

ANIME MUSIC VIDEOS AND STORYTELLING:
PERFORMING CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

by

SABRA HARRIS

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Student: Sabra Harris

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Folklore Program by:

John Fenn	Chair
Alisa Freedman	Member

and

Scott L. Pratt	Dean of the Graduate School
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Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Sabra Harris

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Anime Music Videos (AMVs) are transformative works that provide channels of communication between the viewer and the viewed. The editors who make AMVs have distinct communities built on the evolution of anime conventions in the United States but have prospered and transformed globally. In the performance of technology, AMV editors find ways of using mass-mediated texts to express themselves, to convey emotions, and to communicate social messages. They make new associations by combining materials and display these associations in sophisticated ways on social forums like the Internet and anime conventions. The associations are interpretive and articulate how storytelling, rather than a fixed and linear one-way flow, is nonlinear, a negotiation between the storytelling performer and audience.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Sabra Harris

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of the South at Sewanee, TN

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Folklore, 2016, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Asian Studies, 2013, University of the South

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Japanese Culture and Language
Music and Ethnic Studies
Fan Culture

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Researcher, Funding for Innovative Teaching and Learning Fellowship, Sewanee,
Tennessee, Summer 2010

Researcher, Funding for Innovative Teaching and Learning Fellowship, Sewanee,
Tennessee, Summer 2013

Archivist, Randall V. Mills Archives, Eugene, Oregon, Winter and Spring
2014-2015

Teaching assistant, Department of Religious Studies, University of Oregon,
Eugene, Fall 2015

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, JPN 300, Eugene, Oregon,
Summer 2014

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Asian Religions, Fall 2015

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Archivist, Winter and Spring 2014-2015

President's Scholarship, merit-based, Sewanee, Tennessee, 2009-2013

Mary Sue Cushman Award, merit-based, Sewanee, Tennessee, 2011-2012

Funding for Innovative Teaching and Learning Fellowship, Sewanee, Tennessee
Summer 2013

Funding for Innovative Teaching and Learning Fellowship, Sewanee, Tennessee,
Summer 2010

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On Friday afternoon April 3rd 2015, a crowd pours into the Main Stage room in the Washington State Convention Center in Seattle at the Sakura Con anime fan convention. From 3:30pm to 6:00pm, chairs line 40,000 square feet, fitting approximately 3,500 of the 23,000 individuals registered for the three-day event hosted at the center. A widescreen projector splits the room, masking the technician booth where Vlad Pohnert and his team coordinate a half dozen screens and speakers. At 7:00 that same night, this is the same room stripped of its furniture that will host the Masquerade Ball and then the adult rave from 10:00pm to 3:00am. At 3:30pm, it hosts the Anime Music Video (AMV) Contest. I have come early to find a seat and wait half an hour as the hall fills. At the entrance, volunteers hand out ballot sheets and pencils. There is a tear-away ticket at the top, bubbles with the number of a video corresponding with a category. As the hour approaches, the front of the room becomes packed, diffused slightly towards the back. Two days later, when the winners of the context are announced, the AMV room two floors up, with an occupancy of over 800 people, will overflow, and people will be turned away at the door. The room darkens and the projectors come to life. Three to four minute long clips of anime footage weaved together with music play for nearly two hours. Each submission has its own genre category. The audience watches the four to five videos in each section and fills in the bubbles that designate the videos they vote for. After the ticket has been ripped away and deposited in the boxes after the screening, a list remains - titles of the videos along with the names of their creators and the songs and artists that

the editors use. This, the audience is allowed to take home, to research and re-watch and perhaps even download from editor sites such as AnimeMusicVideos.org.

Anime music videos (AMVs) are fan produced videos that source specifically from Japanese animations, called anime. AMVs, though classified as fan videos, are not a subset of fanvidding. AMV editors have their own distinct communities and forums for circulating and displaying their texts, and these forums are global. Contests are hosted at conventions in the United States, Canada, the international anime convention in Paris as well as online - the American based AnimeMusicVideos.org, which hosts its own specific contests for members, the two Russian based sites Akross.ru and AmvNews.ru, which preserves videos and editor information and hosts multiple yearly contests, the Chinese based site Bilibili, which is themed around anime, manga, and game fandom, and Youtube, where videos are circulated by community channels such as VermillionAMV, AnimeUnity and SoulsTeamAMV as well as prominent users like TheBestAMVsOfAllTime, who most active channel (one of ten) has over 171,000 subscribers. The way that AMVs communicate, and have even become their own communities, has evolved from the first documented anime music video in 1982. AMVs grew from the fanvidding that started at Star Trek fan conventions in the United States, used to entertain audiences in between panels. They then began to play at parties hosted in these, at the time, rather small conventions. As anime conventions became more popular, demand for specifically *anime* music videos grew. For example, statistics for Otakon, one of the most important conventions for anime fans in the eastern United States, shows that attendance at the annual meetings grew from a start of 350 people in

1994 to just over 20,000 in 2004, experiencing double or triple-digit growth each year.¹ The convention I attended in Seattle had over 23,000 people register, the majority registering for all three days.² It is important to note that when these fan produced texts were first being formed, Japanese animations were not the only texts used. French and German animations also found their way into these music videos, but the popularization of the anime convention in the United States created a forum that exposed more and more fans to AMVs.³ This not only formed a spectatorship but the impact of the videos, and the technical skill required in the marriage of sound and image, also inspired other fans to become editors, to join editing communities and submit for a steadily growing number of contests. Vlad Pohnert, a prominent member of the editing community and host to several convention contests, including Sakura Con, increased the level of crowd engagement in the AMV rooms at conventions by creating different participatory games and activities as well as introducing the AMV ballot, which I mention before and allowed the audience to return home with a list of AMVs. This ballot not only purposefully turns the viewer into a voter, or in other words a critic, but also allows the viewer to more easily engage with the text, to transfer the video from the big screen to the computer screen and to the desktop, simultaneously drawing the viewer into a hyperlinked community online, where one video leads to another video to another video at the viewers discretion.

¹ Ellis, Bill, "Love and War and Anime Art: An Ethnographic Look at the Virtual Community of Collectors" in *Folk Culture in the Digital Age: The Emergent Dynamics of Human Interaction*. ed. Trevor J. Blank. Logan, UT, USA: Utah State University Press, 2012. pp. 166-211. p. 204.

² Sakura Con. "About Us," <http://sakuracon.org/about-us/>. Web. 23 Feb. 2015.

³ DeMoss, Brad. Zac Bertschy. "ANNCast: Brad Behavior," 09 September 2012, animenewsnetwork.com, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/anncast/2012-09-14>. Web. 06 December 2015.

Prior to the AMV Contest on the Main Stage, I attended a panel in the AMV room on the sixth floor of the convention center. Though this is my second time attending Sakura Con, it is my first as an ethnographer. I was meant to join the editors dinner on Thursday before the event, but our van broke down in Kelso. After an eight hour repair, I joined the convention the next day and this is therefore the first time I have taken out my recorder and notepad. The panel is titled “The AMV Storyteller - Legends of Action, Love, and War,” hosted by Vlad Pohnert and another editor Vivifx. This panel, Vlad tells me at the technician’s booth afterwards, is a trial run, unlike his panel “Anime According to AMVs,” which is used every other year or so and features a presentation of AMVs using anime that a member of the audience has never before seen. In “Anime According to AMVs,” Vlad asks audience members to explain what they think an anime is about based on an AMV, often to hilarious results. In the first presentation of “The AMV Storyteller,” Vlad and Vivifx narrate between a sequence of different AMVs from different categories, making a weave of stories relying on one underlying story that the two create. In other words, Vlad and Vivifx create a tale using the romance from AMV 1, the action from AMV 2, and the drama from AMV 3, combining singular narratives into one via simple association. This is not unlike the way AMV editors in general use the stories found in anime to create transformative narrations. Fundamentally, I argue that AMVs experiment with stories as a means of expression.

Storytelling was a subject that arose multiple times in my fieldwork, though the editors I interviewed sometimes use storytelling to express other forms of communication in their videos. Editor and AMV host Xstylus believes that the honor of an AMV’s most

salient feature “goes to ‘conveying or invoking an emotion,’ of which telling a story is a tool to aid that goal.”⁴ Gunther, another editor informant, notes, “The most powerful AMVs are ones that do not rely on source or song to tell a story or evoke a feel. They communicate a message... They truly rise above what anime and music is to show a viewer something bigger than them.”⁵ What AMVs mean vary to individual editors, though in each case communication is vital. For this communication, storytelling may act as a tool to convey an emotion or message but may also be a primary reason in editing. In a podcast on AnimeNewsNetwork.com (2012), Brad DeMoss, a prominent AMV editor who began his work in the 1990s, comments to the question of his retirement, “If I would ever retire if I ever got that award [Anime Weekend Atlanta Masters jacket for editing], I don’t know. It would really depend on whether I still have stories to tell.”⁶ In the panel “AMV 101” at 2015 Sakura Con, four AMV editors answer questions posed by the audience on best storytelling methods, and Best Story is an independent category for AMVs on AmvNews.ru. On 13 November 2015, I hosted an AMV contest at the University of Oregon as a project for the East Asian Language and Literature class, “Digital Age Stories,” taught by Dr. Alisa Freedman. Interviewing the participants afterwards, the voters recognized that storytelling, the relationship between the progression of scenes and music, affected their evaluation of the videos. Likewise, after XStylus invited me to judge the AMV submissions for 2015 Anime Expo, which is

⁴ XStylus. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 02 Dec. 2015. Email.

⁵ Gunther. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 23 Nov. 2015. Email.

⁶ DeMoss, Brad. 2012, animenewsnetwork.com.

hosted yearly in Los Angeles, I noticed how trends in storytelling affected the way I ranked the videos.

Editing a story, rather than telling a story, is an important distinction because the act of editing plays a vital role in the meaning of the stories that editors create. The manipulation of appropriated materials is a critical component not only in what AMVs communicate but also the storytelling performance itself, which is inherently tied to technology. Technology, both in the editing equipment and the means of circulation on the Internet, provides important context integral to the identity of the editor as a storyteller. The meaning of a story lies in the context of its performance, as Richard Bauman explores in *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977) and *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual studies of oral narrative* (1986). Using Bauman's research, Chapter II explores the *decontextualization* inherent in editing stories from parts taken from other sources, where the sourced material acquires new meanings and associations for the audience to interpret. In addition to my fieldwork, I rely on Bauman's performance theory to examine AMVs as a means of communication, how technology allows *the viewer* the power to communicate.

Storytelling is an act of negotiation, where power moves between the actor and the audience. However, when the story becomes a product, this negotiation is seemingly restricted to a one way flow, in which the writer/producer contains all the power. In "The Storyteller" (1936), Walter Benjamin lamented the completeness of the novel in the modern era. He views storytelling as "an artisan form of communication" that "thrives in

the milieu of work,” separate from the work of the novelist, who has isolated himself.⁷ Being fixed, the novelist no longer treats the story as a negotiation between the storyteller and the listener. Nearly seventy years after “The Storyteller” was first published, Langellier and Peterson (2004) still argue that the storytelling experience is not linear; it does not go in one direction as if to disseminate information but is reversible and reflexive.⁸ The act of telling a story is an invitation, an offer to engage with listeners, and in this way, is constantly being altered in order to maintain communication with its audience. Benjamin’s criticism of the novel has likeness in the folklore discourse of the 1950s and 1960s that laments the fixedness of folktales by Disney. In her speech in 1956 to the California Library Association, Frances Clarke Sayers argues that Disney, in replacing originally orally-circulated versions of traditional Märchen, created a sense of canonicity in folktales, which she argues vulgarizes the originality of the texts.⁹ In these two different mediums, that of the printing press and that of the feature film, scholars once feared the implications in the dissolution of the oral, specifically that the transformation of a story into a product, a commodity, strips the sense of experience from storytelling, rendering the epic inert. Yet, as fan culture scholars, such as Joanna Russ (1985), John Fiske (1987), Camille Bacon-Smith (1992), Henry Jenkins (1992, 2006),

⁷ Benjamin, Walter, “The Storyteller” (reprinted from 1936) in *Theory of a Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000. p. 80.

⁸ Langellier, Kristin M. and Eric E. Peterson. *Storytelling in Daily Life: Performing Narrative*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004. p. 3.

⁹ Horn Book, “Walt Disney Accused” interview with Frances Clarke Sayers conducted by Charles M. Weisenberg, published in August issue of *F. M. and Fine Arts* and reprinted on Horn Book magazine website, 27 December 1965. <http://www.hbook.com/1965/12/choosing-books/horn-book-magazine/walt-disney-accused/>, accessed 18 January 2016.

Matt Hills (2002), and Cornel Sandvoss (2005) note, the commodity is not nearly so securely fastened.

Fans with the inclination to do so are constantly unfastening the seams, unscrewing the rivets, taking the story and fashioning it to perform new meanings. Fan fiction writers have been doing this with characters and worlds for more than a century, when Sherlock Holmes stories were first mass distributed in *The Strand* in 1891 and fans began the first fanfiction fandom with mimeographs.¹⁰ As Anne Jamison (2013) notes, fanfictions are extremely responsive to emerging technologies. With digital technology and the emergence of the Internet, fans can create new relationships with the materials that host their stories, specifically the video. With editing technology, and reasonable access to it, fans can now adapt the material itself. Fans rarely if ever cut words from a hard copy of, for example, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and paste them with words cut from texts such as *Jane Eyre*, creating a new narrative with the hard materials of their favored works. They can more easily and reasonably replicate the words simply by writing or typing them. However, stories no longer come to us solely on paper. The contemporary audience is a spectator of the cinema, the television, Netflix, Hulu, Youtube. They engage with screens. Likewise, fans have taken the technology of the screen and created new and meaningful fictions that engage with a viewing experience. Relating a story by editing is based on a series of relationships between the source texts and the AMV text as well as between the editor and the source texts and the audience and the viewed texts, both the source material they may or may not have seen and the AMV.

¹⁰ Jamison, Anne. *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World*. Dallas: Smart Pop, 2013. p. 4.

In Chapter III, I use Gregory Bateson's theory of framing in "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" (1955) and Barbara Babcock's work in "The Story in the Story: Metanarration in Folk Narrative" (1977) to examine these interconnected relationships. The relationship between AMV texts and their channels of communication changed once digital nonlinear editing methods began to replace analog linear methods. In other words, the structures that produce AMVs influence how the texts communicated with the editor and the audience. By editing, fans are able to reappropriate the hard copies of these texts and personalize them, transforming the isolated experience that Benjamin once feared encapsulates the novelist into a communication between spectator and storyteller.

This transformation is empowering for the viewer. It favors storytelling as an interpretation and allows the audiences a means of communicating their individual perspectives which are then presented communally. In Chapter IV, I use Hans-Georg Gadamer's work in analyzing the relationship between art and spectator in *Truth and Method* (1960) to discuss how the interpretations made in these videos are communicative and ultimately produce texts that do not necessarily have to be enjoyed primarily in reference their original source materials. Though the AMV is fan produced, created using clips from film, cross-cut to music, these videos are not always viewed in conjunction with fandom. They can be appreciated even if a viewer does not recognize their sources. Even though the content is referential, the text that is produced is often capable of standing on its own. It is the relationship created between the materials, including that of sound and image, which are analyzed in the Chapter V, that provide a meaningful, dynamic impact on the viewer. Often, I and other anime fans I have spoken

with will watch AMVs featuring a certain anime before deciding to commit to watching the series. Likewise, the reverse is true, and a viewer can favor an AMV that features an anime or song that the viewer does not particularly like, as I explore in depth in the case of “Hot Commodity” by the editor Gunther in Chapter V. It is important to consider that AMV editing, though fan produced, has a different and distinct community to fanvidding, which generally features live action television shows. Anime fan culture evolved separately from television fan culture in the United States, where AMV editing was born.

In summation, I use folkloric ethnographic research as well as close readings of certain AMV texts and certain scholarship to explore the AMV as a synthesis of material, a creation of new associations that I argue is transformative and brings new meanings to the texts. By making these associations, editors use signifiers of mass culture as means of self-expression and exploration. One informant, the editor Irriadin remarks:

At the most base level, combining an audio source with a video is fun. You can create hilarious pairings, ones that are soulful and ones that are intense... Sometimes I love to sync action beats. I love absurdity and over-the-top action. Other times, I use AMVs as a vehicle for self-expression. If I'm struggling with some issue in life, whether it be identity, sundered relationships, or just ennui, AMVs are excellent ways of expressing these feelings in a cathartic way.¹¹

By appropriating signifiers of mass culture, editors claim parts of the text for their own self-expression, and by using the text for self-expression, editors allow their interpretations to become transformative. In the Chapter II, I use Bauman’s theory of storytelling as performance to examine the decontextualization of mass-mediated texts and their recontextualization with technology as new narratives that express isolation and connectivity. In Chapter III, I use Bateson’s theory of frames and Barbara Babcock’s work with metanarratives to explore the structure of AMVs. The structures of analog

¹¹ Irriadin. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 02 Dec. 2015. Email.

editing, digital technology, and AMVs contests shape the performance of narratives and therefore what these narratives means. Then, in Chapter IV, using Gadamer's study to analyze the relationship between art and spectator, I argue that the association of divergent materials are communicative. New interpretations emerges and are negotiated when the viewer becomes a user. Finally, in Chapter V, I compare the functions of film music with the image in corporately produced music videos to discuss the relationship between sound and image in AMVs. In showing how imitation is dynamized and contrasts commentate, I argue that interpretations become transformative. The storytelling that occurs in AMVs is performed in a series of relationships, all of which create networks of communication between the text and the editor, the editor and the viewer, and the viewer and the text.

CHAPTER II

PERFORMING DECONTEXTUALIZED MATERIALS

In 2003, Mikel Koven, writing a critical study of folklore studies and popular film and television for the *Journal of American Folklore*, notes that when folklorists (Harold Schechter 1988, Alex Alexander 1979, Larry Danielson 1979) have looked at popular mass-mediated texts, they did so in order to identify traditional tale types and motifs in film.¹² Some folklorists suffice to *identify* the folklore within the mass media texts while others look to analyze the changes to the story's meanings when transferred/adapted/translated from one medium to another.¹³ This effort to identify folklore inside mass media does not look into how transformative properties of narratives are communicative. In the shadow of this concept that folklore exists in traditional texts that can only be *translated* into other mediums, the narratives created in commodification are seen as lesser than the original rather than modes for expression. However, mass media may not only transmit folklore but shape it, specifically our means of creating stories and communicating identities inseparable from technology. Bauman and Ben-Amos' reorientation of folklore in the 1970s from "things - texts, items, mentifacts - to verbal art as a way of speaking, a mode of verbal communication"¹⁴ may allow folklorists to better articulate the methods of communication that exist in the growing landscape of the Internet and mass media. Rather than understanding folklore as an artifact and historical

¹² Koven, Mikel J., "Folklore Studies and Popular Film and Television: A Necessary Critical Survey," in *Journal of American Folklore* 116:460 (Spring, 2003), p 181.

¹³ Koven, 2003, p. 190.

¹⁴ Bauman, Richard. *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual studies of oral narrative*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. p. 2.

object, if one understands folklore as “artistic communication in small groups,” as also proposed by Dan Ben-Amos,¹⁵ one can better study those groups who are connected by the technologies of screens - the computer, the projector, the television, and theater - who use hyperlinks to communicate rather than face-to-face interactions. The search to identify pre-existing motifs in media, as examined by Koven, still conceptualizes folklore as an artifact rather than a performance and a means of communication. The AMV is one such narrative crafted from commodified objects that requires an in depth look at the way technologies provide a network of activity and communication. Editors take shots from anime out of their original situational context and apply music to create a text that speaks about and augments the experience of watching the original material, discusses a social message, or creates a story completely independent of its sources. Within this endeavor, AMV editors are performing an act of what Bauman and Briggs refer to as decontextualization and recontextualization. Decontextualization is inherently an act of disconnection, which occurs when language is transformed into text and becomes isolated from its “social and cultural contexts of production and reception.”¹⁶ Recontextualization then occurs as a reconnection in a new contextual environment, since texts cannot exist by themselves as an abstract entity without any context, though the texts often bring along with them parts of their old context(s) into their new ones.¹⁷ In the decontextualization and recontextualization of anime, editors apply new meanings while

¹⁵ Ben-Amos, Dan. “Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context” in *The Journal of American Folklore* 84:331, (Jan. - Mar., 1971), p. 13.

¹⁶ Bauman, Richard and Briggs, Charles L., “Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life” in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990), p. 72.

¹⁷ Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 75.

manipulating old ones to explore their own sense of power over texts as well as to express transformative experience.

Within the act of retelling stories, and what contexts they use, the storytelling itself changes, and in so doing, the communication changes. Gary Schmidt (2005) takes Bauman and Ben-Amos' premise of folklore as a means of communication and focuses on the variants of the Jewish folklore, "Gershon's Monster." However, his emphasis on the catalyst of change as a means of communication has important implications for how decontextualization informs narratives:

...any retelling of a story is a participation in a tradition of telling something that has had many different lives. No story is a clay pot, because a clay pot is finished, and once cast, no longer liable to change. But stories do change, and each change emphasizes something different, something unique to each variant. The retelling is an addition to an existing corpus, not an unearthing of an artifact.¹⁸

If storytelling is an act of participation, then the relationship between story and audience is not nearly as passive as one may assume. Not only the stories but storytelling itself is adaptable, and context is vital to understanding the ways stories communicate with audiences. Performance is ever an unfinished product, as it is so heavily involved with movement and communication. Therefore, the relationship between the narrative and the audience is constantly moving, and *what they mean* is based on context. Decontextualizing anime removes them from a passive experience and recontextualizes them in an active and transgressive experience. Applying cut and displaced scenes to narratives chosen by the viewer is an epitome of this transformative relationship where the fixed product as presented on-screen remains adaptable, as parts that can be

¹⁸ Schmidt, Gary D. "Who can tell the story? Gershon's Monster and the Quandaries of retelling." *The Horn Book Magazine* Mar.-Apr. 2005: 153-162. p. 160-61.

rearranged and re-constructed *ad infinitum*. Bauman writes on this mutability in performance:

The point is that completely novel and completely fixed texts represent the poles of an ideal continuum, and that between the poles lies the range of emergent text structures to be found in empirical performance. The study of the factors contributing to the emergent quality of oral literary text promises to bring about a major reconceptualization of the nature of the text, freeing it from the apparent fixity it assumes when abstracted from performance and placed on the written page, and placing it within an analytical context which focuses on the very source of the empirical relationship between art and society.¹⁹

This negotiation between novel and fixed is itself an experience exemplified in the performance of AMV editing. By decontextualizing anime to such a point that the characters and worlds can be appear on the computer (in the case of digital) or VCR (in the case of analog) as images to be manipulated, in a sense one removes the mysticism of their creation, the behind the scene cell production where fans usually do not have access. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Walter Benjamin cites this as a removal of the sacred which allows replication to replace originality as an art form. Art has been subject to replication for centuries, from printing and stamping to lithography to photography, but it is on the hinge of the 20th century when reproduction itself becomes an art form that he iterates erases the sense of time and space in a work of art, what makes its existence unique. In other words, what Benjamin feared was the erasing of context because. Even as early as 1926, anthropologists such as Malinowski elucidate that context gives life to the text - the hour of the day, the season - as well as private ownership.²⁰ The manner in which it is told which has sociable functions and

¹⁹ Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984 (first published 1977). p. 40.

²⁰ Malinowski, Bronislaw, “Myth in Primitive Psychology,” in *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*. New York: 1948 (first published 1926). p. 104.

cultural roles. It is in the transformation in the reproduction of the text, the negotiation between the novel and the original, where context arises.

The audience transforms their situations, that of passive observer, through the performance of interacting with the texts - AMV editing - into one in which the viewer gains admiration for his/her performance skills. Once a viewer has shown successful skill as a performer, building on that control over the text, he/she is able to transform the situation still further. Visualizing this experience in discussing verbal art as performance, Bauman (1977) uses the example of bullying, in which case the bullied takes control of his ridicule by participating, speaking the jokes first; then, once his performance skills have earned him enough admiration, the bullied is able to further turn "humor aggressively against those who had earlier victimized him a manner related to and reminiscent of verbal dueling."²¹ Not to liken the viewing experience to bullying, the manner in which the passive subject is able to assert power over his situation through performance and is then able to transform the situation into a creative, self-expressive outlet is a valuable comparison. In this context, Bauman argues that performance is emergent - taking from Raymond Williams' definition (1972) in which "new meaning and values, new practices, new significances and experiences are continually being created."²² The emergent nature of performance, which creates new, explorative contexts, highlights and makes manifest the capacity for change and transformation. Stories are a constant negotiation, not only between audience and speaker, but between the text, the

²¹ Bauman, 1984 (first published 1977). p. 44.

²² Williams, Raymond, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory" in *New Left Review* 82 (1972), p. 11.

one(s) performing the text, and the observer, who it should be noted, is involved in communal experience - either watching AMVs as a social experience at fan conventions or following a network of hyperlinks on websites like Youtube, where one may eventually find specific forums for AMVs like AnimeMusicVideo.org and AMVNews.ru. Once someone watches one AMV in these contexts, they are highly encouraged to watch more, compare and contrast and evaluate. Part of the social context of the AMV is this negotiation with other members of the community but also, and importantly, the way the performance takes control of the material. Bauman and Briggs (1990) note of this power, “To decontextualize and recontextualize a text is thus an act of control, and in regard to the differential exercise of such control the issue of social power arises.”²³ The difference between the fan as a viewer and the fan as an editor is one of engagement that allows the text to be transformed into a narrative of self-expression.

The repurposing of texts is a vital component of the identity of the editor, the viewer turned performer, as a individual who tells stories with technology. Bauman (1986), while remarking on Ed Bell, a famous storyteller in Texas, notes that context is the “participant’s sense of ‘what it is that is going on here,’” in other words how the situation, the narrative event, is defined.²⁴ Ed Bell’s definition of the narrative event is in his current identity as a recognized, public storyteller; he tells stories “in the manner appropriate to the settings that sustain his identity as a storyteller.”²⁵ The context, more than a matter of situational setting identified in objective terms, is the participant’s sense

²³ Bauman, Richard and Biggs 1990, p. 76.

²⁴ Bauman, 1986. p. 105.

²⁵ Ibid.

of “what it is that is going on here.” Likewise, “what it is that is going on here” with AMV editors deals with more than the objectified terms of sitting in front of a computer. The way technology allows consumers to become participants is part of the identity of many storytellers who decide to create stories by manipulating and editing mass-media-produced materials. The folklorist Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995) notes, “We can no longer sharply separate the technologies of reproduction and transmission from those of production, for the new tools of electronic communication do not conform to the distinction that Marx makes between the artisan and the factory worker.”²⁶ This distinction argues that the factory machine uses the worker and is interchangeable with any form of energy, but the artisan makes use the tool; it becomes an extension of him/her, an object of vernacular cultural production. Folklorist Robert Glenn Howard (2008) also notes, explaining that when the folk “express meaning through new communication technologies, the distinction between folk and mass is... blurred by the vernacular deployment of institutionally produced commercial technologies,” adding that with “online participatory media, the distinction is further blurred because the content that emerges intermingles vernacular, commercial, and institutional interests.”²⁷ This blending of media, and of distinctions in the means of production, informs the identity of editor-storytellers. The narrative event is defined by technology; the transfer of information over the Internet into a global circuit is part of the context of the stories. The editor’s identity

²⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, “From the Paperwork Empire to the Paperless Office: Testing the Limits of the ‘Science of Tradition’” in *Folklore Interpreted: Essays in Honor of Alan Dundes*, ed. Regina Bendix and Rosemary Levy Zumwalt. New York: Garland, 1995. p. 72.

²⁷ Howard, Robert Glenn, “Electronic Hybridity: The Persistent Processes of the Vernacular Web,” in *Journal of American Folklore* 121:480 (2008), p. 194.

is not only that of a fan but also that of an individual enfolded in technology and emboldened by his/her access to it.

Originality has context in technology, in the transformation that occurs when narratives are displaced from entertainment industry and are made to be interactive. Inherently, this transformation questions the authority of originality to be the one author of a text. Building on Bauman and Briggs' performance theory and the means of a story to communicate to its audience, Schmidt asks:

Is the reteller's task one of recovery and preservation? That is, should I as a reteller try to find the very oldest version of a tale, and do everything I can to preserve its authenticity... by replicating as nearly as possible the language, inflections, meanings, assumptions of that story? ...Or should I as a reteller assume that even if such a performance were possible, my audience is no longer the parent culture alone? May I then adapt and change the story so that I might more effectively speak to those new listeners and readers?²⁸

Adaptations and change are made in negotiation with the audience. In preserving an original, the story becomes confined to certain situational context that no longer allows it to grow. The act of recovery also implies that the story as historical artifact takes precedence over the story as channel of communication, that it stands as a static object at a distance from its audience. Mass media, editing technologies, and globalization have created new relationships between audiences and the stories they experience and retell, new contexts that inform the identity of the storyteller and the audience and need to be considered. Communication theorist Marshall McLuhan (1955) notes that "It is the framework which changes with each new technology and not just the picture within the frame,"²⁹ and Frank Rose, in *The Art of Immersion* (2011), notes comprehensively that every new medium has given rise to new form of narrative:

²⁸ Schmidt, Gary D. "Who can tell the story? Gershon's Monster and the Quandaries of retelling." *The Horn Book Magazine* Mar.-Apr. 2005: 153-162. p. 153.

²⁹ McLuhan, Eric and Frank Zingrone, eds. *Essential McLuhan*. New York: Basic Books, 1996. p. 273.

In Europe, the invention of the printing press and movable type around 1450 led to the emergence of periodicals and the novel, and with it a slow but inexorable rise in literacy rates. The invention of the motion picture camera around 1890 set off an era of feverish experimentation that led to the development of feature films by 1910. Television invented around 1925, gave rise a quarter-century later to *I Love Lucy* and the highly stylized form of comedy that became known as the sitcom.³⁰

Even while using older mediums and motifs, technology creates new forms of storytelling and new texts that communicate and create different experiences to its audiences. The novel, the newspaper, the television, the theatre screen are the frames that shape the stories we most readily consume. They create structures on which we, as audience, rely, but that also encourage us to question a single authority that can dictate our experiences to us.

One may see how framework and technology has influenced storytelling the digital age in Henry Jenkins' recounting of a conversation with a screenwriter:

When I first started, you would pitch a story because without a good story, you didn't really have a film. Later, once sequels started to take off, you pitched a character because a good character could support multiple stories. And now, you pitch a world because a world can support multiple characters and multiple stories across multiple media.³¹

As Jenkins notes, storytelling has become more and more an art of world-building, realms that cannot be fully explored or exhausted within a single work or even a single medium but that also encourage the audience to experience the narrative as a world, a space that one not only observes but inhabits and with which he/she can interact. Within this framework, there is more than enough space for amateur storytellers, as in those who are not being paid for their labor, to wriggle inside these expansive environments, especially using the Internet. The Internet itself is inherently participatory. It provides a

³⁰ Rose, Frank. *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue and the Way We Tell Stories*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2011. p. 2.

³¹ Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press, 2006. p. 114.

forum to circulate works that may otherwise gain no or very little recognition, but it also instigates users to comment, to contribute, and collaborate. Rose iterates, “The Internet is a chameleon. It is the first medium that can act like all media - it can be text, or audio, or video, or all of the above.”³² This transformative ability allows consumers a new arena to become participants of the stories they want to explore.

In conclusion, the performance of these decontextualized materials is inherently transformative, allowing the emergence of an expressive form of narrative. My study on AMVs looks into storytelling performances that take commodified products like anime, which originate in Japan for Japanese audiences but have become globalized and create personal and community narratives. This act wrests control of materials we generally view as fixed, allowing individuals to ability to recontextualize their experiences with the text as well as with technology, to express isolation and connectivity as well as display how audiences experience interactive involvements with mass-media texts and stories. When the World Wide Web first took off, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes, “electronic communication offers an opportunity to rethink folklore’s disciplinary givens and to envision a fully contemporary subject. It is not a matter of finding analogues between the paperless office and the paperwork empire. The differences are consequential.”³³ She continues, “It is tempting to naturalize the new medium in terms of ideas familiar from the face-to-face world, but that, in my view, would reinstate folklore’s canonical subject, not challenge it, which requires taking seriously the condition of disembodied presence

³² Rose, 2011. p. 2.

³³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995. p. 73.

and immateriality of place, fluid membership and ephemeral existence.”³⁴ Electronic communication is a transformed communication with new cultural contexts and meanings. Studying the way audiences use decontextualized materials to communicate is not game of parallels and analogues but an in-depth look at communication in the digital age and the socialization of media. When the frame itself, not just the picture, has changed, our interactions with the picture have changed and our means of communicating with these forms has changed. With the performance of retelling, repurposing, and remaking mass media narratives, editors reveal intricate relationships with the original text, as well as with the technology used to dissect and transform their “consumed” products. The event of this process of storytelling and message-making, closely interactive with technology, is a distinct form of communication.

³⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995. p. 73.

CHAPTER III

MAKING STRUCTURE: TECHNOLOGY SHAPES

THE “STORY OF ONE’S STORY”

As storytelling becomes more and more an art of world-building, fans find more inspiration to step into those worlds that intrigue them, and technology allows them ever-growing capabilities to transform those worlds and themselves from observers to actors. This interactive engagement with the text allows them to seek new connections with materials but also with themselves and the power of performing transformative works. The technology is not isolated from this experience. When editors decontextualize the materials the media presents to them to tell their own stories, the editing technology they use provides not only a vehicle for expression but is also an active agent in what they say. The shape or frame that editors use to transform commodities into a means of self-expression is important. Technology has become a vital part of the way people communicate, and I argue that technology not only circulates these stories but participates in their performance in such a way that shapes the stories produced in AMVs. Digital anthropologist, Frank Rose (2011), writes:

For most the 20th century, there were two distinct modes of storytelling: the personal and the professional. The stories we told informally - on the phone, at home, at work - existed in an entirely different realm from the professionally produced narratives on TV and at the movies. But where once there was a divide, now there's a blur. Blogger, Flickr, Youtube, Twitter - each of them encourages us to express ourselves in a way that's neither slickly professional nor purely off-the-cuff.³⁵

He argues that the Internet connects the user to a side of storytelling that is focused on the links forged with audience. The balance between personal and professional as degrees on

³⁵ Rose, Frank. *The Art of Immersion: How the Digital Generation is Remaking Hollywood, Madison Avenue and the Way We Tell Stories*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2011. p. 205-06.

opposites ends of a spectrum no longer holds true, and one can see this experience in AMV-making, where the professionally-produced product is unraveled and examined as material that can produce personal narratives and meanings. Using Bateson's theory of frames in "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" (1955), Bauman (1977) writes that "it is characteristic of communicative interaction that it include a range of explicit or implicit messages which carry instructions on how to interpret the other message(s) being communicated."³⁶ This instructional framework is metacommunicative; it intrudes on the text: "Every communication has a content *and* a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore metacommunication."³⁷ When the performance setting intrudes on the narration itself, this is metanarration, essentially "the story of one's story"³⁸

The story of one's story is shaped by technology and influences the narrative in profound ways. In this chapter, I look at the technical aspects of editing equipment and how digital editing technologies, and easier access to them, change patterns of storytelling in AMVs. The cross-cutting of editing creates a layer to the text, separate but integral to the layers provided by the song and the anime footage, that allows AMVs to explore a form of storytelling distinct to editing. By changing *how* stories could be made, the shift to digital editing equipment transforms *what* editors are able to say with their

³⁶ Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984 (first published 1977). p. 15.

³⁷ Watzlawick, Paul, Beevin, Janet Helmick and Don D. Jackson. *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes*. New York: Norton, 1967. p. 54.

³⁸ Term taken from Barbara Babcock's "The Story in the Story: Metanarration in Folk Narrative," a supplemental essay in *Verbal Art as Performance*. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984 (first published 1977).)

materials. The structure of the storytelling method shows each component's relation to the other, how their involvement with one another creates a context for communication. The availability of tools effects genre, the composition of the narrative, as seen when comparing the analog linear method that was popular when AMVs first started appearing at anime conventions in the early 1990s with the digital nonlinear method that took shape in the 2000s. Special effects and the intrusiveness of digital editing have great impacts on narration and the viewing experience. In addition, the viewing experience creates trends in narratives submitted for contests. The way audiences encounter the text influences its evaluation and therefore what types of AMVs are created for submission. By comparing the evolution of AMV contests in anime conventions in the United States with online contests hosted by AMV News, a Russian site, I show that, as Bauman notes, "Performance involves on the part of the performer an assumption of accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential treatment."³⁹ The performer does more than reference and must, in the effort to communicate, build a structure that captivates the audience in some remarkable way. A community of technologies provides a story, a self-referential framework, that informs the stories of AMV editing.

The Analog Editing Story

Vlad Pohnert, a prominent member of the AMV editing community and the host of several AMV contests in North America, notes how editing equipment influences genres of storytelling in AMVs.⁴⁰ He remarks that up to the late 1990s, almost all AMV

³⁹ Bauman 1984 (first published 1977), p. 11.

⁴⁰ Pohnert, Vlad. "Re: AMV Research Questions." Message to author. 31 Oct. 2015.

editors used an analog linear method to edit scenes from anime to selected songs. Almost all AMVs were made using two videotape machines or a laser disc player connected to a videotape machine. Editors could then time stamp and cut footage together. However, this method did not allow editors to cut nonlinearly. In other words, Editors could not start two-fifths into a song unless that section of the song is meant to be the beginning of the AMV. The fan-created videos could be carefully planned with segments of music that emphasized or parodied the heightened emotions of particular scenes but the videos themselves are entirely comprised of straight cuts. In addition, analog linear editing allows for no special effects. The footage could be cut but the images inside the shot could not be manipulated. Pohnert notes that although AMV editors were able to create a wide variety of videos ranging from action to comedy to drama, the majority of the videos made in the 90s were drama:

In order to make a good Drama AMV using the linear Analog Method, it meant much more careful planning of scene selections. This in turn gave rise to much more emphasis on story telling as if you were going to make a straight cut AMVs, the only substance that would make it stand out is a solid concept and a good story.⁴¹

Pohnert points to Marc Hariston's video "Captain Nemo" (1995) done to Sarah Brightman's "Captain Nemo," using footage from *Nadia: Secret of the Blue Water* (*Fushigi no Umi no Nadia*, premiered 1991), a video no longer in circulation but was popular for its epic portrayal of the emotions of the series.

Many AMVs, such as "Captain Nemo," have been lost to time, but AnimeMusicVideos.org, in addition to creating a forum of dialogue for the editing community, has preserved AMVs reaching back to the nineties. While Hariston's video

⁴¹ Pohnert, Vlad. "Re: AMV Research Questions." Message to author. 31 Oct. 2015.

cannot be found and viewed, it does however exist in memory on the forum, when members call for a page dedicated to classic AMVs, and Pohnert continues to keep such videos alive. In 2008, he hosted a “History of AMVs” panel at Sakura Con that iterated the “eras of AMV” from VCR to digital editing and that showcased early AMV, including the first, James Kaposzta’s “Love is all You Need,” using footage from *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū Senkan Yamato*, premiered 1974 on Yomiuri TV) to the Beatles’ “All You Need is Love” in 1982.⁴² While Pohnert notes that digital editing has “exploded” what can be done in AMVs, he finds it ironic that some of the best videos are still those that are simple cuts and fades that focus on characters or storytelling.⁴³ For example, the editor PieandBeer won at Anime Expo 2015 in Paris and was first place in Drama at Sakura Con 2015 for “Levity,” a touching retelling of the story in the movie *When the Wind Rises* (*Kaze Tachinu*, which premiered 2013) using Kodakline’s “All I Want.”⁴⁴ Dragonrider1227 won MomoCon 2015 Judges Choice and Oni-Con XII Epic Drama, as well as was a finalist in categories at no less than five other convention contests for “A boy in funny red boots,” using “Superman (It’s not easy)” by Five for Fighting, and footage from the 2003 TV remake of *Astro Boy*.⁴⁵

Both “Levity” and “A boy in funny red boots,” made within the last two years and applauded by both judges and audiences, use the classic, simple cuts and fades that

⁴² “AMV Eras” thread page <http://www.animemusicvideos.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=87465&hilit=Marc+Hariston#p1116691>, accessed 2016/02/09

⁴³ Pohnert, Vlad. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 22 Nov. 2015.

⁴⁴ PieandBeer, “Levity,” 2015. <http://amvnews.ru/index.php?go=Files&in=view&id=6221>. Web. 28 February 2016.

⁴⁵ Dragonrider1227, “A boy in funny red boots,” 2015. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=195861. Web. 28 February 2016.

Pohnert emphasizes; this type of nonintrusive editing allows for greater focus on character and story development. The stories in these AMV focus on an aspect of the narrative from the original anime, highlighting part of the story or giving the audience a glimpse into the entire story. The music, and the images connection to it, allows the viewer to feel emotionally charged. “Levity” summarizes the narrative of its movie source, allowing the sectional divisions of the song to narrate the dramatic sections in the story. It transforms the movie into an emotional experience, either prompting viewers who have not seen the movie to want to watch it or provoking nostalgia in the viewers who have seen it. Likewise, “A boy in funny red boots” focuses on an aspect of the original story, using the song to highlight the drama involved in the main character’s situation. However, the song also creates connections between Astro Boy and Superman, comparing Astro Boy’s red boots to Superman’s red cape to demonstrate the difficulties of the character’s life, his abandonment by his father and his salvation in fighting crime and saving people. The impact of the editing in both these videos is performed mostly through scene selection, which negotiates with the visceral elements in the music and the allusions to narrative in the lyrics. Though both these videos use digital nonlinear editing, they use the same storytelling structure as defined by analog linear editing and provide deeper emotional impact.

Pohnert notes that the real difference now, with digital editing, is that is easier to make the video flow smoother with the music and that the quality of the image has improved. It is not unusual for videos with better resolution to win out in contests over videos that use low-resolution images but have superb storylines. This smoother

transition between shots is on the account of scrubbing, a term usually used in reference to audio editing - an action in nonlinear editing where the editors manipulates the edit point (the cursor or playhead) along the displayed timeline. Digital editors can repeatedly replay the movement in the shot play until the music aligns with the action. Scrubbing allow a great intimacy with the text. No long part of a large fabric, shots can be cut down to thread, the texture manipulated with increasing detail.

The Digital Technology Story

While digital technology certainly allows for greater precision in matching image with sound, to a partnership in rhythm, precision is not the only value that editors explore with digital technology. An editor's relationship with technology, as a storyteller, reflects the experience of the audience, who are connected by technologies to form communities. In its origins, AMV editing is incredibly social. Fans would claim a room together with their VCRs and assorted footages and spend hours laboring as a group - planning, cutting, and stitching the product together. Videos played for fan parties then began to play at anime conventions in front of audiences, transforming from a novelty to an event. Demand and fascination grew in this context until myriad of contests began to form to answer this community.

One such contest, which exemplifies technology as a social bond, is Iron Editor, modeled off of Iron Chef competitions, which started in 2000 at Anime Weekend Atlanta (AWA).⁴⁶ Two editors are given two hours to go head to head with footage while the audience is entertained by other AMVs. The competitors bring their own song and know

⁴⁶ Pohnert, Vlad. "Re: AMV Research Questions." Message to author. 09 Dec. 2015.

four and five anime sources, given a fifth ‘secret ingredient’ before they start editing. Iron Editor has since expanded to Otakon, Acen, and Sakura Con as well as has inspired similar events at other conventions and online tournaments, creating a new type of AMV production that makes a game of editing with time constraints. In 2014, Iron Editor experimented with AWA’s theme “Man vs Machine.” In addition to the two editors, the hosts employed a laptop with software that cut random scenes together to music to create a video for the competition. The machine was nicknamed Toby, and during the event, the host Omar Jenkins decided to type phrases into his phone and play back in a machine-like tone to act like Toby was speaking.⁴⁷ It gave the machine a personality to the extent that the audience was chanting, “Toby! Toby!” during the competition.

The humans won, but the interactions with the technologies present at the event reveal intriguing relationships that audiences, and editors, have with machines. The event is evidence that technology is more than a tool; it is a means of communication and engagement. The element of play in such events as Iron Editor reveal how editors are not satisfied using technology like an appliance, as merely scalpels to enhance the quality of their work. They seek more and more engagement. In addition to the limitless hours that editors spend as audiences, it should be noted that some editors spend hundreds of hours crafting their videos. Digital technology has lessened the time needed to edit videos in some cases but increased it in others, as the options available to editors becomes more varied, the techniques less straight forward.

⁴⁷ Pohnert, Vlad. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 09 Dec. 2015.

The availability of digital methods of editing also allows editors to more readily experiment with cross-cutting as an act of storytelling. There are three layers of time to consider in AMVs: 1) the time in the movements within the shot, made by the original animators, 2) time as it exists in the song, which may be the beat and/or the meter, and 3) the timing of the cuts which is created entirely by the editor and should allow the story to flow. Without these cuts, the images from the original footage progress too slowly and too independent from the chosen music. The cuts should act as glue to bind the two together, but the cut also may create dramatic effect and participate in the evolution of emotion in the narrative. The cut itself is part of the performance as a means of communication in the video. One example is the AMV “Vessels” made by Gorz. The AMV uses footage from one anime, *Beyond the Boundary* (*Kyōkai no Kanata*, premiered 2013), and uses a section of Glitch Mob’s song, “Can’t Kill Us.”⁴⁸ “Vessels” captures a distilled part of the anime’s original storyline, focusing on the violent fight scenes in the show. The cuts wed the images in the shots with the music but also amplify the anxieties present in the *Beyond the Boundary* and “Can’t Kill Us.” The narrative in “Vessels” is one less concerned with characters and plot as it is with creation a journey of emotion, with the cuts acting as impetus for a dramatic evolution.

The cuts in “Vessels” work intimately with the meter of the song and the actions in the shots of the anime. In the first 30 seconds, the cuts land on eight or quarter notes. Then, when the snare drum and singer enter the song, the cuts become routine, always hitting the eighth note. Here, Gorz creates a buildup of dramatic tension in the music. The

⁴⁸ Gorz, “Vessels,” 2014. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=197368. Web. 27 February 2016.

shots from the anime are in themselves calm, with minimal movement, but all contain some suspenseful element - hair lifting in response to an approaching windstorm or gazes widening in dread. The action in the shots becomes more foreboding - bloodied hands, cruel smirks - even though the cuts are still metered. The meter and cuts have created a pattern which acts as a foundation against which the audience can brace themselves. Meanwhile, the images and scenes create a sense of impending doom. The AMV gains momentum as the shots progress into running sequences - shots from the inside a train carriage, the camera barreling through car doors. With these fast movements, the snare ramps from fourth to eighths to sixteenths to 32nd notes. The escalating energy has built up inside us as we've watched, and we anticipate release.

At the end of the tunnel, the image contorts into an explosion at the same time the music "drops," the percussion falls away and proceeds into a heavier thunder-like bass. In the song, the synthesizer blares a discordant half-note and the instruments begin a new, dramatic rhythm, drawn out and screeching. The shots that appear are those in which the lines of animation lose their form, becoming monstrous. The creatures are amorphous; glass breaks; brightly colored barriers explode; clouds of dust and radiance blur the shot. It is important to note that the cuts have also changed to accommodate this parade of aural and visual mayhem. They too lose form in that they become loose and sporadic. Sometimes the cuts sync with the drawn out cadence of the whining instruments. For example, a series of violent sword arcs are 'heard' in three blasts of the synthesizer. In another example, a high-pitched synthesizer, notably referred to as a saw, sounds out a chainsaw in the shot. During this section, like the cuts, the downbeats in the song are

syncopated, not on the meter. Towards the end of the video, when the violence comes to a tumultuous end, the characters are suspended above an inverted world. It is at this moment that the bass finds the meter; the character return to stillness; the cuts become more spaced. We have reached climax and the audience can now relax. In this video, the cuts are an integral part of the story: the dread in the first part, dissolution in the second, and survival at the end. Because the characters were often interchanged and the motivations for the violence left to the imagination of the viewer (or perhaps those who have seen the anime and know its story), the narrative is less one in a traditional, Aristotelian sense, which maintains that a story is defined by character evolution, and more like a narrative that relies on psychological progression. In the beginning, we are faced with a destructive force. In the middle, we are torn asunder. Yet, in the end, we endure. It is technology's engagement with the text, the weaving of the materials, that communicates with the viewer and gives the narrative its impact.

The Contest Story

The choice of what narratives to employ in the AMV may also rely on how the audience engages with the text. In order to see how older AMVs, meaning AMVs no younger than five years old, compared with newer AMVs, I hosted an AMV Contest Night for Alisa Freedman's "Digital Age Stories" class (17 November 2015). The comments from voters after the contest reveal how their expectations, how they thought the text should engage with them, influenced their evaluation of the videos. Typically, in contests in the United States, that year's AMV submissions are viewed by a panel of judges, who rank the AMV in separate categories. Then, the highest ranked videos

premiere at the anime convention where the contest is hosted, and the audience casts votes on ballots. In contrast, I handpicked the videos for AMV Night. I choose 26 AMVs in seven popular categories from convention contests in the United States. In order to compare see how older AMV compared to newer AMVs, I had chosen AMVs that had won in a contest category or ranked highly in the online Russian contests over the recent two years, with the exception of one AMV in each category, which had either never been submitted to a contest or had won in a year previous to 2010. A total of 15 people voted, who did not know which videos were older. In four categories, the newer AMVs won by a slim margin. In two categories, the newer AMVs had overwhelming votes. But, the Rhythm and Dance category, statistically the most flashy category, “Hold Me Now” a 2009 AMV by an Italian editor, alkampfer, won in a landslide vote over AMVs with more heavy-handed and spectacular editing styles.⁴⁹

When I asked the voters why they chose “Hold Me Now,” some admitted that they chose the AMV for nostalgic purposes while others admitted to a preference to the genre of anime in the AMV. However, most referred, even if vaguely, to the technical aspects of the AMVs as their reason for voting the way they did, specifically the way the other AMVs, while impressive, lacked heart or unity.

The other three videos certainly look more impressive on the surface level of gloss and polish where they emphasize/foreground/show off how much effort they take to assemble. The level of technical skill required for these videos is evident. They certainly require the most editing, or at least they're concerned with presenting it as such. *But most editing does not necessarily equal best editing...*with these rhythm videos, *the visual and sonic overloads*. With so many, it seems like almost a sort of game to identify images. I wasn't familiar with well more than half of the series used in the first three videos. Occasionally something I knew or was a fan of would pop up. At first, I'd have a satisfying moment of recognition, as if sharing insider knowledge or scoring a point in the AMV creator's game. But that was fleeting and often gave way to frustration over the

⁴⁹ alkampfer, “Hold Me Now” 2009. “The Best AMVs of All Time,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkHH3qysXbA>. Web. 28 February 2016.

fact that it was so thoroughly decontextualized to an end I'm not sure I understood or cared for.. (italics mine)⁵⁰

The editing style of the other videos overloaded the viewer. The viewer did not find what he/she refers to as “a sort of game to identify images” engaging over the story provided in “Hold Me Now,” which only uses footage from *Princess Tutu* (*Purinsesu Chuchu*, premiered 2002). Another voter praises the fluid transition of shots to music. However, he/she also notes of the other three AMVs that “[their] effort is acknowledged, but it felt like more of a way to show off the skills that they had versus actually using the medium to tell a story.”⁵¹ A majority of the informants cited storytelling as a means of judging the material, though it should be noted that the pool of voters may be biased; they all attend a class titled “Digital Age Stories” and watched the videos in this context.

It was through judging the 2015 Anime Expo AMV contest in May of 2015 that I personally began to notice how storytelling conceptualized my level of engagement with the AMVs. Those AMVs that displayed impressive technical skill while enjoyable did not “grip me” the same way AMVs that employed a story in the concept did, though this should also be considered as my bias as an ethnographer interested in storytelling. However, after watching some 500 videos, I began to rely on storytelling to capture my interest among an inundation of images. On his experience in judging, editor DeMoss notes:

And then of course, there's also the situation where the AMV creator who wants to stay ahead of the game will just latch onto the latest show that is hot right now so that he can get that visceral response from the audience when it comes on and get that much more of a boost in the voting... Whatever anime is hot that month, or the last three or four months,

⁵⁰ Sabra Harris. “Calling to Anyone who voted on AMV night,” *410/510: Digital Age Stories*. Mightybell, 30 Nov. 2015.

⁵¹ Sabra Harris. “Calling to Anyone who voted on AMV night,” *410/510: Digital Age Stories*. Mightybell, 30 Nov. 2015.

will get an excessive number of videos made to it. And then after a while it gets pretty tiring to see the same footage over and over again just with a different song.⁵²

As he notes later in the interview, when the judging starts to become an endurance trail, it effects evaluation. These contests are highly responsible for the type of videos produced. They provide a forum for distributing work, but they also provide a place for community, where editors from different places all over the country and sometimes even across the world talk about their experiences and their work. Editors influence each other. Kevin Caldwell's pioneering work on lipsyncing inspired Brad DeMoss who foregrounded the mash-up of anime with film trailers. AMVs are not produced in a vacuum but come into being from conversations outside of their own stories, because of communication, not only with the original text but with the audience and with their colleagues.

As conventions built steam in the United States, AMVs as a performative event took shape. The first AMVs were made in response to social situations - an aesthetic need at fan conventions or an amicable interest in the art among colleagues. AMVs were born out of the fan-vidding at Star Trek conventions of the 1970s and originally were not limited to anime. German and French animations often found their way into these videos simply because their creators were fans of them.⁵³ Only when anime conventions started to take hold in the United States were these fan editors asked to submit videos and the videos therefore became exclusively *anime* music videos. As more videos were submitted, these contests slowly developed more categories to organize and balance the increasing number of submissions as well as rules of what type of animation footage

⁵² Bertschy, Zac. "ANNCast: Brad Behavior," 09 September 2012, animenewsnetwork.com, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/anncast/2012-09-14> accessed 6 December 2015.

⁵³ DeMoss, Brad. Zac Bertschy. "ANNCast: Brad Behavior," 09 September 2012, animenewsnetwork.com, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/anncast/2012-09-14>. Web 06 December 2015.

could be used. Unofficial practice for editors to exclusively use anime footage became an official and enforced regulation. To participate in the community, editors had to acknowledge these rules, though Youtube remains a forum where editors can circulate work that does not qualify in official contests but can still be appreciated and commented on.

The trend of AMVs typically selected in North American anime contests is notably different than the AMVs that win contests in Russian online sites like AMV News and Akross Con. The AMV hobby has roots in North America and was fully established before it started to show up in Europe. While European editors were influenced by American editors at the time when it began to cross countries, Europeans, especially Russians, took the concept and developed two main characteristics, which are now starting to bleed into editing trends in the United States. AMV editors from Europe first tended to be a lot more technically artistic and second develop stories that were for the most part dark and even depressing, focusing on failed romances and even tragedies. Pohnert notes, “I think one of the big reasons for this [difference] is that in America almost every convention has an AMV contest so many make AMVs to compete in contests so they try to wow the audience a lot more, while in Russia there is only a few contests so editors tend to make videos more on self-expression.”⁵⁴ The evolution of Russian and North American contests has certainly influenced the orientation of narratives in AMVs, but in addition to Pohnert’s suggestion of quantity, I argue that the

⁵⁴ Pohnert, Vlad. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 22 Nov. 2015.

structure of the contests themselves effects the storytelling. Contests are a metanarration, a situational setting that intrudes on the stories being produced in the videos.

The structure of contests on Russian online forums encourages a certain involvement with the text that is different than the structure of contests at conventions. First, the way that AMVs are displayed on the Russian sites is fundamentally different than the way AMVs are displayed at conventions in the United States. US AMV contests arrange AMVs by category or genre while the Russian sites (as well as other European contests such as AMV France in Paris) use a ranking system. The categories themselves evolved in North American contests based on AMV submissions, but the system created a circular effect where more AMVs were produced based on category options. Editors created videos with the concept of category, or genre, in mind and this focus encouraged editors to look at anime in terms of unraveling footage that allows that chosen aspect of the show to flourish in the video, much like distilling an “essence” from the show to instill in the video. Though it should be noted that not all editors can be generalized by this distinction, it is this concentrated essence around which a large number of editors who submit work to American contests base their stories.

In addition to the formation of categories, this emphasis on capturing an essence may also in part be because of the large emphasis on audience participation in the United States, which revitalized AMV editing in the 1990s. AMVs in the United States have become extremely audience conscious. This leads to “audience pandering” in some cases, where editors will intentionally choose songs and anime that are crowd favorites, leading to more votes and general popularity. The contests are held in large rooms, and in fact,

the contest at Sakura Con has gotten so big as to take up the ballroom where the rave is held. As I noted previously, judges will have ranked the submission beforehand, and those that amass the highest average rank will premier in front of the audience, who are armed with ballots. They will vote for one AMV in each category after viewing them once. Because of this layout, those AMVs that manage to capture that emotional essence of an anime communicate to the audience a little easier than AMVs that use more obscure footage.

In contrast, the online contests in Europe are a little more closed-door, and judges, who must watch the AMVs with obsessive repetition, rank them without the same type of audience participation. These judges are not a mass of curious fans who wander into the auditorium at an anime convention, but people who are required to sit, think about, and evaluate the text on their screen based on their own intimate knowledge of editing. This provides a different context for the stories and produces a different trend of stories. AMVs submitted to the contests on AMV News generally use more experimental narratives and are not so strictly bound to genre, or the categories that are so fundamental to contests in the United States.

It should be noted however that contests does not define an AMVs ability to produce stories. “Animegraphy 2013”⁵⁵ by qyll is an ideal AMV immortalized on Youtube playlists, never submitted to a contest but that shows how one can engage with the text with an underlining story that does not have characters or plot, not even from the original anime as in the case of “Vessels.” Using 209 anime sources and three different

⁵⁵ qyll, “Animegraphy 2013,” 2013. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=193862. Web. 27 February 2016.

songs, the AMV captures the history of anime by first positioning us in 1963, where we watch Osamu's Astro Boy clank across the black and white screen. We listen to his father, the original English dubbed dialogue that christens Astro Boy's story as a hero: "From this day on, you live with me in my house, understand?... And I'm going to be a good father to you, to my son. I'm going to teach you how to fly, how to swim oceans, how to leap over mountains, how to be the bravest boy in the whole world. I'll be proud of you, son." From Osamu, considered the grandfather of anime, Astro Boy's story becomes an allusion for the progression of anime, or more specifically, an homage to the experiences valued by its audience. The video jumps to 2013 and uses 209 titles released from that year to explore the ways that anime's storytelling has evolved without abandoning Osamu's grand promise of brave exploration - to fly and swim and leap over mountains. The audience is subsumed in this text and becomes proud, not of anime's accomplishments as an industry but in the myriad of ways we may have admired and engaged with this text. Because the narrative is so free-floating, jumping from text to text, the viewer is able to insinuate herself into the family of texts, reading the experience as an overarching one rather than a singular event. The audience is able to feel as if it has become part of a history.

"Animegraphy 2013" is a prime example of a crossover. Crossover videos started in the early 2000s. E-ko's "Tainted Donuts" that premiered at Anime Expo in 2001 is one of the first videos that took two anime and made a completely original, comical- and action-based story. The video, "a joyful pain to edit," the creator remarks,⁵⁶ took the

⁵⁶ http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=423, Web. 10 Feb. 2016.

premise of bounty hunters from *Cowboy Bebop* (*Kaubōi Bibappu*, premiered 1998) and set them to chase the characters from *Trigun* (*Toraigan*, premiered 1998). The video had a large impact on its audience and influenced many more crossover videos, but the scenes themselves are still largely straight forward cuts, made to appear like the characters are interacting. Editing software now makes it possible for editors to remove characters from their original scenes and place them side by side on this ever expanding theatre. “Animegraphy 2013” does not quite achieve this effect because the actors in the video are not meant to be speaking to each other, but to the viewer. The video is abstract in this regard but still exemplifies technology as a place where texts can combine to form a narrative. Some editors use this interactive space to build a bricolage of material to express scorned romances or deep psychological tragedies. A story may be told inside the narration, using characters decontextualized and pried from their origins and re-inserted inside the editor’s plot, but this act of isolation and reorientation is itself valuable as a means of context and communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the metanarratives of analog editing, digital technologies, and contests provides a framework where stories take shape. *How* stories are told effect *what* they say. The early AMVs of analog editing were created with close referential attachments. Without the business of special effects, their narratives often explored deep, emotional bonds with the texts. Even editing from the past year has continued to use the straight cuts and simple fades of the analog linear method to communicate with straightforward plots. The audience, experiencing the new connections that the editor

makes with these deftly selected scenes and music, feels a deeper bond with the text. Then, as digital technologies allow editing to intrude more inside the products that fans enjoy, editors become more exploratory. The software becomes easier to manipulate (and easier to purchase) and editors experiment with the limits of what their technology will allow them to say. This deeper manipulation of the text allows technical skill to gain more and more prominence, and storytelling becomes less straightforward. How narratives are expressed in these technologies is explored in my later chapters. Narratives become increasingly less referential, the performance of technical skill becoming an emerging method of communication that treats the text as more corrosive, more liable to change, and more liable to be attached to meanings outside of its original story and context.

CHAPTER IV

VIEWER-TO-USER: APPROPRIATING MASS CULTURE AND PROVIDING NEW ASSOCIATIONS FOR INTERPRETATION

The links made between the signifiers of mass culture and the editor's original contributions to the AMV text does not reside solely in the remixed video. In Gadamer's work on art and spectatorship in *Truth and Method* (1960), he devalues the conceptualization of artwork as a static object, whose essence is hidden inside of it, and the spectator as a subject who watches from a distance and who has no affect on the essence of the work.⁵⁷ He argues that the spectator plays a crucial interpretive role in what the meaning of the artwork is. Monica Vilhauer writes concerning Gadamer's work, "Art then must be understood not as a 'thing' that exists independently of any audience, but as a part of an event in which meaning is communicated and a shared understanding is reached."⁵⁸ Likewise, Tisha Turk's work on fanvidding exemplifies the remixed video as a text that supplies pieces but that the audience must collaborate - negotiate with the given materials - for the video to work the way it was designed to. While the video may still be interesting, engaging, and effective, without this collaboration, it will be, in a very real sense, a different viewing experience and therefore a different video. "A vid's meanings, then," Turk writes, "are never located solely within the vid itself, but rather in the interaction between the vid, the source, and the viewer: meanings emerge and are

⁵⁷ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by J. Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. 2nd revised edition (first published 1960). London: Continuum, 2004. p. 103.

⁵⁸ Vilhauer, Monica. *Gadamer's Ethics of Play: Hermeneutics and the Other*. Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2010. p. 32.

negotiated by the vidwatcher in the gap (whether wide or narrow) between the original narrative and the vid's new narrative."⁵⁹ So, it is the collaboration of viewers that allows the collaboration between texts to make sense, to have meaning. The performance inside the videos, the stories they tell, navigate the space within the gap between the original narrative and the editor's new narrative. As Rabinowitz (1987) notes, prior knowledge of the conventions of the materials used shape our evaluations of the text,⁶⁰ but they also shape our interpretation of it.

While exploring new, transformative narratives, editors use conventions, or what we expect from specific media, in a multitude of ways, allowing audience to negotiate with the significance of materials. Turk places songs as the crucial element in the construction of meaning in the video because the song is the most obvious discursive element. The lyrics and the beat are vital in the construction of the video and a prevalent component that transforms the original narrative. The song and the anime were independent prior to the connections spun by the editor. The audience navigates these webs of new associations. However, technology itself is also something inherent to the video and that transforms the narrative that the audience must navigate to give the text meaning. In digital editing, special effects can create associations between the original narrative event and different types of media. The computer screen is something like a crafting board in this context. Over the images from the original anime, editors can position items with different cultural signifiers, like the frame of a polaroid, sections of

⁵⁹ Turk, Tisha, "Your Own Imagination (Vidding and Vidwatching as Collaborative)" in *Film & Film Culture* 5 (2010), p. 94.

⁶⁰ Rabinowitz, Peter J. *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987. p 3.

newsprint, books, transistor televisions, etc. These items create new associations between the original text and what these items signify.

In addition, digital technology itself has a presence that transforms the stories. Many videos explore the ways interacting with digital technologies have become social events. We are currently navigating the conventions of digital media, what they mean to us, how they effect us. Editors can share their interpretations of digital media as a platform and a space that allows them to interact with mass culture in new and creative ways, to manipulate stories *in the same media that they are produced*, blurring the lines between the professional (the mass) and the personal (the folk). The digital presences in AMVs show how media are interlinked and how in navigating these spaces, we become linked to other communities and people. When viewers appropriate mass culture and use it to express themselves, they provide new associations between divergent, commodified texts for the audience to interpret. This interpretation is transformative, and producing meaning is a collaborative effort.

Special Effects

As I exemplify in “Boy in the funny red boots” and “Levity” in Chapter III, straight cuts and simple fade-outs can allow the editors to foreground the progression of emotion and story development. Special effects can complicate the images and the sequence of events to such an extent that the story dissolves for the sake of visual appeal. However, special effects can also bring to the fore new signifiers and new ways of interpreting the text. Editors can create associations between the original narrative event and the narrative experience of these signifiers. The editor Shin, in “Ivy Bridges,” which

won Project Org Editor on AnimeMusicVideos.org and Best Sentimental and Best Technical at Anime Weekend Atlanta (AWA) 2012, uses a special effect that treats the text as a photo album.⁶¹ The photo album itself has narrative function, conventions that the audience refers in order to read the video. It transforms its anime source through this metanarration. Likewise, “Drawn Dream” by SilentMan, which won Best Video, Best Romance, Best Concept, and second place in Best Design of Visual Effects at the online Russian contest Akross Con 2010, uses a special effects filter that allows the anime source to be displayed as pencil sketches.⁶² By replicating the features of different media, the editor creates a reference that calls attention to new messages, new associations that allow for transformative viewing experiences. Rather than allowing the media to sink into the background of the story, they call these texts to the fore, as interpretive devices that impact the narration.

Special effects can provided a visual experience that mirrors the main character’s emotions in a way similar to music. Music provides an indicator for what the audience should expect from the video - whether we should be excited, filled with anticipation, relaxed and ready to be comforted, or invigorated. Even though special effects literally disrupt the shot, the viewer is able to interpret the disruption as part of the narrative performance. However, despite this obvious visual distortion, special effects can enhance the emotions of the characters, and thereby allow viewers a greater connection to what the editors design the characters to be experiencing, much like music allows us as

⁶¹ Shin, “Ivy Bridge,” 2012. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=189461. Web. 27 February 2016.

⁶² SilentMan, “Drawn Dream,” 2010. <http://amvnews.ru/index.php?go=Files&in=view&id=2895>. Web. 27 February 2016.

audience shortcuts into the narration without being explicitly told what we are meant to be experiencing.

“Ivy Bridges” presents like a series of splayed photographs. Uses the song “Little Wonders” by Rob Thomas, the AMV retells the story from the anime *Bunny Drop* (*Usagi Doroppu*, premiered 2011): when no one wants her, a young girl is taken in by a distant male relative. The scenes are displayed inside polaroids, though the actions are not confined to them and run from one photo and into the next. Occasionally, titles appeared scrawled in marker on the frame, which we learn belongs to her adoptive father. For example, “My resolve” is written underneath the photograph which captures the scene in the anime where the man decides to adopt her. “Little Wonders,” a sweet, lighthearted song produced by Disney, provides more emotional force than clear narration. The AMV does not always use photography to frame the scenes, but at the final fade-out, we see the man close an album titled “Memories,” which leads us to believe that the entire narrative event, performed by the editor, is taken from the album.

The album is memorabilia and signifying a sense of sentimentality and nostalgia. It is interesting to note that even the concept for the video is nostalgic, as it was originally made for a challenge in which editors take the song from the editors’ first AMV and remake/redo/reimagine the AMV.⁶³ The photo album as an item of memorabilia immediately summons a sense of nostalgia that is often associated with childhood, which aids in the video’s narration. While the anime positions a space where family is created, the song provides a sense of wonder, and the special effects relate the text to the personal

⁶³ “Video Information: Ivy Bridges,” http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=189461, Web. 13 Feb. 2016. Made for the final round of Project Org Editor, an online competition only for registered members of AnimeMusicVideos.org.

experience of memory collection. Photo albums are ubiquitous enough to reference our own personal relationships to them - the album that sits in *my* grandmother's house or the album that *my* mom created. "Ivy Bridges" uses that association as a vehicle for the story but also as a link that transitions a mass experience to a folk one. This interpretation is entirely the impetus of the editor and the audience. Neither the original anime or the song shows or speaks about albums. The album displayed in the final shot of the AMV is in fact the girl's kindergarten journal specifically repurposed by the editor. The special effects create an illusion that an event has happened - that the foster father took and collected photos for the purpose of preserving the small moments that transformed them into a family - though this does not actually occur in any scene. The audience creates this metanarration because we understand the convention of photo albums.

"Drawn Dream" is another example where special effects use the conventions of a different medium to rework the text and allows the audience to interpret a new, folk experience from a mass one. SilentMan pairs the anime series *Natsume's Book of Friends* (*Natsume no Yūjin-Chō* which premiered 2008 and its sequel *Zoku Natsume no Yūjin-Chō*, which premiered 2009) to Coldplay's "Life in Technicolor" for the Russian contest Akross Con 2010. The first forty seconds, which contain a series of simple, atmospheric and domestic shots, is set to the opening section of the track, which Coldplay samples from Jon Hopkins' "Light Through the Veins." When SilentMan introduces us to the story, Natsume, the main character of the series, appears as nothing more than a sketched and colorless outline on a blank sheet of parchment. This extremely basic design gains more detail at each pluck of the yangqin, a Chinese stringed instrument, in Coldplay's

song. He the character appears as a sequence of parts, grouped with each twang of wire: a head, then a torso, his cat from the series, his pillow and mattress. With a trill, the picture is colored in with greyscale. Then, with a series of three successive notes, Japanese onomatopoeia, used commonly in manga as sound substitutes, appear on the picture. This loops repeats. As each scene transitions, turning like a page, the images steadily gain more color. The first shot features Natsume in his bed; the second, apparently woken by these sounds, we see him in the action of reaching for his curtain; in the third, he appears from an exterior view of the house, looking outside; the fourth, we see a congregation of smiling yōkai, or Japanese mythological creatures, the instigators of the noise. As Natsume is drawn outside, the sketches become more detailed, colored with pastels, that gain more solidity as he interacts with the creatures. As percussions join the music, we, like Natsume, are treated to the vision of a spirit festival. Balls of light float on the sketches, movement no longer restricted to the sequential act of drawing. The creatures themselves begin to move as independent beings, though they are still clearly drawings. Even in the most active scenes, when a spirit hunts Natsume through the forest, the transition between shots appears as if someone were rapidly flipping through a picture book, each turn synced by a roll of drums. On the last lingering note, Natsume, rescued by other friendly spirits, opens his eyes, and we discover that the adventure has been a dream.

The sketchbook feature allows the viewer to interpret the text as a dream world. The last shot of Natsume's eyes is the only shot since the opening division that does not resemble a sketch, taken clean from the anime. That Natsume experiences a fantastical

world in his dream is not extraordinary, but the way the editor encourages the audience to view the experience as a drawing creates meaningful associations between mediums. The sketchbook is a medium for artistic exploration and experimentation, where ideas are negotiated but do not yet have a fixed form, not unlike the realm of dreams where objects are never fixed and always referential. SilentMan links the story from the professionally produced *Natsume's Book of Friends* with this personal medium. The work on a sketchbook is constantly in-progress, and by associating Natsume's narrative with the dream world and the dream world with the sketchbook, SilentMan allows the commodified narrative to be treated as a work in-progress, one that can always be filled in by its spectator.

“Ivy Bridges” and “Drawn Dream” utilize conventional mediums to provide important pieces in the narrative that the audience must fill. It is important to consider that to understand these conventions, one does not have to be a fan. Neither the photo album nor the sketchbook reference any type of fan knowledge. Instead, the experiences that the videos highlight are that of inclusion. The narrative of “Ivy Bridges” is about an abandoned child who builds a new family. The photo album reenforces this interpretation and connects the viewer personally with the event. Likewise, in “Drawn Dream,” the narrative involves a character who is coaxed into socialization. As he joins the other characters, the art becomes more involved and the story itself gains momentum. The story can be interpreted as that of a boy tempted by the bright lights of social inclusion but also fearful of becoming lost in these associations, evidenced when these new associations causes an unfriendly encounter that leads to him be chased through the woods. But, he is

saved in the dream, by the friends who had originally lured him into the forest. His anxieties are traversed, and he wakes teary-eyed with this revelation. The story in the AMV parallels that of the anime, but like how the album of “Ivy Bridges” never exists in *Bunny Drop*, the dream never exists in *Natsume’s Book of Friends*. They are both the editors’ creations, devising new associations that would otherwise be unexplored. However, the spectator too must be able to recognize these connections for the narratives to have impact. The pencil sketching and the photo album are mediums that audiences can feel personal connections to without being involved in a particular fan experience. Indeed, the special effects can be enjoyed for their technical skill and what they contribute to the story, how they imply an inclusiveness. In other words, an AMV’s impact on the audience is not dependent on an enjoyment of the anime.

Digital Presence

In addition to AMVs that explore elements from stories in the original anime, some AMVs make completely original stories by combining parts from different anime series into crossovers. In these crossovers, technology may explicitly interact with the characters inside the narrative. In “Ivy Bridges” and “Drawn Dream,” technology, though a conspicuous presence in the video, remains implicit inside the narration. However in AMVs such as “Fate Matrix” (2011) by editors Shin and Gunther and “Ship Happens” (2014) by Vivifx, technology is an active agent in the story. The computer screen specifically is not only used to observe and produce media but shapes the world as well as social connections. In the ability to connect online, technology interacts with, and is used by, the protagonists of these crossover videos as a liberating, empowering force.

No longer isolated at a desktop, the protagonists in these AMVs not only interact with characters from other shows and share narratives entirely of the editors' making but also reflect the ways that viewers become empowered by manipulating media on their screens, thereby altering and recreating fantastical worlds and becoming users.

In 2011, "Fate Matrix" won second Overall, Best Teamwork, Best Original Concept, Best Visual Design, second in Story/Plot and Technical, third in Fun and Presentation/Design, and fourth Viewer's Choice at Akross Con. The video is a collaborative work between Shin and Gunther that samples from 27 anime and uses Clock Opera's remix of "Tell Me" by Au Revoir Simone.⁶⁴ The main actor in the video is one of the main characters from *Heaven's Memo Pad* (*Kami-sama no Memo-chō*, premiered in 2011), a socially isolated girl who solves crime from her computer from a room she never leaves (a type of social withdrawal referred to as a *hikikomori* in Japan). The video's opening scene begins by combining the song's piano chords with the operation of keys on a keyboard, which already encourages us to view the keyboard as an instrument. Its selection and relationship with the music is important because it sets up an almost magical tenor, as if the music itself is typing on the keyboard. In the next cut, the shot now bright, a finger presses a key. Then, the perspective retreats to reveal a room full of computer screens and a girl flickering into being, like an image on an old modem. With these two scenes, the jaunty dance on the keyboard and the flickering girl, before the meat of the narrative and the involvement of the percussions in the music, the editors have created a world that priorities digital space over physical space.

⁶⁴ Gunther and Shin, "Fate Matrix," 2011. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=184989. Web. 27 February 2016.

The editors soon make it clear that Fate Matrix is a program that the main character runs on her computer. The program is capable of imposing itself on the real world in the story, represented by the anime that appear on tabs on the girl's desktop, each with its own tab and file to indicate individual stories within the larger narrative. By using this program, the girl can search for and find people in need of help and then change circumstances so that, for example, two lonely people may find love, a baseball player can hit a home run, a shy girl can confess her feelings, etc. One intervention is particularly dark. A girl (taken from *Durarara!!*, which premiered in 2010), her situation explained in the script, "Status: Runaway" and "Trace: Family Trouble," steps on a roof to attempt suicide. The digital girl, viewing her on her desktop, runs the Fate Matrix program, which appears:

```
Run:> HappinessProtocol.exe  
Modifier:> Home Life  
Send:> Text From Parents
```

In the micro-story, the girl's phone buzzes, relating the message "We Love You Come Home Soon." Next to the girl's smiling face on one tab, we see another smaller tab open, "Reconcile Mode Status: Happy," and the angel character clicks her inbox for another case file. The program connects these otherwise unrelated multitudes of micro-stories in a system similar to cyberspace. The smaller, individual narratives become pieces of a network that forms a community. The references to coding language also reinforces the concept of technology's association with communication.

The digital girl is a modern articulation of guardian angels. Gunther, who is responsible for the concept and asked for help from Shin on the digital effects in the video, writes:

I had been toying around with the idea of a sort of "angel" that controls people's fates. Not exactly the most original idea, but in terms of AMVs, it hadn't really been done before. I always had the vision of computer or TV screens as the media to represent the stories of other people, mostly because I guess (growing up right as the Internet was booming) I've come to associate networking with screens/technology. It felt natural for the "angel" to be operating a computer rather than sitting in a white room with a bunch of nebulous clouds representing the stories of other people, or something.⁶⁵

For Gunther, a girl behind a computer screen makes more sense than a winged spectre in the sky as a creature that interacts with our society because that is a better representation for how we interact with one another. We influence one another - we tell stories - through screens. What this interpretation implies is that the digital can be an empowering experience. The girl in the video is extremely powerful. By manipulating the text, she manipulates lives and social interactions. When Gunther and Shin translate the on-screen actions into renditions of coding script, they render the actions into a technical language that the girl can then manipulate. Creative interpretation exerts power over the text, but it is important to view this power as a sense of connectivity, as the purposeful utilization of a space that allows multiple stories to coincide and be part of a metanarrative.

The video offers technology as a means of overcoming loneliness and fear. Halfway through the video, the viewer is no longer restricted to watching the world through the program. The scenes cut to shots of the outside world. People sport floating frames that identify them as individuals connected to the Fate Matrix program, standing side-by-side but with no apparent knowledge of the way that they are already connected. The frames hover over cellphones too, implying that the connections between people are also interchangeable with their devices, that personal relationships exist not merely face-to-face but in technologies synced to communication networks. The video's perspective

⁶⁵ Gunther. "Re: AMV Research Questions." Message to author. 29 Nov. 2015. Email.

transitions to urban life - crosswalks, cars, bridges, trains, elevators, and street markets - implying an overarching theme, comparing urban infrastructure to digital communities. Overall, the video makes a statement on connectivity, that no one is truly alone anymore in a digital age. At one point, Shin and Gunther use a shot that pans out over the city and, over it, superimpose the digital girl's face. This scene emphasizes the omnipresence and omnipotence of the digital world to the viewer. In the juxtaposition of scenes with technology, viewers can infer the digital space itself is a metanarrative in the video, referring to their own experience with digital media, even if that media is not editing software.

In "Fate Matrix," the editors position digital technology as a force that can overcome isolation. Likewise, in "Ship Happens" by Vivifx, the digital alters the physical world and breaks boundaries.⁶⁶ However, while the main character in "Fate Matrix" never crosses the border of the computer, despite the allusion in the opening that suggests she herself is digital, the main character in "Ship Happens" overtakes social media by treating the technology as a playground that she can step in and out of. In 2014, the AMV, made from 22 different anime, won Best Comedy at Otakon, AnimeFest, Anime California, Aniventure, and Nan Desu Kan as well as Staff Favorite at Anime California and Best in Show at Otakuthon. The AMV closely follows the song, "I Ship It," a parody of "I Love It" by the Swedish electropop duo Icona Pop.⁶⁷ "I Ship It" chronicles

⁶⁶ Vivifx, "Ship Happens," 2014. <http://amvnews.ru/index.php?go=Files&in=view&id=6048>. Web. 27 February 2016.

⁶⁷ Not Literally, a parody music and comedy production group that specializes in fandom and nerd culture, exercised their right to "I Ship It," which I remind you is a remake of "I Love It" by Icona Pop, by asking Youtube to take down "Ship Happens," as they believed it followed their material too closely. The video was briefly taken down but is now up again. "Ship Happened" <http://vivifx.tumblr.com/tagged/shiphappens> accessed 6 December 2015.

“shipping,” short for relationship, a term used to describe when fanfiction writers romantically pair characters who are not in relationships in the original work. The protagonist of the video, Haruhi from the anime *The Melancholy of Haruhi Suzumiya* (*Suzumiya Haruhi no Yūutsu*, which premiered in 2006), is a representation of the fan community, specifically the “shipper.” While Vivifx could have simply created scenes that shipped unlikely or obscure pairings, she specifically chose to establish a narrative with a fan girl protagonist and created an antagonist using Kyon, Haruhi’s male cohort from the same series. Throughout the video, this character provides a counterpoint to her obsession, the voice of reason against her mania. While trying to delete the “MY SHIP” files from her computer, in a tussle, he accidentally posts a picture of Shinji, the bumbling hero of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shin Seiki Evangerion*, which premiered in 1995), paired with Taiga, the aggressive high school girl from *Toradora!* (2008). The image circulates Facebook and eventually snowballs into a monstrous shipping war over social media. In the conclusion of the AMV, Kyon, forewarned with the ominous note, “YOU’RE NEXT,” becomes the unwilling subject of her next ship, a comedic resolution meant to underline the power of the fan girl’s imagination.

Kyon’s involvement in the story is impactful, clearly an element generated as a response to fan culture, because his conflict with Haruhi is created entirely by Vivifx. It is never hinted in the song. Kyon often plays the straight man to Haruhi’s jokes in the anime. Referencing this interaction, Vivifx creates a play of forces that characterizes a theme the audience must understand in order to understand the humor. The opposition the editor creates, while making manifest a subcultural phenomenon, lets the story evolve

from a simple but humorous depiction of shipping (as it is in the song) into an exploration of the communal dialogue between people who love shipping and people who find it uncomfortable. The video itself is obviously comedic. The fan girl character, referencing Haruhi's excessive absurdity in the series, is clearly over dramatized, and the Kyon's victimization by the fan text is clearly fantastical. The comedic elements work in collaboration with one another (has garnered so much praise and attention) because the audience is able to fill in the gaps in the narration. Vivifx proposes an interpretation, and viewers complete the experience with their own evaluations.

The way the lyrics interact with the text influences the interpretation of Haruhi's character. Often, the lyrics in AMVs are non-diegetic; like film music, they are not a part of the story but exist in an ambiguous background that the characters generally can not hear. However, "Ship Happens" is an example of an AMV in which the editor decides to have a character act as a singer. Several times, Haruhi "lipsyncs," a technique where the edit manipulates the character's mouth to sound out the lyrics in the song. This technique was first popularized in 2000 by Kevin Caldwell, a figure well-remembered in AMV editing forums for his technical skill in the early years of editing with VRCs, often referred to as legendary.⁶⁸ Lipsyncing is a popular technique among editors and has great crowd appeal. In "Ship Happens," Haruhi's singing is sporadic, but she always sings the chorus, "I don't care. I ship it," and she is the only character that sings. This gives her a stunning amount of power in the text. Because of this editing, the implication is that it is her voice and her voice alone that the viewer hears. Only once does Kyon communicate,

⁶⁸ DeMoss, Brad. Zac Bertschy. "ANNCast: Brad Behavior," 09 September 2012, animenewsnetwork.com, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/anncast/2012-09-14>. Web. 6 December 2015.

and this is done through pictures - an image of the iconic main pairing in *Sailor Moon* (*Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn*, which originally ran 1992-1997), an equals sign, and a picture of a cannon inside a text bubble. This is meant to refer to “canon,” another word used in the fan community for the official storyline and the counterpoint of shipping. By placing Haruhi as the singer, Vivifx has created a character that has agency outside of the underlining story. This is mirrored in her ability to cross into technologies and onto online forums.

By referencing so many texts and because of her interactions with them, Haruhi appears as the most powerful agent in the video. She constantly pops up, in impossible ways, in the technology, and she clearly as a deeply involved understanding of media as well as fandom. In the opening, Haruhi is immediately identified as a fan girl as well as someone engaged with media and technology; we see her in front of a computer, watching Netflix, drawing fanart, and writing fanfiction, all of these texts interconnected as her performance as a fan. The act of observing is not separated from the act of creation. She appears in a video on Tumblr, but breaks the barrier between herself and technology by ignoring the frame of the post to emphasize the compatibility of two female characters from *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (*Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magika*, which premiered in 2011). On DeviantArt, she gives a rousing thumbs up to a male/male pairing between the series *Trigun* (*Toraigan*, ran 1995-1997) and *Cowboy Bebop* (Kaubōi Bibappu, premiered in 1998); she appears once on a cellphone and even on Google page search results, always singing. Her relationships with these digital media, the mass-produced media, and the performance as singer all occur at once, interlinked. Her mastery

of this texts creates a situation of empowerment. In her ability to create multitudes of associations, she has overtaken social media, and even overcome her one detractor by subsuming him in her fan text. This power derives from her presence in digital space. The power Haruhi exerts in the video is reflexive of the power that viewers may exert over commodified products and narrative spaces, when they choose to transform their fan experience from viewer to user. In both “Ship Happens” and “Fate Matrix,” technology is treated as an experience, the angel through her program and the fan girl through social media, that communicates a sense of empowerment, an ability to change the world as it is presented to the person observing the screen.

Conclusion

By forging new associations with media, editors have challenged the perceived limitations of mass culture signifiers. These new associations are expressive of the experience of communicating with digital technology. In the combining of divergent materials, new meanings emerge, and stories expressed in digital mediums, like works of art and analyzed by Gadamer, are not static objects but materials that are continuously being re-evaluated, re-purposed, and interpreted by their spectators. The spectator’s interpretations are inherently empowering for the viewer in that professional mediums are being transformed into personal, folk mediums. When Gadamer (1960) maintains that “the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it,” he iterates how interpretation is an transformative event.⁶⁹ Editing videos specifically provides an important experience where creators can

⁶⁹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translated by J. Weinsheiner and Donald G. Marshall. 2nd revised edition (first published 1960). London: Continuum, 2004. p. 103.

express their ideas in the same media as the original production they experienced. As such, they are constantly referencing their materials. The metanarrative of their communication between the original and the remix is integral to their identity as creators and storytellers. Yet, this identity is not an isolated one. The editor is also the spectator; the user is the viewer, and their performances, the creation of remixed videos, to some degree is constantly negotiated with an audience. The way they incorporate materials into the narrative, as I have shown with the special effects applied in “Ivy Bridges” and “Drawn Dream” and the digital presence in “Fate Matrix” and “Ship Happens,” is a constant act of association. The audience participates in the transformation of materials when they view the videos. In the act of watching, they are forming connections, making associations, that influence their experience of the texts.

CHAPTER V

COMMUNICATING WITH THE SOUND-IMAGE ASSEMBLY

The way that sound interacts with image in AMVs is a complex situation. We have explored how lipsyncing can connote power in “Ship Happens” and discussed the way the cut can work with the rhythm of movement and music to narrate the energy of the text. Russell Lack, a scholar of film music, writes, “Film music is a highly coded form of emotional message; its tones and cadences seem to appeal to something ‘wired in’ to us, triggering the appropriate emotional response at the appropriate moment.”⁷⁰ Music can be used as triggers, to set the tone of the narration as is the case with “Ivy Bridges” from Chapter IV. “Little Wonders” creates an atmosphere of nostalgia and lightheartedness that suits the tone of story and the theme of the photo album. When crafting such a narration it is important to consider how the audience will be able to get into the minds of the main characters. Unlike in a book, the emotions can not often be read as a statement but must be implied through ambience or circumstance. Composer Leonard Rosenman also comments on this issue and proposes a condition of *supra-reality* in film music, where the music perceptually alters the condition of literary naturalism, in other words the unspoken thoughts of the character impossible to ‘see’ in film.⁷¹ If music creates a supra-reality in film it is reasonable to say that music also provides a supra-reality in AMVs. Indeed, this is one of the song’s main functions, allowing the audience to communicate with the emotions of the main character when the condition is applicable.

⁷⁰ Lack, Russell. *Twenty Four Frames Under: A Buried History of Film Music*. London: Quartet Books, 1997, p 174.

⁷¹ Prendergast, Roy M., *A Neglected Art: A Critical Study of Music in Films*. New York: New York University Press, 1977, p 205.

In 1935, Raymond Spottiswoode attempts to delineate five functions of film music in early sound film, which I believe are still largely applicable to video production: 1) imitation, where a score imitates natural sounds or the tonal qualities of speech, 2) commentary, in which the score takes the part of a spectator giving an often ironic commentary on events on screen, 3) evocation, music that works to reveal something about the characters, where a leitmotif might be an example, 4) contrast, where the score appears to contrast dramatically with the image and creates a definite effect, and 5) dynamism, music together with the composition of successive shots to accentuate the impact of cutting or editing points.⁷² In AMVs, the assembly of sound and image often uses imitation for dramatic effect. In film theory, this is sometimes referred to as “Mickey Mousing,” (which is discussed in depth below) in which musical effects mimic visual events, though the term fails to express the dynamism that occurs in the text. Dynamism is Spottiswoode’s fifth function, where the impact of the text is due to the collaborated force of the edited sound and image. Dynamism is vital to understanding how the relationship between sound and image transforms the meaning of the text. Tisha Turk emphasizes in her study on fanvids, “...by adding music, vidders renarrate source text: the new music functions not merely as a soundtrack for the images but as an ‘interpretive lens’ through which to view the re-cut and re-sequenced clips.”⁷³ As I explored in Chapter IV, interpretation is highly transformative. Music does not solely create new associations for spectator to explore but also alters the meaning of the text. Dynamism is a function

⁷² Spottiswoode, Raymond. *A Grammar of the Film: An Analysis of Film Technique*. Berkeley: 1962. p. 192-3.

⁷³ Turk, Tisha, “Your Own Imagination (Vidding and Vidwatching as Collaborative)” in *Film & Film Culture* 5 (2010), p. 96.

that explores how the force of editing sound and image becomes a gestalt that changes the experience of the text. However, while imitation and dynamism informs the complicated way AMVs communicate with their audiences, contrast and commentary is also another extremely important and interwoven force that communicates to audiences in specific ways. Spottiswoode argues that contrast is an elemental function of film music, where the schism between sound and image creates a definite effect on the audience, and commentary is a function in which the music acts as a spectator, providing some means to analyze the images on the screen. Counterpoint, a common theme of montage, particularly in early Soviet film, and is a form of contrast which I argue AMV editors use to express social commentaries. Like imitation and dynamism, the contrast and commentary of sound and images create stories that communicate certain messages to audiences.

Imitation and Dynamism

The relationship between image and sound in AMVs is complex and provides a certain intimacy with the text. Mickey Mousing is one term that may be used to explain how the images “sound out” the actions on screen, but the term is ultimately inadequate to describe the how the assembly of sound and image communicates with the viewer. Mickey Mousing is referred to as “an extreme use of film music for accentuation (known as underscoring) which takes the form of musically replicating visual events as accurately as possible.”⁷⁴ This term, taken from the practice in early Disney cartoons, may be the most accurate to describe the relationship between sound and image in AMVs, but it fails

⁷⁴ Beller, Hans, “Between the Poles of Mickey Mousing and Counterpoint” in *Audiovisuality 2: Histories and Theories of Audiovisual Media and Art*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann, trans. Niamh Warde. Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research, 2011. p 106.

to capture what occurs when editors link movement and music in a video. Traditionally, Mickey Mousing, as the name suggests, is meant to be light-hearted and comedic. Its first known use is in the animation “Steamboat Willie” (1928), where the music allows every action to be over-dramatized. Likewise, even in such films as Alfred Hitchcock’s *39 Steps* (1935) and the James Bond movie *Dr. No* (1962), Mickey Mousing is histrionic; a train whistle replaces a woman’s scream the moment she discovers a corpse in one of the compartments; instruments blast on each strike when James Bond kills a deadly spider meant to assassinate him. The situation is morbid and deadly, but the self-referential nature of the sound exaggerates the drama and makes the scene parodical. Mickey Mousing is a performance based on replication, yet as we have seen, associations made in the convergence of divergent materials is transformative. Mickey Mousing, as a tautological term, implies a transformation that is melodramatic, in which the sound-image relationship is defined by the way the sound parodies the original image. This form of imitation cannot adequately describe the sound-image relationship in AMVs, despite the close similarities between the techniques. In short, the presentation, the context, is too dissimilar.

In AMVs, the pairing of sound with image is vital to evaluating the text. Editor Irriadin remarks on the video that got him into editing, “Sunlight” by SilkSK:

I hadn't seen *Eureka Seven* when I first saw this video in Otakon's 2009 AMV contest, and I still haven't. It doesn't effect my enjoyment and love for this video in the slightest. Sunlight has impeccable scene selection and has an extremely clear direction guiding its flow; the main character is disenfranchised, different, feeling adrift. Struggling with identity issues and a destiny that guides her in ways that creates conflict in her world and with those she loves. Again, I haven't watched *Eureka Seven*, but I can surmise this from the scene selection. It's probably not entirely accurate, but that doesn't matter. Not to me and what I take away from the AMV.

Sunlight does an **incredible** job at creating intimacy with the viewer. It captures not only the main story beats of the source material, but also takes the time to focus on scenes that

don't seem to have a huge impact on the overall plot of the video, like the scene where the protagonist hops on the air skateboard at 2:06. It's perfectly timed, not just in terms of sync but also in allowing the viewer to breathe, to take in the visual splendor and reflect on some part of the themes SilkSK is trying to highlight.⁷⁵

Irriadin iterates that having not seen the source material used to create the video does not detract from the experience of watching the video, which was impressive enough to inspire him to become an editor. He makes a clear correlation between the flow in scene selections and his evaluation of the main character as disenfranchised: “Struggling with identity issues and a destiny that guides her in ways that creates conflict in her world and with those she loves.” He understands this and connects with the character without having seen the anime. It is the positioning of materials that Irriadin states creates intimacy with the viewer. In the scene he mentions, the music does not try to imitate the action, the way that music imitates James Bond’s murder of the spider. Indeed, the force of the combined sound and image “speaks out” the emotions that are meant to be felt in that scene - the moment that allows the viewer to breathe, as Irriadin puts it. This is the main reason why Mickey Mousing is inadequate to describe the pairing of action with sound. The context is dramatic rather than emotional.

AMV editors are less concerned with using the music they choose as a means of dramatizing an action, though that does occur, especially in Dance AMVs. They instead treat shots as a continuous marriage of movement and music meant to communicate the emotion of the scene, to tie the performance of scenes on screen with the experience the viewer takes from the video. This marriage of sound and image is not foreign to film

⁷⁵ Irriadin. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 04 Dec. 2015. Email.

studies outside a context of Mickey Mousing. Henri Frescourt (1959) remarks on Abel Gance's silent film *La Roue* (1920):

Thanks to the marrying of visual and aural rhythms each coinciding with the other, you had the impression that the noise was coming at you from the image. *It was not at all music that tried to imitate but a music that suggested*, that imposed on the ear the same effect as the impending catastrophe imposed on the nerves. The commotion of sound translated the turmoil, the toil of the locomotive into heart-rending notes, percussive explosions, breathless cadences. *The image-sound complex created a sensation of total unity.*⁷⁶ (emphasis mine)

Arthur Honegger's score for *La Roue* was primarily designed to capture the dynamism of the montage sequences, particularly the virtuoso cross-cutting illustrating a train in motion, and Gance constructed the montage in close reference to the notation already worked out by Honegger.⁷⁷ This discussion of 1920s montage film captures the sense of intimacy that Irriadin articulates. AMVs are essentially montages that seek to complete a whole from fragments. Like a gestalt, in the juxtaposition of pieces, new interpretations arises that deliver something new to the audience. It is important to note, from the quotation above, that AMV music likewise is not at all music that tries to imitate but a music that suggests and that comes together with the image as a sensation of total unity. The contextual associations made with Mickey Mousing does not quantify what AMV editors are doing with the texts because, even though there are elements of imitation, the sound-image relationship is attempting to deeply connect the experience in the video with the experience of the viewer, to make the visual visceral. Philosopher Suzanne Langer writes pointedly, "For the elements of music are not tones of such and such pitch, duration, and loudness, nor chords and measured beats; they are like all artistic elements

⁷⁶ Lack, 1997. p. 37.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

something virtual, created only for perception... sounding forms in motion.”⁷⁸ Mickey Mousing, a term used almost exclusively in film studies, may strengthen a dramatic moment, but AMVs generally treat the pairing of sound and image as a continuous movement with references to emotion, like in a music video. However, music videos as well are vitally different than AMVs, particularly in narration styles.

Music videos are a component of record industry, a means of promoting pop iconography, and the images chosen in sequence often prioritize this purpose rather than the construction of a story. Lack remarks that, compared to film, “music videos are a completely different kind of communication” whose “excess resists most kinds of narrativisation.”⁷⁹ In Lack’s description, the music video exists in an excess of images too disjointed to allow the audience to piece them together, to fill in the gaps between narratives. Likewise, Vernallis notes an arbitrariness in the structure of music videos: “A video may provide a detailed depiction of some character at the beginning only to abandon him later in favor of a rhapsody on green.”⁸⁰ Her study regards the salient feature in music videos where any visual element can come to the fore at any time and in which viewers cannot predict what kind of function a particular element will perform in the video.

At the end of the video, I will feel as if I have grasped the video at some fundamental level but cannot articulate who, what, where, when, how, or why. Such videos exploit two important aspects of the genre: (1) that each shot possesses its own truth value - a truth

⁷⁸ Larger, Suzanne. *Feeling and Form*. New York: 1952, p 107.

⁷⁹ Lack 1997, p 222.

⁸⁰ Vernallis, Carol. *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. p x.

that cannot be undermined by another shot's; and (2) that each shot has only a vague temporality.⁸¹

The pieces are too disconnected. What narrativity emerges remains fragmented. Pat Auferheide notes, "the moods often express a lack, an incompleteness, an instability, a searching for location. In music videos, those feelings are carried on flights of whimsy, extended journeys into the arbitrary."⁸² Music videos are often noted for their non-narrative format, and videos that do attempt to portray conventional narratives, introducing characters and exhibiting an evolution for those characters, are held as exceptions.

AMVs too are not always intended to produce stories, but AMVs are structurally different in that they do not have a celebrity to stand at the axis of the video. The celebrity exists as a whole on her own; she does not rely on a narrative to exist. Record industries are primarily interested in promoting celebrity and encouraging consumers to purchase the song. The music video has "no heroes: it offers unadulterated celebrity. The living human beings do not play characters but bold and connotative icons."⁸³ It may be argued that AMVs revolve around their source materials, but this is not strictly true. The source materials are treated as a vehicle for expression; they are crafted like technical play-doh into whatever the editor wants to use these materials to say. The AMV editors that I have spoken to, whether they are writing a story or conveying a message, treat images carefully, with special attention to their selection. Irriadin notes:

⁸¹ Vernallis 2004, p 10.

⁸² Aufderheide, Pat, "Music Videos: The Look of Sound" in *Journal of Communication*, (Winter 1986), p 63.

⁸³ Auferheide 1986, p 67.

I strongly believe that AMVs, much like other forms of storytelling, are about promises. You show characters, set up encounters and frame conflicts. Then you deliver on your promises by showing the characters changing, the outcomes of fights and the resolution of conflicts. This makes your video satisfying to watch, and I would make my videos have those elements even if I never showed them to anyone but myself.⁸⁴

Iriadin sees editing as a promise between the material and the spectator, that associations created in the material are meant to mean something. The interpretation does not provoke arbitrary moods. Even those that most strongly use pop songs, that “pander to the audience,” meaning that they chose songs and themes that are known to be popular among audiences, such as “Ship Happens,” wield the celebrity of the song as tools to convey critical commentary, to provoke dialogue.

In the sound-image assembly, the image may come second to editors, the song meant to be the primary source of inspiration. The image explores the dimensions of the song, providing a visual stimulant for the message that the editor wishes to convey. Though it should be mentioned that AMV editors will often use remixes of songs, or select only parts of a song or even use multiple songs during the length of the video, the musical components of the song are hardly ever altered by the editor, in contrast to the anime material. Some editors are always inspired by anime to create an AMV, and others may be inspired by anime at times and by music at others. For the editor Gunther, the song always comes first:

The song always comes first for me! Usually when I listen to music, I can close my eyes after a few times of listening to it and start to build a mini-music-video inside my head. I feel out the tone and emotion of the song, and then once I have a good idea of what sort of video I might make with it, I start looking for an anime. Sometimes this is an anime I have watched, but many times this has been an anime I have never seen.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Iriadin. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 02 Dec. 2015. Email.

⁸⁵ Gunther. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 23 Nov. 2015. Email.

You may recall that Gunther is an editor whose primary concern is communicating a message and she will use stories for this intent. Irriadin could be inspired by an AMV whose anime source he had never seen, but Gunther has created AMV with anime that she has never seen and about which she only has general knowledge. For her video, “Hot Commodity” (2014), Gunther had never watched the source material, *Kuroko no Basuke*, a basketball themed anime, but developed a narrative with the shots that she was peripherally aware of already in her head when she scrubbed through the footage.⁸⁶ She edits nonlinearly so she fills in the timeline at random intervals until the flow feels natural to her. The idea for the video itself came from a literature theory class while they were studying Karl Marx and his theory about commodities - how they define, shape, and help others identify you. After listening to Macklemore’s song “Wing\$” in class, she realized she could easily find a sports anime to go with it. She finished the video in 2-3 weeks and won Best Social Commentary at MegaCon 2014, a triple crown (Best Drama, Editor’s Choice, and Director’s Choice) at Momocon 2014, and eight other awards from other contests and conventions.⁸⁷

The AMV itself is edited with great skill. There are several instances when the image Mickey Mouses a part of the song - a clap of instruments with the stomp of sneakers and the swish of basketball netting. When the tempo increases, the shots cut to the slide of shoes on basketball court on each beat and ball going through net. Then, in

⁸⁶ Gunther, “Hot Commodity,” 2014. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=194756. Web. 28 February 2016.

⁸⁷ AMV.Org Video Choice Awards – Best Drama VCA; Tora Con 2014 - Judge's Choice; Con-Nichiwa 2014 - Judge's Award Drama; Anime Conji 2014 - Honorable Mention; Fanime 2014 - Audience Drama 3rd Place; Anime North 2014 - Best Cinematography; SMASH!! Con 2014 - Judge's Choice; WA 2014 - Best Drama (Expo).

order to narrate the part of the song, “And then my friend Carlos’ brother got murdered for his fours” (referring to Air Jordan IV shoes), Gunther adds clips from a murder scene in *Durarara!!*. This is a pivotal moment in the song as well as the AMV, when the cuts shake. No longer smooth and fading, the transitions seem to drop down on the viewer, matching the aggression and urgency in the lyrics as well as the pumping of the beat. The narration inside the images shifts, no longer portraying scenes of athletic triumph. The main character struggles against his opponents. When the children begin singing in “Wing\$,” suspending Macklemore’s rapping, the images and the cuts suspend as well; we track a bead of sweat on the ball while a character slowly makes a shot, and the cuts land on the piano chords, roughly four beats apart. The lyrics, “It’ll go so high,” narrate the ball rolling beneath the bright lights of the gymnasium. Shots of the players and the audience watching the game reenforce this pause (though the cuts no longer hit the piano chords), and extend the interruption in the song into an elevated sense of emotion. The lyrics, “Look at me, look at me, I’m a cool kid/I’m an individual, yeah, but I’m part of a movement/My movement told me be a consumer and I consumed it,” are punctuated by a faster rhythm of cuts and conflicts between players in the shot. When the beat finally fades, drifting into a cello wail, on screen, the ball drifts off the court, hitting the ground at the same time that Macklemore pronounces, “Off.” The next scenes, playing to the children’s chorus again, display a slow pan of the gymnasium, pans of the characters’ eyes, and the characters in various moments of strain, panting, sweating, and falling. The last refrain, “And this pair, this would be my parachute/So much more than just a pair of shoes/Nah, this is what I am/What I wore, this is the source of my youth/This dream that

they sold to you/For a hundred dollars and some change/Consumption is in the veins,” tracks images of the nostalgia of the main character’s imagined glory. “And now I see it’s just another... pair of... shoes” tracks with a final shot - the character alone on an outdoor court, the sky darkening with rain, making and missing his free throw.

“Hot Commodity” has an intriguing relationship with its audience in that the message of the video seems to appeal to people even when the song does not. Gunther says that one constant people tell her is: “I hated the song but I love your video; I watched it again and again.”⁸⁸ So, even though the song is the primary motivation for emotion and narration, the anime taking a secondary role, it is inside some combination of the two that where its popularity resides. The effect of the scenes is extremely nuanced by the lyrics, but the video also carries emotional weight because of how intimately Gunther pairs the scenes she selects with music, the beat and tempo in addition to the lyrics. It is the dynamism in the text that makes the imitation of sounds in the image impactful, that creates a unique experience that communicates to the audience. Even though “Hot Commodity” is an AMV that relies heavily on the song for its narrative, the result is something that even those people who do not enjoy the music can appreciate and watch again and again. An imitation would not endear itself to viewers who dislike the original song.

Contrast and Commentary

The videos like “Hot Commodity” that wield the pop song and its celebrity as a tool use another other prominent technique in film music selection, counterpoint.

⁸⁸ Gunther. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 23 Nov. 2015. Email.

Theodor Adorno and Hans Eisler refer to counterpoint as “how music, instead of limiting itself to conventional reenforcement of the action or mood, can throw its meaning into relief by setting itself in opposition to what is being shown on the screen.”⁸⁹ Eisenstein is perhaps the most famous advocate for the use of counterpoint in the *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). When a jaunty march plays in league with such demoralizing images as slums or war, for example, Eisenstein believes this encouraged audiences to think critically about the images on screen and their relationship to them. The audience would extrapolate meaning on their own resolve rather than be lulled into what thinkers like Adorno saw as a drugged, false sense of security churned out by such industries as Hollywood. One example of this in AMVs happens to be the first recorded AMV in 1982, when James Kaposztas uses the Beatles song "All You Need is Love" over action footage from *Space Battleship Yamato*.⁹⁰ The result is comedic. However, pairing the violence of its action scenes with the message explicit in the lyrics of “All You Need is Love” becomes even more notable when one bears in mind that *Space Battleship Yamato* is responsible for redefining anime in the seventies as an adult genre capable of dealing with epic themes. The contrast of the music with the images brings into relief the series’ pioneering force. Generally, AMV editors do not set music in opposition to the action of the anime, though there are of course exceptions, but the contrasts that editors use communicate a forum for speech and expression. The audience thinks critically both of the images on screen and of the music that is presented to them.

⁸⁹ Adorno, Theodor W. and Hans Eisler. *Composing for the Films* (first English translation, 1947), London: Athlone, 2005, p 26.

⁹⁰ Pohnert, Vlad. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 31 Oct. 2015. Email.

In one form of expression, choosing a certain song in counterpoint to an anime provides a specific type of commentary that allows the audience to augment and alter memories of media. By choosing a song that contrasts the mood of the original anime, editors are able to explore the latent dimensions of an anime otherwise ignored or overlooked. Gunther comments that “there is something sort of special about breaking down a complete product (an anime series) and rebuilding it into something else entirely (an AMV)” and that “the best AMVs are the ones that make *Bleach* look like a romantic comedy, or make something like *Lucky Star* into a bloodbath.”⁹¹ This transformation, essentially a form of counterpoint, can be achieved in part through song selection. In other words, by using a song that intentionally does not fit with the mood of the anime, editors can expose and augment latent narratives from the text. Kathleen Williams does some work in this regard in her discussion of recut film trailers on Youtube, that recut trailers “seeks to upend and subvert the role of teen films as a time capsule. They rework the narrative of a feature film and in the process rework our memories of media we’ve consumed. They ask their audience to draw upon their memories of a feature film and to accept the latent storyline that was lying between individual shots.”⁹² By displacing the original genre of the film or anime, editors turn a fixed medium into a medium still capable of adaptation. No longer a time capsule, by exploring these multiple dimensions one can continue to use the medium as a means of expression. On his video “Dissociation,” which uses clips from the anime *Penguindrum*, Irriadin comments,

⁹¹ Gunther. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 29 Nov. 2015. Email.

⁹² Williams, Kathleen, “Recut Film Trailers, Nostalgia and the Teen Film” in *Fan CULTure: Essays on Participatory Fandom in the 21st Century* eds. Kristin M. Barton and Jonathan Malcolm. London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013. p 58.

“Nostalgia, I suppose, got me going but in the end it was about how I could use the themes/scenes of *Penguindrum* as a vehicle of my own self-expression.” Music is an ideal tool for delving into this latent storyline. Music can set the mood of a video, and while this ability can truly bring out and underscore the essence of an anime or message, that mood itself, when chosen counterpoint to the original mood of the anime, allows editing to be extremely transformative.

For example, Shin’s video “Infinite Darkness” (2012), which was created for Round 2 of Org Editor, use the Unlimited Gravity remix of “Sail” by Awolnation to turn the feel-good drama of *Natsume’s Book of Friends* into a horror.⁹³ *Natsume’s Book of Friends* features a high school student dealing with loneliness and isolation and focuses largely his social development as a character. Part of the reason for Natsume’s isolation is the fact that he sees spirits that no one else can. These spirits feature prominently in the anime but are often portrayed as just as lonely and lost as Natsume. It is prevalent to the intention of the series as an instrument that allows Natsume to understand and overcome his own loneliness. However, by pairing this series with “Sail,” and using brief clips from the horror series *Another* for aesthetics, Shin brings out the latent terror of encountering spirits and monsters from the series and transforms Natsume’s social isolation into a situation of immense fear. There is a type of alienation in the video as the camera seems to tilt in every direction. These angles encourage us to experience like Natsume does, never knowing when a monster will appear. The lyrics are dark (“Maybe I should cry for help/Maybe I should kill myself”) and the remix has a much more aggressive rhythm than

⁹³ Shin, “Infinite Darkness,” 2012. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=187536. Web. 28 February 2016.

the original, which uses the dissonance of a synthesizer but has a lulling quality that the Unlimited Gravity remix speeds up. Overall, it gives the video a quality of danger and deadliness that makes Natsume's victimization even more poignant. The sense of helplessness in the main character is nearly overwhelming in the video. The clips from *Another* (*Anazā*, premiered 2012) feature the dolls from the opening theme of the anime, which adds to the creepiness if not the narration itself, which involves scenes of Natsume being attacked over and over again. Rather than tiresome, the repetitive acts of violence, though never graphically horrific, reenforce the trauma of the text. In summation, the main character is constantly surrounded by violence, and the audience too, listening to the music and watching these free-falling camera angles, feels that impending sense of hostility and lack of stability. The mood of music in counterpoint to the mood of the anime serves to draw out latent emotions of dread and fear of isolation that were hinted at but never fully explored in the original series. In the original, Natsume is portrayed to be a caring and brave but essentially sad boy. Yet, in "Infinite Darkness," his encounters with spirits in the anime, the source of his isolation and aberration, terrifies him. Loneliness transforms from a sad experience to a horrific one.

The contrast between the music and the anime series prominent in "Infinite Darkness" is what allows the editor to explore how social isolation and loneliness can transform from a sense of despondency to terror. However, in "Cyrus Virus" (2010), the editor Ileia uses a completely different contrast.⁹⁴ She provides a stark contrast between the popularity of pop songs that are circulated repetitively on our technology (such as the

⁹⁴ Ileia, "The Cyrus Virus," 2010. http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=177139. Web. 28 February 2016.

radio and television, though cellphones and computer feature prominently in the video) and audience reception to these overplayed pop songs in order to provide a commentary on the oppressive nature of the entertainment industry. “Cyrus Virus” swept through contests in 2010, the winner of Best Upbeat/Dance at Anime Central in the Midwest, ranked #5 at Japan Expo in Paris, the winner of Best Concept at ConnectiCon, and the winner of Audience Best Overall at Anime Evolution in Vancouver. Ileia’s note concerning the video on AnimeMusicVideos.org reads:

Non-Americans may not understand this video. Here, the song is obnoxious and infectious, but it's not like that everywhere, and you may not understand why the people dislike the song. Imagine the most played annoying song in your country right now...then imagine it instead of the song in the video, and you'll get the idea.⁹⁵

The video itself is entrenched in the pop culture of the United States, but she makes its message applicable to any country that has a “most played annoying song.” The video is comedic in its lambasting of “Party in the USA” by Miley Cyrus and the way radio stations tended to play the song over and over *ad nauseum*. The video takes all its scenes from *Summer Wars*, a movie about a bumbling boy turned hero in order to confront a malicious Internet virus that he has accidentally unleashed on the unsuspecting world, and uses these scenes to create an entirely new but parallel plot.

Ileia likens the excessive repetition of products like “Party in the USA” in the media to the virus that threatens to break down all communications on the planet in the anime. It is important to note that unlike the majority of AMVs, the song in “Cyrus Virus” is diegetic, meaning that the characters in the video can hear and respond to the music. This is different from lipsyncing, which we explored in Chapter IV with “Ship

⁹⁵ “Cyrus Virus” http://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=177139, Web. 19 February 2016.

Happens.” When the song first appears on the main character’s phone, Ilea provides a fade in and out of the music in relation to the device, implying that the source is not coming from the video but the phone itself. Miley Cyrus is singing her song from his cellphone in the video. The song follows him relentlessly, through every room of the house and even to bed. While meant to be a plot device, it is interesting that the lyrics also narrates some actions on screen, such as when “This is all so crazy” is sung while the main character fumbles around in nervous circles in reaction to the music leaking from his phone. We then realize that the song is infecting other devices, that the issue is not only affecting one person. The shots pan to horrified faces as well as maps from all over the world, iterating how the song is jumping from city to city and affecting communication networks. The characters are forced to band together and go online to banish it. This is done in the form of an avatar who battles with Miley Cyrus in scenes taken from her music video. Within this merging of media in a digital space, the characters manage to defeat her. Her image dissolves; the song fades. However, the song refuses to die and returns. Surrounded by his weeping comrades, the main character is forced to admit that he is starting to find the tune catchy. The song first infected their media, and now it has infected their bodies. In the resolution, the characters do manage to fix the virus, purging it from their devices, although it is only after they have been consumed by it, and only after running its course. However, in the final scene of the video, Ke\$ha’s “Tik Tok” starts playing, and we realize that the battle is a cycle. Defeating one only means the rise of another, and the danger of being consumed by the song is systematic.

The reflexive use of the song comments on the enthrallment of pop culture. The use of the song, both is its own counterpoint because rather than reenforcing the mood of the song, it forces the viewer to look at the song as a product. The use of “Tik Tok” supports this view, implying that “Party in the USA” is not a singular event but a cycle stuck on repeat. The video does not critique “Party in the USA” individually or even as a song but the way industries make money by infecting the radio, the television, the computer, etc. with particular songs as well as the way audiences sometimes reenforce this repetition to exhaustion. We are being subsumed the way the characters in the video are. The video is a work of satire that highlights our inability to dismiss what the entertainment market presses into our media. The song choice is made even funnier when one realizes that in the original anime, it is the American military that creates the virus. The pun is not only that Miley Cyrus is American but that she is singing “Party in the USA,” implying in a roundabout and less than obvious way that American pop culture is also obnoxiously infectious.

Conclusion

Raymond Spottiswoode’s functions set a baseline for understanding image-sound relationships. Rather than clearly relying on one function at any given moment, the assembly of sound and image in AMVs use multiple functions in league with one another in order to communicate stories and messages. The imitation that occurs in the videos does not merely define the way images imitate natural sounds or the tonal qualities of speech but brings to the fore the way that the unification of image and sound can create new engagements with the text. “Hot Commodity” conveys a social message that is

inherent in the Macklemore's "Wing\$,," but it is the assembly of sound and image, the weaving of pieces that uses imitation and dynamism which makes the narrative poignant to viewers and that turns this particular performance of story into a work of art. Likewise, in "Infinite Darkness" and "Cyrus Virus," the contrast of parts brings a commentary to the narrative. In these videos, the sound is often still unified with the image, but the references inherent to either are what creates the friction that allows for commentary. In the case of "Infinite Darkness," the music contrasts with the intent of the original anime and displaces its genre, allowing the audience to experiment with the memory of the anime. This communicates a new consideration of the dimensions of social isolation, overlooked in the original series. In "Cyrus Virus," Ileia positions the music to portray a contrast between media and audience, to expose the power differences between the two. By making "Party in the USA" diegetic and therefore its own actor to which the characters respond, "Cyrus Virus" becomes a satire. In the negotiation between the sound-text and the image-text, "Cyrus Virus" uncovers a *system* and provides the audience with a mean of talking about this system in a critical way. "Party in the USA" first infects the characters' media and then infects their bodies, and though the characters do manage to rid the song from their technology, it is only after they have been consumed by it. "Cyrus Virus" is subversive in that it exposes how, even in an age of immersive participation via the World Wide Web and access to the technologies that allow us to edit and manipulate the stories handed to us as products (as evident in the creation of the video itself), we are still not as free of the restraints of the consumer as we like to imagine. We are still forced to partake in a market that has the energy and resources to

repeat itself until we bow to the impressive force of its advertising. The sound-image assembly in each of these three videos creates a new text that speaks to the viewer. None of the stories in any of the above AMVs are part of the story in the source anime. *Kuroko no Basuke* does not emphasize shoes to talk about commodity and consumerism. *Natsume's Book of Friends* is not a horror. *Summer Wars* is not about an infestation of a pop song. However, the songs allow the editor to create these narratives and transform the meaning of the images collected from each anime. These new stories are impactful, not because the sound and image run parallel to each other but because they are combined. Editors create a dialogue between sound and image that informs the impact of the text.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Relying on Ben-Amos' definition of folklore (1971), I argue that I do not study AMVs as folklore but that folklore resides in the interchange between artistic media and the channels of communication.⁹⁶ It has not been my goal to identify folklore in mass-mediated forms, as if to find ways that folklore has been translated into digital mediums; instead, I have sought to analyze the way combinations of divergent materials transform individual meanings into a text with new associations, that this itself is a meaningful form of communication and one that, despite being born of fan culture, does not necessarily have to be confined to fan experience. In order to study communication in AMVs, I performed fieldwork at the 2015 Sakura Con in Seattle, conducted interviews with editors and AMV contest hosts, judged Anime Expo's AMV contest, and hosted a small AMV contest for Alisa Freedman's "Digital Age Stories." In addition, I also rely heavily on close readings of AMV texts and use scholarly theories to examine what and how the associations and interpretations editors make in AMVs speak to viewers. As I explored in Chapter II, context plays a vital role in the providing a means of interpreting performance. The AMV text is a performance of expressive deconstruction and recombination, a reclaiming of materials that rather than isolating the viewer from the story places the viewer in the role of interpreter as well as storyteller. The act of decontextualizing the material, which I discuss in Chapter II, is important because of this relationship with the spectator and the viewed object in mass culture, where the viewer

⁹⁶ Ben-Amos, Dan. "Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context" in *The Journal of American Folklore* 84:331, (Jan. - Mar., 1971), p.14.

may enjoy the text, and build significant relationships with it, but also feel distanced from it. The narratives the editors create and manipulate in AMVs reveal a powerful engagement with the text, a negotiation where the viewer becomes user and thereby uses the text for self-expression. Editors transform the consumption of these mass-mediated texts into a performance, which Bauman argues is inherently emergent, constantly changing.⁹⁷ In other words, decontextualization, which is inherently the performance of stories by AMV editors, reaffirms the sense of negotiation between the text delivered in the form of mass media, which is perceived as fixed and limiting, and the audience.

I also considered the transformative role technology plays in these negotiations between viewer and text. As I explored in Chapter III, *how* stories can be performed constantly transforms *what* can and will be communicated. It is critical to consider that editors are not only associating the original texts they choose with signifiers in music. They are also associating with the technology of cross-editing, as I illustrate by studying the relationship between the cut, the beat, and the meter in Gorz' video "Vessels." Editing technologies provide structures that create momentum for and shape the telling of the story, but the frame also intrudes on the narrative. Editors are not merely telling stories using technology as a tool; technology is a form of expression. I explored this in Chapter IV in my discussion of the use of special effects and digital presences. Editors use technology to augment latent themes in the original source material, which I explored in Shin's "Ivy Bridges" and SilentMan's "Drawn Dream," and also make new, original stories that reflect the impact technology has on their experiences. Gunther's

⁹⁷ Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1984 (reprinted 1977). p. 40.

collaborative video with editor Shin, “Fate Matrix,” is based not on an interpretation of an anime, or even of a song, but on how Gunther imagines the mythology of guardian angels might function in the digital age. Regarding her interview with me, I reiterate her words, “I always had the vision of computer or TV screens as the media to represent the stories of other people, mostly because I guess (growing up right as the Internet was booming) I’ve come to associate networking with screens/technology.”⁹⁸ I explained how “Fate Matrix” offers technology as a means of overcoming loneliness and fear. This is in relation to the way technology is not just a tool but also an experience. The identity of the editor-storyteller is one in constant negotiation between materials and technology, and the narratives that result are part of this communication.

It is not only the decontextualization that allows the viewed source to become pliable in an AMV but also the music the editor chooses to cross-cut with the scenes. As examined in the last chapter, the marriage of the image with sound is one of the most prominent forces that allows AMVs to be dynamic as well as capable of social commentary. Music plays the part of an interpretive lens, as argued by Tisha Turk (2010) and as seen clearly in my exploration of Gunther’s “Hot Commodity” and Shin’s “Infinite Darkness.” Yet, music also provides another means for the audience to take the text in new, unexplored ways. The assembly of sound and image in AMVs provides a certain type of engagement with the text that transforms a visual experience into a visceral one. As I examined, music is an emotional trigger that coaxes the viewer to interpret the reality he or she sees on screen in a certain interpretative way. However, by pairing

⁹⁸ Gunther. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 29 Nov. 2015. Email.

movements within the footage so tightly with movements generated by the music, editors create another text, a child from this bond. It is this particular text that “creates intimacy with the viewer,”⁹⁹ as editor Irriadin’s notes, predominantly allowing the AMV to be enjoyed even if one does not care for the sourced anime or the sourced song. In other words, it is the sensation of total unity, this fluency of combined materials, that allows the AMV to become something more than a sum of its parts and exist outside fan experience.

In conclusion, communication is a result of negotiation between the original isolated text, the editor, the combined AMV text, and the viewer. In the decontextualization of materials, the editor’s communicative performance is inherently empowering in that editors create texts by challenging the perceived limitations of mass-mediated texts instead of enacting them. In addition, they engage with works of art and narratives, asserting their personal and ever-shifting connections with the texts. The AMV contends that viewing experience is itself interpretive and that interpretation can be articulated with technology. The connections we make with the text transform what it means. What something means, what it communicates, depends on the unique perspective of the one making the interpretation. AMVs are texts with networks of connections - the relationship between spectator and work of art, between sound and image, the metanarratives of technology, and mass-mediated and fan-mediated contexts. The AMV is a gestalt bigger than the sum of its parts because of these communications, and the viewer navigates these relationships inherent to the text as channels of communication.

⁹⁹ Irriadin. “Re: AMV Research Questions.” Message to author. 04 Dec. 2015. Email.

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