Clones, Hybrids and Organ Transplants in Manga and Anime

Mio Bryce, Paul Cheung and Anna Katrina Gutierrez
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Mio Bryce, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia
Paul Cheung, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia
Anna Katrina Gutierrez, Macquarie University, NSW, Australia

Abstract: Manga and anime are commonly regarded as media products geared primarily towards entertainment and merchandising opportunities. However, some are capable of offering critical commentary on society, humanity and more broadly, life itself. Following the lead taken by the ‘God of Manga’ Tezuka Osamu in “Seimei-hen” in “Hi no Tori” (“Life” in “Phoenix”, 1980), a number of manga and anime have produced unsettling images of clones and hybrid beings, particularly those resulting from organ transplantation. These works question, typically ahead of the technology of the time, the value of life, the integrity of its form, and its immunity from commodification. In spite of their fictionality, these narratives are associated with a great sense of reality and immediacy, due in part to rapid developments in biotechnology, computing and engineering. At the same time, humanity itself appears to have changed along with these developments and the fictional narratives can be said to embody fears, hopes, and dreams concerning life and its significance. They deal with a range of pressing social and ethical issues, especially those related to the self and its multiple boundaries, whilst entertaining their readers and viewers. Using several narratives as exemplars, this paper will explore the use of biotechnology in manga and anime as devices in envisioning ‘life’ – what it may be, how it is formed and how it could be dealt with, at the individual as well as collective level. In doing so, the paper will demonstrate how these manga and anime narratives and others like them are relevant in a wide range of contexts despite their apparent linguistic and cultural specificity.

Keywords: Manga, Anime, Humanity, Cloning, Organ Transplant, Tezuka Osamu’s Phoenix

Introduction

In the increasingly voluminous discussions concerning manga and anime conducted outside of Japan, much importance is attached to the linguistic and cultural specificity of these fictitious genres (e.g., Frederik L Schodt 1986, 1996, 2007; Takeuchi Osamu 1992; Jaqueline Berndt 1994; Natsume Fusanosuke 1997; Fujimoto Yukari 1998; Susan J. Napier 2002, 2005). Apart from being understood as ‘Japanese’ in particular ways, manga and anime have been identified even more specifically as entertainment products defining – and defined by – popular youth culture. Foreign, fringe-dwelling, and yet rising in popularity among select groups, manga and anime are most commonly interpreted contrastively with other genres to indicate difference, and by implication, distance. Whether the focus is on deviation from reality, from a particular culture or on their presumed function in society, these discussions have a tendency of underestimating the relevance of manga and anime to the fundamental concerns of existence. Concerns over life and death are replete in manga and anime, challenging not only their characterisation as mindless entertainment for those yet to come of age, but also warranting further examination of these genres that are...
less constrained by the ontological assumptions of otherness. As one attempt at this kind of examination, this paper focuses on biotechnology, one of the most prominent features in the narratives of manga and anime. Using several narratives as exemplars, this paper will explore the envisioning of life – what it is, how it is formed and how it could be manipulated – in manga and anime. Specifically, the authors examine narratives which problematize reproductive technology in relation to existence. In the first section, a brief description of the reproductive technology of cloning is offered alongside an analysis of its portrayal in the works of a seminal and influential manga artist long before cloning became an issue of interest in the public. In the second section, critical appraisals of cloning by a range of other manga and anime artists are presented, highlighting their creative approaches to the problematic of the commodification of the cloned as opposed to the hybridised or synthesised body. In the final section, the philosophical depth of manga and anime is sounded by a theoretically-informed reading of one of the most well-known series outside of Japan. This paper ends with a number of concluding comments concerning the study of manga and anime as part of the search for new directions in the humanities.

**Human Cloning in Reality and manga/anime**

Manga and anime often question, ahead of the technology of the time, the impact of such technology on humanity as it is variously understood. The reproductive cloning of humans featured in manga and anime remains technically impossible at present. Outside of manga and anime, cloning has more recently become representative of cutting-edge biotechnological developments. Closely associated with cloning but receiving less media exposure is stem cell research. Interestingly, in fiction as in real life, cloning is sometimes thought of as the duplication of an entire living being outside of the body. In current practice, however, clones are, strictly speaking, genetically identical and asexually produced copies of a source cell, not of an entire living being. If the resulting embryos are implanted into surrogates, birth may result, as in the case of Dolly the Sheep in 1996. The asexual means of cell reproduction involves the removal of the nucleus of an unfertilised egg cell and replacing it with that of a stem cell. Given a suitable artificial environment, including electrical stimulation, the combination has a chance of becoming an embryo. The subtlety of the differences between copying cells and copying entire living things reflects concerns over the continuity of life across different levels of material existence. Perhaps these concerns can be seen also in the technically inaccurate but widely adopted term for in vitro fertilisation (IVF), namely “test tube babies”.

Apart from the continuity of life from cell to being, the sourcing of stem cells used in cloning has also given rise to some concerns. The embryo that gave rise to Dolly the Sheep was created using a stem cell taken from an adult sheep. It is also possible to remove stem cells from embryos and perform the same kind of nucleus transfer. In the cloning of human cells for research purposes, spare embryos from IVF are used for stem cell extraction. Embryos with stem cells extracted die and are destroyed, a consequence which many people find unacceptable. Again for research purposes, it is possible to place human embryonic stem cell nuclei into animal egg cells, creating human-animal hybrid cells, a technique which is also highly controversial. With the impression of cloning as mass production outside of the body, it is understandable why some might think of and dread the creation of hybrid beings or part humans (Chadwick, 1982; Gogarty, 2003).
Public discourse on clones and hybrids tends to invite imaginings of future possibilities, be they promises of new medical treatments or dire predictions of the end of humanity as it is currently known. It is important however to see the historical and cultural continuity of many concepts underlying seemingly unstoppable technological developments. The idea of the transfer of a body part, whether within the self or between individuals, even across different species, has had a long history. The same applies to the manipulation of plant life. It is from botany that terms such as ‘cloning’ are derived. Consider also the origins of terms such as ‘implants’ and ‘transplants’. Drawing on the cultural resources of ancient times, biologists label a person with a genetically mixed identity “chimera”, a reference to the Greek-mythological being that is part lion, part goat and part serpent. Mixed genetic identity is possible in stem cell transplantation from one person to another. Although genetic identity remains intact in other kinds of organ transplantation such as that involving the liver, research shows fairly predictable changes in identity on the part of the recipient of foreign stem cells (see for example Spital and Jacobs, 2007, cf. Sharp, 1995). These psychological changes appear bound up in physical changes, including the transplanted organ’s attack on the recipient’s body, which is known as graft-versus-host disease, another reference to botany and earlier periods of human history.

Just as the concepts underlying biotechnology are not as novel as they are often presented to be, the issues of life that are featured in recent public discussions do not exclusively stem from achievements in science and medicine. An important example in this regard is the collection of works by Tezuka Osamu1 (1928-1989), perhaps best known as the creator of Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atomu, 1951-1968) and Metropolis (Meteoroporisu, 1942). A medical doctor by training, and an avid graphic artist from a young age, Tezuka’s manga is replete with questions, reflections and critique concerning society, humanity and life. In fact, Life (Seimei-hen), an instalment in the series Phoenix (Hi no Tori) published in 1980, is an in-depth exploration of what it means to be human, cleverly using in vitro cloning technology not possible even at present to form the backbone of the narrative. In the year 2155, flamboyantly successful television producer Aoi Kunihiko makes the ethically shocking suggestion of cloning human beings for the purpose of having them hunted down in a new show. The show is expected to do well on the strength of high but rapidly falling ratings enjoyed by its predecessor, where cloned, non-human animals are used for game hunting. Initial reservations on legal grounds were quickly swept aside when Aoi pointed to the shock value of hunting down cloned humans on television as the selling point of the proposed program. This, together with the argument that clone humans are not really human, convince programming executives and the chief commercial sponsor, to source human clones. In an ironic and dramatic twist, with his right arm amputated, Aoi ends up being cloned and hunted in the show he so callously devised. In the currently circulated version,2 losing his unique identity but not quite his own life, he escapes to a jungle with an adopted daughter called Juné. After 15 years, having spent much time reflecting on his actions and motivations, Aoi returns to the city to seek medical treatment for the critically injured Juné. He learns to his great horror that his clones are still being hunted on the same program, more gratuitously violent formats of the show are planned, and all this is supported by the much-expanded human cloning industry. Aoi

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1 Japanese names will be written using the Japanese convention, that is, surname before first name.
2 The original version published in Manga shōnen (Asahi sonorama) in 1980 ended with Aoi being killed by a hunter.
quietly sets out to destroy this industry and is successful in doing so by ending his own life and those of his clones.

Narratives such as Life called into question accepted understandings of humanity. To read an anti-science stance into the works of Tezuka and those influenced by this “god of manga” is difficult to justify. And yet, common archetypes in his works include scientists of unbridled ambitions, politicians with an insatiable appetite for power, business leaders of infinite greed, and most disturbingly, a largely complicit populace. The story of Life is not so much Tezuka’s position statement on human cloning as it is a commentary on the commodification of human life and the annihilation of identity at one peak of Japan’s economic development. As such, the relevance and appeal of stories such as Life is not limited to the Japanese audience. The demeaning treatment of human life as an object of trade is a concern not confined to the linguistic and cultural domains of Japan.

Tezuka’s Life typifies the treatment of biotechnology in manga and anime. By mixing fact and fiction, biotechnology is used in the creative process to open up a space for critique in relation to some fundamental questions of being human. Whether built into plot devices or used as the basis of character design, biotechnology is rarely the subject matter per se or merely the background to the narrative. Although not intended to foretell biotechnological developments, the period since its publication has been marked by other developments, notably in tissue engineering, genetic modification, network computing and commercial robotics, all areas in which Japanese scientists engage in fierce competition with regional and international counterparts. Rather than purely fundamental scientific work, biotechnology is now seen as a major sector of advanced economies. Not surprisingly then, clones, hybrids and organ transplants are featured in the works of many other artists following Tezuka’s death in 1989.

Commodification of the Body

What do human doubles mean to us? The aforementioned commonly shared knowledge of cloning, both the scientifically accurate and inaccurate, is ingeniously employed by a number of manga works, especially those for girls, posing the question: how should a human life be valued – by a person’s intrinsic, individual qualities, or by their usefulness? By doing so, manga becomes a manifestation of anxiety over the issues of self and identity.

In manga, clones often share some essential commonalities with humanoid robots, as they are all purposely and technologically crafted to serve specific roles or perform specific tasks, regardless of their own desires and feelings. The narratives reflect our ambivalent desires and anxieties for human existence, caught between nature and technological advancement. The financial issues are always implicated in the use of advanced technology and make the narratives realistic. J. P Telotte (1995) argues that the images of human doubles (e.g., humanoid robots) in science fiction films are depicted as a potential threat to displace or replace us and to bind up “all our qualms about artifice—science, technology, mechanism… and about our very nature, as artificers, constructors of the real, and of the self” (p.4). Clones can be seen as the ultimate biological humanoid, being a human as well as an exact double who is crafted to replace (only partially in most cases) the original. Nevertheless, they are generally depicted not as a potential threat but a victim, whose integrity as a human is critically undermined by the fact that they were created as a useful resource, or commodity.
Manga (and anime) are emotive discourses, and depict and appeal to human emotions. Many clone narratives are found in works for adolescents, especially for girls, and focalise on clone characters, who are typically regarded as ‘commodities’, despite living as humans do. Through the depiction of the clones’ pain and anger, the narratives reveal the greed of powerful and arrogant adults who abuse advanced technology and manipulate the clones’ lives for their own benefit. In other words, greed is an essential element of clone narratives, and is contrasted with the sincerity of the clones’ quest for their own lives and their respect for the lives of others.

Clones embody a harsher vision of human commodification than robots and cyborgs. Their social status is problematic, as they are fully human, yet regarded as inferior, a mere copy of the original. Clone narratives are also related to the narratives of twins, in terms of the concept of ‘duplication’, which distinguishes lives: the original is superior, and the copy or spare is inferior (Bryce 2008). As shown below, in manga (and anime) clone narratives we can find graphic, horrifying images, as cloned and cultivated children are used as organ donors. Being a copy, the clones often suffer low self-esteem, positioning themselves as inferior to the original. Their lack of self-worth is extreme, as their value lies only in their body parts. They can be useful solely when they are killed for organ removal. They are not expected to live as a human, although they have everything a human has – bodies, senses, emotions, intellect and their own experiences and memories. Consequently, these characters are situated as ‘victims’, whose individuality and personal values are essentially ignored. Their sense of inferiority and vulnerability therefore consistently underpins these narratives with a fatalistic and pessimistic tone.

Natsume Satoru’s Jinzō shōjo (lit. Man-made girl, 1999-2000) opens with a shocking scene in which a cat-like (man-made) animal is licking a discarded human brain in a park. It is the brain of a high school boy, Misumi Yutaka. It is then transplanted into the rebuilt body of a girl, Nina, by a genius bio-alchemist, Hiruma Anjin. Yutaka was a clone of a rich boy Satonaka, and his body was given to Satonaka, who died in a car accident. The inferior position of clones is made clear by Kai, another bio-alchemist and the creator of Yutaka. In his laboratory, he grows clones in glass tubes for wealthy customers. The clones are made to have emotions and dreams in order to grow healthier, just like humans in the Wachowski brothers’ films, The Matrix series (1999-2003). When Kai is asked by Anjin if murder is committed if a being who feels emotions is killed, he says that they are not humans, but simply a commodity (shōhin). Yutaka was able to grow normally only because Kai’s assistant scientist, overwhelmed by feelings of pity, was unable to destroy a one year old clone baby, and gave him to a childless couple. When Yutaka finds out that he was a clone of Satonaka, he is shocked by his awareness of the worthlessness of his life, which has only been created for money. In anger and despair he exclaims, “The value of my life only exists outside me! If I deny what you, Kai and you (Anjin) did, it means I deny my life! Without my own will and emotions, I would no longer exist! There is no Me! There is no Me!”

Similarly, Yoshitomi Akihiko’s Ray (published in Champion Red) establishes the protagonist, a brilliant surgeon Kasugano Ray, as a clone whose eyes were removed and sold when she was young. Ray’s extraordinary surgical talent is supported by eye implants which give her X-ray vision. However she is continuously traumatised by a nightmare in which a buyer comes to buy her eyes in a white room, where boys and girls like her happily talk to each other about their treasures, without knowing why they were gathered there with identification numbers on their shoulders. Instead of names, they identify each other by their treasured
possessions. Ray, which means zero in Japanese, named herself after her identification number (075-1-74 [=0]). The episode *Kranke 3 Fungas* (2002) depicts Ray rescuing one of the boys called *bii-dama* (marble), who was repeatedly abused during illegal, painful biological experiments by the people who sold Ray’s eyes. The story eventually reveals that the children in the white room were all failed clones used for organ trading and illegal medical experiments. They were regarded as faulty because they failed to hold the memories of the deceased originals. This again poses the question of the value of a clone’s life. Are they individual humans, equal to their originals? It also posits memory as a key factor in distinguishing one from the other, as it is impossible for two persons to have the exact same experience, even if they are genetically identical (Katō 1999).

As a further development of the concepts above, Shimizu Reiko, in a visualization of a graft-versus-host disease, depicts the resentment and pain experienced by clones in *Kaguya-hime* (1993-2005). This is a complicated, lengthy story in 27 volumes, and a hybrid narrative of the ancient folktale of *Kaguya-hime* (*Shining Princess from the Moon*), fantasy and science fiction. The story develops around the main character, Akira and her friends, most of whom are clones of the children of wealthy and powerful people, created so that their organs could be donated to the originals when needed. Eventually some of the clones are killed so that their organs are harvested. The twist is that the abused donors’ extreme fear and resentment of their situation are so ingrained in their body parts that in revenge, these parts take over the minds and bodies of the recipient-origins. The process of this revenge attack by the clone-donor’s cells on the host body is exemplified by Sutton, whose arm and other body parts are donated to Don Bellamy, a basketball player, and Kaede, whose heart is taken by his original and his body is kept on the life support system for the future use.3 Akira’s anger and despair over the fate of her friends is contrasted with the attitude of the doctors, who regard Sutton and Kaede as mere commodities, and carry out their inhuman acts without hesitation.

In these stories, there is very little regard for the clone (and genetically manipulated) children’s lives. They are treated as commodities and abused, despite the fact that they are fully human and their pains and fears are real. The abusers are mainly depicted as powerful, arrogant adult men: a notable example in *Ray* is the man who asks the price of Ray’s eyes in her presence, as if merely asking the price of a gem. Through the focalisation of the clone characters, the narratives encourage the audience to align themselves with the abused clones, thereby placing in tension the powerless adolescents’ sincere pursuit of individual life and the pressures of the ‘real’ world, which is dominated by greedy, arrogant and power-hungry adults. Moreover, these discourses also reveal the passivity of the general public, who play a part in such abuse, as exemplified by the excited audiences of the TV show in Tezuka’s *Life*. The narratives reveal the protagonists’ experiences of ‘passivity’ and powerlessness as manufactured body parts. They read as exemplary accounts of children’s struggles to play roles prescribed under social, parental and educational pressures, while searching for or constructing their own identity. Further, clones in these narratives act as representations not only of marginalised groups in a male dominated society, but also of desperate, abused individuals, treated as commodities, and overwhelmed by the power of socio-economic pressures.

3 Later, however, when their mission (to return the Moon stone to the Moon) is completed, their personalities fade away from their bodies and the originals emerge, as if they experienced a memory lapse.
Clones Performing Humanity

The scope of clone narratives in manga and anime is epic in proportion, going well beyond the scientific and what is theoretically possible (e.g. in *Life*) to the broader realm of creativity within which we find artistic works of all kinds. Embedded in these narratives is a deeply seated anxiety over the ethics of genetic technologies that threaten human dignity and necessarily revolutionize the way we perceive individuality, identity, and what it means to be human. Through cloning narratives, manga and anime challenge common notions of mortality and embark upon the quest for an authentic self in fantastic ways that encourage audiences to examine the reciprocal impact of society on the individual.

Genetic determinism is advocated across many discourses, and has spawned a variety of views. The idea of immortality through replication begs the question of whether uniqueness is embedded in the genetic make-up of every being, and thus preserved in one’s biology. However, Ian Wilmut and Keith Campbell – the scientists associated with the development of Dolly the Sheep – point out that although clones and their parent are genetically identical, environmental factors impact upon growth and development, shaping them into beings that are distinct (Crew, 2004, pp.207-208). Thus cloning brings to the fore the question of nature versus nurture, of whether nurture is sufficient to transform a replica into a unique individual. Do the differences brought about by environmental factors, no matter how minor, break the continuity between the original and the clone? Does the genetically identical but otherwise distinct clone become an authentic individual?

*Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*Shin Seiki Evangelion*, 2005-2006) is considered a groundbreaking anime series on many levels, and one of these is its complex philosophical contemplation of the essence of humanity. The drama of *Evangelion* unfolds through multiple perspectives, including that of the clone Ayanami Rei. This problematizes the definition of what it means to be human by paralleling the formation of her subjectivity with those of the non-clone protagonists, forcing the audience to reflect on and redefine what constitutes being human. Rei’s sense of being is deeply intertwined with the identity of her original, a woman named Ikari Yui, and with the role that Yui originally played in society. Although Rei is not aware of Yui’s existence, her sense of an alternative self is so strong that Rei often wonders whether it is her own life that she is living.

Rei’s unique identity can be examined more closely through John Stephens’ creative application of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. Butler (1993) postulates that gender is based not on biology but on performatives constructed historically and socially, and that the enactment of these performatives determine and interrogate gendered subjectivity. Stephens (2006, pp.5-6) takes this a step further, proposing that posthuman literature explores notions of human subjectivity through the struggles of non-human entities, such as robots and clones, to construct the equivalent of humanity through the performance of “human performatives”. One implication of this is that being human is not only shaped by genetics but constructed and challenged according to how closely a being adheres to performatives ordered by society.

The heart of the problem in cloning narratives is the possibility – and equally the impossibility – of a replicated self to develop his or her own subjectivity and agency. Is it possible for a clone to form an authentic self? Is humanity determined by the ability of the body to enact or resist human performatives, and with it, gendered and other socially valued performatives? When memory is equated with the soul, what impact does this have on the develop-
ment of subjectivity in the clone? Neon Genesis Evangelion attempts to answer these questions, interrogating the connection of subjectivity to mind, body, memory and soul.

In several examples of anime including but not limited to Evangelion, human subjectivity is equated to the soul, which in turn is embodied by memory. Clones in these narratives possess intellect but are still not considered human because they do not have memories, or the few memories they have are not actually their own. In these narratives, clones embark on a quest to become human. In Ayanami Rei’s case, this quest is partly a matter of contesting the claim that she is nothing more than an “emotionless wind-up doll”. In classical humanist thinking, such a quest would not even exist, as intellectual capacity is considered sufficient in defining humanity, a link exemplified by Rene Descartes’ (1993, Part IV) statement, “I think, therefore I am”. Anime clones such as Rei think, but do not feel convinced of their humanity. Her memories are a source of her variable subjectivity, a source that is reshaped through daily interactions with her environment and with other individuals. Hilary S. Crew (2004, p.208) observes that in several examples of science fiction novels for young adults, that, “Beyond ‘the boundaries of generations or chemical bases’ there is the ‘soul’ which is ‘the true self’”. It is this true self that Rei struggles to find in Evangelion, using means that include introspection.

Clone protagonists such as Ayanami Rei conform to N. Katherine Hayles’ assumptions regarding the posthuman (cited in McCallum, 2006, pp.29-32): the soul and memory are the informational pattern held in higher regard than the body; subjectivity is fragmented into soul, mind and body; the body is extended and hybridic, and treated as an intelligent machine to which the soul could be bound. According to this picture of posthumanity, soul and memory constitute the essence of the original and in narratives that follow in the vein of Evangelion, the clone as a vessel of the original’s memories implies that s/he houses the original’s soul. This further implies that there may be no room for the clone to have a soul of his/her own. Interestingly, Rei’s reflexive awareness that she may merely be an ‘empty shell” develops further the theme of the independence of the clone’s mind from the soul of the original. However, her awareness of possessing memories that do not seem entirely hers but belong to the original, Yui, or even to previous Rei clones, plunges her into a state of deep ambivalence throughout the best part of the narrative.

Ayanami Rei is a clone of Yui, the mother of Shinji and wife of Gendo, who is also Rei’s creator. Unknown to herself, Rei is a teenage, blue-haired vessel of Yui’s soul. She is an enigma to her classmates, among whom is Shinji, who never learns of her true identity, partly because of her shadowed past and antisocial personality. She obediently pilots one of the Eva robots created to battle aliens called Angels – the robot which Yui helped design and for which she was to be the test pilot, who died during an unsuccessful trial run.

Rei lives alone but becomes increasingly troubled by her strong connection to Gendo, and later, Shinji, and by the fact that the feelings seem to belong to her as well as to someone else. In one episode of introspection, a vocally distorted voice of hers reduces her self to “an empty shell with a fake soul” (Ep. 25), showing her awareness at some level that she is a vessel animated by a soul that is not allowed to die. The partial knowledge of her fragmented identity fills her with loneliness. Rei is trapped between the essence of Yui’s memory and soul and her own cognition that lacks memory. Her awareness of this fundamental incompleteness exhibits how anime problematizes human existence as more complex than “I think, therefore I am”. In contrast, the often highly intelligent and aware clones in Evangelion and similar anime persistently and poignantly ask, “Who am I?”. For these anime clones, cognition
belongs to the body and is polarized from memory, which belongs to the soul of someone else.

Despite the partitioning of the developing mind and inherited soul, agency remains highly problematic among clone narratives in anime. The memory of the original self constrains any attempt to be or live like a different self. And yet some form of the will to determine one’s own path exists for these clones. In Evangelion, Rei oscillates between an unquestioning loyalty to Gendo as a pilot, an unexplained sense of protectiveness towards Shinji (a performance of the humanity of Yui), and paradoxically, the unceasing wish to return to her supposedly true state of non-existence. Clones like Rei are confronted with the problem of enacting performatives that make them identical to – or resemble – their originals. Part of this clone discourse explores whether they are able to throw off those constraints, and develop authentic agency and subjectivity through those same performatives, or in enacting performatives that distinguish them from their originals. The historical and social constraints on human performativity are in Yui’s case inherited by Rei in the process of the latter’s creation and duplication (Stephens, 2006). Further, Yui’s attempts to challenge these constraints as a female scientist engaged in cutting edge biotechnological research are paralleled by Rei’s decisive departure from the purpose for which Gendo created her. Rei’s premeditated but unannounced act of will towards the end of the narrative is one of the few ways in which she overcomes the constraints placed on her and through which her humanity becomes evident.

Evangelion, however, does not include a final and complete resolution of Rei’s agency nor her subjectivity, despite her tangible but few “alternative performative acts” (Stephens, 2006, p.6). This ambivalence is deliberately developed to be a significant part of the narrative. Rei practices human performatives based on the roles she is given – student and pilot – and the few vague memories she has. Painfully evident to her concurrently is the insight that she is being controlled, against her ambivalent will, by Gendo. The awareness that she exists for a use makes her fearful of abandonment by Gendo after the completion of her assigned task. That she possesses memories not her own reminds her of her inability to be exclusively Rei. Rei cannot form an authentic self for as long as she is trapped between her body and Yui’s soul. In other words, human performatives constrain more than free her. Until the very end of the narrative, she goes through the motions of being schoolgirl and Eva pilot because it is what she was created to do. When an Angel invaded her body and mind, she is confronted by her inexplicably strong desire to save Shinji. To her own surprise, she sheds tears just before an act of self-sacrifice, in which Yui and Rei become one, harmonizing performativity of the original and its alternative counterpart. The roles of mother and colleague are enacted in saving Shinji from certain death. That act confirms Rei’s status as human. However, her performed humanity lasts only for an instant, after which her destroyed body is replaced by a spare body and cloned once more as an imprint of Yui’s soul. This ambivalence is repeatedly echoed by “Rei”, which in Japanese refers to zero.

The final episodes of Evangelion are set up as interrogation scenes that examine each protagonist’s sense of subjectivity. One way of understanding the conclusion of the series is that director Anno Hideaki puts forth an ideology that a stable sense of identity can only be formed in relation with others, and in seeing the “other self” in the minds of others. It is notable how Anno unifies fragmented identities within and across his protagonists to highlight the implication of relationship on human agency. In the case of Rei, she is confronted by the reality of her multiplicity: “All these things [clones] are Ayanami Rei…Why are all these
me?” (Ep. 25). Her inner voices accuse her of being “a false object which is pretending to be a human.” She responds, “I am not false...I am I. I’ve become me in the instrumentality of the links between me and others...Those will form me from now on” (Ep. 25). Rei moves from being a clone to being an authentic human through intersubjective relationships that are unique from Yui’s own relationships. She finally accepts that she is her own self. Yet her inner voices destroy immediately the security in being human through intersubjectivity, telling her that she is, “frightened that you will cease and disappear from the minds of others.” Rei’s answer is problematic: “I am happy. Because I want to die, I want to despair, I want to return to nothing” (Ep. 25). The clone is recuperated as human only to desire the return to nothingness, underscoring death as an essential part of human subjectivity and agency. Rei’s chilling desire to “become nothing” may be interpreted as recognition of her ability to form agential subjectivity through intersubjective relationships. Her desire for death isn’t simply an erasure of self but a portrayal that she, like all humans, can form a stable subjectivity that ends in death. In this way, Evangelion is humanistic in subtly commenting on the futility of prolonging life through reproductive cloning. Even clones should be allowed to die, as they would humanly wish.

Neon Genesis Evangelion is one of many clone narratives in manga and anime which interrogates humanity in terms of the links of the body to the soul and to the mind, and which explores the complex relations between them. These narratives uphold the liberal humanist subject even as they encourage the audience to reconceptualize what it means to be ‘human’ and ‘alive’ through the varied performance of humanity by non-human entities. In the case of Rei, she gains a measure of peace when her fragmented, multiple selves are unified under the liberal humanistic idea that agential subjectivity is formed through interaction, albeit problematic ones, with others.

Irrespective of the state of biotechnology, clone narratives will always be problematic due to the ethical implications attached to them by storytellers, the audience or others. Anime such as Evangelion ably interrogates those implications and boldly suggests the clone as another possible way of being human, not in offering the self to be cloned, but in performing performatives towards a subjectivity that is authentic and relational.

Conclusion

In the manga and anime narratives referred to above, we have identified penetrating and thought-provoking examinations of human society and human existence. These narratives reflect deep-seated anxieties of existence in the presence of rapidly developing biotechnology. Instead of monotonously indicating the opportunities or threats represented by such technology, these narratives create a space for nuanced contemplation of pressing issues in contemporary living, and often simultaneously of those issues lingering despite the vicissitudes of human history. Generic characterisations such as ‘philosophical discourse’, ‘science fiction’ and ‘social commentary’ fail to adequately acknowledge the immensity of the contemplative space in these narratives. Rigid partitions, particularly those employed to construct ontological distinctions between self and other, human and non-human, life and death, reality and fiction, are precisely what these narratives render inoperative or irrelevant. To the extent that narratives of other genres (e.g. literature) and media (e.g. film) also afford such explorations of existence, manga and anime merit serious consideration in conjunction with them, not in contradistinction from them. Such serious consideration of manga and anime does not
need to be conceived of in terms of disciplinary boundaries, those evidenced for example in questions concerning the place of a subject in the taxonomy constituting the humanities. By extension, it does not have to be realised through the distinctive practices of particular disciplines. The ontological indeterminacy of manga and anime, and that of other creative genres, calls for certainty neither in the conceptualisation nor realisation of any scholarly inquiry.

References


**About the Authors**

*Dr. Mio Bryce*
Senior Lecturer and Head of Japanese Studies in Dept of International Studies at Macquarie University, teaching Japanese language, literature and manga related units. PhD in Japanese classical literature, *The Tale of Genji*, from the University of Sydney. Mio is particularly interested in historical, socio-cultural and psychological issues depicted in fiction. She is currently involved in interdisciplinary research into youth cultures, with particular focus on manga and anime, in conjunction with the English Department at Macquarie University.

*Dr. Paul Cheung*
Dr. Paul Cheung is a researcher and writer with an interest in the relationship between philosophy and art. He is progressively publishing a series of articles examining this relationship with respect to the treatment of biotechnology in manga and anime. This rather specific focus reflects in part an interest developed through doctoral and post-doctoral research into the rejection of various forms of biotechnological interventions. A common thread running through these publications is an attempt to break out of the confines of disciplinary orthodoxy without the unquestioning embracing of inter-disciplinarity. He is currently an Honorary Associate in the Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University, having been an academic visitor to tertiary institutions in the People’s Republic of China and the United Kingdom.

*Anna Katrina Gutierrez*
Katrina Gutierrez is a PhD student in the Department of English (Children’s Literature) at Macquarie University. Katrina has dedicated her life to reading, teaching about and creating stories. Her interests are fairy tale, film, comic books, anime, manga and music, and how these interact with one another to create glocal identities. She has published on the connections between glocalisation and transnational identities in The Philippines.