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>>> NARRATIVE\_06: KEITH\_RUSSELL

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## The Glimpse and Fanservice in Anime and Manga: Looking as a Poetic

*Fanservice is the random and gratuitous display of a series of anticipated gestures common in Japanese comics (Manga) and cartoons (Anime). These gestures include such things as panty shots, leg spreads and glimpses of breast. In their valorization they indicate a deep philosophical concern with the status of personal experience.*

*These vagrant moments of libidinous possibility underwrite the anticipation of sensual fulfillment; they indicate the genuine access of the personal to a realm and/or moment of reality in which the physical and the imaginative are co-extensive. The connection between the eye and desire is re-established in defiance of the general requirement in society to deny the glimpse and its consequence.*

*There is no power without freedom; no freedom that cannot be constrained; no constraint that cannot be subverted; no subversion that is not a proclamation of freedom. Such is the circle of power. Within this circle, the segment of personal experience stands out and offers to illuminate the whole through the ways of seeing available within the visual practice of the individual. Where society seeks to cover over the moment of personal seeing, by simply not talking about such things, the Fanservice picturing forth confirms the pathway to liberation that the senses can outline as a method (after-path). As such, the glimpse, in its mediated form as Fanservice, confirms the imagination as the dimension of the interpersonal: someone else also already understands the glimpse. This is perhaps the "darker" freedom because it offers to forgive the otherwise unique nature of vantage (I alone could see from where I stood). What I see you could also see; how I see you might also see.*

*This paper locates and expands the theoretical uses of the glimpse in the context of existing theories such as the gaze. It looks, in particular at the subversive aspects of the glimpse within an aesthetic dimension.*

**Keywords:** Manga, Anime, Glimpse, Ornament, Fanservice, Aesthetic Dimension, Gaze, Confections

### Introduction

There is no power without freedom; no freedom that cannot be constrained; no constraint that cannot be subverted; no subversion that is not a proclamation of freedom. Such is the circle of power. Within this circle, the segment of personal experience stands out and offers to illuminate the whole through the ways of seeing available within the visual practice of the individual. Communication requires that we hold experiences in common, but it also requires that we experience individually. In his last book, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Herbert Marcuse defends the sphere of personal experience from accusations of escapism and indifference to society at large:

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The "flight into inwardness" and the insistence on a private sphere may well serve as bulwarks against a society which administers all dimensions of human existence. Inwardness and subjectivity may well become the inner and outer space for the subversion of experience, for the emergence of another universe. Today, the rejection of the individual as a "bourgeois" concept recalls and presages fascist undertakings. Solidarity and community do not mean absorption of the individual. They rather originate in autonomous individual decision; they unite freely associated individuals, not masses. (Marcuse, 1979, 38-39)

The private sphere of Western cultures has expanded, radically, since Marcuse wrote these words. The proliferation of visual sub-cultures, for example, on the Internet, has seen the opening up of virtual colonies and virtual economies that are grounded in the personal experiences of users and creators alike. This expansion has been typified by the freedoms inherent in the Web's structure and also the freedoms inherent in any new cultural form that has yet to establish modes and codes of behavior typical of mainstream cultural forms. Prior to the Internet, Japanese comic books, Manga, enjoyed a similar period of visual freedom. In the case of Manga, and subsequently Anime, the freedom produced a vivid experimental culture.

Horribly well-behaved Japanese children are reading stories with scenes that make adult visitors from other, more "liberal," cultures blanch. While the elimination of taboos in Japanese children's comics has given rise to many stories of questionable artistic value, it has also been a vital factor in the growth of the whole medium. Freedom from regulation allowed what was originally material exclusively for children to appeal to adults. It made it possible for artists to explore the potential of comics as other artists have explored the potential of novels and films. (Schodt, 1986, 125-126)

The reality of Manga and Anime is somewhat different today. Ten years after his first excited foray into the world of a free Manga, Schodt, reported on the collapse of liberalism brought about by one horrific crime committed by a crazed fan of Manga and Anime.

Tsutomu Miyazaki was a disturbed twenty-seven-year-old man who kidnapped and killed three girls of preschool age in 1988 and 1989, delivering the remains of one of his victims to her family using the pseudonym "Yuko Imada," reportedly the name of a favorite female comic book or anime character. When Miyazaki was finally apprehended, his apartment was found to contain nearly 6,000 videos, including "splatter" and "horror" films and many animation videos of the rorikon porno ilk, as well as similar fanzines and manga. He was the manifestation of the manga and animation industries' worst nightmare: a fan incapable of distinguishing between fantasy and reality, obsessed with

>>> the darkest and most degenerate genre of material—kiddie porn. Even more horrifying for the dojinshi market, Miyazaki had also reportedly sold manga of his own creation ... (Schodt, 1996, 45)

This history is typical of the US comic industry where moral outrage led to the constraining of the content and drawings styles of comics. It is also of broader academic interest in the field of media effects (Catharsis Theory) and studies of cultural repression. However, in terms of freedoms, the ways of reading developed within the Japanese comic cultures, especially the use of Fanservice, have provided recent global visual culture with a wealth of insight into the uses of the visual within cultures, within the lives of individuals and within the experiences of adolescents. The larger lessons, for practitioners, lie in the area of the poetics of seeing that can be found in Fanservice and the glimpse.

### Fairy Stories, Fanservice and the Glimpse

A "fan incapable of distinguishing between fantasy and reality", is the worst fear of any author or artist. The ability to maintain the aesthetic dimension as a dimension apart, as a space of freedom in which darker aspects of the psyche can be explored, is essential to the successful development of all members of society. There are well-defined uses for such spaces, as indicated by Bettelheim in his work on fairy stories.

In order to master the psychological problems of growing up—overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries; becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies; gaining a feeling of selfhood and of self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation—a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious. He can achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams—ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content. It is here that fairy tales have unequalled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly on his own. Even more important, the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which he can structure his daydreams and with them give better direction to his life. (Bettelheim, 1991, 6)

While the fitting of "unconscious content into conscious fantasies" is typical of the narrative aspects of art, the distinct qualities of the momentary or lyrical aspects of personal sensory experience, as evidenced in the glimpse, are mostly abstracted out of commentary. This kind of occlusion of the lyrical is similar to the ideological imposition of political content on works of art with the purpose of making them serious or committed. Attacks on the film

>>> *Amélie* (2001), for example, were aimed at the supersensory, or lyrical aspects. One review that awarded 1.5/5, slams not only the film, but one suspects, a certain kind of French sensibility. The fairy tale style of presenting contemporary life, in Montmartre, Paris, was obviously too much post 9/11.

Watching *Amélie* is like taking a sticky shower in honey. No, wait: *Amélie* is like a never-ending bowl of filling comfort food. It's like a nougat enema. Like drowning in a lake filled with Grand Marnier. Like EuroDisney after a full frontal lobotomy. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, who used to make movies with his partner Marc Caro, has been known for his adventurous and quirky films, especially "*Delicatessen*" and "*City of Lost Children*." He is also known as the guy who made H.R. Giger's creatures swim in "*Alien: Resurrection*." With *Amélie*, he is back in a safe terrestrial setting—a Paris of his dreams, to be precise, a world full of delights without fear or pain or worry. ...Yet in *Amélie*, there is never a sense of danger, or pain, or loss. *Amélie*'s loneliness never becomes tangible. In her sunlit play world, nothing ever goes wrong, and nothing is at stake. But without the acknowledgement of the pain life can hold in store, all the carefree joy winds up looking merely dumb. Instead of filling me with kindness and love, *Amélie* made me angry: so much genuine talent wasted on a weightless, pointless confection. (Fauth & Dermansky, 2001)

A "weightless, pointless confection" it might seem when the world has real problems to solve and real ideologies of terror that must be subverted by truth, democracy and the pursuit of happiness. We will not have pleasure, we will have fear and pain and loss. Marcuse, who committed his life to the subversion of falsehoods, philosophical and political, points out the futility of such an attitude to art, and in doing so, he asserts the subversive potential of the lyrical.

The political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change. In this sense, there may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht. (Marcuse, 1979, xiii)

Lollies, or death? Confections haunt the work of Edward Tufte like badly drawn graphs. For Tufte, the sticky sensory possibilities of the lyrical are to be delimited by the urge for veracity in everything. Even playful illustrations must tell a story. Confections (made-togethers) must add a special virtue to information or else they are mere concoctions (boiled-togethers).

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Like perspective, confections give the mind an eye. ... [They] place selected, diverse images into the narrative context of a coherent argument. And, by virtue of the architecture of their arguments, confections make reading and seeing and thinking identical. (Tuft, 1997)

The clarity possible in a text, and a confection, is that of a textile. The warp and the weft can be so well controlled that reading, imagining/seeing and thinking are contemporary, if not identical. In forming such textiles, word stories and picture stories tell us of idealized events: events that fit within the dramatic arc of the development of character or plot or argument. The closer such texts come to completeness, without excess, the more they are valued. Redundancy is a distraction. Gratuitous moments of libidinous liberation are major distractions.

Words, especially in imagistic poetry, can carry a surplus of visual information that may engage the reader in a dense sensory world (don't think of a monkey). But, it is in pictures that this excess of information becomes available as a substantial component of the aesthetic apprehension of a work. The blue bird is just this shade of blue; the knife is just this big; the heroine just has this look in her eye.

Such elements can be treated as merely poetic or simply incidental parts of the style of a work. Indeed, production values, as talked of in movies, mostly account for the aspects of the visualizations that did not have to be the way that they are but are the way they are because someone selected just this or that way of presenting things. Reading these extra features of a film can amount to the establishing of a poetic or way of making up the film as a made thing. But, ascribing the same kind of process to distinct moments in a film is a larger claim to legibility as if each gesture could be codified or formalized like in a Balinese dance.

This very precise, close reading is typical of lyric poetry. But, in poetry, as in cinema, we anticipate that each gesture is adding to the total work rather than simply appearing for its own sake. In the case of Fanservice, in Anime and Manga, the accidental panty shot is just accidental. Except, of course, it is also something else: it is Fanservice.

The seemingly random and the seemingly gratuitous showing of the curve of a breast, in Manga and Anime is anticipated. It is openly recognized as deliberate and there for no other obvious reason than to gratify the minds of adolescents, mostly, one might suggest, male. The fantasy of the viewer is given content in the visualization but there seems to be no other literary justification beyond the simple mediation of the fantasy. It is possible that every female character in a Manga might show her pants, as some stage in the story, just as it is probable that every female in the real world is most likely wearing pants that might be seen if they were wearing a skirt and fell over in front of you at a bus stop. The logic seems perverse, or comic at best. Nonetheless, it is a logic of seeing.

The glimpse is part of everyday life. Blouses buckle as women move. Random moments of glimpsing are everywhere that we are. Glimpsing is part of our possible visual experiencing of being in the world. What we incidentally and accidentally see tends to be left out and not even mentioned in our accounts of the everyday. Why?

>>> Let's listen in on a few available accounts. In 1934 Cole Porter wrote the song "Anything Goes": "Days of yore a glimpse of stocking was looked on as something shocking..."

This afternoon, back in San Francisco, I had an interesting sighting driving down Clement Street—it was raining out, and I saw a young woman crossing the street, left hand holding up her umbrella ... and as she crossed, her above-the-knee-length grey skirt rode up a bit, revealing a black stocking top and some bare thigh. However, it looks like she was wearing over-the-knee socks and not necessarily thigh highs or stockings, as the "stocking tops" could be plainly seen, and her calves were covered with black opaque colored cotton (I think! Remember, I was in a car!) and not nylon ... still, it was the closest thing to a stocking sighting that I have seen in the streets of San Francisco in years! Literally years! (Stockings HQ, 2008)

### The Glimpse and the Gaze

Confections, in their all-to-gether-ness, may well be like ornaments of information. It pleases the eye to see such things as a distraction from the harder work of organizing for oneself a coherence of parts that do not self-organize into wholes. As the eye moves from a detail of an object to the object itself, the eye needs some kind of comforting that perception, as an event, has not fragmented. The ornament then serves as a graphic sticky point to resolve the dilemma of the multiple eye. Or worse, where there were no meanings apparent in the discontinuities of perception, we would simply make up such meanings, even if trivial meanings. For Herbert Reed these trivial moments of meaning were located in the ornament:

The necessity of ornament is psychological. There exists in man a certain feeling which has been called horror vacui, an incapacity to tolerate an empty space. This feeling is strongest in certain savage races, and in decadent periods of civilization. It may be an ineradicable feeling; it is probably the same instinct that causes certain people to scribble on lavatory walls, others to scribble on their blotting-pads. (Reed, 1944, 32)

This decadence was, of course, to be done away with, thanks to modernism and its minimalism. Doors would become things to disguise through plainness rather than things to announce through adornment. The superfluity of the sensuous always attends all information. This implies that the sensuous is always inherently sensual: even the serif has visual pleasure not required of the letterform. The libidinous, on the other hand, requires no structuring, as it is self-evidencing. The curve of the partly exposed breast is information enough, of itself, when glimpsed: there is no surplus that is not self-referencing.

>>> This lack of surplus is not the case in terms of the partly exposed breast when the exposing is done for someone, as happens within the gaze of cinema and fine art. Such ways of seeing and being seen, as are found in cinema and fine art, are also to be found in Manga and Anime. Characters, within the plot, often gaze on the same objects that the readers/viewers glimpse. Indeed, Fanservice is as much a part of the experience of the characters in Anime and Manga as it is part of the audience experience. Characters and viewers celebrate the freedom of the glimpse, while both also experience the function of the gaze.

Clearly there are parallels to be drawn between the model of the glimpse being explored here and the model of the gaze as announced by Laura Mulvey in her seminal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Scopophilia, the pure pleasure that we all may take in just seeing, is the basis of object desire whether that desire is contested, as in the gaze, or allowed to remain free, as in the glimpse. We must see what we gaze on as we must see what we glimpse. The precise positioning of the audience in each kind of seeing is less relevant here than the assumed nature of the object being viewed. In the case of the gaze, the object of desire is located within a dramatic tension that implicates the viewer in the appropriation of the viewed. In the case of the glimpse, no such appropriation is implied. The drama, in the glimpse is given as a moment of free seeing. Such are the benefits of Fanservice.

Which is not to say that the Fanservice glimpse is not also a kind of fetishistic looking. It definitely is, in its moment of being sustained in the imagination of the viewer. Fetishistic looking, for Mulvey, involves "the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. This builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself. The erotic instinct is focused on the look alone" (Mulvey 1992, 29). In the case of the glimpse, it is the perceptual process itself that achieves satisfaction as a moment of liberation and empowerment.

In this account of glimpse looking, we can recognise key features of Fan service. Not only is looking, itself, a source of desire and its satisfaction, but the looking authorised by Fanservice is precisely to be undertaken as a fetishistic looking, not of the breast, for example, but of looking itself, as glimpse. The Fanservice object is a reassuring object rather than a dangerous object; the gratuitous object is a confirmation of the freedom of desire to find itself structured as the structuring of objects for its own visual satisfaction. That is, the viewer of Fanservice is able to determine erotic values within the orbit of a freedom that defines the erotic object as special, and therefore not dangerously real. These art forms, after all, are not photorealistic. Their lack of realism is part of the empowered and empowering nature of the Fanservice experience. The Fanservice object is a kind of libidinous ornament that not only reassures through confirmation but also announces the freedom of the possible that is located, in its origins, in the everyday viewing of the everyday world.

Indeed, the closer Fanservice comes to reality the less useful it is as Fanservice. Desire is to be located in the Fanservice object, not re-determined as an achieved object of realised gratification. That is, the mediation



>>> of desire is the purpose, not the gratification. This mediation, performed knowingly, within the interpersonal space of the Manga and Anime worlds, is the redeeming quality of Fanservice that points to the hygienic nature of the glimpse. Somewhere between desire and satisfaction there is a space in which what is experienced is just experience. Fanservice is a figuring and confirmation of this free visual space.

### **Affordance and the Interpersonal Poetics of Fanservice Seeing**

In the case of Fanservice, the personal becomes interpersonal. The darkness of the cinema, which figures in Mulvey's concept of the gaze, is not a key element of the glimpse. Anyone reading the comic I am reading is able to see what I see. Anyone else on Clement Street might see what stocking man saw. Where society seeks to cover over the moment of seeing in the everyday world, and treat it, at best, as accident, the Fanservice picturing forth in the comic book confirms a pathway to liberation. These Fanservice objects have been placed precisely to announce the freedom of seeing and the freedom of just finding libidinous objects in the world. Breasts, after all, are in the world. What I see I am free to see because it is in the world. What I am able to see amounts to an anticipation of what I might see and others might see. As such, the glimpse, in its form as Fanservice, confirms the imagination as the dimension of the interpersonal: someone else also already understands the glimpse because they too are in the world where such freely perceivable objects exist. The author, at least, also knows about such things or else he would not gratuitously place these objects in his story, to the possible distracting detriment of his story.

This shared knowledge of the freedom of seeing is perhaps the "darker" freedom because it offers to forgive the otherwise unique nature of vantage (I alone could see from where I stood). What I see you could also see; how I see you might also see. The peeping tom does not enjoy this free looking.

### **Conclusion**

While the interpersonal nature of the Fanservice glimpse can seem to be little more than the sharing of a male adolescent fascination, (are you a stocking man too?) there are cognitive aspects that point to more general and universal qualities of the glimpse. Our attention is called because it can be called. Within Gibson's ecology of perception (1979), the world we see is there to be seen and it has about it the qualities of being see-able. The glimpse of the breast is as undeniable as the sight of Mt Fuji for anyone who attends to what they see. According to Gibson: "The meaning or value of a thing consists of what it affords. ... What a thing is and what it means are not separate, the former being physical and the latter mental as we are accustomed to believe" (Gibson, 1982). The glimpsed stocking top is for the

>>> imagination as a free object. It may also, within Anime and Manga be of the imagination, and hence part of a semiotic system; but being surplus to the story, its value as a free object is guaranteed.

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