Moon Prism Boys: The Magical Boy as Queering Device

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ABSTRACT

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Through a queer lens, this thesis examines the role that the magical boy character plays in the manga *Magical Boy Majorian* (2007-2008), and in season 15 of the popular magical girl genre anime franchise *Pretty Cure*, entitled *Hugtto! PreCure* (2018-2019). Using queer theory and gender studies research, this thesis argues that the magical boy figure challenges problematic forms of masculinity by performing what I call 'shōjoness,' a particular form of feminine aesthetic mainly found in shōjo (for girls) manga, and anime. The thesis contends that *henshin* (transformation) sequences allow a space for gender negotiation, which disrupts a heteronormative structure through the crossing, and blending, of gender expression and form. Acting as what Sedgwick calls a queer survival object (1993), the magical boy becomes a site for queer representation, but also what I call a queering device. In other words, this thesis argues that *Majorian* and *Hugtto* serve as escapes from the burden of heteronormativity, while also holding to some extent the power to inspire change in attitudes toward queerness within, and beyond the pages of the manga, or the screen of anime. Analyzing key scenes from both works mentioned above, this thesis explores how medium specificity (manga structure, and animation techniques) renders queerness by contrasting it with more standard ways of drawing, and animating, consequently challenging normative ways of being. Informed by Scott McCloud's theorizing of the gutter, Thomas Lamarre's work on the interval, and Sara Ahmed's discussion on queer orientation, *Moon Prism Boys* frames particular forms of interstices as spaces that have the potential to positively disturb a monolithic form of masculinity when brought into contact with queerness.

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Introduction

As a May 2019 call for queer animation related academic articles on the Society for Animation Studies mailing list attests, resources when it comes to the topic of queer animation have been proven to be quite scarce (Cooley et al. 3). This realization, while unsurprising, comes at a time of growing interest from scholars in queer manga and animation; Mechademia's (a journal and conference on Asian popular cultures) "Queer(ing)" (September 27-29, 2019) conference being one recent example. The conference on the topic of queerness was in sorts a springboard to experiment on ideas which will make the bulk of the upcoming issue of the scholarly journal *Mechademia: Second Arc* which "will focus on queer(ing) comics, animation, and games, and other related media as well as their fandoms in Asia" (Mechademia). More recently, the online journal *Synoptique* published a special issue on LGBTQ+ animation with the intent "to draw potential perspectives to include queer animated media inside of animated media histories, and revisit our academic frameworks in the field of animation studies" (Cooley et al. 2). In a similar vein, the Quickdraw Animation Society published *On LGBTQ2S+ Animation* (2020)*,* a collection of essays, thought pieces, and queer animated film lists, which serves as "a conversation starter, a place where artists, animators and critical writers can explore topics of queerness, identity and representation in animation from a variety of angles" (Quickdraw Animation Society). Both the Synoptique collective and the Quickdraw Animation Society point out to a gap in literature when it comes to queer animation studies.

This thesis is part of an emerging body of queer animation scholarship that aspires to fill this gap. In this case, by offering a study of the magical boy figure through a queer lens, and more precisely of magical boys featured in the manga *Magical Boy Majorian* (2007-2008), and the anime *Hugtto! Precure* (2018-2019). Since as of the time of writing there are no articles focusing on the magical boy per se, this thesis will rely on existing scholarly writings on the magical girl genre, while putting into relation queer and gender theory with manga theory, and animation theory. To begin, allow me to paint a broad stroke of the few academic studies that have researched the topic of the magical girl, a genre which the magical boy belongs to.

On the Magical Girl

Not unlike studies on queer animation, there are also few studies on the popular magical girl genre in English, none of which address the magical boy at length. The following literature

mostly focuses on the figure of the girl and adopts a feminist approach, which is useful in understanding how the genre works, how it as evolved throughout the last six decades, and as we will see, how empowering feminine codes has been appropriated by the magical boy figure. In her essay "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis" (2013), Kumiko Saito provides a useful history of the magical girl genre in relation to changing gender identities in Japanese society. Outlining three waves of magical girl genre anime she argues that the first wave appears with Tōei Animation magical girl anime *Sally the Witch* (1968-69), and *The Secrets of Akko-chan* (1969-70), contending that they were promoting heteronormative gendered role models. She argues that "the relationship between Sally and her parents faithfully reflects a traditional patriarchal family model consisting of an authoritarian father whose values are the law, a gentle mother who obeys her husband's orders" and a girl who becomes "a good daughter by realizing her father's wishes and imitating her mother" (148). Saito locates the second wave of the genre in the 1970s with *Mysterious Merumo* (1971-72), *Cutey Honey* (1973-74), and *Meg the Witch* (1974-75). While she deplores the fact that these series "extrapolated the magical girl genre toward a form of visual pleasure centered on the heroine's erotic charm and sexual empowerment amplified by the use of magic" (151), this new direction however sparked an interest in the genre from male audiences, and older female viewers (158), widening the genre's demographic. As Toei Animation stopped producing magical girl anime in 1981, Ashi Production created *Minky Momo* (1982), and Studio Pierrot produced *Creamy Mami, the Magical Angel* (1983). Saito explains that these two series contributed in changing the genre in two major ways: "the commodification of the anime text and the inclusion of the male gaze" (152). She argues that both series "expanded [anime's value] from its promotion of merchandise sales as twenty-five-minute-long toy commercials," and that "successful animation studios' new investments in the magical girl increase male fans' mobility toward this classic feminine genre," drawing "visual grammars . . . from male-centered anime that feature robots, battle action, and 'fan service'" (152).

According to Saito, the magical girl genre's third wave can be located in the 1990s-2000s and "emerged as an art of cross-referencing among multiple genres and gender codes" (156). This third wave became the site for progressive representations in mainstream animated media where "lesbian and gay romantic interests are openly addressed in CLAMP's *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1998-2000)" (156). Elements of gender transgression and queerness was also heavily featured in *Sailor Moon* with the intersex sailor scout Sailor Uranus, who is in a romantic relationship with

the cisgender girl Sailor Neptune, but also through a group of magical girls named Three Lights, whose gender expressions tend more toward the masculine before their transformation into magical girls. Saito equates the arrival of the magical boy figure in *Magical Boy Majorian* with Japan's turn to soft power in using "Japanese pop culture as a means of cultural diplomacy" which resulted in "the masculinized image of Japan at work . . . [giving] way to that of feminized Japan at play" (Yano qtd in Saito, 158). Saito further frames the magical boy (who transforms into a magical girl) "as an epitome of *shōjo* actually provid[ing] viewers the agency for a heroic and independent identity against the failing image of male adulthood" (159). As a concluding remark, she contends that "the empowerment of female heroes visualized in the magical girl genre has developed symbiotically with heterosexual norms of society: fighting girls and cross-dressing boys in the magical girl tropes function as counter-agencies to anxieties conventional gender roles undertaken in reality" (162).

Akiko Sugawa-Shimada in her PhD dissertation (2011) also offers a history of the magical girl genre. Following similar waves she offers textual analyses of six magical girl anime from *Sally the Witch* to *Magical Doremi* (1999-2003). Her analysis of the anime series is followed by an entire chapter made from interviews she conducted in Japan with three groups of women and girls: women growing up in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, those who did from the late 1970s and early 1980s, and girls born in 1997 or 1998. Borrowing from Murase's concept of "the darkness of sexuality" (55), Sugawa-Shimada argues that the magical girl genre "offer[s] a site where girl audiences may fantasise about their ideal selves and/or take pleasure in homosocial relationships in texts without being aware of their own gendered bodies" (55). She contends that, among the *Sailor Moon/Magical Doremi* generation of girls, "costumes help them to assert a collective identity as a group and to reproduce female solidarity" (253). This is made possible through the similarity between the magical girls' uniforms in these series, while also their differences in colours, shoes, and different accessories assigned to each girls, allowing for divergence in taste to occupy an important space within the same group. Furthermore, after interviewing young girls from that generation, Sugawa-Shimada concludes that "well-blended femininity and masculinity profoundly appeal to [these] girls" (267). While the masculinity aspect of this may apply to the action-oriented nature of the 1990s magical girl (inspired by the shōnen (boys) series *Super Sentai*), Sugawa-Shimada sees the "gender equality movements [as facilitating] the altering of gender roles in the 1990s and the early 2000s. In sum, she contends

that magical girl anime from the 1990s and up to the early 2000s inspire and depict "female solidarity and self-assertion in a clique through wearing uniforms, well-blended cute and cool femininity, and, finally, the reconceptualization of the ideal father figure through representations of men's participation in domestic chores" (272).

While Saito and Sugawa-Shimada point at a form of "feminized" masculinity by the end of both their research, their focus mainly lies on the figure of the assumed heterosexual cisgender girl, leaving the figure of the boy or seemingly non-binary characters aside. While Kotani Mari (2006) briefly discusses the gender ambiguous and lesbian character Utena in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), she ultimately shies away from expanding on the implications of having a queer character as the lead, choosing to focus on the topic of female empowerment through subverting gender norms. Susan J. Napier (2001) has a similar interest in framing the magical girl as an empowered figure claiming that characters like Sailor Moon "anticipate genuine, although small, changes in women's empowerment over the last two decades and certainly suggest alternative to the notion of Japanese women as passive and domesticated" (33). Saito Minako sees the empowerment of the magical girl as a temporary phase "which teaches girls to envision marriage and domestic life as a desirable goal once they have passed the adolescent stage" (Kumiko Saito 146), as "children's television programs reinforce fixed gender roles functioning in actual society, thereby teaching girls to become a good daughter at home and a good [office lady] at work" (Kumiko Saito 146). Developing what she calls the 'Butterfly Syndrome,' Saito Minako "suggests that 'heroines of the world of girls' are girls 'who intend to successfully obtain their social positions by applying traditional sex roles' without rebelling against a male-dominated society" (Saito Minako qtd in Sugawa-Shimada 2011, 53), thereby framing the genre as a conservative patriarchal form of education for young girls. While her claims make sense for some of the characters found in the genre, her argument does not hold with queer characters such as the queer magical girls I previously mentioned since they end up becoming the adoptive parents of a reborn Sailor Saturn, making for a rather queer family.

Most of the literature mentioned above is concerned with feminist politics with a particular attention to the topic of feminine empowerment (or the lack thereof), and how representation of girls in the genre both reflects and inspire cisgender female formation in society. While this is important work that makes my own intervention possible, this sometimes comes to the detriment of forms of queerness present in these series. While Anne Allison does

tackle similar issues (and was to some extent a source of inspiration for some of the texts previously mentioned), she frames her discussion of the magical girl around toy merchandising, the main topic of her book *Millennial Monsters* (2006). She argues that in the context of *Sailor Moon* "action propels these girls into their fashionable display of multiplicity; their powers are activated and their bodies shape-shift as a preparation for battle" which results in "identity [being] decentered from any one modality/body and is fragmented into multiple pieces that girls around the world can mix and match when they 'play' *Sailor Moon*" (160). By the end of her chapter dedicated to *Sailor Moon* she frames the show as a shopping mall with a "plethora of body and character styles" (160) to choose from, making "the very "body" of Sailor Moon . . . grounded on the principles of morphing and multiplicity from the get-go" (161). Allison's intervention reveals the transformation sequence as a device allowing for audience participation in mimicking the heroines through play, slightly moving away form a focus on girl representation to one nearing a particular form of performance, which as Bryan Hikari Hartzheim argues makes the magical girl anime some sort of half-hour advertisement for toys.

Hartzheim (2016) focuses on toy merchandise in the magical girl *Pretty Cure* franchise where he develops upon what he calls the "magical girl media mix." He contends that the series can be considered as a program length commercial which "is essentially a television show created to sell toys through its sponsor, Bandai Namco" (1059). From this perspective, Hartzheim develops the concept of "product portals," which he defines as "a toy-based narrative device that generates profits for the show, studio and supporting industries" (1063). Furthermore, through analysis of the magical girls' transformation sequences he contends that these product portals "become connective tools that slide between characters and viewers: they position the viewer within the character's world and show them how they can integrate into it" (1076). In other words, the viewer is first invited to purchase the toy corresponding to the magical device on screen, and once the toy is acquired, to mimic the characters through play. This form of economy is constantly renewed as new product portals appear within the narrative itself, triggering a desire to own the new toys. To some extent, Hartzheim's account provides an expanded study of Allison's initial impulse in calling the genre a shopping mall (162), but by pointing out to the way animation itself serves to promote goods. This attention to the mechanisms of animation in relation to viewer's participation reveals how animated characters, in some ways, also holds the ability to animate the viewers through play and consumption. As I

will explain in more details in the next section, in *Pretty Cure* this way of animating transformation is solely reserved to the girl characters, while the magical boy's transformation sequence operates in a very different way, which prompts questions about its function if not the promotion of toys.

As mentioned earlier, straight feminist perspectives have been the major mode of framing the magical girl genre, while the story of queer characters have been written as mere footnotes, and queer voices have been missing from discussions on the genre[1]. Happily, this is changing. Jacqueline Ristola's queer-oriented "Globalizing Fandoms: Envisioning Queer Futures from Kunihiko Ikuhara to Rebecca Sugar" (2020) traces a transnational lineage between the magical girl inspired American cartoon *Steven Universe* (2013-2020) and the work of Kunihiko Ikuhara, an anime director who worked on *Sailor Moon* and *Revolutionary Girl Utena*. Through a comparative analysis of *Utena* and *Steven Universe*, Ristola highlights similarities between the two series as the former "encourages its audience to abandon the ideological systems of patriarchy," and the latter "take[s] the next step and install new ethics of community in their place" (96). Furthermore, she agues that *Steven Universe* gets from anime "particular understandings of queer corporeality" through the power of various forms of bodily transformations but also its "*political queerness*" (101). Akin to the shows Ristola discusses, *Majorian* and *Hugtto* also "envision radical futures as a means of escape from and an alternative to toxic gender norms" which "animate audiences today to agitate for social change and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people" (Ristola 108). My intervention in the matter investigates how queerness is animated in the magical girl/boy genre, and how it animates its readers/viewers through a queer perspective. In the following section I will explain some of the approaches that are used throughout this thesis, and highlight a few concepts which I will build upon to support my analysis of the chosen manga and anime.

Concepts and Approaches

As the previous section shows, most scholarly writings on the magical girl genre heavily rely on textual analyses of anime series' narrative to support sociological readings, often framed through a feminist lens. While I do attend to textual analyses of the series studied for this thesis, I place greater emphasis on formal analysis wherein I account for each medium's materiality. This

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[1] Unlike research on Boys Love (BL) manga such as the anthology *Boys Love Manga and Beyond* (2015) who employs scholars from diverse backgrounds, hence providing an array of perspectives.

builds on work by Thomas Lamarre (whose work I will introduce shortly), and Hartzheim who focus their attention on the materiality of the medium in their analyses. In the context of manga, my approach is highly informed by Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) where he deconstructs comic books and manga techniques, and how they convey meaning, and produce identification with the reader. McCloud's book is a useful resource in understanding how to read manga, but also how manga reads the viewer or pulls them in. His discussion on the gutter (60-93)—or the space between panels—examines the various ways the manga pages can be structured, allowing for an analysis of the relation between the panels which animates the story, but also between the pages making the turn of the page in some instances a form of gutter in itself. Queerness in *Majorian*, I argue, comes to the surface of the page through the use of shōjo (girls) aesthetics illustrated by the more feminine looking magical boy Iori, and elements such as flowers overlaid on the pages which serve to represent the character's inner self. By adopting shōjo (girls) manga visual elements, the magical boys that I will discuss in this thesis are then queered by borrowing this distinct form of femininity. The claims made in this thesis will be supported by Deborah Shamoon's in depth historical study of shōjo (2011), and recent studies of girl culture in Japan as found in the anthology *Shōjo Across Media* (2019) where fashion scholar Masafumi Monden argues that the term shōjo (girl) has become a "culturally crafted concept" (209). Furthermore, I adopt Jacqueline Berndt's framing of shōjo (girl) as a performative concept (5) which allows to investigate the ways not only the characters perform what I call "shōjoness," but also how the manga pages perform this particular form of femininity through page layout, and visual cues.

The contemporary notion of shōjo will then be put into dialogue with queer theorist's Judith Butler's work on gender performativity where she challenges essentialist claims, by deconstructing gender itself revealing its social construction (*Gender Trouble*, 1990; *Bodies that Matter*, 1993; *Undoing Gender*, 2004). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explores the notion of performativity where she argues that gender is only produced and sustained through a form of repetition that involves gender coded gestures, clothing choice, and ways of being masculine or feminine in general (152). She contends that the idea that gender is essentially innate and biologically assigned is erroneous, and that gender is culturally inscribed which makes it something we perform on a daily basis (175-193). By deconstructing gender she sheds light on its artificiality, which frees our understanding of it as a stable, ingrained essence, and into

something that has the ability to fluctuate, allowing a form of play between the gender binary codes available. *Majorian* troubles the heteronormative idea of gender through the act of transformation. As both boys transform into magical girls they are invited to experience femininity in a rather direct sense, but as this thesis contends transformation does not only affect bodies, but also worldviews, as experiencing being female coded in the case of the boyish Masaru will change his initial aggressive relation towards queerness, and women in general. By using Butler's notion of the "incorporated space" (*Gender Trouble* 92) I frame the *henshin* (transformation) sequence where character's are hollowed from their designs as a device granting an inner form of fantasy to expand on the outside through transformation. Butler's concept is useful to understand how an inner world expands on the body's outer surface, while McCloud's notion of "lines to be" (43)—which argues that the more iconic the character, the more the ability of that character to draw the reader into the manga world is increased through identification—acts as an helpful complement to Butler's idea. In other words, the transformation sequence in *Majorian* has the double effect of bringing a particular form of gender-crossing fantasy to the surface of the character, while pulling the reader in, consequently allowing them to experience a certain form of transformation, albeit a temporary one.

As shōjoness attest, queerness emerges through the use of visual codes, but as communication theorists Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe argues with their notion of the "villain-as-sissy" archetype (96), it can also be detected through the performance of gestures and dialogues. Their study of animated children media—where they claim that male villains are often made deviant by being given feminine attributes (90) (e.g. wearing cosmetics, flowing clothes, adopting feminine mannerism)—has proven to be an effective tool kit to analyze the way *Hugtto*'s magical boy Henri is designed and animated as a queer character. To further understand Henri's construction, this thesis puts the villain-as-sissy concept in conversation with Lee Edelman's notion of the *sinthomosexual*, which can be defined as a queer archetype posing a threat to reproductive futurity in his incapacity or reluctance towards child reproduction (35). The objective is to demonstrate how the magical girl genre (including *Pretty Cure*) has built thus far a negative portrayal of queer coded male characters, for *Hugtto* only to subvert expectations in introducing its first magical boy, reversing the viewer's initial biased and unfavourable position towards the character, a reversal of perspective engineered by the anime itself.

When it comes to the study of animation this thesis follows Thomas Lamarre's (2009) stance on interpreting anime through its animation tendencies and the materialities of animation. His work on the roles of cinematism, and animetism have proven useful to bring out contrast between the magical girls' *henshin* (transformation) sequences, and the magical boy's, in *Hugtto*. This thesis contends that the magical girl's *henshin* (transformation) sequence is majorly constructed upon the tendency of cinematism, which favours movement into depth giving the viewer the sense that they are moving into the image (Lamarre 5). This tendency allows for a form of suture to occur between potential buyers and the product portal spotlighted in the anime. Since this way of animating transformation has become the standard of the *Pretty Cure* series, it becomes in some ways normative through its repetition in the genre, which makes the magical boy's *henshin* (transformation) sequence standout from the usual format. This thesis asserts that the *henshin* (transformation) sequence is in this way queered when leaning towards an animetic tendency instead of a more cinematic one, which champions one-point perspective, while the former produces what Lamarre calls a "distributive field," which spreads the force of the moving image across the surface of that image (*Anime Machine* 110). In a distributive field, lines of sight replace a form of ballistic projection where the viewing position is moved away from a single vanishing point or target, instead creating multiple viewing points of entry without a center, nor a predefined line to follow (Lamarre, *Anime Machine* 128).

This thesis puts Lamarre's theory of animation into dialogue with Sara Ahmed's study of orientations which she explores through a queer angle in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Ahmed contends that certain forms of embodiment are acquired depending toward which way bodies or objects are oriented ("Orientations" 552). Through her concept of "straight line" she shows how children are by default oriented towards heterosexuality, and heteronormative norms, where an upward line is drawn towards reproductive futurity ("Orientations" 554-556). As mentioned earlier, cinematic movements animated in the context of the magical girls' *henshin* (transformation) sequence being repeated over time become the standard model for transformation, and the 'straight line' of the *Pretty Cure* series. When considered in this lineage, Henri's transformation into a magical boy becomes a "sideway moment" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 19), which renders possible a form of queer futurity. Ahmed's work helps in understanding how perspectives can be queered through a reimagining of particular codes the viewers are acquainted to. Altogether, this thesis observes the role of orientation on various

levels, and how it allows for a particular form of queer transformation to bring about change in perspectives towards queerness, making the magical boy a queering device, a notion which serves the opposite function of what Ahmed calls a "straightening device,' which she argues works to bring any form of queerness "back" to a heteronormative model of being ("Orientations" 562).

Chapters

Chapter One, "Boys will be Girls: Performing Shōjoness in *Magical Boy Majorian*," explores the role of 'shōjoness'—and its codes—in relation to boys' consumption of shōjo manga, but also how the magical boy (and by association *Comic High!*, the magazine the manga is printed in) becomes a site for "queer survival," (Sedgwick 2-3) or a queer object granting the reader a way to access a temporary escape from the burden of strict heteronormative gender roles. This chapter contends that by putting into contrast a typical shōnen (boys) manga coded character, and a more feminine shōjo (girls) character, *Majorian* opens up a space for gender negotiation through their transformation into magical girls. By using formal and textual analysis, the topic of transformation will be approached through the use of gender and queer theory, and manga theory in order to demonstrate how gender is treated as having a fluctuating quality. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of Halberstam's notion of queer time (*In A Queer Time* 1-2) where I argue that the reader is invited to perform a form of 'shōjoness' through manga consumption, allowing male readers a break—inspiring potential change—from expectations related with traditional masculinity.

Chapter Two, "Boys will be Boys: Orienting and Animating the Magical Boy in *Hugtto! PreCure*" shifts its focus from manga to anime, turning its gaze to the character Henri, who during the series 15th season became the franchise's first magical boy. In this chapter I argue that the magical boy's journey throughout the anime serves as a queering device by reversing long established bias toward queer characters. Making use of Lamarre's animation theory (2009), a comparative analysis between the magical girls' more cinematic transformation and the magical boy's animetic leaning transformation sequence reveals a strong contrast between how both are structured, and how they function. Framing Henri's transformation as a queer one (when compared to the more habitual transformation of the girls promoting product portals), this chapter interrogates the role of orientation through Ahmed's work (2006), showing how viewers

and characters alike are trained not to orient and identify themselves with queer characters which are practically always coded as villains in children animated media. This chapter ultimately argues that the magical boy not only acts as a queering device, suggesting other ways of being, but also as a conduit for the envisioning of queer futures.

Since it can be said that queerness is only queer through its difference from more heteronormative alignments, comparative analysis has been a useful method to reveal how queerness and straightness are differently portrayed through manga structure and design, and the techniques of animation. This is crucial because even amidst the paucity of work on queerness in animation, there is still less work that merges narrative with formal analysis. In other words—to borrow Cooley et al.'s formulation—I "aim at a medium-specific reading where the forms of animation encounter the composition of movement, and how this encounter becomes movement itself" (1). The various forms of analysis I undertake in this thesis whether I look at manga expression, animation technique, narrative elements, or character design are all filtered through a queer lens, favouring a particular form of queer orientation.

Chapter 1

Boys Will Be Girls: Performing Shōjoness in Magical Boy Majorian

What is a magical boy? This question inevitably comes up whenever I discuss *Moon Prism Boys* with academics and non-academics alike. While the magical girl has been positioned as both a genre and a character-type, she has been the focus of a few academic works while the less known (yet blooming) magical boy has been given far less attention. With this fresh project in mind I set out to Yokohama National University in the summer of 2019 where I had an engaging discussion with scholar Akiko Sugawa-Shimada who wrote extensively on magical girls, including an award-winning book on the topic, and scholar Deborah Shamoon, author of *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls' Culture in Japan* (2011), and scholar of Boys Love. The conversation circled around the magical girl genre and opened up on the topic of the magical boy as I shared my own interest in exploring this character type. While Sugawa-Shimada devotes a small part of her recent essay "Shōjo in Anime: Beyond the Object of Men's Desire" (2019) to the magical boys of *Cute High Earth Defense Club LOVE!* (2015) putting it in dialogue with Butler's notion of parody, she was surprised that one would tackle such a narrow theme on its own. Magical boys are indeed not the most common character type found in manga or anime but are nevertheless appearing more often in these types of media since the last decade. In accordance with Sugawa-Shimada's use of parody, they often function as a device to entice laughs as is the case with the chainsaw wielding cross-dressing magical boy Ayumu in the manga *Is This a Zombie?* (2010-2013) or the ambiguously gendered Hideyoshi in *Baka and Test* (2009-2016). Contrary to the other characters who have the powers to summon a fighting avatar, Hideyoshi is the only one who is given a *henshin* (transformation) sequence, a self-reflexive gesture filled with humour as the character himself wonders why he goes through this process when summoning his avatar. While male characters performing femininity in Japanese entertainment have been used in degrading homophobic (and misogynistic) comedic situations in the form of the *okama* (feminine male performers) for decades (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 181), manga like *Sailor Moon* (1991-1997)*, Magical Boy Majorian* (2007-2008) or *Magical Girl Raising Project* (2014-2015) offers a vastly different and somehow empowering approach in situating the 'feminine' boy. Through these stories the 'feminine' boy becomes a site for the potential rethinking of queerness on Japanese popular television, in the face of the okama

caricature. Treating the magical boy only as comic relief ignores the various potentials the figure can hold. As I will argue throughout this chapter, the magical boy figure is not always framed as an object of ridicule, one to be looked at, but can in some cases act as a device challenging gender norms as it pulls the manga reader in, resulting in a particular form of embodiment specific to manga.

Manga is an interesting object of study here, since being in appearance a fixed medium (the images do not necessarily move) it demands of its readers a constant degree of participation. Movement is merely suggested, requiring the participant to fill in the gaps between (and across) the panels, but also, as we will see later, to generate other forms of non-narrative, non-linear motions. My main goal in this chapter is to illustrate how a particular form of girlishness (what I will call 'shōjoness,' a notion I will explain in the section below) can be appropriated by the figure of the magical boy to produce alternative forms of masculinities, away from a more rigid, and traditional understanding of boyhood and manhood. To do so I will put queer theory, comic book theory, and research on girl culture in Japan into dialogue. Atsuko Ishida's magical boy manga *Magical Boy Majorian* (henceforth *Majorian*) will serve as visual support to describe how the infusion of girlishness through the figure of the magical boy allows for a form of transformation within, and outside, the manga pages. I contend that by embodying multiple forms and crossing gender boundaries the magical boy figure is intrinsically queer as he navigates the gender spectrum through transformation.

Gender-B(l)ending

Majorian is a manga that was serialized from 2007 to 2008 in the manga magazine *Comic High!,* which ran from 2004 to 2015. Published by Futabasha (est. 1948), *Comic High!*'s logo (Figure 1.1) is presented both in English and the Japanese *katakana* script, and is accompanied by the sentence "Girlish Comics for Boys and Girls." The magazine's position is an interesting one. By offering 'shōjoness' for male consumption, and identification, it challenges the idea that shōjo (a term I will define in the next section) manga are solely aimed at girls. Borrowing tropes from the magical girl genre, *Majorian* recounts the adventures of two boys: Iori, a more timid and feminine boy, and Masaru, a bully who at first targets the former. Despite their differences, both boys are brought together to fight giant monsters as two rabbit-like aliens grant them powers to transform into magical girls (referred to as Rio for Iori, and

Rumasa for Masaru in their girl form). The obvious comment on gender as construct comes first from within the content of the manga, in the form of the two aliens—non-coincidentally named Gen, and Da, when combined suggesting the term gender.

Figure 1.1 - *Comic High!* logo

This move across gender binaries (the borders delimiting the masculine and feminine) can be defined as what Anne Allison calls a gender-blended genre, when referring to the anime *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997) (128). In *Millennial Monsters* (2006), she explains that *Sailor Moon*'s reimagining of the magical girl genre acts as a crossover between two "distinct categories . . . action for boys and fashion/romance/friendship for girls" (128). She frames the anime series as a "girlification" of the *sentai* genre (e.g. *Power Rangers*; *Super Sentai*) explaining that "the concept was intended to mimic that of the *Rangers*: a group of superheroes who morph from ordinary teenagers, fight alien enemies, and diversify by season (adding new characters, costumes, tools, powers)," while "battles are overshadowed by the personal and interpersonal lives of the girls" (131). According to Allison, this fusion of genres (and the anime's use of the sailor uniform motif) is responsible for the "[stimulation] of two desires among Japanese." The first, she claims, "is to identify with the adolescent girl/hero, an identification (and fantasy) engaged in by girls and also apparently males (boys and men) in a recent *shōjo* fad where 'young schoolgirl' carries the connotation of carefree consumer and dreamer." She notes that the second type of desire takes the form of "lust for the Sailor Scouts as sex objects, a desire expressed by male and female alike [as] there is a pronounced homoerotic flavour in the Japanese version" (134). This double process comes from a wanting to "[capture] other qualities associated with the *shōjo*: her closeness to everyday pleasures and intimate relationships along with the dreamworld she seems to so easily inhabit" (Allison 140). In order to enter the world of girls, and not merely to want them, boys and men aspire to *be* them. This cross-gender identification is reminiscent of girls identifying with (and desiring) boys in Boys Love (BL) manga. One can see a reversal of this process in the magical boy figure, by way of appropriating a form of 'shōjoness.' As I will

expand on later, a form of travel across genders results in the creation of a transformative in-between space shared by the characters and the readers, as characters switch back and forth between genders and sex, allowing the readers to experience gender transformation through character identification. By navigating the gender spectrum, *Majorian* allows an entry point for alternate masculinities into a shōjo (girls) world in a constant state of becoming.

Shōjo's Performativity

In order to understand the interstitial state embodied by the figure of the magical boy, a brief semantic analysis of the term shōjo (girls) is in order. The word shōjo originally pertained to "girls in the liminal adolescent space between childhood and adulthood, the end of which time was traditionally signalled by marriage and motherhood" (Shamoon 2), a category created to establish restrictions on underage marriage during the Meiji era (1868-1912) (Sone 140). Using critic Eiji Otsuka's research on early modern Japan, Yuji Sone explains that "shōjo is a term for a woman in a state between menarche and the legal age of marriage" (140). He further writes that "during this time, the girl was to remain virginal, and would acquire education, thereby adding value to her worth for the time when marriage was to be arranged between families," positioning this newly created category as a liminal unattainable one. While the shōjo was originally constructed as being an innocent untouchable adolescent girl, early literary examples such as Yoshiko in Katai Tayama's novel *Futon* (1907) challenges this notion by presenting an "independent, stylish, sexually desirable, and prematurely sexually active" (Shamoon 27) female character. While this type of rather problematic depiction can be attributed to what Shamoon calls "the patriarchal image of the shōjo" (10), it can be said that shōjo's various representations positioned the term as a variable one from its inception. The other category of shōjo representation that Shamoon indicates arises in girls' magazines (10) initiating a particular form of shōjo culture generating what Miyako Inoue calls a "counterpublic sphere" (qtd in Shamoon, 11). According to Inoue "a counterpublic is constituted by 'particularized individuals' and their interests and experiences situated in their concrete material situations" (127). Looking at Japanese girls magazines from the late 1890s to the 1930s with a linguistic approach, she argues that "schoolgirl speech was multiply displaced and shunned as other. It was the voice that belonged neither to male intellectuals nor to their vision of modernity" (110). As these remarks

testify, the shōjo figure was marginalized a long time ago, and not unlike queer subjects (ones which can be vastly found in shōjo manga) was seen as a threat to hegemonic masculinity.

Jacqueline Berndt, in the anthology volume *Shōjo Across Media* (2019) introduces the term shōjo as it is mostly understood in a contemporary setting: to announce a meta genre of commercial goods, such as manga or to describe a character type found in these same texts (1). In the same book, Masafumi Monden argues that the term is a "culturally crafted concept," (209) and does not have to point to flesh and bones girls per se, making shōjo (girls) a malleable notion. As Berndt draws a genealogy of the transformations of shōjo (girls) from a social marker to a meta genre, she pauses at the 1990s, where she explains that it experienced a major shift. She argues that "shōjo changed from being employed by girls (and women) as a reference point for affiliation, to providing a stock of aesthetic conventions and narrative tropes, a whole shōjo-scape" (2) becoming a "performative rather than representationalist conception" (5). Berndt's emphasis on aesthetics rather than on the figure of the girl herself morphs our understanding of shōjo, making it a code, "a practice, a performative process" (Warren-Crow qtd in Berndt, 2). Focusing on fashion in relation to Alice (from *Alice in Wonderland*) and the image of the Romantic ballet dancer, Monden defines shōjo-scape as being a "dreamy, imaginative space of liminality between childhood and womanhood" (218). He argues that "in shōjo as in other styles, dress is a quintessential medium to craft and communicate the identity of the wearer" (212), making dress (and by extension aesthetics) an external element announcing that the wearer is part of that specific shōjo-scape. His attention to the performative art of ballet and his careful analysis of the dancers' costumes supports Berndt's idea of shōjo as performative which in return allows for a deconstruction and a re-appropriation of shōjo by way of queering in the context of the magical boy. But before jumping into the analysis of *Majorian* I wish to offer a brief overview of queer theorist Judith Butler's understanding of performativity, followed by a contextualization of the term queer in Japan.

The concept of performativity has been (and still is) an often-discussed topic in gender, and queer studies. Since the early 1990s it has renegotiated our understanding of gender through the work of scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler, to only name two. Throughout works such as *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies that Matter* (1993), and *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler deconstructs gender in order to unearth its constructive artificiality. She explains that "gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static

cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (*Gender Trouble* 152). In sum, gender is performed through repetition, one that includes gestures, speech, clothing, and appearance. In *Bodies that Matter,* Butler argues that gender performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (2). She further expands on this point by comparing the concept to a form of theatrical performance which hides the act of acting in plain sight stating that "apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated" (12). By deconstructing the idea of gender she reveals the notion "as a cultural construct which is imposed upon the surface of matter, understood either as 'the body' or its given sex" (*Bodies That Matter* 2). Framing the two heteronormative ideas of gender as "compulsory performances, ones which none of us choose, but which each of us is forced to negotiate" (*Bodies That Matter* 257) she suggests the idea that gender can be a form of play. When disconnected from the concept of sex (as in reference to genitals), gender performativity erases essentialist notions linking specific genders to physical anatomy dictating how one should act. Gender stands as a concept, which when deconstructed allows for reconstruction—or re-embodiment—as she famously argued through her example of drag in the "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions" section of *Gender Trouble* (175-193). The body becomes a surface to be accessorized, and gender becomes a performed practice, which can be acted (and re-enacted) consciously through drag performances. This conscious 'wearing' of gender ultimately reveals the unconscious way people perform gender on a daily basis. By breaking the loop of heteronormative repetition, the body then, released from its authoritative shackles, can become liberated, fluid, or in other words, queered. In the next section I will put into dialogue the terms shōjo (girl) and queer, two concepts that through their definitions and history shares the similar function of producing safe spaces, and when combined together allow for characters like the magical boy figure to come into being.

Queer Japan

The word queer (or *kuia* in Japanese)—and queer theory—gained more currency in Japanese academic, and activist circles since the mid-2000s (McLelland, *Queer Japan* 1), and has been circulated in Japanese intellectual journals since the mid-1990s. Special issues such as 'Gay Liberation' (1995, vol. 6-12) from the journal *Gendai shisō* (Contemporary Thought), and

Yuriika's (Eureka) 'Queer Reading' (1996, vol. 28-13) were among volumes which featured canonical English language essays on queer theory such has the works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler (Suganuma 22). The term queer, while initially used for political purposes in the West, has grown into an umbrella term to "refer to groups and cultures that can be perceived as non-normative in terms of gender and sexuality in a broad sense" (Suganuma 36), both in the West and recent academic writings on Japan (Baudinette 2016; Suganuma 2012; McLelland 2005). The term queer opposes all identity claims (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 7), while containing in itself an ever-expanding melting pot of diverse identity categories. Queer as I refer to it here is in constant tension with its own variable meaning, a paradox which allows for open possibilities when it comes to gender identification, and expression, therefore never quite holding a one true definition. In this fashion I follow Suganuma's method (which he borrows from Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz) of "subjectless critique of queer phenomena" (35). The method "disallows any positing of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent" (Eng et al qtd in Suganuma, 35). Framed as such, queer shares Berndt's understanding of shōjo (girl) as performative (a notion which does not strictly represents a subject) discussed earlier and in the context of *Majorian* allows for non-female readers to access another formation of the shōjo world through (further) queering.

Queering, or queer reading, as a methodology has been of primary importance for queer theory, as Sedgwick explains in her book *Tendencies* (1993). What she calls "queer survival" (2) relates to the embodiment of failure in relation to an unwelcoming heteronormative society, where pressure to submit to binary norms is a constant reminder that queer individuals are on the wrong path. Queer reading is, according to her, a reminder of childhood promises which entails to "make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and, with the relative freedom of adulthood, to challenge queeradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged" (3). She attributes "the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects . . . whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available . . . a prime resource for survival" (3). Sedgwick's formulation of queer survival echoes the ways scholars have framed shōjo (girls) manga, and most importantly Boys Love (BL) manga.

Writing a genealogy of same-sex love in shōjo culture, Shamoon explains that "Boys' love stories allowed shōjo manga artists to portray sexuality and eroticism in a safe nonthreatening way. Because the characters are boys, they are not only distanced from the girl readers' own bodies, but also from the possibilities of marriage and childbirth" (104). This distancing between the drawn boys and the girl readers allowed for a form of fantasy to be produced, therefore, according to Midori Matsui, to generate a space where "the boy characters in these manga invite the girl readers to identify with them because of their feminine appearance, marked with ectomorphic bodies, long flowing hair, and huge eyes" (qtd in Shamoon, 104).

In the same vein, Sharon Kinsella argues that, while in the 1970s, shōjo (girls) manga acted as a safe space for girls, the 1980s saw a rising interest from male readers in inhabiting this space through *dōjinshi* (amateur manga) culture (121). She explains that "many of the men involved in the amateur manga medium perceive girls' manga, and the female milieu surrounding it, to be a progressive cultural scene within contemporary society" (121). To support her claim she turns to an article entitled "Active Citizenship through Girls Manga" published in 1993, which appeared in the *Nihon Keizai* magazine. In the article, the author argues that writing shōjo *dōjinshi* is not mere escapism, but has political power to reshape the social sphere. The writer continues by critiquing masculine culture, where he has to conceal his practice from his colleague at a commercial boys and adult manga publishing company. Kinsella writes that "this negative attitude towards traditional models of masculinity was shared by other male fans of girls' manga," (121) and was a springboard enabling "amateur manga genres [to] express a range of problematic feelings young people are harbouring towards established gender roles and, by association, established forms of sexuality" (124). In response to the 1990s "gay debates"[2] which occurred in Japan, critic Fujimoto Yukari argues that "the boys in question are alter egos of those girls rather than representing men in reality" (qtd in Hitoshi, 216). In light of Kinsella's discussion of boys consuming (and appropriating) shōjo manga, it can be said that the boys portrayed in these texts are also in fact alter egos of these male readers. Their androgynous features allow for a negotiation of the identification process both ways. What are represented may not necessarily always be (homosexual) men per se (or girls for that matter), but a part of the reader's inner fantasy, and the wish to break away from strict heteronormative roles. I

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[2] The so-called "gay debates" involved Japanese gay activists rallying against Boys Love as they deemed the genre unrealistic and offensive to actual homosexuals (Hitoshi 216).

suggest that the magical girl genre, and most importantly here the magical boy figure within it, are tools for queer survival where the magical boy figure provides a frame for queer embodiment through the performance of 'shōjoness.' In the following section I analyze *Majorian* by contrasting its two protagonists to reveal how 'shōjoness' is performed both on the level of the queer character design, and the inferred movement within the pages of the manga.

Shōjo's Surface

Ishida opens the first chapter of *Majorian* by positioning her two protagonists as extreme opposites (Figure 1.2). Masaru stands for a typical *shōnen* (boys) manga hero, with his spiky dark hair and his carefree action-oriented personality. Iori on the other side, contrasts with Masaru, by having blond curly hair, long eyelashes, and being given a timid, and passive personality. The blond boy's androgynous looks are reminiscent of the *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) figure from Boys Love manga such as the famous character of Gilbert in *The Poem of Wind and Trees* (Takemiya 1976-1984), locating Iori on the shōjo (girls) manga spectrum of character design. Binaries are presented in these two panels, which are separated by an oblique gutter (the space between panels)—the only one present on the introductory page—signalling two types of masculinities (and two genre formations) at odds with each other. Nonetheless, the two panels also allow for a space of negotiation between the two characters; a transformative interval that is illustrated later on in the manga, and to which I will now briefly turn to.

This peculiar space I refer to as the *henshin* (transformation) space, allows the boys to become fighting magical girls, to the joy of Iori, and the initial irritation of Masaru. The notion of *henshin* (or bodily change) originally comes from Buddhist doctrine and indicates the ability of bodhisattvas (a person seeking enlightenment on a path towards Buddhahood) to change their bodily form and sex at will (McLelland, *Male Homosexuality* 73). The term was also borrowed from 18th century *kabuki* theatre to explain how men transformed into *onnagata* where they would cross-dress and perform female roles on stage. A more modern use of the term *henshin* can also be found in 1960s *henshin dorama* (morph dramas) (McLelland, *Male Homosexuality* 73). These morph dramas popularized the trope already present in magical girl manga from the early 1960s, and created a specific transformative space, which I will discuss later. It can be said that the *Comic High!* magazine in itself performs a sort of *henshin* (transformation), by orienting

its own 'shōjoness' towards male readers, therefore serving as an official door of entry into the world of shōjo (girls) for boys.
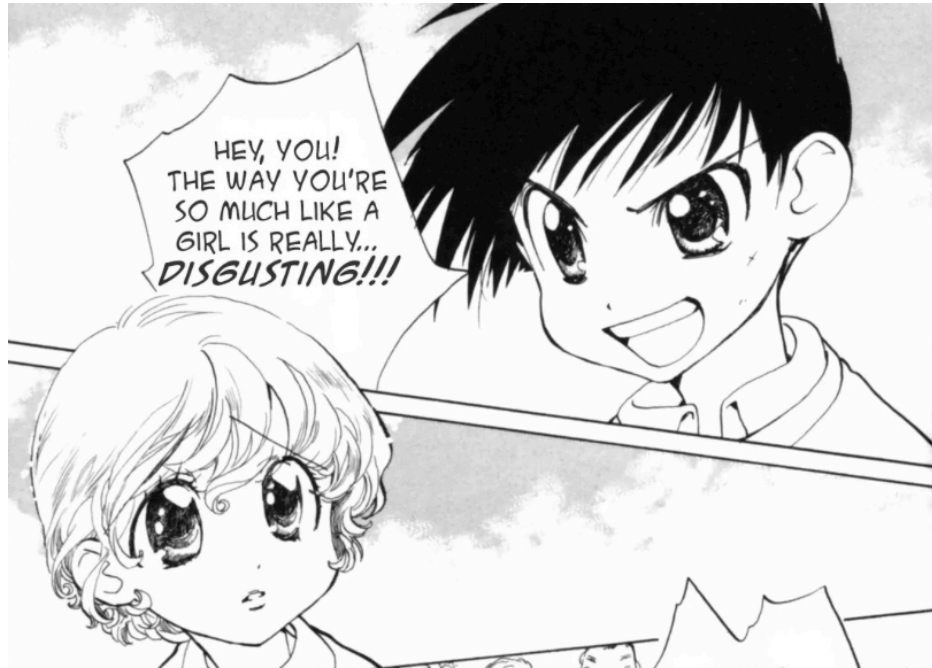
Figure 1.2 - Iori and Masaru's first encounter

In *Gender Trouble*'s chapter "Prohibition, Psychoanalysis, and the Heterosexual Matrix," Butler suggests the idea of the body as an incorporated space:

> The interior psychic space in which identification are said to be preserved makes sense only if we can understand that interior space as a phantasized locale that serves yet another psychic function . . . it is [a space] *on* the body as its surface signification such that the body must itself be understood *as* an incorporated space (92).

Supporting her claim with psychoanalyst's Roy Shafer's research, she explains that "incorporation is a fantasy and not a process; the interior space into which an object is taken is imagined, and imagined within a language that can conjure and reify such spaces" (92). Before applying the idea of incorporated space to *Majorian,* allow me to pause on the term fantasy, an important concept that acts as an entry point to queer survival. Butler frames fantasy as being a "part of the articulation of the possible [and that] it moves beyond what is merely actual and present into a realm of possibility, the not yet actualized or the not actualizable" (*Undoing Gender* 28). Butler refuses to posit fantasy as the opposite of reality, arguing that "the struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy." Both feed into one another as

fantasy "allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home" (*Undoing Gender* 29). It can then be argued that the incorporated space as surface acts as a milieu, which allows for an interior form of fantasy to expand from the inside out, and in return reshape that internal space. The idea of fantasy spreads, altering the subject's appearance, but also the world that surrounds them, as accepting forms of gender non-conformity destabilizes existing understandings of gender classification, and the expected behaviours attached to them.

Framing the (drawn) body as an incorporated space, allows for an understanding of the magical boy as liminal figure, as one which incorporates a form of 'shōjoness' in constant flux between the two polarized components of gender (masculine at one pole, and feminine on the other end of the spectrum). What's most interesting about Butler's comment is the emphasis she puts on the surface of the body. While depictions of interiority have been a staple of the shōjo (girls) manga genre for decades, it is through its external form that it speaks to its readers. 'Shōjoness' has been signalled by Iori's character design (and his aesthetic contrast with Masaru), and is also augmented through the use of non-diegetic flowers whirling around the page (Figure 1.3), a trope commonly seen in shōjo manga. Ornaments become signifiers of 'shōjoness' *on* the figure of the boy, as it is overlaid on the drawn body. Akin to the first page of the manga, the *mangaka* (manga artist) uses the body of the page to contrast shōnen (boys) and shōjo (girls) aesthetics. A short moment after the protagonists' first transformation (which I will describe shortly), the boys find themselves separated and back to their everyday activities as they ponder about the events that just unfolded. Masaru's quite limited interior monologue is presented in three clean rectangular panels, with his body leaning on a straight lined fence. His boyish looks, and army cargo short pants suggest a form of aggressive masculinity. As director Hayao Miyazaki would put it, Masaru at this point is still fighting "to feed the girl within himself" (Galbraith, "Seeking an Alternative" 375).

As the reader turns the page, they are presented with Iori's back, his head turned, seemingly addressing himself to the reader directly. Standing on a step stool he is cooking for his mother, wearing an apron with frills and neatly tied ribbons at the back. Flowers abound the front layer of the page and an interesting shadow appears smudged on the same layer, indicating a form of intimacy—as Iori's mother hugs him—as if the page had been touched and the author's fingerprints (and the reader's) has been imprinted on the paper. The page also presents us with

broken, open, and uneven panels making the gutter expand across its whole surface. Many elements are at work in, and between, these two pages, one affecting the other, revealing the turn of the page as a gutter in itself (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.2 - Masaru's and Iori's post-transformation scenes

The gutter, as Scott McCloud's discusses it in *Understanding Comics* (1993), is a blank space used in comic books to separate panels. McCloud explains that "in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and *transforms* them into a single idea" (66). He continues by indicating that this idea creates a form of closure, which is produced through "our perception of "reality" [as] an act of *faith*, based on mere *fragments*" (62). Furthermore, he argues that "the reader's *deliberate*, *voluntary closure* is comics' *primary* means of simulating *time and motion*,"—an act which he deems participatory "allowing viewers [and readers] to use their *imaginations*," (69) consequently activating fantasy as a bridging function within the reader.

Considering that both of these pages present contrasting tableaux of the boys, and are therefore made to be each read as a whole, the turn of the page, while rupturing time and space, asks of its reader to acknowledge a form of queer movement as queerness is animated through

contrast between how the two boys are presented. This transformative action while not producing motion—neither physical, nor temporal—nevertheless creates a contrasting effect. In the comic book reading context, McCloud frames the mind as an in-betweener "filling in the gaps between panels as an *animator* might" (88). In this specific example what is *animated* is a form of 'shōjoness' which is emphasized not only by the morphing abilities of the lines, and ornaments discussed above, but heightened through the stark contrast presented between the two pages. The turn of the page therefore opens up to an animated 'shōjoesque' universe, allowing for the 'male' reader to first position himself as the gender normative Masaru, and then be transposed to a more malleable, highly aestheticized open world through Iori, and subsequent transformations.

Using scholar Masuko Honda's work on shōjo (girls), Monden argues that "a fashion aesthetic of excessive lace, frills, ribbons, and the fluttering movements such garments make, together signal lightness, delicacy, and the transient freedom ascribed to a state of liminal femininity" (210-211). Shōjo aesthetics or what Honda refers to as *hirahira* (Monden 211) are incorporated into the magical boy granting him access to a transformative 'shōjo-scape,' which alters not only the character per se, but the world and medium that surrounds him. Furthermore, Honda locates 'shōjoness' as a space "where time runs differently" (qtd in King 243). King adds that this particular space "is an amorphous one that, while demarking a set area, can shift its boundaries and content in keeping with the girls or non-girls who inhabit it" (251). King's discussion, in concert with Honda, echoes Kevin Cooley's declaration that "both animation and queer theory . . . share a fascination with amorphous abstractions of the future" (4), a comment which can also be applied to manga. Cooley argues that "cartoons frequently imagine abstract worlds made possible by bizarre technologies and materially untethered bodies, whereas queer theorists are of many minds about the future, but they always seem to be thinking (and writing) about it" (4). Queer theory, academic writings and media objects related to shōjo (girls), such as *Majorian*, share this common interest in a fantastic alternative future. The magical boy/girl genre's utopian movement forward and towards what has yet to come (or what one could become) provides a space to imagine a form of positive potentiality through the idea of queer futurity, a notion which I will now explore in more detail.

Forward-Drawn Futurity

Since so little has been written on queer manga, and most works on magical girl focus on anime, I now turn to Kevin Cooley's work on the magical girl inspired queer cartoon *Steven Universe*, which will be useful in expanding on the relation between transformation and queerness in the context of the magical boy. Cooley "contend[s] that the cartooned body is able to materialize what we might call a queer future in that 1) it is always in flux 2) it only masquerades as having a grounding in material reality 3) it is an abstract and arbitrary thing with only a fuzzy resemblance (if that) to that which it seems to depict, and 4) its cartoonish re-rendering of the real mirrors the socially constructed nature of all bodies and all sexual orientations" (3). Transformation allows for the fluctuating bodies of the magical boys to literally elongate, grow breasts, and cross over from male to female, and back. According to Cooley, this bodily ability to flow across genders (and navigate the in-between of gender formation) acts as a malleable "tool to materialize a world where bodies, genders, and sexualities are free to resist the policing of language and authority" (2). This emphasis on the fantastical allows the magical boy body to "bring to life that which never-has-been" (Cooley 6). Cooley suggests that "it is through this unreality, this perpetually figurative bodily existence . . . that the cartoon [becomes] a wildly effective methodology for approaching the queer utopia that relational queer theorists are concerned with: the queer utopia that never exists but is always coming into existence" (6).

What comes into existence through the idea of transformation in *Majorian* is a renegotiation of masculinity through the exploration of a certain girlish femininity. A pivotal element of the genre is of course the *henshin* (transformation) sequences where the protagonists gain their powers, here a fantastic wardrobe, magical items, and superhuman strength. While *henshin* (transformation) is usually represented as a fairly painless affair in magical girl manga, in *Majorian* the boys' bodies contort, their backs arched, slowly being female bodied, their faces grimacing in ways that can be interpreted as pleasure or pain (or both) (Figure 1.4). Later in the manga, Iori comments on the process being less painful as time goes by, culminating in their last transformation, which turns into intercourse between the two characters, leaving place only to pleasure. The physical pain linked to transformation is reminiscent of male-oriented manga and anime such as *Dragon Ball Z* (1989-1996) or *Devilman* (1987), wherein the former Goku experiences painful muscle growth while morphing into a Super Saiyan (an overpowered version of himself). The latter example presents the viewer with the hero Akira transforming into the

demon Amon, in the 1980s OVA (Original Video Animation). The character's pain is illustrated by a red streak animated behind the character, who is placed in front of a pitch black background, signalling the change taking place from within the character, in the form of a headache, before magic spills on the skin (or surface) of the protagonist. Masaaki Yuasa takes a more metaphoric approach in his remake called *Devilman: Crybaby* (2018), where Akira's body breaks out into multiple animated lines before red flashes indicates that he turned into a demon, the lines becoming more stable, returning to their function of contouring the character. All these transformations, like the one experienced by the magical boys, are reversible; both Goku and Akira fluctuate between human, and non-human forms while always retaining the aspect of pain but to a lesser extent as the narrative unfolds. Incorporating pain in the *henshin* (transformation) space thus suggests that *Majorian* is borrowing its transformation tropes in part from more male-oriented bodily transformations, while keeping with the female-oriented world of shōjo (girls) through the use of *hirahira* elements (or shōjo aesthetics such as frills and flowers).

Figure 1.3 - A painful first transformation

Not unlike Akira's turning into a demon, transformation is performed through the use of drawn lines in *Majorian*. Each transformation is accompanied by a multitude of lines that

suggests a form of velocity, a becoming from boy to girl. What McCloud refers to as *motion lines* (110) (also known as *speed lines* in the manga context) are most often used to convey a sense of speed to the reader, but in this case, it is the whole world around the characters that seems to be in motion, a world without a world, a non-space. The space of *henshin* (transformation) then becomes a space of possibilities, of gender transgression, of queer futurity. Lines twist and curve, allowing for a form of "plasmaticness" to emerge. In his essay on Disney cartoons, Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein "comes to the conclusion that it is the plasmaticness of the animated figures in Disney cartoons, their 'ability to dynamically assume any form,' that establishes their nature, gives them power, and elicits what he considers a primal desire to see and produce malleable images" (Warren-Crowe 34). The plasmatic, for Eisenstein, entails "a rejection of once-and-forever allotted form, freedom from ossification" (qtd in Warren-Crowe 34). As the notion is not strictly limited to animation, Heather Warren-Crowe argues that it "is intimately entwined with issues of agency as they relate to girl-subjects and other marginalized beings" such has "the feminized, infantilized, raced, and nonhuman bodies" (34). Both gender versions of the characters are often presented in the same panel (when there is one) negotiating the boundaries and lines of the characters' bodies, framing them as beings of multiplicity, both existing as male and female at the same time.

Investigating the role of imagination in Japanese popular culture in his book *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan* (2019), Patrick W. Galbraith follows McCloud's idea when he argues that the comic book's openness allows the reader to "get involved in shared worlds of imagination" (11). In order to illustrate how this openness is produced, McCloud draws an iconic abstraction scale with two extreme poles: realistic and iconic (46) or what he calls "lines to *see*" and "lines to *be*" (43). The former is linked to photographic-like art deemed closer to 'reality,' while the latter extreme illustrates an abstract face (one circle for the head, two dots for the eyes, and one straight line for the mouth), linking it to iconic imagery, or for our purpose, to character design found in manga (46). It is important here that we be reminded of the tension between the 'real' and fantasy, since, according to Butler's account I noted earlier, those do not work in opposition, but feed into one other. Galbraith argues that "lines to see are objects in a world, [while] lines to be draw subjects into a world" (11). McCloud explains that "when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the cartoon you see yourself . . . The cartoon is a vacuum into which our

identity and awareness are pulled, an empty shell that we inhabit, which enables us to travel to another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon—we *become* it" (qtd in Galbraith, *Otaku* 11). Framing the character as a shell is bringing attention to the lines that contours them, and a drawing choice which entices a form of connection between the reader/viewer in *henshin* (transformation) sequences. Following McCloud's logic of *lines to be*, the character's design is further abstracted during *henshin* (transformation) sequences, tending towards an even more iconic look framing the sequence as the peak of drawing viewers into the manga world.

Emptying the character of its detail (rendering it somehow naked) during transformation sequences is a reminiscent trope of the magical girl genre. If we analyze Sailor Moon's transformation, we can notice that, similar to the above examples on boy transformations, the background is changed, made flat. As Usagi (Sailor Moon's real name) twirls she inhabits a space without geographical location (and therefore without boundaries) but is also made *non-space-like* as her body is filled with yet another abstract colourful animated background, revealing her incorporated space, before *hirahira* elements magically appear on her hollowed body (Figure 1.5). A similar device is featured in *Majorian* as the boys' contours are shown as empty shells morphing, and ultimately floating in female form with the absence of any background. The moment of *henshin* (transformation) becomes a blank space, opening up the possibility for the reader to enter these worlds, to embody the characters as they are transforming. *Lines to be* in *Majorian* are therefore used to break down gender barriers, making *henshin* (transformation) a transformative device for both characters and readers as they enter this two-dimensional space momentarily.

Figure 1.4 - *Henshin* **in** *Sailor Moon*

Transformation in *Majorian* not only works to turn boys into magical girls, but also, in one instance to morph Rumasa into Masaru, as a young girl. Being turned into a girl in his everyday life, Masaru soon finds out that doing gender is a social contract. Children treat him differently, boys push him away for him being marked as a girl, and his gestures and way of being becomes more feminized as he is denied entry to the world of boys. In sum, Masaru performs gender in relation to the gaze of others. This formation echoes Butler's idea that "one does not 'do' one's gender alone," and that "one is always "doing" with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary" (*Undoing Gender* 1). Exploring the idea of one as author of their own gender, she argues that "the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself)" (*Undoing Gender* 1). This means that the performative result of our 'own' gender (assigned at birth or not), acts as a sort of fragmented reflection of the social formations that surround us.

As Masaru is cast away for being a girl, he tries to hide his change by adopting a more 'butch' look, trying to connote masculinity, until finally peer pressure leads him to "act like a girl," accepting a heteronormative framework of being. Not only is his everyday appearance morphed, but he also gains more frills, and new heart shaped items appears in his hair when he transforms into Rumasa, suggesting a form of hyperfemininity. Masaru wants to be seen, to be recognized. Further in her discussion on 'doing gender,' Butler notes that "if part of what desire wants is to gain recognition, then gender, insofar as it is animated by desire, will want recognition as well" (2). Consequently "recognition becomes a site of power by which the human is differentially produced" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 2), and these norms not only acts as production agents but also to "deproduce the notion of the human" (32), valuing ways of being over less standardized forms of existing. Butler argues that a failure to be recognized positions the subject into a nonplace which produces what she calls the "not-yet-subject and the nearly recognizable" (108), echoing both a form of a queer futurity and the liminal state of shōjo (girls). If, as Galbraith and McCloud argue, the iconic characters are a way of entry into the manga world, and as I have argued earlier Masaru acts as the entry point for the male reader, then the reader also becomes 'girled' through this reverse transformation. The desire for recognition here produces gender performances inside the manga, but also activates a form of becoming in the reader's position, by way of *lines to be*. In other words, by anchoring the reader to Masaru from

the start, the magical boy becomes an avatar for the exploration of female or feminine gender experience and the prejudice that comes with it.

Boy Variable, Girl Possible

Cooley's insistence on futurity and the framing of the queer figure as "always coming into existence" (6) denotes a form of liminality where (as Muñoz would have it) "queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (Muñoz 1). José Esteban Muñoz opens his book *Cruising Utopia* (2009) boldly stating that "queerness is not yet here" (1). Indeed it might never be here. Yet the impossibility of a fixed form of queerness becomes a tool to imagine a form of potentiality, which Muñoz defines as being "a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (9). Framing the notion of queer as such, Muñoz argues that it is "still forming, or in many crucial ways formless" (29). There is a constant transformation that is produced when discussing queerness as a quality stuck in a permanent state of flux. It is in this interval of constant change that both ideas of queerness and 'shōjoness' meet. What is important for both notions is not the result of a given transformation but the *act* of transformation itself.

Queerness, like 'shōjoness,' allows for a breaking of straight lines, for a cross-gender exploration through the emptying, and refilling of an incorporated space. What Cooley calls a "magically queer mode of being" (8) then allows for a return to gender variation possibilities, it grants for a movement back to a form of gendering where "before the transformation of a biological male or female into a gendered man or woman 'each child contains all of the sexual possibilities available to human expression" (Gayle Rubin qtd in Butler, *Gender Trouble* 100). This travelling in time allows for a forward-dawning (Muñoz 1)—or for our field's purpose a forward-*drawing* futurity—by revisiting, repurposing, and renegotiating the past towards a queer future always on the horizon by way of tracing.

Briefly discussing *Majorian*, Kumiko Saito frames "the magical boy as a criticism of the increasing difficulty in envisioning male hero models," and argues that they are "an epitome of shōjo actually provid[ing] viewers the agency for a heroic and independent identity against the failing image of male adulthood" (160). She goes on to suggest that "the growing appeal of the genre to adult men may equally signify men's resistance to their gendered responsibilities" (161). In other words, magical boy and girl media become queer survival objects, and by queer I do not

necessarily equate the term with homosexuality, but to a crossing of, and a resistance to heteronormative values. This form of resistance has been framed as queer failure by Jack Halberstam in his book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). Halberstam provocatively asks "what kinds of reward can failure offer us?" (3), before answering his own question by arguing that "failure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winner and losers" (3). Queer failure's non-conforming nature then is seen in a positive light, producing a softening of boundaries, making them malleable. As I have argued in this chapter, the magical boy's failure to replicate gender norms in *Majorian* helps envision an alternate model for male readers.

And yet, while the affordances brought about by such a text (and medium) allows for new modes of existence to take shape through queer failure, *Majorian* ultimately falls into the same trap previous magical girl texts have. It fails to fail; becoming stops and is frozen into being. Discussing Saito Minako's work on magical girls, Kumiko Saito writes "that the female protagonist in the magical girl genre reconfirms the values of femininity, which teaches girls to envision marriage and domestic life as a desirable goal once they have passed the adolescent stage" (146). This understanding of the magical girl doesn't only position her as a liminal figure, it also suggests she is a temporary one. Sailor Moon ultimately loses her powers when becoming a mother in the future, and the same loss of magic is experienced by the protagonists of numerous shōjo (girl) texts such as *The Secrets of Akko-chan* (1969-1970) or *Creamy Mami, the Magic Angel* (1983-1984).

In *Majorian*'s final chapter, Masaru and Iori after defeating their last foe and saving the world meet at the spot of their original transformation. Together, they decide to use the magical keys left by Gen and Da, which are artefacts that will allow them to transform one last time. Turned into magical girls, Rio approaches Rumasa kissing her, and as her lips touches the other girl's, she slowly reverts back to Masaru. As Rio's ever growing hair flows in the wind, she sits on Masaru engaging into intercourse. As they both attain climax, their bodies take almost the entirety of the page, while lines are drawn in front of them suggesting panels without gutters, while presenting the same continuous illustration. What follows is four uneven vertical panels as dark clouds are passing by, revealing an over bright luminescent moon. The scene ends with the boys drawn as contours holding each other, seemingly floating and surrounded by water, suggesting a dream state. The turn of the page brings the reader forward in time, as the boys are

presented as older with different school uniforms. The gutter that represented an opposition between them in the first page of the manga, now suggests a form of rupture. This separation is further highlighted in the very last page as a river runs across it, separating both boys, as they set out to continue their lives without each other, and enter manhood (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.5 - The boys' last goodbye, and the river as gutter

Conclusion: Queering Failure and Time

It can be said that by falling into the trap of the genre, *Majorian*'s conclusion is a failing of queer failure or an aborted queer future. While bringing temporary relief from a certain form of masculinity in the 'real' world, it nevertheless returns to the status quo. In this context, 'shōjoness' then becomes an open world of possibilities, but for a limited time. By portraying sex in a seemingly heterosexual and binary way (male-female penetration), *Majorian* breaks away from a form of queer time, opening the path to a heteronormative future. Halberstam explains that "queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (*In A Queer Time* 1). Queer time then can be defined as the "potentiality of a life unscripted" (Halberstam, *In A Queer Time* 2) by the rules of reproductive futurity. Through the incorporated space, the male reader can navigate

against an education that promotes "stereotypically "manly" fashion, encouraging [Japanese boys] to take pride in being aggressive, authoritative, and dominant" (Nagaike 193). Kazumi Nagaike suggests that "BL [Boys Love] texts prompt *fudanshi* [male fans of BL] to reevaluate socially established gender paradigms [enabling them to] develop a postmodern reading of maleness and masculinity by acknowledging a male desire to access a female-oriented sphere" (193). This desire she calls 'self-feminization' (193) relates back to the idea of performing 'shōjoness,' which prompts the negotiation of a particular male mode of being through the external aesthetic of shōjo. Galbraith argues that this multilayered process produces "an alternative to hegemonic forms of masculinity and media," ("Seeking an Alternative" 356) and by referring to Male Studies scholar Kimio Itō's personal experience, allows for "the minority or marginal view of shōjo manga to get outside of the majority or mainstream view of 'heterosexual male" ("Seeking an Alternative" 358). Nagaike's and Galbraith's descriptions of the relationship between these readers and shōjo manga uncannily resembles Sedgwick's notion of queer survival discussed earlier.

Framed as such, *Comic High!*, by lending their stamp of approval for boys to consume shōjo (girls) manga, acts as an easily accessible queer survival object, as manga magazines can be found in an array of outlets in Japan, or digitally online. Although *Majorian*'s conclusion is disappointing in its conservatism, the rest of the manga nonetheless allows for a liminal space of negotiation between masculinity and femininity in a broad sense. While it would be utopian to believe that a single text might change gender formations in a society, it is not so far-fetched to believe that many of them can hold that power, recalling Butler's emphasis that the imaginary is closely connected to the 'real.' After all gender is 'done' (to borrow Butler's term) in relation to multiple points of view, and performativity relies on a form of repetition to mold our understanding of gender. Perhaps queer time here can be understood as discreet elements, single alternative moments that disrupt the continuum of everyday heteronormative life. The reader is called to incorporate the shōjo world, and in *Majorian*'s case to share a form of transformation with the characters, if only for a brief moment in time. Performing 'shōjoness' (a form of queerness in itself) ultimately allows for entering and leaving this queer universe, making it possible for the reader to experience this sphere, while leaving a trace as he leaves this fantasy world, a mark that is carried into the 'real.'

Chapter 2

Boys will be Boys: Orienting and Animating the Magical Boy in Hugtto! PreCure

      Pretty Cure (2004-) is an ongoing magical girl genre anime series produced by Toei Animation, the company responsible for magical girl television hits such as *Sally the Witch* (1966-68), and the gender-blending cult series *Sailor Moon* (1991-97). This specific genre gathered high profits over the last three decades with different series, bringing Toei Animation its top yearly grossing revenue from films based on these anime (Hartzheim 1059). Another aspect of this model—which I will go into more details later in this chapter—is the prevalence of toy merchandise licensed from magical girl series which comprise of over seven billion yen in sales annually (Hartzheim 1059). In order to stay fresh, the *Pretty Cure* franchise reboots itself almost each season, presenting new worlds, which introduce new characters, and new series titles (while still including the original title styled as *PreCure*) in almost every season[3]. The anime series is not only in constant renewal, it is broadcasted continuously as it allows the time of only a single week for a new season to start between the finale of its previous iteration (where the next lead magical girl is introduced) and the first episode of the new season. While the constant rebirth of *Pretty Cure* allows for the introduction of fresh visual themes (e.g. stars, angels, elements, card games, etc.), new characters and an original story, it sticks to a narrative blueprint that sets good (magical girls protecting the future) versus evil (villains harvesting negative thoughts, be it fear, hate or anger from people, resulting in the creation of monsters to be defeated) in a rather repetitive way. While it may be productive to think of the *Pretty Cure* franchise as a whole, here I wish to focus on its 15th season entitled *Hugtto! PreCure* (2018-2019), and in particular on the gender non-conforming character Henri, whom I will introduce shortly.

      Set in the fictional city of Hagukumi, *Hugtto! PreCure* (henceforth *Hugtto)* follows the everyday lives of high school student Hana who encounters two characters from the future: a baby named Hugtan and her hamster guardian Hariham Harry who has the ability to shape-shift

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[3] This model has been sustained for almost two decades with the exception of two instances: season 1 (*Pretty Cure*, 2004-2005) and season 2 (*Pretty Cure Max Heart,* 2005-2006) which feature magical girls Nagisa and Honoka, and season 4 (*Yes! PreCure 5*, 2007-2008) and season 5 *Yes! Precure 5 GoGo!* (2008-2009), featuring the same five protagonists.

into a human being. Trying to flee from the evil Criasu Corporation, a company from the future trying to gain Hugtan's Mirai Crystal (a magical item holding immense powers), the time travellers come to Hana for protection. As they are attacked by Criasu's villain Charaleet, Hana awakens as a PreCure (magical girls are referred to as such in the franchise) transforming through the power of her own Mirai Crystal which is born out of her heroic gesture as she protects the baby from harm. Renamed Cure Yell when in magical girl form, she is later joined by four other girls: Saaya (Cure Ange), Homare (Cure Etoile), Emiru (Cure Macherie), and Ruru (Cure Amour). The team's main goal is to fight against Criasu's plan to stop time to a standstill, an evil plot that would prevent everyone's future from being realized. While *Hugtto* stays true to the franchise's familiar themes, it features a surprising character bringing queer representation forward in the form of their first ever magical boy Henri (Cure Infini), which will be this chapter's central focus.

In this chapter, I contend that through transformation the magical boy acts as a queering device, the opposite of what Sara Ahmed calls a "straightening device," a mechanism which serves to erase forms of queerness, and bring "back" subjects to a straight mode of being ("Orientations" 562). A queering device challenges cemented notions of heteronormativity, procuring a site for change from a form of problematic masculinity, while allowing a place for further acceptance towards queerness. The first section presents a summary of other scholars' discussions on transformation in the magical girl genre in order to situate my intervention on the subject. Following this, attention is given to Bryan Hikari Hartzheim's analysis of transformation in *Smile PreCure!* where he develops what he calls a "product portal," a device featured in the *henshin* (transformation) sequences which doubles as real-life toys available for purchase. Hartzheim's intervention will be useful in providing an explanation for the main role of transformation in the case of the magical girls in the *Pretty Cure* series, while at the same time prompting questions about the function of the magical boy's transformation, since no product portals are directly linked to Henri. With this important background set up, I provide a design analysis of the character through a notion known as queer coding, while using Lee Edelman's concept of the *sinthomosexual* to complement Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe's more visual portrayal of the typical queer villain, with a focus on narrative tropes that are particular to this archetype. The special emphasis given to these codes serves to reveal a form of bias coming from the viewers toward queer characters found in animated works, especially ones

aimed at children. I then argue that *Hugtto* challenges these coded negative portrayals of queerness through the magical boy, using Ahmed's phenomenological study of orientations, which provides a framework to understand how meaning is produced through the way subjects and objects are oriented toward each other within, and outside, the animated image. Borrowing from Hartzheim's work I proceed to an in-depth formal analysis of magical girl Cure Yell's transformation using Thomas Lamarre's work (2009) on cinematism. Following this I contrast the magical girl's *henshin* (transformation) sequence to Henri's, which leans towards the tendency of animetism, to highlight the magical boy's sequence structure, and function, positioning it as a queer moment in the entire *Pretty Cure* series. The magical boy in this context becomes an empowering figure for queer politics, one that through the franchise's popularity has gained an important platform via broadcasting in Japan. In sum, the trajectory I undertake through these notions serves to frame the magical boy in *Hugtto* as what I call a queering device, as his unrepentant queerness allows for clear representation harbingering queer futures by inspiring change in how queerness is perceived in animated media for children.

The Logic of Transformation

Central to magical girl anime is the act of transformation. The power to transform has been illustrated in the genre through two main paradigms: ordinary girls gaining the ability to shape shift into adolescents or adults in the series broadcasted in the 1970s-1980s, and the power to morph into fighting warriors, resembling more a makeover than an actual metamorphosis, made popular by the arrival of *Sailor Moon* in the 1990s. While there are only a handful of scholars who tackle the idea of transformation in that specific genre, it is important to offer an overview of what has been theorized thus far in order to situate my own intervention in the matter.

Susan J. Napier in her study of anime (2001) argues that through transformation "the body interrogates the dominant constructions of identity in modern society" (37). She argues that transformation allows for a form of empowerment in women (33), although perhaps a limited one, as the device navigates an ambiguous line between empowerment and sexualization, since, in the liminal zone of *henshin* (transformation), the girls are disrobed, and their naked bodies stand as the only thing to gaze upon for a moment. She contends that this voyeuristic function is not only to be framed in a negative light since it allows the viewer "to take part in the almost

ecstatic transformation of the body itself" (74). While Napier's analysis can be deemed somehow contradictory (are the magical girls empowered or are they objectified?) it nevertheless points out to the participative possibilities of the *henshin* (transformation) sequence.

Anne Allison frames the participatory nature of the *henshin* (transformation) sequence as a sort of addiction when she explains that through the introduction of more magical devices, which double as real-life toys, viewers "become addicted to the rush of transformation" (26). Although the same exact animation sequence is used from episode to episode, the *henshin* (transformation) sequence becomes a site of anticipation for the viewers as it always happens in the midst of confrontations between protagonists and antagonists. Exciting battle scenes and transformation then become "triggers for toy merchandise" (Allison 113), heightening the sequence's participative aspect through play. Allison contends that "the logic of transformation consists of a delight taken in things being constantly in flux, transforming from one state into another" and that "within these chains of body shifting, there is no one, real, or authentic self" (185). This economy of desire which—drawing on Freud—she calls "polymorphous perversity" lies in the power of "continual change and the stretching of desire across ever-new zones/bodies/products" (277). Allison's understanding of transformation and the fluctuating self echoes queer theory writings concerned with critiquing essentialist accounts of gender formation, where scholars argue that there is no such thing as an authentic real gender (see Chapter 1). This also holds true for the magical boy Henri as his foreshadowed transformation came both as a surprise and an anticipated event, blurring the meaning of what it means to be a boy, but also what it means to be a (magical) girl.

Akiko Sugawa-Shimada explores in length magical girl anime series in her PhD dissertation *Representations of Girls in Japanese Magical Girl TV Animation Programmes from 1966 to 2003 and Japanese Female Audiences' Understanding of Them* (2011). Through textual analysis and ethnographic research (interviews) she comes to the realization that the meaning behind the girl's transformation has evolved from one generation to the other, and like others have argued that "supernatural abilities may offer a possibility for subverting the social norms" (56). This subversion was in the case of the *Sally the Witch/The Secrets of Akko-chan* 1960s generation portrayed through adopting an alternate identity. Sugawa-Shimada argues that "the magical transformation of the ordinary girl with the cosmetic mirror suggest an association of femininity with a desire to change into a 'secret' identity" (144). While the secret identity aspect

of the magical girl followed, and became tradition, femininity became a source of its own power in the 1990s as "performing in fashionably feminine ways is closely associated with power, which produces a new girl identity" and "a bond between girls" (Sugawa-Shimada 190). Borrowing Toshie Takahashi's interpretation of the notions of "*uchi* (inside, us)" and "*soto* (outside, them)" (43), Sugawa-Shimada uses the "concepts—*uchi* as the desire for inclusion and *out of uchi* as the desire for differentiation—to discuss group conformity (a desire to be the same) and admiration for a witch (a desire to become different and superior)" (44). Therefore, according to Sugawa-Shimada, transformation in 1990s (and beyond) magical girl anime, ultimately serves to promote both *uchi* and *out of uchi* concepts making for an individualistic, yet solidary, female experience.

Kumiko Saito writes a history of the magical girl genre in her essay "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis" (2013), where she observes changing gender identities in Japanese society since the 1960s. She writes that "if transformation in the previous era signified empowerment by growth, the 1990s magical girls maximize their power by simply being themselves—cute and carefree students" (158). This observation suggests that the characters themselves are getting closer to the everyday life of their intended audience: young school girls. That being said, she argues that "given that cuteness is a concept associated with youth, passivity, femininity, and, overall, powerlessness, the recent brand of magical girls . . . is a sheer paradox of claiming power in powerlessness" (158). She concludes by contending that "the magical transformation is a mechanism that bridges utterly different often opposite spheres of seemingly homogeneous society, thereby mending fractures between the media representations of shōjo [girls] and gendered reality" (162). While she ends her essay in a rather pessimist tone, I find that the vulnerability of the magical girls (what she calls powerlessness) is exactly what is interesting about the genre. Magical girl anime proposes another way of fighting, one that contrast with a more aggressive patriarchal way of solving problems as found in most shōnen (boys) anime. Furthermore, these fractures between fiction and the 'real' are precisely what is productive about these media representations as they may inspire progressive change.

Jacqueline Ristola examines the anime *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997) through a queer lens in her recent essay "Globalizing Fandoms: Envisioning Queer Futures from Kunihiko Ikuhara to Rebecca Sugar" (2020). She frames the *henshin* (transformation) sequences as "powerful metaphors of the transformative power of the feminine" (92), suggesting femininity as

an element to be acquired by anybody no matter the gender. Putting emphasis on the lesbian love story between the two protagonists of *Utena* she argues that "animation has immense potential as a powerfully queer art form, burgeoning with the promise and possibilities of transformation and identity formation" (92). Through the illustration of unapologetic same-sex love, and an ambiguously gendered character as seen through Utena's atypical school uniform (a mix between the boys' and the girls' uniforms), Ristola contends that the anime "encourages its audience to abandon the ideological systems of patriarchy" (96). Ristola's contribution to the emergent subfield of queer animation studies reframes *henshin* (transformation) as what I refer to as a queering device, and I wish to follow a similar approach in the case of *Hugtto*, while turning my attention to a more mainstream work, and the less discussed figure of the boy.

These theories and observations show how magical girl tropes are carried from one era to another while transformed according to various factors that follow societal changes. As I have shown in Chapter 1 with magical boys Masaru and Iori, Henri too finds empowerment through a particular form of feminine energy. The mere possibility of him becoming a PreCure functions to create anticipation towards a potential new transformation sequence, one as Allison argued acts as a form of addictive device. Henri's case can also be analysed through Sugawa-Shimada's idea of *uchi* (the desire for inclusion) and *out of uchi* (the desire for differentiation) in the sense that the magical boy negotiates a fine line between belonging to a group, and staying true to his queer self while under the pressure of patriarchal values. While Kumiko Saito deplores the ambiguous messages conveyed in the genre, *Hugtto* plays with ambiguity on many levels, allowing viewers to notice what she refers to as fractures. These moments of uncertainty are productive in the sense that they reveal bias toward the character of Henri because of his queer coded attributes, suggesting that the viewer frames him (wrongly) as a villain from the get go.

Building on queer, gender, and animation theory in what follows, I wish to frame the magical boy as a queering device, and suggest that *henshin* (transformation) not only lies in one sequence or a moment but acts as a transformative tool which morphs preconceived ideas about queerness both inside and outside the screen. *Hugtto* shows that true to many conservative ideas, queerness can be contagious. Not that it will make people homosexuals, but that it can levitate pressure coming from often oppressive gender expectations, freeing 'straights' and 'queers' alike.

In the next section I will engage with Hartzheim's concept of "product portals," which he developed while analyzing the 2012-2013 season of *Pretty Cure*, entitlted *Smile Precure!*, and its production at Toei Animation studio. Exploring the ways magical girls' *henshin* (transformation) sequences are constructed and for which purpose will help in creating a contrast between the girl's transformation and the very different one of Henri into Cure Infini, allowing to unearth the ways various tendencies of animation within the same anime can convey vastly different meanings.

Product Portals and the Magical Girl Media Mix

In his article "*Pretty Cure* and the Magical Girl Media Mix" (2016), Hartzheim shares the result of his findings after spending six months observing the making of *Smile Precure!* at Toei Animation studio. The focus of his intervention lies in what he refers to as the "magical girl media mix" (1060). Contrary to the common practice of adapting highly successful manga properties, the magical girl media mix relies on original ideas born out of production committees "typically composed of a production studio, television network, and toy company sponsor," such as Bandai Namco (Hartzheim 1062). The anime series relies heavily on what Hartzheim calls a "product portal," which he describes as being "a toy-based narrative device that generates profits for the show, studio and supporting industries" (1063). Since anime is usually made at a loss of about 1 million yen per episode (Hartzheim 1061), the selling and promoting of these toys become the primary goal of the selected committee overseeing the production of the series. Hartzheim explains that "Toei Animation establishes most of the characters, settings and premises nine months to a year before a show is set to air," (1067) in order to pitch a concept to potential sponsors. All of this process begins way before any writers or directors have started working on the anime's narrative, positioning the toy as the most important object created for the *Pretty Cure* franchise. *Hugtto*'s narrative too is constructed around these product portals most often featured in *henshin* (transformation) sequences. An example of these devices come in the form of five heart-shaped jewels called "Mirai Crystals"—corresponding to the colors given to each magical girl—which can be inserted in various forms of toys, such as the PreHeart (Figure 2.1, 2.2). The toy can be described as a smartphone-like object with slight variations depending on the Mirai Crystal inserted into them.

The children can then customize their device depending on their favourite PreCure, suggesting a form of participation encouraged by the series as each episode starts with Hana

telling the viewers to become whatever they wish to be in the future. Before the theme song starts the image zooms in the middle of the Mirai Pad (a product portal allowing the girls to morph into various costumes) as if passing through its screen and entering its inner world, where the girls are seen in a series of career-oriented uniforms (e.g. Hana as a florist, Saaya as a medical Doctor, Homare as a flight attendant, etc.). Other product portals such as the Memorial Cure Clock (an add-on to the Mirai Pad allowing the girls to transform into more powerful costumes), the Twin Love Guitar (a guitar used by Cure Macherie and Cure Amour to operate dual attacks), and the Mirai Brace (a bracelet worn on the wrist allowing the girls to perform team attacks called "All For You" and "Tomorrow With Everyone") are all devices related to forms of transformations (e.g. new costumes, power ups, new attacks). The regular introduction of new products throughout the season keeps the narrative fresh, consequently building up anticipation for new toys to be released on the market.

Figure 2.1 – PreHeart during Hana's transformation   **Figure 2.2 – PreHeart toy**

Hartzheim argues that every episode can be defined as a program length commercial, which means that the anime (sponsored by toy company Bandai Namco) is a form of extended commercial trying to sell toys (1059). In each episode, one specific moment stands out from other scenes in the form of *henshin* (transformation) sequences where ordinary teenage girls morph into magical girls, where product portals are given full attention. The approximately one minute sequence (for each girl) in *Hugtto* can be said to have multiple functions. First, it serves as a cost-saving shortcut using what is traditionally known as the anime bank system (Hartzheim 1074) where animated sequences are reused in various episodes, or in this case in every single

one. Second, the sequence can be said to be the "money shot[4]" (Hartzheim 1077) of each episode putting a particular emphasis on the product portals as they are displayed strategically throughout most of the sequence.

Take for instance Hana's transformation into Cure Yell. The sequence starts with Hana staring straight into the viewer's eyeline as she whips out her PreHeart. The image then cuts to a close-up of the device in her hand as she utters the magical words "Future Crystal!" inserting her pink Mirai Crystal into the gadget prompting a heart shaped icon to glow on its screen (exactly as the toy would). She then proceeds to turn the lower part of the PreHeart modifying the device from a phone shaped product portal to a heart-shaped one as she continues her magical spell screaming blissfully "Heart, shine!" The incantation-like ritual initiates her transformation into an empowered PreCure. The sequence follows with five more close-ups of the PreHeart as every time she interacts with it (pressing a button) a new bodily transformation occurs either in terms of new clothing elements, jewels, hair colour and length, or make-up. The ritual is completed as she stows the item in a pocket sewn to her costume. Hartzheim argues that the "repetition of the bank is designed to condition viewers to appreciate and associate these products with instant pleasure that signals the beginning of relief and release" (1077). The use of full animation in these sequences[5] versus limited animation[6] found in other scenes of the series, combined with cel shaded three-dimensional animation of the product portals creates a form of bridge between the viewer and the character. To further enhance the relationship between the two, commercial breaks promoting toys from the show "bridges the program and the living room, spurring fans to purchase the toy for themselves to extend the characters' lives and world through play" (Hartzheim 1079). Here, Hartzheim suggests that a particular type of space is created and accessed through the use of product portals. This emphasis on the product portal induces questions about the role of transformation for a character like Henri who does not have personalized product portals available for purchase when transforming.

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[4] Hartzheim's use of the money shot is borrowed from Allison's book *Millenial Monsters,* where she equates transformation sequences in the *Power Rangers* series (and *Sailor Moon*) with the concept. The term originates from Linda Williams' *Hard Core* (1989) where she frames the man's ejaculation in porn to an anticipated and heightened moment that is central to the whole scene; a moment of spectacle.

[5] Full animation animates with approximately 24 frames per second (Lamarre, *Anime Machine* 64).

[6] Limited animation uses approximately 12 frames per second to almost none at times to animate (Lamarre , *Anime Machine* 19).

Henri's transformation into a magical boy occurs during episode 42, which challenges the viewer's expectations about the magical girl genre and queer coded characters (a term which I will expand upon in the next section). After suffering a broken ankle from a car accident on his way to what would have been his last performance on ice, Henri gives in to the villain group Criasu, becoming one of them momentarily. Trapped into a floating glass coffin shaped box by the villain Listol, he is changed into a dark blue, grey and black uniform similar to the one the Criasu employee is wearing, reminiscent of Henri's outfit as we first encountered him at the end of episode 7. Listol proceeds in creating an "oshimaida" (a monster born out of negative energy) from Henri's dark energy to fight the now transformed PreCures who came to help. While they fight, the girls keep encouraging Henri into believing into his own future no matter the form. As Cure Yell reaches out to Henri, he succeeds in breaking the glass box and reaches out of it to grab her hand. Coloured beams start to emit from the girls' Mirai Braces and shoot toward Henri, allowing him to enter the *henshin* (transformation) space as an explosion of white fills the screen acting as a bridge between the arena and the magical space. Henri is now floating in the air, as a multicolour coil of light twirls around him slowly emptying features of his character into a hollowed bright green, slightly mixing with the sparkling background of the same color. Similar to the girls' transformations, fully animated light beams morph elements of Henri's dress. The dark parts of his costume turn into white, gold and—in magical girl tradition—he is assigned a main color unique to his character: turquoise. His magical boy costume is completed with white feather ornaments, and a large white bow wrapped around his waist (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3 - Cure Infini (Henri)

As the sequence is completed he is given a form of agency as he comments on the magical boy name (Cure Infini) he chooses on his own, contrasting with the girls as it is never clear if the choice was their own or just an effect of the transformation. One of the most noticeable difference between Cure Infini's awakening and the other girls' transformations is the lack of product portal featured during his sequence. While the transformation is due to the girl's Mirai Braces' combined powers, Henri is not given any device. This way of animating *henshin* (transformation) goes against Hartzheim's notion of the product portal in one sense, but opens up new possibilities on the other in terms of how these toys can be used. As the Mirai Braces are partly responsible for Henri's transformation, the product portal potentially becomes a device allowing boys to identify with the character (as they would with their favourite magical girl) through play. This speaks to the improvisational nature that most queer children live through in terms of finding characters that resembles them.

In this context, it is important to remember the function of queer reading or what Sedgwick calls "queer survival" (see Chapter 1) when analysing queer oriented media (or media that infers queerness), as it reminds us that queer people have for the most part to detect potential forms of queerness through the codes available. Imagination and improvisation is a tool that growing sideways queer people have to master in order to combat a form of alienation in a straight world. What Henri brings to the *Pretty Cure* franchise is clear queer representation without the need of an intermediate form of reading usually done through a determined search for the slightest queer element, as an amount of analytical acrobatics is often required by the viewer to identify the character as queer.

Another reason I have suggested the Mirai Brace as a queer product portal is linked to the fact that there is no Cure Infini licensed products available on the market. I conducted field research a few months after episode 42 aired in Japan in hopes of finding Cure Infini products, and to my astonishment found none, while the magical girls products were easily available. I visited major cities such as Tokyo (Akihabara, Ikebukuro, Nakano), Osaka, and Kyoto, where I found anime related stores such as Animate, and Mandarake. Next, I continued my quest by exploring online stores such as the Japanese versions of Amazon, Toys "R" Us, Ebay, and Mercari. This online search resulted in only a few limited edition items such as a poster of Henri and his love interest Masato, ID cards of both characters, a button of Henri with the words "INFINI" (Figure 2.4) on it (although he is not transformed as a PreCure), and a special

Halloween edition button and poster of the character dressed as a ghost. Taking into account these findings, and the way his *henshin* (transformation) sequence is constructed speaks to the magical boy's function in *Hugtto*, making him not necessarily a specific figure for advertising toys but a progressive character for queer politics. Here, I am not arguing that this goes against material consumption since—as the nature of product portals testifies—the profit coming from the selling of toys is what keeps the show on the air. However, by diverging the viewers' attention from product portals to queer issues, the magical boy's transformation serves a different purpose, while appearing in a program length commercial simultaneously. In other words, the focal point is not on the product portal during Henri's transformation into Cure Infini, but on the character himself, and the implications brought about by the queer character's transformation.

Figure 2.4 - Henri button

While Henri's transformation arrives late in the season (episode 42 out of 49 in total), it could only be rendered possible through a chain of transformative events surrounding the character. As I will explain in the next section, these events do not only affect the inner world of the narrative, but also affect the viewer's perception of the queer character Henri, by playing with preconceived ideas of characters identified as queer. Keep in mind that transformation can be framed as a queering device, a notion which I will build upon throughout this chapter, while returning to Henri's *henshin* (transformation) sequence where I will compare the girls' sequences

from Henri's in term of animation tendencies, which will help understand how the magical boy as queering device works in and through animation.

Queer Coded Villain

Henri first appears at the end of episode 7 as a mysterious unnamed boy. Glad to finally have found a stunned Homare, he holds her in his arms as her eyes fill with tears, to the surprise of the other girls. The episode that follows introduces the viewer to the new character, providing background information on him. Henri's introduction is an impactful one; he is outspoken, and unapologetically queer. The first sign of queerness noticeable in the boy can be detected in how he twirls his mid-length blond hair across his fingers in a feminine way (a gesture reminiscent of *Sailor Moon*'s queer villain Zoisite, see Figure 2.6) after being pushed away by Homare (Figure 2.5), who seems to sense a threat in him from the start. It does not take long for Henri to announce the meaning of his impromptu visit: having spent his childhood training with Homare, he travelled back to Japan to take her to Moscow in order to participate in an ice-skating championship.

Figure 2.5 - Henri plays with his hair in episode 8

Figure 2.6 - *Sailor Moon*'s queer villain Zoisite twirling his hair

Not only does Henri's gestures and gender expression suggest a form of queer embodiment but his whole character design infers a particular form of queer coded villainy, one that is the result of ascribing feminine attributes to a male character in order to illustrate him as deviant (Li-Vollmer and LaPointe 90). His eyes are noticeably drawn bigger and rounder than other male characters (such as Harry or Masato), are adorned by long upper and lower lashes, and are traced using bolder lines (suggesting make-up), akin to the other girls' appearance as presented in the series. It is often the case that in animated works mainly aimed at children, villains are queer coded or depicted through what Li-Vollmer and LaPointe calls the "villain-as-sissy" archetype (96). In their essay "Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Films" (2003), the two authors list elements incorporated in the villain-as-sissy character (found in Disney films, and anime such as *Pokémon*) arguing that these images "can be seen as hostile to homosexuality and gender deviance" (93). Furthermore, borrowing from Fiske & Taylor (1991), and Durkin (1984), they suggest that "children organize information about gender roles and gender performances into their schemata about what it is to be male or female" making "media viewing . . . both a source and a location of children's gender schema development" (93). This means by framing villains as queer and deviant against heroes portrayed as heteronormative cisgender role models, children are inevitably educated to follow the path of the latter model, which is deemed as the good and normal one.

In their attempt to show how animated series and films work as cultural encoders, they lay out various items which act as codes that serve to equate queerness with villainy. Not unlike boys performing 'shōjoness' (as discussed in Chapter 1 where boys transformed into magical girls, which helped them negotiate their own gender expression in both forms), queer coded villains perform gender transgression (in this case femininity), making them stand out compared to the more gender conforming protagonists. Li-Vollmer and LaPointe argue that these queer villains are often illustrated with "delicate physical features that invoke traditional ideals of feminine beauty" and "emphasized through color and shading that give them the appearance of wearing cosmetics" (97-98). While this holds true for both Disney and magical girl anime villains, the former tends to depict a less visually appealing version of the villain-as-sissy in the likes of Jafar in *Aladdin* (Clement & Musker, 1992) or Governor Ratcliffe in *Pocahontas* (Pentecost et al., 1995), while the latter offers beautiful long-haired villains in the likes of the same-sex couple Kunzite and Zoisite from *Sailor Moon* (1992-1997). Queer villains have been as

much a staple in the anime ecology as Disney's with characters such as the *Sailor Moon* villains just mentioned, to *Pokémon*'s gender-bending duo James and Jessie (Figure 2.7) who do not transform per se (although James does randomly grow breasts at times), but use cross-dressing to fool the protagonist Satoshi and his friends in order to steal Pikachu.
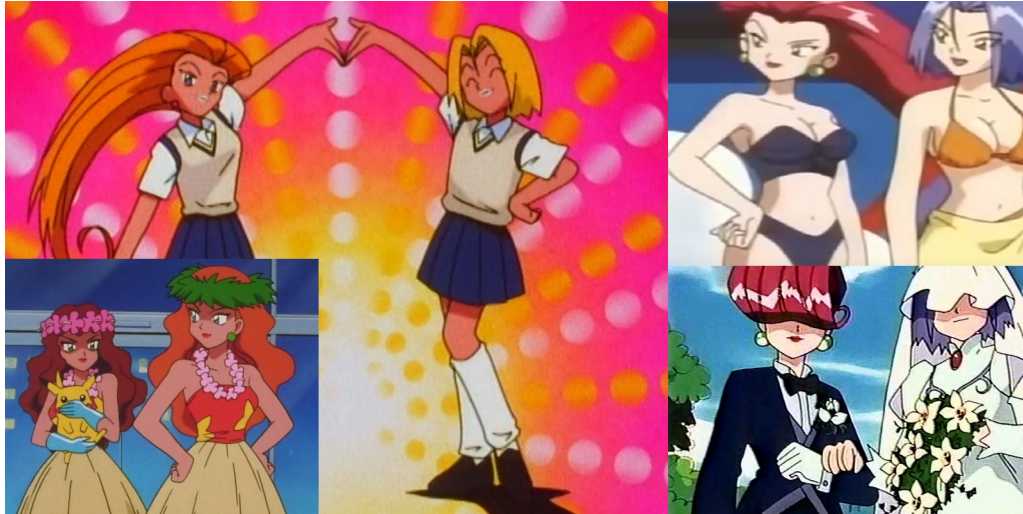

Figure 2.7 – *Pokémon*'s James and Jessie cross-dressing

Another type of code identified by Li-Vollmer and LaPointe can be found in the form of costumes and props (99). Henri's *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) appearance is combined with a set of dark coloured clothes. Wearing black heeled boots, tight black pants, and a dark blue and grey flowing coat (flowing garments is an element deemed as transgressing gender according to Li-Vollmer and LaPointe) not only suggest a form of feminine gender expression, but the dark tones of his attire create a striking contrast between himself, the other girls who adorn pastel tones and whites, the light green forest setting and Harry's cream coloured house. Banking on decades of villain-as-sissy representation, *Hugtto* frames Henri as a queer coded villain in a matter of a few cuts and several seconds of screen time. This form of representation is further played out in the next scene when Henri, now wearing a flowing dress, twirls around happily in a very traditionally feminine way which prompts the more masculine Harry to point out to Henri that he is mistakenly wearing ladies clothes. The boy is further "othered" (and queered) as the viewer—which is by now on the magical girls family unit's side, since the series has been broadcasting for two months in Japan when the episode aired—is invited not to look *with* the androgynous boy but to look *at* him. This effect is emphasised by positioning all the characters on one side of the room while Henri is giving a performance as another form of queer coding is scrutinized. Li-

Vollmer and LaPointe points out that "villains signal their deviant femininity with their body movements and positioning" (100), movements that can either be as straightforward as the ones I have been describing or as simple as a slightly seductive stare, as portrayed when Hana points out Henri's beautiful blue eyes. The boy's eyes are drawn infused with a sense of wonder as stars begin to sparkle inside them and are framed in a close-up, inviting the viewer to observe him as something to be gazed upon and not to identify with.

Finally, Li-Vollmer and LaPointe highlights how villains-as-sissy tend to vary from the dominant ideas of masculinity in terms of activities and dialogues. They argue that "villains appear to be preoccupied with their appearance, exhibiting a kind of vanity usually reserved for women in film" (102) and that "on occasion, the kinds of topics addressed by villains in their dialogue and the phrases they speak point to the deviance in their gender performances" (102). These last two points also hold true to Henri's characterization as he values grooming and how he appears to others, while also holding discussions mostly on fashion and ice-skating.

I have presented Henri so far using Li-Vollmer and LaPointe's analysis (which offers a type of checklist of characteristics) to confirm Henri's belonging to the villain-as-sissy archetype. His sudden arrival is put in place to trouble a form of training towards reproductive futurity illustrated by the magical girls' family unit, who are learning how to take care of the toddler from the future Hugtan. Henri spends most of the episode trying to convince Homare to leave her new lifestyle, insisting that activities such as raising babies or playing house are not really important to people like them. What is most interesting about the character is not solely his queer coded villainy but how his deviation from gender norms will eventually be celebrated within the anime by other characters surrounding him, making this season unique from previous ones in terms of queer representation, one that seems redemptive vis-à-vis prior iterations of the series.

It is important to note that his turn from villain prospect to magical boy is far from a straight line making Henri a character difficult to pinpoint throughout almost the entire run of the season. His allegiance to the PreCures is constantly threatened to drift to Criasu's side as they tempt him to join them on many occasions. This narrative device works to keep an ambiguous stance from the viewer towards Henri as framing him as an ally or a foe becomes the more difficult before his transformation into a magical boy. Henri's development shows how transformation is not only a movement from one state to another, but a fluctuating affair. While

Henri will remain queer coded, it is the viewer's perspective towards queer coded characters that will experience a particular form of transformation, and characters such as Masato who will learn to change his sexist and queerphobic ways through contact with a queer character, framing his shift in perspective and attitude as redeeming, while simultaneously freeing him from a form of toxic masculinity. In order to complete the portrait of the queer villain I am setting up I will now turn to Lee Edelman's notion of the *sinthomosexual*, which will bring a more narrative oriented description to the design focused villain-as-sissy archetype, before further commenting on the *henshin* (transformation) sequences.

No Future for a Queer Creature

Hugtto arrives during a time of alarming decreasing birth rate in Japan, and one that shows no sign of stopping (McCurry). The *Pretty Cure* franchise has always been about protecting a form of futurity, often related to the girls' future careers. Similarly, *Hugtto* with its focus on maternity (e.g. a whole episode is dedicated to the girls learning to take care of newborn babies in the hospital's maternity ward) and the framing of the magical baby Hugtan as a symbol of the future foregrounds a particular form of reproductive futurity as its central theme. The figure of the child is equated with the promise of a brighter future, while queer coded villains are obstacles to its becoming. Lee Edelman in his book *No Future* (2004) harshly critiques this figure through a queer lens. Edelman holds a position that is somewhat defeatist and pessimist, I would argue, since he frames queer people has having no future for they are, most of the time, not participants when it comes to reproductive futurity. Yet some of his analytic is useful to unpack the initial role given to Henri in *Hugtto*'s narrative. He argues that the concept of reproductive futurity used as a political device "works to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child" (3). He goes on writing "[the] Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (3). Edelman contends that by putting emphasis on the figure of the child as a hope for a reproductive future "*queerness*, by contrast, figures outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive" (3).

For him the death drive is a place of abjection and that "queerness attains its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance

from every social structure" (3). He contrasts the queer subject to the image of the child explaining that the latter "embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation's good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights "real" citizens are allowed" (11). That last claim suggests a form of economy resulting in "the imprimatur of meaning-production on heterogenital relations" (13). Queer oriented people are then denied entry into this economy for—in the likes of the time-stopping villains of *Hugtto*—they are deemed as having no future. According to more conservative politics the child must become a childbearing adult as "queerness . . . is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end" (Edelman 19). Seemingly siding with this rhetoric but in a rebellious (possibly irresponsible?) way Edelman concludes that "the future is nothing but kid stuff" and that "there are no queers in that future as there can be no future for queers, chosen as they are to bear the bad tidings that there can be no future at all" (30). Mostly using villain-as-sissy characters from popular culture such as *A Christmas Carol*'s Scrooge (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1951), *Peter Pan's* Captain Hook (Geronimi et al., 1953), and Voldemort from the *Harry Potter* franchise (2002-2011) to exemplify characters who have "a drive toward death that entails the destruction of the Child" (21) (the figure of the child exemplified in Tiny Tim, Peter Pan, and Harry Potter, for each cases), Edelman comes up with a persona archetype which he calls the *sinthomosexual*.

While Li-Vollmer and LaPointe's method deconstructs signifiers of queerness in order to visually locate gender nonconforming elements in villains, the sinthomosexual is related to orientations towards the future or more appropriately its lack thereof. Edelman creates the term *sinthomosexuality* to define an alternative form of being which stands against reproductive futurity due to its queerness. He borrows the term sinthome from Lacan, who in turns took it from "an old way of writing what was written later as 'symptom'" (Edelman 35). Edelman points out that "by calling attention to the status of the word as an archaic form of writing—thus inflecting it in the direction of the letter rather than of the signifier as bearer of meaning—Lacan, who will subsequently describe the sinthome as 'not ceasing to write itself,' implies from the outset its relation to the primary inscription of subjectivity and thus to the constitutive fixation of the subject's access to jouissance" (35). Edelman's fusion of the sinthome and sexuality functions to create a character type (fictional or real) which refuses to produce a form of meaning equated with the birthing of a child, hence to a particular form of futurity. The sinthomosexual then can be framed as a type of social symptom that needs to be eradicated or corrected. He

ultimately describes the sinthomosexual as "neither martyr nor proponent of martyrdom for the sake of a cause, [he] forsakes *all* causes, *all* social action, *all* responsibility for a better tomorrow or for the perfection of social forms" (101). By the end of his book Edelman himself sounds like one of *Pretty Cure*'s lead villains, a prophet of doom declaring that "we, the sinthomosexuals who figure the death drive of the social, must accept that we will be vilified as the agents of that threat" (153). He wraps up his book by blaming futurism itself for making queer people inhuman. The problem with his understanding of futurism is that he exclusively equates it with reproductive futurism, leaving out any other possibilities. He orients the image of the queer figure in the form of the sinthomosexual towards a dead end.

The figure of the villain-as-sissy combined with the sinthomosexual invites the viewer to realize their own bias towards queer coded characters in these animated works. As Edelman seems to have internalized this figure without challenging it, so do the viewers unconsciously because of repetitive exposure to queer characters framed as villains. There is a strong assumption that Henri is or will become one of Criasu Corporation's henchmen solely based on his appearance, and the creators of *Hugtto* seem well aware of this. The viewer's default orientation towards the character is to frame him as an evildoer, and it is precisely that fact that the series will exploit and challenge by undoing it through the power of transformation, in order to build their first magical boy out of queer codes and by extension 'shōjoness.' Henri's character is not oriented towards a dead end, but towards a particular form of queer futurity. In the next section I introduce Sara Ahmed's discussion on queer orientations to explore how orientations can have a transformative effect in the context of *Hugtto*, while comparing the dissimilar ways *henshin* (transformation) sequences are produced for the girls and for Henri by analyzing them through Thomas Lamarre's animation theory.

Transforming the Girl by way of Cinematism

My discussion on the villain-as-sissy/sinthomosexual revealed a form of bias coming from the viewers toward queer coded characters in the context of *Pretty Cure*. This position automatically adopted by the viewer (and the protagonists) reveals a form of pre-determined orientation making queerness an unwanted trait from the start. Thinking in terms of orientations provide a particular lens to consider how subjects and objects (or other subjects) are related to one another, and what is produced when these elements come into contact. This becomes an

effective framework to show how queerness spreads from the queer coded character, and transforms the world surrounding them. Sara Ahmed explores the term orientation (2006) from a queer studies and phenomenological standpoint. She explains that "orientation is a matter of how we reside in space" and the same applies for sexual orientation making it also "a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with" ("Orientations" 543). She describes objects as "orientation devices" arguing that "consciousness is always directed toward objects and hence is always worldly, situated, and embodied" (544). While the word orientation suggests a movement towards something, it is also "the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling" (545). In what she calls the "more than one' of an encounter" she argues that "bodies as well as objects take shape through being oriented toward each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space" (552), making orientation a form of relationship between two objects (be they physical objects or ones of thought, such as feelings). Furthermore, she contends that "bodies . . . acquire orientation by repeating some actions over others" (553), a claim which is reminiscent of Judith Butler's discussion on gender formation, a process that only makes assigned genders seem natural through repeating them over time, and across generations (see Chapter 1).

Whether chosen or not, a constructed orientation produces ways of seeing and being in the world, which as we have seen with Henri's introduction results in preconceived ideas about queerness in animated works. As the viewer is trained to detect villainy through queerness, their conventional orientation "allows us to expose how life gets directed through the very requirement that we follow what is already given to us" (Ahmed, "Orientations" 554). Ahmed develops a notion she calls the "straight line" (554), which she defines as being a line that "shows us the relation between two lines, the vertical and horizontal lines of conventional genealogy" (556). Using the family tree to illustrate her claim she explains that the vertical lines serve to show blood ties with the descendent while the horizontal line portrays the relationship between husband and wife, and siblings (556). This alignment is reminiscent of Edelman's fearful notion of reproductive futurity which according to Ahmed "positions the child as the not-yet adult, by aligning sex (the male body) and gender (the masculine character) with sexual orientation (the heterosexual future)," as children are by default imagined to follow a similar line. If this form of alignment is not respected then a queer effect is produced, making "queer . . .

not available as a line that we can follow" (Ahmed 570). I will now offer a comparative analysis between the girls' more cinematic *henshin* (transformation) sequences, and Henri's more animetic sequence (which I describe in the next section), with a specific attention to the role of lines, and how they orient and are oriented in animation. Contrasting those two tendencies will prove useful to unveil how lines and intervals are used toward different aims, which will provide groundwork for the last section, and a language to study the transformation of attitudes towards the queer character narratively.

As we have seen earlier, Cure Yell's transformation is presented as if a camera tracks around parts of her body as they are transformed, moving towards them, before the image follows a trajectory that infers a movement into space. This is realized through the use of full animation, which gives the illusion that the magical girl is twirling into space. This feat is heightened through the use of a multiplanar background where depth is created through the stacking of images which are animated (slid) at differing paces, making for a magical space alive with movement (Lamarre 6). The background planes, which seem to be floating and drifting in various directions, move according to the character's fully animated movements. The planes are either slid on the side to convey a lateral tracking movement or minimized in size to illustrate a movement into depth (a tracking forward, or backward). While the sequence still uses techniques of animetism (e.g. sliding planes across the image), it highly relies on a form of cinematic movement into depth. Cinematism has the attribute to allow "the spectator [to] become an apparatus-subject" (Lamarre 5), giving them a sense of moving through the image, collapsing the "distance between viewer and target, in the manner of the ballistic logic of instant strike" (Lamarre 5), which allows for a closer relationship between the product portal and the consumer through immersion. The use of cinematism in the context of *Hugtto* (and the whole *Pretty Cure* franchise) aims to bring in potential product portal buyers through a form of participation, as exemplified in these sequences, but also in the episodes end credits where the magical girls are animated through cel shaded CGI, inviting the viewers to dance with them.

In this context, the toy acts as an orientation device suturing the viewer with the animated version of the product portal, placing viewers as a node linked to the magical girl media mix. Through the use of one-point perspective and a sense of movement into depth, *henshin* (transformation) sequences in the magical girl media mix can be understood to function as the standard line to follow in the *Pretty Cure* franchise, since "lines are both created by being

followed and are followed by being created" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 16). This formation—which can be imagined as a straight line curbing unto itself in an endless loop—can be defined as performative as it "depend[s] on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but [is] also created as an effect of this repetition" (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 16). Here, I position the traditional magical girl transformation not only as the standard marketing model of the series, but also as an orientation device reconfirming transformation as a girl only zone, an hyperfeminine one at that. If the magical girl's *henshin* (transformation) sequence is a straight line then how can we read the magical boy's transformation through animation, and orientation theory?

Transforming the Boy through Animetism

As I have explained earlier, Henri's transformation into Cure Infini differs in function to the magical girl's, as it does not showcase any product portal while allowing the Mirai Brace to be used as a product portal through improvisation, thus queering the object. Henri's transformation can be considered as what Ahmed calls a "sideway moment" which may "generate new possibilities" and "redirect us and open up new worlds" (*Queer Phenomenology* 19). If the tendency that is cinematism is representative of magical girl's fully animated transformation sequences, then Henri's sequence—while slightly using full animation—can be said to be constructed around the tendency of animetism, suggesting new ways of framing transformation, opening its potential to be appropriated by boys through play in a more direct manner, not having to identify with girl characters through cross-gender identification.

If we consider the role of orientation in the scene just prior to Henri's transformation sequence we can notice that akin to the first time the girls meet Henri, he is placed on the left of the screen, while the girls are on the right, creating a divide between the two; a sort of good versus evil pattern emerges. Not only is Listol and Henri oriented in opposition to the magical girls, but the viewer is oriented towards the girls. When over-the-shoulder shots are used the image is constantly presented over Henri's shoulder looking down at Cure Yell, while never the opposite, aligning the viewer's eyesight to the PreCure, and not Henri. Listol placed behind Henri, and influencing him into giving in to evil (and abandoning any potential future), acts as a sort of background both in the sense that he is behind him almost controlling him as a puppet, and to represent the sustained background (as in origins) of queer coded villainy discussed earlier. Ahmed explains that a "background would be understood as that which must take place

in order for something to appear" (*Queer Phenomenology* 37-38), and in this context is one that threatens to alt a perspectival transformation from the viewer towards the queer coded character. Ahmed argues that "we can also think of background as having a temporal dimension" (38), and that it "is what explains the conditions of emergence or an arrival of something as the thing that it appears to be in the present" (38). What emerges in the case of Henri is a turning towards the background of queer coded villains in order to face a long constructed bias towards queer characters in order to transform pre-conceived prejudices. This is not possible through Henri alone, but in collaboration with the other magical girls as Cure Yell tells the grief stricken Henri: "If I face you properly, you'll take those feelings and hug them close!" *Hugtto* then suggests taking a backward glance to the way queerness has been represented thus far in the series, while asking us to turn toward the power of transformation in order to achieve a form of queer futurity.

Henri's transformation sequence is, as I have briefly described earlier, triggered by the combined powers of the other PreCures by way of their Mirai Braces. The lights emanating from the PreCures bracelets are portrayed as straight lines of varying colors aiming towards Henri and Cure Yell as she jumps toward him. These lines suddenly twist and turn as the background image changes from the arena to oblique purple lines flattening the whole image, eliminating any sense of depth and place. Animated lines here are oriented toward Henri bridging a rift between him and the group of girls, allowing him to finally transform. Contrary to the magical girl's *henshin* (transformation) sequences which tend more toward cinematism, the boy's transformation is highly representative of animetism. A main "characteristic of animetism is the separation of the image into multiple planes" which "result[s] [in] a multiplanar image" (Lamarre, *Anime Machine* 6). While Cure Yell's transformation sequence is constructed according to the structure of the multiplanar image (see definition below), it does not however harness its force in the same manner as Henri's sequence, which relies heavily on techniques of limited animation. Transforming the girl requires a focus on the drawing of movements by using as much in-between images as possible (full animation), while transforming the boy spends it energy moving (or sliding) the drawings (limited animation) (Lamarre, "From animation" 330).

Lamarre in *The Anime Machine* (2009) explains that "the force implicit in the moving image becomes shunted into the interval between planes of the image" (xxvii), and that this energy allows for "movement *on and between* surfaces," (7) contrasting with a more Cartesian-oriented movement into depth found in (while not exclusively) live-action cinema. This force

which he calls the *animetic interval* (7) "arises when the multilayered image, under condition of movement, opens an interval that effectively channels and directs the force of the moving image, making it central to the viewing experience" (18). The interval is then contingent on its relationship between layers of images, and is only perceived and palpable through the sliding of these planes or the use of limited animation, which narrows down the amount of in-between images used to animate (compared to full animation) creating a slightly jerky movement. The combination of these stacked layers, or planes, is what he calls the multiplanar image or the superplanar image (a variation of the former using flat compositing, therefore narrowing the gap between layers, resulting in an overall flat image) (Lamarre 126). The multiplanar image is the result of using the open compositing technique, a method which "plays with the layering of elements within the image and with the movement between layers" (Lamarre, *Anime Machine* 36). In order to grasp how the multiplanar image functions, Lamarre compares it with the exploded view (or exploded projection). Most often seen through engineering practices or in assembly manuals (he uses the exploded view of a bicycle wheel and all its parts), the exploded view allows us to "see all the elements pulled apart yet held in place, to show how the [object] is put together" (121). According to him the "exploded projection serves to capture the force of the moving image as flat compositing spreads it across the surface of the image," and "the moving image operates to open (or reopen) the structure of exploded projection, machinistically, into a divergent series of animation" (122). In contrast with a more Cartesian organization of the image (and the world), the multiplanar image does not necessarily rely on a single vanishing point, or one at all for that matter. This results in the eye "constantly oscillating around a center that remains nonlocalizable," a movement that can be called superflat (Lamarre 111). Ultimately, Lamarre argues that "to speak of an animetic machine is to think in terms of an interval, gap, or spacing" and that "a thinking machine is a heteropoietic process in which human thinking happens differently than it would otherwise, in another flow of material forms and immaterial fields" (301). Like many other elements of *Hugtto*, animetism allows us to think about transformation in another way when put into contrast with the more cinematic-oriented transformation of girls.

Henri's *henshin* (transformation) sequence opens with one shot made out of various layers that are superimposed, yet close to each other, making for a superplanar image. Henri seems anchored to the background as he and the background layer are slid down creating a sense

of movement upward, slowly revealing Henri's inner features becoming brighter and turning the same colour as the background. Besides his hair, the character himself is not animated, and the colourful line combining the PreCures' powers is now a flat coil that twirls around the character. The animated coil is the trajectory of the subjectile—as seen in Cure Yell's transformation—made visible. This suggests a connection with the PreCures, while not needing ballistic projection since the sequence does not promote any product portal. Throughout the whole sequence Henri is shown from the front, barely being animated. What seems to be of importance for the animators here is not moving the character but portraying the movement of transformation through magic. Magical lines twirling around Henri's body are rendered in full animation instilling a sense of liveliness in a rather still image where layered elements (e.g. stars, hearts, bubbles) of the background are slid in various directions across the image.

What we have here is what Lamarre refers to as a "distributive field" where "with the flattening of layers, the force of the moving image is spread across the surface of the image" (*Anime Machine* 110). While editing helps focus on some elements of Henri's transforming body through cuts, the image nevertheless lacks a center point of reference: the whole image is alive with movement. The distributive field then allows for "lines of sight [to] replace viewing positions, which makes for a 'subjectile' that manoeuvres within the exploded projection alongside projectiles, not a transcendent subject but a projected or projectile subject pursuing lines of sight" (Lamarre 128). Thinking in terms of lines of sight instead of a line aiming towards a single vanishing point makes us turn away from a single point of perspective towards other potential ways of seeing, and being. This recalls Ahmed's theory of orientation as it rings true with Henri's trajectory, and transformation, as she writes "when bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens" (*Queer Phenomenology* 62). The magical boy framed as a queering device might not bring reproduction, but nevertheless brings a form of production. Something is produced, born out of transformation as "the hope that reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies" (Ahmed 62).

What is produced through Cure Infini's transformation is not another profit-driven strategy, but the creation of a queering device. While the transformation of a boy into a PreCure constitutes a queer moment in itself, it is not only the boy's transformation that is of interest but how his queerness extends its reach affecting the people that surround him. In usual

transformation sequence fashion, the layers that constitutes the *henshin* (transformation) space never extends outside that specific sphere. But in the case of Cure Infini, layers of bubbles, and stars remain sliding across the image while the green background disappears leaving its place to a flat image of the arena. As Cure Inifni battles the oshimaida (a monster born out of a character's negative emotions), these magical elements remain in motion reawakening the crowd of people who have been affected by Listol's dark powers, as they now cheer for the ice-skater turned magical boy. Cure Infini's last magical move brings him up in the air as he grows wings, opening his arms in a cross formation as an array of elements (feathers, stars, translucent flowers) are scattered across the image stacked upon one another (Figure 2.8). The background is turned multicolour, hiding any trace of the arena as six beams of light corresponding to each PreCure's assigned colours (including Cure Infini's green) are projected sideways in various directions. This image, which signals the culmination of Cure Infini's powers, offers a combination of a superplanar image with one-point perspective as the beam of lights coming together frames Cure Infini as the image's vanishing point, while floating elements encourages the gaze to move around the surface of the image in a non-perspectival manner.

This formation suggests a coalition between the magical girl's cinematic *henshin* (transformation) sequence, and the magical boy's more animetic sequence, recalling Sugawa-Shimada's formulation of *uchi* (as inclusion), and *out of uchi* (as differentiation) (44) mentioned earlier in this chapter. While Henri's more animetic sequence differentiates him from the girls, therefore positioning him as *out of uchi,* he ultimately is portrayed as included into the PreCure fold visually by including aspects of the girls' Cartesian structured sequences, making for a form of inclusion, while not an assimilation, as true to the nature of his character his sequence remains a queer and unusually different moment in the series.

Figure 2.8 - Cure Infini floats over the arena

Henri's transformation into Cure Infini does away with the background both in terms of a form of bias towards queer coded characters (framing them as villains), and in terms of animation. The background is put into motion, made magical as it transforms Henri into a magical boy. The main use of animetism in the magical boy's transformation sequence disorients the viewer as it subverts expectations making Henri's journey one of intervals or gaps. His gender nonconformity frames him as being somewhere in-between genders, initially creating a drift between himself and other characters, while ultimately providing a queer space for alternative gender expression, and acceptance.

Literature on queer coding allowed me to frame Henri as a queer character in terms of visual cues. Orientation theory on the other hand becomes useful in order to trace how these cues relate to other narrative subjects and objects, while also making us aware of the viewer's relation (and position) towards these codes. Analyzing and contrasting *henshin* (transformation) sequences using animation theory allowed for a mode of thinking through animation to emerge, and further position the magical boy as a queering device (queering *henshin*), through differentiation. As I have argued earlier, Henri's transformation acts as what Ahmed calls a sideway moment (*Queer Phenomenology* 19) which has the power to create new ways of orientating ourselves through the world. Since unlike Ahmed's concept of the 'straight line,' queer cannot be traced as a line ("Orientations" 570), then being cast on the side exists as a form of interval which when in contact with the straight line may produce progressive transformation potentially provoking change to problematic heteronormative norms. This form of queer interval is explored in Kathryn Bond Stockton's book *The Queer Child* (2009) through what she calls "growing sideways," an alternative queer way of being within a predominantly straight world.

Stockton, like many others, lament the fact that queer children are not featured in history and are deemed inexistent since children are believed to be straight by default. This standard understanding of children suggests positioning them as beings of delay where "their supposed gradual growth, their suggested slow unfolding, which, unhelpfully, has been relentlessly figured as vertical movement upward (hence "growing up") toward full stature, marriage, work reproduction, and the loss of childishness" (Stockton 4). By pointing out a straight trajectory up for straight children, Stockton argues that queer children "grow sideways." Borrowing from Jacques Derrida's notion of delay, Stockton writes "the inescapable effect of our reading along a chain of words (in a sentence, for example), where meaning is delayed, deferred, exactly because

we read in sequence, go forward in a sentence, not yet knowing what words are ahead of us, we must take the words we have passed *with* us as we go, making meaning wide and hung in suspense" (4). Positioning the queer child experience as such may lead to Edelman's pessimist outlook on queer life, but her use of the term 'growing' insists on an impulse towards something, however vague the destination. Stockton defines her coined term "sideways growth" as "something related but not reducible to the death drive; something that locates energy, pleasure, vitality, and (e)motion in the back-and-forth of connections and extensions that are not reproductive" (13). This means that the queer child being in constant negotiation with their own identity in relation to others, "who by reigning cultural definitions can't "grow up" grows to the side of cultural ideals" (13). Thinking in terms of growing sideways infers a moving away from a straight line, and just like the planes of the multiplanar image it connotes a sliding across space without a specific centre to navigate towards. Queerness can be thought of as an exploded view of gender, revealing various modes of existence striving for recognition, yet refusing a single vanishing point towards a form of reproductive futurity. Thinking in terms of the exploded projection when it comes to gender is bringing to the fore an understanding of gender as multiple elements or codes that can be appropriated and played with. While gender can be formed and to some extent permanently adopted by an individual, it is useful to modify our relation vis-à-vis binary gender codes by not necessarily following traditional lines of thoughts when it comes to gender specific clothing, and ways of being, or at least subvert negative emotions towards queerness. What Henri brings to queer representation in animation (and on top of that in children media) is an alternative (and more positive and nuanced) depiction of the queer coded character, one that strives for queer futurity. In sum, Henri's function as a queering device can both be felt within *Hugtto*'s world, as outside in the 'real' one.

Conclusion: Everyone is Magical!

In this chapter I have relied on notions of movements, intervals, and orientations, in order to situate the magical boy's place in the *Pretty Cure* franchise. As an anomaly in the series, the character has proven to challenge pre-existing bias toward queer coded characters, but as also shown how transformation is possible through moments of contact in relation with a form of oppressing masculinity. *Hugtto*, while keeping to its origin as a program length commercial, also works as a platform promoting female empowerment and queer acceptance. The series positions

the acceptance of queerness as a powerful community-building tool not only benefiting queer identifying people but also serving to negotiate the meanings behind being a man, and being a woman. This claim is made even clearer in episode 48 as Cure Yell reverses the villain George Kurai's spell—which froze the citizens in time—turning everyone in town into their own version of magical girls/boys/men/women. The mass transformation is possible as everyone's cheers to save the future from being annihilated creates a magical sphere which grows in size, eventually englobing the whole city. Akin to Henri's transformation, every character that transforms is supported by a multicolour sparkling background, flattening the image. Henri and Masato also join the fight both as PreCures as they fly holding hands toward a now giant Kurai, as they exclaim proudly "Let's go to be who we want to be!" (Figure 2.9). The animetic tendency of Henri's *henshin* (transformation) sequence is brought back in this scene with a superplanar image, now suggesting a narrowing of the gap between the queer couple, and the larger society. It is through collective effort that they finally bring down Criasu Corporation as their office building eventually collapses. The building erected high and mighty can be said to represent a traditional and outdated mode of masculinity which frames Criasu's corporation model as embodiment of this strict male gender regiment. The magical boys' cry toward a customizable future and the fall of Criasu's symbol signify a break of the patriarchal line, allowing for an interval to open up for possible alternate queer futures.

Figure 2.9 - Henri and Masato as PreCures

While Hana follows the maternal route criticized by Kumiko Saito (see Chapter 1) in the last episode (which is set in the future), she nonetheless is presented as the President of her own design company which—as she describes it—creates "sparkly clothes for boys and girls" (a nod to queerness), and not just as a mother. Every character is given a happy empowering ending, including Henri who is now an ice-skating coach for a younger generation, accompanied by Masato as the two keep on cultivating a burgeoning romance. The ending offers both reproductive futurity and queer futurity simultaneously, keeping up with the idea of a straight line, while acknowledging a queer interval growing sideways to it.

The magical boy as conduit for the envisioning of queer futures is not unique to the *Hugtto* season of the *Pretty Cure* series. It can be found in various recent media works such as *Steven Universe* (Rebecca Sugar, 2013-2020) or *Magical Boy* (The Kao, 2018-), a webcomic featuring a transgender boy who must not only deal with coming out as a boy, but also a magical one. Building on the analytic framework of José Esteban Muñoz, queer futurity seems to be of late a growing concern for animation scholars. Ristola articulates that *Revolutionary Girl Utena,* and *Steven Universe* both "envision radical futures as a means of escape from and an alternative to toxic gender norms" and that "such visions are what animate audiences today to agitate for social change and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people" (108). Jake Pitre affirms a similar utopian position when discussing the magical boy inspired *Steven Universe* which he describes as being "an insistent optimism in the face of alienation" (21).

Muñoz describes "queerness as [a] utopian formation," one that is "based on an economy of desire and desiring . . . always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (26). Queerness is a movement through intervals, an alternative orientation towards the future. It is an imagined potentiality, an ever-changing *henshin*, allowing for constant transformation. Queerness is unseen motion made seen through materiality and codes such as dress, gestures, and dialogues. Through performativity and utopia it "call[s] into question what is epistemologically there and signal a highly ephemeral ontological field that can be characterized as a *doing in futurity*" (Muñoz 26). Unapologetically queer characters such as Henri call upon our imagination to walk beyond the straight line and feed on fiction to enact change in the 'real.' Hence, despite my disagreements with his conclusions, I must agree with Edelman's framing of the future as kid's stuff because no matter how he dislikes the figure of the child, queer kids are our future.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the manga *Magical Boy Majorian* (2007-2008), and the anime *Hugtto! PreCure* (2018-2019) I have shown how queerness can be a transformative agent in the context of media which are not particularly aimed at the LGBTQA+ community, but to a wider audience. While I have ultimately framed *Majorian*'s queerness as a temporary—yet transformative—escape from sometimes heavy to bear gender binaries which comes with societal expectations, it nevertheless prove to be an object bringing the reader in, suspending them in a particular form of queer time, by way of an incorporated space. I have argued through the use of McCloud's notion of *lines to be* that *Majorian* has the tendency to bring in the reader, and have suggested that *Hugtto* does the opposite by bringing the anime out of the screen through the use of Hartzheim's product portal concept, seeping into the viewer's living room. The former is animated through the act of reading, while the latter (being already animated) animates the viewer by way of *henshin* (transformation) sequences, which encourages the viewer to mimic what is seen on screen. Although these forms of movements between user and work helped in understanding how queerness *moves* within and beyond these two media forms, what was of main interest for *Moon Prism Boys* is what Cooley, Ernest dit Alban, and Ristola calls *motion of illusion*. They contend that:

> If the illusion of motion is wrapped up in the form of animation as simulated kinesthetic motion, then we would like to think of the motion of illusion as the cultural, political, and aesthetic movements that arise out of animation and its illusions, including bodies, worlds, spaces, etc. (1)

If we think of manga as being animated by the reader, then this also rings true for *Majorian*. In the case of both works what has been animated is a form of queerness through a particular form of transformation, one infused with 'shōjoness.' These motions of illusion function as queer survival objects, but also as I have argued with the magical boy Henri (Cure Infini), these characters act as queering devices, allowing the reader/viewer to question enforced gender binaries, and inspire change beyond the pages of manga or the screen of anime. To consume across—and to create works that cross and merge gender lines—has the transformative effect to interrogate, and hopefully affect change to heteronormative structures.

As we have seen in both chapters, queerness is only perceivable through contrasting it with straight tendencies. The two boys of *Majorian* are presented as two opposites, as their

appearance are reflections of shōjo (girls) manga, and shōnen (boys) manga designs, which created an instant contrast between the two boys from the start. *Hugtto*'s Henri's queerness was announced using the decades old strategy of queer coding villains, a visual and narrative technique which initially positioned him in the likes of Edelman's evil sinthomosexual archetype. Although narrative and character designs are important aspects in detecting forms of queerness, it is the role of animation that revealed movement as a producer of queerness. Besides animation as animated images, I refer to animation here as the turning of the page which created a stark contrast between Masaru and Iori, transforming a full page drawn with minimal artifice and straight lines to one filled with oblique and open panels, and covered with flowers in the like of typical shōjo (girls) manga. In the context of *Hugtto*, a comparative analysis between more cinematic *henshin* (transformation) sequences for the magical girls, and a more animetic one for the magical boy located Henri's transformation as a queer anomaly in the *Pretty Cure* franchise itself. This attention to the motion of animation's materiality allowed for a framework to emerge where the idea of the interval was applied to narrative, and by extension to our own plane within the 'real' world.

Both works used forms of interstices as conduits for transformation towards a particular form of queer futurity (albeit an aborted one in the case of *Majorian*). These interstices—whether being gutters in manga or intervals in the animetic image—can be said to "often be born from a rupture, but they can also be born from an operation of repair," (113) to use Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers words. They argue that "an interstice is neither defined against nor in relation to the bloc to which it nevertheless belongs. It creates its own dimensions starting from concrete processes that confer on it its consistency and scope, what it concerns and who it concerns" (110). Akin to Lamarre's understanding of the force shunted within the animetic interval, "the interstice doesn't give any response but generate new questions" (Pignarre and Stengers 111). Ahmed's work on queer orientations provided a useful framework to locate the sources that are put into motion through sometimes unperceivable lines. Her notion of the straightening device when turned on its head provided the concept of a queering device which served to disorient a straight line inviting straight queerphobic characters like Masaru or Masato to either embrace a form of femininity within themselves or accept other ways of being. If lines are traced depending on the direction to which we turn to, then intervals are a space of negotiation created between two nodes facing each other, and when movement is inserted

between these starting points a space is then created allowing for a form of transformation, and in the context of the magical boy, as we have seen, an economy is created through rupture, and repair. A single one true straight line is then exploded into many possibilities, into lines of sight, where one-point perspective becomes multiplanar perspectives.

Queer Magic on the Horizon

As a conclusion, I wish to suggest the future addition of two topics or field of studies which could complement the work done in this thesis: children studies with a focus on media consumption, and magic theory. In *Moon Prism Boys* I have tried to keep an optimistic stance where possible, following Muñoz impulse towards queer futurity, which led me to frame the magical boy as a queering device, one that inspires change or transformation in how boys (and men) embody gender. Orienting oneself towards positivity may risk the chance of falling into a form of naivety, but adopting Edelman's perspective in *No Future* (2004) runs the danger of running straight toward a dead end. A certain form of naivety can be productive if we turn to children studies as children can be framed as "metaphor' for potential and 'development" (Shamoon in Honda 10), which highlights their capacity for transformation. Honda argues that "children are naturally too full of 'fragmentation" (13), which brings adults with a "preference for consistency . . . to impose order on discontinuous categories" (17). Honda continues stating that "children embody the signs of a borderline, ambiguous existence" (22) and that in their world "time does not flow with homogeneous consistency, and individual moments are not joined together" (21). Honda's understanding of children prior to being oriented towards a straight continuum has affinities with Stockton's notion of sideways growth when writing about queer children (2009). Further research on queer children or how children react to queer media aimed toward children will be beneficial in understanding the direct relationship between object and viewer. After all, Ahmed reminds us that a child acquires its tendencies with the objects that are available within their reach (*Queer Phenemonlogy* 86).

Queer-oriented animated television series often use magic as elements of queerness. If we look at Noelle Stevenson's *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018-2020) (a queered reimagining of *She-Ra: Princess of Power* (1985-1986)), Rebecca Sugar's *Steven Universe* (2013-2020), *Flip Flappers* (2016) or *Hugtto! PreCure*, we notice that a common trope within these animated series is transformation through magical means. As I have argued throughout this

thesis, magical transformation spread out of the *henshin* (transformation) space affecting straight-oriented characters on one side, while allowing for a space of identification for queer individuals on the other. What I have called a queering device can also be thought in terms of sympathetic magic where "like produces like; contact results in contagion; the image produces the object itself" (Mauss 15). Thinking ahead, research on the magical boy figure could be expanded by interrogating the role of magic so present in queer animation, while exploring and incorporating research from the field of children studies, since magical boys are always portrayed as young boys.

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