*Transcommunication* Vol.8-2 Fall 2021
Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies

**Special Feature**

# Colorful Execution: Conventionality and Transnationality in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*

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The *Kimetsu no Yaiba* (henceforth, *Demon Slayer*) film's sustained attainment of the number 1 spot at the box office and claim to the highest grossing film of all time in Japan marks an important achievement for late-night TV (*shinya*) anime. While two other anime, *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* (2001) and *Kimi no Na wa* (2016), have reached similar levels of sales and popularity, neither of these works were based on an established late-night TV anime like *Demon Slayer*. This achievement has invited questions in various publications online of what makes *Demon Slayer* so special as to achieve this degree of fame, and more broadly, how this anime is capturing something of the national culture of Japan at this moment.[1]

Indeed, part of the interest in the film is how well it did at the box office within Japan, placing its ascendancy within a national framework. This in turn spurs global interest, as the film begins to generate buzz outside of Japan based on its ascendancy inside Japan. Moreover, the fact that this is an anime that looks very similar to other mainstream anime (largely late-night TV anime) falls right into contemporary notions of anime as representative of Japanese culture, both nationally and internationally. Certainly, this is the case in reports on *Demon Slayer* in the popular press.[2] In this sense, part of the interest in *Demon Slayer*'s film exposes a very important set of tensions for anime, that between the local (specifically Japan) and the global.

It is hard to ignore the importance of the national scale here, and the film's extended popularity provides a point of departure for thinking about anime in regards to the national within Japan. It also gives credence to a notion of anime as part of Japanese national culture, both locally and globally: the film must have struck some chord across Japan for it to be in the number 1 spot for so long. Furthermore, the film's popularity aligns with the standard view of anime's globality, that it is a Japanese (local) culture

now gone global, with the rest of the world slowly gaining access to the film that was so popular within Japan. Subsequently, the impression is that, despite anime's global presence and demand (which goes back decades now), anime, even outside of Japan, is still seen as Japanese culture—a stasis in anime's status as Japanese, despite the global movements and presence. As such, there is a tension here between anime as a local cultural product of Japan, while simultaneously being a global media.

But is there another way to consider anime's globality and is there a way to map that out? This is not to say that anime should be entirely divorced from Japan. In fact, for a fuller engagement with anime, one cannot ignore the relationship to Japan, in regards to the long history of animation in Japan, the connection to the Japanese state (as past propaganda and contemporary nation-branding), the importance of the domestic media mix, and the significant creatives who worked on influential anime. At the same time, anime has been distributed outside of Japan for most of its history via the decades of transnational outsourcing involved in anime production and its continued global popularity. Thus, on the one hand, any alternative mapping of anime's globality would necessarily have to contend with the centrality of Japan for anime, while on the other hand, there is a need to balance the longstanding transnational production and distribution of anime, as well as the only recent raising and acceptance of anime subculture (specifically that of late-night TV anime) to the forefront of Japanese national culture, for which *Demon Slayer* is the latest exemplar.

In order to explore these issues, instead of taking the nation (Japan) as the point of departure, I think it is important to consider the media-form (that is, the interplay between medium, material, and conventions) of the anime, which comes into sharper view when compared to the manga. Indeed, the manga, despite having international distribution, did and does not generate the same type of global buzz. The manga, in fact, did not become popular in the first place until the TV anime became popular. As Marc Steinberg notes, "There is an intensity to the media ecology *around anime* that one is more hard pressed to find, for instance, around manga alone....The tipping point of a series' popularity and impact often occurs around the anime, rather than other media forms."[3] In a similar vein, as Thomas Lamarre details, it's the TV anime that is the integral link across media, where even theatrical releases provide an experience built from the aesthetics of TV anime.[4]

Of course, there will be overlap between the manga and anime, and the media mix is designed so that the popularity of one medium can incite interest in the other (in this case, the anime inciting interest in the manga), but there is still a discrepancy between the two versions of the franchise. Crucially, despite the highly localized production of the manga, it is harder to make the argument about *Demon Slayer*'s manga version as a

lightning rod for a national craze when it was the anime series and film that was the initial spark. Afterall, the headlines were generated by the anime film, not the manga, which was out months before the film was released.

I would also like to note that there are other formal elements that can invoke a different relationship to the national. For instance, the manga features the characteristic dynamism in paneling and deft utilization of tonal differences in the black and white to present the sword battles. The anime versions respond to this dynamism with its own engagement with movement in such spectacle-oriented sequences. While the animation itself is finely crafted, another striking element is the utilization of color. Color designer Ōmae Yūko's chosen palette shines in the sequences when Tanjiro releases his water elemental attacks through his swordsmanship. Bright, vivid blues jump out from the dark backgrounds, a sharp contrast which provides an extra force of impact to the image.

As one anime critic noted, distinct from the manga, this particular utilization of color is one that actively invites, even begs, to be draw into relation with the globally recognizable *ukiyo-e* image of Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (the author even enthusiastically calling it "ukiyo-e-like [sic] animation").[5] Interestingly, this is not the first time such imagery is used in anime. The anime film *Miss Hokusai* (2015) actually inserts the wave itself into a sequence of the protagonist, O-ei, and her sister on a calm river boat, transforming the anime image into a near replica of the *ukiyo-e* image. In this way, *Miss Hokusai* forces the anime image into a direct relation with the *ukiyo-e* image, with Japan's Edo-period past. Such a strategy to tie anime to Japan and its history comes out throughout the film in similar instances of awkwardly transforming the anime image into popular Edo-period imagery, but is most apparent in the final segments of the film. The last minute of the film suddenly transitions into an image of contemporary Tokyo and text appears on screen noting that the city of Edo, where the entire film unfolded, is now actually Tokyo. Without any precedence in the film—that is, not connected to any previous plot points or characters—these last words add one final, overt emphasis that viewers should know that this anime film is Japanese.

While I do not think *Demon Slayer* maintains the same agenda to firmly anchor the anime image to the nation, there is a difference between the manga image and the anime image here, with the latter's coloration allowing for a much easier association of the sequences featuring the water dragon that extends from Tanjiro's sword with the famous imagery of Hokusai's *Wave*. In other words, the ease of association with premodern imagery is incited by the specific execution of the coloring in the anime that is not quite as evident in the manga, due to the differences in materials of production (manga is famously almost exclusively done in black and white).

In this sense, it is very easy to link this anime image to the *ukiyo-e* image, which is

not in and of itself problematic (why shouldn't they pay homage to premodern images?). But with the franchise's national popularity and in the context of anime's global buzz, the evocation of such premodern imagery reinforces a relation to well-worn motifs of representations of Japanese national culture. This all the more highlights anime's recently acquired ascendance to national media-form representative of Japan on the global stage, a view endorsed by the nation-branding campaign Cool Japan. Indeed, the above-noted anime critic closes their discussion on the "ukiyo-e-like animation" as follows:

> When I first saw Tanjiro execute that swing in an actual fighting scene, I think my heart stopped. I absolutely love the ukiyo-e art style because it's a revolutionary art style that represents Japan's international identity. When you think of Japanese art, you think of the ukiyo-e art that consists of plump geishas, bold-faced tengus, and the solitary nature pieces. It's a hallmark of the Japanese cultural arts, so to see Ufotable actually pull off the ukiyo-e art style along with the bright colors and beautiful CGI backgrounds that is usually uncharacteristic of their style is absolutely stunning and pays a great homage to the past. I have to say, the work put into *Demon Slayer* really makes it stand out among Ufotable's other works.[6]

But despite the potential to view the content of the image as easily slipping into notions of the national cultural, further examination of the media-form and the labor creating it reveals a very different dynamic: the anime image of the *Demon Slayer* TV anime is, like most anime, transnationally produced. Along with a vast force of Japanese above the line staff and animators, there are a number of Chinese animators (key animators, such as Jia Wei Gao, Yuan Sui, and Zhong Ning Chen; and 3D CG, such as Hao Zhang), background artists (such as Gao Lin Li, Huan Wang, and Kun Chen), and production manager (Chenguang Xuan) that worked on the series. Furthermore, the Korean company Dr. Movie, and Chinese Companies Tieren Animation and FAI were involved in 2nd and in-between animation, as well as painting for some episodes.

What allows this type of transnational division of labor is the anime production system (emblematic of animation production broadly), which developed from a lineage of celluloid animation that utilized various layers to composite into a single image. Each layer of the image could be given to a different person, even those in a different country, as long as the production was organized accordingly in one place. In fact, this was the case for anime since the 1960s. Even though celluloid is not used in contemporary anime, the production processes developed from it have been retained, if not exacerbated, espe-

cially in regards to transnational networks of animators.

Indeed, the above-described transnationality of the *Demon Slayer* production is a very common pattern in anime. So much so, that I was surprised to see how *few* non-Japanese studios were involved in this production. In other words, *Demon Slayer* is uncharacteristically focused on local production within Japan. And yet, still, it is significantly transnational, but a very specific mode of transnationality. It is not one where all the different places are interconnected and on equal footing. Instead, Japan, and more specifically Tokyo, is the center. Ufotable is here the central studio which organizes all of the production, and the transnationality flows mainly through this studio. This is a very typical pattern for anime production, and as such, I would suggest is another way to see anime's globality, whereby anime's very images themselves are transnational products—made in disparate places and countries, then composited into a single image, a process that operates according to a specific transnational system of production with Tokyo (in Japan) as the privileged node in the center.

Distinct from the manga image—which is made by a minimum of one (though usually with the help of assistants and guidance from editors) in one specific place (the manga studio, usually located in Japan, though not necessarily in Tokyo), then translated and exported into another area—the anime image is made in multiple different places and then brought together into a single image. In this way, anime's images would be what Hye Jean Chung calls a "media heterotopia," where there is a tension between the seeming unity of the image and the disparate locales of production. Taking a media heterotopic view would help reveal those tensions in the anime image.[7]

But distinct from the cinematic images that Chung examines, what gives the anime image its unity is the enactment of certain "anime-esque" conventions.[8] Here, I am adapting Jaqueline Berndt's notion of the "mangaesque"' —that is, what is commonly expected of manga—for anime.[9] Of course there will be convergences and divergences between the mangaesque and anime-esque, due to the close relationship of the two media, but broadly the anime-esque can be seen as the commonly utilized elements seen in anime. This can include the character designs, the types of animated movement, the background imagery, the coloring; generally, what is conventionally seen in late-night TV anime, what is reiterated so frequently that it becomes synonymous, if not stereotypical, of that media. While there is a significant amount of diversity in anime works, there is also a sense of overlap, the conventional elements linking across distinct anime products. Indeed, the very recognizability of anime comes from the repetition of those anime-esque conventions. Moreover, because the anime-esque and the mangaesque can differ, there is a recognition of the distinctions between the two media. In fact, I would go so far as to say that anime is much more consistent in its conventionality than manga, which offers a

far greater expressive range that is commercially viable.

I find such approaches constructive because it opens up anime (and manga) to the transnational. This is because there is going to have to be some limit (at some place, at some point in time) to whatever is considered "anime." Taking the "standard view" of anime, that limit is relegated to the nation: anime is animation from Japan. But the anime-esque (and the mangaesque) places the emphasis on media-form, most specifically convention (the reiteration of what is expected of anime/manga), and consequently does not isolate anime (or manga) to Japan. At the same time, it acknowledges the differences in various groups and the capacity to change: what is to be expected of anime (or manga) will differ from group to group, place to place, time to time. Subsequently, the trade-off is the limitations, the narrow confines within which the reiteration of conventions must occur, and the rigidity with which those who produce anime must adhere to those conventions.

As such, the repetition of the anime-esque conventions is not only what allows anime to be recognizable as a particular media product, but is also what enables the unity of the image in the complex, transnational production system.[10] If the various people drawing the characters in each frame, cleaning up the linework, coloring the images, and painting the backgrounds are all working within the specific register of the anime-esque, then the diversity of locales of and people in production becomes hidden behind the uniformity of conventions. Moreover, a media heterotopic view that takes those conventions into consideration would further help excavate the diversity of the image, in terms of its transnationality and aesthetic specificity.

With this in mind, it is important to note how conventional *Demon Slayer* is as an anime. Indeed, it is utilizing many anime-esque conventions commonly found in late-night TV anime. In this sense, it is a rather unexceptional anime, engaging with many of the common cliches and patterns of anime. For instance, the main character, Tanjiro, is a typical, "pure-hearted" shōnen character who pursues some lofty, seemingly impossible goal. Often these goals are intimately related to the family, like in popular preceding franchises like *Full Metal Alchemist* (2009). In the case of *Demon Slayer*, Tanjiro aims to save his little sister who has become an *oni* (demon). Tanjirō has a deep affection for his younger sister, who is not only drawn and acted in a mode of cuteness typical of late-night anime, but follows the affectionate-older-brother-to-younger-sister pattern of "imōto" common in such anime.

Even the very premise of the show, going off to kill demons is a trope found throughout the anime world, with works like *Blue Exorcist* (2011) following similar patterns. And usually, like in *Demon Slayer*, there are characters that look like humans that are demons, usually with one final (or technically, first) demon that is the most powerful.

The setting of the Taisho period is also not unique to *Demon Slayer*, despite assertions to the contrary. Earlier examples include the popular franchise *Sakura Wars*, which is set in a fictional Taisho era, as is the anime *Otome Yōkai Zakuro* (2010); more contemporary examples include sections of the *Golden Kamui* series (manga 2014, anime 2018) and the *Haikara-san ga Tōru* films (2017, 2018).

The character designs of *Demon Slayer* are noteworthy, but they themselves can be placed within a larger trend of ostentatious designs. While character design is a difficult topic to describe, with limited research on the history of its aesthetics, one area of note is the particularly colorful hair-pieces, what Azuma Hiroki would call a *moe*-element from the database (or here, a character design element).[11] One prior example of these is the anime series *Rokka no Yūsha,* specifically the character Fremy, who has a large, multi-colored flower in her hair. Such hair-pieces are actually something that dates back to prior iterations in the 1970s, and *Demon Slayer* presents its own take on the pattern, a minor variation for the character design element of complexly colored hairpieces on female character designs. This is perhaps most evident in the Ubuyashiki children who appear with wisteria in their hair, as well as in Kamado Nezuko's character design, featuring a pink hairpiece with two strands on it. And while not a flower, the prominent butterflies of Kanao Tsuyuri's and Shinobu Kocho's character designs can be seen as part of the play on variation for that character design element (with a direct precursor in the butterfly hairpiece of Sena Kashiwazaki in *Boku wa Tomodachi ga Sukunai*).

There are also the characters in *Rokka no Yūsha* with animal parts on their head, specifically Nashetania Loei Piena Augustra (with large bunny ears) and Rolonia Manchetta (with cow horns and ears), a design trait taken a step further in *Demon Slayer* with Inosuke's boar head mask. Moreover, the designs of the Hashira group seem to have a broad influence from the ornate character designs in *One Piece*, where the colorful cast of recurring and new characters are bejeweled, spectacled, and clothed in multilayered garments that mix traditional Japanese clothing with Western clothing from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The point here is that there are loose but still noticeable references to prior anime works, creating a combination of allusions to other TV anime. I have tried to focus on specific instances, but there are other more prominent areas of relation to the anime-esque: the type of limited animation rhythms, character facial expressions and gestures (figurative acting codes),[12] and voices the actors use for the characters—all regularly featured in late-night TV anime. But what sets *Demon Slayer* apart is the impeccable finesse of the execution and the combination of those anime-esque conventions. In other words, it is in the particulars of the performance of the anime-esque that *Demon Slayer* demonstrates its specificity.

Here, I think it is worth exploring the mechanisms of repetition in the anime-esque. It is not direct duplication at play, which Azuma's database metaphor would imply. In fact, it is not so much direct access and redundant duplication, but rather a process of reference, of citation that involves a tense relationship between prior iteration and later instantiation. In other words, there is a certain range within which there is reference to earlier enactments, and while there is a clear relation to the past iterations, there is also a specificity to the current performance. There is thus a certain conservative tendency, but not a complete aversion to change and shifts. The process is referential, combinatory, playing with the tensions between repetition and variation inherent in the specific form of repetition that is citation. Each performance becomes the site for further allusion, reference, citation for later anime performances. In effect, these references produce a series of relationships as they refer and defer, as they allude to prior instances as they themselves become sites for further citation.[13]

What comes into view then is a vast web of relations between iterative anime-esque performances, a system that is not necessarily controlled by a central actor, but is far more dispersed. In this manner, examining the anime-esque and the enactment of the various conventions of anime's recognizable media-form reveals a decentralized system that maintains that recognizability. Each anime is thus in dialogue with this web of conventions as it articulates itself as a specific enactment of anime. And it is this dynamic that both enables anime's transnational production and hides that very transnationality. In other words, it is a learning of and proficiency in the anime-esque conventions that enables the disparate locales of anime's animation production to be composited with an apparent unity in the image—that unity coming from the performance of that proficiency in enacting anime-esque conventions. But that unity actually hides the transnationality of the image, as the anime-esque conventions are seen as symbols of Japanese culture.

Taking a media heterotopic view helps expose the diversity behind the unity of the image, revealing that there is another transnational component in the system of anime-esque conventions. In fact, many anime-esque conventions are performed not only by the animators who work directly on anime, but all manner of illustrators and game designers spread out across Asia and the world that invoke the anime-esque in their work. It is their very familiarity with the conventions of anime and the proficiency in re-enacting them that gives their work a recognizably anime-esque element to their productions. This is certainly the case with the recent hit game *Genshin Impact* (2020), which is a game largely produced in China by the company Mihoyo, but is broadly described as "anime-style" in terms of its visuals in both English and Japanese (*animechō*).[14] The character designs are perhaps the most noticeable element, with the character of Venti even featuring the same flower character-element from *Rokka no Yūsha*, which is itself riffed on in *Demon Slayer*.

As such, *Genshin Impact* brings a transmedial and transnational element, another link across national borders that itself relates to *Demon Slayer*, even without a specific reference.[15] In light of this, the picture of anime's globality becomes quite complicated, especially as the transnational component of this game, seemingly "from China," is only made visible because the anime-esque is so intimately associated with Japan.

Altogether then, anime's globality can actually be seen as the clashing and coinciding of various forms of spatial organization of the global. In order to better explore this, I would like to draw on Caroline Levine's notion of "forms," that is, "an arrangement of elements—an ordering, a patterning, or shaping…patterns of repetition and difference."[16] According to Levine, different forms have different affordances, or capacities, that both enable and restrict certain possibilities, and consequently "shape what it is possible to think, say, and do in a given context."[17] Furthermore, forms are not isolated, but rather exist in conflict or confluence.

Two particular forms are visible here, the first being that of the bordered-whole, which has specific internal-external boundaries, and which Levine connects with the "container model" of the nation-state. The bordered-whole can also be extended to the broader conception of the international system of discrete states interacting. The second form is the network, where various distinct points are connected in some fashion. This form Levine associates with the transnational. However, there are multiple types of networks, and to address this, I'd like to read Levine through Lamarre's conception of networks, whereby there are centralized networks (which have a privileged center, operating with a "one-to-many" dynamic where the outer nodes do not interconnect) and decentralized networks (which are heterarchical, operating through "point-to-point" engagements as the nodes interconnect). But, as Lamarre asserts, neither type of network fully subsumes the other.[18]

Bringing these forms into dialogue with the issue of anime's globality, at first blush, there is the internal-external, local-global tensions of anime as a cultural product from the nation of Japan gone global (bordered-whole). This is the "standard" view of anime's globality, and is consistent with notions of anime as "Made in Japan," then exported into another country. In terms of production, this local-global dynamic afforded by the bordered-whole can somewhat align with the production processes of the Japanese manga industry, where the manga is written, edited, and drawn inside of Japan, then exported externally elsewhere. For anime, however, the production is complicated by the centralized transnational network of anime's production, which extends beyond Japan across Asia (and elsewhere), with Japan, and more specifically Tokyo, as the privileged node in the center. In addition, such a production process is itself only facilitated by the system of anime-esque conventions, a decentralized network which allows the various locales of

production to disappear behind the unity of the performance. As each iteration of the anime-esque alludes to previous enactments, this affords a decentralized transnationality which comes into focus in consideration of the many anime and anime-esque games and illustrations currently made across Asia (and elsewhere), displaying that such performances are not exclusively isolatable to Japanese cultural production.

Both the centralized and decentralized networks present an altogether different notion of spatiality than the local-global dynamic afforded by the bordered-whole. Inside and outside do not quite operate the same way, especially in consideration of how much (national) border crossing occurs. Moreover, the centralized network maintains a hierarchical configuration, whereby Japan, or rather Tokyo, is the lead organizational node through which all the various elements of production flow through, without the outsourced areas ever coming into any sustained contact with one another unless mediated by the central studio.

The decentralized network, however, presents a far messier spatial dynamic, where the heterarchical can be taken to the extreme. There is no single operator of control here, and references or citations can be vague and dispersed across time and space, interlinking with one another in ways that radically undermine the notion of inside and outside, containment and (cultural and national) ownership. Indeed, the very idea that anime is a cultural product is premised on its replicability, and try as one might to assert national ownership over the conventions that constitute anime as such, the very means of its production opens it up to widespread reperformance through its reiteration. This allows anime to spread far beyond the boundaries of Japan or anywhere else.[19] While this may initially appear freeing, the other side of this dynamic is the rigidity with which the conventions must be adhered to to be anime-esque. Thus, on the one hand there is a certain freedom of movement through repetition, and on the other hand that very repetition is an imposition that must be strictly followed within the pre-existing register with only minor variation.

In practice, despite the transnational history of anime production, the anime-esque is seen as symbolic of Japanese culture, making the imposition of anime-esque conventions carry the weight of a foreign culture imposing itself on the animators (and audiences). This results in a resurfacing of the form of the bordered-whole nation-state via Japan, which at the current moment operates as the authenticator of an acceptable anime-esque performance. Indeed, this is one of the problems faced by many who create anime-esque and mangaesque works outside of Japan. As Zoltan Kacsuk asserts, because Japan is seen as the forefront of manga (and anime), there is far more leeway for acceptance of variation from works seen as coming from Japan (even though, as I have noted above, most anime are actually transnational). Subsequently, any works open about their production

outside of Japan, despite enacting anime-esque conventions are forced into one of two choices: 1) either repeat exactly what is currently in trend in Japan and get accused of "simply copying Japanese culture" (even though this is the same mechanism occurring for anime production broadly), or 2) attempt more divergent variations but are seen as moving in a different direction than "real" (Japanese) anime, instead of an attempt to enrich the network of anime-esque conventions.[20] Here, the bordered-whole form clashes against the decentralized network, in a cultural politics of national ownership, whose spatiality does not align with the actualities of the decentralized transnational spread of the anime-esque.

As such, it is not necessarily any one of these forms that are more prominent than the other at all times. True, it is the bordered-whole (anime as Japanese popular cultural gone global) that is the "standard" view of anime's globality, but upon closer inspection, through examining the media-formal specifics of anime and its production, the centralized and decentralized transnationalities of anime become more prominently visible. These three forms are in constant engagement with one another: sometimes overlapping, such as when the centralized production of anime in Tokyo aligns with notions of anime as "Made in Japan;" sometimes coinciding, as evinced by the centralized network of production that is facilitated by the decentralized operations of re-performing anime-esque conventions; and sometimes conflicting, for instance, when the decentralized anime-esque conventions are performed in anime or games made mainly outside of Japan, and these are seen as "inauthentic" works.

By tracing the dynamics of anime's media-form, each anime production will reveal different tendencies towards the three forms, but never precisely aligning with any one of these forms. This is the challenge of anime's globality, the complexity of the conventionality that hides behind the seeming unity of each performance, of which *Demon Slayer* is just one of many, each emblematic of the tensions and operations of contemporary transnationality.

## Endnote

1 See, for instance: Yuri Kageyama, "'Demon Slayer' Anime Strikes Chord with Pandemic Japan," Japan Today, March 5, 2021, https://japantoday.com/category/entertainment/animated-'demon-slayer'-strikes-chord-with-pandemic-japan.

2 Kat Moon, "Everything to Know About 'Demon Slayer,'" Time, February 24, 2021, https://time.com/5941594/what-is-demon-slayer-about/; Rafael Antonio Pineda, "Demon Slayer Film Passes Spirited Away as #1 All-Time Japanese Film Worldwide," Anime News Network, February 23, 2021, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2021-02-23/demon-slayer-film-passes-spirited-

away-as-no.1-all-time-japanese-film-worldwide/.169863.

3 Marc Steinberg, "8-Bit Manga: Kadokawa's Madara, or, The Gameic Media Mix," *Kinephanos* 5, no. Geemu and media mix: Theoretical approaches to Japanese video games (December 2015): 40.

4 Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 242-45.

5 Agnes Nguyen, "Theatrical Premiere Impressions – *Demon Slayer: Kimetsu No Yaiba*," April 14, 2019, https://anitrendz.net/news/2019/04/14/theatrical-premiere-impressions-demon-slayer-kimetsu-no-yaiba/.

6 It should be noted that they are discussing the TV anime: Nguyen.

7 Hye Jean Chung, "Media Heterotopia and Transnational Filmmaking: Mapping Real and Virtual Worlds," *Cinema Journal* 51 (2012): 87-109.

8 Stevie Suan, "Anime's Performativity: Diversity through Conventionality in a Global Media-Form," *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12 (2017): 62-79.

9 Jaqueline Berndt, "Facing the Nuclear Issue in a 'Mangaesque' Way: The Barefoot Gen Anime," *Cinergie* 2 (2012): 148-62; Jaqueline Berndt, "Mangaesque – Japanese Media and Popular Culture," accessed March 22, 2021, https://jmpc-utokyo.com/keyword/mangaesque/.

10 Stevie Suan, "Anime's Spatiality: Media-Form, Dislocation, and Globalization," ed. Stevie Suan, *Mechademia: Second Arc (Materialities Across Asia)* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 24-44.

11 Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, trans. Jonathan E. Abel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

12 Stevie Suan,『アニメの「行為者」–アニメーションにおける体現的/修辞的パフォーマンスによる「自己」』(Anime's Actors: Constituting 'Self-Hood' through Embodied and Figurative Performance in Animation)," *Animēshon Kenky*ū, 19, no. 1 (2017): 3-15.

13 This notion of the operations of the anime-esque is heavily inspired by the operations of performativity espoused by Judith Butler. For further details, see Suan, "Anime's Performativity: Diversity through Conventionality in a Global Media-Form."

14 Heidi Kemps, "Just What the Heck Is Genshin Impact?," Anime News Network, January 25, 2021, https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/feature/2021-01-25/just-what-the-heck-is-genshin-impact/.168416; Ozzie Mejia, "Genshin Impact Explores an Anime-Style Open World This Fall on PS4," Shacknews, August 6, 2020, https://www.shacknews.com/article/119646/genshin-impact-explores-an-anime-style-open-world-this-fall-on-ps4; Miguel Moran, "Genshin Impact Is a Jaw-Dropping Open-World Anime Extravaganza – TheSixthAxis," July 21, 2020, https://www.thesixthaxis.com/2020/07/21/genshin-impact-is-a-jaw-dropping-open-world-anime-extravaganza/; プラネットメディア株式会社, "「原神(げんしん)」アニメ調のグラフィックスでPC・PS4・Switchでも楽しめるオープンワールド型の新作スマホゲーム!｜オンラインゲームPLANET," January 24, 2020, https://onlinegame-pla.net/genshin-app/.

15 Moreover, with popular Japanese voice actors dubbing the voices of the characters in the standard anime mode, the game is itself transnational in its production.

16 Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3.

17 Levine, 5.

18 Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology*, 10.

19 Stevie Suan, "Repeating Anime's Creativity Across Asia," in *Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices*, ed. Jeroen de Kloet, Yiu Fai Chow, and Gladys Pak Lei Chong (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2019), 141-60.

20 Kacsuk is talking specifically about manga, but many of the same statements apply to anime. Zoltan Kacsuk, "Re-Examining the 'What Is Manga' Problematic: The Tension and Interrelationship between the Style versus Made in Japan Positions," *Arts, Special Issue Japanese Media Cultures in Japan and Abroad: Transnational Consumption of Manga, Anime, and Video Games* 7, no. 3 (2018): 13-14.