



Practically Naked:

Fan Service in Anime as Hyper-Gendered Performances of Spectacle

A Master's Thesis for the Degree of Master of Arts (120 credits) in Visual Culture

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Abstract

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Mimosa Wittenfelt

This thesis combines Judith Butler's concept of gender understood as a performance and Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* in order to apply it onto the sexually charged imagery in anime known as "fan service." In doing so, it endeavours to answer what visually constitutes a gendered performance in fan service, and how those visuals can be read as a form of spectacle. It finds that fan service consists of inherently biased representations of gender and sexuality that exaggerate specific aspects of the gendered body as a form of wish-fulfilment through practically naked bodies, but which are liable to change due to their very nature as spectacle. In the end, this thesis offers an insight into visual codes that make up gender representation in anime in order to further the understanding of how these images represent ideals which are used to relate back onto real life.

Key Words

Fan Service, Anime, Ecchi, Otaku, Fan Culture, Gender Performance, Spectacle, Gender Representation, Judith Butler, Guy Debord

Table of Content

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Figures.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Aim & Research Question.....	1
Background & Relevance.....	2
Empirical Material.....	3
Theory.....	4
Method.....	7
Previous Research.....	9
Disposition.....	10
Chapter One: Sexual by Design.....	12
Fan Service: The Nucleus of Spectacle.....	12
The Narrative Structures of Wish-Fulfilment.....	14
The Construction of the Modern Galatea.....	15
Chapter Two: Absurd Bodies; or “How is her back not broken?!”.....	22
<i>Highschool of the Dead</i> : Absurdity in Motion.....	22
<i>Food Wars</i> : Ridiculously Sexual & Sexually Ridiculous.....	27
<i>Free!:</i> Fan Service for Female Viewers.....	33
Chapter 3: <i>Kill la Kill</i> ’s Subversion of Perversion.....	38
‘Pigs in Human Clothing’.....	39
Reconstructing Galatea.....	43
The Final Frontier of Gender Performance.....	49
Conclusion & Future Perspectives.....	54
Bibliography.....	56

List of Figures

Fig. 0.1: ‘Cover Art’, *Highschool of the Dead*, dir. Araki T., Madhouse, 2010, [DVD cover]
<<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1685401/>>, accessed 2020-06-06

Fig. 1.1: Saeki Shun, ‘Untitled Chapter 131 Cover’, 2016 in *Food Wars!: Shokugeki no Soma*, Vol. 16: *Captured Queen*, Japan, Shueisha, 2016, p. 67

Fig. 1.2: TVアニメ『Free!』公式ファンブック, Kyoto Animation, Ponycan Books, 2013,
<<http://iwatobi-sc.com/books/>>, accessed 2020-05-30

Fig. 2.1 – 2.7: ‘Episode 8: The DEAD way home’, *Highschool of the Dead*, dir. Araki T., Madhouse, 2010, [TV broadcast]

Fig 2.8 – 2.10: ‘Episode 6: Streets of the DEAD’, *Highschool of the Dead*, dir. Araki T., Madhouse, 2010, [TV broadcast]

Fig 2.11 – 2.13: ‘Episode 2: God Tongue’, *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma*, dir. Yonetani Y., J.C. Staff, 2015, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 2.14 – 2.16: ‘Episode 5: The Ice Queen and the Spring Storm’, *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma*, dir. Yonetani Y., J.C. Staff, 2015, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 2.17: ‘Episode 4: Sacred Mother of Kyokusei’, *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma*, dir. Yonetani Y., J.C. Staff, 2015, [TV broadcast]

2.18: ‘Episode 10: The Supreme Recette,’ *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma*, dir. Yonetani Y., J.C. Staff, 2015, [TV broadcast]

2.19 – 2.22: ‘Episode 1: The Vast Wasteland’, *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma*, dir. Yonetani Y., J.C. Staff, 2015, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 2.23 – 2.25: ‘Episode 2: Memories in the Distance!’, *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club*, dir. Utsumi H., Kyoto Animation, 2013 [TV broadcast]

Fig. 2.26, 2.28 – 2.29: ‘Episode 4: Captive Butterfly!’, *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club*, dir. Utsumi H., Kyoto Animation, 2013 [TV broadcast]

Fig. 2.27: 'Episode 7: DEAD night and the DEAD horde', *Highschool of the Dead*, dir. Araki T., Madhouse, 2010, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.1, 3.6: 'Episode 1: If Only I Had Thorns Like a Thistle...', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.2 – 3.4: 'Episode 3: Junketsu', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.5: 'Episode 6: Don't Toy With Me on a Whim', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.7, 3.9: 'Episode 8: I Will Wipe My Own Tears', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.8, 3.10 – 3.11: 'Episode 9: A Once in a Lifetime Chance', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.12: 'Episode 19: Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.13 – 3.17: 'Episode 16: The Girl Can't Help It', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.18 – 3.19: 'Episode 20: Far from the Madding Crowd', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.20 – 3.27: 'Episode 21: Incomplete', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.28: 'Episode 22: Tell Me How You Feel', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Fig. 3.29 – 3.30: 'Episode 24: Past the Infinite Darkness', *Kill la Kill*, dir. Imaishi H., Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

Introduction

Aim & Research Question

“Anime” is a nebulous term at the best of times, but it is generally understood to be a type of cartoon that originated from Japan. Over the years, anime and other affiliated media types such as manga (a type of comics) and light-novels (a specific kind of illustrated novels) have grown in popularity, and with them specific fictional genres and distinct visual tropes. One of the most prevalent of these visual tropes is colloquially referred to as “fan service.” While the definition depends on context, the term is most commonly used to describe the visual representation of fictional characters in sexually charged scenarios for the viewer’s enjoyment.

These characters are gendered by design in order to be used in fan service. This design can in turn be understood as a *performative act* of gender in fiction, and a visual expression of sexuality geared towards entertaining the viewer as a form of wish-fulfilment. “Gender” can be seen as a performance by following Judith Butler’s theory. She proposed an understanding of gender as series of acts over time, which amalgamates into a performance of gender, as an actor playing a role.¹ It should be noted that Butler examined the acts which constituted a gendered performance in real life, whilst I will examine it in fiction.

A work of fiction does not simply imitate real life. Rather, it elevates the ordinary of every-day into the extraordinary as a form of wish-fulfilment to its audience through a suspension of disbelief. Due to the sexualised nature of fan service, gender expression can be reduced to a series of acts which make up a performance of gender in fiction. The repetition of these acts over time, must like in real life, define what ideal performances of masculinity and femininity are supposed to be like. The sexual acts and imagery of fan service can thereby be reduced to a gendered performance for entertainment that reinforce “ideal” gendered expressions as it is reproduced through fan service over time.

This gendered performance in fan service can in turn be seen as a *spectacle* of mass media, wherein reality has been distilled and fictionalised for consumption and pleasure. According to Guy Debord, the spectacle is a mode of (re)production, wherein the ‘social

¹ J. Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, p. 521

relation between people’ has become mediated by images.² In this context, fan service is only *one* visual expression of mass media which makes up one aspect of ‘*the society of the spectacle*’, as Debord put it.³ Even so, placing fan service under a magnifying glass and analysing it as a nucleus of spectacle may provide a greater understanding of how these visual representations build up over time and shapes the understanding of what gendered bodies look and act like in media.

With this in mind, my thesis endeavour to answer the following questions:

What visually constitutes a gendered performance in fan service?

How can fan service be read as a form of spectacle through sexually charged visuals, in accordance with Debord’s concept of spectacle?

These two questions will shape the structure of this thesis in order to widen an understanding of fan service and how it operates as a visual phenomenon in anime.

I ask this to further understand:

What are the inherent biases in fan service’s representation of gender and sexuality and can these biases be subverted utilising the visual codes of fan service as gendered performances and spectacle?

Background & Relevance

Anime is not for everyone. Furthermore, anime that has an overabundance of fan service, known as “ecchi” anime, is *definitely* not for everyone — it is a niche within an already niche sub-culture. As an animated form of fiction, anime has a tendency to be equated to “silly cartoons,” as if that should invalidate it from scholarly discourse, much like other niche fan cultures of pop-culture have been dismissed in the past. Such arguments are in complete denial of the relationship that not only anime but *fiction as a whole* has to the real and physical world which created the fiction in the first place.

Fiction is and will always be based on reality. It is a man-made fantasy that reveals aspects of the human condition — a *spectacle* in which we use images to relate both to ourselves and others. Thereby it shows and shares ideas and ideals through its fantastical depictions, which the consumer in turn place themselves in relation to. A fiction is still a reproduction of reality and thereby tells of the reality it spawned from. Its world and

² G. Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. K. Knabb, Rebel Press, London, 2000, p. 7

³ Ibid.

characters did not come from thin air. Instead they exist in constant reference to the viewer's perception of reality, which it continuously shapes and moulds through the constant repetition of its images. Debord means that the society of the spectacle present an objective truth of how the world ought to be understood where '[w]hat appears is good; what is good appears.'⁴ Is it not of value, then, to examine just what it is that appears in one of these forms of spectacle?

Underneath the veneer of abnormally large breasts that bounce in fantastical fashion lies a set of ideals and biases which made the breasts bounce in the first place. It are these ideals and biases that I will attempt to unveil. In doing so, I will contribute to the discourse of gendered representation in fictional media and what these depictions say of the human condition.

Empirical Material

By looking at examples of fan service in different ecchi anime shows, I will be able to examine the visual tropes and conventions that make up the visual phenomenon. While anime comes in many shapes, forms and sizes, this thesis will exclusively use anime series that first aired on television, and further restrict the material to their first season if there are multiple. I have further limited my selection to series which premiered in Japan from 2010 to 2015, in order to provide a contemporary rather than historical account of anime. Whereas the historical context of fan service is fascinating all on its own, this thesis' goal is to understand the visuality of this phenomena, rather than its origins and past developments.

The main materials will be taken from *Highschool of the Dead*, *Food Wars*, *Free!* *Iwatobi Swim Club* and *Kill la Kill*. While all shows are examples of the genre of ecchi in their own right, they are also stand-outs within it.

Highschool of the Dead (abbreviated to *HOTD*) by studio Madhouse in 2010 is a cultural touch-stone within the anime community and a go-to example in discussions of the absurd physics of fan service. As will be explained in chapter 2, *HOTD* takes the ideals of the female form and exaggerate them in order to captivate viewers in its world of highly sexualised teenagers surviving a zombie apocalypse. It also provides the archetypical structure of ecchi shows, namely as a harem of girls which surrounds the male main character; a typical kind of wish-fulfilment. The viewer may project themselves on to the male

⁴ Debord, op. cit., pp. 7, 9-10

protagonist, using him as an audience surrogate in order to see this harem as their own, and thus imagine themselves with their favourite female character(s).

But while *HOTD* serves as the stand-in for the numerous ecchi shows that is geared towards a male audience as its focus is solely on female characters, the other examples are far more nebulous. *Food Wars* by J.C. Staff from 2015 is structured as to give a feeble attempt to use both male and female characters as objects to be sexualised. There is a difference in how the male and female characters are portrayed however, which points to the biases in performances of gender.

This becomes further evident when looking for ecchi anime meant for a female audience where male characters are the objects of fan service. There is no one-to-one comparison within the genre itself, as most sexualised anime for women isn't ecchi, but a homoerotic genre known as "Boys Love," which focuses on romance and drama. As such, *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club* by Kyoto Animation from 2013 pointed to a shift in the portrayal male-focused fan service, as it combined the visual tropes of both ecchi and Boys Love, with a female audience surrogate and a homoerotic subtext. It falls in line with the teasing nature of fan service, while still furthering the understanding of the differences between male and female representations.

As an element of story structure, fan service tends to range from narratively insignificant, at which point the plot is essentially put on pause in order to display the characters, to some narrative significance, but in which the moment is still drawn out and lingered upon. *Kill la Kill* by studio Trigger which aired from 2013 to 2014, however, uses fan service as a narrative focal point. *Kill la Kill* thereby becomes a genre subversion in how it construct its narrative visually through the spectacle of fan service in order to critique it.

Theory

The theoretical framework of this thesis revolves around Guy Debord's spectacle and Judith Butler's work on the performativity of gender roles.

In his book *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord states:

1 § In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immediate accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.⁵

He goes on to define “spectacle” as society’s relationship to images and how their constant production and reproduction has shaped the modern day understanding of reality and objective truth to be that of the spectacle. This makes the spectacle something more than simply mass-media, rather Debord defines the spectacle as the ‘*social relation between people that is mediated by images*’.⁶ As such, the spectacle becomes a self-fulfilling loop of production and a mediator between individuals and their perception to the world.⁷

While Debord goes out of his way to emphasise that spectacle isn’t simply the production of mass media in post-industrial times, it is still one part of the spectacle. His theory thus lend itself to analyses of visual media and places the contents of that analysis in a larger context of society as a whole.

In a literal sense, “spectacle” is defined as an unexpected event and something striking, eye-catching and attention-grabbing.⁸ Using Debord’s work widens the scope of this understanding by pointing out how its artifice have become the framework in which the modern world view is constructed, the building-blocks of this *society of the spectacle* are still the smaller spectacles of everyday. Together, they are like raindrops in an ocean: interesting and filled with nuanced particularity when studied in isolation, but impossible to make out when seen as part of the sea.

It is then useful to think of the spectacle as twofold: both as the framework in which society produces its world view through the production and mediation of images, *and* as the particular events and images which make up the building blocks of production and reproduction. This thesis will be focusing on the spectacle on a micro-level, and outline what these building blocks that make up the spectacle look like in fan service.

Fan service’s goal is to engage viewers by providing a fiction of wish-fulfilment on the micro-level, and to fuel a larger consumption of goods as a result of a viewer’s attachment to the entertainment media on a larger scale. While this relation is a thesis all on its own, I will

⁵ Debord, op. cit., p. 7

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 9-11

⁸ Merriam-Webster [website], <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spectacle>>, accessed 2020-05-07; Cambridge English Dictionary [website], <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/spectacle>>, accessed 2020-05-07

focus on the images of spectacle in of themselves to see how they operate as a building-block to a bigger whole.

While anime, like all kinds of fiction, is defined by how it *is* made up and therefore not a true reflection of reality, they are still man-made representations of it. Regardless of the individual visual elements of any given anime show, as a society we still read the characters as human to a degree, and therefore as a representation of a fictional reality to engage with.

Ecchi shows (**Fig. 0.1**) in particular do so by creating attractive characters for the viewers to lust for, with the moments of fan service being the specific eye-catching events which compel the viewer. It creates overtly sexual character designs in which the image of the human body is taken to exaggerated extremes. These absurd bodies are placed in sexually charged scenarios in which these characters interact. In doing so, everything from the character's designs, their visual framing, their actions in the narrative and the voice acting and sound design work to create a fictional performance which places a particular emphasis on gender.



Fig. 0.1: Cover for the first and only season of *Highschool of the Dead*. Note that the female cast takes up much of the foreground, with the male main character, Takashi, placed further back in the top-left corner.

Gender and the corporal reality of a body are two separate but intertwined concepts. In her essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, Judith Butler proposes that the concept of separation can be understood as gendered expression being an act. Following this line of thought, gender roles become as if roles in a play, rather than a natural result of the physical makeup of actual bodies.⁹ She states that:

⁹ Butler, op. cit., p.519

Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief.¹⁰

As such, gender in itself is an act of belief from both its actor and its spectators¹¹, which becomes even clearer when moved into the fictional realm of animation. While Butler examines the corporeal world through phenomenology and theatre theory to see what constitutes a gendered performance in everyday life, I will see what constitutes a gendered performance in fan service. The fictional bodies in fan service in animes are not beholden to corporal reality. They are instead bound by the concept of gender as a shared ideal, found in the social script of gender as a performance. Since there is no corporeal reality that limits the visual expression it becomes a purely performative image within which the body's visual ideal are taken to its logical extreme. This expression becomes *hyper* as the ideal picture of gendered bodies are exaggerated to such an absurd degree that they cannot feasibly exist in our every-day reality. These absurd bodies come to simultaneously reinforce the binaries of gender performance that they reproduce, and parody the script that they are based upon, due to the absurdity of their visual expression.

The reproduction of spectacle go hand in hand with the understanding the performance of gender as acts reproduced over time. By merging Debord's spectacle with Butler's theory of how gender can be understood as a series of performance acts, fan service can be understood as a commercial form of wish-fulfilment which reproduces exaggerated performances of gender.

Method

In this thesis, I will look at the different representations of gender roles in fan service. I have pulled my method from film theory, as outlined in Gillian Rose's book *Visual Methodologies*, which provides a structural basis to analyse the visual content of the empirical

¹⁰ Ibid., op. cit., p.519-520

¹¹ Ibid.

material.¹² The different perspectives in any given scene, shot distance, angles and camera movements are all visual components of the material which add a value system to any given shot. I analyse how each scene is visually constructed and where the focal points lie in order to see how hyper-gendered performance as a spectacle is visually represented.

This will be a qualitative study where I look at specific fan service sequences from my selected material. The selections of my empirical material is partly based on which ecchi animes have been popular in the English-speaking anime fan community¹³ and partly made at my own discretion, choosing animes that I already had some familiarity with.¹⁴ This selection method inevitably skews the analysis towards a Western perspective of anime, which is worth acknowledging. It is, however, still a perspective that I find value in exploring.

Highschool of the Dead will serve as a “typical” example of the ecchi genre and the first series to be analysed. I will look at its character’s design as well as their framing and movement in specific fan service scenes. This will then be complemented and compared to *Food Wars* and *Free!’s* fan service to establish an outline in how fan service operates visually and what it portrays. This will in turn be compared to *Kill la Kill* in order to see how the show subverts the genre and what that subversion in turn does to fan service. The particular scenes are partly chosen due to where they happen in the story; a strategy to create interest for an ecchi anime is to have a lot of fan service in the first episodes of a show, which we can see in both *Food Wars* and *Free!*. *HOTD*, however, also has a rather infamous fan service scene in its 8th episode, which has come to be a go-to example of fan service’s absurdist nature.

Since this is a content analysis I will limit my scope to the material itself and only acknowledge the site of production and audience reception in context to the material. Practically, this means that “the viewer” is a strawman for a presumed and intended audience, rather than based on the discourse of the anime fan community.

Anime is a medium defined by movement, whilst this thesis is a static medium of print and/or pdf files. This makes it difficult to give “proper” examples that fully encapsulate and contextualise the movement on screen. I have done my best to select snap-shots which

¹² Rose, G. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, 3rd edn., London, Sage, 2012

¹³ Spring 2015 – Anime, *MyAnimeList* [online forum], 2015, <<https://myanimelist.net/anime/season/2015/spring>>, accessed 2020-05-07; Summer 2013 – Anime, *MyAnimeList* [online forum], 2013, <<https://myanimelist.net/anime/season/2013/summer>>, accessed 2020-05-07; Fall 2013 – Anime, *MyAnimeList* [online forum], 2013, <<https://myanimelist.net/anime/season/2013/fall>>, accessed 2020-05-07; Summer 2010 – Anime, *MyAnimeList* [online forum], 2010, <<https://myanimelist.net/anime/season/2010/summer>>, accessed 2020-05-07

¹⁴ I neither had the time nor will to watch through four new anime series; *HOTD* was the only anime that I had not watched before starting this thesis.

represent the material, but they *will* fall short in comparison to the actual scene. I simply request that you keep this in mind from now onwards, dear reader.

Previous Research

While scholars have previously examined the construction of gender in anime, the focus have been placed on the narrative constructions, with relatively little written about the visual construction of fan service in particular.

The Erotic Anime Movie Guide by Helen McCarthy and Jonathan Clements from 1998 covers the history of anime pornography/hentai and is a useful insight into the visual tropes that come to define both anime pornography/hentai and fan service itself. McCarthy and Clements lay the groundwork in this particular branch of academic anime scholarship with a focus on the narratives, character types and sights of production of hentai through history, though it is very clear that the book was written before the area of #MeToo, as the most glaring misogynist edges in the material are filed down. But it is one of the first academic works that treats anime pornography/hentai seriously and delves deep into the intricacies of its expressions, while trying to cover as much ground as possible, which enables me to fill the in-betweens.

Going off McCarthy and Clements' work, Susanne J. Napier outlines the various forms the female body takes in anime pornography/hentai in which different character types and narratives takes place, and compares it the very limited visual representations of the male body.¹⁵ While Napier reads the female representation as a nuanced spectrum, the male characters are relegated into one of two roles: either a "comedic voyeur" or "demonic phallus incarnate" as she puts it.¹⁶

This view of the portrayal of female characters is however contested by Patrick Drazen, who categorises the female archetypes as either a graceful and subservient wife or an all-powerful goddess.¹⁷ Both Napier and Drazen, however, work from examples taken from anime pornography rather than ecchi. The main difference is the purpose of the material itself, as ecchi is meant to have an engaging narrative outside of its sexually explicit scenes, and is

¹⁵ S. J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005

¹⁶ Napier, op. cit., p. 65

¹⁷ P. Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation*, Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, California, 2003

beholden to censors in order to air on TV. Anime pornography, meanwhile, has sexually explicit intercourse as the goal of the narrative, and was mainly distributed through VHS and online databases, forgoing the broadcasting censors of TV.

An ecchi show is analysed, however, in Thomas LaMarre's book *The Anime Machine*. LaMarre looks closer at the female cyborg Chii in *Chobits* and how her womanhood is in essence constructed by the values that the male protagonists places upon her.¹⁸ His focus is however more upon the platonic yet sexual relationship between the two main characters, rather than the visual construction of the fan service in itself.

On the other side of the spectrum, Patrick W. Galbraith's *Otaku Encyclopedia* is meant for a general audience as an introduction to the many core terms and concepts in the Japanese fan subculture.¹⁹ In doing so, Galbraith often uses absolutes, as is expected from an encyclopedia, but that in its very nature lends the text to lose the nuance of the term in favour of a straight-forward definition. This is an understandable sacrifice, however. Due to the book's purpose as an introductory guide it has to drop a lot of the... shall we call it meticulous and scrutinising nuance of academic discourse, which Galbraith most certainly is capable of (see his other works, such as *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan*, red: Galbraith et. al., 2015 just to name one) in favour of the vernacular of a broader audience. I bring this up because the vernacular of fan culture is *crucial* to understand it. Galbraith's definitions aren't so much the be-all end-all definitions of anime fans terms and concepts, but rather the encyclopedia has taken the pulse of the subculture and arranged the most common definitions in an alphabetical order, according to Galbraith's research and judgement. It is great ethnography at work, which is why will do what Galbraith asks for in his introduction, and take the discussion further.

Disposition

This thesis is structured in three chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter One: Sexual by Design contextualises fan service in ecchi anime and what constitutes the visual expressions of gendered performance. It looks at the story structures and

¹⁸ T. LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 236

¹⁹ Patrick W. Galbraith, *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An Insider's Guide to the Subculture of Cool Japan*, 1st ed., Kodansha USA, New York, 2009, p. 9

sexually charged visuals which makes fan service a form of wish-fulfilment. In doing so, the chapter outlines how fan service operates as a spectacle that simultaneously reproduce and highlight the biases of gender roles in its own depiction.

Chapter Two: Absurd Bodies; or “How is her back not broken?!” continues this line of thought by categorising different visual expressions on gendered performance in fan service. The exaggerated bodies in motion come off as absurd due to their overly sexualised nature, which in itself becomes part of the spectacle of fan service. Going further, the chapter examines how this spectacle of gender is performed in various ecchi anime, and a pattern emerge. The specific representations of gendered performance vary dependent on the audience surrogate of each show. Female characters are portrayed either as sexually submissive or assertive, facilitating different sexual fantasies. Meanwhile male characters are only shown to be aware of their own sexuality when it’s comedic, and otherwise are completely oblivious to their sexual charge. Fan service visualises a binary where masculinity and femininity oppose each other, so that if the female performance is vulnerable then the male performance must be strong. These visuals mediate a representation of wish-fulfilment, and in doing so defines what sexual imagery equate to.

Chapter Three: Kill la Kill’s Subversion of Perversion covers how *Kill la Kill* re-interprets fan service. It utilises the visual codes of hyper-gendered performances as a form of visual storytelling and the spectacle *becomes* the subversion of fan service as a performance of gender through spectacle.

Chapter One: Sexual by Design

This chapter will provide a deep contextualisation to the empirical material and terms which will be used for the rest of this thesis. It starts by analysing the etymology of “ecchi” and explaining the characteristics of the genre of anime, by looking at the narrative structures and character designs within the genre. One of the key components of ecchi anime is its prolific use of fan service, i.e. sexually charged visuals and moments in a show. Fan service can itself be understood as the nucleus of spectacle in ecchi. This spectacle is in turn composed of hyper-gendered performances, expressed through its sexual imagery.

Fan Service: The Nucleus of Spectacle

A literal reading of the word “fan service” implies that whatever is made in a form of media is to service its fans. This definition encapsulates broad examples of the relationship between creators/producers and fans. Bart Beaty for example, describes the fan service in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as self-referential and intertextual links to its wider fictional universe in the form of so called Easter eggs and small cameos of characters that only the most immersed fans will recognise and appreciate.²⁰ By doing this, the producers creates a shared insider nod to the fans who have, so to speak, put in the effort, and rewards them. André Carrington continues this line of thought by specifically looking at Marvel Studio’s *Babsense Panther* and deeming the entire film, in part, as fan service to distinct African American audience by catering the film specifically to them.²¹ This definition of fan service, however, is far too broad to feasibly work with within the confines of this thesis, and moreover based on western mass media, rather than eastern.

As a counter point, Patrick Galbraith defines fan service in the context of anime fan culture as a display of a character ‘*in a risqué or compromising position to give the fans a thrill*’ in his book *The Otaku Encyclopedia*.²² He goes on to give examples of fan service, such as showing a skirt riding up because of a gust of wind or a girl’s cleavage. Galbraith’s

²⁰ B. Beaty. “Superhero fan service: Audience strategies in the contemporary interlinked Hollywood blockbuster”, *The Information Society*, vol. 32, no. 5, 2016, p. 318-325

²¹ A. Carrington, “From blaxploitation to fan service: watching Wakanda”, *Safundi*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2019, pp. 5-8

²² Galbraith, op. cit., p. 69

underlying message is clear: fan service only depicts women for a male audience. This point is mirrored by Thomas LaMarre, who states:

The term *service* (*saabisu*), often rendered as “fan service” in English, refers to images of girls or women, usually sexually provocative or explicit, which are dropped into anime almost arbitrarily, simply as eye candy for boys and men. In other words, service implies a male-directed mode of address.²³

The problem that emerges from this definition, however, is its gender disparity. It leaves no room for male characters being the objects of fan service. It would be disingenuous of me to dismiss Galbraith and LaMarre’s claims outright; the matter of fact is that fan service is *usually* a male-direct mode of address to the point that it is therefore equated as such for most part. But this assumption further reveals the gendered biases in both anime and fan service itself, which animes such as *Free!*, *Kill la Kill* and even *Food Wars* to a lesser extent disproves by their very existence. All three shows create fan service with male characters — though the kind of sexualisation differs between genders (which will be further explored in Chapter 2). I suppose I could refer to fan service with male characters as “reversed fan service”, but that in itself reinforces the presumed gender roles of the term. If we remove the implied gender in “fan service” and simply deem it sexual, it opens up readings of male bodies as well as female bodies and highlight how they are framed both similarly and differently. This in turn reveals the biases in the social script upon which the hyper-performances are based.

Regardless of a character’s gender, they are, through fan service, rendered the objects of desire. Everything from their character design, to their stories and personalities made to be consumed. Fan service is then how the characters are used, through perspectives and angles, story beats, extra added material (such as anime openings and ending songs, etc.) to sexually engage an audience and bring attention to the characters as sexual objects of desire, and the animes that they are a part of. In doing do, fan service becomes a spectacle through its imagery that represent idealised versions sexual wish-fulfilment, and in so doing it defines what constitutes as wish-fulfilment and what does not.

²³ T. LaMarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp. 216-217, italics original text

The Narrative Structures of Wish-Fulfilment

Ecchi as a genre of anime that combines the story driven narrative of most fictional works with the lewd imagery of anime pornography, sometimes referred to as “hentai”. While pornography can have some form of plot in order to facilitate and justify its sexual acts, and plot-driven stories can feature sexually explicit scenarios, ecchi utilises both in equal measure.

The term “ecchi” (alternative spelling: “etchi”) originates from the Japanese pronunciation of the letter “H”, taken from the first letter of “hentai”.²⁴ Scholars of Japanese culture such as Patrick Galbraith, Helen McCarthy, Jonathan Clemens and Patrick Drazen all categorise ecchi/H as a milder version of pornographic imagery²⁵; softcore as opposed to hardcore. For western fans, “hentai” specifically refers to anime pornography.²⁶ Meanwhile, “ecchi” is used in reference to mild sexual material, but more importantly as a genre of anime with an overabundance of sexually charged scenarios, i.e. fan service.²⁷

One of the most noteworthy characteristics of ecchi anime, however, is how rarely it features sexual intercourse. Instead ecchi as a genre is defined by absence of sex, and the *thirst* for it, either in the form of the main character or directly referring to the audience itself. While ecchi anime even feature full-on nudity in fan service, the characters themselves are sexualised long before the clothes themselves come off, which contributes to the teasing nature of its sexualised expression.

Ecchi shows frame the fan service scenes from the protagonist’s point-of-view or with the perspective focused the objectified character without their knowledge. The show may then create sexually charged scenarios where the protagonist gets tantalisingly close to a sexual encounter, which is then interrupted in one way or another. This fundamentally separates ecchi from hentai/anime pornography, where the sexual encounters are the goal of the narrative. As such, ecchi employs a structure of “come for the fan service, stay for the story,” where the two elements are used to support each other.

²⁴ It came into use by Japanese high-schoolers in the 1950s, particularly girls, in order to talk about sexual material without mentioning the word. In Japanese, “hentai” literally means abnormal or perverted; pornography is typically referred to as “ero” or “erotic”.

²⁵ P. W. Galbraith, *The Otaku Encyclopedia: An Insider’s Guide to the Subculture of Cool Japan*, 1st ed., Kodansha USA, New York, 2009, p. 94; H. McCarthy & J. Clements, *The Erotic Anime Movie Guide*, 1st ed., Titan Books, London, 1998, p. 187; P. Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation*, Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, California, 2003, p. 60

²⁶ *Hentai in a Nutshell*, [online video], 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhUMy_GMgUg>, (accessed 2020-05-23), 2:33-2:40; *The (Semi-NSFW) History of Hentai | Anime Explained*, [online video], <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rY79tRvinc>>, (accessed 2020-05-23)

²⁷ Galbraith, op. cit., p. 99; *The Art of Good Ecchi - How Not to Summon a Demon Lord*, [online video], 2018, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nC6wit4Epeo>>, (accessed 2020-05-23)

The way in which ecchi animes combine plot and fan service is part of what differentiates them from other shows in the same genre. *HOTD*, which is a young-adult zombie apocalypse story, has its fan service both in moments of narrative tension, sexualising violence, as well as in narrative “down-times,” in slower, domestic scenes. *Food Wars*, meanwhile, has a formulaic progression for most of its fan service, which it constantly pushes to extremes. Since it is a humorous anime about cooking, it visualises the experience of eating delicious food through fan service. Which approach is better is a matter of taste, since *HOTD* and *Food Wars* are two very different shows, despite both of them being categorised as ecchi.

The plot and fan service can, however, become at odds with each other, as one takes precedence over the other. Viewers may become frustrated as either elongated scenes of fan service halt the plot, or as the serious moments of the plot take over and diffuse the sexual charge.²⁸ It shows an inherent imbalance between the plot and the visual expression present in ecchi anime series. Though the two are meant to work in tandem with each other, they are by their very nature separate. It is entirely possible to remove fan service from an ecchi anime while keeping the plot of the story intact.

The Construction of the Modern Galatea

A lot of ecchi shows use a harem structure²⁹ in order to combine its fan service with plot. This lets the story introduce a myriad of potential love interests for the main character who “owns” the harem. This harem structure can sometimes *be* the main story, often within comedic anime, like *Love Hina*³⁰ for example. Those plots revolve around the drama of navigating several love interests at once, as well as perpetually asking who will end up with the main character in the end. This is not the only use of harems, though. The harem structure can also be one of many sources of drama and intrigue, as in *HOTD*, where the main character struggles with zombies as well as picking a girl.

While harem ecchis usually have a so called “main girl” which the male protagonist will end up with, the harem structure provides the possibility of featuring multiple character types. By presenting the male main character as a kind of audience surrogate and showing his point

²⁸ On the other side of this coin are the viewers who watch ecchi shows despite the gratuitous fan service rather than because of it.

²⁹ It should however be noted that *all* ecchi anime are not harem anime, just as all harem anime is not also ecchi.

³⁰ *Love Hina* is about a young man who becomes the manager of a girls-only dormitory. Hijinks ensue.

of view, the audience can imagine themselves surrounded by these girls, and focus on their particular favourite(s), while dismissing others.

The primary visual designs in ecchi animes can be seen like the modern Galatea. The classical Greek myth tells of the sculpture Pygmalion of Cyprus, who crafted his ideal woman out of ivory. He asked the goddess Aphrodite bring it to life and the woman came to be known as Galatea.³¹ A man-made ideal of womanhood. And much like how Galatea was made of ivory, these characters are made of lines drawn, and brought to life through animation, voice acting and the viewer's suspension of disbelief. But while Pygmalion made his own ideal woman, singular, anime in general and ecchi harem shows in particular makes multiple possible Galateas. The characters' looks and personalities come to reflect different tropes and fetishes, and while some characters may be given more attention than others, all Galateas are given their place in the spotlight.³²

As a practical example of the different character types, let us look at *Food Wars'* harem. The character given most attention, and therefore the inferred main love interest for the



Fig. 1.1: Cover art for chapter 131 of *Food Wars* manga. It is usual for anime to be based on either manga, light novels or video games, though anime can also be original works.

³¹ Nationalencyklopedin, 'Pygmalion', NE.SE [website], <<http://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/lång/pygmalion>>, accessed 2020-05-05

³² The vernacular for an individual fan's Galatea in the anime fan community is 'waifu'.

protagonist is Erina, the fourth person from the left in **Fig. 1.1**. She is a rich girl and a “tsundere” type. The tsundere³³ archetype is notable for its ubiquity in anime, depicting a character (and often romantic interest) who is cold at first but becomes nicer and warmer over time. Combining this type with the rich-girl archetype means that Erina is portrayed as entitled, proud and cold — in complete opposition to *Food Wars*’ protagonist Souma, who represents the “every-day man” in the show’s elitist school setting.³⁴ Physically, Erina is moderately tall and has medium-sized breasts by the show’s standards, but rather large for real life, blonde and with an hour-glass figure. The show’s second leading lady is Megumi, seen second from the left in Fig. 1.1. As a juxtaposition to Erina, Megumi is a kind-hearted and timid “girl-next-door” type, with a working-class background, notably small breasts though not flat-chested, short stature and blue hair. It’s notable that Megumi is depicted with her behind in focus, rather than her chest as the other girls. It is likely because her breast are small and the composition of the picture doesn’t give room to show both at the same time. Although this gives her an opportunity to have her face in another girl’s cleave, which surely is someone’s wish come true. The girl with the cleavage in question is Ikumi, first on the left. She is also rich, but rather hot-headed and obnoxious as opposed to Erina’s graceful coldness. Ikumi is tanned and adventurous, often showing off her midriff and massive cleavage. Then there’s Alice, first on the right, Erina’s cousin, who fills the role of the mysterious and quirky character type, having a bubbly personality in comparison to Erina’s cooler temperament, with white hair and a breast size that rivals Izumi’s. Finally, in the middle of Fig. 1.1, we have Hisako, who represents another version of Megumi’s caregiving nature. Hisako is hardworking and nurturing, but stoic. She’s Erina’s best friend and right-hand woman, and she is initially depicted as comparatively plain to the other girls, but with a hidden depth as the key to Erina’s back-story. She has shoulder-length hair and a realistic breast size for corporal reality, but small for ecchi anime.

The designs themselves emphasise different parts of the female body that are considered appealing for a male-addressed audience; the girls are skinny and their breasts and/or buttocks are enlarged, and dressed in skin-tight clothing that leaves little to the imagination. While there are differences between each girl’s design in terms of the size of their breasts and buttocks, their hair, height, skin colour as so on, they are all plays on different ideals of

³³ The word “tsundere” comes from the terms “tsun tsun” (ツンツン) which means to turn away in disgust and/or anger, and “dere dere” (デレデレ) which means to be affectionate and loving

³⁴ These opposing personalities are also metaphorical representatives of a debate between elite and common class, through the character’s cooking methods and ideals.

womanhood, Galateas catered to different preferences. Yet this exaggerated representation of the female body is also absurd, womanhood as represented as spectacle is the fantasy of womanhood that only exists to arouse men. Through their skin-tight clothing, the viewer is immediately aware of the bodies underneath and the clothing work to further emphasise the sexual charge of the Galatea's exaggerated body parts, rendering her practically naked.

It is all a form of wish-fulfilment where the ideal partner, the Galatea, exist in the fiction for sale. And so one must buy into it and consume the fiction in order to see her, thereby funding her continued existence.

The majority of ecchi anime is intended for a presumed male audience, with a male lead, and female characters as the objects of fan service. While there are harem animes with a female lead, surrounded by male characters (either referred to as “reversed harem” or “female harem”³⁵) they are generally *not* ecchi shows. Instead, reversed harems are mostly part of the shojo-genre³⁶, and so are focused on the romantic and emotional character drama primarily. Popular reversed harem anime includes *Ouran High School Host Club* and *Fruits Basket*, which romanticises rather than sexualises their characters.

In fact, the few ecchi animes which are intended for female audiences are generally homoerotic, and typically categorised as ‘Boys Love’ (sometimes referred to as “yaoi”) instead of ecchi. Boys Love is fundamentally different from our previous understanding of the ecchi genre. Namely it

draws on the narrative structures of shojo and therefore has a focus on romance. Scholars such as Akiko Mizoguchi and Neil K. Akatsuka have argued that Boys Love emulates a parody of



Fig. 1.2: Cover art of the official fan book for the first season of *Free!* featuring the main cast

³⁵ The language is in itself quite telling; the fact that a harem is presumed to be male wish-fulfilment unless it is specified points to the unequal amount of male and female harem animes.

³⁶ “Shojo” literally means “young girl”, meaning that the genre is geared towards young girls. (Galbraith p. 204)

heterosexual romance, by making the submissive part of a pair a stand-in for women, while still having the benefit of being a man.³⁷ Structurally, this means that Boys Love generally have very clear pair-ups that the audience is meant to root for, and while intercourse may be censored and implied in anime (whereas most Boys Love's manga are more explicit), the characters undoubtedly do have sex. This is in stark contrast to ecchi, which teases but rarely if ever make characters have sex with each other. The lust without relief is the whole point, together with the possibilities of choice in the wider range of Galateas.

This is not to say that there are no ecchi anime for an intended female audience, however. *Free! Iwatobi Swim Club* (**Fig. 1.2**) combines Boys Love and ecchi by heavily implying a sexual *and* romantic tension between its male characters and uses its setting of a high school swim club to depict its male characters half-naked. The female-directed fan service does feature idealised male bodies, but the narrative of the show infuses those moments with homoerotic undertones for the viewers to either extrapolate romantic scenarios from, or take at face value as a story about friendship.³⁸ Rather than making Gou, the female audience surrogate in *Free!*, the owner of a harem, she is placed on the side-lines as the boy's club manager, where she admires their physique. In the story itself, she is not even the main character, but rather Haru is (Fig. 1.2 the black-haired boy in bottom left).

Free! portrays the male Galateas by giving them the bodies of athletes, and the plot justifies this by centring the story around a swim team. The spectacle is seeing attractive, teenage boy's interactions. *Free!*'s character designs do not have the same kind of sexual charge as in comparison to *Food Wars*. The male Galatea isn't exaggerated to the same extent as the female, though it is still stylised after a specific ideal of masculinity.

If the female Galatea exudes sexuality and teases what it would feel to touch her, the male Galatea is made of muscle, and exudes strength. The ideal of manhood is then portrayed as physically strong (and emotionally vulnerable if it is queer-baiting), but not with the same level of teasing as the female Galatea.

³⁷ N.K. Akatsuka, 'Uttering the Absurd, Revaluing the Abject: Femininity and the Disavowal of Homosexuality in Transnational Boys' Love Manga' in A. Levi, M. McHarry and D. Pagliassotti ed., *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre*, Jefferson North Carolina & London, McFarland & Company Inc., 2010, pp. 167-169; A. Mizoguchi, 'Reading and Living Yaoi: Male-Male Fantasy Narratives as Women's Sexual Subculture in Japan', PhD Thesis, University of Rochester, 2008, New York, p. 148. Available from: University of Rochester Libraries (accessed 2020-05-30)

³⁸ The form of fan engagement that extrapolates the potential in homoerotic scenarios is commonly referred to as "slash" in western fandom, since characters names would be written with a slash between them (for example "Haru/Rin") and fans who engage with homoerotic derivative fan works are called "fujoshi" in Japanese fandom. "Fujoshi" translates into "rotten woman".

This points towards the bigger disparity between gendered representations in ecchi, partly since there is no “true” gender-flipped version of standard ecchi shows, such as *HOTD* and *Food Wars*. The other side to this coin is the very concept of gender that ecchi makes use of.

In her seminal article *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, Judith Butler defines gender as a continuous kind of performances throughout history, which has built up a conception of what a specific gender is supposed to look like. She writes that:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.³⁹

This script, then, also serves as the foundational basis for fiction, as it emulates reality and reproduces performances of gender. While female characters are presented as pretty, big-busted, skinny, and sexually available to men, male characters are in turn presented as pretty, muscular yet slender, and which strong emotional bonds to the other males around them.

As previously mentioned, ecchi anime is constantly performing a balancing act between story and fan service, yet the visual emphasis given to fan service in how it effectively pauses the story highlights how it is prioritised over story, most of the time. In this sense, fan service can be understood as the nucleus of spectacle within ecchi anime. Since the spectacle is in itself both a framework and building block, we can view mass media, specifically in the form of anime as part of that larger framework. Fan service then becomes the building blocks, the moment by moment of spectacle, with which the framework of spectacle is made of.

Spectacle is furthermore a representation of reality, and the exchange by which we understand and relate to ourselves and others. Debord states that ‘*what is shown is good, what is good is shown*’, which builds up to a singular version of objective truth.⁴⁰ Anything that is not represented are therefore deviations from societies’ understanding of reality, any radical

³⁹J. Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, p. 536

⁴⁰ Debord pp. 9-10

subversions against the society of spectacle will become part of it, and so that all reality shall be read as part of the framework of spectacle.⁴¹

Yet anime is very clearly a form of fiction rather than a representation of reality — a representation of reality through a fun-house mirror, if you will. While the character's in animes are recognisable representations of people, as male and female, they are at the same time unambiguously alien entities through the superficiality of the medium. As representations of people, characters follow the same social script of gender performance as it exists in real life, re-enforcing said script by reproducing it. But whereas gender performance in real life is bound by the body of the individual, anime characters are not beholden to the same restriction. As we see in ecchi anime, the representations instead amplify the perceived core characteristics of gendered performances, with the expressed goal of creating fan service.

Fan service has no body to anchor it to reality, instead it anchors itself to an idealised performance of gender, based on social scripts rather than reality itself. The performance of gender is in this sense *pure performance* since it is wholly made of a reproduction of a gendered role. All the same, fan service goal is to be a spectacle and so it takes the idealised, pure gender performance and *amplifies* it. This makes fan service a *hyper*-gendered performance. Gendered representations of bodies are sexualised to a point of highlighting the biases upon which they function, and either intentional or unintentionally (or perhaps both) come to parody the very spectacle of gender performance itself.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 11

Chapter Two: Absurd Bodies; or “How is her back not broken?!”

In the previous chapter we established what fan service is and how it can be read as a spectacle. This spectacle is in turn constructed of hyper-gendered performances, by exaggerating the ideal body-parts of each gender and creating modern Galateas. This exaggeration moves the “pure” performance of gender which animation can facilitate into a hyper-gendered performance. At the same time, the reinterpretation of the body as a hyper-gendered performance render them absurd.

By looking at examples of fan service from three different ecchi anime, one featuring women, one featuring men and women, and one featuring men, this chapter will answer how fan service portray these hyper-gendered performances, which the spectacle is made of. There are different types of gendered performances present in fan service, which works of an assumed gender binary of male and female and so the hyper-gendered performance is determined by the character’s assigned gender primarily, and character type secondarily. However due to this hyperbolic nature of fan service as gender performance, its spectacle brings the biases that it is based on into focus. This in turn highlights how male and female characters are portrayed differently in fan service. I have identified three types of gender performances in fan service. They differ mostly in how dependent on if it is a male or female character being fan serviced and can fall into one of two sub-categories. While I do not believe this to be an exhausted list of *all* types of gender performances in fan service, they are the most common. By analysing the visual construction of fan service sequences as either *submissive*, *assertive* or *neutral*, and additionally as either *ridiculously sexual* or *sexually ridiculous*, the components of fan service portal becomes clearer. Notable, however, is also from which point of view fan service is framed, and who is the audience surrogate for these three ecchi animes, as that too informs portrayal.

Highschool of the Dead: *Absurdity in Motion*

Butler stretched that gender performance within the real world is tethered to the corporeal reality of the individual. The body and sex in of themselves are separate from the

perceived gender of the individual, which is instead based on their performance to their given role, through the way they act and present themselves.⁴² She goes on to say:

Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.⁴³

In anime, there is no corporal reality which once is beholden to — instead the restriction *is* the confines of the already existing directive, i.e. the script of ‘social law’ that lays out the binaries of gender performance, to use Butler’s terminology.⁴⁴ As long as the gendered performance in anime is believable, and characters are recognised as their assigned gender, their performance is all but restricted to the width of their creator’s skill and imagination. As the interpretations of gender has pushed the script to its outermost bounds, the portrayals have then resulted in absurd bodies reproducing hyper-gendered performances, where the laws of corporal reality need not apply. As such, I argue that the gender performance is taken to what could be seen as its purest form, wherein the human body is paraphrased and exaggerated in order to be the nucleus of spectacle. The sheer absurdity of these depictions have the intended purpose of catching attention, whether it be from outrage, amusement, fascination, sexual titillation or even a combination of all. The subsequent analysis of *HOTD*’s fan service scenes exemplifies this, as portrays a blatant disregard for laws of physics create our understanding of what a human bodies can and cannot do.

In episode 8⁴⁵ of the show, the main cast encounters a horde of zombies that they must fight off. The fan service sequence “properly” starts when the main character Takashi uses one of his two main love interests, Rei, to balance a rifle on her chest as he shoots the zombies. Rei’s objectification is two-fold as she becomes as a literal tool for Takashi’s action and a figurative sex object through the framing of the scene. The camera circles around them from above, showing Takashi on top of her, mash-cut with close-ups of her breasts jiggling

⁴² Butler, op. cit., pp. 519-520

⁴³ Ibid., p. 536

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The motion of the scene cannot be understated, and the screen shots that I have captured in order to present the scene is putting the analysis of it at a disadvantage, solely due to the medium of this thesis. This scene, in part due to the sheer absurdity of how the bodies in motion, is one above all else that I recommend that you, as a reader, seek out and watch in order to complement my analysis. It is at the time of writing accessible online, on platforms such as YouTube, by searching “Highschool of the Dead legendary boob scene”

with each fired shot (**Fig. 2.1 – 2.3**). Working in tandem with the show’s sound effects and the action Rei’s voice actress Inoue Marina, the viewer can immerse themselves in Takashi’s position and imagine the feeling of how Rei would feel under them. This is a perfect example of what *ridiculously sexual* fan service looks like. The abnormally large breasts have a weight that should at the very least be cumbersome for Rei to move with, yet here they jiggle for the audience amusement, absurdly and absolutely ridiculous, but more importantly overtly sexual.

This part of the scene is then juxtaposed with Takashi’s other main love interest, Saeko (**Fig. 2.4 – 2.7**). She is fighting the zombies with her weapon of choice, a Japanese wooden sword, further ahead. In slow motion, the camera follows one Takashi’s bullet’s trajectory as it goes right between Saeko’s legs, giving the audience a “panty shot”. A second bullet is then fired, which the camera follows as it passes through her flip-flopping breasts.

Let us state the obvious: Rei should have a hard time doing menial tasks considering the size of her breasts. With that in consideration Saeko’s back should have been broken as she, with equally large breasts, has hers bouncing wildly during the fight. More notably is the seemingly lack of a bra, which can be seen due to the perception of nipples, in addition to the bounce and jiggles. Thus, both bodies behave as if they were naked, with the fabric “painted on”, rather than restricting the movement of the breasts as it ought to.

While the character designs have already moved these bodies into a realm of ridiculousness, the way these bodies move is what make them so absolutely *absurd*. If not Rei’s breasts jiggling like pudding at the recoil of the rifle, then the second bullet passing through Saeko’s back-breaking backflip, all rendered in slow motion, clue the viewer in to the



Fig. 2.1 – 2.3: Depicting Rei’s physical reaction to the reverb of the rifle that Takashi is balancing on top of her.

cheer absurdity of these bodies in motion. Yet, one has to remember that the absurdity was a deliberate choice made by director Araki Tetsuro and the people at Studio Madhouse. The absurdity adds to the spectacle, even *makes* the spectacle since this is not only fan service, but the *ridiculously sexual* kind of fan service. The female bodies in HOTD are absurd, its fan service is ridiculously sexual, and that is it's spectacle in action. It is eye-catching, absurd, overly sexual and *memorable*. The very fact that I include this scene will further the very spectacle that I am analysing, by presenting it to a new demographic, namely the academics reading this thesis.

At the very same time, Rei and Saeko exemplify two other types of fan service. Rei is portrayed as *submissive* and essentially as an object to be used by Takashi, Saeko is, by contrast, presented as *assertive* and working with/or for him. Thusly, one of them is a girl which can be owned, another as a dominatrix of sorts, which you may either conquer or consumed by.

This is further emphasised by the point-of-view (POV) of the scene. The parts with Rei is clearly from Takashi's perspective; the set up tries to give the viewer a sense of his general vicinity, from his emotional state (frightened frustration), the physical recoil of his rifle, and the soft, gasping Rei whom he's trying to protect. And so, while the camera provides a



Fig. 2.4 captures the moment Takashi's first bullet passes in between Saeko's legs, the perspective angled so that the viewer can see up her skirt. **Fig. 2.5 – 2.7** detail hoe the second bullet passes through her absurdly large, flip-flapping breasts.

swirling shot from above them both, juxtaposed with close-ups as he shoots, it all serves to show Takashi's experiences: exposed and under immediate threat, yet still guarding Rei by shielding her with his own body.

This is juxtaposed with how the camera follows the bullets over to Saeko. Here the POV has shifted into something that only the camera and therefore the audience can see. It would be incorrect to refer to this a point of view since following the bullet doesn't move the audience to see the character's from a greater emotional distance where the viewer is above it



all—rather the camera brings the viewer into a close-up which produces “a sense of claustrophobic intensity”⁴⁶, since the direct focus being given to first her clothed genitals, followed by her clothed breasts. While the angles themselves would be impossible for any person to obtain, it is the view of the bullet, which is in itself an extension of Takashi.



While this scene encapsulate fan service in motion, most fan service sequences are animated through so called “limited animation,” which has a lower frame-rate. Thusly, the character designs themselves, coupled with the action performance on screen, depicted with minimal movement and still shots that are panned over make up much of the fan service. The sexual charge builds up shot by shot as *HOTD*'s female Galateas gives off a sexual viscosity by design, teasing its audience.



Fig 2.8 – 2.10: Shizuka's predatory advances, as she is an adult whilst both Takashi and Kouta are teenage boys.

This is further exemplified in the fan service sequence depicting Shizuka from episode 5 (**Fig. 2.8 – 2.10**). She only has a flimsy towel to cover up her

body, which the show uses to create a wish-fulfilment scenario where she practically shoves her cleavage in Takashi's face. The cleavage itself has the focus on this scene and the sexual charge builds off of what *could* happen if her towel were to slip. The fan service thereby sexualises the towel in of itself as the means by which her hyper-gendered performance tease

⁴⁶ G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, 3rd edn., London, Sage, 2012, p. 70

and arouse the boys. It is an *assertive* act of fan service, where she is in control, yet her act still makes her an object of sexual fantasy, i.e. fan service.

Although not the object of fan service, Takashi (Fig. 2.1 & 2.8) and Kouta (Fig. 2.9) the recipients of Shizuka's sexual advances are two different kinds of male gender performances in themselves. Takashi as the protagonist of the show is naturally presented as the main POV through which the story is told. He is the main audience surrogate for any given scene, as the owner of a harem, and an avatar of wish-fulfilment for the male-addressed viewer. He is therefore portrayed as desirable, conventionally attractive, and treated with respect. He has agency. Kouta, on the other hand, is the undesirable portrayal of masculinity. He is not attractive but an over-weight nerd, does not have the same level of composure and agency as Takashi. All of this makes him unqualified to have a harem of his own. Where Takashi gets flustered by Shizuka, he is able to walk away from the encounter with his dignity intact, not falling prey to Shizuka, Kouta gets the "classical" nosebleed (signalling an elevated heart-rate as he is overcome with arousal) and faints, falling to floor.

Kouta exists to make Takashi look good in comparison⁴⁷, but the performances also narratively affirm what is considered an attractive and an undesirable male performance. This is relevant for how these two opposing types of male gender performance are the basis for the construction and portrayal of the male Galatea, as will become evident later on in this chapter.

Food Wars: Ridiculously Sexual & Sexually Ridiculous

As previously mentioned, *Food Wars* often combines the character's visceral reactions of food with fan service, using a visual metaphor that likens the delicious taste of a dish to an orgasmic experience. While it often has a "simpler" kind of fan service, wherein a female character gasps and moans, while her short skirt flutters, signalling a physical reaction, *Food Wars*, usually once per episode at least, create dream-like sequences to further metaphor of delicious food. These scenes take the character in focus out of their diegetic place, i.e. their "in world" time and place, and into the non-diegetic space of their experience, which is shaped by the dish and the chef who made it. This is the underlying connection between food and sex that *Food Wars* seeks to explore; eating someone else's cooking is presented as a

⁴⁷ This side-kick character archetype is commonly known as "the lancer". More curious, however, is Kouta's character on his own. It could be argued that he is a "proper" audience surrogate for the kind of men which the anime is directed towards, i.e. male anime fans.

deeply intimate interaction between the chef and the consumer. Thereby framing the consumer as having an orgasmic experience by the chef's labour is just as apt a metaphor as any, and the show combines the sexual charge with comedy of how ridiculous yet still sexual it can make its fan service.

Yet, there is an inconsistency in which characters are portrayed experiencing this “foodgasm,” in what way their experience is conveyed through their expressions and framing.

Erina's fan service sequence (**Fig. 2.11 – 2.13**) occurs at the end of episode 2, after the episode have spent a great deal of its run time introducing Erina and framing her as Souma's judge, and hard one to please. Throughout the episode, Souma has to first convince her to even try his dish, whilst Erina has been fan serviced with escalating levels of sexuality, finally culminating in the climax as she is moved into the dream-space to show what she is tasting, while diegetically she is almost brought to her knees by this “foodgasm”, holding onto the counter, just as she is trying to hold onto her self-control.

This makes this the *submissive* type of fan service. In the dream-scape, which lasts for about 90 seconds, Erina is shown close to naked, with small cherubs with Souma's face undressing her and teasing her with feathers. Some shots show her distressed posture, while others give are extreme close-ups of different body-parts, showing the feathers teasing her breast and buttocks, while also trying to pull away the fabric as to render her completely naked. Her inner monologue reflects: ‘*My body can't help but react*’, and so she is defeated by his cooking, and so the fan service shows her emotionally, but more importantly sexually rendered a submissive receiver of his (cooking) prowess, which she cannot help but enjoy, against her own wishes, in the non-diegetic dream-scape.



Fig 2.11 – 2.13: Erina getting sexually harassed by cherubs wearing Souma's face.

We see the binary opposite of Shizuka's towel (Fig. 2.8 – 2.10) here. While Shizuka was all too willing in projecting the fantasy of “accidentally” becoming naked, here the fan service facilitate another kind of wish-fulfilment that plays with less willing participant who “secretly” wants to get naked, despite her better judgement. And so the visual metaphor for sexual pleasure is literally pulling Erina's clothes off of her.

This heavily infused sexual charge does not happen, however, when Souma has similar experience. Souma is at the very start of episode 5 (Fig. 2.14 – 2.16) taken to the dream-scape, which last for 21 seconds, whereof 8 are spent lingering on the dish he is tasting, leaving the sequence with 13 seconds of Souma himself. The narrative function of this fan service is not the climax of an episode, but rather the inciting incident to the episodes plot, and the focus is both visually and narratively on the chef who made the dish, rather than the naked Souma surrounded by cherry blossoms. Rather than being rendered as submissive, as



Erina, Souma is exemplifying *neutral* fan service.



Neutral fan service is framing what is already there, often without the characters knowledge, as seen here, but most importantly with the characters themselves appearing neutral. There can be no vulnerability for that render them submissive, like Erina, nor any intention to be sexual, such as dressing a certain way or striking a provocative pose, which makes it assertive, like Shizuka (Fig. 2.8 – 2.10). The character have to be oblivious to their own sexual charge for fan service to be true neutral.



While Souma is sexualised in this scen, he still pertains his agency by not succumbing to it/acknowledging it, He is not experiencing a foodgasm the same way Erina was, and so he is not objectified in the same way as she was. Unlike how is shown in extreme close-ups which creates an intimacy between her and

Fig. 2.14 – 2.16: Souma's awed reaction to Satoshi's cooking.

the beholder⁴⁸, inviting the viewer to imagine what she is feeling and how she would react to their touch. Meanwhile Souma is kept in a medium shot, creating a distance between him and the viewer, visually communicating a less intense form of intimacy where the viewer can see but not touch.

The novelty of framing Souma like this, a male Galatea in a male-addressed ecchi anime put into the same established fan service dream-scape as its female Galateas, may be considered as spectacle by the virtue of this alone. But the narrative surrounding intentionally cheapens it rather than strengthens the fan service as with Erina, and so it is not rendered same level of intercity. Souma's version of male gendered performance is the taken from the same core ideal as Takashi, in that he is the protagonist and therefore the audience surrogate. His performance must be approachable for a male audience so that they can insert themselves into his position and story. Appearing flustered by a pair of breasts shoved into their face like Takashi (see Fig. 2.8) is somewhat embarrassing but ultimately relatable reaction, being naked in a field of cherry blossoms is just as incriminating as Souma appears to be — which is to say not at all. As the main man, he reproduces the ideal of manhood as the social script dictates it, and in representing it, he reproduces the style by which male hyper-gendered performance is conceived. In opposition to the female Galatea, the male must be strong, steadfast and graceful to an extent, as he must always be able to walk away with his dignity intact. This is done by keeping a distance to his body and denying the intimacy that extreme close-ups bring, fan servicing him at a moment there the plot takes focus away for them fan service, and not acknowledging the sexual charge that a naked body naturally brings. This performance is refined and reinforced through the constant reproduction of it⁴⁹, in relation to other types of male gendered performances that are framed as lesser, with strengthens the ideal of Souma in comparison.

Satoshi (**Fig. 2.17**) is male character in *Food Wars* that is far more sexualised than Souma himself, and could be likened to a male version of Shizuka from *HOTD* (Fig. 2.8 – 2.10). He too flaunts his sexuality to the other characters and viewer, *assertive* fan service, and is often depicted only wearing an apron. But the male-addressed audience don't have to see themselves in him as his POV is rarely shown and he is not the audience surrogate — nor is he a representation of the ideal man. As a male Galatea he is attractive and physically fit, *and* a “strong man” in that he is a talented chef, but the show frames his assertive male hyper-gendered performance is used for comedy primarily, and fan service secondarily, which

⁴⁸ Rose, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 524



Fig. 2.17: The first time that Satoshi dons his iconic look of ‘just a head scarf and an apron’ **Fig 2.18:** The first time Souma meets Gin in the men’s bath. The text says ‘Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo’ as Gin groans while stretching his entire body, as you do.

makes both him and the fan service itself *sexually ridiculous*. Portraying the male Galatea as comedic in an assertive type of fan service creates a distance between the performance and the viewer the show asks us to laugh at him for his flamboyant act, as well as the characters around him who become flustered by him. Though Satoshi is never hinted to be queer because of his flamboyance⁵⁰, he *is* portrayed as odd and therefore an undesirable and therefore not ideal version of masculinity.

The depiction of masculinity in **Fig. 2.18**, by contrast, is not one that I would classify as fan service even. The narrative is using his extremely muscular form as a set-up for a joke; he is intimidatingly strong, which turns into ridicule as soon as he opens his mouth. While he is still an idealised male performance, it is not one which the viewer is expected to recognise themselves in—likely *due to* the fact that it is the most absurd reproduction of masculinity. As a consequence, it is used for a laugh, and little else.

Another version of the sexually ridiculous type of male fan service is depicted in **Fig. 2.19 – 2.22**, from episode 1. The fan service is centred on the nameless, antagonistic woman who gave Souma a cooking challenge and similarly to Erina is the judge. She and her three henchmen are all portrayed as *submissive* in the fan service sequence, but the way that it is framed differs between the women and the three henchmen.

The woman is given most attention and room in terms of the number of angles and poses she is shown in comparatively the other men, but also since she is shown alone while the three men are always together. The second biggest focus is given to overweight man, but by tying him up like the piece of meat and his helpless expression signal that his performance is clearly meant as a joke. The three men are kept anonymous by their sunglasses, still

⁵⁰ See page 34 on queer baiting in *Free!*



2.19 – 2.22: Here we see four antagonists meeting their delicious demise. Notably, Fig. 2.19 and Fig. 2.21 directly under it are part of the same shot which starts in Fig. 2.21 and pans up to 2.19. The images in this section are thusly not arranged in chronological order, but rather in a way that best convey the fan service sequence.

keeping a distance to them throughout the orgasmic experience, whilst little is hidden of the woman's expression and body.

Even though the woman is also part of the joke, the emphasis on the joke and the sexual aren't the same for her and the men. She is ridiculously sexual, in that she is part of a form of hilarity, but the sexual charge she embodies is greater than the humour of her position. This in opposition to the men who are sexually ridiculous. They are in a sexually charged position, yes, but it the focus is on the joke itself, by placing the over-weight and tied up man first and rendering their submissive reactions as a defeat on their part, and therefore something to be laughed at.

The distance between the male-addressed audience and the male characters in fan service is created by only placing men whom the male-addressed audience are not presumed to identify with, such as older men, anonymous antagonists, overweight and otherwise "ugly" or plain men. The distance is further increased by making these fan service sequences more of a joke by ridiculing the men for succumbing to submissive sexual urges/reactions, degrading them. These men are side-characters, often only featured in one episode, rather than part of the main cast. The bias in the male hyper-gendered performance is then that only shameful and unattractive men are submissive in – they are "unnatural" or uncanny in their performance of the male gender and therefore deemed as lesser men. Weak men. The

expectation of a “proper” male gender performance is not upheld, and so they cannot be male Galateas. Instead they are ridiculous, as their lack of constitution and adherence to the social script of the male gender is broken.

Juxtaposed with the woman, who is ridiculed, yes, but her womanhood is not questioned, rather it is strengthened by her portrayal. The female performance includes the sexual objectification of the female body for a male audience, and so her position is first and foremost sexual, with the joke added on in order to make a spectacle of this fan service sequence. The binary relationship in the script of gender performance makes it so that the female gender is stylised as oppressed, thereby dictating that male gender performance *cannot* be oppressed as well. Instead, male gender performance can either be neutral or assertive, as to not represent a performance of manhood meant only to laugh at, and by extension, represent a corporal reality of the male gender performance deemed laughable and undesirable.

At the same time, placing male bodies in the similar situation as female bodies in a fan service sequence does give it a self-referential form of parody by “lamp-shading” the ridiculousness of *her* situation. Yet these are simple jokes without any follow-through in the narrative, and barely acknowledged at that, thereby truly lamp-shading within the content itself that it is aware of its own overly-sexual depiction, laughing with you.

Free!: Fan Service for Female Viewers

What does the fan service look like when ecchi anime is addressed to a female audience, then? As mentioned in chapter 1, the character design in *Free!* portrays male bodies as muscular and athletic, but this also has its explanation within the story itself, as it revolves around a group of male friends forming a swim club. As part of the sport anime genre, the story naturally lends itself to intense moments of physicality, and *swimming* naturally leads a lot of situations that depict its male cast as wet in only skin-tight swim trunks. By this point, I presume that you, dear reader, can spot the pattern that *Free!*'s plot outlines.

The male Galatea is comparatively tame to his female counterparts, however. While the male form is depicted as overly athletic, yes, it is not at the same level of absurdity of the female form in all other examples.⁵¹ It is still an exaggerated and idealised form of the male

⁵¹ and characters such as Gamagori come to exemplify how the male body can be depicted absurdly, though he is even the only one in his show

body to be sure, but one that is partly justified by the story itself through its setting. This comparative *lack* of absurdity is in of itself rather telling, however, of the biases at play in the male hyper-gendered performance.

The first of these biases comes from the fact that there simply are not many female-addressed ecchi animes, as I have defined the ecchi genre previously. The female-addressed anime that prominently feature sexual material is mostly, as a general rule Boys Love, which is not part of the ecchi genre since it has a different structure, with clearly defined couples, a focus on romance, feature sexual intercourse, rather than tease a lack of it, as is the hallmark of ecchi.



Fig. 2.23 – 2.25: Gou seemingly seeing a shirtless boy for the first time since entering adolescence and finding him dazzling.

In fact, *Free!* rose to prominence in the anime fan community *because* it was the first of its kind, that is a “mainstream” ecchi anime for women which feature boys instead of girls, meant that it had a lot more ground to break in terms of both its story and its visual identity as a subgenre of ecchi. It couples its fan service with so called “queer baiting”, by which the show implies that characters are queer, and there is a homoerotic reading very easily—by intense eye contact, almost mouth to mouth thing, displaying an emotional intimacy between the male cast. Its character designs are more reserved compared to its contemporaries. This is because they emulate the already established male gender performance in anime, partly as seen in protagonists such as Takashi and Souma, and partly since *Free!* is combining the male-addressed ecchi genre with the female-addressed Boys Love genre. The show presents its character design as mostly accurate athletic male bodies in an attempt to

ground it in a visual “realism”, as to counteract the absurdity in both ecchi and Boys Love.⁵² *Free!*’s mere existence is a spectacle in of itself that cannot be understated.

To further analyse the fan service in *Free!* then, we can turn to the show’s audience surrogate. While the POV of the audience surrogate provides doesn’t define the type of attitude a show has towards its fan service, but rather affirms it. Gou, the girl in **Fig. 2.24 – 2.25**, is introduced in the second episode and part of the supporting cast, rather than main cast, which in of itself underscores that her presence is not the focal point and receiver of fan service/sexual charge, instead she (and thereby the viewer) is

an observer. The sequence (**Fig. 2.23 – 2.25**) are from Gou’s perspective, her vision illuminated by twinkles as she discovers the beauty of the male form for the first time. But while she is having an emotional reaction to seeing Haru wet and half-naked for the first time as he is drying himself with a small towel, Haru and the other occupants of the room are indifferent to Haru’s state of undress and Gou’s gaze. Her reaction guides the viewer by adding her perception and twinkles, thereby firmly cementing Haru as a male Galatea. Haru is a neutral subject of fan service due to this indifference, and though a shot focuses on a specific body part, it is not framed as the same kind of intrusive intimacy as in previous examples. It should also be noted that a shirtless man and a shirtless woman have different sexual charges, as the female chest is sexualised to the point that it should be covered in public, whilst the male



Fig. 2.26: Rei is convinced that a big reason as to why he’s having such a hard time learning how to swim is due to the swimwear that Nagisa (to the left) borrowed him. That’s why they’re looking at his crotch, no other reason.



Fig. 2.27: Featuring Saya (left) and Rei (right) leaning over a fence to check if the coast is clear for them to drive out or if there are zombies out on the street.

⁵² While the BL genre has tropes of exaggerated male bodies with abnormally tall men, thick necks, broad shoulders and large hands (also known as “yaoi hands”), I would imagine that the exaggerated male body following ecchi tropes would culminate in large bulks outlining the shape of the male sex organ, even larger muscle masses and something to represent an euphemism for semen.



Fig. 2.28 – 2.29: A close-up of Rei’s buttocks as he excitedly making plans to go and buy swimwear without penguins on them. He is a butterfly guy.

chest is not as inherently loaded with sexuality. Haru’s face is cut off up close, further distancing him and dispelling intimacy, and though he is posing as if on display, he is simultaneously unaware of Gou’s attention. This fan service thereby reinforces the already established praxis that deems a “proper” masculine Galatea as strong and dignified, and most importantly unaware of his own sexual appeal.

Beyond Gou’s POV, the show never uses these glimmers and twinkles for fan service. They are synonymous with her admiration. Instead, *Free!* exercises a comparative subtlety in how it frames its fan service, which essentially boils down to a form of statement. By the nature of its story, the characters spend a lot of time in nothing but swimsuits, and so the narrative provides for the fan service by construction a lot of plot points around these settings. The visuals in turn frame the scene from an angle that a female audience would find most interesting — same as other ecchi shows.

But gender performance is not only singular performance in of themselves, but acts which are reaffirmed through repetition.⁵³ A close-up of a man and a woman from behind does not have the same intertextual reference to *other* close-ups of buttocks. As the repeated depiction of women from behind has far stronger roots, *HOTD* seeks to intensify its sexual charge as it shows its Galateas bending forward, whereas *Free!* simply acknowledges that the male Galatea does have a buttocks. Rei’s behind is draped in shadow, unlike *HOTD* which highlight the girl’s bottoms in order to accentuate them. *Free!* doesn’t give it the same exaggerated curvature and “fullness” either, partly due to the fact that Rei is standing up straight, thereby making Rei’s buttocks flat in comparison.

Curiously, Rei *could* have been depicted from behind bent over, as the girls in *HOTD* are, since he was shown bent over while stretching earlier in the very same episode. As stated, however, *Free!* doesn’t seek to intensify its characters sexual charge, nor does it degrade the

⁵³ Butler, op. cit., p. 521

sanctity of its male Galateas masculinity by showing them in the most vulnerable poses — as a bent over Rei from behind would have to show a more detailed outline of his sex organs, teasing their existence, as the shot from *HOTD* does. Instead, the fan service is framed as milder, more wholesome joke, as the perspective zooms in on Rei's buttocks, unbeknownst to him.

The extreme close up automatically brings evokes a level of intimacy and vulnerability, which makes the fan service switch from neutral to submissive, but sexual charge is mostly defused by the penguin prominently featured in the middle of the briefs. Rei is in a submissive position as the narrative is him asking for help from his fellow club members, the joke at his expense comes off as *endearing* and *cute* rather than demeaning, which is only furthered when he clenches his buttocks in time with this dialogue (he's excited) is *wholesome*.

This one of the many examples of *Free!*'s wholesome tone — for all that the fan service may sexualise the male Galateas as sexual, it does so at a distance. These boys are not sexually available to either Gou or the viewer, and she in turn views them from afar with admiration, rather than lusting for them. The focus is as much on the queer bait which gets stronger as the story progresses and the emotional arcs of the characters are explored, building on previous moments. Whilst the fan service stays consistent and there, much like in other ecchi shows, but rather there for the sake of it, than as a visual element used within the plot.

Fan service comes to be defined by the audience surrogate of each anime. Even if we are not seeing it directly from their POV, they still inform *how* fan service is meant to be seen. Takashi from *HOTD* is aware of the sex appeal of the girls around him, as he gets flustered at times, but also always able to take charge of the situation. He is the owner of a harem, and the girls expressively lust after him. By contrast, Souma from *Food Wars* is seemingly void of any sexual urges of his own, instead solely focused on cooking. But he too has girls falling in love with him and his cooking left and right.

Gou, on the other hand, is not an owner of a harem, nor does any of the male characters express an interest in her, nor she in. She admires from a distance, takes an interest in the physics of the boys, fully content in simply looking. *Free!* narratively has the same lack of sex as *Food Wars* and *HOTD*, but its framing and function differs.

Notably, all of these examples lack a performance female of sexuality where she is neither objectified for a male-addressed viewer, nor placed on the side-lines watching as a passive observer.

Chapter Three: *Kill la Kill*'s Subversion of Perversion

Structurally, *Kill la Kill* is different from the other examples of ecchi anime. For one, it avoids the standard harem structure by relegating romance to a sub-plot between the supporting cast. Instead, *Kill la Kill* has a comparatively wide cast of characters from both genders which are used for fan service, though it still uses the same kind of absurd body tropes as other ecchi anime (e.g., skinny women, enlarged breasts, buttocks, and muscles). The most striking difference between *Kill la Kill*, however, is how its hyper-gendered performances are directly tied to the overarching plot, which makes the most elaborate fan service sequences key moments in the narrative, rather than grinding the story to a halt. *Kill la Kill* conceptualise the biases of visual gendered performance *through the clothes* that dress its practically naked Galateas as the framing device for its conflict. Thereby it brings attention to its moments of fan service by connecting them to the plot. While the other animes have created a symbiotic relationship between their fan service and narrative in order to make them support each other (*Free!* being set at a swim club, *Food Wars* depicting reactions to food, and *HOTD* exaggerating the hormonal urges of teens) *Kill la Kill* incorporates its fan service and makes a core part of its narrative. You cannot take away the fan service and keep the plot intact in *Kill la Kill*. We have seen how fan service in ecchi anime primes viewers to see the naked body as sexual, regardless if that sexualisation is *ridiculously sexual* or *sexually ridiculous*. Fan service utilises a visual short-hand of barely there clothing as a way to tease its viewers with the fantasy of sex, thus making the fickle piece of fabric sexual in itself, as seen previously in chapter two. *Kill la Kill* uses this sexual tension of practically naked bodies as its main plot by making the fashion industry an allegory for fascism.⁵⁴ The clothes themselves are used to comment on the hyper-performance of gender as overly sexual by explicitly making clothes into costumes which symbolises the different biases in gendered expression. The antagonistic forces of the story is the leader of the fashion industry, Ragyou, who in her dual role as mother and main antagonist force the characters into these hyper-gendered performances by literally forcing them into clothes, which in turn let's her turn humans into puppets through mind control which she uses to take over the world.

⁵⁴ The phrase 'kill la kill' (キララキル read: kiru ra kiru) in Japanese serves not only as a directive message but also a pun. "Kill la kill" can be read in several different ways in Japanese. The word pronounced "kiru" can mean "kill" (キル), "cut" (切る), and "wear" (着る); "fashion" (ファッション read: fasshon) and "fascism" (ファシズム read: fashizumu), R. Eisenbeis, 'Kill la Kill Is a Rare Breed of Anime', *Kotaku*, 2014-04-04, <<https://kotaku.com/kill-la-kill-is-a-rare-breed-of-anime-1558049005>>, accessed 2020-05-19

‘Pigs in Human Clothing’

In order to understand how *Kill la Kill* visually subverts fan service through its plot, we must first go through it in a bit more detail. Here is an abridged summary:

Ryuuko is a teenage girl without any real sense of belonging, investigating her estranged father’s murder in the hopes that avenging his death will give her life some purpose. Her only clue leads her to the Honnouji Academy. The school is a hierarchal society under the rule of student council president Satsuki, Ragyou’s daughter, who gives out special school uniforms to her most loyal followers. These uniforms are known as “Goku Uniforms” and they give the wearer special abilities, such as speed, strength, vigilance, etc.

While Satsuki has knowledge that could help Ryuuko, she refuses to share it unless Ryuuko beats the entire student body. Ryuuko is defeated in her first battle, but she then finds a sentient type of clothing called “Kamui”⁵⁵ which grants her immense power when it drinks her blood. She names it Senketsu, meaning “fresh blood”⁵⁶. Senketsu is ‘more powerful in comparison to the Goku Uniforms and so she is not only able to beat her opponent, but go after Satsuki directly. In response, Satsuki reveals her own Kamui, named Junketsu (translation: “purity”), which she uses to keep Ryuuko to their agreement. And so Ryuuko fights through the student body through the first half of the series. Satsuki is framed as the main antagonistic force which opposes Ryuuko, until it is revealed that Satsuki have been trying to fight against Ragyou’s grand plan to take over humanity through clothing, from inside the fascist fashion industry.

Kill la Kill thematically revolves around clothes as a form of oppression. This is made explicitly clear by Satsuki in the very first episode, as she addresses a speech to the student body, and by extension the viewer:

Fear is freedom! Subjugation is liberation! Contradiction is truths! These are the truths of this world! Surrender to those truths, you pigs in human clothing!⁵⁷

The show frames Satsuki as the fascistic leader over her school, and she is to an extent, but that much like clothes themselves cover the “naked truth”, she hides her true intentions

⁵⁵ Literally meaning “God Clothes”

⁵⁶ Which can be read as an allegory for a girls first menstrual period and therefore the first step towards adulthood.

⁵⁷ ‘If Only I Had Thorns Like a Thistle...’, *Kill la Kill*, dir. H. Imaishi, Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

through acting as is expected of her position. The very reason why Satsuki gets Ryuuko to fight through the student body is so that it will train the students into an army. An army that Satsuki will use to defeat *her* oppressor and the actual fascist: her mother Ragyou, who is actually trying to take over the world by making all humans power sources for an alien race by capturing them in clothes that turn into cocoons.⁵⁸ In light of this, Satsuki's words are not the propaganda of a fascist leader, but a war-cry and challenge.

The phrase '*pigs in human clothing*' is integral to understand both Satsuki's and *Kill la Kill*'s narrative as a whole. Firstly, the clothes that the students wear cover up who they are on the inside, thusly clothes are the physical manifestation of a performance they hide behind — a costume. The traditional Japanese school uniform that *Kill la Kill* paraphrases are themselves a paraphrase of military uniforms, thereby all students are dressed like soldiers. This can also read as the sexualised “barely there” clothing of fan service in itself, as the activated forms of Satsuki and Ryuuko's Kamui are overtly sexual by design. The Kamui thereby become a dualistic symbol of hyper-gendered performance through sexualised clothing, but also a powerful weapon for those who wield it.

Secondly, the phrase asks what it means to be human when you take away the clothing. *Kill la Kill* answers this conundrum by asking “Are *you* wearing clothes, or are *they* wearing you?” This question, however, is not asked in explicit dialogue, but rather through the narrative of its fan service.

When Ryuuko first reveals herself in Senketsu's activated form⁵⁹ (**Fig. 3.1 – 3.3**), she is acutely aware of her appearance, i.e. she knows that she is being sexualised and used for fan service. She still has to wear it, however, as it is the only way she will reach her goal, but her discomfort is not only a submissive form of fan service, but her embarrassment is actively hindering her. Her discomfort leads her to not accept Senketsu, which is fuelled by her blood — i.e. her life essence — and let it into her heart. She can therefore not bond with it completely and so she is less powerful and it drains more of her blood to counteract this disconnect between them.

This is as a good of a time as any to talk about how *Kill la Kill*'s lacks a “proper” audience surrogate, as exemplified in in *HOTD*, *Food Wars* and *Free!* In *Kill la Kill* the fan service is not framed from a main character's POV, but rather from the POV of a large and

⁵⁸ It is like *The Matrix*, but with fabric-as-technology and lacking a Biblical allegory.

⁵⁹ *Kill la Kill* much like mecha (giant robots) and magical girl anime as a dormant and activated mode to its “super power system”. In fact, *Kill la Kill* often reference both famous mecha and magical girls animes, for example by incorporating visual references in the Kamui and Goku Uniforms, and by having transformation sequences as the clothes activate.

nameless crowd, or two of the side characters from the cast: namely a pre-pubescent boy and a middle-aged, overweight man (**Fig. 3.1 – 3.2**). By only having their gazes sexualising Ryuuko, instead of admirable characters such as Takashi from *HOTD* or Gou from *Free!*, the anime is telling the viewer that they are that crowd, that child and that man, i.e. the viewers are shameless, slobbering dogs for lusting over its fan service.

As a solution to Ryuuko's conundrum and as a continued address to the viewer, Satsuki (**Fig. 3.3 – 3.4**) declares in her own fan service sequence as the perspective is brought closer and closer to her, in tandem with the intensity of her declaration that:

This is the [exhibitionist] form in which the Kamui is able to unleash the most power! The fact that you are embarrassed by the values of the masses only proves how small you are! If it means fulfilling her ambitions, Kiryuuin Satsuki will show neither shame nor hesitation, even if she bares her breasts for all the world to see! My actions are utterly pure!⁶⁰

This declaration does two things. In the story, it makes Ryuuko realise that she (quote) 'need to get naked' for only then can she become one with Senketsu.⁶¹ Symbolically this



Fig. 3.1 – 3.2: Various reaction of audience as they see Ryuuko in Senketsu. The visuals are simultaneously sexualising her and criticising the (male-addressed) audience for looking at her with lust. **Fig. 3.3 – 3.4:** As the perspective draws closer and closer, Satsuki's breasts get bigger and pushed further up, as her expression grows more intense.

⁶⁰ 'Junketsu', *Kill la Kill*, dir. H. Imaishi, Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

⁶¹ Ibid.

means that she must accept the “exhibitionist” form of Senketsu for it is a means to an end. The second thing that Satsuki’s deceleration does, however, is directly addressing, no *accusing* the role which the Kamui is a costume for, thereby rejecting her hyper-gendered performance through her spectacle of fan service, which they are both part of. In essence, Satsuki says that though she may perform the role of a female Galatea, she is not one of them; the viewer may take gawk at her sexually charged appearance but she is herself beyond that. This fan service is neither neutral nor assertive of any of the like because Satsuki is untouchable. The visuals themselves support this by lingering on her screaming face and pushing her absurdly large breasts up to and above her shin. In this claustrophobic close up, the fan service forces the viewer to confront her. The viewer can either focus on the fury of her expression in between her cleavage, or focus on the cleavage while knowing the righteous fury of the woman it belongs to. As such, *Kill la Kill* uses the spectacle of hyper-gendered performance in fan service to *comment* on the spectacle of hyper-gendered performance in fan service.

To return to Debord for a moment, his statement that spectacle presents as ‘*What appears is good; what is good appears*’ as an undisputable truth to its expression has thus far proven true.⁶² Having said that, *Kill la Kill* does bring the “goodness” of the spectacle of fan service into question here. It subverts the spectacle by utilising the visual language of fan service in tandem with its narrative to change how fan service appears. Does Satsuki have an absurd body with enlarged breast and buttocks? Yes. Is she depicted in a sexualised position? Yes. But the message she, and by virtue the fan service as narrative convey is *defiance* to her assigned role as a Galatea. Although she may be wearing the costume, she is not a pig in human clothing underneath it all.

As the story explains away the Kamui’s fan service-y design by declaring that they were made by a pervert⁶³, the *plot* justifies the design as ‘*the form in which the Kamui is able to unleash the most power!*’⁶⁴ — ergo using fan service to comment on fan service.

⁶² Debord, op. cit., pp. 9-10

⁶³ Which can be read as the creators of the anime calling themselves perverts.

⁶⁴ *Kill la Kill*, ibid.

Reconstructing Galatea

Kill la Kill focuses on the biases in the female hyper-gendered performance, but that is not to say that it's male Galateas are left unexamined. It uses the same ideal body types as seen in *Food Wars* and *Free!* and takes them to their logical extremes. While there male Galateas which embody the “male action protagonist” archetype, “male super smart protagonist” archetype and the “sexually flaunting male side character” archetype (**Fig. 3.5**), their portrayals and fan service is used for laughs, much like other ecchi series. Gamagoori's portrayal and subplot, however, echoes Ryuuko's as he too goes from being 'a pig in human clothing' to finding peace in being naked and shameless, but from a male perspective.

Gamagoori is the first character that the viewer is introduced to in the first episode (**Fig. 3.6**), as he enters a classroom and towers over the teacher. *Kill la Kill* often employs a superficial scaling of its characters, making them appear bigger or smaller depending on who is of most importance/has the power of any given scene. It is used here as a visual form of storytelling, informing the viewer that Gamagoori is a strong and *masculine* character, the same as Gin from *Food Wars*, which holds great authority. He is part of Satsuki's closest circle, essentially one of her generals, and officially he is Disciplinary Committee Chair of the school board. While he is not the type of male character that a male audience would see themselves in, his type undoubtedly represent an ideal of manhood. The anime then makes Gamagoori its voice of morality as he *disciplines* both himself and others in accordance with the story's consensus of what is right, proper and taboo, and thereby comments on the fragile nature in male hyper-gendered performances.



Fig. 3.5: Shows Ryuuko's homeroom teacher and spy from the resistance movement as he reveal his organisation's name to Ryuuko. Yes, it's really called "Nudist Beach." Ryuuko didn't believe him at first either. **Fig. 3.6:** is the first time we meet Gamagoori as he towers over said homeroom teacher/spy.



Fig. 3.7 – 3.8: The first form of Gamagoori’s Goku uniform. **Fig. 3.9 – 3.10:** The second form of Gamagoori’s Goku Uniform

The most overt way *Kill la Kill* visually communicates Gamagoori’s connection to discipline is by the function and design of his activated Four Star Goku Uniform: his sexualised spectacle is a BDSM costume (**Fig. 3.7 – 3.10**). Gamagoori’s Goku Uniform has two forms which function as a stage of build-up and a stage of release. In the build-up stage, Gamagoori is essentially tied up with bondage like a submissive partner in a BDSM scene. He has a ball gag — a common item in BDSM — and he needs to be attacked, i.e. “punished”, in order for the Goku Uniform to reach its second stage. As a character comments on the perverted nature of his Uniform, Gamagoori replies:

Not pervert, convert. The instant I reach my climax, the power that has been building up inside of me will burst out... all at once!⁶⁵

When Ryuuko strategically doesn’t attack Gamagoori, denying his punishment, Gamagoori uses the hidden whips — another common item of BDSM — of his Goku Uniform to punish himself instead, exercising self-discipline. When the build-up of conserved power has reached its peak, the Goku Uniform changes into its second form, where

⁶⁵ ‘I Will Wipe My Own Tears’, *Kill la Kill*, dir. H. Imaishi, Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]



Fig. 3.11: Satsuki stopping Gamagoori from committing seppuku. Seppuku has been used as a way to restore honour for one's self and/or family, and also as a capital punishment in Japan.



Fig. 3.12: Gamagoori fighting hand to hand with a sentient alien suit, after his earlier defeat

Gamagoori and it becomes the “dominant”, to use BDSM terms, and use his whips delivers punishment upon his opponents.

So far, however, these visual references appear as the same kind of “gimmicks” used for chock-value in fan service in order to create a spectacle. What makes this a subversion is how it is used to thematically tie Gamagoori to the plot. When Ryuuko defeats Gamagoori he is forced to face that he *is still* a pig in human clothing. The lability in ideal masculinity states that a subjugated and defeated man is undesirable, and so his failure in battle means that he has failed Satsuki as a general, and he has failed as man. In **Fig. 3.11** we see Gamagoori

naked and ashamed with tears streaming down his face, as he sits up and is about to commit seppuku, a Japanese ritual suicide, as atonement for his sins. But Satsuki steps out of the fog and stops him. She tells both him and the male viewer that the cost of defeat is not to sacrifice one's life/manhood, rather he will find atonement by learning from his mistake and growing stronger.⁶⁶ After this story beat, Gamagoori is never framed as less-of-a-man than he was before his defeat. In fact, I would argue that he is more strongly depicted as an ideal performance of masculinity, as he fights the evil hive mind of aliens essentially in the with his base hands, as seen in **Fig. 3.12**.

Gamagoori's sub-plot is humorous, yes, but crucially it is not degrading in its intimacy. The narrative creates a closeness as it explains Gamagoori's motivations. By treating his pain and vulnerability seriously gives his portrayal a sincerity, both narratively and visually.

In fact, *Kill la Kill* systematically pushes its characters to their breaking point and pieces them back together, stronger than before. As the two main characters, Ryuuko and Satsuki

⁶⁶ On a more meta-textual level, Gamagoori and Satsuki are directly referring the “bushido” fighting spirit of Japan, meant to represent a Japanese version of knightly chivalry.

come to symbolise two paths to womanhood, two ways to take off the costumes of female gender performance.

Satsuki is covered in old tropes — she represents a traditionally Japanese ideal of womanhood. She is visualised as a woman on the top of the world, and the show goes out of its way to depict her as *untouchable*; as she



Fig. 3.13: As Ragyou sexually assault her daughter for thematic purposes and fan service, she laments how weak humans are for being uncomfortable when they are naked in front of others. She points out humanities dependency on clothes to cover them up, which grants clothes power over the naked body.

explained to Ryuuko her actions are pure, and therefore so is she. The anime goes out of its way to subvert this performance of femininity as well, however. For even though Satsuki is the ideal, she is also a prisoner of that ideal. In order to overcome this and break free, Satsuki attempt to turn the symbol of her gender performance, the wedding dress, into a weapon which will destroy the system which made it. Thus, even as she performs the role of the ideal woman, she is not one and her ultimate goal is to turn the perception of the ideal woman back on itself in order to destroy it. In other words, she will try to use her wedding dress, a symbol for the female ideal of purity and purpose through marriage, to fight against her mother, Ragyou, who is forcing her into the role of bride to be.

In opposition to Satsuki, main antagonist Ragyou is the embodiment of the enforcement of binary ideals of gender, as she literally forces characters into clothes. Ragyou's power over Satsuki is brought to the foreground in episode 16 as we get the two interact directly for the first time in their family's grand bath, where Ragyou perform a "purification ritual" on Satsuki (**Fig. 3.13**). Unlike every other character in the series, Ragyou gets to touch Satsuki due to the fact that she is her mother, and so she leaves *nothing* untouched, subjugating Satsuki in this display of power. Since Satsuki is planning to double-cross Ragyou, she goes along with it even though it is making her uncomfortable. This is the first and only time that Satsuki shows discomfort; at all other times, even in pain, Satsuki breezed through it by the strength of will alone, but here she flounders as she is forced to play the subjugated daughter. Even so, she lets it happen, and does not fight back against Ragyou's sexual assault, and submit to the orgasmic experience of the "purification ritual".

Later, in episode 18, Satsuki reveals her true intentions by trying to overthrow her mother. Ragyou overpowers her with ease, since she is not strong enough. Ragyou rips Junketsu off of her, leaving Satsuki completely powerless and defeated. In the aftermath of the fight, Satsuki is taken prisoner by her mother and gets locked in a cage, hanging naked from the ceiling. (**Fig. 3.14 – 3.17**)

Their fan service scene in the cage parallels their fan service scene in the bath in that Satsuki is physically unable to reject her mother's intrusive touch. This time, however, the veil is lifted and their relationship is presented as it truly is: Satsuki is Ragyou's prisoner. By taking Junketsu away from her, Ragyou has denied Satsuki what was supposed to be her ultimate destiny: the wedding dress. It is not the institution of marriage that *Kill la Kill* refers to but the costume that the wedding dress represents. Her father explained that pulling on the wedding dress will make her a slave to clothing.⁶⁷ The image of ideal femininity the role as a bride, with the wedding dress being the ultimate costume which all women should strive to wear. But the role is inherently restricting; the wedding dress the only way to reach adulthood and the only way to achieve true happiness as a woman also comes with the commitment of marriage, which legally binds a woman to her wedding dress forever.



Fig. 3.14 – 3.17: Satsuki being tortured by Ragyou in a cage hidden on the school grounds, and they talk honestly with each.

⁶⁷ 'Into the Night', *Kill la Kill*, dir. H. Imaishi, Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]

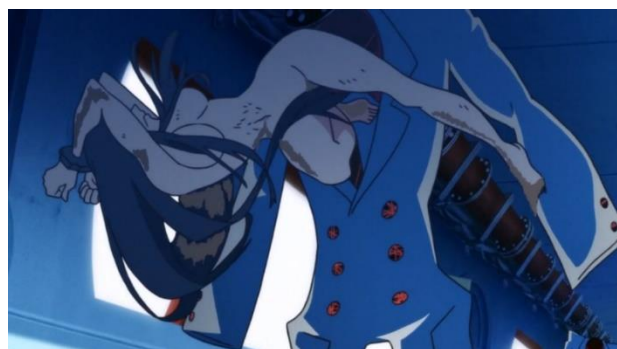


Fig. 3.18: Satsuki's generals are all appalled when they find that Satsuki is tried up naked in a cage. They organise a rescue team. **3.19:** The second Satsuki hears her allies she breaks herself out of the cage and fights her way out into the schools courtyard to meet them.

But in taking the dress away, Ragyou has inadvertently also freed Satsuki of the burden of it. When Ragyou touches Satsuki the second time in the cage, Satsuki does not react to it. She doesn't have to play the part any more, and so while she is under Ragyou's control just like before, she is finally free to be honest instead of following the script of her previous performance. Satsuki the power within herself, through her cunning, resilience and strength to break out of her mother's cage, and naked and handcuffed fight her way to freedom (**Fig. 3.19**). All the while, Satsuki remains "pure" through the simple knowledge that she knows it's true, deep inside her heart. As her true intentions have been brought to light, she has purified herself through the

honestly and belief in her own actions.

Satsuki's assault in the cage is still framed as fan service, however, and so it is sexualised in order to be a spectacle. The narrative is all too aware of this framing, however, and has Gamagoori to both cover an image of Satsuki's naked disposition after the fan service sequence *and* has him express his disgust of the image (**3.18**). Though it seems like too little too late, it is the narrative's way of reprimanding any viewer who took pleasure in Satsuki's assault and calling them out for it.

Just like Gamagoori before her, Satsuki is not portrayed as lesser after her escape, in fact she is stronger *because* she managed to break from the script of female adolescence in a way she hadn't before, and truly be naked without a costume to shield her.

Satsuki's subversion of the female performance is not the final nail in the coffin, however, as Ryuuko too gets forced into the wedding dress.

The Final Frontier of Gender Performance

Since the start of *Kill la Kill*, Ryuuko has been a character searching for somewhere to belong, so she made avenging her father her purpose in life. But when it is revealed in episode 18 that she is Ragyou's thought-to-be-dead second daughter and a half-alien just like her, Ryuuko's entire self-image shatters. The reason why she has been able to wear Senketsu without it killing her has been because of her hidden relation to Ragyou, but this relation means that she is an evil monster, just like Ragyou.

As Satsuki makes her escape, Ragyou manages to lure Ryuuko out and capture her — both in body and soul. By forcing Ryuuko into Junketsu, Ragyou manages to brain-wash Ryuuko into playing the role of bride-to-be that Satsuki had just broken free from by creating a false narrative of motherly love and, quote: *'the bliss of being worn by clothing'* which will bring you true happiness.⁶⁸ Inside Ryuuko's mind, seen in **Fig. 3.20 – 3.21**, Ragyou caresses her body, much like Satsuki in the bath (see Fig. 3.12), and tells her only the two of them can know the true pleasure of wearing Junketsu because of their alien lineage. It is a fan service scene that is



3.20 – 3.21: Ryuuko captured by Ragyou and a secondary antagonist inside of her mind.

immersed in the plot itself as it has been made explicitly clear that Ragyou's soft and tender touches are for her own sick pleasure and evil agenda. The fan service sequence has a secondary focus on hands, simultaneously simulating movements used for masturbation *and* controlling a puppet on a string, as right now, Ryuuko is subjected to both.

Outside of Ryuuko's imprisoned mind, she is not only wearing Junketsu, the wedding dress has been *sown into her very core* so that neither she nor anyone around her can take it off. Her friends and allies are at a loss of what to do, until Ryuuko's best friend Mako and Senketsu manages to get inside her head and disrupt her dissolution. (**Fig. 3.22 – 3.23**) They barge in on a wedding ceremony where the groom is just a mannequin that falls to the floor,

⁶⁸ 'Far from the Madding Crowd', *Kill la Kill*, dir. H. Imaishi, Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]



Fig. 3.22 – 3.23: Mako together with Senketsu (not pictured) crashing Ryuuko's "wedding." When Ryuuko cuts Mako, Senketsu starts sputtering blood over Ryuuko until it covers her eyes and the whole frame in red.

and the artifice of the dream is made abundantly clear. It is a black and white scene, showing the binary roles of man and woman, with the red strings which hold up the groom and frames the picture, binding Ryuuko to its vision of happiness. As Mako and Senketsu bursts in, they are the only other thing in colour. At first Mako tries to reason with Ryuuko that this is not who she truly is or what she truly wants. Ryuuko refuses to budge, clinging onto her idea of true happiness, and so Mako declares:

If you are so intent on staying cooped up in here, kill me and give up on being my Ryuuko!⁶⁹

When Ryuuko cuts Mako, it is Senketsu who bleeds instead with the blood it has taken from Mako, clouding Ryuuko's vision and the whole picture and frame. Only then is the artifice broken, and Ryuuko regains control of her mind and soul. **Fig. 3.24 – 3.27** show how she rips the wedding dress off of her, nearly killing herself in the process, her blood exploding and raining down on her. She is once again naked and exposed, but crucially, this spectacle is *not* fan service. For while it is a spectacle — a pinnacle moment like so many before — where the visuals focus on Ryuuko's body which has been time and time again portrayed as sexually charged and appealing, this is different. The raw force of her actions is expressed through her body. She is firmly rooted on the ground and every part of her body motions upwards and outwards, her usual hour-glass figure is distorted as she lets out her war-cry. Her breasts are not round, soft and squishy as they bounce; they are pushed up and flattened, following her motion as she tears Junketsu off of her. The colours palette moves from the signature white and blue of Junketsu towards red; Ryuuko and Senketsu's colour. It starts with the line-art of

⁶⁹ 'Incomplete', *Kill la Kill*, dir. H. Imaishi, Studio Trigger, 2013 – 2014, [TV broadcast]



her body and a soft glow, to the red explosion of her power against the white backdrop, and finally drowning in the colour of her blood as it comes raining down upon her.



Nothing in the shot composition evokes the hallmarks of fan service. The narrative has her remove the symbol of ideal femininity and the visuals encapsulate the herculean effort of Ryuuko's action. As the rain of blood covers her, her body relaxes and return to its usual figure of soft breasts and a tiny waste. But it is only visible as an outline against completely saturated imagine of red; her stance neutral rather than one of weakness or strength. Here, she is portrayed as a naked, attractive woman without a sexual charge. And so she has broken free from the script of gender performance *in* an act of gender performance.



As Ryuuko puts on Senketsu once more in **Fig. 3.28**, it is clear that the sexualisation which the outfit brings truly do not bother her any longer. The backlighting throws her exposed skin into shadow while her eyes and aura glow, calling the attention of the

Fig. 3.24 – 3.27: Ryuuko ripping Junketsu off on her

image. It echoes Satsuki's declaration from episode 3: This is the form where Ryuuko is the most powerful and what she chooses to wear; she does not care for the value of the masses, and she will not feel ashamed or embarrassed by her body



Fig. 3.28: Ryuuko has finally taken back her own gender performance.

for she knows that her action that reflect who she is, and not what she is wearing.

The subversion of fan service's hyper-gendered performance is not complete, however, as most of humanity are still (literally) enslaved by clothing.

In order to defeat Ragyou completely, Ryuuko puts on every remaining Goku Uniform at once to channel their collective power, which will take her to space where she will be able to fight Ragyou as equals. In doing so, and as she finally defeat Ragyou and the alien hive mind, humanity is restored to its natural state: all are naked. It is in this that the visual narrative challenges Ragyou's final point: humans are not weak, for now they do not cower and hide behind their clothing, instead they are all naked together. As Ryuuko falls back to earth, Senketsu sacrifices itself when she enters the burning atmosphere, noting that she has outgrown it. She comes crashing down, naked and in free-fall, but the rest of her friends and family catch her (**Fig. 3.29 – 3.30**).

Here is where *Kill la Kill* has finally and definitely subverted the tropes of the ecchi genre. By making the duality of clothes and nudity both its spectacle through fan service *and* its plot, it used it's spectacle to comment on it. The potential for parody already existed in the genre of ecchi since the reproduction of a pure hyper-gendered performances had visually highly sexualised and absurd bodies is the core of its visual spectacle. Then, by saturating each episode with hyper-gendered performances and commenting on their appearance, function and reception within its narrative, *Kill la Kill* systematically questioned every aspect of the fan service and its purpose as spectacle. It has done so very specifically by looking down or up at its objects in angels that best show off particular body parts and dressing its character's up in revealing clothing. So when the performance finally pivots with Ryuuko ripping off Junketsu and rejects the female gender performance it represents, the visuals and narrative work off of each other to portray a form of her body that is not sexual despite its

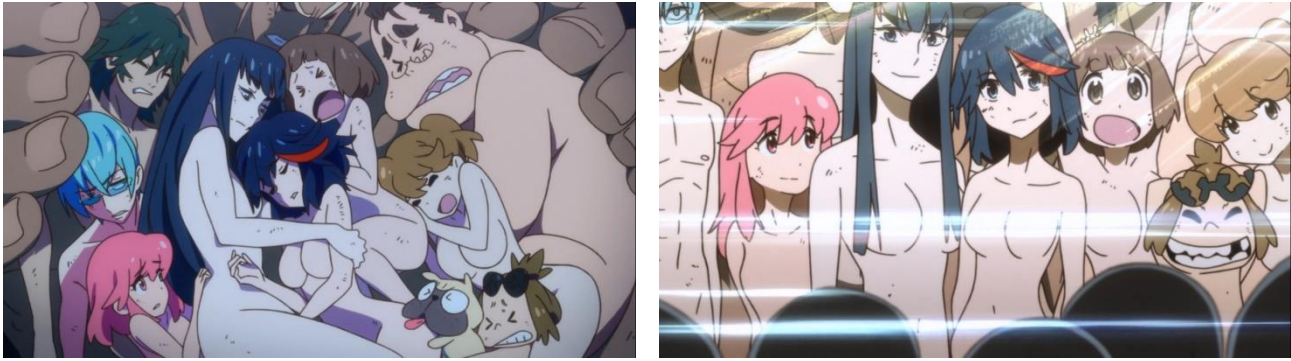


Fig. 3.29 – 3.30: The final scene of *Kill la Kill*.

nudity, and furthermore *despite* its sexualised character design. When Ryuuko falls from the heavens no one hesitates to catch her because of their state of undress, and when Ryuuko wakes up surrounded by nudity neither she nor anyone is embarrassed. Ryuuko saved humanity by taking their assigned gender roles in the form of clothes and using it as the fuel to free them from it, shooting it into space. And humanity caught her as she falls back to earth. *Kill la Kill* posits that underneath the performances that clothes represent, all of humanity are equally naked, and it should learn to embrace it.

Throughout this thesis, we have seen how fan service have visually encoded sexuality onto practically naked bodies, creating a tension between the exaggerated features of the naked body and the skin-tight clothes that extenuate what is hiding underneath. This has been read as a hyper-gendered performance wherein practically naked bodies are exaggerated by design in order to infuse them with a sexual charge. The visual expression of fan service has in turn been read as a spectacle, which commodifies the sexual expression of gender as visual performance, wherein which the spectacle presents this representation as objective ideal of what constitutes as expressions of gendered sexuality.

Kill la Kill visualises the inherent biases in this “objective” representation of gender and sexuality through clothing in order to subvert it. It diffuses the sexual charge of the practically naked body constructed through character design by both visually and narratively removing the gendered aspect that the clothes represent. In doing so, it proposes that nudity is not inherently sexual, but rather the most universal form of the human body.

Chapter Four: Conclusion & Future Perspectives

Fan service is a form of wish-fulfilment where an idealised version of the perfect partner — the modern Galatea — is constructed through sexually charged imagery. It's a man-made fantasy based on the social script of gender performance that govern the corporeal world. Fan service then takes these pre-determined templates of gender roles, found in the social script, and exaggerate their bodily features to a point of absurdity in order to create memorable performances of gender.

The bodies themselves are defined by their binary as either male or female, thereby binding fan service's sexual expression to gender expression itself. Without any physical bodies, the fictional performance of gender is free to distil the characters design into whatever it wishes. The resulting performance is *hyper* as it exaggerates the sexually charged parts of the human body in accordance with the biases of the social script.

The female Galatea exude sexuality whenever she is seen. Dressed in skin-tight clothes she is practically naked; always skinny, and usually have un-proportionally large breasts and buttocks. The male Galatea is far milder in comparison, as if the act of sexualising male bodies and taking their shirts off is noteworthy in of itself. He is defined as confident in opposition to the vulnerability of the female Galatea; his muscle mass may fluctuate from slim to a mountain of muscle.

The range of Galateas evoke different sexual fantasies in their gendered performance. Some play a submissive role and cannot help themselves to fall and lust for the audience surrogate, taking whatever they are given. Others represent an assertive partner, where one can either conquer and tame the sexual demon, or become their slave; the power-balance will always tilt one way or the other, never at an equilibrium.

These two types take on different meaning dependent on the gender they portray. A submissive female Galatea is imagined as the embodiment of sexualised innocence, a partner to take care of and pleasure from. By comparison, the male Galatea is *rarely* portrayed with the same kind of submission. The mere act invalidates his gender performance — and so the type is reserved to ridicule men, as opposed to portraying women as *ridiculously sexual* as a consequence of the hyper-gendered exaggeration of their designs. Furthermore, the assertive male Galatea is also portrayed *sexually ridiculous* by flaunting male sexuality as a joke, whilst the assertive female Galatea teases her sexual maturity like a dominatrix.

The hyper-gendered performance of fan service is founded on the tension of the sexual charge of the naked body. In this sense, fan service can never be truly *neutral*. For even though the Galatea may be neutral themselves, oblivious and uncaring towards the way they are framed, the frame will in itself sexualise them through their “painted on” clothing and the angles in their depictions. The male Galatea is especially liable to this kind of depiction, as it is seemingly the only way for him to keep hold of the ideal male gender performance without becoming sexually ridiculous.

These visuals make up fan service as a spectacle.

The spectacle is as much a system of perception as it is a tangible thing. When Debord said that society has been reduced to spectacle, he meant that society uses reproductive images of reality as a mode of communication and understanding of itself. Debord’s spectacle is founded in Marxist theory, and he sought to conceptualise how the materiality of capitalism had created a superficial need for material goods. In a sense, the spectacle is the social script commodified. Seen through Debord’s spectacle, fan service becomes a commodity of wish-fulfilment, where the modern Galatea represents the ideal partner through sexually charged imagery.

A performance is always up for re-interpretation, however. And so the spectacle is in constant flux by nature. According to Debord, the spectacle regenerates itself to incorporate new expressions of representations in order to keep its objective monopoly as a mode of perceiving reality.⁷⁰ While he is right in saying so, Debord’s statement does not account for when the spectacle becomes a meta-commentary of itself and its function, as in anime like *Kill la Kill*.

Kill la Kill subverts the hyper-gendered performances in fan service by making the symbolical dismantling of gender roles its plot. It is a visual spectacle of storytelling that takes the different codes which make up the Galatea in order to discharge the sexuality in the hyper-gendered imagery of fan service.

This thesis has only focused on one aspect of fan service, however. I have not accounted for the audience reception and discourse surrounding fan service, nor the derivative works of the anime fan community, such as cosplay, fanart and other forms of commentary and discussion. Nor have I talked of the site of production itself. The people behind the studios who make anime. These are all aspects of future perspectives.

⁷⁰ Debord, op. cit., p. 11

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