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6. ALIENATION AND EMANCIPATION IN *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*

6.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters demonstrated how anime illustrates existing philosophical ideas and inspires the viewer to further understanding. The next two chapters look at how anime philosophizes, that is, how anime makes original contributions to philosophy through expressing innovative of philosophical ideas through thought experiments. This chapter examines the nexus of alienation and emancipation through an analysis of the animated TV series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Anno [1995-1996] 2006). Alienation has been a major intellectual concern among social theorists, political theorists and sociologists. Scholars have investigated how human suffering and self-estrangement emerge among particular individuals in relation to the social structures of modern society. Reflecting on different alienation theories developed in sociology, Yuill (2011, 104) notes that there are two main definitions of the concept in the sociological literature: “the emphasis of the degradation of human species-being under capitalism” as advanced by Marxist-oriented sociologists and “the more eclectic descriptive position” as proposed by Melvin Seeman (1959) and other empirically oriented sociologists. Classical studies by Karl Marx and Marxian scholars focus on the alienated experiences of workers in the workplace in relation to social and economic structures, while later scholars such as Seeman examine experiences of alienation in a wider range of social settings: not only in the workplace but also at home, at school or in other social settings.

In the Marxian understanding of alienation, it is important to understand the social phenomenon of alienation in relation to the broader social and economic structure of capitalism. Thus, for Marxist-oriented scholars, de-alienation or emancipation of alienated workers must involve changing the social structure and creating an alternative social system to capitalism. They do not discuss other types of alienation that are not directly linked to economic production, such as experiences of marginalization related to age, gender, race and ethnicity. For Seeman and other more empirically oriented sociologists, by contrast, alienation in the workplace remains an important research interest even as they have broadened the study of alienation in modern society to other social settings. As their primary focus is the identification of broad patterns in human behavior at both individual and social levels however, they rarely discuss these patterns in relation

to larger socio-economic structures. Although these two approaches have different foci, they have at least one thing in common: they agree that alienation is something negative and a problem for both individuals and society. In other words, alienation is a problem for individuals and their relationship to others and is best avoided.

In the field of utopian and science fiction literature, by contrast, the experience of alienation has a useful diagnostic function; it is a necessary condition for recognition of social problems that may be hidden at various levels in social systems, social norms, social values, common sense and so forth. Utopian and science fiction literature often depicts the alienation of protagonists as a narrative device to touch readers and viewers emotions and give them a different perspective from which to view society – a perspective that may lead them to critically reflect on their naturalised everyday life. *Evangelion* is an interesting case through which to rethink existing understandings of alienation as social malaise and individual trouble. The alienated feelings of the main characters are a central theme throughout the series, and the anime illustrates familiar aspects of alienation discussed by social and political theorists. Yet, at the same time, *Evangelion* also presents an alternative dimension of alienation, discussed by some utopian and science fiction literary scholars but hardly broached by social and political theorists.

Evangelion is widely considered one of the most popular anime in Japan.⁶⁵ Directed by Anno Hideaki, produced by Gainax and Tatsunoko Productions, the original anime ran on Japanese television from 1995 to 1996 for a span of twenty-six episodes, concluding shortly afterwards with two feature films: *Neon Genesis Evangelion: Death and Rebirth* (1997) and *Neon Genesis Evangelion: The End of Evangelion* (1997). Since then, there have been three additional film adaptations of the original, *Evangelion: 1.0 You Are (Not) Alone* (2007) and *Evangelion: 2.0 You Can (Not) Advance* (2009), *Evangelion: 3.0 You Can (Not) Redo* (2012), with one additional release planned to complete the *Rebuild of Evangelion* tetralogy. In addition to the various anime adaptations, *Evangelion* has become a franchise that stretches across various media, including comics, novels and video games.

Evangelion is set in the year 2015, fifteen years after a catastrophic event known as the *Second Impact* has wiped out the majority of the Earth's population. In the present, the remnants of humanity have come under attack from enigmatic alien creatures known as *Angels*, whose goal is to initiate a new apocalypse, or a *Third Impact*. In response, mankind creates the *Evangelions* (or EVAs), biomechanical giants that possess similar abilities to the Angels, and which are piloted by

⁶⁵ *Evangelion* won first place in the Top 100 animations category as a part of a Top 100 of Japan Media Art event in 2006, marking the tenth anniversary of the Japan Media Art Festival organized by Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs (Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs 2006).

fourteen-year-old teenagers with a special affinity for the EVAs known as the *Children*. Under the command of the secret military organization NERV, the Children must combat the Angels.

The protagonist of *Evangelion* is an EVA pilot, Ikari Shinji, who is the son of NERV Commander Ikari Gendō, as well as scientist Ikari Yui who helped to develop the EVAs and died in an accident when Shinji was three. Shinji's fellow pilots, the genetically-engineered First Child Ayanami Rei along with Second Child and bratty genius Sōryū Asuka Langley also play significant roles in the series. They, among many other characters, have experienced deep psychological traumas that overwhelm their lives. Problems of emotional isolation and crises of the self are key themes throughout the series.

This chapter examines the idea of alienation and the possibility of de-alienation or emancipation through an analysis of *Evangelion*. This then leads to the following questions: how is alienation conceptualized in *Evangelion*? How does its role compare to the role it plays in Marxist and critical theory, where it is conceptualized as an experience to be transcended through emancipation? Does overcoming alienation equate to obtaining emancipation? If not, what does emancipation mean for the protagonist?

The chapter first briefly reviews different definitions of alienation discussed in political and social theories as well as the science fiction literature. It then analyzes how the anime *Evangelion* illustrates some aspects of existing ideas of alienation, and Seeman's (1959) meanings of alienation in particular. I will then subject the plot of the anime to a counter-factual thought experiment in order to examine whether different situations would change the underlying logic of alienation. I argue that different situations would have no impact on Shinji's alienated feeling, other than deepening it. The last section of the chapter examines the possibility of de-alienation depicted in the last episode of the anime, that is Shinji's imagination of an alternative world and an alternative self. I argue that Shinji escapes from his alienation through imagining an alternative world, and imagination could be understood as a form of emancipation. In conclusion, I suggest that *Evangelion* both illustrates the philosophical concept of alienation and also performs a thought experiment demonstrating both the possibility and limits of de-alienation and emancipation. I argue that Shinji's imaginative world could be seen as a form of de-alienation or emancipation.

6.2. Alienation in Social, Political and Literary Theory

Alienation is one of the central concepts in modern social and political theory, as well as in sociology and psychology. The term refers to "the condition of separation or estrangement" (D. Miller et al. 1987, 6). When it comes to modern social and political theory, Karl Marx has developed the most influential account of alienation.

For Marx, alienation is central to the critique of modern capitalism. Marx deployed his analysis of alienation in capitalist production in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx [1844] 2000c) and later developed them in more detail in *The Capital* (Marx [1862-1866]1990). As we have seen in Chapter 1, analyzing the situation of wagedworkers in the historical context of modern society, Marx observes that alienation occurs for them in four interrelated senses in capitalist society: workers' alienation from the product of their labor, from the act of production, from their fellow humans, and from their *species-being*.

While Marx developed his idea of alienation from his sociological discussion of the political economy of capitalism, later scholars tried to study alienation in a wider social context. Among them, Max Weber reframed Marx's observation of the wagedworker's alienation in modern society as an omnipresent consequence of the phenomenon of rationalisation as experienced by individuals. Studying the nature of various forms of domination, Weber considered *rational discipline* as the most irresistible among the various types of power that lessen the importance of individual action. "Its quality as the communal action of a mass organization conditions the specific effects of such uniformity...What is decisive for discipline is that the obedience of a plurality of men [*sic*] is rationally uniform" (Weber 1991, 253).

In *Max Weber and Karl Marx* (1993), Löwith studied the relationship between Marx's concept of alienation and Weber's notion of rationalisation in modern society and discusses some affinities between them. Löwith (1993, 95) notes

Marx traced this fundamental and universal self alienation of man [*sic*] in modern, political, social and economic structures – that is in the same 'order' that we encountered in Weber as the inescapable destiny of rationalization – in all its aspects: in its economic, political and directly social forms.

For Weber, wagedworkers' separation from the means of production is merely a part of a universal trend of rationalisation in modern society. "The modern soldier is equally 'separated' from the means of violence; the scientist from the means of enquiry, and the civil servant from the means of administration" (Weber 1991, 50).

Other scholars focus on the more social-psychological aspect of alienation. Among them, American sociologist Melvin Seeman (1959) identifies five alternative meanings as components of alienation, namely *powerlessness*, *meaninglessness*, *normlessness*, *isolation*, and *self-estrangement*.⁶⁶ *Powerlessness* refers to a feeling that one cannot influence the socio-political

⁶⁶ Seeman revised these five categories of alienation in his later work (1972; 1975; 1983) and presented six varieties of alienation by dividing *isolation* in two: *cultural estrangement* and *social isolation*. *Cultural*

events in which one interacts. *Meaninglessness* makes reference to a sense of uncertainty about what one ought to believe. Here, Seeman gives an example of the post-war German situation – what Adorno described as meaningless – wherein the individual in post-war Germany could not choose with confidence any of the alternative explanations of the disasters of the epoch (Seeman 1959, 786). *Normlessness*, derived from Durkheim’s description of *anomie*, alludes to a condition in which socially unapproved means are required to achieve important goals.⁶⁷ *Isolation* is a feeling of estrangement from goals and beliefs that are highly valued in the society. *Self-estrangement* is a feeling that an individual cannot find rewarding activities that engage him or her. Seeman points out that self-estrangement postulates some ideal human condition from which the individual is estranged (Seeman 1959, 790). Seeman’s account opens up further investigations on various forms of alienation found in the relation between humans and technology, and among different social groups in modern societies.

Seeman attempts to make the philosophical concept of alienation operational in the field of sociology and his theory utilizes diverse sources in an eclectic manner – drawing from Marxian traditions including Marx’s notion of alienation, the works of T.W. Adorno and Karl Mannheim, Durkheim’s idea of anomie, Weber’s iron cage, and the work of psychologist Julian Rotter. Although his eclectic conception of alienation has been influential and widely adopted by other sociologists, his theory has been criticized too. For example, Harvey et al. (1983) examine the ways in which Seeman used philosophical and sociological literatures on alienation and formulated his theory from them. According to Harvey et al., Seeman seriously misinterpreted his classical sources, particularly the Marxian theory of alienation and the dialectical method that is its essence, replacing it with a positivist psychological method. In their view, Seeman’s theory of alienation bears little resemblance to the Marxian literature which Seeman utilized in his 1959 article but succeeds merely in “translating ‘fuzzy’ sociological concepts into ‘real’ psychological parameters” and “replacing sociological definitions of alienation with psychological ones” (Harvey et al. 1983, 44). Or in Yuill’s more moderate expression, the methodological difference between the Marxian theorists and Seeman come down to “whether one sought to explore the sociological causes of alienation with reference to certain social and historical structures, or whether one wished to chart the psychological experiences of alienation as played out in the subjectivities of individual workers,” and there is no need to separate these spheres of study (Yuill 2011, 106).

From the aforementioned conceptions of alienation in social and political theory, we can see that alienation has never been a unitary concept. Different social and political theorists such as

estrangement refers to “the individual’s rejection of commonly held values in society (or subsector) vs commitment to the going group standard,” while *social isolation* means “the sense of exclusion or rejection vs social acceptance” (Seeman 1975, 93–94).

⁶⁷ For the discussion about alienation and anomie, see, for example, Lukes (1967).

Marx, Durkheim, Weber and many others have offered different perspectives on alienation. Yet at the same time, these theorists do share some understanding. Yuill nicely summarizes such an orientation in four ways:

(1) [Alienation] refers to some form of situation that should not be; (2) loss of self or relationships with others is experienced; (3) something that is profoundly important to being both a social and a private individual is frustrated and deformed; and (4) the root causes of these maladies is to be found in the individual's relationship with wider social and historical process. (Yuill 2011, 105)

As we can see from this summary, alienation appears to have a negative connotation as if it is something to be overcome: it is a situation of "loss," "should not be," or some kind of "frustration or deformation" in one's social life and these situations are "maladies."

Nevertheless, in another strand, the field of science fiction literature, the idea of alienation or estrangement is rather positive, or at least not that negative. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Literary critic Darko Suvin (1979) notably defines science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement," deriving this concept from German dramatist Bertolt Brecht's concept of the *Verfremdungseffekt* (in English, alienation-effect or estrangement-effect). For Suvin, estrangement is a crucial moment to shake one's perception that things (customs, thought processes, etc.) are always a certain way and that nothing can be done to change them. The effect brings the reader to realize that the setting of the *text* differs from that of *reality*. For Brecht, Suvin and their advocates such as Fredric Jameson, the purpose of alienation effect/cognitive estrangement is essentially political. It aims to reveal that what has been taken to be eternal or natural is merely historical and therefore changeable (Jameson 1998b, 47).

Viewed from this perspective, it is therefore not surprising that many modern utopian and science fiction literary works and films created in the twentieth century contain alienated protagonists. For instance, in *We* ([1920] 2007), the classic dystopian novel by Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin, an astronautic engineer D-503 lives in the totalized future nation One State. D-503 is a rationalized and submissive citizen, but after he falls in love with a girl named I-330 he begins to imagine an alternative world and gradually involves himself in rebel activities against the state. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* ([1932] 2007), Bernard Marx lives into a future state where a strict caste system operates under a highly advanced system of eugenics. Having been born in the highest caste Alfa but having the appearance of the lowest caste Gamma, Bernard's position in between the two extremes results in his sense of estrangement. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell [1949] 2000) depicts a future nation under high surveillance, controlled by the Party and its leader, *Big Brother*. Civil servant Winston Smith often daydreams and begins to keep a

secret diary where he writes down his doubts concerning the Party. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* ([1974] 2003), set on two different planets, Anarres and Urras, is centered on scientist Shevek's alienated experience on both planets. In the Wachowski brother's *Matrix* film trilogy (1999; 2003a; 2003b), protagonist Neo/Thomas Anderson's alienated experience from his everyday social experience as a hacker is a starting point from which he feels the otherworldly cognitive sense of other realities. All of the protagonists in these works are ordinary alienated future citizens, and their experiences prompt us to think about our realities differently.

In summary, the idea of alienation is one of the central themes in both the fields of social and political theory as well as in utopian and science fiction literature. Alienation has a negative connotation in social and political theory and it has been described as a situation to overcome. By contrast, in science fiction literature, alienation is not always negative in the narrative but rather an important situation to generate an alternative perspective or trigger social change. The following sections analyze *Evangelion* and explore the notion of alienation and emancipation.

6.3. Alienation in *Evangelion*

Alienation is one of the central themes throughout *Evangelion*. This section examines the ways in which *Evangelion* illustrates Seeman's (1959) five meanings of alienation (i.e. *powerlessness*, *meaninglessness*, *normlessness*, *isolation*, *self-estrangement*) and also shows how the anime reveals the limitation of Seeman's understanding of alienation. In order to do so, I focus on the alienation of the protagonist Ikari Shinji, as well as the separation experienced by all of the main characters.

Who or what exactly is Shinji separated from? What are the outcomes of this condition of separation? As one episode title suggests, Shinji suffers from "Hedgehog's Dilemma," or a fear of getting too close to others for fear of being hurt. Shinji is separated from his family (his father in particular, whom Shinji believes to have abandoned him), his friends and the social world, and has difficulty interacting with others to form interpersonal relationships. In addition, Shinji suffers from low self-esteem and has difficulty constructing his self-identity, which also acts as another main theme of the series.⁶⁸ Knowing the nature of Shinji's separation, we must ask if Shinji can overcome the condition of alienation.

One part of Shinji's sense of estrangement stems from his low self-esteem, relating to his feeling of *powerlessness*, the first aspect of Seeman's alienation. In *Evangelion*, Shinji constantly feels that he cannot build social relationships with others or influence his social situation, and for

⁶⁸ For a discussion on the issues on human identity and reality in *Evangelion* and the anime *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998), see Napier (2007).

Shinji, one of the ways to overcome his 'powerlessness' is to pilot his EVA and to combat the Angels. This choice is not voluntary, however. His personality is introverted and passive, and he prefers on some level to let others make the decisions for him, especially if he can find a small degree of happiness in doing so. Just following his father, NERV Commander Ikari Gendō's order, Shinji joins NERV to be a pilot of EVA. He often feels that he is a coward and keeps saying "I mustn't run away."

Commitment to this socially high-valued goal (i.e. fighting the Angels) is therefore crucial for Shinji to feel valued and to gain power. Yet Shinji's attempt does not fully succeed in overcoming his sense of powerlessness. Although he appears to play a crucial role as an EVA pilot in the battles against the Angels, he is, at the same time, merely a constituent part of the greater institution that is NERV and thus under its control. He must obey NERV's command and if he does not follow it, NERV takes over control of his EVA. For instance, in episode eighteen, when Shinji refuses Gendo's command, the commander activates the auto-pilot system and Shinji cannot do anything on his EVA. In other words, Shinji is separated from the means of violence and is powerless, which is similar to the alienated situation of modern soldiers in Weber's sense. Weber extended Marx's notion of powerlessness experienced by wageworkers to people in modern society (e.g. soldiers, scientists, civil servants etc.) and considered alienation as a universal trend in modernity (Gerth and Mills in Weber 1991, 50).

The clear social goal of *resistance against the Angels* may help to ease the second aspect, *meaninglessness*, a sense of uncertainty about what one ought to believe. At a glance, Shinji's mission appears straightforward. The presence of the Other (Angels) is crucial to constructing the Self (humans/EVAs) and to legitimise 'resistance against the Angels' as a social goal. Yet, in terms of the other aspects of alienation (normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement), this belief creates more problems than solutions for Shinji.

Indeed, the later parts of *Evangelion* (from episode thirteen to twenty-four) begin to question the binary distinction between humans/EVAs and Angels-as-aliens, as well as the legitimacy of humanity's resistance against them. For instance, an Angel in the form of a computer virus hacks into the NERV network and infiltrates its supercomputers (episode thirteen); an Angel infects EVA-03 and transforms it into another Angel (episode eighteen); Shinji's EVA-01 eats an Angel and absorbs its energy (episode nineteen). Once the borders between the humans and the Angels, between the EVAs and the Angels, or between the Self and the Other become obscured, the fight against the Angels is no longer a clear-cut goal since to specify the enemy itself is a problem.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Science fiction literary critic Kotani Mari (1997, 32–40) discusses the issue of the Other with relation to the transformation of Angels. Borrowing the concept of *abjection* developed by feminist theorist Julia Kristeva, Kotani explains that the transformation of Angels results in Shinji's increasing terror and devastated

The transformation of the Angels results in Shinji experiencing the third aspect of alienation, *normlessness*. That is, Shinji must use illegitimate means to defeat the Angels. In episode eighteen, the rogue, Angel-infected EVA-03 defeats Rei's EVA-00 and Asuka's EVA-02, leaving Shinji and his EVA-01 as the only force left to defend humanity. Shinji's father Gendō orders Shinji to destroy the Angel/EVA-03, which Shinji refuses, unwilling to kill the human being trapped inside. In response, Gendō activates EVA-01's autopilot system, the *Dummy Plug*, which mercilessly attacks and destroys the Angel/EVA, severely injuring the pilot in the process. Throughout the battle, Shinji feels a strong sense of *normlessness* since he would have to use illegitimate means (i.e. sacrificing the life of his peer) to achieve the collective goal of defeating the Angels. After this battle, he is far more devastated, especially when he realizes that the "nameless" human being is his classmate Suzuhara Tōji, one of the few people he had managed to befriend.

The fourth aspect of alienation, *isolation*, is also found in the contradictory binary between humans (the Self) and Angels (the Other). Here, Shinji feels a sense of estrangement from the collective goal of society (vanquishing the Angels). In episode twenty-four, Shinji meets a new EVA pilot, Nagisa Kaworu. Over the course of the episode, the two become friends, establishing a relationship closer than any Shinji had previously experienced. Later, when it is revealed that Kaworu is in fact an Angel in human form and Shinji must fight him, he faces the dilemma of whether or not to kill Kaworu. Here, his inner struggle is represented with a static image of Shinji's EVA-01 holding Kaworu in its massive hand, accompanied by a grand Beethoven symphony (Figure 20). Altogether, the scene lasts approximately sixty seconds and, along with the music, leads the viewers to anticipate Shinji's hesitation over crushing the life out of the human/Angel. In the end, Shinji follows through and kills Kaworu, repeating the situation with Tōji in a more intense fashion, and is devastated once again by the loss. For Shinji, whose experiences have led to the Other being comprised of not just the Angels but also fellow human beings, the fact that Kaworu is both has a complex effect on him. Shinji follows the social goal of defeating the Angel Kaworu, but rather than easing his "isolation" the act deepens it further.

psychological condition. Abjection refers to the psychic origins and mechanism of disgust "when the subject experiences a frightening loss of distinction between themselves and objects/others" (Tyler 2009, 79). In Kotani's account, Shinji is increasingly terrified by Angels because he cannot draw clear boundaries between EVA (the Self) and Angels (the Other) to maintain a stable sense of self anymore. Kotani further argues that the more one pursues the inquiry of the Self, the more one must step into the terrain of the Other within, resulting in the obfuscation of the boundaries between the Self and the Other (e.g. between Angels and EVAs, between humans and aliens).



Figure 20 Shinji's inner struggle: to kill or not to kill Kaworu. Screen capture from Episode 24, *Evangelion* television animation series.



Figure 19 Imaginary dialogues in a train carriage during sunset represent Shinji's internal argument. Screen capture from Episode 19, *Evangelion* television animation series.

The scene with Kaworu is not the only instance where visual technique plays a major role in conveying a sense of fear and loneliness. Frequently, the anime represents Shinji's inner struggle through the utilization of abstract or visually ambiguous spaces. One prominent recurring example involves imaginary dialogues held in an empty train carriage, either between Shinji and other main characters or between Shinji and a younger version of himself. Here, the combination of the perpetual sunset with its symbolic orange color motif and the sounds of the train and railway crossing in the background signify an unreal situation. The dialogues — internal arguments in which he repeatedly asks himself the same questions — depict Shinji's self-condemnation.

Consider the final aspect of Seeman's alienation, *self-estrangement*. Seeman (1959, 789–790) characterizes it as a feeling that an individual cannot find rewarding activities which engage him or her. According to Seeman, self-estrangement is different from the other four meanings (powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation) since the four meanings often overlap and it is difficult to specify what exactly the subject is alienated from. Seeman explains that self-estrangement is distinctive in that it postulates some ideal human condition from which the individual is estranged, an account partly based on Marx's account of modern alienated labor as a loss of species-being. To be self-alienated means a loss of intrinsically meaningful activity and to become less than what one might ideally be. Some ideal human condition, the discrepancy between ideal self-image and actual self-image, is a constant issue for Shinji and the other main characters throughout *Evangelion*.

The last two episodes (twenty-five and twenty-six) deal with Shinji and the other main characters' reasons for existence and their self-rewarding activity in a very complex manner, making use of the aforementioned techniques of abstraction and ambiguity to a greater degree than

any episodes prior to them. The final episode portrays a surprising shift to an alternative universe, a world in which Shinji is not an EVA pilot. This setting is perhaps an ideal world where he, as his ideal self, can interact with others without a sense of alienation. This ideal world eschews the portrayal of Shinji's internal struggle through various visual and acoustic techniques used earlier (e.g. static images with voiceover, abstract images, imaginary dialogues held in a train carriage) in favor of an environment without those inner conflicts.

In relation to the second feature, the appeal to nature, the endless psychic struggles for identity, self-fulfilment and self-identification among the main characters is one of the aspects of *Evangelion* most frequently explored by scholars.⁷⁰ As discussed above, piloting the EVA is crucial for Shinji to overcome his sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness. This also acts to correct his sense of self-estrangement and to fulfil his reason for existence. Episodes twenty-five and twenty-six use continuous montages of black and white images, the contents of which range from the EVA to actual photographs of piles of garbage. During these scenes, Shinji, Asuka, and Rei, portrayed solely through their voices, repeatedly ask themselves about their reasons for existing. Shinji in particular says, "No, I am worthless. I have nothing to be proud of... By piloting the EVA, I can be me...I had nothing before I started piloting the EVA" (00:05:36-00:05:52, Episode 26). He continues, "I'm allowed to be here, because I pilot the EVA...I have nothing, nothing at all" (00:05:53-00:06:505, Episode 26). This static scene leads viewers to focus on Shinji's (as well as Asuka's and Rei's) motives for piloting the EVA. For Shinji, being an EVA pilot is crucial to defining himself, and is also a way to approach his ideal self.

Episode twenty-six in particular extensively employs static abstract images and montage in combination with voiceovers to represent Shinji's fluid reality and his crisis in self-identification. Here, Shinji's existential crisis is presented in one symbolic scene in which Shinji's face is filled with the faces of other characters.⁷¹

⁷⁰ For example, as Napier (2007, 110) notes, "What makes *Evangelion* truly groundbreaking are the characters' psychic struggle." Also see Routt (2000) and Lamarre (2009).

⁷¹ Lamarre (2009) discusses this scene in relation to Shinji's existential crisis and a technical crisis of animation. "The animation reminds us that this crisis is not just about a subjective point of view. Rather the animation gives us an exploded view of the psyche." (ibid., 183)



Figure 21 Shinji's existential crisis. Screen capture from Episode 26, *Evangelion* television animation series.

The techniques of limited animation combine with the use of voiceover work effectively in representing the sense of self-estrangement. Indeed, some scholars see *Evangelion* as a prominent example of the expressive potentials of still images in animation. Routt (2000, 41) notes that “The series continually uses stills of Shinji and his surroundings to direct attention to his state of mind and to his memories, constantly reminding viewers that what is going on inside his head warrants our attention – and in this way predicting its own psychological denouement.” Lamarre (2009, 183) argues that “the techniques of limited animation,” such as the usage of still images, which is central in Anno’s work, “function as something other than cheap or hasty approximations of full animation.”

Evangelion implies that alienation is not merely a condition to be overcome but also a momentum to generate an opportunity for alternatives to the current world; in other words, to bring forth alienation-effect/cognitive estrangement. For example, Shinji’s alienation, and in particular his feeling of normlessness and isolation, reveals contradictory elements of the binary distinction between the Self and the Other and the highly-valued social goal of resisting the Angels. This situation also gives him an opportunity to reconsider whether the collective goal or belief, and the ideas behind it, are legitimate or not. The border between humans (the Self) and Angels-as-aliens (the Other) and the clear social goal of defeating the Angels, both of which Shinji assumes to be natural, are actually historical constructs and therefore subject to change. His alienated experience may bring some change to his perception to the current situation. Indeed, in this respect, Shinji’s alienation has a political function as utopian and science fiction literature suggest. The anime presents Shinji’s inner struggle through its narrative and the use of various audio-visual techniques. Yet, the story remains conventional and the change does not happen at all. While Shinji has a number of dilemmas and struggles to meet the collective goal, in the end, he still conforms to the social goal.

In summary, by analyzing *Evangelion* in terms of Seeman’s five aspects of alienation, Shinji tries to overcome his alienation by participating in the collective human resistance against the alien Angels, yet his attempt reveals contradictory elements of alienation. His attempt seems to ease his sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement, but at the same time also deepens other aspects of alienation, namely normlessness and isolation. By piloting the EVA, Shinji becomes a part of a highly valued social goal in the form of resistance while also working to ease

his sense of estrangement. Yet, this attempt is problematic for his trajectory of self-identification and pursuit of individuality. Furthermore, the human resistance against the Angels highlights other issues of defining the Self, self-identification and subjectivity. Shinji's normlessness and isolation reveal that the aliens that the humans fight against are not aliens as such.

The *Evangelion* anime also portrays Shinji's alienation and his inner struggles through the effective use of images and sounds. Among these techniques are the use of still images in the form of montage and abstract visuals, which act as very powerful expressions of Shinji's sense of alienation. The repetitively inserted scenes of imaginary/unreal moments with vivid color also depict Shinji's psychic struggle and his loneliness.

6.4. Thought Experiment: Examining the Potential for De-Alienation

So far, I have discussed the concept of alienation and the possibilities for overcoming it in this anime. This section considers the possibility for Shinji's de-alienation and emancipation. I will subject the plot of the anime to a counter-factual thought experiment in order to examine whether a different situation would change the underlying logic of alienation. Considering alternative scenarios for the anime *Evangelion*, I discuss questions such as: could Shinji escape from his alienation? If yes, what sort of de-alienation would he achieve? If not, what is emancipation for Shinji?

If we suppose that Shinji can escape from his sense of alienation through piloting the EVA, then overcoming alienation is equal to emancipation. Recall the earlier discussion of the five aspects of alienation. If he does not have these alienated feelings (i.e. powerlessness, meaningless, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement), Shinji should be free from his sense of alienation. Let us imagine an alternative scenario with a more determined Shinji. Think about his decision to pilot the EVA again and suppose this mission is a top priority and unquestionable. To pilot the EVA is equal to conforming to the highly valued social goal of 'fighting the Angels.' Shinji can identify himself as the Self through the practice of fighting against the Angels, or in other words, that of defining the Others. Here, the presence of warfare and the enemy functions as a dividing practice to group humans separately from the Angels. For Shinji, joining the war has a double function: to participate in construction of the collective identity as humans, and at the same time, to secure his own existence. This practice closely relates to the nature of the political. As Carl Schmitt (2007, 26) suggests, just as we distinguish between good and evil in the realm of morality, between beautiful and ugly in aesthetics or between profitable and unprofitable in economics, making a distinction between friend and enemy is the basis of the political. In Schmitt's words, the enemy is

[The] other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible. These can neither be decided by a previously determined general norm nor by the judgment of a disinterested and therefore neutral third party. (Schmitt 2007, 27)

Political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss (2002, 8–9) draws on Schmitt's to suggest that "*defining the enemy is the act that brings the collective into being*" (emphasis in the original). The existence of the Other is therefore a necessary condition for that of the Self.

In the current case, the war against the Angels is the act that brings the collective humans into being in a similar manner. This collective action also affects Shinji's psychological status. Shinji's decision to join the battle and pilot the EVA would give him an opportunity to join the collective, which makes him gain power and feel valued. Through these practices, his feeling of powerlessness would be corrected. Shinji's practices would also render for him a clear social goal, and therefore his sense of meaninglessness will be resolved. If he strongly believes in the collective goal of 'resistance against the Angels' and regards it as a top priority, then he would feel no distress over sacrificing the life of his peer, because the sacrifice is still worthwhile, a preferred consequence over saving his peer without killing the enemy Angel. In this situation, he is no longer normless. Any action to achieve a priority goal will be accepted by others in society. If he were to truly commit to the collective goal and make a clear binary distinction between humans and aliens, then Shinji would not need to hesitate over killing Kaworu or any other transfigured Angels since they are just alien invaders after all. He would not feel a sense of isolation when he kills Kaworu anymore. Lastly, if he were to regard his mission of piloting the EVA as an engaging and rewarding activity, he would not feel self-estrangement at all. We might therefore ask, would Shinji be emancipated from his alienation in this alternative scenario?

I would say no, because it seems that his strong commitment to the war against Angels is not much more than consent to a dominant discourse of 'the fight against the Angels/enemy is just' or 'Angels is the Other' for the sake of securing or constructing the collective human identity as the Self. Piloting the EVA became a form of consent to social hegemony. Indeed, an epistemological shift in the later part of the anime shows the contradictory nature of defining the Self, and of Shinji's and other characters' horror. Over the course of the story, the more they encounter various forms of the Angels, the more they feel that the Self (i.e. humans, EVAs) is becoming alien, or that the Other (the Angels) is not so alien after all. The boundary between the Self and the Other (i.e. between humans or EVAs and Angels) or between friend and enemy becomes blurred, resulting in Shinji's psychic conflict. We are no longer convinced of the fixed border between the Self and the Other, which was the very premise of the collective goal of 'fighting against Angels.'

Apart from my earlier discussion of episodes eighteen and twenty-four, which deal with the Angels in various advanced forms, episode sixteen provides another example that shows the unsettled border between the EVA and the Angels. In this episode, Shinji's EVA-01 is absorbed into a bizarre Angel which possesses a gigantic sphere as a shadow, and is trapped within it. While NERV immediately launches the EVA-01 salvage mission, the exact nature of the Angel remains a mystery to them. As EVA-01's life support system runs out, Shinji falls unconscious and experiences hallucinations of his mother. Suddenly, the trapped EVA-01 violently tears the Angel apart and emerges from within it. The EVA becomes savage in a way that no one has seen before. Witnesses and anime viewers are no longer sure if this monster is EVA, the Angel or something else.



Figure 22 Savage EVA-01 emerges from the Angel with sphere. Screen capture from Episode 16, *Evangelion* television animation series.

Visually, close ups and extreme close ups are extensively used to present EVA-01. The destructive scene consists of many different shots with close ups and extreme close ups and gives viewers a sense of tension while also presenting the on-lookers' fear.⁷² Massive amounts of blood spurt from the sphere, and EVA-01 emerges from it. Shots of frightened witnesses, EVA pilots Asuka, Rei, head scientist Ritsuko, Captain Misato and others in NERV, are inserted between the shots of the Angel and EVA-01. Semiotically, the symbolic red color motif is significant and it makes viewers associate the scene with something bloody or savage. Notice that the body of the emergent EVA-01 is not its usual purple and yellow but is stained entirely red. Acoustically, the combination of ferocious roaring, sounds of breaking and tearing, sounds of liquid rushing forth and symphonic music dominate the scene and present a massive scale of destruction. The monstrous roar is particularly significant since the sound implies, for the first time in the series, that EVA-01 is an

⁷² For example, Monaco (2009) discusses how montage or editing can be a powerful tool to create a sense of reality and present psychological complexity by using Hitchcock's famous shower murder sequence in *Psycho* (1960). Hitchcock fuses psychological tension into seventy separate shots in less than a minute of the scene's time span (Monaco 2009, 194–197).

organic being as opposed to a machine.⁷³ Images and sounds depict the monstrous EVA-01 and main characters' fear over the unforeseen runaway of EVA-01. Witnessing the transformation of EVA, the exact nature of the EVA becomes uncertain.

It seems that no strategy so far works to overcome Shinji's alienation. We have seen that fighting against the Angels by piloting the EVA does not ease Shinji's sense of alienation but rather deepens it due to the fundamental problem of defining the Other. Shinji and other characters find that the Angels are not so alien after all. Moreover, the fact that the EVAs are replications of the first Angel using the most advanced science and technology implies the EVAs' otherness and their existence as something more than weapons. Now I will return to the original question: what is emancipation or de-alienation for Shinji, if he cannot overcome his alienation by piloting the EVA? How does the anime philosophize? How does the anime bring an innovative aspect of the idea of emancipation? The last part of the final episode provides a possible form of emancipation as Shinji's imagination. The anime responds to these questions by showing that Shinji's de-alienation is achieved through his imagination. That is, *imagination is emancipation*. The first half of this section presents a philosophical inquiry of the Self, the Other and freedom. Shinji and other characters ask interrelated epistemological questions. Abstract images and simple written texts are accompanied with Shinji's voiceover monologue, or dialogues between Shinji and a younger version of himself, or between Shinji and other characters. The following example illustrates the question of what is freedom.



Figure 23 Simple and abstract images with texts depict Shinji's inquiry of freedom. Screen capture from Episode 26, *Evangelion* television animation series.

Visually, this imaginary dialogue scene consists of very simple images with minimum colors, similar in style to earlier episodes. Some images appear to be pen drawings and others are painted in watercolors. The large blank spaces may indicate a sense of freedom, nothingness, or insecurity.

⁷³ Another significant example of EVA's organic features appears in episode nineteen. During the battle between EVA-01 and the Angel, EVA-01 eats the Angel's corpse and absorbs its energy. Again, witnesses are terrified by the brutal spectacle.

Along with these simple abstract images, written texts such as “That is freedom,” “Why?” and “My image of me?” are inserted in-between and accompany the philosophical inquiry. Acoustically, calming classical music in the background leads viewers to focus on the voiceover dialogues among Shinji, a younger Shinji, and the main characters. Over the course of these dialogues, Shinji realizes that he shapes himself by seeing others and recognizing differences between himself and others. If others do not exist, then he himself does not exist. He says, “Right, I’m me. But it’s also certain that the other people shape my mind as well!” (00:14:20-00:14:27, Episode 26). This eureka moment brings him to an alternative universe in the second half in full color. In this alternative world, another scenario is possible. When Shinji wakes up in the morning, he is neither alienated nor an EVA pilot anymore. If we understand this world as his imagination, and that it reflects Shinji’s unalienated self, we can see that imagination becomes a way for Shinji to emancipate himself from his sense of alienation. This alternative universe can be seen as his ideal world that reflects on his ideal self in relation to my earlier discussions about self-estrangement. This universe may reflect Shinji’s imagined ideal self in his imaginary world.

Perhaps, as long as he has this imagination, Shinji can live with his alienated situation in the world where he is an EVA pilot. Interestingly, viewers later find Shinji holding a play script in his hand and saying “I get it, this is also a possible world. One possibility that’s in me. The me right now is not exactly who I am. All sorts of ‘me’s are possible. That’s right. A me that’s not an EVA pilot is possible too” (00:18:50-00:19:03, Episode 26). This suggests that Shinji in one world is merely one of many possibilities. This scene follows the surprising ending, in which Shinji, surrounded by his family, friends and colleagues, announces “I am me, I want to be myself. I want to continue living the world.” At that moment, everyone claps and congratulates him. Shinji thanks everyone and the story ends with the final words, “Congratulations to the children” (00:20:55-00:21:45, Episode 26). The happy ending of the TV anime series is one ending, but as the series clearly suggests, “it is only one of many possible endings” (Napier 2007, 115).

6.5. Conclusion: Imagination as Emancipation

This chapter began by analyzing how the science fiction anime *Neon Genesis Evangelion* illustrates some familiar aspects of alienation discussed by social and political theorists, before proceeding to argue that *Evangelion* can offer an innovative understanding of the concept of alienation through a counter-factual thought experiment discussing the possibility and limits of protagonist Shinji’s de-alienation.

In the analysis, I first explored how anime similarly depicts five meanings as suggested by sociologist Melvin Seeman (i.e. powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, self-

estrangement) and discussed the possibility of Shinji's escape from his alienated feeling. Over the course of the story, Shinji tries to overcome his alienation by participating in warfare against the Angels, thereby conforming to accepted social norms. Yet, the analysis suggested that Shinji's strategy does not relieve his alienation, but rather only succeeds in deepening it. I argued that Shinji's strategy of conforming to the socially highly-valued goal of fighting against the Angels does not lead Shinji to escape from his alienation and instead merely causes another form of domination (or assimilation) to the prevailing discourse of *aliens as the Other*. Participating in the warfare against the Angels appears to ease protagonist Shinji's alienation, yet he cannot escape from it, because the more he conforms to the battles against the Angels to gain self-esteem, the more he encounters the contradictions involved in treating the Angels as enemies. The transformation of the Angels in the later episodes challenges the binary distinction of the Self and the Other and exacerbates the psychological struggles and fears of Shinji and the main characters. The analysis showed how the anime effectively depicts various aspects of Shinji's alienation and his inner struggles.

In the final section, I examined an innovative aspect of alienation depicted in the anime through a counter-factual thought experiment. I explored another possibility for Shinji's de-alienation by focusing on an alternative universe depicted in the final episode. I suggested that Shinji's imagination became a form of emancipation for him. This imaginary world eschews the portrayal of Shinji's overwhelming psychic struggles earlier. I argued that this alternative universe, which is Shinji's imaginary world, has the potential to free Shinji from his alienated situation. In other words, imagination could be an emancipatory capacity that enables Shinji to escape from alienation.