

ANIME'S THINKING IMAGES: PHILOSOPHICAL CROSSROADS

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In March 2024, Thomas Lamarre was invited by the ERC Project FILM AND DEATH to come to Lisbon for a one-day workshop at the NOVA Institute of Philosophy, titled *Half Life: Radiation and Animation*. In this workshop, Lamarre examined Japan's nuclear ecology, moving beyond the conventional divide between ecology, economy, nuclear energy, and warfare. He introduced a key concept: that animation provides a distinctive way to conceptualize "radioanimacy." By using animation to engage with the continuous *vitality* of radioactivity, the workshop explored how techniques in films like *Barefoot Gen* (1983, directed by Mori Masaki), *Akira* (1988, directed by Katsuhiro Otomo), and *New Godzilla* (2016, directed by Hideaki Anno and Shinji Higuchi) can bridge the separations between Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Fukushima, revealing connections across historical struggles and conflicts. This event led to the formation of a reading group focused on Lamarre's 2009 book, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* and the group's discussions paved the way for this special issue of *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image*.

Indeed, in recent decades, Japanese television animation, Anime, a highly conceptualized, popular, and thought-provoking style of moving images, is receiving more attention from Western academic debate. Yet, in what ways could Anime contribute to the advancement of film philosophy as such? The central question driving our call was: What are the transversalities between anime and philosophy? We aimed to engage with other scholars on the notion of anime as a producer of thought, exploring the intersections between Japanese television animation and philosophy. Our goal was to highlight anime as an intensive, creative practice that mobilized concepts through the investigation of diverse themes.

What drives anime? How does anime wield its power? Anime productions engage with a vast array of themes—identity, trauma, history, adolescence, epistemology, life, death, technology, pop culture, war, psychic activities, and the Anthropocene. Far from merely representing cultural phenomena, anime actively observes, reflects upon, and explores new ways to engage with global, transindividual issues. These include growing up, educational systems, urban planning, scientific progress, the creation of machines, fandom, international conflicts, dreams, the real and the virtual, and the afterlife. As anime's audience continues to grow, its presence in both mainstream and academic discussions has become a non-Western, provocative imagetic force, distinct from the provocations of cinema or contemporary art.

Harnessing the power of the televisual medium, the issues raised by anime unfold both episodically and through its screens, emphasizing the unique spatio-temporalities of its haptic/electromagnetic, domestic moving images. These are distinct from the projections experienced in cinema theaters or the artworks housed in museums and galleries. Japanese television animation complicates our understanding of fictional compositions within the media-ecological *pathos* of everyday life. Watching anime at home or on personal devices like computers, tablets, and smartphones, we engage with multiplanar fictions about bodies in transformation—bodies that are electromagnetically affected by the screens themselves, in a reverse *mise-en-abyme*.

This affective force, which can physiologically destabilize the viewer's organism, is crucial when considering the philosophical implications of anime. It challenges Western dialectical separations between subject and object, fiction and reality, representation and abstraction, and the organic and the inorganic. In *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media* (2018), Thomas Lamarre explored anime's groundbreaking epistemological impact on philosophical debates about moving images, particularly through his analysis of the epileptic episodes triggered by Pokémon. Anime demands a redefined relationship with its productions—one that invites us to explore new layers of meaning and interpretation within, investigating through its different processes of elaboration, rather than framing these popular expressions in limiting ideological or moralistic categories.

This issue features a valuable interview with Thomas Lamarre, conducted during his stay in Lisbon in March 2024. In the conversation, Lamarre offers insights into the differing approaches of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their engagement with moving images. He reflects on key questions that arise from his influential body of work—touching on television, cinema, vitalism, and death. Through the lens of anime, as the interview underscores, Lamarre invites scholars, audiences, and artists to rethink and reorganize their semiotics of perception and expression.

In this issue, we present a collection of articles that explore diverse aspects of anime and its intersections with philosophy, media theory, and contemporary culture. These articles offer a nuanced understanding of how anime both shapes and thinks about societal dynamics, intellectual thought, and technological advancements.

In “*Anime and Drone Warfare: Operational Images, Dissimulation, and Hypercinematism in A Farewell to Weapons*”, Betty Stojnic analyzes the 2013 short film *A Farewell to Weapons* (dir. Hajime Katoki), focusing on how the film portrays drones and autonomous robots to depict the increasing automation and dehumanization of modern warfare. Drawing on Harun Farocki’s concept of “operational images”, Stojnic examines how these images—typically used in military surveillance—are embedded into the film’s visual logic, reflecting not only the technological landscape of war but also the erosion of human agency in the face of increasingly machine-driven processes. The article incorporates “hypercinematism”, a concept by Thomas Lamarre, to explore how the film’s intensified camera movements heighten the sensory experience of conflict. By embedding drone vision into its visual logic, the film becomes a testament to the propagation of drone aesthetics in popular media, as well as a direct confrontation with the weaponisation and eventual automation of what we consider human vision, offering a critical examination of how machines are increasingly reshaping human perception.

In “Escape Vectors, Gravitational Pulls, and Machine Ontology: Politics and Sense-Making in Ryōsuke Takahashi’s *Flag*”, Eamon Reid explores machine-oriented ontology (MOO) as articulated by Levi Bryant, Arjen Kleinherenbrink, and Michael Ardoline, to engage with and assess Ryōsuke

Takahashi's mecha science fiction. Reid uses this framework to examine the relationship between anime media and sense-making operations, emphasizing the importance of the “journalist-assemblage”—the interconnected roles of the journalist, camera, computer, editing software, and the physical process of film development. While referencing Takahashi's other mecha series, the author focuses on *FLAG* (The Answer Studio, 2006-2007) for its portrayal of machines transforming through human piloting, altering their *gravitational* context.

In “VTubers as Animated Performances: Bridging Database Consumption and Digital Kinship”, Wei-Chih Wang argues that VTubers, as a form of digital performance, represent a hybrid intersection of human and virtual elements, challenging traditional notions of identity and community in contemporary media. The article explores how VTubers, by engaging with modular character traits and real-time improvisation, blur the lines between fiction and reality, offering a new kind of digital companionship that fosters emotional connections with their audiences. Through database consumption and transmedia storytelling, the article examines how VTubers expand beyond traditional forms of media and function as both technological performances and social commentary on the nature of virtual embodiment and kinship. The article also raises ethical concerns about the emotional labor involved in these performances and discusses their growing influence in the larger media ecosystem.

“From Drawing to Movement: Yoshinari Yoh and the Stylistic Solutions Developed for Character Design in *Little Witch Academia*” (in Portuguese: “*Do Desenho ao Movimento: Yoshinari Yoh e as Soluções Estilísticas Encontradas para o Design de Personagens na Animação Little Witch Academia*”), by Gustavo de Melo França, examines the feasibility of integrating the theoretical perspectives of David Bordwell, Michael Baxandall, and Pierre Bourdieu to analyze the character design process—an area still underexplored in animation research. Focusing on *Little Witch Academia* (2013), the first work produced by Studio Trigger and created by Yoshinari Yoh, the article explores how this film established a set of stylistic conventions that later became hallmarks of the studio's productions. These include the dynamic motion in action sequences and the heightened expressiveness of facial and body animation. It highlights how an animator's stylistic choices are shaped by the challenges and demands of the production process they seek to address.

"The Joy of Devouring: Metabolism, Desire, and Subjectivity in Satoshi Kon's *Paprika*," by Marketa Jakesova, draws on Annemarie Mol's critique of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the impermeable subject and incorporates Emmanuel Levinas's shift from bodily materiality to the relational and ethical dimensions of consumption. Through an analysis of *Paprika* (2006), directed by Satoshi Kon, the article presents a vision of subjectivity that dissolves traditional boundaries—between self and other, reality and dreams, the material and immaterial, and human and machine. *Paprika* envisions a subject that *metabolizes* the world, continuously deconstructing and reassembling itself through ongoing interactions with its environment.

In "*Anime as Social Imagination: Media Infrastructure and Enactive Cognition in Code Geass and Penguindrum*", Brett Hack explores how the anime "*Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion*" (Taniguchi, 2006-2008) and "*Penguindrum*" (Ikuhara, 2011) utilise social imagination to engage with and challenge the social and cognitive structures of contemporary society. The article delves into how these series create intricate fictional worlds while employing enactive cognition processes to examine the role of media infrastructure in shaping social, familiar and political dynamics. Hack argues that through their engagement with these worlds, viewers are invited to reconfigure their perception of social dynamics, offering a broader critique of the structural forces that influence everyday life. Ultimately, the article positions anime as a form of social and cognitive practice that not only mirrors reality but also serves as a tool for transforming social realities, mobilising the enduring role of fictional experience and its forms of agency to engage with political and media-enunciative processes.

Finally, Ana Matilde Sousa's "The World Awakens and Changes with Your Love; Or, Queering the Badiouian Scene of Two in Kunihiro Ikuhara's *Yurikuma Arashi*" explores the anime *Yurikuma Arashi*, directed by Kunihiro Ikuhara—a series often discussed by fans but largely overlooked in academic writing—through the lens of Alain Badiou's philosophy of love. Noting that Badiou's theory has been criticized by feminist and queer theorists for its heteronormative and exclusionary tendencies, Sousa presents a twofold argument: first, that *Yurikuma* can be seen as a literal and visual representation of Badiou's "Scene of Two" (*la scène de deux*), while also queering this concept; and second, that for

Ikuhara, unlike Badiou, love is a radical, emancipatory political force—most explicitly expressed in this particular work.

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