Emancipation in postmodernity : political thought in Japanese science fiction animation

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SUMMARY

Animation has long been overlooked as source for political thought. The aim of this thesis is to rectify this, and it will do so in two ways. First, it makes a theoretical and empirical case for animation as an intellectual source of political thought that should be used along with philosophical canon. Second, it sheds light on the political significance and expressive potentials of nonconventional sources for political theorists. The thesis explores the philosophical idea of emancipation, and expands the traditional corpus by drawing on Japanese science fiction animation (SF anime), a source that does not normally enter these philosophical debates. SF anime is an unconventional expression of political thought. It is medial rather than textual. Although philosophers have recently recognized the importance of visual media, film in particular, as an additional source for philosophical inquiries, the academic field of political thought remains predominantly textual. In addition, it is geo-cultural. Political thought has long been grounded in strong European traditions, including utopian and SF literature as extended fields of political expression. However, alternative political visions from non-European countries such as the science fiction from Japan have been little explored. Recognizing the scarcity of academic research on political expression in anime, this thesis proposes new ways of understanding the concept of emancipation. It argues that SF anime is a useful site for political theorists to interrogate pressing philosophical ideas, and it can engage with ongoing philosophical discussions through illustrations and thought experiments.

The thesis is organized as follows. The first three chapters establish a theoretical and methodological basis of the thesis. Chapter 1 maps out the landscape of emancipation as a field of knowledge in the existing field of political theory, and argues that the field is predominantly European and textual. Chapter 2 looks at the works of Antonio Gramsci and Tosaka Jun. Discussing the role of intellectuals, the concept of everydayness, and the nexus between theory and practice, this chapter offers a theoretical basis of seeing anime – an everyday cultural practice in Japan and elsewhere – as an important site of philosophical inquiry. Chapter 3 considers the methods and approaches appropriate to analyzing anime as a mode of political thought. The following four chapters are case studies showing how the selected SF anime works become philosophical exercises in considering aspects of emancipation in two ways: *illustration* and *innovation*. That is, anime illustrates existing ideas and/or creates original philosophical arguments through thought experiments. Each chapter sets out the textual field and then demonstrates how SF anime can contribute to and forward our understanding of a particular aspect of emancipation and related concepts through visual narrative. Chapter 4 examines how the feature film *Time of Eve* illustrates Fredric Jameson's concept of *utopian enclave* and the possibility of an alternative world as a site for resistance. Chapter 5 analyzes how the

TV series *Psycho-Pass* illustrates the ways in which Michel Foucault's notion of power operates to secure people's wellbeing in the technologically enhanced surveillance society. It argues that the relation between emancipation and domination is dialectical. Chapter 6 analyzes Melvin Seeman's theory of alienation and its relation to emancipation in the TV series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Discussing the potentials and obstacles to the de-alienation and emancipation of the protagonist through a thought experiment, it suggests that imagination is emancipation. Chapter 7 shows how the feature film *Appleseed* performs a thought experiment that challenges the philosophical argument put forward by philosopher Nicholas Ager. It examines the idea of hybridity and its emancipatory potential.