

Animation

<http://anm.sagepub.com>

Platonic Sex: Perversion and Shôjo Anime (Part Two)

Thomas Lamarre

Animation 2007; 2; 9

DOI: 10.1177/1746847706068899

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://anm.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/2/1/9>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Animation* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://anm.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://anm.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>



Platonic Sex: Perversion and Shôjo Anime (Part Two)

Thomas Lamarre

Abstract Carrying on from part one published in the July 2006 issue of *animation: an interdisciplinary journal*, part two continues its exploration of the animated series *Chobits* with an eye to how it reads problems of media and technology almost exclusively in terms of human desire, much as psychoanalytic theory reads technology in terms of the weird substance of enjoyment. Part two takes up an analysis of partial objects and perversion in order to show how the materiality of manga and anime as media do not entirely disappear but haunt the dynamics of sexual enjoyment. Materiality returns in an evocation of 'full blankness' associated with the white manga page or transparent celluloid sheet, which allows *Chobits* to pervert the logic of suture and the associated dynamics of the male gaze. The nonhuman woman becomes the catalyst for ways of looking that appear to bypass relations with Others altogether, promising the production of entirely new worlds at some elemental level of perception.

Keywords anime, gaze, manga, materiality, new media, new technologies, perversion, psychoanalysis, shôjo, suture

In part one, I stressed how *Chobits* looks at the impact of new media and new technologies through the lens of human sexuality. Consequently, much like psychoanalytic readings of media and technology, *Chobits* tends to treat what Žižek calls the 'weird substance of

enjoyment' as more fundamental than the materiality of media or technologies (their substance, as it were). Confronted with new material conditions that perturb, disrupt or transform existing social structures, psychoanalysis sustains a focus on the ways in which sexual relations mediate them. In effect, something like the personal computer (PC) or the internet tends to appear as a 'partial object', as an object to which the subject adheres in an attempt to avoid a confrontation with lack, the law, prohibition, the symbolic. Moreover, from the perspective of psychoanalytic readings, the technological object or media object is a partial object that turns almost inevitably into the fetish. Rather than functioning as a transitional object (one that eases the subject from an avoidance of lack toward an encounter with its prohibitions), the fetish promises to displace lack endlessly in order to stave off an encounter with it. It is a transitional object forever in transition, but one that takes on amazing powers as a result.

The first chapter of Žižek's *On Belief* (2001b) provides a prime example. The PC and the attractions of the web are discussed largely in terms of partial objects and fetishism. Similarly, in his challenging discussion of the appeal of anime's beautiful warrior girls (*sentō bishōjo*) for male fans, Saitō Tamaki (2000) raises questions about informatization and its effect on the real (*genjitsu*), largely in terms of the 'phallic girl', a figure that functions much like a fetishized partial object, threatening to undermine the entry into the symbolic (p. 282).

These kinds of psychoanalytic reading of technology do much to explain why a computer can so easily sustain attachments that run counter to received forms of sociality – whence the asocial computer geek with her or his panoply of fetishized technological objects that appear to sustain an eternal time of transition (adolescence). Needless to say, Motosuwa in *Chobits* fits such an analysis almost perfectly. Ultimately, he is a guy who does not make the transition from boy to man, from the cozy domesticity of his parents' home to the harsh realities of the urban workforce, or from fantasizing over pictures of women to dating and living with an actual woman. He is, in the end, a guy who flunks out of life, content to play house, to play with dolls. In this respect, the depiction of Motosuwa's relation to Chi in *Chobits* is the very image of perversion.

Perversion

In their introduction to a recent book on perversion, Molly Anne Rothenberg and Dennis Foster (2003) argue that perversion is about polymorphous pleasures (or avenues of cathexis) that come before the law, pleasures that are not yet organized or legalized: 'the category of polymorphous perversion suggests that we are highly motivated to have varying forms of satisfaction and attachment to objects, including both human and non-human relations' (p. 3).

Perversion is, then, a way of remaining in a lawless state, of delighting in bodily movements, the patterning of words, looking, eating, and other activities. Motosuwa and Chi's relation remains precisely at this level, largely unorganized, and there are constant remarks about its unusual status. The animated version of *Chobits* is particularly effective in using bold graphics and colors to emphasize patterns over organized or goal-oriented movement. This is not simply spectacle but a realm of babble, vocal and visual babble. Despite its avoidance of the law, however, perversion shows an orientation toward law. Chi and Motosuwa, for instance, first act as if they were roommates not a couple, and Motosuwa is exceedingly scrupulous in his treatment of Chi. In other words, there is a strong sense of propriety. Subsequently, they begin to act more like a 'lawful' couple, as if newlyweds. Psychoanalytic theory reads such 'as if' behavior as a neurotic suppression of lawlessness, designed to avoid suspicion that there is no law. Yet, for perversion, there is no effective law, no binding authority. When the pervert is caught in the act, this proves not the effectiveness of the law but its impotence. For instance, each time Motosuwa is caught in compromising positions with Chi, this does not signal the advent of the law, of sorting things out properly. Rather it cues further antics and perverse situations.

There is, too, a general mood of anxiety in *Chobits*. Motosuwa in particular worries incessantly about being seen as a pervert, about the unusual nature of his life with a gynoid computer, about not moving into normal relations with girls, and about not finishing his studies and moving on from college in order to get a good job in a corporation. He frets incessantly. Bruce Fink (2003), in his discussion of perversion, sees perverse sexuality as dominated by anxiety because the pervert has undergone alienation but refuses separation. Fink speaks in terms of separation from the mother, but one can think of this problem of 'alienation without separation' in terms of the broader sphere of domestic life. The pervert tries to remain cuddly and refuses to give up masturbatory pleasures, and the result is a splitting of the ego in which contradictory ideas are maintained side by side. Motosuwa, for instance, thinks of Chi in contradictory terms: she is a girl and not a girl. Thus, a sense of anxiety accompanies the manic pleasures of babbling, gobbling, ogling, and spastic gesturing. Yet, fortunately for perversion, such neurotic and maniac behavior provides no opportunity for the law to gain purchase. In effect, the layers of conspiracy in *Chobits* follow a similar pattern: they imply, on the one hand, that there is something out there, some authority, and at the same time, those authorities prove fangless and harmless, inconsequential.

Octave Manoni adds another twist to accounts of perversion. He argues that perversion is close to fetishism. Perversion sustains contradictory ideas about some common phenomena in order to maintain that something untrue is true in a different way. A simple example is

a belief in Santa Claus. While adults know that there is no such entity, they believe in it for someone else, accepting it as true in a different way, even presenting it to the enlightened child as true at some level. Thus he sees the problem not as one of a belief in magic but as one of the magic of belief. He stresses the ways in which belief makes something out of nothing, and the refrain of perversion becomes 'I know well, but all the same . . .'. Again, this interpretation says a great deal about Motosuwa's behavior in *Chobits*: he knows very well that Chi is not a girl and yet all the same he will act as if she is; he must believe for the sake of someone else, for her/it. Conversely, Chi knows very well that she is not a girl, but all the same . . .

Now *Chobits* comes in response to a specific kind of perversion that has attracted an excessive press in Japan in recent years. With Motosuwa, *Chobits* offers a portrait of the *otaku*, of the young male cult fan obsessed with manga, anime, games and/or computer technologies to the exclusion of all other social relations. *Chobits* brings one of the main sources of social unease about otaku to the fore: otaku sexuality. Otaku allegedly remain so obsessed with manga and anime images of girls that they cannot relate to actual women. These young men prefer fashioning sexy figurines from garage kit models or collecting softcore or hardcore pornography featuring anime or manga women, or idol singers. While Motosuwa's lack of ability with computers and dearth of interest in anime disqualifies him as an otaku in some respects, his obsession with soft porn definitely qualifies him as a sort of *hentai otaku*, a 'sex otaku' or 'pervert otaku', that is, an otaku who remains fixated on sexy images to the exclusion of actual contact with young women. He is a 19-year-old virgin, with no dating skills and an apartment full of porn.

One solution to this perceived crisis in the sexuality of young men is to treat these otaku fixations as transitional objects. The young man's obsession with porn is construed as the expression of a normal, healthy, and needless to say, heterosexual sexuality. But his is a sexuality stuck in transition, due to his shyness or awkwardness, as well as a lack of social rituals to assist him in his rites of passage. The idea is that, with a little help, the guy will find a girlfriend and leave his collection of sexy girl things behind him.

This is basically the stance of *Densha otoko* or *Train Man*, which recently generated something of a multimedia craze in Japan. Over the past year or so, *Densha otoko* has appeared as a book (Nakano Hitori, 2004), a film, a television drama, in several manga serializations, and will soon appear as an animated series. Through a series of internet exchanges on Channel 2 (*ni-chaneru*), *Densha otoko* tells the story of a young man, basically an otaku, who tries to stand up for a young woman on the train when a bully harasses her. He falls in love with her but has no idea how to go about courting her. So he writes in to Channel 2 for advice, and a number of people begin to advise him and to follow his adventures in dating. Ultimately, he is able to overcome

his geeky appearance and his obsession for anime girls, and he wins the girl. In this context I cannot deal with the reality effects behind the phenomenal popularity of *Densha otoko* in any detail. I evoke it primarily because it affords such a fine point of contrast to *Chobits*. Where *Densha otoko* reassures its audience that sexy anime girls are truly transitional objects, *Chobits* leaves its readers and viewers in eternal transition. Put another way, *Chobits* refuses to give up the nonhuman woman, to treat her/it as a transitional object. In this sense, *Chobits* is perverse (and profound) in a way that *Densha otoko* is not. *Chobits* endorses the loveable, cuddly side of the male pervert in order to share and extend his neurotic suspension of the law. *Chobits* implies that perversion is somehow more fundamental to human relations than laws or norms, and thus more profound and powerful than the reactionary panic formation unleashed in *Densha otoko*.

The question remains, however, of whether perversion is a good way to deal with the materiality of new technologies or new media. Psychoanalytic theory is often faulted for its tendency to make the weird substance of enjoyment more fundamental than other sorts of weird substances or other structures, thus turning all questions about technology into questions about relations to partial objects. *Chobits* might be similarly faulted. Indeed this problem arises wherever the nonhuman woman makes an appearance. Human–nonhuman relations become structured around man–woman relations, making problems of technology and media appear almost exclusively as structures of desire. Moreover, these structures of desire are closely related to genre paradigms.

The perversion of *Chobits*, for instance, lies not only in its twisting of the genre conventions of ‘living together’ but also in its play on the technophilia associated with the nonhuman cyborg woman of *shōnen* genres. In other words, in *Chobits*, sexual relations mediate and structure human relations to technology and media, making it impossible to think of the power effects of new technologies outside structures of desire. And at the same time, genre conventions mediate and structure formations of desire. Alongside the weird substance of enjoyment, there is the problem of genre, of regulated difference. What is interesting about *Chobits* is the proximity of sexual perversion and genre regulation. In effect, by focusing our attention on new media technologies, it strives to harness the perversion at the heart of generic difference. It tries to inhabit the twisting and bending that opens genre conventions to difference, as if to stave off the mechanisms of regulation associated with mass culture or culture industries. The trope of a ‘woman who is not one’ promises a way to slip out of the grasp of genre. Everything hinges on the intensity of perversion. Can perversion take on sufficient intensity to undermine or overturn regulatory forces?

There is, however, no way to guarantee that polymorphous perversion does not feed into the regulation of difference. And so other

strategies come into play. *Chobits*, like *Chi*, requires specific kinds of seeing and touching of its viewers.

To understand how the materiality of new technologies enters into this generic world of perversion, then, demands a shift in emphasis. As one might expect, given the importance of generic conventions in manga and anime, the impact of new technologies in *Chobits* appears largely at the level of the conventions of image-based narrative. Ultimately, I will argue that (a) *Chobits* sees the problem of new technologies as a general problem of media; and (b) *Chobits* sees the problem of media in terms of the materiality of manga and anime, in terms of manga effects. As discussed previously, there is, for instance, an evocation of full blankness in the place of lack, which draws on the power of the blank sheet of paper or celluloid. Now I turn to how *Chobits* moves toward blankness in an attempt to allow for a thorough reconfiguring of the perceptual structures associated with the male gaze.

Suture worlds

Drawing on the extensive literature about suture in cinema, Žižek breaks down the logic of suture into three elementary steps (2001a: 32). First, the spectator, confronted with a shot, finds pleasure in it in an immediate, imaginary way. The shot absorbs the spectator's attention. Second, an awareness of the frame undermines this full immersion. What I see is only a part, and I do not master what I see. Žižek stresses that, at this stage, I sense that I am in a passive position vis-à-vis the image; the Absent Other runs the show, manipulating the images behind my back. Third, a complementary shot follows, as if to reveal the place from which the Absent Other is looking. Of course, one does not see the Absent Other in the shot but rather one of the protagonists who appears to be the one looking. The one who seems to be looking at the first shot may not run the show but appears at least to own the place. The movement is from an objective shot to a subjective shot. It is from the imaginary to the symbolic, to a sign.

The elementary logic of suture, then, is that of a first shot that appears objective, yet, because it is incomplete or partial, it demands a subjective shot. Although one might think of this in terms of an image or an object (or objective reality) followed by an image of the person who sees that object, Žižek insists the subjective shot does not simply follow the objective shot. Which is to say, the objective shot may not even come first; the spectator might see the subjective shot first. Or, there might be long sequences of objective shots, implying but not giving a subjective shot. In other words, this is a logic or logical structure with a range of empirical variations. Ultimately, Žižek's point is that classical cinema hates point-of-view shots that do not return to a character in diegetic space, in the space of the story.



Famously, Laura Mulvey (1985) argued that classical cinema, that is, Hollywood cinema, had a profound gender bias. Images of women tended always to appear as objective shots, while the subjective shots attribute the looking almost exclusively to men. Simply put, women appeared as objects, and men as the subjects who see them. The underlying logic is more complex than men simply looking at women and objectifying them, however. Mulvey's analysis of gender dynamics also has three stages, analogous to the logic of suture. First, there is visual pleasure or scopophilia, a simple delight in looking that comes of a sense of mastery of the image. Images of women prove especially pleasurable. Second, something troubles this pleasure for men. The trouble derives not so much from an awareness of frame, of the partial or incomplete nature of the shot. Rather Mulvey sees a problem of identification. To alter her terms somewhat, she suggests that men fear mistaking the objective shot (of woman) for *the* subjective shot. Which would allocate the place of looking to the woman. And so, in a third step, come various strategies that attribute the subjective shot almost exclusively to male protagonists. Foremost is the conspiracy that develops between the male viewer's eyes and the camera eye. But narrative strategies and techniques of *mise-en-scène* also conspire to assure that the woman remains associated with the objective shot, and the man with the subjective shot. The result is a visual structure that assures the cinematic domination of women – the male gaze. Mulvey calls for the destruction of this visual structure. She aims to destroy the enjoyment of classical Hollywood cinema. Where Žižek (2001a) sees 'concrete universality' in suture, Mulvey detects patriarchal structures.

Now there are all manner of responses and objections to Mulvey's argument, running the gamut from an insistence on more positivistic analysis to prove that Hollywood cinema truly (statistically) produces such a visual structure (Carroll, 1996), to reminders that cinema also has female spectators and offers other pleasures (Studlar, 1985; Rodowick, 1995). What strikes me as most important in this context are the objections to Mulvey's insinuation that the male gaze is an innate property of the apparatus, of the monocular lens of movie camera. Needless to say, the question of material determination is crucial if one begins to talk about suture in the context of image-based narratives other than cinema, say, in manga and anime. If one produces image-based narratives without the movie camera or using cameras to very different effect, is it still appropriate to speak of the gaze or of the male gaze? Is it impossible to think in terms of the manga effects or anime effects?

Mulvey builds on arguments about the ways in which the monocular lens of the camera invariably produces a dominating, objectifying point of view, one that reproduces the visual structures derived from geometric perspective. Thus the cinematic apparatus automatically produces visual structures of objectification, of domination, of subject

over object. Joan Copjec (1994) in particular challenges the deterministic cast of Mulvey's discussion of the gaze. She builds on psychoanalytic theory to argue that the gaze is about *indeterminacy* not material determinism. There is an indeterminacy in the relation between the spectator and shot, for instance, that assures that the material determination is always in some ways absent to the subject. The gaze entails a logic of the absent origin, not of material determination. In brief, for Copjec, the gaze is not a result of geometric perspective or monocular lens, and movie cameras do not produce the gaze.

Likewise, Copjec does not see the gaze as gendered. There is not a male gaze. Rather there are various ways of negotiating a relation to the Absent Other who appears to run the show. Allocating the subjective shot to male protagonists is one way of negotiating with the gaze, and like all such negotiations, this one is destined to fail. The male attempt to control the gaze is symptomatic of a formation of desire.

In addition, because the gaze is not determined materially for Copjec, it cannot be historicized. The basic problem is that of a fundamental or constituent lack of the human in relation to the world. In other words, if one accepts Copjec's meticulous rendition of psychoanalytic theory, there is no obstacle to thinking about any visual structure in terms of the gaze (absent origin), or to thinking about image-based narratives other than classical cinema in terms of the logic of suture. The gaze is somehow indifferent to historicity and materiality.

Copjec's account of the gaze stands in contrast not only to Mulvey's discussion of visual pleasure in cinema but also to Azuma Hiroki's (2000) argument that the Lacanian gaze is a structure of modernity, as is the subject itself. In the postmodern world of Japanese animation, for instance, Azuma sees a visual logic at odds with the fixed viewing position (and fixed subject) associated with the geometric perspective that, for Azuma, characterizes Western modernity. The proliferation of eyes and the emphasis on figure over background in manga and anime break decisively with the subject of Western modernity, resulting in a non-hierarchical visual structure, a distributive field of vision that does not produce fixed viewing positions, subject positions, or identities (Lamarre, 2006). In other words, Azuma adopts precisely the historicism and material determinism that Copjec challenges. Unlike Mulvey, however, Azuma's goal is not to identify and contest a power formation. Azuma wishes to situate contemporary Japan beyond the structures of Western modernity, apparently to establish Japan's aesthetic difference in a global market, in a rather opportunistic bid to increase Japan's market share in the art world. Thus he embraces the postmodern, posthistorical world. Not surprisingly, even though many of the images that Azuma addresses often present exaggerated gender traits, questions about gender and power do not trouble his account of Japan and the West, of postmodernity and modernity. Nonetheless, Azuma's account poses an important question about historical

specificity and materiality. Are suture and the gaze structures of modernity? Are they specific to Western modernity? Is modernity, Western or otherwise, a thing of the past? What is the status of a 'concrete universality' anyway (if we follow Žižek's provocative definition of suture)?

Significantly, many shōjo manga play with problems of suture and gaze, reminding us that forms and structures that some commentators confine strictly to Western modernity or Western psychoanalysis in an attempt to establish a unique identity or exceptional status for Japan are already in circulation in Japan, and have been for a long time and in many different guises. While such manga do not deploy cameras or use geometric perspective (except in an iconic fashion), they explore the dynamics of objective and subjective shots, as well as the problem of allocating the look to male protagonists. Given the impact of cinematic conventions on postwar manga, it ought not to come as a surprise that manga artists should understand the operations of objective and subjective shots associated with cinema.

A fairly recent manga by Okazaki Mari, *Shattaa rabu* (*Shutter Love*, 1998), provides a perfect example. The story opens with a young woman in school uniform photographing two girlfriends. Above the table she photographs their smiling faces, while under the table, covertly, she takes photos of their legs, which are spread just enough (and the skirts hiked up just enough) to show their panties. On the next page (p. 3), she sells these softcore images to a guy who clearly runs a shop catering to men with a perverse taste for girls' panties (Figure 1). In other words, it seems that the subjective shot cannot be allocated to the female photographer, or at least, not for long. It quickly shifts to a male character, to a man who appraises the objective shots for a male audience.

Shutter Love, however, does not simply replicate the male gaze. Rather it very self-consciously plays with its dynamics. Subsequently, the female photographer gains acclaim for her photos and the attention of a somewhat older and renowned male photographer. His girlfriend, too, is a photographer, and the two female photographers vie for the attention of the male star with their art. In the end, they both 'leave the man behind them, feet on the ground, ever laughing, looking ahead (*maemuki ni*), always ahead' (no page numbers in original). In effect, the female photographers learn that the gaze is restless, that suture operates through indeterminacy, and consequently, they embrace the partial nature of the frame. The last page comprises three images of the three female protagonists (in the style of snapshots) and an empty frame that does not coincide with any of the images. The camera does not inevitably produce a male gaze, the logic of suture also allows for other possibilities, in this case, a world of multiple or polymorphous takes, a world without men, or at least a world that is not organized around the male gaze. In effect, this is one sort of female perversion.

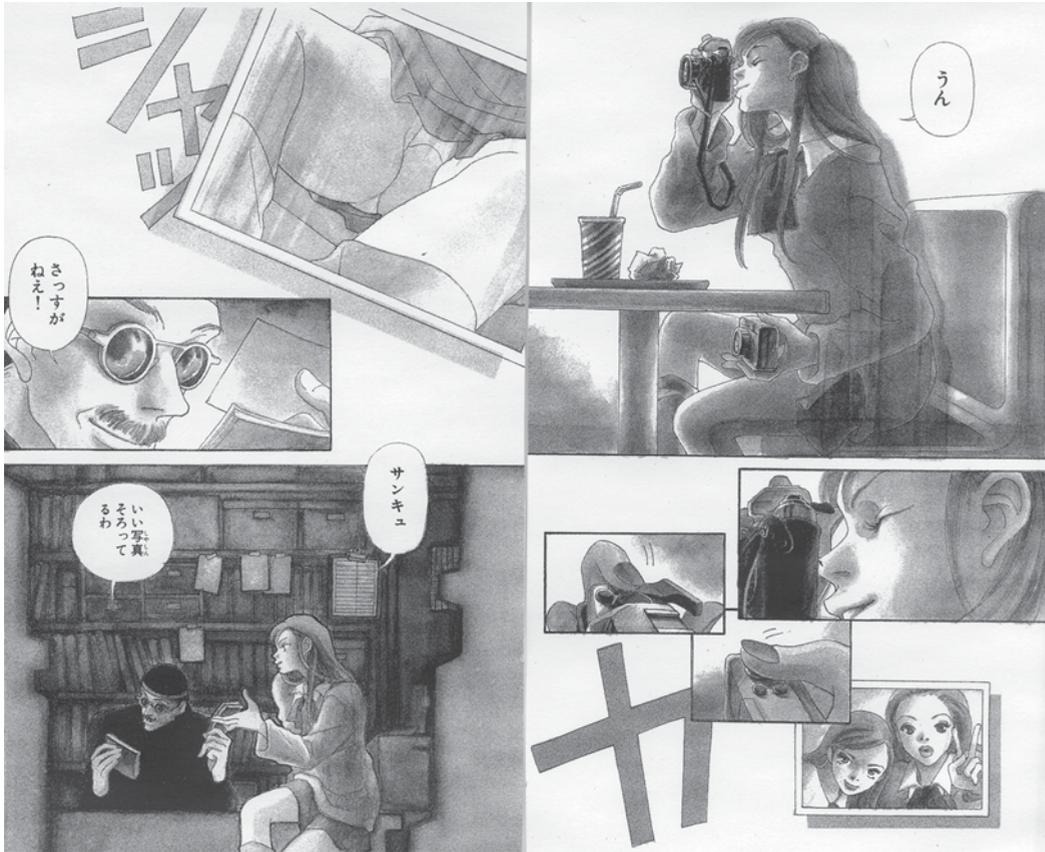


Figure 1 Sequence from the manga *Shutter Love* in which the young woman photographer covertly takes pictures of her girlfriends' crotches under the table, to sell them to a porn shop. © Margaret Comics Kodansha.

In relation to these discussions of suture and the gaze, *Shutter Love* can be read as an engagement with the material and gender determinism implicit in Mulvey (monocular lens = male gaze), only to push the gaze past its allocation to the man by playing with the material indeterminacy evoked in Copjec (1994). The result is not a simple step out of modernity into the posthistorical world championed in Azuma. Rather it is a perversion of the male gaze that undermines its authority in order to explore other possible worlds, worlds that have a relation to authority and organizations (especially the porn trade) yet only to refuse organization in favor of disorderly communities. One might call this condition postmodern or posthistorical, but such a gloss misses the point if the goal is to speak only of a free play of unmoored gender identities within a snobbish materialism (communities of taste). In this scenario, gender still matters, as do viewing positions.

Chobits plays with the logic of suture in a different way, which can tell us something about the relation of television anime to their manga sources. One of the preferred procedures in *Chobits* is to allocate the look to the male protagonist, Motosuwa, only to turn the tables instantly, capturing him in the look of another, effectively stealing the subjective stance from him. The anime series borrows this procedure from the manga. In the first episode of the anime series, for instance, Motosuwa ogles a lineup of sexy female persocoms in a store window, unable to contain his lust for this new technology. Apparently, his is the subjective viewing position. As he loses his cool, however, the subjective shot shifts to the crowd that is looking at him, wondering why this young man is behaving so oddly. In other words, Motosuwa is almost instantly captured in the look of others, much to his discomfort (Figure 2). He is caught in the objective shot with the fetish object, becoming a double of it, or it of him.

The manga and the anime series play up the scenes of Motosuwa caught in the act, so to speak. One of Motosuwa's endearing characteristics is his unawareness of the looks of others in moments of enthusiasm. Yet his unrestrained affective responses are always captured, always seen by someone, and because he is also very self-conscious, he blushes and melts with shame. The anime series places even greater emphasis than the manga on Motosuwa's wild shifts from unabashed passion to humiliation, milking them for comic effect. It often seems, in fact, that the anime series is embarrassed by Chi's dilemma (her reset button) where the manga is not, and as a result, the anime plays up Motosuwa's antics to downplay Chi's situation.

In any event, what is striking about this shift of the subjective shot from Motosuwa to others is the absence of authority in the look of others, especially of normative authority. Simply put, others do not function as Others. In one sequence, for instance, Motosuwa's new friend comes to his door just as Chi has shed her wrappings. She lies



Figure 2 Images from *Chobits* anime in which Motosuwa ogles persocoms in the store window, but his enthusiasm catches the eyes of the crowd, to his embarrassment. © CLAMP • KODANSHA/“CHOBITS” PARTNERSHIP.

on the floor in an erotic pose, pretty much naked. Suddenly, with that knock on the door, Motosuwa is caught in the look of the other. Once he opens the door, he struggles to block his friend's view into the room. In other words, Motosuwa expects his friend to think he's having sex with the gynoid, and will consider him a pervert. Something similar happens when Motosuwa's landlady comes to the door. Yet, as with every other instance in which he feels caught in the act, the other who sees him thinks the situation entirely normal. His friend, for instance, doesn't think sex with a female persocom odd, and his landlady doesn't find his relation to Chi strange. It is exactly as with his pornography collection. Motosuwa may be embarrassed when caught with masturbation materials, but no one thinks it unusual or shows the least embarrassment. The look of others appears only fleetingly as the advent of the law, of prohibition. In fact, others prove to be accomplices to his fantasy. Their look does not prohibit anything but encourages the fantasy to proceed.

The transformation of others into accomplices is typical of perversion. The situation becomes one in which the entire world plays along, allowing the subject to construct an entire world of fantasy. The world of *Chobits* is a world in which there are only accomplices: everyone sees Motosuwa and Chi's relationship as perfectly normal; the women see pornography as only natural, and the men see sex with computers as appropriate, and generally the only worry is how to live in one's fantasy effectively. In this sense, *Chobits* constructs a world without Others. It does so via a perversion of the logic of suture. The series establishes a male gaze with the force of what Mulvey styles fetishistic scopophilia: the gynoids are so cute, so pert, so loveable, and Chi is the cutest of all, primping in frills and lace or swimming in baggy shirts. Chi is the embodiment of the fetishization of young girls. Yet, at crucial moments, the subjective shot immediately moves from the young man's viewing position, exposing him with her. He is caught in the act by the gaze of others. Yet these others do not prove to be Others. They turn out to be accomplices in the fantasy. The weight of authority, the cut of prohibition, never arrives.

Shutter Love offers a good point of contrast, for here, the male gaze is undermined by its own indeterminacy, allowing a glimpse of the world without men. It is in its way perverse insofar as it entails a relation to the law only to prove the law impotent. *Shutter Love* promises a world without men, yet it is still a world with relations to men, to male desire, organizations, and to the law. Those relations are perverted, undermined, transformed. *Chobits* does not imagine a world without men so much as a world without Others. Simply put, where *Shutter Love* ends with the fantasy of a woman's world, *Chobits* closes with the odd couple committed to a life of Platonic sex. Both stories play with viewing positions in order to pervert the logic of suture, but it is *Chobits* that most effectively strips its world of Others.

Worlds without Others

Deleuze picks up Lacan's account of perversion in order to put a different spin on the role of the Other in structuring the visual field. For Deleuze (1990), the function of the Other in structuring the visual field is to introduce the 'existence of the encompassed possible' (p. 307). In effect, this is also a problem of depth. Deleuze suggests that the part of the object that I do not see I posit as visible to Others, so that when I will have walked around to see the hidden side of it, I will meet the Others back there (p. 305). This opens the possibility that what is depth for me is width for Others. In other words, there are other possible depths, other possible viewing positions, other possible worlds. And the Other 'is the structure of the possible' (p. 307). A frightened face is the expression of a possible world that is frightening, or of something frightening in the world, something I do not yet see. I thus try to move around the face, to explore it, to see what remains hidden, to explicate the Other, to figure out that possible world.

While Deleuze does not stress the problem of the frame, or of an awareness of the partial nature of the objective shot, his logic is analogous to suture. There is a sense of the Other running the world behind the visible expression, imparting depth to it, the depth of a possible world. If Deleuze likes Lacan's account of perversion, however, it is because, as discussed earlier, perversion undermines recourse to the Other, to authority, to the law. And Deleuze has doubts about whether one should resort to the Other, in the manner of Leibniz's God, or Lacan's God or Žižek's, to establish the compatibility of truth across different possible worlds. And so, he asks, what is perception if there are no Others? Which is also to say, what is possible after metaphysics, after the death of God? What happens when the Other vanishes, no longer structuring the visual field, when depth rises to the surface?

Real dualism appears in the absence of the Other. Because the difference between an objective shot and a subjective shot disappears, subject and object are, in a sense, one. But something else happens. With the collapse of the Other, a double is liberated, a double that is not a replica of things. Object and subject are doubles, they are doubled. The result, however, is not disorder or disorganization. Rather, Deleuze insists, this is an upright world. In such a world, 'we are tempted to conclude that bodies are but detours to the attainment of Images, and that sexuality reaches its goal much better and much more promptly to the extent that it economizes the detour and addresses itself directly to Images and to the Elements freed from bodies' (p. 313). It is such pure surfaces that the Others hid from me. The Others structured the visual field in such a way that I could not imagine doubles without resemblance. When the Other vanishes, however, the result is a liberated double, a double not constrained by laws of resemblance and correspondence.

Deleuze's exploration of the consequences of perversion helps to explain what is at stake in the perversion of suture in *Chobits*. By stripping the subjective shot of its authority to prohibit or judge, by transforming the subjective shot into an accomplice to fantasy, *Chobits* constructs a world without Others. (Motosuwa, a rube alone in the big city of Tokyo, is not unlike the Robinson Crusoe of Michel Tournier's novel (1997[1969]), which is the occasion for Deleuze's reflections on perversion.) Tokyo becomes a desert island, and in the isolating chambers of the global city, Others do not run the show behind Motosuwa's back. In fact, even though the landlady, as Chi's 'mother', acts covertly to awaken Chi's awareness, Chi's 'father' or creator is dead, and these possible Others function only as accomplices to Motosuwa's fantasy. They do their all to assure that he can remain in this fantastically perverse situation. Nonetheless, this world without Others is an exceedingly upright world. Everyone frets incessantly about it becoming dirty, that is, unwholesome and disorderly, yet no such thing ever happens (as it does in *Shutter Love*, which has its detours through disorderly, unwholesome sexuality). Sexuality bypasses bodies, for bodies are but detours on the way to Images. Motosuwa and Chi realize that sexuality is a tedious and inefficient way of going about things. They go directly for pure surfaces, address themselves directly to Images. The world without Others endorses Platonic sex, a pure deviation.

But what is in it for Chi?

In the absence of Others, apparently, Chi is no longer an object, nor a replica of a woman. Even though there are intimations that she is but a symptom of man, she never experiences a hysterical breakdown, an encounter with the void of her existence. For, in the absence of Others, the regime of resemblance starts to break down. Chi is not a replica of woman, a symptom of man. Oddly, without Others to authorize Motosuwa's gaze as an objectification or reification of her, Chi is freed of resemblance. She becomes a liberated double, not of a computer, nor of a woman, nor really of a man. She is a liberated double-without-resemblance of a doubled man, a pervert, that is to say, a liberated man (who never really resembled a man anyway). This might be dubbed 'feminine perversion', provided one apply it to Motosuwa as well as Chi. It is, in fact, a liberation of the power of the Image, with the power of the fetish liberated from bodies. The desert island of Tokyo, reduced to Images and Elements, freed of bodies, becomes populated with varieties of feminine perversion.

Now, insofar as the world without Others comes in response to the world with Others, it may seem that this is all a trick, an illusion done with mirrors. Chi's power as liberated double may seem derivative, just another twist on the scenario in which women become free on the model of masculine freedoms. Or, one might object that the liberated fetish is simply the empowerment of commodity, a false enlightenment that one ought to debunk. While such objections or cautions

make sense, I tend to think that one must also take seriously these twists of the logic of suture as well as fantasies that redirect the male gaze into feminine perversion. Surely these aren't just the same old tricks or the same old commodities. And in the context of the manga and anime industries in Japan, the logic of the liberated double-without-resemblance makes sense in a different way.

The world of shôjo manga is one of the most significant cultural industries in terms of the number of women producing image-based narratives largely about women and largely for women. It is an industry that builds directly on amateur productions. CLAMP, for instance, first gained audiences through *dôjinsbi* or amateur manga circuits. Manga production also provides a constant stream of new stories for the television anime and manga film industries. Indeed, from the 1980s, the creativity of women manga writers, illustrators, and producers become one of the most important forces in the anime industry, and many of the sexy girl figures associated with shônen genres are riffs on figures first produced by women manga artists.

Nonetheless, women creators are not always treated particularly well in the manga industry, where male editors still dominate. Moreover, while women's manga are a significant source for anime, the anime industry rarely has women in positions of power. As anyone who watches the special features on anime DVDs has probably noted, women mostly labour at the lowest levels of production in terms of prestige, cleaning up sketches, applying colour, and probably pouring tea. Moreover, as the industry employs more computers, it is precisely such jobs that disappear. One of the girls in *Chobits* worries that she can never be as pretty or as intelligent as a computer, and I might add, in anime production, the woman's job might indeed go to a computer.

Finally, it is crucial to note how significant the production of softcore pornography is in Japan. About one third of the films produced in Japan are so-called pink films, largely softcore porn, and it is not unusual for film directors, male and female, to begin their careers in pink film (and many end there). Similarly, a significant portion of anime production is male-targeted pornography. And you need only google *bentai anime* to see what inroads the sex anime industry has made outside Japan via the internet.

In sum, in terms of manga and anime production, women are often the source of inexpensive creativity that feeds into male-dominated sectors of production, and the same industries churn out quantities of softcore, frequently blurring the boundaries between pornography and non-pornography in terms of mass-targeted entertainment.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that women creators should produce fantasies that restructure and undermine the dynamics of the Absent Other that is so much a part of the logic of suture. While the male gaze may not today appear as implacable and authoritative as Mulvey once made it appear, it is clear that, in many manga and anime, the subjective shot tends to be associated with male figures, and

women artists like CLAMP and Okazaki Mari address the androcentric dynamics of the visual field directly.

If *Chobits* is somewhat unusual in its construction of a world without Others, this is partly because it pushes the genre conventions associated with the nonhuman woman to their limits. It is precisely because the Chi remains nonhuman, a computer, that *Chobits* confronts the problem of materiality in a new way. While *Chobits* sees the impact of new technologies in terms of structures of desire, it does not entirely suppress the problem of materiality. Rather it situates materiality at the heart of structures of desire, as a problem of the indeterminacy at the heart of the logic of suture within image-based narratives. As *Chobits* perverts the logic of suture to generate a world without Others, it relies on the elemental structures of manga and anime to bring depths to the surface. The concrete universality of *Chobits* (romance) gives way to a specific kind of material indeterminacy – a pure surface that is nothing other than the full and perfectible blankness of the white page. Only this blankness stands between the image of woman and its complete hysterization.

This elemental blankness crosses nicely from manga to anime in adaptation, generating a perverse force difficult to alter, which potentially allows women's work to function as something more than a source of cheap creativity for larger industries. Of course, this may not be the best or only way of reckoning with the problem of male domination, this foreclosure of the Other twisting the dynamics of the gaze via manga effects. After all, the emphasis on pure surface and blankness in *Chobits* agrees in some ways with Azuma's proclamation of the ascendancy of a posthistorical superflat Japan over Western modernity. Ultimately, however, *Chobits* works within the opportunism of genre rather than that of world history. And, for all the opportunism implicit in its push to situate itself in the marketplace, *Chobits* strives to locate difference within genre and within gender, to locate something that cannot be regulated, without making everything a question of material determinism (as with the superflat). The material indeterminacy that is liberated in the absence of Others promises to give free rein to feminine perversion, affording a shock of enlightenment that, however brief or false, we must try to inhabit critically.

References

- Azuma Hiroki (2000) 'Suupaafuratto de shiben suru – Super Flat Speculation', in Murakami Takashi (ed.) *Super Flat*, pp. 138–50. Tokyo: Madra.
- Carroll, Noel (1996) 'The Image of Women in Film', in *Theorizing the Moving Image*, pp. 260–74. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Copjec, Joan (1994) *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1990) *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Fink, Bruce (2003) 'Perversion', in Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster and Slavoj Žižek (eds) *Perversion and the Social Relation*, pp. 38–67. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lamarre, Thomas (2006) 'Otaku Movement', in Tomiko Yoda and H.D. Harootunian (eds) *Japan after Japan: Rethinking the Nation in an Age of Recession*, pp. 358–94. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mannoni, Octave (2003) 'I Know Well, But All the Same . . .', in Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster and Slavoj Žižek (eds) *Perversion and the Social Relation*, pp. 68–92. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mulvey, Laura (1985) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in Bill Nichols (ed.) *Movies and Methods*, 2nd edn, pp. 303–14. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nakano Hitori (2004) *Densha otoko*. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- Okazaki Mari (1998) *Shataa rabu* Margaret Comics 2842. Tokyo: Shūeisha.
- Rodowick, D.N. (1995) 'The Difficulty of Difference', in *The Difficulty of Difference*, pp. 1–17. London: Routledge.
- Rothenberg, Molly Anne and Foster, Dennis (2003) 'Introduction. Beneath the Skin: Perversion and Social Analysis', in Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster and Slavoj Žižek (eds) *Perversion and the Social Relation*, pp. 1–14. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Saitō Tamaki (2000) *Sentō bisbōjo no seishin bunseki*. Tokyo: Ōta shuppan.
- Studlar, Gaylyn (1985) 'Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of Cinema', in Bill Nichols (ed.) *Movies and Methods*, 2nd edn, pp. 602–21. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tournier, Michel (1997[1969]) *Friday; or, the Other Island*, trans. Norman Denny. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2001a) *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski between Theory and Post-Theory*. London: BFI.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2001b) *On Belief*. London: Routledge.

Thomas Lamarre is an Associate Professor of East Asian Studies at McGill University. He is the author of *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription* (Duke University Press, 2000) and *Shadows on the Screen: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō on Cinema and Oriental Aesthetics* (University of Michigan CJS, 2005), and co-editor, with Kang Nae-Hui, of *Impacts of Modernity* (Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

Address: McGill University, 3434 McTavish Street, Montreal, PQ H3A 1X9, Canada. [email: Thomas.Lamarre@mcgill.ca]