HUMAN/CYBORG/ALIEN/FRIEND: POSTWAR *RESSENTIMENT* IN JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION AND POSTHUMAN ETHICS IN *KAMEN RIDER FOURZE*

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"In this galaxy, there's no one you can't befriend." So declares *Kamen Rider Fourze* (2011-2012), a television and film series representative of the *tokusatsu* (special filming) mode of Japanese science fiction. Over the course of this essay, we will find how this proclamation encapsulates the complex relationship that *Kamen Rider Fourze* shares with its larger historicocultural context. As a *tokusatsu* text, *Kamen Rider Fourze* is part and parcel of a moving picture culture deeply imbricated in the trauma of World War II. Wrestling with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *tokusatsu* imagines a reinvigorated nation through images of super robots and cyborg heroes. In essence then, *tokusatsu*, as postwar Japanese science fiction, is characterized by its Nietzschean *ressentiment*. *Kamen Rider Fourze* fits into this trajectory but more importantly it simultaneously represents a radical fissure. Informed by Martin Heidegger's considerations of technology, Donna Haraway's critique of modern subjectivity, and Jacques Derrida's theory regarding the politics of friendship, I will demonstrate how *Kamen Rider Fourze* breaks from a resentful history of trauma. As opposed to the majority of *tokusatsu* heroes, *Fourze* does not perpetuate a violent metaphysics that reproduces the relationship between victim and transgressor. Instead, through its considerations of the potentiality of technology, reflection on human subjectivity, and a rigorous engagement with the tenets of friendship, *Fourze* gestures to the possibility of an entirely different way of being, and of being with one another.

THE *RESSENTIMENT* OF JAPANESE SCIENCE FICTION

In discussing Japanese science fiction, Jeon Yun-gyeong[1] comments on the ubiquity of robots in the nation's culture, both in its media and its industry. According to Jeon, the

fascination with robotics originates in World War II. Jeon begins with the trauma of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 15 of 1945 and the resulting narratives of victimization. For Jeon, that discourse was marked by the desire for an equivalent military response. Analyzing how these sentiments manifest in mass culture, Jeon argues that the proliferation of robots in Japanese media realizes the nation's desire for a super weapon to match the atomic bomb.[2] Informed by Jeon's argument, this essay approaches a substantial part of Japan's industry and mass culture as characterized by Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of *ressentiment*. The vengeful position of *ressentiment* (or slave morality) begrudges the Other, which then determines the corresponding poles of good and evil. We can observe the *ressentiment* in *tokusatsu* from the mode's early moments as it ostensibly begins with 1954's *Gojira* (or *Godzilla*)(dir. Honda Ishirō). As exemplified by *Gojira*, *tokusatsu* consists of live-action science fiction narratives that heavily feature special effects, primarily in the form of actors wearing colorful costumes. The mode includes a number of genres with *Gojira* playing a foundational role in the *kaiju* (monster) genre. In turn, *Fourze* belongs to the *Kamen Rider* (1971–) series, which is part of the superhero genre. To a certain degree, in the same way that all of the disparate genres share formal and narrative traits with *Gojira*, all *tokusatsu* texts engage the atomic bombings to some degree. In the case of *Gojira*, the film's connection with its historical context is well documented. *Gojira* was released on November 3, 1954 – just months after the U.S. hydrogen bomb tests at Bikini Atoll killed twenty-three Japanese fishermen on March 1.[3] Similarly, it is commonly understood that *Gojira* gestures to Hiroshima and Nagasaki while maintaining the prevalent anxieties in mid-twentieth-century global science fiction. But as much as *Gojira* may have engaged an international audience, we must be attentive to the film's role in postwar Japan.

While nuclear warfare was a global concern, John W. Dower emphasizes one of the key specificities to the Japanese context: only the Japanese have directly experienced the effects of a nuclear attack.[4] He comments, "Certainly the most sweeping and searing destruction ever visited upon mankind left an enormous, abhorrent, and lifelong impression in the minds and memories of all its victims."[5] Furthermore, unlike the rest of the world, Japan was unable to immediately engage the experience of the bombings. Implemented in September of 1945, U.S. censorship barred public discourse regarding Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[6] It was not until three years later that the nation was able to publicly broach the matter.[7] Popular culture would follow in six years with the release of

Gojira. The nation's complicit silence was part of a larger concession in regards to the war, as Japan swiftly and unconditionally agreed to democratization in 1945. Following the Potsdam Declaration, the newly drafted Constitution of Japan proclaimed the nation's renunciation "of war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes."[8] The constitution continues, asserting, "Land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of the belligerency of the state will not be recognized."[9] A deep-seated sense of vulnerability accompanied the nation's comprehensive disarmament, evident in the emergence of the new term *higaisha ishiki*, or "victim consciousness."[10] *Higaisha ishiki*, or a specifically Japanese form of *ressentiment*, proliferated throughout mass culture. For example, Anne Allison contends that *Gojira* was a means for "a replaying of wartime memories" but "with a twist." The film "provided a vehicle for reliving the terrors of the war relieved of any guilt or responsibility – solely, that is, from the perspective of victim."[11] Allison makes the connection between *ressentiment* and *tokusatsu* even more explicit by mapping how the anxiety of disarmament shifts into the desire for rearmament. In discussing the censorship following the war, she argues that militarism and patriotism disappear from public life during the American occupation. Seemingly "pacifist," these positions turn into a neonationalist "warriorship" in *tokusatsu* narratives.[12] Crucial is the way in which Allison identifies postwar anxiety in science fiction. In effect then, Allison too is describing how the genre was a privileged site for discursively working through national trauma. The reason for this is because science fiction already shared a connection with what became one of the nation's major concerns following the war: science and technology.

As the nation attempted to work through the atomic bombings, the postwar conversations gravitated towards discussions of science and technology. That discourse was in turn, characterized by a deep ambivalence. A prevalent argument regarding the outcome of the war found fault in the nation's "backwardness" as opposed to the technological superiority of the U.S. And although the Japanese attributed such terrifying power to science, they simultaneously asserted that it held the possibility for recuperation.[13] This newfound fascination with science and technology led to a revived interest in the nation's youth and an immediate prioritization of science education.[14] Moreover, Japan implemented an aggressive push in the advance of science through a number of nonmilitary pursuits and civilian applications. The efforts would succeed, as the nation experienced an economic recovery that was so substantial that it is still

commonly referred to as a miracle. On the level of mass culture, the technonationalism that undergirded the nation's rebuilding efforts were represented through a generation of youthful robotic heroes.[15] These texts suggested that technology could augment the national subject and that the country could be rebuilt through the cyborg's efforts.[16] In addition, these texts asserted that the acquisition of a final weapon would also guarantee that the Japanese would never again have to experience the same debilitating trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

HUMANISM IN POSTWAR JAPAN, POSTHUMANISM IN *KAMEN RIDER FOURZE*

The cyborg hero of *tokusatsu* hints at an underlying concern of the period following World War II – the reorganization of a national work ethic makes evident that national identity was under reconsideration. And this is due to the fact that Japanese subjectivity itself was indeterminate following the war. One immediate example is the new identity that emerged during this period, the *hibakusha* (bomb-affected persons).[17] The *hibakusha* were both shunned for their affliction and coopted in the processes of self-victimization, inhabiting a crucial role in the visual representation of Japanese trauma. For the *hibakusha* themselves, this conflict was part and parcel of "a fracturing of identity."[18] The *hibakusha* spoke of an experience marked by "dehumanization" and the "loss of humanity"[19] and how they capitulated "their identity as human beings."[20] Even though they were alive, the *hibakusha* were not considered to be human, neither by the general public nor by themselves. Here, human beingness and biological life become separated.

While the *hibakusha* were the most obvious testament to the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the anxiety of nuclear warfare did not end with those who were most directly affected. Not only was the entirety of Japan included, but there was also an insistence that the atomic bombs gestured beyond the national borders. To this, Emperor Shōwa asserted that Japanese surrender was necessary to prevent "the destruction of all human civilization."[21] As Dower notes, Japan's capitulation was thus elevated into an act "that saved humanity itself."[22] Similarly, in writing on the need "to abolish nuclear weapons and control science and technology,"[23] *hibakusha* and nuclear physicist Naomi Shono argues for nothing less than the revival of "the true spirit of humanity" and "a completely new way of thinking."[24] A similar strand can be found in other *hibakusha*

accounts. Contrary to the idea that the *hibakusha* inhabited a liminal space between life and non-life, some maintained that the victims had instead transcended both the corporeal and metaphysical body. This formulation of the victim insisted not on a "mere restoration or recovery of psychological functions" but a "higher level of consciousness attained through the strenuous processes of recovering those functions."[25] What we can observe here is that the atomic bombings forced the nation of Japan to reconsider its very understanding of humanity. In doing so, the possibility of an alternative metaphysics was also broached.

As a *tokusatsu* text, *Kamen Rider Fourze* too plays out the logic of postwar *ressentiment* in what Linda Williams refers to as the 'melodramatic mode of narrative.' For Williams, melodrama is not restricted to a genre but rather the fundamental manner in which filmic narratives are structured. Crucial to Williams's melodrama is the morality play where the victim-hero of slave morality begins and ends the narrative in a space of innocence.[26] That movement in turn is facilitated through the protagonist's violence, or what Williams refers to as "a dialectic of pathos and action."[27] What the melodramatic structure of both *tokusatsu* as a mode and *Fourze* as a text reveal is how narrative media is involved in the ideological propagation of Nietzschean slave morality. Relatedly, another implication becomes apparent when we turn our attention to the target audience of the *Kamen Rider* franchise, namely children. Very much a part of Japan's *Kultureindustrie*,[28] *tokusatsu* texts are commodities that bear value by distributing the dominant morality. One of the ways in which *tokusatsu* does this is evident in the central role that toy company Bandai plays. Bandai does not merely produce ancillary products for *tokusatsu* series but instead actively participates in the development of the franchises. A comparable and useful analogy can be made in high concept[29] children's entertainment in the U.S. during the 1980s. Referred to as "the toy-based program,"[30] and "30-minute commercials,"[31] these animated series were the result of close collaboration between animation studios and toy manufacturers in order to increase product synergy and reduce risk. The shared relationship informs the narrative structure of the programs, with each self-contained episode revolving around melodramatic action. The melodramatic narratives then provide "a basic conflict in every story which would capture boys' attention and give structure to their play."[32] That play would then be facilitated through the purchase of toys, which would be used towards the children's simulation of the shows. Much of *tokusatsu*, including the *Kamen Rider* franchise uses this strategy.

To this day, *Kamen Rider* remains one of the most visible and prolific *tokusatsu* franchises. Even though its ostensible market audience is children, the series continues to target a broad demographic that includes adults. One report from 2006 on the Japanese toy industry features retailer comments regarding children's *Kamen Rider* belt replicas and how they have sold surprisingly well amongst thirty-year-old and forty-year-old men. The report also mentions "the potential of a broader market for nostalgia."[33] Toys are arguably the area in which *Fourze* was most successful, with the "DX Fourze Driver" in high demand in late 2011.[34] The toy would go on to win the "2011 Hit Sales" award from the Japan Toy Association.[35] While the actual texts themselves were not as successful as their merchandise, both *Fourze*'s television series and theatrical-release films had a sizable audience. The final ratings for the television series were recorded at 5.1% with a series average of 5.8%.[36] The films performed well at the box office, as is the case with *Kamen Rider Fourze the Movie: Space, Here We Come!* (*Kamen Raidā Fōze Za Mūbī Minna de Uchū Kitā!*)(2012)(dir. Sakamoto Koichi), which opened in the number one position.[37] In addition to the close relationship between ancillary merchandise and film/television text, *Kamen Rider Fourze* maintains all of the formal and narrative practices of both the *Kamen Rider* franchise and the *tokusatsu* mode. The twenty-second *Kamen Rider* series, *Fourze* consists of a weekly episodic television series and four theatrical-release films that adhere to a cyclical, serial narrative format.

The series follows Kamen Rider Fourze aka Kisaragi Gentaro (Fukushi Sota), a transfer student to the fictional Amanogawa High School. In each episode, Gentaro uses the "Fourze Driver" to transform into Kamen Rider Fourze. With it, Fourze battles the "Horoscopes" and "Zodiarts," *kaiju* that take their forms based on constellations. What these antagonists make evident is how *Fourze* is even more explicitly engaged with science and technology as the central motif of the show is the exploration of outer space. But *Fourze* maintains a high degree of uncertainty towards this new frontier: space is the simultaneous location for unlimited potential and unknowable danger. This can be seen in the way that the main protagonists including Utahoshi Kengo (Takahashi Ryuki) and Jojima Yuki (Shimizu Fumika) share their aspirations with the central antagonist, Gamou Mitsuaki (Tsurumi Shingo). While Kengo and Yuki wish for the realization of human potential through space expedition, Gamou seeks to harness the power of space for his own purposes. In the same way that science was both the cause of Japan's complete loss at

World War II and its most viable solution for rebuilding, space in *Fourze* is a sort of deus ex machina that both causes and solves all complications.

Fourze's power stems from the central technology of the series, the Fourze Driver and the "Astroswitches." Although the narrative of *Fourze* demands the weaponization of the technology, the Fourze Driver was designed for the exploration of deep space. Along with the Astroswitches, the Driver channels the "cosmic energy" of space directly into the user. However, Fourze is not the sole possessor of this technology – instead, his enemies also utilize their own versions of the Astroswitches. While Gentaro and his allies use their switches to transform into robotic heroes, the Horoscopes and Zodiarts use their "Zodiarts Switches" to become hybrid monsters. In that sense, even though the Kamen Riders and the Zodiarts are connected through technology, they are simultaneously segregated through their morality. Interestingly enough, the show almost imbues the technology *itself* with morality: in other words, the kind-hearted Gentaro receives the "pure" Astroswitches while the students with warped ethics receive the "tainted" Zodiarts Switches. Actualizing the students' extant ill will, the switches transform the children into Zodiarts, suggesting that the technology merely magnifies the monstrosity that is already within the students' interiority. On the other hand, those who become Horoscopes, a more evolved version of the Zodiarts, maintain an even deeper sense of *ressentiment*. Thus, the text puts Fourze, the Horoscopes, and the Zodiarts into relation with one another through their shared technology. Against that mutuality, *Fourze* taxonomizes the three categories and demarcates them according to a spectrum of morality.

The way that *Fourze*'s hero shares mutual ground with his enemies is not exclusive to *Kamen Rider Fourze*. A central theme throughout *Kamen Rider* and *tokusatsu* history is the tenuous boundary that separates Self and Other. A useful starting point in considering this liminality is the central function and effect of the diegetic technology: transformation. Most, if not all *tokusatsu* heroes undergo some form of transformation or *henshin*, and in many cases the word itself is mobilized as an incantation. As previously noted, the defining feature of *tokustatsu* is its use of actors in elaborate costumes. While computer-generated-imagery is used to a great degree – a point we will return to later – it is readily apparent that live actors are performing in suits as superheroes, robots, and monsters. Non-diegetically, the audience understands that it is observing human actors. On the level of narrative however, the figures lack such legible definition. This is certainly the case

with *Kamen Rider*. Historically, the franchise has featured a series of lone protagonists (as opposed to the team dynamics in many *tokusatsu* texts) who embody some form of hybridity. For example, many of the early Kamen Riders were products of biomechanical experimentation. Yet, the texts only provide such broad, general explanations; the full nature of their transformations is never fully explained.

This unknowable hybridity is central to understanding both *henshin* and *tokusatsu* in general, and the term itself offers important hints. Written in kanji as変身, *henshin* is comprised of the Chinese characters for "change" and "body." Allison finds an explanation for the heroes' super powers (or *chikara*) in ancillary *tokusatsu* literature, which cite *karada no himitsu*, or "bodily secrets" as the source[38] In the logic of *tokusatsu* then, *henshin* is not to be confused with the costumes. While the *kamen* in *Kamen Rider* denotes a mask, it is not that the heroes merely augment themselves with equipment; instead, they rely on actual transformation on the bodily level. The heroes' bodies thus maintain a degree of instability. The resulting fluidity of subjectivity allows these figures to shuttle back and forth between humanity and an alternative, indeterminate hybrid identity. Subsequently, these figures resist the ontological distinctions that separate the human Self from the nonhuman Other. In that sense, *tokusatsu* figures align with Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg that challenges and dismantles those very binaries. Haraway posits such alternate, radical subjectivities in a posthuman framework in order to allow for the possibility of new coalition politics that resist the humanist traditions of stratification along lines of gender, race, and class.[39] And yet, the continuity between *tokusatsu* and Haraway only goes so far. Ultimately, the *tokusatsu* cyborg does not look to utopian posthumanism. Instead, the cyborg decries Japanese disarmament and realizes a desire for a final weapon. We can see all of this in the majority of *Kamen Rider* series, including the inaugural series.

Kamen Rider (1971-1973) revolves around Hongō Takeshi – referred to in subsequent series as Kamen Rider Ichigō (number one) – and his battles with the terrorist organization Shocker. In order to execute its plan of global domination, Shocker continuously attempts to force the evolution of humanity through its experimentations. The produced monstrosities then serve as weekly antagonists for each episode. The titular hero's kinship to his enemy is even more emphatic in *Kamen Rider*, as the first Kamen Rider is himself a Shocker product, a *kaizō ningen*, or "remodeled human." However, two elements distinguish Kamen Rider

from the other *kaiju*: one, that he can *henshin* at will (unlike the more permanent monstrous states of the villains) and two, that his psyche (and morality) are intact. As we can see here, *Kamen Rider* established a number of features that informed the majority of the franchise including *Fourze*. And yet, there are significant distinctions to *Fourze* that separates it from the other series. While Ichigō and many other early Riders are Shocker experiments, the series still maintain an absolute limit to the affinity between the heroes and their villains – the organization of Shocker is indubitably evil, made evident through the Nazi iconography that *Kamen Rider* generously borrows. As we shall extrapolate later, the key difference to *Fourze* is that the hero's villains also happen to be his *schoolmates*. Another divergence is the politics of *Kamen Rider*, which position its hero as a final weapon that effectively performs the rearmament of Japan through cybernetic technonationalist augmentation. While *Fourze* follows that tradition of the franchise and begins with those politics, it dialectically arrives in a space that hews much closer to Haraway's notion of the cyborg. In other words, unlike *Kamen Rider*'s cyborg, *Fourze* does not reinstantiate the hierarchical divisions between Self and Other. And that is because *Fourze* maintains a distinctive approach to technology.

KAMEN RIDER FOURZE AS *TECHNĒ*

In order to understand the politics of *Kamen Rider Fourze*, we must begin with Martin Heidegger's treatises on technology. For Heidegger, technology encompasses a wide area that includes concerns of epistemology and philosophy. We can see this in the way that Heidegger reestablishes the connection between technology and the act of thinking in his "Letter on Humanism." Critiquing both modern conceptions of technology and modes of thought, Heidegger asserts that modern thinking is a form of "technical thinking," connected with the dominant understanding of technology. In technical thinking, reflection is part of the productive mode of technology that insists on the separation between theory and praxis and is "in service of doing and making."[40] In response, Heidegger returns to the work of Plato and Aristotle to propose an alternative: the notion of *technē*. Beginning with the etymological roots of *technikon*, or "that which belongs to *technē*,"[41] Heidegger positions *technē* or "the activities and skills of the craftsman" and "the arts of the mind and the fine arts"[42] against the technical mode of thinking. Unlike

the conception of technology that is entirely concerned with means and ends, *technē* is inextricably entwined with thinking, being, and truth.

Heidegger makes this relationship clear by citing Plato, for whom *technē* shared close proximity with *episteme*. In turn, both terms indicated a broad sense of knowing.[43] And as he insistently reminds us, the crucial dynamic to *episteme* and more importantly to *technē* is the act of revealing and opening up.[44] This is why *technē* is "a mode of *alētheuein* [truth], a mode, that is, of rendering beings manifest."[45] Heidegger thus places *technē* within *poiēsis* (bringing-forth).[46] And yet, while Heidegger details the specificity that separates *technē* and technology, he also reminds us that the two share relation to one another. After all, according to Heidegger, the productive mode of technology has its origins in *technē*. Along these lines, modern technology too has the potential to reveal and bring forth, although it is clear that this is not its main priority. Instead, modern technology reveals in a manner that changes nature into a 'standing reserve' where energy can be stored for future extraction.[47] Thus in practice, technology stands in diametrical opposition to *technē* for its essential function is not to reveal, but rather to enclose. As Heidegger notes, *gestell* (frame) is "the name for the essence of modern technology."[48]

But because Heidegger is acutely aware of the duality, he invokes Fredrich Hölderlin:

But where danger is, grows

The saving power also.[49]

Technē prepares us for "the propriative event of truth" or *ereignis*.[50] It reveals that which is enframed through technology as *gestell*. The two are in opposition but not categorically unrelated. While modern history has moved in the direction of *gestell*, Heidegger is proposing the possibility of *technē*. The uncertainty in this dialectic of potentiality mirrors the comportment towards science in postwar Japan, where the dangerous power that destroyed Japan also contained the saving power. In the same sense, *Fourze* takes the means of destruction that was posited as its resentful recourse, and uses it not to enframe and perpetuate the trauma of the atomic bombs. Instead, Fourze reveals that history and opens up new possibilities of being.

Fourze then signals a break. And while *Fourze*'s conception as *technē* is the driving force behind that fissure, another of its critical engagements further motivates the text: its tendencies as new media. If the posthumanism in Japan following World War II was

cybernetic, then *Kamen Rider* in the last fifteen years has been *digitally* cybernetic, with the titular hero taking on a limitless library-like capacity of digital empowerment.[51] *Fourze* demonstrates the same representability of humanness as data that can be readily modified. This includes Gentaro's obvious transformation to Kamen Rider Fourze as well as the character's codification into computer-generated-imagery. In addition, the digitality of *Kamen Rider* also concerns one of the main ways that *tokusatsu* texts are currently distributed. Domestically, the series are broadcast in High Definition signals on Sunday mornings, but internationally *tokusatsu* television is primarily circulated through the Internet via fan groups that translate, subtitle, format, and code the shows, releasing them through their webpages.[52]

Digitality permeates the narrative of *Fourze* as well, and of the characteristics of new media as posited by Lev Manovich, none are more crucial to *Fourze* than modularity. Manovich asserts that new media texts are those that consist of modular elements that can be combined to form a larger whole while simultaneously maintaining their own distinctive identities.[53] In the case of *Kamen Rider Fourze*, the preoccupation with modularity appears through the diegetic technology. The primary function of the myriad Astroswitches is the summoning of automated prostheses called "Fourze Modules." For example, the four main switches, #1: Rocket, #2: Launcher, #3: Drill, and #4: Radar, correspond to his right arm, right leg, left leg, and left arm, respectively. What we can also see here is the numerical worldview that codes the signal of the text, the textual technology, as well as the body itself. The above are just a few of over forty switches that can be used in different permutations, making the variable options that Fourze has at his disposal virtually limitless. Furthermore, a number of switches are not limited to Fourze's appendages, but rather change his entire comportment; those switches allow him to inhabit different "states" such as "Fire States" and "Elek (electric) States." What becomes apparent in this new media engagement is how *Kamen Rider Fourze* suggests an entirely different conception of the human body.

The body of *Kamen Rider Fourze* is not a homogeneous, autonomous, stable body with fixed boundaries. Instead, it is a body in a continuum that is endlessly potential and always coming-into-being. Through the Astroswitch prostheses, Fourze inhabits a space of contingency, precisely the same realm that the atomic bombs thrust Japan into. The nation ruminated on the boundaries of the human body, attempted to work through its transgression, and considered the possibility of transcendence. *Fourze* enters this dialogue by asserting that humanity *can* be transcended through technology. At the same time, the

malleable conception of the human body is not exclusive to *Fourze* and is present in other *tokusatsu* texts as well. However, unlike those texts and their heroes, *Fourze* does not merely maintain a superficial posthuman sensibility through its cyborg; instead, *Fourze* maintains rigorous posthuman ethics that reveal how the *ressentiment* of *tokusatsu* is decidedly *humanist*. In other words, because *tokusatsu* performs the fantastical rearmament of Japan, the mode also perpetuates the hegemony of humanism, which shares an uncomfortable proximity to the very source of trauma itself.

The connection between humanism and the violence of World War II becomes clearer in Akira Mizuta Lippit's discussion of animality. Referencing Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Lippit emphasizes how humanism requires the dynamic of exclusion with specific focus on the separation between humans and animals. The exclusion of animals corresponds to the devaluing of nonhuman life, which Lippit argues finds its logical endpoint in the justification of mass murder. For Lippit, this logic finds its correlate in the justification of the Holocaust where the identification of the Jew as nonhuman was paramount.[54] Even more pointedly, Ronald Takaki argues that the atomic bombs were an act of racism, predicated on an identity politics that confronts the Japanese as absolute Other.[55] What Takaki, along with Lippit, Horkheimer, and Adorno are all identifying is what Haraway also contends: the way in which the traditions of militarism, sexism, racism, and violent nationalism are all imbricated in humanism.[56] In proposing a radical conception of humanity as modular and infinitely becoming, Kamen Rider Fourze becomes a figure of *technē* that reveals the historical notion of humanism that essentializes the body into a sovereign unit that not only prevents the coalition politics that Haraway invokes, but also legitimates the very violence that forced the Japanese to confront their own humanity. *Kamen Rider Fourze* then moves beyond the Western metaphysical tradition through its formulation of *technē* and posthuman critique. But there is another key component to the posthumanism of *Fourze*. It is the ethics of Kamen Rider Fourze himself, or to be more precise, of Kisaragi Gentaro. But Gentaro's ethics are not ethics as such. They are the ethics of friendship.

KAMEN RIDER FOURZE AND THE POLITICS OF FRIENDSHIP

In considering the politics of friendship, Jacques Derrida begins his study with a series of philosophical considerations on the matter. He begins with Aristotle and Nicomachean

ethics, which insist on "good men who are friends in the rigorous sense of the term" as opposed to "the others who are so only accidentally and by analogy with the first." Derrida then describes Aristotle's formulation of man as political being and how it leads to 'political friendship.' Counter to political friendship is Aristotle's friendship that is concerned with the matter of justice. This form of friendship is caught in the "asymmetrical and heteronomical curvature of the social space" and emphasizes accountability and responsibility. Against modern notions of the social order, the responsibility of Aristotle's social space comes before the *polis*, governmentality, and determined law. Furthermore, the responsibility of the social space is in essence, one's relation to the Other.[57] Informed by Aristotle, Derrida elevates the Other to the first order of importance and argues that friendship is a constellation with law, violence, justice, responsibility, freedom, and autonomy as its constitutive parts.[58]

Following the line that begins his essay, "O my friends, there is no friend," Derrida insists on the radicality of friendship by arguing that there are no friends; friends, or rather perfect friendships can only occur in the future as part of a completely different potentiality. Instead of operating on tacit assumptions concerning friendship, Derrida instead poses the originary questions of "What is a friend?" and "What is friendship?" In doing so, Derrida follows Heidegger in suggesting that these are philosophical questions that are also fundamentally entwined with being and truth.[59] Moreover, Derrida reveals how even rumination on friendship requires a move towards metaphysics. Similar to the possibility of posthumanism, Derrida suggests that the question of "what is" presupposes the potentiality of friendship before friendship occurs. Thus, for Derrida, it is friendship that makes *being* possible. But this is not to say that Derrida suggests an ontology to friendship – or as he refers to it, the "being-present (substance, subject, essence, or existence)" that corresponds to a causal teleology between it and being. Rather, it is the movement of friendship as *technē* that reveals the entire space. Derrida thus conceives of friendship as "this surpassing of the present by the undeniable future anterior which would be the very movement and time of friendship."[60]

Ultimately, friendship for Derrida culminates in the relation to the Other. Derrida suggests two dimensions to that relation. One concerns the "absolute singularity of the Other" in his relation to the Self. The second dimension sustains the absolute alterity of the Other in that I myself represent the Other to him.[61] But in a characteristic move, Derrida challenges the very dichotomy he himself establishes. Friendship and the Other

generate an aporia through the proximity of these two dimensions that then is further aggravated through friendship. In doing so, the Other's singularity and alterity allow him to pass through the aporia and move beyond the generality of law,[62] which we can understand as the dominant social order. Relatedly, Derrida outlines the way in which friendship can be marked by oppositions such as the "secret, private, invisible, unreadable, apolitical, private, invisible, unreadable, apolitical, or even without a concept versus manifest, public, exposed to witnesses, political, homogeneous with the concept."[63] But Derrida introduces this dichotomous history of friendship in order to insist on contingent potentiality. Michel de Montaigne provides one such model for friendship. Even though de Montaigne works in the Greco-Roman model of reciprocity – thus aligning with a binarized mode of thought – Derrida notes how de Montiagne breaks with the tradition and introduces "heterology, asymmetry, and infinity." Nietzsche and Maurice Blanchot join de Montaigne as further examples that demonstrate how there are no friends but yet there remains the possibility of friendship.[64]

As with these models of friendship, *Kamen Rider Fourze* is located in a history that maintains a certain law. Against this, the transgressive figure of Kisaragi Gentaro introduces contingency realized through *technē*, but made possible through the ethics of friendship. It is those ethics that makes Gentaro such a singular character and *Kamen Rider Fourze* a privileged object of study. In a way, Gentaro's ethics almost constitute the character's essential core. In doing so, *Fourze* too adheres to the metaphysical conceptions of ontological subjectivity. Although Gentaro maintains crucial specificities, we would be remiss to say that the figure completely transcends its context. In fact, Kisaragi Gentaro is an entirely classical protagonist of not only *tokusatsu*, but also of Japanese mass culture in general. The text codes Gentaro as a *yankii* ("Yankee"), a very particular type of twentieth-century delinquent. Interestingly enough, *yankii* culture returns our discussion to World War II. *Yankii* culture originates with jaded, disenfranchised youths adopting American youth culture. Both Gentaro's fashion (pompadour and *sukajan* jacket) and his attitude place him within this tradition. Invoking the sentiments of mid-twentieth-century Japanese counterculture, the old-fashioned Gentaro is woefully behind the times. Much to the chagrin of his hip peers who are unable to relate to his embarrassing sincerity, Gentaro bellows such statements as "Spring is the time of youth!"

Gentaro's outdated sensibility is key to the character. Opposed to the other, highly savvy youths of *Kamen Rider Fourze*, it is precisely Gentaro's old-fashioned way of

thinking that opens up new possibilities of being and relating. Unlike his friends, Gentaro is unable to adopt himself to the highly technologized, fast-moving world of *Kamen Rider*'s Japan. However, he is actually able to make the world around him reconsider its own parameters. His inability to understand technology in addition to his ethics allow Gentaro to assume the Fourze Driver and the position as arbiter of new relationships to forms of nonhuman being. From the very beginning of the show, *Kamen Rider Fourze* defines its protagonist by his will to friendship: "I am Kisaragi Gentaro! I'm the man that will make all students become my friends!" This is the logic of the text that is constantly posited as being anything but. Those around Gentaro insistently emphasize his defiance of logic and common sense. And yet his venture to befriend everyone ultimately succeeds.

With the exception of his childhood friend Yuki, all of the members of the Kamen Rider Club are initially dismissive of Gentaro. The first ten episodes of the series thus chart out the formation of the club as Gentaro befriends all of the central characters that will become his allies. The most important of those relationships is that between Gentaro and Kengo. Immediately disliking one another, their begrudging partnership is entirely provisional, as the full realization of their friendship forms one of the show's central plotlines. The stakes in their relation become clear when Gentaro asks, "How can I befriend the entire school if I can't befriend scum like you?" Gentaro of course does befriend Kengo, and thus the most unlikable student at Amanogawa High becomes his best friend. Along these lines, *Fourze* reveals that Kengo is in fact, not human but a "Core Child," or a being constructed of cosmic energy created by the "Core Switch." Gentaro's greatest friendship is thus with a lifeform that is pure energy. The friendship is so significant that it facilitates Kengo's metamorphosis where he dialectically shifts from humanity to energy before transcending his hybridity to realize his full humanity. Kengo is in that sense, a Pinocchio-like figure set to posthuman politics. Another example is Gentaro's only romantic interest throughout the franchise, Misaki Nadeshiko (Mano Erina). Like Kengo, Nadeshiko is also revealed to be an alien life form. Nadeshiko is a "SOLU" ("Seeds of Life from the Universe") manifest from pure cosmic energy. Even when Gentaro discovers that Nadeshiko is not a teenage girl but rather an alien life form that resembles an amorphous blob, his feelings do not change. Gentaro's romance, which is revealed to be another fold to his friendship, is not predicated on the human subjectivity of the Other. Everything is a possible relation.

Gentaro is so rigorous that neither sentience nor consciousness is a prerequisite for friendship. *Fourze* often emphasizes this for comedic value as when Gentaro is confronted by a personal computer in class. Unable to use the machine, Gentaro instead attempts to befriend it. Shaking the mouse as if it were a hand, Gentaro cheerfully exclaims, "Let's get along, computer." In *Kamen Rider Fourze the Movie*, Gentaro is informed that a satellite with artificial intelligence is threatening to destroy the planet. Gentaro declares that he will stop the robot, but in an entirely unconventional way: "Leave it to me, I'm, the man who will befriend satellite weapons." The narrative strategy of shifting allegiances where former enemies become allies is common in Japanese mass culture and the *Kamen Rider* franchise is no exception. But Gentaro's proclamation is a notable deviation – this is not a situation where a hero begrudgingly allies with his enemy so much as *a figure that views no one as his enemy*. In other words, *Fourze* is the only text where the strategy of alliance is applied wholesale. The rigor of the show becomes clear in how it depicts its ultimate antagonist. Near the end of the series, Gamou, aka the Sagittarius Horoscopes kills Kengo. Although Gentaro and his allies enter the series' climactic battle to stop Gamou, they do not do so with a logic of *schuld* concerning Kengo's killing. Gentaro does not desire a vengeful compensation for the debt of his friend's death. Instead, he and his friends adhere to Kengo's wishes, detailed in a posthumous letter: "If Gamou did kill me, I don't want you to hate him. It wouldn't be like you to hate others." And although Gentaro unsurprisingly defeats Gamou, Gentaro's final, radical gesture to his adversary is to extend his hand. Gamou takes it, and Gentaro's paramount enemy becomes his final friend.

In my mind, even more important is the appearance of the show's supplementary hero, Kamen Rider Meteor. Secretly a transfer student to Amanogawa High, Sakuta Ryusei (Yoshizawa Ryo), Ryusei/Meteor infiltrates the club at the behest of a secret benefactor. Gentaro senses Ryusei's lack of honesty and assures the boy that he can confide in him. In episodes thirty and thirty-one, Ryusei accepts Gentaro's offer. Making a pact with the Aries Horoscopes so that he may save his comatose friend, Ryusei agrees to defeat Fourze. Ryusei succeeds but is forcefully changed back to his human form upon delivering the fatal blow. The forced transformation reveals the true identity of Kamen Rider Meteor to the club. Having heard his explanation, Gentaro addresses Ryusei, his killer. But even in his dying moments, Gentaro expresses his content at being able to truly befriend the other boy: "Your true heart. Your true feelings, I accept them. I'm so happy. Even though it

turned out to be your desire to kill." These are the terms of Gentaro's friendship. The boy's friendship is not couched in terms where the final stakes are the sovereign self, gained through one's mastery of the Other. Instead, friendship is the only true concern, even if it requires the death of the Self.

CONCLUSION

In the first episode of *Kamen Rider Fourze*, Gentaro attempts to acclimate himself to his new school. At lunch, he sits at a "wrong table" in the cafeteria. Yuki immediately chastises him for the action and warns him of the possible consequences. She exclaims, "The seating's dependent on the groups. Look." The subsequent shots feature different groups – modular, homogeneous, easily categorized, and knowable clusters of "delinquents," "studyholics," "goof-offs," "*otaku*," and "musclemen." To this, Gentaro exclaims, "Are you an idiot? I've never heard of such a thing!" Upon finding Gentaro in her seat, the "Queen" of the school and future Chairman of the Kamen Rider Club, Kazashiro Miu (Sakata Rikako) calls Gentaro "*torashi*" or "trash." Miu's boyfriend and fellow future Kamen Rider Club member Daimonji Shun (Justin Tomimori) chimes in, calling Gentaro *gomi* (garbage). Gentaro indignantly blurts out, "Garbage? That isn't funny, I'm trash!" Gentaro's idiotic misunderstanding is commendable, as is his petulant refusal of not only the social law, but also the logic and common sense that undergirds it. In addition to its function as a critique of the way of things, his gesture is also the audaciousness to demand an alternative. It is the willingness to push through trauma and to turn away from *ressentiment*, to see the possibility of a different way of being. It is the admirable ability to have the courage to defiantly say without embarrassment, "I'm trash!"

Manifest in Gentaro's bold proclamation that he is simultaneously trash but also the person to befriend everything in the galaxy, *Kamen Rider Fourze* represents a radical break in the postwar *ressentiment* in the Japanese *tokustasu* tradition. *Fourze* does not merely reject the history of atomic trauma in Japanese science fiction. Instead it fully engages it along with a reconsideration of the dominant understanding of technology, a proposition regarding posthuman considerations of subjectivity, and rigorous politics of friendship. Unfortunately, both *Kamen Rider* series following *Fourze* and other *tokusatsu* franchises

such as *Super Sentai* (1975-) have not followed in *Fourze's* precedent, instead falling back into fantastical representations of vengeful wish fulfillment. Regardless, the larger trends in Japanese mass culture do not annul what *Kamen Rider Fourze* represents. Although we have yet to observe a shift in the dominant, hegemonic considerations of human subjectivity, not only in *tokusatsu*, but also in the global public imaginary, *Kamen Rider Fourze* marks an important moment that demonstrates that such a moment is not outside the realm of possibility.

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[51]. The *Kamen Rider* franchise is categorized into two periods of production, correlating to the reigning emperor. The first Shōwa period of production dates from 1971 to 1989 while the current Heisei period began in 2000. The Heisei *Kamen Rider* series began implementing CGI with *Kamen Rider Kuuga* (2000-2001).

[52]. Some *tokusatsu* is released internationally through *Super Sentai* footage of Super Sentai that Disney-Saban purchases for its *Power Rangers* (1993-ongoing) franchise and select DVD releases. Otherwise, the international market for *tokusatsu* is small enough that fan groups can release the series with little or no intervention from Toei and Bandai.

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