Metamorphoses of Bodies and Desire:

Making queer heterotopias in contemporary Japanese cinemas

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses ‘queer’ and ‘heterotopic’ within the context of contemporary Japanese cinemas. So far, queer studies have proved how ‘queer’ is in itself peculiar and hard to pin down through a universal definition. Studying ‘queer’ thus requires multiple lenses and interdisciplinary approaches. This study argues that ‘queer’ is more than a theme confined to sex or sexuality, but also a methodology applicable to film studies and culture studies in general. It suggests that when used to denote sexuality, ‘queer’ has become a norm and a social convention through the continuous historical reconstructions of it in relation to the changing socio-cultural context. Thus, by coupling ‘queer’ and ‘heterotopic’, this thesis talks about ‘queer’ but at the same time deconstructs it so as to break free the confinements that have been enforced upon queer studies. It further argues that ‘heterotopic’ indicates a state of fluidity and non-hierarchical openness. Therefore, by using ‘queer’ as a method to deconstruct and bring together these two paradigms in film analysis, it is possible to produce a powerful deconstructive effect and refresh our understanding on conventional concepts such as family, love, and intimacy.

Instead of analysing human interactions following orthodox patterns based on institutions like lawful marriage and registered family, this study reconfigures interpersonal connectivity and proposes a heterotopic mode of love, intimacy and family that rejects hierarchy and any normalised framework. It argues that through this mentality, film studies can transcend the boundary posed by heteronormativity and eventually release visual art from its confinements.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"I cannot make you understand. I cannot make anyone understand what is happening inside me. I cannot even explain it to myself."

——Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*

Fujoshi (腐女子) is a recently-coined Japanese term. For many young women, myself included, being a fujoshi is the first step towards learning about gender minorities in contemporary Japan.

Fujoshi refers to female fans of the *Yaoi* genre, denoting how a woman who enjoys fictional gay content is 'rotten'(腐). Many fujoshi are fans of BL (*Boys Love*) manga, and some also participate by producing BL-related work themselves. *Yaoi* is a genre of fictional media originating in Japan that features homoerotic relationships between male characters. Typically it is created and consumed by women.[1] The emergence of BL manga in the 1970s and its boom since the 1990s have been studied by scholars within and beyond domestic Japan as an entry into learning LGBTQ and female subjectivity in contemporary Japan.[2] While this term originally had a negative implication, lately fujoshi is experiencing increasing public exposure and more positive comment. In March 2020, a manga-adapted film: *Wotakoi: Love Is Hard for Otaku* was released, starring Takahata Mitsuki, Yamazaki

[1] For more examples of *yaoi*, see James Welker, "Flower Tribes and Female Desire: Complicating Early Female Consumption of Male Homosexuality in Shōjo Manga." *Mechademia* 6, no. 1 (2011): 211–28.
[2] Scholars on BL culture include Patrick W. Galbraith, "Fujoshi: Fantasy Play and Transgressive Intimacy among "Rotten Girls" in Contemporary Japan." *Signs 37*, no. 1 (2011): 219–40; Akiko Mizoguchi, *BL shinka-ron bōizurabu ga shakai o ugokasu* (in Japanese), 2015; Shigeyuki Yamaoka, *Fujoshi no shinri-gaku 2 kanojotachi no jendā ishiki to feminizumu* (in Japanese), 2019; Mark J. McLelland and Tomoko Aoyama, *Boys Love Manga and beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan.* Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2015; Kazumi Nagaike, *Fantasies of Cross-dressing: Japanese Women Write Male–male Erotica*, Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2012 and A. Mizoguchi, *Reading and living Yaoi: Male–male fantasy narratives as women's sexual subculture in Japan* (thesis), 2008.

Kento and Nanao, some of the most popular actors and actresses in Japan. It is a love comedy of an *otaku* guy and a fujoshi woman. Predating the film was an animated version of *Wotakoi*. In 2019, a TV series featuring fujoshi and a gay high-school boy, *Fujoshi Who Falls for Gay* (2019) won the 16th Confidence Award Drama Prize. Fujoshi and BL sub-culture, once underground, is now coming under the spotlight.



Image 1. Poster for *Wotakoi: Love Is Hard for Otaku*

As well as fujoshi, the object of their fantasies – gay eroticism – is also appearing more frequently on cinema screens. In 2019, one of the most commercially successful gay films was *Ossan's Love: Love or Dead.* Originally a special TV episode, *Ossan's Love* triggered heated discussion on social media in Japan and China once aired, and was later adapted into a TV series. The unexpected commercial success of *Ossan's Love* led to a sharp rise in the popularity of the leading actors Tanaka Kei and Hayashi Kento. The TV series' second season came out in December 2019. In February 2020, at least six films dealing with same-sex eroticism were released.[2] Five of them tell the story of gay men, some adapted from

[2] These films are *Ronito to esuti: Kanojotachi no sentaku* (*彼女たちの選択*), *Baibai, vuanpu!* (*バイバイ、ヴァンプ！*), *Eiri* (*影裏*); *Sei no gekiyaku* (*性の劇薬*) , *Saezuru tori wa habatakanai* (*囀る鳥は羽ばたかない The clouds gather*), and *Sekaiichi hatsukoi: puropōzu-hen* (*世界一初恋: プロポーズ編*).

popular BL manga, while *Eiri* was based upon an Akutagawa Prize-winning novel. Earlier in January, another LGBTQ movie, *His,* hit the market, telling the love story of two men with a discussion on non-conventional family. It has also been reported that another BL-manga adaptation film, *The Cornered Mouse Dreams of Cheese*[3] will be released in June 2020,



Image 2. Poster for *The Cornered Mouse Dreams of Cheese*

starring Narita Ryō and Okura Tadayoshi, members of the popular Johnny's Idol group *Kanjani Eight* (*関ジャニ∞*). It is evident that film producers intend LGBTQ films to depart from independent cinemas and reach out to a broader audience by choosing popular and influential directors and actors.

Shifting our attention to the smaller screen, transgender TV talents have been appearing regularly in Japanese television programmes for decades, taking for instance the beloved Matsuko Deluxe, who ranked as the number one influential TV talent for the years

[3] The original Japanese title is *窮鼠はチーズの夢を見る*. This manga-adapted film has triggered heated discussion on SNS because previously, pure BL-genre films normally starred less famous actors, yet for *Kyūso,* both main characters are popular young talents and the director Isao Yukisada has a reputation for making romantic films such as *Crying Out Love in the Center of the World* (2004).

2016, 2017 and 2018.[4] Beyond the domestic market, the world-famous American TV show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* launched in Japan in late 2019. Although heavily criticised by the Japanese audience for narrating Japan and queer people in a stereotyped way,[5] its launch showed how much attention queer culture is gaining, indicating a prosperous queer market. Apart from the heat on screen, unconventional gender expressions have also become a fashion trend among young people. Genderless models, for instance, are imitated by Japanese youth on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and Twitter.[6] It would seem that 'queerness' has invaded every single aspect of pop-culture and the prospect of it is nothing but promising. Japan, some might conclude, is a utopia for non-normative sexualities.

However, with more knowledge of Japan one would be aware that it is not rare in the country for the surface of something to not reflect what lies beneath the water. This is unfortunately the case for Japanese LGBTQ issues: beneath the idyllic surface, reality strikes with its sharp claws. The disappointing reality can be seen from the fact that among the G7 countries, Japan is the only one not to permit same-sex marriage. Individuals of non-normative sexualities suffer prejudice from their classmates, colleagues, even their families, and only very recently has this aroused public concern. This 'gap' catches my curiosity. As a fan of contemporary Japanese cinemas, I wonder how film narratives process this mismatch. If the function of a cultural product is to visualise the intangible conflicts of society through artistic approaches, then what role does the visual space of LGBTQ films play in familiarising the audience with the term 'queer'?

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[4] The data is based on the Japanese research company ARCHITECT's annual 'talent power ranking'. For more on the base and influence of the ranking, see the company's website https://www.architect.co.jp/our_business_fields/power_rankings_of_mass_media_stars/.

[5] See for example, Steven Wakabayashi's "My Culture Is Not Your Toy: A Gay Japanese Man's Perspective on Queer Eye Japan." *Medium*, March 7, 2020. https://medium.com/@stevenwakabayashi/my-culture-is-not-your-toy-a-gay-japanese-mans-perspective-on-queer-eye-japan-7bb8420660c5.

[6] For an example of a YouTube channel filming Japan's genderless youth, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrYJE1sFVd8&t=6s. It shows how social media play a crucial role in this booming genderless fashion. However, this 'genderless' trend is distinct from 'drag' shows; it differs from crossdressing. Many of the genderless young people do not openly state their sexual orientation nor identify themselves as transgender or homosexual.

Queer: From a theme to methodology

This study is a study of 'queer', the 'Q' of LGBTQ, and it aims to offer a new perspective to understanding 'queer' as a methodology. First and foremost, it questions the conventional definition of this term. Rather than rolling out the 'alphabet soup' of l(esbian) g(ay) b(isexual) t(ransexual) t(ransgendered) i(ntersexed) a(sexual), queer allows a pithy shorthand for authors and organisations concerned with inclusivity.[7] Queer has also become an identity category unto itself. Individuals who want to label themselves with a non-label, who want to be fluid or inclusive in their own stated desires or who want to challenge hegemonic assumptions of sexuality, describe themselves as queer.[8] David M. Halperin stated that queer is "by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers".[9] The spread of this term in Japan was largely owing to Fushimi Noriaki, who is the author of *Queer Paradise: Welcome to the labyrinth of sex* (1996), and chief editor of the magazine *Queer Japan* (1999–2001).[10]

In this research, 'queer' is used to indicate diversity and fluidity. Apart from being semantically indefinable and non-normative, the word 'queer' is endowed with a broader meaning and is approachable from different angles. In terms of usage, it varies grammatically with context. 'Queer' can be used as an adjective to describe non-normative sexualities. In

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[7]April S Callis. "Playing with Butler and Foucault: Bisexuality and Queer Theory." *Journal of Bisexuality: Bisexuality and Queer Theory: Intersections, Diversions, and Connections* 9, no. 3–4 (2009): 213–33.
[8] See A. Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction,* New York : New York University Press, 1996 and A. Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
[9] D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York ; Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1995, 62.
[10] Fushimi Noriaki is a Japanese critic and novelist, one of those few celebrities in Japan who has come out to the public. Some of his works in Japanese include *Hentaisuru sararīman: hyōgen no sekushuariti* (*変態するサラリーマン：表現のセクシュアリティ*, 2000); *Majo no musuko* (*魔女の息子*, 2003) and *Shinjunku ni-chome (新宿二丁目*, 2019).

certain contexts, it is also used as a verb, whose meaning is similar to that of 'twist', 'question', 'transgress' and 'challenge'. Instead of linking 'queer' solely with sexualities, this study also puts forward the notion of seeing 'queer' as a methodology, which is applicable to not only gender studies but also a broader realm of cultural studies.

Another significant connotation of 'queer' is its tendency to deconstruct meanings, because a queer method requires interrogation into epistemological foundations of existing categories and conventions. For example, in this thesis, cinemas transform from a space of pre-scripted cultural and political discourse to a heterotopic space potentially unbounded by norms. It reconfigures the process of filmmaking and film perception, emphasising the open and fluid characteristics of visual art space. Chapter 3, which is the historiography of 'queer Japan', also approaches the history from a different angle, stressing the metamorphic characteristics of historical discourse on queer. It argues how 'queer' has been endowed diverse meanings throughout Japanese history and that it did not always occupy the 'non-normative' margins as it does today. By challenging what we know today as the 'queer history', it unveils a queer Japan that might subvert some images we have of the nation and our perception of *history* per se.

Concepts like intimacy, space, family and even love are also questioned and given different explanations. It explores the socio-cultural backgrounds behind these definitions, asking why and how we get to know what we know today, and whether there is a different understanding of each concept. Therefore, 'queer sexuality' is only one aspect of the connotations of 'queer' in this study. 'Queer' as a methodology can further refresh how we think. Because many people are more familiar with the term 'queer' in the context of sexuality, I choose films and TV series depicting 'queer' in aspects like homosexuality and transgenderism, to make it easier for my readers to understand my arguments. I intend to start from 'queer sexuality' and then move on to display the term's potential as a methodology of

film studies and cultural studies in general. In doing so, this thesis defamiliarises 'queer', endeavouring to deconstruct the term through the very meaning it denotes, which is the ultimate goal of this study.

Structures

This thesis centres upon the making of queer visual heterotopias, borrowing ideas from Foucault's constructions of power, sexuality and space. It aims to further develop Foucault's theory as a method. It chooses an assortment of films and TV series as the analytical objects, with special emphasis on the following three works: *Close-Knit* (2017); *What Did you Eat Yesterday?* (2019), and *Kamikaze Girls* (2004). The chosen works share some common ground: first and foremost, they all deal with non-normative sexualities. *Close-Knit* features a queer family formed from a girl, her uncle, and her uncle's transgender girlfriend. It discusses the meaning of family and unveils how LGBTQ people are excluded and discriminated in real life. *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* is a BL-manga adapted TV series depicting the daily life of a middle-aged gay couple with a special emphasis on cooking and eating. It discusses many cutting-edge issues that often occur in contemporary LGBTQ debates, such as partnership policies in Japan, stereotyped gender labour division and masculinity, as well as the difficulty of 'coming out'. *Kamikaze Girls* features the complex and ambiguous relationships of women. Semiotic methods will be applied to interpret symbols and symbolic acts to understand how cinematic space represents 'queer' and the intention behind that.

The next chapter will introduce the theoretical framework of this thesis by reflecting on Foucault's theory on heterotopias and relevant literature. It tries to demonstrate why this theory is crucial to the studies of queer cinemas, as well as how this study contributes to

Foucault's concepts. It tries to elucidate the function of visual heterotopia by contextualising it within detailed film analysis.

Chapter 3 will explain the meanings and usages of 'queer' in this study by tracing the historiography of 'queer Japan'. The aim is not to pin down what is 'queer' but to unveil the process of how meanings are made and the social power structure behind it. Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to film analysis, constituting the main body of this thesis. Chapter 4 revolves around the issues of stereotypes, masculinity, and queer family in Japan. Chapter 5 focuses on the relationship between women, with the locus of discussion on the 'in-between' ambiguity characterising film discourse on female same-sex intimacy. Overall this study aims to question the scholarship around 'queer', by promoting this term beyond the studies of gender and sexuality, and approaching it as a methodological device. Queer is thus seen as the tool to question and renovate categories and conventions, a methodology of visual art studies.

Chapter 2 *Through the Looking-glass:* cinematic heterotopias

'Oh, Kitty! how nice it would be if we could only get through into Looking-glass House! I'm sure it's got, oh! such beautiful things in it! Let's pretend there's a way of getting through into it'... She was up on the chimney-piece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass WAS beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist. In another moment Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down into the Looking-glass room.

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*

This chapter introduces visual heterotopias, the theoretical framework of this research. In line with Foucault's broad and overarching theory of discourse, heterotopia is understood in this study as a visual cinematic space that is linked with sexuality, marriage and family, which all denote certain institutional powers, yet are unbounded by them. By demonstrating what heterotopia is and how cinematic heterotopias are made through the film-making process, this chapter endeavours to showcase why and how this application of Foucault's space theory is beneficial to studying 'queer' in contemporary Japanese cinemas, and what contributions this study will possibly make to heterotopia studies.

Heterotopias: *The Other Places*

This section introduces 'heterotopia', yet it is not its purpose to write an encyclopaedic entry for this term. Instead of re-articulating Foucault's theoretical construction, it focuses on the application of heterotopias to the study of visual arts, more specifically to film studies. This thesis hopes to reconfigure Foucault's space theory into a methodology for studying film and

queer, by seeing heterotopia not as space-presenting norms but as the queer space of experiments and possibilities.

Although overshadowed by Foucault's other theoretical contributions, heterotopia is surprisingly attractive to readers and scholars, and can be found being applied to diverse fields. Studies on art, architecture, literature, theatre, education, urbanisation, sexuality, feminism, cinema, queer... all draw inspiration from this space theory.[11] To avoid vagueness and a repetition of previous literature, here I contextualise heterotopia within the study of 'queer' in contemporary Japanese cinemas.

Heterotopia is a concept elaborated by Foucault in his work *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1967). It describes certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are 'other' to the real-life social space. By 'Other', Foucault refers to what is 'intense', 'incompatible' and 'contradictory'. The mirror, for example, is the representative of a heterotopia. It is both a real object and a placeless space, for a mirror is a physical object reflecting the real world, yet extending reality by doubling or distorting space, considering the case of a kaleidoscope or a distorted mirror. Therefore, a mirror inevitably eliminates the boundary separating the real and the imaginary, and what resides 'here' is now co-existing in the other side. Reality is therefore not only reflected but also duplicated and modified. It is in



Image 3. The mirror in *Alice in Wonderland 2*

[11] For further studies on heterotopias, see http://www.heterotopiastudies.com/.

this sense that a mirror is a heterotopia, indicating a placeless space possessed by certain physical material, a visual world based on reality yet twisted by the characteristics of its physical carrier.

As a motif, the mirror appears frequently in literature and film. Narcissus of Greek mythology becomes mesmerised while gazing, self-admiringly, at his reflection in water. In *Snow White,* the mirror arouses the dangerous jealousy of the Queen, while in Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* it accommodates a mysterious new world of adventures for Alice. In literature and other forms of art, a mirror can be the reflection of human desire, of our inner voices that are not able to be actualised in reality. The mirror motif is also popular in horror films; characters are frequently seen looking at a mirror and seeing something more or other than him/herself. Mirror in horror movies is also the tunnel towards the world of the dead, erasing the boundary between reality and fantasy. These uncanny moments trigger fear because the mirror distorts the familiar everyday space and the sense of normality based on that spatial construction. The mirror within an artwork therefore exists as a heterotopia, a world within the already semi-realistic world of literature and visual art, a reflection within the reflection. Another example is The Mirror of Erised (see Image 4) in J. K. Rowling's legendary *Harry Potter* series. It is a magical mirror, which, according to Albus Dumbledore, shows the "deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts".[12] The name 'Erised' is 'desire' spelled backwards, as if reflected in a mirror. The happiest and most satisfied person in the world would look in the Mirror and see a reflection of themselves exactly as they are, as they would then have no one and nothing more to yearn for or desire that the mirror could ever show them. The writing engraved on the frame of the mirror is supposedly in a foreign and probably dead language but looking closely it says "I show not your face but your heart's desire" backwards, with the spaces rearranged. The Erised Mirror plays a significant role in

[12] J. K. Rowling. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Chapter 12. London: Bloomsbury, 2001.

this story: it shows Harry the things he craves most in this world – his parents; it also confirms the purity of Harry's soul which eventually helps him to get hold of the Philosopher's Stone and defeat Lord Voldemort. A mirror heterotopia is the extension of reality, a vitrine displaying people's inner desires, a world to satisfy all the regrets one might experience in reality.



Image 4. Harry standing in front of the Erised Mirror *in Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

The mirror is also a cultural motif with transnational significance. In the case of Japan, the Kusanagi Sword (草薙剣), the Yata no Kagami Mirror (八咫鏡) and Tasakani no Magatama (the jewel, 八尺瓊勾玉) constitute the 'Three Sacred Treasures' (三種の神器), the imperial regalia of Japan.[13] Since 690 AD, the presentation of these items at the shrine has been a central element of the enthronement ceremony.The concept of Three Sacred Treasures can be found in contemporary cultural products like in the manga *One Piece* and *The Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*. Outside of Japan, the mirror has been used throughout the ages transculturally: as an implement of the development of consciousness, an appropriated tool for the manipulative purposes of the patriarchy, and also as a catalyst for woman's

[13] See ミニ講話 宮司のいい話 (in Japanese). http://hachimangu.com/cgi/kouwa/kouwa.cgi.

reclamation of self.[14] For example, the mirror is a metaphor in China referring to loyal and honest people who can make others reflect on their manners. The Emperor Tang Taizong of Tang Dynasty of China once commented after the death of his expostulator Wei Zheng that: "Using copper as a mirror allows one to keep his clothes neat. Using history as a mirror allows one to see the future trends. Using a person as a mirror allows one to see what is right and what is wrong. When Wei Zheng died, I lost a mirror."[15] A mirror is thus a queering device of multiple functions and connotations transculturally.

This study argues that cinema is like a mirror, a heterotopia both reflects and modifies the reality. It also suggests that the 'space' within a mirror holds similar characters and functions to the object itself. The dimensional nature of 'space' will not be accentuated here; instead, 'space' is seen as a cultural apparatus containing multi-layered structures. In the realm of queer cinemas, the 'space' is where visual images interact with social discourse on sexuality. This thesis will explore the interrelations between cinematic narratives and visual spaces on multiple levels. Consequently, it studies 'cinemas' instead of 'cinema'. By using the plural form of this term, it suggests multiple lenses of visual representation. The cinema is seen as a plural space, displaying possibilities. The reason this study analyses films from multiple lenses is that it attempts to refresh how we approach visual art by endowing the audience with new lenses. Through semiotic readings of symbols and signs, it hopes to display the diverse approach of filmmaking and film perception, therefore queering the gaze of audiences.

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[14] For more on the transnational significance of the mirror, see Susan Carter and Mara Keller, *"Mirrors of Many Moons. Reflections on the Use and Meaning of the Mirror Throughout History: Instrument of the Goddess Culture, Tool for Patriarchal Female Distortion, and Catalyst for Women's Reclamation"*, 1997, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

[15] Translated from Chinese "夫,以**铜为镜**,可以正衣冠；以史**为镜**,可以知**兴**替；以人**为镜**,可以知得失. 魏征没,朕亡一**镜**矣".

Compared with Foucault's other theoretical contribution, the notion of 'heterotopia' is relatively underworked and appears self-contradictory according to Foucault's own accounts (1966, 1970, 1986). Foucault first used the term 'heterotopia' in the preface to his 1966 book *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, in reference to a fictional Chinese encyclopaedia described by Jorge Luis Borges.[16] Here, 'heterotopia' refers to placeless place that does not exist in the real world. Later, in '*Of Other Spaces*', Foucault described heterotopia as the space that is able to juxtapose numerous seemingly incompatible spaces in one place,[17] using the concept to analyse "specific social spaces whose social meaning is out of place and unsettling within a geographical relationship of sites".[18] However, the spatio-discursive discrepancy noted above has been taken to mean that the concept can be employed as an analytic beyond that of corporeal space alone.[19] The social identity of space does not come from the site itself, but is instead the communication of power into material practice.[20] Therefore, rather than separating the physical carriers of heterotopias from the accommodated cultural space and considering heterotopia as merely a derivation of utopia or dystopia, this study argues that heterotopia provides a useful analytical tool for linking space and power, enabling the identification of space as a discursively non-innocent and political construct. It is this link with power and a Foucauldian discourse that makes heterotopia not only a theory of dimensional space, but also a concept illustrating how the multi-layered space of queer cinemas empowers queer individuals by questioning the conventional institutional meanings of family, marriage, intimacy and love.

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[16] *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* is a fictitious taxonomy of animals described by the writer Jorge Luis Borges in his 1942 essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" (originally in Spanish). For more on Foucault's comments on Borges's texts, see Kelvin T. Knight, "Placeless Places: Resolving the Paradox of Foucault's Heterotopia." *Textual Practice* 31, no. 1 (2017): 141–58.

[17] Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of other spaces." *diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 22–27.

[18] Hetherington, Kevin. *The Badlands of Modernity : Heterotopia and Social Ordering*. London: Routledge, 1997, 8.

[19] Derek Hook and Michele Vrdoljak, "Gated Communities, Heterotopia and a 'Rights' of Privileged: A 'Heterotopology' of the South African Security Park", *Geoforum* 33 (2) (2002): 195–219.

[20] Adrienne Evans, Sarah Riley, and Avi Shankar, 'Postfeminist Heterotopias: Negotiating 'Safe' and 'Seedy' in the British Sex Shop Space.' *European Journal of Women's Studies* 17, no. 3 (2010): 211–29.

Based on the previous studies and taking into consideration the contexts of queer and screen studies, this thesis sees heterotopia as a synthesis of the physical site and the cultural space it accommodates. Rather than understanding heterotopia as a wholly subversive and socially detached construct, I argue that heterotopia, as the differently-ordering space that is tied into larger networks of power, provides a new perspective to approach 'queer' and its cultural representations.

Visual Heterotopia

The previous section discussed the original meaning of heterotopia posed by Foucault and how it is approached and transformed in this study. In this section, I move on to elucidate the making of visual heterotopia through film analysis.

Films are moving images conveying certain messages. The screen becomes a mirror reflecting the physical world through the camera lens, yet what we see on screen is never a duplication of reality. Because even a documentary film, in which people and events appear very real to viewers, is nonetheless a mediated reality.[21] Art expressions will interfere with our recognition of 'reality', creating the heterotopic space where real life events are rearranged, distorted and sometimes challenged, for the purpose of making something unprecedented. This section will introduce some examples of the making of visual heterotopias in cinemas. A more detailed analysis that caters to the specific context of contemporary Japanese queer cinemas will be carried out in Chapters 4 and 5.

In my study, film is considered as the simultaneously imagined and real space because it encompasses the whole industry of film production and consumption, not only what is on screen. Film, as a process of making, also contains multiple structures, resembling

[21] Okuyama, Yoshiko. *Japanese Mythology in Film a Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016, 10.

concepts like ‘queer’, ‘mirror’ and ‘space’ discussed previously. Traditionally, queer cinemas refer to films of ‘queer’ themes, ‘queer’ here denoting non-normative sexualities. However, ‘queer’ means more than ‘queer sexuality’ in this study. It refers to film-making methods as well.

Contemporary cinemas are not artistic utopias: from the plots of a story, to the theme, to the choice of director and actors/actresses, values are based not just on artistic aesthetics but also on capitals and personal values of all interested parties. Thus, a film is a synthesis of varied voices and values reflecting different, even conflicting, interests. In other words, cinematic space is inevitably self-contradictory from the very beginning, precisely like the mirror Foucault used to delineate heterotopia. A film becomes the ‘other’ to the real world, a heterotopia that critically represents reality, while filming and editing techniques can make this visual space more heterotopic. For example, application of montage in film considerably freed cinematic space and challenged the concepts of space and time. Montage in film today is an evolution of the *Soviet Montage Theory* of editing.[22] Though not directly related, they are built upon the same principle, namely, a series of short shots that are sequenced to condense space, time, and information. Linear time is fragmented, while closed space is opened and dislocated, and so are narratives based on the sanctity of conventional time and space. Montage is often adapted by filmmakers as a tool to develop stories. Michael Maher (2015) argues that Hitchcock’s 1960 film *Psycho* is emblematic of film montage. He explains how Hitchcock combined footage of Janet Leigh driving, worsening road conditions through the day into night, and audio from events that happened previously in time. In three minutes, he condensed an incredible amount of story to set up the film for the audience.[23]

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[22] Michael Maher, “The Making of the Modern Movie Montage.” The Beat: A Blog by PremiumBeat, November 20, 2015. https://www.premiumbeat.com/blog/making-modern-movie-montage/. (accessed January 18, 2020).
[23] Ibid.

Dating back further, Japanese cinemas in the 1920s also experimented with montage by breaking through the naturalist traditions and absorbing what was happening in other parts of the world. Director Teinosuke Kinugasa (1896–1982), who was familiar with developments in European cinema, Soviet theories of associative montage and movements in the artistic avant-garde such as expressionism, impressionism and surrealism, worked in collaboration with the *Shinkankaku* school (Neo-Perceptionists) and became the first director



Image 5. Scene from *A Page of Madness*. The girl dancing in her cell.

in Japan to realise his ambition of treating cinema as a distinct art form that was divorced from the commercial concerns of the new mass-audience medium.[24] Together with Nobel Prize-winner Kawabata Kasunari, he made *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta Ippeiji*, 1926), a silent film exploring the surrealist world of mental illness, indebted to European avant-garde films in the 1920s. Telling the story of mentally disoriented people, this film creates a queer heterotopia through filming and editing techniques. It is 'queer' not in the sense of sexuality but in its peculiar way of delineating time and space. 'Queer' here functions as the methodology of filmmaking and the aesthetics for film perception.

[24] Jasper Sharp, "A Page of Madness." Midnight Eye, March 7, 2002. http://www.midnighteye.com/features/a-page-of-madness/. (accessed January 12, 2020).

Time and space are shattered and reinvented in the narrative space of *Madness*. To begin with, in many shots of *Madness,* the characters are seen through fences and bars, conveying a sense of distance and blockage. At the beginning of the film, the daughter is seen dancing through the bars of her cell (see Image 5), her image and the space she resides are fragmented by the iron bars, sending a signal of inner chaos and a sense of isolation. The cell transforms into a heterotopic space for the girl where time is without chronology and the intactness of space becomes fragile.

Fragmenting space is also one characteristic of New Queer Cinema, embodied by the film *Carol* (2015), a story of female same-sex desire directed by Todd Haynes. *Carol* is 'doubly queer': the theme of *Carol* is lesbian love, and its filmmaking methods differ from and diversify traditional film narration. One of the major directors of the New Queer Cinema, Haynes undermines "conventional narrative structure, a structure he associates with the dominant heterosexual culture and its artifacts" in his films.[25] Before *Carol*, three of his films –*Poison*, *Velvet Goldmine*, and *Far from Heaven* – also "deal directly with homosexuality".[26] Victoria L. Smith (2018) studies the making of a heterotopia for lesbian desire in *Carol,* suggesting that Haynes created a very specific heterotopic space of mid-century New York City. His NYC is 'real' because Haynes modelled the look of the city on actual images rendered by some famous photojournalists and photographers, but the image of the city captured by these photographers is also an aestheticised naturalism, a stylised image of a past time and place.[27] Similar to *Madness, Carol* conveys a message of disturbing blockage.

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[25] Richard C. Bartone, "Todd Haynes." *In glbtq: an encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer culture*. http://www.glbtq.com/arts/haynes_t.html (accessed March 23, 2020).
[26] Ibid.
[27] Victoria L. Smith, "The Heterotopias of Todd Haynes: Creating Space for Same Sex Desire in Carol." Film Criticism 42, no. 1 (2018): *Film Criticism*, 03/02/2018, Vol.42(1).



Image 6. Scene from *Carol.* Therese looking through a rain-blurred car window

The opening shot of the film, for instance, is of a metal subway grate in the gutter of a city street at night. It conveys a beautiful but dark impression of blockage and rejection. Smith argues that the disorienting visuals reveal and obstruct, and offer a static image that gives way to a sense of movement and transition.[28] After the brief opening scene, the camera reveals Therese, her face shown through a rain-streaked and fogged car window, looking out on the city at night as she recalls her love affair with Carol (see Image 6). It is suggested that the window here signifies the conflict, restriction, and pathos for women, who are often confined within a feminine domestic space.[29] By emphasising the sense of blocking and confining with its image, *Carol* disrupts the space in which the two heroines reside and transforms it into the heterotopia where their tabooed love story can unfold.

Apart from space, cinemas rearrange time to create heterotopias as well. Another characteristic of *Madness* is that many scenes were shot out of order, leaving it totally to the editor to construct the narrative episodes. For example, many of the shots of the dancing girl in her cell at the beginning were filmed together on one day and then combined in quite

[28] Ibid.
[29] Mary Ann Doane, "Pathos and Pathology: The Cinema of Todd Haynes," *Camera Obscura* 19. 3 (2004): 1–21.

complicated ways with the shots of rain, lightening, and instruments that were photographed on another day. Much of the opening sequence, then, was a tour de force on the editing table, albeit one based on ideas laid out in the script.[30] In a word, in the cinematic world of *Madness*, space and time is 'queered' by various filming and editing techniques. Consequently, concepts like common sense that are based on this system of space and time are also being questioned. *Madness* evokes audiences to rethink what is film and what is reality, luring us to question what has so far shaped how we view cinemas.

Conclusion

This chapter elucidates Foucault's heterotopia theory and further innovates it into a queer methodology for film studies. Based on analysis of films like *A Page of Madness* and *Carol*, it demonstrates how cinema heterotopia is made by applying 'queer' to both film themes and narrative structures, filming and editing techniques. Cinematic heterotopia therefore refers to the open space a film creates, wherein lies the artists' true intentions, relatively free from social constraints. Nevertheless, a complete social detachment is unrealistic even for heterotopia. To see cinematic space as heterotopia is to admit the complexity of visual art as not merely a duplicate of reality or personal preferences of artists, but as aesthetics constantly negotiating with social norms.

Overall this chapter concludes that moving images are heterotopias resembling ambivalent syntheses of 'otherness', which encompass multiple voices and juxtapose incompatible spaces. These symbolic spaces are not closed, but fluid and open to interpretations. By illustrating how queer aesthetics function in film structuring and filmmaking processes using examples of *A Page of Madness* and *Carol*, this chapter also

[30] Aaron Gerow, *A Page of Madness: Cinema and Modernity in 1920s Japan*. Ann Arbor, Mich: Center for Japanese Studies, The Univ. of Michigan, 2008, 40.

indicates that ‘queer’ is not only a theme denoting sexuality, but can be used in various fields as a theme, an aesthetic, or a methodology of cultural studies. The next chapter moves on to the history of queer Japan, displaying how ‘heterotopia’ and ‘queer’ complement each other, and together form the analytical framework of this study.

Chapter 3 Metamorphosis: 'Queer' Japan

"History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation."

—Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*

"There did not have to be a moral. She needed only show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive. It wasn't only wickedness and scheming that made people unhappy, it was confusion and misunderstanding, above all, it was the failure to grasp the simple truth that other people are as real as you. And only in a story could you enter these different minds and show how they had an equal value. That was the only moral a story need have."

— Ian McEwan, *Atonement*

This section unveils what 'metamorphoses' in the title indicates by tracing the history of 'queer' in Japan, particularly focusing on its representation in cultural products like literature, fine art and cinemas. I endeavour to avoid exhausting myself by defining LGBTQ and queer, or differentiating between each term. It is also not the mission of this study to enumerate all the relevant historical facts. Instead, it suggests that by accepting the metamorphic character of 'queer' in term of its usage and social acceptance as shown by history, we might be able to release queer studies from heteronormative dualism that confines 'queer' to the 'marginalised' and 'unnatural'.

'Q' for 'Queer', 'Queer' for All

This chapter discusses 'queer' within the frame of visual heterotopias, in a bid to unravel the interrelations between 'queer' and the making of visual heterotopias. Previous studies of

‘queer’ are often confronted with the conundrum of definition and differentiating between terminologies. To avoid that, ‘queer’ is used as an inclusive and constantly transforming concept implying characters or people that are peculiar and often excluded from mainstream discourse. It is therefore impossible to find ‘queer’ a uniform definition. The implications of ‘queer’ vary with time, place and socio-cultural factors.

As explained in the introductory chapter, in this research ‘queer’ is a synthesis of meanings that addresses those different or peculiar ‘others’ who do not fit in with the idea of ‘normal’: what is considered by society as common, ordinary and most importantly, non-threatening. Generally, in the context of gender studies, ‘queer’ refers to non-normative sexualities, including lesbian, gay, transgender, transvestism, genderless and any statement of identity that does not fit in with hegemonic heteronormativity. In regard with the making and perception of visual arts, ‘queer’ implies ‘newness’ – a form of expression or a theme that is unconventional, refreshing, rebellious, unorthodox…in other words, ‘queer’ as an aesthetic is transgressive to what we have been familiar with. ‘Queer’ is also utilised as a verb, meaning ‘to question’, ‘to challenge’, ‘to reject’ or ‘to deconstruct’. Overall this study endows diverse and broad usage to ‘queer’, not confining ‘queer’ to gender studies but also applying it to the studies of visual art and space.

The next section elucidates the abundant literature on ‘queer’. I would like to point out that this chapter is divided chronologically in accordance with the change of the word’s social acceptance. Although it sees Meiji as a turning point for queer history, it does not follow the historical perspective which views Meiji Ishin as the symbol of modernity separating the ‘evil’ past of the Tokugawa era with the civilised future after the ‘opening’ of

Japan. It questions a Western-centric historical discourse which singularises one voice over diversity, the very perspective this study intends to challenge. [31]

Queer Before the Meiji Period

Japan has an abundant history on queer, especially during the Edo period when queer practice was considered part of everyday culture and a popular practice. Compared with Euro-American countries at that time, where homosexuality was deemed a sin in Christianity and legally banned, there was no explicit legislation banning homosexual practice in Japan. It continued to be technically legal until the Meiji period, when same-sex eroticism was made temporarily illegal. Sodomy was first criminalised in 1872 to comply with the newly introduced beliefs of Western culture and the Qing legal codes. But this provision was repealed only seven years later by the Penal Code of 1880 in accordance with the Napoleonic Penal Code. Apart from this law, there is no explicit law or policy against homosexuality in Japan. Overall, queer in Japan before the Meiji period was common in a way that attracted little academic or legal interest, yet profoundly inspired literary and artistic creation.

Compared with the limited narratives on female 'queer' practice, there are sufficient literary narratives on male same-sex eroticism and transgenderism. Before the Edo period, male same-sex eroticism was publicly acted out among high-class people.[32] In Heian Japan, male homosexual romance had already appeared in literary works like *The Tale of Genji* and *Torikaebaya Monogatari*. Later, in the premodern period (twelfth–nineteenth century), male same-sex depictions came out of three major cultural structures: the temple culture of monks

[31] This study's historical approach follows that of Sho Konishi, who proposes an anarchist modernity of Japan that is based not on the opening of Japan and the westernisation of the Meiji era, but on the anarchist co-operatist everyday practice of Japanese intellectuals and commoners at that time, For more, see, Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan.* Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013.
[32] Yuichiro Ando, *Edo bunka kara miru danshō to danshoku no rekishi* (in Japanese)*,* 2019, 29.

and priests, the samurai culture of the warriors, and the urban townsman's culture of the *kabuki* theatre. In the Sengoku period, male same-sex eroticism was popular among samurai. Date Masamune and Tokugawa Ieyasu were also said to be advocates and practitioners of male homosexual practice.[33] This is inherited by the Edo period. At that time, male homoeroticism of monks and the samurai class was called *shudou*.[34] The pattern for *shudou* relationships is of one being the older (adult) *nenja*, and the other being the younger *wakashu*.[35] Yamamoto Tsunetomo wrote in his famous *Hagakure* that 'the essence of *shudou* is to die',[36] further showing that homosexual practice was not only popular, it could even be seen as noble.

In the Edo period, queer practice spread among commoners as well. One example is the escalating popularity of queer practice on stage, epitomised by *onnagata* (male actors who play women's role in Japanese *kabuki* theatre). The modern all-male *kabuki* was originally known as *yarō kabuki* ('man *kabuki*'). In the early seventeenth century, many *kabuki* theatres had an all-female cast ('*onna kabuki*'), with women playing men's roles as necessary. There was also *Wakashū kabuki* ('adolescent-boy *kabuki*'), with a cast composed entirely of attractive young men playing both male and female roles, and frequently dealing in erotic themes.[37] Both *wakashū* and *onnagata* specialising in adolescent female roles were the subject of much appreciation by both male and female patrons, and were often prostitutes. All-male casts became the norm after 1629, when women were banned from appearing in *kabuki* due to the prevalent prostitution of actresses.[38]

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[33] Ando, 32.
[34] Ando, 26–27.
[35] The respective Japanese terms are '念者' and '若衆'.
[36] The original Japanese is '衆道の極意は死ぬことに候'.
[37] Gary P. Leupp, *Male Colors: the Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011, 90.
[38] Leupp, 90–92.

Originating from *kabuki*, *kagema* came into being also in the Edo period. *Kagema* is a historical Japanese term for young male prostitutes. They were often passed off as apprentice *kabuki* actors who catered to a mixed male and female clientele. *Kagema* who were not



Image 7. *Kagema* and customers playing in *kagema chaya*. Although they are dressed as women, those in black ki-mono are male *kagema*. It was popular for *kagema* to dress as women at that time.

affiliated with an actual *kabuki* theatre could be hired through male brothels or teahouses specialising in *kagema*.[40] Such institutions were known as *kagemajaya*. Customers of *kagema* were not only gay men, but also bisexual men and women. Samurai women, for example, were said to be frequent customers of *kagema*.[41]

The popularisation of queer practice boosted literature and arts on queer themes, which can be seen in *ukiyo-e* paintings and *ukiyo-soshi* writings (Japanese floating world genre). Ihara Saikaku, for example, wrote *The Great Mirror of Male Love,* and composed a series of *ukiyo-soshi* on queer.[42] He even commented that "there exists no line between the

[40] Leupp, 69–72.
[41] Leupp, 10.
[42] *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (男色大鏡 Nanshoku Ōkagami), with the subtitle *The Custom of Boy Love in Our Land* (本朝若風俗 Honchō Waka Fūzoku) is a collection of homosexual stories published in 1687. He depicts a variety of queer practices, including gay co-inhabitancy and bisexuality. His other popular *ukiyo-zoshi* works include *Five Women Who Loved Love.* This book also contains queer elements. For example, he depicts bisexuality in one story which uses the *yaoya-oshichi* (八百屋お七) story as a motif. Oshichi's lover was

love for men and that for women".[43] In addition to Saikaku, popular *gesaku* writers like Ueda Akinari and Hiraga Gennai also engaged in composing queer literature. Ueda's *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* contains stories of male same-sex eroticism, such as *Chrysanthemum Tryst* and *The Blue Hood*. *Gesaku* writer Hiraga Gennai, known for his essay *On Farting*, was fond of the love of males to the complete exclusion of females, and he also composed several works on the subject, including guidebooks on male prostitutes and works of fiction touting sex between men over heterosexuality like *Nehusa / Nenan shigusa* and *Rangiku anasaga*.

Although women are mentioned in these works, in general, there is much less literature touching on female transgenderism, bisexuality or homosexuality compared with that of men. The importing of Buddhism and Confucianism from China partially led to women's disappearance from official historical records.[44] Those limited narratives on women can be seen in diaries, encyclopaedias and *shunga* (erotic paintings). One famous example is the female-to-male crossdressing figure, known as 'Takejiro of the *sobaya*'. [45] Her story is found in literature like *Fujiokaya nikki* and *Morisada mankou*.[46] However, it is not to say that same-sex erotic love and transvestism were only practiced by men. In the Sengoku period, same-sex relationship and sex among samurai women were not a taboo. Because rape was a felony in the Edo period, the shogunate actually encouraged women to dress up like men in order to avoid being sexually assaulted. This contrast between the little literary and historical

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bisexual and when he was in love with her he was also in a relationship with an old monk. *Saikaku okimiyage* (西鶴置き土産 1693) tells the story of a man who bought both female and male prostitutes. Saikaku's works display that queer was a common practice among Edo commoners. The quantity of his works on this theme also reflects that there was no explicit ban on queer practice.

[43] The original Japanese text is '男色、女色の隔てはなきもの'.

[44] For more, see Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Kim Haboush and Joan R. Piggott, *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan.* Berkeley : University of California Press, 2003.

[45] For more on Takejiro, see Nagajima's book and the website: https://ameblo.jp/k-714-yamasiina/entry-12372088300.html

[46] For more queer narratives on women in Edo Japan, see Atsuko Nagashima, *Edo No Kurosu Doressātachi: Sekushuaru Mainoriti No Rikai No Tame Ni* (in Japanese). Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2017. In this book, Nagashima studies the crossdressing and transgender practice in Edo, with an emphasis on women.

narratives on female same-sex eroticism with its popularity among the people asks us to reconsider what is history, if what we know as history and historical records were purposefully manipulated and amended by those who had the power to write them and to exclude certain groups of the society.

Shunga was a slightly different genre, unlike the written literature, which tend to emphasis men over women. *Shunga* displayed possibilities regardless of gender, class, even species. Hybrid sexual practices and sexualities – heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, polysexual, even inter-species sex were depicted in *shunga*. It is interesting to see how women in these paintings appear to enjoy sex, as a sheer contrast to the Christian dogma, which considered sex for women to be merely for reproductive purposes, and that it was sinful for women to enjoy sex. In those *shunga* depicting inter-species sex (image 8) and the sex of other creatures (image 9), the female partners also seem to be enjoying themselves. They showed us how 'queer' in Edo Japan went beyond the context of merely men and women, far transcending the narrow definition granted for it in contemporary times.



Image 8. Hokusai, *Tako to ama (蛸と海女)/ The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife,* 1814



Image 9. A small erotic print, *shunga*, c.1830, showing a mermaid and an octopus making love. Attributed to Keisai Eisen (1790–1848).

Queer after the Meiji Period

Since the Meiji period, 'queer' has gradually come to signify an awareness of identity. Japanese queer-studies scholars Furukawa Makoto and Akaeda Kanoko conducted comprehensive research on the changes related to 'queer' and queer studies in Japan from the Meiji era to the early Showa era, covering the shifting usage of lexicon, legislation regarding queer practice and the trends of Japanese queer studies of different periods.[47] The research shows how terms popular in the Edo era, like *nanshoku*, *nenja*, and *wakashu*, were gradually replaced by translations of sexological terminology, derived from European languages, which focused on homosexual identity such as *urning* and *dōseiaisha* (same-sex-love person) or homosexual acts such as *dōsei kōsatsu* (same-sex intercourse).[48] *Shudou* gradually became an object of ridicule, condemnation, and naivety. Furthermore, male-male sexual practices faced

[47] For more, see Makoto Furukawa and Kanoko Akaeda, *Senzen-ki dōseiai kanren bunken shūsei* (in Japanese), 2006. Their studies have influenced later Japanese scholars like Maegawa Naoyam as well as Euro-American scholars like McLelland and Pflugfelder.
[48] Mark J. McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities*. Richmond: Curzon, 2000,7.

new constraints in Meiji criminal law, particularly in cases involving legally defined minors.[49] Mori Ōgai's *Vita Sexualis* (1909) depicts the shifting of terminology, reflecting the changing attitude towards queer sexuality among Meiji male students. Natsume Soseki's *Kokoro* (1914) is also quoted by scholars to showcase the male same-sex intimacy in Meiji time. This novel deals with social transitions by exploring the close relationship between a young man and an older man he calls *Sensei* (teacher). Many studies of Meiji homosexual literature see *Kokoro* as a testimony of the implicit *nanshoku* tradition among Meiji male students.[50]

The concept of *dōseiaisha* was popularised in Japan in the Taishō era, at a time called *seiyoku bum* (sexuality boom).[51] As a kind of *hentai seiyoku* (queer sexual desire), *dōseiai* was a curious theme of Taishō erotic magazines and the concept spread via popular sexology works such as Habuto Eiji and Sawada Junjiro's best-selling *Hentai seiyokuron*.[52] As for women, with the establishment of *Bluestocking (Seitō)* in 1911, and the changing role of women in society affecting the urban woman in particular, there also emerged lesbian narratives by Meiji women writers like Hiratsuka Raichō and Yoshiya Nobuko.[53] The term *rezubian* (lesbian) was first used during the 1920s.

After the 1930s, with a shift of national ethos towards war preparation and nationalism, queer narratives went underground. However, the post-war celebration of carnal bodies and sexualities brought the topic of 'queer' back to public attention again owing to the

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[49] Gregory M. Pflugfelder, "The Nation–State, the Age/Gender System, and the Reconstitution of Erotic Desire in Nineteenth-Century Japan." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2012): 963–74.

[50] For more, see for example Jim Reichert, *In the Company of Men: Representations of Male-male Sexuality in Meiji Literature,* 2006, and Naoya Maegawa, *Meiji No Gakusei Kara Bōizu Rabu Made, Otoko No Kizuna* (in Japanese), 2011.

[51] For more, see Maegawa, '*Nan-doseiaisha' no shakaishi: aidentitin no jyuyou/kurozzetohe no kaihou* (in Japanese), 2017; Mark J. McLelland, Katsuhiko Suganuma, and McLelland, Mark J., Katsuhiko. Suganuma, and James. Welker. *Queer Voices from Japan [electronic Resource] First Person Narratives from Japan's Sexual Minorities. Studies of Modern Japan*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007.

[52] Maegawa, 1.

[53] For more on the activities of *Seitō* and the literature on relationships between women in the Meiji and Taishō periods, see for example Shiho Takeda, *Yoshiya Nobuko Kenkyu* (in Japanese),2018; Watanabe Shuko, *Shōjozō No Tanjō: Kindai Nihon Ni Okeru Shōjo Kihan No Keisei* (in Japanese), 2007; Julia C.Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker. *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press,2017.

lift of censorship during the Occupation period and the celebration of *nikutai* (the flesh) against *kokutai* (the nation). Same-sex narratives of gay men resurged and were now more erotic than pre-war narratives.[54] A number of pornographic gay magazines came out to meet the need of the expanding gay market.[55] If these magazines were more underground and catered to a limited number of readers, then there were also many big names in the literary world who published works on homoeroticism, represented by Edogawa Ranpo, Mishima Yukio, Inagaki Taruho and Fukunaga Takehiko. These literatures unveil a deep anxiety of emasculation brought upon by the US Occupation. Mishima, owing to his worldwide fame, has been studied by many scholars even though only a few books of him deal with queer love.[56] His *Confessions of A Mask* (1949), *Forbidden Colours* (1951–1953) and *Hagakure Nyūmon* (1967), together with Fukunaga Takehiko's *Flower of the Grass* (1954) and Inagaki Taruho's *The Aesthetics of Boy-Love* (1968) can be considered examples of male homosexual literature.[57] Works like *The Aesthetics of Boy-Love* have an influence on early writers of the *Yaoi* genre such as Takemiya Keiko.[58] These writers were also frequenters of Shinjuku-nichome's gay bars both before and after the war.[59] Even though few of them openly stated their sexuality, their writings and practice reflected a renaissance of queer culture in post-war Japan, and the fact that 'queer' is incorporated into post-war culture reconstruction showcases

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[54] For more, see Mark J. McLelland, *Love, Sex, and Democracy in Japan during the American Occupation.* Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 and McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age.* Asian Voices (Rowman and Littlefield, Inc.). Lanham, Md. ; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

[55] These magazines include「奇譚クラブ」(1947–75),「人間探求」(1950–1953),「アドニス」(1952–1962), and「風俗科学」(1953–1955). For studies on these magazines see Maegawa, 2017.

[56] For more literature on the theme of homosexuality in Mishima's works, see for example Kazuyoshi Kawasaka, "Mishima Yukio and the Homoeroticisation of the Emperor of Japan." *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 2, no. 2 (2018); James Vincent and Paul Anderer, *Writing Sexuality: Heteronormativity, Homophobia and the Homosocial Subject in Modern Japan,* 2000, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses; and Yoshikawa, Toyoko. "Homosekushuaru bungaku kanken (< tokushū > < dansei > to iu seido – kindainihon bungaku no naka no dansei-zō (in Japanese)." *Japanese Literature* 41, no. 11 (1992): 93–103.

[57] For more, see J. Reichert, "Disciplining the Erotic-Grotesque in Edogawa Ranpo's Demon of the Lonely Isle" in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism* edited by A. Tansman, Duke University Press. 2009, 355–380; J. Reichert and Jeffrey Angles, 2006 and Angles, *Writing the Love of Boys: Origins of Bishonen Culture in Modernist Japanese Literature*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2011.

[58] Angles, 235.

[59] For more, see Noriaki Fushimi, *Shinjuku Nichome* (in Japanese). 2006.

the emasculation anxiety felt by many, especially men, during the US Occupation and reveals a search for a new post-war national identity.

Before the Meiji period, 'queer' referred to a diversity of sexualities which were not considered to be threats or marginalities. From the Meiji period onward, 'queer' became a category separated from the 'mainstream' and increasingly incorporated into socio-political propaganda. One example is that during the 1960s and 1970s' women's liberation (*uman lib*), rights related to lesbianism were vital to their activities. In 1971, the pioneering lesbian group *Wakakusa no Kai* (Young Grass Club) was formed, while four years later, twelve women became the first group in Japan to publicly identify as lesbians, publishing one issue of a magazine called *Subarashi Onna* (Wonderful Women).[60] It is against this background that BL manga, which was produced and consumed mainly by young women, came into existence. As for gay men, the 1970s witnessed the birth of Japan's first gay magazine *Barazoku.* It began publication in July 1971 by Ito Bungaku. Along with much Japanese gay culture, gay magazines in Japan are segregated by type, aimed at an audience with specific interests. *Barazoku,* however, attempted to reach a broad audience and thus contained "a little something for everybody".[61] Despite the inclusion of pornographic pictures, however, *Barazoku* was not a pornographic magazine, differing from its forerunners.

[60] Oriana Leckert, "The First Lesbian Porn and 10 Other Revealing Artifacts from Lesbian History". VICE. June 14th 2019. https://www.vice.com/amp/en_us/article/pajx3m/lesbian-history-archive-artifacts/.
[61] McLelland, 2000, 134.



Image 10. Cover of magazine *Barazoku*

In the 1990s, the bubble collapsed and the decade of recession that followed became the turning point for the Japanese to rethink the national ethos and what individuality meant in a transforming society.[62] This time also saw the emergence of many literary fictions boldly depicting same-sex eroticism such as Hiruma Hisao's sensational work *YES, YES, YES* (1989), Nishino Koji's *Sons of the Forest* (1997) and *If We Meet in Shinjuku-nichome* (1993), and Yoshida Shuichi's *Flowers* (1999). More and more writers began to include 'queer' themes in their works.[63] What is notable here is that literary prizes have become more open to

[62] Ron Wilson, *Producing Gayness: The 1990s "Gay Boom" in Japanese Media*, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

[63] Both entertainment literature and pure-literature (*jun bungaku*) writers use the theme 'queer' in their works, including writers like Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, Kawakami Hiromi, Eguni Kaori and Wataya Risa. Yoshimoto's *Kitchen* (1988) features a transgender man; gay and lesbian characters appear in Murakami's *Chance Traveler* (2005), *Kafka on the Shore* (2002), *Sputnik Sweetheart* (1999) and *1Q84* (2009–2010); Eguni's *Twinkle* depicts the complex emotions between gay lovers and the wife of one of the gay men. More recently, Wataya Risa's *Nama nomi nama no mama de* (生のみ生のままで 2019) features lesbian erotic love. For more on queer in contemporary literature, see Yūichi Kuroiwa, *Gei no kajika o yomu: gendai bungaku ni egaka reru 'sei no tayōsei'* (in Japanese). *Akihiro shobō, 2016.*

diversity, enabling works on queer themes like *YES, YES, YES* to be accepted by more readers and judged with less prejudice.

'Queer' & Queer Studies in Contemporary Japan

Historians have brought the history of the margins into more frequent discourse.[64] In other words, the studies of queer were once marginalised; now, as many are shifting their attention to studying queer from diverse perspectives, the existing hierarchy within academic research on gender and sexuality is under decentralisation. Queer studies of Japan contribute to a realisation that queer, conventionally considered as 'marginal', has in fact permeated Japanese history and culture in many aspects. While before the Meiji period 'queer' was not considered as a legal and moral decadence, it was considered as the synonym of the Japanese expression *hentai* in the Taishō Period and studied as a biological dysfunction.[65] During wartime, queer studies were silenced together with queer narratives, while after the war, with the gay magazine boom, queer studies regained its force. The term 'queer' and its representations in mass media and pop-culture have attracted increasing academic interest both within and outside Japanese academia. Domestic Japanese scholars like Fushimi Noriaki, Maegawa Naoya, Furukawa Makoto, Ito Kimio, Akaeda Kanako, Sugiura Ikuko, and scholars from outside Japan like Mark J. McLelland, Jonathan D. Mackintosh, James Welker, Lunsing Wim, Patrick Galbraith, Angles Jeffrey, Gary P. Leupp, Vincent James and Gregory M. Pflugfelder have studied the LGBTQ history and communities, as well as their representation in cultural products.[66] Their interests cover homosexual literature, gay

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[64] Victoria Harris, "Something a Bit Peculiar? Sex, the Germans and the History of Sexuality." *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 2 (2014): 283–93.
[65] For more, see Furukawa and Akaeda, *Senzen-ki dōseiai kanren bunken shūsei (daiikkan)* (in Japanese). Fujishuppan, 2006.
[66] The emergence and boom of gay magazines in the post-war period have been studied by both Japanese and Western scholars. Some examples include: McLelland and Aoyama, 2015. For Lesbian studies of Japanese scholars see Akaeda, *Kindai nihon niokeru onna dōshi no shinmitsuna kankei* (in Japanese), 2011; on

magazines, BL sub-culture, Takarazuka Reveu, lesbian communities, LGBTQ campaigns and policies, yet few pay attention to contemporary cinema and television, where queer is experiencing unprecedented exposure.

Reflecting on the evolution of queer throughout Japanese history, we see how 'queer' has been endowed with all kinds of meanings and ideologies. There are also shifting trends in understanding 'queer' and using it, representing it. Another noteworthy aspect is that from *kabuki* theatre to *Takarazuka*, queer themes and practices have always been active on stage. In terms of queer cinema, the turning point is the 1990s. McLelland (2000) and Ogawa (2017) argue that at the beginning there was a tendency for queer films to cater to heterosexual audiences, especially women. In the early 1990s, a growing number of films dealing with gay men were released, such as *Okoge* (1992), *Kira kira hikaru* (*Twinkle*, 1992), and *Hatachi no binetsu* (*A Touch of Fever*, 1993). They suggest that these movies were not about gay men at all but were media fantasies which used the popularity of male homosexuality with young women to increase numbers at the box office. However, this booming interest reflects the growing public attention towards queer groups and the queer genre in general. Since 1992, Rainbow Reel Tokyo[67], an international film festival for LGBTQ audiences, has been held annually in Tokyo. Entering the 21st century, Japan has witnessed a growing diversity of life choices and the rise of global LGBTQ movements, whose waves also reached Japan. It is time for film makers and audiences to reconsider the old narratives as a starting point of a revolution in cinemas.

Under heteronormative social orders, 'queer' equates to the marginalised and excluded. They are the not-exhibited works of an exhibition, the outcasts. Image, on the

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transgender theatres, see Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan*, 1998.

[67] Until 2016, it was known as the Tokyo International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival (東京国際レズビアン&ゲイ映画祭), also known by the acronym TILGFF.

contrary, is the visible. When queer is represented in visual media, it shifts from the invisible to the visible. Queer and cinematic space are thus complementary: cinemas can visualise the 'queer', which in a contemporary Japanese context is somehow excluded from the 'mainstream' discourse; while 'queer' in return gives life to the visual world, enriching artistic imagination. Therefore, the visual medium is a powerful tool in the study of queer, accounting for this study's emphasis on cinemas.

It is notable that the history of queer illustrates how 'queer' is able to transcend gender studies and be applied as a powerful tool to the study of cultural products and the macro socio-political background. Contemporary queer cinemas therefore become the locus of revolution and the cradle for new meanings. To grasp these shifts requires new approaches and expressional forms. A queer theme and aesthetic thus attributes to expanding the boundary of visual arts through experiment within the visual heterotopic space. In the following chapters, detailed analysis of how this kind of space is constructed and what characteristics it possesses will be carried out.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that what is deemed as 'queer' today is a concept that came into being very recently. The queer history of Japan, argued by scholars to be a history of deconstruction and reconstruction, demonstrates that queer has always been in the country's popular imagination. Before the Meiji period, 'queer' was 'invisible' in a sense that it was not marginalised or censored. There was abundant literature and art works on queer themes, like *Shunga*. After the Meiji period, the meaning, social acceptance and media representation of queer have changed profoundly in accordance with the macro social context. Eventually, in contemporary Japanese cinemas, 'queer' has been applied as both a theme and a method. A

queer perspective of film studies requires new filmmaking approaches, which aim to transform cinemas into open heterotopic spaces. Chapters 4 and 5 will analyse films and TV series featuring certain aspects of ‘queer’, with a particular focus on the making of new meanings and methods in cinematic heterotopias.

Chapter 4 *Confessions of A Mask*: His Story

"Perhaps all our loves are merely hints and symbols; vagabond-language scrawled on gate-posts and paving-stones along the weary road that others have tramped before us; perhaps you and I are types and this sadness which sometimes falls between us springs from disappointment in our search, each straining through and beyond the other, snatching a glimpse now and then of the shadow which turns the corner always a pace or two ahead of us."

— Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited*

To be natural is such a very difficult pose to keep up.

Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*

1. Film Semiotics

This chapter introduces films and TV series featuring queer people and the concept of 'family'. It focuses on two works: the 2017 film *Close-Knit* and the 2019 manga-adapted TV series *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* To navigate through the jungle of meanings encoded in cultural symbols, it will apply semiotics as the analytical tool. Semiotics is the study of a system of signs to determine how symbolic meanings are created and transmitted through the use of words, concepts and images, and was first put forward by Saussure. Saussure argues that the goal of the semiotic approach is this very act of interpretation, unraveling the nature of symbolic representation.[68] Semiotics is useful in this study firstly because a symbol itself is open to multiple interpretations, thus, when the dominant discourse overshadows other voices, it is always beneficial to retreat to the original symbols. One such example is Gregory

[68] For more, see Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. Wade Baskin). London : P. Owen,1960.

M. Pflugfelder's semiotic reading of the reconstitution of erotic desire in nineteenth-century Japan. Pflugfelder suggests that any attempt to understand sexual ideology in the Meiji period must take into account not only the documentary evidence that historians have traditionally relied on, but also the visual and material context that surrounds those written words and that draws them into relation with the lived experience of erotic desire.[69] He thus studies the changes of hairstyle and dressing codes in the late Tokugawa and Meiji periods, and their linkage with social norms around age and gender, which have significant consequences for the viability of *shudou* practices and desires in the changing visual and material environment of the late nineteenth century.[70] Semiotic readings of tonsorial markers unveil Japanese people's changing perception of sexuality during these transitional periods, diversifying a state-centred history.

Film semiotics is the study of signs as they pertain to film on a variety of levels. It is often interpreted through the following aspects: denotation and connotation, narrative, and tropes. Film communicates meaning denotatively and connotatively. What the audiences see and hear is denotative; meanwhile, the sounds and images are connotative and how the scene is shot is meant to evoke certain feelings from the viewer. Connotation typically involves emotional overtones, objective interpretation, social values, and ideological assumptions. Narrative generally has two components: the story presented and the process of telling it, the narrative discourse. Film narrative theory seeks to uncover the apparently 'motivated' and 'natural' relationship between the signifier and the story-world in order to reveal the deeper system of cultural associations and relationships that are expressed through narrative form.[71] This study's film analysis, especially that of chapter 5, stresses the importance of narration in the making of visual heterotopic space and unconventional expressional forms.

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[69] Pflugfelder, 2012.
[70] For more, see Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950.* Oxford University Press,1999.
[71] Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics [electronic Resource]: Structuralism, Post-structuralism, and beyond*. London : Routledge, 1992.

One example of film semiotics is the naming of the main characters of *Kamikaze Girl*s. The two female heroines are named Ichigo (meaning 'strawberry') and Momoko (meaning 'peach'). Both fruits relate to the erotic imagination. For centuries, peaches have been symbols of softness, sexuality, tenderness, love, femininity, and even fertility.[72] According to Ernst and Johanna Lehner's *Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants, and Trees*, peaches in many cultures are representations of female sexuality, mainly in relation to genitalia. The strawberry also has symbolic meanings transculturally. The strawberry was a symbol for Venus, the Goddess of Love, because of its heart shape and red colour.[73] On Hieronymus Bosh's altarpiece *The Garden of Earthly Delights, s*trawberries appeared all over the central panel, and stood for sexual temptation because of its many seeds and its ephemeral odour that is hardly remembered after passing – reflecting the transient nature of earthly pleasures.[74] In the Japanese language, the *kanji* for strawberry is '苺'. The character '母' means mother, and the *kanji* itself represents women's breasts (the two dots indicating nipples), therefore it is suggested that the strawberry is a kind of fruit resembling women's breasts.

Another example is found in *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* The protagonist Shiro has a mother who is featured as a serious woman always dressed in kimono wherever she is, whether outside or at home. It is not rare for older generations of Japanese women to wear kimono, yet such practice is usually for outings, not for indoors. She is thus synonymous with a traditional image of the Japanese woman. Try as she might to understand her son's homosexuality, she can never truly understand what 'gay' means. Her kimono signifies her traditional mindset that makes it more difficult for her to understand queer sexuality.

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[72] María Isabel Carrasco Cara Chards, "4 Reasons Why Peaches Became The Most Erotic Fruit In The Art World". Cultura Colectiva, April 2nd 2018. https://culturacolectiva.com/art/peaches-erotic-symbolism/.
[73] "Strawberries & More". https://web.extension.illinois.edu/strawberries/history.cfm.
[74] For more, see Walter S. Gibson, "The Strawberries of Hieronymus Bosch." *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art* 8 (2003): 24–33.

The third aspect of film semiotics is the trope. Two kinds of trope that appear most frequently in films are metonymy and metaphor. Metonymy refers to the ability of a sign to represent something entirely, while literally only being a part of it. Film uses metonyms frequently because they rely on the external to reveal the internal. Another powerful semiotic tool for filmmaking is the use of the metaphor, which are defined as a comparison between two things that are unrelated but share some common characteristics. Tropes play a vital role in the film analysis of chapters 4 and 5. For example, in *What Did You Eat Yesterday?,* Shiro's parsimony can be seen as a metaphor for him being trapped in his homosexuality in a heteronormative society. He saves money not only for fear of not having a child to take care of him later in life, but also for his anxiety as a gay man. The next section will explore how metonymy is applied in representing gender roles and sexualities in the film *Close-Knit.*

2. Queer, Domesticity and Gender Roles

Scholars of Japanese homosexuality such as Maegawa and Wim Lunsing often suggest a 'gay boom' of media representation on homosexuality in the 1990s.[75] The number of reports and narratives on male homosexuality reached its peak between 1991 and 1994, when Japan was facing numerous social changes such as the burst of the economic bubble, recognition of social stratification, shifts in the woman's role in the family, and increasing promotion of Japan's internationalisation.[76] Jonathan M. Hall and Wim Lunsing have characterised the 'gay boom' variously as a "(m)assive commodification of male homosexuality in Japanese popular culture"[77] and "a phenomenon that swept through the Japanese media."[78] McLelland

[75] For more on the 1990's 'gay boom', see Jonathan D. Mackintosh, *Homosexuality and Manliness in Postwar Japan.* London : Routledge, 2010; McLelland and Romit, 2005 and Wim Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense: Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Japan*. London : Kegan Paul International, 2001.
[76] Ogawa, 2017.
[77] Jonathan M. Hall, "Japan's Progressive Sex: Male Homosexuality, National Competition, and the Cinema", *Journal of Homosexuality* 39, no. 3/4 (2000): 41.

further suggests that since the 1990s there has been a tendency for media discourse to confuse homosexuality with transgenderism and crossdressing, by assuming that gay men also represent the transgender crossdressers, who are effeminate. This section intends to explore to what extent the stereotyped discourse remains, and what new trends are emerging in film and television narratives of 'queer'.

1). Knitting and Paradoxical Femininity in *Close-Knit*

In recent years, the transgender heroine has gained popularity among audiences and appeared in many *terebi-dorama* (TV drama). For example, the 2017 TV series *One-Sided Lov*e (*Kataomoi*, 片想い), adapted from Higashino Keigo's novel, features a group of transgender people and their struggles. Other recent works that discuss transgender issues include *Regret From My School Life* (ごめんね青春! 2014), *Where Did My Skirt Go*? (俺のスカート、どこ行った? 2019), *In the Next Life I Will Be Serious* (来世ではちゃんとします, 2020) and *Manager Miura Becomes Woman Today* (三浦部長、本日付けで女性になります, aired on 21st March, 2020). These works have won positive feedback from audiences and have ranked highly in various television awards. Among these, one that stands out is the 2018 TV series *Life as A Girl* (Joshiteki seikatsu), starring Shison Jun, who has also played the role of a gay man in the *asa-dora* (morning drama) *Half Blue Sky* (Hanbun, Aoi 2018). *Life as A Girl* tells the story of a male-to-female transgender and lesbian protagonist, highlighting her struggles of self-identification and coming out to her surrounding friends and family. It discusses in depth the discrimination transgender people are confronted with from family and colleagues. A new feature of this work is that the heroine looks pretty, slender and

[78] Wim Lunsing, "'Gay Boom' in Japan: Changing Views of Homosexuality?" *Thamyris: Mythmaking from Past to Present* 4, no. 2 (1997): 267.



Image 11. Poster of TV series *Life as A Girl*

fashionable, as opposed to the drag-queen-style crossdressing TV talents. Undoubtedly the actor Shison Jun's appearance and devotion to the character contributed considerably to the success of this work, yet it also reflects a new trend in the making of 'queer' in cultural products. Not only are the stereotyped media representations of 'queer' being questioned, but issues relating to LGBTQ rights, the difficulty of coming out and policies around homosexual marriage and queer family are now being discussed seriously. *Close-Knit* was made in this changing environment.

Close-Knit discusses transgenderism within the context of 'family'. It is directed by Ogigami Naoko, director of the *Kamome Diner* (*Kamome Shokudo*, 2006), a film telling the story of an unconventional Japanese woman looking for a fresh start in Finland by opening her own Japanese restaurant. *Close-Knit* recounts a 'queer family' made up of an eleven-year-old girl, Tomo, her uncle, Makio, and her uncle's transgender partner, Rinko. It investigates the meaning of 'family' and shows the hardships gender-minority people in Japan are faced with in their lives. Owing to the popularity of LGBTQ themes and the fame

of the main actors/actresses, *Close-Knit* triggered huge discussion even before its release. It is also highly praised overseas, being premiered in the 2017 Berlin International Film Festival's Panorama section, becoming the first Japanese film to win the Teddy Special Jury Award and finishing second in the voting for the Panorama Audience Award.



Image 12. Rinko, Tomo and Makio knitting together

The story begins with the precocious primary-school girl Tomo, living with her busy and negligent mother, Mimura. One day, her mother leaves home to live with her new boyfriend, so Tomo seeks refuge with her nerdy but warm-hearted uncle, Makio. To Tomo's utmost surprise, Makio is now living with his transgender girlfriend, Rinko, who was born a male. Like people around them who take Rinko to be a freak, at the very beginning it is hard for Tomo to process Rinko's queer gender. Rinko, who grew up facing discrimination of this sort, does not expect any better reaction from Tomo. Therefore, in spite of Tomo's coldness, she assumes the role of her mother and does the things Japanese mothers would do for their kids: preparing delicate *bento* (lunch boxes) for Tomo, teaching her how to knit, playing Nintendo games with her, and when the girl feels lonely, taking her in her arms. Tomo, craving the maternal love her ever-absent mother cannot give her, gradually opens up to

Rinko and stands up to defend her when she is insulted by her classmate Kai's mother. However, this queer family of three is inevitably confronted with discrimination from the outside: Kai, Tomo's school friend, a boy who agonises over his homosexuality, has a controlling mother who sees homosexuals and transgender people as sinning freaks. Tomo's other classmates as well as other authority figures in this film share the same ground with Kai's mother. Tomo is isolated by her classmates because she is living with the *hentai* Rinko, while people from the child welfare department suspect Rinko of child abuse, simply on the grounds of her transgenderism. Enraged and frustrated by the unfair and crude attitudes of other people, Tomo begins to understand Rinko's pain and in the meantime becomes more sensitive to differences and more tolerant of diversities. She learns to channel her anger into knitting, as taught to her by Rinko, and together she knits with Rinko and Makio, gradually entering puberty.

Close-Knit's discussion of 'queer' is neither direct nor queer at all, like its implicit title. The narration and tone of *Close-Knit* convey the Japanese aesthetics of *momo no aware* (物の哀れ; meaning 'pathos'). The tone of the film is *usui* (薄い; meaning not dense, but pale, diluted and light). A pensive piano score matches the soulful sentiment of the story; meanwhile the dusty, murky cinematography which captures the unloved home that Tomo shares with her mother gives way to an inviting pastel-tinged glow once she shacks up with Rinko and Makio.[79] Cherry blossoms are seen everywhere, and with the reserved performance, *Close-Knit* depicts 'queer' in a way that is usually seen in non-queer cinema, following the linear time principle and without any special editing or filming techniques. By doing so, it first rejects the pattern of depicting the 'queer' theme in a queer way, contrary to *A Page of Madness* and *Carol* that are discussed in Chapter 2, which both apply a queer sense

[79] Wendy Ide, "'Close Knit': Berlin Review." ScreenDaily, February 10, 2017. https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/close-knit-berlin-review/5114730.article./

of time and space to the making of heterotopic spaces. *Close-Knit* therefore forms a heterotopia which rejects some agreed principles on the making of queer cinemas.



Image 13. The family having a picnic under cherry-blossom trees.

Core to *Close-Knit*'s seemingly self-contradictory narration is knitting, an act that has profound connotations in this film. A semiotic reading of Rinko's character through the reappearances of knitting, as well as the hand-knitted phalluses and breasts, might reveal the implicit themes of gender performativity and queer identity embedded in this film. Echoing the film's title, knitting runs throughout the film and threads the plots together. It is Rinko's way of releasing her anger and represents the three protagonists' subversion of the heteronormative social and familial orders. Rinko teaches Tomo, and ultimately Makio, to channel anger and frustration into knitting by engaging them both in her project of knitting 108 woolly phalluses that represent the male identity of her past. She then ritually sacrifices the phallus by burning them, as to finally let go of the 'he' she used to be.

The act of knitting entails two elements worth analysing: the practice of knitting itself and the hand-knitted penis and breast. The repetition of knitting first of all symbolises

Rinko's journey of self-discovery and how she makes peace with who she is. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler poses that there is nothing natural about sex, sexuality and gender, because gender is an act, identity is an effect and the body is not prior to these processes of signification. Identity should be understood as an effect, that is, as produced.[80] Stuart Hall also suggests that identity needs to be thought of as a 'production', which is never complete, but always in process.[81] They both point to the artificiality and fluidity of identity as something made culturally and as being in a constant process of metamorphosis. In *Close-Knit*, knitting is the means by which identity is understood, constructed and subverted. It is utilised as the semiotic device to queer film discourse, the key tool by which cinematic heterotopia is created in this film.

Knitting, like cooking and childrearing, duties that used to belong solely to Japanese women, represents a gendered system of labour division. In Meiji Japan, needlework is linked with femininity and domesticity. In Meiji's *ōraimono*,[82] the function of a 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryōsai kenbo*) is the managing of *kasei* (household affairs). The term *kasei* can be read as *ie no matsurigoto* (the management of the household), referring to every part of running the home, ranging from frugality and keeping track of money, serving one's husband and parents-in-law, to sewing and cooking. The *ryōsai kenbo* ideology, although signifying the debut of a 'new' view of women in the context of a movement to promote girls' education, in fact imposed a strong preference for women equipped with purely domestic skills, the representative one being sewing, as well as feminine virtues such as obedience.[83] In contemporary cultural products, sewing often embodies femininity and is linked with homosexuality. The famous manga and manga-adapted TV drama *Otomen* (オトメン), for

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[80] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999, 187.
[81] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, 1990, 234.
[82] 往来物，texts for women studying handwriting and reading, first edited and published in the mid-Edo period.
[83] Shizuko Koyama, "Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' in Modern Japan", *BRILL*, 2012, 24.

example, is based on the conflicts between orthodox masculinity and activities that are considered as feminine such as cooking, sewing and reading *shōjo* manga love stories. *Otomen* is written and illustrated by Aya Kanno. It began in *Bessatsu Hana to Yume* in late 2006 and concluded on November 26, 2012. It features Asuka Masamune, the coolest, manliest guy in his school. However, privately he fancies 'girlish' things and activities. It tells the story of how he gradually embraces who he is and tells the truth to the girl he loves.

Based upon this association of knitting with femininity, the act thus symbolises Rinko's rejection of her former male identity and the mandatory masculinity required for that identity. By repeatedly knitting and providing care for the elderly in her work and for Tomo at home, Rinko tries to negate her male identity and to establish herself as a woman. Meanwhile, Makio, a man, takes up this feminine activity, a symbolic parody of Japan's rigid definition of masculinity. Here, a paradox emerges: by 'knitting', Rinko and Makio reject the normative model of masculinity; for Rinko, this is also her entry into femininity. However, the form of femininity embodied by knitting is the very product of a socially constructed gender role for women. It stands for the conventional thinking that equates femininity with domesticity. Therefore, Rinko's escape from her gender role in the meantime reinforces an orthodox, gendered labour division, and women's domesticity. Her transgression is at the same time an act of obedience and reinforcement. The intention to subvert, here, is queered by the act itself, forming an interesting juxtaposition further complicating the film.

For Tomo, knitting symbolises her self-exploration. Unlike Rinko and Makio, Tomo is still a child entering puberty. She has yet to engage with terms like 'identity' and 'sexuality. It is Rinko who changes how Tomo sees herself and the people around her, demonstrated by her changed attitude towards Kai. Before her encounter with Rinko, Tomo follows the others and tries to blend in with the crowd. She joins her classmates in bullying and isolating Kai because he likes boys. She refuses to play with Kai even after school because she fears that

people will think they are ‘the same kind’. As her bond with Rinko deepens, Tomo begins to understand and even feel for herself the discrimination Rinko suffers. She begins to knit with Rinko and starts to talk with Kai, trying to understand him. Later when Kai tries to commit suicide because his love letter to a senior boy is found by his mother, Tomo sneaks into hospital to visit him and gives him her lucky coin. Tomo grows throughout the process, her choice of giving her mother a chance and going back to live with her also showing her maturity. The film ends with Tomo putting her hand on Rinko’s parting gift – a pair of hand-knitted breasts, implying the journey of puberty Tomo is set to embark upon and the long journey of self-exploration that awaits her.

Apart from knitting, Rinko’s femininity is reflected in the way she dresses, acts and in her choice of profession. Ikuda Toma plays the role of Rinko. He belongs to the talent agency Johnny & Associates Inc., debuting initially as an idol. Famous for playing the tough guy and for his action scenes in *The Devil* (魔王, 2007), *Ouroboros* (ウロボロス〜この愛こそ、正義, 2015) and *Brain Man* (脳男, 2013), it was shocking to many that he accepted the challenge of playing a transgender woman. Director Ogigami mentioned in an interview that the reason she chose Ikuda to play Rinko, rather than a transgender actress, is that firstly, there are few transgender actresses or actors in Japan, aside from TV talents who perform to make audiences laugh. Also, the choice of Ikuda shifts the film from independent cinemas into the mainstream. She argued that Ikuda’s fame would make the audience think that transgenderism could be ordinary and ‘normal’. Additionally, Ikuda mentioned in the TV programme *Chi-chin puipui* (ちちんぷいぷい) that he himself had a transgender female friend, and prior to filming he consulted her about her upbringing and the troubles she confronted, so as to grasp the mental state of Rinko.



Image 14. Ikuda Toma playing Dazai Osamu in *Ningen shikaku* (2010)

Owing to Ikuda's dedication and talented performance, Rinko is a fully rounded character, not a flamboyant caricature or the exaggerated drag queen of the sort found so often in Japan's media. From the way she dresses, does her makeup, and her dutiful performance in doing housework, to her support for Makio and her maternal love for Tomo, Rinko fits perfectly with the image of a Japanese 'good wife, wise mother', the Meiji construction of femininity that has since then confined women's role to the domestic realm. 'Good wife, wise mother' appeared in the latter part of the Meiji period in the late nineteenth century. Women were taught to fulfill this role because of nationalism in the pre-war era and during wartime. In post-war Japan, this convention retained its popularity and dominance over many middle and upper-middle class Japanese women owing to the needs of economic recovery. Even Rinko's profession fits with this image: she works in an old-people's home as a nurse, a typical woman's job in Japan. Care-taking roles, including nursing and teaching, are traditionally considered as occupations for women. Rinko subverts her masculine identity by these pursuits of femininity, however, it is these supposedly rebellious acts that eventually reinforce the gendered stereotypes and labour division. Therefore, Rinko's subversion of her

gender role is paradoxical; it still exists within the normative social orders and conventions. Her queerness is inevitably harnessed by social constructions.

However, this analysis can be subverted, too, if one takes into consideration new meanings the practice of knitting has acquired, as well as debates around femininity and subjectivity. In a Euro-American context, especially in the US, in recent years knitting has been discussed more and more within discourse on feminism, LGBTQ rights, and anti-racism movements. The *Yarn Mission*, for instance, is a collective that knits for Black Liberation.[84] Needlework has also become a weapon for women's empowerment. Alla Myzelev argues that women can now exercise freedom of sexual self-expression through knitting.[85] Instead of going back to the mythical traditions of our mothers and grandmothers who found solace, support, and joy in the company of other crafting women, now women knitters know how to



Image 15. The *bento* Rinko makes for Tomo

enjoy their sexuality and craft skills, alone or in the company of others.[86] While it is still predominantly women who engage with needlework, some knitting books appeal to men as

[84] For more on Yarn Mission, see their website http://theyarnmission.com/.
[85] Through qualitative interviews, Myzelev puts forward that knitting helps to create an intimate world where women are in charge of their bodies and their pleasures. See Alla Myzelev, "Whip Your Hobby into Shape: Knitting, Feminism and Construction of Gender." *Textile* 7, no. 2 (2009): 148–63.
[86] Myzelev, 2009.

well.[87] The connotations of knitting are changing. Therefore, if we reconsider what knitting means for Rinko, based on these new contemporary interpretations of knitting in the context of women's liberation and empowerment, then what should be modified about the analysis of Rinko's seemingly paradoxical subversion?

Rinko uses knitting as her weapon against the outside world, where 'queer' people like her are considered threatening to society because of their sexuality. Most historians and post-Foucauldian theorists recognise that to reconstruct sexual narratives and to investigate diverse sexual experiences involves inextricable levels of analysis, but that recognition by no means solves the essentially methodological problem of how to think about these two problems concurrently: of how meaning is always socially constructed, always contingent and yet never arbitrary, and how individuals are constituted within discursive systems and yet construct meanings capable of transforming those systems.[88] Knitting is the semiotic tool in this film to understand how queer people deconstruct the socially constructed roles and identities through everyday practice. For Rinko, knitting is the means to negate her old self and an entry into her new self. In this sense, her knitting queers the normative gender roles she has been fighting against; if discussed from the angle of needlework's domesticity, then Rinko's rebellion is in fact a reinforcement of the gendered labour division; finally if considering the new implications of the practice of knitting, such as liberation and self-empowerment, then Rinko is indeed fighting against tradition with her yarn and needles. In other words, this study combines the queer theme (transgenderism) with a queer perspective of semiotics, thoroughly challenging film narration. The result is a need to reconsider the

[87] For example, *Knitting with Balls: A Hands-on Guide to Knitting for the Modern Man* (Del Vecchio, 2006) renders the gendering of craft to the extreme by providing patterns for men only. The authors of *Men Who Knit and the Dogs Who Love Them* (Emborsky and Modesitt, 2007) ask, "Men Golf, Men Fish, Why Can't Men Knit?" The emphasis here is on traditionally straight male hobbies such as golfing and fishing.

[88] Carolyn J. "The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender, and the History of Sexuality. (Michel Foucault)." *History and Theory* 33, no. 3 (1994): 271-296.

meanings and functions of ‘queer’ as more than an implication of sexuality but as a methodology that offers us a new lens in film studies.

Rinko endeavours to perform an ideal femininity that serves as a rejection of her masculinity. It is worth noting that in the film, Tomo suggests many times that Rinko was a better woman and mother than her real mother because she made *bento* and dinner for Tomo. Like knitting, the act of cooking is heavily stressed in the film, acknowledging the crucial role it plays in defining femininity and motherhood. Similar to the dilemma of how to interpret the semiotics of knitting, the view of cooking as a symbol of domesticity or, on the contrary, as a tool of women’s empowerment, would lead to two totally opposite interpretations on how it serves to shape Rinko’s character. My intention here, however, is not to pin down the perfect answer to these debates, but to list all the potential interpretations of these acts of symbolic significance, so as to manifest how fluid cultural symbols are and how many meanings they can signify in cinematic spaces. This helps to unveil the layers of meanings cinematic narratives attempt to convey. Semiotic readings of this kind therefore refresh the single understanding of meanings, and by doing so it draws our attention to the ‘queerness’ of cinematic heterotopias, where cultural symbols subvert their very connotations.



Image 16. Burning 108 hand-knitted phalluses at the seaside

Symbols like the hand-knitted phalluses and breasts in this film form the semiotic tropes entailing certain socio-cultural meanings. Within a heteronormative context, the phallus is the metonymy of masculinity, likewise the breast of femininity. Patriarchal society views the phallus as the centre of power, while a female sexual organ as the lack of a phallus, therefore allocating women a subordinate position to men in society. This Freudian psychoanalysis has been criticised by feminists, yet its emphasis on the multiple meanings a phallus possesses in the social construction of gender roles and identities sheds lights on understanding the reception of queer in a patriarchal society like Japan. The phallus in *Close-Knit* is not to be worshipped, but to be abandoned. A penis is the culprit of Rinko's sufferings, something she swears to get rid of no matter the price she needs to pay. The reassignment surgery was unimaginably painful, facilitating Rinko's determination to knit 108 woollen phalluses and burn them afterwards to achieve a symbolic nirvana. Once this goal is accomplished, she will change her legal gender/sex registered on her *koseki* (household registration system in Japan) from 'male' to 'female', so as to become a woman completely.

The number 108 has profound implications for Japanese people. In Japan, at the end of a year, a bell is chimed 108 times in Buddhist temples to end the old year and welcome in the new one. Each ring represents one of 108 earthly temptations (*Bonnō*) a person must

overcome to achieve nirvana. The religious significance of the number 108 intertwines with the masculinity of the penis, making the burning ritual indicative of a castration. It is paradoxical here that although the phallus's superiority is negated, its symbolic significance is at the same time reinforced in this film, for it is pivotal both in shaping Rinko's identity and in how gender, sexuality, and identity are understood in Japan's patriarchal society.

The breast, on the other hand, not only stands for erotic desire for Rinko but is linked with a desired form of femininity and motherhood. During Rinko's puberty, she longed for breasts she could never have unless it was through the means of surgery, which she later underwent. Knowing of her son's struggle, Rinko's mother had bought her a pair of bras and knitted woollen breasts stuffed with cotton for her. The night when Rinko and Tomo first meet, the latter is mesmerised by Rinko's artificial breasts and is asked by Rinko if she wants to touch them. In this film, Tomo is an eleven-year-old, entering puberty as Rinko's mother mentions when they first dine out together. It is time for Tomo to grow up physically, and to start thinking for herself. The ending scene is of Tomo putting her hand on the parting gift Rinko gives her: a pair of hand-knitted breasts, like the one Rinko's mother gave her decades ago, full of love and understanding. Like the phallus, the breast in this film is made from yarn. Its paralleled status with the phallus makes it possible to replace it. The breast is thus empowered in *Close-Knit*.

There are many ways to interpret Rinko's intention behind her unconventional gift. This pair of breasts in this film stands for womanhood, which is Rinko's longing. For Rinko, her artificial breasts are a step towards being a woman, demonstrating that identity is a production rather than something with an unchangeable nature. *Close-Knit* queers the notion of 'identity' by showing that it is not a pinned-down definition, but a process that simultaneously constrains and frees us. It also tries to re-centre our attention from Rinko to society: Rinko has no problem with her transgenderism; it is the people around her, her

society, who cannot accept it. The film thus conveys that queer people are not the issue; the issue lies with the 'normal' people who are troubled by their bias. This utilisation of an external aspect asks the audience to rethink what is gender and identity, and what it means to be 'normal' in contemporary Japanese society. One conversation between Kai and his mother is thought-provoking. After learning that Tomo is living with the 'freak' Rinko, Kai's mother tells him to stay away from Tomo because she is with someone 'abnormal'. Kai asks her in return what 'normal' is, and his mom replies that normal is normal, it means "there is nothing wrong with you". To be 'normal' therefore requires people to abide by norms and play their assigned roles. *Close-Knit* not only offers another understanding of 'normal', indicating that 'normal' is like identity, that can and should be queered; it also transforms itself into a heterotopia where concepts are deconstructed and reconstructed through symbols.



Image 17. Rinko's hand-knitted breasts as Tomo's parting gift

2). Cooking and Masculinity in *What Did You Eat Yesterday?*

Although knitting as a domestic leisure pursuit appears occasionally in films and TV series, rarely does it play such a significant role in threading plots and generating debates. Cooking, on the other hand, is more widely discussed in relation to sex and sexuality in literature and

visual arts, taking Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen* for example.[89] Like knitting, home cooking was listed as a wife's responsibility in Meiji-era educational books for women. Today, the interrelation between gender and culinary culture forms one focus of Japanese feminism debates.[90] Feminist research demonstrates how domestic food spaces and tasks remain tied to contemporary femininities worldwide.[91] Transculturally, feminist scholars have problematised calls to bolster home cooking by showing how they reinforce intersecting gendered,[92] ethno-racial, and class hierarchies embedded in normative family meal preparation.[93] Central to these concerns is the persistently gendered nature of domestic cooking. Even with the recent popularity of male celebrity home chefs and masculinised interpretations in culinary culture of cooking as leisure rather than labour,[94] women spend more than twice as much time cooking as men.[95] Cooking today is embedded in gendered performances of attention and care, as it has been historically.

Like knitting, cooking is also closely linked to domesticity in Japan. Sociological researchers discovered that compared to its Asian counterparts mainland China, Hong Kong and Singapore, Japan has the most imbalanced gender ratio in terms of household

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[89] Sexual desire replaces the desire for food in Banana's writings. For more, see Fuminobu Murakami, *Postmodern, Feminist and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture [electronic Resource]: A Reading of Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto Banana, Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kojin*, 2005.
[90] On cooking, gender inequality and women's empowerment, see for example, Millie R. Creighton, "'Sweet Love' and Women's Place: Valentine's Day, Japan Style." *Journal of Popular Culture* 27, no. 3 (1993): 1, and Etsuko Katō, *The Tea Ceremony and Women's Empowerment in Modern Japan [electronic Resource]: Bodies Re-presenting the past*, 2004.
[91] Kate Cairns, Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, "Caring About Food: Doing Gender in the Foodie Kitchen." *Gender & Society* 24, no. 5 (2010): 591–615.
[92] Merin Oleschuk, "Gender, Cultural Schemas, and Learning to Cook." *Gender & Society: Official Publication Of Sociologists For Women In Society* 33, no. 4 (2019): 607–628.
[93] For more, see Elliott Sinikka , and Sarah Bowen, "Defending motherhood: Morality, responsibility, and double binds in feeding children." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80 (2) (2018): 499–520; Fielding-Singh Priya. "A taste of inequality: Food's symbolic value across the socioeconomic spectrum." *Sociological Science* 4 (2017): 424–48; Sarach Bowen, Elliott Sinikka, and Joslyn Brenton, "The joy of cooking?" *contexts* 13 (3) (2014): 20–25; Joslyn Brenton, "The limits of intensive feeding: Maternal foodwork at the intersections of race, class, and gender." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 39 (6) (2017): 863–77.
[94] Michelle Szabo, "Foodwork or foodplay? Men's domestic cooking, privilege and leisure." *Sociology* 47 (4) (2013): 623–38.
[95] Lindsey Smith Taillie, "Who's cooking? Trends in US home food preparation by gender, education, and race/ethnicity from 2003 to 2016. *Nutrition Journal* 17 (1) (2018): 41.

participation.[96] Influenced by the '*ryōsai kenbo'* ideology and the post-war construction of full-time housewives,[97] the gendered labour division allocates women to the domestic realm, making *daitokoro* (kitchen) women's battlefield. However, like knitting, cooking is now endowed with different meanings. It has been reconfigured as a cultural symbol embodying both a conventional gendered division and a means of empowerment for women. For example, in Kirino Natsuo's ground-breaking novel *Out* (1997), by seeing food preparation and domestic cooking as vessels through which the female heroines gain their independence, Kirino assigns new meanings to cooking. The importance of food preparation in the narrative further indicates the potential of food production and consumption as a means to defy expected gender roles.[98]

Men as well as women begin to queer this gendered labour division by actively engaging in domestic cooking as one way to reject the conventional masculinity. This type of men's cooking has been coined as *sōshoku-kei danshi* (herbivorous men), men who embody a new 'softened' masculinity. In recent years, both the Japanese and foreign media have devoted a great deal of attention to herbivorous men, who are gentle, deeply concerned with their appearance, and who care about fashion, hairstyles and cosmetics, as well as other supposedly feminine hobbies such as eating sweets and cooking.[99] Male heroes in Murakami Haruki's novels are typical examples of herbivorous men, and the worldwide popularity of Murakami further promotes this image of new masculinity. In response to this trend, confectionery for men has started to appear on the market, targeting those with a sweet tooth,

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[96] For more on sociological perspectives on domestic gender inequality in Japan, see, for example, Sawako Shirahase, *Social Inequality in Japan*, 2014, Emiko Ochiai, *The Japanese Family System in Transition: A Sociological Analysis of Family Change in Postwar Japan*, 1997, and Ochiai Emiko, "Leaving the West, Rejoining the East? Gender and Family in Japan's Semi-compressed Modernity." *International Sociology* 29, no. 3 (2014): 209–28.
[97] Ochiai, 2014.
[98] Marlowe Gardiner-Heslin and Atsuko Sakaki, *Renegotiating Normalcy: Gender and Marginality in The Fiction and Film of Recessional Japan*, 2014, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.
[99] Chikako Nihei, "Resistance and Negotiation: 'Herbivorous Men' and Murakami Haruki's Gender and Political Ambiguity." *Asian Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (2013): 62–79.

so-called *suītsu-danshi* (sweet men) or *amatō-danshi* (sweet-tooth men); and for those who like cooking, so-called *ryōri-danshi* (cooking men) or *bentō-danshi* (lunchbox men), new types of cookbooks, culinary tools, and lunchboxes for men have been marketed. With the increasing number of men who cook, sweet clubs and cooking classes for men have also appeared.[100] The positive attitude to the 'herbivores' has grown further and is demonstrated in popular culture. For example, the popular TV drama *Otome* (mentioned earlier) features a protagonist who has supposedly feminine interests such as cooking, knitting and sewing.[101]

What Did You Eat Yesterday? (abbreviated as *Yesterday* from now on) is a work featuring cooking men. TV Tokyo announced on March 27th 2020 that Yoshinaga Fumi's *Yesterday* manga is inspiring a live-action film that will be released in 2021.[102] Although many fans were initially attracted to the queer theme and cooking scenes, the success *Yesterday* has achieved is largely owing to its discussion of social issues like gay marriage, coming out, masculinity and LGBTQ rights in Japan. *Yesterday* features the relationship between Kakei Shiro and Yabuki Kenji, a middle-aged gay couple living in urban Tokyo. The manga has been serialised in *Weekly Morning* since 2007 and was adapted into a live-action television drama that aired on *TV Tokyo* in 2019. Both the manga and its live-action adaption have received widespread critical acclaim, winning a Kodansha Manga Award, a Galaxy Award, and multiple Television Drama Academy Awards, becoming the dark horse in 2019, considering that it was a late-night drama and had a sensitive LGBTQ theme. The 16th Confidence Award Drama Prize given by Oricon was also awarded to *Yesterday* for

[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Rafael Antonio Pineda, "'What Did You Eat Yesterday?' Manga Gets Live-Action Film in 2021". ANIMENEWSNETWORK. 26th March 2020. https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2020-03-26/what-did-you-eat-yesterday-manga-gets-live-action-film-in-2021/.157992/.

Best TV Series and Best Actor in a Leading Role, the latter of which was won by both Nishijima Hidetoshi and Uchino Seiyō.[103]



Image 18. Poster of TV series *What Did You Eat Yesterday?*

In the series, Yoshinaga depicts the private life of a contemporary gay couple not through physical intimacy, but through food.[104] A semiotic study of the cooking and sharing of food is key to understanding *Yesterday*'s heterotopic narrative space. Each episode of *Yesterday* focuses on Shiro and Kenji as they encounter a particular comedic or dramatic scenario, often focused around issues of domestic life, workplace humour, and LGBT rights in Japan. In *Yesterday,* cooking is emblematic of a rebellion against the orthodox gendered labour division, embodying a new understanding of masculinity. Many of it depicts a sequence in which Shiro, a gourmand, purchases food and prepares a meal for himself and Kenji. Shiro narrates the steps to create each dish through his internal monologue, and frequently prepares meals that have significance in relation to the plots or themes of the chapter.

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[103] "『きのう何食べた？』など受賞！第 16 回「コンフィデンスアワード・ドラマ賞」". Oricon News. 2 August 2019. https://www.oricon.co.jp/confidence/special/53425/.
[104] Ibid.



Image 19. Kenji and Shiro at their dining table in *Yesterday*

Writing for *Manga Bookshelf*, Katherine Dacey praised the series for showcasing "the realities of gay life in Japan depicted in such a matter-of-fact way," while not being "preachy or dreary."[105] This characteristic is reflected by the portrayals of the protagonists. The series does a good job of fighting some deeply rooted, mass-media stereotypes of gay men. Kenji works in the beauty industry and has come out to his colleagues about his gay identity. He partially fits into the stereotyped image of a gay man: working in the beauty or fashion industry, sensitive, behaving 'womanishly' sometimes, hanging around gay bars a lot. His co-habiting partner, Shiro, is a lawyer. Well-dressed and good looking, Shiro is considered the ideal marriage partner in his workplace. However, privately Shiro resembles the 'herbivorous man': his hobbies are cooking and saving money; every day he finishes work exactly at 6pm and afterwards goes shopping for dinner in cheap grocery stores; he is strict with dieting and also thrifty, keeping track of discounts and exchanging recipes with his friend, a housewife in the neighbourhood. His elite surface and his herbivore inside form a contrast that questions

[105] Katherine Dacey, "Bookmarked! 10/22/14." MangaBlog, October 24, 2014. http://mangablog.mangabookshelf.com/2014/10/22/bookmarked-102214/.

the idea of masculinity and the stereotypes of gay men we usually see in films and dramas. While media that features men cooking in Japan typically foregrounds competition and pursuits of excellence, *Yesterday* depicts cooking as merely a hobby and a necessity for life.[106] It renders cooking 'genderless', releasing it from a gendered system. By doing so, *Yesterday* creates an open space without pre-scripted gender roles and norms. Suganuma Katsuhiko argues in *Culture, Society and Masculinities* that as Shiro's utilitarian cooking style is neither archetypically masculine nor archetypically feminine, it "[distances] itself from a polarised gender binary."[107] Shiro rejects the orthodox gender stereotypes that are based on a clear gendered division of labour, yet he does not possess the traits of archetypical femininity which are attached to 'herbivorous man' either. He is 'queer' to both archetypical masculinity and femininity. He makes cooking a heterotopic vessel through which the conventional ideas on masculinity and gender roles are being challenged in *Yesterday*.

Besides, by avoiding a classification of gay couples as comprising one partner being *seme* (attack) and the other one being *uke* (accept), which is usually seen in films and BL manga, *Yesterday* queers the stereotyped narratives on gay men and thus problematises the heteronormative dominance over media discourse. Generally, in BL-theme manga or films, cooking men are not rare. BL manga, for example, often features gay couples that resemble the heterosexual relationship which stresses the labour divisions between the male and female roles. Many BL manga features the co-inhabiting life of two men, one as the *seme* and the other as the *uke*. One of them would be better at domestic chores like cooking and cleaning than his partner.[108] This stereotype is also applicable to television and cinema screens, taking

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[106] Xuan Bach Tran, *Reading Food in Boys Love Manga: A Gastronomic Study of Food and Male Homosexuality in the Manga Work of Yoshinaga Fumi,* 2018. Dissertation.
[107] Katsuhiko Suganuma, "Queer Cooking and Dining: Expanding Queerness in Fumi Yoshinaga's What Did You Eat Yesterday?". *Culture, Society and Masculinities*. 7 (2) (2015): 87–101.
[108] For example, in the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned a manga-adapted animation film *The World's Greatest First Love*. This popular series depicts four gay couples, all of which fit in with the *seme–uke* stereotype. For each couple, one man is better at cooking and housework and this domesticity is emphasised in this manga as a symbol of 'ideal men'.

Ossan's Love as one example. This romantic comedy tells of the homosexual love between Haruta and Mugi, as well as their boss and colleagues. When Haruta and Mugi live together, Mugi always cooks for Haruta and does all the housework like a full-time housewife. Haruta, on the other hand, is clumsy and cares nothing about housework, resembling the image of a married Japanese *sarariman* (salary man). It is clear that *Ossan's Love* bases the gay couple on the mode of a heterosexual couple with one playing the male role and the other displaying feminine characteristics. According to McLelland's research, the idea that same-sex attraction necessarily involves some kind of transgenderism or desire to be like or even become the opposite of one's biological sex is constantly reinforced by Japanese media which discuss homosexuality and transgenderism in the same context.[109] However, *Yesterday* naysays the division of *seme–uke*, and suggests that this mode is a misunderstanding of homosexuality. For example, in the first episode, one of Kenji's female customers falls for him, and when Kenji turns her down by coming out to her, she refuses to believe that he is gay. Later when bumping into Kenji and Shiro one day on the street, she asks Shiro whether he plays the 'woman' role of the two, leading to a quarrel between the couple that night. Shiro admits that he is the *neko* (*uke*) partner when they have sex and does all the cooking, but he strongly rejects the idea that these make him the 'woman' in their relationship. According to Shiro, such a 'man–woman' role division does not exist in their relationship, nor in most homosexual relationships. Also, in Episode 12 the couple go to Shiro's parents' place together for New Year. Kenji manages to please Shiro's parents by making them believe that he is the 'woman' in their relationship, persuading them that although their son is gay, he is not a pervert. Learning this, Shiro exclaims how ridiculous this idea of a 'woman–man role' is, yet admits that this is the only way his parents can understand homosexuality. Throughout the series, Shiro and Kenji are mutually supportive, and their characters are

[109] McLelland, 2000.

complementary to each other. They share housework and are equal in their relationship in the sense that neither has to make sacrifices for the other, and no one needs to follow any pattern or role that has been assigned to them.



Image 20. Kenji and Shiro at Shiro's parents' place for New Year

Overall, many of the gay-couple stereotypes we usually see in BL manga and gay films are cleverly avoided by *Yesterday*. It is clearly indicated that *Yesterday* intends its narrative space to be a queer heterotopia, rejecting stereotyped narrative and expressions. The series has thus received positive reviews from critics, particularly for its realistic depiction of gay life in Japan, and is noted as being one of the first works of mainstream Japanese media to substantially portray a cohabiting gay male couple. Writing for *ComicsVerse*, Melissa Padilla cited *Yesterday* as a series that subverts typical LGBTQ manga and anime tropes, noting that it includes a "realistic depiction of a gay couple who are adults rather than high

school or college students" and that it "tackles gay issues while still maintaining a leisurely, slice-of-life pace."[110]

McLelland and Maegawa, in their respective studies of Japanese gay magazines and films, find that the cultural products of homosexual relationships tend to overemphasise sex and that many of them are pornographic.[111] The 1992 film *Okoge*, for example, highlights the sexual relationships between gay men. Suganuma notes that the relationship between Shiro and Kenji is depicted as largely non-sexual, contrasting stereotypical media portrayals of gay men as hypersexual or sexually deviant.[112] Far from reinforcing equally permissive stereotypes of gay men as emasculated, Suganuma argues that by not depicting Shiro and Kenji's sex life, the series "intentionally ignores the expectations of the curiosity-ridden heteronormative public" to focus on the domestic lives of gay men. He also cautions against interpreting *Yesterday* as being merely assimilationist or homonormative, arguing that it "provides readers with occasional instances of modification of gender and sexuality norms in contemporary Japanese society."[113] *Yesterday*'s queerness is thus not so much related to its LGBTQ theme as to its rejection of conventional understandings and media representations of queer people. It further suggests that to make queer heterotopias in contemporary cinemas does not necessarily require a queer theme; the emphasis is placed the revolutionising of methods, like those of storytelling structures and expressional forms.

In *Yesterday*, cooking and the sharing of food replace sexual acts and link people together. Food leads to interpersonal connection, a powerful device through which individuals share their life and existence. Cooking is like knitting: it channels Shiro's emotions and connects him with Kenji and his friends, as well as with his mother. This connectivity is not based on sexuality, but on a mutual understanding. Food is the medium

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[110] Dacey, 2014.
[111] For more see McLelland, 2000 and Maegaw, 2017.
[112] Sugauma, 2015.
[113] Ibid.

through which intimacy is formed. Food sharing thus manifests a kind of intimacy and love that differs from conventional concepts.

Food as a form of connection is also a theme often seen in films and TV series not exclusive to Japan. One such example is *Midnight Diner*. Originally a Japanese manga, it is about a diner that is open from midnight to dawn, attracting eccentric patrons who share their life stories over the comforting food offered by the owner. Its emphasis on food as the connection between individuals is transculturally successful, and it has been adapted into TV series, films and musicals, in Japan, South Korea and China. Because sharing food is based on trust and intimacy, it forms another form of institution, unlike marriage or family that are so deeply embedded with social norms and ideologies. Shiro and Kenji are not a married couple, yet they eat three meals a day together. This everyday practice, which is not queer at all, asks the audience to consider what love is, consequently challenging some fundamental concepts on which society is based.

Yesterday also differs from orthodox BL-theme works by featuring the life of two middle-aged *ossan* (old men) and their non-romantic life full of realistic troubles like their parents' aging and disease, instead of depicting the romantic love between *bishōnens* (beautiful young boys). The actors who play Shiro and Kenji, Nishijima Hidetoshi and Uchino Seiyō, are also known for playing tough guys in their other works. This further queers the making of this series, transforming 'queer' into a methodology. To sum up, *Yesterday* questions the stereotypes of gay men we usually see on TV and requires the audience to reconsider the meaning of 'queer' as more than a theme, and an art-making method as well.

3. From Queer Family to Heterotopic Family

Both *Close-Knit* and *Yesterday* raise the question of 'queer family' by respectively depicting the life of transgender and gay couples. 'Queer family' in this study refers to those same-sex, co-habiting couples, and transgender people and their partners. 'Family' is of symbolic importance here because in a Foucauldian notion, sexuality is produced by the practices and exclusions effected by the disciplinary power exuded by institutions like family. Specific social practices can exclude, marginalise, and even render unthinkable alternative forms of subjectivity and sexuality. The shape of family as represented in these works is thus crucial to studying 'queer'.

Some examples of queer family in previous literary and cinematic works include Yoshimoto Banana's *Kitchen* and Ekuni Kaori's *Twinkle,* which features the love triangle between a gay couple and the female protagonist. These unconventional families question the meaning and institutional function of both marriage and family that have constituted the fundamental unit of post-war Japanese society.[114] Both works have been criticised for catering to female readers and audiences without seriously depicting queerness. Compared with *Kitchen* and *Twinkle,* which are set in the 1990s, *Close-Knit* and *Yesterday* are relatively new works, and through the struggle of individuals they further discuss issues such as the difficulty of coming out, same-sex marriage, and the topic of adoption, reflecting some of the latest concerns in LGBTQ rights and new models of family in contemporary Japan.

In *Yesterda*y, unlike Kenji's openly attitude towards his sexuality, Shiro struggles with coming out. He has come out to his parents, yet hides his gay identity in his work place and is always aware of others' scrutiny when he and Kenji go out together in public. The series stresses the conflicts between Shiro and his parents and depicts how their attitude changes. In the first episode, Shiro's mother calls him and learns that he has yet to come out

[114] For more, see Shirahase, 2014, and Ochiai, 1997 and 2014.

to his colleagues for fear of their prejudice. She criticises his irresolution, commenting that people are born different, that being gay is great and that it is not something to be ashamed of. Although trying to support their son, it is hard for Shiro's parents to perceive what exactly homosexuality is. In Episode 3, Shiro goes back home and tells his parents about Kenji, the old couple trying to accept the homosexual relationship while they still hoping that Shiro can 'change' and then marry a woman. At the end of the series, they accept Kenji, yet this reception is based on their belief that he plays the role of the 'woman'. In other words, they accept Shiro's homosexuality by taking his homosexual relationship to be a substitute for a heterosexual one. This attitude is not exclusive to Shiro's parents, as many people believe in the *seme–uke* pattern and compose BL works based upon it. By doing so, homosexuality is rendered harmless and no longer a threat to heteronormativity: homosexuality is no more than heterosexuality in disguise. What makes *Yesterday* stand out is that instead of falling into this stereotype, it deconstructs it. Kenji and Shiro's relationship challenges the conventional representations of queer in mass media. It creates a world of its own, where 'queer' is narrated in a way that differs from existing discourse. By challenging stereotypes and conventions, *Yesterday* channels its visual space into a queer heterotopia, offering a new image of gay men and homosexual relationships.

Yesterday also pushes the issue of same-sex marriage into the spotlight. Article 24 of the Japanese Constitution states: "Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis."[115] Same-sex couples are not able to marry, and are not granted rights derived from marriage. In 2015, Tokyo's Shibuya ward began to recognise the rights of same-sex couples for situations such as hospital visits and the shared renting of apartments. It is not a law and does not equate to same-sex marriage. In June 2019, a bill to amend the Civil

[115] "The Constitution Of Japan", http://Japan.Kantei.Go.Jp/.

Code so as to allow same-sex marriage was submitted. It seeks to adopt neutral language with the term 'party of marriage' being used instead of 'husband' and 'wife'. As of 2020, Thirty-two municipalities and two prefectures issued same-sex partnership certificates, which provide some benefits but do not offer any legal recognition. In *Close-Knit,* Rinko's wish is to knit 108 phalluses and then change her sex on her *koseki*, so she can marry Makio. In Japan, each citizen is registered through the *koseki* system whereby an individual is registered as a part of household, while in the West, a birth certificate can act as a proof of identity. *Koseki* registration in Japan performs a somewhat similar role to marriage in the West, as it endows a member of the same *koseki* with the legal power to deal with civil matters such as inheritance, hospital visits or the right to organise a funeral. As a consequence, Japanese gay couples, in the absence of same-sex marriage or civil partnership laws, often use adoption procedures to register themselves as belonging to the same household. In fact, the first publicly 'out' Japanese writer Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973) adopted Monma Chiyo, who was Yoshiya's secretary and same-sex partner, so that she could inherit her property and make medical decisions for her.

Episode 8 of *Yesterday* discusses this issue by introducing another gay couple who are both in their sixties. Kenji introduces them to Shiro because they want to consult him on the adoption procedures of registering themselves in the same *Koseki*. The older one of the two worries that he would die earlier than his partner. He owns his own business and would like his partner to have 100 per cent of the inheritance. However, his parents are still alive and as Japan does not admit same-sex marriage, once he dies his money would automatically go to his parents, something he would hate to see. Therefore, he must adopt his partner as his son if he wants him to inherit his property.



Image 22. Kenji and Shiro having dinner with the old gay couple.

If not being able to marry legally can be alleviated by partners cohabiting and through strategic adoption, the issue of having children is more tricky, since same-sex couples are not allowed to legally adopt in Japan. Lesbian couples and single women are unable to access IVF or artificial insemination. In April 2017, Osaka officially recognised a same-sex couple as foster parents, making it the first such case in Japan,[116] yet it is still difficult for same-sex partners to adopt or be considered for fostering. In *Close-Knit*, Rinko wants to adopt Tomo, because even if she changes her sex on her *koseki* it is physically impossible for her to give birth. For same-sex couples it is more hopeless. The first episode of *Yesterday* goes into much detail to depicting how thrifty Shiro is. One day at the dinner table, when asked by Kenji why he loves money so much, Shiro admits that it is because gay men cannot have children to take care of them when they are old, so he has to save money for later in life. Besides this dinner talk, Episode 1 also tells the story of one of Shiro's clients, a woman, who because of mental instability, cannot see her son after divorce. Through the mother who cannot see her son and the man who can never be a father, *Yesterday* asks its audience to think about Shiro's awkward situation. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Shiro's

[116] "Osaka the first city in Japan to certify gay couple as foster parents". 6 April 2017. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/06/national/social-issues/osaka-becomes-first-japanese-city-recognize-sex-couple-foster-parents/.

thriftiness is a metaphor for his dilemma. He is trapped by his sexuality and the social norms which are not tolerant of his queerness.

In *Close-Knit*, the temporary family of Tomo, Rinko and Makio is based on Rinko playing the mother role and Makio the father role. In *Yesterday*, the couple rejects a heteronormative role-play, yet they cannot stop people from viewing their homosexuality from the standpoint of a heterosexual role division. What lies at the core of these conflicts is the notion of 'role'. Eve K. Sedgwick argues that the assumption of normative heterosexuality as normative subjectivity has obscured how the homosexual–heterosexual divide was itself historically constructed.[117] Butler holds a similar argument, that heterosexuality depends upon an excluded, unspoken, invisible homosexuality for its very meaning.[118] What I would further argue here is that the *reverse* of this assumption is of more value to 'queer' discourse. It is a tendency for 'queer' narratives to build upon a heterosexual model, precisely because the latter is the foundation for cultural institutions like marriage and family. Heterosexual family, for example, requires a distinction between the 'father' role and 'mother' role, forming the basis for legislation on marriage and adoption. It stresses the necessity of 'roles' and a clear division between them, which forms the basis of a heteronormative society. This accounts for why queer people, in pursuing their rights regarding marriage and adoption, have no choice but to use the very norms and roles they want to overthrow to decorate their requests. That also explains why it is hard for queer cinemas and other artworks on queer to reject stereotypes when they are relying on these norms for survival.

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[117] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990, 1.
[118] Dean, Carolyn J. "The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender, and the History of Sexuality." *History and Theory* 33, no. 3 (1994): 271–96.

So far, this chapter has elucidated the dilemma for queer people regarding 'family', by offering examples of unconventional families appearing on TV and cinema screens. I further propose the phrase 'heterotopic family' to describe these queer families that are based on unconventional connections between individuals. From queer to heterotopic, my concern is that concepts of 'queer' are fundamentally based on norms. They function as an antithesis of the normative. Thus, though they negate dualism and binary construction stressed by heteronormativity, they inevitably reinforce the existence of norms and binary. Similar to Rinko's rejection of the phallus that at the same time reinforces its importance, 'queer' shares the same paradoxical nature. Heterotopia, on the contrary, is different. It is neither utopia nor dystopia, but exists beyond this set of antonyms. It is the open and fluid space, a phase of metamorphosis, the in-between. Heterotopia does not present norms or any utopian imagination that is based on a reality it tries to negate. Therefore, 'queer' eventually leads us to 'heterotopic', a condition denoting the deconstruction of conventions. However, there would be no new centres of power. Instead, heterotopias embrace diversities. Heterotopic families, for example, can be based on connectivity, where connectivity is made through everyday practices like knitting, cooking, and food sharing. There are no hierarchies among these practices, therefore the heterotopic family does not fall within any power institution and is essentially anti-hierarchical. Likewise, heterotopic intimacy is not based on sex or sexuality, but instead on the connectivity people built through daily practices that might not be queer at all. These cinematic narratives contribute to a shift from 'queer' to 'heterotopic', endowing a much freer space for cinemas.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses queer family on screen, arguing that these unconventional households challenge family and intimacy as normative concepts, deconstructing stereotypical cinematic

representations of queer people. It also suggests a step from ‘queer’ to ‘heterotopic’, further releasing cinemas from conventions and offering a new perspective of understanding what human connectivity and ‘family’ truly mean.

The next chapter will move on to the discourse on queer relationships between women in mainstream cinemas. Unlike this chapter, which focuses on decoding cultural symbols, chapter 5 will explore more expressional forms of making cinematic heterotopias through the study of female intimacy narrated in selected films.

Chapter 5 *Call Me by Your Name:* Her Story

"In dreams you don't need to make any distinctions between things. Not at all. Boundaries don't exist. So in dreams there are hardly ever collisions. Even if there are, they don't hurt. Reality is different. Reality bites. Reality, reality."

— Murakam Haruki, *Sputnik Sweetheart*

"One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks."

— Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*

The last chapter featured cinema and television discourse on transgender and gay men; this chapter tells women's stories. As showcased in previous chapters, throughout history female-to-male transgenderism and transvestism, or same-sex love between women, has been depicted far less frequently and depictions have been more implicit in nature compared with those of men. Contrary to the films and TV series analysed in Chapter 4, which are clearly categorised as BL or transgender-genre artworks, the film that will be studied in this chapter is not clearly defined as being of the lesbian genre. The film to be analysed is *Kamikaze Girls,* a light novel-adapted live-action film released in 2004. There are diverse voices that suggest how to interpret the complex relationship between the women characters depicted in this film. The key is how to differentiate between 'romantic/erotic love' and 'friendship'.

This chapter aims to offer a new perspective of interpreting female-female intimacy represented on screen. Above all, it explores why narratives of queer practice and desires of women are far fewer in number and more implicit than those of men, by tackling the puzzle

of ‘categorisation’. In other words, it explores the reasons behind the need to divide women’s intimate relationships into different categories and how this influences cinematic representations. By doing so, what I attempt to argue here is that by blurring the dividing line between ‘erotic/romantic love’ and ‘friendship’ as the chosen work does, a queer heterotopia is created in this ‘in-between’ space. It therefore challenges conventional ideas around intimacy and love, putting forward a heterotopic love between women that rejects normative categorisation. There are lesbian films in contemporary Japanese cinema, like *Love My Life* (2006). Originally a 2001 manga by Yamaji Ebine, *Love My Life* was adapted into a live-action film in 2006. It tells the love and daily life stories of Ichiko, a lesbian, and her lover Eri. Besides the theme of homoeroticism, the film version puts much emphasis on the protagonists’ pursuit of their dreams and self-development. However, by choosing a film which is not categorised as having a lesbian theme but which resides in the ambiguous ‘in-between’ area, this chapter intends to demonstrate the role this ‘ambiguity’ plays in releasing cinematic narratives from conventional constraints.

Ambiguous Intimacy in *Kamikaze Girls*

In history, narratives about gay and bisexual men or male-to-female transvestism and transgenderism have far outweighed those of women. This is not only the case in Japan. For much of the history of cinema and television, the topic of lesbianism was considered taboo, though since the 1960s it has increasingly become a genre in its own right. This gendered imbalance prevails in Japan even today, in spite of the fact that queer culture is now consumed by a broad range of audiences. As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, among the six LGBTQ theme films released in February 2020, only one featured intimate

relationships between women, and this was an imported foreign film. The gender gap lies not only in the quantity of artworks but also in how queer intimacy is defined and represented on screen. Compared to the explicit depiction of male same-sex eroticism and transgender practice, the narratives on women tend to be '*aimai*' (ambiguous). This is a continuation of the traditions of the *Class S* genre which was popular back in the Meiji and Taishō periods.[119] *Class S* (*Kurasu Esu*), abbreviated either as S or *Esu*, is an early twentieth-century *wasei-eigo* (Japanese-made English) term used to refer to intimacy between girls. The term is also used to designate a genre of girls' fiction (shōjo shōsetsu) which typically focuses on the same-sex relationships whereby one girl is senior in age or position to the other. The 'S' is an abbreviation that can stand for 'sister', '*shōjo* (young girl)', 'sex', '*schön*' (beautiful in German), and 'escape'. Although *Class S* can broadly be described as a form of love between girls, it is distinct from a romantic relationship or romantic fiction in that it is used specifically to describe platonic relationships based on strong emotional bonds and very close

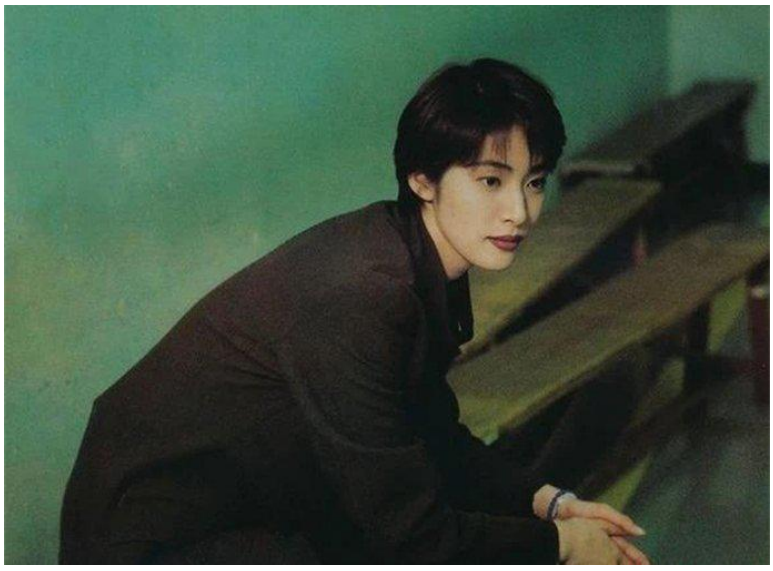


Image 22. Japanese actress Yuki Amami wearing men's clothes when playing *otokoyaku* in Takarazuka

[119] For more, see Robertson, 1998; Shūko Watanabe, *Shōjozō No Tanjō: Kindai Nihon Ni Okeru Shōjo Kihan No Keisei* (in Japanese)*,* 2007; Deborah Shamoon, "The Second Coming of Shōjo." *Heso Culture Magazine.* 16 (2009): 22–23; Gregory M. Pflugfelder, "'S' Is for Sister: Schoolgirl Intimacy and 'Same-Sex Love' in Early Twentieth-Century Japan." In *Gendering Modern Japanese History,* ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno, Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Asia Center, 2005, 133–90.

friendships, rather than sex or sexual attraction.[120] According to Jennifer Robertson (1992), *Class S* was also influenced by the Takarazuka Revue, which features women actors playing male roles referred to as *otokoyaku* (male role, see Image 22). She argues that "many females are attracted to the *Takarazuka otokoyaku* because she represents an exemplary female who can negotiate successfully both genders and their attendant roles and domains."[121] Writers who were actively engaged in the composition of the *Class S* genre include Yoshiya Nobuko, a pioneer in Japanese literature who publicly came out as lesbian herself. Her *Flower Tales* (*Hana monogatari*, 1916–1924), a series of tales of female-female romantic friendships were popular among female students. These stories often depict female-female desire in an almost narcissistic way by employing a dreamy writing style.[122] Their longing for unrequited love was mostly of the platonic kind, and often ended up tragically. Her later novel *Two Virgins in the Attic* (*Yaneura no nishojo*, 1919) describes a female homosexual love experience, ending with the two girls deciding to live together as a couple. This homoerotic theme between young women has been used by writers of other genres, such as Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, who in his *Quicksand* (卍，1928–1930) depicts the intimate relationships between two female students in the Kansai area. *Quicksand* was originally published in Japanese as *Manji*, which refers to the four-pronged Buddhist swastika, a symbol of the four lovers. The English title 'Quicksand' symbolises the destructive nature of their infatuation and unconventional love. It starts with the homoerotic love between the narrative 'I' Sonoko and her same-sex lover Mitsuko.

[120] Erica Friedman, "Why Is It Always Catholic Schoolgirls in Yuri?" *Okazu*, December 16, 2018. http://okazu.yuricon.com/2018/12/16/why-is-it-always-catholic-schoolgirls/.
[121] Robertson, 1998, 82.
[122] Michiko Suzuki, "Writing Same-Sex Love: Sexology and Literary Representation in Yoshiya Nobuko's Early Fiction". *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 65 (3) (2006): 575.

This kind of 'more than friends and yet to be lovers'[123] female-female relationship, which was a popular theme in Meiji and Taishō literature, has been inherited by contemporary literature, manga, anime and cinemas, yet the interpretation of this nebulous intimacy has long been at the core of debates. Should this intimacy between girls be approached as 'friendship' or as 'homoerotic love'? Is there a gauge to decide which is which? This section tries to demonstrate why this need to categorise is so paramount in the making and studying of contemporary Japanese cinemas by taking Nakashima Tetsuya's 2004 film *Kamikaze Girls* (abbreviated as *Kami*) as an example. The goal is to showcase that this categorisation needs to be deconstructed, and that so do the meanings of 'love' and 'intimacy'.

Kamikaze Girls, originally released in Japan as *Shimotsuma Story: Yankee Girl and Lolita Girl* (下妻物語: ヤンキーちゃんとロリータちゃん)，was originally a 2002 light novel written by Takemoto Novala. The story centres on the friendship between two JK students, Ryugasaki Momoko and Shirayuri Ichigo. They come from completely different backgrounds: one is a Lolita-fashioned girl and the other, her antithesis, is a *yankī* (juvenile delinquent).

Momoko and Ichigo are two girls that stand out to each other in many ways. Momoko is a Lolita girl who moved to the countryside town of Shimatsuma to live with her dad and grandmother. In this town, the local people care little about fashion and see Lolita-dressed Momoko as a weirdo. However, Momoko does not care about their comments and insists on her lifestyle, even though that means no friends and isolation. In fact, she enjoys her solitude and believes that her Lolita-clothes are all she needs to make herself happy. Momoko also goes all the way to Daikanyama, Tokyo, to get new clothes from *Baby, The Stars Shine*

[123] There is a Japanese term, '友達以上、恋人未満', used to refer to this type of relationship, but often it is used to describe heterosexual relationships.

Bright, her favourite Lolita-clothing boutique. When she finally runs out of money, she decides to sell some of her father's old bootleg clothes, which leads her to Ichigo, the 'yankee' girl who seems to be nothing like Momoko at first sight.

Ichigo is a member of an all-girl biker gang who firmly believes in honour, loyalty, and fist fighting. Ichigo is deeply impressed by Momoko's bootleg clothes and begins to show up at Momoko's house almost daily. At the beginning Momoko is annoyed by Ichigo's unwelcome appearances because Ichigo's rude manner and taste are nothing like the Rococo style she worships. However, gradually she gets used to Ichigo's appearance and they get closer to each other, even embarking on a journey to Daikanyama together, searching for a legendary embroidery shop Ichigo wishes to visit. They also visit *The Stars Shine Bright*, where Momoko meets the brand's designer. Because of her skill with embroidery, she is recruited to embroider a dress. Later at a *Pachinko* parlour that they always go to together, Ichigo meets a gangster and falls in love with him until she discovers that he is the fiancé of her previous gang leader. Later, inspired by Momoko's independence, Ichigo decides to leave the gang and accepts their punishment. Momoko finds out, and goes to Ichigo's aid. The movie ends with an image of Momoko and Ichigo riding along the road and laughing.



Image 23. After winning the fight, Momoko and Ichigo riding away on Ichigo's motorbike, laughing

Kami is not categorised as a lesbian film, firstly because there is no open statement of homoerotic desire, let alone explicit sex scenes between the two women. Film discourse on the nature of Momoko and Ichigo's same-sex intimacy stresses its 'friendly' nature. It further uses heteroerotic themes in its narrative to dilute any hidden homoerotic implications. At first sight, *Kami* is about girls' friendship with an explicit heterosexual plot. Momoko's worship of the owner of *The Stars Shine Bright* and Ichigo's love for her *senpai*(senior)'s fiancé are presented as heteroerotic desires. Although these plots are not articulated at length, they direct the audience's attention away from the implicit homoerotic discourse. However, many scenes in *Kami* suggest a deeper bond between the girls that render the label of friendship as insufficient. For example, after a fight when they fail to find the embroidery shop, Momoko sacrifices her sleep to make Ichigo the embroidery she wants, falling into a coma afterwards from exhaustion. Later on, Momoko is offered a chance to work for *Baby*, but she is confused about whether she really wants the opportunity. She calls Ichigo, saying "*aitai*" (会いたい,

meaning ‘I want to see you’, sometimes ‘I miss you’) to her. Ichigo is surprised yet happy that Momoko needs her, and replies “whenever you are, I will go and find you”. Later, when Momoko learns that Ichigo is in trouble with gang members, she comes to her aid regardless of the risk. During the fight, when asked by the gang member if Momoko was Ichigo’s friend, Ichigo replies that “she is not my friend”, indicating that their relationship was more complex than a simple ‘friendship’. Eventually they win and ride away on Ichigo’s motorbike together. They are in a sense more intimate than friends, yet are not lovers; at least the film does not openly suggest it. The narrative is essentially ambiguous. Similar to *Kami*, films like *NANA* (2005), and Iwai Shunji’s *Hana & Alice* (2004), both released around the same time as *Kami*, deal with intimate relationships between young women, yet they all avoid explicit homoerotic expressions in their narratives.



Image 24. Momoko calling Ichigo, saying ‘I want to see you’ (the Chinese subtitle means ‘I want to see you, Ichigo’).

This stress on heteroerotic love over homoerotic love featured in *Kami* reflects the privileged status of heteroeroticism. Azuma Sonoko puts forward that ‘romantic love’ is privileged by modern Japanese society because it is the foundation of ‘marriage’, and

marriage is the basic unit of heteronormative society.[124] Azuma further argues that as the woman's ideal role is 'good wife, wise mother', marriage and its foundation – heteroerotic love – is supposed to mean more to women than any kind of same-sex intimacy.[125] This is one reason why, throughout Japanese 'queer' history as shown in chapter 3, narratives of men outnumber that of women.

Kami and the discussions around its theme reflect another trend in the studies of female same-sex intimacy: the need to 'categorise'. Sugiura Ikuko, when writing about the politics of female intimacy in *Kami*, suggests that the film shows the privileged status of the heteroerotic relationship, its requirement of a clear separation of 'friendship' from 'erotic love' and the necessity for people to follow the dividing line without crossing it.[126] Sugiura argues that this need for separating and categorising female-female intimacy is not 'natural' but socially constructed, like gender roles and identities, with the aim to maintain heterosexual hegemony. This argument points to the link between the regulation of intimacy and the power-structure of society. Anthony Giddens in *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* suggests how the definition and categorisation of intimacy varied by era and region, thus the dividing line between 'erotic love' and 'friendship' is a metamorphic concept without a concrete standard. It depends on what we call 'common sense', which is regulated by society. In other words, how we accept and perform intimacy is socially determined. Concepts like 'homosexual' and 'homosocial' would be the same without the predominant 'common sense'. Sedgwick shares a similar opinion, that 'homosexual' and 'homosocial' are essentially concessive terms.[127] She further raises the example of ancient Greece, where homosocial relationships and homosexual desire

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[124] Sonoko Azuma, *Takarazuka, Yaoi, Ai No Yomikae: Josei to Popyurā Karuchā No Shakaigaku (in Japanese)*, 2015, p 64.
[125] Azuma, p64.
[126] Ikuko Sugiura, "Eiga "shimodzumamonogatari" ni egaka reru on'na dōshi no yūjō: Shinmitsu-sei o meguru godoku no kairaku to seiji (in Japanese)". *"shin shakai-gaku kenkyū"* vol. 2, 2017, 25-35.
[127] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1985, 4.

were not divided.[128] In *Symposium*, the speeches revolve around same-sex love. It is notable that the Aristophanes' speech proposes a form of non-hierarchical sex between men that is front-to-front, unlike penetrative anal sex, in which one partner is seen as the 'active' while the other as 'passive'. It was after this era that people began to isolate 'erotic desire' from same-sex intimacy, giving birth to homophobia. Therefore, a mandatory division of intimacy into 'erotic love' and 'friendship' is not just a historical development but also a requirement of heteronormative dominance.

Kami follows this pattern of division by stressing the 'friendly' nature of the intimate relationship between the two female protagonists. In this film, in contrast to the understated heterosexual relationships, there are plentiful details that stress the theme of 'friendship'. For example, there is one scene of Momoko watching a TV programme of teenagers debating why friendship is indispensable to human beings. In Momoko's imagination, she joins them on TV and claims that she doesn't need friends, rejecting the others' statement that friendship was necessary. Ichigo also comments a lot on the fact that that Momoko has no friends and asks her whether she feels lonely. Details like these indirectly heighten the significance of 'friendship'. Sugiura argues that this emphasis on friendship reflects the homophobic dominance over cinematic narratives of female-female relationships. Lesbianism not only counters women's ideal role as *ryōsai kenbo* but also challenges heterosexual marriage. *Kami*'s contrast between the explicit display of heteroerotic desire and the equivocal expressions of a homoerotic relationship underscores the film's portrayal of sexual power relations: even in the respective epistemologies of the closet, heteroerotic desire appears privileged.

[128] For more on how queer is perceived in ancient Greek, see for example, R. L. Hunter, *Plato's Symposium*, 2004 and Frisbee C.C. Sheffield, *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire*, 2006.

There are mainstream films and TV series that explicitly discuss homosexual desires of women, yet the lesbian love story is usually overshadowed by heterosexual romance or ends tragically. For example, Sono Sion's *Love Exposure* (2008) discusses same-sex desire of young women through a plot of pseudo-lesbian infatuation. Winner of the Caligari Film Award and the FIPRESCI Prize, *Love Exposure* depicts the twisted relationships between the three protagonists Yū, Yōko and Aya. One plotline has Yōko falling in love with Yū after he saves her from a fight whilst being dressed as a girl because of a lost bet. Yōko in her frenzy of love for Yū believes that she was a lesbian. At the end of the four-hour-long film, Yōko realises that her true love is Yū, not a girl but a guy. There are scenes of Yōko masturbating while thinking of Yū dressed as a girl, also shots of Yōko and Aya kissing each other. Mika Ninagawa also often features same-sex desires in her works. Her 2012 film *Helter Skelter*, bold in its overt depiction of sex scenes, includes a plotline of the protagonist super-model Ririko seducing her female manager, having sex with her and then her boyfriend to make use of them. Ninagawa's latest series *Followers*(2020), also features a young lesbian artist. She is the best friend of the young heroine, secretly loving her and supporting her through her ups and downs. Because the heroine is 'straight' and insensitive to her emotions, she keeps her love a secret and has sex with random girls to release this pain. These works are not of the lesbian genre, yet they include explicit lesbian themes which always end tragically, as if to punish women's departure from their 'role'.



Image 25. A scene from *Love Exposure*. Aya and Yōko kissing each other.

Heterotopic Love: what we talk about when we talk about *LOVE*

In general, female same-sex eroticism is understated on screen, and not only in Japan: in early cinemas, lesbian themes were generally restrained or coded. Depictions of lovemaking between women first appeared in several films in the late 1960s. The same-sex intimacy depicted by *Kami* resides in the ambiguous in-between space between 'friendship' and 'erotic love'. This thesis sees the ambiguous nature of *Kami*'s discourse as potentially empowering. Instead of following the pattern of categorisation or studying the nature of their relationship, this section focuses on reconfiguring our definition of 'relationship'. In the previous chapter, I attempted to offer a new perspective on this, arguing that 'family' and intimate relationships in general can depart from ties to sex or sexuality. From this angle, emotions like 'love' and 'affection' refer to the feelings an individual derives from his or her interactions with others, and are not designated by one's sex or sexuality. Instead, connectivity between individuals is generated through everyday practices like knitting, cooking, and food sharing.

Kami is all about the connection between Ichigo and Momoko. Although this relationship is not given a name, the film features their deep bond and how it came into being. It is through this process of forming a connection that the film challenges a conventional idea of 'love' that is intertwined with sex and sexuality. Ichigo and Momoko are interlinked not by having the same hobbies or by belonging to the same institution, like school or a workplace. They are linked by some bootleg clothes, by coincidence. This connectivity seems somehow unserious and funny. It also differs from conventional discourse on friendship and romance in the sense that there is no 'pattern' in *Kami*. *Kami* is a film with unexpected events and surprise: primary-school-age Momoko calmly encourages her mother to leave her and pursue a new family, Momoko's childlike grandmother used to be a well-known *yankee* in the local area, Ichigo becomes the model for *Baby* after leaving her gang, Momoko is so talented at *pachinko* that the owner tries to stop her from playing... Seemingly far-fetched and self-contradictory plots endow *Kami* with the strength to generate laughter. It deconstructs what we are familiar with and expect of a film. Symbols in *Kami*'s narrative space are out of order, allowing infinite possibilities of connectivity. It is through this very chaos that meanings can be queered.

Kami's narrative space thus transforms into a queer heterotopia where conventional concepts on 'love' and 'intimacy' are challenged. As discussed in chapter 4, epidemiological inquiries into concepts like 'family' and 'love' can queer the normative understandings we have about interpersonal connectivity. 'Love', for example, can be generated and manifested through knitting or food sharing, not only sex. Instead of analysing human interactions following heteronormative patterns, this study reconfigures love through 'connectivity'. A heterotopic mode of love and family rejects all pre-scripted lines, is not based on sexuality or gender, and lies outside these normalised frameworks. It argues that through this mentality, cinematic space can transcend any boundary posed by norms, achieving a free state.

It is impossible and pointless to categorise the love between Momoko and Ichigo, not only because the need for 'categorisation' is essentially heteronormative, but also for the fact that the existing interpretations and categories we have of 'love' are too parochial. Ancient Greek philosophers identified five forms of love: familial love, friendly love or platonic love, romantic love, guest love and divine love. The Japanese language uses three words to convey the English equivalent of 'love' with nuances.[129] The term *ai* (愛), which is often associated with maternal love or selfless love, originally referred to beauty and was often used in a religious context.[130] Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, the term became associated with 'love' in order to translate Western literature. Prior to Western influence, the term *koi* (恋) generally represented romantic love, as used in *Man'yōshū* and later by *geisak*u writers like Saikaku.[131] It was typically interpreted as selfish and wanting.[132] The third term, *ren'ai* (恋愛), is a more recent construction that combines the *kanji* characters for both *ai* and *koi*, though its usage more closely resembles that of *koi* in the form of romantic love.[133] When dealing with family and marriage, or relationships like that of Ichigo and Momoko, 'love' is often linked with 'romantic love'. According to *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Family Studies, '*romantic love' was primarily used by Euro-American countries after the 1800s. It was considered the necessary prerequisite for starting an intimate relationship and represents the foundation on which to take the next steps towards starting a family. 'Love' is thus socialised and understood based on that sociality. However many further connotations are indicated by these terms, society dictates that the set categories need

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[129] Sonia Ryang, *Love in Modern japan: Its Estrangement from Self, Sex and Society*. 2006, 13–14.
[130] Namiko Abe, "Japanese Words for "Love": The Difference between "Ai" and "Koi"". ThoughtCo., March 27th 2018. https://www.thoughtco.com/japanese-words-for-love-2028042/.
[131] Saikaku in *Five Women Who Loved Love* used '*koi*' to depict romantic love. For example, in the story *Yaoya Oshichi*, he mentioned that 'なんとも此恋はじめもどかし'(what a mess of love!).
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ryang, 2006, 14.

to be followed, and any interpretation beyond them is discouraged. My analysis aims to queer the conventional understanding of 'love' as rigid, with clear subcategories largely linked with sex and sexuality. Overall this study argues that 'love' is a heterotopic concept, generated by interpersonal connectivity. This connection is malleable and diverse, for each person is unique in him/herself and in the way he/she interacts with the outer world. Seeing 'love' from this queer perspective therefore challenges conventional narratives on love and further opens up cinematic space.

Love Heterotopia: Laughter and Parody

Intimacy and love are further deconstructed in *Kami* through parody. As mentioned briefly above, absurd and unrealistic plots endow *Kami* with the strength to parody, and generate laughter. The tone of *Kami* is humorous, for many plots and scenes appear unrealistic, ironic and exaggerated, more obviously so if compared with *Close-Knit* or *Yesterday*. It sets an absurd tone from the very beginning by telling the stories of Momoko's parents – how they met and fell in love and then parted because of Momoko's mother's cheating – in a dramatic and exaggerated way. When persuading her mother to seek her own happiness and enter the local beauty contest simply because it was interesting, Momoko flew into the air posing like superman, a scene to be seen in manga or anime, not in real life. Throughout the film, Momoko from time to time indulges her imagination of Rococo life, and this frequently features her leaping into the sky in her Lolita outfits, roaming with fantasy. The application of surrealistic plots sets an unrealistic tone for the film, consequently expanding its narrative boundary: anything can now happen within this cinematic space. Common sense is shattered at the very beginning, laying a foundation for irony and deconstruction in later narration.



Image 26. Young Momoko flying into the air when encouraging her mom to pursue happiness

Also, when facing her crying mother, Momoko is surprisingly calm. She encourages her, saying that people tend to flinch in the face of happiness. It is not what you would expect a primary-school girl to say. Yet following these philosophical words, Momoko continues by asking her mom to take breast augmentation surgery and participate in the beauty pageant. The sudden change in subject and Momoko's choice of words makes people laugh. There is also a scene of Momoko giving Ichigo a cabbage she had just bought from a truck beside them, asking her to play with this new 'friend' and leave her alone (see Image 27). It is hard



Image 27. Momoko giving Ichigo a cabbage, asking her to play with it and leave her alone

to tell if Momoko is being serious or not, as the whole film is based on this tone of absurdity. The boundary between farce and reality is blurred.

This intentional parody empowers *Kami* because parody is based upon humour. Humour is potentially dangerous, because it generates laughter which has the power to queer. M.M. Bakhtin in his *Rabelias and His World* suggests that laughter "overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom, is never used by violence and authority".[134] Laughter allows us to doubt norms and possesses the potential to examine an object from all possible views and perspectives. Thus, the power of laughter is its innate ability to 'reopen'.[135] The introduction of *Kami* on Rakuten TV[136] categorises *Kami* as being of the comedy genre. I would argue that *Kami* is more than a comedy, for its queer sense of humour suggests some hidden themes related to self-recognition, family, and collectivism. Yet it does parody our conventional perceptions of these issues by deconstructing seriousness. Its absurd narration destabilises reality, breaking open existing narratives, leaving us space for imagination.

The film constructs a heterotopic world by fragmenting its narratives: the continuity of story is interrupted by numerous play-within-a-play moments. The film starts with Momoko being hit by a truck, flying in the air and saying goodbye. This scene is immediately followed by a short introductory animation explaining to the audience what Rococo style is, before abruptly moving to the real-life scene in Shimotsuma, where Momoko is standing on a

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[134] M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelias and His World*, 1984, 90.
[135] A good example of the power of parody can be found in late Tokugawa Japan. It was a time when satirical literature and arts were so popular that they empowered the Edo commoners to laugh at the Bakufu. The catfish paintings, for instance, was a popular motif of satirical arts. For more, see Sho Konishi, "Reopening the "Opening of Japan": A Russian-Japanese Revolutionary Encounter and the Vision of Anarchist Progress." *American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 101-130.
[136] Rakuten TV is a video-on-demand (VOD) streaming service, offering movies and TV series for subscription, rental and purchase.

country road in her Lolita-dress with a cow behind her. It forms a sheer contrast with the luxurious Rococo lifestyle. The cow here symbolises rural life,



Image 28. Television at the railway station's waiting area playing the 'documentary' of Momoko's life-story.

contrasting with Momoko's beloved Rococo style and denoting a sense of irony. Also at the beginning, there is one scene of Momoko waiting for the train to Tokyo. She sits down and watches the television on the wall, which begins to play the profile of Momoko (the title of the micro-documentary is 'Secret stories of Momoko Ryuzaki', see Image 28), telling the stories of her parents and the reason of her moving to Ibaraki with her dad. Later, when Momoko is watching a debate on friendship on TV, she imagines herself joining the debate. The shot shows Momoko appearing on the television screen, while she is already on our film screen(see Image 29). While in a Lolita-theme cafe with Ichigo, Ichigo lectures Momoko about her *senpai*, Himiko's legend. Himiko is a legendary yankee, deeply admired by Ichigo. Though at the end of the film Ichigo admits that Himiko is her creation; she does not exist, yet becomes an urban legend. Momoko complains to the imagined audience that because Ichigo's narrative is way too long, the story is to be made into an animation for the audience

to watch (see Image 30). Then a short animation is inserted to tell the legendary story. It is not



Image 29. In her imagination, Momoko is on TV with other young people, debating the necessity of friendship. The Chinese subtitle means '(people) who have no friends are more independent than those who have to rely on others'.



Image 30. The inserted animation of Ichigo's s*enpai* Himiko's legend

rare for films to utilise flashbacks, yet in *Kami*, flashbacks are inserted either in the form of a play-within-a-play or in a different genre like animation, endowing the film with the hue of absurdity. The film therefore does not have a uniform narrative style; multiplicity and fragmentation are its style. The narrative space of *Kami* is fragmented and fantasised so well that it gives the audience an illusion that anything can happen within this space. It is through this intentional fragmentation of narrative that *Kami* breeds a heterotopia for the queerness of Momoko and Ichigo to thrive.

All these unrealistic plots, flashbacks and play-within-a-play episodes of *Kami* make the film a light-hearted comedy, which discusses serious topics like happiness, friendship, growth and loyalty in a humorous and ironic way. This contrast between seriousness and absurdity is comical. By experimenting with different expressional forms, *Kami* queers filmmaking traditions. This absurd and surreal visual world of *Kami* is Ichigo and Momoko's heterotopia, where they can choose the lifestyle for themselves and reject what is deemed 'common sense' by adult society, without much of a price to pay. For example, Momoko refuses to abandon her peculiar dressing code in order to blend in with the locals. Combined with her distrust in the necessity of friendship, Momoko questions collectivism. Yet Momoko is not bullied because of her peculiarity and detachment; her queerness is 'utopian' in that it is interpreted as purely an individual choice in this film. Researcher of *shōjo* manga Saga Keiko puts forward that a hidden theme of *Kami* is how Ichigo and Momoko fight against social norms by living lives where they follow their own will and aesthetics regardless of other people and the common sense of society.[137] They are also both 'queer' in the sense that they disagree with the common sense and attempt to establish their own rules.

[137] Keiko Saga, *Yoshiya nobuko kara himuro saeko e: Shōjo shōsetsu to `hokori' no keifu (tokushū Yuri bunka no genzai)* (in Japanese). Seidosha, 2014.

Conclusion

This chapter analyses female same-sex intimacy in *Kamikaze Girls*. It argues that when dealing with intimate relationships between women, cinematic narratives tend to be ambiguous and implicit. This ambiguity is mainly caused for two reasons: on the one hand, heteronormativity requires a clear division between 'romantic love' and 'friendship', while on the other hand, women's relationships, either friendship or erotic love, is marginalised within a patriarchal society in Japan. Therefore, explicit lesbian narratives are discouraged in a bid to render women's non-normative sexualities harmless, which accounts for why gay films far outnumber lesbian films.

It suggests that the love between Ichigo and Momoko is heterotopic, existing beyond the categorical system of heteronormativity. By showing readers the 'in-between', this chapter also attempts to offer a new viewpoint of understanding love and intimacy as connectivity unbound by sex and sexuality. Through parody, *Kami* breaks open normative narratives, offering audiences a visual heterotopia where love is reconfigured through multiple lenses. The narration and expressional forms of *Kami* also display how to release cinemas from a status quo on filmmaking. It thus asks both filmmakers and audiences to reconsider what is visual cinema, and what is its strength.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

'You mean…that any fulfilment obtained at the expense of *normalcy* is wrong, and should not be allowed to bring happiness. In short, it is better, because it is morally honourable, for the square peg to keep scraping around the round hole rather than to discover and use the unorthodox square that would fit?…I don't agree.'

— Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*

"I desire therefore I exist."

—Angela Carter, *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*

So far, this thesis has dealt with the deconstruction of concepts. 'Queer' and "heterotopia' are the key words threading my arguments, which are powerful not only in challenging existing concepts but also in providing alternatives. This study thus deals with the deconstruction and reconstruction of concepts that are so basic in shaping the way we think, concepts such as space, love, and family, that it is not easy for us to find a new lens to approach them. This is precisely what I hope this study can contribute to: a skeptical mind, sensitive to conventions and confinements. To do so, I choose cinemas as the open spaces for these processes of deconstruction and reconstruction, which in return offer new perspectives regarding filmmaking and perception. Queer, or more specifically queer sexuality, serves as the entry. Via film and television discourse as well as the historiography of queer sexuality, this thesis unveils the broader application of 'queer', suggesting that it is not only a theme confined to sexuality studies, but also a methodology of subversion, applicable in our studies of cinemas.

In retrospect, chapter 2 contextualises 'queer' within Foucault's theories on heterotopias. Heterotopia further frees 'queer', because the former indicates openness and fluidity, excluding norms, whereas queer is understood often as the opposite to normalcy, in that it is inevitably linked with a set of agreements and regulations. With examples of how queer methods used in filmmaking contribute to creating visual heterotopias, it argues that queer is also a filmmaking method, denoting unconventional aesthetics and filming and editing techniques. The fragmentation of time and space is a typical queer method which expands visual space and invites multiple narratives, a powerful device in making cinemas heterotopias.

Chapter 3 traces the queer history of Japan, indicating that 'queer' is a metamorphic concept whose meaning and status is constantly changing throughout history. Queer literature and arts of the Edo period in particular prove that queer has always been part of a popular imagination in everyday life practices. It thus negates a dichotomic pattern of thinking queer as the antithesis of the 'normal'. The queer history of Japan also indicates that 'queer' is a powerful tool with which to study cultural products and their macro socio-political background. Contemporary queer cinemas therefore become the heterotopias of revolution, inviting more in-depth interrogation through multiple lenses.

Chapters 4 and 5 raise epistemological inquiries into concepts like marriage, family, love, and intimacy, through semiotic analysis of contemporary Japanese cinemas. This section chooses works sharing a common ground: they challenge conventional ideas on love and relationships, either through queer themes like transgender family and gay co-inhabiting, or through queer narrations, like the absurd and fragmented narrative space of *Kamikaze Girls*. These works reject heteronormative patterns of relationship, as well as negating stereotypes forced by heterosexual hegemony. In chapter 4, through semiotic readings of everyday practices like knitting, cooking and food sharing, it puts forward that interpersonal

connectivity through everyday practice is the source of love, forming the basis of relationships. It is thus not restrained by sexuality or any kind of hierarchy that is often linked with heteronormative family and marriage institutions. From this perspective, 'love' becomes connection, which is fluid, egalitarian, and open to interpretation. Chapter 5 further explores this connectivity, by the strength of parody, arguing that the understanding of 'love' and 'relationship' as connectivity is heterotopic in its nature. The laughter generated by *Kami*'s humorous and absurd narratives has the power to parody what we are familiar with, making *Kami* a heterotopia where the same-sex intimacy between women needs reconsideration, eventually deconstructing the heteronormative discourse which is gendered in its oppression of women's sexuality.

This study's interpretations of queer and heterotopia are limited. Constrained by time and resources, it is deficient in aspects regarding the film production process and the audiences' perception of queer cinemas. Yet I hope this study can open up dialogues and contribute to refreshing our epistemological perception of identity by offering new lenses to approach those concepts and ideas that are easily taken for granted by us. It requires a mind to be constantly vigilant, since knowledge itself is a 'fraud', while languages are untrustworthy as they are so deeply embedded with culture, therefore inevitably hierarchical and biased. In a nutshell, this study is not one to answer questions but one to raise more. It is driven by desires: the desire to understand the unfamiliar, to explore the unknown, to figure out how we know what we know, and how we are confined by the way we define the world and ourselves. As Catherine Belsey writes in *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, "desire, even when it is profoundly conventional, is at the same time the location of a resistance to convention. It demonstrates that people want something more". It is this eternal desire to break free that keeps us beating on against the current, ceaselessly into the unknown.

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