

Anime and the Conquest of Time: Memory, Fantasy, and the “Time-Image” from *Ghost in the Shell* to *Your Name*

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Anime is often characterized in terms of its multiplicity and fracture, with a penchant for non-photoreal depictions of fantasy characters who exist in alternative worlds and become embroiled in implausible plot lines. Theories particular to anime are often developed to account for these idiosyncrasies with a tendency to treat anime as a distinct genre rather than part of cinema more broadly.

This article seeks to reintegrate anime within the compass of cinema by employing Gilles Deleuze’s philosophical treatment of the cinematic image. Deleuze argued that in certain instances cinema had the capacity to supplant conventional depictions of movement in space and time to evoke a more fluid perception of memory and consciousness. These instances he characterized as “time-images” as opposed to “movement-images.”

To explore how certain aspects of animated cinema can epitomize Deleuze’s concept of the time-image, I examine the oeuvre of several Japanese animators, from Oshii Mamoru and Kon Satoshi through to Shinkai Makoto. Ultimately I contend that a better understanding of the operation of these images aids us to reassess the “fantasy” element in their work. While acknowledging the entertainment value of certain stylistic flourishes I argue that other “fantasy” tropes carry a more profound cinematic significance.

Keywords: anime, Shinkai Makoto, Gilles Deleuze, memory, fantasy, time-image

Introduction: The Fragmented Mirror

In her groundbreaking overview of anime, Susan Napier characterized the “anime image” as a “fragmented mirror.”¹ This was an intuitively profound insight, highlighting as it did something at the heart of how the animated image in the Japanese context entailed a fundamental disposition toward fracture, multiplicity, and the pursuit of themes that are emotionally deeply engaging while nonetheless being presented through non-photoreal images and fantastical plot devices. These characteristics have been discussed in other instances of academic commentary on animation as well, particularly Paul Wells’

1 Napier 2005, p. 291.

Understanding Animation (1998), and Thomas Lamarre's *The Anime Machine* (2009). These scholars have tended to argue that there is a "special character" inherent in the animated image. In the case of Wells, he grounds his understanding of the animated image in both its profoundly metamorphic character, and its distinct capacity to present the illusion of movement.² Lamarre underscores particular visual tropes that can be traced to the technology of image construction and compositing.³

However, the most thorough discussion of the relation of fantasy to animation to date is the recently published collection of thoughtful essays penned by a veritable "who's who" of animation scholars (including Paul Wells and Susan Napier) entitled *Fantasy/Animation: Connections Between Media, Medium and Genres*, edited by Christopher Holliday and Alexander Sergeant.⁴ While the varied perspectives on fantasy and animation in the collection provide a wealth of stimulating material, rescuing anime from pejorative assumptions of associations with fantasy could arguably be done differently. Rather than establishing a continuum of interrelation through the use of a "forward slash" (as in the title's "fantasy/animation"), fantasy should be more squarely treated within the realm of genre and not as a distinct form of cinema. Moreover, regardless of unhelpful preconceptions within the American Film Institute regarding a distinct category of fantasy film, it does seem necessary that animated fantasy features, indeed any kind of cinematic anime feature, should be treated not so much as a stylistic genre but as a part of cinema more generally.⁵

Accordingly, this article undertakes to reintegrate the discussion of the animated image and fantasy with a broader theory of cinema, and does so with particular reference to the work of Gilles Deleuze. In order to delve further into the mechanics of anime's distinctive cinematic style and its tendency toward fantasy, there needs to be a more systematic consideration of the parameters of time, motion, and space, and the possibilities of less literal forms of representation and more fluid evocation of "truths" in ways that are more sophisticated than the "realistic" depiction of action in the "here and now." Fortunately, Gilles Deleuze does furnish us with such a paradigm, but he did not suppose his paradigm would be applied to animation as such (although it is debatable whether he would find any fundamental point of difference between the cinematic image and the animated image).⁶ However, given some of the idiosyncrasies of Deleuze's terminology it is necessary to state clearly what aspects of his thought are particularly relevant and, indeed, why we would desire recourse to his analysis of cinema in relation to Japanese animation and ultimately the work of Shinkai Makoto 新海誠 in particular.

To build toward the discussion of cinematic anime and ultimately Shinkai Makoto's work, the ensuing section will outline key aspects of Deleuze's definition of the time-image, and its debt to Henri Bergson's conception of time and memory. I then address some key examples that Deleuze himself takes up, the better to identify the most salient stylistic characteristics of cinematic images. Next I transpose these characteristics on to cinematic

2 Wells 1998, pp. 69–73; Wells & Moore 2016, pp. 118–120.

3 Lamarre 2009, pp. xxx–xxxii, 26–44.

4 For a general discussion of the relation of fantasy to anime, see "Introduction," Holliday and Sergeant 2018, pp. 1–9.

5 Holliday and Sergeant 2018, pp. 12–13.

6 See, for example, Gehman and Reinke 2005 and Gunning 2014.

anime, in particular the works of Oshii Mamoru 押井守 and Kon Satoshi 今敏. Finally, I address the works of Shinkai Makoto and specifically *Your Name* (*Kimi no na wa* 君の名は), which emerges as a most explicit example of engagement with the potential of the time-image. I evaluate the fantasy elements in Shinkai's work in terms of their capacity to furnish both mere amusement in some instances and profoundly evocative cinematic moments in others.

Deleuze, Bergson, and the Question of Time

In *Cinema I* and *Cinema II*, Deleuze set out to give cinema a level of philosophical treatment that up until that point it had not received. Commentary on contemporary cinema in France after World War II was embodied in either relatively conventional film criticism or in the more ambitious but nonetheless conservative view of cinema as articulated by André Bazin. Bazin extolled cinema for its capacity to capture objective reality and the personal vision of the filmmaker. This was quite a departure from pre-World War II theorizing that accentuated cinema's capacity to manipulate reality and alter personal perception. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Deleuze, when searching for a philosophical paradigm to employ in reexamining cinema, burrowed back into earlier veins of philosophical investigation, alighting in the process on the thought of Bergson, a figure of considerable influence in the preceding decades.

Bergson was acutely aware of “multiplicity” in human consciousness, and rejected the notion of perceptions and experiences as fixed data that could be quantified and discretely analyzed. At the same time, he wanted to overcome the dualism between realism and idealism, or the gap between the material world and virtual modes of representation. His answer was to propose the “image” as the vehicle mediating both aspects, and “pure perception” as the awareness or recognition of this profoundly integrated realm of expression and understanding. In tandem with this, he explored the implications of this insight in relation to time, famously distinguishing between the more conventional quantitative conception of time as a linear sequence with hard distinctions between past, present, and future, and the qualitative continuity of time which he characterized as “duration.” In *Matter and Memory* (1896), he further explored the relation between this conception of time and memory, articulating a distinction between “habitual” memory, which had a merely instrumental function in sustaining day to day actions, and “pure” memory which could spontaneously break into consciousness with no particular adherence to the order of isolated moments and actions rooted in the past.⁷

Deleuze took these essential tenets and applied them to the *cinematic* image. He was preoccupied with how divergent approaches to the manipulation of cinematic images could alter the bounds of perception. Initially he accentuated the segmented but nonetheless coherently articulated sequences of images that align with a clear chronology, and followed a motor-sensory perception of movement in space. These he called “movement-images.” He then went on to explore the possibility of cinematic images that break down the tyranny of chronological sequencing and the experience of conventionally living and moving in the “actual” world. These he broadly described as time-images. Deleuze was particularly interested in how time-images could transform our engagement with memory

7 For a lucid exposition of the legacy of Bergson and its influence on Deleuze, see Bogue 2003, pp. 11–40.

and consciousness. Disrupting linear time in the narrative and forsaking an exclusive commitment to the conventional depiction of movement in space in the *mise en scène* made it possible to reveal memory and consciousness as facets of perception no longer rooted in habitual action and experience. There would, of course, always be an anchoring of our perception to the “actual” through recognition and recollection, but there could also be a simultaneous exploration of the realm beyond the actual through the apprehension of what he described as the “virtual.” This was a realm pertaining not to the “here and now” or discrete points in the past, but to what Deleuze described as “immanence.”⁸ At root, Deleuze’s contention was that certain cinematic images (i.e. time-images) could take on a character that mediated both the actual or the virtual and, in so doing, reveal facets of the immanent, facilitating a vision that resonates profoundly with Bergson’s notion of “pure perception.”

Identifying Time-Images

Given this basic outline of Deleuze’s conception of the “time-image,” let us now consider how we might identify distinct instances of its articulation. Deleuze expanded on Bergson’s philosophy of time and memory by incorporating some aspects of C. S. Peirce’s semiotics to create a typology of “signs” that are integral to the generation of direct images of time. As we have seen, the time-image is in a fundamental sense a breaking away from the regime of movement-images which lock time in relation to movements in space. Making that break, according to Deleuze, entailed the following:

1. The generation of visual and audial signs (“opsigns” and “sonsigns”) that transcend the constraints of the movement-image.
2. The creation of signs that powerfully and directly reveal, or enable us to intuit, the immanent totality in relation to time (“chronosigns”).
3. The redefining of action in ways that tolerate the breaking of the linear connections of movement in a particular space.⁹

These interventions enable the subverting of the limitations of the movement-image, and reveal glimpses of the immanent whole. In essence, Deleuze’s chronosigns are produced through optical and acoustic images that disrupt motor-sensory perception of empirical movement in space at particular moments. So instead of a chronological succession of incremental spatial moments and movements, time is revealed through distinctively asynchronous depictions as part of a highly fluid continuum. To use Deleuze’s rather poetic turn of phrase, “There is no present which is not haunted by a past and a future, by a past that is not reducible to a former present, by a future which does not consist of a present to come.”¹⁰ Deleuze characterized these cinematic depictions of time as “crystalline” rather than “organic,” in that perception is not tied in a directly organic way to the action inherent in movement-images but rather intuited through the prism of the time-image, hence the crystal metaphor.

8 Deleuze 1989, pp. 82–88.

9 For a more detailed discussion, see Rodowick 1997, pp. 79–81.

10 Deleuze 1989, p. 36. See also Rodowick’s exegesis in Rodowick 1997, p. 81.

To illustrate instances of the time-image in cinema, Deleuze drew on disparate works such as the Italian Neo-Realists, the films of Ozu Yasujiro 小津安二郎, and even Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). He used these examples to describe a burgeoning art of creating cinematic images that revealed a consciousness beyond mere action and movement in the "here and now."¹¹ Take, for example, the cinematic style of Ozu Yasujiro. It would be difficult to find a more emphatic example of filmmaking that subordinates action to place and stillness, and that evokes the deep current of time transcending the clutter and clatter of mundane daily life. Ozu does capture daily life, but as revealed by his lingering shots of hallways and stairs, along with the wooden, almost marionette-like delivery of lines from key protagonists, he has an eye for what is beyond action and speech in the moment that is extraordinarily intense.

There were, however, three films in particular that Deleuze singled out as presenting "crystal images," instances, that is, of time-image that give the viewer a window on "pure" perception and memory. The films were *Vertigo* by Hitchcock, *Je t'aime Je t'aime* (1968) by Alain Resnais, and *Zvenigora* (1928) by Alexander Dovzhenko. It is surprising that his examples are not exactly consonant in theme or style; nor do they readily indicate a common thread. Even so, a brief review of them reveals some useful insights.

Vertigo by Alfred Hitchcock has a very different visual style in its treatment of action and *mise en scène* when compared, for example, to Ozu Yasujiro. It is nonetheless remarkable in the way that the persona of the female lead, Kim Novak, is stretched by playing an imposter who inhabits a profound duality of character. She plays Judy Barton, the young lover and accomplice of Gavin Elster who persuades Judy to impersonate his wife Madeleine who he intends to murder by setting up a fake suicide. The suicide will be "witnessed" by Gavin's friend Scottie, a retired policeman, who becomes intimate with the fake Madeleine before seeing her ascend to the top of a tower. He assumes it is Madeleine whom he sees hurtling to the ground below. He cannot follow her into the tower due to an intense fear of heights, hence the key role of vertigo. Apart from the duplicity and intrigue, the film does succeed in prising open the fluidity of persona, as well as the multiplicity of relations and intimacies that coalesce uneasily across different moments of time. Even when Scottie "discovers" Judy Barton after the apparent suicide of Gavin's wife, he wants her to dress and act as Madeleine, the imposter figure who belongs in a time that cannot be retrieved or redeemed. Hitchcock, in the guise of a detective thriller, has set up an impossible conundrum, one that forms a predicament for the two central characters, even as it accentuates in a rather excruciating fashion the possibility of transcending discrete personalities and fixed moments in time.¹²

By contrast, Deleuze singled out the film *Je t'aime Je t'aime* by Resnais which, quite unlike *Vertigo*, is driven by a science fiction premise. The main character, Claude Ridder, is released from hospital following an unsuccessful suicide attempt, and is approached by a private research institute that offers him the opportunity to travel back in time. The institute claims it has succeeded in sending mice back for a minute at a time, and he accepts the offer. However, his experience is nothing as measured or predictable as had happened

11 See Deleuze 1989, pp. 128–129.

12 Deleuze 1989, pp. 86–87. See also an excellent exegesis of *Vertigo* in Deleuzian terms in Pisters 2003, pp. 33–38.

to the mice; his experiences are fragmentary and of irregular duration. There is the added complication of interaction with his deceased wife Cattrine who he inexplicably and incorrectly says he had “killed.” The film ends with Claude disappearing back in time and apparently not returning. In this case, it is not persona but rather the experience of time and the nature of memory that is stretched, and this treatment certainly coalesces with Deleuze’s (indeed Bergson’s) notion of memory embedded in time as “duration,” as opposed to a set sequence of discrete moments and experiences. Because the director endeavors to present something essentially beyond human experience in the here and now, he must of necessity adopt a plot device that gives at least a plausible avenue for exploring the chronologically impossible. The film thus meets the criteria of the crystal image by presenting time that could otherwise not be experienced or explained by other means, and it does so on the basis of a regime where the relation of actual to virtual is undecidable.

Deleuze’s third film was *Zvenigora* (1928) by Alexander Dovzhenko, a sprawling evocation of Ukraine’s entire history that rests on the fulcrum of the main character, a grandfather, explaining to his grandson the existence of a treasure buried in a mountain. The film mixes fact with fantasy while depicting the overwhelming flow of time and nature that engulfs the individual. The sheer scale of the evocation of time reflects Deleuze’s preoccupation with time as “duration,” and is presumably the main reason why he highlighted it. It is noteworthy, incidentally, that this was a silent film, meaning it excluded live speech-acts.¹³

In reviewing such disparate examples it is apparent that Deleuze was not attempting to say “this is precisely the exemplar of the time-image in cinema,” but rather that the time-image could be appropriated or presented in multiple ways through diverse approaches. The litmus test would be the degree to which the film could provide glimpses of a world beyond a strictly chronological series of events and discrete actions, and the extent to which memory and consciousness could be articulated in fragmented but nonetheless intensely direct ways. Ultimately, Deleuze’s account of the crystal image is multifaceted, providing diverse examples of ways to explore consciousness and memory.

A further point to take from Deleuze’s discussion of these examples is that the transition from the “organic” to the crystalline generates a variety of “side-effects” that appear in typical ways, such as the blurring of personas and of the actual and virtual, along with a radical disrupting of when and where something happened, as well as whether it really happened at all. Referring to the “signs” that generate such moments of revelation, Deleuze states, “Sometimes..., [the signs] are characters forming series as so many degrees ... through which the world becomes a fable. Sometimes it is a character himself crossing a limit, and becoming another, in an act of story-telling which connects him to a people past or to come.”¹⁴ He generates such revelations by playing not just with time but also persona and the criteria of determining which world one is inhabiting and when. Moreover, as “the world becomes a fable,” the distinction between the “false” and “true” is transformed so that the seemingly fantastical stylistic flights of narrative, persona, and place denote not mere illusion or deception, but the force of something immanent.

13 Regarding *Je t’aime Je t’aime* and *Zvenigora* in *Cinema II*, see Deleuze 1989, pp. 86–87. For a discussion of *Zvenigora* in relation to the crystal image, see Matviyenko 2011.

14 Deleuze 1989, p. 264.

To summarize, the potential of the crystalline generates specific implications for our understanding of the time-image in both film and animation. Under the crystalline regime, description or depiction of “the real” falls into a realm where the distinction between the real and the imaginary is *indiscernable*. At the same time, narration entails not rationally sequential articulations of a story, but iterations of the present that are *inexplicable*. This presents a conundrum for making judgments regarding the veracity of what is being depicted where alternative versions of a past appear whose truth or falsity is *undecidable*.¹⁵

The Crystal Image and Anime

Although Deleuze focused exclusively on instances of cinematic filmmaking in relation to the crystalline, it is not only conventional filmmaking that is capable of exploring such possibilities. Indeed, we can identify some animated features that exhibit the same propensities. Animation predisposes itself to this possibility because, generally speaking, it emphatically denies explicit “representation” from the outset. Cel-animated images in particular transpose a character on to a figure that is not necessarily “life-like,” allowing us to engage with such figures with the full force of our imagination, particularly if they deal, even obliquely, with deeper, more implicit references to emotional experience. This rather counters (potentially at least) the implication that the cel-animated image in anime pertains to the realm of mere “fantasy.” On the contrary, it suggests a distinct utility in certain circumstances and with certain subject matter. It might even be said that animated images have a peculiar efficacy in articulating the crystalline, and opening up possibilities for depicting memory and consciousness beyond analogue representations.

In this connection two Japanese animated films readily spring to mind: *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku kidōtai* 攻殻機動隊, 1995, dir. Oshii Mamoru) and *Millenium Actress* (*Senmen joyū* 千年女優, 2001, dir. Kon Satoshi). The degree to which they lend themselves to a Deleuzian analysis makes it surprising that they have not been more fully examined in such terms in anime-related research. *Ghost in the Shell* is replete with multiple reflective surfaces, replications of identities, and multiple levels of time and space. *Millenium Actress* is also deeply structured around the notion of mirroring space, identity, and time.

A prime example of how time is compressed and stretched beyond conventional consciousness in *Ghost in the Shell* is the scene where Kusanagi is at one moment diving in the harbor and then transported instantaneously into a sequence that has no obvious narrative function. It simply invests the moment with the evocation of a cosmos embodied in a mythic East Asian megalopolis. Clearly an amalgam of Shanghai, Tokyo, and Hong Kong (among others), the caverns of the city boulevards are enclosed by half-constructed skyscrapers festooned with cranes and scaffolding, contrasting with the lower streets and canals. As Brian Ruh aptly characterizes it, it is a symphony of vignettes that lovingly evoke the life of the city, and not just one subjective world but an entire universe in a moment. The scene resolves back to a brief exchange between Batou and Kusanagi, as if the previous sequence had not even occurred.¹⁶

This sequence is arguably one of the most emphatically crystalline among Oshii Mamoru’s animated features. Even on the level of visual imagery, Oshii employs the

15 See Rodowick 1997, pp. 85–86.

16 Ruh 2004, pp. 125–148.

reflective surfaces of water to project an enormous aircraft flying overhead, the deluge of rain in the middle of the sequence dissolves the sky, thus the walls and the glistening pathways dissolve together. The floating advertisement on a punt in the middle of the canal is reflected in a shop window, as Kusanagi glances up into one of the shop windows to see the visage of someone who is an exact replica of herself. The sequence continues for some three and a half minutes, and is bookended by a close-up of a pensive Kusanagi who has just returned from an underwater dive. The implication is that the entire sequence has played out in the fraction of a second's contemplation. This is a truly extraordinary embodiment of the crystal image in animation. It skilfully employs reflective surfaces to destabilize the sense of space and create multiplicity and layers within the images, as well as evoking the cosmos in the fraction of a moment.

Alongside Oshii's works, many of Kon Satoshi's films also have a deeply embedded ambiguity of time, place, and persona that certainly merits attention, but it is perhaps his *Millenium Actress* that explores the possibilities of stretching time most explicitly. Janine Villot, who refers to the "plasticity" of time in the film, does refer to Deleuze's theory of the time-image to some extent.¹⁷ While her characterization of both Deleuze's theory and the structure of memory as presented in the film cannot be faulted, there is more to be said in regard to Deleuze's Bergsonian concerns and the possibilities of appropriating crystalline images dealing with memory. Moreover, Villot's concern is with the film's exploration of Japanese history and themes implicitly related to national identity. She does not engage directly with the stylistic aspects of image construction or the possibilities of crystalline images in articulating distinctive perceptions of persona or memory.

In *Millenium Actress* history is not treated as past "facts," but is deliberately problematized through parallel depictions of the main character Chiyoko's personal wartime experiences and her experiences of the films that she acted in, many of which had historical themes. Both personal experience and virtual representations of that experience are thus conflated, so that an indiscernible relation between actual and virtual is deeply embedded in the film's fabric. Moreover, the fluid glossing between "personal" memories and film sequences enhances the sense that the subjective is only part of a broader and more ambiguous tapestry. Are we viewing her actual experiences or staged film sequences? Kon's deft touch in having Chiyoko's interviewers appear in the "flashbacks" and reminiscences enhances the fluidity of connection. They are being drawn into the very same web of inexplicable connections and crossovers that, in one sense, are inconceivable but nonetheless present her interviewers as participants in her broader consciousness of time, not as a sequence of factual events, but a super-subjective experience of a world that is immanent.

Kon's virtuosity in manipulating time, space, and persona is also exemplified in *Paprika* (*Papurika* パプリカ, 2006), which explores the interaction between a world of the unconscious that can be accessed through computer technology and the main characters who are chasing a criminal mastermind. The criminal has invaded the computer and is attempting to use it for his own ends. Kon represents the characters in the world of the unconscious as alter-egos, the main character Paprika herself being the "doppelganger" for a female scientist, Dr. Atsuko Chiba, who works in the lab where the technology is housed. One moment the characters in the film seem to be operating in the "real" world, but they

17 Villot 2014. See also Osmond 2009, pp. 43–58.

then find that both motion and space are severely interrupted, so that the distinction between the virtual and the actual is ultimately undeterminable. The coalescence of the two realms in the film is accentuated by visual motifs such as the sequence where Atsuko walks past some reflective surfaces in her lab and the figure that appears on the reflective surface is her doppelgänger.¹⁸ There are similarly fantastic flourishes in the early scenes of *Paprika* as well: from the opening where the clown emerges from a toy car that is too small to have emerged from, to the next sequence where the detective chasing the villain is incarcerated in a cage within a circus ring, and is attacked by a marauding audience, all of whom, regardless of gender and age, share his face, including his moustache. He then inexplicably falls through the floor of the cage to find himself instantly plummeting from a great height from the ceiling of the circus tent. Saved by Paprika on a trapeze, he resumes his pursuit of the criminal mastermind, only to find that he has entered a corridor where gravity has been suspended and even the walls billow and bend. He sees the criminal exit the other end of the corridor, and here the sequence ends. While highly imaginative and fantastical, Kon presents here a series of images that in key regards epitomize the crystal image, and reinforce our sense that there is a distinctive facility in these animated sequences to present direct images of time.

Considering the foregoing instances together, we see a quite close replication of the characteristic symptoms of the crystalline in animated features, even though, strictly speaking, we are not dealing with precisely the same sort of manipulations of light and movement in space that are found in classical cinema. Whether due to a particular technical facility or simply a long-standing stylistic propensity, it seems that Japanese animation has a distinctive capacity to achieve an intensification of the power to evoke the crystalline realm. With the typical flourish of transposing human forms into the register of “imposters” for “real people,” and the facility for generating images that flout the “laws” of time and space, these films present a consciousness of memory and perception that momentarily reveals fragments of perception superseding analogue depictions of the lived world. Most importantly, in some cases these animated features have had a profound impact on mainstream filmmaking. *Ghost in the Shell* is perhaps the most prominent example of this phenomenon, with its influence on the Wachowskis’ *The Matrix* (1999).

Shinkai Makoto’s Treatment of Time-Images

Having considered how Deleuze’s distinctive preoccupations and interests might be related to earlier instances of Japanese animation, let us now explore how the Deleuzian perspective might take us to a deeper understanding of Shinkai Makoto’s work.¹⁹ It is not an exaggeration to suggest that time and memory has been very much at the core of Shinkai’s films from the outset. In *She and Her Cat* (*Kanojo to kanojo no neko* 彼女と彼女の猫, 1999), there is a palpable sense that the passing of time is the point of each shot, in a manner that transcends individual movements or moments. Indeed, the film is noteworthy for the absence of movement, as in a mobile phone lying on a shelf depicting expectation or a toppled chair indicating emotional upheaval. The camera does not invite us to follow the main characters in their movement; indeed the panning of the perspective creates a rhythm

¹⁸ See Gardner 2009, Wells 2011, and Osmond 2009, pp. 101–118.

¹⁹ The reader is referred to <http://shinkaimakoto.jp/> for samples from a variety of Shinkai’s works.

that evokes continuity of a sort but without reference to action. On another level, Shinkai juxtaposes moving elements within the frame with utterly impassive and immobile elements. So, the kettle on the stand of the gas cooker is a recurring motif that accentuates the fragility of the flickering flame beneath it, as it contrasts with the iron frame around it. The silhouette of a monolithic rail track with clouds that stream beyond it in the background creates a similar effect.

Shinkai's early approach to evoking time rather than action is replicated to varying degrees in his later works, the expansion of the scale of location being a key point of difference. In later films, even as he devotes loving attention to the detailed minutiae of domestic interiors, Shinkai embraces the city and the familiar elements of bridges, railway lines, and roads. He uses them as large-scale anchoring points for juxtaposition with either minimally evoked actions or, conversely, to carve out blocks of constructed cityscape set against expansive skies. A later feature, *Five Centimetres Per Second* (*Byōsoku go senchimētōru* 秒速5センチメートル, 2007), which takes its title from the speed at which a flake of snow falls, exemplifies the relative indifference of Shinkai to action and plot, with the cityscape of Tokyo subtly employed to evoke the essential predicament of the main characters, namely their incapacity to conquer time. This is not just the passing of time, which of course does happen, but a suspension beyond place and time, as accentuated in ambient night shots of the Tokyo metropolis contrasted with human figures as the passive cargo of a commuter train, or unmoored passengers standing unmoving on a station platform. Such techniques indicate more than a passing proclivity with exploring the time-image, even if Shinkai does not necessarily pursue it self-consciously or deliberately.

However, Shinkai has not simply developed a style in his films that generates cinematic time-mages; he has explicitly toyed with the mechanisms of time and the manner in which it is experienced in different places and by different persons. In 2002, he released *Voices of a Distant Star* (*Hoshi no koe* ほしのこえ), which uses the science fiction premise of space travel to engender a situation where the heroine, Mikako Nagamine, is sent on a long-distance mission to battle aliens from Tharsis. However, she must deal with the increasing time-lag in communication between where she is and earth, where the love of her life, Noboru Terao, remains. Apart from the increasingly excruciating separation through time, the two characters must cling to the one thing that transcends time, their memory of each other, which is a continuous present of sorts.²⁰ In a later feature, *The Place Promised in Our Early Days* (*Kumo no mukō, yakusoku no basho* 雲のむこう、約束の場所, 2004), Shinkai revisits the theme of separated lovers, but this time the nature of memory itself is more intensely disrupted. The film commences with three teenage friends who live in an alternative Japan where Hokkaido is occupied by "the Union," and the rest of Japan is part of the Alliance with the United States. The Union builds a mysterious tower that can be seen across the strait from Honshu, and it is the focus of fascination for the three teenage friends: Sayuri, the heroine of the film, and her two male friends, Takuya and Hiroki. However, Sayuri mysteriously disappears one summer and Takuya and Hiroki take two divergent paths in the wake of her sudden absence. Takuya joins an Alliance scientific laboratory which also includes members of an underground organization called the Ulita Liberation Front. He eventually discovers that Sayuri has been in a coma for three years due to some phenomenon

20 Bingham 2009.

related to the tower, where she has become caught up in the its capacity to stream parallel universes. It is apparent that the tower will be used as a weapon against the Alliance, and the Front arranges to strike first. In the meantime, Hiroki has been working on reconstructing a crashed Union drone and after Takuya reconnects with Hiroki they agree that Hiroki will carry out the attack with Sayuri onboard.²¹

The mission is a success but the cost is Sayuri becoming aware that, as she wakes up, she will lose all memory of her prior experience, including the special affection she had for Hiroki. This is not a disastrous ending as such, but it is one that suggests that whatever sustains feeling, memory and affection is not enough to sustain it in a conventional sense. Shinkai even seems to be suggesting that the special relationship between Sayuri and Hiroki *must* be found beyond the conventional reservoir of shared experiences and memories in the past.

The Crystalline in *Your Name*

The foregoing titles provide important context to *Your Name* which visually follows on from the more ambient and gentle style of *Five Centimeters Per Second* (2007) and *The Garden of Words* (*Koto no ha no niwa* 言の葉の庭, 2013), but then marries that more gentle ambience with the earlier plot devices and time shifting seen in *Voices of a Distant Star* (2002) and *The Place Promised in Our Early Days* (2004). Moreover, in *Your Name*, Shinkai interrogates even more deeply the interchangeability of persona, place, and time.²²

The opening scene does not in fact declare the film's more serious intent. It has the catchy Radwimps theme song, and one could be forgiven for imagining after ten minutes that the film might not evolve beyond an elaborate rom-com for teenagers. The schoolgirl heroine is Mitsuha Miyamizu, who lives in the remote countryside, and declaims early in the film that she hates living away from the city and would rather be a young boy living in Tokyo. This segues to the character Taki Tachibana, a boy who lives in the city, who is about to find himself waking up in the body of Mitsuha; she wakes up in his. The potential for comedic episodes abound as the two characters learn more about each other's lives, and begin to leave notes and messages for each other as well as change relations with people at school and work. Taki ends up in a romantic relationship with a coworker, and Mitsuha becomes much more assertive and popular at school.

The film takes an emphatically more experimental turn when Taki decides that he wants to try and find the girl that he has been exchanging bodies with. He had just been informed by Mitsuha that a comet was about to pass through the sky on the day of her village's festival, but that is the last message he receives before the body sharing suddenly stops. The text messages he had received gradually disappear, and his recollection of things begins to fade quickly as well. He travels to the Hida region where he is sure the village is, but he can no longer remember the village's name. Fortunately a shopkeeper identifies his sketch of the village, and he learns that the village, named Itomori, had been wiped out several years previously when a fragment from a meteor broke off and made a direct hit as the villagers were celebrating a festival. Taki rushes to a library to verify the story, and

21 For a thorough exegesis of the film albeit from a postcolonial perspective, see Walker 2009.

22 For a dedicated website covering the background and content of *Your Name* in Japanese, he reader is referred to <http://www.kiminona.com/>.

discovers to his horror that Mitsuha is among the dead. Here Shinkai has broken apart any conventional sense of time and space. Taki has been experiencing a parallel world through another's body only to find that the time that seemed contemporary and parallel had already passed. He has, in other words, been in spaces and moments that could not exist, and yet he has enough recollection of them to lead him to an actual place in the present, and to discover an actual disaster in the past.

As the film progresses from this shocking revelation, so do the treatments of time, space, and memory become more stretched and startling. Taki remembers that on one occasion when he was inhabiting Mitsuha's body, he accompanied Mitsuha's grandmother to a cave high atop a hill overlooking the village. There they left an offering of sacred *kuchikamizake*, a form of fermented saké that was part of the traditional rites performed by Mitsuha's family as hereditary custodians of the local shrine. Taki reclaims the hill and decides to drink the saké. He falls asleep only to wake up as Mitsuha, and it is the day of the festival with the meteor due to traverse the sky that evening. He runs down to the village and tells Mitsuha's grandmother everything that has happened. She recognizes what has happened—and that someone else is in Mitsuha's body—and she encourages him to work out a plan. With Mitsuha's friends they resolve to create a false emergency which will force everyone to evacuate. The plan fails and Taki, as Mitsuha, runs back to the hill to see if he can find Mitsuha in Taki's body. When he gets there, he finds that indeed she is there; however, as the sun sets and twilight descends, they find for just a moment they are their actual selves.

Mitsuha realizes that she must try one more time to convince the villagers to evacuate, but as the twilight turns to night they become aware that they are being separated. In desperation they try to tell each other their names and even attempt to write them on each other's hands, but it doesn't work. Taki wakes up at the time he revisited the cave. He is alone and cannot remember what happened.

The device of having the persona of the two main characters radically destabilized through the interchangeability of their physical beings deeply subverts the idea of “this is a boy” and “this is a girl,” or even that this person is Mitsuha and that is Taki. They have personas, but they are essentially detached and transposed away from their physical selves moving in fixed moments in time and place. This strategy subordinates the conventional sense of time and even displaces it, which is the essential function of the time-image. The device of having Taki drink the *kuchikamizake* to be transported to another plane where the exchange of bodies can be replicated across time enables Shinkai adroitly to create a realm where time continuously divides into “a present that is passing, a past that is preserved and an indeterminate future.”²³ The time-image in this form is not only foreshadowed through such ploys as the exchange of bodies; it is also evidenced through the evocation of a realm where the past and present and even future are profoundly fluid. The key implication is that time can be sensed as the vast undercurrent of whatever superficially is the “action” or the bodily form of the character. At the same time, that vastness can be concentrated into a symptomatic moment that just happens to permit a leap into different stages of that flow of time.²⁴

23 Rodowick 1997, p. 81.

24 See Bogue 2003, pp. 135–149.

There are several other motifs that Shinkai employs to facilitate the ellipsis of time and experience. The primary one is the notion of *tasokare* 誰そ彼, or twilight, which etymologically conjures up the question “who are you?” or “who is there?” *Tasokare* is a quintessentially liminal space that transcends day and night, and in Shinkai’s adaptation, it constitutes a zone that facilitates movement across the past, present, and future. The second motif is *musubi*, which is introduced as a traditional braid-weaving tradition of the village, but ultimately it is worked into a key theme of the narrative. Mitsuha’s grandmother’s commentary on it signifies the profound linkages in life and experience that transcend time and place. The grandmother, Hitoha, explains *musubi* in the following exchange with Mitsuha:

- Hitoha: Mitsuha, do you know about *musubi*?
- Mitsuha: Musubi?
- Hitoha: It’s what we used to call the local guardian deity long ago, and it means “union.” This word has profound meaning. Tying strings together is a union. Connecting to people is a union. And the flow of time is a union. These are all part of the god’s power.
The braided chords that we make are tied to that, a skill from the god. They represent the flow of time itself. They assemble and take shape. They twist, tangle, unravel now and then, break and reconnect. That’s what a union is, what time is.²⁵

In this brief exchange, Shinkai is making explicit his awareness of time not as chronology rooted in a particular time or place, but rather as something enabling connections that unify across different times and different places. Sometimes it is manifest and sometimes it seems to unravel before reconnecting. In essence, he is expressing an understanding of time that is very much resonant with the crystalline as discussed above in relation to the time-image.

The foregoing conception of time and consciousness resonates profoundly with our earlier discussion of the Bergsonian elements in Deleuze that deal with time as “duration” and “pure memory.” By creating sequences that are deeply metamorphic in their depiction of place and persona and profoundly elliptic in terms of narrative, Shinkai is appropriating precisely the kind of crystalline images articulated by Deleuze. To return to the earlier quote describing the nature of signs that generate the crystalline, “[W]e witness change or metamorphosis across a sequence of images as the *transformation of states, qualities, concepts or identities*.” And, indeed, Shinkai’s characters “cross limits, becoming another, ... in an act of story-telling which connects ... to a people past or to come.”²⁶

Anime: Beyond Mere Fantasy

In reviewing the oeuvre of Oshii, Kon, and Shinkai, it is impossible not to be struck by the degree to which the realms of fantasy and a more conventional “reality” are routinely forced to collide and to reveal possibilities of perception and introspection that would not be possible in a conventional depiction of action. To describe their highly imaginative narratological

25 Transcribed from the English-language edition of *Your Name* (2016), dir. Shinkai Makoto, 34:20”–35:20.”

26 Italics by author; see Deleuze 1989, pp. 275.

and visual devices as fantasy invites of course the suggestion that there is an inherent lack of seriousness in the work undertaken. Indeed it is a recurring (though not always openly acknowledged) assumption that anime is inherently juvenile or merely amusing, precisely due to its propensity for the fantastical.²⁷ One might invoke in this connection the critique of Roger Scruton, who argued that cinema, indeed screen media in general, is intrinsically susceptible to the production of morally vapid content, such as gratuitous violence, and escapist romantic dramas, precisely given its propensity to facilitate fantasy. He famously argued that the capacity of film and television to depict plausibly unthinkable violence and cruelty to an audience safe in the knowledge that they are “only on the screen” enabled the worst kinds of fantasy gratifications. In the Freudian sense, they signified a pathological attempt to overthrow or subvert reality rather than deal with it directly.²⁸

Examining the problematic character of “mere fantasy” is therefore important, and it requires us to respond with a more nuanced consideration of artistic expression. One of the foremost thinkers to address fantasy was R. G. Collingwood, who engaged directly with very much the same concerns as Scruton but provided some vital clarifications. According to Collingwood, artistic expression, properly understood, entails some kind of imaginative reworking of *sensa* (sensory perceptions), along with a combination of input from the conscious and the pre-conscious level to produce expressions that engender a deeper self-knowledge, the “bringing to consciousness” of that which was hitherto only inchoately apprehended. Naturally, what we “bring to consciousness” will entail a degree of evoking what we are already conscious of (memory), as well as what we intuit that we know but find difficult to express. Expressing both of these necessitates some particular operation of intellect, emotion, and imagination, and it cannot be confined to the replication of what is already known but must include the discovery of unprecedented forms. Artistic expression cannot be constrained to the replication of the already known, but must be open to possibilities that may well entail the deployment of fantasy as much as fact. At the same time, however, Collingwood distinguished between the use of fantasy as an exercise of facile “make-believe,” and fantasy as an aspect of imagination utilized to bring to consciousness the inchoately felt and perceived. Indeed, he acknowledged that facile or decadent flights of make-believe are tied up with pathological behaviors. Ultimately, however, he asserted that the artistic imagination, insofar as it is preoccupied with artistic expression and not some facile distraction from the life we lead, will engage in fantasy but must also be indifferent to mere desire-gratification.²⁹

In a sense then, Collingwood would have agreed with Scruton’s characterization of fantasy in its pathological aspect. However, he also incorporates a further category of fantasy that is essentially harmless even as it pertains to facile entertainment. Within the compass of a broader category that he terms “amusement,” he includes a further notion of the facile version of fantasy as serving an instrumental gratification of a temporary desire “in-the-moment,” with no intention of applying it to life and living. This covers

27 Thomas Lamarre squarely addresses this pejorative perception of anime (Lamarre 2006, pp. 161–188). He argues, much like Holliday and Sergeant, that the increasing integration of production techniques through CGI have done a great deal to close the gap in perceptions of cinema and anime. While this is certainly true, I would argue that there is a need to address pejorative perceptions of fantasy more directly as well.

28 Scruton 1998, pp. 151–158.

29 See Collingwood 1938, pp. 135–139; Lewis 1989, p. 547.

pathological instances of fantasy but also allows us to delineate simple and essentially harmless fantasies that no one intends to take seriously anyhow. This in turn contrasts with his characterization of fantasy as intrinsic to the “bringing to consciousness” of that which cannot be appraised by conventional modes of expression.³⁰

Consequently, Collingwood provides us with an important distinction between fantasy for amusement and fantasy with significance for artistic expression while being indifferent to desire gratification and the constraints of the already known. Collingwood’s account of artistic expression is in fact not inimical to Deleuze’s conception of the use of signs to bring about a perception of the immanent through the various instances of crystalline images. It also resonates with Deleuze’s conception of a distinct order of “truth” that is generated through the “powers of the false.”³¹ The expression “powers of the false” is perhaps rather unnatural, but it denotes a position which in fact coalesces with Collingwood’s conception of artistic expression as indifferent to the reality or otherwise of the subject matter. This does not imply indifference to “facts” or “empirical experience,” but rather articulates an important precondition for genuinely revelatory artistic expression. That this might bring about the amalgamation of seeming absurdities is a risk but if the artist emerges through the process with some notion of a previously undisclosed consciousness then arguably they have fulfilled a more purely artistic aim.

In *Your Name*, we encounter numerous instances of fantasy that have little expressive or artistic function other than to amuse. The exchange of bodies between the two main characters is one of the key sources of comedy in the first half of the film, and is milked to a degree of overuse. But in the scene where Taki returns to the shrine and drinks the *kuchikamizake* to be then transported to another plane where the exchange of bodies can be replicated across time, Shinkai adroitly creates a realm where the connectedness of the two main characters conquers time. His use of such devices reveals the power of the time-image to portray emotions and memories beyond the analogue world of experience. To regard these artistic devices as mere fantasy short-changes the distinctive power of cinematic images. *Your Name* distills a distinctive message through the crystalline where the flourishes of time-bending, shape-shifting, and mind-sharing coalesce to reveal a powerful relationship between the two main characters that is not anchored in cognition of specific moments of time or in fixed memories. *Your Name* arguably succeeds in articulating the bond between Mitsuha and Taki as a state of “becoming,” a bringing to fore under conditions that disinter it from the “then and there” or the “here and now.” Shinkai uses their experience of each other’s bodies and places in time as the fulcrum for a transition from their temporal selves to an experience, however imperfectly depicted, of something deeper and, in a Bergsonian sense, “pure.” In the Deleuzian sense, *Your Name* is an indistinguishable amalgam of actual and virtual, which offers glimpses of a totality that is neither true or false. It is a perception characterized by profound multiplicity.³² It has a similar power to the work of Oshii and Kon, but is more strikingly explicit in its handling of time, place, and persona.

30 Regarding “amusement,” see Collingwood 1938, pp. 78–87; regarding the artistic processes of “bringing to consciousness,” see Collingwood 1938, pp. 105–117, 125–134.

31 Deleuze’s conception of the “powers of the false” and its philosophical underpinnings are detailed in Deleuze 1989, pp. 127–129.

32 See Deleuze 1989, p. 130; Bogue 2003, pp. 148–150.

Shinkai's attempt to present the bond between his main characters as something beyond time and place, but nonetheless capable of perception, is validated by the film's ending. In a seeming anticlimax, Taki awakens after finally "meeting" Mitsuha to find that he is in his own present, and has little precise recollection of what just happened. He then continues to live his life much as he would otherwise have done, finding out in the meantime that, happily, the villagers of Itomori were saved when the mayor of the village was persuaded to evacuate before the comet struck. Unfortunately, Taki had no way of finding Mitsuha as he could no longer remember her name. The final scene is preceded by a typical Shinkai flourish of two young people, Taki and Mitsuha, seeing each other from different trains and somehow mysteriously sensing that they have a bond. They both alight from their trains and walk towards each other, meeting on a stairway. The film ends with them asking each other their names. The simplest of gestures in a moment is packed with enormous resonance.

Conclusion

Shinkai Makoto's work follows on from a substantial tradition of anime that engages and entertains with arresting imagery while also subtly exploring the deeper undercurrents of human emotion and consciousness. What distinguishes Shinkai from his predecessors in *Your Name*, however, is his appropriation of a profoundly fluid realm of expression that explores the multiplicity of persona, place, and time while nonetheless unifying it in the consciousness of the two main protagonists. It is on one level perhaps merely a romantic drama, and yet the sophistication of his management of time and consciousness renders it worthy of recognition as a powerful cinematic statement.

Your Name departs from the more familiar sci-fi devices evident in his earlier works, and even the works of Oshii Mamoru and Kon Satoshi, to employ what might be described as an almost spiritual and culturally essentialist set of premises. It is unmistakably a self-consciously very Japanese film in its motifs and settings; indeed, Shinkai lavishes affection on both the urban cityscape and the rural countryside. He has also set out to entertain and amuse a broad segment of the Japanese public, in a way that his earlier works were not necessarily able to do. His earlier films are emphatically in the *sekai-kei* (世界系) genre that focuses on the emotional predicament of contemporary young people, who feel alienated and seek a significant other to share their predicament with. Those elements persist to a degree but do not altogether dominate the scope of the work.

In contrast to Shinkai's earlier works, his focus on the human connections in *Your Name* is clearly both more familial, as in the attention he gives to Mitsuha's extended family and ancestry. It is also social and communal, as we see in the scenes depicting school socializing and village festivities. But the core connection between Taki and Mitsuha, though initiated while they are high school students, is elevated beyond the juvenile premise of boyfriend and girlfriend to encapsulate something that binds them beyond that point in time, indeed any point in time. There is a certain poetry in the way that Shinkai has taken the familiar notion of the deepest kinds of love that somehow feel predestined, and seem capable of enduring even beyond this life.

I have devoted considerable space here to teasing out the intricacies of Deleuze's theory of cinema to explore how his thought makes it possible to distinguish various ontologies of the image in *Your Name*. *Your Name* is a film replete with flourishes that propel it

beyond a rudimentary exercise in depicting star-crossed lovers. Deleuze's conception of the time-image enables us to frame how animated images in *Your Name* evoke orders of perception as instances of transcendental moments of memory and consciousness beyond chronological time. By integrating Deleuze's theory of the time-image into an analysis of *Your Name*, we can understand more clearly how the anime discussed above share not merely some relatively superficial relevance to the order of movement-images; there is a great deal that can be unpacked in terms of their significance as a distinctive order of time-images. Animated images may of course operate as movement-images, but when they do that (and not much else) they fall fairly quickly into the realm of simplistic replications of motor-sensory perceptions. It is as time-images that they lend themselves to more profound artistic expression where the constraints of motor-sensory representation are abandoned, and precisely the kinds of radically fractured, multiplied, and transposed expressions emerge in a predominant fashion.

The ultimate merit of this perspective is that it leads to an appreciation of animation as enabling access to realms of cinematic expression that are in their own way sublime and deeply relevant to the broader artistic aim of expressing "truths" about the human condition. Moreover, the perspective helps clarify how Japanese animation, though often neither photo-real nor "realistic," is yet capable of dealing in much more than mere fantasy. Collingwood's insights allow for a more nuanced approach to fantasy as not merely fiction or amusement, and expose the manner in which Deleuze's notion of time-images is tied to some of the purest forms of artistic expression.

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