ANIME AS SOCIAL IMAGINATION:

MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENACTIVE COGNITION IN *CODE GEASS* AND *PENGUINDRUM*

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INTRODUCTION

In episode 11 of *Code Geass*: *Lelouch of the Rebellion*, the anti-hero Lelouch, disguised as his masked alter-ego Zero, flees a battle between his "Black Knights" revolutionary group and the ruling Britannian forces.[i] Zero is cornered by Lelouch's friend/rival Suzaku, a Britannian soldier piloting a "Knightmare Frame" *mecha* (giant robot vehicle.) Just before Lelouch's identity is exposed, his beautiful accomplice CC appears and touches Suzaku's Knightmare to connect to his mind. Her "shock image" immerses Suzaku in a flood of information that the viewer sees as a high-speed montage of images rendered in various styles (Figure 1). Lelouch/Zero touches CC and the three are temporarily immobilized in the flow of media and minds. With Suzaku in shock, Lelouch and CC manage to break away and escape.

Figure 1

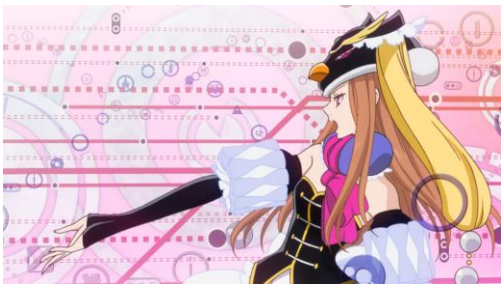

Figure 2

In the first episode of *Penguindrum*, the Takakura siblings are in their dilapidated living room after the sister Himari's miraculous resurrection from a fatal illness, thanks to a mysterious penguin-shaped hat.[ii] As her brothers Kanba and Shōma talk, the hat possesses Himari and shouts "survival strategy!"

The scene cuts to a hyperdimensional space rendered in contrasting animation styles and decorative flourishes (Figure 2). The Himari-being strides imperiously down a flight of floating stairs to berate the bewildered boys, telling them that to keep their sister alive they must find a destiny-changing item called the penguindrum. After Shōma is dropped down a shaft and Kanba stabbed in the chest, the three return to reality.

Anime regularly treats us to such scenes, wherein extraordinary experiences happen to characters and viewers alike via complex arrangements of space, texture, and reference. These fantastical and often ludicrous imaginative situations, as well as the relationships to mediation they evoke, feed more or less smoothly back into the social narratives within which they/we are immersed. The more anime one watches, the more recognizable, coherent, and natural these impossible vistas and their real-world connections become. Similar dynamics appear across genres and styles. *Code Geass* is a masculinist epic in the *mecha* genre that depicts a young protagonist orchestrating a revolution against a global empire. *Penguindrum* is an intimate story of youth relationships that features director Ikuhara Kunihiko's idiosyncratic use of motifs from *shōjo* or girls' manga/anime genres. Their different stories and tonalities nonetheless share underlying methods. The protagonists' quests to change the world in the two series closely engage with the politics of 21st century Japan through direct and sometimes controversial references to real-world terrorism, nationalist revival, and mental illness. Their topical narratives nonetheless hinge on scenes like the two above. These dense, hybrid situations, impossible in consensus reality, become coherent experiences through anime's audiovisual and genre cues, and are crucial stages in the unfolding of the fantasy of changing the world on a grand scale. This essay will explore these patterns of speculative experience—these processes of imagination—that constitute anime's social cognition.

The essay aims to contribute to a growing branch of media theory and philosophy that develops anime's potential for new conceptual frameworks within the hypermediated age. Anime has helped scholars from different perspectives articulate novel theories of media ontology and subjectivity that challenge the dominant paradigms of individualism and representationalism. Thomas Lamarre explicates anime's moving images as machines for "thinking technology" beyond the boundaries of the

modern subject.[iii] Ueno Toshiya has explored questions of machinic being via Oshii Mamoru's anime works.[iv] Deborah Levitt also draws on Oshii to conceptualize the non-representational and an-ontological nature of contemporary animated media environments.[v] Taking a different approach, Sandra Annett's intervention through Merleau-Pontian phenomenology shows how animated images evoke novel sensations of embodiment.[vi] Additionally, Stevie Suan has reworked Azuma Hiroki's semiotic "database" theory of anime/manga within performance theory to demonstrate how anime creates recognizability through citational cues, resulting in a differential selfhood that mirrors the networked terrain of contemporary identity.[vii] This diversity of approaches illustrates how anime can coordinate with different strains of philosophical thought towards the shared project of refiguring our engagements with the contemporary world.

While previous studies have focused on anime as mediation, it is important to remember that anime is also a form of *fiction*. Its audiovisual patterns cohere within the context of cognitive acts through which both creators and spectators enter into the experiential coordinates of an unfolding imaginary situation. As media form and as fiction, anime enacts interrelated processes of social imagination that present experiential possibilities for thinking, moving, and acting within contemporary lifeworlds. These engage with real-world social conditions, not by presenting critical portrayals for reflective thought, but by bringing forth immersive speculative experiences that allow for otherwise impossible renegotiations of selves and environments. The view of imagination put forth here is informed by newer cognitive science paradigms that merge concepts from phenomenology and ecological psychology to theorize mind and cognition as embodied, extended, and embedded dynamical processes through which organisms and environments mutually enact each other.[viii] Enactive imagination is virtual "embodied doing" as an "active engagement with possibilities.[ix] Examining such enactments will enrich the media-oriented discourses on anime by interrogating the often taken-for-granted role of imagination and fiction within these forms, and within media environments more broadly.

The essay proceeds through a comparative analysis of *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum,* treating them as different manifestations of an underlying process and describing how mediation and imagination enact their versions of the contemporary world. The two series' fantasies of individual action changing

the world cohere through enactive processes of imagination on three levels. The first process comprises the reality effects of anime's media form. The techniques that construct the anime work itself are also techniques of imagination, an array of technical and cultural "strategies and devices" through which non-present entities and situations become "perceivable and experienceable."[x] Anime uniquely exploits fiction as an intersubjective and technologically mediated practice of imagination that transects creators, works, and viewers. The second process is anime's negotiation of relations between mediation and experience. This section of the essay applies Lamarre's notion of infrastructural complexes to explain how the two series enact relationships to media environments that straddle different models of media subjectivity while maintaining a coordinative role for situated embodiment. Examining this dynamic reveals how the different media affects identified by previous scholarship, along with their attendant models of subjectivity, interact with fictional immersion and its forms of agency, without defaulting to the old paradigm of the rational individualist subject. The third process is that of "changing the world" itself, in other words, the ways in which anime contributes to collective projects of imagining new social relations and collective formations. *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum* present both intentional and unintentional possibilities within their historical moment through their multilayered and intersubjective processes of enactive imagination. Analyzing the virtual actions each series takes can help connect innovations in media philosophy with context-specific cultural criticism. As I will describe, fictions like *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum* encourage a kind of critical work beyond representationalism that can more actively and flexibly coordinate the enjoyments of popular fiction with serious historical and political contexts. Together, imaginative processes reveal new opportunities for coordinating anime's modes of media-thinking with ongoing projects in media philosophy, aesthetics, and politics.

ENACTMENT: TECHNIQUES OF IMAGINATION

Code Geass depicts an alternative timeline where the world is ruled by the Holy Britannian Empire, a Rococo-esque analogue for global US dominance. Japan has been conquered by Britannia and turned into a colony called Area 11. Lelouch is an exiled Britannian prince living in Area 11; his friend Suzaku, son of the last Japanese prime minister, has joined the Britannian military. The immortal witch CC gives

Lelouch a power called "Geass" (*giasu,* from the "geis" of Celtic mythology) that allows him to control minds. Lelouch strategically uses his power to manipulate Japanese resistance factions into following him. Assuming the alter ego Zero, he forms a paramilitary group whose visual style is reminiscent of *super sentai* (masked superhero teams) tv programs. Their rebellion triggers a cascade of geopolitical realignments and pits Suzaku and Lelouch against each other through countless climaxes, betrayals, and plot twists. The Geass is revealed to be part of a plan by the tyrannical emperor, Lelouch's father, to dissolve all minds into a collective unconscious. After foiling and unseating his father, Lelouch becomes world dictator, only to orchestrate his own assassination by Suzaku, thus achieving world peace.

In *Penguindrum*, the Takakura siblings live an impoverished but happy life in Tokyo until Himari falls ill. After the hyperdimensional encounter, Kanba and Shōma search for the penguindrum, which is a magical diary owned by a disturbed girl named Ringo. The series develops the bonds between them and numerous side characters, who are all connected by magical lines of fate and interlinked psychological trauma. It is revealed that the Takakuras' absent parents were leaders of a terrorist organization who tried to "cleanse the world" with a subway attack. The Takakura siblings are not actually blood-related, but a makeshift family assembled from the fallout of the incident. Ringo's older sister Momoka, the original owner of the fate-altering diary, mitigated the attack's effects at the cost of her life. Momoka's spirit remains in the world, struggling against a vengeful ghost connected to the Takakuras' parents. Frustrated by repeated failures, Kanba tries to follow his adoptive parents' strategy of changing the world through terrorism but is convinced by Shōma to instead "return to the place of fate" and erase their existences, thus resetting the world and keeping Himari and Ringo safe.

Both *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum* are "original anime" (not based on another medium) and so exemplify what Stevie Suan calls the "anime-esque" and its approach to fiction.[xi] As the summaries indicate, each series combines dense layers of hyperbolic anime tropes with pointed references to real-world issues. First airing in 2006, *Code Geass* visualizes Japan's role as an American proxy, a longstanding issue reignited by the US-led Iraq War.[xii] Airing in 2011, *Penguindrum* reinterrogates the social atomization in Japan that began in the mid-1990s, including the legacy of the Aum Shinrikyo

doomsday cult's attack on the Tokyo subway in 1995.[xiii] The standard method of analyzing the two series' social engagements would be to examine how accurately they depict these conditions or their underlying psychological and ideological regimes. Such interpretations rely on a representationalist mode of thinking; the fiction has value insofar as it represents and comments on an external "real" condition that is its ultimate referent. Anime's more productive cognitive work becomes visible when we reverse this relationship, when we see how the real-world references function alongside the fantastical cliches as materials for anime's techniques of imagination to enact the immersive experiences of the fiction.

"Imagination" here describes cognitive processes of making absent entities or situations experientially present. This view of imagination as process rejects the traditional image of "the imagination" as an internal faculty of a detached and unified mind. It is informed by enactivist and related cognitive theories that treat mentality as processes of "dynamic coupling and coordination…distributed across brain-body-environment."[xiv] Thinking and consciousness are sense-making acts that negotiate organisms' embodied capacities for action and embeddedness in material and intersubjective environments. Imaginative processes are "enactive" in that they bring forth virtual experiences as part of engagements with shifting domains of sense-making. They are often materially "extended" processes, wherein speculative experience is anchored in and guided by external material objects.[xv] As sets of mimetic techniques that model vicarious actions, feelings, situations, encounters, etc., fictions can be seen as material extensions of imagination. In his pioneering enactivist account of fiction, José Medina demonstrates how fictions represent real-world conditions by first enacting somatic and situational "patterns of interaction;" these fictional experiences simulate "agential perspectives" within a speculative environment.[xvi] The mixture of real-world references, material imaging techniques, and genre cues through which these agential perspectives cohere constitute the first process of anime as social imagination.

As Deborah Levitt explains, animation does not directly invoke the reality effect of photographic cinema.[xvii] Consequently, anime constructs its agential perspectives through an array of imaging techniques documented in previous studies. The primary technique is that of the "multiplanar image"

described by Lamarre.[xviii] Anime is composed of multiple flat image layers composited together, whose relative movements develop spatiality either by mimicking "cinematic" movement into depth or by laterally sliding the layers over each other in "animetic" movement, directing processes of perception toward different spatial relations.[xix] Sandra Annett details how negotiations of animetic and cinematic movement combine with character depiction to signal varied sensations of movement and embodiment.[xx] Different textures, image-generation methods, shapes, and other features of animation are mobilized to simulate contact points between bodies and worlds.[xxi]

Figure 3

Figure 4

Code Geass and *Penguindrum* integrate evolving digital techniques into classical anime composition. Both series deploy a similar strategy, where the characters' bodies and lifeworlds are rendered in basic cel-style (the look and feel of traditional hand-drawn animation) with layered digital effects and other textures introducing complexity and deviation. In *Penguindrum*, the hyperdimensional "survival strategy" space is composed of saturated color planes and receding layers of digitally rendered shapes and design motifs. The cel-style body designs and movements of the characters ground the spatial relations, offering embodied perspectives on the otherwise chaotic space. The brothers inhabit the space awkwardly via comical poses of humiliation and jerkily animated panic (Figure 3). These stylized reactions exemplify what Suan describes as anime's "citationality."[xxii] Character designs, facial expressions and poses, genre situations, and plot lines take shape through references to previous "performances" of these elements. Anime works achieve recognizability by citing previous versions while introducing small variations, creating a cohesive yet dynamic "anime-esque" system.

As Azuma Hiroki famously conceptualized, this "database" of citable elements incorporates not only anime but also manga, video games, and other related nodes in a transmedia network.[xxiii] In fact, anime-esque citationality goes even further, re-performing live-action cinema, news, scenic views, historical moments or persons, and more. With every depicted element cited in anime-esque form and composited into layers, anime is adept at remediating and merging other image techniques. We see this clearly in the shock image scene of *Code Geass*. The flood of information comprises rapid citations of other media: black and white mockups of 20th century war footage (Figure 4), CG-rendered extra-planetary spaces, memories of CC's past in a Europe-like setting, Tibetan mandalas, and homages to 1990s horror films. The scene enacts an encounter with complexity by moving these recognizable sources in quick succession, teasing referential faculties before moving on. As Azuma intuits, semiotic decoding works to structure anime fictions. However, this decoding also feeds into the virtual sensations of embodiment. In *Penguindrum*, Himari's transformation is an ironic re-performance of the *henshin* or transformation scenes of *Sailor Moon* and other magical girl series, the recognition of which conjures their genre-coded states of physical and sexual metamorphosis. Similarly, the flow of remediations in *Code Geass* evokes divergent geographical, temporal, and cultural scales that the viewer must negotiate quickly, while closeups of characters' eyes and hands ground the flow in embodied perspective, precisely by re-performing classic anime reaction poses. Citation in anime is not merely signification but the mobilization of spatiality, motion, and affect within the context of an imagined situation.

Figure 5

Levitt notes that animation represents "the real" by systemizing different codes of realism within its own methods of figuration.[xxiv] In anime, real-world contexts are integrated into the hybrid compositing

as citations. *Code Geass* Director Taniguchi Gorō has described his preference for inserting symbols and references indeterminately, so as to let viewers "imagine various things."[xxv] In *Code Geass*, little kernels of content appear briefly, pique a sense of politics, then dissolve back into the flow. A nationalistic image of strip-mined Mount Fuji is cut short as Lelouch denounces nationalist characters' "old strategies." A stereotypically European nobleman suddenly spouts talking points of Japanese right-wingers, shifting the onus from western powers to Japanese racism. Analogously, Ikuhara espouses an open-ended creation process, privileging stylized and decontextualized scenes that the viewer "can fill in with imagination."[xxvi] A key example in *Penguindrum* is the "train of fate," a hallucinogenic subway car layered with red circles containing the number 95, the year of the Aum subway attack (Figure 5). Political ideologies and social crises appear as elements within open-ended compositions that privilege the resonance of the fictional enactment rather than the correlation to sustained critiques of real conditions. The Tokyo subway attack, the magical-girl "survival strategy," the Iraq War, and the remediated "shock images" all figure equally as materials for anime's techniques of imagination.

The directors' comments illustrate how anime's layered composition and citationality exploits imaginative "cocreation:" the process by which viewers' spatial, temporal, and affective "mental models" of the fictional situation fill in the gaps between the audiovisual cues.[xxvii] Anime leans on and makes visible this undergirding aspect of fiction that is often obscured by legacies of photographic indexicality: a technically mediated process of imagination geared to enact immersive speculative situations and possible agential perspectives within them. *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum* certainly do contain intentional themes and representations. They are indeed socially engaged; they want to imagine "changing the world" and moving beyond alienating conditions. However, they do so not by critically representing, but by combining recognizable pieces of fictional and non-fictional experience into new possible environments for living and acting. Anime centers this process of thinking *through* situations rather than thinking *about* them. Anime's unique ability to process the complex relationships between mediation and perception within late capitalism defines its version of this second process of social imagination. Building on Lamarre's theory of media infrastructure complexes, the next section will explore *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum's* different strategies for thinking through their hypermediated

lifeworlds.

NAVIGATION: POSITIONALITY AND PLATFORMATIVITY

In *The Anime Ecology*, Lamarre builds a genealogy of media "infrastructure complexes," diagramming how different infrastructural relations of media distribution have structured subjective and social formations.[xxviii] Lamarre highlights how anime provides "metamodels" of infrastructure complexes and reveals tensions within them.[xxix] Both *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum* are situated in the media environment of the early 21st century, which saw an increase in global visibility via expansion of broadcast systems, along with the rise of network communication via the internet and mobile phones. Lamarre characterizes this infrastructure complex as tensions between "big screen" and "small screen" ecologies, with the latter complicating the dominance of the former.[xxx] The fantasy of changing the world in the two fictions thus entails a process of imagining modes of agency within this context. Though their orientations and goals differ, their similar methodology combines anime techniques of imagination into rhythms of speculative experience within the neoliberal infrastructure complex, modeling and coordinating between different agential perspectives and strategies of comportment.

The immediate experiential relation to media infrastructures is the "embodied positionality" of a phenomenal subject, that is, the perspective of a lived body embedded in a physical and intersubjective environment.[xxxi] Here, media screens and signals are distinct from the perceiving body but impinge on it, crowding the senses with disorienting noise but also solicitations of meaning. *Penguindrum*'s stylized aesthetics enacts experiences of navigating this cacophonous space. The cel-style characters and backgrounds form the base world of Tokyo, but these are impacted with layers of symbols: stick-figure pedestrians, surfaces covered with mysterious logos, *mise en abyme* advertisements. Every scene contains decorative flourishes that strangely work themselves into the diegesis, the most prevalent being the caricatured penguins following each Takakura sibling, serving as comic reflections of their mental states while also helping within the plot. Conversely, a repeating transition scene shows a white digital void populated by floating signs for Tokyo subway stations. Sounds of acceleration and deceleration add haptic cues to the symbolic space. There is a kind of semiotic decoding solicited by the layered

images and citations; trying (and failing) to understand where everything fits mobilizes cognitive acts of symbol-processing, referencing, and correlating. However, these functions arise within and in reference to the enacted position of a concerned being navigating its environment.

Figure 6

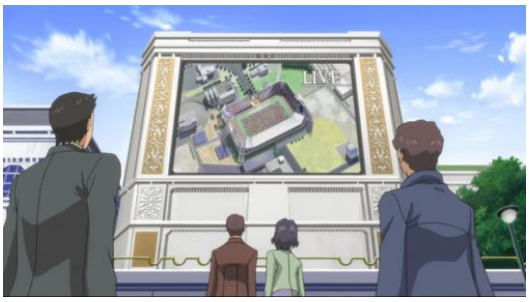

Figure 7

In Levitt's reading of Oshii, multitextured animated spaces visualize the ungrounded nature of modern perception.[xxxii] However, the experience here is closer to Annett's phenomenological "flesh of animation," where the different textures weave into a "tissue" of encounters and movements within a world.[xxxiii] *Penguindrum*'s agential perspectives navigate via the interpersonal. Characters feel their way through hypermediated Tokyo as they pursue their goals and each other in tortuous journeys toward mutual understanding. One early scene has the brothers tailing Ringo, who is trying to photograph a rare swallow to impress another character she is stalking. They lose her in a lingerie shop, rendered through 3DCG helixes of underwear, Victorian decoration, and stereotypical erotic noises, which cue the well-rehearsed tropes of boyish embarrassment. The scene cuts through a decontextualized emergency exit symbol to the brothers finding Ringo traversing a building ledge, conveniently circled for the viewer amid stick-figure crowds (Figure 6). Scenes like this cut paths through signals and affective cues towards new relationships to space, actions, and others within the fictional world, gradually affording the broader picture of the interrelated traumas and supernatural lines of fate that bind characters together.

Code Geass enacts varied moments of positionality to unfold its political drama. Britannia exerts power through "big screen" ecologies, often visualized as skyscraper-sized screens dominating symbolic locales (Figure 7). These orient viewers to the global conflict by fixing them in the limited

position of an average citizen relying on the dominant narratives of broadcast news. Another subtle but instructive example occurs when a new Britannian initiative is shown on a poster, which reperforms the codes of anime-esque public campaign posters seen in actual Japan. A shadow on the wall incorporates our viewing position; we read the poster's semiotic codes as part of an experience of seeing it on the street. In these moments, we are vulnerable inhabitants struggling to piece together the grand events through limited cues. In contrast, Lelouch relies on "small screens" – mobile phones and computers – to move his plot and *Code Geass*'s plot forward, correlating information and managing battle plans in different locations. The *mecha* themselves are figured as mobile consoles operated by keyboard strokes. Moving between small screens enables the fiction of a diverse political movement unfolding in front of Lelouch through the simultaneity of a globalized media environment. Other scenes enact more physical viewing, such as when characters walk through museums or galleries lined with resonant stock images displaying historical context. These varied acts of looking model a strategy of using available materials to actively sort through the political mediascape in search of greater clarity and opportunities for resistance.

As Lamarre emphasizes, infrastructure complexes also connect elements on a deeper plane of immanence.[xxxiv] He highlights moments that afford experiences of the "stuff of blink," the fabric of media-material connections between living and nonliving beings that transects subjective and social formations.[xxxv] For Lamarre, anime's productivity is to model the "platformativity of the world," that is, to visualize radical potentials for fluid identity performance within media platforms.[xxxvi] Levitt's and Ueno's posthumanist ontologies develop analogous concepts.[xxxvii] For these thinkers, anime's power lies in deterritorializing the individualist subject. *Code Geass* models immanent connectivity through the Geass power, which allows Lelouch to give a one-time command to another person. This at first caters to adolescent delusions of grandeur, but the shock image scene, which shows the Geass effect induced by CC, reveals that this connective power does not belong only to Lelouch. Rather, he participates in it, along with other characters, and also begins to lose control of it, leading to unexpected effects. The shock image scene breaks the fiction out of a diegetic impasse – the potential revelation of Lelouch's identity – and the thematic impasse of Lelouch and Suzaku's ideological rivalry. Invocations

of the Geass power catalyze similar realignments throughout the series, pushing the characters' plans and the diegetic scale forward from starting situation in occupied Japan to world-altering conflict. Framed within *mecha* genre conceits, these glimpses of immanent connectivity allow *Code Geass* to see interpersonal and sociopolitical relations as temporary, contingent formations that are malleable to projects of change.

Similarly, the survival strategy scene appears when *Penguindrum*'s characters face some impasse. Their mundane cel-style world suddenly cuts to the digital space, with the brothers and later Ringo undergoing the disorienting magical change scene as an induction to new plot twists. In a tragic moment when Shōma confesses to Ringo that his parents are responsible for her sister's death, the Himari-being (actually Momoka's spirit) appears and announces "this is boring" before transporting them. The series abruptly deposits characters in numerous virtual spaces where narrative connections are exposed and psychological dilemmas are unfolded through paper doll theater, musical notation over oil paintings, public signage, and other textures. Recurring spaces include the train of fate and the "child broiler," a half-mental half-real prison where "unwanted children go to disappear," rendered as a massive factory populated with seated stick figures. In *Penguindrum, "*infra-individual" connectivity is chaotically distributed throughout the series, reconfiguring transindividual relations in stages as the series builds toward the climax aboard the train of fate.[xxxviii]

Platformative scenes afford experiences of immersion within media flow and deploy them as catalysts for psychological or social transformation. Importantly, the chaotic editing and unreal CG revolve around the base animetic layer of characters' bodies, gazes, touches, and movements, which ground the experience via what Annett calls animation's "evocation" of embodied perspectives.[xxxix] The glimpses of the signaletic plane thus come to characters and viewers as part of a speculative situation, the ambient affective force rendered as a visible component of the conscious experience in/of the fiction. Moreover, these sensations are evoked through anime-esque and other citations presumed to be recognizable to viewers. Techniques of imagination make platformativity actionable, enabling the fictions to enact their impossible trajectories while also making explorations of identity and intersubjectivity through media play more available to the imaginations of potential viewers.

Moreover, the moments of media-immanence inevitably return to embodied positionality. CC and Lelouch return to the battlefield; the Takakuras are dropped back into Tokyo. Enactments of platformativity trigger a reordering of the macro-situation by returning to situated contexts. Shifting between the different perspectives enables the characters within the fictional world and the imaginative process of the fiction itself to move. In one instructive flashback scene in *Penguindrum*, Himari is trapped in the child broiler. We see Shōma realize something and set off. The urban landscape opens up through sliding planes of animetic composition, unfolding to a still image of a factory reminiscent of a children's book illustration. The scene cuts to the transindividual void of the child broiler and Himari's melodramatic rescue, then back. This rhythm of departure and return makes the impossible trajectory perceivable and experienceable. Similarly, the dense symbols of *Penguindrum* or the intermedia references of *Code Geass* gain salience because the semiotic acts they trigger are mobilized within situated speculative experiences. Embodied positionality plays something like a coordinating role in how these fictions process media infrastructures. The site of lived bodies and subjective experience is certainly not the "position of mastery" of sovereign rationality.[xl] It is simply the locus for "dynamic coupling," where the cognitive processes of the living organism interface uniquely with processes in the wider environment.[xli] In fiction, therefore, it is where myriad affects and disparate cognitive flows can be temporarily turned into imaginative situations for thinking through.

Code Geass and *Penguindrum* rehearse possibilities for navigating media infrastructures as inhabitable domains. They make present the ambient knowledge that there are indeed ways of coordinating the different experiential relations to media environments, linking a physical journey to a screen image or applying a platformative experience in a face-to-face encounter. Through these navigations, their techniques of imagination continuously enact imaginary domains where extant entities within media infrastructures are arranged differently. Immersing ourselves in them inevitably feeds into a collective questioning of reality, which always contains the prospect of coordinating these shared speculations into real possibilities. The final section will explore this third process of anime as social imagination, where the politically active project of "changing the world" takes shape.

SOCIAL IMAGINATION: POSSIBILITY AND LIMITATION

Citationality assumes a shared orientation toward not only recognizing what certain images or affective cues are, but also recognizing them as potentially comprising a situation. They are not simply a "database" but an "environment of imagination," as Azuma decides.[xlii] Anime's techniques utilize this mutuality to move their characters along and coalesce amorphous forces into coherent and actionable forms. They simultaneously draw on and constitute a "domain of participatory sense-making," a shared space for thinking through the world and its possibilities in their terms.[xliii] Anime's domain of technologically mediated social imagination makes impossible situations experienceable by interweaving its particular codes and cues with the perceptions, iconographies, and discourses of broader infrastructural contexts. In doing so, it presents possibilities that contort or surpass governing rationales in ways unavailable to more realist media forms, often unintentionally.

In *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum,* the real-world dynamics of 21st century neoliberalism are composited into the progress of speculative situations that articulate the impossible trajectory of individuals changing the world. As a result, they continuously reimagine social relations, actions, and collectives. Some of these imaginings are thematically sustained as desired changes; others are enacted as stepping stones along the way. Destabilized institutions and alternative formations pop in and out of view, each carrying a possibility of coordination with real-world projects of political imagination. These possibilities are organized within the genre performances of each series, which simultaneously enable and limit what they can imagine.

Lamarre's ecological model of infra-individual flows is part of a philosophical project of disrupting dominant discourses and encouraging non-normative patterns of identity formation and belonging. The fictions he discusses in *The Anime Ecology* articulate this potential through their modeling of platformative moments.[xliv] *Penguindrum* aligns with this project in its depiction of the family as a social formation. The characters' various neuroses and vulnerabilities all stem from their original families. The legacy of the Takakura parents' terror attack, and by extension the real-world legacy of Aum, are the ugly climax of a network of traumas caused by the normative ideal of the Japanese family and its incompatibility with contemporary Japan.[xlv] The most sustained modeling of these problems is Ringo's

story. Emotionally abandoned by her divorced parents after Momoka's death, Ringo has created an elaborate set of rituals based on idealizing family, marriage, and childbirth, which have made her a stalker in the first part of the series. The traditional family is a "cruel optimism," a formalized aspiration that no longer has correlations in reality and therefore becomes pathology.[xlvi] In *Penguindrum,* healing is achieved by recognizing or constructing alternative forms of kinship.

Platformative encounters enable new kinds of intimacy by reconfiguring previous relations and opening self-identity to new possibilities. In the first survival strategy scene, the configuration of demure sister and protective brothers is scrambled as the Himari-being humiliates them. Kanba is even penetrated by her in a silhouette that joins their two forms. Their path to changing the world begins with internal re-compositing, which gradually brings alternative kinships into view. The non-blood-related Takakuras are confirmed as a "true" family bound by fate. Ringo, sister of a terror victim, becomes integrated with the Takakuras, the children of terrorists. These relations, disallowed by normative family regimes, are made perceivable, plausible, even natural because the characters and the fiction move flexibly through different experiential relations to their environments.

Reinventing the family is an overt theme within *Penguindrum*'s pursuit of change. However, the speculative situations through which that pursuit is enacted produce an interesting side effect that has potential for more fruitful coordination with real-world politics. It consists of reimagining the sites where kinship, intimacy, or intersubjective exploration can happen. In line with traditional ideas of "home," the series romanticizes the Takakuras' meager but cozy house as the place of deep emotional ties. In practice, however, deep moments happen throughout the real and virtual nodes of the cityscape: on streets, in parks, on ledges, within mysterious underground facilities. As described, platformative scenes of psychic exploration are depicted as connecting to physical urban locations. Almost accidentally, *Penguindrum* envisions the entire city as "home," an intimate space for creating bonds and changing the course of mutual fates. It presents possibilities for inhabiting urban spaces in ways that dissolve public/private boundaries and for nurturing social bonds, collectives, and movements that cannot rely on such divisions.

Code Geass intends the geopolitical dimensions of neoliberal infrastructures, specifically, the early

2000s world order of the US-led "war on terror" and Japan's complicity within it.[xlvii] The series' imagination of a subjugated Japan is not merely reveling in old wounds but reenacting the hegemonic forces of the era in visceral form. Set firmly within the tropes of male-targeted genres, *Code Geass* does not use its platformative moments to reimagine individual identity. While variously shamed and foiled, Lelouch remains an idealized male antihero. Lelouch and Suzaku's debating versions of justice – violent resistance versus working within the system – also fix the series' themes of social change as the actions of individual cis-hetero male subjects. However, dismissing the series as a masculinist power fantasy would miss the earnest practices of visuality described above, the methodologies of resistance they suggest to contemporary audiences, and finally, the frenzied reinventions of national sovereignty the series enacts on the path of Lelouch's rebellion.

Code Geass's navigation of its media environment works to perceive how consent is manufactured through "big screen" ecologies of broadcast media. In doing so, it explores ways of working against these forces. Lelouch and comrades fight with tools besides superpowers and *mecha*. Aided by small-screen networks, his group disrupts Britannian hegemony by engineering public spectacles that turn mass media against itself, or recording and disseminating footage of atrocities like guerilla journalists. While far less likely now, this fantasy of small-screen activism captures the possibilities of early 21st century infrastructure complexes and their inaugural hope that tech-savvy and culturally literate individuals might use the new media tools to self-organize, disrupt the mass-media consensus, and mobilize other dissatisfied individuals.

In *Code Geass* too, interesting imagined changes work below these overt themes, within the process of the enactments themselves. The series follows *mecha* narrative logic of escalation; the conflict gains in scope with the development of stronger and flashier robots, unfolding onto wider battlefields with greater stakes. *Code Geass* innovates by mixing political identity into that escalation. Through melodramatic plot twists, allegiances change inside and outside Japan, often in a single episode. The changes are visualized through a succession of remediated world maps. Each map appears for just long enough to act as a cue that geopolitical composition has changed and to stimulate a moment of speculation. Geopolitical alignments are shown as solvent entities within an intensifying cascade,

offering viewers exhilaration and mental stimulation by keeping them in constant expectation. *Geass's* world is a surge of change in which any stable geopolitical formation is impossible.

Figure 8

The excitement of changing circumstances plays with notions of collective sovereignty as "Japan" is continuously reimagined: as a city-state when the Black Knights aim to claim Tokyo; as a Hong Kong-like "special administrative zone;" as a multicultural "United States of Japan;" as a fantastical Japanese diaspora when a million residents emigrate wearing Lelouch's Zero costume, and as a mobile island fortress. By the middle of the second season, collectives agglomerate on the supranational scale, such as the "United Federation of Nations" shown in Figure 8. Each state exists as a short thought experiment, a flash of coherence within the process of geopolitical imagination. The real-world interrogation of national identity becomes a site for delineating possible rearrangements of political sovereignty, begging questions of which might be possible in actuality, and which might afford better experiential relations. Consciously or not, *Code Geass* rehearses the democratic refusal of closure through which a collective can question its core assumptions.

However, there are of course imaginative limits, where potentially productive imaginings come to impasse or regress due to internal dynamics. *Code Geass* keeps Lelouch and other culturally coded images of individual masculinity safe from its creative restructurings of world order. Consequently, the experiments with sovereignty must make way for Lelouch's ascension and martyrdom. The patriarchal core of nationhood remains, limiting new possible formations. In *Penguindrum*, the same techniques

that expose the formalized idealism of family structure render demands for structural change as terroristic obsession. *Penguindrum* nods at systemic conditions for psychological alienation, but naturalizes them as the harsh background of life, falling into the "no alternative" of neoliberal consensus. Imaginative limits stem from genre constraints as much as from ideological attachments. *Penguindrum* can unmake patterns of psychosexual development and envision urban care networks because its focus on youth relationships confines these changes to the intimate sphere. *Code Geass*'s epic *mecha* conflict can map strategies of media jamming and experiment with versions of collective sovereignty, but must enclose these within parameters of male heroes. Such comparisons arise when we see the two fictions as modulations of the same processes.

CONCLUSION: COORDINATION

This essay has outlined how anime enacts processes of social imagination on multiple levels: first, as fictional situations enacted through shared techniques of imagination; second, as possible experiential relations and agential perspectives within media infrastructures; third, as contributions to the collective practice of reimagining social orders. The three processes arise from and refer to our embeddedness within complex and dynamic contexts, but also from our embodied capacities and desires to do things within them. Anime as social imagination opens onto new possibilities for living and acting in contemporary environments, perhaps even changing them, in ways that other thought processes cannot. Recognizing this will allow philosophies of media as well as activist cultural criticism to integrate new concepts and address new potentials connected to imagination and fictional experience.

Exploring anime's imaginative processes highlights the productive copresence of different levels of media subjectivity within fiction. Anime coordinates multiple possible experiential relations to media infrastructures and their lived effects. I have stressed enactivism's neo-phenomenological perspective here to emphasize the non-epiphenomenal role of embodied, positional experience, not as the ultimate ground of media subjectivity but as the provisional site of imaginative enactments, where disparate affects and macroscopic structures become recognizable, shareable, and actionable. Lamarre's ecological model, Azuma's significative model, and others are equally present and equally fundamental

to *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum*'s presentations of possibility. Anime fictions appear to move between models of media subjectivity as they navigate infrastructures, which can open new opportunities for hybrid models. It also hints at the broader utility of a non-individualist, enactive concept of imagination within media theory. This mode of cognition, located somewhere between prepersonal affect and linguistic consciousness and moving differently to either, can uncover more possibilities for agency within the "attention-reason complex" of media infrastructures.[xlviii]

This relates to the political question of how to mobilize anime's speculations within the broader collective imagination of alternative social orders. Until recently, the measure of a fiction's political value has been whether it accurately represents the grievances and goals of an extant project of sociocultural liberation. As we have seen, anime like *Code Geass* and *Penguindrum* do not graft neatly into this representationalist framework. As Lamarre's work illustrates, anime's metamodels are not comments on a given situation but concrete instances of media, thoughts, relations, and institutions generating conditions of possibility given within their infrastructures. The imagination of a desired change within a fiction is therefore not entirely dissimilar to one in a political treatise or in a social movement, particularly in an age when media performance is central to politics. Therefore, the model for linking anime's domain of participatory sense-making to real-world projects of social change should be not representation but coordination, the linking of two productive trains of thought in pursuit of a larger goal. As noted above, anime's imagined changes are inevitably partial and bound by internal limits. But these defects also describe political imagination writ large. A comparative analysis of imaginative processes might help articulate what is being changed and what is being left untouched in each.

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[i] Broadcast in two seasons: *Kōdo giasu: Hangyaku no rurūshu* [*Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion*], and *Kōdo giasu: Hangyaku no rurūshu R2* [*Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion R2*], directed by Taniguchi, Gorō (Tokyo: Sunrise, 2006-2008), https://video.unext.jp/freeword?query=ギアス&td=SID0002580 and https://video.unext.jp/freeword?query=ギアス&td=SID0013601.

[ii] *Mawaru pingudoramu* [*Penguindrum*], directed by Ikuhara Kunihiko (Tokyo: Brain's Base, 2011), https://video.unext.jp/freeword?query=輪るピングドラム&td=SID0002885.

[iii] Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xi.

[iv] Ueno Toshiya, "War and Anime in the Age of Machine-Oriented Ontology: The Case of Mamoru Oshii," *Bulletin*

of the Faculty of Representational Studies 16 (2016) 27, Wako University Repository.

[v] Deborah Levitt, *The Animatic Apparatus: Animation, Vitality, and the Futures of the Image* (Zero Books, 2018), 66-70.

[vi] Sandra Annett, *The Flesh of Animation: Bodily Sensations in Film and Digital Media*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 5-8.

[vii] Stevie Suan, *Anime's Identity: Performativity and Form beyond Japan* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 32-33.

[viii] Timo Elmo Feiten, Kristopher Holland, and Anthony Chemero, "Worlds Apart? Reassessing von Uexküll's Umwelt in Embodied Cognition with Canguilhem, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 28(1) (2020), 1-3, DOI:10.5195/jffp.2020.929.

[ix] Shaun Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions: Rethinking the Mind* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 193-194.

[x] This phrasing is taken from ecocritic Ursula Heise's description of planetary imagination in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 67.

[xi] Suan, *Anime's Identity*, 17-21.

[xii] David Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local: Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan* (Cornell University Press, 2006), 151-157.

[xiii] Anne Allison, *Precarious Japan* (University of California Press, 2013), 30.

[xiv] Gallagher, *Enactivist Interventions*, 6.

[xv] Maria Koukouti and Lambros Malafouris, "Material Imagination: An Anthropological Perspective," in *The Cambridge Handbook of the Imagination*, ed. Anna Abraham (Cambridge University Press 2020), 43.

[xvi] Medina, José, "An Enactivist Approach to the Imagination: Embodied Enactments and 'Fictional Emotions," *American Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol. 50, No. 3 (2013), 331-333, Jstor.

[xvii] Levitt, *The Animatic Apparatus*, 58-59.

[xviii] Lamarre, *The Anime Machine*, 37-44.

[xix] Ibid., 59.

[xx] Annett, *The Flesh of Animation*, 43.

[xxi] Ibid., 48.

[xxii] Suan, *Anime's Identity,* 160-163.

[xxiii] Azuma Hiroki. *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* [*The Animalizing Postmodern: Japanese Society Seen by Otaku*] (Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 2001), 64-67.

[xxiv] Levitt, *The Animatic Apparatus*, 63-64.

[xxv] *Animate Times* Staff, "*Kōdo giasu: fukkatsu no Rurūshu Taniguchi Gorō kantoku intabyū* [Interview with *Lelouch of the Resurrection* Director Taniguchi Gorō]" *Animate Times*, February 8, 2019, https://www.animatetimes.com/news/details.php?id=1549418776.

[xxvi] *Newtype* Staff, "*Kaoridakaki geijutsuron: Kakumei shōjo Utena* [*Fragrant Art Theory: Revolutionary Girl Utena*] *Newtype*, October 1997, 26.

[xxvii] Joshua Quinlan and Raymond Mar, "How Imagination Supports Narrative Experiences for Textual, Audiovisual, and Interactive Narratives," in *The Cambridge Handbook of the Imagination*, ed. Anna Abraham, (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 468.

[xxviii] Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 26-29.

[xxix] Ibid., 291-295.

[xxx] Ibid., 300.

[xxxi] Merleau-Ponty's term, discussed within enactivism in Feiten et. al, "Worlds Apart?" 10.

[xxxii] Levitt, *The Animatic Apparatus,* 68-69.

[xxxiii] Annett, *The Flesh of Animation,* 61-63.

[xxxiv] Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology,* 88-90.

[xxxv] Ibid., 72-73, 90.

[xxxvi] Ibid., 353.

[xxxvii] Ueno, "War in the Age of Machine-Oriented Ontology," 28-29; Levitt, *Animatic Apparatus*, 109.

[xxxviii] Ibid., 114-116.

[xxxix] Annett, *The Flesh of Animation*, 5.

[xl] Lamarre *The Anime Ecology*, 186.

[xli] Gallagher. *Enactivist Interventions*, 21-22.

[xlii] Azuma Hiroki, *Gēmuteki riarizumu no tanjō: Dōbutsuka suru posutomodān 2* [*The Birth of Game Like Realism: Japan's Database Animals 2* (Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 2007), 61-65.

[xliii] Ezequiel A. Di Paolo, Marieke Rohde, and Hanne De Jaegher, "Horizons for the Enactive Mind: Values, Social Interaction, and Play," in *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*, eds. John Stewart, Olivier Gapenne, and Ezequiel A. Di Paolo, (MIT Press, 2010), 71-72.

[xliv] Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology*, 333.

[xlv] Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 25-40.

[xlvi] Lauren Berlant's concept, discussed vis a vis Japan in Allison, *Precarious Japan*, 85.

[xlvii] Leheny, *Think Globally, Fear Locally*, 155-157.

[xlviii] Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology,* 186.

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