

ANIME *and* MEMORY



Aesthetic, Cultural and Thematic Perspectives

DANI CAVALLARO

Anime and Memory

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Thematic Perspectives*

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On the cover: Poster art for the 2001 film *Millennium Actress*
(*Sennen joyû*) directed by Satoshi Kon (DreamWorks/Photofest)

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To Paddy,
with love and gratitude

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It's a poor sort of memory that only works backward.

— Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and
What Alice Found There* (1871)

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Preface

When I was younger, I could remember
anything, whether it had happened or not.
— Mark Twain in G. T. Couser, *Alter Egos* (1989)

The difference between false memories and true ones
is the same as for jewels: it is always the false ones
that look the most real, the most brilliant.
— Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (1942)

The topos of memory has often played a significant role in anime but its impact has grown exponentially over the past decade. Anime's handling of memory is multifaceted and brings it into collusion with diverse symbolic and diegetic motifs. This study aims to provide a detailed analysis of a range of titles wherein different aspects of this cultural phenomenon are articulated. In seeking to offer an original contribution to the burgeoning field of Anglophone anime scholarship, the book does not presume to delve into every possible production in which the memory theme is invoked, since this would inevitably impair intellectual penetration. It endeavors instead to supply in-depth assessments of an appropriate selection of films and series, chosen in accordance with the following criteria:

- they highlight the prominence of memory with reference to specific philosophical, artistic and historical contexts;
- they exemplify the distinctive signatures placed by particular directors and animation studios on their treatment of the topic;
- they are popular in Western countries as well as on home turf and are therefore likely to attract prospective readers of this study.

In its engagement with the memory theme, anime embraces a distinctively Eastern perspective on time that posits incessant becoming as that dimension's most salient trait. Within the unpredictable eddies of this current, there are no universally reliable data, only bundles of provisional intuitions; no neatly parceled facts, only ephemeral remembrances. Thus, the art form assiduously points to the radical impermanence of what we call our world by underscoring the highly subjective and lacunary nature of the stories we construct to keep that world in place. Concomitantly, it rejects the notion of a transparent master his-

tory presumed to chart the unfolding of truth and offers instead a pluralization of histories issuing from inevitably skewed and tentative mnemonic fragments. These messages are rendered especially poignant by their couching in a deliberately unpretentious — at times even restrained — fashion, in keeping with Japanese art's proverbial preference for allusiveness over direct statement, subtly nuanced implication over bold explication.

Chapter 1, "Theoretical Perspectives" evaluates a range of theoretical views pertinent to anime's engagement with memory. The chapter consists of two parts. The first concentrates on the relationship between memory and the five linchpins of Japanese aesthetics (*mono no aware, yugen, sabi, wabi, kirei kire tsuzuki*). All of these aesthetic tenets are deemed profoundly relevant to the theme of memory insofar as they invariably point to philosophical preoccupations with the mysteries of time. The second part expands the book's frame of reference to address memory's implication with temporality at large, its inscription in recorded history, its material embodiment and its inextricability from technology.

The aesthetic and broadly theoretical concepts addressed in the first chapter are revisited in the case studies to follow in order to demonstrate their direct pertinence to specific titles. The case studies consist of eight chapters, each of which explores one particular facet of the collusion of anime and memory by means of close analysis of one primary title and additional reference to a selection of ancillary productions spanning the early 1970s to the present. This approach is intended to maximize the book's historical breadth. The amount of space apportioned to each subsidiary title varies according to relevance and appeal.

Cursory reference is also made, both in the main body of the book and in the chapter notes, to additional titles worthy of inspection by readers eager to pursue particular aspects of the memory theme. This strategy allows for a comprehensive contextualization of the primary titles in relation to further areas of critical inquiry that transcend the book's contingent purview. Chronological range is matched by generic variety, the titles selected for inclusion having been drawn from areas as diverse as action adventure, romance, science fiction, steampunk, the epic, the supernatural, mystery, horror, crime, historical drama, domestic drama and slice-of-life drama (with tangential forays into other anime categories).

Chapter 2, "Memory and Desire" looks at a selection of anime whose narrative trajectory is shaped by the yearning to fulfill an objective fueled by memories of the protagonists' first discovery of romantic longing. Chapter 3, "The Archaeology of Memory," Gilgamesh explores anime's ideation of varying revisionist, legendary or antiquarian versions of history through a focus on the explicitly material dimension of the past and its mnemonic reservoir. In Chapter 4, "Memory as Quest," the emphasis is placed on the extent to which memories, both full-dress and inchoate, are responsible for triggering journeys of self-discovery and self-actualization. The titles discussed in Chapter 5, "Split Memories," dramatize eminently schizoid situations in which memories are carved up and distributed across distinct characters, on the one hand, and brought into play in order to establish powerful bonds between them, on the other.

Chapter 6, "Memory and the City," investigates the inscription of memory on ceaselessly mutating urban environments and the impact of this phenomenon on their inhabitants and their changing perceptions of both themselves and others over time. In Chapter 7, "Memory as Worldbuilding," the focus is on anime's deployment of the memory topos as a means of generating meticulously detailed and coherent universes underpinned by specific styles, customs and world views that render them emphatically credible despite their

fictional status. Finally, Chapter 8, "Submerged Memories," and Chapter 9, "Haunted Memories," concentrate on the impact of latent, repressed or submerged memories on both individual characters and their familial or societal milieu, drawing attention to those memories' penchant for irreverently eroding the boundary between reality and dreams.

The discussion is supplemented by a detailed filmography consisting of three sections (Primary Titles; Secondary Titles; Additional Titles Cited), as well as chapter notes, bibliographical references, and an index.

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CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Perspectives

Harvest moon:
around the pond I wander
and the night is gone.
— Matsuo Bashou (1644–1694)

The moment two bubbles
are united, they both vanish.
A lotus blooms.
— Kijo Murakami (1865–1938)

Chapter 1 examines the relationship between memory and key concepts in Japanese aesthetics in order to illustrate ways in which anime is imbued with time-honored indigenous values even as it persistently absorbs contemporary global influences. It then considers the extent to which, in dealing with memory, anime concurrently grapples with broader issues regarding the concept of temporality and the recording of the passage of time in textual form.

Anime is deeply influenced by Japan's traditional aesthetic principles, and to appreciate it fully, some grasp of those values is highly beneficial. Insofar as several of the concepts underlying Japanese aesthetics allude to metaphysical issues inextricable from a keen awareness of the passing of time, their specific relevance to the memory topos can hardly go unheeded. Particularly important, in this respect, is the notion of *mono no aware*, the “sadness of things”: namely, the pathos associated with sensitivity to the transience of beauty and pleasure. As observed in the entry for “Japanese Aesthetics” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “the feeling of *aware* is typically triggered by the plaintive calls of birds or other animals.”

Auditory effects of this kind are often deployed in anime and can work very powerfully in evoking both memories and the longings to which memories notoriously give rise. As the concept of *mono no aware* is broadened in order to embrace the “affective dimensions of existence in general” (“Japanese Aesthetics”), one frequently finds that it is through seemingly inert objects — rather than human motions and expressions — that pathos is most effectively communicated. Anime repeatedly focuses on static entities drawn from both the world of Nature and interior design (such as rocks and shells, screens and pots) to convey

dramatic density economically, thereby bringing out the inner aliveness of the apparently inanimate and the body of memories that such objects host.

If *mono no aware* points to ineluctable perishability, the notion of *yugen*, conversely, designates the unfathomable timelessness of cosmic infinity. As David Pascal notes, *yugen* “is not the presence of, but the hint, the glow, of the eternal, the incorruptible.” The notion of ineffable grace is intrinsic to *yugen* and serves to throw into relief the ultimate impenetrability of the world we inhabit: a dimension never to be conquered but only, at best, to be imaginatively approximated through a suspension of both belief and disbelief.¹ In terms of *mono no aware*, memory functions as the faculty that strives to salvage durable impressions from the ephemeral. In those of *yugen*, it is a reaching towards the vastness of time: a level of reality to which no individual life cycle can aspire, yet sympathetic participation in the remembrance of other people and epochs might at least evoke.

Overtly entangled with temporality is the aesthetic tenet known as *sabi*: “pleasure in that which is old, faded, lonely ... a love of imperfection. *Sabi* differs from *aware* in that one does not lament for the fallen blossom, but loves it, and from *yugen* in that the flower does not (or rather need not) suggest greater eternities” (Pascal). According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia*, the poetic mood of *sabi* is typified by the haiku of the seventeenth-century poet Matsuo Bashou — for example: “Solitary now — / Standing amidst the blossoms / Is a cypress tree.” As the article points out, the spirit of *sabi* is characteristically captured not by “the colorful beauty of the blossoms” but by “the more subdued gracefulness of the cypress” (“Japanese Aesthetics”).

The concept of *wabi* also commends the beauty of the aged and the flawed, but specifically to honor the spiritual richness to be found in the materially imperfect as opposed to pristine goods. When applied to the domain of memory, *wabi* would seem to suggest that greater beauty can be ultimately located with the frayed tatters of a person’s — or a group’s — inner treasurehouse of recollections than with bounded dates and data. Such beauty will always, given memory’s legendary elusiveness, be understated and unpretentious. Glamour is resolutely ostracized.

Taken in tandem, *sabi*’s and *wabi*’s acceptance of transience and elevation of the imperfect are rooted in Buddhist ideals. These regard lacunary states not as defects but as fertile grounds for growth. After all, it is the existence of gaps that stimulates thought, encouraging the mind and body to devise ways of provisionally filling them, whereas sealed scenarios of completeness stultify both perception and creativity. Just as an image of the moon or of the sun partially obscured by clouds or fog is more beautiful — in the logic of *sabi-wabi* — than an unblemished view, so the very fallibility and fragmentariness of memory are the qualities that make it appealing. However, the courting of imperfection intrinsic to the ideas discussed above is pertinent to anime at large and not merely to anime engaged with the theme of memory. Indeed, Japanese art’s preference for the approximate and the incomplete is mirrored by anime’s own passion for “faces half-sketched” and “backgrounds half-done,” as well as a tendency to leave “things critical to the story never explained” (Pascal).

The materials supplied by the works here examined stylistically reflect the aesthetic criteria examined in the foregoing paragraphs by capitalizing on the inveterate Japanese passion for the allusive and the inconclusive, for suggestion rather than assertion. At times, they accomplish that goal by recourse to graphic flourishes that render their images intentionally incomplete. At others, they adopt the opposite approach, jam-packing the visuals

with a profusion of details and making them indefinite by means of exaggerated repletion. Lack and fullness are construed as germane rather than adversarial, which is quite consonant with anime's impatience with stark binary oppositions. Thematically, viewers are invited to engage with shards and shreds of memory and evaluate their reliability in the face of a rampant mood of ambiguity. Distinguishing empirical knowledge from paranoid delusion, lived experience from hallucination, and science from magic is thus positioned as the axial — and never-ending — interpretative act.

The picture emerging from this body of thought is an intrinsically unstable world view that matches Japanese philosophy's grasp of reality as constant flux, as impermanence (*mujou*). As we have seen, Japanese aesthetics is capable of both lamenting and upholding that fundamental condition. Either way, however, it emplaces it as the *only* reality that presents itself to the senses. This proposition carries considerable weight when it is assessed specifically in relation to the phenomenon of memory. Indeed, it intimates that the worlds constructed by memory are never anchored to a Platonic substratum of unchanging truths but actually partake at all times of interminable cycles of birth, death and rebirth.

The Japanese preference for allusiveness over explicitness is typically suggested, in anime of the kind here explored, by recourse to panoramas and to background art. These find a vivid correlative in the type of landscape presented by Nancy G. Hume in her assessment of Japanese art's fascination with the inconclusive and inexplicable facets of the aesthetic experience: "When looking at autumn mountains through mist, the view may be indistinct yet have great depth. Although few autumn leaves may be visible through the mist, the view is alluring. The limitless vista created in imagination far surpasses anything one can see more clearly" (Hume, pp. 253–254).

Another pertinent characterization of the lure of allusiveness is provided by the thirteenth-century author Kamo no Choumei: "It is like an autumn evening under a colorless expanse of silent sky. Somehow, as if for some reason that we should be able to recall, tears well up uncontrollably" (quoted in "Japanese Aesthetics"). An analogous mood pervades Italo Calvino's description of the imaginary city of "Diomira": "the special quality of this city for the man who arrives there on a September evening, when the days are growing shorter and the multicolored lamps are lighted all at once at the doors of the food stalls and from a terrace a woman's voice cries ooh!, is that he feels envy towards those who now believe they have once before lived an evening identical to this and who think they were happy, that time" (Calvino 1997 [1972], p. 7). In both Choumei and Calvino, memory plays a major part in conveying the feeling of ineffability as the perceiver senses the urge to remember something profound yet just beyond his grasp.

One additional aesthetic principle deserves attention in this context: the *kire* ("cut") or *kire tsuzuki* ("cut continuity" or "cut continuation"). Like live-action cinematography, anime uses the cut as a versatile technique. One of its most distinctive strategies is the employment of cuts to move quite sharply from one shot to the next (which allows studios to economize in the creation of frames), yet also evoke a sense of continuity by retaining certain formal elements across discrete shots, such as a natural or architectural detail. This ploy reflects closely the principle of *kire*. At the same time, the concept echoes the Zen teaching: to look at the world with eyes unclouded by contingent desires and thus perceive its underlying beauty, the self must let go of its hold on the here-and-now and cut itself off from the pressures of the moment.

By consciously embracing a state of rootlessness, the self may thereby harmonize its actions and affects with the impermanence of the world at large. Additionally, in presenting motion as a corollary of the sequential arrangement of distinct, albeit adjacent, scenes (a defining trait of all animation as a frame-by-frame construct), cut continuity underscores the episodic character of life. Applied specifically to the topos of memory, the concept delineated above indicates that what we think of as recollections, be they reflections of actual events or pure imaginings, can be released from their putative roots in empirically quantifiable facts and allowed to take off unfettered into parallel universes.

The principles of *kire* and *kire tsuzuki* also suggest that it is possible to appreciate the beauty of each single component of a large constellation of interconnected entities without losing sight of the beauty of the overall ensemble. Calvino advances this proposition in the segment of his novel *If on a winter's night a traveler* titled "On the carpet of leaves illuminated by the moon," which is set in a traditional Japanese context, where the narrator observes the ginkgo leaves falling from the boughs and coming to rest on the lawn below, and reflects on the possibility of distinguishing "the sensation of each single ginkgo leaf from the sensation of all the others." His host and mentor Mr. Okeda assures him that this is feasible. The secret is to concentrate on an individual leaf first and then gradually proceed to reconstruct the wider scenario: "If from the ginkgo tree a single little yellow leaf falls and rests on the lawn, the sensation felt in looking at it is that of a single yellow leaf. If two leaves descend from the tree, the eye follows the twirling of the two leaves as they move closer, then separate in the air, like two butterflies chasing each other, then glide finally to the grass, one here, one there. And so with three, with four, even with five; as the number of leaves spinning in the air increases further, the sensations corresponding to each of them are summed up, creating a general sensation like that of a silent rain..." (Calvino 1993 [1981], p. 194).

This process requires at once the ability to isolate each of the individual elements from its companions, which entails a cut or series of successive cuts, and the ability to still grasp the interconnectedness of the various elements by focusing on the continuity that brings them together. Memory often operates in an analogous fashion. A comprehensive, albeit inevitably provisional, appreciation not only of the beauty of memory but also of the pain (and indeed the terror) inherent in its contents demands sensitivity to both the building blocks and the entire edifice. Hence, it entails both cuts and the orchestration of the isolated components into a continuous flow.

Leaves, incidentally, play an important part in Japanese aesthetics (as do blossom and vegetation generally). This is typified by the Zen anecdote in which a priest in charge of the garden of a famous temple meticulously rakes up and disposes the dry autumn leaves in preparation for the imminent arrival of illustrious guests. When the priest asks his master if the result of his efforts is agreeable, the older man praises him but also opines that there is scope for improvement. He then proceeds to shake the trunk of the tree from which the leaves came in the first place, which triggers a fresh shower of leaves, and instructs his acolyte to arrange them in the pattern of the original layer. The tale underscores the idea that in order to truly appreciate the beauty of Nature, it is necessary to restrain from the desire to tame it and organize it according to human agendas and develop an intimate awareness of the design principles on the basis of which Nature itself distributes and lays out its materials.

This proposition is also pertinent to the processes through which memories are formed, consciously grasped and constellated as an ensemble within the psyche. Where memories are concerned, the kind of procedure commended by the Zen elder with regard to the autumn leaves works as a metaphor for the necessity of achieving a deeper understanding of their import instead of smoothing or glossing over the difficulties arising from their often burdensome bequest. The attainment of awareness is the pivotal factor in this task. The characters portrayed in the anime examined in this book must learn precisely how to become aware of their memories, and internalize their lessons, past the constraints posed by their dominant desires, self-divisions and repressions.

Of all the productions here examined, the ones that articulate most potently the ethos of *mono no aware* are those discussed in Chapter 6, “Memory and the City.” This is because the urban setting, as the receptacle of both private and shared remembrances, tends to be presented as an unrelentingly mutating map in which everything is, by definition, ephemeral. The titles addressed in Chapter 4, “Memory as Quest,” for their part, partake of the spirit of *yugen* by positing memory as the trigger for daring forays into the unknown and the unknowable. The works covered in Chapter 7, “Memory as Worldbuilding” also invoke *yugen*: in this instance, mainly in the form of a reaching towards cosmic infinity. In both cases, mythological frames of reference are occasionally brought into play to underscore the timeless magnitude of the task at hand.

Sabi is elliptically evoked by the anime studied in Chapter 3, “The Archaeology of Memory,” where a bittersweet fascination with the ancient and the crumbling recurrently manifests itself. *Wabi* comes most overtly to the fore in the titles addressed in Chapter 2, “Memory and Desire”; Chapter 8, “Submerged Memories”; and Chapter 9, “Haunted Memories.” In Chapter 2, the lure of the imperfect is captured by the very nature of desire as an endlessly self-renewing — and hence insatiable — mechanism that is only capable, at best, of yielding partial satisfaction. In chapters 8 and 9, it is the amorphous character of the memories involved that renders their latent power coterminous with imperfection, as well as an overarching sense of unpretentious beauty. The works explored in Chapter 5, “Split Memories” emplace the principles of *kire* and *kire tsuzuki* as decisive by literally cutting up mnemonic materials and apportioning them to distinct personae. However, insofar as these various characters are portrayed as interdependent, an overriding sense of continuity can also be detected across the fabric of their adventures.

In assessing anime’s engagement with the relationship between memory and wider aspects of temporality and history, four interrelated elements deserve close attention: the collusion of past and future; the construction of history; the materiality of memory; and the interplay of memory and technology. Memory pertains to the future no less than to the past: recollections are ineluctably colored by a propensity to project their legacy onto prospective scenarios. The use of fractured timelines and multiperspectival diegesis dramatically enhances this motif. Eastern notions of time based on principles of cyclicity and recurrence are deeply relevant to this scenario. In principle, according to this perspective, everything has already happened for an eternity in the past, and will continue to happen for an eternity in the future. The hourglass of existence is turned over and over, and us with it, mere grains of sand.

Memory does not provide a reliable record of past occurrences but rather edited, and hence arbitrary, versions of history: in so doing, it fabricates both personal and communal

narratives by recourse to the mechanisms of repression, sublimation and idealization. All texts are based on the displacement of meaning and presence: any individual element present in a text is only meaningful insofar as it is implicitly related to other elements that are not present but could have been. Meaning is an effect of what is absent no less than what is present, and, by extension, of unvoiced memory traces no less than openly articulated recollections. Writing is inseparable from memory because all texts are tapestries of previous traces. There is no means of reascending the river of time to the first memory, let alone of trying to foresee the ultimate memory. A text is an ensemble of traces which can never totally erase memories of previous texts. We always write over previous writing, and always remember over previous recollections. Concurrently, all forms of language are riddled with aporias, undecidables, slippages and self-dismantling marks.

Although memory is a mental phenomenon, it also takes corporeal form insofar as its contents become embodied in actual people and places. In tandem, these provide the basis for vast ideological and mythological systems. This idea challenges the Cartesian mind-body dualism endemic in the West in favor of a characteristically Eastern perception of balance between spirit and matter. In underscoring the materiality of memory, the works here examined propose that even though memory is often regarded as a fundamentally mental function, the acts of memorization and retrieval actually bring the body into play as a primary agent. At the most basic level, this is borne out by the fact that reminiscences are most frequently associated with sensory experiences. It is not uncommon, for example, for a smell to evoke a memory or indeed a galaxy of memories.

According to Christian Steinbeck, the body can indeed be conceived of as a “medium of memory,” and Japanese thought overtly contributes to the validation of this hypothesis. Thus, although the images that reminiscences bring forth pertain to something that is physically absent, memory and corporeality are inseparable. Steinbeck discusses the case of a clinically brain-dead Japanese youth as an apt illustration: “all parts of his brain had permanently ceased to function,” yet the patient’s body remained sensitive to the presence of close relatives, as attested to by significant fluctuations in “blood pressure and pulse rate” (Steinbeck, p. 4). This, Steinbeck maintains, indicates that even without the brain’s support, the body is still capable of processing mnemonic materials and of displaying reactions that reflect a person’s “individual past and personal life history.... As long as it is perceived as an individual, living body, it continues to be part of an intercorporeal exchange,” which entails that the “flow of memories will be influenced and mediated by the living presence of the brain-dead body” (pp. 4–5).

The corporeality of memory is confirmed by cases of patients who, following organ transplants, exhibit novel personality traits that are presumably passed on to them by the organ donors. These can be regarded as memories literally flowing from one person’s body to another’s. As Ben Ashford notes, a paradigmatic example is provided by Cheryl Johnson who, in the wake of “a life-saving kidney transplant,” found herself transformed into something of “a brainbox.” An avid reader of “popular novels” prior to the operation, she subsequently developed a passion for “high-brow writers such as Jane Austen and Russian heavyweight Fyodor Dostoevsky” (Ashford).

A further illustration offered by Steinbeck, also drawn from Japanese culture, consists of the principles of a seventeenth-century strand of Neo-Confucianism advocating a “theory of correspondence” between nature and human society (Steinbeck, p. 6). Its principal

exponent, Ogyu Sorai (1666–1728), promulgated the notion that the body plays an essential role in the grasp and assimilation of exemplary behavior — and hence in the fostering of harmony — by means of its “performance,” especially of “rites” and “music” (p. 7). It is as though the sense of balance inherent in ceremonial and melodic practices could physically map itself onto the body while this engaged in their enactment, and so communicate to the performer via his or her body the virtuous principles emanating from that concord and the ability to remember them as enduring guides. Sorai’s theory therefore connects corporeality and memory unequivocally.

Once certain patterns are firmly imprinted onto the body, the latter is in a position to perpetuate the legacy of the past as a “living symbol” even “without depending on conscious acts of remembrance” (p. 8). Therefore, it should not be regarded as a passive conduit for mental activities and contents but rather as an agent that plays an indispensable role in the genesis and expression of thoughts, feelings and hence memories. Whereas conceptual thinking and its representations tend to marginalize the corporeal dimension of existence in favor of abstract schemata, the body’s symbolic function grounds meaning in the concrete realm of matter.

Memory is inseparable from technology. Since prehistory, being human has meant being involved in the development of technologies, not only mechanisms and tools, but also stories, pictures and melodies. As Bernard Stiegler persuasively argues in *Technics and Time* (1998), human evolution and technological development are inextricably intertwined. Human history is a chain of successive transformations of the technologies conceived by diverse cultures, and memory is a record of such transformations — a mnemotechnology.

As an inherently technological phenomenon, animation is ideally equipped to convey this message. Over time, the relationship between technology and animation has repeatedly yielded an intriguing paradox. Indeed, as James Clarke argues, although animation is a “product of the mechanized, modern age,” it “often tells stories that play up the usually hapless relationship between humans and their inventions.” The irony of this situation is compounded by the fact that “it was by mocking and parodying the modern world of machines that animation really broke into mainstream culture, itself becoming a mass-produced form involving huge numbers of animators, painters, designers and technicians” (Clarke, pp. 2–3). Artificiality, therefore, constitutes the very essence of animation.

Insofar as the cinematic apparatus in its entirety depends on artifice, even though the more realistic film genres tend to ensconce this dependence, it could be argued that animation’s procedures form the bedrock of cinema at large. Lev Manovich has promulgated this hypothesis by emphasizing that the inceptive techniques from which cinema evolved “all relied on hand-painted or hand-drawn images.” When, at the end of the nineteenth century, “the automatic generation of images and their automatic projection were finally combined,” animation was marginalized as a “bastard relative” and cinema “cut all references to its origins in artifice.” What cinema opposed most pugnaciously was animation’s tendency to proclaim “its artificial character” by explicitly “admitting that its images are mere representations.” Conversely, cinema sustained by mimetic priorities “works hard to erase any traces of its own production process.... It denies that the reality it shows often does not exist outside of the film image.”

The exponential growth of digital tools and techniques over the past two decades, and their enthusiastic adoption not merely by animation but also by live-action cinema, signals

a return to the industry's artificial foundations. Often, methodologies first tested in the domain of animation are subsequently adapted to the requirements of live-action cinema, making the latter something of a by-product. As Manovich comments, "Born from animation, cinema pushed animation to its boundary, only to become one particular case of animation in the end" (Manovich 2001).

As far as anime — as a distinctive form of animation — is specifically concerned, the technological dimension acquires unique resonance. Indeed, anime never induces us to forget its constructedness. According to Donald Richie, anime is "completely presentational.... Everything is designed." In this respect, it could be regarded as the "quintessential" Japanese art in that it fully encapsulates the latter's propensity for the "presentational" — a frank exposure of the work's madeness — as opposed to the "representational" — a striving towards mimetic realism meant to efface artificiality (Richie).

As a mnemotechnology *sui generis*, anime underscores the evolution of animational techniques over time as a markedly material process that entails not only the creation and perfection of tools and methods but also the charting of a body of memories by means of moving images. This involves that in erecting memory as their cardinal theme, the films here studied never lose sight of the technical dimension. As a result, the story's mnemonic contents and the ways in which these are presented are inextricably interrelated. The affective import of the memories mapped out by an anime does not simply depend on their inherent poignancy, but also, perhaps more importantly, on the cinematographical style and format in which they are couched.

The four elements discussed in the preceding paragraphs will be returned to in the body of the book to exemplify their relevance to specific productions and contexts. Be they traumatic or therapeutic, the memories dramatized by anime are intangible experiences that nonetheless succeed in bringing intensely palpable worlds to the screen. Thus, they constitute a correlative for the cinematic apparatus itself as a presence made of absence: a sprawling dreamland in which every frame is a presence dependent for its meaning on the absence of what it evokes or records, and is hence analogous to a fleetingly preserved memory. In the process, anime holds out an intricately woven poetry of remembrance.

CHAPTER 2

Memory and Desire

Millennium Actress

(feature film; dir. Satoshi Kon, 2001)

We do not remember days; we remember moments.

— Cesare Pavese, *The Burning Brand* (1961)

Fate is like a small sandstorm that keeps changing directions. You change direction but the sandstorm chases you. You turn again, but the storm adjusts. Over and over you play this out, like some ominous dance with death just before dawn. Why? Because this storm isn't something that blew in from far away, something that has nothing to do with you. This storm is you.

— Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore* (2005)

In *Millennium Actress*,¹ desire functions as the trigger of both the protagonist's life story and the cinematographical format imparted on the narrative, thus bringing together the thematic and structural dimensions of the film. At the same time, desire is indissociable from the memories that unrelentingly feed it at each turn of the action.

Millennium Actress's protagonist is the eighty-year-old Chiyoko Fujiwara, a retired actress of high repute. The film chronicles Chiyoko's life history by recourse to intertwined events from her actual experiences and snatches of the countless movies in which she has starred. Chiyoko's memories fluidly unfold, in a stream-of-consciousness fashion, in the course of an interview conducted by Genya Tachibana, a documentary maker who also happens to be one of the *grand dame*'s most loyal admirers, with the assistance of the cameraman Kyoji Ida. The purpose of the interview is to commemorate the studio, now in the process of demolition, to which Chiyoko once contributed her versatile talent. When Tachibana and his associate visit the actress in the secluded mountain lodge where she appears to have spent her thirty-year-long retirement in almost total isolation, and the documentarian presents her with an old key, the door to her memories is literally unlocked. Scenes from both Chiyoko's movies and the real world behind them start welling up and accumulating in a deftly paced crescendo by means of impeccable editing and intercutting.

In this respect, the director's dexterity is most eloquently attested to by the action's

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