# Future pioneers - Macross Plus as both nexus and new paradigm for genre tropes in 90s anime

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**Abstract**

Traditionally, studies of the cyberpunk genre within anime have centered around landmark films such as *Akira* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995); their techno-orientalist aesthetic contributing toward a 'boom' in anime's popularity in the West. In contrast, I take Shōji Kawamori & Shinichirō Watanabe's *Macross Plus* (1994) as my focal point, examining how the film blends and remixes diverse audio and visual influences to present a more globalistic, culturally-blended vision of the future. I argue that this distinctly postmodern, stateless quality allows the film to act as both nexus between old modes and new, as well as a lens through which me might better understand how key genre tropes have evolved as part of anime's wider media mix.

**Introduction**

The 1990s represented a crucial turning point for Japanese animation - marking a watershed for the medium's burgeoning fandom in the West, whilst also encapsulating rapidly evolving visual and stylistic trends; driven forward by a new generation of creative figures - born in the 60s, voraciously consuming a broad range of media of both Eastern and Western origin as they grew up, and now coming of age. These individuals would draw on these influences to craft works that openly displayed a new, broader cultural awareness and deployed this efficiently to challenge previous ideas of what, exactly, anime represented as a medium.

This study will take as its focus Shōji Kawamori & Shinichirō Watanabe's *Macross Plus* (1994), and examine how it acts as a kind of nexus for a number of key genre tropes and modes of expression that dominated anime in the 80s and early 90s, as well as how it laid down a new standard for how these tropes could be portrayed going forward. Utilising the lens of genre theory, postmodernism and the discourse of 'statelessness', I will examine the film's blending of cultural and thematic influence and seek to answer the core question of what ways, and to what effect, the film 'remixes' a combination of established genre tropes - working in tandem - into a new, cohesive whole.

Drawing on the theories of melded man/machine entities outlined by Sharalyn Orbaugh (2006), Toshiya Ueno's ideas on 'techno-orientalism' (1999), as well as Susan Napier (2005) and Rayna Denison's (2015) discussions of newly globalised, hybridised kinds of anime, my lines of analysis will broadly break down into three key areas. Firstly, the way the film draws on the cyberpunk genre specifically to examine the interstice between humanity and technology. Secondly, the 'stateless' quality of the film and how it draws on both audio and visual elements to transcend traditional ideas surrounding 'cultural odour'. And thirdly, the film's postmodernist nature, and how this is created through a 'carnivalesque' mixing of disparate genre tropes and modes of expression.

In this manner, we seek to put forward a re-evaluation of *Macross Plus* as a crucial node within the wider landscape of 90s anime, moving the conversation beyond the monolithic, techno-orientalist status of 'entry point' titles like *Akira* (Katsuhiro Ōtomo, 1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*, Mamoru Oshii, 1995) to consider how the film engages with many of the same themes, but - crucially - presents them within a far more universal, post-national vision of the future. It is this cross-cultural playfulness that we would argue uniquely places this film at a juncture in which it could then serve as a template for a new breed of 'global' anime, such as Watanabe's subsequent TV series *Cowboy Bebop* (1998) and *Space Dandy* (2014).

From its early incorporation of CGI alongside traditional 2D animation to its handling of forward-thinking technological concepts such as AI hologram pop idols and unmanned military drones, *Macross Plus* stands as a pioneering work both thematically and as a cinematic 'package'. As such, by placing it within the wider existing discourse around anime-as-medium, we seek to trace fresh lineages between 'old' modes and new. As both a 'genre movie' and a movie that mixes together a variety of genres, the film serves as an analytical bridging point in which we might explore how it is not only the individual nature of these disparate tropes themselves that creates meaning for audiences, but the very act of 'mixing' itself.

**Part 1: 'Post-Human' entities - The machine in imitation of life**

To begin, it is useful to first present a brief plot summary of *Macross Plus* - in doing so, we would invite attention toward three core narrative strands - rivalry, music and romance; with a wider theme of humanity vs. technology acting as a kind of glue tying these disparate

strands together. It is this theme in particular which we will argue stands as the cornerstone for an understanding of the work's interaction with genre tropes.

The film centres around the conflict between military test pilots Isamu Dyson and Guld Bowman who are competing in a showcase of two differing flight technologies. Isamu's YF-19 aircraft relies purely on raw, physical human skill for operation, whilst Guld's YF-21 incorporates a new mind-control interface that allows the pilot to operate it purely via thought. These themes of human vs. artificial control are given a parallel in the introduction of Sharon Apple - an artificially-intelligent holographic pop idol, who during the course of the film develops a malevolent consciousness and rebels against her human creators. It is left to Isamu and Guld to put aside their former rivalry and unite in their efforts to stop Sharon Apple, saving childhood friend and love interest Myung Fang Lone in the process - who serves as Sharon's 'producer'.

When Macross Plus was released in the 1990s, it arrived as part of a landscape in which understandings of science-fiction as a genre of anime had become inextricably linked with the aesthetic sense and thematic tropes of cyberpunk. Landmark films such as *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* came to define Western understandings and subsequent scholarly discourse of the anime 'boom' within the decade, with *Akira* in particular acting as a kind of 'ground-zero' - from which everything else stemmed. Statements such as Hideko Haguchi's claim that "When talking about Japanese anime's introduction to the rest of the world, it is impossible to avoid referencing Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*" (Haguchi 2014, 174) and Antonia Levi's reference to Akira as "typical of a whole school of science fiction anime which warns of the dangers of combining human and artificial intelligence" (Levi 1996, 92) offer a taste of the emblematic nature of Otomo's film as a kind of 'full house' of cyberpunk tropes - and it is against these that we might reasonably examine how *Macross Plus* interacts with these in subtly different, subversive ways.

Susan Napier's seminal study *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* summarises the cyberpunk genre as "focusing on dystopian futures in which humans struggle in an overpoweringly technological world where the difference between human and machine is increasingly amorphous" (Napier 2005, 11). She goes on to explain the genre's appeal as fundamentally linked to turn-of-the-millennium sensibilities, allowing creators to play out contemporary fears and anxieties about an increasingly technologized world in an artistic medium. In *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* - as well as Japanese live-action works from the same era, such as Shinya Tsukamoto's acclaimed *Tetsuo: The Iron Man (1989)* - we see these fears taken to a horrific extreme, where flesh and metal are physically melded together; patchwork, hybrid bodies that feel as fractured as the dystopian worlds they are set in. These works present a very 'physical' take on cyberpunk tropes - in which human and machine are corporeally 'jacked in' and meshed together.

Moving into the 90s, we begin to see the opposite; an evolution into a more cerebral, 'networked' imagining of this same symbiosis; a reading of the cyberpunk genre that is not only human vs. machine, but also human vs. information (or more specifically, data) - the kind of "deterritorialized zone of the imagination" (Napier 2005, 171) Napier sees in subsequent anime cyberpunk works like TV series *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998). Charting its course through the 80s and into the 90s, we might imagine the cyberpunk genre as a series of disruptive revolutions; progressing through an initially analogue, mechanised aesthetic, before leading into a more wholesale, digitized blending. Science fiction author Bruce Sterling describes this as an "overlapping of worlds that were formally separate: the realm of high tech and the modern pop underground" (Sterling 2017, 37) - liminal zones where the newly informationized incarnation of cyberpunk could portray worlds in which this digitized revolution could seep into an (inter)net-worked society's most populist sensibilities. Now, cyberpunk wasn't just something that happened to your body - it was there, in your mind, too.

It is to these 'zones of the imagination' that we must look in finding contrast between the dirty, riotous dystopias of *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*, and the more optimistic, glossy future-topias of *Macross Plus*. In the squalor, dark streets and urban decay of *Ghost in the Shell* and *Akira*'s cities, we see the epitome of cyberpunk as 'high tech low life' (Ketterer 1992, 141) - disenfranchised individuals kicking back against a system rife with governmental politicking and urban malaise. But in *Macross Plus* - with its cocktail of adult characters, romance, pop music and impossibly fast fighter jets - what we are presented instead is more 'high tech high life'. While all three films highlight the potential dangers of technology, *Macross Plus* seems insistent on accounting for its possible pleasures too - the irresistible speed, thrill and 'newness' that only the latest technology can bring.

This theme of pleasure and populism is also born out in the way the film intersects and collides the cyberpunk style with that of the mecha subgenre. While studies such as those by Schaub (2001, 79-100) and Denison (2015, 34) highlight a certain degree of overlap and syncretism between the two, we would arguably identify the mecha subgenre as belonging far more to the lineage of 'pilotable robot' shows such as the long-running *Gundam* (1979 -) series, with the planes piloted by the male leads of *Macross Plus* acting as 'variable fighters' that can morph, *Transformers*-style, into a humanoid combat robot. These inherently toyetic titles typically see human pilots insert themselves into the cockpits of said robots before engaging in "bizarre combinations of mechanical/organic violence in which huge machines combat each other in fantastic displays of mechanical agility while at the same time hinting at the organic bodies inside them" (Napier 2014, 207). Referencing both the mecha and cyberpunk subgenres, Carl Silvio sees these tropes as "metaphors for our collective anxieties, hopes, and expectations concerning the posthuman condition" (Silvio 2006, 117). Crucial here is the idea that a symbiotic relationship with machines is not an inherently negative experience, but one with the potential to offer expansion or enlightenment above and beyond current human ability. We see a memorable visual representation of this blending between human and machine in the opening minutes of *Macross Plus* - as one of

the movie's two male leads, Guld, sits in his plane, preparing to take off. The film shows us his inner thought processes as he envisions flexing his hands and feet, the plane's wings and rear-flaps flexing respectively, as he does so. Here, man and machine have in-essence 'melded' together as one. With Guld sitting in a lotus-position in the cockpit, the process is portrayed as an almost meditation-like experience in which the biological mind (the brain) and the machine mind (computer circuitry) are synchronised in a kind of out-of-body experience.

In *Frankenstein and the Cyborg Metropolis,* Sharalyn Orbaugh envisions this kind of liminal blend - existing somewhere between the man/machine threshold - as what she terms the "existential uncanny" (Orbaugh 2006, 96). For her, this permeability between body and mind (both biological and technological) ties human consciousness into a wider 'network'; one that comes with the added complication of how a human mind might conceivably visualise the "nondimensionality and instantaneity" of this networked world. The example presented above of Guld mentally 'melding' with his plane highlights one potential answer - another comes via the medium of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery). In a method also employed by *Ghost in the Shell*, *Macross Plus* utilised the then-new incorporation of CGI elements within a traditionally 2D animated film as a means of presenting viewers with a way of 'imagining' the world as its 'networked' characters might see it. During one of the many fighter-jet test flight sequences in the movie, we see Guld confronted with a swarm of oncoming missiles - these are first presented via 2D animation; a swirl of twisting vapour trails. The image then blurs into a corresponding visual display conveyed via CGI, in which the vapour trails are matched and then extended by a computerized, 3D extrapolation of their attack vectors.

This conflation between the real and 'imagined' virtual world is echoed later in the film during one of synthetic pop idol Sharon Apple's concert sequences. Here, her holographic avatar appears to float through the city as she sings, tracing trails of light through the busy streets.

Meanwhile, the windows of skyscrapers appear to shatter as white birds fly out from the falling shards of glass, scattering feathers as they fly. Throughout this all, pedestrians look up and are transfixed by the combination of music and visuals - sucked into the 'inescapable permeability' of the real and unreal. Here, more than any other point in the film, we see the city itself (and its population) incorporated as part of this networked world - an involuntary evolution that Orbaugh sees as an "intrinsic, inextricable" evolution of "city, technology and body" into one existence (Orbaugh 2006, 96). Here, it is not simply man and machine that have melded, but also the urban environment itself - a third factor in this triumvirate of systems - suggesting that in an inherently networked world, existing in an isolated, un-mixed state is no longer possible.

In these theories, we see echoes of Orbaugh's ideas of cyberpunk as a kind of modern-day reimagining of the Frankenstein parable and the inherent dangers of science that - while initially well-intentioned and generative in nature - contains the potential to run wild and rebel against its creators. As she writes: "Like the monster in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, rejected first by his creator and eventually by all the other humans with whom he tried to establish contact, the people of modernizing Japan were forced time and again to recognize that even the complete acquisition of the "godlike science" of language—in the form of the discourses of industrial, post-enlightenment modernism—was not enough to save them from the curse of monstrosity in the eyes of the West" (Orbaugh 2007, 175). Here, the theoretical potential of science is hamstrung when 'actualised' - promising ideas faltering when transferred from the state of simple 'information' to physical, real-world application.

In referencing these themes in a specifically Japanese context, Orbaugh's discourse invites us to consider the notion of cyberpunk within the scope of techno-orientalism. Building on the ideas put forward by Edward Said in his landmark work *Orientalism* (1978), techno-orientalism is described by Toshiya Ueno as a system of stereotypes and tropes that combine to create an 'invented' version of Japan: "If the Orient was invented by the West,

then the Techno-Orient also was invented by the world of information capitalism. In "Techno-Orientalism", Japan not only is located geographically, but also is projected chronologically" (Ueno 2003). Ueno goes on to explain about how the view of Japan through a techno-orientalist lens - particularly via mediums such as anime - is one that is seductively attractive to the West, creating and compartmentalising received ideas of what Japan 'is'. So much so, he argues, that "The Orient exists in so far as the West needs it". In essence, a Japanese cultural product like anime - precisely because of its populist seductivity - is inherently positioned to become part of a tapestry of re-mixing and re-fashioning of creative tropes; building a vision of Japan that is - itself - a mere trope.

Masunori Oda relates Ueno's ideas regarding this matter to the work of American author William Gibson, and his repurposing of a techno-orientalist Japan as the backdrop to his cyberpunk novels such as *Neuromancer* (1984), and more specifically to our argument, *Idoru* (1996) (Oda 2001, 250). Like *Macross Plus*, *Idoru* features an artificially intelligent 'synthetic personality' pop idol - the titular 'Idoru' - with much of the plot focusing on how a rock-star has become infatuated with this pop idol; Rei Toei. Again, like *Macross Plus*, we see more traditional 'serious' cyberpunk themes plugged into an excitingly exotic future-city informed by the information-overload of popular media culture. Gibson himself is explicit in his orientation of Japan as a place inextricably linked to these composite tropes of cyberpunk:

> Modern Japan simply was cyberpunk. The Japanese themselves knew
> it and delighted in it. I remember my first glimpse of Shibuya, when one
> of the young Tokyo journalists who had taken me there, his face
> drenched with the light of a thousand media-suns—all that towering,
> animated crawl of commercial information—said, "You see? You see?
> It is *Blade Runner* town." And it was. It so evidently was. (Gibson 2001)

Here, Gibson's views tie urban Japan - as geographic locale - into a landscape of media culture. Animated. Commercial. Drenched in information. It is in this context that we can understand opinions such as those by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun in which she targets Gibson's techno-orientalist stylings as seeking to "orient the reader to a technology--overloaded present/ future (which is portrayed as belonging to Japan or other Far East Countries) through the promise of readable difference, and through the conflation of information networks with an exotic urban landscape" (Chun 2008, 177). This idea of "readable difference" - namely, linguistic or visual connotations of otherness, is echoed in Gibson's use of the word 'Idoru' as the title of one of his novels. By importing a Japanese loanword, which in turn has been imported from the English word 'Idol' - much like Gibson's reference to Japan as "*Blade Runner* town" - our attention is again drawn to the re-purposed, self-circular nature of this techno-orientalist discourse, East and West colliding in a melange of influence that serves to perpetuate its own invention. Oda references this as "a kind of 'contact zone' for the West to meet the latest Japan/ese" (Oda 2001, 250), but suggests that the reciprocity of this system is at such an extent that it distances itself from older ideas of orientalism, positioning itself instead as a more mutual osmosis of ideas and concepts.

Returning to the idea of loanwords, we see a strong example of this osmosis within *Macross Plus* and the heavy use of English loanwords within the Japanese dialogue of its script. As Naoki & Hiroko Chiba point out, these loanwords are particularly orientated around the disciplines of music and technology. For example "*BDI shisutemu* (BDI system), *BL yunitto* (BL unit)... *beeta endorufin* (beta-endorphin)... *saburiminaru efekuto* (subliminal effects) and *koketisshu parusu modo* (coquettish pulse mode)" (Chiba 2007, 156-158) are all used to describe elements of Sharon Apple's concerts, a hefty stream of 'tech jargon' to emphasise the 'otherness' of the technology. In this sense, the self-referential circle is closed - and just as Gibson employs visions of a high-tech Japan for exotic thrill, so too do the Japanese creators of *Macross Plus* in their use of English loanwords to convey the very same thing.

Along these lines, if we are to consider *Macross Plus* as a work that exists in a place where the contraflows of East-West influence have become inextricably blended, is it possible to envision a discourse that exists 'beyond' the established narrative of techno-orientalism? For this, we might look back to Edward Said's *Orientalism* and his foreword to the 2003 edition of the text, where he posits the term 'humanism' as this potential 'beyond-orientalism', suggesting that this "Humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods… This is to say that every domain is linked to every other one, and that nothing that goes on in our world has ever been isolated and pure of any outside influence" (Said 2003, xvii). Said, it must be noted, does not comment specifically on Japan or anime within his book, but in highlighting his ideas of humanism, we seek to draw parallels with his community of cultural 'interpreters' and the kinds of creative blends between East and West we have highlighted above. Here again, we see a distinct awareness of mixing - that if we are to remove the notion of walled 'insides' and 'outsides', what remains is an interlinked domain (ie. nexus) where all influences (both Eastern and Western) are wholly combined. In addition, Said's use of the word 'domain' brings with it connotations of a technological, networked system, and indeed - it is to the notion of cyberspace he turns as a kind of aide and key driver toward this 'humanist' domain: "We are today abetted by the enormously encouraging democratic field of cyberspace, open to all users in ways undreamed of by earlier generations" (Said 2003, xxii). In this sense, Said returns us to the question at the heart of cyberpunk as a genre, and whether we envision it as overtly pessimistic and dystopian, or optimistic and hopeful. The difference between potential and actuality - between man's capacity to perfect technology, and the responsibility to use it wisely. In a networked, open system where all influences are linked, what new, combinatory modes of expression start to emerge?

**Part 2: 'Stateless' states - Crafting a culturally diverse future-topia**

If we are to understand 'anime' as 'animation of Japanese origin' (Clements & McCarthy 2015, 245), we present a situation where an anime film comes pre-loaded and pre-stamped with connotations of the country it was made in - ie. its 'cultural odour' (Iwabuchi 1998, 165-180). As we have observed above however, the existence of a cultural 'contact zone' between East and West where influences from both can intermingle as part of a globalised distribution network, these distinct notions of a work 'belonging' wholly to a single nation begin to be eclipsed by something more universal and combinatorial in nature. In essence, the 'cultural odour' has become 'odourless'; the end-product 'Made In Japan', yet aesthetically 'stateless' - a product of so many 'mixed' influences that its true 'origin point' becomes a far more elusive matter. This theory runs in tangent with ideas discussed by Naylor/Helford (2014, 309-314) and Denison (2011, 221-235) regarding the *mukokuseki* or 'stateless' quality of many anime (particularly science fiction anime) and how this potentially arises from 'transcultural creative processes' leading to the creation of hybridized content. In this regard, the manner in which *Macross Plus* crafts a culturally mixed, 'stateless' world as its primary setting serves as a useful case study to illustrate these points.

The bulk of the film's narrative takes place on the colony planet Eden, and it is in the visual depiction of this world that we are provided the most overt example of the movie's 'stateless' quality via a number of backdrops which are heavily inspired by real-world, American locales. These include the hilly streets of San Francisco, a wind farm in California's Central Valley, highways in Orlando, Florida and, most notably, the film's 'New Edwards Air Force Base', which is modeled on California's real Edwards Air Force Base. Likewise, the test pilot conflict which serves as the film's core narrative was inspired by the real-world Advanced Tactical Fighter program the United States Airforce undertook in the 1980s, with the Northrop YF-23 fighter jet serving as a direct design influence for the YF-21 plane within the film (This is Animation - The Select: Macross Plus Movie Edition 1995).

Susan Napier draws on the writings of film scholars Susan Pointon and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto to draw allusions to exactly this kind of "constant cross-pollination" and "cultural borrowing" in relation to anime. Here, the focus is placed squarely on the Japanese creators and their exposure "since birth" to Western influence. In essence, if we are to consider anime as a product of said "Japanese creators", it is to understand the idea of a "Japanese creative identity" that is informed just as much by Western influences as it is by Japanese ones. Strictly regional, national boundaries are redefined into a newly transnational "globalistic" vision (Napier 2005, 22-23). We can observe these qualities in the descriptions of the transnational creative mode as being one of inherent "plurality" (Hjort 2010, 12-33), or "as shorthand for an international or supranational mode of film production whose impact and reach lies beyond the bounds of the national" (Higbee & Lim 2010, 10). In essence, by drawing so heavily on non-Asian influence as part of its aesthetic, while *Macross Plus* still exists within the formalised categorical framework of 'anime' and 'Japanese', its actual creative DNA is arguably more part of a cultural 'interstate' - the *mukokuseki* quality referenced above. This aesthetic is furthered in the fact that almost all signage in *Macross Plus* is in English. This presents a strong contrast to the world of *Ghost In The Shell*, which notably based its cityscape and signage on the neon-lit streets of Hong Kong - a model that fits into a lineage of the 'future city' as inherently Asian, recalling our discussion of William Gibson's novels and *Blade Runner*, in which a feel of exoticism was created via a "postmodern pastiche" of "Asian design elements" (Yuen 2000, 1-21).

Thus, by rejecting, or presenting an opposite to the 'pastiche' of the 'Asian' future-city, *Macross Plus* achieves an aesthetic quality more open-ended in nature, and more reflective of the stateless mixing of influences that serves as its origin point. *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* - through the visual language of their aesthetic settings - arguably still feel as if they are telling 'Asian' stories, ie. stories in which a pan-Asian or Japanese urban environment feels distinctly plugged into their narrative sense. In contrast, the post-national, post-modern "Pacific era" (Morley & Robins 2002, 168) feel of *Macross Plus* suggests a cinematic product

in which the creative toolset of science fiction has been fully 'freed' into a more universal model that exists beyond any current notion of 'nation'; the kinds of "transculturation" and "transnationalism" described by Iwabuchi as essential to "over-coming a nation-centric view of global cultural power" (Iwabuchi 2002, 41). It is a film that both presents as, and is a product of, a more globally-aligned aestheticism - one that is objectively 'of Japan', but in which an understanding of 'Japan' represents a nexus of transnationally informed creators for which the creative impulse will inherently be informed by non-Japanese influences.

In achieving this transnational aesthetic, the film not only employs its setting, but also its characters. On more than one occasion we are shown characters that are depicted as black, as well as a 'mixed' family of two children belonging to a black mother and caucasian father. Meanwhile, in the name of main character Isamu Dyson, we are given a distinct example of both Japanese and Western heritage combined into one, 'mixed' whole. As Antonia Levi comments: "[science fiction anime] will often deliberately combine a Japanese name with a non-Japanese identity (or vice versa) to indicate a future in which intercultural marriage is the norm. This is certainly the case in *Macross Plus* which features a multiracial, multi-special cast of characters…" (Levi 1996, 13-14). In referencing this multiracial quality within the specific context of science-fiction as a genre, it is worth also noting how the film's other lead male, Guld, is of half-human/half-alien heritage - further conflating the notion of 'multiracial' into that of 'multispecies'.

Napier analyses the "new kind of hybridity" represented by characters and settings like these as part of a "global younger generation that is increasingly electronically conversant with the vast variety of worldwide popular culture." For her, the "postethnic" identities of these characters help create a fantastical "anywhere" free from the constraints and conformity of the real world "in which the audience can revel in a safe form of Otherness unmatched by any other contemporary medium" (Napier 2005, 26-27). This last point in particular is crucial, as it highlights the importance of both science-fiction and anime as mediums especially

conducive to free expression, where the trope of statelessness itself begins to take on an appeal all of its own.

These ideas of statelessness achieving a special significance amongst fans of anime are further outlined in Sandra Annett's exploration of Shinichirō Watanabe's TV series *Cowboy Bebop*, a show which *Macross Plus* in many ways served as a dry-run for, sharing much of the same aesthetic and thematic DNA in common, in addition to a number of key staff members (Newman 2016, 1). *Cowboy Bebop*, Annett argues, "marks the point of crossing in the late 1990s between North American and Japanese fan communities, between cultures of television and the Internet, and between the postnational and transnational modes of animated globalization" (Annett 2014, 110). For her, Watanabe (b. 1965) - as a director - was central to crafting "globally oriented anime that mix Japanese historical themes with the audio-visual stylings of contemporary pop cultures" (Annett 2014, 122). This pick-and-mix approach suggests a memetic quality to pop culture 'stylings' - a creative amalgamation in which these stylistic (and thus, recognisable) tropes continue to copy across genre works, precisely because they exist as part of the pop cultural sphere. Namely, to operate within the 'popular' style is to naturally gravitate around and consolidate tropes that have previously proven popular in their own right.

To this extent, having discussed the visual, aesthetic manifestation of this globally orientated mix, we will now turn our attention to how *Macross Plus* also employs audio as a central element to achieve the same effect. Hideko Haguchi's *The Interaction between Music and Visuals in Animated Movies - A Case Study of Akira* lays down an excellent framework for discussing soundtracks in relation to the medium of anime, combining both a study of the composer themselves and their production process with a textual analysis of the music in relation to the film itself. Haguchi makes an important distinction that "Music has never been a primary focus in anime research" (Haguchi 2014, 174), but cites "the sophisticated interaction between [*Akira*'s] visuals and music" as a core part of the film's lasting legacy and

appeal. As such, we would argue that to understand *Macross Plus* as a complete cinematic work (comprising *both* audio and visual elements), it is crucial to look to the film's soundtrack and its composer Yōko Kanno (b. 1963).

Prior to her work on *Macross Plus*, Kanno had spent the late 80s composing soundtracks for a number of video games and serving as arranger on the ending theme *Once in a While, Talk of the Old Days* for Studio Ghibli's *Porco Rosso* (1992). It was 1994, however, that marked her debut work as a composer for anime, with soundtracks for both *shōjo* science-fiction series *Please Save My Earth*, and more significantly, *Macross Plus*. Her contribution to the film must, in many ways, be understood in a two-fold manner. Firstly, as a composer in a 'traditional' sense of the word - providing a classical, orchestral score, recorded largely in Tel Aviv by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Secondly, she was to create a suite of 'pop' songs to serve as the in-film material performed and sung by the AI idol character Sharon Apple. For these songs, Kanno would blend a number of musical genres (pop, industrial, electronica, slow jazz, up-beat techno, slavic-style choral chants) and languages (English, French and the invented alien 'Zentran' language) to add to the film's depiction of a 'stateless', culturally diverse world - one in which music plays a central role. Kanno herself is clearly aware of this dimension of genre-mixing, commenting in an interview:

> I hear everyone talk about how many genres [I work in] like classical,
>
> jazz and others, but personally, I don't divide music by genre when
>
> creating. I don't create by saying, 'I must create a classical piece
>
> here,' or 'I must create a jazz piece here.'
>
> ("An interview between Egan Loo and Yōko Kanno")

The majority of Kanno's eclectic music for Sharon Apple is delivered as part of two extended concert sequences which appear at roughly 20 and 70 minutes into the film's duration. These concerts combine a heady mix of strobing, colourful visuals (both traditionally

animated and CGI) with Kanno's propulsive soundtrack to create a surreal, trance-like effect distinct from the rest of the film; designed to evoke the 'rave' atmosphere of a live concert. This interlinking of the animated medium and 'rave' music can be considered in relation to Toshiya Ueno's *Techno- Orientalism and media- tribalism: On Japanese animation and rave culture*, where he likens the "design and color sense" of certain anime as reminiscent of both "psychedelics" and the "tribal atmosphere of open air rave parties" (Ueno 1999, 102). Ueno goes on to explain how this distinct audio-visual environment echoes many of the ideas explored earlier regarding networked systems and the liminality between biological and artificial bodies:

> Through various technologies — sound system, rhythm machines, decoration, videos and computer graphics, drugs and dance — ravers can invent an extended artificial body or collective identity. Crucially, ravers are quite aware that the 'nature' with which they feel unified is thoroughly artificial and technological. (Ueno 1999, 104)

This attitude of a technologized, drug-like experience is echoed in *Macross Plus* during a press conference sequence in which Sharon Apple's forthcoming concert is introduced, with a reporter stating: "Some experts say that the singing of an emotionless computer is nothing more than a type of narcotic". This attitude reaches its logical conclusion later in the film when Sharon's AI system runs wild and we are told that for the people at the concert: "All they see now is Sharon. All they hear now is Sharon". Sharon then affirms this herself, stating: "You needn't worry anymore. You needn't do anything anymore." In these lines, we can read a kind of commentary on the role of pop idol culture (and by extension, the media as a whole) within the same lineage of potential dangers expressed regarding technology earlier. Indeed, many of the track titles from Kanno's soundtrack - *Information High / Idol Talk / Let's News / Pulse* - allude to this concept of a media culture of frantic information

overload, albeit one in which said media plays a vital role in establishing channels of unification and communication between individuals.

In seeking to tell a story in which music plays a central component, *Macross Plus* moves within a narrative space in which it is inherently informed by the trans-cultural 'potential' of music as a popular medium of mass-entertainment, much like anime itself is. In this respect, we can look to studies by Ian Condry (2006) and Ken McLeod (2013, 259-275) which seek to trace a link between music (in this instance, hip-hop) and anime as part of what Condry calls "the polycentrism of globalization" (2006, 215). Examining the instance of African American hip-hop's use of Japanese motifs as an example of a globally hybridised experience of identity and racial formation in the 21st century, we can see this as a kind of bilateral flow in which: "Hip-hop went from the United States to the world, while anime traveled from Japan to the world." (Condry 2006, 215). Here, populist mediums like anime and hip-hop take on an almost ambassadorial role - cultural product to be traded not simply on a financial level, but as part of an intellectual melange of creative sharing.

On a basic level, we can envision these kinds of bilateral flows of pop-culture product (ie. anime or music) as examples of the "postmodern eclecticism" outlined by Douglas McGray in *Japan's Gross National Cool* (2002, 44-55); symptomatic of an environment where "Japan was postmodern before postmodernism was trendy, fusing elements of other national cultures into one almost-coherent cool". For McGray, like other globally-popular Japanese properties like *Hello Kitty* or *Pokemon*, the medium of anime is simply part of a far larger, all-encompassing phenomenon of 'product', which might also include comic books, CDs, videogames, clothes, toys and other assorted merchandise. This environment of interconnected consumption has been termed variously as a "broader transmedia nexus" (Condry 2006, 204) or "media mix" (Steinberg 2012), and an understanding of it is crucial to seeing an animated work like *Macross Plus* not just as a film that combines a multitude of genre tropes, but as a specifically delineated 'genre movie' (Hess 1977, 65-95) for which the

existence of this wider media mix is integral to its existence as part of the wider commercial 'machinery' of the anime industry as a whole.

As simply one installment within the larger '*Macross*' franchise, the roots of the film's relationship with ideas of the animated medium as 'product' date back to the original 1982 *Macross* TV series which serves as a prequel to the events of *Macross Plus*. This original series was exported to the US, retitled as *Robotech* (1985), a series that combined *Macross* with two other unrelated anime series - retooling them into a patched-together, Frankenstein-like new entity that changed character names and plotlines in an effort to adapt the material to American tastes. Fred Patten's in-depth account of the franchise's release in the US provides further detail on how this hybridisation very much stemmed from a desire to match the show to the strict formats of American television syndication, which dictated a minimum number of episodes (Patten 2004, 307). Likewise, the name *Robotech* itself came about as part of an orchestrated effort to match the animation's identity to the trade name of a number of *Macross* 'robot' toys that had been imported from Japan for sale in the States.

This process of combining and altering a piece of animated content to maximise revenue returns and match different audience requirements would resurface a decade later in *Macross Plus* itself. The film's scriptwriter Keiko Nobumoto (b. 1964) originally wrote the work as a feature-length piece, before the script shifted into a model that would see the animation split over four individually released home-video volumes - known as OVAs (original video animation). This release model had gained precedent within the anime industry in the 80s, and by the early 90s had developed serious traction, as these works typically tackled more adult material, and with a higher production standard, than TV animation (Patten 2004, 105-107). From these four individual releases - each roughly 30 minutes in length - the two-hour theatrical version was then edited, returning *Macross Plus* to its originally planned length. The finalised version contains roughly 20 minutes of new and alternative footage, re-mixing this into, and re-using existing footage, to allow a theatrical

version of the same material to be released for comparatively little extra work. Here, we see Condry's transmedia nexus in evidence again, this time feeding back into itself in an effort to maximise financial returns, breathing new life into existing visual content to allow it a 'second chance' at recouping production costs.

This concept of repackaging was echoed in the release strategy for the music of *Macross Plus* - of particular note because, at the time, it was one of very few anime soundtracks also released in America. The 'original' soundtrack was released across two separate CDs in both Japan and America, followed by a four track mini-album of just Sharon Apple's songs, and lastly, a further version of the soundtrack subtitled 'for fans only' that included instrumentals and alternate versions of songs not featured in the first two soundtrack discs. Thus, for those wishing to own the 'entire' musical experience, they would have to purchase four separate CDs - and for American fans, this would involve importing two of the discs from Japan. This 'completionist' aspect of the film's media mix is important to consider as it is representative of a wider trend in the way anime and its associated paraphernalia are marketed; a "mode of desire" Hiroki Azuma identifies as similar to "the passion of trading-card collectors to "the complete" (i.e., to collect all cards in a set)" (Azuma 2009, 104). For Azuma, the *otaku* culture of hardcore anime fandom is characterised by this culture of engendered consumption, one in which anime exists as simply one element in a database of intersecting elements.

Understanding the wider 'transmedia nexus' and culture of consumption that *Macross Plus* was released as part of is important because, in many ways, it is directly tied to the trajectory of its co-director Shinichirō Watanabe's career. In *The Soul of Anime*, Ian Condry argues how the mecha and sci-fi genres in particular helped solidify ideas of the 'anime fan', with works like *Gundam* (1979) and *Space Battleship Yamato* (1974) emerging into the *Star Wars* (1977)-infused climate of the late 70s and a shift toward more 'adult' fan audiences for the medium. Condry goes on to explain how toy manufacturers would stipulate the kind of

mecha robots they would like to see in their accompanying anime series, but that otherwise, creators were largely left to their own devices. He cites Watanabe as typical of this environment, with the director claiming "he began working in anime because he was told it would be easier, and quicker, for him to become a director there than in live-action films" (Condry 2013, 122-123). In Watanabe's attitude, we see the medium of anime itself outlined as a kind of facilitator for freedom - creative and commercial drives dovetailing neatly, with checklists of 'required' genre elements serving as a backbone and easy 'in' for creators to then create works as they pleased.

Denison's reading of the mecha subgenre adds further detail on its continuing popularity, and like Condry, she sees characteristic works like *Gundam* as emblematic of a sea-change that occurred within the anime medium; the impact of the franchise's media mix instrumental in the move "beyond anime texts into the realms of fully fledged cultural phenomenon". Denison is keen to stress however that the mecha subgenre is simply part of a wider oeuvre of science-fiction anime that can trace its lineage back to Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* (1963) and science fiction's status as an 'imported concept'. To this respect, she states: "Science fiction has become so bound up within Japanese media production that now it is normal for the romanized phrase 'SF' to stand in for the term" (Denison 2015, 27). Here, science-fiction as concept is specifically couched in non-Japanese script, drawing allusions to it as a 'coded' concept and carefully delineated category.

In contrast though, she also presents the case of Watanabe's *Space Dandy* (2014) and how while this animated TV show is clearly a work of science fiction, and is set in space, its official website "never names the show as science fiction" (Denison 2015, 28). As such, we might envision Watanabe's vision of the show - which acts as a kind of 'genre kaleidoscope', bringing together different directors, animation styles and genres for each individual episode - as post-genre, building on the 'mixed' nature of Watanabe's *Macross Plus* and *Cowboy Bebop* to transcend formal, traditionalist notions of being purely 'science fiction'. As Denison

goes on to explain later in her book: "Rather than anime universally being "what we collectively believe it to be", anime's genres remain contingent on context; what is an anime genre in one place may not be a genre elsewhere" (Denison 2015, 102). As such, in a transnational context, we might envision the mixed genres of *Macross Plus* as an inherent advantage; in which one genre might be played up for certain global markets, while for other audiences, it might be presented in an entirely different context.

These ideas of genre as contingent on context and spatial orientation are important because they hint toward Watanabe's distinct awareness of international markets, with longtime Watanabe collaborator Dai Satō (b. 1969) claiming that when it came to Watanabe's TV series *Samurai Champloo* (2004), he "had planned to rely on foreign capital from the start, and his plan was to market it abroad" (Annett 2014, 124). We see this too in *Space Dandy*, which notably aired in the US - dubbed into English on the Adult Swim channel's Toonami block - *before* its Japanese debut a day later on the channel Tokyo MX. In this context, we can see Watanabe's directorial output as no longer solely a Japanese product for Japanese audiences, but a truly global product in which an envisioned and acknowledged Western audience is no longer an afterthought, but a prioritised component of an international rollout.

**Part 3: A carnival of genres - Robots, romance and revelry**

In *The Moe Manifesto*, Patrick Galbraith describes the quality of the *Macross* franchise as a 'mash-up work' as integral to its appeal to anime fans - combining robots and battle sequences with beautiful character designs, melodramatic romance and idol performances. He goes on to cite Sasakibara Go's *Bishojo no gendaishi* (Contemporary History of *Bishojo*) and its argument that the core narrative drive in the franchise is not the action and battles, but the love triangle between its protagonists (Galbraith 2014, 14). Antonia Levi echoes this view, seeing romantic elements as crucial to the appeal of anime to a teenage *otaku* audience, stating "It's not surprising that romance is part of almost all anime regardless of

what else is going on" (Levi 1996, 111). In this light, it is useful to also examine the comments of *Macross Plus*' co-director Shōji Kawamori (b. 1960), presented on the back cover text blurb of the UK DVD release of the film:

> It's easy for me to say this now, but originally there were three plans that eventually created the one story. One was a story of good friends suddenly feeling immense hatred for each other and fighting to kill each other. The second was a slightly comical story of two pilots racing to get to see their heroine's concert. And the third story encapsulated a world of high-tech gadgetry with a love story. And hence… As there is so much going on in so little time, I had difficulties including all three ideas into one story… To me, the original plan combining to make one episode was the key point to the '*Macross*' atmosphere…
>
> (Macross Plus - The Ultimate Edition [DVD sleeve], 2002)

It is this notion of 'atmosphere' that is of particular relevance to our argument here, and its relation to the three central 'expressive modes' of anime suggested by Napier; that of apocalypse, festival and elegy. While *Macross Plus* arguably contains elements of all three of these, it is the 'festival' mode which is most suggestive of the combinatory free-play of genres we see suggested in the comments from Kawamori above. Indeed, Napier suggests that the animated medium is especially conducive to this kind of atmosphere: "As with the festival space itself, the space of animation is one that allows for experimentation, fluidity, transformation, and ultimately an entry into a world more radically Other than anything in conventional live-action cinema" (Napier 2005, 31). In this evocation of 'radically Other' worlds, we see recollections of the ideas of statelessness explored earlier, with the world of *Macross Plus* positioned as an experimental space in which the festival mode can be envisioned both literally - in the atmosphere of rave-like pop concerts - and thematically, via a collision of disparate genre tropes. Denison elaborates on Napier's suggested modes of

expression, citing Watanabe's *Cowboy Bebop* as a prime example of how the mixing of genres within a work inherently lends itself to "moments of the festival" in a show "which deliberately mixes elements of space opera with gangster, Western and film noir stylistics, even making occasional comedic forays into horror" (Denison 2015, 17). For Denison and Napier, the festival is not only combinatory, but transformational - the animated medium itself giving rise to a free-play of experimentation where deliberate mixing, and the resulting 'Otherness' becomes the raison-d'etre in and of itself.

Denison's categorisation and labelling of these categories ties into Steve Neale's theories of identifying works as "multiply generic" (Neale 2000, 2) - namely, how reworking and subversion of received notions of what genre 'is' relies on an implicit audience knowledge of conditions and aesthetic styles that then become conventions through this process of categorisation and grouping. Citing Altman, Neale goes on to explain how these interactions with genre become an integral part of the production and consumption of films:

> By definition, all films belong to some genre(s)... but only certain films are self-consciously produced and consumed according to (or against) a specific generic model. When the notion of genre is limited to descriptive uses, as it commonly is when serving… classification purposes, we speak of 'film genre'. However, when the notion of genre takes on a more active role in the production and consumption process, we appropriately speak instead of 'genre film', thus recognizing the extent to which generic identification becomes a formative component of film viewing. (Altman, quoted in Neale 2000, 27)

Here, we see a specific delineation between the kinds of categorisation Denison employs in describing the many genres present in *Cowboy Bebop*, and the more 'active' relationship

with genre employed by Kawamori, Watanabe and Kanno in the production of *Macross Plus* as a 'genre film' to be consumed as part of an existing anime media mix designed to sell product such as robot toys and CDs. To this extent, an analysis of Neale's closer readings of two genres in particular - science fiction, and the musical - provide a useful tool in allowing us to see exactly how this active engagement with tropes manifests itself within the film itself.

Citing Sobchak, Neale's discussion of science fiction roots itself in how the "visual surface" of science fiction "presents us with a confrontation between a mixture of those images to which we respond as 'alien' and those we know to be familiar" (Sobchack 1987, 87). In this, we see strong ties to the ideas of mixing and statelessness discussed earlier, whilst in Neale's comments on trends in the 1990s toward more postmodernist science fiction styles as "rendering the artificial as ever more human", (Telotte 1995, 22) we see this mixing born out in the stylistic climate of 90s cyberpunk. Within this environment, science fiction films become "a surface for play and dispersal" amidst a "new and erotic leisureliness" (Sobchack 1987, 227-228; Neale 2000, 100-104).

We see similar ideas of playfulness and mixture in Neale's subsequent discussion of the musical genre, where he comments "The musical has always been a mongrel genre" - with the prerequisite of music, song and dance being its only essential ingredients, enabling the musical as especially open to being combined with other genres. To this extent, the musical offers many of the same blendings of the 'alien' and 'familiar' presented in science fiction, with Neale noting the 'escapist' nature of the musical, and how this offers "aesthetically 'utopian' solutions to real social needs and contradictions" (Neale 2000, 104-112). Just as Denison and Napier point to the thrill of 'Otherness', Neale's ideas around the alien, escapist nature of certain genres suggests a contrast drive toward a cinematic playground in which the tools of said genres - their tropes - become the key instigators by which creators might experiment with fictional explorations of real-world issues.

In this context, we can clearly see how *Macross Plus* - as an overtly science-fiction work that integrates and incorporates music as a core narrative element - lends itself to an atmosphere of fluid play in which it can also bring in components of the romance, action and military genres to become the epitome of the 'festival' mode discussed by Napier and Denison. In looking to further express the manner in which the film intersects with this mode, it is worth relating Napier's 'festival' with the theory of the 'carnivalesque' put forward by Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. In Bakhtin's theory, the carnivalesque functions as a narrative mode that liberates the norms of the dominant style or atmosphere through humour and/or chaos. Within this atmosphere of freedom and play, opposites are mingled and fools become wise. In an ambiguous "world upside down" (Bakhtin 1968, 370) where high and low culture meet, a new "polyphonic" feel emerges in which there is "familiar and free interaction between people" (Bakhtin 1993, 122). It is this same 'polyphonic' mixing of styles we see within *Macross Plus* - where serious, philosophical science-fiction concepts meet mid-way with the ecstatic thrill of action, romance and pop music. This 'drawing together' of people, tropes and styles is all conducive to the kind of liberation of the dominant atmosphere Bakhtin references.

Many of the most overtly carnivalesque tropes are best presented in the film's central character - Isamu - who epitomises Bakhtin's theory of the fool-turned-wiseman. From the off, he is characterised as brash and jocular, from both his use of Western phraseology like "*Okay, no problem*" and "*suriringu daro?*" (Isn't it thrilling?) (Chiba 2007, 157) to other characters repeatedly lambasting him as a "*baka*" (idiot). Kanno's soundtrack assists here too - while the rest of the film's incidental music is largely orchestral or electronic in nature, Isamu's introductory theme *Welcome To Sparefish* (potentially alluding to him as a fish-out-of-water) is comprised of low-slung, rugged, acoustic guitar work reminiscent of classic Hollywood westerns, placing him in a lineage of cyberpunk 'console cowboys' (Fernbach 2000, 234-255). And yet, by the film's conclusion, he has 'come good', saving both the movie's heroine and the city at large from Sharon Apple's rogue AI program; his 'human skill'

and daring trumping technology and cold machine logic. His 'wisdom-of-fools' is best encapsulated in a quote from earlier in the film where he proclaims "A hundred travel books aren't worth a real trip" - namely, that the real 'experience' will always trump information.

For Isamu, the world of *Macross Plus* remains one of constant carnivalesque play - a cocktail of thrills intimately linked to an inversion or transcendence from the ordinary day-to-day world - a quality Napier envisions as a kind of "speed induced pleasure flow" (Napier 2005, 262). She takes the freewheeling spirit of *Akira*'s motorbike hooligans as her example, and we see a similar attitude present in Isamu (who like *Akira*'s protagonist, also rides a bright red, futuristic motorbike) when he describes why exactly he enjoys flying planes so much: "When the throttle is open for all it's worth, and the G's are slamming me back, and it seems like I'm flying on into forever, I feel like I can just barely see something. Another world". In Isamu's quasi-sexual, almost orgasmic description of his pleasure-seeking, thrill-ride modus operandi, we can see the kind of drive that Orbaugh links to Foucault's postmodernist concept that sex "harbours what is most true in ourselves" (Orbaugh 2007, 177). In Orbaugh's opinion, these explorations of sexuality are a fundamental focus of cyberized narratives surrounding subjectivity and what it means to be an 'individual'. This outlook is best typified in *Macross Plus* where notions of 'technomasculinity' (Fernbach 2000) - in which both women and machines are fetishised and conflated into a singular thrill-ride - is contrasted directly with a hybridised machine-femininity in a scene where Isamu's friend Yang is 'hacking' Sharon Apple's systems in an attempt to bring her under his control. We see disembodied 'parts' of Sharon's incorporeal body floating in the air, and he comments: "I'm trying to kidnap Sharon. However, I can't find the most important part." Isamu jokingly quips back: "Well, I suppose her virginity would be kinda hard to get". This idea of Sharon Apple as a kind of feminine yet supra-sexual being bears closer examination in relation to Ueno's ideas discussed earlier linking animation and rave culture. For him, these cyberized, feminine identities take on an almost totemic, shamanistic quality:

> The mimetic antagonism of ravers can only be resolved around DJ as mediator and technoshaman… in both Japanimation and trance, the position of women is very significant and one frequently encounters the merging of women into the machine and technology. Many Japanimations feature female protagonists… endowed with special relationships with technology. ...the naked woman as cyborg, and hybrid images of women and machines are clichés of Japanimation. These commonly embody themes of the loss of individuality to the wider body of technology. (Ueno 1999, 104)

These ideas of merging and loss of individuality are important as they tie *Macross Plus* and its technologized world into a wide scope of themes which Jean-François Lyotard identifies in *The Postmodern Condition* as symptomatic of the "computerized", "telematic" era. Lyotard envisions this as a process in which information is "exteriorised" and "materialised", an "informatisation" and "commercialisation" of the world in which data becomes omnipresent, material and unending (Lyotard 1984). This outlook is emblematic of a landscape of popular media product that exists both within the film - in the form of AI pop idol Sharon Apple - and 'without', via its position as part of a globalised transmedia mix of consumer habits. Indeed, in many ways, the ideas of 'digital artifice' and 'reproduction' inherent in the very idea of a holographic idol like Sharon Apple encapsulate the concept of a postmodernist pop-cultural phenomenon, as born out in studies by Yuji Sone (2017, 139-166) and Ka Yan Lam (2016, 1107-1124) of real-world holographic pop idol Hatsune Miku.

In this light, we can envision Macross Plus as engaging with the idea of postmodernity on a number of levels - namely, through its self-referential existence as a piece of popular media telling a story specifically *about* the consumption of popular media, but also in its evocation of an irreverent, carnivalesque 'atmosphere'. By wrapping these concepts into its wider themes about the role of the individual in a world where the boundary between human and

machine bodies is increasingly blurred, the film's continued process of melding and mixing begins to emulate the "speed induced pleasure flow" described by Napier earlier - a wholesale cinematic experience that brings a distinctly tangible flavour to the atmosphere and expressiveness of the 'festival' mode.

**Conclusion**

In writing this study, I have sought to highlight specific stylistic lineages within the history of anime, moving the conversation beyond monolithic, 'ground-zero' works like *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* by taking *Macross Plus* as a representative work through which we might examine and re-evaluate how key genre tropes in the spheres of cyberpunk, mecha and science-fiction at large have evolved over the years. From the jockeying of creative and commercial priorities in a merchandise-driven medium to the evolving position of anime as 'made in Japan' yet consumed globally, we are presented a window into a cultural product uniquely suited to act as a 'nexus' for a wide swathe of both inputs and outputs.

By envisioning *Macross Plus* as a 'mash-up' film in which various genre tropes and creative influences are amalgamated into a singular whole, we see it not only as a product of what came before it, but also a springboard for what followed. As highlighted in the continuing output of its co-director Shinichirō Watanabe, the distinct pop-cultural blending - comprising both audio and visuals - he developed in this film would become a kind of directorial calling card; a style that was distinct in itself, precisely because it blended so many other styles of both Eastern and Western origin. Taken together with Shōji Kawamori and Yōko Kanno, we are presented with a picture of transnationally literate creators working to piece together a cinematic product that not only works within the framework and tropes of genres like cyberpunk and mecha, but invests them with a new, globally infused aesthetic that is both familiar and exotic in nature.

What we are left with is - much like cyberpunk's evolution from analogue to digitized visions of melded, man/machine entities - an unfurling network of interlinked elements (such as music, setting, characters, themes and technical production aspects) which function both individually, but also as part of what we might term a blueprint or paradigm for future innovation. *Macross Plus* presents one such model - existing not only as a calculated 'genre film' effort - but a stepping stone on a path of gradual shift toward an understanding of anime as a truly globalized, postmodern 'media mix' in which audio and visual, East and West, creators and consumers, all flow into a single, culturally amalgamated 'collective identity'.

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