

## 2. CASE STUDY: ANIME MUSIC VIDEOS

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When on 1 August 1981 at 12:01 a.m. the Buggles' 'Video Killed the Radio Star' aired as MTV's first music video, its lyrics parodied the very media presenting it: 'We can't rewind, we've gone too far, . . . put the blame on VTR.' Influenced by J. G. Ballard's 1960 short story 'The Sound Sweep', Trevor Horn's song voiced anxiety over the dystopian, artificial world developing as a result of modern technology. Ballard's story described a world in which naturally audible sound, particularly song, is considered to be noise pollution; a sound sweep removes this acoustic noise on a daily basis while radios broadcast a silent, rescored version of music using a richer, ultrasonic orchestra that subconsciously produces positive feelings in its listeners. Ballard was particularly criticising technology's attempt to manipulate the human voice, by contending that the voice as a natural musical instrument can only be generated by 'non-mechanical means which the neruophonic engineer could never hope, or bother, to duplicate' (Ballard 2006: 150). Similarly, Horn professed anxiety over a world in which VTRs (video tape recorders) replace real-time radio music with simulacra of those performances. VTRs allowed networks to replay shows, to cater to different time zones, and to rerecord over material. Indeed, the first VTR broadcast occurred on 25 October 1956, when a recording of guest singer Dorothy Collins made the previous night was broadcast 'live' on the *Jonathan Winters Show*. The business of keeping audiences hooked 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, promoted the concept of quantity over quality: yesterday's information was irrelevant and could be permanently erased after serving its money-making purpose.

MTV chose in its defining moment to air a video that disapproved of the ineluctable transition from talent to marketability, to the extent that the band blows up a television in the video's closing moments. Horn remarks of making the video:

'Video' was a picture like a little screen play which we tried to illustrate with the music. We wanted the album to have that precise clinical feel – it's all part of the concept of the plastic age. But rather than totally rely on machines we took different musicians and made them play like machines. (Pike 1980)

MTV heralded a new era, symbolised by a spaceman stepping onto the moon and holding an MTV flag. Its first music videos were conceived as promotional clips for both artist and channel: saturation play and cross-promotional synergy (airing songs that plugged MTV in their lyrics) guaranteed that aired songs would become hits, in turn granting commercial success to band and channel alike.<sup>1</sup> MTV founder Bob Pittmann realised the advantage of marketing this radical medium to a naïve and rebellious youth culture, who became their target consumers. He once remarked that 'the strongest appeal you can make is emotionally. If you can get their emotions going, make them forget their logic, you've got them. At MTV, we don't shoot for the 14-year olds, we own them!'<sup>2</sup> Pittmann's revolution was, in fact, a marketing farce; as testimony to Ballard's and Horn's prophecies, music diminished in favour of manmade stage presence – the song and musicians became subordinate to the eye candy. These 'self-contained packages of sight and sound' eliminated the need for listeners to embellish songs with their own interpretation. Music videos were stigmatised as a simple 'electric fix' (Saltzman 2000:17).

Who would have surmised that two decades later youth culture would 'hand MTV's ass back to it on a silver plate', by announcing the death of video by Internet?<sup>3</sup> In 2000 eStudio created a music video titled 'Internet Killed the Video Star', which, producers Mark Cohn and Ken Martin explain, 'chronicles the explosive growth of a whole new medium . . . and leaves a lot of road kill in its wake – MTV, AOL, Bill Gates, and others'.<sup>4</sup> The music in the video is performed by a fictional group, the 'Broad Band', comprised of three animated girls performing with 'Internet' instruments – a computer keyboard as piano, mouse guitars, and Apple laptops as drums. The plot? A disgruntled, fat man is about to blow his head off while watching redundant MTV videos when a computer magically appears to provide an alternative: home-generated, quality music videos. The marketing ploy? Freely shared music and video files over the Internet and affordable editing software allow people to customise listening and viewing experiences for themselves. eStudio was broadcasting an already nascent, bastardised art form: the 'unofficial' music video.

UNOFFICIAL MUSIC VIDEOS (UMVs): A PARODY OF STATUS  
QUO PRODUCTION

Unofficial music videos (UMVs) are created by ‘ultimate fans’. They collate (mash up) footage from televised series, movies and traditional music videos with music they have sampled and possibly mixed at home. Although distributing their videos is considered copyright infringement, the unauthorised video is generally created under the premise that the music and video industries are drowning in a sea of greed and corporate politics that rarely promotes true talent or gives artists their monetary due for the intellectual property they create. Some groups, like Eclectic Method, argue that ignoring copyright is the essence of UMVs, not merely as a sign of rebellion, but with the aim of changing existing laws.<sup>5</sup> Others use them to promote political propaganda: one well-known example is Franklin Lopez’s ‘George Bush Don’t Like Black People’ (2005), which combines news footage from the Katrina disaster with a remix of Kanye West’s song ‘Gold Digger’, subversively broadcasting a side-comment made by West that ‘George Bush don’t like black people’. In addition to news footage of black people stuck on their rooftops or children asking for food, the rewritten lyrics (set on top of West’s original music) criticise Bush for his tardiness in visiting New Orleans after the Katrina aftermath, and the reappropriation of Katrina funds to the war in Iraq: ‘Bush ain’t a gold digger, but he ain’t fuckin’ with no broke niggas’ and ‘Come down Bush, come down come down’ replace the original lyrics, which had criticised women for valuing wealth and manipulating their men for it.<sup>6</sup>

One universally shared ideology amongst creators of unofficial videos (UMVers) is that the sum of spliced parts remains greater than the originals from which those parts hailed. This process mirrors the traditional music-video technique of *commutation*, in which an object’s ‘cultural parameters’ are jarred. A polar bear appearing in a Madonna video, for example, seems nonsensical – its appearance forces the viewer to question how a polar bear relates to the quintessential pop icon.<sup>7</sup> Danger Mouse’s ‘Grey Video’ (directed by Ramon and Pedro, 2004) combined rapper Jay-Z’s *Black Album* with the Beatles’ *White Album* to emphasise the kindred relation between music and video of different genres and eras. The video mashes clips from the Beatles’ *Hard Day’s Night* with footage from a Jay-Z live performance, and features a computer-generated scene of John Lennon break-dancing and Ringo Starr scratching. Inadvertently, the album sparked an electronic civil disobedience protest known as Grey Tuesday (24 February 2004), during which participating websites allowed 24 hours to download Danger Mouse’s album freely. They permitted this in defiance of current laws that limit sampling and using unlicensed music, and to promote copyright reform. Producers Ramon and Pedro offer little commentary on their ‘Internet cult video’, other than a disclaimer that it was made for

experimental purposes, under the influence of drugs, and in homage to the Fab Four and Jay-Z. Brian Burton (Danger Mouse) also never intended his mixing and matching CD to spark legal controversy; he simply referred to his album as an exercise in ‘deconstruction and reconstruction’ (Paoletta 2004). Contrary to Eclectic Method’s work, Burton did not want to delineate the problems with current music/videos. His focus remained on experimentation, on producing an avant garde collation for its own sake. When asked why the album stimulated such demand, he offered an even simpler response: ‘I’m surprised that this many people like the CD. What I made was a f\*\*\*ed-up recording. It confirms that people want that which they cannot have’ (ibid.).

What do UMVers want that they cannot have? Certainly they no longer want their MTV! Rather, they crave the time, talent and freedom to re-envision music and video – to play, blur genres, contradict ‘pop’ meanings, and revitalise what has become a slowly dying, ever greedy, talent-lacking industry. Thus, the Internet has become home to many types of UMVers. Some use spliced clips to enhance music with poignant imagery (and vice versa). Others jumble or mock traditional associations in ways that result in funny, political or nonsensical videos. Still others focus exclusively on showcasing their technical prowess. Regardless of motivation or ability, the underlying intent is to form a community in which everyone and anyone can participate and contribute.

#### ANIME MUSIC VIDEOS (AMVs): A SELF-REFERENTIAL GENRE OF UMVs

One unique faction of UMVers is the anime music video collective. While their talents and intent can be categorised among the broad range described above, AMVers must – in order to fit the AMV genre – limit their footage to anime-related media. Although they are more restricted in materials, AMVers hold the distinct advantage of industry ambivalence towards the ‘pirating’ and rendering of video footage in music video form. Most industry Anime Expos feature a panel on AMVs, and host a variety of fan contests including an ‘AMV Iron Chef’, which – on the model of the world-renowned cooking show – allots AMVers a set time limit to create and ‘serve’ their AMV to the audience for judgement in several categories. The anime industry only recently gained a foothold in the Western world, so AMVs are essentially free marketing: they not only promote awareness of anime products beyond the small base of hardcore fans, but also allow companies to recruit editors for making trailers and DVD extras.<sup>8</sup>

Vlad G. Pohnert’s ‘Orange Road’ (September 1993) marked the first notable appearance of an AMV. Pohnert bridged Samantha Fox’s remake hit ‘I Only Wanna’ Be with You’ (1993) with clips from Matsumoto Izumi’s *Orange Road* (1988) to create an AMV that represented a plot both works shared: intellectual boy falls in love with wilful girl and must overcome external hindrances

(i.e. social class, distance, other boys and girls) to be together. Fox had debuted in the UK as the ultimate Page 3 girl – she was a topless model converted into pop star overnight. Her music video promo ‘I Only’ featured the singer in lingerie and leather, trying to tempt ‘good boys’ into giving her attention. *Orange Road* also appealed to ‘young love’ tastes and was among the most popular romantic comedy *shōnen* manga, often targeted at young male readers. Thus, Pohnert did not reinterpret the song or anime; ironically, his underground bootleg promoted the pop aspect of both. This video, while a pioneer in the UMV and AMV scenes, nevertheless mimics MTV’s first phase of videos: it is a mood-enhancing narrative that *typifies* adolescent experience.<sup>9</sup> But – unlike Fox’s and Izumi’s work – this AMV was not created to *appeal* to teen sensibility for commercial gain; it was shown only in local clubs, as one fan’s devotion to anime, as an exercise in the then uncommon art of making a video using the VCR-to-VCR method.

First-generation AMVers like Otaku Vengeance and Dark Rose Studios also produced works that merely took obscure, rebellious songs and perverted the original anime’s intent. Otaku’s ‘Bitches’, for example, features Mindless Self Indulgence amalgamated with the children’s anime *Pokemon*, in which cute and fuzzy Pikachu lip-synchs the lyrics ‘Bitches love me’ cause they know that I can rock, and bitches love me ‘cause they know that I can rhyme, and bitches love me’ cause they know that I can fuck, and bitches love me ‘cause they know that I’m on time.’ Dark Rose Studios lodged Relient K’s ‘Pirates who Don’t Do Anything’ in *Cowboy Bebop* (1998), emphasising that the main protagonists as bounty hunters did little but ‘lie around, and if you ask [them] to do anything, [they’ll] just tell you, [they] don’t do anything’.

Today’s AMV producers are less interested in blanket reiterations and mockery of themes and generally fall into two camps: those interested in using effects to further the video’s meaning, and those who use the video to further the appearance created by effects. Popular effects include color shifts, freeze-frames, cross-fades and inversions, and serve the purpose of synchronising music with video. Trickier, more impressive effects such as compositing allow the editor to fabricate a scene that doesn’t exist in the source, by using bits and pieces from various anime. AMVs are typically categorised by one of the following approaches:

- 1 Storytelling: combines audio and video to tell a story, whether true to the original sources, or an entirely new story.
- 2 Exploratory: focuses on the message, not the character or narrative, to convey the editor’s feeling about war, innocence, love, etc.
- 3 Examination: character development videos that examine an individual’s personality, biography or relationships. Sometimes groups of characters are examined in terms of some commonality.<sup>10</sup>

From the viewer's perspective, AMVs are judged similarly to traditional music videos. Expressiveness, originality, sensory appeal and reviewability affect a viewer's appreciation of the work. Among these elements, reviewability – the desire to watch a music video more than once – is the most critical, because it reinforces the viewer's interest in the media being promoted (in the case of traditional videos, the music; in the case of AMVs, the anime).

Reviewability sounds easy enough to accomplish: simply make a video fun and visually appealing enough so that viewers will remain captivated. But the methods are more complicated and diverse. Traditional music-video-makers such as Nigel Dick, Michel Gondry, Mark Romanek and Spike Jonze use a variety of techniques to ensure reviewability. Dick promotes 'cool stuff' videos, 'crammed full of accessories and visual aids to disguise the lack of substance' (Saltzman 2000: 37); Gondry has been compared to Georges Méliès and labelled a special-effects wizard (he was among the first to use the 'bullet time' effect, and is well known for his manipulations of *mise en scène*), and uses these effects to emphasise 'how stories become created, amplified and distorted', because 'our lives are shaped by these stories' (Thrill 2006); Romanek – whose 'Closer' (Nine Inch Nails) and 'Bedtime Stories' (Madonna) videos are in New York's Museum of Modern Art permanent collection – builds music videos around the 'charisma machine' embodied in the musician; they do not so much define performance as provide a context that parallels the artist's intent (Rainer 2005). Jonze, a master of commutation and offbeat videos, underscores the improvisational aspect of video-making: 'The first third is the ideas you bring to it, the second third is what other people, like the DP, the FX guys or the actors bring to it, and the final third is what ends up happening by chance or via spontaneity on the set, which you don't plan for but what is often the best stuff' (Hunter 2000). Contained within these statements is a kernel idea: reviewability is essentially grounded in the viewer seeing something unexpected and overwhelming (whether by content or by sensory overload).

Unfortunately, perhaps because they tend to be younger and exempt from 'selling' their products, AMVers rarely articulate a personal vision or provide ready formulas for reviewability. The majority of AMVs seem to lean toward retelling the anime's narrative or character profiling, while a few others focus on one-upping their own technical feats. Reviewability stems from three main approaches. Some AMVers create technical effects so original and breathtaking that it requires several viewings to absorb them; at times, a select few even kick off new genres by playing with the relationship between effects and theme. XOST Productions, for example, recently developed 'Recursive' videos, in which the source footage for the AMV is derived from the AMV itself. The first editor's segment uses anime footage, and all subsequent editors use the previous editor's footage, so that the 'theme' of the AMV is created from a random chain. Decoy Ops Studio describes an 'Educational' genre, which has a two-fold

purpose: anime's elite characters' fighting techniques are portrayed while simultaneously revealing the AMVers' technical weaponry. The second approach to reviewability relies on using lesser-known anime and/or music, or from twisting well-known anime with a new story or set of associations. Suberunker Studeosh, for example, is known for its parodies of pop culture, in which segments from an anime are matched to pop iconography in music. Premonition Studios, by contrast, is like the Spike Jonze of anime; it offers quirky videos that promote lesser-known bands, and relies on commutation to create interesting parodies ('Elvis vs. Anime'). Finally, reviewability can be accomplished by inventing a new scenario that is completely unrelated to the original footage or song. Istiv Studios calls this 'Scenaristic' videos, and comments upon the technique in the making of 'The Race': 'I search[ed] for a story that can motivate the characters to participate in the race. I had the idea of a mysterious Great Prize that no one knows what it is. So the participants are imagining their own anime story.'<sup>11</sup> One might argue, then, that traditional music-video-makers (TMVers) generally use effects that cater to the viewer, while AMVs rely upon self-referentiality: they are created more for the producer's personal gratification and in homage to anime than to elicit a response from their audience. AMVs that perfectly match a song and anime (as with Pohnert's video) get less reviewability than AMVs that define new themes and trademark the producer.

Consider, for example, the translation of AC/DC's 'Back in Black' (1980) into the Evolution Control Committee's political parody of Dan Rathers and the CBS news, and then Aquiline Studio's audio sampling from this parody to parody the foremost (and most corrupt) informant in the anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995). AC/DC's song appeared on an album of the same title, and delved into themes of mortality and hedonism. It was composed in tribute to the band's former lead singer, Bon Scott, who had died of mysterious causes earlier that year. In 2000, the Evolution Control Committee created a UMV titled 'Rocked by Rape': they took the background music from AC/DC's song and mingled it with sampled words from Dan Rathers's newscasts, then mingled both with footage from wars, government officials and Hollywood icons to criticise the manner in which television bombards us with depraved situations.

As we watched Rathers convey the news each night, we were struck at the brutal violence that was delivered, day in, day out. Unfailingly, the good news ALWAYS appeared as the very last segment of each broadcast. You may call it dessert, but we call it empty calories – a meaningless gesture; an insincere smile to follow 25 minutes of carnage. How can we sit idly by, watching that insincere smile on Dan Rathers's face? When you offer a daily parade like that, you must expect that some people will wonder just what the emperor is wearing.<sup>12</sup>

Rathers had used the phrase ‘rocked by rape’ to cover a story about a girl’s abduction and murder. Evolution Control’s UMV mocked Rathers’s words, implying that the innocent public is being raped by sensationalist media – a media more interested in delivering shocking news that gathers viewer ratings than in focusing on positive current events.

In 2003 Aquiline Studios sampled the entire audio from the ECC’s UMV, and created an AMV that mocked the ever-popular apocalyptic anime *Evangelion*. Dan Rathers becomes a voiceover for Gendo Ikari, the leader of NERV – an organisation that fights aliens that are trying to wipe out humanity using bio-engineered weapons. Ikari, like Rathers, should be the most trusted man in the news; the AMV presents him not only as the trustworthy ‘teleprompt spokesperson’ for NERV, but also as a news story. Ikari does have his own agenda in NERV – to resurrect his dead wife – and he commits heinous crimes to achieve it. Arrows point to Ikari’s head when the words ‘liar’ and ‘unremorseful killer’ appear as if he is reporting on himself, whereas Rathers’s use of these words reported nothing about his character. The AMV also takes scenes from the original anime and alters their meaning so that they refer to ‘real’ fan culture. When the words ‘economic collapse’ are voiced by Ikari-Rathers, an image of Asuka Langley’s notebook appears with a false subtitle: ‘Asuka Langley Soryu Photo Application, Only 30 Yen Per Picture’. Asuka is a temperamental, redheaded teenager desired not only by the main protagonist, but also by a host of real-life fans who render her in explicit outfits and poses in their fan art. The implication here is that obsession with a fictional character has created a real-life economic disaster. One would have to be part of anime culture to get the joke; otherwise, one would assume the subtitle to be an exact translation of what was happening in the anime.

#### FROM TMV TO AMV

Aquiline’s video attained high reviewability and excellent overall ratings on the central website for AMVs, AMV.org. The website hosts an annual competition for ‘Best Video’ in several categories. MTV also hosts an annual video awards show (VMA). Their ‘Best Breakthrough Videos’ corresponds to AMV.org’s ‘Most Original Video’, and it is interesting to compare the quality and intent of the videos in both competitions.

The MTV music video awards allow for only one ‘winner’ per category each year. Surprisingly, I found on average 40–80 AMVs for each MTV winner from 1998–2005. The MTV ‘Best Breakthrough’ award list is as follows:

- 1998: Prodigy, ‘Smack My Bitch Up’
- 1999: Fat Boy Slim, ‘Praise You’
- 2000: Björk, ‘All is Full of Love’





Figure 1 Image of Asuka Langley

- 2001: Fat Boy Slim, 'Weapon of Choice'
- 2002: White Stripes, 'Fell in Love'
- 2003: Coldplay, 'The Scientist'
- 2004: Franz Ferdinand, 'Take Me Out'
- 2005: Gorillaz, 'Feel Good Inc.'

Generally, the concept behind each of these songs was as groundbreaking as the video. Sadly, their AMV counterparts rarely deliver more than a stale, regurgitated impression. Prodigy's 'Smack My Bitch Up', for example, encountered censorship and criticism for its seeming references to rape and violence towards women. Prodigy member Howlett, however, explained that the song referred to 'doing anything intensely, like being on stage – going for extreme manic energy'.<sup>13</sup> The few lyrics in the song, 'Change my Pitch Up, Smack my Bitch up', were actually sampled from rap group Ultramagnetic MC's 'Give the Drummer Some', which itself used samples from James Brown's 'Funky Drummer' and others. The TMV, directed by Jonas Åkerlund, was filmed as though through the eyes of the protagonist and features a drunk, coked-up vandal who smacks and fondles women; the shocking twist is that what seems to be a man is revealed in the closing seconds as a lesbian. Unfortunately, the AMV variants

add nothing to the originals. They are all action videos that feature heroes and their nemeses beating each other.

Fat Boy Slim's 'Praise You' samples the lyric 'praise you' from the opening of 'Take Yo' Praise' by Camille Yarbrough; Slim says of his music that his interest rests with sampling from 'crap records' to create mainstream dance tunes rather than developing meaningful themes. Spike Jonze directed the TMV, which was groundbreaking not only for its cameos of Jonze and Slim, but mainly because it was filmed *guerilla style*: outside a movie theater without permission to film on the premises (the theater manager actually attempts to turn off the portable boom box in the video). More arbitrarily, Jonze had originally filmed the video for a different Slim song, 'Rockefeller Skank', using random people named as the fictional Torrance Dance Community Group, and spending a mere \$800 – most of which was used to replace the portable stereo and feed crew and cast. Again, the AMVs leave much to be desired, and little to the imagination: they focus on praising the impressive feats of anime heroes. To Jonze's credit, a degree of self-referentiality exists in this work. His cameo as one of the untrained, aloof dancers relates to his spontaneous, untraditional and isolated personality in real life.

Slim's 'Weapon of Choice' sampled Sly & the Family Stone's 1968 recording 'Into My Own Thing'. The video – also directed by Jonze – became legendary overnight because celebrity Christopher Walken starred in the video as a flying, savvy dancer in a hotel lobby. Again Jonze attained a degree of self-referentiality not only for his own quirkiness, but also for depicting Walken as a suave if odd man, not unlike his personality in real life. Among the AMVs one parody appears: the 'Ode to Perversion'. Producer Der Kommissar decided it would be funny to splice perverted dialogue from various anime – *Cowboy Bebop* (1998), *Last Exile* (2003), *Neon Genesis* (1995), *Trigun* (1998), *FLCL* (2000), *Love Hina* (tv) (2000) and *Outlaw Star* (1998). 'Weapon' was not the first song he intended to use, but he decided upon it because out of several upbeat instrumentals it was one that would complement rather than drown out the dialogue. Kommissar realised the song would work when, in a visit to the mall, it played in the food court; the producer instantly felt like 'jumping on top of my table and dancing' as Walken had in the original, and chose the song for its 'fun' element. Some of the snippets, which comprise only a fragment of the entire anime, are 'Hey you're not looking up my dress are you?', 'Mind if I hang out and watch?' and 'I lost my room can I share yours?' Kommissar's AMV does not always parallel the original anime's themes (most being serious in tone), but does complement the comical, if infrequent, perversion in their dialogues.<sup>14</sup>

Björk's 'All is Full of Love' comes off the album *Homogenic*, which the artist describes as being 'about inventing your own paradise, but underneath your kitchen table, so it's very secretive'.<sup>15</sup> The album proceeds chronologically and

this song – the last track – culminates in a formerly trapped woman overcoming her oppression not through battle but through love. The highly controversial video, directed by Chris Cunningham, features a passionate embrace and kissing between two very human-looking robots (the female robot looking uncannily like Björk); Cunningham brainstormed the video when first hearing the track, at which time he ‘wrote down the words “sexual,” “milk,” “white porcelain,” “surgery.” [The video]’s a combination of several fetishes: industrial robotics, female anatomy, and fluorescent light in that order.<sup>16</sup> Again, like Jonze, Cunningham managed to produce a video that was self-referential (to Björk’s physical appearance and native culture). This was the one award-winning TMV that had an equally impressive trail of AMVs. Ingress Production’s ‘All Full of Geist’ revisits the TMV’s main theme using the anime *Key the Metal Idol* (1994). The anime is Pinocchio retold – Key is a dying android with an irreplaceable battery, and can rejuvenate only by befriending 30,000 friends before she flickers out. The anime’s theme recalls the song’s story of a girl who can escape her sterile life only through love. Ingress’s AMV takes the TMV and anime a step further in several aspects:

The style of the technology in the anime, and particularly the vision of the white-shelled robot Key emerging from the water in the OP sequence, also fits very well with the ‘lesbian robots’ in the real music video for ‘All Is Full of Love.’ In his video, Cunningham uses the sound of the strumming *koto* to go into a close up of the machinery around the robots, and I tried to imitate this here with shots of Ajo Heavy Industries’ robotics technology. The clip of water dripping off Key’s face played backwards at 0:50 is a homage to the backwards-dripping milk that appears in Cunningham’s video.<sup>17</sup>

Embryonic Productions ‘All is Full’ is also a technical masterpiece, although the producer emphasises that, unlike her previously shallow ‘special-effects’ videos, this one strongly accentuates the source anime’s plot. *Lain* (1998) traces a girl’s rite of passage from lost adolescence in the dead, real world to omnipresent being via Wired, an international computer network. The final scene involves Lain shedding this metaphysical protective ‘shell’ and speaking with a father-figure/god who mentions madeleines (a classic metaphor for memory) after his attempts at comforting her with regard to the transformative and dramatic events that have unfolded.<sup>18</sup> The AMV pays homage to *Lain* and the TMV’s character development and plot; however, the music and effects also imitate the anime’s theme: Björk’s song combined Icelandic tones with machine sounds to blend her childhood nostalgia with synthesised techno music, just as *Lain*’s youth merges with her computerised state. In addition to *Lain* lip-synching the lyrics, the producer creates a 37-layer overlay, each with its own

motion effect, that slowly disappears to reveal a full-screen facial of Lain.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps most impressively, though used only to mask the repetitive aspect of Björk's song, the producer removed the closing parts of 'All is Full' and ended the AMV with Olive's 'You're Not Alone' (1995). The subdued trip-hop song forms a triplet with 'All is Full' and *Lain*; its lyrics perfectly compliment the theme of a girl's split personality, separated between the real and virtual worlds and trying to find serenity: 'Two minds that once were close, Now so many miles apart I will not falter though, I'll hold on till you're home. Safely back where you belong, And see how our love has grown.'

While 'All is Full of Love' remains the only 'Best Breakthrough' MTV video that is outdone by its respective AMVs, the same cannot be said of award-winning AMVs and their complementary TMVs. In fact the Top 4 in the run-off/final vote for 'Most Original AMV' for 2005 received awards in several categories:

- Yann J., 'Jihaku': Best Drama, Sentimental, Most Artistic, Video of the Year;
- Decoy Ops, 'Naruto's Technique Beat': Best Instrumental, Visual Effects;
- Kevin Chiou, 'Still Preoccupied with 1985': Best Character Profile, Comedy, Fun, Parody Video;
- Kevin Chiou, 'The Wizard of Ozakasuberunker': Most Original Video, Creator.

Yann J.'s 'Jihaku' remains impressive for the sheer magnitude of anime featured – about 120 joined as a montage using the Foo Fighters' song 'Best of You'. The Foo Fighters' lyrics and video depict one person (lead singer Grohl, perhaps) vying to stop his escapist tendencies, and encouraging his listener to abandon his defeatist attitude and block out the person 'getting the best of you'. The TMV focuses mainly on Grohl's open mouth singing into the microphone, then shifts to various, seemingly unrelated images of fighting children, sex, a wall graffitied with words like 'They all died in the fire I started' and 'Resist', and animals attacking each other in the wild. The Fantasy Studios producer intended to mimic the theme and appearance of its TMV:

It's a video about life in general, a confession about life, full of passion, rage, deception, determination, desire to fight, desire to give up. . . . Some people said to me this video is really pessimistic, others said the message is very hopeful. I'm glad this video brings this ambiguity. Like in the real music video, I have put neutral scenes and elements, without explanation or reason . . . I love it. I have inset also real scenes of the Foo Fighters' singer to keep the side of a real music video.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly, Yann J. titled his AMV *jihaku*, which means ‘confession’, and while critics have made biographical speculations about Grohl’s life via the lyrics and TMV, both Grohl and his AMV counterpart remain silent on the intentions behind their work, stating that it is based on an inexplicable feeling. This may be the quintessential example in which TMV and AMV exhibit self-referential qualities based on the artists’ observations of, and experiences in, the ‘real’ world.

Decoy Ops, mentioned earlier in this chapter, created ‘Naruto’s Technique Beat’ as an ‘Educational’ video. The chosen song, ‘Seizure of Power’, was an instrumental work borrowed from industrial icon Marilyn Manson; it was created for the *Resident Evil* (2002) movie score, and therefore has no TMV. Interestingly, the movie has anime-esque offshoots: it was based on a Japanese video game titled *Biohazard* (2000) and created by Shinji Mikami (who, in turn, had borrowed the basic story from the Japanese horror film *Sweet Home* (1989)).<sup>21</sup> As Decoy Ops explains, the AMV is a character development from *Naruto* (1999), in which ‘A ninja delivers the complete study on the Five created by Decoy Drone. As the ANBU members watch the tape, they witness the incomprehensible power of the chosen five subjects.’<sup>22</sup> Viewers likewise watch the character study from the Drone’s perspective, while witnessing the ‘incomprehensible power’ of the producer’s talent. In addition to altering the original anime’s colors, the AMV features its own plot, a series of stunning overlays, fabricated subtitles, and semblances of how a drone would see things. The AMV is self-referential not only in highlighting the producer’s technical prowess, but also in representing his character. Like the anime’s main character Uzumaki Naruto, Decoy Ops’ commentary typecasts him as a prankster – a loud, hyperactive adolescent who ‘ninjas’ (pirates) footage and searches for approval and recognition from the AMV community.

Kevin Chiou of Suberunker Studeosh won a host of awards in 2005 for two AMVs. Chiou’s penchant for comical and parodied work parallels his self-image: his live virtual journal is titled ‘Suberunker’s Superbly Santastic, Sufficient (Sometimes Stupid) SiveJournal’, and the weekly entries reveal a self-absorbed, energetic college student who makes deprecating or quirky comments not only about his own work, but about Disneyland, movies and friends/project associates. Briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, Chiou’s jokes stem from finding anime footage that matches his selected song’s iconography (or is manipulated to do so). The music is drunk-punk-pop band Bowling for Soup’s ‘1985’, which describes a suburban mother’s confusion about contemporary pop culture, her shattered dreams of being a libidinous actress, and her nostalgia for 1985 – the time when she was still cool and music was ‘still on MTV’. The TMV parodies the band more than the woman. When her husband leaves, the voyeuristic lead singer pulls his mates indoors, and they perform as an amateur garage band, dressed up as Robert Palmer’s sexy

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women, break-dancers who can't break-dance, George Michael, and a Motley Crew/Whitesnake heavy metal hair band. They do this in order to attract the 'M.I.L.F.' (mother I'd like to fuck), and she delivers her goods by jumping onto their car, partially stripping, and gyrating to their performance. When asked why they titled the song '1985' when the references were about 1984, lead singer Reddick offered a droll excuse: '1985 rhymes better with "preoccupied".'<sup>23</sup> Lyrics as nursery rhymes mattered more than historical accuracy, and this lack of regard for truth is a frequent accusation made about the 1990s generation. Chiou's video, likewise, is faithful to the original anime's history. It is based on *Azumanga Daioh* (2002), which aired 5-minute episodes and a 6-minute movie, itself representative of the theory that today's youth suffer from attention deficit disorder (ADD) and a lack of interest in anything serious. The anime's title has little meaning either, being a play on the creator's name 'Azuma' and the magazine in which the story (as manga) was first published, *Daioh*. Only two males appear in the anime (one being a teacher obsessed with teenage girls), and the story revolves around the absurd behaviour and experiences of six high school girls, a few of whom exhibit ADD behaviour. Like '1985', the anime's theme song refers to themes of teenagers' nonsensical behaviour and disconnection from reality. Titled 'The Cake of Mishearing', the chorus lyrics read 'CAKE FOR YOU! A simple happiness TEA FOR YOU! With a big smile the chorus of angels at the window is to you, just your ear playing tricks? The voice saying "I love you, I love you".'<sup>24</sup> Chiou takes the AMV one step further than the TMV, parodying both '1985's iconography and popular anime by creating perversions of the original album covers: Nirvana translates into *Evangelion's* 'Nerv'ana with the evil Angel replacing the original – a beautiful, naked angel with internal organs exposed; U2's 'Wide Awake in America' translates into 'Wide Awake in Japan' with the archetypal, evil Pokemon replacing Bono, the quintessential rock icon; Blondie's 'No Exit' features *Full Metal Alchemist* characters instead of the original band members; and *Moulin Rouge's* movie poster features Ozzy Osbourne as an absinthe Green Fairy. What distinguishes the AMV above Bowling for Soup's TMV is that the former intentionally mocks anime and music classics, while the latter only parodies the youth culture of 1985. Perhaps most ironically, the award-winning AMV was categorised as a 'tiny project' by its producer.

Last but not least, Chiou's 'Wizard of Ozaka' was meant to parody the classic *Wizard of Oz*. The title has a double meaning: first, it pokes fun at the American mispronunciation of Osaka – the third largest city in Japan, known in Tokyo for its comedians, which in turn becomes the land of 'Oz'aka. Chiou's anime uses *Azumanga Daioh* for the main footage (the protagonist Osaka takes Dorothy's role), and splices in characters from *Full Metal Alchemist* (Alphonse Elric – a boy whose soul is trapped in a suit of armour – as the Tin Man), *One Piece* (loyal protagonist Luffy in a straw hat becomes the Scarecrow), *Bleach* (plushy sap

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Kon embodies the Lion), and *Evangelion* (evil mastermind Gendo is the Wizard). The anime is set to the instrumental on the *Chicken Run* soundtrack (2000); while no TMV exists for the song, the animated film plot is reminiscent of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and the protagonists (the chickens), like Dorothy and her travelling companions fleeing the Wicked Witch of the West, desire to escape the grasp of egg farmers who intend to make them into chicken pot pies. Chiou describes the evolution of the AMV from a simple parody of the film into a criticism of real-life role-playing games (RPGs), in which people assume the role of fictional characters. Theorist Tracy Hickman notes of RPGs that

In role-playing, the *characters* must constantly be confronted with problems and situations strongly based on their morality, so that they face the ethical dilemma of being faithful to their beliefs or betraying them, and *players* must be aware of the consequences of their decisions, within the conscience of the role the player chose to play at the beginning of the game. (Hickman 1996)

Chiou's self-referentiality here rests with a theme shared between anime, film and RPGs: the plots trace character development based on moral issues. In *Oz*, the characters must realise they have the resources to overcome evil and develop self-confidence; in *Azumanga Daioh*, the immature girls learn to take life, knowledge and etiquette seriously; in *Full Metal, Evangelion* and *Bleach*, characters learn to accept the inevitable death of loved ones and allow closure; in *One Piece*, they learn the value of unity and fighting for one's dreams; and in RPGs, they learn to take responsibility for their decisions and use their conscience.

#### CONCLUSION: IT'S A MAD MAD WORLD

Members of anime culture express their devotion to the art in several ways: 'Cosplay', in which fans dress in the fashion of anime characters; 'fan sub', in which Japanese anime are subtitled for foreigners; fan art, in which drawings and manga reinvent the characters and plot lines of the original; and finally, AMVs. In Japan AMVs are labelled MADs, 'Videos of Madness', perhaps because of an obsession so extreme that the creator defines himself or herself via the anime. Among Japanese creators of MADs are Kanzuki Yasiro, Otone Tamu, S2H and Nodoame. Piano is a Japanese AMV editor who distinguishes between two forms of MADS: *Douga* MADS based on anime, and *Bishojo* MADS based on game footage. In an interview with Alan Clontz for the AMV.org site (30 August 2004), Piano disagrees when Alan states that Japanese MADs 'seem to have better design and graphic style' than Western AMVs. He feels, instead, that the technique is similar, but argues in favour of Western

AMVs because technology – more accessible to Westerners than youth in Japan – has made the content of Japanese MADs ‘thin’.<sup>25</sup>

The AMV may be a nascent and unaffordable art for Japanese fans, but music from and as an offshoot of anime remains quite popular. Japan’s MTV introduced anime VJ Lilli in 1992. The virtual VJ calls herself ‘cyberbabe’ in a live interview with CNN (25 May 2001), and mentions that she is currently recording her own CD and is in talks to produce her first music video.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, anime-related music has its own Top 25 chart in Japan. Currently the top three songs are Younha’s ‘Houki Boshi’ from the *Bleach* original soundtrack (OST), Origa’s ‘Inner Universe’ from *Ghost in the Shell*’s OST, and Lia’s ‘Tor No Uta’ from *Air*’s OST. Various kinds of soundtrack are written and released in conjunction with anime: image albums, which have songs that develop the anime character but are not included in the anime; CDs released in the character’s name rather than the actor’s own; BGM – the background music from the show; OSTs; and music box instruments. Image albums are rather interesting because they supplement the anime and often ‘explain’ confusing or underdeveloped elements. For example, a 24-track CD was released in 1997 for *Key the Metal Idol* with monologues from Key’s perspective, whereas in the original anime Key rarely expresses her thoughts, feelings, or why she made certain decisions. *Seiyu*, or voice actors, often later become musicians and release their own records. *Seiyu* develop their own fan base to the extent that shows are watched for the sake of hearing the *seiyu*’s voice. Among the more popular *seiyu* are Kikuko Inoue, Megumi Hayashibara, Aya Hisakawa and Mari Iijima. Frequently the *seiyu* will sing the opening or closing themes for the show in which their character stars. Kikuko Inoue was part of the groups DoCo and Goddess Family Club, and is perhaps best known for her roles in *Ah! My Goddess* (2005) (for which she sings ‘Anata no Birthday’ as Belldandy on the soundtrack) and *Chobits* (2001), and for her voice acting in several video games such as *Metal Gear*. Megumi Hayashibara, though little known outside Japan, is popular for her roles as Faye Valentine in *Cowboy Bebop* and Rei in *Evangelion*; her voice featured in several video games including *Ranma 1/2* and *Slayers*, and she produced several solo albums for King Records including *Half and Half* (1991) and *Center Color* (2004). Aya Hisakawa is a J-pop singer and member of the Peach Hips, the name for five voice actors from the anime *Sailor Moon* (1992), who produced several *Sailor Moon* albums and performed the themes ‘Tuxedo Mirage’ and ‘Moon Revenge’. Mari Iijima, for example, was the voice actor for teen idol superstar Lynn Minmei in the hit television series *Macross* (1982), and later sang the number one single ‘Do you remember love?’ over the closing credits to the anime’s film (1984).

Perhaps the opening and closing trailers for the above named anime count as AMVs, although most television shows begin and end with a song and show clips/character profiles. It is possible, though, that some anime intentionally use



music videos. Mima Kirigoe, for example, plays the heroine and leader singer for the J-pop group CHAM! in *Perfect Blue* (1998); they give a live music performance in the opening sequences. The film features Mima as a pop idol whose reputation becomes soured after a diminishing music career and a questionable role in a soap opera. Its plot focuses on the impact of fame and fortune on pop icons, including pleasure, paranoia and depression during the rise and fall of their careers.

AMV subculture continues to spread to the extent that Iron Chef competitions are held at almost every Anime Expo internationally. Many AMVers are avid gamers as well. Because anime is produced and translated at a slower rate than that at which video games appear, AMVers are looking to video games for more footage. This has extended into the music scene as well: in 2006 the Norwegian band Rektor developed *Princess*, the world's first playable music video game, which can be played at [www.rektor.no](http://www.rektor.no). Rektor describes the game as '[the player] being a hero making your way through various missions, [such as] beating up the Beatles, steal[ing] Elvis's moon burgers, and dancing in the shiny yellow Rektor hero suit'.<sup>27</sup> Last but not least, there is the band Osaka Popstar and their *American Legends of Punk*. The album was released in May 2006; its punk-based songs are named after famous anime including the tracks 'Sailor Moon', 'Astro Boy' and 'Shaolin Monkeys' as a play upon the recent show *Shaolin Showdown*. Included with the CD are a booklet featuring the band in anime form and a bonus DVD of the songs 'Insects' and 'Wicked World' as AMVs.

Creators of AMVs, by producing self-referential works, become the ultimate fanime (fan + anime) champions. Like the Ultimate Fighting Champion, AMV culture is 'an exciting alternative to [an entertainment] climate controlled by idiot-savants and overpaid wannabes' (Syken et al. 2005: 30). Technological means have become accessible, allowing individuals to create an artificial world in which natural 'sound' is transformed into something more pleasing, more 'silent' (underground), more based upon reaching a utopian world in which there is no ownership of the means of production and private property is non-existent. In deferential perversion of Madonna's famous lyrics, AMVers do not live in a Ballardian world, nor are they Ballardian girls (boys).

#### NOTES

1. For example, Dire Straits' song 'Money for Nothing' (in which Sting sings 'I want my MTV' repeatedly in the background), was the first video aired on MTV Europe, 1 August 1987. The video features an animation-rendered man who enters the television to take part in a 'real-life' Straits concert.
2. 'MTV is Rock Around the Clock', *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 November 1982. Retrieved from the Inquirer's Internet Archive Database, no page numbers: <http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/archives>.
3. Random comment made during a group interview at the AMV contest, Anime Expo 2006.

4. Introduction preceding the video by eStudio: <http://www.poptix.net/funny/videostar.swf>.
5. *DJ Mag*, November 2005, retrieved from [www.eclecticmethod.net](http://www.eclecticmethod.net). Eclectic Method also disdains the traditional music video's favoritism of visuals over music.
6. Other examples of mashups include LMC's 'Take me to the Clouds Above', which mashes U2's 'With or Without You' with Whitney Houston's 'How Will I Know' and depicts the band as angels with a Houston impersonator; Josh Wolf's 'The Hand that Feeds', in which a Nine Inch Nails video is spliced with protest footage of the government blowing up mosques; and Fatalshade's 'My Little Pony' with 'I'm too Sexy'.
7. This example and definition are borrowed from Vernallis (2004).
8. This is not to imply that AMVs are immune to legal disputes over copyright infringement. In 2005 the main hub for AMVs – AnimeMusicVideos.org, which is a small-scale server with peer-to-peer sharing – was served a cease-and-desist order by Wind-Up Records. As a result, 2000 music videos were removed from the website. Posted on the Anime News Network (November 2005), <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/article.php?id=7837>.
9. Pittman referred to MTV as a 'mood enhancer to create a television form that was nonlinear, using mood and emotion to create an atmosphere' (Vernallis 2004: xiv).
10. This section on AMV is largely borrowed from the general AMV theory section found on <http://www.amvwiki.org>.
11. Taken from Istiv Studio commentary on the Amv.org website: [https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members\\_videoinfo.php?v=78914](https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=78914).
12. <http://evolution-control.com/press/cbs/ecc.html>.
13. [http://theprodigy.info/discography/official/Smack\\_My\\_Bitch\\_Up/index.shtml](http://theprodigy.info/discography/official/Smack_My_Bitch_Up/index.shtml).
14. Cowboy Bebop, Trigun and Outlaw Star are 'Space Westerns'; Evangelion and FLCL are apocalyptic surrealistic shows that explore dysfunctional relations; Last Exile explores four philosophical questions in a Victorian war setting; and Love Hina explores an unrequited adolescent love.
15. <http://unit.bjork.com/specials/albums/homogenic>. Taken originally from *MTV News*, March 2001.
16. <http://www.director-file.com/cunningham/bjork.html>. Included on the site are files about Gondry, Joseph Kahn and Johan Renck.
17. Commentary provided by Ingress Productions on the AMV.org website: [https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members\\_videoinfo.php?vid\\_id=15933](https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?vid_id=15933).
18. Summary taken from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial\\_Experiments\\_Lain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial_Experiments_Lain).
19. From Embryonic's commentary on AMV.org: [https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members\\_videoinfo.php?vid\\_id=51652](https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?vid_id=51652).
20. Commentary by Yann J. (Fantasy Studios) on AMV.org: [https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members\\_videoinfo.php?vid\\_id=90488](https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?vid_id=90488).
21. Interestingly, both films also promoted video games named after them in the same years.
22. Commentary by Decoy Ops on AMV.org: [https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members\\_videoinfo.php?v=74029](https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/members_videoinfo.php?v=74029).
23. Comment made on the band's website: <http://www.bowlingforsoup.com/bio.html>.
24. Lyrics translated on [http://www.animelyrics.com/anime/azumangadaiah/soramimi\\_cake.htm](http://www.animelyrics.com/anime/azumangadaiah/soramimi_cake.htm).
25. [https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/interview.php?interview\\_id=11](https://www.animemusicvideos.org/members/interview.php?interview_id=11).
26. <http://edition.cnn.com/COMMUNITY/transcripts/2001/05/31/lili>.
27. Retrieved from Rektor's website: <http://www.rektor.no/index.php>.

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