

BINDING A UNIVERSE: THE FORMATION AND TRANSMUTATIONS OF  
THE *BEST JAPANESE SF (NENKAN NIHON SF KESSAKUSEN)*  
ANTHOLOGY SERIES

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Binding a Universe: The Formation and Transmutations of the *Best Japanese SF* (*Nenkan Nihon SF Kessakusen*) Anthology Series

The annual science fiction anthology series *The Best Japanese SF* started publication in 2009 and showcases domestic writers old and new and from a wide range of publishing backgrounds. Although representative of the second golden era of Japanese science fiction in print in its diversity and with an emphasis on that year in science fiction, as the volumes progress the editors' unspoken agenda has become more pronounced, which is to create a set of expectations for the genre and to uphold writers Project Itoh and EnJoe Toh as exemplary of this current golden era. This thesis analyzes the context of the anthology series' publication, how the anthology is constructed, and these two writers' contributions to the genre as integral to the anthologies and important to the younger generation of writers in the genre.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION: THE “HERE AND NOW” OF JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION.....1
	The Summer of Japanese Science Fiction ..... 1
	Terminology and Concepts ..... 4
	Chapters and Methodology ..... 8
II.	THE POSTWAR HISTORY OF JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION AND THE POSITION OF THE YEARLY ANTHOLOGY .....11
	The Postwar History of Japanese Science Fiction ..... 11
	Tsutsui’s Japan’s Best SF Stories Anthology ..... 14
	The Best Japanese SF Anthology and Its Function ..... 16
III.	THE ANTHOLOGY, ITS COMPOSITION AND AGENDA .....19
	The Winter of Japanese Science Fiction and Its Aftereffects ..... 19
	The Drive for Diversity and Consequent Enclosure ..... 22
	EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh: Creating a Standard ..... 26
	SF as Junbungaku: EnJoe Toh’s Positionality ..... 32
IV.	ENACTING THE POSTHUMAN: ENJOE’S TEXT, ITOH’S LEGACY .....37
	“I Have a Good Night”: Ties to Genre and Literary Conventions..... 37
	Project Itoh “From the Nothing, with Love” ..... 45
	The Project Goes On: Itoh as a Meme ..... 48
	CONCLUSION .....53
	REFERENCES CITED .....57

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION: THE “HERE AND NOW” OF  
JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION

*The Summer of Japanese Science Fiction*<sup>1</sup>

Japanese science fiction has now reached a second golden era. The first golden age of prose science fiction in Japan began with the first “boom” in the 1960s and came to a full flourish in the early 1970s, when science fiction became widely known to outside the fandom, spreading to various publication and media. After experiencing a decline in the 1980s and 1990s, publications are once again plentiful, with new domestic writers gaining more visibility within the community of science fiction readers in Japan. In April 2012, the oldest existing science fiction periodical at the time, Hayakawa Shobō’s *S-F Magazine* (*S-F Magajin*), published a ten-year anniversary feature of the Hayakawa J Collection, their soft-cover imprint for domestic science fiction novels, and later that year, in the November issue, the same magazine published another feature called “The Summer of Japanese SF (*Nihon SF no natsu*),” featuring new material from younger domestic writers. To add to this excitement, the international publishing of Japanese science fiction also started gaining attention, with major anime and manga distributor, VIZ Media LLC launching their Japanese prose science fiction label Haikasoru in 2009. Haikasoru, named after the title of Philip K. Dick’s *Man in the High Castle* (1962, trans. into Japanese in 1965 and 1984) transliterated into Japanese (SF Magazine 2014: 516), went on to publish two translated

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<sup>1</sup> Japanese names are written family name first, unless otherwise explained. For titles of previously untranslated material, English titles appear as provided by the Japanese publisher where applicable.



novels to be named for the Special Citation at the Philip K. Dick Award<sup>2</sup> for outstanding English language paperback. These are the highlights that *S-F Magazine* has addressed in support of its argument for the current robustness of the market for Japanese science fiction.

It was amid this excitement that the anthology series *Best Japanese SF (Nenkan Nihon SF kessakusen)*<sup>3</sup>, published by Tokyo Sōgensha, debuted. Like Hayakawa Shobō, Tokyo Sōgensha specializes in the publication of genre fiction, especially in translation. In their early days, before branching off from its parent company in Osaka, Sōgensha had published works by such literary authors as Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and Kawabata Yasunari, but since its reorganization and restart in 1954 as Tokyo Sōgensha, it has actively engaged in the promotion of genre fiction, especially in mystery and science fiction, hosting an award for new writers in each of the two genres.

The editorial team are Ōmori Nozomi (b. 1961), translator and critic, and Kusaka Sanzō (b. 1968), a veteran editor who played a major part in the re-evaluation of popular ninja stories and detective fiction by Yamada Fūtarō (1922-2001). Borrowing from Tsutsui Yasutaka's (b. 1934) editorial philosophy, in editing his own anthology series in the 1970s, of including the diverse, emphasizing "incredible flexibility" (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 505), Ōmori and Kusaka started out editing these volumes, with Ōmori acting as the visionary who brings to the table "what [he] thinks is SF," with Kusaka acting as discussant in selecting what pieces are ultimately published in the volumes (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 10-11). Ōmori laid out the goals of this anthology as "showcasing a new generation of

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<sup>2</sup> The Philip K. Dick Award is awarded to the year's "distinguished science fiction published in paperback original form in the United States." ("Philip K. Dick Award" accessed June 13, 2016)

<sup>3</sup> Previously untranslated. Translated English title and all translated English subtitles taken from the slipcovers, Tokyo Sōgensha, 2008-2015.

talents, [as well as] answering the questions ‘What is the current situation of Japanese SF like?’ ‘What is currently being written in Japanese SF,’ and ‘What *is* SF?’” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 7-8). Kusaka also noted in the afterword to the inaugural volume that while “science fiction may have not had the tradition of looking back,” that the time has come to “record the history [of Japanese SF]” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 501).

However, in addition to the goals articulated by the editorial team, the anthology also serves another purpose: to set the standard for Japanese science fiction through selecting stories, and by doing so, define what science fiction is for this current generation of writers, in particular, by highlighting EnJoe Toh (b. 1972) and Project Itoh (Itō Keikaku, born Itō Satoshi, 1974-2009), whose thematic contributions in their focus on the post-human position them as invaluable to the anthology and to the domestic science fiction community in the eyes of the editors. This anthology simultaneously celebrates the robustness and diversity of the current golden age of science fiction and reinforces the market hype emphasized by *S-F Magazine* and the Japanese science fiction community. This market hype directs readers and writers towards texts that lay claim to accessibility to non-science fiction fans but as time progresses became more high-context, often laced with references to previous, prominent works in the genre. Moreover, the anthology has succeeded in pushing forward the “Japanese post-human” as a trend in Japanese science fiction and highlighting it as mainstream, and also has witnessed a reconciliation, or at least the beginning of one, between the literary institution of *junbungaku*, or “pure literature,” and the science fiction genre, something previously unattained, although writers from the first golden age expressed their dissatisfaction at being considered as “lower” form of literary art, meaning that science fiction pieces were not considered for either the

Akutagawa Prize for *junbungaku* or the Naoki Prize for popular fiction in that first golden era (Sasaki 2016 chap. 5).

In this thesis, I argue that the *Best Japanese SF* anthology has both established and transformed expectations for what constitutes science fiction in Japan. While dedicated to an ideal of inclusiveness that serves both veteran and novice readers, their emphasis on two writers in particular, Project Itoh and EnJoe Toh, has reified the “Japanese post-human” as one of the new mainstream themes. The anthology, in its periodical nature, works to define, document, and continually rehabilitate the genre as they celebrate this current excitement in domestic science fiction.

### *Terminology and Concepts*

First, to clarify terminology, I use “science fiction” in this paper to refer to the term “SF” as used in the Japanese context. The term “SF” refers to many concepts and subgenres – speculative fiction, space fantasy, and science fantasy – and also as proposed by manga artist Fujiko F. Fujio, also stands for “*sukoshi fushigi*”<sup>4</sup> or “a little mysterious.” However, because its present-day existence takes root in the immediate postwar need within the genre to cultivate the scientific mind through fiction, I chose to call it “science fiction” instead of these other terms or the abbreviated “SF” except when quoting from primary sources.

Concurrent with the definition of “SF” is the question of genre, of what constitutes as science fiction. As Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint argue in their essay “There Is No Such Thing as Science Fiction,” while there is a preconceived “notion of genres as pure and

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<sup>4</sup> See the Fujiko F. Fujio Museum website welcome page (“Welcome to the Museum [Museum e yōkoso]” accessed August 5, 2016).

distinct categories” (Bould and Vint 2008: 43) as is demonstrated above by the variety of terms that “SF” might represent, “genres are never, as frequently perceived, objects which already exist in the world and which are subsequently studied by genre critics, but fluid and tenuous constructions made by the interaction of various claims and practices by the writers, producers, distributors, marketers, readers, fans, critics and other discursive agents” (Bould and Vint 2008: 48). I believe this to be true of “Japanese science fiction” as well, and that the *Best Japanese SF* anthology project takes part in shaping the idea of this genre through claims to authority, with the editors acting as model consumers, presenting how current science fiction should be read.

Another term that is key to discussing the anthology is the “post-human.” The idea of the post-human is important to the anthology not only because it is one of the popular and recurring themes to appear in the anthology, but also, because of its gestural function in shaping the authors Project Itoh (Itō Keikaku) and EnJoe Toh and their careers as writers who engage with the “post-human” in their writing, and in doing so enact the “post-human” as understood by the Japanese science fiction community. *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* defines the term as referring to the result not of “natural evolution [...] but to the results of our own or others' intervention via Technology (including techniques of Biology), Genetic Engineering, Nanotechnology, and so on” (“Posthuman” 2016). The Japanese context adds a few more details to this basic definition. Fujita Naoya, in the introductory chapter of the book *Post-humanities: Science Fiction after Project Itoh (Posutohyumanitīzu: Itō Keikaku igo no SF)*<sup>5</sup>, describes the “Japanese post-human” as an expansion on the concept of the non-Japanese post-human narratives in that due to the

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<sup>5</sup> Previously untranslated.

audience's affinity towards character icons, these narratives blur the lines in the relationship between the reader-subject and the character, and concerns the immersive and connective nature of present-day communication technology and cultural artifacts as "software" that runs on the hardware that is society (Fujita 2013: 4–6, 10). Fujita further analyzes that the contemporary reader "feels a strong reality" in the concept of the Japanese post-human, and that it is modeled after what Project Itoh proposes in his novel *Harmony (Hāmonī)* (2008), as represented by the subject which loses its subjectivity/awareness amid network connectivity (Fujita 2013: 6–7). While a simple binary approach of Japanese versus non-Japanese could be reductive, Fujita's claims to the Japanese post-human as initiated by Project Itoh's ideas and to apply this concept to literary production is key to discussing the *Best Japanese SF* anthology.

Lastly, in discussing the editorial philosophies behind the anthology and canon formation within the genre, I would like to apply the "dynamic canon" model to this anthology series. I bring this model into discussion because I believe that the selection process and the end product of the *Best Japanese SF* anthology creates an evaluative dynamic which brings forward certain works while pushing others to the background, exhibiting a similar function as that of the literary prize. The "dynamic canon" is a concept that Edward Mack uses to describe the function of the two most prestigious literary awards in Japan, the Akutagawa Prize for *junbungaku* or "pure literature," and the Naoki Prize for *taishū* or "popular" fiction. The mechanism of the "dynamic canon," in contrast to the "static canon" of the collected literary anthologies of past works (*bungaku zenshū*), functions to "produce a continuous stream of elevated work" (2010: 183) through biannual selection of the best works in literary arts and popular fiction. These works are selected by

a committee of writers and critics, whose critiques are printed in the literary magazine *Literary Seasons* (*Bungei shunjū*) for the Akutagawa Prize and *All Readings* (*Ōru yomimono*) for the Naoki Prize, both published by Bungei shunjū. These critiques, especially for the Akutagawa Prize “have a significant impact on the dissemination, reception, and preservation of literary texts” (Mack 2010: 13). However, this mechanism is ambivalent in that while it creates two separate awards for fiction which in their early days the committee struggled to make “separate but equal” (Mack 2010: 222), this was never really achieved. Instead, the prize mechanism contributed to elevating the “pure” above the “popular,” and thus reinforcing its legitimacy, although what is “pure” is entirely subjective and is only given the appearance of objectivity through a committee selection.

In the *Best Japanese SF* anthology, this elevation of the important above what is not happens in discussing other stories worthy of merit in the yearly overview. The selections of the *Best Japanese SF* anthology are also based on conference between the editors, and each story is accompanied by a short introduction to the author and the story, often with a short word on why the story was selected, and at the end of each volume there is an overview of events and trends in science fiction publishing in Japan that year. Starting from the second volume, the editors include a “long list” of recommended Japanese science fiction stories, and often mention a few which stood out either in the introduction or the overview, again, with justifications on why these stories *did not* make the cut.

In this way, the anthology binds into one volume the stories representative of that year as the editors see fit, while constructing a narrative of emphasizing diversity in the current situation in Japanese science fiction, although the definition of “diverse” seems to have changed as the volumes progress. Identifying the new “diverse,” then, is essential to

the creation of genre expectations, and this anthology serves to create a one-stop location for readers to sample these expectations in a single package for each year. These emphases, while aiming to celebrate the diversity of the domestic science fiction scene, then, also create a steady stream of works elevated above others, much like the “dynamic canon” for the Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes. Not only that, as the volumes progress, the anthology highlights the editors’ emphasis on the writers Project Itoh and EnJoe Toh, elevating these two above all others as standard bearers for the genre. Even with Itoh’s untimely death in 2009, this model continues to elevate Itoh as a talent that had yet to be perfected but that left behind a legacy to be carried on by other writers. This elevation does not set EnJoe and Itoh far apart from the others in the anthology; rather, it can be said that they provide the thematic standards for selection and contribute to an ongoing inquiry into the boundaries of what is science fiction. Furthermore, it can be argued that the science fiction community’s efforts in creating a space to keep Project Itoh’s vision alive is an enactment of the post-human vision proposed by Project Itoh and EnJoe Toh.

### *Chapters and Methodology*

In Chapter II, I outline a brief history of Japanese science fiction, focusing on its postwar beginnings and Tsutsui Yasutaka’s (b. 1934) anthology of Japanese science fiction as inspiration for *The Best SF* anthology. By providing a history leading up to the current “summer” of Japanese science fiction, I argue that the anthology is significant in that it is the first anthology of its kind, one that creates a real-time documentarian product that records events and trends in current Japanese science fiction, a need which arose from the Japanese science fiction community experiencing both the golden era and its decline.

In Chapter III, I discuss the editors' agenda in further detail and analyze some of their commentaries from individual volumes to address their editorial philosophy, which is based on American anthologist and novelist Judith Merril (1923-1997) and Tsutsui Yasutaka's innovations in editing their anthologies, and where the *Best Japanese SF* departs from these anthologies. By doing so I seek to explain their fear of the return of the "winter" of science fiction as a driving force and justification behind the creation and editing of these anthology volumes. I argue that the anthology series fortifies the industry's claims for the contrasting "winter" and "summer" concepts, and that by hailing the two writers EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh as being of great importance while looking for other like-minded and innovative writers, old and new, pure and pop, prose and visual, the co-editors seek to establish that the ideas that EnJoe and Itoh bring into discussion are the mainstream in Japanese prose science fiction today. By discussing the paratextual elements in the volumes, I seek to analyze how the editors act as model consumers and creators simultaneously.

In Chapter IV, I analyze the writers EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh, and their contributions to the genre, in order to discuss how the post-human is addressed in these stories, as well as how the legacy of Project Itoh is being perpetuated after his death in a way reflective of Itoh's ideas of the post-human. First, I discuss EnJoe Toh's story "I Have a Good Night (*Ii yoru wo motte iru*)" (2011) in light of his winning the Akutagawa Prize in 2011 and how it bridges the unarticulated gap between what may be science fiction and what might not be. I chose this story because it is placed last in the 2011 volume, which is, as I discuss in Chapter II, a slot which is allotted to the most significant person or event of that year. Even during the first golden era of Japanese science fiction, the genre had had a



troubled relationship with the rest of the literary community, especially the literary establishment. To emphasize that EnJoe Toh won the Akutagawa Prize, while not differentiating between his style as a science fiction writer and *junbungaku* writer, indicates that a milestone has been achieved. In my analysis, I argue that EnJoe Toh's story, follows the tradition of the "fantastic" in Japanese literature as subversion, as Susan Napier suggests, in its construction of the "internal alien" (Napier 1996: 110), while also making valid connections to a critically acclaimed short story by a foreign author, "Story of Your the Life" (1999) by Ted Chiang, successfully triangulating its position. Secondly, I discuss Project Itoh's "From the Nothing, with Love" (Original title in English, 2008) and its thematic elements of consciousness and the self, along with the mediation of technology that brings these thematic elements of the post-human to question. Finally, I discuss two stories written as tributes to Itoh to demonstrate how Itoh and his ideas have started to become a meme, or a touchstone, in other writers' works, and thus even after Itoh's untimely death have managed to keep Itoh's legacy alive.

CHAPTER II  
THE POSTWAR HISTORY OF JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION  
AND THE POSITION OF THE YEARLY ANTHOLOGY

*The Postwar History of Japanese Science Fiction*

In this chapter I outline the postwar history of science fiction very briefly in order to give context to the shift in popularity and the return of the golden age in the present day, in which *The Best SF* anthology is published and evolving. I argue that in the current context of Japanese science fiction in print, the editors seek to position the anthology as a device and a process to create a space to strengthen the definition of what Japanese science fiction is, while seeking to rehabilitate the culture and place of short fiction within the genre.

The history of science fiction in Japan traces back to the immediate postwar period, when Unno Jūza (1897-1949), known as the “father of Japanese science fiction” (Nakamura 2007) and a writer who had been writing *kagaku shōsetsu*, literally “science novels,” since the interwar period and had served as a war correspondent during World War II, started writing voraciously to rehabilitate the *kagaku shōsetsu* for the new age (Nagayama 2012: 14–15). In the prewar period when the catchphrase “the mind that does science (*kagaku suru kokoro*)<sup>6</sup> emphasized frugality and pragmatic use of resources in everyday life, no inquiry into or criticism of these unscientific, irrational policies and military operations was possible (Nagayama 2009: 617). As though in reaction, in the period immediately after the war, Unno once again turned to finding the real scientific mind in fiction.

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<sup>6</sup> The translation for “*kagaku suru*” as “do science” is taken from Hiromi Mizuno, *Science for the Empire: Scientific Nationalism in Modern Japan* (2008): 170.

Unno's engagement with the scientific mind heavily influenced manga artist Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989), later known as the "God" of manga. Tezuka, by invoking his own knowledge of medicine and science, created his own constellation of works which further developed the imaginary worlds presented by Unno in the interwar period, that of scientific inquiry, what humanity can do with science and both the fantastic and horrific consequences that ensue (Nagayama 2012: 15). For instance, Nagayama points out that Tezuka himself cites Unno as the inspirations for Atom's seven powers in *Astro Boy (Tetsuwan atomu)* (1952-1968), from Unno's short story "Mr. F, the Robot (*Jinzō ningen efu-shi*)," (1939) and the character Piiko in *Doctor Mars (Kasei hakase)* (1947) is modeled after Princess Oruga from the short story "Earth Has Been Stolen (*Chikyū tōnan*)"<sup>7</sup> (1936). This early cross-pollination between prose and the visual is one key characteristic of Japanese science fiction that is highlighted through the course of its history.

The 1950s saw the rise in popularity of translated English-language science fiction, following the publication of the American pulp magazine *Amazing Stories* (1926-2005 and 2012-present), which was then being published for the first time in Japanese (*Amējingu sutōrīzu*, 1950). At the time these stories were not called "science fiction" but "weird fiction" (*kaiki shōsetsu*) due to the relative unfamiliarity of the former term (Nagayama 2012: 50). Also, despite their pulp magazine origins, the Japanese editions were published in paperback book format and labeled "library series" (*sōsho*). Domestic production of prose science fiction did not flourish until the 1960s after *S-F Magazine* began its publication in 1960, and the year before that, Abe Kōbō published *Inter Ice Age 4 (Daiyon kanpyō-ki)* (1959), which was "produced at a time when even the designation of 'science fiction' was

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<sup>7</sup> Previously untranslated.

unknown” (Bolton 2009: 190). Nagayama positions Abe Kōbō, who is, in a larger literary scope a key player in the post-war avant-garde movement (Bolton 2009: 25), as “a singular member of generation zero” (Nagayama 2012: 32) of domestic science fiction. However, Nagayama also notes that, the science fiction community “admired [Abe] but was hesitant to frame him into science fiction” (2012: 39). This hesitation may have stemmed from the fact that, after “science fiction” had become a familiar concept to those interested, Abe began pursuing other forms of writing to expand his own boundaries (Bolton 2009: 120).

The ideas that Abe proposed in his literary experimentation and exploration consolidated into a genre thereafter, from which emerged writers later known as “*gosanke*,” or “the three greats.” The word *gosanke*, or the “three honorable houses,” traces its etymology to the three branches of the Tokugawa clan who supplied a male heir to the main clan when the need arose, and is often applied to the “three great” talents of any given genre. In the case of Japanese science fiction, the *gosanke* were Komatsu Sakyō (1931-2013), Hoshi Shinichi (1926-1997), and Tsutsui Yasutaka, and like their namesake, influenced each other and the generations that followed. Komatsu is known for his grand-scale narratives of global catastrophe, Hoshi for his succinct and accessible “short-short” stories, and Tsutsui for his use of slapstick and meta-fiction, and later crossover to *junbungaku*<sup>8</sup>. Tsutsui, the only surviving member of the three, has since contributed to the *Best Japanese SF* anthology and remains an invaluable member of the domestic science fiction community.

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<sup>8</sup> Some examples of his *junbungaku* pieces are *Virtual Men (Kyojin tachi)* (1981), which was awarded the Izumi Kyōka Prize for Literature that same year, *The Fictional Fleet (Kyokō sendan)* (1984), Tatsumi Takayuki lists Tsutsui among the “three greats of contemporary Japanese literature (Tatsumi 2000: 242).

*Tsutsui's Japan's Best SF Stories Anthology*

Komatsu, Hoshi, and Tsutsui were leaders in the first golden age of Japanese science fiction, and Tsutsui Yasutaka, who was a well-established writer in his own right, chose to document this golden age in an anthology. Titled *Japan's Best SF Stories (Nihon SF besuto shūsei)*<sup>9</sup>, this anthology collected stories from the 1960s in one volume, and one volume for each year from 1971 to 1975, consisting of six volumes in total. The volumes were published within the year and a half between May 1975 and December 1976, and is considered to be the first “year’s best” domestic science fiction anthology (Tsustui 2014 volume 2: 450–51).

Containing manga as well as prose fiction, these volumes showcased the diversity and range of talents of domestic science fiction in the early 1970s and the 1960s. While not the first anthology of domestic science fiction, Tsutsui’s was the first one that documented the genre in periods: the first decade in one volume, and then each of the five years following that decade. However, Tsutsui had the benefit of temporal distance in compiling these volumes, unlike the editors of *The Best SF* anthology. This allowed him to take into account critical acclaim surrounding those short fiction pieces that were being considered for his anthology, and to take note of important events in the genre after they have happened, such as the untimely deaths of writers Hirose Tadashi (1924-1972) and Ōtomo Shōji (1936-1973), as well as events in publishing that indicate a significant move in the genre.

As he brought his anthology series to a close with a volume for the most recent year, Tsutsui was not optimistic about the situation of science fiction, even so far as to declare that 1975 “may be the end of SF as a genre” (Tsustui 2015 volume 5: 485). His

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<sup>9</sup> Translated English title taken from the slipcover of the reprint edition.

worry was that acceptance into the larger category of popular fiction may have stunted the dissemination and permeation of science fiction, particularly into the realm of *junbungaku*. The solidification of SF's place in popular fiction would ironically result, he feared, in its dismissal by the literary institution, stating that "along with the internal urge to keep science fiction within the confines of popular and middlebrow fiction and the external pressure to safely keep science fiction in its current place, there also exists the propensity of the *bundan* (literary institution) in refusing to admit literariness in science fiction" (Tsustui 2015 volume 5: 486). Tsustui expressed his reservations about the future of Japanese science fiction in 1975, stating that this year was the beginning of the end, when science fiction became too popular and thus came to be ignored as lacking the literariness required by the literary institution, in effect solidifying science fiction as being merely popular (Tsustui 2015 volume 5: 485–86).

As reflective of his observations, the 1980s to the 1990s saw a time in Japanese science fiction dubbed "the winter," from within and by outsiders, where, allegedly, sales dropped, visible successes were scarce, and prose science fiction was at an overall decline. Nagayama attributes this partially to the rise of anime film and auteurs Miyazaki Hayao and Oshii Mamoru and the publishers' demand for the more visually spectacular, as exemplified by the *Star Wars* film trilogy (Nagayama 2012: 237–42, 253), which possibly diverted fans away from prose fiction and into other media. Another factor may have been the science fiction community's failure to recognize those *junbungaku* or non-genre specific literary fiction with speculative fiction or cyberpunk-esque themes, specifically such works as Murakami Haruki's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

(1985) and Murakami Ryu's *Coin Locker Babies* (1981)<sup>10</sup>. In other words, Tsutsui's observation about the rest of the literary community failing to recognize literariness in science fiction, or recognizing other writers who challenge established categories in ways science fiction has done, might have a corollary in which the science fiction community fails to recognize science fiction-ness in literary fiction. Nevertheless, those in the domestic science fiction writers' and publishers' community struggled to find ways to make science fiction less niche and accessible, which finally bore fruit in various forms in the 2000s.

### *The Best Japanese SF Anthology and Its Function*

One of such continued efforts is the anthology series *Best Japanese SF (Nenkan Nihon SF kessakusen)*. The inaugural volume of the *Best Japanese SF* anthology was the first annual anthology of science fiction to be published in Japan in thirty-two years, after the 1976 publication of the fifth and final volume in Tsutsui's *Japan's Best SF Stories*. The year 1976 had also seen the final volume in the *Year's Best SF (Nenkan Sf kessakusen)* anthology series edited by then-American anthologist Judith Merril<sup>11</sup>, which featured selected stories from the American anthology series of the same title and which had also been translated into Japanese. Judith Merril was involved in editing the American anthology *Year's Best SF* from 1956 to 1968, which "played an integral role in shaping the direction of American science fiction as a genre" (Newell and Lamont 2012: 141). Her editing style was inspired by the "decline in quality of modern American science fiction"

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<sup>10</sup> Both were nominated for the fan-vote *Seiun Award*, but for both years, the grand prize was awarded to works published by Hayakawa Shobō, and thus more genre-specific.

<sup>11</sup> Merril became a Canadian citizen in 1976 after the volumes translated into Japanese were published in the U.S. See Judith Merril Website <http://www.judithmerril.com/about.html> (accessed July 25, 2016).

(Newell and Lamont 2012: 141), and addressed in her anthologies critical writing and historical analysis of American and British science fiction of the time. Merrill also did not hesitate to include pieces that may not have read as conventional science fiction, including nonfiction pieces and poetry, but reviewers in support of her style and her annual “summation” essay which she wrote for her volumes asserted, in the magazine *Authentic Science Fiction* (1956), that the anthology was “needed to lift the public concept of science fiction to a higher plane” (152, qtd. in Newell and Lamont 2012: 141).

It is clear from Ōmori’s comments that Merrill’s stance as an anthologist carries over to the *Best Japanese SF* anthology series as well. Ōmori not only addresses Tsutsui’s and Merrill’s anthologies as having been the last yearly SF anthologies to be published in Japan before this current project but also emphasizes that these anthologies were the inspirations for him to create a new yearly anthology with Kusaka (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 9–10). As Ōmori states in the afterword to the Chikuma Bunko reprint edition of *Japan’s Best SF of the 1960s* (2014), Tsutsui’s edited volumes were also his inspiration to compile his edited collection of short stories from the 2000s (Ōmori in Tsutsui 2013: 449). Ōmori’s *Japan’s Best SF of the Decade (Zero nendai Nihon SF besuto shūsei)* (2010) is a two-volume collection of stories written in the decade from 2001 to 2010, and carries over, with Tsutsui’s permission, the title “*besuto shūsei*” or “collected best” (Ōmori 2010: 9). Like Tsutsui’s anthology of the 1960s, these two volumes were compiled well into the last stretch of the 2000s and therefore provided more of a macroscopic grasp or a static overview than the one-volume per year approach of the 1970s stretch of Tsutsui’s anthology.

In contrast, the *Best Japanese SF* series is the “here and now” of Japanese science fiction, carrying on the spirit of Judith Merrill’s anthology, translated and published in Japan



up to 1976 by Tokyo Sōgensha. As co-editor Ōmori states in the introduction to the inaugural volume, the anthology showcases new domestic talents less known to those outside the science fiction readership (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 7–8). In the second volume, co-editor Kusaka adds to this claim that an annual anthology also functions to document the history of the genre, and therefore it is important for this project not to fail in “one or two volumes, for it will not be able to show its true value [if it should fail]” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2009: 7). Although Kusaka made this statement early on in the anthology’s existence, as the series approaches its ninth year in 2016, it is apparent that the editors choose stories to fulfill this claim, focusing on stories that are reflective or representative of work written in that year or events in science fiction and the rest of the world (Ōmori and Kusaka 2012: 8).

The periodical nature of the *Best SF* series thus makes the series a living record of the genre and proof of its robustness in the current times following “the winter” of Japanese science fiction in the 1990s. This claim of the dark ages, however, needs further examination. In the next chapter, I will discuss in more detail the “winter” of Japanese science fiction, and the editors’ anxieties about falling back to the dark ages, with the *Best Japanese SF* series functioning as a reminder of those ages and, simultaneously as representative of the current flourishing in Japanese science fiction.

CHAPTER III  
THE ANTHOLOGY, ITS COMPOSITION AND AGENDA

In this chapter I will discuss the editorial philosophy behind *Best Japanese SF* anthology series and its agenda in defining what Japanese science fiction is at present, through examining the commentaries written for these volumes. These commentaries provide what Gerard Genette calls “paratext,” information pertaining to the fictional, published text. These commentaries are important because they not only provide documentarian information, but provide information that the editors specifically want the readers to access. I argue that the anthology and its editors seek to inherit the process and editorial agenda of science fiction anthologies created by their predecessors thirty to forty years earlier, but in response to the “winter” of Japanese science fiction in the 1990s, also carry the agenda to preserve the currently flourishing creations by science fiction writers in Japan. Through their selections for the volumes (and their justifications on what they did *not* select) the editors engage in creating a standard for domestic science fiction for the current generation. Finally, hailing EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh as the flagbearers of this new generation, the editors seek to find talents old and new that are reflective of the ideas and innovations in science fiction that the two writers brought to the field.

*The Winter of Japanese Science Fiction and Its Aftereffects*

It is unclear when the term “winter” was first used to describe the low times in Japanese science fiction, but science fiction critic Nagayama Yasuo quotes Komatsu Sakyō from his 1989 talk with fellow writer Morishita Katsuhito, stating that the current times

were “the winter” for science fiction, meaning that science fiction writers of the day were unable to harness cutting-edge knowledge of science and technology and create a concrete worldview (Nagayama 2012: 251). Nagayama also cites another writer, Kawamata Chiaki’s 1993 essay and his concerns that because science fiction was aiming for a broader audience with less genre-specific knowledge, it may have affected production within the genre (Nagayama 2012: 251). These concerns culminated in a 1997 *Nikkei Shimbun* op-ed calling out science fiction for its near-death in low sales, mocking science fiction as being in its “ice age,” and *Magazine of Books (Hon no zasshi)*, a magazine that publishes articles and columns regarding books and the publishing industry, publishing a talk between writers Takahashi Ryōhei and Kagami Akira that same year titled “The SF written in the past ten years are all garbage! (*Kono jūnen no SF wa minna kuzu da*)” referring, again, to the genre’s lack of commercial success and the publishers’ reluctance to market books as science fiction, and whose sensational title caused much more commotion than the content of the talk itself (Nagayama 2012: 252).

In the May 1997 *S-F Magazine* feature, in response to these two outlets, editor-in-chief Shiozawa Yoshihiro launched a serial called “SF Emergency Forum (*SF kinkyū fōramu*)” that spanned five issues, stating that because the genre and its short domestic history allowed readers to grow with the genre, it became insular to newcomers, and Takahashi’s call for a more accessible science fiction was valid. However, Shiozawa continues, those claims made by *Nikkei* and *Magazine of Books* were more inflammatory than informative, since new, ambitious works were, in fact, being published (Shiozawa 2014: 416–17). According to Nagayama, Ōmori, too, contributed to the more constructive arguments for the underappreciated but robust situation of domestic science fiction, and

those collective efforts resulted in the creation of new genre fiction awards (Nagayama 2012: 252–56). In short, the claims made by those outside the genre were reflective of the low sales of science fiction publications, but to those within the genre, production and quality never really faltered. Nevertheless, it was important for those within the genre to respond to those claims and assert that science fiction was not, as *Nikkei* claimed, cornered into a niche and quickly dying out. It would then hold that Ōmori's efforts in promoting and maintaining the integrity of science fiction in Japan would later take shape in his anthology projects, and especially in the periodical, documentarian nature of the *Best Japanese SF* anthology series.

In the mission statement of the *Best Japanese SF* anthology as articulated in the introduction to the first volume, Ōmori specifies that they tried to “fill the needs of various types of readers” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 8) in this anthology, addressing to imagined readers of various writers popular within the science fiction community, such as those who, in the past, have read Komatsu and Arthur C. Clarke (1917-2008), both known for their grandiose visions for the future of humanity, but have not kept up with recent trends, die-hard Tsutsui fans accustomed to reading cerebral metafictional inquiries and satires but has no clue about space, fans of slipstream such as Steven Millhauser (b. 1943) and Steve Erickson (b. 1950) who are at a loss with the emergence of various subgenres (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 8). One can speculate that this propensity for emphasizing diversity stems from Tsutsui's proposed idea of “dissemination and permeation (*kakusan toshintō*)” and behind that is the fear of the “winter” days brought about by the blissful but closed niche that was domestic science fiction in the 1990s.

Another trajectory that Ōmori emphasizes is important in compiling the anthology

is the difference in roles between Kusaka and himself. He identifies Kusaka as playing the Tsutsui Yasutaka role, finding pieces written by known science fiction writers, and Ōmori identifies himself as the Judith Merrill of the pair, throwing in pieces that are less easily identified as purely science fiction (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 10). Through this formation, they seek to lay out what domestic science fiction has been like in these recent years, what is being written domestically, and the big question: What *is* SF (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 8)?

Thus, to remind both readers and writers alike, that domestic science fiction has reached a point where science fiction is omnipresent in various literary publications and should and will include materials for novice and veteran readers alike, this anthology project came to include authors from various backgrounds, in terms of where they are published and how long they have been in the industry, various themes ranging from applications of real-life technological innovations to the explorations of outer and inner space, serious examinations of theories in physics or environmental science that spin a whimsical tall tale, absurd erotica and horror, all of which the editors deem invaluable to their efforts in documenting the here and now of Japanese science fiction while creating annually an entertaining volume with a commercial appeal.

### *The Drive for Diversity and Consequent Enclosure*

The editors' emphasis on diversity, as far as selecting non-science fiction pieces, is most emphasized in the anthology's first three volumes. These three volumes featured pieces from *Waseda Literature* (*Waseda bungaku* by Waseda University), an established university literature publication, *Pleiades Stories* (*Shōsetsu subaru* by Shūeisha), a popular

fiction magazine but not specifically science fiction, and pieces from *Monkey Business*, a literary journal begun by translator and University of Tokyo professor Shibata Motoyuki<sup>12</sup> to give a few examples of publication outlets. Selections from these non-genre specific publications also were far from conventionally science fiction. For instance, selected for the first volume is a pair of short essays by translator Kishimoto Sachiko (b. 1960), “Contemplations on Darth/Animal Suit-Phobia (*Dāsu kō/Kigurumi fobia*)” (2007) serialized in Chikuma Shobō’s promotional magazine *Chikuma*, the former speculating on the daily life of Darth Vader and how he might wind down after a long day of evildoing, the latter on her fear of animal suits and how it separates the person inside from the rest of the world. The former speaks to a work of science fiction, and the latter speaks to the compromised physicality and solitude of being confined to a small space. Although speculative, neither concerns the future, nor do they question technology or science and its effects on humanity, nor take the reader into strange new lands, save for perhaps the author’s delightfully meandering mind. The 2008 collection featured two stories that were not at all science fiction, Tsuhara Yasumi’s “Pillow of Dirt (*Tsuchi no makura*),” (2008) a historical fiction piece about a man who fought and survived the Russo-Japanese War and lived until the Shōwa era, and Fujino Kaori’s “The Orchid (*Kochōran*),” (2008) a domestic horror about a woman and her killer orchid. These examples are Ōmori’s efforts in shaping the anthology after Judith Merril’s, selecting at least one piece per volume that might puzzle the reader as to its science fiction-ness.

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<sup>12</sup> Although editor-in-chief Shibata Motoyuki describes this project as “goofing off” with literature in the Japanese website (Accessed August 13, 2016), the English language Tumblr page acknowledges that the project “showcases the best of contemporary Japanese literature. It aims to translate and present a wide array of established and emerging authors” (Accessed August 13, 2016). Thus I believe it is safe to assume that the original incarnation also intended for its pieces to be literary.

In the fourth volume, however, Kusaka notes a prominent change in the selections, calling the volume, “the volume with the highest ‘SF density’” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2011: 8), referring to the fact that all but one piece were what would be conventionally considered as science fiction, and even the exception was a spinoff piece from the *Police Dragoon (Kiryū Keisatsu)*<sup>13</sup> series by Tsukimura Ryōe, a near-future police novel series that feature police squads fighting crime in battle robots. Kusaka attributes this shift, the expansion of the pool of works deemed science fiction, to the active publication market for commissioned anthologies, including Ōmori’s *NOVA*, and the *S-F Magazine* features that highlighted Japanese authors, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the association Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of Japan (SFWJ). It was also this volume in which all the selections came solely from genre fiction publications for the first time.

The editors’ tendency to choose from solely science fiction outlets seem to become less pronounced in the subsequent volumes. However, this does not indicate that they have strayed from a more solidified idea of what they consider science fiction. In the volume for 2012, Kusaka defends against this seeming decline, stating that while in terms of publication outlets the numbers were sparse, as far as selections are considered, they “had enough material for a second volume, with all different selections” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2013: 9–10), emphasizing that middlebrow literature magazines such as *New Tide Stories (Shōsetsu shinchō* by Shinchōsha) and *Contemporary Stories (Shōsetsu gendai* by Kōdansha) both published science fiction special feature issues, adding to the discourse of science fiction as an omnipresent concept in prose fiction. The editors also choose selections from web magazines, self-published collections and individual stories, and

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<sup>13</sup> Previously untranslated, English title taken from the J’Lit webpage for the series (Accessed August 13, 2016).

magazines published exclusively in e-book format, not limiting themselves to traditional genre magazines. In this way, they have allowed themselves to continue seeking for diversity in publication media, but in terms of content, they have reserved the space almost exclusively for science fiction as conventionally conceived of.

As for composition within the volumes, out of the fifteen or so stories per volume, each volume includes at least one of the following: a contribution by a veteran writer, one by an established but newer writer, an experimental piece in terms of format or style, and stories that speak to significant events within the science fiction community. This final point is most pronounced in the 2011 volume which features three major events important to science fiction: the passing of Komatsu Sakyō, the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and the subsequent tsunami and nuclear meltdown, and the dramatic return of space probe Hayabusa. The fact that the other volumes are less articulate in this aspect could mean that, much more had happened in 2011 than in all previous and subsequent years combined.

Finally, another characteristic of these volumes that is perhaps most important to note is that the final slot in each volume is always awarded to a piece that represents a significant person or event from that year. The editors call the final slot in the anthology *tori*, a term that comes from the *rakugo* comedy performance culture. This word is usually associated with other performing arts and refers to the final and most important performer in a series of performers. That the editors use this word to refer to the final position indicates that whatever piece they place in this slot is crucial to the anthology, and to documenting that year in science fiction.

For instance, from the 2013 collection is Ubukata Tow's novella "Legend of the Divine Start (*Shinseiden*)," (2013) a Japanesque cyberpunk vendetta, which was first



published in the collection *SF Jack* (original title in English, 2013), an anthology of all new stories to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Science Fiction Writers of Japan (SFWJ) association. The *tori* for the 2014 collection was a contribution from the 2014 Nihon SF Taishō winner, Torishima Dempow's "The Annelida Punishment (*Kankeiko*)" (2014). The 2010 collection features a fifty-year veteran, Mayumura Taku, and his story "You're Gonna Trip Soon (*Jiki ni kokeru yo*)" (2010) in this slot. Mayumura wrote one short story per day for his ailing wife for five years, and this period in Mayumura's life had been adapted into a feature film, *1778 Stories for My Wife and Me (Boku to tsuma no 1778 no monogatari)* (2011), and three months prior to the film release the *bunko* (small paperback) publication of a selected works collection of the actual stories he had written for his wife, titled *1778 Episodes for My Wife and Me (Boku to tsuma no 1778 wa)* was released. He had been awarded this position in light of his contribution to broaden science fiction readership, although his endeavors in writing these stories were entirely personal. Thus, in the composition of individual volumes also, the editors find a way to celebrate and record the current golden era of domestic science fiction. Their efforts bring to light the culture of short fiction in science fiction publishing in an age where magazines are less popular and writers must find other means to publish short fiction.

#### *EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh: Creating a Standard*

However, there is another agenda, perhaps less pronounced than the drive for diversity, that is prevalent in the first five volumes: highlighting Project Itoh and EnJoe Toh and their works as a standard for the new era in Japanese science fiction. In the first volume of the anthology, Ōmori Nozomi explains the conception of this anthology as made

possible only because of Project Itoh and EnJoe Toh (Ōmori and Kusaka 2008: 170), and he and Kusaka still consider both to be essential to the anthology up to the most recent volume published in 2015 as the two writers are both highlighted in the annual overview. Although EnJoe and Itoh both emerged from a science fiction award for new writers, they led vastly different careers with different appeals.

Project Itoh died in 2009 at age thirty-four, leaving behind two full-length original novels, one video game novelization, a handful of short stories, massive amounts of blog entries consisting of movie reviews, writings on science fiction, and hospitalization, and an unfinished thirty-page manuscript for his third novel. In his interview with the online magazine *Anima Solaris*, Itoh explains his penname as “an older handle that [he] started using when [he was] running his old website, before the blog” with an intention to “make himself into a project” (*Anima Solaris*, 2007). Itō Keikaku is written 伊藤計劃, the final Kanji written in Traditional Chinese as an homage to Hong Kong films. While not particularly reminiscent of Hong Kong films, his love for the cinema and the visual is apparent in his stories, having written novels and short stories heavily influenced by film, manga, and video games, that questioned the alteration of the human identity by medical innovation, and their possible repercussions on society at large, in short, an inquiry and anxiety in anticipation of the inevitable post-human society.

Itoh, along with EnJoe Toh, was a runner-up in the 2006 Komatsu Sakyō Award, for which no grand prize was announced that year. This was an award officiated by the science fiction giant and one of the “three greats” Komatsu Sakyō and sponsored by the Kadokawa Haruki Corporation. Until its discontinuation in 2011 upon Komatsu’s death, the award searched for new science fiction writers to continue the inquiry into themes such

as “humanity’s relationship with science and technology” and “the origin of outer space and the reason for humanity’s existence” while writing within the framework of entertainment (“Komatsu Sakyō Award - Kadokawa Haruki Corporation” accessed August 24, 2016). Itoh’s first novel, *Genocidal Organ (Gyakusatsu kikan)*, was published the following year and was met with critical acclaim among the science fiction readership, along with EnJoe Toh’s debut novel, as the next big newcomers (Kashihara 2015: 39). Just prior to the release of *Genocidal Organ* Itoh underwent surgery and treatment for lung cancer that had metastasized from a malignant tumor in his leg treated years before. During his time in and out of hospital he wrote the novella “The Indifference Engine” (original title in English, 2007) and finished the novelization *Metal Gear Solid: Guns of the Patriots (Metaru gia soriddo: ganzu obu za patoriotto)* (2008). In his final hospitalization prior to his death, he finished writing the novel *Harmony (Hāmonī)* (2008), a medical dystopian novel inspired by his illness and his prolonged stays in the hospital (Ōmori and Project Itoh 2015: 36). Itoh was posthumously awarded the 2009 Nihon SF Taishō Grand Prix for the novel *Harmony*, and its English translation received the Philip K. Dick Award Special Citation in 2010. His writing style is heavily influenced by film and video games, especially in his descriptions of the military, as Itoh often read technical books on military operation in addition to science fiction novels (Kashihara 2015: 38).

In his essay “When will we see the end of ‘Post-Project Itoh’ (*Itō Keikaku igo wa itsu owaru ka*)” in the October 2015 Project Itoh special issue of *S-F Magazine*, Ōmori points out that the Japanese science fiction community has all but immortalized Itoh through the term “post-Project Itoh (*Itō Keikaku igo*, *igo* meaning ‘here after’)” on the event of his death (2015: 60), although Ōmori himself at the time saw the term differently.

He explains that when he first used this term, he did not intend it as a marker for Itoh's death nor for it to evolve into a term that defines what came after Itoh's passing but rather to refer to the shift in the trend of Japanese SF following Itoh's debut, the rise of the "Japanese post-human" (Ōmori 2015: 61). To this effect, the term encompassed works by both seasoned writers and newcomers alike, including the other pillar of the anthology, EnJoe Toh. Many of the books published and events curated also carry the catchphrase "The Project Goes On," indicating that this is a concerted effort, perhaps not so far as to immortalize Itoh, but to expand his readership and allow his texts to survive.

As I explained in the introduction, the "Japanese post-human" is character-driven due to the character-centric narrative structure of twenty-first century Japan, blurring the lines in the relationship between the reader-subject and the character, and concerns the immersive and connective nature of present-day communication technology and cultural artifacts as "software" that runs on the hardware that is society. In addition to these considerations, in Itoh's case, the focus of his stories lies in its inquiries into the self and its continuity. N. Katherine Hayles, in her book *How We Became Posthuman*, addresses the concerns about "privileging the abstract as the Real" (Hayles 1999: 13) and disregarding the material body. In this essay, Hayles cautions against the emphasis on information and the idea that consciousness is but "informational patterns" (1999: 2) that can be separated from the body, but is also fascinated by the terror and pleasure this idea of disembodiment invokes. This transformation of the body and the human identity through outside means is the basic idea behind post-humanism, but in Itoh's stories, ultimately, this happens through modifications to how information is processed, maintaining the "hardware" that is the body.

Ebihara Yutaka, also in the collection *Post-humanities: Science Fiction after*

*Project Itoh*, points out that in *Harmony*, Itoh proposes a development on Hayles' idea of disembodiment: what if the soul was "dead media," an interchangeable function component that the body can seek out to keep the body alive (Ebihara 2013: 88). Literary critic Okawada Akira, in the same collection of essays, argues that this continuity is also the essence of Project Itoh's posthumous presence in that he was succeeded by EnJoe Toh when EnJoe addressed the upcoming release of *Shisha no teikoku (Empire of Corpses)* at the press conference following the announcement of Akutagawa Prize recipients. The performative gesture of EnJoe Toh naming himself after a fictional story generator program consummates into EnJoe consigning himself to the position of the surrogate for Itoh in order to complete the unfinished Project (Okawada 2013: 17–18).

Itoh's largest appeal, aside from the thematic elements, Ōmori admits, is the fact that he died too young, and for Itoh's works to survive, it was imperative to create an appealing narrative of Project Itoh that allowed for the survival of these stories, even if this act implicated the industry in glorifying his death rather than leaving the texts to be evaluated on their own (Kashihara 2015: 39). His and the industry's reliance on paratextual storytelling consummated what Okawada calls the "Project Itoh Bubble" (Okawada 2013: 17), but reached far beyond what Okawada witnessed in 2012 upon the publication of *Empire of Corpses* (Okawada 2013: 18–19). The way in which Project Itoh is separated from the man Itō Satoshi in this celebration of neither his career nor his life, but what he represented to the science fiction world, is both postmodern and post-human, but more as the latter as Project Itoh is purposefully repurposed into a meme after his death.

In 2015 and 2016, this, along with *Harmony* and *Genocidal Organ* were adapted into anime films for theatrical release produced by Noitamina. Noitamina, which is the

English word “animation” read backwards, is a late-night television broadcast block on the Fuji Television network and is a project that has produced less conventional and more experimental anime, aiming to “turn upside-down the conventions of anime” and wishing for “all people to watch anime” (“About NoitaminA [NoitaminA Towa]” 2016) implying that they do not cater only to die-hard anime fans but seek to expand viewership. This attitude of expanding audience through challenging conventions and celebrating innovations is shared by the science fiction genre as well, as is represented in the *Best Japanese SF* anthology series.

Concurrent with these announcements of anime adaptations and the theatrical release of the film *Empire of Corpses (Shisha no teikoku)*, two volumes, also edited by Ōmori Nozomi, were published: *Project Itoh Tribute (Itō Keikaku toribyūto)*, which is a collection of short stories inspired by Itoh and his work, and a special issue of the commissioned anthology series *NOVA*, titled *The League of Corpses (Shisha tachi no teikoku)*. The latter, whose title is a variation on Itoh’s original title with the word “corpse/deceased (*shisha*)” in plural form, features contributions from eight writers, all based on the same thirty pages from which EnJoe Toh wrote *Empire of Corpses*. The Project is, as it appears, very alive and well, seven years after Itoh’s passing. However, despite these concerted efforts to disseminate Itoh’s work and his legacy past the borders of genre and media, Ōmori also wishes to find new talents who will “end post-Project Itoh” (Kashihara 2015: 39) and who will continue revitalizing Japanese science fiction. The orchestration of the Project by Ōmori, then, is both a dynamic memorial for a writer who died before fully realizing his potential and a platform on which writers can experiment and pursue their individual post-human inquiries.

Itoh's presence as a genre writer whose influence spans from foreign film to video games and is not limited to prose fiction made him the ideal innovator of the "zero *nendai*" science fiction. *Zero nendai* roughly translates to "decade zero" but because it carries a different definition in environmental studies I opted to keep the Japanese term. According to literary and cultural critic Uno Tsunehiro the term in Japanese also indicates the literary and cultural qualities of the era as that arose in response to the political and literary/popular culture influenced by the traumatic events of the 1990s (economic decline, the 1995 Aum Shinrikyō sarin attacks and the Great Hanshin Earthquake) and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), as well as the September 11 terrorist attacks (Uno 2008: 15–22). Uno further analyzes that one of the underlying themes in *zero nendai* fiction is the acceptance of society's flaws and uncertainties as they are, and the focus on how to survive under these conditions (2008: 21–26). In Itoh's case, his posthumous mimetic presence placed him as one of the ideal keystones of Japanese science fiction beyond his death, creating a textual world in which the uncertain is a given, but instead of surviving the uncertain, proposes a large-scale change to the idea of the self by means of technology and science.

*SF as Junbungaku: EnJoe Toh's Positionality*

In contrast to Project Itoh, EnJoe Toh, despite support from the science-fiction community, has had a much less popular culture appeal from the beginning of his career. EnJoe Toh, as written both on his Japanese releases and translated English releases, tells in his interview with WEB Magazine on Books (*WEB Hon no zasshi*) that he borrowed his name from a fictional story generation program from a short story written by his academic advisor Kaneko Kunihiro (*WEB Magazine of Books* 2010). Just prior to the release of his

first book, the 2006 Komatsu Sakyō Award runner-up, *The Self-Reference ENGINE* (2007, original title in English), his short story “Of the Baseball (*Obu za bēsubōru*)” won the 104<sup>th</sup> Bungakukai Prize for New Writers (2007), and later became a nominee for the 137<sup>th</sup> Akutagawa Prize (2007). Since then, he has written actively for both *junbungaku* magazines and the *SF Magazine*, nominated for prizes in both fields, straddling and challenging the barrier between the two registers of literary publishing.

In 2012, EnJoe won the 146<sup>th</sup> Akutagawa Prize on his third nomination, with especially scathing remarks from the then Tokyo Governor and 1955 Akutagawa Prizewinner Ishihara Shintarō, who retired from the selection committee after this round. Ishihara’s comments as he left the committee called EnJoe’s work “a badly fabricated word-game” and that he “felt bad for the reader who has to put up with it” (*Bungei shunjū* 2012: 364). Ōmori, in his introduction to EnJoe’s piece in the 2011 volume, seems to view Ishihara’s departure from the Akutagawa committee as a concession (*omake* in Japanese) to EnJoe’s win, perhaps against the literary institution. But more importantly, as mentioned in the previous section, in the press conference immediately following the announcement, EnJoe responded to one of the questions that his next book was the completion of the novel that Project Itoh had started writing, working from the thirty-page manuscript. This natural acknowledgement of his ties to genre fiction (although he did not mention the term “SF” or otherwise) is indicative of his intentionally writing across borders, which is one of the qualities that the editors of the anthology valued in EnJoe from the start of the anthology. EnJoe himself also acknowledges this as he is quoted in *Asahi Shimbun* that he attempts to “expand [his] readership not by [expanding] within the genre, but moving [himself]” (Books.Asahi.com: 2011).



To give details of EnJoe’s writing style, in the “winner’s talk” with Numano Mitsuyoshi, a scholar of Russian literature and an expert on science fiction writer Stanisław Lem, the two address “Harlequin’s Butterfly” as a nod to Nabokov and track EnJoe’s other influences to such authors as Abe Kōbō as well as non-Japanese writers such as Lem and Jorge Luis Borges. His off-beat humor consists of his playful words and absurd ideas and turns, backed with science, technology, and philosophical ideas, ranging from chaos theory to a computer analysis of the Heian poetry collection, *The Collections of Twenty-one Eras (Nijūichidaishū)*. Despite all of the strangeness, the stories are fairly simple at the core, with stories that could be whittled down to such tropes as trying to find a missing lover or friend, reconciling with estranged family, or hitting a ball (falling from space) with a bat. At the same time, EnJoe’s stories also discuss the Japanese post-human elements of immersion and connectivity in communication, although these elements are often described not in the context of present-day communications technology but in entities such as encoded messages written in a fictional linguistic system (“Palimpsests, or Eight Layered Stories (*Parinpusesuto, arui wa kasanegaki sareta yattsu no monogatari*,” 2007), a physical net that captures ideas (“Harlequin’s Butterfly (*Dōkeshi no chō*),” 2011), or the translated texts that are thrown between two writers who translate (and often rewrite) each other’s work (“The Tale of Matsuno’e (*Matsuno’e no ki*),” 2011). This emphasis on how words and text travel and affect the human existence, altering the human into something that is not – the post-human – is at the core of those pieces he writes for *junbungaku* publications; thus, EnJoe is able to deliver an idea that emerged from science fiction seamlessly to within the closely guarded gates of the literary institution that had troubled Tsutsui and Komatsu.

So what makes his science fiction different from his *junbungaku*<sup>14</sup>? Similar to Tsutsui Yasutaka's claims in his serialized essay with the website *Gendai Business (Gendai bijinesu)* that he does not differentiate between what he writes as *junbungaku* and what is not (2015), EnJoe also attributes this difference only to "difference in vocabulary" (EnJoe and Ōmori 2016), implying that, aside from differences in terminology, his themes and styles do not change. While it is true that his pieces written for a science-fiction readership involve material that require a more concretely science fiction-oriented literacy (loosely meaning that the reader must have a certain capacity to accept as the norm alien species and space travel, fictional applications of existing scientific theory, fictional scientific theory, and the beginning and the end of the universe), his pieces written for the *junbungaku* magazines are not dissimilar in that the readers are forced to accept strange phenomena occurring within the story only observed by the narrator. In that sense it can be argued that his *junbungaku* pieces lean more towards being reflective of the narrator's interiority rather than the strange occurrences themselves, but these inquiries also cannot exist without those strange occurrences.

To summarize, the high-low negotiation in literature as proposed by the "dynamic canon," is thus challenged by genre fiction, which, in its own right, had developed its conventions to reify standards and reward the exemplary. However, this "dynamic canon" or at least something similar to it, is still applicable to the science fiction genre, by adding value to the individual pieces by associating them with important events to the genre and

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<sup>14</sup> The debate on what makes a piece of literature "pure" is too massive to be discussed extensively here. For the scope of this paper I will rely on the *de facto* definition: those pieces published in the five major literary magazines (*Bungakukai*, *Shinchō*, *Gunzō*, *Subaru*, and *Bungei*), and Edward Mack's argument that the term "pure" operates more as a function to elevate certain pieces of written fiction above others and give them power (Mack 2010: 185).

when applicable, society at large. At the forefront of these practices, the foundational writers, are EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh. In the next and final chapter, I will discuss EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh's contributions to the anthology and to the genre, and address the posthumous mimesis of Project Itoh.

## CHAPTER IV

### ENACTING THE POSTHUMAN: ENJOE'S TEXT, ITOH'S LEGACY

To highlight the differences between EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh, and to address why, in the editors' eyes, these differences made them the ideal torch bearers for a new age of Japanese science fiction, in this chapter, I will discuss their writing styles, as well as their individual stories. In addition to that, I will discuss two stories in tribute to Project Itoh, one from a veteran writer, and the other from a comparatively younger writer, to show that Project Itoh remains an integral part of the anthology and the Japanese science fiction landscape, and that again, the anthology functions as a space to solidify claims made within the genre and to identify genre expectations.

#### *"I Have a Good Night": Ties to Genre and Literary Conventions*

The collection for 2011 ends with EnJoe's "I Have a Good Night (*Ii yoru wo motte iru*)", first published in *Shinchō* and then published alongside the 145<sup>th</sup> Akutagawa Prize nominee "This is a Pen (*Kore wa pen desu*)" in a single book (2011). By virtue of its publication outlet the novella would be categorized as *junbungaku*, as do the editors of the anthology who did not hesitate to give this piece the closing position. Ōmori's description that this is "EnJoe Toh's version of Ted Chiang's 'Story of Your Life' (1999) written in non-SF language" (Ōmori and Kusaka 2012, 448) indicates the editors' justification on its selection and position, despite the fact that EnJoe had published other pieces that year which would read as more traditionally genre fiction, such as the Cthulhu mythos piece "Expelled from Celaeno (*Seraeno houchiku*)" or the piece written for the *Shōsetsu Hōseki*

horror feature, “No Name (*Nanashi*).” Judging from the fact that most of EnJoe’s contributions from other years were first published in genre magazines, including two previously unpublished pieces from 2007 (submitted to the *Gunzō* New Writer’s Award but rejected) and 2008 (written for the anthology) respectively, choosing this piece which was published in *New Tide (Shinchō)*, a literary magazine, but *not* nominated for the Akutagawa, had a special meaning for the editors.

The novella is placed at the end of the 2011 volume as something of a victory lap for Ōmori in that he had provided the platform on which EnJoe was secured a position as a writer who flitted between science fiction and *junbungaku*, expanded readership in both realms, and finally won the most prestigious literary prize in the country. As I argue in the previous chapter, the last slot of the anthology is usually granted to the most memorable person or the idea of that year. For the editors, then, the most significant thing to occur that year in science fiction was for a science fiction writer of this generation to be awarded the Akutagawa Prize. Ōmori explains in the introduction to this novella that the story is “not SF in a narrow sense” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2012: 448) but at the same time, as I quoted in the section above, makes a comparison to the critically acclaimed “Story of Your Life” by Ted Chiang, thus including it within the realm of what the editors define as science fiction while informing the readers that this is also a piece of *junbungaku*.

First, I would like to point to the story’s focus on words and language, as EnJoe’s focus is primarily on the text/words and the mind. On a cosmetic level, the Japanese title “*Ii yoru wo motte iru*” reads like a word-for-word (thus deliberately incorrect and awkward) translation of the English expression “have a good night.” This is an indication that the story involves language and the discrepancies between the two languages or parties

involved. Perhaps to a reader who follows EnJoe avidly, the title is also reminiscent of “This is a Pen (*Kore wa pen desu*)” (2011), the Akutagawa nominee novella coupled with “Good Night” into a single volume (EnJoe 2011). This is another very common phrase that is recognizable as the direct translation of “this is a pen,” which has long been the first English phrase that most Japanese people learn in school. These two phrases both evoke nostalgia and the uneasiness in the first steps to understanding the other, not through direct communication, but through learning the other, like one would when learning a language for the first time.

This uneasy other, in this story, is something that Susan Napier describes as the “internal alien,” by which human beings are “oppressed, not by some alien outside force but through some frightening power inside themselves” (Napier 1996: 111). One of the examples she gives is Murakami Haruki’s novel *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (*Sekai no owari to hādoboirudo wandārando*) (1981), and the protagonist and his *doppelgänger* who, in the end, consigns themselves to a fantasy world rather than living in the “future ‘real world’ of technological dystopia” (Napier 1996: 127) because he feels that this is his responsibility. This is similar to what the narrator in “Good Night” experiences as his responsibility to his family, and to find his own inner peace. What is different in this story is that the narrator was once free from this oppression on his own volition, and that this interaction with the “other,” the memory of his father, is also more or less voluntary.

As the title and the nostalgia invoked suggest, the novella is an exploration of memory and its process. The premise of the story is loosely based on an actual brain condition called hyperthymestic syndrome, which involves an extraordinary

autobiographical memory in which causes afflicted individuals to remember their personal pasts with “considerable accuracy and reliability” (Parker, Cahill, and McGaugh 2006: 36), in other words, rendering them unable to forget the details of their daily lives. EnJoe lists as his reference the autobiography of Jill Price, a woman diagnosed with hyperthymestic syndrome, and Soviet neuropsychologist Alexander R. Luria’s *Mind of a Mnemonist* (1968), the latter of which appears in the story as well.

Based on these real-life scientific discoveries, EnJoe turns this condition into a (literal) city mapped and built inside a man’s mind that grows as his life progresses, as the narrator, the man’s son, retrospectively discovers through reading the records of the father’s sessions with a psychologist researching this memory disorder. The scientific accounts as recorded by the psychologist, which the narrator does not quite understand but explains to the reader to the best of his abilities, create the magical realism central to the plot as well as function as the premise of the tension between father and son. It is revealed at the beginning that the narrator spends twenty years trying to process and understand the (literal) memory of his late father by tracing the patterns and processes of his mnemonic condition, and through the course of the story the readers find that the narrator eventually creates a “library” inside the narrator’s mind that replicates the city in the father’s mind. While all of these ideas seem extremely complicated and abstract, at the core, this is a story of a man coming to terms with (the memory of) his estranged and strange father, as well as a love story between the narrator’s parents, on how the father met the mother in the city inside his mind, and how the two reunited inside the narrator’s mind. In line with the idea of the “internal alien,” the narrator internalizes the alien, his father, in order to face his discontent that he had experienced in his life, estranged from his father.

The story begins by the narrator acknowledging the complexity of what it means to be a continuous conscious self, then jumps in narration twenty years, to the time when his father was still alive, and discusses how incoherent his father's words were, as was his whole existence before the narrator reads the accounts of his father's condition:

During [mother's] funeral, he kept tapping on a large typewriter, and at first I wondered where he had gotten such a toy. My older sister, who had also rushed back home, must have had enough, or because it looked unsightly in front of the guests, or because the noise of my father hitting the keys was irritating, yanked the paper out of the typewriter and tossed it on to the floor. I did not recognize the symbols on the paper, and I thought it natural for me not to. Father would never write letters. Nothing coherent, at least, and if I had found a lucidly written autobiography, I might have at least resorted to punching him. (EnJoe 2012: 452–53)

This passage illustrates the narrator's and his sister's frustration at their father being uncommunicable and incoherent, mediated by instruments of communication: a typewriter and strange symbols. These strange symbols, the narrator later finds, belong to a programming language called the APL, invented in 1957, and thus starts to decipher and understand what his father's schizoid behavior and speech really meant. Layered patterns and symbols comprise this programming language, and, to simplify the story, the narrator discovers that this is how his father's mind also operates, that is, in layers of words comprising a single idea.

Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" is also comparable to "Good Night" in its focus on language and how it alters thought and perception, which is the software that runs on the hardware that is the human body, although unlike Napier's examples, the protagonist is faced with a real, physical alien from a different part of the universe. However, the effects of this encounter are not dissimilar and this is why I have brought this story into discussion. The narrator of the story is a linguist working with the government to study the language



of the first alien species to make contact with the human race. This encounter is significant not for the contact itself (this ends in the aliens leaving abruptly, having taught the human race nothing) but in that as she learns the alien language she also learns their way of documenting ideas in layers, and therefore allows multiple ideas to be documented simultaneously. This system makes possible the narrative structure of the story that alternates between the narrator speaking to “you,” the linguist’s deceased daughter, about the events that happened in “your” life and the events that took place in the alien encounter, and as is revealed at the end of the story, these narrations take place at the moment of the daughter’s conception, that is, the first time the narrator makes love with the father of her daughter.

Both “Good Night” and “Story of Your Life” see a similar thematic development in that coming in contact with and understanding the foreign drastically changes the workings of the narrators’ minds: in “Good Night,” through the process of understanding father’s mnemonic system, and in “Story of Your Life,” through the deciphering of an alien language. Both systems alter the narrator’s idea of time and the continuity of consciousness, especially in relation to those deceased. In “Story of Your Life,” although the story is written in both chronological (narrator meeting her future partner during the alien contact project) and reverse-chronological order (starting at the point of daughter’s death and moving back in time), in this passage the narrator acknowledges how her own thought and language have been affected by learning the written language of the alien species (Heptapod B):

My mind was cast in the mold of human, sequential languages, and no amount of immersion in an alien language can completely reshape it. My worldview is an amalgam of human and heptapod. [...]

[...]But occasionally I have glimpses when Heptapod B truly reigns, and I

experience past and future all at once; my consciousness becomes a half-century-long ember burning outside time. I perceive – during those glimpses – that entire epoch as a simultaneity. It's a period encompassing the rest of my life, and the entirety of yours. (Chiang 2010: 140–41)

This revelation comes at the climax of the story when the research team engages in a final conversation with the heptapods, and in the reverse order, the day the daughter was born, then finally leading to the midpoint in the narrator's linear memory at which the narrator's partner asks "Do you want to make a baby (Chiang 2010: 145)".

A similar alteration of consciousness is also central to EnJoe's "Good Night" but manifests itself in the context of human to human communication that results in a post-human-like self. I add "like" here because this alteration occurs not as a result of communication technology but as a result of methodical understanding of the other, the estranged father with a brain condition which the narrator discovered after the father's death. However, when this "methodical understanding" is interpreted as a mind-altering function or communication device, then it fits into the model of the post-human alteration that affects connectivity and communication, as Fujita Naoya proposes. Although unarticulated, there seems to be a similar process occurring in *Hard Boiled Wonderland* as well, giving it a cyberpunk-esque inquiry into the human consciousness and free will.

The point of departure from "Story of Your Life" occurs as the narrator creates his new consciousness and unannounced, sets off to reunite his mother and father. Earlier in the story, the narrator discusses that his father had recognized him not as his son but "Supporter A," which further estranges the son from his father. However, in the years and the process in which he reconstructed the city in his own mind, the narrator melds himself with his father:

So let us now read. In bits and pieces, from my father's random array of words,

invoked as I wish it, my own sparse and meager city of memories, step by step.

My father walked through the doors of a bookstore, open late, with my sister on his back.

I have grown to be the image of my father, and my little niece the copy of my sister in her childhood.

My mother, who was looking at the shelves, turned towards me and smiled.

“You’re late,” she said. “You’re really late,” she laughed. I’m sorry. Time. I needed, so much time.

“Look at her. Our granddaughter.”

Father and I tilted our shoulder and showed Mother my niece sleeping on my back.

“Yes, I know.” Mother reaches her lithe fingers and caressed my niece’s cheek. (EnJoe 2012: 519–20)

This seamless transition from the narrator to “narrator/father” leads to the end of the narrator’s role as “Supporter A” and thus consummates in the narrator’s reconciliation and departure from his father. Because all of this is happening inside the narrator’s mind, one could easily assume that these events are only imaginary. However, these events are only as imaginary as the father’s mnemonic system, which, the narrator, through years of meticulous understanding and restructuring his father’s memory, finally understood to be real.

This focus on what is real against the backdrop of absurd concepts, or the construction of an individual reality is akin to what is at the core of the Japanese post-human. In the discussion of the post-human, this is achieved by the individual’s interaction with technology, and often unwittingly absorbed into such situations. In this story, the narrator and his “journey” in search of his father (who is, as already deceased), to replicate the idea that was his father. This ties in neatly as a mirror image to number four in Hayles’ list of conditions that makes for the post-human: “In the posthuman there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (Hayles

1999: 3). In the story, the narrator's father, reconstructed in the narrator's mind is not exactly the same yet, but similar enough that the narrator is able to replicate his mother as well, just as his father had done before he had met the narrator's mother in real life. There is no distinction between the narrator's real parents (who are deceased) and the parents that the narrator creates inside his mind. To the outsider, this is an invisible gesture, but a necessary one for the narrator to reconcile with his inner alien.

This deployment of the post-human is also a central theme to other pieces featured in the anthology series, especially those written by Project Itoh, and those stories developed as memes of Project Itoh.

*Project Itoh "From the Nothing, with Love"<sup>15</sup>*

Itoh's final contribution, "From the Nothing, with Love" was also his last commercially published work. A pastiche on the James Bond film series, the story is an inquiry on the continuity of consciousness, similarly discussed in EnJoe's "Good Night," and also functions as a commentary on the continuity of the character James Bond that remains unchanged amid the many iterations by different actors over decades. This short story is a development on his James Bond tribute manga, "On Her Majesty's Own Property," first published as contribution to the Musashino Institute of Art Manga Club alumni collection, then reprinted in Itoh's posthumous essay collection *Second Phase (Daini isou)* (2011) that was also the title of his blog. The manga, clearly marked as fan fiction, retains the proper nouns from the source material, whereas in the short story all clear declarations of the protagonist's identity are eradicated and replaced with the generous clues inserted

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<sup>15</sup> The title in Japanese contains a period at the end, omitted in the English translation (Project Itoh 2014: 149).

throughout the story – Aston Martin, Project #7, the protagonist’s past accomplishments such as successfully retrieving stolen nuclear weapons (as seen in *Thunderball* (1965)), “license to kill,” not to mention the title, a play on *From Russia, with Love* – alluding to the character and its world. Itoh utilizes the character and the world to create his inquiry on the continuity of consciousness and self, but as a story in which the consciousness is eliminated through the copying of the agent’s memory data into a new body.

In the story, a certain MI6 agent continues his existence through the application of a procedure of copying personality and memory to a new body, rewriting it as the new incarnation of the agent. The agent faces a serial murder of his successors and the supervisor to his project, and during the investigation, he discovers that the organization was performing research on him and his memory. He interrogates one of the scientists involved in the research, having doubts about his own memory and its continuity, and discovers that his consciousness is on the verge of disappearing through years of transcription, and whatever actions that the agent performs he does so as a programmed process without his consciousness mediating. He goes home realizing that he is the perpetrator in these murders, and finds a package waiting for him, a blank notebook and a letter that his conscious had written, addressing his nonconscious self, asking him to write in the notebook about what he feels, about the last remnants of his consciousness. Subsequently, the agent attempts to destroy the facility which contains all of his memory data, but is stopped short. When the agent is transcribed to a new body his consciousness is now gone, but the text that documents him remains.

The story begins with the narrator, the agent, identifying that he is “a book. A text, unfolding continuously (Project Itoh 2014: 149)”. This is a phrase that appears repeatedly

throughout the story. The importance of the narrator acknowledging himself as a text is an essential part of the story in that it points to the intertextuality or the referentiality of the characters and its world, but moreover, it is a metatextual discussion on how a text survives after the author has perished. It would be much too sentimental to layer Itoh's life onto this idea, but to consider the story in light of how one text develops into another, renewing itself, that is, becomes a meme as defined by Richard Dawkins, this story provides valuable insight on the nature of the text and ideas.

In *Bodies of Tomorrow*, Sherryl Vint points out the body as a nexus in which “the material and the discursive body are mutually productive” (Vint 2007: 17) which is to say that the body is “read” and the discourse surrounding it feeds back to how the physical body is presented, and the dualities that comprise the awareness of the body (natural/unnatural, male/female, mind/body) could potentially change our own ideas about how the body should be. In “From Nothing,” this process becomes an automated, closed loop through the loss of conscious awareness, and the attention to the body also disappears with it. The “text,” which is simultaneously the narrator and the text that he writes in the story, functions singularly an attempt to break this loop, thus creating discourse and ending it. The failure to do so closes the loop once and for all, and the narrator, or what is left of him, the process without awareness, remains to function.

This theme in which an existence continues without its awareness is eerily reflective of his presumed immortality, the creation of the “Project Itoh meme.” Where Barthes’ “Death of the Author” was a conscious erasure of the author in an effort to evaluate the text without intervention by the author’s positionality, in Itoh’s case, this gesture of preserving the author and his legacy allowed Itoh to become something of a symbol,

perhaps a guideline if not a guiding light, for his predecessors, contemporaries and followers alike. To evaluate the texts and their followers, the author constantly comes into question. In discussing this phenomenon, I would like to bring to attention two short stories, “Now, the Collective Nonconscious, (*Ima, shūgōteki muishiki wo,*)<sup>16</sup>” (2011) by Kambayashi Chōhei (b. 1953) and “A Pistol for Miaha (*Miaha e okuru kenjū*)” (2011) by Hanna Ren (b. 1988), both published in the 2011 volume of the anthology. These stories are the earliest examples that speak to the idea of Itoh as a meme that also directly reference Itoh, more specifically, the novel *Harmony*, addressing Itoh’s ideas concerning the loss of “self” or “awareness,” or *ishiki* in Japanese, directly translated to consciousness. Kambayashi challenges the use of the word “consciousness,” while Hanna develops the idea of a consciousness that is malleable by application of technology.

### *The Project Goes On: Itoh as a Meme*

“Now, the Collective Nonconscious,” according to editor Ōmori Nozomi, “ignores the codes of the novel (132).” Written in the style of *shishōsetsu*, also called the “I-Novel,” a genre in which the narrator’s interiority is often equated with the author’s interiority, the story is simultaneously a book review, an eulogy, and a commentary on the Japanese post-human, a concept which Kambayashi helped create through his own work, namely *Yukikaze* (*Sentō yōsei Yukikaze*) (1979) and its sequels *Good Luck, Yukikaze* (*Guddo rakku Sentō yōsei Yukikaze*)(1999) and *Unbroken Arrow* (*Anburōkun arō: Sentō yōsei Yukikaze*)(2009), in which a human but emotionally detached pilot and his AI fighter plane develop a relationship centered on the development of consciousness and will by the AI during an

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<sup>16</sup> This is not a typo but a deliberate punctuation seen in the original title.

ongoing war against an alien species. In “Collective Nonconscious,” the narrator, a middle-aged writer (presumably Kambayashi, born in 1953 with a career spanning three decades), in the months following the Great East Japan Earthquake, starts using a Twitter-like social network service called “Chatter (*Saezuri*)” and encounters an online entity who calls himself “Itō Keikaku.” Then the narrator, in conversation with “Itō Keikaku,” begins reviewing Itoh’s novel *Harmony*, with a commentary that Itoh’s understanding of what awareness or consciousness might be fell short, and that the story only functioned as a commentary on emotions and free will, which are but functions of awareness, and did not grasp what “awareness affects the human, and what it produces” (Kambayashi 2012: 152). The narrator further analyzes that the product of awareness is the individual understanding of reality from which fiction is born, therefore that the loss of awareness is the loss of fiction. The aftermath of this loss of fiction, the narrator argues, is what should have been written, and would have been written if Itoh had not died.

On the other hand, in “A Pistol for Miaha (*Miaha e okuru kenjū*)” (2011) Hanna Ren constructs a world in which the text *Harmony* survives as a sort of a Canonical text in the advancement of medical technology. Written as a part of a private, fan production anthology (*dōjinshi*), *Project Itoh Tribute (Itō Keikaku toribyūto)*, published by the Kyoto University SF Association. This is not a commercial publication and was first sold at the convention event Literary Flea Market (*Bungaku furima*) in 2011. The version which appears in the anthology is rewritten, with an added ending, altering the trajectory of the story completely from its initial incarnation and creating a storyline which became more of a response to the ideas presented by Project Itoh.

The title is a mashup of the antagonist’s name from *Harmony* and a title of another



modern classic short story, the 1971 “Pearls for Mia (*Mia e okuru shinju*)” by Kajio Shinji. To any enthusiast of Japanese science fiction, the title sets up expectations for a tragic love story in which barriers in communication (in “Pearls” an experiment in time travel) and a story about medical innovation altering the society into a dystopia (in *Harmony*, the entire premise of the story). As is with the James Bond franchise in “From the Nothing,” Hanna does not cite the name Itoh Keikaku/Project Itoh or the book *Harmony*. However, because of its publishing outlet, the *Project Itoh Tribute* anthology *dōjinshi*, references to one of the characters and ideas in *Harmony*, the physical appearance of the so-called “Bible” (a white, pocket sized book, similar to the *bunko* edition of *Harmony*) and moreover, acknowledgement by the author and editor Ōmori Nozomi, this story rests safely as tribute to Project Itoh and, just as Kambayashi in “Collective Nonconscious” proposed, tells the story of what could have happened beyond Itoh’s imagined future, past the loss of consciousness and free will proposed on a global scale in *Harmony*, through events initiated by a woman named Miaha<sup>17</sup> and on a smaller scale, its effects limited to one individual, in “From the Nothing.”

In the story, the book presumed as *Harmony* functions as part of a collection of stories, called “the Bible” within the owner family of the largest medical nanotechnology corporation in the country. The stories included in the collection are written “between the beginning of the last [twenty-first century] and the beginning of this century (Hanna 2012: 172),” and, according to in-text references, the collection includes Itoh’s “The Indifference Engine,” Ted Chiang’s 2002 short story “Liking What You See: A Documentary,” and Greg

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<sup>17</sup> The name is reverted to “Miach” as per its Celtic origins in the translation by Alexander O. Smith (2010: 10); “Miaha” is the transliteration of the name in Japanese, which is also used for the reading of the name written in Kanji in Hanna Ren’s story.

Egan's 1997 story "Reasons to be Cheerful," all of which feature medical procedures that alter the human perception of the world and how these alterations affect the individual. Hanna further develops these inquiries by calling into question the genuineness of these perceptions as observed by the other and the ethicality of molding the human perception.

The technology in the backdrop of the story is nanotechnology that molds the human emotion of love and devotion. In the events of the story a genius who calls herself Miaha, after being forced into liaison with the protagonist's corporation, injects herself with nanomachines based on the aforementioned technology, but modified so that her original personality is replaced by a docile personality, who is in love with the protagonist, but is lacking in knowledge or passion for science and therefore useless to the corporation.

The question here is whether this altered perception renders the individual as fabricated. Hanna's answer to this question is that the answer is not so relevant as the process of questioning. The protagonist admits that his aversion to "affection created by implants" (Hanna 2012: 227) had only been an excuse to avert his eyes from the inevitable, that the new personality is an individual in her own right, with free will and awareness. His wish to revert Miaha's personality to the old had only emerged from his personal agenda, that he had fallen in love with the old Miaha and wished to reconnect with her although he had no hope of connecting with her in the first place. The erasure of free will, or at least a partial alteration to it, as proposed in the stories from "the Bible" does not manifest in the "real world" of "Pistol," and although massive alterations occur, humanity, and individuals, continue to survive, at least for the time being.

These two stories contribute to creating a textual world in which Itoh functions not only as a reference point but more as a departure point from what Itoh proposes, that

is, the malleability of what is human through technology and the anxiety of connectivity. Kambayashi, as predecessor to Itoh in discussing these issues, had no choice but to react to the loss of a mind who could have challenged Kambayashi's claims, as does Hanna, who was able to finally ease the pain that he felt upon hearing the news of Itoh's death (Hanna 2012: 233). While these contributions, both to the reader and authors alike, are therapeutic, they are both earliest attempts at preserving the idea that was Project Itoh, seems to have succeeded at least for now.

The two stories also function to fill the role of the Project Itoh slot in the anthology, the counterpart to EnJoe Toh as stated in the introduction to the inaugural volume. It is clear that the editors intended for both Itoh and EnJoe to be leaders and innovators in creating a new generation of Japanese science fiction, and although Itoh is no longer able to carry out this task, the two tributes show that the seeds have been planted. Although Kambayashi does not hold back that his own contributions to the genre long preceded Itoh's career, the inclusion of Kambayashi's story in the volume is a seal of approval from the previous generation. Hanna's story, then, is representative of what Itoh and his texts meant to the younger generation and what these writers can present to the world which must proceed without Project Itoh. Through these editorial gestures, the volume succeeds in reviving Itoh and creating a space within the Japanese science fiction sphere for writers to continue developing what Itoh, and Kambayashi before Itoh, started, which is the contemplation on what technology can do, not only to the human body, but humanity as a collective, and perhaps, to move beyond anxiety and speculate a society where these alterations function as the norm and not the end result of a catastrophic breakthrough in technology.

## CONCLUSION

The two stories written as tributes to Project Itoh were merely the beginning of the Project Itoh meme. In 2015, Hayakawa Shobō published a volume also titled Project Itoh Tribute (*Itō Keikaku toribyūto*), with contributions from six writers who debuted after Itoh's death and two of his contemporaries. However, aside from Hanna Ren's take on *Empire of Corpses* (which, again, remixes elements from Itoh's other works as well as other known works in science fiction), the stories have only one thread in common, that is, as editor Shiozawa Yoshihiro states in the foreword to this volume, that the stories "discuss 'how technology alters humanity,' which was Project Itoh's definition of cyberpunk" (2015: 7). Thus, Hayakawa's anthology is, at the request of its editor, the embodiment of "post-Project Itoh," without using these exact words and using "tribute" instead. The mission behind the deliberate avoidance of "post," and what the "Project" has become after Itoh's death, is apparent in Hase Satoshi's comment to his contribution to the tribute anthology that, after 2009, "many writers, not just myself, have done all they could to prevent 2009 from becoming the end of something" (Hase 2015: 730–31). Although the tribute anthology comes from a completely different track of publishing from the *Best Japanese SF* anthology (different editor and publisher, to begin with), this is but one fruit borne from the same goals in the *Best* anthology, which is, to discover and define the present and the future of Japanese science fiction.

In this thesis, I have analyzed the *Best Japanese SF* anthology in light of its context as a product of the "summer" of Japanese science fiction and its contribution as a site for not only showcasing domestic writers but also documenting events within the genre. As

the volumes progressed, the editors' search for diversity became a search for diversity not in the sense of ambiguity as a science fiction piece, but openness to non-science fiction genre specific publications. Where a particular piece is placed within the anthology is important as well, in particular the final position, which is awarded to the most significant person or event to happen that year. Aside from these missions, the editors turned the anthology into a promotional vessel for the two writers they deemed most important to the generation: EnJoe Toh and Project Itoh. EnJoe has appeared in all of the volumes since the first volume, but Itoh, who died in 2009, has also become an enduring part of what is written in science fiction since his death as is demonstrated in these volumes.

By documenting these events and movements in Japanese science fiction, the editors continue to successfully create a space, which is the collection of fiction, where the reader can grasp what "current Japanese science fiction is" to a certain extent. However, the reader must realize that it is the editors' view and agenda that is presented in the volumes. By including pieces from a wide array of high culture to popular publication outlets, they achieve a certain degree of diversity in the volumes, and although these attempts may contribute to their advocacy for the omnipresent science fiction, they still engage in acknowledging and reinforcing the "high and low" dynamics in literary culture by creating their own hierarchy, the collection and the long list in each volume.

Jeffery R. Di Leo suggests that the anthology "serve[s] canonical and disciplinary ends by having a formative role in both" in his discussion on American literary canon, and that the anthology provides "a momentary vision of a continuously changing landscape" (2007: 3). While Di Leo's interests lie mostly in the pedagogical use and function of the anthology, these statements also hold true in the *Best Japanese SF* anthology series in

which the editors consciously focus on the “here and now” in each volume of the collection. While they seek to entertain the readers by providing a wide range of selections, from the readily accessible to those that satisfy the more particular reader, their mission is to record this breadth of production in this current era not only for future generations but for the current readership, to prove that the genre is abundant both in supply and in demand.

A further inquiry, then, is whether they truly cover this wide array that they claim to, and to a certain extent, present. In the commentaries sections, they admit that the pool of works represented by the recommended readings list at the end of the volumes “have no set standard in mind, nor are they comprehensive” (Ōmori and Kusaka 2009: 538). By no means was I able to personally read every work in those lists, but just by counting, there seems to be more of a discrepancy in representation than the editors might realize. For instance, women’s and gender fiction are underrepresented in these volumes, with women comprising around twenty percent of each year’s list. It is true that the 2009 collection, seven out of nineteen writers were women. However, in the other volumes this number is limited to three or less. It is unclear from these volumes how active women writers are in each year; it could be that the percentage is directly representative of the population of women writers. Nevertheless, the anthology’s claim to diversity may not necessarily be conscious of representation, and while this anthology is a beneficial and integral part of Japanese science fiction, we must question what the editors choose to excise from their painting of the landscape.

Another larger inquiry, then, is the impact of such anthology on a larger literary landscape: partial representation, setting standards, and guiding the readers to the idea of a comprehensive understanding of the genre. I would not go so far as to say that the editors’

efforts are divisive; if anything, as I have argued, their drive is to include the diverse. However, as I analyzed, their impulse might be focused on converging “Japanese science fiction” into one place, the anthology, perhaps because of the concerns Tsutsui Yasutaka laid out, the “dissemination and permeation” of science fiction might be hindered by the literary institution. The anthology is one result of the survival strategy of Japanese science fiction, 2000s and beyond. My question, then, is whether this impulse might be found in other genres, for instance, the horror or mystery genres, whether these genres also carry with them a nuanced relationship with the higher literary institution or the middlebrow, and how these genres interact with the rest of the literary world, including cross-pollination among genres and media. A continued study of anthologies, collections, and literary awards for the high and the popular, as well as the representation of literature in other media will be key to answering these questions.

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