

Oddkins vignettes:
A case study of Human-Robot Kinship in Science-Fiction manga through Kazuo
Umezu's *I Am Shingo*

Ariane Charbonneau

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By: Ariane Charbonneau

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Monika Kin Gagnon

_____ Examiner
Dr. Monika Kin Gagnon

_____ Examiner
Dr. Matthew Penney

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Krista Geneviève Lynes

Approved by _____
Dr. Monika Gagnon, Graduate Program Director

January 23, 2020 _____
Dr. André G. Roy, Dean of Faculty

Abstract

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Ariane Charbonneau

This thesis argues that manga as a medium is a remarkably appropriate way of exploring the continuous thread of Haraway's theorization of kinship and filiations without blood relating. Manga, per its formal characteristics, has an inherent intricacy, drawing from words, illustration and cinema to create a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. To demonstrate this, we explore a case study of science-fiction manga (*I Am Shingo*) through the lens of Donna J. Haraway's body of work. More specifically, it uses the concept of "oddkins", borrowing from Haraway's Cyborg theory and her Companion Species theory, to articulate these rich, loaded relationships. Additionally, we invoke Haraway's later works, where the focus is not only on hybridity and heterogeneity, but on the links that develop within the different beings inhabiting a common space and their inevitable interactions. This thesis is constructed around one case study, looking at Kazuo Umezu's *I Am Shingo* (1982). Through this tale of a robotic offspring trying to reunite its star-crossed lover parents, we explore examples of oddkins as Shingo encounters allies from various walks of life and interfaces with them. Additionally, we will discuss the benefits Haraway's body of work can have on manga studies.

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Table of Contents

List of figures _____	vii
Introduction _____	01
Literature Review _____	07
Theoretical framework _____	21
Observations and Finding from <i>I Am Shingo</i> (1982-1986) _____	36
Conclusion _____	58
Bibliography _____	61

List of Figures

Figure 1 : An example of HiraHira aesthetics from the manga ChobitS _____	18
Figure 2: Umezu's take on abstract backgrounds to express character's emotions. _____ Note the emphasis on the glistening eyes.	19
Figure 3: Monroe in their full physical integrity. _____	36
Figure 4: The moment where Satoru first sets his eyes on Monroe _____	36
Figure 5: What remains of Monroe (now known as Shingo) at the end of the series. _____	36
Figure 6: Satoru trips and puts his hand right where the machine is assembling pieces. _____	39
Figure 7: Satoru's hand as seen by Monroe (initial Shingo-vision). _____	39
Figure 8: Monroe goes haywire trying to comprehend and grab Satoru's hand. _____	40
Figure 9: Front cover of <i>I Am Shingo</i> volume 4, in the deluxe UMEZZ PERFECTION! edition. _____	40
Figure 10: Fearless old lady plugs Shingo into the wall despite heavy machinery trying to stop her. _____	43
Figure 11: The old lady wakes up after Shingo's intervention. _____	43
Figure 12: Meeting between Shingo and the wild dog. _____	45
Figure 13: The rejuvenated wild dog, now with an inexplicable human face. _____	45
Figure 14: The tension is high as Shingo tries to get on the conveyor belt in the port. _____	47
Figure 15: The fly use Shingo's memory to create a portrait of Marin in the air. _____	47
Figure 16: Shingo is, without question, accepted and embraced by the snakes. _____	48
Figure 17: Shingo is dropped onto the conveyer belt by his allies on the ground and the flying al- lies take over the support mission. _____	48
Figure 18: Miki, very excited to meet her friend, burst out of the cupboard she was locked in. As she gets closer to the door to meet Shingo, her body develop new appendages. _____	49
Figure 19: Miki casually enters the family's apartment and put on a dress to go out . _____	51
Figure 20: Cover page of Apartment 23 illustrating Shingo in the port writing an ultimate mes- sage for the person who gave him knowledge. _____	55
Figure 21: A hard-boiled Satoru is reminded of his roots by Shingo's last message. _____	56

Introduction

Manga is the name given to Japanese comics. Meaning simply “comics” in its native language, manga differs from European or American comics through its monochrome graphics, its page formatting and the significant length of books. This industry has developed tremendously since the post-WWII era, capturing the heart not only of its home country, but of the world at large. In the past two decades, an increasing amount of attention has been given to the niche that is Manga Studies in the university although, considering the abundance of topics possible around this medium, the surface has barely been scratched. This thesis proposes a literary and social feminist analysis of the kinship (interpersonal intimate relations) between humans and robots in *I am Shingo*, a science-fiction manga from the 1980s. More precisely, this thesis argues that manga as a medium is a remarkably appropriate way of exploring the continuous thread of Donna Haraway’s theorization of kinship and filiation without blood relating, instead assuring a lineage happening through fortuitous encounters. To refer to the beings in these coincidental relationships, she created the term oddkin. Manga promotes these entanglements both through its narrative and formal elements. The richness in its layouts, heavily inspired by cinematography and loaded with both dynamism and introspection pairs beautifully with the oddkin entanglements tying living beings not related through blood links in unexpected combinations. Said layouts bring the focus on emotion and internal turmoil compels the reader to tangibly identify with the topic at hand. In addition, as a cheap media to produce and reproduce, manga has a great potential to explore niche topics and distribute the result on a wider scale than other mainstream media such as television.

The introspective dimension of manga is phenomenally compatible with feminist approaches. Reading Haraway, I initially fell in love with her work on companion species¹ and the apparatus it provided for interbeings relationships, as its tenets include a necessary amount of contextualization and adaptation for each unique situation. Her idea of kinship and “staying with the trouble”, of uncertain boundaries persistently haunted me. While a feminist thesis about human-root relationships immediately call forth Cyborg Theory and its manifesto, it is here reex-

¹ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Paradigm 8 (Chicago, Ill: Prickly Paradigm ; Distributed by The University of Chicago, 2003).

explored and implanted melded with conclusions from Haraway's subsequent works. Biology is indissociable from Haraway's theories. While robots in this thesis have no organic parts, it is the mutual influences with other creatures that makes them part of an ecosystem. Haraway's later works around kinship through co-existence, including the Companion Species Manifesto² and *Staying with the Trouble*³, continue the manifesto's work of dissolving illusionary boundaries. The weaving of the two existences comes from the what the humans impart in the production/creation process, which blooms in (often surprising) ways as robots learn and build on the information provided by their environment. As Haraway's work focuses mostly on the organic, confronting it to a different premise, about a sentient metal form seemed an interesting experiment. Other feminist theorists provide useful, less posthuman theories as well: Japanese feminist Chizuko Ueno's redefinition of social bonds from associational (obligatory) to selective bonds, in the context of the fall of the modern Japanese family. As she depicts the new social bonds born from choice instead of the obligation of blood, her sociological theories accompany the intrinsic heterogeneity of the cyborg. Ueno's theories are limited to the social and human/human interactions. They have the merit of concretely exposing ways in which social structures crumble and what replaces them. Haraway's theories go beyond this, as they wish to question intimacy and choices in a posthuman fashion. This thesis wishes to use Haraway's theories to analyse manga due to the aforementioned compatibility through entanglements. On the other side, I believe feminist studies could benefit from the focus on the world building that can be found in Manga Studies, as many analyses put the fictional work in the backseat, engaging with the theories without actually weaving them with the narrative of the work explored.

In order to have a realistic scope for my research, I restrained my thesis to one case study, centered around the influential *I Am Shingo*. Because of its depiction of robot-human relationships budding through this fable, this horror science-fiction story published more than three decades ago continues to have a cultural impact to this day. Written and illustrated by the renowned Japanese artist Kazuo Umezu, it had a significant visibility domestically at the time of publication.

I Am Shingo is an ominous tale of a robot child looking to reunite his parents torn apart by

² Ibid.

³ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

life and circumstances. This gothic, laborious saga depicted oddkins in an even more explicit manner than expected, and questioned explicitly (if a little heavy-handedly) what “measures” humanity.

Literature Review

This literature review introduces manga, its defining characteristics and domestic history, and take a look at manga and anime studies in English since their inception. While the scope is mostly limited to the North American market (US publishing houses and French exports to Québec), it also includes nods to European scholars whose work brings interesting nuances to the field. In addition to providing an overview of the medium itself through its definition, history and social characteristics, the current state of academic inquiry and key authors in the field, as well as definitions of what is manga and its social function, this review pays particular attention to what has been written on shōjo Manga, or manga for girls and women, for its visual conventions and historic turns have had repercussions on the entirety of the field, as well as analyzing its form and visual characteristics and what makes manga especially prone to vivid emotional representations.

What is Manga?

Manga as a word in general simply designates Japanese comic art: “Japanese comic art draws from history, culture, politics, economy, and other social phenomena to reflect the reality of Japanese society, lifestyles and nationhood.”⁴ It is also “one of the most important Japanese cultural exports to the world today and covers a variety of topics wide enough to be ubiquitous nationally as well.”⁵ The vast majority of manga was first serialized in magazines⁶ and a more lasting bounded volume version would be produced only if it were popular enough with readers.

These thick magazines are printed in offset on inexpensive newspaper-quality material, in order to reduce production cost and to ensure the price is appropriate to their nature as a disposable commodity.⁷ In anglophone scholarship, the term “Manga” is mostly used to refer to “story”

⁴ Moscato, “Fukushima Fallout in Japanese Manga,” 385.

⁵ Kinko Ito and Paul Crutcher, “Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay,” *Society* 51, no. 1 (February 2014): 45.

⁶ Kinko Ito, “The World of Japanese Ladies’ Comics: From Romantic Fantasy to Lustful Perversion,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 1 (2002 Summer 2002): 70.

⁷ Ibid.

manga (fiction), which rose in popularity in 1954, after World War II.⁸ Manga is also used for more educational purposes, including but not limited to essays in comic form, educational manga (gakushu manga) and biographies (denki manga)⁹. From interviews by Prough¹⁰, we know that mangaka conceptualize their stories for their domestic market. Even if manga's horizons are broader than they ever were, international fans are still seen as simply a bonus for mangaka.

A Condensed history of post-war manga

While manga in print steadily grew in popularity in Japan since the 1950s, it is at the dawn of the 1990s that its popularity peaked, and then lost some steam in the following years¹¹. This is consistent with the recession following the highest and longest period of economic prosperity in Japan (The Economic Bubble) and its burst due to speculation in the real estate market. Since its first import in the west at the beginning of the 1990s, manga has since enjoyed an increasing international popularity despite its consumption in magazine form has somewhat dwindled in Japan. Following two decades where most published manga were written and drawn by men, the 1970s brought a significant change. At that point, young women started being the main producers of shōjo manga (as opposed to male authors who wrote about what they thought young women might like)¹², they led a visual revolution by putting the emphasis on atmospheric repre-

⁸ Ito, "A History of Manga in the Context of Japanese Culture and Society," 466.

The quasi-totality of translated manga is story manga, so this distinction does not come up during common fan discussions.

⁹ Bouissou, *Manga*.

Elisabetta Porcu, "Down-to-Earth Zen: Zen Buddhism in Japanese Manga and Movies.," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 16 (January 2015): 39.; Ito, "A History of Manga in the Context of Japanese Culture and Society.," 466.; Sari Kawana, "Romancing the Role Model: Florence Nightingale, shōjo Manga, and the Literature of Self-Improvement," *Nichibunken Japan Review: Journal of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies* 23 (2011 2011): 200.

¹⁰ Jennifer Sally Prough, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of shōjo Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011).

¹¹ Kinko Ito, "A History of Manga in the Context of Japanese Culture and Society," *Journal of Popular Culture* 38, no. 3 (February 2, 2005): 456–75; Although it sounds counterintuitive, the manga industry is all but a dying culture, even as it continues to bloom financially despite reduced sales in the primary publication of paper magazines. Due to the way Japanese media convergence works (called "media mix") in which popular works spark multimedia franchises and a plethora of merchandise, the manga industry is still a profitable venture. For more information on this phenomenon, see Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (U of Minnesota Press, 2012).

¹² Paul Gravett, *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* (London: Laurence King, 2004).

sentations of the abstract through patterns and motifs to make feelings and ambiance tangible, such as ominous heavy swirls as a background to express torment, or soft, sparkly gradients to manifest bliss: “These visual and psychological connections to Japan’s past and present, along with manga’s focus on iconography, language, and political or social conditions have provided the genre with enduring popularity and mass appeal.”¹³

This artistic switch also included character with large eyes, an aspect considered a staple in most contemporary manga. The purpose of these proportionally oversized eyes is to put the accent on the characters emotions, This change in iconography would influence the landscape of manga and become the main stylistic spin over time.

Social purpose and manifestations

As per Manga Shōnen’s manifesto in 1955, Manga is considered a way to prompt good values in younger people.¹⁴ There is also a wide community of fans who produce their own fanzines based on existing franchises, the biggest festival being the Comic Market. Manga is cheap to create, as it requires only pen, paper and black ink in its most rudimentary form. It is also usually produced through traditional media¹⁵. The astronomical quantity of titles on sale is reflected in the variety of topics covered. Compared to other mass media, manga has formal advantages that make it especially suitable for more marginal or controversial subjects. These advantages include its low productions costs and engagement requires the viewer to actively take the book and manipulate it in order to ingest its content. This barrier somewhat lessens the possibility of taking it in in passing, without context, as opposed to a movie that unfolds before your eyes. One example is the food/gourmet manga *Oshinbo*, which included an honest and critical almost documentary coverage of the consequences of the Fukushima nuclear incident.¹⁶ At the time,

¹³ Derek Moscato, “Fukushima Fallout in Japanese Manga.,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 41, no. 4 (October 2017): 382–402.

¹⁴ Ryan Holmberg, “Manga shōnen: Katō Ken’ichi and the Manga Boys,” *Mechademia* 8 (November 2013): 176.

¹⁵ Jennifer Sally Prough, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of shōjo Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2011), 163.

¹⁶ Moscato, “Fukushima Fallout in Japanese Manga.”

none of the Japanese news outlets presented the health afflictions of Fukushima residents, entertaining a discourse that made the situation seem less pressing and alarming than it was.

However, not all manga can be taken as straight documentation (it is, after all, fiction). An example is the works on *hikikomori*, a social phenomenon of people shutting themselves outside of society and into their own room or house for extended periods of time. While they provide commentary on contemporary masculinity”, they also do a disservice by inexactly representing the phenomenon as an almost exclusively male affair. In reality, “every third *hikikomori* is female, the fictional narratives [...] tend to build on male characters to nurtured and rescued by women.”¹⁷ In opposition, to the idealized saviour figures, shōjo manga present girls existing, solving problems of their own and going about their lives, including unconventional options like questioning gender norms and identity have been characteristics of the shōjo manga genre since the 1970s.

Form & content

“[T]his may be stating the obvious, but art is what makes a manga a manga.”¹⁸ Most manga artists catered to the same audience for the length of their career, by staying with the same magazine and editing house for all their works. This historically meant a division by gender and age. Considering this categorization requires a significant amount of amendments to reflect the demographics of the actual readers, it is increasingly re-examined and questioned.¹⁹ Our case study diverge from the traditional system, as Umezu dabbled in manga for both boys and girls, youngsters and adults, experimenting with different themes and different levels of intensity and seriousness. This places Umezu as an avantgardist, as it is in line with newer tendencies, more than two decades after his lastest published manga. Currently, readers seek new horizons²⁰ and online publications have a less gender-targeted content.²¹

¹⁷ Heinze and Thomas, “Self and Salvation: Visions of Hikikomori in Japanese Manga,” 166.

¹⁸ Hirohiko Araki, *Manga in Theory and Practice: The Craft of Creating Manga* (San Francisco: VIZ Media LLC, 2017), 119.

¹⁹ Kinko Ito, “The World of Japanese Ladies’ Comics: From Romantic Fantasy to Lustful Perversion,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 1 (2002 Summer 2002): 68–85.

²⁰ Prough, *Straight from the Heart*, 156.

²¹ Fraser and Monden, “The Maiden Switch: New Possibilities for Understanding Japanese shōjo Manga (Girls’ Comics)”, 546

“Big and unrealistic eyes look only at dreams:”²² the softness of big, starry eyes has been “co-opted” or generalized as the current umbrella visual genre, from shōjo manga through Moe culture (in which the audience feels a strong attraction for a character they want to protect, which dismally often turns into a messy mix of “golden cage” fantasies and projection. In sum, the cuteness of the character is purely performative for the reader/audience’s sake and the character has no fleshed out nature beyond it) and its subcategories²³ Many articles casually mention the Lolicon genre (short for lolita complex, an attraction and fascination for (much) younger women). This genre is, to my observations, also overrepresented in the scholarship and often celebrated in an uncritical way, as most of them refuse to engage in exploring the connections with the girlish figures they like and flesh and blood women and girls. Thus, while there is a fantasy dimension that deserves to be acknowledged, in practice said works confine women outside of personhood. As they are their own person with their own life and inevitable flaws, they will never be as compliant as the idealized version of a girl. They are thus looked down upon not only as humans (through sexism) but they are pushed out of the very category of women because it is filled with unachievable ideas of what “womanhood” is. Sharon Kinsella, one of the pioneers of English-language studies of Japanese popular culture, describes it as a parody in her fieldwork in the late 1990s, it is likely due to its wide presence within fanzines (Dōjinshi) inspired by existing intellectual property (self-published fanart, in other words), hence all labeled as parodies. However, characterising its nature as a subversive criticism of the manga industry’s typical protagonists is extremely questionable to me, as lolicon is appreciated very literally by its adepts. The current state of the genre is a sort of zoological display of young girls going about their daily life, putting the reader in a voyeuristic position. The fact that moe is currently, through its sheer volume, the main visual current of manga also erases the existence of the sheer visual diversity of manga by suggesting an

²² Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, “Early Twentieth Century Japanese Girls’ Magazine Stories: Examining shōjo Voice in Hanamonogatari (Flower Tales),” *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 4 (2003 Spring 2003): 733.

²³ Many articles in the scholarship casually mention the Lolicon genre (short for lolita complex, an attraction and fascination for (much) younger women. This genre is, to my observations, also overrepresented in the scholarship and often badly described. While Kinsella describes it as a parody in her fieldwork in the late 1990s, it is likely due to its wide presence within fanzines (Dōjinshi) inspired by existing intellectual propriety. Characterising Its nature as a subversive parody or criticism of the manga industry typical protagonists is extremely questionable to me, especially in the current visual state of manga. Mostly has a sexual character in nature and considering the implications behind youthful female characters depicted sexually, should be threaded lightly/carefully.

erroneous homogenized current. In public discourse (not by fans), manga = moe. Since moe involves gratuitous sexy scenes, and considering the implications behind youthful female characters depicted sexually, it should be handled gingerly.²⁴ Conversely, manga scholar and former editor Otsuka Eiji voluntarily published within the pages of the same lolicon magazine authors with a diametrically opposed vision and art style, such as Kyoko Okazaki's debuts works, known for their noncompliant, marginal heroines, a far cry from the typically mild-mannered childlike heroines of lolicon manga.²⁵ Further, the page is conceptualized in such a way that it would be impossible to move any of the panels without rethinking the entire layout. They are made to be consumed as a group rather than individually, which provides the reader with a more seamless emotional experience.²⁶

Manga is mostly produced through traditional means, ink and paper, which makes it very accessible. While there has been an increase in the use of digital means (computers and tablets), access to high quality technology is by no mean a requirement.²⁷

Hirohiko Araki, a popular author of the long-running series *Jojo's Bizarre Adventures*, suggested in his book *Manga in Theory and Practice* that realism in the art seeks to imitate reality, but necessitates skills. Signification is an object that is recognizable at a glance, whereas realism requires a quest for photographic accuracy. This manifests in having relevant parts depicted realistically, and the rest suggested, if not omitted. For instance, one might convey the attractiveness of a character through detailed lashes but not detailed nostrils.²⁸

²⁴ I'm not saying that moe = lolicon = manga is for pedophiles, although this has unfortunately been the general perception and critique. It's as if you were going to an international independent film festival and people around you believed you were about to spend 100+ hours of your life watching slightly different versions of *The Hangover 2* over and over again.

²⁵ Dave Kracker, "Girl Talk", 14 novembre 2014, <http://www.ceiling-gallery.com/blog/2014/11/10/okazaki-kyoko>.

²⁶ Hiromi Tanaka and Saori Ishida, "Enjoying Manga as Fujoshi: Exploring Its Innovation and Potential for Social Change from a Gender Perspective.," *International Journal of Behavioral Science* 10, no. 1 (January 2015): 77–85.

²⁷ Jennifer Sally Prough, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of shōjo Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 163.
Naoki Urusawa's Manben. "Inio Asano." Season 1, episode 3. NHK, September 18th, 2015.

²⁸ Hirohiko Araki, *Manga in Theory and Practice: The Craft of Creating Manga* (San Francisco: VIZ Media LLC, 2017), 123.

Anglophone Scholarship

Manga is considered different enough from *Bande Dessinée* and American comics that it is mentioned, but not elaborated on, within English (US) books on the general subject of comics and graphic novels.²⁹ Despite this, the general notions of how sequential art works and the general techniques of signification can apply to all types of sequential art.³⁰ Painted with a (very) broad brush, studies of manga tend to fall either around analyses of very specific themes of social pertinence, such as the social phenomenon of youth isolation, the lack of transparency of the media covering the Fukushima Nuclear disaster or the representations of Zen in popular culture through manga (being largely around the narrative content and not the unique characteristics of medium itself), or general overviews of the medium in which manga are lumped together by intended readership. These appraisals do not allow readers who are not academics, but not fans of manga (acafans) to grasp the narrative diversity within the offerings for said demographics. Overlap between the social themes depicted in manga and the way they were uniquely in the manga medium are scarce. A good example of an article that engages with the medium's formal particularities is Carl K. Li's "Visualizing emotion and seeing change in science fiction manga: political potential in the expression of emotion in *7 Billion Needles*."³¹ There is also a dichotomy in researchers' interests, polarizing authors into fans who decided to use their passion as their academic subject of choice or "Researcher tourists" (researchers whose first foray into manga was that published piece). Both the previous baggage of the researchers (whether they initially knew and appreciated the subject before) and the age of the research shapes studies of manga. While there is no question of gatekeeping here, studies by "researcher tourists" tend to be extra exoticizing and scantily informed on the details of the visual codes and conventions of the medium, such as the common misconception that characters in manga have large eyes to look like children, whereas the creator of this trend, Osamu Tezuka, was inspired by theatre makeup from his hometown, which puts

²⁹ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1st HarperPerennial ed (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994).

Barbara Postema, *Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments* (Rochester, New York: RIT Press, 2013).

³⁰ Examples of this would include depicting movement by drawing multiple instances of the arms, which the reader will understand as the character doing multiple things at once depicted in one moment and not that the character suddenly grew unexplainable extra appendages.

³¹ Carl K. Li, "Visualizing Emotion and Seeing Change in Science Fiction Manga: Political Potential in the Expression of Emotion in *7 Billion Needles*," *Japan Forum* 28, no. 4 (December 2016): 413–38.

emphasis on the eyes to transmit emotion better. This lack of previous (or adequate!) knowledge therefore leads to maintaining demographic analyses and ethnographic explanations that are no longer accurate to live on perceived as current truth in the anglosphere, while Acafans³² treatment of fictional work sometimes focuses so intensely on the media conventions that they divorce them completely from their context. This ties into a trend; while Anglophone and western scholarship written specifically about manga and its surrounding popular culture is fairly recent, western exoticizing accounts of Japan are not.

Most of the earliest scholarship (such as Kinsella's "Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement"³³) does not escape this tradition. Using tantalizing examples to frame the genre as a cornucopia of alien content, works that are more anthropological in nature are steeped in a mix of interest and contempt. Even more current works written by outsiders (as opposed to academics who are also fans) have a tendency to fall into this Orientalist paradigm.³⁴ A choice prime example is a quote from the Mammoth world of manga: "Beside weird characters and plots and multiple functions, mangas [...] are poorly drawn by American and European standards. [...] The vigorous introduction of manga has homogenized the look of comic books and almost obliterated traditional means of producing them." Further, academic texts use sentences such as "Donald Richie investigates all aspects of this **strange** and ephemeral world"³⁵[emphasis added] on the jacket to describe the book's content.³⁶ Exoticisation is a constant, while the works that are heralded as masterpieces are winning points for their 'universality', therefore erasing the specificity of context specifics and cultural nuances. Along the same lines is a lack of comprehension that visual culture has a different (and arguably bigger) place in Japan for readers of all ages, leading to the conclusion that Manga/comics are a thing for teenagers. This

³² Acafan is a portmanteau of the words Academic and fan. This term coined by Henry Jenkins designates an academic who self-identifies as a member of a fandom (i.e. a fan)

³³ Sharon Kinsella, "Japanese Subculture in the 1990s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24, no. 2 (1998 Summer 1998): 289–316.

³⁴ M. Spiess and L. Goldshtaub, "Mangas or Fantasy Love of Adolescent Girls," *Neuropsychiatrie de l'Enfance et de l'Adolescence* 60, no. 2 (01 2012): 126–30, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neurenf.2011.07.007>.

³⁵ Emphasis is mine.

³⁶ Donald Richie, *The Image Factory: Fads and Fashions in Japan* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

misunderstanding also fuels moral panic related to sexuality³⁷ and violence³⁸ in mass media when works intended for a mature audience are perceived as being for children.

On the side of academic fan studies, there is a tendency to prioritize outliers or work that is already set apart from the norm. The problem is that doing a review of the academic articles written in the last decade and comparing them to books previously written serving as an overview of the genre highlights this gap without dispensing knowledge from anything in the middle. Examples of this are the body of studies on Boys' Love (hereafter BL); while it is a prolific but niche subcategory of shōjo manga (for girls), the volume of academic literature dedicated to BL largely surpasses what has been written on shōjo manga in English and which does not actually take into account its ties with more mainstream publishing genres. While this is partially due to the researchers' own interests, it is interesting to note that "acafans" studies related to Japan are more prolific in the anglosphere than on their home turf, where the subject of fan trends is not particularly revered as a pertinent inquiry.

Similarly, academic literature mentions that shōnen manga (for boys) is "the default" and this can be verified by reading the more general guides or how-to guides written by manga authors. However, academic works produced in English analysing the content of shōnen manga specifically barely exist. Most of the scholarship on manga covering the medium as a whole has been published and written at least a decade ago³⁹ and has focused more heavily on the narrative than its visual form.

Manga classification conventions

Although there is always a mention in passing that things are changing, the academic con-

³⁷ Mark McLelland, "'Not in Front of the Parents!' Young People, Sexual Literacies and Intimate Citizenship in the Internet Age.," *Sexualities* 20, no. 1/2 (February 2017): 234–54.

³⁸ Ulrich Heinze and Penelope Thomas, "Self and Salvation: Visions of Hikikomori in Japanese Manga.," *Contemporary Japan - Journal of the German Institute for Japanese Studies, Tokyo* 26, no. 1 (March 2014): 151–69.

³⁹ Jean-Marie Bouissou, *Manga: histoire et univers de la bande dessinée japonaise* (Arles: Picquier, 2010); Gravett, *Manga*; Frenchy Lunning, ed., *Emerging Worlds of Anime and Manga*, Mechademia 1 (Minneapolis, Minn. ; London: University Minnesota Press, 2006).; Frederik L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, 1st ed.-- (Tokyo : New York : New York, N.Y: Kodansha International ; Distributed in the U.S. by Kodansha International/ USA through Harper & Row, 1983).; Scott McCloud, *Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Harper, 2006).

sensus in the anglosphere is that manga are classified by gender and age categories. The default or “average” manga, the image of what a manga *is* corresponds to the description of shōnen manga, also known as manga for boys aged 5~18 years. Other genres are generally considered offshoots, as Choo highlights to confirm yet another manifestation of sexism in Japan.⁴⁰ While this categorisation of manga is reductive at best, the current study having series by authors who dabbled in a vast array of genres and audiences (for instance, Kazuo Umezu and CLAMP both debuted their professional careers by writing shōjo manga, which is aimed at a younger female audience instead. This bias is countered by having this literature review veer more toward shōjo manga, which has aesthetically and thematically left an impression on later works. Looking at advice coming from mangaka themselves, the renowned Hirohiko Araki, famous for his 20 years+ series *JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure*, shōnen manga is the recipe for a “golden road” manga, one that will be “intrinsically excellent”, characteristics that ensure a manga will sell, which can be boiled down to ways to keep the reader curious and invested emotionally, therefore giving them no choice but to turn the page to know more. Even when talking about romance manga,⁴¹ the structure itself describes more serious issues, such as confrontations and resolving steps toward a goal. Looking at what has been produced in Japan and is referenced in anglophone scholarship, the translated Foreword to *Tezuka is Dead* hints at a similar conclusion, referencing manga from the popular shōnen *Jump* and barely mentioning the narrative of manga for women, while explicitly noting the style’s undeniable sway on what is considered “Manga’.⁴²

While the typical manga is considered to be shōnen manga, the creation of shōjo manga created a particular universe anchored in Girl Culture and act as a liminal cathartic zone as well as a model to aspire to. These “typically ‘girlish’ genres that have been highly popular but under-theorised.⁴³

40 Kukhee Choo, “Girls Return Home: Portrayal of Femininity in Popular Japanese Girls’ Manga and Anime Texts during the 1990s in *Hana Yori Dango* and *Fruits Basket*,” *Women* 19, no. 3 (Winter 2008): 275–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09574040802137243>, 280.

41 Araki, *Manga in Theory and Practice*, 100.

42 Itō Gō and Miri Nakamura, “Tezuka Is Dead: Manga in Transformation and Its Dysfunctional Discourse,” *Mechademia* 6, no. 1 (October 23, 2011): 69–82, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mec.2011.0019>.

43 Lucy Fraser and Masafumi Monden, “The Maiden Switch: New Possibilities for Understanding Japanese Shōjo Manga (Girls’ Comics),” *Asian Studies Review* 41, no. 4 (December 2017): 544–61.

Surprisingly, anglophone scholarship does not reflect the bias that shōnen manga (for boys) is the “default” type of manga, of which shōjo would have been a mere variation rather than its own whole genre. Quite the opposite: while the whole of shōjo manga tends to be perceived as frivolous and unworthy of study, merely mentioned in passing, some academics, such as Jennifer Sally Prough, have focused their body of work on that genre.

Considering shōjo manga is supposed to be a mere offshoot of shōnen manga, it also seems obvious that scholarship on shōjo manga will also mention the essentials of shōnen. Shōjo manga might be regarded as a “narrative genre” under the umbrella of manga but its possibilities are endless. Horror, SF⁴⁴, high school love stories, any narrative topic can be handled under the label of shōjo manga. While Fraser and Monden recognize that “[O]rdinary schoolgirl concerns are signs of a culture of triviality that fails to address more political concerns of gender, queerness and sexuality”⁴⁵, the consistent oversight of these works reinforce the idea of their vacuity instead of looking at character agency and how they might influence—positively or negatively—young girls who relate to them because of their similar circumstances.

Only one article in the literature focused on science-fiction manga and most of the scholarship is developed around the ideas of intended publics (shōnen/shōjo/seinen/jōsei), which is increasingly contested as web publication and new magazine with a mixed readership blur these limits.

Experts in the field

As previously mentioned, Anglophone academic coverage of manga was pioneered by Sharon Kinsella in the 1990s, and her influence is hardly contestable, as she is still cited by everyone in the field more than two decades later. While part of her work has aged badly due to the dramatic vocabulary used, it laid the ground for questions of gender and representation in Japanese popular culture, without being a vitally pertinent overview of manga as a whole. In her

⁴⁴ Critically acclaimed authors Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko are excellent examples of the pioneers of shōjo SF. For further readings I’d recommend *They were 11*, *To Terra* and the more recent *Otherworld Barbara*; Carl K. Li, “Visualizing Emotion and Seeing Change in Science Fiction Manga: Political Potential in the Expression of Emotion in 7 Billion Needles,” *Japan Forum* 28, no. 4 (December 2016): 413–38.

⁴⁵ Fraser and Monden, “The Maiden Switch: New Possibilities for Understanding Japanese Shōjo Manga (Girls’ Comics).”

wake, Kinko Ito's research of raunchy mangas for adult women (*jōsei*) or Jennifer Prough's in-depth portrayal of *shōjo* manga as an industry and the specifics of its various actors are more compelling contemporary examples of Japanese women's cultural escapism and media representations.

BL gained critical and academic attention post-1980s, on both the local and the international scene. While it is acknowledged in passage as a subgenre of *shōjo* manga because the target audience is the same despite very different aesthetic conventions. As BL is proportionally over-represented in academic coverage, it eclipses the wide world of *shōjo* manga⁴⁶, therefore presenting a distorted image to the non-initiated⁴⁷. Dru Pagliassoti is one of the eminent voices on that subject in western anglophone scholarship.

While other currents of research exist, such as research on the otaku subculture heralded by Patrick Galbraith and Ryan Holmberg's historical research into manga for men, their expertise is not topical within the scope of this thesis.

Formal specificities of manga

Manga emerged as a particularly apt medium to explore kinship because of its focus on affective sensibilities woven in its very form, aided by the layout style which Li calls 'Nagare' (流れ), which enables new ways of depicting emotion. In his words: "When characters emotions and affective responses are expressed in manga, a single instance is frequently displayed across multiple panels. [This expresses] the combined weight of those expressions [...] not only 'temporally', but also 'spatially'."⁴⁸ This is expressed through the fact that the smallest possible unit in manga is not the panel, but the page, as the irregular layouts of panels are expressly done to reflect the action. While it is possible to isolate a single panel in a manga, its context outside of the page is completely lost. The current of action within a page in manga fulfills the same role as gutters

⁴⁶ Lucy Fraser and Masafumi Monden, "The Maiden Switch: New Possibilities for Understanding Japanese *shōjo* Manga (Girls' Comics).," *Asian Studies Review* 41, no. 4 (December 2017): 545.

⁴⁷ For instance, *shōjo* manga often features (non-romantic) relationships between women in a very affirming way. Per its subject matter, BL's characters (even in the supporting cast) are mostly male, therefore not showcasing this trope at all.

⁴⁸ Li, "Visualizing Emotion and Seeing Change in Science Fiction Manga: Political Potential in the Expression of Emotion in 7 Billion Needles."

(displaying the passage of time and making the reader fill what is not drawn explicitly with their logic and imagination) while not tangibly actually having gutters drawn on the page. Li highlights in his analysis of the manga *7 billion needles* that this tangible depiction of emotions allows readers to understand how the character feels through demonstration, therefore facilitating empathy.⁴⁹ Monden concurs, arguing that “an approach that uses *shōjo* manga, a highly “girlish” medium, to critique conventional gender norms in Japanese society often falls itself into denying “girlish aesthetics”⁵⁰ which “enact complex and fascinating versions of girlhood.”⁵¹

Readers who prefer BL to heterosexual romance do so because they perceive the relationship as being more pure because it is devoid of gender oppression and therefore both partners are equal.⁵² *Shōjo* manga and its codes are particularly relevant to our case, as all levels of people involved in the production would refer to “human relationships” as the main appeal of the *shōjo*⁵³ manga genre.

Disdain for the feminine & girls’ culture influence on manga

The idea of *Shōjo* (as a being) creates a limbo in time, in between childhood and adulthood. *Shōjo* manga is about narratives that are addressed to the aforementioned *Shōjo*. Howev-



Fig.1 Clamp, *Chobits*. 7, trad. par Suzuka Asaoka et Alex Pilot, vol. 7, 8 vol. (Boulogne: Pika, 2003), 166-167.

⁴⁹ Carl K. Li, “Visualizing Emotion and Seeing Change in Science Fiction Manga: Political Potential in the Expression of Emotion in *7 Billion Needles*,” *Japan Forum* 28, no. 4 (December 2016): 413–38. 425.

⁵⁰ Lucy Fraser and Masafumi Monden, “The Maiden Switch: New Possibilities for Understanding Japanese *shōjo* Manga (Girls’ Comics),” *Asian Studies Review* 41, no. 4 (December 2017): 551.

⁵¹ Lucy Fraser and Masafumi Monden, “The Maiden Switch: New Possibilities for Understanding Japanese *shōjo* Manga (Girls’ Comics),” *Asian Studies Review* 41, no. 4 (December 2017): 545.

⁵² Allegedly. See Ágnes Zsila et al., “Loving the Love of Boys: Motives for Consuming Yaoi Media,” *PLoS ONE* 13, no. 6 (June 14, 2018): 1–17.

⁵³ Jennifer Sally Prough, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of shōjo Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2011). Chapter 1 p.2



Fig.2 Kazuo Umezu in Kazuo Umezu, *Je suis Shingo*, vol. 1 (U.E.: Le Léopard Noir, 2017).

er, as opposed to puberty or adolescence, the shōjo is an asexual being. Shōjo manga as a genre is not a stranger to the muddy territories of gender identity, although they tend to enthusiastically give closure instead of staying with the ambiguities. This is in part done through the dreamy Hira Hira aesthetics (meaning fluttery), a type of ornamental visuals relishing in delicate extravagance. These symbols exist to convey dreaminess and pleasure to the viewer. They are described by Monden as flowing ribbons and big dreamy eyes, which add an extra layer of symbolism and, through its embrace, dismisses the negative connotation associated with femininity as an ostentatious, frivolous thing. An example of this would be the numerous bubble motifs surrounding the character (Tchii) in figure 1. The bubbles exist to convey Hideki's special feeling of warmth when he sees or thinks of Tchii. As these bubbles are symbolic, and a communication from the author to the reader, it would be incorrect to read this panel as “ Tchii is physically surrounded by misty bubbles ”.

Through the use of characters with an unestablished or undistinguished gender, shōjo manga allows for a melting of the sharply enforced gender dynamics in the socially normative imaginary while still including the hira hira aesthetics. The most famous is Rose Of Versailles' Oscar François de Jarjayes, a woman raised as a man who “provide[s] girls and women with a stage to experience the life of a revolutionary androgyne who fights to overthrow the ancient, powerful regime of gender and sexuality.”⁵⁴ Less iconic academically surveyed examples also include “Sex-changing” alien in *Saint Roommates*⁵⁵, who is the roommate, best friend and lover of the protagonist, although never all of these things all at once. This also allows the expression of same-sex attraction without upsetting the status quo and the ultimate narrative of compulsory heterosexuality. The gender bending provides an escapism as the (assumed female) reader can be both

⁵⁴ Nobuko Anan, *Contemporary Japanese Women's Theatre and Visual Arts: Performing Girls' Aesthetics*, Contemporary Performance InterActions (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: PalgraveMacmillan, 2016).

⁵⁵ Fraser and Monden, “The Maiden Switch: New Possibilities for Understanding Japanese Shōjo Manga (Girls' Comics).”

escapism and critical thinking on the systems of gender construction.⁵⁶ While our two case studies have been influenced by Hira Hira aesthetics, Kazuo Umezu only kept the part of the beautiful heroine with sparkly eyes from his debut, while the gothic horror of *I Am Shingo* incarnates everything but flutteriness. This is a conscious choice; as we recall his debut as a more traditional author, this contrast's purpose is to break the boundaries between the delicate and the grotesque. In addition to the prospect that the young reader who identifies with the protagonist might find solace in perceiving themselves as beautiful despite the ugliness of the world surrounding themselves, the untarnished charm of the heroine gives her a sort of invincibility to reassure the reader she can (probably) overcome any obstacle.

⁵⁶ Ágnes Zsila et al., "Loving the Love of Boys: Motives for Consuming Yaoi Media.," *PLoS ONE* 13, no. 6 (June 14, 2018): 1–17.

Theoretical framework

This thesis provides a feminist analysis, which posits that while *I Am Shingo* introduces stories that are in appearance normative, it expresses kinder ways to relate to one another through its depiction of Human-Nonhuman (Machines) relationships. This is enabled by the break of the organic idea of filiation and the creation of links tying kindred people together not through blood links, but through woven clusters of otherwise estranged beings. These kinships allow for the continued diffusion of intimate knowledge without the constrictions of unyielding social conventions and imposed obligations. This is akin to what Donna J. Haraway theorized as the Chthulucene, a moment when beings evolving through the world gain new savoir-faire through unsuspected ways. This chapter will apply Haraway's theories on kinship, through her concept of companion species, to the inorganic figure that is the machine. While Haraway has explored both the cohabitation of an organic/inorganic symbiosis within one being and the various ways species tangle in their sharing of planet earth, this thesis' interest in posthumanism focuses on the emotional relationship between humans and machines and how empathy would be extended to engineered creations whose legitimacy is being questioned. Correlated with this are the ways in which we develop alternative, constructive ways of connecting to others who are already here, found, as opposed to people connected through each other primarily through moral and legal duties.

When it comes to the feminist interface of humans and machines, Haraway immediately comes to mind. Her work incorporates both the abstract dimension of semiology and the concrete dimension of lived realities. This thesis centres around the semiotic webs woven between humans and non-humans. Haraway's theories often incorporate science fiction, as she sees the potential of transposing oneself into these imaginary settings to inspire pluralistic futures. In terms of theory, the leap from the cyborg to companion species, ironically perhaps, allows the under-theorized mechanical side of her theory to shine. While drawing on Haraway's cyborg manifesto, machines in this thesis will be considered a kind of "companion species" (not cohabiting in the same body but in intimate kinship with humans), whose origins and development are obviously tangled with humans. To note, this academic contribution is not meant to reflect the current state of artificial intelligence. Rather, it uses the setting of *I Am Shingo*, including the elements requiring suspension of disbelief, as a fecund core to elaborate on the meanings imbued through the extension of empathy.

Innards of the cyborg

From her cyborg theory to her concept of the Chthulucene, Haraway's body of work is one of nuances and coexistence. It was born from her disdain for the Cartesian perception of a nature-culture divide. The Cyborg, therefore, consists in accepting that immaculate concepts cannot be demonstrated in reality, as any case would necessitate ignoring or voluntarily excluding information. In the Haraway canon, cyborgs have a mandatory tangible, material dimension, which ensure that rich symbolic meanings do not become disconnected from reality, and therefore avoiding a mythologizing/deification of the cyborg. Jennifer González, fellow researcher interested in cyborgs, formulated this with precision: "The Cyborg in this case is not without origins though it is without an origin myth."⁵⁷ Seeing the roots of the cyborg eliminates the need to romanticize its inception.

Haraway works in an inductive manner, as her theorizing starts from what is already there. Haraway's denunciation of boundaries lives on in intersections of the organic and the inorganic and how they mingle to a point where they are intrinsically connected. The cyborg is constituted of more than one organic element by an "interface of automatons & autonomy,"⁵⁸ While some acts are thought out and voluntary (autonomy), a large part of the magic happens in the mundane routine of the everyday (automaton). These automatons' parts are often what is ultimately obscured to fit the subject within the boundaries of strict, established categories. This existence and her new parts are either a melding of organic and machinelike components or a union between separate organic systems. This organism works symbiotically, as it is part of a system and/or a system itself; as such, it is an intimate collaborative relationship. Lastly, the Cyborg is not, in itself, intrinsically good or feminist. Its nature is not determined, it is a tool that can be utilized or adapted in a myriad of ways and cannot be confined to a binary model.

Haraway has described cyborgs as "Cyborgs were never just about the interdigitations of humans and information machines; cyborgs were from the get-go the materialization of imploded

57 Jennifer González, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research," in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray et al. (Routledge, 1995), 63.

58 González, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies: Notes from Current Research." 58.

(not hybridized) human beings-information machines-multispecies organisms.”⁵⁹ This suggests two things: first, it alludes to the inevitable impurity/mix of the outside and the inside, as an implosion suggests the inside pressure has become lower than the outside and therefore, has succumbed to it. The second element to note is the use of the past tense, indicating both that the contamination has happened before the following events and is inevitable, but also that it happened prior to the very inception of the being. Through the Cyborg, Haraway exemplifies that embodiment goes against essentialism, as nothing “pure ” exists in practice. Because of these impurities, the cyborg is positioned strongly against determinism, as the unexpected traces may lead to unsuspected reactions. As the sum (and more!) of these micro-traces, the body of a cyborg is intimately personal and unique. This means the nature of “ The Cyborg ” has no inherent affiliations; its nature is neither good nor bad, but can be wielded to many ends; through the simple act of recognizing what there is and subsequently its potentialities, that wall dissolves and the networks that already existed in the backdrop are revealed.⁶⁰ However, expunging change and (potential, beneficial) progress by fear are both denial and self-sabotage.

This is enabled by the break of the organic idea of filiation and the creation of links tying kindred people together not through blood links, but through weaved clusters of otherwise estranged beings. The disparate backgrounds of these creatures brings many perspectives to the table. Through this emerge “situated knowledges,” which involve recognizing how the specific point which you are in came to be and its unique properties. Situated knowledges provide a dimension of details as to how the work came to be, in exchange for the bliss of simplicity and universal truths; you can’t go back to the sterile world, and you quite literally have to get your hands dirty.⁶¹ That is not relativism. It resembles it, since different locations have different compositions, but each one has its own truth that corresponds to its reality. It’s not about differences in perception, it’s about differences in what *is* there. The visual language of manga, through its focus on atmosphere allows the readers to see the internal world of different characters, sometimes simultaneously. As a literary device, this would otherwise be difficult because it would be convoluted to

⁵⁹ Donna J. Haraway, “ SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far ”, *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No.3., 2013, [doi:10.7264/N3KH0K81](https://doi.org/10.7264/N3KH0K81).

⁶⁰ Krista Lynes and Katerina Symes, “Cyborgs and Virtual Bodies,” *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, February 1, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199328581.013.7>.

⁶¹ Lynes and Symes, “Cyborgs and Virtual Bodies.”

place the reader in each character's mind, whereas manga can do this at a glance through its visuals. Regarding the idea of kinship compared to the family, this means acknowledging the value of a type of privileged connection and intimacy while criticizing how it came to be. Is a biological connection generative of affinities? Could perhaps shared affinities generate a deeper and more significant closeness? Asking these questions contaminate antiseptic landscapes, as it reveals the cracks in the apparently pristine myth of the family. Situated knowledges do not negate the existence of point A and point B, but rather accept to see the nuances and what separates the two. Concisely: No essence, but nuances.

Haraway is no stranger to the use of fiction in order to demonstrate a point, her own works regularly referring to specific cases and decorticating the meaning they suggest. As she says, "art and engineering are natural sibling practises for engaging companion species."⁶² In her work, however, the medium of comics does not seem to have been explicitly explored⁶³ despite being itself a cyborg, the product of a complex weave of media which actively work together (both as they are created and under the reader's deciphering gaze) to provide an augmented experience of fiction. This is not to say that comics are better than novels, but a good comic takes you even beyond that through its gutters of possibilities. The cyborg comparison rings especially true when it comes to manga and its flow. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, manga has a particular type of flow called *nagare*, which involves planning the layout of panels using the page as the smallest possible divide rather than the panel, as it is usually agreed in Western comic scholarship.⁶⁴ In addition, the world of sequential art allows for a variety of ways to depict the world. Trying to get a similar effect in a simply textual way would prove tedious, as ease of reading would potentially suffer from vast jumps in language and style. While it can make for an interesting exercise stylistically (I'm thinking of the layout experimentations in Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, for instance), this influx of information compromises the ease of reading that

⁶² Donna J. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Paradigm 8 (Chicago, Ill: Prickly Paradigm Distributed by The University of Chicago, 2003), 22.

⁶³ While she often references political cartoon, these images are typically contained within a sole panel, which takes out the temporal dimension we see in sequential art.

⁶⁴ Barbara Postema, *Narrative Structure in Comic: Making Sense of Fragments* (Rochester, New York: RIT Press, 2013). Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1st HarperPerennial ed (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994).

more figurative visuals would confer. On that note, the gutters are not present to generate a space for a synecdoche to develop itself. The space for “breathing” present within the entity of the gutter is teeming with connections and no distinct answer. While drawn art presents more intentional elements than photography (that has to work with the imposed reality of the space), readers will pick on different nuances without necessarily invalidating other findings. “We also live with each other in the flesh in ways not exhausted by our ideologies. Stories are much bigger than ideologies. In that is our hope.”⁶⁵

Haraway & narrative fiction

Haraway is not a stranger to the use of fiction as a way to elaborate theories. She likes to use examples from multiple domains, such as science-fiction novels and political comic strips to demonstrate her points, as well as creating stories in order to implicate the reader as an active participant. An important notion she establishes in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (hereafter referred to as *Modest_Witness*) is that stories, for her, are not about being “made up” or make-believe, she uses them as ways to demonstrate truth(s) and the context in which said truths take place.⁶⁶ These stories for truth are an element of Haraway’s theories around SF terms, such as, but not limited to String Figures, Speculative fiction and, of course, Science-Fiction. The latter is the most pertinent for this thesis and therefore the one it will favour. The genre is a fertile ground for that purpose, as it has a good part of world-building, and it is through this world building that historical complexities of the different emotional worlds are imparted.⁶⁷ The fact that science-fiction necessitate the articulation of the details of the setting in order to captivate the reader also allow a substantive contextualization that make the situation of situated knowledges explicit.

Birth of the cyborg and its use as a feminist tool

The discursive presence of cyborgs as undesirable, corrupting beings and the general aversion to technology in the feminist movement of the 1980s is undoubtedly because of their

65 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 17.

66 Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 1997), p.230.

67 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 5-6.

associations with military and medical institutions, perceived as essentially masculine and subjugating. Haraway brought forward not only the idea that these tools can also be adopted or reclaimed by feminists, but that essentialism was a flawed concept to start with. The figure of the cyborg and the notion of hybridity were then used as a framework for dismantling binaries, erasing the artificial lines between nature and culture, woman and man, Good and Bad, among other things. Showing that technology-as-masculine is a social construct, the coup de grâce were the material examples of cyborg bodies as a playground for modifications “thus challenging the ‘givenness’ of physical gender identity.”⁶⁸ After this demonstration, advocating that divides are not a fiction and cannot be done in good faith, she proposes the idea of committing to the truth.

“Post cyborg, what counts as biological kind troubles previous categories of organism.”⁶⁹ In her *Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway clarifies that the “lettres d'honneur” of these connections are gained through the fleshy, fragile existence of organic and otherwise still “taken from nature” despite some aspects of it being crafted.⁷⁰ Through the mutuality, respect is born. Consider the web of kinships holistically, humans, animals, insects and even robots as an emotional ecosystem.⁷¹ The practice of seeking purity is one of cutting links, but this epuration is one-sided; the link is let go through a cut, not an untangling, and therefore, the knot remains as a witness to what was. “We're living in a world of connections - and it matters which ones get made and unmade.”⁷²

The power of the cyborg also wields great epistemological responsibilities, as one must remain constantly vigilant not to deify and uproot the starting point that is the stage prior to the hybridity we're discussing. It requires us to question our definitions and perceptions. Considering the starting point as a nonhybrid state of sterile purity thus rendering them inscrutable, would be reproducing the very thing cyborg theory tries to rectify. The cyborg, according to González's assessment of the research, must continue to problematize the coming together of two distinct and definable entities. “If any progress is to be made in a politics of human or cyborg existence, het-

68 Lynes and Symes, Katerina, “Cyborgs and Virtual Bodies.”

69 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 15.

70 David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, ed., “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late Twentieth century. ”, in *The cybercultures reader* (London New York: Routledge, 2000), 291-24.

71 “Whole with interdependent parts, likened to a living being.” Definition of Ecosystem by the Oxford English Dictionary.

72 Hari Kunzru, “You Are Cyborg.” WIRE, February 1, 1997, <https://www.wired.com/1997/02/ffharaway/>.

erogeneity must be taken as a given.”⁷³ This added constraint questions further where humanity rests, or what it means to be human. Let us not forget that while, “post cyborg, what counts as biological kind troubles previous categories of organism,”⁷⁴ it is equally crucial to remember that every single thing was born from a distinguishable source, as there is no magical conjuring, constructively embracing decay. The idea is less about having a moral high ground (commonly referred to as “political correctness”) and more about acknowledging and engaging with the mundane details of our environment and in accordance with our open emotions toward others: “We’re talking about whole new forms of subjectivity here. We’re talking seriously mutated worlds that never existed on this planet before. And it’s not just ideas. It’s new flesh.”⁷⁵ In her subsequent works, Haraway integrates that idea through the notion of “staying with the trouble.”⁷⁶

Interweaving cyborg with companion species, chthulucene and other oddkins

Haraway joins the cyborg to other figures in her work, calling the assemblage of figures she gathers a “family affair”. She says: “I need my sibling species to get me through this life story; our bodies share substance; we are kin.”⁷⁷ This cohabitation means we must meet at a point convenient for both parties. Through this meeting, binary models such as good/bad, nature/nurture, right/wrong, biology/society are lifted, because not only is this not the question we ought to answer at this meeting, but also because it’s “messier than that.”⁷⁸ The multiple factors of the equations do not allow for such reductive answers. Why is this important? In conversation, when people describe something as natural, they’re saying that it’s just how the world is; we can’t change it. On the other hand, if women (and men) aren’t natural but are constructed, like a cyborg, then, given the right tools, we can all be reconstructed.

As this thesis looks at relationships between humans and cyborgs as kinship, it works

73 González via Lynes and Symes, “Cyborgs and Virtual Bodies,” 8.

74 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 15.

75 Kunzru, “You Are Cyborg.”

76 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

77 Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 1997), 120.

78 Kunzru, “You Are Cyborg.”

through Haraway's idea of "becoming-with,"⁷⁹ developed across her reflections in the Companion Species Manifesto. Despite the fact that the Manifesto takes its roots in biology,⁸⁰ the theorist herself hints at the theoretical compatibility of this connection:

"Clearly, cyborgs—with their historical congealing of the machine and the organic in the codes of information, where boundaries are less about skin than about statistically defined density of signals and noise—fit within the taxon of companion species. That is to say, cyborgs raise all the questions of histories, politics and ethics that dogs require."⁸¹

The Companion Species Manifesto, in a nutshell, draws from Haraway's own relationship with her dog and their training for agility contests. For Haraway, companion species are critters living alongside each other in the sense that their respective existences are tied into each other in social, biological and behavioural ways. It describes a state of existence, which is "becoming with", as Haraway's notions of posthumanism means extending our focus and empathy beyond the human.⁸² Her attention shifts from the cyborg, based on the entanglement between the different facets that constitute a being from within, making it a hybrid, to the entanglement among beings that generates improbable kinships. These improbable relationships enable what she calls "oddkin", relationships where unsuspected pairings allow for spontaneous combinations of unrevealed consequences. When we look at the resulting actions and intimacies of the oddkins, we raise possibilities of willfully adopting the same type of interactions in other contexts. The idea of responsibility in oddkin relationships is absolutely crucial when applied to a human-machine relationship as machines are undeniably shaped by our intentions at their inception, even if their development can take them in unanticipated directions. Despite being shaped by humans, machines' decision-making and learning works in different ways than their creators. To compensate for this, machines have to grapple with concepts such as death and becoming old while humans have to try not only to understand robotic logic, but also the caveats and vulnerabilities of robots, especially regarding concepts such as memory and its possible modifications.

79 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, *Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

80 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 2.

81 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 21.

82 Sherryl Vint, "A Family of Displaced Figures': An Overview of Donna Haraway," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 1, no. 2 (2008): 289–301.

This thesis extends empathy beyond “natural” mutations and emphasize the potential of reciprocity between humans and machines. Despite the fact that metals are not as biodegradable as human tissues, all of our possibilities depend on nature, whether it is less renewable mining or finicky new realities of adapting our diets to climate changes. As changes in an environment affect all its components, a look at the “mutations” of robots away from planned regular maintenance and the nuances of their interactions with humans without a guiding hand. Looking at fictional accounts is not a way to veer away from the truth. In fact, this deviation from discussing technical limitations allow us to look at the affective links between humans and machines without thinking of modifying the circuits in order to avoid grappling with the situation as encountered and finding solutions together, instead of eliminating others as a quick, temporary solution. “Who lives? Who dies? That’s what Haraway means when she talks about politics being inside techno culture.”⁸³

The kin explored in this thesis exist in limbo, a space between Haraway’s Chthulucene and Chizuko Ueno’s theory of selective bonds and “female bonds”. Ueno, an eminent Japanese feminist, has observed the institution of the modern family⁸⁴ in Japan and the way its roots were obfuscated to make it seem “natural” rather than a construct and how it is currently decomposing. While decomposition does not affect human, machines and institutions equally, decay is inevitable. It would make for a bad compost, but certainly works wonders coupled with recycling. Looking to connect, tentacles, wires and cords doesn’t have to be under duress to be entangled. While the Chthulucene is more metaphysical than Ueno’s very practical theorizing of Selective Bonds, their common sets of characteristics beg for them to cross. To me, the figure of the cyborg and the figure of the Chthulucene bear a similar feeling, especially through the idea of recharging through a connection. These lines exist as both a metaphor and palpable evidence. Haraway explains this by saying that “beings do not preexist our relatings”⁸⁵

Observing the cyborg figure under the lens of oddkin, this thesis examines reciprocal interactions between multiple species or beings that were not “predisposed naturally” to interact. For a feminist theory of human/machine relationships, this means inductive reasoning (from the

⁸³ Kunzru, “You Are Cyborg.”

⁸⁴ Chizuko Ueno. *The Modern Family in Japan: Its Rise and Fall* (Melbourne, Victoria: Trans Pacific Press, 2009).

⁸⁵ Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 6.

roots to the top) as a guiding principle, a commitment to get digging and get your hands dirty. A reassuring, clear cut conclusion has to be forborne. The culmination of the research will mean carrying multiple truths at once, working together as a whole.

Haraway proposes the making of “oddkin,” significative relationships in which being invested themselves regardless of species, recognizing the importance of links that are actually there without necessarily being institutionally sanctioned or recognized.⁸⁶ Contrast this with Chizuko Ueno’s theory of Selective bonds as opposed to Associational bonds.⁸⁷ Ueno’s theory considers three types of bonds: Blood and territorial bonds are one, while all other relationships, such as work colleagues, are agglutinated under the label Associational bonds, and Selective bonds. As the importance of the “naturally given” bonds (family as in whom you inherit your blood from, the geographical context in which you come into existence) lessens, the category of associational bonds becomes easily crowded and distinctions are necessary. This is where Selective bonds come in. Perceived as a novel third group, it is one that is fully chosen (hence the Selective Bonds name) and enacted through involvement.⁸⁸ This third space allow for a questioning of the social structures between humans and these fractures allows the chthonic beings’ tendrils to tangle freely with all their environment instead of being restrained.

The anatomy of selective bonds

Ueno enumerates the characteristics of selective bonds as follows:

- 1-It is a mutually chosen relationship, all involved parties constantly make the choice to be in the relationships and untie these bonds without disadvantage should they deem necessary to do so.
- 2-”It is a mediated relationship,” in which it is the space of interaction no longer has to involve physical presence (ex. Pen pals, internet friendships).
- 3-It renounces conforming to established roles in hierarchies and the expectations that

⁸⁶ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.

⁸⁷ Chizuko Ueno, " The Possibility of Female Bonds ", in *The Modern Family in Japan: Its Rise and Fall* (Melbourne, Victoria: Trans Pacific Press, 2009), 223.

⁸⁸ Ueno, “The Possibility of Female Bonds.” 224-225.

come with the connoted label.⁸⁹

4- It cannot be taken for granted, as all parties have to always make the choice of staying and involving themselves in it. For instance, participation in fandoms: it serves no “useful” purpose and allies people from all walks of life for their sole necessary commonality is passion for a common work. Should one fall out of love with the work or move on to other pastimes, there are no consequences to employment, livelihood or living conditions.

These theories are therefore conceptualized around human social structures to think about. Haraway’s approach of kinship across species cannot be contained within this model. Ueno provides a model specifically articulated around human mingling and letting go of rigidly established social obligation to instead follow individuals choosing to rely on each other. As Haraway’s view of kinship goes beyond human social structures and choice, as it demands that Humans (or, arguably, any being able to read/comprehend/apply her theories) consider all those they have to share this space with and how.

Conclusion

Although she never specifically used manga, Donna Haraway is no stranger to using fiction as a mean of theorizing. To Haraway, fiction serves as a facet of reality. She says “Cyborgs were always simultaneously relentlessly real and inescapably fabulated. Like all good SF, they re-did what counts as—what is—real.”⁹⁰ Fiction serves as a pivot point to see a different angle of truth. In order to analyze the bonds tying the characters of *I Am Shingo*, we will first look under the lease of Ueno’s model of the erosion of the nuclear family and what replaces it (selective bonds). Through these simple fissures, I argue that a place is made for relationships to go beyond an anthropocentric model, which is where Haraway’s theories come in. Inviting us to reconceptualize whom we consider as companions and share our intimacy with, we will look at the discursive and formal ways in which *I Am Shingo* offer an alternative to the family model in the form of oddkins.

⁸⁹ Ueno, “The Possibility of Female Bonds.” 224-226.

⁹⁰ Haraway, “SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far”.

Observations and Findings from *I Am Shingo* (1982-1986)

I Am Shingo (わたしは真悟) is a manga series written and illustrated by Kazuo Umezu. His career has spawned for more than three decades. Despite not having published new manga since 1995, his works are still part of popular culture in the 2010s. In the most recent decade, *I Am Shingo* has notably been adapted into a musical⁹¹, high-fashion clothing⁹² and has won the “prix du patrimoine” from Angoulême’s *Festival International de la Bande dessinée* in 2018⁹³. A notable feat of Umezu is that his signature horror style was initially developed and published while he was making mangas for young girls, whose content is typically more influenced by everyday life and romantic love. Having a young audience allowed him not only to pioneer the horror manga genre, but also to put the focus on the terror of being vulnerable and disempowered. Most of his protagonists are the same age as his initial audience, children and sometimes teens.

I Am Shingo was originally published between 1982 and 1986, in *Big Comics Spirits*, a *Seinen* (literally “youth”) magazine, that targets adult men. As previously mentioned, his initial readership was composed of young girls, who followed his career even as he moved to publications aimed toward a different audience. His unique style organically combines dreamy, literally

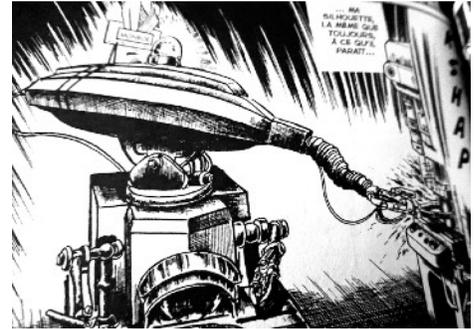


Fig.3 (top) , 4 (left) Kazuo Umezu, *Je suis Shingo*, vol. 1 (U.E.: Le Léopard Noir, 2017), p. 141, 100.

Fig. 5(right) Kazuo Umezu in 模図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.403.))

⁹¹ Karen Ressler, “Kazuo Umezu’s My Name is Shingo Manga Inspires Stage Musical”, *Anime news reporting*, *Anime News Network* (blog), 23 avril 2016, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2016-04-23/kazuo-umezu-my-name-is-shingo-manga-inspires-stage-musical/.101242>.

⁹² Juliette et Justine, “La robe de Shingo”, *Online store*, Juliette et Justine, 2018, <https://juliette-et-justine.com/products/detail/36>.

⁹³ FIBD, “*Je suis Shingo* de Kazuo Umezu primé à Angoulême”, *Manga news reporting*, *Manga News* (blog), 28 janvier 2018, <https://www.manga-news.com/index.php/actus/2018/01/28/Je-suis-shingo-de-Kazuo-Umezu-prime-a-Angouleme>.

starry-eyed delicate heroines and grisly scenes of violence and death.⁹⁴ His genius did not go over the heads of his maidenly fans; in the 1995 bunko (pocket paperback) edition of his manga *Senrei* (*Baptism*), acclaimed writer Hiromi Ito wrote an afterword in which she notes that even in 1965, she had a deep-seated feeling Umezu's manga were girl manga (and precious, rare ones at that).⁹⁵ His virtuosity at crafting manga whose main appeal are the emotional links between diverse characters (including machines, plants and humanoid-sized mutant chicken⁹⁶) made his science-fiction series an obvious candidate for analysis in the context of this thesis.

Umezu is quite clear in *I Am Shingo* to make the claim that family is not necessarily biological: it is people to whom others relate. This is expressed by the implosion of each of the three biological families, as well as the general untrustworthiness of adults; Marin's parents are her very busy father, who is beaten in a racist hate crime by Robin, the pedophile her mother insists is a fine young man and to whom she trusts with the care of her daughter, while Satoru's father (who was always irresponsible) turns into an alcoholic, while his mother abandons her son to get married to a rich(er) man. Under these circumstances, it is safe to say that Umezu advocates for a dissolution of traditional family bonds. And yet, *I Am Shingo* is about finding compatible beings that make us feel safe in this chaos. Therefore, this work values kinships/found families as a better alternative to biological bonds.

***I Am Shingo* in a nutshell**

In *I am Shingo*, the reader follows the saga of a factory machine which gains self-awareness through the intervention of star-crossed lovers Satoru and Marin. The children meet during a

⁹⁴ One such example is へび女 (*The Snake Woman*), published in English as *Reptilia*, whose original publication in Japanese was in the magazine *Shôjo Friend*.

⁹⁵ Translation to English by me. Taken from *Baptism* vol 3 p.276 by Glénat, French. The French translation reads as follows: "J'étais convaincue que la première parution était "La jeune fille aux yeux félins -- Neko no me no Shojo", mais d'après la liste des oeuvres, cette histoire fut publiée en 1965, lorsque j'avais 10 ans. Pourtant, le manga d'Umezu m'était déjà familier. Je me rappelle qu'en 65, lorsque l'histoire "Mi-humain, mi-poisson -- Mangyoujin" fut publiée dans la revue "Shonen Magazine"[sic], une sorte de jalousie m'a prise; j'avais l'impression que les garçons nous avaient volé Umezu et qu'ils ne comprendraient pas la qualité de ses manga. Cela laisse imaginer qu'à cette époque, je connaissais déjà pas mal d'oeuvres de Kazuo Umezu en tant que manga pour filles."

⁹⁶ The mutant chicken is a main character of one of his other series, titled *Fourteen*. It will not be covered in this thesis but it's worth mentioning that *I Am Shingo* is not the sole foray of the author into interspecies connections.

visit to the factory and start making regular nightly visits to the robot nicknamed Monroe, becoming close over time.⁹⁷ The lovers' relationship is cut short after a failed attempt at eloping, which includes climbing to the very top of the Tokyo Tower. Monroe gains self-awareness through the divine intervention of a lightning bolt and renames themselves Shingo, connecting with both of his parents at that crucial moment. Marin and Satoru's parents intervene and try to force the children to never speak to each other again, while Marin's family follow her diplomat father to England and Satoru's family moves away as the entire staff of the factory is being laid off and their current home is too expensive. As Monroe gains a sense of self, it adopts the name Shingo and goes on a quest to reunite their "family," learning the hard ways of the world in the process. The way *I Am Shingo* obstinately sits between magical realism and traditional science-fiction is often uncomfortable, as the children are not spared from any of the horrors of the world (like parental neglect, sexual abuse and murder, among other things!). This confers a grit to the series that forces the reader to take the main characters, who are two children and a robot, and their intentions and decisions, very seriously, as they entirely commit to them. However, said magical realism leads to some convoluted plot twists, which happen mainly in the secondary arcs. As they are not essential to the topic of this thesis, I do not consider them here.

Analysing the bonds under the umbrella of Donna J. Haraway's Chthulucene is interesting, as most of the relationships and allyships are the result of the characters fortuitously being there at the same moment. Shingo, Marin and Satoru could be considered a case study in cyborg theory. As soon as the children have their first meeting, people around them start noticing that they have changed and have general resentment toward this new way of being. Satoru, who used to be an unfocused air-head, suddenly develops a passion for programming/Machine software engineering while Marin, who used to contain herself despite her mother's recurrent dismissals of her daughter's agency, discovers she has abilities in domains that were never offered as an option to her and stands up to make her limits respected. While the bits of personality both children exchange with the machine count as a sort of hybridity, it all concretizes as they go to Monroe to ask for advice to avoid being separated. They get a set of instructions whose final step is to go to the very top of the Tokyo Tower, at a whopping 333 meters above ground. As Satoru and Marine reach the top of the tower, it is hit by a lightning bolt, resulting in Monroe becoming fully sen-

⁹⁷ as it is ornamented with a photo of the late actress.

tient. While they clearly did not anticipate Shingo’s awakening and subsequent quest to reunite the two children, their augmentation of Monroe with data his system was never technically programmed to handle, such as human faces and information, tastes, what the children like, the history of their families, is astonishing considering Monroe’s core purpose is in theory limited to screwing pieces together.

The contrast of Shingo’s progress is evident if we compare two key moments, one at the beginning of the story and a later moment of the saga. At the beginning, Satoru accidentally places his hand under Monroe's camera.⁹⁸ The machine's curiosity is piqued, interrupting all its current tasks. The reader then sees in “Monroe-vision” a Satoru made out of clunky pixels. As the story progresses, you can see Shingo’s evolution as their speech pattern and vision become less stiff and richer, more elaborate and nuanced. Later, as Shingo develops a humanoid form, the level of detail is significantly higher. The covers of the Umezz Perfection edition are illustrated in that style, providing a good example of the development happening in Shingo, as he slowly perceives more depth and more details, resembling what could even be a contemporary 3D model in our current time period. The intricacy and generally ink-heavy, almost gothic backgrounds that Umezu draw help to add to feeling of contrast, as the “Shingo-vision” is minimalist and clear. In addition, in this work, Umezu does not make use of the irregular panels specific to manga, but issues the same need to use the page as the smallest common denominator as he decomposes actions into minuscule moments. This over-detailed treatment of time forces the reader to refer to the whole page for context as a single panel is meaningless despite the panels being regular rectangles. This can be observed in figure 7, as the pixelated hand surrounded by changing geometric shapes is completely devoid of sense if the page is broken down in isolated panels.

⁹⁸ *Je suis Shingo* vol. 1 p.181



Fig.6 Kazuo Umezu, *Je suis Shingo*, vol. 1 (U.E.: Le Léopard Noir, 2017), p. 182.



Fig.7 Kazuo Umezu, *Je suis Shingo*, vol. 1 (U.E.: Le Léopard Noir, 2017), p. 183.

Embodiment of the cyborg and mingling with oddkins

A significant part of Shingo's journey is their emotional development as they interface with other beings. Shingo, who is named Monroe when he initially joins the factory, becomes a cyborg from the Satoru's input as he reprograms the robot (instead of his father) to recognize handwritten characters and make predictions using the personal data they input in him, like when he predicts Satoru and Marin together will "become happy"⁹⁹. While the full extent of Shingo's self is enabled through the contact of the lightning bolt with his parents at the top of Tokyo tower, his divergence from his initial purpose was already manifest when he generated instructions the couple should follow to reach the aforementioned happiness at the time of their elopement.

Shingo is a huge industrial machine at the start of the story, and their clunky, massive body gets gradually mangled during their journey. The core of Shingo's physical body resides in the two parts that first encountered Satoru, which are one of their claw-hand and visual-captors/cameras, the central parts to be protected through the full trip. It is worth noting that, yes, the individual processing power of these parts puts the *fiction* in Science-Fiction, as they are fantastical in their functioning, without a central system powering them and their functions. Initially after his awakening, Shingo neither grasps their strength nor has any inherent ethical concepts of correct conduct, or of death, which leads to the serious damages to both allies and enemies. As he matures through time and experience, he learns to use his power benevolently in ways that are mutually beneficial to the beings he interfaces with, for instance preserving the soul of dead children so they can reassure their parents or considering a wild dog who rescued him as a new member of their family. As other charac-

⁹⁹ *Je suis Shingo* vol. 1 p.358

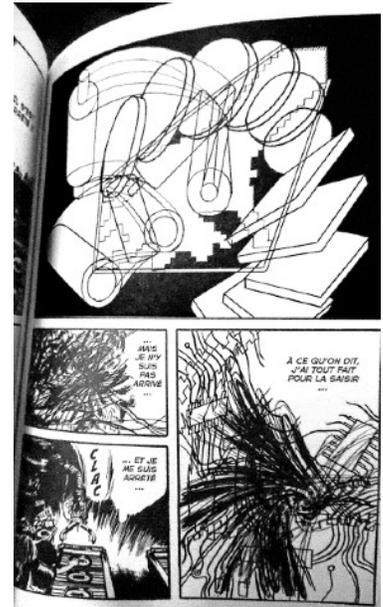


Fig.8 Kazuo Umezu, *Je suis Shingo*, vol. 1 (U.E.: Le Lézard Noir, 2017), p. 184.

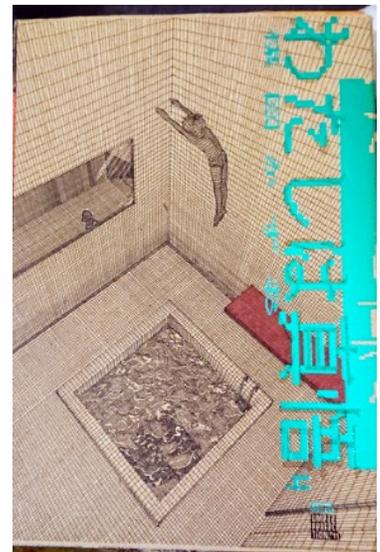


Fig.9 椋図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 4, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010), front cover.

ters are compelled to interact with Shingo, their cyborg nature is highlighted through their relating to our metallic hero. In these three scenes, *I Am Shingo* exemplifies beautifully Haraway's idea of the cyborg as a site of possibilities.

The leap from the cyborg to companion species is thin here, which is why Haraway's concept of oddkins is particularly appropriate. Not quite beings in a symbiotic interface yet having a bodily connection more intimate than companions living by your side, oddkins are beings in an improbable intimacy with each other. These improbable intimacies are rich in symbolic meanings: while the interfacing is quite concrete, their truth exist both in the present (So Far) and in the possibilities of various Speculative Futures. The anchor in the "So Far" helps avoiding a mythology (origin myth between other). This means the Cyborg attaches its rich symbolic and metaphoric aspect to an always embodied reality. The various terms beginning with the letters S and F (Science Fiction, Speculative Feminism, String Figures, etc.) are a fertile ground to understand the playing field of the cyborg. For the case study of oddkins in *I Am Shingo*, we will be focusing on three events happening at a key moment in the story: after Shingo saved Marin from an deadly satellite crash and finally relayed Satoru's "I still love you" to Marin, he is now tasked to transmit her answer. Shingo is tired and has much less means than when he started his quest. They find themselves in situations where their quest would have abruptly ended were it not for the external intervention. Throughout the story, unfortunately, Shingo experiences little intimacy with his two "parents", as it mostly happened before their awakening. Therefore, I argue that the three following impromptu interfaces are significantly meaningful demonstrations of oddkin relationships.

Oddkin in *I Am Shingo* in three interfaces

Old lady¹⁰⁰

Shingo is maimed after interposing the humanoid self he managed to create between Marin and a falling bit of satellite. In the process, they sacrifice this entity and the machine part of the self sustains heavy damage, which include a throwback so big Shingo is catapulted through the roof of a faraway factory. In there he tries to recover by plugging what is left of him into an electrical outlet in order to heal. As they do so, the other robots in the factory block the power outlet and attack our metallic hero, as they perceive him as an outside disrupting the flow and

¹⁰⁰ *I Am Shingo* vol. 6 p. 49-56

harmony of the factory. Witness to the entire scene is an insomniac old woman suffering from the lack of autonomy allowed by her caretakers due to her poor eyesight, mobility difficulties and reduced hearing. Despite these obstacles, she reaches the noisy factory and immediately approaches Shingo, who is getting attacked by the machines of the factory. In spite of her disbelief that she

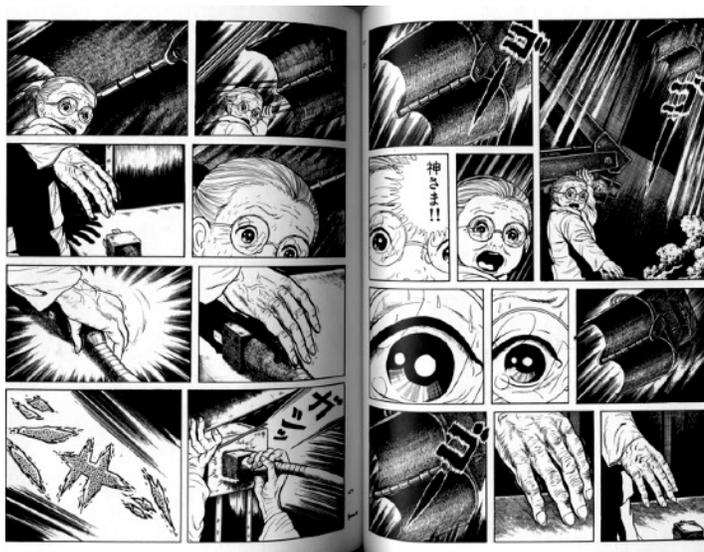


Fig.10 Kazuo Umezu in 榎図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.50-51.

heard Shingo call out for Satoru, she feels it is her duty to help the maimed machine. She watches in horror and can't handle Shingo looking powerless and desperate. She goes to get help, only to be brought back to her apartment. When she comes back, she gathers her courage and even through the bed of cardboard boxes upon which Shingo lies just enflamed, she screams at the factory machine to stop, physically blocking them with her crutches and, in a panic, asks Shingo what they want her to do. As she figures out it's the plug, she forces the factory machine's arm out of the way to access the outlet.

Right as she connects Shingo to the electricity, the factory exacts revenge by crushing her head. As the “camera” pans out, the reader sees Shingo managed to jam part of himself between the claws’ two sides, saving the old lady from being beheaded. As she lies on the floor, bloodied, Shingo

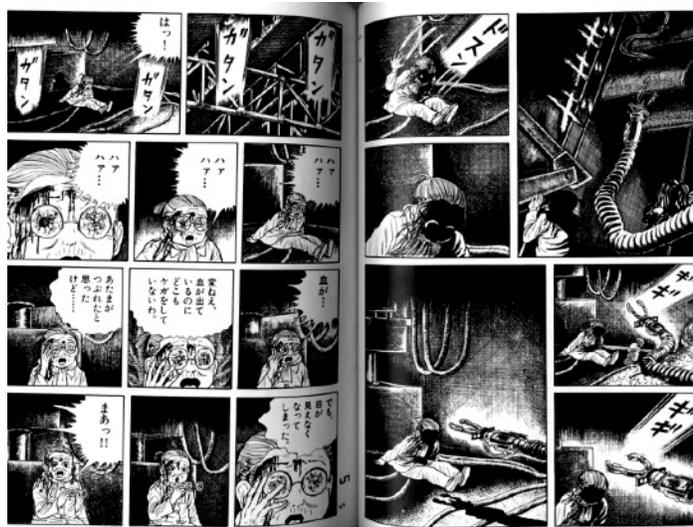


Fig.11 Kazuo Umezu in 榎図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.54-55.

approaches her with his claw-hand, after which the reader only sees onomatopoeias. When she awakes, her forehead bears the mark of the needle within Shingo's claw hand. Very confused, she takes off her glasses to realize she now sees perfectly without them, and that her hands and legs have also been restored to their peak functionality. Through an impulse of empathy she could not quite explain, Shingo left in front of her

their amputated part, with a self-portrait of their humanoid face and the simple sentence “I Am Shingo”. As she wonders if Shingo is god/a godly-intervention, our eponymous protagonist is in the back streets, crawling with difficulty, trying to remember the path to Satoru’s house.

In this entire scene, the factory is depicted as inhospitable and oppressive through Umezu’s laborious, dense cross-hatch shading. Whereas the factory’s walls and machine are expressed only in hard lines, Shingo is shaded more softly, with plenty of white to make its detail visible. During the entire scene, the granny, who is only in round linework without shading, is also in great contrast to the environment. The moments when she discovers her miracle healing are expressed in a dramatic *clair-obscur*, making light of the situation while also reflecting her own perception of the changes in her body for the reader, as it is not as it was before.

Though the supernatural-scientific connection, Umezu erases the nature-culture divide as the cause of the events can only be inferred. Both Shingo’s survival and the sudden recovery of the old woman are dependent on the empathy she felt for Shingo, which they returned by also saving her life as soon as it was possible for them to act. Although panels showing only the ceiling and onomatopoeia suggests violence or horror that can’t be shown, the very next panel shows the grandma’s face in all its details, as opposed to completely obscured between the claw attack and Shingo’s paranormal intervention. That reassuring, selective lightening only around Shingo’s hand before the intervention and then transferred to the grandma allows not only for a very clear hierarchy of which parts of the panel are important, but also literally lighten the mood, with hope and clarity.

Dog¹⁰¹

Later, Shingo is mulling over barely missing Satoru because he couldn’t scream to get his attention, and is now reduced only to the long arm part of the original manufacturing machine. As he is about to get run over by a train, a wild dog jumps to catch him in-extremis and pull him out of the trajectory of the train. As they fall down along the mountainside, Shingo wonders if the dog just grabbed him or wanted to help him. He introduces himself to the dog and tells him that he is about to meet with his father. The dog greets him and accepts him as a friend by enthusiastically licking one of the sides of its claw, before using his paws and mouth to grab onto Shin-

¹⁰¹ *I Am Shingo* vol. 6 p.258-275

go to help him in his quest. The dog's sole request is to be adopted and taken care of, which Shingo believes his parent will absolutely do. In this second fortuitous meeting, Shingo and the dog plan a future together, where they would join the same close-knit group of people. The quick trust that develop between the two is survival against adversity. As the duo traverses the forest to get back to the city where Satoru is, the dog's body has endured multiple lacerations from the environment and the group of angry wild dog following them to off the traitor, as he



Fig. 12 Kazuo Umezu in 榎図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.260-261..

has been othured by its kind for aligning with an outsider. The dog is really determined to help Shingo and is devastated when they get separated when hit by a police car, and is then seriously maimed as it gets hit more directly. Shingo's arm breaks off again, but not before he has time to make the dying wild dog young again, which is then carried off by the officers, in order to increase his chances at getting adopted by a family. Even if they could not reach their end goal together, Shingo wants to ensure his newfound companion reaches happiness.



Fig.13 Kazuo Umezu in 榎図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.275.

Insects & undesirables

As the dog is taken away by the officers, Shingo is carried toward the port by a new procession of allies. Our third oddkin interaction is with an overlooked class of living beings; insects and other vermin. Interestingly, the initiators of this interaction are the flies themselves. At this moment, Shingo is really associating with the overlooked and the undesired, who welcome and help him right at the moment. Shingo believes that nothing more is possible as he cannot move and has no way to grab Satoru's attention. Additionally, Shin-

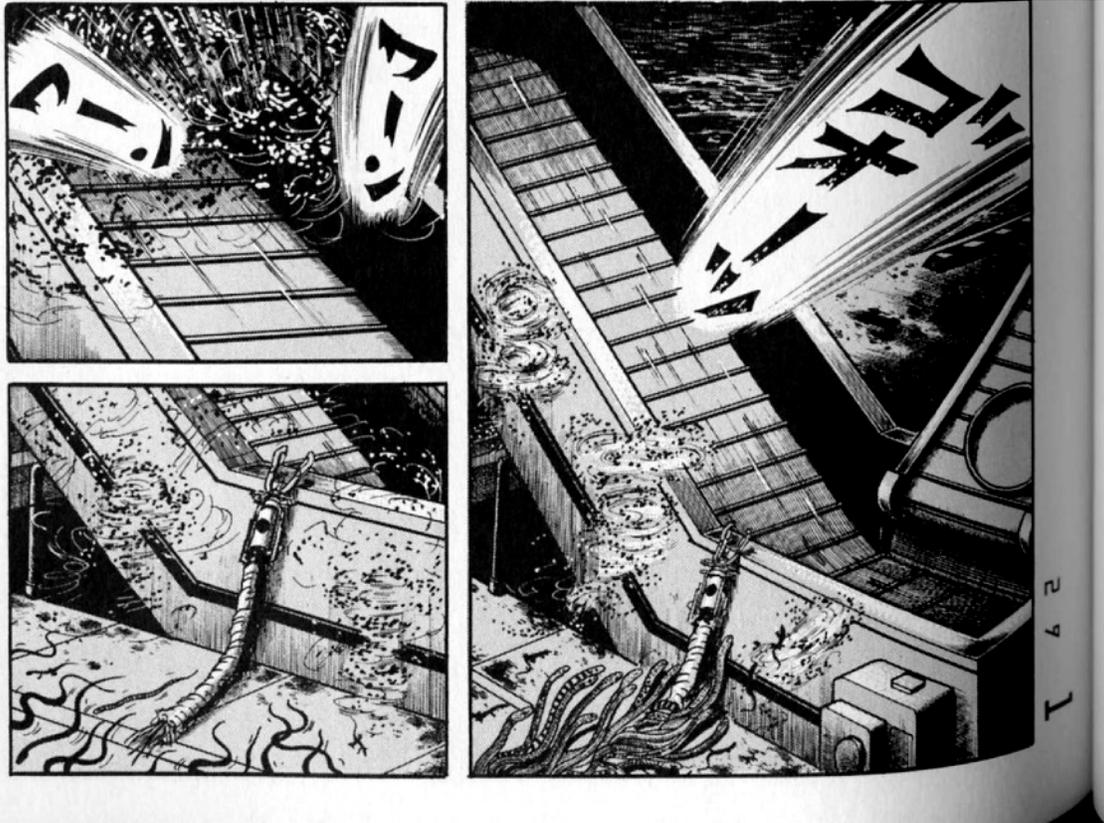


Fig. 14 Kazuo Umezu in 椽図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.291.



Fig. 15 Kazuo Umezu in 椽図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.298-299.

go (reduced to his claw hand and a cable is formally very similar to the snakes), and in the ensemble scenes where they carry him, their visual presence melds together¹⁰² as they work toward a common goal blurring the lines separating the organic from the mechanical as the sinuous imagery is as far as possible as the previously displayed grid-like Shingo-vision. Umezu's signature laborious *decoupage* of time into minuscule moments allow us to see how the group follows Shingo along his journey. The slithering beings stay on the ground, eschewing their procedural formation when helping Shingo up the conveyer belt. Then, the flies take over, serving as Shingo's mean of support, specifically to help their communications with the world. Despite physically losing pieces, Shingo gains knowledge and distance with the collaboration of others; the path they could follow on their own (after having first being helped by Marin and Satoru) ends abruptly and in violence. It is only through recognizing the connection between all things (when assessing themselves as Chikyu/Planet Earth) that Shingo makes their mission possible, fitting with the Chtulucene voluntary and involuntary entanglements. The subsequent collaborations are increasingly intimate, as Shingo has to rely on others more, but their also always get closer to its core. Vermin (snake, flies and other bugs) who carry him to the port and coordinate their air formation to reproduce Marin's face from Shingo's memories as a way to send a signal to Satoru¹⁰³.

All of these interspecies collaborations are born from the empathy of seeing, or rather, feeling, that someone is in need. Neither the old woman, who is persuaded Shingo is immobile and just a machine, nor the wild dog or the cortege of underappreciated creatures who should have no opinion toward metal except that it's probably dangerous. As soon as their empathetic interest was piqued, the bonds were woven, and through this interpellation comes the sense of duty in which, de-



Fig.16 Kazuo Umezu in 楳図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.285



Fig. 17 Kazuo Umezu in 楳図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.291.

¹⁰² *I Am Shingo* vol. 6 p. 282-283

¹⁰³ *I Am Shingo* vol. 6 p.275-299

spite obstacles, they go back and persist in finishing their self-assigned mission. The interesting part is that despite being less and less functional (and post-Marin accident, unable to speak), Shingo always return the favour, as they feel the kindness aimed toward them.

Miki & Shingo, in human friendship

I need my sibling species to get me through this life story; our bodies share substance; we are kin. —Donna Haraway¹⁰⁴

In another case of oddkin, we have the friendship of Miki and Shingo. The two meet as Shingo, in the sewers, connect with the building's phone panel. Miki's family moved into the apartment previously occupied by Satoru's family. Shingo finds the apartment as the address was entered into his database when this two "parents" were programming data into the machine back at the factory. We “ see ” Miki

for the first time as Shingo hacks to the landline and specifically asks to speak to her. Despite their initial disconcertment that anyone would know their daughter and ask for her by name, they hand/hold the telephone to her ear so that she can have a conversation.

Miki's life has been heavily sheltered. Confined to a sterile chamber for most (if not all!) of her life, she did not get the

opportunity to mingle with her peers and socialize. The phone call with Shingo is the first time she gets to really exchange with another kid in the same age group (supposedly), leading her to refer to Shingo as her first friend, after they bond over their respective lack of mobility and isolation. She expresses that if she qualifies as human, so does Shingo. This statement is somewhat of

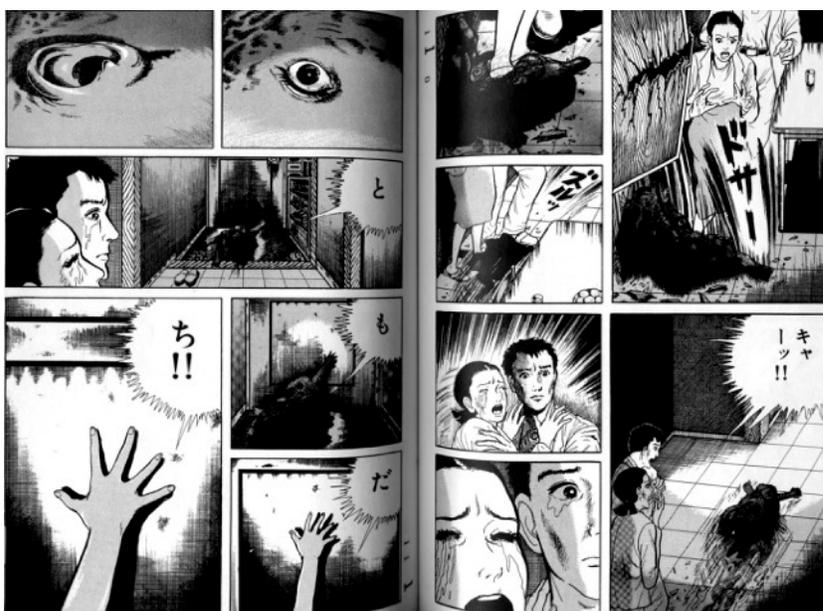


Fig. 18 Kazuo Umezu in 榎図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.110-111.

¹⁰⁴ Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan_Meets_Onco.Mouse*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 1997), 120.

a double edged sword; in one sense, it recenters the discourse on human exceptionalism and their superiority. However, this declaration also involves refusing to let humanity be narrowly defined, as Miki refuses to let anyone strip her of her humanity and extends this to Shingo, for she sees them as an equal.

Miki is an interesting character because despite being a secondary character, much can be inferred from the information revealed about her. There are also some notable omissions. When she meets Shizuka, she is delighted that they have a chance to become friends and seems unaffected by the other girl's surprise.

What makes Miki a cyborg is that her will to live has been fuelled by Shingo, which has in parallel affected her body. The cyborg-isation is due to how meeting Shingo changes her, physically, but mostly emotionally. However, not covering her bodily transformation would be a gross oversight. As disability scholar Alison Kafer noted, critical engagement with the lived conditions of disabled people has been missing from Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. Kafer says:

Of course, cyborg theory requires an intervention as well, for, far too often, disability functions in cyborg theory—including Haraway's manifesto—solely as an illustration of the cyborg condition. [...] Disabled bodies are simply presented as exemplary, and self-evident, cyborgs, requiring neither analysis nor critique. If, as Haraway insists, cyborg bodies are not innocent, but are “maps of power and identity,” then a close crip reading of the cyborg is long overdue.¹⁰⁵

From the perspective we get due to the setup at Miki's parents, there is a strong implication that their daughter is vulnerable and dependent on them and on technology that make her environment sterile. This initial characterization of Miki defines her by her isolation, as she has never been allowed to interact with other children, whom she can likely heard playing around the apartment complex. In order to further this impression, Miki is never seen in her first few appearances. By this, I mean the reader is presented a birds' eye view, seeing the bed she lies in, is provided descriptions of her appearance when six years old Shizuka relates to her mother what she has seen when she snuck into the neighbouring apartment.

¹⁰⁵ Alison Kafer, “The Cyborg and the Crip: Critical Encounters,” in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Indiana University Press, 2013).



Fig. 19 Kazuo Umezu in 模図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.127.

However, for a horror manga that is heavy on explicit violence, somehow Umezu neglected to make the transformation scene for Miki an horrific one. Surely, growing bones and organs in a matter of minutes would be very painful. There was potential for a more nuanced depiction of a cyborg experience that is not purely positively toward an able-bodied standard. Miki's spirited escape from the cupboard and the sounds preceding said escape, clearly, she has capacity for some autonomy, which her parents never encouraged by keeping her confined to her bed. Another intriguing bit is the children-seized dress in Shizuka's room. Considering the fact that she doesn't have any other siblings, what are the implications of this; did her parents buy it just hoping for such an event to ever happen and then got scared when they realized her new legs meant she could independently run toward her freedom?

One thing that differentiates Miki and Shingo's relationship from the previously described trifecta of cyborg interactions is the way it is presented. The older woman, the dog and the pest coalition all have a span of existence within the story that is limited to their interaction with Shingo. The Older woman wakes up to the noise of his arrival in the factory and fends off the machine. We never hear from her again. The dog grabs Shingo in-extremis from a fatal fall and, as the police car rams into the canine and the titular robot, he gets taken away. The pests then pick up Shingo and get him on the conveyer belt. They all seem to serve as tools to the story, as their serve their purpose and exit without elaboration. Miki is different in that she is introduced prior to her meeting with Shingo as Shizuka's new mysterious neighbour, and that she is not provided a satisfactory closure like the trifecta. As she and Shizuka are let in the building with the cult and Miki has an increasing amount of bloody coughing fits, her story provides no closure for the reader. While frustrating, this establishes Miki as a character whose existence is not limited to her usefulness to Shingo.

This different cyborg relation is interesting to consider under the lens of Alison Kafer's critique of

the cyborg manifesto, in which she highlight inconsistencies between what the manifesto proposes to do and what it actually says. The gist of her argument is that Haraway's manifesto aspires to account for the cyborg experience of interfacing between humans and technology, but in practice, it obfuscates explorations of said experience in its many examples using disabilities as examples of cyborg-ness. According to Kafer, the manifesto posits disable people as helpless and their recourse to technology as self-evident. Between other case studies, she names the numerous reports of Christopher Reeves as the exemplary cyborg as he was dependent on an iron lung after a horse-back riding accident. None of these accounts explore Reeves's feelings regarding his interfacing with the machine, using the machine's replacement of his muscle function for breathing. In a similar fashion, cyborgs studies tend to represent these technologies as purely positive, without considering the nuanced experience of the negative aspects they may have (wearing prostheses can lead to uncomfortable skin irritation, adding issues in conjunction of solving others)

As Miki's body transforms into a traditionally able-bodied one through Shingo's intervention, we get to see Miki exploration of the world, but there is unfortunately no suggestion or exploration of how she could have interfaced with Shingo with their original body and still see the world. For a few pages, however, we can see that Miki is not the disempowered, feeble damsel that her parents believe she is, as her meeting with Shingo made her set her views on getting out, to the (dubious) point where her parents judged their daughter would be best contained locked in a cupboard.

Shingo is not the only being redefining humanity in this series; their friend Miki provides an interesting counterweight. After Satoru's family is forced to relocate, the apartment gets new tenants, an excessively secretive family, which leads Shizuka, the little girl living next door to what was Satoru's apartment, to sneak in and investigate while the adults are away. She discovers a very bare apartment, whose main feature is a bed surrounded by multiple plastic curtains, as if protecting an immuno-compromised person. She later describes the person she meets to her mother as " arms, legs and that's it ". As Shingo find his way into the sewers under the building, he connects to the telephone system. Miraculously, Miki senses it's a friend and implores her parents to hand her/hold for her the phone so she can talk to Shingo. Meeting Shingo this way, she makes her first friend and assess that Shingo and her both qualify as humans.

Although they are her parents, the adults in Miki's life try to limit their daughter's expo-

sure to the world, in what seems at first like an attempt to protect her health, but soon reveals itself as a bizarre controlling charade as she gains strength and independence. After their phone conversation, Miki meets Shingo, and she finally manages to make a friend and find understanding. While her parents appear deeply touched, the next insight in their apartment reveals that they locked their daughter in a closet, as they become scared of her desire for independence. She gains the physical means for independence when Shingo engraves on her door a mathematic incantation that allows her body to resume the development that usually happens in utero. Under her new prim appearance, she finally gets to talk to Shizuka, her neighbour whom she's met before. She puffs out at Shizuka's surprise that she can now speak, as she says she was always speaking with her heart before. Through her existence, Miki demonstrates Haraway's theories in an alternative way; instead of being human and then stripped of her humanity through the use of cyborg modifications, she only gains the means to be recognized as human through such interactions. Unfortunately, her newly developed body is not a magical, immediate fix to her fragile health, which is still present, and it impedes her quest because her body cannot follow Shingo's increasingly faster pace.

Through the relation between Miki and Shingo, Umezu flips on its head the notion that certain organisms determine humanity "[...] what counts as biological kind troubles previous categories of organism,"¹⁰⁶ while avoiding deification through the erasure of their roots. Even within magical realism, there is no conjuring out of thin air.

Life, love, hope and death

In A Manifesto for Cyborgs, Haraway clarifies that the fleshy, fragile existence of the organic and otherwise "taken from nature" are as valid parts of the cyborg as the manmade components.¹⁰⁷ Through this mutuality, respect is born, and our titular cyborg learns the harsh reali-



Fig.20 Kazuo Umezu in 襟図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.403.

¹⁰⁶ Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, ed., "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late Twentieth century.", in *The cybercultures reader* (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 291324.

ties of life in the field: When children from the neighborhood who helped Shingo escape scientist-assailants find an untimely demise, Shingo does not understand why their bodies are unresponsive. Later, in volume 6, despite interfacing with other beings, Shingo is using the very last of his energy to write¹⁰⁸ the gist of the message he had to transmit to Satoru (Love, written in a phonetic alphabet, which Shingo spoke for most of the series). In the span of ten pages, and without any facial or human expression, Umezu manages to convey the simultaneous deep grief and hopes of Shingo as he finally gets to meet his father again and despair that he would not be able to talk to him. To do so, the laborious windy and dark pages give way to a sunrise that creates light (therefore more white space, which allows the eye to rest) while maintaining a laborious use of cross-hatching around Shingo, giving both a textural intensity to the scene and making Shingo's hard work palpable. Through the use of angles and the thinning of time through elongated moments, such as dedicating page 407 entirely to Satoru's grasping the side of the boat to help himself out, Umezu forces the reader to literally "stay with the trouble", while making them reflect on what makes them feel like they do, as the sequence of panels contains little new information. One can sense Shingo's longing for this moment. Then, on page 411, Shingo calculates the moment where they use their leftover energy to trace the final stroke of AI and attract Satoru's attention at the same moment. As Satoru's hardboiled face from the horrors he has seen in the past few days look down, you feel through the softening of his expression that he is suddenly reminded of what incentivized him to undertake that journey in the first place.¹⁰⁹ Romantic love in Shingo represents a drive. Though idealized, it is the connection that generates hope in a certain future. Let me be clear: romantic love is not an end in itself in *I Am Shingo*, but rather an optimistic take on what could become if accept to build this ecosystem.¹¹⁰

If the practice of seeking purity is one of cutting links, then *I Am Shingo* resolutely pushes against it by highlighting relations that are often trivialized (children's feeling) but that have a disproportionate impact on not only the plot, but on the world at large to decide what to make of it. Likening this to the figure of the Chthulucene through the ideas of recharging through a connec-

¹⁰⁸ *I Am Shingo* volume 6, p. 401-410.

¹⁰⁹ He thought Marin was back, but it was just a petty thief with similar extremely good-looking hair.

¹¹⁰ "Whole with interdependent parts, likened to a living being." Definition of Ecosystem by the Oxford English Dictionary.

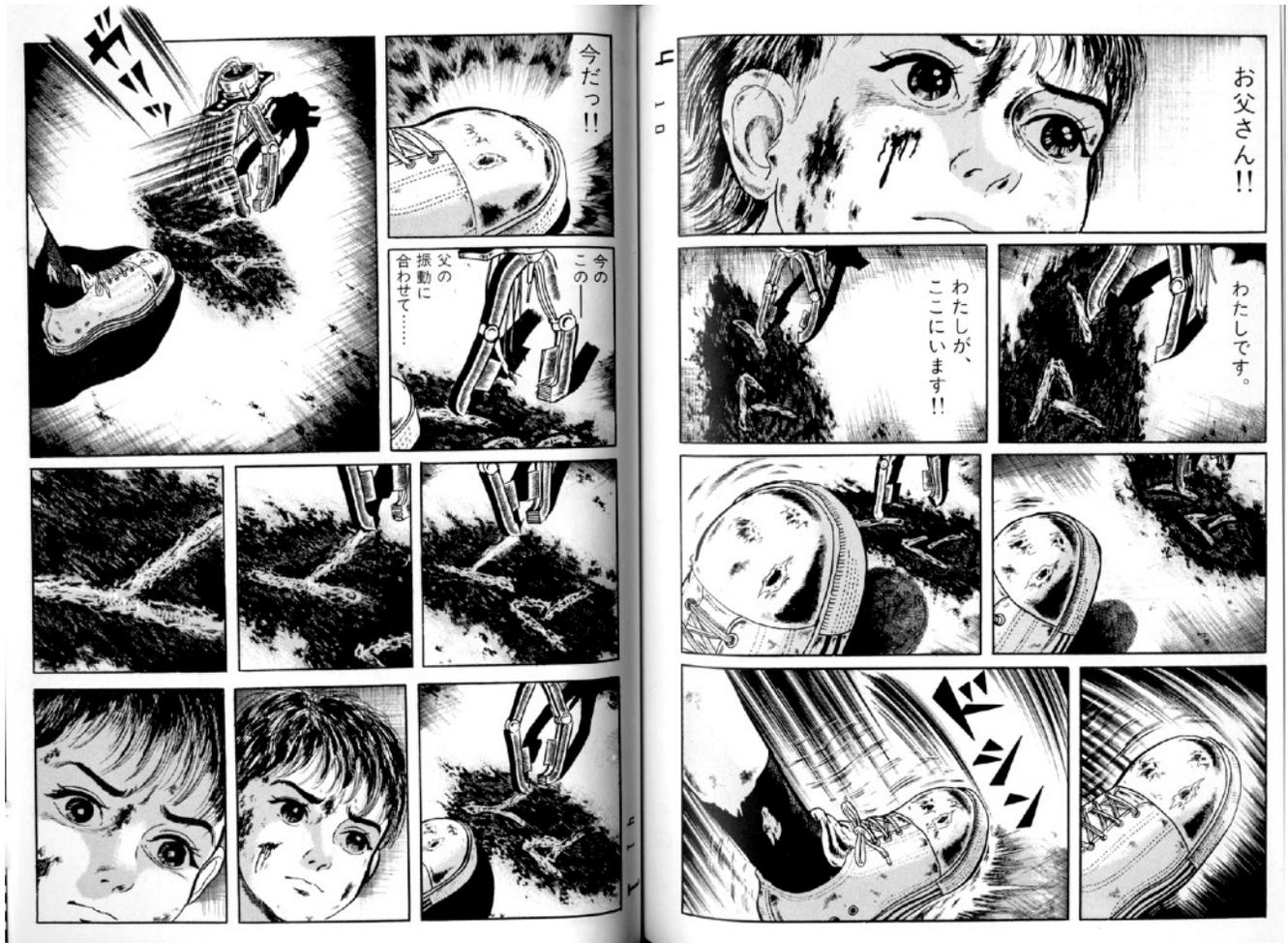


Fig.21 Kazuo Umezu in 榎図かずお, わたしは真悟, UMEZZPERFECTION!, vol. 6, 6 vol. (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2010) p.410-411.

tion, that the substance of a being is shaped by their encounters and the promises to one another show the inevitability of ties with others and how that inevitability is actually desirable. These lines show as both a metaphor and palpable evidence. Haraway explains this by saying that “beings do not preexist our relatings”¹¹¹ and *I Am Shingo* demonstrates this in a thoroughgoing, literal way by making world politics and conspiracies turn around what was at the beginning essentially two children sneaking around to spend time together giving unexpected resources to a machine’s learning.

These unforeseen connections are tied together as an intricate web where conventional social structures, such as children going to school, being taken care of by their parents and not

111 Haraway, *The companion species manifesto*, 6.

being murderers, are corroded to show the recesses of the heart.

In conclusion, *I Am Shingo* emerges at the same time as Haraway's cyborg theory and coincidentally faithfully demonstrates the possibilities of connecting with others. Whether it is through temporary physical symbiotic relationships (in which each party is inherently transformed by the interaction even after the separation) or through the Chthulucene-like in which Shingo creates communities around fulfilling a common goal.

Conclusion

This thesis advances that manga as a medium is a remarkably appropriate way of exploring the continuous thread of Haraway's theorization of kinship and filiations without blood relations, reassembled under the label oddkins. Oddkins is a theoretical term Haraway came up with to explain fortuitous intimacies between beings of different species that don't quite correspond to her definition of companion species. Narratively, manga has a focus on the interior turmoils of the characters, making it a fecund place to detail intimacies. As a medium, manga also has some undeniably cyborg elements in the fact that the art and the text are inseparable from each other in order to follow the narrative. Manga also varies from other sequential art forms by having the page as the smallest possible unit and not the panel. This is due to its cinematic qualities, namely the use of irregular panel sizes, forcing the reader to consider the page as a whole or the overtly meticulous division of actions in a small time frame. While this has the impact of making the moment feel longer, the way panels are divided in *I Am Shingo* makes it impossible to infer what the context and action happening are, leading the reader to need the full page in order to have the necessary minimal context to make sense of the fragments.

As we have seen in the literature review, manga's current form bloomed after World War II. In the decades following, Japan economy rose steadily, with no sign of crash or recession until the beginning of the 1990s. *I Am Shingo* started its serialization in 1982, while money was still flowing. Its tale of a misfit duo of pre-teens went against the grain of the social climate, preceding by a few years the start of a new paradigm where young people could not rely on their elders for social security or financial support and where the promised opportunities did not concretize. *I Am Shingo* invites its readers to start reconsidering the value of the established social order and to seek novel ways to be in a rapidly changing world.

Haraway and manga

Donna J. Haraway's body of work has left a significant mark on academia, especially feminist and communication studies. Although she has exemplified her theories through many different media, manga was not one of them. Through her writing, she illustrates her theories with a wide array of examples, from primatology to webcomics, which allows the reader to manipulate

the information differently than purely academic textual examples. Through this thesis, I hope to encourage other scholars interested in manga to draw from the knowledge generated by Haraway. The greatness of her writing resides in their mundane, concrete application. The size of collected volumes and chapters in manga allow space to wallow in the details, which works well to involve the reader in the world building. The intricacy of connections and interactions highlighted by Haraway would be a daring new way to explore manga as a medium compared to solely looking into literature or film studies. Feminist studies of fictional media could, in turn, benefit from Manga studies' dedication to understanding the internal logic of the fictional world they put forth.

As seen earlier, manga's heavy cinematic influences make its immersive flow propitious to emotional connections and therefore empathy. Many of the eminent manga titles (equally acclaimed locally and overseas) such as *One Piece* know an impressive popularity because they offer both fantasy and a "rawness" of character. Typically (also another vast generalization), the focus in these popular works will be toward misfits making a place for themselves and others in an otherwise hostile world. While far from free of violence, conflict resolution always includes discussion and an attempt to understand why their adversary is taking this particular course of action. These manifestations of emotion are seldom encountered in western media, especially if you consider media for girls. *Sailor Moon's* success can be imparted to the fact that there was nothing like it in Western markets (such as North America and France, the latter being the second biggest market for manga after Japan). Manga has now joined the mainstream of western culture, if only because people all have a more or less vague idea of what it is. This momentum would be a perfect gateway to use these stories to dream, conceptualize and apply ways of living in these tiring times when the recourse to binaries is so tempting because it would make things digestible. But the cohabitation will not be easy nor painless. Despite what would be comfortable to believe, we are not exonerated from the consequences of morally reprehensible actions, even if one holds the moral high ground. Haraway's theories include favoured and incidental relationships between creatures and living being beyond humans and the animal kingdom. They give us a map to defend our ground, and to make sure this "our" is based on proliferating connections and not on cutting back what qualifies as "us." As previously demonstrated, Chizuko Ueno's theory of selective bonds provides a concrete example of Haraway's reconsideration of established order of human social

dimension. But it is really in the cohabitation of realism and signification, speculative futures and scholarly tabulations that manga and Haraway meet to invite us to think outside of the box.

Through its fantastical take on intimacy and on new possibilities offered by the mutation of something human-made that takes an unexpected spin, *I Am Shingo* may not offer a revolution, but it splinters expectations from works of fiction in its own genre. The complex webs of connections linking the characters together illustrate the implosion of the biological family bonds and, at the same time, reflect the way the story is depicted visually through the division of space and time unique to manga compared to other forms of sequential art.

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