchanged between characters with nothing but simple angular shapes onscreen, representing what might perhaps be an abstraction of disembodied consciousness.

In addition to the *Evangelion* television show, there was also an *Evangelion* manga that began its serialization shortly before the show's run. In the wake of the success of the show (and perhaps due to fan displeasure over the final two episodes), two theatrical films were created. The first, *Evangelion: Death and Rebirth* (1997), was a summary of the first 24 episodes of the series with nearly half an hour of new footage that ends in a cliffhanger. The second film, *The End of Evangelion* (1997), which was released in Japan a few months later, concluded the series in an explosively apocalyptic way. Rather than the philosophical abstractions mentioned above, the film ended with smoothly-animated climactic battles and the seeming destruction of the Earth. In spite of the more concretely depicted ending, the images depicted in the film were surreal enough to generate plenty of fan argument about what the ending was supposed to mean. In addition to the two films produced in the 1990s, creator Hideaki Anno is currently in the process of creating a series of four new *Evangelion* films for theatrical release. As of this writing, the first three films in this new series have been released, with the final film to come out in 2013 or 2014. The first film re-animates the events from the television show up through episode six in relatively faithful form, telling the same story in a similar manner but with updated visuals and an increased use of 3D CG animation. The second and third films begin to diverge more from the television chronology, and even introduce new characters to the storyline. As present, it remains to be seen how the final film will conclude the re-envisioning of the franchise.

As we can see, consumption and adaptation feed upon one another. New stories are constantly being created, which in turn spur the creation of further character goods, which provide fans with an increased number of departure points from which to base re-imaginings of the show's events and characters. In the case of *Evangelion*, a particularly interesting juncture for this is an alternate 'school' world that depicts the same characters from the series but contextualized in a different setting in which they are students and teachers at a seemingly normal high school. This has its roots in the final episode of the television series, which took place in the protagonist's mind as he tried to envision what an alternate world might be like in order to work through his sense of self. It took up very little screen time, though—fewer than five of the last ten minutes in the last episode of the twenty-six episode series. However, this formulation of the *Evangelion* characters in an alternate school setting seemed to strike a chord with fans as a number of games and manga have been subsequently produced that have their basis in the re-envisioning of the *Evangelion* world to a greater or lesser degree. This also led to the development of video games such as the *Shinji Ikari Raising Project* (*Shin seiki Evangerion: Ikari Shinji ikusei keikaku*, 2004, PC game), which was made into a manga by Osamu Takahashi beginning in 2005, as well as the *Girlfriend of Steel* (*Shin seiki Evangerion koutetsu no gaarufurendo*) and *Girlfriend of Steel 2* (*Shin seiki Evangerion koutetsu no gaarufurendo 2nd*) games for multiple platforms. The storyline of the latter game was later adapted into a manga version that ran in a *shoujo* (girls') manga magazine in 2003, which was released in English as *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Angelic Days*. However, Azuma asserts that this alternate world of the *Evangelion* characters in a school setting 'was already a parody of an image that had been widely circulated as a derivative work at the time of the original broadcast' (2009: 38). In other words, during the program's original run on Japanese television the creators took notice of the fiction and comics the fans were creating and incorporated that into the show, adapting the desires of the fans and blurring the lines between what is 'original' and what is a parody of the 'original' work. However, this is not to say that *Evangelion*, or anime / manga franchises in general are necessarily unique in incorporating fan ideas

into the officially sanctioned product, but there is a greater awareness of the need to interact with fans in anime culture.

By Hills's criteria of the 'family resemblances' of cult texts, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* could certainly be viewed as cult. In the aftermath of the boom in animation following *Evangelion's* broadcast, the show was seen as a unique and very personal vision that creator Hideaki Anno was able to bring to the screen. Although he was well-regarded as a director and an animator before he created *Evangelion*, with this series Anno catapulted himself not only into the high esteem of anime fans, but into the popular consciousness as well. (Anno has appeared in a Nissan car commercial and has had multiple film roles, including the voice of the protagonist in Hayao Miyazaki's latest film *Kaze Tachinu* in 2013). The two *Evangelion* films that followed the series were a response to fans' requests to try to bring some closure to what may have been the most maddeningly unique end to an anime series to date. As I have mentioned, the final two episodes of the series dispense with narrative and instead concentrate on the subjective emotions within the main characters' minds, employing a wide array of animation techniques and superimposed text to accomplish this. In other words, the fans wanted more of a sense of closure to the deferred narrative; although the films did answer some questions, such as how some characters felt about one another and the ultimate plan of a secret organization behind the scenes, it left many more open for argument. *Evangelion* also gives the impression that the world depicted in the series is only a part of a greater whole, with references given to a murky history involving the Second Impact as well as contemporary events in Germany and the United States that are never seen. This has given fans ample room to write their own fan fiction and *doujinshi* (amateur comics) based in the world of *Evangelion*. It has also given Gainax, the studio that produced the series, the opportunity to merchandise the title on a massive scale including immersive video games that allow the player to control one or more of the characters.

However, discussing *Evangelion* as a cult text brings up the greater problem of how to relate ideas of cult to anime more generally. Anime can be used to refer to both film and television animation, and although it sometimes treated as such, anime is not a genre, since it contains genres of its own (science fiction anime, romance anime, school life anime, sports anime, etc.). As Jason Mittell explains in *Genre and Television* (2004), animation can be discursively constructed as a genre in of itself, and the same could be said for anime. While specific anime texts can fit into the cult category, the cult's emphasis on formal elements of the individual text means that anime as a whole cannot be considered cult. Nor, for that matter, can any other category or genre. However, playing on Hills's idea of 'family resemblances' among cult texts, I would like to propose that anime texts can be thought of as sharing similar visual and structural elements that help to make anime into a generally coherent (although not strictly bounded) group of texts that can also share qualities by virtue of association that may not strictly be a part of certain texts. In other words, anime fandom encompasses texts that can be considered cult and those that cannot. (There is no separate fandom for cult anime texts – *Evangelion* fandom cannot be separated from anime fandom in the same way that *Star Trek* fandom can be considered separately from general science fiction fandom). As a result, the cult aspects of certain prominent texts like *Evangelion* can expand to give all anime texts something of a cult sheen, which has the effect of helping anime texts travel transnationally within established fan circles.

Although anime texts seem to fit into Hills's concept of cult texts, they also problematize his idea of hyperdiegesis. Although he does not explicitly say so, Hills's concept of a 'detailed narrative space' that 'appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension' (2002: 137) seems to imply that the narrative elements of a single cult text across various formats (films, novels, comics, and radio dramas, for example) would interlock to form a single overarching worldview. Granted, certain elements may not be accepted as canonical by either the producers or the fans, but the idea of hyperdiegesis seems to be working toward such a unified idea. In contrast, the individual elements of many anime franchises are rather self-contained, but still add to

the greater whole. In other words, in a franchise that consists of a novel, a manga, and an anime, each format may have its own 'narrative space' with its own peculiarities, even though they share many common characters and narrative elements. In a sense, one might say that anime and manga cult texts are an example of continual adaptation and re-fashioning both the exotic and the familiar into a cohesive whole.

In the case of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, these familiar and exotic elements become intermingled as the show moves transnationally. As Susan Napier has suggested, this has been one key factors in anime's attractiveness to fans outside of Japan, noting, '[T]he medium is both different in a way that is appealing to a Western audience satiated on the predictabilities of American popular culture and also remarkably approachable in its universal themes and images' (2005: 9-10). Of course, what is familiar in one part of the world may be seen as exotic in another. One of the writers on *Evangelion*, when asked about religious references in the show that specifically point to Christianity and Judaism, said that they were put in there partially as a way to distinguish *Evangelion* from the many other giant robot shows on the market, and that if they had known that the show was going to be exported they would have reconsidered including such allusions. When the show was imported into the US, though, it was precisely these religious references that American fans were able to apprehend and puzzle over. In other words, aspects of the show that were originally intended to make it more exotic to a Japanese audience became familiar when viewed in the US, while the more mundane elements of the show to a Japanese audience (like daily school life) were seen as exotic and unfamiliar to an American audience. Such references help to concretize the hyperdiegesis of the cult text, pointing out new avenues for possible fan inquiry.

### **The Database of *Ghost in the Shell***

Another approach to the database elements in contemporary Japanese anime and manga can be seen in an examination of a franchise like *Ghost in the Shell*. Similar to *Evangelion*, *Ghost in the Shell* refers to multiple media universes envisioned by multiple creators, each with a unique take on the same characters. The franchise is a near-

future cyberpunk tale set in the 2030s and follows the exploits of Japan's Public Safety Section 9, an elite counterterrorist squad. The franchise began in 1989 when Masamune Shirow's original manga began to be serialized in *Young Magazine Kaizokuban*. The serialized chapters were collected into a *tankoubon* (trade paperback) in 1991 while Shirow continued to produce additional chapters throughout the 1990s, and in 1995, director Mamoru Oshii adapted the manga in a full-length theatrical film (see Ruh 2004: 119-140 for further details). Later that year a novel adapting the franchise was published, written by Akinori Endo, a frequent screenwriter for anime shows and films. A *Ghost in the Shell* video game for the PlayStation console was also released in 1997, featuring animated cutscenes produced by animation studio Production I.G (which had worked on the film as well). Shirow continued to develop the world of *Ghost in the Shell* in manga form, releasing *Ghost in the Shell 2: Man-Machine Interface* in 2001 and *Ghost in the Shell 1.5: Human-Error Processor* in 2003. The worlds of *Ghost in the Shell* continued to be expanded in anime and game form as well: with two television series and an OVA (original video animation, or a direct home video release) directed by Kenji Kamiyama in 2002-3, 2004-5, and 2006 respectively; a second film called *Innocence* directed by Oshii in 2004; two games—*Koukaku kidoutai: stand alone complex (Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex)* and *Koukaku kidoutai: stand alone complex – karyuudo no ryouiki (Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex – Domain of the Hunter)* for the PlayStation 2 and PSP (PlayStation Portable) in 2004 and 2005, respectively. Around this same time *Ghost in the Shell* novels by Junichi Fujisaku and Masaki Yamada were also published. A new anime series called *Ghost in the Shell: Arise*, to be directed by Kazuchika Kise, has been announced to premiere in mid-2013.

There are at least three distinct narrative universes present in the world of *Ghost in the Shell* – the world of Shirow's manga, the world of Oshii's two films, and the world of the television series. (As of this writing, it remains to be seen if *Ghost in the Shell: Arise* will fit into any of the existing universes, or whether it will create one of its own). In my formulation, a narrative 'universe' is one that presents a unified view of the characters and the events that take place within these universes can all be reconciled. In other

words, there are few overt contradictions. What connects the many universes in the minds of the fans are the database elements that are able to flow from medium to medium and from country to country. The remainder of this article will trace how these three different universes intersect with one another and different media such as film, television, video games, DVDs, and novels. It will also examine how these universes have made their way from Japan to the United States as a way of illustrating the transnational flow of media products.

The original *Ghost in the Shell* manga, which began its magazine serialization in 1989 and continued through the end of 1990, contains seven chapters that for the most part tell an overarching narrative. The content in *Ghost in the Shell 1.5: Human-Error Processor* was created and serialized right after the run of the original *Ghost in the Shell* manga, although the chapters were not collected into *tankoubon* (graphic novel) format until much later. Although not a part of the original *Ghost in the Shell* manga, the first two stories predate the first film. This is important to note, since elements from both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Ghost in the Shell 1.5* were incorporated into Oshii's anime feature.<sup>3</sup> Some elements of *Ghost in the Shell 1.5* were later incorporated into the *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* television series. For example, the Section 9 operative Azuma, who has a large role throughout *Ghost in the Shell 1.5*, beginning with the chapter 'Fat Cat', does not make an appearance until the *Stand Alone Complex: Solid State Society* OVA. Another important character is Proto, who debuts in the manga chapter 'Mines of Mind,' but does not appear until *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex 2nd Gig*. In addition to characters, parts of manga episodes were later incorporated into anime adaptations. The climax of 'Lost Past' involves a tense standoff between Saito and another cyborg sniper who can link into satellite imagery. This general idea would later be adapted for use in a different context in the *Solid State Society* OVA. Of particular interest is a scene in the second part of the 'Drive Slave' story in which the new form of Major Kusanagi tries to open the hatch on an attacking multi-legged construction vehicle to get to the pilot. As she tries to open the hatch, her arms strain and her synthetic skin begins to tear apart, revealing the complicated

mechanisms and circuitry underneath. This same scene happens in the first *Ghost in the Shell* film when Kusanagi tries to open the hatch on a multi-legged tank that has been attacking her. In both versions the strain on her arms gets to be too much and they eventually are ripped from her body. This scene presents an interesting way of approaching the adaptation process as particularly striking actions or incidents are repurposed to fit alongside new scenes or scenes that have been adapted from other parts of the manga. This method of adaptation is an example of a kind of database at work. After the scenes' initial creation by Shirow, they then become a part of a conceptual database that can be generally termed 'Ghost in the Shell'.

Subsequent works within this universe can draw various elements from this database even if they did not originally work together. Take the example mentioned above of Kusanagi trying to open the construction machine/tank. In the 'Drive Slave' manga story, the incidents depicted take place after the Major's merger with the Puppet Master at the end of the first *Ghost in the Shell* manga. In the movie, though, the Major's battle with the tank precedes her merger with the Puppet Master. As mentioned previously, it is not possible to completely reconcile the events of the manga with those of the films and television series, but the anime versions often pick and choose their constituent elements from an array of selections presented by the manga.

In their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin write that 'animated film cannibalizes and refashions everything it touches with a ferocity that is itself mediated and excused precisely because the genre is not 'serious' and is supposed to speak to children' (2000: 147). Although I would take issue with their premise that animation is always intended for an audience of children, I find this to be an interesting vantage point from which to approach animated adaptations. In many ways, this parallels my current argument that contemporary media products like anime are created by incorporating many different inputs and selectively choosing or filtering them. In this regard, it's worth taking a closer look at the end of the second season of the *Ghost in the Shell* television series – the conversation Gouda, the series' main

antagonist, has with another politician shortly before he is killed neatly parallels one that take place at the very beginning of Shirow's original *Ghost in the Shell* manga. In the manga, the conversation is in a different context, but in it the people engaged in the discussion talk about the same things – master states and slave states, and how a state may profess to subscribe to the tenets of capitalism, but in fact be an 'ideal socialist state'. For our purposes, the exact details of the conversation are not the most salient points, but rather that the dialogue was appropriated for the onscreen adaptation in very different circumstances.

In order to stop Gouda from leaving the country, armed agents of the government at Section 9 surround him. As in the referenced scene in the manga, Gouda's bodyguards sport machine guns that had been concealed as briefcases. The way in which the team surrounds Gouda even alludes to a parenthetical comment in the original manga by the author. In the manga, when they try to arrest the defecting government official everyone in the surrounding circle is armed. In an aside written in the gutter between panels, Shirow writes, 'The police have their target surrounded, but if they fire they'll hit their comrades. I don't recommend trying this, dear readers...' (2007: 10). However, in *2nd Gig*, the team members at one end of the corridor all have guns, while those on the other side block the way with (presumably) bulletproof shields, seemingly taking Shirow's jocular advice into account in execution of their operation. In the end, to stop Gouda from leaving, Kusanagi kills him in a hail of bullets. She then leaps from the window of the high-rise building, and the viewer is left watching her from above, falling until she is nearly out of view. This references similar scenes that appeared at the beginning of Shirow's manga as well as Oshii's first *Ghost in the Shell* film.

The end of *2nd Gig* adapts a scene that is lifted nearly directly from the beginning of the first *Ghost in the Shell* manga. It takes place during spring at a Japanese shrine, with cherry blossoms raining down upon the Section 9 crew. There are also lines of dialogue that are similar to those in the original manga – including a statement by Kusanagi to her relaxing compatriots that she is calling off their 'round-the-clock cherry blossom

surveillance operation' – the English translation of the manga uses 'round-the-clock cherry blossom viewing party' (Shirow 1995: 16). However, the scene in the anime ends in a more melancholy manner than that in the manga. Shirow's manga has Section 9 pulling out of the shrine grounds in their robotic tanks and the members doing a 'brain dive' into Kusanagi's mind to be briefed on the next mission. After the previous similarities with the manga, the changes in the anime version may be disconcerting to some fans familiar with the original, but demonstrate a willingness to alter source material to fit the scripted circumstances. As they are preparing to leave, Batou asks Kusanagi, 'What about the briefing? Wanna handle it with a brain dive?', clearly alluding to the original manga. However, Kusanagi's response is negative, suggesting that Batou handle the briefing and that he and the others go ahead without her. He looks at her disbelievingly (as if he too had read the manga and thought he knew what to expect), and then proceeds ahead while Kusanagi takes off on her own. The film ends on the scenes of her driving her robot tank by herself. This remediation of a scene from the Shirow's manga is a gesture toward hyperdiegesis and a wink at fans who had read the original.

So far, we have discussed the process of adaptation, but have left the series' transnational journeys outside of Japan's borders relatively untouched. Now that we have discussed the various films and series in some depth, we can begin a brief discussion of how the franchise has crossed borders, and what it has carried with it. One of the more interesting phenomena is that there are many more *Ghost in the Shell* DVDs in Japan than were released in other countries, mostly consisting of supplementary material. For example, there is a series of *Official Logs* that consist of a book / DVD set, only the first of which was released in English. It covers through episode nineteen of the first *Stand Alone Complex* season and consists of essays, sketches, and background interviews with cast and staff members. Although one cannot by definition create a cult product, it is possible to create a media franchise with cult tendencies by giving fans the tools they would need in order to conduct their fannish activities. The *Official Logs* are one set of such tools, as they offer a glimpse not only

into the production of the series, but into the characters and the world around them, providing details about such things as the functioning of advanced cyberbrains as if such technology really existed. As we can see from the fact that only the first log was released in an English-language version, even if a foreign market is able to support the commercial release of series like *Ghost in the Shell*, it may not be able to support a release of a cultish product like the *Official Logs*. Since it provides supplementary information that requires knowledge of or interest in the *Stand Alone Complex* universe in the first place, the *Official Logs* function much like the trivia in science fiction fandom as discussed by Nathan Hunt (2003). He concludes that fans purchase science fiction magazines containing trivia 'to acquire competences, competences that, in turn, provide the necessary currency for acceptance and participation within fandom' (198). In Hunt's view, 'trivia are a form of cultural capital and, as in any other marketplace, they are a commodity that can be turned into economic capital' (198), yet the case of the *Official Logs* demonstrates that process is a two-way street. In the absence of what a producer or distributor might deem a significant economic base (as determined through sales of the first volume of *Official Logs*), they will cease localization of the product, restricting access to cultural capital (at least for those without Japanese language skills).

Even when a particular release makes its way overseas, it can never replicate the exact same viewing experience. DVD artwork and extras prime the audience for ways to experience a particular title, and even if the same feature content is present on a DVD, these variations are enough to alter the viewing experience (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002; Parker and Parker 2004). Multiple levels of adaptation and localization are required whenever a media property is brought into a new country, particularly if there are differences in language. For anime, at least a subtitle track needs to be added to a DVD release. Often an English dub is also added, particularly if the series of film is going to be shown on television or have a theatrical run.<sup>4</sup>

Another key feature that can cause differences in viewing experiences is how the video releases themselves are contextualized. In this case, we will examine a DVD that was released in Japan as *Innocence: Animated Clips* (*Inosensu no joukei*, or *Scenes of*

*Innocence*) in conjunction with the second theatrical *Ghost in the Shell* film directed by Mamoru Oshii. It was released in a North American Region 1 version titled *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence - Music Video Anthology*. Both versions consist of footage from Oshii film set to music from the film. The footage is not of any of the dramatic events that take place, but rather consists of sweeping tracking shots through some of the intricately-designed animated set pieces created for the film.

The difference in function between these two discs may be understood through Charles Solomon's editorial review of the US version on Amazon.com, in which he writes, 'Anime music fans may enjoy these fragmented clips, but others will wonder why Oshii allowed director Mizuho Nishikubo to cut up his film haphazardly' (Solomon 2005).<sup>5</sup> This is a useful question because it points to how media products can be misinterpreted when they move across borders in a fragmented manner. We can see this a little more clearly if we examine the release dates of the *Scenes of Innocence* DVD as well as the main *Innocence* film itself. The film was released in Japan in March 2004 and in the United States in September 2004. The *Scenes of Innocence* DVD also was released in Japan in March 2004 in advance of the main film's theatrical run. From this we can glean the intended purpose of the Japanese version – it was intended as a promotional piece in order to get more viewers interested in the film. When this is taken into consideration, much more about the DVD becomes clear, particularly why there is not more character animation in the scenes from the film that are depicted. Due to the lead time necessary for tasks like developing artwork, authoring the DVD scenes and menus, and pressing the disc itself, the scenes on the DVD necessarily must represent the film in an unfinished stage. Consequently, it will seem incomplete since the DVD is being presented as a teaser of sorts for the main film that is yet to come.

However, this presents something of a problem when a DVD like *Scenes of Innocence* becomes the *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence - Music Video Anthology* in the US. As mentioned previously, the theatrical version of *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* was released in the United States in September 2004. The first Region 1 DVD version of the

film came out in December 2004. However, the music video DVD was not released in the United States until July 2005. Such a release schedule means that the DVD that was originally designed to serve as a preview for the film's theatrical release in the Japanese market needed a way to justify its existence in a US market in which the film had been released and had been available on DVD for over half a year. In other words, the Japanese *Scenes of Innocence* DVD was originally designed to preview the background and music to a prospective audience in order to prompt them to go see the film. However, by the time *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence - Music Video Anthology* was released in the US, the film had long been out of the theaters and was even available on DVD. If we take these release dates into account, we can begin to understand why the US version was marketed as a collection of music videos rather than as incomplete preview footage. The fact that Bandai Entertainment thought that re-packaging and releasing the DVD as something other than a promotional video for the film attests to both the immense amount of detail that went into the creation of the settings for the film and the presumed cultic interest fans of the film would have in its supplementary materials. From this single example, we can see that even though *Inosensu no jokei* and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence - Music Video Anthology* are nearly identical in their main content, they end up serving very different functions due to the temporality of their respective releases.

Another type of adaptation that commonly occurs for anime properties is to create a manga out of the animation. This is sometimes called 'ani-manga,' 'cine-manga,' or 'film comics'. One might think that the commonalities between manga and anime would lead to an ease of adaptation between the forms, however as noted above, the process of turning manga into anime can be very involved, and the result is often very cinematic, which is not easily transformed back into manga. This might not be so noticeable in scenes involving characters conversing with one another, but it becomes much more apparent when any kind of movement is depicted. Anime and manga encode movement in very different ways. The images of anime are not meant to be seen out of the context of their surrounding images that, when put together, create the impression of

movement. Manga, on the other hand are intended to be viewed in this way, so a manga author will take this into account when setting up action scenes. This all leads to the point that taking still images from an anime and arranging them in a certain way on a page, adding dialogue bubbles, and superimposing onomatopoeic sound effects do not create the same kind of reading experience that a manga does.

What 'film comics' do, though, is create a kind of refresher guide to the film. I make the connection this explicit because such comics do not substitute for the film, nor do I believe that they are intended to do so. As mentioned above, the movement depicted in such manga and the transitions between panels are sometimes hard to decipher because the images were not originally designed with such readings in mind. In the case of the English translation of the *Ghost in the Shell: Innocence* film comic, this is reinforced by some of the uses of language. Rather than translate the text from the Japanese version of the film comic, the English version says that the '[d]ialogue [is] based on the English subtitles translated by Linda Hoaglund with Judith Aley.' From this, one can infer that the reading experience is supposed to attempt to mirror the viewing experience by not only using the visuals but also by replicating the dialogue. Also of interest are a few pages of Japanese text that are left untranslated in the second volume of the comic (Horn 2005). On these pages, the comic abandons the manga-esque formatting and instead presents the images in a straightforward format, with the upper two-thirds given for pictures arranged in regular patterns (say, six rectangular images arranged two across and three high) and the lower third for text. At the end of the second volume, it notes that the Japanese text on these pages are lyrics to a song called 'Ballade of Puppets' written by the film's composer Kenji Kawai, and it goes on to describe how Kawai's music fits and accentuates director Oshii's themes (Horn 2005). In this way, the film comic is tied even more strongly to the original film—the emphasis on Kawai's music would seem to indicate that one needs to experience the music to gain the full meaning of the events depicted. The film comic essentially serves as a pointer to the original. Also worth noting is that the end of the last volume carefully

reproduces the ending credits of the film in Japanese and English for 20 pages, which is over 12% of the length of the volume (Horn 2005).

## **Conclusion**

As we can see from the above examples, the anime cult text is similar to other types of cult texts in that it does participate in Hills's 'family resemblances'. Additionally, the texts that constitute the *Evangelion* and *Ghost in the Shell* franchises are varied, and many contain both complementary as well as overlapping narratives. Some texts were created as adaptations of previous media, some to expand on a particular narrative universe, while others still were a combination of both types of impulses. However, unlike the hyperdiegetic cult texts in Hills's formulations, the hyperdiegesis in many anime texts extends across multiple diegetic worlds that share not only narrative points and characters, but often key differences as well.

In addition, the cultic nature of certain texts has an influence on how they officially travel across national, cultural, and linguistic barriers. For example, in the case of the *Ghost in the Shell Official Logs*, which is itself a pointer to the database of the world of *Ghost in the Shell*, the North American market was not able to support that particular kind of paratext even though it was a fertile ground for many other *Ghost in the Shell* releases. When the fanbase is not large enough to support licensing and translating such paratexts into another language, the fantasy of fans collides with the reality of the costs entailed in creating, manufacturing, and distributing these products. Ultimately, although being a cult text may assist in the transnational transit of some elements of a particular franchise, not all of the associated paratexts flow at the same rate (or sometimes at all), leading to a different view of a franchise than the one in its country of origin.

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1

"See Ruh (2014) for further discussion on the concept of the database in more detail.

2

Laserdiscs of the animation were sold in limited quantities at the time, but the footage has never been made available commercially overseas due to issues of obtaining the necessary copyright clearances for the characters they used from multiple science fiction stories as well as for the music.

3

"It is interesting to note that none of the screen adaptations have incorporated any of the narrative elements from the *Ghost in the Shell 2* manga, although some of the visual style is reflected in the *Stand Alone Complex* television series.

4

"Subtitles are rare occurrences in American theaters and particularly on American television. *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, though, was released with subtitles only into US theaters, so this rule is not set in stone.

5

The US release incorrectly lists Nishikubo as director, when his actual title is *enshutsu*, or 'technical director.' See Frazier 1996.